

# MULTISYSTEMIC THERAPY (MST)

Community-based, family-driven treatment for young people



## The MST Model

Multisystemic Therapy is a community-based, family driven treatment for young people exhibiting challenging antisocial behaviour that addresses the core causes of such conduct. The MST “client” is the entire ecology of the young person - family, peers, school, and community.

MST strengthens natural systems, and works through and empowers caregivers to be long-term change agents, creating more sustainable effects than treatment methods focused solely on the individual.

It is a service that involves a highly structured clinical supervision process and a comprehensive quality assurance process, to ensure that adherence to the MST model is maximized to deliver consistent, highest quality results.



## Delivering MST in partnership

MST is delivered through a partnership arrangement with MST Services, which is licensed by the Medical University of South Carolina to disseminate MST with clinical fidelity. Life Without Barriers is the Australasian Network Partner for MST Services and is licenced to both deliver MST and MST Prevention and support the implementation and delivery of the programs by other agencies across Australia and New Zealand. These services include the provision of program start-up, ongoing MST clinical support, fidelity monitoring and quality assurance activities, and organisational assistance. Life Without Barriers also provides accredited orientation training for all MST and MST adaptations.

## How it works

MST targets young people between the ages of 11\* and 18. It is delivered in the home, school, neighbourhood and community and removes barriers to service access for families. It can be delivered as an early intervention

strategy to prevent escalation of problem behaviours including alcohol and drug misuse or as an alternative to custodial or out-of-home care placement where serious anti-social and offending behaviours are present.

MST is implemented using the following framework:

- A single clinician working intensively with 4 to 6 families at a time
- Team of 2 to 4 clinicians plus a Clinical Supervisor (Team Leader)
- 24 hours a day / 7 days a week availability using an on-call system
- 3 to 5 months is the typical treatment time (4 months on average across cases)

It draws from research-based treatment techniques including strategic and structural family therapies, behaviour therapy, parent management training and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

\* May include 10 year olds with the approval of the MST Consultant. MST CAN includes children from age 6.

## Research driving positive outcomes

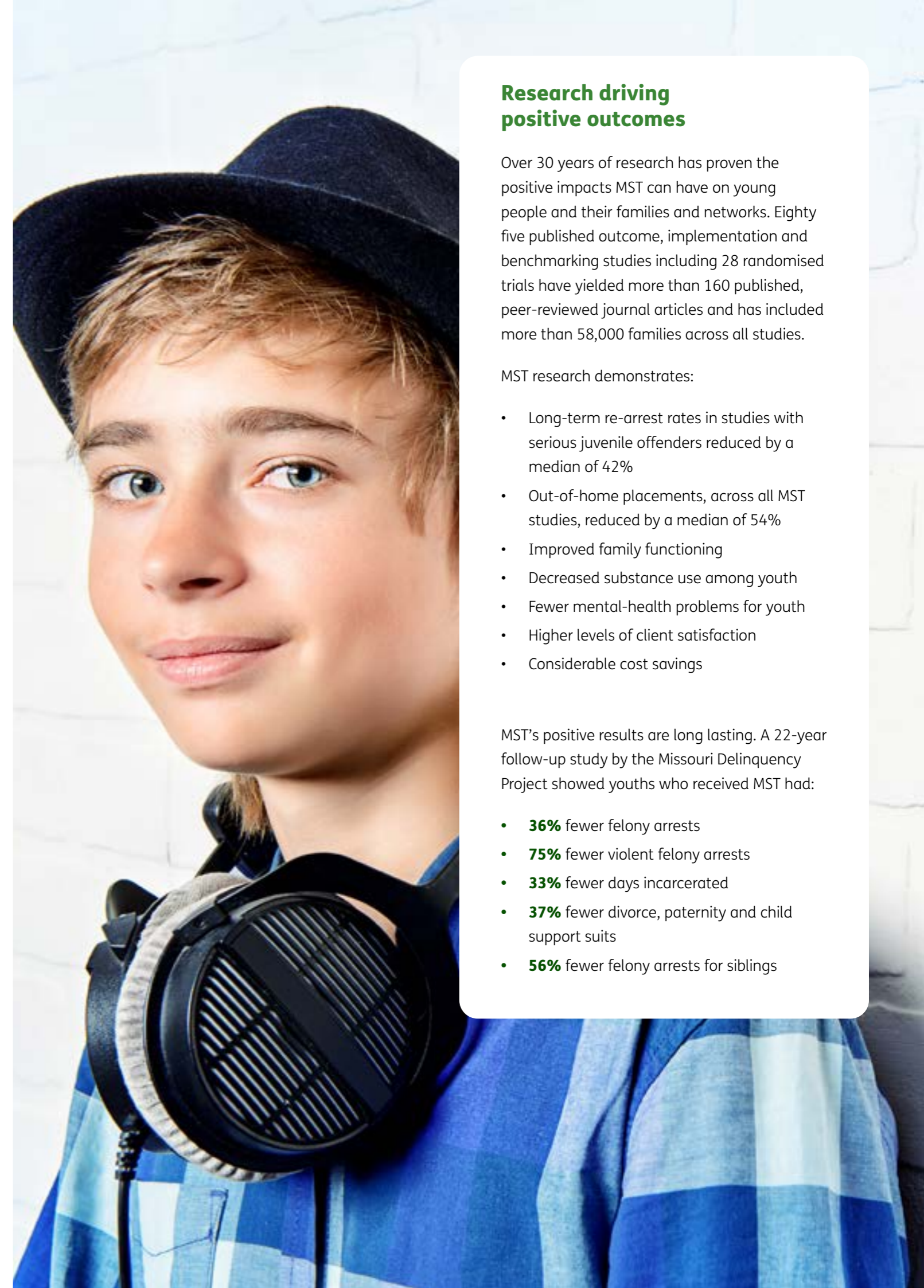
Over 30 years of research has proven the positive impacts MST can have on young people and their families and networks. Eighty five published outcome, implementation and benchmarking studies including 28 randomised trials have yielded more than 160 published, peer-reviewed journal articles and has included more than 58,000 families across all studies.

