

GoWell is a collaborative partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the University of Glasgow and the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, sponsored by Glasgow Housing Association, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

A large graphic consisting of two overlapping human silhouettes. The left one is teal and the right one is grey. The teal silhouette is larger and partially overlaps the grey one.

## Youth Diversionary Programme Evaluation

September 2010

*GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has a number of different research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: [www.gowellonline.com](http://www.gowellonline.com)*



## INTRODUCTION

Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), in addition to its role in social housing provision, is engaged in a wider range of activities intended to promote safe, inclusive and sustainable environments and enhance tenant and resident wellbeing. GHA co-funds these activities principally through its Wider Action Fund (WAF), working in partnership with tenants and homeowners, local housing organisations (LHOs) and other registered social landlords (RSLs) and a range of other agencies.

Youth diversionary projects are one dimension of the WAF programme, others include health improvement, employability, and financial inclusion initiatives. Youth diversionary projects supported by GHA vary in terms of their aims, scope, coverage, content and stage of development and range from strategic partnerships at national and citywide level to more localised level initiatives.

To assist with funding decisions in this area and to build an evidence base, GHA commissioned an evaluation of a selection of its youth diversionary programmes in 2007. This evaluation was conducted between October 2007 and November 2008 as a nested study within the wider GoWell research programme. The full report is available on the GoWell website: [www.gowellonline.com](http://www.gowellonline.com). This briefing paper provides a summary of the main findings.



## BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE EVALUATION OF YOUTH DIVERSIONARY PROJECTS

Across nearly all the areas studied in GoWell, perceptions of anti-social behaviour have been worsening over time and within this, one of the most often cited problems is 'teenagers hanging around on the street', which itself is linked to many other problems in residents' minds. It is hoped that regeneration of the most deprived areas will help to reduce such problems through a mixture of physical and social changes which both alter opportunity structures within communities and change young people's aspirations and preferred activities.

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<sup>1</sup> See GoWell Report Progress for People and Places: Monitoring Change in Glasgow's Neighbourhoods.

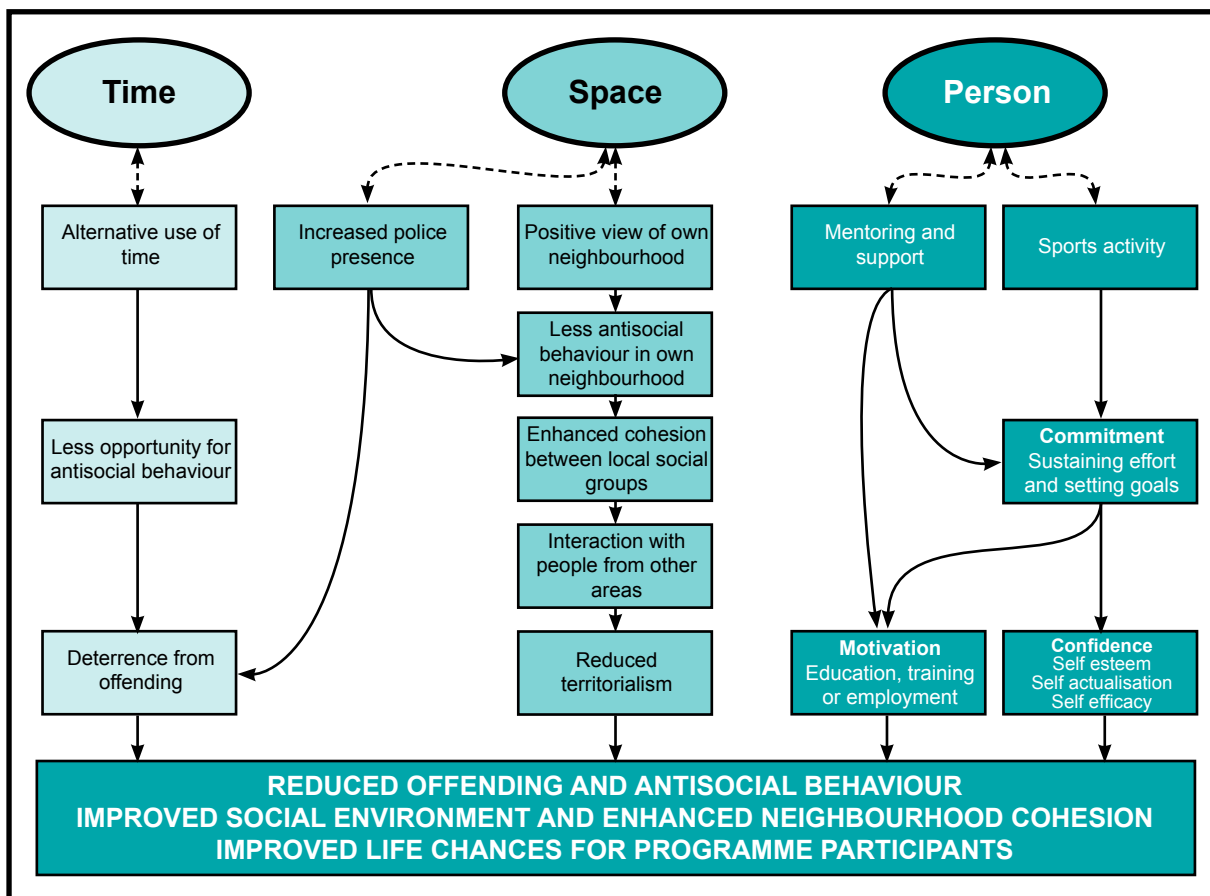
<sup>2</sup> See GoWell Briefing Paper Who Says Teenagers are a Serious Problem?

