

Chapter Nine

Evaluation and Crime Prevention

9.1 Introduction

If governments do not spend enough on crime prevention, one reason may be that they do not believe it works. United Kingdom expert Jon Bright writes about the common myth that prevention is too “soft” for a problem as “hard” as crime,¹ and speculates that many policymakers privately hold this view.

Empirically based evaluations which are well designed, properly resourced and follow the scientific method are able to rebut this myth. There is enough evidence from overseas, the United States in particular, to provide persuasive argument that crime prevention through social support can be more effective over the long term than more punitive law and order measures.

Like the Parliament of Western Australia’s Select Crime Prevention Committee² this committee has found very few local evaluations of the standard of the United States research. The committee is concerned that the local evidence needs to be developed and more thorough evaluation encouraged in New South Wales. Those evaluations that have been conducted provide useful information and data, and it is time to build on these in a more systematic way.

In this chapter the committee will examine what is meant by evaluation, because the term itself is often used to mean very different things. The chapter will focus on outcome evaluations, because this is the type of evaluation that most needs to be encouraged in New South Wales. The committee will then examine the major overseas outcome evaluations. Finally, some preliminary suggestions as to how evaluation may be encouraged in New South Wales crime prevention are examined together with a review of the recommendations in this report that are relevant to evaluation.

The committee cautions against anyone seeing evaluation as an end itself. It does not believe that the only barrier for governments to invest more in prevention by social support is the lack of empirically based evaluations. However, better information will assist those who argue for prevention to

¹ *Turning the Tide* 1997 p 26.

² First Report June 1999 p 32.

be more persuasive in political debates over how scarce public funds should be spent.

9.2 Types of evaluation

Evaluation has many different meanings. To some in the community sector “evaluation” is a dangerous word: funding agencies use it when deciding whether to wind up a program. To those in government agencies it can be a routine step, part of the process a project has to pass through whether the evaluation is needed or not. Academics argue fiercely about the methods of evaluation while decision makers often ignore even the best evaluations.

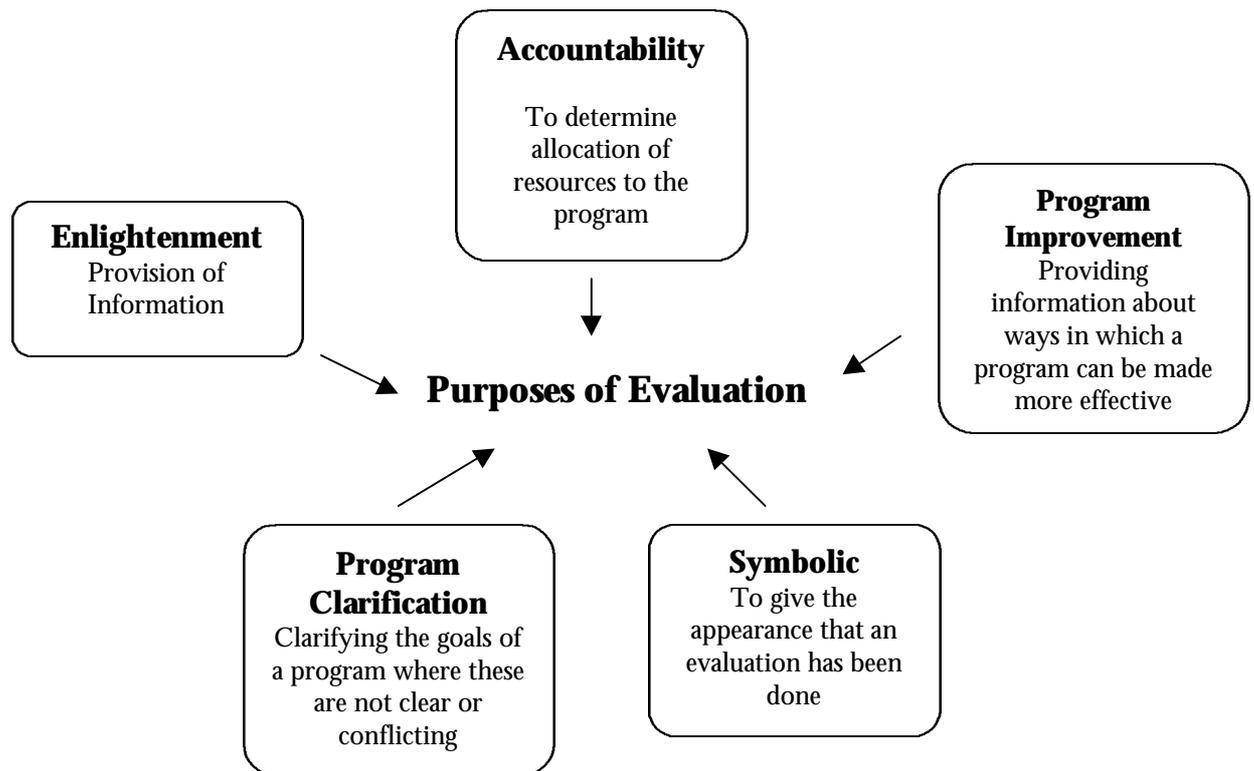
Evaluation is a process of obtaining information designed to assist decision making about the program being evaluated.³ There is no one “right” way of carrying out an evaluation, despite the way it is sometimes presented. For instance, it is commonly believed that a valid evaluation must be undertaken by an individual or group detached from those operating the program. For certain purposes this is desirable. However, there is a major body of work which now argues that those evaluations which have most effect on the program are those which are either conducted by those operating it or jointly with an outsider facilitating “insiders” to reflect on their program.⁴

