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Proposed Changes to CSGP: Possible Impacts on Youth Services

Background

In early January 2010, the chief executive of Community Services (formerly DoCS), released a communiqué outlining a proposal to separate the Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) into two streams:

- Stream 1 – services whose results have to do with ‘community strengthening’; and
- Stream 2 – services provided directly to children, young people and families.

The message was written after initial discussions with a number of CSGP peaks and a focus group of key CSGP organisations working with Community Services on their current reforms relating to Keep Them Safe. Whilst some concerns were raised in these meetings, it was generally felt that the proposal had some merit and needed further examination. Two working groups were set up, with YAPA electing to focus on the proposed “community strengthening” stream at this stage of discussions.

Stream 1 - Community Strengthening

Many services will be aware that the former Area Assistance Scheme, which operated in six regions across NSW, was redeveloped in 2009 to form the Community Builders Funding Program. Community Builders is managed by the Communities & Early Years (CEY) division (formerly Communities Division) of Community Services, which has a focus on whole of government initiatives to develop coordinated, strategic approaches to issues facing young people, children and families and to implement community programs locally. After some consultation with the sector, the division developed a results framework around existing evidence on community development that has been accepted as a basis for the ongoing government funding of Community Builders overall, and used for the application process which closed in late 2009.

The proposed changes to CSGP would see the funding for services under stream 1 being transferred to the Communities & Early Years division. The CSGP funds would use the current program results framework that has been used for the first round of Community Builders funding. The new stream, however, would retain the statewide scope and renewable funding, as was the case under CSGP.

YAPA is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW.

YAPA works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued.

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The results in the Community Builders program framework include the following:

- Community members feel connected to their community
- Community members are resourceful, skilled & access services
- Community members participate in community activities and services
- Community members participate in community decision-making
- Community members trust each other
- Community members respect each other

These were developed after consultation with services in the six regions covered by Community Builders, and relevant statewide and regional peak bodies.

The Community Builders Funding Program also has developed a series of Service Activity Descriptions, which indicate how funded services are likely to achieve the results above. The three activities are:

- Community Capacity Building
- Community Skills Development
- Community Sector Development

These models were used for the first funding round, which closed in late 2009. The funding allocation process will take place in the coming months and YAPA will be monitoring how the Service Activity Descriptions are used in practice, through its involvement in the Western Sydney selection process for Community Builders, and inviting feedback from services in the regions.

YAPA and other CSGP peaks (NCOSS, LCSA and WSCF) are also currently in discussions with Communities and Early Years about additional Service Activity Description(s) that may be necessary to cover models of work to be conducted in the new 'community strengthening' stream.

YAPA believes there is some significant value in placing youth services that primarily work with a youth development / community strengthening approach in a program that explicitly targets community level outcomes, such as Community Builders. The added value is that Community Builders is a program that has already been developed and successfully undergone scrutiny in negotiations between Community Services and NSW Treasury (i.e. the program has been successful in the part of the process where previous bids to increase CSGP funding falls over).

The major benefit of this move is that this would place community development services in a budget area that explicitly states the purpose of these services, and the results framework used, clearly shows the connection to government community strengthening priorities – which may make funding them more attractive.

As of the 2009/10 Budget, CSGP funding is reported within the Community Services budget against the heading "Contracted Child Protection Services",

within the budget area of “Statutory Child Protection” – having been moved from the “Community Services” area of their budget. Whilst it has been argued that this put CSGP funds closer to the core priorities of Community Services (thereby protecting it) YAPA and other peaks have raised the significant risks this creates for youth and community development services in the medium term. Services on this end of the spectrum will find it more difficult to justify how their activities link to child protection outcomes and the funding that the services are linked to.

Stream 2 – Direct services to children, young people and families

These services are those that are more closely linked to the child protection outcomes of Community Services than “community strengthening” services, and YAPA believes are likely to include family support services, adolescent family counselling, and many youth services. Services providing direct services to young people may not clearly see the link between the results of their work and traditional child protection outcomes. However, the direct nature of their work means these services can fit more easily into the results areas of the broader child protection system, and the funding can therefore be justified with Community Services priorities more readily than services primarily engaged in youth and community development.