Regeneration will not happen to the same degree everywhere, and changes occur over a long period of time; many communities cannot wait that long for help with problems of anti-social behaviour. For these reasons, public agencies seek to intervene specifically to tackle youth-related antisocial behaviour problems in disadvantaged communities.

## THE AIMS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROJECTS

In 2007/08, Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) funded 22 Youth Diversionary Projects across the city through its Wider Action Fund. The projects aimed to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour; to improve the local social environment and community safety and cohesion; and to improve the life chances and opportunities of young participants. Our own understanding of the unifying logic of the programme is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: GHA Youth Diversionary Programme: Proposed Programme Logic**





## EVALUATING GHA'S YOUTH DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMME

The aims and objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Gather evidence relating to best practice in youth diversionary initiatives.
- Describe GHA's portfolio of projects in relation to this best practice.
- Evaluate three selected projects in terms of their processes, outputs and outcomes for the young people themselves as well as for local residents and local organisations working in the areas.

The evaluation was also intended to contribute to GHA's learning about the programme so that both future projects, and future monitoring and evaluation of the programme and projects, can be improved.



## METHODS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation combined qualitative and quantitative research methods, studying three youth diversionary projects with different characteristics. The evaluation involved interviews and focus groups with project participants, local residents and stakeholders (both directly involved in the projects and others). The evaluation also involved a survey of participants and the analysis of several sources of secondary data on crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). This incorporation of the views of local residents, young people, and project stakeholders on the performance and effects of the projects is a particular strength of the evaluation.

From the 22 Youth Diversionary projects run by GHA we selected three to study in detail:

**Operation Reclaim (OR):** Operating in five sites across the North East of the city since summer 2007 providing coached sporting and physical activities for large numbers of young people, plus mentoring support for education, training and progression towards employment.

**Participate (P8):** Operating in the Shawbridge Estate in the South West of the city since January 2008 providing individual level support for personal, social and educational development to ten 'disaffected' young people.

**Jedworth Avenue (JA):** Operating in the Drumchapel Estate in the North West of the city, completing in summer 2007 providing individual level activities for six young offenders, including cognitive behavioural therapy and training opportunities.

These projects are shown in more detail in Table 1, below:

**Table 1: Summary of key characteristics of the three youth diversionary projects included in this evaluation**

Project Name	Location	Project implementation stage (at time of evaluation)	Target group content	Intervention
<b>Operation Reclaim (OR)</b>	Five localities across North East Glasgow  Located at football training grounds with indoor and outdoor facilities	Well established: in five sites since summer 2007	All young people in five neighbourhoods – including asylum seeker and refugee sub-population	Coached sport and physical activities  Support with education, training and progression towards employment
<b>Participate (P8)</b>	Shawbridge (Single site in South West Glasgow)  Located in shopping centre in local area	Early implementation: began in January 2008	Local group of approximately ten 'disaffected' young people	Individual level promotion of young people's personal, social and educational development
<b>Jedworth Avenue (JA)</b>	Drumchapel (Single site in North West Glasgow)  Located in local youth centre	Completed: summer 2007	Local group of six young people who had already engaged in offending or offensive behaviour	Individual level restorative justice activities, including cognitive behaviour therapy and personalised training opportunities

As stated, the main aims of the projects are **to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour and raise the community's sense of safety**, but they also had other important, fundamental aims, namely:

**Sustainability:** to affect long-term changes in the sustainability of tenancies and communities; and to change young people's aspirations and behaviour in the long-term.

