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An Evaluation of Cerridwen

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THE EVALUATION

This report outlines the key findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the Media Academy Cardiff's (MAC) Cerridwen programme. The evaluation of the Cerridwen programme was conducted by Dr Gemma Morgan – Lecturer in Criminology, at Swansea University. Gemma has extensive experience of working with the third sector and statutory agencies towards the development of new knowledge and evidence-based practices. This report is based on interviews with programme staff, observations of the Cerridwen sessions and feedback from young people, which draw on aspects of the Youth Justice Evaluation Inventory (YEJI) (Ugwudike, Morgan & Raynor, 2018). The YEJI based on research evidence of effective practice with young people (Ugwudike et al., 2018; Trotter, 2009; 2013a; 2013b; 2015; 2017; Trotter and Evans, 2012; Trotter et al., 2015; Farrell et al., 2011; Brogan et al., 2015; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Luong and Wormith, 2011; HMI Probation, 2016; Adler et al., 2016; Lipsey, 2009; Lipsey et al., 2010). The YEJI focuses on identifying the strengths of front-line practice and areas that require improvements. A key objective of the YEJI is to promote evidence-based approaches to working with young people. As such, the YEJI incorporates items that are based on the international research literature on effective modes of service delivery (see for example, Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Dowden & Andrews, 2004; Latessa et al., 2002; Raynor et al., 2014; Trotter et al., 2015). The YEJI assesses the extent to which dimensions of the effective practice literature are present in real-life practice. YEJI was designed to assess a range of practices in order to evaluate practice integrity. Practice integrity refers to the extent to which services apply evidence-based practices that are linked to reductions in re-offending (Ugwudike and Morgan, 2018). Therefore, the YEJI assesses a range of areas linked to evidence-based practices such as the organisational context and ethos, quality assurance strategies, intervention design and implementation, assessment and supervision practices. The report outlines key the strengths of Cerridwen that are aligned to the effective practice literature and recommendations for improvements.

THE BACKGROUND OF CERRIDWEN & PROGRAMME DESIGN

The partnership between the MAC and the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service (YOS) identified there was a significant increase in the number of young people being referred to the YOS for violent offences. In response to the increase in severity and frequency of violent offences being committed, MAC embarked on the Understanding Violent Behaviour Project to respond to this issue. As part of MAC's agenda to address violent offending, the Cerridwen programme was developed. Cerridwen is a seven-week group programme designed for 10-25 year olds. The key aim of Cerridwen is:

for the young people and adults to recognise the impact of their life experiences on them, recognise the impact of their behaviour on others, increase their self-esteem, self-worth and self-awareness and for them to increase their empathy skills. It is believed that by increasing all of these skills through various group and individual exercises and self-reflection, that there will be a decrease in the severity and frequency of aggressive behaviours exhibited and ultimately cessation.

There is a clear need for the Cerridwen programme, which is responsive to the needs of the local community. The Cerridwen programme can also have further reach and would be a useful resource for other services who work with young people who are prone to violent behaviour.

The design of Cerridwen was informed by an extensive literature review of evidence-based practices for understanding and responding to violent behaviour. The evaluation revealed that Cerridwen is a well-designed and underpinned by effective evidence-based practices. A key strength of Cerridwen pertains to it being underpinned by cognitive-behavioural approaches. Several studies reveal that cognitive-behavioural approaches are the most effective mode of intervention to change behaviour and reduce re-offending (Adler et al.,

2016; Lipsey, 2009; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Redondo et al., 1999, Koehler et al., 2013). The Cerridwen programme focuses on increasing young people's empathy and also helps to develop coping skills and problem-solving techniques in order to avoid future offending. These represent effective practices that are linked with reductions in offending (Gendreau et al., 2010; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Dowden and Andrews, 2004). Cerridwen has also been designed to consider the individual characteristics and needs of young people. The Cerridwen programme draws on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research and recognises the vulnerabilities of young people (see Bellis et al., 2015). Cerridwen is designed to recognise and respond to barriers of engagement in order to ensure that the programme is accessible to young people. The responsive design and assessment practices of Cerridwen is a key strength of the programme. Programmes that are responsive to the individual's characteristics and address barriers for learning and engagement are more likely to reduce attrition and re-offending rates (Raynor et al., 2014; Herzog-Evans, 2017; Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Ugwu-dike and Morgan, 2018; Lipsey, 2009; Bourgon and Bonta, 2014).

