

SYDNEY SOUTH WEST  
AREA HEALTH SERVICE

Youthblock Health  
& Resource Service



# Marginalised Young Men: meeting their needs

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April 2007

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through Rosemount Good Shepherd Youth & Family Services  
and Youthblock Health & Resource Service







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Mindy Sotiri  
April 2007

## Executive Summary

The impetus for a project into the needs of marginalised young men came from workers at Youthblock and Rosemount (both youth services located in the Inner West of Sydney). Workers at these agencies had identified that for some young men, especially those who appeared to be at great risk (of suicide, or involvement in the criminal justice system), engagement with youth services was – when it existed – difficult and frequently erratic. The difficulties involved in engaging, and then maintaining connection with this group of men- combined with the perceived risk this group posed to both themselves and to others- propelled these services to seek funding for a project to further explore these issues. Funding was obtained from the Myer Foundation, a philanthropic organisation with a strong commitment to social justice and civic responsibility<sup>1</sup>. This funding enabled Rosemount to employ a researcher part time (16 hours a week) for a 38 week period to design and carry out a project exploring both the issues for marginalised young men and service providers, as well as the relationship between them. This report, (and the recommendations it contains) is the end result of this research.

Four distinct issues were investigated.

1. Who are marginalised young men<sup>2</sup>?
2. What are the needs of these marginalised young men?
3. How are services meeting the needs of marginalised young men? and
4. What could or should services be doing differently to meet these needs?

A hybrid qualitative methodology for analysis was adopted which utilised a combination of content analysis and grounded theory. Three separate research processes were chosen to explore these questions. These included:

- 1.) A literature review exploring a range of reports, policy documents, theoretical material and research pertaining to marginalised young men
- 2.) Interviews with 40 service providers from 20 different agencies<sup>3</sup>
- 3.) Interviews with 17 young men who had experienced some form of contact with youth services

Although it is tempting to suggest that the research in this report occupies conceptual territory that is entirely distinct from the research that has come before it, this is not the case. And although there are plenty of calls to re-evaluate, re-think re-design – or in some way revolutionise – approaches to young men’s health and well-being, caution is needed before embarking on such pleas for ‘bold new directions’. There are two primary reasons for this. Firstly, there is already a substantial body of research which points with at least some degree of clarity and consistency to what some of the key issues are for marginalised young men. Secondly, it is misleading to suggest there is a ‘magic bullet’-

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.myerfoundation.org.au](http://www.myerfoundation.org.au)

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘young men’ in this project refers to young men between the ages of 12 and 24

<sup>3</sup> Interviews were also conducted with a number of ‘expert’ individuals. The services that participated included; mainstream youth services, educational providers, Aboriginal specific services, refugees, gay and lesbian specific services, multicultural specific services, legal and criminal justice specific services.

some way of working with young men that has not previously been discovered, and that will rectify the range of well-identified problems.

The way forward is both more and less complicated. Although there is certainly merit in exploring innovative programs for young men (groups like ‘Rock and Water’ clearly break new ground when it comes to engagement and connection) it should not be the fact of their novelty that makes such programs desirable. There is a continuing need to explore what there is that currently exists and appears to work, and then move on to rectify the existing situation so that such programs and policies are able to be implemented (and not just for short term pilots). Participants in this research displayed a wealth of experience and insight, and much of the value of this report is to be found in the participant’s identification and analysis of already established issues. What is needed now, and what this report offers as a first step, is the placement of these issues into a framework for action.

Marginalised young men – those at risk of institutionalisation, imprisonment and suicide – are often those who do not access, or are not accessed by, agencies at which their attendance would be voluntary. The needs of this group of young men are substantial. They are generally impoverished, both socially and economically, are frequently involved in problematic drug use, are often disconnected from their families, tend to have difficulties in mainstream education, have difficulties more generally with ‘fitting in’, and struggle to find motivation and hope. There are some groups of young men for whom these problems are exacerbated, particularly, Indigenous young men, young men who are gay or transgender, young men with intellectual disability, young men with mental illness and young men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

And yet in spite of all of this, or perhaps *because* of all of this, many agencies and many young men themselves, remain optimistic about finding ways of engaging the most marginalised, and connecting them to services in ways that are meaningful. Indeed, many services and young men are doing this already. There is much that can be learnt from those services, or from workers within services about how this is happening. There is however much more that can, and should be done, to ensure that those young men who are most in need, have better and more plentiful opportunities.

These young men require services that are tailored to meet their needs; services which are flexible enough to respond quickly, and at times with spontaneity, to pressing issues and concerns. They need workers who care about them ‘as people’ - not just as clients, but who are skilled and professional enough to do more than simply ‘be mates’. They need programs that give voice to their problems, *and* programs that allow them the space to have fun, or that simply allow them space. They need the opportunity to talk in counselling settings, *and* they need opportunities for expression through different means such as music and physical activity. The most vulnerable men need services to seek them out (via outreach), to follow them up (often beyond what would normally occur) and remain vigilant about the risk of them falling through the many gaps that exist in the current welfare framework. Those young men who want help and make the move to ask for it need services that are accessible with regard to geography and opening hours, offer

a range of different services (including importantly casework) and are welcoming and respectful in their approach. Some of these needs are readily met via small alterations to existing service structures. Others clearly require more substantial structural and cultural change.

It is young men who are most in need, most at risk, and most marginalised who force youth services to reassess their standard modes of operation. They are frequently the 'problem clients' - the young men who cause exasperation and frustration amongst workers and agencies because of the combination of the vastness and complexity of their needs and the accompanying range of self destructive behaviours that can make meeting these needs even more difficult. Tensions exist between the needs of services (worker safety, efficient use of worker time and resources, pragmatic prioritisation of all client needs – including examination of the ways in which the service can be most effective) and the needs of the most vulnerable men. Any serious attempts to engage the most seriously marginalised young men involves more than promoting innovative programs and providing genuinely compassionate workers. The tensions that exist need to be identified and named. Cultural questions should be asked. What are the kinds of behaviour that cause problems for this service? Why is this behaviour a problem? How much of this behaviour can or should be tolerated (or even embraced) in the name of a more inclusive service? Where are the gaps in terms of funding for this group, and what needs to happen for these gaps to be filled?

When asking these questions it is useful to employ a strengths-based approach. This should not mean applying a relentlessly optimistic analysis. There is often a temptation in strengths based analyses to obscure or deny the severity of problems in a quest to reframe them in terms of their positives. But marginalised young men face serious, often life-threatening, challenges and there is little point in dressing these up as anything else. Nor is there any point in avoiding the fact that sometimes the responsibility for these problems needs to be located at an individual level. However what strengths-based approaches can do is invoke us to explore the complexity of these problems, and steer us away from narrow or pathological analyses.

Reticence to seek help needs to be viewed in the social context in which it is occurring. Structural explanations for men's 'problems' should always be explored in conjunction with explanations that focus on individual responsibility. Prejudice and discrimination with regard to the expression of various forms of 'masculinity' (including noisy and boisterous behaviour in waiting rooms) should be identified and addressed. This should occur regardless of whether the explanations for such expression are attributed to cultural or biological forces. Resilience needs to be recognised and maintained. But perhaps most importantly, it is hope and hopefulness that needs to be invoked, nurtured and wherever possible, celebrated.

## Recommendations

### Nuts and Bolts of Service Provision

1. Services should wherever possible be located close to public transport routes, and ideally situated within the communities where potential young service users reside or spend time. Where this does not occur, services should consider the use of transport services (picking up clients from their homes and driving them to the service) to overcome the barriers posed by inaccessible and expensive public transport systems and the reticence of many young men to leave the communities in which they are comfortable.
2. Services targeting young men should be open outside of standard business hours, particularly between the hours of 3pm and 10pm.
3. Youth agencies should wherever possible incorporate a number of different programs in the one physical location to improve ease of access to a variety of services.
4. Services should strive to create a relaxed, comfortable, attractive and welcoming environment. This is particularly important for young men who are visiting the service for the first time.
5. Service providers need to be aware of the potential for intimidation and bullying, as well as behaviour that might be considered anti-social occurring inside youth services, particularly in waiting rooms and drop in spaces. Attempting to counter- and prevent this behaviour and provide a safe and comfortable environment for all service users should be a priority.

### Flexibility and Spontaneity

6. Services should ensure they have the capacity to respond immediately- and spontaneously- to young men 'in crisis.' This is often the point at which marginalised young men seek help.
7. Flexibility and spontaneity are effective case-work tools with marginalised young men and should wherever possible be utilised. Urgent matters (such as housing and Centrelink payments) should be followed up with a speed that reflects the seriousness of these problems for the young man involved. This may for instance involve making a spontaneous decision to accompany a young man to a Centrelink office to assist in sorting out a payment problem.

8. Services need to explore the possibility of maintaining a flexible approach to appointment times particularly with regard to relaxing punitive policies related to punctuality.

## Help and Choice

9. In the short term, there is the need to frame approaches to counselling both directly and indirectly. Until there are significant shifts in the way in which 'seeking help' is perceived culturally, young men need to be given options to obtain help which are not framed in terms of 'obtaining help'. It is also important that overt or direct offers of assistance (especially with regard to counselling) remain available to avoid contributing or compounding any existing cultural stigma.

10. The embarrassment and stigma attached to seeing school counsellors needs to be addressed. The possibility of the provision of alternative external, confidential and discreet services should be investigated.

11. Youth Services should wherever possible explore the possibility of combining counselling with a practical casework service.

12. Youth Services should wherever possible offer a range (and at times a combination) of therapeutic options including group-work, one on one counselling, case-work and at least some informal 'counselling' which can take place outside of a clinical setting.

## Engagement

13. In order to prevent the high 'drop off' rate of marginalised young men, close attention should be paid to the type of information obtained in initial referrals including the existence or level of support that is available for the potential client. There is also the need to pay attention to the quality of the first contact with the service (is the service welcoming? Are the workers friendly?) When young men do not turn up for appointments explanations should be sought for their absence.

14. Strategies to combat the daunting nature of visiting a service for the first time should wherever possible be put in place. This might include arranging to transport and accompany young men visiting the service, or arranging to meet initially in an alternative (and more comfortable) environment.

15. Services should attempt to connect and engage with marginalised young men via outreach and street-work programs.

16. Service promotion should be targeted (via a range of outreach projects) towards those young men who do not know that services exist as well as those who have not traditionally made voluntary contact.

17. There is a need to explore ways of targeting ‘at risk’ young men in the first two years of high-school. Special attention should be paid to identifying ‘invisible’ boys- those young men who are ‘under the radar’ but perhaps most at risk of suicide or serious mental health problems.

### **Specific Program Strategies**

18. There is a need for marginalised young men to have spaces to go to which are not necessarily a means to an end. For instance, drop in spaces should not always be seen as an entry point into counselling or health promotion. Young men have a legitimate need to simply ‘hang out’ and this should be acknowledged as important and recognised in the design of drop-in spaces and other programs and services.

19. Youth services would do well to explore the short-term benefits of ‘getting away’ with groups of marginalised young men who have not before been on a holiday or experienced leaving their home environment.

20. Programs targeting marginalised young men should strive to include the following qualities: challenge, excitement, the possibility of learning and practically applying a specific set of skills, directness (in their approach) and optimism (with regard to the ability of young men to change)

21. Where possible, a strengths-based approach to the risk taking behaviour of young men should be adopted. This involves re-framing risk taking behaviour with regard to the development of problem solving skills, and providing opportunities for ‘risk taking behaviour’ in non-dangerous situations

22. Education has the capacity to be a great leveller. Ensuring marginalised young men have access to alternative education when they have failed – or been failed by – mainstream schools should be a key funding priority for young men of school age.

23. Alternative education options should wherever possible be tailored to suit the interests of marginalised young men (e.g. combining literacy courses with car mechanics education)

24. Workers need to pay attention to resilience factors and work wherever possible to assist in accessing and mobilising external sources of support to young men with fragile resilience.

25. There is a need for services to explore ways of incorporating the centrality of friendship – particularly pre-existing friendships – into the provision of services to ‘at risk’ young men and into strategies for engagement.

26. Youth services should explore the possibility of obtaining funding to expand music programs and promote these programs to young men who are most at risk.

27. Sporting and physical activity programs should be considered alongside music programs as a priority in terms of engaging marginalised young men.

28. Suicide, drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness and the fraught relationship with police are widely recognised problems facing marginalised young men. These areas (and the many sources of information pertaining to them) should continue to determine the direction of program design and policy initiatives in this area, and also be used to inform individual client work.

29. Understanding family relationships is often central to understanding both the ‘hassles’ and the sources of strength for many marginalised young men. Special attention should be paid to fathering, (both young men’s experience of their own fathers, and their own roles as young fathers).

## **Service Culture**

30. Services need to investigate the extent to which there is a culture of ‘fear’ around working with young men in their organisation. If such a culture exists then further questions are required with regard to the legitimacy of this fear and the ramifications of this fear in terms of potentially excluding marginalised young men.

31. A youth services working group should be established to develop a range of communication strategies to ensure the most marginalised young men have the opportunity to receive services, and to avoid where possible, falling through the many gaps in the welfare framework. Such a group would clearly need to address the privacy concerns associated with inter-agency information sharing.

32. Services should seek ways of balancing the tensions that exist between the need to cope with large workloads and workplace safety, and the need for a more flexible and spontaneous approach when working with young marginalised men.

33. Services would do well to explore the tensions that exist between the needs of services and some of the challenging behaviours and attitudes that are displayed by marginalised young men. The rationale for withholding or withdrawing services to this group requires particular investigation.

34. Services offering support to marginalised young men need to explore their own policies pertaining to cultural diversity to ensure they are adequately catering to the many different needs within this sub-population.

## Cultural and Philosophical Frameworks

35. The fact that there is a diversity of need amongst young marginalised men should form the *starting* point for program design. The need to generalise about the needs of young men should be acknowledged as a pragmatic feature of program design, not a sign that difference is not being acknowledged.

36. There is a need for further investigation into the pressures young men face to conform to ‘mainstream’ versions of masculinities, whilst culturally inhabiting the margins in other forms of social life.

37. There is no need – or pragmatic reason – to frame the needs of boys and young men as existing in competition to the needs of girls and young women. Although comparative information can be useful as a starting point for analysis, this should not form the centrepiece of any arguments for reform.

38. Strengths-based approaches to working with young men should wherever possible be utilised. Such approaches should recognise the strengths and resilience of young men, and take into account the range of structural factors influencing help seeking behaviour.

39. Dreams, hopes and finding the motivation to achieve these are key issues of connection between marginalised young men and workers. Workers need to explore ways in which they might support the setting of achievable goals and dreams, and then ensure they utilise any small successes as building blocks for motivation.

40. Wherever possible young men should be involved in the design of programs, promotional material and participate in leadership roles within services.

41. The frequently stated need to incorporate social and cultural understandings of masculinity into the way work is conducted with young men needs to be explored. The capacity for such understandings to be pragmatically applied to program design should not be assumed.

## Workers

42. Services working with young men should acknowledge the significance of role models (including the informal role modelling provided by workers). There is value in services being able to provide a range and choice of different role models so that young men have the option of connecting with somebody for whom they feel a personal affinity.

43. Whenever possible young marginalised men should be given the option of working with male workers with whom they have some form of shared cultural history.

44. In addition to possessing a range of professional skills, marginalised young men require, and respond well to, workers who genuinely care about what happens to them.

45. Workers need to be highly skilled, well trained, well informed (especially about referral options), well-connected, and confident in their abilities to work with marginalised young men. This is especially the case when it comes to the quick analysis of issues, picking up on implicit communications and assessing mental health.

46. Workers need to maintain strong professional boundaries with the marginalised young men whom they are assisting.

## Funding and Lobbying (Structural Work)

47. The absence of services for marginalised young men needs to be addressed at a structural level. This is particularly the case for young men already caught up in the cycle of Juvenile Justice, homelessness, and young men requiring a safe place to detox. These areas should form the basis for both future funding applications, and lobbying via advocacy groups (such as the Youth Justice Coalition)

48. The continued over-use of imprisonment for marginalised young men needs to be investigated and lobbying at a state level should occur to promote alternatives to custody. Vigilance is required to challenge funding arrangements that favour punitive rather than preventative measures in crime control.

## Future Research

49. Services should exercise caution to ensure that the current pressure to produce 'evidence based research' does not diminish the quality, substance or meaning of the research questions that are asked.

50. There is a need for well-funded research into the long-term impact of specific programs on the lives of marginalised young men. The difficulty of establishing the parameters of such research should not be considered a rationale for not conducting this work. Youth services should whenever possible examine funding possibilities for this type of project.

51. There is a need for a comprehensive audit of programs (in Australia) that target marginalised young men. Services should wherever possible explore funding possibilities for this kind of future project.

52. Future research would do well to utilise music as a means to facilitate discussion with young marginalised young men.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## ***Background.***

The impetus for a project into marginalised young men came from workers at Youthblock and Rosemount (both youth services located in the Inner West of Sydney). Workers at these agencies had identified that for some young men, especially those who appeared to be at great risk (of suicide, or involvement in the criminal justice system), engagement with youth services was – when it existed – difficult and frequently erratic. The difficulties involved in engaging, and then maintaining connection with this group of men, combined with the perceived risk this group posed to both themselves and to others, propelled these services to seek funding for a project to further explore these issues. Funding was obtained from the Myer Foundation, a philanthropic organisation with a strong commitment to social justice and civic responsibility<sup>4</sup>. This funding enabled Rosemount to employ a researcher part time (16 hours a week) for a 38 week period to design and carry out a project exploring both the issues for marginalised young men and service providers, as well as the relationship between them. This report, (and the recommendations it contains) is the end result of this research.

## ***What is the Research Question?***

A solid body of research and literature has emerged over the last decade outlining a range of health and welfare issues that are specific to young men. The nature of this body of research – its preoccupations, themes, and conclusions – is integrated throughout the current research project.<sup>5</sup>

The current research is an attempt to answer four distinct questions.

1. Who are marginalised young men?
2. What are the needs of these marginalised young men?
3. How are services meeting the needs of marginalised young men? And
4. What could or should services be doing differently to meet these needs?

The emphasis of this report is on the final question. It is this question that drives the key recommendations. The research focuses primarily on the needs and issues for young men and youth services in the inner-west of Sydney. However the findings and recommendations of this report may also be of relevance when exploring the issues for young men (generally) in other geographic locations.

## ***How was the Research Conducted? (Methodology)***

The study included three distinct research processes.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.myerfoundation.org.au](http://www.myerfoundation.org.au)

<sup>5</sup> See **Additional Methodological Notes**

1. A literature review exploring a range of reports, policy documents, theoretical material and research pertaining to marginalised young men
2. Interviews with stakeholders and service providers
3. Interviews with young men

This research utilised a hybrid qualitative methodology<sup>6</sup>, a combination of content analysis and grounded theory<sup>7</sup>. Content analysis is a style of textual analysis, which attempts to examine in critical detail the content of documents. This research reflects the general direction of content analysis in that it involved a critical search for attitudes, values and motives within the text, extending the analysis beyond the language used (in both the literature and interviews) to look for meaning (see Sarantakos, 1993:211). In addition grounded theory in its broadest form was drawn upon; that is the theoretical claims (and recommendations) made by the research are grounded in data. Grounded theory (in particular the ideas of Strauss & Corbinn, 1998) informed the process of data analysis. This is explored in some detail below in the ‘Data Analysis’ section of the report. It is worth noting briefly here that this process involved the sifting, categorisation and interpretation of interviews and literature (the data), thereby allowing theory to emerge<sup>8</sup>.

## **Selection of Participants**

### **Service Providers**

The researcher directly approached (either via telephone or e-mail) a range of organisations located in the inner west and inner city of Sydney that worked with young men, as well as individuals who were ‘experts’ in the area of young men’s health. The potential participants were asked to participate in an informal interview to explore the needs of marginalised young men. 40 workers from 20 different organisations agreed to take part.

### **Young Men**

17 young men were recruited for interviews in this project. These young men were recruited via two approaches.

1. Direct approach from the researcher
2. Self nomination

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<sup>6</sup> Qualitative methodologies (including the methodology used in this project) generally do not make claims to ‘scientific objectivity’. This should not be seen as a sign that the research conducted is in any way less rigorous than research engaging quantitative methods. When attempting to explore, understand, or investigate a complex array of data, it is perhaps more useful to utilise a qualitative approach. This approach is more concerned with the ‘quality’ of the data, and the ‘understandings’ this data might provide us with, than it is with the ‘measurement’ of defined variables.

<sup>7</sup> Some have noted that grounded theory might easily be considered a specific form of content analysis (see Berg, 1989:23)

<sup>8</sup> Some have noted that the distinction between ‘data’ and ‘theory’ is somewhat artificial. It is difficult to isolate, disconnect, and otherwise protect ‘data’ from external influences including already existing theoretical models (see Seale, 1999:88).

Youth friendly posters<sup>9</sup> were placed in key positions in 5 different youth services asking young people to volunteer for participation. These posters included the information that on completion of the interview participants would be given a \$20 gift voucher (to spend either at Coles/Myer or Fish Records). They were asked to call or text the researcher to express their interest in the project. Young men using the internet café at Youthblock Health Service were approached directly by the researcher. Young men participating in the day program at Rosemount were also asked directly if they were interested in participation. Workers at Youthblock and Rosemount also told young people about the research and gave the young people the researchers contact information.

Given the qualitative nature of the research, it was not the intention of this research to have a 'representative' sample of young marginalised men. However it is worth noting the demographic characteristics of the young men who did participate where this is known. Demographic questions were not included in the interviews, and information was only recorded on the basis of additional information put forward by the young men (generally because ethnicity or cultural 'difference' impacted on their ideas and experience pertaining to the needs of marginalised men). 5 young men identified as being from African refugee background, 1 young man identified as Aboriginal, 1 young man identified as Polynesian, 1 young man identified as Vietnamese, and 1 young man identified as Lebanese. 9 young men did not make any reference to ethnicity. 3 of this group of 9 identified as being gay.

## **Interview Technique and Content**

The interviews conducted for this research used a semi-structured and open technique. Although participants were given a list of guiding questions<sup>10</sup>, these questions were intended to guide the discussion, rather than limit it. The researcher attempted to engage in-depth with aspects of the discussion that were considered important by the participants. This style of interview is sometimes referred to as 'a conversation with a purpose' (see Berg, 1989:57), The purpose in the case of this research project was gathering information related to the needs of marginalised young men. The researcher strove to create an 'informal' and conversational atmosphere. Digression from the list of questions was supported and encouraged throughout the interview process. At the start of each interview the researcher allowed space in which the participants were able to ask questions about the research, and engage in free discussion. The interviews took place in three different contexts; in a face-to-face interview, in a group interview, or via telephone.

Interviews with the service providers and young men explored the needs of young men, ways in which services could or should engage with young men, and how services might be improved for this group. The interviews with the young men aimed to find out what young men *think* about the services they know about, and to record their *opinions* about what works and what doesn't. The questions were framed to give the option of speaking

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<sup>9</sup> See **Appendix 1 (Youth Friendly Poster)**

<sup>10</sup> See **Appendices 2 and 3 (Guiding Questions for Workers and Young Men)**

generally (what they think, have noticed, seen, heard about) or to allow participants to speak from their own experience.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Interview Content**

The questions in the research were *not* personal or intrusive, and did not relate to issues that might generally be considered ‘difficult or painful’. However the possibility that some young people might find the interview distressing was still present. Although the design of the interview was geared towards asking for ‘opinion’ rather than personal experience, it was considered possible that reflecting on the issues of the needs of young people (even from a distance) might be upsetting. In order to cope with this possibility a number of strategies were put into the place including; assessment and checking in of the impact of the research (by the researcher, also a social worker with many years of counselling experience); and the option of seeing a counsellor at Youthblock at the conclusion of the interview.