A significant benefit for both Community Services and some CSGP funded services is that there may be opportunities to more easily access funds that are already allocated under Keep Them Safe. The areas identified would allow funding for CSGP services to provide:

1. additional Brighter Futures places for 0-8 year
2. new Intensive Family Preservation Services; and
3. programs for prevention and early intervention

The first two funded areas are earmarked for Community Services to allocate, however currently it is unknown which government department(s) will be responsible for allocating the prevention and early intervention funding and for what types of programs. However the budget announcement in 2009 states the funding is aimed at a range of “evidence based prevention and early intervention services, such as family support services and sustained health home visiting.”

YAPA believes that the current information available on funding allocations means that youth services who are not already working in child protection and family support settings, or who decide to move towards engaging in this work, are unlikely to access the current funding available, due to their logical linkages with the work of family support, health services, etc.

Services should also be aware that new funding would also be tied to services models currently being developed, which will align with Keep Them Safe outcomes and be subject to performance-based contracting earlier than would otherwise be the case under the progressive roll out of contracts across existing Community Services funding programs.

YAPA remains conscious of the risk that services in this stream will be progressively moved towards work on Community Services priorities that focus on children and families, to the detriment of young people, and will be monitoring the impacts of this through our members and ongoing discussions with Community Services.

Crossing Streams

Many youth services will rightfully consider that their work falls under both streams of the proposed CSGP. Feedback from services received by YAPA and other peaks shows there is a level of concern from services that fall into this category.

This issue has been flagged with Community Services for further consideration, however it is anticipated that a way for services to continue to undertake work in both community strengthening and direct service streams will be developed. Ideally, funding accountability requirements will be streamlined to prevent services in this situation from having to complete funding acquittals for each of the two streams, for work currently undertaken under the one CSGP service agreement. YAPA will continue to work towards this aim.

Services who fall into both categories should find some guidance on how to proceed once funding arrangements are finalised, service models and descriptions are developed, and of course, the decision to proceed with the proposed split is made.

Risks and Rewards

There are a number of possible risks under this proposal, including the specific ones noted above. However, these must be weighed against the significant risk of continuing under the current circumstances, which would allow Treasury to continue to excuse itself from increasing CSGP funding based on the diversity of service models and outcomes currently falling under the CSGP umbrella.

The CSGP peaks are also aware that for many services, the erosion over a number of years of funding levels, when viewed against service costs and increased client demand, will make the capacity for a number of services to implement any changes quite difficult. As discussed, there is little funding in current budget allocations that is likely to filter down to CSGP youth services. YAPA's two areas of work listed below will aim to assist this issue.

2010 / 11 Budget

The CSGP peaks, including NCOSS, Local Community Services Association (LCSA), NSW Family Services and YAPA continue to lobby at the Ministerial level and with the Premier and Treasurer in the lead up to budget night for increased funding for CSGP services. Previous campaigns have placed CSGP

in a stronger position than in previous years, however there is still significant work to be done. From time to time YAPA will ask its members to support actions towards this aim. If you are interested in undertaking some local lobbying work with members of parliament, please get in touch with us via info@yapa.org.au with “CSGP Campaign” in the subject line.

Support for the Youth Sector

YAPA has secured a partnership project with NSW Family Services, funded by Community Services until mid-2011 to support the youth and family services sectors through the transition to the new arrangements arising from Keep Them Safe. In anticipation of the significant support that would be required if the proposed changes to CSGP are adopted, this project has the capacity to also work with the sector on CSGP realignment issues. More information on the “Keeping It Together” project and its work supporting the youth sector through this period will be available once its up and running, in the next month or so.

Any questions, comments, thoughts or concerns can be sent to YAPA via info@yapa.org.au, with “CSGP” in the subject line. We would welcome any feedback from the sector.