A sense of the future

evaluating Mission Australia youth services

Youth Futures
Creative Youth Initiatives
Triple Care Farm
The Opposition/The Crossing

November 2002

Mission Australia
This paper sets out key indicators that mesh strongly with the Christian basis of Mission Australia. ‘Evaluation’ is a primary Christian objective in a faith that calls people to decide - to choose - to love God and neighbour. The gospel requires a critical assessment of past performance, whether the actions of life or the sins of the past, and a determination to work to more complete, or holistic, goals. As an organisation committed to excellence in service delivery and to ‘holiness’ (that is, ‘wholeness’) in relationship with each other and God, the staff of our various youth services work to:

• counteract long-term marginalisation
• provide flexible and holistic support, responsive to individual needs
• assist clients return to appropriate education and employment
• provide a continuum of services for clients
• establish services with an excellent reputation in the wider community and in the youth sector in particular.

These are all key goals of the paper and they are not accidental. Their social science structure finds sympathetic expression, for example, in St Paul’s writings when he argues care for the most insignificant people and for their inclusion as worthwhile members of a vital community (see 1 Corinthians 12:14-26). Or, again, in the Gospels, where Jesus places at the heart of his teaching about the Kingdom of God a discernment or evaluation that enables people to make wise and lasting choices.

These choices all come with a cost (Luke 14:25-33). It is here that Mission Australia seeks to be distinctly Christian, for it sets the meeting of client need above the burden of expenditure. Its ‘funding is a perpetual problem’ but the task of serving the needs of the marginalised is within its own compass of discipleship. You, the reader, are asked to be a convert to this Christian cause and to help us bear the cost of showing the love of God as we meet human need. Your generosity to these youth services will be the measure of the way God’s children discern the possibilities so open to us.

Mission Australia’s National Chaplain
This paper is a consolidation of the following service evaluation reports:


Mission Australia gratefully acknowledges the support of the following organisations:

**Youth Futures**
Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Lend Lease, Myer Foundation, Victorian Office for Youth, City of Greater Dandenong, Foundation for Young Australians

**Creative Youth Initiatives**

**Triple Care Farm**

**The Crossing**
NSW Department of Community Services, Amway, The Baxter Charitable Foundation, Fred P Archer Charitable Trust

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**A Sense of the Future**

Mission Australia is one of Australia’s leading Christian community service organisations with a focus on helping families and children, young people, homeless people, communities and providing employment services.

The underlying aim of Mission Australia’s work is to help individuals and communities strengthen and increase their capacity to help themselves. Mission Australia is developing, and delivering, new and contemporary services to tackle the new social problems facing our society. In more than 340 services around the country, our qualified and caring staff offer help in many different ways. From homeless support to employment advice, Mission Australia’s experienced personnel assist around 200,000 people each year, bringing real benefits to their communities.

Mission Australia has always been about making a difference in people’s lives. In all our services, we seek to achieve long term change for our clients. Mission Australia constantly evaluates its work in order to maximise its resources and do the best job it can. By striving for efficiencies, and partnering Government and other organisations, we can increase support to disadvantaged Australians.

In working with young people Mission Australia seeks to provide diverse initiatives that will respond to a range of needs. Overall these help build young people’s self-confidence and sense of the future as well as providing real skills. Programs reach young people at risk in their own environment and work holistically with the young person’s needs, their peer group, and the local community. As well as measurable outcomes such as entrance into employment and education and training, we also build strong personal relationships with the young people and provide a context in which they can develop resilience and a robust sense of personal worth.

(Vardon & Cousens 2002)

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First printed in November 2002 by Mission Australia.
Report prepared by Kate Everett, Policy Officer, Research and Social Policy, Mission Australia
The multitude of challenges and pressures faced by young people in contemporary Australia can find some without the personal resources and necessary support structures to remain connected to society. These young people may find themselves unable to maintain stable employment, without suitable long-term accommodation and/or disconnected from family and the community.

In 2001, approximately 15% of young people aged 15-19 were considered to be at risk of long term marginalisation from mainstream society. At the same time, as many as a quarter of young people in Australia aged 18-24 were at risk of long term marginalisation (Curtain 2001).

For many of these young people, mainstream support services may be unsuitable. Alternative approaches are necessary that are flexible and responsive to individual needs, and offer holistic support to build individual resilience and strengthen capacity to interact within the community.

