An evaluation of Inform Plus delivered by Circles South West between 2019 and 2022

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research in practice

Contents

Executive summary

Inform Plus is a programme devised by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation for adults arrested, cautioned or convicted of internet offences relating to indecent images of children (IIoC). Circles South West (CSW) is the Approved Provider of Inform Plus in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire and was commissioned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Devon and Cornwall to provide Inform Plus specifically for men *convicted* of IIoC related offences who were *referred by the police*. The programme provides a structured and supportive environment for participants to explore their offending behaviour, and to develop strategies to avoid future offending. It is an 11-week course with two facilitators conducting weekly sessions for up to 10 participants. CSW has delivered four Inform Plus groups at three locations (Camborne, Exeter and Plymouth) . The Covid-19 pandemic and CSW staffing changes interrupted the delivery of the programme.

Since 2017, Research in Practice have worked with CSW as an independent evaluator of their core Circles work (also known as Circles of Support and Accountability – CoSA), which consists of community-based, restorative interventions that aim to reduce the likelihood of reoffending for people who have committed sexual offences. Growing out of the Circles programme to focus on internet offences, Inform Plus commenced in 2019. Research in Practice and CSW worked together to develop a set of questionnaires (two pre-existing and one modified) for Inform Plus participants to complete during and after the course. The questionnaires were designed to capture how participants changed as a result of the course with respect to one protective factor and two risk factors for internet reoffending.

Questionnaires were completed at the start and end of the course as well as 3-month follow-up. This provided completed data for 4 of the 6 cohorts, including participants from all three locations. Quantitative data was collected from participants across 3 core questionnaires, and qualitative comments were also gathered on participant progress from the individuals themselves as well as the Inform Plus facilitators.

Positive changes were detected in the combined scores of all Inform Plus cohorts for every tool between each time point. Changes were statistically significant between the earliest and latest scores for three of the six tools used in the study. Meanwhile, comments made by multiple stakeholders reported positive changes in the lives of participants, with only a few references to continued struggles in the life factors targeted by the intervention. Stakeholders often mentioned an improvement in participants' emotional wellbeing and their confidence to reengage with society and employment, as well as in maintaining positive relationships with friends and colleagues.

The report shows that Inform Plus has a consistent positive impact on participants (men convicted of IIoC, referred by the Police) by enhancing protective factors, which reduce the risk of future offending via improved social networks and personal resources, as well as by mitigating risk factors for criminal internet behaviour.

Introduction

This report provides an evaluation of the Inform Plus groups provided by Circles South West (CSW) for men convicted of offences involving indecent images of children (IIoC), with the aim of reducing their risk of reoffending. The aim of the evaluation is to help CSW in their delivery of Inform Plus across the South West region, and to better understand the impact of Inform Plus on this particular cohort of convicted men referred by the police.

CSW have delivered four Inform Plus in groups covering the Camborne, Exeter and Plymouth areas. Inform Plus aims to help people explore their offending behaviour in a structured, supportive environment which guides them to identify changes and strategies to reduce their likelihood of reoffending in future.

CSW also delivered a related programme, 'Inform', for partners and relatives of people who have committed internet offences involving indecent images of children. The Inform programme focuses on providing safety and support for the participants to explore the emotional and practical impact on them and their family. Due to low numbers of returned evaluation forms, data from the programme has not been included in these analyses. This is to protect the anonymity of the Inform participants, and to ensure sufficient data quality in the results presented.

The Inform Plus groups in this evaluation were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Delivery of the groups were interrupted and there were some unanticipated delays. CSW Inform Plus groups required referrals from the Devon & Cornwall Police forces; these were significantly lower than anticipated, which may also have been impacted by pressures on police during the pandemic.

Evaluation methods

The evaluation approach taken by CSW involved Inform Plus facilitators collecting self-reported data from participants, as well as comments on participant progress from the individuals themselves, as well as facilitators. These data are responses to questionnaires collected at the start (first week) and end of the course (week 10) as well as a follow-up (week 12).

