

# Evaluation of a diversion programme for youth sexual offenders: Fight with Insight

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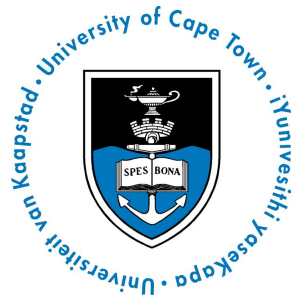


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**TEDDY BEAR CLINIC**  
FOR ABUSED CHILDREN

## Introduction

The abuse of children is a concerning issue in South Africa. Interventions with the perpetrators of this abuse, especially young offenders, are vital in order to break the cycle of abuse. Conventional methods to treat young offenders within the justice system, such as punitive correctional facilities, have not been proven to be effective in the reduction of recidivism rates amongst these youth, as this system is only able to keep youth offenders from committing crimes for a specific period of time.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that these types of facilities may do more harm than good, as they do not address the psychosocial needs of these youth that led them to the commission of a crime/s, which can negatively impact the identity of these youth as well.<sup>1-3</sup> In contrast to these conventional methods, psychosocial and cognitive-behavioural therapies have been recommended in the treatment of youth offenders,<sup>4</sup> and a combination of these treatments is often used in diversion programmes for the rehabilitation of youth offenders.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from these therapeutic methods, various alternative activities have been incorporated into the rehabilitation of youth offenders, such as sport.<sup>6</sup> The evidence for the effectiveness of such programmes is however limited. Sandford et al<sup>7</sup> maintain that sport (and physical activity) can play a role in the promotion of pro-social behaviour. This is relevant for youth offenders, but a clear understanding of how and with whom this will happen has not been attained, and claims regarding the benefits of such programmes relay on a number of conditions.<sup>7</sup> Regarding research in this area, they recommend a focus on the “optimal combinations of individuals, activities and contexts” in sport and physical activity programmes, and argue that the impact of such programmes needs to be defined and determined more precisely.<sup>7</sup>

### Fight with Insight

The Teddy Bear Clinic for Abused Children (TBC) is a non-profit organisation based in Johannesburg that works to protect and rehabilitate abused children. Therapy and counselling services are offered, along with the assistance, love, comfort, safety, and on-going support needed by children who have suffered abuse. The TBC works with parents and communities in order to empower them with knowledge and skills to help put an end to child abuse. The TBC also works with learners and teachers at schools in an effort to prevent child abuse.

Fight with Insight (FWI) is a boxing project facilitated at the TBC’s offices in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg, and is intended for children and youth who have committed a sexual offence, as part of a 12-week diversion programme, SPARC (Support Programme for Abuse Reactive Children). Diversion can be defined as the channelling of children and youth away from the formal court system into programmes that make them accountable for their actions and give them an opportunity to repair the damage caused by their crime, within themselves. The vision of SPARC is to disrupt the cycle of abuse and prevent the development of potential adult offenders by reducing recidivism. With the launch of the new Child Justice Act (Act 75) of 2008, an important step has been taken in ensuring that children finding themselves in conflict with the law are dealt with more appropriately. The diversion programme is therefore a preferred option taken by the courts, and will lead to more referrals to the FWI programme.

FWI has two complementary components that run back-to-back. Within the same day, participants attend a boxing session and then move on to a Cognitive-Behavioural Group Therapy (CBT) session,

combining the physical and interpersonal disciplines. Those who complete the full 12 weeks are then able to join the Box Office Boxing Gym programme (in Johannesburg's southern suburbs). Support groups are also offered at the TBC for parents of FWI participants.

The content of the therapy sessions (for youth) include the following, and these themes are also integrated into the boxing sessions:

- Acknowledgement of responsibility for one's actions;
- Awareness that actions have consequences;
- Understanding sex and sexuality, including HIV/ AIDS;
- Develop victim empathy;
- Affirmation exercises;
- Anger management;
- Problem solving skills;
- Steps to healthy touching, appropriate and inappropriate touching;
- Developing clear boundaries; and
- Impulse control.

Certain of these themes are integrated into the boxing sessions more explicitly than others, such as anger management, impulse control and affirmation (leading to improved self-esteem). The integration of these themes in the therapy and boxing sessions should lead to improved outcomes in these areas. Furthermore, it is intended that through the boxing sessions, participants develop respect for the art and sport of boxing, learn basic rules and skills of boxing, and improve their strength and fitness.

Further details about the FWI programme are provided under the 'Findings' section later in the report.

### **Research aim**

While some internal monitoring and evaluation of the FWI programme has taken place, the programme has yet to be formally evaluated by a party external to the programme. Therefore, the aim of this study was to qualitatively evaluate the effectiveness of the FWI programme.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Define programme effectiveness within the context of the FWI programme;
- Describe the programme and mechanisms of its effectiveness;
- Evaluate perceptions of the programme's effectiveness, according to participants, programme managers and programme facilitators; and
- Describe factors influencing the effectiveness of the programme.

## Methods

### Study design

Because FWI has approximately 12 participants per 12-week programme, which is a relatively small number in comparison with other sport for development programmes, a qualitative approach was deemed to be most appropriate for the evaluation. Qualitative research is by nature more exploratory and descriptive, and would enable a better understanding of psychological and social processes and issues that are not well understood, such as those that underlie the effectiveness of the FWI programme. Furthermore, smaller samples are used in qualitative research (compared to quantitative research), as the aim of qualitative research is to produce rich information; this can be achieved more effectively with fewer participants. The smaller numbers of FWI participants would not have been sufficient for robust statistical analysis, and such analysis may have produced data lacking in depth.

Since FWI participants and parents were already familiar with the therapeutic setting, where they would have engaged with psychological issues at a deeper level, it was believed that semi-structured focus groups were the most suitable method for data collection with these groups. Considering that FWI programme staff could contribute to the objectives mentioned above (especially one and two), key informant interviews were chosen as the best means of obtaining information about and insight into the FWI programme, both from the perspectives of programme management and facilitation.

### Study sample and procedure

Focus groups were conducted with FWI participants (n=17), parents of FWI participants (n=7), and youth offenders who had only participated in CBT sessions, and did not take part in any alternative therapies, such as boxing (comparison group, n=10). Comparison groups were included so that it may be possible to identify factors unique to the FWI programme, and specifically the boxing component of this programme, that could contribute to its effectiveness. Details of focus group participants are provided in Table 1. All focus groups took place at the TBC, and were audio recorded. Due to the sensitive nature of the discussions, smaller groups of five to six participants (per group) were favoured. Key informants interviews were conducted with FWI programme staff involved in the management (n=3) and facilitation (n=3) of the programme.

Focus group participants	n	Age	Gender	Programme involvement
FWI Group 1	n=6	12-18 years Average: 16 years	16 male	FWI 2009-2011
FWI Group 2	n=5			
FWI Group 3	n=5			
Mixed interview	n=2	13 years 12 years	1 male 1 female	FWI 2010 CBT 2009
Comparison Group 1	n=5	11-19 years Average: 15 years	9 male	CBT 2008-2010
Comparison Group 1	n=4			
Parent Group 1	n=3	n/a	4 female	n/a
Parent Group 2	n=4		2 male	

**Table 1: Focus group participant details**

### **Focus group facilitation**

For practical reasons, the parent focus groups and one of the control focus groups were conducted by a female facilitator, who has assisted with the facilitation of youth CBT groups and parent support groups since 2011. The rest of the focus groups were facilitated by a male facilitator who has facilitated CBT groups (including those as part of FWI) since the end of 2010. Both facilitators were fluent in Zulu and Sotho (the African languages commonly spoken in Johannesburg), as the majority of the individuals participating were not first-language English speakers. Both were skilled and experienced in group facilitation with youth, and were well equipped to deal with the sensitive nature of the discussions. Furthermore, both facilitators were familiar with the types of issues dealt with by FWI participants and their parents, and were therefore able to facilitate the discussion in such a way that the relevant issues were explored without posing any additional risk to participants.

Those coordinating the focus groups tried as far as possible to get participants who had done the programme together to be in the same focus group, but this wasn't always feasible. Participants were therefore not always that comfortable to speak with each other, which relates to issues of trust within the group. Because of the anticipated difficulties of establishing trust between participants, it was felt that a facilitator who was unfamiliar with the participants and the programme – an 'outsider' – might have further inhibited the establishment of trust between participants. This is why the facilitators were individuals from the FWI programme, so they had conducted therapy groups with some of the participants, and had contact with some, but not all, of the other participants through additional programme activities, e.g. outings or trips. The male facilitator felt that this familiarity encouraged participants to be more open in the focus group discussions, and that participants who did not know him perceived him as a stranger and were less trusting of him.

