Research into Intensive Supervision Program
Report for Juvenile Justice, New South Wales

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Executive Summary

The New South Wales Department of Juvenile Justice (JJNSW) has piloted the Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) in Werrington and Newcastle. The program adheres to the international evidence-based Multisystemic Therapy (MST) approach. The ISP targets chronic juvenile offenders and seeks to empower caregivers to enhance parenting as well as advocate for the young person with schools/vocational institutions, community organisations and peers. The program structure allows discretion to design programs for individuals and families while closely following the MST model. The program works in the home with the family and provides 24/7 support. Many of the families had previously experienced unsuccessful outcomes with other programs.

The aim of the research project, carried out by a team from Western Sydney University, was firstly to consider the impact of the ISP beyond the young person’s reoffending and upon his or her life as a whole, and secondly to investigate the economic effect of life changes brought about by the impact of the ISP.

The methodology of the research is influenced by the perspective of Critical Best Practice (CBP), which aims to focus on aspects of practice that have been successful, to critically analyse this practice, and then to seek to replicate it.

The project team was provided with a list of 27 families and young people by JJNSW. Of those 27 groups approached, three declined to be interviewed, so interviews were carried out with 24 caregivers. 16 of the young people agreed to be interviewed. The average age of the young people interviewed was 15.4 years at the time they received the ISP intervention. The majority of the families had a single caregiver. 16 of the families had siblings younger than the young person who was the focus of the ISP. The intervention with the young person lasted five months.

The families interviewed had completed the ISP from one to three years prior to the interview with the research team. The passage of time allowed the researchers to evaluate sustained change in the families. It also allowed a better prediction of the long-term trajectory of the young person and family from behavioural and economic perspectives.

Outcomes – The Impact of the ISP on the Lives of Young People and Families

The impact of the ISP on the young people and families can be divided into five themes. These are displayed in bold type below.

At the time of the interviews 19 (80%) of the families reported that the young people were not engaged in offending at all. The self-reports of the individuals and families were supported by reconviction data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), whenever that was available. The families had a significant impact on supporting the path towards desistance but also impacted court outcomes at an earlier stage:

The judge, the last thing he actually said, he looked straight at Paul and he said, ‘every time I have seen you, you have had both your parents sitting behind you. If it wasn’t for the fact that your parents were sitting behind you … you wouldn’t be coming back [home] for five years’.
The ISP intervention had a transformative effect on education and employment. Prior to the ISP, none of the young people had had a positive relationship with their school. By the time of the research interviews, 15 young people had started a new school or TAFE, seven were in some form of employment and only two were in neither education nor employment. In almost all cases, the young people had been able to return to education or employment in a different setting than they had initially attended, and often the ISP worker had played a significant role in arranging the new placement.

Only two of the young people in the study received a formal diagnosis of mental illness, but the way in which all their lives were described by themselves and their families indicated that poor mental health was a factor in all cases at the time the ISP was introduced. The ISP program was able to contribute to improved mental health for all but two of the young people involved in the study:

*In the early part he went ‘Leave me alone’. But they didn’t give up … Now he is on medication for his anxiety and depression. She [the therapist] has made a big difference. She doesn’t see it. She has made a big difference in the family in general*.  

Nine young people reported using alcohol and drugs before or during the ISP, and 6 continued to use after the ISP. However, for those who continued to use alcohol and drugs, many reported either or both a reduction in their use of such substances or a continuing use that was not so directly associated with offending or with associating with antisocial acquaintances.

The most significant finding of the research was the impact that the ISP intervention had on the parents, caregivers and siblings of the young people. When the parents and caregivers spoke about their lives before the ISP, they often conveyed a sense of intense desperation. Ten of the parents or caregivers spoke about their own deteriorating mental health at that time and four said that they did not think that they would have survived without the support of their ISP worker. One spoke of having a rope in the tree in the backyard and of planning their suicide to ensure that their child did not find them. Another said:

*I just didn’t know where to go anymore. I had done everything I could. I had done, you know, this program, done that program. Tried to do this. Tried to do that. Tried to get the police involved. Tried this. Tried that. There was nowhere left for me to go. And I’m just watching my baby destroy himself. If it wasn’t for ISP coming along, I would have killed myself.  

During the ISP, families spoke overwhelmingly of feeling supported, of not feeling guilty and of being understood. They appreciated the evening support and the 24-hour on-call service. 22 of the families said that they felt that their worker completely ‘got it’:

*She didn’t make me feel bad, because I felt I did a bad job as a parent because my son did a naughty thing … They are just amazing really.  

She just came to me. She came all the way to me. And she listened.

After the ISP, caregivers reported that they were calmer and more focussed than they had been before the ISP. They were less reactive and were able to apply the skills learnt:

*This is the furthest I’ve ever got with my kids. … When I notice things start to fall apart here, and the house gets untidy, and the kids aren’t getting home by dark, I can apply back to those rules. Like, I have stuck it up on the fridge.*
Another mother spoke of persisting with the ‘positive strategies’ learnt for ‘a year after the program ended’. She was successful in eventually seeing a change in her son’s behaviour. At the time of interview the young person was beginning the second year of his apprenticeship and had recently decided to stop using drugs, for the first time in four years.

Parents and caregivers also spoke about the sensitivity of the program in addressing family issues that could impact parenting:

*The therapist temporarily shifted to one of the siblings … because she was, I don’t want to use the word suicidal but, you know, cutting herself and things like that, so I had to have an extra plan put in place for her.*

**Economic Analysis**

This part of the study explores the economically relevant information contained in the interviews. It considers the family relationships in which each young person is embedded and identifies those most impacted by the ISP. Most often this person is the primary carer, but it can also be a sibling or other family member. For each young person the analysis considers the time from their initial engagement with the ISP until they reach the age of 25. As the interviews were conducted between one and three years after their involvement with the ISP, the analysis focuses on economically relevant information that allows us to outline a trajectory for each young person that is supported by events and information provided in different sections of the interviews. We have triangulated this information with what is known about offender life trajectories in the literature, and matched self-reported data with offense data provided by BOCSAR where this was available.

The aspects we found to make the biggest impact on the economic outcomes in each case were: the past and expected histories of offending, of education and training, and of employment. We used publicly available data for daily costs of community-based and detention-based youth justice services and corrective services for NSW, for social benefits while in education and training, and for income tax payable based on minimum award wages as applicable to each young person and their family. We analysed, for each young person and their family, the relationship between the public expenditure related to their offending and their education and training, and the income tax payable by them. We found that the balance for the public purse ranged from $171,912 spent to $97,975 saved. In all cases the trend was towards less expenditure and more savings as the young person got older.

We then examined the interviews for information as to what the interviewees expected would have happened in their lives without the ISP, and developed alternative trajectories for each young person and those family members that had been most impacted by the ISP in an economic sense. We again triangulated their actual and alternative trajectories with what is known in the literature. We found that the balance for the public purse ranged from $119,018 spent to $510,607 spent, and that in no case was there money saved overall.

Lastly we compared for each family the actual trajectory with the alternative one. We found that by the time the young person reaches 25, the difference between the two trajectories will range from $70,650 to $451,028 in favour of the trajectory with the ISP. These amounts keep increasing the more time beyond the age of 25 is considered, and in the cases of young people completing tertiary education in their early twenties this increase will be very significant indeed.
These analyses use the actual 2012–2013 NSW average daily costs for community-based youth justice services published by the Productivity Commission, based on the total recurrent expenditure on community-based supervision. We note that other recent studies have assumed significantly lower daily costs, and therefore recommend that further research be conducted using the economic information provided in these interviews and actual daily expenditure on the ISP.

**ISP Supporting Desistance by Supporting Families**

A desistance approach to working with offenders involves a shift from an emphasis on programmatic interventions to an approach underpinned by relational and social context. Desistance is something that is not simply managed by criminal justice practitioners, it is co-produced with offenders themselves, and there is a need to work with families, community organisations, schools and employers. The research found that of the 19 young people who had avoided further offending, 9 could be confidently stated as being well along the pathway to desistance. The ISP intervention supported this process through the role of the clinician, through working with the young person and family as desistance co-producers, through focusing on the young person’s own goals and aspirations in the context of their lives, and through providing help in overcoming obstacles. Many of the young people described the process of getting involved in offending as a drift away from families and school and into drugs and alcohol, anti-social peers, and finally offending. Had this drift continued, it could have led to serious or persistent offending and total breakdown of family or school placements. The ISP provided support to families to set the young people on a direction of desistance from offending, bringing significant positive benefit to the offenders, their families, and society in general.
Introduction

The New South Wales Department of Juvenile Justice (hereinafter JJNSW) is responsible for the ‘safe and secure care of young offenders who are sentenced to custody by the courts or who are remanded to custody in a juvenile justice centre pending the finalisation of their court matters’ (JJNSW, nd). On average in 2010, there are approximately 434 young people in custody each day, representing an increase from previous years (JJNSW, 2010). Almost half these young people are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background and many experience complex issues. For instance, a 2009 study revealed that 87% of respondents had a psychological disorder, with substance use being one of the most common (Indig et al., 2011).

Young offenders are accommodated in one of nine juvenile justice centres in NSW. They are also managed and monitored in the community through the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice.

In recognition of the complexity of the circumstances and lives of many young offenders, JJNSW has piloted in two locations, Newcastle and Werrington, a community based approach which targets several of the significant contexts in which young offenders engage. The Intensive Supervision Program (ISP) is based on the American Multisystemic Therapy (MST) model and has been designed specifically for juveniles who commit serious and/or repeat offences, or whose severe anti-social behaviour increases their risk of offending. The program focuses on changing factors linked to anti-social, offending behaviour across individual, family, peer, school/vocational and community systems – in other words, the multiple systems in which the juvenile is embedded. MST has demonstrated significant effects on the criminal activity of serious juvenile offenders in more than a dozen clinical trials (Henggeler et al., 2009). A large randomised clinical trial (N 176) showed that MST produced a 63% reduction in rearrests for violent and other serious crimes among chronic juvenile offenders at a 4-year follow-up (Borduin et al., 1995). In a subsequent (i.e., 13.7-year) follow-up of the same sample, Schaefer and Borduin (2005) found that MST produced continued reductions in serious crimes and days incarcerated for former participants, who were on average 28.8 years old.

JJNSW utilises MST, in their Intensive Supervision Program for work with juvenile offenders in the Australian context. ISP staff work with the young person, their family and significant others to provide parents with the skills and resources to independently address anti-social behaviour and provide juveniles with skills to successfully adjust to family, peer, school and neighbourhood demands. The program also aims to develop positive inter-agency links that help families and juveniles access appropriate services (JJNSW, nd).
The Intensive Supervision Program aims to:

- deliver home-based and community-based interventions
- reduce rates and/or seriousness of juvenile offending and anti-social behaviour
- develop positive parenting practices
- reduce substance misuse by youth and/or their caregivers
- enhance family relationships
- increase parental/carer monitoring skills
- decrease juvenile association with anti-social peers
- increase juvenile association with pro-social peers
- improve juvenile school or vocational attendance and performance
- develop a support network of extended family
- involve neighbours and friends to help caregivers achieve and maintain changes

(JJNSW, nd)

The program structure is flexible, allowing the worker the discretion to design a program which acknowledges that the ISP team members work with some of the State’s most marginalised and challenging families, who experience multiple and often multigenerational disadvantage and live in difficult environments. Many families have not successfully engaged in other programs. In line with the MST model, ISP therapists think creatively and do ‘whatever it takes’ to engage the family with a view to breaking the involvement of any or all family members in criminal activity.

The interventions used by clinicians will depend on how they ‘fit’ with each family’s situation. They could include:

- couple therapy
- family therapy
- cognitive behavioural therapy
- behavioural therapy
- substance misuse treatment
- Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)
- mediation/conflict resolution
- crisis intervention skills
- teaching problem-solving skills
- assertiveness training
- developing partnerships with key stakeholders
- contingency management
- developing informal social supports
- facilitating pro-social activities

JJNSW now seeks to determine the effectiveness of this approach, in acknowledgement that targeted intervention which brings about any shift in anti-social, pro-criminal behaviour in families who may be experiencing disengagement, marginality or family dysfunction should be captured. Whilst such change may be an indicator of an altered trajectory for the family member referred to the juvenile justice system, it might also have an impact on the lives and lifestyles of other family members with similar trajectories. It is this collateral change in behaviour and opportunities that is generally overlooked in evaluations which have as their focus the identified client rather than the family or network in which the client is embedded. A change in the culture or milieu in which a young person is situated is the goal of the ISP. It is consistent with the conviction that preventive intervention programs should address several
factors simultaneously, placing a strong emphasis on their interconnectedness, and that clinical intervention strategies in community settings (e.g., educational, mental health, public health) to support skills for developing favourable attitudes about pro-social behaviour can be an effective approach to addressing psychological risk factors (Williams et al., 2001).

Aim of the Research Project

The Intensive Supervision Program has been piloted in recognition of the complexity of the lives of many juveniles who come to the attention of the department and of the environments in which they live. The ISP has been the subject of evaluation and research within Juvenile Justice and MST has been extensively evaluated by international, primarily American, researchers. This research is outlined later in the report. The aim of the current project is to gather information outside what is already known. Part A of the research focuses on the impact of the ISP beyond the young person’s reoffending and also considers the impact on his or her life as a whole. Part B focuses on the economic benefits achieved through the life changes brought about by the ISP.

The methodology of this research is influenced by the perspective of Critical Best Practice (CBP) (Ferguson, 2003). CBP research methodology aims to focus on aspects of practice that have been successful, to critically analyse this practice, and then to seek to replicate it. A CBP approach suggests that learning occurs through the sharing of best practice.

This research analyses, holistically and in depth, 24 selected cases and identifies the aspects of the ISP program that have been successful in bringing positive change to each young person’s life and relationship with parents, siblings, school and peers. It also considers the impact of the program on the wider family, particularly on younger siblings. The report commences by reviewing literature and research to date on MST interventions and on how young people and adults desist from offending. It then goes on to present, firstly, the qualitative research into the impact the ISP has on the life of young people and families and, secondly, the research into the economic impact of the ISP. In the concluding section a composite case study is presented, to give a clear sense of how the ISP impacts on the life of a typical young person and family. The report ends with some concluding thoughts and recommendations for further research. The three appendices present the spreadsheet used for the economic analysis, the list of young people and families, and the schedule used in the interviews with families.

Review of Literature

The Impact of MST

The Intensive Supervision Program is a licenced Multisystemic Therapy (MST) program and as such it is appropriate to briefly introduce MST literature. Multisystemic Therapy is an intensive home-based, family-focussed treatment for youth aged 12–17 years old with serious anti-social behaviours. Grounded in social ecological theories, MST believes behaviour is embedded within a network of interconnected social systems. The MST model has been described comprehensively in the clinical volume Multisystemic therapy for antisocial behavior in children and adolescents (Henggeler et al., 1998; 2009). In this volume, Henggeler and colleagues explain the rationale behind MST and provide clear guidelines for implementation of the model. The central tenet of MST is, as the name suggests, the fact that the intervention targets multiple systems simultaneously. Clinicians aim to address the causes of anti-social behaviour across the key systems within which young people are embedded. These systems
include the family, peers, school or workplace, and the local community. A strong focus of the program is to empower parents with the skills to guide and, if necessary, contain the behaviour of their teenage children. In striving to increase the skill level of parents it is hoped that the benefits of the program will endure (and perhaps even further develop) long after the clinicians have stopped working with the family.

There has been a consistent stream of research into the effectiveness of MST since the early publications in the mid 1980s (for examples see Henggeler et al., 1986; Bourduin et al., 1995; Henggeler, Pickrel & Brondino, 1999; Schaeffer & Bourdin, 2005). In perhaps one of the better-known studies, Multisystemic treatment of serious juvenile offenders: Long-term prevention of criminality and violence (1995), Borduin and colleagues conducted a randomised clinical trial (N = 176) that compared the reoffending rates of youth who were randomly assigned to receive either MST or individual therapy. At a 4-year follow-up, MST was shown to have produced a 63% reduction in arrests for violent and other serious crimes. A 13-year follow-up of the same sample (N = 165, 94% tracking success) revealed a continued reduction in serious crimes and days incarcerated for former MST recipients (Schaeffer & Borduin, 2005). Finally, in the longest follow-up published to date, Sawyer and Borduin (2011) were able to show that the benefits of MST continued well into adulthood. This 21.9-year follow-up with the same sample (N = 148, 84% tracking success) indicated that the ‘MST participants were significantly less likely to be arrested for felony crimes than were individual therapy participants (34.8% vs. 54.8% respectively) within 21.9 years of treatment termination’ (Sawyer & Borduin, 2011: 649).

While the bank of MST research continues to grow at a steady pace, a Cochrane Review in 2005 noted that most of the evaluations of the model had involved the developers of the model (Littell, Campbell, Green, & Toews, 2005). The review noted that independent evaluations of MST (e.g. Leschied & Cunningham, 2002) had reported relatively modest effects when compared with trials carried out by the developers of MST. Baglivio and colleagues (2014) highlight a limitation of the RCTs that compare MST to treatment as usual; a referral to MST requires that at least one parent or guardian be willing to participate in the service, whereas individual therapies and probation supervision have no such requirement. Parental participation and support is likely to be a significant covariate that is not accounted for in these studies. Baglivio and colleagues have added to the research data base by conducting a multi-year, statewide comparison of MST and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) effectiveness. Their study was based on a large sample (629 youth referred for MST and 1574 referred for FFT) and found ‘few significant differences in the effectiveness of the two modalities’ (Baglivio et al., 2014: 1050).

More recent studies bear witness to a relatively new focus in relation to MST research. That is, efforts are now being made to better understand the important ‘mechanisms of change’ (Kazdin, 2008) within the model. While previous research has focussed on quantitative techniques to measure outcomes of MST in comparison to business as usual, some recent developments have seen an emerging appreciation for seeking to understand which aspects of the model appear to be responsible for the changes. For example Tighe and colleagues (2012: 187) published the results of their research into the families’ experiences of therapeutic processes and outcomes following participation in MST. This research study considered the impact of MST from the perspective of the families, focussing on aspects of the intervention that promoted or limited change. This research was concerned with ‘what works best, and why,’ and reported on outcomes of MST such as an improved ‘emotional quality of the parent-adolescent relationship’.
To date MST programs have, by and large, been evaluated in relation to MST goals. It should be noted that these goals do not form the only useful measure of MST effectiveness. For example there is value in considering the outcomes of an MST program in relation to the new body of ‘desistance’ knowledge that is emerging in the juvenile justice field. The process of looking through a ‘desistance lens’ contributes additional layers of context and understanding of the complexity of the interplay between MST and young lives, and ‘what helps’ youths to find and follow a pro-social path during their formative years. This desistance literature will be introduced in the next section.

**Supporting Desistance from Offending and Promoting Good Lives**

In seeking to understand how the ISP has a positive effect on young people and families it is helpful to draw on the research into how offenders desist from criminal behaviour and how criminal justice workers can support that desistance process. Our suggestion is that the approach of the ISP means that the research on desistance processes has a greater relevance and application to how the ISP is experienced than some of the research on the impact of particular programmatic interventions. This section will set out the literature and research into desistance and the Good Lives Model, and this will then be used to elucidate the impact of the ISP on those young people and families in our sample where we are most confident that there has been progress towards desistance.

**What Does the Desistance Research Say?**

A desistance approach to work with offenders involves a shift from an emphasis on programmatic interventions to an approach underpinned by relational and social contexts (McNeill, 2006; Weaver, 2014). Desistance is defined as consisting of a primary component – when an offender is not offending – and a secondary component – when the offender has taken on a new, non-offending identity (Maruna, 2006).

