

# Facilitation of Residential Diversion Programmes for Youth Sex Offenders in South Africa

**Thulane Gxubane**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7887-2007>

University of Cape Town, South Africa

[thulane.gxubane@uct.ac.za](mailto:thulane.gxubane@uct.ac.za)

## Abstract

This article explores practical issues social workers need to consider in the facilitation of residential diversion programmes for youth sex offenders in South Africa. It draws on a broader study which explored the use of residential diversion programmes in the management of youth sex offenders in South Africa. The research design combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection, analysis and presentation of data. A purposive sampling method was adopted, and in-depth individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with ex-youth sex offenders, their significant others, and professionals involved in the management of youth sex offenders and/or their victims in a variety of settings. The study found that some respondents preferred individual counselling, some preferred group counselling, while others preferred a combination of both. It can be inferred that both methods are important and that each can play an important role in the rehabilitation of youth offenders. The youth respondents also felt that a good sense of humour and incorporation of physical activities in group sessions would be the most effective facilitation style. Most respondents preferred that the residential diversion programmes for youth sex offenders be facilitated by social workers rather than volunteers or paraprofessionals. The professionals who participated in the study unanimously agreed that a generic social work degree does not fully prepare social workers for working with sex offenders. Based on the key findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed for the effective facilitation of residential diversion programmes for youth sex offenders.

**Keywords:** residential diversion; programme facilitation; youth sex offenders; therapist's facilitation style; therapist's characteristics; residential social work



## **Introduction**

In South Africa, the rehabilitation of youth sex offenders (YSOs) in residential diversion programmes (RDPs) in accordance with the Child Justice Act (South Africa 2008) requires intensive therapeutic interventions to be able to effect behavioural change among YSOs. While the assessment and treatment theories of YSOs have advanced significantly in the field, the facilitation of RDPs especially for YSOs has received little attention both in research and practice, locally and internationally. It would seem the neglect of facilitation is due to an assumption among social work practitioners and scholars that facilitation is a given and common sense; hence it is taken for granted. The author concurs with the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM 2006, 8) which states that “treatment literature to date has focused on treatment models and content of programs for adults and juveniles who have committed sex offenses”; however, “how treatment is delivered is as important as what is delivered”. More so that some studies found that therapists’ characteristics and their facilitation styles of programmes for sex offenders had an influence on behavioural change among sex offenders receiving the treatment (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2002; Marshall et al. 2003; Marshall et al. 2006).

This article explores the facilitation of RDPs for YSOs. It draws on the findings of the doctoral study by the author which explored the facilitation of RDPs as one of the main objectives. The study followed up on male ex-YSOs between the ages of 10 and 17 years after they had engaged with the RDP that the author facilitated when he was employed as a social worker at a youth secure care centre after a period of five years or more. The second sample consisted of key informants who were youth justice service providers in South Africa. First, the article presents a problem statement followed by the literature review. Thereafter, a brief description of the RDP that informed the study is presented followed by a summary of the methodology of the study. Further on, a summary of the profile of the research respondents is presented followed by a discussion of the research findings. The article is concluded by the presentation of the key findings and recommendations of the study.

## **Problem Statement**

The effectiveness of diversion programmes in reducing recidivism among youth offenders came under the spotlight when the redrafted Child Justice Bill (Bill 49 of 2002) was brought before Parliament on 5 and 6 February 2008 for the final round of public hearings in South Africa. The author participated in these hearings as a member of the Driver Group of the Child Justice Alliance. A major contributory factor to the ineffectiveness of youth diversion programmes, which was pointed out by many submissions to Parliament, was the over-reliance on trained auxiliary social workers and assistant probation officers to facilitate diversion group programmes. In ensuring that high standards are maintained in diversion practice as well as holding diversion service

providers accountable, the national Department of Social Development was mandated to develop the policy framework for the accreditation of youth diversion programmes (DSD 2010). Two important criteria relevant to the facilitation of diversion programmes in the aforementioned policy stipulate that: (1) youth diversion programmes must be managed and supervised by professionals; and (2) lay counsellors who facilitate programmes must do so under supervision of a professional qualified in behavioural sciences (DSD 2010). The overall aim of the study was to explore the facilitation in relation to approaches, modalities, skills and characteristics of facilitators which could promote behavioural change among YSOs enrolled in the RDPs.

