



Effectiveness of the Halt programme - summary

Conclusions and opportunities for improvement

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Wendy Buysse

wbuysse@dsp-groep.nl

Manja Abraham

mabraham@dsp-groep.nl

Daniele Hofstra

dhofstra@dsp-groep.nl

In conjunction with: Marga van Aalst and Paul Boekhoorn

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Introduction

The Halt programme is a youth diversion programme the objective of which is to appropriately sanction young people under 18 years without this resulting in them having a criminal record. As a result of an effect evaluation in 2006, (Ferwerda et al., 2006), the programme, which was developed in the 1980s, was renewed over subsequent years. The following has been examined in the present study:

How does the Halt programme work and how can the Halt programme be improved?

The ultimate objective of the study is to contribute to a possible improvement of the Halt programme.

Method

A plan evaluation has been carried out in order to examine the intended (intermediate) objectives of the Halt programme and the effective elements that are to contribute to this. Available methodology descriptions, policy documents, reports and ministerial circulars were analysed for this and translated into a programme theory. The draft programme theory was presented to Halt policy makers and the Ministry of Security and Justice, as well as experts who were involved in the continued development of the Halt programme (N=4).

The effect of these effective elements (for specific target groups) was investigated using a literature search, and it was investigated whether effective elements can be added to the Halt programme to further increase its effect. The literature search was set up systematically, with fixed search terms, criteria for inclusion and exclusion and a 2000-2016 research period. The studies selected for the literature search include comparable interventions and/or core Halt elements, and focus on a comparable target group as well as influence on behaviour and/or the prevention of recidivism. We carried out a research of literature into recent screening instruments to obtain insight into the possibilities of screening for the Halt intervention. A summary of the results from the literature search was presented in an expert meeting and the options for improvement and continued development of the Halt programme have been discussed with the experts.

Halt programme and effective elements

1 What are the intended (intermediate) objectives of the Halt programme?

Using the Halt programme, Halt intends to achieve objectives focused on the offender (the young person), the parent(s), the victims as well as society. The ultimate objective is to prevent recidivism among young people. Halt distinguishes five intermediate objectives for young people and three for parents that contribute to this ultimate objective. Refer to flow chart 8.1 for these objectives. The objectives for young people focus on increasing insight (into the consequences of the offence and behavioural alternatives),

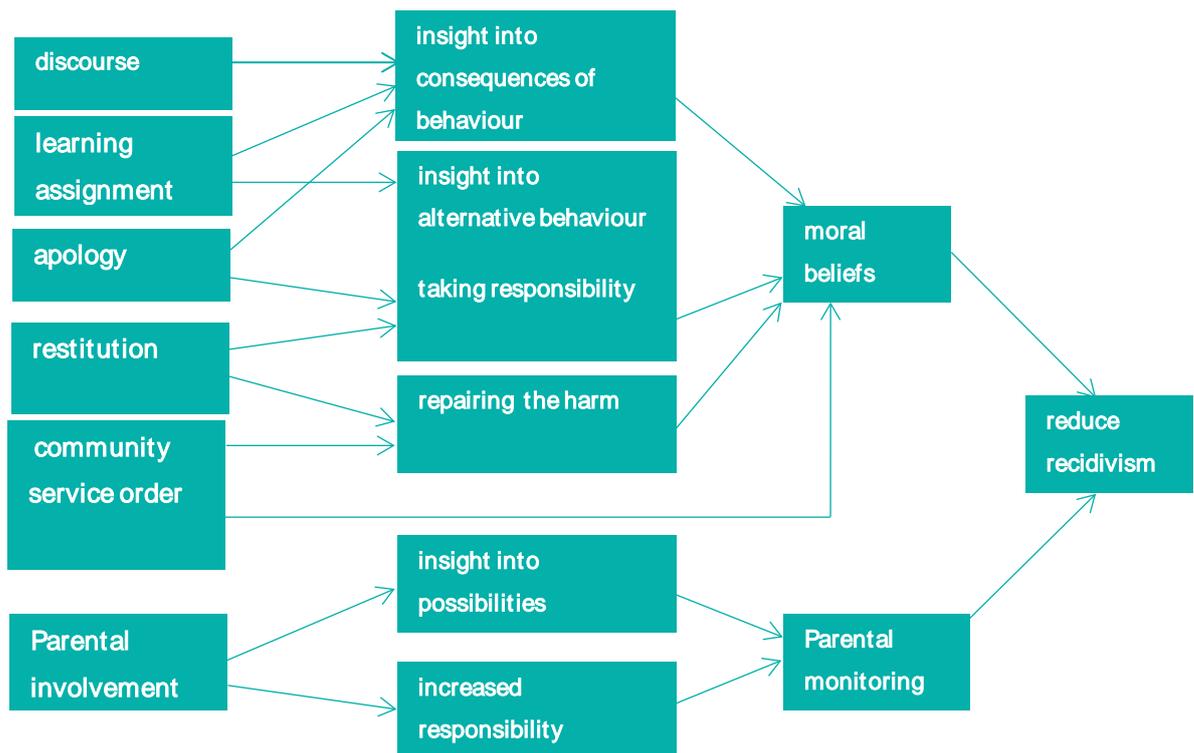
taking responsibility for personal behaviour and restoring the damage, and increasing their sense of standards. The objectives for parents also focus on increasing insight into personal responsibility and the backgrounds of the offence by young people.

