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EVALUATION OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES YOUTH DRUG COURT PILOT PROGRAM

JUSTIN MCNAB AND TONY EARDLEY

Although there is widespread community concern about juvenile crime and its association with illicit drug use, in many cases young people's involvement in crime is transitory and not serious, and there are generally low rates of recidivism. This highlights the importance of diverting young people wherever possible from the formal criminal justice system, in order to avoid future escalation of criminal activity through institutionalisation and association with other offenders.

There are several innovative diversionary programs currently in place for young people in NSW. These include the use of cautions by police for minor offences and a scheme for youth justice conferencing. However, diversion is not only appropriate for young people with minor offences. It is

also important to try to stop those who have already built up a history of offending and are facing serious charges going to prison and becoming entrenched in criminal behaviour as they reach adulthood. This is the central aim of the NSW Youth Drug Court Pilot Program (YDC), which began operating at the end of July 2002 in two Children's Court areas of western Sydney. The drug court model is a form of diversionary practice that has been operating with some success in the United States for a number of years and is being trialled in several other countries. The YDC is similar to the Drug Court for adults based in Parramatta, NSW, but the model was adapted to reflect differences in the ways that the Children's Court works, including its therapeutic focus and less

adversarial procedures.

The YDC program is targeted at young people aged between 14 and 18 years who have a problem of drug or alcohol use, are facing serious criminal charges, such that a custodial sentence is likely, and plead guilty to at least the main charge. In the initial pilot stage, potential participants also had to come from, or have a strong connection with, western Sydney. Unlike the adult Drug Court, the YDC follows a pre-sentence model, whereby sentencing of participants is postponed until they have completed or left the program and sentencing takes account of what they have achieved during their participation.

The program involves intensive supervision, service provision and case management, aimed at

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LEAD ARTICLE:
 Justin McNab and Tony Eardley discuss the recently completed Evaluation of the Youth Drug Court Pilot Program

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STAFF AND VISITOR UPDATE

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

We are pleased to announce that DR ILAN KATZ has been appointed as Deputy Director. He is currently working with the Policy Research Bureau in London, and is expecting to join the SPRC in early 2005. More details will be provided in future issues of this newsletter.

ROBYN DOLBY will continue her research as an Honorary Fellow of the Research Centre.

DEPARTURES:

TONY EARDLEY is on leave to take up a position at the Waters Future Research Alliance, based in the Development and International Division at the University of Western Sydney.

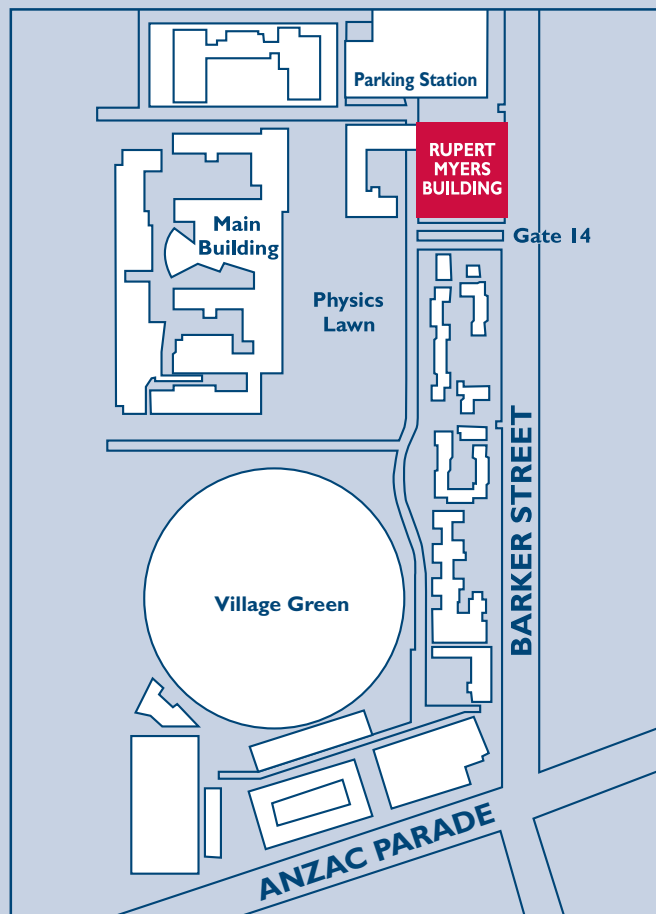
ARRIVALS:

SHERMAN CHAN has joined the Centre to complete her thesis entitled *Financial Exclusion: Is it a Problem in Australia?* Sherman is being supervised by Peter Saunders, John Nevile, John Lodewijks and Susan King (Anglicare).

ALAN MORRIS has joined the Centre on secondment from the School of Social Science and Policy, UNSW. Alan is working on the DSP New Claims project for Department of Family and Community Services and the Housing Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Evaluation.

JESSICA PLATUS is on a Social Work placement at the Centre, working on families first research.

