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Evaluation of the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service, After Care and Supervised Community Accommodation initiatives

Final Report

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Report for:

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Queensland Government

SPRC
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Table of Contents

Abbreviations

ABS   Australian Bureau of Statistics

CALD   Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (background)

DCCSDS   Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

NGO   Non-Government Organisation

NPAH   National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

SAAP   Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

SCA   Supervised Community Accommodation

SPRC   Social Policy Research Centre

SRS   Service Record System

TIL   Transition to Independent Living (unit)

YHARS   Youth Housing and Reintegration Service

Tables and figures

Executive summary

Project background

In December 2008, the Australian Government white paper, *The Road Home*, set ambitious targets to halve homelessness by 2020. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) Queensland was allocated $284.6 million to expand existing services and to establish new initiatives.

The Road Home recognised that housing shortages represent only one of the factors that result in people sleeping rough, and called for initiatives to address the "structural drivers" of homelessness (p. 24). While the NPAH channelled significant funds into core outputs such as *A place to call home*, which increases the stock of transitional accommodation available to those who are homeless or at risk, *The Road Home* also identified the need for initiatives:

- to prevent "exits into homelessness" from statutory and custodial care (p. 27)
- to assist young people to remain connected with their families (p. 30)

These objectives underpin the program logic of Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA), Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) and After Care, which stand among almost thirty initiatives set out in the Queensland NPAH implementation plan.

Evaluation framework

In 2012 the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (hereafter referred to as the Department) commissioned the Social Policy Research Centre to conduct an evaluation of the three initiatives. The evaluation commenced in May 2012, and involved a literature review, analysis of policy and program documentation, structured interviews with a client sample (n = 47), interviews and focus groups with service staff (n = 24) and other stakeholders (n = 23), and analysis of quantitative data on program operation and client outcomes for the period from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013. This report focuses on the effectiveness, appropriateness, efficiency (including costs) and longer term sustainability of the three initiatives.

Supervised Community Accommodation

SCA targets young males aged 16 to 18 years as they transition from the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. The initiative operates out of a four-bedroom house in an inner-city suburb in Townsville. SCA participants benefit from stable, safe accommodation with 24-hour support, case management tailored to their needs, and up to $3,500 in brokerage to enable them to establish themselves in SCA house and improve their independent living skills. The combination of these components provides very effective support for young people, most of whom are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

During the first two and a half years of operation SCA supported 19 young people for periods of up to six months. Eleven of these young people mostly or partially achieved their case plan goals. SCA succeeded in preventing exits into homelessness in ten cases, where young people

achieved sustainable housing outcomes by reconnecting with family and relatives or moving into independent accommodation.

SCA provides young people with the opportunity to set their lives on a new course. This is underlined by recidivism analysis, which found that from a sample of 13 participants, four did not reoffend in the 12 months following their exit from the program, and for the nine who did, rates and seriousness of offending declined. Young people were most likely to reoffend in the six months following their exit from the program, underlining the need for young people to transition to support of the type offered by YHARS.

Despite being well-funded to achieve its aims – SCA reported a unit cost of $153,000 per person, excluding capital outlay – SCA operated at only 59 per cent capacity. Under-subscription stemmed from a lack of suitable referrals. SCA has implemented a broader referral process to improve subscription, and it is imperative that the success of this process be monitored. SCA also received a larger than expected proportion of referrals for clients under the age of 16 years. The need to support relatively large numbers of very young clients imposes a rethink on the service parameters under which SCA presently operates, or requires the establishment of additional services to cater for this group.

Youth Housing and Reintegration Service

YHARS targets young people aged 12 to 21 years who as they transition from care, a child safety order and/or the youth justice system. In addition, the initiatives directly combats youth homelessness by supporting young people who are sleeping rough or living in unsuitable or temporary accommodation. The initiative operates in six catchment areas across the state: Inala (a suburb in the south-west of Brisbane), Toowoomba, Hervey Bay/Maryborough, Rockhampton, Townsville and Mt Isa. YHARS participants receive holistic case management support and brokerage of up to $3,500. In addition to drawing on accommodation with family and carers and existing transitional housing, YHARS provides a very limited number of young people with a Transition to Independent Living (TIL) unit.

From 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013, YHARS supported young people through 1,135 support periods. Females slightly outnumbered males, and around one-third of young people came from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. In 850 closed support periods, 28 per cent of young people achieved all of their case plan goals, 25 per cent ticked off most, and 17 per cent partially completed their case plans. In 17 per cent of cases the young person was living with parents at the end of the support period; overall 60 per cent of young people found stable accommodation in public and private housing.

YHARS providers cited a lack of public and affordable private housing in their catchment areas as the single greatest barrier to improved case management and client outcomes. The chances of a young person setting their life on a better course are however greatly increased by the availability of suitable transitional accommodation. Qualitative and quantitative data confirm that young people housed in Transitional to Independent Living (TIL) units achieve better outcomes and are better equipped to cope with a difficult housing market, however each YHARS service was provided with only three TIL units, and a second expected source of

transitional accommodation, Kids Under Cover Youth Studios, were only rolled out in very limited numbers in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville.

YHARS currently offers young people brokerage of up to $3,500. Quantitative and qualitative data show that brokerage forms a crucial component of the YHARS support model, yet across the state YHARS providers spent less than 60 per cent of their brokerage budget, and a brokerage amount of $2,000 was on average sufficient to allow young people to achieve their goals. The data suggest that more modest per-client brokerage limits in YHARS would free up significant funds without negatively impacting on service delivery, and could be used to increase the stock of TIL units and Youth Studios. Alternatively, service providers could place more emphasis on using brokerage to achieve longer-term goals involving participation in education and training leading to credentials.

After Care

After Care targets young people aged 17 to 21 who are transitioning from the child safety system. In contrast to YHARS, the initiative is available to young people from all over the state. Young people who benefit from After Care can access up to $3,500 in brokerage and case management support if a suitable local service provider is identified. When a young person eligible for After Care lives in a YHARS catchment area, the local YHARS service may provide that case management support directly.

Although YHARS and After Care stand as separate initiatives in the Queensland NPAH implementation plan, the Department of Communities combined their implementation by contracting four of the six YHARS providers to administer After Care across the state. While this generated certain efficiencies in relation to the processing of referrals (the target groups of YHARS and After Care overlap), the combined implementation has resulted in marked inconsistency in the implementation of the initiative.

Across the state After Care achieved 84 per cent of its service level target, and spent 53 per cent of its brokerage budget. Take-up of After Care increased significantly year on year, with particular impetus provided by the recruitment of additional staff dedicated to addressing low subscription rates. Yet while After Care now appears on track to meet its service targets, services in some locations have collected no data on service performance and client outcomes.

After Care represents an attempt to extend, wherever local services allow, the YHARS service model to as many young people as possible across the state. While not intended as a purely financial transfer of brokerage funds, some YHARS providers see themselves as playing the role of a bank, and expressed concern over and frustration with insufficient holistic support services for young people leaving care generally and specifically with the quality of support provided to After Care recipients not in their direct care. As the system presently operates, there is no way to evaluate the impact of After Care on young people outside of YHARS catchment areas.

After Care does have the potential to improve service integration for young people across the state, but to do so it needs to be overseen *and evaluated* by experienced staff who can act as

an interface between Child Safety and suitable support services. YHARS staff can continue to fill this role, but it distracts from their core business of supporting young people in their catchment areas, for which there is already sufficient and in some places excessive demand. After Care attracted almost half the funding allocated to YHARS. If After Care is to make an impact commensurable with its significant resources, a clearer mission statement and implementation plan for the service needs to be developed. The service must be visible to young people who have exited care, and able to arrange holistic support for them where they need it. The service should be developed in consultation with service providers who engage with young people exiting care, and importantly with these young people themselves. It needs to specify accountability mechanisms for external service providers developed in consultation with After Care providers and young people.

Recommendations

SCA
- That the SCA catchment area match that of Townsville Youth Justice Service Centre.
- That further consideration be given to what support SCA should provide for young people under 16 years of age exiting from the youth justice system.
- That the new referral process be closely monitored to ensure efficient use of SCA house.
- That SCA increase the involvement of families in case management to encourage mutual responsibility and improve long-term client outcomes.
- That SCA continue to develop links with local training and education providers to ensure that their clients have access to these services.
- That SCA refer suitable clients to YHARS and, where possible, provide notification well in advance to facilitate smooth transitions between services.
- That left-over brokerage monies be used to support transitions from SCA house to stable, independent accommodation, as allowed by the *Guidelines for Service Provision*.
- That SCA continue to develop links with YHARS and explore options to provide on-going support to participants once they exit the program, even if they leave the Townsville area.

YHARS
- That YHARS providers regularly engage with Child Safety to improve or maintain effective working relationships that support transitions from care.
- That no referral to YHARS be declined only because the individual is too young. Service agreements should specify that the lower age limit for YHARS support is flexible. A referral for Child Safety intervention may, however, be the most appropriate response.
- That each YHARS provider consider the characteristics of clients well supported by staff and service networks, to ensure that service differentiation and specialisation do not exclude young people from other groups.
- That YHARS program objectives, service capacity and prioritisation of target groups be reviewed to ensure on-going support for young people sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness.

- That YHARS service levels in Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and Rockhampton be reviewed to ensure adequate on-going support for young people in those catchment areas, particularly for those sleeping rough, with appropriate increases in funding.
- That there be greater flexibility around timeframes for case work in contexts where there is limited housing stock.
- That best practice guidelines be developed for tracking and maintaining contact with highly mobile young people.
- That consideration be given to the employment of people with mental health qualifications to support staff to work more effectively with young people dealing with these issues.
- That guidelines be developed to help case workers and clients balance brokerage expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments, particularly education.
- That the YHARS per-client brokerage limit be reviewed. If reduced, the Department could consider using funds to acquire more TIL units or increase staffing in areas of high demand.
- That the Department increase the supply of TIL units.
- That youth studios or TIL units designated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people be set up in Mt Isa and other locations where young people from remote communities have to wait to return to country after exiting detention.
- That the Department liaise with the Queensland Department of Education and Training to increase the provision of places in Flexible Learning Programs for young people and prioritise places for young people who have been in care in these programs.
- That formal processes to support more effective partnerships between service providers and Child Safety officers be put in place.

After Care
- That reporting processes for external After Care clients be urgently reviewed.
- That best practice guidelines be developed for tracking and maintaining contact with highly mobile young people.
- That guidelines be developed to help case workers and clients balance brokerage expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments, particularly education.
- That consideration be given to creating a program or service (or making it a priority for After Care) to build more effective linkages between services that cater for young people who have exited care, especially those outside of YHARS catchment areas. The service should pay particular attention to reaching those in the 18 to 21 years age bracket who may not be in contact with, eligible for, or want on-going contact with Child Safety services (as a support service case) and who are disconnected from other appropriate services.

Data reporting and monitoring
- That a more nuanced reporting system, like the Outcomes Star, which capture holistic case management practices, be incorporated into the SRS.
- That the Department provide professional development to help service providers understand the different components of data monitoring systems in terms of key functions and purposes. Service providers should be able to identify which components of the system are used for service improvement and which capture holistic aspects of service delivery, and

how they might use data to support their own professional practices and gain recognition for these practices.
- That SRS training be more responsive to staff changes.
- That staff have regular opportunities to provide feedback on "coal face" issues to platform developers.

1 Introduction

In December 2008, the Australian Government released a white paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, setting ambitious targets to offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers and to halve homelessness by 2020. The white paper formed the backdrop for negotiations with state and territory governments, formalised in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), which provided, for an initial period ending in June 2013, $1.1 billion of funding, of which $284.6 million was allocated to Queensland to expand existing services and to establish new initiatives.

The Road Home recognised that housing shortages represent only one of the factors that result in people sleeping rough, and called for initiatives to address the "structural drivers" of homelessness (p. 24). Research identified in our literature review showed that young people are particularly at risk of homelessness in the wake of family breakdown or on leaving care or institutional settings. While the NPAH channelled significant funds into core outputs such as *A place to call home*, which increases the stock of transitional accommodation available to those who are homeless or at risk, *The Road Home* also identified the need for initiatives:

- to prevent "exits into homelessness" from statutory and custodial care (p. 27)
- to assist young people to remain connected with their families (p. 30)

These objectives underpin the program logic of Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA), Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) and After Care, which stand among almost thirty initiatives set out in the Queensland NPAH implementation plan.

The Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (hereafter referred to as the Department) commissioned the Social Policy Research Centre to conduct an evaluation of these new initiatives. The evaluation commenced in May 2012, and involved:

- a literature review (submitted in November 2012)
- analysis of policy and program documentation
- structured interviews with a client sample
- interviews and focus groups with service staff and other stakeholders
- analysis of quantitative data on program operation and client outcomes

A snapshot report, completed in September 2012, provided a summary of what we knew about the programs and their implementation, service delivery and outcomes for clients. The interim report, submitted in January 2013, built on the snapshot report with findings from the first phase of data collection undertaken in October and November 2012. Feedback from the interim report provided the focus for the second phase of data collection, completed in May, June and July 2013. This final report provides a synthesis of all findings from the various components of the evaluation process.

1.1 Overview of the initiatives

The evaluation covered three new initiatives funded under the Queensland NPAH plan:

- Initiative 11 – Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA)
- Initiative 12 – Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS)
- Initiative 14 – After Care

The NPAH implementation plan set out funding arrangements for an initial four-year period (2009/10 to 2012/13), in which SCA attracted $3.035m, YHARS $9.315m and After Care $4.000m. Together the three initiatives accounted for around six per cent of the Queensland NPAH budget.

1.1.1 Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA)

SCA targets young people aged 16 to 18 years exiting the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville.

SCA provides young people with accommodation in a house in an inner-city suburb, which is supervised around the clock. Residents benefit from intensive, holistic support (in addition to case management provided by the Youth Justice Service Centre), and can draw on brokerage funds of up to $3,500.

1.1.2 Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS)

YHARS targets young people aged 12 to 21 years who are transitioning from care, a child protection order, or youth detention. The service also supports young people who are sleeping rough or living in unstable or temporary housing arrangements. YHARS providers operate in six locations across the state: Inala (in the south-west of Brisbane), Toowoomba, Hervey Bay, Rockhampton, Townsville and Mt Isa.

YHARS provides holistic case management (and supplements case management provided by Child Safety and Youth Justice Service Centres), and allows young people to access up to $3,500 in brokerage. The service aims to help young people reconnect with their families and access accommodation in the private rental market or through the public housing register.

YHARS originally involved two transitional accommodation options. Service providers in each location manage three Transition to Independent Living (TIL) units, where young people (and young families) can stay while they search for longer-term housing. YHARS also offered some young people the opportunity to live in a Youth Studio (delivered through the Kids Under Cover initiative) – mobile units set up on the property of a consenting family member or carer – and by the end of the evaluation period eleven units had been installed and occupied in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Table 1: Overview of SCA, YHARS and After Care

	SCA	YHARS	After Care
Target age	16–18 years old	12–21 years old	17–21 years old
Target groups	– exit detention	– exit out-of-home care – exit child safety order – exit detention – sleeping rough	– exit out-of-home care – exit child safety order
Location(s)	Townsville	Six localities	State-wide
Case management	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brokerage	$3,500 per client	$3,500 per client	$3,500 per client
Accommodation	SCA house	TIL units, Youth studios	

Source: Service agreements
Notes: Eligibility for After Care was extended from 18 to 17–21 years of age following a lack of demand for the service.
YHARS providers are not expected to offer brokerage to all clients. Further details are set out in the findings chapter.

1.1.3 After Care

After Care provides support to young people aged 17 to 21 years who are transitioning from out-of-home care. In contrast to YHARS, which operates in six local and regional areas, After Care is available to young people across the state.

After Care allows young people to access case management support and $3,500 in brokerage. The initiative is administered by four YHARS providers, and the service agreements of all YHARS providers except Mt Isa require them to provide case management to a small number of After Care clients. To reflect the combined service delivery of YHARS and After Care, this report presents the findings for both initiatives in the same chapter.

1.2 The Service Record System (SRS)

The Department supplied YHARS and SCA with software to facilitate service provision and the collection of data for NPAH reporting requirements. The Service Record System (SRS) creates a record for each client that can hold data on:

- demographics
- target groups and reasons for seeking assistance
- referral pathways and outcome
- support provided, including case management, brokerage and accommodation
- case plan completion and case closure
- changes in housing, income and participation in education, training and the labour force

Stakeholders on all sites and at all levels of the Department noted issues with the SRS. Feedback from end-users is provided in each chapter of findings, while systemic issues relating to data quality and its suitability for evaluation and planning purposes are considered in the summary and conclusion.

1.3 Methodology

The project brief set out a series of evaluation questions relating to the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the initiatives. The evaluators refined these questions in consultation with the Department and through a one-day stakeholder workshop. The evaluation framework is included at the end of this chapter, and addressed point-by-point in a summary at the beginning of each chapter of findings.

The evaluation team adopted a mixed-method approach to address the questions, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The Service Record System (SRS) provided the bulk of the quantitative data used in the report. Researchers extracted data, verified by service providers, for the period from 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2013. Other sources of quantitative data are referenced throughout the report.

Researchers collected qualitative data in two phases. In the first phase, three field workers spent two to five consecutive days on each site. Interviews and other data collection were structured by a handbook provided by the Department, although researchers rephrased some of the questions with young people in mind. Field workers interviewed:

- Young people, both current and former clients of the initiatives
- SCA and YHARS staff
- Allied service providers in frequent contact with young people using the initiatives
- Public servants involved in the establishment and oversight of the initiatives

The second phase of qualitative data collection involved follow-up telephone interviews with a selection of staff members and stakeholders.

1.3.1 Interviews with young people

Researchers conducted interviews with 47 young people, during which they explored what young people experienced with the service and what impact it made on their lives.

The responsibility for finding interviewees fell to the service providers. The SPRC designed a recruitment flyer that invited young people to take part in an interview, offering a $50 voucher as an incentive. Service providers received the flyer two weeks before field work commenced, and proved very generous with their time and resources in order to assist the evaluation. They attracted the interest of young people, provided transport to and from interviews and, where necessary, brokered trust between young people and the researchers in an unobtrusive way.

Researchers obtained consent from all young people interviewed. Those aged 16 years or older could provide consent on their own behalf. Younger interviewees required consent from a parent or guardian, whom service staff provided with appropriate information and consent forms. Researchers gave young people the opportunity to (re)read the information and consent forms at the start of each interview.

Table 2: Interviews

Young people	47
SCA, YHARS and After Care staff	24
Allied service providers	11
Stakeholders	12

Most interviews took place on the site of service providers in a quiet and private atmosphere, but some young people preferred to be interviewed at home or in a neutral setting such as a local cafe. In these instances field workers gained an insight into the large areas that YHARS staff cover in their day-to-day work. Time constraints meant that researchers could only interview a limited number of young people off site, which in particular restricted the amount of qualitative data that could be collected on the experiences of After Care clients who were not case managed by a YHARS provider.

Researchers took a flexible approach to the interview process in order to accommodate young people and staff. Some interview participants cancelled scheduled interviews because they changed their mind about their involvement in the evaluation, or because they could not keep the appointment for other reasons. In one case an interview was cancelled because the young person became homeless on the very same day, and the case worker needed to find emergency accommodation.

Interviews usually involved a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the young person. Young people usually preferred not to speak in the presence of a case worker. In a couple of instances an interview involved a young person and their guardian. Researchers also facilitated focus group interviews, as some young people wanted to involve their siblings and friends. These were not always as effective as one-on-one interviews. One young person attended two interviews, one with a friend and one alone. During the joint interview, which his friend dominated, he had trouble articulating his views, but during the second interview he proved much more forthcoming and spoke freely about his emotions and his family life.

Interviews typically lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and covered a wide range of topics, including:

- the experience of being homeless or without stable accommodation
- past and present accommodation
- general satisfaction with the initiatives
- the referral process
- relationships with case workers or other support staff

Researchers also asked young people to speak about perceived changes in:

- social and family networks
- physical and mental health
- personal wellbeing

- independent living skills
- participation in education, training, employment and community involvement

Where questions touched on sensitive issues such as abuse, family breakdown or difficult transitions, interviewers ensured that young people felt able to opt out. Most young people spoke openly about their family, but some clearly avoided questions about their past. Field workers informed service providers (without breaching confidentiality) where they felt that the interview might have caused the young person distress.

Researchers recorded most interviews, but Cleveland Detention Centre did not allow this, and a small number of other interviewees also preferred to speak without being recorded. In these instances researchers relied on notes taken during the interview.

1.3.2 Interviews with staff, allied service providers and stakeholders

Researchers interviewed 24 YHARS, After Care and SCA staff, and carried out 11 interviews with representatives from allied service providers, including non-government organisations (NGOs), Centrelink and local schools (Table 2). Potential interviewees were directly contacted by the evaluation team.

Interview questions focused on the appropriateness of the initiatives with regards to:

- target groups, catchment areas and referral pathways
- methods, strategies and approaches used to implement the initiatives effectively
- costs of service delivery
- staff training and development
- partnerships with other services, and lessons learnt from this cooperation
- stakeholder perceptions of service quality
- barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the initiatives
- key areas for program improvement

The evaluation team also completed 12 stakeholder interviews involving departmental staff and higher-level service managers. All stakeholders were offered individual interviews, but most preferred to speak with their colleagues on site.

1.4 Evaluation framework

The evaluation framework sets out specific research questions in four areas: appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability and impact.

1.4.1 Appropriateness
Are the initiatives reaching and working for the right people?

- Have the initiatives been implemented as intended?
- What variations have occurred across sites?
- Who is being referred to the program and by whom?

- To what extent are the initiatives appropriate in meeting the needs of clients?
- Are the service models appropriate for their location and the local service systems?
- Are the geographic catchment areas appropriate?
- How well do YHARS and After Care fit together?
- Are the service models meeting the needs of young people from:
  – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
  – culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
  – other groups (e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender)

1.4.2 Effectiveness
How well are the initiatives working?

- How well are services operating?
- How well are services targeting young people exiting child safety and youth justice?
- How well is YHARS targeting young people who are sleeping rough?
- What are the critical success factors for engaging and working with After Care clients?
- How well is SCA targeting young people exiting youth detention?
- What are the characteristics and needs of client and how have these changed since the initiatives began?
- What types of assistance are clients receiving?
- In what ways has support changed to meet changing characteristics (e.g. ages) and needs of client groups?
- What accommodation options have been used and did these meet clients needs?
- Have effective case-management practices been implemented?
- How could case management be improved and what are the constraints?
- What have been the critical success factors in engaging and working with service providers and clients from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds?
- What is the level of demand for services?
- Is there unmet demand and how are service providers dealing with this?
- Is there under-use of available resources, and if so, why?
- What factors (facilitators and barriers) have impacted on service delivery:
  – staffing and human resources (e.g. staff qualifications, turnover and staff–client ratios)
  – available brokerage funds
  – size of service catchments and problems of distance
  – levels of support and referrals provided by mainstream and other allied services
  – access to direct accommodation options, including TIL units and Youth Studios
  – access to other, longer-term housing options
  – duration of client support
  – combining the program management of YHARS and After Care
  – location of providers and availability of resources within the local service system
  – external contexts (e.g. natural disasters, impact of the mining boom on housing costs)

– available outcome measurement tools and training

– reporting mechanisms and database

- Have the initiatives helped to deliver improvements in client outcomes?
- Have clients achieved their agreed case management goals?
- Have clients achieved sustainable housing outcomes?
- What factors are critical in obtaining and sustaining tenancies?
- Have clients maintained or improved connections to family and community?
- Have client outcomes improved in other areas? (e.g. independent living skills; physical and mental health outcomes; participation in education, training and employment, social outcomes)
- Have protective factors increased and risk factors decreased for young people exiting from juvenile justice?
- Have young people completed their Youth Justice and bail orders? Have they subsequently been remanded in custody again?
- Do services have the capacity to allow clients to make mistakes and "fail safely"?
- Do the service models promote young people's participation and inclusion in transition planning for independence?

1.4.3 Efficiency
Do the services achieve their service goals?

- Are caseloads and service targets appropriate?
- What level of support was required for young people during their transition to exit from support and post exit?
- What particular areas of program activities are under-resourced?
- Are there areas of under-spending?
- What were the average unit costs of services per client and how do these compare with those of other similar services?

1.4.4 Sustainability and impact
Can the service be continued under current resourcing arrangements? Does the service make a contribution to a better service network that improves outcomes for young people?

- What unintended outcomes were there of the initiatives?
- To what extent have the initiatives led to improvements in service integration and the co-ordination of services to meet client needs?
- How could service integration be improved?
- Have the initiatives contributed to any service system level innovations or reforms (e.g. new ways of working or service innovations both planned and unplanned)?
- What would be required to replicate successful elements of these models?
- What aspects of the initiative(s) could be improved?

Each chapter of findings begins with an overview that addresses, point by point, each of the questions in the evaluation framework.

2 Findings – Supervised Community Accommodation

Mission Australia runs Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA) in Townsville. The initiative assists young males transitioning from the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre who are at risk of homelessness. SCA House has rooms for four young people who usually stay for a period of up to six months. In addition to 24-hour support, SCA staff provide holistic case management so that the young person develops the independent living skills required to reconnect with family or find independent accommodation in the community.

2.1 Overview against the evaluation framework

2.1.1 Appropriateness

- Mission Australia *implemented the initiative as intended*. SCA participants benefit from stable, safe accommodation with 24-hour support, case management tailored to their needs, and brokerage funds to enable them to establish themselves in SCA house and improve their independent living skills.
- SCA predominantly caters for young Indigenous males. Staff *meet the needs of young males from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds* through specific case management support and in other ways, such as the practice of retaining a room for young Indigenous males who make short trips back to country to renew family and spiritual connections.
- The SCA team *involve young people in their transition to independence*, from the outset of the collaborative referral process through to case management and brokerage decisions, all done in a way to make the young person feel in control.
- SCA's initial service agreement specified an *inappropriate geographic catchment area* and referral pathways that resulted in a lack of suitable referrals. The team has defined a new referral process that relaxes the strict geographic boundaries of its catchment area and allows it to interact more effectively with other local services for young people.
- SCA received a higher than expected number of *referrals for very young males* (12 to 15 years old), raising the question of whether the initiative can provide appropriate support for these individuals.

2.1.2 Effectiveness

- SCA *successfully targeted young people exiting youth detention*, and has defined a new referral process to ensure that all young people in its target group have the opportunity to join the program.
- SCA participants benefit from 24-hour accommodation and supervision, case management tailored to their individual needs, and brokerage. The combination of these components provides *effective support for young people*, and each component enhances the effectiveness of the others (e.g. accommodation improves the effectiveness of case management, and *vice versa*).

