

CASSPLUS Evaluation: Final Report Executive Summary

April 2022



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What is CASSPLUS?

CASSPLUS is an independent charity which provides free advice and support for defendants, their families, and others in 4 magistrates' courts in Devon and Cornwall

CASSPLUS (Community Advice and Support Services +) is a service which provides free advice and support from magistrates' court settings for people involved in the criminal justice system.

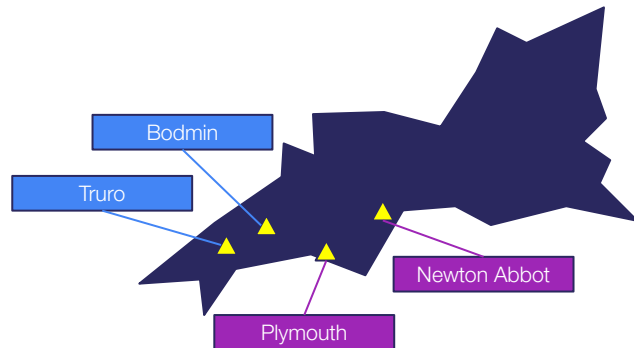
Each site has 1-2 members of staff and a team of volunteers working from a location inside the court. Support is generally provided face to face in the first instance, with follow up calls made as needed.

Services users are provided with practical help/interventions, signposting and/or ongoing mentoring/motivation. Support generally follow one of four typical journeys outlined below.

CASSPLUS clients usually come from one of four routes:

1. Direct approach by CASSPLUS to individuals waiting
2. Magistrate-led referrals
3. Custody/cells staff-led referrals
4. Other court staff-led referrals

The four magistrates courts where CASSPLUS teams have a presence



Typical CASSPLUS client support journeys

1. Brief intervention	2. On the day support	3. Medium-term support	4. Long-term support
Signposting	Signposting	Signposting	Signposting
	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention
		Mentoring	Mentoring
		Motivation	Motivation

CASSPLUS aims to intervene with individuals before offending behaviours are fully entrenched. The client profile shows a high level of need in those they work with

In 2019/20 most CASSPLUS clients were:

- Defendants, not represented by a solicitor
- Not employed and receiving 2+ benefits
- Dealing with multiple and complex needs

66%

of clients were defendants

37%

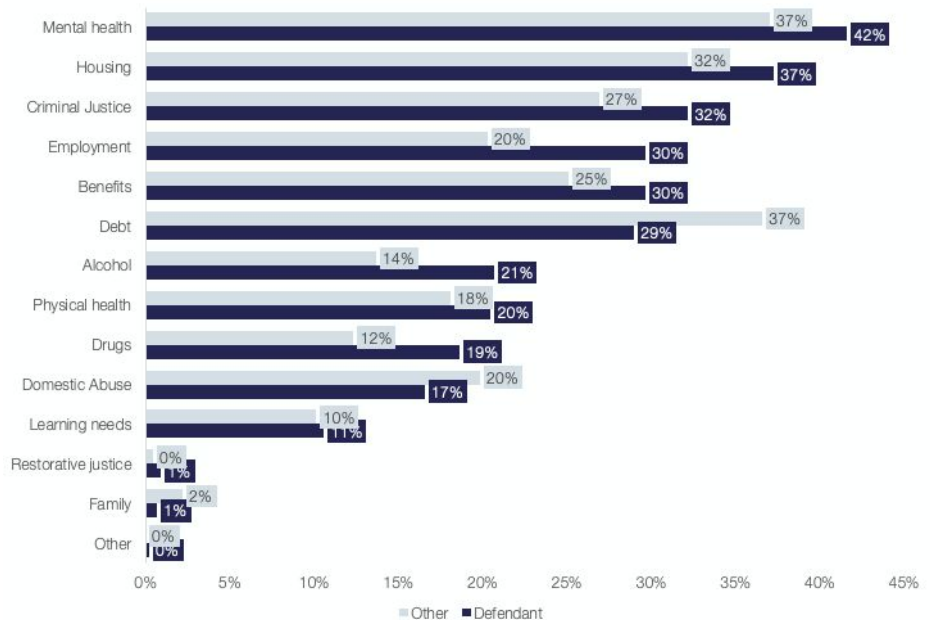
of defendant clients had a previous conviction*

54%

had more than one need

CASSPLUS clients generally have a high need profile - for example 41% of clients identified a mental health need:

Proportion of clients with specific needs identified by type of need split by defendant and other client groups, 2019/20



*There were 126 clients where status as a defendant or other was not completed. Therefore the proportion may be skewed.



