



# TARGETED EARLIER INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

**Response to Sector Consultation Paper**

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## **About Youth Action**

Youth Action (formerly YAPA) is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

To achieve these objectives, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

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## CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction .....	4
1.2 Principles .....	4
1.3 Summary of Recommendations .....	7
2.0 Response to Sector Consultation Paper .....	10
2.1 System Design .....	10
2.2 System Design Recommendations .....	15
2.3 Service Delivery .....	23
2.4 Service Delivery Recommendations .....	27
2.5 Program Improvement .....	28
2.6 Program Improvement Recommendations .....	31
2.7 Program Support .....	32
2.8 Program Support Recommendations .....	34
2.9 Reform Process .....	35
2.10 Reform Process Recommendations .....	36
3.0 Conclusion .....	37
3.1 Contact .....	37

## 1.0 Introduction

As the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW, Youth Action NSW's vision is for a service system that provides young people with the best possible supports and opportunities that are required to live full, meaningful and participatory lives.

Youth Action NSW represents the 1.25 million young people aged 12-25 who live in NSW<sup>1</sup>, many of whom will require the support of, or come into contact with, youth services. Youth Action NSW also represents the youth services that undertake this work and, as such, has consulted with over 100 youth services to inform Targeted Earlier Intervention systems reform. This consultation is underpinned by numerous research pieces and projects that Youth Action NSW has commissioned since 2011 when the current suite of funding programs were introduced.

### 1.1 Principles

Emerging from these consultations and research are a number of principles that Youth Action NSW recommends form the foundation of a successful youth services system in NSW. While each principle is unique, they are also interdependent and form a whole package.

#### **Youth Services should be part of a shared vision for young people in NSW**

Fragmentation of the service system impedes services from achieving greater and better outcomes for young people. It is necessary to build a coalescing vision for either services or the children and young people<sup>2</sup> they support, providing direction and unity across the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> As at 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The word client and young people are used interchangeably throughout the submission. We recognise the need to identify service users as separate from young people in NSW more broadly but preference young peoples being identified as a person first and foremost, as opposed to a number in a service system.



A system that has a vision and is focussed on results would include a clear and articulated continuum of service provision, from population prevention to targeted intensive services. Universal access to support services and developmental programs for young people to build their resilience and capacity are crucial, as suggested by the 2015 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) literature review, *Better Systems, Better Lives*. Evidence overwhelmingly shows that investment in prevention and early intervention reaps benefits for both the state and young people, avoiding costly crisis work and the flow-on effects of acute need<sup>3</sup>.

### **Youth services should have broad outcome measures**

The outcomes of youth services are broad and far-reaching. They contribute both to young people's avoidance of risk factors (e.g. crime, violence, homelessness), and their participation in a number of protective assets (e.g. school, recreation, family). As such, broad outcome measures that can reflect the important contribution of youth service are currently lacking. This broad framework would also provide depth and transparency to a shared vision for young people, demonstrate the value of investment at all points of the continuum, including prevention, early intervention and intensive support services.

As there is little population level data to show progress or improvement for the young people of NSW, and therefore no shared outcome measures, there is also an environment in which services are contracted to conduct activities, forced to collaborate in a competitive environment, and cannot demonstrate with any rigour or meaning the impact that they have on the lives of young people.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example Gauntlett, E.; Hugman, R.; Kenyon, P. and Logan, P. (2001). *Number 11: A meta-analysis of the impact of community-based prevention and early intervention action*. Prepared for the Australian Department of Family and Community Services. Retrieved online from [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/prp\\_no\\_11.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/prp_no_11.pdf)

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### **Services in NSW should be integrated and well-connected**

Connections between organisations are a priority for youth services. However, many of these connections are relational and ad-hoc, with few formalised points of integration and connection. A system that is well-connected allows for the flow of accurate, timely and clear information. This creates a more efficient system overall, and ensures that young people do not have the burden and trauma of repeatedly sharing their story. It also ensures that services can "get down to business" in supporting young people to achieve outcomes. A well-connected system improves conditions for everyone.

### **The expertise of delivery services should be respected**

The service system should reflect and engage the expertise of all partners - young people, services and funding bodies – to ensure the best outcome for young people. The effective delivery of services requires an operating environment in which trust is actively fostered, and in which the expertise of delivery services is acknowledged and reflected in contracting and operating arrangements.

Rigid contracting that fails to reflect the expertise of those 'on-the-ground' greatly reduces effective operating environments across many parts of the services system. The flow-on costs to both young people and funders are significant, but avoidable.

### **The service system should be innovative**

A greatly improved service system should have an appetite for innovation. It is important for the system to emphasise accountability, but this must sit alongside the permission to try new approaches, and pursue innovation to counter chronic social issues. If pressure to perform and deliver is too high, creativity and innovation can be stifled, and a culture of conservatism and compliance can take its place.