- SCA provides a supportive environment in which young people can *learn from mistakes in a supportive environment*.
- SCA's *access to direct accommodation*, *low staff–client ratio*, *low staff turnover*, *duration of client support* (usually 6 months), *generous brokerage funds* for each client, and *linkages with YHARS*, *facilitated effective service delivery*.
- SCA supports young people in the Townsville local government area. SCA does occasionally assist young people from other parts of the state by providing short-term accommodation until they can return home.
- SCA delivered *improved client outcomes*. Eleven participants mostly or partially achieved their case plan goals.
- Ten SCA participants achieved *sustainable housing outcomes* by reconnecting with family and relatives or moving into independent accommodation.
- Four SCA participants (from a sample of 13) *did not reoffend* in the 12 months following their exit from the program. For the nine who did reoffend, the rate of offending and the severity of offences declined in comparison to pre-program levels.

2.1.3 Efficiency

- SCA received $3.035 million in funding over the first four years of the NPAH.
- SCA supported 19 young males at a *unit cost* of $153,000 per person (excluding capital outlay).
- SCA is *adequately resourced* at full capacity considering the risks of the client group.
- SCA house *remained under-subscribed*, providing only 2,289 of a possible 3,852 bed nights (59 per cent). The SCA team has implemented a new referral process to address this issue.
- SCA's usual support period of six months appears sufficient to allow young people to achieve their case management goals, so *service targets should not change* unless the initiative receives the infrastructure to accommodate more people.
- SCA brokerage *remained underspent*. The SCA team would like to see these monies made available to help clients transition from the service, and indeed the *Guidelines for Service Delivery* do allow for this.

2.1.4 Sustainability

- SCA has *improved service integration and coordination* by building links with local service providers for young people. SCA now liaises directly with Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, Child Safety Centres and YHARS as well as Youth Justice Service Centres.
- The SCA team would like to *improve links with local services* who can provide training and education opportunities for young people.
- *SCA staff reported high levels of satisfaction* and *appropriate support*.
- *Data and reporting methods should be improved* to capture the holistic aspect of SCA's support.

2.2 Service components

SCA comprises four main components – referrals, accommodation, case management, and brokerage – which come together to provide holistic support for young people. This section shows how SCA participants, with guidance from staff, draw on the different components of the initiative to suit their individual needs and achieve their goals. While the section considers each of the program components in turn, it also provides evidence to show that each program component works to strengthen the effectiveness of the others, and that each plays a role in improving client outcomes.

SCA program components are delivered by the staffing model outlined in the *Variation to the Department of Communities Service Agreement* (October 2010). SCA employs one service manager, one part-time senior case manager, six full-time and three casual support staff, and four casual mentors.

2.2.1 Referrals

The SCA team has the responsibility to assess referrals in relation to eligibility criteria and program aims in order to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the service. On the basis of this assessment SCA may choose not to accept a referral. A young person may also choose not to accept support.

Staff stressed that the referral process aims to provide the young person with information about the supports, processes and conditions of the service so that he can make an informed decision about whether or not to commit to the program. As one staff member put it:

> *Young people are positive about coming to SCA house, but there is always a lot of fear and uncertainty of the unknown. The more we can explain the process to the young person, the better it works out for everyone.*

The respectful consultative process that occurs between staff and the young person during the referral process sets the tone for the rest of the experience. This process emphasises the importance of young people being in control, explicitly making decisions to improve their wellbeing, and provides them with an experience of positive action towards desired futures that they can incorporate into their sense of self.

Table 3: Referrals by financial year

	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	Total
Referrals	7	11	15	33
Accepted	7	7	8	22
Acceptance rate	100.0	63.6	53.3	66.7

Source: SRS data
Notes: Accepted referrals in 2010–11 include one young person originally referred to Townsville YHARS. Accepted referrals in 2012–13 include one young person who had not commenced support by the end of June 2013.

SCA registered its first referral in November 2010, and by the end of June 2013 had received 33 referrals in respect of 25 individuals (Table 3). SCA accepted all referrals in 2010–11, 7 of the 8 individuals referred to its service in 2011–12, and 8 of the 13 individuals referred in 2012–13 (Table 4).

Because of the consultative nature of the referral process, non-accepted referrals should not simply be interpreted as *rejected* referrals. In 2011–12, for example, SCA recorded four non-accepted referrals in respect of three individuals:

- One 14-year-old Aboriginal male, living with both parents in a house/townhouse/flat, was referred to SCA in July 2011. On this occasion he declined support. In February 2012, the Youth Justice Service Centre referred him for a second time to SCA, at which point he joined the program. SCA closed his support period two months later, however, as he was unwilling or unable to engage with the service.
- One 15-year-old male, whose Indigenous status was not recorded, was first referred in February 2012. He was living in short-term or emergency accommodation due to a lack of other options. SCA declined his referral, citing a lack of accommodation and noting that the young person did not correspond to its target group. Three months later the young person was still living in short-term or emergency accommodation, and the Youth Justice Service Centre again referred him to SCA. What happened to the individual remains unclear, for although SCA recorded that it accepted his referral, his service record is blank.
- One 14-year-old Aboriginal male did not accept support following a referral in January 2012. The Youth Justice Service Centre also referred him to SCA in 2012–13, when his referral was declined for other reasons.

SCA reported seven declined referrals in 2012–13. In three cases SCA referred the individual to YHARS. Of the remaining four non-accepted referrals, SCA declined one because he did not correspond to its target group, one young person declined support, and the remaining two referrals were rejected for other reasons that are not clear to the evaluation team. In general program efficacy would benefit from more detailed record keeping in regard to non-accepted referrals (see section 4.2 The Service Record System).

While some individuals prefer to return to family and familiar environments rather than commit to the program, staff members indicated that young people more readily accept support following a period in detention (see 2.2.5 Case study – Max) or if they return to detention for a second or third time.

Table 4: Referred individuals by financial year

	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	Total
Referred	7	8	13	25
Accepted	7	7	8	21

Source: SRS data
Notes: Columns do not sum to totals as some individuals recorded multiple referrals.

Table 5: Referrals to SCA by age and Indigenous status

Indigenous status	Aged 13–15	Aged 16–17	Total
Aboriginal	10	12	22
Torres Strait Islander	1	1	2
Both	3		3
Neither	3	1	4
Not recorded	2		2
Total	19	14	33

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Two-thirds of the referrals to SCA involved young Aboriginal males, and more than half of all referrals were made in respect of an individual aged 13 to 15 years (Table 5). While SCA expected a large proportion of its clients to be Indigenous, SCA was not designed to cater for those younger than 15 years of age. The *Guidelines for service delivery* (p. 5) note that "the accommodation service will not specifically target 12 to 15 year olds", although "the service provider will need to manage referrals from this age group. The aim of the SCA service when working with [these] young people "*will be to provide short-term accommodation while re-connecting them with family or extended family members*." This raises the question of what services are available for these very young people, and whether the eligibility criteria and service orientation of SCA should change, or whether another distinct service needs to be set up to cater for young people under 16 years of age. Service providers believe that currently there is not enough effective support for this group.

The point at which young people come into contact with SCA has varied since the start of the initiative. The *Guidelines for service delivery* (p. 10) stipulate that all referrals to SCA should originate from the Youth Justice Service Centre in Townsville. As the program matured, Youth Justice referred young people to SCA before their period in custody came to an end. In 2012–13, SCA for the first time received referrals for individuals still in detention, whereas in previous years most of the individuals referred to the service had already left the Detention Centre and had been sleeping rough or in short-term emergency accommodation.

The *Service Agreement* (July 2010, part C, p. 5) indicates that where possible, SCA should provide initial services to young people while they are still in detention. One of the effective practices at SCA involves sharing an orientation booklet with young people prior to their release. The SCA team developed a photo booklet of life in the house to help young people understand the aims of the program and perhaps, most importantly, to imagine themselves in the service. The booklet encourages young people to accept support and helps them transition to life in the house.

It is worth noting here that Inala YHARS also developed effective practices to support young people exiting detention. Staff members regularly attend lunch in the detention centre with young people and other allied service providers. Through this informal contact YHARS staff

build up trust with young people and are aware of when they are due to be released. This allows them to explore accommodation options and put case management goals in place for the time of release. Contact with young people while in detention has resulted in smoother and more effective transitions, with fewer young people exiting detention into homelessness.

Since the release of the interim report, the SCA team has developed a new referral process. Although referrals from the Youth Justice Service Centre allowed SCA to achieve its nominal service targets, SCA house remained under-utilised. SCA is well funded, even when at full capacity, and during our first round of consultation, staff indicated that they would like to modify the eligibility criteria for the service in order to create more referral pathways and thus increase the number of referrals. SCA now allows referrals from Cleveland Detention Centre, Child Safety and YHARS in addition to usual referrals from the Youth Justice Service Centre. These changes only came into effect late in the evaluation period, however, which explains why SCA reported no referrals from sources other than Youth Justice within the evaluation period.

The broader referral pathways also address shortcomings of the original referral process. SCA staff and stakeholders identified that the SCA catchment area (specified in the *Guidelines for service delivery* in the footnote to page 4) did not match that of the Townsville Youth Justice Service Centre. As a result, not all Youth Justice clients became eligible for accommodation in SCA house. The new referral process strengthens cooperation between SCA and Townsville YHARS, improving the effectiveness and sustainability of both initiatives. Formerly, only SCA could refer clients to YHARS. The referral process now operates in both directions. SCA and YHARS teams meet fortnightly to discuss client referrals, and the YHARS Program Manager is a member of the SCA reference group, which meets every second month.

The original SCA catchment area also made no allowance for the fact that young people in custody in Cleveland Detention Centre come from all over the state. One SCA staff member explained that when a young person from, say, Mt Isa exits custody, there is typically no short-term accommodation available while he waits to return to country, and that such cases can fall through the system as SCA has no access to their records. SCA now occasionally provides accommodation for one or two nights to a young person suddenly released by court. This arrangement falls outside the service agreement, but fulfils an important need for these young people.

Overall SCA responded quickly to referrals, with the median of five days elapsing between referral and the beginning of the support, usually involving a stay in SCA house.

Key finding:
- Referrals to SCA were younger than expected, with more than half in respect of an individual outside the age bracket for which SCA was designed to cater.

Recommendations:
- That the SCA catchment area match that of Townsville Youth Justice Service Centre.
- That further consideration be given to what support SCA should provide for young people under 16 years of age exiting from the youth justice system.

2.2.2 Accommodation

SCA house represents the focus of the initiative, providing a fixed point for workers and young people. The Department provided a house located in a central Townsville suburb that can accommodate up to four single young males at a time. The SCA team remains on site 24 hours a day to support the residents and oversee the management of facilities.

In the first three years of operation SCA house was under-subscribed. SCA provided 2,289 bed nights, around 59 per cent of the 3,852 bed nights available, and the house has had two or fewer residents for around 55 per cent of the time. (Table 6)

SCA accommodates young people for up to six months, and this period of time appears on average to have been appropriate for young people to pursue their case plan goals. As would be expected, clients who stayed for longer periods in SCA house achieved more of their case plan goals. Those who mostly or partially achieved their case plan goals stayed on average for around five months, although some clients stayed for longer than seven months (Table 7). While SCA house remains under-subscribed, catering for longer than expected stays has not posed a problem, and SCA only declined one referral due to a lack of accommodation (in circumstances described on page 12). If, on the other hand, referrals to SCA were to increase, care would need to be taken to ensure that enough rooms were available to receive incoming clients without forcing those at the end of their support period to leave before they are ready.

The location of the house in a central Townsville suburb makes it easy for young people to pay visits to family and friends, often using bicycles provided by the house. SCA house, on the other hand, operates a strict no-visitors policy, and staff tell young people that "*if you want to visit someone, we'll take you there.*" Support workers noted that while some young people at first resisted the no-visitors policy, most felt that it provided them with a safe environment. The young people interviewed indicated that these externally-imposed limits allowed them to say "no" to situations that could get them into trouble, without being seen to betray the group solidarity that can be so important to them. As one young man said, "*my old friends know the set up at the house, so they don't hassle me.*"

Table 6: Nights with number of residents in SCA house

Residents	2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		Total	
	Nights	%	Nights	%	Nights	%	Nights	%
0	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	3.6	13	1.3
1	31	13.4	0	0.0	147	40.3	178	18.5
2	109	47.0	173	47.3	57	15.6	339	35.2
3	53	22.8	164	44.8	82	22.5	299	31.0
4	39	16.8	29	7.9	66	18.1	134	13.9
Total	232	100.0	366	100.0	365	100.0	963	100.0

Source: SRS data
Notes: Nights in 2010–11 counted from the first night of accommodation.

Table 7: Minimum, average and maximum stays in SCA house by case plan completion

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Minimum	Average	Maximum
	#	days	days	days
Mostly	6	69	150	211
Partially	4	131	175	233
Slightly	2	55	75	94
Not at all	7	9	30	70
Total	19	9	105	233

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures calculated on data for the 19 young people who had completed SCA support by the end of June 2013.

SCA staff and young people also mentioned house curfews, which vary according to individual circumstances. Curfews ordered by magistrates, for example, must be enforced. Staff suggested that some young people may need additional support and surveillance to meet the conditions of their court order. Young people spoke positively about how staff assisted them to respect these limits by calling when their curfew was approaching and picking them up, if required, to get them back to the house on time (see 2.3.7 Case study – Louie).

SCA allows young people to leave the house for a short period of time to visit family or return to country, and during this time their room is kept for them. While this means that the bed is not available for another individual at risk of homelessness, it reinforces to the SCA client that his connections to family and country are respected and form a critical part of his wellbeing. Perhaps most importantly, it gives the young person a sense of stability that he may not have experienced in his life.

Key findings:
- SCA house remained under-subscribed, providing only 59 per cent of a possible 3,852 bed nights. SCA has broadened its referral pathways to address this.
- SCA allows young people to return to country for short periods of time, during which it holds their room for them. This practice communicates respect for family ties and spiritual connections.

Recommendation:
- That the success of the new referral process be closely monitored to ensure the efficient use of SCA house.

2.2.3 Case management

The first three years of the SCA initiative have demonstrated that young people at risk of homelessness, particularly those who have spent time in detention, require more than a roof over their heads. SCA reinforces the effectiveness of its accommodation component through holistic case management tailored to the needs of each young person.

The SCA team provide young people with emotional and social support, and work therapeutically where possible. The intensity of support depends on the individual. Within his first few weeks in the house, the young person usually establishes a particularly good rapport with one case worker whose shifts match his own routines. Through this process, which SCA team members refer to as "natural selection," the young person is assigned a key worker.

Often the first task of SCA case managers is to build trust with the young person. SCA clients may lack trust in adults due to their experiences before and during detention. They may also display a diminished sense of entitlement, and struggle to know "how to be" in an environment in which they and their needs are respected (see 2.2.5 Case study – Max). SCA staff address this internalised sense of unworthiness by enabling young people to access a safe house and valued goods, and communicate respect for the decisions that young people make about their own wellbeing and trajectories. As one young person put it:

> That's what's good about the people here. They say it's our choice whether we want to stay out of trouble, but they trust us to choose good. It makes you want to be good.

Once a case worker is assigned to a young person, that worker is responsible for designing individualised programs to suit his needs. Staff indicated that once they have gained the trust of the young person, they can begin to develop case goals and tackle deep-set emotional issues through practices like anger management (see 2.3.7 Case study – Louie). Despite the rigour of the goal-setting process, SCA workers take care not to overwhelm the young person, but rather encourage him to play an active role. Youth Justice and SCA case managers explained that they always attempt to make the young person feel in control of their case plan. This is important because clients have often gone from tenuous situations, where their basic physical and emotional needs have not been met, to the highly-controlled environment of a detention centre. Reasserting control over their future represents a critical step along the path to independence.

SCA staff operate to a strict weekly schedule, with time allocated for case management and household chores. As for the rules regarding the house, such as the no-visitors policy, the SCA team sets well-defined boundaries, but within these limits allow young people considerable flexibility and freedom (see 2.2.5 Case study – Max). Case plans are typically structured around a number of education modules designed to assist young people to develop independent living skills. Support workers engage participants through these modules, which cover personal care, nutrition and meal preparation, cooperation with others and regulating and managing emotions.

As the young person progresses towards his practical goals, the focus of case management shifts to healing relationships with family and relatives. In cases where clients are under 16 years of age, SCA aims to reintegrate the young person with his family, as set out by the *Guidelines for service provision*. One case worker offered the following example:

> A 14-year-old might come to live in SCA house for the first time. We would aim to gradually reintegrate him back into his family. This could happen by driving the young person to the family home three times a week so that they can have dinner together.

Table 8: Minimum, average and maximum support periods by case plan completion

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Minimum	Average	Maximum
	#	days	days	days
Mostly	6	81	194	308
Partially	4	140	193	245
Slightly	2	59	77	95
Not at all	7	15	56	101
Total	19	15	150	308

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures calculated on data for the 19 young people who had completed SCA support by the end of June 2013.

Case workers also encourage young people to build links with training and education institutions. The highest level of education attained by most of those who enter SCA house is Year 9, and many have had negative experiences with mainstream education. To address this, one case worker explained that "*we might go with the person to see the local school principal and with consent from the young person, talk about what is possible. We would then support the young person to understand the information.*" Unfortunately alternative education programs in Townsville often have long waiting lists, making it difficult for young people who do not wish to return to mainstream schools to achieve goals that involve formal credentials.

The SCA team also provide opportunities for young people to engage with the wider community, and have recently supplemented these activities with programs run by police liaison officers. For some young people the house itself provides the opportunity to form new friendships with people who may come from similar backgrounds and who, like them, are striving to improve their lives.

Case management support typically exceeds the stay of a young person in the house. From 19 closed cases, SCA reported an average support period of 150 days, about 45 days longer than the average accommodation period (Table 7). Longer support periods allowed a young person to achieve more of their case plan goals, suggesting that support for the young person to transition from the house constitutes an essential part of the service model (Table 8). SCA workers do not have the capacity for further outreach work, which puts at risk the sustainability of behavioural change. Indeed, recidivism analysis of SCA participants indentified that they are most likely to reoffend in the six months following their exit from the program (see section 2.3.6 Recidivism). The need for follow-up outreach support underlines the importance of links with programs like YHARS and other programs for young people and the need to capture these service links in data and reporting systems.

One of the constraints on case management identified by the SCA team concerns the difficulty of managing communication between staff and families when staff members work to a rotating shift roster. Over the next twelve months SCA plans to improve communication with families to involve them more actively in case management and encourage an approach of mutual obligation and responsibility.

Key findings:

- SCA staff strive to involve young people in all aspects of case management, encouraging them to take responsibility for their future and to develop independent living skills.
- SCA support periods often exceeded accommodation periods, and young people achieved better outcomes when support extended beyond their stay in SCA house.
- SCA cannot maintain follow-up outreach with young people, underlining the need for transitional support along the lines provided by YHARS.

Recommendations:

- That SCA increase the involvement of families in case management to encourage mutual responsibility and improve long-term client outcomes.
- That SCA continue to develop links with local training and education providers to ensure that their clients have access to these services.
- That SCA refer suitable clients to YHARS and, where possible, provide notification well in advance to facilitate smooth transitions between services.

2.2.4 Brokerage

Brokerage represents an important tool to allow young people to settle into SCA house. While rooms come equipped with basic furniture, young people get to choose their own linen from the household stock, and they can also use brokerage funds to buy other items for their room. Case workers commented on how important access to these goods was for their clients, who have often not had the same access to material goods as other young Australians. Support workers emphasised that young people understood these purchases as a privilege, which boosted their sense of self-worth and helped them to care for their possessions. As one SCA staffer put it: "*They look after their stuff really well, and I was surprised by that at first, until I realised how much they valued what they got.*" One former program participant recalled that he used part of his brokerage funds to buy a flat-screen TV that he took with him when he left the house. Another appreciated that "*SCA bought me a fan ... so I'm not hot in my room.*" The purchase of these goods helps participants to improve their sense of self worth (see 2.2.5 Case study – Max).

Table 9: Minimum, average and maximum brokerage by case plan completion

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Minimum	Average	Maximum
	#	$	$	$
Mostly	6	470	1,845	3,155
Partially	4	135	1,400	2,470
Slightly	2	560	595	1,055
Not at all	7	85	390	825
Total	19	85	1,085	3,155

- Source: SRS data 2010–13
  Notes: Money amounts rounded to the nearest five dollars. Figures calculated on data for the 19 young people who had completed SCA support by the end of June 2013.

One of the strategies used in case management was to increase the amount of brokerage funds spent on clients as they progressed towards their case plan goals (Table 9). This demonstrates that SCA workers and their clients made decisions about the use of funds in direct relation to case plans, but that brokerage also provided an effective incentive for young people to pursue their goals.

Brokerage spending nonetheless remained well below the per-client limit of $3,500, with an average spend of $1,085. SCA staff explained that they would like to offer their clients some additional support options, such as "*additional transition supported-accommodation*," as young people currently spend most of their funds on items such as clothing and toiletries. The model proposed by SCA would see young people move out of the house after 6 months into a semi-independent living environment that would provide them with continued support while they continue to develop their independent living skills.

Key finding:
- SCA brokerage spending fell well short of budget and the per-client limit of $3,500. SCA participants spent an average of $1,085.

Recommendation:
- That left-over brokerage monies be used to support transitions from SCA house to stable, independent accommodation, as allowed by the *Guidelines for Service Provision*.

2.2.5 Case study – Max

Max grew up in a regional town where he lived with his mother and siblings. His mother worked long hours to support the family, and the children were alone a lot of the time. Max said his mother "*had a short fuse*," but he understood that "*she had a lot to do with bringing up the kids on her own*". As Max sees it, there was no discipline in his family. He says he developed bad habits – stealing, lying, cheating – as he was growing up, and that he "*lost a lot of loved ones because of it.*" Max experienced a number of foster care placements, and was couch surfing with friends and extended family.

At the age of 17, he disengaged from school, and smoked marijuana and drank a lot of alcohol, which got him into more trouble. Despite this Max secured outdoor labouring work through a job network. At the time he was awaiting sentencing for a previous offence, and he was grateful to the owner for giving him a chance. He enjoyed the work and did well for three or four months until he became irritated, had an anger outburst, and was fired. Max was very distressed that he had lost this job and "*not held it together.*" He said that he has had a problem with anger since he was very young and that he gets stressed out very easily. When he lost this job he gave up looking for work, as he knew he was going to serve a custodial sentence and had been awaiting sentencing for some time. Max was referred by Youth Justice to SCA for 6 months prior to sentencing. He is now at the very beginning of a two-year sentence in detention for his first offence.

Max found the SCA house different from his other experiences of formal care. He experienced flexibility that was unlike any other place in which he had lived. He was given a lot of

freedom around choices of food, entertainment and activities. His opinions were taken into account. Max had all his material needs met with SCA brokerage: he was given a mobile phone with credit, a bike, money for doing chores, and got to choose his own linen and pictures for his room.

Nonetheless, Max had difficulties settling into the SCA house, and acknowledged these were "*of my own making*." In retrospect he says he was angry with himself for losing his job, stressed out about detention, and found it difficult to manage his relationships with other residents and staff. He felt he took the SCA house environment for granted, and stated that "*SCA house felt like a real home, we were getting looked after so much*." Max found the SCA house "*really special*." He got a lot of one-on-one support to help him manage anger, stick to his curfew and learn new independent living skills.

In detention Max grapples with regrets about past actions, and fears getting involved in trouble with other young detainees. He appears depressed, though he spoke about his hopes for life once out of detention. In detention he is completing Year 10, and said he wanted to "*keep my head down and get an education. I want to learn how to do things so I can take care of myself better when I get out of here and get a good job*." Reflecting on his experience in SCA house, Max said "*I would be way nicer if I went in now. I took the house for granted and I regret it now. It was the best house I'd ever been in, and I've tried lots of other options*." He is hoping to get the opportunity to try the SCA house again on his release.

2.3 Client outcomes

2.3.1 Case closures

SCA reported 19 closed cases in the first three years of operation (from November 2010 to the end of June 2013). Four closures resulted from a young person completing their case plan, and three from a client moving to a different area. In three cases, the young person returned to custody, including one who had completed most of his case plan goals. In the remaining nine cases, seven young people were unable or unwilling to engage with the service, and two clients terminated their support period. (Table 10)

Most clients made progress towards achieving their case plan goals, even in circumstances where their support period terminated prematurely. Aside from the results presented in the following sections, however, data captured by the SRS did not allow researchers to determine what this meant in practice, a point made by SCA staff themselves (see section 2.4.3 Data and reporting). For example, SRS data give no indication as to how ambitiously a young person might have set his case plan goals, or how these compared to the case plan goals of another client. In the absence of contextual information on case plan goal achievement provided by a system like the Outcomes Star, the evaluation team warns against any attempt to compare case plan outcomes of SCA clients to those in the other initiatives in this report.

The young people whom SCA supports are often highly mobile. Among the six young people who achieved most of their case plan goals, it is possible that three could have achieved all of their goals had they not moved from the area before their support period came to an end. Two of these clients moved from Townsville after spending around seven months in support, the other after less than three months.

Despite the emphasis on developing independent living skills, some young people understandably found it hard to leave the SCA house environment. One commented: "*When it was time to leave I didn't want to go, it felt like home…. I wish I could go back there now.*" Another young person said that "*being in the house means you don't have to do it on your own. You know someone is there for you, even if it's not your family.*" These steps take time, and the SCA team feels that some transitional support arrangement should be made available to young people who exit their service. Given that some clients will move from the area before completing their case plan goals, that support would ideally be available state-wide. Analysis of recidivism among SCA participants underlines the importance of post-program support, as young people proved most likely to reoffend in the six months following their exit from the program (see section 2.3.6).

Key findings:
- SCA reported 19 closed cases
- Eleven of these young people mostly or partially achieved their case plan goals.

Recommendation:
- That SCA continue to develop links with YHARS and explore options to provide on-going support to participants once they exit the program, even if they leave the Townsville area.

Table 10: Reasons for case closure by case plan completion

Case plan closed when client...	Case plan goals achieved?				Total
	Mostly	Partially	Slightly	Not at all	
completed case plan	2	2			4
moved from area	3				3
was unwilling or unable to engage		2	1	4	7
terminated support				2	2
returned to custody	1	1		1	3
Total	6	5	1	7	19

Source: SRS data 2010–13[1]

Table 11: Living arrangements at case closure

Client living with...	Aged 14–15	Aged 16–17	Total
one or two parents	2	1	3
relatives or friends	3		3
unrelated persons		3	3
other	2	4	6
not known		4	4
Total	7	12	19

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Age at date of case closure.