The focus on desistance processes when considering work with offenders in the community is both a development of the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) model and a reaction to it. The RNR model was associated with the ‘What Works’ movement and led to a particular approach to both the work with offenders and to evaluating and researching that work. The RNR model focussed on the development of accredited programs; offenders were assessed and allocated to these programs, and sophisticated quantitative research models were used to determine the success, or otherwise, of these interventions on reoffending rates. This approach has had a very beneficial impact on work with offenders, particularly in dissipating some of the pessimism associated with the ‘nothing works’ discourse attributed to Robert Martinson. (See Miller (2010) for a discussion about how Martinson’s work was received and the impact it had on criminal justice policy and debate.) However, claiming that behaviour change was caused by the completion of programs has not always matched the lived experience of work with offenders, the complexity of their lives, or the reality of workers’ interventions with them (Ward & Maruna, 2007). In work with young people, studies have shown that contact with the criminal justice system can itself be damaging to young people and that even the best programs will have only a marginal beneficial impact on offending as a whole (McAra & McVie, 2011).

Perhaps the clearest summary of the shift in ethos from the RNR model to a desistance approach is encapsulated in Ward and Maruna’s (2007:12) suggestion that a subtly different question should be asked by researchers:
As numerous observers have argued over the years, “What Works” is probably the “wrong question” for the important issue of offender rehabilitation. Imagine, after all, that, rather than asking “What Works”, Martinson had asked “What helps people go straight?” The difference in word choice is subtle enough. Presumably the two phrases mean essentially the same thing. Yet the difference in impact between the two questions is substantial.

Desistance approaches emphasise relational and social context. The process of desistance is not owned by the practitioner or expert but by the desisting offender and by her/his community. The role of the practitioner is one of support (McNeill, 2006; Weaver, 2014). This is entirely in line with the approach taken within MST programs such as the ISP.

A desistance approach will emphasise the impact of life events and achievements in the move away from offending. The four main such life transitions are spirituality, marriage, parenthood and employment (Weaver, 2014). There are clear links between these; employment can lead to financial stability, making marriage and parenthood more likely and attractive. For girls and young women, pregnancy may bring an abrupt end to offending behaviour but, depending on circumstances, may place different constraints on young women’s lives (Sharpe, 2012).

Another shift from the RNR paradigm to the desistance paradigm is in how work with offenders is conceptualised. Rather than seeing rehabilitation as something that is done to offenders, a desistance approach emphasises co-production and working together. The role of the practitioner in supporting desistance is an important focus of research into the approach. This co-production involves interaction with families and communities and a focus on goals more broad than simply a discussion of the offender and the offending behaviour:

If, then, desistance is about more than simply reducing reoffending, this would suggest that supporting desistance requires going beyond a sole focus on the individual, as if their offending behaviour occurred freely and in isolation, to address the social opportunities and obstacles that either help or hinder desistance. (Weaver, 2014: 195)

Desistance is something that is not simply managed by criminal justice practitioners. As well as the co-production with the offenders themselves, there is a need to work with families, community organisations, schools and employers. Family-focused work is particularly crucial in providing support, particularly after the support provided by criminal justice practitioners has ceased (Weaver, 2014).

A high quality relationship with a criminal justice practitioner who is supportive, optimistic and takes a holistic approach to the work is crucial in the promotion of desistance (McNeill et al., 2005). Service users value someone they can trust, respect and get on well with:

The challenge for practitioners, then, is to find new ways of promoting and supporting people’s social participation, capitalising on people’s strengths, building capacities, recognising and responding to the barriers people face, and creating meaningful and sustainable opportunities to live differently. This means progressing beyond the development and provision of services focused primarily on promoting abstinence from offending through the acquisition of new skills, towards supporting the realisation of good lives. (Weaver, 2014: 201)

In the ISP, this promotion and support is offered primarily to families but, particularly for older young people, offered directly to the young people as well.
An important aspect of this relationship between worker and client is the hope and optimism that the worker will show in believing that the offender is not irredeemably bad, and that s/he can make a change in life. Farrall and colleagues (2014) refer to this as a worker being a ‘normal-smith’: someone who does not need convincing of the good character of the offender, thus facilitating their transition away from a deviant identity. The converse of this is a ‘deviant-smith’ who will reinforce the deviant identity of the offender.

Closely associated with the desistance approach is the Good Lives Model (GLM), a strengths-based approach that reduces risk while building the capacity of offenders to live lives that are personally meaningful and fulfilling (Chu et al., 2014; Ward & Maruna, 2007). The GLM is based on an understanding that offenders are goal-directed and prioritise human goods in their lives in the same way that non-offenders do. However, their offending arises from using inappropriate means to achieve these goals, possibly through a lack of capacity or opportunity to use legitimate means. The Good Lives Model takes a strengths-based response to rehabilitation, aiming to create new skills and capacities within the lifeplans set by the individual (Ward & Maruna, 2007). As discussed below, when we relate the cases to the desistance framework, there is a particularly strong association between MST and the Good Lives Model.

Research Methods

The research is formed of two parts: an analysis of cases and an economic analysis of key benefits.

The research focussed on young people who had completed the ISP program more than 12 months previously. This allowed some ongoing impacts of the program to be assessed. As is standard practice in JJNSW research, participants were offered vouchers as an incentive to participate. Interviews were carried out over a 9-month period.

The research team was provided with contact details for 27 families by JJNSW; locations were split between Werrington and Newcastle. These families were initially contacted by JJNSW, and safety procedures agreed with JJNSW were followed in all cases. The team attempted to make contact with all 27 of these families, but in three cases it was not possible to arrange interviews. 24 of the 27 families were interviewed. This 89% interview take-up rate represents a very successful response in research of this kind.

The demographic data provided by JJNSW shows that the sample of young people interviewed was broadly representative of all young people who received the Intensive Supervision Program. The demographic data of the comparison group was based on 197 young people who received the ISP. The average age of the young people interviewed was 15.4 years old, compared to 15.2 in the comparison sample. The comparison group was 84% male and 16% female, but the interview group had a higher number of females; 6 of the 24 young people who we interviewed were female, making up a quarter of the sample. In both the interview group and the comparison group the largest amount of respondents described themselves as Australian (45.7% in the comparison group, 50% in the interview group). The next largest group were those who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (25% in the interview group, 28% in the comparison group). There were small numbers of young people and families who identified themselves in other ways; we interviewed one individual who identified as African American and one as a New Zealander. The comparison group contained small numbers (under 2%) of people who identified in other ways that did not appear in the
interview group: Cook Islander, Egyptian, English, Fijian, Greek, Iranian, Lebanese, Maltese, Maori, Polish, Samoan, Sudanese, Syrian, Tongan.

The most significant difference between the interview group and the comparison group relates to their experience of the criminal justice system. Of the interview group, 75% were in the community at the time of receiving the ISP and 25% were subject to a Youth Justice Conference. This compared to 69% in the community and 21.3% subject to a conference in the comparison group. The rest of the comparison group were in some sort of custodial setting at the start of the ISP: 3.6% in control custody and 6.1% in remand custody. This suggests that the comparison group might be a group of more serious offenders and this is borne out by the statistics relating to the most serious offence committed. The highest number of young people in the comparison group had committed an offence of aggravated assault (34.5%). Only 8.3% of the interview sample had committed an aggravated assault offence. 16.7% of the interview sample had committed the less serious offence of ‘other acts to cause injury’, suggesting that when this group committed acts of violence, the acts were of a less serious nature. A quarter of the interview sample had committed a most serious offence of breaking and entering, compared to 10.7% of the comparison group who had this as their most serious offence.

In all 24 cases detailed, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the parents or caregivers of the young people, either in their homes or in a neutral venue. In all cases, attempts were made to interview the young people themselves but this was not always possible as some young people chose not to make themselves available. A total of 16 young people were interviewed, some quite briefly, some in depth. 12 of those 16 young people signed consent forms giving permission for the researchers to gain information from JNSW and from BOCSAR about their offending records before, during and after their experience of the ISP.

The interviews with the young people and, particularly, the parents and caregivers provided a vast volume of rich and detailed data. This was entered into the Nvivo software system as a preliminary way of organising and interpreting this data. The emerging themes of education, offending, family relationships, mental health, drugs and alcohol and supporting desistance are discussed in detail in the next section.

Four clinicians were interviewed both in relation to the ISP in general and to their work with specific, individual cases.

In the initial research proposal we stated that it was our intention to interview School Principals to gather information about the change in a young person’s attitude and behaviour before, during and after the program. Of the 24 cases interviewed there was not one young person who had remained at the same school after the ISP, so we were not able to keep to that intention. However, as discussed below, there were young people who had a successful return to education in a different school and we have relied upon the accounts given by these young people and their caregivers of their educational experience.

**A Note on Confidentiality**

As part of our ethics application for carrying out this research we committed to protecting the anonymity of respondents, so the names that appear in this research report are not the real names of any of the interviewees. However, it was the view of the research team that this approach, although necessary, was not sufficient to protect the confidentiality of respondents. This research investigated a small sample of young people and families and an even smaller sample of workers so there was a risk that even when names were changed the individuals would be identifiable. All young people and families had interesting and original stories to tell.
about their lives but relating these verbatim would have made these families easy to identify by those who know them. Additional steps that we took to protect confidentiality are as follows:

We have changed some details of the young people where true information might have made them easy to identify. We have made every effort to do this in a way that remains true to the original individual.

Although we carried out the research in two locations we make no reference to the location of each family. It was not our task to compare the work in Werrington and Newcastle and we did not notice any significant differences in outcomes between the two locations.

The majority of the clinicians interviewed were women and in this report all clinicians are referred to as female.

Feedback received from the interim report indicated that our use of ‘[the clinician]’ or a blank space (‘___’) when quoting a comment about a clinician inhibited the flow and power of the quotes. For this reason all direct quotes about a clinician refer to the clinician as ‘Chloe’. This is not the real name of any of the clinicians and ‘Chloe’ in this report refers to a number of different clinicians.

The most detailed case study, appearing at the end of the final report, is a composite of a number of the respondents interviewed. Every detail in the case study does relate to someone interviewed but the case study as a whole is not a description of any one individual case.

The next section of the report presents Part A of our analysis, comprising our findings across the five key themes of offending, education, family and siblings, mental health, and drugs and alcohol.
Part A: Case Studies Presented by Theme

Offending

The clearest measure of the anti-social, pro-criminal behaviour exhibited by the young person is the extent to which they engage in offending behaviour. One of the ISP’s primary aims is to reduce the rate and/or seriousness of the young person’s offending. Family reports indicate that the ISP contributed significantly to a reduction, or cessation, of offending in 22 of the 24 families interviewed. 12 young people and their carers signed consent forms allowing the researchers to access information about them from JJNSW and the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). With this consent the researchers have been able to verify accounts of offending against official conviction figures for these young people. The official record of convictions was found to be consistent with family reports for all of the young people involved. It was noted, however, that while the two accounts of convictions were consistent, the family account included more detail about offending behaviour that had not resulted in conviction. While the families appeared to speak freely about offending behaviour to the interviewer, their understanding/definition of the word ‘offence’ was not always consistent with the legal definition of criminal behaviour. On the one hand, families discussed offending behaviour that had not been detected or led to conviction, thus perhaps rendering that instance of offending more serious than the criminal record showed. On the other hand, sometimes drug use or alcohol consumption was discussed without acknowledgement that it was offending behaviour. Comments made by the families relating to the offending behaviour of the young people need to be read with this in mind.

At the time of interview 19 families reported that, to the best of their knowledge, the young person was not engaged in any offending at all. Six of these families indicated that there had only ever been ‘one offence’. However, further discussion revealed that families tended to cite as offences only those events that had attracted police attention. Pete had been charged on one occasion with property damage. Discussion with the family revealed that this had not been the first or the last time that Pete had caused significant damage to property, but that it was the only time the police had been involved. While Pete’s family had explained that there was only ever one offence, the discussion during interview indicated that there had been a number of previous instances of property damage but that there had not been any for the past 18 months or so. Pete’s criminal record supports his family’s account; he has only once been involved in behaviour that resulted in a conviction. Similarly, Emma had been charged with an offence involving a stolen vehicle; she said quite proudly that she only had ‘one offence’, but also talked about times when she had been ‘off her face on drugs’. Emma did not identify her drug use as an offense, and her criminal record supported her account of events.

7 of these 19 families explained that, while positive changes started to happen with the introduction of the ISP program (e.g., parents felt supported or communication increased at home), the young person’s anti-social or offending behaviour did not stop immediately. This group of young people slowly reduced, then ceased, their offending over the course of the 5-month program. These young people have maintained their cessation of offending in the time since the program.

A further three families explained that while circumstances improved during the life of the program, the improvements that were set in place with the support of the worker continued to develop after their departure. For these families offending stopped after the program had completed. In Erik’s case, access to criminal records data confirmed that he had committed no further offences since the completion of the ISP. Erik remained out of the school system and
unemployed at the conclusion of the program despite the worker’s energetic advocacy on his behalf with the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service to assist in finding him a job. Left to his own devices during the day he continued to smoke marijuana with his friends and steal from his family. The ISP clinician had included his mother, Bev, in her approaches to the CRS, and Bev had continued with these approaches after the worker departed. A few months later she was successful, and Erik was offered an apprenticeship through the CRS. At the time of interview he was beginning the second year of his apprenticeship and had recently decided (for the first time in four years) to stop using drugs. He felt that his memory was deteriorating, causing him to make mistakes at work. He no longer wanted to spend his hard-earned wages on drugs that impacted negatively on his brain. Bev firmly believed that the positive changes had started with the ISP. It appears that the ISP had been able to alter the trajectory for this young person and his family. The clinicians achieved this via their holistic approach to working with families. That is, they worked to improve the relationship between Erik and his parents, thus reducing arguments at home. They reassured Bev that the situation was not irretrievable, they encouraged her to keep striving for a positive outcome, and they modelled the skills necessary to advocate on Erik’s behalf with the CRS. Bev became more confident and assertive in her approaches to CRS. The improved relationships at home, the sense of hope that things could change for the better and the knowledge that a daytime activity would be an important step in this process increased Bev’s motivation to continue her efforts with CRS. Despite the family (and Erik) showing relatively small gains at the conclusion of the program, Bev had everything she needed to continue following the alternative path, a path that, over time led to a productive ‘working class’ lifestyle with no further offending for her son. This is a path that would have been much more difficult for the family to access without the intervention of the ISP.

Three of the families reported an ‘improvement’ (rather than a cessation) in offending behaviour. That is, the offending had become less frequent and the nature of offences had become less serious. An example of this improvement was provided by Ben’s family. Ben had been involved in graffiti, breaking and entering, car theft and drug use between the ages of 13 and 15 years old. He began working with the ISP program when he was 15. At the time of interview he was 17 and reported that he had not offended at all for almost two years, but that he had recently started to ride his motorbike without a licence, and to smoke marijuana ‘occasionally’. Ben faced three challenges in relation to finding ‘legal’ transport: he was barely literate and did not feel confident to undertake the written Knowledge Test, he had some unpaid fines for catching the train without a ticket, and public transport where he lived was very limited. With no reasonable access to legal transport Ben had opted to ride his motorbike unlicensed (and had been picked up by the police for doing so the week before the interview). Despite being highly motivated to work, without transport there were few options available to him. Smoking marijuana with his friends was not ideal, but under the circumstances was also not outside the parameters of ‘normal’ teenage behaviour.

Ben is one of the young people who gave us permission to access his criminal record data and his case highlights some of the conceptual issues involved in discussing ‘offending’. He, and his family, spoke of improvement in offending behaviour and a positive trajectory, despite the continued use of drugs and the road traffic violations. Ben’s criminal record is not inconsistent with this description but it does show a number of offences since the completion of the ISP, including a public order offence but mainly traffic violations. As will be discussed later, it could be argued that Ben’s continued offending has meant that the ISP has not been effective in his case, but it might actually be more accurate to say that, although it did not lead to an immediate cessation of offending behaviour, it has helped him on the pathway to desistance. The pattern of Ben’s life over the next five to ten years will determine whether he could accurately be described as a desister.
A father, Greg, spoke of his son’s reduced offending. Jason had been charged for graffiti, car theft and shoplifting in the past, however Greg felt that he had ‘grown through those stages’. Greg did not believe that Jason was stealing or doing graffiti anymore, he believed he had developed a stronger sense of right and wrong. However, he was also aware that Jason was sometimes using the drug ‘ice’ now. He was not alarmed by this development and felt that if he continued to use the strategies he had learned along the way (ISP strategies included), that he would be able to provide a safe and secure home for his son and the guidance to help him move away from ice use as well.

The final young person who spoke of reduced offending was Jim. Jim explained that he had once considered it good fun to deliberately go looking for trouble (fights or shoplifting), and to ‘tease’ policemen. He had used ice for a period of time, and had become violent and aggressive toward his family members on different occasions. Police had instigated Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) protecting his family following a number of violent outbursts. According to his own report during the interview, Jim now tries to maintain a much lower profile and stay out of trouble. However he also spoke of ongoing marijuana and alcohol use, and of selling marijuana and stolen goods (clothes) for a friend a few months earlier. He had stopped using ice because he had decided it was ‘not a good thing to have in your life’. This decision was in line with his intention to stay out of trouble. Jim seemed to equate ‘not being caught’ with ‘not having done anything wrong’. While he had certainly not ceased offending, his conversation denoted someone who had in the past been caught up in a world of drugs and complete disrespect for the law. At the interview he spoke of his hope to find a labouring position and earn an income legally, suggesting that he might be moving towards the adoption of a non-offending identity.

It appeared that the ISP had not been able to facilitate a shift in the offending pattern or behaviour for three of the young men included in the study. While the families of Cam and Ricky felt that they benefitted from the program in a number of different ways (particularly in relation to the mothers’ mental health), the offending behaviour of these boys did not appear to shift in response to the ISP. Kemp’s offending behaviour related to his obsession with motorbikes and his criminal record shows that he has convictions for riding without a licence both before and after the ISP. Attempting to solve the problem of this repeated unlicensed riding has not been straightforward, as Kemp’s age and his literacy difficulties have made it difficult to plan for him taking his test. Again, Kemp’s family report other positive impacts from the ISP, particularly in the fact that he is still in school and planning to take a TAFE course next year.

**Education**

**Behavioural Problems, Poor Attendance and Suspensions**

In addition to the offending behaviour committed by the young person, another demonstration of anti-social behaviour was evident in the school setting. All of the young people considered for this study were frequently in trouble because of their behaviour at school. Parent and carer reports indicate that none of the young people had a positive relationship with their school prior to the ISP (they mostly ‘hated school’) and that they had disengaged from learning some time before the ISP began working with the family.

For 15 of the young people primary school had been fairly trouble-free and school grades had not been a concern. Problems for seven of this group began early in their high school careers (by Year 8), perhaps highlighting the significant challenge of transitioning from primary school
to high school. These problems at school coincided with the commencement of offending behaviour, increased drug and alcohol use, and difficult family relationships. As well as being important in its own right, education is related to offending behaviour; poor educational achievement is identified as one of the factors associated with offending (Farrington, 1996; Smith, 2013) and girls who offend have often experienced difficulties at school from an early age (Sharpe, 2012). School plays an important social role, regardless of the ultimate educational outcomes, in socialising young people, associating them with potentially pro-social peer groups and keeping them occupied during the day (Cunneen & White, 2011). It was certainly the experience of a number of families in the sample that exclusion from school led to young people finding themselves on the street during the daytime and associating with anti-social peers.

For nine of the young people problems at school began during their primary years. This group of students struggled with the social and academic expectations inherent within the school system. They did not always understand the work set in class, and had trouble getting along with teachers and fellow students. Seven of these nine young people experienced significant disruption to their early years of schooling by means of homelessness, regular moves, domestic violence, parental drug use and/or neglect, or the death of a parent.

