External Process and Outcome Evaluation of the Canberra Police Community Youth Club Project P180

Executive Summary 20th August 2026

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Youth Early Intervention and Diversion

Young people who are disengaged from education, experiencing family or personal adversity, or at risk of offending may require intensive, coordinated support before difficulties become more entrenched. Whilst several approaches have been used to tackle youth antisocial behaviour and crime, most Western jurisdictions employ a modified justice model (Wilson & Hoge, 2013) where rehabilitative actions are taken. One such avenue is early intervention and/or court diversion programs. Diversion and early intervention are viewed as the most effective and fiscally responsible strategies to reduce youth crime (Victoria Justice and Community Safety, 2022).

Research has shown that the most promising early intervention programs are those that: are grounded in a clear developmental and cognitive-behavioural theory; focus on high-risk youth (at risk of antisocial behaviour and school dropout); target changeable criminogenic needs in family, school, and peer friendships; deliver adequate dosage (program length) with high fidelity (good program structure); are culturally responsive; foster strong practitioner-youth relationships; and are monitored and refined through ongoing evaluation (Pooley, 2020). Such programs, when combined with structural reforms such as raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) and diverting young people away from formal justice processes, offer the best prospect of reducing the burden of youth crime while enhancing the wellbeing and life chances of vulnerable children and adolescents.

The Canberra Police Community Youth Club (CPCYC) P180 Program

Project 180 (P180) is an evidence-based, 20-week intensive early intervention and diversion program for young people aged 12 to 18 who are at risk of offending, involved in the youth justice system, disengaged from education, or experiencing significant adversity. Participants receive face-to-face support from program facilitators and case managers four days per week, together with case management and support for their families or guardians.

The aim of P180 is that holistic interactions with the young participants and their families will assist in creating a supportive environment to help users to achieve their individual goals, reduce antisocial and recidivist behaviours, increase community connections, support engagement with education and employment, and promote positive development and prosocial pathways. The program combines education, social and emotional learning, independent living skills, health and wellbeing support, physical activity, practical qualifications, service referrals, family support and case management.

Core program activities include a Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways, healthy relationships and emotional regulation programs, daily emotional check-ins, cooking and independent living skills, driver education, vocational preparation, physical and outdoor activities, transport assistance, food provision, and connections with health, employment and youth services.

External Evaluation of P180

The P180 evaluation project has five aims and related outputs, as follows (amendments to original draft evaluation plan as of 27.03.2026 noted in blue italics):

1. Undertake an evidence-based literature review on the risk and protective factors for young people at-risk of offending and identify factors of effective early intervention and diversion programs for at-risk youth.
2. Undertake interviews with P180 stakeholders in Canberra to assess their views on the efficacy of the P180 as an early intervention and/or youth diversion program.
3. Carry out an output evaluation of the CPCYC P180 Project. The evaluation will assess change across a range of social attitudes, offending and substance use, family functioning and school attendance using CPCYC entry and exit surveys *over three years (2023, 2024 and 2025).*
4. Carry out a longitudinal follow-up of *2024 P180 participants using case-study methods and outcome analysis of participants post P180 at two periods (12 and 18 months*) to explore longer term outcomes of P180 in terms of how the program impacted young people's future pathways and goals.
5. Use the findings from the review, to develop an evidence-based checklist using good practice elements for effective early intervention and youth diversion programs. This checklist will be used to evaluate how the P180 *program delivery* compares with good practice, and to provide future recommendations (*Process evaluation*).

The evaluation used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. The P180 program content and program delivery was assessed using a specifically developed process evaluation checklist that compared the P180 content and delivery with best-practice elements in programs that work for at-risk youth. The outcome evaluation analysed pre- and post-program data across the 2023 to 2025 cohorts, whilst the 12th and 18th month longitudinal follow-up component used qualitative case-study methods to explore longer-term outcomes, future pathways, education, employment, wellbeing, family relationships and service use.