2.3.2 Reconnecting with family

A key objective of the SCA initiative involves helping young people to re-establish links with family. Indeed, in cases where a young person has not yet reached 16 years of age, the *Guidelines for service delivery* stipulate that the service should aim to reconnect the young person with their family or extended family members whenever this is possible (p. 5, 13ff).

The SRS does not capture complete information on the relationship between young people and their families, but it does provide a partial proxy when a client returns to live with family after exiting support. At case closure, two of the clients aged 14–15 years and one aged 17 were living with one or two parents (Table 11). The SRS provides no information on whether these young people needed to re-establish links with their parents before they could move home (but see the qualitative data presented in section 2.3.5). Returning home to live with parents did not correlate with the young person achieving his case plan goals, for although one of the three young people did achieve most of his case plan goals, the other two made no

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[1] Table reflects updated figures provided by the Department via email 4/9/2013

progress at all. A further three young people aged 14–15 years moved into accommodation with relatives or friends, which the SRS groups into a single category.

2.3.3 No exits into homelessness

Preventing exits into homelessness from youth detention represents the core objective of the SCA initiative. Accommodation arrangements at case closure showed no correlation with the completion of case plan goals, but the data nonetheless reported positive outcomes. Of the seven clients aged 14–15 years at case closure, six moved into a house, townhouse or flat and were living rent free (except for one individual, who was renting public housing). The housing situation of older clients showed greater variation – including three young people who returned to custody – but only one was living in emergency accommodation- or youth shelter-type arrangements. The details of a further two clients were not recorded.

Key finding:
- SCA enabled 10 clients to transition to stable accommodation.

2.3.4 Income and participation in education, training and employment

All but one young person came to SCA with no source of income. SCA enabled nine clients to access social security entitlements. At the conclusion of support, seven young people were on Youth Allowance (including one who already received the payment when he started the program), while a further three had begun to receive the Special Benefit, a payment reserved for individuals who, for reasons beyond their control, cannot earn a livelihood or satisfy the job-search activity test that Youth Allowance requires.

Many SCA clients came to the service of school age, and SCA case workers enabled five to return to school outside of the youth justice system. At case closure three young people had enrolled and were attending school, one had enrolled but was not always attending, and one had enrolled and was waiting to start.

No client exited SCA into paid employment, but two were looking for work.

Key findings:
- SCA enabled nine clients to access social security entitlements.
- SCA enabled seven clients to participate in education or the labour force.

2.3.5 Wellbeing

SCA aims to prevent young people from exiting detention into homelessness. In order to achieve this, SCA clients require life skills including anger and stress management, personal care, meal planning and nutrition, and budgeting. They may also need to engage with formal learning opportunities that can provide them with the skills for long-term economic independence. For many young people the initiative provided benefits not captured in SRS variables like stable housing outcomes and participation in education, training and work.

SCA house, by encouraging cooperation between peers and support workers, helped two of the young people interviewed to build more positive relationships with family members once they left the house. One commented: "*I now get on a lot better with my grandmother, and am not so angry, and help her around the house.*" Others benefited from the opportunity to form friendships with people who were also striving to improve their lives. One young person said that his time at the house helped him "*to stay away from the people I got into trouble with before.*" He said that he was learning strategies to keep away from drugs, which had led him to crime in the first place, a qualitative finding supported by analysis of recidivism among SCA participants.

2.3.6 Recidivism

Analysis of recidivism among SCA participants by the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General found promising results. From 13 participants, four did not reoffend in the 12 months following their exit from the program, and among those who did commit further offences, the rates and seriousness of offending declined. The small sample size meant that results could not be compared to a control group, and the Department recommended repeating the analysis once more young people have completed the program. The complete write-up is included at the end of this report.

Key findings:
- Four SCA participants (from a sample of 13) did not reoffend in the 12 months following their exit from the initiative. For the nine young people who did reoffend, rates and seriousness of offending declined.
- SCA participants were most likely to reoffend in the six months following their exit from the initiative.

2.3.7 Case study – Louie

Louie was primarily raised in an all-male single-parent household with older siblings, until his father was no longer able to care for him. There were substance abuse issues in his immediate and extended family. While his father provided relatively stable housing, Louie's home life has always been punctuated by stays with his grandmother. He described his home life as lacking discipline and noted that he and his brothers have attracted trouble over the years, "*stealing, and running around on the streets.*" Prior to entering detention he resided with his grandmother permanently because his father was no longer able to care for him.

The make-up of his Nan's household fluctuated, and Louie found it difficult to manage the changing dynamics that occurred as other family members moved into the house in times of crisis in their own lives. He noted that he and his Nan have "*been best mates,*" but that their relationship changes when conditions change in the household. Louie had difficulty remaining in emotional control when other older members of the family were not managing their own anger and crises in the shared space of the household. This volatility affected Louie's capacity to regularly attend and keep up at school, and he developed a sense of himself as someone who "*didn't fit in at school. I was pulled out because I missed too many days.*"

Louie had spent time in detention when he was 13 years of age. He exited detention to his grandmother's house under a Youth Justice Order, but over time, there was a significant amount of violence in the household. Police deemed Louie to be at risk. Youth Justice found him a place at the SCA house, where he spent 6 months.

Louie loved living at the SCA house from the very beginning. Staff worked hard to establish a caring relationship while setting tight boundaries on the management of Louie's anger. Louie responded well to staff as "*they did not get angry like my grandmother and don't change how they are all the time.*" The steady and consistent approach of staff gave Louie the experience of living in a safe and predictable environment. He stated that he "*liked how good they looked after us.*"

Louie thrived on opportunities to practice living skills and to make mistakes in a structured environment. As he learnt to reflect on his attitudes towards others, his attitude improved and he was able to manage his anger while living in the house. He has become practiced in taking time out to manage his anger.

In the SCA house, Louie had his first experience in having some control over his personal space, and was able to choose his own furnishings, linen, accessories etc. Staff bought him a flat-screen TV and other electrical goods. "*I loved my room,*" he stated, and he also appreciated that he "*could help [himself] to food and was never hungry,*" "*watch good movies, get taken out, do fun stuff, get money for chores and save for an Xbox.*"

Louie found the SCA procedures and staff very helpful in supporting him to meet the requirements of the house. There is a curfew for young people on Youth Justice Orders. Louie says that the practice of sending residents a text before their curfew time enabled him to keep to his curfew. He has developed trust that programs like SCA can support him to be on the track in life that he would like to follow.

Louie stayed out of trouble for the six months that he lived at the house. He found it hard to leave the SCA house as it felt like home: "*I was OK for about a year after I left and wasn't so angry, but things built up a bit again.*" Now 15 years old, he returned to his grandmother's and has a more successful experience co-habiting with her because of the skills he had learnt through SCA. His relationship with his grandmother is the most important one in his life, and he is very sensitive to how well that relationship is travelling.

Louie was able to draw on the anger management skills that he learnt and practiced when he was in the SCA house. This enabled him to engage in a whole range of capacity building activities. After exiting SCA he has participated in activities run through the YHARS program. This participation kept him busy and supported him to avoid activities that might get him in trouble with the law. YHARS have supported him to apply for a weekend job by helping him write his resume, and he has been regularly employed for the last few months. Indications are that a permanent full-time job will be made available to him in the near future.

He plans on finding his own unit once he turns 16, as he finds the conflict at home too stressful. He wants to "*stay out of trouble so I don't have to worry anymore.*"

2.4 Program viability

2.4.1 Program efficiency and average costs

SCA attracted $3.035m of funding for its first three years of operation. The Department used some of this money to obtain SCA house and for administrative purposes, including the cost of setting up and maintaining the SRS (shared with the other initiatives in this report).

The service agreement with Mission Australia set service level targets at between eight and sixteen clients per year (on the expectation that not all young people would receive a full six months of support). In view of this, the SCA budget provided brokerage funding sufficient for twelve young people to spend $3,500 per financial year.

During this period SCA supported 19 young people, five short of its target of 24 people. The *average cost* of supporting each SCA client (not including capital outlay) therefore came out slightly higher than budgeted, at around $153,000 per client, even though the average brokerage spend remained well below the per-person limit of $3,500. (Table 12)

SCA house remained well under-subscribed (see section 2.2.2 Accommodation). As a result, supporting additional young people would not have required extra infrastructure, and SCA could reduce the average cost of supporting each young person by ensuring that its facilities remain well utilised.

Key finding:
- SCA supported 19 young people at a cost of $153,000 per person.

2.4.2 Staff recruitment, satisfaction and retention

SCA staff satisfaction is high, and the initiative has maintained the same six full-time staff members and consistent casual staff since it opened in November 2010. SCA staffers provided a very positive assessment of their working conditions, and several research participants spoke of the motivation and enthusiasm of the SCA team.

Table 12: Program costs

		Budget	Actual
Clients	#	24	19
Staffing	$ '000	2,251.7	2,251.7
Other	$ '000	637.3	637.3
Brokerage	$ '000	126.0	21.4
Total	$ '000	3,015.0	2,910.4
Cost per client	$	126,000	153,000

- Source: Service agreement, SRS data 2010–13
  Note: Budgeted client number calculated on the basis of brokerage funding at $3,500 per client.

The service manager indicated that the service is staffed by highly skilled case workers who are able to mentor young people towards viable futures. Each staff member had prior experience working with young people at risk of homelessness, and some also had experience with the criminal justice system. On joining the initiative the SCA team undertook initial training. Minutes from the SCA Reference Group meeting in November 2010 outlined sessions in child abuse awareness, strengths-based practice, positive behaviour support, eliminating suicide, communicating with young people, and service systems and processes. Staff visited Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, and also received training in trauma awareness, substance abuse, child protection behaviours and mental health first aid.

The SCA philosophy emphasises inclusion and respect, and these apply as much to the staff as to young people. All support workers contribute to case plans, have a high level of involvement in planning meetings, and take part in daily debriefs and discussions on client development. Staff meetings are held weekly. The Service Manager noted the culture of respect shown to SCA team members, and the acknowledgement that their understanding of the young people in their care forms a critical component of service efficacy.

Support workers felt valued as professionals, and agreed that SCA provided them with sound knowledge to assist young people at the house. SCA staffer commented favourably on the high-level communication skills displayed by management, without which the initiative could not function. They felt they benefited from professional development opportunities mentioned above and from formal supervision conducted on a monthly basis. Staff members can call the Senior Case Manager at any hour of the day, and Child Services also remain on call. The SCA team sets up self-care plans to prevent general burn outs, and management ensures that annual leave is taken. Staffer also have access to the Employment Assistance Program, and the North Queensland Chaplain visits the service regularly.

SCA recognised the important contribution made by Indigenous male workers, who play an important role in mentoring young Indigenous males, and provide cultural support. The SCA Service Manager expressed her hope to attract more of these male workers in the future, and indicated that the initiative would take this into consideration during recruitment processes.

Key finding:
- SCA staff reported high levels of satisfaction and support.

2.4.3 Data and reporting
SCA staff felt that the SRS has some shortcomings that hamper its effectiveness as a tool for facilitating service provision and for evaluating client outcomes. They believe that the system was designed to cater for YHARS rather than the requirements of their program.

Staff mentioned that the SRS does not allow them to record notes on an individual. Currently the service keeps important client details such as Medicare numbers separately. Case workers would also like to see more flexible functions relating to family details and maps.

The SCA team advocated for increased data sharing with YHARS in cases where a young person moves between the two services.

Of most concern to staff was the reporting of client outcomes. They argued that the SRS does not capture their holistic approach to case management. As one staff member put it:

> *The SRS requires you to give an overall grade about what has been achieved with a young person during their stay at the house, but this is not an effective evaluation method, as you lose the impact of all the things that the young person has achieved along the way.*

The Outcomes Star represents one alternative reporting method, and SCA staff found it to be a very effective tool, but had difficulty relating some of its domains, such as accommodation and tenancy, to the SCA program.

Further discussion of the Outcomes Star is provided in the chapter of findings on YHARS and After Care, while the summary and conclusions to this report contain recommendations for improving the way the SRS captures client outcomes across the three initiatives included in this evaluation.

Key finding:
- The SRS does not capture sufficient data on case management practices and outcomes.

Recommendations:
- That a more nuanced reporting system, like the Outcomes Star, which capture holistic case management practices, be incorporated into the SRS.
- That the Department provide professional development to help service providers to understand the different components of data monitoring systems in terms of key functions and purposes. Service providers should be able to identify which components of the system are used for service improvement and which capture holistic aspects of service delivery, and how they might use data to support their own professional practices and gain recognition for these practices.

3   Findings – YHARS and After Care

Youth Housing and Rehabilitation Service (YHARS) operates in six locations across the state. YHARS caters for young people between 12 and 21 years of age who are transitioning from care, child safety orders and youth detention. The service also tackles youth homelessness by supporting young people who are sleeping rough or living in unstable or temporary housing arrangements. YHARS provides case management support for up to two years, during which time case workers act as mentors, assist young people to find suitable accommodation, and allow them to access up to $3,500 per annum in brokerage. Services in each location also manage three Transition to Independent Living (TIL) units, which provide housing for a limited number of young people while they search for stable accommodation; as well as assessing and managing client referrals to the Kids Under Cover Community Managed Youth Studios.

After Care is a state-wide initiative that targets young people aged 17 to 21 who transition from care. After Care allows young people to access case management support through a local service and up to $3,500 in brokerage per annum. Referrals to the initiative are assessed by YHARS, and when a young person lives within a YHARS catchment area, the local YHARS may provide case management support. This chapter refers to After Care clients who were case managed by YHARS as *internal After Care clients*. Those not case managed by YHARS are referred to as *external After Care clients*.

3.1   Overview against the evaluation framework

3.1.1   Appropriateness

- Five non-government organisations *implemented* YHARS case management, brokerage, and Transition to Independent Living (TIL) units in six locations, *as intended*. Kids Under Cover Youth Studios were limited to three in Brisbane, four in Townville, two in Rockhampton and two in Toowoomba.
- Four YHARS providers *implemented* After Care referral and brokerage processes for young people throughout the state, *as intended*. All YHARS providers except Mt Isa case managed a small number of After Care clients, although the proportion of internally-supported After Care clients varied considerably by location, from 3 per cent in Inala to 41 per cent in Toowoomba.
- YHARS and After Care reported 2,529 *referrals* across both initiatives. The most important sources were other non-government organisations including specialist homelessness agencies (27 per cent), Child Safety (23 per cent), self-referrals (16 per cent) and Youth Justice (6.5 per cent).
- *Referrals* were made in respect of young people between the ages of 10 and 25 years. Females slightly outnumbered males. Almost one-third identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- YHARS and After Care service levels were set at a similar level to the number of young people aged 15 to 17 years who are discharged from out-of-home care in Queensland.

- Demand exceeded service capacity, particularly in Hervey Bay and Rockhampton, where services rejected some referrals specifically on the basis of service capacity. Demand for After Care proved well below service-level targets for the first 3 years of the NPAH. The Department provided YHARS providers with funding to recruit staff specifically to increase the number of young people accessing After Care.
- YHARS delivers *appropriate* case management and brokerage. TIL units provide a highly suitable form of transitional housing that helped many YHARS participants achieve their goals.
- The *appropriateness* of After Care support largely depends on whether the young person requires case management support, and if this can be found in his or her local area. YHARS providers expressed doubt over the quality of support available to some of their external After Care clients.
- YHARS *catchment areas* are appropriate, although all services supported some young people outside of their catchment area. Toowoomba YHARS supported several young people in Ipswitch, which lies outside of its catchment area.
- The YHARS *model meets the needs of young people from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and CALD backgrounds*, as well as *other groups*. Inala YHARS, which supports a large number of young people from CALD backgrounds, recruited one cultural-specific case worker. Services such as Hervey Bay, which has no Indigenous case worker on its staff, draw on expertise from external consultants.

3.1.2 Effectiveness
- YHARS and After Care supported 1,604 individuals through 1,702 support periods.
- *Client characteristics showed no discernible trend.* Females slightly outnumbered males. The median age was 17 years. Almost one-third of young people identified as Indigenous, and 11 per cent were from CALD backgrounds. Participants were predominantly single.
- YHARS and After Care supported 458 young people transitioning from care, *around 30 per cent of the young people discharged from out-of-home care* over the same period of time.
- YHARS supported *111 young people transitioning from the youth justice system.*
- YHARS supported *700 young people who were sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness.* YHARS providers devoted more than half of their resources to directly combating youth homelessness.
- YHARS providers implemented *effective case management practices*. The evaluation did not assess the case management practices used by external After Care providers.
- A persistent and consistent approach to making and maintaining contact represents a *key success factor* in engaging with YHARS and After Care participants. The success of case management relies on the ability of case workers to establish a meaningful relationship with their client.
- Indigenous staff members in many instances provide the *key to engaging with Indigenous young people*. Services drew on expertise from external consultants in locations where they could not recruit Indigenous case workers.

- Case workers endeavoured to *involve young people in their transition to independence*. This practice was more recognisable to young people in some locations than in others.
- *A lack of suitable transitional accommodation represents the greatest barrier to improving case management practices and client outcomes*.
- YHARS providers used a range of *transitional housing options*, from accommodation with families and carers, to TIL units, to emergency, community and social housing.
- *Brokerage remained underspent*, and monies were not often allocated to investments with long-term outcomes such as education and training, despite guidelines to support this type of investment.
- *Staff expertise and dedication*, ample *brokerage*, access to *TIL units* and strong *partnerships with allied services facilitated effective service delivery*.
- *A lack of suitable transitional and affordable housing*, *untimely referrals* (especially from Child Safety agencies), and concerns surrounding *job security* from January to June 2013, *hampered effective service delivery*.

3.1.3 Efficiency

- YHARS received $9.315m and After Care $4.000m in funding over the first four years of the NPAH.
- YHARS provided 1,135 support periods to YHARS and internal After Care clients at a *unit cost* of $9,470.
- YHARS providers exceeded *service level targets* by 8 per cent. After Care attained 84 per cent of its client target.
- Brokerage *remained underspent*. YHARS spent 58 per cent and After Care 53 per cent of their respective brokerage budgets. After Care did meet its brokerage target for 2012–13.

3.1.4 Sustainability

- YHARS has *improved service integration and coordination* by building links with local service providers. Some services improved their relationship with Child Safety and Youth Justice officers through focus group discussions.
- After Care could drive *tighter service integration for young people throughout the state*, and may be able to play a role in improving networks between external service providers that support young people who have exited care.
- YHARS staff reported *appropriate levels of support*, but *concerns surrounding job security* towards June 2013 compromised the capacity of services to retain and recruit staff.
- *Data and reporting methods* require urgent attention, particularly in relation to After Care participants who are case managed through external organisations.

3.2 Implementation

Five non-government organisations deliver YHARS in six catchments identified as areas of high need, including the south-western Brisbane suburb of Inala (Table 13). Although the Queensland NPAH plan lists YHARS and After Care as separate initiatives, the Department combined their implementation by contracting services in Inala, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville to manage referrals and brokerage for After Care. In addition, the service agreements of all YHARS providers except Mt Isa require them to case manage a small number of After Care clients (Table 14).

While YHARS serves specific locations, After Care is available for young people across the state, and its catchments correspond to Departmental administrative regions. This creates an overlap between YHARS and After Care catchments in two places. Hervey Bay YHARS operates within the After Care region administered by Rockhampton, and must therefore secure brokerage for its After Care clients through Rockhampton. Mt Isa YHARS is located in the After Care region managed by Townsville, but does not take on After Care clients.

Service agreements set out the staffing arrangements of each service. Although there is some variation between sites, most operate with one program coordinator, several case workers, and one finance and administrative officer (Table 15). Inala employed one cultural-specific case worker, anticipating the high proportion of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds that would seek support. Toowoomba YHARS was the only site to dedicate from the outset a staff member to the implementation of After Care, employing one youth worker to identify appropriate After Care service providers and to support After Care clients during their transition from care. (Five service providers later received funding to employ dedicated After Care project officers.)

The Department concluded the tender process for services in the four locations with an After Care administrative function by the beginning of August 2010. In other locations the process took longer: Mt Isa YHARS signed on in late September, and Hervey Bay in February 2011 (Table 13). The evaluation team has no knowledge of whether delays in the tender process shaped, or were shaped by, the final implementation of After Care.

Table 13: YHARS providers

Catchment	Organisation / trading as	Date of service agreement
Inala	Marsden Education / Career Keys	1 August 2010
Toowoomba	Australian Red Cross Society	1 June 2010
Hervey Bay	Australian Red Cross Society	1 February 2011
Rockhampton	Capricornia Training Company	3 June 2010
Townsville	Queensland Youth Services	1 June 2010
Mt Isa	Mt Isa Youth Shelter / Young People Ahead	24 September 2010

Source: Service agreements

Table 14: After Care responsibilities of YHARS providers

YHARS	... provides After Care case management?	... administers After Care brokerage?
Inala	Yes	Yes
Toowoomba	Yes	Yes
Hervey Bay	Yes	No
Rockhampton	Yes	Yes
Townsville	Yes	Yes
Mt Isa	No	No

Source: Service agreements

Table 15: YHARS and After Care catchment areas

	YHARS catchment area	After Care catchment region(s)
Inala	Inala, surrounding suburbs	Brisbane, South East, North Coast
Toowoomba	Toowoomba RCA, Dalby, Warwick	South West
Hervey Bay	Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Fraser Coast RCA	
Rockhampton	Rockhampton LGA	Central
Townsville	Townsville LGA	North, Far North
Mt Isa	Mt Isa LGA	

Source: Service agreements
Notes: LGA = Local Government Area, RCA = Regional Council Area. For After Care catchments, see Figure 2 (p. 50).

Table 16: YHARS staff by site

	Program Coordinator	Senior case worker	Case worker	Youth worker	Admin Finance	Total FTEs
Inala	1	1	3		1	6
Toowoomba	1		4.5	1	1	7.5
Hervey Bay	1		2		0.8	3.8
Rockhampton	1	1	3		1	6
Townsville	1		4		1	6
Mt Isa	1		2			3

Source: Service agreements
Notes: FTE = Full Time Equivalent

Table 17: Key implementation dates

	First referral	First day of case management...			First night in...	
		YHARS	AC internal	AC external	TIL unit	Youth studio
Inala	10 Nov 2010	Nov 2010	Feb 2011	March 2011	Feb 2011	Oct 2011
Toowoomba	20 Oct 2010	Oct 2010	Nov 2010	Nov 2010	April 2011	(2 units)
Hervey Bay	1 April 2011	April 2011	April 2011	n/a	May 2011	
Rockhampton	27 July 2010	July 2010	Nov 2010	Feb 2011	March 2011	(2 units)
Townsville	21 July 2010	July 2010	July 2010	Oct 2010	Nov 2010	May 2011
Mt Isa	19 Oct 2010	Oct 2010	n/a	n/a	Oct 2010	

Source: SRS data
Notes: AC = After Care, TIL = Transition to Independent Living (unit)

YHARS providers were operational soon after the conclusion of the tender process. Most sites registered their first referral and began to provide YHARS case management within a few months of signing the service agreement. Services often took longer to implement After Care. Rockhampton YHARS, for example, began to support its first YHARS client less than two months after signing its service agreement, but took on its first After Care client four months later, and a further three months elapsed before it registered its first After Care client case managed by an external organisation. (Table 17)

Service agreements specified that in addition to existing community and social housing, YHARS providers would be able to offer young people two further accommodation options:

- Transition to Independent Living (TIL) units, managed directly by YHARS
- Youth Studios, managed by the Kids Under Cover initiative

Most service agreements allocated funding specifically for the establishment of TIL units, and all units were in use by May 2011 (Queensland 2010–11 NPAH Annual Report, p. 27). Youth Studios, on the other hand, have been used in a limited way in Brisbane (three units), Townville (four units), Rockhampton (two units) and Toowoomba (two units)[2].

Key findings:
- YHARS providers began to support young people within a few months of signing their service agreements. The implementation of After Care often took longer.
- Only one YHARS provider initially employed a dedicated After Care liaison worker. Five providers later negotiated service agreement variations for this.
- Youth studios were used only in a limited way.

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[2] As indicated by Department in email 23/09/13

3.3 Referrals

Service providers received 2,529 referrals in respect of 2,289 young people (to the end of June 2013). While some individuals had multiple referrals, most (91 per cent) recorded only one (Table 19). YHARS and After Care accepted three-quarters of all referrals, and over three-quarters (78 per cent) of all referred individuals (Table 18, Table 20).

The number of referrals to YHARS and After Care varied considerably by site, ranging from 632 in Toowoomba to 102 in Mt Isa. The number of referrals directed to Inala, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville, which assess referrals for After Care, predictably exceeded those received by Hervey Bay and Mt Isa. (Table 21)

Among the young people referred to YHARS and After Care, females slightly outnumbered males. Around one-third (32 per cent) of individuals identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both, while the Indigenous status of 13 per cent was not recorded. (Table 22)

Table 18: Accepted and declined referrals and rates by financial year

		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Accepted referrals	#	504	693	698	1,895
Acceptance rate	%	82.8	70.9	74.0	74.9
Declined referrals	#	105	284	245	634
Rejection rate	%	17.2	29.1	26.0	25.1
Total	#	609	977	943	2,529

Source: SRS data
Notes: Figures include three referrals to SCA accepted by YHARS and exclude one referral to YHARS accepted by SCA.

Table 19: Referred individuals by number of referrals

Referrals	1	2	3	4	Total
Individuals	2,076	189	21	3	2,289
Per cent	90.7	8.3	0.9	0.1	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures include three referrals to SCA accepted by YHARS and exclude one referral to YHARS accepted by SCA.

Table 20: Referred individuals by number of accepted referrals

Accepted Referrals	0	1	2	3	Total
Individuals	508	1,673	102	6	2,289
Per cent	22.2	73.1	4.5	0.3	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures include three referrals to SCA accepted by YHARS and exclude one referral to YHARS accepted by SCA.

Table 21: Referrals by location

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Inala	123	178	244	545
Toowoomba	144	321	167	632
Hervey Bay	37	101	104	242
Rockhampton	123	164	197	484
Townsville	158	175	191	524
Mt Isa	24	38	40	102
Total	609	977	943	2,529

Source: SRS data

Table 22: Referred individuals by gender and Indigenous status

	Female	Male	Total	Per cent
Non-Indigenous	626	645	1,271	55.5
Aboriginal	367	306	673	29.4
Torres Strait Islander	13	14	27	1.2
Both	14	10	24	1.0
Not recorded	156	138	294	12.8
Total	1,176	1,113	2,289	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures includes three referrals to SCA accepted by YHARS and exclude one referral to YHARS accepted by SCA.

