Issues raised by Melbourne Citymission at the Productivity Commission Hearing into the Job Network held in Melbourne April 10, 2002

Melbourne Citymission is not a Job Network Provider, as the agency did not tender for the Job Network
Melbourne Citymission believes that the privatisation of the employment services system was a radical shift and that the agency's role was to stay outside this service system and take on a" watching brief" - an advocacy role on behalf of unemployed people who are disadvantaged in the labour market.
Melbourne Citymission, instead, decided to partner with other agencies to further investigate the new employment services system and its impact on the unemployed. In attempt to provide a voice on behalf of unemployed people.

In the first instance the agency partnered with Hanover Welfare Services and produced the report in 1998 – *"Improving the Job Network for People in Housing Crisis" – the Experiences of Two Melbourne Agencies*. In producing this report 227 people who were either homeless or at risk of homelessness were surveyed. The research found that the initial assessment was flawed via the JSCI due to under reporting and insufficient weight being given by this tool to homelessness and associated barriers to employment – transport, personal issues and contactability. Unemployed people were confused and frustrated by the system and young people in particular felt that they had to do well during the assessment/interview.

Melbourne Citymission and Hanover recommended that Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, (SAAP) agencies and other Community agencies, (non Job Network Providers) have already established trusting relationships with this group and using this information would improve the accuracy of the assessment and lead to improved employment outcomes. The two agencies further recommended that protocols be developed with SAAP and other community agencies to make preliminary assessments of the factors of the JSCI and to make recommendations to Centrelink staff on behalf of their clients.
Centrelink is currently underesourced to effectively assess the needs of disadvantaged unemployed people. The implementation of this recommendation would assist Centrelink's resource issue. The take up of this recommendation would also support the Commission's idea around the provision of a "case history" and "flexible questions" re the JSCI.

In 2001 Melbourne Citymission partnered with Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Hanover Welfare services and produced the report *"Negotiating the Maze" – An analysis of employment assistance for young people.* This study found that the service system was fragmented and that there needed to be a relaxation of the restrictions between programs and that there should be a trial of program combinations.
Due to this report a "*Collaboration"* trial (initially funded by DETYA but now funded by DFACS) has been implemented in Maribyrnong, (please see attached information about the trial). To inform the trial Melbourne Citymission, in 2002, interviewed 47 young people who were disconnected from the employment, education and training system to assess their "Barriers to Young People's Successful Negotiations of Employment, Education and Training Pathways" (see attached report). The results were that young people expressed low confidence in the Job Network, specialist services would better meet their needs, they would like support to be non judgemental, opportunity to make mistakes and time to work out what they need. The young people were also concerned about the cost of training and the limited amount of work experience and employment opportunities.

Melbourne Citymission supports the model of services working in an integrated way, such as what has been proposed in the policy document *Australians Working Together.* That is, the Job Network and the Personal Support Program working in an integrated/ coordinated way with disadvantaged unemployed person. This idea should be extended to other programs such as JPET, Job Pathways Program and other relevant State Government programs.

The Collaboration trial will be piloting this model. Melbourne Citymission will keep the Productivity Commission updated about the progress of the trial. There is also a National Interdepartmental Committee that hopefully can also keep the Commission in the information loop.

MARIBYRNONG COLLABORATION PROJECT

Progress Report – December 2001

Introduction

The Maribyrnong Collaboration Project officially commenced in June 2001. It is one of five national collaborative trials being funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). It is the only trial taking place in Victoria, and the City of Maribyrnong was chosen by DETYA because socio-economic indicators put young people in this LGA amongst the most disadvantaged in Victoria. The Project will operate over an 18 to 24 month period, and result in a community-owned gateway model providing these young people with sensitive and relevant support.

Progress

The first phase of the Project focused on planning, mapping and networking of the service system and those associated with it, young people were included in this process as well. A presentation of the findings were presented at a number of local information sessions, which resulted in the formation of three working groups, a Key Stakeholders Group, A Critical Thinking Group and a Young People's Advisory Group.

This development reflects the interest and commitment that individuals, groups and service providers have to providing a better system for disconnected young people in the City of Maribyrnong. Those who are unable to participate actively in the process are clear that they can contribute to the Project at any stage and in a wide range of ways. One avenue is via the monthly Project newsletter, which is emailed out to a distribution list of 130 people. Even direction taken in the Project is underscored with an emphasis on collaboration, and, so far, it has worked with remarkable success.

Phase three of the Project has seen the various working groups evolving a gateways model that will address the issues and needs of the young people, a model that will be community owned and operated. At the present time, a multiple gateway model is preferred as it will allow a wider range of services to be directly involved in supporting young people along a more 'seamless' pathway into education, training and employment, allowing their other issues to be addressed through a supportive referral system.

Services who elect to become a part of the gateways network will display a logo, signifying their agreement to supply a quality and consistent service to young people. A charter is being developed which will incorporate the protocols and elements of good practice that have been developed by the Project working groups.

The next phase of the Project will see the draft gateway model presented at a major information session for consideration and discussion between government departments, community services providers, young people and community representatives. Recommendations will be taken back to the working groups, who will, by this stage, have commenced a merging process that will bring them together as one advisory group, to assist with the implementation of the gateways model.

Outcomes

A number of notable outcomes have already been achieved with the Project, thus far:

- The depth of involvement from local stakeholders and government representatives has been very encouraging. The willingness for people to look at collaborating to improve the outcomes for disconnected young people is being demonstrated quite clearly.

- The level of Government interest is very strong, as demonstrated in the number of visits and amount of communication that has taken place over the past six months. Interest has been from both federal and State governments.