Mission Australia has a long history of working with young people from a range of different backgrounds facing a wide variety of issues. Our youth initiatives include legal assistance, individual counseling, alcohol and other drug counseling, wilderness and adventure programs, crisis and medium-term accommodation, art and music therapy, drop-in centres, employment assistance and vocational training for young people at risk.

Like many other organisations providing human services, Mission Australia is shifting towards a more systematic approach to its youth initiatives, which focuses on the interactive role research and evaluation play in the provision and ongoing development of our programs. Our programs and on the ground staff in turn provide invaluable insights into the key issues for ‘at risk’ young people and guide our advocacy efforts on youth policy issues.

As a part of this process and in an effort to share our learnings with others in the field, we have prepared this paper, which draws together evaluations of four of Mission Australia’s youth services, namely:

- Youth Futures
- Creative Youth Initiatives
- Triple Care Farm
- The Opposition (now, The Crossing).

The paper provides a snapshot of each of the four programs at the point of evaluation. It outlines the strengths and weaknesses identified through the evaluation process, sets out key recommendations and provides an update on the strategic changes and progress made since the evaluation.
Youth Futures has shown that young people, if given the right environment and treated respectfully are capable of highly creative contributions to the community, capable of overcoming their issues and capable of building a positive future” (key informant in evaluation).

How the program works
Youth Futures began its life as a two year pilot program targeting 15-19 year old people in and around the identified high need areas of Frankston and Dandenong, Victoria. The program specifically assists the most disadvantaged young people in terms of their employment and educational status – those who are disconnected from mainstream education and employment. It is a program providing a range of creative life skills, personal development programs and individual support for these ‘at risk’ young people. After clients have been engaged and received assistance to stabilise their lives in areas of need, the program then aims to facilitate a sustainable and supported return to appropriate education or employment.

Youth Futures is based on a non prescriptive, flexible model that provides one-to-one support and group activities. It combines individualised assistance, supported job search and job skills training, vocational counseling and cross referral to services provided by other agencies. It also offers other program modules designed for community involvement (including community theatre, mural creation, story telling, active recreation, life skills, mentoring and home economics).

The program’s specific goals during the pilot period included assisting disadvantaged young people in achieving employment and re-integrating early school leavers into the education system. The program was also designed to build on best practice models for assisting disadvantaged young people.

The program was initiated by the board of WorkPlacement, with pilot funding from the former Australian Youth Foundation (now Foundation for Young Australians), the Myer Foundation, the Pratt Foundation, the EM Potter Foundation and the Hollingworth Trust. Half of the Australian Youth Foundation’s financial contributions were designated to an independent external evaluation of the project. The program’s pilot period ended in June 2001 and in May 2002 the auspice of the program was taken over by Mission Australia. It now is a key component of Mission Australia’s Youth Initiatives in Victoria.

SNAPSHOT OF CLIENTS AT END OF THE PILOT PERIOD:

- There were 144 new registrations over the final 6 months of the pilot period
- 51% male, 49% female
- Most common presenting issues included low level of education, lack of confidence or motivation, need for job search techniques, substance abuse
- Only 11% were in education at point of contact
- 66% were living at home
- Almost half were receiving government financial assistance

The evaluation process
Youth Futures commenced in July 1999 at the Frankston site and in November 1999 at the Dandenong site. Six-monthly evaluations of the project were undertaken.
throughout the pilot period. This paper draws heavily from a final report, which draws together the findings of the four interim evaluations.

The interim evaluations consisted of an analysis of basic client data collected throughout the pilot period along with interviews and focus groups with clients and staff. Additional interviews as well as reviews of internal documents were undertaken for the final report. A review of relevant literature and policy is also included in the final report.

Compilation of the final report did not include interviews with other key stakeholders such as councils, other services, or employment and education providers in the local communities of each program. It is acknowledged that this is a significant gap in the evaluation of this project.

The overall strengths and weaknesses of the program as a whole are outlined in Table 1A. The recommended program enhancements are also contained at the end of the table.

**Finding the way forward**

As mentioned above, the Youth Futures project operates at two locations – Frankston and Dandenong. The Frankston site began first and has had a less stable pilot period, with many changes. The Dandenong program began 4 months after Frankston and has had a more stable pilot period.

Important to note is that the Dandenong Youth Futures is co-located within an existing multifunctional youth resource centre – the Visy Cares Centre. The centre holds 19 other youth services that deliver counseling, advocacy and other forms of assistance to young people and had an already established positive profile among young people in the Dandenong community.

