

Supported health care follow-up for young people being released from custody improves continuity of care

Category: Strengthening Primary Health and
Continuing Care in the Community

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Supported follow-up through the Juvenile Justice Centre Release Treatment
Scheme improves continuity of health care for young people being released
from custody
Justice Health

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Justice Health Locations



Aim

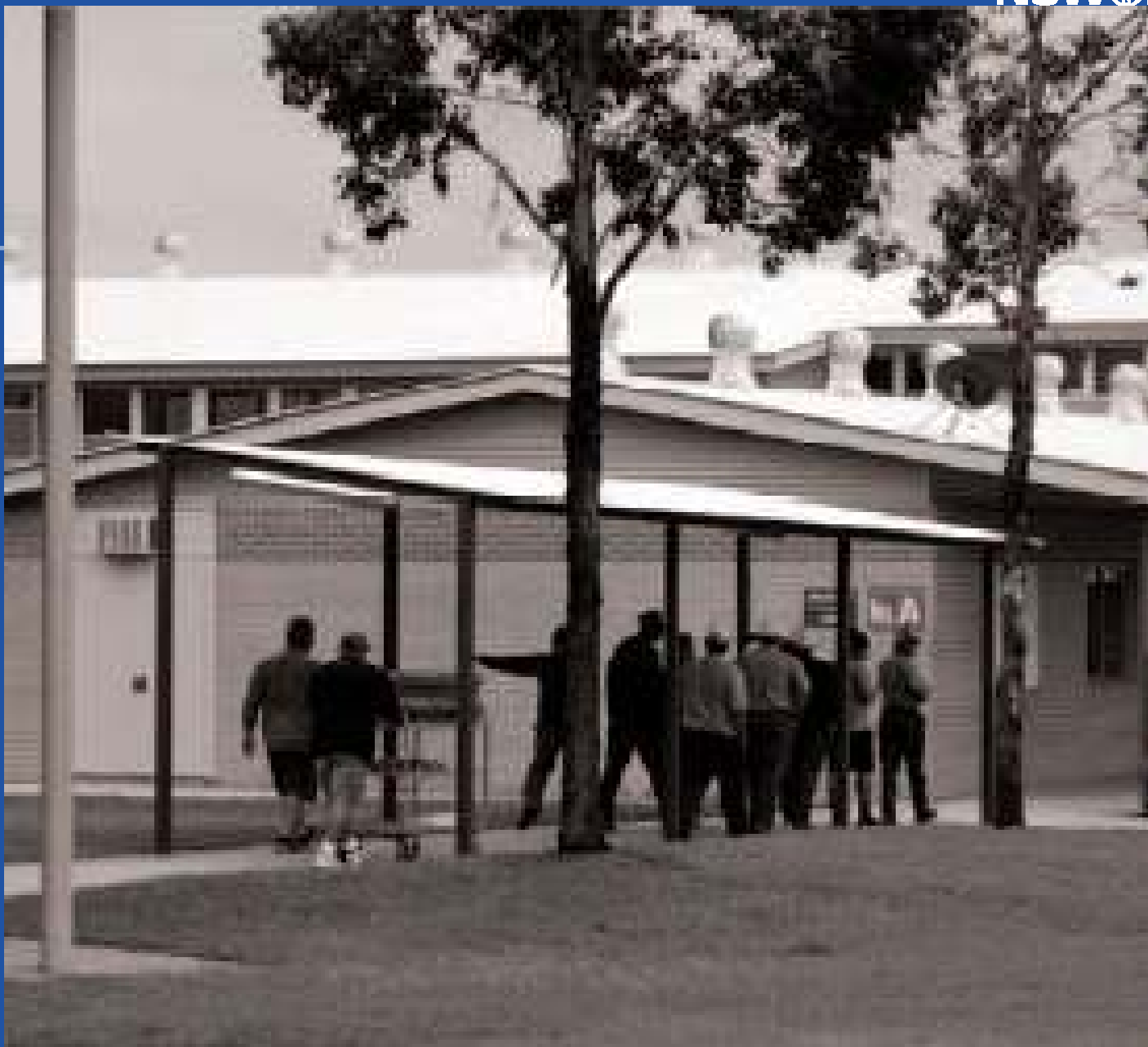
- To demonstrate that supported follow-up for young people leaving custody in NSW leads to:
 - improvements in access to health care,
 - increased health care engagement with family/carers and
 - improved treatment compliance.