### **Informed Consent**

All young men who made contact with or were approached directly by the researcher were given verbal information about the project and their right not to participate. All young men were informed that their decision as to whether or not to participate would not impact on their relationship with the service provider they were connected to. All young men that chose to participate in the project were given written and verbal information about their right to withdraw from the project at any point, their right to complain about the research process, and their right to discontinue the interview at any point<sup>11</sup>. All service providers who agreed to participate were sent detailed information outlining the background to the project and the parameters of the interview.<sup>12</sup>

### **Anonymity**

The names, and other identifying details of the young men who participated in the research were not attached to the interview notes or transcripts. The researcher did not at any point ask for the young men to divulge their full name. Where the interviews occurred via telephone and it was necessary to send gift vouchers to an address, this address was not recorded with the interview transcript. The record of address was destroyed when confirmation that the young man had received the voucher was obtained by the researcher. The names of the workers interviewed from the various services were also not attached at any point to the transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

This research utilised a grounded theoretical approach to the analysis of data. This involved applying notions of ‘theoretical saturation’ and ‘open coding’ (see Straus &

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<sup>11</sup> See **Appendix 4 (Participant Information Form- Young Men)**

<sup>12</sup> See **Appendix 5 (Participant Information Form- Service Providers)**

Corbin, 1998:136-137). Open coding of the data refers to the ‘naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:62). The initial coding of the data was approached in as open a manner as possible. That is, the words of the interview participants and the content of the literature determined the coding of the categories. The researcher entered the data analysis process as free from preconceptions as to what might be found as possible. Although there are clearly limitations to the ‘new born baby’ approach advocated by Glaser & Strauss (1967) it was adopted in principle with a self-consciousness as to the difficulty of applying it in practice. The objective of this type of approach is to let the ‘data’ determine the direction of the analysis. This form of coding requires an inductive approach. The researcher ‘immersed’ herself in the material in order to identify categories and themes, (rather than testing a range of hypotheses, or searching for pre-existing thematic structures).

‘Theoretical saturation’ refers to the end point of the coding process. The interviews and literature were read, and re-read repeatedly and categories that arose were noted and coded. This continued for each section (interviews with service providers, interviews with young men and literature reviewed) until the analysis had reached a ‘saturation point’. That is, the reading, re-reading and analysis of the texts did not produce any new categories that might be coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998:136).

The coding and data organisation of the interviews and literature was achieved by using a variety of colour codes and symbols that were attached to a constantly changing key that noted the various categories. Text with matching colours and symbols was cut and pasted into documents in which matching categories were grouped together. The initial coding phase of the interviews with service providers resulted in the identification of 47 categories<sup>13</sup>. The initial coding phase of the interviews with young men resulted in 17 categories<sup>14</sup> (the difference in category numbers perhaps reflects the difference in terms of the numbers of people interviewed, rather than differences with regard to the richness of the data). The initial coding of the literature reviewed resulted in a further 43 categories.<sup>15</sup> These categories were then put together. Over a period of weeks and repetition of the analysis process eight themes (or theoretical structures) emerged from the combined categories. These themes form the basis (and the chapters) of this report<sup>16</sup>. There are sub-categories within each of these theoretical structures which constitute different sections within the chapters of this report.

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<sup>13</sup> See **Appendix 6 (Service Providers Categories, Initial Coding)**

<sup>14</sup> See **Appendix 7 (Young Men Categories, Initial Coding)**

<sup>15</sup> See **Appendix 8 (Literature Review Categories, Initial Coding)**

<sup>16</sup> These themes include; 1) Is this a Crisis? 2)Help Politics, 3)Philosophical bases for practice, 4)Turning Up, 5)Program Strategies and Service Development, 6)What Works with Workers?, 7)Small Steps, and 8)Research and Evaluation.

## **Limitations to the Research**

### **Sample Selection**

Perhaps the most obvious limitation with regard to the sample of young men who were selected for participation in this research is that they were *already* connected to youth services (as this is where they were either approached, or saw the posters inviting participation). Future research would do well to explore ways of involving young men who are not in any way connected to youth services in their research.

### **Accuracy of Transcripts**

Time constraints and ethical considerations led to a decision not to audibly record the interviews. Instead, detailed notes were taken throughout the interviews and were transcribed as soon as practicable after the interview had taken place. As much as possible, this transcription used the participants own words. The ‘quotes’ in this report are a product of this method of transcription, and as such are perhaps not as accurate as a transcript that recorded verbatim the entire content of the interview.

### **Candour during Interviews**

There are some young men who have clearly internalised the language and ideology of youth services. This was perhaps a barrier in seeking their ‘opinions’ as to the needs of this group. At times there was a clear desire to communicate with the researcher in terms that it was assumed the researcher was more likely to understand.

Service providers, to varying degrees, understandably felt the need to ‘defend’ or ‘promote’ their own service. This undoubtedly would have impacted on the candour of the responses to questions in the interviews with regard to the kinds of things services should be doing to improve the quality of their connection with young men.

### **Additional Methodological Notes**

This report does not include a formal literature review. Instead, the literature reviewed is synthesised to form part of the analysis along with the interviews with service providers and young men. This methodological decision reflects an attempt to both avoid the repetition often found when including a literature review *and* a discussion, as well as avoiding replicating the not insubstantial body of ‘review’ style literature that already exists.

Recommendations are noted throughout this report (and are also contained in the executive summary). In the report these recommendations appear in boxes within the text with grey shading. The recommendations range from specific suggestions for future programs, to more generalised suggestions regarding the structures and set up of youth services. The recommendations in the executive summary have been clustered together into distinct categories and do not reflect the order in which they appear in the report. Many of these recommendations are also of relevance to young marginalised women.

Direct quotes from participants are used throughout the report. These quotes are used to both illustrate points, as well as to make them. The words of participants and the information obtained during the interviews are granted the same status (with regard to intellectual worth) as the literature reviewed. All quotes appear in bold italics.

The references for the literature reviewed in this report are generally noted in the text, using the standard, 'Author, Date: Page' format. Where documents were obtained from internet pages, the internet site is listed instead (and the date the document obtained is noted in the bibliography). Where documents were downloaded from the internet but included authors and dates the internet site is not listed. There are a few publications without a date listed. (This happened primarily with brochures). This is noted as 'undated' when this occurs.

## **Chapter 2. Is this a Crisis?**

There is a significant body of literature suggesting that the situation facing young men in contemporary post-industrial societies constitutes a crisis. These claims relate to a number of factors, all of which are discussed in some detail in this report. Firstly, it is argued that changes in conceptions of masculinity brought about as a consequence of cultural and structural shifts in industrialised societies have brought about a crisis in masculine identity. Secondly, it has been suggested that the gender specific health concerns of young men – including importantly premature and preventable death are so serious, that this should be considered a male health crisis. Thirdly, the nature and extent of boys ‘failure’ in the classroom, or perhaps more acutely, the failure of the school system to cater to the needs of many boys has been scrutinised. Frequently the conclusions reached in response to such scrutiny have suggested there is a crisis in boys’ education.

Numerous authors have attributed the ‘crisis of masculinity’ to the post-industrial absence of clear, traditional male roles (i.e., breadwinner, protector, worker) (see Dines, Cornish, Weston, 1996:13; Titley, 2003:12-14; Weaver-Hightower, 2003:478) whilst others have argued that it is the extent of the freedoms enjoyed by young men in contemporary societies that is partially to blame (West, 2002:3). It is suggested that such freedom and the related absence of structure can lead to boredom, which in turn leads to anti-social behaviour amongst young men (Bradford, 1999 in West, 2003:3). Others have attributed high levels of male violence and anti-social behaviour to a loss of ritual, and perhaps more esoterically to a loss of ‘male spirit’ (Rudner, in Price, 2004:2). Risk taking behaviour- including behaviour that involves aggression and violence- has been connected to an attempt to replicate initiation ceremonies (Rudner, in Price, 2004:2). Others suggest that a more generic crisis- ‘Boys are suffering either silently or violently, but they are without a doubt suffering’ (see [www.supportingoursons.org/misc/moreinfo.cfm](http://www.supportingoursons.org/misc/moreinfo.cfm), 2004)

It is suggested here that although the question ‘is there a crisis (of or for masculinity)?’ is important, it is more useful in any exploration of young men, to firstly ask ‘what exactly are the problems?’ Whilst it requires only the most cursory analysis of research into men’s health and well-being to conclude that men are indeed harming themselves and others at an unacceptable rate, and there is much else about the health and well-being of young men that is problematic, it narrows the debate considerably to frame this as constituting a crisis of masculinity. This report is in part an attempt to identify and untangle the multitude of factors (which alongside masculinity) invoke such a sense of urgency and crisis. The following section of this report begins this exploration.

### ***Not All Boys (Who needs help?)***

It is useful from the outset to make the distinction between marginalised and non-marginalised young men. This research is concerned with those young men who are

most at risk of suicide, imprisonment or other forms of institutionalisation. Although there are certainly some health concerns that do not respect socio-demographic boundaries (for instance, mental illness), it is now well established that young men from impoverished communities, disconnected families (and are additionally marginalised as a consequence of class, culture, geographic location or discrimination) face risks that are much higher than those faced by the general population (see Mill, 1997:6; Pease, 1999:29-31; NSW Health, 1999:11; Goward, 2004). This report takes the position that it is not gender on its own that causes disadvantage, but the combination of gender with other key forms of disadvantage. It is not masculinity itself, which should provoke any suggestion of crisis, but the intersection of masculinity and various other cultural and social formations.

Some researchers have suggested that the issues that have gained currency as a 'crisis in masculinity' are not new (Goward, 2004). Goward (2004)- the former federal sex discrimination commissioner suggests that what is new are the issues facing young working class men with limited education. Goward (2004) argues that the place for this group of young men is much less clear cut than it has been historically, and that if there is a 'crisis' than it is primarily this group that is bearing the brunt of it (Goward, 2004). This idea was echoed in the interviews with regard to what it is that constitutes marginality. Service providers pointed with consistency to the socio-economic status of young men when attempting to describe the features of marginality.

Others have argued more forcefully that although men and boys experience 'pain' this in itself should not be viewed as the same thing as women's 'oppression' (see Mill, 1997:7). It is argued in the following chapter of this report that there is little benefit in framing the issues for men and women in terms of a competition for oppressive status, but it is worth noting here that although there are certain groups of men who are 'oppressed' it is misleading to suggest it is all men who fall into this category (see Pease, 1999). It has been noted by a number of authors that there is considerable institutional power awarded to men (generally) and considerable relative economic and social disadvantage faced by women (Pease, 1999:31, Goward, 2004)<sup>17</sup>. This fact however, should not detract from the legitimate concerns for particular groups of men. Some authors have noted that it is perhaps more useful to view these concerns as specific to a range of social factors, not simply the assignation of gender (see Mill, 1997, 6; Pease, 1999:29-33; West, 20002:2; Weaver-Hightower, 2003:484).

In Australia it is clear that men in Indigenous communities experience distinct disadvantage. This disadvantage has been the subject of numerous government reports, and policies. Whilst it is not within the scope of this project to over-view this material, it is important to note from the outset that the levels of suicide, ill-health, premature death,

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<sup>17</sup> Goward points out that irrespective of any 'failure' of boys to achieve at school, as men, they are still much more likely to be business leaders, board members, senior managers and parliamentarians (three quarters of federal politicians are men). They are also more likely to earn better money than women (full time women workers earn 84 cents of the male dollar- and much less when part time and casual work is added to the equation) and less likely to live in poverty (by old age women are two and a half times more likely to live in poverty) (Goward, 2004)

imprisonment (and additional involvement in criminal justice institutions) for Indigenous men are so much higher than those of the general population that it is difficult to view this situation as anything other than a form of institutionalised racism. There is no separate section in this report exploring this distinct form of disadvantage, not because it isn't needed, but because it requires its own analysis, which is beyond the scope of this project. In addressing the problems for Indigenous men, the causes of this racism must also be addressed. The history of racist violent colonisation, the enduring legacy of the separation of children from their parents, and the continuing impact of social and economic marginalisation- must be incorporated into any solid analysis. It is noted by the NSW Department of Health that although there have been vast improvements on a number of health indicators for the general population, the health of Aboriginal men has continued to deteriorate and this has been exacerbated by the failure of mainstream health services to effectively engage Aboriginal men (NSW Health, 2001:4). Although the issues facing young Indigenous men are discussed throughout the body of this report, it does not offer any substantial engagement with the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage.

In addition to Indigenous men, and the more generic category of men from lower socio-economic backgrounds, there are other groups of young men who are distinctly disadvantaged. Men in rural areas, men with mental illness, men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, men who are gay or transgender, men from families where there is intergenerational substance abuse, unemployment, and imprisonment, and men who have experienced childhood abuse and neglect all require specific attention (see NSW Health, 1999:11; NSW Health, 1999:22-23; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:5; Dawes, 2001:4; AIC, 2005:6; Woods, 2005:11). The following section of this report explores some of the key issues impacting on these groups of men.

## **Setting the Scene**

### **Suicide (and other premature and preventable death)**

It is now well documented in Australia that suicide is the leading cause of death amongst young men (see Fry et al, 1999 in West, 2002:1; McDonald, McDermott & Di Campli, 2001:1). Although there are statistical anomalies across the research in this area, there is general consensus that men (of all ages) are more likely than women to commit suicide. This ranges from twice as likely (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003, Goward, 2004, McMurray, 2007:293) to four times as likely (for young men between the ages of 15 and 44) (White, Fawcner & Holmes, 2006:454) to six times as likely for young men (NSW Health, 1999). It is also clear that for some groups of young men, the risk of suicide is even greater. The suicide rates for Indigenous men are four times that of the general population (McMurray, 2007:293) whilst 19% of young men in juvenile justice custody in NSW had seriously considered committing suicide (NSW DJJ, 2003:9). The NSW Commission for Children and Young People found in their analysis of child deaths, that 71% of suicides and deaths from risk taking behaviour are young men (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003).

There is considerable research to suggest that homophobia, intolerance and the associated difficulties in coming out (particularly isolation and loneliness) are key factors in suicide amongst young gay men (MacDonald & Cooper, 1998:23-25). Others locate the causes of suicide more generally to the sense of exclusion and dislocation experienced by young men. Woods (2005) draws on Durkheim's (1897) work on suicide, suggesting that suicide amongst young men is related to their place (or lack of) in the community (2005:9) whilst others have pointed to the loss of status and value of men as explanatory factors in Indigenous suicide (McDonald, McDermott & Di Campli, 2001:4-6).

In addition to dying as a consequence of suicide, it is well established that many boys and men's deaths are premature and preventable- especially with regard to accidents, violence and injuries (White, 199:32; NSW Health, 1999:3; Barker, 2000:263; Woods, 2005:3). The NSW Commission for Children and Young People notes that young men are over-represented in all forms of death (2003). Young men are three times more likely to die in motor vehicle accidents (White, 2005:1; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:3) four to five times more likely to die as a consequence of an injury (NSW Health, 1999:14, MacDonald, McDermott & Di-Camppli, 2001:1) and one and half times more likely to die as a result of violence (NSW Health, 1999:14). Young men are also more likely to die as a consequence of a workplace accident (Leeder, 1998:8) and as a result of adolescent experimentation (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003). In Aboriginal communities, the death rates for young people are extraordinarily high. 15% of Aboriginal deaths are people under 25 years of age, whilst 22% of Aboriginal deaths are people aged between 22 and 44 (NSW Health, 2001:12). The comparative rates for the general population are 3% and 5%. Although the proportion of these deaths that are men is not clear from these figures, it is fair to surmise that given what is known about suicide and accident rates amongst young men generally, that this over-representation would be reflected in these figures.

In addition to dying young, men are also dying younger than women. It is well established that men have a shorter life expectancy than women (Goward, 2004; Woods, 2005:1) and die prematurely from a range of preventable health conditions (including heart disease and cancer) (White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:454). Although the young men interviewed did not identify premature death or suicide as a 'hassle', the high levels of suicidality amongst marginalised young men was a key concern for service providers working with this group<sup>18</sup>.

## **Drug and Alcohol Use**

Young men have higher rates of problematic drug or alcohol use (comparable to women, and the general population) (Barker, 2003:263). They are more likely to die as a consequence of drug or alcohol use (White, Fawkner, & Holmes, 2006:454) and there are strong causal links in some communities between excessive alcohol use and violence (Putt, Payne & Milner, 2005:1). There are also strong links between problematic drug and

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<sup>18</sup> For a solid evaluation of programs designed to reduce suicide amongst young men see Oliver & Storey, (2006)

alcohol use and the commission of crime (Putt, Payne & Milner, 2005:1). In their exploration of the drug use careers of juvenile offenders, the Australian Institute of Criminology found that 70% of young people reported being under the influence of drugs or alcohol whilst they were committing an offence (AIC, 2005:3). Additional research into young people incarcerated in Juvenile Justice Centres found that most young people who are locked up had used alcohol and cannabis, half had used amphetamines and a third had used ecstasy (Pritchard & Payne, 2005:1).

Outside of criminal justice settings, the problematic use of alcohol by young men has been linked to a range of risky behaviours including an increased likelihood of participating in unsafe sex (Lindsay, 2001:5). In research exploring the health risks of young workers in their social activities it was found that young male workers were more likely to be engaged in risky alcohol and drug use, with close to 50% of young men in the research identified as drinking harmful amounts of alcohol every time they drank (Lindsay, 2001:3). Others have pointed to the problematic ‘burgeoning subculture’ of binge drinking, and have suggested for young men with mental health issues, this practice has the capacity to greatly exacerbate existing problems (Dadich, 2006:33).

Harmful drinking and drug use was identified in the interviews with service providers and young men as constituting a major problem for marginalised young men. Some service providers noted that most of the young men that utilised their services had serious problems related to their drug use. Other service providers suggested that many young men use cannabis ‘*to chill out, to relax, to fill up time, and often to go to sleep*’ but that it had a de-motivating and depressive side effect. The young men interviewed echoed this theme. ‘*Everyone fucks up because of the drugs...mainly pot, everyone smokes it and thinks its not harmful*’.

The distracting and masking impact of heavy drug use was noted throughout the interviews as having a significant impact on every day life. One young man noted, ‘*A lot of young men have struggles with drugs and alcohol...their dreams get wasted on drugs*’. Service providers pointed to the manner in which drugs were used as a means to ‘*forget problems*’ and ‘*deal with boredom*’ but suggested that the cycle of addiction tended to create comparable problems to those that it masked. It was suggested by some workers that this was particularly the case for Aboriginal young men. One worker noted; ‘*These drug issues are a mask for deep seated problems related to inter-generational trauma, lack of identity, lack of knowing their culture, and struggling to deal with the contrasts between their western society and their culture*’. Young men identified alcohol as particularly risky in this respect. The links between alcohol use and motor vehicle accidents, and violence was well recognised amongst the group of young men interviewed.

## **Health, Mental Health and Disability**

It is generally acknowledged in the research literature that the health status of boys and young men is worse than that of girls (NSW Health, 1999:13). Although there has been considerable (if belated) attention paid in recent times to male specific physical health problems such as prostate cancer (Goward, 2004) and sexual health (Barker, 2000:263-

264; Men's Health Forum,2003:1), it was the issue of mental health that received the most attention in the interviews with service providers in this research. The experience of depression, anxiety, low mood, low energy, low motivation, difficulty sleeping, trouble thinking clearly, attachment problems, narcissism, and generally feeling 'miserable' were identified as key issues of concern with regard to the mental health of young men. Some service providers also noted the loneliness experienced by young men with serious mental health problems. It was suggested that whilst women in this situation still tend to maintain friendships, young men are frequently extremely isolated which can further exacerbate the seriousness of their situation.

In addition, the high levels of ADHD, conduct disorder and suicidal ideation are noted in the research literature as significant problems for young men (see DOCS, 2003:9; Dadich, 2006:33). These concerns were also noted in this research. Service providers also suggested there are large numbers of young men who have an undiagnosed brain injury. Such an injury was considered to be an underlying explanatory factor with regard to some impulsive or otherwise problematic behaviour. Similarly, intellectual disability, particularly disability that was considered borderline, and perhaps not ever officially diagnosed was considered to pose particular risks for young men, specifically rendering them vulnerable to unhealthy or dangerous peer influence.

The social (rather than biological) nature of many of the health issues facing young men was another theme that occurred across the literature review and the interviews with service providers (see NSW Health, 1999:1). Service providers noted that there is a lot of chronic illness that can be prevented by paying attention to behaviours in adolescence (i.e., smoking, drinking, diet), and also noted that adolescence is a time when there is a need for injury prevention (particularly with regard to car safety) and other preventable injuries.

Many discussions of the health of young people incorporate discussions related to the risk taking behaviour of young men. Young men are viewed as more likely (than other people) to engage in a range of risk taking behaviour including gambling (Marshall, Haughton & Harris, 2005:7) unsafe sex<sup>19</sup> (NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, 2003:9), smoking, drinking, not wearing sunscreen, not exercising enough (McMurray, 2007:293) and unsafe injecting (Barker, 2000:263). Service providers also pointed to risk taking behaviour with regard to the manner in which young men take risks with their physical safety using the examples of driving dangerously, and train surfing. It was suggested that it was useful to re-frame risk-taking behaviour in terms of the opportunities it provides to develop skills in trying new things, problem solve, and adapt to difficult situations. However it was suggested that there is a need to try and help young men to take risks in an informed way, and assist them with the problem solving aspect of this behaviour.

Where possible, a strengths-based approach to the risk taking behaviour of young men should be adopted. This involves re-framing risk taking behaviour with regard to the

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<sup>19</sup> 1/3 of young men in Juvenile Justice had never used a condom during sex (NSW DJJ, 2003:9)

development of problem solving skills, and providing opportunities for 'risk taking behaviour' in non-dangerous situations.

## Criminal Justice

Young men are over-represented in a range of criminal justice settings. They are over-represented in adult prisons and Juvenile Justice Centres (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:3, Goward, 20004; AAP, 2006:22 Feb<sup>20</sup>), they are more likely to be apprehended by police<sup>21</sup> (Smart, Vassallo, Sanson & Dussuyer, 2004:1), they are over-represented as perpetrators of violence (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:3; Alles, 2002:2; Goward, 2004) and over-represented as victims (Goward, 2004). This situation is exacerbated for Indigenous young men who are also over-represented in prisons, more likely to be arrested, and more likely to be arrested at an earlier age (Putt, Payne & Milner, 2005:2-4). It is also well established in the research literature, that those young men who end up incarcerated as a consequence of breaking the law have generally experienced significant disadvantage and have themselves frequently been the victims of crime<sup>22</sup> (NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, 2003:9).

The fraught relationship and mistrust that exists between young men and the police was a recurrent theme in the literature (see Cameron, 2000:5; D'Souza, 2001:2; Perrone & White, 2000:5) as well as in the interviews with young men. The young men interviewed noted that it was primarily young men who were '*harassed by cops*', and suggested that sometimes if a young man was already experiencing a number of problems, getting hassled by the police could feel like the final straw. The possibility of losing your temper in response to police harassment was seen as a very real problem- '*if you go off at them then you might accidentally get charged*'. Young men suggested that '*if you fit the criteria that the cops have of the type of person that does crime, then you get hassled all the time*'. One young man noted that there was sense to this '*..it is people like us that normally have done the crime*', but still expressed frustration at the intrusion of searches and indignity of questioning.

