



Using a core components approach in evidence review and service redesign in youth mentoring

Anthony Shannon, Director Early Intervention, Volunteering and Youth, NSW Communities and Justice
Associate Professor Amy Conley Wright, Dr Betty Luu and Laura Metcalfe, Research Centre for Children and Families, The University of Sydney



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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.



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Overview

- Project purpose & aims
- Project approach and methodology
- Key findings
- Application of the evidence review in the Youth Frontiers program



Youth Frontiers program

- The Youth Frontiers program delivers quality mentoring to young people in contact with the youth justice and child protection systems in NSW, with the aim of increasing their wellbeing and connection to community, and avoiding further contact with the justice system.
- Young people participating in Youth Frontiers are matched with mentors who spend a minimum of 52 hours over 12 months supporting them to achieve their goals.
- In 2021, the program **has been reshaped** to focus its mentoring and support activities to young people that are part of a vulnerable priority cohort

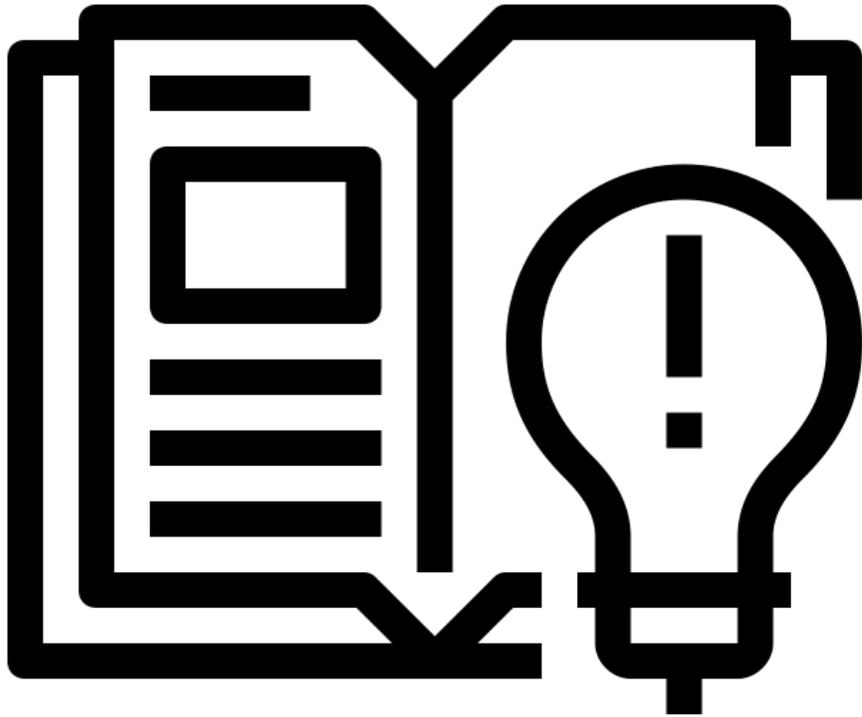
Project aims

- The aims of this evidence review were to:
 - Explore what early intervention and diversion programs have been implemented in Australia and overseas that have included a mentoring aspect
 - Identify outcomes that these programs have contributed to and critically assess the strength of evidence for interventions focused on pro-social activities and youth justice diversion for vulnerable young people
 - Determine specific core components of these programs that effectively deliver positive outcomes for young people.

Approach

- We conducted an evidence review on youth mentoring programs that divert high-risk youth from coming into contact with the criminal justice system.
- Closing the Gap Clearing House evidence review on the effectiveness of mentoring programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified activities, practices and approaches that should be used when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Key outcomes for these programs include: reduced risk of entry (or re-entry) into the youth justice system, antisocial behaviour, and criminal activity.

Rapid review process



Created by Maxim Basinski
from Noun Project

**Define research question
and scope**

Search for evidence

- Search strategy

Screen studies for inclusion

- Assess for risk of bias

Extract data

Data analysis and synthesis

PICOS

What **mentoring programs** for **young people, who are at risk of contact or are in contact with the juvenile justice system**, are effective in reducing **antisocial and/or criminal behaviours** and **diverting youth from the juvenile justice system**?

Participants/population: Young people aged 10 – 17 years, who have had (or are at risk of) contact with the youth justice systems.