SARAH YALLOP is on an internship at the Social Policy Research Centre, working on the Housing Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) Evaluation.



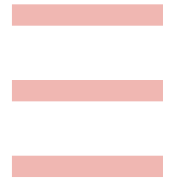
The Social Policy Research Centre is located on Level 3 of the Rupert Myers Building, South Wing, Kensington Campus. Enter by Gate 14, Barker Street.

THE SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH CENTRE

The Social Policy Research Centre is located in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales. Under its original name, the Social Welfare Research Centre was established in January 1980, changing its name to the Social Policy Research Centre in 1990. The SPRC conducts research and fosters discussion on all aspects of social policy in Australia, as well as supporting PhD study in these areas. The Centre's research is funded by governments at both Commonwealth and State levels, by academic grant bodies and by non-governmental agencies. Our main topics of inquiry are: economic and social inequality; poverty, social exclusion and income support; employment, unemployment and labour market policies and programs; families, children, people with disabilities and older people; community needs, problems and services; evaluation of health and community service policies and programs; and comparative social policy and welfare state studies.

The views expressed in this Newsletter, as in any of the Centre's publications, do not represent any official position of the Centre. The SPRC Newsletter and all other SPRC publications present the views and research findings of the individual authors, with the aim of promoting the development of ideas and discussion about major concerns in social policy and social welfare.

FROM THE DIRECTOR



As I write, Australia is in the midst of a Federal election campaign. In recent times election campaigns have represented awkward situations for independent, academic research centres. Both political parties commission university-based research centres to help evaluate existing policies, to develop new policy ideas and, most importantly, to ‘cost’ their proposals. Using respected, independent experts lends great authority to the claims of political parties but, in the cut and thrust of political debate, the work of research centres can become the object of direct political attack.

Somewhat bizarrely in an election campaign distinguished by big-spending policy launches, Peter Costello, speaking as the Treasurer, attacked the ALP tax and family policies claiming to have found (without the aid of Treasury staff) a \$700 million ‘black hole’. Ann Harding, Director of NATSEM, found herself in the position of having to defend the credibility of her Research Centre’s ‘modelling’ for one client (the ALP), against attacks from another regular customer (the Treasurer). This is a truly uncomfortable choice for any director of an independent research centre – having to uphold the professional reputation of your research institution while biting the hand that feeds you. The debate revolved around very technical issues, such as assumed weekly take-up rates for PAYE tax and gross existing liabilities under the Low Income Tax Offset. However, given the confusions generated by the baffling events taking place in the cyberspace of economic modelling, the public verdict depends upon who has credibility with the parliamentary press gallery.

A further issue is the relationship between these virtual, micro-simulated predictions about the effects of a new policy and the actual outcomes of the same policy. Scrutiny of the effects of policy change rarely goes beyond these

micro-simulated events. Take the GST, for example. Its effects were anticipated with elaborate models predicting its likely impact on those with varying levels of income. Treasury did its own modelling, and the acronym ANTS (A New Tax System) was enthusiastically embraced by a variety of government policy departments. But little was done after the introduction of the new tax to study whether the effects on various subpopulations correspond to those predicted by the models.

It is true that there is a growing field of program evaluation research, but for a number of reasons this is less than satisfactory. Independent research organisations find that it is fraught with new forms of challenges to their independence. Ostensibly, governments favour ‘evidence-based’ policy and, following the widespread introduction of the funder/provider split, they insist that evaluations be conducted by the non-government organisations providing the services. On the face of it, evidence consists of facts and knowledge gathered by scientific investigation, but there are problems with these evaluations. There is the problem that good measures of program outcomes are notoriously lacking, largely because the subtle changes wrought by policy interventions often escape measurement. Then there is the problem of whether governments really want to fund the studies that would collect good outcome measures. If outcomes cannot be confidently expected to be positive then, from the government’s point of view, the risk of bad publicity is greater than any political benefits there might be. Moreover, funding thorough evaluations of outcomes is expensive, and the less politically risky course of action is just to emphasise the magnitude of government spending, rather than studying carefully whether the intervention has made any difference. Further, because

evaluation research is typically commissioned by government, the roll-out of programs generally precludes any experimental study of outcomes, the funding is usually insufficient to cover any intensive collection of outcome data and, finally, governments attempt to strictly control the dissemination the findings.

This would be less of a problem for the independence of the research community in Australia if the basis for academic autonomy had not been simultaneously eroded. Claims about flexibility in a rapidly changing world, and attacks on supposed ‘featherbedding’, have meant expanded powers to make university staff redundant. Universities now talk about ‘continuing’ as opposed to ‘tenured’ staff. Moreover, central funds now play a greatly reduced role in ensuring the financial viability of universities. Among the so-called ‘sandstone’ universities a significant proportion of university funds comes from fee-paying students and research contracts. Research institutions, like welfare service providers, find themselves increasingly operating an environment of competitive contract research. There have been some widely reported public scandals about alleged plagiarism and improper assessment procedures in some universities’ dealings with fee-paying students. The danger is that contracted research centres, too, might find themselves under pressure to put finances ahead of independent reporting.

