

# WA YOUTH STRATEGY

## Submission from the Youth Partnership Project

### Feedback Summary

1. All young people are best supported when comprehensive services are provided at all intervention levels.
2. Investment in targeted early intervention reduces demand on crisis systems – saving money and better supporting young people.
3. Soft-entry points support young people to access the wider youth service system.
4. Targeted intervention and re-direction services must identify and reach out to individual young people needing support.
5. Collaboration is essential to effective & efficient service provision.
6. Collaboration is most effective when facilitated by a resourced backbone organisation.
7. Place-based governance structures are best placed to ensure strategic approaches to local service provision.
8. Youth programs need to be evidence informed, outcomes focused, and have clear indicators of success.
9. Using co-design to develop youth services ensure services are accessible, youth friendly and genuinely meet the needs of young people.
10. Access to comprehensive, current, place-based data ensures youth programs meet community needs.
11. Co-Investment ensures youth services can be resourced to address shared problems.
12. Youth sector funding must be sustainable, yet flexible.

### Who We Are

As the backbone organisation for the Youth Partnership Project, Save the Children is pleased to provide feedback to the Department of Communities to inform the development of a new Youth Strategy for Western Australia. Save the Children is one of Australia's largest aid and development organisations, and we believe every child deserves a bright future. We have been working in Australia for over 65 years, supporting children and young people with emerging and complex needs to keep them on track. Today we operate in over 200 sites – in cities, regional centres, towns, and remote communities.

The Youth Partnership Project (YPP) is a strategic project, developing a better youth early intervention framework which is effective, aligned, and scalable. This project engages state government agencies, local government and the not-for-profit community sector to work better together to improve outcomes for young people with complex needs through the planning and delivery of community services. In doing so we provide evidence that contributes to government strategy and policy.

At the Youth Partnership Project, we know that strong and strategic leadership is essential to ensuring that government and community services can deliver lasting results for young people and help them to transform their lives. We recognise the Western Australian government has a key role in providing this leadership, and the development of a comprehensive Youth Strategy is a key element. Young people are an important part of our communities; not only for their future potential, but for their inherent worth and the many ways they already valuably contribute. However, young people also face unique challenges, so it is essential that as a community, we provide the right support to enable young people to thrive.



## Where Should the Focus of Youth Programs Lie?

Access and engagement, targeted interventions, and redirection and re-entry services all provide valuable support; together meeting the diverse needs of young people in our community at different levels of vulnerability. It is essential that youth services across the spectrum are supported. We cannot effectively support all young people within our community if comprehensive services are not provided at each of these levels.

However, it is important to emphasise the critical role of targeted intervention services. Targeted or early intervention services identify young people who, if left unsupported, are likely to enter tertiary or crisis systems such as youth justice or child protection. By identifying and supporting vulnerable young people at this critical stage, early intervention services create significant savings in expenditure on tertiary services, and more importantly, allow young people to thrive in their communities.

Additionally, services at each level must be targeted to meet the needs of vulnerable communities. This is especially relevant for targeted, early intervention, and redirection services, where certain communities - such as Aboriginal young people - are disproportionately represented in crisis systems. Where there is overrepresentation in crisis systems, relevant redirection and early intervention services should have targets to ensure they are meeting the need of these groups of young people.

We welcome the discussion paper's definition of young people as those aged 10-25 years. As we have previously identified,<sup>1</sup> various youth service providers have raised concerns with us that children younger than the previously defined youth age of 12-25 have been presenting with youth issues for many years. This change, lowering the age range to begin at 10 years, is essential so services are empowered to respond to this emerging issue.

## Ensuring Access to Youth Programs

The youth service system is complex and can be difficult to access and navigate, as noted in the discussion paper and the Speak Out for Change Summit Report.<sup>2</sup> We need to be strategic and creative to break down barriers which prevent young people from getting the services they need. Soft-entry points help young people engage with the youth service system. These may be youth centres or engagement programs such as sports or afterschool activities. Such programs grow young people's awareness of services available and help to build confidence to access more specialised support. Importantly, these programs bring young people into contact with youth sector professionals, enabling the building of relationships and trust. These relationships give the youth sector a human face, enable youth workers to better understand young people's needs, and allow them to make and support referrals to appropriate services.

