

8 Appendix 1: Literature and program review

The Redfern Waterloo Street Team (RWST) was established as a multi-agency, early intervention strategy for at risk children and young people in the Redfern Waterloo area. The original model was designed with the expectation that the service would operate 24 hours over a seven day week, providing brief intervention casework and referral to young people in an outreach model. However, since its inception the Street Team has changed its model considerably, from a casework model to a program model.

The Redfern Waterloo Authority together with the NSW Department of Community Services initiated an evaluation of the RWST. The evaluation is intended to examine the effectiveness of the current model of service delivery and to identify opportunities for integrating strategic direction of the RWST with current Redfern Waterloo human service sector redevelopments.

RPR was engaged to conduct the evaluation in July 2005. The evaluation methodology has included a focused internet search to identify service models which may more effectively meet the needs of children/young people and their families in the area. This paper reports on the findings of the literature review.

The literature and program review have been structured into four parts:

- effective practice in youth activity and support programs
- effective practice in supporting children/young people and families with complex and high level needs
- effective coordination of youth service delivery systems
- good practice in operating mentoring programs.

8.1 Effective practice in youth activity and support programs

A number of elements recur in the literature on effective youth activity and support programs. These include:

- using a well-planned, outcomes driven approach
- using strength-based approaches that build resilience and connectedness
- using a holistic, multi-faceted approach which is inclusive of families
- having a long-term prevention/intervention focus which targets transition phases
- having structured programs which provide a variety of age-appropriate activities
- having a strong focus on youth participation and empowerment
- ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness
- taking coordination and collaboration seriously.

While discussed separately, it is recognised that in practice the features of good practice are interlocking and mutually reinforcing. For example, the most effective services have an

intentional outcomes focus on building resilience and connectedness. Building resilience is in turn linked to having structured programs that provide a variety of age-appropriate activities that build on existing skills and foster connectedness. Similarly, consulting and involving children /young people and families in decision making is an integral component of ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.

Using a well-planned, outcomes driven approach

The research consistently confirms that to be effective, services/programs for young people need to be well-planned and take an outcomes driven approach. Planning and evaluation are part of a cyclical process which informs good decision-making. The starting point for this approach must be defining the outcomes that are intended to result from the work.

Those involved in planning and implementing youth programs need to:

- be clear on what outcomes are being sought
- use approaches (and structures) that are most likely – based on existing knowledge and experience – to achieve those outcomes, and
- use monitoring and evaluation processes – which involves all stakeholders – to inform ongoing program development. The most effective programs have a culture of critical reflection and continue to evolve over time.

Using strength-based approaches that build resilience and connectedness

Recent research on effective programs for children and young people emphasises the need to move beyond identifying risks to finding successful ways of promoting protective factors and resilience. Resilience is the capacity to endure difficulties and to ‘bounce back’ and includes personal characteristics of “*responsiveness, flexibility, autonomy, empathy, caring, communication skills, a sense of humour and any other pro-social behaviour*” (Bernard, 1991).

Factors promoting resilience are fairly consistent across longitudinal studies and include supportive families, positive relationships, external networks and the opportunity to develop self-esteem and efficacy through valued social roles or activities (Newman, 2002). Protective factors may be located within the young person (e.g. learned attitudes and beliefs), the family context, or school and community. A summary of protective factors in each of these domains is presented in Table 2.

Current research identifies the importance of the school environment in influencing life outcomes for young people. Particular risk factors that arise in the context of the school environment include educational failure, bullying and violence, peer rejection and poor attachment to the school (Homel 1999). Key factors in promoting resilience in middle childhood and adolescence include positive school experiences and trusting relationships with teachers, and the creation of home-school links, which promote parental engagement and social support (Newman 2002). Research in the United States, demonstrates that increasing parent’s participation in their children’s schooling through developing their skills as advocates, supporters and monitors of their children’s education both increases their children’s academic successes and their broader capacities as parents (Smith and

Carlson). This research points to the value of interventions which work with schools to build a positive, inclusive school culture which is supportive of vulnerable young people and families.

Strong social support networks and positive peer relationships, and opportunities for children/young people to participate in and contribute to their community are also consistently identified among the key factors which help to promote resilience in middle childhood and adolescence (Newman 2002). US research has found that young people without a social network are significantly more likely to report current illicit drug use, multiple sex partners, and survival sex than young people with a network (Ennett et al, 1999). When children/young people themselves are asked what helped them succeed against the odds, the most frequently mentioned factors are help from members of their extended families, peers, neighbourhoods or informal mentors, rather than the activities of paid professionals (Newman, 2002).

Recent research similarly highlights the importance of strengthening informal peer and social networks for parents. There is a substantial body of evidence demonstrating the extent to which families who become clients of child protection or child welfare services are socially isolated. Conversely, research evidence reveals significant improvements in family functioning when their integration into community networks is facilitated (Tomison and Poole 2000). This affirms the importance of programs which help to build the connectedness for families as well as individual young people.

In summary, what emerges from this body of research is that the key to preventing problems such as early school leaving, homelessness, youth crime and drug addiction is to focus on activities and approaches that build resilience. Services can improve the capacity and resilience of children/young people, their families and communities by implementing activities/interventions which:

- challenge young people, help them to develop problem solving skills and build their self-esteem
- help to strengthen family relationships
- help to strengthen social networks and connection to community, both for children/young people and for parents
- improve children/young people's connection with their schools and with the education system
- improve children/young people's circumstances where possible, for example, by providing referrals to ensure adequate health, housing and income support.

Youth development approaches have been developed in the United States and to a lesser extent in Australia as a model of "resilience building". Youth development concentrates on building the personal strengths and capabilities of young people rather than only seeking to prevent young people from engaging in risky behaviours. Youth development programs are defined by an intentional outcomes focus on:

- personal/individual development including team work and leadership skills, - specific activities that are designed to focus on the enhancement of personal attributes, such as self confidence, self reliance and self management skills are integral

and

- strengthened connection with community through relationships, participation and contribution to community (Ausyouth 2001).

An important feature of the approach is that youth development programs use an *integrated* range of group and one-to-one activities which may include, for example, social and recreational activities; peer education; mentoring; leadership development; literacy/tutoring programs; and jobs skills training. The benefits of using an integrated approach are discussed in the next section.

Table 2: Protective factors that promote resiliency

Individual personality attributes or dispositions	Social Competence	Responsiveness; flexibility; empathy & caring; communication skills; sense of humour.
	Problem-solving skills	Ability to think abstractly, reflectively & flexibly; Attempting alternate solutions for cognitive & social problems
	Autonomy	Internal locus of control; sense of power; self-esteem; self-efficacy; self-discipline; impulse control; ability to act independently & exert some control over one's environment
	Sense of purpose & future	Health expectancies; goal-directedness; success orientation; achievement motivation; educational aspirations; persistence; hopefulness; hardiness; belief in a bright future; sense of anticipation; sense of a compelling future; sense of coherence
Family factors	Caring and support	Opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one person who provides stable care and from whom they receive appropriate attention
	High expectations	Paternal confidence in their child's ability to succeed; Structure & discipline—clear rules and regulations; Moral considerations; Faith & religious beliefs
	Encouragement of children's participation	Children are acknowledged as valued participants in family life & work; Children are given responsibilities—chores; part-time work Respect for the child's autonomy
School factors	Caring & support	Opportunity for bonding—child to satisfy need for caring & support if it is not available within the family; A favourite teacher as a confidant & positive role model; Caring peers & friends;
	High expectations	Academic emphasis; Teacher's belief in child's ability to succeed; Teachers' clear expectations & regulations;
	Youth participation & involvement	Opportunity to participate and be meaningfully involved, and have roles and responsibility within the school environment; Engagement in school activities/attachment to school
Community factors—developing 'competent' communities	Caring & support	Availability of social networks—formal and informal—within the community that can promote and sustain social cohesion; Availability of resources necessary for health human development (healthcare; childcare; housing; education; job training; employment); Ability of social networks to respond adaptively to needs of community members
	High expectations	Cultural norms—young people seen as contributors to society; as resources, not problems; Clear expectations about substance use and abuse
	Opportunities for participation	Opportunity for young people to meet their basic human need for connecting to other people—social participation: Opportunities for economic participation; Developing a sense of belonging and attachment to one's community;

Source: Adapted from Benard 1991.