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### **Services should be able to be flexible and agile**

Services that are flexible and agile are able to respond to the needs of the whole young person they work with, and this approach should be enabled by the service system. Services should also be able to respond to the needs of their local young people, and adapt as new needs and opportunities arise. As experts in delivering services, providers and government can work together to design effective service systems and programs that are responsive, and therefore appropriately targeted. Inflexible, cumbersome or badly implemented systems often see young people "shuffled" from service to service to deal with specific issues, while no one service takes responsibility for their overall progress.

### **Services should be able to take responsibility for real change**

Every young person in contact with the system should have a clear, responsible youth specific support worker who has the knowledge and skills to oversee their holistic progress. The welfare and progress of clients are of paramount concern, and many services invest significant time and resources in building professional relationships with young people, based on evidence that strong, consistent relationships with vulnerable young people are key to supporting them effectively. Young people value having someone strongly "on their side" whom they trust to help them navigate their challenges, rather than an inconsistent team of providers who segment the young person into a collection of "needs" to be solved.

## **1.2 Summary of Recommendations**

The following 25 recommendations are extracted from the body of this submission, which begins at section 2.0 below. In summary, to improve outcomes for young people through the TEI reform process, Youth Action NSW recommends:

**Recommendation 1:** Co-develop an outcomes framework in partnership with services to

unify and orientate services.

**Recommendation 2:** Implement a shared outcomes-orientated framework across government departments.

**Recommendation 3:** Ensure there are appropriate levels of funding to support an operational continuum.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase local planning.

**Recommendation 5:** Design and implement systemic recognition and reward for collaborative practice.

**Recommendation 6:** Develop an alternative to competitive tendering.

**Recommendation 7:** Use local data to drive a results-orientation.

**Recommendation 8:** Continue funding sector development through Youth Development Officers.

**Recommendation 9:** Invest in shared IT systems.

**Recommendation 10:** A District-based approach to system planning, to leverage the expertise and experience of service providers.

**Recommendation 11:** Give emphasis to the flexibility of service provision.

**Recommendation 12:** Where appropriate, young people should select the provider that they feel best supports them in making progress to ensure accountability for outcomes.

**Recommendation 13:** Invest in shared client management software and outcomes measurement systems.

**Recommendation 14:** Tailor outcomes frameworks to suit the local contexts and needs of services and communities.

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**Recommendation 15:** Collect and disseminate data from a range of external sources to facilitate local planning and to show system impact.

**Recommendation 16:** Fund and/or provide local training and continuous improvement initiatives to support program improvement.

**Recommendation 17:** Develop a resource bank to support access to evidence-based or evidence-informed practice, including research on implementation of programs.

**Recommendation 18:** Increase local collaborative planning processes which involve providers, such as co-design.

**Recommendation 19:** Invest in shared training opportunities that support the needs of local providers.

**Recommendation 20:** Invest in shared client management and other IT systems/software.

**Recommendation 21:** Fully implement FaCS relationship based contract management guidelines, to support a partnership approach between providers and contract managers.

**Recommendation 22:** Develop and distribute a reform timeline, including the implementation phase, with key quality monitoring processes/KPI's included.

**Recommendation 23:** Actively consult with researchers, providers and service users at key consultation/co-design points in the reform process, to ensure that all stages of system design meet the needs of stakeholders.

**Recommendation 24:** Resource local implementation, not only design and reform processes.

**Recommendation 25:** Clarify how co-design processes and other reforms that providers may already be participating in can be used to inform local implementation.

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## 2.0 Response to the Sector Consultation Paper

Youth Action NSW welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Targeted Earlier Intervention Programs Sector Consultation Paper*. Youth Services are integral to the development and support of all young people across NSW. As such, Youth Action NSW looks forward to working in partnership with FaCS to ensure reform builds upon the successes of the current system, and grows a services system focussed on the best possible outcomes for young people.

Underpinned by the principles outlined in section 1, the following submission responds to the five consultation areas proposed in the *Targeted Earlier Interventions Programs Consultation Paper*. Youth Action NSW response is informed by consultation with over 100 services, combined with specifically commissioned research and over 20 years of organisational experience supporting young people and youth services across the state.

### 2.1 System Design

As it stands, the service system is not enabling consistent, high quality outcomes for highly vulnerable young people. Many services report that they are working "against the grain" to make meaningful change with and for young people, and describe many major barriers within the support system. These barriers are analysed and evidenced as follows.

#### 2.1.1 Segmenting young people into a range of issues

The experience of our members clearly shows that a young person is not the sum of their individual issues. Yet, the development and progression of the whole client often gets missed in pursuing individual service activities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many services are assisting young people to access a range of secondary/specialised supports, with the client going on to "do the rounds", only to

land back in their laps being no better off for all of the referrals and time put in by services.

Progress and change is more than simply having, for example, their drug addiction, anxiety and family issues “treated” by a series of courses. The service system needs a clear, “whole-of-person” orientation, which should be reflected both in how progress is measured, and how support is provided – young people cannot continue to just be a segmentation of smaller issues to be “solved”.

