

Better Choices: Youth in WA

MISSION
AUSTRALIA

Better Choices: Youth in WA

Mission Australia Submission

About Mission Australia

Mission Australia is a national non-denominational Christian organisation that delivers evidence-based, client-centred community services. In the 2016-17 financial year we supported over 140,000 people through 470 programs and services. We work with families and children, young people and people experiencing homelessness and also provide specialist services for mental health, disability and alcohol and drug issues.

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into increasing choices for young people in Western Australia (WA). Mission Australia is a leading provider of a range of youth services for vulnerable and at-risk young people in WA including the Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS), Navig8, Youth Beat, Reconnect and Community Services Support. These services are spread across both metropolitan and regional areas.

We are encouraged by the WA government's commitment to develop a youth strategy. We are of the strong view that while this strategy should focus on the needs of all young people, a particular emphasis should be on WA's most vulnerable young people.

We are also of the view that the programs and services that are developed from this strategy will need to be co-designed with input from young people, sector organisations and different levels of government.

Our submission for Better Choices: Youth in WA focusses on four areas for consideration:

- Youth Voices – what young people have told us they are concerned about,
- Mission Australia Youth Programs WA - to help young Western Australians make choices about their future,
- Mission Australia Youth innovations from across Australia, and
- What the youth programs focus areas should be.

Youth voices

Mission Australia conducts an annual *Youth Survey* targeting young people aged 15-19 years. The survey gathers feedback on a range of issues including the personal and national concerns of young people, mental health and wellbeing and transition to further education and employment. In 2017¹ around four in ten respondents from WA indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their post-

¹ Mission Australia, Youth Survey Report 2017, pp 150-164, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-evaluation/youth-survey>

school goals. They felt that the **top three barriers** that would impact on their study/work goals were *academic ability* (20.7%), *financial difficulty* (14.9%) and *mental health* (13.8%).

A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people than non- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people indicated the presence of a range of barriers to achieving their post-school plans including family responsibilities, where they live, lack of school support, transport, lack of family support and discrimination.

Coping with stress (45.7%), school or study problems (38.4%) and body image related issues (30.5%) were the top 3 concerns for young people in WA.² A much larger proportion of males than females in WA identified *alcohol and drugs* as an issue of national concern (43.8% compared with 34.0% of females). However, many more females than males identified *mental health* as an issue of national concern (40.4% compared with 28.8%).

In 2016 the joint report released by Mission Australia and Black Dog Institute showed that around one in four (24.9%) young people aged 15-19 years met the criteria for having a probable serious mental illness in WA.³ Females in WA were around twice as likely as males to meet the criteria for having a probable serious mental illness (30.0% of females compared with 17.5% of males).

Friends, parents and relatives were the three most commonly cited **sources of help** for young people who responded to the *Youth Survey 2017* from WA (81.6%, 74.0% and 57.6% respectively). It is therefore essential that we are educating family and friends about how they can help vulnerable young people and direct them to the services they need.

Mission Australia programs to help young Western Australians make choices about their future and implementation of such programs

A range of factors influence young people's decision making about their future. These factors may include socio-economic background, educational experience, role models, careers advice, work experience, discrimination and confidence.

Young people who experience greater difficulty finding work often experience specific barriers, including problems with mental health, housing or childcare.⁴ The prominence of mental health as a nominated barrier to future plans in this year's *Youth Survey* is of concern in relation to young people seeking employment; as well as those pursuing future study. Employment can provide young people with a sense of purpose and value as well as an opportunity to interact with other people.⁵

² Ibid

³ Mission Australia, Five Year Mental Health Report, 2016, accessible at: <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people/706-five-year-mental-health-youth-report/file>

⁴ Oxenbridge, S. & Evesson, J. (2012) Young people entering work: A review of the research, Ref: 18/12, Employment Research Australia.

