



Intervention Hub

Part of the Red Snapper Group

An impact evaluation of the first ten computerised cognitive behavioural therapy programmes



Intervention Hub



EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING



ANGER MANAGEMENT



VICTIM AWARENESS



ALCOHOL AWARENESS



WOMEN'S PROGRAMME



THINKING SKILLS



YOUTH PROGRAMME



DOMESTIC ABUSE



CANNABIS AWARENESS

Introduction

This document describes the first large-scale approach to providing Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT) to service users in the UK developed by the Intervention Hub. The document also presents an initial impact evaluation of the first 10 programmes which are designed to reduce reoffending behaviour and promote desistance from crime. The document is written by Russell Webster¹ who has undertaken his own analysis of monitoring data generated from the first 1500 individuals to have been referred to the programmes.

How the programmes work

The programmes are based primarily on CBT, but also make use of other theoretical approaches including: Mindfulness; Desistance Theory; Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT); The Cycle of Change; Motivational Interviewing and Pro-Social Modelling. The first ten programmes, known as hubs, are:

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Alcohol Awareness | Thinking and Social Skills |
| Cannabis Awareness | Domestic Abuse |
| Women's | Victim Awareness (Restorative Justice) |
| Education and Employment | Anger Management |
| Youth | Wellbeing and Resilience |

The Intervention Hub can be accessed via any computer, smart phone, or tablet that has access to the internet irrespective of their operating system. Hubs can be operated by the service user themselves at any time of day or can be accessed alongside a professional to aid discussion and learning.

Each Hub is separated into sessions and each session is broken down into three areas:

1. **Knowledge** – The user is presented with multi-modal information to help develop an awareness of the subject matter.
2. **Understanding** – Reinforces and assesses understanding whilst also helping practitioners identify any areas of concern or development.
3. **New Skills** – The user is offered a number of problem solving strategies and skills to make sustainable changes. They are also able to download a PDF summary of the new skill that they can use outside of the session.

¹ Russell Webster has twenty five years' experience as an independent researcher specialising in substance misuse and crime. He has undertaken evaluations for a wide range of statutory and voluntary sector clients including the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board. Russell runs the leading blog in the justice sector and you can see a full portfolio of his work here.

The programmes have been designed to cater for all learning style and so include:

Audio bars for those with reading difficulties
Visual content such as videos and diagrams
Written instructions

Case examples
Skills practice
Downloadable content

Profile of service users

The probation caseworker (“responsible officer”) recommends that an individual undertakes a specific Hub if that person has a specific criminogenic need which that programme addresses. The referral takes place within the context of the long-established probation Risk-Need-Responsivity principles, recently reaffirmed in the summer 2019 operating blueprint for the new probation system. The blueprint emphasizes the importance of strengths-based, and trauma-informed approaches where relevant, which are a central component of the wellbeing & resilience and women’s Hubs in particular.

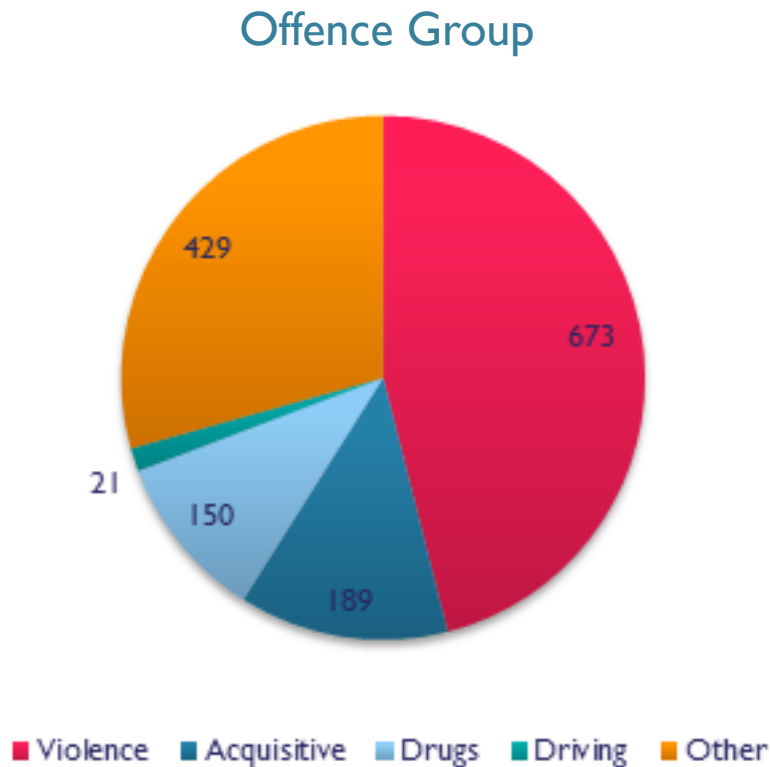
More than 1500 service users have been referred to the completed versions of the first ten Hubs (this does not include the 911 individuals who participated in the pilots). The Hubs have been used by service users with a very diverse profile.

It is no surprise that most participants (like the probation caseload) are male, but a healthy 18% have been women. While the age of participants ranges from 18 to 72 years; the average age² of participants is 32 years, although those doing the anger management Hub (average age 29 years) tend to be younger than those participating in the women, wellbeing and alcohol awareness Hubs (average age 34 years for all three programmes).

The overall offence group of all participants is also recorded and [Figure 1](#) shows that the largest proportion have committed an offence of violence, reflecting the high take-up levels of the victim awareness, domestic abuse and anger management Hubs.

