

YOUTH ETHICS FRAMEWORK FOR TASMANIA

December 2012



youth network of Tasmania

Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), the peak body for the youth sector, has led the development of a Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania, in partnership with many sector representatives and organisations, through a Youth Ethics Working Group, formed in 2010.

The Youth Ethics Working Group has also been supported by input from the youth sector in Tasmania, through participation in presentations, forums, and in response to the *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania Consultation Paper* in early 2012.

The Framework is a voluntary guide for individual youth sector workers and organisations to support appropriate and ethical practice when engaging with young people (12- 25 years) in Tasmania. It also aims to provide the youth sector with a tool that promotes consistency in the practice of youth work across the sector and be a platform for discussion on youth ethics.

YNOT and the Youth Ethics Working Group will be working with individual workers and organisations, including volunteer groups and youth-led organisations, within the youth sector to support the implementation of the Framework.



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Background

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for the youth sector in Tasmania. In 2010, YNOT convened a Youth Ethics Working Group to develop a Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania.

This working group is made up of a range of sector representatives from community sector and government organisations across Tasmania.

In developing the Framework the working group undertook a range of tasks:

- consideration of how other Australian states and territories approach youth ethics;
- participation in national and international discussions on youth ethics; and
- facilitation of youth sector involvement in the development of the Framework.

Presentations and consultation forums were held across all Tasmanian youth sector regional groups: Youth Action Priorities (YAP), Northern Youth Coordinating Committee (NYCC), and North West Action for Youth (NWAY); at the Tasmanian Youth Conference 2011 (TYC); at the YNOT Youth Sector Forum 2010 and 2011; and through written and verbal YNOT communications, including newsletters and reports. The working group was also mindful of the diversity within the Australian and Tasmanian youth sectors and how the issue of ethics relates to the professionalisation of 'youth work'.

The *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania Consultation Paper* was released in April 2012 by Minister for Community Development Hon Cassy O'Connor. Sixty-five responses were received from organisations, individuals and government agencies. Feedback included unanimous 'in principle' support for the introduction of a *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania*. The *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania Outcomes Paper* (October 2012) communicated the findings of the consultation with the sector, outlining the major themes, and the proposed development of the Framework. The working group incorporated feedback, and launched the *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania* on 11 December 2012.

Definitions of terms

Please note: these definitions are for the purpose of this document only

Code of ethics: a set of statements identifying the unique values that a group holds. The code does not address how these values translate into behaviour, provide guidelines on how to act in certain circumstances, or set out how behaviour is to be measured.

Young people: the Youth Network of Tasmania defines young people as 12-25 years of age.

Youth sector: describes those undertaking the broad social practice of working with young people. Youth sector practice includes working with a diverse clientele, and is concerned with issues as far ranging as homelessness, employment, youth justice, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, sexual health and youth participation. The varied nature of practice means that work within the youth sector is delivered through many institutions, including government and community sector organisations, schools, recreation groups and church-based organisations. Volunteers can also form part of the youth sector, as unpaid workers, or as part of youth-led organisations.

‘Youth sector worker’ can be summarised as:

- Commitment to working *with* and *for* young people as primary client
- Self-identification as ‘youth sector worker’ (as separate, or alongside occupations like social work)
- Commitment to ensuring young people have access to opportunities, advice and services that allow them to lead healthy, fulfilled lives and develop successfully into adults.



Context

The Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania is targeted at individuals and organisations that work with young people, aged 12 to 25 years. The following section will outline some background material on the context in which the *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania* exists.

Any discussion of 'best practice' when working with young people occurs in line with the United Nations *Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)*. Ratified in 1989, the UNCROC is the international human rights treaty that sets out the basic rights of children and young people (0-18 years of age). Individuals and organisations working with young people also operate under relevant State and Federal legislation, for example, the *Tasmanian Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* and any other relevant legislation, for example the *Personal Information Protection Act 2004*.

The terms 'youth sector' and 'youth sector workers' are clarified in the Definition of Terms above. However, despite such definitions, 'youth work' is considered an ambiguous term. Youth work is generally considered to be part of the community services industry, providing a range of programs and services to young people. The term is loosely applied to those specifically labelled 'youth workers', and others who are employed to work with young people, such as social workers. Many workers, despite their engagement with young people, do not identify as 'youth workers' but do view themselves as working within a broader 'youth sector' in Australia.

