

# Evaluation Summary for

## Treating Sexually Harmful Teenage Males: A longitudinal evaluation of a Therapeutic Community - Summary Report

Glebe House is an independent children's home, run by a Quaker charitable trust. Founded in 1965, it operates as a therapeutic community for particularly damaged and challenging young men, typically aged 16-19 years, who are also perpetrators of sexually harmful behaviour.

Following a successful pilot study in 1999-2000, the Trustees commissioned a substantive longitudinal study to run over the period 2002-14. The specific advantage of this rarely-employed method was its ability to evaluate over a long period Glebe House's effectiveness in terms of: any reduction in the type and extent of problems identified on the young men's arrival; any key lifestyle changes after leaving; and any reduction/cessation of their sexually harmful behaviour thereafter.

The research drew on semi-structured interviews with 43 young men (known as the Ongoing Cohort, or OC) at intervals during and after their residency, with a further 15 who left the Community prematurely (the Early Leaver Group, or ELG) and with staff and external professionals. It also drew on case records, and Ministry of Justice re/conviction data for the OC and a comparison group (CG). Its key findings are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Almost all of these young men came from damaged and debilitating family backgrounds, where neglect and the range of abuse types were prevalent. Case records reported physical health problems at arrival in 72% of the 43 OC and 80% of the ELG; mental health symptoms such as post-traumatic and dissociative states were also reported but had often not been formally diagnosed. Arguably, Glebe House needs greater access to diagnostic expertise in these latter areas.

54% of the OC and 73% of the ELG had spent the greater proportion of their lives in the Care system with frequent placement and educational disruption. 49% of the OC and 87% of the ELG had diagnosed conditions, notably learning disabilities. Educational/psychological assessment and the educational programme at Glebe House had done much to mitigate these problems and enable residents to gain qualifications before leaving.

Just under half of both the OC and the ELG had been criminalised for the sexual offences towards children, mainly within their own families, placements or schools, which had led to their referral to Glebe House. In all but 3 of the OC cases, these were contact offences; all the ELG's offences had been at the more serious end of the contact spectrum. Although similarly harmful sexual behaviour had been perpetrated by their fellow residents arriving via the Care system, it often seemed to be a matter of chance or geography as to who was criminalised.

Twelve of the 15 members of the ELG left early because of offending or other unacceptable behaviour within the Community. Of note was that a higher proportion of the ELG had arrived at a slightly older age, from multiple Care placements, direct from Secure establishments, and with criminalised members having committed more serious offences than those in the OC, bearing implications for the likely programme completion of young men with these characteristics. Confirming other research findings, sexual recidivism among this group of programme 'drop-outs' was proportionately greater (eleven-fold in this case) than among the programme completers.

Based on a checklist administered on arrival and departure, the majority of the OC reported a significant reduction or cessation of their highest-ranked problems by the end of the therapeutic programme. These notably included self-harm, suicidal thoughts, depression, reactions to bereavement and loss, and their own experiences of abuse and neglect, which they felt the programme had helped to heal. Additionally none of them was in denial about their own previous sexually harmful behaviour.

Based on a further checklist, there was a very high set of scores in respect of all aspects of life at Glebe House. Staff, one-to-one therapy, groupwork, education, sport and work experiences, and support with family contact were all highly praised. This was mostly true of community meetings, but some felt they could be boring and go on too long. Contact with Social and YOT Workers and Probation Officers was generally appreciated, though a minority had felt ill-served and let down at times.

Responses within the young men's interviews, together with staff interviews and questionnaires, provided evidence of the ongoing commitment, professionalism and a high degree of job satisfaction of staff at all levels of the Community, despite an unsettling period of change over recent years. It is crucial that these qualities are nurtured and sustained.

Ministry of Justice re/conviction rates showed considerably greater recorded criminal activity among the CG compared with the OC. In total, 7 of the 43 OC members (16%) had offended, committing 21 offences, as against 19 of the 43 in the CG (44%), committing 95 offences leading up to May 2014. Only one OC member had a re/conviction for a sex offence and one for a violent (non-sex) offence, as against five each from the CG.

Annual post-leaving interviews with the OC, and telephone interviews with their involved professionals revealed a need for more preparation by Glebe House for specific elements of budgeting, employment and parenting. Overall, however, though only a minority were in employment at final interview, most young men and professionals alike felt that in other key areas, such as accommodation, family relationships and healthy lifestyles, Glebe House had given them the tools for future resilience.

### Conclusion

This longitudinal study reported on the effectiveness of a therapeutic community for young men in their late teens, who were perpetrators of sexual harm, and were, for the most part, themselves damaged and abused in a range of ways. It found a notable reduction, at departure, of some very serious problems identified by these young men on arrival at the Community. It also found that 84% were not subsequently re/convicted, as against 56% of the comparison group, and that only one person had re/offended sexually and one violently, compared with five each of the comparison group. Those coming to Glebe House at a slightly older than average age, from Secure establishments and with previous multiple care placements, were at higher risk of dropping out of the therapeutic programme than those without such characteristics; and those dropping out were considerably more likely to re/offend sexually.

After leaving Glebe House, the majority of young men who had completed the programme were not in stable employment, but were coping well in other key areas such as accommodation, family relationships and healthy lifestyles, and making the best of their limited circumstances. They had benefited from independence preparation, but would have appreciated more of this. They would also have benefited from ongoing external professional support where this had been absent, or ceased prematurely. For this reason, the Community's current plans to establish a Circle of Support and Accountability for each departing resident, to ease their transition into the wider community, appears to be a logical and coherent future development.

Sexually harmful behaviour, particularly when directed towards children, is a high-profile problem in contemporary society. It is also a complex problem, which incarceration is unlikely to solve, though it may afford temporary public protection. As noted in the main report, research suggests that most young sex offenders do not re-offend, and adolescence is a developmental stage when the potential for long-term change is optimal. The longitudinal and complementary qualitative and quantitative data contained in this report have the advantage of demonstrating movement over several years, and can thus claim considerable robustness of method and reliability of findings. In particular, the study has been able to demonstrate that positive change has followed for the majority of those respondents who have completed the therapeutic programme. Not only were most of them not re/convicted, as against a considerably higher-convicted comparison group, the majority also felt their lives had been turned around by the two or more years they had spent at Glebe House and by the commitment of staff who always had time for them. Thus, it would appear that an investment in placements at Glebe House is well worth making.

To give the last word to one young man who left the Community eight years ago and lives now a stable and law-abiding life:

***The work can be hard, but it's worth doing because then you can have a future.***