Table: Questionnaires and data collected

Tool	Description	Who completes	When
Good Lives Model (GLM)	A series of questions measuring the extent to which an individual has attained eleven types of primary goods, from healthy living to creative expression. The model assumes that attainment of such goods through pro-social means reduces the risk that individuals will seek them through criminal behaviour. Progress is measured numerically using the GLM framework's scoring system (initial score at end of course, desired score, and score at follow-up), as well as additional qualitative evidence. Qualitative feedback is collected at follow-up from (1) the participant, (2) the Inform Plus facilitator, and (3) the relevant MOSOVO officer.	Participant	End and follow-up
The Internet Behaviours and Attitudes Questionnaire v3 (IBAQ, modified)	A 4-section questionnaire, with over 100 items designed to assess internet behaviours and attitudes that predict internet-related sexual offending (IBAQ; O'Brien, 2003). The tool was modified to include 34 of the original 100 items, incorporating only those questions relevant to the circumstances of the Inform Plus programme and the current nature of internet offending.	Participant	Start, end and follow-up
UCLA Loneliness Scale (short) (Hughes, Waite, Hawkley, and Cacioppo, 2004)	A short version of the validated UCLA loneliness scale, developed in 2004, which asks three questions to give a numerical measure of self-reported loneliness.	Participant	Start, end and follow-up
Participant Evaluation Forms	A series of questions developed by the Lucy Faithfull Foundation to gather feedback from participants to help monitor and improve the course.	Participant	End of course

Data was collected, anonymised and scored by the Inform Plus team and securely sent to Research and Practice for analysis. Data was cleaned and analysed in Excel.

In order to ensure representative samples, at least four responses were required per time point to be included for analysis. Since the study examines changes on individual GLM domains, the GLM tool is treated as a grouping of eleven tools for each domain of primary good.

Due to insufficient sample sizes (under four per time point), six of the eleven GLM domains were removed leaving five for analysis.

Scoring responses

Responses on each questionnaire were scored at each time point following a scoring template which indicated what numerical value each answer corresponded with and whether the value needed to be reversed in accordance with the question's framing.

Following O'Brien and Webster (2007), participant responses for the IBAQ survey were excluded when 3 or more (10%) answers were unavailable and missing data for under 3 items were given a value of 3.

Analyses

Data was analysed in aggregate for all Inform Plus cohorts due to the insufficient sample sizes for cohort-level analysis.

Two surveys gathered data across three time points, which would normally permit an ANOVA test to simultaneously calculate statistical significance across three samples. However, since the samples are below 30, which is the minimum desired size for an ANOVA test (Ross and Willson, 2017), T-tests were instead performed for all three points of comparison.

A paired t-Test or an independent two-sample t-Test was performed respectively for samples with matched participant scores at each time point and for unmatched samples.

The three core questionnaires used in the study measure a *protective* factor and two *risk* factors for internet reoffending. The GLM tool measures a protective factor, i.e., the pro-social acquisition of primary goods. Accordingly, a *higher* score on this tool reflects a reduction in the risk of future offences. Conversely, a *lower* score in the IBAQ and UCLA loneliness tools indicate a decreased risk of reoffending.

Limitations of available data

Due to the various challenges in data collection, not all Inform Plus cohorts provided sufficient responses to be included in the analysis. Specifically, one of the two cohorts in Camborne and Exeter are not part of this evaluation.

Data gaps also took the form of missing responses for certain time points and for items on surveys. Whilst data imputation was used to retain participant responses where only a few items were skipped, the evaluation still relies on small samples sizes. An average of 12 participant responses could be used for each time point across the surveys.

Caution is therefore advised when interpreting the findings, since small sample sizes reduce the power of the study and increase the margin of error.

