

The impact of Blagg on
challenging and reducing
offending by young people

An evaluation of a drama based
offending behaviour workshop

Commissioned by Manchester & Bury Youth
Offending Teams and TiPP

Centre for Applied Theatre Research
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Contents Page

	Page
Introduction	1
Evaluation aims and objectives	1
Research methods and sample	2
Background to Blagg –	
What is Blagg?	10
History and development of Blagg	11
A drama project or offending behaviour programme?	11
A theory base for Blagg	12
Group work programmes for young people at risk – models of effective practice	14
Results –	17
The impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending	18
Reconviction study	33
Young people evaluate Blagg	37
Staff's experience of implementing Blagg –	40
How Blagg works to overcome resistance	41
Issues involved in setting up a group	42
Managing local contexts	45
Programme and delivery style – facilitating factors	46
Comparing Blagg with Plus	48
Summary of findings	48
Recommendations	53

1. Introduction

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of a drama based offending behaviour workshop (Blagg) developed by TiPP, a theatre organisation based at the Drama Department, University of Manchester. The evaluation aimed to assess the contribution of Blagg to overall service delivery of two Youth Offending Teams (Yots) within Manchester and Bury. The primary aim of the youth justice system is to reduce offending by children and young people. The Youth Justice Board¹ (YJB) lists a series of objectives relating to this aim, including confronting children and young people with the consequences of their offending and designing interventions that tackle the risk factors associated with offending. This evaluation assesses the contribution Blagg makes to the delivery of YJB aims and objectives, in particular, in challenging and reducing offending by young people.

The evaluation is timely: it tests the effectiveness of an exciting and practical approach within a context that recognises the important role of evaluation in developing good practice. The evaluation findings described in this report highlight the potentially positive contribution of drama based projects to the development of group work provision for young people at risk of offending.

The evaluation was commissioned by Manchester and Bury Youth Offending Teams and TiPP. It was carried out by Jenny Hughes from the Centre for Applied Theatre Research (CATR), with supervision from senior staff at CATR and consultancy from Dr. Cheryl Simmil-Binning from the Department of Applied Social Science at Lancaster University.

TiPP is a theatre charity hosted by the Drama Department in Manchester University that delivers a range of drama projects and programmes, especially with young people at risk. CATR is also based at the Manchester University's Drama Department. CATR aims to research and develop applied theatre in a range of contexts.

The evaluation was commissioned in January 2002 and data collection was carried out from March 2002 to November 2002. The preliminary results of a reconviction study are reported here, although the full study will not be complete until December 2003.

2. Evaluation aims and objectives

The evaluation of Blagg had the following aims and objectives:

Aims:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of Blagg in reducing and challenging offending
2. To monitor and evaluate the contribution of Blagg to the work of Yots in Manchester and Bury

¹ The non governmental body responsible for co-ordinating youth offending teams across England and Wales

3. To identify the issues involved in the delivery of Blagg by trained non-drama specialists

Objectives:

1. To clarify the aims, objectives and theoretical underpinning of Blagg by exploring views and experiences of the original creators and commissioners and reviewing relevant literature
2. To compare reconvictions of groups of offenders who have and have not taken part in Blagg
3. To compare the seriousness and frequency of offending (using reconviction data) prior to and post participation in Blagg
4. To monitor attitudes to offending prior to and after participation in Blagg and compare with data from other group work programmes
5. To monitor selection procedures for Blagg and make appropriate recommendations
6. To gather feedback about Blagg from young offenders
7. To gather feedback about Blagg from Yot workers
8. To make recommendations and provide guidelines for good practice for future delivery of Blagg

The evaluation compares the outcomes and processes of participation in Blagg to principles of effective practice in offending behaviour group work with young people identified in other literature. A secondary aim of the evaluation was to provide Yots across Manchester and Bury and other local audiences with detailed guidelines for improved delivery and effectiveness of Blagg. With this in mind, it was important that the evaluation worked closely with Yot staff to set realistic aims and objectives and identify staff needs from the evaluation. The process included producing reports and working with teams to make findings and other records available to help staff develop confidence in using of the programme.

3. Research method and sample

The evaluation aimed to monitor the overall use and impact of the Blagg workshop within Central Manchester and Bury Yots and investigate specific implementations through carrying out at least two in-depth case studies. The evaluation initially included a comparative case study of Plus, a 20 week long cognitive behavioural group programme for young offenders developed by Liverpool University. However, there were no implementations of Plus planned for the time period of the study in Greater Manchester and other data was not available, so the initial design needed to be adapted.

The following bullet points summarise the evaluation activities that took place within the research period:

- Six implementations of Blagg were evaluated (these are referred to as case studies). These included all implementations of Blagg in the Manchester and Bury area carried out within the time period of the evaluation
- Monitoring of the use of Blagg in all Yots trained in Blagg across England up to six months following initial training
- A paper based study and interviews with Yot practitioners trained in and implementing Plus
- A reconviction study, including reconviction rates up to one year following participation in Blagg, is also being carried out. Preliminary results are reported here, although the full study will not be complete until December 2003
- Interviews with the original creators and commissioners of Blagg and a review of relevant literature
- A review of effective practice literature in offending behaviour group work with young people

The methods employed in the evaluation incorporate guidelines from the YJB and other relevant agencies regarding good quality evaluation of programmes with offenders. The evaluation seeks reliability by including a variety of perspectives (staff, evaluator and young people) and by incorporating a multi-method approach. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches generates different datasets that can be compared. It is important that the subjective impressions of staff and participants are considered alongside a wider reconviction study. Information from the reconviction study can be used to explore the relationship between participant and staff perceptions of impact and future offending behaviour.

3.1 The case studies - methods

The case studies focussed on gathering staff and participant perceptions of the impact of Blagg on offending, other social and personal outcomes. Issues regarding programme implementation were also explored. Evaluation activities included:

- Observation of Blagg workshops: recording reactions of participants, staff delivery style, the process and impact of the drama exercises, the fictional character and story developed/issues addressed
- Referral forms recording offender profiles, specific aims of the programme for each young person and other demographic information
- Registers of attendance

- Questionnaires² and qualitative interviews with Yot staff before, during and after each Blagg programme, gathering feedback about the programme and assessing impacts on offending behaviour
- Questionnaires³ and qualitative interviews with young people before, during and after each Blagg, assessing attitudes to offending and gathering feedback about the programme

All protocols measuring offenders' attitudes to offending before and after participation in Blagg were adapted from standard measuring instruments and psychometric tests for adults. The initial case studies relied upon staff assessment of any changes in individuals as regards attitudes to offending. However, staff perceptions were sometimes limited by lack of knowledge of the young person prior to participation in Blagg (this was even the case when personal officers were contacted, especially for those young people referred early in their order). There is a lack of validated psychometric tests measuring attitudinal change for young offenders.⁴ The evaluation team and steering group were unwilling to use existing psychometric tests developed for adults, feeling that they are inappropriate for young people. A short, accessible questionnaire for young people was therefore developed as part of the research to complement staff feedback.

The reliability of information gained via the questionnaire and interviews with young offenders is debatable – getting beyond 'young people saying what they think you want to hear' is a particularly acute problem for evaluators working in this setting. Attendance at groups is often required under a Court Order and young people are aware that the outcome of their order may be decided on them giving appropriate or acceptable rather than congruent or detailed responses.

Throughout the period of evaluation the researcher was mindful of local conditions that impacted upon the extent of the 'success' of each Blagg. The specific aims and objectives and structure of each implementation varied in accordance with the needs of local conditions/different participating groups. Blagg is designed to evolve creatively and flexibly – directed by and responsive to the issues and concerns of participants. As a consequence, the 'programme' being assessed was not the same in every case. This evaluation sought to integrate understanding of local conditions so as to develop understanding of the impact of Blagg in real contexts.

3.2 Sample

Case studies of six implementations of Blagg at two sites were carried out: Central Manchester Yot and Bury Yot. Staff at the two sites had adapted the programme to meet the specific needs:⁵

- Staff at Central Yot devised a six session programme (sessions lasted one and a half hours and took place in the early evening)

² See appendix B for staff questionnaires

³ See appendix C for young people questionnaires

⁴ Feilzer, M *Cognitive Behavioural Projects in Youth Justice* March 2002 Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford p iv

⁵ See appendix D for a summary of exercises and activities in the two different programmes

- Staff at Bury Yot devised a two day programme (two full days, 2 sessions a day with lunch provided, in the school holidays)

33 young people, aged 14 – 17 years, took part in the six Blagg workshops that comprised the case studies. As noted above, the case studies included all implementations of the programme carried out within Manchester and Bury Yots within the time period of the study. 15 young people took part in Blagg at Bury Yot and 17 young people took part in Blagg at Central Yot. The case studies carried out by Central Yot were:

1. 14th February – 21st March 2002, a six session programme facilitated by two Yot support workers with a group of nine young men, aged 15-17 years
2. 12th September – 17th October 2002, a six session programme, facilitated by the same workers with eight young men, aged 14 – 17 years

The case studies carried out at Bury Yot were:

3. 23rd - 24th July 2002, a two day programme, facilitated by two Yot workers (supervised by a TiPP worker) with 6 boys, aged 13 – 16 years
4. 5th- 6th August 2002, a two day programme, facilitated by two Yot workers with three girls, aged 14 – 15 years (supervised by a TiPP worker)
5. 21st- 22nd October, a two day programme, facilitated by two Yot workers with four boys aged 14 - 16 years
6. 24th-25th October, a two day programme, facilitated by two Yot workers with three girls, aged 15 - 16 years

Starters and finishers

Of the 17 young men that started Blagg at Central Manchester Yot, two did not finish the programme (both from the first case study). One participant did not complete because he was judged to be ‘at risk’ in the group as a result of gang related issues. The other participant was removed from the programme as a result of behaviour issues. Of the 15 participants at Bury, two did not finish (both from the first Blagg) – one participant was due to attend another programme on the second day and the second had to work. One young woman took part in Blagg on two occasions.

Yot staff involved in the study report that this completion rate exceeded their expectations and that is extremely high when compared to the Plus group work programme. Although the comparison is not fairly matched, with Plus targeting prolific young offenders and implemented over 20 weeks, it certainly suggests that the structure, length and content of Blagg was relevant to and engaged young people that were referred. In addition, good management of groups, from positive relationships with staff to practical issues such as willingness of staff to give young people lifts to and from sessions may have been factors contributing to high completion rates.

Gender, ethnicity and local context

This section describes and discusses some important issues relating to the young people who took part in the case studies and differences in context at the two sites. The following charts show the demographic range of the case study sample. Figures 1 & 2 show that representation from black, minority and ethnic groups varied significantly at the two sites.

Fig. 1 Blagg participants at Bury – 16 young people

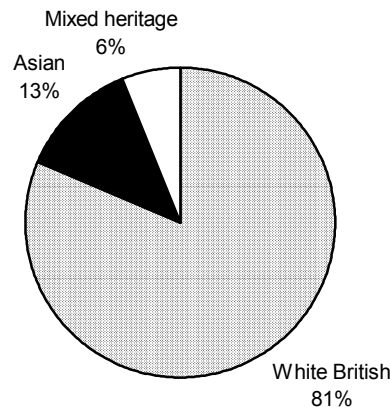
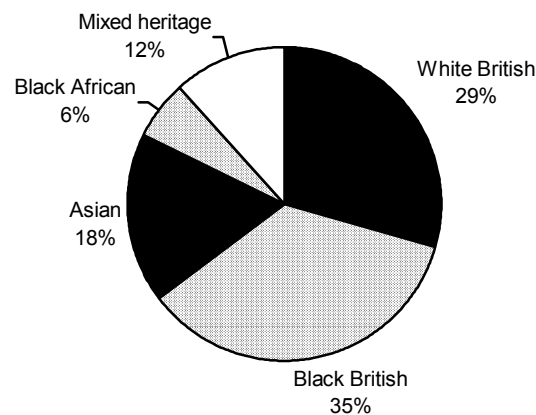


Fig.2 Blagg participants at Central Manchester – 17 young people



The Central Yot participants represented a wider ethnic range than the Bury group; 65% of Central Yot participants were non white, compared with 23% of the Bury group. Cultural, gender and social differences had a significant impact on the implementation and outcomes of the programme at each site. Research continues to show that young black people are substantially over represented at all levels of the youth justice system - especially marked at the level of custody (black young people are far more likely to receive custodial sentences). However, self reported offending (considered the most reliable measure of offending rates) shows no statistically significant differences between black and white young people.⁶ Commentators suggest that black young people's development continues to be adversely affected by

⁶ *Youth Crime Briefing: Some facts about young people who offend – 2000* Nacro Youth Crime 2002

racism and that many young black people, 'endure a penetrating sense of alienation'⁷ in day to day life. Experience of racial discrimination has been identified as a risk factor that may place young people at greater risk of negative life outcomes as well as blocking the effect of protective factors such as high intelligence and educational achievement.⁸ Institutional racism and its effect on how young black people engage with educational programmes are important factors that should be considered when understanding evaluation findings. For example, lower levels of participation in the initial case study at Central Yot may in part a result of negative experiences of education and the criminal justice system of some of the young men in the group.

Other issues relating to local context are relevant. Central Manchester Yot receives referrals from across inner city Manchester and issues of deprivation and disadvantage are more acute than outlying areas such as Bury. Finally, staff at Central Yot had run two Blagg programmes successfully with two groups. The Bury team had no prior experience of Blagg and a member of staff from TiPP attended for parts of all the implementations, to assist development of skills. This helped Bury staff translate the training they had received into expertise in terms of developing the use of the programme and had a positive impact on the workshops.