Using a holistic, multi-faceted approach which is inclusive of families

Children/young people often have multiple and complex needs that cannot easily be addressed by interventions that focus on a single approach. Current research emphasises the importance of an integrated approach to helping young people both in terms of the issues addressed in their lives and in terms of the *structure* of programs/intervention approaches (Burt, 1998). Services need to respond to the total life situation of young people, rather than to just one part of their lives, if they are to have a real and lasting effect.

Interventions are most effective when they combine multiple approaches such as (for example) the provision of information, the development of skills and knowledge, and on-going support. A review of 21 promising prevention programs and approaches in the United States identified a 'multi-component' strategy as common across effective programs (Eisen et al 2000, cited in Goldsmith et al 2004)

A useful illustration of this approach comes from a New Jersey high school that put in place an integrated range of supports such as crisis intervention; individual and family counselling; preventative health services; employment counselling, training and placement, and summer and part-time job development; recreational activities; and referrals to other health and social services. Over a one-year period, drop outs were reduced from 73 to 24 and suspensions from 322 to 78; the number of student pregnancies also reduced substantially (Burt, 1998).

A holistic approach also means addressing the multiple contexts which influence children/young people, including the key people in their lives – parents and other family members, teachers and other significant people within their community (Homel, 1999)

Traditionally many youth services have worked with young people with very little connection to their parents beyond gaining permission for particular activities such as excursions. There is, however, a strong body of research evidence indicating that the best results in supporting and strengthening the resilience of young people, comes from services that involve and are inclusive of their families (Paul 2004; Mitchell 2000; Nelson et al 2003). This is consistent with resilience research which emphasises that a strong connection to family is the one of the most important protective factors for children and young people of all ages.

Beyond this basic level, a number of youth services/programs in Australia are using strategies aimed at strengthening the level of connection between family members and family functioning. Some approaches which have been found to be effective in engaging and supporting parents and other family members are:

Enlisting parental support for program staff and goals

At the most basic level, activities or interventions are likely to be more successful if they inform and involve parents. Parents are more likely to have trust in and be supportive of their children attending activities when they know what is going on and feel they are welcome. Services can use a variety of strategies to achieve this such as using opportunities for informal face-to-face communication (eg when parents pick up their children), having an 'open-door' policy, newsletters, information nights or open days, and inviting parents to one day of a holiday program (Strickland 2005).

Beyond this, youth programs can use a variety of approaches to encourage active parental assistance with the program's operation, for example, acting as volunteers and/or assuming leadership or governance roles (Harris and Wimer 2004; Strickland 2005).

Bringing parents and young people together to spend time positive time together away from their usual demands

Some agencies have had success in running programs, such as outdoor activities or camps, which provide parents and young people with opportunities to enjoy activities and learning together. By sharing positive time together, families are able to develop more meaningful and respectful relationships (RPR Consulting 2004; Strickland 2005).

'Kids Speak' is a good example of this approach which is already in operation in the Redfern/Waterloo area. It is a collaborative project between government and non-government agencies which over the period of operation has involved: Barnardos, The Factory, Connect Redfern, St Saviour's Anglican church, the Police Citizens Youth Club, the Department of Housing, the Department of Community Services, South Sydney Council, Redfern Waterloo Street Team and the Department of Sport and Recreation. The initiative targets children aged 5 to 12 and their families, with special focus on isolated families not connected to formal community services. It includes a number of components:

- Family Fest – a 'family gathering' on Friday afternoons with sports, games and food for the children and a free raffle of a fruit and vegetable tray at the end of the afternoon for the parents/carers.
- Arts and Crafts Program (currently provided by RWST)
- Linking parents/carers and children to other services, through direct contact with them at the Family Fest and through an outreach worker who provides follow-through support.

Using whole-of-family case work approaches

Strategies which work well in providing casework support that involves parents and other family members include:

- initiating phone contact with parents when young people first engage with the service (subject to the young person's agreement)
- working separately with young people and their parents and then bringing them together
- meeting parents (as well as young people) at their place of choice
- promoting the strengths and positive aspects of young people to parents (and the community)

- enabling the young person or parent to identify their own strengths and build on them, for example by using tools such as ecograms²⁴
- linking parents to other services, resources and skill building opportunities (RPR Consulting 2004).

Building on the family's strengths and linking parents to other supports within the community will increase the capacity of the family to resolve their own issues as they arise, rather than becoming dependent in their relationship with the youth service.

Running parenting programs and support groups

Parenting programs aim to build on the confidence and abilities of parents, enhancing the skills and resources necessary for the creation of a more supportive family environment for their children. This type of program potentially benefits families in two ways:

- by increasing parents' knowledge of current thinking about adolescent development and exposing them to new ideas and/or skills in parenting and problem-solving; and
- by reducing parental stress through introducing strategies for self-care and expansion of social support networks.

Effective parenting programs typically include a range of strategies such as information sharing, building parents' skills (such as communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving) and building linkages to other support services. Parenting programs are likely to be more successful when they provide opportunities for parents and young people to work together (or at least work with young people and parents concurrently) (Mitchell 2000; Tomison, A.M. and Poole, L. 2000).

Having a long-term prevention/intervention focus which targets transition phases

Research evidence clearly indicates that interventions are most effective when they target the transition phases of young people's lives and stick with young people for a substantial period of time (Burt, 1998). Programs that provide continuity of support and long-term involvement with young people and their families are more likely to contribute to positive life outcomes. Conversely, too many interventions fail because they are too late, one-off or withdrawn prematurely.

The transition from primary school to high school is a critical period for both young people and their parents. This is often a time when decline in academic motivation and achievement and behavioural and emotional problems may emerge. Difficulties in this period of youth transition have been identified as foreshadowing future problems such as school withdrawal, substance abuse, delinquent activity, teenage pregnancy and homelessness (Eccles et al 1996). Conversely, positive social, academic and emotional adjustment in this phase foreshadows educational attainment and personal wellbeing (Smith & Carlson, 1997). For parents, the transition period represents a crucial time for increased involvement in or concern about their children's lives (Mitchell, 2000).

²⁴ An ecogram is a tool that can be used in casework to help clients to identify their own support networks, which can be added to as the networks develop and grow. It can also be used in evaluation to demonstrate before and after situations.

The transition from school to work or further training is also a crucial time for young people (Homel 1999). This is a time when young people can easily slip into unemployment and welfare dependency. This points to the importance of ensuring that programs are inclusive of young people in the older teenager to early twenties age bracket and include a focus on strengthening engagement with education, training and employment.

In the United Kingdom (UK), there is a strong focus on the development of an integrated policy and program approach to supporting social inclusion of young adults in marginalised communities. This work highlights the importance of providing continued support to vulnerable young people into their twenties, and includes a strong focus on providing new opportunities for young people not in education, employment or training.