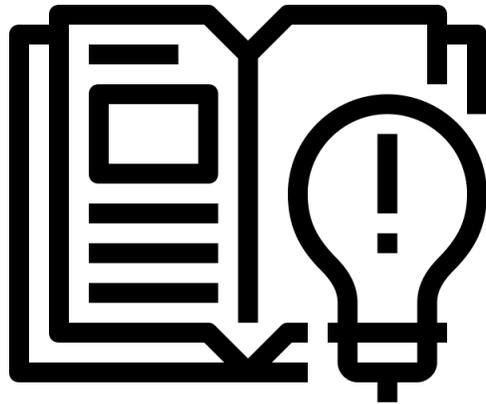
Interventions: mentoring program or intervention and any type of mentor

Comparisons: Any comparison group

Outcomes: reduced risk of entry (or re-entry) into the youth justice system and reduced antisocial behaviour or criminal activity

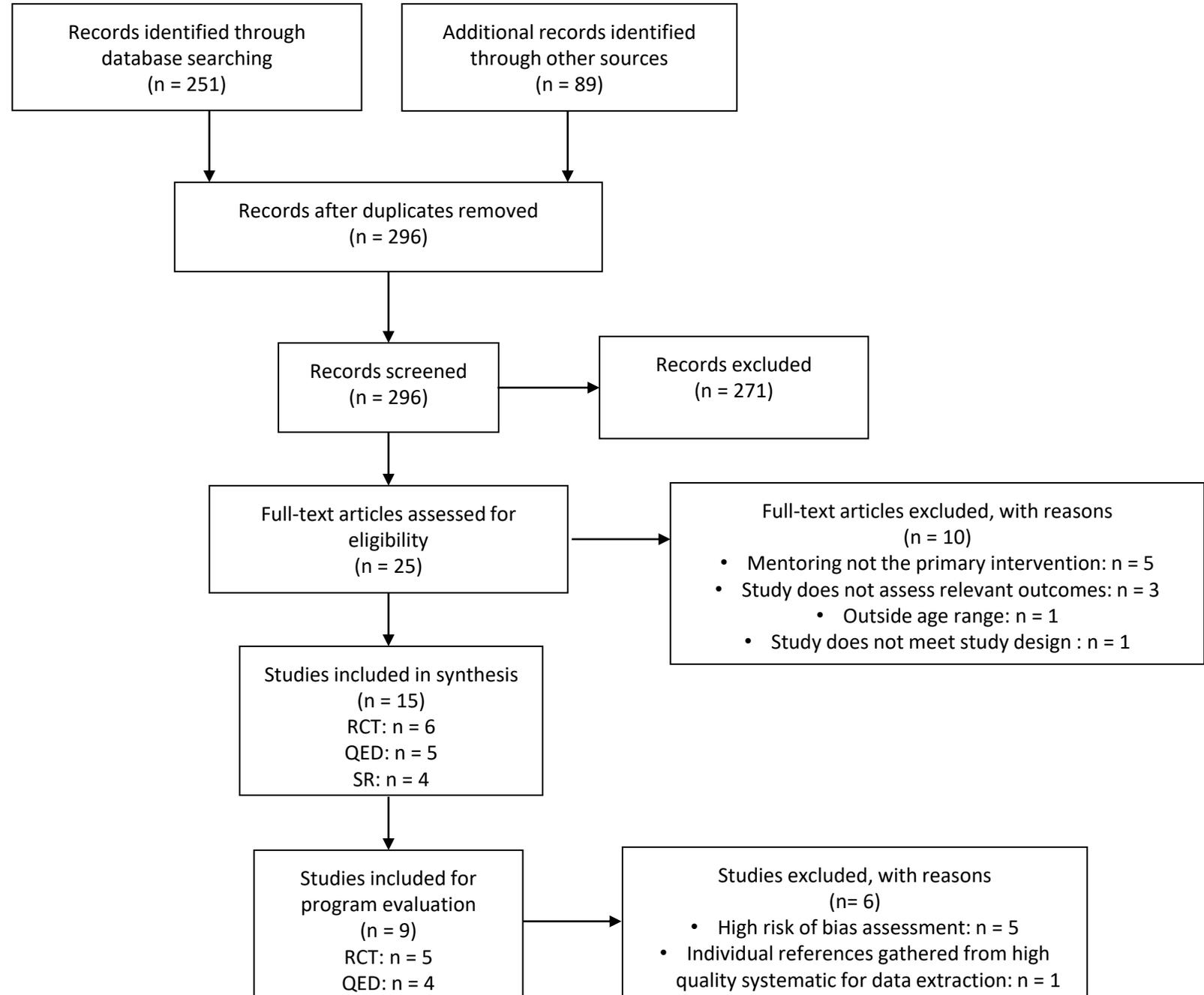
Study designs: e.g., systematic reviews, meta-analysis, randomised controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs

The screening process

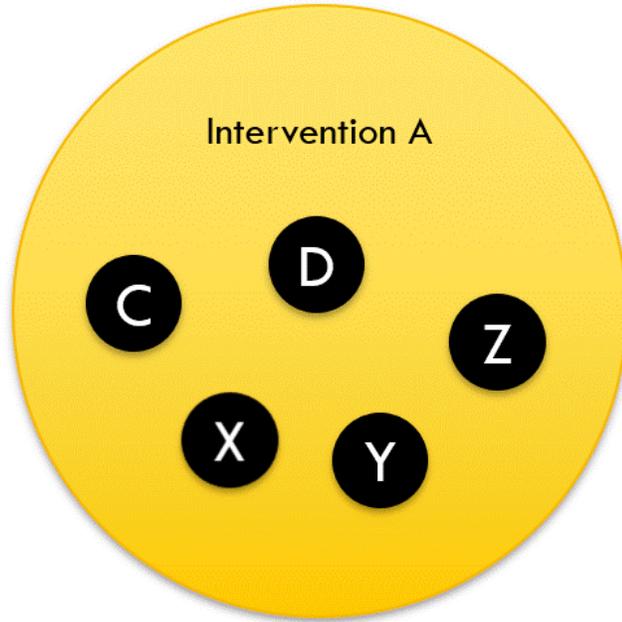


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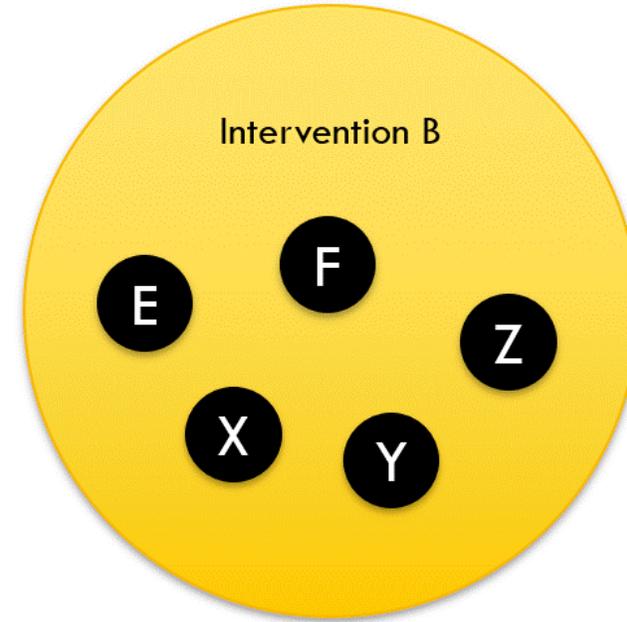
Identification
Screening
Eligibility
Included