⁵ See further: Social Ventures Australia, *Fundamental principles for youth employment*, 2016, p.18

Alcohol and drug misuse can also form a barrier to education and employment. The consultation draft of *The Western Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency Strategy 2017-2021* identified a considerable number of young people drank at harmful levels for single-occasion alcohol-related harm, more than half of young adult drug and alcohol survey respondents had used cannabis in their lifetime and almost one-third had used ecstasy and one-fifth had used meth/amphetamine.⁶

Programs that are intended to support young people need to fully understand the complex circumstances that can be faced by young people and respond holistically including integrating place based supports from more than one service. It is also important for the services support young people through their journey at their own pace.

Young people can be very 'wary' of support services and outreach is particularly important for engagement. An approachable, friendly, non-threatening service response is required where young people feel comfortable talking about issues.

There are numerous youth programs that are already operating in Western Australia to deliver positive outcomes including specific programs for young people with substance misuse issues, in contact with the juvenile justice system or in out of home care. Some of these are outlined below and can be built on over the course of the strategy.

Open Doors

Open Doors supports young people aged 12 to 18 and their families living in the Mirrabooka area and surrounding suburbs. Support is provided to young people experiencing issues with drug and alcohol abuse, family breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and mental health. The program is an outreach based service which means service staff meets with the young people on their terms including at school, home or anywhere that is suitable for the young person.

Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS)

A number of co-located programs and services operate under this umbrella and aim to address the holistic needs of young people in Perth who are trying to deal with alcohol and/or other drug misuse and associated challenges such as mental illness, gender identity and a past history of trauma or abuse. Mission Australia works closely with young people, their families and other service providers in areas such as education, employment and housing. In particular, Mission Australia works collaboratively with Next Step, the clinical services arm of the Mental Health Commission, and court-related juvenile justice teams to provide integrated services. DAYS offers case-management, individual and family counselling, access to mentors, psycho-education groups and clinical psychology, residential services and includes access to an allied health team of clinical psychology, nurses, GPs and psychiatry. DAYS also offers the Youth Withdrawal and Respite Service, Youth Residential Rehabilitation Service and THASP/Transitional Accommodation.

⁶ Mental Health Commission WA, *The Western Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency Strategy 2017-2021*, Consultation Draft, p 18 accessible at: <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/media/2048/wa-alcohol-and-drug-interagency-strategy-2017-2021-consultation-draft-august-2017.pdf>

Case Study

Cathy is an 18 year old young person from regional WA who accessed DAYS. Although she has not used substances since she left DAYS, she finds it difficult to maintain sobriety as the majority of the people in her life are currently using drugs. Cathy feels that unless she moves to a different town, it will be harder to abstain from using drugs. Her goal is to continue her studies.

Cathy feels that young people in regional areas should not have to move away from their homes and familiar networks to achieve their goals. She believes that there should be a whole of community response that not only supports young people with their own addiction issues, but addresses the impacts of drug and alcohol through their entire community.

Reconnect

Reconnect supports young people aged 12–18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The aim is to improve family relationships so the young person may be able to return to the family home. If this is not possible, the young person will be supported to obtain alternative housing. In addition the young person will be supported to remain engaged at school and to address their other needs, such as mental health, addiction issues and life skills. Mission Australia runs seven Reconnect services including one site in WA (Peel, Mandurah).

Youth Alcohol and Drug Treatment Service

The Youth Alcohol and Drug Treatment Service in Port Hedland provides young people and their families with counselling to address some of the barriers to gaining treatment services to drug and alcohol issues. The service is located on site at Youth Involvement Council (YIC) and provides young people engaged in this service with direct support as well as community outreach.

Youth Accommodation Support Services (YASS)

Funded by the Department of Communities and operating from a Perth residential facility, this service provides 24/7 accommodation and support for up to six young people, aged 15 to 18 years, who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Providing holistic support for up to three months, the service aims to help young people to address issues underlying their homelessness (e.g. drug and alcohol issues, mental health and family relationships), increase life skills (e.g. financial management, cooking), transition to stable long-term accommodation and engage/re-engage with education or employment. There are also four transitional beds on site, which can be occupied for up to one year by young people aged from 16 to 25 years.

