Forward

The Sunshine CPLAN was formed in 2011 as a part of a larger initiative across Queensland, driven by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) with participating youth agencies. The Sunshine region which takes in a vast area from Moreton Bay to Bundaberg has many networks of youth agencies providing services to young people. The Sunshine CPLAN has engaged with about 20 youth agencies predominantly in the Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast regions.

The Youth Narratives Research report had its genesis in what could be described as an experiment in strategic sector work to build an action-oriented culture of collaboration. Unfortunately sector collaboration in recent times has become victim of contractisation that leaves many agencies in the untenable position of having to juggle their availability for strategic work with the more mandated program and case management collaboration. It’s easy to see which one gets precedent.

However, even in this difficult environment the participating Sunshine CPLAN agencies have demonstrated over the past three years the benefits of strategic collaboration to their work. The sharing of information, developing strategic alliances, contributing to stimulating debate and discussion about trends and issues in the youth sector all acted as a backdrop to making the Sunshine CPLAN a vehicle that kept drawing participating agencies together, despite significant cuts to the sector since 2012.

The Youth Narratives Research project was a culmination of enquiry that began with articulating the common threads that connected youth services in the region resulting in the Integrity in Our Practice document. The Integrity document is a statement of common youth work values and practice. The Youth Narrative Research project followed up the work of the Integrity document by asking the question, does youth work (as identified in the Integrity document) achieve outcomes with young people?

The collaboration continued with the invitation to University of Queensland School of Social Science to partner with the Sunshine CPLAN to embark on this question of enquiry. Three Social Science students (Alex, Anya and Kate) worked eagerly with us to implement the project. On behalf of the Sunshine CPLAN agencies who participated in the research project we wish to thank the students for their excellent work which has provided a valuable contribution to the youth sector in our region.

Sadly, with government cuts YANQ is no longer able to resource the regional CPLANs, however, in the Sunshine region the vehicle continues to drive sector issues and looks forward to promoting youth work through this valuable research report.

Howard Buckley

Sunshine CPLAN Facilitator 2011 - 2014
Executive Summary

In recent years, reports and discussion papers by peak youth bodies, including CPLAN’s own Integrity in Our Practice document, have attempted to address the absence of a nationally agreed definition of youth work. Widespread vocalisation of the sector being at a ‘crossroads’ highlights the challenges that have troubled the industry in the past: the deterioration of training and education opportunities, the disappearance of youth worker roles into broader occupations and a lack of professional development pathways. This project wishes to take a step back and evaluate the on-the-ground work that practitioners of community youth work are currently engaged in. It argues that despite the rhetoric, outcomes of youth work remain overwhelmingly positive, evidenced by the real life changes that occur in the lives of the youth who have been recipients of the agency’s services.

In the literature review section, the parameters and definitions of the study are set. By drawing on existing literature and reports from national and regional bodies, the authors undergo a review of the current state of the community youth sector. The authors argue that the significance of their work lies in contributing to existing definitions of youth work and identifying the core strengths and successful elements of youth work practice.

The methodology which guided this project, Collective Narrative Practice is outlined in the methods section along with the techniques used to collect and analyse data.

The results of the study are evidenced in the penultimate section of this report in the format of responses to the three research questions. The findings of this research show that the major difference youth work makes to the lives of young people is in creating a network of support and assisting them to develop a sense of self-worth required to navigate everyday challenges.

Finally, the conclusions and recommendations section summarises the key findings and offers a way forward based on open conversation and recognition of the unique and essential service that the industry is providing.
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Abstract

This report investigates the experiences of young people in their contact with community youth services across the Sunshine Coast region in Queensland. The central aim of the project is to determine what difference youth work makes in the lives of young people. Collective Narrative Practice (CNP), a qualitative technique of data collection, was selected as the most appropriate way to engage with this form of social inquiry, as it is participatory and collaborative and known for its appropriateness to obtain insightful and engaging narratives. The data is in the form of 15 youth narratives and 7 youth worker narratives, forming a collection of diverse experiences and voices about youth work and outcomes. Discussing elements of successful practice and the benefits of working according to integrity guidelines, the report ultimately concludes that in encouraging self-worth and providing support, youth work helps vulnerable young people overcome numerous challenges such as completing education, dealing with family conflict, becoming independent and finding employment. The significance of this research is in evidencing the unique value of youth work and highlighting the critical importance of youth workers in supporting, respecting and assisting marginalised young Australians.
Introduction

Youth work is a unique and essential service that strives to enhance the lives of vulnerable young Australians. This report aims to build on existing conceptualisations of the core strengths of youth work and contribute to youth sector renewal. The Youth Narratives Project is a year-long research endeavor undertaken in partnership with the regional youth association CPLAN. The Communities of Practice Leaders Action Networks (CPLAN) is network of decentralised youth agencies under the umbrella of the community youth sector peak body, Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ). Covering the CPLAN Sunshine Coast region this project engaged with 20 agencies, six of which directly contributed to the Youth Narratives Project. Following consultation with CPLAN, the Youth Narratives Project asks three main questions.

Firstly, what difference does youth work make in the lives of young people?
Secondly, what are the elements of successful practice when conducting youth work and finally, how are such elements reflected in CPLAN’s Integrity in our Practice document? 

Conducted in a context of uncertainty, and amplified by the recent change in government, the rationale behind this project is to take a step back and identify core strengths and successful elements of youth work at a time when the hollow discourse of results-based accountability and performance indicators dominates. This research sits in the cleavage between two realities: the inherent desire to help people and the world of competitive tendering, budgeting, and financial management.

In undertaking this project it has been the intention of all involved to ensure participation is worthwhile for those sharing their stories. For this reason, Collective Narrative Practice was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. This qualitative technique utilises narrative collection to gather data and draw conclusions about the experiences and perspectives of the youth. Narrator and researcher collaboration in the construction of insightful and descriptive narratives is a central element of this participatory method. A total of 15 youth and seven youth worker narratives were collected and upon collation of this data, 3-4 narratives were chosen to be adapted into a digital story. Frameworks of systematic investigation guide the structure of this report, which begins with a literature review scoping the parameters of the youth services sector and offering conceptual definitions. The methodology section provides theoretical grounding of CNP and outlines the steps taken to collect data. Analysis of the data is addressed in the results section and discussion of the findings follows. Finally, the report concludes with recommendations and final reflections.

Ultimately, the Youth Narratives team hopes that this endeavour will inform and remind the reader of the essentiality of youth work in providing value and support for marginalised young people.

