

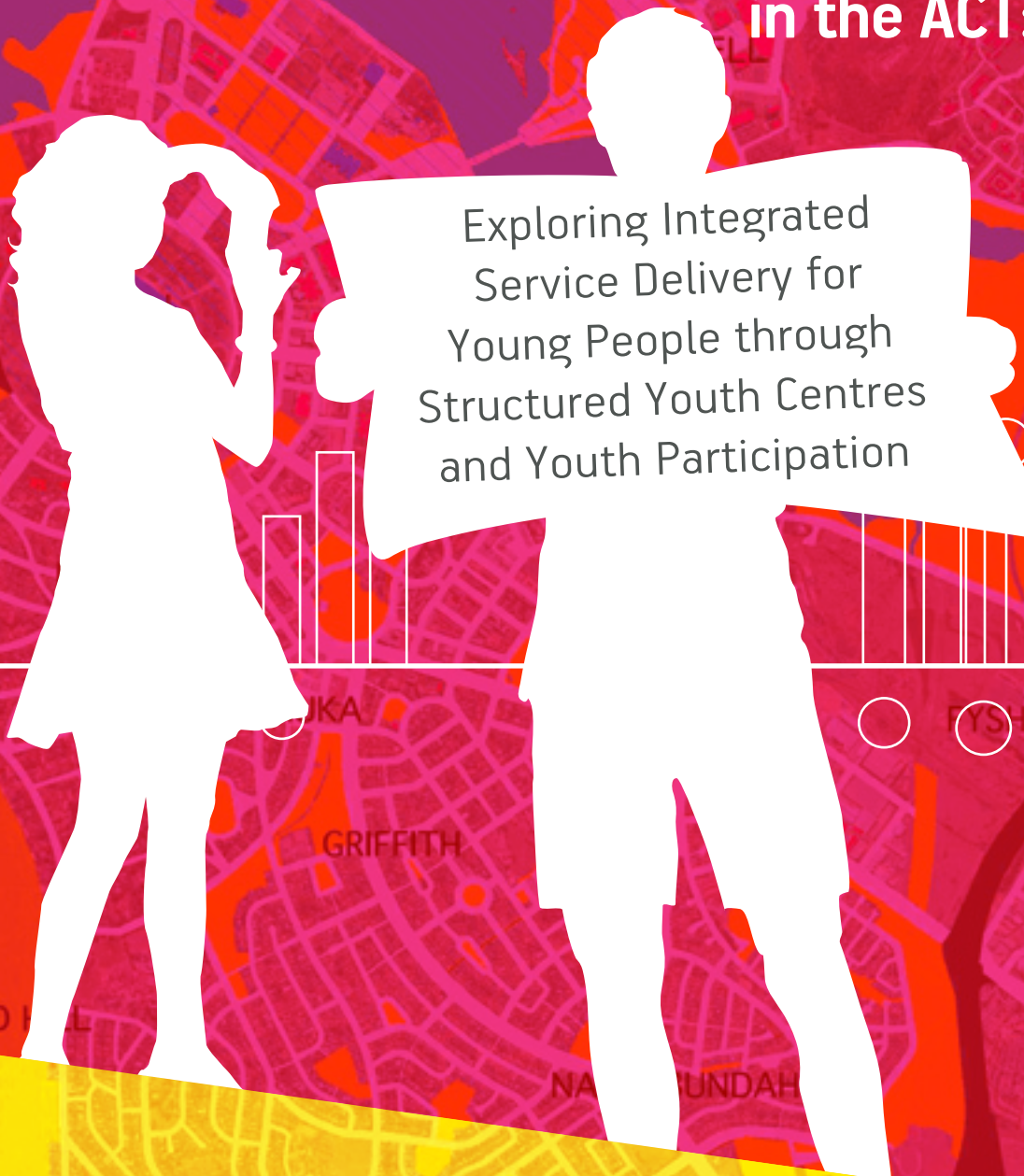
youth coalition

of the ACT

families
ACT

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

in the ACT:



Exploring Integrated
Service Delivery for
Young People through
Structured Youth Centres
and Youth Participation

June 2013

The Youth Coalition of the ACT and Families ACT acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the act and we pay our respects to the elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. We celebrate Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

Youth Engagement in the ACT

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Youth Engagement in the ACT

**Exploring Integrated Service Delivery for Young People through
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Executive Summary

In 2012 the Youth Coalition of the ACT and Families ACT, the Territory peak bodies for youth affairs and for children, young people and families, commissioned a scoping paper around youth engagement and youth participation in the ACT.

This was in response to a number of concerns expressed by practitioners working with young people. These were that:

- The closure of the majority of youth centres in the ACT was contributing to a significant reduction in young people's access to services and that rather than improving outcomes for young people, service reforms were contributing to social exclusion and increased vulnerability for youth;
- Youth Engagement services were lacking a specified purpose, common type and clear view of their work's intended outcomes;
- The model of delivery for youth focused services funded under the CYFSP was underpinned by relatively negative assumptions about young people, instead of a strength-based ones.

The scoping paper proposed a research project comprising four components: a literature review; an examination of case studies; service mapping and interviews with service providers; and a youth consultation.

Interviews with practitioners indicate that the shift from centre based service delivery to outreach under the CYFSP has not delivered the results hoped for and has created barriers to youth engagement.

The literature review, case studies and youth consultation reinforce the need for centre based services at the heart of any outreach activities. Effective youth engagement relies on a spectrum of interventions being available including:

- Centre based programs;
- Outreach; and
- Drop in.

A review of youth services in the ACT in 2009, found that "not surprisingly youth centres or 'drop in' centres ... made the highest number of referrals for young people" and "organisations which provide outreach services [for young people] provide more health promotion, advocacy and life skills training rather than other service types" (Saunders et al: 62).

Anchored service delivery, such as drop-in, provides a soft entry point to the service system, particularly for a number of young people who have had negative experiences with adults, services and systems. For these young people in particular, engagement takes time and drop-in allows this engagement to take place at the pace they choose. Youth consultation reinforced that drop-in is still high on the agenda for young people and needs expansion (extended and consistent hours of operation).

It is equally clear from the literature, case studies and youth consultation that the more structured activities there are in centres, the better the youth engagement. This leads to the importance of structure and planning. The literature review and case studies reinforce the need for organisations to have a robust framework for youth participation & engagement. Effective strategies for youth participation help ensure

that services are targeted appropriately and deliver desired outcomes for young people. Young people involved in the youth consultation felt at present that they did not have enough involvement in the design and delivery of programs and activities.

Practitioners commented that engagement on its own was not enough and that the service offer has to be clear, concrete and immediate. This is especially the case where needs are urgent (e.g. accommodation, financial assistance, mental health services). The majority of practitioners felt that not being able to provide immediate services after the initial contact can lead to adverse outcomes for young people and can undermine the critical 'trusting' relationship established during early stages of engagement. Effective youth work is relationship based. Young people often prefer to maintain a strong relationship with their first point of contact. Therefore youth engagement workers need some capacity to 'follow through' by providing a level of direct assistance when required, rather than simply referring on to other services. Additionally, young people would benefit from having a case management service attached to youth engagement.

The case studies makes a strong case for integrated service delivery which is cooperative, collaborative and co-located. This partnership approach underpins models with a long term track record of success, like Frontyard in Melbourne, which deliver a comprehensive range of youth specific services. However good governance is essential to making these service provider relationships work. Formalised interagency agreements, joint policy statements and operating procedures are the cornerstone of such partnerships.

All of the case studies cited provide models which could be applied in modified form in the ACT. However the sector needs to engage in determining which model or models it prefers and ongoing work needs to focus on improving youth participation.

One of the key concerns driving the research was that the prevailing model for working with young people was not strength based. The youth consultation revealed that young people did not want to be stigmatised, isolated and labelled as vulnerable, *'It should be a mix... otherwise no one will go because they will be associated as 'vulnerable'.* They expected to be partners in decision making affecting their lives. The literature makes a strong case for involving young people in their own case management. The concept of service user control of the support they receive is at the heart of CSD's Co-Design project.

Working with young people requires a range of complex skills and significant experience for workers to be able to connect constructively. Workforce development, support and supervision were highlighted as key issues in interviews with service providers.

The lack of adequate funding for youth engagement has been factor in limited service availability and the consequent failure to attract young people to services. The government's recent allocation of substantial additional funds through the 2013-2014 ACT budget offers a great opportunity to make much needed improvements to youth engagement in the ACT. This paper offers valuable insights to inform and guide these improvements.

This paper is a contribution to an ongoing body of work around youth engagement and service provision in the ACT. The peaks see the need for further work to explore the themes identified in the research.

There has been significant interest in the draft, and it is hoped that this will prompt ongoing discussion and debate in the government and community sectors about how best to provide services for young people.

Introduction

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This was in response to a number of concerns expressed by practitioners working with young people. These were that:

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Literature review

A literature review of integrated service delivery models for young people explored key characteristics and programs in 'structured drop-in' youth centres and youth one-stop-shops both in Australia and overseas.

Case studies

Four case studies were selected of Australian and New Zealand initiatives which have been developed by community sector organisations and have a youth focused integrated model of service delivery.

Service mapping and interviews with service providers

One of the main objectives of the research was to gain a better understanding of how CYFSP funded youth engagement service providers are conceptualising and implementing their work. Interviews were conducted with youth engagement as well as other youth focused services in the ACT. Information was gathered from practitioners about their work including outreach activities and intended outcomes, linkages with family support and other relevant services, as well as their perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the services they provided.

Youth consultation

Finally the project provided an opportunity for young people to share their views on youth services including how they could be improved. The focus was on those more vulnerable and at-risk. Three youth focus groups were facilitated where participants expressed: their perceptions and expectations of youth participation; the benefits and barriers they face; as well as useful strategies for involving vulnerable young people in the process of designing and managing youth services.

The research project took place between January and June 2013.

The broad intent of the research was to resource discussion in the community and government sectors about how to improve youth engagement and youth services in the ACT.

1. A Literature Review of Integrated Service Models for Young People

1.1. Overview

This literature review represents a scan of Australian and international literature with the aim of identifying existing evidence around models of best practice for youth services. A number of documents, journal articles and reports published from 2000- 2012 were explored during the process. The review is based primarily on secondary sources, using information from published papers, policy and strategic documents, program evaluation reports and other similar reviews that focused on approaches to delivering services specifically for young people.

Scope and structure of the review

The key objectives of the literature review were to:

- Examine the rationale for integrated service delivery for young people;
- Articulate features of promising models of 'structured drop-in' youth services/one-stop-shops;
- Identify participation approaches for young people with a focus on those vulnerable and in need of services.

The material is divided in three sections, each of them addressing the above components.

Defining the Age Range of the Review

Young people comprise a number of different age groups, each with common and different complex needs. Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010) using the work of Burt et al (1992) and Santrock (1991) note two distinctive periods of adolescence – early: 9-15 years and late 16-19 years. However, Burns et al (2008) suggest that while the age range assigned to 'young people' differs, 12 – 25 years of age is commonly used in Australian youth policy to define young people. In the context of this review, Saunders et al (2009) note that the ACT Youth Services Grants Program (YSP), which funds a substantial proportion of the services for young people in the ACT, provides funding for a range of universal services and early intervention programs to support young people 'at risk' aged 12-25 years, with a primary focus on the 12-21 years age range. This review has focused mainly on literature that addresses services and programs for children and young people from 9-25.

1.2 A Rationale for Integrated Service Delivery for Young People

The concept of integrated service delivery has received increasing attention both internationally and in Australia. The idea of working towards integration of services is not a novelty. While reviewing service coordination and integration in the welfare and workforce development systems in 1999, Martinson observed a tendency to focus on the benefits of providing services within an integrated service delivery framework which tends to reduce barriers in inter-organisational collaboration and brings together different professionals to provide a range of services for children, young people and families. In a 2000 research project around models of integrated service models Fine noted that 'in the recent years, there has been a shift away from specialised and bureaucratic patterns of service provision towards a more coordinated, integrative approach' (5).

These patterns have found their way into policy and strategic documents in different countries. In the United Kingdom (UK) last decade saw two major policy developments with Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) and Youth Matters (2006b) providing a platform for working towards integrated services for children and young people. In the United States (US), a reform in education was initiated through the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) which aimed at improving academic performance, promoting sport and recreational activities, developing social skills and reducing risk or criminal behaviour among children and young people (Bond, 2010:9), providing also for the integrated services to support the reform. In Australia, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has highlighted the importance of such an approach recently in *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (2009); *Protecting Children is Everyone Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*¹ and *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* (2009).

From a research and evidence point of view it seems that nationally and internationally more effective and efficient service delivery is achieved through reconfiguring the existing system of universal, targeted and specialist services into an integrated and tiered service system (GWA, 2009). This more holistic approach, it is argued by advocates, can create synergies leading to innovation and streamlining of service delivery through information and skill sharing (Fine 2000: 5). Integrated service seeks to counter the 'silo effect' through re-alignment of multiple services, effective use of resources to avoid duplication, timely transfer of information and development of a transparent and seamless response to the complex needs of individual service users. (Bond, 2010:7)

1.2.1. What are Integrated Social Services?

In its simplest form, the term '*integrated services*' refers to examples of joined-up social services, for the benefit of service users or providers (Richardson and Patana, 2012: 4). Early models were pioneered in health and literature from that sector suggests that "integration is a coherent set of methods and models on the funding, administrative, organisational, service delivery and clinical levels designed to create connectivity, alignment and collaboration within and between [different] sectors" (Kodner and Spreeuwenberg, 2002). Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010) have cited the work of Corter et al (2007) who conceptualise 'integration' as the creation of a single entity, with common policies and practices and a core staff team. However for them, integration more closely resembles co-location or collaborative partnership networking. (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010:5)

The same view is shared by Wieninga et al (2003:18), Sloper (2004) and Rosenheck et al (2003), who describe three stages of work towards achieving integration of services by utilising.

1. **Co-location** – all agencies are based in the same location – legal services, mental health services, housing services, other social services or case management services.
2. **Collaboration** – agencies work together through information sharing and training and creating a network of services to improve service user experience and reduce gaps in services for clients.
3. **Cooperation** – the highest degree of integration in which professionals communicate and work together in small teams or from multiple agencies on a service user's case.

¹ This document specifies that one of the key strategies under Outcome 2 'Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early' is to 'Implement an integrated approach to service design, planning and delivery for children and families across the lifecycle and spectrum of need (Bond, 2010:9).

The use of such models is currently viewed as one of the most effective ways of ensuring adequate and optimal child development, reducing risk factors for families and promoting the well-being of children, young people and their families (Valentine et al, 2007). Assumptions underlying the success of an integrated model include benefits resulting from reduced complexity navigating the system (e.g. a single point of entry which reduces the need for multiple assessments), more timely service delivery and decreased likelihood of families "falling through the cracks" (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010:2). Furthermore, by increasing the capacity of universal, targeted and clinical services to work together with each operating in the service user's different environments such as school, home and community, it is more likely that the needs of service users will be fulfilled in a more holistic way (Valentine et al, 2007).

Richardson and Patana (2012), while reviewing a number of literature resources, identified a list of arguments for supporting integrated service delivery model as:

- Cost-effectiveness - Savings for service users as well as providers;
- Improved accessibility – *Both for service users and provider*;
- Improvement of quality of services and improved outcomes.

They also suggested some barriers to integrated service delivery:

- Uncertainty about outcomes – how effective they will prove;
- Obstacles to administering integrated social services – cost, sustainability, structural and organisational changes required, different stakeholders involved;
- Challenges of joint work between professionals – different professions, lack of continuity in collaboration, extra work, and different views of service delivery;
- *Data sharing problems* – different agencies use their own tools; it may be costly and there may be legal implications around consent to share information.

1.2.2 Why Integrated Services for Young People?

Previous reviews of research undertaken around early intervention and prevention models, which use an integrated service delivery approach reveal that so far focus has been on the early years of life, with integrated programs providing for families with children 0-3 years or 0-8 years (Valentine et al, 2007). A desk research of integrated children's services undertaken by National Foundation for Educational Research in the UK, found that of the 54 countries and states analysed², at least 34 had some form of service provision similar to this model (NFER, 2010). However, more recently it has been argued that providing holistic early intervention and prevention strategies and programs that build resilience and competence in multiple life-skill areas during middle childhood and the adolescent years may also be the most effective strategy to avoid future health, mental health, educational and social emotional problems in our young adult population, (NSW Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People [NSWPJCCYP], 2009; Hayes, 2007, cited in Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010).

There are a number of arguments that support integrated services for young people. First, there is evidence of unacceptably high levels of poor health and developmental outcomes among children and young people and the service systems that have worked well to support children and families in the past are struggling to do so in a rapidly changing social landscape (GWA, 2009). At a broad level, the previous silo approach has meant that young people have become subject to disparate services and services gaps (Wiening, 2003:18).

² The research included most of the European countries as well as other states around the world, including Australia.

The situations of young people at risk may be highly complex with multiple needs across a number of domains, such as housing, justice, health, disability, and family support. Based on a broad range of literature, Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010) identified a number of common concerns and issues for young people in Australia. They include:

1. Chronic disease and injury;
2. Mental health disorders;
3. Physical activity and overweight and obesity;
4. Crime;
5. Substance abuse;
6. School retention and participation in employment;
7. Early sexual behaviour; and
8. Homelessness and running away.

These issues are equally prevalent among young people in the ACT. The recent Rate Canberra 2012 survey of young people aged 12-25 found that school, work and employment, body image, mental health (stress, feeling sad or anxious), and lack of activities to engage with, were among the most frequently rated issues that affected young people's life and worried them (Barry & Robertson, 2012:24). Indeed, the majority, if not all, of the initiatives around integrated services for young people in Australia tend to address these issues.

Such complex situations require matched responses, which are increasingly demonstrated through integrated multi-agency approaches (Disney & Associates, 2005:4). An ARACY-funded literature review of international and national integrated service models found that integration enables a joined-up response to 'wicked' problems, and can be resource-effective, enable knowledge and resource sharing, lead to long-term solutions and foster a sense of responsibility for young people's outcomes (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010, cited in Bond 2010).

In the ACT context, recently there has been a greater focus on the need for integrated services for vulnerable children, young people and their families. The Service Delivery Framework of the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support calls for implementing a combination of systems and processes including governance, service standards, common assessment and referral procedures across services to achieve integration (OCYFS, 2012:3). The Blueprint for Youth Justice 2012-2020 of the ACT government (2012) identifies the numerous services and programs for children and young people (both in the justice system and other areas), however it notes the lack of coordination between them. This strategic document aims to improve this coordination and alignment and increase community participation leading to better connected and integrated services (ACT Gov. 2012:30).