- Disconnected and at risk young people have shown by there presence on the Young People's Advisory Group and participation in the focus group work for the research component of the Project that they are wanting to see changes occurring to the service systems. The attendance at, and participation in, the Young People's Advisory Group meetings attests to their desire for change and their willingness to contribute to the planning and decision-making processes.

- Logos for the gateway network are being tested out at present, and when the approved logo is finally chosen it will be displayed by each of the participating services to signify that it will provide consistent and quality support to disconnected young people.

- The foundations of a charter have been developed and are being consolidated into a 'working' document. All of the work that has been done on the protocols and elements of good practice will be integrated into a charter to direct the rolling out of the gateway model and to guide the participating services in their contact with young people.

Melbourne Citymission

The Collaborative Youth Services Trial - Maribyrnong Collaboration Project

Report to the Department of Family and Community Services (DFACS) for the period ending December 2001.

This progress report documents the second three months of the Maribyrnong Collaboration project. The Project has progressed very well during the October to December period. In reference to the diagram, Stages in the Development of the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project, the project is now entering the third phase (Phase 3b). (Refer to Appendix A)

Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the report relate to the requirements listed in the funding contract schedule – *C. Reports, C1 (b*). Section 5 features other developments occurring within the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project.

1. Progress in developing the final model, in conjunction with the Stakeholders.

1.1 Background

From Phase 2 of the Project, *Information Sessions* (June/July 2001), stakeholders within the City of Maribyrnong have shown preference for a 'gateway' model to service the needs of disconnected and at risk young people who reside, study, work or frequent the LGA. The focus of the three working groups, the Stakeholders Group, the Critical Thinking Group and the Young People's Advisory Group, established as a result of the Information Sessions, has been directed toward the development of a gateway concept. (Refer to Appendix B)

The gateway concept, as it has evolved, places emphasis on community ownership, providing existing services with the opportunity to become gateways into the education, training and employment service system, if they can satisfy the requirements and agree to the conditions of the Gateways Charter.

Maribyrnong City Council has been asked to consider a role in the core support element of the Project as it is regarded as a neutral body and will not be seen as having any vested interest of its own. It is believed this core support role has to be separated from those agencies that have already elected to take part in the gateways trial, or those who may become gateways in the future.

Negotiations with the Council are in the early stages at the present time. More information will be provided to DFACS as it becomes available.

1.2 Final Model

The gateways model, as it now stands, is based on the original draft model presented at the information sessions in June and July. (Refer to Appendix B) The model was based on the original DETYA requirements and the recommendations of the Creating Employment Pathways (CEP) project, documented in the 'Negotiating the Maze' report.

Through the collaborative efforts of the stakeholders, the draft/theoretical model has been shaped into a workable version that will be implemented during the trial phase (Phase 4) of the Project. The model builds on the work already being undertaken by many of the services within the City of Maribyrnong. However, it will provide a framework for agencies in providing consistent services, current information and supported referral, creating more 'seamless pathways' for disconnected young people aged between 12 and 25 years.

The charter, including the code of practice and the protocols, will help to regulate and guide the gateway agencies in providing the best possible service for the young people.

1.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Model

Continuous monitoring and evaluation of the gateways model will occur during Phase 4, with necessary changes being made to the model, if required. It is only after the working model has been implemented and reviewed will it be considered as 'final.'

Information pertaining to the monitoring and evaluation of the gateways model is detailed in Section 4 of this report (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3)

2. Implementation strategies to meet the Project goal and action research framework.

2.1 Implementation Strategies

2.1.1 Stakeholders involved in the Project, as recorded in the first report, have elected to adopt a 'gateways' model for assisting disconnected, or at risk, young people. This model makes it possible for existing services in the City of Maribyrnong to be actively involved in providing advocacy, guidance and support to these young people in their efforts to gain entry into education, training and employment, and with other needs.

2.1.2 Building on the sense of community ownership, a charter is being devised to assist in the selection/accreditation of services as gateways and to guide their operations in meeting the needs of young people. The Project working groups have spent the last three months devising a code of practice and a set of protocols based on good practice. A large amount of information has been processed to come up with a clear and workable code of practice and protocols. It forms the core of the charter, which will govern the operations of the gateways model.

Agencies who have agreed to participate in the trialling of the gateways model will meet in late January to review the protocols and code of practice.

2.1.3 A logo is also being developed as an integral part of the model. It is intended that the logo will be displayed by all gateway agencies to signify their involvement and commitment in the Project. This strategy is also regarded as all-important for 'sign-posting' to young people that there is a range of accessible services to assist them directly, or to provide them with sensitive and supportive referral.

The Young People's Advisory Group has been creating design ideas for the gateways logo and presenting these to the other working groups. A shortlist of logo designs will be market-tested on a cross-section of young people before the final selection is made. The logo will then be issued to the agencies that are the designated gateways, and be promoted through the information sessions and the community education campaign.

2.1.4 A community education campaign has been included as one of the major features of implementing the gateways model. Strategies are being devised so that government and non-government agencies, young people and the general community in the City of Maribyrnong are aware of the gateways model – its purpose, the charter and the logo.

The campaign will make use of information sessions, the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project email distribution lists and personal visits to agencies and schools. Written information will also be produced in pamphlet form or as a pocket-sized booklet for young people, families, community workers, schools and other groups of stakeholders.

2.1.5 Negotiations are underway with Maribyrnong City Council to use part of their youth Internet site, Konnected, as a way of providing up to date information on education, training and employment options. The web site will be a central point that can be accessed by agencies, schools, young people and other interested groups or individuals.

This strategy is in its early stages. There are issues that have yet to be resolved by the working groups, for example, whose responsibility will it be to keep the information on the website updated. This, and other issues, will be resolved as the Project enters its next phase.

