

Summary

Rationale

Special places for juvenile frequent offenders have been established in four youth correctional institutions in the Netherlands since October 2004. Thus in total a number of 44 places have become available. These places offer programmes of three till six months' duration for juvenile frequent offenders in order to help them change their behavioural patterns and prevent recidivism. The programmes consist of an intra-mural part (in the institution) and an extra-mural part (preferably in the youngsters' own home towns). The provision of both parts of the programme is the responsibility of the correctional institution concerned. After the completion of the programme the offenders are supposed to take part in a follow up programme for which the authorities of their home towns are held responsible.

These special frequent offender places are meant for male juvenile offenders from the 31 largest cities in the country. Juvenile frequent offenders are those youngsters that are up to and including 17 years old and that have been charged with an offence more than five times in their lives, of which at least one time in the same year as their last reported offence. This is the official definition. The Prosecution Counsel broadened this definition into one that includes also the young people that are at risk of turning into frequent offenders. Their actually used definition thus came to be those who have been officially reported at least twice in the last three years and now again have been booked for a criminal act.

These special places are not meant for boys charged with major offences or indecency offences. And as the programmes are developed as a compact intervention, they are not meant for treating boys showing complex multidimensional problems; these youngsters need a more extended intervention.

In order to gain insight in the dynamics of these newly established places and to support the further development of such places, the scientific research and documentation centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice launched a study on the participation, the content, the delivery, the effects and the follow up of the developed places and programmes. PLATO, a research and development centre of the University of Leiden, is the institute that carried out this descriptive study.

More than in other cities juvenile delinquency and frequent offender problems arise in the four major cities of the country: Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht. Therefore special attention has been given in this study to the ways these cities deal with referring frequent offenders to the special places and to their ways of providing follow up care for these offenders.

Research questions

The research focuses on the following questions:

1. How many juvenile frequent offenders in the 31 most populated cities have been referred to the special frequent offender places since October 2004? And to whom do these places appear to be accessible?
2. How are the intervention programmes composed and to what extent may they be considered promising as far as effects and impact are concerned?
3. How do the four largest cities provide follow up to those offenders that return from the special intervention programme and how do these follow up activities relate to the intervention programmes?
4. What results may be expected from both the intervention programmes and the follow up programmes?

Data collection

The study includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection. To each research question quantitative data have been gathered, derived from files as kept by the Ministry of Justice. In addition to that, 50 offender portfolios out of a total of 118 were analysed.

To deepen the understanding of the data, additional qualitative data have been collected in various ways. Various interviews were held, for example with the persons that refer the offenders to the

special places, persons from the four correctional institutions for juvenile offenders and policy advisors of the four major cities. Furthermore, screening took place of frequent offender intervention programmes and follow up programme (policy) documents.

Also a focus group has been interviewed about the extent to which the intervention and follow up programmes inter-relate. The focus group consisted of managers of the four correctional institutions for juvenile offenders included in the study, the co-ordinators of the four municipal follow up programmes of the four largest cities, and the region of Limburg (included because of the specific regional function of Het Keerpunt in the province Limburg).

Results of the research on special places for juvenile frequent offenders

Theme 1. Level of occupation of the frequent offenders places

Places show a structural under-occupation and places have only slowly been effectuated

From October 2004 until December 1st 2006, 118 juvenile frequent offenders have been referred to and placed in the specially established places. From October 2004 until October 1st 2005, 33 places were available and the average level of occupation was 8. After this period (until December 1st 2006), 44 places were available and the average level of occupation was 22.

It took more than half a year before the level of utilisation of the places began to increase slightly. In summer 2006 an occupation of 2/3 part of the places was effectuated. After this, the level of occupation declined.

The age group involved is over 16 years old and only half of the placed offenders come from the 31 largest cities

The majority of the youngsters is over 16 years old. The places are meant for those in the age category from 12 up to and including 17 years old.

Furthermore the places are intended for those youngsters coming from the 31 largest cities. However only half of the offenders come from these cities, predominantly from the largest cities in the provinces Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland and Limburg. It's remarkable that there are no placed youngsters from the big cities in the province Overijssel at all.

The utilisation of the places increases (temporary) when new information is provided

Communication and information appear to have a positive yet temporary effect on the level of occupation. This applies to both national and local actions, to flyers, documentation and web site communication and information. After an initial positive effect, including an increase of the number of placements, a gradual decrease follows.

The national definition of juvenile frequent offenders is hardly applied in practice

Interviews with referring persons in the four largest cities reveal that definitions often used are close to the one formulated by the Prosecution Counsel. They imply that the youngster must have been charged with two or three (or more) offences, one of which in the last calendar year. Unlike the national definition here an additional requirement is that the cases were brought in court.

