

UQ (IPSWICH) COMMUNITY SERVICE AND RESEARCH CENTRE - YOUTH SERVING AUSTRALIA (YSA)

SERVICE EVALUATION

BRIEF:

The evaluation aims to present an overview of YSA's operations that is framed by the following guidelines

- ⇒ Background of YSA, history of service, context of operation
- ⇒ Client data analysis (including quantitative and qualitative analysis and presentations)
- ⇒ Recommendations and key learnings

BACKGROUND OF YSA

The Vision:

'A society that enables young people to participate fully and creatively in community'

Youth Serving Australia has operated as a service provider in the youth services sector in Ipswich city and region in SE Queensland since August 1999. YSA is a Non Government Organisation (NGO) which proclaims its indebtedness to the vision of the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, the Reverend Peter Hollingsworth - and his desire to see the emergence of service organisations that would 'address the long-term support needs of young people and assist them in their development as independent adults'.

YSA aims to deliver on this vision by:

- ⇒ Addressing 'the immediate needs of young people in the community':
- ⇒ Providing a framework for building community capacities to deliver 'integrated, coordinated and holistic prevention and early intervention responses to youth needs':
- ⇒ 'Facilitate the development of communities that value young people', and their 'worth' and 'contribution to the community'.

Context of operation

Ipswich City and region is, for a variety of social, economic, geographical and political reasons, seen as location marked by social disadvantage and social *problems*. The region attracts a lot of attention - including the attention of those agencies and organisations (government and non government) that attempt to deal strategically with these problems (for example, Queensland government Community Renewal program funding).

YSA's service development and delivery functions have been influenced by the ways in which non-recurrent government and philanthropic funding shape service delivery options. Like many other similar agencies YSA's activities have been influenced by uncertainty over funding, by the administrative workload associated with *inventing* and implementing a service delivery model, and by the ongoing attempts to seek out funding to develop and deliver programs that are consistent with its *mission statement*.

Given this context YSA appears to have been quite successful - though this success appears to have come at the cost of staff turnover (which impacts on program development and delivery), and an uncertainty about what exactly constitutes the *core business* of YSA - a consequence of having to constantly reposition or *rebrand* itself for possible funding opportunities.

Organisational Structure

A volunteer, community based Management Committee oversees YSA's activities and strategic direction. A Program Co-ordinator, who is responsible for co-ordinating, planning, developing and evaluating a range of activities, preparing funding submissions and networking and collaborating across a broadly defined Youth

services sector, reports to this Management Committee. A part time (P/T) Mentor Volunteer Co-ordinator and Youth Support Worker have been responsible for the day-to-day delivery of YSA's programs/activities which are located in and across the following areas

Outdoor and Wilderness Activities	Personal and Social Development	Community Service and Development	Vocational Education, Training and Experience
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History of Service

If it wasn't for YSA I can honestly say I would still be struggling. There should be more youth services like this around

(A young client's comment at the point of disengaging from YSA case management)

YSA has, to some extent, been successful in attracting some short term, and strategically targeted funding to enable it to put its vision into practice. This funding has come from a variety of local, state and federal government departments, local service organisations, and philanthropic trusts including:

- ⇒ Ipswich City Rotary
- ⇒ The Sidney Myer Foundation
- ⇒ The Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund
- ⇒ Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet

Support for YSA activities has also taken the form of *in-kind* support from a variety of individual, business and community organisations, for example the provision of rent-free, centrally located shop front premises. This central location has, it appears, been important in establishing YSA's profile among young people in Ipswich. This funding and support has enabled YSA to develop a number of programs, and a service delivery model that is largely consistent with its vision and aims.

YSA Activities: A Snapshot (December 1999 - February 2001)

1 P/T Youth Support Worker
1 P/T Mentor Support Program Worker
Total Number of case managed clients - 35 young people aged between 15 and 21
Total number of non clients (drop in to shop front premises) - 45 (approx)
Total number of young people YSA had some dealing with - 80

YSA Case Managed Clients December 1999 - February 2001

YSA has case managed 35 young people. This case load has meant levels of client contact in excess of 25 hrs per week. Case management involves ongoing one-to-one contact and counselling - dealing with referrals in relation to health, housing, education, employment and training, and networking and advocacy on behalf of young people.

Total Clients	Male	Female
35	20 (ages 15-20)	15 (ages 15-21)

YSA Dealings with Non Clients December 1999 - February 2001

Throughout this period YSA had dealings with 45 young people as irregular non clients who dropped in to YSA's shop front premises. Support for these young people included representations to agencies such as Centrelink, providing food assistance, crisis counselling, accommodation advice, and referrals to appropriate service providers.

YSA CORE ACTIVITIES 2000: JOURNEY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Aims and Objectives

Initially run as a 3 day/week program for 5 weeks to provide a focus for attracting young people as clients - given the apparent difficulty of accessing young people in the initial stages of operation. This program also had an objective of establishing a service development and delivery profile for YSA in the youth services sector in Ipswich. It should also be noted that the program aimed to be a positive intervention into young people's lives 'in its own right'. A second Journey program built on the apparent success and evaluation conducted of the first Journey.

The program in practice

30 young people enrolled in the first program - of these 20 finished the program (6 young people enrolled in the second program - all completed). The Journeys consisted of a range of activities that reflected the program aims to involve young people in;

Outdoor Experiences, Community Projects, Social Education, and Vocational Exploration and Development. These activities included rock climbing, paintball skirmishes, resume writing and job search skills, cooking, budgeting, sexual health and drug and alcohol workshops.