## **Literature Review**

Generally, there is a paucity of research focusing on the facilitation of RDPs for YSOs in South Africa. The South African studies that the author is aware of which focused on the facilitation of RDPs or related topics are those by Singh and Singh (2014), Kleinhans (2013), Steyn (2010), and Van der Merwe and Dawes (2009). Reference is also made to international literature and studies which are relevant to this article even though some are dated. These include CSOM (2006), Fernandez et al. (2000), Righthand et al. (2011), McCamey (2010), Marshall (2005), Marshall et al. (2002), Marshall et al. (2003), and Marshall et al. (2006).

## **Eclectic Theoretical Approach**

The study that informs this article is guided by an eclectic theoretical approach to social work practice with YSOs. An eclectic theoretical perspective refers to an integrated approach to social work practice that draws from more than one theory to understand and respond to complex human behaviour (Coady and Lehmann 2016). YSOs are not a homogenous group, they have a range of individual needs and problems, which include the factors that cause, support, or contribute to offending behaviour at individual, family, school, and community levels (CSOM 2006; Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009). Oliphant and Pavlic (2012) maintain that a task-centred and solution-focused approach guided by a strength-based theoretical approach seem to be the most influential strategies used in social work to bring about behavioural change among YSOs, because a strength-based theoretical approach is premised on building relationships which is core to social work practice. Londt (2008) asserts that treatment programmes for sex offenders are generally eclectic and draw from different techniques or interventions that practitioners have experienced as effective. To achieve long-term behavioural change and minimise the potential for reoffending among YSOs, therapists are encouraged to adopt an eclectic, multi-disciplinary, multi-system, and multi-modal interventions to promote a holistic and integrated approach to the facilitation of YSOs' programmes (Gxubane 2015; Oliphant and Pavlic 2012; Singh and Singh 2014; Steyn 2010).

## **Treatment Modalities and Approaches to Facilitation**

The group modality, which has been the most exclusively preferred modality in the treatment of YSOs, has been challenged recently by experts in the field considering the research which demonstrates the potential for negative outcomes when delinquent peers are aggregated for the purposes of intervention (CSOM 2006). Hence Oliphant and Pavlic (2012, 159) argue that “group and individual interventions should typically be concurrent with family therapy to bring about change in the family system”.

In the past, there was a preference for somewhat aggressive, confrontational, and punitive approaches to the treatment of YSOs, which was later questioned because of concerns that these approaches may lead to increased resistance and hostility, which could result in less engagement with the treatment programme (CSOM 2006). Oliphant and Pavlic (2012, 159) believe that effective treatment strategies involve helping YSOs to take responsibility for their behaviour as well as identifying “cognitive roles in sexual abuse is one of the important steps towards change”. It is believed that the way confrontation is dealt with is likely to have an impact on the offenders’ behaviour change (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2003).

Therapists’ confrontational and non-confrontational style was identified by Marshall (2005) as one set of indices which were strongly linked to behavioural change among sex offenders. Marshall (2005), and Marshall et al. (2003) maintain that an excessive confrontational style should be eliminated in favour of a non-confrontational approach. These scholars believe such an approach needs to be supportive but firm in promoting internal motivation among YSOs to invest in the treatment process (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2003). It is recommended that facilitators be empathic and warm while maintaining directiveness to achieve behavioural change among sex offenders (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2002; Marshall et al. 2003).