Offences and orders

Figures 3 & 4 show the range of offences and orders amongst the case study participants. There were important differences between the Bury and Central Yot groups - with the latter generally containing young people who had committed more serious offences. The cumulative gravity score of the Central Manchester participants is 101, compared with 81 for the Bury participants. Selection procedures varied at the two sites: at Central Yot the concern was to provide a group work programme for young people who had committed robbery; the implementations at Bury Yot were more general offending behaviour programmes for young people around relevant themes identified by staff.

Staff at both Yots aimed to recruit participants of similar ages. Bury Yot staff decided that to attempt a mixed group may create too many distractions and felt that girls perform better in single sex environments; this resulted in single sex groups being facilitated.

⁷ Goldson, B *Youth Justice: Contemporary Policy and Practice* 1999 p61

⁸ *Risk and Protective Factors associated with youth crime and effective interventions to prevent it* Communities that Care on behalf of the Youth Justice Board 2001 p25

Fig.3 Central Manchester participants - Offences

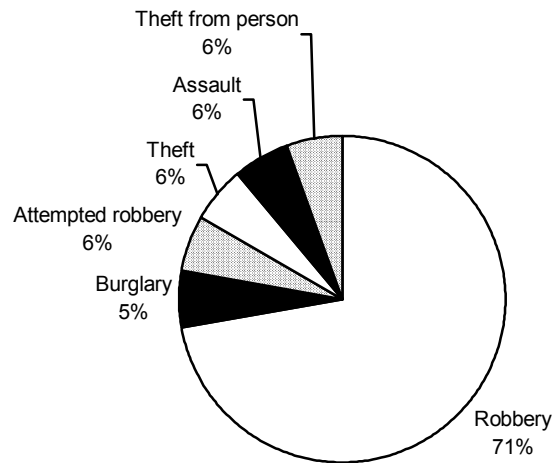
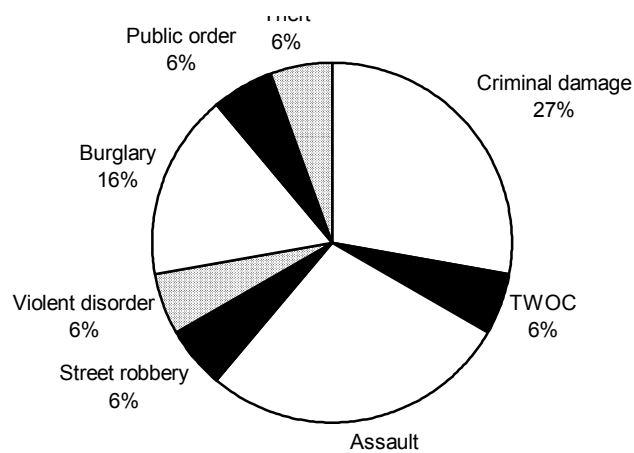


Fig. 4 Bury participants – offences



Figures 5 & 6 show the range of orders amongst participants at the two Yots. The differences reflect the variable gravity scores across the two groups. Amongst the Central Yot participants the order length ranged from 6 months to two years, at Bury Yot order length ranged from 3 months to two years.

Fig. 5 Central Manchester participants - orders

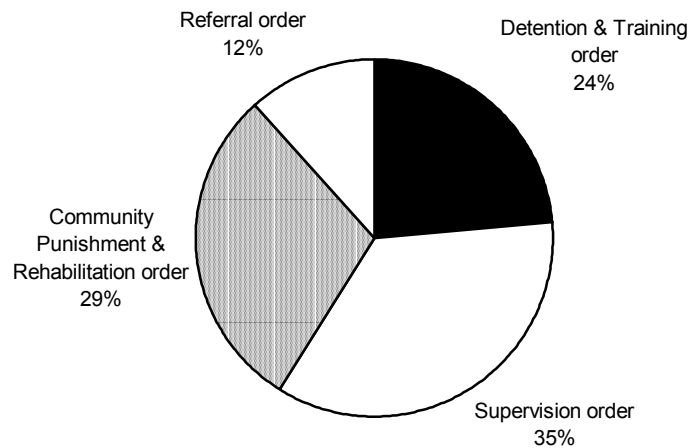
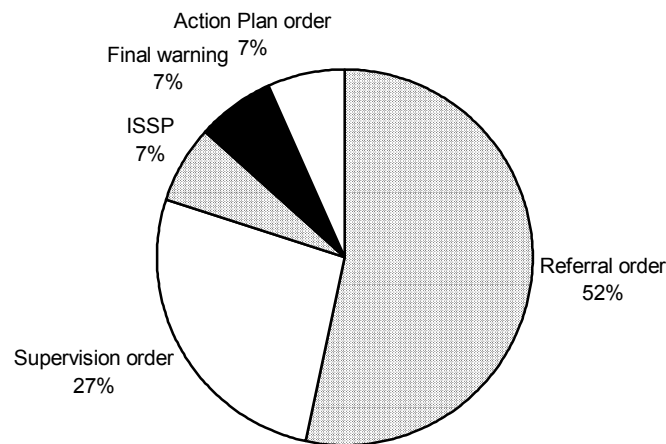


Fig. 6 Bury participants - orders



3.2 Monitoring Blagg implementations across the country

Follow up calls to all Yots that have been trained in Blagg within the last year in England were carried out, to monitor and evaluate wider use and impact of the programme. The following Yots were contacted 6 months following the training, and a worker from each took part in a telephone interview:

- South Manchester
- Manchester ISSP
- Wigan
- Bolton
- Salford
- Trafford
- Leicester
- Leicestershire
- Suffolk
- South Tyneside

3.3 The comparison study – experiences with Plus

Plus is a cognitive behavioural group work programme for young offenders developed by James Maguire from Liverpool University. Plus was identified as a suitable comparison for Blagg. Evaluation activities included:

- A paper based study of the Plus manual and accompanying literature
- Interview with Jackie Burrows from the Plus evaluation team at Liverpool University
- Interviews with Yot practitioners trained in Plus in the North West region, including workers from Bury, Central, Wigan, Salford, Trafford and Stockport Yots

4. What is Blagg?

Blagg is a drama-based offending behaviour workshop developed by TiPP and Jocelyn Meall (a designer) in partnership with Greater Manchester Probation Service in 1992. Blagg employs drama tools and techniques to engage offenders in exploring criminal behaviour. The workshop can address a variety of topics – crime, violence, drug use, peer pressure – and provide staff with material to stimulate and develop work with offenders within longer term programmes. In the ten years since its inception Blagg has been used in a wide variety of probation and Criminal Justice settings with a variety of adult and young offenders.

In response to great interest in the programme from a variety of Yots in the late 1990's TiPP developed Blagg for use with young offenders and young people at risk of offending. This led to a series of training events within Yots across England. Initial two or three day training events include the offer of a follow up or troubleshooting session with experienced TiPP staff, where Yot staff can discuss issues arising in their use of Blagg and secure TiPP's input into the development of the programme within their specific local context.

Blagg was originally designed as a one day workshop, but can be adapted and extended to run across two or three days or a series of sessions. The workshop is structured around a fictional character – Joe Blagg - created by participants. The group create the main features of Joe's life – who s/he lives with, friends, interests, work, education etc. and then go on to create an offence that Joe is about to commit. The workshop unfolds as the story of Joe's life is created by the group – exploring the moment of the offence, who is affected by the offence, the consequences of the offence and finally, looking at the series of events leading up to Joe committing the crime. The final section of the workshop engages the group in rehearsing interventions Joe could have made in the scenarios leading up to the crime in order to avoid the offence. Participants are encouraged to create still images and role play exercises that show the thoughts and feelings of Joe and other characters at various moments in the story.

The programme is accompanied by a visually stimulating set and props that aims to facilitate initial engagement in the programme and provide visual metaphors

representing the offence or incident around which the programme evolves. The main metaphors are contained in the floor base (made from hardboard) onto which an explosion is painted and a 1m high wooden head – onto which the fictional character and his/her thoughts and feelings are recorded throughout the workshop. The explosion visually communicates the idea that one offence has many effects on the community.

4.1 The history and development of Blagg

The creation of Blagg was guided by debates about effective practice within the ‘What Works’ literature in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Blagg is an example of applied theatre practice: it evolved from the application of theatre and drama to the objectives of the Criminal Justice system and combines elements of a therapeutic offending behaviour group work approach with a drama workshop. It was developed at a time when professionals across the Criminal Justice system were becoming more interested in drama as a way of engaging people in discussion of offending and other life issues that seemed more effective than traditional group work approaches.

Blagg was inspired by the work of participatory drama practitioners such as Augusto Boal⁹ and cognitive behaviour theorists Maguire and Priestly¹⁰. Cognitive behavioural approaches employ some conventions of participatory drama – the use of role play to develop social skills for example. Blagg takes the bare elements of a creative drama workshop that explores issues: warm up, create fictional characters, find out about their lives and future, then warm down - and infuses it with elements drawn from a cognitive behavioural approach, for example, ‘freezing’ moments in time to explore thoughts and feelings and problem solving.

4.2 A drama project or offending behaviour programme?

Is Blagg a drama project influenced by cognitive behavioural approaches or is it an example of cognitive behaviour group work that uses drama exercises? This is an important question as it relates to how to implement Blagg within overall programmes: is it a stand alone programme that staff can implement as part of ongoing work with offenders, or can Blagg be the central offending behaviour programme which other interventions can be built around?

James Thompson, one of the original creators of the workshop, describes Blagg as, ‘*a drama...structured quite carefully around narrative*’,¹¹ although he also emphasises the importance of the ‘application’ of drama to a criminal justice context. The ‘application’ made it necessary to incorporate cognitive behavioural approaches as they were seen to be effective and were supported by an evidence base. This meant that traditional drama practices were altered. For example, in a ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ approach (as important source of Blagg), the importance of the group identifying the central ‘problem’ to be explored using drama is emphasised. However, the creators of Blagg recognised that participating groups in criminal justice settings

⁹ Augusto Boal developed an arsenal of drama tools and techniques, ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’, that drama to help groups explore oppression and rehearse ways of changing their life experiences

¹⁰ Principally – Maguire & Priestley *Offending Behaviour: Skills and stratagems for going straight* 1985

¹¹ Interview with Jenny Hughes, May 2002

will not necessarily identify offending as problematic. The cognitive behavioural approach identifies poor thinking skills as a key factor in offending and focuses on developing the individual thinking and behaviour patterns of the offender to improve their capacity to identify and solve problems. The first section of the Blagg workshop therefore explores the offence and its consequences with the aim of helping groups identify the offence as a problem and motivate them to change/resolve the problem. Once the offence has been identified as a problem participants can more meaningfully explore the context of the offence and what Joe can do to change the outcome of his or her story.

4.3 A theory base for Blagg - drama as a means of practising skills or performance/rehearsal as important life skills in their own right?

The narrative that the Blagg workshop generates is fictional. Workshop leaders explain to participants that Joe Blagg is a fictional character that is the ‘missing member of the group’ – representative of the lives and experiences of group members without being identified with any individual. This directly contrasts to other offending behaviour group work programmes for young offenders, which engage young people in exploring their actual offences.

The issue of how thinking and behaviour is ‘transferred’ from the fictional world of Joe Blagg to the ‘real’ life of participants has been discussed by the creators of Blagg. Cognitive behavioural approaches use role play to help participants practice problem solving and social skills and check learning as programmes progress. James Thompson suggests that the rehearsal and performance of different experiences and outcomes for Joe is an important focus of the workshop in its own right – performance and rehearsal has other benefits, in addition to learning and then practising or applying skills.

Blagg ‘works’ though rehearsal and performance in two main ways. Firstly, Blagg aims to examine offending from different perspectives – uses drama exercises to explore the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the different characters affected by the offence. Secondly, Blagg uses the convention of rehearsal to explore the range of actions (of ‘performances’) that each character (principally Joe) can use to attempt to resolve or change the outcome of his or her life. The discussion of the range of narratives created within Blagg involve participants taking on and shedding roles (demonstrating new behaviour – new and varied ways of behaving and responding) through repetition and rehearsal.

If a young offender ‘performs’ resisting pressure to steal a car in the workshop is he or she is more likely to resist pressure in a real scenario? It is unlikely that the relationship between the metaphorical realm and real experience is so direct and uncomplicated in most cases,

‘the workshop moment is real and not real...rehearsal implies there’s a learning of a script, learning of a role, learning of behaviours, and there is an assumption because of that that those will replicated...something of the enjoyment of that moment might

*stay in their mind and in their body and remind them, but they aren't going to be repeating lines from the workshop'*¹²

How might 'change' take place in a drama workshop? Actors take on and shed roles routinely and do not expect them to be permanently change as a result of single roles. The 'skill' or learning involved in performing involves the ability to view the world from the frame of reference of a range of other people and understand their thoughts and feelings as their experiences evolve. Drama is a complex process that involves the creation and examination of different perspectives and pressures in the same moment, rather than splitting them off into different modules of learning that are devoid of characters, history, narrative and context.

The theory that is emerging suggests that Blagg 'works' not because it rehearses young people in particular behaviours but because this rehearsal *prepares* young people to respond to other people and social moments more fluidly and effectively. This is not simply about understanding the victim's point of view, but the ability to understand a range of perspectives and widen emotional repertoires,

*'theatre practice, in a general sense of role development, plot/narrative creation and conflict exploration and rehearsal, can therefore undermine fixed 'criminal' characteristics and 'criminal action' by offering new characters and a new kind of behaviour'*¹³

*'it is not enough to simply ask a person to play the role of their victim and see how it feels...Blagg is about an ability to be fluent in multiple roles'*¹⁴

This theory base is supported by developmental psychology. One approach suggests that the development of a stable identity and social competence depends on our ability to 'role take' – to take the role of someone else in social interaction, imagine how we are being perceived, and respond appropriately. Role theory¹⁵ suggests that learning how to perform and adapt to different roles (in life as well as in play) are important life skills. Children and young people develop the ability to role take through play (in play children take roles in an imagined world, step in and out of role and world, experiment with, manipulate and test actions and interactions) and organised games (games require an individual to take into account the different perspectives of many different people).

