AYJ Conference 2019

The role of speech-language pathology in the Queensland youth justice system

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“I have to admit that in all the years I have been looking at prisons and the treatment of offenders, I have never found anything so capable of doing so much for so many people at so little cost as the work that speech and language therapists carry out.”

How did we get SLPs in Queensland Youth Justice?

- Independent Review of Youth Detention—Queensland

- Identified the need for systemic improvements to practices pivotal to the safety, wellbeing and rehabilitation of young people:
  - cultural services and support
  - program delivery and evaluation
  - positive behaviour management and incident prevention
  - mental health and therapeutic support
  - incident footage and investigation
  - oversight.

83 Total recommendations
4 Directed at Queensland Corrective Services
79 Directed at Youth Justice
23 Require commitment and consultation from other departments & agencies
Structure

6 full-time positions:

• 1x Senior Practitioner (SLP)
• 2x full-time SLPs: Brisbane Youth Detention Centre
• 2x full-time SLPs: Cleveland Youth Detention Centre (Townsville)
• 1x full-time SLP: Southern Queensland Region
We work on more than speech...

- Speech
- Voice
- Mental health
  - English as a Second Language
  - Social language (a.k.a. pragmatic language)
  - Basic language: receptive & expressive
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Perspective-taking
- Emotional regulation
  - Hearing impairment
  - Dysphagia
- People who use augmentative and alternative communication
- Morphology & syntax
- Reading and writing
- Fluency
## Prevalence of language difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevalence of young offenders with communication difficulties</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>64% of young people in custody had language delays</td>
<td>Lount et al., 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.7% of young people have <strong>severe</strong> language delays</td>
<td>2015 NSW Young People in Custody Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% of 7000 young offenders had speech, language and communication difficulties (n=4,200)</td>
<td>Bercow Report, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-90% of young offenders have a communication disorder</td>
<td>Bryan, Freer &amp; Furlong, 2007: Hughes et al., 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prevalence of language difficulties

- 48% have severe disorder in oral language
- 77% have severe delays in understanding what they are reading
- 51% can’t read SINGLE WORDS
- 38% said basic sentences with incorrect vocabulary & grammar
- 78% could not describe the differences/similarities between words (e.g. why is smooth different from rough)
- Language impacts all areas of life

References:
2015 NSW Young People in Custody Report; Bryan, Freer & Furlong, 2007; Rucklidge et al., 2009
Exposure to complex trauma & poor attachments

- Most children exposed to DV will have difficulty in reading and learning how alphabet sounds go together (Blackburn, 2008)

- Females with language disorders experienced more severe and frequent sexual abuse compared to those without language disorders (Brownlie et al., 2017)

- Many children on welfare were also found to have 1 positive statement and 11 negative statements per hour compared to children of parents working as professionals, who experienced 32 positive statements and 5 negative statements per hour (Hart & Risley, 2003)

- Maternal responsiveness strongly predicted better receptive, expressive and overall language skills at age 3 & 4 years old (Hudson et al., 2015)
Young people referred to psychologists in schools for their behaviour were more likely to have difficulties with structural language, reading, and using the right language in social situations.

Girls with poor expressive language were more likely to damage their social relationships.

Boys and girls with poor receptive language are more likely to be aggressive.

Children with Conduct Disorder were also disordered in using the right language in social situations.

Young people referred to psychologists in schools for their behaviour were more likely to have difficulties with structural language, reading, and using the right language in social situations.
Impact on education, employment and programs

A larger proportion of adolescents with developmental language disorders were employed in service and unskilled occupations whereas typically-developing adolescents were more involved in skilled and professional education and occupations (Conti-Ramsden & Durkin, 2012).

Impact on ability to engage in primarily verbal mediations – RJ Conferencing, appearing in court, counselling appointments, work programs (Bryan, 2004).

Moseley et al. (2006) found that offenders gaining oral language skills through communication interventions were 50% less likely to re-offend in the year after release than the national average.
Real examples of communication and literacy skills of young people in Queensland Youth Justice
• Cannot follow 3-step instructions
• Difficulty using instead of, without, although, because (prepositions)
• Mixes up past and present tenses (says is, not was)
• When telling a story, they describe poorly and forget to mention how the story finishes.
• Cannot predict what happens next in common situations
• Poor ‘world knowledge’
### Legal vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Able to read?</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example given?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comply</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“For bail and that.”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Don’t know.”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Don’t know. What’s a victim, miss?”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magistrate</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Like a court to the magistrate.”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Bail</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“You did something bad.”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curfew</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Six to six curfew.”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>“Don’t know. You do what you do.”</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Different BYDC clients
Youth Justice Speech-Language Pathology Pathology Guidelines

- Raising awareness of what SLPs do
  - centre visits, staff/executive meetings, info sessions, workshops around QLD

- Offering practical workshops
  - Communicating with Young People
  - Recognising differences between AAE vs SAE
  - How to modify written documents for young people

- Recruitment & ongoing clinical supervision (individual + group)

- Focused professional development & complex clinical case management

- Information-sharing with other depts & agencies

- National & international networks

- Evidence-based practice for YJ cohorts

- Data collection

Youth Justice Speech-Language Pathology
September 2017 → May 2019
Collaborative partners

- Young people, families, caregivers
- Foster parents, residential care workers
- Child Safety

Community-based:
- YJ staff – caseworkers, youth workers, Restorative Justice convenors
- NGOs supporting specific services – Integrated Case Management; Supervised Care Accommodation
- First Nations Action Board members

Youth Detention Centres:
- Behaviour support team – psychologists & SLPs
- YJ staff – caseworkers, youth workers, programs staff
- Dept of Education
- Forensic Child and Youth Mental Health Service
- Primary medical services (GP, Dentist, Nurse)

External services:
- Courts
- QLD Police Services
- QLD Corrective Services
- Legal Aid QLD
- Griffith Youth Forensic Service
- NDIA
The impact so far...

Youth Justice staff:

- **look for communication difficulties first** before blaming it on behaviour.

- can better **identify signs of communication difficulties** (including masking strategies) and have strategies to respond to this.

- are aware of the prevalence of low literacy in young people.

- have the tools to **modify documents for young people with low literacy**.

- have an increased awareness that many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people speak an Australian Aboriginal English dialect instead of Standard Australian English → is not ‘bad English’.
Youth Justice Speech-Language Pathology 2019-2020

- **Modifying written information for young people to understand**
- **Continued incorporation into YJ clinical governance**
- **Training/skill-building across YJ (internal):**
  - Communicating with Young People
    - Caseworker: all
    - Youth Workers: all
    - Supervised care accommodation
- **Group program pilot:**
  - "Tell It Again"
  - Learning the skills to tell a coherent story
- **Restorative Justice Conferencing:**
  - Scaffolding communication in pre-Conference meetings & during Conference
- **Speech Pathology Australia Justice Working Group**
- **Expand networks**
  - Courts, magistrates/judges
  - Child & Youth Forensic Outreach Services
  - Legal Aid & ATSILS
  - Universities, researchers, NGOs

**“Communication Skills for the Workplace”**
Guiding modules for young people
A collaboration with Transition 2 Success
Future directions

• Evaluation of SLP in Youth Justice

• Scoping of reading and writing programs in QLD – link young people to continue learning.
  – Provide reading intervention for YP → link to reducing recidivism

• Research projects: internal and external

• Work with intermediaries/communication assistants
Questions?


References


References


References


The Communication Trust. (November 2014). *Doing justice to speech, language and communication needs: Proceedings of a Round Table on Speech Language and Communication Needs in the Youth Justice Sector*. 

Queensland Government
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