## **Skills and Characteristics of Facilitators**

There seems to be consensus among some scholars that therapeutic work with YSOs is a specialised field of social work (Kleinhans 2013; Oliphant and Pavlic 2012; Righthand et al. 2011; Steyn 2010). Hence it is proposed that social workers who want to work in this field must receive specialist training (Kleinhans 2013; Righthand et al. 2011; Steyn 2010; Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009). Internationally, some universities offer specialist academic programmes and qualifications such as the Juvenile Sexual Offending Counsellor Certification Programme by the Kent School of Social Work (n.d.) in the USA. The Sexual Behaviour Treatment Programme in Maine (USA) makes use of trained volunteers who are professionals as “sexual behaviour specialists” to work effectively with YSOs (Righthand et al. 2011, 25).

The importance of appropriate characteristics over the suitable knowledge and skills the professionals who work with YSOs need to possess has been emphasised by Fernandez

et al. (2000), Marshall (2005), Marshall et al. (2002), Marshall et al. (2003), and Marshall et al. (2006). Based on the findings of their research which studied therapists' characteristics, Fernandez et al. (2000) conclude that, not only were they able to identify characteristics of effective therapists, but also these characteristics appear to be readily trainable. Hence, they were able to develop a training programme meant to teach novice therapists the skills they need to effectively change their sexual offender clients (Fernandez et al. 2000). Marshall (2005), Marshall et al. (2002), and Marshall et al. (2003) found that the main influential characteristics of therapists were empathy, warmth, and directiveness, and that these go with supportiveness, genuineness, respectfulness, and confidence.

### **Summary of the Residential Diversion Programme for Youth Sex Offenders**

The programme was a therapeutic and educational individual and group programme aimed at treating youth perpetrators of sexual offences, so they could gain basic sex education and an insight into the impact and the far-reaching consequences of their unlawful sexual behaviour. It was guided by cognitive restructuring and behaviour modification theories as well as a circle of courage and restorative justice theories. It assisted the YSOs to take responsibility for their sexual misconduct, to develop empathy for their victims, to acquire basic education about human sexuality, to develop personal competency, and to prevent relapse. The group programme comprised three stages, namely the beginning, work, and termination stages. In the beginning stage members were helped to know each other, and to bond with each other and with the facilitator. In the working stage the learning expectations and objectives of the group were tackled. Home visits were conducted mainly where the victim was a family member or a person who stayed in the same yard or next-door house to that of the YSO. The home visits were conducted to facilitate family group conferences in line with the objectives of the Child Justice Act which seek to promote a restorative justice response in dealing with youth offenders. Most YSOs who were diverted to the RDP had a close relationship with their victims, and others were siblings and stayed in the same house or yard (see the profile of the youth respondents (YRs) below).

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study which this article draws from used combined qualitative and quantitative approaches in the research design since the researcher wanted to triangulate data on some research objectives. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the value of methodological triangulation is that it allows the researcher to use multiple and different sources, methods and theories of data collection in order to provide corroborating evidence and well-validated conclusions. This article focuses mainly on qualitative research data, although it will be noted that quantitative data were used to provide corroborating evidence to the qualitative data on the YRs' preferred form of counselling. The study adopted a non-probability purposive sampling method. Three sets of samples

participated in the study, namely the ex-YSOs, their parents or guardians, and the key informants from various professional groups who were involved in the management of YSOs and/or their victims in a variety of settings in the Gauteng and Western Cape provinces of South Africa. Owing to the limited overall population size of ex-YSOs (31) who completed the RDP and their SOs, they were all considered for participation in the study. Twenty out of thirty-one (65%) ex-YSOs were successfully traced and they were all willing to participate in the study.

The sampling criterion for the professionals who were key informants in this study was that they needed to have had a lengthy period of experience in working with YSOs and/or their victims in their current occupations. The author believed that, by virtue of their experience, such respondents would offer deeper insights into the research focus area (see the profile of professional respondents below).

Three semi-structured interview schedules were developed in advance and used as tools for data collection with each sample set. The primary method of gathering data that was employed in the study in line with the research design and the objectives of the study was in-depth face-to-face interviews. Consent was negotiated with each respondent before the start of each interview for the use of an audio-digital tape device to record the interview.