**Integration:** to contribute to the integration of migrant and foreign residents within communities; and to re-integrate offenders into the community.

**Familiarity and Respect:** to reduce hostility and raise young people's familiarity with, and respect for, both people from other areas and for the police and fire services.



## FINDINGS

### The problem of anti-social behaviour

The topic of anti-social behaviour (ASB) was explored with local residents through a number of focus groups. ASB involving young people was a prevalent issue according to residents, and underlying it were issues of poverty, boredom and associated alcohol misuse. However, the term 'youth diversion' was considered a bit misleading as many of those involved in causing problems for the community were reported to be people in their 20s.

Local residents thought that many young people lacked sufficient parental support and guidance, and suffered from low self esteem and lack of confidence. Thus, youth diversionary projects with personal and social development objectives were thought to be appropriate; simply keeping young people 'busy' would not provide a sustainable answer to the problem.

Inadequate management of the local environment contributed to the opportunities for ASB. In particular residents reported that parks, play areas and open spaces lacked supervision and sufficient maintenance.

### Regeneration could be both part of the problem and part of the solution

- Derelict or empty buildings (an inevitable part of the regeneration process in some areas) provided a location for young people to gather and drink or set fires. It is not clear whether levels of security around buildings was a contributory factor here.

- It is difficult to attribute changes in crime and anti-social behaviour to youth diversionary programmes alone, independent of other ongoing social influences and processes (for example increased policing, CCTV, or wider environmental improvements), especially in regeneration areas where structural and social improvements are continually taking place.

## Characteristics of successful youth diversionary initiatives

Through a review of the research literature we identified a number of characteristics associated with successful youth diversionary initiatives, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Characteristics of successful youth diversionary initiatives**

Planning and design
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● clarity of objectives, rationale, strategy and desired outcomes</li> <li>● locally-based: founded on a clear definition of local needs, employing local staff, and adopting a ‘bottom-up approach’</li> <li>● young people involved in design and organisation, where possible</li> <li>● medium or long-term in duration, not limited to a few months</li> <li>● strong organisational culture of collaboration and multi-agency working</li> </ul>
Content and delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● use peers or qualified outreach/street-workers</li> <li>● target at-risk youth/offenders</li> <li>● work in the context of other aspects of young people’s lives (school, training/education, employment)</li> <li>● given attention to people’s wider personal and social development (e.g. cognitive skills, self-esteem and confidence)</li> <li>● leisure or sporting activities should be integrated within a wider development programme</li> </ul>

## GHA’s youth diversionary initiatives

When measured against best practice criteria identified in the literature, the majority of GHA funded youth diversionary projects appear not to have contained many of the elements required for success. Of the 22 youth diversionary projects which GHA funds, seven projects contained four or five of the ‘success components’, but a further 12 projects contained two or fewer success components – indeed, many projects had none. On this basis, there is scope for GHA and its partners to review the nature and quality of the youth diversionary projects they support.

Nonetheless, a range of factors or characteristics were thought to enable the OR, JA and P8 projects to successfully address their aims. The key elements that contributed to the projects' impacts, according to stakeholders and participants were:

- The diversionary effects of having something enjoyable to do.
- Team based competitions (in the case of Operation Reclaim) which enabled young people to engage with people from other areas as well as to co-operate with young people from other ethnic groups from within their own area.
- The involvement and visibility of the police and the fire service, which together provided a sense of safety and suitable role models. This also reduced hostility towards and boosted respect for these services and personnel.
- Having staff who were skilled in dealing with young people; able to communicate and build trust but also offering structure and discipline. Mature and experienced coaching staff were considered most effective in this regard.
- Complementary and inter-agency working which enabled both simultaneous and reinforcing action on several fronts, as well as offering referral opportunities to assist with the needs of individual participants, e.g. for advice or training and employment opportunities. Multi-agency commitment to tackling local problems in a co-ordinated way was both an important part and a by-product of the youth diversionary projects.