Attendance records for all of the students were typically poor. Two of the students in particular had become quite skilled in not attending. Both of these young people were dropped off at school by their parent/carer, and found a way to leave each day without entering a classroom. This was a long-standing issue that both of the schools and families were trying hard to address, with little success.

The remaining 22 students also appear to have had a higher rate of absences than average, although it was their behaviour when they did attend that received more attention than their truanting. The anti-social behaviour displayed at school included fighting, property damage, drug use, selling drugs, and a general disrespect and rudeness toward their teachers and fellow students. This poor behaviour was often met by punitive action from the school; almost all of the students had received long suspensions (three to four weeks), sometimes with only a few days attendance at school before receiving another one. Parents talked about two significant difficulties associated with long suspensions. Firstly, they felt it created a vacant pocket of time for their son or daughter, who then had few options but to fill the space by ‘hanging around undesirables’. Jennifer explained this dilemma in relation to her son Billy:

He was home here 24 hours a day. All the feral, I shouldn’t say it, but all the feral kids, the naughty kids that don’t go to school, that go around doing bad stuff, hang around here. Billy spent two days with those kids and committed that crime.

Francesca echoed this point:

They did give Jim a long suspension at one stage. That was the worst thing they could have done. No school. No structure. We can go round the parks and meet all the other kids who hang around there. Not going to school. Been suspended. Sitting around smoking dope and we can find a really nice little niche there.’ And that’s sort of what happened.

After Jim met this group of friends he did not ever really re-engage with his education. He was expelled, attended two different behavioural schools, and then dropped out completely. Jim and Francesca estimate that he finished school about two months into Year 8. They report that he was continuing to offend at the time of interview but that his offences were less frequent.
and ‘not as bad’ as they had been during the ISP program. He had not been able to find a job, despite enlisting the services of an employment agency to help him.

The second problem associated with long suspensions was that it further alienated the struggling students when they re-entered the classroom. It was felt that this contributed to a cycle of poor behaviour and then further suspensions, as the sense of alienation from school grew (Cunneen & White, 2011). 13 of the students were expelled from their school. Some were expelled from more than one school.

A combination of poor behaviour at school, long suspensions, and a strong preference not to be there resulted in a complete breakdown in formal education for 12 of the 24 students. Tony explained how this process unfolded for his daughter Bri:

Bri stopped liking school when she started High School aged 12 or 13. She had a little bit of trouble in primary school, but she was going all the time. I was getting called in at least once a week because she was misbehaving and interrupting, she didn’t like authority. She bashed one of the boys in her first week at high school and was sent home for two weeks. She went back, and she threw a pencil at the teacher, then they sent her home for a month. She had only been at school for two days. And the third time, they said no, they have got to send her to this problem school. Then after that, that was the end of it. She wouldn’t go to the troubled kids school, she just said ‘oh, they are all idiots’. She wouldn’t even try. They use to chase her around. I’d take her all the way to the station, I’d wait at the station about twenty minutes, it’s only about two minutes walk from there. I’d get on the train and next minute they would be ringing me saying ‘where is Bri?’ I’d say, ‘I dropped her up at the station’. She just wouldn’t go.

It dead set ruined her schooling, how quick they just got rid of her. I know it was her fault doing that stuff but straight in the first month or two of high school and she was gone. That was the end of her education.

Chloe tried to get her back into school, she went for a while then I kept getting calls saying she is not going. Even Chloe dropped her off a couple times, and she just took off. Or they would ring us up and say she is just disrupting everything. She wants to go, and we can’t stop her, and she would just walk off. She just wouldn’t stay.

Tony felt certain that the ISP would have had a much stronger chance of success if years hadn’t passed before he received some support to make Bri go to school again.

The Impact of the ISP on Education

The ISP workers invested much energy in building/improving connections between young people, their families and the school setting. This work brought some great success. In approximately 15 families ISP clinician work involved supporting the young person to start a new school or TAFE program because the existing or previous school relationship was considered irretrievable. 7 of the 24 young people had not been attending school for more than three months prior to starting the ISP, a further five had not been attending for more than a year. The ISP clinicians were able to facilitate a pathway for two of the young people to begin school programs through the TAFE system, and a further two to begin apprenticeships. Three of these four people were continuing with their education at the time of interview, one had left to begin full time employment in a coffee shop. One young person had started an apprenticeship
during the months following the ISP program and was continuing into the second year. One young person had started a TAFE course and was actively seeking part time work (he attended a job interview the day before the researcher’s visit) two years after completing the ISP program. Of the 12 young people who had been out of the education system for an extended period of time, three had chosen not to return and instead started employment in labouring positions. These three young people had continued to work, albeit somewhat sporadically, during the years following the ISP program. One other person was receiving the disability support pension and the family were also exploring options for part time or volunteer work. Two of the young people appeared to have no firm plans for education or employment: time with their anti-social peers and recreational drug use continued to be valued elements of their lifestyle.

On a brighter note, 12 of the 24 families credited the ISP with supporting their young person to achieve a significantly higher level of education than they had thought possible. Seven of these young people had left school at the time of interview, and they had left with at least a Year 10 level of education. Five young people were still attending school, one of these was about to sit his Year 12 exams, two were progressing through Year 10 with plans to continue on, and two were completing Year 9. This group of families believed that without the assistance provided by the ISP, their son or daughter would not have been able to continue in the education system.

I missed a lot of school. Way too much school. I missed at least two years of school but then went back to school with ISP. I didn’t want to go back to that school, but I did… (Emma)

Emma was interviewed two years after the ISP worker had supported her return to school. She was working toward completing a tertiary preparation course at TAFE and hoped to go on to university.

Families and Siblings

An important aim of this research was to extend its gaze beyond the young person, and to consider the impact of the ISP upon the family more broadly. Family discord and poor parental supervision are risk factors in leading young people into offending (Farrington, 1996) but family support can also be a protective factor in supporting young people to desist from offending. Family factors are important concerns in considering young people’s involvement in the criminal justice system, with many young people who appear before the courts not living in nuclear families (Cunneen & White, 2011). In this sense, the ISP works with an unusual subset of young people within the criminal justice system, in that by definition they have identifiable and supportive parents or caregivers. Nevertheless, the offending behaviour of the young people places family life under considerable pressure. The interviews provide a striking picture of the difference in family life before and after the program. Some families described a distinctly different existence prior to their experience with the ISP. They described a time of barely coping and of relationships that were characterised by disharmony and angst. This description was in contrast to the environment in which the interviews were carried out, an environment that no longer seemed to be teetering on the edge of disaster. The program had a significant impact on family wellbeing, parenting skills, and the mental health of parents and siblings. It was clear that the parents and caregivers interviewed now demonstrated many parenting strengths, including the ability to respond positively to the young person and siblings, to set boundaries and to reward positive behaviour. As the environment within the home changed, and as the young person reduced their anti-social behaviour, it also appeared
likely that the trajectory for younger siblings within the family shifted. These points are discussed in more detail below.

The potential support of the parents was an important factor in determining whether the family were eligible for the ISP, so responsibility was placed on the family to support the path away from offending. The ISP requires parental agreement. This is seen most clearly in Paul’s case. His mother quoted the judge’s words to him in court:

*When they went to court, and I remember this so clearly, the judge, the last thing he actually said, he looked straight at Paul and he said, ‘every time I have seen you, you have had both your parents sitting behind you. If it wasn’t for the fact that your parents were sitting behind you every time you came in here, you would be walking straight out the back and your hands would be in handcuffs and your mother and father would be in tears. And you wouldn’t be coming back for five years’.*

Paul had no previous record but he had fallen in with the wrong crowd, become increasingly difficult and defiant at home, and eventually committed a very serious offence of armed robbery. His criminal record confirms that he has committed no further offences, so the judge’s decision to avoid a custodial sentence and create an opportunity for the ISP to work with the family can be seen as a significant turning point in his life.

**Improved Family Wellbeing**

*There was no life before the program. Because to me, arguing, fighting and just getting through the day, I don’t call that life. So now, I can take a breather, we can talk. That’s life, coming into effect for me. I might have been alive, but there was no quality of life. Now it’s— We are at home.* (Barbara, mother of Frank)

When parents and carers talked about life ‘before ISP’, they often conveyed a sense of intense desperation. Ten of the parents/carers spoke about their own deteriorating mental health at that time and four of these people felt sure that, without the support of the ISP worker they ‘wouldn’t be here’. This was clarified in interview to check that parents weren’t simply using a figure of speech to emphasise how bad they were feeling at that time. However, as Francesca explained, she had been ‘bloody close’ to ending her life.

*I just didn’t know where to go anymore. I had done everything I could. I had done, you know, this program, done that program. Tried to do this. Tried to do that. Tried to get the police involved. Tried this. Tried that. There was nowhere left for me to go. And I’m just watching my baby destroy himself. If it wasn’t for ISP coming along, I would have killed myself.* (Francesca, mother of Jim)

Francesca had felt unable to ‘fix’ Jim and, due to his violent and offending behaviour, unable to see a way out of her nightmarish existence at home. Suicide had become an attractive option for her.

Similarly, Jacob’s mother Tina told the interviewer she ‘had a rope in a tree in the backyard’, and that she had been thinking about different ways to ensure that it was not one of her children that found her hanging.

All of the families talked about their struggle in relation to the offending young person. Family relationships became strained and the quality of life was often severely impacted. As the
primary carer for the young person suffered, so too did everyone else in the family. However,
all of the respondents also talked about an improvement in the family relationships and general
wellbeing of everyone at home as a result of their involvement in the ISP. This change is
difficult to measure or quantify, but it was evident to some extent in all of the families
interviewed. The young people who were interviewed acknowledged the positive effect that
the ISP had had on their lives – in some cases begrudgingly, as they found that tighter, more
disciplined, more confident parenting led to restrictions on their freedom. This was most
succinctly expressed by Kemp, in his reply to a question about whether the ISP had made his
life better:

Yeah, they made it better, but it was boring-er.

The Importance of the Relationship with the ISP Clinician

Just as the language families used to describe life before the ISP was striking, so was the tone of
language in relation to the ISP workers. Families spoke overwhelmingly of feeling supported, of
not feeling judged, and of being ‘understood’. The nature of the relationship between the
worker and the family emerged as a key feature of the program. When Francesca was asked
about the most helpful thing in relation to the program she explained:

I think probably that she listened. She really listened. She got it and no one else
really got it. Just knowing someone was there was huge.

Within the context of this supportive relationship parents had someone with whom they could
share the load. They had someone who could boost their energy levels enough for them to try
new strategies, and someone who could reintroduce a sense of hope around the future. There
were two elements to this relationship that were significant for families: firstly that the worker
cared and didn’t judge them, and secondly that they ‘knew what they were talking about’.

All of the respondents told positive stories about real and significant changes that the ISP had
been able to facilitate within their families. Of the 24 families interviewed only two felt that
there was a limit to how much their worker was able to understand in relation to their
situation; 22 felt that their worker completely ‘got it’. Offering the program in the family home,
and with 24-hour support, was particularly appreciated by most families.

I was relieved. I was so totally relieved … when Chloe came on to the scene. I was
able to stay home and get some more laundry done, get other things done, catch
up a bit, make the house more a home, instead of just a lock-up, a controlling
environment. Make it more of a home. So it helped me a lot. It helped Steve
because he was able to just sort of be more comfortable, because he does get
paranoid.

She came in here without any sort of judgement. Without any, you know, always
coming in with a smile on her face. Having a good vibe, and bringing it into the
house. And just being sweet to Steve. And you know, good ideas. And just that
extra bit of support which is, like I said, for a single parent, and as a grandmother,
brilliant. Helped me. Helped me a lot. Some people might not understand it, but
just that bit is a huge load. And you are not on your own. Because you lose a lot of
people. You lose a lot of friends and relationships because they can’t deal with it.
They can’t deal with how you are being treated in your home by this child that you
love. And they can’t deal with it. They can’t come around and watch it. So you
lose it. You lose them. And then you are losing more support. Then you are even
more on your own. And then for someone like Chloe to come in, it is like a little blessing from heaven. You know. Brilliant. (Francis, grandmother of Steve)

Steve completed the ISP and has largely avoided offending since the completion of the program. His criminal record shows one sole incident since completion of the ISP – a caution for criminal damage in late 2012 – and no further offences in the last two and a half years.

Louise explained the significance to her of having the ISP at home:

That was the most important point for me. That she can come to my house. Bindy was at home and Chloe tried to involve her. Maybe not the first or second time. But somehow she convinced Bindy to get involved. But if I’d had to meet her outside it wouldn’t have happened. It wouldn’t work because I’ll keep seeing her by myself but she, Bindy, wouldn’t go. And it’s better for her as a counsellor to see the environment. (Louise, mother of Bindy)

While most of the young people were reluctant to engage with the ISP clinician when they first arrived, many warmed slowly to the idea of working with them.

I didn’t talk to her at first. But she was supportive. She helped me with things. When I got kicked out of school she was trying to help me to get back into school. But, I didn’t want to go back to school. And she helped me with a lot of things, like, if it wasn’t for Chloe then I would have had to stay going to juvenile justice every week. But instead I just had to see her. She just came to me. She came all the way to me. And she listened. (Ray)

More Focussed Parenting

All of the parents and carers reported that their parenting was calmer and more focussed than it had been before the ISP. They were less reactive and this contributed directly to fewer arguments in the home. Families reported increased communication between parents and young people, and felt that this had contributed to improved relationships. This appeared to hold true, even for the four young people who had moved out of home.

Yeah, I changed my strategies, the way Chloe told me. I tried to separate my anger and just focus on my daughter. Only my daughter. Not my anger. And that made me think better when I did that. And also, because of my anger towards her, she was very rude to me and I used to ground her from everything. Chloe taught me to separate my anger, and to ground her from one thing. Not everything. Because when I ground her from everything, why should she live here? That’s why she ran away. She had nothing to lose. (Louise, mother of Bindy)

Parents were clearer in the rules that they set for their teenagers. They often had a ‘Rules Contract’ that was written with the guidance of the clinician. These contracts outlined the expected behaviour in detail, along with the rewards or consequences that would follow depending on the choices that the young person made. These contracts were another of the strategies that clinicians employed to increase the pro-social behaviour of the young person, and to decrease anger and arguments in the home.

It is difficult to quantify the impact of improved parenting practices, however it is well established that warm and consistent parenting, the type of parenting encouraged by ISP clinicians, is a protective factor for young people (Baumrind, 1991; Burns et al., 2008). In these
families not only did the identified young offenders benefit from the increase in skills of their parents, but so did all of the siblings within the home.

**Impact on Siblings**

The information presented thus far has addressed the impact of the ISP on the young offender and on the broader family system, however brothers and sisters are also a part of the family system that the ISP targets for change. As changes occur elsewhere in this system – in the form of more focussed parenting or improved mental health of the caregiver, for example – the siblings will be impacted. As their environment ‘changes shape’, so will they. As the parents felt more supported and the home became calmer, positive ripples made their way through the family system, directly benefitting all members of the household. Only one of the 24 young people identified for this study was an only child; the other 23 young people had one or more siblings. Irrespective of whether their siblings were older or younger, all of them benefitted to some degree from the assistance provided to their family system by the ISP.

Parents generally raised the topic of siblings during interviews for one of two reasons: because they were conscious that they were practising their new parenting strategies with all of their children and they were noticing significant changes, or because the ISP clinician had supported them with an issue that was specifically related to a sibling, and not to their ‘young offender’. There were also a number of interviews wherein both of these statements held true: the ISP had helped them to improve their general parenting skills and supported them with challenges that were specifically related to siblings.

16 of the families that were interviewed included siblings who were younger than the client of the program. With one exception, it was these families who identified the greatest benefits for the siblings. The exception relates to a family in which the ISP client was the youngest child, however the mother spoke of her deep appreciation for the ISP clinician’s support and intervention when her oldest son became suicidal following the break-up of a longstanding relationship.

> Because they were there for him in that situation. In the early part he went, ‘no, I don’t want them here. Leave me alone’. But they didn’t give up. He has matured and also found better ways of coping. Now he is on medication for his anxiety and depression. Only a very small dose, but he wouldn’t have went to the doctor before ISP. Chloe convinced him to go. She has made a big difference. She doesn’t see it. She has made a big difference in the family in general. (Jennifer, mother of Billy)

This was a familiar story. On five occasions families relayed stories of a time when the focus of the ISP clinician had temporarily shifted to one of the siblings. Barbara explained that her clinician had

> worked with the whole family. It was mainly for Frank. But there was issues with Sonya sometimes. Even the concentration on Frank had moved to Sonya. You know at some stage in our six months she was the main concern. Because she was, um, I don’t want to use the word suicidal, but you know, cutting herself and things like that, so I had to have an extra plan put in place for her.

Barbara was referring to a behaviour plan, or a ‘Rules Chart’ in this conversation. When asked if she could remember anything about the Rules Charts she had used during the program, she was able to remember one that was the same for all four of her children. The chart related to
going to school. Mornings had been busy and stressful in her home and the clinician had helped her to design a Rules Chart to alleviate this.

*It was about preparing your stuff the night before. Making sure you have got all your equipment. Basic stuff that would make it easier for you to go to school. Making sure you’ve got the correct uniform so they can’t get in trouble for that, and they don’t have to argue back with the teacher.*

If the children followed the chart and attended school each day they received their pocket money on the weekend and were allowed an outing with friends. If they didn’t, they missed out on the pocket money and had to stay at home. Barbara felt that the mornings were calmer as a result of the chart, and that the children went off to school in a better mood. As a parent, she felt more in control when she utilised these strategies. Frank’s criminal record shows one caution since the completion of the ISP (for an offence of criminal damage that took place after the interview for this research) and he is making good progress in school.

Greg also referred to using the Rules Chart to help with younger siblings. He explained how he had to learn to think about the long-term goal when he was parenting, not just about what was happening right now. During the interview he explained that two weeks earlier he had been fed up with the state of the house and had drawn up new plans. Jaime (11 years old) was to do the dishes each day and Brad (13 years old) was to do the vacuuming. They changed chores at the end of each week. If they did their chore each day they received $21 at the end of the week.

*This is the furthest I’ve ever got with my kids. And if it wasn’t for Chloe coming in here with that program, I wouldn’t have this in place. It’s not a lot. It’s a good starting point for me. When I see things falling apart here, which they do, because of everything … When I notice things start to fall apart here, and the house gets untidy, and the kids aren’t getting home by dark, I can apply back to those rules. Like I have stuck it up on the fridge. And even that, it is only the vacuuming and the kitchen get done. When they don’t do it, then I can apply punishment. I say, ‘well, fine. Don’t do it. But you don’t get three bucks and I won’t take you riding’.*

Greg was asked if he thought the program would help him to keep the younger kids out of trouble.

*One hundred per cent! I come home now and I’ve got a clean house. Most of the time. They do it, because they want it … He starts to realise you’ve got to work for your money. When he gets to 16: ‘I’ve got to work for my money. I’ve worked for my money for the last five or six years mowing Dad’s lawn, doing the vacuuming and washing’, and it just implants it in the head.* (Greg, father of Jason)

Greg had finished with the ISP over 12 months before the interview, yet two weeks earlier he had resurrected the Rules Chart. Greg had recognised that his influence as a parent was waning, and that this had started to show in the state of the house and the time the kids returned home in the evening. The ISP had taught him some positive strategies for addressing this problem, and he had been able to use them again a year after the program had ended.

