



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

Housing Assistance and Homelessness Prevention

Reconnect Operational Guidelines

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1. Preface

The Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) funds the Housing Assistance and Homelessness Prevention Program. The aim of the initiative is to prevent homelessness by intervening early with families and young people to stabilise and improve their housing situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community. This is achieved through interventions such as counselling, mediation, group work and practical support in culturally and contextually appropriate services.

Reconnect is an early intervention service strategy under the Housing Assistance and Homelessness Prevention Program with an emphasis on family reconciliation. Following a two-year pilot Youth Homelessness Project, *Reconnect* was established in 1998 as a response to youth homelessness.

These Operational Guidelines provide the framework for the implementation and administration of *Reconnect*. The Guidelines provide the basis for the service delivery of *Reconnect* and should be read in conjunction with the contractual arrangements under which payments to deliver *Reconnect* services are made.

The operational guidelines include:

- The purpose of *Reconnect*;
- FaHCSIA expectations of service providers including performance expectations; and
- Other relevant information pertinent to the successful delivery of *Reconnect*.

FaHCSIA reserves the right to amend these guidelines from time to time by whatever means it may determine in its absolute discretion and will provide reasonable notice of these amendments.

2. Overview

In December 2008 the Australian Government released its White Paper on Homelessness – *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*. Since then, all levels of Government have been working to build more affordable homes, establish new services and achieve better results for people who are homeless. *Reconnect* contributes to the White Paper strategies for reducing homelessness by half by 2020, through *Turning Off the Tap; Improving and Expanding Services; and Breaking the Cycle*.

Reconnect is a community based early intervention program for young people 12 to 18 years (newly arrived young people from 12-21 years), who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Reconnect uses family focussed early intervention strategies to help the young person to stabilise and improve their housing situation, achieve family

reconciliation, and improve their level of engagement with work, education, training and the community.

Reconnect services provide counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family, to help break the cycle of homelessness. Service providers also use brokerage to 'buy in' other services to meet the individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

Reconnect objectives are achieved by working towards:

- family reconciliation, wherever practicable, between homeless young people, or those at risk of homelessness and their family. Family reconciliation outcomes include:
 - the young person returning home;
 - ongoing positive family relationships are created which provide the young person with emotional and physical support;
 - reconciling the young person with other family members e.g. grandparents or siblings;
 - both parent (s) and the young person accepting that independence is appropriate for the young person; or
 - establishing a viable support system for the independent young person that includes a member of his/her family.
- fostering the young person's engagement with employment, education or training, and the community;
- innovative service delivery approaches through the application of Good Practice Principles and Participatory Action Research;
- improvement of coordination of services delivered by government and the community sector;
- building on the community's existing capacity to develop appropriate responses to their own needs; and
- engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

2.1 Reconnect Target Group

FaHCSIA funds *Reconnect* services to deliver services to young people aged 12 to 18 years (newly arrived young people 12-21 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Some *Reconnects* cater for specific client groups (see 2.2 for further information). *Reconnect – Newly Arrived Youth Specialists (NAYS)* target newly arrived young people aged 12-21 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

If the local situation requires services to be provided to a different target group, it must be agreed in writing with FaHCSIA.

2.2 Reconnect Specialist services

There are a number of specialist *Reconnect* outlets which provide services for young people who require some form of specialist service delivery. Examples of these specialist groups are: (NB this list is NOT exhaustive, these are just examples)

- Indigenous:
 - *A young person aged between 12 and 18 years of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which she/he lives.*

- Experiencing mental health issues:
 - *Mental health problems and mental illness refer to a range of cognitive, emotional and behavioural disorders that interfere with the lives and productivity of people.*

- Newly Arrived Youth (this definition only applies to the Reconnect Program):
 - *Young people aged between 12 and 21 years who have arrived in Australia in the previous 5 years, this is regardless of the visa type they have entered on. However there is a focus on young people entering Australia on humanitarian visas and family visas.*

2.3 Referrals

Participants may be self-referred or referred from a range of sources, including:

- schools, education and training organisations;
- parents or family;
- community agencies;
- Centrelink
- juvenile justice;
- police;
- child protection agencies
- accommodation services;
- specialist services, such as English language centres; and
- state/territory community service departments.