### 2.1.2 Administrative/contractual barriers to holistic work with clients

There are a range of programmatic restrictions that decrease the flexibility and responsiveness of services. For example:

- Restrictive age criteria (such as 12-18 under the EIPP program) which limits services effectively supporting young people to transition into youth services, or out of them;
- Specific restrictions on who services can support, resulting in a “pass-the-buck” mentality of “this client isn’t my problem”;
- Unrealistic lengths of service provision which are, in many cases, too short to enable the achievement of significant outcomes;
- Specific restrictions on geographic coverage of services, putting barriers in the way of clients accessing services; and
- Overly prescriptive delivery models (e.g. emphasis on case work) which don’t always fit the needs of the individual or the local service system, resulting in ineffective work, service gaps and/or duplication.

These restrictions contradict many of the principles that Youth Action NSW recommends the NSW service system adopt – a whole-of-life-cycle approach, local flexibility, working with families and client-centrism. As a result, services continue to work outside of their guidelines, or can't help their clients as much as they need to in order to effect meaningful, long-term change.

### 2.1.3 Barriers to a preventative continuum of services

The continuum of prevention, early intervention and intensive services needs review. Instead of serving as a continuum, these three levels of provision mostly work as discrete entities, with no clear integration of their roles.

For example, the EIPP program is clearly labelled as an early intervention program. The Keep Them Safe Interagency Guidelines identify that:

“The term ‘early intervention’ refers to activities, programs and initiatives designed to alter the behaviour or development of individuals who show signs of an identified problem, or who exhibit risk factors or vulnerabilities for an identified problem, by providing the resources and skills necessary to combat the identified risks... it refers to intervening as soon as a problem is apparent.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the goals of early intervention is to prevent the escalation of serious issues that may require a more intensive and costly response. However, many services report being referred clients and families who present with issues that have progressed beyond the level of ‘early intervention’, including many with significant and entrenched complex issues, or whom would be classified as at Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH). Under their guidelines, most EIPP services are ineligible to access or refer clients to the more intensive Family Support and Family Preservation services,

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<sup>4</sup> Child Wellbeing & Child Protection Interagency Guidelines (2015). *Prevention and early intervention strategies*. Retrieved online from [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/kts/guidelines/pei/pei\\_index.htm](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/kts/guidelines/pei/pei_index.htm)

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and are left holding far more risk and complexity. These young people and families are outside the originally intended scope of the program, and therefore services at this level are not funded (and therefore lack the skills and resources) to create positive change for clients of this complexity.

Supporting such complex clients prevents services from providing adequate assistance to those with a moderate level of need and developing issues, who legitimately require early intervention. In this way, the continuum breaks down, with services unable to effectively intervene early, nor provide large-scale assistance for high-needs clients.

Youth Action NSW strongly supports the approach advocated by ARACY in the Better Systems, Better Lives literature review into prevention and early intervention services. Only with an operational continuum, from prevention through early intervention and into intensive support, will investment in services reap long-term benefits. We support the approach of proportionate universalism, where every young person in NSW is extended preventative services, with other services supporting them relative to their need. Working closely with schools offers one of the best chances to strengthen young people through effective prevention work, and lends itself towards targeting interventions towards young people in entrenched or developing need.

#### **2.1.4 Barriers to collaboration and partnership**

In a service system that is structured to share workload between many different service providers, the interface between organisations becomes key to effectively achieving client outcomes. This ranges on the spectrum from inter-agency communication, partnership, and collaboration right through to service integration.

In our consultations services expressed clearly and emphatically that good partnerships help them achieve outcomes for clients, and that they valued their functional partnerships. However, they noted that there are severe, frustrating and ongoing barriers to effective partnerships and collaboration:

- Anti-collaborative agency cultures, largely based on a mindset encouraged by competitive tendering. There can often be an unspoken attitude that results in “protecting numbers”, rather than engaging in shared work for the benefit of young people. This also extends to some services trying to be more visible than others in the funding landscape, and taking on services which duplicate those provided effectively by other organisations.
- Different organisational values, philosophies, outcomes and theories of change, which can hinder organisations working well together. Examples include youth services working with schools, police, health services and faith institutions, all of whom work to different outcomes, define the needs of young people differently, and therefore focus their energy into interventions and work that can often be at odds with the holistic/developmental outcomes of youth services. These differences often produce friction and decrease the value of the service system to the young person.
- An inability to access, share and transfer information, which disenfranchises young people with the system. Services often need information quickly to provide high-quality services to clients, but either:
  - a) Don't know who else may be working with a client/family;
  - b) Don't have up-to-date information on what other services are providing, including eligibility criteria and/or relevance for their clients; or

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- c) Can't easily or quickly access information held by other agencies.

These scenarios result in large inefficiencies as time is wasted trying to form partnerships, track down workers and communicate with other parties. Clients have to tell and re-tell their “stories”, and are bounced from service to service trying to find the right one to help them. This situation is often compounded when clients move areas.

