A Business case for Youth SAAP

Viability of Youth SAAP funded services in QLD

Queensland Youth Housing Coalition

A Business Case for Youth SAAP

Crisis accommodation is an integral part of the social cohesion that makes our community. In the next 5- 10 years without adequate funding, this social support that binds our communities will be extremely compromised. The impact will be felt across the community, at the core of which will be the ability (or more accurately the inability) of marginalised and disadvantaged citizens to be able to participate in social and economic opportunities.

This business case demonstrates the value of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) to the community and the people it aims to assist. A survey was conducted with 45 youth SAAP providers (accounting for 62.5% of all youth SAAP funded services) the result of which demonstrate the value of the program in Queensland. The survey also found that government/s can no longer rely on the goodwill of non government organisations (NGO's) to meet the shortfall in the funding of the program.

A comparison of international approaches to homelessness demonstrates that Australia is a world leader in the area. SAAP in particular, as the national program that addresses homelessness, can be identified as an excellent programmatic response that stands out on the international stage.

The data represented in this business case is based on information provided by 43 youth SAAP funded services (59.7%) in Queensland. We have excluded the information provided us by the outreach services due to the variation within that model.

The survey provides key insights into the service viability of the Queensland youth SAAP funded services;

Key points:

o   Queensland has one of the highest homeless rates in Australia.

o   The trend is showing that homeless young people are getting younger.

o   There are four types of service models that support young people at the crisis end of the continuum of care spectrum.

o   There are 72 funded youth SAAP funded service models (with some organisations operating more than one model of service) currently operating throughout the State.

o   There are no services west of the Great Dividing Range, with the exception of 3 services based in Mt Isa.

o   The majority of services are located in major centres on the eastern seaboard of Queensland.

o The withdrawal of services in other social support systems has seen SAAP services inundated with people who should/could more adequately assisted through the health or disability sectors. There are also an increasing number of young people under 15 accessing youth SAAP funded services due to the lack of child protection responses.

The survey was an attempt by QYHC to determine the service viability of youth SAAP funded services in Queensland and the impact of this on service delivery. The survey was distributed to all SAAP services by email and with a follow up phone call. The data was collated by two staff of QYHC to ensure minimal data interpretation and a further phone call was placed to services where the data was unclear or open to interpretation. In the following key areas the survey found;

Viability

The survey requested information on the financial viability of organisations now and over the course of the next agreement.

o Most services (74%) indicated that they were struggling to fund core activities or that they were utilising other forms of income (eg donations) to support their current level of activities.

o It is of concern that 5% of respondents indicated that they were facing service closure.

o There are serious concerns around viability in terms of the operational costs in service delivery, these include but are not limited to:

- Adequate wage levels to pay and attract qualified staff.

- Rising costs of insurance, cost of compliance with occupational health and safety legislation.

Impact on Service delivery

The survey indicated that without any viability funding there would be a decrease in the capacity of the service system to meet needs particularly around complex needs clients. Further that the numbers of clients assisted would decrease due to the need to decrease staffing or staff hours.

o 65% of services indicated that without viability funding they would have to reduce staff hours or positions.

o 79% of services indicated that they would either have to decrease their client numbers or take clients with less complex needs.

o About half (53.5%) of the services indicated that they would need to either reduce their opening hours or reduce their staffing during these times.

Impact on Innovation

A substantial amount of community support is provided by youth SAAP funded services to their communities over and above their core funding. Not continuing to support the SAAP service system will mean that a large amount of other community support programs may also be cut. Further, any pilots or new ideas will be limited as the community as a whole will not have the same capacity to participate in areas where SAAP funded services form a substantial and dependable mechanism for community participation.

o The youth SAAP funded services provides the backbone for many new community initiatives and 79% of respondents indicated that they provided some form of innovation. This is the basis of community capacity building. For example in Queensland it was the youth SAAP funded service sector that initiated the need for a youth bail accommodation option and supported the need for more integrated forms of service delivery.

o 63% of respondents provided additional housing in the community without any additional SAAP core funding.

o The majority of respondents indicated that innovations would be the first area to be 'cut' if service viability became an issue.

Recommendations

o That Government recognise and support the National SAAP IV Evaluation Report commissioned by the Federal government.

o That there is growth of 25% to current funding levels to ensure viability of the service system to meet the needs of high and complex needs clients.

o That there is an increase of funding of 15% over and above the 25% to meet unmet demand.

o That a National Homelessness Action Plan be developed In consultation with the community.

Contents

Part A: The case for SAAP

Background

- o SAAP is the jointly funded Commonwealth, State and Territory program that is Australia's primary response to the needs of the homeless and those at-risk of homelessness. The aim of SAAP is to "…provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services, in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence" (*Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* (Cth) s.5.2). Youth SAAP funded services comprise a range of types from crisis accommodation to long-term youth housing.

- o The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) has been implemented through 5 year agreements with all the State and Territory Governments since 1985. The program has continued to grow and develop via a process of National Evaluations.

- o The Commonwealth and the States are currently in the process of renegotiating the SAAP V Agreement (2005 -2010). The Commonwealth offer does not provide any growth funds for SAAP, it only changes who contributes, and provides for 2.1% indexation.

