Education, Employment and Training

Project Oracle synthesis study 01/13
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Contents

Glossary of key terms 1

Key Insights 2

Introduction 3
Do education-based interventions working with young people who are not in education, employment or training reduce youth crime and violence?

Project Oracle Synthesis Studies: Aims 4
A realist approach to synthesis

Analysis 8

Eligibility Criteria 6
Search strategy
Projects included in the synthesis

Key Implementation Findings 9

Synthesis of Projects’ Programme Theory 10

Conclusions 17

References 18

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Glossary of key terms

Context – the external factors which influence how individuals participate in or organise and carry out an intervention. The context affects the availability or resources and the opportunities for a project to be carried out. For example, the arrangement of key institutions for young people, such as schools, colleges, police, young offender institutions, etc. can facilitate the building of network. Interventions and their participants are embedded in social contexts characterised by dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, material inequality, racial and ethnic diversity, and perhaps gang tensions and violence.

Evidence – the range of available robust and reliable information which demonstrates the impact of a policy, public service or programme.

Indicator – a measurable characteristic or process which reflects (indicates) that change has occurred.

Intervention – a planned action which aims to bring about positive change. This may aim to improve social inclusion, empowerment and equality, such as in social work. The term intervention refers to person-centred approaches which aim to change behaviour, attitudes, and so on.

Methodology – the rules, assumptions and data analysis methods which outline an approach to research or analysis. This is different to a research or evaluation method, which is a tool for collecting and analysing data.

Outcomes – the end result of a process is its outcome. The outcomes of a policy, a project or an intervention are the changes that it has caused, or is aiming to cause. This is not the same as an output, which refers to the products offered by a policy, a project or an intervention.

Participant – an individual who engages with an intervention which is aimed at bringing about change for them, such as in their behaviour or attitudes.

Programme – an on-going series of activities to affect an issue or problem. Whereas a project has a defined beginning and end, a programme may be more open-ended: an overarching programme can be composed of various projects.
Key Insights

This study

This study concentrates on education-based interventions working with young people who are not in education, employment or training in order to reduce violence.

Interventions were included that are London-centric or have London as one of their sites. A small evidence base has been gathered, with eligible studies relating to nine projects being found.

What evidence is there?

The synthesis found that projects working for the education, training and employment of young people need to address four key factors if they are to achieve successful and sustainable outcomes: ‘Referral’, ‘Hooking’, ‘Influencing’ and ‘Facilitation’

1. Target the appropriate audience for the intervention. The most effective way of doing so has been via referrals from appropriate agencies, although some young people not in education, employment and training will be unresponsive to interventions, for example, if they are heavily immersed in deviant lifestyles.

2. Offers incentives to young people to engage with a programme. Potential participants need to be ‘hooked’ into the activity.

3. Support and encourage positive attitude change amongst participants which can lead to changes in behaviour and re-engagement with further education, training or employment. Many intervention activities per se, for example those related to sport, are unlikely to generate changes in attitude or orientation on their own, but they can provide a setting where measures where further opportunities for change can be provided.

4. Facilitate young people’s transition into further education, training, apprenticeships or paid employment; only then can longer-term beneficial outcomes be achieved.

So can we say what works?

Some common conclusions can be made, in particular that:

Funding is essential for delivery of sustainable projects as well as for staff retention.

Good partnerships that facilitate pathways of young people into further education, training, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and paid employment are vital for programme success.

However, there is little robust evidence directly reflecting causal links between interventions and long-term outcomes.

It is difficult to estimate longer-term outcomes, such as sustained engagement with education or employment or a reduction in reoffending behaviour, due to the nature of evaluations commissioned, and provisions of the Data Protection Act regarding the known criminal activities of past participants.

The Project Oracle evidence hub is one way that useful and relevant evidence can be more effectively gathered.
Introduction

This study examines projects which have focused on young people who are not in education, employment or training (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). The acronym NEET¹ has been presented for this category of people (see for example, Tanner, Obhrai and Spilsbury, 2007; Spielhofer, Benton, Evans, Featherstone, Golden, Nelson and Smith, 2009), to refer to young people not in any activities that lead to economic activity.

The number of young people not in education or employment in London is rising, and because of its ties with youth disadvantage and social exclusion, this population is of concern to policy-makers and wider society.

