

## **Notes from YDA conference held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> August.**

### **Break out group: Mobilizing Communities**

Discussion led by David McKenzie on how to create a community of services which worked collaboratively to tackle issues faced by young people.

Mike (?) spoke about the approach taken in Geelong whereby a range of different youth services are working together using an early intervention framework to pick up the 12 to 18 year old young people who are just entering the homeless system.

As many young people (YP) enter the system with no support, the focus was on providing this and maintaining the support until they were able to access mainstream service. This was something viewed as vital as many services dropped off along the way.

YP entering program displayed a range of issues including behavior problems, family conflict, in and out of home on numerous occasions, contact with Centrelink.

Mike spoke about the importance of community services working together in a collaborative way if YP were to access the range of support needed. A whole community approach was needed. Issues being to look at who is the community and who needs to be mobilized in order to create a network.

This includes:

Youth homeless agencies

Salvation Army

Family Services

Schools- school focused youth programs, Commonwealth youth programs

Reconnect agencies, including Mackillop

Family violence agencies – early intervention to work with families at risk

Generic services- important to plug YP into mainstream services when they are ready.

Drug and Alcohol agencies

Mental health

Local and state government

Centrelink – as this was a key entry point and often first point of contact for YP who were just entering the system

Young people themselves were seen as key in order that they were allowed to provide info on how they accessed the service system and any issues which they felt needed changing – to not presume YP know how to access system or even that services exist which can help them.

The focus being to keep young people in school or at home with their parents if this is viable.

If the YP were not able to remain at home, it was essential that housing needs were adequately addressed

Mike said an early intervention workgroup had been set up which looked at how best to develop a model of early intervention in Barwon.

Stressed the need for strong data collecting systems which captured up to date information and research to provide to Govt for further funding.

Shane Austin then spoke about his foundation

Stressed what foundations are and are not.

That his community foundation approach was about working with and facilitating community need.

That his foundation was more than just a funding source although this was one aspect of it – not just financial but was private assets for private good.

Question to be asked being 'how can the foundation be involved in mobilizing the community and who is the community of interest?

Shane stressed that foundations can be useful as they are not seen as competitive for other business and that they can work across a broad range of groups including charities, community groups. Benefit in terms of agencies accessing foundation as certain doors were open to it which may otherwise not be.

He said that a range of big businesses such as Metro and Metlink had contacted foundation with a genuine interest in social issues and wanting to do something. Looking at how best to mobilize this interest and funding to create action and clarity of direction. (didn't say how this could be done but said this was a key issue to consider)

He felt business wanted to get a mechanism for engaging the community.

Key question he raised being 'at what cost will this collaboration come at?'

He felt it was important to build a mosaic of how community can work together – how to provide the space to do this?

Shane stated that there was a role for community leaders, researchers, peak bodies and philanthropy to create an alliance to look at some of the issues above.

The idea to promote being 'it is in our backyard and not someone else's issues.

Mike – communities need to lead government and show leadership about direction.

General Discussion

That the community sector was better organized 20 years ago and that the spirit within the community sector was strong and organized. During the 1990s something happened and things changed, the capacity to organize changed.

SAAP funding changed the ways in which services worked and the focus and delivery of service provision shifted.

Other changes noted being that network meetings were now facilitated by people giving money rather than a more bottom up approach or focus.

A need to use the media to convey to the general public the issues of need e.g. youth homelessness, MH and to be creative in how things were done.

The Kennett years of competitive tendering having a negative effect on services and collaborative working practices between agencies. – ideas stopped being shared.

A need to rebuild networks and for agencies to maintain their own independent integrity.

That the top down approach was not working. Change needed to be bottom up and community led. A need to look at government policy and funding restrictions versus community engagement and what can be done on the ground/grassroots level.

Comment made noting the need for a streamlining of service provision and referrals for young people as the system was difficult if not impossible to navigate. This meant many YP were not getting picked up or were lost in the system. The idea of Hubs such as Visy in Sunshine and another in Dandenong seen as a good working example of how this could work. Visy containing a range of services such as MH (headspace) health, employment. YP could get a range of needs met at one location. Good example of how local govt funding can be secured through forming partnerships.

A need to break down the silos which currently operated and to look at regions where services were working collaboratively such as Geelong and look at why and what is being done there which can be adopted to other regions.

A need to be creative was noted, particularly in areas where there are few services and large geographical areas between services. Issues such as transport being important particularly when working with YP with the comment made that as the bureaucratic system was failing in many regards, the community needed to initiate things and drive change in a creative manner.

Why Geelong works?

Since the 1970s there was a long history of strong investment in networking between agencies partly because of geographical location and boundaries. Lack of agencies force the existent agencies to work together and form stronger working relationships.

Geelong services were goal oriented.

General discussion

Agencies have maintained their own individuality and work creatively and proactively around the issues presented such as funding shortages. Issue noted that agencies (generally, not specific to Geelong) become territorial around funding and stop sharing and working as a regional system.

Again the use of research to back up outcomes deemed vital in order to gain ongoing funding from Govt.

A need acknowledged to use ideas to drive policy change and be more action oriented.

Ideas put forward to get govt involved in any project early on and then make them champions of the project from the beginning rather than just going to them for funding.

A benefit of the silos viewed making the issues visible. Such as homelessness. Important not to negate any benefit of silos and work with the politics of these to think about resources to tap into.

Issues around SAAP and how since its introduction, services have changed their approach and limited their scope in some ways.

To work from a bottom up and top down approach by forming strong relationships with those on the ground and also lobby ministers and inform them about current issues. To use the media in keeping the public informed and keeping agendas on the table.

Funding alone won't save the problems without creative and innovative thinking and action.

Comment made about the number of refugees presenting in the Hume/Broadmeadows areas and the particular issues they face, including trauma, history of rape/violence and long history of living in refugee camps. The different needs they face and how services are working with this group of the community. A need for the local community/services to work in ways which are relevant to the unique needs of that community. To work smarter and more collaboratively.

Comment in relation to agencies working together being that during funding times they become competitive but that they generally work well together.

A need to partner with other services, present sophisticated research and findings to apply for funding.

Questions whether a centralized intake system is a good model of practice and whether one point of referral works. Issues of coordination noted with each region being so different that there needs to be room for local approaches. Despite regional differences there are a commonality of issues which can be addressed.

Whether LAZAN concept works

A centralized point doesn't work if there is nothing to provide when people do present in need. Aspiration of LAZAN good but one point of access presents issues. Comment made that whilst Homeground is Northern central point, workers there are not trained in working with YP and this is an issue.

Early intervention approach finally recognized by fed and state govt as the best approach. Community needs to work with what is there to build early intervention agenda into government initiated projects.

The need to not just continue to have talk fests without initiated the learning from these into concrete goal oriented action.

Building stronger networks with key players involved to work out specific time frames/goals.

Comment around the lack of senior workers at network meetings and how important it is to have them. CEOs etc present so they are in the loop about issues on ground-

this brings in funding. The voices get heard this way and issues from community are placed on agenda.

To not lose sight of the successful work being done on the community level rather than just focusing on governmental areas and funding deficits. Example of mentoring programs which engage YP and the community at the ground level for positive change. To get the whole community involved in issues.

Way forward was to acknowledge the work done to bring issues to public's awareness. That the early intervention approach was now recognized by community and government as being the best approach which was positive. That there was a real interest from business about how it can get involved and help, it was now important to know what to do with this. How to mobilize this new awareness and support into action?

To use the links already present in the community and look at how to strengthen these....