There are some categories of offence which are overwhelmingly committed by young men. For instance homicides that are anti-homosexual in motivation are almost always committed by young men under the age of 25 and tend to occur in groups (Tomsen, 2002:1). Male sexual offending is also thought to frequently have its origins in adolescence or earlier. Some have suggested that intervention is particularly important in this area because unlike a lot of other kinds of offending in adolescence, sexual offending does not tend to be something that is 'grown out of' (Tidmarsh, 1997:70). 'Joyriding'

<sup>20</sup> AAP reported that young men constitute 83% of people in Juvenile Justice (AAP, 2006, 22 Feb)

<sup>21</sup> Although young men are over-represented in this category, it is important to note that young people generally are over-represented in terms of police apprehension. Half of all people apprehended by police for offending behaviour in Victoria (between 2002-2003) were between the ages of 10 and 24 (Smart, Vassallo, Sanson & Dussuyer, 2004:1)

<sup>22</sup> 42% of young people in custody had experienced physical abuse, 11% experienced sexual abuse, 38% experienced emotional neglect and 34% experienced physical neglect (NSW Department of Juvenile Justice, 2003:9)

has also been the subject of specific investigation. Dawes (2001:3) notes that most people involved in stealing cars and joy-riding are from marginalised socio-economic groups with limited skills, employment or prospects for employment, and at least one of the motivating factors for young people in stealing cars is their exclusion from public space (Dawes, 2001:3-5)

Some researchers have explored the manner in which young people are portrayed in the media with relation to crime, and focused specifically on the myth of ‘youth gangs’ in Australia. Although there is certainly ‘youth crime’, depictions of youth gangs in the media and the political sphere are frequently overstated and perhaps serve a political purpose (fear mongering) rather than responding to a real problem (Perrone & White, 2000:1). It is noted by Perrone and White (2000) that much youth crime in Australia is opportunistic (rather than organised) (Perrone & White, 2000:3). However the policy implications of fear around youth ‘gangs’ are evident in legislation regarding public space. Such regulations, which allow ‘move on’ powers to police and security guards, obviously impact on young people more than others who have alternative places of congregation. The impact of feeling unwelcome in public space has more profound consequences with regard to the relationship many young people may develop with the broader community (Perrone & White, 2000:4). The targeting of certain ethnic groups (particularly young Lebanese men) is a particular problem with regard to this (Perrone & White, 2000:1)

Another theme amongst the young men interviewed was the relationship between the use of drugs and alcohol and doing crime. Other causal factors identified were low self-esteem, a lack of support, anger, homelessness, sleeping rough, not having responsible role models, mental health problems, and doing crime for attention. One young man suggested that if young men are not getting any attention for any good things ***‘they will try and get attention from doing bad things. It can become a vicious cycle- because people become institutionalised- and the get used to going in and out of prison’***. The structural and cyclical nature of disadvantage, crime and imprisonment was well recognised by the young men who participated in the interview. One noted that ***‘people who end up going in prison have often spent time in care’***, whilst another pointed out that ***‘If the government doesn’t spend more money on young people when they need it, they will end up spending more because the young people will end up in prison’***

Suicide, drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness and the fraught relationship with police are widely recognised problems facing marginalised young men. These areas (and the many sources of information pertaining to them) should continue to determine the direction of program design and policy initiatives in this area, and also be used to inform individual client work.

## **Education and Schooling**

There is a substantial- and growing- body of literature exploring the issues for boys in educational settings. Education, generally, seems to have had much more success in

conducting research and evaluating programs than the welfare sector. The findings and preoccupations of this body of educational research are relevant to the current study in two key ways. Firstly many of the strategies adopted in the classroom to engage young men are easily applied to health and welfare settings. Secondly the background to this literature- the thinking with regard to masculinity, men's movements, the comparative disadvantage between boys and girls – is easily transplanted to community settings. Questions regarding the validity of a 'gendered' approach to service provision, the place and impact of feminism on boys, the extent to which services should tailor their programs to 'natural' or 'biological' understandings of male behaviour, and the extent to which such behaviour itself requires examination- are all well covered in this body of research. The issue of the 'under-achievement' of boys is also a key theme (see Weaver-Hightower, 2003:483), as are the connected range of explanatory factors.

It is now well established that there are significant differences between girls and boys with regard to literacy- with boys lagging considerably behind girls (Martin, 2003:27; Goward, 2004). Martin (2003) notes that there are gendered differences in education with regard to motivation and achievement, and that generally speaking at school, girls outperform boys (Martin, 2003:27).<sup>23</sup> Boys are also over-represented with regard to school expulsions and suspensions<sup>24</sup> (West, 2002:1; Martin, 2003:27; Goward, 2004).

For a thoughtful and coherent over-view of the debates regarding boys' education, it is useful to explore the work of Weaver-Hightower, 2003. In brief, Weaver-Hightower (2003) notes the manner in which the focus in research in education has shifted onto the educational of boys. He calls this the 'boy turn' (2003:471) and identifies a number of causes of this shift including the popular media, popular psychology, and ensuing the 'moral panic' about the education system failing boys (2003:473). Although he notes the 'loudness' of this cause, he also points to the often problematic reasoning behind the claims of its proponents, including importantly the anti-feminist stance adopted by some of its most vocal supporters. These claims posit that feminism has suppressed boys 'nature' and that in this way school is failing boys. Critics have noted that simply looking at gaps in test scores simplifies the complexity of the issue regarding differences between boys and girls. Some argue that it is inadequate to base findings of disadvantage on test scores alone and note that regardless of test scores, or lack of achievement whilst at school, boys still go on to achieve outside of the school environment (Weaver-Hightower, 2003:486). Weaver-Hightower notes that it is not all boys that are disadvantaged at school, and suggests that rather than simply asking 'what about the boys', it is important that the question 'which boys?' is confronted (2003:84)

There is a need to move beyond the standard understandings of the gender differences evidenced in school achievement, and in doing so move beyond abstractions in the debate and into concrete suggestions regarding curriculum and practice (Weaver-Hightower, 2003:488-489). Weaver-Hightower suggests there is a need for coherent evaluations of

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<sup>23</sup> See Goward (2004) for a comprehensive break-down of the comparison between boys and girls in Australian schools

<sup>24</sup> Goward (2004) notes that boys make up 80% of all school suspensions (2004)

programs for boys, as well as the need to spend more time focusing on teachers and their needs with regard to training (Weaver-Hightower, 2003:488-489).

The need to look at how well teachers are doing their job formed a key theme in the interviews with the young men in this project. It was noted that many young men find their relationships with their teachers problematic- sometimes to the point where they attribute missing school to a difficult situation with a teacher. ***‘If you have a bad reputation with some teachers you can never make it up. You jig just so you don’t get in trouble’***. The young men also noted that if you had a ‘bad reputation’ it was very difficult to ever shake this. Even if significant efforts had been made to change, teachers were unlikely to recognise these efforts. ***‘Some teachers- even if you have changed, they don’t notice it- they don’t let you change- and still treat you badly’***. Some young men suggested that their teachers were ‘lazy’ and simply didn’t try very hard to do a good job of teaching, whilst others had a strong sense that teachers simply did not like them, and as a consequence ***‘they can be slack to you- treat you badly’***. ‘Good’ teachers were considered to be those who were ***‘understanding and friendly’*** and more likely to treat the young men as adults. The significance of the relationship between students and teachers was also noted by service providers- One noted that ***‘A lot of young boys don’t like school- they feel like the teachers pick on them’*** whilst another stated that ***‘Disliking one teacher can put them off going to school.’***

The benefits and disadvantages of co-educational class-room settings have received significant attention in the research literature. Bell (2002) explored the impact of co-education on boys who shifted from a single sex to a co-ed school setting (2002:24). Using the ‘Coopersmith’ inventory for all boys in year 7 and 8, he found there was a significant drop in self esteem in the year following the introduction of co-education (Bell, 2002:24). He attributed this drop to the way that the culture of the classroom moved from being academic to social, and the increased possibilities of being embarrassed and ‘paid out’ (Bell, 2002:25)

In Slade’s (2001) research into the educational outcomes for boys in South Australia, he interviewed a number of boys at school and noted that despite the diversity of the boys interviewed for the project there was a uniformity with regard to the identification of the issues and proposed solutions these boys felt were important. Slade suggests that boys are troubled by the difference between the successes in their lives outside of school (in sporting, social, work realms) and their lack of success inside of school. He argues that there needs to be room for the accomplishments of boys within the school curriculum (Slade, 2001:7-8)

A common theme in the interviews with service providers was that marginalised young people ***‘are those young people who haven’t yet cracked the code of school’***. It was noted that an ***‘obvious goal is to get them through to year 10’*** so that they could get some ***‘runs on the board’*** and ***‘make a go of things’***. The absence of education was viewed as being a significant barrier to engagement with the community outside of the school environment. Workers noted that young men were frequently lacking basic skills in numeracy and literacy and problem solving, and were often very disengaged from

education. Some suggested that marginalised young men have problems transitioning from primary to high school, whilst others stressed the need for alternative education options and employment assistance for those young men for whom school was not a viable option.

Education has the capacity to be a great leveller. Ensuring marginalised young men have access to alternative education when they have failed- or been failed by- mainstream schools should be a key funding priority for young men of school age.

### **Family- the source of the biggest hassles/the source of the most strength**

Difficulties at home and problems with families were described consistently throughout the interviews with young men in this research as constituting the biggest ‘hassle’ in their lives. Family fighting, family violence, family break up, family drug use, and difficult family histories were all noted as being responsible for a large amount of stress in the lives of young men. In addition, dealing with the death of family members was also considered to constitute a large stress. *‘Family loss is also something a lot of young men have to cope with. This is very hard when people don’t die naturally’*.

Parents who lack understanding, and were inflexible with regard to their permission to participate in a range of activities were also considered very stressful. *‘Families are sometimes not understanding of their struggles.’ ‘Families don’t understand what it is they want to do’, ‘Some young men might not take part because they are not allowed- their parents won’t let them’*. However it was also suggested with some respect, that families were less likely to be fooled by any deceptive behaviour on the part of young men *‘Families know all the bullshit’*. Service providers also noted the importance of family with regard to working with young men, and suggested that for some groups, their parents- and more specifically, their mothers would be the first port of call if they had any serious problems. The involvement of close family (and particularly mothers) was recognised by workers as being a key part of their role in working with young men. *‘Part of the job entails spending a lot of time on the phone with girlfriends and mothers who are dealing with the anti-social behaviour of young men who are dependent on drugs- they are often attempting to get the guys to behave in a more responsible manner’*. The significance of family as a source of support was also recognised by the Wentworthville Needs Survey which suggested that young men were much more likely to talk to their parents (than a youth worker) about the issues about which they were bothered (D’Souza, 2001:8)

The ‘broken’ nature of family life for many young men was noted by service providers as being a key factor in the marginalisation of young men. Intergenerational unemployment, and drug use, lack of attachment, exposure to domestic violence and a more generic absence of support were all viewed as common experiences of the young men utilising youth services. Some workers also noted that the experience of child abuse is a central issue for many of the men that sought assistance and suggested the absence of services in this area – especially for those men who were seriously traumatised as a consequence of abuse- constitutes a serious problem.

The role of fathers in the lives of young men, and the role of fatherhood for young men was also a key theme in the discussions of the family situation of young marginalised young men. *‘Perhaps part of problem is the absence of ‘dads’ or the presence of those who are not helpfully involved’*. It was suggested by workers that there was a need to develop the fathering skills of the marginalised young men that had children in order to address the issue of un-involved or under-involved fathers. Additional research into the needs of young men who are fathers and are accessing services has suggested that there are frequently difficulties in obtaining information about this group because of the reticence of services to intrude in a personal sense. This means that young men tend not to be asked about their parental status (McCann, Smart & Goulbourne, 2006:43). To compound this situation, young men who are fathers often experience discrimination and prejudice and are reluctant to disclose their status as fathers. They experience discrimination particularly with regard to custody issues (McCann, Smart & Goulbourne, 2003:44). This is particularly the case for young men recently released from prison (McCann, Smart & Goulbourne, 2003:44).

Understanding family relationships is often central to understanding both the ‘hassles’ and the sources of strength for many marginalised young men. Special attention should be paid to fathering, (both young men’s experience of their own fathers, and their own roles as young fathers).

### **Cultural and Social Disadvantage (and exclusion).**

The manner in which young marginalised men are culturally disadvantaged was a key theme in the interviews with service providers. Some pointed to the way in which many young men have a hard time ‘fitting in’. This can be as a consequence of the way they look, the way they act, or the way in which they have situated themselves outside of the mainstream. Quite often it is a combination of all three. *‘Young people falling outside of the mainstream tend not to have the same opportunities or the same access to opportunities as others. They are facing adversity because of not fitting into stereotypes’* and *‘Young people who don’t fit the picture have a difficult time- especially those who challenge authority’*. There is a sense that young men are both ‘not accepted’ by mainstream societies, but are also not necessarily eager to join. For these young men, their cultural identity exists squarely outside of the mainstream, and some workers noted that there is a sense that there *‘is nothing holding’* these boys. *‘This group have often developed an alternative culture based around ‘anti-heroism’- this involves being anti-establishment, anti-successful etc. This is particularly connected to the rapper Tupac- who is identified as being anti-establishment, and appreciated for the notion that he ‘told it like it is’. He was also black and marginalised’*.

Some service providers point to the cultural pressures to be *‘achieving, winning and successful’* at a very young age, and suggest that this notion places a great deal of pressure on marginalised young men. *‘There are high levels of anxiety and pressure that are part of our cultural make up and strongly impact on young men. Individualism, competition, and the lack of time-out all contribute to this and is perhaps connected to suicidality’*.

It was suggested that young marginalised men tend to find support with others who are in similar situations, and that if they are unable to connect with such groups, ***‘they can become incredibly depressed’***. The ability of this group to ask for help, to access services or to more generally participate is compromised both by the fact of their marginality, as well as by their behaviour which is a clear consequence. ***‘People tend not to ask the opinions of people if they are loud, rude or aggro’***. Some workers suggested that teachers and workers are frequently too quick to judge when young people speak. ***‘Answering back to teachers is not necessarily a bad thing- Important to listen to what it is that young people are actually saying- not just assume they are wrong because of the context in which they are saying it’***

## **Homophobia**

Young gay men are clearly marginalised as a consequence of their sexual identity, and their cultural identity. This was a key theme in the interviews with both service providers and young men. It was suggested that for young gay identifying men growing up in rural areas, homophobia and the stigma attached to being gay or transgender is particularly difficult. Young men noted that dealing with sexuality was a big hassle, particularly for those boys still at school. ***‘Young men can feel very isolated- especially with regard to sexuality. There is a lot of homophobia at school- and lots of boys get paid out’***. It was suggested by the young men that there was a need to challenge homophobic attitudes in a variety of settings, including youth services. ***‘From my experience, hearing other people talk in a disparaging way about being gay when you are there to just use the computers can be really awful’***. Some young men suggested that there was a need for services to be particularly discreet with regard to the way they dealt with young men who were attempting to come out, and others suggested there was a need for young gay men to be educated by youth services about things like vilification.

## **Racism**

In the interviews with service providers it was suggested that racism was a serious problem for many marginalised young men. It was noted for instance, that at school some kids ***‘get picked on for being Aboriginal’*** and that ***‘young men from Pacific Islander Background receive constant police harassment because of the way they look’***. Some workers noted that for some refugee communities- particularly for those young men from Africa, that the experience of racism is something that is very new, and very destabilising. One worker noted that ***‘Young people start to doubt themselves’*** and another suggested that racism ***‘severely impacts on self-esteem’***. It was noted in the interviews that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face additional barriers as a consequence of racism, and that this can affect a range of different situations such as finding employment, working, school and socialising.

## **Emotional Disadvantage**

In the interviews with service providers a number of themes arose with regard to the specific forms of emotional disadvantage experienced by particular sub-groups of young

men<sup>25</sup>. In one discussion about which boys were at risk of suicide, or serious mental health problems, it was suggested that those boys that were ‘invisible’ required the most serious attention. Although there is also a need to pay attention to the needs of those boys who were regularly in trouble, it is the ‘invisible kids’ that are most ‘at risk’. ***‘Kids in trouble tend to have low emotional maturity. Invisible kids tend to have low emotional maturity plus a lack of willingness to ask or fight for what they want. They...try to avoid attention. These kids are characterised by immaturity, lack of hope, despair and a desire to stay invisible.’*** Such kids are characterised by an absence of any obvious hobby, absent fathers, inadequate home support, and tend not to have ***‘been in a group for long enough to know that it matters’***. This notion is also supported in the research literature. Maakrun notes that it is both the very quiet and the very noisy boys in the classroom that require attention and may need support and suggests that it is the very quiet boys who are most at risk of suicide (Maakrun, 2003:2).

There is a need to explore ways of targeting ‘at risk’ young men in the first two years of high-school. Special attention should be paid to identifying ‘invisible’ boys- those young men who are ‘under the radar’ but perhaps most at risk of suicide or serious mental health problems.

Other characteristics of particularly vulnerable young men were noted by service providers to include; an inability to relate to peers, difficulty resolving conflict, difficulty regulating behaviour, a disconnection from their physicality when conflict arises, an inability to cope with many problems, and difficulty utilising self control for long enough to keep quiet so that they might be taught a skill. Some workers noted that these boys ***‘don’t develop group skills or listening skills and they never get to practice these’*** and suggest that the upshot of this in an educational setting is that many of these boys ***‘decide that it is better to be bad then dumb’***.

Low self confidence and insecurity were noted by service providers to be both a contributing factor to difficult behaviour in classroom settings, as well as a consequence of feeling inadequate in this context. It was suggested by some workers that young men frequently have very unrealistic ideas about what their skills are. One worker noted that they either have overly inflated or overly deflated self esteem.

The role of resilience, and the absence of resilience in some young men were also identified by service providers as an important factor when working with marginalised young men. The absence of resilience was viewed as being a consequence of very difficult life experiences, but was seen to have a further marginalising impact. Young men with a fragile sense of resilience were viewed as being unable to ***‘bounce back’*** from sanctions or difficult life events. ***‘Some don’t have strategies to help them get up’***. It was suggested that there was a need to look at those young men in terms of their (in)ability to mobilise resources in their lives, and look at where they might be attached to adult- and other- sources of support.

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<sup>25</sup> The ideas of Rollo Brown (as expressed in interview) form the basis for much of this section

Workers need to pay attention to resilience factors and work wherever possible to assist in accessing and mobilising external sources of support to young men with fragile resilience.

Another theme relating to emotional disadvantage was that of immaturity. It was suggested by a number of service providers, that part of what was successful when working with marginalised young men was simply waiting for them to mature a little. One worker noted that their service *'takes the approach of keeping them alive until they get a bit older'* whilst another suggested that it is frequently *'age which ends up indicating success.'* This pragmatic approach is perhaps an indicator of the difficulty some services have in connecting, and making a difference with some young men. This issue is explored further in this report in the section exploring barriers to success.

### **The Centrality of Friendship**

Friendship and social relations are central to the lives of young men. Young men noted that when experiencing difficulties the first people that young men were likely to confide in would be friends. *'Young men would talk to friends first- you need to talk to someone who is understanding and who might try and help'*. Some young men noted that there were perhaps limits on such discussions. One young man stated *'It works okay talking to friends but there is a limit on what friends can do to help'* whilst another pointed out that *'when young men don't talk to youth health services- they talk to themselves or to each-other- but it can be useful to talk to someone who is different'*. The young men also stressed the importance of friends in providing information about the existence of external help and youth services. Wanting to hang with friends was also identified as a key reason for missing school- *'Sometimes you don't go to school because you want to hang with friends. And then when you miss school you get behind on projects and get stressed out about getting behind and it all builds up. Then you might fight with your parents and end up missing school again'*. In addition the presence of friends at a youth service was seen as a motivating factor to continue attending, and the absence of friends a de-motivating factor. *'My initial thoughts of the service was that it sounded really stupid. I didn't want to be away from friends and stuff'*. Some researchers have also noted that the majority of boys think the best thing about school is their friends (Slade, 2001:2; Martin, 2003:29). Some young men also saw attendance at youth services as being a good way to meet new friends. The centrality of friendship to the lives of young men requires further consideration with regard to how to best utilise this in the design of programs. Although peer educator schemes and other programs which involve young people in health promotion could formulate part of a strategy, there is also a need to look at the involvement and importance of pre-existing friendships in attempts to engage young men.

There is a need for services to explore ways of incorporating the centrality of friendship- particularly pre-existing friendships- into the provision of services to 'at risk' young men and into strategies of engagement.

## Chapter 3. Help Politics

### Asking for Help

Men- including young men- access health and welfare services less than women, even though there are a range of issues about which they require assistance (NSW Health, 1999:25; Macdonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown & Sliwka, 2000:2; Kids Help Line, 2001:1; Looney & Shexnayder, 2003:44; Woods, 2005:4; Dadich, 2006:33-34; McMurray, 2007:293). There is also considerable research to support the idea that young men tend to delay accessing services, and frequently only attend when things have reached an urgent or crisis state (NSW Health, 1999:25; Kids Help Line, 2001<sup>26</sup>; Men's Health Forum, 2003:1; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12; White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:454). In conjunction with these factors, this service contact does not tend to be ongoing (Kids Help Line, 2001:1)

Supporting young men who do not actively seek support is a key challenge for health and welfare services (Titley, 2003:37). Strategies for engaging young men at risk, and then sustaining this engagement also requires attention (Looney & Shexnayder, 2003:iv). There is a significant body of research that points to the way in which some traditional conceptions of masculinity have significant health costs for men (Barker, 2000:263; White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:454). Such literature tends to stress the way in which the 'social education' of young men leads to a reticence to ask for help or share feelings (Dines, Cornish & Weston, 1996:13; West, 2002:2; Woods, Kids Help Line, 2004:2; 2005:8; White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:454). Others have suggested that young men fear that such services would not be able to meet their needs, are embarrassed about accessing them, and don't trust that confidentiality would be maintained (NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12; Dadich, 2006:34)

In the interviews with service providers these themes were re-iterated. It was argued that whilst it was clear that a '**lot of young men need counselling**' they don't tend to go because of embarrassment and a sense that '**exposing emotions is a very dangerous thing.**' It was suggested that young men '**don't want people to know they are having a hard time**' and also noted that '**young boys have bravado to maintain.**' Service providers identified the relationship that such rationales have with traditional conceptions of masculinity. One worker noted '**..it's a cultural thing. Men are supposed to be strong and not complain about needing help**', whilst another stated that '**cultural notions of masculinity involve keeping emotions in check**'. This is particularly the case when it comes to seeing school counsellors. It was noted in both the interviews with service providers and with young men, that most young men are vehemently opposed to

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<sup>26</sup> In this 2001 research the Kids Help Line identified themes related to young men's help-seeking behaviour. These included; problematic relationships (although this tends to relate to flare ups in relationships rather than ongoing problems) difficulty with drug use and worries about a pregnant partner or friend (Kids Help Line, 2001:1)

seeing a school counsellor, partly because school counsellors tended to have a bad reputation, partly because of how public seeing a counsellor at school could be, and also partly because of a desire to avoid being seen as a victim. One young man noted '*At some schools there are good school counsellors- but sometimes if it gets around that you have seen the school counsellor than everyone thinks you are a loony*'.

The embarrassment and stigma attached to seeing school counsellors needs to be addressed. The possibility of the provision of alternative external, confidential and discreet services for school aged boys should be investigated.

In NSW, the Kids Help Line conducted a survey to attempt to find out why young men and boys appeared more reluctant to contact service providers and seek help (2004:1). They found that a significant proportion (47%) of the 422 boys that were surveyed 'never or very rarely talked about their feelings or concerns', although 43% of them wanted to. (Kids Help Line, 2004:1). In research conducted by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People into young people at risk of suicide, they found that over 40% of young people who had committed suicide had no contact with any service providers prior to their death (2003:xi). They also found that those services that did have contact with young people prior to their suicide tended to underestimate the suicidality or risk of the young people that had attended (2003:xi).

There is an emerging literature which suggests that rather than attributing men's reticence to seek help to inadequacies on the part of men, that it is necessary to look at the inadequacies of existing health services in meeting men's needs<sup>27</sup> (MacDonald et al, 2000:2; Woods, 2005:8-9; White, Fawcner & Holmes, 2006:455). It is argued that it is more useful to adopt a socio-structural approach to change, than to place the onus to change men's health seeking behaviour on men themselves (Woods, 2005:8-9). A prevalent stereotype in the health system is that men 'lack' a number of qualities (and it is the absence of these qualities which results in some of the poor health outcomes) (see McDonald, McDermott & Di Campli, 2001:5). Some research has found that a surprising number of men are willing to talk with others about their health concerns as long as the environment is supportive (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:8). Others have been suggested that the question is no longer *whether* men want to engage in services, but rather what sort of services (King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:1).

The interviews with service providers revealed a combination of 'masculinity' based explanations of help seeking behaviour amongst young men and pleas for a greater onus on socio-structural service accessibility issues. One worker noted '*Men don't access services because the services are just not there for them- they are not geared towards working with men with complex needs- and aside from institutional settings (where it is not necessarily a voluntary working relationship) services are not 'accepting' of the men who they think should be accessing them*'. Another worker argued '*It is a myth about men that they don't need to express themselves emotionally...Lots of young men*

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<sup>27</sup> This issue is discussed in some detail in the section of this report exploring strengths based approaches to working with young men

*are trying to access help but it is just not there...Relationship counselling for instance isn't free'*

There were considerably different approaches in the interviews with regard to the extent to which service providers should frame counselling as something other than counselling in order to make the services more attractive to men. Some workers argued that the notion of counselling was **'threatening to masculinity'** and suggested it was best to engage with young men in other ways, and allow any counselling to occur in incidental settings. Other workers suggested this approach was a mistake. **'Setting services up as something else is buying into exactly the same cultural notions of masculinity as they are often purporting to challenge...Men often don't have problems going to counselling- but it is services that are often inflexible with regard to the needs of men. Pretending that the service is not offering help, is reinforcing the idea that it is problematic to seek help'**.