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1 A brief description of the role, rationale and activities of each agency is included in Appendix 1.0.
Literature Review

When youth sector peak organisations characterise the sector as being “at a crossroads” (AYAC, 2013a, p. 1) or at a “critical stage” (Nicholson, 2014) they are referring to the urgent need to adapt to a number of significant challenges that have come to affect the way community services are delivered. The purpose of this literature review will be to situate some of those challenges and position the Youth Narratives Project in a broader context as a means of giving some perspective on the circumstances of this research.

The community youth sector in Australia faces numerous challenges. Davies argues that the sector has undergone significant changes in the past 30 years which can be understood as a “shift from advice to management” (2011, p. 7). According to Davies, approaches to youth work, whereby practitioners worked autonomously and discreetly, prioritising support and advice, have been phased out in favour of top-down, value-for-money methods according to ‘effective operating principles’. The beginnings of this shift can be traced back to Thatcherism and the implementation of ‘cost effective’ ways to deliver welfare. This period marked the start of the shift toward downsizing and managerialism whereby restructuring the delivery of social services was justified by a rationale that privileged the market and economic gain over people and their experiences of hardship.

The imposition of a managerialist agenda created an ongoing tension that is fundamentally at odds with the core attributes of youth work practice. Davies argues that this paradox continues to impact on the sector and is one of the reasons for the current crisis. Eikenberry and Kluver (2004) look at some of the tangible consequences of this shift in paradigm to the delivery of services to vulnerable people. The authors refer to the “marketisation of non-profit organisations” to discuss the ways in which certain agencies are driven to adopt the practices and procedures of the prevailing institutional order to meet the requirements for financial support (2004, p. 133). Marketisation challenges the way the sector can operate by causing a shift away from a focus on service to a focus on documentation, reporting outcomes and securing funding.

Marketisation may also discourage non-profit agencies from providing services to those with chronic needs or multiple problems when outcomes are difficult to measure and contact is time-consuming, a point particularly relevant for the complex nature of youth casework (Alexander, 1999, p. 68). Cocks (n.d.) conceptualises this movement as a tension between programmatic (those factors important to the person receiving them) and non-programmatic (reporting, complying with regulatory bodies, quality implementation) elements of service delivery, arguing that despite the rhetoric, “human services are generally planned primarily from the standpoint of non-programmatic concerns” (Cocks, n.d.). External structural pressures are forcing community youth agencies to move away from traditional people-centred approaches to market based mechanisms in order to survive. This is the context within which agencies such as CPLAN operate.

As the rationale behind imposed results-based accountability began to interfere in the nature of youth

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3 While Davies’s work refers largely to the UK, parallel government policies were also being implemented in the Australian context.

4 The distinction between programmatic and non-programmatic elements is further discussed on page 16, for examples refer to graph on page 16.
work, practitioners found themselves losing touch with the layers of richness and authenticity that previously defined the community welfare sector. Agencies and peak bodies, such as YANQ and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC), increasingly saw the need to articulate a clear definition of youth work and its place in the social services sector or risk an “erosion of what our organisations have stood for over a century” (Nicholson, 2014). In regaining clarity and purpose, a number of regional and state peak organisations released reports and discussion papers attempting to define and delineate the sector (See AYAC, 2013a; AYAC, 2013b; “YANQ,” 2012; YANQ, 2010, 2012). There was a widespread ‘return to basics’ to recover a commitment to grass-roots and community identity. The result of such soul searching was a reformulation of what it means to do youth work and the qualities of the sector’s practitioners.

After two years of discussion and consultation YANQ settled on the definition of a youth worker as:

**A person who contributes to the protection and promotion of a young person’s rights and to ensuring their everyday necessities are met (YANQ, 2012, p. 6)**.

The role of a youth worker is therefore to educate, enable and support youth who require assistance in accessing services, navigating systems and generally establishing a better quality of life (YANQ, 2010, p. 11). Building on this definition, AYAC defines youth work as a process of empowerment that facilitates the active involvement of a young person in society (2013a, p. 12). What these definitions have in common is a commitment to assuring positive change. Attempts to define and delineate the sector in the face of institutional and identity challenges are examples of a self-conscious project of renewal and have the overall outcome of re-developing a sustainable and vibrant culture of youth work. To set the parameters of the study, the Youth Narratives Project drew on these definitions to reach an understanding of the concepts needed for underpinning the social inquiry.

The Youth Narratives report can be seen as contributing to the existing literature by identifying the core strengths, and successful elements of youth work practice. It aims to contribute to the sustainability of the sector by providing evidence of the unique contribution that youth work makes to the lives of young people. By bringing together diverse voices and stories the Youth Narratives Project affirms the essential function of the youth work sector in the realm of community welfare.

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5 For full definitions of youth, youth worker and youth sector see Appendix 2.0.
Methodology

This project seeks to reveal the difference that community youth work makes in the lives of vulnerable youth by allowing the voices of young people to come to the fore.

In order to do this successfully the Youth Narratives Project depended on a methodology that fulfilled several criteria. Firstly, we desired an approach which avoided an exclusive focus on an individual’s experience and instead situated data in a common social and political context. Secondly, we needed an approach to data collection that did not hide the diversity of experiences and finally, being youth ourselves, we wanted to conduct research according to values of advocacy and empowerment.

Collective Narrative Practice (CNP), a qualitative methodology that recognises the value of individual’s narratives as meaningful data, was chosen as the most appropriate method to guide the social inquiry.

CNP is located within an interpretivist paradigm which understands reality as socially constructed rather than objectively determined. It follows that narrative analysis understands people as active social agents, and seeks to uncover their interpretation of a particular incident and the meanings they have attached to it. This kind of analysis connects narratives to a broader context by creating a body of collective. As Willis points out, “the objective of a narrative approach is to reveal how individuals’ actions and interpretation coexist with broader social structures and patterns” (Willis, 2013, p. 328).

Originally developed by David Denborough, narrative practice evolved from collective narrative therapy- a healing practice for individuals, groups, and communities who have experienced trauma (2008). Because of this, CNP is seen as particularly relevant for working with vulnerable individuals and communities. Essentially, when conducting CNP the researcher collaborates with research participants in constructing, reflecting on and adapting narratives so to develop a true representation of participant

Phases of CNP Methodology

- interview
- collective editing

Data analysis
- discussion
- thematic identification
- creation of collective narrative
- de-identify narratives

Data collation

Narrative collection
experiences. As Shevell evidences, “it is ... a rigorous process in that the participants are positioned as co-researchers and interpreters of the data” (2014, p. 9) This practice discourages researchers from recording the interview. Instead one researcher asks questions to draw out the narrative, while another researcher drafts a version of their story.