MST research demonstrates:

- Long-term re-arrest rates in studies with serious juvenile offenders reduced by a median of 42%
- Out-of-home placements, across all MST studies, reduced by a median of 54%
- Improved family functioning
- Decreased substance use among youth
- Fewer mental-health problems for youth
- Higher levels of client satisfaction
- Considerable cost savings

MST's positive results are long lasting. A 22-year follow-up study by the Missouri Delinquency Project showed youths who received MST had:

- **36%** fewer felony arrests
- **75%** fewer violent felony arrests
- **33%** fewer days incarcerated
- **37%** fewer divorce, paternity and child support suits
- **56%** fewer felony arrests for siblings



## YouthChoices MST

YouthChoices MST worked with young people who had more charges, higher rates of serious offences and more previous nights in custody than is usual for young people on supervised orders.

### YouthChoices MST - Brisbane Queensland

In south-east Queensland, Life Without Barrier delivered MST, via a social benefit bond, to young people who had averaged 35 criminal charges over the 18 months prior to referral.

**Success of the program was measured over 18 months after exit from MST, to find out whether results were being sustained. Impressive results were achieved for all measures.**

| Outcomes in Queensland                           | Year 1 Cohort | Year 2 Cohort |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Reduction in offending (criminal charges)        | 22%*          | 43%           |
| Reduction in nights in detention                 | 74%           | 92%           |
| Reduction in the proportion who seriously offend | 27%           | 18%           |

The results reported by the Queensland Government for the first 114 young people referred to Life Without Barriers' MST program align with the strongest MST outcomes recorded overseas.

The 92% reduction in detention nights achieved in Queensland indicates that the likelihood of adult imprisonment has greatly reduced for these young people, and consequently so has their risk of future unemployment, homelessness, and poor mental health.

25% of young people referred to the Queensland MST program were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Their families were slightly more likely to complete MST than non-Indigenous families (87% vs 85% completion), so we can expect this cohort to show long-term positive outcomes.

\* The Year 1 result was skewed by a single prolific offender. If this young person had been excluded, the reduction in charges would have been 54%.

## Services

Life Without Barriers currently supports eight teams in New Zealand and six in Australia who are delivering the standard MST program. The model has been adapted or enhanced to address the needs of particular cohorts.

### Life Without Barriers delivers:

**MST CAN** - an adaptation of the MST model designed to treat children aged 6 to 17 and their families who have come to the attention of child protection due to physical abuse and/or neglect and have been the subject of a substantiated report in the preceding 180 days.

Common treatment strategies include safety planning, Cognitive Behavioural Therapies for managing anger and addressing the impact of trauma, Reinforcement-Based Therapy for adult substance misuse, family therapy focused on communication and problem solving, and sessions to support the parent in taking responsibility for the events that brought the family to child protection.

### Life Without Barriers can deliver and support:

**MST Prevention** - includes enhancements to meet the needs of families with young people at risk of abuse or neglect; and child protection stakeholders. It supports high risk families to stay together in their homes by increasing the safety and well-being of all children in the home. The program offers an increased clinical focus on caregivers to improve interpersonal effectiveness, impulse control and positive affect, a higher sense of urgency regarding child safety and an emphasis on the emotional well-being and behavioural functioning of the primary young person.

The addition of a caseworker position assists the team in gathering required assessments on family members and in meeting case management needs. Unlike MST Child Abuse and Neglect (MST CAN), a substantiated child protection report is not required but current engagement with the child protection system is. The target young person must be no younger than 10 but the family may have younger children in the household.





## About Life Without Barriers

Life Without Barriers is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit service providers, supporting vulnerable people for over 25 years. As a leading out-of-home care agency, we support over 2000 children and young people in foster, kinship and residential care across Australia. Beyond these services, Life Without Barriers also delivers an extensive national network of disability, aged care and mental health services.



### Acknowledgement

In the spirit of Reconciliation, Life Without Barriers acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country, and their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

### Want to know more?

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