

Father Chris Riley's 
Youth Off The Streets®

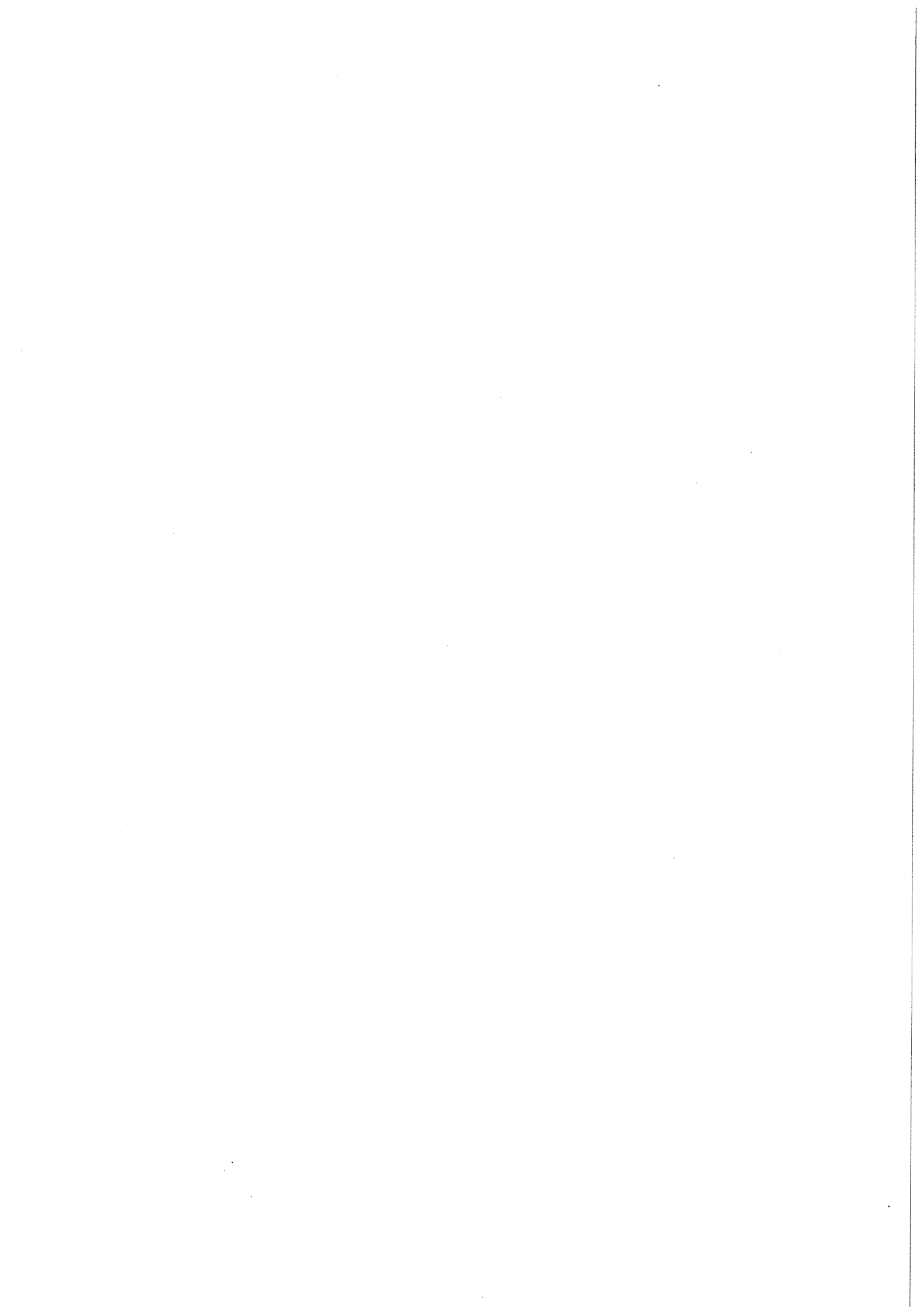
Department of Social Services

Welfare Review Submission

8th August, 2014

On behalf of

Youth Off The Streets



Introduction

Organisation background

Established 23 years ago, Youth Off The Streets has grown from a single food van delivering meals to young homeless people on the streets of Kings Cross to a major youth specific agency offering a full continuum of care through delivery of a wide range of 25+ services.