As it relates to the Youth Narratives Project, 22 stories – 15 youth and 7 youth workers – were collected across six different locations (see appendix 3.0). Of the young people interviewed, 8 were male and 7 were female, and ages ranged from 12-25. All youth workers interviewed were female.

Collecting the narratives was a three phase process. Firstly, the research project was explained to the participants in ‘laymen’s terms’ and they were given the opportunity to ask any questions. During this stage, in adherence with ethics guidelines, permission was gained by having participants sign a consent form. For those who were under 18, we required the signature of a legal guardian, a process which was negotiated by having the respective agency liaise with the guardians of the participant. Secondly, the participants were interviewed, each for approximately forty-five minutes. At the conclusion of each narrative, the research scribe would read back the participant’s narrative to verify the recorded account and together researcher and narrator would begin the process of collective editing. Access to three researchers on rotating rosters helped guard against interview bias, as different combinations of researcher and scribe were utilised.

Data analysis was primarily an organic process of discussion between researchers that occurred after each interview. Often this ensued in the long car trips home. During this period, key themes and important moments were analysed and unpacked. Next, the
Stories and storytelling are pervasive in nature. They cut across time and place to capture a collection of important experiences and bring coherence to them. Collective Narrative Practice offers contextual meaning in a way that positivist methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, cannot.

data was cooperatively adapted into shorter one page stories to create data of collective experience. After these initial phases, the more rigorous process of thematic identification and quantification of key experiences began. This phase involved drawing out the common themes to highlight shared experiences among the youth. Narratives were then de-identified to ensure anonymity and to adhere to ethical guidelines directing the research.

According to CNP, data collection is necessarily an unstructured process that, by design, should not adhere to a strict schedule or program. For this reason ‘prompts’, based on Brian Stanfield’s (2000) ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisive) guideline were used. This allowed the research team to mimic the ebb and flow of conversation and listen for key moments in the narratives.

Despite its appropriateness for this project, CNP is not without limitations. Its value derives from the detailed and insightful interview structure; however this process is time consuming and therefore limits the number of participants for potential inclusion. A technicality of the methodology is that it raises questions about ownership – who actually owns and controls narrative data – the participant or the researcher? By basing the narrative collection on principles of collaboration, the Youth Narratives team has tried to mediate any unfavourable participant outcomes regarding ownership. Also, by default, this methodology is not able to capture numerical or statistical change, although as mentioned earlier in the report this was not a limitation to our project. A final limitation which may have impacted on the validity of this research is that each youth centre selected who was to be involved in the research, and subsequently some may have chosen biased participants. However, justification of participant choice must consider the fact that youth chosen needed to express a desire to share their story and those who did not enjoy their experience at youth agencies are less likely to be available or want to be involved in this research.

The final stage of CNP is the collective sharing of constructed narratives with research participants, where narrators are invited to respond to the collective narrative. This phase of analysis involves the movement from personal storytelling to collective analysis whereby a shared identity is established (Shevellar, 2014). At the time of writing, the collective component of the research had not yet been fulfilled. However, preliminary collective engagement took place when the Youth Narratives team presented initial findings of the research at the 2014 Youth Affairs Network Queensland conference. Members of the audience were invited to offer feedback and share their opinions. The Youth Narratives team is also acutely aware that the research lives beyond this report. As a team we are looking forward to realizing this final stage which will be initiated with the youth narratives film screening.

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6 A breakdown of the ORID structure as well as the full list of prompts can be found in Appendix 4.0.
7 By including an ‘opt-out’ clause in the consent form participants who were concerned about ownership were able to withdraw their narrative from the data set.
Findings and Discussion

**Q. What difference does youth work make in the lives of young people?**

In determining what difference youth work makes in the lives of young people it was necessary to identify some of the difficult circumstances that led youth to contact or be referred to community welfare services. CNP as a methodology allowed for detailed investigation of these factors. An understanding of these challenges enabled researchers to gauge the value and contribution of youth work to the real life changes in the lives of their clients. Prior to contact with the agency common challenges respondents articulated were: troubles at school (including being kicked out or dropping out), depression, fighting with parents and difficulty forming healthy relationships (see figure 1). For example, as identified by a youth worker:

“When James first came here he had low self-confidence and he struggled to develop healthy relationships”.

A lack of encouragement and difficulty coming to terms with sudden change were additional issues identified, exemplified by the following quotes:

“I never had much encouragement at home because where we’re from we learn to harden up”
“I wagged six months of school... When I was meant to go back and start year 11, I lost my little brother in a motocross accident. I disappeared for a year”.

Overall, this research found that the major difference youth work makes to the lives of young people is in providing them with external support and assisting them to develop a sense of self-worth required to navigate everyday challenges. To face issues such as homelessness, family breakdown, unemployment and financial troubles, youth require strong support networks to enable them to independently overcome challenges. Within the parameters of this study, the Youth Narratives team defined support networks as the comfort of knowing that there is the help and time of a youth worker available if a young person needs it.

The identified outcomes of youth work are overwhelmingly positive (see figure 2 for the most commonly identified outcomes). Sixty per cent of participants reported growing self-confidence as a major outcome of youth work.

“My confidence has really improved since starting at Sustainable Partnerships”

Participants also acknowledged the attainment of educational outcomes, advice on building healthy relationships and emotional support as valued attributes of their experience with community youth organisations.

“I’ve come out of my shell a little bit more now and I can talk to strangers”.

Guidance, in terms of how best to deal with challenges was a further identified outcome of youth work. Other narrators recognised the value of youth work in helping them become more positive, outgoing and happier.

“One year ago I was a dropkick, annoying and depressed. Now I’m happy, cheerful and loving the world”

“I’m no longer a silent person, now I sing as I walk down the street”

As an unexpected side note, this research also evidenced the mutually beneficial relationship of youth work, on both the recipient and employee. As described by youth workers who discuss:

“How cool it is to see how much his confidence has grown” and how “watching Anna do that full circle has been amazing”.

Making a positive difference in the lives of young people is important not only because it impacts on the quality of life of the individual, but because it also benefits the wider community. As youth become more empowered there are flow on effects for society, which include improved school retention rates, a higher number of engaged citizens and strengthened community relationships.

“In the past five years I’ve seen many positive changes in James, he’s even considered uni, which is something that wouldn’t have been on his radar a couple of years ago”
The narratives in Appendix 5.0 evidence the value, quality and promise of youth work.

