Impact of COVID-19
on the
Qld Youth Sector

April 2020

In response to YANQ members contacting us and raising various concerns about continuity of service to marginalised young people, support for youth workers and contract/funding issues, YANQ released an online survey to the youth sector on 31st March 2020 and closed the survey on April 15th.
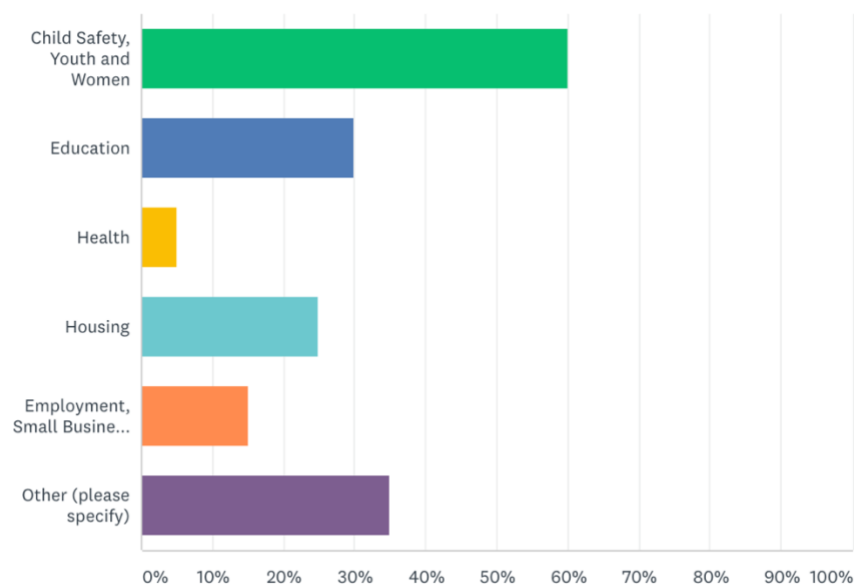
The purpose of administrating this survey was for YANQ to collect information about service needs and capacity within the youth sector. This will allow us to undertake informed advocacy on behalf of the sector on issues impacting the youth sector and extra support needed for the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following report documents the responses to the above-mentioned survey. We do not have the necessary resources to undertake a detailed analysis of the results and to publish a comprehensive report. Therefore, we are providing the data which, we believe, should be used in forming supportive responses to the youth sector during this crisis.

Over all there were 21 respondents covering a diverse geographic range across the state stretching from Gold Coast in the south to Cooktown in the North and Mt Isa in the North West.

The surveys were completed predominantly by CEO's followed by Team Leaders, frontline youth workers and management committee members.

We asked the sector to describe which State Government Departments they receive funding from.

Other sources of funding included, DJAG, Local Councils, Department of Transport and various Federal Government Departments.

It should be noted that there are many services across the State which have never received any funding from the Queensland Government. These are primarily volunteer-based, but still have fixed costs to cover (rent, insurances and other regular outgoings). These costs may force many of these organisations to shut down, potentially without hope of re-opening once the current Coronavirus crisis is over. These organisations create tens of millions of dollars' worth of savings for the Government each year. Considering the large number of non-profit organisations that fall into this category (volunteer-based and without ongoing state government funding), some form of one-off support payment must be considered.

Services were asked if they had any service delivery contracts with various Government Departments which were due to expire in the next 6-12 months.

38% of respondents indicated that they had contracts running out in the next 6 months and 62% indicated that they had contracts running out in the next 12 months.

We asked what impact is COVID-19 having on their ability to deliver services.

Respondents named a number of issues with key issues being:

Increasing numbers of young people are needing transport, emergency accommodation and food. Each young person is having a higher level of support needs.

Reduced overall contact with young people, both at youth services and outreach, in particular new clients and referrals. Building trusting relationships with new clients is always difficult but trying to do so online is almost impossible. Cessation of group programs is also impacting on relationship building with young people. Limited face-to-face contact with young people is having a negative impact on working with young people who are on bail and other marginalised young people who generally do not like talking on phone and generally need hands-on work. Workers are finding it hard to maintain connection with this group of young people.

Respondents identified a number of administration issues including inability to access client files at work, and organisations having limited resources such as laptops and other technology for workers to work from home. Due to this, some programs have had to shut down all services. Responses also suggest that there are major concerns about the way this crisis will impact on organisations' abilities to achieve contracted KPIs.

Comments also reinforces that most marginalised young people have limited access to devices and data, making ongoing communication difficult.

Respondents described mental health as a major concern particularly with changes to daily activities/routines. There was also concern about the limited capacity to refer young people to detox and rehab facilities.