The UK social inclusion agenda also includes a strategy aimed at 'Closing the Digital Divide' by providing access to information and communication technologies in deprived areas. The policy recognises that not having access to information and communication technologies leads to or reinforces disadvantages at a number of levels:

for children, not having access to computers and the internet at home or in the community, may make it hard to keep up at school; for adults, computer literacy can be important for re-entering the labour market; and for the community as a whole, better access to communications networks(can) make it easier to access opportunities in other areas, and enhance local social cohesion (Department of Trade and Industry UK, 2000).

The strategy includes ensuring that each deprived neighbourhood has access to at least one publicly accessible community-based information technology facility. There are now over 6,000 'online centres' in the UK - places where people can access the internet in a safe, secure environment and where they also receive technical support and training. The online centres have targeted areas where they are likely to have the most impact on inequality and are based within diverse community settings such as community centres and libraries. 95% of houses are within 5km of a centre (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit 2005).

Having structured programs which provide a variety of age-appropriate activities

Mahoney and Stattin (2000) examined how the structure of adolescent leisure activities relates to antisocial behaviour. They found that participation in highly structured leisure activities was linked to low levels of antisocial behaviour, while participation in activities with low structure was associated with high levels of antisocial behaviour. Overall the results were similar for boys and girls; however, the absence of any highly structured participation appeared especially problematic for boys' antisocial behaviour.

Youth development approaches emphasise that the organisation of activities should be structured sequentially to build and maintain learning outcomes and to recognise increasing responsibility for self (Ausyouth 2001). One example of this is the Victorian Council of YMCAs, which has focused on building a suite of programs which over many years provides opportunities for young people to learn about and engage with governments at a local, state and national level (Ausyouth 2003). Similarly, the YWCA of NSW has

developed a financial literacy program called 'Finance First', which works with primary age children and their parents concurrently, sequentially building on the children's knowledge and skills in three stages.

There is, however, a place for a drop-in component within a more structured program both as a way of initially engaging children/young people and to provide some time during which children/young people can simply 'hang out' with peers and unwind during the non-school hours (Walker and Abreton 2004, cited in Lauver et al 2004).

Offering a variety of well-implemented services and activities and providing choice is related to a program's ability to attract and retain participants (Goldsmith et al 2004; Lauver et al 2004). What is of interest or a challenge to one young person or group of young people will not be to others (Ausyouth 2001). Moreover, studies of youth development programs in the United States have found that young people benefit most from participation when they engage in a variety of activities (Goldsmith et al 2004).

The programs and activities offered should be fun, engaging, appropriate to the age of participants and build on existing skills and capabilities (Ausyouth 2001). Studies in the United States have found that programs that sustain the interest and have positive effects for older teenagers, for example, often include development of job-related skills or work experience, community service, and/or leadership opportunities (Lauver et al 2004).

Having a strong focus on youth participation and empowerment

Empirical and research evidence consistently demonstrates that the most effective services have a strong focus on youth participation and empowerment. Such services create or use existing opportunities to assist and support young people (and their families) to make informed choices and successfully take responsibility for program activities, their own lives and social action in their communities.

Consulting and involving children/young people in planning and decision-making is the best way of ensuring that program activities are appropriate and meet their needs (Ausyouth 2001). Involving young people in decision making also provides a vehicle through which they learn important skills about how organisations and communities work and how they might be influenced (Ausyouth 2003).

Services also have an important role to play in providing opportunities for young people to engage with and contribute to their community through the organisation's programs and activities. This may include, for example:

- initiatives designed to build young people's leadership skills
- providing opportunities for service to the community that are meaningful to both young people and the community
- encouraging communities to value and engage young people, for example, by facilitating opportunities for young people and adults to jointly undertake a community project (Ausyouth 2001).

Ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness

Services need to be accessible and inclusive of the diversity of children/young people and their families. This includes taking account of culture, gender, sexuality, age, ability and geographic location. A good starting point for implementing this principle is having a good understanding of the community served. Based on this understanding, service providers then need to develop proactive strategies, which address access barriers and reach out to those who are most marginalised.

A commitment to flexibility is also a critical aspect of achieving more accessible and inclusive approaches as it will ensure that individual needs of children/young people and families can be met (Ausyouth 2003).

Accessibility involves physical location and design of premises, as well as service and program design appropriate to the culture(s) of the community served. In the context of Redfern/Waterloo, Indigenous children/young people and families constitute a high proportion of high needs groups due to an interlocking range of factors such as poverty, low school retention rates, poor housing conditions, lack of access to appropriate services and a long history of previous separations from families and culture.

It is therefore crucial that models of practice are culturally relevant to Indigenous people. Employing Indigenous staff is a key strategy in providing culturally appropriate services. It is also critical, however, that non-Indigenous staff are able to work in genuinely respectful ways with Indigenous staff and the wider community.

Taking coordination and collaboration seriously

The need for effective coordination and collaboration is linked to the importance of offering holistic, multi-faceted approaches. The needs of young people and their families are varied and complex, and are more likely to be appropriately met by a range of service options. Effective coordination with other agencies is imperative to ensure that young people and their families are linked to the services that best meet their needs.

By sharing ideas, expertise and resources, services are also better able to develop innovative strategies relevant to their communities to address the issues impacting on young people, families, and communities.

8.1.1 Example of an effective model: YouthLinx

YouthLinx is a federally funded prevention and early intervention program targeting young people aged 11–16 years and their families in socially disadvantaged communities. It aims to prevent young people from developing and continuing with patterns of behaviour that may have negative long-term effects on their family relationships, schooling and employment. Its goals are to improve the capacity and resilience of young people; strengthen the resilience of their families; and increase young people's participation in the community. Services adopt proactive strategies to strengthen resilience by:

- facilitating young people's access to a range of innovative supervised and structured activities attractive to them and focused on their expressed needs, mainly outside school hours
- providing positive peer supports, and

- where possible and appropriate, providing individual practical support and guidance to young people and their families.

The age target for YouthLinx intentionally includes two key transition points for young people – from primary to high school and from junior secondary to senior secondary school, because many young people become disconnected from positive pathways of growth and development at these points. As a prevention and early intervention program, it primarily targets young people *before* they develop behaviour that may have negative long-term effects on their family relationships and on their education and employment prospects.

However, YouthLinx services also work with young people expressing early risk behaviour and at stress points induced by such things as conflict, abuse, sexuality issues, cultural issues and change in family structure. Flexible and changing programs of activities allow numerous entry and exit points so that young people may come into the program as required or contact staff after a period of absence. The youth development focus of YouthLinx encourages young people to build on their skills in each new activity or project, resulting ultimately in greater cumulative personal and community benefits.

YouthLinx Outcomes

As a prevention and early intervention program, YouthLinx services work to strengthen young people's protective factors that can help overcome risks arising from their individual circumstances, life experiences and/or difficult environments. Protective factors help to make young people more resilient in the face of difficulties and more able to negotiate transitions to adulthood. The research on building resilience and protective behaviours suggests that by undertaking the following interventions, young people may decrease risk of anti-social and risk-taking behaviours, disconnection with school, family and community. Research indicates that effective interventions to promote protective behaviours include:

- providing interesting/fun activities that are well-structured
- involving young people in problem-solving, leadership and meaningful contribution
- supporting their relationships with family and other adults
- providing opportunities to have positive experiences in school and in the community.

Ultimately, YouthLinx services contribute to the following outcomes:

- improved family connection
- strengthened individual capacity for making constructive choices
- increased connection with education
- increased social networks and increased community connection.

A set of good practice principles has been established to guide YouthLinx services in planning their programs so that the outcomes can be achieved.

YouthLinx Good Practice Principles:

- *Accessibility and inclusiveness and communicating effectively*

Services need to be accessible and appropriate to the diversity of young people and their families by taking account of culture, gender, sexuality, age, ability and geographic location. Services need to communicate effectively with young people, their families and others in their lives so that trust can be built and the service can be responsive and flexible in meeting their needs.