In addition, Halt sets objectives focused on doing justice to the victim and society. Doing justice to the victim is explicitly stated as an objective in the Public Prosecutions Department guideline and framework for prosecution. These objectives have been left aside in the further research.

2 How (using which activities and through which (behavioural) mechanisms) are these objectives to be met? What core elements does Halt distinguish?

This study further examines the effect of the effective elements for attaining the (intermediate) objectives for young people. Halt states six effective elements that ensure the objectives for young people are met. The mutual relationship between the effective elements and the (intermediate) objectives as stated by Halt, the developer of the programme and the policy advisor of the Ministry of Security and Justice are summarised in flow chart 1.

Flow chart 1 Halt programme theory concerning the objectives focused on the young person.



Based on the relation between the effective elements and the objectives, a distinction can be made between three groups of effective elements:

- ③ Having discourse with the young person and the learning assignment focus mainly on providing insight and increasing amoral beliefs.
- ③ The restorative justice elements of offering an apology, restitution and the community service orders focus mainly on taking responsibility and repairing the harm, which will result in an increased moral beliefs.
- ③ Parental involvement is focused on parental monitoring, i.e. the promotion of standard-setting behaviour by parents.

This latter effective element focuses on parents. Standard-setting behaviour by the parents, however, aims at a behavioural change in the young person and has therefore been included in the literary research. None of the respondents has specifically stated as a effective element that the Halt programme is a diversion program which avoids contact with criminal justice authorities and that the young people will not have a criminal record in the case of a positive conclusion, while Halt is a diversion program by definition.

Empirical support of the Halt programme in the literature

3 Can empiric support be found for the way in which the objectives with the effective elements can be achieved?

Indications have been found in the literature that the intended objectives can be achieved by offering apologies, restitution, community service order and parental involvement, provided that certain conditions are met. The sincerity of the apology and the sense of guilt, the active involvement of the young people in establishing the restitution and a proper preparation of the apology in a victim –offender mediation are required. It is expected that most young people at Halt are still functioning on the level of conventional moral reasoning, meaning that they are sensitive to other people's condemnation and that they rely on their internalised moral principles to a lesser extent. This must be taken into account when practising and carrying out the apology. A properly carried out apology may help realise repair of the relationship with the victim, and this repair of the relationship can be added as an intermediate objective.

The literature also provides indications that entering into a discussion with the young person may contribute to the objectives, provided that motivational interview techniques are used. No indications have been found in the literature that the intended objectives can be achieved using the learning assignments – which are currently mainly verbal and reflective. In addition, there is no proof that the learning assignments have an adverse effect on the targets. Finally, the literature shows that the use of a behaviour contract in which it is established, in conjunction with the young people, parents and victims, how the damage can be repaired and what is further required to prevent the young person from committing an offence again, can contribute to achieving the intended objectives. Agreements are laid down in the Halt programme via a contract, and this can explicitly be referred to as a effective element and elaborated further.

4 What are the target groups for which the effective elements stated are active?

(Is there a relation between criminogenic factors, developmental age, a mild intellectual disability (MID), autism spectrum disorders (ASD), cultural characteristics and neurobiological characteristics and the expected extent of effect of the effective elements? If so, how?)

The possible effect of the effective elements stated co-depends on the extent to which the risk of recidivism, the type of offence, the developmental age (the level of cognitive, social and emotional, and moral development), cultural characteristics, deficits in executive functions, emotions and social cognition and the specific characteristics of a mild intellectual disability and ASD are taken into account in the design of the Halt programme. The characteristics may also have affected the committing of the offence for which they were referred to Halt. Based on the literature, it may be expected that meeting the specific requirements of these target groups increases the chances of the intended objectives to be achieved.