1.2.3 Models of Integrated Services for Young People

A number of initiatives that employ such an approach have been identified in Australia and other countries. This research identified two literature reviews that provide a thorough analysis of such initiatives to date, which include the Australian experience as well. Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010) conducted a review of international and Australian models of integrated services for young people. This body of work analyses the structure of models, population of young people they target, range and type of services and key players in the process, as well as evidence of their effectiveness, lessons learnt and barriers identified. The second by Bond (2010) is a more focused review of such models, aiming to analyse the policy and service structures of youth hubs or centres for the purpose of informing the development of service delivery

models for young people by the Brotherhood of St Lawrence. Both documents can be used to inform future initiatives for integrated service delivery models in the ACT. In addition, the work of Fine (2000) which addresses coordinated and integrated human service delivery model is a useful source.

Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010:2) identified two types of approaches driving such initiatives: **top-down** and **bottom-up**. The first approach is usually driven by government policies and funding models supporting an integrated across agencies approach. The second approach is typically initiated by one or more local service agencies without reference to particular Federal or State initiatives or requirements.

The authors have provide a list of national and international examples of each approach. For the purpose of this review, only Australian examples are included, with more focus on the bottom up initiatives.

Top- down initiatives in Australia

- Headspace: A National Primary Care Mental Health Initiative;
- The Turnaround Program in the Australian Capital Territory;
- Better Futures Initiative in the New South Wales;
- Youth Connections.

Bottom-up initiatives in Australia

- Frontyard Youth Services Victoria;
- The Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS) – Victoria;
- Glebe Youth Services in New South Wales;
- YouthZone at Pole Depot Community Center – New South Wales;
- Brisbane Youth Center – Queensland;
- Youth at Risk Alliance (YARA) – Queensland;
- Integrated Family and Youth Service – Queensland;
- ReachOut.com – National (web-based) Initiative.

The authors have also included a range of *enablers* and *barriers* for each approach.

1. Top-down approaches may be constrained by funding which is time limited and does not cover spending required for integration process, different agencies may have different philosophies with unclear definition of the roles each of them is supposed to play and risk not meeting the needs of hard-to-reach young people. *Enablers* can include early consultation with communities and community services, having a common vision and operating under a shared strategic and operational platform, engaging in vertical and horizontal engagement, utilising 'soft entry' points (such as art and other recreational activities) and utilising the same or similar evaluation frameworks.
2. Bottom-up models may experience barriers related to cooperation when competing for funds, lack of formalised agreements and partnerships, inadequate funding to facilitate integration and not having a common evaluation structure. Enablers include the understanding of a common vision and, quite often, goal, recognising the expertise that each agency/service provides, and focusing their efforts in addressing the needs of clients by employing a variety of tools (Brechman-Toussaint 2010).³

³ In both models the emphasis is on collaboration and how to facilitate it, in order to achieve full integration.

Bond (2010) on the other hand conducted her review by analysing services for young people across the spheres of health, education, employment and social participation. She identified five key themes arising from critical thinking for effective services around these areas.

- **Prevention** - A primary service model based on 'prevention' and delivered through universal provision of basic services.
- **Partnership** - Building relationships and establishing partnerships between the government, community and business sectors, grounded in a shared vision.
- **Service integration** - The practical integration of services and providers to improve access, streamline intake and assessment and assist inter-agency referral.
- **Holistic care** - Services that address the needs of the whole person, including housing, health, productivity (education and employment), and broader social and spiritual wellbeing.
- **Strengths-based participation** - An assets-based approach that identifies individuals' aspirations and strengths, engaging them as the agents of change and solutions in their own lives. (Bond, 2010:33)

Both these analyses identified the need for further research and time to reflect more comprehensively on the lessons learnt and what the best models are. The development of integrated service models for young people is a fairly new area of work and many initiatives, especially top-down ones have not been in place for long periods of time (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010:84). In addition, approaches to youth services in Australia are fragmented and lack the visionary policy and supportive legislation to deliver substantive and holistic integrated services (Bond, 2010:33). What is needed appears to be a common goal and vision for making a difference in young people's lives rather than developing a common way of achieving a positive difference for young people (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010:84). Integrated services should not lead to assumptions that professionals working in an integrated model need to develop the expertise to meet the holistic needs of children and young people, as in the case of teachers (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010:84), although, institutional reform is required to break down traditional divides, such as that between schools and community services (Bond, 2010).

Top-down initiatives have shown some positive results such as those where schools are used as service hubs for young people (Bond, 2010:34) or those related to education such as Youth Connections. There are positive signs of integration in the ACT's Turnaround Program for young people with complex needs and the growing number of foyer approaches which offer housing and social support in conjunction with vocational training and employment assistance. These can promote the independence of young people, especially those at risk of homelessness (Bond, 2010). An important facilitator of these models is the capacity of services to focus specifically on the needs of child or young person rather than upon local boundaries or historical practice (Brechman-Toussaint & Kogler 2010:84).

Among the bottom-up initiatives, designing services around a community centre and/or youth centre model seems to be prevalent among current services for young people, with some developing capacities to be involved in outreach activities outside their location. Youth centres can deliver a variety of universal or targeted programs, with operational models ranging from co-location to integration (Bond, 2010). As place-based approaches, they address the needs of young people in a community setting, while having the potential to work in partnership with schools, training providers, employers and community organisations.

They provide a fresh venue alternative to schools, are accessible for non-school attenders and can provide prevention and intervention services, with scope to add crisis services and even housing through a foyer approach. (Bond, 2010). The next section provides an overview of the features of 'structured drop-in' youth centres.

1.3. Promising Models of 'Structured Drop-In' Youth Services/One-Stop-Shops

Youth centres can range from a small service located within a community hub providing one or two activities, to relatively big youth hubs dedicated exclusively to offering services for young people in need. Sometime they exist as a separated section in major agencies and sometime belong to an integrated youth program that is provided in different locations and covers a considerable geographic area. Some centre names are purpose oriented reflecting the provision of activities such as music or outdoor adventure activities or of open venues for events. In Australia, 'youth enterprise' or 'innovation centre' alludes to the education, training, employment functions of the centres, while those located within larger community facilities have names such as 'youth annexe' (Bond, 2010). Based on the initiatives of Youth-One-Stop-Shops developed in New Zealand over the last five years, some of their features are described in this section with the aim of providing additional information on how to better design the service delivery within these youth hubs.

1.3.1 Components of Youth Centres' Target Population and Service Delivery Age

Most of the youth centres focus their service provision on the 12-25 years age group. This pattern seems to be common also among all the integrated youth services explored by Brechmain-Tuisant and Kogler (2010) both internationally and in Australia. Some have an age requirement for different services and programs while others may include children from the age of 10, especially when services have features of prevention or early intervention (Bond, 2010:23). Similarly in the Youth One-Stop Shops in New Zealand, entry age for services is 10, since their demographic seeks less mainstreaming care and youth often fall through gaps between child and adult services (Macfarlane et al, 2009:5).

In other cases, youth centres operate within a multi-age site (both younger and older service users) such as service or community hubs, when particular geographic locations require a concentration of services to support communities (Fine et al, 2000). According to Lord et al (2009), studies demonstrate that by involving a broad range of stakeholders in integrated centres, children, young people and their families benefit from having a wide range of agencies through easier access and referral as well as better coordination between services for clients with multiple needs. While in those cases, there is a potential for intergenerational activity, a major shortcoming is that younger people may feel the premises are 'dominated' by adults or their use of space is restricted (Bond, 2010:23).

1.3.2 Universal versus Targeted Programs and Services

Youth centres usually provide both universal and targeted programs and services. Although recent approaches in integrated youth services aim to focus on a particular group of young people (i.e. those who are or risk of becoming homelessness, those who experience drug and substance abuse), this is used to ensure a 'soft entry' point for service users. Generally, their service models take a whole of life approach and provide a range of services such as legal and financial assistance, employment and training and family mediation.⁴

⁴ See Frontyard Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission in Victoria as an example.

Some youth centres focus on universal provision to ensure all young people have a comfortable place where they can go and seek support and participate in activities such as careers advice, health services, extracurricular social activities (e.g. drama, sport) and community volunteering (Bond, 2010). They are usually open and available to all young people and provide a good opportunity for people from different backgrounds and genders to have a place where they can mix (NYA, 2008, cited in Bond, 2010). YouthZone at Pole Depot Community Centre in New South Wales is a good example of how 'universal' and 'targeted' can be combined with the goal of offering integrated services for young people.

Targeted services, on the other hand, usually seek young people deemed 'at risk' on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage, those who are out of school, training or not working, are homelessness, show anti-social behaviour or have been involved in criminal activity, have poor health outcomes (e.g. mental health or substance abuse), become parents at a young age, etc. (Bond, 2010). In order to be able to support such a wide range of services, youth centres may and have employed a consortium model with a number of agencies coordinating their work as well as providing specialist services in a number of different locations⁵. Services offered through Youth One Stop Shops in New Zealand are provided on-site, in schools or via mobile services and satellite clinics (McFarlane, 2009:35). However, these models go beyond the structure of 'drop-in' youth centres. Usually, youth centre programs and services are guided by models of prevention and early intervention, which are combined to support each other as well as in some cases tertiary or crisis care, with most of them providing case management and other intensive programs and services (Bond, 2010).

However, it is not clear how the share of universal and targeted should be distributed in youth centres. Nissen (2011) based on the work of Bazemore (2001) and Abrams & Huyn (2009) notes that "over time, too great an emphasis has been placed on correcting bad behaviour rather than developing successful young people and assisting them to navigate critical developmental transitions [...] on the way to their adulthood". Saunders et al (2009) support this statement when suggesting that "in the literature there exists a tension whether universal service provisions should be the focus compared to targeted interventions for young people". Moore et al (2009) suggest that the intense focus on the provision of targeted and treatment services compared to those universal and preventative in nature has contributed to a model that targets vulnerable and young people 'at risk', without necessarily contributing to better services for young people. For them an integrated tiered system of universal, targeted and specialist services will provide a wider range of services and be able to support those that are more in need of services.

1.3.3 Place

It is obvious from different documents that the setting of a youth centre which allows young people to 'freely drop-in' and access services is very important. Bond (2010) suggests that 'place' is a broad umbrella term embracing a myriad of concerns which include issues of social planning, access to service and the physical space where services operate.

1.3.4 Social Planning and Strategic Aims

A review of international good practice in youth facility provision for the Brisbane City Council (2001) identified four major models:

⁵ See Youth Support and Advocacy Service (formerly known as Substance Abuse Service Initiative (YSAS) in Victoria

- Stand-alone youth facilities;
- Youth facilities that are integrated into community facilities;
- Negotiation of protocols with school authorities to integrate youth facilities into school facilities;
- Developing clear access or inclusion programs to ensure that youth 'facility' is integrated into existing community facilities.

The first three models are commonly used for youth centres both internationally and in Australia⁶ with stand-alone facilities providing a relatively limited range of services. Almost all of the integrated youth services in Australia reviewed by Brechman-Tuisant and Kogler (2010) are integrated into one or several community facilities and operate in close collaboration with a number of non-for-profit organizations and government departments. Brisbane Youth Services Initiative (QLD), Glebe Youth Services (NSW) and Dandenong Centre (VIC) may be considered stand-alone youth facilities. However, their considerable size allows them to ensure a wide range of service provision⁷. In the ACT, Saunders et al (2009:62) noted that there were only a small number of services that work in collaboration with schools, in community development or who are co-located.

Integrating youth facilities with schools seems to be a pattern of top-down initiatives, which successfully engage with young people by applying an integrated service model similar to that of primary health care (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010). While these models serve the purpose of ensuring a continuation of school programs through extracurricular activities, provide an after-hours place for young people and opportunity to use existing resources and skilled staff, some issues may arise for service users. They may not prefer to spend more time in school, especially those who do not see it as a positive environment. For those disengaged from education, this is a place to be avoided (Bond, 2010).

Most youth centres, similar to community service hubs, are a response to community needs. They are either established as components of a larger program/agency to deal with issues of community regeneration or, in established communities, they aim to respond to gaps in existing services or to social problems (Bond, 2010). In addition, in communities of young families with children rather than young people, the early establishment of youth centres may be perceived and used as a preventative measure (Bond, 2010).

One of the big potentials of such centres is the role of informal support networks that develop in these settings, which function as mutual aid structures for participants (Fine, 2000:5). It has been argued that young people are more likely to seek services and maintain a relationship with a service organisation when it has a distinctly youth focus and when there are other young clients/users/members they can develop relationships with (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010:82). This is especially the case for isolated young people. A review of youth services in the ACT in 2009, found that "not surprisingly youth centres or 'drop in' centres ... made the highest number of referrals for young people" and "organisations which provide outreach services [for young people] provide more health promotion, advocacy and life skills training rather than other service types" (Saunders et al: 62).

⁶ The fourth usually is used in coordinating library services across youth centres in a given country or region but includes very little frontline work and direct engagement with service users.

⁷ Established in 1996, Dandenong Centre in 2003 co-located 18 youth specific service in a 'one-stop-shop' to provide integrated and holistic services for young people and their families.

1.3.5 Access to Services and Activities

Ensuring that all young people, especially those most in need, have access to and use the support services offered in drop-in centres is a key concern. Some of the barriers to access which need to be addressed relate to concerns that young people have around issues of confidentiality, trust and knowledge of the services available (Bernard et al, 2004; Booth et al, 2004). Further evidence suggest that youth are a particular demographic group who would rather go without care than access services which do not address their needs in an acceptable way (Bernard et al, 2004). Therefore, youth are more inclined to seek services in settings which suit their specific health, privacy and social needs (MacFarlane et al, 2009:29).

Proximity of youth centres is crucial for young people, especially for those with limited means of transport. To allow easy access by public transport, some UK regions have determined that young people should not need to travel for more than 10 minutes by bus or more than two miles (3 km) (Bond, 2010). Working hours during which youth centres operate play a crucial role in allowing service users access. Most services offered by Youth One Stop Shops in New Zealand attempt to provide for those who work or who are unable to attend services during school or study hours by opening later in the day or having appointment times after 5.00 pm. While this was considered very convenient from service users, suggestions were made to open services for a time on Saturday or to be open later in the evening (MacFarlane, 2009:56).

Co-located healthcare, social support and mentoring programmes reduce the need for youth to travel and improve social resilience and development of individuals with a potential for achieving long-term positive outcomes (Youthline Auckland, 2008). Consented data sharing across agencies/organisations involved in the young person's care, such as in the case of the Youth Substance Abuse Initiative in Victoria (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010), may reduce even further unnecessary delays in accessing a service for a young person.

Many agencies offering drop-in programs in non-school hours refer to a global model of prevention where recreational activities in an open, accessible, and welcoming setting are used as a means to attract youth and reduce time that otherwise would be available for high-risk activities in at-risk environments. In recent years more sophisticated approaches targeted at specific groups or problems have been favoured over this generic approach, as the reviews from Berchman-Tuisant & Kogler (2010) and Bond (2010) reveal, both in Australia and overseas. However, 'drop-in' centres can play multiple roles by offering youth: an alternative setting to their milieu, whether it be disadvantaged or problematic families; and a viable option and counterbalance to inactivity, boredom, and isolation or to frequenting public arcades, bars, or merely hanging out in the streets, parks, or vacant lots (Mercier et al, 2000).

A Canadian research from Luken and Warner (2005:3) identified five key ingredients that make for a successful youth centre: youth ownership, mentorship, community connectedness, effective coordination, and a sustainable source of energy that will ensure continuation of services and access for young people. For the authors, these concepts shift the focus from the often all-consuming stresses of money and facilities to critical factors such as community support, people resources and youth-adult relationships. Finally, all the five components mentioned above are interconnected and serve to build upon each other to produce a successful centre. The following section will focus on addressing some of these components with focus on participation approaches for young people accessing better integrated services.

1.4. Participation Approaches for Vulnerable Young People.

While children's and young people's 'participation' is commonly used as a term, there is no single definition. The Foundation for Young Australians defines youth participation as "being about developing partnerships between young people and adults in all areas of life so young people can take a valued position in our society and the community as a whole (as well as young people) can benefit from their contribution, ideas and energies" (1). As a key practice for promoting young people's healthy development and learning it refers to "activities through which young people have opportunities to make meaningful decisions, develop and practice leadership skills, and experience a sense of belonging or mattering" (CNYD). The final goal for their involvement is for them "to have a say in a way that is comfortable and appropriate for them" with "adults really listening to what young people have to say and giving due weight to this in decision-making" (NSWCCYP, 2003).

Work to understand the results of 'positive development' of services for young people has identified youth participation as a core strategy of intervention which promotes positive development in young people. (Catalano et al 2004.) In order to better comprehend the dynamics of youth participation, Bell et al (2008) have suggested four main approaches:

1. **formal participation**—the use of structured and usually longer-term approaches to involving young people in decision making which are typically executed through formal policies. For example, youth round tables, youth advisory groups, youth parliaments and structured consultation such as surveys or focus groups;
2. **informal participation**—the use of mechanisms that have no or a 'loose' structure, are 'casual' in their tone, require limited planning and resources, are quite often short-term and are usually not executed through formal policy. For example, casual chats between service providers and service users, one-off discussion groups and youth-led participation;
3. **targeted participation**—approaches that are designed to involve young people from a particular background, or who have shared experiences;
4. **universal participation**—approaches that are designed to involve the general youth population in decision making.

However, it is difficult to determine whether the role of each approach is fully understood when designing participation strategies and where the focus needs to be in order to ensure participation of vulnerable young people. A literature review of youth participation conducted by Bell et al (2008:38) found that young people from diverse backgrounds ought not be treated as a homogenous group that will want, or be able, to access universal youth participation opportunities. Instead, both in Australia and internationally, young people's different experiences of exclusion and disadvantage often shape targeted youth participation strategies (9). The capacity to engage with young people in relevant services is perhaps the most critical element when planning services for this group (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010:82). In order to address issues of participation, disengagement and retention, all youth focused organisations should have a clearly defined framework for youth participation and engagement (Wierenga et al, 2003:43).