Table 23: Referrals by source

	Other NGO	Child Safety	Self	Youth Justice	Other	Total
Inala	159	139	34	32	181	545
Toowoomba	147	133	121	51	180	632
Hervey Bay	16	40	59	32	95	242
Rockhampton	157	62	119	19	127	484
Townsville	157	189	44	22	112	524
Mt Isa	34	6	28	9	25	102
Total	670	569	405	165	720	2,529
Per cent	26.5	22.5	16.0	6.5	28.5	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Note: Figures include three referrals to SCA accepted by YHARS and exclude one referral to YHARS accepted by SCA.

3.3.1 Referral sources

Referral source data reveal that YHARS effectively linked into local service systems, both inside and outside their catchment areas. Other NGOs (including specialist homelessness agencies) represented the most common referral source, accounting for more than one quarter (27 per cent) across all sites. In Rockhampton, YHARS established particularly strong links with Roseberry Community Service based in South Rockhampton, which contributed most of its 32 per cent of referrals from other NGOs. Referrals to After Care should in many cases originate from service providers outside of YHARS catchments, and all four sites that manage After Care referrals did indeed register a significant proportion from other NGOs. (Table 23)

Referrals as a key element in transitions from care
YHARS and After Care support young people transitioning from the Child Safety and Youth Justice systems, and the initiatives cannot begin to achieve their aim of preventing exits into homelessness without effective cooperation from these agencies. According to SRS data, Child Safety Service Centres contributed 23 per cent and Youth Justice Service Centres 6.5 per cent of referrals across all locations (Table 23). Interviews during the second round of data collection revealed some inconsistency in the recording of referrals, however. As a representative from one site explained:

> *Identifying which department sends us the most referrals is not an exact science. We often deal with young people who come to us through other means, and we then approach the relevant department to get them to send us a referral. This is partly due to a lack of understanding of our program, and partly due to a high turnover in departmental staff. Many of our young people should have been referred to us by Child Safety, and sometimes we mark a referral as coming from Child Safety because the young person was involved with Child Safety, even though Child Safety didn't refer them.*

The interim report, citing interview qualitative data, identified communication between YHARS and Child Safety case managers as an area for urgent improvement. While staff on one site spoke of a good relationship with Child Safety, other sites expressed frustration with the referral process:

> *At present we get referrals for young people perhaps a week before they leave care. Sometimes we receive them the day before or the day after. Child Safety has not engaged with us, and we get almost no information from them other than that the young person needs independent accommodation. Ideally we would receive referrals at least twelve months in advance.*

During the first round of research, another YHARS provider indicated that although they had sought to liaise and foster relationships with Child Safety, they were not always successful.

Since the interim report, two sites have reported improved relationships with Child Safety. They attributed their success to combined focus-group discussions, which gave both sides the opportunity to understand the environment in which the other works, and provided Child Safety case managers with information on the YHARS and After Care service models. Mt Isa

YHARS spoke of a much improved relationship with Child Safety, and said that referrals from the agency had markedly increased, while Hervey Bay YHARS expressed their hope that "*proper buy-in from the local Child Safety office*" would "*translate into better outcomes for young people exiting care.*"

Referrals play a vital role in transitions from care. They put young people in contact with services, and allow services to gain the trust of young people and obtain important information that they need to provide suitable support. Starting a collaborative planning process with young people well before they leave care would enhance their chances of experiencing a smooth transition to post-care services and ensure that they feel supported yet in control of the process. Poorly-timed referrals and those lacking sufficient information undermine effective transition planning, and often leave YHARS and After Care case workers dealing with crises rather than early intervention and capacity building strategies.

Self-referrals

YHARS and After Care accept self-referrals (*Guidelines for service delivery*, p 21), which accounted for 16 per cent of all referrals across the state and around one-quarter in Hervey Bay and Rockhampton (Table 23). While in some locations self-referrals indicated problems with other referrals pathways (such as those from Child Safety, discussed above), in other places self-referrals reflected that the service had a particularly strong local presence.

In Mt Isa self-referrals contributed 27 per cent or all referrals, while those instigated by family and friends contributed a further 8 per cent (not shown). Case workers in Mt Isa pointed to the size of the local community and the effectiveness of word-of-mouth as a way local people find out about services. Community networks also explain the disproportionally high number of young women who seek assistance from YHARS in Mt Isa. Networks among Aboriginal communities are very strong in the area, and many hear about YHARS through others who use the service. Many of the young women interviewed for the evaluation had small children, and had heard from other young mothers about the service.

Self-referrals also indicate the success of the initiatives. Some young people told interviewers that learning about YHARS through friends gave them the confidence to approach the service. One young person explained that once his friends saw him "at TAFE and doing so well," they also sought help from YHARS. "*None of us have been in trouble since. We're all trying to get our lives back on track.*"

Self-referrals may also result from considerable efforts on the part of case workers to get young people to engage with the service. In one instance a YHARS staff member approached a young man who was sleeping rough, and asked if he would like to speak with someone. The young man agreed, but then refused to cooperate. As he put it:

> *I didn't like the worker and told him to piss off. But he came back every day. I wouldn't talk to him, but by coming all the time he ended up making me want to talk to him. He's one of the greatest carers I've ever had.*

Indeed, many young people noted the consistent and persistent approach of YHARS workers to engage with them as a key factor in their sustained involvement with the service (see 3.3.2 Case study – Stephen).

Key findings:
- YHARS and After Care received more than one-quarter of all referrals from other NGOs.
- Child Safety service centres contributed 23 per cent of all referrals. YHARS identified the timeliness and thoroughness of referrals from Child Safety as an area for improvement.
- Some sites recorded high numbers of self-referrals, reflecting tight-knit local networks and the persistence of case workers in encouraging young people to engage.

Recommendation:
- That YHARS providers regularly engage with Child Safety to improve or maintain effective working relationships that support transitions from care.

3.3.2 Case study – Stephen

Stephen, 18 years old, grew up in a family home with his parents and six siblings. He is the second oldest child. His father worked and his mother suffered on and off from clinical depression. Throughout his childhood Stephen experienced ongoing physical and verbal conflict between his parents and with his siblings. He developed challenging adolescent behaviours, found it difficult to engage with school, and had few social connections. He disengaged from his parents, who found him "*out of control*." He describes his life during this period as "*hard to deal with*" and "*lonely*," and mentions anxiety and the difficulty of coping with "*not much support*."

During his early adolescence Stephen got into trouble with the law on several occasions. He drifted in and out of his family home, and lived on the streets intermittently. He began using drugs and found self-care increasingly difficult, and suffered from health issues and poor nutrition. Child Safety intervened when he was 15 years old. Over the following year he spent time in foster care, but his continued drug use caused the placements to break down. From 16 he lived in shelters and shared accommodation until he was able to access a semi-independent living unit provided by an NGO, which supported him for 10 months.

Once Stephen was living in the unit, he was referred to and accepted by After Care. At first he indicated that he neither wanted nor needed After Care support, and early contact with him was difficult. After many months of persistent and regular contact from staff, Stephen opened up a little and became gradually more receptive. He now has a very strong and open relationship with his After Care worker, and will share news or seek support.

Stephen's case worker spent a lot of one-on-one time working with him on how he could make some positive changes in his life. He started to talk more about his feelings, and was encouraged to look at different ways of expressing his anger. As he suffered from very low self-esteem, he and his case worker spent a substantial amount of time identifying his strengths and setting goals for the future. Stephen said that "*no one had ever talked to me like*

that before or listened to what I wanted. I didn't really know what I liked to do in the beginning."

Stephen used some of his brokerage money to take driving lessons and to find a part-time job in a local supermarket. When he enrolled in a Certificate in Mechanics at TAFE, brokerage allowed him to access a computer and other technical aids for his course. His After Care worker has helped him to work on rebuilding relationships with his family and to manage his anger appropriately. Stephen has reconnected with his family, but says that he needs "*to be careful when he sees them*" or he gets "*stressed out*."

Stephen now lives independently in social housing, is saving for a car and in a stable relationship for the first time. He feels like his life "*is getting on track like never before*." He says, "*I haven't been in trouble since I got involved with After Care. There are people there who care about me, and I've never had that before*."

3.3.3 Declined referrals

YHARS and After Care declined 634 referrals made in respect of 508 individuals (Table 20). Rejection rates varied significantly by location. They ranged from 5 per cent in Inala to almost one-third in Toowoomba and Townsville (Table 24). The SRS provides no data on whether a young person was referred to YHARS or After Care, so it is not possible to separate declined referrals by initiative.

The SRS does record reasons for declined referrals. As users can nominate more than one reason, we prioritised them for the purposes of the evaluation. We considered rejections due to age as the most important reason to identify because of the heightened risk of younger people, followed by those due to area, lack of accommodation, service capacity, target group, and lack of facilities. Referrals were only considered to be declined because the client refused or wanted a different service if no other reason was given. In almost one-fifth of cases, there was no recorded reason. (Table 25)

Table 24: Declined referrals and rates by location

	Total referrals	Rejected referrals	Rejection rate
	#	#	%
Inala	545	25	4.6
Toowoomba	632	207	32.8
Hervey Bay	242	70	28.9
Rockhampton	484	138	28.5
Townsville	524	169	32.3
Mt Isa	102	25	24.5
Total	2,529	634	25.1

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Table 25: Reasons for declined referrals by location

	Age	Area	Accommodation	Capacity	Target group	Facilities	Client	Other	None	Total
Inala		3			5	2	5	8	2	25
Toowoomba	5	18	1	15	10		33	21	104	207
Hervey Bay				38	3		3	22	4	70
Rockhampton	7	4		74	20		11	16	6	138
Townsville	19	14	32		40	4	49	11		169
Mt Isa		1	3		5	1	12	2	1	25
Total	31	40	36	127	83	7	113	80	117	634
Per cent	4.9	6.3	5.7	20.0	13.1	1.1	17.8	12.6	18.5	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Rejection reasons prioritised from left to right, so that each declined referral contributes only once to the tally.

Table 26: Referrals declined due to age, area and accommodation in Townsville

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Age	5	9	5	19
Area	2	9	3	14
Accommodation	7	8	17	32

Source: SRS data

Table 27: Age of referrals declined due to age in Townsville

Age	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
10–13	2			2
15–17	3	8	2	13
21		1		1
22–25			3	3
Total	5	9	5	19

Source: SRS data

Table 28: Referrals declined due to service capacity in Hervey Bay and Rockhampton

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Hervey Bay	2	21	15	38
Rockhampton	6	20	48	74
Total	8	41	63	112

Source: SRS data

Hervey Bay and Rockhampton both cited service capacity in 54 per cent of declined referrals. Rejections on this basis increased year on year, starting at eight in 2010–11 and reaching 63 in 2012–13 (Table 28). Given the under-subscription of After Care in the Rockhampton area, the evaluation team can only presume that these referrals were intended for YHARS, which implies that YHARS service capacity in these locations could not meet demand.

As mentioned, Toowoomba rejected around one-third of referrals, and half of these had no recorded reason. In Townsville, which had a similar rejection rate to Toowoomba, one-third of rejections resulted from the client refusing or wanting a different service, and the site also recorded a relatively high number of rejections on the basis of age, area and accommodation. Rejections due to a lack of accommodation increased year on year, whereas rejections due to age and area peaked in 2011–12 (Table 26). Most rejections due to age involved young people between 15 and 17 years of age (Table 27), which suggests that they were referred to After Care rather than YHARS. The evaluation team found no other evidence to suggest that the age limits for After Care should be modified.

Key findings:
- YHARS and After Care declined 634 referrals made in respect of 508 individuals.
- Rejection rates varied significantly by location, ranging from 5 per cent in Inala to almost one-third of all referrals in Toowoomba and Townsville.
- Hervey Bay and Rockhampton cited service capacity in 54 per cent of rejected referrals.

3.3.4 Referrals in respect of very young people
While the majority of referrals fell within the 12 to 21 age bracket (Figure 1), YHARS providers did receive five referrals in respect of individuals aged 10 or 11 years:

- A school, on suspending or expelling an 11-year-old Aboriginal boy, referred him to Townsville YHARS in July 2010. The service accepted his referral and commenced support in November 2010. The boy lived for six months with a family or carer, until his case was closed because he was unwilling or unable to engage with the service. He had however returned to school. Six months later the boy referred himself to YHARS, which accepted his referral. His support period continued to June 2013, during which time he lived with a family or carer, until he again proved unwilling or unable to engage with the service. During his two support periods he received $1,277 + $4,278 = $5,555 in brokerage.
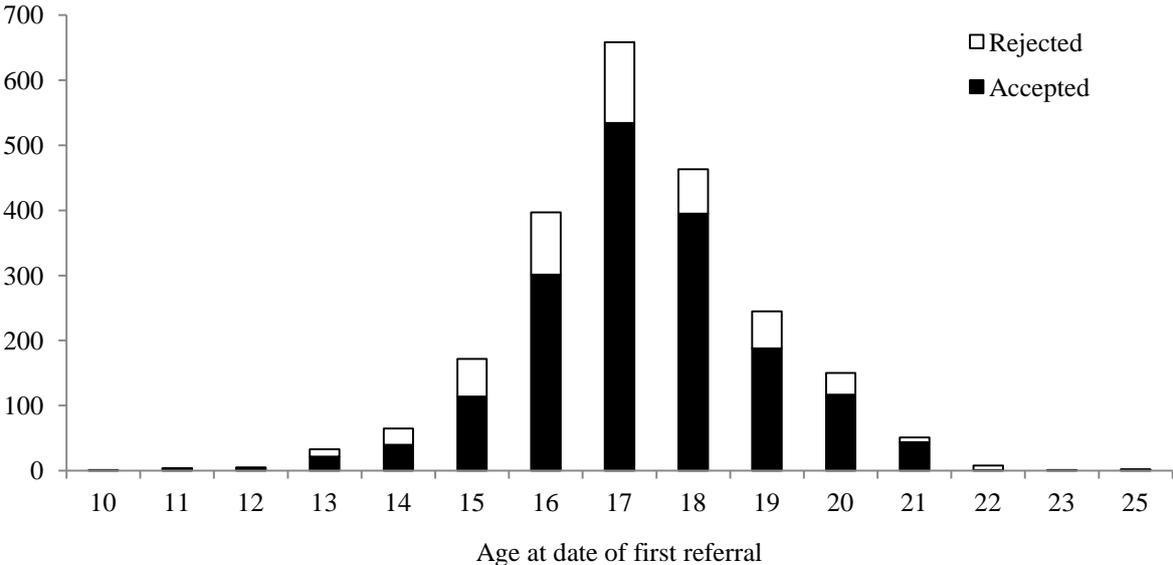
Figure 1: Accepted and declined referrals by age

Source: SRS data 2010–13

- An NGO referred a 10-year-old Aboriginal male to Townsville YHARS in January 2011. Although at imminent risk of homelessness, the service declined his referral due to his age.
- A crisis agency referred an 11-year old Aboriginal male to Toowoomba YHARS in November 2011. Although at imminent risk of homelessness, the service declined the referral without recording any reason.

In contrast to these cases where outcomes were very unclear, an 11-year-old Aboriginal male, who was sleeping rough, referred himself to Mt Isa YHARS in April 2012. The service accepted his referral and supported him for 11 months, finding him accommodation in community housing and providing $1,714 of brokerage. During this time he returned to school. His case was closed when he moved from the area to live with relatives in public housing.

YHARS can deliver support that improves the wellbeing of very young people at risk of homelessness, and the service should not decline referrals because an individual is too young.

Key finding:
- YHARS received five referrals in respect of individuals aged 10 or 11 years. The records of these very young people show some cause for concern.

Recommendation:
- That no referral to YHARS be declined only because the individual is too young. Service agreements should specify that the lower age limit for YHARS support is flexible. A referral for Child Safety intervention may, however, be the most appropriate response.

3.4 Clients

YHARS and After Care supported 1,604 individuals through 1,702 support periods. The number of clients differs from the number of accepted referrals for two reasons. First, there were 175 accepted referrals that never progressed to case management support, and for which SRS records remain blank. Second, service accepted 18 referrals in June 2013, but their case management support period had not commenced by the end of the financial year. (Table 29)

The number of YHARS clients ranged from 74 in Mt Isa to 282 in Toowoomba, which was substantially more than the next largest intake of 214 young people in Rockhampton. Inala accounted for the highest number of After Care clients, 295 in total and again substantially more than the next largest intake of 190 in Townsville. The ratio of YHARS to After Care clients varied significantly by location, from 5:2 in Toowoomba to 1:2 in Inala. Likewise the ratio of internal to external After Care clients differed from one location to the next. Toowoomba supported 44 of its 107 After Care clients internally (41 per cent), while Inala directly supported only 8 of its 295 After Care clients. (Table 30)

Key findings:
- YHARS and After Care supported 1,604 individuals through 1,702 support periods.
- The proportion of After Care clients supported internally by a YHARS provider ranged from 41 per cent in Toowoomba to 2.7 per cent in Inala.

3.4.1 Client characteristics

Variations in service size accompanied variations in other demographic characteristics. As for referrals, YHARS and After Care supported slightly more young women than men. The gender balance of clients varied considerably from location to location, however (Table 31). As discussed, in some locations social networks played an important role in attracting clients to the initiatives, and this almost certainly contributed to the disproportionately high number of young Aboriginal women supported by the YHARS service in Mt Isa. In Inala, a very high proportion of clients were young men from CALD backgrounds (Table 32).

Table 29: Declined, non-progressed and accepted referrals by location

	Declined	Not progressed	2010-13	2013-14	Total
Inala	25	77	442	1	545
Toowoomba	207	29	389	7	632
Hervey Bay	70	25	143	4	242
Rockhampton	138	29	316	1	484
Townsville	169	12	338	5	524
Mt Isa	25	3	74	0	102
Total	634	175	1,702	18	2,529

Source: SRS data 2010–2013

Table 30: Clients by location

	YHARS	After Care internal	After Care external	Total
Inala	147	8	287	442
Toowoomba	282	44	63	389
Hervey Bay	132	11		143
Rockhampton	214	16	86	316
Townsville	148	59	131	338
Mt Isa	74			74
Total	997	138	567	1,702

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Table 31: Clients by gender and location

	Female	Male	Total
Inala	192	245	437
Toowoomba	203	146	349
Hervey Bay	58	75	133
Rockhampton	171	127	298
Townsville	143	173	316
Mt Isa	50	21	71
Total	817	787	1,604

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Table 32: Indigenous and CALD background clients by location

	Indigenous	CALD	Total
Inala	16.9	33.4	437
Toowoomba	23.8	4.9	349
Hervey Bay	24.8	2.3	133
Rockhampton	30.2	1.0	298
Townsville	53.5	3.2	316
Mt Isa	87.3	5.6	71
Total	31.9	11.4	1,604

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Table 33: Supported family types by location

	Single	Couple	1-parent	2-parent	Other	No record	Total
Inala	314	9	19	8	6	86	442
Toowoomba	277	35	23	18	20	16	389
Hervey Bay	104	12	7	10	6	4	143
Rockhampton	218	31	27	9	11	20	316
Townsville	265	24	19	19	2	9	338
Mt Isa	46	7	17		2	2	74
Total	1,224	118	112	64	47	137	1,702

Source: SRS data 2010–13

YHARS and After Care predominantly supported lone individuals. The services accepted ten times more referrals for singles than for couples and for single parents, and twenty times more referrals for singles than for couples with children (Table 33). Although qualitative data in the first phase of research suggested that the number of families seeking support was increasing, quantitative data did not bear out these observations (not shown).

Key finding:
- Some locations reported a high proportion of clients from a particular group. While these specialisations map to local demographics and are undoubtedly good for young people in those groups, YHARS must also ensure that it reaches young people in need of support who do not hear about the service through their social networks.

Recommendation:
- That each site consider the characteristics of clients well supported by staff and service networks, to ensure that service differentiation and specialisation do not exclude young people from other groups.

3.4.2 Target groups

The *Guidelines to service delivery* identify four target groups. YHARS and After Care both target young people transitioning from the care of the Department of Communities - Child Safety Service system (Including being subject to a statutory intervention), or a period of sentence or remand in a Youth Detention Centre, and those who are sleeping rough or living in unstable or temporary housing arrangements.

What proportion of young people exiting institutional arrangements did YHARS and After Care support? Client numbers by target group provide one estimate. For YHARS providers, they also give a sense of the balance between preventative work – helping young people to reconnect with family and avoid "exits into homelessness" – and support that directly tackles youth homelessness in the here and now.

Table 34: Target group of YHARS and internal After Care clients by location

	Out-of-home care	Child safety order	Youth Justice	Sleeping rough	Not recorded	Total
Inala	6	39	17	89	4	155
Toowoomba	18	43	22	222	21	326
Hervey Bay	4	15	12	100	12	143
Rockhampton	11	19	10	178	12	230
Townsville	49	59	49	50		207
Mt Isa	3	9	1	61		74
Total	91	184	111	700	49	1,135
Per cent	8.0	16.2	9.8	61.7	4.3	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Target groups prioritised from left to right so that each client contributed only once to the tally. In practice, young people often fall into more than one category. For example, many young people in youth detention are also under child safety orders.

Of the 1,135 YHARS and internal After Care clients, 8 per cent were transitioning from care, 16 per cent from a child safety order, and 10 per cent from youth justice (Table 34). In some cases clients satisfied more than one of these conditions, in which case the evaluation team categorised them as transitioning from care, then a child safety order, then youth justice, in that order. In 62 per cent of cases the young person was sleeping rough, while the target group of 4 per cent of clients was not recorded. These figures indicate that YHARS providers devoted more than half of their resources to addressing primary homelessness, and more than a third of their resources to preventing exits into homelessness.

The Australian Health and Welfare Institute *Child Protection* reports indicate that some 520 young people aged 15 to 17 years and some 300 aged 10 to 14 years are discharged from out-of-home care in Queensland every year (their table A20). Over the first three years of operation, YHARS providers supported 91 young people transitioning from out-of-home care (Table 34), and when external After Care clients are taken into account, the initiatives reached a total of 458 young people transitioning from care. This represents around 30 per cent of the number of young people (in the 15–17 age bracket) discharged from out-of-home care over the same period of time. It should be noted that YHARS and After Care received funding to support 1,757 young people over three years.

As YHARS and After Care receive more referrals, prioritisation of target groups will become an important issue. Initial service agreements required Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to be prioritised. In addition, some service agreements require providers to prioritise young people exiting from care and youth detention before taking on young people who are sleeping rough (see, for example, Inala *Service Agreement* Part C, version 1.0, page 9). In Hervey Bay and Rockhampton, where services recorded 112 referrals rejected due to service capacity constraints, almost all were in respect of young people who were sleeping

rough. This highlights the possibility that without funding to increase service levels, the capacity for YHARS providers to address primary youth homelessness may in the future be "squeezed out" by preventative work with young people transitioning from institutional arrangements.

Key findings:
- YHARS and After Care supported 458 young people transitioning from care. YHARS supported 111 young people transitioning from the youth justice system.
- YHARS supported 700 young people who were sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Recommendation:
- That YHARS program objectives, service capacity and prioritisation of target groups be reviewed to ensure on-going support for young people sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness.

3.4.3 After Care geographical coverage

The SRS provides no simple means of measuring the geographical coverage of After Care, in particular the number of After Care clients from outside of YHARS catchment areas, making it difficult to evaluate one of the fundamental objectives of the initiative.

Determining the extent to which After Care reached young people across the state is difficult for two reasons. On one hand, although the SRS records referral outcomes – YHARS, internal After Care, external After Care, or declined – it does not distinguish referrals to YHARS from those to After Care. This leaves no simple means of attributing *declined* referrals to one initiative or the other. On the other hand, external organisations case managing After Care clients can legitimately be located within or near YHARS catchment areas. While the evaluation team found no evidence of this practice, the current arrangements do in fact allow services to call on external After Care support as a means of coping with excess demand for YHARS. For these reasons, analysis of After Care coverage must go beyond the external After Care client numbers reported by the SRS.

The evaluation team mapped YHARS and After Care referrals to Statistical Areas defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Figure 2). The geographic location of a referral was defined by the address of the individual at the date of first referral. We then determined YHARS catchment areas descriptively, based on those localities where client numbers exceeded a certain threshold. Using this methodology, we found that 1,115 of the 2,289 individuals referred to YHARS came from localities outside of YHARS catchment areas. The same applied to 604 of the 656 individuals whose first accepted referral involved external After Care support. While the methodology undoubtedly overstates the geographical spread of referred individuals, these results nonetheless suggest that YHARS providers did succeed in extending After Care to those outside of their catchment area.

An appendix at the end of this report discusses the methodology and its limitations.
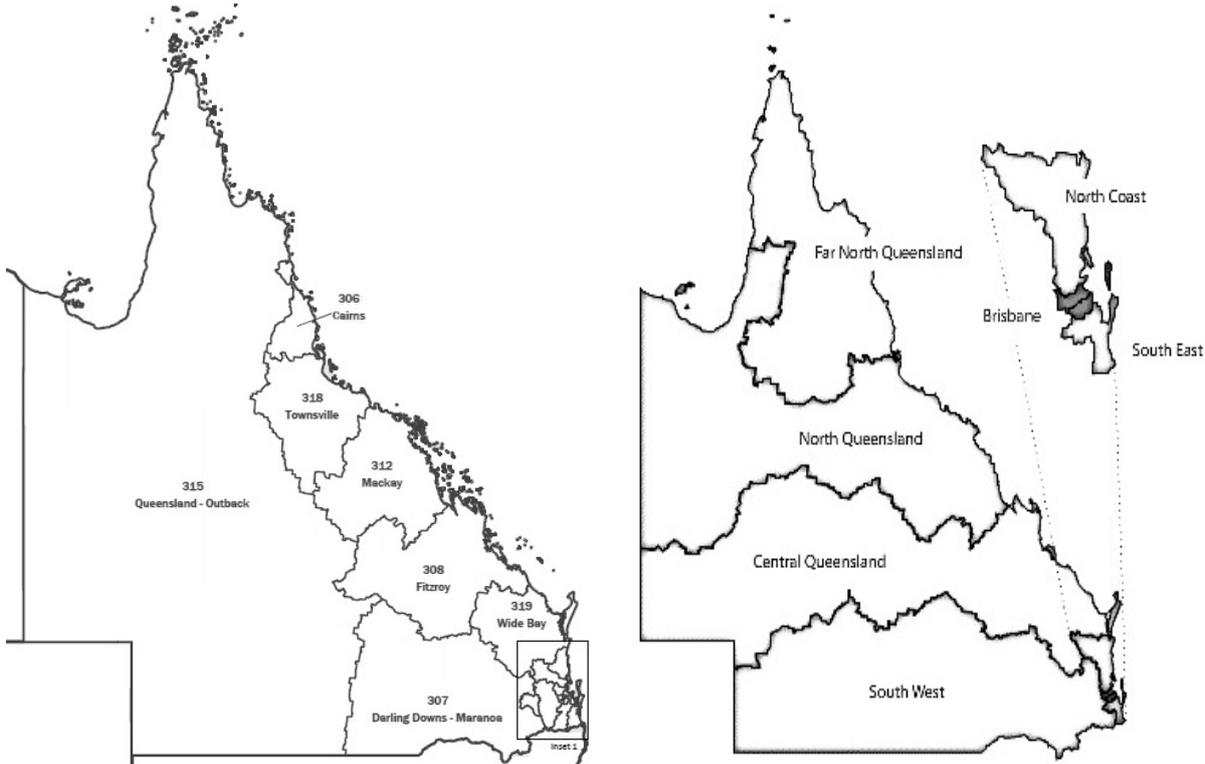
Figure 2: Statistical and administrative areas

ABS Statistical Areas (left) and Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services administrative areas (right), which correspond to After Care catchments.