The qualitative component included 20 participants: four former P180 participants, three parents or carers, five CPCYC staff members and eight external stakeholders. The external stakeholders included representatives from the social enterprise organisations that work in collaboration with P180 staff and participants, education, ACT Policing, the ACT Childrens Court and the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services.

Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee. All evaluation data is stored on a high-security server at the University of Canberra.

Inability to Analyse Recidivism Data

Although recidivism data formed part of the evaluation aims, suitable data were not available for comparative pre- and post-program analysis by 10 August 2026. The information provided consisted of heavily de-identified, group-level lists of convictions for the Semester 1 and Semester 2 2024 cohorts, rather than individual-level records. Consequently, the evaluation team could not link offences to individual participants, demographic characteristics, program commencement or completion, or participation in other CPCYC programmes. The data therefore could not be reliably attributed to P180 participants and could not be used to assess individual recidivism outcomes.

P180 Evaluation Findings

Process Evaluation Findings

The process evaluation found that P180 is strongly aligned with contemporary best practice for youth early intervention and diversion programs. The program achieved a score of 35.5 out of 40, equivalent to 88 per cent, which is above the benchmark identified for good practice (Bonta & Andrews, 2023).

P180 is underpinned by the Risk-Need-Responsivity framework and incorporates Good Lives Model principles. It combines a focus on reducing criminogenic risk factors with strengths-based

development, including education, employment readiness, social skills, health, wellbeing, family functioning and community connection (Bonta & Andrews, 2023; Fortune, 2018; Ward & Brown, 2004).

The program's four-day-per-week model over approximately 20 weeks, together with relapse prevention planning and post-program outreach, was considered appropriate for young people with moderate to high levels of need. The evaluation also identified the importance of matching program intensity and participant allocation to individual risk, readiness and support requirements (Pappas & Dent, 2021; Pooley, 2020).

Outcome Evaluation Findings

Across three years of data, the overall pattern of findings indicated that P180 produced meaningful positive changes in young people's lives. However, statistical comparison was limited because pre- and post-program questionnaires did not always use the same questions or rating scales across cohorts.

The most consistent findings were improvements in mental wellbeing, coping with challenges, anger management and emotional regulation. Participants reported reduced frequency and intensity of anger and improved ability to control anger, with several cohorts showing statistically significant pre- and post-program improvements.

The evaluation also identified improvements in relationships with fathers or male carers, whilst changes in relationships with mothers or female carers were less consistent across cohorts. Participants reported reduced offending while receiving CPCYC support, fewer arrests, greater understanding of the consequences of offending, and improved respect for the law and police. These findings were primarily self-reported and should not be interpreted as verified reductions in recidivism.

P180 supported engagement in education, training and employment preparation. Young people reported increased confidence in their ability to learn, completion of Certificate II qualifications, improved job-readiness, greater motivation to return to education and the development of practical skills through work experience and social enterprise activities.

Participants also described improvements in healthy habits, physical activity, access to health services, social skills, conflict resolution, understanding of healthy relationships, goal setting and help-seeking. The program's daily check-ins, group support, practical activities and trusted relationships with staff were repeatedly identified as important contributors to these outcomes.

Qualitative Evaluation Findings

Across the qualitative interviews, trusted relationships with P180 staff emerged as the central mechanism supporting engagement and change. Young people described feeling recognised, valued, understood and supported, whilst parents and external stakeholders highlighted the importance of reliable adults who could build confidence, encourage help-seeking and support future planning (Fortune, 2018; Pooley, 2020).

The young person case studies showed that P180 could support re-engagement with school, alternative education, training, employment, mentoring and vocational pathways. Practical activities, work experience, qualifications and structured routines helped participants translate increased confidence into tangible skills and future opportunities.

The findings also demonstrated that outcomes depended on timing, readiness and the circumstances surrounding each young person. Positive engagement with P180 did not always lead immediately to participation in education or employment, particularly where external stressors, mental health difficulties or other barriers remained active.

Parents and carers reported improvements in mood, confidence, educational engagement and family functioning, including reduced conflict related to school attendance. However, the interviews also identified weaknesses in transition planning, particularly when young people returned to

mainstream education or other services that did not provide sufficient continuity, flexibility or support.

