

The provision of support and advocacy for Indigenous young people on a regional basis – the CAYLUS model

Introduction

The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) provides a service which links young people (aged 5 – 25 years) to diversionary activities and drug and alcohol treatment programs; and which links remote communities with assistance in offering their young people an enhanced quality of life through addressing the lack of diversionary and treatment options. It receives funding from a wide range of sources, with core funding of \$425,580 being provided by the National Drug Strategy and Combating Petrol Sniffing from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, a further \$165,000 from the Department of the Attorney General, and \$88,000 from the Juvenile Diversion program. CAYLUS is located in Alice Springs, and is part of Tangentyere Council, an organisation which primarily provides services to the town camps located around Alice Springs.

The region served by CAYLUS is covered by four local government Shires – the Barkly, the Central Desert, the MacDonnell and the Alice Springs Shires. Together these Shires cover 873,821 sq kms with over 30 main communities¹. Most of these communities have amenities consisting of a single shop, a school (to early secondary level), a health clinic and varying levels of sport and recreational infrastructure. Excluding Alice Springs, the region has a population aged 5 – 25 years of approximately 4450 Indigenous young people living in remote communities². These young people have an average median income of approximately \$215 per week³, which is less than half the national median weekly income. The average life expectancy for the Northern Territory is 57.6 years for men, and 65.2 years for women, which, again is substantially less than the national figures⁴.

The region is populated by people of the Pintubi, Luritja, Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara, Anmatjere, Altyawara and Arrernte, groups. English is spoken as a second language through much of the region. Many of the people living in the region follow a traditionally oriented lifestyle in which hunting, gathering and ceremonial activity play important parts in everyday life. The region is also characterised by high levels of alcohol use, with the Northern Territory as a whole consuming 13.82 litres per capita (national average 9.32 litres per capita), and consumption rates in Central Australia

¹ Local Government Regional Management Plan, 2008;

http://www.localgovernment.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/57073/Final_CENTRAL_AUSTRALIAN_REGION_RMP_09.pdf

² 2006 Census – this is likely to be an underestimate due of the difficulty is gaining accurate assessments as reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The population of young people in Alice Springs has been excluded from this total because CAYLUS principally provides services to young people from remote communities who are in Alice Springs for the purposes of substance use.

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

being higher than average for the Northern Territory (15.5L per capita)⁵. There are also high levels of use of marijuana with 24.4% of people over the age of 14 years reporting using marijuana in the last 12 months (national average 12.9%).⁶ Petrol sniffing has also been an issue in the region, with 244 young people documented as sniffing petrol and other solvents on a regular basis between the years 2005 and 2007.⁷

The region is therefore characterised by vast distances, considerable levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, low levels of educational attainment, poor health, and high levels of substance use. The data available does not allow for an accurate picture of the lifestyle of young people in the region to be drawn. However it is safe to assume that at the lower end of the age range targeted by CAYLUS (5 – 12 years) are negatively impacted by the conditions of life described above, and at the higher end (12 – 25 years) they are participating fully in the pattern of life prevalent in the region.

The CAYLUS model

CAYLUS's primary role is to work towards the improvement in the quality of life for young people living in remote communities in Central Australia. They achieve this through implementing two key strategies. The first of these is to assess gaps in service provision to young people in the region, and to fill those gaps through a mixture of direct service provision, supporting other service providers, and advocating with policy makers to address the needs in the sector. CAYLUS hold a pool of money known as 'brokerage funds', which it is able to deploy quickly in order to cover immediate and vital gaps in service provision on communities. The second key strategy is to identify issues which have a negative impact on the lives of young people, and implement strategies to address those issues. Examples of this are working towards reducing the supply of drugs and alcohol, and particularly of unleaded petrol; and working to improve the capacity of the network of appropriate drug and alcohol treatment services.

CAYLUS currently has a staff of six, which is a small team with which to address such entrenched and difficult issues over a large area. The model through which CAYLUS implements its' two key strategies is to gather information, respond to requests for assistance, and to function as a point which links stakeholders together so that they can work more effectively to address specific issues. For example in supply reduction of volatile substances they have formed linkages between suppliers, retailers, police, service agencies and consumers in order to reduce easy access to sprays and glues which are on sale in Alice Springs. This has resulted in a substantial drop in levels of volatile substance misuse in Alice Springs. In the area of demand reduction they link youth programs with support structures, and funding bodies and the wider political environment in order to increase the number coverage and quality of youth services in the region.

