

## 8. Child-focused programs

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Child-focused programs accounted for 18 per cent of all programs in the analysis. The majority could be generally classified as:

- adolescent parent support programs (mainly for mothers);
- respite and substitute care services for children and families requiring ‘time out’ or emergency assistance;
- generalist support and counselling programs for ‘at risk’ and maltreated children and young people;
- school-based health promotion and resiliency programs<sup>21</sup>;
- services for young people at risk of homelessness; and/or
- programs run in sexual assault centres or women’s refuges for children who had witnessed domestic violence.

Some of the child-focused programs included:

*FaBRIC, Family Based Respite Care Inc., Weston Creek (ACT).* FaBRIC provides respite care to families of children and young adults (up to 25 years of age) with disabilities. The program aims to enhance the quality of life for the young person with disabilities. The programs are designed to be flexible and provide care for each person on an individual level, meeting their needs in a meaningful and timely way. While not specifically targeting ‘at risk’ clients the program provides support to families to assist them in their role of primary carers. Where appropriate FaBRIC will facilitate the involvement of other agencies to assist in family support.

*‘Friends’ Early Anxiety Prevention Program, Kingscote Area School, Kangaroo Island (SA).* Groups for secondary students that aim to teach skills to enable the young people to cope and manage all the challenges that life will present. The program aims to develop personal self-esteem and give students skills on which to build positive and happy relationships. It also hopes to build emotional resilience and individual’s problem-solving abilities.

*Big Brother, Big Sister, Jesuit Social Services, (Vic.).* The program is based on the belief that friendship can make a remarkable difference to a young person’s life. Young people between the age of 7 and 16 are referred to the program because they are in need of extra support and friendship. An attempt is made to then match each young person with a Big Brother or a Big Sister who feel they have something to gain by developing a positive relationship with a young person. All volunteers are carefully screened and trained prior to being matched. All matches are supervised and supported by staff.

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<sup>21</sup> To be considered ‘child-focused’, programs must have incorporated programs or activities that went beyond those offered in personal safety or Protective Behaviours programs.

**The Breakfast Program, Narrabundah Primary School (ACT).** The Breakfast Program provides breakfast for all children in the school who wish to partake. Breakfast is prepared by parent helpers in the canteen and starts at 9:00 and finishes at 9:30. The senior children distribute trays to classrooms and collect the trays and return them to the canteen. The food is paid for from a Schools Equity Fund from the ACT Department of Education. The primary objective is to provide a nutritional breakfast for the many children in this area who would not normally have a daily breakfast. The underlying assumption is that children who have had a healthy breakfast will be better able to attend the day's academic program.

**Child Therapy Program, Children and Domestic Violence, Centacare (Qld).** The program aims to help children understand what domestic violence is, learn to cope with their own feelings and learn 'non-violent' behaviours for when they are angry; identify with other young people for a shared experience; have fun and increase their self-esteem; and develop a practical safety plan. The program uses artwork, puppets, symbols in the sand-tray, clay work and role playing and aims to provide a child sensitive space which allows them to address their issues in an age appropriate and child friendly ways.

Almost half (43 per cent) of the child-focused programs were being run in combination with family support programs also offered within the host agency. Adopting a family support element was generally done by programs where it was felt that involving and working with the child or young person's family was required in order to facilitate the provision of effective support to the child, such as programs for child witnesses of domestic violence (which also provide support to the mother) or programs assisting young people at risk of being made homeless. To be considered 'child-focused' however, the programs had to maintain a philosophical and service provision focus predominantly on the maltreated or 'at risk' child. School-based programs provide a good example of this sort of program:

**Youth Connection Youth Work Service, Office of Youth, Department of Education and Community Services (ACT).** Youth Connection has a prevention and early intervention focus to work with young people at risk of leaving school. Youth Connection provides direct support and assistance to young people in high school with the aim of supporting them to stay in education. Clients are usually referred from high schools across Canberra and present as regular truants or are receiving regular school suspensions. The service is mobile and flexible, with four youth workers, one working specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. The youth workers work closely with parents and schools to ensure workable outcomes for young people. The intervention is short to medium term, with some room for long-term support for more complex cases

## Substitute care services

Eight per cent of all programs (and 10 per cent of both family support and child-focused programs), involved some form of out-of-home placement of the child or young person. The type and duration of placement ranged from very brief emergency care, to regular and irregular respite care, to the long-term placement of children and young people in foster care and residential care under guardianship of the State and generally as a function of experiencing significant harm at the hands of caregivers. For example:

**Together Again Program, Children Australia Inc. (Oz Child) (Vic.).** The Together Again Program (TAP) is a reunification program which works with families whose children have been referred for protective reasons. A combination of family therapy and in-

home support is used for up to 12 months with those families where a TAP assessment has determined that the return of the child/ren is appropriate. The program operates in the DHS Southern Metropolitan Region (Melbourne).

