

Evaluation of the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage

2014-2016



The Difference is Research

Executive summary

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) were commissioned by the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS), to help develop a rolling monitoring and evaluation process with the aim of:

- Monitoring the success of CAYLUS's implementation of the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage 2013-16 project;
- Assisting CAYLUS to develop a sustainable, unobtrusive, monitoring and evaluation process that can be extended beyond 2016, to help inform a range of activities and projects over time.

As such, the overall aim is to provide CAYLUS with a systematic, sustainable and enduring method of data collection and monitoring that may remain in place after project completion. This will allow additional data to be collected at a later stage, and for changes over time to be monitored and explored. By improving the capacity of the CAYLUS staff to evaluate and monitor their service, the standard of CAYLUS's work may be informed and improved, and the enduring disability associated with substance misuse in Central Australia may be reduced.

Background

Established in 2002, CAYLUS supports community initiatives that improve the quality of life and reduce substance use among young people across a service area that spans more than 500,000 square kilometers in Central Australia. In doing so, CAYLUS supports the development and ongoing maintenance of community initiatives aimed at reducing the supply, harms, and demands associated with substance misuse among young people and their families across the region. One way that CAYLUS works to reduce demand is by working to ensure that engaging diversionary activities are available to young people, especially in times and locations of high need (CAYLUS 2015).

There is a strong association between alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and crime, particularly in remote Central Australia, where Aboriginal people (especially young people) interact with the criminal justice system in disproportionate rates (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014; Murphy, et al., 2010; Higgins and Davis, 2014; Hunter 2001; Weatherburn, et al., 2006, 2008). CAYLUS has taken the view that this type of crime reduces the quality-of-life for young people and their families, both as victims and offenders, who become entangled in the complexities of the Northern Territory Criminal Justice System. In this way, crime can be understood both as a cause and effect of substance misuse. As such, CAYLUS has taken a 'crime prevention aware' approach to its work with young people and families in the region.

As part of this evaluation, NDARC has worked with CAYLUS in monitoring its support and delivery of youth programs in an area that spans 21 communities in Central Australia. While CAYLUS takes a broad and inclusive approach in program design, its core efforts are focused on community members aged between 12 and 25 years, the group which is deemed to be at greatest risk from substance misuse and its effects. Where there is an identified need for a program, CAYLUS uses

Youth Worker Brokerage funds to either support delivery by a local or regional youth service provider, or when necessary, to directly implement a program. Programs vary from fully fledged, residential full-time youth programs (where the CAYLUS Youth Brokerage will tend to make up a small but necessary part of the overall budget), through to short-term programs delivered during times of high-need (e.g., in response to petrol sniffing outbreaks, or during school holidays).

Programs that receive brokerage support tend to provide programmed activities during the evenings, after school hours, on weekends, and during school holidays. Exact operating hours are usually negotiated locally based on community needs and objectives. The best results have been achieved in programs which are offered consistently and reliably, especially at night. Youth program activities also vary between communities, but often include sport, music, disco, movies, arts and crafts, computers, bushtrips and learning culture. Ideally programs move beyond providing activities that are just entertaining young people, into offering programs that are engaging, and provide young people with skills and new opportunities.

This evaluation report focuses on the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage, by examining data collected in the first stage of an ongoing data collection process. The first stage aims to establish the impact of brokerage supported programs and activities on local level community crime (particularly crime involving young people), petrol sniffing, and a range of other aspects of community life.

The first stage of this project was conducted by Dr Christina Marel (lead researcher), Associate Professor Katherine Mills, Professor Maree Teesson, Professor Anthony Shakeshaft and Dr Fiona Shand between May 2014 and February 2016. Stage two of this project will commence in mid-2016.

Key Findings

Youth Programs

This evaluation synthesised information from a range of sources and found that youth programs have strong support within the sample communities, with the majority of respondents indicating that youth programs have a positive impact. Three quarters of participants (74%) suggested that young people become bored when no youth programs are available; 78% of respondents indicated a need for more things for young people to do (and thus a need for programs that provide activities); and 96% of respondents had attended a youth program at some point.

