



**FINAL REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH CONNECTIONS –
SPECIALISED SERVICES PROGRAM**

On behalf of the Australian Government

Department Of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

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Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The context

The Youth Connections – Specialised Services program (YC-SS) is an aspect of the national Youth Connections (YC) initiative that has been implemented only in South Australia. It has been developed through close consultation between the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS).

The YC-SS program is placed in a complex policy and operational environment that involves the wider structure of the YC initiative and the South Australian youth-related agency and service provider interfaces at strategic and field levels. In particular, YC-SS operates from an educational agency base in an area primarily the responsibility of the State-based juvenile justice services.

The program

The YC-SS program is designed to facilitate holistic case management support for young people at imminent risk of, engaged in or transitioning from connection with juvenile justice. It is also charged with supporting capacity development among agencies that carry responsibilities on behalf of these young people. While the South Australian Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCIS) provides a form of case management to implement court requirements, complementary YC-SS case management focuses on establishing and maintaining connection with a learning or employment pathway. Through the YC-SS approach, holistic development needs are assessed and addressed in support of setting and attaining life goals as opposed to complying with court requirements.

The Evaluation

The Evaluation of YC-SS was commissioned by DEEWR to provide analysis of the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the YC-SS program. In addition, the Evaluation was asked to consider the key principles of the program that would be essential if other jurisdictions were to consider addressing similar issues.

Appropriateness

In terms of appropriateness, there is a clear need for additional specific provision for the targeted group. Such provision is over and above that which is available through either State or nationally provided general program resources. The targeted group faces conditions so complex that the support for them needs to be personal, tailored, close and coordinated. Only with these features, will support offer any prospect of connection to education or employment and a constructive life in society.

While the issues of the young people cannot be addressed through YC-SS alone, a program such as YC-SS is appropriate as part of the suite of effort to guide these young people along a more positive life pathway. In that regard, the program is appropriately located and placed within other resources and programs for these young people. The personalised relationships developed through YC-SS are an essential factor that enables the support and resources available through other agencies to be harnessed.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness within the YC-SS program derives from the holistic case management approach, skillfully

applied especially at entry to and during incarceration. The consortium partners demonstrate a high level of very specific skills that are essential for connection and success. Effectiveness is enhanced by the approach to administration and coordination, leveraged from within existing structures. Effectiveness is also enhanced through a coherence of views across the providers about the values underpinning the approach to case management.

Efficiency

Efficiency is achieved through placement of the YC-SS program into existing administrative structures, programs and resources. Implementation is especially strengthened by placement within what is an efficient administrative structure supporting learning programs for young people associated with the South Australian juvenile justice program. Efficiency is enhanced by the structural connections among program elements, with case management strongly supported by targeted capacity development, both in terms of interagency operation and local provision.

Further, efficiency is enhanced by the alignment of YC-SS with other programs and structures in education and youth justice. This especially involves the DECS Youth Education Centre operation within the training centres, the broader YC program, the DECS Innovative Community Action networks (ICAN) and the DCSI case management to address court requirements.

Opportunities

While the Evaluation found that appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency can be demonstrated in the YC-SS program, there are opportunities where the value for money obtained from program outcomes could be enhanced.

The evidence suggests opportunities to strengthen case management provision by building-in a more intensive provision immediately following release. In this period, there is a 'window of opportunity' to more effectively connect each young person making the transition from incarceration. Reallocation of current YC-SS resources could help to support this additional provision, especially those resources used for activity focused reporting and for broadly strategic information sessions. Under current arrangements and despite their initial intentions, the evidence indicates that too great a proportion of the young people released from incarceration soon revert to the circumstances that formerly placed them into contact with juvenile justice.

The evidence suggests that a more intensive case management structure, explicitly focused within the short 'window of opportunity', could provide a bridge that capitalises on the positive progress that many make during incarceration. As holistic case management has been an essential component of YC-SS during incarceration, it seems appropriate that this element be sustained and expanded into the short period immediately following release. In large measure, it is during the 'window of opportunity' that the greatest potential exists to affirm the worth of and advance the personalised plans, development and aspirations created during incarceration.

Equally, the evidence is compelling that it is during this period that the risks are heightened substantially of the young people not connecting with a planned learning or employment pathway. Without the sustained and structured support indicated as essential by the Evaluation evidence, it may be inevitable that the immediate barriers to a successful transition will invariably prove insurmountable.

Such an approach has potential to directly impact effectiveness, extending outcomes beyond the period of incarceration. In particular, there may be increased likelihood of securing the longer-term outcomes of connection and engagement to which the YC-SS program seeks to contribute. The

evidence suggests that the full spectrum of capacity associated with provision for these young people should be brought to bear to facilitate such an approach. This community oriented capacity building specifically around each young person may provide further value for money, especially now that the initial strategic capacity building among the various agencies has been so well achieved through the YC-SS program to date.

In this capacity building regard, there may be opportunity to negotiate through the juvenile justice system for court orders for young people to participate in the holistic case management offered by YC-SS post release. This life connection case management would have a place to complement the current DCSI case management where the focus is on ensuring compliance with court orders. Orders that relate to supporting connection to a learning or employment pathway may provide an important imprimatur for the YC-SS case managers. They would be an imprimatur to engage with the various youth connection agencies and programs so that their resources are coordinated closely around the young person, maximising connection to a learning or employment pathway. For many, only such close and coordinated support will provide any prospect of overcoming the barriers to their connection and engagement in the period immediately following release.

The capacity-building remit of the YC-SS program has been a key aspect of the work undertaken to date. There has been a focus on awareness raising within and across the key agencies and community organisations. Additionally, there has been advocacy in relation to policy affecting young people in the juvenile justice system, advocacy that has changed both policy and procedure. However, there are now opportunities for the focus of capacity-building to be shifted. The evidence suggests that this shift should be towards ensuring that structures and resources are in place around each young person as they prepare for and make the transition to community life. Such structures and resources are needed, immediately and closely to support exiting young people and address their barriers to constructive personal, social and educational connection. A key place for future capacity building in the YC-SS program is in the 'window of opportunity'.

The evidence suggests that opportunities exist to increase the effectiveness of program reporting. This could be achieved through a reporting frame that identifies the contributing outcomes that are the specific responsibility of the program. The nature of the program clients and their life circumstances often preclude broader reconnection within the timeframes of direct program influence.

Because more immediate hygiene issues are typically the priority, progress towards connection may need to be measured through smaller steps than the ultimate outcomes required of YC more broadly. For example, upon release, securing accommodation, developing a positive routine, withstanding pressure from former peers, restraint from use of alcohol or drugs and immediate participation in a constructive education pathway could well be essential shorter-term outcomes. Securing these contributing outcomes is critical as they form the base of longer-term connection and engagement.

It is possible that an efficiency dividend for the YC-SS program will arise from a reporting frame that addresses the contributing outcomes that are the *raison d'être* of the program. Such a frame, and approach, may have potential to free-up resources currently used for the reporting of what are primarily inputs and activity oriented outputs. Advocacy to courts for links to YC-SS support could also add to efficiency of government effort overall. For example, one possible effect of a court imprimatur may be to generate the focus required of all the associated providers on the needs of the young person at and immediately following release.

The following principles of milieu, support, design and operation can be extrapolated from the findings noted above. These principles are the basis of appropriate, effective and efficient operation of the YC-

SS program. Any translation of the program to other jurisdictions would need to take these principles into account.

1. The policy context accords explicit importance to addressing the needs of those at imminent risk of, during and following incarceration.
2. Advocacy highlights the imperative to address holistically the needs of young people associated with the juvenile justice system to increase the likelihood of learning continuity or access to employment as appropriate.
3. The program is placed within and complements existing structures and operations, leveraging from them to address the complex issues that impact learning continuity or access to employment for the client group as appropriate.
4. For each young person, a trusted 'through care' relationship with a case manager provides intensive support, personal development and life planning when first attached to the program, during incarceration and in the period immediately following release. The relationship optimises social, learning and economic reconnection as appropriate.
5. Initial community capacity development occurs through information dissemination and awareness raising among field agencies and organisations, including through visits to the youth training centres. The work contributes to: improved field understanding of the conditions and requirements of incarceration; the procedures for release; and, processes for ongoing community-based and personalised communication with each young person.
6. Advocacy draws attention to the potential for court orders to incorporate an explicit requirement to participate in post-release case management focussed on learning continuity, social and personal development and access to employment options, as appropriate.
7. The case management provision at release is responsible for 24/7 personalised support and the mobilisation of local agency services to address imminent issues and ensure sustained connection to learning or employment, as appropriate.
8. Community capacity is built by working with agencies and organisations to ensure they have active and grounded processes that support each young person in the transition planning process and as they exit from incarceration.
9. Administration enables a structural connection among the program elements and to associated agencies and programs, especially within juvenile justice and education.
10. Outcomes that contribute to learning continuity or employment connection for the targeted group are identified and progress against them is reported.

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SECTION 1: CONTEXT

Introduction

The Youth Connections – Specialised Services program (YC-SS) is an aspect of the national Youth Connections (YC) initiative unique to South Australia. The YC-SS program operates in a complex environment that involves the wider structure of the YC initiative and the South Australian youth-related agency and service provider interfaces at strategic and operational levels. The operation of YC-SS also involves the complex world of the relatively small number of young people who are associated with youth justice in South Australia. These various layers of complexity need to be understood so that any response by government to the issue of educational disconnection for such young people can be addressed appropriately, effectively and efficiently.

This introduction to the Evaluation Report sets out the program and agency context for the operation of YC-SS and outlines the Evaluation methodology. Without an understanding of the program and agency contexts, there is a risk that the program could be replicated within other jurisdictions on the assumption that it could work in any context. While the principles of operation and the issues of the clientele may be similar across all jurisdictions, any direct transfer of the program into another environment carries the risk that essential elements of its strategic and operational support may not exist within that context.

