

Submission Response

from

Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ)

JPET Evaluation

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Ph: (07) 3844 7713

Fax: (07) 3844 7731

Email: yanq@thehub.com.au

Prepared by Carolyn Grant
Policy Officer (YANQ)

March 2000

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1. About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. YANQ's members total over 500 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, seeking to represent and promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people, to government and the community.

Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs, projects and research that are responsive to the needs of young people and we promote and support cultural diversity.

2. Introduction

In responding to the Jobs, Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) Evaluation – Terms of Reference, YANQ staff consulted with a range of workers, including a number who work with young people in JPET programs across the state of Queensland. YANQ Policy and Network Officers consulted with a number of JPET workers and others who interface with JPET programs.

YANQ advocates on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged and marginalised young people and in so doing aims for positive social change to improve the quality of life for all young people in Queensland.

Many of the organisations, programs and workers with whom YANQ liaises, work with, for and on behalf of young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, experiencing family conflict, violence, sexual abuse, participating in the youth justice and child protection systems and at risk of suicide and self harm. Many work with young people from particular target groups such as non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), refugee or unaccompanied minors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT); young women; young people for whom the mainstream education system does not fit and many others.

Given the program guidelines for JPET Providers definition of Mutual Obligation – *the Government's principle that unemployed job seekers, supported financially by the community, should, in addition to actively seeking work, undertake another activity to improve their competitiveness in the labour market and/or contribute to the local community* – it is critical to understand the intensive assistance and support required by many of the young people who access JPET programs.

We understand the JPET program objective to be – *assist young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or facing similar severe problems, in ways which not only help them with their income and personal support needs, but which also ensure they secure career paths and sustainable futures.* Certainly, working towards a sustainable future for many of the young people who access JPET will include maintaining a reasonable state of health; identifying and addressing substance use issues; accessing safe, affordable, secure accommodation; seeking counselling and support for mental health issues, sexual assault, torture and trauma, suicidal ideation, post traumatic stress; and for some, parenting support and related skill development. This is not an exhaustive list and the young people who access JPET are by no means an homogenous group. It does however illustrate the range and depth of skill required in providing a JPET program and the intensive nature of the support required by young people accessing the program.

For JPET programs across Queensland, some represent one of the few services providing support to young people in a particular geographical area. Program workers are aware of the essential skill of linking with other services and developmental referral, however, there are often not the services to refer to, particularly given the crisis nature of the work with many young people in the broad target group. Services such as emergency relief, crisis accommodation, respite, food vouchers, crisis counselling are some of the services which are often difficult to refer young people to.

3. Response to Terms of Reference

3.1 The Efficacy of the Program for Different Target Groups

- **Whether clients are being assisted with accommodation, training, education, work experience or employment.**
- **Any improvements in life skills, changes in attitudes or behaviours;**
- **Other relevant statistics or measures such as school retention rates, return to school rates, recidivism rates including community response or satisfaction with the programme**

YANQ consultations and ongoing working relationships with JPET, show that the efficacy of JPET is often hindered by a range of factors, the least of which is the actual efficiency and effectiveness of JPET programs.

These factors include:

- **the lack of related support services** in areas that many JPET programs service eg crisis, medium and long-term accommodation options. In Queensland under 18 year olds cannot access public housing. The high cost of private rental is often prohibitive for young people on income support benefits and other tenures are not available. If young people identify substance use issues and choose to address this, there are few options for youth specific detoxification or rehabilitation. Ultimately, the services that JPET programs may think to refer young people to, which may be difficult/"complicated" referrals, in fact, don't exist or do not have vacancies.
- **shrinking job opportunities** for low-skilled young people.
- **a changed labour market.**
- **competing with older age groups** (most of which have more work experience than young people) in an environment of increasing unemployment. This includes competing for traineeships and apprenticeships.
- Current **unemployment rates for young people** in Queensland (15 – 19 year olds looking for fulltime work, unemployment rate at February 2001 was 34.2% - *ABS, Labour Force Stats, February 2001*)

- **lack of understanding, empathy and support provided by some external training providers** eg in traineeships
- lack of understanding, empathy and support of young people's issues (particularly long term unemployed and disadvantaged young people) provided by **organisations and supervisors providing work experience** and job placement opportunities
- inability of **mainstream education** providers to support young people who traditionally would not have remained in that system – many have returned to or stayed in mainstream education facilities to ensure access to Youth Allowance, whereas in a previous labour market and prior to the implementation of changes to youth income support this would not have been the case.
- **withdrawal of student support services** in TAFE's and other training provider institutions.
- **Lack of alternatives to mainstream education system.** This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of community based alternative education facilities that are emerging, some running entirely on volunteer labour, using Distance Education resources, others developing creative models that will support at risk young people. Currently the lack of alternatives results in young people being suspended and excluded.

Improvements in life skills and changes in attitudes or behaviours relate to the often long term, intensive nature of the work that is JPET. Many young people require ongoing support of an intensive nature given their previous life experiences, lack of opportunities and lack of positive role models in often chaotic lives.

Improvement in this area is directly related to adequate resources from which to base a program that works across the spectrum of early intervention and prevention to longer-term tertiary intervention. **All JPET services consulted discussed an inability to provide the range of services required to meet the objectives of the program.** Some JPET programs have offered extensive services in the past, and would like to continue to offer a broad range, include counselling and support. This is not currently possible given current funding levels.

Additional services required include adequate administration support in order for direct service workers to be able to focus on support services to clients, increased on-site trainers and needs-identified project workers.