What is the **CASSPLUS** theory of change?

The CASSPLUS theory of change outlines how the activities/interventions CASSPLUS provide should result in certain outcomes. Crest developed this in the early phase of the evaluation to support the identification of indicators of impact

- CASSPLUS's governing purpose is to promote social inclusion, by preventing exclusion and supporting people who are socially excluded. This applies **in particular but not exclusively** to people involved in the criminal justice system and their families
 - An important part of this is **reducing reoffending** as well as providing general support and advice to people in the courts
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- Interventions to reduce reoffending take various forms, but research to date has identified some **key factors** that are effective at decreasing reoffending:^{1, 2}
 - Addressing criminogenic needs
 - Supportive networks and relationships,
 - Perceptions of procedural justice and fairness,
 - Holistic support
 - We have developed a **theory of change** to illustrate how CASSPLUS interventions aim to address each of these factors
 - It sets out five long-term outcomes of CASSPLUS and seven short-term outcomes. These outcomes are driven by both direct intervention by the service itself, and through other agencies involved with the client

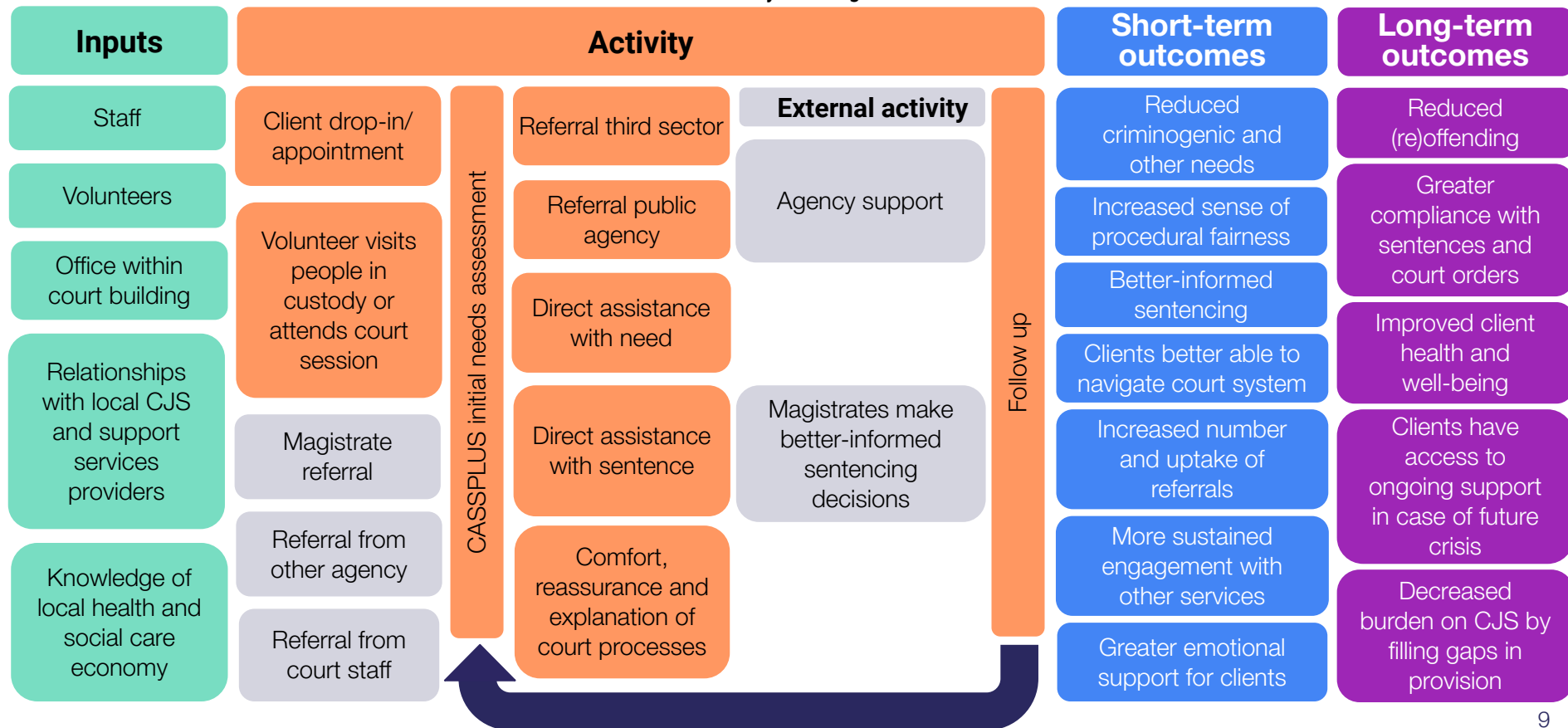
"The aims of CASS are to...reduce reoffending rates by enabling people that have got themselves caught up in the criminal justice system, from whichever side of the fence that happens to be, to access the support to unravel some of the issues going on in [their] lives and be able to change their track"
—CASSPLUS staff