On the one hand, research has shown correlation between disengagement from education, employment and training and negative consequences such as criminal activity. This has driven programmes aimed at reducing violence and reoffending through education and employment schemes (Coles et al 2002).

On the other hand, however, the commonly-held assumption that engagement with education, employment or training necessarily leads to a reduction in reoffending is not supported by research (Barry 2010). It is not always possible to demonstrate a causal link between a resource and resultant behaviour, for example between gaining paid employment and reduced offending behaviour (Sampson and Villela 2012). However, there is evidence to suggest that engaging with opportunities does have an overall positive benefit of reducing violence and reoffending (SEU 2002), despite some contrary viewpoints (Barry et al 2010).

As a result, it is important to ask if there is evidence of improving education, employment and training causing a reduction in youth crime.

This study contributes to the movement towards adopting an evidence-based approach to improve decision making in policy interventions which has steadily been gathering momentum. Policy documents argue that there is a lack of “authoritative synthesis and communication” of the existing evidence base (What works: evidence centres for Social Policy, 2013). One of the aims of Project Oracle is to fill that gap by being a repository for youth evidence and synthesising this to inform providers and commissioners about ‘what works’ to tackle youth violence and more broadly improve quality of life for young people in London.

¹ It is understood that the term NEET may be criticised for being a broad generalisation with negative connotations. This study does not promote this but employs the term because it has appeared in the policy literature and evaluation material which has been the subject for the analysis.
Aims of the Syntheses Studies

The synthesis studies being produced through Project Oracle aim to create a better understanding of what works well, in what contexts, and for whom. They aim to help both providers and funders design and commission projects that have a greater likelihood of succeeding.

Synthesis study aims:

1. To identify which projects work, for whom and under what conditions
   Focus on evaluations of previous interventions to draw broad conclusions regarding how intervention mechanisms influence outcomes in different contexts.

2. To assess the type and quality of evaluation data currently available
   Analyse the evaluations being conducted in terms of their underlying theory, methodological approach and data collection strategies.
   Outline indicators of positive and negative outcomes.
   Identify gaps and shortcomings in the evidence base for future work.

Here we adopt a realist evaluation approach (Pawson & Tilley 1997) for synthesising the available evidence on what works, for whom and under what conditions. So what does a realist approach mean? A realist approach is also concerned with understanding causation, i.e. what causes something to work. In order to understand what causes something to happen, it is not necessary that we observe it many times, according to Sayer (2000). Sayer suggests that as long as the observation of a successful intervention is able to identify exhaustively the support factors, causal mechanisms and implementation issues, it will be able to make adequate predictions about the intervention’s probable success given the presence of the support and causal factors, which facilitate its smooth implementation, and thus, eventual success.

A realist approach to synthesis

1. Identifies an underlying theory of change
   Do the interventions aim to achieve change through an approach which is theoretically grounded?

2. Examines interventions in their context
   Do interventions have the same impact on all participant groups in all places? Which institutional and social contexts facilitate positive outcomes?

3. Is aware of interventions and contexts being open and changeable
   Do intervention providers borrow from or compete with each other? Do positive or negative outcomes create or restrict opportunities for future programmes? Can synthesis studies facilitate knowledge exchange among intervention providers and commissioners?
The realist approach has identified that interventions in social programmes have the following characteristics (Pawson 2006; Pawson and Tilley 2009):

- A realist synthesis aims to combine the ‘collective wisdom’ about the successes and failures of previous initiatives in a particular area of policy and/or provision. It can also-
- Help in the development and promotion of best practice guidelines.
- Improve learning across policy and organisational boundaries.
- Stimulate creativity by drawing upon existing findings and applying them to new and untried programmes.
- Engage stakeholders, whose ‘insider’ knowledge and understanding can be documented, formalized and tested. (Pawson et al 2004)

### Eligibility Criteria

Syntheses clearly depend on the range and quality of the evidence that has been collected in individual studies within the areas being examined. The following discussion begins by explaining how the studies that speak to the subject matter of this synthesis were identified, before moving on to the findings themselves.

This synthesis study examines education-related youth interventions, which include as one of their aims a reduction in violent behaviour in London. Thus, in order to be included in the synthesis study, the evaluation had to focus on interventions that were education focused, had NEETs as the target audience, specified violence or crime reduction as one of their aims and were London-centric. They were also all reported in English and produced since 2008.