Our non-denominational community organisation assists youth aged 12-21 facing challenges such as homelessness, drug and alcohol dependency, exclusion from school, mental health issues, poverty and isolation. We support these young people as they work to turn their lives around, overcoming immense personal traumas such as neglect and physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

Thousands of youth are assisted annually through our services which include:

Homelessness – Nightly Streetwalk, Crisis Refuge, Food Van, Residential Services, Referrals

Mental Health – Clinic, Family Program, Counselling, Assessment, Referrals, Education

Outreach – Logan in Queensland; South Eastern Sydney, Berkley in Illawarra; Derwent in Tasmania; Blacktown, Wilmot, Fairfield, Holroyd and Doonside in Western Sydney ; Kurri Kurri and East Cessnock in Hunter Valley; Bankstown in Sydney, Bourke and Narrandera in Rural New South Wales.

Centres for Youth – Mentoring, Service Learning, Young Parents, Gardens, Arts Studio, Music

Education – Four accredited High Schools for disadvantaged youth, National Scholarship Program

Aboriginal Services – Residential Services, Outreach, ASPIRE Education, Mentoring, Wellbeing

Residential Programs – New Pathways, Aboriginal Residential Care Program at Cordeaux Heights Centre for Youth

Alcohol & Other Drugs – Dunlea Centre for youth/families suffering substance dependency

Core Services

Homelessness: – Food Van, Street Walk, Don Bosco Home Crisis Refuge
Street Walk provides a night time presence, making contact with and building trust with the young people on the streets; our Food Van goes out every night to serve food and drink to people in need and Don Bosco refuge provides crisis and short term accommodation for young homeless people in a safe, supportive environment. From June 2014, Youth Off The Streets was awarded the New South Wales (NSW) government's Going Home Staying Home (GSHS) Specialist Homelessness Services funding for the Inner West Youth Homelessness Service.

Education – four accredited high schools for disadvantaged youth, National Scholarship Program. Over 20 years experience has taught us education is one of the most effective ways

to break the cycle of disadvantage. Our four accredited high schools offer an alternative setting, working with students to develop learning and skills required to re-enter mainstream education, attain academic qualifications, access training or employment and reconnect with community.

Aboriginal Services – Residential, Outreach, Education, Cultural Learning, Mentoring, Health

We aim to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities by offering Outreach and Early Intervention services based on proven models that are culturally appropriate and specifically tailored to meet the needs of the community.

Mental Health – Clinic, Family Program, Counselling, Assessment, Referrals, Resources

We offer counselling and assessment by a team of Psychologists who work with youth in their own environment to engage and create rapport. Our Family Program offers young people an opportunity to re-engage with family members in a safe and secure environment. We provide supportive referrals to psychiatrists and external psychologists and collaborate with Headspace sites and have a long standing MoU with the Black Dog Institute

Alcohol & Other Drugs – Dunlea AOD Youth Service for young people and their families

Dunlea is an education and treatment day program designed for young people aged 13-19 years who have problematic levels of drug and alcohol use. The service also caters for their families who may be struggling with the issues surrounding the young person's substance use.

Outreach: 24 locations throughout NSW, Queensland and Tasmania.

Regions include: Western Sydney, South East Sydney, Illawarra, Narrandera, the Hunter Valley, Logan and Hobart. Engaging young people in their own environment, staff coordinate and supervise positive diversionary activities in a safe, friendly environment, allowing youth to interact, socialise, meet youth workers and build trust and connections in the community.

Residential: New Pathways (Hanging rock), New Pathways is a residential treatment program for male adolescents with complex-needs.

Integration: *Centres for Youth, Mentoring, Aftercare, Young Parents Program, Art, Sport, Culture, Service Learning, After School Programs.*

A wide, holistic and innovative approach is required to help young people turn their lives around. We provide a range of support programs for wellbeing, transition to independence, personal development and successful reconnection with community. One of our core programs, Service Learning, is an innovative intervention that teaches generosity and empathy via opportunities to “give back” to community.

Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

Mutual Obligation

- *How should participation requirements be better matched to individual circumstances?*

While Youth Off The Streets overall aim is linking disadvantaged and vulnerable clients to education and employment services we take a holistic approach through client centred case management, by addressing clients immediate needs which include: food, shelter, mental health support and rehabilitation first. Our model of dealing with this particular group is based on respect for the individual and is fluid based on their individual needs. We have outreach caseworkers who are flexible in their working hours. We utilise StreetWalk to build rapport and trust before we offer any additional support. This encourages the young person to ask and when they start asking then they are starting to take control for themselves. This empowers the young people without them knowing.

Young people don't work on a 9 – 5 clock, so we are flexible to their needs and 24 hour Crisis support, StreetWalk and Outreach Workers enables this to be achieved. We go to the young person. Too many services place the responsibility on the young person to come to them and keep appointments with them. This feeds in to the young person's resentment of always working to someone else's goals. We don't impose goals we discuss and create with the young person goals based on what they want. We work on one or two things maximum at a time that are important to the young person and we make these goals achievable. We encourage support and validate their decisions.