In Section 2, there is consideration of evidence about the life circumstances of the clientele. This Section places the issues faced by these young people, especially prior to and post incarceration, in the starkest possible relief. In the conduct of the Evaluation, the situation and issues of the young people involved in the YC-SS program and their interface with various agencies and organisations provided important reference points for analysis of the evidence.

The Report then presents, in Sections 3, 4 and 5, the key findings about the YC-SS program against questions relating to appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency. There is exploration of the possible implications of these findings, set against the context of the agencies and organisations, and the life circumstances of the young people themselves.

Section 6 presents, as a conclusion, an overview of the key implications that have emerged from the evidence. Leading from this summation, a set of key principles is presented. These are the principles which, the evidence shows, should be considered were any similar program to be planned and introduced in another jurisdiction.

The program context

The YC-SS program focuses YC resources specifically on young people who are at imminent risk of, engaged in or exiting from connection with juvenile justice.

As an extension of effort within the YC initiative within South Australia, the Australian Government is contributing \$300,000 per year to the YC-SS program over four years. The YC-SS approach has been designed to provide services to young people who are:

- at imminent risk of entering the juvenile justice system
- under orders in the juvenile justice system, or
- making the transition from the juvenile justice system to community life.

The operational link from the YC initiative in South Australia to the YC-SS program is explicit in the Program Guidelines for the State. For any young person engaging with or making the transition from the juvenile justice system, there is a requirement that providers in the YC initiative generally will

ensure support services where the circumstances and/or context, such as geographic location, would be such as to preclude or limit appropriate support through the YC-SS provider alone.

The design of YC-SS, as for YC more broadly, emphasises a holistic and personalised case management approach for each YC-SS client, with a focus on identifying and addressing the barriers to their learning or employment or employment connection. Additionally, there are two YC service components, which, within the YC-SS program, have a focus on the juvenile justice cohort. These are the development and implementation of:

- youth-focused activities and initiatives that contribute to the support for and connection of young people who are at imminent risk of entering, are in, or are exiting from the juvenile justice system
- strategies and approaches that contribute to capacity building across education providers and other relevant programs so that across the State there is maximisation of available resources to support young people who are at imminent risk of entering, are in, or are exiting from the juvenile justice system.

While incarcerated, those selected for participation in the YC-SS program receive additional support, with the aim of preparing them for release and tailoring their support at release. The YC-SS consortium is contracted to support up to 50 young people per year throughout its four-year operation.

The services provided through YC-SS focus particularly on:

- the development of an individualised re-engagement plan
- ongoing contact with the young person and appropriate referrals following exit from the juvenile justice system
- advocacy to a range of providers and services following release
- identification of support for the young person to connect with an established appropriate learning facility
- design, oversight and monitoring of a tailored learning program following release
- the engagement of the young person in appropriate outreach and re-engagement activities¹, especially through coordination with regional YC service providers.

Reporting data indicate that, as at the beginning of 2012, there had been 54 young people registered to receive YC-SS services. Of these, 30 had received specialised services and exited with a reported 'outcome'. Across the YC 'characteristics' schedule, 82 per cent of participants had previously been incarcerated, with 76 per cent having current or previous court orders. Some 71 per cent were receiving Centrelink income support. In the data, 37 per cent of participants identified as being Aboriginal.

In terms of YC-identified 'barriers', alcohol and drug abuse was a feature for 47 per cent of participants. Unstable living arrangements were identified as a barrier for 35 per cent of participants while 31 per cent were assessed as having low literacy and numeracy skills. Inadequate family support was associated with 29 per cent of participants. Some 25 per cent of YC-SS participants were suspected of or diagnosed as having mental illness issues and a similar percentage was assessed as having socialisation issues. Some 20 per cent had anger management issues. Behavioural problems and low self esteem were attributed each to 14 per cent of YC-SS participants. A similar percentage was assessed as being homeless at the time of their connection to the program.

Current data shows 28 young people participating in the program. Eighteen of these have enrolment extensions from 2011. Eleven are in the community, some with community service orders and some without. The others are in the youth training centres.

Six of the current participants have an association with schools and have a Flexible Learning Option

¹ These are services provided by YC. In YC-SS, they are focused on the juvenile justice clientele.

(FLO) registration, potentially allowing access to school education funds upon release. Seven current participants have been released since entry to the program and are continuing their connection to YC-SS through ongoing case management or handover to YC providers for support.

Average stay in the program is about eight months. However, the data show that this varies considerably. For example, variation can arise from how long the young person is incarcerated or whether the contact is through outreach facilities, including the Flexicentre. Contact continues where possible past release into the community, although it ceases if the young person is further incarcerated in adult institutions.

In addition to direct case management, 39 outreach and re-engagement activities were conducted to connect with severely disconnected young people, linking with 321 people. As a further aspect of the YC-SS program, 41 activities were conducted to strengthen services in the regions.

The agency context

The YC-SS program is conducted under the auspices of the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (DECD), with links to the juvenile justice system that is part of the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI). The provider for the YC-SS program is the Youth Education Centre (YEC) in consortium with the Services to Youth Council (SYC), a not-for-profit community service agency. The YEC is classed as a government school for organisational and staffing purposes.

The YEC program is based in three campuses in juvenile justice institutions. The three campuses are:

- the school within the Magill Youth Training Centre
- the school within the Cavan Youth Training Centre
- the Outreach/Flexicentre campus associated with the Magill campus.²

While YC-SS operates from an education base, it is placed within a juvenile justice environment and makes links to agencies and organisations that provide youth services.

For the 2010/2011 financial year, the average FTE daily enrolment in the youth training centres was 54, with 1005 admissions. In 2011, a total of 511 young people participated in the Outreach programs, with average FTE daily enrolment of 24. In 2011, the proportion of young females participating in the Campus programs was 9 per cent.

At both the Magill and Cavan campuses, the YEC provides an emphasis in the curriculum on improving students' literacy and numeracy skills, responding in particular to generally low levels of functionality. The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) is delivered locally. Within the curriculum, the Introductory Vocational Educational Certificate 1 is delivered in all campuses. A music program is a feature of the curriculum.

Also, specialist personnel from community organisations, including the SYC, deliver short courses, covering areas such as victim awareness, anger management and 'boys to men'. Such programs can be accredited via a SACE locally developed program in Health. Pastoral care is a prominent feature of the curriculum, including a strong focus on the development of students' positive self-esteem and positive self-reliance.

The YEC Outreach program includes: general courses at the Flexicentre campus; short vocational courses; a four days per week vocational education program for at-risk students from regional schools; a work experience program involving employer mentors; and, a transition program for Indigenous young people showing high risk substance abuse. Under the auspices of the YEC, each student has an personalised learning plan.

² It is anticipated that the Magill campus will close in 2012 and that a new facility will be opened at Cavan.

All YC-SS clientele participate in the full range of YEC provisions while at the youth training centres or attending the Flexicentre or outreach programs. In addition, they are provided with life skills coaching and support through personalised case management to support an ongoing connection with an educational pathway, including following release. This includes liaison with and support for schools and community organisations, especially YC contractors, prior to and during incarceration and upon their release. Case management for those released to regional centres is handed over to those organisations. For those released within the Adelaide metropolitan area, SYC provides ongoing case management to support re-connection with a learning pathway.

The case management structure and approach of YC-SS needs to be understood in terms of agency context. The DCSI provides statutory case management for all young people in incarceration or who are under court orders. This case management is explicitly concerned with ensuring that the young person complies with the conditions of their court order. Participation in DCSI case management is mandated. In a complementary role, YC-SS case management, which is voluntary, focuses on holistic support to connect the young person with a learning or employment pathway. Being statutory, DCSI case management requirements take precedence and YC-SS support needs to be tailored around youth justice service orders.

Implementation of YC in South Australia, and therefore YC-SS in particular, is aligned with the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) program, which extends to all regions of the State, with the exception of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. The ICAN operation is a DECD initiative funded through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships to address the needs of young people disconnecting from education. Within the ICAN program, there is opportunity for enrolled students who are disconnecting or disconnected to access Flexible Learning Option (FLO) funding.

By agreement, to avoid duplication, YC addresses the needs of the more severely disconnected young people. YC-SS specialises in support of those severely disconnected young people who have come into formal contact with the juvenile justice system. As young people in the YC-SS program exit incarceration, there is opportunity to access ICAN support and FLO funding. Where these young people are not enrolled in a school, 'exceptional circumstances' funding can be accessed to enable their connection to a learning situation³.

As a partner in the consortium to deliver YC-SS, SYC shares responsibility with YEC staff for case management provision extending from the Youth Training Centres and into the Adelaide metropolitan area. The YEC and SYC case managers make use of a wide range of connections across government agencies and local organisations to provide the spectrum of tailored support YC-SS clientele require to engage with learning.

Beyond the metropolitan area, support for YC-SS clientele is expected to come through the program's connection to YC providers, relationships with agencies and community service organisations, and through liaison with local schools and training providers. This support may involve the young person having a relationship with a case manager from a community service organisation, although in regional situations such support is not necessarily guaranteed.

³ A small amount of local ICAN case management funding is available to local ICAN schools to support young people who are not FLO-enrolled, but who are showing significant signs of disengagement. Students may be eligible if they are:

- already enrolled as a Tier 1 enrolment in any DECD school and their circumstances warrant some additional support
- not enrolled in a DECD school, but who are eligible to be FLO-enrolled in the following term of the current year, including some young people exiting juvenile justice.

This resource applies to case management only and may not be used for learning programs. It may provide adequate support to re-engage the student, or manage/avert a crisis, or provide enough support for the transition of a student into secondary/senior secondary school, or any life transition which could impact upon positive engagement.

Methodology

The Evaluation methodology comprised the following components:

- a literature review
- a desktop analysis of key program documents
- analysis of program statistical data
- stakeholder interviews
- provider discussions and site visits.

