



**State of the Youth Sector Forum –
14 November 2017**

Draft Report

1 December 2017

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Background and context

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia. We operate primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society. The State of the Youth Sector Forum (the Forum), held on 14 November 2017, had over 70 attendees in leadership positions across the youth sector from across the state. The Forum was held in response to a number of emerging issues of concern for the youth sector, and areas where it is important that the youth sector has some engagement; but the pace of change is such that it is unclear if youth sector CEOs are fully aware of all the changes.

It was important to bring together a number of youth sector leaders to ensure the sector was on the same page in regards to the changes and were aware of the potential impacts of these changes. Additionally, the Forum provided an opportunity to articulate a joint, clear policy and advocacy message in response to some of the key changes for the sector.

The Forum also included a consultation from Nous Group on behalf of the Minister for Youth on the Discussion Paper *Better Choices: Youth in WA* intended to form the basis of consultation for a West Australian Youth Strategy (the Youth Strategy).

1.2 Key feedback

There were many important points that were almost universally agreed that were raised throughout the course of the consultation and the Forum.

The **key strengths of the youth sector** are the dedicated and passionate people that choose to work with young people, the value of the voice of the young people, and the capacity of the sector to prioritise needs of diverse groups of young people/different cohorts.

The **key improvements** for the system that the sector raised were related to funding, commissioning and procurement. There are several changes required in this area to ensure that funding for youth services is sustainable, consistent and appropriate. The sector is also interested in exploring agreed-upon outcomes, designed by the sector, government and young people, and appropriate, agreed-upon ways of measuring those outcomes in order to reduce confusion around reporting. Ideally, these outcomes should be implemented at a systemic level, **across sectors and departments**.

1.3 *Better Choices: Youth in WA*

The main point with respect to the process of the consultation for the Youth Strategy were that the session was a **good start** for a youth strategy, however there is a strong non-negotiable requirement from the sector for further consultation.

The sector could not accept that this was a consultation process in its entirety, but a starting point for input. The sector felt that the consultation with the youth sector for a ten-year plan, which they would be buying into and working towards, could not be finalised in a three-hour session.

1.4 Sector priorities

Key priorities for the sector include that:

Transitions between all of the systems are a problem for young people. Moving from the justice system back to education, or out of out of home care, in and out of housing, or even from primary

to high school are vulnerable points for young people, and critical to their overall wellbeing. As a system, greater and more effective supports for young people transitioning between systems are vital to ensuring their wellbeing.

There is an ongoing issue for **young people leaving the out of home care system** (particularly those aged 18-21) and the lack of support provided to young people once they leave government care.

It is important that **Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)** deliver services and supports in their own communities. This is critical to building the capacity of Aboriginal young people, and supporting them, their family and community strengths.

As a sector, we must understand how we are **measuring outcomes and impact**. Data collection and data sharing is an integral part of this, as it helps to identify predictors and tailor targeting intervention for specific at risk groups.

Training opportunities, especially in the regions, are important for the sector to maintain professional standards. Some groups were interested in a joint training 'fund', or at least more coordination amongst training needs across the sector. This is a role YACWA can take on as part of its support to the youth sector.

1.5 Feedback

The feedback about the Forum was generally positive. 65.4% of attendees were satisfied or very satisfied, 27% of attendees were neutral, and 7.6% were somewhat unsatisfied. There were none that were not at all satisfied. Overall, 100% of respondents (26 responses) wanted to see a State of the Youth Sector Forum held annually. This will be a powerful tool for the youth sector to feed into advocacy strategies, and to bring the youth sector together to align and self-organise around issues that are important to them.

YACWA would like to thank WACOSS, Lotterywest and Bankwest for their support of the event.

2.0 Reflections on the Minister's Youth Strategy

2.1 Overarching perspectives on framing

There was a lot of discussion about the use of language framing the Youth Strategy aimed at developing a common understanding among attendees. The Youth Strategy will be a key guiding document towards a long-term strategic outlook for young people in Western Australia. It was acknowledged there is a need to ensure that as much as possible there is a common language to inform the Youth Strategy and ensure it results in an integrated service delivery system.

There was contention among attendees regarding definitions of the youth 'sector' vs 'system' as detailed within the Better Choices discussion paper. For example, education and youth crisis accommodation and housing were articulated within the Discussion Paper as sitting outside of the 'system'; whereas the youth sector would absolutely see both as integral parts of the system.

The sector agreed more with the definitions of sector and system when dividing services into those that are 'mandatory' (i.e. that government has to provide, such as education and child protection) and 'voluntary' (i.e. those that government is not required to provide and is discretionary in nature, regardless of their value to the community). Much of what the youth sector delivers fits into the latter category.

Attendees generally agreed that the definitions used only really work provided they are not over-interpreted.

Despite a general agreement over definitions being reached it was acknowledged that there were still important caveats to be noted. For example, a lack of placements in out-of-home care (OOHC) (considered a 'mandatory' service) means that sometimes the youth sector pick those young people up through youth accommodation, transition, or crisis care services. This occurs despite services not being funded to provide this support and can impact their ability to deliver core services. In placing such tight definitions on areas of the 'system', there is a risk of creating an area of 'cheap' or unfunded service provision. The complexity and interconnectedness of a system is difficult to divide out into various areas.

