

# **Flexible Responses to the Accommodation Needs of Young People**

## ***Pooled funds allow flexible approaches to youth homelessness***

### **Summary**

Since 2002, four Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) agencies in the Sunshine Coast region have shared a pool of additional funding, which they have applied to individual responses for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Through a formal cooperative working agreement, the partner agencies are able to use funds to provide additional support beyond that available through existing funding, to help high-needs clients avoid homelessness. Funds are used for diverse purposes including intensive youth worker support, short-term payments for accommodation, or provision of a service that is critical to their accommodation stability.

### **Partners**

Signatories to the agreement are four SAAP-funded agencies operating on the Sunshine Coast:

- Integrated Family and Youth Service Inc. – early intervention, secondary and tertiary services for young people across broad areas of Queensland.
- Noosa Youth Service – early intervention, secondary and tertiary services for young people across broad areas of Queensland.
- Youth Focus – support for young people in the Caloundra area.
- Gympie Widgee – support for young people in the Gympie area.

### **Background**

At the time of the developing this response in 2002, the youth sector had acknowledged the need for a strategy to maximise the impact of additional funds that became available, to meet and focus on young people's needs. The geographic spread of the Sunshine Coast created a challenge in making resources available across the region, without young people having to attempt to travel to Maroochydore to access support. The ability to achieve and maintain this has ensured that local strategies and solutions have been developed within local communities across the region.

### **Drivers for collaboration**

Brian Burdekin's report "On Homeless Children" highlighted the complexity of the issues and the critical need for collaborative, flexible responses to meet the diverse needs of young people. Similarly the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, "Footprints to the Future" recognised the young people live in a challenging, rapidly changing environment, creating a need for new ways to assist young people's transitions through life, learning and work roles.

A number of Sunshine Coast agencies recognised the need for a new approach, and worked with the then Department of Families to apply it to use some additional recurrent funding that became available in 2002.

## **The collaboration story**

Youth housing and service organisations in the Sunshine Coast region had been working together since 2000 to collaborate to share a pool of emergency relief funds for a flexible, client-centred approach.

In 2002 the then Department of Families allocated recurrent funding of \$60,000 to enhance the capacity of the existing SAAP system in the four local government authorities within the region.

The department's regional office facilitated development of an agreement between four organisations working with young people in the area to create the Flexible SAAP Response.

The broad aims of the Flexible SAAP Response are to:

- increase crisis and supported transitional housing capacity;
- broaden crisis accommodation options and choices; and
- increase support to individuals with an intensive level of need.

The primary target group are typically aged 14 to 18 years, homeless or at risk of homelessness, and with high levels of need that are not able to be met within normal service provision and existing agency or community resources.

The four partner agencies have signed an agreement to share access to the additional regional SAAP funds. Guidelines were developed for the use of funds, allowing flexibility for innovation. Funds can be used for purposes ranging from intensive Youth Worker support to financially support accommodation in the short term. The agreement also specifies what the funds are not intended for, such as topping up existing activities.

Funds are auspiced by Integrated Family and Youth Service under a Service Plan. Integrated Family and Youth Service is responsible for budget reporting, quarterly reconciliation and annual audit, and provides a balance sheet to each partner at the end of each month.

## **Tools and strategies**

- The four partners are signatories to a cooperative working agreement, originally signed in 2002.
- A Service Plan outlines the responsibilities of the auspicing organisation.
- Partners agreed meet a minimum of once each quarter to monitor and review arrangements, expenditure and accountabilities; although more often this contact has been by phone.

## **Outcomes**

As a result of this collaboration the following outcomes have been achieved:

- flexible and responsive supports and service delivery across the broader region;
- broader options and choices for disadvantaged young people;
- realisation of true early intervention and prevention approaches;
- maintenance of respective individual and organisational governance and structural frameworks; and
- a flow-on effect from the flexible pool of resources to local services.

## **Success factors for collaboration**

- The formal signed agreement is described as “the glue in ensuring the commitment to providing a flexible pool of resources for young people stays real”.
- The agreement has allowed each partner organisation to develop independently while ensuring the program has continued to focus on young people, without organisations having to embrace each other totally.
- Regional staff from the then Department of Families were at the forefront in establishing the flexible response to youth homelessness and have supported the program since, including increasing the flexible pool of funds in November 2006.
- The participating organisations have aimed to partner well beyond the narrow information-sharing function of most interagency networks, but to generate inter-organisational solutions and strategies that are locally relevant, build on local strengths and engender local responsibility.
- The flexible response was based on an intention to increase young people’s sense of belonging and connectedness with their community (including family and school), and encourage a caring community reaction. The partners considered that services that are not couched in young people’s community of belonging actually increase disconnectedness by:
  - ignoring and disempowering existing networks;
  - introducing people to welfare-oriented networks; and
  - connecting people with other people in similar stages of disconnection or alienation.

## **Challenges**

- Back in 2002, two of the four agencies originally planning a joint submission instead made last minute individual funding submissions. Later discussions led to the current alliance, but this experience prompted development of more formal mechanisms for cooperation than those originally envisaged.
- Confusions between agencies about clarity, values, organisational changes and ability to work together were reduced through signing of the cooperative working agreement. Ongoing work is required to avoid the pooled resources being consumed into existing SAAP or other service project areas or being compartmentalised to each partner organisation rather than retaining the potential from the pooling of the funds.
- While partners agree to meet regularly; time, changing relationships, organisational values and directions has made this a struggle, with most communication occurring over the phone.

## **The future**

As the auspice, Integrated Family and Youth Service is currently working with the Department of Communities to create a specific service agreement for the flexible SAAP response, rather than the current model where it sits under an existing SAAP Service Agreement.

## **For more information contact**

Mark Clissold, Integrated Family and Youth Service Inc. ph: 5438 3000.