To consider evaluation then, the first question to be asked is *for what purpose* is the evaluation being undertaken? Is it to demonstrate that the program has had an impact on reducing crime? Is it for the funding agency to know whether the project is cost effective, that the benefits in reducing crime are exceeding the costs of the program? Is it for the people operating the program (or those it is directed to) to discover how they can improve the program? Owen⁵ has suggested the main purposes of evaluation are as follows:

³ Definition based upon that used by Owen J in *Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches* 1993 p3 Allen and Unwin.

⁴ Fetterman D Kaftarian and Wandersman(eds) *Empowerment Evaluation* (1996) Sage Publications; Guba and Lincoln “Countenances of fourth-generation evaluation” in Palumbo D (ed) *The Politics of Program Evaluation* (1989) Sage Publications.

⁵ 1993, chapter 1.



The next question to be asked is “*What is being evaluated?*”

A simple classification is that evaluation can be of:

- need;
- process; or
- outcome.

To put these into a perspective within this report, the question with regard to the intellectually disabled could be put:

- Is crime prevention needed among the intellectually disabled, and specifically what is needed? (need)
- How have the aims of the program been implemented? (process)
- Has the program reduced the involvement of participants in crime, compared to their involvement prior to the program? How can this causal link be shown? (outcome)

With these examples the timing of the evaluation may differ: to evaluate “outcomes” the project must have been fully operational for sufficient time for results to be demonstrated, whereas to evaluate “need” the program may

not have begun. One type of evaluation may lead to another: if a program cannot be demonstrated to produce expected “outcomes” it would make sense to go back a step to examine whether this was because of the “process” used, or further back whether it is misplaced in its understanding of actual need.

EVALUATION TYPES

NEED ↔ **PROCESS** ↔ **OUTCOME**

Need

Evaluations of “need” are crucial for the design of programs, and for the re-design of programs that appear to be failing. In their preliminary stages they can be described as needs assessments; if a program is already underway or has been planned they are more clearly characterised as “design evaluations”⁶. Their validity depends upon considering as many of the stakeholders for the program as is feasible. For a crime prevention program aimed at the intellectually disabled it would be crucial to consult intellectually disabled persons and their carers as well as service providers, if conducting a needs assessment.

Process

“Process” evaluations can be relatively simple. If a program has clearly defined goals an evaluator can simply assess whether the strategies being pursued are logically connected to those goals. Process evaluation is very useful for finding out whether a program is being implemented as it was intended. The more complex the programs the more removed those who implement them are from the original design. The de-institutionalisation of the intellectually disabled may be an example where the implementation, in terms of providing support services, may differ over time from the original program.

There is a vast literature on the difficulties of implementation, perhaps best summed up by the full title of one of the earliest studies: *Implementation: How Grand Plans in Washington DC are bought crashing down in ... Oregon.*⁷ In terms of crime prevention Bright⁸ quotes fourteen possible reasons for programs failing, including:

- insufficient resources, including inadequate staffing levels;
- too large or small catchment area;

⁶ Owen J, *Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches* 1993, Chapters 9 & 10.