Involving young people in the repetition and rehearsal of scenarios (rather than acting it the 'right' way) , will increase a young person's ability to be fluent in a wide variety of solutions and responses to social moments. This may help them develop the cognitive and emotional dexterity or fluency to perform more effectively in their lives outside. Performance is about action – executing intentions in the world - trying out different actions and understanding their effects. Taking part in performance can help young people feel more in control of their responses, thoughts and feelings and develop their ability (and confidence) to effect different outcomes.

¹² James Thompson, in interview with Jenny Hughes, May 2002

¹³ Thompson, J *Drama Workshops for Anger Management and Offending Behaviour* 1999 p20

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p27

¹⁵ See the work of Erving Goffman, summarised in Roth, I (ed) *Introduction to Psychology Volume 1* Open University Press 1990

This section has attempted to summarise the theory of how learning on the fictional level of the workshop might be transferred to the real lives of young people participating in the workshop. The report includes an interrogation of this theory base in view of the data collected during the evaluation.

5. Group work programmes for young people at risk – models of effective practice

The causes of offending are complex and involve a combination of social, individual, material, intellectual and emotional factors. Effective programmes to reduce offending are generally understood to be programmes which seek to address the risk factors associated with offending (for example, family conflict, poor thinking and problem solving skills) whilst strengthening protective factors (for example, educational success, opportunity to take part in positive activities outside the home). Risk and protective factors that may be addressed by group work programmes for young people include individual characteristics such as thinking/reasoning ability, social skills, life skills (e.g. self control and problem solving) and confidence and self esteem. Group work programmes can provide opportunities for participation that involve recognition and praise from others and subsequent positive impact on self esteem and self image.

Three different models of group work with young people at risk were identified during the course of the research: cognitive behavioural; ‘personal development’ groups based on a person centred model; and youth work approaches that seek to deliver personal and social development opportunities for young people (through promoting positive relationships with peers and adults in informal settings and structured activity such as sports, outdoor pursuits and art).

The approach seen as most effective or ‘evidence based’ in terms of addressing offending behaviour are cognitive behavioural approaches to group work. The efficacy of cognitive behavioural approaches is not accepted uncritically and there are important limitations in the evidence base, for example, *‘research data is too general to allow conclusions as to why particular forms of intervention work, with whom, and by what mechanism’*.¹⁶ Little is known about how age, gender and race issues effect the outcomes of programmes for example.

5.1 Cognitive behavioural approaches to group work with young offenders

Cognitive behavioural therapy incorporates methods and theory from a group of approaches - behaviour modification, cognitive therapy, social skills training and problem solving training. Cognitive behavioural approaches assume that,

*‘the individual is a product of an environment that has failed to equip them with the necessary cognitive skills to lead law abiding lives. As a result they lean towards impulsivity and egocentrism, behave inappropriately and have attitudes, values and beliefs that may support this behaviour’*¹⁷

¹⁶ Youth Crime Briefing *Effective Practice with Young People who offend* Nacro August 1999 p10

¹⁷ Youth Crime Briefing *Using Cognitive Behavioural Approaches with Children and Young People who offend* Nacro June 2001 p1

Cognitive behavioural programmes work by giving positive reinforcement and challenging negative behaviour (where appropriate), modelling positive social relationships through the group environment (providing opportunities to observe others) and identifying and confronting attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that support offending behaviour. The following aspects of a young person's thinking and behaviour are open to change through cognitive behavioural techniques:¹⁸

- Impulsive behaviour
- Rigid or concrete thinking
- Difficulty in solving problems and making decisions
- Inability to identify alternative solutions
- Susceptibility to peer pressures
- Inability to keep things in perspective
- Lack of self confidence
- Poor problem solving
- Lack of victim empathy

Cognitive behavioural programmes include behaviour modification and therapy (positive and negative reinforcement of behaviour and identifying individual responses), social skills training, problem solving – looking at problem scenarios and solving them using steps to solve them and rational emotive and cognitive therapy (changing a person's way of structuring their conscious experience).

5.2 Good practice in group work programmes with young offenders

The following bullet points summarising aspects of good practice in designing and implementing group work programmes with young offenders have been identified with reference to available literature about cognitive behavioural and other group work with young offenders¹⁹ The principles of effective practice reviewed here provide a framework by which to assess Blagg.

- Cognitive behavioural and other group work approaches with young people need to be incorporated into a multiple service approach - be part of an intervention that targets family, peer group and community risk factors as well as individual characteristics - interventions should have clear protocols/policies to address and involve family and carers and the wider community context

¹⁸ *A Practical Guide to establishing Cognitive Behavioural Programmes* Nacro & Youth Justice Board May 2000 p17

¹⁹ The following texts were consulted for this section of the report: *A Practical Guide to establishing Cognitive Behavioural Programmes* Nacro & Youth Justice Board May 2000; Youth Crime Briefing *Effective Practice with Young People who offend* Nacro August 1999; Feilzer, M *Cognitive Behavioural Projects in Youth Justice* March 2002 Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford; Merrington, S *A Guide to setting up and evaluating programmes for young offenders* 1998; *Risk and Protective Factors associated with youth crime and effective interventions to prevent it* Communities that Care on behalf of the Youth Justice Board 2001 & literature published to support the Groupwork Plus programme by Liverpool University

- Interventions should adhere to the risk principle – more intensive programmes aimed at high risk offenders and vice versa. Over focus on cognitive behavioural approaches may be ‘too interventionist’ for some young people – shorter programmes focussing on single factors, e.g. victim empathy, may be more appropriate for some groups
- Programmes should focus on ‘criminogenic’ needs, that is, directly focus on risk factors that cause offending and protective factors that can prevent it. Assessment/referral processes for programmes need to be planned – staff need to make decisions regarding who is suitable for the programme (considering factors such as age, gender, size of group, readiness for group work, issue/crime to be addressed, types of orders, education experience, experience of groups, behaviour, lifestyle, circumstances, motivation) and the aspects of offending and thinking/behaviour to be addressed
- Programmes should match young people’s learning styles and include an active, participatory approach (combining active and reflective components). Programmes should set realistic and achievable targets for participants and be appropriate to age/maturity levels. Structured, directive approaches – combining a teaching approach with creative thinking and problem solving are more effective with young people than unstructured approaches
- Programmes should take place in a community setting – within the young person’s environment - so that learning can be readily practiced in real life
- Programme planning and integrity are important, but the principle of flexibility is also important. Aims should be integrated into method used, staff should be trained and programmes monitored and evaluated according to clear objectives and performance targets. Young people should be aware of the aims of the programme, understand the content and feel that it is relevant to them. Programmes should offer flexibility whilst retaining this integrity so as to respond to issues and group/individual needs. Young people’s issues often emerge in unpredictable ways and should be addressed as they emerge, the ability to deal with crisis and unpredictability is a prerequisite of work with troubled young people. Programmes also need to be flexible and be adapted as necessary to maintain the interest and motivation of young people
- Young people may need help to motivate and maintain engagement through programmes e.g. short goals/group target setting, certificates, planning in other incentives
- The level of motivation to change of the young person may be a key factor related to positive outcomes. Programmes may need to take account of this by including motivational interventions at the start of the programme
- Some young people may need to be prepared for group work – young people who offend may have difficulty in groups and placing them immediately in a group may be inappropriate

- All programmes should involve a clear commitment to anti-discriminatory practice - the needs of young people from different backgrounds need to be taken into account
- Training should include opportunities to learn about the theoretical base of the programme as well as how the programme is to be delivered. Developing staff's competence in group work skills is an important part of maximising engagement and participation of young people
- A commitment to and knowledge of the programme from all staff within the team is important. Opportunities for regular communication help to coordinate interventions and provide opportunities to communicate outcomes and any outstanding issues
- Staff need time to plan, set up and debrief from sessions. This may involve relief from normal working obligations to put in place any new intervention involving group work, especially in the early stages
- Clear programme manuals, including aims and objectives, how programmes should be delivered and what the outcomes should be, have also been identified as a mark of good practice in group work

5.3 Group work approaches involving drama

Some of the literature on group work approaches with young people identify the use of drama as effective. Whilst the impact of drama has been noted, evaluation has been small scale, ad hoc and mainly qualitative.

The following bullet points summarise the impacts of using drama identified in current literature on good practice:²⁰

- Drama generates 'emotional insight' as well as 'intellectual insight' and can therefore help young people develop victim empathy
- Drama can address a wide range of criminogenic factors, from self esteem, the relationship between thoughts and feelings and behaviour, testing alternative behaviours, challenging beliefs
- Drama can engage young people in exploring thoughts and feelings in involving and immediate ways
- Drama is a non traditional means of engaging young people in learning and skills development and may be more suitable to the learning styles of excluded young people

²⁰ The following texts have been used for this section of the report: *A Practical Guide to establishing Cognitive Behavioural Programmes* Nacro & Youth Justice Board May 2000, Merrington, S *A Guide to setting up and evaluating programmes for young offenders* 1998 & Randell, N (ed) *Including the Arts; preventing youth offending – a report on the first national conference on the role of the arts in preventing youth offending* 2002

In addition to this literature, CATR has carried out a number of evaluation and research projects from which an evidence/theory base for the impact of drama based interventions is emerging. For example, taking part in performance and rehearsal processes and exploring issues through creating/engaging in a fictional world may have specific and powerful impacts on young people that connect to YJB aims and objectives. Theory and evidence from CATR's other evaluation and research is drawn upon in the results and summary sections of this report, to interpret and explain emerging findings.

The problems involved in evaluating the arts are well documented – arts processes generate soft outcomes and it is difficult to translate these into quantifiable indicators of outcome. In addition, there are problems attributing causality as arts projects do not operate in isolation and specific problems being addressed through projects are complex and have deep rooted causes.²¹

6. Results

The results of the evaluation are structured into the following parts:

- Staff's aims and objectives in using Blagg
- Participant's hopes and expectations prior to participation in Blagg
- The impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending by young people
- Young people evaluate Blagg
- Staff's experience of implementing Blagg with groups of young people - issues for consideration

6.1 Staff's aims and objectives

Staff that facilitated the programme and personal officers that referred young people to Blagg identify a number of issues that they aimed to address with young people. The following list shows staff aims and objectives staff – those mentioned most frequently are reported on first:

- To explore the impact of offending on victims - *'to look at the impact on victims really and reiterating to him the seriousness of the offence'*
- To develop young people's awareness of the impact and consequences of crime for the community – *'to open their minds up to how crime is affecting the whole community'*
- To encourage a sense of responsibility – *'to make them understand that they are responsible for what happens in their life...ultimately you have that choice and you have to live with the consequences of that choice'*
- To develop awareness of own thinking and behaviour - *'to develop awareness of his own thoughts and decision making process'*
- To develop strategies to manage peer pressure
- To develop conflict resolution skills
- To improve self worth or self esteem

²¹ Bridgewood, A 'Social Inclusion: policy and research in the arts' a paper presented to the Second International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, Wellington, New Zealand, January 2002 p11

Staff aims and objectives relate directly to criminogenic factors. Issues identified were both generic and related to individuals. Referral and assessment procedures had engaged with the particular needs of individuals attending the programme.

6.2 Participant's hopes and expectations

Each young person attending Blagg was asked to relate their hopes and expectations of the workshop. This question relates to the importance of young people being aware of the aims and objectives of programmes (identified as an aspect of good practice). Of the 33 young people that took part in Blagg

- 18 young people said they did not know what they expected or hoped to gain from the programme
- 6 young people gave responses that related to exploring offending behaviour - *'something to do with acting something to see how your victim felt', 'just to help me not do (the crime) again'*
- 3 young people described positive expectations of the group - *'that it's enjoyable', 'just something good'*
- 2 young people described negative expectations of the group - *'I'm expecting that whatever we do I'll take part in it I don't have much choice in it', 'I just want to get on with it, get it over with'*
- 2 young people gave responses that related to working in a group, *'just people sat about talking isn't it?', 'like a lot of people sat around having a conversation'*
- Two young people gave responses related to doing drama - *'a play or something'*
- One young person expected the group to be 'something to do' - *'just something to use the day up'*

This shows that many young people who attended the programme had only vague or unclear expectations. This may indicate that young people had difficulty in openly acknowledging issues of offending behaviour with the evaluator or may indicate that many young people attending the programme were reluctant to clearly identify their offending as a problem they wanted to address in the group.

Involving young people in setting/clearly communicating the specific aims and objectives of the programme may increase young people's commitment to the programme and the outcomes of participation.

6.3 The impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending of young people

The following section describes the evaluation findings relating to the impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending. It includes results of case study

investigations, supplemented where appropriate with feedback from staff contacted during the wider monitoring process.

6.3.1 Staff perceptions of the impact of Blagg on attitudes to offending – quantitative data

Staff involved in the case studies were asked to rate each participants’ attitudes to offending, prior to and after taking part in Blagg. The results are shown in Figure 7.