### **Interview and focus group guide questions**

Guide questions were used for the interviews and focus groups (see appendix), and these were developed in consultation with the FWI programme staff because of their insight into programme issues. For the FWI and comparison group participants, the guide questions aimed to elicit participants' perceptions of the extent to which the programme in which they have participated had been effective (i.e. what they have learnt, and how they have changed), and the factors they felt had influenced this change or learning. Focus groups with parents of FWI participants were similar, but focussed on the extent to which parents believed that FWI programme had been effective in bringing about positive changes in their child. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, space was given in all focus groups for participants to explore issues that were not directly addressed by the guide questions, but were applicable to the research. Guide questions for the key informant interviews focussed on the extent to which key informants believe that FWI programme has been effective in bringing about positive changes in programme participants, and their views on the factors influencing the effectiveness of the programme.

### **Translation, transcription and analysis of data**

Focus group and interview recordings were verbally translated into English by an individual from the TBC fluent in English and the languages spoken in the focus groups. These English recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

For the analysis of data, transcripts were read through initially to obtain a general sense of the issues raised in the focus groups and interviews. A coding framework of themes and sub-themes was developed based on the guide questions, and refined in light of any additional issues that emerged in the interviews and focus groups. Using this coding framework, transcripts were then coded according to thematic content. The analysis therefore made use of deductive and inductive approaches. Atlas.ti Qualitative Data Analysis Software (Scientific Software Development GmbH, Berlin, Germany) was used to assist with the data analysis. Once the transcripts had been coded, quotes for each code were grouped together and summarised, and specific quotes were chosen that best represented the sub-themes and themes outlined in the coding framework. After the coding of data, programme staff at the TBC with experience in qualitative data analysis were consulted. The purpose of this consultation was to provide feedback on the validity of the coding framework and the coding process, which helps to enhance the overall validity of the findings.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town (REC REF 245/2011). Informed consent was obtained from the parents / caregivers of these youth for their and their child's involvement in the focus groups, and youth gave assent for their involvement in the study. Consent was also obtained from key informants.

## Findings

### Programme effectiveness defined

Key informants were asked how they would define the success or effectiveness of the programme. From their perspective, the main indicator of effectiveness for FWI is the reduction of recidivism, but in addition to this, they mentioned a range of intrapersonal and interpersonal indicators of effectiveness. These could be seen to influence the achievement of the main goal of reducing recidivism, and also relate to the description of the programme and mechanisms of its effectiveness, both of which are described in the following section. Intrapersonal indicators included participants being able to address their cognitive distortions and defence mechanisms, thereby helping them to understand behavioural triggers and develop insight into their offending behaviour. Increased self-awareness and awareness of choices, self-esteem and confidence were also seen to be indicators, along with improved problem solving and decision making skills, anger management and impulse control, and the assumption of responsibility for their choices and behaviour.

Interpersonal indicators referred to by key informants were improved relations between participants and their families as well as adjustment within their community and conflict resolution. The facilitator of the boxing component of the programme felt that being able to make a good first impression with others was essential. Also within the context of the group was the development of trust in the group, between participants and facilitators.

*[So in terms of kind of indicators of success on an individual level, would you say that that then relates to dealing with the different themes - so say like acknowledging responsibility or managing anger, good problem solving skill...] Yes, yes...definitely. But all of those will show through. Like for example the anger management and the impulse control, rather than hurting someone else, to take out their frustration on a bag, I think would be an indication of them having worked through those themes. So higher self-esteem and more confidence, an indication of that would be applying that principle of first impression. So just being able to go up to people and say, 'hi, my name is whatever,' would be an indication of applying that. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

## **Description of the programme and mechanisms of its effectiveness**

A description of the FWI programme, how it works and its outcomes was developed based on the responses of those who are involved with the management of the FWI programme. In order to achieve the main purpose of the programme (reducing recidivism), FWI aims to address unmet participants' unmet emotional needs, to empower and holistically develop participants, to provide an alternative means of expressing themselves, and to expose them to positive role models in the boxing context.

*Well, the big thing would be recidivism - that would be a big thing...But I suppose on top of that, to a lesser degree...then you would have things like adjusting to the community, family relations improving, all of that kind of stuff that goes with it as well. (Key informant 1 – programme management)*

*...to give children an alternative way of expressing very powerful negative emotions, to expose them to a positive role model, to empower them. I think it's very empowering to learn something new and to learn more about what you're capable of. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

*The desired outcome...for me it's more than just not re-offending, it's meeting unmet emotional needs...a lot of these children, they have a hole in their heart...and they try and fill this hole in whatever way they can. And some times it's aggressive sexual impulses, whatever. And therefore we try and get them to understand where those feelings are coming from. So it's not just the re-offending, it's getting in touch with their own feelings, who they are, where they come from, and also having a vision regarding their future. So working on that self-esteem and working with a goal and a purpose that could be more desirable and meaningful for them...It's developing the child holistically. It's an integrated approach but looking at the overall well being of the child...Using group discussion, role-plays and other activities, such as reflection on a video they have watched, the CBT helps participants to develop self-awareness and insight into the offending behaviour that brought them on to the programme. Their cognitive distortions and defence mechanisms are addressed, and they are encouraged to come to an understanding of the triggers for their dysfunctional behaviour. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

Other issues dealt with in the programme, and explicitly in the CBT, are conflict resolution, problem solving, anger management, impulse control, and taking responsibility for their choices and behaviour. These psychological concepts are linked to participants' sexual behaviour and other life experiences, and examples from boxing are often used in this regard. By dealing with the issues mentioned here, the CBT aims to develop the self-esteem of participants, and the intention is that the development of self-esteem is mirrored in the boxing component of the programme. Furthermore, it is believed that the awareness gained in the CBT helps to make participants more aware of the processes taking place in the boxing.

*...we find that defence mechanisms come to the fore...it is before acceptance actually takes place there's denial of impact, denial of awareness and denial of responsibility. And when I say impact - 'Oh, I didn't give him such a hard blow, I just gave him a soft blow.' So the impact or denying of responsibility, 'he gave me a hard punch, that's why he deserves to get back.' Or denial of impact awareness, that 'I didn't realise I have such a strong punch. I wasn't aware of my strength or might.' So we challenge that as well. And breaking down those defences then they come to understand and realise that ultimately they are responsible, that they have choice and that they made those choices...it would then focus on sexual behaviour as well. So, who is responsible then? Who makes choices? Who makes the ultimate decisions around it? And even if they are told to do it, whose choice is it? So we draw an analogy, we also use lots of practical examples from the boxing and other examples. So it's drawn back into their life experiences. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

In terms of the boxing component, this is intended to reinforce the CBT and enhance its impact, as well as relationships within the group. It was described as the vehicle through which participants can gain an understanding of themselves and their situation, help them to process what they are dealing



with in the CBT and come to a point of insight. For those participants who may find it difficult to speak within the CBT group setting, the boxing can allow them to communicate their feelings non-verbally and bring certain issues to the surface where they can then be dealt with more easily in the CBT. Participants are given the freedom to talk, feel and express themselves in the boxing setting, and the fact that the boxing does not focus on participants' offences can contribute to this sense of freedom.

*I think self-esteem by itself, firstly you're going to need to be sort of free. And the child needs to start by talking by actions before they can voice out. I think that works towards the freedom. So boxing, if you go there and you box and you are quiet but there's sort of you're 'talking' to the bag, you know: 'this girl!' whatever that child might be saying. And then through that, when the child comes into the session, they're able to say something else because they've been saying it non-verbally with the bag...it's not like everybody will be able to come to the group and fit into the discussion. There will be some of the children who alternative therapy is going to help them more than the therapeutic group. In the therapeutic group it's more about discussion, and how do you then feel free to discuss if you've got a low self-esteem? You won't. It's the same thing in class. You won't raise your hands and say something if you have a low self-esteem because you feel like if it's wrong people are going to laugh and do that, whatever. So there's the issues of confidence, of which the boxing for me, it's building that. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

*I think that's what's nice about the boxing as well, because the whole reason the child is at the Teddy Bear Clinic is because of their offence. So all the focus is on the negative aspects of themselves...you're an offender...So when they talk about self-esteem they talk about it in the context of the offence. When they talk about anger management they talk about it in the context of the offence and the child is constantly being reminded of all the bad parts of themselves. And then they go to the boxing and there's no focus on that at all. They talk about like the actions have consequences but not in the context of the offence, and they talk about first impressions being so important. So it's almost like taking the focus off the offence and just letting them be a child, you know, and be seen as a child. And I think that's also nice for them with Anton<sup>1</sup> because I don't think Anton ever brings up anything related to them. And I think they feel like they're a fresh person in his eyes or something, from what I observed of him interacting with them. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

Related to the sense of freedom participants can experience is the space they are given in which to release any anger they may be feeling. In this context, venting their anger can be done in a constructive way, and does not necessarily need to involve physical contact with other participants, since participants can make use of other boxing equipment for this purpose. Even so, participants are given permission to fight in this context, which can augment the feeling of freedom within the programme.