In Edward’s family, there was a combination of factors. At times, the clinician would work directly with one of his younger brothers (Edward is one of five children), as there was behaviour that the brother was engaged in that needed to be addressed. In addition, the family, who were of a Pacific Islander background, acknowledged the positive impact that the change in Edward’s attitude and behaviour had on his younger siblings.
These are only two of the many benefits that siblings received from their family’s involvement with the ISP. For example, one mother explained that her younger daughter was very happy that she ‘had her big sister back’, when the big sister had stopped offending and had rekindled her connection to her younger sister. Another mother explained that her younger children had become very wary of their older brother due to his previous violent outbursts in the home. She had noticed that one in particular had become much more settled within himself now that he no longer had to anticipate what frightful (violent) event might be about to unfold. Similarly, for all of those families in which the young person had returned to school or found work, the younger siblings now had a productive role model to look up to. The environment they were living in contained more pro-social and productive features than it did before the introduction of the ISP. That is, the protective factors for the younger siblings were increased, while the risk factors were decreased.

**ISP Supporting the Mental Health of the Young Person**

An examination of the interview contents reveals that mental health issues appear to have been a problem, at least for a period of time, for all of the young people involved with this study. Mental illness is a significant problem amongst young people in the criminal justice system and this can be exacerbated by a period in custody. Research found that 88% of young people in custody in NSW reported symptoms consistent with a clinical disorder (Cunneen & White, 2011; JJNSW, 2003b). The very fact that the ISP keeps young people out of custody is a contribution to their mental health. However, mental health orders were also found to be common amongst young people sentenced to community orders (Cunneen & White, 2011; JJNSW, 2006).

Only two of the young people in this study received a formal diagnosis of mental illness, but the way their lives were described by themselves and their families indicated that poor mental health was a factor in all cases at the time when the ISP was introduced. However, whether it was by supporting improved family relationships, by teaching a young person how to think more positively, by enabling a return to school or training, or by some other method, it appears that the assistance offered by the ISP program was able to contribute to improved mental health for all but two of the young people involved in the study. It is noteworthy that Cam and Nathan, the two young people who continue to exhibit signs of poor mental health, are the same two young people whose offending behaviour did not appear to change in response to the ISP.

The most common story told during interviews in relation to poor mental health was about the extent to which the young person was feeling ‘down’ during the time that they were offending and engaging in antisocial behaviour. For example Jennifer was asked to imagine how her son Billy might respond if he was asked to provide a ‘score’ in relation to how happy he was with his life before the program, and how happy he is with life now. Jennifer guessed that he might say he was about seven out of ten happy with his life at the moment, but that he was two or three out of ten happy before the program started.

*He was down. He was really down.*

While Andrew did not talk so much about Jacob being down, the content of his interview hints at concerns that Jacob may have been suicidal.

*Chloe told me what to look out for. ‘And if this happens, do this.’ Do you know what I mean? She gave Jacob and me phone numbers and contacts. Kids helpline*
and that. And if he wanted to talk to somebody, didn’t want to talk to Mum or Dad, he could ring this phone number and talk to them. And, like, other things: if I seen a change in Jacob, just look[ing] at him, if I noticed something was happening, [she told me] to talk to her. She was really good like that.

Jacob had been through a number of conferences and cautions prior to the commencement of the ISP but his criminal record shows no further offending since he completed the program.

The following examples have been taken from interview transcripts, however due to the unique (and therefore identifiable) nature of the stories they are presented here in general terms.

One interview suggested that perhaps the young person had battled with undiagnosed anxiety, and that this had contributed to ending her formal education just a few months into Year 7. Another interview suggested that perhaps the young person had been weighed down with grief following the death of his mother, and then of his grandmother a few short years later. These two deaths had also meant that he was displaced from his community. Yet another interview suggested that a young person had battled with a significant depression for a year or two before turning to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain. And finally, one interview clearly outlined a young person’s battle with severe depression over a period of two to three years. Despite the family’s efforts to seek help they were unable to find any. On three occasions they had taken their child to a hospital, where a psychiatric assessment had been done. On each occasion they had been sent home again. The young person continued to offend in fits of rage. The family and young person found relief only after a significant suicide attempt resulted in hospitalisation and subsequent treatment for depression. Since that time there have been no further offences and the family have started to rebuild.

It is clear that many of the young people targeted for this research were battling with poor mental health at the time of their offending. It is equally clear that the ISP program was able, either directly or indirectly, to positively impact their mental state over time.

**Drugs and Alcohol**

Drug and alcohol use/abuse, as well as being an offence in its own right, is usually linked to how well a young person is faring in other areas of their life. Drug use is associated with other types of youth offending and many young people involved in offending come from areas characterised by high rates of drug use (Smith, 2013; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). In NSW, illicit drug use amongst young people in the criminal justice system is widespread and offending young people consume drugs at a much higher rate than their non-offending counterparts (Cunneen & White, 2011; Putnins, 2001). Alcohol use is also high amongst young people in the criminal justice system, although this consumption is more in line with that of non-offending young people (Cunneen & White, 2011; Putnins, 2001). For girls, there is an added concern about alcohol and drug use increasing their own vulnerability (Sharpe, 2012). The link between drug and alcohol use and other offending was apparent in the lives of the young people interviewed in this project.

In line with our chosen methodology, the information presented relies heavily upon the conversations with the families and young people. It is important to remember that the parents may not have been aware of all of their son’s or daughter’s drug use, and that the young people may have been reluctant to discuss their drug use in front of their carer. It is difficult to see, however, how this information can be verified objectively; criminal records will not present a full picture of the extent of any young person’s past drug and alcohol use. It was our
impression that families seemed willing to share this information without reservation or hesitation.

Nine families talked about substance misuse as part of the package of problematic behaviour that the young person was engaged in. For example, Billy would go and “hang out” with his friends after school, on weekends, or during suspension time. Often this “hanging out” would involve smoking marijuana and then going out to paint graffiti. Billy’s mother was pleased when he was given a curfew by the police because it supported her efforts to restrict Billy’s contact with these peers. With the combination of the curfew, his mother’s commitment to containing his behaviour, and the strategies provided by the ISP, Billy’s pattern of visiting the friends was interrupted. His mother believes that he was then able to see that they were not good people for him to spend time with. He has since distanced himself from these friends and stopped smoking marijuana. Each of the nine families has a similar story to tell. That is, they are able to tell a story about a time when the young person included drugs and/or alcohol in their life, and the drug use contributed to an increased rate of offending. However this group of nine families also reported that the young person was no longer using any illicit drugs. The families reported that the young people’s use of alcohol had either stopped or was constrained within what were, to them, acceptable limits.

Drugs and/or alcohol did not seem to feature strongly in the lives of seven of the young people before the ISP. One of these families reported an incident where the son had come home intoxicated one evening, but that to the best of their knowledge there had been no further alcohol use. It is possible that some of this group used drugs or alcohol at parties or with friends at some point, however substance misuse was never identified as an issue, and the parents/carers did not recognise it as a problem.

There were six young people who continued to include drug misuse in their lifestyle. All the members of this group ended their formal education earlier than was ideal, and they all continued to offend in one way or another. For example, one young man stole money from his parents to pay for his “pot”, while another sold drugs or stolen goods to support his drug use. In at least two of these families the parents/carers were battling with their own addiction to drugs or alcohol.

We are not able to comment on drug use for two of the families that were interviewed. We were not able to interview the young people in these families, and the carers were not sure whether the young person had been using drugs or not.

While some families recognised illicit drug use as an offence, others did not. As previously stated, it was not unusual for families to say that there had been ‘no further offending’ since the program, but to also relay stories about the ongoing drug use of the young person.

**Desistance**

**What Aspects of Desistance Ideology Constitute a Useful Way to Conceptualise the ISP Program?**

Applying the earlier question of ‘What Helps?’ to the present research project means that apposite question is not whether the ISP ‘works’ in moving offenders away from criminal careers but whether it ‘helps’ in promoting desistance.
Desistance can be achieved through a number of pathways, including parenthood, marriage and employment. Although these options are not yet appropriate options for the young people in this research at this time in their lives, it was clear from our research that the young people, as teenagers, could make decisions and follow trajectories that impacted the future likelihood of employment and supportive and successful relationships.

We are not aware of a previous instance of an intervention based on Multisystemic Therapy being evaluated within a desistance framework, but Ward and Maruna (2007) suggest that MST is an example of the operationalisation of the Good Lives Model. MST’s emphasis on strengths, on approach goals and on working on the systems that surround a young person, not just on the young person her/himself, make it entirely consistent with GLM principles. Further, MST interventions do not simply target offending behaviour but seek to preserve home placements and educational progress.

Although very resource intense, and therefore not easy to disseminate widely, the MST approach illustrates for our purposes both the conceptual and the empirical link between goods promotion and risk management. (Ward & Maruna, 2007: 141)

The nature of the ISP makes it particularly well suited to being evaluated within a desistance framework, for three reasons. Firstly, the complexity of the client group, comprising the young people and their families, makes it inappropriate to speak in simple terms about whether the intervention ‘works’. As seen in the preceding discussion, the impact of the program on young people and families is as varied as the families themselves. Some parents and caregivers gave the program credit for saving their lives or the lives of their children. In many other cases the ISP program was a significant factor in supporting a young person to return to school or take up a TAFE place. Parents and caregivers often spoke about the positive impact that the ISP had upon siblings, both in direct work carried out with such siblings and in the positive effect on younger siblings of seeing an older family member making constructive life choices. In many of these cases the positive impact was associated with a reduction or cessation of offending. This was not the case in all instances, particularly when drug use and unlicensed driving is included. (These are both clearly offences, but are not always perceived as serious concerns by young people and families.) So, if the question asked is whether the ISP ‘works’, then a positive answer might be difficult to provide in all cases. However, if the question asked is whether the ISP ‘helps’, then, as will be described, it seems clear that in all cases investigated the ISP program was a significant help to the family.

The second reason why a desistance framework is a useful way to consider the ISP program is the fact that the program is targeted at young people. It is established that desistance is a process not an event, and that offenders often go through a process of a reduction of offending or a winding path of some desistance but some intermittent offending before ceasing offending permanently. As mentioned above, Maruna (2006) has described a primary and secondary stage of desistance where young people first cease offending and then later take on a non-offending identity. It is very difficult to consider the life of any individual and say for sure that they have stopped offending for good. This is particularly true for young people, and it was highlighted in this project by the mapping of both the planned future and potential alternative future for each young person. There are many variables to consider in predicting the future for a young person and this is a necessarily speculative exercise. However, it was clear that, in the many cases where the ISP program contributed positively to educational progress, improved family relationships and stability in living arrangements, or reduced drug and alcohol intake, this would have a potentially enormous positive impact on the young person’s future. Research in the UK (Macdonald et al., 2011) identified that the two factors that were most associated with leading short-term offending careers into serious, long-term careers were a growing
dependence on drugs and a full disengagement from education. Young people who were successful in desistance became involved in purposeful activities and disassociated themselves from offending friends. As discussed below, in relation to specific cases from the research, the ISP intervention specifically addressed these factors in the young people’s lives. The ISP can best be conceptualised as an intervention that can change a trajectory leading to long-term positive outcomes, rather than a ‘quick-fix’ to stop offending behaviour in its tracks.

The challenge, however, in applying a desistance framework to young people arises from the very fact of their age. How is it possible to say with certainty that a young person aged 18 or 19 years old has permanently moved away from offending? Becoming a desister is like becoming an adult; it is not a simple transition, it is a series of complex processes (Rocque, 2014). This is where Farrall and colleagues’ (2014) conception of different models of desistance for different groups of offenders is most helpful. Farrall and colleagues (2014) acknowledge that not all groups of offenders desist from offending in the same way, and some of the models they utilise (the desistance of alcoholics and engrained drug users, in particular) clearly do not apply to a group of young offenders. Their description of how some street offenders desist by finding employment and/or stable relationships does have some application but, again, these young people are too young for these life changes to be considered permanent. It is Farrall and colleagues’ (2014) application of Matza’s (1964) concept of drift that is of most useful application to the description of the ISP. This model refers to offenders who had limited offending careers, no strong identity as offenders, and seemed to drift into offending rather than making any commitment to an offending career. Dufour and Brassard (2014) also refer to a category of offenders who they describe as ‘the remorseful’, who offend without ever thinking of themselves as offenders and desist by returning to the personal identity they had prior to the offence.

The third reason why applying a desistance framework to the evaluation of the ISP program is appropriate is because of the emphasis placed upon practitioner skills and the relationship between the client and the worker. Clinicians need to be ‘normal-smiths’ (Farrall et al., 2014), confirming a pro-social identity and need to show the skills identified by Trotter (2014) in earlier research with JJNSW. Young desisters needed to possess hope in their future (Macdonald et al., 2011) and the worker should support that. The worker should (Trotter, 2014):

- Be clear about their role
- Be reliable and fair, modelling pro-social values
- Help the offender in solving problems s/he identifies
- Encourage the offender in focusing on problems associated with offending
- Help the offender to develop strategies to deal with issues
- Take a holistic approach
- Develop a therapeutic alliance by working in a collaborative, friendly and optimistic way

More recent research (Trotter et al., 2015) has shown that this therapeutic relationship is particularly important in the supervision of Aboriginal youth, and the researchers set out five principles for the effective supervision of youth justice. As discussed below in relation to Michelle, these principles were present in the ISP work:

- Culturally informed communication
- Valuing Aboriginal knowledge
- The importance of the working relationship
- The significance of family
- Highlighting strengths and achievements
The role of the clinician is crucial in the way that the organisation thinks about the ISP and how it trains its staff, but it was also identified, again and again, as the most memorable part of the intervention by the young people and families who we interviewed.

The Young People as Desisters

As discussed above, it is difficult to say with certainty that any young person has desisted from offending as they are still in the process of identity formation and there has been only a short period of elapsed time since their last offence. Desistance is not a straightforward path, so even when desistance seems to be established just one further offence can seem to undermine this (see Halsey and Deegan (2015) for a discussion of this dynamic in relation to desisters who they worked with). We did, however, note some remarkable progress in some of the young people and families who we interviewed and have some confidence in stating that some of them are far down the path to desistance. In describing a young person from our sample as a desister, we have applied four criteria:

- There has been no further offending since the completion of the ISP; this is supported by self-reports from young people and families, as well as official criminal records, where available
- The young person is in stable accommodation and in stable relationships with their family and caregiver
- The young person is in school, college or other education or employment
- There is no reported drug use or alcohol abuse

When these four factors are present we feel we can say with some confidence that the young person currently has an offending-free identity. These four factors are connected to each other and are self-reinforcing. A young person who is not using drugs or abusing alcohol has a better chance of maintaining stable environments at home and school or work. A young person in employment or education has less opportunity to associate with drug- or alcohol-using friends and to become involved in offending networks.

For some of the young people we interviewed some but not all of the four criteria were present, and we would not wish to imply that they were not desisting from offending or that the ISP had no positive benefit. We would suggest that there was at least one more step that they could take before we could confidently apply the desister label to them. For example, young people who had not returned to education or training needed to do so. Edward’s criminal record confirms no further offending since the ISP, and his parents speak positively about his progress, but we did not include him in our list of desisters as he was not in education or employment at the time of interview. Young people who self-described as having ceased offending ‘apart from occasionally smoking drugs’ needed to cease their drug use. Some young people who have committed further offences might be on a pathway to desistance: their offending might be diminishing in seriousness or frequency or they might have committed one offence as an isolated setback on an otherwise positive trajectory. We wanted to set stringent defining criteria to allow us to refer to the young people discussed in the next section as desisters with some confidence.

Using the criteria set, we identified nine young people as having taken on the identity of desisters at the time of interview: Billy, Emma, Erik, Georgia, Jacob, Michelle, Ray, Susan and Warren. If time shows that we are correct in saying that these nine young people have achieved a non-offending identity, then this is a considerable achievement for the ISP, as they constitute nearly 40% of the sample. Our caution in restricting the list to nine young people
suggests that the full list of desisters might be longer. Certainly, the list of young people who have avoided offending since completing the ISP is longer than this list. There are a number of factors regularly identified as promoting desistance in the literature that were present in work with these young people, and these are outlined below in relation to the desisting young people.

The Role of Clinician

The role of the clinician is crucial to the support of the desistance process. Clinicians should be ‘normal-smiths’, expressing faith in the ability of the young person to lead a pro-social life (Farrall et al., 2014). They should demonstrate the necessary professional skills, including the ability to develop a therapeutic alliance by working in a collaborative, friendly and optimistic manner (Trotter, 2014).

Michelle had committed a series of offences such as stealing jewellery and getting into fights, including one very serious fight. Michelle’s family is Aboriginal and her mother felt that it was a positive factor in their engagement with the program that their clinician worked in partnership with a colleague who was also Aboriginal and that she took time to discuss cultural issues at the start of the intervention. This colleague was not the family’s primary clinician but she remained involved throughout the program, providing support, advice and, at times, interpretation. The family spoke very positively about the influence of the clinician and the quality of the support and advice provided. The clinician taught them tools that they could use beyond the end of the intervention. This support had a flow-on effect; although Michelle’s mother was the primary client, her father began to regularly phone her mother to seek parenting advice.

The clinicians are highly trained and highly skilled professionals but it is the combination of this skill with their personal qualities that is remarked upon by families:

Chloe was lovely. She was really nice. We liked her. (Michelle’s mother)

The sensitivity of the clinician and the intervention to the specific cultural background and needs of the young person was also remarked upon by Warren’s family and Ray’s family, and is an important part both of promoting desistance and of the ISP. Susan’s family identified as ‘half-Aboriginal’ and also spoke very positively about the role of the clinician, although they did not directly link this to cultural sensitivity.

Billy only committed one offence but it was a serious one; he lit a fire with some other young people. He made attempts to put out the fire and contacted emergency services himself; this action suggests that even at the time he carried out the offence he was not fully committed to his offending behaviour. His mother, Jennifer, described the ISP worker as ‘amazing’ and ‘unbelievable’ and going far beyond what was required. Examples of what was perceived as ‘going beyond’ included working with Billy’s younger siblings. The worker taught parenting strategies which were extremely helpful, but Jennifer particularly appreciated the way in which this was done:

My son don’t talk to anyone … But even Billy liked Chloe. She didn’t make me feel like I was any less of a person because of where I live and everything, and she just makes you feel like a human being. She didn’t make me feel bad, because I felt I did a bad job as a parent because my son did a naughty thing … They are just amazing, really. (Billy’s mother)
Jennifer appreciated the evening support, the 24-hour on-call service and the advocacy that her clinician did on behalf of her son. She particularly appreciated the work of her ISP clinician and also spoke very positively about all the JJNSW staff with whom she came into contact. Jennifer’s description of the support of the clinician was consistent with accounts provided by other parents and caregivers. However, she went further than others in saying that without the support of the ISP she doubted that she would have survived the crisis of her son’s offending. This was an extreme response, but not a unique one; Jacob’s mother (see next section) attributed the ISP intervention to saving both her life and that of her son.

**Young Person and Family as Co-producers of Desistance**

Effective desistance approaches are underpinned by strong practitioner relationships, where practitioners think of themselves as supporters and co-producers of desistance, not providers of treatment (Weaver, 2014). Successful desistance processes require offenders who are motivated to change (Farrall et al., 2014). While the young people who were targeted for the ISP program did not always demonstrate a level of motivation to change, the program was voluntary and parents were not bound to accept it. The parents are the primary focus for ISP interventions and they were definitely motivated to see change within their families. Just as the desistance practitioner thinks of herself as a supporter and a co-producer for change, the ISP clinician thinks of herself as a supporter who aims to assist the parent/caregiver to be a co-producer of change for their teenager. In most cases the ISP clinician was also able to support an increase in the young person’s motivation to change.