2.2 Strengths of the youth sector

The most rated strength of the youth sector were its dedicated and passionate people

The other key strengths of the youth sector that were articulated included:

- Youth participation in designing services and using the voice of the young people – the youth sector tends to do this particularly well.
- Prioritising needs of diverse groups of young people/different cohorts, and finding creative ways of meeting different young peoples' needs.
- Collaboration between services, and a willingness to share ideas – especially in some regional areas.
- Youth work is very related to relationships. It's not something that is as evident in other areas of work.

2.3 Opportunities to improve the youth service system

There were many opportunities cited to improve the youth services system. Some of these were youth sector specific, but many of them related to government processes and to existing funding models.

Youth sector specific

The youth sector recognised the importance of consortia arrangements, and having the skills, capability and time to engage with these. However, it was also noted that it is important to encourage government to look at those arrangements to ensure that smaller organisations aren't at a disadvantage (as some anecdotal evidence has recently suggested following the youth justice tendering process).

Often organisations want to jump on a project to look like they're collaborating, however there can be other organisations that do the same work as them, and potentially better than them. The sector reflected that we all need to be self-reflective on the objectives and purpose of our organisations and what services we provide, how we diversify services, and when collaboration is appropriate.

A key point was made around the cultural competence of organisations in engaging with Aboriginal young people. Given the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in statutory government systems including out of home care and youth detention, it is important that organisations have the cultural competence to work appropriately and effectively with Aboriginal young people, especially given the limited number of Aboriginal people working within the youth sector.

Relationship with government

The first major point the sector made was a need to separate the Youth Strategy's development, including services that are needed and required, from funding and procurement. These should ideally be two processes that occur separately so that the strategy is not influenced by the procurement process – rather procurement should be driven by the strategy's identification of what mix of services is appropriate and required.

Funding was involved with almost every other point that was made

Funding, commissioning and procurement was one of the major elements of the system that required attention and improvement. Organisations stated that they would like to see this included as an element of service design and quality – and identifying if we have the right mix of services. **Co-design** with client groups, and engaging directly with young people, needs to occur prior to commissioning.

Long term funding is required, with a minimum of three-year contracts.

The sector would also like to see some **agreed-upon outcomes**, designed by the sector, government and young people, and appropriate, agreed-upon ways of measuring those outcomes. Ideally, these outcomes should be across sectors and government departments.

It is important that, whilst encouraging not for profit (NFP) organisations to collaborate more and engage in consortia, that government departments also need to find a way to work across departments in their own collaborative frameworks. **Life doesn't happen in departments**. It should be possible to combine funding buckets where it is appropriate to achieve cross-sectoral outcomes.

In terms of commissioning, the sector thought it was important for mechanisms to be established to **assess bids** to ensure they have true connection with communities, and that panels have regional and local intelligence in those decision-making processes. Regional Managers Forums were cited as one possible mechanism by which this could happen.

Regional funding was also raised as a concern to ensure there is equity in regional and metro service delivery. The impact of the ERO was also raised, and how that impacts on the cost of delivering services particularly in regional areas.

Finally, the sector discussed the importance of services being accessible to young people and available after office hours, but that we must have funding arrangements flexible enough to enable that to happen. **Funding restrictions** on the number of young people to see in a year, and on when to stop seeing young people after a certain age are highly output-oriented measures which do not support achieving outcomes with young people.

Other

A more general point was made with respect to schools and the potential to use them better as a vehicle for information about services - homeless services, mental health services, etc. It was acknowledged that some schools already do a great job at this, and others could be better. Many people in the room felt that youth workers should be in schools and attend network meetings to access point.

Finally, there was a point made that we spend time investing in co-designing and creating systems for young people, and that perhaps we need to invest in them to create systems for the youth sector, so we better understand their experiences; this is not always related to technology.

2.4 Process

The main points with respect to the process of the consultation for the Youth Strategy were that the session was a good **start** for a youth strategy, however there is a strong requirement for further consultation. This was not a consultation process in its entirety, but an element of one. The sector felt that the consultation with the youth sector for a ten-year plan, which they would be buying into and working towards, could not be finalised in a three-hour session.

The sector felt we need to ensure that a **diversity** of young people are engaged in the consultation process, including **young people in crisis and at risk**, and not just young people in the 'mainstream' system. Ensuring that young people in regional and rural areas are asked for their input was also highlighted as a priority.

It was noted that there is a need for consultation, not just with young people, but with broader community groups and families. It was also perceived as important to have young people and the sector in the room together as much as possible – so that we can hear what they are saying, and they can hear what we are saying. The point was made that if the sector did not feel that we had had enough time to properly engage with the Discussion Paper and the consultation process for the Youth Strategy, then young people would certainly feel that they hadn't either.