CASSPLUS activity is designed to be able to deliver support which aligns with the evidence around what works to reduce reoffending

Addressing criminogenic needs	CASSPLUS provides direct assistance applying for benefits and other financial help, as well as referrals to food banks and to services tackling substance misuse, accommodation problems, mental health, and other criminogenic needs. They also help clients develop fine payment plans and liaise with court staff.
Supportive networks and relationships	By providing a supportive presence within the court and a listening ear to their clients, CASSPLUS helps them cope with the immediate stress of the court. CASSPLUS also gives ongoing encouragement to many of their clients to help them stay positive and motivate themselves, and generally offers a positive and supportive relationship and connection to the community.
Perceptions of procedural justice and fairness	Clients often struggle to understand court proceedings and what decision has been reached. CASSPLUS helps explain legal terminology and the practicalities of sentencing, as well as sometimes advocating on behalf of clients when they lack other representation and making magistrates and court staff aware of mitigating factors where relevant.
Holistic support	Many support services are 'mono-problem', and struggle to deal with interconnections between multiple needs or address them simultaneously. CASSPLUS provides holistic support and informal case management for clients with multiple needs, offering a single point of contact or crisis management service for complex cases. They are also responsive to clients' priorities in sequencing and seek to address contributing factors to their problems, e.g. working to resolve debt or housing problems before, or at the same time as, offering mental health treatment.

The overall aim of CASSPLUS is to support social inclusion, but there are also a number of short- and long-term outcomes the service hopes to achieve

CASSPLUS Theory of Change





What impact is CASSPLUS having?

We assessed the following short- and long-term outcomes of the CASSPLUS theory of change through the course of the evaluation

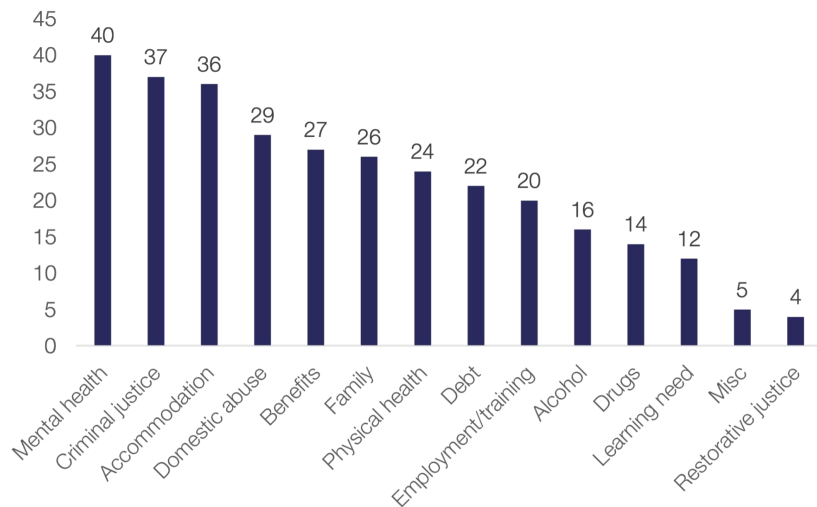
CASSPLUS Actions	Short-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Referrals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced criminogenic and other needs 2. Increased sense of procedural fairness 3. Better-informed sentencing 4. Better navigation of the court system 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced re(offending) 2. Greater compliance with sentences and court orders 3. Improved client health and wellbeing 4. Clients have access to ongoing support in case of future crisis
Assistance with a need		
Assistance in understanding the criminal justice system process		
On-going mentoring/support		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Increased number and uptake of referrals 6. More sustained engagement with other services 7. Greater emotional support for clients 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Decreased burden on the criminal justice system by filling gaps in provision