CPCYC staff described P180 as an intensive, holistic and increasingly structured program that combines education, emotional learning, practical qualifications, family work, case management, service connections and vocational pathways. Staff also reported substantial workload pressures, burnout, turnover, limited access to specialist mental health and alcohol and other drug supports, and difficulties managing cohorts with different levels of risk (Lyneham et al., 2018).

External stakeholders viewed P180 as filling an important gap between mainstream education, youth services and formal justice responses. ACT Policing, the ACT Children's Court and the ACT Inspector of Custodial Services identified potential for P180 to contribute to early intervention, diversion, bail deferral and community-based sentencing options, provided that sufficient program places were available when young people were ready to participate.

Key Findings, Program Enhancement and Funding Recommendations

There are six key findings from the full P180 process, outcome and qualitative evaluation.

Key Finding #1: P180 is a Well-Designed and Evidence-Based Program

The evaluation found that P180 is strongly aligned with recognised best practice, achieving a score of 88%, which exceeds the benchmark for good practice identified by Andrews and Bonta (2023). The program is ideally suited to vulnerable and at-risk young people who are at high to moderate risk of antisocial, risky, and/or offending behaviour. The program uses an intensive intervention model and combines risk reduction with strengths-based GLM approaches.

Program enhancement recommendation

Strengthen pre-program and assessment processes by introducing a more structured approach to assessing risk and protective factors at program entry and completion. This will provide richer data to demonstrate behaviour change and also prevent low risk participants being placed into the P180.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement

Develop a more comprehensive intake and exit assessment framework using the risk and protective factor domains already identified within the program review. Align these assessments with participant case planning and outcome reporting.

Funding recommendation for key finding #1

Future funding should include resources for assessment development, staff training and ongoing evaluation activities. Strengthening assessment systems will help demonstrate program effectiveness and support future funding applications.

Key Finding #2: Positive Relationships With Staff are Central to Participant Outcomes

Across the evaluation findings, relationships with P180 staff emerged as one of the strongest contributors to positive outcomes. Young people consistently reported feeling respected, supported and valued, while parents and stakeholders highlighted the importance of staff in promoting engagement, confidence and future planning. One negative finding was that staff reported feeling that workplace stress and burn-out was a risk for them.

Program enhancement

Protect and strengthen the relationship-based model by supporting workforce sustainability and staff wellbeing.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement

Maintain regular supervision, reflective practice and debriefing opportunities. Monitor workload, turnover and workforce wellbeing to ensure staff can continue providing intensive support.

Funding recommendation for key finding #2
Funding should support safe staffing ratios, professional supervision, workforce development and staff wellbeing initiatives. Given that relationships were consistently identified as a key mechanism of change, workforce investment should be considered a core program requirement.

Key Finding #3: The Program Improves Wellbeing, Emotional Regulation and Confidence for At-Risk Young People

Participants reported significant improvements in wellbeing, coping skills, anger management and emotional regulation. Young people also described increased confidence, self-awareness, communication skills and optimism about their future. These findings were among the most consistent across all evaluation components (Barnes-Lee & Petkus, 2023; Beelmann & Lösel, 2021).

Program enhancement
Further strengthen content relating to risk-taking behaviours, antisocial peer influences and relapse prevention.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement
Review existing program content and incorporate additional material focused on peer influences, risk-taking and maintaining positive change following program completion. Strengthen relapse prevention planning documentation.

Funding recommendation for key finding #3
Funding should support ongoing program refinement, curriculum development and the review of existing program resources to ensure content remains responsive to participant needs and emerging evidence in best-practice for at-risk youth programs.

Key Finding #4: P180 Provides Positive Outcomes Across Multiple Areas for At-Risk Young People

The evaluation found improvements in family relationships, educational engagement, employment readiness, health and wellbeing, social skills and community connection. Participants, families and stakeholders consistently described the program as holistic, with outcomes occurring through the combined effects of education, practical learning, family support, case management and service coordination.