Stakeholders reported that sustained coverage, intensity, inter-agency collaboration and quality of project staff were essential to achieving and sustaining the aims of reducing ASB and improving community safety. However, only Operation Reclaim (OR) was reported to have each of these elements.

The impacts of the largest project, OR, may also be a function of its intensity and scale, leading to its success in engaging large numbers of young people: a maximum of up to 15% of young people in the relevant areas of north Glasgow could attend on any one night. Nine out of ten of those participating reported attending every week, with the vast majority (85%) attending 'most days'.

There was also widespread agreement among OR participants that they enjoyed the activities provided. OR involved team sports which mixed people from different neighbourhoods, and involved competition and awards ceremonies which also helped boost its impact. The former broke down territorial barriers between young people and the latter instilled a sense of pride and achievement in participants.



## Impacts on the neighbourhood and community

A number of positive impacts of the projects upon the local neighbourhood and community were fairly consistently reported by a range of stakeholders and by the participants themselves. However, data were often not available, robust or consistent enough to corroborate these reported benefits. The most significant impacts were reported in two areas:

### Crime and anti-social behaviour:

- **Reductions in incidents and reports (to official agencies) of crime and ASB.** Residents, participants and stakeholders all reported reductions in crime and ASB, partly attributing this to the projects. Residents' focus groups in particular elicited consistent perceptions of reductions in local crime and ASB in recent years. Official crime data tended to support the notion of a recent reduction in crime levels, particularly non-violent juvenile crime from early 2007 onwards, by which time the largest project (OR) was operative in all five locations in the north of the city.
- **Reductions in fire setting, particularly to buildings and rubbish** Stakeholders reported that fires and bogus calls to the fire service had reduced. We examined fire service data for the JA project area, which showed elimination of fires to buildings and of malicious calls to the fire service over a 12 month period. However, demolition of derelict buildings is also a likely reason for the reduction in fire raising.
- **A reduction in gang activity, especially gang fights.** This was reported consistently by residents, the police and participants; and reported in both the north of the city and the west.
- **Resource savings, firstly to the police in respect of dealing with gang incidents and, secondly, to the Local Housing Organisations (LHOs) in respect of property repair and graffiti removal.** One LHO estimated its spending on graffiti removal had fallen by 90% in three years. Regeneration activity and building clearance could also have contributed to these cost savings.

### Community social life:

- **Reclaiming of public spaces for use by young people and the wider community.** Residents and young people reported that some parks and open spaces were being made more accessible for use by the local residents. Some residents reported an increased confidence to venture outside and make use of nearby spaces. This was reported by both stakeholders and project participants.

- **Reduced tension and hostility between youth from different ethnic groups.** Stakeholders reported a reduction in hostility and racist incidents. However, this had not progressed to ‘meaningful interaction’ between youths from different ethnic backgrounds and it was reported that social segregation still existed between ethnic groups in and around the projects. The passage of time and interaction through schools were other recognised contributors to ‘improved’ ethnic relations.
- **Improved police-community relations.** Both stakeholders and participants reported an improvement in relations between the police, young people and the community as a result of police involvement in the projects.

## Other factors

There were other developments or activities which occurred during the period of operation of the youth diversionary projects which probably also impacted upon incidents of crime and ASB. These serve as confounders when trying to attribute any success to the youth diversionary projects, but in some ways also complement the youth diversionary projects. The main other developments were:

- Increased policing and the installation of CCTV.
- Demolition and clearance processes which had two effects: reducing the opportunities for fire-setting – once buildings were down; and removing some key offender individuals and families from the area.
- Improving local expertise in dealing with ASB, particularly through the LHOs supported by GHA’s Neighbour Relations Team.
- The efforts of Strathclyde Fire & Rescue service, putting on a range of school and community-based fire and safety programmes.

## Impacts upon project participants – young people

The impacts of the projects upon participants can be summarised in four areas:

### Offending:

Without systematic follow-up procedures, it was difficult for project staff to be certain about having impacts upon offending behaviours. However, staff in each project could relate accounts of particular individuals whom they had observed moving away from crime and ASB to more positive relations and endeavours.