- *Ensuring safety*

YouthLinx services need to provide a safe environment with appropriate boundaries in which young people and their families can develop (safety relates to both physical safety issues as well as emotional and social safety).

- *Connectedness; Commitment to sharing power, resources and ownership; Offering challenge, creativity, reliability and caring*

YouthLinx agencies use holistic approaches that increase resilience, social connectedness, and build on people's current personal strengths. YouthLinx assists and supports young people and their families to make informed choices and successfully take responsibility for activities, their own lives and social action in their communities.

- *Working together; Advocacy*

YouthLinx agencies work collaboratively with other agencies and community groups to maximise opportunities and resources for young people and their families and to ensure that coordinated support is available to assist them. YouthLinx also advocates for and supports young people and their families to challenge and positively change structures that limit their opportunities.

- *Outcomes focus*

YouthLinx agencies use planning and evaluation to increase the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes for young people, their families and communities. YouthLinx also uses reflective practices (such as action research) to adapt their practices to local conditions and the circumstances of the target group. Reflective practice includes gaining feedback from young people families and community organisations as well as planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Good Practice Guides

The good practice principles for this program have been described at length in a set of good practice guides, which provide many case study examples of good practice and explanations of why the case studies exemplify good practice. The guides are entitled:

- *Building Connectedness to the Community*
- *Strengthening Engagement with Education and Training*
- *Working with Parents and Families*

A background literature review (*Evaluation Literature Review Report*) that analyses recent research about service delivery models that are successful has also been completed. These were produced by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services when the program was known as Youth Activities Services and Family Liaison Worker.

8.2 Effective practice in supporting children/young people and families with complex and high level needs

Young people with severe or multiple needs in areas such as homelessness, substance misuse, offending or mental health will need access to a range of services in order to address the range of problems. But too often services will approach someone's problems as individual issues rather than looking at them as interlinked. As a result, individuals can find themselves pushed from pillar to post on unpredictable and repetitive journeys around different agencies and on a downward spiral of social exclusion (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister UK 2005).

- While this statement was written in relation to the service system for young people in the United Kingdom, unfortunately it is also highly applicable to the situation in Australia.

The review has identified three program initiatives targeting children/young people and families with complex and high level needs which are particularly useful to this project. The three programs are outlined below. The three programs repeatedly highlight similar practices that lead to more favourable outcomes for young people with complex and high level support needs. They also point to broader system issues that enabled or hindered the successful delivery of services to these young people.

Common elements of service delivery practice which lead to successful outcomes for children/young people and families with complex needs include:

- assertive outreach to reach and engage children/young people and families
- immediacy of response
- good assessment processes and individualised plans that build on the strengths of the child/young person and family
- active participation by the child/young person in decision making
- involvement of family members and other significant adults in the assessment and case planning process
- using flexible and holistic approaches which include a focus on:
 - building children/young people and families' skills, for example, in problem solving
 - strengthening connections with family, school, peers and community
 - supporting parents and other people who are important to them to provide better assistance to the child/young person
- access to specialised and appropriate services to address specific issues

- having the young person's cultural context respected and acknowledged within service provision
- providing open-ended and consistent support for a considerable amount of time.

For the broader service delivery system, common themes include:

- development of a common framework, set of principles or values to guide consistent practice across the system
- flexible funding such as is possible through brokerage funding or pooling of funds to support individualised service delivery responses
- experienced, capable and committed staff with the level of skills to assist families to navigate the service system and provide appropriate therapeutic intervention
- staff: client ratios that allow intensive support to be given as needed
- strong collaborative relationships between service providers with clear systems for assessment and case management that are easily accessed and understood
- staff need to have an agreed role in assisting systemic change (internally and externally) – development and implementation of a more integrated model of service delivery will often require the appointment of a senior worker whose role is to provide leadership in the change management process and who has the high level of skills necessary to carry out this role successfully.
- a service system that includes specialised agencies able to provide expertise in relation to mental health and drug and alcohol issues
- a focus on outcomes and continuous improvement.

8.2.1 Wraparound and Systems of Care (USA)

The Wraparound process with a System of Care has been developing over the past 40 years, and is now being implemented by increasing numbers of communities across the United States. Wraparound operates at an individual level, as a process for planning and delivering services for children with serious emotional disturbance and their families. A System of Care is a network of services and supports that exists at a community level that allow Wraparound to work with individuals.

The system of care and Wraparound processes has federal support through the US Federal Centre for Mental Health Services which assisted communities in building local systems of care.

Wraparound emphasises the following values and practices:

- services and supports should be provided in places that the child and family identify as their community. Thus, for example, a core component of the care plan may be the provision of in-home behaviour management/mentoring.
- planning for services and supports should be individualised and strengths-based.
- all interactions with a child and family should be ‘culturally competent’, recognising and respecting the unique family and community culture that the young person is part of.
- families should be full and active partners in every level of the Wraparound process.
- Wraparound is a team based process involving the young person, family, natural supports and service providers. Team members are selected on the basis of their connection to the young person and family rather than their role alone or agency connection.
- conventional services should be balanced with natural community and family resources.
- service providers must make an unconditional commitment to supporting the child and family. When difficulties arise, the services and supports are changed, but never eliminated.
- desired outcomes are determined on the basis of child, family and team priorities.
- Wraparound requires flexible funding and creative approaches to service delivery. Teams should have the capacity to create and tailor whatever services and supports the child and family need. Successful Wraparound processes often require access to pooled funds where resources are not tied to a specific program or service.

A recent study on Wraparound, *Promising Practices* (Kendziora 2001) reported that as of 1998 around 24 states had 90,000 children and young people being served through a Wraparound process. In this study, six young people and their families were studied in detail to evaluate outcomes in relation to the young person’s situation and to document the processes that led to changed outcomes. The young people ranged from 13 to 19, included both girls and boys, Native American, Hispanic and African American young people. The young people had a history of removal from families, sexual and physical abuse, neglect, disabilities, drug use and mental health issues. Three of the young people had inappropriate sexual behaviours, while one young man was a member of a gang that had committed murders.

The young people were chosen partly to investigate the potential for Wraparound to be successful in working with this hard end of young people. The study found that Wraparound had been successful in producing positive outcomes for each of the young people involved in key life domains. The study described in detail the processes tried in relation to the core elements of Wraparound, providing useful insights for working with this group of young people.

8.2.2 Reconnect (Australia)

The Reconnect Program is a national early intervention program that targets young people aged 12 – 18 years at risk of early home leaving or who are recently homeless (usually less than 12 weeks out of home) and their families. Reconnect services work with young people and their families towards a range of outcomes: improve family connection and reconciliation; strengthen individual capacity for making constructive choices; improve or stabilise the young person's circumstances; increase engagement with education, training and employment; and increase community connection.

Around 100 services are funded nationally according to relative need. Because the services have been targeted to highly disadvantaged communities, many of the young people and families accessing Reconnect services include young people with intensive support needs. Thirty services target Aboriginal communities specifically.

The program is guided by Good Practice Principles which include an emphasis on: immediacy of response (within 24 hours of initial contact); outreach to schools, parks, and other venues; working holistically with the young person and their family; collaboration between agencies; and service provision that is sensitive to the culture and context of the young person and their family.

Reconnect workers use a 'toolbox' of interventions including counselling, mediation, practical support, practical support and linking young people and families to other services. Brokerage funds are available to assist young people and their families to access supports that would make a difference to their situation, and these funds are linked to a planned case management approach. Services are designed around an individual young person's needs in the context (where possible) of their family.