A most important feature of the Westminster doctrine of the separation of powers is the principle of judicial independence. It has long been recognised that a firm basis for an independent judiciary requires a separation of their tenure of office from possible political interference. A similar doctrine has been used to justify tenure amongst academics. Independence is vital for those who supply information to government. It is important for researchers to

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EVALUATION OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES YOUTH DRUG COURT PILOT PROGRAM

CONTINUED
FROM PAGE 1

reducing offending and drug use amongst young offenders, improving their health and social functioning, and providing them with educational and employment opportunities. Participants tend to have a range of difficulties, including poor educational achievement, dysfunctional family backgrounds and psychological problems. The YDC attempts to address this wide range of young offenders' needs and problems in a holistic way, drawing on the expertise and involvement of both Children's Court magistrates and staff from juvenile justice, police, legal aid, health, education, employment and social work backgrounds.

The NSW Attorney General's Department commissioned a consortium from the University of New South Wales, led by the Social Policy Research Centre, to evaluate the pilot program's operations and outcomes over the two years to the end of July 2002. The evaluation was based on statistical monitoring; implementation reviews at two stages of the pilot; a study of program outcomes, including analysis of data on offending and in-depth interviews with participants; a review of legal issues; and an analysis of program costs. This article summarises the findings from the evaluation (Eardley et al., 2004).

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

In the two years of the pilot, the YDC received 164 referrals of young people facing possible custodial sentences for serious offences. Of these, 75 (46 per cent) were judged eligible and chose to take part. Take-up of the program overall was considerably lower than anticipated at the planning stage and this was a cause of some concern in the initial period of the pilot. However, while there were a number of factors that may have contributed to the relatively low number of referrals, the main reason seems to have been that there were simply fewer young

offenders meeting the eligibility criteria and wishing to participate than was originally estimated. On the other hand, there was initial surprise amongst some stakeholders at the high level of heroin use by participants. Expectations that the participant group would also include some young people for whom cannabis was the main drug used were not fulfilled. Young women were a target group for the program and they made up 23 per cent of all referrals, broadly in line with their overall presence in the juvenile justice population.

"Overall, the evaluation found that the program is having an important, positive impact on the lives of many of those participating. The unit costs of achieving these impacts on a group of young people with entrenched drug use and criminal histories do not appear to be greater than those involved in keeping them in custody."

However, the proportion of young women who actually started on the program (34 per cent of all those referred) was significantly lower than that for young men (49 per cent).

Of the 75 participants, 29 (39 per cent) went on to complete the program to the Court's satisfaction, or to 'graduate'. Nearly half chose to extend their involvement in the program beyond the initial six months, with some having several extensions. The average length of involvement was around 10 months. Two-thirds of the participants engaged in some form of educational or vocational course while on the program, and more than half of these completed their courses. Almost all were unemployed when they started the program, but nearly one-fifth achieved an employment outcome

during their participation, either part-time or full-time, although the work was often short-term or casual.

Data limitations make it difficult to be precise about levels of further offending by participants and it was not possible to find or construct an effective control or comparison group to allow a robust statistical estimate of the impact of program participation. Best estimates suggest that around 60 per cent of participants appeared in court on fresh charges whilst they were on the program, although charges were often minor. Nearly two-fifths went on to receive some form of detention, either in the juvenile or the adult prison system, indicating that diversion from incarceration may often only be temporary, but this included only two of the program graduates. Around 35 per cent of participants were not recorded as having offended in a period following involvement with the program and graduates were less likely to re-offend than those who left or were discharged before completing, even though many of the latter spent part of this period in custody. However, the post-program offending data were only available for a short period after the end of the pilot, so longer-term effects are not known as yet.

Most participants interviewed while they were on the program reported that their drug use had decreased compared with three months before entering the program. Post-program interviewing also suggested that graduates were more motivated to reduce their drug use than those who left the program before completing. Although health improvements were also reported, these were not all sustained and mainly seemed to represent a short-term gain from initial program involvement. Nevertheless, some of the health interventions arising from program involvement were significant, including items such as dentistry which participants would have otherwise been unlikely to access.

There was also some reported improvement in mental health over the longer term, particularly for young women and those who graduated from the program.

There was a high and sustained level of satisfaction amongst participants, both with the program overall, with the operations of the Court and with casework staff. Many participants saw the support and care they received from the YDC workers as the best thing about the program, while for others it was the reduction in their drug use. Given participants difficult backgrounds, entrenched offending

and high levels of drug use, these results are encouraging.

Stakeholders interviewed identified two main achievements of the program. The first was in the area of developing interagency cooperation and the second concerned the difference the program had made to young people's lives. What might appear to be small individual achievements, such as re-establishing some communication with parents, for many young people represented significant progress. Even if positive outcomes were not immediately obvious,

many stakeholders felt strongly that the program was successful in providing young people with information and tools that they could carry with them and use at a future point in their lives, when they were more ready to make a positive change.