**Youth For Christ Adolescent Community Placement Program, Youth For Christ Melbourne (Vic).** The Adolescent Community Placement Program has two streams, the Eastern and Metropolitan streams, developed to cater for the needs of 13–18 year old males and females. The program receives half of its referrals from the DHS Eastern region (statutory referrals), with the remainder coming from other sources within the community (voluntary referrals). The program utilises families or single people from within the community to act as caregivers, opening up their homes to accommodate a young person. As a Christian organisation, the program also utilises the support of the local church. The role of the workers is to recruit caregivers, train them and endeavour to match those young people referred to the program with available caregivers. Day programs have been developed (either school or work-related) for the young people to ensure living and social skills are developed and to support the young person with day-to-day issues; for example, transport, financial support. Workers often take on the role as case manager, with clients from the Department of Human Services. The program aims to provide young people with stable accommodation and to assist them to work towards independent living.

**SOS Children's Villages, SOS Children's Villages Inc. (SA).** The Children's Villages give children an opportunity to learn about themselves and experience good parenting, so that their own children are prevented from repeating the cycle that has touched their parents. Children who are under long-term State guardianship orders are welcomed into a family home, which is located in a friendly village neighbourhood. While the village is fully integrated in the local community, the children are given every opportunity to deal with the grief of their past. Stability is a major strategy, made possible by enabling siblings to be placed together, focusing care and attention solely on the children, limiting placements to foster children, paying the foster mother a salary, providing organisational supports, professional back-ups and time-out when needed. The children benefit from feeling at home in a normal environment. Through stability, the children can develop meaningful relationships – with siblings, foster parents, school teachers, friends and club leaders. The child can go on to be a capable, responsible adult and their children subsequently have a greater chance of protection from abuse.

**Shared Family Care, Inala Community House, Inala (Qld).** The Inala Shared Family Care program aims: to provide placements that are safe, nurturing and within a stable family environment for children coming into the care of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care; to support care providers and care provider families before, during and after placement. Other goals and strategies include: to maintain, enhance and increase the community of approved care providers; to respond to requests from the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care to provide safe, quality care for children in the care and protection of the Director-General; to maintain and develop partnerships between the service, the area office and other agencies; and to achieve quality, professional service delivery.

**CASY House, YWCA of Darwin (NT).** CASY House is a crisis accommodation refuge for young homeless people aged 15–18 years. CASY house aims: to provide a safe and supportive environment where young people in crisis can be accommodated; to work with and support young people to develop independent living skills; to assess and refer young people to specialised support where appropriate; to support young people to develop their potential and implement strategies to establish an ongoing and positive direction in their lives; to advocate on behalf of young people.

## Working with adolescents

Many of the child-focused programs reflected an acknowledgment of the special needs of adolescents and the issues they may face, including: family breakdown and the need for mediation services; youth homelessness; and support for young people as parents and/or as they make the transition to independent living.

### *Parent education*

While providing general support, programs targeting teenage parents have the specific objective of developing young parents' skills and support networks in order to prevent the development of abusive or neglectful parenting behaviour, and the intergenerational transmission of maltreatment, in the next generation of 'at risk' parents.

***Youth and Family Support Service***, *Mercy Community Services Inc, Wembley (WA)*. This program is also now known as the Youth Homelessness Early Intervention Program. The objective of the program is to improve the level of engagement of homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness in family, work, education, training and the community. Strategies include: using family focused early intervention strategies to achieve family reconciliation; improving coordination of services delivered by government and the community sector; working with Centrelink to ensure availability of income support. An outcome of the program is that target communities be able to build on their existing capacity to develop appropriate responses to their own needs.