The common elements approach

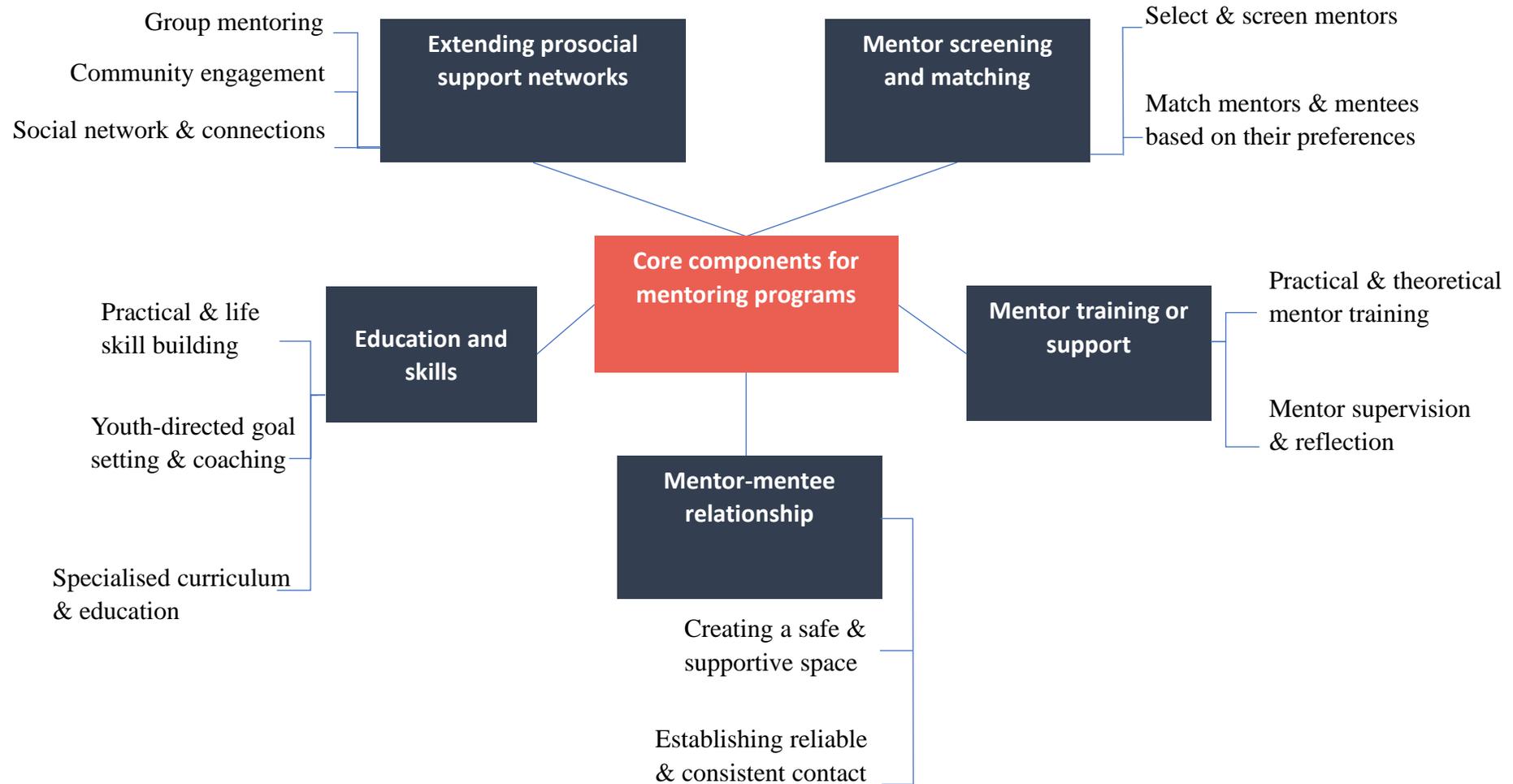


When using the core components and flexible activities to design or implement a program, it must be tailored to fit the needs and characteristics of the target group.



E.g., well-evidenced and effective interventions (e.g., Intervention A and Intervention B) are comprised of Practices X, Y and Z

We identified 5 core components recommended as standard program components for youth mentoring programs:



Considerations for working with Aboriginal communities

- More frequent and intense contact may be appropriate - the more vulnerable the mentee, the more contact time needed
- Involve local Elders as mentors or in other activities, enhancing cultural connections and respectful relationships with local community leaders
- Promote pathways for education – e.g., organising mentoring partnerships with university students
- ‘Yarning up, not down’ is important when setting goals (Ware, 2013). Mentors and mentees should talk together about solutions to challenges, rather than mentors coming in with outside solutions.

Mentor screening and matching

The process of screening and matching prospective mentors with potential mentees is an important preliminary step to ensure a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship can be fostered.

Flexible activities include:

- Select and screen mentors
- Match mentors and mentees based on their preferences

The process of screening mentors ensures they are 'fit for task' and can work with the targeted mentee population.