Respondents also raised concern about suspension of employability programs and loss of traineeships and the unknown future of school-based programs.

There were specific concerns relating to housing. Respondents identified an increasing need to support young people with housing applications and concerns relating to the provision of safe housing opportunities for young people to self-isolate, stating that all youth shelters are full. Housing providers are also facing a reduced capacity to deal with risk related to hygiene and infection e.g. 7 bedrooms and only & 2 bathrooms in a youth accommodation. Also concern about some young people who are not able to stabilise in an emergency accommodation environment and continue engaging with other young people and risky behaviours i.e. drug and alcohol consumption and then be in close proximity to other young people and youth workers. Services are also having difficulty purchasing PPE with no stock in town.

We asked if services are experiencing an increase in demand.

Responses were mixed. Some services have had less demand (about a quarter of responses), other services have had increase in demand (three quarters). Of those who have had an increase in demand the focus has been on:

- Assistance and support
- 19-25-year age group
- Predominately male referrals
- Emergency accommodation
- Food banks
- Mental health
- Family mediation
- DV related calls
- More complex level of need
- Therapeutic services for anxiety
- After hour family support

We asked services where they are experiencing the greatest pressure.

Responses were varied, including:

- *Concerned about the lack of face-to-face contact with my young people;*
- *Major concern about maintaining contact with young people who don't have internet or mobile phones;*
- *No outreach services;*
- *Concerned that once students are able to not attend due to Covid, and are not able to embrace multimodal delivery of curriculum via online/paper based or phone, that they will no longer find the desire to attend school at all;*
- *Risk of student disengagement from school due to many students requiring one-on-one support from staff or learning difficulties;*

- *Lack of networking with other organisations regarding housing young people into their own accommodation;*
- *Keeping young people engaged;*
- *Emergency accommodation for male referrals, although this also relates to males outside of target groups;*
- *Increase in brief interventions across all target groups to find suitable accommodation;*
- *Increased changes in mental health;*
- *Unknown future regarding school and group contracts;*
- *No known end date to resume therapeutic camps;*
- *Keeping staff jobs while programs are suspended;*
- *Emergency relief and brokerage due to lose of employment and income;*
- *Crisis accommodation, in particular for young males;*
- *Not having the ability to monitor school students' wellbeing;*
- *Financial, even though our programs have been put on hold, we still have to bear administrative costs (insurances, office rent, etc..)*

We asked what measures services are taking to manage these pressures.

Once again responses were varied and included:

- *Having weekly phone and text messages with my young people;*
- *Looking at providing access to the students for my welfare teams via phones and ipods. Also reviewing the dialogue and intention of contact post the Easter break - who when and what to contact regarding;*
- *Streamlining correspondence between organisations to ensure there is not an influx of emails between organisations;*
- *Being flexible and offering alternatives to usual service delivery;*
- *Increased brief intervention capacity - intake and assessment support. Mental Health supports in a virtual environment - links and connections provided;*
- *Focusing on operational programs;*
- *Maintaining regular phone contact with students and attempting to establish a video chat channel moving forward (work in progress and student resource dependent);*
- *Calling them and trying to online connect where we can;*
- *Manage what we can;*
- *Managing expenditure centres;*
- *Lots and lots of variation requests and business continuity plans proposed to funders;*
- *Seeking increased funding to allow for increased financial support of young people;*
- *Referring to adult male shelter but not ideal, no other options available in community apart from YHARS but due to service restrictions unable to meet demand;*
- *Developing activities or information sheets to help clients. e.g. list of doctors that provide Skype consultations, interact play with children, card games you can play, exercise plans etc;*
- *Switching to online and tele services;*

- *Emailing or letting others know if they see young people to get them to contact on 1800 number. Letting young people know Telstra phone box are now free calls;*
- *We are trying to manage as best we can with the limited funds we have at our disposal.*

We asked the services how have they changed the way they deliver services? And if they have implemented flexible or innovative ways of responding?

I am currently working from home, home visits and face-to-face visits are currently limited. I stay in weekly contact with my young people through phone calls, text messages and through our newly created Facebook page. We have created our own Facebook page titled the "Warwick Youth Service". We have had a good response with young people joining, we are hoping this will allow us to provide our current young people and other young people in the Warwick community another youth related platform to provide support and for them to receive updated information around what is going on for them around the Corona virus as well as youth related information and the ability to connect with a trained professional if they feel the need.

The majority of respondents told us that they are now using phone/video calls where possible and online opportunities as the main way of connecting, conducting assessment and supporting young people and their families. Services are transitioning their programs to digital platforms.