Client needs improved across most types of need whilst the client was in contact with CASSPLUS

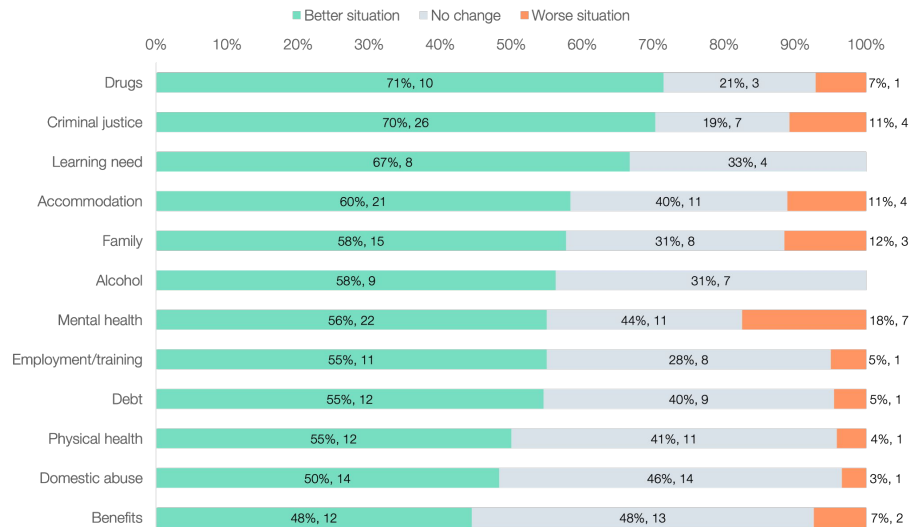
1. Client needs were improved during engagement with CASSPLUS:

Across most need types, a majority of clients with an identified need said that need had improved during the period they were in contact with CASSPLUS. The majority of service users also told us in interviews that CASSPLUS had improved their situation in some way.

Number of clients with a need identified at first assessment and at least two needs assessments recorded, by need type



Number and proportion of clients with a need identified at first assessment whose need had improved, stayed the same or worsened, by need type



Clients were better able to navigate the court system, but there was no concrete evidence of an impact on perceptions of procedural fairness or sentencing

2. Clients did not see an impact on their view of procedural fairness:

There was no significant evidence to suggest that CASSPLUS has a positive impact on perceptions of procedural fairness, however interviewees outlined characteristics which suggested it **supported the four principles of procedural fairness**: voice, neutrality, respect and trustworthy motives.

"I think the points that I've raised on my side of the story have definitely been taken into account....yeah, I definitely feel that I've been heard."

- CASSPLUS Client

"In the past I've had solicitors who I felt like a burden to, to go and ask them what was going on and even then I didn't really feel like I knew what was going on. But these guys just always kept me informed." - CASSPLUS Client

3. There was not enough evidence to suggest CASSPLUS aids better-informed sentencing, but court staff still value the service:

Some stakeholders felt CASSPLUS are influential in the information the magistrate has before sentencing, but interviewed magistrates did not agree.

"I think [CASSPLUS Coordinator] has spared me prison. Because if I was going up to answer the charges I'm facing tomorrow and I didn't have anyone to represent me I think I would have been stuck. I think I would have been put inside by now but [CASSPLUS Coordinator] was the one that contacted a Solicitor who advised me on what to do."

- CASSPLUS Client

4. Clients felt better able to navigate the court system:

18 of the 27 clients said that CASSPLUS helped them understand what to expect at court, or interpret what happened afterwards. Some first time defendants expressed a **desire for an even greater degree of support**.

"I was quite nervous and I didn't know what was going to happen. But after speaking to [CASSPLUS Coordinator] she put it in a clearer picture for me."

- CASSPLUS Client

Stakeholders articulated the benefit of CASSPLUS in increasing the referral options for clients and support them to sustain engagement with other services

5. Stakeholders felt CASSPLUS drove up referrals and supported clients to follow through on referrals:

We were not able to evidence whether CASSPLUS increases the volumes of referrals to services without a baseline. However we were able to test the perceptions of stakeholders and found a **general consensus that the physical presence of staff makes service users much more likely to take up a referral.**

"They are an asset to the court environment. We don't have time as Ushers to talk them through stuff. [With CASSPLUS] you have the presence of a person. If you're given a phone number you won't follow it through. If you say here's a person, you are much more likely to follow it through."