2. Calculated as a mean

Figure 1 – Offence group of intervention hub participants



The participants are mainly from the low and medium tiers on the Risk of Serious Harm scale with 54% formally assessed as medium risk by probation staff, 44% as low risk and 2% as high risk.

Impact

The impact of the Hubs is measured by a series of bespoke questionnaires designed by a team of subject matter experts. The questionnaires are specific to each Hub and test changes in knowledge and attitude; the same questionnaire is self-administered by the participants before they have started the programme and after completion. Pre-and post-programme scores are sorted into three categories:

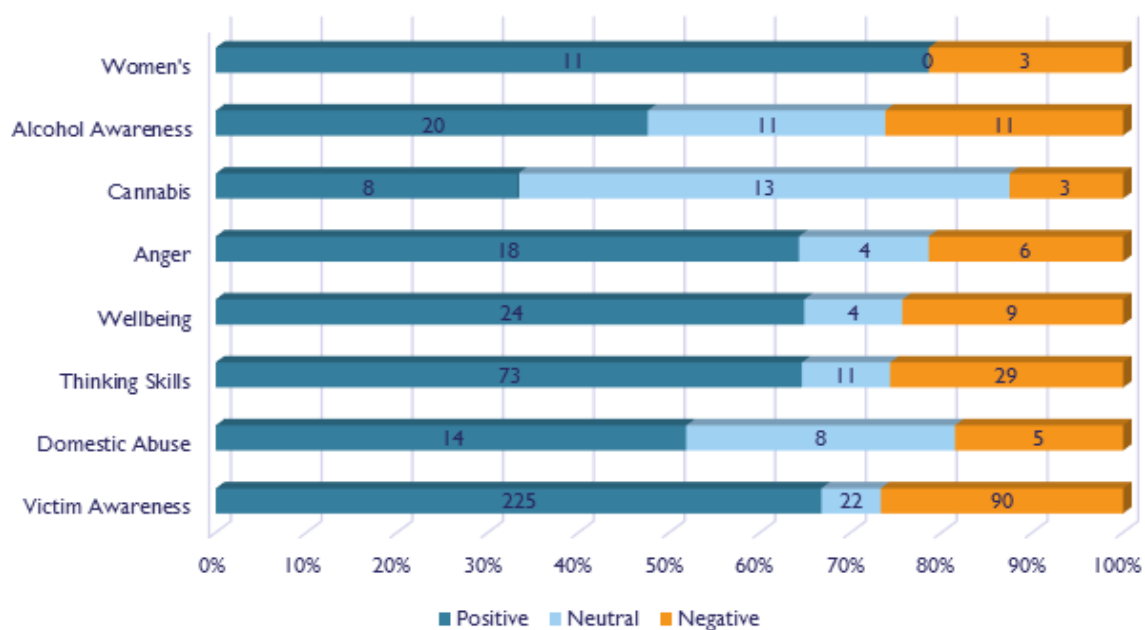
Positive – participants were assessed as having benefitted from undertaking the programme; improving both knowledge and demonstrating more pro-social attitudes.

Neutral – participants were assessed as possibly having benefitted from the programme.

Negative – participants were assessed as not having benefitted from the programme.

Independent analysis found that more than three fifths (63.2%) of participants were assessed as having benefitted from undertaking a programme; improving both knowledge and demonstrating more pro-social attitudes, with a further eighth (11.7%) assessed as having possibly benefitted. Progress varied by Hub as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2 – Progress outcomes on completion by Hub



Hub participants were also asked in the official, anonymised feedback process whether they would recommend a specific programme to others. Overall 83% stated that they had found the programme useful and would recommend it.

Feedback from probation staff

The Hubs were developed and modified in line with feedback from both service users and probation staff. The Intervention Hub conducts regular online feedback gathering sessions with probation staff. The most recent feedback (January and February 2019) revealed a high level of satisfaction with the Hubs, with just minor criticisms aimed at improving administrative processes. In particular, probation staff liked the structured format, the focus of individual Hub sessions, the clarity of the sessions and the fact that service users have the flexibility to access the programmes independently. There was a strong consensus that the Hubs impact positively on reducing offending behavior. Sample feedback includes:

"I like the structured format and it helps to keep sessions focused and relevant. The exercises are also clear and help to explain things to participants and use their own examples." [Probation Officer]

"I like the structure it gives to appointments with participants- enabling them to complete meaningful work and contribute towards RAR days." [Probation Officer]

"I like the overall format and that this can be easily accessed independently." [Probation Service Officer]

"As they work through the exercises they have to think about them, so can link their offending behaviour to the Modules" [Probation Officer]

Conclusion

Mental health chatbots and apps providing computer assisted therapy are becoming much more common in helping people suffering from anxiety and depression manage their wellbeing using cognitive behavioural techniques, often while waiting for, or alongside, face-to-face therapeutic interventions from mental health professionals. Apps such as Calm Harm are becoming established in the mainstream and are increasingly recognised and recommended by mental health professionals.

The Interventions Hub is developing a similarly thorough approach to help people tackle their own offending behaviour. The Hubs are not designed to operate as standalone interventions but to help probation staff facilitate individual service users to understand and desist from crime. The hubs have three main critical components:

1. They are evidence-based and provide detailed feedback on individual progress.
2. They provide an extra resource for probation staff with high caseloads and limited time to deliver lengthy sessions.
3. They promote agency – the central element of effective desistance work – by encouraging service users to take responsibility for their own progress.

