

Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an all-round music and entertainment industry entrepreneur, singer, musical theatre performer and vocal coach, with an extensive professional background and profound passion for delivering creative arts and music therapy-based programs in which rehabilitation, recidivism prevention and positive behavioural change are achieved within groups of offenders in Australian prisons. With over 25 years specialising in cognitive development, self-actualisation, organisational behavioural practices, creative arts therapies and group workshop facilitation, I have engaged over 500 Australian inmates at Clarence Correctional Centre and facilitated over 20 criminogenic programs, in which music became my most valued tool in supporting self-healing and self-growth among participants in the Criminal Justice System. Over the course of my career, I have witnessed profound transformations among participants who have completed my programs, compared to participants who have not engaged in my programs.

I commenced my journey using music for justice reform in 2012, when I wrote **RYME** (**Re-engaging at-risk Youth through Music and Education**). An intervention and prevention program that I facilitated on 17 occasions in Queensland, over the course of four (4) years. Following this success, I created **ROME** (**Re-engaging Offenders through Music and Education**), a rehabilitation program that is now being facilitated at Clarence Correctional Centre. Both programs are backed with empirical evidence and research that demonstrate the effectiveness of creative arts programs as an alternative to incarceration and as an early prevention option for at-risk youth. They are also culturally sensitive and provide specific opportunities for First Nations youth and offenders to engage, by incorporating and addressing the needs of First Nations participants.

I am also currently studying a Master in Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University, prior to pursuing a PhD on the impact of creative arts interventions and music therapy programs on successful reintegration of offenders in society.

I strongly believe that with my background, skills, academic qualifications and above all my determination to bridge the gap between early intervention among all groups of at-risk youth and recidivism; that a program such as **RYME** addresses the majority of the terms of reference of the Youth Justice Reform in Queensland Inquiry and I welcome the opportunity to facilitate **RYME** as my response to the Inquiry by reducing the many risks and challenges that young people face.

RYME – A SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM

The aim of **RYME** is to help to re-engage at-risk youth through writing, performing and recording music, and to provide opportunities which lead to career choices within the music industry as well as learning about recording, engineering and production.

The Program will provide an individualised and responsive service for young people who are most at risk of disconnecting, are already disconnected from education, have found themselves on the wrong side of the law and are struggling with making successful transitions to further study, training and/or employment. The program will help at-risk youth to re-engage through music and to provide opportunities to assist them to work within the music industry.

Definition of ‘at-risk’

Wesley Misson: *young people from 12 to 25 years of age who are facing difficulties in their lives brought about by bullying, violence, family breakdown, poor school attendance, alcohol and other drug use, homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless and who find themselves in crisis situations, including being at-risk of offending or having already committed an offence.*

Young people at-risk would typically have barriers that limit their opportunities to participate in education, training or employment. The barriers impeding a young person’s transition are often complex.

Factors that may affect a young person’s successful participation in education or training may include, but are not limited to: educational factors, such as poor literacy/numeracy, low academic performance, dissatisfaction with school, or bullying personal factors, such as mental health issues, medical conditions, disabilities, substance misuse, low self-esteem, caring responsibilities, under-developed social skills, lack of self-discipline, or an inability to conform to acceptable community standards.

Social, cultural and community factors, such as low aspirations for young people, community violence, or lack of specialist services also come into play.

THE RESEARCH

RYME has been created from empirically supported research and a theoretical framework based on criminogenic risk and responsivity factors.

RISK

Risk focuses on understanding the likelihood of re-offending and how it can be reduced (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). Its measurement relies on the use of factors that have been proven to be related to criminal behaviour. The basic knowledge of what constitutes risk factors will aid in the identification of individuals who are likely to reoffend. Knowledge of what constitutes risk and how it can be measured is important as it will help program developers and facilitators decide who needs help and the level they need (Andrews & Dowden, 2006).

Risk factors are either static or dynamic and usually measured pre intervention (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). Risk is viewed as cumulative. The higher the scoring on individual factors the higher the overall risk profile and hence chance of re-offending. Andrews and Bonta (1994) expressed risk in a framework known as the central eight. The central eight lists the eight (8) criminogenic risk factors most predictive of criminal re-offending. Table 1 (adapted from Andrews & Bonta, 1994) shows the factors of the central eight along with their key indicators. The indicators serve as a means of operationalising otherwise abstract factors.

Offenders who score higher on elements of the central eight are more likely to re-offend and hence are more likely to benefit from a higher intensity of intervention. Comparatively, offenders who are at lower risk are less likely to re-offend and hence require lower intensity of intervention (Ward, Melsner & Yates, 2007). Bonta, Wallace-Capretta and Rooney (2000) found that when service intensity and risk levels were mismatched, there was a likelihood of increased re-offending.

Table 1: Central Eight Factors and their indicators

| Factor | Indicators |
|------------------------------------|---|
| History of Anti-Social Behaviour | Early and continuing involvement in a number and variety of anti-social acts in a variety of settings |
| Anti-Social Personality | Impulsive, adventurous, pleasure seeking, restlessly aggressive and irritable |
| Anti-Social Cognitions | Attitudes, values, beliefs and rationalisation |
| Anti-Social Associates | Criminal Friends, isolation from pro social others |
| Substance Abuse | Abuse of alcohol and/or Drugs |
| Family/Marital Relationships | Inappropriate parental monitoring and disciplining, poor family relationships |
| School / Work | Poor Performance, low levels of satisfactions |
| Pro Social Recreational Activities | Lack of involvement in Pro social hobbies and sports |

RESPONSIVITY

The Responsivity principal focuses on delivering services in a manner that is effective and takes into account individual differences. Responsivity can be broken up into two key areas: general responsivity and specific responsivity.

General responsivity emphasises the style and structure of delivery. It focuses on cognitive social learning interventions as being the most effective way of teaching people new behaviours (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). The relationship principal embraces traditional counselling techniques (e.g. being warm and respectful, working alliance) (Bonta & Andrews, 2007) and forms the first of two areas under general responsivity. The second key area is the structure principal. The structure principal promotes changes in thought patterns via appropriate modelling and reinforcement. Regardless of the aim of the program, general responsivity should be used to guide the framework for intervention (Gendreau, 1996).

Specific responsivity acknowledges the need to account for an individual's strengths and personality factors. Examples of such areas of interest include but are not limited to anxiety disorders and education. Anxiety disorders while classified as a minor need factor with little

to no criminogenic implications can still serve as a barrier in treatment. Overly anxious individuals are unlikely to be able to focus sufficiently to internalise key messages conveyed by treatment. Similarly, noting an individual's education level will allow interventions to be delivered at a level at which a person is most likely to understand (Andrews & Bonta, 1994).

CREATIVE ARTS INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Several different psychological theories have been identified to analyse how arts-based programs can bring about changes in the behaviours of offenders (Hughes, 2005).

In addition, several theoretical frameworks support the use of creative arts therapies when dealing with trauma. This orientation suggests that nonverbal, expressive therapies (such as certain creative arts therapies) can be more effective than verbal therapies in treating individuals who have experienced significant trauma in their lives (Klorer, 2011).

Engaging in creative arts programs has been shown to be an innovative and effective way of dealing with anger and aggression amongst offenders (Blacker, Watson & Beech, 2008).

Using music as a tool for expression, participants can build human capital and begin to see how they could 'make good' for the future, which is important for the process of desistance from crime and reduces risk of anti-social behaviours that among youth leads to crime (Maruna, 2005).

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