In the short term, there is the need to frame approaches to counselling both directly and indirectly. Until there are significant shifts in the way in which 'seeking help' is perceived culturally, young men need to be given options to obtain help which are not framed in terms of 'obtaining help'. It is also important that overt or direct offers of assistance (especially with regard to counselling) remain available to avoid contributing or compounding any existing cultural stigma.

The difficulty of 'talking' about problems was identified by young men, but the importance of talking about problems was just as common a theme- often within the same interview; One young man noted **'The hardest thing or worst thing about going (to a youth service) is talking to workers about what your problems are and then waiting to hear what they think about it. The best thing ... is getting help with the problems that you have been having.'** The young men tended to focus on the qualities or personality of the person that they would be inclined to speak with about problems- rather than their professional status. **'They would be more likely to talk to the person in the service they get on really well with- not necessarily the counsellor- just the person who they feel comfortable with.'** There were few distinctions made between the benefits of talking to friends, and talking to health or welfare workers. It was primarily important that the person they chose to speak to **'had compassion...and wants to try to help'**. Some young men noted that it was likely that they would speak with parents and friends before getting in contact with a youth service. Others suggested that there was some benefit in seeking professional help, primarily because workers were able to connect the experience of the young man with the experiences of others that they may have helped. **'Being able to talk about how you feel with people who understand the position you are in is very positive. You know that other people have gone through it before and they have dealt with it before. You get a sense that if other people have got through stuff then you can as well.'**

The young men also noted that the pressure to conform to a particular model of masculinity is a barrier in seeking help. A theme throughout these interviews was the gendered difficulty of asking for help. **'Men don't seek help like women do', 'There is a**

*sense that they should act like a man and take care of it themselves’, ‘Guys are different from girls- they don’t want no-one to know about their problems’ and ‘Men are more likely to keep things to themselves’*

The difficulty of talking to a counsellor- and asking for help was framed primarily in terms of how hard it could be to talk about painful things that have happened and the sense that nobody could possibly understand. The relationship between the young man and the service provider could exacerbate these difficulties. The success (or otherwise) of this relationship is sometimes related to the people who work as counsellors. A number of young people noted that counsellors are generally ‘old’ and therefore don’t understand the kinds of hassles that young people face. *‘It would be good to have someone closer in age (as a counsellor) that they could relate to a bit easier’*. Others suggested that counsellors were too intrusive, and asked too many questions, and were too serious.

As well as suggesting that it was easier to seek help from someone who was a similar age, other young men suggested it was also important that service providers and counsellors were representative of the communities who were seeking help. One young man noted, *‘Some young men- particularly young Polynesian men are more likely to talk to their own kind- talk to elders in the community- especially if they have been through the same sort of stuff. They might have done drugs or used alcohol or in the past got into fights.’* It was suggested in the interviews with young men, that this was also the case for young Aboriginal men, and young African men. Other young men suggested that young men found it inspiring to connect with people who were successful and well known in the fields of music and sports- particularly if they too shared some form of cultural history with the young men seeking help<sup>28</sup>.

Whenever possible young marginalised men should be given the *option* of working with male workers with whom they have some form of shared cultural history.

## **Sex Roles and the Construction of Masculinity**

The difficulties young marginalised men experience ‘asking for help’ is frequently framed in the literature and interviews as being connected to designated sex-roles, and the cultural and social construction of masculinity (NSW Health, 1999:8; Laws & Drummond, 2002:77). Much of the writing in this area makes the distinction between biologically and culturally defined masculinity, and tends to warn against gender essentialism (the idea that all men share interests and characteristics as a consequence of their masculinity) (White, 1997:33; Weaver-Hightower, 2003:484). It is frequently argued that masculinity is not a static or single category, and that it is a mistake to view masculinity and femininity as diametrically opposed categories (Weaver-Hightower, 2003:479-484; Dalley, 2006). More specifically, in writing about men’s health, distinctions are made between ‘sex role theory’ and bio-medical explanations of men’s health (Pease, 1999:29). It has been suggested that sex role theory which initially sought

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<sup>28</sup> A more detailed analysis of what is useful with regard to ‘worker qualities’ follows in the chapter ‘What Works with Workers’

to challenge purely bio-medical explanations of men's health primarily by formulating sex roles as social constructs, which could with the right education and personal capacity be overturned (breaking free of the stereotypes)- has ended up with its own set of limitations. A number of authors have suggested that perceptions of men's health utilising only sex role theory tend to be overly concerned with 'life-style, health risk behaviour and lack of health care utilisation' (Pease, 1999:29) rather than the more complex array of factors which impact on men's health seeking behaviour.

It has been argued by others that even if masculinity is entirely a 'construct', this does not diminish the strength of its application (Titley, 2003:11). The characteristics of the constructed male identity are frequently noted to include strength, decisiveness, bravery, an expectation (and occasional celebration) of violence, independence, autonomy, a drive to compete, heterosexuality, being active in the public sphere and limited displays of emotion (White, 1997:34; Titley, 2003:3-16). Such characteristics and expectations clearly contribute to a sense of discomfort in simply experiencing hardship and problems, as well as seeking help for these. The notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' is frequently used to describe this dominant or prescribed form of masculinity, but also to make the distinction between this and the diversity of masculinities that are subordinate to it (White, 1997:34)

It has been argued that although male sex roles are oppressive towards women, they are also (and perhaps) equally oppressive to men (Mills, 1997:4) but resisting culturally prescribed features of masculinity is clearly a challenge. Some authors have suggested that although it is primarily men's responsibility to engage with changing inequitable gender relations, it is also in men's best interest to do so (Flood, 2005:2). Young men who live on the margins frequently position themselves as existing outside of the 'mainstream' and in many ways this is true. They are often excluded from public space, hassled by the police, kicked out of school and home and disconnected from their communities. However in other ways cultural pressures – and mainstream versions of masculinity permeate some of the most explicitly marginal subcultures. The pressures (and perhaps desires) to conform to these stereotypes need to be examined alongside the relationship many young marginalised men have with purportedly 'alternative' subculture.

There is a need for further investigation into the pressures young men face to conform to 'mainstream' versions of masculinities, whilst culturally inhabiting the margins in other forms of social life.

## **Boys will be Boys?**

As noted briefly above, there are problems in the application of the 'masculinities' approach to understanding gender differences in health and welfare settings. Given (that within this approach) gender identity is fluid and culturally determined, then men's ability to ask for help, (and resist other imposed stereotypes) tends to be viewed as an individual responsibility. Not seeking help or conforming to stereotypes is likewise often

framed in terms of failure<sup>29</sup>. However situated within the relative complexity of the arguments surrounding the fluidity of conceptions of masculinity, there are alternative essentialist positions, suggesting that there are innate (and often fixed) differences between men and women and boys and girls<sup>30</sup>.

The idea that ‘boys will be boys’ is for instance used to explain the problems some boys face in the class-room, and tends to be argued in conjunction with the idea that it is an overly ‘feminised’ environment that is the problem, rather than boisterous behaviour when it comes to ‘under-achievement’ (West, 2002:2; [www.supportingoursons.org/mis/moreinfo.cfm](http://www.supportingoursons.org/mis/moreinfo.cfm), 2004). Within this literature it is suggested that there is a need for a distinctive approach to working with young men that recognises their ‘distinctive biological and social needs’ (Menslink brochure, undated: 6). This approach was also evident in the interviews with service providers. ***‘You need things that allow boys to be boys- and to be competitive with each-other’*** and ***‘There need to be ways for boys to express their masculinity in a way that is not socially destructive.’*** One worker suggested that difficulties with counselling were ***‘related to the fact that young men tend not to understand emotions- rather they ‘feel’ stuff and then act on it’***.

Although it is clearly not within the scope of this paper to resolve the nature, or origin of ‘masculinity’, it is useful to explore these different approaches in terms of potential policy and program implications. In much social science literature, and most cultural studies research, the very term ‘essentialist’ is viewed as a pejorative. However, many workers in this area (and indeed, many parents of young children) although wary of any form of determinism, do suggest that there are differences between boys and girls that are not entirely cultural. The difficulty of untangling cultural and biological influence makes the task of designing programs based on what suits ‘boys’ decidedly more complex. There are a multitude of exceptions to every rule and clearly generalisations about ‘needs’ are problematic. But perhaps so too, is the current nervousness about *not* generalising. The fact that there is a diversity of need should be the *starting* point for any program design, not the assumed end point. And the requirement to generalise should be acknowledged as a key, pragmatic feature of program design, not a sign that difference is not acknowledged.

The fact that there is a diversity of need amongst young marginalised men should form the *starting* point for program design. The need to generalise about the needs of young

<sup>29</sup> A more detailed response to this position is examined in the section ‘Strengths Based Approaches’

<sup>30</sup> There is a large body of literature in this area, and as such it is well beyond the scope of this project to explore it. However there are frequently themes within some of the literature that suggests that distance from traditional masculine roles has been very damaging for men in post-industrial society. Some have suggested that all men have a warrior ‘side’ but that this side is suppressed by the social pressures and that there is a need to ‘reclaim the sacred masculine’ ([www.mkpau.org/what\\_is.php](http://www.mkpau.org/what_is.php), 2004). Others have noted that there is an ‘innate’ drive in teenage boys to prove themselves via some form of heroic ordeal, and that in some cultures this drive is well understood and catered for through initiation rituals. Such rituals generally involved a break from parents and then a stint in the wilderness (Rudner (2002) in Geoff Price, 2004:3)

men should be acknowledged as a pragmatic feature of program design, not a sign that difference is not being acknowledged.

### **Is this a Competition?<sup>31</sup>**

It is typical to preface any discussion of men's and boys health and well being with a litany of facts highlighting the statistical differences between men and women with regard to suicide, homelessness, incarceration, educational and health outcomes and violence. And indeed, this report adopts a very similar approach. Whilst such lists are important, and such statistics illuminating, the comparative health and well-being of men and women and boys in girls, is in some senses only a peripheral issues with regard to designing concrete programs and policies.

It is reasonably clear that if there were competition for privileged position between men and women, and the parameters of the competition were defined with regard to status, power and position within the community, men would come out on top. However there is little benefit in terms of the practical application of programs and the design of good services, in viewing the issues for boys as in competition for the issues for girls (or indeed vice-versa). The success of men (as a group socially) does not diminish the immensely important issues for marginalised young men. Although funding arrangements are often (correctly) targeted to specific groups so as to make the best use of limited resources, it is suggested here that there is no need to replicate the fierce competition for limited government resources in our arguments about the needs of young men and women.

There are numerous reports pointing to the discrepancies between health services and health outcomes for men and women. It is argued there are discrepancies between the health generally of men and women (Leeder, 1998:8); discrepancies between services offered to young women and their babies compared to young men and their babies (McCoy, 2006:2), discrepancies in the way that women and men are 'invited' to take part in the health system (White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:454) and discrepancies in the way in which male and female perpetrators of violence are represented (Woods, 2005:6). It has been pointed out that many health services are structured and geared towards assisting women rather than men (White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:455). As noted previously, in educational settings it is frequently argued that, compared to boys, girls 'get a better deal at school' (Slade, 2002:1; West, 2005:7) and it has also been suggested that because of feminism, the issue of masculinity is only taught in terms of negatives (see West, 2002:4).

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<sup>31</sup> There is debate regarding the extent to which the spectre of men's health (or lack of) can be measured by comparison to the health of women. It is important to note that the concern of this research was not to compare the situation of young men and women. Young men were not asked about the way they felt they were treated in comparison to the young women in their classrooms or families. It seemed more important to allow young men to express their opinions without prompting some form of competition. It is perhaps of note that there did not seem to be the expression of any sort of 'unfairness' with regard to gender in this research when it came to describing 'hassles'

There have been a number of researchers who have identified this preoccupation with competition and attempted to challenge some of its core assumptions. Whilst MacDonald et al (2000) point to the extent to which men's health has been neglected within health care systems, they also argue that the need to focus on men's health is not in response or in comparison to any attention that might have been paid to women's health. They suggest that when using a population health approach, men, as a sub-group of the population require help (Macdonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown & Sliwka, 2000:1).

The comparative (or competitive approach) has resulted in a number of misconceptions. It has for instance been noted that the relative success of the women's movement in bringing attention to the inadequacies of the health system for women has resulted in an incorrect and persistent assumption that if the health system has not been working for women, then it must have been working for men (Macdonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown & Sliwka, 2000:2). Others have noted that there is an unfounded fear amongst feminists<sup>32</sup> that focusing on boys (in health, welfare and education) will occur at the detriment of gains made by girls (Weaver-Hightower, 2003:843; Woods, 2005:7). Numerous authors suggest there is a need for a partnership approach (National Men's and Boys Convention, 2003:1; Martin, 2003:31; Weaver-Hightower, 2003:4899-490; Goward, 2004) and it is suggested in the current study that there is no reason why future initiatives should not be beneficial for both men and women.

There is no need – or pragmatic reason- to frame the needs of boys and young men as existing in competition to the needs of girls and young women. Although comparative information can be useful as a starting point for analysis, this should not form the centrepiece of any arguments for reform.

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<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps important to note that the influence of feminism in discussions of men's health and well-being is pervasive. Feminism is considered by some to have been both the spring-board for rethinking problematic constructions of masculinity (Mills, 1997:1; Weaver-Hightower, 2003:476), as well as constituting at least partially the 'problem' for men in a variety of settings (See Biddulph, 1995 in Mills, 1997:4). Feminism is at times in the research literature held accountable both for some of the problematic shifts in the well-being of men, as well as the difficulties faced by disadvantaged men in attempting to change their situation.

## **Chapter 4. Defining a Philosophical Base for Practice**

### ***Strengths Based Approaches***

There is a substantial body of recent research which points to the importance of shifting to a 'non-deficit' or strengths based approach to men's health and welfare (McDonald, McDermott & Di Campli, 2001:1; MacDonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown & Sliwka 2001:1; McDonald & Crawford, 2002:81; Titley, 2003:9; Menslink, undated:5; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:1; Flood, 2005:9). There is movement away from pathologising - which has characterised the way in which men's health has been approached in the past - (see MacDonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown & Sliwka 2001:1; Hayes, 2003:141; Flood, 2005:9; McMurray, 2007:293) and towards identifying men's strengths as a starting point for health and welfare practice. This approach challenges the idea that the reticence to use health services or otherwise seek help is evidence of some form of 'lack' (MacDonald et al, 2000:2) and also argues the need to move beyond the stereotypes of men as violent abusers (Woods, 2005:6; McDonald, McDermott & DiCampli, 2006:7). MacDonald et al (2000) term this a 'salutogenic approach' (2000:2). In addition to starting from a position of men's strength, this approach involves exploring the structural (rather than individual) explanations for men's health and well-being (White, 1997:36; D'Souza, 2001:5; Rudner in Price, 2002:3; McDonald, McDermott & Di Campli, 2006:3)

There are calls in the research literature for the application of such a strengths based approach in programs with young men. Such suggestions include: programs that promote a culture of success in the classroom (Martin, 2003:28); focusing on resilience factors with young marginalised men (D'Souza, 2001:7); avoiding viewing young men as 'problems' and taking the time to learn from their 'energy, idealism, flexibility and creativity' (Dines, Cornish & Weston, 1996:14); recognising the strengths of young refugee people and allowing them to be the source of information about their culture (Couch, 2005:48); focusing on young men who do not behave in sexist or violent ways and learning from them about the development of gender equitable attitudes (Barker, 2002:266); remaining 'male positive' and optimistic about the potential for change (Flood, 2005:3); and instilling self esteem and a sense of belonging in young men much earlier in their lives (Maakrun, 2001:1).

Strengths based approaches to working with young men should wherever possible be utilised. Such approaches should recognise the strengths and resilience of young men, and take into account the range of structural factors influencing help seeking behaviour.

### ***Gender Specific Holistic Practice***

In conjunction with the theme in the literature that modes of working with men shift to a more salutogenic (or strengths based) approach, there is a concurrent theme suggesting that in part, the difficulties young men experience in their relationships with service providers is a product of the absence of preventative, holistic, gender specific policy and planning (Woods, 2005:1-5). This is at least partially explained by reference to deficits

in our understandings of gender and masculinity (Men's Health Forum, 2003:1). Within this literature there are calls to 're-think' service provision for men (White, Fawkner, & Holmes, 2006:454) and more specifically, to target policies directly at young men and boys (White, Fawkner & Holmes, 2006:455).

There are differing views with regard to the extent to which men's health is taken seriously at both a governmental and cultural level. Some researchers suggest it has now been 'mainstreamed' (see Hayes<sup>33</sup>, 2003:141) whilst others argue that men's health has only been paid lip-service with little concrete action (in terms of policy, research and action) in most areas (McDonald & Crawford, 2002:77; Woods, 2005:1-2). McDonald & Crawford (2002) point out that NSW is the only state to have a concrete policy position on men's health (2002:77). NSW Health (1999) suggests that whilst there has been a growing awareness of the issues facing men amongst local health workers, there is a need for a more coordinated response (NSW Health, 1999:5)

The NSW Health department has recognised (at least in theory) the importance of gender as a determinant of health in its 1999 policy document (*Moving Forward in Men's Health*<sup>34</sup>). This document provides a framework for health workers and services and aims to provide strategies for increasing accessibility and support for men (NSW Health, 1999:3). NSW health has adopted the broad definition of health outlined by the World Health Organisation, which takes into account not just health conditions specific to men or areas where men are particularly at risk, but also those social factors which influence men's health seeking behaviour and the outcomes of this behaviour (NSW Health, 1999:7). The importance of conceiving health as something other than simply the 'absence of disease' is a strong theme in health promotion literature (White, 1997:31; NSW Health, 1999:3). So too is the notion that the health needs of men require framing in the context of the communities in which the needs arise. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged communities (NSW Health, 1999:28; McDonald & Crawford, 2002:80; Oliver & Storey, 2006:40).

Although it is made clear in the research literature (and indeed in the interviews with service providers) that it is necessary to incorporate social and cultural understandings of masculinity into the ways in which services work with young men, the practicalities of how to apply this understanding are not always as transparent. There is little dispute there is a 'need' to look at what the needs of young men are, and situate these within a holistic framework, but it is quite another thing to use this principle as a starting point for program design. In the latter section of this report, there is a focus on the practicalities of service use and programs for young men. The extent to which these projects incorporate structural understandings of masculinity requires further examination. But perhaps so too

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<sup>33</sup> For a comprehensive (recent) history of men's health and men's health promotion in Australia see Hayes (2003). His research traces some of the shifts in men's health since 1995 noting significant reports and funding arrangements. For an exploration of shifts in men's health specific to NSW, see McDonald & Crawford, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> This document is not specific to young men, but does include young men as a sub-population of special need

does the assumption that such understandings are easily translatable to a policy and program context.

The frequently stated need to incorporate social and cultural understandings of masculinity into the way work is conducted with young men needs to be explored. The capacity for such understandings to be pragmatically applied to program design should not be assumed.

### **Why Engage?**

It has been suggested that youth work with young men and boys ‘should be seen as nothing less than a pressing task for the present and an investment in the future’ (Titley, 2003:9). The rationale(s) for attempting to engage young marginalised men was a key theme in the interviews with service providers, many of whom viewed the role of their service as a potential (and sometimes crucial circuit breaker) in a cycle of extreme disadvantage. Sometimes the reasons offered were philosophical in nature, related to an ideal vision of community. One worker noted that engagement was important because *‘...of the way in which a society might be judged with regard to the way in which it treats those people who have fallen to the bottom of the ladder’*. Another suggested that the role of the youth worker is *‘to break down the community of despair and create a community of hope.’* It was also suggested that the dangerous risk taking behaviour of some young marginalised men impacted on a range of people and that workers had a responsibility to the broader community as well as the young men who were taking risks. *‘Young men are at risk emotionally, physically and in terms of sexuality. They also put others at risk’*. This desire to protect others from the risks imposed by young marginalised men, also extended to future generations. One worker noted, *‘There is a need to break the cycle of abuse and neglect- particularly with regard to the inter-generational aspect of this’*

A clear theme in the interviews was that if young men who were disadvantaged were not engaged at some point, then it was likely that this would result in homelessness, problematic drug and alcohol use, imprisonment and self harm including suicide. *‘If they didn’t access services they are at higher risk of suicide, alienation, depression, prison, and have very few options’*. It was suggested that if young men did not connect or engage with voluntary services, it was likely they would end up in contact with institutions that were either at the crisis end of the welfare spectrum, or involuntary. *‘If youth health services don’t connect with those young people, then sometimes the services that the young people do connect with are juvenile justice and youth refuges’*. There was a pragmatic element to this approach also. *‘Keeping young men out of prison saves money. So does keeping young men out of emergency departments’*.

In addition to avoiding imprisonment and homelessness, it was suggested by service providers that engagement with young men was important in a more generic sense – to assist them to cope with the day-to-day challenges that might otherwise be overwhelming. *‘They need to acquire the resources necessary to live the lives in the way they would like to’*. One worker noted that young men who did not access services were often *‘very resilient’* but suggested that *‘they could be better off or empowered if*

*they were to engage with services. Young men are often able to cope with extreme situations and issues- but contact with services provides role models and people that can direct, support and assist'*

It was also suggested by some workers that although engagement with young men could be difficult, the impact that it could have is incredibly significant. ***'Even if the young person has had one significant person in their lives this can make a huge difference'***. It was also noted by some workers that the period of adolescence is a particularly critical time with regard to developing responsibility for health and well-being. The developmental significance of this time was also viewed as providing an important impetus for engagement with young marginalised men.

There are clearly plenty of reasons to engage with young marginalised men. However the way in which this should occur- and even the possibility of whether or not this *can* occur, are clearly more complex questions. The remainder of this report is an examination of ideas about 'what works' and what doesn't when dealing with young marginalised men. This includes strategies for engaging young men, strategies for programs, as well as strategies for maintaining connection. This broad ranging discussion is divided into a number of themes and categories reflecting both the diverse possibilities - and the plethora of problems - identified in the interviews and literature.

## Chapter 5. Turning Up

The very act of ‘turning up’ to a youth service constituted an important theme in the literature, and the interviews with service providers and young men. Although some of the more complex structural issues with regard to accessibility are discussed further in this section, it is worth commencing this discussion of ‘what works’ by noting some of the very practical issues raised in this research<sup>35</sup>.

Some authors have suggested that men have very low frustration tolerance with regard to accessing services and will give up attempting access if there is nowhere to park or if the service is otherwise difficult to get to (King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:2-3). This theme was echoed in the interviews with young men who noted that sometimes the decision whether to attend a service was influenced by both the difficulty getting there by public transport and the amount of money it might cost. One young man noted that *‘Money can be a problem- physically getting there by transport can also be a problem’* whilst another stated, *‘The distance from home can be a problem for some young men and they will stuff their attendance up’*. Service providers concurred with this notion, pointing to the increased likelihood of attendance if the service was near to the young man’s community or place of residence. *‘Kids are also very tribal- they won’t travel. There is often a fear of the unknown.’*

Services should wherever possible be located close to public transport routes, and ideally situated within the communities where potential young service users reside or spend time. Where this does not occur, services should consider the use of transport services (picking up clients from their homes and driving them to the service) to overcome the barriers posed by inaccessible and expensive public transport systems and the reticence of many young men to leave the communities in which they are comfortable.

Aside from geographic accessibility, opening hours are a key issue with regard to ‘turning up.’ The need for services to operate outside of school, and outside of business hours was noted in the literature and the interviews (see Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:3; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:2-3). One worker stated that *‘the hours between 3 and 10pm are really important’* and another pointed out that restricted opening hours *‘can really put people off’*. The NSW Commission for Children and Young People in their report into contact with services for children and young people with no-one to turn to suggested that to counter some of the difficulties in getting there, that services for marginalised young people should be integrated wherever possible into the everyday activities of young people (2003:101).