Nature of the Problem

- Young people in custody are primarily from disadvantaged backgrounds characterised by:
 - Family disruption,
 - Poor educational attainment,
 - Regular risk taking behaviour and
 - Poor health statuscompared with the general community.

- High levels of:
 - Symptoms consistent with a mental health disorder
 - Drug use



Extent of the problem

- The extent of the problem was determined through:
 - Evaluations of areas of need
 - Conducting focus groups with young people in custody
 - Research and discussion with services available in the Orana region
- Identified:
 - Transport difficulties in attending health services
 - Some services perceived as not ‘youth friendly’
 - Less likely to attend appointments if made far in advance
 - Lives too disorganised to follow up with healthcare needs



Strategic importance

- This project aligns with NSW Health Strategic Directions:
 - Strengthen primary health and continuing care in the community and
 - Build regional and other partnerships for health.
- By addressing health issues this may also lead to reduced re-offending rates
 - Aligns with the NSW State Plan Priority R2: Reducing re-offending

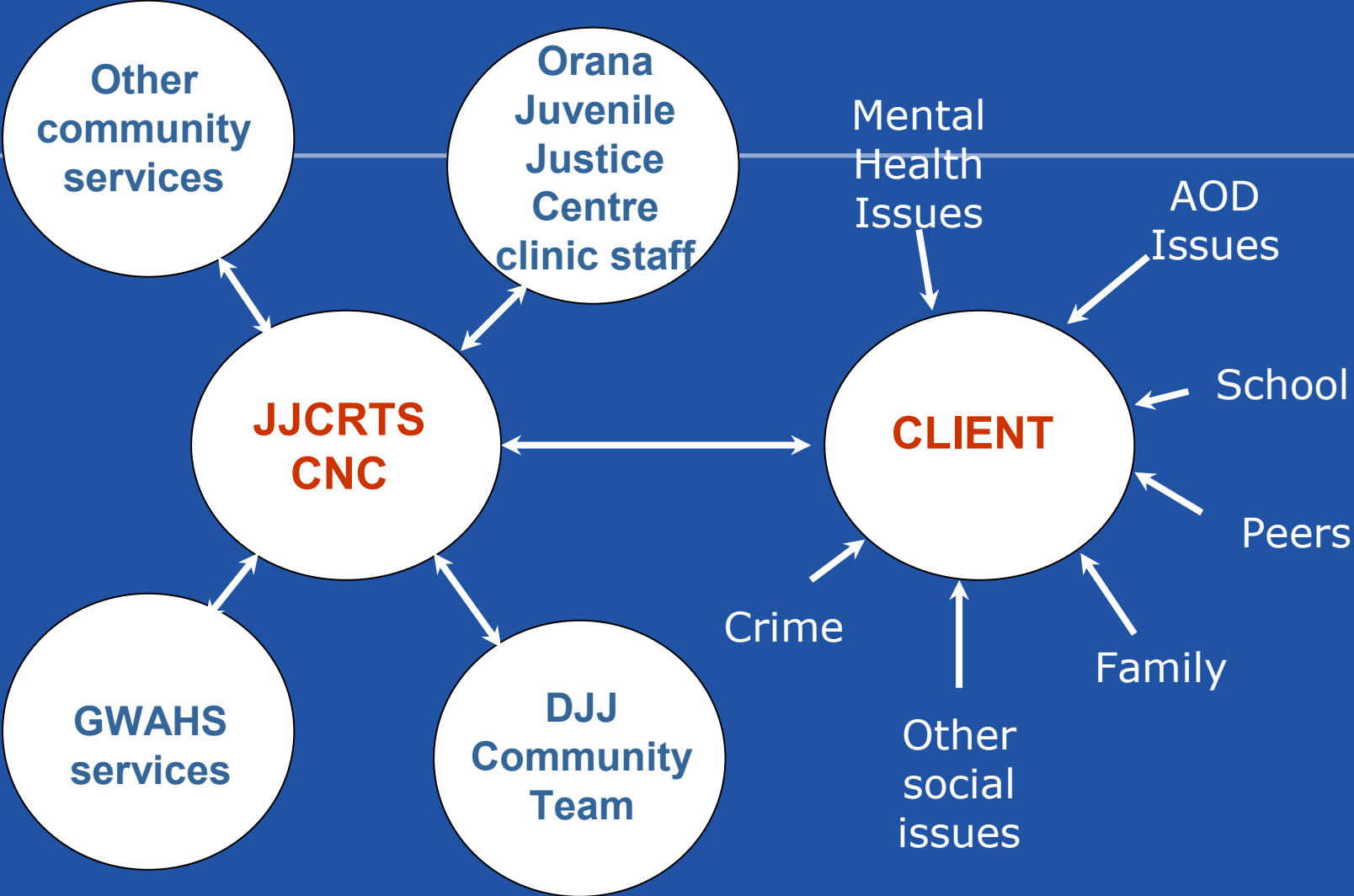
Planning & Implementing solutions

- Assessment of need and planning project
- JJCRTS Health Professional recruited in November 2005
 - Established relationships with relevant organisations
- All young people in custody in the Orana JJC in custody for ten days or more - assessed for suitability for inclusion in the project
- To be included on the pilot project participants:
 - Had to be returning to the designated project areas
 - Have a history of drug or alcohol misuse
 - With a current mental illness must be compliant with their medication
 - Not have a history of a serious violent or sexual offence



Planning & Implementing solutions

- Health professional followed young people in the community:
 - Improving the young person's and family's health literacy
 - Support to attend ongoing health appointments
 - Advocacy for the young person with healthcare and other services
