

Space to Think: Lessons and Impact of the IVY Project

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The Interventions for Vulnerable Youth (IVY) service commenced in September 2013, aiming to fill a gap in service provision for high risk young people aged 12 to 18 years. It is a national service funded by the Scottish Government and based in the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice at the University of Strathclyde.

Improving mental health is a national priority in Scotland. Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland: Policy and Action Plan 2009–2011 (Scottish Government, 2009) committed NHS Health Scotland to work with key stakeholders to develop a set of national indicators to monitor trends in children and young people's mental health, which were published in November 2011 (Parkinson, 2012). The importance of these indicators was highlighted in the mental health policy document, Mental Health Strategy for Scotland: 2011–2015 (Scottish Government, 2011).

Particular emphasis within the strategy was the issue of how best to tackle conduct disorders. Conduct disorder refers to a broad spectrum of behavioural problems from a relatively mild form of behavioural disturbance to the most severe forms of externalising behaviour, such as extreme violence and sexual offending. Conduct disorders frequently coexist with other mental health problems; for example, in some groups more than 40% of children and young people with a diagnosed conduct disorder also have a diagnosis of ADHD. Other identified coexisting issues include substance misuse, attachment difficulties, trauma presentations, and mood difficulties. Conduct disorder does not always lead to offending behaviour, however, studies have shown that the relationship between the two is strong. Conduct disorder is also a significant predictor of adversity in adulthood.

IVY was developed with an awareness that a significant proportion of high risk young people with severe conduct and offending behaviour problems are unable or unwilling to access resources capable of meeting their complex psychological health needs. It provides three distinct but related levels of risk assessment and management using a Structured Professional Judgement paradigm, which is recognised as best practice in risk assessment. The service aims to ensure a consistent minimum standard for all referrals, that young people with the highest level of risk and need do not incur any undue waiting times, and that they have access to appropriate resources.

Two years on from the birth of IVY, [an evaluation](#) was undertaken to determine what referrers think of the service, where it is now and where it should go in the future. Three main areas were examined: the consultation, the Risk Analysis Report and the wider experience of IVY.

104 referrals were made to IVY during its first two years from 26 of 32 local authorities across Scotland, of which 91 were accepted as appropriate. 10% of surveyed professionals used the service on more than one occasion and 100% responded that they would use the service again.

98% of survey respondents were positive about their self-identified aims being met, 56% feeling their aims had been met excellently, 37% that they had been met well and 7% fairly.

91% of respondents thought the Risk Analysis Report received at level 1 added a new way of thinking about potential risk and 94% felt it would influence the young persons' care plan. 73% of respondents reported that the young person had either maintained their current living placement or had moved towards greater independence and 90% believed the service had benefited the young person, family or carers. Benefits identified included gaining insight into behaviours, increased access to appropriate resources and interventions, improvement of carers' and workers' understanding and expertise, and greater ability to inform other agencies involved in providing care or a service for the young person, eg. schools, CAMHS and Children's Hearings. Over 95% of respondents also rated that the Risk Analysis Report would help the young person towards better SHANARRI outcome indicators of well-being.

The survey of referrers and other professionals involved in the care of the young people, highlighted that one of the most striking outcomes was in providing guidance and support in these complex and high-risk cases, put most simply, 'Space to Think'.

The IVY service is comprised of a multi-disciplinary team with particular expertise in working with challenging young people. The staff are committed to this work and the design of the service enables open discussion, sharing of information, and valuable reassurance and guidance throughout. Within levels 2 and 3 of the IVY service, there is the benefit of additional access to specialist assessments and direct work with the young person.

To make a referral to IVY, download a referral and consent form at www.cycj.org.uk/ivy. For further information or to discuss a potential referral please contact CYCJ on 0141 444 8622 or email ivy-admin@strath.ac.uk.

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Our work focuses on three key areas: practice development, research and knowledge exchange.

CYCJ produces a range of monthly factsheets on youth justice and related topics. You can find these by visiting www.cycj.org.uk

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