In Australia, the term 'youth sector' has replaced the term 'youth work' as the most commonly used term to refer to the historically diverse social practice of working with young people. Youth sector workers engage with a variety of young people, and have varied motivations, values, skills, and practice methods (Cooper & White 1994). Workers provide a wide range of services, including welfare support, recreation, street work, health services and employment programs (White 1990:171,174; White 2004). Given the absence of a professional framework, workers are accredited through various courses, including university degree programs, Training and Further Education (TAFE) qualifications and other professional development training programs (Bowie 2004; Hugo & Anderson 1998). Historically many workers have operated without qualification.

Workers also have diverse career paths, may be paid or unpaid and operate in rural or urban contexts, within schools, government departments and community sector organisations (Bessant & Weber 1999). Many are also volunteers, including young people who are working with other young people in youth organisations.

The ambiguous nature of 'youth work' practice within the youth sector has led to calls over many decades for youth work to become 'professionalised', or at least, increase the professionalism of the current youth sector (see Emslie 2012; Sercombe 2004; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria 2004:23). Proponents have argued that increased professionalism would achieve greater standardisation of training and education, regulation of malpractice, better working conditions and remuneration for workers.

One of the key elements of professionalism is the introduction of a Code of Ethics for youth sector practice. Sercombe (2010) has highlighted that without increased professionalism, such as the introduction of a Code of Ethics, the youth sector has no control over what is appropriate practice; hampering effective regulation of inappropriate behaviour and practice of workers. There is not a national model, and although the national youth nongovernment peak, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is investigating the possibility, it is unlikely that such a model will be introduced in the near future. Code of Ethics for 'youth work' (similarly defined as 'youth sector') have been developed by the youth community sector peaks in Western Australia, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria. All of these models have been based on the 'Fairbridge Model' developed by Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) in conjunction with Professor Howard Sercombe. The existing state and territory Codes are voluntary and organisations have incorporated the Code items into their services as guides to practice, to develop policies and procedures, and to inform how they manage and review staff performance.

In October 2010, YNOT hosted a forum presentation and facilitated discussion by Professor Howard Sercombe, a recognised international expert in the field of Youth Ethics. During this forum a number of significant issues and potential actions were identified by participants, relating to the need for a Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania, and how the document could be developed.

The final version of the *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania* aims to provide workers in Tasmania with greater clarity when negotiating ethical issues with their clients. It is a tool that promotes consistency across the sector and a better public understanding of what is involved in working with young people. The framework also provides a platform for discussion on youth ethics and youth sector professionalisation.

Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania

CODE OF ETHICS

1

Primary client

The primary client of a youth sector worker is the young person.

2

Ecological and structural influences

A youth sector worker recognises the impact of ecological and structural influences on young people. The work of youth sector workers needs to take into consideration the environment and context in which young people live.

3

Equity

Youth sector workers will actively seek to support young people with experience of social disadvantage and/or exclusion. A youth sector worker will be non discriminatory in their practice and mindful of cultural diversity.

4

Empowerment

A youth sector worker seeks to empower the young person by beginning with the belief that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.

5

Duty of Care

A youth sector worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of foreseeable harm, injury or exploitation.

6

Anti-Corruption

A youth sector worker will seek to ensure that those who work with young people will not advance themselves at the expense of young people.

7

Transparency

The relationship between a youth sector worker and young person will be open and truthful.

8

Confidentiality

Information provided by young people will be respected; they will be made aware of the limits to confidentiality, and, where possible, their permission sought for disclosure.

9

Cooperation

A youth sector worker will actively cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.

10

Knowledge

A youth sector worker has a responsibility to keep up to date with the current information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.

11

Self-awareness

A youth sector worker will be conscious of their own values, interests and limitations, and will also be respectful of the values and interests of others.

12

Boundaries

The relationship between a youth sector worker and a young person is a professional relationship with clear boundaries that is intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth sector workers will behave in a way that is consistent with these boundaries.

13

Self-care

Good youth sector work practice is consistent with preserving the health and wellbeing of youth sector workers.

14

Professional awareness

A youth sector worker is committed to the development of a strong youth sector that is able to support young people as they transition to adulthood. They will be aware of the strengths and diversity of young people as well as those that support them.

