

Submission

No 54

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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InquiryChildrenandYoungPeople9-14YearsinNSW2008

2nd May 2008

Committee on Children and Young people
Parliament House
Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Members,

Submission to the Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Inquiry.

We were pleased to see the Inquiry called and hope that the deliberations during the Inquiry and the subsequent recommendations for improvement will lead to a better service for children and young people and their families where appropriate, and community services.

Our submission is relatively brief as demands on our agency mean we are very busy and have limited extra resources for involvement in Inquiries such as this one at the moment. Currently our agency has been invited to participate in numerous such inquiries, consultations and other activities. We have really provided some points of concern and only touched on some issues.

Please feel to contact me should you require clarification or additional information. I am happy to make myself available to provide verbal evidence to expand or clarify these issues should the Committee feel that would be useful.

Yours Faithfully,



Narelle Clay, AM
Chief Executive Officer



Southern Youth and Family Services
Submission

Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW

April / May2008

SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN

GENERAL BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Our Response

Our response to the Inquiry is based on our long history of providing services to young people and their families and our thirty year history of working closely with all State and Government Departments relevant to the needs of children and young people.

Background Information on the Organisation

Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS) was formed in 1978 and is a medium sized community agency providing services to young people and their families in southern NSW. The service covers four Local Government Areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and the Shoalhaven and recently was successful in obtaining a National Project. We have also been successful in the recent Expression of Interest with the Department of Community Services for Out of Home Care (OoHC) Services in NSW for the whole Southern Region.

In many ways, SYFS can be seen as a local site which embodies the whole of Government approach or joined up service delivery. SYFS has developed and enhanced services and added programs to meet the needs of young people. We have a strong view that you have to meet many needs simultaneously to help a young person. SYFS offers a wrap around service response for a young person. The complexities in providing this can partly be explained by the appallingly uncoordinated funding system which operates across State and Commonwealth Governments programs to community groups such as SYFS. We raise this further on in the submission.

The agency receives funding from a number of programs including:-

- The NSW Department of Community Services through the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) for the Family Counselling Project, Out of Home Care (OoHC) Program for both residential care and independent living support, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) for various residential and outreach supports, and Drug Summit for the RAGE Program for support for young people with specific issues such as drug and alcohol problems, and other at risk behaviours.
- The NSW Department of Housing and the Office of Community Housing (OCH) for Supported Housing Initiatives Program (SHIP), Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) and leases.
- The NSW Department of Juvenile Justice Post Release Support Program for RAILS for outreach support.
- The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) through the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) and Connections for education and pre vocational support and the Transition to Independent Living Program (TILA) a special allowance to young people leaving care.
- The NSW Education Department for the Links to Learning Program for educational programs for early school leavers.

- The Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs through the Reconnect Program for early intervention for families, Newly Arrived Youth Support Service Program (NAYSS) special assistance to young people and families who have recently arrived in the country, Emergency Relief emergency cash assistance, Local Solutions Program for special assistance to young parents, and from the Mental Health Community Based Program for early intervention for young people and families with mental health problems.
- The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Services (SESIAHS) for the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program (IHSHY), the Non Government Organisations Grants Program for the National Women's Health Program (NWHP) and the Healthy Active Program for Youth Program (HAPY) for services in adolescent health.
- National Youth Mental Health Foundation Youth Services Development Fund for the new youth friendly General Practice Health Service.

The agency manages thirty services including:-

- Crisis Youth Refuge
- Two residential medium term supported accommodation services
- A Foyer service combining employment, education and accommodation
- Two outreach accommodation and support services with living and social skills education
- Two outreach support and brokerage services which support and provide financial assistance to young people with issues such as drug and alcohol, mental health and other risk behaviours
- Two residential out of home care services, one short term and one medium term and with outreach support
- A subsidised community housing program
- Two early intervention programs working with young people and families to keep young people engaged with family, to prevent homelessness
- Two early intervention programs working with young people and families to keep young people engaged with family, to prevent homelessness with a special emphasis on young people and families newly arrived in the country
- Two early intervention programs working with young people and families to keep young people engaged with family, to prevent homelessness with a special emphasis on people with mental health issues
- A specialist intervention project focussing on mental health and suicide prevention
- A family and adolescent counselling service
- Three services focussing on employment, education and training with curriculum based education, flexible support, pre vocational assistance and assistance to gain employment
- Four adolescent health services - an adolescent health service, a service for young pregnant women and young mothers and babies, a healthy lifestyle program and a new General Practice
- A national Transition to Independent Living Allowance Program which distributes the Commonwealth Allowance to young people leaving care
- An Emergency Relief Program
- Koori Group providing a soft option entry point for Koori clients
- A service which supports young parents as an early intervention strategy