The prominence of positive change as an outcome of youth work suggests that the agencies were overwhelmingly successful in their practice with young people. Part two of the research asked what were the elements that led to this success? In investigating this question it was necessary to examine the role of the youth worker in contributing to positive change in lives of young people as well as determining exactly what it is about the youth workers that make them successful.

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**Common Outcomes**

In an attempt to quantify qualitative data, the number of responders for each theme was counted and transferred into a percentage for ease of comparison.

“**I’ve now got my year ten certificate**”

“**When I grow I want to be a hospital person, one that helps people**”. (This quote featured in a narrative of a 12 year old boy).

As the data demonstrates, the vast majority of participants engaged in the Youth Narratives research reported positive outcomes associated with engagement with CPLAN agencies. It is worth noting however that not every participant narrated an entirely positive experience of his or her involvement with youth organisations. One young person had recently suffered a number of setbacks in the youth-youth worker relationship and was described as more closed off and reserved by her youth worker. It was inferred that the agency had not been able to exert positive change on this particular individual in the same way they had with others. This is not to devalue the expanse of positive data generated, but rather to evidence that despite overwhelmingly positive outcomes, youth work cannot be seen though rose-coloured glasses and challenges associated with youth engagement remain critical obstacles to successful practice.

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The narratives in Appendix 5.0 evidence the value, quality and promise of youth work.
Youth Connections, a program which offers assistance to young people who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging from school, provides services including case management, alternative education pathways and training.

At the end of 2014, Youth Connections will no longer be funded by the federal government due to budget cuts in the welfare sector.

The closure of Youth Connections featured in the Youth Narratives research. Two research participants, who at the time of interviews were enrolled in the program, elaborate on the consequences associated with the closure of this program for youth who are at risk of disengaging from education:

“I want Youth Connections to stay open and help other kids that don’t succeed in high school”

“Problems fitting into mainstream school are pretty common”.

Our research found that overwhelmingly, the two most important components of youth work were the ability to confer support and self-worth to the client. Thus, conducting youth work successfully means creating a network of support by providing encouragement and a sense of personal empowerment.

From the narratives it was also relevant to identify a number of desirable qualities of youth workers in order to have a sense of what it is about their work that resonates with the youth (see figure 3). These qualities included the ability to offer guidance:

“They gave me a different point of view that wasn’t so negative and helped me work out what was going on in my life”

give encouragement:

“She was really easy to talk to and gave me the confidence to open up to her”

and be easy to talk to:

“Helen isn’t just a good teacher she’s a friend”.

One respondent described talking with her youth worker like talking with her mother, a person she can always “vent to” and who is continuously checking in on her. This relationship between Millie and Cara was one of the strongest seen in the data set. Both described their relationship as meaningful and mutually-beneficial. After falling pregnant, Millie was the first person Cara confided in.

“I’ve received a lot of emotional support from the agency”.

On many occasions it is even the little things that young people appreciated the most:

“There was one day I was tired and she made me a coffee. It tasted like crap but I told her thank you anyway”.

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“Problems fitting into mainstream school are pretty common”.

Case Study: Youth Connections – the Cost of Defunding
Another element of successful practice was associated with engaging youth in a diverse range of meaningful activities, usually outside the traditional school environment. Those interviewed at Sustainable Partnerships discussed the benefits of being involved with an agency that organises fun and creative work experience. Another organisation, SevGen provides indigenous youth who are struggling to conform to mainstream schooling the opportunity to experience a different form of education.

“We do painting and went to the park and learned SevGen things. We learnt a lot of stuff.”

As aforementioned in the literature review, the youth sector is currently at a crossroads. One of the reasons for this is the tension that exists between programmatic and non-programmatic elements of service delivery and the challenges associated with balancing the two (see figure 4). Two realities were uncovered from the narratives that reflect this tension. Firstly, in their narratives, youth workers tended to focus disproportionally on the non-programmatic challenges they faced in conducting their daily work:

“If the YJET program had more funding, we could provide teaching for up to Year 12”

“We haven’t got any formal funding right now, we are running based on income that we are making”

“We need to get more funding so we can do more”.

While funding is a genuine cause of concern, too much emphasis on it can begin to affect morale and job satisfaction and could eventually begin to impact the delivery of programmatic elements such as support and encouragement for youth.

Interestingly, youth shared an alternative reality in their narratives, one that related to programmatic elements of service.

“Ebony and Lucy have had a major impact on me, they’ve been a huge help to me socially”

“They helped me do up a new résumé because I want a job in hospitality and they’ve helped me with my confidence.”

Youth expressed overwhelming positivity in receiving the services offered by the agencies in the study. However, the youth workers responsible for providing these services seemed disconnected from the outcomes because they focused disproportionately on the challenges they face in their work. This suggests that youth workers themselves may need more support in balancing the non-programmatic elements of their service delivery but also that it may be necessary for youth workers to take a step back and remind themselves of the value and benefits of their work. In theory, it could be concluded that a good youth worker
is able to balance the tension between programmatic and non-programmatic elements of youth work and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the delivery of service, in reality however, we are aware that is easier said than done.

Q. How are elements of successful practice reflected in CPLAN’s Integrity in Our Practice Document?

The Integrity in our Practice document was developed by the Sunshine CPLAN agencies in an attempt to respond to the question: What would it take to create a vibrant youth sector in this region? It was intended as a “foundational document that would provide all youth organisations across the region with an articulation of their shared values and common practice”. Furthermore, it was designed to be a tool for building up regular contact between the agencies and also to train and induct new youth workers.

Determining the extent to which CPLAN’s Integrity in Our Practice document was employed in agency conduct was addressed through discussion of this document during interviews with youth workers.

Responses to this question varied from:

“I don’t know anything about it” to “We’re conscious practitioners but integrity doesn’t just happen.”

None of the youth workers interviewed reported reliance on this document to guide best practice nor did the actual document feature in the narratives as CPLAN may have originally envisaged. This does not devalue or question the integrity of current practice within the agencies. Rather, the research indicates that despite living out the values held in the document, there was an absence of the explicit use of the CPLAN guidelines in guiding best practice. Instead we found that CPLAN employees subliminally espouse these values in their practice with young people; and the use of values such as integrity, comes from their own life experience or from their superiors rather than from a CPLAN document.

“It helps to...have a few experiences to draw on”

“It’s passed on from senior workers who instill these values in us”.