Code of Ethics WITH COMMENTARY

Prologue

Youth sector workers aim to empower young people to become active participants in their communities. The core of youth sector practice lies in the relationship with the young person as the primary client, expressed through a commitment to helping young people reach their potential and promoting their achievements within the wider community. The following statements are informed by this core position.

Commentary

Young people are important contributors to the economic, social and political life of Tasmania and have a right to be recognised and included in society in a meaningful way. Youth sector work is characterised by a unique and specific professional relationship with a young person, rather than just a set of skills or practices.



Primary client

The primary client of a youth sector worker is the young person.



Commentary

Youth sector workers are accountable to a range of people: funding bodies, peers, management committees, parents and communities. However, this statement reminds us that the interests and needs of the young person are at the core of the youth sector work relationship.

Case Example 1

Ruth is a worker at a school that is led by a principal who continually emphasises that staff must keep in mind students, parents, teachers and the community when it comes to decision making. Ruth is working with Nikki, 16, who lives with her father. Nikki is struggling with the level of control her dad exerts over her, her friendships, her decisions, her social activities and her access to technology.

When Nikki first meets Ruth she discloses that she is depressed, feels suicidal at times, and though she loves her dad, she would really like to live away from home. Soon after Ruth meets Nikki, Nikki's dad calls Ruth to talk about his frustrations trying to get Nikki to behave at home. He asks Ruth to help him by telling Nikki that he wants the best for her and by letting him know whenever there are incidents at school involving Nikki. Ruth feels concerned by the conflicting needs of Nikki and her dad. She decides that her first priority as a youth sector worker is to Nikki, so she consults with the school's Chaplain about "sharing" the casework for this family, arranging for him to provide support to Nikki's dad.

Case Example 2

Mark (17) and Dale (29) live in a small, rural community, sharing a caravan as temporary accommodation. They are good friends and have known each other since Mark was a young teenager, estranged from his family and living on the streets, with Dale often taking on the role of Mark's guardian. They regularly visit the local Community House to access the facilities and receive support from both of the staff members of the Community House. Billy is the centre's youth worker.

Recently, Mark has reconnected with his grandfather who lives in the next township and has begun to stay with him every few days. This has raised some issues between Dale and Mark, with both men seeking support from the Community House staff, depending upon who is on shift. As the youth worker, Billy is clear with both men that Mark is his primary client. When approached by Dale, Billy maintains Mark's privacy and best interests and refers Dale to the other worker to discuss his situation.

Ecological and structural influences

A youth sector worker recognises the impact of ecological and structural forces on young people. The work of youth sector workers needs to take into consideration the environment and context in which young people live.



Commentary

This statement acknowledges that youth sector workers are involved not only with individual young people, but also with the complex social forces that influence their lives, including how young people relate to their peers, schools, work and community. Youth sector workers must also be aware of family and carer relationships, as families have the primary responsibility for the care of children and young people. Youth sector workers must be aware of changes to family or care relationships and the impact this may have on the young people's attitude and behaviour. Youth sector workers have a responsibility to be aware of state and national social and policy implications, as well as events and issues that may have an impact on their clients.

Case Example 1

The residents of a rural community have been struggling with the incidence of underage drinking. There have been a number of education sessions with students held at the local school in an attempt to address the issue. Although young people participate in this approach, there seems to be little actual change to their behaviour. During consultation with young people and other community stakeholders, it is highlighted by a few young people that there is excessive drinking in the adult community, including a heavy drinking culture within the local sporting and community groups. A working group of community members including young people is formed to highlight and address a broader drinking culture within the community.

Case Example 2

The Government has recently raised the cost of driving assessment tests and driving licences. While it is a policy not explicitly aimed at young people, young people make up the majority of first-time licence holders and will be disadvantaged by this change as the costs are in addition to novice driver lessons and buying one's first car. Youth sector workers are aware of how policy change can inadvertently affect young people and are able to advocate on an individual and collective level.

Equity

Youth sector workers will actively seek to support young people with experience of social disadvantage and/or exclusion. A youth sector worker will be non-discriminatory in their practice and mindful of cultural diversity.



Commentary

All young people have the right to a respectful relationship with a youth sector worker. Youth sector workers have a responsibility to ensure that young people who experience social exclusion and/or disadvantage have access to the services they require, and are supported to be active, valued members of their communities.