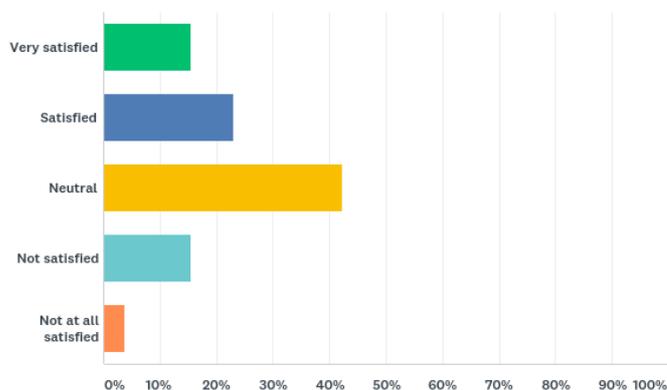
The sector also noted that strategy must be aspirational, and we should be developing strategy around our highest aims as a sector, then work to what's feasible. Here, the sector felt that the strategy has been developed with a very fixed focus.

Forum attendees were very interested to have oversight of the Nous Group report provided to YACWA after the Forum. There were some people concerned that the process did not allow the nuance of the youth sector's advice and expertise to be represented.

2.5 Feedback

The feedback on the consultation is based on 26 responses received to a very brief Survey Monkey survey that was sent out the following day.

Q2 How satisfied were you with the consultation on the State Government's WA Youth Strategic Plan, facilitated by Nous Consulting on behalf of the Department for Communities?



Overall, 38.4% of respondents felt very satisfied and satisfied with the consultation; 42.3% felt neutral about it, and 19.3% were not satisfied, or not at all satisfied.

Some of the comments included:

'I think they did a great job, especially given the differing opinions of some participants.'

'The consultation session felt tokenistic. Through the process although there was discussion it seemed to have an agenda, with some predetermined outcomes.'

'I think the consultation was relatively useful, and the facilitator did the best he could with the information he was given. The questions asked of the room were good and the activities with post-its were [sic] useful however it was clear that there were some difficult and controversial questions asked. I think it is great to see that the Minister is committed to making change within the youth sector, however the process is moving extremely quickly and probably needs more time for consultation. It would be useful for the sector to see the results from the mornings consultation.'

'There was not enough time to fully explore the document. I view this session as the start of the consultation process for a long-term plan; this session is nowhere near sufficient to inform a long term strategy. Further consultation needs to take place, to ensure that a wide range of organisations and young people are included in the process, not just those who were able to attend the day. Discussions regarding the impact of the strategy on funding also need to take place.'

'I felt the session was managed to achieve the outcomes desired, by rephrasing and rewording the sticky notes potentially could change the intent from the audience.'

'Well facilitated sessions'

'The consultation as a starting point was useful and great to get together with others in the sector, however many areas of Youth services not represented. Concerning if this process was the "sector consultation" for Government Strategic Plan'

'Consultation needs to be an ongoing process - this was a good start but hope there will be further opportunities for the sector to shape the future direction of youth policy'

3.0 Getting on the Same Page

There have been, and will continue to be, a number of changes to the community services landscape that will have an impact for young people and for youth services. Some of those that were raised at the Forum were:

- **A new government**

Already the new Labor government is having an impact on the state of the sector. It remains to be seen the extent to which the Machinery of Government (MOG) changes and various Departmental mergers will change and impact on the sector.

- **Supporting Communities Forum**

The Supporting Communities Forum will form the basis of the relationship for the state government with the community services sector, replacing the Partnership Forum. Organisations have expressed interest on being on the Forum, and its composition and strategies are yet to be decided.

- **At-Risk Youth Strategy**

The at-risk youth strategy is still under development, and funding has been rolled over. It will be going to consultation with the sector in the coming months, so the youth sector needs to keep apprised of developments here.

- **State Budget**

The State Budget has been tough for people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage this year, and is lacking in many areas, particularly early intervention.

- **Youth Homelessness**

This sector is currently under a service review, and there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the funding under the National Partnership Agreement – NHaHA.

- **Youth justice**

The Labor government's Target 120 strategy was a major election promise, to target the 120 most prolific juvenile offenders in a \$22M assigning a support person to each family who will coordinate services for that family. The roll-out of this remains to be seen.

Youth Justice (and as a result the Banksia Hill Detention Centre) currently sits under the newly formed Department of Justice. YACWA believes this should sit with other youth services in Child Protection and Family Support and this will transition sometime in the future.

- **Legislative reforms**

- *The Children and Community Services Act 2004 (CCSA)*

A statutory review of the operation and effectiveness of the CCSA was required in 2017 under section 249 of the Act. The Child Protection and Family Support division of the Department of Communities recently conducted the Review on behalf of the Minister for Child Protection, the Hon. Simone McGurk MLA and a [report](#) of this was tabled in parliament on the 28th of November 2017

- Young Offenders Act

The Department of Corrective Services developed the green paper '**Young People in the Justice System: A Review of the YOA**' to ensure the YOA is achieving its objectives in the context of contemporary research and evidence about what works in youth justice. Submissions were received based on this paper and the review is currently ongoing.

- **NDIS**

There remains a significant amount of uncertainty around the NDIS and its roll-out, which affects young people living with a disability.

- **Child Protection**

There is a lot of change within the child protection space. The tendering process for the Earlier Intervention and Family Support Services has commenced with the outcomes still to be determined. The progress of the Out of Home Care Reforms have been delayed and the outcome of these reforms remains to be seen.

The reform within the Leaving Care services is still unseen after two co-design workshops held earlier in 2017.