A wide range of potential sources were drawn on, not limited to academic research studies. We did not restrict the review to evaluations that used particular designs (e.g. Randomized Control Trials or some form of quasi-experimental methods). The ‘realist’ framework is open to diverse forms of evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, that can be drawn together to help understand what does and does not lead to successful outcomes.

The search strategy used, focused on locating published and unpublished literature relating to youth programmes to reduce violence. Three inter-related approaches were used:

1. **Searches of databases of published articles**, including: Google scholar, ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index); British Education Link; IBSS; PsychInfo; Metalib; Swetswise and JSTOR.

2. **Examining online material and ‘grey’ literature of specific youth programme providers**. Domain experts in the area of evaluation studies were personally contacted to solicit unpublished studies and websites of specific organisations and commissioning bodies were trawled for online evaluation reports.

3. **Project Oracle’s outreach networks were activated in soliciting evidence submissions**. Whilst many providers engaged with Project Oracle currently have a low level of evaluation evidence, this is set to expand and will provide an important resource for similar studies in the future.

Any study submitted was reviewed according to the screening and eligibility criteria listed above and justifications for inclusion and exclusion articulated in the caveats below.
Key words and descriptors for search engines were added according to the conventions of each specific database used. The key words used for the database searches were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
<th>Raw search hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td>“evaluation study” AND NEETs AND London</td>
<td>3560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>“evaluation study” AND NEETs AND London</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>youth OR young AND education AND violence OR crime AND ”evaluation study” AND London</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRoQuest</td>
<td>youth AND education AND violence AND “evaluation study” AND London</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PsychInfo</td>
<td>Youth AND “evaluation study” AND intervention</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swetswise</td>
<td>Intervention AND evaluation AND youth</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalib</td>
<td>Youth AND “evaluation study”</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 10 studies or evaluation reports relating to nine projects were included in the synthesis. They are sourced from the ‘grey literature’ (no reports in peer reviewed academic journals fulfilled the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study). Six of these evaluations were specifically related to projects in London (projects 1 to 6 below). The final three projects (7 to 9 below) were national evaluations, but included London as an intervention site.²

Included project evaluations:

- Street League
- Fight for Peace
- Mayor’s Youth Offer
- Daedalus Project
- Create + Project
- Parent Advocacy Project*
- Summer Arts College (and 7a Unlocking Value)
- Activity Agreement Pilots.**
- Young People (NEET) and Music making

* The Parent Advocacy Project (Project 6) has been included even though it does not have violence reduction as a specific aim, because it is part of Project Brodie, an initiative from the Mayor for London’s ‘Time for Action’ programme that aims to tackle youth problems and violence in the capital.

** Activity Agreement pilots did not have reduction in violence or reoffending as an explicit objective, but focused on process evaluation giving valuable insight into how NEET related interventions are delivered and contributes to understanding the process of engaging young people in education, employment and training.

² Reference to studies in the main report will be made based on these numbers
Analysis

For each report included in this review the underlying theory, mechanisms and support factors that contribute to the success or otherwise of the outcomes were identified. Each of the 9 individual evaluation reports has been analysed, not only in terms of the success or failure of the interventions but also in terms of the type of evaluation that was conducted.

The reports ranged from project evaluations (four projects) to whole programme evaluations (five projects). They all employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to measure outputs and intermediate outcomes, and seven of them articulated a theory of change which reflected how they aimed to have an impact on youth violence and crime.

Programme success was measured as:

- a. The development of personal and social skills, positive changes in attitude and motivation to re-engage with education, employment and training.
- b. Self-reporting of reoffending behaviour.

However, there were also problems in the evidence base. Only four projects measured medium term outcomes and six projects reported difficulties measuring long term outcomes such as sustained engagement with education, employment or training or a reduction in offending behaviour. This was due to the nature of the evaluations commissioned and the provisions of the Data Protection Act regarding criminal history and progression of young people. Four evaluations identified possible positive unintended outcomes and three noted negative ones but none attempted to measure them.

Furthermore, a lack of control groups in all projects meant it was difficult to establish the specific effect of the interventions. In sum, all projects showed little robust evidence to causally link interventions with the production of long-term desirable outcomes.