Youth sector workers acknowledge that groups of young people are particularly affected by social inequality, for example young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, young people identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer, young people with disabilities, young people who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and young people with experience of poverty.

Case Example 1

Phillip is a youth sector worker who is approached by David from a Sudanese background. Phillip finds it difficult to understand David as he tries to explain difficulties he is facing in regards to his school enrolment. Phillip explains that they have access to a telephone interpreting service and organises for an interpreter to be present over the phone. Phillip and David are both able to make themselves understood, enabling Phillip to not only help David find out more about his education options, but also provide information and assistance in a range of other areas.

Case Example 2

Lisa is a 16 year old girl who wants to talk to someone about difficulties she is having with getting along with her mother. Lisa has recently begun a relationship with another 16 year old girl. She has never had an easy relationship with her mother and her father is rarely at home. Lisa says her mother is either harassing her about something or avoiding her, which has become much worse since she found out about her new relationship. Lisa wants to move out but has nowhere to go.

After further conversation, the worker learns that Lisa feels very happy in her new relationship, is attending school, has a good group of friends, and is accepting of her sexuality. She is very upset about her mum's behaviour and negativity, and needs help to manage the difficult situation at home. The worker affirms Lisa for seeking help and for being in a positive relationship. She also explores with Lisa ways of possibly improving her relationship with her mother (including offering to contact her mum to arrange a referral for support), and provides information about Lisa's options for alternative accommodation.

Empowerment

A youth sector worker seeks to empower the young person by beginning with the belief that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.



Commentary

This statement focuses on the youth sector worker's accountability to young people, and the commitment to supporting a young person's own ethical and responsible action. Individual young people may struggle to act in their own interests, due to factors such as a lack of knowledge and experience of systems, mental health issues or being in emotional distress. These things are explored as the youth sector worker assesses the situation. It is important that this is done with an underlying belief that young people are able to make their own decisions and act in their own interests.

Case Example 1

Hannah is 16 when she comes into the youth health centre. She hasn't been before and is obviously very nervous when she asks to see a worker. Sophie welcomes her and explains about privacy and confidentiality. Sophie builds rapport by being friendly, non-judgmental and asking how she can help Hannah. Hannah tells Sophie that she has recently learnt about STIs at school and wishes to have an STI check. Sophie affirms Hannah's decision to seek health care and normalises Hannah's situation, saying that the service is set up to support young people to take care of their sexual health. Sophie organises the test and gives Hannah a thorough explanation of the process and follow-up. Sophie outlines that the process is free and reassures Hannah about her confidentiality. Hannah is thankful for Sophie's assistance and asks whether she would be able to also organise a consultation with a GP to discuss contraception, which Sophie assists her with.

Case Example 2

Matt is 13 and has not been attending school for the last couple of weeks. His mum is worried about him and he has come to the attention of the police for shop-lifting and drinking in a public place with a group of other boys. Sandy works at the local youth centre where Matt sometimes volunteers. When Matt misses youth group meetings, Sandy contacts Matt and arranges a meeting at a local coffee shop. Sandy listens as Matt describes the anxiety and hopelessness he has been feeling and how, although he is worried about not going to school, he has been unable to face attending classes. Matt asks Sandy for support and together they make a plan about how to help Matt manage his anxiety, including organising for Matt to meet with a counsellor and arranging a meeting with his mum, Sandy and his teacher.

Duty of Care

A youth sector worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of foreseeable harm, injury or exploitation.



Commentary

Youth sector workers recognise the risks associated with intervention into the lives of young people; sometimes action in a situation can cause additional harm. Workers have a responsibility to ensure that activities, referral processes and programs are generally safe, as well as being appropriate for each particular young person in their care. Risk assessment and management needs to be thorough, staff properly trained and equipment well maintained. Given that abuse of young people is not rare, it is also important to exercise care in the employment of staff, full-time or part-time. Proper investigation needs to be made into the work and criminal histories of potential employees and volunteers.

Case Example 1

Joe works for a youth organisation that organises events. Joe runs a panel event with young people who are in, or have been in foster care, discussing their issues with decision makers. Joe spends time with the panel, preparing for their involvement in the event. He arranges for a volunteer to take pictures of the event for the organisation's records and the participants provide consent to use their images. The volunteer photographer asks if she can put the photos on her Facebook page. Joe informs this young person that it would be inappropriate as participants did not give consent for their photos to be used in this way.