- **Better Choices: Youth in WA & the WA Youth Strategy**

The Better Choices paper is open for submissions until 18 December 2017. The related WA Youth Strategy is currently undergoing consultation.

- **Youth mental health**

The youth mental health system is one in flux, with recent funding cuts to prevention and early intervention.

- **Regional Managers Forums/District Leadership Groups**

RMFs and DLGs are groups consisting of the most senior government managers in a geographic area. They regularly meet and engage with each other around issues of strategic importance in their region. The state government has a renewed interest in RMFs/DLGs, and so the potential for placed-based planning may be on the rise.

- **Organisational challenges**

As if the strategic policy changes mentioned here weren't enough, there are a number of trends and shifts affecting organisations. The Equal Remuneration Order increases are continuing to have an impact across the sector, as some organisations struggle to keep up with the pay increases with limited state government support. There is a push from government and other funders towards collaboration, and the establishment of consortia, considering mergers, measuring outcomes, and many other expectations that require time, space and capacity and consideration. None of these are easily come upon at the moment!

4.0 Provision of urgently needed services to people in crisis

The summary of output for each of these areas is now addressed in turn. The most popular points, the key messages, are the ones on top, followed by other points that were not so universally raised.

4.1 What are our strengths (as a sector) in this area?

The strengths of the sector in this area where (not in any particular order):

- Our Emergency Relief services are very responsive
- There is a diversity of organisations for crisis situations, and they are generally quite responsive
- There are a number of great services that have been doing great work for a long time
- The sector manages OK with minimal resources. Lots of good-will and collaboration
- The connections between services within the 'crisis' area are strong
- The fact that we have a 24-hour Kids Helpline service

4.2 What should be the sector's priorities in this area?

The most important point raised in terms of what sector priorities should be was the **continuity of care** for young people in crisis. There should be safe access to support and spaces, and young people should have the right support at the right time. There were concerns that this does not currently exist for a variety of reasons.

The second proposed focus of the sector was to address systematic disadvantage through strong family support.

It was noted that there has been significant progress in the provision of youth mental health services in the sector. However, the **mental health system** is difficult to navigate, particularly in regards to the provision of crisis mental health services to clients. It was also stated that there is a lack of culturally appropriate youth mental health services, as well as a lack of holistic services for young people with complex needs, or young people with co-morbidities.

One group raised that young people were staying longer in **crisis accommodation** because there's nowhere for them to go. There has been no new crisis accommodation in 30 years; therefore more beds are required. The age range of 12-15 was particularly identified as an area where there was no funding for crisis accommodation and there are risks for organisations that try to serve those young people.

Transitions between all of the systems are a problem for young people. Moving from the justice system back to education, or out of out of home care, or even from primary to high school are all really vulnerable points for young people. As a system, we need to support them better during these transitions.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) was raised as a real concern, in that it is an issue not 'owned' by any sector or service, and there is nothing designed and resourced for young people experiencing FASD. There is also limited support for young mothers around the risks of FASD.

When engaging with young people

It was raised that a young person's own cultural concept of family must be the focus, rather than constructs of their family that we may unconsciously create.

The sector felt that we need to upskill staff to engage appropriately with young people, particularly important when working with Aboriginal young people and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Trauma informed practice was raised as being important to embed when working with young people and not just a tick box on tenders or other contractual requirements. The evidence exists that it can create new neural pathways increasing resilience and emotional regulation.

4.3 What should we (YACWA) focus on?

YACWA will advocate for the issues raised above as the sector priorities.

The major issue of concern raised by a number of respondents was the ongoing issue is with **young people leaving the care system** (particularly those aged 18-21), and the lack of support provided to young people once they leave government care.

Another issue where YACWA could do some work is with regard to youth worker burnout.

Youth policy

- Advocating for support for families of at risk young people;
- The lack of crisis accommodation services in WA – particularly for young people with complex needs;
- There should be an independent child advocate or advocates to which children can complain, and who can communicate on behalf of children re: their service experiences.

Sector policy

- Funding restrictions limit the capacity of organisations to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people;
- Coordination of targeted services and engagement services. A crisis service should have knowledge about how a young person can move out of that service, into other targeted interventions, engagement services, etc.
- There is no integration across government services (i.e justice, police, health, child protection, etc)
- There is a lack of acknowledgement from the state government that the ERO is putting service delivery at risk, and effectively defunding services.
- There is a need for more proportional funding for services delivering in regional areas.

4.4 Other points made

This section lists the mix of points that don't fit neatly into the headings above. They are still issues that may be important to the sector, and they may still be priorities for YACWA.

The perspective of one youth worker was that he believes that young people prefer to live on the streets rather than enter crisis accommodation, as they believe that their needs aren't going to be met, and they have greater freedoms sleeping rough.

There is a significant disadvantage for young people who don't have home and community support, and cannot access services for a variety of reasons (or they don't fit the eligibility criteria due to funding constraints). These are the young people that fall through the gaps.

5.0 Valuing young people's voice

The most popular points, the key messages, are the ones on top. These are followed by other points that were not so universally raised.