Jacob was a persistent minor offender whose offending was escalating until the point where his family was offered the ISP following a court hearing. At an early stage in the ISP there was a significant crisis in his life and in the life of his family, when he committed a sexual offence against his younger sister. The ISP intervention led to a complete turnaround in Jacob’s life and the work here was a very strong example of co-production, where the goals and the workplan were agreed between the clinician and young person, not simply imposed upon them. The goals were not simply focussed on education or employment. The clinician discussed with Jacob the importance of him being a good role model to his younger siblings so they did not get into the same difficulties as he had experienced. School was an important focus of the work with Jacob. A return to education was an ambition of both the family and the clinician but Jacob’s dislike of school and his attitude when there made it difficult for him. The co-production of desistance applied as much to the family as to Jacob himself: the ISP clinician and the family worked together to put in place processes and rules to ensure that Jacob attended. Jacob has been attending a sex offenders program and has made significant changes to his life. He is now living with his father, away from the younger siblings, and is attending school every day. He is not associating with offending friends and has committed no further offences. The ultimate goal for Jacob, and his mother, is to have the whole family reunited again and this has been a significant driver of the work.

The clinician also took a co-worker approach in working with Frank. He had been getting into difficulties at school and in the community, but without actually committing criminal offences, until he was brought home drunk one night by the police and reacted impulsively and aggressively, leading to his arrest. He had received suspensions at school, and the school placement was in danger of breaking down. The ISP clinician worked in partnership with Frank and with his family to support the maintenance of the school placement and this, in turn, led to improvements in other aspects of his life, particularly relationships in the family. The clinician’s approach was to make a plan and to consult and agree with all family members who were available, primarily Frank and his mother but also Frank’s siblings. At interview, Frank’s mother
described how her own career goals have been achieved and how she has seen improvement in her life since the ISP. Frank’s family describe no further offending since the program ended. Although we had initially included Frank in our list of desisters, he no longer fits the definition as his criminal record indicates a caution for an offence of criminal damage committed after his interview for this project. However, it was clear from interview that his life was on a positive trajectory, so it is to be hoped that his progress will survive this setback.

In both these cases, it was the co-working with the family that was particularly effective in the promotion of desistance. It is often women – mothers, wives, girlfriends, partners, daughters – who cope with the problems of male offenders and take on the role of the change agent in the offenders’ lives (see Halsey and Deegan (2014) for a detailed discussion of this in the Australian context). The ISP provides support for mothers who can then go on to support desistance in the young people.

**Working with the Young Person in Context, Not in Isolation**

An effective desistance approach will involve an interaction with the family and the community, not just the individual. A practitioner who is prepared to work within the young person’s social context will support their desistance (Weaver, 2014).

Georgia’s offending was closely associated with her drug use. She had initially started to smoke marijuana as a younger teenager, progressed to taking pills and progressed further to dealing pills. She did not complete school. She attempted TAFE but, even though she enjoyed it, she was not able to continue for practical reasons. Georgia attended the Ted Noffs Foundation for rehabilitation, aged 16. Following the ISP, Georgia now has a stable, full-time job in a restaurant and is also involved in lecturing young people about how to stay off drugs and how to avoid getting into trouble. This improvement in educational outcomes has also been accompanied by an improvement in family relationships. The work with Georgia demonstrates the importance of working in context rather than dealing with the young offender in isolation. Simply working with Georgia on drug use or thinking skills might have made some difference to her but it was the work in finding employment, and providing support when some early attempts at establishing education and employment were unsuccessful, that has made a difference to Georgia. She is now an independent person with a job, a car and a boyfriend. The other, obvious, way in which the ISP supports a young person in context is through working with the family. Georgia’s mother was particularly grateful for the advice and support that she was given in working with Georgia and the skills that she was taught that will help her long after the program has ended.

Georgia was another young person for whom desistance felt like the adoption of a new identity, both for her and for her family:

*So she has turned herself around. She is just a changed kid.* (Georgia’s mother)

Susan’s family contrasted the ISP approach to previous interventions that had had less success. Susan had worked previously with Juvenile Justice and had been diagnosed with ADHD, but individually-based interventions did not lead to a cessation of her offending behaviour. As well as offending, Susan had developed a pattern of dropping out of activities and training programs that she enjoyed and that would have built her future, including school. In this case the ISP clinician did very little work with Susan herself but concentrated on supporting her grandparents (who she lived with) to support her and to develop strategies to manage her behaviour. Susan’s criminal record shows that she has committed no new offences since the ISP and is now studying a beautician’s course at TAFE, with ambitions to go on to university.
The entire context of her life has changed since the ISP; she has different friends and a vastly different relationship with her family.

‘Good Lives’ Focus on Young People’s Own Goals and Aspirations

The Good Lives Model is a strength-based approach that focuses on reducing risk alongside building the young person’s capacity to live a meaningful, fulfilling life. It is a positive, strengths-based approach, promoting the pursuit of positive goals by pro-social means (Chu et al., 2014; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

Warren had been getting into some trouble at home and at school but had not come to the attention of the police until committing one significant offence, when he, with others, burned down a large public building. This offence led to his being involved with the ISP program. The family in this case focussed their discussion on the work that the ISP clinician carried out with Warren himself, rather than with the family. The clinician included Warren’s brother in a lot of the work, even though his brother was not a direct ISP client. Although there was no explicit reference to the ‘Good Lives’ model, the approach taken was very much in line with that model. The clinician worked with Warren to focus on his goals, and these were pro-social, common aspirations relating to work and family. She then worked with the family to find a new school for Warren when it became clear that he was not going to be able to return to the school that he had previously attended. Warren came from an Aboriginal background and the school that the ISP placed him in catered particularly for young people from that background. The ISP clinician also supported him in pursuing his chosen sport, surfing, and the combination of this change in use of social time and return to school led to a new and more positive peer group and a more constructive use of his time. The family also moved house after the time of Warren’s offending and is in much more healthy and stable accommodation. Although this was not facilitated directly by the ISP clinician, it could be argued that the increased confidence and stability in the family brought about by the ISP intervention led to a situation where a new family home could be achieved and maintained. Similarly, Warren’s mother is able to make more of a contribution to the life of Warren’s sister now that she is free of some of the stress of worrying about his offending.

A focus on the potential for a good life was also present in Erik’s case. He had been getting into a lot of offending difficulties – not all leading to conviction – including drug offences, theft and later stealing cars. The regular visits from the police and, particularly, the periods of remand in custody caused significant disruption in his home and to his school life. The family described the ISP intervention as ‘heaven sent’. Again, the focus on a good life, and on helping Erik to achieve his positive aspirations, allowed the worker to work with his mother in helping Erik to find apprentice employment as a panel beater. Erik disliked school and had gotten into a lot of trouble there, so rather than focussing on that negative experience, the focus was on his positive aspiration to achieve a trade. This built upon the confidence he had acquired by getting good grades in metalwork at school, the only subject he enjoyed and achieved well in. The clinician helped Erik to find an apprenticeship placement, followed by an interview, and then a job. This process increased the number of ‘normal-smiths’ in Erik’s life. Erik’s mother said of his work colleagues:

They treated him like a person instead of a hopeless no-hoper. (Erik’s mother)

She contrasted that treatment with the messages he received from school: that he was a failure who would end up in prison.
Erik himself credits this employment to the turnaround in every other aspect of his life. He no longer offends or takes drugs and his accommodation and home life are stable. Desistance research refers to the adoption of a new identity in desisters and this was particularly clear in Erik’s life. He said that he no longer considered himself to be an offender but that he now described himself as working class and proud of it.

**Practical Help in Overcoming Obstacles**

Research has shown that one of the most important roles that practitioners can play in supporting desistance is supporting offenders to overcome obstacles that stand in their way (Farrall et al., 2014). Young people might decide that they want to avoid future offending and lead pro-social lives but lack a strategy by which to achieve this (Moore et al., 2013). Even the young people we interviewed who were motivated to desist faced obstacles in doing so. In many cases the most notable obstacle was the difficulty in returning to education once this relationship had broken down.

Emma did not have a long offending record but her family described her life as spiralling into difficulties. She missed two years of school, would not stay at home and associated with other offending young people, taking drugs including ‘ice’. The main obstacle in getting her life back on track was the breakdown of the educational placement. The ISP clinician was able to facilitate, firstly, a return to the original school and then, later, a move to a different school. The caregivers described the importance that the clinician gave to this work, saying that the clinician started working with the school even before her visit to the family. This stability in Emma’s education has led to a change in her peer group and an improvement in relationships at home. She is no longer involved in drugs or offending and hopes to go on to university and train in youth work. The work with Emma was a coherent and consistent intervention, with the work with her and her family accompanying the liaison with the school and TAFE. The clinician worked to support Emma to develop a more positive attitude to education while facilitating her return to school.

Ray’s family located the start of his offending behaviour as occurring at a time when he moved from a public school, which he liked, to a private school, which he did not like. He was expelled from this school and this led to him associating with offending young people and starting to take drugs. His offending was associated with his anger, and his violent behaviour at home led to the police being called on a number of occasions.

The primary obstacle that needed to be overcome in working with Ray was the difficulty in obtaining a full-time educational placement for him. The ISP clinician worked to overcome this and was initially unsuccessful in getting Ray back into the school he had attended previously. The clinician worked with Ray to develop his goals – to work to earn the money to buy his own car. Further efforts led to two alternative apprenticeship placements, and then a college placement where Ray is now studying for a Year 10 Certificate. Ray’s goal is to be in employment, earning his own income. Similarly to many young people of his age, Ray has not yet settled on a particular career. Whereas the educational breakdown led to the commencement of offending behaviour, the family attributed a return to education as the main factor in the positive change in Ray’s life. Ray now lives his life in a different physical space than previously, leading to a different attitude to his use of time and a different group of acquaintances in his life. A change in the use of physical space is often associated with desistance (Farrall et al., 2014). This will have an impact on any young person’s behaviour, but Ray’s mother, Daniella, suggested that this was particularly true for Ray; she relayed a comment that had been made to her by one of Ray’s high school teachers:
If I put Ray with the good boys he will be the best, if I put him with the bad boys he will be the worst. (Daniella, mother of Ray)

Creating opportunities for Ray to mix with pro-social peers and limiting his time to access anti-social peers has supported Ray in developing new hope for his future. These practical changes in his ‘physical space’ have meant that Ray no longer engages in drug use or demonstrates violent outbursts, and this has allowed the family situation to normalise.

An End to Drifting and a Change of Direction

The ISP is a considerable step towards the promotion of desistance in young people. Although Multisystemic Therapy and desistance approaches do not share their research grounding or historical roots, there is considerable overlap in their value base and approach to young people and families. The families we interviewed spoke extremely positively about the ISP program, and particularly about the clinicians who worked with them, but they did so in the context of the rest of their lives. They did not see the ISP as a magic wand or black box that brought a cessation of offending; instead they linked changes in employment, education, family life, drug use and self-esteem to the ISP. A clear theme was that of a change in direction – young people who were drifting from occasional offending into more and more troublesome behaviour gained support in pointing their lives in a different direction. The ISP intervention could be seen as an oblique, indirect approach (see Canton, 2012) where the focus of the work was on factors other than offending behaviour but where there was, yet, a significant impact on re-offending. Families supported the young people in pursuing desistance and the ISP supported the families.

The young people and families experienced the ISP in the context of the criminal justice system, with all that is associated with that system, so it was not perceived as a purely therapeutic intervention. Previous research on desistance (Rudes et al., 2014) found that leverage was also an effective strategy in promoting desistance. For some young people and families more punitive criminal justice approaches were experienced alongside or prior to the ISP. The youth justice system has always been effective in imposing sanctions but, until recently, was not as consistent in promoting a desistance approach (Halsey, 2006). Threats or sanctions were not, in themselves, enough to promote desistance but they could be effective alongside other approaches. Leverage was a factor in Ray’s desistance; he spent short periods in juvenile detention and determined that he would never return there. Michelle’s mother, Alison, identified the curfew as a factor in stopping Alison’s pattern of offending, and a curfew was also helpful when it was imposed on Erik. Paul’s mother described the need to report to probation during the ISP as a ‘constant threat over his head’ that contributed to the success of the program. Curfews or short periods of detention brought an end to the escalating offending behaviour while the ISP intervention started to build a more positive lifestyle.

It is important to note that even for the young people who we have identified as desisters, there are still ups and downs and challenges in their lives and in the lives of their families. In a number of cases, there were further examples of conflict at school or of associating with anti-social acquaintances. The cessation of drug taking and alcohol abuse did not happen instantly. However, there have been two significant changes relating to occasions where there were setbacks. Firstly, the young people themselves have an incentive to draw themselves away from offending behaviour. In the language of differential association, they had more factors to draw themselves away from offending, to counterbalance the pressures on them to continue to offend. Secondly, the families had the personal skills and resources to support the young people in deciding not to pursue further offending. The ISP clinicians had provided significant
support but had also taught skills and promoted confidence, allowing the parents and caregivers to work effectively beyond the end of the program itself. Importantly, the clinicians also advised families and caregivers that future slip-ups were normal, meaning that they were prepared when this happened, rather than rendered defeated by obstacles encountered. Farrall and colleagues (2014: 48) describe how effective criminal justice practitioners, who develop engaged relationships with offenders, can leave ‘imprints’. What is said by workers is retained and may be drawn on at a later stage, when there has been a change in circumstances and desistance is more possible.

The most appropriate application of desistance research to the ISP relates to the concept of drift (Farrall et al., 2014; Matza, 1964). In line with this conception, we found that our desisting offenders had no strong identity as offenders and had drifted into offending behaviour rather than making a conscious commitment to an offending career. It was often drug use, anti-social peers and/or a breakdown of school placement that precipitated this drift. A breakdown in family relationships went alongside this. The ISP stopped this drift. This was achieved in similar, but not identical, ways with each individual and family. It was based on warm and focussed therapeutic working relationships, engaging with families in their social context, joint workplans to achieve the young person and family’s conception of a good life, and support in overcoming obstacles when they arose. In all cases we interviewed this combination had a positive impact on the life of the young people and families. In the nine highlighted cases we would suggest that the ISP set the young people on a direction of desistance from offending, bringing significant positive benefit to themselves, their families and society in general.
Part B: Economic Analysis of Some Key Benefits of the ISP

Background and Literature

This economic investigation relates to qualitative information provided by families who participated in the ISP between one and three years prior to the interviews. Most of the common economic analysis techniques are based on quantitative data and large datasets, and are therefore not able to harness the particular richness of the data available here. While we had to develop a novel methodology to analyse the economic information provided in the interviews, it is nevertheless interesting to review the findings of economic investigations that deal with one or other aspect related to our research, and we thus briefly present their findings to provide a context for our own research.

First we would like to look at some of the findings of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) and their Benefit-Cost Results. They describe their own research approach as follows:

**Research Approach.** WSIPP has developed a three-step process to draw conclusions about what works and what does not to achieve particular outcomes of legislative interest. First, we systematically assess all high-quality studies from the United States and elsewhere to identify policy options that have been tried and tested and found to achieve improvements in outcomes. Second, we determine how much it would cost Washington taxpayers to produce the results found in Step 1, and calculate how much it would be worth to people in Washington State to achieve the improved outcome. That is, in dollars and cents terms, we compare the benefits and costs of each policy option. It is important to note that the benefit-cost estimates pertain specifically to Washington State; results will vary from state to state. Third, we assess the risk in the estimates to determine the odds that a particular policy option will at least break even.

(http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost?topicId=1)

Overleaf we reproduce the WSIPP’s findings as updated in July 2015, which clearly demonstrate that Multisystemic Therapy (MST) not only has benefits that are substantially higher than the related costs insofar as they apply to Washington State, but also that there is a relatively high chance that the benefits will exceed the costs.
Table 1: Benefit-Cost Results for Juvenile Justice as calculated by WSIPP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program name</th>
<th>Date of last literature review</th>
<th>Total benefits</th>
<th>Taxpayer benefits</th>
<th>Non-taxpayer benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Benefit minus costs (net present value)</th>
<th>Benefit to cost ratio</th>
<th>Chance benefits will exceed costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional Family Therapy (youth in state institutions)</td>
<td>Dec. 2014</td>
<td>$18,104</td>
<td>$8,108</td>
<td>$29,997</td>
<td>($)405</td>
<td>$3,669</td>
<td>$11.19</td>
<td>99 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression Replacement Training (youth in state institutions)</td>
<td>Dec. 2014</td>
<td>$20,403</td>
<td>$6,137</td>
<td>$23,266</td>
<td>($)1,575</td>
<td>$27,827</td>
<td>$18.66</td>
<td>94 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Family Therapy (youth on probation)</td>
<td>Dec. 2014</td>
<td>$30,378</td>
<td>$7,808</td>
<td>$22,570</td>
<td>($)405</td>
<td>$26,973</td>
<td>$8.92</td>
<td>99 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multisystemic Therapy for substance abusing juvenile offenders</td>
<td>Sep. 2013</td>
<td>$30,646</td>
<td>$6,421</td>
<td>$24,226</td>
<td>($)7,689</td>
<td>$22,958</td>
<td>$3.99</td>
<td>70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multisystemic Therapy</td>
<td>Apr. 2012</td>
<td>$23,300</td>
<td>$5,524</td>
<td>$17,776</td>
<td>($)689</td>
<td>$15,611</td>
<td>$3.03</td>
<td>88 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggression Replacement Training (youth on probation)</td>
<td>Dec. 2014</td>
<td>$16,137</td>
<td>$4,123</td>
<td>$12,014</td>
<td>($)1,575</td>
<td>$14,562</td>
<td>$10.25</td>
<td>93 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Integrated Transitions</td>
<td>Dec. 2014</td>
<td>$26,241</td>
<td>$6,532</td>
<td>$19,709</td>
<td>($)1,734</td>
<td>$14,508</td>
<td>$2.24</td>
<td>74 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Family Parole (with quality assurance)</td>
<td>Jan. 2013</td>
<td>$14,706</td>
<td>$3,539</td>
<td>$11,167</td>
<td>($)458</td>
<td>$10,168</td>
<td>$3.24</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care</td>
<td>Jun. 2014</td>
<td>$17,356</td>
<td>$4,279</td>
<td>$13,077</td>
<td>($)230</td>
<td>$9,126</td>
<td>$2.11</td>
<td>65 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of Services</td>
<td>Apr. 2012</td>
<td>$6,416</td>
<td>$1,699</td>
<td>$4,717</td>
<td>($)413</td>
<td>$6,005</td>
<td>$15.53</td>
<td>70 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic communities for substance abusers</td>
<td>Dec. 2012</td>
<td>$10,446</td>
<td>$2,660</td>
<td>$7,785</td>
<td>($)461</td>
<td>$5,805</td>
<td>$2.25</td>
<td>73 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug court</td>
<td>Jul. 2014</td>
<td>$7,512</td>
<td>$2,145</td>
<td>$5,367</td>
<td>($)209</td>
<td>$4,303</td>
<td>$2.34</td>
<td>62 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim offender mediation</td>
<td>Apr. 2012</td>
<td>$3,876</td>
<td>$1,071</td>
<td>$2,805</td>
<td>$605</td>
<td>$3,271</td>
<td>$6.41</td>
<td>78 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other chemical dependency treatment for juveniles (non-therapeutic communities)</td>
<td>Dec. 2012</td>
<td>$220</td>
<td>$448</td>
<td>$172</td>
<td>($)329</td>
<td>($3,020)</td>
<td>$0.07</td>
<td>32 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared Straight</td>
<td>Apr. 2012</td>
<td>($13,504)</td>
<td>($3,425)</td>
<td>($10,079)</td>
<td>($67)</td>
<td>($15,571)</td>
<td>($200.84)</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summary statistics the WSIPP provides for Washington State for Multisystemic Therapy, the model that the ISP follows, include a benefit to cost ratio of US$3.03, benefits minus costs of US$15,611, and a probability of positive net present value of 88%. This is fairly strong evidence that it is reasonable to undertake a qualitative study that investigates particular cases in NSW, Australia, to see whether differences can be established (and if so, what kind of differences) once a number of specific situations are considered in their complexity. Considering specific, concrete situations in a particular time and place allows us to recover and include in our investigation some of those aspects that have been removed from datasets that have been ‘cleaned’ from specifics in order to allow the use of statistics-based economic techniques and large-scale comparisons between different programs.