The target groups are:-

Families with adolescents in need of support and the family members of the young people using SYFS services

Young people aged twelve to twenty four years who are homeless and/or disadvantaged (unemployed, in poverty, housing stress etc) and/or vulnerable. This group includes:-

- Young people in the care of the State Department and State Wards
- People with disabilities
- Aboriginal people
- People from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds
- Young offenders and those at risk of entering the Juvenile Justice system
- Young people in need of protection who have been abused or are at risk of abuse
- People with mental illness
- People with alcohol and other drug use and other at risk behaviours such as suicide attempts, prostitution, and others
- Refugees and new arrivals
- School attendees and early school leavers

Data

In the last financial year we:-

- Received 12,078 referrals to our services
- Provided 9,531 instances of service
- 626 families and 1,431 young people received services such as family support, counselling, accommodation, case management, and all other relevant services - a total of 2,057. This is an increase on the previous year which when 1,647 services were provided and 1,590 in the year before that.
- 2,547 requests for assistance not able to be met.

A concerning feature of our data is the growing number of under 16 year old people for whom DoCS has no formal responsibility. The number of under 16 year olds has increased but DoCS formal intervention with them has not. Over the last few years there seems to be an increasing trend for DoCS to not become involved with the client or to have minimal involvement with young people. This year 26% of our clients were under 16 year but only 10% had involvement with DoCS. In 2005/2006 33% were under 16 years and only 14% involved with DoCS In 2004/2005 31% were under 16 years and 13% were involved with DoCS. In previous years 50% were under 16 years but half were involved with DoCS.

The most requested service is for supported accommodation and that is also the area where we are unable to adequately meet demand - 1,390 requests for accommodation were not met. This is followed by requests for support for young people (867) and support for families (290).

The Context in Which This Community Agency is Operating

Community agencies are under increased pressure and over the last decade have taken on more responsibility especially in the area of child protection, out of home care support and working with high and complex needs clients. Funding levels have become inadequate and accountability systems onerous. Many community agencies receive funding from multiple funding departments across both State and Commonwealth levels of Government. While we support accountability, in some cases the requirements far exceed what is reasonable and far exceed what occurs in similar systems in other countries. In some cases this results in less time on direct support of clients and lower morale and satisfaction amongst the workforce. An overview of some of the issues facing community services include:-

- Inadequate responses by DoCS to support young people both in child protection and OoHC.
- Supporting clients with high and complex needs. While most Departments assist in some way there is inadequate funding and inadequate support from all the relevant Government Departments eg DoCS, Health, Education, Juvenile Justice, Education, Housing etc.
- Lack of supported accommodation and housing placements for young people. Difficulties in finding appropriate placements for young people with complex needs including young people with early signs of mental illness, young people with untreated mental illness, young people from the Juvenile Justice system, young people using alcohol and other drugs especially the newer drugs such as "crystal meth".
- Lack of suitable rental properties on the private market and lack of capital for residential services including Out of Home Care Program. Inadequate investment in properties causes real difficulties (lack of client privacy, inadequate staff facilities, and unsafe conditions) for the small number of residential services that exist in NSW.
- Lack of specialised education programs for young people struggling in the education system and needing more creative and flexible options.
- Absence of appropriate supported accommodation facilities for young offenders leaving detention.
- The effects of the Centrelink income breaching policy on young people leading to increased vulnerability, poverty and increased incidence and/or risk of homelessness.
- The funding crisis in community services as a result of inadequate Government funding to meet demand and inadequate regular and planned indexation and the impact of the Commonwealth Government's efficiency dividend which fails to meet increased costs leading to service reductions. Youth agencies and residential agencies are particularly badly affected.
- General inadequate funding levels provided to manage new responsibilities and increased demands placed on community agencies by the introduction of legislation such as the Children and Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act requiring accreditation standards to be met.
- The appalling wages and conditions offered to youth and community workers. Many youth agencies offer salaries of as low as \$16.90 to \$19.12 an hour. The next highest category would be \$19.82-\$22.87 an hour. This low salary make it difficult to attract suitable qualified staff and very difficult to maintain them. Many leave to get better funded positions in Government jobs. The drain on community services of this practice is huge. Yet more and more youth agencies are expected to carry out complex and difficult work including case management, crisis intervention, care planning etc.
- Many youth agencies receive inadequate funding. Many youth projects in NSW are only funded for part time positions and for workers to work in sole positions. This makes it difficult

to carry out any networking or agency liaison and can also cause Occupational Health and safety problems.