Case Example 2

Part of Gavin's role as a youth sector worker is to organise recreational activities for young people in order to help build their confidence and self esteem. Gavin arranges groups of young people to go mountain biking, go-karting, surfing, abseiling and other activities. Before young people participate in the activity, Gavin ensures the activity will be conducted in a safe way, has adequate supervision with appropriately trained staff and makes sure that young people have completed relevant permission forms, which also detail existing medical conditions.

Anti— Corruption

A youth sector worker will seek to ensure that those who work with young people will not advance themselves at the expense of young people.



Commentary

Young people can be a marginalised group in society, with limited ability to have their voices heard. This statement requires youth sector workers to ensure young people are protected from misuses of power, including from workers themselves. While youth sector workers should succeed in their chosen career, this should never be at the expense of young people. This statement also encourages youth sector workers to be honest about their personal motivations and rewards, including financial gain, power, profile, emotional security, personal identity and so on.

Case Example 1

Fran works with young people in an area of Tasmania that has come under negative media attention for having high rates of teenage pregnancy. She knows that the picture that has been painted in the news does not accurately reflect the situation in her community and the lives of the young people that she works with. Fran has the opportunity to showcase her work with young parents and to 'set the record straight' with a popular current affairs program. As well as featuring Fran, the interviewer wishes to show 'human interest' stories and footage, directly from the young people Fran works with. After much consideration and guidance from her manager, Fran decides that this opportunity is too risky and may expose the individual young people, some of whom are under 18 years, to further negative portrayal and personal risk. Despite the desire to set the 'record straight', Fran concentrates her efforts on her work, and promotes positive messages via media which allow for more control over the messages portrayed.

Case Example 2

Tracey is a youth sector worker who works with young people disengaged from school and employment. Tracey's program is funded to run a project to connect her clients to mainstream services, including being active in local youth groups. Although Tracey's program did have some good outcomes for the young people who were involved, there was not a high rate of participation in the program. Tracey feels that although it may paint her service in a slightly negative light, it is important to recognise the underwhelming participation in the report to the grant deed. Tracey wishes to outline in the report a number of potential reasons behind this lack of participation. She also includes in her report a number of improvements that she would make to the program, should it receive funding again.

Transparency

The relationship between a youth sector worker and young person will be open and truthful.



Commentary

From the outset of the relationship, youth sector workers have a responsibility to be clear with young people about what services they can and cannot offer. Workers should be conscious of not raising unrealistic expectations in their clients about the changes that they can make to their lives. This also includes being clear about the responsibilities that their clients must uphold, for example, acting within the law. Workers should be mindful of (and discuss where appropriate) issues of confidentiality, disclosure, mandatory reporting, health and safety. Workers also have a role in explaining to young people the relationships they have with other interest groups, including where their funding comes from, who they are working for and what they are trying to achieve.

Case Example 1

Mark works with young people in an area where a large company is the major employer. He has approached the company to see if they would be open to providing funding assistance to some of his programs. The company has said that they would be willing to donate funds if they receive promotional or marketing services in return, through the use of logos and media opportunities. Mark realises that this would change the nature of the services and the relationship that his organisation has within the community. He decides to negotiate with the company to see if they would be willing to work within his parameters and resolves to forego the funding opportunity if it means compromising the services and his organisation.

Case Example 2

Kath is a youth sector worker who has started a new relationship in the last few months. Her new partner's daughter, Shenna, comes to see Kath at work and tells her that she is pregnant and doesn't know what to do. She is very worried about her father finding out. Kath feels uncomfortable about her conflict of interest in working with her new partner's daughter. She discusses this with Shenna and introduces her to another worker in the service who can talk through her options and support.

Confidentiality

Information provided by young people will be respected, they will be made aware of the limits to youth sector workers' confidentiality, and, where possible, their permission sought for disclosure.



Commentary

In accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988* and *Personal Information Protection Act 2004*, young people have a right to expect that their information is kept confidential. However, in some cases, confidentiality is not possible or even desirable: there are always limits. It is important that the limits of confidentiality are explained to young people at the beginning of their relationship with a worker. If a circumstance should arise where the youth sector worker is mandated to, or believes, disclosure to police, child protection, or other group is necessary, they have a responsibility to discuss this with the young person and explain why this is an appropriate course of action.