When the ISP was introduced in Newcastle and Western Sydney in May 2008, the subsequent Annual Report for Juvenile Justice stated that

> [t]he program is specifically aimed at juveniles who commit serious and / or repeat offences. A range of issues are addressed including substance abuse, financial problems, housing needs, family conflict and negative peer pressure. The program deals not only with behavioural problems specific to the young offender, but assists in tackling underlying problems within their family as well as their relationships in the wider community (Department of Human Services – Juvenile Justice 2009: 46).

It is therefore crucial that any evaluation of the economics of the program in NSW, be it qualitative or quantitative, also considers other family members beyond the juvenile offender.

In 2014 two articles were published by the same research team, which address the impact on siblings in a large-scale economic study in the United States of America (Dopp et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2014). The researchers compared the economic benefits of MST with those of individual therapy (IT) using arrest data from 176 serious juvenile offenders and 129 of their closest-in-age siblings. Both articles are based on follow-up research to the Missouri Delinquency Project, a large randomised clinical trial by Borduin and colleagues (1995). As
MST programs work with the whole family, it is likely that MST programs have a bigger impact on siblings’ delinquency than IT programs.

Dopp and colleagues found that 71.74% of MST sibling pairs had recidivated by the end of the 25-year period, as opposed to 82.14% of IT sibling pairs. The odds of being arrested for any crime during the follow-up were 1.81 times higher for IT sibling pairs. The corresponding values for felony crimes were 44.57% for MST versus 61.90% for IT sibling pairs, with the odds being 2.02 times higher for IT sibling pairs (Dopp et al., 2014: 699). Considering taxpayer benefits and tangible and intangible benefits to crime victims, Dopp and colleagues calculated cumulative benefits of MST over IT of US$35,582 per referred youth, US$7,798 per sibling and US$37,987 per sibling pair, and an average cumulative incremental benefit of MST per dollar of cost of US$4.78 for referred youths and of US$5.04 for sibling pairs (Dopp et al., 2014: 701). After discussing a range of other cost and benefit data, they highlight two key advantages of MST over conventional IT.

First, MST interventions target empirically identified risk factors for criminality and violence in youths (e.g., behavior problems, problematic family relations, association with deviant peers, poor school performance), which are commonly shared by referred juveniles and their siblings. Second, interventions focus on caregivers as the primary conduits of change and are designed to enhance their parenting skills (e.g., monitoring, conflict management) and resources (e.g., social support). By addressing shared risk factors and increasing caregivers’ effectiveness, MST has the capacity to produce clinical and economic benefits beyond those observed in an individually focused treatment. (Dopp et al., 2014: 702)

Wagner and colleagues provide more details about the siblings included in the study. 60% of the closest-in-age siblings were younger and 40% were older than the juvenile offenders. At the time of the original study, no juvenile arrest records had been collected for the closest-in-age siblings, and their juvenile records had been permanently sealed once they had reached adulthood. So the study only includes the siblings’ adult arrest records, which, however, covered 84% of the follow-up period.

The findings in both articles provide strong evidence not only that Multisystemic Therapy programs for juvenile offenders provide clinical and economic benefits, but also that these benefits are likely to be bigger than those provided by individual therapy. Yet they also beg a number of further questions: What about other siblings beyond those closest in age? What about other significant people close to the young offenders, who are impacted on by the MST program, in particular the caregivers themselves?

These questions reach beyond what can be addressed in large-scale randomised control trials, because they involve too many interdependent variables around each of the juvenile offenders, and too many specifics of individual cases. And once we can no longer construct large datasets that have been ‘cleaned’ of too many interdependent variables, most statistics-based economic techniques can no longer be used, and novel methodologies need to be developed that can harness the benefit of rich, qualitative studies.
While most relevant research so far has been undertaken in the USA, Allard and colleagues (Allard et al., 2014) assessed longitudinal costs of offender trajectories in Queensland, Australia. They addressed three research questions:

1. What are the monetary costs of crime?
2. What is the optimal number of offender trajectories in an Australian offender cohort?
3. What are the monetary costs of officially recorded offending for individuals on different offender trajectories?

(Allard et al., 2014: 81)

Reviewing existing literature and using statistical techniques, they determined the number of offender trajectories in the Queensland Longitudinal Database, which includes 41,377 individuals born in 1983 and 1984 and guilty of offences committed when aged between 10 and 25 years old. They identified five offender trajectories: two chronic, one moderate and two low trajectories. The costs of crime included criminal justice system costs as well as wider social and economic costs based on offence type. Applying costs to offender trajectories they found that the two chronic groups accounted for only 4.8% of the cohort, but for 41.1% of the total costs. On average, each chronic offender costs between $186,366 and $262,799 by the time they turn 26 years old. 60% of these costs accrue to the criminal justice system. On average, each chronic offender costs over 20 times more than offenders in the two low offending groups (Allard et al., 2014: 82).

While these are Queensland figures and there are differences in the juvenile justice systems of the two states, the study by Allard and colleagues provides strong economic support for a program that targets ‘juveniles who commit serious and/or repeat offences’ and helps these young people to develop a desister identity. Being again a large-scale study that uses statistical techniques to identify types of trajectories and related economic costs and benefits, the study by Allard and colleagues provides a very useful backdrop for a qualitative study that uses the actual trajectories described by interviewees who participated in the ISP.

**Methodology of this Study**

**What is Economically Relevant?**

We conducted interviews relating to 24 young offenders whose families had participated in the ISP. These interviews highlight the young people’s experiences and the changes in their lives, but they also contain a wealth of information on the impact the ISP had on the people that live around these 24 young people, as the ISP focuses on working with the young people’s carers. In most cases these carers also care for a range of other people, whose lives will also be significantly impacted by how the carers experience the program and by the changes they subsequently make to their own lives. Many of these changes have significant economic consequences that will need to be considered by an economic analysis of the program.

Figure 1 illustrates a web of such relationships, some of which may be economically relevant – depending on the particular situation in each of the 24 stories and depending on the changes the program initiated. Hence each story will have its own web, and within this web a particular range of economically relevant changes.
Each case is different, and in each case the young person’s web contains different relationships that are relevant. In addition, of those important relationships, not all are economically significant in the sense that important changes do not always have big economic impacts. In this section of the report we focus on those relationships that have had the most sizeable economic impact, either by a change in the contribution to the community, mainly in the form of more or less income tax being paid, or a change in the costs the community incurs, be it for youth justice, corrective services or social security benefits. In other words, not all of the issues discussed in the themes of Part A are directly economically relevant, and not all of them can be quantified in dollar terms with sufficient confidence to remain relevant. Of the six themes discussed earlier, the economic analysis will focus on the costs of offending that accrue to the criminal justice system and on the economic outcome of education, in terms of social benefit payments received during education and of income tax paid during apprenticeship and subsequent employment, assessed for the young person and for carers and siblings where relevant. The theme of desistance informs the trajectories developed for each case.

**Trajectories**

Based on the methodology of system-focussed stress testing developed originally within the International Monetary Fund (Blaschke et al., 2001; Boss et al., 2008) to evaluate the health of different countries’ financial systems, we identified trajectories for the young people and their web of relationships using the information provided in the interviews by the carers and, where available, the young people, ISP clinicians, JJNSW and BOCSAR. While we focussed on alternative trajectories described by the interviewees, we were aware of the limitations imposed by issues concerning the selective memory of the interviewees. We thus limited ourselves to alternative trajectories for which the interviewees had provided at least some evidence elsewhere in the interview as to the likelihood of their occurrence.

In other words, we were very cautious in assuming a deterioration in offending in the alternative trajectory of a young person and, similarly, we only included direct benefits to others (siblings and other relatives as well as carers) where the interviews had substantiated these benefits in other contexts than in response to questions regarding what life would be like without the ISP.
The interviews took place between one and three years after the completion of the ISP. They provided rich information about the actual past and present, including life before, during and after the ISP. They covered what the young people and their carers expected to happen in the future, and what they thought would have happened without the ISP coming into their lives.

We could therefore evaluate some key economic factors in each of the young people’s pasts. This past included their period of offending, their time with the ISP and between one and three years since the ISP. We could also examine the young person’s present as well as the young person’s expectations for her or his future. In addition, we could analyse the economic implication of what they and their carers saw as their alternative trajectory without ISP intervention.

**Figure 2: Actual and alternative trajectories**

![Diagram showing actual and alternative trajectories]

The 24 interviews are full of rich data that are specific for each of the particular cases, and as such this report does not include the trajectories themselves, as this would lead to a range of issues of deductive disclosure and internal confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009; Tolich, 2004). Both these terms refer to the fact that in qualitative research that is rich in details, there is a very real danger that even though names and places may have been de-identified, the specifics of the case will allow those familiar with the particular setting to identify specific participants. What follows here purely for illustrative purposes is a visualisation of Fernando’s trajectories, a fictitious case we have put together based on key aspects of several real cases. It illustrates some of the common issues that have become evident in developing the scenarios of the first six interviews analysed. Figure 3 contains the actual past and present, and the future as the interviewees expect it to unfold and as it appears likely based on facts reported elsewhere in interviews and files. Particular attention has been paid to comments made in different parts of the in-depth interviews that can substantiate that the expectations for Fernando’s future have a high degree of realism.
Investigating the key cost factors within the actual trajectory allows us a picture of how long it takes for the costs to the community (mainly the expenses for the ISP and, where applicable, social benefit payments) to be recovered from contribution to the community (mainly by income tax payments from the young person, but also those from people in his or her web of relationships significantly impacted by the ISP). We call these intra-trajectory considerations. They can be undertaken for both the actual and the alternative trajectories. Depending on data and resources available, these considerations can be of varying depth and detail, but as long as the data sources used are consistent, they can provide interesting insights.

The alternative trajectory illustrated in Figure 4 contains the interviewees’ views on how Fernando’s past and present would look without the ISP, and thus highlights the changes the work with the ISP clinician provoked. The alternative future is also informed by the literature on studies and research concerning youth in comparable situations. While the descriptions here contain a number of possible aspects of the future trajectory in particular, the economic considerations in the report have deliberately kept a very positive outlook for the trajectory without the ISP. This ensures we provide a conservative analysis of the potential benefits of the ISP and accounts for some desistance that would have occurred also without the ISP intervention.
As mentioned above, we can undertake an intra-trajectory analysis for the alternative trajectory, but we now can also undertake inter-trajectory investigations comparing the alternative with the actual trajectory. In particular, we can start to appreciate how much more the young person and his or her web of relationships, once supported by the ISP, can contribute to the community, first and foremost in the form of income tax payments and of social benefit payments that are no longer needed in the actual trajectory. Most importantly, and in line with a best practice approach, we can start to identify which factors contribute most, directly and indirectly, to the economic contribution the ISP makes, and which are the relevant timeframes within which the benefits can be harnessed. These key factors and their related timeframes will form the core of the research findings discussed below.

Data Sources

We calculated the costs of offending that accrue to the criminal justice system based on the Australian Government’s Productivity Commission 2015 Report on Government Services, Volume F ‘Community Services’, Chapter 16 – Youth Justice Services, and Volume C ‘Justice’, Chapter 8 – Corrective Services.\(^1\)

\(^1\) We used the average daily costs per young person under community-based supervision on an average day for both the ISP and any further community-based supervision we considered in the alternative trajectory, and the average daily cost per young person under detention-based supervision on an average day for any detention considered in the alternative trajectory prior to the young person turning 18. For adult offending assumed in the alternative trajectory we used real net operating expenditure per prisoner per day.

While we are aware that the ISP is likely to cost more than the average community-based supervision, we decided to use the publicly available data from the Productivity Commission to allow for some level of consistency – the magnitude of difference between the trajectories and the growing difference over time makes the relatively higher cost of the ISP insignificant for the purposes of this investigation.

Similarly, we have used the most recent set of reports and adhered to their adjustments to 2013–2014 dollars based on the General Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GGFCE) chain price deflator for past years, but have refrained from discounting future expenses in light of the relatively steady real-term cost increases in the justice system, which is likely to outweigh the effects of formal discounting in the current low-interest rate environment. Again, the magnitude of the values compared makes such adjustments insignificant for the purposes of this investigation.
Where appropriate, we also used data from Volume E ‘Health’, Chapter 12 – Mental Health Management, from Volume F ‘Community Services’, Chapter 15 – Child Protection Services, and from Volume G ‘Housing and Homelessness’, Chapter 18 – Homelessness Services to calculate alternative trajectories that involved in-patient treatment for mental illness, out-of-home care, and support services for homelessness respectively.

To calculate social benefit payments we used eligibility criteria and payment rates published on the website of the Australian Government’s Department of Human Services (www.humanservices.gov.au). We used the values applicable after 20 March 2015. In line with the caveat in Footnote 1 we refrained from discounting past and future values. Similarly, we used the income tax schedule in place for the 2014/15 tax year published on the Australian Taxation Office’s website (www.ato.gov.au), and award wages in force by the end of June 2015 published on the website of the Fair Work Commission (www.fairwork.gov.au).

**Key Findings**

After identifying the economic information provided by the families interviewed and constructing actual and alternative trajectories in discussion with social scientists, we analysed the resulting data regarding the components that made the biggest impact on the overall results: the costs for offending, the costs for education and training in the form of social benefits the young people and any relevant members of their web of relationship received, and the income tax contributions made by all of them. In each case we looked at the actual trajectories and the alternative ones, first by themselves in an intra-trajectory analysis, and then comparing the two in an inter-trajectory analysis. At the end of this section we will discuss some overall findings, considering the different components of each case together and looking at the overall costs and benefits to the community.

**Partial Analysis: Offending**

Every offence committed causes a variety of costs to a range of people and institutions. For the purpose of developing trajectories that allow for intra-trajectory and inter-trajectory comparisons, we have used the above-mentioned cost per day per young person subject to community-based and to detention-based supervision2 ($107.39 and $1,292.29 respectively) for the time the young person was under 18 years of age, and real net operating expenditure per prisoner per day ($181.60) for incarcerations assumed in alternative trajectories once the young person was 18 years or older. These figures are averages for NSW calculated by the Australian Productivity Commission and differ, sometimes greatly, from figures used in other studies that use figures that are more closely linked to the particular study’s objectives and assumptions3.

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2 The number of young people under community-based supervision on an average day is calculated by summing the number of days each young person spends under supervision during the year (irrespective of age) and dividing this total by the number of days in the financial year. To derive the average daily cost per young person under community-based supervision on an average day, total recurrent expenditure on community-based supervision is divided by 365.25. This figure is then divided by the average daily number subject to community-based supervision.

3 A footnote for economists:

In an economic analysis that compares two or more programs and their respective costs and benefits, economists would use marginal costs (those costs that relate to one more unit of outcome produced), but here we are not comparing different programs. We are looking at the economic information contained in qualitative interviews and at triangulations of this information where possible, but all related to the one program.
As average figures, these values include all recurrent expenses on community-based supervision programs. However, one needs to keep in mind that the ISP is one of the more expensive programs of community-based supervision – as its name indicates, it is intensive and thus also cost-intensive. Given that the ISP is designed to take place over five months, the costs for offending assumed in the actual trajectory average $17,000. In some cases there were additional costs, for example for the additional supervision of a young offender through a juvenile sex offender program.

**Intra-trajectory comparisons**

Intra-trajectory comparisons can then look at how long it will take until these costs to the community have been recovered through additional contributions to the community that have been enabled by the ISP, or at the balance for the public purse between income and expenditure considered by the time the young person reaches the age of 25. The key income for the public purse is additional income tax paid by the young person and/or other members in his or her relationship web of mainly carers and siblings, who without the ISP would not have been able to access gainful employment, or only work to a more limited extent. This will be discussed further below.

Such an intra-trajectory review will be more accurate the more accurately the income and expenditure for the public purse can be determined. However, as long as the ISP enables the young people and those in their webs of relationships to overcome their particular obstacles to more and better paid work, the program will, in most cases and over a more or less extended time period, be financially beneficial to the public purse and thus to the community. Roughly speaking, if only one person in the web is enabled to obtain full-time paid work at the 2014 minimum wage of $640.90, it will take him or her just under five years to have contributed more back to the community in income tax than the $17,000 average cost of community-based supervision. As the ISP is significantly more expensive than this average cost, it will take longer to repay – but in many cases it is not only one person that the ISP has equipped to gain or return to paid employment, and often some people in the relationship web work at above the minimum wage rate.

It is interesting to note that in the actual trajectory the highest cost of roughly $78,000 was incurred by Jacob, who was also undertaking a juvenile sexual offenders program starting halfway through the ISP, followed by roughly half as much or about $39,000 for Ricky, one of the non-desisters, who at the time of interview was still engaging in petty crimes even though his mother expressed that he had improved a lot and expected him to keep improving.

In the alternative trajectories the costs for offending range roughly from $40,000 to $400,000, depending on whether the young person can reasonably be expected to grow out of an offender career by themselves, and at what age. The ‘low-cost’ $40,000 case is a very optimistic, but not altogether improbable, trajectory for one young woman. The majority of the cases range roughly from $110,000 to $190,000.

**Inter-trajectory comparisons**

Comparing the two trajectories focusing just on the supervision costs, one finds that even allowing for the ISP being significantly more expensive than the average community-based supervision program in NSW ($17,000), in the overwhelming majority of cases the ISP provides cost savings to the community in terms of supervision costs not incurred ($40,000 to $400,000).

We also deliberately and systematically want to err on the side of caution, so as to provide the most conservative picture commensurate with the interviews.
In addition, the alternative trajectory in many cases includes the need for alternative residence arrangements for the young person, as the ISP is provided to carers who are willing and able to engage with the program in order to keep the young person living with them. Once this is no longer possible and the young person has to be provided with out-of-home care, either for their own safety or that of siblings and other family members, the costs of the alternative trajectory skyrocket. Given that the ISP is offered to families of youth who have committed serious or repeat offenses, the alternative trajectories for more than two out of three interviewed cases includes one or several stays in one or other form of out-of-home care for adolescents, ranging in cost from $130,000 to $210,000.

Partial Analysis: Education and Employment

Intra-trajectory comparisons
The intra-trajectory comparisons for the actual trajectory considering the costs and benefits to the community regarding education and employment are very interesting indeed. Once the young people are back in education or training with the help of the ISP, many of them are eligible for Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY, which in the first instance is an additional cost to the community. However, for most of them their active participation in the regular activities of school or apprenticeship makes it likely that they will find employment that provides earnings above the tax-free threshold, which in economic terms means that it is only a question of time until their income tax contribution outweighs the original social benefit payments for Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY. Even in the one case where Steve started out on a full disability pension, the better management of his mental health and physical surroundings, which the ISP strengthened and supported, can reasonably be expected to lead to him achieving his dream of slowly increasing weekly working hours, which in turn will lead first to a reduction in the disability pension, and, with time, to income tax payments.

Michelle has clear plans and family support to undertake a 4-year teaching degree at university, and once she reaches the age of 26, her income tax payments will have outweighed the ABSTUDY she received. From then onwards, her income tax payments are benefits to the community that would not have happened, or would have been smaller without the ISP. Emma is progressing well through TAFE aiming for a university degree, and only three years in the job will pay for all the Youth Allowance received. Frank will be eligible for Youth Allowance during his apprenticeship, but paying taxes throughout the apprenticeship and subsequent employment in his trade will ensure that by the time he is 25 years old he will have paid over $7,000 more in taxes than he received in Youth Allowance. Ricky has not stopped offending yet, but the ISP has helped his family back onto a calmer track, so that his mother thinks some of his late father’s friends in the construction industry will still be willing to lend a hand and take him on as an apprentice bricklayer. Economically this means that Ricky will make by far the biggest contribution in terms of income tax payments of almost $35,000 until he turns 25, without considering the sizeable penalty rates common in his industry. In addition, the fact that he will have regular work and income in an environment where his colleagues and bosses will be looking out for him is one of the biggest protective factors that make it likely that he will also develop a desister identity.