Results

Data in this evaluation

The data analysed in this report includes four of the six Inform Plus cohorts facilitated between 2019 and 2020. These data include responses from a total of 20 participants:

Table: Number of participants in the dataset

Cohort	Participants
Camborne	5
Exeter	3
Plymouth (cohort 1)	7
Plymouth (cohort 2)	6
Total	20

The table below summarises the number of questionnaires collected with at least four responses at each time point. Six of the eleven GLM domains received too few responses (under 4) at each point for inclusion in the analysis. This leaves five GLM domains for analysis, listed below:

Table: Total number questionnaires with 4+ responses returned by tool (all cohorts)

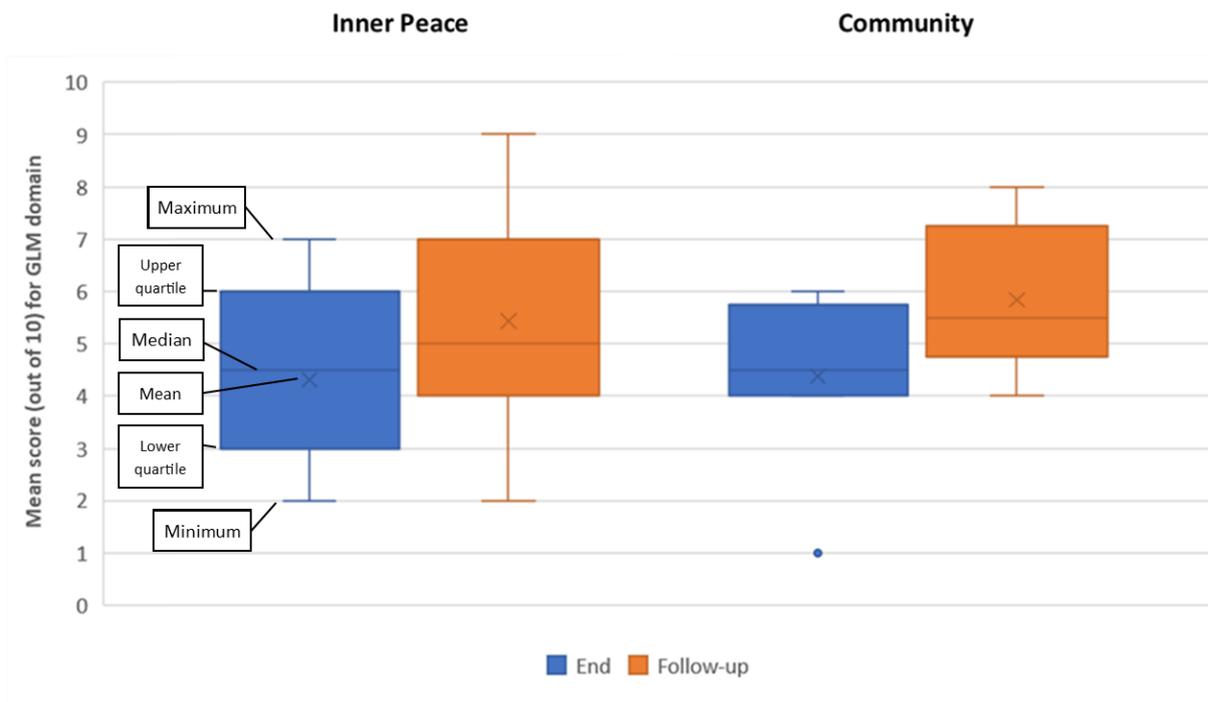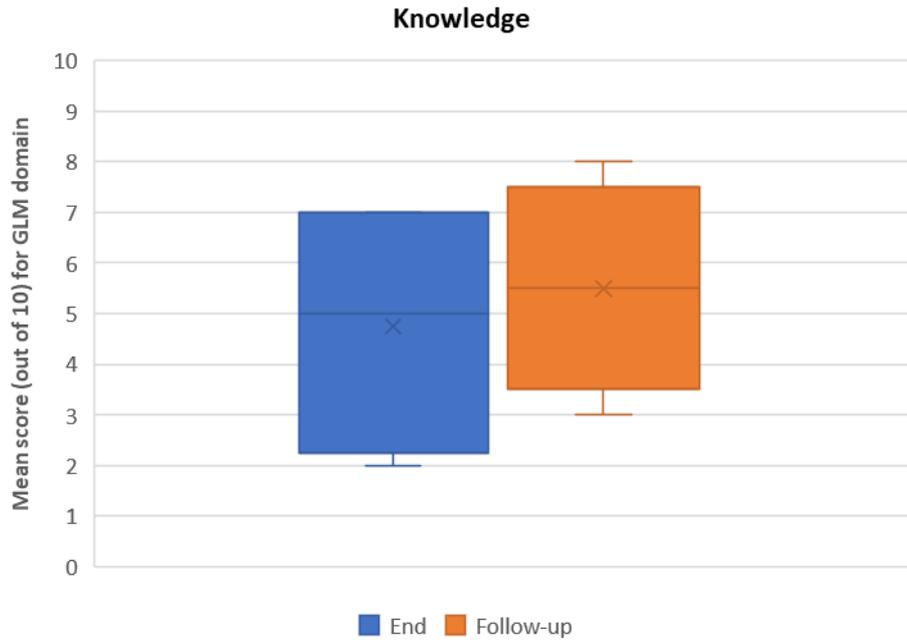| Tool		Total	Start	End	Follow-up
GLM	*Community*	16	-	8	8
	Excellence in work	14	-	7	7
	Inner peace	30	-	16	14
	Life	18	-	9	9
	Knowledge	8	-	4	4
IBAQ			56	18	18	20
Loneliness		58	19	19	20