Offenders with such a criminal past are included in a so-called 'frequent offenders list'. This allows them to be placed in one of the special places for juvenile frequent offenders in the four correctional institutions. An additional consideration in the definition formulated by the Prosecution Counsel is a sense of concern about the youngsters' situation, criminal history and development; often that is also considered a valid reason for placement.

The process of referring to these places and its considerations as such structurally affects the level of occupation: it reduces the number of placements

The number of youngsters meeting the requirements should be high enough for the 44 places to be filled. Still the places are under-occupied. The following influences seem to add to this effect:

- Lack of information about why, and how to refer to places.
- It takes time to make the professionals concerned realise that for adequate measures it is necessary to consider the criminal history of a person rather than only his last offence.
- A preference for ambulant approaches, in which the youngsters' social climate in their home situation is ameliorated (like Multi System Therapy and Functional Family Therapy (FFT)).
- A preference for placing juvenile offenders in the region of their home towns.

- The fact that the duration of the programme often exceeds the duration of the penalty. This may be avoided by placing the offender under a supervision order (a civil law order), but the procedures necessary to do so are said to be complicated.
- The youngsters' age. For youngsters from the age of 17.5 that are placed on civil law grounds, doubts are expressed about the possibility for them to complete the full programme in the time still available. Younger offenders on the other hand often do not meet the requirements yet or are believed to be better off with a more home based approach.
- The low numbers of participants as such. These also affect the perceived potential of the programme: it takes a group to make it feasible, not just a few participants.
- Doubt about the quality of some parts of intervention programmes, especially the educational quality.

Theme 2. Intervention programmes

Programmes are developed as a compact intervention

The programmes are developed rather for youngsters who have committed many (but relatively minor) offences and are having less severe problems, than for youngsters who have committed major offences and are showing complex multidimensional problems. According to national rules, programmes must last three till six months; still almost all programmes last longer than three months. The correctional institutions indicate that this longer delivery is necessary since usually no significant changes in awareness and behavioural patterns may be expected within only three months.

Programmes do have potential, but differ in transferability, articulation and specificity

The study shows that the programmes for juvenile frequent offenders of the four correctional institutions are well described in a general sense. Distinct parts in the programmes are not always explained in a clear way. Transferability of these distinct parts differs a lot. Two institutions (De Hunnerberg en Rentray) have programme parts that are well described and transferable; De Hartelborgt and Het Keerpunt however have well described programmes in a general sense, but the separate parts of the programme are not documented. As a consequence it is difficult to know whether these parts are properly delivered and if that is done according to plan. Furthermore lack of documentation makes it difficult for others to implement the distinct programme parts.

Each institution offers its own programme. The programmes differ in content and in the extent to which the distinct parts are attuned to the needs of this specific target group. These distinct parts are not specifically developed for juvenile frequent offenders; sometimes existing materials are adapted to these youngsters. The programmes are a new remix of existing parts, rather than a completely new developed intervention.

In general the programmes do have the potential to be, or to become effective programmes. Analysis of the offences, cognitive and behavioural therapy, competence training in practical, social and problem solving abilities, as well as self-regulation of aggression are included. Two programmes also include optionally FFT. Various research outcomes of former studies in the field of effects of intervention programmes point out that such programmes may be expected to be effective.

Programmes often do not proceed as planned

The actual provision or delivery of the programmes often shows quite a few discrepancies from the programmes as they were planned.

In the first place the offenders often do not stay long enough to complete the programmes. According to the correctional institutions a minimum of three months is needed for implementing the full intramural part of the programme and two to three months for the extramural part. From the data it becomes clear that 32 of the total of 118 boys spent less than three months in the programme. Only 35 youngsters took part for a longer period than five months.

Secondly, there is under-occupation. The frequent offender groups were much smaller than anticipated, which implied that some parts of the programme could not be carried out, or groups had to be mixed with other groups not meeting the requirements of the definition of juvenile frequent offenders.

Finally, the participants in the programme often are not the kinds of persons for whom the programme is meant. Analyses of portfolio's show that most of the programme participants have the multidimensional complex problems for which, as stated above, the compact programme is not appropriate.

Theme 3. Follow-up programmes

Follow-up programmes aim at supporting the youngsters after they have finished the programme of the correctional institution, to help them get adjusted to living in normal society again. These programmes target various areas of the youngsters' life: living, work/school, social environment, leisure and psychosocial care.

There is no hard evidence available on the numbers of juvenile frequent offenders coming from the four correctional institutions attending follow up programmes. These data apparently never were registered. Evidence may only be derived from interviews with policy advisors from the four largest cities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Rotterdam), custodial staff and focus group participants.