We don't work on a three strikes and you are out policy we understand that young people will fall down more times than most and we let them know that this is ok and that we will continue to be there for them. Sometimes we are just there. Young people also need time to determine what their needs and wants are and we let them know that it is ok to have no idea or to just want make any big decisions. We support these young people by helping with day to day things like living skills and support in food and shelter and a chat to maintain that rapport and let them know that we have no expectation on them to be constantly moving forward and that it is ok to slow down and take your time.

For 2012 – 2013 financial year:

- We had 15 inward referrals for financial / debts
- 106 outward referrals for financial / debts
- 400 instances of advocacies for financial / debt

We feel that providing compliance and punitive frameworks on clients who are experiencing trauma, homelessness and AOD issues for inability to develop career plans or prove they are looking for work will not be worthwhile without effective case management which looks at their overall needs. While we support matching requirements to individual needs, we feel that

identifying vulnerable people early and working with them to match their immediate needs would be more effective than imposing obligations on clients who's ability to apply for jobs or even make appointments with employment services is hindered by a range of factors including: lack of transport, lack of fixed address, lack of access to internet. After consultation with experienced program managers who work with these clients on a day to day basis a number of concerns were raised including:

- Increased distrust of Social Services among clients experiencing intergenerational disadvantage
- Lower self esteem if these clients experience repeated lack of success in applying for an "obligated" number of jobs
- Increased cost to employers who would now receive disproportionate number of applications
- Increased course fees by TAFE and other educational establishments mean that this demographic would struggle with meeting educational expectations
- Many of our clients don't know how to access income support when they are first time homeless – some don't even know it is available – they have frequently fled domestic violence and as such do not have all the required details to access these services, nor do they have responsible adults in their life who can guide them

We feel strongly that a strength based approach to these clients is necessary to achieve the outcomes that the Government wants. Our Outreach program fits within the first phase of Youth Development and its structured programs lead toward youth developmental outcomes. The focus of Outreach is to:

1. Actively engage with young people in their own places and spaces at times that are suitable for them
2. Raise the awareness of young people to their own strength, assets and future possibilities
3. Show commitment to young people and encourage self-commitment by young people to explore their full potential
4. Raise awareness in the community of young peoples' strengths, assets and future possibilities

Our strength based approach to young people is corroborated by academic literature. Academic P Clements finds effective interventions tend to build on people's strengths; to involve elements of participation, self-help, and mutual support; and to offer the least stigmatizing approach. Ideally, the most basic credo of street youth interventions should be to develop a caring and safe space for the population to 'get back on their feet'.¹

Essential to an effective income support system is building trust with the unemployed/disadvantage. Many have experienced intergenerational distrust of these services, and young people in particular are less likely to ask for help. To build trust a softer approach is needed in which the client is engaged by a role model/case worker and a relationship is developed based on trust rather than mutual obligation.

¹ Karabanow, J., & Clement, P, *Interventions with Street Youth: A Commentary on the Practice-Based Research Literature. Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*, (2004) 4(1), 93-108.

Studies have also identified a number of concrete elements of respectful practice:

- Peer involvement in service delivery was identified as another practical demonstration of respect and valuing of young people's experience.²
- Outreach also demonstrates that workers value young people 'by being willing to go out, find, and provide services for clients'.³
- Outreach is also identified as a means of increasing the accessibility of services by literally meeting young people 'where they are at' and particularly critical for assisting young people who either do not know about or avoid services.⁴

The need for this approach is evidenced by the Specialist Homelessness Services Case Management Resource Kit 2012 which suggests: The client/caseworker relationship is extremely important in ensuring the ongoing success of any case management process (AHURI, 2009). A critical aspect of the relationship is the level of engagement and respect achieved throughout the case management process and this starts from the first meeting. Engagement includes getting to know the client's interests, what motivates them to action and what barriers they perceive. It is also about building trust and mutual respect so that the relationship stands up in times of conflict or when there are 'road blocks' preventing the client from moving forward. This is particularly relevant to clients with complex or multiple needs. An effective caseworker needs to invest heavily in the relationship with the client, to motivate them towards action. If there is not a sufficiently strong relationship (trust, knowledge and respect) the caseworker is less effective at motivating a client and supporting them to act on their goals.