*...they're given permission. Something that we always teach children - don't fight. Don't, don't, don't. Here they're allowed with free reign...you can use yourself physically, you're allowed to do that. But then so what does this mean for you or what did it mean for you when you did this? And when that happened to you, how did it leave you feeling? Those things are again processed, and again it goes very deep, it goes beyond their actions, it goes beyond what is not said. It's the unsaid that is brought to the surface. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

*...it gives the space to vent. Because we know that these children were abused in one way or another, not necessarily sexually, but it does give them the space to vent. And I believe that he's written quite a good programme that works around it, so they're not just punching bags, they're actually going through a whole self-development programme with boxing as the focus. (Key informant 1 – programme management)*

Aside from these more implicit aspects of the boxing component of FWI, there are a number of more explicit processes at play that help to develop participants. Firstly, self-awareness is encouraged as participants share their feelings when they 'check in' and 'check out' at the start and end of every session. Secondly, there are four principles communicated to participants by the boxing coaches: 1)

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<sup>1</sup>Main boxing coach (name used with permission).

first impressions (creating the right first impression that shows self-respect and respect for others), 2) compassion, 3) consequences to action, and 4) moving on from the result.

*Firstly is that they are given an opportunity to express themselves freely and that they need not hold back the punches. But it also gives them insight into the fact that what I give out I'm going to get back. So if they're going to be ruthless and brutal, it's going to come back to haunt them. So I think that makes them more aware or sensitises them to their behaviour, the consequences of their behaviour. It fits in very much in line with what we're teaching them or in line with the justice as well, that actions have consequences, so it's aligned to that principle. They also develop victim empathy. To experience pain - hitting out and lashing out and hurting somebody, it's painful for that person, but being on the receiving end, it becomes painful for oneself as well, so there is a deeper understanding, and that's what we would refer to as victim empathy. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

Thirdly, and related to this, are certain metaphors evident in boxing that can relate to real life, such as the concept of authority figures in life (referees), understanding that there is a time and place for everything, and the importance of discipline. Lastly, boxing is seen as an excellent platform for the development of physical skills. As participants develop these skills, they are able to experience a sense of achievement and mastery, feel physically stronger, and learn their capabilities and limits, all of which are empowering and can help to develop self-esteem and confidence. This can help participants assume a level of power in control over an area of their life, which may be lacking in their current (or past) circumstances.

*We do believe that the power of boxing has a strong healing component to it. It allows the child to assume power and control. Because a lot of the children that we see have unmet emotional needs, these are children crying out for help and therefore acting out, in ways they're trying to solve their own problems. It's an attempted solution to the problem, which is not always adaptive, but as we can see because they've landed into the diversion programme, it's maladaptive behaviour role patterns. And this is a way of them then assuming power and control, because often they feel helpless, powerless, out of control, unable to explain why they're doing what they're doing. And this gives them a sense of achievement, mastery as well, and makes them feel in charge. So they're able to assume that and they feel stronger about themselves, so this impacts on their sense of being as well, their self-esteem. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

*...the way I see them when they start, just thinking about body language and expressions, they start like hulking down, closed-up teenagers. And by the end of the programme, from what they've learned from Anton, they're so much more open and like you can just see the whole...the change in their body, you know, and their manner...the fact that the kids are learning something new, something that they might not have been exposed to before...learning what you're capable of, you know, how hard you hit, it's very empowering. And a lot of the kids have quite a low self-esteem; they might have been bullied or they might be bullies. So I think just learning what you are capable of is very empowering, and you're learning something new that's quite cool at the same time, so I think it builds the self-esteem and confidence quite a lot and is quite a big factor in feeling good about yourself and changing your behaviour. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

### **Participants' perceptions of the programme**

FWI participants had generally positive perceptions of the programme and of the TBC from where the programme is run. Their comments indicated that they felt that the TBC had been non-judgemental in their approach, had helped them deal with their anger and offending behaviour, and had been a positive influence.

*What I can say is the Teddy Bear has helped me a lot. I'd like to inform the people in the bad situations if you go to Teddy Bear, go tell them that you have a problem like you can't stop doing so they can help you. (FWI participant)*

*Like Teddy Bear don't treat you like you did something wrong or like you're guilty. Like they treat you as their own child. (FWI participant)*

*The programme, I like it because it takes us away from the people who detracts us from the right path so that we can be good people. (FWI participant)*

The majority of participants (in the FWI and comparison groups) were positive about the CBT component of the programme. A few participants expressed their appreciation for the chance to speak and say how they felt in the therapy and the boxing group, but the difficulty of talking was also mentioned by one participant, and this related to the shame he felt about his offending behaviour.

*...the group session that Anton was doing...we were talking about ourselves and inspiring each other, everyone. Problems in the group, we will share each other's secrets, all of us together. (FWI participant)*

*Like talking about the stuff that you've done wrong. Because I don't know about you guys but I feel ashamed that I had done it. (FWI participant)*

FWI participants' perceptions of the boxing component of the programme were overwhelmingly positive, and it was frequently referred to as "nice", "great" and "fun". The boxing was perceived as an opportunity to talk with and encourage each other, to learn about protecting oneself, but also about not hitting others for no reason. Participants appreciated the physical nature of the boxing, and they seemed to have enjoyed the physical exertion they experienced in the sessions.

*They were fine. I enjoyed them and they kept me away from a lot of things, like going on the street and do funny things. (FWI participant)*

*...Running and skipping, sweating. [And how did you feel about doing all those things?] Fresh. Energetic and strong. (FWI participant)*

The dominant view amongst participants from the FWI groups was that the programme had helped them, and they would recommend it to others. Participants from the comparison groups were not as quick to point out that the programme had helped them, but a number of these participants were happy to recommend the programme to others.

*Yes, it has, it has helped us a lot. Yes, we can talk about it to other people out there. (Comparison group participant)*

*I'll advise the person to take the session here because it was helping us. When we came here we were very serious. If we were not serious we would still be in court. (FWI participant)*

Participants in all groups were asked what they thought they had learnt from the programme, and what had changed the most within or about themselves. There were a number of parallels between participants from the FWI and comparison groups, but the FWI participants spoke more about this topic than participants in the comparison groups. Participants from the comparison groups often spoke of their learning and change in more general terms, using terms such as "emotional skills", "social skills", "goal setting" and "problem solving".

FWI participants on the other hand seemed to be more specific about certain areas of change or learning. They mentioned a range of things that did not emerge in the comparison groups' discussions, many of which seem to relate to changes in behaviour. These included expressing feelings and sharing with others; resisting peer pressure and staying away from "bad friends"; not doing "bad things"; being more disciplined; doing better at school and in other sport; thinking less about their

legal situation and thinking less about girls; helping others in a similar situation; feeling regret and wanting to apologise for their offending behaviour; feeling more confident; learning about abuse; and understanding their circumstances better. Some of the more general statements included thinking about the future and being a better person.

*As for me, it helped me a lot because when I was at home my friends will do things that are out of order. I was unable to be away from them but since now I came here there's been some changes. The other things, it was respect because before we couldn't do it, but Victor<sup>2</sup>, you know, was able to help us to change that behaviour. I used to think a lot about court now and then but now it has helped me a lot. I don't have to think much about it. (FWI participant)*

*And the session reminds us about the respect, it helped me. At home I was not keeping the time and all the times I will come late and this Victor sessions helps us a lot. (FWI participant)*

*I'm not interested of doing the wrong things like the things that I did before I came here. That's the thing now that I no longer have to think about it since I've come here. (FWI participant)*

Other areas of learning and change that were mentioned in both FWI and comparison groups, but more often in the FWI groups, were the following: respecting others and myself; communicating with others, which would involve talking and listening to others; being aware of the consequences of actions; and taking responsibility for behaviour and seeing where behaviour has been wrong.