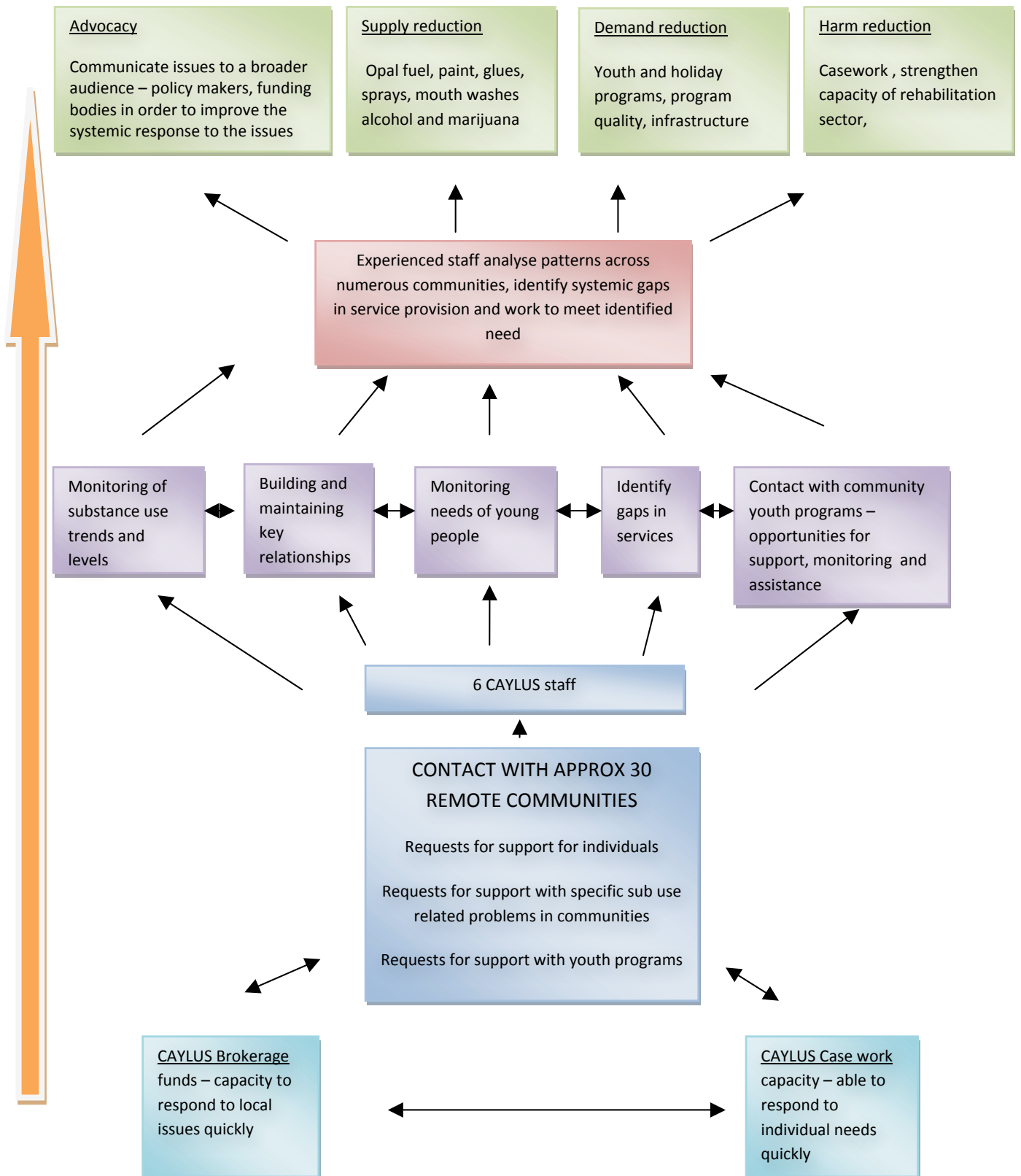
⁵ Northern Territory Treasury, 2004 a, in Alcohol and Other Drugs Program Profile of Services and Intervention Report, HMA and Associates, 2005

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002a

⁷ d'Abbs and Shaw, Data collection for the petrol sniffing prevention program, 2007

Underpinning the implementation of the two key strategies is the base level of the work done by CAYLUS, which is in the field of individual harm reduction – casework. CAYLUS employ a full time caseworker, and actively manage approximately 20 cases at any one time. This work on the individual level functions to inform CAYLUS of current trends in sniffing and other substance use, the needs of individuals, and the barriers to meeting those needs – that is an intimate picture of what is going on ‘on the ground’. The individuals and their families also provide linkages between CAYLUS and their home communities in remote areas. Through these linkages CAYLUS derive further information on the lives of young people on remote communities. Their staff become known as points of contact for youth issues. This leads to both advocacy and potential service provision roles.