Despite their differences, the ethos behind both programs remained the same, i.e. the provision of services, meaningful activities and the support of a significant adult in the life of at risk young people enhances their chances of successfully connecting or reconnecting with employment, education or training.

Due to the flexible nature of the pilot program, and the undertaking of evaluations at 6 monthly intervals, the program has undergone fairly constant change throughout its two-year development phase in line with the recommendations of each evaluation. Many of these developments are worth noting.

Appointment of a new manager mid way through 2001 brought with it changes to the program structure to bring the two sites more in line with each other and created a more structured and settled operational model for the program overall. It also brought relief from some of the burdens placed on other staff members.

The existing data collection and collation methods are currently being reviewed and funding is being sought to support the development and implementation of a new system by the end of 2002. The new system will ensure that client information and outcomes are collected and located in a confidential manner, that the spectrum of outcomes achieved by clients is documented and understood and that the information about clients who have left the program is accurately collected and monitored. In addition, ongoing evaluation of the program’s activities by staff and clients will continue as it has throughout the pilot period.

Transitional support for young people during changes in staffing is now being provided. New workers undertake a hand over process with the departing worker over a two-week period, which includes meeting with existing clients and local service providers. In addition, remaining staff provide support and assistance to the young people and the new worker during the transition period.

A Youth Strategy Advocacy Group, comprising community, funder and staff representatives, was established by Mission Australia early in 2002. This group will assist in strategic planning for the Youth Futures programs in Victoria, and also advise Mission Australia's new national Youth Research and Social Policy unit, Y Research.

In October 2001, a third site for the Youth Futures program – the Dandenong Plaza Youth Information Centre – was opened. It offers information, referral and support to young people many of whom frequent the Dandenong Plaza Shopping Centre. The Centre also aims to address issues within the shopping centre and surrounding precinct such as public safety, crime and violence. Preliminary reports suggest this new site is progressing well and in addition to the information and referral services, several events have been held with large numbers of young people attending.

Also, the Living in Full Effect (LIFE) program – a life skills component of the Youth Futures programs – has recently been finalised and is shortly to be introduced to Frankston.

Table 1B provides a snapshot of outcomes for Youth Futures for the year July 2001 – June 2002.
**TABLE 1A: Youth Futures strengths, gaps and recommendations**

### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Two locations have enabled different elements to be trialed simultaneously
- 6 monthly evaluations have allowed learning and flexibility in enabling change as and when needed
- Successful at targeting hard and soft outcomes:
  - 400+ clients placed in education, training and employment during pilot period
  - Personal development programs reported high levels of commitment, motivation and increased self esteem
- Youth outreach worker successfully engaged 174 young people during the first 6 months
- Non-compulsory nature of program suited to target group
- Activities approach has allowed space and time for relationship development
- Good use of separate designated space for activities and individual support
- Solid relationships have developed with other supplementary services and the local community
- The model of relationship building between client and worker is significant and in some cases said to be the most important aspect of the program
- High appreciation amongst clients for staff and the benefits of their relationship with the staff members

### IDENTIFIED GAPS

| Limited data collection on clients entering the program | Develop and implement comprehensive and consistent data collection system to allow monitoring of service and client outcomes | ✓ |
| Lack of formal post-placement support | Resource and introduce formal post-placement support | ✓ |
| Lack of ability to track outcomes and pathways of clients after leaving the program | Establish procedures for long term monitoring of young people once they move on from the program | ✓ |
| Lack of transitional support for clients when facing changes in staff | Provide resources for transitional support for young people if the project is to face changes in staff | ✓ |
| Lack of evaluation of individual activities | Clients and staff to evaluate each activity | ✓ |
| Long period of stabilisation of the program and settling coordination between the two sites | No specific recommendation as new Manager appointed and issues addressed prior to completion of evaluation | — |
| Limited resources to support staff resulting in unstable employment patterns | As above | — |
| Lack of sufficient funding to run more activities and increase staffing to levels felt appropriate | Mission Australia staff to explore on-going funding sources | ✓ |

### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider the reestablishment of a Community Advisory Committee to provide the program with an additional connection to the community and further opportunities for raising community perceptions of young people
- Develop more youth empowerment programs, based on successful previous programs

**TABLE 1B: Youth Futures Outcomes July 2001 – June 2002**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FRANKSTON</th>
<th>DANDENONG VISY CARES CENTRE</th>
<th>DANDENONG PLAZA</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information &amp; Referral</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>2280</td>
<td>2803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Registrations</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Support Sessions</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>925</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Placements</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Training Placements</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants in Programs</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>4139</td>
<td>4453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creative Youth Initiatives

“CYI is a unique and exceptional program providing a supportive, non-judgmental and nurturing environment in which the undiscovered creative skills of students are developed and through which some of their emotional pain is reduced” (program evaluator).