All four of these young people, Michelle, Emma, Frank and Ricky, are training in fields where there is a shortage of well-qualified people, making it very likely that they will all secure full-time employment. Jacob, on the other hand, is not likely to go beyond the absolute minimum in terms of schooling, and will need to start out in part-time menial jobs. But given his particular circumstances, he is unlikely to re-offend, and in the longer term he is likely to find
more permanent employment, though this is likely to be at or just above the minimum wage. Nevertheless, assuming a full-time job at minimum wage from age 20 to 25, he will return to the community some $17,000 in income tax payments.

These are just some illustrations of intra-trajectory comparisons for education and employment within actual trajectories of some of the young people in our cohort, focussing on education and employment. They highlight how a lengthening of the timeframe considered in an intra-trajectory comparison of the actual trajectory will increase the likelihood that the community will benefit from the young person being part of the ISP – provided he or she can use the time with the ISP to co-create a desister identity for themselves. What the detailed analysis of the economics of selected interviews shows is that many of the factors that make it more likely that the young person can co-create a desister identity, either during the ISP or over subsequent months and years, are similar factors that make it more likely that he or she can contribute more back to the community.

Inter-trajectory comparisons

Inter-trajectory comparisons between the actual and the alternative trajectories are interesting too. While many of the alternative trajectories do not lead to a hardened criminal identity and quite some of the young people can reasonably be expected to develop a desistance identity over time for a variety of reasons, the economic picture is very different from that in the actual trajectory.

One of the reasons for this lies in the relationship between the current tax-free threshold of $18,200 per year (or roughly $350 per week) and the 2013–2014 national minimum wage of $640.90 per week (or $801.13 including the minimum 25% casual loading). In short, this means that in a casual position at the national minimum wage one has to work more than 45% of the year at 38 hours per week, or every week of the year for at least 17 hours per week, to become liable for taxes. In a permanent part-time position one has to work more than 21 hours per week for the whole year. This means that in many of the alternative trajectories the young person’s income will be below the tax threshold – so even when they are not re-offending, in economic terms they will simply not earn enough to start contributing to the community through their income tax payments if they are not in regular, continuous employment. As we have discussed before, education and training are among the most important factors in securing regular, continuous employment and with it a desistance identity – but they are also the most important criteria in an economic analysis of the ISP, beyond their importance for the development of a desistance identity discussed in Part A.

The other reason why the two trajectories are so different in terms of the economic picture lies in the fact that the actual trajectory tends to increase the economic contribution the young person makes to the community, while the alternative trajectory does not. This makes inter-trajectory comparisons show stark contrasts that increase over time, even though we were very cautious in assuming steep careers in the actual trajectories and very optimistic in our assumptions for the alternative trajectories.

The entry-level weekly wages for the occupations we considered ranged from $656.90 for butchers, $721.50 for hairdressers or $690.40 for builders (with varying penalty rates) to $895.52 for 4-year trained teachers. The minimum wage for apprentices who had not completed Year 12 started at 50% of these amounts, but we started at 55% for those who had

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4 These are the rates in place until 30 June 2015. As of 1 July the rates have been increased:
The national minimum wage is currently $17.29 per hour or $656.90 per 38 hour week (before tax).
Casual employees covered by the national minimum wage also get at least a 25 per cent casual loading.
(www.fairwork.gov.au)
completed Year 12. As mentioned above, many of the young people were eligible for Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY while in training. An inter-trajectory comparison of social benefits received during education and income tax paid during employment from the time of the ISP until the young person reaches the age of 25 provides a picture that is at first confusing: it ranges from $187,952 in favour of the actual trajectory to $15,517 in favour of the alternative trajectory!

The first thing to consider is the timeframe. Particularly in cases where the young person is undertaking tertiary studies and receives Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY, the person may need to be over 25 years old for the overall income tax payments to outweigh the allowances received during the study years. This is the case for Michelle and Emma and also for Warren, who in the actual scenario, up to 25 years of age, receives $15,517 more social benefits than he pays in taxes, while in the alternative scenario undertakes neither further studies nor an apprenticeship, yet also does not earn enough from occasional work to pay taxes. So while at first glance these alternative trajectories look economically more beneficial for the community, as soon as the timeframe is extended, the inter-trajectory comparisons for Michelle, Emma and Warren look better, as their income and thus income tax contributions will increase over time, and very quickly outweigh the social benefits they have received. In fact, it would appear that for those young people interviewed who undertake tertiary studies, the ‘tipping point’ is around the age of 26 or 27 years.

Interestingly enough, the biggest difference for this inter-trajectory comparison in favour of the actual trajectory, economically speaking, refers to a young woman who is also likely to desist in the alternative trajectory. However, in her case one of the key factors in her desistance is the likelihood that she will have an early pregnancy. While childbirth is a strong protective factor for young offenders and one of the key factors mentioned in the desistance literature, the circumstances of motherhood require a whole range of support from the community, mainly through social benefit payments for which this woman will be eligible. So while this young person can reasonably be assumed to desist without the ISP, economically speaking it is much more beneficial for the community for her to receive support from the ISP, get an education, and have children when she is settled and can care and pay for them herself.

Another interesting case is Ricky, who will be working in the construction industry, where his late father was well connected. Even though we assumed he works only the two years when he is 23 and 24 years old as full-time labourer, while over the previous years his part-time work stays below the tax threshold, he still contributes almost $7,000 in taxes and does not receive any social benefits, which leaves an inter-trajectory difference of some $28,000.

Partial Analysis: Families and Siblings

In keeping with the webs of relationships we established based on the interviews, we now have to include at least the most relevant other family members, regarding offending and regarding education and employment. There were a number of cases where the clinician worked directly with siblings to support them through acute crises at the time, but more often siblings benefited more indirectly, from better parenting, from an overall calmer home, or from a better role model in the young person working towards a desister identity.

While younger siblings in particular will benefit from better parental support to stay in school for longer and thus have better employment prospects, we have only included siblings and carers in the trajectories where the interviews provided specific information, where this

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5 All the awards used are referenced in the literature list below.
information could be validated from other parts in the interviews, and where the changes were relatively close in time. In line with such a cautious approach we have also not assumed any sibling offending in any of the alternative trajectories, as none of the interviews have provided specific information in this regard6.

**Intra-trajectory comparisons**

As for the young people themselves, for their siblings the intra-trajectory comparisons regarding education and employment depend highly on the timeframe chosen. This holds for both the length of time considered and the age of the sibling within this timeframe. If older siblings return to TAFE to complete Year 12 and then start an apprenticeship, they will have had less time to pay income tax from a job for which they are qualified, if the analysis stops when the younger sibling turns 25. Similarly, younger siblings who first have to finish their regular schooling may not yet have completed their apprenticeship, or may have had only one or two years to contribute income tax by the time their older sibling turns 25.

However, even if the siblings are eligible for social benefits during their studies or apprenticeships, their income tax contributions will, over time, become significantly higher than the social benefit payments they received. The same holds for carers who the ISP enabled to return to work or to complete education or training. When considering only the timeframe until the young person turns 25, the actual intra-trajectory net contributions by carers and siblings ranged from $-9,443 in the case of Warren’s brother, to $38,072 for Frank’s sister and mother, and to over $100,000 for Ricky’s mother and brother. Again, in all these cases a longer timeframe will improve the figures.

A case that we didn’t cost in dollar terms but would like to mention is Steve’s carer, his grandmother, who was supported in working towards her own goal of becoming a registered foster carer for the time when Steve will no longer need so much of her attention. Given the lack of foster carers in NSW, one more child that can be put in foster care as opposed to a residential placement will save the community a significant amount of money.

**Inter-trajectory comparisons**

Comparing the two trajectories for each family, economically the case of Frank stands out. The ISP clinician indirectly supported Frank’s older sister, who at the time was self-harming and suicidal, by supporting their mother in dealing with the sister and her issues. Considering that the sister was well on her way to successfully completing Year 10 at the time of interview and had firm plans to undertake a beautician’s course at TAFE, we included her in the calculations. The interview indicated in different contexts that without the support from the ISP clinician the mother would not have been able to support the sister enough that she could stay at school. Hence we included her in the alternative trajectory as on Youth Allowance and Newstart Allowance except for the year when she is 20, and again from 25 onwards (in no trajectory does she reach the tax threshold).

While such a scenario is by no means exceptional, it highlights very clearly the economic benefits of supporting a family so that siblings can finish school and undertake some training that helps them find paid employment. Inclusive of four years of Youth Allowance while undertaking an apprenticeship as a beautician, by the time Frank turns 25, his older sister will have contributed back to the community $6,387 in the actual trajectory, while in the alternative one she will have received social benefits to the tune of $67,257 without having made any income tax payments. This is a cautious scenario insofar as it does not include any further costs due to the sister’s mental ill health.

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6 Sibling offending was investigated by Dopp and colleagues (2014) and by Wagner and colleagues (2014) as follow-up research to the Missouri Delinquency Project.
Ricky’s family’s case highlights one of the key reasons why it is important to undertake both intra-trajectory and inter-trajectory comparisons. We saw in the intra-trajectory analysis of the actual case that by the time Ricky turns 25, his mother and brother will have contributed over $100,000 in income tax, a contribution enabled by the support they got from the ISP. So what would this contribution have been without the ISP? It would have been $58,353, which in an inter-trajectory comparison shows a $43,730 difference between the two trajectories.

So, while the case of Frank’s family stands out in the inter-trajectory comparison with a difference between the two trajectories of over $100,000, Ricky’s family stands out in the intra-trajectory comparison of the actual case, where the family actually contributes over $100,000 in income tax. In the other cases, the differences for the contribution of siblings and other family members range from $10,000 to $15,000 for the time until the young person turns 25, but again, a lengthening of the timeframe would increase this figure significantly.

**Putting the Pieces Together: The Overall Economic Picture**

Looking at the overall balances between the economic costs and benefits of the ISP considered here, there is a wide range of results depending on the individual situation of each family.

Considering first the overall balances for the actual trajectories, we find that they range from an overall amount of $171,912 dollars spent on Steve, $28,974 spent on Jacob and $21,736 spent on Emma, to $4,937 saved in the case of Michelle, $28,430 saved in the case of Frank, and $97,975 saved in the case of Ricky – by the time each of them turns 25. However, looking at the different families and their situations makes it evident that it is more important to consider where these costs and benefits are heading – in all cases the balance swings towards more savings and less spending as the time goes on, be it due to disability pension payments reducing as income increases, or income tax payments making up for Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY payments received, or income tax payments increasing with advancements of careers.

Secondly, we have been optimistic in our assumptions of what the young people and their families would achieve without the ISP in the alternative trajectories, which means a cautious assessment of the benefits due to the ISP. The costs to the community we considered by the time the young people were 25 years old amounted to $119,018 in the case of Warren, who in the alternative trajectory would not be able to comply with the conditions to access Youth Allowance or Newstart, and thus would cost the community comparatively little. At the other end of the spectrum was Steve with $510,607, who would have to rely on the full disability pension and support for his mental health issues. But more importantly again, these costs are all rising as the young people grow older.

Thirdly, we can compare for each family the overall balance for their actual trajectory with the overall balance for their alternative trajectory without the ISP. The difference between the two trajectories amounts to $70,650 for Warren’s family at one end of the range, and to $451,028 for Frank’s family at the other end. Again, these differences will grow larger as time passes. This holds true not only in cases where continued offending leads to more public expenses on

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7 While this is by far the largest figure, it needs to be seen in the context of the fact that we did not consider the economic benefit to the community from Steve’s grandmother becoming a foster carer. We did not do this because calculating this particular economic benefit to the community is more complicated than calculating the expected income tax payments. Foster carers are volunteers who are not paid a wage but who receive some compensation for their expenses in raising the child. Calculating the alternative costs to the community, in the absence of what economists call ‘replacement costs’ of housing children in orphanages, would require a wide range of economic assumptions, which we were not prepared to make.
juvenile justice and, later, corrective services, let alone to increasing costs caused by the offences themselves. Somewhat surprisingly this increase in the difference between the two trajectories also holds true in cases where the juvenile offenders ‘grow out’ of offending without the interventions of the ISP. This is due first and foremost to the fact that the ISP enables the young people and their families to make increasingly more meaningful and, at least in all cases we investigated, economically significant contributions to the community as time goes on.

**Conclusions from this Economic Analysis**

This is a qualitative study that analysed the economic information in interviews with the families of 24 juvenile offenders, who received the ISP between one and three years prior to the interviews. Wherever possible we triangulated economic information from different parts of the interviews and with other information available.

Much could be done to refine the economic values we have used here, ranging from using the actual costs of the ISP rather than the average costs of all community-based youth justice services in NSW, to using marginal rather than average costs, or using advanced discounting techniques and predictions of cost and wage increases. These are just some of the techniques commonly used in mainstream economic analyses that are based on large sample sizes and randomised control trials. However, these techniques lose their relevance once rich qualitative economic information that relates to particular cases is investigated – an epistemological perspective that is still in its infancy in economic analyses.

It is therefore important to highlight the kind of conclusion that can be drawn from the type of economic analysis presented here, as the role of the actual dollar values reported here is fundamentally different from the role of dollar values arrived at from large scale randomised control trials. In the current analysis the importance of a particular dollar value derives from its size in comparison to the size of related values, from its development over time, and from the factors that influence its size and development.

Once this difference is clearly understood, the findings from our economic investigations are very strong indeed:

The ISP is a very good investment of public resources because in all cases the program pays for itself, sooner or later, including in cases where the young people have not, or have not yet, developed a desister identity.

This can be illustrated well by Ricky’s case, for which we have calculated a difference of $255,437 between the two trajectories, a difference that lies in between the two extremes of $119,018 and $510,607. Even though Ricky could be seen as a ‘failure’ of the ISP as he is not, or is not yet, a desister, and we have accordingly assumed that he will continue to offend until he turns 25 in both trajectories, the ISP is still over $250,000 cheaper when compared with no ISP. ISP intervention provides savings to the tune of almost $100,000 in the actual trajectory, which considers the impact of the ISP.
Composite Case Study: Gordon

Gordon and his family are not based on any one case but are a composite of a number of families interviewed as part of the ISP research. A composite case study is presented in this way to enable us to provide a full and detailed account of the impact of the ISP, without jeopardising the confidentiality of any of the families interviewed. We believe that presenting a case in this way is the best way of demonstrating the impact that the ISP has on the life of an individual and family and the transformative effect described by the families interviewed.

Before: The events leading up to the ISP

Gordon is now a 17-year-old young man and was 15 at the time that he received the Intensive Supervision Program. Gordon lives with his mother, Bridget, and younger sister, Ashlee, now 14. At the time the ISP commenced, Bridget worked as a clerical worker in a local hospital.

Gordon received the ISP for an offence of breaking and entering into a warehouse. Nothing was taken, but a large and expensive window in the warehouse was broken. This was Gordon’s first criminal conviction. He was detected by the burglar alarm in the warehouse and arrested at the scene. Gordon had been drinking before he committed the offence and when the police brought him home he spoke angrily and aggressively both to the arresting officers and to his mother. The sentencer told Gordon that when she read the court papers she had been considering a custodial sentence, but that she was impressed by Bridget’s support for him and her attitude in court so she was going to give him one last chance. She told Gordon that if he ever appeared in court again he would be sent to custody.

Although this was Gordon’s first court conviction, his behaviour at home, school and in the community had been causing increasing concern over the previous months. His school was very near home and he left every day, on time and in his uniform, but Bridget had recently discovered that he had not been attending, missing all or part of most days to socialise with friends who were either doing something similar or had been excluded from school. Some of those friends were involved in low-level offending, particularly shoplifting, and Bridget was concerned that Gordon was engaged in similar behaviour as well as drinking alcohol and taking drugs. Gordon admits that he was drinking alcohol but denies any involvement in drug-taking or shoplifting. At the start of the ISP, Gordon had no particular hobbies or interests. He had previously enjoyed canoeing, occasionally travelling to the river with his father, but no longer participated in any sport due to the change in his group of friends and the fact that he now saw less of his father. Gordon spent a lot of time in his bedroom, playing computer games.

Gordon’s sister, Ashlee, has not caused any difficulties at home or in the community and is making good progress at school in attendance, behaviour and achievement. However, she looks up to her elder brother and has been colluding with him to keep his behaviour a secret from their mother. Bridget is concerned that if Gordon’s behaviour is not addressed then Ashlee will repeat his pattern. Bridget is also very self-critical of her own role. She feels that a ‘good mother’ would have noticed if her son was not attending school and was drinking alcohol during the day. Bridget is extremely committed to both her children but admits that, particularly since his father left home, she has found it very difficult to find effective strategies to manage the behaviour of a growing teenager. As Gordon got older she gave him increasing autonomy to come and go as he pleased and she now thinks this was a mistake.

Gordon’s father, Dan, lives in a neighbouring town with his new partner and her two younger teenage children. Dan is an Aboriginal man (Bridget identifies as white Australian) and Gordon is very proud of his Aboriginal identity. Dan has had quite a limited involvement in Gordon’s
life since he separated from Bridget three years ago, meeting up with both his children once or twice a month. He was horrified to hear of Gordon’s involvement in offending and of the other behaviour that led up to it, and he is now committed to supporting his son in any way required.

The Intensive Supervision Program
Bridget received a phone call from Chloe in the days following Gordon’s court case. Although she had been relieved that Gordon had not received a custodial sentence, she was feeling worried about how she could begin to address his difficult behaviour. The phone call from the ISP was a welcome surprise and she agreed to a visit in the next few days.

During the initial visit Chloe explained that she would be working primarily with Bridget to help her guide Gordon back to a path of non-offending. She visited Bridget twice a week for the following five months and they developed quite a strong bond. Bridget spoke about how supported she felt by Chloe and how helpful she found the strategies that Chloe introduced (‘strategies’ is a word that Bridget used several times during the interview).

Chloe didn’t waste any time getting started and within two weeks she had organised a meeting at Gordon’s school. During the meeting Bridget, Chloe and Gordon learned that Gordon had missed a significant amount of schooling and that the Principal would not agree to him moving on to Year 10 the following year, insisting that he repeat Year 9. Gordon became extremely angry in the meeting and the Principal suggested that he might prefer to find another school. All three left the meeting believing that the school did not want Gordon to return, and that he would be unsupported by staff if he did. Chloe and Bridget began to explore other options.

During this time Chloe also developed a behaviour plan with Bridget and explained the importance of having clear rules and consequences. At first Bridget thought making a ‘rules chart’ for the fridge was a silly idea: Gordon was 15 and rules charts were for 5-year-olds. Despite her reservations she found herself hoping that the chart would work after they had developed it. Chloe helped Bridget to explain the contract to Gordon, who didn’t complain nearly as much as Bridget anticipated.

The introduction of the rules chart coincided with Gordon starting school in the same town that his father lived in. The contract required Gordon to attend school all day every day in return for his weekly phone credit. He felt embarrassed about telling his friends he didn’t have credit and as soon as he realised there was no other way to attain it (Chloe kept impressing on Bridget the importance of not giving in, and she even visited daily for a while when it was first introduced), he stopped fighting and started attending school. Chloe and Bridget felt that the ‘phone credit’ reward gave Gordon an extra incentive to engage with his new school, and that the new school freed him from the negative reputation he had developed in his previous one. The two interventions complemented each other nicely. In addition to this, without the usual arguments about going to school each morning everyone seemed to be in a better mood; there was more room for nice – even fun – interactions within the home.