*And then this thing of you being aware of the consequences of what you do, that everything we do, if you have done something you must know there are consequences...if you have done something you are able to regret and feel sorry. Like me, when like I've done something wrong to someone, I am able to go to that person and say I'm sorry. The thing that I've done inside me will haunt me because it's not supposed to happen. (FWI participant)*

*My behaviour has changed because sometimes, like before I came here my mother would shout at me. I didn't care about her, I will just look at her. But now when she tells me what you did today was not right, I can sit with her down and tell her that what you did today was not right and then I will apologise. (FWI participant)*

*As I said earlier on, I would always be late and not be on time at home, sometimes 12 o'clock midnight. But now I am able now to get home very early, like around eight. I know to control myself. Before me and my sister, we couldn't communicate, we always fought. But now we are okay. I am able to control my anger. (FWI participant)*

*...before I was not listening at home. But now I'm listening. When they tell me at home to be indoors, to be at home, I listen to them. If they tell me that these friends are not good for you, like I don't follow them. Things like that. (FWI participant)*

*Just like talking about stuff that's wrong and learning from stuff that's wrong and knowing that there are things that I have done, it was wrong. Because first in my eyes it wasn't wrong, it was right, and we are now learning all the things that have been in your life, not to make that mistakes. (FWI participant)*

Bullying was mentioned across all groups (with roughly the same frequency), and participants felt that the programme had helped them to avoid bullying – as the aggressor, victim and spectator. In the FWI groups, there was a particularly strong belief that the programme had helped them to avoid fighting “on the streets”, and a number of FWI participants felt that FWI had equipped them with boxing skills that they could use to protect themselves from others who wanted to fight with them. This may be related to participants’ belief that the programme had helped them to better control their emotions,

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<sup>2</sup>CBT facilitator (name used with permission).

especially anger, and while this was mentioned in the comparison groups by a few participants, it was mentioned far more in the FWI groups.

*Just learned a lot of respect and no more bullying. Like at school I was a bully to other children and they taught us and I've changed. (FWI participant)*

*Boxing has taught me that if someone fights with another person, that I shall go to them and stop them because what they are doing is not right. Like fighting on the street is like for someone picking up bricks and hit someone. This boxing thing has helped me a lot because other people, they like fighting. (FWI participant)*

*The time when he was teaching us, when I went to school and also when I was coming here, I'll see some bullies bullying other children, I will feel that pain and feel that also I was once doing this thing, and this thing they are doing is not okay, then also I will also see that this thing is not right. I've seen that bullying is not okay. (FWI participant)*

*I'm not fighting that much and I know how to control my own moods like...My anger management...I don't get so angry at people anymore. (FWI participant)*

One area of improvement that featured somewhat more prominently in the comparison groups was empathy. This included thinking of others, caring for others, treating people better, being aware of others' pain, and not hurting or being cruel to others. Related to this was being fair to others and not being selfish. In the boxing context, this was about learning to spar without hurting each other. Learning to forgive was mentioned in both a FWI and comparison group.

*I've learned to think for other people, you see. I used not to think about for other people, I will just live. But now I can think how other person is feeling. (Comparison group participant)*

*The things that we have been learning, things that we've been writing down, orientation, and so on, he was teaching us, guiding us in terms of certain goals. So it made me realise that other people, they do feel pain. (Comparison group participant)*

While participants were able to identify areas of learning or change, many did acknowledge the difficulty associated with these changes. In the comparison groups, social skills were mentioned in this regard, and in the FWI groups a few participants mentioned the challenge of controlling anger. Other challenges highlighted in the FWI groups were dealing with emotions, expressing feelings, changing sexually inappropriate behaviour, taking responsibility and understanding one's wrong doing. One participant found the boxing component of the programme a challenge.

*I would say to like express my feelings because sometimes when someone, like when we were in Durban and you miss your parents, and then if it happens that you cry, then everyone will laugh at you. So it only bottles up and then when you're alone it all just comes out. (FWI participant)*

*Also the same as you, to learn how to control your anger management and like touching a girl and all those things. (FWI participant)*

When asked how the programme could be improved, participants from the FWI and comparison groups tended to point out more practical or logistical aspects of the programme, such as more frequent sessions. A few participants from the comparison groups requested that sport be added to their programme, and asked for additional access to social workers. FWI participants requested more space and boxing kit for the boxing sessions, and mentioned some transport challenges that they had experienced when attending an outside event.

## **Key informants' perceptions of the FWI programme**

While it could be argued that those involved in a programme may present an overly positive view of its effectiveness, these views have been incorporated as these individuals have a unique perspective of the programme and may be in the best position to observe its benefits to participants. The key informants interviewed (all involved in some capacity with FWI) believed that the programme is being effective and is making a difference in the lives of participants. The evidence of this effectiveness that they shared is not seeing children re-offend, which is based on their own follow-up process and feedback from courts, and the positive feedback that they have received from the participants themselves, as well as their caregivers and other individuals who have referred children on to the programme. Improvements on certain psychological scales administered to participants have also helped to track changes brought about by the programme.

*Looking at the feedback that we get, the follow-ups...and that we don't have the children who are re-offending, I think at some point the programme is it's actually effective. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

*It is exciting, it is, and very beneficial to the children because there's teamwork and it's constructive, it's not destructive. [And would you say that the programme is being successful at that?] I certainly do believe, I'm sure there's things that we can improve on, but certainly it is very positive from the feedback received from the children, from the caregivers, from people outside of the Teddy Bear Clinic who have referred them into this programme, the feedback we've received has been very positive. And then looking at the statistics, that is a bonus as well with regard to re-offending. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

Furthermore, their opinion on the effectiveness of the programme is derived from the improvements that they have seen in the children participating in the programme. These improvements are in the areas of relationships with other participants, openness to and freedom within the programme, confidence, self-esteem, discipline, and respect for each other and the facilitators. Improvements in physical strength have also been observed in some participants.

*...the children...they don't want to see something, they just isolate themselves. But when we start the group on the boxing, they started to make the relationship with other boys here. They're starting to be more open now they are free. So that's it helped them to make the relationship, to speak out to whatever they've got problems they can speak out here...you can see the first impression for themselves when we meet them first time and their first impression is very down. They don't want to look at someone, they just want to isolate. When time goes on, when we are busy working with them with the boxing they started to be open, they can understand, you see...They are learning discipline, respect. (Key informant 5 – programme facilitation)*

*And then just naturally boxing's disciplines that we put across to the kids, being honour, and what have you, just made these kids stand up straight. First of all, especially both the kids, the abusers and the abused have had the power removed from them - one's been caught and the other one's had something happen to them. And so they all walked in there with their heads down and slightly embarrassed by what's happened. And you find after a couple of months these guys are walking up straight...all of them improves strength-wise, without a doubt. (Key informant 6 – programme facilitation)*

One key informant did however point out that the programme might not be effective for all participants.

*...there are children who come to the programme just for the sake of not...so that they don't go to prison or they don't go to the awaiting trial youth...but that is one of the mentalities that one will work with the children...But even at the end of the programme you still have children who for them it was just another chapter that they just have to pass and close. So I have to come here so I don't have to go to prison and close and that's it. (Key informant 4 – programme management)*

Key informants echoed some of the difficulties around change mentioned by participants. These centred around participants acknowledging responsibility for their offending behaviour, particularly if they were not the only one involved in the offending act; understanding the consequences of their behaviour; and changing their behaviour so that they don't re-offend, which is particularly challenging if participants don't believe that they can change. One key informant also dealt with the challenge of participants not understanding why they are in a diversion programme, and this would feed into the issue of taking responsibility.

*It's probably the sexual issues...I think that would be the most difficult one...there's a lot of stuff around sex and sexuality...belief systems and those things are from a very early age. (Key informant 1 – programme management)*

*When children come for the first time, they don't know why they are coming, so I feel that maybe from the justice system or whoever who's sending the children, there should be at least an examination on why the child is going to the Teddy Bear Clinic, why the child has been referred for diversion...But, however, through the programme also there are other challenges that we come across. It's when children have to acknowledge a responsibility for what they have done, which for me it also forms the major thing for the programme and for the diversion as a whole. Because if you don't acknowledge responsibility you cannot be diverted - that is what the law says. So that is a challenge for children because they struggle to see what is it that they did wrong and why they should be sent here. And like I've mentioned to you, the issue of looking at 'why me only, while I was not alone into this act'... (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

*Some they blame other people, they said I do this because of my friend, for peer pressure, for the influence of the friends. Some they said, no, I was just doing this for fun, I was not thinking before doing the thing. But when we go on with them about the consequence about their action, they understand that they do wrong, they have to change their behaviour. (Key informant 5 – programme facilitation)*

In terms of improvements to the FWI programme mentioned key informants, these included expanding to other areas, teaching other skills within the programme (such as computer skills), and enhancing the existing links between the CBT and boxing components of the programme.

*I think we're very grateful for having that programme, but we would like to roll it out in our other satellite offices...because it's working so well here, we feel that the other children or the other offices are missing out on this opportunity and we would like to capitalise on the success of this programme. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

### **Factors influencing change and programme effectiveness**

A range of factors influencing change and programme effectiveness emerged in the focus group discussions (FWI and comparison groups) and with key informants. These included intrapersonal and interpersonal factors, aspects of the CBT and boxing components of the programme, programme facilitators, and the broader social context. Some participants specifically mentioned that it was a combination of factors that contributed to its effectiveness.