How the program works

Creative Youth Initiatives (CYI) is a service located in inner city Sydney targeting homeless and marginalised young people, aged 16-24. It consists of two main programs that aim to provide creative opportunities to these young people in an attempt to build self esteem, improve communication skills and provide positive learning experiences and educational qualifications.

The programs are:

- Sounds of the Street – an accredited music course, where participants learn to compose, perform and record music and at the end of the program, produce a commercially available CD.
- ARTWORKS! – a creative visual arts program, with an annual exhibition where the young people’s artworks are offered for sale to the public.

Other programs such as drama, creative writing, video production and photography are run when funding or volunteer tutors are available. Participants are also provided with access to information about a variety of pertinent issues such as substance abuse, sexuality, goal setting, dealing with feelings, assertiveness, working with others, health issues and employment and training opportunities.

Creative Youth Initiatives is an innovative centre that is unique in that its running costs are provided mainly through corporate sponsorship, donations, trusts and foundations and through income from Mission Australia fundraising events. It is also moving toward a model of social entrepreneurship that will involve expanding the existing entrepreneurial activities of students undertaking paid design work and musical performances, and exhibition and sale of students’ artworks.

SNAPSHOT OF CLIENTS AT TIME OF EVALUATION:

- 60% of clients were homeless on admission
- 87% claimed they had suffered abuse (sexual, physical or emotional)
- Most had experienced long term unemployment
- The majority were seriously affected by poverty
- Although of ‘average’ or ‘higher’ intellectual potential, many had suffered school failure and had poor literacy and numeracy skills
- Almost 80% had attempted self harm or suicide within the last two years
- The majority of students were aimless and had no purpose or life goals when they entered the program

The evaluation process

The evaluation was undertaken by Ken Buttrum, former Director General of the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, over a two-month period in late 2001 and early 2002.

The evaluation process involved the following:

- development of a staff team evaluation form used to assess service standards
- staff meetings to explain and discuss the evaluation process
- completion of the staff team evaluation form by all staff members
• visits by the evaluation coordinator to
the service to review and discuss staff
evaluations and to meet with staff,
program participants and where
possible family members
• discussions with personnel from other
agencies that have working
relationships with the service.

The strengths and weaknesses of the CYI
program identified through the evaluation
process have been summarised in Table 2.
The recommendations for program
enhancement are also included at the end
of the table.

Finding the way forward
As with any evaluation, some of the
suggested program enhancements were not
thought to be appropriate. However, many
of the recommendations are already in
place and others are on the way to
being realised.

A new manager has been appointed, and the role
refocused to oversee many of the changes. Previously
casual staffing positions have been made permanent, pay
rates increased and regular staff meetings and individual
support sessions are now in place. Staff training in case
management is also underway and there are plans for
other training such as occupational health and safety,
computer skills, first aid and disruptive behaviour
management.

The service is looking to appoint a staff member
responsible for Business Development early in 2003 to
oversee funding opportunities for the service and
opportunities for clients to sell artworks and perform
musical compositions. In addition, an Accreditation
Officer will soon begin working with CYI to further
develop the accredited training components of the
program. In the meantime, two new courses have been
introduced: a creative writing course, which is run as
TAFE outreach and therefore accredited, and a
photography course.

A streamlined intake procedure is now in place. Welcome
Kits for new clients are available, containing amongst
other things, information about clients’ rights and
complaints procedures. A client information database has
been developed and protocols on client confidentiality are
also now in place. Protocols on the use of case studies of
clients as well as their photographs are being investigated.
Mechanisms to monitor program effectiveness are also
being developed, with exit interviews now a formal part
of the program. A suggestion box is now in place and
staff discuss feedback from clients.

The Student Support Coordinator position has increased
to a full time load which enables increased support for the
students enrolled in the program and networking and
liaison with the students’ case managers (who may be
external to CYI).