However, targeted intervention and redirection services working with vulnerable and at-risk young people should not only rely on young people coming to them. Instead, these services must think about how they can identify young people in the community who would benefit from the service and reach out to engage them. This may take the form of traditional outreach, or by working with other agencies to identify young people. An example of this is the YPP's Youth Intervention Partnership Model, where a matrix of indicators relating to education, child protection and contact with police is used to collaboratively identify young people at risk of becoming juvenile offenders. Once identified, these young people are approached to take part, and are provided with holistic early intervention support.

## How to Best Implement Youth Programs

Many issues faced by young people are not the responsibility of one agency, department or service alone. They are shared problems which require shared solutions. Collaboration allows services to prevent duplication and combine efforts and resources to reach a common goal. Collaboration is increasingly recognised as essential to the future of the public and community service sectors. However, engaging in collaborative initiatives is generally considered as an "extra opportunity", rather than an essential aspect of service provision. When collaboration is a lower priority, engagement in such initiatives tends to drop off when work load increases, even if the outcomes of collaboration are likely to lead to greater efficiency or reduction

---

<sup>1</sup> YPP, Regional Youth CAN Action Plan, 2015; YPP, Input for WACOSS Government Service Priority Review Submission, 2017

<sup>2</sup> YPP, Speak out for Change: Youth Voices on Youth Issues, 2015

of workload in the long term. In order to provide increased motivation and incentive to engage in collaborative work, engagement in collaborative initiatives must be identified as a priority in strategy, and be reflected in relevant service tenders. Collaboration requires time and effort, and when this is recognised as a part of effective service delivery, it helps justify time spent on this important work.

The Youth Partnership Project provides an example of strategic, coordinated collaboration. The YPP was created to address complex social issues experienced by young people in the South East Corridor of Perth, while addressing segmentation and duplication amongst and between government and non-government services. Harnessing the learnings of collective impact and using a place-based approach, the Youth Partnership Project has developed a culture of collaboration between not-for profit community organisations, state agencies and local governments, as well as developing a collaborative model for service delivery with a focus on early intervention for young people with complex needs. This collaborative model not only supports services working together towards a common goal, but facilitates the sharing of information, resources and training. Importantly, the collaboration of the Youth Partnership Project has been made possible through the resourcing of a backbone organisation. This has provided dedicated resource to understanding the 'whole service system' and coordinate services effectively and strategically to a common goal. The resourced backbone organisation has been critical to the YPP's success in driving collaboration and improving service provision for young people with complex needs.

Place-based governance structures also have an essential role to play in developing strategies to address unique needs in local areas. District leadership Groups and Human Services Regional Managers Forums provide a valuable forum for ensuring that service provision across departments are aligned, and strategically addressing the needs of the community. With a holistic, local perspective, these groups can compare data, identify emerging issues, and close service gaps. Harnessing the role of such groups to ensure youth services are tailored to the context and needs of local communities, will ensure more effective provision of services to young people.

Youth programs need to be evidence informed, outcomes focused, and have clear indicators of success. To ensure youth services have impact, approaches need to be based in reliable evidence and best practice. By focusing on outcomes for young people, rather than merely service outputs, we can ensure that all programs are making a genuine, positive difference in young people's lives. Continual monitoring and evaluation ensures that we regularly and consistently confirm whether the program is achieving its aims – and if not, changes can be made to ensure improvement in service provision quickly, rather than waiting until the end of the funding cycle. When service providers and funders hold themselves accountable, regularly collect data on progress, and make improvements as required, young people receive quality youth services.