These barriers to effective partnerships and collaboration largely seem to be the micro-level products of a competitive sector in which services will soon have to vie against their current partners for funding. While organisations may be happy to collaborate in small ways, as long as they're focussed on growth in the next reform or funding round, there will always be seemingly insurmountable barriers to meaningful, trusting and effective collaboration and integration.

## 2.2 System Design Recommendations

Youth Action NSW recommends the following to improve system design:

### **Recommendation 1: Co-develop an outcomes framework in partnership with services to unify and orientate services**

To enable local flexibility and a focus on client outcomes, the outcomes-orientation of the current system should be enhanced. The most clear and repeated point of feedback from services who are presently under TEI programs is that the outcomes that they report against do not accurately reflect or value their work, and are therefore an exercise in collecting information just for the sake of it. Services want to collect data, but they want this to be a meaningful process that contributes to:

- Articulating a clear picture of the changes that services are making in the lives of

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young people; and,

- Constructive, honest and data-informed discussions around service alignment, development, improvement and strategic planning.

Youth Action NSW is coordinating a pilot of shared outcomes across 10 organisations in the Nepean-Blue Mountains district. The pilot has shown that developing shared measures which are meaningful across services is possible, and that broad outcome measures can be used to link the many and diverse activities that services undertake in response to local need, without compromising either accountability or data integrity.

An outcomes framework co-developed with experts in child and youth development and on-the-ground practitioners would allow flexibility in local service provision and activities without the restrictive elements of the current programs. This would echo the streamlined outcomes contracting approach recently employed by the New Zealand Government.

Finally, this outcomes framework should be very specific about the population data trends that it is aiming to improve (e.g. school attendance, teen pregnancies, youth employment). However, this framework should also have a clear rationale for how the work of services impacts on these population figures. For example, youth services often contribute to improving student participation in schooling through support around mental health, homework, family issues and more. However, simply specifying school attendance as a population outcome of a youth service does not reflect the complexities of working with individual young people. A large number of positive outcomes could be achieved without school attendance improving, such as improvement in subject results, decreased stress, improved family functioning, or the beginnings of pathways to other education or employment. The same complex link between program and population results would be true of child wellbeing and child protection reports, employment, and several other

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population wellbeing conditions.

### **Recommendation 2: Implement a shared outcomes-orientated framework across government departments**

As part of our consultations, services were asked “who else do you need at the table to do your work effectively?” Their responses strongly included representatives in the Departments of Education, FACS, Health, mental health, juvenile justice, housing and other NGO’s.

Rather than relying only on local, and at times inefficient, collaboration to produce these partnerships, we advocate for an outcomes-oriented framework shared between government departments, which unites the various service systems that young people in NSW have contact with. This system should also be underpinned by reliable population performance data (such as indicators provided by ARACY’s The Nest Action Agenda).

This approach has been used successfully in the United Kingdom, United States of America and New Zealand to realign service models to be more person-centric, and should be a priority in reforming human services more widely.

Youth services facilitate positive outcomes daily alongside a range of partners from other sectors, but if they continue to work to different, separate outcomes, we are unlikely to see evidence of change in NSW populations.

### **Recommendation 3: Ensure there are appropriate levels of funding to support an operational continuum**

Youth services strengthen and develop young people to be more resilient, healthy and resistant to risk factors in their lives. They do not only play a diversionary role (e.g. referring to specialised services) when risks present, but are developmental, and as such,

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preventative.

ARACY's literature review also strongly encouraged investment in preventative work, in order to avoid a never-ending cycle of clients experiencing deepening crisis. Youth Action NSW confirms ARACY's recommendation, as the current system is only comprised of short interventions, rather than sustained developmental work.

As such, Youth Action NSW strongly advocates for funding to services that undertake both universal and targeted preventative work, with an evidence-based outcomes framework which clearly captures the outcomes of this level of provision. This should be supported by a continuum of increasingly intensive, flexible services to provide early intervention for developing issues and also intensive services to support complex clients and families who are already experiencing entrenched issues.

#### **Recommendation 4. Increase local planning**

Youth Action NSW supports the current FaCS localisation agenda, as local services and communities have the best capacity and expertise to produce effective local service systems. The role of smaller, local organisations with established community connections is essential, and Youth Action NSW therefore advocates for local system planning frameworks that involve both users and delivery services in their design, ensuring a role for smaller organisations in recognition of their value in the wider system.

One suggestion proposed by Youth Action NSW members is the formation of local NGO representative/leadership structures to represent a cluster of local service providers, which would enable services to "have a voice" at the table with the range of government departments who will naturally be a part of this planning.

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### **Recommendation 5: Design and implement systemic recognition and reward for collaborative practice**

Services expressed that there are few systemic incentives to reward or acknowledge collaboration, and thus reinforce it as a desirable behaviour. If collaboration is to be a hallmark of any future system design, it will have to be fostered, recognised and rewarded.

As discussed in previous recommendations, a system of shared client-centred outcomes/KPI's would go some way to supporting a collaborative environment that is focussed on the needs of young people. As with systemic changes under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Social Benefit Bonds in the United Kingdom, and Public Social Partnerships in Scotland, innovative ways of contracting more collaborative, non-competitive arrangements should be investigated.