Fig. 7 Impact of Blagg on attitudes to offending – staff perceptions

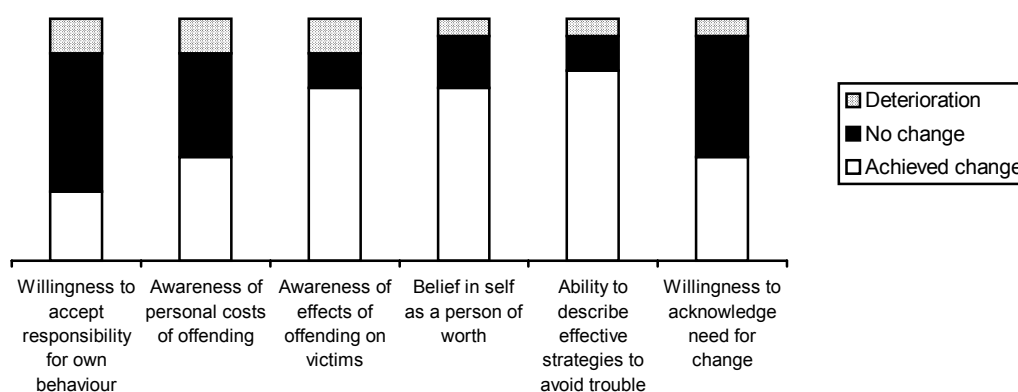


Figure 7 suggests that staff perceive Blagg to have greatest impact on young people’s victim awareness, self esteem and ability to describe effective strategies to avoid trouble.

The impact of the programme on victim awareness is supported by the comments of participants (as reported below) and shows that staff feel the programme successfully meets their aims and objectives. Increased confidence and self esteem is a frequently reported outcome of taking part in drama. Drama provides supervised and safe opportunities to meet and interact with peers and gain recognition and praise. Staff noted increased confidence and self esteem in many participants as they became more comfortable and engaged within the group setting, *‘by the end she was talking freely to the others’*.

The experience of successfully managing being in a group with peers is especially important for those young people who were not regularly attending school and were socially isolated,

‘it’s done him a lot of good, just to get him out of home, be part of a group, get a certificate, have a bit of praise, he’s never done group work before’

Staff felt that Blagg had least impact on willingness to accept responsibility for behaviour and willingness to acknowledge the need for change – if these aspects were previously low or high in a young person then they were likely to stay the same. This suggests that the programme by itself did not motivate young people to change their behaviour. It may be helpful to develop more detailed exercises and activities within

the consequences section of the programme in order to focus attention on responsibility and stimulate motivation to change.

A significant minority of young people showed deterioration, or decreased awareness against each of the questionnaire measures. This change can be accounted for by staff getting to know young people’s issues in more detail as a result of contact during the programme,

‘he’s in it a lot deeper than we think, the scenarios he was coming out with...it’s seeing the real him from what case holders put on the referral forms’

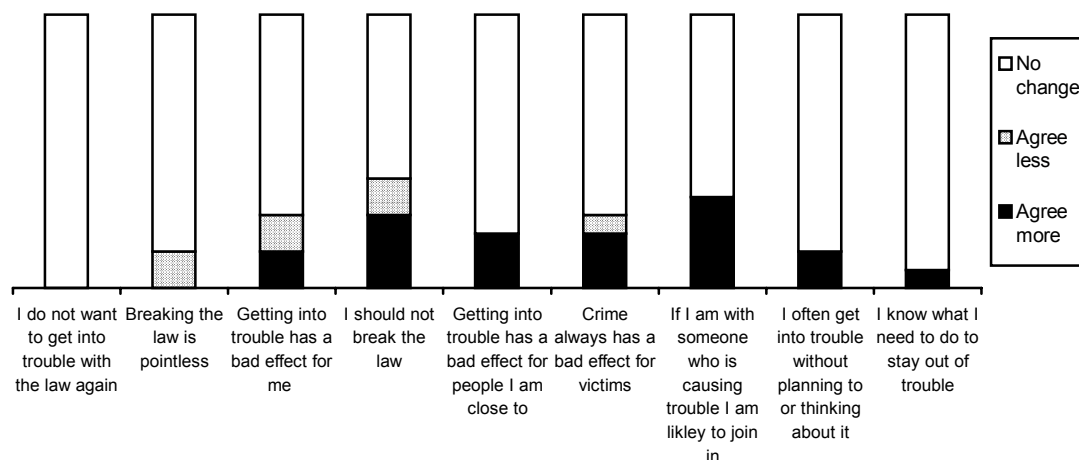
‘I saw a completely different side of him, bravado, maintaining an image of self as hardened offender in front of the group, this raised lots of issues regarding his offending and drug use and self image’

Some young people show no change in any of the questionnaire measures – participation in the programme confirmed staff’s perceptions of already high or low scores in terms of their attitudes to offending or willingness to change behaviour. Some young people show improvement on key aspects, or decreases in key aspects and this generated awareness of individual’s issues to inform future interventions. Staff running the programme were able to report back to personal officers and make recommendations for future work. Examples of recommendations made include: further offending behaviour work, referral to drugs agency, work on self esteem, referral to bullying programmes.

6.3.2 Participant perceptions of the impact of Blagg on their offending – quantitative data

A short attitude questionnaire was devised by the evaluator to attempt to gather feedback from young people about the impact of Blagg on their attitudes to offending. The results are shown in figure 8.

Figure 8 Impact of Blagg on attitudes to offending - young people’s perceptions



The graph suggests that Blagg may have most impact on young people’s awareness of the effect of their relationships with peers on their offending, their judgement that offending is wrong and awareness of the effect of offending on others.

It is difficult to interpret the findings of the attitude questionnaire. The graph shows that most young people showed levels of agreement with each statement before and after taking part. The difficulties of encouraging young people to give a meaningful or accurate account of their experiences and lack of validated tools to measure young people's attitudes to offending are discussed elsewhere in this report. In the view of the evaluator, the qualitative data reported below gives a more useful reflection on the impact of taking part in Blagg on challenging attitudes towards offending.

6.3.3 Impact of Blagg on offending – themes from qualitative data

The following themes summarise the evidence emerging from the qualitative data from interviews with staff and young people relating to impact of Blagg on young people's offending:

- *'Why did we make that choice?' – increased awareness of thoughts, feelings and decision making at the time of the offence*
- *'I know not to do it again' - developing effective strategies to avoid trouble in the future*
- *'Just looking at what you can lose by the things that you do' – increased awareness of the personal costs of offending*
- *'What they have to go through after you've done what you've done' – increased awareness of the impact of offending on victims*
- *'I didn't realise how many people it did effect' – increased awareness of the impact of offending on the wider community*
- *'Thinking about how he got led on by his mates' – increased awareness of the involvement of peers in offending*
- *'Listening to the ideas of other people' – the positive impact of working in a group with peers*
- *'You see the real them' - using Blagg as an informal assessment tool*

The following sections describe the comments of staff and young people in relation to each of these themes. Each theme is summarised at the start of each section.

6.3.4 'Why did we make that choice?' – increased awareness of thoughts, feelings and decision making at the time of the offence

- Young people suggest that the programme 'made them think' about offending, in particular, increasing their awareness of thoughts and feelings leading up to an offence. Staff observed increased insight into the cognitive and emotional processes that lead to offending behaviour in some participants and comment that Blagg stimulated high levels of participation in debates about offending

- Many participants identified with the fictional character created within workshops and suggest that they related the lessons learnt directly to their own lives
- Staff indicate that the fictional character and story secured high levels of engagement and participation and the metaphorical distance freed young people to talk about and explore their own thoughts, feelings and decisions
- Staff suggest that many young people lack opportunities to discuss offending; the opportunity to explore offending in a supportive and challenging context is important for young people who may not identify their behaviour as problematic. Blagg encouraged participants to explore and discuss troublesome behaviour in a way that helps them identify it as problematic

Young people indicated on questionnaires that Blagg ‘made them think’, *‘it’s good because it gets you thinking’*. Blagg involves young people in creating an character and narrative that explores the triggers and consequences of an offence. Some young people indicate that the opportunity to engage in thinking and talking about crime helped them more clearly identify the factors that lead to crime and define offending as a problem,

‘learning about how, acting about how it all turned out and that, learning about how making an offence gets you into trouble’

Staff report that the debates and discussions about the thoughts and feelings of Joe leading up to the crime were detailed and observed levels of insight amongst some individuals that were higher than expected,

‘it was good what he said about feeling both scared and aggressive and what you’ve got to do is get the aggression to override the fear and (another participant) said, ‘you’ve got to put things to the back of your head’, he said sometimes doubt is there because your emotions are telling you not to do it, so it’s quite detailed stuff, those two in particular have got a lot of insight into what’s going on in their heads’

‘some of the stuff he was coming out with in the last few sessions was really insightful and big turn around for him’

In general, levels of participation from young people were also higher than staff expected,

‘it gets levels of interaction from groups far far more than other programmes we’ve used, because of that we believe young people are likely to remember more from it, therefore are more likely to use the positive messages they get...even young people that we thought may cause a problem have really got into it and if they enjoy it we believe it’s more likely to have a greater impact’

Many young people described particular scenes from Joe’s life when asked to describe the aspect of the programme that had the most impact on them. Memories of particular moments in the narrative were surprisingly detailed. The narrative structure of Blagg means that aspects of offending are dealt with in the same moment, as part of the developing drama and this more complex approach is reflected in young people’s accounts. Participants were less likely to identify ‘modules of learning’ or

particular skills as impacts and more likely to express their identification with Joe Blagg and his or her the story as a site of impact,

'just all the action, because I can remember all the acting, like...I remember the part...when Jo didn't do the assault...why she got in trouble, it was an assault...it sticks in your head'

Other comments show that many young people directly related Joe Blagg to their own lives,

'when we came to do it, it was like 'oh my god, I've done that', it's what actually does happen, it's not all just made up, it's what does happen to people...I know how to act it out because it's actually happened to me'

It is difficult to translate these comments into clear evidence of impact of offending. The fictional character and story was memorable or significant for some young people and the material generated was relevant to them. Staff suggest that engagement in the fictional character and story motivated young people to take part in discussions of offending and thinking/feeling to a level of depth and detail that they would not normally (if asked to talk about themselves) and that this is an important end in itself,

'they were able to focus in on them as Joe and they were able to put it in the head because they were thinking about what was going on in their head'

'when they're creating the characters, they put a lot of themselves in it, without realising they're doing so, so they're invested in that character, but they don't yet feel, 'oh it's me we're talking about'...when you see young people involved in the emotions part of it, when they're trying to work out what emotions Joe is feeling, ask your average 15 year old, 'how are you feeling?' and they'll say 'dunno', well actually, they are actually really engaging what Joe might be feeling or thinking, because it's not them'

Some young people specifically identified greater awareness of thoughts and feelings leading up to the crime as an outcome of Blagg,

'when (a member of the group) was being Jo walking round the different scenes, three hours before the crime, two hours before and then one, that made me think because before I committed my crime I had pure people coming up to me in the hours before it saying things'

'when we had to push Joe around it made me think about all the things that get you mad before a fight'

Exploring the thoughts and feelings in Joe's head as he or she makes the final decision to commit the crime – also had a strong impact on some young people,

'the voices we were doing, the angel and the devil, that made me think more'

'thinking about the two ways Joe could go, it gets the answers out of us because we've been there and done that and it makes you think why did we make that choice?'

Some staff commented that many young people lack opportunities to discuss offending and that the opportunity to explore offending in a challenging context has a profound impact on young people who may not identify their behaviour as ‘offending’ or as problematic,

‘it made him think about all those issues because he probably doesn’t get a chance to think about all those issues’

‘the biggest thing they’ve got out of today is they’re aware of what is an offence, what sorts of things are offences, who it does affect... they know the consequences of what would happen’

6.3.5 ‘I know not to do it again’ - developing effective strategies to avoid trouble in the future

- All young people stated that taking part in Blagg had helped them see how they get into trouble and identify ways of staying out of trouble in the future
- Young people found it difficult to identify or articulate clear strategies for dealing with pressures to offend and were more likely to describe what they felt they should do
- It may be helpful to develop this aspect of Blagg so that specific moments of pressure are explored in more detail and interventions rehearsed and revised
- Taking part in Blagg helps to reinforce messages about avoiding offending developed in one to one work and ongoing interventions with young people

All young people that took part in the programme indicated on questionnaires that taking part in Blagg had helped them see how they get into trouble and identify ways of staying out of trouble in the future. However, young people found it difficult to identify or articulate clear strategies for dealing with pressures to offend, and were more likely to describe vague responses or wishes rather than strategies, for example,

‘by not getting led on by my friends’

‘it’s helped me see how the victim feels’

‘I don’t want to go to prison’

‘(one of the scenes) made me think because, really, I could of got out of that situation I was in, it was like my situation’

Staff comment that the narrative structure of the programme – exploring the offence and consequences and then looking at how Joe could have avoided committing the offence – engages participants in debates about how to avoid offending. One member of staff commented that this engagement in exploring how Joe can manage his or her life differently is important in itself,

‘the lines that they came out with made you know that it was working, because when we were going back (devising alternative solutions to the moments of pressure leading up to the crime) a couple of them said, ‘we probably wouldn’t have done it’ when

they'd thought about it, 'well, I bet she doesn't even commit the crime now because we wouldn't' and that's all you want isn't it?'

Many comments of young people about avoiding trouble in the future reflect ongoing work within the Yot. When asked before the programme what would help them keep out of trouble in the future many young people identified other activities within the Yot, *'coming here, doing reading and writing, learning with a worker', 'I reckon they'll help me here a lot, they've got a curfew and helped me get into a boxing club'*. Another major thing identified by young people as helping to keep them out of trouble is 'having something to do,

'doing things like this, not messing about, coming here keeps me out of trouble because I'm not going out'

It is likely that taking part in Blagg helps reinforce positive messages about strategies to avoid trouble from one to one or ongoing interventions with young people. It may be helpful to develop this aspect of Blagg so that specific moments of pressure are explored in more detail and more strategies rehearsed and articulated by young people.

