

Youth Services Workforce Skills and Training Project

Methodology

July 2009

An initiative of



youth affairs network qld

Background:

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) has been advocating for a systematic approach to the development and maintenance of our youth sector workforce to ensure quality services for young people. YANQ recently received funding support from the Office for Youth, Department of Communities and the Department of Education and Training (DET) to undertake a Youth Services Workforce Skills and Training Project.

This project will examine the current state of affairs in the youth sector who is the sector, what skills currently exist, what skills will be critical to meet future needs? It will inform how the sector can prepare for the future through attracting, retaining, developing and training a skilled workforce. This landmark project creates the platform to ensure a vibrant and sustainable youth sector workforce that protects and promotes young people's rights.

The project involves:

- **researching literature** about youth workforce skill development and vocational education and training requirements and products across Australia as well as internationally;
- **collecting data** on the current skills, competencies and qualifications of youth workers
- **projecting future skills** needs in line with young people's needs, government priorities and contemporary practice frameworks;
- **identifying preferred models** and potential alliances to support skill development.

The project outcomes will be:

A Clear Plan: The key outcome of this project will be a Position Paper and Youth Sector Development Plan. The paper will contain recommendations and be used to inform skilling and workforce development initiatives.

An Engaged and Informed Sector: The youth services workforce will be engaged in this project from the start to the finish - in surveys, workshops and discussions about the viability and sustainability of a vibrant youth sector in Queensland. This will ensure that a plan is developed by the sector, for the sector, paving the way for successful implementation of the plan.

Purpose:

This phase of the project has been designed to achieve two outcomes.

1. To collect data from youth service providers and other key stakeholders to create a workforce profile that will include workplace demographics, information about existing skills, competencies and qualifications, current skilling needs and projected future needs. This data will inform the final project Position Paper and the Youth Sector Development Plan which will contain recommendations and be used to inform skilling and development initiatives.

2. To actively engage the youth service sector in dialogue about the purpose, characteristics and future of the sector that will continue in the implementation phases in 2010 and beyond, strengthening ownership and buy in through the processes used for data collection in particular focus groups, forums and interviews.

A review process that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data will be used to ensure that the information collected is thorough and effective in terms of analysing the program and informing the recommendations. It is the intention of the consultants that stakeholders are actively involved in this process in the provision of information and the development of recommendations and strategies that will inform the Position Paper and the Youth Sector Development Plan.

The methodology is based on an action research approach in that participants will be asked to reflect on their experiences on the youth services sector and provide information and draw analysis and generalisations to inform future plans for the development of the sector.

The methodology has been designed to be broad based and multi layered to develop a thorough picture of the current context of youth services and the requirements, strategies and possibilities for future workforce development of this sector. Review of a range of similar workforce development projects in Queensland and internationally all indicate the need to start from (or develop) an accurate workforce profile in order to understand the current context of the sector and establish themes that require further investigation through engaging with the sector. A primarily qualitative approach will be utilised to provide depth to the data collected and ensure context and meaning to the target populations, working from the premise that a Queensland-wide sector development strategy needs to ensure relevance to all parts of the state and to different types of services.

The research methodology uses five distinct processes for data collection.

Data Collection Methods:

Survey

Aim

The survey is designed to provide a snapshot of the existing workforce including qualifications, skills and experience of workers as well as motivations for entering and remaining in youth services work and projecting future skills and knowledge requirements. It will provide an opportunity to gather a range of perspectives from individuals across the range of service types and structural positions within organisations. The survey is designed to collect data from youth workers as well as from managers of services. Data from managers will provide both specific individual demographic and training related information as well as providing from workforce demographics for all youth services staff. This information will ensure a broader snapshot of the overall sector should youth worker responses be limited. Collated survey results will provide a quantitative snapshot of the current workforce context as well as enabling comparison between regions, service types or other identified variables. Data will also be produced that can be validated by young people, youth service providers in other regions or service types or even against similar information from other sectors where useful.

Participants

The survey will be made available to all youth workers and managers in identified services of Department of Communities funded services and Reconnect services that are in the project target group. The survey may also be administered to other services as identified by the IRG or steering committee as relevant to collect data to provide an overall picture of the youth services sector.

Process

The survey will be made available through internet and paper based mediums to meet differing learning needs. It will be introduced by a letter about the project and follow up personal contact will be made with services to encourage them to complete and return the survey. Survey results will be provided to the sector in other areas in Queensland.

Forums

Aim

Forums will be used to promote dialogue and debate about what youth work is, the values underpinning it, what is currently happening in the sector and future workforce needs to maintain a vibrant and healthy youth services sector. The intention is that through bringing a range of stakeholders with varying perspectives together and providing them with information and an environment to consider the future of the sector, that both brilliant ideas and realistic possibilities will emerge. The engagement of industry stakeholders in this type of process on a regional basis will also assist in furthering engagement of the sector in the longer term project outcomes as well as energising an interest in the sector's future.

Participants

Youth workers and managers from services within the project target group as well as other key stakeholders within specific geographic locations. Stakeholders include education providers, other organisations providing services to young people, government departments, peak bodies.