We propose to make this effective the Department of Social Services needs to:

- Gain the trust of the long term unemployed and overcome intergenerational welfare dependence through strength based approaches rather than punitive obligations
- Effective case management that takes a holistic view of a clients individual circumstances and liaises with NGO's who often act as these clients legal guardians – services such as ours which work with the young person directly can help both the client and the employment service through support and referrals
- At Youth Off The Streets we place education at the centre of our programs, through a transition to independence model. Education for us though is holistic and encompasses a range of programs that focus on the skills our clients need to live independently. On top of accredited high schools we provide education programs that include: cooking skills, budgeting skills, financial literacy and how to navigate the service system.
- We feel that extensive education is necessary before clients are willing to engage in employment and education services and fulfil their obligations. Budgeting skills for example are taught through practical life skill courses that include clients shopping for food and preparing dinner on a limited budget for all members of one of our schools.
- It is our experience that many clients who are first time homeless do not know how to access income support services nor navigate the complex application process nor

² Kidd, S. A., Miner, S., Walker, D., & Davidson, L. 'Stories of working with homeless youth: On being "mind-boggling"' *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29 (2007) 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 18.

access their personal documents – let alone fulfil obligations. To navigate the system clients need support in the form of case workers and positive role models as they too often do not have any positive role models in the home environment

- It is our view that employment services at present are not equipped to deal with the complex needs of these young people in a holistic way and more investment in case management and wraparound care is needed – whether to the NGO sector or within the public sector

Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

Mutual Obligation (continued)

- *In what circumstances should income management be applied?*

We do not support the board-based or long-term application of income management. We consider its use may be effective in very specific and limited contexts and must go hand-in-hand with supportive interventions and must not be applied long-term.

We support the conclusions of a July 2013 evaluation of income management in the NT commissioned by the Australian Government which found:

some evidence that income management may, to a limited degree, in the short-term, assist some people experiencing adverse outcomes from financial harassment and/or having problems managing their finances. It is applied in blanket fashion to a large number of people who are able to manage their money and who report that they do not have problems related to alcohol, drugs or gambling and considerable feelings of disempowerment and unfairness among those who are compulsorily subject to the scheme.

In relation to longer-term objectives, the evaluation found:

... little evidence to date that income management is resulting in widespread behaviour change, either with respect to building an ability to effectively manage money or in building 'socially responsible behaviour' beyond the direct impact of limiting the amount that can be spent on some items. Rather, the evaluation suggested that, 'the early indications are that income management operates more as a control or protective mechanism than as an intervention which increases capabilities'.

Based on current evidence it is clear that short term income management could be effective for clients at risk of homelessness but long term it would not teach them any skills. We feel an educational approach is more important, one in which clients are engaged and taught budgeting skills. This would be a strength based approach instead of a punitive one. The only circumstances in which income management should be applied is if a child is under the supervision of Family and Community Services and is thus at high risk.

Frontline staff at Youth Off The Streets raised concerns that income management could potentially:

- Lead to income management tools such as the Basics Card being sold for cash, in some cases less than the value on it. This can cause debts to spiral and addictions to increase
- Deeper and wider distrust of social services including non-government ones
- Reduced self esteem because of using income management tools such as the BasicsCard in stores – stigmatising welfare dependency
- Lack of freedom of choice and the opportunity to buy products from retailers who don't accept such cards
- Increased crime – if unemployed people are experiencing AOD or other destructive issues then managing their money may result in them seeking money from illegal sources
- Lack of flexibility in relation to unplanned bills and expenses

Early Intervention

- *How can the social support system better deliver early intervention for children at risk?*

Instead of limiting the income of young people, or managing their income, it is worth considering investing in early intervention services like Youth Off The Streets' Outreach Program. We have a proven track record of engaging young people in their own environment and providing them with opportunities to improve their life. Non-government organisations are well placed to build connections and trust with disadvantaged communities.

Government should ensure that funded programs are also properly resourced to effectively evaluate the change and social impact generated by their interventions. Interventions should be funded and measured over a 3-5 year period in order for a valid and robust evidence base to develop to generate responsive policy and funding models.

Supporting the non-government and community sectors to disseminate, share and replicate.

The early intervention section of the interim report on welfare reform leaves out any mention of community based programs that target disadvantaged young people in their own environment. Youth Off The Streets' Outreach model has a proven track record in assisting young people find educational opportunities and full-time employment before they become welfare dependant.

In April 2013, Youth Off The Streets received \$5 million to establish 10 new Outreach locations around Australia as part of the National Crime Prevention Fund. We now have 24 locations in NSW, Tasmania and Queensland.

The Outreach programs start with low key diversionary and recreational activities (oztag, basketball, arts and crafts etc) and builds up to be more structured, specific activities as trust and acceptance grows in the community. Each Outreach is different because the program is designed to respond to the needs of the community.

The Outreach program targets young people aged between 12 and 21 years and re-engages this group with the community by providing education and employment opportunities. An example a success was three young people from Illawarra Outreach achieving their Certificate II in Construction with guaranteed employment upon graduating with the certificate.