Data from these components were triangulated through analysis as a basis for the Evaluation reporting.

In the conduct of the fieldwork, several discussions were held with the key YEC staff to fully understand the design and implementation of the YC-SS program and to begin to gather data on the achievements of the program, any impacting issues and outcomes. The YEC staff and those from SYC provided a contact list of those people most closely associated with the YC-SS operations.

Within the metropolitan area, strategic interviews were held with key DECD executives. Field interviews included all SYC case managers, DCSI case managers in two regions, DECD interagency behaviour support personnel, personnel from associated community service organisations such as Red Cross, teachers at the YEC, and personnel from a residential facility for Indigenous young people that acts as a halfway house for re-entry to the community following release. The fieldwork also extended to a sample of regional areas most involved with YC-SS to date. During the regional visits, interviews were held with an ICAN manager, a police officer, school principals and staff, a flexible learning centre leader, and community agency leaders, including YC providers.

Conclusion

The evidence indicates that there needs to be a high level of engagement between stakeholders to successfully support this high needs group.

The YC-SS program is placed within a complex policy and operational environment. It has been established in a policy environment that is largely that of juvenile justice rather than education. It operates in an area where the needs of the clientele are high and there are multiple players. Delineating the role of YC-SS from that of others can prove challenging when the need is one for flexibility across spectrums of client issues and contact stages.

While the number of YC-SS clientele is small, the resource demands to attend to the needs of each client are extensive. These demands necessitate structures that require high levels of engagement between those associated with the program and the clientele. They are demands that occur within the youth training centres, the linked programs, and community-based support arrangements. In understanding the environment, account needs to be taken of the demands that arise from the interface across agencies and organisations that is intrinsic in the implementation of the YC-SS program.

Overlaying this complex environment are issues associated with the life circumstances of the young people participating in the YC-SS program. The picture of these circumstances that emerged over the course of the Evaluation is one that provides a key framework for understanding the evidence base. Albeit limited, some insight into the complexity of this picture, with its multiple overlays, is provided in the following section of the Report.

SECTION 2: LIFE CIRCUMSTANCES

The pictures

The life circumstances of YC-SS clients are more complex and challenging than those of any other YC group. However, many have aspirations for a more constructive life. To achieve these aspirations, they need support additional to general provision for disconnecting young people.

As engagement with stakeholders occurred over the course of the Evaluation, a series of pictures emerged that provided some insight into the life circumstances of the young people participating in the YC-SS program. These pictures reveal insights that very substantially informed analysis of the wider Evaluation evidence.

Many contributors to the Evaluation illustrated their understandings about the program by sharing insights into the lives of these young people. As they did so, an increasingly complex set of pictures emerged. These pictures were of often deeply troubled lives. Many illuminated the alienation of the young people from mainstream society. All revealed a struggle to come to terms with the norms of behaviour that are necessary in order to be connected to a constructive and socially inclusive life.

Beyond such pictures, there is another layer that challenges widely held perceptions about young people caught up in the juvenile justice system. The pictures in this layer show young people with aspirations to be successful in the wider mainstream society. They aspire to learn because they know that learning provides a pathway to a job and a steady income. When they experience it, they come to value security, safety, and personal hygiene. They want to be well fed and well clothed, often aspiring to the more successful lives of those, such as their school peers, whose company they no longer keep. They know that it is better to be 'clean' than to be abusing substances. They know that it is better to have a relationship with a trusted adult than to succumb to high-risk peer pressure and dysfunctional family situations.

Intensive personalised support is needed to address dependence and lack of competency. This requires delivery by skilled staff to build personal capacity from a relatively dysfunctional and dependent personal base.

What many of these young people do not have is the wherewithal to turn these aspirations and connections into reality. The barriers around them are too high and too confronting for them alone to overcome. For many, the only hope to break the cycle of personal dysfunction and begin a more positive life direction will come through intensive, skilled and personalised support, maintained over time.

For others, even where such support is available, little prospect will be seen of any future other than survival for its own sake. Their risk of the crime treadmill continuing into adulthood will be high, as will the cost to society. Best-case outcomes for these young people may include no escalation of the seriousness of their crimes. In the case of some YC-SS clientele, even this may be a preferable outcome to some of the prospects they would otherwise face.

The barriers

For the great majority of people in mainstream Australian society, there is no frame of reference to comprehend the barriers around some of the young people who are clients of the YC-SS program. While no life journey is smooth or without its troubles, for many of these young people that journey is nothing other than a sustained litany of issues seemingly designed to marginalise, alienate and diminish them. Many simply do not develop the skills and understandings necessary to carry out a

positive daily routine.

Over time, these barriers can become so overwhelming that they lead inexorably to young people who have lost control of their lives, are highly frustrated and socially excluded. Their frustration may become manifested in a range of emotional states including anger, passivity, withdrawal and insecurity. The young people can also exhibit symptoms of depression and hopelessness, often appearing to those working with them as bordering on mental illness. Their behaviours can appear irrational, spontaneous and confronting, although other behaviours can be highly planned and deliberate. Such behaviours have carried these young people almost inexorably towards and into the juvenile justice system.

Poor decision-making is the common element among YC-SS clients. While support to improve decision-making can be provided, the best outcome for some may be no further escalation of their level of criminal behaviour.

Whatever the individual manifestation, the recurring common element appears to be the lack of capacity of these young people to make sound decisions that will start the processes of overcoming the barriers. While positive intentions may be genuine, for too many of these young people, sustaining them proves impossible.

That said, over the course of the Evaluation, a number of contributors observed that, while there are readily identifiable themes in the life circumstances of many of the young people connected to YC-SS, not all faced similar barriers and not all to the same extent. Nor did seemingly similar barriers necessarily have the same manifestations or consequences at the individual level. Beyond this consideration, some young people in the YC-SS program may come from seemingly respectable and functional family and community circumstances. Nevertheless, their entry into the juvenile justice system may have arisen from one highly consequential poor decision.

Their family

For many YC-SS clients, the most prominent picture in their lives is the high level of family dysfunctionality. For them, 'family' can be an inter-generational picture of unemployment, low schooling outcomes, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness and criminal connection. For young people from such families, the picture will probably include poor nutrition and hygiene since birth. The picture may include emotional rejection and direct abuse. Over time, such rejection and abuse may lead to the young person disconnecting almost completely from the family and even living peripatetically.

Because family life takes place on the periphery of mainstream society, there is no learning of or exposure to the caché of social skills that are required to participate constructively and inclusively in the mainstream. Consequently, many of these young people can present as being physically, psychologically and emotionally damaged.

The absence of emotional bonding can reinforce this vulnerability by making them look to others outside the family as the means by which they can be recognised and feel valued. Their social milieu can be a high-risk one, where wider societal norms guiding behaviour are subsumed and lost. They can be highly vulnerable to exploitation by others. This was illustrated during the Evaluation by reference to exploitation of some of these young people by adults, for criminal purposes and for personal gratification.

The effects of family dysfunctionality have the potential to reach into all aspects of the lives of these young people. Moreover, these effects are cumulative. By the early teenage years, or even younger, the cumulative effects of family dysfunctionality can make them highly at risk of the criminal behaviours that will lead them into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Their schooling

Family dysfunctionality can directly impact school attendance and the opportunities to acquire even basic literacy and numeracy skills. Many of these young people come to school with little they can draw on to help them make the connections that, for the wider cohort, are one of life's rites of passage. From initial schooling, there is often a pattern of social, emotional and cognitive disconnection, leading to behavioural disconnection as schooling progresses. In particular, failure to develop adequate literacy skills drives an ever-deepening gulf between the young person and school.

Many of these young people have little wider circumstance that would encourage their continued connection with schooling, precluding them from seeing value in obtaining an education. For example, older family members may be hostile about school because of their own experiences and may even discourage regular attendance. Because they have few, if any, social skills to live in the world of the school, or to make the cognitive connections that schooling requires, behaviour can manifest itself as explicitly confronting and non-conforming. Other family members may even actively join in and reinforce this. At times, the situation becomes so organisationally overwhelming that the school disconnects from the young person.

Such a picture, however, needs also to be seen against the Evaluation evidence that points to the highly positive experiences of many while they are in the youth training centres or enrolled at the Flexicentre. While personal freedom has been lost for some, the picture that emerges is one of many young people responding positively to a safe and secure environment and to a structured and tailored approach to learning where their success appears possible. The positive circumstances of life in the youth training centre and the structured, often practical, learning made available suggest to them that they can continue to learn upon their release. The learning achieved in the youth training centre can be seen by them as the first step to a constructive and socially inclusive life. At least during incarceration and immediately upon release, they can see continuing this learning as being important to overcoming the barriers that to date have precluded any such intention being achieved.

Their health

The pictures that emerge from the Evaluation evidence are of many YC-SS clients having health related issues that are not comparably replicated in the wider community. In general, there appears to be only limited self-cognizance of the importance of being well in order to cope with life's challenges. Many are caught in a bind. They are not well and lack the skills or resilience to make the decisions that would improve their health. Over time, this becomes compounding.

During the course of the Evaluation, pictures were painted of young people who had never experienced regular meals, and of those in circumstances who would steal food to satisfy their hunger. Diets, by-and-large, mean that nutrition is poor, with excessive fat and sugar consumption.

Issues related to substance abuse figure prominently in the evidence gathered over the course of the Evaluation. Substance abuse includes tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs. It often appears to be linked to family dysfunctionality, either directly or indirectly. It is also associated with circumstances where peer pressure becomes greatest or where they are 'captured' by predatory adults, including within their family or cultural group. Substance abuse often impacts their health and impairs their ability to participate successfully in the broader society. The habits and consequences associated with substance abuse exacerbate the likelihood of engaging in criminal activity.

Again, although freedom is lost, their time in the youth training centre is one where they experience regular and healthy meals, live in a hygienic environment, and are removed from the culture of substance abuse. Observations were made during the Evaluation that the improvement in individual health during this time can be quite marked, contributing to an overall sense of wellbeing and a more

positive outlook.