3.4.4 Service targets

The combined implementation of YHARS and After Care created some complexity in the calculation of actual service levels. Service agreements required all sites except Mt Isa to provide case management to a "small number" of After Care clients, with these clients counted towards YHARS service targets. Hence an After Care client who received case management through Hervey Bay YHARS counted as one Hervey Bay YHARS client and also as one Rockhampton After Care client.

Service providers exceeded their YHARS targets by 8 per cent. Toowoomba exceeded its YHARS target by 45 per cent, despite its very large catchment area. Hervey Bay and Rockhampton also exceeded their YHARS targets by around 20 per cent. Inala, Townsville and Mt Isa achieved YHARS service levels of 82, 91 and 76 per cent respectively. (Table 35)

While client numbers represent the simplest measure of service levels, they do not take into account the length of support provided to clients. Service agreements in fact specify client numbers based on a full year of support, which corresponds to the period recommended for most YHARS clients (not in need of accommodation options). When support periods were taken into account, no location exceeded its YHARS service target, and service levels ranged from 93 per cent in Toowoomba to 56 per cent in Mt Isa (Table 36). The discrepancy between the two calculations of service levels implies that most young people benefited from considerably shorter support periods than the recommendation duration of one year.

Table 35: YHARS and internal After Care client numbers and targets

		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Inala	YHARS	44	50	53	147
	Internal After Care	3	4	1	8
	Total	47	54	54	155
	Target	61	60	60	181
	Per cent	77.0	90.0	90.0	85.6
Toowoomba	YHARS	93	150	39	282
	Internal After Care	11	23	10	44
	Total	104	173	49	326
	Target	70	80	75	225
	Per cent	148.6	216.3	65.3	144.9
Hervey Bay	YHARS	26	57	49	132
	Internal After Care	6	4	1	11
	Total	32	61	50	143
	Target	24	48	48	120
	Per cent	133.3	127.1	104.2	119.2
Rockhampton	YHARS	85	66	63	214
	Internal After Care	3	5	8	16
	Total	88	71	71	230
	Target	65	65	65	195
	Per cent	135.4	109.2	109.2	117.9
Townsville	YHARS	71	36	41	148
	Internal After Care	23	21	15	59
	Total	94	57	56	207
	Target	75	75	75	225
	Per cent	125.3	76.0	74.7	92.0
Mt Isa	YHARS	20	25	29	74
	Target	35	35	35	105
	Per cent	57.1	71.4	82.9	70.5
Total	Clients	385	441	309	1,135
	Target	330	363	358	1,051
	Per cent	116.7	121.5	86.3	108.0

Source: SRS data, Service agreements
Notes: The Inala Service Agreement specifies separate client targets for YHARS (54 in first year, 53 thereafter) and internal After Care (7 per year). All other locations work to a combined target for YHARS and internal After Care clients.

Table 36: YHARS and internal After Care case management support days and targets

Location	First referral	Client target per year	Target support days to 30 June 2013	Actual support days to 30 June 2013	Per cent %
Inala	10/11/2010	60	57,900	47,219	81.6
Toowoomba	20/10/2010	75	73,950	68,902	93.2
Hervey Bay	1/04/2011	48	39,504	25,714	65.1
Rockhampton	27/07/2010	65	69,615	58,810	84.5
Townsville	21/07/2010	75	80,775	63,578	78.7
Mt Isa	19/10/2010	35	34,545	19,442	56.3

Source: SRS, Service agreements
Notes: Target support days equals client target based on a full year of service multiplied by the number of days from date of first referral to 30 June 2013 inclusive.

Table 37: After Care client numbers and targets

		2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Total
Inala	Internal	3	4	1	8
	External	65	68	154	287
	Total	68	72	155	295
	Target	125	125	125	375
	Per cent	54.4	57.6	124.0	78.7
Toowoomba	Internal	11	23	10	44
	External	3	18	42	63
	Total	14	41	52	107
	Target	51	50	50	151
	Per cent	27.5	82.0	104.0	70.9
Hervey Bay	Internal	6	4	1	11
Rockhampton	Internal	3	5	8	16
	External	4	34	48	86
	Total	13	43	57	113
	Target	55	52	51	158
	Per cent	23.6	82.7	111.8	71.5
Townsville	Internal	23	21	15	59
	External	20	45	66	131
	Total	43	66	81	190
	Target	54	53	53	160
	Per cent	79.6	124.5	152.8	118.8
Total	Clients	138	222	345	705
	Target	285	280	279	844
	Per cent	48.4	79.3	123.7	83.5

Source: SRS, Service agreements
Notes: After Care clients in Hervey Bay contribute to the Rockhampton service level target.

After Care reached 84 per cent of its client target, and the number of young people supported increased considerably year on year. In 2010–11 After Care achieved only 48 per cent of its target, while in 2012–13 client numbers exceeded the target by 24 per cent. After Care client numbers in each location mirrored the overall trend, except in Townsville, which had already exceeded its After Care client target by 25 per cent in 2011–12. (Table 37)

Key findings:
- YHARS exceeded its service target by 8 per cent. Services in Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and Rockhampton supported clients well in excess of their targets.
- After Care achieved 84 per cent of its client target, with considerable year-on-year increases in client numbers.

Recommendations:
- That YHARS service levels in Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and Rockhampton be reviewed to ensure adequate on-going support for young people in those catchment areas, particularly for those sleeping rough, with appropriate increases in funding.
- That consideration be given to creating a program or service (or making it a priority for After Care) to build more effective linkages between services that cater for young people who have exited care, especially those outside of YHARS catchment areas. The service should pay particular attention to reaching those in the 18 to 21 years age bracket who may not be in contact with, eligible for, or want on-going contact with Child Safety services (as a support service case) and who are disconnected from other appropriate services.

3.5 Program components

YHARS offers young people holistic case management and brokerage of up to $3,500. Where young people are sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness, case workers help their clients to find transitional accommodation, which may include a stay in a Transition to Independent Living (TIL) unit. This section discusses the qualitative and quantitative data on the adequacy and effectiveness of the case management, brokerage and accommodation components of the program.

As set out in service agreements, After Care clients do not necessarily benefit from the wrap-around services offered to YHARS participants. While all YHARS providers except Mt Isa are required to provide case management support to a "small number" of After Care clients, brokerage represents the core of what After Care offers young people, with the advantage that brokerage funds can be delivered to a young person anywhere in the state. Nonetheless, data on external After Care clients, where it exists (see section 3.6.1 Case closures), suggest that many did receive case management support.

3.5.1 Case management

Case management delivered by YHARS providers constitutes a planned approach to service delivery (*Guidelines for service delivery*, p. 22). Stages in this planned approach begin with the referral of a young person through to their exit planning, case closure and evaluation. Who is responsible for this case management varies based on the referring agency and the age and other circumstances of the young person. Where case management is maintained by another service such as Child Safety or Youth Justice, that agency retains lead responsibility for the young person. In these situations YHARS works with the agencies and the young person to reduce their risk of homelessness and to help them reconnect with family and to reengage with education, training and employment opportunities.

While case management alone does not guarantee a young person a path out of homelessness, the qualitative evidence suggests that providing consistent, sustained support within a trusting relationship significantly improves their wellbeing, at least in the short term. We examine here the case management practices necessary to engage with a young person, and constraints on achieving outcomes imposed by limited support periods, housing stock and transition planning. The discussion is based on qualitative findings that provide insight into the process of relationship building between the case worker and the young person, the opportunities for self-determination, and how to provide young people with holistic support that helps them to achieve greater independence and stability.

Service providers and young people did not commonly use the term case manager. Young people usually referred to their case manager by name or used terms like "*worker*", "*key worker*" and "*case worker*". One service identified case managers as Youth Mentors, a title felt to be more appropriate to the role. One stakeholder explained that the case work practiced by YHARS does not necessarily correspond to the traditional, office-based model of case work. He emphasised that YHARS focuses on outreach work, where case workers begin by

engaging young people in a social relationship. Case management, he suggested, "*does not truly capture the diversity of the work.*"

Case workers discussed key elements of their roles in interviews, and these included discussion of tools, approaches, outreach and rapport-building processes, and service integration, all of which they saw as essential components of effective support. Qualitative data from all sites revealed three key ingredients to case management success: persistent and consistent contact from the case worker, the willingness and commitment to engage on the part of the young person, and the development of a meaningful relationship between the young person and the case worker.

Interviews with young people confirmed that these principles corresponded to practice. Most young people reported meeting with their case workers face-to-face at least once a week. Young people highly valued this contact, and stressed its significance to their wellbeing. Many also mentioned that they speak with their case worker by telephone. In some locations young people noted that their case worker visits them whenever they need support. Service providers validated this, stating that contact is often needs-based. This appeared to result from large caseloads, which risk putting case workers in a situation where they spend more time "putting out fires" rather than building supportive relationships with their clients.

Case workers put effort into impressing upon young people the importance of their engagement with supports. A number of participants expressed the view that the success of the service depended on their own personal engagement and their capacity to accept guidance and take steps towards improving their own lives. One interviewee thought that a lot of young people would benefit from YHARS, "*but they might be reluctant to do anything to help themselves.*"

Young people recognised that YHARS case workers put a lot of effort into building meaningful relationships with them. Most young people attributed their good relationship with their case worker to his or her personality:

> *My caseworker listens, he's funny, and it's good to talk to him.*

> *It's a very good program... My caseworker and I are good friends, which is why the program works well... The staff are very motivated and keen on helping us.*

> *We make jokes and all that... He's a really good guy... He always tries to help out when he can'*

> *He's someone who's easy to get along with... I connected to him from day one.*

Young people also appreciated the dedication shown by their case workers. As one of them put it, "*I like that my caseworker gets stuff done.*"

Staff on all sites spoke of involving young people in goal setting and tracking progress against case and action plans. These processes were more recognisable to young people in some locations than in others, however. Those who saw themselves as heavily involved in setting case

plan goals spoke of it as a new experience, and one that offered new perspectives on what support meant to them and about their own agency. Goals set in collaboration with young people varied widely, from practicalities like getting together some goods necessary for independent living, to gaining credentials to work at a particular job, to social and behavioural outcomes.

Service providers identified limited housing stock as the most significant barrier to effective service delivery. A lack of affordable accommodation in YHARS catchment areas means that many young people reach the end of their support period *before* they are housed, leaving no time for case workers to work with them to develop independent living skills. Case workers felt that in such cases, there needed to be greater flexibility around timeframes for support.

Length of support periods
Service agreements specify a 12-month limit to the support provided to young people (not in need of an accommodation option like a youth studio). Case workers suggested that this limit represented a barrier to effective service delivery. They suggested that a two-year support period would enhance outcomes for young people, and stressed that young people still need support once they are housed. One service provider explained that:

> *... young people are exited when they are housed and seem to be moving forward in a positive manner, however they often still need on-going support. Once they've built a strong rapport with their Youth Mentor, this is often the only real support they feel confident enough to call on. For ongoing, positive outcomes a young person often needs to be case managed to a lesser degree for longer periods.*

SRS data confirmed that YHARS case workers in some instances took a flexible approach to the length of support required by young people. YHARS participants took on average eight months to achieve all or most of their case plan goals, and After Care participants required on average nine months, yet some remained in contact with services for more than two years.

Table 38: Average and maximum support periods of YHARS clients

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Average	Maximum
	#	days	days
Fully	206	242	875
Mostly	185	246	848
Partially	135	199	865
Slightly	87	193	827
Not at all	97	106	586
Not recorded	41	168	735
All clients	751	208	875

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures calculated on data for young people who had completed support by the end of June 2013.

Table 39: Average and maximum support periods of internal After Care clients

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Average	Maximum
	#	days	days
Fully	35	296	902
Mostly	30	296	803
Partially	8	131	295
Slightly	11	133	409
Not at all	13	212	559
Not recorded	2	148.5	219
All clients	99	250.6	902

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures calculated on data for young people who had completed support by the end of June 2013.

Table 40: Average and maximum support periods of external After Care clients

Case plan goals achieved?	Clients	Average	Maximum
	#	days	days
Fully	90	146	740
Mostly	60	257	730
Partially	2	152	224
Slightly	5	111	393
Not at all	9	267	436
Not recorded	1	8.0	8
All clients	167	190.7	740

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Figures calculated on data for young people who had completed support by the end of June 2013.

Data for external After Care clients administered by Toowoomba and Townsville (and a very small number administered by Rockhampton, see section 3.6.1 Case closures) suggest that these After Care participants did indeed receive case management support, as their records give an indication of their achievement against case plan goal. The data show a very high proportion of participants achieving all or most of their case plan goals, and that these young people took on average between five and nine months to reach that point. Certain YHARS providers expressed doubt on the quality of case management support given to external After Care clients. In the absence of contextual information on case plan goal achievement provided by a reporting method like the Outcomes Star, the evaluation team warns against any attempt to compare case plan outcomes of participants in different locations and initiatives.

Leaving care plans

None of the research participants mentioned leaving care plans. Research identified in our literature review underlines the importance of leaving care plans in creating good outcomes for young people. Qualitative data revealed a significant gap in planning the transitioning process from care to independent living. Although leaving care plans are suggested in *Guidelines for service delivery* (2012, p. 9), of the young people we spoke with, none had leaving care plans. Staff at YHARS and Aftercare concurred that transition planning for young people leaving care is not adequate. The process was often ad hoc in response to a crisis in care or a young person reaching an age where they were required to leave care. Service providers cited a lack of transition plans for many young people, including 15 year olds, leaving the child protection system. Actively involving a young person in the case planning process was limited which meant that support people for the person might not be identified and supports are not tailored to reflect individual needs. The development of leaving care plans that include well defined accommodation arrangements and an ongoing process of assessment and monitoring are rare.

Leaving care plans are an artefact of careful engagement and shared planning with young people. For those who have diminished trust in adults fulfilling their responsibilities towards children, and have experienced high stress, artefacts are a powerful reminder of what has gone on. The process of developing and implementing these plans is as important as the artefact itself. The process should operate as a mechanism where information and trust can be passed on through referrals to the next tier of support for young people who have been in the child protection system. It appears that this mechanism rarely happens in a formal way and only in several sites in an informal way.

Various initiatives to improve transition planning are going on in the different sites. One of the more effective transition intake strategies articulated by YHARS caseworkers in Inala was their attendance at a weekly community lunch in the detention centre. This informal forum gave them the opportunity to become known to young people about to exit detention and an opportunity to explore with a young person their plans and options before they were in a housing crisis. A number of young people were able to be housed with extended family and non-kin family where they could access social and emotional support.

Townsville YHARS have proposed the establishment of a specialist team of skilled workers who take responsibility for developing, implementing and monitoring case plans for transitioning to independence. They recommend this element of the Child Protection System be outsourced to a local community organisation. They also recommend the establishment of effective communication systems between the Department and the organisation regarding the release and maintenance of all care leaver's records, including current contact details and status. They would like to see a young person have consistent and regular contact with their case manager who would identify support needs in conjunction with the young person and carers and modify existing plans and proposals.

Lack of housing stock was again cited as a significant factor in providing support to a young person leaving care: "*access to accommodation is essential, without accommodation options there cannot be a smooth transition from care.*"

Several service providers drew attention to the connections between trust and effective transitioning from YHARS to other services at the end of their support period. One explained that they try to refer young people to other services, but it is hard for the young people to trust a new service as it takes them 3 to 6 months to build trust with a caseworker, "*but we would love to work more with other services*". Where this was done effectively trust could be brokered on to other service providers. One young person explained that he and his flatmates "*became mates with the real estate person.*" In his case YHARS service providers have established a good partnership with a local real estate provider and took him along on several drop-in-visits and this then set up the young person's relationship with an allied real estate provider. One provider said that "*attempts to link young people in with other services is often fraught with difficulties as other services are not as involved with the young person or the young person does not relate and will not access these services without their Youth Mentor's encouragement, sometimes from behind the scenes. Often other services are not youth specific or have different agendas.*"

Transition planning is in one respect the core business at YHARS, and young people also need to be transitioned out of the YHARS programs. The process of supporting young people to move away from YHARS was considered important by a number of stakeholders and service providers. A stakeholder acknowledged that the YHARS initiative is part of an empowerment approach and called the program the "*walk away project*" as one of its goals is "*to enable clients to walk away from the project as they shouldn't need it all their life.*" Here, *client-focused* means to assist the young person in becoming that self-dependent and autonomous that s/he does not rely on the service anymore.

Engaging Indigenous young people

As identified in the *Guidelines for service delivery* (2011, p. 24), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are a priority group for these initiatives. Currently they are overrepresented young people in the criminal justice system, and in line with service agreements "*it is critical that dedicated strategies are put in place to ensure these young people's needs are sensitively and appropriately met.*" The quantitative data suggests there continues to be a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people whose cases are closed because they lose contact with services.

The factors essential to the successful engagement of these young people are complex and multi layered. A shared understanding of what is meant by 'homelessness' is an important starting point in connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Initiatives to deliver culturally appropriate services to these young people, the strategies to support this; employment of staff who are representative of and sensitive to, cultural needs; adaptation of the program and constraints of service delivery; plus the perspectives of young people are all explored here.

All service providers stressed their commitment to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and to improve their cultural competence. The qualitative data revealed that each had implemented some kind of strategy to respond to the cultural needs of this target group. Some service providers noted that the understanding of what it is to be 'homelessness'

is significantly different for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, 'sleeping rough' may not necessarily be interpreted as homeless by them. They may consider the *'separation from land and family'* as being homelessness instead. This provider noted that it is important to keep this in mind when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that it would be useful to develop and use a common definition amongst all homelessness services. Services did not have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies specific to YHARS and Aftercare but operated through their Organisations' overarching principles around inclusion.

One provider emphasised 'there needs to be a sound understanding of colonisation and its ongoing effects on Aboriginal people. Understanding the risks and causes of overrepresentation in the child safety and criminal justice system helps us to work more effectively with them'. This same provider stated the importance of understanding the local people and protocols in their region to enhance their ability to engage with young people and their families, and emphasised that it was important to work with the whole family, not just the young person, wherever possible. The attitude of staff and services, the ability to build trust with communities and the sharing of resources with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services were all cited as significant factors in successful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Efforts were made by most services to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At one site, there were several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers (a man and a woman) as well as workers from a different cultural group. This allowed the service to have a high profile in the community and to be seen as culturally responsive. In one site, the provider acknowledged that while it was desirable, it was difficult to find Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with an appropriate level of educational attainment. Here and elsewhere service providers worked collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services within the community and shared resources and case management. Young People Ahead who manage YHARS in Mt Isa have a reference group made up of Aboriginal elders who provide guidance on cultural aspects of the service.

In Hervey Bay, there were no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caseworkers but they conducted *'cultural activity camps'* based in the community and scheduled every six months to inform young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the service. These camps allowed providers to address issues young people might be facing, such as couch surfing, anger management and identity challenges. While it is usually young people of 16 and 20 years of age who participate in these camps, they are flexible and accommodate young people if they perceive a need. The camps offer an opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility for their life and their community. Other innovative services included *'yarning circles'*. These are dialogue circles used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to build respectful relationships, learn as collective group, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge by sharing stories about their lived experiences, feelings, thoughts and ideas on the different topics.

There was a perception among service providers that some young people are not *'centred in their culture'*, which has been passed down by their ancestors. He added that without this cul-

tural connectedness affirmation, it is hard to establish beliefs and values, which they try to teach in these cultural camps. Short funding time frames for both YHARS and the services they work with were a barrier to developing these types of programs. One Provider noted that they had ' *just partnered informally with an Aboriginal organisation to support young peo-ple...[when their funding was discontinued]. This has had an impact on our ongoing work. The organisation is not around anymore but 2 young male workers from there have started their own consultancy and we utilise them'*.

The need to provide a greater degree of flexibility in relation to times and programs for Abo-riginal and Torres Strait Islander young people was highlighted by several providers. One ser-vice provider talked about needing '*opportunities for us to develop life skills with longer range programs, I would love us to work with a housing provider who would give us a house and we would have a house parent for those young people getting prepared for independence. It needs to be Aboriginal specific using local Aboriginal people.'*

Two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people interviewed talked about the support they received from YHARS to return to school and further education. One young man has now reengaged with school and is in Year 10, has an apprenticeship and has attended a lead-ership program in a large city from a remote area. Another young woman, who had been an accomplished student at school and had attained lucrative full time employment but had lost her job when she became pregnant,. YHARS had helped her reengage with higher education and she was looking for employment. Both these young people said that being offered safe and stable housing with the additional support of YHARS staff had enabled them to move forward in their lives.

Young people from remote communities face additional challenges. Many are vulnerable to the risks of couch surfing or life on the streets when they exit detention as they need to wait in regional or metropolitan centres before they are able to return to family in remote areas. Abo-riginal and Torres Strait Islander young people exiting detention in Mount Isa experience a lack of suitable accommodation. They may have to wait long periods to 'return to country', which may be many hundreds of kilometres away. This issue makes family reintegration and sustainability of positive outcomes for a young person one of the hardest service goals to achieve. Here, transitional housing, such as the community managed youth studios, could be a suitable housing option.

Engaging highly mobile young people

High mobility is significant among the target groups. Many research participants had moved several times, sometimes to another state within Australia. These movements were sometimes related to the separation of their parents and resulted in less or no contact with one of their parents. Where participants were disconnected from their families, they sometimes expressed a lack of belonging (being at home) even though they were housed. Sometimes their move-ments were related to very scarce housing stock and they were moving around to find ac-commodation.

As highlighted, the sustainability of the initiatives to effect change in the life of a young person, in terms of both stable accommodation and independent life skills, requires a high degree of engagement with the YHARS service. This ability to engage in services and set and achieve goals is diminished when a young person is highly mobile. The impact of the initiatives on these young people is also difficult for services to ascertain. Service providers suggested it was difficult to keep track of young people when they are moving especially if it is out of area. '*It is hard to get results when a young person moves in and out of the service*'. Some of these highly mobile young people are also liable to '*change their mind in a moment and we need to be highly flexible and highly adaptable*'.

While delivering services in small tightly knit towns has specific challenges, there are some advantages in terms of keeping in contact with young people. Providers in Mt Isa noted they had strong networks from being in such a small town, '*we can find a young person by working so closely with other services*'. They also talked about the networking amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which enabled not only referrals through word of mouth but also the opportunity to find young people who they may have lost contact with.

It may well be that like YHARS clients in MT Isa; most young people are only moving between two or three communities/areas. The program could potentially explore better ways to assess and meet the needs of highly mobile young people, particularly those whose movements are fairly predictable in that they move between the few places of significance in their lives.

Access to mental health services

Mental Health issues affect many of the young people who connect with YHARS and Aftercare. Service providers and stakeholders discussed the complex nature of engaging a young person with substantial mental health issues, including substance misuse, and highlighted training undertaken by YHARS staff so they could better support young people's mental health.

Service providers felt that many of their clients suffered with post-traumatic stress, grief and feelings of anger and disappointment from processing experiences of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Some interviewees talked at length of experiences that corroborated this view. One young person had not slept properly in years due to feelings of distress related to difficult childhood experiences. Another participant had been admitted to hospital ten times in the weeks preceding the interview due to self-harm. These issues have led to a high demand for psychological support that cannot be provided by the services themselves.

Substance abuse was an issue for a number of the young people interviewed and the issue was raised by service providers and stakeholders. One young man explained that he had been underweight for many years due to his drug problems. Some had experimented with drugs and found themselves increasingly disengaging with their schools and families. One young woman from a relatively strict large family started using '*weed*' with her school friends at 14 years and dropped out of school and fell pregnant. Many had witnessed their parents abusing drugs and alcohol. For some witnessing the drug use of their parents and older peers led to the

use of alcohol and other drugs, but others communicated their determination to take a different path and make choices to focus on education and work. One young woman explained how her mother had been a street kid when she was younger and having her children placed in foster care had prompted the mother to get support and be drug free. The young woman participating in the interview indicated that she herself had no interest in drugs and alcohol because she had seen the damage it could do to families.

Many found their past and present circumstances provoked anxiety about the future and in particular about housing security. A young person who left home due to family issues now lives by herself in a one-bed room unit supplied through a local NGO agency. She expressed a sense of despair about being able to find a route out of homelessness:

> *I'm always scared that I could be homeless again one day... I never wanna do the wrong things 'cause I'm scared to be homeless again and those days were very very bad.*

Caseworkers need to be well linked in to psychological services so they can make appropriate referrals. In remote areas the lack of mental health services is pronounced. In Mt Isa wait lists are long as a psychiatrist only visits once a month, though they can do video link if necessary.

Service responses to supporting young people with mental health issues typically involved additional training for staff. One service provider stated, 'these young people[with mental health issues] take up most of our case management hours and are extremely exhausting to work with.' No case workers had formal qualifications in mental health, nor are any program outcomes based on mental health outcomes. Nevertheless, all services had provided some form of Mental Health First Aid training to staff. As well as mental health training, Townsville YHARS supported new staff develop skills in this area by shadowing experienced staff, and mentoring and role modelling by the coordinator. A significant issue for services is the lack of outreach mental health services for young people when they are not yet stabilised as it is- 'the period where the young person often becomes involved with the justice system'.

Key findings:
- Limited housing stock was the most significant barrier to effective service delivery. Many young people reach the end of their 12-month support period *before* they have found longer-term housing.
- Transition from care plans were poorly used, which has meant that YHARS and After Care case workers often have initial contact with clients at crisis rather than prevention points. Various initiatives to improve transition planning with Child Safety case managers are now underway.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from remote communities are particularly vulnerable when exiting detention as they may have to wait for long periods before returning to country, but services find it difficult to meet their transitional housing needs. There are a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people whose cases are closed because they lose contact with services before they achieve their goals.