The service is currently located in temporary lodgings and
negotiations for permanent premises are underway.
### TABLE 2 Creative Youth Initiatives strengths, gaps and recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM STRENGTHS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The program’s philosophy is clearly understood by both staff and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff are committed to the program and its ongoing development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Service is greatly appreciated by the students who are reported to leave with a tremendous sense of self achievement and speak highly of the non-judgmental support, encouragement and assistance received from staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There is always a waiting list for the program — which shows its reputation as a good service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Location of the program(^1) in the inner city close to public transport and services is very appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff have developed good working relationships with other youth and mental health services enabling students access to a range of appropriate additional programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Service has established an excellent reputation in the wider community</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Almost all students find stable and supportive accommodation whilst involved in the program</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 30-40 students complete shorter TAFE accredited courses each year and graduate with a TAFE certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Each year some six art students gain entry to various art schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Generally three students succeed in recording music professionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Most students complete their programs and leave with improved social skills and a number of practical life goals</td>
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<th>IDENTIFIED GAPS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of clear performance indicators and data collection to monitor the program’s effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support staff levels are inadequate for complex needs of client group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff time spent on funding applications reduces time for students and manager’s time for supporting staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity of existing staff employment status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leased premises are unstable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ineffectual relationships and communication with other Mission Australia services and national office support departments</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of performance indicators and associated data collection system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implement student feedback procedures, including exit interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate possibility of increased support staff levels to meet the complex case needs of the students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish other commercial projects to supplement funding base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve relationships with national office fundraising staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secure employment status of staff and introduce regular staff support sessions, team meetings and training days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate alternative, more permanent site for the program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote the program with other Mission Australia services to provide a continuum of services for clients</td>
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<tr>
<th>BEING ADDRESSED</th>
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<tr>
<td>On-going — more still to be done</td>
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<tr>
<th>ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Streamline program’s intake procedures and improvement of service information packs and promotional materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Introduce a wider range of accredited courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardise protocols for use of client photos and case studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase the number of musical performances to increase the opportunities and payments for students</td>
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</table>

\(^1\) Although the program has relocated to other premises since this evaluation was undertaken, the new premises are similarly located in the inner city close to public transport and other services
Triple Care Farm

“This is an invaluable program without peer in youth services within this state, and last year there was always a list of between 15 and 20 young people awaiting admission. In my view, a huge gap in services for our adolescents would result from either a reduction in or closure of this centre” (program evaluator).

How the program works
Triple Care Farm is a youth rehabilitation program located in the NSW Southern Highlands. It provides a comprehensive network of residential care, individual support, family counseling, and vocational education and training to many disadvantaged young people. They include young people who have faced homelessness, mental health issues, alcohol and other drug misuse, family violence and other issues. Young people volunteer to participate in the program, to get away from their current environment and make a change in their lives.

Units of service include:

- Residential Unit – offering accommodation according to the student’s stage of progress.
- Vocational Training Unit – offering structured and professional training programs, including farming and landscaping, music, art, literacy and numeracy, woodwork and metal work. Accredited courses in welding and occupational health and safety are also offered.
- Specialist Casework and Counseling Unit – offering individual case management, counseling, group work and placement and aftercare services.

An educational program through Links to Learning and a recreational program are also part of Triple Care Farm.

SNAPSHOT OF CLIENTS AT TIME OF EVALUATION:

- 81% male, 19% female
- 4.8% were 15 year olds, 38% were 16, 16.7% were 17, 19% were 18, 12% were 19 and 9.5% were 20 year olds
- Many clients came from Sydney (45.2%), clients were also from other areas of NSW: the Illawarra, the Riverina, the Southern Highlands and the Central Coast
- Clients were referred by detox units, other youth services, youth refuges, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Community Services, and the Department of Housing. In addition, some clients were self-referrals, and others referred by their families
- Very few had proceeded past Year 9 at school
- Most had poor literacy and numeracy skills
- The majority were unemployed prior to admission to Triple Care Farm

The evaluation process
The evaluation was undertaken by Ken Buttrum, former Director General of the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, over a two-month period in late 2001 and early 2002.

The evaluation process followed that of CYI and involved the following:

- development of a staff team evaluation form used to assess service standards
- staff meetings to explain and discuss the evaluation process
- completion of the staff team evaluation form by all staff members
- visits by the evaluation coordinator to the service to review and discuss staff evaluations and to meet with staff, program participants and where possible family members
- discussions with personnel from other agencies that have working relationships with the service.

