



## Youth

# Improving outcomes for young people by spreading and deepening the impact of targeted youth support (TYS) and development

## Key messages

- Evidence shows that TYS interventions can be effective in reducing teenage pregnancies and promoting positive behaviours.
- TYS has also been found to reduce emotional and behavioural problems, including delinquency/offending, school exclusion and truancy.
- Evidence largely from studies outside of the United Kingdom (UK) shows that TYS services increase the emotional wellbeing and confidence of young people as well as their participation in education.
- Young people can derive benefits from TYS services that go beyond intended consequences. For example, an intervention aimed primarily at reducing teenage pregnancy can also have positive impacts on participants' confidence and sense of autonomy, regardless of whether or not reductions in teenage pregnancy occurred. Programmes can also have benefits for family relationships and improving parental engagement.
- One-on-one youth work has been found to be effective.
- While there is some anecdotal evidence on the barriers to the uptake of services, evidence on which young people use TYS services and why they engage (or fail to engage) needs improving if it is to inform effective service delivery.
- Successful TYS involves systematic staff training and ongoing workforce support. This training and support should be integrated into the design of the intervention in order to gain maximum benefits.
- Schools are the main site for the uptake and recruitment of young people into TYS interventions; agencies should work closely with them to develop effective means to target hard-to-reach groups, particularly those excluded from education.
- Good information on vulnerable young people needs to be gathered, recorded and shared by schools in order to support integration and the referral process.
- Successful TYS interventions build and maintain strong relationships on three levels: (a) between agencies, (b) with local communities and (c) at the one-to-one level with young people involved in TYS.
- Providers could improve identification of young people to be included in the interventions and ensure that they are more rigorously needs based by applying more consistent definitions of 'at risk' and 'vulnerable'.
- The views and needs of the target group need to be heard, shared and incorporated into TYS programme design.
- There is insufficient evidence on the cost-effectiveness of TYS programmes to comment on their return on investment.

- Robust monitoring and evaluation of the costs and progress of TYS interventions should be prioritised as a matter of urgency because (a) it would enable providers to identify which interventions are most likely to be cost-effective and (b) monitoring costs and impact can be beneficial to the intervention's success, if the information about what is working is fed back into the programme.

The research review aims to improve understanding of targeted youth support services by evaluating the evidence on:

- eligibility and uptake of TYS services
- the impact of TYS on desirable outcomes
- the facilitators and barriers to effective TYS services.

## Who are the key stakeholders?

The key stakeholders are those people or groups who might have a vested interest in TYS services. Presented here is a general description of the specific stakeholders relevant in the context of this review, and a more precise description of the stakeholders, as found in the evidence.

The key stakeholders identified are:

- adolescents with support needs
- parents and carers of adolescents with support needs
- education-based staff including head teachers and teachers in different kinds of schools, tutors and designated teachers, pastoral support staff and special educational needs coordinators
- local authority and community service providers
- social workers responsible for working directly with vulnerable young people
- specialist frontline professionals
- policy-makers.
- **Adolescents with support needs** are 11- to 19-year-olds who are at risk of or have been identified as having problems such as substance misuse, youth offending, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, or learning, social or emotional disabilities. These youths are also collectively referred to as 'vulnerable young people'.

The research suggests that adolescents might have multiple problems and could be

The review also looks at the available evidence on cost-effectiveness of TYS programmes. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature, involving systematic searching and analysis of key data. It summarises the best available evidence to help service providers improve services and, ultimately, outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Matrix Evidence carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data work.

hard to reach by mainstream services. They are particularly interested in receiving relevant, appropriate and non-stigmatising support.

- **Parents and carers of adolescents with support needs** provide them with day-to-day care, in order to help them to achieve their potential. Evidence about their experiences is limited, yet the review does show that interventions which approach TYS from a family level have positive effects on the confidence and motivation of family members as a whole.
- **Education-based staff (head teachers, teachers, tutors, pastoral support staff, special educational needs coordinators, etc)** are critical in identifying young people as 'vulnerable' and appropriate for partaking in an intervention. The review shows that schools function as the heart of many TYS interventions. Schools and their staff often provide the basis for the identification of at-risk young people, and are frequently involved in the implementation of programmes.
- **Social workers** are involved in case management (linking young people with agencies and programmes that support their needs), counselling, conducting interventions, community organising, and policy and practice development. They work directly with vulnerable young people that may be at risk of developing problems or have been identified as having problems.

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- **Managers of services providing TYS** can work in schools, community groups, local authorities and volunteer organisations. They manage and coordinate policy and practice relating to the implementation of TYS services. Evidence suggests that those who provide TYS services often require more training and support. Managers require reliable information and communication in order to achieve the goals of their services.
- **Specialist frontline professionals** can be involved in identifying vulnerable young people as well as in implementing the

interventions. The evidence shows that strong relationships between specialists and other agencies are important for the identification of hard-to-reach young people.

- **Policy-makers** in government departments are engaged in introducing new policy and implementing and reviewing the effectiveness of existing policy. Evidence about their experience is more limited, but shows that effective lines of management communication with policy-makers could promote positive outcomes for TYS.

## What data is available to inform the way forward?

There is not currently any data that directly measures the impact of TYS. There is, however, plenty of data available that provides demographic details relating to the vulnerable young people at whom support may be targeted and that enables local authorities to build a picture of the extent to which young people might be vulnerable to particular issues in their area. The variety of problems covered under the TYS agenda (for example, teenage pregnancy, anti-social behaviour, non-attendance at school, low self-esteem) makes data collection challenging, as many of these factors are measured by different sectors: health, criminal justice, education or social

work. A Common Assessment Framework, with standardised national indicators across these different risk factors, will help in the identification and referral of youth, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the success of the programmes.

C4EO's interactive data site ([www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk)) enables local authority managers to evaluate their current position in relation to a range of key national indicators and to easily access publicly available comparative data on vulnerable young people and the prevalence of the issues that targeted youth support aims to address.

## The evidence base

The introduction of the TYS agenda has undoubtedly led to a rise in the research base concerning at-risk and hard-to-reach young people in the UK. However, there are still weaknesses in the evidence base, and there is a need for:

- more discussion of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, particularly concerning referral and definitions of 'risk'
- more cross-disciplinary research that bridges the psychological and social issues involved with youth support

- more research that addresses the differing and diverse experiences of young people, including disability, gender, ethnicity and immigration status
- more research that reports outcomes data through either conducting before-and-after studies or incorporating ongoing follow-up mechanisms into the research design
- more cost and cost-effectiveness data.

## Research review methods

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, through recommendations from the Theme Advisory Group, and by considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. This approach attempts to eliminate bias in the selection of

literature, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible. All of the literature is UK or United States (US) based and a wide variety of TYS programmes were identified.

Data contained within the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods but primarily by obtaining online access to known government publications and access to data published by the Office for National Statistics.

## Next steps

An updated version of the review is due to be published in spring 2011. This will include validated local practice examples and views from children, young people, parents, carers and service providers.

C4EO reviews about positive activities and youth alcohol consumption are also available on the C4EO website. Local decision-makers and commissioners working in children's

services may also find it helpful to read the Youth Directors' summary, which presents the key messages from all three reviews.

C4EO is using the main messages from the three Youth Theme reviews to underpin its knowledge-sharing and capacity-building work with children's services and, through them, the full range of professions and agencies working with vulnerable young people.

## Research summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of the key messages from the research review on this topic.

Please go to [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to download full and in-depth versions.

## How can C4EO support your vision?

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