Policy about follow up has started only recently

The development of policies aiming at delivering follow up programmes didn't start before mid 2006. In each of the four largest cities the policies are different. Some delegate the co-ordination, others focus on the adaptation of programmes to the needs of frequent offenders. The over all picture is that for juvenile frequent offenders mostly existing facilities and programmes are used aiming at broader groups of juvenile frequent offenders and other youth at risk. Only one programme was found that had been specifically attuned to the needs of juvenile frequent offenders. It is important to note that the target group of this programme was different from the target group of the programme for juvenile frequent offenders (16-23 years instead of 12-17). Furthermore, the criterion for participation in this programme is the number of offences as such (three offences, of which at least one serious) and not the number of reported offences.

Intervention programmes and consecutive follow up programmes thus far are insufficiently attuned

All parties concerned and involved (custodial staff, local authorities, probation officers and child welfare council employees) agree that a lot may be enhanced in this respect. Making follow up programmes obligatory, better identification, division and allocation of tasks and adequate exchange of information are mentioned as directions in which improvements may be found.

The follow up programmes don't show the longitudinal coherence needed with the initial attempts to work on moral development and new behaviour.

Financial problems are mentioned as obstacles for proper implementation of follow up programmes, especially in smaller municipalities and for those having reached the age of eighteen. For this last group, money no longer is available in case of optional (not compulsory) follow up, so support stops and risks of recidivism increase.

The distance between the correctional institutions and the youngsters' home towns is also considered a problem as far as co-ordination is concerned. Finally, insufficient opportunities for accommodating people are available, no safe places to live. A drop back into old behavioural patterns often is the result.

Theme 4a. Expected success of intervention programmes

Given the fact that the practice studied shows a lot of programme inconsistencies and low numbers of attendants, it is difficult to derive clear conclusions. However the study does allow for some tentative conclusions:

Few young offenders seem to have completed the entire intervention programme (intra-mural and extra-mural part)

Ministerial data (datum date December 1st 2006) indicate the following:

- 118 frequent juvenile offenders have been referred to and placed in the specially established places.
- At December 1st 2006, 21 boys still were in the programme (17 in the intra-mural part of the programme, 4 in the extra-mural part of the programme).
- Considering the programme completed *when the intra-mural part plus the extra-mural part have been completed*, the following can be noted:
 - There are indications that 11 boys may have completed the full programme (intra-mural plus extra-mural part).
 - There are indications that 86 boys left the programme prematurely, for different reasons (79 in or at the end of the intra-mural part, 7 in the extra-mural part).
- Considering the programme completed *when the offered programme has been completed* (also when this includes only an intramural part), the following can be noted:

- Possibly 23 boys may have completed the full offered programme. This number also includes the 12 boys that stayed for 5 or more months in Het Keerpunt, where the programme only includes an intramural part.
- Possibly the other 74 boys did not complete the (full) offered programme, but left the programme prematurely.

At least approximately 1/3 of the total group has staid in the institution long enough to have been able to attend the full programme

Comparing the actual and the intended duration of attending the programmes, it may be concluded that at least 35 boys staid in the institution long enough (= at least five month) to have been able to attend the full programme. This duration is a condition for completing the full programme, not a guarantee that this really happened.

Not completing the intervention programme in most cases was caused by contextual juridical factors beyond the programme itself

Both the data from the correctional institutions for juvenile offenders and the analyses of the files show that many young offenders stopped the programme because it exceeds the duration of their stay in the institution; for example because the penalty was complete, or because of transfer to another institution.

Individual features affect chances of completing the programme successfully

According to the correctional institutions, individual features of juvenile frequent offenders that affect their chances of successfully completing the programme (in terms of more competences, less problem behaviour and less recidivism) are motivation for participation and motivation to change, a normal intelligence, problems not being too complex, a perspective, an understanding of ones own problems, and good friends.

Theme 4b. Expected success of follow up programmes

Not enough quantitative data are available for firm conclusions about the follow up programmes

Even though agreements were reached in 2004, the actual implementation of the follow up programmes did not start until 2006.

The anticipated success rate of follow up programmes is estimated low

Thus far many ideas have arisen on how things might improve. Translating the national policies to make them meet the local needs is what is mentioned as vital. It is not enough to divide and plan tasks; sharing responsibilities and commitment is what is needed most. Local authorities have a crucial role in the chain management needed to make programme activities have the necessary coherence.

Conclusions and reflection

Preparation and timing

After establishing the special places for juvenile frequent offenders, it took more than a year and a half before the places became operational. The implementation of the new places and related programmes appeared to have been insufficiently planned in advance. The places were there, but nor the organizations nor the procedures were ready yet.

