

# An Evaluation of St Giles Trust's SOS Project

## – A narrative Summary

### The SOS Project

St Giles Trust's SOS Project was conceived in 2006 to support young offenders caught up in cycles of repeat and prolific offending, typically driven by involvement in gangs.

It offers intensive, tailor-made support for young people provided by ex-offenders with lived experience of the issues facing their clients.

Since 2006, SOS has expanded from one to 12 tailored but integrated projects across London in collaboration with external partners.

In 2012/2013 St Giles Trust engaged TSIP (The Social Innovation Partnership) to conduct an evaluation into SOS to examine its practices and impact.

### The evaluation

TSIP carried out a mixed-methods evaluation that aimed to analyse impact of SOS and optimise its implementation.

This included a quantitative analysis of re-offending rates, a review of administrative data, a programme assessment (focusing on reporting mechanisms and processes) and a number of interviews with staff, clients and external partners.

***"They actually  
get results.  
No-one else does  
that for you."***  
- SOS client



## Understanding the SOS Project

TSIP worked with SOS to develop a Theory of Change outlining the process by which a client is referred to the SOS Project, is assessed and given support in different areas.

It also highlighted the short-term outcomes that this support is expected to lead to, as well as the more general long-term outcomes (e.g. reduced likelihood of gang activity, offending or re-offending and number of victims of crime).

## Casefile analysis

**TSIP analysed a sample of 156 completed case files of SOS clients. The key activities and outcomes of these were:**

- 73% of those who undertook ETE activities successfully achieved an outcome
- 76% of those who were in housing need successfully achieved an outcome
- 43% were assisted with benefits

## Unpacking client engagement

The team found that SOS is not just 'ticking boxes'. Caseworkers offer intensive support across a wide area and a breadth of issues.

This underlines SOS works with a set of clients who have hard to measure issues e.g. motivations, thinking and behaviour. It also provides **both practical and behavioural support**.

## Interviews with clients and partners

**TSIP carried out interviews with 16 clients and 9 partner agencies, finding:**

- 87% of client interviewees said that engaging with the SOS Project had changed their attitude to offending.
- 73% said that it was important that their caseworkers were ex-offenders themselves, as they could relate to them and felt inspired that they too could turn their lives around.
- When client interviewees were asked what the worst thing about the SOS Project was, most said "nothing" (and most other responses related to issues out of SOS' control, e.g. long waits for housing)
- 86% of interviewees from partner organisations said their experience of working with the SOS Project was either good or very good.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the SOS Project helps clients to stop or reduce re-offending.
- 100% said that the relationship between SOS Project staff and clients were either good/very good.

## Reconviction study

Insufficient data was available on SOS clients to provide conclusive evidence of the impact of SOS on re-offending rates. The authors also highlight that the predicted reconviction rates provided by the Ministry of Justice focus on static risk factors e.g. age, gender, criminal history whereas clients worked with through SOS have more dynamic risk factors e.g. lifestyle, motivation to change, living arrangements.

The authors recommended further work in this area for the future.

## Key findings

- The caseworkers themselves are the biggest strength of the SOS Project.** Their commitment, willingness to challenge their clients, and ability to address their attitudes and behaviours whilst still providing support are integral to the SOS Project's work. **Clients most frequently mentioned support from SOS workers and the information, advice and guidance as the most valuable parts of the SOS Project.**
- The SOS Project and St Giles Trust in general are clearly (based on case file reviews, interviews, and partner discussions) **receiving referrals from multiple routes, and taking on clients who are difficult or not motivated to reform.** This dynamic and **'hard-to-measure'** variable means the reconviction analysis needs to be considered in this context.
- The SOS Project is well-aligned with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) understanding of best practice** – it takes a holistic approach that principally targets four of NOMS' reoffending risk factors – this is an important foundation that St Giles Trust are targeting well. With more structure, all nine outcomes could be strongly targeted.
- According to client interviews and caseworkers' self-reported outcomes, the SOS Project shows signs of positive impact.** The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and case file analysis indicates good work.
- A reconviction analysis** showing reduced re-offending amongst SOS clients was not conclusive. However, due to unavoidable issues with data, these results may not accurately reflect the SOS Project's impact. Further work is recommended.
- Data collection needs to be improved** in order to fully and accurately capture the SOS Project's impact. The 24/7 nature of SOS caseworker roles leaves little room for this and TSIP recommended dedicated administrative support.
- TSIP recommended **careful consideration of evaluation methodologies and selection of outcomes** when providing projects like SOS that emerge organically and are subject to a wide range of funder requirements i.e. take on a variety of/difficult clients, use multiple referral routes and offer flexible interventions

*"St Giles Trust caseworkers' commitment to their clients knows no boundaries – theirs is a 24/7 role that leaves little time for administrative duties."  
– TSIP*

*"They give 100% support – you can ask them to help with anything"  
SOS client*

## Conclusions

TSIP found that the SOS Project is a promising project - it is well-conceived and well-designed, showing strong alignment with NOMS' best practice and receiving positive feedback from both its clients and its partner organisations.

Its biggest strength is its staff, who have shown themselves to be committed, passionate, able, and in a unique position to provide effective support to the SOS Project's ex-offender clients, support which clients themselves highlight as the SOS Project's most valuable contribution to their rehabilitation.

TSIP highlighted that data collection must improve to provide robust evidence of impact. St Giles Trust have already begun to follow TSIP's recommendations in terms of data collection and evidencing the impact of the SOS Project.

**For more information about this report or the work of the SOS Project in general, please contact us:**

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**Find out more about the work of SOS by clicking on this link:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwXv5K0ZFpo&feature=youtu.be>

***"Interviews with the caseworkers revealed their enthusiasm and passion for the job, and this was also reflected in the commitment and dedication that was evident throughout TSIP's evaluation of the SOS Project." TSIP***