### **Recommendation 6: Develop an alternative to competitive tendering**

As has been made clear across this submission, a competitive tendering model has a range of flow-on consequences that likely far outweigh its cost efficiencies.

As part of TEI reforms, youth services are most concerned about the impact of competitive tendering on their local service-scape. Their feedback is not concerning the loss of their own funding, where it could be better spent to achieve client outcomes, but that competitive tendering is not an equitable method of assessing the fitness of organisations to deliver effective services.

As the peak body for all youth services in NSW, it is not our position to preference one provider over another. However, it would seem that without a comprehensive outcomes framework in place to assess the outcomes of the work of services, there is no meaningful way to assess which services perform better than others. For example, a small local

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provider may have an excellent track record of working with the community and engaging disadvantaged indigenous young people to provide them with a range of supports to keep them out of crime and in school. A larger organisation may have significantly greater cost efficiencies and data capture ability, but due to high turnover of staff or a lack of community connections may produce lower outcomes for the community than the smaller provider. Without a meaningful (and high integrity) outcomes system, larger organisations will always be preferred for cost, process efficiency or service capacity, rather than on outcomes achieved.

The New Zealand government is presently embarking on a streamlined outcomes contracting model that uses outcomes to underpin integrated contracting by government departments. One of the aims of this project is to acknowledge the valuable differences between providers, and place them on a level field around contracting processes, outcomes collection and outcomes reporting. We strongly support a similar approach where outcomes for young people are the primary objective, not only internal process efficiencies.

### **Recommendation 7: Use local data to drive a results-orientation**

In line with the above, we advocate for a system where organisations and funders talk regularly together about data, client outcomes and results. There are no publically available population indicators to indicate that services are working to improve the wellbeing of young people, and no outcomes data publically reported by FaCS or services to justify investment.

As part of our Nepean-Blue Mountains outcomes pilot project, the 10 organisations come together regularly to display and discuss their data in order to undertake shared service improvement. We believe that this collaborative, transparent ethos in conjunction with

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services undertaking continuous improvement is key to any future effective service system.

### **Recommendation 8: Continue funding sector development through Youth Development Officers**

One under-recognised role that services advise is “working” to foster collaboration is Youth Development Officers (YDO’s).

Often part-funded under the Community Builders program and provided mainly by local governments, a large part of the YDO’s role is to undertake sector development initiatives, including coordinating the local youth interagency and bringing together services to plan for young people in their Local Government Area. There are also many regions where YDO’s collaborate to undertake wider sector development, including being core to local system realignment, collaboration and innovation. During consultations, services strongly supported that interagencies coordinated by YDO’s were a key mechanism for sharing information and collaborating.

Many also undertake valuable LGA-wide prevention, community strengthening and community development work for young people, including youth participation activities.

Should funding for these roles be changed/altered significantly under the reform process, a major structural and collaborative component of youth service provision in NSW would be lost.

### **Recommendation 9: Invest in shared IT systems**

A range of systems have been used recently to assist with data capture and information flow between services. While a range of human factors have often impeded the usefulness of these initiatives, on the whole services had positive feedback on using intelligent, well-designed systems as part of their work.

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Patchwork and CIMS are two systems that have both been trialled recently in different Districts. Feedback from services has been positive, particularly regarding the information that access to these systems enabled, and the accountability that goes with some information being available to other services (e.g. faster referrals and receiving feedback on actions taken by the other service).

With a range of NDIS-inspired products hitting the market, as well as several new products, we suggest that a useful suite of systems will be a necessary investment to enable more effective communication, collaboration and data capture.

However, based on our experience with the Nepean-Blue Mountains outcomes pilot, there are a number cautions alongside this point:

- a) Systems should be invested in centrally, not organisation-by-organisation. Services in South Western Sydney said that a key benefit of investment in CIMS was that it was centrally provided by FaCS, which meant that it was a shared platform with other organisations. If each organisation had their own system, the efficiency and accountability gains of this investment would be lost.
- b) Some organisations will need close support and time to change systems and processes, implement solutions and adapt.

Training and ongoing support will be necessary to support the uptake of new technologies. From the pilot sites of Patchwork, CIMS and custom solutions implemented by services, the largest variable in their success as a system-wide tool is adoption by workers into their practice. To make a new solution truly integral, workers have a learning curve to negotiate. If a solution is too complex to use in or around their work with young people, or there isn't accessible support, workers are unlikely to adopt it.

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## 2.3 Service Delivery

Agencies are consistently striving to provide high quality, effective and life-changing services to young people. Youth services want to be delivering:

- Evidence-based or evidence-informed programming;
- Innovative programs based in, and which address, local need;
- Interventions and programs that make a significant difference in the lives of young people.

Many of the points to improve service delivery echo, or are symptomatic of, system design issues. However, services expressed that there are elements of service delivery that are not working or frustrating their efforts, as outlined below.