One of these case studies has been summarised to give the flavour of the YDC program from an individual's perspective. The following story, based on a summarised case study of one individual participant¹, is typical of many of the young people's experiences in that while staying off

JOHN'S STORY

'John' had a history of poly-substance abuse, but in particular was highly dependent on heroin and had a three-year history of offending. Charges which brought him to the Youth Drug Court included firearms offences and possession of illicit drugs. He was already taking part in a rehabilitation program at the time of his acceptance on to the YDC program and after an initial residential period was allowed to live at home with his family on condition that he could produce clean urine samples. However, after only about a month at home he overdosed and his bail was breached. There followed a spell in custody while another suitable rehabilitation program was found. This time John entered an adult rehabilitation program. Despite being discharged for a month for breaching rules, he was reaccepted and went on to successfully complete the program. He also voluntarily extended his YDC program by two months in order to complete his residential rehabilitation. When he left the rehabilitation centre he moved into shared housing, found with the help of his Juvenile Justice counsellor.

He was positive about the effect of the YDC program on his life. Without it he believed he would have been spending considerable time in custody. The YDC program had provided the added impetus that was needed, with the adult rehabilitation being a particularly useful experience. The program was much harder than he imagined it would be and he was unprepared for the intense level of supervision. He also felt that more could have been done to help relations with his family and he was disappointed that more family counselling was not offered.


Two months after John's graduation from the program, he was still living in the same accommodation and was happy there. He had stopped using heroin, though reported some additional recreational use of alcohol. He was reasonably positive about the future and had an improved relationship with his family, whom he saw much more frequently than before he entered the program.

Nine months later, John reported a significant relapse in heroin use. He had referred himself for medicated detoxification treatment through a hospital, but found the

experience unsatisfactory. The prescribed medication made him feel worse and he eventually detoxified on his own. He felt that the knowledge he had gained from the YDC program helped him through this period, particularly through an understanding of what was happening to him physically. While not currently using heroin he believed that he was treading a thin line and could easily lose control. Use of other drugs such as alcohol and cannabis had increased, as a result, John thought, of his reduced heroin use. He had moved from his previous shared housing into private accommodation on his own.

During his time on the program, John only breached his bail conditions once. He did not appear in official records as having offended since leaving the program, but admitted to taking part in some criminal activity during this period. However, he was adamant that the offences were minor. He did not want further contact with drug court staff, but acknowledged that the program had helped to 'get the ball rolling' and provided the support that he needed.

¹ Some details have been changes to avoid any possible identification.



drugs often remains a continuing struggle, the program provides important tools and support for the young person to deal with this challenge in the future.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION

The evaluation also examined the implementation and operations of the program, through stakeholder and participant interviews, review of documentation and observation of the Court in action. While there were a number of teething problems, as would be expected, the implementation of the YDC program was generally effective and most of the problems identified were addressed in the pilot period of operation.

One of the major difficulties was an initial delay in establishing a stabilisation facility for new participants, which led to some spending significant periods of time in custody waiting for suitable placements, contrary to the main intention of the program. The opening of the Induction Unit in November 2001 was a key element in the program's subsequent development. There were also differing views within the program about the most appropriate location for detoxification, given that home-based detoxification turned out to be unsuitable for many participants because of their unstable or problematic family situations. Waiting lists for detoxification services were often too long to meet immediate needs, so many participants were detoxifying in custody using Department of Juvenile Justice services.

There was a general shortage of crisis accommodation suitable for YDC participants in the initial stages of the pilot, in spite of the lower than expected take-up of the program, but the situation improved significantly over the pilot period both as a result of the opening of the Induction Unit and the development of partnership schemes with community housing agencies. However, there remains a shortage of suitable short-to-

medium term housing for young offenders, especially those with drug problems.

Other implementation issues identified in the evaluation included a need to develop more effective monitoring and data collection across the program as a whole, rather than by individual departments/agencies for their own requirements. Early difficulties with interagency cooperation were exacerbated by high staff turnover and while many of these problems eased as the program developed there was still a view amongst some stakeholders that effectiveness might be improved by the appointment of a single program manager rather than the present arrangement of joint management across the participating departments.

LEGAL ISSUES

The review of the legal operations of the YDC concluded that it was operating effectively within the bounds of its legislative framework. The Court has been maintaining a consistent approach both to eligibility requirements and to sentencing. There were two main areas of concern, however. One was the use of detention in custody as a sanction for breaches of a bail order under a pre-sentence program model, bearing in mind the limitations on detention imposed under the *Children's (Criminal Proceedings) Act (1987)*. There is an argument for new legislation to clarify these powers and to codify sanctions. The other was that there is a potential for conflicts of interest and inappropriate uses of information in court proceedings. This potential arises from the team approach taken by magistrates, prosecution, defence and YDC casework staff within the Court's non-adversarial framework. While these issues were considered largely hypothetical, further guidelines might help to avoid problems in the future.