1.4.1 Theoretical Approaches in Understanding 'Youth'

The discourse around the development of participation approaches has emphasised the importance of understanding how young people are viewed by different social and governing institutions. Burns et al (2009; 7-8) have highlighted two main perspectives on 'youth':

1. **Developmental Approach:** Youth is a transitional stage of preparation for 'adulthood'; understood as clearly identifiable processes which are universal and age-related and, focuses on individual factors for 'successful development'.
2. **Social Approach:** Youth identity and experience is also shaped by institutional processes and social structures and young people should be viewed and valued for what they contribute in the present – not only what they will become in the future. This approach acknowledges that whilst developmental processes are important, traditional transitions (for example from study to work or unemployment, or from dependence on family to independent living or economic independence) and the strategies young people use to navigate these are distinct from previous generations. Therefore a 'social generation' approach compels us to explore both how young people negotiate new social contexts and structures and how they make meaning through this process.

1.4.2 Macro-Systems and Contexts Affecting Youth Participation

Literature around preventing youth disengagement and promotion of participation suggest that young people need to be considered within contextual and systemic considerations. Bruce et al (2009:29), in their research provide four such areas that require attention, when understanding the continuum in which young people 'operate':

- The often negative media portrayal of young people⁸;
- Inadequate service provision;
- The poor design of many public spaces (including malls) and the lack of socially responsible management practices for these spaces; and
- The lack of appropriate schooling approaches, in particular alternative education practice for young people excluded from mainstream schooling.

In a broader national context, Burns et al (2008:11) describe some of the changes that are shaping the experiences of young people in new and sometimes unpredictable ways: 1. **Proliferation of technology** – internet and mobile phones are widely used by young people; 2. **Changes in the social fabric of society** – decline in affordable housing, increased levels of divorce, sole parent families and family conflict/violence; 3. **Increasing deregulation and instability of labour market** – more flexibility but less job security for young people; and 4. **Increasing emphasis on 'the individual'** – more life choices but less 'security'.

These components are essential when defining and designing good practices of participation and services for young people. Youth work should consider and critique macro-contexts to ensure that youth-related practice is relevant and meaningful (Bruce et al, 2009:29).

⁸ Sharland (2006) notes that increasingly young people are identified by government and policy makers as troubled, in trouble or as future leaders and Riele (2006) advises that such 'negative' construction of young people can be problematic as it focuses on individualized experiences of young people rather than the effect that surrounding structures have on them.

1.4.3 Theoretical Approaches of Youth Participation

A rapid examination of the literature on strategies for youth participation suggests that it is difficult to pinpoint a set of practice principles that will best facilitate this process. However, Bell et al (2008:31) note that, while there is not a homogenous view in the academic and practitioner literature on how to implement such strategies - both in terms of appropriateness and meaningful outcomes - there are two discernible approaches that represent distinctive constructions of young people, participation and decision-making processes.

Youth Development

Within youth development literature, youth participation is commonly used as an intervention strategy for enhancing the benefits of other programs and interventions (such as those aimed at employment, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and/or welfare recipients) (Bell et al, 2008: 32). It has gained prominence particularly in the United States over the past few decades as a way to help young people become capable, socially engaged adults (Saunders et al, 2009:41) and utilized in Australia at the Federal level through the National Strategy for Young Australians (2010, Bell et al, 2008).

However, Saunders et al (2009) suggest there is a lack a consensus between US and Australian models of conceptualizing youth development approaches. While youth development approaches usually focus on at-risk young people and aim to help them cope with risky and threatening transitional environments (Bell et al, 2008), the Australian models appear to mainly be conceptualized around traditional groups such as Scouts and Guides, which are usually well resourced and identified as being the highest of achievers (Saunders et al, 2009:42).

Youth development programs are delivered in a range of settings including schools, families and communities and utilize a variety of methods such as mentoring, peer tutoring and curriculum based training (Saunders et al, 2009). Participation of young people is used as a mechanism for maximizing the benefits of youth oriented projects and programs (Bell et al, 2008) and to ensure that service users are consulted around the objectives of programs, helping to continue the commitment and financial support for services (Sinclair, 2004).

Bell et al (2008) have noted two main issues related to youth development programs in the Australian context. The first is linked to the argument of viewing young people as 'at risk' which on the other hand drives interventionist youth policy agendas and is clearly structured along class, gender and ethnic lines (Kelly, 2003: 177 cited in Bell et al, 2008:32). The second is the predominance of youth development approaches in existing youth participation approaches which are exclusive and tend to be utilized only by well-resourced young people. Groups that are treated as 'at risk' and marginalized are less likely to be portrayed as having agency over decision making in their own lives (Bell et al, 2008: 26).

Youth Involvement

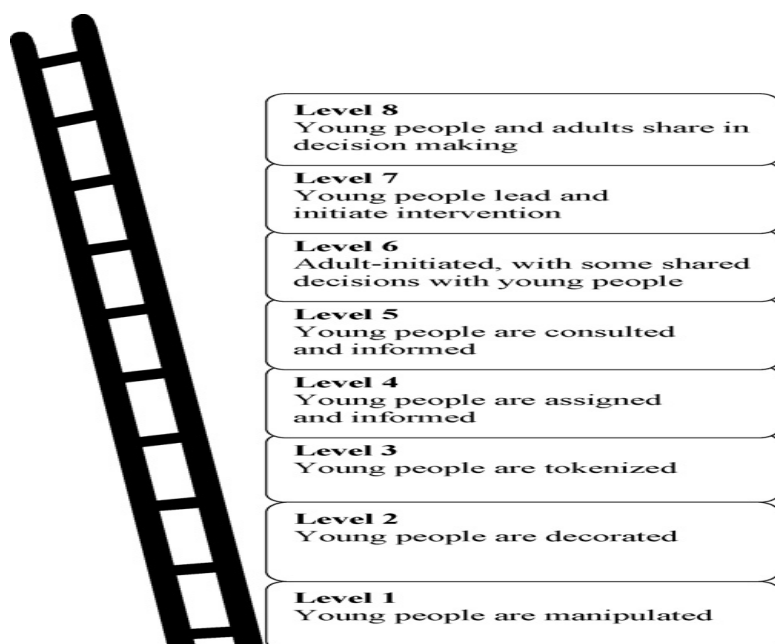
While there are similarities between the two approaches, youth involvement puts a significantly different emphasis on how the benefits of young people have broader social outcomes and lead to social and political change (Bell et al, 2008). Using the work of White and Wyn (2008), Bell et al suggest by using this approach young people are able to change policy making, organisations and society. This approach focuses on the principles of equality and justice for young people, and opportunities for young people exercising their right to participate in decision making process that affect them (Bessant, 2003).

There are a number of benefits in encouraging the use of this approach. Within the realms of research and practice, youth voices must be given the space to emerge as forces of change (Gurstein et al, 2003). A study by Holdsworth et al (2005) highlighted that when young people experience adequate participation, they regard programs and services more positively and benefit more in terms of outcomes. Kirby & Bryson (2002) while recognizing the fact that there still not enough evidence around the quality of decisions made (or influenced) by young people, maintain that youth participation improves services and enhances their ability to adapt to changing needs, improves service development and client support, increases the use of services and participatory practice for young people (Kirby et al, 2003).

As mentioned above, the literature available is not able to privilege one approach over the other, since they consider individual and structural factors that affect the lives of young people in different ways. However, what is most important is that evidence on the impact of disengagement and lack of participation of young people is very clear. Based on a number of literature documents, Burns et al (2008: 9) suggest that young people who are disengaged or excluded from their peers, schools, families and communities experience poorer health and mental health; they are at increased risk of long term unemployment, chronic alcohol and drug use, homelessness, mental illness and suicide; at a broader level these issues have an impact on broader community by increasing health, justice and welfare system expenditure and bring to lower social cohesion and economic productivity.

1.4.4. What Youth Participation Looks Like?

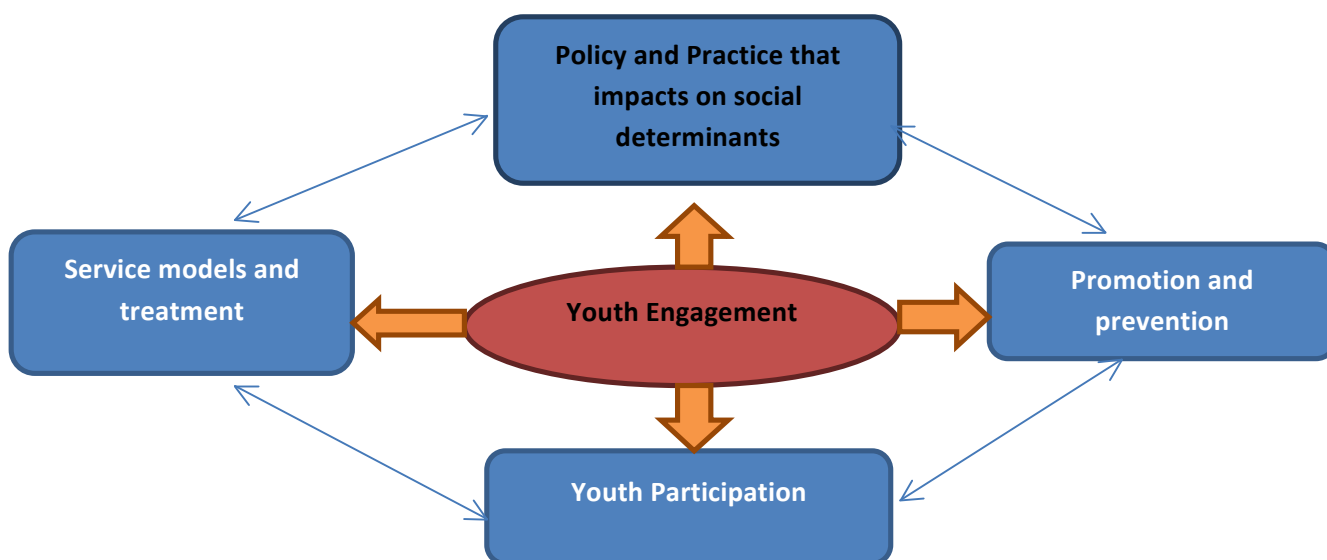
Youth participation has received increasing interest with focus on the improvement of youth focused service delivery. Most of the work that aims to provide a clear view of youth participation in practice focuses on the partnership and power shared between governments (or other powerful organisational forms) and young people (Bell et al, 2008:31). While the model developed by Hart (1992, 1997) has received criticism during the last decade, it has been used as an important paradigm when articulating and designing strategies for youth participation.



Hart's (1992, 1997) ladder of youth participation (engagement).

Shier (2001) on the other hand, has tried to define participation of children and young people by using a continuum with five levels: 1. Children and young people are listened to; 2. Children and young people are supported to express views; 3. Children and young people's views are taken into account; 4. Children and young people are involved in decision making; 5. Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision making. However, these models view youth participation as an issue which embraces this population as a homogenous group without providing specific suggestions for vulnerable and 'at risk' young people. It is important to note youth participation is usually viewed and placed within youth engagement activities. Burns et al (2009:38) have provided a diagram in which youth participation is considered a complementary approach for youth engagement – together with policy and practice that impact on social determinants, promotion and prevention, service models and treatment.

For them, while youth participation has become part of government policies and forms a key policy area, its outcome and impact measurement is rarely undertaken. It needs to be assessed in a collaborative, flexible and systematic way with the view to derive principles and models of best practice that are applicable across settings (government, non-governments, services and the corporate sector).



Adopted from Burns et al (2009:36): Importance of Complementary Approaches to Youth Engagement

This literature review identified a recent, although still relatively modest, interest in ways vulnerable people may be better encouraged to participate in services and decision making. Bruce et al (2009) found that best practices in youth work are more likely to be associated with the presence of four components in the service being offered:

1. **Connectivity** – services are long-term, sustainable and relationship-based;
2. **Strength-based approach** – a shift from collective thinking about young people as problematic based to a strength-based approach that views them as resources;
3. **Capacity building** – services that are committed to capacity building particularly in terms of professional training;
4. **Contextual and systemic considerations** – macro contexts such as economic, political and cultural factors need to be considered when designing services for young people.

However, these components are still broad and provide little in terms of practical steps on how to better facilitate youth participation. It is obvious that while theoretical aspects of this issue are well articulated in

a range of documents, more research need to be undertaken to measure the impact that current strategies have had in improving the participation of vulnerable young people. Some of the experience gained from other integrated service models can drive future initiatives in the area. For example, while evaluating the Headspace program, Muir et al (2009) identified a number of factors that affect service users' engagement or disengagement with the programs.

<i>Factors that keep young people coming back to Headspace</i>	<i>Factors that discourage young people from accessing and engaging with Headspace</i>
Environment – youth friendly	Psychological barriers to help-seeking
Accessibility – good location in some venues	Cost
Relationships with staff – open and non-judgmental	Opening hours
Control over service experience – being well – informed about proceedings	Physical space – inappropriate setting for delivering services for young people
Appoint reminders – frequent and punctual	Waiting time to see practitioners – long waiting lists
Youth participation – processes, policies, campaigns	

In conclusion Wierenga et al (2003:42) and Bruce et al (2009:30) provide this summary of elements of youth participation (and engagement models) as considerations for future work in this area:

1. Is the youth service community based, birthed and sourced?
2. Is the youth service one that has worked with young people for a significant period of time and which has, during that time, sought to develop strong relationships with young people and other youth sector stakeholders?
3. Are there signs of community life, connectivity and collaboration?
4. Does the youth service have a strengths-based approach to working with young people in terms of helping young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will benefit them?
5. Does the youth service seek to develop independence/autonomy within young people through empowerment and youth participation and through promotion of young people in leadership and governance?
6. Does the youth service foster acts of civic engagement, generosity and social responsibility?
7. Is the youth service inclusive of all young people entitled to access the service?
8. Does the youth service place high value on the training of youth workers, leaders, etc.?
9. Is the youth service committed to capacity building by working with young people to gain insights into problems and issues, cultures and a voice in community planning and public policy?

2. Case Studies of Integrated Service Delivery Models for Young People

2.1 Frontyard Youth Services – Victoria

Note: Unless otherwise stated documentation for this section of the report was obtained from downloadable documents and material presented on the following website:

<http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/What-We-Do/Our-Programs-Services/Frontyard>

Frontyard is an integrated youth service centre which has been developing within Melbourne Citymission's Central Business District premises over the last 25 years (Cameron, 2009). It provides services for young people aged 12-25 years who are disadvantaged and at-risk of, or already experiencing, homelessness (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

Its history dates back in February 1989, when a National Inquiry into Youth Homeless by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission released the report 'Our Homeless Children'. This report led to the development of a model of service delivery, which provided the foundation for a youth service based in Melbourne CBD, later named Frontyard.

A year after the report's release, the Melbourne City Council established the Youth Information Service to provide information, referral and support to young people who were homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless. In December 1990, the Melbourne Youth Access Centre co-located with the Youth Information Service. The Youth Access Centre was the first out-posting service of the Department of Employment, Education and Training to be co-located with another community agency. The Youth Pilot Project of the Department of Social Security joined them in 1991, and the three co-located services became collectively known as Frontyard by 1992. Other youth focused services joined in the following years.

Integration of Service Delivery

In 2000, Frontyard began the process of developing a model of integrated service delivery that ensured that the co-located services continued to work collaboratively for the benefit of the client base (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010). Melbourne Citymission, as the lead agency, engaged two consultancies to firstly identify and then develop the model. Articulation of formal agreements between the service providers and the lead agency finalised the partnerships during the second phase of research. The provision of new premises by Melbourne Citymission promoted co-location of services as well as providing appropriate settings for jointly delivering services for young people.

Frontyard Youth Services is now a collection of nine (independently funded) co-located services that work together to address the physical, emotional and social needs of young people aged up to 25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and spend time in the Melbourne CBD. Five of the services are also state-wide.

Co-located agencies and services provided in the Frontyard Initiative include:

1. **Centrelink** - Community Engagement officers support young people who are homeless or at risk, to understand, claim and keep income support payments from Centrelink.
2. **Melbourne Youth Support Service** is a telephone information and referral service that helps young people find crisis accommodation and other support services related to issues such as substance use, mental health, family support and material aid.

3. **The Melbourne Gateway Reconnect Program** works with young people, who are newly homeless or at risk of homelessness, to reconcile with family whenever appropriate and improve their engagement with education, employment, and their community.
4. **Job Services Australia** provides personalised help and services that are targeted to a young person's needs so they can access training opportunities and work experience.
5. **Youthlaw** provides free legal advice and casework to young people, and is active in policy development and advocacy around issues affecting young people's legal rights. Youthlaw also conducts education programs relating to legal issues for young people and their workers.
6. **Young People's Health Service (YPHS)** is a free health service dedicated to improving the health and life outcomes of homeless young people.
7. **The Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP)** is a state-wide program that supports services that work with young people (aged 15–25) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. FRMP can support homelessness services to access brokerage funds on behalf of their clients to buy a range of interventions (individual counselling, family counselling, etc) that assist their clients to resolve issues regarding family breakdown.
8. **Youth Connections** offers case management to young people disengaged from education. It can also help with Centrelink problems and enrolling in courses.
9. **Pastoral Care** workers offer young people using Frontyard a one-on-one support service, where they can talk through things that may be worrying them, such as the loss of a loved one, their future, their beliefs and life.

Visiting services include:

- **Youth Support & Advocacy Service** (formerly known as Youth Substance Abuse Service);
- **HomeGround** (homelessness, housing and support services);
- **Inner South Community Health Service** (Dental Outreach program);
- **Doutta Galla Community Health** (podiatrist and dietician).

In addition, Frontyard has established relationships with a wide range of youth focused community based providers. External linkages include government departments, other community agencies, schools, business, as well as emergency, social and health services (See Figure 1 below).