Their communities

As for other aspects of the circumstances of the young people in the YC-SS program, the picture of the communities with which they are associated is a complex one. Some YC-SS clients are relative isolates, with nothing that apparently ties them to any community apart from generally staying in the same geographic location. Evidence was provided about young people associated with the program who 'live rough', stealing food and other necessities as required and as opportunity affords. Many can be extremely difficult for case managers to locate and to maintain contact.

Beyond this small number of young people, a greater proportion is identified as belonging to peer networks that constitute their primary community. These networks are formed on the basis of similar personal circumstances and cultures, and views about life choices. Many connections within this community are developed while incarcerated. Within these networks, there can be quite a strong repository of knowledge about how to 'work the system' in order to survive. Each network can have a hierarchy of leaders, especially built around stronger personalities and reputations. These 'leaders' can influence substantially the decisions that individual network members make about engagement with support, participation in learning programs, relationships with authority, use of substances and commission of crime.

In the metropolitan area, such network communities can be either relatively tight-knit or quite extensive. They can also be fluid, both in terms of membership and in terms of where they are located or have influence. In the regional areas, the networks tend to be somewhat more defined although evidence was provided about the sometimes-considerable movement of young people between the regional areas and the Adelaide metropolitan area.

As another layer to the pictures that provide insight into the communities of these young people, evidence was provided about how some attempt to avoid being caught up in the networks, especially after their release from a youth training centre. They can be reluctant to go back to a geographic location where they are known or may quickly disappear from that location to another if problems arise for them.

These communities, as well as the often-dysfunctional family situations that are involved, can bring very considerable pressure to bear on the young people to conform to and engage in the life of the milieu. Where this occurs, it is highly likely that their behaviours will lead to further contact with the juvenile justice system.

The critical window

One of the most compelling insights provided through the evidence is the concept of the critical 'window'. This is the window that exists between the time when the young person is released and that point at which they are likely to succumb to the pressures to revert to their former life and behaviours. During the Evaluation, this 'window' was described as being only a few days. Indeed, a number of participants in the Evaluation were emphatic that it was less than 48 hours. However, other evidence indicates the need for a longer 'halfway' period, especially for those young people who do not have the basic skills to live independently.

During this 'window', there is an apparent tension. It is a tension, on the one hand between the positives the young person takes from their incarceration, including their improved health and their aspirations around lifestyle and education, and on the other the pressing realities of existence in a known world. These pressing realities often involve such things as the need for shelter, food, clothing, transport and a daily routine. They can also involve seeking out the family, social and community

environment with which they are most familiar and where they can feel they 'belong'. By way of illustration, observations were made about the typical 'partying' that often takes place upon release, with all its inherent risks and consequences.

These realities are often so overwhelming that the intentions held at release can quickly dissipate, as can the level of personal wellbeing. The opportunity for continuity from the youth training centre, including from its education program, can very quickly be lost as the young person is re-immersed in the circumstances that in so many ways contributed to their incarceration. The 'window' is one of 'opportunity', but it is for a very short time. As the 'window of opportunity' closes, so the barriers to connection with learning or employment loom larger. The issues around recidivism become quickly apparent.

Conclusion

While addressing the life issues of the YC-SS clientele is well beyond the scope and capacity of YC-SS, the program is in a position to make a unique contribution, especially during and immediately after incarceration.

The life circumstances of the young people in the YC-SS program throw into sharp relief the challenges associated with the intents of the program. As mentioned previously, while the numbers are small, the range and complexity of these challenges are not. The life circumstances of these young people provide a compelling insight into the need for a program such as YC-SS. Well beyond the scope and capacity of YC, the needs of these young people during and immediately after incarceration require specific and skilled attention if the continuity of their learning or access to employment is to be an outcome. Any evaluation of YC-SS in terms of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency needs to be highly informed by this particular context.

SECTION 3: APPROPRIATENESS

The previous Section on the circumstances of the YC-SS clientele indicated a clear rationale for intensive support for the relatively small number of young people who have been selected to participate in YC-SS. For many, their life circumstances, taken together, act to form seemingly insurmountable barriers precluding their early and sustained connection with learning or employment or employment as they re-enter society.

It is appropriate there be a specifically designed and funded program to address issues of learning continuity or access to employment for young people at imminent risk of incarceration, during incarceration and shortly after their release.

While the number of such young people is small by comparison to the cohort, their needs are great. Moreover, the long-term cost to society by not supporting them in addressing those needs is potentially much greater than the short-term cost of support at the earliest possible age. There is clearly a need for additional specific provision for the targeted group, making a program like YC-SS appropriate.

A program such as YC-SS alone is not designed to deal with the full gamut of barriers to learning or employment or employment, nor the broad range of barriers faced upon exit from incarceration. However, the evidence indicates strongly that it is appropriate that there be a specifically designed and funded program to address issues of learning continuity or access to employment for young people at imminent risk of incarceration, during incarceration and shortly after their release.

There is a clear gap in provision in these areas, a gap that means many of the currently available justice, education and social services cannot be fully effective because the young people do not have the skills, knowledge, dispositions and capacities to make and sustain connections with them. It is into this gap that the YC-SS program has been placed. The evidence indicates that in contributing to effort to address this gap, the appropriateness of the YC-SS program is clearly demonstrated.

Moreover, the placement of YC-SS within relevant structures already established by education, juvenile justice and social inclusion structures and programs allows the program to leverage from the efforts of those efforts to secure its place. This placement allows for the necessary contacts both with the young people and with providers around them, facilitating efficiency and effectiveness in synergy with other efforts. The complementary nature of the program adds further to its appropriateness.

Program structure

“To what extent is the Youth Connections – Specialised Services (YC-SS) Program appropriately structured to support participating young people and meet the gamut of their needs?”

The evidence indicates that many elements within the structure of YC-SS are appropriate to contribute to the reduction of barriers to learning or employment. The program has provided an important structural capacity for the education centres within Magill, Cavan and the Flexicentre to more fully meet the complex range of needs associated with the young people’s learning while incarcerated or at imminent risk of incarceration.

Many elements within the structure of YC-SS are appropriate to contribute to the reduction of barriers to learning or employment. The holistic case management approach that complements the work of other agencies is especially important.

Further, the structure has created some important elements that provide potential for learning continuity or access to employment for the young people following release. Within the structure, for those selected to participate in YC-SS, these elements are especially those that involve:

- a strengthened relationship with the DCSI case managers
- provision of complementary case management oriented to educational continuity
- an approach to goal identification and exit planning for each young person
- liaison with community service organisation case managers and/or other support personnel
- strengthened liaison with government agencies and community service organisations, especially in relation to information sharing and complementarity of processes.

Structurally, the program tends to have greatest success prior to and during incarceration. There is scope to build on this success, especially immediately following release.

The evidence indicates that the program is appropriately placed to contribute to the learning continuity or access to employment of young people in the juvenile justice system. This includes the elements of the program covering the involvement of young people at imminent risk of, during and exiting incarceration. The structural elements prior to and during incarceration are proving to be highly appropriate. However, analysis of the evidence suggests that, to improve appropriateness, consideration could be given to the reallocation of program resources to include a structure that provides more intensive and appropriate support immediately following release.

Design gaps

“To what extent are there gaps in the design of the YC-SS Program?”

The current structure of the program focuses on and allocates resources to administration and reporting, case management prior to, during and after incarceration, liaison at exit, and capacity building in communities.

However, the Evaluation evidence indicates that within the structure of the program there is an identifiable gap that is consequential when considered against the remit of YC-SS. It is the gap associated with the suite of issues highlighted in the evidence about the period of time immediately following release from incarceration.

From the evidence, the structure does not enable the appropriate allocation of resources to address the complex transition issues that impact educational continuity in the days immediately following release. This gap in the structure of the program means that it cannot fully and appropriately address its core intents.

Further development

“In what ways could the appropriateness of the YC-SS Program be strengthened?”

The findings cited above show that the case management provision through YC-SS within the youth training centres is structurally appropriate. However, the structure could be strengthened by explicitly incorporating a role to ensure maximum liaison between each young person and the key people who will be involved in their personalised exit plan once they are released.

Continuation of the intensive and personalised holistic case management for a short time beyond release could improve program outcomes.

The evidence indicates that where close liaison has occurred with the young person while incarcerated and a personal relationship of trust and facilitation continues from incarceration to the period immediately following release, exit outcomes in the initial transition period have been strengthened.

This is not a matter of transference of support responsibility. Rather it is a matter of ensuring that the program structure enables the young people to develop, during incarceration, a relationship of trust with a person who will be available locally once they are released and who can be relied upon for advice and support 24/7, especially in the 'window of opportunity' immediately following release.

Evidence gathered over the course of the Evaluation suggests that, to strengthen program appropriateness, there is a need for explicit responsibility to be exercised for close liaison with and support for each young person during the 'window of opportunity' to ensure that initial intents are sustained. This includes work prior to and during the 'window of opportunity' that connects the young person to relevant programs and services offered by agencies and community service organisations.

The Evaluation evidence indicates that the 'relationship' concept should be an important underpinning of effort to optimise reconnection. There are not necessarily any statutory obligations following release that would underpin continuity of relationship between the young person and the YC-SS program. In this regard, there may be scope for advocacy so that conditions involving engagement with a YC-SS case manager are included within court orders.

Further, the program structure incorporates a remit around capacity building. The very operation of this aspect has highlighted issues that cannot be addressed appropriately through a program of the scope and scale of YC-SS. The Evaluation evidence indicates that the design of the program structure has not recognised sufficiently the complexity of issues that arise around capacity building. The evidence indicates that capacity building at the strategic level and throughout the State is very largely beyond the scope and capacity of the program. While much has been achieved in initial awareness raising, the resource demands on the program personnel involved are not sustainable.