This list is not exhaustive, and *Reconnect* services can accept referrals from any source. *Reconnect* services should maintain effective linkages with appropriate agencies in their local community to assist with making appropriate and effective referrals.

2.4 Out of Scope Referrals

Program participants must meet the eligibility requirements and be within the *Reconnect* target group. Out of scope referrals are people who do not fit the *Reconnect* target group, including being outside the age range or funded geographic areas for *Reconnect*, or who are not homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

If a service provider wishes to provide a longer term service to an out of scope client, it must be discussed with the relevant FaHCSIA State or Territory Office contact and written approval obtained. The provider should detail the rationale for focusing on an additional target group and demonstrate that expanding the scope of the service will not disadvantage eligible participants from accessing *Reconnect* services.

Once approval has been obtained, these individuals become Reconnect clients and should be treated as such.

To better support services a 'Non-Engagement Clients Guide' has been created, mapping out the steps that need to be taken when an individual presents and some assistance has been provided, but they don't become a Reconnect client.

2.5 Group work

In addition to individual case work, Reconnect services are able to work with clients and potential clients through group work, it must be noted that community information sessions do not fall into this category as Group Work should be recognised therapeutic intervention.

Group work may:

- be all that some young people need;
- be a less threatening, 'soft' entry point to support;
- allow young people to attend with their peers or siblings and assist 'break the cycle' of negative behaviour or influence;
- provide support to young people in realising 'they are not alone' in dealing with certain issues;
- offer a support network outside of the group;
- develop opportunity for young people formerly engaged in the service to act as peer support and/or mentors;
- empower attendees through support of people of their own age and experience;
- involve a number of support services participating over the course of time, particularly if the group is multi-session;
- be effective in engaging young people if a waiting list exists at the time of referral and one-to-one work is not possible initially;
- be an effective way to provide service in an outreach location where ongoing one-to-one support is not readily available;
- provide a network for other groups including parents and other care-givers;
- provide opportunities for social and fun activities through numbers;
- bring together young people of the same gender or ethno-specific group; and
- be a cost effective way of managing larger groups of clients.

2.6 Reconnect Good Practice Principles

In delivering *Reconnect*, service providers are required to comply with the following seven Good Practice Principles. These principles are integral in achieving outcomes for young people and families.

- Accessibility of Services
- Client Driven Service Delivery
- Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery
- Working Collaboratively
- Culturally and Contextually Appropriate Service Delivery
- Review and Evaluation
- Sustainability

Strategies for implementing each of the seven Good Practice Principles are contained in the Appendices of this document.

2.7 Participatory Action Research

A key component of *Reconnect* is Participatory Action Research (PAR). Effective and responsive early intervention services are required to have a reflective, culturally appropriate and improvement-oriented approach. *Reconnect* services are to actively encourage participants and relevant services to participate in PAR to develop enhanced intervention approaches.

Reconnect services are expected to provide at least two (2) Participatory Action Research reports to FaHCSIA each year. At least one (1) of these reports must be based on a theme or topic chosen by the service from a list decided by FaHCSIA. The list will contain a range of topics which are informed by key issues in the youth homelessness sector for that financial year.

The value of PAR in *Reconnect* is its capacity to ask questions about how to achieve positive outcomes for participants, seek answers through reviewing work practices, and then improve those practices on the basis of the insights gained. PAR aims to be responsive to participants and stakeholders by finding appropriate ways to include them, so the questions, strategies and interpretations of the process are not solely influenced by the service provider.

PAR also enables experimentation and flexibility, which is important to the development of services that are responsive to the needs of participants and the community. In addition, PAR contributes to the development of sound coordination between local services responding to the target group.