Brechman - Tuissant and Kogler (2010) suggest that, although Frontyard offers a wide range of services, they generally fall into the following areas:

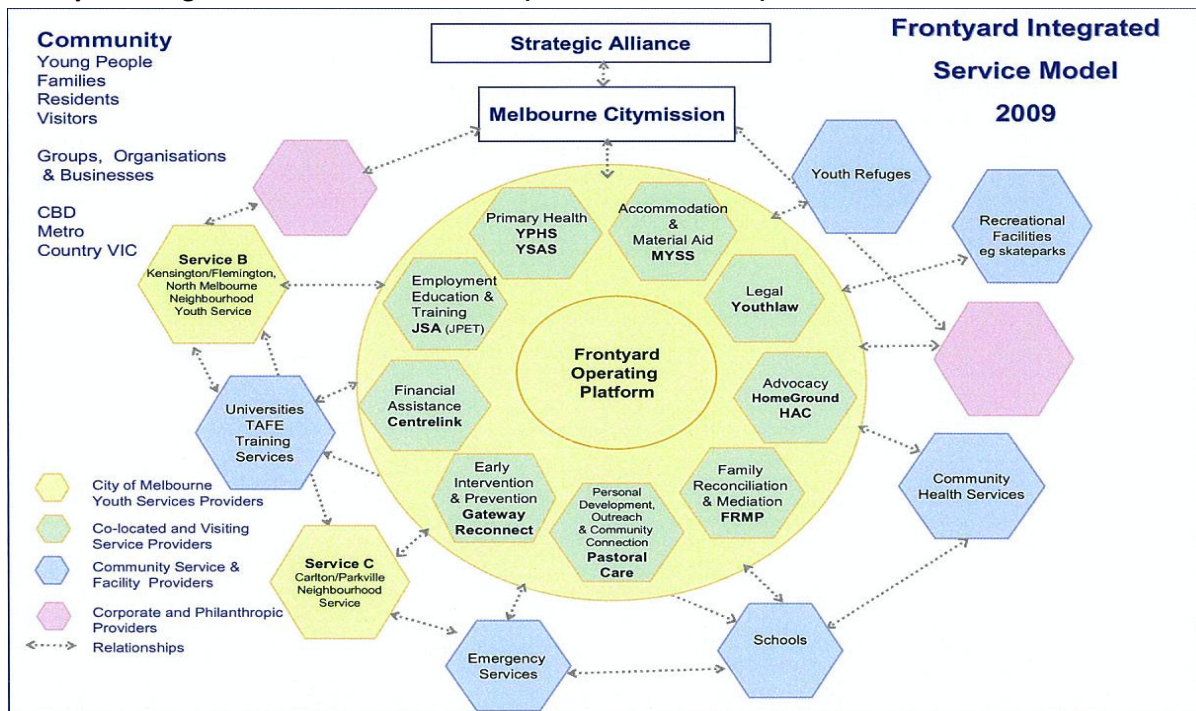
- Health and Well-being;
- Legal Services and Financial Assistance;
- Crisis Accommodation;
- Employment and Training; and
- Family Mediation.

Working together with co-located services

Frontyard's operating platform (including rent, utilities, the manager, a subsidiary program and a youth worker's salary) is funded by the City of Melbourne through Melbourne Citymission which auspices Frontyard. Frontyard's co-located services are more than merely tenants in common, they share a commitment to integrated service delivery while maintaining their independence and accountability to their various funding bodies (Federal, State, Local, Community and/or Corporate) (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

The evolution of this integrated model has allowed services to deal with the common barriers faced when attempting to collaborate at such a level. The main structure responsible for coordinating the collaboration is the Common Operating Platform which provides a consistency around ways organisations work together to meet individual goals of young people. Mechanisms such as the common critical response procedure, single point of entry and waiting area, shared procedures and protocols of integrated service delivery are illustrations of this common operating model (Cameron, 2009).

Frontyard Integrated Service Model, 2009 (Cameron, 2009: 12)



Common Operating Platform of Frontyard Services (Cameron, 2009:12)



Target group

The Frontyard target group are young people at risk, aged between 12 and 25 years. As a definition; 'at risk' at Frontyard includes young people who are currently or potentially experiencing:

- Homelessness;
- Family breakdown;
- Early school leaving;
- Abuse — substance, physical, emotional or sexual;
- Mental illness and/or developmental/adjustment difficulties;
- Social isolation.

This does not exclude individual agency or service provider target group definitions. Frontyard recognises that a percentage of clients utilising its services will fall outside the definition. It may be argued that this approach is a component of a 'no wrong door' philosophy, where anyone can access some relief service for their circumstances and contribute to early intervention and prevention.

Initial Assessment, Intake Process and Service Access

A client satisfaction survey conducted by Frontyard in 2009-2010 found that most of service users had heard about the service for the first time from other young people. Information provided by other services that collaborate with Frontyard was another important source of self-referrals. More than half of the service users were 'walk-ins' straight after the initial contact. This was largely due to the clarity with which youth workers explain the range of services and the positive initial impression that young people develop about the service (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

A Youth Worker is the first person young people see when arriving at Frontyard. The waiting room is attended by a small team, in order to deal with the flow of people arriving as well as unpredictable situations related to client's behaviour (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010). After describing their situation, young people are given detailed information about the services available and according to their immediate priorities are referred to one or more relevant services. These providers are able to meet the urgent needs of the young person since the services are provided on site. Information about social gatherings is offered such as the Weekly Open BBQ administered by Pastoral Care (Brechman-Tuissant & Kogler, 2010).

When a young person needs accommodation, family mediation, employment and education or training, a Case Manager is assigned and a case plan with goals is developed together with the young person. Both the youth worker and case manager offer practical and emotional support, aiming to build a long term relationship based on trust. Young people are continuously encouraged through their engagement with services, as well as helped to find their place within the community by developing a strong and positive sense of self. If their needs are not fully met by Frontyard services they are linked with other community based providers, usually based in the area where they live.

It is important to note that initially the role of intake and assessment for the co-located services was filled by generic administrative staff. Recently there has been more emphasis on the Youth Work involved in these initial stages, especially the initiation of a youth worker - client relationship that provides an avenue for young people to tell their story, overcome initial reluctance to access services and receive appropriate advice and referral for relevant services (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

Main Players in the Frontyard Initiative

Melbourne Citymission started and developed Frontyard in partnership with Melbourne City Council (MCC), the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS), other government departments and community based agencies. Melbourne Citymission is the lead agency responsible for managing and governing the operational development of these services, according to its strategic plan and Funding Service Agreement with the City of Melbourne (Brechman-Tuissant & Kogler, 2010). Frontyard is governed by a Strategic Alliance with representatives from Melbourne Citymission (auspice), MCC (which funds the Common Operating Platform) and DHS (which funds individual services). The structure is responsible for ensuring that protocols and operational activities are formalised and complied with, as well as the development of a strategy which guides the work of the initiative (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

The Frontyard operating platform comprises a Frontyard Manager and a number of Youth Workers with shared costs such as rent and utilities. This model enables Youth Workers to exercise a high level of independence at a direct service level and for the Manager at an operational management level. It allows the co-located independent services to focus on their specific area of work, and be less concerned with issues of coordination (Cameron, 2009). The platform is supported with adequate resources to manage the facility, initiate and implement programs, link with a range of services within and outside the premises, promote the initiative in communities and develop and review operational protocols. Services and funding bodies are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities, which are regulated with specific formal agreements (Mcdonnell & Biffin, 2010).

Integrated Service Delivery Features and Success Criteria

According to Mcdonnell & Biffin (2010), this model combines a number of elements with the aim of achieving and ensuring sustainable and lasting outcomes for clients:

- **‘Whole of Life’ Approach** – by providing a range of easily accessible services and programs;
- **Common Operating Platform** – Avoids overlapping and provides independence at direct service level;
- **Shared Responsibility for Governance and Funding** – The Strategic Alliance has representatives from all organisations involved;
- **Youth Focused and Specialised ‘Crisis’ Services** - Co-location facilitates provision of immediate services for young people;
- **Direct Links to Early Intervention** – Youth Workers are able to identify indicators that could lead to homelessness or other long term issues and take appropriate action to prevent that;
- **Extensive Network of Referral Services** – links with a wide range of institutions and services;
- **Opportunities for Collaboration** – joint submissions, awareness campaigns and advocacy;
- **Established Long-Term Relationships Between Services** – over 10 years of co-location and joint management;
- **Skilled Youth Workers** – offer the essential ‘glue’ for engaging clients with services;
- **Stability of the Initiative** – Frontyard has been run by Melbourne Citymission for over 25 years.
- **Innovative and Responsive** – Feedback is sought from a number of activities and used to guide the initiative;
- **Robust Contractual Arrangements** – Foster collaboration and avoids micromanagement in running the service;
- **Branding and a High Level of Community Awareness** – helps young people to connect with services and assist cooperation with a number of agencies.
- **A Model that Can Be Replicated.**

Success of the Initiative

The Frontyard initiative has expanded through the years including more services in order to provide a wrap-around approach for young people in need. It has an experience of evaluating its services periodically and undertakes necessary changes suggested by these reviews. The initiative has established a reputation and has become a trademark for youth focused services. On average, every year Frontyard assist more than 1500 young people who need support. The experienced staff members and the value that is put on an efficient youth work throughout the initiative, facilitates a smooth delivery of services. It is important to note that operating hours from Monday - Friday, 9am- 8pm and Saturday & Sundays, 10am to 6pm allow young people to access services after working hours during week days and facilitates intake process during the weekend. The continuous commitment and support from Melbourne Citymission has allowed a long term vision for the initiative.

Comments

The Frontyard model can be easily replicated. Its structure allows for the provision of a range of services for young people. Using homelessness as a soft entry point for young people offers good opportunities for early and smooth engagement with youth in need of support. While the Frontyard itself currently is a mid to large size initiative, a more limited replica of the model as a start would not be difficult to set up. More information is required around sharing information procedures and protocols that regulate interaction between different services. However Frontyard seems to be open about sharing that knowledge with other interested stakeholders. The model has taken considerable effort and financial support to reach the current stage, and appropriate funding would be crucial to replicate it, both initially and then to sustain it in the longer term.

2.2. Youth One Stop Shops – New Zealand

Note: Unless otherwise stated documentation for this section of the report was obtained from downloadable documents and material presented on a number of YOSSs websites. The reader can access them from the following link: <http://www.evolveyouth.org.nz/page/58/YouthOneStopShops.boss>

A Youth One Stop Shop (YOSS) is a community based facility that offers access to a range of health and other services using a 'wrap-around' or holistic model of care. It is specifically designed to provide youth targeted services which are responsive to the needs of young people. The model of service aims to improve young people's access to health and social services in a seamless, coordinated and appropriate way.

The first initiative was established in Wanganui, New Zealand, 1994 and brought together a small number of services which mainly focused on health care provision, including alcohol and drug services. The following year, the 198 Youth Health Centre opened in Christchurch, based on a contract with the then Regional Health Authority (now the District Health Board). Since then around 14 YOSSs have been developed independently in other locations and settings.

A YOSS network of has been established since 2009 under the auspice of New Zealand Aotearoa Adolescent Health and Development (NZAAHD) to provide a forum for sharing, learning and support across services. NZAAHD has developed a number of guidelines and documents around health service provision for young people. Among other things these cover a code of ethics, practice standards, youth work, youth health and education. However, it is difficult to establish whether all initiatives evaluate and review their practice work against these standards.

Range of Services provided by Youth One Stop Shops

These initiatives provide a range of health and other services, directly or indirectly. They usually have a number of different providers co-located, which enables better access for young people as well as promoting coordinated and integrated care. Services are provided at little or no cost, are youth focused, strength-based with a strong emphasis on building trust, providing safety and maintaining confidentiality. Services aim to help young people to meet their health, social, education, employment and developmental needs.

Health Services

Most YOSSs provide general health/primary care, sexual and reproductive health and family planning. Half of them offer mental health, health promotion and education, counselling, vaccinations and alcohol and drug services. A small percentage also deliver oral health, smoking cessation, school based services, group work, physiotherapy, chronic disease management and liaison with co-located youth alcohol and drug services. MacFarlane et al (2009) suggest that agencies have identified the need for more funding towards provision of mental health support.

Other (non-health) Services

All initiatives provide advocacy, information and assistance for young people to help find suitable accommodation, training, education and employment, while some provide social work services, life skills training such as budgeting advice and youth transition support. Mentoring programs (both for individuals and families) may be available, though budget constraints limit this to only some YOSSs. Other less common services include peer support, family group work, council area youth worker, youth development programs such as art, music, dance, food whenever possible as well as emergency clothing, liaison with transition services, work and income and community law.

Proportion of business and hours of operation

Most YOSSs devote the majority of their time, and in some cases all of it, to activities related to health and disability. This is an understandable reflection of their funding requirements – health versus non health services budget. The hours of operation vary considerably between YOSSs with some reporting 27-32 hours per week while others more than 45 hours. This is affected by staff availability, funding as well as the demand and other commitments of service users.

An evaluation of YOSSs in 2009, revealed that most services attempt to provide access for those who work and who are unable to attend services by opening later in the day or having appointments after 5.00 pm. However, clients and staff suggest that increasing the availability of opening hours will facilitate greater access for service users. Open services on Saturdays and late in the evening were other options.

Target Group

The age group targeted by services is largely 10-24 years with 15-19 being the main recipient group. In some cases services for over 25 years of age are offered and contract requirements often determine the profile of clients, including their age. Although their focus is to offer services for 'vulnerable' and 'at-risk' young people, the definitions used vary from centre to centre. It is important to note, that most of these differences relate to the discourse about whether to use a strength-based or a deficit-based approach in working with young people who need help. Alternative definitions of this group include 'young people with

high needs', 'with less resources' or 'any young person who is not engaged in a positive activity' (Macfarlane et al, 2009).

Although a number of YOSSs are trying to develop effective models to engage and provide easy access to vulnerable young people, the paradigm driving their policy is about offering an equally safe and youth-friendly environment for every young person. Macfarlane et al (2009) while noting that overall Youth One Stop Shops do well in supporting vulnerable young people who access their services, some centres need to find a balance between increasing the service provision for this group and maintaining an 'open door' for every young person.

Main Players in the Youth One Stop Shop initiatives

The main players in the Youth One Stop Shop initiatives are all non-governmental organisations that have the endorsement of the New Zealand Department of Child, Youth and Family and the Ministry of Health as an approved Social Services Provider. Other stakeholders involved are the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Youth Development, and Ministry of Education along with a number of government bodies including New Zealand Police. In addition, local city councils, schools, other community agencies such as Family Planning, the YMCA, Skylight and Kites Trust have strong relationships with YOSSs, mainly through joint work and activities (MacFarlane et al, 2009).

As of 2009, of the non-funding institutions, 20% received referrals from Youth One Stop Shops, 45% made referrals to them, 10% provided services through the YOSSs and 2% provided staffing. Each of these links required a different relationship and varying combinations of formal and informal information exchange. Other types of links included sharing accommodation or co-location of services; collaboration on youth health or youth development community projects and events and in the development of resources; providing training to, or receiving it from Youth One Stop Shops; seeking advice from YOSS staff as clinical experts in the field; and acting as community advocates for youth. Overall, relationships with stakeholders were positive and functional.

Funding

The model of funding usually used is self-funding with regular financial support received from respective District Health Boards, the New Zealand Grants Board, and through fundraising activities (Brechman-Tuisant & Kogler, 2010). Other funding sources identified include:

- Targeted health related intervention contracts, which are not ongoing;
- Fee for service visit claims;
- Private business and charitable organisations;
- One-off payments to cover events. (MacFarlane et al, 2009)

The different levels and sources of funding, the fragmentation of these sources and how this affects the sustainability of projects and initiatives as a whole are the main issues in this area. In addition, the diverse contractual and reporting obligations make extra work for services. MacFarlane (2009) suggest that the YOSSs would benefit greatly by a centralised leadership, which would provide for a better consistency in funding and therefore in service provision. For example, instead of different government body providing portions of funding for specific projects, the Ministry of Health (or another single institution) should as directly as possible guide the funding avenues. This would avoid administrative costs related to each layer of funding transfers, possibilities that funding does not reach YOSSs and their clients, and establish a less complex system of funding.

Governance Models and Legal Structures

The majority of YOSSs are listed as charitable trusts while a few are Incorporated Societies. In two instances YOSSs hold both these identities. These models provide the basis on which a governance structure is developed. All of them have a governance board or a board of trustees which comprise community members who for the most part volunteer their time.

The organisational structure of each provides for the roles of board and management. While there is no uniform model, the general pattern involves a three tiered institutional structure, with the board overseeing strategic planning, the managers dealing with operational issues and other staff participating in service delivery in line with the defined funded projects. The lack of a clear vision of roles and expectations on the part of some boards has led to a blurring of the boundaries between management and governance. Tensions arising from this have generally been dealt with successfully however, more needs to be done to clarify the roles of respective governance bodies and endorse these roles through relevant documentation.

Success of the initiative

The YOSS initiatives provide youth focused services, primarily in the area of mental health and other support activities. These hubs offer a safe, friendly and confidential environment for young people.

Although the results of their services are not usually evaluated, they appear to be an appropriate alternative to conventional health services for young people. Youth friendly opening hours to accommodate study and work commitments, services provided free, efforts to facilitate youth involvement at all levels of organisation and service provision, responsiveness to youth need when designing and delivering services and collaboration with other organisations to reduce barriers to service access for young people, are the key benefits of their integrated service model. Facilities located centrally or close to public transport are more accessible for service users. A range of services are provided with the ability to refer to secondary or tertiary services and youth workers provide active support to link young people with other external agencies. This role is crucial in facilitating an initial supportive engagement process with youth. The process is supported by outreach or mobile services outside the premises.

The initiatives place a strong emphasis on staff developing cultural competency and culturally appropriate services. Privacy and confidentiality are cornerstones of service delivery and the co-location of different services diminishes the stigma that young people might experience approaching a single service, especially one providing mental health support. While every YOSS may differ in terms of the core service provision philosophy, a process of unifying these hubs under a single leadership may help to minimise such differences.

The biggest challenge that YOSSs face is the lack of consistent funding. A dependency on government funding, multiple funding arrangements and requirements from different sources, time-limited funding grants and the possibility of losing section/s of current funding due to sector restructuring, and times of economic uncertainty are limiting the expansion and a long term vision for the initiatives. In addition, due to funding requirements, health services outweigh social ones resulting in service gaps when young people need social support.

Comments

While all the YOSSs apply a one-stop-shop model for their services, the range of programs varies considerably between them. They are valuable places for young people, especially in smaller, isolated

communities. Their focus on health services for youth allows young people to access support in a friendly, safe and confidential space. However, in the ACT mental and primary health care services are provided already by other programs such as headspace and Turnaround, as well as Child and Family Centres, Youth Health Programs and The Junction. Despite this, research activities conducted for this paper identified the need for more mental and other health services for young people. YOSSs' experience in providing primary and targeted service for young people in one location may be useful in the context of the ACT.