***Young Pregnant and Parenting Program***, *Community Health Bendigo, Eaglehawk (Vic.)*. -The program's goal is to identify vulnerable young families experiencing family breakdown or at risk of family breakdown due to a current or past involvement with abuse (substance abuse, abuse of a physical, sexual or emotional nature and abuse in the form of neglect) and provide a preventive program by means of peer support and education. The target group are young, pregnant and parenting people up to the age of 25. The objectives are: to increase the facilitators' awareness of the young pregnant people's attitudes, knowledge and barriers to achieving health, by identifying needs of young pregnant people; to maintain knowledge of, and interaction with other health, welfare and educational agencies and services; to conduct a Peer Education Program to enhance the process of health promotion; to conduct ongoing needs analysis and evaluation; to provide health education and support to the target group. The program has two youth workers who work in the clinic.

***Triple P program***, *Kelvin Grove State High School, Kelvin Grove (Qld)*. Kelvin Grove State High School runs Triple P for teenage parents at the school through Behaviour Support Services. The Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) aims to deliver to parents a better understanding of their child's behaviour and provide them with management strategies to cope and better deal with inappropriate behaviour.

### *Health promotion*

Other child-focused programs, often with a health promotion focus, included:

***Home and School Support (HASS) 'Changes...Your Choice'***, *Salvo Care, Child and Family Services, Hobart (Tas.)*. The Home and School Support (HASS) program works with 10–14 year old males who are at risk of homelessness, leaving school and/or offending behaviour. The program is a ten-week outreach service to the clients and their families. Work is done with families on their behaviour and reasons for their 'at risk' status. Schools give support to maintain the young person at school. Joint

counselling is provided and referrals to other agencies. Intensive support is given to the families with the aim of preventing departmental and police intervention. The organisation also runs a ten-week counselling and life skills program for 10–18 year old males and females, referred by the police as a consequence of the Diversionary Conferencing Process.

***Homelink, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle (NSW).*** Homelink utilises the skills and talents of volunteers to assist school-aged students to maximise their personal and academic potential. The program utilises trained community volunteers to deliver services. It is based on friendship, support and information sharing and aims to create a bridge between families, schools and the community; it is flexible, adaptable and tailored to individual need and focuses and builds on existing strengths and talents of the client group. Homelink is currently building a men's volunteer program, recruiting and training male volunteers to be linked with young males in schools. Volunteers will have a mentoring role as well as encouraging other men to be role models. Note: the Homelink program only runs when funding allows it; recent donations have enabled the funding of a part-time worker.

***Vietnamese Youth and Family Service, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, (Vic.).*** The Vietnamese Youth and Family Service offers a multifaceted program for Vietnamese young people. The aim of the program is to offer Vietnamese young people a variety of chances to meet together on a regular basis in a safe, enjoyable, and friendly environment so that, through sharing life experiences and obtaining proper training, education and resources, these young people will be better equipped members of the community. The program is designed for young people in years 10, 11 and 12 who live in the City of Brimbank (LGA). The program runs for eight weeks of each term and includes teenager stress, life skills, Vietnamese culture, communication skills, conflict resolution, cross-cultural communication, dealing with authority and professionals, and identifying signs of depression.

***Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP), Northern Territory Department of Education, Student Services Darwin (NT).*** The Resourceful Adolescent Program was run at the Batchelor Area School in the NT by staff contracted by the NT Education Department, Student Services. The Resourceful Adolescent Program is an experiential, resilience-building program designed to promote positive coping abilities and the maintenance of a sense of self in the face of stressful and difficult circumstances. The major theoretical underpinnings of the program are cognitive-behaviour therapy. Techniques taught include keeping calm, problem solving to enhance coping, promoting harmony, and dealing with conflict and role disputes by understanding the perspectives of others. The common thread that runs through the program is the teaching of techniques to maintain self-esteem in the face of stress and difficult interpersonal situations.

***Poatina Village Youth Services, Fusion Australia (Tas.).*** The Village is an intentional community that provides support to five to ten young people (15–25 years). The Poatina Village concept is based on being able to take 'at risk' young people from their 'normal' surroundings, where established patterns of behaviour may be destructive and unhelpful, to an environment where they can participate as independent people in a caring, child-focused, adult community. Young people are provided with: an opportunity for gainful employment (Poatina operates a commercial tourist venture that supports the youth service); long-term supported residence in a supportive environment; creative leisure pursuits; and individually designed programs of support from youth workers skilled in assisting young people to achieve a sense of purpose and personal goals.