Service providers need to identify and explore questions of importance in order to develop the early intervention capacity of the local community. Issues should be explored in a systematic way, with an emphasis on improving outcomes for young people and their families.

Service providers are required to report on the insights gained from successful and unsuccessful service delivery approaches drawing on PAR and other

relevant information, including the engagement of other local services and participant views. The information and insights generated through these processes will be shared with other service providers as a means of identifying and generating good practice for *Reconnect*.

Services should allocate 1-2 per cent of their budget to support PAR initiatives, e.g. the use of external expertise, additional relevant training, and/or expenses associated with stakeholder participation in PAR processes. It is seen as positive for services to undertake joint ventures in these areas.

PAR resources are available from the FaHCSIA website at:
<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/homelessness/reconnect/Page/default.aspx>

2.8 *Reconnect forums*

Reconnect services are also required to participate in any FaHCSIA sponsored provider forums, which can be designed to share good practice, supply training in the PAR process and provide opportunities to learn from shared experiences.

3. Funding for the Program

3.1 *Annual Budget*

FaHCSIA may, at its discretion, require service providers to submit a detailed budget.

3.2 *Brokerage/Client Costs*

Brokerage is intended to enable services to “buy in” additional support services that are needed in an immediate crisis or in the short to medium term, but which the service does not have the capacity to provide. As a guide, 5% of annual funding should be reserved for brokerage. It can be used to purchase a range of services or items, for example:

- educational / vocational related items and / or costs associated with facilitating engagement or re-engagement in education, training or work;
- health-related services which cannot be accessed within a reasonable time-frame from the public health system, including mental health services;
- legal services; and
- specific services to assist young people and their families in practical ways, such as transport, meals, private psychological assessments, counselling and mediation, accommodation assistance (including respite), translating services.

Note: brokerage/client costs are not intended to replace emergency relief or other crisis/cash assistance from other sources. Rather, the intention is to provide services with the flexibility to purchase assistance for clients that would not otherwise be available as part of achieving outcomes in client case plans.

The organisation must ensure all staff are aware of the amount of brokerage funds available in order to use them effectively to provide support to participants.

3.3 Service and Management Fees

Service providers cannot charge fees to *Reconnect* participants. However, sometimes a minimal charge may be needed to enable an activity to take place. In this event, service providers should ensure that *Reconnect* participants are not excluded because of their inability to pay.

A service management fee may be charged by an auspice body for the overall management of *Reconnect* being conducted within their organisation. The fee is usually charged as an administrative expense, as a percentage of the total funding received and must be easily identified in the financial acquittal report submitted to FaHCSIA.

Should an auspice body consider charging a service management fee, they must negotiate with FaHCSIA to determine whether the fee is appropriate and the appropriate percentage rate to apply. When deciding if a management fee is appropriate, the impact on service delivery must be carefully considered before a fee is set.

4. Links and Working with other Agencies

An important characteristic of delivering a quality service is the capacity to establish and maintain links with other agencies. Key stakeholders are integral to providing a holistic and quality service and can provide valuable information on issues including referral processes, client needs, local issues, community feedback and approaches or gaps in service delivery.

Active involvement of key stakeholders can strengthen collaboration between services within communities and act as a pathway for improved service delivery. It also assists the service provider to incorporate community feedback into their planning and review processes. Participatory Action Research is an excellent mechanism to involve key stakeholders and is integral to improving service delivery.

Key stakeholders are those with whom the service provider interacts during service delivery and the agencies providing incoming and outgoing referrals. Service providers should establish good working relationships with other agencies, including:

- schools;
- Centrelink;
- youth services;
- accommodation and/or refuge services;
- charitable organisations;
- state/territory youth and welfare departments and other government departments;
- police, juvenile justice and legal services;

- counselling services;
- cultural, recreational and/or sporting groups; and
- community elders, young people, families etc.

When working with Centrelink, service providers should provide Centrelink with a detailed written and/or oral report if requested:

- where a homeless young person is a current *Reconnect* client and is currently in receipt of income support (due to it being unreasonable for them to live at home) and that support is shortly to be reviewed; or
- where a homeless young person is a current *Reconnect* client and is applying for Australian Government income support.