Co-design offers the opportunity to ensure that services are accessible, youth friendly and genuinely meet the needs of young people, by combining young people's lived experience with professional expertise. Young people have a right to be genuinely listened to and participate in decisions that impact them, and embracing co-design offers the opportunity for meaningful engagement of young people in service development. The Youth Partnership Project has used co-design to develop and trial a collaborative early intervention model to prevent at-risk young people coming in to contact with the criminal justice system. Through the co-design process, young people from the Armadale area who have been in contact with the criminal justice system at all levels have helped partner organisations to better understand the challenges that lead to disengagement and contact with the justice system. Consultation with young people through co-design has been essential in informing the operational components of the Youth Intervention Partnership Model. We recommend that the WA Youth Strategy encourage the use of co-design for the development of new youth services.

### **Importance of Data for Great Youth Programs**

Access to current, place-based, and comparable data will ensure that youth programs continue to meet the needs of young people in the community. In 2017, the Youth Partnership Project released the Change the Story Report<sup>3</sup> which included location-based analysis of youth focused data obtained from a variety of sources, including the Department of Education, WA Police, and

---

<sup>3</sup> YPP, Change the Story Report, 2017

Department of Corrective Services. As far as we are aware, this was the first time this type of information has been available to the youth service sector. Being able to compare data about young people from across departments – particularly for specific local government areas - was an invaluable way to identify the unique characteristics and needs of communities.

More comprehensive approaches, such as linked-data, will also provide better information about how youth services can best support vulnerable young people, and ensure youth programs can be targeted to the areas of highest need. The need for improved data sharing to improve performance is also a recommendation of the Service Priority Review Blueprint for Reform.<sup>4</sup> We recommend that the WA Youth Strategy investigate possibilities for ensuring that information like this can be harnessed to ensure youth programs are meeting key needs in communities.

## Fixing Funding

Funding for the youth sector needs to focus on sustainability, flexibility, and co-investment. Many of the complex social challenges facing our communities today are not the responsibility of any one government department or funding body. Responses to such issues, especially those which are collaborative and/or place-based, need to be adequately resourced. In the Change the Story Report, the Youth Partnership Project recommended the need to explore a mechanism for co-investment for these types of approaches which create cross-sector outcomes (for example, the YPP's Youth Intervention Partnership Model). Shared problems which arise from issues across government department mandates require shared responses – with shared funding to enable collaborative approaches.

Through consultation, both service providers and young people have told the Youth Partnership Project that there needs to be greater sustainability in the funding of youth programs. With short-term funding contracts, young people feel that the services on offer are ever-changing and that good programs which have finally become established come to an end with the end of its funding, only to be replaced by a new program which must “find its feet” before having impact.<sup>5</sup> Short term funding leads to constant turnover of staff which impacts the vision and continuity of youth programs and services. Youth programs and services need to have access to long term funding contracts of three years or more, as highlighted by the Aboriginal Youth Investment Reform principles. This ensures the sustainability of youth programs and services for young people who need support.<sup>6</sup>

Flexibility is also important. Traditionally, funding contracts for community services have been rigid which presents complications for services seeking to provide responsive and place-based services. Agencies need the ability to be flexible in delivering their services to ensure they can be responsive to the context and needs of the people and community in which they work. By having some flexibility with client groups, services are better able to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable young people who might otherwise fall between gaps in services.

## AYIP is Supporting Young Western Australians

In closing, we would like to provide an example of a project helping young Western Australians. AYIP provides collaborative, holistic and targeted support to young people with complex needs. Using a research informed matrix to identify young people, a diverse partnership of non-government service providers, government agencies and the local government work together with the aim to reduce the number of young people engaging in the juvenile justice system. Partners provide support across six key areas of criminogenic need: social and emotional wellbeing, life skills, family support, access to resources, educational engagement and safe community spaces. This collaborative support is facilitated by a dedicated coordinator. There is a focus on strong relationships with the young people, initially built through a collaborative holiday program. Young people who have been involved have had great success; achieving educational goals, reducing offending behaviours, and supporting other young people through leadership opportunities.

For further information about this submission, please [contact Karina Chicote](#), YPP Manager.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Premier & Cabinet, Service Priority Review Blueprint for Reform, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Youth Partnership Project, Speak Out for Change Summit Open Consultation Data, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Youth Partnership Project, Regional Youth CAN Action Plan, 2015