- Any accreditation processes are often very demanding and many youth agencies are not resourced adequately to even consider entering such processes.
- High demands on community agencies for administration, data collection and other accountability processes. Many Government driven accountability processes have now become onerous, not related to the level of funding and staff capacity, many parts of it are unnecessary and are reducing the time spent on doing the job required. Similarly tendering processes have also become overly onerous.
- NSW funds a number of youth programs but these are often poorly linked, very poorly funded, have not developed or grown as a response to need. Most of the funding for 9-14 years olds goes into Child Protection. There are of course some generalist youth funding such as neighbourhood centre youth projects but these are as already mentioned very poorly funded. The Better Futures program (funded in the Division of Communities in DoCS) has experienced short term funding, a few single service sites (eg Dapto NSW, Minto NSW) were funded - quite significantly funding for small geographical place based projects. Yet existing services doing a positive job but struggling to remain operational due to poor funding were not considered for this funding. By comparison services dealing with much larger numbers of clients receive far less funding. The rest of the Better Futures funding was only released in small amounts of non recurrent one off projects and these in many ways become quite useless in terms of building capacity in a local area. The Better Futures money was also frozen prior to the last State election. We do not support the cumbersome, overly top heavy planning processes used in better Futures (and families First). It is far too dominated by the bureaucracy, wastes time and costs a lot of money. More information below.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for the Inquiry covered the areas of:

Terms of Reference

1. The needs of children and young people in the middle years ie between 9 and 14 years of age
2. The extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage
3. The activities, the services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience
4. The extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years
5. Any other matter considered relevant to this Inquiry.

Firstly we do not intend our comments in this submission to be critical or disrespectful to the hard work carried out by any other Government Department or agency. We accept this is a complex and difficult work environment. There are many deficits in the system and these need to be addressed. We hope also that the Inquiry will in fact be a catalyst to obtain the necessary extra resources and support to make improvements.

Secondly we recently provided a submission to the Inquiry into Child Protection and the Department of Community services. There would be information gathered during that Inquiry that would be relevant to this Inquiry as well.

Thirdly, we have predominantly covered issues under the first three terms of reference.

The needs of children and young people in the middle years ie between 9 and 14 years of age

children and young people in this age group have a wide variety of needs.

Children and young people do have a wide variety of needs. These include need for safety, protection, support, housing, warmth, clothing, food, knowledge/education, exercise, recreation, sleep, health care etc. The degree to which the needs are met is based on many conditions some external such as the structural causes of homelessness, poverty and other situations such as domestic violence, child abuse, drug and alcohol use, etc.

Young people in this particular target group also require nurturing, appropriate relationship forming opportunities and adequate role modelling. The younger portion of this age group (aged nine to eleven or twelve years) may not receive these aspects of care in residential accommodation services or short term foster placements.

There are many young people who have high needs. One of the things that can contribute to poor outcomes is an inability to obtain support and treatment for specialist needs. These needs are most noticeable when considering the behaviour of these young clients. It can include:-

- Suicide risk
- Self harm
- Alcohol and other drug abuse and addiction
- Aggression and intimidation
- Harassment

- Violence including possession of weapons
- Involvement with gangs
- Non compliance with treatment including counselling, medication etc
- And others

The extent to which the needs of children and young people in the middle years vary according to age, gender and level of disadvantage

We do not necessarily agree that this age range is the best way to divide up age groupings. There are many 13 and 14 years olds who are reasonably mature for their age and who would not best be supported by being grouped with 9 and 10 year olds. The education system groups people by age ie primary school to about age 12, high school starting at age 13 years. Accommodation services most usually group people based on children's services being for people below aged 13 years and youth services for those 13 years and up. It would seem to us more useful to define the groups based on those already used guidelines. The groups you have suggested nine to fourteen years of age we believe would complicate service delivery strategies.

The needs of children and young people may be similar regardless of age. However, the strategies for meeting those needs may vary based on the age, gender, level of disadvantage, situation, developmental stage, disability, mental health, abuse issues, societal norms, and the child and young person's own wishes.

The activities, the services and support which provide opportunities for children and young people in the middle years to develop resilience

A Wide range of Services Are needed

There is a range of services, supports, programs and activities which are needed to assist a young person not only develop resilience but which will enhance a children or young person's life, their health and wellbeing, their safety, their education etc. It is clear that growing up in a safe, loving, supportive family where there is adequate money, secure housing, and a positive lifestyle is the best and most appropriate place for a child or young person to develop, gain confidence, self esteem and resilience. Many families may find themselves in need of support at various times during the early years of a child or young person. These may be caused by a period of unemployment, bereavement, ill health or other such circumstances. Other families may need longer term support caused by long term disadvantage.