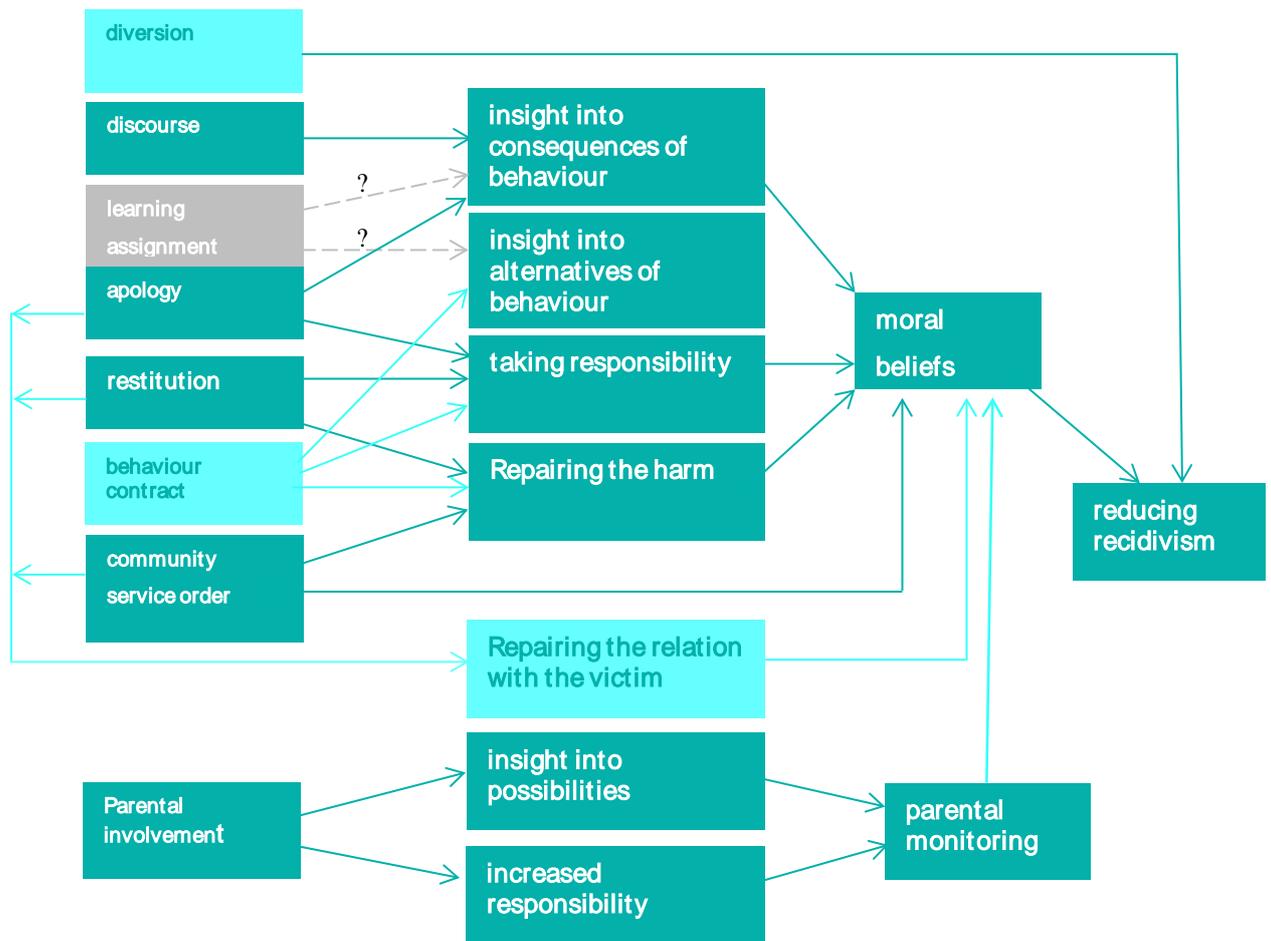
5 Does the literature describe active effective elements of (juvenile justice programmes for young people who commit offences which are not present in the Halt programme but may be included in this?