Service providers must acknowledge that the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* may apply to the use and disclosure of reports. FaHCSIA or Centrelink may also require service providers to sign declarations of privacy and confidentiality when receiving personal and other information.

4.1 Stakeholder Feedback

As part of *Reconnect's* online reporting requirements, each service is required to obtain stakeholder feedback each financial year, with the aim of having at least five completed forms in the system from a variety of sources, where possible. This independent feedback forms part of the data for the Performance Assessment Criteria (PAC) Trac.

4.2 Community Collaboration

Service providers can assist young people, by networking, developing collaborative partnerships and providing leadership in early intervention issues. This can be done through:

- collaborating on support for individuals;
- integrating service delivery; and
- networking with existing agencies (or building new networks) to identify issues and address gaps and barriers in local service delivery.

Effective community collaboration includes the opportunity to:

- participate in inter-agency groups, committees and forums to work on issues of common concern;
- collaborate in joint ventures with agencies working with the same target group or issues of concern;
- collaborate in local community gatherings or state based forums;
- develop positive working relationships with government agencies; and
- exchange ideas and knowledge.

4.3 Community Capacity Building

In addition to supporting young people and families through service delivery, providers are required to contribute to building the capacity of their community. At least two (2) community capacity building projects are to be reported in the Reconnect Online Data System (RODS) each financial year.

Strengthening community capacity can be defined as enhancing the ability of individuals, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work collaboratively to encourage and sustain positive change. The aim of community capacity building in Reconnect is to assist communities to identify risk factors or early signs of young people's homelessness, to know about available resources and people, and strategies to have the issues dealt with.

Building community capacity involves developing skills and knowledge among parents and community members in order to increase their capacity to support their families' needs.

5. Data Collection

Data collection provides the information required by FaHCSIA to monitor and evaluate FaHCSIA programs. Continued funding of programs relies heavily on the ability of FaHCSIA to provide observable and objective measures of performance.

FaHCSIA undertakes to:

- request data for legitimate business needs, i.e. policy development, planning, accountability and program management;
- make data collection consistent with other program areas working with similar target groups;
- provide services with the tools to have input to the development and review of data collection;
- collect data for program and/or service-level evaluation; and
- enable service providers to review their data and track performance against benchmarks.

5.1 Information Technology Requirements

In order to provide online data to FaHCSIA for reporting purposes, the minimum recommended system requirements are:

Operating System: Windows XP
Web Browser: Internet Explorer 5.5 min. or latest version
Firefox 2.0.0.4 min. or latest version
Screen Resolution: 1024 x 768

5.2 Data Collection

Service providers are required to participate in *Reconnect* data collection as specified in the **Reconnect Data Collection Policy Manual** and the **Funding Agreement**.

Data is collected through the Department's online data system which is available to all *Reconnect* Service Providers via the internet. For registration or other queries about the system, contact the Reconnect Helpdesk through emailing reconnect@fahcsia.gov.au.

Services are required to collect ongoing data on each client and their case/s. This includes information about all individual young people and other supported people such as their families. Throughout the case, data will need to be entered into the online data system. This will allow a comparison of young people's situation at the beginning and completion of the case. Services will be able to access the data they have entered and run reports on the data. All client and case data related to a financial year is to be entered by **31 July**.

Although client and case data relates to the financial year, keeping up to date records is the preferred method, this provides opportunity for accurate tracking of peaks in client and community need.

The online data system is also used to collect data on:

- feedback from young people and their parents or carers;
- groups run by a service;
- community capacity building projects completed;
- participatory action research projects conducted per annum;
- feedback from other organisations and community groups that a service works with; and
- the annual progress report.

Group work activities are to be recorded in RODS and this data inputs to various reporting components within the system. Group work does not contribute to the calculation of the average cost per case.