Case Study: Constructing a better future for disconnected youth

Last year, Illawarra's youth unemployment rate was 21.5 percent, almost double NSW's average of 11.5 percent. With the implementation of the new budget, which means axing many youth-orientated programs and cuts to unemployment benefits, the rate of youth unemployment rate is expected to increase.

At Youth Off The Streets we have seen, firsthand, how important practical programs are in helping disconnected and disadvantaged young people to participate in the workforce.

Just this year, three Aboriginal boys from our Berkeley Outreach participated in a 12 week program to complete a Certificate II in Construction. The program was held at Warrigal Employment, an Indigenous owned recruitment and training company in the Illawarra area. The course is nationally accredited and offers participants the opportunity to specialise in a field of their choice and provides them with necessary workplace skills.

The participating boys, aged 15, 19 and 21, had the chance to gain invaluable industry experience, being taught by a qualified instructor, as well as partaking in placements at local worksites.

Once they have obtained their Certificate II in Construction, the involved young people will either be offered employment at their existing placement or will have the chance to work on the upgrade of the Wollongong Hospital.

Linda O'Donnell, a senior youth worker at Berkeley Outreach, has been blown away by the positive impact of the boys' involvement in the course.

"The 15 year old...was our main focus because he was so young and so disengaged. Just having that opportunity to complete the course because, he didn't go to school at all, and have a certificate at the end was something major for him." Giving these boys the chance to learn, work and be involved, has not only bettered themselves, it has bettered the Illawarra area as a whole. These young people have gained lifelong workplace skills and are now able to positively engage with their community. "It's just changed their direction completely," says Linda "from being unemployed...to three boys having these opportunities - it's just life changing."

Youth Off The Streets believes it is important for the government to act in the best interests of the least fortunate and to protect them from further inequality. "I don't know where the direction of our society is going...if we don't have these sorts of opportunities, where are our kids going to be in the future?" Youth Off The Streets is striving to combat youth unemployment. We hope to be able to continue offering, and connecting, young people with services that help them become active members of the community and the workforce.

During the 2013/14 financial year, we held 890 sessions of Outreach across 24 locations. Key highlights include:

- We totalled 27,787 instances of contact, or 2300~ per month
- That is an average of 53 young people per session (33 males and 20 females)
- 80% of sessions had at least one community volunteer in attendance

One of the most important things to take away from the above statistics is that our Outreaches work hard at finding education opportunities and employment for young people. In a lot of the areas we work, youth unemployment is well above the national youth unemployment rate of 12.5%. Logan, for instance, has a youth unemployment rate of 60%. Our Outreach in Logan focuses on building employability skills like resume writing and helping young people apply for jobs. They hold various workshops every Thursday at the Youth Off The Streets office.

Education and Training

- *What can be done to improve access to literacy, numeracy and job relevant training for young people at risk of unemployment?*
- *How can early intervention and prevention programmes more effectively improve skills for young people?*

The government can improve access to literacy, numeracy and job relevant training for young people by increased funding for independent schools that specifically target and support disadvantaged youth and communities. Youth Off The Streets operates four independent, accredited high schools for disadvantaged young people have not thrived within mainstream education. The schools focus on providing a practical learning environment that equips young people with the right job skills.

If the government wants early intervention and prevention programs to improve the skills of young people, then they have to invest in community organisations, like Youth Off The Streets focusing on job-ready skills is too narrow; a wider focus on their life circumstances is needed to fully invest in the right programs that will help young people. Attention to the development of “soft skills”, including pro-social skills and mental and physical health, and support to develop independence in the absence of a supportive family environment is critical to the longer-term employability of disadvantaged youth.

Chapel School- Key College, Merrylands Campus (Step UP program), for example, offers two weeks of work experience throughout the year for young people and every Friday is available for traineeships. Step Up is for young people looking to complete years 11 and 12. In 2014, we’ve had one young person complete a Cert II in Retail and another young person completes a Cert II in Digital Media. These two young people now have a greater chance at either securing employment or progressing to tertiary education.