⁷ Pressman and Wildavsky 1973, Berkely.

⁸ *Turning the Tide* 1997, p 86.

- lack of focus/program drift;
- low client attendance and attrition;
- lack of monitoring;
- lack of support for volunteers; and
- inappropriate targets.

Bright stresses the importance of clear assignment of responsibility and accountability, and ensuring programs are delivered with sufficient resources to achieve their purpose.

Outcome

“Outcome” evaluations are sometimes also described as “impact evaluations”⁹. They ask the question “What difference did the program make?” At their best they provide essential information upon which policymakers can base their decisions.

Unfortunately “outcomes” is a very slippery concept. An evaluation can attempt to measure the difference the program made upon the participants, or the external environment. In crime prevention terms, crime statistics for the target group before the program and after can be compared. However, as seen in Chapter Three, crime statistics can fluctuate significantly and are very much influenced by the policing strategies used and may not give the full picture of actual crime. Further, to what extent can the changes be attributed to the program or to other changes in the external environment? There are also intangibles such as the fear of crime which are important outcomes not measured by crime statistics.

The committee’s visit to Moree provides an illustration of this dilemma. Figures for crime have declined rapidly since a series of crime prevention measures were introduced. However does this mean that the crimes committed have declined or simply that the police are responding differently? To what extent is the fall due to crime prevention initiatives or to other developments within the town? Is the decline just part of a statewide trend?

Another illustration was given by Professor Bob Walker at the committee’s 1998 conference:

if we present information about the incidence of child abuse, it is not possible to say that government interventions have actually changed things in that area. For a

⁹ Owen J, *Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches* 1993, Chapter 6.

start, we do not know what the number of incidents would be if there was no government interventions. There are so many other variables that it is quite a challenge to social science researchers to analyse phenomena, particularly in the short term.¹⁰

To address this dilemma evaluators could take a variety of approaches. These are explained below when discussing the report of Professor Sherman entitled *What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*. Generally, they have adopted what is termed the scientific or experimental method.¹¹

Cost benefit analysis

Cost benefit analysis is a particular form of evaluation of outcomes. It should be stressed that this is different from evaluating whether a project works. It involves a systematic identification of the benefits and costs of a program so as to establish whether it has been cost effective. There are five main steps:

1. Identifying inputs to a program, such as staff, physical facilities used etc
2. Assigning costs to those inputs.
3. Identifying benefits, such as reduced crime or improved family relationships.
4. Assigning costs to these benefits.
5. Comparing the costs and benefits as a ratio.

The fourth step is the critical point, because many benefits will be very difficult to measure or assign a cost. What value should be put to a benefit such as “the community feels safer than it did before” or “an individual has a more positive self image”? It is possible to assign values but it is often argued that there is an inherent bias in cost/benefit studies to understate benefits simply because benefits are harder to measure. The value of these studies, however, is that they can be used to argue to governments that allocation of funding to one program will provide better returns than allocation to another. The Rand Institute study (see below) provides a very persuasive argument to United States governments that certain types of early intervention programs will reduce crime at less cost than “three strikes and you’re out” policies.

Evaluation tools

Before discussing actual evaluations mention should be made of some of the tools able to be used by an evaluator:

¹⁰ Standing Committee on Law and Justice, *Proceedings of the Conference on Crime Prevention through Social Support*, Professor B Walker, p 121.

¹¹ There is an alternative approach which argues that it is artificial to treat communities as if they can be compared objectively, and that an approach subjectively grounded in the experience of each community is required; National Crime Prevention, *Pathways to Prevention* March 1999, pp 94-95.

- quantitative studies (surveys, statistical analysis);
- qualitative studies (focus groups, interviews);
- case studies (observations, field research); and
- performance indicators (data on targets set by management).

These are all valuable and will be useful to collect data in different contexts. All can be used in each of the three types of evaluations – need, process or outcome.

9.3 Overseas evaluations

At the conference to launch this inquiry the committee brought to Australia Professor Larry Sherman. Professor Sherman headed a group of experts who prepared for the United States Congress a report entitled: *Crime Prevention: What Works, What Doesn't; What's Promising*.¹² The title is very self explanatory. The report was aimed at resolving a dispute about how much money to spend on various crime prevention programs. To advise Congress the authors examined all the evaluations of various approaches to crime prevention, including law and order methods, to divide the approaches up into the three categories of the report's title.

