



Not-for-Profit Sector
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

November 2009

To *The Productivity Commission*,

Inspire Foundation commends the Productivity Commission for their work to date developing the *Draft research report on the contribution of the not-for-profit sector* and we welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the findings and recommendations therein. We support, in principle, the draft report and the subsequent recommendations and we consider the report to be timely and insightful analysis of the current state of the sector and a potential foundation for stronger relationships with Governments, leading us all toward a more impactful not-for-profit sector.

The Inspire Foundation is a national non-profit organisation established in 1996 in response to the then escalating rates of youth suicide. Inspire's mission is to help millions of young people lead happier lives. With the, 2020 vision of every young Australian knowing, trusting and using Inspire's programs when they need them, Inspire serves young people aged 14-25 through three national, technology-based programs, [Reach Out.com](http://ReachOut.com), [Act Now.com.au](http://ActNow.com.au) and BetweenTheLines.net.au.¹

Young people are at the centre of all Inspire does – as partners in the development and delivery of all Inspire initiatives. We innovatively use technology to reach young people and build trusted social brands that are part of their landscape. Inspire's work is evidence-based and underpinned by research and evaluation, conducted in partnership with leading academic institutions and research centres including the Brain and Mind Research Institute (BMRI) at the University of Sydney and Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, Centre for Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne. The information and recommendations presented in this submission have been developed as a result of Inspire's extensive experience working with young people to develop effective technology-based programs aimed at improving young people's mental health and wellbeing.

Inspire Foundation agrees with the Productivity Commission's supposition that measures of inputs, and even the service delivery outputs, fail to adequately capture the contribution of not-for-profit organisations and we are pleased to see the sector recognising the need to understand the impact of our efforts at both an individual and systemic level. With regard to the proposed *Framework for measuring the contribution of the sector*, we support the inclusion of measures of impacts across domains of individual and community wellbeing, such as: sense of self; safety from harm; engagement in meaningful activity; social connectedness; and self-efficacy.

We encourage the Australian Government to work closely with the sector to identify a range of specific outcome and impact measures that are relevant and useful at an organisational level that can also be combined to provide a clear and meaningful picture of the contribution of the sector at a national level. We believe that identifying such measures will be crucial in the

¹ Reach Out.com (www.reachout.com) provides information and support to young people going through tough times, and ActNow.com (www.actnow.com.au) provides young people with opportunities and connections to find out more about their world and take action on the issues they care about. Between the Lines (<http://betweenthelines.net.au>) Between the Lines is a joint initiative of the Inspire Foundation and Ted Noffs which aims to build a community where young people can discuss and debate issue relating to drugs with others, and find information and help, which ultimately informs and reduces problematic use.

development of the Commission's framework, and will enhance the evidence base to support effective social policy creation and reform.

Finally, we also encourage the Commission to consider the value and potential of the internet as both a tool and setting for service delivery. The internet and its associated technologies are a way of life for young people. In 2008, national surveys of internet use showed that 95% of 18 to 25 year olds are online, and after family and friends, it's where young people turn to for advice and support in difficult times.² With its unique ability to connect people to information and each other, the internet can be re-thought of as a setting in which 'devices, activities and social arrangements' are activated – and can have extensive reach and a powerful impact.

Our experience through both Reach Out and ActNow has reinforced that the online environment is an important setting in which to engage young people and improve their mental health and wellbeing. Our experience developing evaluation frameworks in an online environment has led us to encounter and overcome a number of challenges in measuring our reach and impact of online services. These include: being able to accurately measure user numbers and the quality of a visit; ensuring rigorous sampling and recruitment strategies; and determining which methodologies are most appropriate for measuring impact.

Our research to date has shown us that there is a paucity of information about appropriate measures for online health promotion and we urge the Commission to explore the online setting as an important model of service delivery, thus requiring substantial investment in evaluation. Inspire Foundation are committed to understanding the true impact of our online programs and are constantly developing new methods and tools to assist us in evaluating our programs (see Appendix I) to review Inspire Foundation's evaluation framework. We invite the Commission to consider Inspire Foundation as a potential case study for online evaluation strategies and we will keep the Commission informed of any resulting evaluation reports and publications as they come to light.

We hope that you find the information and recommendations included in this submission of significant use to the *Review of the contribution of the sector*. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss our submission further.