The research data were analysed and presented mainly qualitatively, and occasionally quantitatively. Through content and thematic analysis, the author was able to identify patterns and trends, and to generate sub-themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from research variables some of which related to the research objectives. Key direct quotes of the respondents are used in the presentation of the qualitative research with a purpose of "... bringing the voice of the participants or respondents into the report" (Delpont and Fouche 2011, 426). Findings of the study were further related to existing theoretical frameworks and other studies, showing whether the findings are supported or falsified.

It is important to note that the YRs had all reached an age of consent at the time of research and therefore did not require their parents or guardians' permission to participate in the study. All the respondents participated in the study voluntarily and were further assured of confidentiality regarding all the information they divulged, and anonymity. The study was granted ethics clearance by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities Graduate School of the University of Cape Town.

The qualitative research design and case studies have inherent limitations as they rely greatly on subjectivity and the findings are not easily generalisable. Such designs also limit the size of the sample. However, subjective perceptions that are derived from qualitative approaches to research offer a richer understanding of complex human problems that require in-depth investigation.

## **Profile of the Research Participants**

Only the profiles of the YRs and professionals are presented since the research variables that are discussed in this article only draws from these two sample sets. The primary sample set consisted of male YRs who were formerly enrolled in the RDP. Twelve of the YRs were between the ages of 15 and 17 years; three YRs were between the ages of 13 and 14, and another three were between the ages of 18 and 19 years when they were arrested for their respective sex offences. A high proportion (17 out of 20) of YRs was charged with rape, of which one case was sibling incest where a brother raped a younger sister. The other three YRs had committed male rape.

In relation to the relationships of YRs with their victims, they were all very familiar and acquainted with their victims. Four YRs were in a love relationship with their victims, while another three victims were friends' girlfriends. Almost all (19 out of 20) YRs were staying within the same neighbourhood as their victims. Eight YRs stayed very close to their victims: three in the same yard, another three in the immediate next-door house, one in the same house, and another one stayed in the sixth house from his victim's home.

The secondary sample set comprised 31 respondents: six magistrates (MAGs), six prosecutors (PROS), six probation officers (POs), five secure care social workers (SCCSWs), and eight community-based social services professionals. The overall average number of years of experience the respondents had in their occupations during the period of this study was 10 years. The lengthy period of experience many respondents had in their current jobs was in line with the type of key informants that the author targeted, since he believed they would bring rich insights to the study. In the discussion of the research data below, the YRs and professionals who participated in the study are given numbers to ensure anonymity.

## **Findings**

### **Individual versus Group Method of Counselling**

The first aspect on the facilitation of the diversion programmes which is often hotly debated in the field of diversion practice, especially in working with YSOs, relates to two schools of thought. One firmly believes that in working with YSOs one-to-one counselling is much more effective than the group work method of intervention. The other school of thought believes the contrary. Table 1 presents the research data regarding the YRs' preferred form of counselling based on their experiences with both methods of intervention when they were enrolled in the above-mentioned RDP.

**Table 1:** Youth respondents’ preferred form of counselling

YR	Preferred form of counselling			
	Individual	Group	Both	Not discussed
1	√			
2	√			
3		√		
4		√		
5	√			
6	√			
7		√		
8	√			
9		√		
10			√	
11				√
12		√		
13	√			
14	√			
15	√			
16				√
17		√		
18				√
19		√		
20			√	
	n = 8	n = 7	n = 2	n = 3

### Individual Counselling

Table 1 shows that nearly half (8 out of 20) of the YRs preferred individual counselling, pointing to a need for privacy in counselling. The YRs insisted that it is imperative for any social worker who wants to get through to them to see them individually:

I preferred individual sessions because some issues are very private and personal. (YR 8)

I preferred individual because sometimes when I am in the group I don't feel comfortable talking about certain things around other people. I like privacy. (YR 14)