5.1 What are our strengths (as a sector) in this area?

The sector felt that of all the areas, we are most strong in this area. Young people's voices tend to be embedded in an organisation's structure. Some felt that the importance of young people's voice had been amplified more recently. Others felt that they have always been quite good at celebrating young people –the WA Youth Awards hosted by YACWA was given as an example of this.

5.2 What should be the sector's priorities in this area?

One of the key points from all groups was that we need to ensure that a **diversity** of young people are engaged in consultation, including **young people in crisis and at risk**, and not just young people in the 'mainstream' system. Ensuring that young people in regional and rural areas are asked for their input was also highlighted as something that should be a priority. It was also acknowledged that this takes time and significant resources, which often don't exist solely for this purpose. As mentioned previously, the sector also felt it is important to build organisational cultural competency in order to ensure that diversity of voices is heard.

Ensuring that there is a **feedback loop** to young people about how their engagement was heard and put into practice is important. As one group said - *We ask for young people's voices, we get it, but that's just not enough. There should be a feedback loop.*

5.3 What should we (YACWA) focus on?

One of the key focuses for YACWA in this area should be integrating the voice of young people with the voice (and ear) of government. It is important to the sector that government's consultation is not tokenistic, and YACWA has an important role to play in **holding government to account around its consultation with young people**.

Another point highlighted by more than one group is the role YACWA can play in **guiding** organisations about how to run their youth reference/advisory groups, and advocating for **funding** to appropriately resource these groups. Funding for adequate youth consultations was also highlighted as an area that YACWA could support.

The sector also highlighted how important it was to capture examples of youth engagement, co-design and consultation so that we can learn from them, and make sure that we are learning from what works and what doesn't.

5.4 Other points made

This section lists the mix of points that don't fit neatly into the headings above. They are still issues that might be important to the sector, and they may still be priorities for YACWA.

It's a skill to engage young people in the most effective way – and we often do not do this in a youth-friendly and accessible manner. Most summits and forums focusing on getting young people's voices often have barriers in terms of ensuring genuine youth participation. One step further than where we are now would be empowering young people themselves to tell their own story, instead of it coming from the youth worker or a third party.

6.0 Earlier intervention

The most popular points, the key messages, are the ones on top. These are followed by other points that were not so universally raised.

6.1 What are our strengths (as a sector) in this area?

A number of the examples of strengths here are from **individual organisations**. For example, Scouts was provided as a great example of team building/goal building, and encouraging positive mental health. The Armadale Youth Intervention Partnership (AYIP) was discussed as a preferred model for earlier intervention, and headspace was mentioned for their work in mental health. A regional provider gave an example of a program they had structured to work with 5-10 year olds, because they were just being dealt with on the streets. With no marketing at all, they are attracting 30 kids a day, which enables them to identify concerning issues before they are 11-12 year olds and 'too cool' to access support. Family Support Networks were mentioned as a strength in this area where they exist. Finally, another organisation mentioned school-based incentives as a very successful strategy in earlier intervention.

Health programs (i.e. Physical, anti-smoking, lifestyle, sexual health) are generally done well, as are workshops on a variety of life skills and overall well-being programs which are included in a variety of services.

Another strength identified by the group was **peer-led support** in earlier intervention. And finally, once again, the passionate people in WA who do actually provide successful early intervention on a shoestring budget were identified as a strength but also a point on which to improve with access to more funding.

6.2 What should be the sector's priorities in this area?

The state system is extremely complex and very difficult to navigate (refer to points made previously under 4.0).

It is important that the sector **collaborate** with respect to earlier intervention. The sector also felt it was important to keep the government accountable to ensure that they did not use funding restrictions as an excuse to neglect early intervention.

Funding was raised as an issue more broadly, and a review of models of funding for earlier intervention is likely required. One group stated that small funding works for more targeted services or new services, for which there are numerous regional examples. But for more systemic changes in earlier intervention, we need additional long-term resourcing, and so we need to look at the system to figure out where that comes from.

One group felt that the **education system** is lacking in how it deals with early intervention situations. Some schools continue to utilise a punitive way of dealing with complex behaviours, which can often contribute to disengagement of young people. Trying to influence this school response was listed as something that should be a priority for the sector.

Another popular response was to define what we mean when we are trying to **define 'at risk'** young people. Every sector, organisation and government department have different definitions, which makes it difficult to understand what targeted interventions are, and what earlier interventions are. The sector needs to have good, robust definitions around this rather than a generic term of at risk. To do that, we need access to government and systemic data. The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) have a shared risk matrix which is used across organisations. Perhaps a sector-wide risk matrix could be explored.

6.3 What should we (YACWA) focus on?

If there was an appetite for a sector-wide **risk matrix** that would certainly fall to YACWA. Alongside this, there is a role for YACWA to play in advocating for data-sharing, such as what currently occurs within the YPP. If RMFs/DLGs in all areas were as informed as in Armadale, then the possibility for true place-based community development (and perhaps commissioning) would be considerably enhanced.

Another priority strategy for YACWA is to advocate for **state-wide funding for earlier intervention services**, to create long term systemic change, and encouraging government to have this long term vision, rather than focused on election cycles.