Based on the literature search into comparable diversion programmes and juvenile justice programmes, it can initially be concluded that the majority of the interventions in the literature is much more intensive in supervision and duration of the programme compared to the Halt programme. Adding more intensive effective elements is not possible within the legal framework of the Halt programme, in which the number of hours for the arrangement has been maximised. Based on the literature, it can furthermore be concluded that the 'diversion' can expressly be nominated as a effective element. There are indications in the literature that, for young people with a slight risk of recidivism and minor issues, a diversion program that is adapted to their level of cognitive, social and emotional and moral development may prevent recidivism. Although the Halt programme is a diversion programme, this is currently not stated as a effective element.

Adapted model

Based on the results in the literature, the programme theory that has been formulated based on the plan evaluation can be adapted as follows.

Flow chart 2 Possible additions to the programme theory (objectives targeted at) the young person



The pale blue parts are suggestions for supplements

Discourse with the young person

When a Halt employee enters into discussions with the young people, this may contribute to increased insight in the immaterial and material consequences of their behaviour and the realisation that their behaviour is wrong, provided the following conditions are met:

- ① The Halt employee uses motivational interview techniques.
- ① The Halt employee adapts his/ her phrasing to the young person's level of cognitive, social and emotional, and moral development.
- ① During the offence analysis, the Halt employee establishes a clear relationship between the offence and the consequences of the behaviour by the young people.

Learning assignment

No indication has been found in the literature that the intended objectives can be achieved using the learning assignments (an assignment and a discussion about this). Moreover, no proof has been found that the learning assignment has an adverse effect.

Apology If young people offer an apology to the victim, this may contribute to their insight into the consequences of their behaviour and the realisation that their behaviour is wrong, provided the following conditions are met:

- ① The apology is prepared, such as by practising with the young person.
- ① The apology is prepared with the victim.
- ① The apology is offered in the presence of the parents, young person and the victim (provided the parents have the suitable parental skills required).
- ① The victim experiences the apology as sincere.
- ① The victim responds positively to the apology.

If no victim is involved or the victim is not prepared to collaborate, the following activities may contribute to achieving the objectives:

- ① The young person apologises to a representative from the community who experiences adverse effects caused by the offence. The discussion must comply with the above conditions.
- ① The young person writes a letter of apology and the Halt employee enters into discussion with him/ her about this letter.

Restitution

If the young person compensates for the damage, this may contribute to taking responsibility for his/ her own behaviour, an increased moral beliefs and the repair of the relationship with the victim, provided that the following conditions are met:

- ① In conjunction with the young person, parents and victim, the Halt employee establishes how the damage can be compensated.
- ① The manner of restitution is laid down in a behaviour contract.

Community service order

If the young person carries out a community service order, this may contribute to insight into the consequences of his/ her own behaviour, an increased moral beliefs and the young person taking responsibility, provided:

- ① (part of) the damage is repaired in the community service order.

Parental involvement

If the parents are involved in the Halt programme according to the manner below, this may result in increased insight into their responsibility for their child's criminal behaviour and their options to prevent this behaviour.

- ③ The Halt employee involves the parents in the analysis of the offence and the risk assessment.
- ③ The Halt employee involves the parents in establishing how the damage can be repaired.
- ③ The Halt employee involves the parents in formulating the behaviour contract.
- ③ The Halt employee involves the parents in the apology discussion, taking into account the parents' skills.

Whether the involvement of the parents has a positive effect on their standard-setting behaviour depends on the extent to which the parents have parental skills adapted to the level of the cognitive, social and emotional and moral development of their child. If this is the case, the standard-setting behaviour by the parents can contribute to the moral beliefs among young people and applying behavioural alternatives. This was not stated this explicitly in the programme theory. It is also known that interventions focused on the family show maximum effect on recidivism. However, this usually concerns the more intensive interventions compared to the involvement of parents in the Halt programme, meaning that parenting support or training courses for parents may be a condition for achieving this effect.

Behaviour contract

Recording the actions required to be taken for the repair of the damage and to obtain insight into behavioural alternatives in a behaviour contract may contribute to an increased moral beliefs in the young person and increased insight into behavioural alternatives, provided that:

- ③ the Halt employee establishes the actions together with the young person, the parents and, preferably, the victim;
- ③ the actions are monitored.

Working with a behaviour contract may provide the parents with increased insight into their options to prevent the criminal behaviour by their child, provided that:

- ③ the actions in the contract have been established in conjunction with the parents and young person;
- ③ the actions correspond with the parents' parenting skills.