2.1.6 A 'linkages worker' (to be based with the Western Area Consultative Committee) will be employed for the implementation phase of the Project. This position will ensure the transition of the model from its current position as a theoretical construct to a fully operational service. The major tasks of this worker will be to:

- Assist with the setting up of the gateways
- Resource the advisory group meetings
- Assist with the design of the community education campaign and its delivery
- Construct the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project Web pages – possibly incorporated into the City of Maribyrnong's 'Konnected' youth website
- Organise the public information sessions
- Provide training for the gateway agencies - designated workers and management.

A duty statement is presently being prepared for the Linkages Worker position. A final draft of the position description will be presented to the working groups for ratification.

Funding opportunities also have to be explored in more detail to determine what time fraction can be allocated to this position, and, hence, whether all the listed duties can be undertaken by the Linkages Worker within the determined time fraction.

3. Identify stages of the Project requiring further action research.

3.1 Follow up on research recommendations

The research worker employed to assist the Project in its previous phase has completed a survey of local agency workers and conducted focus groups with a wide range of young people. The findings of this research has been written up and distributed for comment.

A more detailed report is due for completion by the end of January and is being produced in conjunction with the Maribyrnong/Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) – a State-funded program. A draft copy of the report, 'Barriers to Young People's Successful Negotiation of Employment, Education and Training Pathways,' has been included with this Progress Report as Appendix C.

This report will be used to inform the Project of areas that may require further research. Any further research should continue to utilise the knowledge, experiences and participation of all relevant stakeholders concerned with the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project and its aims.

3.2 Appropriateness of the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project's Charter

The draft charter has been constructed using the knowledge and experience gained from all the working group members. A number of workshops were held top facilitate the gathering of information and its documentation. Research into other services charters, codes of practice and protocols has also been undertaken.

The success of the Project is dependent on both the willingness and ability of agencies within the City of Maribyrnong to collaborate and support the gateways model, and the decision of disconnected young people to access it. It is vital, therefore, that the co-operation of these stakeholders is maintained, while their opinions and recommendations are recorded and built into the charter, as deemed appropriate.

During the next phase of the Project, the draft charter has to be presented to the working groups for review and any necessary changes. It will then be discussed with the agencies being considered as gateways in the trial phase of the gateways model. The charter has to be workable, and it is the gateway agencies that are best able to assess whether all the provisions of the charter can be complied with. Some modifications may result from these discussions.

Continuous consultation, monitoring and review will be necessary throughout the trial phase. An analysis of the results should indicate if any additional modification to the charter is necessary. Once again, the research process will include the participation of all key stakeholders, with the findings being used to shape the final gateways charter.

3.3 Overcoming barriers that may inhibit 'strategic' agencies, for example, Centrelink, from participating as gateways

As the Project is focusing on disconnected young people, aged 12 to 25 years, a number of serious barriers have already been raised for consideration. The Critical Thinking Group has been discussing the implications of the rising numbers of under-age school leavers, particularly those in the 12 - 14 age group.

The work of the Footscray/Sunshine School Focused Youth Service Coordinator, ('School Attendance Support Project' report, 2000) has indicated the lack of a consolidated approach to addressing this issue and the dearth of programs for this age group warrant immediate responses from all relevant parties before the situation escalates any further.

In terms of appropriate responses, the Critical Thinking Group is still challenged to come up with a solution that can be easily implemented. On one hand, the Victorian Department of Employment, Education and Training should be dealing with these young people. On the other hand, however, if these young people have been out of the education system for some time, the support of local agencies may have to be enlisted to address any of the extraneous issues these young people present with.

Centrelink, for instance, under its current mandate, would not be able to provide the full services of a participating gateway. Other programs, such as Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) and the State Government's Pathways Projects, and the agencies who auspice them, would also have difficulties in providing services to these young people under their current guidelines.

Similarly, young people in the upper age groups (22 to 25years) may also experience difficulty in accessing certain agencies because of age or other program restrictions, such as not meeting selection criteria, not being homeless or not being at risk of homelessness. This is particularly pertinent where the nominated gateway worker(s) may already be operating in programs governed by these restrictions.

Additional action research needs to be undertaken to explore ways of overcoming these barriers or else the potential for some agencies to participate as gateways may be jeopardized. This research component will require the active involvement of Government, along with all the other stakeholders.

Perhaps program restrictions could be relaxed for the trial period of the Project, with an assessment of the outcomes being used to facilitate discussions with relevant government departments on whether it is feasible, in the long term, to permanently relax these restrictions.

3.4 Other barriers with the potential to prevent agency involvement in the Project

A fuller comprehension of the range of barriers effecting agency involvement in the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project will emerge as the implementation phase unfolds. At this time, there are already a number of important factors that have been raised by various stakeholders. The major factors appear to be:

- Level of adequate funds or resources available to provide an effective gateway service to disconnected young people and other significant stakeholders
- Staffing availability - ensuring that a worker(s) is allocated the time and principal role as the dedicated gateways worker
- Appropriate space for meeting with young people who access the agency for its gateway services.

4. Development of strategies for monitoring the Project.

4.1 Gateways Advisory Group

During the trial phase of the Project, the Stakeholder, Critical Thinking and Young People's Advisory working groups will merge into one Gateways Advisory Group. If the young people represented on the Young People's Advisory Group do not feel ready for this change, the Group will continue to meet separately and report back to the Gateways Advisory Group at each meeting.

The ongoing monitoring of the Project will be the responsibility of this Advisory Group and the Linkages Worker. Monitoring of the Project will be achieved through:

- Minutes of the Gateways Advisory Group - gateway agencies participating in the trial phase will report back to the Group at regular meetings
- Surveys administered to the gateway agencies, young people and other significant parties
- Audit statements completed by the participating agencies
- Monitoring visits by members of the Gateway Advisory Group.