It is essential and an indication of a socially just society to ensure there are adequate and accessible support services and that a family, child or young person can gain all the opportunities and resources needed for a full and safe life in this country. Universal education, health care including dental should be a given in this country. Unfortunately there are high costs now related to access many of these services and opportunities.

Income Support

For young people it is essential that income support measures are in place either through the Department of Community services or Centrelink. Regardless of whether a young person aged 14 year should be out of home or not, the reality is there are many who are out of home, and to deny them adequate income support measures only pushes them into other lifestyles which are unacceptable eg crime such as stealing, prostitution etc. Income levels for young people are too low for them to be able to meet even their basic needs if not residing in the family home.

The high incidence of homeless young people shows the absolute need to address income issues.

Education

Education is also extremely important. However although there are some programs for early school leavers (such as Links to Learning) they are inadequate and need to be funded in an improved way and expanded. There also needs to be much attention given to how to manage young people who are not performing well at school, and for whom suspensions are often seen as a management strategy. When disadvantaged people are suspended, they often have no supports to assist them, and so being excluded from school is not something they view as negative. Also, some families in this situation do not have the capability to provide adequate tutoring or supervision for the young people during these periods. In the case of homeless young people, they can be suspended from school, and then the SAAP youth accommodation service which may only have one worker on duty has to provide additional supports to the suspended young student. If a school has to remove a young student through a suspension there needs to be special programs and tutors provided to offer one on one assistance till they can return to mainstream school.

Health

Adolescent health services also are inadequate and need urgent attention. The Department of Health micromanages non Government health services and this is not helpful. The Commonwealth funded program Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) is managed by the State Area Health Services. The Commonwealth State Agreement ran out in June 2007, was temporarily extended till October 2007, then to December 2007, then to June 2008 and now only till December 2008. This is highly unsatisfactory, shows no commitment whatsoever to disadvantaged young people and means a loss of staff and an inability to plan by community agencies. Adolescent health services in the area of primary health, dental health, mental health, sexual health, smoking, positive health behaviours and attitudes and many other areas of health must be funded and expanded.

After Hours Services

There is an appalling lack of services working after normal hours and on week-ends with young people and yet these times are often key times to engage with young people. The SAAP services again are often the only services open after 6pm on any evening and throughout the night. There is an appalling lack of a responsive and adequate after hours service leaving community agencies to do for which they are not adequately resourced.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention can best be delivered by universally delivered services such as health including dental health, education, social housing etc and through structural problems such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness and discrimination being eliminated.

The definition about what Early Intervention is needs to be universal. Currently it is inconsistent and means different things to different people. Early intervention that is well targeted and delivered may well over time reduce the number of children and young people in need of support. For example may reduce the number of people being taken into care because of the risk of harm. It is this organisation's experience that young people and families may require interventions at various stages of their lives and in most cases the earlier the

intervention the better the outcome. However this does not mean that early intervention is only provided to babies or children under one. Early intervention can be successfully provided at any age as an intervention to prevent any situation from worsening.

Early intervention also is best delivered in conjunction with a range of other programs. They are not services unto themselves. Early intervention is an approach and all services could develop early intervention strategies into particular problems or situations.

It is our view that early intervention would best be delivered by the community agencies although all Government and community agencies need to understand early intervention and how to intervene as early as possible. Community agencies are, in our view, best placed to provide early intervention services, to prevent abuse and neglect, including family support, family and adolescent counselling, parenting skills, social and living skills education, referral, advocacy, information, drug and alcohol support, refuge, accommodation and housing and others

We believe the best place for various models of early intervention is in local communities in local community services. We believe that community agencies present the opportunity and likelihood of a non threatening positive professional relationship to potential clients and therefore clients are more likely to self identify, approach such an agency and seek help early.

Better Futures Program

The NSW Government has also promoted the Better Futures Program which originated in the Premiers Department and is now situated in the Division of Communities in DoCS as an early intervention response for adolescents. This Program is a poor response. It is poorly funded. Funding has been frozen since approximately mid 2006. No money (other than for the larger recurrent funded services) has been released since well prior to the last State election. It was primarily non recurrent money, so small project based services developed for short periods but increasing and strengthening capacity in the community was not possible. The emphasis on local planning and whole of Government involvement quite simply worked against developing services and improved responses for adolescents. Government Departments were meant to improve and demonstrate improved early intervention for adolescents in their Departments. Very little data or evidence was ever provided. A few larger services were funded for two years then extended and were based on small geographical areas. Again funding inequities with other similar services in the community were evident. These were well funded services and yet results have not been provided adequately and it has not led to an expansion of successful models. The Better Futures Program should be rolled into the DoCS CSGP Program to increase the capacity of existing services. This would add to much needed infrastructure, building on existing capacity and result in much more positive outcomes.