*There are different problems that you'll find around the country in South Africa. If a programme is too educational, it then does not address the therapeutic side of a child, it's just you educating...the programme that we have at Teddy Bear Clinic is the combination...and it also has a life skills component. So without that you won't be able to say you are being effective because at some point there must be the skills that these children have to leave here with, and they can see that this is what they have achieved at the end of the programme or at the end of each session. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

*I think the themes and what they do beforehand, before they come to me, set a foundation for a correct manner of addressing life. And once they arrive at my gym or programme, they seem to be ready and willing and it does prepare them for what's coming at my training sessions and also the future, you know. From a skills development perspective, it gives them the emotional skills that they will require to analyse their problems in their head, and what have you. I give them*

*skills that will help them address life from my four principles, but also from like quite an aggressive way, you know, and they've got to be careful out there. So I think this gives them the confidence that works. [And in terms of expanding, would that be the therapy and the boxing component or mainly just the boxing?] No. We've tried it with one kid, just the boxing, and we selected him from the naughty kids in the area and we pulled him into the project and he hadn't been through the diversion. And he's been at my gym for probably six years, he has, and he came into the project without the diversion and he still carried on offending and he had issues and things like that. And we found that if they didn't go through the diversion project, being the head side of it, that it wasn't going to work....you need to address the emotional side first, before they box. So they go hand-in-hand, definitely. (Key informant 6 – programme facilitation)*

Comments regarding intrapersonal factors were generally made by key informants, and some of these are inferred from the discussion around the programme's effectiveness. Intrapersonal factors that were seen to positively influence change were participants' understanding of their behaviour and of the reasons why they are in the diversion programme, along with an acknowledgement of their responsibility for their behaviour, and an ability to focus on the programme process.

*The movie plays a very big role because when they watch the characters, where one of the main characters has been sentenced to a go to school and serve a sentence, they then start to see what was the wrong thing that somebody has done, and then the role that the justice system has played. Although it becomes sort of difficult for them to fully accept responsibility. But then we work together for them to understand and see that for people to be able to be accountable for what they have done, they need to first look back and say there must be something wrong like that you say I have done this. And that is how they can be able to acknowledge that responsibility. But sometimes the children, they see whatever that they were doing as it's either as a play or as an experiment. Or there was an agreement between the two parties, and that is where it becomes so difficult because you try to explain to the child what the law says in terms of teenage sexuality. And on the other side they are saying, 'But we had an agreement and it was my girlfriend.' So the law for me, it makes things difficult for these children and for them to acknowledge responsibility, it becomes another issue. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

Intrapersonal factors that were considered to hinder change in participants were a lack self-confidence and low self-esteem, which would allow them to be more easily influenced (in a negative sense), distraction within the programme process, or a desire to isolate themselves from others and not actively engage in the programme. A few key informants mentioned that some participants have a poor attitude towards the programme, or have the type of personality that makes them resistant to intervention. The boxing coach also mentioned that the physical ability of participants can influence the effectiveness of the boxing component of the programme.

*Based on the research and what I also find out, the issue of self-esteem has got also a lot to do with what these children will do, because you wouldn't really be easily influenced if you've got a high self-esteem - you will stand by your words or you will stand by what you believe in. So that is also somewhere where I will see changes from the children - and then that is also where you will also pick up how easily is this child been influenced by the media or influenced by peers or by the system at school, or whatever that is happening around them. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*  
*In some children they have got a really low self-esteem and such low confidence that that plays more of a role in the offending behaviour. In others it might be the impulse control and anger in combination with past experiences of trauma. So I think it really depends on the child. (Key informant 2 – programme facilitation)*

*We've had a massively smart kid in the project, and I asked all the kids what do you want to be when you leave school. And he wanted to be a gangster. And after the twelve weeks and he carried on and he still fights. It's been a long time; it's taken so long for this guy to stop saying he wants to be a gangster. That was the one case where we just found that it wasn't getting through to him. He did soften slightly but I don't know if we're always going to have 100% success. [Do you think that comes down to personality? A combination of personality and maybe circumstances?] Ja, definitely, I think it is his personality. It's not something that the environment has done to him. But based on his environment that he grows up*



*in, influences his personality negatively. So it's just the circle of friends, the circles that he moves in probably that will want him to become like that. (Key informant 6 – programme facilitation)*

With respect to interpersonal factors, a few participants mentioned the role of other participants in helping them to change, particularly through developing relationships and listening to each other in the CBT sessions.

*...if ever they come here they get involved with the different peoples here, there are different kids. So they started to create a relationship...And they feel comfortable, they started to behave, even if they have been naughty but now they started to behave because they are seeing that, oh, I'm welcome, I'm a person like a human being like others. Everybody can make a mistake. But what we don't want is that to make a mistake again. (Key informant 5 – programme facilitation)*

The role of family support was discussed, and many participants agreed that their family was supportive. This support seemed to take the form of encouraging them to attend the programme or physically bringing them to the programme sessions.

*[How did your family support you?] By encouraging me to come here so that I couldn't think things at home, so that I can concentrate here, because if I think things at home I won't be able to concentrate. My parents said I should put some effort in this. (FWI participant)*

Key informants highlighted the importance of family support in bringing about change in participants, along with the challenges posed to the programme by a lack of parenting skills and lack of communication. A few key informants mentioned that parents with greater access to resources may have more insight into their child's behaviour and the role of the programme, but can also be resistant and be more inclined to seek external assistance.

*So I think also that I would say the parents have the role to play...if the family is not involved, I doubt if we'll achieve whatever that we have to achieve with the child...they need to know how do they address their children when it comes to the issues of sexuality and what is the appropriate age to start to discuss these things with their children. In most families, especially from what I find into the group, I will refer to African families, the sex and sexuality is not really discussed until there is something, for example, maybe pregnancy as a result. Then they will be starting to discuss the issues of sex and sexuality. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

*As you know that many of these children are referred by the courts, so there's external controls in place, that they're mandated to come here...parents are reluctant, often seeing it as a reflection of them being inadequate or unable to manage and control their children, so therefore seeing it as a direct attack on their parental abilities and parenting skills. So there is a level of reluctance and trepidation to coming into this programme...parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not have the level of knowledge or insight into the value of this programme, so there would be more resistance to engage robustly with this programme or this intervention. The middle-income and more affluent groups have more insight, but the more affluent groups are also resistant we find because they would rather seek external consultation and deal with it 'under the carpet.' (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

Regarding the CBT component of the programme, a number of participants in both FWI and comparison groups spoke highly of their facilitators. These participants felt that their facilitator had helped them to understand their behaviour and had encouraged them to communicate.

*There was a guy who's speaking with me, he helped me to learn to listen to my teachers, to respect and to help them...to listen to them when they speaking...I must not backchat people. (Comparison group participant)*

*Others were scared to talk in the group. Most of the times they'll often be quiet, so we couldn't be one thing as a group. Only a few people will talk in the group. We couldn't communicate all of us together. Victor will be able to encourage them to help them to talk. (FWI participant)*

*He helped us to understand these things, because some people they just can tell you something and you don't understand it...he helped us to understand what's all the things. (FWI participant)*

It was mentioned by key informants that these facilitators endeavour to accept and validate participants, and provide them with a safe place in which they don't feel judged or labelled because of their behaviour.

*Each child is validated, that is important for me, that they're all seen and accepted for who they are and what they bring into it. They're not graded as you are better than somebody else or you're a better fighter. It's not about being a better fighter, and I think that's important, the validation that they receive because that certainly feeds into the self-esteem issue. And often that's with children we find that there isn't sufficient validation of who they are. Their uniqueness is accepted and embraced in the boxing...the facilitators certainly have a huge role play because they are the ones that reach out to the children and they are the ones that make the children feel that they are unique and that they have something meaningful and valuable to get. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

*I don't judge them and I don't like them to judge each other because we treat them the same...if ever we don't treat them the same, one of them, they won't come, they won't feel comfortable to come and participate...we don't label them. We accept them as the way they are. (Key informant 5 – programme facilitation)*

Some FWI participants and key informants spoke very positively about the main boxing coach. Key informants described him as a role model whom the participants respected. They mentioned the discipline and boundaries that he instilled, and the fact that he taught them that they could be men without being violent towards others.