Q. How are elements of successful practice reflected in CPLAN’s Integrity in Our Practice Document?
In the absence of a nationally agreed definition of youth work, government agencies and society at large are left with limited terms of reference through which to understand the value, unique role and necessity of the work undergone in the community youth sector. In recent years, reports and discussion papers by peak bodies have attempted to address these challenges. The aim of the Youth Narratives report has been to contribute to efforts to promote the sector by identifying core strengths and successful elements of practice.

Adopting CNP as a methodology to uncover rich and detailed experiences, this report sought to determine the difference youth work makes in the lives of vulnerable young people. Research findings evidence that an overwhelming majority of participants associate engagement with CPLAN agencies with positive change (as a positive experience). A boost in self-confidence, emotional support and the attainment of educational credentials are some of the commonly identified benefits harvested from youth work. Ultimately, this report argues that the most beneficial outcome of youth work is in providing vulnerable young people with a sense of self-worth and support to overcome everyday challenges.

Research found congruence between the espoused values of the Integrity in Our Practice document and the actual practice of youth work with the CPLAN agencies, despite the fact the document wasn’t widely discussed during narrative collection. Given that this document was the impetus behind this research, open conversation of the values advocated in the document and their relevance to everyday practice would be beneficial.

Across the community youth sector, it remains imperative that youth workers not only acknowledge but celebrate their success in working with vulnerable young Australians. While research shows that the current lack of funding has contributed to low levels of morale within the sector, it is important that youth workers do not become absorbed in non-programmatic elements of service. As the narratives indicate, the difference youth work makes to the lives of vulnerable youth is pervasive and employees must not lose sight of the valuable work they accomplish. We hope this report will be the impetus for CPLAN agencies to come together and celebrate their work.

Since releasing the first version of this report, the secondary component of the Youth Narratives Project, the production of a short film, has got underway. To coincide with the 2015 National Youth Week, this film will be presented to audiences at the Department of Communities Regional Forum. In conjunction with the Youth Narratives Research Team, the producers of the film have decided to film the narratives: ‘I sing’, ‘I hope it’s a boy’, ‘Getting back into the world’ and ‘Pit stop’. Its expected release date is April 16th 2015.
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Appendix

Appendix 1.0: Role and Activities of each Agency

**Push Productions** is one of the nations leading social change media publishing houses. For over 20 years Push Productions has specialised in developing communication strategies for marginalised, difficult to engage communities throughout Australia.

**Intercept** are a band of youth workers like no other. We represent the young people of Moreton Bay and speak out for those who need our help most. If you’re aged 10-18 years and are having trouble with home, school or life – we are there to help you through the tough times. There is always someone on hand to get you through life’s speed bump.

**SevGen:** For visionary people who need or are yearning for a different way to be ‘educated’ SevGen is a loving, living, laughing, listening and learning place.

**Worklinks** is a not-for-profit community organisation. We provide a number of programs and services to members of our community including people are school and recently out of school and mature-aged people. We pride ourselves on providing quality services and programs – tailored to individual needs – and based on strong community networks and partnerships.

**Sustainable Partnerships** Australia proactively responds to the needs and goals of people at local, state and national levels including those experiencing disadvantage.

**Deception Bay Community Youth Program (DBCYP)** is a community based organisation that has provided activities and services for young people since 1994. We believe that the Deception Bay community can only benefit from active participation from young people.
Appendix 2.0: Key Definitions

(YANQ What is Youth Work: Defining a Sector)

Youth Worker:

Someone who works with young people within the context of their culture, identity and place to ensure their rights are protected and promoted and their needs are genuinely met.

Young Person (Youth):

Someone who sees themselves differently to an older child but who is not yet an adult or being given their due rights as an adult.

Primary Purpose of Youth Work:

To resource and support young people who want help to access, navigate and make the best of their life choices.

Appendix 3.0: Location of CPLAN agencies
Appendix 4.0: ORID

**O: Objective** - gain a piece of factual information by asking a specific question. "What has been the most significant change that has occurred in your life since coming into contact with the youth agency?"

**R: Reflective** - look and listen for emotional highs and lows, pay attention to how event has affected the interviewee. "Tell us about this change"

**I: Interpretive** - the 'aha!' moment, a prompt that will draw out meaning and sense. "What was the role of the agency in this change?"

**D: Decisive** - prompt should encourage the interviewee to relate back to collective experience and future action. "Do you see other youth facing similar challenges? What would you like to agency to do in the future?"

**Prompts**

Q. How did you originally come into contact with the agency?
   - What were some challenges in your life before contacting the agency?

Q. What has been the most significant change that has occurred in your life since coming into contact with the youth agency?
   - Tell us about this change
   - What was the role of the agency in this change?
   - Do you see other youth facing similar challenges?

Q. What would you like the agency to do in the future?
   - What makes a good youth worker?

Q. Have you heard of the *Integrity In Our Practice* document?
   - To what extent does it guide your practice with youth?
Appendix 5.0: Narratives

I Sing
Six years ago I dropped out of school. I was 16 and had just moved from Logan so I didn’t have a lot of friends.

I was bullied. I used to be a small person, I was beaten up, hurt emotionally and physically. I didn’t share who I was, had trust issues and shut everyone out. I was a silent person, but I knew inside that I’m not a quiet person.

I heard about Deception Bay Community Youth Programs (DBCYP) through my mum who went to church with one of the workers here. At this time in my life I wasn’t doing anything or going anywhere.

My mum’s friend told her about a program being run to help youth get jobs, it’s called the ‘Get Set for Work’ program. I decided to call DBCYP.

Since coming into contact with the agency the youth workers have helped me figure some things out about myself and be comfortable with who I am. I’ve become more open, met more people and become more culturally adapted.

I started working in Deception Bay and after some time I also started volunteering here at the youth centre. Younger kids approach me wanting to talk about their problems. It’s good, I feel like I can help people and go places. It’s even encouraged me to think of youth work as a future goal. I see other youth facing similar challenges and I hate seeing young kids go through the difficulties and bullying like I did.

I want to look for another full time job and get out there and do things, as well as keep volunteering at deception bay. These days there’s not many people that don’t know me. I’m no longer a silent person, now I sing as I walk down the street.
Unique Stories

Young people come into contact with youth agencies for a number of reasons. When James first came here he had low self-confidence and he struggled to develop healthy relationships with others. In the last 5 years I’ve seen many positive changes in James, he’s even considered uni, which is something that wouldn’t have been on his radar a couple of years ago. It’s cool to see how much his confidence has grown.

Working in the field for the past ten years has shown me that all youth have unique stories. Many young people haven’t had anyone take the time to help them recognise their strengths. Youth work aims to help them with the realisation of who they are and that they can contribute positively to society.