A key feature of Reconnect is an emphasis on building collaborative working relationships with other key agencies. This networking and collaboration is important in ensuring smoother and more effective cross-referrals and more coordinated case management. However, the role of Reconnect services also includes working collaboratively with other agencies to build community capacity for early intervention in youth homelessness. As specialist services in early intervention in youth homelessness, they model good practice approaches, share resources (for instance, by providing training, secondary consultation and sharing access to brokerage funds) and work to build infrastructure/policies that can better support young people and families.

Another key feature of the Reconnect program has been the inclusion of action research as a core evaluation methodology for services to continually refine their service delivery approaches. All services received initial training and ongoing support in developing skills in using action research.

A longitudinal outcomes study has been completed which measured outcomes of young people and parents who have used the program (RPR Consulting 2003). The evaluation found that there have been a range of positive outcomes for young people and their families seen by Reconnect services including improvements in the stability of young people's living situations; communication with families; young people's ability to manage conflict and young people's attitudes to school.

8.2.3 An integrated family support model – Maribyrong Integrated Family Services (Victoria)

Maribyrong Integrated Family Services (MIFS) is an integrated model of supporting high need families which includes a common assessment procedure and an immediate response service capacity. The aim is to divert families from the statutory child protection system and to provide a more comprehensive family support response to meet their complex needs. It commenced operation in April 2005 and is funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) under the 'Family Support Innovation Projects'.

MIFS targets families who have been constantly renotified around neglect issues, but who are not a priority for intervention by Child Protection. These families often have complex issues which may include poverty, domestic violence and abuse, substance abuse, and isolation from informal and formal networks. Frequently, they have been worked with by multiple agencies, but nothing has changed. MIFS seeks to engage families in a different way, asking the family *'why have we failed in the past?' and 'how can we make it work?'*

MIFS involves a formal partnership between nine agencies, with MacKillop Family Services as the lead agency. The partnership brings together all of the DHS funded family support services in Maribyrong, encompassing expertise in infant, adolescent and parenting support, linkages to universal services relevant to family support, and improved linkages to services with expertise in working with Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups.

The implementation of a new integrated model, which is very different to traditional service delivery, has required a substantial and ongoing commitment of time and effort by all partner agencies. The level of change required in both regional Child Protection services and community service organisations is very significant. The change management process has been facilitated by the appointment of a Senior Project Worker, who undertakes a leadership role in the development and implementation of the model. This includes:

- being responsible for the implementation of project planning processes, including providing support to various working groups and coordinating the development of shared information management processes
- engaging all stakeholders in the change management process
- developing policies, procedures and practice guidelines to support the implementation of the approach
- being responsible for a Communication Strategy to engage other agencies, universal services and the broader community.

The service delivery model has been designed to improve:

- the capacity of agencies to provide an immediate response to client needs

- the capacity of agencies to provide an ongoing service to families with complex needs
- co-ordination of family support service referrals
- management of waiting lists
- matching of client needs to specialist expertise within agencies (eg CALD, Indigenous, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues).

The agreed principles for case management and family support are respect, client self determination, community inclusion and confidentiality. Caseworkers in the partnership use strengths based and solution focused approaches. The service model includes:

A centralised point intake process through the MIFS community line

The community line provides an entry point for all MIFS as well as MacKillop services. The duty worker makes decision about the most appropriate actions required to meet the family's needs. This may include:

- direct referral to services where the presenting issues indicate, or because the family already has an established relationship with a particular agency/worker
- referral to MacKillop Family Services or MIFS. Where MIFS is determined by the duty officer to be the most appropriate response to the family's needs, the referral is forwarded to the START team members at Caroline Chisolm Society (for families with children under 8) or MacKillop Family Services (for families with children over 8).

A Community Based Child Protection Worker being co-located at MIFS

The Community Based Child Protection Worker is available to the MIFS duty worker, referring agencies and community members to assist where needed with clarifying issues of risk and appropriateness of responding to a family situation within a community based service delivery and voluntary supportive environment, rather than a protective environment.

The Community Based Child Protection worker participates in all aspects of the case management process. The worker provides specialist advice and consultation and is also actively involved in community education on child protection issues. This has included, for example, attending school network meetings on an ongoing basis to provide consultation in regards to some of the more complex vulnerable families without this discussion needing to be recorded as a notification.

The location of the Child Protection Worker in the lead community service organisation is critical in promoting greater mutual understanding of the respective roles of Child Protection and Family Services and supporting the closer interface between the statutory and non-government sectors.

A short-term assessment and response

Following the assessment process, short-term assessment and response occurs within three working days by designated Short Term Assessment and Response Team (START) workers. Due to its expertise in working with families in pregnancy and/or with young children, the Caroline Chisolm Society is contracted to provide the short-term assessment and response for this group, while MacKillop Family Services provides this role for all other families.

The short-term response is focused on meeting the expressed needs of families with complex needs and maximising the likelihood of longer-term engagement of the family. Where the START worker determines the need for longer-term intervention they develop recommendations for a proposed service plan. This information is presented by a START worker at the fortnightly Interagency Allocation and Review meeting (see below) to enable referral for longer-term action. The START worker advocates for the family around their longer term needs and in this process assists with identifying service sectoral structural issues.

Information concerning service system limitations/challenges is reported to the Innovations Management Group (IMG). The IMG comprises senior representatives of each agency and meets monthly to strategically plan for and monitor progress in meeting the service agreement requirements for MIFS.

Longer-term service delivery managed by the Interagency Allocation and Review process

The goal of the Interagency Allocation and Review meeting is to provide comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary and interagency service delivery in an effort to most appropriately and effectively meet the needs of families and match families with services and skills of worker within agencies across the service system.

The Interagency Allocation and Review group meets for one hour every fortnight to allocate all MIFS referrals to the most appropriate agency to accept case management responsibility for longer term action and support for the family. Should there be a delay in the preferred agency being able to take case responsibility immediately, a process for monitoring the family during the waiting period is made. Prior to any case closure of families allocated via the MIFS Interagency Allocation and Review meeting, the family situation is reviewed by the Interagency meeting.

8.3 Coordination and integration of youth service delivery

The general move towards increasing collaboration between agencies and improving the coordination of human services stems from a recognition of the limitations and problems that flow from delivering services within program 'silos' which do not meet the complex realities of peoples' lives. Integrated service delivery is increasingly a public policy goal shared by governments and community organisations, and many funding contracts now require collaborative work between agencies at the community level.

Yet there is a lack of clarity around what constitutes coordination, collaboration or integration. Integration of a service system is increasingly conceptualised as a continuum.

Fine, Pancharatnam and Thompson (2000).²⁵, in their report on Coordinated and Integrated Human Service Delivery Models describe this continuum in the figure set out on the following page.

Figure 1.1 The Continuum of Integration: A Basic Schema

↩ Autonomy		Integration ↪	
Autonomy	Cooperative Links	Coordination	Integration
Parties/agencies act without reference to each other, although the actions of one may affect the other(s).	Parties establish ongoing ties, but formal surrender of independence not required. A willingness to work together for some common goals. Communication emphasised. Requires good will and some mutual understanding.	Planned harmonisation of activities between the separate parties. Duplication of activities and resources is minimised. Requires agreed plans and protocols or appointment of an external coordinator or (case) manager.	Links between the separate parties draw them into a single system. Boundaries between parties begin to dissolve as they become effectively work units or sub-groups within a single, larger organisation.

Source: Fine, Thomson and Graham (1998); Leutz (1999).

