

Executive Summary

The Social Capital Hubs were a co-designed initiative of Beenleigh and Logan Community Corrections District Offices and the Logan City Council Community Safety Program team as an innovative way to enhance case management and connection to community and services.

It is the responsibility of all corrective services officers to manage persons who are released to the community subject to community based or parole orders (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2005; Queensland Corrective Services, 2019). A core purpose of community corrections is to achieve community safety through rehabilitation and reintegration, thereby reducing recidivism.

A key part of case management involves connecting clients to appropriate services to aid their rehabilitation and build their social capital. This study evaluates an innovative strategy for boosting offenders' social capital, access to community resources, and sense of belonging.

The Hubs Initiative

The Beenleigh and Logan District Offices are two of the four offices that comprise the QCS South Coast Region (SCR). The SCR supervise the largest average number of offenders serving community corrections orders in Queensland on any given day. The Hubs initiative was designed as a mechanism to improve case management and referral pathways for clients and community members located in the Logan and Beenleigh jurisdiction.

The proposal was to hold events where service providers and offenders would be brought together in a community setting. The broad aims of the Hubs, as designated by the project team were:

- to encourage clients to develop pro-social, mainstream connections within the local community.
- to facilitate clients' access to service providers by:
 - increasing their awareness of services/opportunities; and
 - creating direct referral pathways and links with service providers.
- to support case management by providing a check-in point for clients and officers outside of the formal setting of District Offices.

The process for determining how the Hubs would be set up and operated for the purposes of the study was the result of consultation between the management team including Logan City Council Community Safety Program Team and Beenleigh and Logan District Offices.

The Hubs Pilot – Methods

This mixed-methods design study relied on a range of qualitative and quantitative data sources including in-depth interviews with 98 participants across five stakeholder groups (including clients, service providers, Logan City Council staff, officers and community members), descriptive attendance tracking data collected as part of the Hubs procedures, and systematic observations conducted by researchers at each Hub.

Findings

The results identify several clear benefits resulting from the Hubs. Of most significance is that Hubs provide the possibility of **direct referrals to services through a community-based event** in which clients and community members can be **introduced to a range of relevant services**. From comments received in the stakeholder interviews, there was evidence that the informal atmosphere of the Hub was comfortable to clients, their family members, and supporters who also attended. Officers commented that there were **positive effects of getting out of the office** and that the relaxed 'vibe' of the Hubs made effective

connections between officers and clients possible, but also made staff feel like they had a more collaborative working environment.

Through attendance at the Hubs, **both clients and staff were introduced to and learned about a range of services in their community**. In addition, there was evidence that as a result of making contact at the Hubs, many **clients made connections with relevant services** following the Hubs. Service providers stated that the format not only gave them **greater exposure to potential clients** but also allowed them to **connect with other services** with which they had not previously been familiar. In a similar manner, community members also found the Hubs to be a valuable resource to obtain information about services available in the area, highlighting that **the value of the Hubs extended beyond clients**. Furthermore, the open format where officers and clients mingled with community members was seen as **fostering a pro-social environment** where clients participated in a community rather than strictly a corrections-oriented event.

Key benefits

Productive 'co-design' approach. The Hubs demonstrated the possibilities for co-designed and cooperative strategies that Community Corrections can develop with other agencies, like the local council and service providers, who are willing to develop partnerships and protocols to support clients. Community Corrections' contribution was underpinned by the goal of improving community safety by enhancing clients' social capital, achieved in part by increasing clients' access to needed services and by increasing their connectedness and sense of belonging to the community, while Logan City Council's goals were to increase public safety by encouraging service provider collaboration and engagement.

Client connection to services. Stakeholders recounted stories of client–service provider connections, both during and following the Hubs that resulted in positive changes for the clients. For some clients, the Hubs represented the first opportunity to front up to needed services. There was general agreement that the benefits accrued to clients through the Hubs should be viewed as part of a process that would create awareness, build relationships and help clients feel that they were part of the community.

Informal atmosphere of the Hubs was beneficial. Stakeholders described the Hubs as having a positive vibe with a friendly and sociable atmosphere where many clients and members of the public felt sufficiently at ease to converse with officers and service providers.