Chapel School, since 2004, has helped 63 young people achieve their Record of School Achievement and equipped many more with the skills to thrive. This is a testament to the hard work put in by Youth Off The Streets staff and young people that attend the school. Highlights from our schools in 2013:

- Key College, Redfern (years 9 and 10)
 - 3 students achieved their Barista Certificate
 - 2 students received their RSA/RSG
 - 5 students completed a TAFE Sustainability Certificate
 - 1 student found an apprenticeship in automotive
 - 1 student completed a TAFE Sport & Recreation Certificate and attained a traineeship at a sporting facility

- Key College, Chapel School (years 9, 10, 11 and 12)
 - 7 students completed their HSC
 - 9 students were enrolled in TAFE courses
 - 4 students completed their RSA/RSG
 - 9 students were employed in casual/part-time jobs

- EDEN College, Koch Centre for Youth, Macquarie Fields (Years 9 and 10)
 - 2 students completed a Barista course
 - 4 students completed a Certificate II in Hospitality
 - 9 students completed a Certificate II in IT & Work Ready Skills through TAFE

- Craig Davis College, Cordeaux Heights Centre for Youth, Illawarra (years 9,10,11 and 12)
 - 2 students enrolled in Certificate II in Construction
 - 2 students participated in work placement

These numbers clearly articulate the effectiveness of our schools. Many of the young people in our schools are homeless or reside in a refuge, they have to work part-time to support themselves through high school. Giving them the right skills to work is essential and an underlying principle of our schools.

Youth Off The Streets recommends increasing the funds allocated to Independent, accredited schools that equip young disadvantaged people – not suited to mainstream education – with the right skills to get a job.

Early intervention and Prevention programs – Youth Off The Streets’ continuum of care
Improving the skills of young people through early intervention and prevention programs is a very narrow view of the problem. The focus shouldn’t just be on skills, but on the overall wellbeing and capacity of the young person in general. Making sure they have a safe living environment, and are emotionally stable is essential before arming them with skills for the workforce. Youth Off The Streets’ education programs and Outreach programs all fall under the early intervention and prevention programs. However, they often act as points of initial contact for young people to experience our full continuum of care.

For a young person, coming from a disadvantaged background brings with it some complicated circumstances. Many deal with mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, complex needs and homelessness. The key to help these young people is to have a suite of

programs that work together to break the young person free of disadvantage. At Youth Off The Streets, this is known as our continuum of care.

We offer young people over 20 services to help them discover greatness within. It's about offering young people help with their education, health, mental health, social skills and many other things.

What full continuum of care actually means

Before Christmas, Father Riley used an example of a young person receiving the full continuum of care that we offer at Youth Off The Streets. That means the young person went from homeless to homed (and employed) using almost all the 25 services we offer.

Jarrold, 16 years old, is taken off the streets by our service Street Walk and given refuge in Don Bosco Home. Jarrod was homeless for one year before we found him and can't remember an enjoyable Christmas. All his energy was focused on surviving the harsh conditions on the street.

He's allowed to stay at the refuge for three months. In that time, he works with the youth workers at Don Bosco Home to secure a place in one of our four accredited, independent high schools and resumes his education. Being on the streets at such a young age is tough, especially dealing with the mental torment they face each night on the street. Jarrod is able to book sessions with our Mental Health Team, which performed 531 individual sessions for young people last financial year. They are able to help Jarrod deal with internal issues and begin to regain control over his state of mind.

Youth Workers at Don Bosco Home manage to find Jarrod a part time job, from there he can support himself and moves out of the refuge into shared accommodation. Having an income, attending school and living independently means he can start enjoying life again.

Later that year, Jarrod gets his Record of School Achievement (RoSA) and exits our service, but after enjoying his first Christmas in a while. He is part of the School's Christmas celebrations and can afford to celebrate with friends. Youth Off The Streets isn't done with him yet. Once they are out on their own, without support, they can fall back into trouble and can become homeless again. Jarrod is immediately put into our 'Aftercare integration' service, which continues to support him in finding work and independent living arrangements. Through that service Jarrod was able to secure an apprenticeship and is working to become a plumber. Christmas is now his favourite time of the year.

Jarrold's story represents the aim of Youth Off The Streets. We try to connect our services together to offer young people a full continuum of care. Only then can they turn their lives around and enjoy Christmas.

Pillar Four: Building Community Capacity

The Role of Government

- *How can community capacity building initiatives be evaluated to ensure they achieve desired outcomes?*

We advocate the following:

Well formulated, consultative, robust evaluations conducted in partnership between service deliverers, funders and/or independent consultants that are appropriately funded over a meaningful time period (3-5 years) using current accepted models that will deliver meaningful results for both communities and policy makers (for example; Results –Based Accountability, Social Return on Investment, Participatory Performance Reporting).

The ‘Role of Government’ section in the interim report focuses on the influence of, and appropriate of scope of reform for, community capacity building initiatives.⁵ Identifying the tripartite governmental system of national, state and local, the report focuses on the location based approach model, wherein specific geographical regions and local government bodies are tasked with issuing and evaluating small scale grants for specific, localised projects and issues.⁶ Operating within a vertical division of responsibilities and powers, the necessity for cooperation and coordination amongst federal, state and local government when responding to key social issues such as homelessness, youth-disadvantage and employment related issues is highlighted by the location-based approach to social welfare funding.

