

Att: Review of AOD Services in Tasmania

17 May 2017

To Whom it May Concern,

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for the non Government youth sector and young people in Tasmania. Integral to the work of YNOT is the youth participatory and consultative structure, the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) which represents the needs and interests of young people aged 12-25 years. As the peak body for young people in Tasmania, we are primarily concerned the way in which alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues affect young people, and the way in which the support services could better serve at risk young people and the workers who engage in this space.

Researchers emphasise the vulnerability of the adolescent brain to substance use exposure. Of particular concern is substance use that is intensive and persistent. This pattern of use during adolescence greatly increases the risk that the development of the neural networks responsible for memory, planning and the regulation of emotion and behaviour will be adversely affected. Further, the emergence of problematic substance use patterns in adolescence is associated with lower educational and occupational attainment, greater likelihood of offending and the development of mental health problems¹.

We support the development of many of the recommendations coming out of the Review of Drug Use and Service Responses in North West Tasmania and the expansion of these ideas to a whole of State system. But we would also like to re-emphasise and support some feedback that we have gained from young people and the youth sector in terms of where there is space for improvement, things to be mindful of and some of the specifics to youth in the development of the next phase of the AOD service system framework.

Areas of need: Youth Specific Residential Rehabilitation, Detox and Withdrawal Services

Feedback we have received from the sector is that there a number of challenges in regards to about how service provision could be improved and where there are gaps, particularly for young people. In particular, residential rehabilitation services and detox programs that focus on youth specific needs and provided in age appropriate settings is a repeated area of need under the current structure. Currently there are limited spaces for young people in residential rehab services and this can pose a barrier for young people to get the help that they need, and pose a further challenge for AOD workers working with young people to refer them to the correct resources.

The Victorian organisation Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) developed a snapshot of young people's involvement with AOD and AOD services through the State-wide Youth Needs Census in 2013². This study shows there is strong evidence that tailoring

¹ http://www.ysas.org.au/sites/default/files/YSAS0016_ClientCensus_2012_v4_Snapshot_Brochure_0.pdf

² <https://www.ysas.org.au/sites/default/files/A%20Vision%20Realised%20report.pdf>



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services to meet individual needs or subgroup characteristics not only positively influences treatment outcomes but also the likelihood of treatment involvement and retention in programs. Applying this to a Tasmanian context, although there are slightly different needs in terms of what drugs young people are using and affected by, we believe there is scope to develop programs and services that are tailored to the needs and culture of young people - and will deliver positive outcomes.

Providing youth specific residential rehabilitation services is important on a few different levels, firstly, youth specific residential rehabilitation services enhance safety, security and address questions of age appropriateness in residential rehabilitation. This would also decrease unsafe situations or situations that would potentially escalate problems. Young people attending AOD services often have extremely high levels of psychological, social, educational, legal, housing and mental health problems and being able to incorporate some of these programs be able to recognise more of the complex overall picture of a disaffected young person's life and get them help they need or access to resources that might not be immediately visible to young people and their families.

The issue of housing is a particular concern for young people under the age of 18, because they often have little backup for accommodation outside of their immediate family and aren't able to lease property, moreover, 40 percent of homeless people in Tasmania are under the age of 25. For those cut off from their families, employment or coming from situations of abuse it may be difficult to find safe accommodation and drug affected young people might not be able to get the appropriate help in shelters. Adequate residential rehabilitation services would ease the pressure on these services, even if they are places where people can use on a short term basis and should be prioritised in the next service system framework³.

Education and Prevention

We also would like to reaffirm support for strong preventative and education programs surrounding AOD. Often it is natural for young people to experiment with Alcohol and Other Drugs, particularly through ages 15-23 and we are strong proponents of continuing to improve and commit to education and preventative services. These services are incredibly important for influencing young people to understand the risks associated with AOD and to reduce harm. Communication and awareness is often a key to getting through young people and the somewhat fragmented nature of the system is likely to deter young people from accessing services or getting the care that they might need.

Many people are simply unaware of where to go to help if they need it, through previous Tasmanian Youth Forum's focused on Mental Health YNOT found that young people wanted increased education in schools about the potential harms of drugs and alcohol, to assist them to make healthy choices especially in regard to their mental health⁴. Secondly, awareness for organisations or services as to where young people and their families can go if they need to get help was not high and developing positive trends of awareness to spaces where young people can feel safe and valued can work towards positive outcomes.

Additionally under the new service system, we would recommend an emphasis on facilitating connection with meaningful activity and social connection for young people, especially those who may need to engage with the AOD service framework. Work should be done in terms of fostering links with different types of meaningful activity whether that be education, arts, recreation or general social connectedness. The capacity for getting young people back on their feet, participating in society and developing their future prospects

³ <http://www.shelertas.org.au/housing-in-tasmania/homelessness/some-facts/>

⁴ Tasmania Youth Forum *Mental Health Matters: A report on Young People's Ideas about Positive Mental Wellbeing* Collected by the Tasmanian Youth Forum

should be a highly valued mechanism in the overall AOD framework and may work the break the cycle of substance abuse.

Outreach

Outreach was another significant challenge and concern for youth AOD workers and organisations, and is an issue that is a prevalent one in the Tasmanian policy context in that services can be difficult to access or are otherwise extremely resource intensive for small regional areas. This was another area which has been outlined in the North West Report but is something that is a state-wide challenge. Perhaps there is space to look at creative, flexible and time effective ways that might engage remote people. General outreach and transport for young people who are in less remote areas is also a challenge, and is a space that could be looked at in the new framework.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joanna Siejka". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joanna Siejka
Chief Executive Officer