Other relevant statistics that would assist the JPET program in terms of advocacy for increased funding and support for the work they are doing include school retention rates. Exclusion and suspension rates of young people in Education Queensland facilities are currently difficult to ascertain in a coordinated fashion. Information was collated and available in the past. However, our understanding is that since 1999, when local Queensland media stated that approximately 19,000 students were suspended and excluded from government schools during 98/99, that this systematic collection no

longer occurs at an Education systems level but only at a local level. This has the potential to invalidate any State “picture” if local systems do not match.

Given the nature of the work done by JPET services it is critical that qualitative information is collected as well as quantitative. Small steps for young people can often be an enormous journey.

Improvement in skills etc, will occur when young people have their basic needs met. JPET continues to struggle with accessing services that can assist young people with meeting their basic needs. Pathways to employment, education and training must be built on a recognition that the target groups that JPET provides services to, often require ongoing, long term, intensive support. Current resourcing levels of JPET services are insufficient to enable this to occur and resources must be increased post haste.

3.2 Good practice service delivery models including benchmarking

- **Service design, quality of workers**
- **Models of service delivery**
- **Service standards benchmarks**

Good practice cannot be divorced from service viability. JPET services are struggling to provide quality services to young people, while recognising that they cannot provide all required services. Program budgets do not enable the resourcing that is required, given the intensive nature of the work. This does not however negate the fact that community based JPET services provide innovate, necessary services to disadvantaged young people who can access a service that facilitates and supports their “connection” to mainstream systems.

Funding bodies need to consult directly with JPET providers regarding increased core budgets and the flexibility to apply for one off project funding for identified needs.

The services that JPET provides must be viewed in the context of crime prevention, suicide prevention, substance use education, family mediation and a range of connected issues in young people’s lives. All models of service delivery must reflect a service response that recognises the breadth and depth of the issues the diverse target groups face.

3.3 Programme administration by Government and Providers

- **The Commonwealth – evaluation and monitoring, Request for Tender process, contracts, Departmental coordination**
- **The Service Providers – internal administration, support and training, community linkages, linkages to other programmes etc.**

JPET services consulted are well linked to other community programs and services as is necessary to facilitate their client groups' multiple pathways.

JPET needs to be promoted and marketed. This would assist service providers with linking with employers and advocating on behalf of the young people with whom they work. This requires coordination from the Department and facilitation of general advertising of the program, providing the ground work that otherwise distracts from supporting young people.

It is essential that JPET programs are able to offer quality in-house training for some programs, particularly initial training that includes pre-vocation preparation. This may include going back to basics and supporting young people to develop routines, literacy and numeracy support etc. It is essential that these initial services are provided in an environment where young people can develop trust and self-confidence to progress to further education and training, and linkages with other programs.

Given the JPET client group, which was described by one service provider as "the young people who don't fit anywhere" it is essential that JPET programs have adequate resources to access support and training. This includes worker access to professional supervision, debriefing, relief staffing component and training budget allocation.

3.4 Overall Programme design

- **Adequacy of guidelines and performance assessment;**
- **Target group – appropriateness of definitions, need to broaden or change;**
- **Relationships with other programmes or Government services;**
- **Strategies to encourage the autonomous movement of young people from homelessness to secure accommodation to education/training to work experience/employment to financial independence.**

JPET Steering Committees, as required by funding guidelines, would appear to be an additional stress upon JPET providers, resulting in time away from the core work of supporting young people. Resources are diverted to organising meetings, facilitating meetings, minuting meetings, mail outs for meetings, etc – given the limited administration support available to JPET services this would seem an unbalanced use of resources, particularly for a program which links well with other programs, particularly other community based services and relevant State and Federal government departments. Feedback received by YANQ included "meetings for meetings sake". Community based JPET workers already participate in existing local and issues based networks/interagencies. Creating further forums only create further stresses on a community sector, which is already over-stretched.

It is essential that JPET programs cross link. To this end, one strategy adopted in South East Queensland, has resulted in JPET workers attending (at least) quarterly forums to discuss issues relevant to the program and the

young people with whom they work. This provides an opportunity for discussion and think tank on issues such as strategies to support young people in their move towards independence and future pathways.

Definitions of the target group as stated in the guidelines could be enhanced to include the range of supports that are required and the diversity of issues that are responded to by JPET. This would provide prospective tenderers with a clearer understanding of the target group and possibly the range of skills and roles required in a JPET service. For example, the definition of "*child in care/ward of the State*" could include not only what this means, but a description of the issues that a young person from this target group may face.

Certainly, strategies which encourage disadvantaged young people who are the target group of JPET into secure accommodation and financial independence

YANQ, as the peak body for the community youth sector, in Queensland, auspices funds for State-wide networks, to support their communication and networking function. This extra allocation of funds has proven to enhance linkages between workers funded under the same Departmental program and contributes to best practice within the sector

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, JPET provides a service that in many ways is working at the early intervention/prevention end of the continuum of service delivery. This ultimately results in savings if young people can be appropriately supported along identified pathways. However, funded services are struggling as a result of increased costs such as GST compliance, transport and vehicle costs, increased client support costs such as food and hygiene products, and limited operational costs for supports such as information technology, which is critical for accountability and reporting on outcomes.

Given the range of barriers that JPET seeks to overcome, some of which are listed in the program guidelines, it is critical that resource allocation to JPET services be reviewed if young people are to receive quality services.

The FaCS *Reconnect* Programme funding was one programme that was suggested as a benchmark for any future review of JPET funding allocations. Although Reconnect and JPET are clearly funded for different outcomes, there are similarities in the intensive nature of support work undertaken.