Linked to privacy is embarrassment. The YRs reported that they were afraid of embarrassing themselves and being laughed at by other group members if they shared certain information in the group session, as expressed in the following statements:



Some other issues are too sensitive to be spoken in groups. Kind of embarrassing to disclose the details about your rape ... because others will laugh at you. (YR 1)

Individual counselling because ... in a group there some of the things you'll feel like if you disclose them the group is going to laugh at you. (YR 13)

### **Group Counselling**

The group counselling method was preferred by over a quarter (7 out of 20) of the YRs (see Table 1). The reasons which were stated by the participants who preferred group counselling included the following:

I preferred the group ...we learn more from each other ...different group members raising different questions and we all get an understanding on that issue. (YR 4)

Sometimes we think what we did was abnormal ... but if you... in a group, there are people who talk about the very same things that you've experienced. Then you start to relate and feel that you're not the only one with this issue. (YR 19)

### **Both Individual and Group Counselling**

Very few (2 out of 20) of the YRs preferred both forms of counselling, indicating that each served a different purpose. The insightful and rich motivations the YRs provided, as articulated in their responses below, reflect a good understanding of what social workers seek to achieve through employing both methods of interventions:

I prefer both ... in a group it is three or more...you express yourself and you get different comments from different people ... I also prefer a one-on-one for much deeper issues. (YR 10)

I preferred more individual because you can share a lot more sensitive stuff to one person. However, both forms of counselling ... I have also explained how the group helped me. (YR 20)

Most professionals who participated in the study were not content with the exclusively group-based method in which diversion programmes were presented as discussed in the literature review above. They preferred a combination of both individual and group processes:

I think the combination of both individual and group counselling ... because there might be very personal intimate things that the child wants to share but will not share in a group discussion. Group you're just dealing with basic information. If it's one-on-one where you're talking counselling, you would need one-on-one. (MAG 6)

PROS 4 mentioned his frustration with the exclusive group method approach, arguing that this delays the system and that it may discourage justice officials to make use of a diversion even where suitable:

What happens in some of these processes is that they tell you now they say we can't start the programme because we can't do it for just one person. They say they need five or ten so they can start the programme. So everything is a mess ... it's a group programme that requires a certain number of young offenders so they can start the programme. So that all delays the system.

The research data show that some YRs felt comfortable with the individual method of intervention, some preferred a group method of facilitation while others favoured both individual and group methods of social work similarly to the professionals who participated in the study. It was pointed out in the literature review above that since YSOs are not a homogenous group, they often have a range of individual needs and risk profiles which are more likely to be dealt with adequately through a one-to-one method of intervention (Kleinhans 2013; Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009). While a group method is the most applied method of intervention in diversion programmes, its ability to achieve behavioural change among YSOs has been questioned as discussed above. The successful completion of a group programme does not necessarily mean that an impact has been made as it may take some time for the offenders to be ready and willing to change their behaviour (Kleinhans 2013; Oliphant and Pavlic 2012; Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009). Hence a combination of group and individual methods of interventions accompanied by interventions with the families have been found to be the most promising approach towards achieving a holistic approach in the rehabilitation of YSOs (McCamey 2010; Oliphant and Pavlic 2012; Singh and Singh 2014).

## **Skills and Characteristics of the Programme Facilitators**

The importance of the skills and characteristics of the programme facilitators emerged strongly among YRs. In addition to the necessary knowledge and skills, YRs emphasised the importance of the right attitude, as reflected in the self-explanatory quotes below.