Fine et al. have noted that “beyond autonomously operating agencies, the spectrum identifies three forms of collaboration:

- ‘*cooperative links*’ refers to service ‘linkages’ or more simply ‘links’ — each party remains independent but communicates and cooperates with others in a voluntary way over specific activities which may involve common beneficiaries or goals;
- ‘*coordination*’ represents a planned and deliberate meshing of the activities of the separate agencies in a more systematic way and implies the surrendering of a significant degree of autonomy by each of the agencies involved. Plans are fixed according to a plan or protocol, or decision making is vested in a third party (for example a case manager) with responsibility for coordination.
- ‘*full integration*’ creates new programs (for example, managed care services) or units (such as hospitals) where resources are pooled. The fully integrated program gains control of resources to define new benefits and services that it controls directly, rather than to better coordinate existing services.”²⁶

8.3.1 Findings from the Reconnect longitudinal community study

The Reconnect Longitudinal Community Study examined 12 Reconnect services over a two year period to assess the impact each service made on building capacity for early intervention within their communities. As part of the study, the Fine et al model was used

²⁵ NSW Cabinet Office and Premier’s Department, March 2000. Fine, M., Pancharatnam, K., and Thompson. C., *Coordinated and Integrated Human Service Delivery Models – Final Report for NSW Cabinet Office and Premier’s Department*. University of NSW: Social Policy Research Centre

²⁶ Fine M. et al, 2000, page 4

to measure the level of integration occurring in youth inter-agencies in each area and the Reconnect contribution to assisting their level of integration.

Two case studies are provided from the research that provide a good example of how more coordinated service models developed within two different areas. The two case studies give a detailed picture of the types of activities undertaken across the network to address service gaps, work collaboratively and develop systems for more seamless approaches. The two case studies also explain how coordination was achieved and the resources that are required to maintain coordination.

At the time of the first visits to both areas, the youth networks were undertaking a highly coordinated series of activities that addressed the needs of young people across the service continuum –including providing coordinated prevention, early intervention, crisis and transition services. By the time of the second visit a year later, a lack of funding had taken a toll on what was able to be achieved, with a substantial collapse in activity occurring in one network.

While these case studies are focused on the impact of a Reconnect service on developing more integrated service systems, the actual network function is described and provides many examples of what could be replicated within the context of the Redfern Waterloo area. The two case studies are reproduced below (RPR Consulting, 2002).

Case study: Agency C — A Reconnect-coordinated network

The Reconnect service began developing this network (which is formed around agencies delivering services to potential Reconnect clients) during the pilot project period. At the time it began, the network was linked within a more traditional interagency model focused around information sharing.

The Reconnect network by the time of the first study visit

By the time the formal Reconnect Program had evolved from the Youth Homelessness Pilot Program (YHPP), a wide range of service providers were beginning to develop a formal commitment to the Reconnect framework, resulting in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between key agencies. Services included in the MOU participated in training in the Reconnect model, including action research and the Good Practice Principles.

Signing the MOU committed the agency to working with clients who fall within the Reconnect target group in a way that is consistent with the Reconnect Good Practice Principles. The network was driven by the coordinator of the Reconnect service, although there was a high level of participation and ownership of the network's activities by all the agencies involved. This understanding and commitment was confirmed at the first stage visit in both the service provider meeting and the individual interviews. At the time of the first study visit the network had achieved the following:

- agreement on the use of brokerage funds across the network so that agencies could access the Reconnect and other brokerage funds against agreed criteria for clients falling within the Reconnect target group. This gave access for a much wider range

of young people and their families to funds to support young people's connections to family, school and community.

- Network members had attended training on the Good Practice Principles and action research.
- an after-hours service developed as a network response to identified needs and was staffed by workers from the network, including the child protection service (using separate funding to pay for the service). This allowed access to assistance on weekends and at nights when family conflict was likely to erupt. The after-hours service was staffed by two workers at a time, with the after hours number advertised to police, other agencies and the general community. It provided phone counselling and referral and workers would attend police stations or other agency venues if a young person was found on the streets.
- a youth worker pool that provided access to relief youth workers across the network, coordinated by Reconnect on behalf of the state welfare department who had primary use of the youth workers.
- some agreements between network members on practice issues and case coordination approaches, and a number of joint projects between members. For example, Reconnects clients could access a parenting training program run by another network member.
- publication of a kit that contained material that promoted the whole network of agencies rather than simply the Reconnect service itself. The kit was named the "Reconnect early intervention agency network: community and government agencies working together" and provided the Reconnect service number as a central contact point.
- a pool of Reconnect trained and supervised mediators, along with a pool of private practitioners (counsellors, psychologists) who could be accessed on a fee for service basis or through the use of brokerage funds by all network members.
- a pool of volunteers trained and supervised by the Reconnect service but allocated across the agencies to support individual young people. The volunteers were mainly drawn from fourth year psychology/social work students who volunteered time, as opposed to being on placement. Many volunteers worked with an agency for a year or more, sometimes assisting individual young people and sometimes undertaking project work.

The Reconnect network at the time of the second study visit

In the intervening year the network moved to become incorporated so that it could receive other funds and take over the auspice of the Reconnect service.

Services that formed part of the new incorporated network agreed not to compete against the network for new funding targeted to the Reconnect client group. Rather, the network as a coordinated group was to decide where new funding should be allocated. Under the plan for incorporation, the Reconnect service was to increase its coordination role to act as a resource service to the other agencies in relation to training, assisting with funding applications and coordination of services.

By the second visit incorporation of the network had occurred, although the new network had not as yet taken over the auspice of Reconnect. The newly incorporated body had resulted in two types of members — full members (organisations who formally became members and agreed to abide by the goals of the network) and

associate members (other members of the network that had not formally joined the incorporated body). Considerable turnover occurred between individual service providers who were active in the network between the two visits. Only one person, the Chairperson of the new network, had been previously involved. There were 10 full members at the time of the visit, of which seven had young people and/or families as their core target group. Four of the services were early intervention in focus, while the others provided crisis or post-crisis support services. One service was a victims support service that had neither a young people/families focus or an early intervention focus.

Discussion with some of the full members of the network highlighted the shift in understanding that had occurred between the two stages of the study. Where the network members had previously reported a clear understanding of the early intervention focus of Reconnect and the Good Practice Principles that guided service provision, the new members of the incorporated network were not clear on these. The victim support organisation representative, for example, was very confused as to why his organisation had joined the network, describing it essentially as an opportunity to share information.

It also became clear that while organisations had joined the network, the decision for membership had occurred at the worker/manager level, not at a Board or management committee level. This became a tension, for example, when the Department of Families announced a tender project for an early intervention project in the area. Membership of the network required agreement to not tender against each other. In this case the network put in a tender, but so did one of the full members of the network. While the tenders had a different focus, they were both competing for the same funding. When questioned about this, network members responded by saying that they hadn't really competed as the tenders were to do different things and the network could support either approach. In fact the agency that had tendered separately for the funds had done so at the instigation of their Board who were not aware of the membership requirements of the network, so this agreement had not even been considered in the process.

By the time of the second visit, the Reconnect service itself was facing a funding crisis.

Reconnect's rapid expansion had been funded by accessing a number of one-off grants. Its base level funding had not been indexed since it had been funded initially as a Youth Homelessness Pilot (YHP) agency. Costs had increased substantially due to both award increases and the need for higher rental expenses to accommodate the range of projects operating under the Reconnect network.

A number of projects operating as activities of the network ceased as funding ended, while Reconnect itself could not continue to have staff time allocated to both maintaining the network *and* to the basic casework practice. Thus by the second visit the range of activities sponsored by the network had dwindled to one — the after hours service, which was kept going by volunteers.

Network members had assumed that the Reconnect coordinator would be free to take on the role of coordination of the network as the major part of her role. This could be sustained as long as the other projects provided some funds towards coordination. However, as funds decreased and Reconnect remained the only funded service, spending the bulk of time on coordination of the network became unsustainable for Reconnect. The Reconnect Coordinator left a few months before the second study visit and the other Reconnect staff also turned over within a month of the study being completed.