Community Services Grants Program DoCS

A positive program in the area of early intervention is the State funded Community Services Grants Program (CSGP). It provides funding to neighbourhood centres, family and adolescent services and other local based services which can engage clients. A component of this Program funds Adolescent and Family Counselling services (often closely connected to SAAP services) but these are under funded, have never received adequate indexation and so have reduced over time. This Family and Adolescent Counselling Program was primarily to support and work with families and young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. It has assisted through early intervention to maintain families together, to keep young people at

home where it is safe and to reduce child abuse and early home leaving. This Program is positive but has been undervalued and under supported by Government for a decade. The recent National Youth Homelessness Inquiry recommends the expansion of such programs in each State and Territory. In SYFS, we have one worker supporting families and adolescents funded by the State and this is simply inadequate. Utilising the less than effective Better Futures money to add a worker to services such as the SYFS one would be a positive enhancement.

Reconnect Commonwealth Funding

Reconnect funding from the Commonwealth also provides an excellent example of a model program for early intervention with young people. It provides funding to support families and young people to remain at home, or to re-engage them at home, or in education, training and community at the earliest opportunity. Services such as Reconnect could be increased and engaged at the assessment stage to reduce the need for court involvement. There could be a place for joint departmental and community agency assessments to assist in developing the best possible case plan in the initial stage of the intervention. There is unmet demand though and this Program could be expanded. The CSGP funding for Family and Adolescent Counsellors works well linked to Reconnect and additional funding for CSGP would be highly beneficial.

Statutory Child Protection

This area is not so much for this Inquiry and was covered in detail in the Child Protection Inquiry recently held. However it is worth noting a few issues in regard to the age group of the young person you are interested in. From a service provider's perspective we believe the current child protection system is unable to adequately investigate and assess reports of young people who have been abused or who are at risk. We are particularly referring to the young people aged 13 and 14 years. The AIHW data shows an increase in reports but funding to community agencies has not been provided for community services to assist in this work. Although DoCS has received some funding increases for extra case workers in terms of youth, we have not seen practical improvement in the quality or quantity of case work and assistance to young people.

Statutory interventions need to be based on need and not prioritised by age. There needs to be flexibility in the assessment process and a holistic approach to case management involving where relevant all family members. In the current system we believe the Department of Community Services is unable to provide the necessary case management and casework interventions to adequately support and address the issues for the young person and the family. This has led to groups such as the "under one year olds" being prioritised. While we accept the higher level of vulnerability of babies, we believe that all children and young people deserve to be prioritised with regard to need and it is unacceptable that adolescents are not considered a high priority. There are many unallocated case in DoCS and these are mainly young people and again we are referring to young people aged thirteen and fourteen years.

In terms of working with young people, we believe community agencies end up doing the bulk of the actual support work, case work, case management and medium to longer term work and yet the funding is not adequate to do this properly.

This places added pressure on the SAAP system as many young people who should be in the Out Of Home Care (OoHC) system do not gain access to it due to inadequate assessment and therefore remain in SAAP unnecessarily. SAAP services do a good job of propping up the OoHC system. However is not designed to meet the needs of this younger and more vulnerable target group. It is the policy of this organisation to notify all young people under 16 years of age who enter SAAP services to the Department and request intervention. Because DoCS are under resourced and unable to fulfil their statutory requirements, our workers often have to take on additional responsibilities in case management and family assessments. We would like to see an improvement in this area. Hopefully there will be some relief to the SAAP system with increased funding and services in the OoHC system later this year.

There needs to be additional resourcing and process improvements to speed up the time and stress experienced through cases in court. In our experience it can take a year for a child protection court case to be completed. The waiting time at court on a given day is stressful and a terrible drain on resources. The court system needs to be resourced so that proper appointment times can be given, so that cases can be dealt with in a reasonable time frame and the stress on those involved is reduced.

Out of Home Care Services

Again much of this issue was reported in the Inquiry Into Child Protection. In summary though relevant to children and young people in your target group there is quite simply an inadequate number of placements for young people and an inadequate spread and range of accommodation and placement services.