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<sup>35</sup> For detailed strategies pertaining to increasing accessibility for young people (both young men and women, it is useful to explore the NSW CAA fact sheet (NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, p13)

Services targeting young men should be open outside of standard business hours, particularly between the hours of 3pm and 10pm.

Service providers pointed out that large numbers of young men *never* turn up for the appointment that they have made, and many more who do turn up for the initial referral, don't ever return to the service for additional follow up appointments. '***There are many many people who make an initial booking and don't end up attending***'. One worker estimated that perhaps '***50% of people that make an appointment don't ever turn up for that first appointment***' whilst another suggested that the high rates of non-return for young men made it very important to look closely at what it is that happens in the first referral. There is a need to know from the first referral '***what the strength of the support network is or has been for the young person- and then judge from this the level of risk the young person might be- and then go and find them***'. It was also noted by workers that one bad experience at a youth service could put people off for good, thus re-emphasising the importance of the quality of the first contact with a youth service.

In order to prevent the high 'drop off' rate of marginalised young men, close attention should be paid to the type of information obtained in initial referrals- including the existence or level of support that is available for the potential client. There is also the need to pay attention to the quality of the first contact with the service (is the service welcoming? Are the workers friendly?) When young men do not turn up for appointments explanations should be sought for their absence.

It was also suggested in the interviews with service providers that young men who were at risk tended to access services at the point of crisis (rather than before). One worker stated that '***this could be a legal matter, their health, the end of a relationship or pressure from a girlfriend or loved one. Things like assault charges, dui charges, getting kicked out from wherever they were living- realising that they've had lapses in memory as a consequence of really heavy drug use- and not being able to remember their bad behaviour***'. This pattern of help-seeking behaviour provides two options for youth service providers. One might be to set up services so that they are able to respond immediately to the crisis the young man is experiencing, and the other would be to set up services to intervene (perhaps through health promotion and outreach) before crisis point was reached.

Services should ensure they have the capacity to respond immediately- and perhaps spontaneously- to young men 'in crisis.' This is often the point at which marginalised young men seek help.

### **Service Inaccessibility**

There are structural features of many services that make them inaccessible to marginalised young men. This was a key theme in the interviews with service providers. Some structural features relate to practical issues with regard to accessing services (some of which are noted above). Others relate to a more fundamental 'lack' in services for young men. It was suggested for some young men there was very little to access '***aside from probation and parole***'. One worker noted that there was a real gap in service

provision for men in the 18-24 year old age group and suggested *'this group is particularly vulnerable as a consequence'*

Some workers noted that the majority of youth services did not tend to target those most in need. One worker stated that a lot of services *'tend to be very middle class- especially with regard to the gay and lesbian communities'*. The length of waiting lists, the absence of expertise, cultural insensitivity and intolerance (including homophobia) were all noted as problems in NSW youth services. It was suggested that service accessibility, like much else in the lives of marginalised young men was *'not a level playing field'* and that there is a *'need to locate responsibility for marginalisation within 'the system'*.

The absence of services for marginalised young men needs to be addressed at a structural level. This is particularly the case for young men already caught up in the cycle of Juvenile Justice, homelessness, and young men requiring a safe place to detox. These areas should form the basis for both future funding applications, and lobbying via advocacy groups (such as the Youth Justice Coalition).<sup>36</sup>

### **Meeting the Needs of the Service- Not the Client**

*'Sometimes when the interests of the organisation are greater than the needs of the client, or when the system and processes are more important than the person – this can breed failure'*.

Youth services are sometimes not designed to meet the needs of their clients- particularly those clients who are young marginalised men. This subcategory of the 'service inaccessibility' theme was strong in the interviews with service providers. The 'non-compliance' of young male clients, as well as some of the behaviours commonly displayed by this group (for instance raising voices) are not always readily accommodated by the agencies and services that are supposed to help them. *'Services tend to like clients who are 'compliant' when what actually needs to happen is for services to be more flexible'*. It was suggested that sometimes the rules governing agencies were inflexible, and strict policies regarding issues like punctuality and anger tended to make the service less attractive to young men. One worker stated, *'Many of the men do not fit service criteria. They have dual or multiple diagnoses and are often excluded from services on the basis of their 'anger'. Sometimes the fact of being an 'angry' man is enough to be excluded. Health policy dictates that health services do not work with angry men . This can refer even to those men who have simply had one argument with a girlfriend- this for some services is enough for them to be ineligible'*. Another pointed out that *'Some young people find it very difficult to fit into service guidelines'*

It was suggested that there were also differences in priority between youth services and the young people they are funded to assist. One worker noted *'There are differences between what youth services see as being the major needs of young people and what young people see as being their needs. It is easy to do something that is bureaucratically acceptable- but not accessible for young people'*. Some workers

<sup>36</sup> For more information see <http://www.mlc.asn.au/YJC.html>

suggested that increasing the focus on the needs of the client could sometimes be partially resolved by examining the design of the service. One worker pointed out that this could mean changing basic features like *'ensuring drop in areas are not too close to where people need quiet environments in which to work.'*

There is clearly some difficulty involved in balancing the needs (and behaviours) of some marginalised young men, and the requirements of agencies which are working with a range of client groups. 'Relaxing' about the display of boisterous, loud, or even angry behaviour is perhaps not possible when other clients are sharing the service space. And there is certainly no argument to allow abusive behaviour. However it seems that there is certainly a need for youth services to closely examine the extent to which policies governing behaviour and attendance contribute to the exclusion of young marginalised men.

### **Flexibility and Choice**

There is a need for services working with young men to be flexible, and offer choice with regard to the services provided. Numerous reports have stressed the need for flexibility and spontaneity (see NSW Children's Commission, 2002:93-102; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12; Martin, 2003:29). This also emerged as a key theme in the interviews with service providers. The theme of flexibility and choice was evident in both the literature review and the interviews with services providers and young men.

Flexibility is needed with regard to the focus of the work and the rules of the organisation (especially with regard to punctuality and meeting times). It was noted that it is very important for workers to be able to prioritise what is important when working with young people and change work schedules accordingly. For instance one worker noted that *'sometimes spending a day in court with one kid is more important than running a scheduled music workshop for 20'*. Others noted that the focus of counselling might need to change, and that it was also helpful to be able to be spontaneous with regard to case-work. It was suggested that *'young men are more likely to go to places which are readily available when they need them. A lack of spontaneity can put people off'*

Flexibility and spontaneity are effective case-work tools with marginalised young men and should wherever possible be utilised. Urgent matters (such as housing and centrelink payments) should be followed up with a speed that reflects the seriousness of these problems for the young man involved. This may for instance involve making a spontaneous decision to accompany a young man to a Centrelink office to assist in sorting out a payment problem.

Young men often do not turn up to appointments on time. Some workers suggested that it was important not to punish young men for this and pointed out that adopting a flexible approach would enable those with very chaotic lives to access services. One worker pointed out that *'young men don't use organisers or diaries- so there does need to be real flexibility with regard to meeting times'*. Another worker stated that *'problems arise when there is a lack of flexibility- especially with regard to punctuality'* and in

line with this theme another worker posited that ***‘the way in which the worker adheres to rules can make a big difference. For instance some clinicians are very strict about punctuality whilst others are more flexible’***

Services need to explore the possibility of maintaining a flexible approach to appointment times particularly with regard to relaxing punitive policies related to punctuality.

The ability to give young people choices with regard to aspects of the service provision was viewed by service providers as a useful way of allowing the young person a sense of control, and also seen as a form of flexibility. One worker stated, ***‘We offer a choice of caseworker, so after a week or so of staying there the young people choose the person they want to help them. Everything’s about choice.’*** Another worker pointed to the importance of being ***‘client centred. You’re always letting young people know that they are in control of the process.’*** Giving young people choices also extends to the programs that they are involved in. For instance in a music program it was noted that it was the role of the worker to enable the young men ***‘make decisions about the direction of the song.’***

There is clearly tension between the above suggestions, and the reality of working in some youth services. Services working with young people are often over-stretched in terms of resources, and require clear strategies in place to manage workloads and worker safety. Pragmatic decisions need to be made about priorities with regard to client work, and client need- and it is in this context that the ability for services to offer flexibility, spontaneity and choice is diminished. There is a need however for services that are funded to work with this client group, to examine ways in which these tensions can be balanced.

Services should seek ways of balancing the tensions that exist between the need to cope with large workloads and workplace safety, and the need for a more flexible and spontaneous approach when working with young marginalised men.

## **One Stop Shop**

A range of services for young men should ideally be grouped together in one geographic location, thus increasing accessibility for those young men who rarely attend services, or who do not like to travel. The NSW for Children and Young People notes in its research that it is frustrating and difficult for young people to have to go and visit a range of different services- especially if they are vulnerable young people who require assistance from a number of different government agencies (2002:97). Having services operating closely together (some workers suggest having a range of agencies housed together) or at least having clearly collaborative relationships is important in terms of making sure young people are able and willing to access the services they require (2002:97).

The need for a ‘one stop shop’ was reiterated strongly by the young men. One young man noted that ***‘it is important that young men are not constantly referred to other places- it is useful to be able to access all services in one geographic location’***, whilst another pointed out that the best youth services they had attended had ***‘everything in one***

*place...All the help you need is there'. The service workers interviewed agreed. One worker noted that 'Young people don't like being told to go to lots of different places' whilst another stated that the youth health service model was ideal 'where there are multiple access points- space to hang out and programs, and then options for counsellors.'*

Youth agencies should wherever possible incorporate a number of different programs in the one physical location to improve ease of access to a variety of services.

## **Environment**

The physical environment of the service is a key feature in attracting young men and assisting them to feel comfortable when they arrive. Some authors have noted that the environment is particularly important with regard to influencing the level of safety and trust a man is likely to feel towards an organisation with their first point of contact (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:3; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12). To achieve a sense of comfort for young men it is important to make reception areas welcoming (Menslink brochure, undated:7), have youth workers or other workers approach young men who arrive in a welcoming and friendly manner, (Tittley, 2003:44; NSW Children's commission, 2000:92) and avoid formal classroom type settings (Oliver & Storey, 2006:40).

Services should strive to create a relaxed, comfortable, attractive and welcoming environment. This is particularly important for young men who are visiting the service for the first time.

## **'Never Heard Of It...'**

The young people interviewed for this research were very clear about the importance of promoting services to men in a way that was both effective (at reaching them) and relevant (with regard to the style and content of the advertised information). *'The way it is advertised is very important'*. A key theme in the interviews with young men was that one of the main reasons that people did not access youth services was simply that they had never heard of it. One young man noted that *'Some young men just wouldn't know about it- they wouldn't know what it was all about'* and another stated *'A lot of people just don't know that services exist.'*

Some believed that this could be remedied via brochure and poster campaigns, whilst others felt that youth health services needed to adopt a presence in schools and participate in other forms of outreach to let those young people most at need know about what was on offer. *'It would be good if youth services...could get out there a little bit more'*. There were suggestions of utilising e-mail and SMS to best connect with this group. It was also noted that a degree of 'luck' was required in finding out about the services on offer, and that this could be a matter of finding a worker who 'happened' to be aware of a range of opportunities. One young man suggested that *'If somehow there was a database of all the stuff available that would be great. Like- Father Chris Riley- has a \$5000 grant available for people moving out of home and starting back at school and*

*stuff- but it is hard to find out about this stuff*'. Another stated, *'I'm lucky because I'm connected up with the right people, but a lot of others don't know what to do about all the things they want to do. They have pipe-dreams rather than actual opportunities'*.

The need for solid health promotion practice in attracting young men to services is also well established in the literature (see NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:22)<sup>37</sup>. The importance of services connecting with young people at risk is of particular concern. The NSW Children's Commission has suggested that the break down of social relationships, and the lessening of community ties has in some senses served to increase the responsibility of formal services for children and young people who are not connected in any substantial way to anyone else (NSW Children's Commission, 2002:91). It is noted by the commission that extremely disadvantaged kids are very reliant on workers to assist them to navigate and negotiate services and let them know what it is available (NSW Children's Commission, 2002:91).

Some authors have suggested that there is the need to obtain expert advice if running a multi-media style campaign (Oliver & Storey, 2006:40) whilst others have argued that it is not so much the style of the campaign, but the places and people to whom it is targeted that make a difference in determining whether or not health promotion is successful. Some have suggested for instance that men's health promotion should be extended into men's workplaces (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:22), whilst others have emphasised that projects need to have clear strategies for targeting young men when they are receptive to engagement (Lloyd, 2002:5; Oliver & Storey, 2006:3)

Service promotion should be targeted (via a range of outreach projects) towards those young men who do not know that services exist as well as those who have not traditionally made voluntary contact.

### ***The Unknown and the Embarrassing***

The unfamiliarity of youth services, the potentially embarrassing nature of attending, and the general fear of the unknown contribute to the reticence of marginalised young men to access services. The young men who were interviewed noted consistently that their first experience of a youth service was generally fraught. One young man stated, *'the first experience of going (to the service) was nerve-wracking- mostly just not knowing anybody'*. Another noted that many young men are *'scared to go because it is something different and they don't know what to expect'*. All the young men stated that they were nervous attending a youth service for the first time. Some noted this was to be expected given the *'newness' of the situation'*, whilst others suggested that there were strategies that youth services could adopt to make things easier for young men attending for the first time. One young man suggested that *'if someone was to come in and they were really unfamiliar with the place someone could come up to them and make them feel a*

<sup>37</sup> For solid principles guiding good health promotion practice it is worth exploring the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's Strategies for Promoting Men's Health (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, p14)

*little more comfortable. They could introduce themselves and introduce a few other people, and let them know where everything is and be made to feel comfortable.*’ ‘*Not knowing anyone*’ at the youth service was consistently noted as contributing to the nervousness involved in attending for the first time.

The ‘uncool’ nature of youth services also dissuades some young men from attending. One young man noted that ‘*some kids might feel embarrassment about going to a youth service*’ whilst another stated that ‘*many people view youth services as being geeky*’. For others the nervousness (and potential embarrassment) around attending was related to a fear that confidentiality wouldn’t be respected, and that there would be a lack of privacy and discretion within the service. It was stated that youth services needed ‘*to be a bit more discreet*’, and needed to ‘*respect confidentiality*’ particularly with regard to counselling services.

Although to some degree, the embarrassing nature of attending a youth service is not something that is easily remedied by the service providers themselves, it is worth exploring strategies that might counteract the daunting nature of visiting for the first time. At the most basic level ensuring youth services present a welcoming environment for young men when they first arrive is essential. Other strategies would include organising to accompany the young man (or men) to the service – perhaps by arranging to pick them up from home, or meeting them at a location which is comfortable for them.

Strategies to combat the daunting nature of visiting a service for the first time should wherever possible be put in place. This might include arranging to transport and accompany young men visiting the service, or arranging to meet in an alternative (and more comfortable) environment.

### ***The Problem is the Other Kids***

In addition to being potentially nervous and embarrassed about attending a youth service for the first time, young men are also anxious about their relationships with the other young people who are attending the service. It was noted in the interviews that it was common in youth services to run into people that you did not necessarily want to see. The difficulty in having to deal with this sort of situation- at the same time as feeling vulnerable anyway was a key theme in the interviews with young men. One young man noted that ‘*you have to deal with conflict- there might be people there from your past that you don’t want to have to deal with*’. Another stated that ‘*the problem is...you might see people you knew from the past there- and you might not want to see them. For instance you might have had a fight about a girlfriend- and then if they turn up to the service, you don’t feel like coming back*’

The way that young people conduct themselves in the service was also noted to sometimes put young men off attending. One young man noted that the ‘*worst thing is how some young people might carry on- they can be really loud and noisy*’, whilst another noted that sometimes large groups of people could be intimidating, and that sometimes you ‘*get a certain type of crowd...and they should not necessarily be hanging out together*’. It was also noted that within youth services, some young men

service users were intimidating- or at least annoying with regard to actually utilising the services. One young man noted that *'sometimes on the computers if someone is bigger than you they will tell you to get off the computer- its not fair'*.

Service providers need to be aware of the potential for intimidation, bullying as well as behaviour that might be considered anti-social occurring inside youth services, particularly in waiting rooms and drop in spaces. Attempting to counter- and prevent this behaviour- and provide a safe and comfortable environment for all service users should be a priority.

### ***Dreams and Pipedreams***

The need for young people to be assisted in 'following their dreams' was a key theme in interviews with service providers and young people. This issue has received scant attention in the research literature and requires some exploration as to what this might mean in practice. There is some literature pointing to the complex philosophical assumptions behind the idea of 'following dreams'. Hallam et al (2006) have suggested that certain cultural trends that are popular amongst young people (including the equation of happiness with material wealth and beauty) are problematic (Hallam, Olsson, Bowes & Toumbourou, 2006:28). They argue hedonistic ambitions are ultimately less likely to cause happiness than a sense of self worth (Hallam, Olsson, Bowes & Toumbourou, 2006:28) and posit that the trend towards telling young people to 'pursue their dreams' as a means to reach happiness is perhaps as overwhelming as it is inspiring (Hallam, Olsson, Bowes & Toumbourou, 2006:29). The authors note that the root of much western cognitive therapy belong in the traditions of hedonistic philosophy- and argue this is problematic for its lack of moral core (Hallam, Olsson, Bowes & Toumbourou, 2006:29). It is suggested that an Aristotelian approach- whereby happiness is a product of 'well-doing' and well-being and well-doing are inextricably linked, might form a more useful base for working with young people (2006:30). This kind of philosophical base might be found in the psychological work of people like Erikson who proposed a developmental model based on the search for identity and meaning (Hallam, Olsson, Bowes & Toumbourou, 2006:30).

*'Workers need to try and get them to start dreaming about something better than what they have'*. Regardless of what constitutes the 'dream', this research found that assisting young men to follow this, is an important way of assisting with engagement. Workers noted that young men are notoriously hard to motivate (a sentiment also shared by the young men interviewed) and suggested that finding *'a hook of motivation'* was crucial in the process of engagement. There are a number of ways of achieving this. One worker suggested that *'they need to have a sense of 'what's in it for me?'*, whilst another noted *'they need to have a sense that they can do anything that they set their mind to'*. Building up self-esteem and confidence and *'restoring a sense of self worth'* in order for young men to feel positive about their prospects of *'achieving their goals'* is also a key issue. *'One of the most important things is to build up self confidence and help people...think positively'*. Workers pointed to the importance of finding out what 'mattered' or was 'valued' by the young people they were working with, and stressed the

importance of *'not putting your own values on the kids'*. One worker noted that, *'Most kids come good- but there is a small group that require that some intensive work is put in. You need to get them to think about what a successful and satisfying life looks like.'* Another worker outlined how satisfying it was for young people to achieve goals that they had set for themselves. *'When they start achieving things, this lifts their spirit as well- workers need to help them achieve goals that they have identified'*

The young men who were interviewed noted the links between motivation, boredom<sup>38</sup> and depression with regard to accessing services. Some young men noted that young men *'won't go to services because they are depressed'*, whilst others said young men *'wouldn't access services because they would find it boring'*. It was also suggested that going to a youth service was seen by some young men as being a waste of time. One young man noted, *'Some young men don't go to a place like Youthblock because of their pride. They think that they don't need help. They see it as being time wasting. They view their time as important or as precious- and think that talking about their problems is a waste of time'* whilst another stated *'Young men that don't turn up usually get distracted because they feel like they've got something better to do. They might want to smoke with their friends.'* It is interesting to note that the reverse was also stated to be case. A number of young men noted that 'boredom' or feeling down were often reasons for going to youth services. One young man stated that *'The best thing about going is knowing that you have somewhere to go when feeling down or really bored and you can't think of something to do'*, whilst another said the main reason for going to a youth service was *'to kill time'*.

The absence of motivation in some young men was discussed in terms of personal deficit, as well as depression. One young man noted that *'Some young men might just not have the will-power'*, whilst another pointed out that a lot of young men *'don't have enough focus...they find it hard to keep their mind on the right thing'*. Others stated that some young men simply *'couldn't be bothered'* or *'were too lazy'*. Procrastination also plays a part in the non-attendance of some young men to youth services. One young man stated that, *'People don't come because of procrastination. They put off coming until things get really extreme. You might spend six months getting more and more nervous about something but just avoiding the situation even though you know something might be wrong'*.

It is clear that many marginalised young men require support to become motivated and dream. Some of the young men interviewed suggested that young men *'have too many dreams'* and this can result in a situation where *'their head is never still'*. It was pointed out that the absence of support and encouragement could easily lead to an absence of hope and consequently depression. One young man stated that *'the problem is when young men don't follow their dreams. Their dreams will be chasing them but they*

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<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that some of the research literature has connected boredom to 'depression, hopelessness, loneliness and distractibility', as well as smoking and alcohol use amongst young people (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:20).

*don't follow it and then it gets further and further away. It is important that staff at youth services help people to lift their dreams, to encourage them to do something.'*

The theme of the importance of following dreams was particularly strong amongst those young men from African refugee backgrounds. There are complex difficulties in maintaining- or hanging on to- the dreams that had been harboured prior to coming to Australia. Although many young African men dream of obtaining an education and a job before being accepted as refugees, life in Australia is frequently overwhelming - in terms of both its freedoms and the absence of support. One young man stated ***'When young refugee boys come here they forget why they came here- to find a new life, to study or to work. They lose their dream because they are free.'***

Although it is clear young men need support in following their dreams, there was a level of ambivalence about the extent to which workers should be 'pushy' in the way that they worked with young men. Some suggested that ***'it is important to push young men to do what they like- encourage them to dream and to follow their dreams'*** whilst others noted that the reason particular youth services were comfortable were because ***'worker are not too pushy. Young men go there to find out more about opportunities'***. One young man pointed to the importance of ***'feeling free'*** whilst another suggested that a lot of young men ***'feel like they are being controlled'*** and argued that whilst it is important opportunities, options and support are on offer, this should never be done in a way that is too controlling or pushy.

What then should youth services be doing to assist young men to 'follow their dreams?' and to what extent should workers try and determine what these dreams are? Is there a role for workers to assist young men to look beyond the cultural preoccupation with material goods and wealth accumulation, and towards dreaming and goal setting which is more concerned with well-being and doing good? There are perhaps two uncontentious points when exploring the dreams of disadvantaged young men. The first is that there are many young marginalised men with no sense of hope, and these young men are at great risk. Working with these young men is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for youth services, and finding, or instilling a sense of hope (and motivation) is an incredibly difficult - and incredibly important task. The second point is that for young men that do have minimal hope, achieving something that is an explicit goal or dream has the potential to provoke a profound shift in esteem and motivation, regardless of how 'small' that goal might be. For this group of men, workers and services need to find ways to vigilantly support the setting of goals that are able to be achieved.

Dreams, hopes and finding the motivation to achieve these are key issues of connection between marginalised young men and workers. Workers need to explore ways in which they might support the setting of achievable goals and dreams, and then ensure they utilise any small successes as building blocks for motivation.

## Chapter 6. Program Strategies and Service Development

### ***Music and Creative Programs***

*Music is good because you can talk about your struggle without actually talking about your struggle*

Music (and other creative) programs frequently provide a point of access into youth services for marginalised young men. This has received considerable attention in the research literature. Service providers and young men interviewed for this project clearly viewed music programs as being a powerful means of engaging those young men who may not otherwise attend a youth service.

The benefits of engaging with marginalised young men via creative means is now well established in the literature (see Bloustein & Peters, 2003:36; Flood, 2005:13; McGregor & Mills, 2006:221). Music is frequently a focal point for young men at risk (Bloustein & Peters, 2003:32; McGregor & Mills, 2006:223). It has been noted by some researchers that young people who are marginalised frequently connect with music and continue to learn and develop skills through this medium even if they have dropped out of mainstream education (Bloustein & Peters, 2003:32).

It was suggested by workers that the reason for this connection is because when working around the medium of music, young men are already hooked in. The possibility of achieving other work as an incidental part of their engagement with music programs is clearly considered an important benefit. One worker noted, '***Music connects with young men because it is tapping into something they already love. Their original motivation for doing the music program is often about becoming a star, or an anti-hero, but in the process a lot of other good work gets done***'.