COSTS

The evaluation included an analysis of the costs incurred during the first 18 months of the pilot

program. There are various alternative ways of measuring unit costs in the program and these produce a variety of cost estimates. One reasonable measure of per capita costs per day on the program (between \$359 and \$452) compares favourably with per day costs of keeping young people in custody (around \$500 without counting additional services). This does not take into account the relative time young people would spend in custody in the absence of the program: while participation was short for some young people, for others it was significantly longer than the period of custody they were likely to have received. On the other hand, this comparison does not take account of benefits deriving from the program, including reduced offending by at least some of the participants, as well as improvements in their health and social functioning.

There appeared to be sufficient resources going into the program at the present client level, although there are still issues about accommodation needs, access to some treatment services and educational costs. To meet these needs fully in the context of a continuing program might involve some increase in overall program costs, unless some existing resources can be reallocated to improve efficiency of service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the evaluation found that the program is having an important, positive impact on the lives of many of those participating. The unit costs of achieving these impacts on a group of young people with entrenched drug use and criminal histories do not appear to be greater than those involved in keeping them in custody. On this basis the key recommendation was that the YDC program should continue and be expanded to other geographical areas, subject to a number of issues being addressed at legislative, policy and administrative levels.

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WORKING COLLABORATIVELY: IMPROVING SERVICE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



MARGOT RAWSTHORNE AND TONY EARDLEY

This small research project undertaken on behalf of the Department of Family and Community Services investigated Australian and international experience of working collaboratively to improve outcomes for young people, particularly those with complex needs. The experience of Australian practitioners in working collaboratively was gained from three focus groups held in Sydney, Dubbo and Melbourne. International experience was identified through an internet based literature review of collaborative programs aimed at addressing the information and referral, employment, education, training, health and housing needs of young people.

There is growing concern among both practitioners and policy makers in Australia about the effectiveness of current approaches to addressing the needs of young people. This is particularly the case for young people with complex or multiple needs, such as those with mental health problems and those experiencing homelessness. This concern coincides with international efforts to improve sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged young people. Service providers and policy makers alike are seeking ways of creating more seamless service provision and a better continuum of care, as a means of improving overall service provision and outcomes.

Current Australian approaches to addressing the needs of young people are characterised by fragmentation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people with complex or multiple needs may often seek assistance during periods of crisis, moving around the service system from one service

provider to another. Whilst services may be able to assist with the crisis, little long-term sustainable change is achieved. At the same time, all levels of governments are recognising the need for 'whole-of-government' responses to meet complex community needs. Program 'silos' and departmentalism are seen as creating artificial barriers to developing and delivering 'good policy' outcomes.

Alongside this critical reflection on current practices, the structural ageing of the Australian population is placing greater significance on the successful transition of young people to independence and self-reliance. As the structural ageing cycle deepens over the next 20 to 50 years, it is likely that increased importance will be placed on the engagement of young people with the labour force.

The research identified the following *factors that facilitate working collaboratively*:

- Adopting a holistic perspective and tailoring services to young people's needs

The need to improve client outcomes has been the starting point overseas and in Australia for critical reflection on practice, resulting in a desire to break down silos and reduce fragmentation by working collaboratively. Focus group participants felt that regardless of the 'presenting issue', a key factor in facilitating working collaboratively appears to be seeing the 'whole young person', not merely a specific disadvantage or need. Overseas experience suggests that collaboration tailored around the needs of young people has a greater chance of success.

- Creating shared responsibility and common goals

Overseas and Australian experience suggests that successful

collaboration requires a sense of shared responsibility and common goals. Focus group participants felt that services or individual workers need to be working towards the same outcomes for young people. Part of creating shared responsibility is the need to have clarity about the contributions each partner can contribute and to have realistic expectations of the partners.

- Time to establish trust and respect


Part of creating shared responsibility is the need to have clarity about the contributions of each partner and to have realistic expectations of the partners. Focus group participants noted that a key element of trust is a willingness to respect the values and approaches of other partners. This is particularly the case when attempting to work cross-culturally.

- Providing staff with support and resources

Overseas experience suggests that successful collaboration initiatives acknowledge and address the support and resource needs of paid staff. Working collaboratively often requires staff to work differently from the way they have been trained or have operated in the past. Organisational support is important as collaborative projects can challenge the way individuals or services have traditionally provided services to young people. Without support individual staff can resist or act as a barrier to collaborative work.

- Creativity and flexibility

Overseas experience and Australian practitioners believe collaboration should be motivated by the need to work differently or address an emerging need. Those focus group participants managing youth services noted that collaboration requires the creative



use of resources and does not always require new or additional resources. It requires looking outside the square to meet the needs of young people, drawing on resources not always evident. Collaboration could be stifled through over-prescriptive funding guidelines and performance measures. Overseas and Australian experience suggests successful collaboration requires a commitment to working together but also a pragmatic view about what is achievable, as well as willingness to compromise.