- o The SAAP V Funding Offer Fact Sheet (March 05) released by the Minister of Family and Community Service indicated that the Commonwealth would create an Investment Fund (established through the withdrawal of funding from direct service provision from each State where the Commonwealth was contributing more than 50%).

- o The Investment Fund (as outlined in the Ministers Fact Sheet March 05) will contribute;

  - i. $11 million (2005 – 2007) – "pilot a series of initiatives to identify new ways of working and strengthening existing reform and good practice in the sector, with a view to easing unmet demand and improving outcomes for children and families".

  - ii. $95 million (2007 -2010) – "will be rolled back into the base funding over the subsequent three years of the Agreement, distributed fairly among all states and territories. This will integrate the successful features of the pilots more broadly into existing service delivery development across the sector."

International comparisons

AHURI undertook an overview of international and national approaches to homelessness and a literature review to "identify, assess and compare the range of current definitions, legislation, planning and policies that address homeless and inadequate housing in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union Countries" (page 1).

The report 'Recent International and National Approaches to Homelessness – Final Report to the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee' was released in March 2004.

The report states that "Australia is arguably at the forefront of advances in the definition, enumeration and response to homelessness". The report also states that "It is in this field of providing strategic and cohesive approaches to homelessness that Australia can become a leader in 'good practice' internationally" (page 2),

National Evaluation of SAAP IV

The National Evaluation Report of SAAP IV (May 2004) Executive Summary found that funding was required to "… increase the capacity of the sector to meet the current levels of demand overall" and to "…increase the capacity of the service sector to more effectively address the need for a greater proportion of client to achieve independent living" (page 9).

The report found that the SAAP funded service system is working to capacity across the continuum of care spectrum of early intervention, crisis and post crisis. The report however raises questions as to how much can be achieved by SAAP on its own. The Evaluation Executive Summary comments on the need for a more whole of government approach and states that "Until a more systematic whole of government approach is adopted, major challenges will remain in providing joined-up services needed to reduce homelessness occurring and providing appropriate pathways out of homelessness" (page 6).

Finally the Report states that "The cost of the program is high, (although perhaps lower than other comparable public assistance programs), but not nearly as high as the consequences of not addressing these evident needs" (page 11).

Part B: Description of the current service delivery system

Continuum of care

The response to youth homelessness is within a continuum of care.

The continuum of care framework encompasses the areas of prevention, early intervention, crisis and post crisis.

Once there is an understanding of the continuum of care then an exploration can commence on the programmatic solutions.

Service models can then be developed in response to the need with a view to providing a holistic service that aims to develop living skills that will enable young people to participate in social and economic opportunities. Most service models have a component of social support (counselling, family support and mediation, social and recreational opportunities) and skill development (education/training/employment).

Communities need to identify the mix of service responses that best and most flexibly meets their needs. Therefore in discussing different models of youth SAAP funded services it must be remembered that how they work on the ground and with other service delivery agencies is unique to that area.

Youth homelessness in Queensland

Statistically it is very hard to demonstrate the total numbers of homeless young people in Queensland. The two main sources of data are from the SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) and the ABS Census, each having a different data counting method. The NDCA data is cumulative and is collected by services over the course of a financial year while the ABS Census is a 'point in time' data collection method and conducted once every 5 years. The data however does provide us with some interesting information and there has been an attempt to draw some of this information together through the work of Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie.

So what does the data show?

The 2001 census study found that nearly a quarter (24,569) of the homeless population (99,900) were living in Queensland.

The 2001 census study[1] found that the rate of homelessness in Queensland was 69.8 people per 10,000 or about 1.4 per 200 Queenslanders are homeless on any given night.

The 2001 census study found that only 9% of homeless people (using the cultural definition of homelessness) were accommodated in the SAAP funded service system on the census night – this is about 1 in 10 homeless people compared to 1 in 7 nationally.

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[1] Chamberlain,C. and MacKenzie, D, Counting the Homeless 2001- Queensland, Swinburne University & RMIT University, 2004

The National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) data for 2003/2004 found that there were 17,950 clients who utilised the SAAP funded service system providing a total of 28,350 support periods (1.58 support periods per client).

The NDCA data for 2003/2004 found that one in every two hundred people (10 years +) in Queensland are homeless (54/10,000)[2] – supporting the census data.

There is a very high rate of indigenous homelessness in Queensland.

The percentage of clients by age clearly demonstrates that the there is a steady increase in the numbers of unaccompanied young people under the age of 15 utilising the SAAP funded service system. The numbers of young people aged 15 -17 whilst going down in 01/02 has also steadily increased in the last three years.   Conversely the numbers of young people 18 -24 years entering into SAAP has declined – see table 1 below.