The strengths and weaknesses of the Triple Care Farm program identified through the evaluation process have been summarised in Table 3. The recommendations for program enhancement are also included at the end of the table.
Finding the way forward

Shortly after completion of the program evaluation, staff and management came together to plan the enhanced service. As a result, the program has been restructured into 3 progressive stages: Gateway, Explorer and Outbound. The new structure commenced at the beginning of Semester 1, February 2002.

The program is now more cohesive and clearly defined, encouraging the graduated development of each client’s personal, educational, work and leisure skills to enhance their chances of successful community reintegration. Importantly, as part of this process, clients now have responsibility over their own, personalised program, and must meet certain goals and requirements prior to applying for the next stage of the program.

Other program enhancements include:

- The Wilderness Program has been removed from weekdays and replaced with the new Sport and Recreation Program on weekends, involving leisure and recreation during both day and evening.
- The education program (Links to Learning) is now operating out of a more suitable venue, allowing more emphasis on the remedial education of clients. Funds have also been secured to employ the teacher full time.
- The client age group has been refined to include only 16-21 year olds.
- It has been agreed that maintaining a coeducational program is valuable in retaining a holistic service.
- A Women’s Health Group has been established for female students and a Men’s Health Group will be up and running soon.
- Work experience outside the Centre is broadening.
- Two residential building projects have been completed, making new and improved accommodation available to clients.
- New accredited training courses in OH&S, and Oxy and Mig welding have been held.
- A quality assurance program has been implemented along with accredited training for staff. A working committee has been arranged to put together a timetable for other training required. The shift structure has also changed, including removal of split shifts.
- In acknowledgement of the Manager’s invaluable role in not only fundraising but in advocacy, the Assistant Manager has taken on much of the day to day running of the service. Team leaders have also been appointed to manage specific program areas.

- Triple Care has also gained out of home care licensing for four years from the Department of Community Services, and the new Office of the Children’s Guardian.

To date, all feedback about the program enhancements, from staff, students and parents has been extremely positive. The changes to the program are not yet complete. Other goals that are currently being addressed include:

- Revision and redistribution of program information to referring agencies
- Further enhancement of educational and employment training programs
- Establishment of performance indicators to monitor program effectiveness
- Enhancement of methods of gaining student and family feedback on the program
- Establishment of further research links with the University of Western Sydney and investigation of options for long term evaluation of the program
- Gaining greater access to support services for students returning to the community
- Enhancement of staff training based on needs revealed through performance appraisals.
### TABLE 3 Triple Care Farm strengths, gaps and recommendations

#### PROGRAM STRENGTHS

- Energetic centre manager who is an intuitive leader with a passion for the disadvantaged young people in his care and has a genuine desire for the continuous improvement of the program
- Program has clearly stated goals, objectives and service delivery principles
- Staff are committed to scrutiny of the program and are keen to improve and refine the service
- Client group is well targeted
- Multidisciplinary staff team includes a casework coordinator, an alcohol and other drugs counselor and an intern psychologist and covers the complex nature of the client group well
- Accredited training courses are available
- Mostly regional catchment of the client group enables improved client support after program exit and during community reintegration
- Clients are being linked to appropriate support services during the community transition process
- Good working relationship with the Department of Health which allows good health care services to clients
- Established positive reputation in the local community and throughout the youth services sector
- 95% of the young people entering the program in the first 6 months of 2001 successfully graduated
- Well respected by the staff of the Departments of Community Services and Juvenile Justice

#### IDENTIFIED GAPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Gaps</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Being Addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program is somewhat fragmented and lacking in cohesion</td>
<td>Consideration of a new model to refine program</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current staffing structure can lead to communication difficulties between training, casework and residential staff</td>
<td>Review and re-organise staff team concept</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development, rostering and OH&amp;S difficulties</td>
<td>Review staff rostering system in accordance with new team roles</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Link staff training to performance appraisals</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily routine complicated and often disrupted</td>
<td>Review the staging of the program and the daily routine</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of formalised incentive system to encourage poorly motivated clients</td>
<td>Introduce formal student incentive scheme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range of clients and coeducational mix questioned by some staff members</td>
<td>Consider whether continuation of the coeducational program is appropriate</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider more appropriate gender specific programs for young women</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarify the age range of client group</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited emphasis on remedial education – teacher employed on part time basis only, classroom location inappropriate and equipment limited</td>
<td>Implement fundraising strategies to ensure purchase of educational equipment</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Investigate more appropriate premises for classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase teacher to a full time position</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough of Manager’s time is focused on managing the service due to responsibilities in marketing and fundraising</td>
<td>Assistant Manager to take over some of the day to day responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review rules, policies and procedures of the centre, such as the management of challenging student behaviour
- Consider and implement more appropriate, accredited work-related skills development programs and develop further work experience opportunities in the final stages of the program
- Develop and implement more short courses to improve client’s life, relationship and employment skills
How the program works