GLM scores

Mean scores for each GLM domain have been calculated across all cohorts at the applicable time points (end and follow-up). For this tool, an *increase* in mean score represents a reduced risk of reoffending through the pro-social attainment of the respective primary good.

As shown in the boxplot charts below, mean scores increased between end and the follow-up for every GLM domain.

The first boxplot is labelled below to demonstrate how it is read. Box plots are useful to visualise how the data is distributed. For example, long lines show there was a large range between the lowest and highest scores, and larger boxes indicate that responses were more spread out and there was not a strong concentration around the middle (median) or average (mean) values.

Graph: Mean GLM scores for all cohorts

Inner Peace

Community

Mean score (out of 10) for GLM domain

Maximum
Upper quartile
Median
Mean
Lower quartile
Minimum

■ End ■ Follow-up

Excellence in work

Life

Mean score (out of 10) for GLM domain

■ End ■ Follow-up

Knowledge

At a significance threshold of p ≤ 0.05, *Excellence in work* (p = 0.00584) and *Life* (p=0.00008) were the only two GLM domains with a statistically significant increase in mean score.

However, both *Inner Peace* (p=0.05257) and *Community* (p = 0.05318) saw changes in mean scores that came extremely close to the threshold of significance.

The *Knowledge* domain showed the most insignificant change (p = 0.15946).

IBAQ scores

Mean IBAQ scores were determined for each of the three time points. A *decrease* in mean IBAQ score indicates a smaller likelihood of reoffending. The following results are based on a modified 34-item IBAQ tool with possible mean scores ranging from 34 to 170.

As shown in the graph below, the mean IBAQ score for all cohorts fell at each time point.