- Expanding knowledge of other agencies, sharing skills, ideas and approaches

Overseas and Australian experience suggests collaboration is facilitated by forums that expand knowledge of other agencies and enables the sharing of skills, ideas and approaches. Evaluations of overseas experiences strongly indicate these 'secondary' outcomes of collaborative projects can be as important as achieving the specific primary outcomes. Focus group participants noted that collaborative projects endorsed by forums such as youth interagencies often gain added credibility and support.

The research identified a range of *barriers to working collaboratively*, many of which were the 'flip-side' of factors that facilitated collaboration. These included:

- Competitive environment and organisational culture
 - Funding arrangements
 - Professional training and orientation
 - Administrative issues
 - Staff turnover
 - Lack of trust between government and non-government agencies
 - Government structures and systems
 - Eligibility rules
 - Funding arrangements.

In the current Australian context the most significant of these barriers was the competitive environment for funding. Some

organisations view collaboration as eroding their 'niche market' or expertise. Others sometimes see large organisations (particularly church-based agencies) as 'poaching' projects or funds that 'belong' to their community. An organisational culture that encourages these sorts of behaviours or views can stifle collaboration. According to focus group participants, these views or experiences do not need to be current to act as a barrier to collaboration: a history of poor behaviour (real or perceived) in relation to partnerships or collaboration will often inhibit future collaboration for some time. This is particularly the case for government agencies who fail to 'deliver' on collaborative projects entered into with non-government agencies. A bad collaboration experience with, say, Community Health will make future collaboration very difficult, regardless of the goodwill and commitment of other community health staff. Focus group participants managing youth services felt that fundamental to successful systemic collaboration is a sense of equal power in decision making or shared responsibility, which is difficult to achieve in a competitive environment or between partners of unequal status or resources. They also noted that the ongoing reform of government/non-government relations has impacted on the ability of agencies to undertake collaborative work.

This study suggests that moving towards a more integrated and collaborative youth service network is not straight-forward. Addressing one of these issues may assist increased collaboration in some settings but it would appear that if fundamental change is to occur to the service network a more comprehensive approach is needed. Whilst there are a number of practical barriers to collaboration, it would appear cultural change (both within government and within non-

government agencies) is likely to have the greatest impact on addressing the needs of young people. From the focus groups it would appear there is considerable goodwill among Australian practitioners and services that may assist in this cultural change.

The following recommendations are suggestions for facilitating collaboration to improve service outcomes for young people:

- Cultural change, at all levels of government, is required to break down 'silos' and develop whole-of-government responses to the needs of young people

- There is a need for governments to address the negative impact of competitive tendering and contractual funding arrangements on collaborative behaviour

- The resource implications of 'working collaboratively' need to be acknowledged by governments, including specific funding to facilitate formalised partnerships and support for community development activities that create greater collaboration

- Greater flexibility should be built into funding arrangements and existing arrangements should be reviewed to ensure they do not act as a barrier to collaboration

- Collaboration should not be 'mandated' through funding arrangements but needs to evolve from a desire to create better outcomes for young people

- Collaborative pilots should be of sufficient duration to be viable, with particular attention given to the time required to establish relationships

- Collaborative pilots should be properly documented and evaluated, thus adding to our knowledge of effective collaboration.

This report will be available on the SPRC website later in the year. For more information phone Dr Margot Rawsthorne on (02) 9385 7803.

NEW DISCUSSION PAPERS

ACCOUNTING FOR HOUSING COSTS IN REGIONAL INCOME COMPARISONS

PETER SIMINSKI AND
PETER SAUNDERS

SPRC DISCUSSION PAPER
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This paper discusses a series of methodological issues that arise when assessing regional differences in the propensity of households to be relatively poor, focusing specifically on whether it is better to base such comparisons on measures of income that are defined before or after deducting housing costs. It is argued on conceptual grounds relating to the

factors that give rise to regional differences in housing costs, that an after housing costs measure of income is preferable for some, but not all, regional analyses. It is also demonstrated that differences in housing costs are not always offset by differences in transport costs and, in fact, transport costs are higher on average in major cities than in the balance of Australia. Regional income comparisons of income both before and after housing costs are presented derived from unit record data from the latest (1998-99) Household Expenditure Survey and from the 2001 Census. Despite differences in data coverage and definition, the patterns are not sensitive to the data source used, both sources indicating that while the

percentage of people in low-income (bottom quintile) households is lower in major urban locations than in the rest of Australia, these differences are much smaller when account is taken of housing costs. These results contradict other studies that show a large gap in regional living standards in Australia.

NEW REPORTS

Impact of Staff Ratios on Under 2 Year Olds in Children's Services, Karen Fisher and Roger Patulny, SPRC Report 11/04, Report prepared for National Association of Community Based Children's Services (NSW), Early Childhood Australia (NSW), Local Government Children's Services Association (NSW) and Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW), Social Policy Research Centre University of New South Wales, Sydney, May 2004.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/NACBCSReport.pdf

Resident Support Program Evaluation Plan, David Abelló, Karen Fisher, Sally Robinson and Lesley Chenoweth, SPRC Report 10/04, Report prepared for Disability Services Queensland, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, January 2004.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/FinalEvaluationPlan.pdf

Youth Health Project Evaluations, Justin McNab, Cathy Thomson and Karen Fisher, SPRC Report 9/04, Report prepared for NSW Health, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, October 2002. Available soon.