The model has some limitations compared to other integrated service delivery models for young people in that the percentage of non-health services offered is relatively small. Further, long waiting list for mental health services, the lack of access to emergency and short term accommodation, youth transition services and culturally appropriate services are also identified issues.

2.3 Glebe Youth Services – New South Wales

Note: Unless otherwise stated documentation for this section of the report was obtained from downloadable documents and material presented on the following website: <http://www.glebeyouth.org.au/>

Glebe Youth Service (GYS) is a non-government organisation located in Glebe, Sydney that began in 1989 to provide young people aged 12-24 years with recreational programs, links to educational opportunities and support. Its primary vision is to support and advocate for young people connected with the Glebe community to achieve their full potential. The purpose of their work and services is to develop in young people a sense of dignity and personal responsibility to achieve their goals and contribute in the community.

Over the years the organisation has gone through major changes in an attempt to expand its range of services and work toward a more integrated approach to service delivery. Its current strategic plan has a focus on education, employment and vocational outcomes for young people. The organisation has an emphasis on marketing its services to partners, funders, policy makers and sponsors in order to develop alternative revenue streams to drive and support growth. During recent years there has been an emphasis on developing strong and mutually beneficial relationships with other services providers and especially with stakeholders and communities, an important mechanism for better defining and designing services to fit the needs of their client target group.

Target Group

GYS provides services through a number of programs and activities for young people aged 12-24 years who live or work in the Glebe area. While the primary target group comprises young people who live within the Glebe Estate, a Housing NSW area that covers most of the lower half of Glebe neighbourhood, GYS is open to all young people who are connected to the area in one way or the other. The Glebe Estate community faces a range of issues including poverty, family breakdown, mental illness, chronic school refusal and poor literacy which lead to high levels of unemployment among residents. The majority of young people who attend and engage with services are Indigenous. Key issues faced by clients include poor health, educational disengagement and over-representation within the legal system.

Range of Integrated Services in Glebe Youth Service Initiative and Partnerships:

Glebe Youth Service offers a range of programs and services including:

- **The Drop-in Program** which provides a safe space for young people, but more importantly an avenue for regular contacts with them. The drop-in is not entirely structured, however a number of activities are provided to facilitate initial engagement with young people such as sport, and cultural and recreational programs as well as a meal prepared by staff, students and volunteers as part of their Food Program. Through the contacts established during the drop-in, members of staff are able to suggest a range of services to young people according to their needs.
- **The After Dark Program** is an initiative supported by the City of Sydney. It operates on Fridays from 6.30 – 10.30 pm at the Peter Forsyth Auditorium and on Saturdays from 7.30- 11.30 pm at GYS building. It provides an opportunity for young people to enjoy a healthy meal and participate in a variety of sport activities. It aims to divert young people from alcohol and drug use/abuse and other youth anti-social behaviours, as well as provide a refuge from their daily reality. The program underwent external evaluation a few years ago and the findings are being used to improve the service. GYS is working toward expanding its range of activities and encouraging more gender-balanced participation. Oasis Youth Support offers additional resources during the After Dark sessions. In addition Juvenile Justice collaborates in running the program with members of police force participating in activities.
- **Case Work (Management) and Crisis Intervention Intake:** For those with higher level needs, youth workers engage with young people to develop and implement remediation plans as required. GYS uses its links and partnerships with other agencies to refer clients and follow up on their progress. Some of the external service providers with whom they collaborate closely are Housing New South Wales, NSW Department of Education and Communities, NSW Department of Family and Community Services, TAFE Ultimo, Aboriginal Medical Service and Glebe Family Medical, Oasis Youth Support, Elsie Refuge for Women and Children.
- **A Number of Holiday Activities GirlZone and BoyZone Weekly Programs:** Includes a number of structured and non-structured activities for girls or boys only. Each term the program agendas are reviewed based on the surveys of participants. Older participants offer peer mentoring for younger ones. Both programs have expanded in recent years, attracting more young people and becoming more sustainable.
- **Glebe Pathways Education Project** (a continuation of **Glebe Re-Engage Education Project**): addresses chronic school refusal by assisting young people with literacy and numeracy skills and establishing pathways back into mainstream education such as Sydney Secondary College, TAFE or vocational training (in partnership with the Department of Education and Training), assisted by Save the Children Australia and Reconnect.

Additional programs and activities

GYS used to provide a program called Get Real which offered opportunities for young people to develop music production and computer skills. It is not clear whether this program is still running.

GYS plays an important role in hosting, organising and participating in key community events. Through these activities GYS strengthens its partnerships, engages with community members and provide advocacy for young people and their needs. The Forest Lodge and Glebe Coordination Group (FLAG) meets twice a month at GYS and serves as a medium for promoting current initiatives and encouraging communication and knowledge sharing between community groups, business and government agencies.

GYS continues to be a source of student placements for social work students and also Masters of Teaching students. GYS is also connected to the University of Sydney (USyd) through the USyd/Glebe interagency partnership.

Key Players in Glebe Youth Services Initiative

The Glebe Youth Service is supported by the New South Wales Department of Community Services under the Community Services Grants Program and receives funding from the City of Sydney. Other donations are received from local business, public individuals or groups and from a number of other government and non-government agencies who provide small grants, such as the Becher Foundation, NRMA, the New South Wales Attorney General's Department and the Department of Science Education and Training.

The service is governed by a Board of Management made up of representatives from the community and non-government sector with an interest in youth development. Members serve on the Board voluntarily and meet monthly. The Board is responsible for the strategic and operational aspects of the service.

A number of organisations collaborate with the centre for service delivery including Ultimo TAFE Outreach and local secondary schools, which help deliver an education program to young people who have few schooling options remaining as a result of disruptive behaviour and high level school refusal. Other partners have included the Glebe Society, Department of Juvenile Justice, Glebe Chamber of Commerce, Marrickville Youth Resource Centre and Marrickville Council. OzHarvest and Food Bank help with provision of food while StreetSmart, Short Black Films and Drawing Room Productions facilitate the recreational activities.

The Glebe Youth Service employs five full time staff with backgrounds in Social Work and Youth/Community Development. There is also an administrative assistant and more than a dozen casual staff. Volunteers also play a significant role in service provision with Glebe Youth Service staff taking responsibility for the coordination, training and supervision of volunteers.

Success of Initiative

The Annual Report of GYS 2011-2012 highlights a number of general social benefits of the program. Due to the increasing engagement of young people in GYS activities and other services, the youth crime in the area of Glebe has been at exceptionally low levels. There has been an increase in youth employment numbers and a drop in disengagement from education. The level of knowledge and awareness around healthy life styles through sport activities and healthy eating has developed dramatically and has resulted in a decline of requests for crisis intervention and other areas of specialised support.

During 2011-2012 the program provided casework for more than 80 individuals, with positive outcomes. Although numbers are not available, the drop-in has attracted increasing numbers, with young women using GYS as a safe place where they can get information and learn new life skills. By offering the services of an outreach nurse during drop-in, in partnership with Youthblock, GYS has enabled the distribution of more specialised information on healthy diet and lifestyle.

During 2011-2012, an average of 35 young people attended each After Dark session, with 162 referrals being made to GYS or other specialised services. The program provided 3400 meals and combined a range of sport and entertainment activities such as short films, drawing and other recreational activities. The program has helped to build positive relationships between police and young people as well as the community.

Both GirlZone and BoyZone programs have become popular hubs for young people to bond with each other and explore new ways of interacting. The programs have provided opportunities for young people to visit a number of institutions and participate in external projects thus expanding their life knowledge.

The Glebe Pathways Education Program has seen 22 students participating as of June 2012 with average attendance remaining stable at 65 per cent. In 2011, 8 students from the program graduated with schools certificates and GYS used its partnerships to place them in further study in hospitality, beauty and art courses.

Comments

The size of Glebe Youth Services makes it a simple model to be adopted in the ACT as a format for an integrated service delivery model for youth. Although most of the participants in the program are from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, it offers examples that can be used for engaging with all young people. The combination of drop-in, outreach activities and structured programs allows a flexible yet robust whole-life approach to working with young people. Its limited range of services suggests that the GYS model would be a great working example for a start up initiative. The experience gained from GYS through close collaboration with government departments, other agencies, education and academic institutions, police and community, highlights the benefits of working together across different areas of work with a variety stakeholders. Finally, GYS has managed to engage with the most vulnerable young people and create great opportunities for their future life.

2.4 Brisbane Youth Services - Queensland

Brisbane Youth Services (BYS) is a community based organisation in inner-city Brisbane that has been in operation since 1977. It operates as a large incorporated association which provides a holistic continuum of care to homelessness and disadvantaged young people aged 12-25 and their children in the inner-city area of Brisbane.

The organisation offers a community hub for young people and young families to access a wide range of services across multiple levels of immediacy and intensity. Service users can access basic immediate needs such as a shower and food, while they are given the opportunity to benefit from other intensive, therapeutic and planned support according to their individual circumstances. The structure of services aims to facilitate young people's development and help them to create a new future.

Range of Integrated Services in Brisbane Youth Service

In 2012, there were six teams within the BYS, responsible for the delivery of the following services.

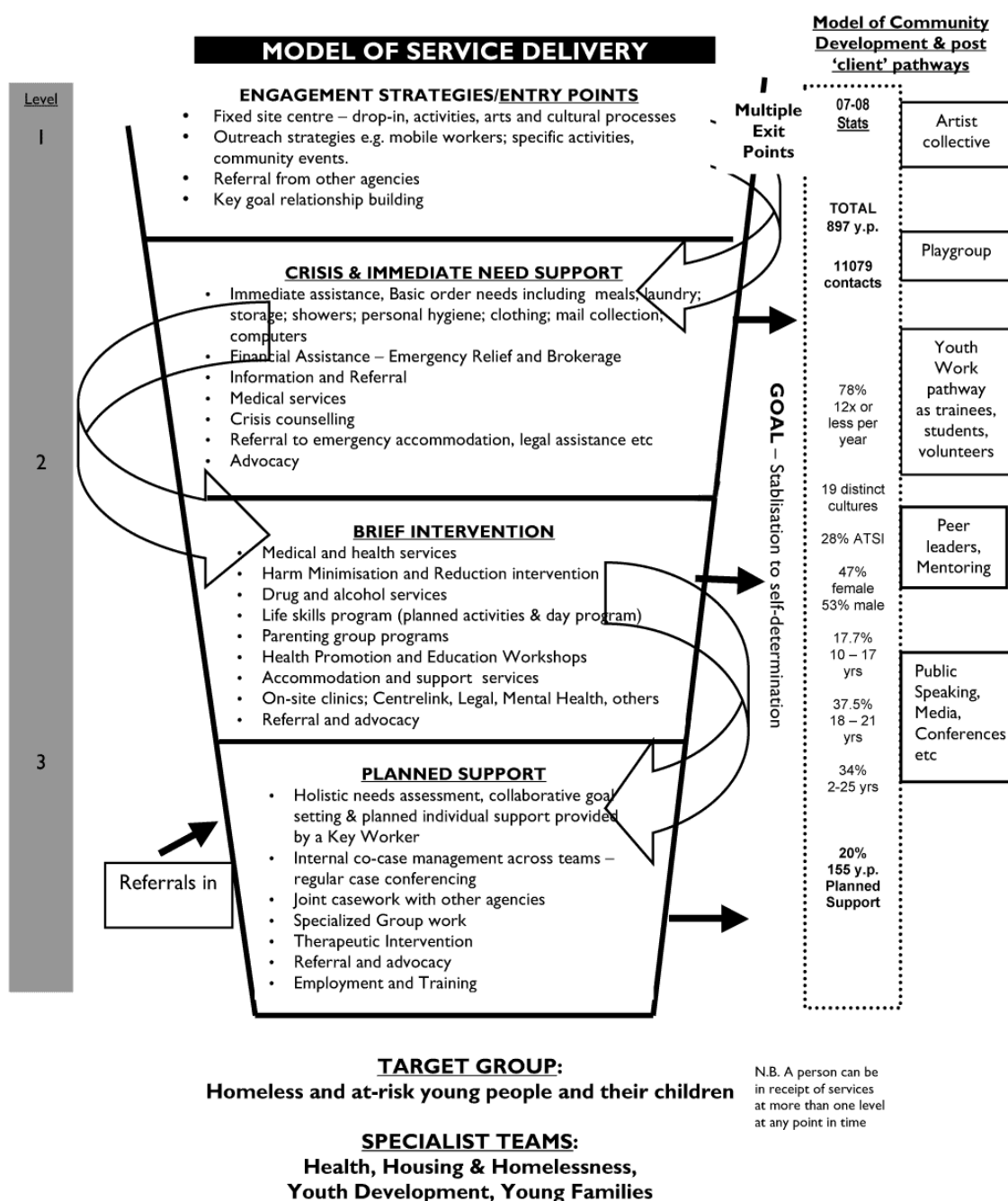
1. **Housing and Homelessness** - drop in services that provide showers, a laundry, food, mail collection, storage for belongings, computers and phones, and a program of activities; access to emergency assistance for housing and transport fares; a transitional housing program and housing support;
2. **Health** - a specialist youth medical clinic that includes a doctor and nurse; access to drug intervention workers who provide treatment, education and support for illicit substance use/abuse; a needle and syringe exchange program; an on-site mental health outreach clinic; health education and promotion activities; intensive personal support and counselling;

3. **Education** – Youth Connections program to support young people to return to, or continue with education. Includes one on one support, liaison with families, schools and other agencies, referral to specialist services and numeracy and literacy tutoring;
4. **Employment and Training** - on-site assistance from Centrelink, resource development projects, and an employment and training program;
5. **Youth Development** - legal and court support from a visiting Homeless Person Legal Clinic that includes a weekly clinic at the Diversion Court; a crime prevention program; public space based outreach services; sport activities and arts/recreational programs and opportunities; community cultural development projects; information, advice, support and advocacy across a range of issues;
6. **Young Families** - a range of parent support services for young families and young women that includes intensive support; parenting groups; peer education programs.⁹

In addition two more teams – Administration and Executive Management – ensure the completion of all other duties necessary for the management of the organisation, strategic guidance, research activities and alignment of services towards achievement of overall goals of the initiative. Brechman-Tuissant & Kogler (2010) suggest that the broad range of services can be best thought of as falling within four categories of intervention, based also in the service delivery model of BYS:

- Engagement strategies/entry points;
- Crisis and immediate support;
- Brief interventions;
- Planned support.

⁹ The author has provided a brief description of the activities, while recognising that there may be additional services offered by BYS.



The integrated service delivery model of BYS combines a focus on the levels of engagement with young people and the spectrum of interventions required to facilitate their ongoing development (see the Service Delivery Model diagram). There are three levels of service delivery within the model. Movement of service users between different levels of engagement is not linear. Rather young people move across them depending on their circumstances and needs.

Levels of Engagement

Level One – Initial Access

This is where the young person makes initial contact with the services. There are different entry points such as drop-in, through or as a result of outreach, project work, phone contact or returning service users after a period of absence.

BYS puts a great emphasis on this phase by trying to create a strong connection with young people, by providing adequate information about the service, offering a sense of belonging, as well as a safe and welcoming space for them.

By building a relationship, workers start introducing young people to the services available based on an initial understanding and assessment of their needs and immediate situation. When necessary they are introduced to crisis support and interventional services while work for further referrals to other agencies is initiated.

Level Two – Service Provision

The young person is engaged with a service according to the immediate needs, such as housing or health, while an ongoing assessment of their needs continues. The aim is to identify whether the initial response was appropriate and what other needs should be addressed. At this stage, preparatory work for an action plan may start when necessary to facilitate their transition to the third level. In addition, level two involves a follow up process for young people who have received BYS services, but are no longer engaged.

Level Three – Planned Support

Service users enter a continuous relationship with a key worker. Together they develop a case [management] plan which involves setting goals for a longer period of time and periodical and ongoing assessment of young person's progress. It is common during this phase that a multi-dimensional approach is applied in which regular contacts and update is conducted with workers from BYS and other organisations involved in service provision.

Spectrum of Interventions

The wide range of services provided aim to address the varied needs and components of young people's lives:

Drop-in: Every day from 9-12 pm and then 1-4 pm (except Thursday morning). Initial contact point and provision of basic needs – food, storage, showers, laundry, computers, phone, mail collection.

Drop-In Outreach - A number of external services visit the drop in to add to the range of services available to young people at BYS. This is regulated through formalised agreements (MoUs) and includes Centrelink, Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT), a private Psychologist, with QPILCH¹⁰ Legal Clinic and SPER¹¹ currently being finalised.

Public Space Outreach - Outreach workers visit public places in the inner city area that are frequented by homeless young people. They provide information about available services, access to emergency

¹⁰ Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House Incorporated

¹¹ State Penalties Enforcement Registry - Queensland

accommodation, food and other essentials, as well as follow-up support to address housing, drug use, health, income support and any other issues affecting young people on the streets.

Activities and Community Events - A range of recreational and diversionary activities, though lack of sustainable resources may affect consistency. Mostly focused in sport and healthy life-style activities. Young people and communities are supported to organise and manage these events.

Structured programs and activities

Health Promotion & Life Skills - A structured program of workshops and programs run across the week, with the purpose of up skilling young people around all aspects of their lives¹² including a weekly cooking program, a weekly young parents group, specialist parenting groups and a range of other education sessions on topics such as housing, the law, rights and other issues.

Education, Training & Employment – implicit learning activities incorporated in every aspect of service delivery, as part of sustainable development of individual young people. An internal accredited Training and Employment Program is provided while relationships with education and training providers are fosters continually.

Community Arts – A crucial component in BYS practice framework, it is delivered in collaboration with art organisations, young people and support workers.

Resource Development – A number of resources are developed for and with young people through Community Cultural Development Practices.

Health Services – A free of charge health clinic staffed by a Registered Nurse Tuesday – Friday, GP's Monday and Friday afternoons from 1.00 pm to 4.00 pm and a Psychologist Tuesdays. Services include medical services, sexual health care, health screening, vaccinations, mental health care plans as well as emergency responses to overdoses and self-harm.

Drug Intervention – Two full-time and one part-time specialist Drug Intervention Workers help young people through crisis, individual and support group work. The team has close relationships with other similar programs in Brisbane and the country.

Community Education – Beyond what is mentioned above, education programs around sexual health, HIV/AIDS, Hep. C, and drug use are offered for youth workers and communities on request.

Case Management/Planned Support - Young people are supported intensively to achieve their goals and become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent to self-determine their own lives. A strong commitment to professional supervision and development ensures that staff receive internal individual supervision and monthly team professional development.