4.2 Linkages Worker

The linkages worker has an instrumental role in monitoring the Project throughout its trial phase. Being an integral part of setting up the gateways, the linkages worker will be monitoring from the outset the progress of the participating agencies, the effectiveness of the community education campaigns, the level of access to the gateways by young people and other vested groups, and the effectiveness of the information provided by the gateway agencies and the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project web pages.

4.3 Gateway Network

As the project nears the end of its trial phase, the Advisory Group (combination of the three working groups) will be reformed into the 'Gateway Network.' The Gateway Network will comprise the participating agencies and associate members (schools, agencies unable to actively participate as gateways but who are supportive of the initiative and other interested parties, such as young people and community members).

Once the Gateway Network is formed it will have the ultimate responsibility of monitoring the Project. This will entail the following aspects:

- Maintaining a charter that is relevant to the agencies and young people
- Ensuring that the self-regulatory system employed to evaluate the service provided by each of the gateways is adhered to. (Gateways will have an audit list to check their performance against, while a representative of the Gateway

Network will undertake a monitoring visit to the gateway agency to verify the results of the audit, and that standards in the charter have been met.)

- Checking that information provided to the gateways, young people and associates is up to date, for example, overseeing the update of information provided on the website.

5. Other matters of significance.

5.1 Developments worthy of mention

5.1.1 The Maribyrnong Collaboration Project has maintained its momentum since the last reporting period. The commitment of the stakeholders to this Project has continued, as evidenced in the attendance and the work produced by the members of the three working groups.

5.1.2 The Project Implementation Group (PIG), made up of the four organisations (Brotherhood of St Laurence, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Hanover Welfare Services and Melbourne Citymission) that were responsible for this Project being funded, continue to oversee the various phases of the Project to ensure the outcomes are being met. They are also devising strategies on how best to promote the outcomes of the Project, nationally.

It is envisaged that the PIG will present, whenever the opportunity arises, recommendations for consideration in the development of future policy that relates to young people and the education, training and employment service system.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence has been providing secondary consultation to the research worker during all stages of the research component of the Project.

5.1.3 Also worthy of mention is the level of interest being shown in the Project:

- Several senior bureaucrats from Canberra (Matthew Davies, Craig Kentwell, Tricia Rushton and Peta Fitzgibbon) have made visits to the Project
- State government departments have shown growing interest, with the Victorian Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) now having a representative on the Stakeholders Group
- The Maribyrnong/Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) coordinator has developed a close working association with the Collaboration Project
- The Melbourne West Area Consultative Committee (MWACC) is exhibiting renewed interest in the Project.

This level of interest is partly attributed to the innovation the Project is displaying. It is also due, in part, to the success of the monthly newsletters that are disseminated to a distribution list of 130 individuals and groups.

5.1.4 Another matter of significance is the contributions being made by the young people associated with the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project. Their input, to date, has been most impressive. Their willingness to be involved, combined with the strength and maturity of their ideas, has helped to inform and guide the work of the professionals on the other working groups, as well as that of project and research workers.

5.1.5 Articles and briefing papers have been prepared for a range of purposes throughout this phase of the Project, for example:

- An article was requested by the Melbourne West Area Consultative Committee (ACC) for its bi-monthly newsletter. The newsletter goes out to many employer agencies in the Western Region, and this opportunity may assist in creating a higher level of interest in the Maribyrnong Collaboration Project within this sector where previous interest has appeared to be seriously lacking
- A briefing paper was prepared for a delegation from Melbourne Citymission that met with Mr Stuart Bensley, Energy Solutions, Corporate Services, BHP-Billiton. Mr Bensley was interested in finding out about new and innovative projects that related to the employment service system.

6. Conclusion

Overall, the period from October to the end of December has been challenging, creative and exciting. The foundations for the trialling of the Gateways model are now well in place, and, with further fine-tuning, the model will be ready to implement in April 2002.

Further elaboration on any of the information contained in this progress report can be obtained from the Project Worker, John Byrne, on 02 9680 8233.

'Barriers to Young People's Successful Negotiation of Employment, Education and Training Pathways'

Research Report of the Maribyrnong Collaborative Trial in association with the Maribyrnong LLEN

Researched by Liz Dearn for Melbourne Citymission, January 2002

Background

High youth unemployment throughout Australia in the nineties has kept youth unemployment on the political agenda. Governments have implemented various policy and program responses to maximise young people's chances of safe and effective transitions through post compulsory education into employment. However, large numbers of young people remain marginalised from employment, education and training[1]. A recent approach for dealing with this problem is to look at the way the service system is letting young people down - there is general agreement that despite the range and number of programs available, that the service system is not providing a comprehensive response to all young people's needs.[2]

One of the main features of the employment, education and training system throughout the nineties in Australia has been that of constant changes to policy frameworks that dictate program types as well as changes to the way the sectors are funded. On the ground, the program environment, particularly in employment services, has been in constant flux, resulting in a lack of program continuity, a high degree of confusion over program availability and changes to the relationships between service providers. The net effect of ten years of competitive tendering, funding cuts and short term funding arrangements is a highly fragmented system in employment, education and training.

The 'Negotiating the Maze' research (Dearn, 2001), funded in partnership by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Melbourne Citymission, Hanover Welfare Services and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, was undertaken in this context with the aim of developing new models of service provision for young people in employment, education and training. The research illustrated the level of fragmentation evident in the provision of employment, education and training services for young people and the effects of this fragmentation - fractured, disjointed pathways between programs, the lack of an appropriate point from which to access the system, a lack of guidance and support and confusing age and eligibility criteria between programs are the hallmarks of this complex system.

