

# LISTENING TO QUEENSLAND'S YOUTH SECTOR

Report on the findings of the 2012 Youth Affairs Network Qld Consultations with the Queensland Youth Sector to inform the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' Youth Sector Review

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the findings of consultations conducted by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc (YANQ) in late 2012. These consultations were designed to enable YANQ to produce a sector-driven, evidence-based response to the Queensland Youth Services Review. A total of 282 youth workers and youth service managers across Queensland participated in the statewide consultation process through either attendance at one of 7 regional face-to-face sessions, or through an online survey.

Brief discussion and recommendations about some of the implications of these findings for the Review, draw together the consultation findings and data collected through a number of YANQ research projects over the past 2-3 years.

## CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Whilst some variations existed between regions (in particular, between the more urbanised south east corner (SE Corner) of Queensland, and rural/regional areas) a number of strong themes emerged:

### The needs of young people

The highest overall need identified was access to affordable housing. Other priority needs identified were family support/social inclusion, access to youth services, mental health support and education/re-engagement. Access to public transport was also highlighted in several rural/regional areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were consistently identified as the group with the most unmet needs, closely followed by criminalised young people (particularly in the SE Corner), young people with disabilities, young people from small communities and refugee young people (particularly in the SE Corner). There is generally a higher level of unmet needs amongst young people in rural/regional areas.

### Types of services with the best outcomes for young people

Respondents overwhelmingly advocated flexible, accessible, multi-functional, community-based services with the capacity to respond to changing needs and/or

the different needs of young people and their families/communities in different regions (rather than funding for pre-identified needs or pre-determined services). The single model which was most widely supported was a hub, with a variety of services co-located, and the capacity to provide outreach services. Advice varied as to whether it was best to provide larger regional services or smaller local services. Advice also varied as to whether youth housing services should be integral to, or separate from, these hubs. Rural/regional respondents particularly favoured the existing Youth Support Co-ordinator Initiative. Resources to continue to train/support youth workers, link youth workers/services and undertake research/development activities were widely seen as an important component of viable service system.

### Forms of engagement with the best outcome for young people

It was overwhelmingly agreed that voluntary involvement in youth programs achieves the best long term outcomes for young people.

### Primary target groups of young people

The majority of respondents proposed that youth work should target all young people, not only those who are marginalised - a trend that was accentuated amongst rural/regional respondents. Respondents from the SE Corner were more likely than those from rural/regional areas to prioritise a focus on marginalised young people.

### Methods of service delivery with the best outcomes for young people

Respondents overwhelmingly saw individual work with young people (particularly informal interactions) as the most effective method of service delivery. Informal group work to build peer support amongst young people and community development work also rated highly. A combination of formal group work, community education and advocacy for young people were also seen as effective in some situations.

### Customising service delivery according to target group

Preventative work, early intervention and indi-

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vidual support for those already facing problems, were considered most useful to young people. Rural/regional respondents tended to emphasise the importance of prevention and early intervention work with a wide cohort of young people. Respondents from the SE Corner placed a greater emphasis on individual post-problem support for marginalised young people.

Overall, respondents were largely agreed on how the available funding should be allocated. Both south-eastern and rural/regional respondents proposed that two-thirds (2/3 - 67%) of the available resources should be allocated to direct Youth Service provision and one-third (1/3 - 33%) should be allocated to Youth Worker/Sector Development. The only significant variation between the two groups, was the greater weight placed on funding of regional services (28%) amongst respondents from rural and regional areas. Both groups proposed that approximately 20% of funding should be dedicated to local services, at least 10% of funding should be dedicated to services in metropolitan Brisbane, and at least 10% of funding should be spent on multi-regional or statewide services for particular target groups of young people (e.g. Murri young people).

Funding of developmental activities was also seen as a high priority - with both rural/regional and SE Corner respondents arguing that between 6% and 8% of the total budget should be allocated to each of the following areas - organisational supervision/mentoring and peer support; organisational reflection/research/evaluation; regional networking/activities; sector-wide research/development; and sector-wide workforce training/development. This is consistent with the findings of the Health and Community Services Workforce Council (2012:9), which highlighted the importance of development and support, given data that suggests that 51% of youth workers have been in the sector for 2 years or less, and only 40% have access to regular supervision.

Large NGOs that focus on addressing pre-identified needs or providing pre-determined programs, were widely perceived to be the least effective in addressing the needs of young people. Most respondents argued that, whatever the outcomes of the Review, the Queensland Government should invest in existing local or regional services, rather than appointing new organisations to develop new programs and services. This would optimise service efficiency through leveraging on existing credibility and goodwill toward effective existing organisations.

These findings are highly consistent with recent YANQ

research studies and consultations. These include the Youth Sector Workforce Skilling and Training Research Project; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Sector Skilling and Training Research Project; consultations leading to YANQ's response to the Youth at Risk Initiative (YARI) review; Multiculturalism in Queensland's Youth Sector; and a series of consultations to answer the question What is Youth Work? (See the Bibliography for further details of published reports.)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective youth work is an investment in young people's lifelong social engagement and participation. It is essential that the Youth Services Review enable workers and organisations with expertise in the needs of their particular communities to develop and maintain services which will produce the best possible long term outcomes for young people. Given the varied nature of communities and services throughout Queensland, this will inevitably lead to different types of services, addressing different needs, in different regions across the state.

**Recommendation 1:** That the Youth Services Review adopt a multi-faceted, flexible practice framework which enables service providers to respond to the particular needs of their constituency - including young people, their families and their communities.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Youth Services Review optimise the unique role and contribution of youth workers to service delivery.

**Recommendation 3:** That, wherever possible, the Queensland Government continue to invest in existing community-based local and regional youth service providers, rather than appointing organisations from outside the community to develop new programs and services.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Youth Services Review recognise the critical role of developmental activities when allocating funding - particularly organisational support and development; regional networking and collaboration; and sector-wide workforce development and research.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Youth Services Review propose that further work be undertaken to identify and respond to the needs of youth people living in remote areas of Queensland.

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