Case Example 1

Erin is a youth sector worker who is supporting Cassie, who has been charged with motor vehicle theft. Cassie confides in Erin that she was under the influence of amphetamines and alcohol when she got into the stolen car. As part of her role, Erin refers Cassie to a drug and alcohol service for counselling.

Cassie's mother rings Erin and tells her she suspects that Cassie has been using drugs. She repeatedly asks Erin whether she knows anything about this. Erin recognises it would be a breach of confidentiality to disclose what Cassie has told her and politely declines to discuss it.

Erin talks to Cassie about her mother's concerns. With Cassie's consent, the two of them speak with her mother about Cassie's drug use and explain she has started drug and alcohol counselling.

Case Example 2

Josie is youth sector worker employed by local government in a rural area. Prior to Josie being employed in this position, the local community began having meetings with local stakeholders regarding issues facing young people living in the area. The meetings were attended by community representatives such as Neighbourhood Watch, local church groups, the school principal, business operators, health service staff and the police. Josie has been told by her manager that the meetings are seen as valuable by the community and she is to participate. Given the values that underpin Josie's practice, Josie believes collaboration to be worthwhile, but after attending her first meeting she is concerned about the focus of the group and the way young people are being portrayed. During the second meeting she attends, Josie is asked to report on what she has been doing, and she explains that she is working with a group of young people to run some holiday activities. Some members of the group ask Josie which young people are participating, as there are young people in the area who are believed to be a bad influence on others. Josie is concerned about this request and feels pressured by the group to "name names". Josie explains to the group that one of the benefits of the program is that it engages young people from a variety of backgrounds and because of confidentiality reasons, it is not appropriate that she provide names of young people involved.

Cooperation

A youth sector worker will actively cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.



Commentary

Ethical youth sector practice involves a commitment to working in co-operative partnerships with others to achieve positive outcomes in the best interests of young people. Connection with professionals outside the youth sector enables the youth sector worker to provide young people with access to a greater range of choices of support networks, information, skills and resources to meet their needs. Working in isolation increases the risk of developing dependency-based relationships, and denies young people the right to an equal choice of available resources. Working in partnership with other organisations and individuals in the youth sector can also help to promote best practice models being used across the sector, through the sharing of ideas, knowledge and new information about effective and appropriate methods of practice.

Case Example 1

Robyn works with young people in a community-based service. She has an arrangement with the accommodation support service in her area to streamline referrals where young people are in need of housing assistance. With the young person's consent, she provides appropriate information to the organisation so that the young person does not have to re-tell their whole story.

Case Example 2

Peter works for a youth service that seeks to provide advocacy services to young people with disability. Peter hears of an upcoming grant round which could provide funding to expand his service to also provide young people with disability with the opportunity to participate in decision making forums. However, Peter knows of another service that has a slightly different focus to his own that is also interested in applying for the grant round to get funding for a similar project. Peter approaches this service, and asks if they would be interested in collaborating as he feels that a program that includes both services would have greater benefit to young people. The other service is encouraged by Peter's idea, and rather than competing for funding, they are able to put together a strong grant application.

Knowledge

A youth sector worker has a responsibility to keep up to date with the current information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.



Commentary

While acknowledging that the youth sector is diverse and workers have varied backgrounds and focuses for practice, it is essential that youth sector workers maintain a high level of competency in working with young people. This includes workers in issue-specific areas, as well as volunteers and other workers who operate outside the mainstream youth sector, for example a worker who engages with young people in an alcohol and other drug service but is not a youth-specific worker.

Working with young people requires specific and specialist skills and knowledge, and youth sector workers should regularly participate in training and remain up to date with current ideas around 'best practice', relevant legislation and policy developments, changes to services and structure within the youth sector and reporting requirements. Youth sector workers should also aim to attend networking opportunities and professional development, including participating in briefing sessions, regional and local youth sector meetings, conferences and forums, to not only learn and develop their professional skill set, but also engage with other workers in their area of expertise and region and to expand their knowledge of 'best practice'. Engaging with other youth sector workers also works to strengthen youth sector networks and the ability of the sector in Tasmania and nationally to respond collectively and appropriately to youth issues in the community.