However, to reach its conclusions the authors recognised that "evaluation" has many meanings and that not all were equally useful for their purposes. They found most evaluations were "process" orientated, useful for those running the program but of limited value for making nationwide generalisations. They chose to look at only those evaluations which had something to say about outcomes, and divided these into five levels of evidence as to what works, from least useful to most useful:

- *Level one* where a correlation exists between say, the introduction of heavier sentences and the rate of offending;
- *Level two* where a study is available which compares the position "before and after" the program was introduced with the "before and after" in another area where the program was not introduced;
- *Level three* where a study is available with a control group. This compares the impact of the program with a area of *similar characteristics* where the program was not introduced;

¹²

1997 National Institute of Justice USA.

- *Level four* where at least two studies of a level three type exist which reach similar conclusions; and
- *Level five* where the results using a control group have been reproduced many times in many different environments nationwide.

Sherman and his colleagues then gave values to all the evaluations of programs according to this hierarchy. To be classified as a project that “works” there had to be at least two *level three* studies available, that is outcome evaluations using control groups. Among the programs classified as “promising” there had to be at least one level three evaluation together with some other supporting evidence of lesser value. The result is a comprehensive list which provides an invaluable guide to Congress on where its crime prevention dollars can be most usefully spent.¹³

The other major overseas study goes one step further than the Sherman study in assigning costs and benefits to the programs and its outcomes. The Rand Institute study¹⁴ took nine highly regarded crime prevention programs that had been sufficiently well evaluated to identify benefits. After assigning values to these benefits and costs to the program inputs it then compared this with the costs and benefits of the “three strikes” law in California in reducing crime. As was seen in Chapter Six in regard to two early intervention programs, this Rand Institute study was able to demonstrate that many of the prevention programs had a higher cost/benefit ratio than the punitive law and order measure.

The value of a study such as this is that it not only demonstrates crime prevention by certain early intervention methods works; it also demonstrates it works more cost effectively than alternative methods of crime prevention. This is the type of information that is very valuable to governments struggling to allocate resources across programs with equally valid aims.

There is a recent trend in crime prevention literature to collating studies so as to provide an overview of the effectiveness of different strategies. The two most recent examples were both undertaken by Farrington and:

- a study of cost/benefit studies of situational crime prevention methods,¹⁵ primarily in the United Kingdom. The study was largely inconclusive

¹³ For more detail and a summary of the programs see Standing Committee on Law and Justice, *Proceedings of the Conference on Crime Prevention through Social Support* 1998.

¹⁴ Greenwood PW et al 1996 *Diverting Children from a Life of Crime* New York, RAND.

¹⁵ see Chapter two for an explanation of this model.

because of the poor quality of the outcome evaluations used to arrive at an identification of benefits,¹⁶ and

- a study of 24 evaluations of family based intervention programs, primarily from the United States and the United Kingdom. This found most of the programs to be effective in reducing childhood anti-social behaviour and later delinquency, although at least two well funded large scale programs failed to demonstrate any measurable outcomes in comparison to control groups.¹⁷

9.4 Local studies

One of the most comprehensive surveys in Australia was undertaken by a team led by Professor Graham Vimpani for the National Child Protection Council.¹⁸ This examined evaluations of home visiting programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. It found some local evaluations but none which approached that of using an control group. Interestingly some reasons were suggested for the lack of these outcome evaluations. They include:

- many social programs do not have their goals clearly defined;
- the fluid world in which social programs operate make experimental designs problematic;
- there are ethical problems in leaving a control group without services if they are at risk;
- many programs have no formal requirement to evaluate their impact; and
- there are insufficient resources to conduct thorough evaluation.¹⁹

The *Pathways to Prevention* report relied upon overseas studies for its discussions of early intervention programs, finding that locally there was a need for more outcomes based evaluations.²⁰ The report recommended the

¹⁶ "Value for Money: A Review of the costs and Benefits of Situational Crime Prevention" Welsh B and Farrington D, *British Journal of Criminology* Summer 1999 No 3.

¹⁷ Farrington and Welsh "Delinquency Prevention Using Family-based Interventions" *Children and Society* vol 13, no 4 1999.

¹⁸ *An Audit of Home Visitor Programs and the Development of an Evaluation Framework* 1996 Department of Family and Community Services, AGPS.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 36-37.