The Opposition was a 24 hour crisis facility located in a three level terrace in the Kings Cross area of Sydney, providing accommodation for homeless young people aged 16-21 years. The majority of the client group were young people who faced long-term substance abuse and severe psychological and behavioural problems. It provided immediate crisis intervention and short term respite (1-2 nights) with the provision of a bed, food, showering and laundry facilities. On occasion clients could stay longer (1-2 weeks).

During their stay, staff worked with clients to find them alternative accommodation. The purpose of the short stay was to avoid entrenching young people in the refuge system and ‘homeless street scene’ in Kings Cross. The staff provided some elements of case planning to longer-term clients, however case management was not a core element of the service. Other services provided were support, referral and advocacy. One proclaimed place bed was also available.

SNAPSHOT OF CLIENTS AT TIME OF EVALUATION:

• 67% male, 33% female
• Clients were referred from other youth services, the Homeless Persons Information Centre, refuges, a hospital and Missionbeat, and several clients were self-referred
• Clients presented with a range of issues including alcohol and other drug issues, pregnancy, family breakdown, mental health issues, disability and gender identity issues
• The average stay for these clients was 3.4 nights

Since, and as a result of, the evaluation process, the Opposition has undergone a transformation. The target client group has been refocused, the approach to care given has changed and accommodation is no longer provided. These changes are discussed in more detail below.

The evaluation process

The evaluation was undertaken over a 6 month period in 2000 by Diana Jazic and Dean Luck, two Managers of other Mission Australia accommodation services at the time.

The evaluation process involved the following:

• interviews with staff, clients, internal stakeholders (other Mission Australia staff), external stakeholders and the funding body
• a two week service analysis (including details of the number of clients who accessed the service, client profile, length of stay, referral source, agency referred to, income received, and age breakdown)
• a comparative study with another inner city youth service to guide the evaluation team in terms of operational aspects including type of accommodation, number of bed spaces, client profile, staffing, food, cleaning, case management, client outcomes and partnerships.

Business and Occupational Health and Safety reviews were also undertaken as part of the evaluation process. The strengths and weaknesses of the program identified through the evaluation process have been summarised in
Table 4. The recommendations for program enhancement are also included at the end of the table.

**Finding the way forward**

In the course of conducting the service evaluation, the evaluators, under advice from staff, found that there were a number of operational issues that needed to be addressed immediately. New systems were put in place for the management of client records, new referral forms and a staff induction package were developed and staff rosters were reviewed. The process of ordering food was also reviewed, resulting in a better quality of food being made available, and a community and corporate day saw the cleaning and painting of the premises. There were also changes in the delivery of service to clients; increased networking and communication with other service providers began.

In light of the evaluation’s outcomes, the decision was made to explore new models of service provision in order to best meet the needs of clients. A series of consultations with relevant agencies was held to determine current issues, needs and service gaps. It became clear that the client group most in need of services were those with complex support needs in the 18-25 age group. The most prominent issues were alcohol and other drug use, mental illness, including personality disorders and young people with challenging behaviours.

As a result of this research, a new service model was developed, one which would refocus the service to firstly meet the identified need and secondly shape it to fill this identified gap in service provision. The Opposition closed its doors in early 2001 and reopened them in early 2002 as The Crossing.