Table 1: Young people in SAAP

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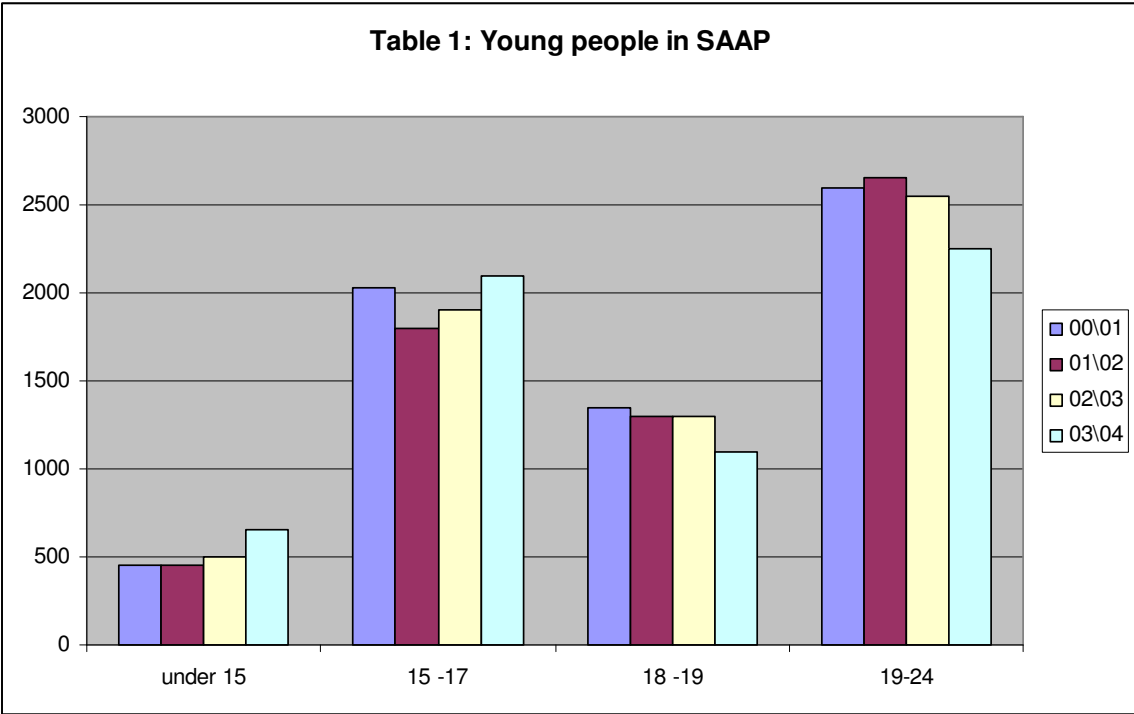
[2] AHURI (2005), SAAP NDCA report series 9, Homeless people in SAAP, SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2003/04 Queensland Supplementary Tables, pg 6.

Table 2 demonstrates that the support periods for young people under 15 is increasing while for the 19 -24 year olds they are markedly decreasing.

Table 2: Support periods
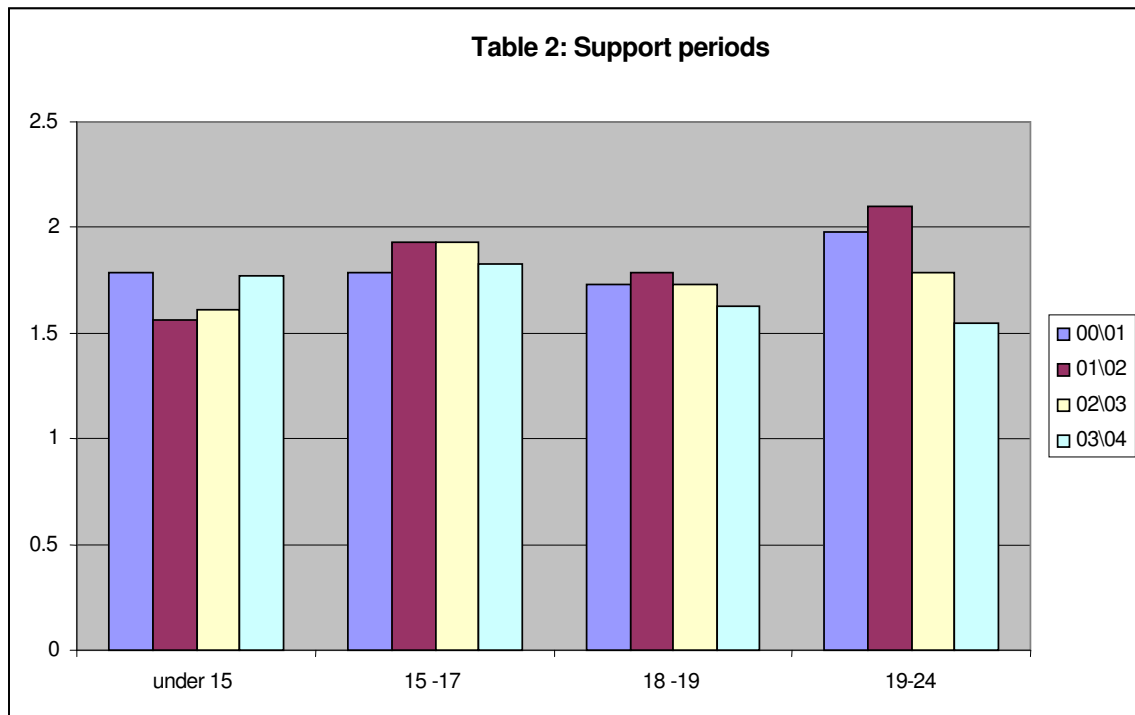
Models

In responding to youth homelessness at the crisis end of the continuum of care spectrum there are four main models of youth services in Queensland. These are the crisis youth shelter (crisis fully supported), the share house with 24 hour youth work workers rostered on (medium term fully supported), 'units of housing' either flats or houses located in the community where youth workers visit and provide support (externally supported models) and outreach models where youth workers meet young people outside of the service.