The Maribyrnong Collaborative Trial was funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) in March 2001 on the basis of the findings of the 'Negotiating the Maze' research (2001) to develop innovative and collaborative models of service delivery in the Maribyrnong area for young people aged 12-25 who are disconnected from or 'at risk' of becoming disconnected from employment, education and training.

Young people are likely to be particularly disadvantaged in the Western Region given with the area scoring lowest on the ABS index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage. This relative disadvantage is underlined by the following statistics:

- The unemployment rate for young people 15-24 years in the Footscray area in the March 200 quarter at 14.8% compared to a 7.8% Victorian average.
- 39.7% of residents are born in a non-english speaking background compared to a state average of ….
- 60% of unemployed people in the area were born in a non-english speaking background. [sources: Health and Wellbeing Profile, City of Maribyrnong Ethnic Profile…]

The research was commissioned as part of the Collaborative Trial to explore some of the barriers to young people's successful pathways through and into education and training and into employment in the Maribyrnong area, from a service system point of view. While the research findings will contribute to the project's understanding of the adequacy of the Maribyrnong service system in responding to young people's needs, the findings are also expected to have some broader policy and program development applications beyond the Collaborative Trial. In recognition of this and in the spirit of developing coordinated responses to young people's needs at the local level, the Maribyrnong LLEN[3] has contributed to the writing up of this research report.

Research methodology

There were two parts to the research – in the first part, questionnaires were distributed to service providers asking them to nominate the most significant impediments to providing effective services to young people within their service program and within the Maribyrnong area. In the second part, focus groups were conducted with young people to to examine the breadth and variety of young people's experiences of the service system, particularly in relation to the types of barriers they confront in the negotiation of their employment, education and training pathways.

Questionnaires were emailed and mailed to sixty-three agencies and service providers in the Maribyrnong area, predominately those working in the areas of employment, education and training as well as community-based agencies providing generic or specialist welfare, community development, housing, legal and health services to young people. Responses were received from thirty-one agencies/service providers.

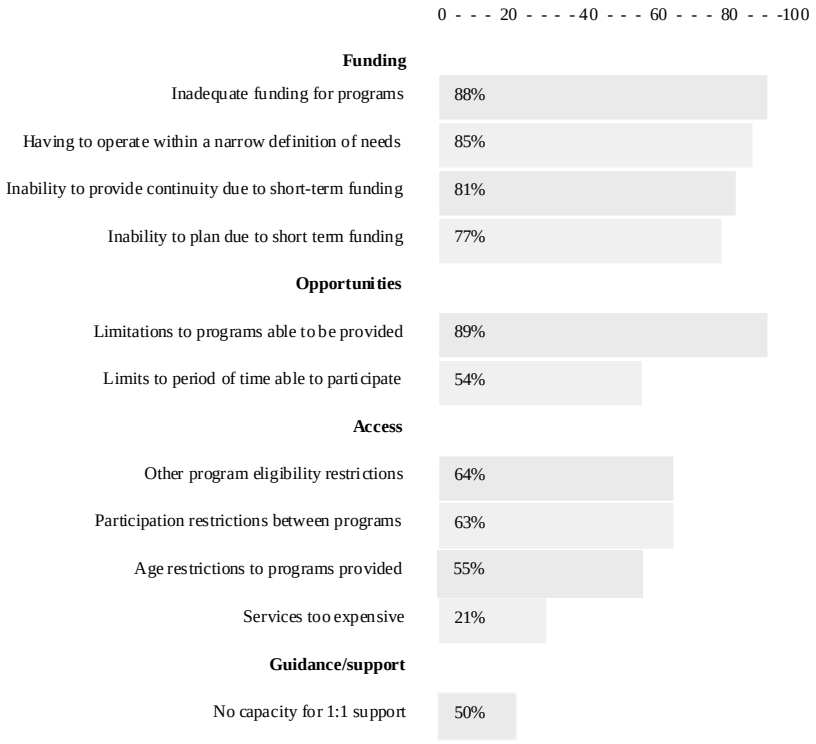
Focus groups were comprised of young people who are disconnected from or 'at risk' of becoming disconnected from employment, education and training. Groups were organised around a matrix where the key organising characteristics were participation or non-participation in school or an employment, education or training program[4] and receipt on non-receipt of income support (Youth Allowance, Newstart, Supporting Parent Benefit). A total of 47 young people (21 male and 25 female) with a mean age of 19.5 years participated in focus groups.

Because the research focus was on young people most 'at risk' of not having successful transitions, it was felt that the most useful data would come from interviewing young people who confront multiple barriers to gaining employment. As such, the groups comprised young people who were homeless, Asylum Seekers/Refugees, from diverse language and cultural backgrounds, residents of the juvenile justice system and young mothers. Most young people interviewed who were not at school were also early school leavers.

Findings from the service provider questionnaires

Findings from the questionnaires indicate that the broad findings from the 'Negotiating the Maze' research have a strong resonance at the local level. There was a difference between what service providers considered to be impediments within their service and within the Maribyrnong area. This suggests that either services had strategies for dealing with some of the difficulties at the level of their own service or that they were more willing to name the problems at an area level.