Some of the difficulties involved in measuring project success in terms of tangible outcomes can be illustrated by the evaluation of the Mayor’s Youth Fund (Case Study 1).
Case Study 1: Mayor’s Youth Offer

For this project, measurement of the reduction in NEET status was difficult. The overall figures of the evaluation suggest that the proportions of those ‘EET’ and ‘NEET’ remained similar at the end of the programme as at the beginning, yet this was because 28 out of 68 young people who responded to the evaluation survey reported that they had moved out of NEET status during the programme period, but 27 also reported that they had moved into NEET status during the same period.

Additionally, a lot of the work was aimed at being preventive rather than remedial. Thus, interventions were aimed at young people ‘at risk’ of being NEET and not mainly those already declared NEET. This made it difficult for the programme to report tangible success in terms of how many people were moved from NEET status back into education or employment.

Key Implementation Findings

The analysis revealed key findings relating to implementation issues and contextual factors that were common across projects. These may be seemingly self-evident findings, shown in the table below, but their salience shows that they are aspects of implementation that need attention when setting up new projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-agency working</th>
<th>Referral from relevant partner agencies is the primary method for identifying young people ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET or sustained NEETs, but clarifying roles and responsibilities of involved staff and partner agencies is vital in the early stages of a project.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder involvement</td>
<td>Programmes benefitted from involving and consulting young people and stakeholders in the planning and implementation stages and parental involvement was important in re-engaging young people in education, employment and training and was addressed in some projects. Moreover, engaging with the really ‘hard to reach’ NEETs (with added mental, personal and/or social difficulties) was difficult and did not yield a high proportion of successful outcomes (see Case Study 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long-term view</td>
<td>To have a long-term impact programmes identify a progression path for young people to re-engage with education, employment and training. Funding was also key to delivery of sustainable projects as well as for staff retention (see Case Study 2), and professional, qualified and competent staff who are able to connect with young people are vital for programme success. The fact that implementation of programmes was affected by funding, its availability and flexibility, was highlighted in many reports. An example of how funding patterns might lead to unintended consequences is illustrated in Case Study 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed interventions</td>
<td>Programme theory underlying interventions need constant refining and revision in response to evolving evidence base. Provision of multi-modal interventions, involving some forms of cognitive behavioural therapies(^3) were more likely to produce positive outcomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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\(^3\) Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a way of talking about: how you think about yourself, the world and other people; and how what you do affects your thoughts and feelings. CBT can help you to change how you think (‘Cognitive’) and what you do (‘Behaviour’). Royal College of Psychiatry; http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/treatmentswellbeing/cbt.aspx.
Case Study 2: Daedalus

The Daedalus project evaluation report suggests that some goals that were recognised as being beneficial by a young person may not be recognized within a programme's target criteria or objectives. Thus, a Payment by Result (PbR) model might prove detrimental to the young person's interest if practitioners concentrated only on achieving pre-set targets and criteria, since their payment depended on it.

Case Study 3: Create + Vital Regeneration

The evaluation report acknowledges that there is a group of young people within the 16-19 age group who have many unmet needs and complex lives. They can be unknown to statutory and community agencies, or known only to criminal justice agencies or health services. They are likely to be disaffected and reluctant learners. The report states that there is wider research support for the fact that social programmes find it difficult to engage with these young people and intensive outreach work is required to gain their trust.

Project experience indicated that even when a young person agrees to attend a course they will require high levels of support and they will have more uncertain outcomes in terms of re-engaging with ETE. In other words, it is more expensive and more risky for a community-led project to provide effective services for these young people. Recognising and acknowledging the requirements of these different NEET groups in funding applications will enable different costs and targets to be set for each group. This approach, the report concludes, will enable Create+ to work with all NEET groups.

Synthesis of Projects’ Programme Theory

The evidence provided by the nine reports suggests that stand-alone activities or interventions are seldom effective at engaging young people in education, employment or training rather than crime and violence. The most effective interventions were multi-modal, i.e. they consisted of several different elements and offered an integrated set of interventions. Thus, the more successful programmes aiming to achieve specific behavioural and measurable outcomes and have a long-term impact, appeared to be based on a theory of change along the lines visualized in Figure1.