### **Appropriate Attitude, Knowledge and Skills**

If you are not able to listen attentively to the young offenders, they will also not listen to you ... If in a group one member is hyper-active, you should be careful that you do not neglect other group members and focus entirely on that member. Another important skill or character is that the person has to be full of energy. (YR 13)

It should be professional people because you share with them very personal stuff especially sexual offences. Professionals will keep it confidential ... Care workers and

volunteers cannot be suitable people because they hang around a lot with other juveniles and they talk freely. (YR 20)

### **Friendly Personality**

The importance of appropriate characteristics over and above the suitable knowledge and skills the professionals working with offenders need to possess has been emphasised by YRs:

I would say you have to be ten different people in one because you have to be sociable, make people comfortable to open up, dependable and reliable. A person you can trust. (YR 10)

Someone who has tolerance, patient and understanding. A person who does not get irritated easily. (YR 6)

### **A Sense of Humour is a Necessary Quality**

Detention is often stressful and frustrating. The following response seems to suggest that facilitators of RDPs need to be creative in helping the group members to ease tension by using humour:

Someone who can relax members of the group, ease the tension and make jokes as we go along with the group session. The more we laugh a bit is the more we become comfortable in a group. (YR 7)

### **Incorporation of Physical Activities**

YR 10 cautioned against overemphasis on talking about sex in the programme:

Discussion about sex offences and sex issues should be there only as a reminder that you did this, and it is wrong. There should be other activities like soccer, cricket or artwork that will keep you busy and not think of what happened. (YR 10)

### **Rehabilitated Ex-youth Sex Offenders as Co-facilitators**

Some YRs suggested that rehabilitated ex-YSOs should be invited as co-facilitators or guest facilitators in the group programme:

I think the facilitator should be someone who will understand, someone who has been there before and out of that situation. (YR 1)

Inmates don't relate to anyone but people who've been where they are. Facilitators should invite people who have been through such experience ... that alone will inspire others who are feeling hopeless and thinking it is the end of the road. (YR 19)

The research data seem to indicate that the YRs were sceptical about the facilitator and the way the group sessions were facilitated. The inference that can be made from this is that facilitators need to be constantly aware of how they come across and interact with the YSOs in the RDPs. It seems it was important for the YRs that the facilitator had a positive attitude and displayed a warm and genuine personality to influence them positively towards change of behaviour. The findings of this study seem to concur with those of Marshall (2005) and Marshall et al. (2003) who found that an excessive confrontational style should be eliminated in favour of an empathic and warm style while maintaining directiveness to achieve behavioural change among YSOs (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2002; Marshall et al. 2003).

The research data also seem to suggest that some YRs were uncomfortable when group discussions focused on their unlawful sexual behaviour. However, uncomfortable as it may be, it is the responsibility of the therapist to help YSOs to take the responsibility for their sexual misconduct and to gain an insight on how it has affected the victim. This task has been identified as one of the important steps towards influencing behavioural change among YSOs as discussed above. However, it was also argued that the way confrontation is dealt with is likely to have an impact on the offenders' behaviour change (Marshall 2005; Marshall et al. 2003).

Other suggestions proposed by the YRs such as the incorporation of physical activities and involvement of rehabilitated ex-YSOs as co-facilitators are discussed in the key findings and recommendations of the study below.

Another theme of facilitation, which was explored with the professionals, is a highly contested issue in the area of diversion practice. It refers to whether youth diversion programmes could be facilitated by non-social workers. There were varied responses among the research participants on this research theme, and the sub-themes that emerged from analysing the research data are discussed below.

### **Opposition to the Use of Volunteers**

Owing to funding challenges, some NGOs have opted to train volunteers to facilitate the diversion programmes. Others make use of auxiliary social workers to facilitate the diversion programmes. However, the facilitation of diversion programmes by non-professionals has raised a serious concern among other role players. They are concerned about the quality and effectiveness of such an approach, as reflected in the following two responses:

Their [volunteers] hearts might be in a right place but they might not have the necessary skills to be able to assist. (MAG 6)

They [volunteers] have the compassion and they are enthusiastic but it's not that we say they don't play a role, but they still have to be trained and study for the degree. (PROS 5)

Such responses indicate that, even though the volunteers might have the desire to help, this on its own is not sufficient, particularly in working with YSOs. This perception is shared by another prosecutor who also seems vehemently opposed to the use of volunteers:

My problem with volunteers ... they don't have the knowledge ... Sexual offenders' programme should be done by professionals. At the end of the day they are volunteers ... they will never be experts because they do not have training. (PROS 4)

The research data as presented above from the justice role players reflect a strong disapproval of volunteers to facilitate diversion programmes, especially with the YSOs. The disapproval is similar to that discussed in the introduction above. It is also linked to the standards for youth diversion programmes which were found not to be good enough to reduce recidivism among youth offenders in South Africa (Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009). Internationally, it would seem there is a preference for making use of trained professionals as volunteers to work with YSOs such as in the Sexual Behaviour Treatment Programme in Maine in the USA (Righthand et al. 2011) as discussed above.

### **Volunteers have Other Roles to Play**

The two areas that were identified as possible places where volunteers could contribute were offering social support to and monitoring of YSOs, and presenting educational components of the programme, as shown in the following two responses:

Visiting to see how the child lives make sure that the child attends and find out why he did not attend if he did not. (PROS 4)

Volunteers should do the educational stuff. They can be seen individually by professionals and in a group by the volunteers. (PO 5)

The research data as presented above seem to suggest that volunteers could be allocated other roles and responsibilities. In so doing they would provide necessary support services to social work rehabilitation services. This is in line with the principles and philosophy of the Child Justice Act which seeks to mobilise volunteers, voluntary organisations, local institutions, and other community resources to contribute to the rehabilitation of youth offenders.

### **Trained Auxiliary Social Workers**

The trend in Government and the non-governmental sector has been to make use of trained auxiliary social workers to facilitate the diversion programmes. This was supported by a probation officer who held a senior position in a government department:

In some rural areas they had only one social worker who was not coping. Today they have four auxiliary social workers who are capacitated by the in-service training that they received. The programmes can be classified according to which ones can be

facilitated by the professionals, those that have a therapeutic component and which ones by the non-professionals. (PO 1)

The research data seem to suggest that the use of paraprofessionals to facilitate youth diversion programmes seems inevitable especially in rural areas owing to the challenge of manpower. When paraprofessionals are used in the facilitation of RDPs, it is therefore important that they: (1) receive the necessary training; (2) facilitate educational components of the RDPs in groups; and (3) work under close supervision of a social worker in line with the requirements of the Diversion Accreditation Policy (DSD 2010) discussed above.

### **Social Workers most Appropriate Facilitators**

It was felt by some respondents that social workers are suitable to facilitate the RDPs since they are trained in both individual and group methods of interventions. Part of the justification was that, if an issue emerges in a group session that warrants individual attention, social workers would be able to follow up on it rather than having to refer it to another professional to deal with:

A social worker. Someone with therapeutic skills because in a group session maybe it can come out that a boy says that he was sexually victimised. Then you need to deal with that. So the facilitator must have skills to do a one-on-one counselling as well, because say for example you do the group but now you find out that Bonga was sexually abused by his father and now you refer him to me. I don't know Bonga and you have already established a good relationship with Bonga, which can also be ruined when you refer him to another person. (SCCSW 5)

### **Basic Social Work Degree Inadequate**

The general belief that social workers are well trained to be able to deal with YSOs was challenged by many respondents, most of whom are social workers. They insisted that a social work qualification on its own is not enough and felt that working with YSOs is a specialised field:

I think it needs certain expertise, you can't say because I'm a social worker I can do that. You must get extra training on that in terms of knowledge, attitude and skill. (PO 2)

It's not a simple diversion programme to run. Do not put someone because they have a social work degree. To run such programmes you need additional skills and knowledge. (SCCSW 4)

The research data in this study seem to suggest a consensus among many respondents that the facilitators preferably need to be social workers. Some social work respondents regard social work practitioners as competent facilitators who can bring about behavioural change among YSOs. Others believe that social workers do not have the necessary specialised knowledge and skills for working therapeutically with YSOs. The

latter opinion is in line with the predominant view in the literature that therapeutic work with sex offenders is a specialised field of practice. Therefore, specialised training should be a prerequisite for the facilitation of RDPs for YSOs (Gxubane 2015; Kleinhans 2013; Singh and Singh 2014; Steyn 2010; Van der Merwe and Dawes 2009).