There are 197 services funded from the SAAP to assist homeless Queenslanders. Of these there are 72 models of service funded to assist homeless young people accounting for 35.5% of the recurrent funding. The youth SAAP sector consists of 24 hour crisis shelter (28), 24 hour medium/long term supported (6), externally supported accommodation (30) and outreach support (8).   All four models are provided within an understanding of the continuum of care required by young people and with the goal of transitioning young people to live independently in the community. Some of these models are stand alone operations in the community and others may be part of larger organisations providing multiple responses to community need.

The tables over describe the three of the models of service delivery based on a good practice benchmark developed in consultation with youth SAAP funded services. QYHC has also attempted to provide indicative costing for these models of service, however we acknowledge that services can be provided at a lower level of funding at the expense of quality.

Table 3: Crisis fully supported accommodation – good practice benchmark

Description	Cost: $662,015.00
Service Model	24-hour on site support, 24-hour referral/intake, and basic life skills needs
Target Group and profiles	Homeless and at risk young people 15- 24 years
Staffing model	1 full-time Coordinator – CASH A 4,no caseload, focus on organisational management/compliance, administration, finances, resource development, broad policy development, supervision of caseload 7 full-time Youth Workers – CASH Award B Level 2 /3 (Level 3 to allow for 2 people per shift, 3 8 hour rotating shifts and 2 plus sleepover, + relief hours). 1 full–time Administrator CASH A1/ 2
Broad service outcome	Crisis accommodation and support appropriate to client need through the provision of a case management approach to address immediate housing and support needs.
Objectives	To provide support services to address: ▪ Immediate needs of safety, shelter, food, health and hygiene etc.; ▪ Crisis intervention and support; ▪ 24 hour referral/intake; ▪ Case management approach to needs identification and short term goal setting; ▪ Advocacy; ▪ Education, training, income issues; ▪ Information and referral for appropriate transition to more stable accommodation.
Capacity benchmark	7/8 young people on-site in a share accommodation model Over 16 years, broad support needs - staff to client ratio 2:8 Include under 16's, JJ, high support needs – staff to client ratio 2:7

Table4: Medium/long term fully supported accommodation – good practice benchmark

Description	Cost: $714,515.00
Service Model	24 hour on-site support, assessment process prior to intake and living skills program
Target Group and profiles	Homeless and at-risk young people aged 15-18 years. Young people with limited or no family support who have complex or high support and supervision needs.
Staffing Structure	1.0 full-time coordinator CASH 4,no caseload, focus on organisational management/compliance, administration, finances, resource development, broad policy development, supervision of caseload 7.0 full-time youth workers CASH 2/3, (Level 3 to allow for 2 people per shift, 3 8 hour rotating shifts and 2 plus sleepover, + relief hours). 1.0 full time Administrator CASH 2 1.0 full-time outreach/follow up support worker SACS 4/5
Broad service outcome	Transitional accommodation to support to enable young people to move towards independent living.
Objectives	To provide living skills program and case management, information, referral and advocacy, educational and therapeutic recreational programs, day program for young people who are not engaged in vocational or educational training, follow up support. 1. To enable young people to develop sound practical living skills and resources for independent living; 2. Assist young people to identify goals and work towards them; 3. Address the diverse needs of young people; 4. Assist young people to learn skills in conflict resolution and decision making thus encouraging them to make informed decisions about their lives and to take responsibility for same; 5. Assist young people in their personal and social development; 6. Assist young people to re-establish family links wherever possible and to foster a sense of community belonging.
Capacity	7/8 young people on-site in a share accommodation model and an average of 15 external follow up support clients Ratio of 2 staff to 7/8 young people at all times (worker health and safety)

Table 5: Externally supported accommodation and support – good practice benchmark

Description	Cost: $293,991.00
Service Model	Long term externally supported (units or share), living skills program, referral, advocacy and personal support, follow up support.
Target Group	Homeless and at-risk young people aged 16-25 years.
Staffing Structure	1 full-time coordinator, SACS 6,no caseload, focus on Organisational management/compliance, administration, finances, resource development, broad policy development, supervision of caseload 2 full-time youth workers, SACS 5 0.5 Administrator (19 hours), SACS 3 1 full-time outreach/follow up support worker (inc housing information and support)
Goals	Transitional accommodation, assistance and support to enable young people to move towards independent living.
Objectives	1. Enable young people to develop sound practical living skills and resources for independent living; 2. Provide information, advocacy and referrals to other services to develop responses to individual client needs; 3. Assist young people to identify goals and work towards them; 4. Assist young people to learn skills in conflict resolution and decision making thus encouraging them to make informed decisions about their lives and to take responsibility for same; 5. Assist young people in their personal and social development; 6. Assistance and follow up in securing and maintaining accommodation when young people exit the program.
Capacity	8 young people in a externally supported model (flats or share) and an average of 15 external follow up support clients Ratio of 2 staff to 8 young people at all times

Youth SAAP funded services acknowledge that young people enter into their service from a variety of situations and with varying living skills. Further, services are concerned about the dependency that can be developed by young people who live in SAAP.