*They shouldn't change Anton, Anton is very good. If they bring someone else, we won't be able to cope. We are used to Anton. (FWI participant)*

*Anton...his vibe is very infectious...he instils quite a lot of discipline in them without being overly strict or...they just want to listen to what he says. So he never comes across as mean or strict or hard, but he is very disciplining, if you know what I mean. He just has a way of doing it. So I think he is a big factor that makes the boxing programme particularly unique...his impact on the kids I think is huge. I think they look up to him and respect him a lot. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

Based on FWI participants and key informants' responses, it would seem that this coach's four principles mentioned earlier, that are specifically reinforced in the boxing component of the programme, and carried through to the CBT sessions (compassion, first impressions, consequences to action, and moving on from the result), help to significantly enhance the programme's effectiveness and bring about change in the participants.

*The anger management part, the boxing helped me to think about if like I'm in a fight, I must feel what he's feeling when I'm punching him. So what Anton taught me when he used to punch me is that if I punch someone, that pain he feels, I must also feel. So I must not continue on punching him and I must have compassion. (FWI participant)*

In terms of the way in which the boxing component of the programme contributes to effectiveness, the physical nature of the boxing provides an excellent conduit for the anger and aggression that many participants may feel as a result of their circumstances, and this helps to challenge the common

notion that boxing would promote aggression rather than channel it appropriately. The fact that boxing can channel aggressive impulses in an acceptable and constructive way sets it apart from other alternative therapies offered within the diversion programme as a whole, such as art, dance and music. Since boxing is more physical than these alternatives, it could be seen to be more cathartic for participants.

*I think that and the fact that it's [boxing] much more physical than the other alternative therapies...even though there's the movement therapy and it's dancing, it's not as physical as the boxing, so and not as cathartic probably...they're probably all cathartic but not as obviously cathartic. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

*Some of the kids do tend to have a very aggressive streak but through boxing we're able to refine that into channelled energy, exertion, and teach them to understand their feelings...Basically it's acknowledging that you've been hit hard and there's consequence to action and so you're going to get hit in the face because you dropped your hands. And so that's the second principle of the four that we teach. And it's understanding those emotions that go through your mind while you're actually boxing and how to address them from a competent mind. (Key informant 6 – programme facilitation)*

*...this is an opportunity for them to release their tensions and stresses. It allows them to be physical, very physical, but it's very constructive. It's channelling those aggressive impulses in an acceptable way. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

The boxing coach (a key informant) pointed out that the respect, discipline and rules associated with boxing make it different to fighting on the street, and he emphasised that boxing teaches consequences and respect for elders.

*The disciplines that were developed through boxing, the Queensbury Rules, it was an honour sport. You will always find that a boxer is very respectable and honourable and there's a small percentage that don't live up to that ideal, but generally boxing is known as the gentleman's sport and it's the honour code that boxing gives across...But there's a lot of respect in boxing. You come into the gym, the trainer is the hierarchy that they have to listen to. So there's this respect thing for your elders and there's rules. So we hop in the ring and if you hit the guy behind the head, that's against the rule, hitting below. So it's a strict code of fighting clean. And it's great in the sense that the consequence to action, rule number two really applies well. If you're late or if you do something wrong, there's always going to be a consequence...And it just mirrors life and so that's how I find the boxing does so well. (Key informant 6 – programme facilitation)*

There seemed to be agreement amongst some of the key informants that boxing is an accessible sport that does not only favour the physically capable. The low cost of boxing, compared to other alternative therapies, makes it more feasible to roll out similar programmes on a larger scale.

*...all you need is a local gym and there's a lot of local gyms. So from that point of view I think it's more implementable than the others, and less expensive to implement. (Key informant 1 – programme management)*

Boxing is seen to be a generally appealing sport for boys, which can serve as an incentive within the FWI programme. In addition to the benefits mentioned already, it is also an activity that can increase fitness and strength, thereby providing health benefits to participants.

*I think it is very accessible...a lot of kids, especially boys...they want to know how to fight in some kind of way, you know. I mean, not fight per se, but know some moves. So it makes it quite an attractive sport or thing to do with them. (Key informant 2 – programme management)*

Key informants spoke of some challenges that operate outside the programme context and at a more societal level, such as the influence of the media and technology (especially cell phones) on the

dissemination of material relating to sexuality. These challenges can make it harder to explain to participants why their behaviour is inappropriate if they are receiving a conflicting message outside of the programme, and can therefore hinder the effectiveness of the programme in bringing about change.

*...when I look at me when I was at their age and the things that they are doing now, I also see that really and truly the time has changed, you know, and children are doing things at an early age. You will be surprised how an eleven-year old will describe a sexual actually and how it's done and why it should be done, which are the things that when you look at children you don't think that they might have such a kind of a knowledge...And before, like when you look back, sex did not really take place at schools. Although it was there, but not the way it is now. And now children are having sex at school more than at home or anywhere on the street or whatever...I think where you have to tell the children that they cannot engage into sexual activities at their age and that they cannot be in possession of pornographic material, and then they already have those things into their cell phones, of which they don't see anything wrong. So the other thing is to get the message about sexuality through to the children, and when is it appropriate to do so and the reason behind why people engage into sexual activities. (Key informant 4 – programme facilitation)*

Other factors influencing the effectiveness of the programme related to the FWI programme itself, and schools. A few participants mentioned that their school had been supportive of them, which would have helped them in the process of change. This was echoed by some key informants.

*Very cooperative, I think supportive. The schools that have referred have not labelled the child or stigmatised the child, so there hasn't been any secondary victimisation. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

With respect to aspects of the FWI programme that help to make it more effective, key informants mentioned the presence of qualified staff on the programme, the supervision available for these staff, the inclusion of research in the programme, and the fact that the programme is well planned and thought through.

*...there's a protocol, there's guidelines, there's step by step, there's preparation. It's not just a random thing from session to session, so next time we'll just decide if something's going to happen. It's planned and children are prepped and even the facilitator preps, and it's all recorded. So when the process notes are captured, there's an opportunity to reflect on the sessions and then to discuss that. So there's that peer review as well in the group supervision and a feedback process. (Key informant 3 – programme management)*

### **FWI parent groups**

In the focus group discussions with parents, there seemed to be a mostly positive perception of the support groups for parents, although there was some discontent about the time that parents had to sometimes wait for their groups to start. Some parents expressed the feeling that the support groups had helped them, particularly in the area of communication with their child. A few parents spoke about the anger they feel towards their child because of what they have done and how this could reflect on them as parents.

*As for me, it has helped me a lot because like even if the child has done something wrong, I don't talk to him roughly as it used to happen before. I am able to correct him in a right way. I used to accuse him before when he has done something, and I will be very harsh on him. (FWI parent participant)*

*For me it has helped me a lot because now even if like the child has done a wrong thing, I am able to talk to the child without anger, even if like the child is angry, for me I'm able to be really consistent, not show that anger. And sometimes I laugh and the child also end up laughing with me. (FWI parent participant)*

*For me I was very angry for the first time that I heard that. I heard it at school, so they told me that I must take him to Teddy Bear, and I was very, very angry. I didn't know what was going to happen but the thing I was angry because sometimes you don't think your child can do that, you know. So when it comes it's like you feel...you feel like you are different from other parents...like maybe you don't take care of your children, you are vulnerable, you know. (FWI parent participant)*

Regarding parents' perceptions of the FWI programme, there was an expectation that the programme would help their son, and many believed that it had accomplished this and would recommend the programme to others. This help related to changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, and support from others. A few parents believed that the programme gave their child a break or helped keep them occupied, which could possibly suggest that the programme is perceived by some parents as more recreational than therapeutic.

*I also thought it was going to help him, especially he was going to join like another group of boys and he was not going to be alone all the time and they were going to help him change from the things that he used to do before. So it was going to make a big change in his life. (FWI parent participant)*

*I also thought the same, that this diversion was really going to help him, also teach him about life because us as parents, sometimes we don't talk much to our children. (FWI parent participant)*

*I also think that it refreshes their minds because if you've been thinking about something, maybe you were angry and now you are led to do something else, so it's refreshing your mind. (FWI parent participant)*

Areas in which parents had observed a change in their child's behaviour were school work, other sports, anger management, discipline, and relationships with others.

*He told me that it helps me a lot because when he comes here to the boxing he gets so much occupied and when he gets back home he doesn't get time to go to the township and fool around, so at that time he's very tired so I think it keeps him very occupied. (FWI parent participant)*

*I can also repeat the same and say the programme has really helped my son a lot because his behaviour has changed and the way he conducts himself, he has so much difference in it. (FWI parent participant)*

*I feel it has changed him a lot because he's even able now to carry his book, to look into his school books. He does his homework, everything which has to be done at school, he does it. Even at home he helps a lot with house chores. (FWI parent participant)*

*When you ask him questions sometimes you can see that he's angry, but he's able to apologise. (FWI parent participant)*

*This for me, my son has changed a lot at home and there's so much discipline from him. He's a right child. Before he was a child, you know, with anger, but now he's changed a lot. (FWI parent participant)*

There were some parents who were unsure or confused about the role or benefit of boxing in the programme, and were concerned that it may cause them to fight with others.

