

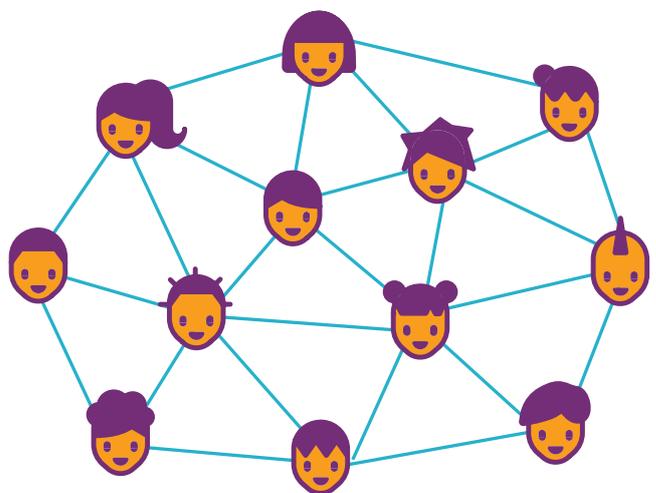
Resource a joined-up NSW youth development sector to be accessible to all young people

The youth sector is essential to building the connection of young people to family, peers, community, and caring and safe adults. It supports young people's healthy development and operates across a wide range of areas for the benefit of young people.

Many young people in NSW need additional support to reach their full potential. Young people present to youth services in NSW with issues most predominantly, of homelessness, employment, education and training, and family relationships or breakdown respectively.¹ The youth support sector provides services to enhance the protective assets in young people's lives and support them intensively in times of need. But the majority of youth services report working at capacity and not being able to meet demand.² The continuum of service provision in NSW is broken, and despite broad support for change, reforms haven't harnessed the expertise in the sector.

A NSW GOVERNMENT CAN:

- Ensure appropriate levels of funding to meet need across the youth work service continuum.
- Facilitate tailoring of outcomes frameworks to serve local contexts and which respond to the needs of communities and the services supporting them.
- Enable reform processes to shift from prescriptive to flexible commissioning to enable local service sectors to adapt and respond to emergent local need.
- Increase contract length to five years, allowing youth services to plan for the long-term and work more collaboratively with other agencies.



Youth services do essential work that places young people and their interests first in order to establish a trusted and caring professional relationship within which healthy development can thrive. Youth workers are in a unique profession that facilitates independence, connectedness, and participation in society among young people participating in youth services.³

Youth work is commonly understood to be a tool for personal development with youth workers working alongside young people to support them in making informed choices on matters that impact their lives and which supports change at both an individual and structural level. Youth work links young people to a range of positive activities of a 'social, cultural, educational and political nature' and sits within the domain of non-formal education.⁴ Youth workers build connection to family, peers, community and caring and safe adults and supports young people's healthy development.⁵

Yet in NSW, many young people may not be getting the support they need. Young people present to youth services in NSW with issues most predominantly of homelessness, employment, education and training, and family relationships or breakdown respectively.⁶ The youth support sector provides services to enhance the protective assets in young people's lives and supports them intensively in times of need. But the majority of youth services report working at capacity and not being able to meet demand.⁷

Better outcomes are achieved when young people get support early in the life of an issue, not just earlier in life. Adolescence is a period of rapid developmental change, during which personal and environmental change can take place, and is an opportunity to provide the supports that lead to positive outcomes for young people. A rational early intervention approach targets critical periods of rapid development, both very early childhood and adolescence.⁸ It is clear that quality, evidence-based and developmentally appropriate prevention and early intervention programs result in better outcomes than those applied in crisis.⁹

Despite quality services to young people, there is a fragmentation of the NSW service system that impedes services from achieving greater and better outcomes for young people. It is necessary to build an overarching vision for services or the children and young people they support, providing direction and unity across the sector. Rigid and siloed approaches to contracting across the continuum of youth work service provision is problematic. Contracted delivery models and terms remain prescriptive (e.g. emphasis on case work), and of insufficient durations. Prescriptive contracting, which specify delivery models and activities to be undertaken, frequently fails to fit meet presenting need. Additionally, short-term funding cycles of up to three years, fail to allow services to engage in strategic long-term planning, including collaborative activities within local service system. These approaches to contracting fail to recognise 'on-the-ground' experience and expertise and reduce effective operational environments.¹⁰ The implications of these approaches are profound and result in ineffective work, creation of service gaps, and compromised outcomes for young people.

There is support from the sector for real and lasting change. Effective change requires co-design with the sector.¹¹ This co-design must be inclusive of young people and youth workers and must be implemented and evaluated in partnership. Additionally, youth services need to be able to work strategically, to plan for the long-term and to be able to work without fear of short-term competitive tendering.

For young people at risk and who experience exclusion and disadvantage in NSW to thrive, a shared vision for young people is required and must be inclusive of a well-connected and appropriately resourced continuum of youth work services from prevention and early intervention to targeted intensive supports.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Youth Action, 2011, *Youth Work Snapshot 2011*, Youth Action, Sydney, accessed via: <https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/youthaction/pages/193/attachments/original/1446290668/YAPA_SNAPSHOT_2011.pdf?1446290668>
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- 3 Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, 2013, *The AYAC Definition of Youth Work in Australia*, AYAC, Sydney accessed via: <<https://ayac.org.au/uploads/131219%20Youth%20Work%20Definition%20FINAL.pdf>>
- 4 Council of Europe, 2015, *Youth Work Portfolio: A tool for the assessment and development of Youth Work Competence*, COE, Strausberg, accessed via: <<http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-portfolio/youth-work-competence>>
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- 7 Australian Council of Social Services, 2013, *Australian Community Sector Survey 2013 National Report*, ACOSS, Sydney, accessed via: <https://acoss.wpengine.com/images/uploads/Australian_Community_Sector_Survey_2013_ACOSS.pdf>; Youth Action, 2011, *Youth Work Snapshot 2011*, Youth Action, Sydney, accessed via: <https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/youthaction/pages/193/attachments/original/1446290668/YAPA_SNAPSHOT_2011.pdf?1446290668>
- 8 Viner R, 2013, 'Life stage: Adolescence', *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer, Our Children Deserve Better: Prevention Pays*, HMSO, London.
- 9 Sammut, 2011, *Do Not Damage and Disturb: On Child Protection Failures and the Pressure on Out of Home Care in Australia*, Policy Monograph, Centre for Independent Studies, NSW; Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 'Benefit Cost Results' accessed via <<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost?topicId=3>>
- 10 Youth Action, 2015, *Targeted Early Intervention Programs, response to sector consultation paper*, Youth Action, Sydney.
- 11 NSW Council of Social Services, 2015, *A Fair Deal For Our Community Services*, NCOSS, Sydney, accessed via: <https://www.ncoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/campaign/A%20Fair%20Deal_%20Final.pdf>