That said, improved capacity building grounded in the initial stages of the journey from incarceration is a highly appropriate and necessary aspect of the program for success. It is this interpretation of the capacity building element within the YC-SS program that has the greatest potential to achieve the continuity sought within the program intent.

This capacity building needs to be practical and tailored, enabling development and continuity of the key personal relationships needed with and around the young person across the stages of incarceration, exit and initial engagement with learning or employment. Through such grounded capacity building around each young person at exit, a program of the scale of YC-SS can have strategic impact through local demonstration.

Individual needs

"To what extent is the YC-SS Program appropriate in the ways it works at the level of the individual young person?"

The evidence indicates that, within the structure of the YC-SS program, the focus on case management to support young people at imminent risk of, during and following incarceration is appropriate. Further, the evidence shows that the role of the Flexicentre in contributing to meeting the needs of the YC-SS young people is being appropriately and well supported by the liaison that takes place. The relationship development role inherent in this work is proving a highly appropriate one within the overall remit of the YC-SS program.

During the Evaluation, case managers observed that they were finding the capacity provided by the structure was enabling them to engage more fully with clients to address the barriers impacting educational continuity. They highlighted the potential within the structure for account to be taken of the wider critical issues that were precluding connection to and engagement with learning or employment.

However, at the individual level, evidence was cited pointing to the reality that many young people following release found continuity in learning or connection with employment among their most pressing challenges. Case managers, especially in the metropolitan area, pointed to a structural

disconnect between them and education providers and educational support personnel. Reference especially was made to difficulties in securing the resources necessary to connect the young person to an educational situation.

Observations were made about barriers in accessing money for enrolment and course fees, course equipment and for accommodation and other services. Barriers can also be imposed on the young person when they seek entry to a course past the enrolment cut-off date. Barriers are also imposed because the young person may be unable to meet the entry requirements around literacy and numeracy, even though their practical skill level in the course area may be quite high.

In the context of the lives of these young people, these barriers are major and highly consequential. Unless there is structural capacity to deal with them immediately, it is highly likely that the young person will further disconnect. Where this happens, the resources required to reengage with them may prove inadequate and they can be effectively 'lost'. These structural disconnections represent a gap in a program where other elements within the program structure can be shown to be well covered.

For school oriented young people, this gap may best be addressed through better contact with education agencies and schools, especially around FLO funding. For those wishing to connect with vocational education, other avenues of funding, preparation and support may require better liaison with providers, programs and agencies including the South Australian Department for Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST).

In the regional areas, evidence points to the importance of a key person taking the lead, on behalf of the young person, in the coordination of agencies and community service organisations, including schools. Where this occurs, the approach is strongly focused on the circumstances and needs of each individual, taking whatever actions necessary to ensure their connection and engagement, especially in the often very challenging first few days after their release.

However, where such coordination is not apparent, critically in the short time following re-entry to the community, the response can appear largely *ad hoc*. The evidence indicates that the young person often quickly 'disappears' into the peripheral world of dysfunction, unhealthy behaviour and subsequent criminality. Any opportunities that may have existed from the point of release can dissipate extremely quickly. Reconnection with the YC-SS case manager or the YC provider may only occur after the realities of life have become simply overwhelming or a further crime has been committed, leading to re-incarceration. In these instances, it cannot be said that the needs of the young person are well met through the YC-SS program.

Moreover, this issue can be exacerbated in regional areas where there is a lack of agency and service organisation presence, where the skill levels in the local personnel may not be sufficient, and where suitable education programs are not available. While there may be debate about attribution for such gaps, the reality is that they impact the appropriateness of the program structure.

Indigenous young people

"To what extent is the delivery of the YC-SS Program appropriately addressing the needs of Indigenous young people?"

The proportion of Indigenous young people in the YC-SS program is in the order of 37 per cent, yet only 5 per cent of the State's population identify as being Aboriginal. While YC-SS personalised case management is provided to these young people, they can also access other services, such as temporary accommodation, cultural visits and mentoring. This linkage is provided on a case-by-case basis. So also can other funding be readily integrated into the program, including for educational and training programs.

However, the particular issue that impacts many Indigenous young people who access the program concerns those whose community is based in a regional or rural area where services may be limited and not readily available. Although the impact on Indigenous young people is a marked one, it is not an issue of Indigeneity as such, but one that concerns the program, and its clientele, overall. In that sense, issues of appropriateness are not ones for Indigenous people alone, but for the structure of the program overall.

Structural considerations

“What structural considerations would need to be addressed if the YC-SS program were to be transferred or scaled?”

The evidence indicates that, to a considerable extent, the structure of the program is most appropriate for transference. That said, there are particular structural issues around the ‘window of opportunity’ element and in relation to operational capacity building that could be more appropriately addressed in program design. These structural considerations would be likely to apply in any transference of the program to other jurisdictions or if the program were scaled up.

In terms of the ‘window of opportunity’, the days immediately following release, there is an identified need to specifically and sufficiently target program resources to support each young person with personalised 24/7 provision of localised case management services. Services need to be on call and provided proactively to ensure that the young person remains ‘on track’ once the structured support of incarceration is removed.

Without being tied to court orders, such services can only be accessed voluntarily. Access to them is likely to depend to a significant extent on the quality of the relationship that the young person has developed during incarceration. Accordingly, the development of such a relationship during incarceration is a structural issue that needs to be considered in any possible transference. Moreover, there is scope for the juvenile justice case manager to advocate for such services to be included in court orders. This would further strengthen the links among the agencies and embed a formal place for YC-SS type case management upon exit.

SECTION 4: EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness depends substantially on key operational relationships that have been built up through design, positioning and structure of the YC-SS program.

The Evaluation was asked to gather and consider evidence about the effectiveness of the YC-SS program. Essentially, the evidence falls into the two principal elements of the program. The first element comprises the work undertaken in relation to addressing issues of learning continuity or access to employment for the young people. The second element is the work in relation to capacity building across agencies and community service organisations to support that learning continuity or access to employment if appropriate.

Across both elements, the evidence indicates clearly that effectiveness depends substantially on the development and maintenance of key operational relationships. From the evidence, the program is enabling effective work to be undertaken that strengthens the relationships between the young people and participating case managers. This includes case management and liaison work undertaken in the Flexicentre, the youth training centres and in the community following release. It also includes work undertaken to build relationships with and across a range of agencies and service providers who are placed to contribute to better connection, engagement and transition outcomes for YC-SS clients.

Where these relationships are in place, the evidence suggests that effective work is being undertaken and that there is potential for further progress for individual young people in a planned learning pathway. However, where particular factors have acted to limit the development of necessary relationships, effectiveness in the program is proving difficult to attain. The impacting factors include those that relate to geographic location, stresses within case management, issues in coordination and communication, and available skill capacity. Effectiveness is also impacted by the structural limitations that apply around the 'window of opportunity' explored in the previous Section of this report.

In considering the effectiveness of the YC-SS program, full account needs to be taken of the extent to which achievement of the YC-SS program intents is predicated on the orientation, structure and capacity of wider effort beyond education to address the needs of the clientele. Moreover, full account needs to be taken of the invariably complex personal circumstances within individual lives that can act to diminish effectiveness within a delineated program such as YC-SS.

Long term and broader effectiveness of reintegration of disengaged young people into the community, education and work is beyond the scope of YC-SS. Rather, effectiveness in the program must inevitably be predicated on the extent to which hygiene related barriers to educational connection are addressed before, during and after incarceration. Any considerations about the effectiveness of the YC-SS program must be seen against its delimitations and its capacity to harness sufficient support to address these barriers.

Principal intents

“To what extent is the YC-SS Program effective in meeting its principal intents around connection, engagement and transition?”

For those young people involved in YC-SS, the program is strengthening the opportunities they have to be connected to learning. From the evidence, the work in the Flexicentre and in the youth training centres is supporting many young people to make a connection to learning and to feel that learning is worthwhile in their lives. A key factor that enables this connection to be made is the relationship that is developed between the young person and the trusted YC-SS case manager working with them, supporting teachers who are delivering learning programs.

One of the discernible outcomes of the program, as indicated previously, relates to many young people feeling confident that they can develop the skills and resilience to engage with a learning pathway. The program demonstrates that this engagement involves a balance between, on the one hand, close personalised support and planning and, on the other, the progressive implementation of strategies that encourage and build self-reliance and sound decision-making.

As considered elsewhere in this Report, incarceration provides a safe and structured environment where, in effect, the barriers for a young person connecting to and engaging with learning can be explicitly addressed through the support that is provided. This wider support is associated with learning that is tailored, structured and explicit. With support in place that addresses these barriers, the approach to learning provides opportunity for success as a basis for progress. Building on this learning connection, through the YC-SS program, with close additional support the young people have the opportunity to establish aspirations, set goals and develop plans for their further engagement once they leave.

It must be recognised, however, that the quality and proximity of support will always remain key factors in their sustained engagement. On release, they transit immediately from a highly structured, predictable and support-oriented environment to one that can be chaotic, unpredictable and where, within current structures, support is often not immediately to hand.

Where, during incarceration, decisions were essentially made for them, suddenly they are required to make their own decisions. And yet, it is their very inability to make sound decisions for a constructive life that in large measure may account for their incarceration in the first place. Even though continuing case management may be on offer, a range of services may be available and educational programs may be suitable, the decisions the young people make immediately upon release may mean that reconnection with learning does not occur. That this failure to achieve initial intentions can be the case serves to affirm how critical is the proximity of planned, high quality and tailored support in the 'window of opportunity' upon release, preferably mandated through a court order.

The quality and proximity of support are key factors in sustained engagement of YC-SS clientele.