Apparent Outcomes

YSA appeared to be successful in delivering programs that drew on an inter agency service delivery model - with many activities conducted in collaboration with agencies such as Challenge Employment, Centrelink, Young People's Health, Mission Employment and 'The Outlook'@Boonah. Important connections were established and maintained with a number of other agencies in the youth services sector in Ipswich - these connections have been, and continue to be, important in the work YSA undertakes with young people.

The first Journey was important in also establishing a client base for YSA's case management/mentor program - of the 20 young people who completed 17 agreed to participate in this mentoring program. This would seem to indicate that the Journey did indeed provide a positive intervention in young people's lives 'in its own right'.

These 'positives' include one young woman who was able to deal with her drug use behaviours and return to school; a 'newly confident' young man who gained a full time job; and other young people who were supported into part-time employment.

Additional Comments

Both Journey's represented a large investment in terms of time, energy, management, development, delivery, evaluation and networking - an investment which gives the appearance of having *paid off* in terms of the work YSA seeks to do with young people. The programs fit well with YSA's commitment to develop a 'holistic' approach without 'service duplication' - and to develop 'referral pathways' for young people with other agencies in the youth services sector in the Ipswich region.

YSA CORE ACTIVITIES 2000: MENTOR PROGRAM

Aims and Objectives

YSA obtained funding from the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund to facilitate a program which aimed to recruit and manage a team of community volunteers. These volunteers were to establish a mentor relationship with young people who were being case managed by YSA. The mentor relationship aimed to provide additional means to support young people's transitions into fuller community participation.

The program in practice

Substantial effort was invested in the development of appropriate policies and practices for facilitating, training and managing volunteer mentors (these policies and materials appear to constitute a valuable resource that at the present time is under utilised). Fifty-five people expressed interest in participating as volunteer mentors in response to a number of newspaper ads, community agency announcements and local news stories. Of these, 30 volunteers commenced in two training programs - 20 participants completed the mentor training and background police checks.

A great deal of work was done to manage these volunteers, maintain their involvement and conduct a process of facilitating the appropriate 'linking' of mentors and young people. At one point during 2000 up to 11 mentors were 'linked' with YSA's young clients. Other volunteers worked in administrative capacities in the YSA office - a vital contribution to maintaining YSA's capacity to develop and deliver services for young people.

There is evidence that involvement by volunteer mentors tapered off after a period of 6 months, as other commitments and changed circumstances impacted on mentors' *investment* in the program.

Apparent Outcomes

There is evidence to indicate that volunteer mentors provided welcome support and assistance to young people via face-to-face meetings, and activities and through periodic phone calls - support which included, in one instance, 'valuable' and timely advice to one young 'mother-to-be'.

Another mentor/client relationship was initially based in the young person's need for 'maths homework help', and this young person's desire to be a jackaroo in the future. During the time of this relationship the young person received an A in a maths test. He also spent weekend time at the mentor's property learning a range of skills - he even 'made his own whip'. This was, indeed, a 'good news story' - and an indication of the types of positive, and powerful, outcomes possible within such a program.

Additional Comments

Two key factors appear to have limited this innovative and potentially powerful intervention:

Uncertainties over short term funding and, hence, the long term sustainability of a mentor program. This issue repeatedly appears in YSA documents.

Commitment by volunteers to continue participating in program - a consequence, in part, of changes in volunteer circumstances, and the impacts this has on volunteer commitment. This is a common issue for organisations that manage volunteer type programs.

There is potential for a revamped mentor program to constitute an innovative and powerful element of YSA's *core business* (see separate attachment: Recommendations and Key Learnings).

YSA materials analysed for this evaluation included: funding applications and evaluations, monthly Support Worker reports, YSA Co-ordinator reports, YSA newsletters and Mentor Program monthly reports. Direct quotes from these documents are identified by the use of 'marks'.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY LEARNINGS

The above programs emerge from this evaluation as representing the activities YSA has been involved in which most powerfully connect to YSA's mission statement. Ongoing concerns about what constitutes YSA's *core business* - a consequence of uncertainty connected to funding and sustainability - might usefully be addressed through a process that focuses on apparent strengths and successes. Finite energies and resources can then be directed to building sustainability into the strategic activities YSA might undertake.

An example here would be a revamped mentor program that was structured by a different logic. A great deal of effort and resources have been invested in recruiting, training, and managing volunteer mentors to provide another level of community based support for young people. Yet the experience of volunteer programs is that people's commitment to volunteering almost inevitably wanes over time. It can be argued that this type of mentor program is not sustainable in the long term.

A different sort of mentor model provides an opportunity to link a range of already identified needs and program possibilities to deliver on YSA's vision:

- ⇒ YSA Support Worker reports repeatedly identify that the biggest problem facing clients is unemployment
- ⇒ YSA Co-ordinator's report of January 2001 identifies the need for 'Youth Entrepreneurship Development'
- ⇒ YSA newsletter of February 2001 identifies a number of 'Youth participation project' possibilities (eg a Youth media project).

A project based mentor program could aim to involve groups of young people in a range of projects, of limited duration, with clearly identified and achievable outcomes.

Young people could be 'project managed' by a range of industry based mentors (very broadly defined) who had a professional commitment to developing in young people a range of 'entrepreneurial skills' that would enhance the future opportunities of these young people. A lot of work is involved in this sort of program but YSA's history suggests that it might be uniquely placed to undertake this work.

Such a model would move away from a volunteer model that relies solely on 'spare time voluntarism' (which can be valuable - but is often unsustainable). There would be a shift to an industry based model supported by appropriate case management strategies and mentor support and training - organisational resources and knowledge currently under utilised by YSA (for examples see *Students at Risk (DEET Case Studies)*, 1992, AGPS Canberra).