- Court Usher

"Unless people knew about us already, they wouldn't necessarily find their way to us without CASSPLUS. Even if they did know, they might struggle to access the service without proactive support."

- Drug and Alcohol Service

6. Similarly interviewees felt there was a positive impact on sustained engagement with services:

Many CASSPLUS clients have difficulties in managing appointment attendance, and CASSPLUS play a role in **supporting clients to manage their time** and communicate difficulties to other providers. We found evidence that these calls were often being made, and that some were effective, but weren't able to draw concrete conclusions on the actual impact on service engagement.

"[The CASSPLUS Co-ordinator] asked me to call her on my day off to let me know if I got the place. It felt like I was talking to my gran or my auntie. It felt like she really cared."

- CASSPLUS Client

"I'd say about 90% of people have followed through with referrals when I call them after three weeks. We also hear that through the services themselves. But that may just be in Cornwall."

- CASSPLUS Co-ordinator

"[The CASSPLUS coordinators] have been helping me get in touch with my counsellor. [The counsellor] just keeps seeing me once and then I never hear from them again...but [the CASSPLUS Co-ordinator] gets me back in touch with my counsellor again."

- CASSPLUS Client

Clients and other stakeholders highly commended the emotional support CASSPLUS provides for defendants and their families

7. CASSPLUS are highly effective at providing emotional support to clients at court and following court:

CASSPLUS fills an important gap in being the only organisation present in Court with the aim of supporting defendants first and foremost, from a person-centric standpoint. Stakeholders and clients alike agreed that CASSPLUS provides valuable emotional support to defendants (and also to victims and witnesses).

The theory of change outlines the intended impact of the provision of emotional support in resulting in some of the other mid-long term outcomes. By supporting clients to cope emotionally with their day at court, they are more likely to be successful in addressing needs and making positive changes.

"They show them a bit of kindness. Someone feels invested in them. Makes them feel seen."

- Probation

"They were there to meet me in court and go through it with me and help me...calm the situation down...because it was quite traumatic"

- CASSPLUS Client

"When I found CASSPLUS a bit of light shone on me...just knowing they're there I feel a lot better mentally."

- CASSPLUS Client

"A lot of the time because they are going in for a general chit chat, they think 'I can chill out here and have a sit down and a cup of tea'. They always come out a lot better. They go in with tears but never out"

- Security Staff

Due to data gaps, we were not able to evidence the impact of CASSPLUS on reoffending or compliance with sentences

1. We were not able to evidence the impact of CASSPLUS on reoffending:

However, cohort data has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice Data Lab to enable them to conduct the analysis. This has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and will be updated in due course.

One client stated they had not had to return to Court since being supported by CASSPLUS and attributed this to a mix of the support provided by them as well as other agencies:

"I got support from CASSPLUS and the other people they referred me to, to realise I should keep myself away from trouble. I kept myself busy and stopped mixing with idiots."

- CASSPLUS Client

Most other clients did not draw a direct connection between the service provided by CASSPLUS and any perceived risk of reoffending. Some felt confident that they were not at risk of reoffending but did not attribute this to CASSPLUS involvement or support.

2. We were not able to evidence the impact of CASSPLUS on compliance with sentences:

We were not able to obtain sentence compliance statistics so were not able to evidence the impact of CASSPLUS on greater compliance with sentences and court orders. This is a recommendation for future evaluation work to consider.

There were several examples given by clients of CASSPLUS assisting clients to pay fines, or to set up payment plans with the relevant authorities (in both criminal and civil cases). We can theorise, though not prove, that this will naturally increase rates of compliance compared to an absence of CASSPLUS involvement.

"I went in and said to her [CASSPLUS coordinator] about this car tax [overdue payment] and she said 'oh ideal - the man from the DVLA is here today.' And so she took me to him there and then and he sorted it all out there and then. I didn't have to go to court or worry about it."

- CASSPLUS Client

CASSPLUS has a sustained impact on client wellbeing and provides ongoing accessible support to clients

3. CASSPLUS has a positive impact on client wellbeing:

21 of the 27 clients interviewed said that CASSPLUS had supported their general wellbeing. Clients frequently referred to their **mental health having improved** along with their outlook on life. Interview participants generally agreed that CASSPLUS had a positive impact on their ability to deal with problems in the longer term.

"It gave me a more positive outlook...I think it was just down to her support and feeling that we'd been heard."

- CASSPLUS Client

"I'm more comfortable now. In certain ways. Like down the phone - like speaking. They helped me...to be more confident in myself."

