A model for youth alcohol diversion? Findings from the evaluation of the Youth Alcohol Referral Network (YARN) Pilot

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Description of YARN

• Pilot program - education on health and social consequences of alcohol use.

• Two components:
  • Diversion - address and/or reduce risky patterns of alcohol use;
    - timely and appropriate health ‘intervention’ (assessment and education).
  • Community Education Component – harm minimisation and resilience.

• Funded by the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF).

• Intended outcomes:
  • improved knowledge;
  • reduced alcohol use and alcohol related offending;
  • provide evidence of a model of youth alcohol diversion.
**Pilot period:**


**Pilot site (diversions):**

- Barossa Yorke Police Local Service Area

(Riverland, Barossa, Lower North and Yorke Peninsula)
**YARN Diversion Model**

**Pathways for diversion:**
(modelled on the PDDI)

- **POLICE DIVERSION** (detection)
- **FAMILY CONFERENCE** (undertaking)
- **SELF-REFERRAL**

**Drug Diversion Line (DDL)**
- Appointment booked
- Voluntary referral (YARN resource cards)
- Mandated Referrals

**YARN assessment (health worker)**
- Compliance
- Non-compliance
- Referred back to police
- No further action

Office of Crime Statistics and Research, Attorney-General's Department
• 132 individuals diverted (141 diversion occasions, average of 5.9 diversions/month).
• Vast majority (95.0%) were detections for alcohol related offending (7 FC referrals).
• Low repeat diversion (7 of 132, 5.3%).
Time and Location of Diversions

• Time of day and week:
  • Saturday (n=62) and Friday (n=35) in early to late evenings; and
  • Sunday (n=15) in early hours of morning.

• Offence location:
  • Yorke Peninsula (56.0%, n=79)
  • Barossa (26.2%, n=37)
  • Lower North (17.0%, n=24)

• Suitability of appointment location – distances in Yorke Peninsula.
Profile of Individuals Diverted

• Sex:
  • Overall - Males (75.0%, n=99), Females (25.0%, n=33).
  • Individuals 2+ times - 6 males and 2 females.

• Indigenous status:
  • Five male individuals identified as Aboriginal (3.8%);
  • All diverted once only;

• Minimal other drug use – 66.7% reported no use of drugs
• Majority of individuals (93.2%) aged 14-17 years at time of first diversion.
• Age at first diversion - 17 years (33.3%), 16 years (26.5%) and 15 years (19.7%).
• High compliance rate - 95.0% of diversions;

• 96.8% of individuals diverted on one occasion complied;

• 3 of 8 individuals diverted on 2+ times did not comply (84.2% rate);

• Geographical patterns:

  • 6 in 7 non-compliant individuals resided in Yorke Peninsula.
Key Findings – Process

- Well supported by stakeholders - positive/minimal impact reported;

- Diversion component largely implemented as intended;

- Eligible young people successfully diverted to timely and appropriate health treatment;
  - Effective police referral, appointment booking and assessment processes (DDL);
  - Two-thirds of referrals made on day of detection (9/10 within 2 days);
  - 6 in 10 diversions achieved ‘outcome’ within 28 days of diversion (YARN model).

- Low rate of re-diversion – 7 individuals of 132 (5.3%);

- Overall high compliance rates.
Key Findings – Intervention

• Appropriateness of health intervention;
  • Majority diverted highly functioning (minimal drugs and crime) but risky alcohol use;
  • ‘High risk’ young people – Yorke Peninsula;
  • Further intervention required beyond YARN intervention.

• Generally positive views of police by participants;

• Vast majority participants reported positively on YARN assessment:
  • harm minimisation approach through provision of information rather than a “lecture”;
  • meaningful rather than punitive process.
Key Findings – Alcohol

• Addressing and/or reduced risky patterns of alcohol consumption:

  • Knowledge of alcohol and health and social consequences – 75.0% reported increases;

  • Attitudes towards alcohol – 7 in 10 individuals reported positive changes;

  • Use of alcohol – 50.0% positive changes at 1st interview and 2nd interview;

  • Quantity/frequency of alcohol consumption (3 months) - 32.0% reduced measures;

  • 2 in 10 reduced from ‘heavy’ to ‘light’ drinkers or ‘light’ to ‘non-drinkers’.
Key Findings - Offending

• Overall low offending history:
  • Two-thirds had no contact with formal criminal justice system;
  • 1 in 10 had a finding of guilt and 1 in 10 attended a Family Conference;
  • 2 in 10 had ever received a formal caution (driving, good order and larceny).

• Changes in offending 6 months before and after diversion to YARN:
  • 13 individuals had 1+ criminal events pre-YARN;
  • 20 individuals had 1+ criminal events post-YARN;
  • Increases attributable to 14-16 year old males.

• Limitations and context of findings.

• Impact on offending not clear.
Achievement of Intended Outcomes

Decreasing alcohol use:

- achieved for an encouraging number of young people.

Improved knowledge of health and social consequences of alcohol use:

- 75.0% of interview participants reported increases in knowledge.

Reduction in alcohol related crime:

- difficult to measure and limited conclusions;
- changes in type of offending *may* suggest reductions in ‘alcohol-related’ offending;
- low rate of re-diversion;
- given low offending rates overall, refinement recommended.
Evidence of a model of youth alcohol diversion – ‘particular conditions’:

- AERF funding;
- Receptiveness of stakeholders;
- Dedication and commitment of individuals;

Already in place in SA to assist further expansion:

- Existing links between health, police and education;
- Existing PDDI diversion practices and procedures in operation across the state.
Conclusions

• Alcohol model of diversion is required and can work.

• Issues requiring improvement identified.

• Recommendations – training, assessment and community education.

• Issues for further roll out:
  
  • Suitability of model for other regions and impact on stakeholders?

  • Expansion to adults?