Some Out of Home Care Services (especially residential care services) have received low levels of funding for the service required. At times this had led to:-

- Inability of the agency to attract and maintain suitably qualified, experienced and committed staff
- Inability to guarantee security of employment due to short term nature of contracts and uncertainty
- Inability to employ the staffing levels required which affects the quality of care, the quality of outcomes and contributed to some critical incidents
- Inability to replace and repair furniture and equipment leading to low morale and unnecessary difficulties in performing the work
- Inability to purchase major capital items such as vehicles
- Complete lack of capital funding to provide adequate premises for the residential service which has created insecurity, high costs of relocations within the private market and increased risk of critical incidents because of poor design issues
- Inability to manage difficult and volatile situations and the agency being seen as "not able to cope".

I have visited community placement, residential care and housing services for young people across Australia and in the United States, England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Germany. I was impressed with many of the services I visited. In many ways the SAAP in Australia stood up as a credible and positive program. Our Out of Home Care services did not fair so well in my assessment. By visiting many different services, seeing a range of models, understanding the different environments, I learnt many things or had many of our views reinforced. Based on our observations in NSW, across other State and Territories and in the countries mentioned above, and also from our service delivery experience, we believe there are some critical success factors that are necessary to develop an effective, appropriate Out of Home Care system. Again some of these improvements may be possible in the rollout of funds to successful tendering agencies that is to come in the future. In our opinion these are:-

- A committed community sector with agencies keen to provide Out of Home Care and which have experience and skills.
- A trained, skilled and committed workforce in Out of Home Care agencies and in the Department.
- Adequate time for caseworkers in the Department and/or the community agencies to build and maintain relationships with clients and to work with clients in an intensive way.
- Adequate support and encouragement to Staff in the necessary work of interagency liaison, networking and building relationships with other agencies and to consider this work as important as the assessment and investigation.
- Regular and quality training for Staff in the Department and in the community agencies.
- Good planning and accessible and available exit options from the Out of Home Care system.
- Adequately funded aftercare /leaving care programs. This includes funding to set young people up in independent living situations. We estimate that this costs approximately \$6,500 per person. This should be complemented and not replaced by the Federally funded Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).
- Adequate staffing hours be provided to community agencies to ensure appropriate and adequate leaving care and after care supports.
- Support for all models of service delivery in the Out of Home Care system by Government, the Department and the community. There must be recognition that all the models are valuable to an effective Out of Home Care system.
- Good range of service types and support intensive levels in the Out of Home Care system including foster care, community placement, residential care, and outreach support and in all models the ability to provide treatment, intensive support, medium and minimal support.
- An adequate and secure level of funding and resources, both recurrent and capital, which adequately supports an effective and quality care system and ensures that:-

- Staff in community agencies are experienced, trained, supported, and remunerated adequately and that staffing levels are adequate to meet the needs of the young people. Wages equity with similar Government jobs to be implemented.
- Community agencies have a secure infrastructure including the ability to provide for premises and/or rent costs, staff supervision, training and development costs, costs for transport and vehicle costs, equipment, replacement and repairs, communication and computer costs and other such costs.
- Community agencies have adequate resources to have psychologists and behaviour management experts on site.
- Capital funding for properties for residential services. Properties must be planned well, purpose built or renovated, with attention to design including appropriate supervision and safety considerations, appropriate reception and other facilities included such as education facilities, facilities and suitable modifications for people with disabilities. Other important aspects in the design are in providing adequate privacy, space and facilities for the young people's accommodation.

In the services we visited overseas one of the things that stood out was the design and style of the properties for residential services. The design was able to ensure the need for good supervision, contributed to a safer environment for young people and staff and minimised the risk of vandalism. The design and quality of building materials did improve the overall operations of the service, increased the possibility of good outcomes for the clients and also helped in creating a more positive work environment. Residential care will not be as effective unless a purpose built or purpose renovated building is provided.

Crisis versus Early Intervention

We believe there is a role for other government departments to be more actively involved in early intervention and support services through the provision of funding to community agencies. However, this cannot be at the expense of a reduction in existing crisis and more transitional type services as these are already not meeting the demand.

System Failure, Examples of Services Needed

There are some severe gaps in the current system in terms of meeting the needs of young people. Even when young people are in care there are difficulties in engaging the right service as early as possible. There is no magic way to fix this other than additional resources be provided to both Government and non Government agencies to adequately respond to demand. The inability to respond appropriately to some of these issues such as mental health, violent behaviour, drug use etc are serious problems. Many young people have to leave their local area to receive relevant supports. Examples include

Examples include:

- There is a need for the court / juvenile justice system to identify issues early and seek interventions when it is obvious that a young person is heading down a destructive path - that this need is reported and appropriate supports are put into place.
- It has been our experience that some young people are detained in custody for longer than necessary as there are no appropriate placements available to them. This is unacceptable and should not occur. Increased supported placements and SAAP like

services, Juvenile Justice half way accommodation options and bail hostels and other models must be funded.