Youth Off The Streets is familiar with the relative advantages and disadvantages of a geographically coordinated, demographic approach to funding initiatives by the government. Noting the many government initiatives targeting disadvantaged communities,⁷ the appropriate scope for evaluation of such initiatives highlights the necessity for increased cooperation and interaction between the government and the not-for-profit sector.

A recent productivity commission report on the role of local government as a regulator noted the specific advantages associated with a flexible, dynamic and geographically specific approach to regulatory governance frameworks.⁸ Noting the ability for local government to respond to the ‘*geography, size and density of population, and financial capacity as well as differences in community needs and aspirations*’,⁹ the report reinforces the positive potential of community and demographically centred funding initiatives. Building upon the advantages of networking, capacity building, advocacy, policy development, support and

⁵ The full Interim Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes* (2014) 113

⁶ Ibid, 114.

⁷ The full Interim Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes* (2014) 117.

⁸ Productivity Commission Report *Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation: Role of Local Government as Regulator* (2012) 45.

⁹ Ibid 46.

awareness raising,¹⁰ the biggest problem relating to this approach lies in an appropriate method for evaluating these initiatives.

Traditionally, smaller scale grants are offered with a relatively minimal reporting and the scope of evaluation itself (usually proportionate the amount of funds awarded) focuses on the short-term outcomes, most often after 1 year of funding. Whilst this is an effective evaluative framework for the direct and immediate outputs and outcomes of the project, it fails to account for the deeper, systemic changes that occur within a community. As location-based funding and community capacity building initiatives tend to be evaluated in terms of their immediate, tangible outcomes, the more long-term, intergenerational and demographic trends are often not assessed in relation to the project. This is not to suggest that short-term or tangible outcome based assessment is in any way an incorrect approach. It is more to highlight that, if community capacity building is aimed at providing appropriate initiatives for the educational, social and economic benefit of a specific geographic or demographic community, then evaluation of the specific input and effectiveness of individual projects (in order to determine their usefulness in achieving such outcomes) needs to be assessed in relation to these trends.

It is for these reasons that Youth Off The Streets makes the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

- *Higher levels of interaction between government bodies and interagencies, local and regional not for profit groups:* this will allow for a more flexible, responsive and coordinated social support service and also contribute the reduction of bureaucratic inefficiency, which the interim report notes as a barrier to effective community capacity building.¹¹
- *Higher levels of analysis outside of the traditional micro-assessment of a particular program, with greater program/ funding initiatives in alignment with strategic regional and local government focuses.* This will allow for more detailed and coordinated policy production for future funding, as well as identifying successful pilot projects and initiatives requiring more funding and expansion.
- *Need for accounting associated research and evaluation costs into the proposed budget* of a funding submission. This will reinforce and increase both the quality and depth of feedback from not-for-profit agencies to the government.
- *Need for longer term funding as opposed to nominal, one-year programs* (we appreciate this is somewhat necessary due to the dynamic nature of shifting priorities and areas of concern within LGs, and States), however with increased R&E, multiyear funding can allow a funded project to be re-assessed and adapted in order to change and meet the existing needs of the new and developing issues.

¹⁰ Ibid 63.

¹¹ The full Interim Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform, *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes* (2014) 116

- *Need for longer term studies on activities and their outcomes:* which will allow for more precise funding initiatives, and not-for-profit programs, aimed at directly addressing specific community and demographic issues, which vary considerably depending on region and client group.
- *Consistent formatting of government evaluation reports:* greater uniformity in evaluation would lead to superior feedback, reduced inconsistency and more direct analysis from project research.

Community Resilience

- *What strategies help build community resilience, particularly in disadvantaged communities?*

Any strategies targeted toward building community resilience need to ensure due community consultations take place. This empowers the community to make decisions for itself. Over time this can overcome distrust in the Social Services system, if the outcomes of consultations are listened to, acted on and delivered in partnership with communities over a realistic and sustainable time frame.

There are non-government organizations in New Zealand now developing “generational” Strategic Plans- that is - 25 year plans to tackle intergenerational poverty, welfare dependency etc.

Identifying and acknowledging community strength, survival strategies and current resiliencies must be a first step in helping communities to build resilience and capabilities.

Acknowledging the impacts of social, geographic and historical forces is also important in building resilience.

Government clearly articulating the meaning and expectations for community “resilience” is also essential in both building trust and the capacity for resilience; it should not be code for “getting people off welfare”.

According to Tony Vinson’s Research, ideas of “social cohesion” and “inclusiveness” identify key characteristics of a “strong” community. The members of communities characterised by cohesiveness and inclusiveness will have effective access to the labour market, the legal system, the welfare system, and the family and community system.