### 2.3.1 Services being prescribed delivery models

As is to be expected, agencies from different areas say different things about the types of services that work best in their context. Some responded that, in their experience, individual interventions such as case work and counselling have the greatest capacity to make change for clients. In other areas, there was a significant need for universal group workshops aimed at prevention and early intervention. Rather than being an impediment, this diversity reflects that service providers can be flexible, assess the needs of their local areas and adapt accordingly. Many are frustrated by overly prescriptive contracts that specify delivery modes in place of outcomes accountability. Provided there is a District-based approach to system planning, the expertise and experience of service providers can be harnessed to produce effective services.

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### 2.3.2 Prescribed service timeframes are too short

As with the above point, overly prescriptive conditions, while well intentioned, can often interfere with good practice. This is particularly clear with regard to service provision timeframes, particularly under the EIPP program. For some clients, 3 months is a reasonable timeframe in which to resolve some initial challenges. However, meaningful change which prevents future issues (particularly for complex clients) often takes far longer. Agencies report working consistently longer with clients (which is good practice in a client-centred system), or “closing” and “re-opening” the same client to ensure continuity of service.

Similarly, many of these restrictions don't allow the necessary time to build effective relationships with young people. As said by one agency, services need to offer:

“Care and support that is based around sustained, one-to-one relationships. There is no question that the most impact workers have is when they have developed sustained relationships with clients. When clients grow to know and trust workers they become open and susceptible to their advice and support. You don't need research support to tell you that people respond best to real, meaningful connections.”

Again, a focus on outcomes rather than outputs/processes in contracting would assist services to implement interventions over appropriate timeframes based on their local needs. Combining this with a continuous improvement model, such as Results-Based Accountability, and relationship-based performance management would assist with managing these processes.

### 2.3.3 Strict eligibility criteria denying services to young people

In a client-focussed system, the best worker/agency that can access a young person or family should respond. Services are reporting significant issues with arbitrary age restrictions – they have 10 year-olds wanting to access workers and services, and post-18 year-old's requiring support as they move into adulthood.

Provided that services and workers have the appropriate skills, approaches and abilities to work with those concerned, clients should have the choice of which services they access, rather than prioritising contracting/administrative needs over client preferences.

Again, an effective contracting and relationship management approach based on partnership will assist with managing these challenges.

### 2.3.4 Young people aren't involved in planning service provision

This focus on prescribed activities often rules out meaningfully engaging clients in the development and review of service programming. While youth services should implement high quality, evidence-based programs and approaches, young people's participation in services provided to them should also be a core principle, as it increases local relevance and effectiveness.

To do this, services require some programming flexibility, and also the resources, skills and time to both apply evidence-based programs, and to develop processes which meaningfully engage young people.

### 2.3.5 Young people can't access inflexible services

A client-centred system should place an emphasis on providing access to services in

places where clients and young people are, rather than requiring them to be sought out or travelled to for access. Agencies also report a lack of programmatic flexibility, time or resources to engage with young people in accessible ways.

Similarly, many necessary specialist services remain inflexible in their attempts to provide equitable access to young people, most often by geographic location or opening hours. Particularly in rural and regional areas, there are instances of services being based in population centres, and offering no access to services in more outlying locations. In these instances, contracts should allow for flexibility by acknowledging and supporting the higher cost and time required to provide services to outlying areas, and emphasise flexible service provision rather than being focussed on a fixed location or opening hours which exclude young people.

### 2.3.6 Co-case management can defer the responsibility of agencies

While services acknowledged that partnerships and collaboration are normally to their benefit, there was a strong caveat. Many services echoed that co-case management often produced a situation of “all care, no responsibility”, where there were many providers around and assisting a young person, but no one agency took responsibility for their care, success and progress. In this case, it is often the most caring worker who will “break the rules” to ensure that the client is housed, fed, at work or school on time, and has made appointments etc.

Any future individualised models of service, such as case management, should provide a mechanism whereby a service of the client’s choosing “owns” their progress and outcomes, and is flexible enough to provide or facilitate the services needed for holistic, integrated work.

## 2.4 Service Delivery Recommendations

Outlined in Section 2.3, Youth Action NSW recommends the following to improve service delivery:

**Recommendation 10: A District-based approach to system planning, to leverage the expertise and experience of service providers**

**Recommendation 11: Give emphasis to the flexibility of service provision**

Emphasising flexibility should be supported by:

- a. A focus on outcomes, not outputs, in the contracting of service provision, which would enable greater flexibility around the eligibility of young people, timeframes of services provision, types of services offered etc.;
- b. Implementing a data-informed continuous improvement model, such as Results-Based Accountability;
- c. Implementation of relationship-based contract management;
- d. The ability to involve young people in the design of services and interventions;
- e. Acknowledgement and support for the higher costs of outreaching services, or offering services after hours, to make them accessible for young people.

**Recommendation 12: Where appropriate, young people should select the provider that they feel best supports them in making progress to ensure accountability for outcomes**

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## 2.5 Program Improvement

Program improvement is a major principle of the work of youth services. Collection of outcomes, output and quality data to support improvement is already in place in many organisations, with many of these systems, frameworks and practices being self-initiated.