Mentor training or support

Providing mentors with the knowledge and skills to be a mentor is crucial. This involves becoming aware of the needs of the mentees and issues that are likely to arise.

Flexible activities include:

- Practical and theoretical mentor training
- Mentor supervision and reflection

Activities involve not only the provision of adequate and informative training to mentors, but also allow frequent opportunities for mentors to give updates, reflect on their mentoring journey, and receive support.

Mentor-mentee relationship

The quality and meaningfulness of the primary mentor-mentee relationship is critical to a successful mentoring program.

Flexible activities include:

- Creating a safe and supportive space
- Establishing reliable and consistent contact

It's important to create a safe and supportive space where mentors and mentees can interact and engage in activities and establish pathways for communication between the mentor and mentee.

Education and Skills

Mentoring programs should consist of structured activities that focus on education and skills to allow mentees to set goals and trial new skills in a safe environment. They should also be intentional and prepare youth for independent living. Decisions about the nature of these structured activities can be tailored based on the needs and interests of mentees.

Flexible activities include:

- Practical and life skill building
- Youth-directed goal setting and coaching
- Specialised curriculum and education

These activities include opportunities for mentees to develop and refine practical life skills, acquire new knowledge and information, as well as determine their own goals and be guided to achieve them by the mentor. Structured activities can work in parallel with unstructured activities, such as socialising between mentee and mentor or between mentee and peers.

Extending prosocial support networks

Promoting connections beyond the primary mentor-mentee relationship helps to build social skills and establish and extend prosocial support networks.

Flexible activities include:

- Group mentoring
- Community engagement
- Social network and connections

Community engagement can encourage mentees to extend their social network and interact with, and give back to, prosocial individuals in their local community.

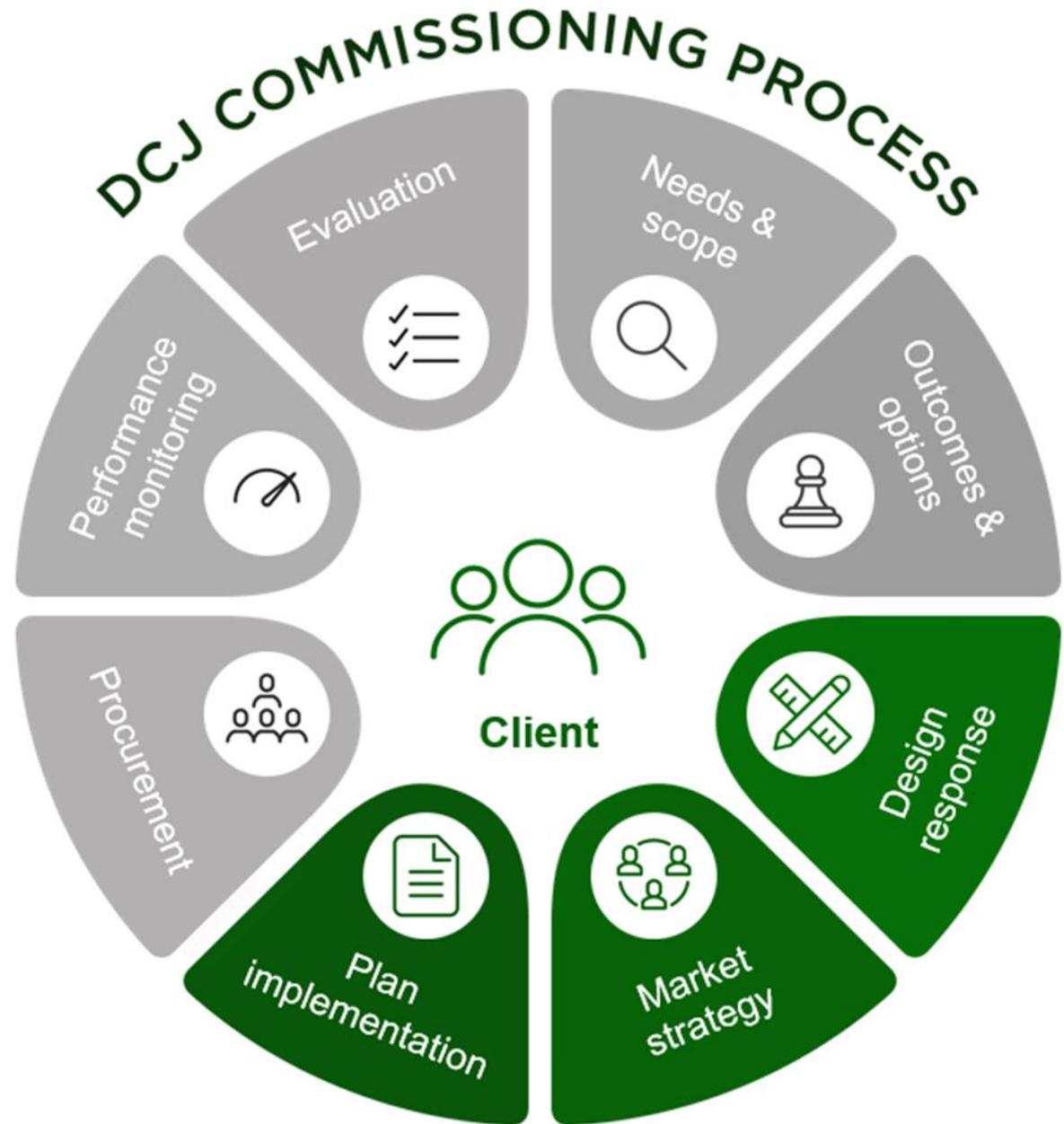
Applying core components to Youth Frontiers