Graph: Mean IBAQ scores for all cohorts
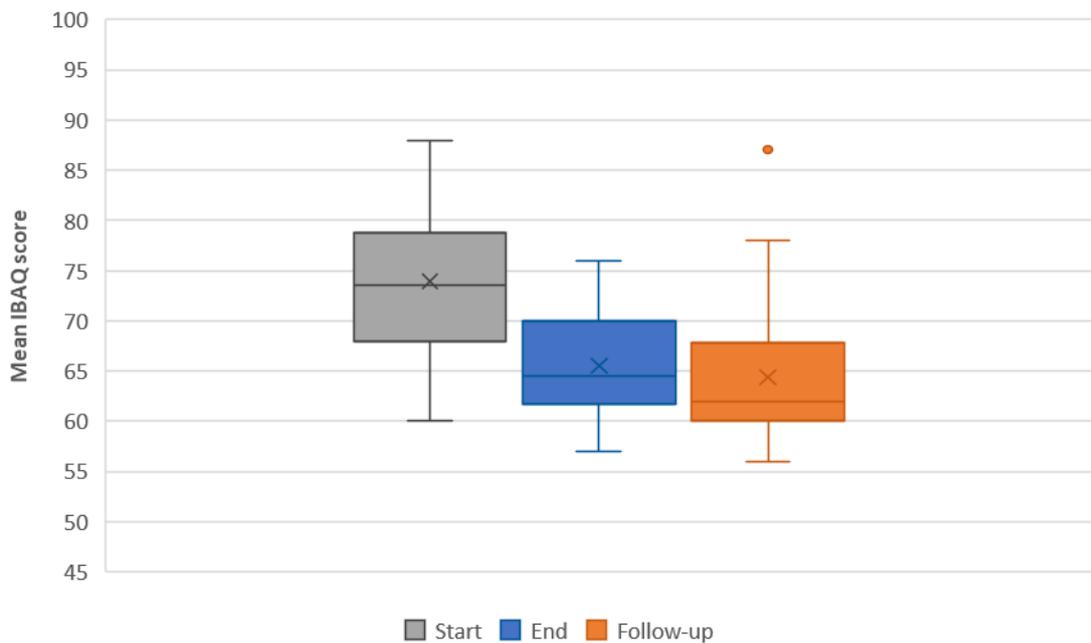
A paired t-Test for IBAQ scores at the start and end of the programme showed a significant change in mean score (p = 0.000025). However, an independent two-sample t-Test found an insignificant difference (p = 0.3035) between end and follow-up.

The change between start and follow-up scores remained significant (p = 0.0002).

Loneliness scores

Loneliness scores for all cohorts were averaged at start, end and follow-up. A *lower* UCLA loneliness score indicates a reduced risk of future offences. Possible mean scores for each time point range from 3 to 9.

As shown in the graph below, the mean loneliness score fell at each time point with a very small decrease between the end and follow-up.
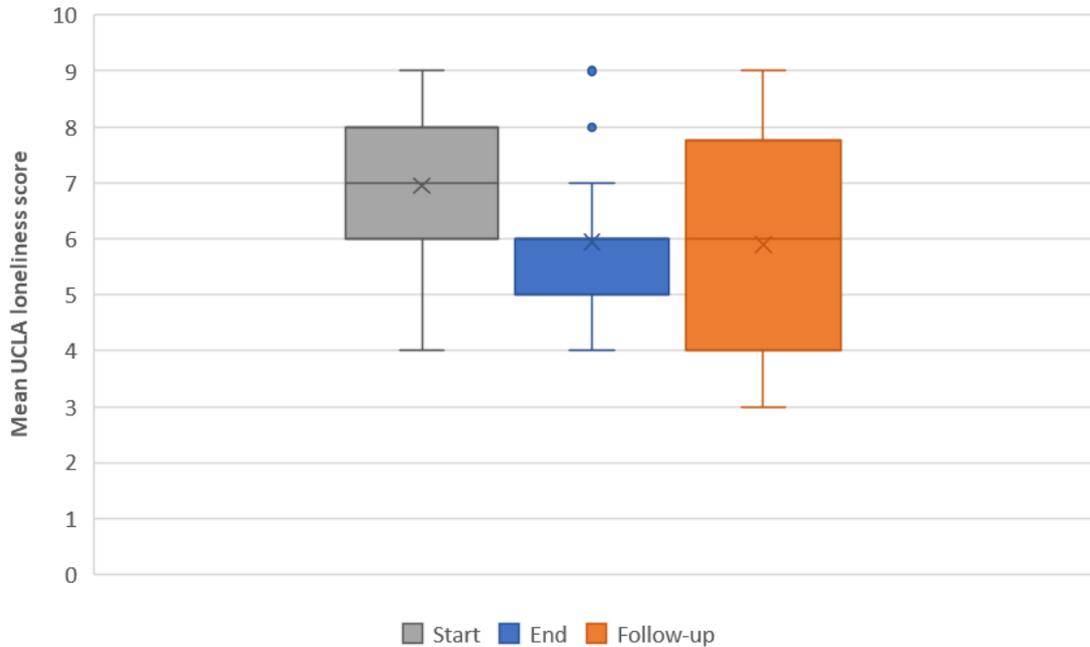
A paired t-Test revealed a significant change between the start and end of the programme (p = 0.0069). However, a two-sample t-Test for end and follow-up results showed an insignificant difference (p = 0.0847).