Figure 1: The CAYLUS Model



CAYLUS has now been operating for seven years, and wherever possible, employs staff who are already well known in the communities before their tenure with CAYLUS. The result of this is that they have personal relationships with the senior Indigenous and non Indigenous decision makers in most communities in Central Australia. In conjunction with contacts made through casework, this network of relationships enables regular contact with these communities. CAYLUS therefore receive requests from communities and individuals for support in specific circumstances, and are able to access senior Indigenous and non Indigenous people to quickly establish the parameters of any situation and negotiate solutions. Such requests lead to the direct service provision undertaken by CAYLUS, and to the provision of support to other agencies. An example of this is that communities regularly contact CAYLUS when they have a group of young people sniffing solvents. CAYLUS then visit the community, talk through the options for action with senior Indigenous and non Indigenous community members, and then arrange immediate action. The action in this case is often to facilitate the placement of leading sniffers with an outstation rehabilitation program, which generally leads to a cessation of sniffing activity.

The ongoing provision of case work service and the existence of the network of contacts across communities and service provision organisations in Central Australia has led CAYLUS to develop expertise in the provision of services to young people in remote communities. This is primarily in the form of 'youth programs', which typically provide diversionary activities in the form of arts, crafts, sport and multi media. These youth programs are provided in both ongoing, and school holiday contexts. CAYLUS's role in the provision of youth services is both to directly provide services, and to undertake a range of activities that improve the quality of services run by other agencies. Examples of this are assistance with recruitment, provision of job descriptions, de-briefing workers, assistance with particular events and provision of equipment and logistical support.

Involvement in the provision of youth services for a number of years has resulted in CAYLUS developing an awareness of the structural barriers to the provision of quality youth programs in remote areas. They have therefore expanded their operations to overcome some of these barriers. They are currently doing this by sourcing funds and procuring the creation of infrastructure such as recreation halls and accommodation for youth workers in remote communities; by undertaking a workforce expansion program through liaising with the tertiary education sector to promote the sector to students, and by arranging systems of work experience for students studying relevant disciplines.

Their knowledge of the needs of young people who are abusing drugs and alcohol in Central Australia has also led CAYLUS to recognise the lack of access to appropriate rehabilitation services. They have therefore become involved in providing support to remote outstation rehabilitation centres which are the services that best suit the needs of young people from remote areas. The support provided to the two major services of this type in Central Australia is in assistance with logistical issues, financial support and advocacy.

Major achievements of CAYLUS

CAYLUS started in late 2002 with a single staff member, a small budget of and no vehicle. In the intervening years it has grown to six full time positions, seven vehicles (many of which are on long term loan to youth programs in remote areas) and a total annual operational budget of approximately \$678,580 . During the seven years of operation CAYLUS has had major achievements in the following fields.

Petrol sniffing and other volatile substance misuse

The number of people sniffing petrol in the remote communities of Central Australia has dropped from 244 in 2005 – 07, to 9 in 2008⁸. This decrease has been attributed to the almost universal use of Opal fuel, which is specifically designed and produced because it has no hydrocarbons, and therefore does not produce intoxication when sniffed⁹.

CAYLUS played a key role in advocating for the need for a complete regional rollout of the fuel. In 2005 they formed what was known as the Opal Alliance which was a lobby group comprised of another non government organisation, and a major commercial operation in Central Australia. This group commissioned a cost benefit analysis of a widespread roll out of the fuel from Access Economics, a conservative economic think tank. This study clearly showed the economic cost of sniffing, and therefore the economic gain of putting in place a measure that would drastically reduce the levels of sniffing in the region. In 2006 the Department of Health and Ageing agreed to the widespread rollout advocated by the Opal Alliance. Since that time CAYLUS have continued to educate communities about Opal fuel, and to monitor outlets that continue to sell unleaded petrol (ULP).

In addition to their work in supply reduction measures for petrol, CAYLUS have also worked on supply reduction for volatiles in Alice Springs. This has been necessary because volatile substance users came to Alice Springs to access volatiles when ULP was no longer available in their communities. CAYLUS has employed a full time staff member to work with retailers, police, suppliers and consumers to monitor volatile substance use levels and trends in Alice Springs, and to design and implement effective supply reduction measures.

Building the capacity of youth services in Central Australia

In 2002 the provision of youth services in the remote communities of Central Australia was sporadic, with only five communities having a youth service, and in two of these five, the service delivered was only occasional. Most communities had some funding from sport and recreation grants, however typically they struggled to recruit and supervise workers to the positions available. Some communities obtained specific funds, however these programs tended to run for short periods and then collapse.