Case study: Agency E — A coordinated youth network with high level Reconnect participation

The Reconnect service operating in this model was established prior to the Youth Homelessness Pilot Program (YHPP) to assist schools to develop early intervention approaches to working with young people and their families. The Reconnect service gained funding under the pilot program and extended its activities to incorporate more direct casework with young people and their families. The success of its work in the pilot led to two other related services being established by the same auspice body with money from the state government: a worker to foster systemic-level change in schools in the area, and a youth and family counsellor.

While the pilot program was operating, the local youth network was strengthened as a result of a range of 'drivers': the YHPP's work, a range of new funding programs directed towards early intervention, and the strong leadership and direction provided by the coordinator of the new youth team within one of the local Councils. The network now has 300 agencies as members and a 30-person Steering Committee (made up of representatives of different service groups) that meets regularly to oversee the network's activities. The Reconnect Coordinator plays a strategic role on the committee and holds the position of Deputy Chair.

The network at the time of the first study visit

The network executive at this time had the following roles:

- identifying opportunities for funding and developing collaborative funding applications for community development activities as well as service provision. At the time of the first visit it had just received notice it had successfully gained funding for two community development projects to work with at risk young people on arts-based projects over a period of three years.
- designing and delivering regular training programs to members on a range of practice issues, for example, mental health issues for young people.
- consideration of more integrated service system approaches. For example, the network executive was beginning to discuss developing joint assessment models to operate across the service system in relation to assessing the needs of young people and identifying the most appropriate interventions and agencies to work with them.
- identifying issues and developing collaborative responses to them. For example, the network had recently organised training around the issues of young people who were same-sex-attracted. Out of this training a small grant was gained to fund the facilitation of a same-sex-attracted support group for young people across the area. A range of schools and services were involved in assisting the development of the group that was facilitated by a Reconnect worker.

The Executive group provides leadership to the network as a whole. The Reconnect coordinator, in the role of Deputy Chair, was widely acknowledged to have played a strategic leadership role in the network, particularly in relation to collaborative practices. The coordination of the network was undertaken primarily by the youth team of one Council, including taking primary responsibility for administrative tasks of network coordination, information exchange and sourcing of funds. However, the Reconnect coordinator frequently worked on funding proposals with the Chair of the network, who was the youth team coordinator in Council.

The network at the time of the second visit

During the intervening year between visits, the network had continued to develop projects that coordinated agencies more closely. The second Council in the area had become more actively involved in the coordination of the network, sharing some of the tasks with the Chair of the network. Network initiatives during this period included:

- a mentoring project linking boys who had no males in their lives with older men in the area had been coordinated by the Council for the network. Reconnect and two school counsellors were involved in its operation.
- funding had been gained to do a feasibility study into the development of the integrated assessment system and funding sources for implementation had been identified. The Reconnect coordinator was leading a small group of agencies in this work.
- a standardised induction training program for agencies in the network had been developed. To be run every second month, the induction program was for new workers in the area to gain an overview of agencies in the area, the range of activities being coordinated and how to utilise the network. By the time of the second study visit the training had been run twice and was considered to have been highly successful.
- a survey of network members had been undertaken on the potential use of electronic and internet communication for the network. An online newsletter, bulletin board and subscription list was being developed to increase ease of communication across network members. It is likely that the integrated assessment group will also utilise this electronic communication as the system is planned to provide ease of information exchange between participating agencies.

However, by the second visit the role of Reconnect within the network had begun to change. Reconnect's auspice service had a complete changeover in senior management and had restructured its operation. The auspice service had been subsidising the rising costs of Reconnect, as funding to the service had not been indexed since the original pilot program. The auspice's management had decided to cut this subsidy, effectively reducing the capacity of Reconnect from 3 staff to 1.8 staff. The Reconnect coordinator left the organisation a few months before the second stage visit, as did another long-term Reconnect staff member.

As a result of its decreased capacity, Reconnect has withdrawn from active membership of the network and any of its activities, instead maintaining all its resources for provision of casework. Other networking activities of Reconnect are also being withdrawn, including secondary consultation to the school welfare coordinators network, a project to work with six less-engaged schools, a parenting support group and the same-sex-attracted support group.

Executive members of the network interviewed for this study were very concerned at the long-term implications of this withdrawal. Reconnect had provided a core early intervention youth and family focus for the network. In addition, the collaborative relationships built by Reconnect through its casework and work with schools were seen as a key reason for engagement of a range of agencies in the network. While the turnover in the Reconnect coordinator's position had not previously resulted in a lessening of Reconnect's role in providing leadership within the network, this is now the case.

8.3.2 Councils as lead agencies for coordination

In Victoria local government has traditionally been a substantial direct provider of community services, generally at a greater level than in other states. While this is still the case, an increasing number of Councils are taking a more coordination, rather than a direct delivery role. One of the most interesting examples is that of Banyule Council, an outer Melbourne area that includes substantial public housing as well as wealthier areas, includes rural as well as urban areas and has high population of CALD (particularly refugee) populations. It has a substantial ageing population and around 5000 young people aged 12 and over.

Banyule made a decision to move to a more coordination role following a strategic planning process around six years ago. It surveyed all young people in the area via a household survey to find out what they wanted and what they perceived their needs as being. They mapped the range of agencies in the area to see what gaps existed and what role Council could usefully play. The Council decided to use its staff of a Coordinator and five youth worker positions to play a more strategic role in supporting young people in the area in their transition to adulthood by concentrating on providing:

- links to employment in the area
- increasing skills of young people and their participation capacity
- supporting the service system to address the needs of young people more effectively
- funding venues, facilities and other infrastructure.

Supporting the service system

The Council coordinates and supports the youth interagency, which comprises 300 members. The Council Youth Coordinator functions as the Chair of the executive committee and undertakes the secretariat responsibilities of the interagency. The Council helps to identify funding opportunities and coordinate sponsorship from business, but does not directly compete for funding. The Council provides IT support for the network's bulletin board and communication system and provides venues for the network's meetings and activities.

The interagency meetings decide which service/s is best placed to run a project and how other agencies can link into it. In some instances Council acts as the auspice for grants, but pays the agreed agencies to operate the project. Council also auspices funding for youth groups such as the Drug Strategy Funding provided for groups of young people to operate drug free dances.

The Council currently coordinates/auspices two services in the area using this approach and also auspices a range of one-off projects (such as theatre based projects). The two services are:

- Crisis & Information Referral - for young people experiencing problems
- “Back Up” is an early intervention program linking young people (and their families), who have received a Police Caution and or Court Summons, to support services. The program is run in partnership with Victorian Police, Juvenile Justice and local youth support services.
- Link-U (After Hours Youth Outreach Service) - Link-U is a mobile outreach service that operates throughout the municipality between 7.30pm - 12.30am on Friday and Saturday nights. (Times may vary in summer and winter). The service offers information and support in connecting young people and their families to relevant services and facilities in the community. In addition, LINK-U offers a ‘what's on’ information service for young people. Link U is staffed by both young people (for the what’s on component) and youth workers from other agencies, with the mobile outreach developing as a result of the ‘what’s on’ program getting crisis calls from young people in the area.

Increasing youth skills and participation

The Council’s team of youth worker support a number of youth committees formed from advertising widely through schools and through household letter-boxes. The youth committees have been chosen as a result of the survey of young people (which now occurs on a regular basis). The committees are taught meeting skills, management and organisational skills, and undertake the work of the group, guided by the youth worker.