DBCYP hasn’t changed much in the past ten years because we’re a value-based agency, which brings stability to how we work. We’re conscious practitioners but integrity doesn’t just happen. It’s passed on from senior workers who instill these values in us. Keeping young people engaged is one of our long-term goals.

Deception Bay is isolated due to lack of transport. But there’s beauty and strength in this community because in a closed off community everyone sticks together.

Looking forward, funding is always going to be an issue. As a consequence of the budget and restricted access to Centrelink and other youth services, we’re expecting to see youth engage in riskier behaviour.

We will need to go back to the streets for more crisis work.
I hope it’s a boy

I never had much encouragement at home because where we’re from we learn to ‘harden up’. Living in this area I struggled to find work and didn’t have much confidence to resume drop or put effort into searching for a job. My main problems have been difficulty building healthy relationships and being social.

I heard about DBCYP through my siblings. My brother comes here as well, he also has difficulty in social situations.

I use the youth centre for résumé writing and job searching. They helped me do up a new résumé because I want a job in hospitality and they’ve helped me with my confidence. I love job searching now, I put so much more effort into it.

They really pushed me...well because...I’m actually having a baby. I hope it’s a boy because I eat a lot. At the start I was scared because I wouldn’t have support. I was going to have an abortion but Millie (youth worker) reassured me that I would be able to handle having a baby, which was good because I don’t believe in abortion. Talking to Millie is like talking to my mum. She’s always checking up on me. We have really long conversations, and we talk about relationships. I just vent to her and tell her everything that’s going on.

I do see other youth facing similar challenges, especially teenagers; they don’t know what to do in this situation.

Millie was the first person I told about the baby.
I enjoy working here

In the Deception Bay area we tend to deal with a lot of young families that are struggling. Young people often come here for help with food and accommodation.

I first met Cara a couple of months ago when she was participating in a hospitality course run by DBCYP. We connected because we’re both from New Zealand and I can identify with that.

I’ve tried to build a relationship with Cara’s parents because I know that in our culture trust is important. In pacific Island families it’s considered embarrassing to be pregnant before marriage. We related to each other because I went through the same situation when I was young.

Since coming to the agency Cara has learnt to trust and she’s confided in me. She did not want her parents to know and was very nervous about telling them. We could share stories about that and I tried to support her through this.

I enjoy working here, it’s even helped me with my own family and these days I’ve got different insights to draw upon.

In the economic climate we’re in, the demand for youth work seems to be increasing. I see many other youth facing similar challenges in this area.

It helps to be a good listener, be yourself and have a few experiences to draw on.
Emotional Support

I moved out when I was 16, I had a difficult relationship with my mum and struggled living at home. I lost a lot of friends after school.

I fell pregnant when I was 19 and now my daughter is 17 months old. She’s well behaved but she’s a lot of work. I came into contact with the agency through the Young Parents Program and through my sister. I go to morning coffees organised by DBCYP where young mums meet up and talk about stuff.

They also helped me manage my phone bill when my phone was stolen and I couldn’t handle the repayments. They referred me to antenatal classes when I was pregnant, which gave me a lot more confidence going into labour. I’m also renting accommodation through the agency where me and my daughter live.

I receive a lot a lot of emotional support from the agency and I’ve got better confidence and self-esteem. Most of my friends I met through the programs run by DBCYP.

After I broke up with my partner I got sick. It was a lot to deal with at once and I became depressed. The centre helped me during this time. They gave me a different point of view that wasn’t so negative and helped me work out what was going on in my life.

I see other people facing similar challenges. Even my other family members have had contact with the centre and my younger sister is also pregnant. The agency has helped out a lot of young people but I think they need more funding to help others.

I’m at a good point in my life.
Getting Back Into The World

When I was 6 I signed up for motocross and I’ve been in the industry now for 11 years, I even had a sponsor. One day mum bought me a bike and I just jumped on it and it was natural. My little brother and I were the top two riders in Australia.

In grade 10 I wagged 6 months of school...well pretty much everyone wags, but probably not for 6 months. Mum knew that I didn’t want to be at school so she took me out. When I was meant to go back and start year 11, I lost my little brother in a motocross accident.

I disappeared for a year. When I came back into life I stayed in my room and never left. Once I told Jess (youth worker) about my little brother she understood what I went through. Now I know that I can’t blame my brothers death on myself. Since then I’ve opened up a lot and been happier.

I found out about Worklinks and their Youth Connections program through an employment service. I’m doing my year 10 certificate and I’ve been flying through all this. I’m going to go to TAFE and get my year 11 and 12 certificate. It’s fun. You get to meet a whole bunch of new people. Everyone’s real nice. It’s a mad place. I like it.

I’m starting to get back in the world. I’m more happy with myself. I’ve changed a lot since I’ve been here. I would normally just sit in my room and play the PlayStation. Jess is funny. There was one day I was really tired and she made me a coffee. It tasted like crap but I told her thank you anyway.

I want Youth Connections to stay open and help other kids that don’t succeed in high school. They are closing down at the end of the year. I’m hoping that anyone in my situation has somewhere to get their year 10 certificates.

It’s been a while since I’ve been on a bike, over a year a half. It would bring back a lot of memories. I kind of want to do it but at the same time I don’t.
At Their Level

I interviewed Ken when he first came here. He’s come from a very checkered background and his history is quite dark. Things at school didn’t work but this program seems to work well for Ken. He has got an ability to change and make some good choices and he knows the good from the bad. I’ve got so much time for him. Since starting at Worklinks he is more open and seen as a leader here. He has developed some strong leadership qualities that he didn’t previously have. I don’t think he ever had the opportunity to be a leader. This has been a huge change.

Jonny came in at the beginning of the year, he was a bit absent at times.

He is a typical teenage boy, I have a pretty good relationship with him, a good repour. He’s always been respectful here, but he does get himself into a bit of strife outside the program because of the choices he makes.

We come in contact with the youth when they have been disengaging from school or when something at school doesn’t work. They don’t necessarily suit mainstream education and schooling. We provide an alternative option. We are playing a small part and trying to engage them positively and support them in that change process.

It’s less rigid here. There are rules and expectations yet we know how to approach young people, we have been doing this sort of work for a long time.

Part of the job is about being down to earth, not taking yourself too seriously. Knowing when to pull them up and when to let it go. That comes with practice and confidence. Reaching them at their level, not being judgmental. They all come from different experiences. They are the experts in their lives.

Worklinks is a very equality driven organisation, we don’t like to turn our back on helping any kind of young person. We don’t like leaving students high and dry.