Given that early intervention programs take a longer time to produce substantial outcomes and more difficult to measure in terms of outcomes, there is also an **education** piece for YACWA and other peak bodies about the value of early intervention and how, even though it is difficult to measure, it's worth the effort and funding. Part of this education could be mapping where those individual youth intervention programs that government runs are, and the impacts they have.

There was also a point that YACWA could pick up the missing advocacy for earlier intervention in the middle years, particularly for young people in the age range **of 5-10 year olds**; the youth sector is seeing this as a large gap in service delivery. Anecdotal evidence at one table was that they have children approaching them at 7-8 years old, who they can't give drug and alcohol education to, but at 10 years old they can be addicted to meth.

6.4 Other points made

This section lists the mix of points that don't fit neatly into the headings above. They are still issues that might be important to the sector, and they may still be priorities for YACWA.

It is important to acknowledge how difficult it is to measure something that didn't happen. Academics might refer to this as the 'counterfactual' – what would have happened if your service or organisation didn't exist. For example, if an organisation or service didn't exist, and some poor outcome might have occurred for a young person without the organisation – this as a scenario is very difficult to articulate particularly to a funder.

7.0 Breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage

The most popular points, the key messages, are the ones on top. These are followed by other points that were not so universally raised.

7.1 What are our strengths (as a sector) in this area?

One of the repeated themes throughout this Forum has been the acknowledgement of **intergenerational trauma and trauma-informed practice**. And so, even though some areas probably could do better at engaging with people in this way, the fact that the youth sector clearly has it so front of mind can be seen as a strength.

Another acknowledged strength was the sector's ability to get young people meaningfully engaged in training, school and other **employment pathways**. There were a few examples provided around how this is done – one regional organisation has a wrap-around service, and Queensland/NSW have great strengths in employment collaboration, which has been less successful in WA. One group acknowledged programs that they must have thought had been successful in this area, but no longer exist in WA – the Youth Access Centre (YAC) and the Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET) were highlighted.

7.2 What should be the sector's priorities in this area?

One key theme that was stated across more than one group was the importance of **Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)** delivering services and support in their own communities. This was seen as one of the key elements in building the capacity of Aboriginal young people, and supporting them, and their family and community strengths. One group gave the specific example that Aboriginal workforce development programs incentivise Aboriginal young people to gain meaningful employment; however, this opportunity in isolation without support is not enough.

Employment opportunities were mentioned numerous times in this area, and the sector felt that we do not necessarily **integrate well or collaborate with the traditional employment sector**. As one group stated, Job Active providers aren't youth friendly or holistic enough. They only address employment issues, but the young people aren't being supported for all the other issues that they have going on in their lives which means ultimately the 'intervention' fails. Creating better connections and feedback between these sectors, and better support, was highlighted as a priority for the sector.

As one group stated, if we don't invest in early intervention, we will never break the cycle. If there is no new funding, one group felt that the government and NFPs should come together to look at how to reallocate funding.

Alternative education programs and stable accommodation/housing were listed together as important elements in breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.

There were particular cohorts mentioned as needing to be a sector priority, including children and young people leaving care, the justice system's "frequent" flyers", and those at high risk of multiple hospital admissions.

Finally, there was a particular emphasis on **data**. It's important to look at what hasn't worked, and ensuring that future strategies rapidly learn from these lessons. If we can use data to identify families that need the most help in a given community, then it is possible to target resources to them, but it requires a lot of communication and coordination between government agencies to

ensure that they share data. As one group stated, there is legislation in place to support data sharing but it's not well understood across government.

7.3 What should we (YACWA) focus on?

YACWA being aligned with WACOSS was stated as being extremely important.

One group stated that YACWA should let services focus on individual cases and YACWA should focus on challenging **high level systemic disadvantage**. This will necessarily involve a focus on aligning state, federal and local legislation which is often contradictory.

Other roles that were listed for YACWA include:

- Focus on interaction with employment industry – in creating jobs for young people;
- Look at duplicating campaigns such as the YPP 'Change the Story' campaign, and coordinate across the sector;
- Dissemination of research in breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage which will be useful to the sector

7.4 Other points made

This section lists the mix of points that don't fit neatly into the headings above. They are still issues that might be important to the sector, and they may still be priorities for YACWA.

A number of groups mentioned that this issue is not focussed just on youth or on WA – its national, it's the economy, its families, it's systemic and intergenerational.

One group stated that making a difference in this area needs to be based on a trusting relationship, but many federal government reforms use a carrot and stick approach. This creates mistrust of agencies where for generations people have mistrusted government.

Finally, there was a point that although the youth sector organisations want to work with family, the ultimate focus has to be on young people. And so we need to know our limitations and boundaries just as we need to know our strengths.

8.0 A Strong Sector

This section had the least content (probably as it was the last one of the day), and so a lot of this is presented in dot point format.

8.1 What are our strengths (as a sector) in this area?

The Multicultural Youth Advisory Network of WA (MYAN WA) and Agency Network for Youth network (ANY) meetings were mentioned as great strengths in having a strong sector.

The professionalism of the sector, and the development of youth work as a specialized area, was also mentioned as a strength.

Once again, the passionate people and collaboration across the sector, as well as the focus on the strengths of young people were mentioned.

8.2 What should be the sector's priorities in this area?

There were two main messages about the sector's priorities in this area.