- CASSPLUS Client

"I'm learning to keep myself safe with the help of CASSPLUS"

- CASSPLUS Client

4. CASSPLUS provides ongoing support to clients which they feel is accessible:

Most of the clients we spoke to had engaged with CASSPLUS beyond the initial point of need 21 of the 27 clients interviewed said that they felt they would have **access to future support from CASSPLUS** should they need it. A number of clients described an initial phase of support from CASSPLUS and then a break before re-contacting them with a different issue.

"You might not need it [CASSPLUS] all the time, but knowing it's there is invaluable."

- CASSPLUS Client

"She's helping me with a family solicitor and sorting arrangements with the kids. Because obviously my ex used to beat my son as well...I knew [CASSPLUS staff] dealt with that side of things as well. I knew she has other teams to the side of her on the women's side."

- CASSPLUS Client

CASSPLUS has a positive impact on reducing demand on some criminal justice system partners, and also supports the effective sharing of information

5. CASSPLUS has a positive impact on reducing demand on some criminal justice system partners:

A number of court-based service stakeholders that we interviewed articulated either how CASSPLUS were able to **provide clients with a different kind of support** that they couldn't offer, or felt that their workload was somehow reduced by the ability to refer individuals onto CASSPLUS. Thereby **reducing demand on the criminal justice system** and other services.

"We had a girl who was being a bit...loud and boisterous. We talk [people] down, but can't offer them what CASSPLUS can offer. So though they don't manage the situation, they notice the situation and they get people to come in the office and chill out and chat to them."
- Building Security Officer

"Witnesses often have extensive needs, and I don't have the time to deal with them all."
- Witness Service (Citizens Advice)

Some stakeholders felt that, as well as reducing demand, CASSPLUS impacted the effectiveness of their own work

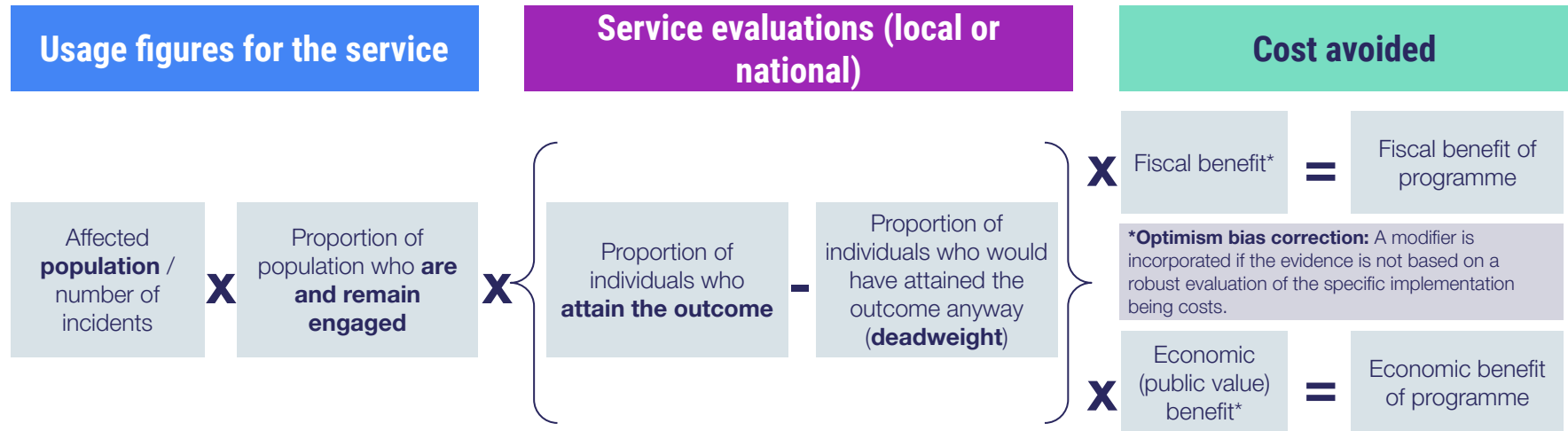
Beyond the outcomes identified in the theory of change, our evaluation also found that CASSPLUS has an **impact on the effectiveness of other court services** (on top of reducing the initial burden on the criminal justice system).

Referral routes are often two-way for CASSPLUS, as a result of having built strong relationships in the local area. For example CASSPLUS might refer a client to a drug and alcohol service one day, and the next that same service may refer their clients to CASSPLUS to provide support around court attendance.