The change between the start of the programme and follow-up remained significant (p = 0.0321).

Good Lives Model comments

Qualitative reflections on participant progress in each GLM domain were provided by (1) the participant, (2) the Inform Plus facilitator, and (3) the relevant MOSOVO officer at follow-up.

Excellence in Work

Comments in the Excellence in Work domain noted that participants had found or applied for new work, developed a better attitude with colleagues, or improved their productivity at work. However, one participant was still experiencing frustration in work, and another was taking a break from university, whilst recognising the continuing importance of 'channelling energy' through learning.

Life

Some participants had achieved a greater life balance, improved relationships and a better ability to empathise. Others found new work where their skills could grow or had put their finances in order. However, one participant felt 'in limbo' due to an ongoing criminal investigation.

Inner Peace

Notes on Inner Peace referred to greater participant happiness, self-control and calmness; exercising more and feeling benefits to their well-being; and a new awareness for how to apply the principles of GLM when needed. However, other participants experienced worsening depression and intense feelings of guilt or stress due to past convictions or current investigations. In some such cases, the participant had reached out to external agencies for support or described the value of the course in helping them to understand their offending and preventing them from repeating criminal behaviours.

Stakeholders noted improvements in participants' sociability with colleagues and neighbours, as well as meeting new people. A small minority of comments expressed the need for greater social engagement.

Knowledge

One participant was developing an interest in gardening, another was focusing on learning through YouTube, and yet another had become more aware of their triggers for offending.

Conclusions

In this evaluation, we found the participants of Inform Plus showed reduced risk of reoffending, as measured in improvements to protective factors and the mitigation of risk factors for criminal internet behaviours. Changes across these factors were captured through a carefully selected set of questionnaires and were found to be statistically significant for three of the six tools used. Using a mixed methods approach we found that participants themselves, as well as facilitators and MOSOVO officers (Management of Sexual and Violent Offenders), noticed positive changes in participant sociability, relationships, work life, and emotional well-being. Although involving a relatively small number of participants, this evidence supports the use of Inform Plus as part of a restorative approach to reducing the risk of internet sexual offending.

Although an assessment of scores has not shown statistically significant differences in participants' inner peace, community, and knowledge, the total number of quantitative tools used in the study and qualitative comments gathered has demonstrated that the majority of Inform Plus participants have seen improvements in one or more areas that help to reduce the risk of reoffending.

The tools used in this evaluation have been selected and in one case modified with the help of stakeholders and professionals, and informed by evidence on sexual offending and wider research. Combined with a longitudinal approach to evaluation, we feel that the present evaluation offers evidence to support the effectiveness of Inform Plus in strengthening protective factors and mitigating risk factors for internet sexual offending for men convicted of offences relating to indecent images of children. However, due to the small sample sizes obtained for this study, caution is advised in interpreting the results.

References

Ross, A., & Willson, V. L. (2017). One-way ANOVA. In Basic and advanced statistical tests (pp. 21-24). Brill.

O'Brien, M., & Webster, S. (2007). The Construction and Preliminary Validation of the Internet Behaviours and Attitudes Questionnaire (IBAQ). Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment, 19(3), 237-256.

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