Many young people describe strategies relating to managing relationships with peers more effectively, both during Blagg and in the interviews carried out afterwards. Because this was such a strong feature of accounts – it is described in a separate section below.

6.3.6 'Just looking at what you can lose by the things that you do' – increasing awareness of the personal costs of offending

- Young people identify increased awareness of the personal costs of offending as an impact of taking part in Blagg
- Staff suggest that exploring the story of the fictional character helps young people more clearly articulate their thoughts and feelings about the personal costs of their offending

Young people identify increased awareness of the personal costs of offending as an impact of taking part in Blagg,

'not to do the crime, the offence...the consequences, just looking at what you can lose by the things that you do'

Again, the comments of young people during interviews suggest that they clearly identify with the fictional character and the story that has been created, and draw comparisons to their own life,

'when he's been sent down...one phone theft and he got 12 months and I'm thinking I've got nine phone thefts, so it's just made me think...it's just made me think a lot'

'creating Joe made me think things about me in lots of different ways, because he's the same age as me...what Joe went through, it made me think if he ever gets into trouble again, he's had it'

Again, staff identify the liberating impact of the fictional character – because they are not talking about themselves - young people are more likely to clearly acknowledge their thoughts and feelings about the personal costs of offending.

6.3.7 ‘What they have to go through after you’ve done what you’ve done’ – increased awareness of the impact of offending on victims

- Increased awareness of effects of offending on victims was identified as an important impact of the programme by staff and young people
- Young people report that they gained the ability to take the perspective of other people from playing different parts or characters in the developing narrative
- Staff valued the impact of the programme on increasing young people’s victim awareness and again identified the liberating impact of the fictional character – young people were more likely to explore the thoughts and feelings of the victim of the fictional offence (many young people defend themselves by minimising the impact of their own offence)
- Some young men in the sample resisted identification with the victim during role plays – by minimising impact on victims, blaming victims or refusing to play the part of the victim. It may be difficult for young men to explicitly identify with the victim perspective, even on a fictional level, in front of other peers

Increased awareness of effects of offending on victims was identified as an important impact of the programme by staff and young people. It was also the impact mentioned most frequently after ‘increased awareness of thoughts, feelings and decision making at the time of the offence’,

‘it makes you see the other side – the victim’s point of view, it makes you see how they feel’

‘understanding...what they have to go through after you’ve done what you’ve done to them, the emotional effects and all that, how they feel inside, I did understand all that a bit before, it just gave me a bit more of an idea’

Young people report that they gained the ability to take the perspective of other people from playing different parts and the hot seating exercise,

‘the drama bit...where I was being the victim and she was being Joe, and the bit where we were asking questions yesterday (the hot seating), you got to see how the different characters felt about what had happened, like the victim was really shook up and the victim’s son’

‘you get to think about it, and you get to perform it, you know like how the bully feels and how the victim feels’

Increasing awareness of the impact of offending on victims was a key aim and objective for staff. Staff valued the victim awareness aspects of the programme and as with the other impacts on offending, identify the liberating impact of the fictional

character and story as a key factor facilitating young people's awareness of impact on victims,

'very often young people deny how their crime has impacted upon the victim or their family or even their own family, because taking it on board creates too much guilt but because Joe's fictional it's easier for them to do that'

'it's the best tool we've got at the moment to look at victim empathy...in paper programmes they minimise it because it's personal to them'

The comments of young people suggest that playing different parts in the developing narrative helps them gain the ability to view the offence from a variety of perspectives. It was noticeable that young women were far more able to do this than the young men, especially when it came to playing the part of the victim. Some young men would minimise the impact on the victim, or deliberately assign them low status within the role plays. Others resisted taking on the role of the victim in role plays and even when they did do so, tended to change the role so that the victim took control over events and overpowered Joe in some way. Staff also noted this,

'they weren't that good on the victim were they? (one participant) was saying he deserved it, he should have just handed over the phone, I'm going to do work on with him next week, victim stuff because he was 'it was his own fault he got hit'

'he wouldn't have got stuff nicked off him, he was adamant about that, a lot of them are like that...they can never imagine themselves being in that situation or someone in their family being that vulnerable'

Despite this apparent reluctance, interviews suggest that young men do gain increased awareness of the impact of offending on victims during the programme. It may be very difficult for young men to identify with the victim in the context of a group of unfamiliar peers with whom it is important to establish and maintain some sort of image or status. In addition, participants' responses within each character or part they played revealed important attitudes that could be fed back into ongoing work with the young person. This was an important outcome of the programme for staff (see, *'You see the real them'* below).

6.3.8 'I didn't realise how many people it did effect' – increased awareness of the impact of offending on family and the wider community

- Young people and staff identify increased awareness of the impact of offending on the wider community as an impact of taking part in Blagg
- The 'Who is affected?' exercise – where a still image of people in the community affected by the offence is built around an image of Jo committing the offence – powerfully communicates the impact of offending on the wider community

Young people and staff identify increased awareness of the impact of offending on the wider community as an impact of taking part in Blagg. Young people also identify that their awareness of the impact of offending on their own family as significant increased,

'when Joe had a visit from his mum in prison, all of us had to act in that session and he gets told off by the people he's close to, it made me think how shameful it is having your mum having to visit you in jail'

The 'Who is affected?' exercise – where a still image of people in the community affected by the offence is created by the group using participants to represent each person – powerfully communicates the impact of offending on the wider community. Staff and young people describe the powerful impact of this exercise.

'how it affected so many different people of just five minutes of something happening ...I've thought about it before but I didn't realise how many different people it did affect, the police, the Yots, her little son and all that'

'young people have been taken aback when they've seen how many people have been effected by the offence'

One member of staff suggested that the physical embodiment of the consequences of the offence in an image made the message more likely to be remembered by young people,

'when you're actually saying how close would that person be, how closely would they be affected, they can physically see how directly hurt people are and then all the other people round and when we came back to that today they put the chairs out, they knew where the different characters were, they knew exactly how close they should be to Joe, so they'd learnt that...normally they forget things, when you have a one to one session you say 'can you remember what we were doing last week' and they go 'no'

6.3.9 'Thinking about how he got led on by his mates' – increased awareness of the involvement of peers in offending

- Increased awareness of the impact of relationships with peers on offending was also a strong theme emerging from interviews with young people. When asked which part of the workshop might help them stay out of trouble in the future many young people responded with answers relating to managing relationships with peers more effectively
- Research on risk factors for young people's offending suggest that peer relationships are very salient to young people's offending. Feedback from young people suggests that Blagg may be a helpful way of addressing problems with peer relationships. Many young people describe strategies relating to managing relationships with peers more effectively, both during Blagg and in the interviews carried out afterwards

Increased awareness of the impact of relationships with peers on offending, and the moments leading up to offending was a strong theme emerging from interviews with young people. Research suggests that involvement of peers in offending is a risk factor for young people, so this finding reflects the particular needs of this group in relation to Blagg. Many young people, when asked which part of the workshop might help them stay out of trouble in the future responded with answers relating to managing relationships with peers more effectively,

'not get involved with other people causing trouble'

'choose your friends wisely at the end of the day'

'walking away when your friends tell you to do something'

Developing assertiveness skills with peers is identified here as a key skill by young people participating in Blagg. One member of staff also identified this as a key area for development of Blagg,

'I think we should be using Blagg for peer pressure...the incident could be a peer pressure moment...if you don't spend time with people that commit offences you're quite unlikely to go and rob something, how many young people go on their own to do those sorts of things? ...as a young person peer pressure is absolutely massive'

6.3.11 'Listening to the ideas of other people' – the positive impact of working in a group with peers

There is some evidence to suggest that taking part in a group with peers may have some impact on altering attitudes to offending. Some young people and staff identify the positive impact of working with peers,

'(interviewer: what made you think?) 'listening to the ideas of other people'

One young woman commented that taking part in the programme made her reconsider her relationship with her family, in particular, the need to make more effort to resolve difficult issues with them as a result of working in the group with young people in care.

Staff also suggest that interacting with and discussing offending with peers may act as a deterrent and increase awareness of the consequences and personal costs of particular behaviour,

'I think he may have been quite shocked actually today when we were talking about prison sentences...I think he was surprised when (another member of the group) turned round and said he was in custody for a first offence...was arguing that Joe would get custody when he was saying he'd get a community order'

6.3.12 'You see the real them' using Blagg as an informal assessment tool

- Staff suggest that a young person's responses within the workshop often revealed more about a young person than one to one work and that important issues were highlighted that could then be fed into ongoing work or through appropriate referrals
- This highlights the potential use of Blagg as an informal assessment tool that can be planned into young people's orders early on. It also highlights the importance of effective liaison with personal officers before and after Blagg
- This can only be an informal tool – information is invested in Joe by young people because it is not really them and confidentiality should be respected

- Young people play out different roles in different contexts. The drama activities (fictional settings created within the narrative) and group work setting present staff with an opportunity to view the different ‘performances’ young people play out with peers and in other contexts of their lives
- Staff become more aware of a young person and the roles they play and can therefore work with them in more targeted and focussed ways following Blagg. In addition, young people become more aware of the different roles they play – and begin to test out a wider and more detailed range of thoughts, feelings and responses
- Blagg provides the opportunity for young people to see staff in different ‘performances’ or roles and this can improve relationships
- Further research is needed to assess how young people apply the learning gained through Blagg to their own lives and the impact it has on future behaviour

Young people play out their own issues and experiences when taking part in Blagg; invest in and identify with the fictional character of Joe Blagg and the narrative that unfolds. The metaphorical or fictional elements of the programme provide a safe, distanced setting for young people to raise issues of concern – they are not talking about themselves, therefore risk less recrimination from staff and peers. The fictional settings created within the narrative and the group context present staff with an opportunity to view the different ‘performances’ young people play out in different contexts of their lives. Staff suggest that a young person’s responses within the workshop often revealed more about a young person than one to one work and this highlighted outstanding issues for future work with the young person,

‘it’s of benefit to me because...he’s obviously committing more offences because of his knowledge of different offences...I didn’t think he had any issues with drug and alcohol but clearly listening to him and his knowledge about it and what he was saying to the others he has got knowledge of it, I’m not saying he’s using and has a big bad habit but he needs some education about it’

‘I’m not saying he’s anything but they’re really different when they’re in a group from one to one, you see the real them and I have really changed the way of working with my two since then’

This suggests that Blagg could be used as an informal assessment tool for workers, and attempts should be made to plan the programme in to early in orders, to leave time for ongoing work. It also highlights the importance of effective liaison with personal officers before and after Blagg, as staff need to know the young person in order to identify emerging issues and these can then be communicated back to workers responsible for one to one work with the young person.

Sometimes new insights directly related to a young person’s offending and at other times different issues emerged, including: abuse, risky behaviour, poor relationships with carers/parents, drug use, behaviour problems, negative self image. In addition, sometimes participation in Blagg led to improvements in or more positive perceptions of young people and their abilities,

'I'm glad we had (name of one participant) in it because I think it proved loads of people wrong 'oh, you're not going to have him in a group, it's going to be a nightmare' and he was all right, he coped really well'

In addition, young people get the opportunity to see staff in different 'performances' or roles and this can improve their relationships,

'I think they see us in a better light now, because we've had a good laugh with them really, we've treated them more like adults...they don't see us like that, we're normally behind a desk in an interview room'

It is important to point out that what young people reveal of themselves in the group, within the metaphorical narrative, cannot be taken as 'true' in the accepted meaning of the word and used as 'evidence' of further offending for example. This raises confidentiality issues – staff should respect the fact that information has not been formally disclosed and therefore it can not be *directly* acted on. Often staff were already previously aware or suspicious that a young person had specific issue and the extra information meant that they could continue to be appropriately vigilant in future work with the young person, whilst respecting their right to privacy. As one member of staff comments, *'it just adds to our understanding, it's just some more information that comes out'*.

How 'true' is information presented by young people through the fictional character or via their 'performances' in front of peers in a group context? This question is of central importance to assessing the effectiveness of Blagg in reducing and challenging offending and has important implications for the delivery of Blagg. It is feasible that the feedback given from young people, in Blagg and interviews during the evaluation is proof of their understanding of the performances that would most benefit them in a youth justice setting, where they are required to show evidence of awareness of the impact on victims. Does 'performing' the role of the victim show greater ability to empathise with victims of offences in real life?

Performance theory and psychological role theory suggest that learning to create and adapt 'performances' – the way the self is presented - is an important part of human development,

*'(human development is a process of) learning appropriate bits of behaviour, of finding out how to adjust and perform one's life in relation to social and personal circumstances'*²²

Social commentators and performance theorists point out that many recreational activities, including the arts, take place in what is called *liminal* time and place – a place/time outside of normal routines where people (temporarily) shed their ascribed roles and take on new ones, a context that is open to all kinds of possibilities and is free from social constraints,

'actors on stage do more than pretend. The actors exist in the field of a double negative. They are not themselves, nor are they the characters they impersonate. A

²² Schechner, R (2002) *Performance Studies: An Introduction* Routledge 2002 p23

*theatrical performance takes place between 'not me...not not me'...in that highly charged in-between liminal space'*²³

Characteristics of liminal space include freedom of expression and the performance of feelings that are prohibited in other social settings. Both of these themes are featured in staff's descriptions of young people taking part in Blagg. Staff become more aware of a young person and the roles they play and can therefore work with them in more targeted and focussed ways following Blagg. In addition, young people become more aware of the different roles they play – and begin to test out a wider and more detailed range of thoughts, feelings and responses. Within the workshop young people experience themselves as having an important part to play in the social world, that the part they choose to play has an impact on others, and that the parts other people choose to play have a similar impact on them.