⁸ D'Abbs and Shaw, Evaluation of the Impact of Opal fuel, 2008

⁹ *ibid*

CAYLUS has addressed this situation by working with Community Councils, and more recently the new Shires to assist with recruitment, resourcing and funding programs. They utilise four main strategies to achieve this:

- Employment of a full time staff member to support youth workers in remote communities to improve the quality of their programs. This is done through community visits to provide assistance with specific events, de-briefing, mental health first aid training, and coordination of logistical support from Alice Springs.
- Direct provision of youth programs (as distinct to holiday programs) to 11 of the communities in the region for various periods; direct provision of school holiday programs to 20 communities in the region over a number of years;
- Access funding for youth initiatives across the region.
 - \$1m disbursed in brokerage fund for fast and flexible support to individuals and youth programs since 2002;
 - \$1.458m sourced and administered through CAYLUS for youth programs since 2002; and
 - \$2.961m provided to other youth services providers where CAYLUS supported the application and assists with the implementation of the program through provision of expertise and logistical support
 - Total of \$5.419m disbursed to support young people in rehabilitation and to provide youth programs across the region
- Access funding for the construction of infrastructure for youth programs
 - \$3.34m accessed and administered for the construction of youth related infrastructure (recreation halls and staff housing) for 12 communities in the region;
 - assisted access for \$2m for the refurbishment of an outstation rehabilitation centre
 - Total of \$5.5m accessed for improvement of infrastructure for program delivery to young people in the region

CAYLUS has also played a pivotal role in increasing the total funding for young people's programs to the region. As part of their advocacy work for the regional implementation of Opal fuel for supply reduction purposes, CAYLUS also strenuously and successfully advocated for increased funding for youth programs for diversionary activities¹⁰. When the Commonwealth Government made the decision to fund the regional rollout of Opal fuel in 2006, they also allocated \$3m to the provision of

¹⁰ Urbis Keys Young, 'Review of the first phase of the petrol sniffing prevention program', 2008

diversionary activities in the Northern Territory¹¹. This funding was augmented in 2007 by the additional of \$12m to fund diversionary activities for the four communities in the southern region of Central Australia¹². Finally in 2008 a further \$5.4m was made available through the Department of Families and Communities, Housing and Indigenous Affairs for youth projects¹³. The funding was made available through the Northern Territory Emergency Response. This brings a total of \$19.6m into the Northern Territory for the provision of additional youth services.

Improving the capacity of remote rehabilitation treatment services in Central Australia

The Central Australian region has two remote residential rehabilitation services – Ilpurla and Mt Theo. Both these services offer culturally based residential rehabilitation for young people from throughout Central Australia. They are a vital element of the response to young people's substance use in the region because they offer a place where young people can go and receive assistance by in an environment controlled by senior people from within their own culture.

Both of these services face the challenges of running a service in an extremely remote environment, and trying to incorporate traditional Aboriginal values and practices into their program; while still meeting the financial and accountability requirements required by funding bodies.

CAYLUS has worked in several ways to improve the capacity of these two services through implementing the following strategies:

- Accessing funding from the Department of the Attorney General to pay the food, transport and equipment costs for individual clients;
- Coordinating referrals to the services from the Justice system, Indigenous families, the Alcohol and Other Drugs services in Alice Springs and the Department of Family and Community Services;
- Assisting with sourcing funds for wages and equipment for both services;
- Advocating both the need for, and the benefits of remote rehabilitation services

Conclusion

CAYLUS have delivered a holistic substance use service to the remote communities of Central Australia for seven years. They have developed a model that has its roots in delivering a flexible,

¹¹ Minister for Health and Ageing and Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2005; Wilson 2005

¹² Urbis Keys Young, 'Review of the first phase of the petrol sniffing prevention program', 2008

¹³ Monitoring Report – Measuring the progress of NTER activities, FaCSHIA;
http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/Documents/monitoring_report_2/part3.htm

speedy and responsive service based around satisfying requests for assistance from its constituents; and then synthesising the knowledge built up through this process to advocate for a strengthening of the government response to the issues faced by young people living in remote communities in Central Australia. They have been very successful in delivering successful supply, demand and harm reduction services to the region.

It is important to examine the basis for their success, to investigate the key factors that have delivered such benefit to the region with a view to seeing if they can be replicated in other areas. A recent evaluation which obtained feedback from numerous stakeholders identified the main success factors as :

- the experience and longevity of the CAYLUS staff;
- their ability to disburse funds in a fast and flexible fashion to meet immediate needs;
- the network of personal relationships that CAYLUS staff have developed with key stakeholders throughout the region.¹⁴

These three factors can all be replicated in other regions. The first can be achieved by careful recruitment of people with existing experience of youth services within the target region, the second through negotiation with funding bodies and the third by allowing a project time to mature within a region.

¹⁴ Shaw, 'An evaluation of CAYLUS – 2007 – 2009, 2009, unpublished