Evidence at the level of the individual young person indicates that where such support is in place, the approaches and practices can more often be considered effective in supporting transition. The challenge, however, lies in how best to implement YC-SS so that structurally there is maximum capacity to enable this support for all young people as they make the transition from incarceration to the community. Because of the limited scope and resourcing of the YC-SS program, there is likely to be value in considering how more of the resources of YC and other agencies could be garnered and coordinated to strengthen provision of grounded, at-hand support in the period immediately following release from incarceration.

Broader contribution

“To what extent is the YC-SS Program effective in contributing to broader effort and achievement in the Youth Connections initiatives as a whole and across the spectrum of agencies working in the area?”

Through the capacity development role associated with the YC-SS program, considerable work has been done to enhance communication and align actions among agencies on behalf of the YC-SS clientele. This enhancement has occurred at strategic and operational levels. Consultatively generated recommendations have been made for agencies to consider around their procedures related to young people in the juvenile justice system, including their support following return to community life.

Where contact has been made, awareness has been raised about issues in information sharing and

communication among agencies. At the strategic level, changes in regulations mean that information can be shared among agencies and organisations if it serves the wellbeing of the young person. There has been broadening imprimatur for work across agencies to coordinate efforts on behalf of the young people. This has included the development of complementary roles focussed on supporting court orders and enhancing the chances of re-engagement.

At the operational level, the timeliness of communication among agencies, including schools and government departments, about incarceration and release has improved, although more is to be done. Within particular geographic areas, communication operates at a personal level around the transitioning needs of the individual young person, allowing the local agencies and schools to prepare for their re-entry.

An aspect of this personal liaison has been the facilitation of visits by regionally based community organisation and school personnel to the youth training centres, enabling relationships of trust to be established. In the Evaluation evidence base, this aspect of the work, sponsored and arranged by YC-SS, was strongly endorsed as it facilitates the individual young person having a personal connection with their local support base. In the evidence, the importance of this connection to their later transition appears as critical. This is especially the case in the 'window of opportunity'.

Capacity building in each local area occurs best when agencies form appropriate support around each young person. While they can prepare for the role, agency capacity develops by directly engaging in the work.

However, the Evaluation evidence indicates that there is potential to strengthen the continuity of provision from YC-SS to YC and to other field agencies supporting youth connection, engagement and transition. While SYC case managers provide support for re-entry and reconnection to learning within parts of the metropolitan area, in the regions in general a comparable level of support is not as apparent.

Moreover, the ongoing connection of these young people beyond the responsibility of YC-SS is one that warrants greater priority than appears to be the case from the evidence. Because of their particular life circumstances, many of the young people who have been in the juvenile justice system and have returned to their communities are perceived as 'too hard' and largely beyond the resource capacity of YC, schools and other agencies. And yet, effective transition to school and community based learning programs will be vital in implementing the personalised learning plans that have been initiated under YC-SS. Carriage of this transition is beyond the remit of YC-SS but may be enhanced through more proactive and intensive support immediately upon release, coupled with YC, other agency and school support coordinated through YC-SS.

Key approaches and practices

“What are the key approaches and practices that underpin success within the YC-SS Program?”

From the Evaluation evidence, the following are the key approaches and practices that contribute to effectiveness within the YC-SS program.

- There is a highly effective relationship between the YC-SS consortium partners. It is based especially on a shared view about the purposes and values of the program and its potential to increase the life opportunities of extremely vulnerable young people.
- Those working within YC-SS are highly responsive to their knowledge of the individual circumstances of each young person. They ensure that provision at the individual level is tailored so that case management, liaison and support will maximise opportunities for learning continuity or access to employment.

- YC-SS has benefitted greatly from the very high level of field credibility of those overseeing implementation and of the case managers who are working within it. The commitment and skills that these people have brought to YC-SS are proving vital in identifying key issues and generating the approaches and practices through which they can be addressed.
- In an area of operation across various sites and interfaces, the implementation of YC-SS has been undertaken with a very significant level of consistency. The leadership of the program has brought to bear a set of understandings about what YC-SS can add to the already existing and formalised infrastructure. There is a congruence of views that underpins a team approach. Consequently, the practices employed across the program emerge from shared views about best practice to strengthen opportunities for educational continuity.
- The YC-SS program has leveraged from a well-established network of agencies and service organisations working in the area of school education, youth connections and juvenile justice. Leadership of the program brings to it a detailed knowledge of the existing infrastructure that has capacity to address the needs of highly disconnected and disengaged young people associated with the juvenile justice system. Strong personal contacts across agencies and organisations, at both strategic and operational levels, have been used to influence policy and procedures.
- The implementation of YC-SS has benefitted from the strong social inclusion commitment of the South Australian Government. It has also benefitted from the imprimatur given by the Government to cross-agency work and the development of aligned agency procedures as an approach to strengthening outcomes for young people at risk of disconnection and disengagement.
- The effectiveness of YC-SS has benefitted from the flexibility within the DEEWR YC initiative to tailor a program that addresses an identified gap in provision for the particular clientele within South Australia. The program takes due cognizance of the structure and operation around disconnecting young people that the State education system has implemented. Ongoing responsiveness by DEEWR to adjust the program requirements in consultation with the providers and the DECD has further added to the effectiveness of the program.
- As alluded to elsewhere in this Report, the implementation of YC-SS has been characterised by relationships with clientele that are highly trusting and mutually respectful. That this trust and mutual respect are attached to learning is proving highly significant in the context of the program. Such trust and respect have not necessarily been present or prominent in the previous learning and life experiences of YC-SS clients.
- Implementation of YC-SS has been cognizant of the opportunities to link with complementary programs and access particular funding sources to support the learning continuity or access to employment of young people as they move from the YC-SS program. This cognizance is especially around fit with the DECD ICAN initiative, access to Flexible Learning Options (FLO) funding and access to 'exceptional circumstances' funding.
- The YC-SS program has been characterised by recognition of achieving fit between the work of case managers within it and the role of the DCSI case managers in addressing mandated requirements. While the respective briefs are different and while one is mandated and the other voluntary, at best practice level the approaches are highly complementary and constructive.

Limiting factors

“What factors within the Program most limit success?”

From the Evaluation evidence, the following are identified as the primary factors most limiting success within the YC-SS program.

- While YC-SS can demonstrate elements of success in particular aspects, both at the level of the individual and in terms of capacity building, broader success in the program is limited by the fact that the remit accorded it involves issues that are well beyond its scale and scope. As a consequence, the Evaluation evidence suggests that the program is ‘stretched’ across its constituent elements to a point where success in any one of them is potentially prejudiced.
- Further, the evidence suggests that in relation to the capacity building element, the challenges are so substantial that capacity building runs the risk of being equated only with information sharing and discussion forums in selected locations. This involves a potential risk that the grounded work required for capacity building around the ‘window of opportunity’ may not be accorded the priority it warrants.
- The Evaluation evidence shows that success within the program is impacted by orientation and capacity across a range of agencies and community service organisations. Substantially these agencies and organisations are front-line providers and typically exhibit the levels of stress associated with high demand social service environments. Consequently the operational stresses and daily distractions in these agencies and organisations can negatively impact YC-SS outcomes irrespective of shared liaison and coordination planning.

Supporting Indigenous young people

“What does the evidence demonstrate about the effectiveness of the Program in supporting Indigenous young people and strengthening their connection, engagement and transition?”

Participants in the Evaluation presented evidence about outcomes for Indigenous young people in the context of the life circumstances of the cohort as a whole. The point was made that it is these circumstances, applicable to all YC-SS clients, which need to provide the frame of reference for effort. The barriers confronting Indigenous young people who are in the YC-SS program are primarily about life circumstance. These extend to the wider cohort.

That said, the evidence indicates that the effectiveness of the YC-SS program is enhanced through its links to available programs and funding sources that support Indigenous young people more broadly. However, in terms of outcomes, there is only limited evidence, and mainly through anecdote, that can trace the contribution of YC-SS to reengagement of Indigenous young people.

Although not possible to attribute success to YC-SS alone, its connections with other agencies and support, including through ‘halfway’ type accommodation and guidance, indicate some positive outcomes. In particular, the connections allow intensive short-term support upon exit from incarceration.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this support addresses immediate and pressing hygiene issues, continues an element of structured guidance and gives time to make connection with learning. Although recidivism is common among those who take part in the halfway services, intentionally their crimes do not tend to escalate. Many crimes are associated with food, transport and other immediate needs. That, in the main, they do not escalate tends to demonstrate the efficacy of intensive halfway support, a finding that has considerable import for the program overall.

Data usage

“To what extent is the YC-SS Program effectively using data to support students and improve individual

and wider initiative outcomes?”

The YC-SS program involves a high level of attention to meeting data entry requirements and to ensuring that the critical activities implemented by case managers are accounted for. The supervision and quality control arrangements around data entry are well organised and thorough. The data provide a basis for those working within the program to understand activity and output and the range of support provided at the individual level. Young people are tracked into, within and exiting from the program to ensure that the processes of YC-SS support are in place.

That said, demonstration of success within the YC-SS program has been limited by failure to incorporate an outcomes based framework against which program outcomes could be measured and reported. While the YC program has an outcomes matrix in its reporting structure, at the level of disengagement of YC-SS clients, the indicators are about activity, rather than outcome. Consequently there is limited scope within the overall YC initiative to have a line-of-sight that includes the highly disconnected and vulnerable young people in the YC-SS program. Moreover, because the reporting is against activities, there is limited scope to roll-up data to form a picture of outcomes across the program.

For YC-SS participants, reporting about the extent to which life barriers have been removed is at far too high an order. Addressing these barriers is well beyond the scope and capacity of the YC-SS program. Reporting about outcomes such as the extent to which: sound personal relationships have been established and maintained during and after incarceration; immediate hygiene issues have been resolved; short-term aspirations have been established and pursued; potentially negative connections have been avoided in the time immediately following release; and, the young person remains healthy and ‘clean’ for a period following release would serve better to focus and monitor what the program can achieve.