Diversion

Referring young people to Halt means they receive an out-of-court settlement. They are diverted from the traditional juvenile justice system. A diversion programme for young people with a low risk of recidivism that is adapted to their level of cognitive, social and emotional and moral development may contribute to the reduction of recidivism.

Screening, signalling and referring by Halt

6 How does signalling, screening and referring proceed at Halt?

Halt observes signals for concern and risk situations in order to adapt the arrangement to the gravity and nature of the offence and the risk factors that play a role in the offence. In addition, signals may be a reason for further referral to care. The Halt signalling tool is used for both objectives. This instrument focuses on

dynamic risk factors for recidivism, psychosocial issues, including (signals indicating) domestic violence or child abuse and the request for care/ assistance. There is little or no screening for MID, ASD, cultural and neurobiological characteristics. Halt has recently acquired experience in a pilot with the SCIL, an MID screening tool.

Based on the discussion with the young person and the parent(s), Halt employees establish whether referral takes place, and the assistance and support to which they refer. The signalling instrument is a means in this. The criteria based on which referrals take place in practice vary. The results of the (theoretically substantiated) Halt signalling instrument, the professional assessment that something is wrong and the help request from the young people and parents themselves are leading for a referral. Referral takes place at the start, during or in the conclusion of the Halt programme.

7 What does the literature teach us about the screening of criminogenic factors, developmental age, MID, ASD and neurobiological characteristics? Can this screening play a role in Halt's referrals? If so, what role?

In order to increase the effect of the effective elements, it is important to take into account criminogenic factors, the developmental age, characteristics of a mild intellectual disability, characteristics of ASD and cultural and neurobiological factors when carrying out the Halt programme. Based on the screening of these factors, the Halt programme can be adapted to the requirement of individual young people. The question to be asked here is whether this can be carried out efficiently within the Halt organisation in view of the specific expertise required for this screening. This applies in particular to ASD and neurobiological characteristics. In addition, screening only indicates whether there are certain issues and shortages. Further diagnostic research is required to properly map the issues.

Halt programme opportunities for improvement

8 Is it possible to formulate any opportunities for improvement concerning the Halt programme based on the answers to the above questions?

Opportunities for improvement have been formulated based on the conclusions from the literature search. These opportunities for improvement were presented to a group of experts in an expert meeting, and accentuated based on the results of the expert meeting.

In addition, the expert meeting has led to various additional suggestions that do not result from the insights the literature search produced. These suggestions have been included at the end of this section.

For each effective element, find suggestions below for possibilities to increase the workability.

Learning assignments

- 🌀 In the learning assignments, consider making increased use of modelling and exercising based on the principles of the social learning theory. Greater effect may be expected from this than from the learning assignments as currently formulated.

Apology

- ③ Consider making use of an apology only if a young person has not yet apologised properly and the damage has not yet been repaired. If this has been dealt with prior to the Halt programme, an apology has no added value.
- ③ Consider preparing the apology with the young person as well as the victim, in particular if young people with specific issues are concerned, such as a MID or ASD and for which supervision during the apology is important.
- ③ Consider a group conference in the case of offences involving various victims or persons in the community that suffer from the consequences of the offence. This is expected to have more impact than offering apologies to an official representative, such as a municipal policy advisor. It might be considered to train various Halt employees in the coordination, chairing and supervising of the conferences.
- ③ Consider establishing the repairing of the damage and the manner in which this damage is repaired in conjunction with the young person, the parents and the victim. Record this in a contract and monitor it.
- ③ We note that the literature search focused on the effects of the offender and not on the effects on the victim. This is to be expressly considered when carrying out an apology. The effect on the victim must also be considered if repair of the relationship with the victim and reintegration in society is the objective.

Parental involvement

In order to properly involve parents, it is important to obtain a better idea of their questions and requirements and their parenting skills. Devoting more attention to this in the initial discussion allows for an improved consideration of the ways in which parents can be involved. In addition, options for referring to volunteer youth assistance can be considered.

Discussion with the young person

During the discourse with the young person, consider making use of motivational conversation techniques to instigate the motivation for behavioural change. Depending on their preliminary training, some Halt employees already make use of these techniques. This can be elaborated more extensively in the manual. It is also important for employees to have received sufficient training to adapt conversation techniques to the requirements of specific target groups.

In addition, it is proposed to explicitly add the following two effective elements.