Program enhancement
Strengthen transition planning and ongoing support for participants leaving the program.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement
Develop transition plans before program completion that identify education, training, employment and support pathways. Utilise warm referrals and continue outreach support for participants requiring ongoing assistance.

Funding recommendation for key finding #4
Funding should support the broader service model, including case management, family engagement, outreach support, transition activities and partnerships with education, employment and specialist services. These activities are integral to sustaining participant outcomes rather than additional program features.

Key Finding #5: Demand for P180 Places Highlights the Need to Increase Program Delivery and Additional Support Pathways for At-Risk Young People

Stakeholders consistently reported that demand for P180 exceeds available capacity, resulting in waitlists and missed opportunities to engage young people when they are ready for support. The evaluation also highlighted the importance of ensuring that participants are appropriately matched to interventions based on their level of need and readiness.

Program enhancement
Expand capacity through a tiered support pathway that includes pre-program outreach, alternative support options and post-program case management.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement

Develop structured pathways that provide outreach and case management for young people waiting to commence the program, offer alternatives for those unsuitable for the intensive group model, and provide ongoing support following program completion. Ensuring that only high to moderate risk youth are placed in P180 may also assist in increasing available spaces. However, this would mean increasing staffing for community out-reach services and in-house one-on-one mentoring for low-risk young people attending the CPCYC.

Funding recommendation for key finding #5

Additional funding could support increased service capacity, outreach services, inhouse mentoring availability, and interim support and post-program engagement. This would help reduce waitlists while maintaining the integrity of the intensive P180 model.

Key Finding #6: Stronger Program Outcome Measurement Will Strengthen the P180 Evidence Base

Although the evaluation found strong evidence of positive change, limitations in data collection reduced the ability to measure outcomes over time. Pre- and post-program surveys were often not directly comparable, long-term follow-up data were limited, and access to recidivism and police contact data was unavailable. Outcomes for participants who disengaged early were also difficult to track.

Program enhancement

Strengthen outcome measurement, long-term follow-up and access to administrative and recidivism data.

Implementation strategy suggestion for program enhancement

Align pre- and post-program survey questions and rating scales, make greater use of outreach data for longitudinal reporting, and establish follow-up processes for participants after program completion, including those who disengage early. Continued efforts are recommended to re-establish access to recidivism and police contact data. This could possibly be achieved through discussions with ACT Policing and JACS. While recognising the limitations of recidivism as a sole outcome measure, access to this data would provide another measure P180's long-term effectiveness.

Funding recommendation for key finding #6

Dedicated evaluation funding should be built into future program budgets. This should support data collection, participant follow-up, outcome reporting and administrative data linkage processes. Improved evidence on long-term outcomes will strengthen the ability to demonstrate program success, increase accountability and may enhance future funding opportunities.

Overall Conclusion

This evaluation demonstrates that P180 is an effective and highly valued intensive early intervention program for at-risk young people. Its strongest features are its evidence-based design, intensive and holistic support model, strong practitioner-participant relationships, family and case management, practical education and employment pathways, and focus on both risk reduction and strengths development (Bonta & Andrews, 2023; Pooley, 2020).

P180 contributes to improved wellbeing, emotional regulation, confidence, family relationships, educational engagement, employment readiness, help-seeking and positive future orientation. The program also fills an important service gap between mainstream education, community youth services and formal justice responses.

The key opportunities for future development relate to strengthening assessment and outcome measurement, improving participant risk and readiness matching, reducing the risks associated with mixed-risk cohorts, supporting workforce sustainability, expanding program capacity, and improving transition planning and longer-term follow-up. Continued investment in these areas would help sustain program quality, strengthen the evidence base and support the future development of P180 (Pappas & Dent, 2021; Pooley, 2020; Ward & Brown, 2004).

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Primary source report: Kelty, S., Ng Tseung-Wong, C., & Joshua, P. (2026). *External process and outcome evaluation of the Canberra Police Community Youth Club Project P180*. University of Canberra.