Analysis of the Evaluation evidence reveals a need for an outcomes matrix that, in its structure and organisation, will capture the elements and continuity that are intrinsic to YC-SS. From the evidence, such a matrix could have value in the program by covering aspects such as personal wellbeing, relationships, and connection to and engagement with learning. A similar matrix is used within the ICAN initiative. Its incorporation into YC-SS, even in a modified form, could potentially strengthen linkages with ICAN and YC, adding an outcomes dimension for highly disconnected and disengaged young people that would better serve the YC-SS program.

SECTION 5: EFFICIENCY

The efficiency of YC-SS stems from its placement among agencies, providing access to already existing administrative structures. Efficiency also stems from the use of highly skilled and committed personnel.

When considering the Evaluation evidence in relation to the efficiency of YC-SS, account needs to be taken of the quite limited scale of the program and its resource base. The impacts achieved through the program have arisen in no small measure through the astute application of available resources. This especially includes allocating resources to maximise synergy with effort in the area by other agencies and community service organisations.

Efficiency has also arisen by embedding implementation of the program within existing infrastructure, wherever possible. The YC-SS program has also successfully extended the capacity of key operational staff across the consortium through staffing supplementation.

The Evaluation evidence highlights the very substantial level of commitment among those involved in the implementation of YC-SS. People working in the program are characterised by highly efficient work practices through which their specialised skills and networks are brought to bear in highly responsive ways. At the individual level, there is compelling evidence of instances where a relatively small staffing allocation has resulted in people undertaking work that well exceeds what that allocation would be expected to purchase.

The evidence shows efficiency has arisen through the DEEWR approach to accord maximum flexibility to those leading and implementing the program. Those involved in the program have confidence to make local decisions about resource allocations to address identified needs.

The YC-SS program has harnessed considerable goodwill across agencies. This is shown particularly in instances where DECD officers, principals and those working in the ICAN initiative consciously look for opportunities to support the goals of YC-SS. It is also demonstrated in instances where complementary and efficient relationships have developed between YC-SS staff and DCSI staff.

Key efficiency considerations

“To what extent does the YC-SS Program model provide the optimum approach to achieving its principal intents?”

“To what extent are there ways in which aspects of the YC-SS Program could be changed or developed so that available resources could be better applied?”

The evidence shows that, within the delineated scale and scope of YC-SS, the program operates efficiently. In terms of administration, leverage, liaison and cross agency engagement, the program is efficient. There is a quality control approach to program administrative requirements and reporting that ensures timely information is gathered and used. The efficiencies arising from high quality program administration make a discernible contribution to program effectiveness.

However, whether the program provides the optimum approach needs to be informed by the extent to which it effectively achieves its highly challenging remit. Orientation within YC-SS appears largely to be towards addressing identified gaps in meeting the needs of the clientele. These gaps include the need for case management, transition planning, advocacy and liaison with agencies upon release.

There are compelling reasons to address these gaps. However, as the evidence shows, despite addressing those gaps, many young people continue to be effectively ‘lost’ upon release and experience little or no learning continuity or access to employment. Notwithstanding the valued

efforts that occur within YC-SS to address the gaps in provision for exiting young people in particular, participants in the Evaluation identified the need for an approach that would more effectively bridge the transition from incarceration to the community for a greater proportion of the cohort. While such an approach may imply resource reallocation, the evidence indicates that value for money would be improved through the effectiveness dividend provided by such an approach.

Specifically, analysis of the evidence suggests that an approach is required to ensure the ‘window of opportunity’ becomes precisely what the expression says. There is a need for consideration to be given to the approach needed within the community during this immediate transition period. This could involve exploration of the explicit structure required around the exiting young people and how the guidance, support and resources they need in the immediate term could be best guaranteed as they confront the realities of community life. Through such an approach, there is likely to be increased capacity to leverage from the tangible benefits that have arisen for the young person during incarceration.

It is this planned and structured leveraging during the period immediately following release from incarceration that has particular potential to support learning continuity by helping to address the immediate life issues confronting the young person. Such a transition structure, appropriately resourced, would provide the basis for relevant local agencies, service organisations and networks to engage with the young person to secure and support the continuity of their learning or access to employment.

Conceived in these terms, the approach would have potential to focus the capacity development role of YC-SS on the grounded work required beyond initial awareness raising and discussion. Such an approach has the potential to provide true value for money, enabling YC-SS to more fully and efficiently address its challenging remit.

Program and resource alignments

“To what extent is the YC-SS Program well aligned with other investments, initiatives and strategies in the State? What opportunities exist for such alignment to be improved?”

What is the YC-SS Program enabling to be achieved that otherwise would be beyond the capacity of available resources? “

The evidence indicates that considerable effort has been expended to maximise alignment between YC-SS and other investments, initiatives and strategies in South Australia that address the needs of highly vulnerable young people. Through this alignment and complementarity, value is being added to already existing initiatives and strategies.

By way of example, the evidence indicates complementary alignment between YC-SS and DCSI case management, which addresses court-mandated requirements. The case management provided through YC-SS adds value and capacity to the DCSI work by addressing life skills and planning issues and by supporting incarcerated young people to form goals and build plans for continued links with learning. Further, this preparatory work during incarceration, and the efforts on behalf of young people as they make the transition into the community, supports the work of DCSI case managers as they strive to ensure court orders are addressed.

In addition, YC-SS is enabling YEC to strengthen educational work in the youth training centres and in the Flexicentre by linking this work to the life plans and goals of the clientele. YC-SS is facilitating an increased focus on addressing the personal barriers likely to impact connection with learning while incarcerated. Connections during incarceration represent a highly efficient use of resources to target young people who, at particular times, display personal behaviours that are disconnecting them from learning.

As a consortium partner, SYC is playing an efficient complementary role to YEC through its community-based case management work in the Adelaide metropolitan area. This is oriented especially to continuing relationships with young people who have been released from a youth training centre and who reconnect with the case manager only when life pressures become too great. While SYC case managers, on the basis of YC-SS funding, have a focus on facilitating connection to a learning program or access to employment, this focus is integrated into wider work connecting the young person to services in areas such as health and housing. They also support clients to meet court-mandated requirements.

The linkages from YC-SS to ICAN and to YC in the regions are varied. From the evidence, there are instances where linkages are made, facilitating liaison and information sharing. By way of illustration, evidence was gathered about how the ICAN initiative in a region was linked to YC-SS through the planning it did to ensure that, for each transitioning young person, arrangements were in place for enrolment into a learning program and for available funding such as FLO to be accessed expeditiously. This linkage was complemented by alignment with YC work addressing wider life needs, including accommodation, clothing, food and transport. Through YC, there were also opportunities for the young person to connect with providers offering, for example, specialised health services, training and Indigenous support.

In other instances, however, the evidence indicates that a vacuum exists such that a young person returning to a particular location may make a transition that is 'under the radar'. As a consequence, overall the linkages in these circumstances present as somewhat less efficient than those existing in other places. This is largely the case because these linkages appear, from the evidence, as largely dependant on personal contacts and networks rather than any notion of a consistent structure or role that provides planned, intensive, explicit and close coverage for each young person following their release.

To address the alignment issues highlighted in the Evaluation evidence, it is now timely to consider the approaches and structures that would most efficiently address the needs of the young people immediately following release and especially during the hours and days that constitute the 'window of opportunity'. Irrespective of the location to which the young person initially returns, a structure is required that will guarantee the agency and service organisation alignments necessary to maximise the likelihood of learning continuity through a successful transition.

The efficiency dividend would be improved if young people returning to regional centres were provided with continued intensive post release support from skilled case managers who are well known to them.

Consideration should be given to a structure and process for each young person that is planned and initiated prior to release, and is implemented immediately at release. What occurs needs to be transportable, so that the support directly accompanies the young person wherever their destination over the period of the 'window of opportunity'. During this time, a focus of the support should be especially on activating the connections and alignments that will provide the young person with the best opportunity for a successful transition and learning continuity or access to employment. Complementing this focus and built on a trusting relationship with the young person, the support should also ensure that there are positive circumstances around them in basic life needs such as accommodation, food, personal hygiene, clothing and suitable diversionary interests.

Wherever possible, the approach to meeting these needs in the 'window of opportunity' should contribute to precluding recurrence of the behaviours that led to the initial criminal activity. This may include consciously creating the circumstances that would limit opportunity to consort with others who may act, even deliberately, to bring a successful transition undone.

In the evidence base, there is commentary that such support could be more effective when accompanying court orders mandated conditions designed to give the young person the best chance to make a positive reconnection with society after release. Were YC-SS to develop an approach and structure around the ‘window of opportunity’ as described above, cognizance of this by courts may well lead to recognition and incorporation into court orders, even when prior service orders have been fully discharged. By developing an effective approach to and structure for the immediate period associated with the ‘window of opportunity’, applied for each individual young person, the overall efficiency of YC-SS would be enhanced.

Data management

“To what extent could the efficiency of data collection, analysis and usage in the YC-SS Program be improved?”

The efficiency of YC-SS could be improved if outcomes more specific to the program were identified and reported against.

Data collection within YC-SS conforms to all requirements as established by the contract to provide data for the DEEWR Youth Attainment and Transitions Management Information System (YATMIS). Data collected are stored within the YEC administrative systems under password in spreadsheet and database formats, enabling analysis at participant record level as needed.

Data can be readily accessed and are provided expeditiously as required. While the database and spreadsheets are transactional, slices of data are kept over time to allow longitudinal analysis. Much of the data is kept for administrative purposes, but the data structures also provide all information necessary for required reporting.

Data collection is regular and thorough, with quality assurance procedures in place to ensure timely and accurate provision of data from case managers about all clients. Case studies about clients, their issues and their activities are collected on a cumulative basis, providing extensive qualitative data about individual progress within the program.

Within the limits of administrative and reporting requirements, the collection and provision of data related to the YC-SS program must be deemed administratively efficient. However, the evidence suggests that, in relation to the YC-SS clients, there are issues about the type of data collected.