Behaviour contract

Consider discussing the offence and listing the risk factors more extensively. After that the required actions are established together with the parents and the young person, and recorded in a behaviour contract. Include how the young person will repair or compensate for the damage in the behaviour contract and

consider involving the victim in this. Together with the parents and young people, in the final discourse evaluate whether the actions in the behaviour contract have been carried out.

Diversion Consider labelling diversion to a greater extent than currently is the case, as it provides the young person with the opportunity to avoid having a criminal record. If the young person properly concludes the Halt programme, has apologised and repaired the damage in a satisfactory manner, the young person will not have a criminal record.

Opportunities for improvement relating to custom work

Customised work

Consider – more than currently is the case – assuming a customised Halt programme to the needs of the young person by analysing the backgrounds of the offence and the young person's level of development in the initial meeting, as well as the role and the options of the parents to influence their child's behaviour in the desired direction. Based on this analysis, a suitable choice can be made from the package of measures. This also has consequences for the expertise required from Halt employees. This way, harmonisation with the principle of professionalism is ensured. They require sufficient insight into the factors and mechanisms that are important for behavioural change. Based on the outcome of the analysis, they must be able to establish the young person's intermediate objectives that require attention and the suitable measures for this. In any continued development, it is important to guard against a too strong recording of the Halt programme. Custom work is best applied if all Halt employees have proper insight into why and when they apply a certain component.

Opportunities for improvement in relation to signalling, screening and referring

Screening, signalling and referring

Consider screening and referring by further developing the Halt employees and completing the signalling instrument with various specific characteristics of target groups.

It is important to take into account that screening only provides an indication of whether there are certain issues, such as MID. Screening does not constitute diagnostics. Based on the screening, a consideration is to be made whether the issues require further diagnostic examination, which Halt will commonly not be able to do.

In addition, deficiencies in skills can be screened for to a greater extent at the start of the Halt programme, allowing for the Halt programme to be deployed more effectively. Certain deficiencies in skills cannot be tackled in the Halt programme, but Halt can deal with more comprehensive deficiencies by referring to youth assistance or youth care. This is the case in deficiencies in young people as well as for supervision skills of parents.

By addressing the reasons for the offence behaviour, the development of the young people and more comprehensive questions and concerns young people and parents have more explicitly when entering into

discussion with young people and parents, increased customised work can be provided in the case of referral.

In the continued development of screening and referral, it is important to guard against too many protocols and ensure sufficient options for peer reviews to Halt employees, for instance. Customised work is important for a more effective deployment in screening and referrals also. Another condition for proper referring is that the Halt employees have a proper idea about the contacts in the neighbourhood and youth teams and in schools. If parents have any questions, they can refer them to the volunteer youthcare.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that young people at Halt are usually part of a low-risk target group and screening should not be too intensive. The offence may be a signal of underlying issues, but underlying issues are not involved for each young person.

Additional suggestions from the expert meeting

Various suggestions for improvement that are broader than the effect studied in this literature search have been provided in the expert meeting. If Halt wants to take over these suggestions, further investigation into the effect of these suggestions is required.

Learning assignments

- 🕒 In the case of any continued development of learning assignments, consider deploying the options of gaming. Gaming provides the option of having young people exercise alternative behaviour and showing them the effects of their behaviour. In addition, gaming provides the opportunity to start by assessing the young person's level of functioning and to adapt the behaviour to be exercised and the situations to this. A combination of gaming and discussions (never only digitally) may also increase the young person's motivation. This fits in with the social world and the requirements of young people.

Diversion

- 🕒 Do not label the Halt programme as a diversion programme only, in which a criminal record can be avoided, but also state that it is a reward for the proper completion of the Halt programme. Not having a criminal record is important for participation in society – the basic assumption of the youth law. Without a criminal record, the young person has more future options for participation in the labour market, finding a work placement and to do voluntary work. Labelling the avoidance of a criminal record as a reward for the proper completion of the Halt programme can have a motivational effect and prevent recidivism.

In conclusion: Study the effect

Based on this study, certain Halt programme components are open to improvement. However, it is important in an impact study to check whether the intermediate objectives are actually achieved with the

effective elements as was initially considered. A randomised study is still preferred. If the consideration to provide more customised work is adopted, this must be taken into account in the design of the study. Not all effective elements will be included and the same objectives aimed for each young person; these will depend on the backgrounds, the type of offence and the young person's level of functioning.

DSP-groep BV
Van Diemenstraat 368
1013 CR Amsterdam
+31 (0)20 625 75 37

dsp@dsp-groep.nl
KvK33176766
www.dsp-groep.nl