Process

Half day forums will be conducted in a number of geographical locations within the project regions. Where possible, forums will be connected to other activities within regions such as workshops or network meetings to make the best use of participants time. Part of the forum will be providing participants with information/ideas to inspire discussion and conversation about the future of the workforce and possible strategies for workforce development. Forums will be conducted after surveys have been collated so that initial themes and outcomes emerging from the data can be discussed and validated and possible strategies for future development can lever from this. Forums will be facilitated and recorded to ensure the best opportunity to collect data and support participation of all.

Focus groups

Aim

Focus groups will be conducted with specific groups based on services types or service users where more detailed information is required to ensure that a complex and holistic picture of the youth services sector has been created. The aim is to include all identified client groups and groups based on other variables if required e.g. workers from rural and remote areas.

Process

Areas for focus groups will be determined through consultation with IRG and steering committee members to ensure adequate representation as well as through any themes that emerge during the data collation of the surveys. Focus groups will be facilitated and recorded to ensure the best opportunity to collect data and support participation of all.

Participants

Focus groups will be conducted with youth services such as those that work with young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, mental health providers, provide services in rural and remote areas and services working with young people with disabilities and others as identified by the IRG and steering committee. It will also include some focus groups with young people to validate the data that is emerging from surveys in relation to the types of skills and knowledge that will be required by youth workers into the future.

Interviews

Aim

A small number of in depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted to present deeper insight through detailed experiences of individuals. This 'case study' approach will tap into a greater sense of person or place, locating people in their particular work situation to gain a better contextual understanding of their story in a workforce development framework. These stories may be featured in the final report to illustrate themes. It is envisaged that these narratives may also lead to small project ideas that will illustrate the broader desired outcomes and recommendations of the project.

Interviews will also be conducted with key stakeholders, in particular government, to inform strategic directions within existing contexts such as funding areas and government policy. Interviews will be conducted near the beginning of the data collection phase and once the first quantitative data has been collated and analysed.

Process

In depth interviews will be conducted in person or on the phone with identified people who have agreed to take part and be featured as part of the final report to provide depth, detail and texture to the research.

Interviews with government and other stakeholders will be conducted and recorded by project workers to inform the context of the project rather than featuring as narratives.

Participants

Participants will be identified that 'typify' themes emerging from the data, for example new workers entering the field, workers who have moved into management positions etc. Interviews may also be conducted with people who have left the sector.

Government and other stakeholders will be contacted regarding interview opportunities.

Existing Workforce Data

Aim

Existing workforce data will be gathered from stakeholders such as government and the ISD project and analysed to inform the overall profile that is being developed. If possible attempts will be made to reduce duplication for services by using existing data.

Process

Project workers will ask Steering Group and IRG members to identify and provide any existing workforce data as well as reviewing recent data collection through the Rimfire project to inform the final survey that will be distributed.

Participants

Office for Youth, DET, ISD and others

References

Diamond, A & Associates, Ovens C, Roberts L & van Gils, T (2008) *Child Protection Skills Formation Strategy Report*

Health and Community Services Workforce Council (2003), Aged Care survey

Ministry of Youth Affairs (2007) Report on the Questionnaire on Professional Development and Training for Youth Workers

National Youth Workers Network Aotearoa (2006) *Real Work: A National Report on the State of Youth Work in Aotearoa*. Wellington, NYWNA, 2006

Scottish Executive (2007) *Moving Forward- a Strategy for Improving Young People's Chances through Youth Work* Edinburgh

Scottish Executive (2006) *Youth Work- opportunities for all* Edinburgh

Data Collection Table:

Who	How	Data to be collected	When
<p>Target group youth service providers- managers and youth workers</p> <p>Other identified services working with young people</p>	<p>Survey</p>	<p>Current position Length of time in sector Qualifications Other training Reason for entering the sector Reasons for remaining in the sector Types of skills and knowledge required to do their job- current - projected into the future</p> <p>Which knowledge and skills they have now, which ones they need Preferred learning methods</p>	<p>July- August</p>
<p><u>Geographically based-</u> Youth service providers- workers and managers, target group and others Education providers- TAFE, Uni Departmental staff supporting community base services- Office for Youth, DET, FaHCSIA, Child Safety Peaks Other sectors who have done similar work</p>	<p>Forums</p>	<p>Focused discussion regarding what is needed to develop and support a vibrant and strong youth services sector into the future</p> <p>Key themes will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what youth is, values underpinning youth work - current experiences in the sector of skills required, skilling opportunities, barriers to training and skilling - - workshopping future possibilities large and small, state and local - Exploring particular themes that have emerged from survey 	<p>August- September</p>

<p><u>Identified areas/themes:</u> workers with young people of different backgrounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CALD - Mental health - Disabilities - ATSI <p>workers in rural and remote areas young people</p>	<p>Focus groups</p>	<p>Identification of specific skills and knowledge required to provide effective services to all young people- comparison with data emerging from surveys</p> <p>Validation of data of skills and knowledge required by workers with group/s of young people</p>	<p>August- September</p>
<p>Identified individuals in specific work role/situation eg long term youth service providers new workers new managers people who have left the sector</p> <p>Government stakeholders</p>	<p>Interviews</p>	<p>Narratives of workforce development experiences and requirements to support and maintain workers in the industry</p> <p>Understanding strategic themes</p>	<p>August- September</p> <p>July and September</p>