Further research is needed to assess how young people apply the learning gained through Blagg to their own lives and the impact it has on future behaviour, for example by carrying out follow up interviews with young people up to a year after participation

6.3.4 Reconviction study

While a range of criteria are being utilised to assess the impact of Blagg, it is important to include consideration of the degree to which it can be shown to impact on offending. Accordingly, a study of data relating to offending prior to and after participation in Blagg is being carried out for all young people who participated in the case studies. This section reports on the preliminary analysis of data on reconvictions for up to one year post participation in Blagg.

It should be stressed that, for reasons which will be explained below, caution needs to be shown in interpreting this data, the more so at this stage since the information currently available is only partial. Data for post convictions was collected in June – August 2003, therefore does not comprise a full year following participation for participants in the final three case studies. The reconviction study will be revisited and completed by December 2003.²⁴

The reconviction data (see tables below) appears to give some support to the findings of the qualitative analysis: that participation in Blagg makes a useful contribution to reducing and challenging offending by young people as part of an ongoing programme of work within Yots. However, further analysis of the data, including a review of the findings in context suggests that the data should be interpreted with caution. Differences in the way each case study group was selected can account for variations in data. In addition, low numbers of young people in the sample mean that the findings are limited in scope and should be supplemented by a larger study before any more conclusive interpretations are made.

The reconviction study compares reconviction data from Blagg participants with reconviction data drawn from a control group of matched young offenders from

²³ Schechner, R (2002) *Performance Studies: An Introduction* Routledge 2002 p64

²⁴ Contact TiPP or Bury Yot for further information – see appendix A for contact details

Manchester and Bury Yots. This locally identified control group provides a more accurate comparison than national data. Control groups were selected to match offences, orders, gender and date of intervention from each Yot. In addition, a representative balance between first time and repeat or prolific offenders was sought. Data regarding convictions was collected from the Youth Offending Information System (YOIS), a computer database system used by many Yots across England and Wales. YOIS includes data from ASSET forms – the assessment tool used by Yots - and court proceedings that are regularly updated by administration teams within Yots. Feedback from teams suggest that the data is reliably recorded and up to date. ASSET is currently being evaluated by the YJB.

Table 1 Reconvictions of Blagg participants

	Reconvictions (%)		Gravity of index offence	Gravity of most serious reconviction offence in year post participation. Change shown in ()
Total sample	30% (n=10)		55	46 (-9)
Sub groups:	No. participants reconvicted in sub group	% of sub group reconvicted		
Central Yot group	5 (from a total of 16)	31%	30	28 (-2)
Central first time offenders	2 (8)	25%	12	10 (-2)
Central repeat offenders	3 (8)	37%	18	18 (0)
Bury Yot group	5 (15)	33%	25	18 (-7)
Bury first time offenders	0 (4)	0%	-	-
Bury repeat offenders	5 (11)	45%	25	18 (-7)
Bury boys	4 (10)	40%	20	15 (-5)
Bury girls	1 (5)	20%	5	3 (-2)

The initial aim was to assess changes in the seriousness and frequency of offending as well as measure reconvictions. Gravity scores are given in the tables below, however, changes in frequency are not recorded fully here as the incomplete data means results do not reflect the real picture. This is especially the case with the section of the control group that received custodial sentences: data should be drawn for the year after release from custody to give a true reflection of impact on frequency of offending. The preliminary results of the reconviction study are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 2 Reconvictions of control group

	Reconvictions (%)		Gravity of index offence	Gravity of most serious reconviction offence in year post participation. Change shown in ()
	No. participants reconvicted in sub group	% of sub group reconvicted		
Total control group (n=71)	39% (n=28)			
Sub groups:	No. participants reconvicted in sub group	% of sub group reconvicted		
Central control group	21 (43)	49%	126	98 (-28)
Central control group - first time Offenders	6 (14)	43%	36	27 (-9)
Central control group - repeat offenders	15 (29)	52%	90	71 (-19)
Bury control group	7 (28)	25%	42	33 (-9)
Bury control group – first time offenders	0 (2)	0%	-	-
Bury control group - repeat offenders	7 (26)	27%	30	33 (+3)
Bury control group -boys	5 (21)	24%	30	27 (-3)
Bury control group - girls	2 (7)	29%	12	9 (-3)

Table 1 shows that 10 young people have been reconvicted since participation in Blagg, a reconviction rate of 30.3%. This compares to a reconviction rate of 39% in the control group. A study of one year juvenile reconviction rates published by the Home Office in 2002 (presenting the first opportunity to study a national cohort after the implementation of youth justice reforms) showed that reconviction rates for a national cohort were 24.4% (19.1% for first time offenders and 44.2% for repeat offenders).²⁵

The lower reconviction rates after participation in Blagg are a positive indication of the impact of Blagg. However, the tables show significantly different reconviction rates for participants at the two sites: reconvictions of participants at Central Yot were 31% (compared with 49% for the control group) and at Bury Yot reconvictions were at 33% (compared with 25% for the control group).

Some explanation for this difference may be found in a differential approach to selection for Blagg in the two Yots. Table 3 shows the risk of re-offending for participants and control groups as assessed by Yot workers using the ASSET assessment tool (higher score suggests higher risk). The average risk scores show that Bury Blagg participants were at greater risk of re-offending prior to taking part in Blagg than the Bury control group, whereas Central participants were less at risk than the control group.

The different risk scores in turn reflect the way in which groups were selected for Blagg at the two sites. At Bury, referrals were made from the general population of offenders, though workers sought to avoid referring first time offenders that were less at risk (in line with effective practice guidelines on matching need to intervention). Thus, those at higher risk of re-offending tended to be selected.

At Central, Blagg was specifically targeted at those young people who had committed the serious offence of robbery, so the category considered (both participants and control group) were generally higher risk. However, those selected for Blagg from that group were considered to have the capacity to cope well in a group situation. This had the effect that those selected for Blagg tended to be assessed as having a lower risk of re-offending than the control group.

Table 3 Asset scores of Blagg participants and control group

	Central Blagg	Central control	Bury Blagg	Bury control
Asset risk scores (average)	14.5	21.1	11.6	8.3

More detailed analysis and a review of context of Blagg at each site therefore suggests that the positive impact on offending suggested by a cursory glance at the data should be treated with some caution. Differences in the way each case study group was selected can account for some changes in the data.

²⁵ *One Year Juvenile Reconviction rates July 2000 cohort* Debbie Jennings, Home Office June 2002

The problems with reconviction data have been well documented, for example the relationship between convictions and actual offending has been questioned. In addition, reconviction data on its own cannot explain why and how young people benefit from any intervention. However, reconvictions are still seen as a reliable measure of success for interventions. The difficulties with reconviction data are magnified in the evaluation of Blagg; it is difficult to attribute any change in offending to a single intervention such as a two day drama workshop within a wider programme of interventions facilitated by Yots.

Accordingly, a reconviction study cannot be expected to provide the whole picture in assessing the impact of the programme. It does, however, provide an important element to be considered alongside the more qualitative findings to emerge from this study, albeit that the issue remains of how the impact of one Yot programme can be isolated from the others applied within the same overall intervention.

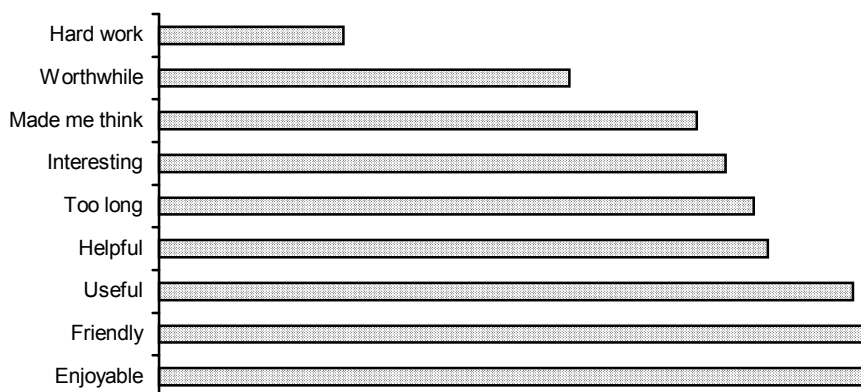
To summarise, the data suggests that participation in Blagg may have a positive effect on challenging and reducing offending within the wider Yot programme. Further analysis of the complete reconviction dataset should be carried out to assess changes in the frequency and seriousness of offending and assess which cases Blagg has greatest impact on. However, it is not possible to attribute any changes solely to participation in Blagg. Reconviction data should be used in conjunction with qualitative analysis of the accounts of young people and staff and more subtle and appropriate measures of success to provide a more robust assessment of the impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending.

6.4 Young people evaluate Blagg

This section summarises other research findings from the investigations with young people, relating to what they felt was good about Blagg and any suggestions for improving the programme.

Young people filled in session evaluation forms wherein they were asked to circle words that most accurately described their experience of the programme. Figure 9 shows the range of words that were circled most frequently by participants.

Fig. 9 Words/phrases used most frequently by young people to describe participation in Blagg



Blagg was experienced as enjoyable and the issues raised within the workshops were ones that young people felt were useful and worthwhile. Whilst the activity is structured and directive – young people also valued the element of informality.

The high number of times ‘too long’ was circled by young people reflects low attentions spans and difficulty concentrating that many participants showed during sessions. One member of staff commented, *‘nearly all of them have been out of school or they’re at school but not doing full days so it’s a long day for them’*

6.4.1 Best and worst things about taking part in Blagg

Young people were asked to describe the ‘best things’ about taking part in Blagg. These comments have been analysed and three overlapping themes identified.

- *The opportunity to take part in drama and acting*
- *The opportunity to meet and interact with other young people*
- *Having something to do*

Young people described the following as the ‘worst things’ about taking part in Blagg:

- *Waiting for latecomers to arrive*
- *Other young people disrupting the programme*
- *Some of the games and drama exercises*

The opportunity to take part in drama and acting

The acting, drama and games were most frequently mentioned as the best things about the workshop. Young people identified playing particular games, playing particular parts or identified parts of the narrative as the aspects as the session they most enjoyed. This remained the case even where levels of participation and resistance to taking part in games and acting was high. For example, the first case study (in Central Yot) young men were particularly resistant to taking part on role plays (and potentially looking foolish in front of peers). Young men from those sessions still identified that they enjoyed the acting – even if this involved the opportunity to watch other people taking on roles and contributing to discussions about each character’s behaviour and the development of the narrative, rather than taking on roles themselves.

The opportunity to meet and interact with other young people

Young people enjoyed taking part in an activity with peers that provided opportunities for all the ‘get involved’ and contribute their ideas about issues and experiences that are relevant to them,

‘having fun, because it’s not just one of us it’s loads of us’

‘just having a laugh and talking and things’

In some cases, they identified working with peers as a key benefits of the programme,

'it shows that you can get along with anyone'

'it made me communicate with people better'

Many young people participating in the programme were not attending school regularly and lacked structured opportunities to take part in activities with peers in a safe setting. Many had a history of difficulties in groups with peers. Some were isolated socially – lacking opportunities to meet other young people outside of the home (especially those young people that were trying to avoid re-offending by not spending time with peers that were involved in risky or negative behaviour). Taking part in Blagg provided an opportunity to meet and interact with peers in a positive and supervised setting. Staff also identify high levels of enjoyment and mixing with peers in Blagg as important,

'I think they have enjoyed themselves and I think a lot of them, they've had to prove something wherever they've been, in a home or in their own home or at school, but here, they've just got on with the task'

'she was sat there really listening and really enjoying it and laughing'

The positive responses of young people indicate that the programme was able to engage young people who are 'hard to reach' to a great extent. The following findings identify in more detail what young people valued about the programme.

Having something to do

The third strong theme relating to the best things about Blagg was the importance of having 'something to do',

'it stopped me from being bored'

'it's good because there's nothing to do during the day'

Waiting for latecomers to arrive

Sessions were often delayed at the start as young people attended late and referrals were followed up. Many young people referred were not used to taking part in a structured activity that required time keeping and some organisational skills. Late attendance is also likely to reflect ambivalence to taking part in the programme. Often young people who had attended on time were waiting for others and many identified this as their 'worst thing',

'hanging around at the start waiting for people to arrive'

It was important that staff showed some flexibility regarding start time of the sessions. Many latecomers took part once they were engaged in the session and the overall programme. Strict adherence to a 'start on time' policy would have excluded some young people who benefited from participation.

Other young people disrupting the programme

Some young people described other young people disrupting the programme as their worst thing,

'(it was harder because) everyone was just messing about'

'the only negative thing was all the messing about'

Young people's comments on delivery style and issues of control over the group are included in the effective practice section below.

Some of the games and drama exercises

Some young people felt that some of the games were not age appropriate, although many of the same young people described the games as their 'best thing'. Drama games involve excitement, physical movement, physical and emotional expression that can challenge codes of behaviour amongst young people, especially those young people that are conscious of needing to maintain an image in front of their peers,

'some of them games were all right but they were a bit childish'

Young people both like and dislike games: they enjoy taking part in games that provide opportunities to let off steam and 'have a laugh' but can become anxious about how this might make them appear to peers. It was clear that some young people participating in Blagg had not previously had the opportunity to take part in group games and needed extra guidance as to how to play games in groups.