It’s sad the Youth Connections program is closing down, I haven’t processed it. We will help them with where to go next and what support they need.

The program has been going for so long, it’s got lots of merit and so many positive outcomes, not just here but Australia wide.
About Time

My name’s Joe I don’t really know what to say about myself. It was rough growing up with my family. I dropped out of school in grade 9 to start work as a plasterer. I ended up losing my job because of my boss. He lost his license so I couldn’t work.

I came to Intercept 3 months ago. I’m 17 and I’m at school doing what you would call year 10. It was about time I needed to see someone so I started seeing Sabrina. I now have a better relationship with my family. In the future I would like to have a stable job and my own house. I’m happier with myself and I’ve stopped doing a lot of stuff which has kept me out of ‘juvie’. Things at Intercept are going well the way they are.

I’ve only been here 3 months but I feel like I’ve come a long way.

Confidence

I was referred to Intercept through school, I was having a rough time with my family and I didn’t know what to do or where to go. I’m 16 and I’m still at school at Bribie Island. Since coming to intercept, I didn’t know how to explain it. I have less hate and a more positive outlook on things. Sabrina helped here by giving me suggestions of what I can do to strengthen my bonds with my parents. I’ve come a long way since seeing Sabrina. I’ve seen youth workers before then but I’ve moved the furthest with Sabrina. She was really easy to talk to and gave me the confidence to open up to her. I wouldn’t mind working as a youth worker.

I got my L’s today!

They Actually Care

I’m Anna, I’m 16 and this is my daughter Alex, she’s almost 4 months. I came in contact with Intercept through my conditional bail. Before I came I was just a little shit. I’ve been with Intercept for like a year now but it has been on and off. I’ve now got my year 10 certificate, I did a few cooking schools.

The youth workers are persistent, tolerant and they actually care. They don’t just say ‘do your work’.
Mini Me

I’m Rennai, I’m the facilitator for YJET – that’s Youth Justice Education and Training. I’ve been working at Intercept as the YJET facilitator for about 14 months. We run an alternative school teaching the Year 9 and Year 10 Certificate.

Before Anna came to YJET, I had previously worked with her in another role, and through the youth justice system, which was really good. Anna has done a lot of programs at the Youth Justice Department, like YJET and the gym program; Anna has been able to do a lot.

The main focus of the YJET program is education and schooling, and this is what we are funded for; however we incorporate the teaching of life skills into the program too. Life skills are a huge part of education; we do a lot of different things. If the YJET program had more funding, we could provide teaching for up to Year 12. A good youth worker needs to be flexible and a quick thinker.

I got to work with Anna a long time ago, so I’ve watched her grow and want more out of life. She has become more confident, and she has become a lady. I’ve watched Anna become a leader in the YJET group. By the time she was ready to leave the YJET program, it was like she was a mini me!

At the beginning it was a fight to get Anna to work, and now Anna was helping the other kids.

Watching Anna do that full circle has been amazing.
The power of happiness

I’m Sabrina, I’ve been working at Intercept for 3 years. I’m the reconnect support worker, so I work with young people who are at risk of homelessness or who have become homeless.

I think a big thing in this area is family breakdowns and conflict. The majority of reasons why kids are disengaging or not coming to school or having problems are around conflict. It comes back to without that strong connection at home and family role models everything falls over.

Joe’s life was heading in a particular path and in the very short amount of time. He’s got wonderful support but not just with the agency also in himself. He’s flipped it, he’s brought about change. I’m not saying there won’t be struggles or challenges.

The same is for Amy. I’ve been a youth worker for 11 years and one of my happiest moments was chatting to her. She’s had a major self-discovery...huge. As a youth worker that was massive and it was all her. She knows what it is. That self-realisation that she now holds the power for her happiness. I’m happy I’m still doing my job for that reason. But we need more funding so we can do more.

You need to know your limitations to be a good youth worker, know where your skill set is. If you can’t provide that for your client you need to be resourceful to find other services. Passion is important but you need more substance. You need to be a jack-of-all-trades. You need to be resilient, and without that resiliency you’d get burnt out so fast. Unfortunately nothing can teach you that, you actually have to be on the ground doing it.

I guess there has been change and not just tokenistic change, real change for both my clients.
**Pit Stop**

I live with my brothers and sisters and they are annoying. I have 3 younger sisters and a brother, and my older sister is 16, I’m 12. There are 6 of us. I’ve been coming to intercept since a bit before my baby sister was born, for about 4 months.

I started a new school this term and I’ve haven’t missed any days. I like going to school, its fun. At my old school I missed a lot of days because I didn’t like going to school. I go to Caboolture special school. My favourite subject is maths, I’m kind of good at maths. I like the elevator cause I’m too lazy to walk up and down the stairs.

Liz comes to my school. She helps me with my anger triggers and how to take a pit stop. A pit stop is like a big breathe, you play with the sand, read a book and talk to safe people like my mum or Liz or my teacher. I do them when I’m feeling angry.

Liz made me these cards but I came up with the ideas of what to put on them. Green ones are good choices like taking tablets when my mum says, red are bad choices like running away or punching or kicking. They help me sort out how I feel when I’m angry or happy.

Now I stop and think about what choice to make before I do it. We made a tree of all the good things about me, like helping others.

I’m a kind person.

Making a tree helped me realise these things. I got 5 A’s and 2 B’s on my report card. School is great. I’ve made like 20 friends at my new school. One is annoying because he keeps following me.

When I grow up I want to be a hospital person, one that helps people.
Run Away

When I first met James he would break the window open and run away. James was seeing a paediatrician and the social worker there made the referral to us. My role with James is to do case management to keep James and his family out of the child protection system so that child safety doesn’t get involved.

At the beginning James was going to mainstream school and he wouldn’t stay in class very long, we weren’t aware of his diagnosis. He would run away and get suspended lots, we had a potential expulsion.

James has an intellectual impairment and more research found that it was a lot more severe than what the school had thought, so we advocated for him to go to special school. He has made it a whole term there. That’s been really impressive.

We’ve done some work with getting James mum on board, she was a bit nervous about that. He has had some meltdowns but they are not as bad as they used to be.

James is aware of good choices and bad to choices and he knows not to make the bad ones. He’s been really responsible helping his younger brother with the same choice card technique. He used to hurt his little sisters but he doesn’t do that anymore. He’s been really nice and helpful with his new baby sister.

I see James at school each week and talk to his teachers before this about case management.