Case Example 1

John works with a mental health support service for young people, which often requires him to respond quickly and appropriately to crisis situations. John's position requires him to complete and maintain mental health first aid training. It is John's responsibility to ensure that his qualifications are current and that he remains aware of any opportunities for professional development, in order to ensure that he is able to provide 'best practice' support to the young people in his care.

Case Example 2

Maria works with young people who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. Support and education programs for this cohort of young people changes frequently, with new funding opportunities becoming available periodically and other programs being cut. In order to provide quality services to the young people she works with, Maria needs to be an active part of a number of information and community and youth sector networks, in order to explore funding opportunities, as well as remain aware of the training and professional development opportunities that will support her to effectively work with her clients.

Self-awareness

A youth sector worker will be conscious of their own values, interests and limitations, and will also be respectful of the values and interests of others.



Commentary

Young people hold a diversity of values and interests, which at times may differ from the values and interests of the youth sector workers with whom they engage. Despite these differing values, a youth sector worker who is self-aware is able to act in the best interests of the young person and maintain a relationship of respect and dignity. This may include a youth sector worker recognising their own limitations and relying on the expertise of others, who may be better suited to handling an issue. There are times when a youth sector worker will be required to make a decision based on a young person's action, which may breach an individual's rights, but is culturally acceptable. However, this should not result in a situation where the universally accepted concepts of human rights are compromised.

Case Example 1

Alex works with young people from newly-arrived migrant and refugee backgrounds. She is a second generation Australian and was brought up hearing stories about how difficult it was for her parents to establish themselves in Australia and make a new beginning. Alex grew up feeling that she had a non-Australian household, making her personally aware of how isolating this experience could be for young people. Many of the organisations Alex works with include people of her parents' generation who tell Alex that they never had any assistance when they arrived and find it difficult to understand why she is working to help young people become established. Alex is aware that her clients and their families have emigrated to Australia for vastly different reasons than her parents. She is also aware of how difficult it is to hold on to one's culture, yet try to fit into mainstream society. She is mindful that many people in Australia, including previous migrants, are not aware of the many contemporary reasons why people emigrate to Australia. She makes sure that those she works with understand the needs of her clients, as well as reassuring them that she values their own experiences and insights.

Case Example 2

Dave is a youth sector worker employed in a community health centre. John is a young man who Dave has been providing support to over several months for family issues. John's behaviour has been extremely volatile in the past, but things have improved at school and he is reporting that his home life is more settled. Dave has recently learnt from John's teacher that things have escalated again at school and John is refusing to attend. John has come to the attention of the police for animal cruelty after he allegedly killed the neighbour's cat.

Dave is extremely disappointed with John and can't believe that he would do this after John has worked so hard to help him. Dave feels sick about the animal cruelty and decides to 'wash his hands of him'. One day John makes an unscheduled request to see Dave. Dave is very angry, but manages to control himself and makes the time to see John. John blurts out that he needs legal aid as soon as he enters Dave's office. John states that he had an argument with his step father a few days ago, and all he could think of doing was to get out of the house. As he left the house the elderly neighbour's cat was on the door step. In anger John stomped on the cat, accidentally killing it. The neighbour witnessed this from their window and called the police. Dave is still shocked by John's actions and the impact that they could have on the neighbour, but is able to continue to support John.

Boundaries

The relationship between a youth sector worker and a young person is a professional relationship, with clear boundaries, that is intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth sector workers will behave in a way that is consistent with these boundaries.



Commentary

Youth sector workers recognise that the relationship between themselves and their young clients is a professional, contracted relationship, and therefore limited. Young people are in a position of vulnerability as they have less access to knowledge, resources and skills than workers. Creating a safe place, where boundaries are not compromised, is important as it enables young people to share personal issues, sensitive information, fears and emotion, that they may not share in any other relationship.

Case Example 1

Susan works in a multipurpose youth centre in a regional area. Susan meets a young person named Mike at an informal pizza and information night at her service. After meeting Susan, Mike regularly drops in to the youth centres to ask for information about various services the centre offers. However, when Mike asks Susan out for a date, Susan realises that Mike's feelings for her have developed beyond their professional relationship. Susan thanks Mike for his invitation, but reinforces the limits of her role as a youth sector worker, making it clear that her professional role does not allow for a personal relationship with a young person.