Regular Practice Review and Planned Support meetings are conducted to support workers to reflect on and improve their practice, as well as to ensure that young people's support needs are being addressed. All support workers document their work in an electronic case management system to ensure accountability to young people, the organisation and funding bodies. The system is accessible to young people to monitor their achievements and record their feedback about the services that they use.

Support and Advocacy Services - A support worker is available to assist young people every day from 9.00 am to 4.00 pm. Workers will advocate on behalf of young people with hospitals, specialist health services, Centrelink, and other government and community services when required.

Community Development – BYS works strongly within the local Fortitude Valley networks to ensure the voices of young people are considered and valued. It aims to connect communities from different

¹² BYS has recently trade-marked its model of health promotion 'Spin for ya Health' which was just recognised as a best practice process with vulnerable target groups. 'Spin' runs at least fortnightly around a wide variety of health related topics.

geographical areas and enable representation of 'young people' politically and in other broad areas of the institutional and social spectrum.

Research and Development – Activities include regular in-house research such as the biannual Drug Survey. Whenever funding allows, BYC conducts different research activities based on tangible needs of the organisation and/or the youth service sector. It has welcomed a number of institutions which have utilised BYC as a research site, while collaborating in numerous government and not-for-profit research and sector development initiatives. Students are invited to complete their field placements and internships encouraged.

Systemic Advocacy – BYC participates in a number of networks, forums and sector meetings.

Main Players in the Initiative

BYC is governed by an Executive Board. The management of the organisation is conducted by the Management Committee – responsible for the overall strategic direction – and an Executive Management Team that assumes responsibility for organisational operation. The latter consists of three Executive Managers responsible respectively for Programs, Finance and Partnerships and reports to the Management Committee monthly.

'Our Stakeholders' – BYC Strategic Plan 2009-2011 (2009: 5)



BYC is committed to undertake periodic and structured processes of review to ensure that their services are aligned with the vision, values and hopes for the agency¹³. Their strategic plan for 2009-2011¹⁴, reflected the need to consolidate their services to achieve a better level of strength and sustainability, as well as minimise the gaps for service users. Five main goals were identified in that document:

1. Strengthen existing services and reduce service gaps through effective and evidenced based service delivery;
2. Facilitate processes for young people to be involved within the organisation beyond being service consumers;
3. Secure appropriately designed and long-term premises for all of BYC programs;
4. Maximise our commitment to building a strong and inclusive workplace/culture through the implementation of a Workforce Development Strategy;
5. Influence key stake holders to enhance service development outcomes and influence social policy for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

¹³ BYC has an experience of contracting external consultants and research companies to develop strategic and other important documents.

¹⁴ This is the latest available Strategic Document available online.

Clear indicators were designed in order to measure the achievement of these goals (KPIs).

Funding

BYS currently receives core recurrent funding from 6 programs. The Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing funds:

- The National Illicit Drug Strategy for a Drug Intervention Team; and
- Funding for the provision of Emergency Relief.

Department of Communities funds:

- Supported Accommodation Assistance Program for drop in, outreach, case work, housing services and Intensive Parenting (early Intervention) Programs;
- Youth Development for diversion from crime and facilitation of personal skill enhancement;
- Family Support Program for young pregnant and parenting women and men. Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program for a clinical health treatment service and sexual health education.

Queensland Health funds:

- Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs fund a Specialist Youth Drug Intervention Worker

In addition, BYS receives non-recurrent funding from:

- Department of Communities under the Building Links and National Youth Week Initiatives;
- Jupiter's Casino Community Benefit Fund and Gambling Community Benefit Fund for renovations, upgrade of premises and vehicle replacement;
- Brisbane City Council for Outreach Support, Indoor Cricket and Brokerage;
- Queensland Health for Dual Diagnosis Survey report and re-design project;
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing:
 - Under National Insurance Disability Scheme for a Dual Diagnosis Health Project; and
 - Under the Day to Day Living Program for individualised support to young people with a dual diagnosis and a Clinical Drug and Alcohol Initiative.

The organisation has developed partnerships with numerous corporate, business and community supporters. They range from business enterprises, banking and legal institutions to various sport, community and academic organisations.

In order to ensure the continuation and, whenever possible, expansion of their services, BYS has established a model of fundraising and donations. During this year, the organisations have moved to new premises which underwent full renovation to provide appropriate settings for youth focused services delivery. In two other locations, the organisation manages the Centre for Young Families and the Centre for Young Women.

Comments

BYS is a large structure able to provide a range of services for young people. This has allowed the organisation to become one of the main service providers for youth in inner-city Brisbane. Their model of governance provides for clear administrative roles between different sections while aiming at a common goal – improving and increasing service delivery for young people. Being able to receive funding from Federal and State governments, BYS has worked to maintain a level of consistency in service provision

while continuously improving service quality. Partnerships and financial support from a wide range of community and business add more security in a long term commitment to their role in the youth community.

The combination of drop-in and outreach with a range of structured programs has facilitated BYS's strong presence in the community while being able to provide immediate support for those young people in need. Additional cultural, art and education activities ensure that young people stay engaged in a continuous way, while case management ensures that young people are helped through planned support.

BYS has gone under major changes in the last few years; largely due to a commitment to periodically review their work. Issues and lessons learnt identified through research and evaluation activities have provided the basis for the recent structural changes. The model may not be easily replicated, however, some of the features such as the successful combination of outreach/drop-in with youth focused structured programs may be useful in the ACT context.

3. Mapping Current Approaches to Youth Engagement in the ACT

The purpose of this component of the research is to assess the variations in how youth engagement is currently understood by service providers, and how youth engagement services funded under the CYFS Program are being implemented. Interviews with service providers focussed on issues relating to:

- Perspectives on youth engagement;
- Youth engagement service models;
- Outreach activities and intended outcomes;
- Linkages with family support and other relevant services;
- Strengths and limitations of youth engagement services.

Each of these points is outlined in a separate section in the report below.

All the services that provide youth engagement services, funded by CYFSP, were invited to participate in the research activities. Based on recommendations from Youth Coalition and Families ACT, other services outside the CYFSP also participated. The aim was to provide a broader view of current youth engagement and outreach activities in the ACT, to collect additional information around best practice and suggestions for the future in this area of work. Ultimately, 13 services provided input.¹⁵

Data was collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with service providers of youth engagement services. The interview guides for these interviews were developed in consultation with the Youth Coalition and Families ACT.

Potential interviewees were sent written information about the research activities prior to their participation. A consent form was signed prior to the interview process.

All but two interviews were audio-recorded, with permission of participants given in those cases, and detailed notes made from these tapes. Interview data was coded using Nvivo (qualitative research data analysis software).

¹⁵ Please see Appendix 1 for a list of services.

3.1 Service providers' perspective on youth engagement

Why the need for youth engagement? – it facilitates young people's access to social services from which they are likely to be otherwise excluded.

The research found that youth engagement activities are considered pivotal to reaching young people in general and especially those with high level needs. For those interviewed, youth engagement aims to facilitate young people's access to a specific service, ensuring their regular and active participation in activities organised by the service, and those youth becoming promoters of the service to other young people. The main principle involves creating opportunities for young people to develop skills and to have better opportunities in the future, tailoring activities according to their needs and receiving their feedback.

Participants identified two main methods of engaging young people:

- **Working directly in facilitating the engagement of young people with structured youth focused and family support programs.** These programs are designed to target a specific group, such as homeless youth, young mothers and parents, youth in need of mental and primary health services, young people already or at risk of becoming disengaged from education, young carers and those out of home care.
- **Initiating and coordinating wider and across sector engagement activities.** These activities can take place in schools and across services, organisations and youth contexts such as collaboration with other youth focused programs, promotion of their services in major events such as National Youth Week, organising activities that primarily involve young people (such as music nights, initiatives for social change, etc), assertive outreach activities and youth engagement activities across different services in a given organisation.

Engagement strategies are most effective when young people are involved from the outset

Participants placed a great emphasis in involving young people in the process of designing as well as managing youth focused services. Youth engagement and other focused services continuously collect information from young people about the activities in which they would like to participate. In the recent past, a number of forums were operating based at youth centres with exclusive participation of young people and facilitation from practitioners. These structures helped service providers to better understand the needs of young people in respective communities, and to use information collected to plan activities while ensuring that young people had a strong say in the types of services from which they would benefit most.

Members of forums were service users or young people from communities who had been engaged with one or more youth services. Recently, the number of forums has decreased dramatically due to the changes that occurred last year in the service delivery model with a loss of centre funding and resultant reduction in the operating hours of youth centres. This has contributed to a low level of attendance of young people at drop-in. Some services are exploring the possibility of re-starting these forums, incorporating changes to their structure and redefining their roles from lessons learnt from their past operation.

However, it is important to note that for those forums that still exist, there have been attempts to re-structure their constituency of these by inviting youth members outside the previous 'service engaged' eligibility requirements. The idea is to have a better understanding of the barriers that discourage young people as a group, regardless of their specific needs, from obtaining information about and engaging with a

given service or program. It is anticipated that this approach will also provide a better view of the need for early intervention and prevention activities to help young people deal with their problems prior to worsening of their circumstances.

Information collected in such forums helps practitioners to identify and enhance protective factors for youth such as social connections with adults and peers, a sense of belonging and fitting in community and school environments, and recognition and acknowledgment of individual skills and achievements. Members are encouraged to participate through provision of training courses and are supported to engage in volunteer roles and represent services at a number of community events.

The two key challenges to engagement with youth are: 1. Making that engagement sustainable; and 2. Identifying and targeting more marginalised young people

The data collected reveals that youth engagement can be challenging. It was frequently reported that engaging with young people, especially in the mid to long term, is more difficult than with other social groups. Young people find it difficult to engage with a number of different practitioners and services, deal with the forms and procedures required in the process and prefer to maintain a strong relationship with their first point of contact. Issues of stigma and confidentiality are also very important for young people, and they may react immediately by withdrawal from services if they feel forced to share information or expose their problems.

Practitioners said that early contact with young people tends to be about the development of trust rather than demand for services and this requires a safe, friendly environment. Typically it may take several contacts to enable open communication with a young person. However once trust is given it is essential to provide immediate response to his/her needs to establish a sustainable relationship with the practitioner and/or service.

b. Identifying marginalised young people who have dropped out of school and are more in need of services

Almost all services reported that more needs to be done in reaching and engaging with vulnerable young people, since they tend to be the most isolated, hardest to track and least willing to participate in programs. The most difficult group to involve tends to be those who have disengaged from the education system. Services recognise this as an issue requiring attention.

Youth Engagement services within CYFSP

Most services use two key approaches to deliver engagement activities: 1) Structured/non-structured drop-in in youth centres or other youth friendly spaces; and 2) Outreach activities.

Prior to the implementation of the CYFSP, drop-in was the main model used to make initial contact with young people. With the closure of some youth centres in the ACT and the limited operating hours in others such as Woden and Tuggeranong, workers noted that they are facing difficulties in designing and implementing new strategies for youth engagement. On the other hand, even those centres that are open for a number of hours during the week are experiencing low levels of participation.

Service providers reported that there is widespread belief among young people that youth centres have closed, and no activities are provided anymore in these spaces. For some workers this is a discouraging prospect for the future, since it has taken them a long time to establish this channel of engagement and

current approaches used are not providing desired results in terms of linking young people with services and programs. More importantly, services suggested that this has resulted in losing the connection with some of the most vulnerable young people with high needs, especially young girls, for whom the centre was often a safe place.

Following the loss of anchored services, workers have explored and tried a number of alternate engagement strategies. Practitioners recognise that working closely with schools through youth support workers, nurses and teachers has opened constructive avenues for engaging with young people. Although, the level of collaboration may vary from one school to the other, there was a unanimous agreement that expanding this area of work will produce good results and it remains one of the priorities of youth engagement services.

In addition, more contact and information sharing with agencies and services across the sector would facilitate an improved referral system for young people. Service providers would like to see a more responsive model for young people that would more quickly address their needs, especially in the areas of homelessness and mental health. While, outreach activities are delivered assuming that they will result in linking young people with a variety of youth focused services, practitioners are not clear whether the range of existing services is sufficient to adequately respond to young people's needs.

The majority of practitioners felt that not being able to provide immediate services after the initial contact can lead to adverse outcomes for young people and can undermine the critical 'trusting' relationship established during early stages of engagement. As some service providers noted 'young people approach and stay engaged with a service when they see you can really help and provide what they need and what you promise is delivered'. Services report that collaboration and joint work intended to be generated by the changes in the service delivery framework, are not providing the necessary support for youth engagement services. Practitioners noted that a defined structure to support referrals for young people is not yet in place.

Most referrals are currently facilitated through individual workers' networks. Practitioners felt that often when other additional services are required, the information available to them was limited. Quite often, when services are not available workers will try to prolong their engagement with young people, hoping to provide some kind of relief and support. At the same time, while they are aware that this may overstretch, or not be an efficient use of their resources, maintaining this relationship with young people is considered crucial in keeping in touch with them, suggesting early intervention/prevention actions and avoid escalation of their issues.

Data collected suggests that Youth Engagement services can increase their impact by becoming the outreach 'wing' of an integrated service delivery model. Participants noted that such a model would work very well for young people. The positive experience of 'The Junction', as a holistic health service for young people, as well as other youth engagement services co-located with a number of additional programs (as in the case of YWCA Lanyon Youth Centre, Belconnen Community Service, and the different services co-located in Civic Club 12-25 or the proximity of Gungan-Gulwan with PCYC and Erindale College), suggests that bringing a number of youth focused programs together would facilitate wrap-around service provision for young people.

For practitioners, having more services co-located or in close proximity will also help with referrals and sharing information between services. An important aspect of this arrangement is to have a carefully designed structure, both in terms of easy access for young people and a youth friendly, safe space and confidential setting for young people. The model of 'headspace' (Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation) suggests that having a one stop shop service where young people can access a range of services, do not feel stigmatised and can be directly referred to more specialised services if needed, provides some valuable lessons when designing services for young people.

Working in youth engagement as well as in other youth focused services, requires a range of complex skills and significant experience. As one practitioner noted:

'In this position you basically do everything – initial contact and assessment, counselling, mentoring, support and life coaching. You can be a teacher, a facilitator, one who organises and facilitates group work - you need to do all of these, sometimes at the same time'.

Youth workers require substantial experience in order to be able to connect constructively with young people. While qualifications were considered very important by participants in the research, they suggested that more needs to be done in the ACT to recognise this specific skillset. For their part agencies need to provide adequate support for new workers in undertaking roles in youth services. As one worker suggested 'we should not be left to sort things out on our own, we need to be helped properly throughout our work'. Stakeholders suggested that a considerable number of experienced youth workers left the sector during the past year, due to the changes occurring in the sector. The trend is continuing, leaving this area of service delivery in need of more skilled workers.

3.2. Youth Engagement Service Models

Youth Engagement services funded under the CYFSP have tried to restructure their models according to the service principles and requirements of the Service Delivery Framework. From research activities, it is obvious that these programs are attempting to find the best ways to ensure a high rate of engagement success with young people by trying different approaches. While there are some similarities between the different services approaches, each of them is trying to adapt their model according to their capacities and requirements of young people who participate in these activities.

Service Models

YENGAGE – Northside Community Service and Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn

The program provides drop-in at Civic Club building twice a week. On Thursdays from 3-6pm young people participate in the Road Ready course. On Fridays from 3-7 pm the program offers a cooked meal with the assistance of young people from Radford College and uses the sessions to engage and talk to young people, providing necessary information and assistance if help is needed to access certain services.

In addition, drop-in operates on Tuesday from 3-6 pm by the outreach support workers from The Junction (located in the same building). Both programs, YENGAGE and The Junction try to support each other in running the drop-in sessions resulting in a better ratio of workers to clients as well as increased support for young people in need. The program offers food whenever possible and with the exception of Road Ready, is not structured around other specific programs. A number of facilities are provided on the premises such as

computers, free internet, pool and other games, and the popular outdoor skate-park adjoining to the building. A band night is organised once a month from 5.10- 10.30 pm.

The age group of young people attending the drop-in is predominantly between 12-21 years, with a few older service users. The participation rate is stable with each session having 10-20 participants. Most of them are based in Civic, with many living in housing estates in the surrounding area. Occasionally young people from Southside come to the drop-in, although they are not regular participants and usually come along with their peers.

Y.ENGAGE run a number of targeted outreach activities both in the inner north and Gungahlin regions of the ACT. This includes running a weekly breakfast program at CIT in Gungahlin and attending a weekly breakfast program at the Gold Creek School. Y.ENGAGE have also run outreach activities at the Gungahlin skate park, where they provided a free BBQ and cold drinks as well as service information and referrals if required. Y.ENGAGE also conduct a 'youth beat' both in Civic and Gungahlin. The youth beat involves walking a regular 'beat' of hot spots where young people congregate. The youth beat increases the visibility of the program outside of regular organised activities. Y.ENGAGE ensure that both the Gungahlin and the Inner North regions receive equal amounts of outreach service delivery, and often refer young people engaged with during outreach activities to the drop-in space in Civic to further discuss their issues and problems.

More opportunities for collaboration with schools have been explored, by establishing contacts with youth support and Youth Connection workers in schools. YEngage contributes to coordinating holiday programs with other services such as Youth Connections and distributes that information to young people. In addition, they participate in community events as a way of providing outreach activities and when required they offer one-off support for young people who are experiencing problems with housing, employment, Centrelink, etc. The program is able to make immediate referrals to other programs co-located in the same building such as Youth Connections and the Junction, however they would like to see the same level of response from services in other locations.

Woden Youth Centre

The centre is opened for drop-in Thursdays from 2.30pm – 5.30 pm and Fridays from 2.00 – 7.00 pm. Band nights are organised fortnightly on Fridays (as an extension of the drop-in until 10.00pm) and Saturdays from 6.00 – 10.00pm. The Café at the centre operates during opening hours. The drop-in is not structured, although workers plan and implement a number of recreational or discussion activities for young people to participate and engage in. A barbeque is organised weekly on the premises and a Free Meal Friday session is provided at 5.30 by the Southern Cross Club. The program is aiming to collaborate with the Smith Family (located in relatively close proximity) to set-up a larger food bank.

The age group of young people attending the drop-in is predominantly between 12-21 years old. The participation rate fluctuates depending on different factors related to young people's lives.