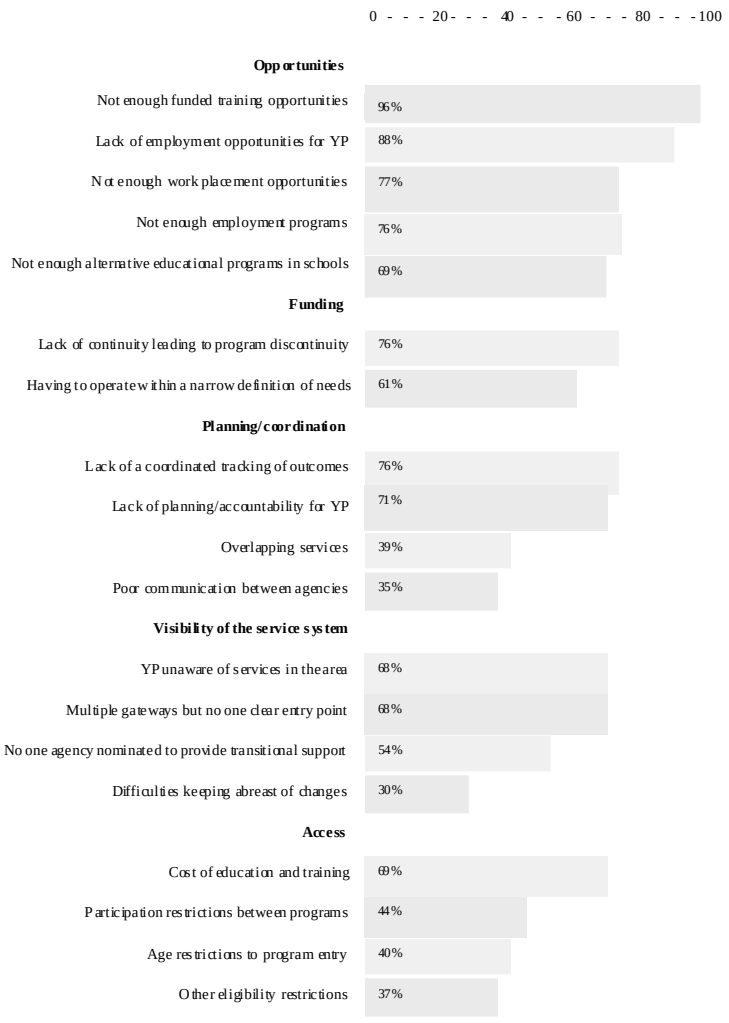
At the level of their own program or service, the most *frequently rated* impediments to providing effective services fell under the categories of 'funding', 'opportunities' – particularly limitations to programs able to be provided and 'access' – particularly program eligibility restrictions (see Graph 1).



Graph 1. Impediments to providing effective service delivery to young people *within programs/services* (% service providers nominating)

At an area level, there was not as much differentiation between the *most frequently rated* issues. However, responses validate the 'Negotiating the Maze' findings – every questionnaire item was identified as an impediment to service delivery within the Maribyrnong area by more than 80% of respondents (graph not shown).

In terms of the *most significant issues* (rated 4+ as significant on a scale of 1-5) responses at the area level help to prioritise barriers to young people's participation that need to be addressed within the Maribyrnong area. The most frequently rated as significant issues are 'opportunities' - particularly the lack of funded training opportunities and the lack of employment opportunities; funding restrictions; 'planning and coordination' – particularly the lack of coordination in outcomes tracking and the lack of planning and accountability for young people's programs; and issues around 'visibility' as well as the cost of education and training (See Graph 2).



Graph 3. Most significant impediments (rated 4+ on a scale of 1-5) to the provision of effective service delivery to young people *within the Maribyrnong area* (% service providers nominating)

Findings from the focus groups

Pathways visibility -information/guidance/ support

A commonly occurring theme throughout the focus groups was the sense that pathways through the system need to be made more visible - for those at school, more clarity around the sorts of pathways available and for those outside school, assistance to identify opportunities and support to help them negotiate the complexity of the program environment.

While some young people at school felt satisfied about the amount of information provided to them about subject choice, careers and courses available to them on leaving school, most would have liked more information about career options.

Many young people felt confused about the subjects they had chosen and where those choices would take them. Most focus group participants at school were from African backgrounds. As such, their confusion was perhaps confounded by their relatively recent arrival in Australia and that many of them were without parents or adult family members.

For young people who had left school those participating in programs tended to be more satisfied with the amount of information they have about employment, education and training options than those not participating in programs. There was general agreement from the homeless young people that they did not feel a part of the information loop.

Some of those not participating in any program felt it would be helpful if they received more information to assist them to find work. Many young people identified gaps/inconsistency in information provided by Centrelink and the Job Network.

The link between being part of a program and being informed possibly results from the one on one support young people receive in the programs represented. Young people outside programs generally expressed a view that they do not receive enough support or guidance. Some young people highlighted the gap between support received at school and once outside.

For many unemployed young people, Centrelink's role in providing income support means that it may be their first point of contact with the employment, education and training programs/assistance. However, a general feeling of disatisfaction was expressed about Centrelink throughout the focus groups.

There's not much help. Like we're young. We don't know what we want to do . How are we supposed to know which subjects to do and stuff like that? [Young woman, 16, African background]

They don't advertise what JPET does or all the other courses for everyone else. You don't hear about that unless by accident or someone else tells you. [homeless 22 year old male]

It would help if the agencies you were registered with sent you out information about courses they were holding. They're on computers. They know what you're interested in and what you're trying to get a job in. [Girl, 18, Newstart]

When you're at school and you're looking for a job, you've got guidance counsellors, you've got everyone helping you. They'll even set up jobs for you. Once you leave school, you're got no-one helping you. You're just another number.[Girl, 19 Newstart,

…I just stumbled on Western Citymission… when l became unemployed all l knew was you go to Centrelink and they pay the dole and its up to you to get yourself work. But for information on courses because l don't know TAFE or the university structures and things, l think, there is support but you have to be a part of something to access it properly.(girl 1, gp 3a)

When asked who or what agency they would approach for if looking to get into a course or seeking information about work some named Centrelink. However many young people nominated their support worker or a welfare agency they had had past contact with or a friend or family member as the first point of contact.