While the required data are collected and reported efficiently in an administrative sense, the Evaluation evidence challenges the value for money of such work. In particular, efficiency needs to attach to capacity to enter, access and use data that are highly informing of program outcomes. Irrespective of efficiency in current practice, the evidence indicates that current practice it is not attached to this higher order purpose.

As a collection of data within the YC outcomes framework, YATMIS requires the entry of what are essentially activity-based data in relation to what are called Level 3 and Level 4 operations. While data are also recorded in YATMIS about progress in addressing barriers to learning, for the clientele of YC-SS the evidence indicates that these data are at too broad a level to be the responsibility of YC-SS alone. It is not possible to deduce confidently from analysis of the progress data the factors contributing to or limiting the effectiveness of YC-SS.

This lack of confidence stems from several factors. In relation to data entry around progress against the identified barriers, case managers report that they find this quite difficult. Addressing the barriers for this clientele is a long term and complex task and outcomes in terms of the barriers may only be realised well beyond involvement with YC-SS. Moreover, other factors outside the control of YC-SS impact on progress in addressing the barriers. Attribution to YC-SS can be highly problematic. As a

reaction to these issues, entry of these data occurs only annually and is seen by program staff as unreliable. There is no evidence that these data are used in any systematic way to inform implementation of the program.

Evidence gathered during the Evaluation suggests that demands related to the entry of extensive activity-based data can be inordinately time consuming. That this is the case is seen by some participants in the Evaluation as diminishing the effectiveness and efficiency of YC-SS. The observation was made that case managers should be spending less time on data entry and more time with their clients and liaising with agencies and community organisations. The priority given to the entry of detailed activity-based data is not seen as an efficient use of program funds.

Overall, there are insufficient data as a basis to provide informed understandings about the outcomes of the program. There can be little doubt that the outcomes required of YC-SS are contributing outcomes, in that their achievement contributes to longer-term outcomes beyond the scope of the program. These contributing outcomes, no matter how well they may be known through the experiences of program staff, are not identified with sufficient clarity within any data structure. Because this is the case, there is a delimited capacity to identify opportunities for the development and strengthening of the program. Moreover, without the understandings that would come from analysis of reliable outcomes data, there are limitations around understanding where program investments are required to increase effectiveness and efficiency.

The issues raised in relation to data are very substantially beyond the scope of those leading implementation of the YC-SS program. They are matters for consideration by DEEWR in relation to the design of YATMIS insofar as it enables the critical data to be gathered, entered and reported about a highly discrete cohort of young people at the most vulnerable end of the youth disconnection spectrum. The efficiency of the program could be strengthened through consideration of the data related issues highlighted by the Evaluation, including account being taken of how such consideration in turn may contribute to the effectiveness of YC-SS.

SECTION 6: IMPLICATIONS AND PRINCIPLES

Implications

The previous Sections in which the evidence from the Evaluation was considered raised a range of possible implications that can be identified in relation to YC-SS. The following discussion draws these implications together in a summative way. By so doing, there is capacity to identify from the implications the key principles that would need to be considered in the further development of YC-SS and for any possible transference into other jurisdictions.

YC-SS complements broader attempts to bridge the gap between the personal resources of the clientele and those needed to access learning or employment.

The YC-SS program demonstrates the need for specific additional provision as part of the suite of effort around young people associated with the juvenile justice system. In design, the program makes a significant contribution to address explicitly what many perceive to be a major gap in provision for these young people. The gap is about the extent to which the young people have few, if any, personal resources, especially resilience, to make and maintain connections to learning or employment. Moreover, and far exceeding what young people in the wider population experience, they are confronted by frequent transitions where the risks around learning or employment discontinuity are exacerbated. The YC-SS program complements broader attempts to bridge that gap, which for many of these young people is more akin to a chasm.

The effectiveness of effort within the program derives very substantially from the quality of case management work. Those working in the program are highly skilled in supporting deeply vulnerable and often very damaged young people. The effectiveness of case management work has been enhanced by a professional approach to implementation and coordination, strongly leveraged from within existing structures and programs. There is a coherence of view about the values underpinning, and the practices in, this form of case management that will give each client the best chance to continue their learning or to access employment as appropriate.

The implementation of YC-SS has been strengthened as a consequence of its placement within an especially efficient existing administrative structure. The administration provides the structural connection among the YC-SS program elements and also from YC-SS to aligned programs and structures, especially within juvenile justice and education. Without this efficient administrative base and its seamless integration, it would be difficult to envisage YC-SS having its current reach and success. The esteem in which the program is held and the credibility of its work are enhanced by the efficiency and quality of program administration.

The program has demonstrated the importance of it being placed in a context where policy recognises the needs of young people whose life circumstances act to marginalise them and place them at risk of social and educational disconnection. This policy context means that the needs of young people in the juvenile justice system are a focus of government effort at strategic and operational levels. That this is the case is evidenced in the initiative taken by DEWR and DECD to establish YC-SS within the YC framework. It is also evidenced by the extent to which alignment has occurred between DCSI and YC-SS.

From within YC-SS, there has been advocacy to develop across agencies the consistency and complementarity required to address the particular needs of young people associated with the juvenile justice system. This advocacy has highlighted the imperative to address holistically the needs of these young people rather than through segmented programs delivered by agencies and community

service organisations. It is this advocacy that has contributed to instances of agency and organisation alignment with YC-SS.

The establishment of YC-SS has been accompanied by a strategy of awareness raising and facilitation of discussion forums where agency and community service organisation representatives have explored how better to meet the needs of young people associated with the juvenile justice system. This includes the re-integration of young people exiting the youth training centres. In locations where it has occurred to date, this strategy has laid a base of shared understanding.

Building on the work of YC-SS to date, it is now timely to add a focus on localised efforts associated with each young person transitioning from incarceration.

Building from this work, it is now timely that effort to address the capacity building remit of the YC-SS be focussed on working with agencies and organisations to develop active and grounded processes that will support each young person as they exit from incarceration. This approach would have potential to more effectively connect YC-SS to YC in the work required to support young people on return to their communities following release.

Through YC brokerage, proactive effort should guarantee that each young person, immediately following release, would be engaged with the personalised, coordinated resources and expertise necessary for appropriate social and educational reconnection. This guarantee should apply irrespective of the location to which the young person returns.

Within this guarantee, there is especially explicit work required to address issues associated with the 'window of opportunity'. While there would be a need to reallocate resources among both the program and agencies, YC-SS is well placed to be the vehicle through which every young person develops a close case management relationship during incarceration that will be continued for a short time irrespective of where they go upon release. This would mean resourcing a suitably skilled person, including where necessary from a regional location, to visit the incarcerated young person on sufficient occasions to establish a relationship that they will value on release. It would mean resourcing this case manager to be with the young person at the time of release, or when there is the prospect of release. It would mean resourcing this person to accompany the young person 24/7 throughout the first days of their release.

During this critical time, the case manager would need to have sufficient imprimatur and resources to make the on-the-ground decisions and connections that would enable the young person to overcome the initial barriers to appropriate social connection and to maintain learning continuity or access to employment or access to employment. Were this relationship to be a condition of a court order upon release, it is probable that capacity to achieve the reconnection and continuity would be strengthened.

By incorporating a refocussed capacity building dimension structured explicitly around young people as they return to their community, YC-SS would be better placed to fulfil its remit to strengthen the learning continuity or access to employment or access to employment of young people associated with the juvenile justice system. Such a refocussing would have potential to increase the on-the-ground alignment between agencies and community service organisations. It would have potential to join-up and optimise the value of available resources. Moreover, it would contribute to building the unique expertise required to address needs that are highly complex and challenging.

Such a refocussed capacity building dimension would further clarify the role of YC-SS against its remit and allow a better identification of the outcomes that can be expected from the program. Further, the refocussing would integrate the two key aspects of the YC-SS remit, case management and capacity building. In fact, the refocussing would have potential to leverage from the case management element within YC-SS so that there is increased capacity to achieve the outcomes that will contribute to

learning continuity or access to employment or access to employment.

Principles

The following principles of milieu, support, design and operation can be extrapolated from the implications noted above. There is considerable evidence that these principles, operating together, would need to be present in relation to any program designed to achieve learning continuity or access to employment or access to employment for young people at imminent risk of entry to, during or following incarceration.

1. The policy context accords explicit importance to addressing the needs of those at imminent risk of, during and following incarceration.
2. Advocacy highlights the imperative to address holistically the needs of young people associated with the juvenile justice system to increase the likelihood of learning continuity or access to employment as appropriate.
3. The program is placed within and complements existing structures and operations, leveraging from them to address the complex issues that impact learning continuity or access to employment for the client group as appropriate.
4. For each young person, a trusted 'through care' relationship with a case manager provides intensive support, personal development and life planning when first attached to the program, during incarceration and in the period immediately following release. The relationship optimises social, learning and economic reconnection as appropriate.
5. Initial community capacity development occurs through information dissemination and awareness raising among field agencies and organisations, including through visits to the youth training centres. The work contributes to: improved field understanding of the conditions and requirements of incarceration; the procedures for release; and, processes for ongoing community-based and personalised communication with each young person.
6. Advocacy draws attention to the potential for court orders to incorporate an explicit requirement to participate in post-release case management focussed on learning continuity, social and personal development and access to employment options, as appropriate.
7. The case management provision at release is responsible for 24/7 personalised support and the mobilisation of local agency services to address imminent issues and ensure sustained connection to learning or employment, as appropriate.
8. Community capacity is built by working with agencies and organisations to ensure they have active and grounded processes that support each young person in the transition planning process and as they exit from incarceration.
9. Administration enables a structural connection among the program elements and to associated agencies and programs, especially within juvenile justice and education.
10. Outcomes that contribute to learning continuity or employment connection for the targeted group are identified and progress against them is reported.