Our Program Manager for Aboriginal Services in Griffith, Narrandera and Bourke, Maria Williams, when entering an area instead of asking what the communities issues are.....asks what the community’s strengths are. Her aim is to empower communities to make decisions for themselves by using a strength based, respectful and cooperative approach. Bourke outreach staff prior to running outreach each night ask Aboriginal Elders and community members if they can set up in the Mission and run free sport and food activities, it is this

active and continuous respectful consultation that has enabled us to gain the community's trust and engagement.

Client Centred Approach

The need for a client centred approach, which underpins our philosophy of care is evidenced by a study by Wesley Mission in May 2013 (Homelessness and the next generation) which found that previous experience with social services in relation to childcare arrangements had, in some cases, resulted in distrust of 'government' services which then spread to a distrust of assistance services more generally. Seeking assistance for homelessness and being provided an environment which enabled the foundation benefits of safety, security and stability to be obtained provided the space and time for re-engagement in the 'system' and a gradual re-establishment of trust in services. By putting the client at the centre of program delivery, whether through StreetWalk, or through crisis accommodation, we aim to overcome previous distrust of social service agencies.

Having client centred policies at the heart of program delivery ensure that engaging clients in the program is easily facilitated. There are general policies that apply to all staff and volunteers as well as policies relevant to the specific services that Youth Off The Streets provide. These policies include:

- Access for clients
- Client rights and responsibilities
- Case management
- Case plans
- Client feedback
- Client complaints
- Confidentiality
- Reasons for non acceptance into service

Outreach fits within the first phase of Youth Development and its structured programs lead toward youth developmental outcomes. The focus of Outreach is to:

1. Actively engage with young people in their own places and spaces at times that are suitable for them
2. Raise the awareness of young people to their own strength, assets and future possibilities
3. Show commitment to young people and encourage self-commitment by young people to explore their full potential
4. Raise awareness in the community of young peoples' strengths, assets and future possibilities

Self determination

During community consultations in Narrandera in November 2013, it was found there were concerns expressed by some parents about not wanting to go to schools due to "past injustices" and a perception of schools and teachers as figures of authority. Issues were also raised about some Aboriginal parents having poor literacy and numeracy themselves and therefore there were issues of both shame (not being able to assist their children with homework, feeling inadequate) as well as possibly not valuing education due to their own poor

schooling experiences. The consultations found that Aboriginal parents were more likely to respond to forms of communication and activities that were more "informal" and they were less likely to attend parent and teacher nights or formal events. Some participants indicated that communication was usually only when "something bad happens".

Following consultations Youth Off The Streets developed a program exploring traditional educational practices with the parents, to tackle disengagement with their own culture as well as addressing disengagement with education. This fits in with our broader program of building Aboriginal self determination. The evidence base and need for this approach is evidenced through academic literature: It derives from the need for trusted Aboriginal role models and traditional cultural knowledge for both parents and young people. It aims to cover traditional educational practices for both parents and young people by bridging the gap between young people's home environment and schooling. It acknowledges traditional culture through informal meet and greet sessions that build relationships between families and community, while linking clients with appropriate community services organisations for longer term care. Our program links in with Mission Australia's Family Case work Program for those clients requiring more intensive support. It uses guidelines published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Effective parenting support programs for Indigenous families generally include the following:

- Use of cultural consultants in conjunction with professional parent education facilitators and home visitors.
- Long-term rather than short-term programs.
- A focus on the needs of both parents/carers and the child.
- A supportive approach that focuses on family strengths. Use of structured early intervention program content while also responding flexibly to families.
- Youth Off The Streets works with parents, carers and community through engagement activities to address the above barriers and build parents capacity to positively influence children's learning outcomes.

Consultations with the community

There are unique challenges facing disadvantaged communities and there is no one size fits all solution to community issues. To design a program that best fits with a community, we run a three stage research and implementation process which is conducted prior to the start of each Outreach program.

- The first stage is a research process extracting demographic statistics from ABS, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and Local government council's social plans. This provides a good overview and identifies the social need in each area; it also provides a review of existing services to reduce the risk over-saturation of social services in a particular community.
- The second stage consists of gathering feedback from local young people, community adults and local services. This method involves on-line and paper-based surveys asking a range of questions about issues, gaps and partnership opportunities.
- The final stage involves putting staff from Youth Off The Streets directly into the community via a program similar to the StreetWalk Outreach. This program focuses on the uniqueness of the people in the community making vital contact and connections. The StreetWalk program also builds trust within the community acting

as a gateway to access other relevant services including drug and alcohol treatment, counselling, accommodation and education programs.