Many of the young people still at school could not nominate a place that they would used as a gateway to the service system outside their school support systems.

They can help but they're not the first place people would go. There are a lot of organisations out there that can help and have one to one with the person whereas Centrelink has got all these different people. [G Slingshot]

The Job Network places don't tell you enough information. Centrelink tells you that the Job Network place does that for you but then they say "what's Centrelink going on about?

The Impact Of Breaching On Centrelink's Role As Gateway To The Service System

"I was in Slingshot from 23 July and it took nearly 4 payments or 6 weeks before they acknowledged l was doing an approved activity and in between that time l was meant to go to an interview but that was when l was in class, so l had to go through a whole weekend without payment because l didn't go to the interview. So, l'm at the stage where l won't deal with them. l get JPET to talk to them … for me"

Employment - opportunities and discrimination

Most of the young people interviewed placed a high priority of getting work, many of them being 'desperate' for work. This was the case for young people at school seeking part-time work and those not in any education or training seeking full-time work.

The main barriers participants had confronted in trying to get work were age, experience, language, culture, religion, transport, qualifications as well as 'the way they looked' for homeless young people. Having a criminal record and child care were the main issues for young people in detention and young mothers respectively. Overall participants felt there should be more opportunities for them to prove themselves.

The majority of young people still at school (whether on Youth Support or asylum seekers/refugees not in receipt of any income) were seeking part-time work to supplement their income. One of the main barriers to their attaining work was seen as the difficulty combining the competing demands of school and hours of work. The sorts of jobs available to them tended to be badly paid as well as sometimes entailing difficult travel.

But you find out just for the trolley pushing jobs you need to be 17 and have five years work experience. I mean where are you going to get work experience like that from? … no-one ever gets a job because you don't meet the criteria [B1 Ozanam]

It's quite difficult and when you find a part-time job its like it messes up with your education because you're got to work …l'll be getting home tired after study and then can't wake up the next morning and so then you must have a car because part-time is like 7pm 'til 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning and there's no transport.[male, 19 Asylum Seeker]

The teacher was honest with me and said you won't get a job because you're black …and it's true because my case manager sent me to restaurants and hotels and l never…l'd do the interview but no-one calls you back. So it's true. [YM, African background, NStart]

While many young people shared the experience of discrimination on the basis or age and experience in trying to gain employment, there were differences between the groups. Nearly all the African participants had experienced discrimination on the basis of colour, language or religion. Many talked about their experiences of discrimination from employers.

Some young people who were disconnected from the service system conveyed a high level of hopelessness about gaining employment. This was particularly the case for the group of young men from African backgrounds.

Having a criminal record was nominated by some young people as a barrier to employment – both because of the gaps incarceration left in their employment history and because of the reluctance of employers to take them on.

You try and you do your best and always there's no chance you know – and you say, like, you're not going to get it you know, it's going to be like that always, you know.[22 year old man from African background]

What makes t really hard too is that l fucked up and l've got a criminal record and how l can't work behind a till or anything like that because of my record because they do a record check on you and as soon as your record comes up with anything to do with thieving or anything like that that's it they just throw you off. I'm not into that, l haven't done crime for ages so l just want to fucking do something but l've got this thing holding me back. It's really hard [B2 Ozanam]

Many Young People Expressed Low Confidence in the Job Network

"I got allocated to Intensive Assistance and went to the first appointment and then l ended up moving but the whole time l was in Canberra they done nothing for me, they just gave me one appointment and that was the last l heard of them. And then l'd go in there and put jobs down and that but l'd hear nothing from them. I'd go in there and put down my 20 jobs – like the shittiest jobs but they're still jobs and l'd ring up and ask had they heard anything and they'd say nup, nothing, you know like.." (B2 ozanam)

Education and training – barriers and opportunities

Most people interviewed had either left school early (between year 8 and year 11) or were 'at risk' of leaving school early because of financial difficulties. What was highlighted across the groups was the difficulty overcoming the barriers that they experience in trying to reconnect with education and training.

A common denominator for many of the young people interviewed was that they were living away from home and would have to fund their living expenses and education costs from their Youth Allowance. Being on a low income meant that employment was in many cases prioritised over study:

I'd look straight for a job because l hate being on this Centrelink shit. It's pathetic. You go and do a course and you still get paid the same as what Centrelink pays you so you might as well get out there and look for a job. At least if you get a job you're getting at least $300 per week'
(anglo boy, bador's gp, refuge)

There's been a few l wanted to do but the concession fee is just like…there was a business one at the TAFE in Sunshine that was $900 and the concession was like $850 (B1 Ozanam)

Many felt they were in a sort of a catch 22 situation, knowing they needed to do further education and training but not being in a position where they could afford it.

Inadequate funding for training and inadequate concessions limited the study they could do

While many young people placed a high emphasis on school completion/education training, others viewed gaining work as a priority. In some cases, further education and training were not seen as enhancing their employment options. This was particularly the case for unemployed focus group particpants from the Horn of Africa where there was agreement about the pointlessness of further study

There was general agreement from the homeless young people that education was one way of them staying involved and active:

They can offer to help me with the school…but l've got to get into a course first and then they can pay for it but my first module l've got to pay for myself until l complete my year 10. They pay for the course but l've got to pay for my first fees and l got stuck which means l'm in a it of a catch 22 (why didn't they offer to pay for the first bit?) …they weren't able to …something l've got to do for myself or something like that and l couldn't.
[G4 Ozanam – homeless, left school at year 10]

I guess again through Intensive Assistance l can get them to pay for me to do one course but that's it. And like the course was a two part…Yeah, so you could do a course that goes for 2 months and then you have to wait the next year for the next allotment to do another course. [B1 Frontyard]

It (education and training) doesn't guarantee you a job (bador's gp)

It's not just to get work. It's to broaden your mind and keep your mind active. If you don't keep your mind active you're just going to sit back and smoke bongs, drink piss and do nothing aren't you' (general agreement) [B1 ozanam]

Income issues – low income/ breaching

Several important issues emerged in relation to income – the almost universal experience of participants having breached by Centrelink , the inadequate level of income support and its impact on young people's ability to participate in education and training and in the community generally.