Evaluation of the New South Wales Youth Drug Court Pilot Program, Tony Eardley, Justin McNab, Karen Fisher and Simon Kozlina, with Jude Eccles and Mardi Flick, SPRC Report 8/04, Report prepared for the NSW Attorney-General's Department, Social Policy Research Centre University of New South Wales, Sydney, March 2004.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/YDACFinalReport04

Parent Support Strategies, Prue Warrilow, Karen Fisher and kylie valentine, SPRC Report 7/04, Report prepared for Families First Cumberland Prospect, Social Policy

Research Centre University of New South Wales, Sydney, March 2004.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/ParentSupport.pdf

Early Learning Support Strategies, Prue Warrilow, Karen Fisher and kylie valentine, SPRC Report 6/04, Report prepared for Families First Cumberland Prospect, Social Policy Research Centre University of New South Wales, Sydney, January 2004.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/Earlylearning.pdf

Review of the Early Childhood Teachers Shortage Interim Policy, Christiane Purcal and Karen Fisher, SPRC Report 5/04. Report prepared for the NSW Department of Community Services, Social Policy Research Centre University of New South Wales, Sydney, December 2003.
www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/ECTFinalReport.pdf



NEW PROJECTS

EVALUATION OF THE MENTAL HEALTH HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION SUPPORT INITIATIVE (HASI)

New South Wales Health
Karen Fisher, Alan Morris, Bruce Bradbury, David Abelló, Kate Norris, Kelly Sutherland and Sarah Yallop with Michael Bleasdale (DSaRI)

The project is a two year evaluation of the NSW Health Mental Health Housing and Support Initiative (HASI). We are measuring the outcomes and processes from the initiative, focussing on the interests of the people supported by HASI. Methods will include interviews with people supported by HASI, providers, government, carers and advocacy groups; quantitative data analysis; and document and literature reviews. If you would like

to comment on the evaluation, please contact Kelly Sutherland email kelly.sutherland@unsw.edu.au or ph 02 9385 7817.

DISABILITY SERVICES QUEENSLAND REFERRAL PROCESSES TO PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Disability Services Queensland

Karen Fisher and Adeline Lee with Sally Robinson (DSaRI) and Lesley Chenoweth (University of Queensland)

Disability Services Queensland has engaged the University of New South Wales Consortium to conduct an independent review of the processes used by Disability Services Queensland when advising people with a disability about private residential services.

The review is researching the current policies and practices of Disability Services Queensland, with a view to identifying options for the enhancement of its operations. It is the current policy of Disability Services Queensland not to refer people with a disability with complex support needs and challenging behaviours to private residential services for long-term placements.

As part of the review, Disability Services Queensland is interested in receiving comments from any person or organisation on the processes used by Disability Services Queensland when advising people with a disability about private residential services.

If you would like to provide any comments, please contact us by telephone on 1800 065 576 or email adeline.lee@unsw.edu.au by 30 November 2004.

FROM THE RESEARCH SCHOLARS

The life of a PhD scholar, when working towards that final goal of submitting a thesis, can be a solitary and at times stressful pursuit. For Lyn Craig who announced this month that her thesis was 'in production' (sent to the binder) prior to submission there was a sense of satisfaction and relief that the elusive goal is in sight. Lyn's thesis on 'The Hidden Cost of parenthood: the impact of children on adult time' uses detailed analysis of ABS Time Use data to explore the magnitude, character and distribution of adult time devoted to children.

Roger Patulny is also at the final draft stage of his thesis 'Social Capital, Trust and Volunteering' due for completion in December 2004. Roger's study uses the World Values Survey and the ABS Time Use Survey to explore aspects of social capital: trust, networks and volunteering.

Realisation of the hard work and dedication a thesis entails comes with accepted conference and seminar papers at overseas venues and a welcome break from the grind of study. Both Lyn and Roger left for Rome in early October to present papers at the International

Association of Time Use Research.

Lyn will present a paper on 'An Equal Load? Time-diary evidence about the "second shift" and shared parenting'. Roger will follow up his paper in Rome: 'Gender and Social Capital' with a seminar presentation on 'Social Capital and Welfare' at University of Essex. Roger's paper will be available from the SPRC Website later in the year.

EVALUATION OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES YOUTH DRUG COURT PILOT PROGRAM

CONTINUED
FROM PAGE 6

Aside from the legal issues discussed above, these included a recommendation for review of program eligibility criteria; the optimum period for mandatory program involvement; sanctions for non-compliance with program requirements; optimum combination of treatment options; and the purpose and application of urinalysis. Other issues for consideration included: further co-location of different service elements of the program to improve communication and cooperative working; more effective cross-departmental monitoring and recording of key program

interventions and participant outcomes, based on an agreed set of indicators; better data on offences coming to the attention of the police and the courts in order to determine accurately the level of offending by program referrals and participants; and better co-ordination and management, possibly through the appointment of a single manager with overall responsibility for the program.