Reintegration to the community. Stakeholders felt the Hubs represented a strategy to increase clients' prosocial interaction with and reintegration to the community while serving an order. This occurred because the Hubs were held in an open public space where other members of the community were welcomed.

District Office and service provider interaction and collaboration. The Hubs allowed officers to create connections with service providers which assisted them in knowing where they might be better able to refer clients with different needs. In addition, the more personal connection led to a stronger collaboration to aid in connecting clients to the service.

Interagency connections between service providers. The Hubs helped to promote interaction among service providers that had not previously existed. The interaction had a direct effect on client outcomes when service providers were able to direct clients to other agencies that better addressed their needs.

Positive community effects beyond Community Corrections. Services at the Hubs were relevant for many members of the broader community and people passing by the Hubs were able to participate in the Hub and connect to a variety of needed services in the one place.

Mechanism for case management and referral. The Hubs initiative reflected a shift in the practice and culture of the work of community corrections. Both officers and clients commented that the less formal environment was productive. From this view, the Hubs could serve as an adjunct to the necessarily more

formalised engagement during supervision meetings by encouraging an alternate productive form of engagement that was more collaborative than directive.

Place-based approach. Whole of Government initiatives include a focused on place-based approaches to address social, health and criminal justice issues (Queensland Government, nd). The hubs is but one example of this and QCS may consider this evaluation as part of the government strategic priority “keeping communities safe” and/or the criminal justice reform framework. In the future, QCS can review whether a place based approach is a suitable and effective form of contact to be built into the case management model.

Factors associated with successful outcomes of the Hubs initiative

Consultation and coordination. Stakeholders agreed that several processes needed to occur in the lead up, execution, and conclusion of Hubs. Many commented that the effective operation of the Hubs requires that both the officers and services providers have a clear understanding of Hub procedures and the benefits that can accrue to clients who attend. To this end, offices should continue to designate the coordination and operation of the Hubs as part of the role and responsibilities with the office. During the pilot, interview participants suggested that greater consultation and communication with all stakeholder groups would address many of the problem areas that were raised during the evaluation.

Location and Transportation. Results show that the choice of venue is important and having the events in an open and accessible location encouraged participation. Consideration of travel time, parking and accessibility via public transport in selecting locations was also deemed to be important. Some consideration could also be given to the geographic distribution of Hubs to reach clients located further away; though, stakeholders acknowledge that this would require more coordination and perhaps a distribution of organisational responsibility to different District Offices.

Selection of Services. The overall success of the Hubs initiative is dependent on matching client needs to relevant services. Through the course of the study the variety of services in attendance increased, however, stakeholders commented that continued attention to the type and mix of services in attendance at each Hubs was important. Among services to consider in the future were those targeting the different needs of men and women, those focussed on clients with children, and those focussed on Indigenous clients.

Invitation of clients. Some clients indicated that they only attended the Hubs because they were required, or thought they were required, to do so. Officers should consider and/or be clearer in their communication with clients whether attendance should be optional for those clients that would prefer to meet only in the office or who might be reluctant to engage in an open, public setting.

Timing. Stakeholders suggested that Hubs should be scheduled less frequently to avoid problems of lethargy and burnout amongst providers and staff. Further, using a strategy of staggered arrivals could help to alleviate bottlenecks during busy periods at each Hub.

Guidance for Hub attendees. Giving Hub attendees information about each service provider at the Hub in addition to a map indicating the location of the various service providers at the site would be advantageous during peak times when staff cannot accompany all clients through the event.

Supervision of children. For clients attending the Hubs and accompanied by children, it is suggested that a safe area with games etc. along with appropriate supervision is provided.

Follow-up. In order to allow for officers to effectively track their clients' connections to relevant services to aid in case management, as well as to allow a greater understanding of the broader effects of the Hubs, coordination among officers, clients and services regarding follow up to contacts made during the Hub event would be of benefit. This should include information that can be used to coordinate among officers and the various services with respect to any post-Hub communication with the client.

Data collection. During the pilot study, Hubs procedures for collecting information were continually developing. Given that one aim of the Hubs initiative is to increase referrals to services, developing a standard method for collecting information about client-service provider connections would be useful for gauging the extent to which the aim is met. While adding additional administrative layers to the work of officers and/or service providers may serve as a barrier to referring by increasing workload, better utilisation of existing data collection processes may be of benefit for ongoing monitoring of the program.