- The Health system needs a range of additional services eg adolescent specific residential mental health service (many young people end up in adult psychiatric wards and are often classed as unsafe there and need special arrangements), an after hours call out system for youth services, improved dental services, a drug and alcohol youth detoxification and residential rehabilitation services (many young people have to go to Sydney or Canberra for this service)
- Services especially residential and program based for young sexual offenders are much needed.

- The Police would benefit from being trained in welfare issues and assessment as this would reduce the number of reports to the DoCS Helpline and put less pressure on the system. Previously new recruits to the Police Service would attend field placements at community organisations to gain a greater understanding of the system and assist them in their assessments. This was unfortunately ceased, but was an excellent program while it lasted.
- Improved after hours DoCS response
- Lack of adequate placements in specialised, creative educational programs
- Lack of appropriate medium and long term supported accommodation placements
- Lack of crisis accommodation
- Poor supports in court system, long waits in court
- Inadequate services for sibling groups when they are removed from home

4. The extent to which changing workplace practices have impacted on children and young people in the middle years, including possible changes to workplace practices which have the potential to benefit children and young people in the middle years

Many people are working longer and longer hours. This is partly due to increased work pressures and demands and also to do with people needing to earn more to “make ends meet”.

In regard to flexible working arrangements to assist with the care of children and young people, the focus on workplace providing family friendly work practices is positive. This relates to parents being able to work more flexible hours to accommodate the need for child care etc. However in reality it is much more difficult than it sounds. These work place flexibilities often only occur in jobs which are of a medium to higher income level. Shift workers, lower income jobs often do not provide that flexibility. In community organisations the Government funding provided is inadequate to be able to offer too much flexibility as relief funds for essential service coverage is not available.

The other significant pressure on families is the cost of living, the high cost of rent, the high cost of mortgages. Single parent families are really doing it tough. Most families need two income earners to be able to manage the high cost of living. The cost of child care is very high and there is very poor access to after school and other such programs for the nine to fourteen year age groups.

The Commonwealth Industrial Relations Work Choices also had a very negative impact on some work arrangements. However, over time this should be changed with the new Commonwealth Government.

5. Any other matters considered relevant to this Inquiry.

The Importance of Community Agencies

Community agencies are vital to an overall improved system for the support of children and young people. The potential for increased involvement by community agencies has not been properly realised and resourcing to enable the full realisation of this potential is a significant issue.

Wages and Conditions in Community Agencies, Skills Shortage, Training

Community agencies must be funded adequately to be able to attract and maintain suitably experienced, qualified and committed people to be able to deliver their services. There is a skills shortage in many industries now but it is critical in the community sector and in youth agencies. Community youth workers receive between \$15,000 and \$20,000 less than similar positions in Government agencies. This is unsustainable as community workers leave their jobs because of pay and conditions and go to Government jobs. It is reprehensible but Government agencies often use community services as a training ground for their staff, then recruit by saying to community workers, "Come and work for us, get more money and work less hours." Many community youth workers work between 10 and 15 hours a week routinely unpaid. Again this is unfair. There is an absolute imperative in NSW (and across Australia) to improve the level of wages and conditions in community agencies to be competitive with similar Government jobs. In visiting other child and youth agencies across the UK we observed better wages equity and in fact people would move from Government positions to work in community agencies.

Staff training and development opportunities are limited in youth agencies as they are so poorly funded. Many youth services are funded for part time workers and this again limits the opportunities for training and development.

Connection Between Good Funding and Quality Service Delivery

There is absolutely a connection between good funding and quality. Good funding means components such as staff supervision, training, professional development can be paid for and planned adequately. It means adequate staff numbers can be employed which helps meet demand on the service and improves the overall occupational health and safety of the workplace. Being able to attract and maintain suitably qualified and experienced staff, to offer

good wages and conditions competitive with similar Government positions and being able to offer security of tenure are critical elements related to funding.

Funding Pressures and Improvements, CPI, Short Term Funding

Some components of the funding system that have to be fixed include ensuring community agencies can expect a reasonable amount of indexation each year meet CPI and other increases. Indexation should at the very least allow the service to maintain its level of service delivery and not have to reduce hours each year. We need to move away from providing short term, non recurrent funding to community agencies. It does not build capacity in the sector, does not deliver good outcomes and uses valuable time and energy. We need to ensure the NSW Government lobbies to have all community programs - especially those funded by the Commonwealth - quarantined from the negative effects of the efficiency dividend.