Be clear about the change we're trying to make for clients and how we'll know that change is being achieved.

Be disciplined in how we specify outcomes, use evidence to design our service response, and measure the effectiveness of our service.

Work together with clients, communities and service partners.

Start by building the core components into the Program Logic



NEED	EVIDENCE	PROGRAM	MECHANISM FOR CHANGE	OUTPUTS	PROGRAM OUTCOMES		GOAL
<p>The decisions, <u>actions</u>, and quality of support that young people receive during adolescence can significantly shape their future.</p> <p>The developmental status of adolescence creates inherent vulnerability. This is because of the lag in their psychosocial maturation, in particular their impulse control, future orientation, and resistance to peer influence. These are all crucial in their decisions to engage in risky and criminal behaviours.¹</p> <p>The NSW Government, <i>Forecasting Future Outcomes Stronger Communities Investment Unit - 2018 Insights Report</i> identified adolescents aged 10-14 with the following characteristics as a vulnerable group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interactions with the justice system - assessed as at risk of significant harm one or more parental risk factors (including: interacting with justice system, mental illness, alcohol or drug misuse, domestic violence). <p>This group of young people is likely to have high estimated future cost of service provision and support, and poor social outcomesⁱⁱ. For example, they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more than 50x more likely to be placed in out-of-home care - 3.8x more likely to enter custody - 2.5x more likely to be admitted to hospital for alcohol and other drugs - less likely to complete the NSW Higher School Certificate (43% compared to 63%). <p>Further, young people are more likely to be in criminal proceedings for an offence than adults, as the likelihood of being involved in criminal activity peaks in adolescence and early adulthood and diminishes with age.^{iii,iv} For example, in NSW:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 42% of alleged offenders for robbery were aged 10-17 years - 33% of alleged offenders for breaking and entering a non-dwelling were aged 10-17 years - 35% of alleged offenders for vehicle theft were aged 10-17 years.^v <p>Evidence tells us that these young people are also more likely to be experiencing mental health issues, substance misuse and disengagement from school and community ^{vi vii}</p> <p>Aboriginal people are overrepresented throughout the NSW criminal justice system, making up 24% of its adult prisoners, and 52% of juvenile detainees, despite being just 2.9% of</p>	<p>Youth mentoring is a consistent, prosocial relationship between a young person and an older peer or adult intended to support positive development of youth^{ix}.</p> <p>Five core components are common across evidence-informed youth mentoring programs for diverting young people from youth justice involvement and/or further criminal activity^x:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor screening and matching • mentor training and supervision • engagement • personal and life skills development • social networks and community engagement. <p>These are recommended as standard program components that could be delivered by youth mentoring programs to address the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Primary</i>: reduced risk of entry (or re-entry) into the youth justice system, anti-social behaviour, and criminal activity. • <i>Secondary</i>: reduced substance use, improved self-perception and autonomy, school participation and engagement, prosocial <u>behaviours</u> and peer/family relationships^{xi}. <p>Young people in contact with youth justice have said they want connection to trusted adults such as mentoring by community members, Elders, and other people with similar lived experiences to themselves, to share knowledge and life experiences. This is particularly important for</p>	<p>The Youth Frontiers program is made up of 5 standardised core components, delivered to young people 10-17 years of age in NSW.</p> <p>These components can be tailored to the local context and client needs. Each core component has different flexible activities that describe how it can be implemented.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mentor screening and matching Flexible activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • select and screen mentors • match mentors and mentees. 2. Mentor training or support Flexible activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor training • mentor supervision and support • mentor partnerships with other agencies. 