Youth programs are also viewed as having a positive impact on children's schooling outcomes. The vast majority of respondents (more than 97%) felt that youth programs pass on skills to help young people do well at school.

Disco was the most popular activity with more than 80% of respondents indicating that they use discos a lot, followed by football, which attracted more than 65% of participants. Basketball was the third most popular activity, attracting more than 50% of respondents to participate in the activity a lot.

Alcohol and other drugs

There were significant relationships between perceptions of youth programs in the sample communities and perceptions of AOD use across several domains. Significantly, those who perceived problematic AOD use in their community also indicated there was a need for youth programs. This was evident for alcohol, ganga and sniffing.

The vast majority of respondents (93%) indicated that the youth programs supported by the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage help keep young people from sniffing. Further, 95% of respondents felt that youth programs help keep young people from drinking grog.

Crime

The data collected as a part of this evaluation demonstrates strong support for youth diversionary activities as a method of reducing crime, with 98% of respondents indicating that youth programs help keep young people out of trouble (in the remote Central Australian context, the term 'trouble' encompasses a range of behaviours, including vandalism, fighting, drug use and other problematic activities).

There was also a significant relationship between crime and perceived problematic ganga use, which was particularly evident among community members in communities B and D.

Crime data was provided by the Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency Services (NT PFES).

To date, CAYLUS has conducted surveys in community D, which demonstrated high levels of program engagement, but comparably higher rates of crime as recorded by the NT PFES. However, the CAYLUS youth program in community D was delivered in response to sniffing occurring in the community and was a relatively short-term program, delivered with intensity over a period of approximately five months. As such, it is possible that longer-term programs targeting criminal involvement and community cohesion are necessary in order to significantly reduce community crime.

Conversely, communities E and J had higher levels of community engagement as a part of longer-term youth programs between 2013-2015, but lower levels of criminal involvement as reported in PFES crime data.

Resilience

Resilience has been conceptualised as the ability to cope with traumatic events, with research indicating that people with higher levels of resilience have better mental health, higher levels of self-esteem, and are less likely to become involved in risky behaviours such as AOD use (Bonanno 2004; Campbell-Sills, et al., 2006; Buckner, et al., 2003; Cuomo, et al., 2008; Wallace, 1999). Furthermore, resilience has been shown to be associated with positive emotions, which in turn, are protective against depression and substance use following a traumatic event or crisis (Fredrickson, 2003; Bonanno et al., 2007).

The data collection as part of this evaluation also gathered information on levels of resilience in sample communities. Notably, in terms of the objectives of the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage Project, these data indicate that resilience may be an underlying factor in whether respondents actively identify problems and issues they are faced with. This insight may prove useful to CAYLUS in understanding the variety of ways that communities identify and respond to substance misuse issues they are facing, and ways of planning its work around this.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations have arisen from this evaluation. They are presented in chronological order.

Recommendation 1

CAYLUS continues to work with service providers and local youth workers to promote and facilitate the collection of a comparable set of program and attendance data. Where providers currently collect an alternative set of data, CAYLUS should continue to accept data in this format rather than imposing multiple formats on providers. However, over time, CAYLUS should seek out opportunities to move providers towards a common format.

Recommendation 2

As communication systems improve and information technology becomes more readily available, CAYLUS should work with providers in moving towards an online system of data collection, so that data can be made available in real time to all stakeholders.

Recommendation 3

It is vital that CAYLUS continues to monitor issues regarding the prevalence and impact of sniffing on the ground in a variety of ways, and does not solely rely on community members' ability to identify and articulate issues and seek help. The local youth programs supported by CAYLUS are one good way of doing this.

Recommendation 4

Diversions activities, such as those delivered with CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage funding, are seen by local stakeholders as an effective way of reducing trouble and crime, reducing levels of volatile substance use, and reducing levels of drinking among young people. They are also seen as an effective way of equipping young people with skills they need to do well at school. CAYLUS should work to continue operating the CAYLUS Youth Worker Brokerage beyond the life of the current project, and through this, continue to support the availability of diversions activities in sites of strategic value and/or high-risk.