- The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers is an important element in developing culturally responsive services. Formal links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations also strengthens service delivery to this group of young people.
- Many YHARS and After Care clients are highly mobile, and this has a negative impact on service delivery and evaluating outcomes.
- Many clients are dealing with mental health challenges, and there are few mental health supports available to them.

Recommendations:
- That there be greater flexibility around timeframes for case work in contexts where there is limited housing stock.
- That the Department support more effective communication between key stakeholders, transition planning and case management for young people leaving care.
- That youth studios or TIL units designated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people be set up in Mt Isa and other locations where young people from remote communities have to wait to return to country after exiting detention.
- That best practice guidelines be developed for tracking and maintaining contact with highly mobile young people.
- That consideration be given to the employment of people with mental health qualifications to support staff to work more effectively with young people dealing with mental health issues.

3.5.2 Case study – Tom

Tom (21 years old) was seven when his parents separated and left him in foster care. They moved away from the area and he remained in foster care from when he was 7 to 18 years old. He has 3 brothers who were in other foster homes. Tom has had more than 15 foster carers and attributes his depression and anger management issue to childhood instability and lack of stable attachments. He says of his foster carers that he had *'lots of bad ones then some good ones who I messed over because I couldn't see them as good people I was so messed up'*. Tom says at 16 he started drinking a lot and stealing alcohol. When he was 17 he went into detention for 14 months for assault.

He reconnected with his mother in detention and on release went to stay with her but discovered she had a mental illness and things did not work out. He moved away to another regional town, started drinking and drugging and for a while selling drugs. He made lots of money, had a girlfriend and a baby and felt that life was good for a time. However, when they separated Tom became very depressed and suicidal. He felt *'he had run out of options'*. He said *'every youth worker says you will grow up and it will be better but that doesn't help when you are having a terrible time'* Tom took an overdose and spent time in hospital. Tom found out about YHARS through his younger brother when he was released from hospital. Tom's state of mind at this point was very fragile and he doesn't remember his first meeting with them.

As there was no accommodation available in a TILS unit at the time so YHARS set Tom and his brother up in a hotel for 2 months. During that time YHARS supported them to apply for rental properties but as they were on Centrelink benefits they were not considered as good prospective tenants. Tom has tried living with both friends and family but as he becomes more stable and 'clean' this often does not work out if they are using drugs and alcohol. *'I don't drink now, I realise it doesn't work for me, it got me into all my problems. I refuse to live the lifestyle my brothers live'*. At the moment he doesn't want to see any family. He says he used to drop everything for them but cannot do that anymore.

YHARS provided Tom with a case manager, but he says it took him a long time to trust YHARS due to *'my own stuff'*. *'YHARS said they would give me a roof over my head and once they did that I began to trust them.'* Over time however, he learned to trust his case-worker and this has enabled him to find the confidence to look for work - he has been in stable employment for 6 months in an electrical supplies store. He has learnt how to manage his money with help from YHARS and saved to buy a car and how to access a unit on the rental market.

The thing that Tom most values about YHARS is that *'they do it because they WANT to help and I am not used to seeing an organisation that cares like that'*. He says he *'has everything he needs at home now'* and that YHARS brokerage enabled him to have those things. The caseworker checks in with Tom three times a week, Tom rings him if he needs him and the worker meets him that day or as soon as he can the next day. YHARS are currently helping Tom to access legal aid so he can reconnect with his son.

He says he *'gets everything he needs from YHARS but there is a limit to what I want them to do, I like to do things for myself if I can'*. Toms says that learning to trust has been his biggest issue and that he still works on that every day. In the future *'I would like to help other kids, they would definitely benefit from the YHARS program, and so many kids need help.'*

3.5.3 Brokerage

Brokerage plays a fundamental role in the program logic of YHARS and After Care. The *Guidelines for Service Delivery* specify that brokerage should be used to support a case plan, but leave case managers considerable flexibility to determine how funds should be spent, and stipulate that purchases "*should be assessed and negotiated in collaboration with the client*". Case managers acknowledged the value of brokerage funds as a tool both for establishing relationships with young people and for encouraging them to achieve case plan goals. As one case worker put it:

> *Brokerage is wonderful, a great tool. Sometimes you meet with a young person on the streets and you can provide them with a feed at McDonalds. They are keen to go to those places, so you put that into their case plan and meet with them regularly.*

The function of brokerage within the YHARS and After Care initiatives differs from the typical uses presented in *The Road Home*. The examples given in the white paper concerned the

Table 41: Purpose of YHARS and After Care brokerage expenditure (2010–11)

Expenditure category	Expenditure	Per cent
	$	%
Household goods (furnishings, white goods)	57,288	51.6
Other	13,857	12.5
Training-related (laptop, internet, text books)	7,024	6.3
Food	5,681	5.1
Life-skills (cooking classes, financial skills)	4,349	3.9
Bond and/or rental guarantee	4,108	3.7
Travel for employment, training, education	3,202	2.9
Rent arrears	3,115	2.8
Medical services	2,536	2.3
Driving lessons	2,180	2.0
Removal costs	1,750	1.6
Utility bills	1,680	1.5
Fees for education or training	1,289	1.2
Dental services	1,116	1.0
Uniforms, safety wear	982	0.9
Medicine, health, hygiene consumables	802	0.7
Alcohol and drug counselling	0	0.0
Mental health services, family counselling	0	0.0
Total	110,957	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010–11
Notes: Expenditure shown for 92 clients whose support period began and ended in the 2010–11 financial year.

payment of rental arrears or a bond in order to maintain or secure a rental property (pp. 26, 29, 51), the improvement of a rental property to ensure the safety of its tenants (p. 33), and the purchase of items and services for children (pp. 52, 56). YHARS and After Care brokerage funds, on the other hand, were above all used to allow young people to set themselves up in a new rental property. Detailed expenditure data for the 2011–12 indicate that participants only spent 5.5 per cent of their brokerage monies on bonds and rental arrears, but more than 50 per cent on household goods (Table 41).

While service providers require flexibility around how brokerage funds should be spent, some guidelines would help case workers and clients balance expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments. Training-related expenses (including fees), life-skills and driving les-sons accounted for only 13 per cent of all brokerage expenditure, while nothing was spent on

alcohol and drug counselling, mental health service or family counselling. In some cases this may have occurred because these services could be obtained through other services, and the *Guidelines for Service Delivery* specify that brokerage funds should not be used where assistance is available through other sources. Both short- and long-term spending bring value to the client, but long-term spending has greater value once clients feel comfortable and respected within the initiative.

Expenditure data showed that among YHARS and internal After Care clients, brokerage increased in line with the achievement of case plan goals. YHARS clients who ticked off all of their goals spent, on average, $2,090 throughout their support period, more than the $1,950 spent by those who achieved most of their goals, and significantly more than the $270 for those who satisfied none of their goals. The same relationship was observed among internal After Care clients. The use of brokerage funds as an incentive to complete case plan goals appeared less direct in data of external After Care clients (not shown).

External After Care clients in general spent significantly more brokerage than those case managed by YHARS providers. On average, external After Care clients spent $2,610, internal After Care clients $2,220, and YHARS clients $1,740 (Table 42, Table 43). This discrepancy can partly be explained by the difference in age between YHARS and After Care clients, as older After Care clients are more likely to incur higher costs as they establish themselves in rental and employment markets. Another possible explanation might be the higher cost of accessing goods and services faced by After Care clients outside of well-serviced urban areas, an explanation somewhat supported by YHARS client data, which reveal the highest average brokerage spend among YHARS clients who completed all or most of their case plan goals in Mount Isa (not shown).

Table 42: YHARS brokerage expenditure and client actuals and targets

	Expenditure			Clients			Per-client
	Actual	Budget	Per cent	Actual	Target	Per cent	average
	$ '000	$ '000	%	#	#	%	$
Inala	199.8	318.5	62.7	115	91	126.4	1,740
Toowoomba	220.6	455.0	48.5	166	130	127.7	1,330
Hervey Bay	104.5	236.0	44.3	82	67	122.4	1,270
Rockhampton	338.7	430.5	78.7	169	123	137.4	2,000
Townsville	270.9	455.0	59.5	128	130	98.5	2,120
Mt Isa	96.1	236.0	40.7	49	67	73.1	1,960
Total	1,230.7	2,131.0	57.8	709	608	116.6	1,740

Source: SRS data 2010 – 13, Service agreements
Notes: Brokerage available to Hervey Bay and Mt Isa did not quite correspond to 67 clients at $3500 each. Average client amounts rounded to the nearest ten dollars.

Table 43: After Care brokerage actuals and targets and average spend per client

		Expenditure			Clients			Brokerage
		Actual	Budget	Per cent	Actual	Target	Per cent	per client
		$ '000	$ '000	%	#	#	%	$
Inala	Internal	18.8			8			2,350
	External	694.0			275			2,520
	Total	712.7	1,312.5	54.3	283	375	75.5	2,520
Toowoomba	Internal	67.1			33			2,030
	External	144.2			47			3,070
	Total	211.3	528.5	40.0	80	151	53.0	2,640
Hervey Bay	Internal	15.5			9	15	60.0	1,720
Rockhampton	Internal	25.3			16			1,580
	External	161.9			67			2,420
	Total	202.7	553.0	36.6	92	158	58.2	2,200
Townsville	Internal	139.8			54			2,590
	External	301.4			109			2,770
	Total	441.2	560.0	78.8	163	160	101.9	2,710
Total	Internal	266.4			120			2,220
	External	1,301.5			498			2,610
	Total	1,567.9	2,954.0	53.1	618	844	73.2	2,540

Source: SRS, Service agreements
Notes: After Care clients in Hervey Bay contribute to the Rockhampton service level target.

Qualitative data suggested that the discrepancy between YHARS and After Care brokerage spends may also relate to different practices among service providers. Some case workers expressed scepticism about the way brokerage funds were being used by external services supporting After Care clients. One case worker complained of a lack of oversight in the use of brokerage funds:

We need the Department to sit down with us and work out how to improve the After Care system. There needs to be more accountability from these services [regarding the use of brokerage funds]. I challenge them to tell me how $3500 worth of crap will change a person's life. They buy a computer for someone to look up jobs!

Detailed expenditure data for 2010–11 could not be used to determine the spending priorities of external After Care clients, as only two clients completed their support periods during this year.

The evaluation team recommends further exploration of the suitability of per-client brokerage targets. The recommended brokerage fund limit of $3,500 per client comes with a significant opportunity cost, and has a weighty coefficient in calculations on the efficiency of the initiatives. In the context of over-demand for YHARS services and, in particular, TIL units, and given that YHARS clients appear able to achieve their case plan goals with less than half of the $3,500 brokerage allocation, the option to reallocate some of the funding earmarked for brokerage to TIL units or more staff appears worthy of consideration.

Key findings:
- Brokerage plays a fundamental role in the effective delivery of YHARS and After Care.
- Detailed expenditure data for the 2011–12 indicate that more than 50 per cent of brokerage funds were spent on household goods.
- External After Care clients spent significantly more brokerage than those case managed by YHARS providers.

Recommendations:
- That the YHARS per-client brokerage limit be reviewed. If reduced, the Department could consider using funds to acquire more TIL units or increase staffing in areas of high demand.
- That reporting processes for external After Care clients be urgently reviewed.
- That guidelines be developed to help case workers and clients balance brokerage expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments, particularly education.

3.5.4 Accommodation

YHARS recorded an average of 182 nights of transitional accommodation in respect of its 850 YHARS and internal After Care clients with closed cases, with longer stays corresponding to more successful client outcomes. Clients who achieved all or most of their case plan goals required around seven months of transitional accommodation. (Table 44)

Table 44: Average stay by accommodation type

Goals achieved?	Total nights	Family/ carer	Youth studio	TIL unit	Community housing	Social housing	Private rental	Other	Not recorded
Fully	223	79	1	25	30	33	36	19	1
Mostly	220	67	0	11	41	29	40	32	0
Partially	157	60	0	6	27	11	22	28	2
Slightly	158	64	0	1	12	17	23	38	2
Not at all	88	31	0	0	16	7	6	27	1
All clients	182	62	1	11	28	21	29	27	1

Source: SRS data 2010 – 13
Notes: Figures calculated using data of 850 YHARS and internal After Care clients with closed cases.

YHARS offered two specific transitional accommodation options. As mentioned, Kids Under Cover Youth Studios were used only in Brisbane, Townsville, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. Each service also managed three Transition to Independent Living (TIL) units. To be eligible for these units, young people must have low-to-medium support needs, be eligible for income support and social housing, and demonstrate skills for semi-independent living. Referrals for accommodation in these units may come from Youth Justice, Child Safety and other government and non-government service providers. If a young person is accommodated in a TILS unit, YHARS becomes responsible for their case management (*Guidelines for Service Delivery*, p. 20).

Service providers also accessed other forms of accommodation offered by families and carers, and community and social housing. Across all sites, a shortage of accommodation options and a high demand for TIL units led to long waiting lists. In Rockhampton, staff noted that their waiting list included more than 15 people. One allied service provider explained that they were negotiating with the Department of Housing to transform the TIL units from one- to two-bedroom units to provide more suitable accommodation for young parents. One TIL unit had already been transformed, while the redevelopment of the other units was awaiting approval from the Department.

TIL units represent an important and successful facet of the initiative. Young people interviewed who were housed in a TIL unit understood that it offered them a chance to stabilise, develop a tenancy track record and develop other skills. One young person who had left his previous home because of its location and moved into a TIL unit stated that "*it's pretty awesome... I don't do parties in it.*" Another young person who used to live with his foster family moved into a TIL unit in February 2012. He commented that "*it's great owning a place like this,*" and explained that moving into a TIL unit constituted a first step towards housing stability.

A stakeholder from the Department noted that young people in TIL units usually achieve the best outcomes, which SRS data confirm. Young people who achieved all or most of their case plan goals spent, on average, more time in TIL units and less time in other forms of accommodation than other clients (Table 44). Qualitative data indicated that young people who moved into the units underwent a change in attitude to housing. A stakeholder gave an example of changing behaviours: "*They don't turn the music up so loud, because they realise it might put their tenancy at risk.*"

The long waiting lists for TIL units can place YHARS case workers in delicate situations. On one site, staff felt a conflict of interest between their roles as case managers and landlords, which required them to provide emotional support on the one hand, but set limits and manage behaviour on the other. On another site, a case worker explained how a TIL vacancy would be filled through a team meeting that would prioritise young people on the basis of their needs, such as their exposure to domestic violence. The case worker noted that they "*also look at other factors, such as low income and unemployment,*" and prefer to house people with whom they have established a relationship.

TIL units were not the only form of accommodation that allowed young people to achieve their case plan goals. Many young people with successful outcomes used accommodation with family or carers, and some also lived in community and social housing (Table 44). Nonetheless, SRS data showed clear evidence that family and carers and TIL units provided young people with the best chance of achieving their goals.

Key findings:
- YHARS and internal After Care participants used around seven months of transitional accommodation to achieve their case plan goals.
- Young people housed in TIL units or with family and carers achieved better outcomes.

Recommendations:
- That the Department increase the supply of TIL units.

3.6 Client outcomes

3.6.1 Case closures

YHARS providers had closed the cases of three-quarters of their YHARS clients and 72 per cent of the internal After Care clients by the end of June 2013, consistent with expectations for a three-year observation period with a nominal support period of one year. Case closure data of external After Care clients, on the other hand, revealed that some locations did not use the SRS to record client outcomes. (Table 45)

Table 45: Case closures by initiative and location

	YHARS			After Care internal			After Care external		
	Cases	Closed	%	Cases	Closed	%	Cases	Closed	%
Inala	147	97	66.0	8	2	25.0	287	0	0.0
Toowoomba	282	234	83.0	44	32	72.7	63	59	93.7
Hervey Bay	132	102	77.3	11	9	81.8	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rockhampton	214	168	78.5	16	11	68.8	86	4	4.7
Townsville	148	111	75.0	59	45	76.3	131	104	79.4
Mt Isa	74	39	52.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	997	751	75.3	138	99	71.7	567	167	29.5

Source: SRS data 2010–2013

Table 46: Reasons for case closure and case plan completion (YHARS, internal After Care)

Case plan closed when client...	Case plan goals achieved?						Total
	Fully	Mostly	Partially	Slightly	Not at all	No record	
completed case plan	169	80	5		1		255
moved from area	37	49	50	31	18	7	192
moved to another agency	3	4	4	1	1	3	16
lost contact	3	9	12	7	22	9	62
unwilling or unable to engage	14	44	62	45	52	5	222
terminated support	9	17	4	5	8	2	45
returned to detention				4	2		6
Staffing reasons		5	4	1	2		12
Not recorded	6	7	3	3	4	17	40
Total	241	215	148	95	108	43	850

Source: SRS data 2010–13

Table 47: Reasons for case closure and case plan completion (external After Care)

Case plan closed when client...	Case plan goals achieved?						Total
	Fully	Mostly	Partially	Slightly	Not at all	No record	
completed case plan	74	53	6				133
moved from area	1	1	2		1		5
lost contact		1		1	3		5
unwilling or unable to engage	2		1	1			4
terminated support		2					2
Not recorded	13	3			1	1	18
Total	90	60	9	2	5	1	167

Source: SRS data 2010–13

While Toowoomba and Townsville reported closed cases in respect of 94 and 79 per cent of their external After Care clients, Rockhampton reported only 4 out of a total of 86, and Inala reported not a single closed case (Table 45). Given that After Care does not necessarily involve case management, it is not clear to the evaluators whether this lack of data represents a breach of contractual arrangements or simply that After Care delivered through Inala and Rockhampton constituted a monetary transfer without any case management support.

Among YHARS and internal After Care clients with closed cases, more than half achieved all or most of their case plan goals. Case plan completion represented the most common reason for closing a case plan, cited in 30 per cent of cases. In 26 per cent of cases, the client proved unable or unwilling to engage, and in a further 23 per cent of cases, the client moved from the area. (Table 46)

Available data on external After Care clients showed that 54 per cent fully completed and 34 per cent mostly completed their case plan goals. Practically all cases were closed following case plan completion (Table 47). Certain services cast doubt on the quality of case management provided to external After Care clients. If true, this implies that these impressive results in reality reflect poor reporting practices and unambitious case plan goals.

Key findings:
- YHARS providers reported 850 closed YHARS and internal After Care support periods.
- More than half of YHARS and internal After Care clients achieved all or most of their case plan goals.
- Around one-fifth of YHARS and internal After Care clients disengaged and a further 12 per cent moved from the area before they could complete all or most of their goals.
- Data on external After Care clients administered through Inala and Rockhampton was very incomplete or inexistent.

Recommendation:
- That reporting processes for external After Care clients be urgently reviewed.

Table 48: YHARS and internal After Care clients living with parents at the end of support

	Total closed cases	Young person living with one or two parents	Per cent
Inala	99	14	14.1
Toowoomba	266	57	21.4
Hervey Bay	111	20	18.0
Rockhampton	179	30	16.8
Townsville	156	18	11.5
Mt Isa	39	3	7.7
Total	850	142	16.7

Source: SRS data 2010–13

3.6.2 Reconnecting with family

Keeping young people connected with family represents a key component in the strategy to prevent youth homelessness. YHARS seeks to reconnect young people with their family when that relationship has broken down. The SRS does not capture information on the relationship between young people and their family, but it does provide a partial proxy in cases when a young person returns to live with family following support. Of the 850 cases closed in respect of YHARS and internal After Care clients, 17 per cent of young people were living with one or two parents at case closure (Table 48).

Key finding:
- One-sixth of YHARS and internal After Care clients were living with one or two parents when their cases were closed.

3.6.3 Stable housing

Preventing exits into homelessness stands as the core objective of the YHARS and After Care initiatives. Of the 850 cases closed in respect of YHARS and internal After Care clients, almost half were renting, 12 per cent were living rent free, and 13 per cent were in other arrangements, including one individual who purchased a home. The housing situation of the young person was not recorded in one-quarter of closed cases. (Table 49)

Among the 167 external After Care clients with closed service records, 63 per cent were renting and 12 per cent were living rent free, while the housing situation of 13 per cent was not recorded. (Table 50)

There is some concern as to whether accommodation in a caravan park or transitional housing, noted in the cases of twenty YHARS and internal After Care and 24 external After Care clients, corresponds to stable housing, and whether support for these clients should have ended without the young person specifically requesting that support be terminated.

Table 49: Housing situation of YHARS and internal After Care clients at case closure

		Closed cases	Per cent
Renter	Private housing	231	27.2
	Public housing	86	10.1
	Boarding house	45	5.3
	Community housing	40	4.7
	Caravan park	10	1.2
	Transitional housing	10	1.2
Rent-free	Private housing	71	8.4
	Public housing	28	3.3
Other		113	13.3
Not recorded		216	25.4
Total		850	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010 – 13
Notes: One young person supported by YHARS purchased a home.

Table 50: Housing situation of external After Care clients at case closure

		Closed cases	Per cent
Renter	Public housing	42	25.1
	Private housing	29	17.4
	Transitional housing	20	12.0
	Community housing	9	5.4
	Caravan park	4	2.4
Rent-free	Private housing	11	6.6
	Public housing	10	6.0
Other		21	12.6
Not recorded		21	12.6
Total		167	100.0

Source: SRS data 2010 – 13

Qualitative data indicated many obstacles to housing young people appropriately, including a general shortage of available housing as well as prejudiced housing providers who are particularly reluctant to offer accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people or ex-offenders. In some cases young people found housing in areas where they felt unsafe or were far from training and employment opportunities. In general a lack of public

and affordable private housing compromised the capacity of the initiatives to achieve long-term objectives for young people.

Key findings:
- Around 60 per cent of YHARS and After Care clients found stable accommodation in public and private housing.
- In 89 cases the young person was living in a boarding home, caravan park or transitional housing, raising concerns over whether support for these clients should have ended.
- Services cited a lack of public and affordable private housing as a key barrier to long-term client outcomes.

3.6.4 Income and participation in education, training and work

Engaging young people in education, training and employment is one of the six key objectives outlined in the *Guidelines for Service Delivery* (2011, p. 7). Often the first step towards increased independence and improved participation in education, training and work involves accessing Centrelink entitlements. On commencing support, 145 of the 850 YHARS and internal After Care participants reported no income (17 per cent). Case workers enabled young people to access benefits suited to their needs. Thirteen young people began to receive Aus- or Abstudy, indicating that they had commenced formal education, and 87 clients began to receive Newstart allowance, which involves a job-seeker activity test. A further 21 young people began to access the Parenting Payment which, unlike the Newstart allowance, does not have an activity test. (Table 51)

Table 51: Income sources of YHARS and internal After Care clients

	Before	After
Wages or salary	77	71
Aus/Abstudy		13
Youth allowance	428	398
Newstart allowance		87
Parenting payment	63	84
Special benefit	9	13
Disability support pension	23	27
Other	0	17
Nil income	145	60
Not recorded	105	80
Total	850	850

Source: SRS data 2010–2013

Table 52: Labour force status of YHARS and internal After Care clients

	Before	After
Employed full time	21	59
Employed part time	76	82
Unemployed	293	218
Not in labour force	251	217
Not recorded	209	274
Total	850	850

Source: SRS data 2010–13
Notes: Full-time employment considered to be 35 hours per week or more.

While income source data showed that the number of wage and salary earners declined from 77 to 71 (Table 51), labour force status data indicated that the number of young people in full-time work increased from 21 to 59, and the number with a part-time job increased from 76 to 82 (Table 52). The labour force status of almost one-third of clients at case closure was not recorded.

Many clients saw a change in their education status. Overall the number of young people enrolled in school decreased from 272 pre-program to 181 at case closure (not shown). No educational status for 78 per cent of young people was recorded, reflecting that many of these young people had moved beyond schooling age. Education is typically discussed in the service agreement as a pursuit that can follow stabilising resources such as accommodation and access to specialist support services. Brokerage funds can be used "for enrolment or course fees at an educational or training institution," as well as to pay for lessons that support young people to acquire licences required in certain jobs (2011, p. 32).

Young people in care and those at risk have higher chances of becoming disenfranchised in schooling and have low attainment rates because of disrupted school attendance and subsequent problems at school (Working Group on Education for Children and Young People in Out-of-home Care in Queensland, 2011). Connecting young people to formal education and training where they could acquire recognised credentials required concerted approaches and relationships built up over time on the part of YHARS services. There are two types of participation in education and training that are important in the YHARS initiatives. The first is opportunities to engage in educational opportunities focussed on independent living skills and the second is opportunities to engage in formal learning which leads to credentials. The first is important because it is often needed before young people who have had negative experiences with school are prepared to consider the latter.

Most of the YHARS services offered 'soft education' opportunities for their clients. Easy entry activity based short courses were considered important for clients not only in terms of content (typically around independent living skills) but also in terms of reengaging with the idea of 'learning'. Group activities were designed to build confidence, social skills and a strong sense of self-efficacy in their clients. Some of the courses offered included horse whispering

courses, cooking classes, health, beauty and hygiene classes. The objectives of these courses gave young people a chance to develop tacit skills in independent living (socialising, broadening horizons, skills in personal care), which many young people in the YHARS target groups have missed out on in their homes and residences. These courses were offered alongside more standard workforce preparation courses like computer skills, hospitality and so on. Many of the young people we spoke to felt their engagement in these activities kept them '*off the streets*' and '*out of trouble*' and gave them opportunities to '*make friends*'. Many service providers believed that engagement in these learning opportunities enabled young people to make bonds in their communities, to avoid conflicts with their neighbourhood, and to reengage with identities as learners.

A number of YHARS clients had been able to continue their education in conventional schools. Staff in a number of sites had formed a sustainable and positive partnership with local (conventional) schools. In Hervey Bay for example, the local school was attended by a lot of YHARS clients, especially those with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. The allied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth specific service based near the school was also part of this partnership. YHARS had instigated this partnership 'through one of their really skilled workers who engaged with the head of the school'. Young participants mentioned that they can complete their high school certificate there as well as other certificates. Here and in other sites, caseworkers had established good relationships with local schools and worked closely with teaching staff encouraging two way communication about students who had housing issues. These experiences suggest that school sites can be a 'good cross over point' in young people's lives (where they are in school) and there are productive outcomes for YHARS when strong partnerships are established with schools. Unfortunately, not all sites believed personnel in their local conventional schools were responsive to the out-of-school issues young people faced and that they were able to engage in effective cross agency work.

Nula's case study (section 3.6.5) is an example of how the provision of adequate housing enabled one client to remain connected to conventional schooling. This case study highlights the importance of caseworkers spending time building relationships with families and with school personnel as well as with young people. The triumvirate enables them to effectively address the question of what constitutes the best housing in terms of housing that enables young people to secure a future that is economically adequate as well as housed via continuing with education rather than housing that gets young people off the streets but might not lead to a housing secure future. In Nula's case, effective and sustained case work allowed the best possible supports to be wrapped around Nula to increase her chances of moving away from potential protracted unemployment and raising a child in poverty.