The aim of the service system is to allow multiple points of entry and to ensure that young people have access to social and recreational opportunities as well as assisting in family reconciliation where this is possible and appropriate in order for them to have healthy broader community relationships.

Part C: Pressure points

External structural issues

All services have strong linkages to other service systems.   In turn, the limitations of other service systems directly impact on SAAP due to the transitional nature of the program and the complexity of need of some of the people it assists.

To critically examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the SAAP requires an examination of the issues at both the service delivery level and the structural/policy level. This was a point during the last SAAP evaluation which stated (Queensland SAAP III Evaluation (p.xii));

> *"Effective client outcomes for SAAP will be determined as much by circumstance external to the program as by the quality and effectiveness of service delivery within SAAP. These external factors include not only macro-economic opportunities and housing affordability, but also access to a range of other community service programs such as family support, mediation services, counselling and others."*

QYHC also want it acknowledged that the youth SAAP funded services have been seriously affected in their capacity to work to their full potential due external pressures. This has been an ongoing issue with Rodney Fopp in 1997 writing;

> *"… Supported accommodation services are in danger of becoming de facto housing options for many young people who do not need support, simply because there are few housing alternatives."*

This argument however does not mean that the program should only be a support program with no housing attached. Previous national evaluation and reports into youth housing identify the complexity of the SAAP service delivery environment:

o   The lack of low cost/affordable housing for independent young people;

o   That young people who have reached a point where they are ready for independent living cannot do so;

o   That services are cross-subsidising by accommodating high and low support needs for financial viability purposes;

o   That young people who need supported housing are missing out or waiting for long periods of time to access.

QYHC supports the need for an integrated service system, which has:

- o Definable points of entry (this does not mean or equate with one point of entry);

- o Formal processes of assessment of client need (this is able to be conducted through the case management approach and is clearly a training and professional development need);

- o Range and balance of service response (defined by the local community);

- o Defined pathways between crisis and other types of responses (however it is the client who determines the path they will follow with the support of services and that the pathways between services and support systems need clearly defined protocols);

- o Follow up support for young people exiting SAAP.

Lack of child protection responses

One of the growing issues for youth SAAP funded services is the increasing numbers of young people under 18 accessing their services, more particularly young people between the ages of 12 to 16 years of age.

By accommodating young people under 16 in a formal sense SAAP is moving into the area that is the responsibility of the State, and into other models of casework practice. In the process of doing so young people 18- 25 years no longer have the ability to enter into the SAAP through the youth housing system.

If young people aged 18 – 25 are not able to access youth SAAP funded services they need to be housed somewhere else in the broader housing sector. Young people, who may not have the living skills, are moving into community housing and these housing placements are breaking down. Housing providers are identifying that young people in their housing require support to maintain their housing. The key issue is that young people have limited housing options and are accessing housing that does not meet their needs - no amount of external support will be adequate.

While there has always been the need to accommodate young people under the age of 16 there seem to be some clear trends that indicate the youth services funded from SAAP may soon be the only accommodation response for these young people. There are therefore implications for the whole service system from the alternate care system through to the housing sectors and for the young people that utilize all these services.

It may be worth noting the historical issues relating to young people 'in care' who are now being accommodated by youth housing services funded through SAAP:

- o Often they were referred to SAAP funded services as an end on the line measure because there was no option left for a young person.

- o SAAP funded service providers often expressed concern about young people 'in care' entering SAAP services for a range of reasons often related to their ongoing safety and well being, particularly in the case of short-term shelter placements.

- o Young people may have ended up in youth funded SAAP services by default because the statutory child protection system was unable to meet their needs.

It is critical that these historical factors remain at the forefront of our thinking about supported accommodation services funded from SAAP and child protection responses, because they clearly indicate that youth funded SAAP services are in a position of:

- o Formalizing service delivery that occurred due to a drift of young people into these services because the child protection system could not respond to young people's needs. This does not equate to providing innovative planned responses to the needs of young people;

- o Participating in cost and responsibility shifting that will hide the reality of chronic under resourcing in this area.

Of importance is the cost and responsibility shifting from the Department of Child Safety onto a range of other service systems. The NDCA data identifies a steady increase of young people under the age of 15 entering into the SAAP service system.

The reason as to why this may be occurring could be put down to:

- o The lack of focus by Department of Child Safety on adolescents (12-18) and the legislative changes with regard to the departments role re: young people in care;

- o Decreasing numbers of foster carers willing to accommodate adolescents due to a lack of adequate support when housing these young people;

- o Lack of support for alternate care models;

- o That the service models in SAAP are more suitable for some young people rather than residential care facilities or foster care models.

Key drivers

QYHC has identified a number of key drivers for the program that need to be adequately responded to in order for service viability to be addressed.

Staffing wages

A major issue for services is the lack of appropriate staffing levels. In particular this is a issue in youth shelters where in Queensland currently they have only one staff member on at night and often with up to 6-8 young people.

In recent years there has also been an incredible difficulty in trying to recruit and retain staff. The inability to compete with government in the level of wages that the sector can offer means that many people are opting to work in a better paid sector.

The lack of resourcing has also meant that it is difficult to support staff and to release them for training, networking and other sector development improvement processes.   In addition to this many staff undertake a number of administrative support functions. In turn staff spend precious hours seeking further funding or attempting to explore alternate funding sources.