The pathways between programme-provided resources and changes in reasoning and behaviour comprise programme mechanisms (Pawson 2003). It is important to understand how resources offered (e.g. activity, support, or training) appeal to the participant so that they engage with the programme and how this might bring about a positive change in attitudes and behaviour. Cartwright and Hardie (2012) suggest that even if a policy, programme or project works ‘somewhere else’, it might not work ‘here’, if the support factors needed for it to operate are not secured or if the principle or mechanism that makes the intervention work has not been identified.

In this case, the intervention is the provision of some activity or support and the intended outcomes are a reduced number of NEETs, reduced violence and reduced reoffending. Along this journey some interim
outcomes have to be achieved which are essential to achieve the final outcome, or may be positive outcomes in themselves. The synthesis study recognizes that identifying and measuring these necessary but sometimes neglected interim outcomes is also important. Synthesis of the projects indicated that the theory of change for interventions aimed at reducing NEETs and reducing violence incorporates a number of steps that follow a sequence.

The available evidence shows that there are four mechanisms whereby the provision of a recreational or educational activity may result in a change in behaviour, relevant to violence and re-engagement with education, employment or training:

1. Provision of activity in a safe environment within which participants can develop of healthy, positive social relationships with peers and role models.
2. Assessment of needs of individuals and provision of cognitive behavioural therapies to encourage change in attitudes and goal orientation.
3. Provision of tailored programmes orientated to meeting individual needs, interests and abilities that will foster sustained engagement.
4. Identification of a definite progression path and opportunities to move from NEET status to engaging further with ETE.

Interim or short term outcomes include increased confidence, positive attitude, motivation to change, better social, emotional and personal skills, leadership qualities, teamwork, and perhaps some accreditation. Intermediate or medium term outcomes in this case would include re-engagement with ETE. Longitudinal tracking of participants would be needed to gauge whether there had been a long term sustained behavioural impact of any programme, in terms of engagement with ETE after leaving the programme and reduced reoffending or violence. As mentioned before, none of the projects collected this data.

See Figure 1 for a theory of change model that emerges from the synthesis of all studies included in this review.
Within this theory of change, the success of education related programmes hinges around four ‘pivot points’:

1. A referral mechanism which will ensure that appropriate candidates are channelled into the programme. The characteristics of an appropriate candidate appear to include an openness to engage with the programme activities, while fitting the programmes target audience: NEET and involved in violent behaviour.
   - Project evaluations suggest that the target participants for programmes working with NEETs or those ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET mainly come via referrals by partner agencies or via outreach work. Reviews of research suggest that interventions targeted at individuals at risk or already manifesting problem behaviour are more effective than universally applied programmes (Ross et al 2010, Wikstrom & Treiber 2008). It is therefore important to ensure that appropriate partner agencies are identified and procedures are set in place to ensure that relevant young people most likely to be responsive to the intervention are being referred by these partners. This is a key element to the eventual success of the project. For example, schools have been developing Risk of NEET Indicators (called RONI kits) based on statistical work by the Department of Education and local knowledge.

2. The activities must be interesting enough to the referee in order for them to be ‘hooked’ into the programme.
   - In order for any intervention to work, it is essential to attract young people within the target group to make them engage with the project. The ‘hook’ has to essentially be something that catches the interest and attention of the target audience and facilitates engagement. The hook can take various forms: recreation (such as arts, sports, and music), or monetary incentives (in the form of weekly allowances or travel costs). Anything that can incentivise young people to join the programme and make it easy for them to engage is an essential part of designing the programme.

3. Intensive engagement with qualified personnel capable of identifying and addressing individual needs of participants is necessary to influence the requisite attitude and behaviour change.
   - Ross et al’s (2010) review of effective strategies to reduce youth crime suggests that effective programmes incorporate therapeutic elements that nurture behavioural and attitude change in the young person as a step towards motivating them to engage in further training, skill enhancement or educational opportunities offered within the project. Ross’s (2010) review along with Wikstrom & Treiber’s (2008) report on offender behaviour programmes found that the more successful interventions incorporated some element of mentoring or counselling or one-to-one sessions between young people and practitioners who are qualified, professional, sympathetic and capable of building up a relationship with the young person based on mutual trust and respect. Intensive support and encouragement provided in the process is essential for motivating a positive change in attitudes and goals. This is the precursor for behavioural change essential for NEETs to engage with training or education opportunities.

