

Effectiveness of Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS) in Reducing Sexual Recidivism Among Young People in Queensland

Executive Summary

This policy brief summarises key findings from a quasi-experimental evaluation of the Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS). GYFS is a specialised treatment program for young people adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland. The study examined administrative data from 1,489 young people processed between 2010 and 2024, comparing outcomes for 144 treated with 303 untreated comparable young people. Findings demonstrate that participation in GYFS significantly reduces reoffending, particularly sexual recidivism, reinforcing the value of specialised, evidence-based treatment services within Queensland's Youth Justice system.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Overall recidivism reduced by 34–44%.** Young people who received GYFS treatment were 1.6 to 1.8 times less likely to reoffend compared to similar untreated young people.
- **Sexual recidivism reduced by 78–90%.** The rate of sexual reoffending was up to 10 times lower among treated young people.
- **Non-sexual and violent reoffending also declined.** While reductions were smaller and sometimes not statistically significant, trends were consistently positive.
- **Methodologically rigorous evidence.** Advanced quasi-experimental methods, propensity score matching, inverse probability weighting, and Cox regression, controlled for confounding factors providing one of the most analytically robust studies on this specific topic to date.
- **Treatment mechanisms.** GYFS integrates cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), trauma-informed practice, and a multisystemic model addressing, individual, family, social, and contextual risk factors.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Reinforce and expand specialised treatment capacity:
 - Evidence strongly supports continued and expanded investment in GYFS and similar services to ensure more eligible young people can access specialised intervention earlier.
- Integrate developmental and trauma-informed frameworks:
 - Addressing developmental, psychological, and ecological drivers of offending produces measurable benefits for community safety and rehabilitation.
- Embed evaluation within service delivery:
 - Ongoing program monitoring using administrative data and quasi-experimental evaluation designs should be institutionalised across youth justice services.
- Enhance culturally responsive service delivery:
 - Develop targeted strategies to improve referral, engagement, and cultural adaptation within specialised treatment models.
- Adopt evidence-based referral criteria:
 - Referrals should prioritise high-risk cases but align with clearly defined eligibility criteria to ensure equitable access and methodological integrity.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Follow-up was limited to the youth justice period; long-term adult outcomes remain unknown. Recidivism was measured using only proven offences. Future evaluations should include adult data, qualitative outcomes (e.g., wellbeing, family stability), and treatment engagement metrics.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

POLICY AREA	RECOMMENDED ACTION
<i>Program Funding</i>	Sustain and expand funding for GYFS to meet demand and ensure statewide coverage.
<i>Evaluation Infrastructure</i>	Establish a longitudinal data-sharing framework between Griffith University and the Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support for continuous evaluation.
<i>Cultural Responsiveness</i>	Co-design culturally specific interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
<i>Workforce Development</i>	Maintain a model led by registered psychologists with ongoing supervision and professional training.
<i>Cross-System Integration</i>	Strengthen partnerships between youth justice, education, health, and child protection sectors to support holistic rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

Griffith Youth Forensic Service provides a proven, evidence-based model for reducing reoffending among young people adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland. The program's individualised, multisystemic, and research-informed approach delivers clear benefits for public safety, rehabilitation, and service equity. Continued government investment in specialised, trauma-informed interventions like GYFS represents a cost-effective and socially responsible policy direction for Queensland's youth justice system.

Source: Cale, J., Whitten, T., Perales, F., O'Shannessy, D., & Leclerc, B. (2025). A quasi-experimental evaluation of a specialized treatment service for youth adjudicated for sexual offences in Queensland, Australia. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 99, 102462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2025.102462>

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