Services report collecting outcomes information on the following:

- Resolution of initial/immediate issues, such as risks of homelessness, family conflict, school disengagement or difficulty, peer issues and bullying, financial difficulties, mental health);
- A range of health and mental health areas;
- Changes in wellbeing across service delivery;
- Information on levels of resilience and protective factors;
- Long-term developmental outcomes.

They use a range of systems and processes to collect this information, as follows:

- Client self-reports;
- Regular reviews across case management and counselling processes;
- Surveys across programs (including pre- and post- tools);
- Third-party feedback and observations (such as schools, families, workers);
- Client follow-up for longer-term outcomes.

The above processes are ad-hoc and agency-by-agency. There are some challenges to increase rates and effectiveness of program improvement across the system, discussed

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below.

### 2.5.1 Services need support investing in client management or outcomes systems

It takes significant time to develop, purchase, implement and review outcomes frameworks, collection and reporting systems and review processes. Many organisations have developed their own data bases and reporting solutions (for small organisations) or client management systems (for large organisations), which mostly include overlaying outcomes that go beyond those specified under their FaCS contracts. These support systems are a valuable point of investment where the expertise and purchasing power of FaCS could assist delivery organisations. Most of the customisable, flexible and supported solutions on the market are unaffordable to smaller services.

Youth Action NSW suggests working with several diverse service providers, large and small, to undertake pilot-site trials of a range of support systems, with a view to scaling up those that are rated as most appropriate by services. This has happened well under the Safe Home for Life prototyping of District-Led Technology Solutions, with Child Story and Patchwork emerging as viable, with two other technologies still being tested, and many others ruled out based on testing.

### 2.5.2 Outcomes frameworks in use aren't appropriate for supporting program improvement

Services articulated the challenges of having program outcomes prescribed for them, both as a method of oversight and as a way to undertake innovation and continuous improvement. While they want client impact data to articulate the difference that they are making, often this outcomes approach needs to be tailored to the context and

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needs of individual young people and local communities. Any outcomes framework therefore needs to be flexible enough to meaningfully reflect change in the lives of young people.

### **2.5.3 Services can't access external data to facilitate their planning or demonstrate impact**

To assist local organisations with showing impact, external data is often an excellent way to review local service provision and undertake systems realignment and improvement. There are a large number of excellent international examples where good quality, granular data has been used to inform local decision-making, enable the targeting of effective interventions and drive significant partnerships and collaboration around impact.

Locally, several areas are generating their own data to support young people. Sydney's Northern Beaches, Ryde and Lane Cove areas are duplicating the Geelong Project, which screens all young people in local schools for risks of homelessness, family break-down, poor mental health, low self-esteem and school disengagement. Local approaches and interventions are then targeted at students with identified vulnerabilities to intervene early, combined with preventative school-based programming.

Services also noted a range of data that would enable them to target interventions and demonstrate impact at local levels. This included data covering:

- NSW Health;
- NSW Justice: Juvenile Justice;
- Out of Home Care and statutory intervention systems;

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- Timely youth employment and unemployment sources;
- Data and information from other TEI programs.

#### **2.5.4 Services can't afford to prioritise training and continuous improvement**

Services are challenged by their ability to invest in the development of their people and programs. While many prioritise improvement practices such as program reviews, supervision of staff, training, client input and surveys, as well as team days and reviews, they articulate doing this in an extremely lean way, often unable to fund any support or development due to time, program or resourcing restrictions. In this environment it is very hard for services to be reflective and committed to organisational development and improvement.

While internal organisation-specific development and training is important, it is also important that shared training and continuous improvement practices be offered across organisations to enable efficiency and access to these support functions.

## **2.6 Program Improvement Recommendations**

Outlined in Section 2.5, Youth Action NSW recommends the following to enhance program improvement:

### **Recommendation 13: Invest in shared client management software and outcomes measurement systems**

This should include several pilots of software to assess their capacity to meeting the needs of both FaCS and providers.

### **Recommendation 14: Tailor outcomes frameworks to suit the local contexts and needs of services and communities**

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**Recommendation 15: Collect and disseminate data from a range of external sources to facilitate local planning and to show system impact.**

This should include data from:

- a. NSW Health;
- b. NSW Justice: Juvenile Justice;
- c. Out of Home Care and statutory intervention systems;
- d. Timely youth employment and unemployment sources;
- e. Data and information from other TEI programs.

**Recommendation 16: Fund and/or provide local training and continuous improvement initiatives to support program improvement**

## **2.7 Program Support**

Any design is only as good as its implementation, and how programs are supported to implement design is key to their overall success. Services require a range of supports to enable them to achieve truly effective delivery, and there are several areas that require attention, as outlined below.

### **2.7.1 Services need research and implementation support**

A key gap that services report is a lack of access to relevant, up-to-date research and information to inform effective service delivery and programming. Many asked for a library or resource centre outlining programs, approaches and innovations with a substantial evidence base.