3. Engagement Flexible activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentor-mentee relationship • reliable and consistent contact. <p>The duration of the mentoring relationship is 12 months, with weekly mentoring for a minimum of 1 hour.</p> 4. Personal and life skills development Flexible activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practical and life skill development • goal setting • personal growth and development • educational activities and support. 5. Social networks and community engagement Flexible activities include: 	<p>Quality youth mentoring is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including enhanced mental health and reduced offending.</p> <p>For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who are significantly over-represented in the youth justice system,^{xiii} mentoring can strengthen connection to culture, a protective factor associated with positive life pathways.^{xiv}</p> <p>Screening and matching prospective mentors with potential mentees <u>is</u> an important preliminary step to ensure a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship can be fostered.</p> <p>Providing mentors with training and support to be a mentor is crucial. It ensures mentors are well equipped to meet the ever-changing and complex needs of young people. This in turn, can ensure young people get the high-quality support they need to make positive changes in their lives.</p> <p>The person who mentors matters – the bond they create with the young person can enhance sustainability and the overall success of the program. Establishing mentor-mentee relationships that are reliable and consistent can build trust and respect. In turn, they empower, <u>support</u> and encourage the young person.</p> <p>Supporting young people to develop practical and personal life skills can build their confidence, <u>resilience</u> and independence.</p> <p>Promoting connections beyond the mentor-mentee relationship (<u>e.g.</u> family, peers) helps build social skills and establish and extend support networks. Activities that support young people to engage with their community can also increase their sense of belonging and build their confidence to</p>	<p># <u>of</u> program participants</p> <p># <u>of</u> mentors screened, orientated & trained</p> <p># <u>of</u> mentor-mentee matches</p> <p># <u>of</u> mentor-mentee rematches</p> <p># of face-to-face <u>mentoring</u> hours per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> e-mentoring hours per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> one-to-one mentoring hours per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> group mentoring hours per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> team mentoring hours per mentee</p> <p>total # mentoring hours per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> hours of community engagement per mentee</p> <p># <u>of</u> weeks program participation, per mentee</p>	<p>Short-term Outcomes</p> <p>Young people have supportive relationships</p> <p>Young people have access to the services they need</p> <p>Medium-term Outcomes</p> <p>Young people have a sense of choice and control (self-determination) in their lives</p> <p>Young people are resilient and can tackle major life challenges</p> <p>Young people feel a sense of connection and belonging to their communities</p> <p>Young people are less likely to engage in risky behaviours</p>	<p>Indicators</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people who report having supportive relationships</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people engaged with other relevant services</p> <p>Indicators</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people who feel they can control and influence their life outcomes</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people who feel able to cope with life events</p> <p>Indicators</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people who report feeling a sense of belonging in the place and community where they live</p> <p>Proportion (%) of young people who self-report engaging in risky behaviours</p>	<p>Young people avoid contact with the <u>justice</u> system</p>

Youth Frontiers - Outcomes

- **Goal** - young people avoid contact with the justice system.
- Early intervention focus - increase young people's wellbeing and connection to community.
- Outcomes tested with service providers and measured through the Data Exchange.
- **Short-term Outcomes**
 - young people have supportive relationships
 - young people have access to the services they need.
- **Medium-term outcomes:**
 - young people have a sense of choice and control (self-determination) in their lives
 - young people are resilient and can tackle major life challenges
 - young people feel a sense of connection and belonging to their communities
 - young people are less likely to engage in risky behaviours.