²⁰ National Crime Prevention, *Pathways to Prevention* March 1999, p 188.

funding of demonstration projects²¹ in settings to provide a cumulative base of local knowledge on early intervention. Both state government agencies and non-government groups could explore the potential for this as to date the committee is not aware of these projects having been funded.

9.5 A local evaluation strategy

It has been suggested to the committee at various times during the inquiry that a study such as that of Professor Sherman's *What Works* should be conducted here. In a submission to the inquiry the Local Government and Shires Associations made an interesting use of the study by considering which of the effective United States strategies were suitable for local councils to attempt.²²

The committee does not believe that a study such as Professor Sherman's should be undertaken in New South Wales at present. From the evidence to this committee there are not sufficient numbers of outcome evaluations to use as the basis for such a study. New South Wales is one step behind. There is a need to encourage more rigorous evaluations, particularly more "before and after" studies with control groups before the next step is taken.

There is some material on which to build upon. The best of the programs the committee has seen, such as Families First, are reliant upon overseas studies to justify their project design but are building evaluation into their programs. Programs have been usefully evaluated, such as Schools as Community Centres (although these would not be characterised as level three studies in Professor Sherman's hierarchy). Other programs, such as those represented by the Family Support Services Association, have produced valuable data on their clients and services. The Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General's Department is assisting local councils to evaluate projects funded through their grants programs. But more is needed to build up a body of local evidence to complement the overseas lessons on the difference that crime prevention through social support can make.

The committee believes there needs to be long term planning at the highest level of government to develop over time a body of evidence which can be used to decide how to allocate public funds to areas of crime prevention which work in local conditions. The committee recommends the Premier's Council on Crime Prevention head this effort, as the peak body with an oversight of crime prevention throughout New South Wales agencies. This requires a "whole of government" exercise, with many departments having

²¹ *Ibid*, pp 99-100.

²² *Submission*, 14/9/99, Local Government and Shires Associations, appendix.

programs with a crime prevention potential. The Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General's Department, provides secretariat support to the Council; however it would need resources to fund evaluations of the type required.

Recommendation 33

The committee recommends that the Premier's Council on Crime Prevention develop and fund a strategy for a whole of government effort to conduct outcome evaluations of programs with potential to reduce crime which departments either:

- **invest considerable amounts in at present (Families First, family support services, child care etc); or**
- **consider to have potential for increased investment in the future (Schools as Community Centres, local government crime prevention)**

These evaluations should examine the "before and after" impact of the program on crime compared to a similar area over the same period where the program was not introduced. The length of the evaluation should be appropriate to that necessary for the outcomes of the program to be demonstrated.

The strategy should also encourage individual programs to conduct other forms of evaluation, such as needs based studies and process evaluations, and to collect the data useful for all types of evaluation.

During the various chapters of this report the committee has made a number of recommendations which require evaluation of one type or another. Preferably these could be incorporated into the centralised evaluation strategy, although each has value as a stand alone exercise. The relevant recommendations are summarised below:

Recommendation Number	Type of Evaluation
2 and 3	Outcome
5	Needs/process
6	Outcome
10	Process
15	Needs
17	Needs/process or outcome
21	Process/outcomes
27	Outcome

Non-government sector

Outcome evaluations are costly, especially those for early childhood intervention programs where the impact on crime is very long term. It is unreasonable to expect the non-government sector to fund significant evaluations of this type if it is not funded by governments to do so. However the committee has been impressed by the way in which non-government organisations such as Burnside, Barnardos, and the Family Support Services Association have established collaborative relationships with universities through Australian Research Council grants. They have also obtained funding from other sources to conduct research into needs and evaluate the impact of new programs. An interesting suggestion arising from a submission from the Country Women's Association²³ was to try to encourage Phd students to undertake studies in crime prevention through social support, perhaps by the offering of scholarships.

The committee would also not want its focus in this chapter on outcome evaluations to dissuade agencies from conducting process evaluations or needs assessments, both of which have much to assist programs effectiveness. Process evaluations can be conducted relatively cheaply and can lead to significant improvements to program effectiveness. Indeed, if an outcome evaluation suggests a project has failed it should lead to the asking of the question as to why the intervention has failed: the answer may be in its implementation rather than the program itself.

The committee believes there is ample evidence from overseas that crime prevention through social support can be effective. It is vital to promoting this form of crime prevention that a larger body of rigorous evaluations be built up in New South Wales.

²³

Submission, 25/8/99, Country Women's Association.