Coordinators in particular undertake a huge number of high and complex tasks. A Coordinator's primary task is organisational management and quality assurance and will undertake case management where appropriate to the organisation. The tasks that coordinators undertake in addition to this may include one or all of the following:

o Organisational management/compliance;

o Administrative (internal policy and procedures development, implementation and review, strategic and operational planning, liaison with funding bodies, service agreements, workplace health and safety, marketing and public relations, insurance);

o Financial (Budgets, audits, accounts);

o Resource development (submission writing, project management);

o Human Resource Management (conversant with Industrial Relations Act, development of position descriptions, recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers, training for staff and volunteers, staff supervision, staff grievances. provision of up to date and relevant information for staff body);

o Broad policy development (engagement in policy development processes of government ie SRSI, network with relevant stakeholders);

o Casework (monitoring the quality standards of the service, provision of casework where appropriate);

The development of a coordinator position through the utilisation of a number of funding sources needs to be reflected in a whole of government approach. This means that all funding sources must acknowledge the need for organisational management costs including that of coordinator. Until this approach is adopted there is no ability for services to combine funding to create a coordinators position. Further that there needs to be an acknowledgment that this funding is 'on-top of' not detracted from the existing funds allocated.

Remuneration for coordinators needs to be set at a level that is commensurate with the skills and knowledge required for the position.

It is worthwhile making a comparative example between a youth SAAP funded coordinator position and a Department of Child Safety Team Leader position, the functions that these positions undertake and the remuneration that each position is entitled to. As can be seen from the chart below there is no parity at all between the government and non government sectors, this is even starker considering that there are no youth SAAP coordinators that are funded at level 8 of the SACS Award.

Dep't of Child Safety	SACS	CASH
PO 5	SACS 8.3	CASH Level 4 (Category A)
$59,494 – 74,516 per annum	$56,740.00 per annum	48,482.00 per annum

Regardless of the size of an organisation there are some administrative tasks that need to be carried out in all organisations and a level of administrative support. For some organisations there is a split between the administrative support tasks and bookkeeping. The funding of positions need to take into account the costs associated with both functions.

The overall administrative tasks of an organisation are becoming increasingly complex. Further, the introduction of the National Accountancy Framework has required organisations to have an increased level of skill in their financial management systems. Due to the diversity of tasks required for the position of administrator (administrative support and bookkeeping) it is increasingly difficult to compete in the job market and attract appropriately trained staff.

	Clerical Award As at 2002 (top increment) Weekly pay (gross)	SACS Award As at 27.6.04 (top increment) Weekly pay (gross)	CASH Award Cat A As at Feb 05(top increment) Weekly pay (gross)
Level 1	534.20	561.22	**667.23**
Level 2	561.20	621.81	750.94
Level 3	602.90	**684.38**	809.71
Level 4	621.80	765.83	930.80
Level 5	**663.50**	826.43	
Level 6		953.12	
Level 7		1020.40	
Level 8		1087.67	

Considering the nature of the work that is undertaken by administrative staff there is a requirement of at least a 0.5 position within each organisation. The administrator position (based on administrative support and bookkeeping duties outlined above) should be pegged at least at Level 3 of the SACS Award.

There are a number of issues surrounding the awards (Crisis Accommodation Supported Housing Award and Social and Community Services Award) currently applicable in the sector. These are:

a) Application of the award -
There is a level of complexity in determining the appropriate Award for the workplace especially if the organisation has more than one function. The use of the CASH and the SACS Award in some services has been due to the higher administrative tasks that some coordinators undertake. There is clearly a need for government to have a better understanding of the employment 'make-up' of services and the Award implications.

b) Funding for the payment of the award-
For all services the funding of the Award to the mid-point has created extreme financial difficulty. There is strong agreement that government funding needs to be at the highest pay-point of the relevant Award. In some cases services have been forced to change their hours of operation in order to meet the Award costs.

c) Variation in the funding of the award by services -
There is an issue about the levels of funding due to the variations between services. These variations may be due to the size of the organisation, its structure and therefore the variations in the tasks that youth workers and coordinators undertake within each service.

d) On-call
This is mainly conducted through a pager system. Most services are covering this cost through a TOIL system.

Staff/client ratios

There has been much discussion in the youth sector about the level of support young people require in supported accommodation. Essentially this debate should be about quality service delivery and so the focus should be on the staff/client ratios.

The level of support that is required by young people needs to be flexible and the focus should be on the service system being able to assess and respond flexibly to changing need. Young people enter into youth SAAP funded services with a range of issues such as needing support to live independently, advocacy and referral, accommodation, child protection, drug and alcohol and mental health (to name a few).

The focus then can be on the 'throughputs' of a service ie if there is a high volume of young people being provided support by a service it can be assumed that many of these young people may only need low levels of support. If there were a low volume of young people accessing a service this would indicate that there are young people with high levels of support. This will also allow for greater accountability of the service to the community. Needless to say there needs to be a greater emphasis on case management and benchmarks utilising this system of support.

The key policy driver for SAAP is the support needs of the young people have who accessed the program.

Insurance

The cost of insurance is a major issue for all services.