The first was around **measuring outcomes and impact**. It is important to having a strong sector that we are able to measure outcomes and impact, and have evidence. Data collection and data sharing is an integral part of this, as it helps to identify predictors and tailor targeting intervention for specific at risk groups. Some groups were interested in a collectively funded data platform.

The second was with respect to **training opportunities**, particularly in the regions. Often regional areas have to wait for training and it is often expensive, or trainings aren't provided regionally and sending people to Perth for training is also prohibitive. Some groups were interested in a joint training 'fund', or at least more coordination amongst training needs across the sector, which is a role that YACWA could certainly play.

Some of the other points mentioned included:

- Continuously advocating and standing up for young people
- Ensuring adequate training for volunteers to handle cases/situations
- Make sure we connect and collaborate more
- Greater information sharing between different sectors and industries that have a vested interest in growing and developing strong young people.

8.3 What should we (YACWA) focus on?

Clearly, the data and training priorities are ones that YACWA should focus on in this area.

Other feedback included:

- Ensuring government does not frame consultation too narrow, and pushing focus to budget bids without proper consultation;
- Ensuring YACWA consults with sector on all levels of advocacy i.e. youth strategy submission;
- Action plan ensuring talk is backed up with definitive action
- Mapping of services – a sector wide database to assist sector wide mapping
- Project person to organise training for a number of organisations who might pool funds.

9.0 Conclusions

There were a number of important points that were almost universally agreed upon throughout the course of the consultation and the Forum.

9.1 Key strengths of the youth sector

The following strengths were identified by attendees as critical to the youth sector's success and should receive continued support:

- The dedicated and passionate people that choose to work with young people.
- Youth participation in design, and the voice of the young people
- Prioritising needs of diverse groups of young people/different cohorts, and finding creative ways of meeting different young peoples' needs.

9.2 Improvements for the system

Attendees identified a number of systemic issues within the youth sector, with the following improvements:

- Inclusion of service design and quality elements into funding, commissioning and procurement processes to improve quality standards across youth services.
- An examination of the mix of services across the youth sector (including prevention, intervention and postvention services) to determine if the current mix is appropriate for Western Australia.
- Agreed-upon outcomes, collaboratively designed by the sector, government and young people, and appropriate, agreed-upon ways of measuring those outcomes. Ideally, these outcomes should be consistent across sectors and departments.
- Agreements across departments and across sectors on the sharing and use of data to better inform measurement and decision-making processes.

9.3 *Better Choices: Youth in WA*

The West Australian Youth Strategy requires further targeted consultation to effectively promote better outcomes for young people and ensure sector buy-in. The consultation session of the Forum was a good start, however was far too brief to constitute a consultation process in its entirety.

9.4 Sector priorities

Sector priorities were identified across multiple groups of attendees at the Forum. Key priorities identified as critical to the youth sector's immediate future included:

- Reviewing **crisis accommodation** to address critical capacity and funding issues.
- Providing greater support to young people **transitioning between youth service systems** to ensure they are able to successfully navigate these vulnerable junctures.
- Improving processes and supports for **young people leaving the out of home care system** (particularly those aged 18-21) who experience a drop-off in support once leaving government care.
- Maintaining a focus on engaging and 'co-designing' with a **diversity** of young people, including young people in crisis and at risk, and young people in regional areas, and advocating for appropriate time and resources to be spent on co-design.
- Supporting the youth sector to develop common language and **definitions of 'at risk' young people** using government and systemic data, and examine the potential for a sector-wide risk matrix to facilitate this.

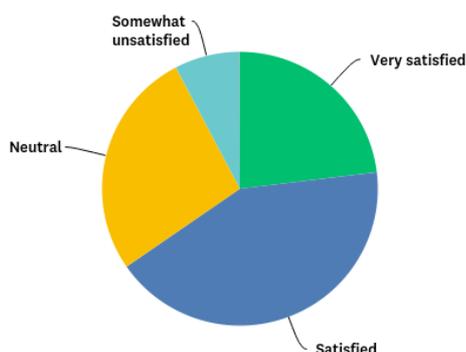
- Continuing to support the role of **Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)** in delivering services and support in their own communities. This is critical to building the capacity of indigenous young people, and supporting them, and their family and community strengths.
- Supporting the sector to **measure service outcomes and impacts**, and improve its capability to utilise data to identify predictive factors and tailor intervention strategies.
- Coordinating **training opportunities**, especially in the regions, to enable the sector to maintain professional standards.

These priorities should form the basis of joint advocacy among the youth sector, and will be identified as areas of focus for YACWA's continued sector support and advocacy.

9.5 Feedback

The feedback about the Forum was generally positive. 65.4% of attendees were satisfied or very satisfied, 27% of attendees were neutral, and 7.6% were somewhat unsatisfied. There were none that were not at all satisfied.

Q1 Overall, how satisfied were you with YACWA's State of the Youth Sector Forum that you attended on 14 November 2017?



Some of the specific feedback included:

I think it's really beneficial and there would be some value in knowledge sharing across the sector. Although there is partnership and collaboration there is still very much a guarded way in which we operate given the current government landscape.