4. Ensuring that motivated members of the participant group are facilitated in achieving their aim; to (re)engage with further education, training, apprenticeships or paid employment, is vital.
   - Engendering positive attitudes and behaviour, enhancing skills, and basic education are in themselves not enough to bring about the desired change in behaviour following the programme unless a young person is specifically helped to achieve their aims of engaging with further education, training or seeking employment opportunities. This involves linking up with organizations and institutions offering these opportunities. The role of the practitioner extends to helping with applications and admissions, setting up apprenticeships, opportunities for volunteering, or meeting prospective employers. This is intended to attain the twin aims of reducing NEET levels as well as diverting young people from reoffending or violence by offering them an alternative contextualised life choice.

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4 See for e.g. www.southend.gov.uk/download/3572/risk_of_neet_indicator
The evidence indicates that programmes are likely to succeed if appropriate resources are offered to targeted individuals and groups. Resources on offer need to include activities or incentives that attract the attention and interest of identified young persons to engage with the programme in the first instance. Once engaged, the programme then offers opportunities to develop protective factors such as having stable, warm and affectionate relationships with significant adults or role models who foster positive attitudes, and make friends and develop greater confidence and social skills.

As expected, the review found that change in attitude and motivation to achieve goals is essential for young persons to want to engage with further ETE opportunities. If there are a wide range of training and education resources on offer to suit individual needs and interests then there is a greater likelihood of engagement. Finally, after young people have gained further qualifications or skills, the overall success rate of reducing NEET levels will be high if the path to further education, training, apprenticeships, volunteering or paid employment is linked to the programme delivery.

Restating what we have just said, this synthesis found that key mechanisms for diverting young people from violence and crime in the kinds of programme reviewed here include:

a) A positive change in attitude, coupled with
b) Gaining qualifications, as well as
c) Having the opportunity to realise ambitions.
**Action Points for Future Programmes**

**Targeting the right audience:**
In order to ensure effective targeting, it is important to have buy-in from partner organisations strategically placed to make referrals. It is also essential to negotiate procedural rules and legal requirements and set processes and mechanisms in place to facilitate referrals before the project takes off.

The Daedalus project illustrated the importance of streamlining and having an efficient referral process. The project initially suffered a setback because the earlier referral process was considered to be cumbersome as well as time intensive. As a result sufficient numbers of young people were not being referred to the special Heron Unit set up by the project for young offenders. There were also concerns that the right referrals were not being made resulting in participants being moved from the Unit within a short period of time because they lacked the motivation to participate and engage.

The evidence also suggests that most programmes find it difficult to engage with a small number of hard-to-reach populations and therefore often appear to have little or no discernible impact on changing their NEET status.

Street League (SL) engages with some of the hardest to reach populations, many of whom are dealing with a combination of homelessness, substance abuse and crime, and who do not have aspirations beyond fulfilling their basic needs. SL recognizes that many of these will not engage with the programme beyond Street sports. That fact is built in within their programme’s expected outcomes. Only those who are willing or ready to move on to the next stage of receiving a more formal course of training are given support to do so. This suggests programmes have a greater likelihood of succeeding in achieving specific outcomes if they concentrate on those that are vulnerable but are willing to engage. This is not to advocate that programmes ought not to target the hard-to-reach groups, but merely to acknowledge that a majority of the kinds of projects included in the review were perhaps not appropriate for these groups and that specially designed programmes to address the needs of the most vulnerable are required.

**Designing the appropriate hook:**
In order to engage the young person’s initial interest, a programme must offer one or more activities that young people find appealing.

The Fight For Peace (FFP) project offered boxing and martial arts because it was thought that these sports would be attractive to young people living in violence prone areas to help them learn self-defence techniques and find a disciplined outlet for their aggression and frustration.

The activity itself (whether it is art, sports, or film-making etc.) will bring about some benefits in terms of fostering discipline, a positive association with learning, inducing a healthy physical or mental state, building social skills, confidence, and self-belief, which was considered indicative of success by all nine project evaluations included.