Learning specific skills and developing musicianship is also viewed by young people as the clear goal of their participation in music programs. This is particularly the case with hip-hop programs<sup>39</sup> where there is a clear set of skills that can be developed. One worker noted that '***part of the process is about picking up skills and building esteem through this process***'. Having skilled workshop facilitators is important. Some authors have noted the importance of 'authenticity' in creative programs and have argued that the people taking creative arts programs need to be 'real' artists or practitioners (Halsey,

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<sup>39</sup> Some researchers have noted that despite the popularity of music (and especially hip-hop) amongst young men, boys do not continue to study music in the senior years of high school. McGregor & Mills (2006) have suggested that in an attempt to make music more popular to boys some teachers have ended up reinforcing 'hegemonic constructions of masculinity' through their choice of hip-hop music much of which is based on misogynistic or homophobic material (McGregor & Mills, 2006:221-228)

Jones & Lord, 2006:vi)<sup>40</sup>. The young men who were interviewed also expressed the importance of the skill development and feedback aspect of the music program. One young man noted that *'learning about rhyming is important- and so is getting help with spelling, and making it sound good'*. Another young man noted that the best thing was getting *'some tracks laid down and getting feedback so that you can find out how good you are.'*

For others music provides an outlet for expression which is easier than simply talking about difficult issues with a counsellor. One young man stated that *'The music is important to talk about problems without having to sit down and talk about problems'*. Workers also noted the capacity of music to provide young men who were not comfortable with talking as a means of expression. One worker noted, *'the music program provides young people with an opportunity to voice their world and the capacity to externalise emotion. Also much hip-hop is based around dissing which is a familiar part of youth culture anyway'*. Another worker pointed to the way in which young men who would not normally get involved in any kind of youth service are willing to become involved in music programs. *'Music gets past the bravado. Music excites enough for young people to take the risk of getting involved in something that is unknown.'*

It seems clear that music programs have had some success in engaging marginalised young men where other programs have not. What has not been explored in any detail are the long term benefits of this engagement. Although there is clearly a need to examine this (because if music programs are both successful at engaging young men, *and* in bringing about positive changes in their lives, then there is clearly a case for further promotion and funding of such services). However it is also necessary to examine the meaning of the success of the projects, purely in terms of the manner in which young men – who are not otherwise connected with youth services- participate. Even if the long term benefits of the project were found to be negligible in any measurable terms, the fact of participation and engagement is perhaps important enough on its own, even in the short term, to warrant expansion and promotion of music programs.

Youth services should explore the possibility of obtaining funding to expand music programs and promote these programs to young men who are most at risk.

A useful entry point for future research could well be to discuss the music that young men listen to. In hindsight this might have been a good tool to facilitate discussion – especially with those young men who did not have a great deal of confidence in their own 'opinions' as to the way services could improve.

Future research would do well to utilise music as a means to facilitate discussion with young marginalised young men.

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<sup>40</sup> Others have argued that hip-hop itself has at its core a notion of authenticity, and it is this in conjunction with its position as a form of global youth sub-culture which makes it attractive to young marginalised men (Mitchell, 2003:22).

## **Somewhere to Hang**

Young men need places where they can simply hang out. Sometimes this can be in order to ‘get away’ from family and friends and chill out, and sometimes this can be in order to spend time with friends in a social and comfortable atmosphere. Service providers and young men pointed to the lack of space for young men in the broader community, and suggested that youth services play (or should play) an important role in giving young marginalised men a sense of space and belonging.

The young men who were interviewed stated with clarity that simply hanging out was a central reason for many young men to attend youth services. This might involve using the pool tables, playing games, playing music and using the internet (especially MSN and myspace) or ‘chilling out’. One young man stated that ***‘a lot of young men come...just to chill out, use the internet or listen to music. It is a kind of get away spot’*** whilst another described a youth service as ***‘a place to chill and get away from home’***. Young men clearly saw being able to have a place away from home as an important feature of the service, as was having a place where it was okay to relax and use the facilities.

Service providers supported this view and incorporated into this theme the importance of a space which was free of ‘hassle’. One worker noted that marginalised young men tended to engage more with ***‘drop in style services where they can just hang out. These are not seen to be as threatening as more formal services’***. Another worker noted the importance of there being ***‘no pressure on the kids when they come here’*** whilst another pointed to the need for ***‘some sort of structured environment where they can go without getting hassled.’***

The social aspect of ‘hanging out’ was viewed as important by the service providers who pointed to the importance of young people feeling like they ***‘are not alone or isolated’***. It was suggested that providing young men with a social environment was an important tool for future engagement, and was also a means to assisting in building self confidence. One worker stated that it is ***‘very important for young men to feel part of things...partially because of the importance this has in terms of esteem building’***

Although it is clear a lot of young men use youth services in order to ‘hang’ there are also many who see their primary use of youth services as being related to utilising the facilities and services. The young men who participated in the interviews noted for instance, the usefulness of using computers and internet, pool tables, and recording studios. Others mentioned the importance of free condoms and food. A number of young men suggested that their initial impetus for using the service was related to medical or dental needs but that this often resulted in the utilisation of other services. ***‘I originally went to see the dentist, but have since seen a counsellor and taken part in the music program’***. Some young men noted that being provided with information and education with regard to drugs and sex was also an impetus for using youth health services. Having access to legal assistance was also viewed as very important. Other young men who did not have English as their primary language noted that perhaps incidental to the services provided that attending a youth service could work as a ***‘good***

***place to get better at English'***. One young man summated that the ***'best thing about youth services is that you get back up- for all sorts of things'***

The extent to which youth services should function as 'drop in' centres needs to be examined. Similar to musical programs, it is often assumed that 'drop in' is the first stage of a process of engagement. However for many young men, this is the primary purpose of the organisation- an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. The benefits of simply having a place to go (even if this is only in the short term) should perhaps be recognised in the design of programs and services. This may be related to the benefits of alleviating boredom (and possibly associated anti-social behaviour), the advantage of giving young men the opportunity to feel they do belong somewhere, as well as the development of skills through the use of computers and other facilities on offer that form part of the drop in service.

There is a need for marginalised young men to have spaces to go to which are not necessarily a means to an end. For instance, drop in spaces should not always be seen as an entry point into counselling or health promotion. Young men have a legitimate need to simply 'hang out' and this should be acknowledged as important and recognised in the design of drop in spaces and other programs and services.

### ***Physical Activity and Sport***

Physical activities, and sporting activities can be important tools for engaging young marginalised men. Some of the research literature suggests that involvement in some community sporting programs reduces the likelihood of crime or anti-social behaviour (see Cameron & McDougal, 2000:1; Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:1). Others have suggested that the physicality of involvement in sport can act as an important outlet for angry young men.

In Morris et al's (2003) research into the impact of sport for marginalised young people they found that it was the *provision* of the activity rather than the *type* of activity that seemed to have an impact in steering young people away from antisocial behaviour (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:1). They suggest there are a number of key elements in service provision which have an impact with regard to engaging young people at risk of anti-social behaviour (and then preventing this behaviour). One such factor is ensuring that sporting program cater to all young people- not just those at risk. The influence of peers who are not at risk or engaged in anti-social behaviour is an important factor in terms of both influencing and attracting those who are (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:1). Another key element is the involvement of the community and post-program follow up (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 20003:2). The authors note that although physical activity may not directly impact on anti-social behaviour, the research suggests that involvement in physical activity lays the foundation for changes in these areas by providing skills, and opportunities for development. However, for this to occur such programs need to be linked in with other health and welfare services (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:2).

Morris et al (2003) note that there is considerable evidence to suggest that involvement in sport and physical activity assists in improving cognitive skills such as problem solving (2003:19) and also has benefits with regard to social skills, self esteem, and emotional stability- including reducing depression and anxiety (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:19-20). There is also evidence to suggest reduced problematic drug and alcohol use amongst young people who are involved in sport<sup>41</sup> (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:21).

In Cameron & McDougall's (2000) exploration of the impact of sport and physical activity on crime prevention, they discuss a number of programs that utilise sport or physical activity as a means to prevent crime. They note the ways in which such programs might build trust between people and provide a sense of accomplishment and belonging (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:3). The authors point out that although crime prevention is not the primary purpose of most sporting activities, it is frequently a by-product (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:1). It is suggested that this might be particularly the case in some Aboriginal communities (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:1).

NSW Health has also suggested sporting programs in Aboriginal communities may be a useful strategy with regard to both health promotion and crime prevention for young men (NSW Health, 2001:23). Others have noted that there are frequently short-term reductions in crime during sporting matches and carnivals in some Aboriginal communities (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:5). The usefulness of sporting programs with regard to longer term crime prevention is viewed by Cameron & McDougall as being ultimately connected to the extent of community support and involvement (2000:1)

Some authors have suggested caution in viewing sport as some sort of panacea to marginalised young men (Maakrun, 2001:2; West, 2002:2). Although much achievement that is valued by boys and those around them whilst they are at school is related to sporting achievement, the reality is that the majority of boys will not excel in sport- and this has the potential to reduce self esteem (Maakrun, 2001:2). West (2002) notes that although sport is important for many boys its benefits are predicated on the idea of conditional acceptance (performing well) (West, 2002:2).

The service providers in this report viewed sport as a useful means to engage with some marginalised young men, but were at pains to point out that it was important to ***'cater for the quiet kids too- those that are not into sporty outdoors type activities.'*** For those young men that were interested in sport, then facilitating or organising involvement in sporting teams and organisations was viewed as a key strategy. Team sports were seen to ***'be helpful in bringing them together'*** whilst the physicality of sporting programs was seen to be an important gender specific approach for engaging young men. One worker noted that ***'in youth services there tends to be an emphasis on 'talking' rather than***

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<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that there is some research that suggests involvement in some types of sport may actually be a predictor for violent or 'delinquent' behaviour outside of it (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:23) whilst other research has found little difference between drug use and involvement in sport (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:24) although the *type* of drug use might differ. For example athletes might be less likely to smoke, but more likely to binge drink (Miller et al, 2000 in 2003:23).

*anything else (like moving)*’ and suggested for young men this was problematic. For some young men, particularly those with mental health problems who put on a lot of weight as a consequence of their medication, it was suggested that there was a real need for *‘more resources to get them out and moving.’* Playing basketball with the young men, and *‘integrating counselling and interactive activity’* were suggested as useful strategies. Other workers pointed simply to the *‘enormous amount of talent’* evident amongst young male service users, and suggested that this alone should constitute the rationale for more resourcing of sporting programs.

Sporting and physical activity programs should be considered alongside music programs as a priority in terms of engaging marginalised young men.

## **Outreach**

Perhaps one of the least contentious elements of ‘effective’ work with young marginalised men is the use of outreach. The importance of connecting with young men outside of office environments, going into ‘their world’, and connecting and developing trust through this process is evident in much of the research literature (NSW Children’s Commission, 2002:105; Titley, 2003:39; Flood, 2005:5; Marshall, Haughton & Harris, 2005:12; Oliver & Storey, 2006:42). This also constituted a key theme in the interviews with service providers. It was noted that *‘Street work is very important for developing trust’, ‘often contacting marginalised young men needs to happen in the street’* and *‘if we were better resources we could have outreach workers in identified places or venues’*

Services should attempt to connect and engage with marginalised young men via outreach and street-work programs.

## **Getting Away**

There are clearly benefits in getting young marginalised men outside of their usual environment and engaging in challenging activities outside of the city. The ‘adventure style’ nature of many camps is particularly appealing to young men. It is difficult to measure the extent to which the benefits of such camps are long term<sup>42</sup> but the usefulness of ‘getting away’ constituted a key theme in the interviews with the service providers.

Some workers noted that the benefits did not need to be long term, but that for some young men simply having the opportunity to have a break from their usual lives could be therapeutic (in the same way as taking a holiday might be). One worker noted that *‘Getting away- say to a camp in the mountains, or getting time away- this is a luxury most of the young people cannot afford- just to get away from their life for a few days’*.

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<sup>42</sup> Wilderness programs appear to have had mixed results and mixed successes with regards to evaluation. It is complicated to isolate the experience of the program (in terms of bringing about change such as reducing the likelihood of committing crime), or simply the experience of having someone who cares (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:3)

Similarly, the opportunity to *'enjoy themselves'* and *'get their mind off things for a while'* and *'see a world outside of the one they are used to'* can be very valuable.

It was also suggested that when young men were *'outside of their comfort zone'* they tended to behave with workers in ways that were more likely to be useful in terms of facilitating engagement. One worker stated that *'when people are shifted a little outside of their comfort zone this can make a big difference. They seem to feel a little safer talking and it also shows that the worker enjoys being in their company'*. It was also suggested that sometimes it could help removing the young person from their friends. One worker noted that this was *'not as a form of punishment, but as a way of allowing the young person the space necessary to make changes'*.

For those workers who had been away with marginalised young men, the experience was generally described as profound. However the expense of the trips was also noted as a prohibitive factor, particularly because of the absence of evidence with regard to the extent to which the impact of such journeys are sustained.

Youth services would do well to explore the short-term benefits of 'getting away' with groups of marginalised young men who have not before been on a holiday or experienced leaving their home environment.

### ***Working with Violent Men***

There is considerable literature focused on the violence of young men, particularly with regard to how best stop it. It is perhaps obvious to note that the starting point for working with men who are violent is to explore the causes of the violence. Although this theme recurred in the literature it did not constitute a focus of the interviews for this project.

Violence and anti-social behaviour is related to a number of factors. It is suggested in the literature that it is connected to; boredom (Morris, Sallybanks, & Willis, 2006:1), the unaffordability of recreational pursuits (Cameron, 2000:1); problematic drug and alcohol use (Cameron, 2000:1; Smart, Vassallo, Sanson & Dussuyer, 2004:5) difficulty or inability to 'manage' anger (Cameron, 2000:1), racism- particularly tension and fights between various 'ethnic' groups (Perrone & White, 2000:5), the experience of being a victim of violence (Tittley, 2003:8). the attaining of status within a peer group (Dawes, 2001:6) and the absence of forethought with regard to weighing up the costs and benefits of violence (Cameron, 2001:219).

Other writing in this field looks to socio-cultural explanations of male violence including the extent to which men's position of power is reflected in anti-social and violent behaviour (Mills, 1997:2; Rigby, 2003:3), and the pressures men are under as a consequence of attempting to conform to stereotypical masculine identities (Martin, 2003:30; Tittley, 2003:6). Mills (1997) suggests that understandings of violence should begin with the premise that men hold a privileged position within gendered relations, and notes that this should form the basis for discussions with boys around gendered violence (Mills, 1997:2). He suggests that in programs that seek to deal with boys and violence, respect should be the key starting point- both in terms of program delivery and content

(Mills, 1997:2). Flood (2005) points out one of the most significant challenges in working with men is overcoming their defensiveness with regard to issues of violence (Flood, 2005:6)

Other violence prevention (and anti-social behaviour) strategies identified in the literature include; working with families (families often constitute the site of conflict for young men) (Cameron, 2001:222), and early intervention, particularly with young men at risk in early adolescence (Cameron, 2001:222; Martin, 2003:31; Smart, Vassallo, Sanson & Dussuyer, 2004:6). Some authors suggest that there is also a need look at some of the structural features of male violence in the community. For instance, the relationship young people have with police requires examination (Cameron, 2001:255) as do sensationalist media depictions of young people (Perrone & White, 2000:5) and violence in Aboriginal communities (McCoy, 2006:1).

Given the extent of literature in the area of working with violent men (especially when compared with the literature directly addressing other aspects of men's health and well-being), there is no need to replicate this material in the current research with regard to practical applications and recommendations. It is perhaps important to reiterate that the young men and the service providers interviewed for this project did not prioritise 'violence' as a key issue. The service providers did discuss dealing with the 'anger' of young men, and sometimes this was associated implicitly with violence, but primarily discussion of men's anger was directly in relation to the need to avoid pathologising all men as violent abusers. Some workers did discuss programs that dealt with aspects of anger<sup>43</sup> (and again, implicitly, male violence) but violence itself was not a clear theme. Anger did not appear at all as a theme in the interviews with young men.

### ***Therapeutic Approaches (Casework, Groupwork, Counselling)***

Group-work, individual counselling and casework are all useful approaches for working with young men. There are however differing opinions with regard to the success of these approaches in connecting with those young men who are severely disadvantaged. There are also different views with regard to the extent to which 'connecting' with young men is important on its own (even if it doesn't result in any substantial 'therapeutic' work. It is suggested in the interviews that much work with young men occurs incidentally- after young people have engaged with a worker or youth centre via a route that is not necessarily explicitly about receiving 'help' (i.e., using the computer to download music, or the pool table to meet up with friends). One question for youth services is whether this is in itself important- or whether this initial connection should always be viewed as an entry point for receiving other forms of assistance.

In the literature there is no clear consensus with regard to the use of group work in connecting marginalised young men (D'Souza, 2001:4) with most authors suggesting that successful services should offer a choice of group and individual work (King, 2004:5; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:x). For a successful group to occur it is argued that it should be 'small' (Martin, 2003:30), preferably all male (Flood, 2005:7) and have a clearly

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<sup>43</sup> See **Appendix 9** for more information about the 'Rock and Water Program'

identified purpose (King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:6). Some workers noted the importance of the **'social interaction that young people end up having with both other young people as well as workers'**. In addition to the social aspect of groups, other workers pointed to the way in which group settings might feel a little safer than one on one counselling. One worker stated, **'there are benefits in groups for young men for a number of reasons- there is the social aspect, and also the focus is not entirely on the young man- and so they might feel less 'locked in' and like it might be easier to get out- which is a positive thing when working with young men'**. Some of the literature suggested that practitioners needed to be aware of the potential for groups to allow 'male collusion with sexism and violence' (Flood, 2005:7). Others pointed to **'the contamination factor'** and suggested vigilance was necessary to ensure that the groups did not constitute a site of negative influence.

The interviews with service providers revealed a strong theme that counselling and case-work should happen in tandem, and that where possible this should occur in an informal environment. **'There is a need to look at more of a case management approach- engaging with young people in terms of assisting with practical assistance (centrelink, housing, food etc) and then engaging further on longer term issues when client ready'** It was suggested that young men are more able to talk about what is happening in their lives in informal settings, and also through the process of sorting out practical difficulties. It was noted by one worker that **'Sometimes within counselling teams there can be a culture to maintain a sense of distance from the clients- some young people are very uncomfortable with these sorts of professional relationships'**. It was suggested in interviews with workers that it was in the process of physically accompanying a young man (usually by driving them) to appointments and meetings, that useful work took place. One worker suggested that; **'Sometimes with young men it seems that more informal settings are better in terms of talking about what is going on with them. In this sense driving can be good- in the car it isn't necessary to look them in the eye.'** Aside from the car (which was suggested throughout the interviews as a useful place to engage young men in talking about their lives), it was also noted that **'young men do well with the 'blokey' stuff- going out fishing, where the pier can become the counselling ground'**. Another worker suggested that a useful way to engage was to **'go to their cafes or favourite places to hang'**. The need for counselling to occur in a setting that is 'non threatening' was a key theme here.

Youth Services should wherever possible explore the possibility of combining counselling with a practical casework service.

A number of workers suggested that **'the professional counselling model is not necessarily useful for this group'**. There was however an alternative theme suggesting that individual counselling in a more traditional counselling context could be extremely useful for young men, and some workers suggested that it was a falsely perpetuated myth that young marginalised men didn't want or need to talk. Some workers suggested that it was crucial that the practitioner was very skilled, and adaptable, as well as having a clear framework from which they could work. Some workers noted that **'cognitive behavioural therapy does not work for non-verbal boys'** whilst others suggested that

cognitive behavioural approaches could be extremely beneficial especially with regard to *rewarding, goal setting, behaviour management...and getting them to reflect on behaviour and work out how to do things differently next time*'. Other workers pointed to the benefits of the narrative approach. Additional features of counselling noted in the research to be important include; *'everything being transparent', 'all practitioners using the same system', 'assisting young men to see the world outside of themselves'* and *'being able to accept what has happened in the past and then letting go.'*

The absence of consensus with regard to the best way to engage therapeutically with young marginalised men is perhaps an indication that there is a need for a diversity of approaches. Group work clearly works in some instances, and formal one on one counselling works in others. It does seem clear that there is a need for at least some counselling positions to also engage in practical casework, and at least some counselling to occur in non-professional or clinical settings.

Youth Services should wherever possible offer a range (and at times a combination) of therapeutic options including group-work, one on one counselling, case-work and at least some informal 'counselling' which can take place outside of a clinical setting.

### **Key Characteristics**

In the literature there were a number of clear themes with regard to the characteristics that were important in running successful youth services and programs for young marginalised men. Although these features are noted throughout this report, it is worth addressing them briefly as a separate category.

The importance of programs being novel and innovative is a strong theme in the literature. It is suggested that programs that are novel and different are more successful at attracting young men and have the capacity to excite them to stay. This is particularly the case with any educational program (Lloyd, 2002: 6; Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:3; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:vii). There is also the importance of 'challenge' - that is, there is a need for young people to take risks (intelligent risks) as well as challenges in the personal (including intellectual domain) (Lloyd, 2002:6-8; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:vii). Alongside programs being challenging they should also have a practical application, and where possible a specific set of skills that young men have the capacity to master (Martin, 2003:30; Menslink, undated:7). Programs should also be direct in their approach (Menslink, undated:7; Lloyd, 2002:5) and their language (King et al 2004:3) as well as utilising a positive and optimistic outlook with regard to the capacity of young men to change (Lloyd, 2002:5; King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:3; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:x).

Programs targeting marginalised young men should strive to include the following qualities: challenge, excitement, the possibility of learning and practically applying a specific set of skills, directness (in their approach) and optimism (with regard to the ability of young men to change)

## **Education/Employment/Training**

Education is a critical issue for young men in terms of preventing marginalisation, and also in working to redress it. The service providers in this research used a broad definition of education, and suggested that there was a need to explore alternative education options, as well as examining the accessibility of mainstream schooling. The need for flexibility in educational settings was also reiterated. One worker noted that *‘a lack of basic education can undermine work and social opportunities’* whilst another stated that *‘making sure that people’s education doesn’t have big gaps is very important’*. It was also suggested that the content of education courses should be tailored towards the interests of young men. For instance one worker noted that *‘there have been some great courses that combine literacy with car mechanics education’* and another suggested that *‘more practical skills based programs are needed’*. Some workers argued that the outcome of education should be employment, whilst others suggested that the process of education on its own was an important factor with regard to reducing the risks for marginalised young men. It was clearly stated that one of the key challenges was letting young people *‘know what’s out there in order to be able to access it.’*

Alternative education options should wherever possible be tailored to suit the interests of marginalised young men (i.e., combining literacy courses with car mechanics education)

## **Training, Participation, Community Linkage, Diversity and Funding**

The following sections raises briefly key issues in service development for services working (or attempting to work) with young men. A consistent theme in the research literature was the need for workers (in health and welfare) to receive more training in both working with young men and evaluating the programs designed to assist them (Sandor & Bondy<sup>44</sup>, 1995:5; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:15; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:59; Oliver & Storey, 2006:41).

The importance of the participation of young people was also a key theme with regard to service development. It is widely noted in the research literature that young men should be involved in the design and implementation of services and programs at a number of different levels- from the design of promotional material, to their participation in leadership roles (NSW Health, 2001:24; Victorian Health Promotion Foundation & Hayes, 2001:15-16; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:27; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:vii). This theme was reiterated in the interviews with service providers. One worker noted that programs that tended to be successful

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<sup>44</sup> Sandor & Bondy (1995) surveyed workers who were involved in the provision of service to young people. The researchers were particularly interested in the workers understanding of child protection legislation (in Victoria) and their responsibilities with regard to mandatory reporting. The researchers found that one of the areas that workers had the least amount of training in were the ‘special needs of young men who had been abused’ (Sandor & Bondy, 1995:5)

were those *‘where the young people are involved in the design of the project- and its implementation’*

Wherever possible young men should be involved in the design of programs, promotional material and participate in leadership roles within services.