Services are investing in understanding and using social media. Most of the work is being done via IT at the moment. There are coaching sessions via video/Zoom/Google Hangouts and online group activities.

Online services are being utilized to source things like accommodation, bus tickets, phones and other essentials. Services are utilising tele-guidance, counselling services and online wellbeing services such as the BRAVE Program, Health HeadSpace etc.

Platforms, programs and apps being explored include, video conferencing, Facebook groups, House Party, Google Hangouts, Bunch, Zenly, Drawful, Zoom, Skype. Some services emphasised that they got client consent through text and that they have a privacy statement which they share with young people. Services are being mindful of giving directions to young people that would put them in breach of the Covid-19 restriction laws.

Services are also using online mechanisms to conduct team meetings, supervision etc. They are developing new risk assessments for working with young people and developing 'working from home policy' for those workers who can respond via phone to young people and assist with brief interventions.

Respondents also mentioned that they are doing more home delivery with emergency items that are required. Services are also beginning to share and create resources to be sent/delivered to clients. Generally, there is more collaboration with services delivering specific relief.

Some services expressed that they are having more contact with parents and guardians for assistance with learning and engagement. The survey was conducted during school holidays so we don't know the extent of the real challenge when school starts back and how youth services manage the change in service delivery of learning and well-being.

We asked what concerns respondents would like YANQ to raise with the QLD Government?

The main concern is, and always has been, insufficient crisis housing for our young people especially in a time when isolation and being told by authorities not to go out and about unless required. Homeless people are exposed to the dangers of COVID-19 as they have no-where to go.

Youth at risk seem to have fallen off the radar especially those who are under the care of Child Safety but receive no support or assistance.

Many of our clients are disengaged from school and looking to return or are currently attending. Many of these clients also don't have the resources for virtual learning ie; laptops, wi-fi, phone plans with enough data. With this being a common area for case management we are concerned this young people will lack meaningful engagement and also fall behind on their goals and education in general.

Continuing support structures for vulnerable populations - funding for those who are continuing to provide engagement services to lighten the cost for families.

The effect that school closure will have on our young people. Access to data and laptop for students with minimal access to resources and finances. Risk of further disengagement of already at-risk young people with a history of disengagement from education. Risk of young people being at home more in unsupportive or threatening environments. Require more youth housing options and emergency / temporary accommodation options for youth.

Labour market opportunities, housing.

Pleeeeeeeeease just roll-over funding and let us divert funding into ICT. This is a great opportunity to be investing in our future scope of delivery. Pleeeeeeeeease stop asking for service return dates in continuity plans. Just keep your eye on Italy and we'll be a couple of months behind them. Pleeeeeeeease stop making COVID-19 into a new industry in itself!!!

What provisions are out there for young people at risk during this time? Are the organisations or social enterprises that care for these young people being financially supported I know one of the social enterprise companies in Toowoomba has had to shut their doors for now and they need financial support.

Access to masks and safety equipment is low if not in medical. By outsourcing emergency relief for COVID affected to support agencies is risky without that equipment.

Open up public houses in Mount Isa for YPA to coordinate emergency crisis accommodation for young people, and provide essential services and support as required.

Difficult to achieve KPI's in this environment. Increase expenses in data usage (video conferencing uses a lot a data).

Often, in schools we are at the frontline in reporting suspicions of harm to children. What's going to happen now?

Will I still have a job when the COVID-19 is gone?

To close alcohol venues, this in not helping situation. intoxicated people will not obey social distancing rules if they're alcohol affected. Stop supermarkets raising prices in difficult times.

The fact that they refuse to recognise effective, proven, community-based prevention and early intervention programs that create significant savings to both government and community.

I am part of the Qld government. I am responding to this survey as I believe that our intention of collaboration and breaking down barriers of communication has never been more vital.

Finally, we asked what do the services need to address their concerns?

Respondents were clear that they need support, additional resources and funding. They also stated the need for funding/budget flexibility and funding guarantees. They were explicit in wanting a voice in Government.

Respondents also raised the need for more communications and shared visions between organisations and a desire to work with all agencies and stakeholders to support our youth.

Respondents asked for more information around increased services provided by Child Safety or Family and Child Connect. They also want more help with IT connection and development of online platforms to connect with young people and their families through internet.

Comments advocated for housing affordability for our homeless youth and ongoing safe suitable housing opportunities where young people have some control over their environment to reduce individual anxiety.

Of major concern is the fact that there is proven demand for some programs throughout Queensland, but these programs are limited in what they can deliver due to the lack of recurrent government funding.