Information collected will be used by FaHCSIA to develop a series of reports, such as a Performance Assessment Criteria (PAC) report outlining performance against *Reconnect* objectives in three key areas:

- Results/Outcomes: this gauges the difference the *Reconnect* service is making in the young person's life, living arrangements and family life;
- Service Delivery: reviews how the *Reconnect* outlet is providing services to the community, young people and families; and
- Service Outputs: encompasses the financial cost of providing the service to the community.

The PAC is one of the sources of information FaHCSIA takes into consideration when reviewing a service's performance in preparation for the service visits.

Benchmarks or targets have been developed to provide a guide as to expected deliverables. The benchmarks have been based on best available knowledge, but may change over time as more reliable data becomes available. The performance criteria include some benchmark quantitative information and qualitative information. Criteria are assessed using multiple information sources (e.g. providers, clients, community members).

In collecting data, service providers are required to:

- explain to *Reconnect* participants why information is needed from them and how it will be used;
- provide complete, correct, timely and accurate data; and
- contribute to the development and review of data collection systems.

Service providers are welcome to contribute suggestions for improving the collection and use of data via email to the reconnect@fahcsia.gov.au.

Service providers are required to provide data requested as outlined in the Funding Agreement with FaHCSIA.

5.3 Reporting back to Service Providers

Reports on data collected by FaHCSIA will be available to service providers via the online reporting system. This enables service providers to track their performance against benchmarks and assists them to improve service delivery.

6. Complaints

6.1 Complaints - Service Provider

FaHCSIA has a formal process for the handling of all external complaints it receives about FaHCSIA programs and FaHCSIA funded service providers. Service Providers can lodge a complaint with the National Office Complaints Team by:

Ph: 1800 634 035 Fax: (02) 6204 4587

Email: complaints@fahcsia.gov.au

Post: FaHCSIA Complaints

PO Box 7576

Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

A complaint is defined as:

“Any expression of dissatisfaction with a product or service offered or provided” [Australian Standard AS4269-1995].

The Department has a 'complaints recording system' to capture complaints to the Department about any of its services or those delivered by funded service providers.

For the purposes of the Department's complaints recording system, a 'complaint' does not include:

- ministerial correspondence;
- freedom of Information requests; or
- complaints made to service providers, as these will be covered by their own complaints mechanisms required under Funding Agreements.

If the service provider is dissatisfied at any time with our handling of their complaint, they can also contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.gov.au.

6.2 Complaints – Client/Service Type Participant

All service providers are required to have mechanisms in place to address complaints from Program participants and this information is to be available should the Department request it. Complaint handling mechanisms should be easily identifiable, accessible and solution oriented. They should be sensitive to the issues all clients and stakeholders, including young people, face, be responsive to their needs as consumers, and ensure confidentiality, natural justice and procedural fairness.

Service providers are required to maintain a formal register of complaints received and to provide the register to FaHCSIA if requested.

In some circumstances, Program participants may not wish to discuss their complaint with the service provider, or may simply wish to deal directly with FaHCSIA. In these cases, Program participants should lodge a formal complaint by contacting the National Office Complaints Team on:

Ph: 1800 634 035 Fax: (02) 6204 4587
 Email: complaints@fahcsia.gov.au
 Post: FaHCSIA Complaints
 PO Box 7576
 Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Any documents provided or created by FaHCSIA in the investigation and resolution of a complaint may be subject to release under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

7. Contact Information

7.1 FaHCSIA State/Territory Offices

New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory

Level 9	GPO Box 9820
280 Elizabeth St	Sydney NSW 2001
Sydney NSW 2000	

Tel: 02 8255 7717

Fax: 02 8255 7739

Northern Territory

39 – 41 Woods Street	GPO Box 9820
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Darwin NT 0800