A well-designed and detailed manual accompanies the Cerridwen programme. The manual outlines the theory/approaches the underpinning Cerridwen and the curriculum for each session, with clear steps for delivery. Each session has its own theme, which focuses on developing the young people's human capital (e.g. communication, problem solving and empathy). The manual essentially helps to ensure that the programme is delivered with integrity (Gendreau et al., 2004; Mann, 2009). Additionally, Cerridwen is flexible in terms of its delivery. The aim is for the young person to engage with the entire programme, but the structure also allows for each session to be delivered individually. The programme is usually delivered to small groups of young people but is also suitable to be delivered on a one-to-one basis. The delivery of the Cerridwen programme in a group setting can help to provide mutual support for young people and help to increase engagement by learning together. Cerridwen also incorporates effective assessments of young people. The programme staff recognise that effective assessments should be undertaken, and assessment outcomes should inform service delivery. There are processes in place for ensuring that these are implemented in practice.

The young people are assessed to identify needs, strengths, and protective factors that can encourage desistance from offending and improve their lives. The assessments are also used to track young people's progress during Cerridwen.

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION, QUALITY ASSURANCE MONITORING & STAFF SKILLS

Cerridwen is a well-designed programme and underpinned by a sound theoretical and empirical evidence base. However, the effectiveness of a programme can be dependent on it being implemented and delivered with integrity (Duwe & Clarke, 2015; Helmond et al., 2014; Lowenkamp et al., 2006; Ugwudike & Morgan, 2018). This often relies on having skilled staff (Herzog-Evans, 2017; Raynor et al., 2014; Duwe & Clarke, 2015). Observations of the Cerridwen programme did reveal that it was delivered with integrity; it is delivered in accordance with its design. The programme facilitators ensured that the aforementioned programme manual was followed appropriately. The purpose of the sessions was made very clear to the young people, and they were solution-focused and well structured. As previously noted, there is scope for flexibility in the delivery of Cerridwen to respond to key responsibility factors that may impede a young person's ability to engage with the sessions. During the observations, staff were effective in adapting the sessions to the needs and abilities of the young people.

The staff and management of MAC have created a warm and supportive environment for young people, which is to be commended. It was evident that the approach to service delivery is aligned to principles of 'children first, offenders second' that resonates throughout Wales (WG/YJB, 2014; Haines and Case, 2015). The Cerridwen programme facilitators displayed excellent relationships. Several studies reveal that the practitioner/service user relationship is integral to enhancing engagement, motivation and reducing re-offending (see Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Creaney, 2014; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Haines and Case, 2015; Johns et al., 2017; McNeill, 2006a; McNeill and Batchelor, 2002; McNeill et al., 2012; Raynor et al., 2014; Trotter, 1996; 2013a; 2013b; 2015; Williams et al., 2018). Relationship skills pertain to practitioners to be 'warm, genuine, humorous, enthusiastic, self-confident, empathic, respectful, flexible, committed to helping the client,

engaging, mature, or intelligent' (Dowden and Andrews, 2004: 208). The use of relationship skills also requires communication to be 'directive, solution-focused, structured, non-blaming, or contingency-based' (Dowden and Andrews, 2004: 208-209). Overall, the staff displayed a wide range of these skills and were effective in their engagement with the young people and regularly praised, encouraged and supported them.

The programme facilitators were also effectively supported by MAC's Criminal Justice Services Manager. There appeared to be good lines of communication between management and front-line practitioners and good levels of organisational harmony. The Criminal Justice Services Manager also provided valuable clinical supervision to the programme facilitators. After each Cerridwen session, the Criminal Justice Services Manager would usually have a debrief with the staff to discuss how the session went and if any issues arose. The Criminal Justice Services Manager on occasions, would also deliver sessions. Providing clinical supervision to staff and management being involved in front-line service delivery helps to ensure that the programme is delivered with integrity and increase the self-efficacy of staff (Gendreau et al., 2004; McGuire, 2004; Taxman and Belenko, 2011; Trotter, 2017).

SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT & FEEDBACK

MAC regularly conduct surveys with young people to ascertain whether they are satisfied with the quality of services they received. Results from these surveys are then used to inform service delivery. This is one way in which MAC effectively monitors the effectiveness of Cerridwen and adapts practice accordingly. The MAC and Cerridwen programme viewed and engaged young people as key stakeholders. Also, participation in the programme is voluntary and collaborative. This is vital as collaborative supervision can help to reduce re-offending (Raynor et al., 2014; Trotter, 2015). As noted, the management and programme staff should be commended on how they engage with and support young people. Feedback from a sample of 60 young people who completed the Cerridwen programme has been resoundingly positive. The majority of young people found the programme facilitators supportive and helpful:

'They [facilitators] listen without judging you for your mistakes, they treat you fairly and with the respect that anyone would deserve' (16 year old male).

'They made me feel really welcome and helped me to think about things in a different way without telling me how to live my life' (14 year old female).

Additionally, the majority of young people felt that Cerridwen had helped them to manage their anger and aggression more effectively:

'It's not even that I'm a violent person. I just get so frustrated when I think people are laughing at me. Cerridwen has helped me deal with that' (male 15 year old).

'I know myself better now. I know I jump to conclusions when really I need to step

back and wait because the worst thing doesn't always happen, your mind can play tricks on you' (female 17 year old).

'I already act differently when people wind me up; I don't lose my head anymore' (13 year old female).

'I know myself better so I can control myself better' (13 year old male).

Essentially, feedback from the young people further demonstrates the value of the Cerridwen programme and MAC's commitment to support and engage young people.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cerridwen programme is a valuable resource that can be used by a range of organisations and practitioners to help support young people who display violent behaviours. The evaluation revealed that there are several strengths of the design and implementation of the Cerridwen programme. These largely pertain to:

- A robust and evidence-based programme design and manual
- Skilled staff who effectively employ relationship skills
- Effective quality assurance mechanisms such as clinical supervision and service user feedback
- Effective assessment practices and the adaption of service delivery to the specific characteristics of the young people
- Organisational harmony, including effective staff/management communication
- The effective engagement of young people as key stakeholders

One recommendation for future Cerridwen programmes relates to enhancing the privacy of the sessions. During the observations, it was noted that the sessions took place in an open area, where other staff members would walk through. A more private setting will decrease the number of distractions and increase the likelihood that young people will engage in the session and disclose information that will help to the programme facilitators to support them (see Vanstone and Raynor, 2012; Ugwudike et al., 2018).

In order for the integrity of Cerridwen to be maintained, it is important that the quality assurance mechanism previously discussed remain in place (e.g. clinical supervision, management delivering some sessions, evaluation practices). When selecting new staff to deliver the programme, it is important that they are chosen on ability to effectively employ relationship skills (e.g. warm, genuine, humorous, enthusiastic, self-confident, empathic, respectful, flexible, committed to helping the service user, engaging, mature, or intelligent, being an excellent role player, directive, solution-focused, structured, non-blaming, or

contingency-based) and structuring skills (e.g. effective use of authority, problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, pro-social modelling) (see generally, Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Raynor et al., 2014; Ugwudike and Morgan, 2017). Staff who possess these skills are more likely to effectively engage with the young people and help to change their behaviours (Bonta and Andrews, 2017; Raynor et al., 2014; Ugwudike and Morgan, 2017; 2018). To ensure that evidence-based practice skills are embedded in practice, practitioners could have the opportunity to conduct self-evaluations, and where possible, peer evaluations. These evaluations should involve comparing practice skills with the skills that have been shown by a large body of research, to help produce positive outcomes for children and young people. MAC could use the skills checklist contained in the YJEI to assess new staff and to conduct peer evaluations, which can help to maintain and enhance professional development, reflective practice, and quality assurance (Ugwudike et al., 2018).

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