Some young people found the focus accrued to them during the drama exercises difficult - *'being asked to get up'*. Many young people participating in Blagg lacked self confidence. The opportunity to take part in an activity like drama with their peers offers a unique opportunity to develop self confidence and social skills, but can at the same time present challenges and provoke anxiety. It is important that staff are aware of the potential difficulty young people have – fear of exposure in front of peers is a serious issue - and manage the process sensitively and supportively. Young people suggest that staff taking part in games and role plays themselves and a friendly informal atmosphere helped them to feel comfortable within the group.

6.5 Staff's experience of implementing Blagg with groups of young people - issues for consideration

This section includes an analysis of staff feedback about Blagg, relating to issues that emerged whilst implementing the programme as inexperienced drama practitioners. Data was gathered from feedback from staff during the case studies and the wider monitoring of Blagg.²⁶ This section is structured into the following sections:

²⁶ For a list of Blaggs run at different Yots across the country – the full results of the monitoring exercise, see appendices

- *How Blagg works to overcome resistance*
- *Issues involved in setting up a group*
- *Struggles with the significant events exercise*
- *Managing local contexts*
- *Programme style and delivery style – facilitating factors*
- *Programme structure – what is most effective with young people?*

6.5.1 How Blagg works to overcome resistance

- Staff reported higher than expected levels of participation in the programme. Resistance, in terms of low levels of participation in the exercises, was identified as a problem in only one of the case studies
- Some staff identified the need for extra support to deal with moments in the workshop when young people's responses lack depth and detail. TiPP have adapted the training to take into account the needs of young offenders, including how to work effectively with resistant or reticent groups. Staff identify the need for a way to remind themselves of adaptations, variations and ways to develop exercises. It may be helpful to incorporate more exercises from the training in the manual

Working with resistance is a regular feature of group work with young people at risk. Staff anticipated some resistance to taking part in the drama exercises or some groups, identifying low motivation of young people, behaviour problems and influence of negative participants as potential sources of problems,

'there's a few of them that are going to be quite disruptive and quite reluctant'

'(some of them are) quite entrenched in what they're doing, been through the mill and are going to be unhappy about being in a group in the first place, never mind what we're going to ask them to do'

However, although many groups had problems with short attention spans and minor disruptiveness of participants, resistance to taking part was a significant problem in only one of the six case studies observed. All staff commented on higher than expected levels of participation in the programme. Staff identified the 'flow' of the programme as an important factor in overcoming initial resistance or reluctance,

'you walk in, the group's sat with, 'drama, not doing it', real resistance, but the way the programme is, you go into the characters, and then you gradually you'll find people who are really, really engaging in high level debates about it and completely carried away in the world of Blagg'

Resistance was a particular issue for the young black men (although not exclusively) in the sample, who particularly struggled to take the risk of standing out in front of peers – other high status young black men. This became a particular difficult for the group of participants that included representatives linked to different gangs in Central Manchester,

'you're fighting a losing battle when you're in a six week programme and with young people who the worst thing that can happen to them in the world is to look stupid in front of these people, who often have a higher standing than them in the community'

In addition to participating in the drama, staff also encountered resistance to acknowledging the impact of offending – with some individuals trying to minimise the impact and personal costs of the offence,

'when we looked at the effects on others, the police station and the interview, I think for some that got a bit difficult, touched a few nerves really, they tended to either make a joke or become defensive'

Staff reported find that some groups of young people did not contribute as fully as expected and the story did not develop in any depth and detail. One member of staff that regularly uses the programme states that more detailed supporting literature about the programme would be helpful,

'sometimes it develops well and sometimes it doesn't, last week the group weren't giving out much information and there isn't a great deal in the programme or the manual that can help you...we're putting in more traditional group exercises alongside Blagg to get more out of them... the manual is a bit light on material at times, there was a lot of stuff from the training that isn't in the manual, we need a quick reference to get hold of all those ideas'

6.5.2 Issues involved in setting up a group

- Staff identified a number of issues that needed to be addressed in order to set up, plan and facilitate a group successfully. The following issues should be considered by Yot managers in partnership with teams prior to implementing the programme: commitment and understanding of the programme of others in the team; referral procedures; planning Blagg in to core service delivery within Yots (planning it into young people's orders/contracts for example); time management (staff time is needed to liaise with and feed back to personal officers and staff involved in delivery need time to plan and debrief from sessions). Inexperienced staff would benefit from time, relieved of statutory obligations and/or a percentage off their workload to plan and rehearse delivery of the programme
- Where staff are inexperienced in group work, delivery of Blagg may be enhanced by involving staff in further training in basic group work skills including management of group dynamics and issues involved in setting up and facilitating groups. Yot managers may need to allocate extra time and resources to this end

Staff facilitating case studies emphasised the commitment of the Yot team - to make referrals, pass on relevant information about participants and take part in feed back sessions, as important to the effective delivery of Blagg. This was a problem where general pressure on staff's time meant that Blagg was not prioritised and the programme was not written into young people's orders, meaning that they were not required to attend,

'we told people three months ago and then every meeting since but we didn't have any referrals'

'it will be much easier when it's written into orders'

General pressure of time also meant that staff groups found it difficult to plan sessions. Staff would benefit from time, relieved of statutory obligations and/or a percentage off their workload, to plan and rehearse the programme, especially in the early stages when the programme is unfamiliar and staff confidence low,

'we didn't (have time to plan last week) and it's hard because it's got to be a time when two of you are free and quite often we don't get the names through quick enough to do that...getting time to sit down both of you together, if we just had time to go over it before that would help'

Staff also emphasise the importance of 'rehearsing' explanations of exercises before sessions,

'I think we were under rehearsed and didn't spend enough time preparing, I felt unprepared going into it...we were just snatching hours here and there'

The programme also benefits from a clear assessment and referral procedure. Staff delivering the programme need prior access to information about young people, including their offence, relevant personal and social issues and young people's experience of/responses in group settings and relationships with peers.

The wider monitoring exercise found that lack of time was a key obstacle preventing the use of the programme in Yots. Other factors preventing implementation of the training included: lack of appropriate space, lack of appropriate referrals and ongoing review of group work programmes meaning that all programmes were on hold. These problems were common to implementation of the various Yot programmes and not specific to Blagg.

6.5.3 The significant events exercise

- Staff feedback shows that Yot teams value Blagg because it is seen as very effective in encouraging young people to explore the personal and social costs and consequences of offending. The 'second half' of the programme – exploring Joe's life leading up to the crime – received less emphasis in feedback from staff
- Staff carrying out case study implementations describe difficulties facilitating the second part of the programme. Exploring a shorter lead in to the crime (identifying trigger events on the day of the crime rather the year before, as TiPP advise in their training) helped successful delivery of this section as young people could relate the build up of pressure to the offence more directly - the short build up tended to reflect their own pattern of offending
- Some staff commented that it was difficult to get young people to identify scenarios that they could change. Allowing exploration of some scenarios where Joe is powerless may be relevant to young people who are likely to have fewer options as a result of lower social status/powerlessness (although it

is important to continue to emphasise that the way Joe responds to those events is within his or her own control)

- When rehearsing interventions into trigger scenes, there was a tendency on the part of staff to end the exercise early, rather than test out different solutions. Sometimes this was an issue of low concentration amongst groups. It may be important that staff develop this part of the programme to encourage continued participation whilst devising and rehearsing a range of solutions. Exploring a variety of responses encourages a more fluid and flexible response to the world than concrete responses typical of offending behaviour
- Further opportunities for staff to develop understanding and expertise in delivering the whole programme will help ensure that Blagg fulfils its potential within Yots. Continued allocation of time and resources from Yots to build in troubleshooting days (one off sessions offered by TiPP post training) is important. In addition, additional events or resources for e.g. a seminar or conference, the production of supporting literature (possibly including a visual resource such as a video) or development of the manual should be considered

The wider monitoring of Blagg revealed that Yots tend to focus on or emphasise using the programme to explore victim awareness and personal and social consequences or costs of offending. The research findings above suggest that this is an effective use of Blagg, but it is important to note that young people identify the impact of the wider programme in addition to the victim awareness aspects, for example, exploring Joe's thoughts and feelings leading up to the offence.

Observation of staff facilitating Blagg and feedback from staff during interviews revealed that many staff struggled to facilitate the second part of Blagg successfully - principally, exploring the significant events leading up to Joe's crime and then rehearsing interventions to change the outcome for Joe. This exercise provides the opportunity to explore how Joe can apply himself more effectively under pressure and involves groups in devising and rehearsing different strategies for resolving difficult scenarios. This is an important part of the programme that explores a young person's ability to relate learning back to contexts relevant to their own lives and also encourages them to try a range of solutions - playing out multiple solutions encourages a more fluid and flexible response to the world than rigid, concrete responses typical of offending behaviour.

In one group a participant suggested that an event leading up to the offence was related to his relationship with his father - 'it's because his dad can't handle him, and he only sees his dad once a week' and course leaders responded: 'that's something Joe's got no control over is it? It's got to be a moment where Joe has a choice' and commented in the interview,

'we had a bit of a problem with getting across that Jo had to be the one changing the scenes'

There may be an issue about Blagg with young people in this - relating to the powerlessness they experience in some key experiences in their life. It might be worth exploring those experiences (especially if they are suggested by and interest the group - exploration may encourage wider engagement), with the proviso that whilst young

people cannot control the events themselves they may be able to improve their control of how those events continue to affect them.

In addition, there was a tendency in all groups to end the exercise prematurely – to go with the first suggestion as to how to resolve the situation, rather than try out different solutions and discuss with the group how realistic they were and whether they felt that the solution could be applied to their own lives,

'I wonder whether we should have made them re-do that scene again because when his friends were trying to persuade him the second time they didn't really have a go at him'

Finally, staff found that this exercise was most effective with young people (and more relevant to their own offending) when it involved exploring a shorter time period before the offence (for example, three hours before rather than the three years before the crime),

'rather than what led up to your crime, looking back over your life, 'well what led up to your crime, in that week?', so you don't need as much depth of understanding - I think you have to accept that, at certain ages, people's cognitive skills are not that developed, merely because of their age'

6.5.4 Managing local contexts

- The observation of Blagg in different sites highlighted the importance of understanding and adapting the management and delivery of the programme to local, specific contexts. In addition, a consideration of issues of gender and ethnicity of participants is important, including how these issues might effect relationships between staff and participants

The case study implementations of Blagg at Central Yot involved careful and sensitive management of a number of issues relating to cultural difference and specific problems for young people in inner city Manchester. It is important that staff are aware of the particular difficulties of young people that attend groups and understand the social context of such difficulties,

'you just need to be aware that it's a factor in the room, it may look like people aren't participating...you must bear in mind that, if it's males with females (leading), that they're used to saying to their mums 'I'm not doing that'

In addition staff running the programme with young women found that it was important to adapt their responses and the emphasis of the programme to respond to the different ways young women were engaging with the programme. For example, young women related Jo Blagg to their own lives more directly and brought their own experiences more directly into the material,

'the boys didn't relate their crimes to Jo in the same way, the girls, it was all their issues, so it was Jo but it was their issues that we were pulling out'

6.5.5 Programme style and delivery style – facilitating factors

Staff were asked to reflect on what they felt helped young people to participate and achieve a positive outcome from Blagg. The accounts of both staff and young people identified a number of ‘facilitating factors’ in the programme and delivery style, including:

- Staff involvement in games and role plays, *‘what worked quite well with us staff being involved was the role play, us playing different characters’*
- Staff ‘selective hearing’/positive reinforcement – only responding to positive comments from participants, *‘the negativity, you’ve got to ignore it, because if you don’t you get hung up on challenging everything that they say, just listen, selectively hear, listen to the good things and pick those up’*
- Consistent encouragement to young people
- Determination of staff to persist, even when difficult
- Focus on enjoyment of the programme, *‘what works well in terms of leading groups like Blagg with young people...to keep it light hearted, to keep it fun’*
- Active, participatory approach, *‘they’re able to engage, take part in it, get involved, the fact that there’s no written work involved is important, it’s not like sitting down in a classroom because a lot of them have got problems with that anyway’*
- The programme’s relevance to young people, *‘it’s their language and they can relate to it and in doing it, in making it up themselves, rather than just being told, they’re actually acting it out and understanding it for themselves’*
- Good co-working, *‘we bounced off each other...when I wasn’t getting things across she could chip in and the other way round’*
- Opportunities to develop confidence as a leader by observing other people running the programme with young people, *‘when you physically see it working with young people and it’s working so well and they’ve all got so much out of it then that gives you something to aim for’*
- Opportunities to develop confidence in leading skills to by own experience of running the programme, *‘it’s knowing the flow of the programme, knowing what comes next’*

Young people were also asked to comment on what they found helpful in terms of the approach of staff. Analysis of their accounts also reveal a number of factors facilitating higher participation,

- Friendly atmosphere, *'it's been helpful because everyone's really cheerful and friendly'*
- Respectful approach leading to stronger and enhanced relationships with young people, *'they treat us with respect, like we're grown ups, not like we're criminals, they treat us like we mean something'*
- Active, participatory approach, *'not just sitting down and writing, at least you're not getting bored writing stuff'; 'doing like games in between and everything, waking people up and everything and letting everyone have turns'; 'they're like 'do it how you think it should happen', and if one of the kids think the adults are doing it wrong they can, everyone can have an opinion about how to do it so I think that's been good'*
- Staff getting involved in the games and role play, *'just getting involved themselves'; 'if you just tell us to do something and don't show us what you're going to do we won't do it, when staff do it first that helps'*
- Consistent application of the rules, although an element of informality and flexibility is important, *'if they'd stuck to the rules...they should have been more strict', 'they haven't been too strict, they let you off a bit, it's right the way it is – if they'd have been more strict then everyone would have laughed at them'*

6.5.6 What is the best structure for Blagg?

The case studies provided the opportunity to evaluate two different structures for the programme: a six week, evening session programme and a two day programme. Further evaluation of different structures in action would be required before being able to confirm which structure is best for young people but the following bullet points summarises issues arising with each programme design.