Youth participation and leadership programs include a range of activities which are intended for and run by young people with assistance and guidance from a Banyule City Council Youth Services worker. The programs are:

- *Discussion Action Representation & Thought (DART)* - DART is a school based advocacy support program for Student Representative Councils and Student Bodies. It provides training for students to facilitate in-school forums to identify young people’s needs and issues and develop appropriate responses. It helps SRCs document their findings, identify how the issues could be addressed and how to lobby different levels of government. Regular forums with local Councillors are held for young people who have participated in this process to present their issues to Council.
- *Frog In A Blender (FIAB)* - FIAB is a committee of young people responsible for organising Banyule's All Ages music events at the Macleod YMCA. Membership is open to all young people.
- *Jets Studios* - Jets Studios (a venue funded by Council) provides a range of music related services for young people. Band practice rooms and “state of the art” recording facilities are available for hire at very affordable rates. Jets Studios also offers accredited music industry training courses tailored to suit all levels and capabilities including sound engineering, Ausmusic modules, literacy programs and school holiday workshops. A number of youth committees oversee different aspects of the Jet Studios operation including venue hire, recording studio hire and training.

Increasing employment for young people in the local area

The Council has a strong emphasis on increasing opportunities young people's employment in the area by linking youth participation activities to vocational programs as well as by developing specific employment strategies. Current approaches include:

- nineteen young people are currently working with Banyule Council while continuing with their education and training. Twelve are School Based New Apprentices, six are full time trainees and one is a full time apprentice. Eight of these positions are co-funded by the State Government's *Jobs For Young People* program. Council offers opportunities in a number of its service areas covering Certificate courses in Horticulture, Office Administration, Child Care, Sports & Recreation, Music Industry and Events Management. The trainees assist in providing programs based at the Greensborough Skate Park, Jets Studios, the Macleod YMCA and the Parks & Gardens Dept. All the New Apprentices are paid to work at Council while they complete their secondary studies or TAFE training.
- Labour Market Programs - Banyule Council youth section is involved in delivering a number of programs including Work for the Dole and the Community Jobs Program. To date, activities have included building and landscaping a new bike path, landscaping works around a variety of Council sites, parks maintenance, film making and sound recording.
- Secondary & Tertiary Student Placements - for young people interested in youth work Banyule Council's youth section offers secondary school work experience and tertiary placements.

Funding venues, facilities and other infrastructure

In addition to funding the Jet Studios, the Council provides include a number of bmx jumps and skateboard parks. The Council maintains a website called *Stufflink* which lists all current activities for young people in the area as well as referral information for services.

8.4 Mentoring programs

As Rhodes (2001) points out, supportive relationships with non-parent adults can have a powerful influence on the course and quality of young people's lives. Indeed, researchers working from within a risk and resilience framework have consistently stressed the crucial importance of having a significant relationship with an adult other than ones parent(s) (Burt, 1998; Newman 2002).

Informal mentoring often occurs naturally in young people's lives through the support they receive from extended families, teachers, clergy, and others. However, the level of informal support available to young people has declined in recent decades as a consequence of ongoing economic and social change (Hartley 2001). As a result some children/young people are left with few or no adult supports. Further, male role models are lacking in some families. Formal mentoring programs have developed in recent years as one way of providing children/young people with support and guidance from a caring adult. Mentors are generally volunteers, who offer assistance in meeting the child/young person's educational, social, career and/or personal goals.

Since mentoring programs vary widely in relation to target group and program quality it is difficult to draw conclusions about its overall effectiveness. However, a growing number of evaluations suggest that high quality mentoring programs can positively influence a range of outcomes, including improvements in peer and parental relationships, academic achievement, self-concept, lower recidivism rates among juvenile offenders, and reductions in substance abuse (Rhodes 2001; DuBois et al 2002). Longevity in relationships, frequency of contact and close relationship between mentor and mentee contribute to positive outcomes (DuBois et al 2002; Jekielek et al, cited in Hartley 2001).

Conversely, however, short-term mentoring relationships have the potential to harm children/young people (Dubois et al 2002; Rhodes 2001). As Rhodes (2001) points out, young people referred to mentoring programs may have experienced multiple failed or disappointing relationships with adults in the past and the failure of yet another bond with an adult can undermine their sense of wellbeing. Mentoring relationships may end prematurely for a variety of reasons. One contributory factor is that many programs are struggling with relatively few resources and insufficient personnel to provide mentors with ongoing support and supervision (Rhodes 2001).

A number of features of good practice are consistently identified in both the Australian and overseas literature on mentoring (Mentoring Australia 2000; Rhodes 2001; Wilczynski et al 2003; Urbis Keys Young 2005).

Models and organisational structure

Auspicing organisation

Mentoring programs are unlikely to be effectively implemented unless they are able to take advantage of the resources and infrastructure of an established auspicing organisation (Urbis Keys Young 2005). Mentoring projects which are integrated into a range of other services are more likely to be effective than those that are stand-alone (Wilczynski et al 2003). Stand-alone projects may have difficulty, for example, in recruiting young people. Conversely, where mentoring programs are integrated into an existing youth service, clients already know and trust the staff and are more likely to be receptive to the suggestion that they participate in the mentoring project.

- Auspicing organisations should be well established and recognised within the community in which the mentoring initiative is being conducted.
- The auspicing agency needs to have well developed links with a range of local agencies who can support the work of the program.

Co-ordination

Strong overall co-ordination of the mentoring program is crucial to its success.

- Staff running mentoring programs should be appropriately skilled with clear job descriptions. The key elements for effective co-ordination are the capacity to manage and support people, and to facilitate and maintain ...
- Co-ordinators need good training and support.

Recruiting, monitoring and supporting mentors

- The program should provide clear expectations to prospective mentors through every step of the recruitment process, from marketing of the program through mentor orientation and training
- The mentoring program should have in place clear policies and processes for screening the suitability of mentors, including child protection requirements
- The program should have a comprehensive process for monitoring which includes:
 - provision of regular supervision, feedback and support to mentors
 - feedback from mentees at the early stages of the relationship and on an ongoing basis
 - a process for managing grievances, premature termination of the mentoring relationship and rematching.

The mentoring relationship

The research evidence consistently shows that specific policies and processes around the mentoring relationship are likely to improve positive outcomes.

- a clear and considered approach to matching the young person and mentor which takes account of the interests, needs and goals of the young person, including factors such as gender and cultural background
- a process that ensures that the nature, duration and procedures (eg where meetings will occur, procedure if someone cannot attend a meeting) of the mentoring relationship are made clear to all parties involved at the beginning and on an ongoing basis as required
- to be fully effective the mentoring relationship should be sustained over a long period of time. Wilczynski et al (2003) recommends a minimum of six months and ideal length of twelve months
- continuity of contact is a significant factor in the success of the mentoring relationship. Contact must be 'regular and consistent' (Wilczynski 2003)
- the young person should play a significant role in determining the activities undertaken during the mentoring process

- the mentoring program needs to have in place clear procedures for ending the mentoring relationship.

Group mentoring programs

Most mentoring programs are based on a model of pairing an adult and young person on an individual basis. However, the Bega Reconnect Service in NSW has developed and implemented, in conjunction with the local TAFE college a group mentoring program. The program brings together approximately 10 boys and 8 men for a day a week over four months around a range of activities (such as building a go-cart and taking a three day wilderness journey). This innovative approach has several advantages over the more usual individual mentoring schemes – the boys can observe how the adult mentors relate to each other and get a new perspective on male friendship, and also have the freedom to create a range of relationships with a range of men (thus also avoiding the potentially detrimental impact of early termination of an individual mentoring relationship). The Reconnect workers also noted that a critical factor in the program's success was the strong personal relationships between the mentors – something that had been deliberately fostered by the men having a fortnightly meal together in each other's homes for the duration of the program.

8.5 References

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