Youthbeat

Mission Australia Youthbeat program is a youth homelessness service that offers safety and early intervention programs, supporting young people experiencing homelessness or facing challenges on the streets of the Perth CBD. This comprehensive program provides mobile outreach to young people in the

Northbridge and inner city areas, as well as case management, including informal counselling and goal setting.

A key feature of the Youthbeat model is the follow-up support offered to young people and their families. The Department for Communities, specifically the Crisis Care Unit (CCU), WA Police, Nyoongar Outreach Services and Youthbeat collaboratively work together in the Youth at Risk Strategy (YARS).

Case Study

Claire is a 13 year old young person who was linked to YouthBeat as she had stopped attending school regularly. Her concerns included family conflict, use of alcohol and drugs and mental health concerns.

Claire was initially reluctant to be referred to any mental health supports, because she was worried about the response she would get from family members. However, she was successfully referred to the Headspace program where her engagement with the program was supported by her father and her education provider. Claire is now receiving the necessary supports and is engaged with her school.

Remote School Attendance Strategy

Remote School Attendance Strategy Meekatharra focuses on getting children into school. Improving Education outcomes including Year 12 attainment. Improving youth transition to vocational and higher education and work. Supporting families to give children a good start in life through improved early childhood development, care, education and school readiness.

Children's and Family Support Service (CAFSS)

The aim of the Children's and Family Support Service is to help build healthy and strong communities by enhancing children's and families' ability to meet life's challenges and to foster resilience and hope for a better future.

Case Study

Hannah is a young woman who was affected by the death of a family member due to suicide at a very young age. She sought help from a number of services but when she started high school she found the pressure and stress hard to manage.

Hannah reached out to Mission Australia's *Children and Family Support Service (CAFSS)* where she was matched with a case worker who she was able to relate to what she was going through and she felt comfortable to talk to the case worker about her concerns. With Mission Australia's support she has now returned to her education and is studying film at TAFE.

Navig8

Operating throughout the South West and Great Southern regions of Western Australia, this service assists young people aged 14 to 25 to successfully transition from the care of Department of Communities to independent living.

Mission Australia's innovative youth services in other jurisdictions

Mission Australia provides a range of youth services across Australia and these services have produced positive outcomes that change the lives of young people, their families and the communities. These services are innovative, evidence based and meets the needs of the young people and their communities. They could be replicated in ways that fit local circumstances to add to existing youth services in WA.

Charcoal Lane in Victoria

Charcoal Lane is a social enterprise in Fitzroy Victoria that combines a restaurant specialising in native flavours with a comprehensive training program for young people who have experienced vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment. Charcoal Lane enables Aboriginal and other young people to gain both accredited hospitality qualifications and professional experience within a supportive developmental environment. On completing traineeships at the restaurant, young people are well prepared to move into careers in hospitality, or other industries.

Synergy Auto Repairs in Victoria

Synergy Auto Repairs is a social enterprise based in North Melbourne that offers customers a full suite of smash repair services, while providing a flexible accredited training program and support for young people aged 16-20 with a history of motor vehicle related offences. The program harnesses participants' interest in cars and aims to help them build a career in a field that matches their interests. The initiative is an Australian-first partnership between Mission Australia, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC), Kangan TAFE, and Suncorp Group.

Social Enterprise programs such as Synergy Auto Repairs and Charcoal Lane provide work experience and education to young people who are often excluded from the workforce based on ethnicity, long-term unemployment or disengagement from schools, experience generational disadvantage and/or disengaged from the community. These programs also result in reducing the risk of engagement with the criminal justice system.

There are also numerous programs that are available to young people experiencing housing issues and homelessness that can be adapted and replicated in WA including early identification programs such as the Community of Schools and Services model trialled in NSW as the Ryde Project.