Case Example 2

Andrew works for a youth organisation which has many young people as volunteers. Andrew often hangs out socially after hours with many of the young volunteers. One of the volunteers makes an inappropriate personal remark during a professional meeting with a potential partner of the organisation. Andrew realises that he has entered into inappropriate relationships with many of the volunteers, which has changed the dynamic of their relationship to be too informal and social. Andrew decides to modify his behaviour and discusses boundaries with the volunteers. They decide to have a facilitated session to explore the professional boundaries and develop a common understanding of each other's roles.

Self-care

Good youth sector work practice is consistent with preserving the health and wellbeing of youth sector workers.



Commentary

In order to ensure the longevity of their careers and provide high quality service, youth sector workers need to prioritise their own health and wellbeing. Good quality professional practice also takes time to develop, and is not well-served by people who are unable to mentally and physically handle challenging situations.

Case Example 1

Bob is a young person and a youth sector worker. Bob engages in many of the same 'risky' activities as his client group, such as staying out late partying, but only becomes aware of how rundown he is when he loses his temper with a young client, and his practice is called into question by his supervisor. Bob reflects in supervision that his lifestyle is negatively affecting his practice. This has quite an impact on Bob and motivates him to make plans to moderate his risk taking.

Case Example 2

Tracey works with young people who are involuntary clients of a statutory service, many aspects of this work are about safety and protection with little focus on the experience of the young people or the development of their skills. Tracey finds the work both rewarding and challenging but is frustrated and becomes increasingly stressed by the lack of inclusion of her clients regarding decision making in their daily living. When she tries to raise this during supervision, she is directed back to client and organisational tasks. Tracey is beginning to feel that her professional skills and personal reflections are not valued. Tracey seeks and gains employment in another organisation with a focus that is more in line with her own professional framework.

Professional awareness

A youth sector worker is committed to the development of a strong youth sector, that is able to support young people as they transition to adulthood. They will be aware of the strengths and diversity of young people and those that support them.



Commentary

Youth sector workers are aware that their role is to support young people, but not to make those young people dependent on their assistance. A youth sector worker assists clients to recognise and develop their strengths, building their capacity to be responsible in their own lives.

In turn, youth sector workers must endeavour to develop their own capacity both individually and as a sector, personally and professionally, to respond to the ever-evolving needs and challenges of working with young people. Youth sector workers will engage in relevant and value-adding professional development and networking opportunities to aid their practice and ability to respond to the evolving nature of the profession.

As youth sector work is a unique profession that is often not recognised or understood by others, it is important that youth sector workers ensure that those they are working with understand their role in providing support to young people. Youth sector workers also need to acknowledge and respect the approach of other professionals and their respective contributions in assisting young people.

Case Example 1

Abby is employed by a service that works with international students in schools. Abby aims to not only support the young people that she works with to adjust, but also help prepare them to be independent as they transition into Australian life. As an example, Abby helps to build on the existing capacity and strengths of these young people by showing them how to use the bus service to get to her own workplace. Abby trusts her young clients to use the bus service in the future, rather than picking them up in her work vehicle and fostering dependence on her.

Case Example 2

Michael works with young people with disabilities, supporting them to access services. Michael is approached to be on a Working Group which is focused on reforming Education policy, in particular how previous policies have failed to achieve outcomes for young people with disabilities. Michael attends the first meeting of the Working Group. He is surprised to see that rather than directly engaging with young people with disabilities, the Working Group consists of workers such as himself, school teachers and principals, bureaucrats and parent groups. Michael brings up this point at the meeting, advocating that young people ought to have their own voices heard by decision makers. As a result of Michael's efforts, the Working Group organises to include youth representatives and host forums to get young people directly involved in the reforms.

Future Steps

In 2013, the Youth Ethics Working Group will continue to meet to support the implementation of the *Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania*. This will include supporting the development of resources to practically assist youth sector workers to incorporate of the Code of Ethics in their practice, including the development of products designed specifically for young people.

The Youth Ethics Working Group will also meet and work with organisations, including education and training educators and institutions, within the youth sector in Tasmania, in order to aid their implementation of the Code of Ethics.

If you or your organisation would like more information about how to become involved with the Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania, please contact the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) by calling 03 6223 5511 or emailing ceo@ynot.org.au

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