Darwin NT 0801

Tel: 08 8936 6509

Fax: 08 8936 6331

Queensland

Level 3
100 Creek Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

GPO Box 9820
Brisbane QLD 4001

Tel: 07 3004 4737

Fax: 07 6204 5108

South Australia

Level 18
11 Waymouth Street
Adelaide SA 5001

GPO Box 9820
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 08 8400 2118

Fax: 08 8400 2199

Tasmania

Level 1
199 Collins Street
Hobart TAS 7000

GPO Box 9820
Hobart TAS 7001

Tel: 03 6211 9327

Fax: 03 6211 9399

Victoria

Casselden Place
2 Lonsdale St
Melbourne VIC 3000

GPO Box 9820
Melbourne VIC 3001

Tel: 03 8626 1128

Fax: 03 8626 1220

Western Australia

Level 12
152-158 St George's Terrace
Perth WA 6000

GPO Box 9820
Perth WA 6001

Tel: 08 9229 1563

Fax: 08 9229 1597

National Office

FaHCSIA *Reconnect* National Manager
PO Box 7576
Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Reconnect Helpdesk email: reconnect@fahcsia.gov.au

8. Appendices

8.1 Definitions

(for the purposes of the Reconnect program)

Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness

A person is considered homeless if he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure accommodation. The following definitions of Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness are based on the categories used by Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie in their studies of homelessness for the Australian Bureau of Statistics.¹

Homeless

A person should be considered homeless if their living situation falls within the following definitions:

Primary homelessness. This includes all people without conventional shelter who are considered to be “roofless” or “sleeping rough”, such as those:

- living on the streets;
- sleeping in parks;
- squatting in derelict buildings;
- using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter; or
- residing in other improvised shelter.

Secondary homelessness. This includes all people in temporary accommodation who may move between arrangements frequently, such as those:

- in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under Supported Accommodation Assistance Program;
- in hostels, refuges or overnight shelters;
- staying temporarily with friends or relatives (“couch surfing”); or
- residing in a boarding house temporarily (less than 12 weeks).²

Culturally, it must be recognised that for some groups living with relatives or extended family members can be considered a stable and appropriate housing option. Although these arrangements are considered secondary homelessness by the above definitions, services engaging with these young people should consider the stability and ongoing nature of the housing when determining whether or not the young person is homeless. Where the living situation is considered permanent or semi-permanent (i.e. likely to remain stable for 3 months or more), then recognition of their status as “At Risk of Homelessness” may be more appropriate.

¹ Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie, *Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Analytic Program: Counting the Homeless 2006*, (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

² Ibid, pp. 3-4.

Tertiary homelessness. This refers to occupants of boarding houses and other single room establishments where individuals live there on a long term basis (more than 3 months) but do not have access to the minimum cultural standard of accommodation, meaning there are shared amenities and no security of tenure in the form of a lease.³

Marginally Housed. This refers to people who have housing situations close to the minimum cultural standard. These standards also take into account the stability of that housing as a key factor.

At Risk (of homelessness)

In daily practice, *Reconnect* workers make judgements about 'risk' by taking into account a complex body of qualitative information about a young person's circumstances. Central to this, is the evidence of escalating family conflict or dysfunction and reduced tolerance. Other factors that need to be considered include deteriorating academic performance, truancy, personality changes, mood changes, acting out and risk taking behaviours, inappropriate peer groups and substance abuse.

Young people can also be at risk of homelessness if their living situation conforms to the tertiary homelessness or marginally housed categories above, or if their current living situation places them in danger of physical or mental harm.

Early Intervention and Prevention

In the literature around youth homelessness, a number of concepts are generally well accepted. These include:

The notion of the 'career trajectory': at risk>tentative break>in and out>permanent break>involvement in homelessness sub-culture\transition to chronicity>acceptance of homelessness as a way of life.

The concept of homelessness as a process: that there is a process where young people become, remain and exit homelessness. This is coupled with the idea of homelessness as a 'lived experience'.

The concepts of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness (as above) where primary homelessness refers to people without shelter, secondary homelessness refers to people living in insecure accommodation such as emergency accommodation and couch surfing, and tertiary homelessness refers to people living in hostel type accommodation.