## **Key Findings and Recommendations of the Study**

The study found that some YRs preferred individual counselling, some preferred group counselling, while others preferred a combination of both. It can be inferred that both methods are important and that each can play an important role in the rehabilitation of youth offenders. Therefore, it is recommended that

- while the group approach has its merits, the facilitators also need to ensure that each group member receives individual attention too. The choice as to which method is most appropriate at a given time will depend on the practitioner's continuous assessment of the YSO's needs and presenting problems. This will help in identifying treatment themes that may be specific to each young offender's deviant thinking pattern and cycle of sexual abuse.

The author supports the suggestion that was proposed by some YRs for rehabilitated ex-YSOs to be invited to the group sessions to inspire other youth group members. However, the author wants to caution that this needs to be carefully implemented because the invited young persons might have the right attitude, but they might not have the necessary facilitation skills. It is therefore recommended that:

- instead of ex-YSOs participating in the group sessions as co-facilitators, they should rather be invited as guest speakers in one or two sessions of the group programme; and
- the guest ex-YSO should be guided by the programme facilitator regarding the structure and the way the presentation should be pitched. This is vitally important to avoid sending a wrong message to group members and causing embarrassment to the programme facilitator.

The study found that a good sense of humour and the incorporation of physical activities into the sessions were strongly recommended by the YRs. The author supports these strategies and further recommends that

- it would help if group facilitators mixed talks with some humour and games that would lead to one or more topics of the programme. Without physical engagement, the facilitator is likely to lose the youths' attention, since they tend to have a short concentration span.

The respondents preferred the RDPs to be facilitated by social workers rather than volunteers or paraprofessionals. The author concurs with the YRs who emphasised that

the appropriate personality and passion for working with YSOs are more important than the appropriate skills and knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended that

- when diversion service providers are recruiting social workers who will facilitate the RDPs, they need to appoint those who have the right personality and passion for working with youth offenders and who feel comfortable talking about sex with young people.

The professionals in the sample unanimously agreed that a generic social work degree does not fully prepare one for working with sex offenders. While the author agrees that working with YSOs is a specialised field of work, he does not believe that it needs to be made a stand-alone postgraduate diploma or degree. It is recommended that

- such specialised training could be offered as one or two modules in a Social Work Master's Degree programme rather than as a stand-alone qualification. It could be located within the Master's Degree in Probation and Correctional Practice programme.

## **Conclusion**

This article explored the facilitation of RDPs in relation to approaches, modalities, skills and characteristics of facilitators which could promote desirable behavioural change among YSOs enrolled in the RDPs. It was found that it is important for facilitators to apply both individual and group methods, as well as work with families to maximise opportunities for behavioural change among YSOs. It was argued that, to minimise potential for reoffending among YSOs, social workers are encouraged to adopt an eclectic, holistic and integrated approach to the facilitation and treatment of YSOs in RDPs. It was emphasised that active involvement of the family is not only essential for providing YSOs with social support but is also vital in the facilitation of effective reintegration of YSOs when they are released from the secure care centres. There was a consensus among the respondents that therapeutic work with YSOs is a specialised field of social work practice which requires additional specialised training. The importance of appropriate characteristics over and above therapists' knowledge and skills was found to be significant in influencing behavioural change among YSOs.

## **Recommendation for Further Research**

The area of facilitation has received very little focus especially in South Africa, and internationally. The study that informs this article focused only on facilitation as one of the main objectives of the study and it used a very limited sample of YSOs ( $n = 20$ ) and professionals ( $n = 31$ ). It is therefore recommended that a study on a larger scale with bigger samples within the South African context be conducted similar to those by Marshall (2005); Marshall et al. (2002); Marshall et al. (2003); Marshall et al. (2006).



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