The service now consists of a multi disciplinary team of workers who provide long term intensive outreach casework and support for clients with complex needs, whether they are in or out of accommodation. The service model is based on developing supportive, cooperative and continuing relationships between clients and staff. It aims to empower the young person to work towards achieving identified goals and improving quality of life. The Crossing operates out of the same premises as the Opposition, but no longer provides accommodation.
**TABLE 4 The Opposition strengths, gaps and recommendations**

**PROGRAM STRENGTHS**

- Long history of association with homeless young people in the Kings Cross area, particularly those most strongly excluded
- The only service in the area that catered for the targeted client group
- The only service that offered a 24 hour referral service
- Provided ‘time out’ for difficult clients from other services which served the purpose of providing a bed and a meal to young people who may otherwise lose their accommodation at these other services
- Provided the only Proclaimed Place bed in the area
- Staff skill set well suited for working with clients with mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependencies and with young gay, lesbian and transgender people
- Easily accessible location for many young homeless people in the Kings Cross area and located in close proximity to a diverse range of support services such as health services, government departments, other community services, transport and shops
- Strong relationships developed with other accommodation services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDENTIFIED GAPS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
<th>BEING ADDRESSED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient and inappropriately stored client records</td>
<td>Review of policies and procedures in relation to secure, confidential and appropriate client record keeping, and the equity and fairness of entry and referral processes, and decision making processes</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with supervision of clients with complex needs and behavioural issues in a three storey terrace</td>
<td>Review rosters and levels of staffing in relation to safety on shifts and service provision</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review service policies and procedures and development of clear guidelines for planning, teaching and quality control in the areas of OH&amp;S and required standards</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic location for some vulnerable young people not exposed to Kings Cross area and those attempting to remove themselves from networks, habits and lifestyle in area</td>
<td>Review the suitability of current premises</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak relationships with other Mission Australia services due to nature of client group</td>
<td>Develop further strategies to promote and encourage internal networking with complementary services</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions existed amongst staff members about purpose of service and ‘time out’ and 2 night accommodation model thought to not be appropriate strategies for many of the clients</td>
<td>Explore alternative service models including early intervention, global case management, aftercare or outreach provision</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No case management procedures and policies in place</td>
<td>Establish case management principles and practices</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal staff induction or development process</td>
<td>Review of staff training and development needs, including an audit of skills for case management and knowledge of required standards</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average occupancy rate of only 50%, proclaimed place only 20%</td>
<td>Review the use of proclaimed place beds at the service in line with the NSW Government’s revised strategy</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with standard of food provided</td>
<td>Review the quality, quantity, storage and expenditure of food</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tools for measuring and evaluating outcomes with clients</td>
<td>Further analysis of desired outcomes</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in young homeless women not reflected in the male client culture predominant at The Opposition</td>
<td>Further analysis of client group</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emerging Themes

The evaluations of these four youth services provide a valuable insight into the ways organisations like Mission Australia can better provide services to meet the needs of the people they assist. The evaluation findings also highlight the ways in which we can better operate our own services.

Several important themes emerge from the evaluations that should be highlighted:

- Organisations must have the courage to change programs to respond to the changing needs of the people they assist and the dynamic changing environment of community service provision in Australia.

- Comprehensive and secure program monitoring and data collection systems are important, not only for internal reporting purposes, but also to monitor client outcomes and to allow staff to provide the most effective forms of post-program support, which in turn ensures greater likelihood of client success.

- The balance of flexibility and formality within a program’s structure is vital to allow responses to the needs of each individual client.

- An holistic approach that is integrated with other services to provide complimentary care and services is essential in pursuing best practice in service delivery and to maximise the beneficial outcomes for young people; as is acknowledgement of the importance of life skills in addition to employment and educational outcomes.

- The relationship staff form with clients is an integral component in the success of these programs. Ensuring staff members are adequately supported, and allocated resources and time for personal development and training is extremely important.

- External input into evaluations through interviews with other stakeholders in the service’s local community (e.g. local councils, other service providers, education and employment providers) allows a more comprehensive and balanced view of the success of the programs.

- Funding is a perpetual problem. The difficulties experienced by our youth services in acquiring and maintaining funding highlight a significant gap in recurrent funding sources for youth services and community services more generally. There is an abundance of funding available through government, philanthropic and corporate sectors for new projects, for trial periods. However, sources of ongoing funding for projects that have proven successful past the pilot period are not so abundant. Nor is funding available for the post-program support that many young people need to achieve ongoing stability in their lives once they leave our services.

On the development front, Mission Australia’s Community Services National Office is developing a comprehensive and systematic data collection and analysis system. A self-evaluation tool based on the Participatory Action Research model is also being developed. Once completed, the data collection and analysis system and the evaluation model will be used across all Mission Australia community services to enable staff to reflect on and improve their practices.

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Graphic Design: Imagecorp Pty Ltd
Printers: Superfine Printing Pty Ltd