

## Adolescents at risk - Who cares?

### CAFWAA National Practice Exchange Outcomes

CAFWAA's mission is to promote and improve services to disadvantaged and marginalised children, young people and families, particularly those who are consumers of the child protection and out of home care services.

Australia wide, the number of young people with intensive support needs was estimated by Howard Bath in 1998 to be approximately 990 (6.7% of the total in care population).

These young people have serious emotional and behavioural problems, such as substance abuse, suicidal tendencies, aggressive and violent behaviour, running away, involvement with paedophiles and exclusion from school. A considerable proportion have a formally diagnosed or diagnosable psychiatric condition and many have mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. They cause grave concern to the community.

Around Australia, there has been widespread alarm in the child protection and welfare industry about the adequacy of current models of care and treatment for this specific group of young people and their families.

#### Issues identified

The concern for the welfare and needs of young people requiring high levels of support was identified by CAFWAA members as a national issue of the foremost importance and warranting urgent dialogue and discussion between government, service providers, carers and workers responsible for these young people at the coalface.

Australian responses to these troubled young people in the target population group lag well behind other Western countries where innovative models of therapeutic residential intervention have been developed, evaluated and integrated into the continuum of care needed by children and young people living in out of home care.

There were three key issues which were identified as matters of immediate priority by all key stakeholders at the National Practice Exchange:

- That across Australia there is no provision for a range of services which provides the type of therapeutic and multi-disciplinary intervention needed by young people with intensive needs who pose a substantial danger to themselves and/or others.
- That there is insufficient resourcing and service provision available to meet the mental health, education and family support needs of these young people.
- That there is a need to enhance and adequately resource early intervention strategies targeted to young people and their families who experience inter-generational disadvantage, in order to prevent further increase in the numbers of young people found in this population group.

#### Recommendations

The CAFWAA National Practice Exchange highlighted the need for a cross-jurisdictional, cross-stakeholder response to improve our capacity to provide for the intense support needs of this very needy group of young people. We recommend that State and Territory Welfare Ministers:

- Support CAFWAA in furthering the impact of the Practice Exchange by allocating \$20,000 in order for CAFWAA to achieve the following:
  1. the production and distribution of the proceedings of the First National Practice Exchange on adolescents with high support needs;
  2. that CAFWAA, with participation of other stakeholder representatives, draw from these documents a range of options and models that are seen to be effective in meeting the needs of this target group;
  3. That this information be broadly circulated throughout the sector, giving the opportunity for states/territories to discuss and test the relevance and effectiveness of these strategies locally;
  4. With a view and commitment from states/territories to share these findings at a further national CAFWAA Practice Exchange early in the year 2000.
- Provide resources for the development of a range of therapeutic out of home care options in each State and Territory.
- Ensure that additional resources are provided and service integration is strengthened to enable young people with intensive support needs to access the range of mental health, drug treatment, education and family support services they need to address their multiple difficulties.
- Allocate additional resources to provide early intervention to young people and their families who are at risk of requiring intensive support if their support needs are not addressed in a timely and integrated manner.

Trevor Wight  
Chairperson, CAFWAA Committee

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