Collaboration and linkages between services is a critical element of successful service provision. Improving the relationships between services has significant flow on effects in terms of ensuring young marginalised men do not ‘fall through the gaps’. Numerous reports stress the importance of community linkage (see NSW Health, 1999:30; Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:22-23; Couch, 2005; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:35; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:vii-x; Oliver & Storey, 2006:40), however there is less material which outlines in a comprehensive manner how such linkage should be enacted or carried out.

Considerable effort is required to ensure that agencies do work together – in terms of work with both individual clients, and also in terms of achieving some degree of consistency with regard to the framework in which such work should be carried out. Service providers in this research spoke of the frequency with which young marginalised men ‘fall through the gaps’ of the various services. It was also noted that when young men stop attending a service and there are concerns about their welfare, it is often very difficult to track their progress through to other agencies. There is a clear need for better communication between services with regard to this. There is also a need for privacy concerns to be addressed in any future formulation of communication strategies.

A youth services working group should be established to develop a range of communication strategies to ensure the most marginalised young men have the opportunity to receive services, and to avoid, where possible, falling through the many gaps in the welfare framework. Such a group would clearly need to address the privacy concerns associated with inter-agency information sharing.

Young marginalised men fall into a diverse range of cultural ‘categories’ and as such the services offering support to these men need to address their own policies with regard to catering for diversity. Recognising the diversity of need, and then ensuring that programs are sensitive to this is a key recommendation in much research exploring the service development needs of youth services (see Lingard, Martino, Mills & Barr, 2002:2; Flood, 2005:10; Kumar, 2005:4-6; Oliver & Storey, 2006:3). This issue also constituted a theme in the interviews with service providers in this research. One worker noted that there was a *‘need to have culturally appropriate programs, and culturally specific programs. There is a need to have a policy of understanding and an appreciation of cultural difference’*

Services offering support to marginalised young men need to explore their own policies pertaining to cultural diversity to ensure they are adequately catering to the many different within this sub-population.

Funding, or lack of funding is a key concern for many services working with marginalised young people. The need for long term, sustained funding which acknowledges the long-term nature of work with marginalised young men is a key issue (NSW Children's Commission, 2002:103; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:51; Oliver & Storey, 2006:43). Some authors have noted the manner in which short term funding arrangements have the capacity to have a detrimental impact on both program quality and duration (Morris, Sallybanks, & Willis, 2003:2).

The issue of resource allocation is clearly important as a service development issue, but also requires consideration in terms of its structural politics. When seriously considering how to reduce the risks of marginalised young men it is necessary to examine the kinds of budgetary commitments that consecutive state governments have made to the expansion of the prison system at a time when there is no evidence to suggest there has been any increase in crime. Given that the majority of young men in prison in NSW are marginalised, it is important to look at what is happening with regard to resources in preventative or early intervention programs. If there is to be serious governmental commitment to the health and well-being of young men, then there needs to be a thorough examination of the over-use of prison for this population.

The continued over-use of imprisonment for marginalised young men needs to be investigated and lobbying at a state level should occur to promote alternatives to custody. Vigilance is required to challenge funding arrangements that favour punitive rather than preventative measures in crime control.

## Chapter 7. What Works with Workers?

### ***Men (Workers and Mentors)***

In any discussion pertaining to workers (who spend time with young men) there is inevitably debate and discussion about the extent to which 'being male' is a benefit when working with this group. There is much literature to suggest that there is a need for more male involvement in youth health and welfare (see NSW Health, 1999:27, NSW Health, 2001:22). There are three key reasons presented for this. The first (and most common justification) is that the employment of men provides role models or mentors for marginalised young men (Mills, 1997:2; Rudner in Price, 2004:5; Flood, 2005:7; Halsey, Jones & Lord, 2006:vi). The second is that it is considered that young men connect better with other men (see literature cited in Mills, 1997:7), and the third is that it is men's responsibility to assist men (Mills, 1997:3; Flood, 2005:7)

These themes were reiterated in the interviews with service providers and young men. The need for men to be employed in role model or mentor positions was a particularly strong theme. One worker stated, ***'Merely being a male within the youth sector is important in terms of worker quality'***. Another pointed out that ***'There is a real need for increased funding and resources for quality mentoring programs (like big brother). Boys need male roles.'*** The employment of men as mentors was considered especially beneficial if ***'those men might bring to the job some qualities that are not traditionally considered masculine'***. Some workers suggested that this could challenge some gender stereotypes. Although the need for male mentoring was strong, it was pointed out by some workers that this was not simply related to gender, but to cultural identity also. One worker noted ***'it is really important to have Aboriginal workers- Aboriginal kids feel more comfortable talking to someone who is Aboriginal'***. Other workers suggested there was a need for young people to be employed in youth services but that this needed to happen in conjunction with support and supervision. One worker stated ***'it is very important to employ young people- but this has to happen in conjunction with training and support'***. There was also the suggestion that role modelling and mentoring could occur through peer education. One worker suggested that it was ***'Important for young people to have peer influence- someone that they can talk to at any time'***.

Some workers suggested that regardless of whether or not mentoring was an official policy, for young people, the personality of the worker is more important than much else in terms of service provision. One worker stated, ***what matters to this group is not what you say- its who you are when you say it.'*** Another worker noted ***'Lots of programs hinge around charismatic adults- the kids want someone to look up to- they also want a sense of care from that adult'***.

There are also those who suggested that the gender of the worker is less important than other qualities that the worker brings to the job<sup>45</sup>, and others who suggested that a key issue is giving young people some choice in who they decide to work with. One worker noted, *'it is important to have a lot of different models with workers- but this is not necessarily about ethnic or cultural background'*. Another noted *'we have a range of different (role) models working at the school that young people can engage with.'* Regardless of the 'type' of role model workers might offer, it seems important to acknowledge that this is an implicit part of the job when working with young men.

Services working with young men should acknowledge the significance of role models (including the informal role modelling provided by workers). There is value in services being able to provide a range and choice of different role models so that young men have the option of connecting with somebody for whom they feel a personal affinity.

### **Genuinely Caring**

*'It is really important that the young person feels that you value them as a person – not just as a client'*.

Although there are clearly structural factors at play with regard to the manner in which young men access, (or don't access) services, a key theme in the literature and the interviews was the extent to which individual connections can impact on 'outcomes'. The existence of one caring worker or teacher appears to in some circumstances have a profound influence on those young men who are most at risk.

The significance of workers who *really* listen and *really* care simply cannot be underplayed. This is noted throughout the literature with particular importance given to those young people who are without solid supports elsewhere in their lives (NSW Children's Commission<sup>46</sup>, 2002:108; Gillespie, undated: 3). In the interviews with service providers it was noted consistently that *'workers need to have a sense of humanity', 'be good at listening' 'be consistent' and 'be responsive and empathic'*. One worker noted that *'Many young people have had experiences with workers who are not genuinely trying to help them'* whilst another pointed out that *'ignoring their problems is the worst thing a worker can do- or not following up when you say you are going to.'*

The need for skilled, empathic teachers, who again *really* care (both about teaching and their students) is reiterated through the research literature (Dines, Cornish & Weston, 1996:14; Slade, 2001:4; Lingard, Martino, Mills & Barr, 2002:9). It was suggested both in the interviews with young men and service providers as well as in the research

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<sup>45</sup> For instance some research has suggested that the gender of the teacher did not appear to be a factor of note with regard to education (and the skills involved in engaging young men), although some boys do suggest it would be easier to speak to a teacher of the same gender with regard to personal problems (Lingard, Martino, Mills & Barr, 2002:4)

<sup>46</sup> The Children's commission in suggest that these qualities in workers are particularly important when where young people do not have strong relationships with their parents or family. The importance of relationships with workers in formal service settings intensifies in these contexts (NSW Children's Commission, 2002:95)

literature that many young people believe that many teachers are not interested in teaching or kids (see Slade, 2001:5). One worker stated, *'It is really important to hire people for their values. About 15% of teachers just don't like kids and kids hate dealing with incompetence'*. Another worker noted *'Young people are better judges of character than a lot of people. One of the things young people say regularly is that a lot of teachers just don't give a shit about them. They need to feel that people genuinely care.'*

Young men consider the personality of workers and teachers extremely important, and the extent to which they are 'genuine' about what they do is perhaps viewed as one of the most impressive attributes (see Slade, 2001:4; McCann, Smart & Goulbourne, 2006:43). So too is the presence of worker hope and enthusiasm (see Gillespie, undated: 1; Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:3). One worker noted that young men who seek help at services *'need to feel that they are not viewed as a failure and that they have the potential for success'*, whilst another suggested that *'workers need to believe in the young men they are working with'*. Another worker summated *'Regardless of the theoretical framework or counselling techniques that are being utilised, if the person working with the young person does not have 'unconditional positive regard' for the person then it is unlikely that the young person will engage. They have to believe that you believe that they are basically good. This is essential to engage, and can result in a really powerful connection'*

It is difficult to recommend that workers 'genuinely' care about the young people they work with. This seems both trite, and perhaps at times impossible. However it is important to note that alongside the professionalism that is needed (and frequently assumed) when working in areas of youth health and education, there is a need to acknowledge the necessity of 'caring' work with this group. It seems clear that this is what a lot of young people connect with, and regardless of the professional skills that are brought to the job (and there is certainly a clear need for these also), if the worker does not actually care about the person they are working with, then the professional skills frequently redundant.

In addition to possessing a range of professional skills, marginalised young men require – and respond well to- workers who genuinely care about what happens to them.

### ***Trust, Rapport and Honesty***

As well as being 'genuinely caring' workers must spend time building up trust and rapport between themselves and the marginalised young men they come into contact with. One worker noted that *'To build trust between workers and young men is very important- because once you have built the trust you are able to understand the problems'* whilst another worker suggested that *'if you build trust and they have problems, even if you can't solve it, then at least you can refer them to a good organization.'* The difficulty of establishing trust with young men who were mandated to attend services was noted throughout the interviews. One worker pointed out that *'mandating very often doesn't work- or is at the very least problematic. If workers are seen as 'part of the system' then this can work against the building of trust'*

## **No Fear**

Workers should not be fearful of the young men they are working with. It was suggested throughout the interviews with service providers that if young men sense that they intimidate you then it can be very difficult to attain a successful level of engagement. Some workers noted that being able to deal with the 'typical' behaviours of young men was a key skill in working with this group. One worker stated ***'it is also very important not to be scared- (and therefore respond defensively)- of young men and their big voices and big energy.'*** Another noted that ***'it is important to be able to be present with anger and testosterone.'*** This theme is reiterated in some of the literature. For instance, King, Sweeney & Fletcher (2004) suggest it is important that workers are comfortable with 'the male approach' with regard to interaction. It is postulated that for a variety of reasons men are 'naturally more boisterous, louder and have a stronger presence in social situations' (then women). They note that these aspects of male interaction can sometimes be seen as threatening (King, Sweeney & Fletcher, 2004:4)

In some ways this idea goes to the heart of one of the primary tensions in the work that explores attempts to 'engage' marginalised young men. Some writers suggest that the manner in which engagement occurs should be based upon a vaguely biological assumption about the kind of behaviour that is 'naturally' male. Others suggest that such behaviour is not inevitable, and at times not 'appropriate'. The fact workers felt it necessary to point to the importance of an absence of fear, suggests that fear does play a part in the interaction between workers and young men. Further questions need to be asked about the extent to which this fear is legitimate, a product of anti-masculine sentiment or culture, or something in between.

Services need to investigate the extent to which there is a culture of 'fear' around working with young men in their organisation. If such a culture exists then further questions are required with regard to the legitimacy of this fear and the ramifications of this fear in terms of potentially excluding marginalised young men.

## **Skilled**

There is a real need for workers to be well trained, skilled, and confident when working with marginalised young men. This was noted throughout the interviews with service providers and the literature (See NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:12). One worker noted that it is ***'really important for workers to know what they are doing and keep up to date with best practice (for instance being able to challenge an incorrect diagnosis of BDP).'*** Another worker stated that ***'workers need to be skilled enough to analyse quickly what the issues are for kids'*** whilst another suggested that ***'workers need to be able to pick up what is not explicit- the stuff which is unsaid- for instance a young person wanting to use the needle exchange but not being able to be clear about this to the worker on duty'***. In addition to counselling and therapeutic skills, there is also a need for workers to stay informed about opportunities, programs and services for young people in order to be able to refer appropriately, and ensure smooth transition between services when this is needed. One worker noted that ***'the ability to network is very important'*** whilst another stated ***'workers need to know what is out there'***.

Workers need to be highly skilled, well trained, well informed- (especially about referral options), well-connected, and confident in their abilities to work with marginalised young men. This is especially the case when it comes the quick analysis of issues, picking up on implicit communications and assessing mental health.

### ***Walking the Walk?***

The ability of workers to engage with young marginalised men sometimes occurs by connecting in ways that are familiar, comfortable and ‘cool’ for the young person. For some workers this is achieved by ***‘smoking cigarettes with young people’***, whilst for others it involves ***‘using the language that young people use’***. The ways in which people that work with young men dress is also seen as an important factor (see NSW Children’s Commission, 2002:104). One worker noted that ***‘physical image is important. Workers need not to be dressed too far apart from the young men (i.e., wearing expensive suits)’***.

Some service providers suggested that these kinds of strategies were not always the best ways of engaging young marginalised men for any sustained or significant work. One worker noted that ***‘it is not enough to take kids to Maccas and smoke ciggies with them. You need to have concrete programs as well. Streetwise kids see through a lack of skill and concrete opportunity.’*** Workers also suggested that one of the most significant ways of engaging with marginalised young men was to have a strong focus on outcomes. ***‘Seeing the result of work done is incredibly important. This can be therapeutic or practical outcomes’***

The style of communication workers use is not confined to the use of young peoples language. Some workers suggested there was a need to have ***‘a sense of humour’*** and others noted the importance of a ***‘very relaxed attitude’***. Treating young men in a respectful manner, and avoiding an overly authoritarian approach was also noted as being important. One worker stated that ***‘there are problems when workers or services are too ‘school marmish’***, whilst another noted the importance of ***‘treating them like adults’*** and yet another suggested it was important to ***‘not act like their mother’***,

Respect between workers and young men can also be achieved through the establishment of the workers credibility. This can occur either through concrete assistance with practical problems, or, as is the case in some creative arts programs, through the display of expertise in a particular creative skill. One worker noted that ***‘in the music program it is important to get facilitators that have credibility- like a really good rapper. When the rapper is introduced and they freestyle, often credibility is established and respect is immediate’***. There are clearly different ways of engaging marginalised young men, and this issue provoked some of the most diverse responses in the interviews. Some workers clearly view the issue of ‘connection’ as important enough on its own to warrant invoking strategies that are intended to connect with young men on their own ground. Others maintained a more ‘professional’ approach, suggesting that it is necessary to maintain professional boundaries, and that although ‘connection’ is important, it is only one step in the process of engagement.

## **Strong Boundaries**

The establishment of strong boundaries between workers and young men is clearly important<sup>47</sup>. Workers noted that there were frequently problems if workers '*tried to be mates*' with the young men they were also attempting to help. One worker stated that young men '*need to be very clear about what can and can't happen*', whilst another noted that '*boundaries are particularly important with this group. Workers need to be able to model appropriate professional behaviour.*' Some workers suggested that this is particularly the case with '*long term service users*' suggesting that it was often with this group that services relaxed their professional approach. Other workers suggested that a common problem could also be '*playing favourites*' and suggested that boundaries tended to become depleted when this occurred.

There is perhaps some tension between the maintenance of strong professional boundaries and attempting to connect by 'walking the walk', or even simply displaying humanity and genuine compassion. The need for genuinely caring workers clearly needs to be attached to the need for professional and skilled workers, but the difficulty in matching these two qualities needs to be addressed.

Workers need to maintain strong professional boundaries with the marginalised young men whom they are assisting.

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<sup>47</sup> One worker noted that in addition to establishing strong boundaries (and perhaps in order to be able to do so) there are a number of personal qualities that are required in workers in the area of marginalised young men's education. '*They have to be in pretty good health physically and emotionally. They need to be pretty focused on job and have good supervision. They need to have a framework or scaffold to work within, a healthy life on the outside, absence of drug and alcohol problems. They need to have worked with healthy kids- They need to know what healthy kids being oppositional looks like compared to disturbed kids being oppositional*'.

## Chapter 8. Small Steps

### **Recognising Success**

Services working with marginalised young men need to be realistic about what constitutes success with this group, and recognise successes (however small) when they do occur. Workers in this research pointed to a combination of concrete and practical achievements, as well as therapeutic (and frequently more difficult to measure) signs that things are progressing well. For some workers seeing their clients *'looking healthy and well'* signalled success. For others, seeing their clients *'becoming happier'* was a positive indicator. Others noted that seeing the young men they worked with *'make decisions to make some changes'* was an important achievement. For a number of workers, the mere fact of voluntary attendance at a youth service was viewed as a solid indicator that work was progressing. *'Sometimes simply returning to the service would constitute success'*. For others, the extent to which the young person appeared to be engaged with the service was very important. One worker suggested that success could be measured by asking *'Are they engaged? Are they more hopeful? And are they coming up with solutions?'* Another worker suggested that success was *'When people choose to use the opportunities that are available to them.'* Exiting the service can also be seen as a sign of success. One worker noted that success can be viewed when young men are *'not as engaged as they once were because of a growth of confidence in other areas'* and another noted that success could be seen when people *'feel worthwhile, move on, and display the desire to start fresh'*

Concrete successes range from achieving some form of accommodation, although specifically the movement from *'short term to medium term accommodation'* was viewed as very positive. One worker noted that *'success is when their next offence is lesser- or when they don't offend- although that can be overly optimistic'*. Other concrete signs of success included; *'reconnecting with school'*, *'Connecting with study or sport'*, *'improved medical health'*, *'reconnecting with family members or significant people and building positive relationships'*, *'connecting with the broader community especially through work.'*

### **Recognising when it's too hard**

There are clearly numerous barriers and difficulties involved in providing services to marginalised young men. Service providers pointed to a number of these, and identified the importance of recognising the limits of the service being provided, and at times, recognising when the provision of assistance was not working out. Although there can be enormous resilience amongst marginalised young men, at times the extent of their disadvantage can be overwhelming in terms of attempting to 'fix' situations. One worker noted that *'for some young people, their disturbance is too great. They are so oppositional that there is no hook to grasp them with. They end up lacking empathy and generally drift towards the drug and criminal milieu. These kids are often past school, and past being compliant. There are often serious problems with regard to diet, lack of food, lack of sleep and depression – and that can mean that some young people are not at all open to intervention'*.

The extent of the ‘needs’ of some young men was viewed by a number of workers as being a significant barrier to the provision of service. One worker noted ***‘the kids that come have buckets of need’***. The difficulty many young men have in ‘trusting’ staff was also noted as a key barrier to successful engagement. One worker suggested that ***‘Failure- is most likely to occur when the young person doesn’t trust anybody and when they find it very hard to connect with anybody’*** whilst another suggested that often the issue of trust was related to the referral source; ***‘if the young person is referred from Juvenile Justice or DOCS, the workers are seen to be colluding with these organisations.’*** A number of workers postulated that by the time the young men they were attempting to assist reached their service, there is sometimes a sense that the provision of service is too late. One worker noted that, ***‘In many ways early intervention would be easier and preferable- because by the time you get to thirteen or fourteen, if the young person is really disturbed then it doesn’t really matter how great a program is.’*** Another pointed out that ***‘Young men are frequently unsure where they fit in. By the time they are seen by a youth service, they are viewed as being part of the problem rather than part of the solution’***.

Other workers suggested that sometimes young men with long histories of drug use became very good at ***‘telling workers what they want to hear’*** and that this tended to prevent a lot of useful work being done. Some workers also noted that a number of very disadvantaged young men suffered from ***‘service fatigue’*** and others simply ***‘don’t want to be there’***. Although the behaviour of the young men accessing (or attempting to access) services is clearly a strong theme with regard to the barriers to service provision, so too are a number of cultural and social factors<sup>48</sup>. A number of workers pointed to ***‘actual or perceived homophobia or transphobia’*** as an exclusionary factor, whilst others noted that ***‘language barriers might unintentionally exclude some young men’***. Some workers argued that an absence of knowledge about service provision, combined with the reticence of men to seek help prior to things reaching crisis point constituted one of the largest barriers to successful engagement. One worker noted that ***‘getting young men to see a GP or see someone when they have a pain- before it gets terrible- would be ideal’***

Although clearly reticent to themselves be responsible for preventing marginalised young men from accessing services, a number of services had clear policies with regard to service exclusion. Reasons for ‘banning’ or ‘exiting’ young men from services included; ***‘non attendance’, ‘drug and alcohol use (on the premises)’, ‘not doing anything set in the case plan’, ‘not paying rent, not sticking with curfews, not participating in domestic chores’, ‘for violence towards other workers’, ‘homophobic or racist comments’, ‘people with a history of excessive violence- and display of this’, ‘perpetrators of sexual abuse’*** and those who ***‘don’t want to take responsibility for themselves’***. The extent to which these factors are reasonable grounds for withholding services is clearly the subject of some contention between- and in some cases- within services. Again there is tension between the needs of the service (and the services responsibilities to workers and clients),

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<sup>48</sup> For a more detailed examination of structural barriers to service provision see ‘Service Inaccessibility’ in Chapter 5

and some of the more challenging behaviours and attitudes displayed by marginalised young men.

Services would do well to explore the tensions that exist between the needs of services and some of the challenging behaviours and attitudes that are displayed by marginalised young men. The rationale for withholding or withdrawing services to this group requires particular investigation.

## **More to be Done**

There is clearly more that needs to be done to better meet the needs of marginalised young men. The service providers and young men interviewed for this project had a wide range of suggestions. Suggestions were of course based on the diverse experiences of the workers and young men and frequently reflected the (perceived lack of the) organisations they were primarily connected to. As such, there is some difficulty in dividing these issues thematically. Instead a full list of the stated service needs is noted below<sup>49</sup>.

- The need for comprehensive neuro-psychological assessments in the public system. One worker noted that ***'Getting a solid and accurate diagnosis is crucial and often doesn't happen'***. Another suggested that ***'misdiagnosis is a really big problem. Men are often diagnosed with borderline personality disorder when they are actually suffering from complex post traumatic stress disorder'***
- The need for more recreational equipment that works including gym and sports gear and more space within youth services to utilise this
- The need for more (generally) of existing services within youth services- more computers, better internet access, better musical and recording equipment
- The need for increased resources generally, but also specifically in early intervention and prevention, as well as long term follow up for young men who participate in short or medium term programs
- The need for more adventure sports and wilderness programs. One worker suggested that what would be really useful are those programs that ***'cater for adrenaline junkies- things like white water rafting, abseiling, rock climbing- things that are safe but that help teach skills with team building and conflict resolution also'***
- The need for information and education about cars, including a free driving school. One worker noted ***'men need to learn to drive before they get caught driving unlicensed. They need opportunities to fulfil their desire to be a part of the car world'***
- The need for volunteer training programs

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<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that the recommendations of this report are only partially drawn from this list. The recommendations noted in the executive summary and throughout the report are the end-product of the thematic analysis of the all of the content in the literature and interviews (not just the questions about 'what should be done')

- The need for a ‘late bus’ so that young men could get home safely after they have been out
- The need for accommodation support for young men in crisis
- The need for interesting excursions
- The need for games (like car-racing games) to be placed in youth services
- The need for inspiring surrounds (and the need for redecoration). One young man noted that ***‘some people would walk in... see what is there and leave again. It would be good if it was inspiring to look at’***
- The need for more detox services which are specific for young people. One worker noted that ***‘the informal mentoring that takes place in adult settings is problematic’***
- The need for refuges which were specifically for young men and boys
- The need for most youth services to stay open later
- The need generally for more workers and improved conditions for workers including better training, support and supervision. One worker noted ***‘it would be useful to have better pay rates for workers so that they are not lost to different sectors’***
- The need specifically for more highly skilled, specialist counsellors, more male workers and more Aboriginal workers
- The need for more specialist services for young men with intellectual disability
- The need for more support for young fathers
- The need for more apprenticeship courses with a focus on vocational training
- The need to find creative ways to utilise the untapped potential of the internet. One worker noted that ***‘it is important to look at what kids do on their own. The internet is a vast untapped possibility to connect with some of these kids. I’m not sure how, but it needs to be looked into.’***
- The need to explore the untapped potential of video-games. One worker noted that ***‘video games are pinnacle to the conversation. You cannot talk about young men without addressing video games. The key is how to use it beneficially. A lot of young men are successful in this area of their lives and this must be used.’***
- The need to explore and evaluate the use of rock and water programs both inside and outside of the school environment
- The need to increase the focus on social welfare in schools and increase the partnerships between community agencies and mainstream schools
- The need to focus and target young men who are seriously at risk. One worker suggested that ***‘what might be interesting would be to look at boys in year nine and ask; who is healthily anchored? Who brings themselves to attention (through getting into trouble)? And then look at who is left. Because it is this group that are the invisible boys that are perhaps most at risk of killing themselves’***
- The need for recognition from the health service of the importance of a gender specific approach to young men’s health. One worker suggested that ***‘getting some recognition from the area health service in relation to men’s specific position would be very useful, particularly with regard to a coordinating role’***

- The need for better communication between government departments

## Chapter 9. Research and Evaluation

Various authors have identified specific areas in terms of the need for further research. These include; the question of why men don't use services (McDonald, McDermott, Woods, Brown, & Sliwka, 2000:3), evaluation of anger management programs (Cameron, 2001:226), evaluations into the capacity of sporting programs to act as crime prevention measures (Cameron & McDougall, 2000:6), the social and behavioural (rather than statistical) issues in men's health (NSW Health, 1999:32), long term evaluations into the success or otherwise of outdoors or wilderness programs (Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003:3).