All of the young people at school talked about the financial difficulties they were experiencing in trying to maintain their education. Money was unanimously highlighted as greatest barrier to their continuing education and training, the cost of books being the most often mentioned difficulty.

Many of these young people were Asylum Seekers/refugees and many of them were living without parents or adult family members, some dependent on the financial support of welfare agencies.

When you don't have an income you feel different from the other students because you've got something different. Tickets and stuff and lunchtime…sometimes you want to go out with your friends but you can't because you don't have an income.
[B1 gp2]

They don't really pay you enough. It costs me $435 per month – that's not including water, SEC and phone and l think l get $315 every fortnight'
[Anglo girl , 20 living on her own, returned to school to complete VCE]

Many of those interviewed consider leaving school an option but have been unable to find work. Most were looking for part-time work but found it difficult to combine the time demands of part-time work with school.

Nearly all the young people participating in focus groups in receipt of Centrelink payments had experiences of being breached – mainly for failing to attend appointments. The homeless group were all in receipt of reduced payments or no income (as a result of breaching):

We want to work because it's not enough the payment (Centrelink). We need to work to get more money to help ourselves, for books and things. It's really difficult for our age, especially because we go to school and they say, what time can you work from – 11 until this time but we can't because it's school time. It's hard to find a job at our age. If you do find a job outside school time then you work and go home and you don't have time to do your school work. They should do something about that. [female, African background, 16 years]

There's support There's support out there, there's no income. Sometimes it makes you want to quit school to go for a full-time job. Yeah, sometimes you feel like, what am l doing at school, l should go for it, l need money so l better go to a full-time job and be like normal. But on the other hand, you can't afford it. So you stay and there's still a pain inside. [B1 gp 2, asylum seeker, doing yr 11, looking for PT wk)

What's really hard l reckon is…you…get breached and that so because you're not in a stable place to live you're moving around all the time and you can't keep up when you change your address and you miss an appointment and they breach you. They breach you like sixty bucks which is a lot of money [Homeless young man, 20 years old]

I'm not sure exactly what happened but now there's another problem. I haven't received payments for a while so…two weeks. But that's apart from the other problem…l think l have been breached like a fifty dollar breach for handing my form (in) late.
[Homeless, Ozanam 19]

Unintended Impact of Breaching

"The hardest thing…l'd hitchike back to Canberra but l can't get no income because there's no jobs which makes it hard becauase you're meant to live on the streets in Melbourne or a big city just so you can get an income" [B2 Ozanam]

Service provision – young people's experiences of services

What came across clearly throughout the focus groups is that young people, particularly those who are most disconnected from the service system, have individual needs that are in many cases not understood by service providers and not being met by the service system.

There are lots of misconceptions about young people – they don't get young people like they think that we all take drugs and do illegal stuff but l haven't even had a puff on a cigarette[B2 gp 5]

Be one of the biggest drug users out going down there and find out how hard it is to get anywhere with Centrelink [B1Ozanam]

The homeless young people interviewed expressed a fairly unanimous view that workers did not understand them.

This lack of understanding can create conflict between young people and services.

There was a strong view expressed by young people outside school that the Job Network, Centrelink and other services should be tailored to better meet their needs

Yeah, walk in there like the way we dress and that, just walk in there just go 'look l want to apply to get on the dole and see what you have to do, see how hard it is

They all need to take (sic) a lot of understanding about homelessness and the youth. At the moment a lot of the workers don't understand youth…just you and where you're coming from, being homeless and having no place to stay. A lot of people can't understand that. They look at you like, what are you homeless for [B1 Ozanam]

There are pressures to be like them wher you're not and just can't be… [g2 Ozanam]

Yeah, they're rude and arrogant and that's where l've just felt like punching one of them l don't know just cracking up out of...you crack up and then they call the cops and you just get locked up'

Conclusion - Facilitating Successful Transitions

The Maribyrnong service system is a microcosm of the broader employment, education and training program environment with all its concomitant complexity. Despite the range and number of programs, there is general agreement that the service system is not providing a comprehensive response to young people's needs.

The findings of the research indicate that the highest priorities at the service system level in the Maribyrnong area are :

- the visibility of the service system - the need for an appropriate gateway as well as the need for appropriate guidance and support to assist young people to negotiate the complexity of the system
- the limited employment and work experience opportunities available to young people
- the cost of education and training
- discrimination against young people in employment and the lack of sensitivity to young people's needs by services
- issues around income and breaching
- the planning of services for young people and the need for a coordinated approach to outcomes tracking
- funding issues and associated program architecture (participation restrictions)

These findings offer a starting point for developing policy and program development solutions that will facilitate young people moving towards active and productive citizenship in Maribyrnong and beyond.

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[1] See MacDonald, 1999

[2] See Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Report, the Victorian Post Compulsory Education and Training Review, Negotiating the Maze).
[3] LLEN=
[4] Employment, education or training programs represented were JPET, programs provided via Juvenile Justice for incarcerated boys and two programs run by Melbourne Citymission – a self-employment program, Slingshot and an short certificate course, the Comic Book Program.