*The boxing, at first I was really, really confused when I was told that they are going to do boxing. I really didn't understand what was going to happen. But as I think through this thing I thought that perhaps somehow the boxing was going to help him, really, you know like move his mind from what he choose to think, and also that life doesn't end here. (FWI parent participant)*

*For me it was confusing because boxing goes together with anger and bullying and everything, it's like fighting. I was asking him, 'Why are you going there and doing boxing? Are you going to come back now and fight other children?' (FWI parent participant)*

Suggestions for improvement mentioned by parents included meeting more frequently; having other branches of the programme in more accessible areas, due to the challenges of transport; and having the contact details of other parents so that they could contact them in times of crisis.

*I think when schools are closed, maybe they can just come once and do that boxing again and perhaps meet the counsellors here - that can help them as children but it can also help us as parents...The parents as well, they can come maybe on weekends once in a while just to have counselling as parents. As parents we stay in different places, we stay far, so already coming here once in a while, it will really help us a lot because the only thing that unite us here, it's our children, so it will be easier to talk to other parents, especially that we are not neighbours, so it's always easier to talk to someone who's far, who will not judge you or anything. (FWI parent participant)*

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study began with a definition of effectiveness within the context of the FWI programme. Central to this definition is the reduction of recidivism amongst participants, and this is supported by a number of intra- and interpersonal indicators of effectiveness. The description of the programme, which expands on the brief outline given in the introduction, explains how the CBT and boxing components of the programme work together to bring about change in participants.

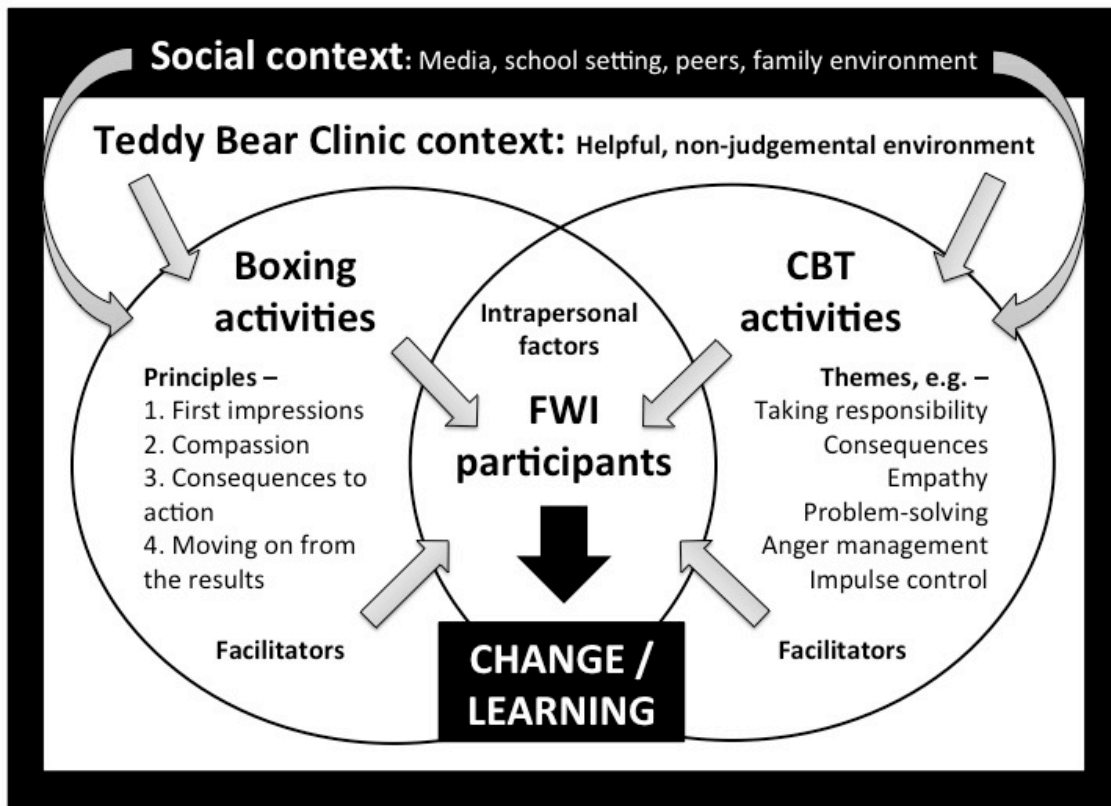
Participants' perceptions paint a generally positive picture about the programme and its effectiveness. While these alone may not be seen as conclusive due to their subjective nature, positive perceptions can play a role in the facilitation of the mechanisms of programme effectiveness. Furthermore, key informants and parents' perceptions reinforce these positive perceptions, and the parental perspective gives insight into families' experiences and highlights the importance of involving and supporting family members in the programme.

Worth noting are the differences between FWI and comparison group participants' perceptions of the change and learning they experienced as a result of their respective programmes. FWI participants had more to say on this topic, and tended to be more specific about changes and learning, many of which related to changes in behaviour, improved understanding and greater insight, such as being aware of consequences and taking responsibility. This may be due to heightened self-awareness, which could be influenced by increased self-confidence from the boxing sessions, or it could be due to the fact that themes from the CBT are strongly reinforced in the boxing sessions, especially through the four principles. This reinforcement may have caused FWI participants to be more focused on areas of change (and hence more specific), and could have led to more profound behaviour change. Or it may have resulted in enhanced awareness of behaviour change, and caused them to discuss it more readily in the focus groups.

Bullying was a pertinent issue for both FWI and comparison group participants, and while this was evidently dealt with in both the FWI and CBT programmes, it is possible that fighting was addressed more explicitly in FWI where a clear distinction was made between boxing and "fighting on the streets." It is possible that because of this, FWI participants may feel better equipped with the skills to manage anger and channel their aggression. Regarding empathy, which was mentioned more frequently in comparison groups, it could be that this principle features more prominently in

programmes with only CBT. In the FWI programme, empathy (or compassion) is emphasised alongside the other three principles in the boxing sessions, and may therefore not be as conspicuous for FWI participants.

The mechanisms of programme effectiveness and the factors influencing this effectiveness can be summed up in Figure 1 below. This conceptual model could exemplify an “optimal combination of individuals, activities and contexts,” as proposed by Sandford et al,<sup>7</sup> and presents a range of conditions referred to by these authors.



**Figure 1: Mechanisms of programme effectiveness**

This conceptual model helps to highlight that it is not boxing on its own that can bring about change, although this has never been claimed by the programme, but rather that the interplay between the physical nature of the boxing, the four principles that are emphasised by the boxing coach, and the themes addressed within the CBT. These combined help to develop the skills required by participants to bring about sustainable and meaningful change in their lives, particularly as they learn to apply these skills outside the context of the diversion programme and their offending behaviour. This aligns with Sandford et al’s assertion that “...it is not necessarily the specific nature or physical goals of a programme that are most significant, but the learning processes inherent in them. The real benefits for young people, therefore, lie in the accumulation of skills that will provide them with social currency in a much wider range of situations.”<sup>7</sup>

In light of participants and key informants’ comments, the role of the main boxing coach deserves additional attention. This individual teaches FWI participants boxing skills; imparts life skills and instils

values through the four principles; helps to empower participants and build their self-confidence; and enforces discipline and boundaries. Through this, he commands the respect of these youth and is somewhat of a paternal role model for them, particularly as he demonstrates to them that they can be men without being violent towards others. East et al maintain that paternal absence can influence the development of certain maladaptive and risk behaviours, such as early sexual activity,<sup>8</sup> which could include sexual offences. The association between paternal abandonment and risk of sexual recidivism has also been established.<sup>9</sup> It is quite likely that many FWI participants may be lacking a father figure, and that this paternal absence may have contributed to the offending behaviour that brought them to the diversion programme. Therefore, it is possible that a strong male role model who demonstrates paternal characteristics could meet a need within FWI participants, and could be a powerful catalyst for long-term personal development within these individuals.

### **Study limitations and strengths**

Despite the choice of small groups (5 – 6 participants) to provide a more comfortable setting for the focus groups, some may criticise the small sample size for this study. Considering the nature of the research, the sample size could be justified, but there were some difficulties experienced with contacting participants and getting them to agree to come to a focus group which could go some way to explain why the sample was not larger. Some participants, particularly with comparison group participants, did not understand why they were being contacted if their involvement with the programme had come to an end. Getting the number of participants for this study was already a challenge and consumed a number of man hours making phone calls. Even with this effort, a number of participants did not arrive for the focus groups on the day. Therefore, as much as additional focus groups could have provided more data, doing more focus groups may not have been possible. The mixed interview (with one FWI and one CBT participant) was a result of a miscommunication, but at the time, the facilitator felt it was worth interviewing the two participants together, even though they had participated in different programmes.