Stakeholders also often referred to CASSPLUS as a **fountain of local knowledge**, indicating that they frequently call to ask what the CASSPLUS team know about other local agencies. In this way, CASSPLUS not only acts directly on behalf of clients, but **facilitates local networks of information-sharing and support**.

We also conducted a cost-benefit analysis for the CASSPLUS service using the Greater Manchester cost-benefit analysis model

The financial and social benefits of a service are calculated using the formula below.



Fiscal benefit: savings to the public sector that are due to a specific project - largely made up cashable savings (i.e. reduction in expenditure due to the outcome being achieved)

Public value (economic) benefit: wider social benefits including gains to society such as improvements to general health, family well-being educational attainment, access to transport or public services.

The Value = Benefits – Costs

We found that, even using a conservative estimate (to account for data quality issues), CASSPLUS has a positive public value benefit

We approached the cost benefit analysis in **two ways** and so were able to **stress test** our results. It is important to note that neither analysis attempts to quantify the full value of CASSPLUS a whole. Each method only accounts for a small proportion of the work does and for some of the outcomes achieved for a proportion of clients.


Using **method 1** we assessed the impact of CASSPLUS on 135 different needs across 64 clients

For this cohort we found that for every £1 spent by CASSPLUS there was a **public value benefit of £3.36**.

Using **method 2** we assessed the impact of CASSPLUS referrals to 3 core services, which accounted for 10% of CASSPLUS referrals in 2019/20.

We found that for these services, CASSPLUS was responsible for a fiscal benefit of around £2,600 and an economic/social benefit of £33,000. We then extrapolated this figure upwards to gain an estimate for 100% of referrals. We estimated that for every £1 CASSPLUS spends, there is a **public value benefit of £1.87**.

The two figures generated by our cost benefit analyses are not comparable, but **both provide a positive assessment of the economic/public value delivered by the service**. However, we recommend that CASSPLUS continues to expand and quality assure its data collection so that a more robust assessment can be made in future. Both of our analyses had to be subject to significant optimism bias discounts to account for the lack of hard data available. This has resulted in a potentially conservative view of the fiscal and economic impacts.



What are the critical success factors of CASSPLUS?

As well as developing the theory of change, our process evaluation identified the key elements of CASSPLUS operations which support the aims of the service in terms of targeting, affordability and proportionality

Targeting	<p>We found that while there is no defined target cohort, CASS+ effectively identifies and prioritises those it deems most at risk, whilst still supporting anyone that requires help. Staff work with court agencies to identify those at risk, and prioritise dynamically to manage demand. This has proven effective with the majority of clients meeting at least one of the characteristics staff described as benefiting the most from CASS+ (i.e. defendants charged with low-level offences open to engaging with support services).</p>
Affordability	<p>We found that the model is low-cost with minimal capital expenditure (being based in courts) and can be delivered at scale by deploying a small team of expert staff who recruit and train a much larger number of skilled volunteers. In Plymouth courts increasing repeat demand has placed pressures on staff to maintain a caseload and offer support to new clients in court, but this has largely been resolved by the development of an appointments system.</p>
Proportionality	<p>We found that being client-led allows CASS+ to make effective prioritisation decisions according to clients' own assessments of their needs. In addition, offering a scaled approach to interventions, means CASS+ can be as proportionate to the level of need as possible, whilst accounting for individual levels of engagement and motivation. However, it is also worth noting that the extent to which CASS+ is proportionate to client needs also depends on the availability of the agencies they are referring clients to and the thresholds of other services. For some there may be a waiting list, and therefore a need for CASS+ to provide a source of support and motivation to clients whilst they wait to be seen. Equally, the client-led nature of the service may mean disproportionate resources are sometimes focused on certain clients or needs, but equally it can improve efficiency and effectiveness by creating greater client buy-in and ensuring more appropriate sequencing of interventions. This might include, for instance, addressing immediate food and housing needs before long-term mental health needs.</p>

This informed the identification of six critical factors that drive success for CASSPLUS and should be retained as a core part of the operating model. They should also be a core part of any service development in other areas

1. Expert staff and volunteers - the volunteer model is essential to have the required reach across potential clients, and to facilitate the other critical success factors. Staff must be highly knowledgeable in terms of the local service landscape.

2. Generalist - the service must be able to address multiple needs and act as a central repository of local information, with sign posting as a core capability.