Outreach activities include the youth engagement team going to shopping centres and other places where young people congregate such as skate parks. Practitioners talk with them about services and activities available and try to provide information in engaging and accessing services. The program is establishing contacts with youth refuges as a way of providing immediate support for young people in need of accommodation as well as collecting information from service users around activities and programs they

would like to attend and participate in. In addition, the Youth Engagement team is trying to collaborate with schools mostly in the Woden area to distribute information at school assemblies and/or other gatherings for young people.

Belconnen Community Services

Belconnen Community Service (BCS) Youth Engagement program (formerly known as U-Turn Youth Services) is designed based on findings from a consultation process prior to the changes in service delivery across the sector. The area used for youth activities has been renovated and reopened as the 'Corner@BCS'. It is used as open access/drop-in space three times a week. On Mondays there is a Breakfast Club from 10am – 12pm, followed by recreational and living skills sessions on Tuesday and Thursday from 2pm - 6pm. Road Ready is provided on Thursdays from 4.00-6.00 pm.

The Corner has been designed to provide young people aged 12-25 with a safe place to socialise with their peers, get something to eat, and learn about what services are available services to meet their needs. Advocacy and referral are part of the engagement process. Young people can participate in a number of recreational activities while other facilities such as washing machine, refreshments, internet access are available at no cost. The participation rate is around 10-15 people per session with indications that this will increase in the future.

Every Friday and Saturday, the service operates an assertive outreach program. The Youth Engagement team takes a newly renovated caravan out to a number of 'hot-spots' to engage with young people. Apart from the mobility that the vehicle provides for workers, they are able to offer a mix of information, referral, craft and art, music and dance activities. The outreach service also provides small workshops, limited food, media, outdoor movies and sport activities. This service covers the areas of Belconnen, Kippax Centre and Charnwood, with outreach activities aiming to initiate contacts and relationships with young people, and progress guiding them to additional services.

Other outreach activities include participating in school events where the service promotes and distributes information for young people around activities at the Corner and youth focused services and attempts to collect information that helps the program to improve their structure and coverage.

The Youth Engagement team reinforced the importance of providing a range of services, in a similar way to a one stop shop model for young people. However, they do provide referrals or additional information to young people who need a specialised service not covered by BCS.

The service includes young people in designing and managing services. A Youth Council was in place before the re-structuring of U-Turn and was heavily involved in providing feedback around service delivery including suggestions for improvement. It is not active at the moment due to changes that occurred in services; however, groups are frequently conducted with participants to generate ideas for periods such as school holidays.

Directions ACT provide their services at the Corner as part of the Needle and Syringe Program in which BCS is a Secondary Supplier with a focus on young people.

Gugan-Gulwan Youth Engagement Activities

Based on experience accumulated over a number of years, the organisation aims to apply youth engagement across all its services. Young people can attend drop-in twice a week from 10.00am – 3.00 pm. The service does not apply restrictions to the participants, although its focus is on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The centre draws a high number of participants in part due to its proximity with the Erindale College and Shopping Centre and the nearby skate park. At the same time it has established a reputation over the years for providing a welcoming and safe space for young people.

Most of the drop-in activities are not structured with young people coming to the centre to spend some time in a safe and youth appropriate setting. After initial contact participants may engage in a number of structured programs such as the Music Program, Drug and Alcohol Program, Young Men's Group, Young Women's Group, and Reconnect Service focused primarily on Indigenous people.

A limited amount of food is provided whenever resources and donations allow. Gugan-Gulwan is exploring opportunities to increase the amount of food and other items for immediate needs of young people, while the refurbishment of premises is a priority that the organisation would like to undertake as soon as sufficient additional funding is acquired.

Since its CYFSP funded Youth Engagement activities are provided throughout the ACT, Gugan-Gulwan is operating a van that facilitates the Street Beat Program. This is a night outreach program aimed at Under 18's to reduce young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's binge drinking and involvement with the juvenile justice system, and to promote Sexual & Reproductive Health and Smoking Cessation. The van operates twice a week in winter on Fridays and Saturdays, while Thursdays from 6 – 11 pm are added during summer. It visits a number of places where young people congregate during late hours in different areas of the ACT, including Queanbeyan. Workers wear distinctive blue jackets and shirts and they have become a familiar sight for young people. Workers engage with young people, provide information around issues of offending, alcohol abuse and healthy reproductive behaviour while promote a range of youth and family service for people in need.

Communities@Work Youth Engagement Service

Communities@Work Youth Engagement Service is based at the Tuggeranong Youth Centre and offers a number of structured and non-structured activities. The Journey is a graffiti art program that encourages south-side young people to express themselves creatively through the medium of Contemporary Mural Art design and painting in a safe, structured and supportive environment. This initiative is run in partnership with the Contemporary Art Space on Mondays from 4-6pm.

Road Ready is provided on Tuesdays at the same time. The course is delivered through a flexible approach with workshops tailored to meet each young person's needs. This will be ongoing so if a young person misses out on a planned session they will be able to complete it at a later time, at their own pace. On Wednesdays and Thursdays workers from Communities@Work and YWCA (Lanyon Youth Centre) team up to facilitate the drop-in and programs in the respective centres, while on Fridays both teams conduct outreach activities around the shops at Tuggeranong or other place where young people meet such as the Gazebo.

The Youth Engagement worker conducts a number of activities in local high schools and colleges, in close collaboration with Youth Support and Youth Connection workers with the aim of engaging young people, especially those with high needs, promoting their programs and delivering joint courses.

YWCA Youth Engagement – Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre

The Youth Engagement worker at Lanyon provides a range of activities in the Tuggeranong area to engage with young people aged 12-25 years and link vulnerable young people into relevant services. Activities are run in collaboration with the Tuggeranong youth engagement worker from Communities@Work. They work together to engage young people in a range of structured programs offered at the Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre. This is an example of utilising engagement as a way of attracting young people to a carefully designed program of activities that support and improve their development.

The centre has continued to provide a much needed venue for a range of sporting, cultural and special interest groups to run programs that promote participation for people in the Lanyon Valley. The premises have recently undergone through a significant renovation and extension with the support of the Community Services Directorate,. The extension provides space for a food hub and a training café. The existing building received a number of upgrades including a new heating system and new lighting. The skate park has been relocated to the front of the building and the building has been surrounded by a secure perimeter fence.

These changes have resulted in safer and more appropriate settings for young people. Members of staff have promoted the renovated centre in the community inviting young people and their parents to come and visit and get a feeling of the environment. The feedback has been very positive and has resulted in a dramatic increase in participation for young people. As one of the workers noted, ‘now this is place for every young person – it is a place for social connection, individual development and for which young people are developing a sense of belonging’.

Almost all of the programs offered at the centre are structured. They run during four days of the week, making this centre the only one with such a high rate of structured drop-in in the ACT. When young people are not attending a program but would like to spend time in the venue, a number of activities are available such as free internet and computers, a pool table, a large selection of books, DVDs and CDs. A number of youth workers are available to talk to young people at any time and provide advice and facilitate referrals when needed.

Structured Programs

YOUTH CONNECTIONS - The YWCA of Canberra Youth Connections Officer works in the Tuggeranong region and is based at the Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre. The Youth Connections Officer provides intensive case management for individual young people as well as running group programs in Erindale College (Pictures of Life Program) and Wanniasa High School (Step-up, Give back Program)¹⁶. Last year the program conducted several successful groups including a photography group in conjunction with Photo Access. The program will be continued with additional activities such as making short films. It usually runs on Friday mornings from 9-12 pm. A number of DIY workshops supported by local companies, allow young

¹⁶ More information about this programs can be found at http://www.ywca-canberra.org.au/children_community_services/lanyon_youth_centre

people to learn vocational skills and help the community. Opportunities are explored for new activities, focusing on vocational skills that would provide opportunities for young people to follow a career path. The program has developed strong links with Erindale College and Wanniasa High School and is currently collecting information from students around additional vocational activities in which they would like to participate. The Youth Connection worker is exploring the opportunities to organise future activities in the centre.

LANYON CLAIM LITERACY Project - The Project is a partnership between the YWCA of Canberra, Lanyon High School and U-Can Read University of Canberra. The identification of the need for such a project was through the implementation of the Youth Connections program and other programs delivered at the Lanyon Youth Centre. The lack of necessary literacy skills was proving to be a significant barrier to engage with education and training for some of the young people.

The project has been funded through the ACT Education and Training Directorate Youth Attainment Grants. Members of staff at the Centre identify during drop-in or other programs a cohort of young people who have significant literacy skills deficits to constitute a considerable barrier to their engagement with education and training. Then with the endorsement of Lanyon High School ten students in years seven and eight are selected to participate in a twenty week project. Participants attend Lanyon Youth Centre twice a week for two hours throughout the Project and engage in an intensive literacy program with the support of individual trained tutors. The project has been an outstanding success with all participants improving their literacy skills and with very positive feedback from the young people, their parents and school staff. The program is currently running in 2013 on a Tuesday morning and Wednesday afternoon with more opportunities being explored to expand it in the future.

THE STEPS Program – An early intervention program which aims to educate, support and empower young pregnant and parenting women (aged 13-25) to develop skills to improve their overall health and that of their children. Positive parenting is a core element of the program which has incorporated the *Circle of Security Parenting Program*. The program runs twice a year for seventeen weeks at the centre on Tuesdays from 9 am – 3 pm, with flexible hours for participants where needed. It incorporates presentations from Nutrition Australia, the Cancer Council, MACH nurses and The Junction to name a few. STEPS Program is supported by ACT Health, ACT Government.

The program is offered to young women throughout Canberra, and participants are welcome to join at any point throughout the program. The program also provides additional support through a case management model. Transport is provided where necessary. The cost is free. Lunch and child care on the premises are also provided free of charge.

Y-ASPIRE – A young women's leadership program for school girls in years 7 and 8. It focuses on helping young women build a strong connection to schooling through an integrated learning program. Building skills and confidence for young women to transit from high school, supporting them to identify and achieve their future goals and engage them in activities that help them to develop an awareness of themselves are main component of the program. Topics covered during the program include identity, skill building, body and self-confidence, relationships and future careers.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT – The new therapeutic program, funded under the CYFSP, based in Watson provides outreach counselling to children and young people in a newly renovated counselling room in the centre. The counsellor is available on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to work with clients and their families.

LANYON FOOD HUB – Initiated last year, the Food Hub is now an extension of the centre. It is run through the Emergency Relief funding that the YWCA of Canberra receives from the Commonwealth Government, free food from Lanyon Woolworths and donations from the Yellow Van (previously OzHarvest). Emergency Relief funding is used to purchase food from the Food Bank in Sydney and this allows the funding to go much further compared to purchasing food from the major supermarket retailers.

The Food Hub is run by a team of volunteers, many from the Argyle Housing complex located adjacent to the Community Centre. Every Thursday from 9.30 am – 1.00 pm individuals or families in need can collect food parcels or items from the Food Hub. More specifically for young people, an afternoon tea is provide every day and for those more in need of food, workers make the necessary arrangements based on the information received from participants.

FOOD STUFF – The newly renovated training café is used to deliver a cooking program for young people. There they learn basic and advanced skills in cooking with a focus on a healthy diet. Over 10 participants attend the program that runs for more than ten weeks on Tuesday afternoon from 3.00 – 5.30 pm. The program attracts both sexes. At the end of the course, they prepare and serve cooked meals for 20 guests and receive a certificate of recognition.

Overall, the Lanyon Youth Centre is working towards delivering fully structured programs for young people. It has been transformed into a popular place for young people and members of community and a hub where they can socialise with each other, learn new skills and get information about additional services when needed. The 'isolated' status of Lanyon compared to the rest of Canberra and the ACT, has proved to be a strong factor in attaining a high rate of youth participation both in terms of attendance at the centre as well as involvement in the programs delivered.

3.3 Outreach Activities and Intended Outcomes

Although there are similarities in the outreach models that Youth Engagement services implement, each has developed specific activities based on their capacities, facilities available, area of coverage and demand from service users and partners. The following categories can be used to describe the range of activities currently provided by Youth Engagement services. A small amount of information from other youth focused services participating in the research is also included.

Street Outreach Activities –are conducted usually after business hours on Fridays and Saturdays in places where young people congregate. Two services utilise a van to facilitate initial contact with young people, allowing workers to provide a range of entertainment activities, small amounts of food or refreshments and high mobility for the team who are able to cover a wide area within a short period of time. Alternately services, visit shopping malls, skate parks and other popular places for young people, where they distribute information and promote other services available in their respective locations. The band nights and evening food delivery/barbeque sessions complement after-hours activities, although they are also considered to be drop-in sessions.

Intended Outcome – Youth Engagement services aim to target young people who may not attend activities during the day, are hard to engage and have little knowledge about services available. Although the primary target is those more in need and at risk, the programs try to provide information to all young people who in return can suggest to their friends and other peers sources of help if their circumstances require.

Outreach Activities in Schools - Each service has developed connections with high schools and colleges in the areas of their regional coverage. Youth Support Workers, Nurses, and Youth Connection workers act as points of contact with Youth Engagement Services. Occasionally teachers, Pastoral Care teams, and, on few occasions, even school management, get involved in the process. Activities mainly include promotion of different services, drop-in activities and youth centres' facilities through presentations to school assemblies or groups of students, distribution of leaflets and face to face interaction with young people. In some cases workers attend the drop-in within schools during breaks or classes. Breakfast Clubs are organised by some services where food is provided as a mean of facilitating engagement.

Intended Outcome – Outreach in schools has a number of objectives. More generally, it aims to promote services, establishing links between schools and community sector and increase the level of understanding among education staff members about what services are available for young people. Youth engagement workers often provide school staff with advice on how to approach and engage young people in need of services. It was frequently noted that referral pathways and the model of service delivery are key areas that would require more information dissemination among professionals working in education institutions.

A second important aspect to the work in schools is early intervention and prevention. Young people who are at risk of becoming disengaged with education are supported by linking them to Youth Connections or programs that feature components of alternative education. Literacy and vocational programs seem to be the most frequently used interventions for this group. For those that are in greater need, case management services and family and emergency relief support are suggested with referral procedures facilitated by workers. The level of collaboration between services and schools varies, with some already having close contacts with two or more schools and others being still in the process of establishing contacts.

For services other than Youth Engagement that provide youth specialised services – health, legal advice, leadership courses and others - schools are the most common place to deliver structured or semi-structured courses and presentations. The sessions are usually organised upon request from school representatives, although services plan their activities in a way that promotes coverage of the ACT as a whole. Nevertheless, demand for the sessions outstrips the capacity of services to deliver them.

Services report a positive outcome from providing learning activities in schools. A considerable number of young people are engaged into more structured service programs. This is especially true for individuals who have attended a number of training/course sessions and have developed some connection and relationship with facilitators/practitioners. Additionally, young people who attend these activities use the information gained to inform their peers where to ask for help if needed. In a context where young people learn about and approach services through 'word of mouth', more training courses in schools, as well as other promotional/engagement activities could be explored through collaboration with education institutions.

Open Access/Drop in activities – Youth Engagement programs use the facilities in Youth Centres for this component. On average, services provide two sessions per week which usually take place from 2-6 pm. For those co-located with other services, an additional session is offered in conjunction with other teams. One service offers a Breakfast Club in the same space.

Drop-in sessions are rarely structured with the exception of Road Ready courses. Computers and free internet, entertainment, art, music and sport activities are available for service users. Food provision, depending on the resources available to services, is a common feature that aims at attracting young people to attend. Skate parks, on site or in close vicinity, are complementary facilities.

Lanyon Youth Centre is the only location that provides fully structured drop-in as well as open access four times a week, most days both in the morning and afternoon. The centre has integrated youth engagement activities with a range of additional programs. While newcomers are welcomed in the drop-in, the common space in the centre is used to provide also a waiting area for participants in between sessions. The daily afternoon tea has become a ritual that ensures a consistent and high level of attendance by young people in the community.

Participation rates vary between services depending on the location, frequency of sessions, number of workers, hours of operation, and provision of resources such as food, bus tickets, phone cards, etc. The temporary closure of some centres together with limited and inconsistent operating hours, have played a major role in this fluctuation. For some services, it has taken a great deal of effort to revive drop-in activities and 'spread the word' that they are still operating. Reports suggest that numbers have not recovered to the level before changes were introduced in the service delivery model.

Intended Outcomes

Workers ensure that open access sessions provide a safe accessible place for young people, where they can spend time building social connections and get support for their needs. The age group is usually 12-21 years, although in some cases older participants may attend. The focus is on those more vulnerable and at risk of becoming so, with workers trying to provide immediate advice, support and facilitate referrals to specialised services.

During drop-in, workers try to engage with newcomers, catch-up with frequent users and see how they are faring and distribute relevant information and advice based on individual needs. Often they help young people with applications, completion of forms, internet searches, phone calls and other needs. Assistance for those in need of emergency support is provided on the spot.

Secondary Outreach Activity

Attendance at Sector Meetings – Youth Engagement teams participate in a range of meetings organised across the sector. This includes sessions organised by all tiers of service provision – primary, secondary and tertiary. More specifically, service providers are regular participants in youth forums organised by Youth Coalition of the ACT.

Intended Outcome - Service providers get information about other youth focused services, promote theirs as well as contributing with ideas around improvement of service delivery. Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with other services, including those that provide case management and group work, is another important purpose of these activities.

3.4. Linkages to Family Support and Other Relevant Services

One of the primary roles of Youth Engagement services funded under the CYFSP is to target young people who are vulnerable and in need (medium to high risk) and who mainstream service providers typically find hard to engage and to link them with services with which can address their needs (CYFSP, 2012:25). This role underpins the work of each service. A number of issues were identified during the research activities which should inform future actions around youth engagement approaches.

Youth Engagement services are using the connections they have with other programs within the same agency and when necessary extend beyond this circle. Participants agreed that it is much easier to engage young service users with a service that operates within the same organisation or consortium and, when applicable, to services co-located in the same building/premise. This allows for a better understanding of service provision between two different programs, good communication between workers as well as providing an opportunity for the young person to maintain contact with the initial engagement worker. However, this collaboration tends not to be regulated by relevant documents and it is carried out in an ad-hoc and on a needs basis.

For service users, quite often the youth engagement worker acts as a point of support for other needs and issues that the client may experience during the course of engagement with a given service. Although this kind of support usually falls within the case management role, workers deem that when required, although not part of their job description and role, they will provide it in order to ensure that clients stay engaged with the service. However, with limited resources available this is putting additional pressure on Youth Engagement workers. They suggest that both their work and young people would benefit from having a case management service attached to youth engagement.