There is a broad acknowledgement on the part of health professionals that men's health should be treated as a distinct area of research and concern (see White, Fawcner & Holmes, 2006:455). The lack of- and need for- further consultation with young men, and research and evaluation of programs targeting young men, is a strong theme throughout the literature (see McDonald et al, 2000; Cameron, 2001:226 D'Souza, 2001:3; Pickard & Ronk, 2003:10, NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:49-54). The absence of evidence-based research is lamented by numerous authors (see Children's Commission, 2002:113; NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:19). Aside from utilising scientific principles, it is suggested that evidence based research lends legitimacy and accuracy to its findings and allows services to prevent the repetition of mistakes by learning from the past, in addition to converting information into answerable questions (NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health, 2005:19).

It should however be acknowledged that there are considerable problems with utilising what is commonly referred to as an 'evidence based approach' in the welfare sector. Although it is not contentious that programs should be properly evaluated and lessons learned from the past about what is and isn't effective, the ambition for objective evidence- in combination with a continuing absence of funding to conduct research- has the potential to considerably weaken the *kinds* of questions that are asked. For instance it is more likely for a health promotion scheme to ask questions about levels of participation and understanding of course content than it is about longer-term consequences of such a program. Although there are plenty of evaluations in existence that may be considered acceptable 'evidence' that a program is successful, the parameters enforced by the current obsession with easily measurable outcomes (and there are of course resource issues at stake here) means that whilst the evidence might be solid according to scientific principles, it is also often lacking in substance. This issue was noted by a number of service providers. One worker stated, '***Measuring success and engagement is sometimes complicated. The way in which success is measured by health does not always reflect how 'meaningful' the experience of the service is. For instance, health is occupied with 'occasions of service'- but the provision of service might have been fleeting but extremely meaningful- It is very difficult to measure this.***'

Services should exercise caution to ensure that the current pressure to produce ‘evidence based research’ does not diminish the quality, substance or meaning of the research questions that are asked.

There is a need to acknowledge the lack of resources directed towards solid evaluations into programs that ‘work’ with young men. This situation in the welfare sector is certainly not specific only to this issue. Within the community sector generally, there is rarely any long-term or substantial investment into the evaluation and research of what might broadly be termed social issues. This is at least in part due to the difficulties involved in defining what the parameters of such research should be. How should success be measured? Is it the number of boys who appear to be at risk of going to prison who did not? Is it the boys who appeared to have serious mental health issues who have stayed alive over a period of time? The difficulty of identifying suitable outcomes for evaluation, is not however an insurmountable problem, and is certainly no excuse for the absence of funding in this area. The scarcity of resources in this area is itself worthy of further research consideration, but more important is the need to look long term at program success. This means following up participants over a specified period and attempting to assess the impact of one particular program (as opposed to the many other influencing variables) on that person’s life.

There is a need for well-funded research into the long-term impact of specific programs on the lives of marginalised young men. The difficulty of establishing the parameters of such research should not be considered a rationale for not conducting this work. Youth services should whenever possible examine funding possibilities for this type of project.

It is clear from this research that there is the need for a solid audit of innovative programs targeting young men<sup>50</sup>. In 2002 the UK Health Department produced a literature review and mapping project that identified services and programs, which worked with young men. As a follow up to this project, 12 of the most established programs were identified, visited, and evaluated over a three month period. The detailed thematic analysis of the findings of this research provides an excellent starting point to any ‘what works’ discussion, as well as providing an excellent blueprint for the kind of research that might be possible in Australia (see Lloyd, 2002).

There is a need for a comprehensive audit of programs (in Australia) that target marginalised young men. Services should wherever possible explore funding possibilities for this kind of future project.

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<sup>50</sup> This kind of project was clearly beyond the scope of this research. There are however a number of recent programs and projects that are mentioned in **Appendix 9**, primarily as examples of the type of project that would be worthy of further evaluation into ‘what works’ with young marginalised men in Australia. Another useful starting point for this in Australia might be an examination of programs covered in the ‘Bulletin of Good Practice in Popular Education’

## Chapter 10. Conclusion

Although it is tempting to suggest that the research in this report occupies conceptual territory that is entirely distinct from the research that has come before it- this is not the case. And although there are plenty of calls to re-evaluate, re-think re-design- or in some way revolutionise- approaches to young men's health and well-being, caution is needed before embarking on such pleas for 'bold new directions'. There are two primary reasons for this. Firstly, there is already a substantial body of research which points with at least some degree of clarity and consistency to what some of the key issues are for marginalised young men. Secondly, it is misleading to suggest there is a 'magic bullet'- some way of working with young men that has not previously been discovered, and that will rectify the range of well-identified problems.

The way forward is both more and less complicated. Although there is certainly merit in exploring innovative programs for young men (groups like 'Rock and Water' clearly break new ground when it comes to engagement and connection) it should not be the fact of their novelty that makes such programs desirable. There is a continuing need to explore what there is that currently exists and appears to work, and then move on to rectifying the existing situation so that such programs and policies are able to be implemented (and not just for short term pilots). Participants in this research displayed a wealth of experience and insight, and much of the value of this report is to be found in the participant's identification and analysis of already established issues. What is needed now, and what this report offers as a first step, is the placement of these issues into a framework for action.

Marginalised young men- those at risk of institutionalisation, imprisonment and suicide are often those who do not access- or are not accessed by- agencies at which their attendance would be voluntary. The needs of this group of young men are substantial. They are generally impoverished- both socially and economically, are frequently involved in problematic drug use, are often disconnected from their families, tend to have difficulties in mainstream education, have difficulties more generally with 'fitting in', and struggle to find motivation and hope. There are some groups of young men for whom these problems are exacerbated- particularly, Indigenous young men, young men who are gay or transgender, young men with intellectual disability, young men with mental illness and young men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

And yet in spite of all of this, or perhaps *because* of all of this, many agencies and many young men themselves, remain optimistic about finding ways of engaging the most marginalised, and connecting them to services in ways that are meaningful. Indeed, many services and young men are doing this already and there is much that can be learnt from those services, or from workers within services about how this is happening. There is however much more that can, and should be done, to ensure that those young men are who are most in need, have better, and more plentiful opportunities.

These young men require services that are tailored to meet their needs- services which are flexible enough to respond quickly- and at times with spontaneity to pressing issues and concerns. They need workers who care about them 'as people'- not just as clients, but who are skilled and professional enough to do more than simply 'be mates'. They need programs that give voice to their problems, *and* programs that allow them the space to have fun, or that simply allow them space. They need the opportunity to talk in counselling settings, *and* they need opportunities for expression through different means such as music and physical activity. The most vulnerable men need services to seek them out (via outreach), to follow them up (often beyond what would normally occur) and remain vigilant about the risk of them falling through the many gaps that exist in the current welfare framework. Those young men who want help and make the move to ask for it, need services that are accessible with regard to geography and opening hours, offer a range of different services (including importantly casework) and are welcoming and respectful in their approach. Some of these needs are readily met via small alterations to existing service structures. Others clearly require more substantial structural and cultural change.

It is those young men who are most in need, who are most at risk, who are most marginalised who force youth services to reassess their standard modes of operation. They are frequently the 'problem clients'- the young men who cause exasperation and frustration amongst workers and agencies because of the combination of the vastness and complexity of their needs and the accompanying range of self destructive behaviours that can make meeting these needs even more difficult. Tensions exist between the needs of services (worker safety, efficient use of worker time and resources, pragmatic prioritisation of all client needs- including examination of the ways in which the service can be most effective) and the needs of the most vulnerable men. Any serious attempts to engage the most seriously marginalised young men involves more than promoting innovative programs and providing genuinely compassionate workers. The tensions that exist need to be identified and named. Cultural questions should be asked. What are the kinds of behaviour that cause problems for this service? Why is this behaviour a problem? How much of this behaviour can- or should be tolerated (or even embraced) in the name of a more inclusive service? Where are the gaps in terms of funding for this group, and what needs to happen for these gaps to be filled?

When asking these questions it is useful to employ a strengths-based approach. This should not mean applying a relentlessly optimistic analysis. There is often a temptation in strengths based analyses to obscure or deny the severity of problems in a quest to reframe them in terms of their positives. But marginalised young men face serious- often life-threatening challenges and there is little point in dressing these up as anything else. Nor is there any point in avoiding the fact that sometimes the responsibility for these problems needs to be located at an individual level. However what strengths based approaches can do is invoke us to explore the complexity of these problems, and steer us away from narrow or pathological analyses.

Reticence to seek help needs to be viewed in the social context in which it is occurring. Structural explanations for 'men's problems' should always be explored in conjunction

with explanations which focus on individual responsibility. Prejudice and discrimination with regard to the expression of various forms of 'masculinity' (including noisy and boisterous behaviour in waiting rooms) should be identified and addressed. This should occur regardless of whether the explanations for such expression are attributed to cultural or biological forces. Resilience needs to be recognised and maintained. But perhaps most importantly, it is hope and hopefulness-, which needs to be invoked, nurtured and wherever possible, celebrated.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1- Recruitment Poster

**Are YOU A Young Man Aged Between 12 and 24?**

**Want to have a say about what you think?**

We are doing research into how to make youth services better- and we want to interview YOU. The interview will take around 20 minutes. You *won't* be asked for your name or any personal details.

**Interested?**  
Call or Text Mindy  
0425293391

Or leave a message for her at Youth Block on  
(02)95162233

For your time you get a \$20 gift voucher to spend at Fish Records or Coles/Myer

**Rosemount**  
GOOD SHEPHERD  
Youth & Family Services Inc.

## **Appendix 2- Guiding Questions for Service Providers (Workers)**

- 1.) When we talk about marginalised young men what is meant by this? (What do we mean by marginalised?)
- 2.) (Why) is it important that marginalised young men engage with services?
- 3.) If we were to talk in terms of needs, how would you define the needs of this group?
- 4.) In your experience what are some of the services that this group appear to have engaged with?
- 5.) How would you define 'success' with regard to your service working with this group?
- 6.) What would you view as failure when it comes to working with this group?
- 7.) Do you believe there are barriers to service provision for marginalised young men?
- 8.) If yes, what are these barriers?
- 9.) Thinking about worker qualities, could you describe any kinds of worker qualities that you think are particularly helpful/important when working with marginalised young men?
- 10.) What about qualities that are unhelpful/counterproductive?
- 11.) If there were unlimited resources what kinds of services do you think should/could be available?
- 12.) What kinds of service evaluations do you know of that already exist? What can be learnt from these evaluations with regard to the issues for young men and what works?
- 13.) Thinking of developing an interagency- who do you think should be key players?
- 14.) Do you have any suggestions with regard to who else (in other agencies/services) might be useful to speak to with regard to this project?

### **Appendix 3- Guiding Questions for Young Men**

I am doing a research project that is about places like \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service young person is accessing). I wanted to talk to some people that are using the service to find out what they think. You don't have to give your name, or talk about your own experience if you don't want to. As part of the project I am trying to find out how places like \_\_\_\_\_ can do a better job. I am especially interested in finding out whether young men find the service useful or not.

- 1.) In your experience, or from what you have seen, what do you think are the main reasons that young men or boys go to places like \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service)?
- 2.) When you think about the young men that you know, what would you say are the biggest hassles in their lives?
- 3.) Places like \_\_\_\_\_ are sometimes given money by the government to help young people. What (if anything) do you think that places that are supposed to work with young men could do to help them with those kinds of hassles?
- 4.) How did you first hear about \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service)?
- 5.) When you first heard about \_\_\_\_\_ what did you think about the idea of going there?
- 6.) When young men don't want to go to youth services (like \_\_\_\_\_), why do you think that is?
- 7.) In your experience, or from what you have heard, what is the worst thing about going to a place like \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service)?
- 8.) In your experience, or from what you have heard, what is the best thing about going to a place like \_\_\_\_\_? (insert name of service)

## Appendix 4 - Participant Information (Young Men)

# SYDNEY SOUTH WEST AREA HEALTH SERVICE

## Participant Information

### Research into Young Men in the Inner West of Sydney

This project is looking at how well services that work with young men are doing their job. You have been asked to participate in an interview/focus group because the study aims to find out what young people think about services like \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service that the young person is accessing).

The purpose of the study is to get your opinions about what sorts of things are helpful or unhelpful when young people access services. You will be asked a series of questions about what you think. If you decide you don't want to answer any of the questions you don't have to.

Your name will not be recorded (either on tape or written down) at any point during the research process. The interview will last between 15 and 30 minutes.

If you decide not to take part in the interview then this will not affect your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service). You can decide at any point during the interview that you don't want to continue. You can also decide at the end of the interview that you don't want your interview used..

At the end of the interview you will be given a \$20 gift voucher for either Fish Records or Coles Myer.

If you have any questions about the research project you can contact Mindy Sotiri (the head researcher) on 9516 2233.

If you have any complaints about the way the research was conducted then you can call the Executive Officer of the Ethics Review Committee (the group that tries to make sure research is conducted in a way that is fair and doesn't hurt anybody). This number is 95156766.

Thank-you for your time and interest in this project.

## **Appendix 5- Participant Information and Detailed Project Information (Workers)**

# SYDNEY SOUTH WEST AREA HEALTH SERVICE

### Participant Information(Service Providers) 'Marginalised Young Men in the Inner West of Sydney: A Needs Analysis and Service Evaluation'

This project explores the needs of marginalised young men in the inner west of Sydney and how accessible and effective services that are working with this group are. You have been asked to participate in an informal interview because your organisation works with young marginalised men. The purpose of this interview is to find out what your opinions are about the way in which your organisation works with this group, what you think the needs of this group are, and what you think works- or doesn't work- when working with young men. You will be asked a series of questions about what you think

Neither your name, nor the name of your organisation will be attached to any interview notes. The interview will last between 15 and 30 minutes and the interviewer will write notes throughout to keep a record of your answers. After the interview is complete the researcher will transcribe your notes, and these will later form part of a grounded content analysis.

If you decide not to take part in the interview then this will not affect your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of service). You can decide at any point during the interview that you don't want to continue. You can decide not to answer any questions you would prefer not to. You can also decide at the end of the interview that you don't want your interview used in which case the notes from the interview will be shredded.

If you have any questions about the research project you can contact Mindy Sotiri (the head researcher) on 9516 2233.

If you have any complaints about the way the research was conducted then you can call the Executive Officer of the Ethics Review Committee. This number is 95156766.

Thank-you for your time and interest in this project.

## Appendix 6- Service Providers initial categories

### Connecting with Young Men

- 1.) Why Engage
- 2.) Casework, Groupwork, Counselling
- 3.) Informal Counselling
- 4.) Outreach/Streetwork
- 5.) Getting away
- 6.) Somewhere to Hang
- 7.) Sport/Adventure/Physical
- 8.) Music/Creative
- 9.) Social/Being Part of Things
- 10.) One Stop Shop
- 11.) Information
- 12.) Education/Employment/Training
- 13.) Video and Internet
- 14.) Motivation/Dreams/Self Worth
- 15.) Culturally Okay Services
- 16.) Mentors/Role Models/Peers
- 17.) Working with the Family
- 18.) Success
- 19.) Barriers and when it gets too hard

### Masculinity

- 20.) Boys will be boys?  
The danger of talk (and asking for help)

### Worker Qualities

- 21.) Genuinely caring, patient, and persistent
- 22.) Trust, rapport, honesty
- 23.) Skilled
- 24.) Flexibility and choice
- 25.) Ways of Connecting
- 26.) Strong Boundaries
- 27.) Role models
- 28.) Personal attributes

### Issues

- 29.) Health/Mental health/disability
- 30.) Addiction
- 31.) Child abuse
- 32.) Esteem/resilience
- 33.) Educational disadvantage
- 34.) Maturity/developmental
- 35.) Masculinity and Youth (Social and cultural disadvantage)
- 36.) Emotional disadvantage/Invisible kids/Self control
- 37.) Homophobia
- 38.) Racism
- 39.) Economic Disadvantage
- 40.) Intergenerational Disadvantage/Family
- 41.) Risk Taking
- 42.) Crime and Criminal Justice

### Accessibility

- 43.) Service Inaccessibility
- 44.) Asking for help/not asking for help (service inaccessibility)
- 45.) Meeting the needs of the service- not the client
- 46.) Flexibility
- 47.) Something to be done

## **Appendix 7- Young Men initial categories**

Youth Services- What works? What doesn't? What could?

- 1.) Chilling Out/Hanging Out
- 2.) One Stop Shop
- 3.) What helps (Practical use of services)
- 4.) Music- Talking about your struggle without talking about your struggle
- 5.) The Unknown and the Embarrassing
- 6.) The Problem is the Other Kids
- 7.) Getting there
- 8.) Never Heard Of It...
- 9.) More Sport, More Games, More Resources

Hassles

- 10.) Family
- 11.) Teachers
- 12.) Crime/Police/Trouble
- 13.) Drugs and alcohol
- 14.) Homophobia

What Matters?

- 15.) The Centrality of Friendship
- 16.) Talking and Not Talking
- 17.) Dreams and Pipedreams (motivation and depression)

## Appendix 8-Literature Review categories- initial coding

- 1.) Is this a crisis
- Stats and Facts
- 2.) Drug and alcohol use
  - 3.) Violence/Bullying/Anti-social behaviour
  - 4.) Other Risk Taking
    - Peer and Family Relationships
  - 5.) Gender Specific Health
  - 6.) Premature and Preventable Death
  - 7.) Suicide
  - 8.) Mental Illness
  - 9.) Education and Schooling
  - 10.) Imprisonment
  - 11.) Policing/Exclusion/Space
- Help Politics
- 12.) Asking for Help
  - 13.) Sex roles and the Construction of Masculinity
  - 14.) Boys will be boys?
  - 15.) Men V Women
  - 16.) Is this a competition
  - 17.) Feminism to blame
  - 18.) Gender difference in education
- 
- 19.) A waste of time?
  - 20.) Philosophy, Principles, and Practice
  - 21.) Strengths Based Approaches
  - 22.) Following Dreams?
    - Gender specific holistic practice
- 
- Nuts and Bolts
- 23.) Environment
  - 24.) Flexibility
    - Accessibility
  - 25.) Targeted
  - 26.) Training, Research and Design
  - 27.) Working with Violent Men
  - 28.) Positive, Innovative, Challenging
  - 29.) Choice- group and individual
  - 30.) One Stop Shop
  - 31.) Social
  - 32.) Making Services Known/Promotion
  - 33.) Participation
  - 34.) Community Linkage
  - 35.) Diversity
  - 36.) Funding
  - 37.) Workers
  - 38.) Men (Workers and Mentors)
  - 39.) Outreach
  - 40.) Music and Creative Programs
  - 41.) Physical Activity and Sport
  - 42.) Programs that Work
  - 43.) Research and Evaluation

## Appendix 9- Recent Evaluations

Boycott et al (2006) ran a project with year seven and eight boys which was targeted towards those boys who were at risk of suspension or expulsion. The program focused on social development prior to the development of academic achievement- and viewed this as the key to moving forward academically (2006:1). Boycott suggests that it is important for boys to be part of a group in order to develop their social skills, and suggests that a group size of between 6 and 8 is ideal (Boycott, 2006:2). In her project boys were identified and chosen to participate in the group because they were constantly being sent to the principal for problematic behaviour (Boycott, 2006:2). Part of the group involved a 'check in' time where the boys talk about 'one good thing' they did that week, or one thing they could have done better (2006:4). Boycott (2006) stressed the importance of teaching boys to observe what is going on, as well as the usefulness of asking them questions about what they observed (particularly with regard to disruptive behaviour) (2006:6).

Pickard & Ronk (2003) ran a 'Rock and Water Program' over a five week period for TAFE students who had been identified as being 'at risk'. The program combines 'self-defence type exercises' with a range of self-awareness strategies (for instance, taking responsibility, anger awareness, instilling a sense of power and choice, and finding inner calm). It is a course designed specifically for men. Pickard and Ronk adapted the course from the Rock and Water prototype<sup>51</sup> to suit their needs including the shorter (five week) timeframe the project was to be run in. The feedback throughout the course was generally very positive. Although some of the participants noted that they had problems with some of the other participants taking place, a number of the young men participating reported profound shifts as a consequence of participation (Pickard & Ronk, 2003:5-8). The absence of research into the long-term impact of the project was noted by the authors.

In Dadich's (2006) research, she explored the use of self-help support groups such as alcoholics anonymous, and GROW(a mental health support group) for young men. She notes that young men do not tend to attend these groups in any representative numbers but that there is an absence of data about the experience for young men who do attend (2006:34). Dadich explored the experiences of 28 young men who attended groups. She found that young men first got in contact with the support groups in question because of a strong sense that they needed to change after getting to a particular desperate point in their lives. Some young men in her research reported having attempted to change in the past and having used more traditional or mainstream services. These were noted as being unsuccessful at least in part because of a sense of not being able to be honest with the service provider. The groups offered a sense of support to the young men, as well as providing a source of information. Information from people in the group was felt to be pragmatic (they'd been there/done that) and honest. Young men felt less isolated, more hopeful, and appreciated the potential to make friendships as a consequence of the groups (Dadich, 2006:36-38)

Dixon & Hadjilalexidou (2005) discuss a 'photo-voice' project that involved giving young homeless people disposable cameras and instructions to take photos of things that were important to them. The authors note the importance of planning (the project) and flexibility (with regard to the needs of the participants). The strategy of 'photovoice' involved young people taking photos and then talking about why they were important. Importantly, the project didn't require written skills or any particular artistic merit. The authors noted that although young people were involved and engaged in the process of taking photos, they were perhaps less interested in the 'being given a voice' part of the project (Dixon & Hadjilalexidou, 2005:55)

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<sup>51</sup> see <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/rock-and-water/about.html> for more information

Currie (2002) outlines a program run for 12-15 year old boys who have displayed anti-social behaviour at school, are angry and displaying aggressive behaviour, but not yet embroiled in committing crime. The program is called 'Doing Anger Differently' Currie posits that a successful program is dependent on the 'fit' between the difficulties a young man is facing and the design of the program and suggest that what is crucial in programs with young men is that the program involves 'doing' rather than simply talking. To this end, the 'Doing Anger Differently' program utilises percussion, as well as the maintenance of anger management journals (Currie, 2002:5-6)

Maakrum (2004) ran a successful project called 'machismo' at James Cook High School, This project involved visiting artists connecting with young boys at the school, and was noted to have astonishing results with regard to both participation and outcomes (Maakrum, 2004:2)

Rodney & Lake, (2002) describe a 14 week (one day per week) course for year 7 and 8 boys who are having difficulty with the transition from primary to secondary school as evidenced by their behaviour (Rodney & Lake, 2002:31). This project involved working closely with itinerant support teachers around negative behaviours, as well as getting the boys to work as 'teachers aides' in the special school (for kids with intellectual disability) on the grounds of their school (Rodney & Lake, 2002:3)