- Young people were encouraged to set their own health goals which were re-visited frequently



Outcomes & Evaluation

- Non-blinded randomised controlled trial methodology used
 - Young people were placed in either the:
 - Intervention group or
 - Usual care (control) group
- Outcome measures were collected for both groups.
- Young people in the treatment group indicated a strong preference to continue contact with the Health Professional
- There was wide acceptance of the program amongst Justice Health and Department of Juvenile Justice staff

Outcomes & Evaluation

- At twelve months:
 - Increased access to health care (84% for JJCRTS group against 53% for usual care group)
 - Improved involvement of their family/carer(s) in their health care (82% for JJCRTS group)
 - Improved compliance with treatment (35% for JJCRTS group)
 - The mean number of weeks since previous admission to a DJJ centre improved more for the JJCRTS group (4.3 weeks longer) than for the usual care group (1.0 week shorter)

Sustaining Change

- To sustain changes created by this program the following changes have been made:
 - Increased linkages with other agencies
 - Continuation of focus on working with caregivers
 - Continued focus on including young people regarding suggestions and improvements to the project
 - Use of the evaluation of the pilot project to inform ongoing broader service development and planning

Lessons Learned

- This project has:
 - Demonstrated an effective approach to improving continuity of health care with a group that are often seen as being difficult to follow-up and engage
 - Increased knowledge regarding issues facing young people on being released from custody in NSW
 - Emphasised the importance of engaging young people and their carers in the delivery of their health care
 - Importance of working across organisations with complex issues

Future Scope

- Lessons learnt from this pilot project can now be replicated in other areas within NSW
- Possible scope in extending project to include young people appearing before Children's Courts to help address access to health care issues for those placed on non-custodial orders.