

Policing Young Adults: A Review of the Chance to Change Scheme

Summary of Findings

Introduction

The report has been prepared for Avon and Somerset Constabulary and RISE Mutual. It provides an independent review of *Chance to Change*, a deferred prosecution scheme designed to address the offending behaviour of young adults within the area.

Chance to Change is a scheme for 18-to-24-year-olds. It allows an individual who has been accused by police of committing a crime, to participate in a supervised intervention process aimed at addressing their behaviour and specific needs. The process acts as an alternative to a formal prosecution. The scheme is run in partnership with RISE Mutual, Step Together, and The Nelson Trust. Each offers specific interventions, with The Nelson Trust working exclusively with female referrals.

The scheme follows either a standard or enhanced pathway, the processes for each are largely the same, although those eligible for the enhanced pathway (care leavers, racially minoritised groups, those identified as having additional needs), are offered a broader range of interventions, some of which are community and needs specific.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was adopted for this review. This included an overview of academic and policy literature, analysis of local anonymised data from RISE Mutual on the Chance to Change cohort, an anonymous survey of service users, interviews with service users, as well as interviews with practitioners working on the scheme from Avon and Somerset Constabulary and RISE Mutual.

Considerations

With the relatively low number of interview and survey service user participants, it's important to be mindful that the responses in this report are not generalisable to all service users. Additionally, with participant recruitment there is the risk of self-selection bias, where those who have been included may be more likely to be positive about their experience. These are worthwhile notes when drawing conclusions from any research, but it does not discount the comments made by the service users represented here.

Summary of Findings

Tailored Approach

The Chance to Change Scheme provides a tailored approach for service users in two ways; tailoring responses to young adults, and tailoring interventions to the individual.

'I think that this is perfect for young people who have made a mistake and truly want to change.' (Service User)

The focus placed on tailoring interventions is a core reason for the positivity from service users. Having interventions which fit the needs of individuals, rather than expecting the individual to fit to the intervention, is likely to be more successful and lead to real-life change for the service users.

Giving Young Adults a Chance

Service users described how Chance to Change provided them with a second chance, as well as acting as a safeguard for those whose offending is linked to challenging circumstances.

"I'd like to thank everyone involved, it's almost a second chance for people who maybe acted wrongly in a situation and had instant regret and acknowledgment of what they have done. It's also the first time I'd spoken to anyone in that way about how I was feeling at the time, and it's help[ed] loads." (Survey Participant)

'Sometimes we do bad things and make mistakes not because we are bad people, but because we need support. Sometimes our financial and mental situation leads us to have bad attitudes, but inside we are good people, and we just need someone to help us.' (Service User)

Here 'giving people a chance' means more than a chance to address wrongdoing, it's also a chance to actively participate, or take time to talk through experiences that they may not have acknowledged previously.

Developing the Scheme

During interviews practitioners were keen to explore how Chance to Change could develop and evolve. There were three areas highlighted: increasing referrals, expanding numbers in the enhanced pathway, and expanding eligibility.

Underlying these three themes is the confidence of practitioners that Chance to Change has the potential to offer more as a response.

"I do wonder sometimes whether the numbers would increase if there was a much wider knowledge of it, knowing that people were going to get a much better intervention by way of a deferred prosecution than they ever would on a community resolution." (Practitioner)

Indeed, practitioners recognised the potential long-term impact of the scheme, as opposed to a perfunctory criminal justice disposal, on those encountering the criminal justice system at a young age. The prospect of preventing a young adult from engaging further in crime is quite considerable, which, with development, could be afforded as an option to more.

Whilst a relatively small number of service users were included in the review and they themselves may come with their own biases, the feedback on their experience with Chance to Change was overwhelmingly positive. This is a testament to those who work on the Scheme. Service users at times likened the support to counselling and were particularly thankful for the flexibility employed by practitioners. At the core, Chance to Change is evidence of a tailored approach being embedded at multiple stages. This not only fosters behavioural change but also offers a meaningful 'second chance' for those in need of support when breaking the cycle of crime. Practitioners expressed interest in expanding the eligibility, and increasing referrals, particularly for those disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and currently excluded due to the criteria. Chance to Change provides a much-needed intervention for those not always being reached through other means. Its real-life impact is demonstrated by the below testimony from one service user:

"I created and a men's mental health support group...we do a walk and talk session for men...We've set up a group down here...we've got about 18 – 25

members...Doing the course has made me be more aware and learn things, then I take them into the group and help them." (Service User)

This service user's experience highlights the considerable potential and long-term impact of Chance to Change.

Recommendations

1. Encourage greater knowledge sharing within Avon and Somerset Constabulary of Chance to Change. This could take place through targeted communications or embedding Chance to Change in different police procedures.
2. Carry out an exercise with police data to ascertain whether potential referrals are being missed. Here paying attention to those who would benefit from the enhanced pathway.
3. Improve recording practices of cohort data, with a particular focus on the unrecorded/not disclosed data.
4. Carry out an outcome analysis. Investigate the extent to which service users drop out, disengage, or do not complete the intervention.
5. Consider whether opening up eligibility could benefit a broader range of young adults. This could be by both re-visiting the exclusion list and considering whether other interventions would benefit female referrals.
6. Continue the partnership between Avon and Somerset Constabulary, RISE Mutual, Step Together and The Nelson Trust. There is clear value in operating the Scheme with a broad range of experts.