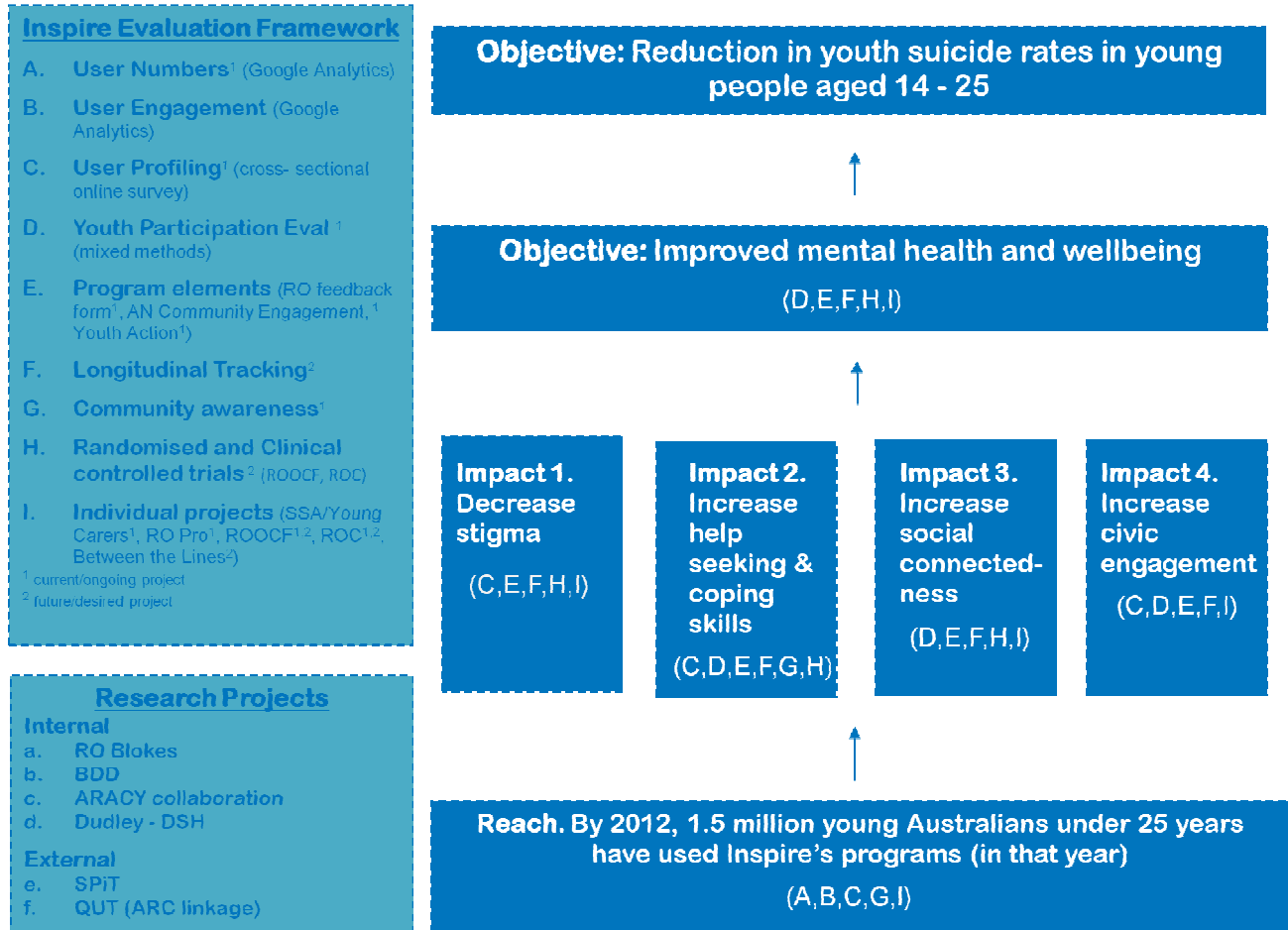
Kind regards,



Ms Kerry Graham
Chief Executive Officer
Inspire Foundation

² Wyn, J., Cuervo, H., Woodman, D., and Stokes, H. 2005, Young people, wellbeing and communication technologies, VicHealth, Melbourne

Appendix I



Explanatory notes:

A and B - uses commercially available software package called Google Analytics to provide us with insight into User Numbers and Engagement.

C - Annual user profiling questionnaire which provides a 'snapshot in time' understanding of who uses ReachOut.com and their experience of the site.

D - Comprehensive youth participation evaluation which utilises a questionnaire, in-depth interviews and case studies developed by peer researchers to gain an understanding of the impact of young people's involvement in the development, implementation and evaluation of Inspire's programs. This evaluation looks at the impact on the young people themselves, the service being delivered and the governance of the organisation.

E - Program element evaluations such as a content analysis of the ReachOutOnline Community Forums (also known as Rotreat).

F - Longitudinal tracking of site members.

G - Community awareness survey conducted annually to assess awareness of ReachOut.com amongst young people aged 14 to 25.

H - We plan to conduct random control trials of particular elements of ReachOut such as ROC or the forums.

I - Individual project evaluations for example of our work with teachers or health care professionals.

We also conduct a number of research projects to generate evidence to inform our program development, delivery and evaluation