### **Personal development:**

Project participants and stakeholders reported personal development gains for young people from their involvement with the projects, with most references to: improved confidence; maturity; self-esteem; a more positive attitude to life; and an interest and desire to form relationships or networks with other people.

### **Education, training and employment:**

Survey evidence from participants indicated that they received a range of types of help via the projects (in terms of advice, support and referrals), with most help being given in relation to sport, leisure, health and social issues. Significant proportions of participants also received help with learning and training: 31% of OR participants said they received advice on these things. Help was also provided with employment: 11% reported receiving employment support, which could mean help with job searching or with CV preparation.

It is possible that the projects had a broader effect upon participants' attitudes and motivation: a third (33%) of OR participants had started work experience since attending OR; nearly a fifth (18%) of participants had started a job; and a tenth (11%) had started a new course. However, without a comparison group of young people from similar areas and backgrounds, it is difficult to be certain about the extent to which these impacts are attributable to the OR initiative.

### **Health behaviours:**

Perhaps the most important impact of the projects is reflected in the fact that three-quarters of OR participants reported that they felt healthier and more optimistic about the future since attending the project.

In interviews and discussions, some participants reported improved fitness and a healthier lifestyle since participating in the projects, but it is possible this is only true for the more committed participants. However, our survey of OR participants found a reported reduction in the number of evenings and weekends spent at home, possibly indicating that participants are more physically active than previously.

The other most notable potential health-related gain was that there was a significant reduction in participants' reported frequency of drinking alcohol, perhaps due to less 'hanging around' on the street.

Changes in participants' reported experience of, and involvement in, crime and ASB presented a mixed picture, and were not statistically significant, possibly due to the small size of the survey. Reports of being involved in fighting and stealing rose slightly, but involvement in vandalism and violence fell slightly.



## RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPROVING AND DEVELOPING THE PROGRAMME AND PROJECTS

There are several key areas where issues pertaining to the effectiveness of the projects should be discussed by the sponsors:

### **Targeting:**

The two main issues here relate to gender and offender-status:

**Gender:** The projects currently recruit predominantly boys (80% of participants in OR are boys). This is insufficient given resident reports that girls are also engaging in ASB. Girls in general may also benefit from the activities and support offered by the projects.

**Offender-status:** Some projects target offenders and others do not, but are open to all local young people. These two approaches offer different benefits to participants and to the community. However, stakeholders in both OR and P8 advocated the benefits of mixing offenders with non-offenders, namely that: it weakens the gang dynamic among offenders; it gives offenders the opportunity to change their behaviours through mixing with others; and it avoids non-offenders feeling that offending is subsequently rewarded with enjoyable activities.

There is also an issue of age. The broader the age range, the harder it is for projects to provide suitable activities for everyone. Yet, local reports indicate that older young people (aged 20 and above) should also be included because they are the source of many local problems.

The indications of community level effects, for example on crime and ASB, were strongest in the case of OR, and here it is worth noting that these impacts may have come as a result of the project's much larger scale. Stakeholders argued that the scale of OR delivered benefits because positive peer influence was more likely to operate among participants, and it created a 'virtuous circle' of increasing levels of local participation in OR rather than gangs.

### **Activities:**

The activities provided in the largest project, OR, are predominantly sports-based and mostly male-oriented. This currently limits the attractiveness of the project for girls. Furthermore, most projects do not currently provide a lot of personal and social development (PSD) activity to many of their participants, though all provide some personal development and advice. This is an area that merits strengthening in all funded projects, taking advantage of the fact that more enjoyable activities manage to attract young people (including the disaffected), to the projects in the first place.

### **Monitoring:**

Project activity and monitoring information available from Youth Diversionary Projects funded by GHA could be improved in coverage and quality to enhance future programme development and evaluations. In addition, consideration should be given to establishing consistency in the collection and recording of ASB incident data, including repairs and vandalism by social landlords (LHOs and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs)). A planned and systematic approach to the use of local crime data to evaluate the impact of youth diversionary projects is essential. This would have to involve a comparison of trends in crime data for project areas, with trends for a number of similarly deprived non-project areas in the same part of the city (e.g. north Glasgow).