The six session programme:

- The six session early evening programme fitted well into the days of young people that were attending school or college or working
- The six session programme worked well when the fictional character and offence was created in the first session – the relevance of the programme was immediately more apparent to young people
- The longer programme runs the risk of young people not completing. Although the number of starters and finishers was high, it was noticeable that momentum was lost as sessions continued – young people were participating less fully and enthusiastically than in earlier sessions

The two day programme:

- The two day programme during school holidays fitted well for young people at school and had the additional benefit of providing a diversionary activity

- The longer session time meant that young people had more time to form relationships – this had positive effects in that it offered young people more opportunity to get to know each other but also meant that both boys groups caused some minor disruptions during lunch time on the second day, as greater familiarity led to loss of inhibitions

Both implementations maintained the integrity of Blagg: both included each major exercise, giving the group an opportunity to explore the consequences and antecedents of Joe's crime and ending with an exploration of Joe's future.

7. Comparing Blagg with Plus

The study of Plus included interviews with staff trained and experienced in facilitating Plus and a paper study of the Plus manual and other supporting literature. The aim was to highlight differences and similarities between two offending behaviour group work programmes with young people, in order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of Blagg: to show where it works well and areas for further development. There is a dearth of established group work programmes for young offenders and Plus was selected as a comparison as it was the only programme in the region that was used systematically within Yots.

However, the comparison of Blagg with Plus highlighted the differences between the two programme more than the similarities. Whilst there is some overlap in terms of theory base and skills required to run the programme, the content, structure and underlying philosophy is different. The differences lie in the history and development of the two programmes: Plus is developed by clinical psychologists and adapts a fully developed adult cognitive behaviour programme for young people, whilst Blagg is developed by theatre practitioners and is more firmly rooted in an applied theatre tradition. Plus is a long programme based on a 'treatment model' of practice that attempts to comprehensively address the cognitive, social and emotional factors involved in an individual's offending history. Blagg is a short term intervention and creative tool, to be adapted by youth justice staff according to their assessment of the needs of the young people they are working with in the context of ongoing work, *'not a solution to complex problems but accessible techniques for use by criminal justice staff engaged in group work'*.²⁷ Because of these differences, the comparison study was not a useful means of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Blagg.

8. Summary of findings

The findings show that participating in Blagg has some impact on challenging and reducing offending by young people and can be a valuable tool when used in conjunction with ongoing work with young people. The evaluation findings support the use of Blagg as an exciting and engaging group work programme, that secures high levels of participation from young people and explores the causes and consequences of offending in a way that does not expose or stigmatise young people. Blagg employs an active, participatory format and an informal learning context that is valued by and relevant to young people and Yot staff. The fictional character and

²⁷ Blagg manual, TiPP 1992 p 1

narrative flow recreates, freezes, then deconstructs the 'real time' of an offence and thoughts and feelings of offender, victim and representatives of the wider community prior to and after an offence is committed. Blagg can be a powerful experience for young people and the fictional character and offence provide a degree of both structure (protection from exposure in front of others) and freedom to explore thoughts and feelings in more depth and detail that young people will permit themselves in one to one settings that deal more directly with personal experiences.

Investigations with staff suggest that Blagg has most significant impact on young people's awareness of the effect of offending on victims, self esteem and ability to use effective strategies to avoid trouble. Staff comment that the convention of the fictional character frees up young people to talk about their own lives. Staff valued the impact of the programme on increasing young people's victim awareness and again identified the liberating impact of the fictional character. Staff found that participants' responses within the workshop often revealed more about a young person than one to one work, and that important issues were raised that could then be fed into ongoing work or through appropriate referrals. This highlights the potential use of Blagg as an informal assessment tool that can be planned into young people's orders early on. It also emphasises the importance of effective liaison with personal officers before and after Blagg.

Young people felt that the programme was enjoyable, worthwhile and relevant to them. Young people clearly related the fictional character and story to their own lives. Blagg stimulated detailed discussions of offending and an exploration of thoughts, feelings and decision making involved in offending at a level of depth and detail that often surprised staff and led to an observable increase in insight into offending behaviour for some participants. All young people that took part in the programme indicated on questionnaires that taking part in Blagg had helped them see how they get into trouble and identify ways of staying out of trouble in the future

Increased awareness of the impact of relationships with peers on offending was also a strong theme emerging from interviews with young people. Research suggests that involvement of peers in offending is a risk factor for young people, so this finding reflects the particular needs of this group.

Across all investigations staff were extremely positive and enthusiastic about Blagg, commenting on the programme's power to communicate who is affected by an offence to young people, identifying the relevance of the programme style and content to young people and it's ability to stimulate and maintain their engagement. Staff also value the flexibility of the programme to respond to needs of different groups and be adapted to different contexts. Staff enthusiasm and commitment to the programme is a key factor in the successful implementation of Blagg.

The findings of this evaluation provide some evidence to support the theory base of Blagg, but further research and evaluation is necessary to continue to develop an evidence base to test and develop the theory base and provide guidelines for good practice in this area. Further research could also provide more information on the contribution of Blagg to enhanced interaction/relationship building between Yots and young people and other findings useful to wider audiences of the programme.

It is important that the evaluation findings relating to the impact of Blagg on challenging and reducing offending are combined with conclusions of the completed reconviction study. This quantitative data may provide further information about which groups Blagg ‘work’ most effectively with and indicate how far any learning and development observed in young people whilst participating in the programme effects future decision making and behaviour.

Staff and young people identified a number of ‘facilitating factors’ involved in the successful implementation of Blagg, including:

- A friendly, informal atmosphere, staff involvement in games and role plays, staff’s positive reinforcement and encouragement and the focus on enjoyment of the programme
- The active, participatory approach of the workshop and the programme’s relevance to young people
- Opportunities to staff to develop confidence as leaders by observing other people running the programme with young people and by own experience of running the programme
- Provision of time with colleagues to plan effectively

The following table compares Blagg to recognised effective practice in offending behaviour group work with young people and identifies areas for development. These are summarised in the recommendations section that follows.

Effective practice:	Blagg:
1. Approaches with children and young people need to be part of an intervention that targets family and community factors as well as individual thinking	Blagg is carried out within a context of ongoing work with young people
2. Interventions should adhere to the risk principle – more intensive programmes aimed at high risk offenders and vice versa	The content of Blagg reflects the issues of participants. The fictional offence and story can be tailored to specific needs and avoid being ‘too interventionist’. The programme can be developed to address a wide variety of different offences and risk factors. It is unlikely to work as a single intervention however, without ongoing one to one work where young people can apply learning to their own lives
3. Programmes should focus on ‘criminogenic’ needs, that is, directly focus on factors that cause offending	Blagg focuses on reasoning/ thinking skills, decision making, awareness of consequences and effect of offending on victims. It

	also addresses self esteem issues and can provide a positive environment for young people to interact with peers
4. Programmes should match young people's learning styles and this means they should include an active, participatory approach, set realistic and achievable targets for participants, be appropriate to age/maturity levels and be enjoyable. Structured, directive approaches – combining a teaching approach with creative thinking and problem solving are more effective with young people than unstructured approaches	Blagg is a fully active and participatory approach, that varies in format between physical activity, creative work, discussion and reflection, and observation. Most young people report that they enjoyed taking part and welcomed working with staff in a more informal environment. Staff report high levels of engagement with the programme in most cases. Blagg has a clear narrative structure and the exact content of the narrative is created and developed by staff and participants
5. Programmes should take place in a community setting – within the young person's environment, so that learning can be readily practiced in real life	Blagg can be used in a variety of contexts
6. Programme planning and integrity are important, but the principle of flexibility is also important. Programmes should offer flexibility whilst retaining integrity so as to respond to issues and group/individual needs	Blagg provides a strong structure or narrative flow that does not alter (involving the fictional character, the offence, its consequences, events leading to the offence and the character's future). The content of the narrative is entirely flexible and responsive to the interests and issues of participants. Programme length and session times can be adapted to specific groups
7. Young people should be aware of the aims of the programme, understand the content and feel that it is relevant to them	The evaluation showed that young people find the content of the programme engaging and relevant
8. Programmes also need to be flexible and be adapted as necessary to maintain the interest and motivation of young people	Blagg is responsive to the issues and experiences of young people. Timings of sessions and programme structure can be adapted
9. The level of motivation to change of the young person may be a key factor related to positive outcomes. Programmes may need to take account of this by including motivational interventions at the start of the programme	Blagg starts by exploring a fictional offence and it's consequences for the offender, victim and wider community. The aim is to motivate participants to want to change the outcome for Joe by exploring consequences of the offence. For groups exhibiting low motivation, more detailed exercises and

	activities within the consequences section of the programme can be used in order to focus attention on responsibility and stimulate motivation to change
10. Some young people may need to be prepared for group work	Yot staff are responsible for carrying out assessments of young people's readiness for group work as part of the referral procedure
11. Assessment/referral processes and targeting of participants for programmes need to be planned	Yot staff are responsible for assessment and referral processes. Staff need support to ensure that they have adequate time to plan assessment processes and prepare for the overall programme
12. Training should include opportunities to learn about the theoretical base of the programme as well as how the programme is to be delivered. Developing staff's competence in group work skills is an important part of maximising engagement and participation of young people	Staff found training positive, informative and enjoyable. The theory base for Blagg is rooted in a combination of cognitive behavioural approach and applied theatre. TiPP should use the theory sections of the evaluation report to inform future training. Continued allocation of time and resources from Yots to build in troubleshooting days (one off sessions offered by TiPP post training) is important. Where staff are inexperienced in group work, delivery of Blagg may be enhanced by involving staff in further training in basic group work. Yot managers may need to allocate extra time and resources to this end
13. All programmes should involve a clear commitment to anti discriminatory practice - the needs of young people from different backgrounds need to be taken into account	A consideration of anti discriminatory practice should be a routine part of planning and preparation for Blagg
14. A commitment to and knowledge of the programme from all staff within the Yot is important, with regular communication planned in	Again, the evaluation shows that staff need support from managers to ensure that they have adequate time, especially when inexperienced in programme delivery, to plan and prepare for the programme
15. Staff need time to plan, set up and debrief from sessions – and need support from managers to allocate necessary time to comply with statutory obligations as well as put in place a new intervention	As above

16. Clear programme manuals have also been identified as a mark of good practice in group work	Staff feel the manual is clear and mostly user friendly, but have identified areas for development (see recommendations)
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9. Recommendations

The evaluation findings suggest that Blagg can be developed in the following areas:

- Young people should be made aware of the aims and objectives of programme prior to participation. Clearly communicating the specific aims and objectives of the programme may increase commitment to the programme and the positive outcomes of participation
- Young people identify the impact of relationships with peers on their offending. Developing the use of Blagg to take account of the impact of relationships with peers on offending may be important in adapting Blagg to the needs of young people
- Further research is needed to assess how young people apply the learning gained through Blagg to their own lives, for example by carrying out follow up interviews with young people up to a year after participation and completing the reconviction study. Further research and evaluation may also help to identify the impacts and outcomes of Blagg in different local contexts. Further research could also provide more information on the contribution of Blagg to enhanced interaction/relationship building between Yots and young people and other findings useful to wider audiences of the programme

The following recommendations are made to staff and Yot teams implementing Blagg:

- The ‘Why did it all happen?’/significant events exercise is an interesting part of the programme that will allow young people to begin to apply learning to real contexts. Encouraging young people to try out different solutions to problems is as important as coming up with the ‘right’ answer as it provides an opportunity to experiment with a range of thoughts, feelings and behaviours to the same stimulus and develops a young person’s ability to adapt to and change situations in their own lives more effectively
- Staff responsible for Blagg need to allocate adequate time to plan sessions, gather information about referrals, provide feedback to personal officers and rehearse programme delivery. This will involve allocating at least the same time as they spend with participants to planning and preparing, especially whilst building confidence in the programme. Yot teams should consider reducing staff case loads to enable them to effectively plan programmes
- Where staff are inexperienced in group work, delivery of Blagg may be enhanced by involving staff in further training in basic group work skills including management of group dynamics, working with young people at risk, anti-discriminatory practice within groups and issues involved in setting up

and facilitating groups. Yot managers may need to allocate extra time and resources to this end

- Continued allocation of time and resources from Yots to build in troubleshooting days (one off sessions offered by TiPP post training) is important as it can improve staff's confidence in and knowledge of the programme and offer ideas for development of key exercises

The following developments to the manual and training programme are recommended:

- Staff would find the inclusion of descriptions of more games that may work with young people helpful
- A section on strategies for working with resistant groups may also be helpful, including ways to encourage increased participation in exercises, ways of working with minimising/denying impact of offending and possible extensions and developments of key exercises
- Staff may find it helpful to discuss potential obstacles to implementing Blagg and ways to overcome them as part of the training programme
- TiPP should consider how they can provide opportunities for staff to see the programme working with young people prior to their delivery of it, as this increases staff confidence and commitment to the programme. This might involve opportunities to observe practice at TiPP or other Yots. In addition, additional events or resources for e.g. a seminar or conference, the production of supporting literature possibly including a visual resource such as a video should be considered.