Crisis services (regardless of size or auspice) indicated that insurance was about 5% of their total funding grant.
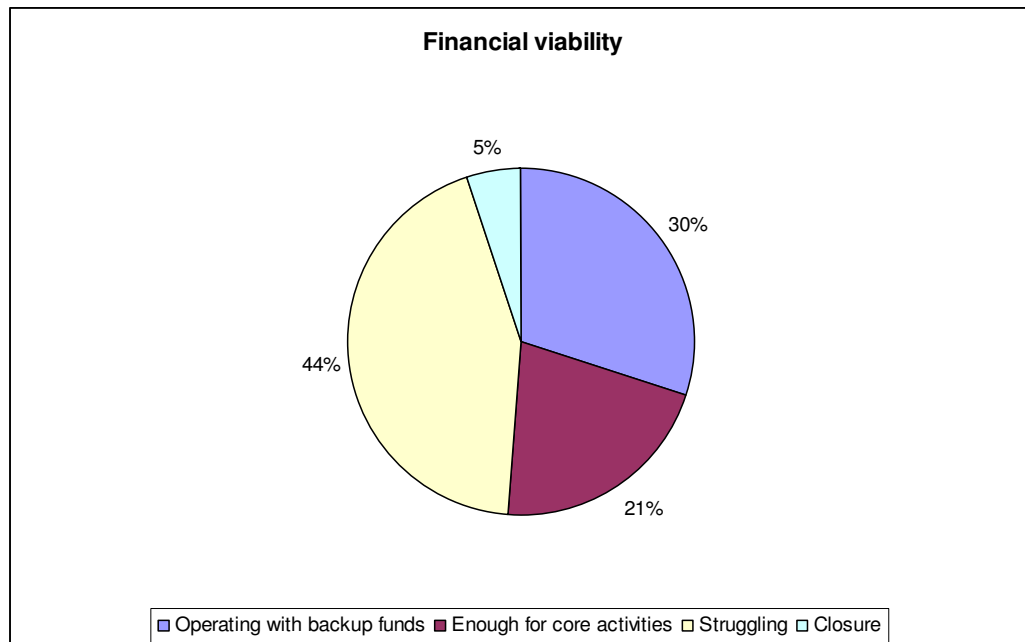
Part D: Viability

Mean funding

The mean funding per youth SAAP funded service regardless of the model during the 2003/2004 financial year was $243,000[3].   This is clearly lower than the good practice benchmarks. When any service system is under stress, the ability to respond to young people becomes limited to a discreet model of service delivery as the system does not have the ability to respond holistically, flexibly or innovatively. Therefore capacity is limited.

The critical area in determining financial viability is to determine all the components in order to be able to conduct a comprehensive costing.   Different models will have certain line items that other models would not require. However, it is important to be able to identify all cost areas.

There is nothing worse than making young people feel that they are undeserving when they are in supported accommodation eg young people should have access to good quality food and it is acknowledged that this is sometimes hard to do with a full house and limited resources.

An organisation cannot operate without an infrastructure and this includes the need for capital items. All budgets should also include a capital line item.

Financial viability

Financial viability

5%

30%

44%

21%

☐ Operating with backup funds ☐ Enough for core activities ☐ Struggling ☐ Closure

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[3] AHURI (2005), SAAP NDCA report series 9, Homeless people in SAAP, SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2003/04 Queensland Supplementary Tables, pg 4.

Most services (74%) indicated that they were struggling to fund core activities or that they were utilising other forms of income to support their current level of activities.

A large number of these services verbally indicated that they had in previous years a financial buffer to ensure their service viability. In recent years, particularly due to the increase in insurance and rising wage costs, they no longer have the ability to create this financial buffer.

It is of concern that 5% of respondents were already indicating that they were facing service closure.

Bed capacity

In exploring the bed capacity of the youth SAAP funded service sector it is important to acknowledge the different models of service and their functions, therefore we have split the concept of bed capacity into two areas. For the crisis and medium term fully supported we have used the concept of bed capacity, while for the externally supported accommodation we have used the concept of units of housing – which may have one to four beds.

The mean bed capacities were:

o Crisis accommodation: 6.4 beds

o Medium term: 4.4 beds

o Externally supported: 6.5 units of housing

All the services indicated that they were working to capacity however this did not mean a full utilisation of the beds/units of houses available. Services when dealing with their intake need to take into consideration a number of factors:

o Household type and household numbers - because there is generally only one staff on overnight there needs to be consideration around the household mix. This is a duty of care issue.

o Staff skill level - the household mix is considered in the light of the level of staff training, skills and expertise on any given night – again a duty of care issue.

The lack of beds often means that young people do not make choices about where they can be accommodated. Youth services advocate the need for young people to be able to make informed choices about their accommodation.

Young people may not be accommodated in the most appropriate model of service based on their needs, in many cases young people with high and complex needs may not be able to be accommodated on any given night. Services strongly support the need for young people to have non discriminatory access to services and for a range of housing models that meet a range of needs.

