

Evaluation of the Pre-court Support for Adolescents using violence in the home (AVITH) Pilot

Centre for Innovative Justice (2022). *Evaluation of the Pre-court Support for Adolescents using violence in the home (AVITH) Pilot: Final Report* (Evaluation report, 07/2022). RMIT University.

Click [here](#) to read the full article.

Through funding from the Victorian Legal Services Board, Youthlaw developed, piloted and evaluated an early intervention program that aims to assist young people using violence in the home earlier in the legal system process (the Pilot). The goal of the Pilot was to better assess, respond and support young people who use violence and have broader co-occurring issues. They received 50 referrals, however only 18 young people were eligible for the program.

The Pilot commenced at the beginning of 2021 where they focused on the Metropolitan West areas serviced by the Sunshine and Werribee Children's Court Divisions of the Magistrates' Court, as well as Melbourne Children's Court.

Youthlaw gained assistance from the Centre of Innovative Justice (CIJ) to evaluate the Pilot to determine its continuation or expansion.

Key discussion points

Eligibility for the program

- The young person is the respondent on an intervention order **OR**
- Identified risk of the young person using violence in the home **AND**
- Aged 10 and under 18 years old **AND**
- The young person is not being represented in any child protection legal matters **AND**
- Any legal matter will be listed in the Melbourne Children's Court, Sunshine Children's Court Division or Werribee Children's Court Division.

Implementation

- Multiple referral pathways, for example: Victoria Police; the Youth Advocacy and Support Services (YSAS); the Orange Door.
- Youthlaw built and maintained relationships with outside services to assist, as well as helped these services identify and respond to AVITH-related legal needs.
- Challenges to implementation included: COVID-19; sector-wide fatigue; reduced face-to-face contact; high turnover of staff at referral organisations.
- Some people were referred but were not eligible because of their age; young person was experiencing violence and not using violence in the home; it was seen as intimate partner violence; the young person did not want to engage in the Pilot.

Effectiveness

- The Pilot was successful in having earlier referrals, they were referred prior to their first mention.
- Youthlaw practitioners were able to gain key information about the young person's needs and experiences and, assist them with these because of the trust and rapport they were able to build with the earlier referral.

- Young people engaged more (89%) in their legal case and were also able to gain a further understanding of the legal system and how it related to their case.

Efficiency

- The Pilot was found to be efficient and value-for-money.
- There were less adjourned cases, which meant cases were resolved in a timely manner.
- Out-of-court negotiations were used more because of the Pilot program, where 39 percent of these matters were resolved prior to the first mention.

Appropriateness

- For young people who use violence at home, the Pilot worked well to meet their needs.
- Key features of the pilot that were found to assist with meaningful engagement were, appropriate and specialist support; flexible and tailored approaches; strengths-based, trauma-informed and family violence risk-informed practice framework.
- The low numbers of young people involved in the Pilot has meant though that they were not able to assess its appropriateness for specific cohorts.

Recommendations

Early referral

1. Have an agreement with Victoria Legal Aid to have AVITH cases be triaged by Victoria Legal Aid and if appropriate be referred to Youth Law.
2. Have a continued agreement with YSAS to continue to refer AVITH cases to key services, such as EYOP
3. New referral pathways through the Children's Court and Magistrates' Court of Victoria
4. New referral pathways through mental health services such as Orygen Clinical Services (including headspace) and the Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service
5. As part of the formal referral process, implement secondary consultations to assess eligibility
6. Ensure eligibility criteria are clarified and streamlined for referring organisations
7. Assess if the Pilot program could include young people up to 21 years of age
8. Implement more referral pathways for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds young people.
9. Assess whether implementing a priority flag within the referral process when the young person has an interim order in place.

Service response

10. Continue to have multiple ways for young people to engage in the process as well as the programs being person-centred and flexible.
11. Have a program for AVITH young people who also have experienced (and continue to experience) family violence
12. Create resources for young people and practitioners on key topics relevant to the legal system and processes for AVITH
13. On a quarterly basis have training for Victoria Police on AVITH
14. Create resources for young people and practitioners on options available to the young person when they are experiencing family violence

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

15. Update the program's Theory of Change to include the findings in this evaluation
16. Continue to monitor results and use emerging data to improve the program.

Please see [here](#) for the full article.