Youth Frontiers - Program

- Target group - young people 10 – 17 years of age in contact with the justice and child protection systems.
- Each core component has different flexible activities that describe how the component can be implemented – tested with service providers.
- Components can be tailored to the local context and client needs, allowing for local service design – important for Aboriginal organisations.
- Mentors - paid or voluntary.
- Mentoring type - one-to-one, team or group mentoring (face-to-face or e-mentor).
- Mentoring duration - 12 months with weekly mentoring for 1 hour.
- Four locations, with defined target groups:
 - Central Coast & Sydney LGA - Aboriginal young people
 - Fairfield LGA & Illawarra - young women.

Referral Pathways

- Engage young people as early as possible regarding contact with the justice system:
 - warnings or cautions issued by Police, or be known to Police, or
 - involved in a Youth Justice Conference, or
 - appeared before court for the first time, with or without proceeding warnings or cautions.
- Referral pathways established locally by service providers, including referrals from:
 - NSW Police
 - Youth Justice
 - Youth Koori Court
 - Police Citizens Youth Club
 - Community or Neighbourhood Centres
 - Youth organisations & homelessness services
 - Community Elders
 - DCJ Community Service Centres.

Youth Frontiers - Theory of Change

- Quality youth mentoring is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including enhanced mental health and reduced offending.
- For Aboriginal young people mentoring can strengthen connection to culture, a protective factor associated with positive life pathways.
- Screening and matching mentors with mentees is an important step to ensure meaningful mentor-mentee relationships.
- The person who mentors matters - training and supporting mentors is critical, ensuring mentors are well equipped to meet the needs of young people, and in turn, ensuring young people get high-quality support to make positive changes in their lives.

Youth Frontiers - Theory of Change

- Establishing mentor-mentee relationships that are reliable and consistent can build trust and respect, and in turn empower, support and encourage the young person.
- Supporting young people to develop practical and personal life skills can build their confidence, resilience and independence.
- Promoting connections beyond the mentor-mentee relationship (e.g. family, peers) helps build social skills, and establish and extend support networks.
- Activities that support young people to engage with their community and culture can increase their sense of belonging and build confidence to access services and ask for help when needed.

Communities & Justice Evidence Portal

- Expected go live end-2021 - publically available online.
- Early intervention sector wants access to evidence that is high quality, accessible and relevant, and able to be used to design and implement services.
- Will include two types of evidence: evidence-informed programs; and core components and flexible activities.
- Evidence-informed program summarises detail - what the program is, outcomes it contributes to, strength of evidence, program effectiveness, and how it is implemented.
- Information about what each core component is, how components work together and how they can be used to inform program design.
- Each flexible activity is described with information for practitioners - how the activity can be implemented, what should be considered when working with specific client groups, who the activity has been conducted with, and which programs implement it.

Questions?

Research Centre for Children and Families
Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Website:

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html>

Email: rccf.research@sydney.edu.au

Email to register for our mailing list.



Program name	Country*	Age	Mentor Type	Format	Program duration	Meeting length and frequency	Outcome domains	Evidence rating
Campus Connections ^{ix}	USA	11-18	Volunteer	Group and Individual	12 weeks	4 hours per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Antisocial behaviours •Self-perception and autonomy 	Mixed research evidence (with no adverse effects)
Reading for Life ^x	USA	11-18	Volunteer	Group	10 weeks	2 hours per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Juvenile justice involvement 	Mixed research evidence (with no adverse effects)
TAKE CHARGE ^{xi}	USA	16-17	Paid	Group and Individual	1 year	60-90 minutes per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Juvenile justice involvement •Self-perception and autonomy 	Mixed research evidence (with no adverse effects)
Mentoring Program for At-Risk Youth ^{xii}	USA	10-17	Volunteer	Individual	6 months-1 year	3 hours per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Antisocial behaviours •Self-perception and autonomy 	Mixed research evidence (with no adverse effects)
Project Arrive ^{xiii}	USA	13-14	Up to organisation	Group	1 year	50 minutes per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Peer and family relationships •School participation and engagement 	Mixed research evidence (with no adverse effects)