Services also recognise the need to be able to respond flexibly to young people and to be able to provide follow-up support once they exit the service. In many cases this is limited due to the resourcing of the service and the lack of recognition of the importance of follow up support.
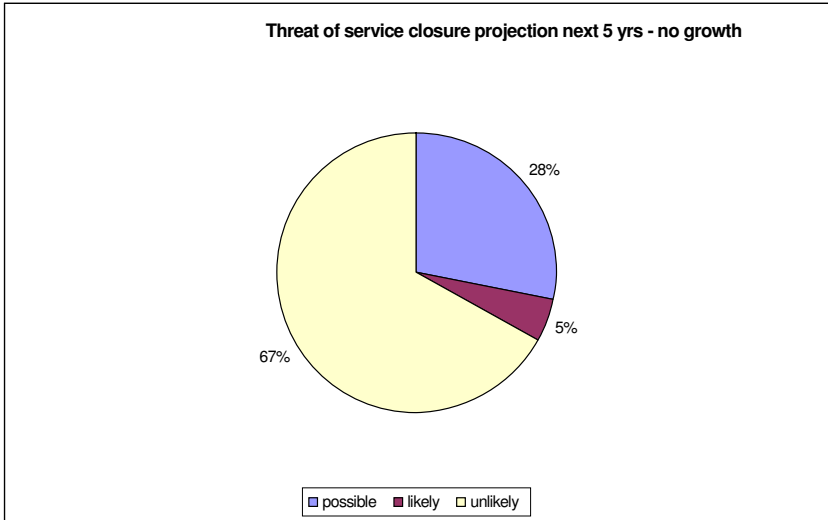
SAAP is not resourced adequately to be able to implement a 'first through the door policy'.

The issue of who will be housed is therefore not as easy as it first sounds. There needs to be an acknowledgment that there are a range of needs that young people will present to a service. In many cases it is impossible to tell (either through the physical appearance of a young person and an initial interview) what sort of issues young people are dealing with and how this may affect their behaviour and their behaviour with others. Further young people's needs may fluctuate and it is impossible to set arbitrary timeframes on the amount of time they may require from the service. Placing a 'type' or 'characteristic' on young people stigmatises them and in the process devalues them as individuals.

Service Provision

If there is no additional funding (other than indexation) during the course of the next agreement, SAAP services indicated the following impacts:

Client group

o   51% indicated that they would reduce client numbers or target clients with less complex needs

o   28% indicated that they would not take on any new clients or increase client numbers

Hours open

o   46% indicated that there would be no significant change to their hours of service

Staff numbers and hours

o   46.5% indicated that there would be a reduction in the staffing hours

Threat of Closure

o   If there is no change in funding 5% of services are facing service closure

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Threat of service closure projection next 5 yrs - no growth

28%

5%

67%

□ possible   ■ likely   □ unlikely

Should there be a 5% cut to funding services indicated the following impacts;

Client group

o   65% indicated that they would reduce client numbers or target clients with less complex needs

o   21% indicated that they would not take on any new clients or increase client numbers

Hours open

o   41.8% indicated that they would reduce the hours their service was open and staffed

Staff numbers and hours

o   60.5% indicated that there would be a reduction in the staffing hours

Threat of closure

o   If there was to be a funding cut this would mean that further 21% of service would need to either close their service or undertake some form of major restructure

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Innovation

Seventy nine per cent (79%) of services indicated that they were providing some form of innovation over and above their core funding.

Sixty-three per cent (63%) of services provided some form of transitional housing (eg Youth Headlease Transfer, Same Housing Different Landlord) in the community for young people.

Other innovations that youth SAAP services provide included:

o   Community education – eg school based lectures and information seminars

o   Community development – eg programs for young people in the community, alternate learning opportunities, family/individual counselling, parenting support, building partnerships (affordable housing), integrated case management responses, participation in pilot programs such as family homeless pilot, arts and crafts (indigenous), networking, crime prevention strategies ,recreational programs, Schoolies week, one service indicated that they provided a drop-in centre for young people

o   Resourcing – eg supporting professional development, youth info cards, emergency relief, one service indicated that they provided a health clinic on site

All the services who were conducting some form of innovation in the community indicated that these would be the first activities that would be discontinued.

Recommendations

The business case attempts to highlight the issues related to youth services who receive SAAP funding. In particular it demonstrates that service models are not funded adequately.

Not all SAAP funded services are stand alone models, most SAAP funded services attempt to work constructively with other community stakeholders and some SAAP services are part of large community or church organisations.   The critical issue is that SAAP models are not funded adequately, not funded to a standard and as a result are limited in the being able to flexibly and innovatively meet the needs of young people – this was supported by the work of the SRSI projects conducted during the course of the last agreement.

Services attempt to provide quality outcomes for young people with the resources that they have at their disposal. The limitation of the youth SAAP funded service system can be clearly related to the lack of funding and external pressures on the service system as a whole.   Youth services attempt where possible to provide a holistic service to young people on a continuum of care framework that meet the needs of young people in their community.

SAAP funding is the starting foundation in many communities for the delivery of services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.   Unfortunately as the real value of the SAAP dollar declines and as service costs rise there has been a decline in the complexity of need that can be responded and the capacity of the system.

This business case recommends that;

o   That Government recognise and support the National SAAP IV Evaluation Report commissioned by the Federal government.

o   That there is growth of 25% to current funding levels to ensure viability of the service system to meet the needs of high and complex needs clients.

o   That there is an increase of funding of 15% over and above the 25% to meet unmet demand.

o   That a National Homelessness Action Plan be developed in consultation with the community.