The review of Music Making in 32 different projects identified various additional benefits that emerged from young people engaging with music. The review found that many of the Youth Music funded projects incorporated a live performance to showcase young people’s skills and talents. These performances helped young people conquer their fears and anxieties and develop their confidence. They also served to raise ambitions. For example, one project reported that their participants had performed to such a high standard that it had encouraged staff to raise their expectations and organise performances more regularly. In addition to performing, participants were given the opportunity to be involved in a variety of other tasks including fundraising, marketing, promotion, branding and creating resources such as DVD’s, CD’s and websites. Such tasks allow young people to build a portfolio of transferable skills that are likely to be considered attractive to employers.
Engendering attitude change

Once the young person is engaged, their situation (readiness to progress) and needs should be assessed in order to deliver a tailored programme of activities to suit individual requirements. This will help in achievement of intermediate programme outcomes, such as development of personal and social skills, positive changes in attitude and motivation to re-engage with education, employment or training.

Activity agreement pilots were based on a personally negotiated contract (the Agreement), outlining how the young person should take to move into education, employment or training in return for access to financial support, developed between a Connexions Personal Adviser (PA) and the young person. Young people received continuous support from their Connexions PA throughout the process. As part of the Activity Agreement, a flexible programme of personally tailored activities for the young person was agreed between the PA and the young person. These activities could be part-time or bite-sized courses, part of mainstream provision or commissioned through the Connexions Partnership and included a variety of bespoke basic skills provision, vocational taster courses or personal development courses.

Inculcating positive attitudes and motivation to engage with further training or education opportunities requires qualified, committed and motivated staff to encourage young people to think more positively about themselves, their situation and the future.

The role of Resettlement Brokers (RB) in the Daedalus programme demonstrates the importance of committed and supportive staff in youth work. RBs were considered central to the success of the Programme by stakeholders. Particularly, the quality of their one-to-one contact on the Heron Unit was seen to be a real benefit to young people, building up a relationship where they would act as mentors to each young person on their reintegration into the community after being released from prison. RBs provided support and training not only to young persons but also to employers and trainers. Good relations between employers and RBs meant the former felt they could speak about their concerns to someone who would manage problems around the young person. The evaluation report describes that young people voiced positive accounts of their RB fostering self-confidence and a belief that they could achieve success after being released, and also assisted in rebuilding family relations.

Smoothing the path to education, employment or training:

A programme is more likely to lead to, medium to long term outcomes, such as sustained engagement with education, training or paid employment and reduced involvement in crime and violence, if there is a clear progression path defined and made accessible to young persons after they have successfully engaged with ETE.

The FFP evaluation report describes this process in detail whereby those young people who are ready to move to further education or apprenticeships or employment, are provided with a ‘pathways programme’ which helps them with practical matters such as writing their CV or filling out application forms and are delivered by volunteer professionals in environments that help young people raise their self-esteem and aspirations.

Similarly, in the Daedalus project, Resettlement Brokers (appointed as part of the project to work with young people) to smoothen young offenders’ reintegration into the community, did so by continuing to provide support to young people post-release from prison and help resettle them.
Buy-in from prospective employers, training and/or higher education institutions can also provide pathways to achieve goals. Involving these institutions and organisations in the programme design and implementation stage will also ensure that the skills and training delivered within the programme will help motivated young people to exit NEET status.

The FPP programme works in partnership with prospective employers to ensure that young people are given the opportunity to realise ambitions either through volunteering, apprenticeships or paid employment.

Conclusions

Key insights can be highlighted from the evidence:

It is important that robust referral mechanisms are set up at the initial stages of any programme. This includes buy-in from key partner agencies, as well as setting up of formal mechanisms and agreements between the provider and partner agencies.

It is important to offer an activity or incentive that can appeal to young people and motivate them to engage with a programme.

Chances of success are enhanced when programmes include multi-modal interventions that go beyond provision of activities and accreditation.

Building up good partnerships that smooth progression pathways of NEETS into further education, training, apprenticeships, volunteering opportunities and paid employment is important for programme success.

So, what does the synthesis of the evidence, notwithstanding its limitations, suggest about what works, for whom, and in what circumstances?

What works: the provision of hooks that attract relevant, referred participants whose individual needs are assessed and met by interventions tailored to suit individuals that foster a pro-work and counter-crime set of attitudes and aspirations, and where post-programme next steps are facilitated.

For whom: those who are NEET, at risk of NEET and involved in or on the fringes of criminal activity, who have some initial disposition to change and are not heavily immersed in a criminal lifestyle or have serious mental or personal problems.

In what circumstances: where the programme is delivered well, have assured funding sources, professional and committed staff members able to motivate young persons and where there are available relevant jobs or educational or training opportunities for which programme participants are prepared.
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