We have mentioned the issue of resources constantly. Over recent years, there are increasing demands and pressures of increasing costs on community services caused by many things. Some increases to the budgets of relevant departments has occurred but these have not kept pace with the escalating costs of providing services to children and young people in this current environment. Very little new money has come to the community sector other than the early intervention DoCS Brighter Futures (young children) money and the recently announced DoCS OoHC funds. As mentioned throughout this submission community agencies have faced increased costs which have not been funded adequately and which when not funded adequately lead to a reduction in funds spent on direct service provision. Most community agencies have not received adequate funding to manage the demands on their services, the increased expectation of quality of case work and support, increased monitoring, reporting and other work. This caused a reduction in service hours and at times a loss of staff positions. These increased costs include:

- New community and social services award and upgrades to it
- Increased superannuation
- Increased worker's compensation and other costs.
- Communication advancement and changes
- Computer technology advancement and changes, software support and training
- Other insurances
- Training and other salary related items

Pressures to do With Compliance, Administration, Accountability, Higher Expectations

We believe the expectations of community agency workers have increased a great deal in recent years and at times we consider them to be unrealistic in the light of available resources. Over the last few years the requirements for more formal case management, higher levels of documentation about cases, computer data collection and information management, standards of work performance, accreditation, compliance with various new legislative requirements (eg Occupational Health and Safety legislation, Accreditation, Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) legislation and other legislation) have all increased and/or become more complex. The cost of compliance is huge now. Even simple things have caused cost increases for agencies. For example, the increased cost and administration under the new legislation for

Police checks and screening processes for staff. The current Working With Children Check is a more limited assessment than the previous Police checks carried out forcing agencies to conduct a more extensive Federal Police Check at a cost to the agency. These extra requirements and increased expectations have been implemented without adequate resourcing. To enable adequate time to be spent with the young people and to ensure that all expectations can be met increased resources are necessary.

Existing community agencies providing child and family services need to be supported and funded adequately. Additional resources both recurrent and one-off capital are needed by community agencies for the Department to improve service delivery. It is not possible to continue to do more for less or the same. The cost of providing adequate, safe and appropriate child and youth services is high. However, we believe the community if educated about this would be supportive and understanding of this. It is the responsibility of Government to ensure the resources are delivered as promised.

Co-operation Between Government and Non-Government

There must be improved cooperation between community services and government departments. These relationships should not be forced but instead be allowed to form naturally over time. For example, over the past 30 years we have formed a large number of formal and informal partnerships which are very successful. We share information, training, staff, policies, provide support for each other in submissions, expressions of interest, interview panels etc. These relationships work well because we have a level of mutual respect and agreements that we will not compete unnecessarily.

Through these connections with other services we are able to work effectively together to achieve the best possible outcomes for the clients and minimise the level of intrusion in their lives. This requires a level of trust and a mutual understanding of each others service. This understanding and respect is developed over time and cannot be forced.

Suggestions

1. Funding to community agencies must include the ability to have wages and conditions equitable to similar positions in Government.
2. The NSW Government develop a capital fund for community agencies for design, building, purchasing, renovation and upgrade for offices, case work space, programs and activities and residential services.
3. Indexation and other funding systems be improved to ensure adequate funding including exemption from any Commonwealth and the State efficiency dividends.
4. Expansion of the number of youth supported accommodation options.
5. Funding be increased to community groups to deliver increased services, and to fill service gaps mentioned above including in the area of mental health, drug and alcohol and other services.
6. An immediate funding increase to the DoCS CSGP Program for Adolescent and Family Counsellor Services attached to Non Government Agencies in the SAAP and Out of Home Care areas.
7. An immediate funding increase to the DoCS CSGP Program for the enhancement and expansion of effective existing youth services.
8. Early Intervention services be managed by community organisations and existing services receive funding to enhance their early intervention capacity.
9. Better Futures funding be transferred into the DoCS CSGP Program for allocation to existing services to enhance existing services and funding be made recurrent and expanded.
10. The IHSHY Program be funded for the long term, indexed, and managed by community agencies.
11. Additional education supports be provided for young people who are at risk of early school leaving and also during times of suspension.
12. Administration and onerous requirements for community groups be reduced and more streamlined approaches be agreed to with community agencies.
13. Government fund and develop adequate responses and services in portfolio areas for the following services
 - Residential and other mental health facilities in local regions
 - After hours supports
 - Residential and other drug and alcohol health facilities in local regions
 - Adequate placements in specialised, creative educational programs
14. Lobby to ensure income levels for young people are increased including special benefit payments for young people not eligible for Commonwealth income but who have no other income support.