Challenges were faced when people brought their own agenda (scared of losing funding) instead of making comments overall from a professional perspective.

it was well run, I feel my expectations would be met with the knowledge from this forum

Absolutely. I believe it should be an annual initiative in order to connect the various youth services across the state and have a unified voice in advocacy for future discussions around strategies, policies and ideas of how we can better support each other.

However the focus should be on a plan to provide services for Youth how we can come together placing the young person at the centre.

Yes to another forum. Very helpful to have bursary to support regional attendance.

It may be useful to address key issues such as youth homelessness, and youth suicide. Having youth representatives as part of the forums would be useful

YACWA to visit regional areas. A number of youth services have demonstrated success year after year. Many of the suggestions people listed on post it notes are being applied in regional areas e.g... Alternative learning programmes, life skills delivered in schools.

Overall, 100% of respondents (26 responses) want to see a State of the Youth Sector Forum held annually. This will certainly be a powerful tool for the youth sector to feed into advocacy strategies, and to bring the youth sector together to align and self-organise around issues that are important to them.

Appendix 1: Agenda for State of the Youth Sector Forum

Time	Duration	Topic
9am	30 mins	Welcome to Event (YACWA) Welcome and House-keeping from Craig Spencer (Bankwest) Welcome to Country (Shaun Nannup) Welcome from Minister
9.30am	3 hours	Nous consultation period (includes morning tea) Discussion paper – WA Youth Strategy
12.30pm	30 mins	Lunch
1pm	30 mins	Debrief session from the morning – follow-up for YACWA
1.30pm	45 mins	Getting on the same page WACOSS and YACWA present mini-presentations to cover trends affecting the youth sector that youth sector managers and CEOs should be aware of. Over to the floor - what other trends are other people are seeing, that others in the youth sector should be aware of?
2.15pm	20 mins	Afternoon tea
2.35pm	80 mins 4 rotations of 20 mins each	SOYS - World Café style The aim of this session is to have a point in time experience of the state of the youth sector. Themes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provision of urgently needed services to people in crisis 2. Valuing young people's voice 3. Early intervention 4. Breaking of cycle of disadvantage and poverty 5. A strong sector 6. OTHER
3.55pm	20 mins	Dot prioritising exercise - prioritisation
4.15pm	15 mins	Wrap up and where to from here

Appendix 2: Attendees from the State of the Youth Sector Forum

Sherenne	Foale	headspace Rockingham
Sharon	Gough	Indigo Junction
Garry	Fisher	City of Swan
Mick	Geaney	Hope Community Services
Lisa	Dunne	Calvary Youth Services
William	Hayward	SNAICC
Sophie	Stewart	Social Reinvestment WA
Louise	Giolitto	WACOSS
Brooke	Draper	Mission Australia
Shaun	Mays	Rsie Network
Jennie	Burns	YMCA WA
Sherry	Donaldson	Scouts WA
Jason	Ellis	Youth Mental Health, NMHS
Fiona	Kalaf	YOUTH FOCUS
Jennie	Gray	WACOSS
Yvonne	Hunt	The Salvation Army
Karina	Chicote	Save the Children
Andrew	Hall	Perth Inner City Youth Service
Monique	Douglas	Propel Youth Arts WA
Mike	Dixon	Whitelion
Verity	Leach	The Smith Family
Lindsay	Campbell	Education Dept WA
David	Russell	Fairbridge
Joanne	Fletcher	Black Swan Health
Juan	Larrañaga	Save the Children
Linda	Elezovich	Girl Guides WA
Jamie	McGleave	Propel Youth Arts WA
Leanne	Strommen	Centrecare
Graham	Hansen	WACOSS
Catrina	Aniere	Millennium Kids Inc
Meagan	Roberts	Aboriginal health organisation
Joe	Moniodis	Edmund Rice Centre WA
Lisbeth	Comissao	Edmund Rice Centre WA
Tony	FitzGerald	yourtown
Katie	Brown	The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - Australia
Debbie	McCabe	City of Swan
Judy	MacCallum	Murdoch University and WAYMN
John	Gillespie	The Federation of WA Police & Community Youth Centres
Mark	Finch	The Federation of WA Police & Community Youth Centres
Warwick	Smith	Youth Mental Health
Gayle	Mitchell	St Vincent de Paul Society
Rebecca	Boladeras	Passages SVPWA
Rick	England	Albany Youth Support Associations
Leah	Doherty	MercyCare
Dana	Anderson	Youth Futures WA
Carol	Shannon	Leeuwin Ocean Adventure Foundation
Philippa	Boldy	Anglicare WA
Alyson	Stewart	Mercycare
Yanthe	McIntyre-Gadsby	Mercycare

Vicki-Tree	Stephens	Youth Involvement Council
Stephanie	Davis	City of Joondalup
Anna	Treloar	Ngala
Dawn	McAleenan	Rise Network
Jo	Aberle	Escare Inc
Elise	Jorgensen	YMCA WA
Susan	Rooney	St Vincent de Paul Society WA Inc
Sarah	Lewis	CREATE Foundation
Jeremy	Chetty	Student Edge
Be	Westbrook	Peel Youth Services
Penny	Sandover	Dept of Communities
Carol	Pearce	AnglicareWA