For those youth engagement services that are attached or co-located with other services, the referral process is much easier - both in terms of immediate service provision as well as acting as a one stop shop where young people can access a range of service under one roof or in very close proximity. Furthermore, service providers suggested that increasing the number of specialised services in one given location will bring benefits for young people and services as well.

When referrals are made to external services or agencies, based on the initial assessment from a youth engagement worker, an option or a range of options are presented to the young person. Quite often practitioners offer to get in touch with the service if the service user agrees to that. Participants in the research reported that this process is usually the most difficult one for young people due to the lack of information, waiting times and reluctance to get in touch with other services. The lack of means to do so – telephone, internet access for Centrelink, money for public transport or a vehicle may also affect young people approaching services independently.

It was frequently noted that the current model of centralised intake both for housing and specialised youth services does not provide an easy entry for young people. A major issue faced by service users and sometimes youth engagement workers when making referrals involves the lack of immediate support provision for young people when needed. As one service pointed out, "usually it takes some days for a case to be reviewed which is a long time to wait for a young person" and "you would expect a specialised

support worker to get in touch with the young person or us the next day, and that is not happening at the moment".

For most youth engagement workers, their efforts in establishing a constructive initial contact with a young person during drop-in, but most importantly at outreach, are undermined by limitations in fulfilling immediate needs. Housing was the most frequently mentioned issue, with workers quite often using individual connections to facilitate and speed up the provision of emergency accommodation. The lack of sufficient youth emergency accommodation, definition of homelessness for young people which may prevent them having access to crisis accommodation, lack of appropriate response after business hours or during weekends and changes in the way youth refuges currently operate, were some of the concerns voiced by service providers.

On the other hand, youth engagement teams raised the difficulty of limited services for young people. While the purpose of outreach is to link young people with youth focused services, it is not clear if a range of such services are available in any given region or area of the ACT and at any given time. The outreach activities during Friday and Saturday nights are viewed or intended to target a different group of young people that may not be reached during the day. However, apart from promoting their activities and distributing information for other available programs, workers are not able to make immediate referrals or engage young people with emergency services during those times, due to their business hours. Finally, practitioners were not able to quantify the number of referrals that may have resulted from this type of outreach activities. This suggests that there is no evidence yet that these outreach activities are bringing the expected results.

3.5. Strength and Limitations of Youth Engagement Services

Strengths

Youth Engagement services have detailed activity plans in place. They have a growing understanding of the requirements of service delivery and feel the way they are operating at the moment is consistent with the new changes in the service system.

Outreach activities, especially those conducted in schools, are proving to be an effective way of establishing initial contacts with young people and facilitate their engagement with services. Furthermore, services see great potential in collaboration with school to deliver early intervention and prevention programs.

Services that are co-located with other programs are experiencing a better rate of continuous engagement with young people. This is due to the capacity to provide immediate support and warm referrals for participants as well as maintaining frequent contacts with service users.

Youth Engagement services recognise that more work is required in some areas of the sector to explain the changes in the service delivery system.

Limitations

The funding allocated for Youth Engagement services needs to be reconsidered. With the current resources, teams are struggling to staff even limited operating hours of drop-in sessions while carrying out activities in schools and street outreach.

The work of Youth Engagement services would benefit from the immediate availability of services, such as housing, mental health other relief support.

The current service system makes it difficult for young people to access a service. Centralised intake services must take into consideration changes that facilitate improved assessment procedures which allow a more rapid response to young people's needs. Decisions on operating hours need to take into consideration a more youth friendly approach, both in terms of after hours and weekend services.

The lack of sufficient case management services makes it difficult for youth to access this type of support. Youth Engagement teams would benefit from these kinds of programs being attached to their service. Practitioners suggested that their services should be considered as the outreach arm of a multidisciplinary youth focused program which would be ideally located under one roof.

The limited operating hours of some services drop-in sessions is hampering engagement with young people. Those interviewed during this research suggested that an increase in the opening days and providing drop-in during school hours would increase the intake for some services and ensure a better coverage for young people in need. Drop-in activities in youth friendly settings are seen as a valuable soft-entry point for youth engagement, although there is a need to better structure these activities.

While some progress has been achieved in working together towards a more integrated service model, practitioners suggested that there is a need for more collaboration. Some practitioners believe that parts of the service system in the ACT remain disjointed with programs operating in relative isolation and putting insufficient effort into the collaboration envisaged in the Service Delivery Framework.

Outreach activities are not necessarily reaching those young people most in need. This becomes even more problematic if they are disengaged from education, since any mechanism for tracking them is lost.

The lack of structured programs attached to most of the youth engagement services is limiting their capacity to provide immediate referrals. Positive experiences drawn from the cases studies in this report, as well as contextually from The Junction, YWCA Mura Lanyon Youth Centre and BCS, can be used to review and re-structure the current model of youth focused services. As one participant in the research noted, 'I would like to see all Youth Centres transformed into Youth Programs'.

4. Youth Consultation

A key component of the research was to provide vulnerable young people with the opportunity to give their views about the most useful and appropriate approaches and processes (both formal and informal) for youth participation.

Focus groups were used to explore issues relating to:

- Perceptions and expectations of participation;
- Benefits and barriers to participation;
- Effective strategies for involving vulnerable young people.

Each of these areas is dealt with separately below.

The Youth Coalition, through its networks, approached a number of agencies who work with young people to help facilitate access to a group of young people to conduct focus group interviews. The Youth Coalition and Families ACT decided on this approach rather than extending an open invitation to attend a forum in recognition that vulnerable young people would be more likely to engage through an agency with which they already had a relationship. Focus groups were conducted at 3 services:

- Club 12/25 (Y-engage/YEP);
- Ted Noffs;
- Woden Youth Centre.

Data was collected via semi-structured focus group discussion conducted with young people in the centre space of each program. The questions for these groups were developed by the Youth Coalition and Families ACT.

Each focus group started with a discussion about the purpose of the research, and how young people's comments would be incorporated into the report. Verbal confirmation of understanding and consent was secured prior to the discussion proceeding. Negotiation regarding the use of the terminology 'vulnerable' to describe young people who might be experiencing disadvantage, disengagement, or other significant issues that might lead to them needing or seeking service support also took place prior to the research questions with one focus group opting to use the term 'hectic' instead of 'vulnerable'.

The same facilitator ran each group, with a note taker in attendance to record the key themes and points raised in conversation.

In acknowledgement of their contribution to the research project, the young people who attended focus groups were remunerated for their time. One participant identified that the payment they received for participating in the focus group (\$25) was 3 times their current wage per hour. In total 28 young people participated across the 3 focus groups, 8 young women and 20 young men, ranging in age from 13 to 25 years old. The majority of the participants were aged 16-21 years old.

The participants were from a range of cultural backgrounds, and had differing experiences of youth service engagement.

Participants in the focus group at Ted Noffs included young people from the residential program who spoke of their experience of services in other jurisdictions, while a number of the young people who attended the Woden Youth Centre focus group had only recently 'discovered' the service. The focus group at Club 12/25 included young people who are engaged with the Youth Education Program, as well as the Y-engage program.

4.1 Perceptions and expectations of participation

Background

All participants were involved in an activity or program organised by a service as this was how the Project engaged with them. Participation in programs other than the one through which the young people were engaged was varied, with around half of respondents identifying another program or activity in which they participated.

Sporting and recreational programs were most commonly mentioned, with a smaller number identifying other youth service programs such as CREATE, PCYC, volunteering with headspace, or attending other *'drop-in (such as BCS) if it was open/available'*.

Generally the activities and programs participants engaged with were conducted at a youth or other centre. Sporting and recreational activities also took place at skate parks, sports grounds/stadiums, and campgrounds. Participants also mentioned schools and National Youth Week event sites (such as Garema Place) as locations where they had participated in activities.

The most common way in which young participants said that they had found out about programs and activities was by word of mouth, through friends. Other information sources included:

Other programs/services/workers referring;

- Internet;
- Police;
- Band night posters.

Participants were asked to identify how much of their time was spent participating in activities/programs (on average). Most said 1-2 times per week and then clarified that their participation was largely dependent on the frequency of the program or activity being available. Most were accessing programs that were only offered 1-2 times per week, but identified that they would attend more if programs were available more often.

Perception

Overall participants believed that programs and activities were important to young people and were valued but felt there could be a greater variety offered. There was a high level of awareness of funding constraints on programs and services with many participants saying they believed services needed more funding which would lead to newer equipment and a greater variety of activities being available. A couple of participants identified that they were easily bored and they would like services to make programs and activities more entertaining.

Generally programs and activities, particularly centre-based ones were viewed as providing space that was youth-friendly.

'It's somewhere you can chill, forget about it, play pool, it's warm, friends are here, food, holiday programs at end of term.'

Expectation

Participants were asked to identify what they had expected to achieve through their participation in programs and activities. Responses were varied with some young people having no expectations, some looking for a positive experience, and some identifying that they had concerns prior to engagement.

'I wanted a place to hang out that was better than other areas I could go, like the slums of Queanbeyan.'

'I want to go somewhere where I can stay out of trouble, have fun, that's good for my self-esteem.'

'I thought it would be terrible.'

'I was scared someone might knife me.'

Generally participants agreed that they were looking for programs and activities to offer them something to do to fill in the day; the opportunity to learn some things; an alternative to other parts of their lives; and fun.

Participants were also asked if there was a difference in their expectation prior to engaging with programs and what they actually experienced. Again responses were mixed, with some saying that it was as expected and some saying some things were better than expected and that they got more than they had anticipated out of participating.

'Yeah we dragged him along, now he doesn't want to leave.'

4.2 Benefits and barriers to participation

Activities and programs that had most helpful personal and professional development as identified by participants were:

- Music programs;
- Life skills (like Ted Noffs);
- Anger management;
- Sexual health;
- Road ready;
- Digital photography ;
- Graffiti (Art);
- Sport, in particular soccer;
- Xbox or PS3/4 on plasma;
- Pool.

In discussion the idea was raised that it was important to have programs where young people, 'can just be there but don't have to participate, or are participating by just being there.' Participants valued the idea that they had active choice in how they engaged.

Competitions, rewards and incentives were also discussed and seen as valuable.

'A couple of years ago my work was reviewed and I won a prize.'

In contrast participants also discussed elements that were not helpful to them. These included being forced into participating; centre-based programs being open, but having nothing to do there; activities being 'like school'; activities or programs being too short; or the people running them not being engaging. One participant, who identified being engaged with a drop-in style service for a long period of time, noted her observation of change,

'with drop in being cut back, more people hang around the bus interchange or malls instead of coming here.'

Participants were invited to discuss the changes they would make to programs and activities if they were running them. The value of making things more flexible was identified, while the idea of straightforward choices was also discussed. While participants felt it was important to let young people decide, and 'not force things down [their] throat', they also noted that it was important to make activities a regular occurrence.

'An activity develops better when its more consistent – it gives people something to look forward to during the week.'

During discussion about funding participants identified that increased resources would allow later opening hours, and more (and better quality) equipment for programs and activities.

A number of participants at one focus group also discussed the need for more male staff in services, to confide in, ask questions, or play sport with. Another group discussed the idea of making activities 'the equivalent to going out' in terms of appeal and fun – in order to get more people participating.

When asked about the need for specific focussed programs such as – alternative education, living skills, information on legal issues for young people, health / mental health, participants again stressed the importance of choice. While they felt this really came down to the individual, they suggested that a way services might design their services was to work with program participants to identify options for programs and 'find the most popular one'.

The programs participants thought would be useful were those that would help them with job preparation, getting a job, or activities that would lead to job readiness such as a minor tertiary courses, help with white card, first aid, or road ready.

4.3 Useful strategies for involving vulnerable young people

Overall participants felt that that young people did not have enough involvement in the design and delivery of programs and activities. While they identified that some services involve young people, this was for less important decisions like what to do in school holidays. While this was valued, participants felt involvement should go further.

In discussing whether they thought greater involvement of young people in the design and running of programs would result in more young people participating in them, the focus groups were consistent in their response. While participants thought more young people would come to programs and activities, they felt it was important that if young people were designing and running programs that they had skill set and support to do this well.

'It could go horribly wrong.'

Further, each group discussed the idea of 'older' young people leading this work with 'younger' young people. Or young people who had experience, but could offer mentoring and support.

'Young adults should have more say rather than leave it to the adults'

'Young people with skills, so it would not just be 'kids like us', but people with experience.'

Overwhelmingly participants in the focus groups said that they would get involved in designing or running programs if given the opportunity.

Participants were asked if they thought that particular groups or 'types' of young people accessed programs and activities. There were two schools of thought with around half believing that there was no stereotype and that a broad range of young people accessed services, and the other half identifying groupings such as 'troubled kids', 'bored people', 'hectics', 'young people who are disengaged from the mainstream', or 'people who experience anxiety'.

'Those who have a family don't need the youth stuff.'

Participants were then asked to identify if they thought programs and activities should be targeting vulnerable/'hectic' young people. This question generated a great deal of discussion, with most agreeing that while programs should aim to engage vulnerable/'hectic' young people that it was important that this was not exclusive.

'It should be a mix... otherwise no one will go because they will be associated as 'vulnerable'.'

The consensus was that a mix of young people was the best outcome participants highlighted that some people get a lot out of being with other young people who have had difficult times. This discussion also generated more comment about choice.

'It's annoying having someone follow you around when you have problems. You need access to bus passes and food without having to talk about problems.'

'Anyone should be allowed to come. If it's only for specific people then others won't come.'

'It'll just be a bad place if good people can't come. It's like a form of racism.'

Participants were then asked in what ways technology can be used by services to communicate with more vulnerable young people. All participants identified Facebook as an effective mechanism, as well as text messaging. Some also identified that they would like to see youth service programs and activities promoted more in schools and on television.

The final part of the focus groups was a discussion about ways in which the focus group participants themselves could help improve participation of vulnerable young people in programs and activities. Most identified that they could talk with more young people about the programs they knew of and let them know of their existence. Some discussed other incentives, including prizes or payment for participation.

Conclusions

This research paper has explored current issues facing youth engagement services in the ACT by interviewing practitioners from CYFSP services and other youth focused programs.

The views of young people are represented in the research with a focus on how to improve their participation, and increase their involvement in designing and managing youth services.

The consultation process was supported by a literature review of recent publications, dealing with integrated service models for young people. Four case studies of such initiatives in different states in Australia provide examples of models which could operate in the ACT.

Information collected from interviews with service providers suggests recent changes in the service delivery model for young people have not achieved the results expected and have created significant barriers for youth engagement in general and youth access to services in particular. The shift from centre based service delivery to a stronger focus on outreach for youth engagement under the CYFSP was intended to broaden engagement with and access to services. However youth workers report that is very difficult to achieve satisfactory engagement with a limited operating timetable of open access/drop-in for young people or solely through outreach activities. Youth consultation reinforced the need for more drop-in for young people, with extension of operation hours and an increase in the range of activities and programs offered by services.

Drop-in is a key element in facilitating initial contact with young people. All the case studies included in this report use a model of structured drop-in as a soft-entry point to the service system. During the initial contact, workers are able to introduce the young person to a broader spectrum of services if needed.

The literature review, case studies and youth consultation activities suggest that a (youth) centre-based model is able to better support outreach activities. Indeed, youth engagement and youth focused services are usually delivered by using a combination of engagement activities such as centre based programs, service promotion and outreach in places such as schools, other community organisations, public spaces and through linkages to other services.

Practitioners reported that their work would benefit if combined with a range of structured programs for young people. While youth engagement is an important link in the chain of youth support, it does not ensure that young people get adequate support for their needs.

Practitioners said that more structured, concrete and immediate services are required, especially for cases with urgent needs in housing, financial assistance and mental health support. The lack of immediate service provision and issues of accessibility to centralised intake process for housing and other services is hampering the effectiveness of initial work with vulnerable young people.

However it is clear that a single service or agency would not be able to provide the whole spectrum of specialised youth services. To address this issue, services such as Frontyard and Brisbane Youth Service, have established partnerships with a number of government and community services, through formalised interagency agreements, joint policy statements and clear operating procedures.

All four cases studies in this report were selected as models that reflect the benefits of integrated service provision. All could be partially or fully implemented in the ACT. However, further work is needed to assess local needs and how a model might be adopted in the context of current financial and human resources and the youth support services already in place.

The scoping paper and project research activities also identified the need to move from a deficit – based approach to a strengths-based approach. Young people participating in focus groups said that they do not want to be stigmatised, isolated and labelled as vulnerable and ‘in trouble’. They would like to be partners in decisions affecting their lives and be involved in their own case management activities.

For young people, youth services are not only for individuals at risk. As experience from Headspace has shown, every young person, regardless of their life and family circumstances, may require assistance in dealing with personal issues. If support is provided in a timely and appropriate manner, these young people are able to enter adulthood equipped with better life and personal skills. The work already undertaken by CSD’s Co-Design project around service user control has direct applicability to youth engagement and services for young people.

Information collected through the literature review and research activities emphasises the range of complex skills required for the youth services workforce. This is a crucial element in the success of service delivery for young people. The emphasis that Frontyard has put in the qualifications and experience of structured drop-in workers (see the case study for more details) is a good example of this. Workforce development, adequate support and supervision were highlighted as key issues in interviews with service providers.

It is clear that youth engagement services have put a great deal of effort into re-structuring their programs and complying with new service delivery requirements, however their work to date has been constrained by inadequate funding. The government’s recent allocation of substantial additional funds through the 2013-2014 ACT Budget offers a great opportunity to make much needed improvements to youth engagement in the ACT. This paper offers valuable insights to inform and guide these improvements.

This paper is a contribution to an ongoing body of work around youth engagement and service provision in the ACT. The peaks see the need for further work to explore the themes identified in the research.

There has been significant interest in the draft, and it is hoped that this will prompt ongoing discussion and debate in the government and community sectors about how best to provide services for young people.

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Appendix 1. List of services that participated in the research activities

Youth Engagement Services (CYFSP)

YEngage – Northside Community Service and Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn

Tuggeranong Youth Engagement Service - Communities at Work & YWCA Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre

The Corner – Belconnen Community Service

Woden Youth Centre – Woden Community Service

Gugan-Gulwan

Other Youth Focused services

The Junction

Youth Connections ACT

Youth Law Centre

Directions

Headspace

Companion House

CREATE Foundation ACT