In spite of the best efforts of YHARS staff to establish relationships with local schools, not all young people were able to secure educational credentials through conventional schooling. The Queensland Department of Education and Training supports flexible education options for young people at risk of schooling disengagement and are based on behavioural not therapeutic models of care, including Positive Learning Centres, district based centres and Flexible Learning Services. The Working Group on Education for Children and Young People in Out-

of-home Care in Queensland, did not see these centres as the most appropriate sites for young people in care because these young people need a more therapeutic model (p. 12,2011) Flexible learning programs are another alternative and tend to be relatively small, have high levels of staffing, flexible timeframes and personalised curriculum. They have been shown to be successful for young people dealing with complex issues (Te Riele 2012).

A number of YHARS clients we spoke to were attending Flexible Learning Programs. These young people were having positive experiences of schooling and were committed to attaining education credentials. The programs offered extra support and flexibility for young people managing precarious housing or heightened care responsibilities in their homes. Furthermore, these young people were able to gain educational credentials in an environment where they did not feel that the instability in their home lives was stigmatised (See Case Study: Jucinta).

While flexible learning centres are sites where a holistic approach to young people underpins everyday practice, not all young people could access these resources. A number of YHARS services providers reported that the entry level skills expected by their local flexi-school were too high: 'most of the young people who use YHARS don't get into Flexi-school as the expectations of the schools are too high'. In other sites waiting lists were too long and young people were not able to access the service when they were ready. The qualitative interviews show that the experience of preparing to take a step towards a positive resource and then missing out because of services are not accessible is often a repeated one for young people at risk. Unfortunately these experiences probably reinforce the notion that education is not for them.

While participation and attainment in education and training offers an important route out of poverty and instability for young people it is not enough on its own to ensure wellbeing. In Nula's case her wellbeing was guaranteed by the combination of being able to complete school and be adequately housed with her family. This meant she had the social supports around her that were needed as she moved into the early stages of parenting and potentially her own working life. Social connection is very important to young people at risk and YHARS programs are strongly focussed on supporting young people to rebuild old connections and forge new ones.

Jucinta's case study (section 3.6.6) illustrates a situation where participation in education was very important for a young person but nonetheless was secondary to her family obligations. YHARS supported her to go to a Flexible Education program where she could meet these and engage successfully in education.

Key findings:
- YHARS supports two types of participation in education and training: opportunities to engage in educational opportunities focussed on independent living skills, and opportunities to engage in formal learning that leads to credentials.
- Positive educational outcomes were associated with strong relationships between YHARS caseworkers and education providers.

- A holistic approach was important in setting up the conditions which enabled young people to reengage with education and/or work.

Recommendation:
- That the Department liaise with the Queensland Department of Education and Training to increase the provision of places in Flexible Learning Programs for young people and prioritise places for young people who have been in care in these programs.

3.6.5 Case study – Elena

Elena (19 years) was one of nine children living with her parents in a three-bedroom social housing property. When she was 14, she became involved in a relationship with a boy and left home. She proceeded to couch surf with friends. After becoming pregnant she returned to her family, but her situation was precarious as she had strayed from the strict traditional Christian values that emphasise commitment to family and marriage within the community. Pregnancy outside of marriage goes against the grain of expectations in her family of origin.

Elena came into contact with YHARS through an arts-based workshop that they provided at a community event. When the YHARS workers learned of her pregnancy, they began to case manage her. YHARS support initially included food packages and a 'Go' card. YHARS workers also introduced Elena to the idea of a Youth Studio when she indicated that she could not return to live with her parents due to a lack of space.

Her parents were initially wary of the Youth Studio option. They worried that accepting support from a government agency would categorise Elena (and her child) as homeless. As first-generation migrants from South America, the family was embedded in a tight ethno-specific community network characterised by bonding capital, where its members work together to meet the needs of each other. People inside the network look upon outsiders, including government agencies, with distrust. The parents had no intention of refusing Elena and her child a home, and did not want any official record of them as being at risk of homelessness.

> *Me and my dad we communicate. He makes me understand the good and the bad of working with these services and he opens me up to the things that might happen.... See if I had not told him, you would just look at me as at risk of homelessness and then think certain things about me.*

YHARS workers met with the parents over time, and were able to reassure them that the administrative categorisation needed to secure a Youth Studio would not have adverse consequences for Elena or reflect on their own capacity to provide for their children. YHARS caseworkers were sensitive to their need to be recognised as good parents and providers. Once this respect was established, Elena's parents agreed to a Youth Studio. A worker familiar with the cultural values, beliefs and priorities of the family conducted this delicate process over time, and took care to enable Elena to re-establish herself in the eyes of her family and community, and assume a more adult position in the community as she entered parenthood.

Once Elena had returned to the family home her parents insisted that she return to school in spite of her pregnancy. YHARS caseworkers had a strong relationship with the school and together they encouraged Elena to continue. Elena now lives together with her baby in the Youth Studio at the back of her parent's house. Her parents provide regular childcare. She successfully completed year 12, and is now considering a nursing degree.

3.6.6 Case study – Jucinta

At the time of interview Jucinta was a 15-year-old Aboriginal girl living in a very crowded three-bedroom house with four adults (her mother and her partner, and her aunt and her partner) and seven siblings. She and her siblings had been taken into care when she was in late primary school while her mother sought help for a drinking problem. Her mother's own childhood had been with alcoholic parents who were unable to care for her and she had had grown up on the streets since she was 11 years of age. Jucinta was and always had been heavily involved in the daily care of her younger siblings. By the time Jucinta was in early high school, her mother had addressed her drug and alcohol issues and had her children restored to her care. Through their solid connections to local school, YHARS had first made contact with Jucinta when she was about to transition to high school. They had let Jucinta know about a flexi-school that was several suburbs away but which did a bus run and could pick Jucinta up. The flexi-school caters for young Aboriginal women and offers crèche for students with care responsibilities for young children. Jucinta was able to use the crèche for her younger siblings. Jucinta is able to attend school, and to use the available resources without stigma and with the assurance that her living situation is understood and her responsibilities respected. She is very committed to finishing her education. Many of her aunts and uncles have spent time on the streets and some of her cousins are homeless. Jucinta wants to stay away from 'that kind of life' and want to support her younger siblings to do the same.

At the time of interview, Jucinta was finding it difficult at home because of the overcrowding wanted accommodation close to home but not within the house. YHARS had explored the option of a TILS unit for her but this would have separated her from her siblings and was a step she was not willing to make. She had tried living in a tent in the backyard, but recent rains have made this an undesirable option. The Youth Studio option would have been ideal for Jucinta, but unfortunately the program had been discontinued at the time of interview.

3.7 Program viability

3.7.1 Program costs

The combined implementation of YHARS and After Care, and the lack of data on external After Care clients, who may or may not receive case management support, make it difficult to calculate accurate per-client costs. Funding amounts set out in service agreements specify amounts for staffing, and this covers the cost of assessing referrals and managing brokerage for external After Care clients.

Table 53: Program costs

$ '000	Inala	Toowoomba	Hervey Bay	Rockhampton	Townsville	Mt Isa	Total
Staffing	1,140.4	1,346.0	651.0	1,114.5	1,300.2	727.6	6,279.8
Other	459.6	667.9	249.0	500.1	769.4	324.4	2,970.3
Brokerage	218.6	287.7	120.0	364.0	410.7	96.1	1,497.1
Total	1,818.6	2,301.7	1,020.0	1,978.7	2,480.2	1,148.1	10,747.3

Source: Service agreements, SRS
Notes: Staffing includes cost of managing external After Care referrals and brokerage, but does not include the cost of extra After Care staffing supplied in 2012–13. Other does not include the cost of preparing and maintaining TIL units. Brokerage includes YHARS and internal After Care brokerage amounts.

Assuming that the costs of managing external After Care clients remained relatively low compared to the cost of supporting YHARS and internal After Care clients, these overlaps in funding can be ignored. The average cost of supporting a YHARS or internal After Care client came out at $9,470. Per-client costs then varied from $7,060 in Toowoomba to $15,520 in Mt Isa.

	YHARS and internal After Care clients	Average cost per client
	#	$
Inala	155	11,730
Toowoomba	326	7,060
Hervey Bay	143	7,130
Rockhampton	230	8,600
Townsville	207	11,980
Mt Isa	74	15,520
Total	1,135	9,470

3.7.2 Partnerships

This section explores the different partnerships that the YHARS, After Care and SCA initiatives have established since the start of the program. This section is informed by qualitative data on the types, dynamics and strengths of these professional linkages, starting with linkages with the Department itself.

This analysis of partnerships draws conceptually on a public health model to consider the types of partnerships that YHARS/SCA/Aftercare services have with other services. This public health model is useful for thinking through how young people are 'reintegrated' as well as housed.

Briefly, a public health model consists of three different levels of intervention (Edwards et al (2009):

a) Universal—a whole-of-population platform for preventing neglect and abuse

b) Secondary—addressing specific risk factors that compromise parenting in vulnerable families

c) Tertiary—intake and referral for statutory child protection services.

These three levels of intervention work together to bring about better outcomes for children and families. Universal services provide a platform for preventing neglect and abuse in the whole population. This is expected to reduce the number of families entering the secondary service system because it reduces the risk of families becoming vulnerable. For those families that are vulnerable or at risk, secondary services provide them with a means for better supporting those families to support their children without escalation into the statutory system. Finally, universal and secondary services work together to decrease the number of children and families entering the tertiary or statutory system. As a service designed to support young people to exit the statutory/ tertiary system, it is important to consider partnerships with other agencies in terms of how they reconnect, reintegrate young people with other tiers of services.

Before elaborating on partnerships, it is important to note that partnerships are critical to a holistic case management approach that looks at the young person's whole situation and the people and agencies involved in it.

It also seems important to note that some partnerships were unintended and have evolved over time, whereas others, such as SCA and Youth Justice Services or YHARS and Child Safety Services, were set up from the beginning and are explicitly mentioned in the Guidelines. These partnerships were nominated as key referral sources in the service agreement. A range of other partnerships has evolved through the YHARS/SCA/Aftercare core business of delivering a range of services, which necessitate engagement with community.

The qualitative data also indicated that partnerships with different agencies varied in their strengths and dynamics and were influenced by various factors, such as the frequency and the nature of contact. The style of local managers influenced the approach taken to collaboration. For example, at one site, the YHARS program coordinator said that they '*keep meetings to a*

minimum' with other agencies and that they make *'a lot of informal contact, such as email and phone calls'*. Where this more informal style is preferred, formal meetings with clients and stakeholders are scheduled only where they appear necessary. Most sites attended inter-agency meetings in their local area *'other gatherings under different umbrellas'*. These were personal and professional preferences as one program coordinator offered a contrasting view, *'I'm fan of sit-down meetings'* and expressed the wish for more formal meetings. While these are preferences it is likely they affect the style and quality of partnerships.

There are four main types of partnerships between YHARS staff and other agencies. These are: partnerships with their own funders in the Department; partnerships with government stakeholders who work with the same target groups at a tertiary or statutory level; non-governmental agencies who deliver targeted programs; and universal education, employment and health providers. Interviews showed that each of these types of partnerships held different types of challenges and so the collaborations had different strengths and weakness.

Relationship with the Department

Service providers in general indicated they had a reasonable level of contact with their funding agency. Staff indicated that they attend meetings with the contract managers from the Department. However, the frequency of informal contact differs across sites. A service assessment is undertaken once a year. Service providers meet with the Department at least once a quarter and with a reference group with key stakeholders and the representatives of services, which include Departmental staff or staff from non-for profit organisations. This is an open forum to talk about supports, challenges and successes. Aside from these formal occasions contact is initiated on a needs basis.

Most services suggested they had typically had contact of an informal nature, made through phone or email up to 3 times a fortnight. The stakeholder requests information from the program manager of YHARS and initiates contact,, which is *'about anything that's related to the service agreement'*. The research participant also noted, that the *'contact is usually reciprocated'*.

A stakeholder from the Department explained that structural changes in the initiatives affected flows of communication between the Department and the managers and staff of YHARS and Aftercare: *'we are finding our feet again'*. This research participant explained that one of the changes included that the contract manager's location changed, which affects the frequency of face to face meetings between the initiative and their contract manager.

Partnerships with Child Safety and Youth Justice agencies

The long term vision articulated in the program logic –that joint case planning is developed between funded services, Youth Justice and Child Safety - has yet to be consistently realised. While there was evidence of some effective partnerships between YHARS and Child Safety personnel, most YHARS/After Care providers indicated there was a need for improved communication between themselves and Child Safety Services in order to deliver more effective services to young people exiting care or at risk. The following reasons may have contributed to weaknesses in this collaboration:

- High turn-over of staff in Child Safety and in YHARS;

- Misunderstandings about scope of YHARS: YHARS staff perceived that Child Safety staff referred to YHARS to provide accommodation which is not the remit of YHARS;

- Insufficient and irregular face to face meetings between staff from the initiatives and the Child Safety Services:

Some of the research participants from YHARS made the following suggestions for improvements in their relations to the Child Safety Services:

- Regular meetings and ongoing reviews of referral pathways, processes and requirements;

- Consistent and timely correspondence to work on early intervention strategies and to prevent young people falling into crisis and;

- 'Proper hand-overs' to facilitate smooth transitions, integrated care and effective exit planning for care leavers;

- Employment of an additional staff member: *'maybe it's someone that needs to look after sector development'* to monitor and facilitate the partnership between the YHARS and the Child Safety Services; and

- Increased awareness in all agencies about the role and responsibilities in other organisation

- Short secondments or visits between the department and YHARS services.

YHARS providers also felt that personnel in Youth Justice Services also were misinformed about the nature of services offered by YHARS and believed they were an accommodation service. In at least one site providers reported that relationships with Youth Justice were improving as a result of internal policy development.

> *'Youth Justice now weekly attends meetings... there have been massive improvements in our relationships and referrals are now increasing and their understanding has improved of what we do and what we don't do'.*

Where personnel from Youth Justice Services understood the remit of YHARS the relationship was a productive one. YHARS staff noted *'it's easier to track their clients as there are bail conditions etc.'*. Staff from the Youth Justice Services also found that the collaboration could be very positive,

> *'YHARS have made us look at our own practice and made us do it better - this is an unexpected outcome... 'Our young people hit all the major homelessness factors - no school, fractured relationships etc. We make referrals to YHARS to support our interventions that are already in place. We leave housing etc to YHARS - it works really well as transition'.*

Here YHARS staff were visibly active supporting young people in court and represented at every meeting Youth Justice have with clients and thus the two services were able to reinforce their supports.

Universal service linkages

The initiative aims to connect young people with the resources and services they need for independent life and this involves connecting young people to health and education services, which are universally available as well as tailored to the needs of specific at risk populations. Many of the services have developed linkages with universal service that connect young people to the education, employment and health sectors that support independent citizens throughout their lives. Connecting young people with universal services is an important step in their moves away from tertiary and targeted services. These links were strongest where staff had been in communities for considerable lengths of time.

Partnerships between YHARS and health services – in particular dental and mental health services were particularly important for young people who may not have received much medical treatment in their lives. Many young people using the YHARS services needed referrals to dentists, psychologists, counsellors and therapists. In this context, one of the stakeholders noted, *'YHARS are going really well in the community'*, *'they attend net work meetings and instigate engagement with other areas'*. In some areas YHARS have strong links with 'Headspace', the national youth mental health foundation. The capacity to be proactive about health and to connect with health agencies before health issues become critical is an important skill across the life course and young people are encouraged to develop their skills in this respect.

Partnerships with Centrelink were also of critical importance to young people's outcomes. The Inala site also had strong links with Centrelink and is an effective model for high quality practice. Staff had strong contacts to an Aboriginal employment officer who was also a local community elder, she was able to provide a friendly point of first contact and support young people to get the information they needed about the eligibility for benefits and other options. A number of the young people we interviewed in this location were employed (or in employment and education). These cross linkages between YHARS and universal providers of education and employment services are very important linkages that can capture young people as they fall through gaps in the system and before they enter crisis or the tertiary system.

In summary, some of the initiatives established close and positive relationships with the educational, employment and health sector. There are discrepancies in the strengths and collaboration of these partnerships. Expenditure on dental and health services do not feature largely in brokerage reports.

Partnerships with targeted non-government agencies and community groups

Partnerships with allied service providers and with community groups and leaders were particularly important for the efficiency and effectiveness of services. These groups provided ways for YHARS to access their client groups and resources to support them meet their goals.

The allied service providers (predominately in the non-profit sector) were positive about their partnerships with the YHARS, After Care and SCA initiatives. A few allied service providers explained that reasons for this strong partnership includes that they share responsibility and have a *'shared client group'* and make *'mutual decisions'*.

Outreach work that promotes the program within the local community was essential in the early establishment of the programs. Since the inception of the program all YHARS initiatives have made considerable time and resource investment in marketing the services in their catchment areas. However, sites differ in the degree to which they then have focussed directly on client needs, or, continued to focus on outreach to services and community members who support young people. Some sites offered capacity building group activities to a broad group of young people as a way of supporting young people to achieve their goals AND as a way of engaging local community and raising awareness of the service. Young people within and beyond the target group were taken along to community events and encouraged to participate in workshops and skills classes. This broader work meant that young people were networked into a number of community services and groups as well as ensuring other services and young people themselves were aware of the YHARS service.

Across the sites YHARS had strong partnerships with a range of services including education and housing providers, drug and alcohol services youth refuges, youth clubs and services. At one site, staff reported that they have established a positive link with a targeted drug and alcohol service who refer to YHARS. In another site, YHARS developed a partnership with a service assisting refugees, displaced people and those affected by landmines to rebuild their lives through the expert delivery of development programs in cooperation with local communities and other agencies. This site also developed a good relationship with a non-for profit organisation that caters for young teenagers who are pregnant or already existing parents. In another site, staff explained that there is greater success for the young person if their service collaborates with allied services:

> *'Partnerships are the most important factor for success. Ability to bring together Mercy, Uniting Care, YHARS and Child Safety to monthly meetings where we discuss TILS unit and nominations.'*

Staff from this site perceived collaboration with other services as a requirement for the young person to achieve his/her goals and to move towards independence. In another site, YHARS operated as a coordinating agent for services across the universal and targeted provision. YHARS had established a partnership with a flexible school. Staff interviewed from the school explained that YHARS streamlines the process of young people seeking supports from non-profit organisations. Many of their students and their families seek support from agencies not linked up at a case management level. The process of seeking support from multiple agencies is time consuming and can become a habituated response that does not lead to greater independence and self-sufficiency. YHARS staff to act as a conduit between young people, their families and different agencies and are able to ensure young people's help seeking behaviours are directed towards establishing independence. YHARS staff have worked to establish effective communication channels and trust with different agencies in order to ensure

young people have access to various agencies that hold different expertise and that young people are effectively supported towards an independent life.

Effective partnerships were described as horizontal and respectful collaborations - one allied service provider suggested YHARS and her service have *'mutual interests in each other'* and spoke of *'shared responsibility'* and *'sharing the burden'*. She noted their relationship was characterised by a consistent flexible approach, have a mutual respect for one another and are aware of each other's boundaries. For example, YHARS has access to brokerage, which provides their *'shared clients'* with access therapeutic services. In return, the allied service provides YHARS with housing options for their clients as they have *'exclusive access to units and to two youth shelters'* based on their relationship with the Brisbane Housing Company.

Partnerships with housing providers are particularly important. In general, the qualitative data indicated that good partnerships have been formed with housing providers across all sites. At one site, staff from the allied service explained that the three main reasons why they have a good partnership with YHARS include the following:

> They (YHARS) *'are very clear about how things are not working when they're not working'*;

> They can have frank and honest conversations with each other;

> There is a good negotiation between them; and

> Both sides have solid understanding of what each other's roles are.

One site established a strong collaboration with the agency that supplies the TILS units about one and a half years ago. This partnership was described as positive due to the openness of staff from both sides. This allied service provider also serves as a mediator between YHARS and the Department of Housing, who provide other housing to YHARS clients who are not able to get into a TILS unit. The housing officer from this non-profit organisation explained that he works closely with the team leader of YHARS and touches base with him every second or third day. He noted that *'we tend to treat it as a total package'* and explained that they enjoy working in a team with YHARS staff in order to support the tenants' in the TILS units. This partnership was supported by regular team meetings with the team leader and manager from YHARS. In this site, the service also developed a good relationship with a non-for profit organisation that caters for young teenagers who are pregnant or already existing parents.

Partnerships with community groups and leaders were also very important in casework with young people who were strongly identified with specific community groups and in particular for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Two main strategies – employment strategies and partnerships with Indigenous specific services – were used to establish strong partnerships were established with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The strategy used in other sites has been to establish and maintain strong links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth specific services. According to the views of staff from the YHARS initiative and the allied service providers, this is a result of transparent and open

communication flows, regular meetings and community engagement. It stood out that in Hervey Bay, a strong and positive partnership between YHARS, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth specific service and the local school had been established. Staff called it a *'special piece of work'* and explained that one of the caseworkers mainly works on the site of a local school as many of the service users have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and attend the school. The program coordinator of YHARS stressed:

'it's really about the capacity to develop strong connections with organisations when we really don't have adequate staffing numbers and the demands are so high'.

He explained that the collaboration between YHARS, the school and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-youth specific service is an imperative instrument in targeting young people with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. In this context, they sometimes work together with the Youth Justice Services as well if one of these students has been involved with them. The YHARS caseworkers indicated that they all benefit from each other. For example, the allied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth specific service and YHARS offer cultural camps in the local community to this target group to facilitate rapport building with these clients. The allied service noted that they have a good relationship to each other as they work closely with YHARS, *'we learn from each other'*, and *'there is a lot of trust from clients/community devoted to the service'.*

Furthermore, the data indicated that there is some contact between the different YHARS sites, also in terms of the administration of After Care brokerage. For example, staff managing this brokerage for Hervey Bay is located in Rockhampton, which is why there is a need for some correspondence. However, the services are fairly spread out and show differences in their approaches and the way they manage and prioritise their referrals.

3.7.3 Staff retention, recruitment and satisfaction

Staff retention and development is an important facet of the effectiveness of programs. Understaffing and attrition contribute to a loss of skills and professional networks in the initiatives. This section will discuss staff qualifications and then some of the professional activities that support effective work practices such as training, supervision and teamwork.

Qualifications of staff

Personnel from the YHARS, After Care and SCA initiatives typically have professional and extensive experiences in working with young vulnerable people. The data also indicated that not all staff members hold a trade certification/apprenticeship or a tertiary degree in a related discipline. However, some mentioned that they completed a Certificate IV in Youth Work and others mentioned that they completed university degrees in Theology, Psychology and Education. The data also revealed that the initiatives are perceived as a professional service by allied services, stakeholders and the young people. At one site, an allied service provider explained:

> *'YHARS staff are experts... they have specific knowledge/experience and are very open and responsive... all YHARS services work well... YHARS also does a thorough screening on their employees to make sure they are professional'.*

However, qualitative data indicated that there have been staffing issues across some of the YHARS sites, which led to higher caseloads. This may have an impact on the wellbeing of some caseworkers and strategies need to be put in place to prevent 'burn outs' and to maintain the worker's motivation and enthusiasm.

Training

This section is based on findings that emerged from the qualitative data and the program documentation. In one YHARS site, staff mentioned that the service has provided personnel with training in areas, such as mediation, incidental counselling, suicide prevention, self-defence, first aid and management of residential/complex needs. Furthermore, staff explained that they attended a homelessness conference. In another YHARS site, staff reported that Red Cross has provided in house training in relation to case management, time management and stress management.

The qualitative data revealed that training sessions in areas, such as trauma awareness, substance abuse, child protection behaviours and mental health first aid were provided as well.

However, across all sites, the qualitative data revealed that there was a lack of consistency in implementing training about the management of InfoExchange, SRS and the outcome star assessment tool, which was developed by the Office of Youth as service providers explained: *'SRS was developed by case managers and the Office of Youth picked it up and created it for YHARS'*. One of the things that was criticised was that training in using SRS was only provided to staff who had worked on the program from the beginning. This led to inconsistencies in using the database across sites as staff, recruited at a later point in time, did not have this initial training provided by the Office of Youth which had been impacted by the machinery of government changes in 2012.

Supervision and teamwork

Service quality and staff retention are not only dependent on the training backgrounds of staff but also on the ongoing process elements of service delivery. Staff across all sites reported they receive regular and consistent supervision. However, the time spent on supervision and informal debriefings varies across sites.

In some sites, supervision resources had been scaled back once effective teamwork practices were established. In one site, staff initially had a compulsory supervision with an external psychologist every six weeks. However, now the service is established, the psychologist can be accessed any time and typically is called on when serious adverse events occur.

Young people using the program spoke in a way that indicated high levels of consistency in caseworker approaches. They typically identified 'YHARS' personnel as a collective group and spoke of 'YHARS', they and them...

> *'YHARS is keeping an eye on me now... YHARS will always check on me in the future... they are really good friends of mine'.*

> *'YHARS people do everything for me'.*

'they (YHARS) know how to engage with young people like me'.

'YHARS kept me stable after I exited Child Safety Services'.

The level of input service providers had into program and design and set up has been an important influence on whether direct service providers actively engaged with process (program delivery) and/or structural (resources available in the initiatives) elements of service delivery. Managers at most sites indicated they have autonomy in the way they translate the policy into practice and the extent to which they were able to be responsive to local needs. Most discussed this flexibility in terms of process elements of service delivery (how they organised time for case management, made decisions about brokerage money and how to allocate it, managed the balance between outreach, partnership building and casework). The extent to which they tried to negotiate structural elements of the service agreement differed across locations and is associated with the level of input they had in the program design stages. Five of the six service providers negotiated additional staff using unexpended budgeted funds flowing from the delays in set up and low utilisation of After Care in the early years of service agreements. Some managers and staff felt that program and job insecurity compromised their capacity to retain staff and build experienced high functioning teams. This issue was particularly acute in remote areas.

Job security is of major importance for all workers and the current waiting game makes it incredibly difficult to retain staff and would also make it nigh on impossible to recruit new staff should the need arise.

There is a wealth of effective practices occurring in the different sites and staff and managers of YHARS services would benefit from more opportunities to share their insights. Furthermore, the more experienced teams could share their expertise in translating policy into practice and innovative aspects of service delivery.

Key findings:
- YHARS services have developed and continue to develop effective partnerships across government and non-government agencies and community groups.
- Staff retention and recruitment are an issue because of uncertainty in funding.
- Individual case workers are well supported.
- Team work and collegiality are high in most individual sites.

Recommendation:
- That formal processes to support more effective partnerships between service providers and Child Safety officers be put in place.

