Review of Youth Justice
Group Conferencing Program

Youth Justice Group Conferencing Statewide Advisory Group meeting

16 November 2010
Overview of presentation

• Summary of the project

• Key findings

• Stakeholder and participant views

• Cost analyses

• Summary

• Recommendations

• Where to from here?
Summary of the project: Purpose of the review

**Purpose of the review:** to determine the effectiveness of the Youth Justice Group Conferencing (YJGC) Program in meeting its stated aims, as well as to provide recommendations to the Department to improve the operations of the Program.

**Aims of the YJGC Program**

- effective diversion for young people from more intensive supervisory court outcomes
- effective reintegration of young people into the community following the Conference process
- reduced frequency and seriousness of re-offending of young people referred to the Program
- increased victim satisfaction with the criminal justice process
- reduced costs to the Youth Justice system.
Summary of the project: review questions

• To what extent has the YJGC Program achieved its objectives?

• To what extent are the outcomes achieved by Group Conferencing associated a range of factors, such as:
  – the nature of offences committed
  – the characteristics of the offender
  – the participation of victims
  – the participation family members etc etc

• What is the level of satisfaction of stakeholders and participants with the Group Conferencing Program?

• What are the unit costs of the Group Conferencing Program compared with Youth Justice custodial and community based orders?

• What specific improvements can be made to the Group Conferencing Program?
Summary of the project: review activities

• Targeted literature review
• Interviews/consultations with Group Conferencing service providers and stakeholders
• Analyses of service activity data and outcome data for a sample of young people that participated in Youth Justice Group Conferences in Victoria between April 2007 and June 2009 (n=372)
• Analyses of outcome data for a comparison group of young people broadly matched who received a Probation or Youth Supervision Order in the same time period (n=129)
• Interviews with Group Conference participants (11 young people, 19 family members and 10 victims)
• Analyses of unit costs and associated benefits
Key findings of review: demand (p.33)

• Very high uptake by young people - nearly all (95 per cent) young people referred to a Group Conference in the sample took part in a conference

• Demand has increased significantly for the Program over the past five years, with the Program outperforming targets in 2008/09 and 2009/10
Key findings of review: effective diversion (p.37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence imposed</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-supervisory orders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Behaviour Bond</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountable undertaking</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine/Discharge</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not proceed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferred Sentence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total % non-supervisory orders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>75.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervisory orders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Supervision Order</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total % Supervisory Orders</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>372</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Key findings of review: lower recidivism compared with comparison group (p.39)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Within 12 months</th>
<th>Within 24 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review of Youth Justice Group Conferencing (2006)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Justice Group Conferencing participants</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probationers Group</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Review of Youth Justice Group Conferencing (2010)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Justice Group Conferencing participants</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison group (Probation/Youth Supervision Order)</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key findings of review: severity of subsequent offences
(as per Australian Standard Offence Classification National Offence Index scores) (p.41)

- The most common offences committed that lead to a Youth Justice Group Conference are burglary, recklessly cause injury, unlawful assault, intentionally cause injury, criminal damage, armed robbery and theft of a motor vehicle.
- Whilst there are significantly lower recidivism rates for GC participants, there are similar proportions of young people in both groups who commit more serious offences (approx 5.5%)
All of the victims and family members (100%) and the majority of young offenders (91%) strongly agreed or agreed that ‘Overall, I was satisfied with my involvement with the whole Group Conferencing Process’
Highly skilled and competent Convenors who are able to implement the Youth justice Group Conferencing model are central to the Program.

“The strength of the Program was largely attributed to the dedication and skill level of the Convenors, including their flexibility and ability to communicate and facilitate effectively.” (p. 44)
Cost analyses  (p.59)

Immediate and short-term savings

• For every $1 invested by the Department of Human Services on Group Conferencing, at least $1.21 is saved in the immediate and short term.

(The report notes these cost benefit figures are likely to underestimate the actual savings to Government)

Longer-term savings

• Diverting young people from the justice system due to participation in the Youth Justice Group Conferencing Program is likely to have longer-term flow-on effects for reduced demand for other Government services.
Summary of findings

The review found “the Youth Justice Group Conferencing program to be broadly effective in meeting its stated objectives”.

YJGC is an effective and efficient program in terms of:

• Diversion
• Recidivism
• Cost benefit
• Stakeholder views
• Participant feedback
Recommendations

• The report contains 11 recommendations related to “strengthening” the program primarily.

• Recommendation 2 proposes a review of the current level of resourcing in order to:
  ◦ meet current state-wide demand
  ◦ ensure quality convenors are attracted and retained in the field
  ◦ accommodate post-conference follow-up

• Recommendations 3 to 11 relate to: strengthening the operational model, convenor accreditation and training, data collection, and promoting the positive findings

• 7 recommendations are congruent with the 2009 Victorian Parliamentary Law Reform Committee’s: ‘Inquiry into alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice’.

• The report proposes that DHS lead in addressing some recommendations and that some are referred to specific stakeholders or a broader group such as the Group Conferencing Statewide Advisory Group.
Where to from here?

• Develop a communication strategy to promote more widely the positive findings of this evaluation, including conference papers etc.

• DHS response to resourcing requirements – seek support from other government departments [and external stakeholders?] for budget proposals to expand and strengthen the program.

• Establish a Reference Group, comprising service providers and other key stakeholders, to provide advice in regard to addressing some of the key recommendations, including those related to enhancing the program model.

• Other suggestions?