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Similarly, services acknowledge that any program is only as effective as the quality of its implementation. They also require access to evidence about what makes programs work on the ground, and therefore how to implement programs with high quality and fidelity.

This work could be done with one or more external research bodies, such as ARACY, the Parenting Research Centre, or a number of local universities.

### **2.7.2 Increased collaborative local planning and co-design processes**

Services also want to be tied into effective local structures which can make change for young people. Organisations which have recently participated in Safe Home for Life co-design processes and other collaborative local planning initiatives have valued discussing shared outcomes and being a valued part of realigning local systems to achieve better outcomes. Ongoing use of local planning structures will remain important, as will their role in upskilling local workers to suit the new systems that are developed.

### **2.7.3 Providers need access to meaningful training aimed at their local needs**

As outlined in section 2.5.4, shared training identified in partnership with local providers should be a key component of program support. Many organisations cannot prioritise allocating resources to external training opportunities, and offering training and other initiatives across organisations can ensure that there are systemic gains, rather than organisational ones.

### **2.7.4 Providers need access to client management systems and technology**

Again, as discussed in Part 3, a key component of program support could be access to shared information/management systems and technology to increase efficiency of

organisations. Systems mentioned included CIMS, unified case file systems, several data basing solutions, Patchwork and Link2Home.

### 2.7.5 A partnership approach between providers and FaCS contract managers

Services also emphasised that partnerships with their contract managers were important assets in effective service delivery. Members continue to report significant variation in both the approach to, and quality of, their contract management. The standardised FaCS's relationship-based contract management guidelines are a positive start to addressing this, but need to be implemented fully, and can be built on to form a true partnership approach.

## 2.8 Program Support Recommendations

Outlined in section 2.7, Youth Action NSW recommends the following to improve program support:

**Recommendation 17: Develop a resource bank to support access to evidence-based or evidence-informed practice, including research on implementation of programs**

**Recommendation 18: Increase local collaborative planning processes which involve providers, such as co-design**

**Recommendation 19: Invest in shared training opportunities that support the needs of local providers**

**Recommendation 20: Invest in shared client management and other IT systems/software**

**Recommendation 21: Fully implement FaCS relationship based contract management guidelines, to support a partnership approach between providers and contract**

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managers

## 2.9 Reform Process

A successful reform process will be focussed on achieving better outcomes for young people. In order to achieve this, a successful reform process should:

- Have feedback and quality monitoring processes built in;
- Have timeframes that are responsive to changes in the context of the reform. This includes transparent, realistic and flexible implementation timeframes, allowing for equity amongst service providers in any transitional arrangements;
- Be consultative across the process, including the system design stage. This consultation should be with researchers, providers and clients to ensure the integration of all three perspectives (research, practice and user). In doing so, it will value local knowledge which reflects the needs of local children, young people, families and communities;
- Show evidence that the wide consultation which has already been undertaken has informed the final design;
- Improve or increase the amount of effective work, and seek to remove the elements that are ineffective;
- Have resources attached to high quality implementation of the system locally;
- Like any change initiative, recognise that its people are core to adoption and successful roll-out. This means that the culture of the system should also be a consideration alongside the more formal, planned system components.

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A final point that youth services in NSW raised related to clarifying how collaborative reform processes may overlap or tap into other collaborative initiatives. For example, many agencies have already been involved in Safe Home for Life co-design workshops and Going Home, Staying Home reforms and training, both aimed at realigning and integrating service systems. It is important that initiatives are integrated to avoid multiple and duplicate collaboration and co-design initiatives that tax and fragment the service system.

## **2.10 Reform Process Recommendations**

Outlined in section 2.9, Youth Action NSW recommends the following to ensure a sound reform process:

**Recommendation 22: Develop and distribute a reform timeline, including the implementation phase, with key quality monitoring processes/KPI's included**

**Recommendation 23: Actively consult with researchers, providers and service users at key consultation/co-design points in the reform process, to ensure that all stages of system design meet the needs of stakeholders**

**Recommendation 24: Resource local implementation, not only design and reform processes**

**Recommendation 25: Clarify how co-design processes and other reforms that providers may already be participating in can be used to inform local implementation**



### **3.0 Conclusion**

The views, opinions and recommendations outlined in this submission are those of Youth Action NSW, and bring together our extensive consultation, research and organisational experience. Youth Action NSW is committed to supporting a TEI reform process that produces the best outcomes possible for the young people of NSW, and reviews the system to this end.

We remain committed to representing the views and needs of both young people and the youth sector, and to working closely with the NSW government to ensure a smooth and effective process. On behalf of our members, we look forward to seeing a system that is based on the principles outlined at the beginning of this submission, and can increase its positive impact on the young people of NSW.

### **4.0 Contact**

For more information about this submission, please contact Katie Acheson, Managing Director at Youth Action NSW at [Katie@youthaction.org.au](mailto:Katie@youthaction.org.au) or telephone 02 8218 9802.