3.7.4 Data and reporting
Some service providers identified technical issues with SRS:

SRS has its shortcomings - putting data in and saving it does not mean it is necessarily saved. Can look for it 5 minutes later and it is not there. It is so intermittent, we cannot pinpoint where the problem arises.

The Townsville service provider notes they have no problems with saving data and suggest the problem described above may be related to the services' internet connection and available bandwidth.

Staff felt they had been poorly trained in using the tool. It is not clear whether there were significant technical difficulties with the platform or whether it was inadequate training many staff found SRS record keeping frustrating. Training had been provided for all staff at the set up of the program but many staff had come on board after this data and not been able to avail themselves of SRS training. They felt there needed to be processes in place to train new staff in the use of SRS and to feedback to the department what was not working about SRS.

Service providers and departmental staff also felt that SRS outputs were difficult to reconcile with other data and thus difficult to use:

> *We do lots of cross checking of SRS expenditure and our own internal expenditure, and the reports contradict each other. We do a massive report for After Care, for example, and then when we do an individual report they don't match.*

The other issues raised were about the usefulness of data recorded. Some felt that confusing criteria created unreliable data particularly in relation to client outcomes connected to client goals. At one site, the service provider reported that SRS is *'very subjective measure based on how you set the goals'*. Some staff wanted clearer guidance on how to use the system.

In addition some service providers felt the way the data was put together in reports from the Department did not effectively capture the services delivered.

> *We enter data into system and then the department community pulls data from it and makes a report. It is hard to verify where they get the data from when you see the report. We have 5 units and 2 transitional houses but they only pull the data from the units not the houses, so it misrepresents our numbers of bed nights. We are unaware of how the data is used or the rationale for how they measure it.*

There was a strong perception of the part of YHARS staff that data collection and monitoring was not an effective use of time and took away from time spent with clients. While this may in part be connected to technical difficulties with the platform and with using the platform it also may be that staff were not adequately well versed in how data can and should be used in program planning, development and evaluation.

Many were concerned about the type of data collected. For example, they felt that options (transport, outreach or home visit) that aimed to capture how they spent their time was too limited. Caseworkers were concerned that SRS did not capture time spent on referrals. If they thought a young person was particularly at risk they spent time in contact with a person placed on a waiting list, but SRS does not provide the option to capture this

> *We can only record the 'end result' not the effort that went in to getting there.*

> *SRS tool doesn't give us what we need. We are using a stone age tool in a space age environment.*

The format of SRS reporting was not seen as consistent with the strengths based approach that underpins the program. Some staff felt that the format of SRS is problem-focused.

> *One thing that is difficult in delivery of our work is we have become such an outcomes based service. We understand the need for outcomes decision making, but we lose a large part of the narrative. This worries us. We ponder the likelihood we are becoming a human services sector that just ticks boxes, and we don't want this.*

Furthermore, the program as a whole would benefit from developing clear protocols about data sharing and confidentiality. Some service providers felt that the data was not being used as effectively as it could have been because there was no mandate for sharing data and information among the services. One provider reported that staff from the initiatives had the choice to make information available to other YHARS or SCA services across Queensland. However, not all services agreed to make this information visible. This research participant suggested that this meant a young person who moved into a different catchment area in Queensland was not as well supported as they could be. However, other service providers felt this type of data sharing would compromise client confidentiality.

Services have provided feedback to the Department about their difficulties in working with SRS and that they would like to be provided with more data capturing methods. Hence, amendments have been made by the Department, but the services are still experiencing difficulties with SRS.

Outcomes Star tool

The Outcomes Star assessment tool supports collaborative goal setting with clients and measures their outcomes against the goals they have set with their caseworkers. In general, the outcome star tool was not well used because there were no resources allocated to embed it in everyday practice. Furthermore, services have had the option to use the tool or not. Where management has opted to use the tool, caseworkers often appear to be confused about how to use it and how the information sits along information gathered in SRS. There was confidence in the tool from several stakeholders who know how to use it successfully, but these stakeholders commented that resources need to be allocated for training.

Various planning tools were used to develop skills and facilitate transition from YHARS into independent living, including case plans and action plans. Most formally, service providers used the outcome star assessment tool to measure the achievements of young people's goals. However, the young people interviewed did not recall anything to do with goals connected to those outlined by the outcome star tool, which indicates that the process was not used in goal planning with young people in an explicit way.

Some caseworkers used the tool directly with clients as a visual guide in their efforts to help clients see their own progress towards goals.

According to the qualitative data, SRS does not fully capture the complexity of casework, is based on a deficit-oriented format, which is not congruent with the strength-based approach the services take. The Outcome Star tool was considered by those familiar with it, to be a useful productive tool but there is not enough consistence in its use for it to function as an evaluation tool beyond its casework application. Resources are needed to support its use if it is to be used more effectively.

Key findings:
- Staff experienced technical difficulties when using the SRS.
- Training in using the SRS was not offered continuously, and thus not able to resource all users.
- The SRS does not capture the complexity of case work and client outcomes.

Recommendations:
- That SRS training be more responsive to staff changes
- That staff have regular opportunities to provide feedback on "coal face" issues to platform developers

4 Summary and conclusions

The executive summary recapitulates the key findings and recommendations highlighted throughout this report. This chapter instead focuses on systemic issues examined during the evaluation of SCA, YHARS and After Care.

4.1 Combined implementation of YHARS and After Care

YHARS and After Care stand as separate initiatives in the Queensland NPAH implementation plan, yet the Department of Communities combined their implementation by making certain YHARS providers responsible for the administration of After Care.

Combining implementation in this way achieved certain efficiencies, particularly in relation to the assessment of referrals and administrative costs. As the After Care target group represents a subset of the group targeted by YHARS, directly all referrals to one program arguably results in the optimal allocation of resources.

Even in the case of the referral process, however, the combined implementation of YHARS and After Care has created challenges in terms of defining service level targets and program planning. It is not clear whether After Care, in its original conception, intended to deliver case management support to young people, although these holistic wrap-around services like those delivered by YHARS clearly represent the ideal form of support for many young people in need of After Care. There is no clear way of determining whether a client should be After Care or YHARS, and this creates some unnecessary confusion in service levels, which is important not so much in order to check whether YHARS providers are meeting their targets, but to know whether After Care is in fact catering for the 500-odd young people who exit care every year across Queensland.

On the other hand, requiring YHARS providers to manage After Care has also demanded more of those case workers whose time should ideally be devoted to the young people in their care. Services in several locations spoke of the challenge of linking in to local networks such as the Child Support services. Yet in administering case management to young people outside their catchment area, YHARS is also required to create links with suitable service providers across the state. At the outset only Toowoomba dedicated one staff member to finding these organisation, and the assessment of several YHARS providers on the state of these relationships is sobering:

> *We need the department to sit down with us and work out how to improve the Aftercare system.*

> *These relationships are not working well. We try to identify any organisations who will case manage so we can tick a box.*

In the first two years of operation After Care referrals remained well below service level targets. As a consequence the Department of Communities agreed to use unexpended funds due to the delays in set up and low utilisation of After Care in the early years of service agree-

ments, for new positions devoted to After Care. These positions had a dramatic effect on the number of After Care referrals in 2012–13. Due to the origin of these funds, they were only available to June 2013. However, the impact of those extra personnel suggests a different implementation plan that could provide better results. In addition the eligibility for After care was changed (from 18-20 to 17-21) to respond to underutilisation.

After Care remains a state-wide program, with the geographic challenges that this imposes. It should ideally be overseen by a small but mobile staff with a lot of experience in the sector. Their role would be to assess all incoming referrals to After Care, which would require them to build close links with Child Safety service officers, and in cases where they felt case management would be beneficial and feasible, to refer those young people to YHARS or other service providers, in which case they would also evaluate the quality of support provided.

Separating YHARS and After Care in this simple and cost-effective manner would simplify support for young people exiting care (and for their Child Safety case workers, who would only be required to interact, at the level of referrals, with a small team of workers) and allow targets and adequacy levels to be better monitored. These staff members would also oversee the case management provided by external organisations to ensure its quality.

Providing a dedicated staff to the administration of After Care would provide the best chance of ensuring effective state-wide coverage of the program, and leave YHARS providers to their core task of acting as mentors to the young people in their service.

We would recommend that this includes dedicated funding to support a network of strong professional networks and service linkages among post-care staff, including the Department. Currently, After Care is not visible to young people who have left care or the service providers they come in contact with. Research with young people who have left care is needed to ensure the effective design of support services that continue to be available to them up until they are stable and able to accrue the resources that will support them attain an adequate standard of living.

4.2 The Service Record System

The availability and quality of suitable quantitative data has limited the scope of this evaluation and diminished its impact for evidenced-based policy decisions.

The SRS in some cases provides too much information, in other cases not enough. Given the key objectives of SCA, YHARS and After Care, namely preventing exits into homelessness, and helping young people to reconnect with their families, the SRS captures insufficient data on family relationships, while demanding too much information on housing, including details on tenure, a physical description of the accommodation, and information on others living in the house. Capturing too much information places a substantial burden on services. Detailed data entry should only be required where the evaluation framework justifies the capture of data.

By far the most worrying shortcoming of the SRS, and one consistently raised by the services themselves, represents the evaluation of case management. It makes no sense to rate case plan goal achievement on a scale from fully to not at all, if no information on those case plan goals is captured.

The evaluation team found that the SRS did not always capture the data necessary to analyse the operation and effectiveness of the initiative. In particular:

- the initiative for which a referral was intended (as distinct from referral outcome)
- the housing situation of young people whose referrals were declined
- more nuanced brokerage spending categories
- information on family relationships before and after support

The evaluators also recommend that a more nuanced reporting system like the Outcomes Star be incorporated into the SRS. In the case of the Star this would require no more than a record with a date stamp and a score, from 1 to 10, against the 10 domains of the Star. SCA workers and their clients could choose when to add a new record, allowing snapshots to be added throughout the support period. These data would capture the breadth, depth and progression of case management, which snapshots of certain outcomes at the beginning and the end of the support period cannot illustrate. With such a system in place, researchers would also be able to track the progress of clients in cases where they transition from SCA to another initiative such as YHARS or After Care.

4.3 Summary of recommendations

The evaluation team affirms the value of the initiatives examined in this report, and believe that implementing our recommendations will improve staff satisfaction and outcomes for the young people who engage with the initiatives.

SCA
- That the SCA catchment area match that of Townsville Youth Justice Service Centre.
- That further consideration be given to what support SCA should provide for young people under 16 years of age exiting from the youth justice system.
- That the new referral process be closely monitored to ensure efficient use of SCA house.
- That SCA increase the involvement of families in case management to encourage mutual responsibility and improve long-term client outcomes.
- That SCA continue to develop links with local training and education providers to ensure that their clients have access to these services.
- That SCA refer suitable clients to YHARS and, where possible, provide notification well in advance to facilitate smooth transitions between services.
- That left-over brokerage monies be used to support transitions from SCA house to stable, independent accommodation, as allowed by the *Guidelines for Service Provision*.
- That SCA continue to develop links with YHARS and explore options to provide on-going support to participants once they exit the program, even if they leave the Townsville area.

YHARS

- That YHARS providers regularly engage with Child Safety to improve or maintain effective working relationships that support transitions from care.
- That no referral to YHARS be declined only because the individual is too young. Service agreements should specify that the lower age limit for YHARS support is flexible. A referral for Child Safety intervention may, however, be the most appropriate response.
- That each YHARS provider consider the characteristics of clients well supported by staff and service networks, to ensure that service differentiation and specialisation do not exclude young people from other groups.
- That YHARS program objectives, service capacity and prioritisation of target groups be reviewed to ensure on-going support for young people sleeping rough or at imminent risk of homelessness.
- That YHARS service levels in Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and Rockhampton be reviewed to ensure adequate on-going support for young people in those catchment areas, particularly for those sleeping rough, with appropriate increases in funding.
- That there be greater flexibility around timeframes for case work in contexts where there is limited housing stock.
- That best practice guidelines be developed for tracking and maintaining contact with highly mobile young people.
- That consideration be given to the employment of people with mental health qualifications to support staff to work more effectively with young people dealing with these issues.
- That guidelines be developed to help case workers and clients balance brokerage expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments, particularly education.
- That the YHARS per-client brokerage limit be reviewed. If reduced, the Department could consider using funds to acquire more TIL units or increase staffing in areas of high demand.
- That the Department increase the supply of TIL units.
- That youth studios or TIL units designated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people be set up in Mt Isa and other locations where young people from remote communities have to wait to return to country after exiting detention.
- That the Department liaise with the Queensland Department of Education and Training to increase the provision of places in Flexible Learning Programs for young people and prioritise places for young people who have been in care in these programs.
- That formal processes to support more effective partnerships between service providers and Child Safety officers be put in place.

After Care

- That reporting processes for external After Care clients be urgently reviewed.
- That best practice guidelines be developed for tracking and maintaining contact with highly mobile young people.
- That guidelines be developed to help case workers and clients balance brokerage expenditure on short- and long-term items and investments, particularly education.
- That consideration be given to creating a program or service (or making it a priority for After Care) to build more effective linkages between services that cater for young people

who have exited care, especially those outside of YHARS catchment areas. The service should pay particular attention to reaching those in the 18 to 21 years age bracket who may not be in contact with, eligible for, or want on-going contact with Child Safety services (as a support service case) and who are disconnected from other appropriate services.

Data reporting and monitoring

- That a more nuanced reporting system, like the Outcomes Star, which capture holistic case management practices, be incorporated into the SRS.
- That the Department provide professional development to help service providers understand the different components of data monitoring systems in terms of key functions and purposes. Service providers should be able to identify which components of the system are used for service improvement and which capture holistic aspects of service delivery, and how they might use data to support their own professional practices and gain recognition for these practices.
- That SRS training be more responsive to staff changes.
- That staff have regular opportunities to provide feedback on "coal face" issues to platform developers.

Report on recidivism among SCA participants

<u>**AIM**</u>

To examine recidivism among an initial group of 13 people who were participants in the Supervised Community Accommodation (SCA) program.

<u>**METHOD**</u>

Participants

The initial 13 people who undertook the SCA were the participants in the analysis. Program length for each of the SCA participants varied. For some SCA participants, program length was not continuous due to absences in youth detention or the watch house.

The length of time that each SCA participant had been in the youth justice system prior to program commencement ranged from 1 year to over 4 years. The number of proven offences prior to program commencement varied significantly from 5 to 116 for SCA participants. The most serious prior offending by SCA participants ranged from assault and rape to unlawful entry and break and enter. All SCA participants had been accommodated in youth detention and almost all had been admitted to at least one supervised youth order prior to program commencement. SCA participants generally had significant needs across a range of areas including education and employment, peer relations and family circumstances.

Data

The Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General's (DJAG) Integrated Client Management System (ICMS) contains data relating to people who are aged between 10–16 years at the time of their offence. This data was used to examine youth justice system outcomes for SCA participants that occurred after their exit from the program.

A proportion of the SCA participants turned 17 years of age during or soon after exiting the program. In Queensland, people aged 17 years and over at the time of their offence are subject to adult criminal justice system processes. For these people, Queensland Police Service data was used to examine police actions following program exit.

Data is correct as at the end date of the data reference period (DJAG data: 31/03/2013, QPS data: 31/05/2013) but may be subject to change.

Measures

Three recidivism measures were examined. These measures are:

1. The proportion of SCA participants that reoffend

2. The rate of offending of SCA participants (pre- and post-program)

3. The seriousness of offending of SCA participants (pre- and post-program)

Recidivism was defined as SCA participants having a proven offence within the recidivism monitoring period. For those SCA participants who turned 17 years of age during or soon after exit from the program, recidivism was defined as SCA participants having a police action within the recidivism monitoring period. The recidivism monitoring period was up to 12 months in length.

See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for the definitions and counting rules of the measures.

RESULTS

Measure 1: The proportion of SCA participants that reoffend

Youth justice system data was available for 9 of the 13 SCA participants. The data showed that 4 out of 9 (44 per cent) SCA participants had a proven offence during the 0–3 month recidivism monitoring period. At the end of the 0–6 month and 0–9 month recidivism monitoring periods, 6 out of 9 (67 per cent) SCA participants had a proven offence. At the final 0–12 month recidivism monitoring period, this increased to 7 of the 9 (78 per cent) SCA participants having a proven offence.

Police data was available for the remaining 4 SCA participants. The data indicated that in the first 3 months after program exit, 1 out of 4 (25 per cent) SCA participants had a police action. At the end of the 0–6 month recidivism monitoring period, this had increased to 2 out of 4 (50%) of SCA participants having a police action. At 0–12 months, none of the remaining 2 SCA participants had a police action, although data was not available for one person due to their recent exit from the program limiting their recidivism monitoring period to 6 months.

Measure 2: The rate of offending of SCA participants (pre- and post-program)

Youth justice system data was available on the rate of offending pre- and post-program for the 7 SCA participants with a proven offence after program exit. The post-program rate of offending for all 7 SCA participants was lower than their rate of pre-program offending; some participants had a substantially lower rate of offending. The average rate of offending per SCA participant pre-program was 10.9 per 100 days; this figure declined to 6.4 post-program.

Measure 3: The seriousness of offending of SCA participants (pre and post program)

Seriousness of offending was examined using youth justice system data for the 7 SCA participants with a proven offence after program exit. When pre-program offending was compared to post-program offending, the data showed that offence seriousness reduced for 6 of the 7 SCA participants.

CONCLUSION

Available data presented in this document shows that recidivism – when measured by a proven offence or police action after exit from the SCA program – was evident for at least 9 out of the 13 SCA participants. Recidivism was most likely to occur in the first 6 months following program exit.

Although a proportion of SCA participants did engage in recidivism after their program exit, the reduced rate of offending among all SCA participants was encouraging. Likewise, a comparison between offence seriousness pre- and post-program indicated that there was a reduction in offence seriousness for most SCA participants after program exit. Thus, the data suggests that when recidivism did occur after the program, it was generally at a lower frequency and severity.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations with the data and measures outlined in this document. The data *must be interpreted with these limitations in mind*. These limitations include:

- The recidivism monitoring period is less than 12 months for a proportion of the 13 SCA participants. International research recommends that the recidivism monitoring period is between 1 and 2 years in length. This is to enable sufficient time to track an offence from charge to court outcome and to identify if recidivism levels change over time. It is recommended that data analysis be repeated in 6 to 12 months to provide a greater recidivism monitoring period for SCA participants.
- The maximum number of SCA participants able to be examined in terms of recidivism was 13. This sample size is small and strongly limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the effect of the SCA program on recidivism. Recidivism measures should be assessed at a later time when more people have completed the program.
- In order to identify whether changes in recidivism can be attributed to the SCA program, recidivism among a comparison group (e.g. people admitted to detention who did not complete the SCA program) should be examined in the future.
- QPS data was used to assess recidivism among the SCA participants who turned 17 years of age during or soon after exiting the program. For these people, recidivism was defined as a *police action* (e.g. arrest) for an offence with an offence date in the recidivism monitoring period. Not all matters commenced via a police action may result in a proven outcome. Consequently, it is possible that the findings that are based on police data may over-count recidivism.
- Further examination of people who *do not* reoffend should occur to assess any differences in their profile compared to those who *do* reoffend. This could include comparisons of risk and need profiles, or SCA program level factors such as the time spent in the program. Identifying if any post-program periods in youth detention influence the opportunity to reoffend could also be explored.

APPENDIX 1

Definitions

Recidivism – for the people who do not turn 17 years of age during or soon after program exit, recidivism means a proven offence within the recidivism monitoring period. For those SCA participants who turned 17 years of age during or soon after exit from the program, recidivism means a police action within the recidivism monitoring period.

SCA participants – are the initial 13 people with an exit from the Supervised Community Accommodation program.

Proven offence – means that the person has a charge proven in a Queensland court. The offence date of the proven offence *must occur in the relevant recidivism monitoring period*. If a person has a proven offence in an early recidivism monitoring period (e.g. 0–3 months), they are counted as a recidivist in all subsequent periods even if they "age out" or there is no youth justice data available for the person in subsequent recidivism monitoring periods. "Minor offences" are not included in the definition of proven offence.

Police action – includes the police actions of arrest, caution, referral to youth justice conference, notice to appear, summons, warrant and other. The offence date of the police action *must occur in the relevant recidivism monitoring period*. If a person has a police action in an early recidivism monitoring period (e.g. 0–3 months), they are counted as a recidivist in all subsequent periods even if there is no police data available for the person in subsequent recidivism monitoring period. Police actions for "minor offences" are not included in the definition of police action.

Recidivism monitoring period – is the 0–3 month, 0–6 month, 0–9 month or 0–12 month period beginning the day after the person exited the SCA program. Where a person has more than one stay in the SCA program, the latest exit date is used. SCA participants may not have the entire 12 months as a recidivism monitoring period due to either the SCA participant turning 17 years of age during or soon after exit from the SCA program OR because the length of time between the date of program exit and the date of data extraction is less than 12 months.

"Minor" offences – are those with an Australian Standard Offence Classification, Queensland Extension (QASOC) beginning with 13, 14, 15 or 16. The QASOC is a tool that provides for offence ordering including for the purposes of determining offence seriousness. These divisions are coded as "minor offences" for the purposes of the SCA analysis only.

Supervised youth justice order – includes probation, community service, intensive supervision, conditional release, detention and supervised release orders.

APPENDIX 2

Counting Rules

Measure 1: The proportion of SCA participants that reoffend

(A) Count: The number of program participants who have the available recidivism monitoring period (i.e. 0–3 months, 0–6 months, 0–9 months or 0–12 months)

(B) Count: The number of program participants at (A) with a proven offence (or police action) within the available recidivism monitoring period (i.e. 0–3 months, 0–6 months, 0–9 months or 0–12 months)

(C) Divide: (B) by (A)

Measure 2: The rate of offending (pre- and post-program)

Pre-Program

(A) Count: The number of proven offences per person. The proven offences must have an offence date prior to program commencement.

(B) Count: The number of days at risk prior to program commencement. Pre-program days at risk is calculated as the number of days from the first proven offence date to the program commencement date minus the number of nights the person is held in detention.

(C) Divide: (A) by (B) to give individual rates.

(D) Sum the individual rates and divide by the number of SCA participants, then multiply by 100. Limit this to only those SCA participants with a post-program proven offence.

Post-Program

(A) Count: The number of proven offences per person. The proven offences must have an offence date after the program exit date and on or before the last date of the available recidivism monitoring period.

(B) Count: The number of days at risk after the program exit date and before the last date of the available recidivism monitoring period minus the number of nights the person is held in detention.

(C) Divide: (A) by (B) to give individual rates.

(D) Sum the individual rates and divide by the number of SCA participants, then multiply by 100. Limit this to only those SCA participants with a post-program proven offence.

Measure 3: The seriousness of offending (pre- and post-program)

(A) Identify: The most serious offence per person prior to program commencement

(B) Identify: The most serious offence for the person after the program exit date and before the last date of the available recidivism monitoring period.

(C) Compare: The seriousness of offending pre- and post-program.

Methodology used to map referrals to statistical areas

Referrals were located using locality and postcode data at the date of first referral (or the first date thereafter). Where an individual had no fixed address at the date of referral, we used as a proxy the address of his or her partner, parents, family members or friends, in that order of preference. (It should be noted that SRS users in Townsville recorded many client addresses in West End, as the suburb is locally known, rather than Townsville West. West End is officially a locality in central Brisbane.)

The evaluation team took a descriptive approach to determine which localities corresponded to YHARS catchment areas (rather than prescribe the catchments set out in service agreements). YHARS catchment areas were taken to include any locality that registered more than 10 YHARS clients. In Inala, this meant that many surrounding suburbs were included, but Kingston and Oxley, which had high numbers of external After Care clients, were not. In Townsville the catchment area extended as far west as Condon, but not so far as Alice River and Rangewood, even though Townsville YHARS supported some young people originally from those places. Specifying the Toowoomba catchment area required special care, as the service agreement stipulated that YHARS would provide support to young people over a very large area stretching from Toowoomba to the towns of Dalby and Warwick. We included all locations in this triangle in the catchment area, but excluded some locations nearby but outside of Dalby and Warwick, such as Maclagan, Peranga and Pittsworth. Toowoomba YHARS also provided support to young people in Ipswich, but the city was not included in its catchment area, and nor were towns on the way to Ipswich, such as Forest Hill.

Referrals were then mapped to ABS Level 4 Statistical Areas using its postcode concordance. As the Toowoomba YHARS catchment area covered all of the Toowoomba and part of the Darling Downs – Maranoa statistical areas, results for these areas were combined.

The success of the methodology can be assessed by comparing the relative numbers of YHARS, internal and external After Care clients (Table 54). YHARS case workers did not apply rigid boundaries to their catchment areas, and the analysis does not account for any changes to catchment areas that may have resulted from YHARS providers establishing relationships with organisations capable of supporting external After Care clients.

The analysis provides the only means of determining to what extent After Care reached young people outside of YHARS catchment areas. It also allows declined referrals to be allocated to the different initiatives. These results are discussed in the relevant sections of the findings on YHARS and After Care.

The evaluation team would recommend that the methodology outlined here be refined and applied to inform future planning decisions on the location of additional YHARS catchments.

Table 54: Referred individuals by Statistical Area Level 4

SAL4	Catchment	First accepted referral				Total
		YHARS	AC int	AC ext	None	
Brisbane – South	Inala YHARS	86	3	3	6	98
	Non-catchment	17		37	2	56
	Total	103	3	40	8	154
Toowoomba and Darling Downs – Maranoa	Toowoomba YHARS	244	24	13	104	385
	Non-catchment	8	9	9	14	40
	Total	252	33	22	118	425
Wide Bay	Hervey Bay YHARS	128	11	10	24	173
	Non-catchment	1		44	5	50
	Total	129	11	54	29	223
Fitzroy	Rockhampton YHARS	184	7	14	13	218
	Non-catchment	9	4	15	3	31
	Total	193	11	29	16	249
Townsville	Townsville YHARS	123	46	8	38	215
	Non-catchment	3	1	9	9	22
	Total	126	47	17	47	237
Queensland – outback	Mt Isa YHARS	67		4	14	85
	Non-catchment	1	1	6	4	12
	Total	68	1	10	18	97
All other SAL4s	Non-catchment	132	16	484	272	904
State-wide	Catchment	832	91	52	199	1,174
	Non-catchment	171	31	604	309	1,115
	Total	1,003	122	656	508	2,289

Sources: SPRC analysis, SRS data 2010–13, ABS SAL4–postcode concordance
Notes: Toowoomba YHARS catchment area intersected two SAL4s: Toowoomba, which it completely covered, and part of Darling Downs – Maranoa.