Ryde Project in NSW

The Ryde Project is an innovative 'place based' initiative bringing together government, education, health and community services to provide early intervention and support to young people. The project, based on the successful Geelong Project, aims to reduce youth homelessness and educational disengagement by building capacity and resilience, ensuring safe and supportive environments, maintaining positive engagement with education, and connecting youth and families to their community. This is achieved through the universal screening of young people and the provision of support to schools, young people, and their families through a collaborative network of partners that make up The Ryde Project. This Community of School and Services model has the potential to be linked

to other programs such as the federally funded Reconnect program to ensure young people needing supports are identified early, preventing escalation and reducing the need for crisis responses.

Spin 180 Youth Homelessness Program in the NT

Based in Darwin, Spin 180 Youth Homelessness Program is a service for young people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, disengaged from education or antisocial behavior. Spin 180 offers two youth services, the youth sailing program and the shine and strength program.

Youth sailing program is an eight-week program in partnership with the Darwin Sailing Club for young people aged between 12-21 who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, disengaged from education or antisocial behavior. The shine and strength personal development programs aim to equip participants with the knowledge and skills needed to develop self-awareness and personal growth.

Traditional Camps – Townsville QLD

Mission Australia in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS), provides Indigenous camps on local, traditional country to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are involved in the criminal justice system and are at high risk of reoffending. Up to 10 camping trips per year are planned to a local national park to do culturally appropriate activities to strengthen young people's connection to culture and country.

The camps are based on the premise that connection to mob and to country is an essential part of health as a first nation person. The cultural camps aim to enhance the self-esteem and cultural pride of Indigenous young people, particularly those who may feel disconnected from their cultural identity. After the camp, the elders maintain regular contact with the participants.

MA and MAH at Clarendon Vale and Rokeby Tasmania

In 2013 Mission Australia Housing (MAH), under an agreement with Housing Tasmania, took over management of a portfolio of about 500 aged social homes in the neighbourhood of Clarendon Vale and Rokeby in Tasmania. These suburbs, on the outskirts of Hobart contain a high percentage of social homes, had a history of low service provision and a lack of opportunity for residents.

Alongside the provision of tenancy and property management, MAH embarked on an integrated program of community development. What has emerged is a vibrant and renewed community, taking action and making tangible improvements.

Safety concerns both within and outside of the home were raised by the community. It was acknowledged that improving community safety is a long-term process that requires strong leadership, effective collaboration and support from community, government and business sectors. In June 2014, a number of local community partners agreed to work under a *collective impact framework* and *One Community Together* was created. These programs work towards creating a welcoming community, ensuring the physical environment supports safety, developing activities that create positive social and

community environments, and workshops and training that meets the needs of the community members.

Case study

Emily is a 20 year old from Clarendon Vale, Tasmania and she is currently pursuing a university degree to become a teacher and is working part time as a disability support worker. Emily is the first person in her family in generations to go to university. Emily is an active member of the community and engages with Clarendon Vale Primary School, PCYC and Clarence Plains Child and Family Centre.

She feels that there are some positive initiatives that bring the local community together and provide an opportunity for people in her community to socialise, including outdoor active-play areas, a community garden and community events like the 'Clean Our Community' day.

Emily recently received the 'One Community Together Young Leader' award for her contributions to the community. She plans to continue to work with the young people in her community and recognises that her life experiences can demonstrate to other young people how they can overcome systemic barriers.

Where should the focus of youth programs lie?

Youth services should provide holistic wraparound supports that respond to young people's individual needs and circumstances and take a youth focussed approach. Young people need access to a broad range of services that include both universal programs and targeted approaches that respond to the needs of the most vulnerable young people including those experiencing homelessness, disengaged from education and employment, experiencing mental illness, in out of home care and in contact with the juvenile justice system.

Both early intervention and crisis responses are required. It is also important to ensure that the services take into account and have capacity to support the young person, their family and carers, as well as improve their communities. Services should also be integrated across different sectors as well as between different tiers of the government.

Young people themselves should be an integral part of the strategy design process and a broad strategy of this nature should also be properly resourced to meet the desired outcomes. It is hoped that the examples of successful programs operated by Mission Australia in WA and across the nation as well as the rich data from our *Youth Survey* set out above will provide valuable insights for the strategy development process and we would be happy to discuss any of this further and provide any information required.