"There are services for [helping] people in different ways, but one place that does everything is really important." - Probation officer

3. Responsive - the service must be able to respond to clients and provide advice rapidly. Whilst clients should be able to make appointments if needed, the drop-in option is essential.

4. Independent, non-statutory status - the service must be independent from the criminal justice system and engagement must be voluntary.

"It's a comfort. [Clients] know [CASSPLUS are] not part of the legal system but because they are in court it gives them a bit of reassurance that they are there to help them, rather than the official judicial process." - Probation officer

5. Localised - The service must have detailed local knowledge to be able to answer a broad range of questions, and must also be a physical presence in court.

6. Non-targeted - The service must be available to anyone physically present in court - without any thresholds required to receive support.

What next for CASSPLUS?

Our evaluation has found that CASSPLUS is effectively supporting those that are involved (or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system) to better navigate the criminal justice system and address their needs, which may reduce the risk of offending

Overall we found **good evidence** to suggest that CASSPLUS is **delivering well against 3 out of the 7 short term outcomes** described in the theory of change:

- It is helping clients better navigate the court system
- It is providing greater emotional support for clients in the court setting
- It is helping to reduce criminogenic and other needs



There was **some evidence** to suggest that CASSPLUS is also:

- Increasing the number and uptake of referrals
- Supporting more sustained engagement with other services



There was **less evidence** that CASSPLUS is:

- Increasing a sense of procedural fairness
- Driving better sentencing



With the long term outcomes, we found evidence that **CASSPLUS has a positive impact on client wellbeing, access to support and decreasing the burden on wider criminal justice system partners.** We did not find evidence that CASSPLUS reduces reoffending or increases compliance with sentences and court orders.

We recommend that CASSPLUS continues to deliver the service in Devon & Cornwall, with some key considerations for ongoing delivery. We also recommend a further evaluation once data collection has matured further

We recommend CASSPLUS:

Considers ways to remain a non-targeted organisation but **increase outreach and support** to those involved in the criminal justice system or at risk of involvement in a **more intensive way**

Maintains a physical presence in court, but also **develops an approach to access clients virtually** as virtual court hearings continue

Maintains and develops relationships locally, and leverages funding from some of the agencies who describe seeing a positive impact on their own work as a result of CASSPLUS

Continues to **collect and monitor outcomes data** to assess the performance of CASSPLUS in meeting different needs

We recommend a future evaluation considers:

A **further evaluation** of the outcomes we co were not able to evidence - around better **sentencing and increasing compliance with sentences**. This should include a focus on exploring the views of magistrates and probation staff views in more detail, as well as obtaining data on sentence concordance and compliance

As assessment of the **representation of defendants** in the Criminal Justice System in Devon & Cornwall in the CASSPLUS cohort to establish if the service is successful in reaching and supporting all those who would benefit from engagement - this should include a focus on ethnicity

A **longitudinal study** which could identify whether there might be certain **“sweet spot” timelines**, whereby if progress has not been made for a certain need within a certain timeframe, there may be an argument to focus resources on the needs where CASSPLUS is able to make the greatest impact

Thank you

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Annex: Evaluation Methods & Limitations

Limitations

Impact of Covid-19

The methods used were tweaked to respond to the need to operate in a **virtual environment**, and in the same way the **CASSPLUS model changed due to court closures** - for a period of time there were no new clients, and existing clients were receiving support virtually. This impacted the number of clients we were able to engage with as part of this evaluation. In addition, the number of volunteers reduced significantly during the pandemic which meant the needs assessment process was delayed due to the lack of capacity to support this.

The **Ministry of Justice** was also impacted by the pandemic and was unable to complete the reoffending analysis as planned.

Cost Benefit Analysis Limitations

Two primary mechanisms are employed by CASSPLUS for their clients:

1. **Direct support and advocacy**

Some of the intended outputs from CASSPLUS's direct support are extremely **difficult to quantify** and value e.g. greater emotional support for clients. Our intention was to capture these indirect effects by incorporating actual impact on reoffending rates. We were unable to obtain this analysis in time, which has further complicated assessing the cost-benefit ratio of these more indirect effects.

2. **Referral and signposting work**

The bulk of our cost-benefit analysis of the CASSPLUS service has therefore **focused on its referral and signposting work** and excludes the direct assistance work that CASSPLUS does. But even just measuring this is difficult as it relies on both the effectiveness of the organisation making the referral and the organisation receiving the referral.