

The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) approach: Financial Break-Even Analysis results for the West Mercia T2A project

Since 2009, the West Mercia Transition to Adulthood (T2A) project has been delivering a new intervention for young adults in the criminal justice system. This briefing is a summary of a break-even analysis (BEA) of the West Mercia T2A project, undertaken by Matrix Evidence and published in October 2011. It measures the extent to which the West Mercia T2A project needs to reduce offending among its cohort of young people in order to 'break even' (by recouping the direct costs of the intervention via reductions in costs to the public purse).

The results reveal that the West Mercia project would break even within one year if it reduces reoffending among the young people it works with by 13%. Over two years, a 7% reduction in offending would be required. Looking longer term, the project would break even if it reduces offending by as little as 2% over the lifetimes of its cohort. Evaluations of the West Mercia T2A project suggest that this reduction in offending is likely to be met, and that the project represents good value for money.

Why focus on young adults?

Young adults aged 18-24 constitute less than 10% of the population, but are disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system, making up more than one-third of those commencing a community order or suspended sentence order, one-third of the probation service's caseload and almost one-third of those sentenced to prison each year. There are approximately 17,000 young adults in prison in the UK. It is estimated that nearly 70 per cent of young adult offenders will reoffend within two years of release, costing taxpayers up to £20 billion per year. Yet young adults are the most likely age group to 'grow out of crime' if they receive the right intervention, while the wrong intervention at this time can slow their desistance and extend the period that they are involved in the criminal justice system. These facts demonstrate the importance of recognising the distinct needs and circumstance of young adults, and the necessity to develop effective sentencing and criminal justice responses.

The Transition to Adulthood approach

The T2A approach has been developed from research and practice by the T2A Alliance, a broad coalition of organisations and individuals which evidences and promotes *'the need for a distinct and radically different approach to young adults in the criminal justice system; an approach that is proportionate to their maturity and responsive to their specific needs'*. Convened by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the Alliance's membership encompasses leading criminal justice, health and youth organisations¹. In 2008, the Barrow Cadbury Trust established six T2A projects, which are testing different approaches to improving services for young adults in the criminal justice system.

¹ Addaction, Catch22, the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, Clinks, the Criminal Justice Alliance, the Howard League for Penal Reform, Nacro, the Prince's Trust, the Prison Reform Trust, Revolving Doors Agency, the Young Foundation and Young Minds

Of these, three main pilot projects provide innovative community interventions tailored to the needs of young adults, with the aim of reducing reoffending and social exclusion. They are located in Birmingham, West Mercia and London, delivered by Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust, YSS and the St Giles Trust respectively. The projects have been subject to a formative evaluation, completed at the start of 2011 by Oxford University, which identified promising early results and highlighted the projects' success in engaging young adults in actions which will help them towards reducing offending and securing better lives. The T2A evaluations are available in full at www.t2a.org.uk.

Summary of the analysis

The T2A approach is one that provides services to young adults in the criminal justice system by targeting their unique needs, with the ultimate aim of reducing reoffending. The T2A projects, while varied in their delivery methods and client groups, all provide young adults with practical support and assistance with their needs (such as housing, health, employment, and education), alongside key-worker mentoring support aimed at increasing motivation and changing attitudes. Matrix Evidence was commissioned by the Barrow Cadbury Trust to undertake a break-even economic analysis to determine the minimum effect required by the intervention on reoffending rates in order that the projects would be cost-neutral. This builds on the University of Oxford's Centre for Criminology formative evaluation (published in 2011), and precedes Catch 22's outcomes evaluation, which will measure the projects' impact on reducing reoffending (available early 2012).

Aims and methods of research

The objective of this research was to generate a break-even analysis of the T2A approach across its main projects. The BEA determines the necessary reduction in offending required for the costs of the projects to be equivalent to the benefits, where the benefits of the projects are calculated in terms of: criminal justice cost savings; NHS cost savings; and avoided victim costs (2010 prices). Matrix Evidence conducted interviews with the projects and completed desk-based research to calculate the costs of providing the intervention at each site, and constructed models to determine the necessary reduction in reoffending required for the projects to break even. The analysis can measure the effects for a range from one year after the intervention through to the age of 50 years old ('lifetime'). This paper presents break-even results for one year, two year, and lifetime measures.

The West Mercia T2A project

YSS run the T2A project based in West Mercia and works with young adults with high needs in the community who have a medium risk of offending. The project offers a flexible, community based, one-to-one support and mentoring service, using a mixture of paid staff and local volunteers.

Each young adult on the T2A project determines what level of support they require, including support for family members, and develops their own action plan. The key worker steers them through the available provision, overcoming any barriers (real or perceived) and provides feedback to agencies to influence service practice and policy development.

Staff are responsive to need and flexible in their approach due to the potential changing and chaotic lifestyles of the young adults involved. YSS has established a robust multi-agency T2A steering group

with senior management representation from across the criminal justice system, and the T2A project encourages regular discourse between the West Mercia Probation Trust and the Youth Offending Team, and key workers are regular visitors at team meetings and will often meet up to discuss T2A referrals.

Results of the BEA for the West Mercia T2A project

If the effect of the West Mercia T2A intervention is maintained for just one year, the break-even point requires 13% reduction in offending. Over two years, a break event point of 7% would be required. Over a lifetime, the break-even point is just 2%.

West Mercia T2A	
Average number of young people worked with per year	98
Total direct project costs per young person	£1,571
Break-even point (% reduction in offending required to break even)	
1 year	12.9%
2 year	6.8%
Lifetime	2.0%

Additional financial benefits of the T2A approach

Aside from direct project costs, an additional factor contributed to the BEA, termed ‘leveraged resources’. Leveraged resources refer to services (such as housing and education) that have been leveraged by T2A key workers, but are provided to young people by providers outside of the T2A project.

Additional service ‘leveraged’ by the West Mercia T2A project	Resource financial value (average amount in £ per young person)
Housing services	£3,971
Education services	£391
Other services	£291

Conclusion

This BEA, and the initial findings from the T2A evaluations, strongly suggests that the West Mercia T2A project represents good value for money. This is due to the likelihood that the services will break even within a short time following the intervention, making savings by reducing reoffending. The project offers a robust and effective approach to reducing young people’s offending, improving their lives and integrating them within their communities.