### **Stakeholder involvement:**

Several stakeholders professed their interest in being given more information on a regular basis about the projects, and getting more involved in the projects. This would offer the projects both promotional opportunities (there was some lack of awareness of the projects among residents), and a greater range of support mechanisms for participants through partners.

### **Coverage and duration:**

Several aspects of coverage and duration were evident as issues for the projects. First, should the projects operate on Saturday evenings as well as weekday evenings? There were some reports by participants that they engaged in ASB when the projects were not running, and police stakeholders thought weekend operation would be desirable. Second, there were other local areas, especially where gangs operated, that would benefit from the projects. Third, some of the projects were short-term or seasonal, and yet there were clearly benefits from the sustained duration of OR.

## **Limitations of the evaluation**

The evaluation faced a number of difficulties which limit its ability to make very strong, generalisable conclusions. These drawbacks include the following:

- The fact that only three of 22 projects were studied, although one of these was the most extensive, multi-site project, Operation Reclaim.
- The lack of a prior baseline position for the project areas.
- The lack of a control or contrast (non-project) area in the study.

- The non-availability and narrow range of types of project data available for examination.
- The incomplete and inconsistent nature of the secondary data available, as well as the small number of recorded incidents for tightly defined areas, reducing the robustness of the data analysis.
- The modest size of the participants' survey (63 completed and useable forms).

## Questions and uncertainties about impacts

A number of uncertainties remain about the effectiveness of the projects in delivering the range of impacts reported. The main unanswered questions are:

- Whether some impacts (e.g. reductions in vandalism or alcohol consumption) are maintained on evenings when the projects are not operational.
- Whether impacts will be sustained over time, particularly if projects cease to operate.
- Whether reductions in crime and ASB are greater than in other similar areas of the city which do not have youth diversionary projects operating.
- Whether some problems (e.g. gang activity) are displaced to other locations.
- Whether attitudinal and behavioural changes (e.g. to other areas and to people from other places) are also evident outside the context of the projects, i.e. when young people are free to make choices in their own time.

These issues of displacement, sustainability and extension of impacts are not ones which this study can answer within the resources, methodologies and information available and therefore future research would benefit from considering these issues.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was conducted by Dr Elizabeth Aston at the MRC/CSO SPHSU, in collaboration with Dr Hilary Thomson (MRC/CSP SPHSU), Dr Anne Scoular (previously MRC, now NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde) and Professor Ade Kearns (Department of Urban Studies, Glasgow University). Professor Mark Petticrew (previously MRC, now London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) supervised the original research specification.

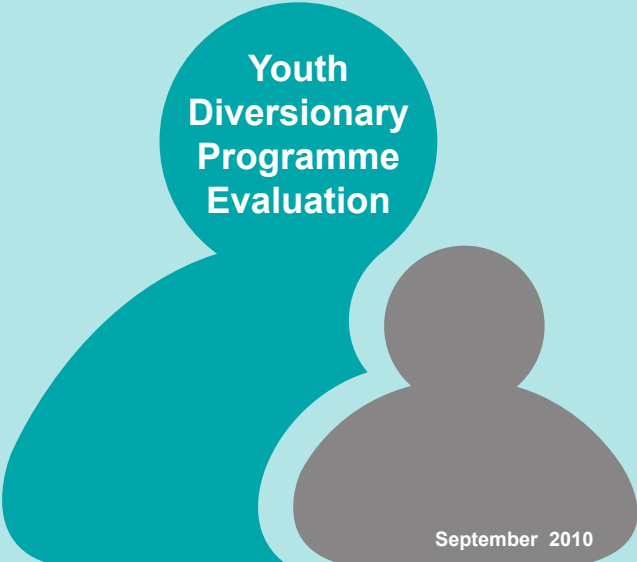
Hexagon Research and Consulting (Glasgow) conducted and reported on the focus groups that formed part of this research.

GoWell would also like to thank the following:

- Glasgow Housing Association (GHA)
- GHA tenants who took part in focus groups
- Young people who participated in the questionnaire and interviews
- Staff delivering the Operation Reclaim, P8 and Jedworth Avenue initiatives; Strathclyde Police, GHA Local Housing Office staff, GHA Development and Regeneration team and all partner agencies who participated in interviews and provided data.

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The graphic consists of two overlapping, rounded shapes. The larger one on the left is teal, and the smaller one on the right is grey. The teal shape has a white circle inside it containing the title text.

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