Regarding the facilitation of the focus groups, despite the female facilitator's familiarity with and experience on the programme, her gender may have introduced an additional power dynamic in the control group she facilitated and participants may have found it harder to establish trust with her. Having 'insiders' to the programme conducting the focus groups could be perceived as a flaw in the study design, since participants' willingness to share their perceptions (both positive and negative) of the programme may be open to social desirability bias. However, while the participants' perceptions of the programme's effectiveness were an important component of this study, this study also aimed to gain an understanding of how the FWI programme works and the factors contributing to its effectiveness. Participants' responses that relate to an understanding of the programme may be less open to social desirability bias, and a facilitator familiar to participants may have more readily elicited these responses. Taking into consideration the topic of the focus group discussion, it was ultimately determined that the importance of establishing trust within the focus groups outweighed the risk of social desirability bias, and the establishment of trust was more likely with a facilitator who was familiar to participants, which in some cases was a female facilitator.

Study investigators acknowledge that the method of translation and transcription is not typical, but this method was chosen since the cost of the more typical method (transcribing the interviews and focus groups into an African language and then translating these into English) was hugely prohibitive.



In terms of the strengths of this study, the qualitative methods used helped to explore issues pertinent to the programme in a way that purely statistical methods would not have been able to do. This is particularly relevant for understanding the nature of programme effectiveness and its mechanisms, as well as factors influencing this effectiveness. Furthermore, the triangulation of data sources (FWI participants, parents and key informants) helped to provide different perspectives, and the main themes that emerged in the data were reinforced from these different sources. A comparison group helped to provide a different perspective from individuals who had not been exposed to the alternative therapy of boxing, and in this way could serve to highlight the distinctive features of the boxing that contribute to the effectiveness of the FWI programme.

### **Recommendations**

No major changes were recommended for the programme in the interviews and focus groups. FWI participants' suggestions were more to do with programme logistics than the programme itself. Parents' suggestions highlighted the supportive role of the programme for parents, and that some parents desired more of this support, through increased accessibility of the programme, more frequent meetings and more communication between parents. Regarding one key informant's suggestion to enhance the links between the CBT and boxing components of the programme, the findings indicate an already significant relationship between these components of the programme, so it could be argued that any improvements to this relationship would be beneficial for the programme. Following on from this, it is important that any additional (and more practical) skills introduced to the programme, as suggested by one key informant, should not be at the expense of the skills already addressed in the CBT and boxing sessions.

The main recommendation from this study would be the expansion of the programme, and it is hoped that these study findings help to strengthen the case for this. Key to this expansion would be ensuring that the combination of CBT and boxing is maintained, and that there remains the "optimal combination of individuals, activities and contexts,"<sup>7</sup> which would include the valuable context of the TBC. This study has helped to identify what could be seen as the key conditions for the success of the programme's expansion, and these would be: a helpful, non-judgemental environment for the programme; boxing sessions that incorporate the four principles mentioned earlier; CBT that addresses the relevant themes; and facilitators who encourage personal growth and serve as role models for participants.

### **Conclusion**

FWI is a unique programme that combines sporting activity with therapeutic processes, with the intention of rehabilitating youth sex offenders. While long-term follow up would be able to assess the true impact of this programme on recidivism and holistic change within these individuals, this study has provided significant insight into the programme, how it works and the kind of change and learning that it helps to bring about in its participants. Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to an understanding of the factors that can both hinder and promote the success of this programme. Those factors promoting success should continue to be upheld in the current programme, and constitute an essential foundation for any further expansion of the programme.

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# Appendix

## FWI participant focus groups – Guide questions

### Experiences of FWI:

- If someone mentions the FWI programme, what immediately comes to mind?
- What did you think of the boxing sessions?
- What did you think of the group therapy sessions?
- What did you like best about the programme?
- What did you like least about the programme?

### Effectiveness of FWI:

- What do you remember you gained or learned on the programme?
- What was the most helpful / important thing you learnt on the programme? / Which part of you has changed the most because of the programme?
- What do you think helped you to learn / change this?
  - Individuals: facilitator, other participants
  - Activities: group therapy, boxing sessions, integration of these
  - Contexts: Teddy Bear Clinic
- What skills have you learnt from the programme that help you the most now in your life? (e.g. taking responsibility, being aware of consequences, anger management, problem solving)
- What has been the hardest thing to learn / change?
- What could help you to learn / change in this area? (e.g. more support from my family, friends or teachers, a mentor that could help me on my own, more group therapy or a support group, another programme similar to FWI)
  
- What aspects of FWI could be improved / what could be added to FWI?
- What aspects of FWI do you think should not be changed?
- Would you recommend this programme for other children / youth who are in the same situation as you?
  
- Is there anything else anyone would like to mention about the Fight with Insight programme?

## Control group focus groups – Guide questions

Experiences of the rehabilitation programme:

- What did you think of the group therapy sessions?
- What did you like best about the programme?
- What did you like least about the programme?
- Is there anything you would have liked to add to the programme?

Effectiveness of the rehabilitation programme:

- What do you remember you gained or learned on the programme?
- What was the most helpful / important thing you learnt on the programme? / Which part of you has changed the most because of the programme?
- What do you think helped you to learn / change this?
  - Individuals: facilitator, other participants
  - Activities: group therapy, or other activities
  - Contexts: Teddy Bear Clinic
- What skills have you learnt from the programme that help you the most now in your life? (e.g. taking responsibility, being aware of consequences, anger management, problem solving)
- What has been the hardest thing to learn / change?
- What could help you to learn / change in this area? (e.g. more support from my family, friends or teachers, a mentor that could help me on my own, more group therapy or a support group, alternative therapies)
- What aspects of the rehabilitation programme could be improved / what could be added to the programme?
- What aspects of the programme do you think should not be changed?
- Would you recommend this programme for other children / youth who are in the same situation as you?
- Is there anything else anyone would like to mention about the rehabilitation programme?

## **FWI parent focus groups – Guide questions**

- When you first heard that your son would be going through the SPARC Diversion programme, what did you think?
- What did you think when you heard that the programme included boxing?
- What is your general opinion of the Fight with Insight programme?
- What kind of feedback did you get from your son about the programme?
- What do you think has been the most helpful part of the programme for your son?
- Where have you seen the greatest change / improvement in your son? (e.g. change in attitudes, behaviour, self esteem, anger management)
- Would you recommend this programme for other children / youth who are in the same situation as your son?
- Where there any parts of the programme that you think were not helpful for your son?
- Do you think there is anything about the Fight with Insight programme that could be changed / improved?
  
- What has it been like to be part of a parent group at the Teddy Bear Clinic?
- How has this group helped you?
- Would you recommend this group to other parents who are in a similar situation to you?
- Do you think there is anything about the parent groups that could be changed / improved?
- What other kinds of support would you find helpful?
  
- Is there anything else anyone would like to mention about the Fight with Insight programme or the parent groups?

## Key informant interviews – Guide questions

- How would you describe your involvement / relationship with Fight with Insight and/or the Teddy Bear Clinic?
- If someone mentions the FWI programme, what immediately comes to mind?
- How would you describe the role that FWI plays in SPARC?
- What do you think sets FWI apart from / makes it unique compared to other aspects of SPARC?
- In your understanding / opinion, how do you think FWI works to bring about change in its participants?
- Of the themes that are covered in the FWI programme:
  - What is your opinion on the way in which these themes are integrated into the boxing sessions?
  - Which do you think are the most relevant (for participants, participants' families, those who have been abused, others)?
  - Which do you think are the hardest to change?
  - Which do you think are the most open to change?
  - Should there be other themes added to the list?
- Effectiveness of FWI:
  - How would you define 'success' in the context of FWI? What would you say are the key indicators of success for FWI?
  - How effective is FWI in bringing about behaviour change in its participants?
  - How have you seen FWI influence families of participants?
  - What impact has FWI had in your setting (school, home etc.)?
  - What factors do you think contribute to the effectiveness of FWI (individuals, activities, contexts)?
- What aspects of FWI could be improved?
- What aspects of FWI do you think should not be changed?

### Themes

- **Acknowledgement of responsibility** for one's action
- Awareness that actions have consequences, focus is on 'Stop and think before you act' via role-plays and simulation exercises
- Understanding sex and sexuality, including HIV/ AIDS
- Develop victim empathy
- Affirmation exercises
- Anger management
- Problem solving skills
- Steps to healthy touching, being made aware of appropriate and inappropriate touching
- Developing clear boundaries
- Impulse control