The majority of children we work with come from child safety; all their stories are so different. We work with children from 10 to 18, all who are at risk of entering child protection. We see lots of school refusal it’s a common problem we come across. Everyone has different reasons for school refusal. For James he just wasn’t coping well with the amount of people and they weren’t providing the support he needs. For other kids its bullying or issues at home.

A good youth worker is somebody who is really committed to the job and wants to help young people. Intercept as a whole has really good youth workers because we all come from such diverse backgrounds. You have your social workers, counsellors, those who studied psychology. It’s really good to have a mix of people.

We work very collaboratively.
Achievement

I came to Sustainable Partnerships and joined the YEAH group program which is the Youth Engagement Program about a year ago. The first time I went to the first meeting they had I didn’t really know anyone there. But I have met a lot of new people that I’m good friends with now.

The first event I went to they got me to do artist liaison and photography, which sparked my interest in photography. I got to photograph the next event, it was my first paid photography gig, which was really cool. Being here has helped me to get some experience, I want to get into concert and gig photography.

My confidence has really improved since starting at Sustainable Partnerships, I wouldn’t be doing anything like this if I wasn’t in the YEAH crew. I’ve made a lot of new friends, which is something I can say I have achieved.

Lucy and Ebony (youth workers) went out of their way to get to know everyone in the program. They made sure we tried something different at each event to make sure we all found something we enjoyed. The workshops they do at the moment are great. They always make sure everyone feels included. I would be good if they could do more events, but it all comes down to funding. I always take something away from their workshops.

Ebony and Lucy have had a major impact on me, they’ve been a huge help to me socially. Just meeting them has been awesome; I’ve become really good friends with them.
Stage Manager

I knew Lucy (youth worker) because she is one of my friends cousin, I messaged her on Facebook and she told me about the YEAH crew at Sustainable Partnerships. I was a bit iffy at the start because of the commitment but I went to the first meeting and really enjoyed it.

At the start of this year I began to take an interest in event planning, my goal is to run my own music events. I was stage manager for one of the events here, Royal Sounds. It was a busy job I felt very professional.

It was crazy at first here, everyone was loud and I was quiet. I’ve come out of my shell a little bit now and I can talk to strangers. As a person I’ve become more open to other people and open to more ideas. You really have to work together at all the events. I’ve learnt some practical skills and I’m getting used to working as a team. I like volunteering.

Ebony and Lucy promote a positive image of youth. They are really open to difference and understand people, that’s what makes them good. They put on events that provide a safe and enjoyable area for youth to hang out at.

I want to go to QUT to study film when I finish school.
I love music

The first time I participated in the YEAH crew I was in year 11. I wanted to go to this concert but I didn’t have any money so my friend told me rock up early and volunteer, they gave me a shirt and here I am two years later.

After finishing school I had so much free time. I thought volunteering here would be something fun and interesting to do and I love it.

At the last concert I did I organised all the artists. I had a great night I couldn’t walk the next day though my feet were so sore. We’ve been planning for the next event since then. I’m so excited because I’m stagehand for the big stage.

I’ve got to meet so many cool people and lots of people in the music industry. I’ve gained lots of practical skills. It’s given me confidence to do more. I love music, I can’t play instruments to save my life but I love volunteering.

I love being a leader, I hate bossy people but I love being in charge of things.
Good change

I wasn’t really doing much with my life before I came here. I dropped out of school in year 11. I was living with whoever, my life was challenging sometimes. It was hard living on my own short of money, food and that.

I’ve been in contact with Push Productions since April. The department of child safety referred me. I was in foster care and that was how I found out about the program. I’m 18 so I’ve moved out now.

I do print and design work here with Hannah (youth worker). I’ve changed since coming to Push Productions. I get up every morning and go to work which fills my day. I feel more confident, having money has been another good change since coming here.

The youth workers here help with writing your resume, what types of business people have, what they wear how they act and stuff like that. The program gets us ready for the real world and real work.

I’m coping good I have a house, I’m moving out to another house soon.
Life upside down

I came to Push Productions under care because I’ve had child abuse. Before I came here my life was hard. I was moving from foster home to foster home. I had no one to talk to. I was doing self-harm a bit.

A child service lady found Push Productions for me. Hannah (youth worker) called and asked if I wanted to come and work for Lazy Dog Tees. I make hats, cups, bags and t-shirts. I come here 3 days a week and I’m at school the other days.

Working here has turned my life upside down. I have someone to talk to here. The people are the best thing about Push Productions. They’ve helped me get youth allowance and just heaps of stuff.

Hannah has helped a fair bit. She is young, that’s good for young people. She listens really good and she’s there when you want to talk. The agency has a good program going right now, there isn’t anything they should change.

I like this kind of work I want to keep it going if I can. I’m not as negative about things since coming here. I’m more confident and have better people skills.

This place will change our lives around.
Leaps and bounds

I came to Push Productions in March. This is a very unique role in youth work in that they are not my clients but my colleagues so it has been interesting learning the boundaries. Obviously I still work with them as if they are clients but it does give me a bit more scope to work in a different way and treat them more like adults. My work is about me trying to maintain my professional and personal boundaries. Push Productions is about teaching them work skills and to transition them into other employment. My role is about building links and helping the kids figure out what they want to do.

I’ve seen amazing improvements in Sam he’s come a long way in leaps and bounds. He was very negative when he started, you’d ask him ‘how was your day’ and he’d respond ‘shit’. Everything was negative. He has pretty much no literacy and numeracy skills so we asked if he was interested in seeing a tutor. We have started the process of getting some funding for about 7 months of tutoring which he started this week. He is really excited about that.

About 6 weeks ago we had a market stall set up next to Head Space and I asked him to go and have a chat with them. A week later he said he wanted to get counseling and asked for help to make an appointment. I’m not doing formal case management with him, its just working alongside him.

Paige has had a bit of a backwards slide recently. She is a lot more closed off and reserved. I think that is just how she’s been raised. You think you’re starting to have a breakthrough with her but then she just slips back. She’s learnt to say what she thinks people want to hear. She will throw out random comments at really inappropriate times whether that is her reaching out to get some support.

One day she said ‘I remember being homeless and living on the streets with my dad’ or ‘when I was born I was addicted to drugs’. Self-reflection and self-awareness are important traits in youth work. Someone who is clear on their boundaries, because young people can get quite attached. Someone who is kind, caring and understanding. You also need an ability to put your shit aside and not put that onto young people.

We haven’t got any formal funding right now, we are running based on income that we are making. They see the value of this organisation. Our criteria right now is that the kids have to been on child protection orders and ready to be transitioned from care.

The hope is that child safety will give us funding and keep us going.