The target group

In juvenile frequent offenders programmes the participating youngsters are often put together in groups. Youngsters their age however are known to be easily influenced by their peers (Patterson, Reid & Dishon, 1992). Given this strong mutual possibly negative influence, one may argue that such group composition may be counter productive.

The rationale of the programmes

The programmes for juvenile frequent offenders are a new remix of existing parts, rather than a completely new developed intervention.

The one programme for juvenile frequent offenders does not exist. Some general features may be similar, but every correctional institution for juvenile offenders chooses its own way in elaborating the programmes.

The elements the programmes include have seldom been developed for this specific target group. This would probably have required too high an investment for too small a group. Rather the institutions appear to have a need for more broadly applicable offers, meeting the needs of various groups of juvenile delinquents. Programme elements focused on particular features of the various groups allow for individually or specific group focused programming, using a specific mix of such elements.

Accreditation of the programmes

Nor the programmes, nor the distinct parts in it are based on formally accredited methods. If the programmes continue, they will have to meet these standards in the future.

Delivery of the programmes

De Hunnerberg had the highest and most permanent level of occupation of these special places. The relatively low under-occupation possibly may have a relation with the fact that this correctional institution is a strictly guarded one. Furthermore this correctional institution has well elaborated, articulate and transparent programmes. The other institutions more often were confronted with too low numbers of participants. As a consequence, their programmes often could not be fully delivered. Either it was impossible to deliver all programme components and it appeared not to be possible to fully bring to live the social interactive dimension needed within the programme, or it meant that participants for reasons of low numbers had to be mixed with other groups showing other criminal profiles.

Practical obstacles

The duration of the youngsters' stay in the correctional institution often does not match with the duration of the programmes available for these youngsters. Often programmes could not be fully delivered because of that. As long as programmes may not be delivered fully, no effective approach seems to be within reach.

The efficacy of the programmes and the chain of elements included in it (from the intervention programme to the follow up) often suffers from too far a distance between the home towns of the youngsters and the referred to institutions. Since there are only four institutions having these special places nationwide, these distances often are wide.

Programme coordination

A well attuned and smooth transition from intra-mural to extra-mural programmes on to the follow up stage benefits from chain management, that enhances the mutual consistency of programme components and phases.

Follow-up

Follow-up still has been insufficiently realised. It is often unclear how the responsibilities are allocated. At the national level a frame of reference has been developed for such division of responsibilities, showing explicitly how these may be divided and translated to the local situation. The big cities may better have a more directive role in instigating this process. Once the programme is in operation, the child welfare council will function as a case director, guarding and furthering the coherence and responsibilities of all partners. Furthermore, re-integration might benefit a lot from case management throughout all the phases of intervention, from initial placement towards finally the completion of the follow-up. Case managers may add to the quality of the interventions by guaranteeing the continuity of the available information and the approach chosen.

Research questions

This research focused, as planned, at the ins and outs of the special places for juvenile frequent offenders. During the research it became clear, that also the rationale of these special places should have been a relevant and initial part of this research (or should have been studied earlier). Such an analysis can make clear whether these special places are a suitable solution for a perceived problem. In the research, the juvenile frequent offenders were not compared to the regular youngsters in the correctional institution, while this point evokes questions in this research. Such as: How different are these two types of youngsters? And how different are their programmes, concerning duration and content? Because of these questions, it may be wondered what is the surplus value of these special places compared to the regular places.

General reflections

Many of the professionals interviewed during the study express their support for the concept of special places for juvenile frequent offenders. The places allow for the individually work focused on raising awareness and behavioural change these youngsters so desperately need.

This study shows that the *duration* of the programmes for juvenile frequent offenders is more often supply-driven (executing the programme with a planned duration) than demand-driven (offering a programme based on the duration of the inflicted punishment of the youngster). Since the programmes include separate modules, the *content* of the programmes could be made demand-driven but in practice this doesn't happen sufficiently in all institutions.

The initial expectations of the programmes have not been fully met. The target groups often were not reached. Due to lack of participants programmes were not always developed to their full potential, nor delivered. The energy put into the programmes shows too low a level of return on investment. There is a well conceivable risk that through these experiences, motivation of all parties concerned may have been affected negatively.

During this research, information often appeared not to be available since it had not been registered, nor filed properly to allow for the descriptive kind of study aimed for. Also information had not been registered in a uniform way. To allow for such studies in future it is important to improve the existing level of registration and storage of information. Only then future researchers will be able to reveal in retrospect the nature and the quality of the processes studied.