A final decision about the future of the program has not yet been taken, but in the meantime the Government has announced a further three years funding for the Court,

to be known from July 2004 as the Youth Drug and Alcohol Court, with an extended catchment to include central and eastern Sydney.

REFERENCES

Eardley, T., J. McNab, K.R. Fisher and S. Kozlina, with J. Eccles and M. Flick (2004), *Evaluation of the New South Wales Youth Drug Court Pilot Program*, Final Report for the NSW Attorney-General's Department, SPRC Report 8/04, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney (available for download from <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/YDACFinalReport04.pdf>).

FROM THE DIRECTOR

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

maintain the integrity of scientific knowledge, as was dramatically shown by the ideologically-driven opposition to mainstream genetic theory, that resulted in the steady deterioration of Soviet biology in the Stalinist era. It is important for governments because sound independent information leads to

better policy. For example, knowing accurately whether Western troops would be greeted as occupiers or liberators has great significance for calculating the consequences of geo-political decisions. If policymakers sincerely wish to make policy more 'evidence-based', then there needs

to be more support for independent research. Emphasising competitive, contractual arrangements for specific pieces of research might reduce the role and autonomy of researchers and their capacity to inform policy-makers.

Acting Director, Michael Bittman

PUBLICATIONS AND MAILING LIST

SPRC DISCUSSION PAPERS (FREE)

The Discussion Paper below has been posted to the SPRC Website:

Peter Siminski and Peter Saunders *Accounting for Housing Costs in Regional Income Comparisons*, SPRC Discussion Paper 135

MAILING LISTS (FREE)

- SPRC Email Notices *You will receive email updates about events at SPRC*
- SPRC Newsletter Mailing List *You will receive Newsletters regularly*
- SPRC Annual Report Mailing List *You will receive Annual Reports*

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AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL POLICY CONFERENCE 2005

20-22 JULY 2005

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: A QUARTER-CENTURY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The Social Policy Research Centre invites offers of papers for presentation at the next Australian Social Policy Conference to be held at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, from 20-22 July 2005.

Next year marks the 25th anniversary of the Social Policy Research Centre. To mark this event, the overarching theme for the 2005 conference will be "Looking Back, Looking Forward". The end of the long economic boom in the mid 1970s led to the realisation that new social policies were needed to cope with the new economic and social environment. The establishment of the SPRC in 1980 (initially known as the Social Welfare Research Centre) was one response to this. Twenty-five years later, economic growth has returned, but inequality continues to grow and social change continues to be rapid. Like the Red Queen, social policy-makers must keep running in order to adapt to new circumstances and needs.

For the 2005 Australian Social Policy Conference, presenters are being encouraged to examine social and policy changes past, present and future.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The success of the Australian Social Policy Conference is based on the presentation of high quality, original papers across the range of social policy fields. We are now inviting offers of papers from researchers, teachers, students and practitioners of social policy. Papers can present the results of research, discuss conceptual approaches to contemporary social policy research, describe work in progress or raise issues for social policy debate.

As in previous conferences, discussion will be organised around thematic strands. The topic areas from within which the final strands will be selected, and for which we are currently seeking offers of papers, include the following.

- Employment, Unemployment and Welfare Reform
- The Work/Family Balance
- Childhood and Child Well being
- Disability
- Social Policy and Environmental Sustainability
- An Open strand will also exist for papers on other subjects of interest and importance outside the main themes.
- Income Distribution and Social Inequalities
- Retirement and Ageing
- Indigenous Australians
- Spatial Dimensions of Social Policy
- Organisation and Delivery of Community Services

SELECTION OF PAPERS

Acceptance of papers for presentation at the conference is necessarily competitive. Selection will be the responsibility of the SPRC, in collaboration with some external session organisers, and will be based on the abstracts submitted. Criteria for selection will include academic quality, originality, accessibility and relevance to current debates in social policy. We welcome papers presenting all points of view.

If you wish to offer a paper, please send the title and an abstract of no more than 200 words. Please specify the thematic area (or areas) into which you feel your paper falls. We reserve the right to place it elsewhere, where appropriate, to maintain program balance.

The closing date for the receipt of abstracts is 14 March 2005. Please email your abstract (preferably as a MS Word document) to:

ASPC2005@unsw.edu.au

Or by post to: Australian Social Policy Conference 2005

Social Policy Research Centre

University of New South Wales

Sydney NSW 2052

Or by fax to: (02) 9385 7838

Telephone enquiries about papers or the conference in general should be directed to Duncan Aldridge (02) 9385 7802. Please note: registration for the conference will not start until 2005.

The conference website will be accessible from early 2005 through the SPRC website (www.sprc.unsw.edu.au). Information on the papers presented at the previous (2003) conference can be found at www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2003/.