Bridget valued Chloe’s acceptance and non-judgemental advice in relation to whatever problem she raised with her. During the time that they worked together Ashlee had a fallout with her friendship group and became so distressed that she scratched her arms with a pair of scissors. Bridget explained that this was just one of the many dilemmas that Chloe supported her through during the five months. She said that Chloe always had good advice and nothing was too much trouble – it really felt like she had someone to lean on for the first time since Dan left.
It’s like having a partner that you can discuss things with just to check that you are on the right track.

Chloe was very active in her efforts to include Dan in the ISP process. In the past he had felt that Bridget was exaggerating about how bad things were with Gordon and he hadn’t really taken much notice. After the court case he felt a bit guilty about not providing more support to the children. He appreciated Chloe’s openness and the fact that she didn’t seem to view him as the ‘baddie’. Dan had thought that the kids would be fine as long as they knew he was around, and that he didn’t really need to be there every week for them. Chloe helped him to see that his role was important, and that if he wanted his children to feel his love, he had to show it to them in tangible ways. He was surprised at how different his parenting responsibilities felt, especially when Gordon changed schools and started to spend more time at his home. Dan felt good about the changes in his relationships with his children and listened to Chloe’s advice. Chloe introduced Dan to Paul, the Aboriginal Team Advisor. Together they stressed the importance of Gordon having things to do that would keep him busy and away from his troublesome friends. Dan and Paul formed a connection quickly. Paul was also a fan of water sports and after learning about their past canoeing he helped to introduce Gordon to the sport of rowing. Paul helped in practical ways as well. He picked Gordon up from school and took him to the rowing club the first few times until Gordon started to make friends and was motivated to find his own way there. The rowing club was in the same town as the school and on training nights Gordon agreed to stay with his dad, although his ‘home base’ continued to be at his mum’s house.

By the end of the five months Gordon was settled at a new school and had established a new routine. Although things were not completely perfect Bridget was able to look toward the future with a sense of hope, rather than of dread.

After
Gordon and Bridget were interviewed 18 months after the ISP intervention. They both described a home that was characterised by arguments and tension before the ISP, however the home experienced by the interviewer appeared to include a good measure of warmth and positive regard for each other. There was humour during the interview and the level of worry that Bridget referred to a few years earlier was noticeably absent.

Bridget was extremely positive about the influence of the ISP on her parenting and on the life of her family. She said that at the time of the court appearance she was in despair, felt isolated and had run out of ideas as to how to respond to Gordon’s behaviour. She said that she had considered giving up her job so that she could be home more but couldn’t see any way in which she could afford to do that.

Bridget was particularly positive about Chloe’s role. She said that Chloe was encouraging and non-judgmental and made her feel that she was coping admirably with a very difficult situation. Chloe’s experience in similar cases made Bridget feel that Gordon’s behaviour was not as irredeemably bad as she had initially feared and that her response as a mother was not so unusual. She said that there were a number of factors that have contributed to the change she has seen in Gordon in the last two years but she sees Chloe’s work as a turning point, both in teaching her parenting strategies and in giving her the strength to implement them. Bridget is still working in the same office but has recently received a promotion to a more senior administrative role. She says that Gordon’s improved behaviour, and the confidence she now feels in being able to be out of the house for longer periods, enabled her to be successful in her promotion application.
Gordon has continued at the school that Chloe negotiated for him and is now planning to take a TAFE course in tourism. He remains unclear about what work he wants to do and has followed his father’s advice in choosing this course, as he thought it might suit his personality and other interests. He will attend a local TAFE, near a water sports centre, so he can pursue his rowing hobby. He has found a job in a local fast food restaurant and is enjoying the freedom that comes with earning his own money. Gordon continues to split his time between his mother’s and his father’s homes and has a good relationship with both of them. His friendship group is drawn from those young people at his new school who share his interest in water sports, and there is no excessive drinking or drug-taking behaviour in that group. Gordon’s part-time job keeps him busy most evenings, reducing the opportunity for any anti-social behaviour or associations. Gordon feels, rightly, that he should personally take most of the credit for the positive change in his life, but he says that he enjoyed working with Chloe and Paul and that they did help him. Gordon has not reoffended since receiving the ISP.

Ashlee, now 14, has continued to do well at school and her relationship with both her mother and her father has improved following the ISP. Bridget says that Ashlee is approaching the age that Gordon was when he started getting into trouble, but she sees no signs of similar concerns with Ashlee. Bridget says that although she puts some of this down to her own clearer parenting strategies, she sees Gordon’s change of attitude also as a factor. Ashlee continues to look up to her brother and now can see him thrive in education and employment and can be encouraged to do the same.

Dan also speaks positively about the ISP and how it helped him to reconnect in a new way with his children and to take his parenting responsibilities seriously. He also now has a friendly and respectful relationship with Bridget and says that he will occasionally phone her to ask advice – based on what Chloe taught – on how to manage the behaviour of his step-children. He has become more flexible in relation to the step-children’s father and facilitating them spending time together. This seems to have contributed to more harmony in his own home in a way that he had not anticipated. Dan has realised that he is able to influence many parts of his life by changing his behaviour in a positive way. He had not been able to make this link as clearly before the ISP.
Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout this report it has been our aim to give voice to the families’ narratives around their experience of the ISP program, along with a considered analysis of how this translates in economic terms. We are confident that we have achieved this aim. The impact of the ISP on the young people and their families is an extremely positive one. In many instances, the program has been a significant factor in supporting young people to move away from offending and reduce or stop drug and alcohol use. Although the following paragraphs focus on the impact that the ISP has on the lives of young people and families, it is important to emphasise that preventing future offending also brings significant positive benefit to the wider community, in preventing future victimisation. While the impact on offending is very commendable, and is a clear objective of the ISP, some of the program’s other outcomes are as impressive, particularly in the area of education and employment and in family life.

Generally, when a young person has committed offences, experienced (and partly caused) the breakdown of family relationships and has been suspended or excluded from school then it is rare to see a return to full-time education. So in that context, the work of the ISP in supporting or rebuilding relationships with educational providers has been incredibly important in transforming the lives of young people. This also has a measurable economic benefit. Where the ISP approach is particularly impressive is in being able to work both with the young person directly (through the provision of support to the family) and within the wider context. It was a common pattern in the group we interviewed that the young person would return to education or employment, but not to the same school where they had previously attended. The ISP clinician could facilitate an educational or employment outcome that fitted in with the young person’s own personal qualities and aspirations for their life. The ability to place the young person on a path to future employment was perhaps the single most significant factor in the economic analysis and the positive trajectory that could be drawn. The forecast of the lives of the young people is changed from someone who might drain state resources (through the costs of prison sentences and other criminal justice processes) to someone who might contribute to society both by paying taxes and by the actual work that they do.

The ISP transformed the family lives of those who received the program. ISP clinicians worked with caregivers – in most instances, most of the work was with mothers – to support them to support young people in desistance. However, they also treated the mothers as clients in their own right and worked with the family as a whole. In interview after interview, mothers and other caregivers spoke of the transformative effect of the ISP on them and on their families. On four occasions, mothers gave credit to the ISP for saving their own lives; another said that prior to the ISP she had feared for the life of her son. Mothers often bear the burden of their sons’ offending and can sometimes experience the criminal justice system as an intervention that makes a bad situation worse. Carrying out interviews many months after the completion of the ISP allowed us to see that the program had an ongoing impact both in providing confidence and support and in teaching parents and caregivers skills that they continued to use in parenting all their children. The skill and commitment of the clinicians in working with Aboriginal families and young people is of particular note. Aboriginal young people are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system and are often poorly served by the services provided, but those families who identify as Aboriginal spoke highly of the engagement, commitment and cultural sensitivity of the clinicians. This applied equally to those families from other cultural groups. The impact on families also brought a strong economic benefit, allowing parents and caregivers, in some instances, to find work, pursue their careers or take on the care of another foster child. Younger siblings experienced better parenting as well as seeing an older brother or sister transformed from a negative role model to
a positive one. This had a significant impact on the future trajectory of the lives of these younger siblings.

As our modelling shows, the economic impact of the ISP on the lives of young people and families is dramatic. These young people are defined as high-risk offenders and could go through their teenage years committing further offences and spending their time in and out of custody and subject to a series of community sentences. This future offending would also negatively impact on families that they might have. The ISP has changed this trajectory, so, in economic terms, they are net contributors to society rather than taking from it. Our modelling shows this change in trajectory for a majority of the young people, demonstrating a significant economic impact. However, even if a smaller number of young people make this successful change, or their lives without the ISP would not have been as dire as we have predicted, there is a strong economic argument in favour of the ISP on the basis of the change that it can make to the life of any one individual.

The desistance framework, and the promotion of good lives, is a particularly useful way to consider the impact of the ISP. Desistance approaches emphasise the importance of co-production and of working with people to help them to achieve their own goals and objectives, and this is at the heart of the ISP. To truly meet the definition of being a desister, a former offender needs to take on a new identity and to no longer see himself or herself as an offender. The values of the ISP are entirely consistent with that approach: from the start the young people and families are treated in the context of the lives as a whole, not judged or written off because of their offending behaviour. The ISP does not claim to be magic solution that miraculously causes offending to cease, it builds a new structure and context to the lives of young people allowing sustained change over time. Desistance researchers ask ‘what helps’, rather than ‘what works’ and there is no doubt that the ISP is a help to the young people and families who receive it.

**Future Research Ideas**

The ISP has been much researched, particularly in the USA, but this qualitative study brings a new approach, allowing the stories of the young people involved to be told. It is hoped that this research will be read in the context of other research that has been carried out or is currently in progress, providing a rounded picture not just of whether the ISP is successful but of how and why it is effective. The findings of this research do present some possibilities for future research projects:

- Firstly, and most obviously, a follow-up longitudinal study following the lives of the young people and families in this research project would be of great benefit. We have predicted change for them and, in most cases, suggested that they can expect a positive future, but a follow-up study in two years’ or five years’ time, and possibly beyond that again, would reveal whether this optimism was justified. Will the young people on a path to desistance succeed in their aim to stay away from offending? Will the young people for whom we are still concerned about their offending or their substance use come to learn the lessons from the ISP at a later stage in their lives? Will the mothers and other caregivers who have learned and demonstrated new parenting skills continue to be successful in implementing them, particularly with younger siblings? Will the impact of this different approach to parenting be seen in the lives of the younger siblings over the longer term? A longitudinal study would also allow the economic analysis to be strongly grounded in the reality of what actually happens in the lives of the participants.
- A second idea for further research would be to focus further on the mothers of the young people. Mothers carry the burden both of young people’s offending and of supporting them in desistance, and they receive little support from the formal criminal justice system, or anyone else, in this work. Of the mothers interviewed in this research study, ten referred to their deteriorating mental health and four credited the ISP with their survival. The findings from this study show a very positive response to the ISP and future research could consider whether a similar positive response is achieved from any other criminal justice interventions and whether there is any correlation between the response of mothers to the approach taken with them and the future offending behaviour of their children. Another, related, area of research might be a more detailed study of the impact of interventions on the mothers as well as on the behaviour of their children.

- Thirdly, the economic analysis applied here could be applied to other juvenile justice interventions, both those based in custody and those in the community. Justice reinvestment is receiving increasing attention both in criminal justice academia and in wider policy discussions. The greater the amount of economic data that can be gathered, the more information will be able to be fed into these debates.

- Fourthly and finally, this project has been an innovative one in bringing together different disciplines in researching the same subject. To our knowledge, this is the first time that a research team of this nature has carried out research into juvenile justice in Australia. This interdisciplinary approach has been invaluable in bringing economic analysis to a criminological discussion and in providing the necessary qualitative data and criminal justice and social work expertise to an economic analysis. Future work of this sort would also be extremely beneficial in informing criminal justice debates in Australia. This joint approach could be brought to all areas of criminal justice interventions, both with young people and with adults, and both in the community and in custody.
Research Team

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Dr Heather Dalby

Dr Dalby is a Research Assistant working on this project. She has extensive experience as both a practitioner and a researcher with young people. Since June 2015, Dr Dalby has been a full-time employee of Juvenile Justice New South Wales.

Acknowledgements

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Most importantly, we thank the young people, parents, caregivers and workers who gave up their time to be interviewed for the project.
References


Offender Rehabilitation: An evidence-based approach to assessment and treatment, New York: Wiley


## Appendix A: Information Timeframe

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Timeframe</th>
<th>Actual Past</th>
<th>Actual ISP</th>
<th>Actual Present to end 2014</th>
<th>Future</th>
<th>Alternative Past &amp; Present from start ISP to end 2014</th>
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Appendix B: Details of Young People and their Families

Ben, 18  Lives at home with his mother Rachel, step-father Thomas and three siblings. Is actively seeking work but not having any success

Billy, 15  Lives with his mother Jennifer and older siblings. He is attending Year 9 in a mainstream school

Bindy, 17  Not living at home with mother Louise, staying with an aunt. Has attempted TAFE courses. Was not working or studying at the time of interview

Bri, 16  Lives at home with her father Tony and one sibling. Attending TAFE part-time and looking for work

Cam, 18  Not living at home with mother Nicole and siblings. Living in a different town and working as a labourer. He continues to battle with a marijuana addiction

Danny, 17  Lives at home with his mother Di, father Trevor and four siblings. Is currently unemployed although he has worked in two different labouring roles

Edward, 17  Lives at home with his mother Michelle. Currently unemployed although he has worked in two different labouring roles

Emma, 17  Lives with her grandparents Kathy and Sean and attends a tertiary preparation course at TAFE

Erik, 17  Lives at home with his parents Bev and Garry, and two siblings. Has just finished the first year of an apprenticeship

Frank, 15  Lives at home with his mother Barbara and two siblings. Doing well in Year 9 at a behavioural school at the time of interview

Georgia, 17  Lives at home with her mother Mandy and younger sibling. Is working full-time in a coffee shop

Jacob, 15  Lives with his father Andrew and older brother. He continues to have contact with his mother and attends a behavioural school

Jason, 16  Lives with his father Greg and younger siblings. Is not attending school and is regularly using ice

Jim, 16  Lives out of home, moves regularly, currently staying with a friend while her mother is in ‘detox’. Not attending school or working

Kemp, 16  Lives at home with his parents Judy and Mark, and three siblings. Completing Year 11, then planning to leave school and look for work

Michelle, 16  Lives with her parents Stuart and Alison, and younger siblings. Attends Year 10 at a new and supportive high school
Nathan, 17  Lives with his parents Linda and Derrick, and two siblings. Left school to work part time for the second half of 2014, has realistic plans to do Year 12 at TAFE in 2015

Paul, 17  Lives with his parents Craig and Angela, and one sibling. Was completing Year 12 at the end of 2014

Pete, 18  Lives with his grandparents Gerry and Joanne. Receives a disability support pension and is seeking part-time or volunteer work

Ray, 16  Lives at home with his parents George and Daniella, and two siblings. Has tried several career paths and returned to TAFE to finish Year 10 at the end of 2014

Ricky, 16  Lives at home with his mother Jane and one sibling. Not attending school or working at the time of interview

Steve, 17  Lives with his grandmother Francis. Receives a disability support pension and is seeking part-time employment

Susan, 17  Lives with her grandparents Elsie and Len. Has returned to school and is completing Year 11

Warren, 15  Lives with his mother Bronwyn and younger siblings. Was hoping to move back to mainstream schooling in 2015
Appendix C: Interview Schedule: Parents and Caregivers

This is a semi-structured interview schedule so the questions should be treated as subject headings and prompts, not strictly worded questions. The exact wording used can vary to find the best way to gather the information from the respondents. The same schedule will be used for young people and for family members but the questions will be asked in the appropriate format. The Schedule designed for clinicians followed the same format, with the same subheadings.

Introduction

The information on the participant information sheet will be outlined to the interviewees, in plain language, emphasising the voluntary nature of their participation and the fact that information will also be sought from other sources – juvenile justice workers and educators.

Parents will be asked to consent to the participation of their child who is the centre of the ISP intervention as well as the participation of other siblings who are part of the young person’s daily life.

When consent has been obtained, information will be gathered under the following headings.

Introductory Question

This interview will be focussing on the Intensive Supervision Program and the difference it has made to your life and the life of your family. Could you please describe your experience of the ISP in a few sentences?

As well as the impact on the young person could you please identify any specific impact the program has had on your own life?

We will now move on to discuss specific areas of your life and the young person’s life where the ISP might have had an impact.

The ISP Itself

How did you first hear of the ISP program and why did you agree to participate?

Did you have particular expectations of the ISP program when you first heard of it? Did it meet those expectations?

What were the best aspects of the ISP program? What in particular brought positive benefit to the life of the young person and your family?

Offending

What was the young person’s offending record prior to the commencement of the program? (Include convictions, police contacts and general impression of behaviour. It will be useful to gather information both about the frequency and persistence of the offending and its seriousness.)

What is the young person’s offending record during and following the program? This will include formal charges and convictions but also your own impression of her behaviour. Have
there been any further convictions since the commencement of the program or are there any pending charges?

*(should remind participants at this stage that client files will be accessed so we’re more interested in general impressions rather than exact times, dates, offences etc.)*

**School and Education**

Was the young person attending school or in other formal education prior to the commencement of the program? What was his response to education? What level of education had she achieved?

Since the commencement of the program, has there been a change in the young person’s attendance at school? Has there been a change in achievement at school, including any change in school placement or type? Have there been any recent reports on behaviour at school and, if so, what did those reports say?

Does the young person like school? Has her attitude to education changed since the commencement of the ISP program?

If there has been a positive change in the young person’s attitude to education has that been matched by a positive response from the school/education authorities?

**Family**

Who is the young person’s family? Who lives in his/her house? Are there close family members (not necessarily blood relations) who are an important part of the young person’s life who do not live in his/her house?

Have there been any changes in relationships within the family since the commencement of the program? (These could be relationships with the young person herself but could also be other relationships, such as between partners or between caregivers and siblings.)

Has there been any change in your own behaviour since the commencement of the program? Please describe what this change has been.

Has there been any change in your lifestyle or the lifestyle of any of the family members, including their use of leisure time?

Has there been a change in the behaviour of the young person’s siblings since the commencement of the program? Please describe this change and suggest what might have been responsible for the change.

Has there been a change in the relationship between you and the young person’s younger siblings?

Have there been any obstacles to the positive changes that are being attempted in the life of the family? What have these been? Have they been overcome and, if so, how?

*(obstacles might include the attitude and expectations of others as well as more practical obstacles, such as attempts to find employment not being matched by employment opportunities)*
Friends and Peers

Prior to the commencement of the ISP were some or all of the young person’s group of friends involved in offending?

Did many of the young person’s friends know that she was subject to an ISP?
How did they react?

Has there been any change in the young person’s group of friends and/or in his/her relationship to those friends?

*(the parents should be reassured that no names of the young person’s friends will appear in the final report and we do not even need to be told the names of her friends)*

Other Aspects of Young Person’s Life

How would you describe the young person’s day to day life prior to the commencement of the program? (think of weekdays, evenings and weekends)

Has there been any material change in other aspects of the young person’s life, including place of residence, employment status, pregnancy, childbirth, fatherhood or relationship to any children?

Does the young person drink alcohol or use drugs? Would you say that s/he drinks alcohol or uses drugs more or less often now than s/he did when you started the ISP?

Final Question

Is there anything else that you would like to add about either your experience of the ISP program or about changes in your life over the time of the program?

I mentioned at the start that I will be interviewing the young person’s youth justice workers and someone connected with his education. Is there anyone else who you think it might be useful for me to talk to about your experience of the ISP program?