The concepts of primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary prevention strategies: where primary prevention strategies deal with social, economic and political causes of homelessness; secondary prevention strategies are about identifying young people perceptibly at risk of homelessness and strengthening their protective factors to enable them to remain engaged with school, community etc; tertiary prevention strategies are those that deal with

³ Chamberlain and MacKenzie *Australian Bureau of Statistics Counting the Homeless 2006*, p. 4.

young people experiencing homelessness to prevent their transition to chronicity; and quaternary prevention strategies deal with issues around preventing lifelong homelessness.

Early intervention refers to measures taken to assist individual young people as soon as possible after the young person has become homeless. Early intervention is assistance to young people either in the early stages of a homeless career, or with those young people perceptibly at risk of becoming homeless.

Prevention strategies, on the other hand, are not necessarily targeted at specific individuals. Prevention strategies in the *Reconnect* context are aimed at preventing young people making a transition to chronic homelessness and may cover mainly secondary and tertiary prevention strategies outlined above.

It needs to be understood that even with these definitions there are grey areas for particular cases where prevention blurs with early intervention and vice versa.

Refugee

Young people can be defined as a refugee if:

- they were born overseas; and
- they have entered Australia under the Humanitarian Program; and
- are experiencing multiple barriers.

If someone has entered Australia under the Humanitarian Program they will have been granted one of the following visas under the offshore resettlement program or the onshore protection program:

Refugee and Humanitarian Visas

- Off Shore Resettlement
 - Refugee Visa (subclass 200)
 - In-Country Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 201)
 - Global Special Humanitarian Program visa (subclass 202)
 - Emergency Rescue visa (subclass 203)
 - Women at Risk visa (subclass 204)
- On Shore Resettlement
 - Protection visa (Class XA) (subclass 866)
- Resolution of Status (RoS) visa (subclass 851)
 - NB this visa type has replaced the following visas
 - Temporary Humanitarian Visa (THV)
 - Secondary Movement Offshore Entry (Temporary) category
 - Secondary Movement Relocation (Temporary) category

- Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) subclass 785 (Temporary Protection)
- Permanent Protection Visa (PPV) subclass 866 (Protection)

Young asylum seekers living in the community under a community release Program are not eligible for *Reconnect* as they remain officially “in detention”, even though in a community setting, and have not been granted appropriate visas.

Reconnect providers should contact Department of Immigration and Citizenship if there is any question about the type of visa held by the young person, or the services they are able to access.

8.2 Good Practice Principles Strategies

Accessibility of Services

Maximising accessibility to parents, other family members and young people is an important element of good practice. Key features of accessibility include effective promotion, immediacy of response and outreach.

Promotion

- promotional materials need to use simple language, either plain English or in relevant community languages;
- there is no universal form of promotion - services may need to be promoted differently to each target group;
- the use of language is important, as people do not like to be perceived as ‘problem subjects’- there is a need to universalise the issues being faced; and
- promotional materials should be distributed widely in the community, rather than just relying on perceived ‘first to know agencies’.

Immediacy of Response

When a parent or young person makes contact, a quick response is extremely important. The capacity of a *Reconnect* worker (rather than the intake officer of a service) to respond within 24 hours appears to decrease the possibility of young people leaving or being expelled from the family home.

Outreach

Outreach can reduce the stigma people may feel about accessing a ‘welfare’ service. Outreach can be provided at venues where young people (and in some cases, their parents) feel comfortable, such as at homes, schools, parks, cafes and community or youth centres.

Client Driven Service Delivery

Flexible services that can adapt to the needs of both young people and families are important and can be achieved by:

- recognising the different stages families and young people may go through after seeking assistance, e.g. families may want more active, practical

assistance in the short-term before being moved to explore underlying issues;

- using different models of intervention. Within the *Reconnect* pilot projects, it was found families and young people reacted well to solution-focused approaches that provided skills to deal with situations at the time and in the future; and
- linking Participants with a range of supports and ensuring they are referred to appropriate services. Brokerage funds, incorporated in the budget, may enable a service to respond creatively by purchasing specific services.

Holistic Approaches to Service Delivery

Services need to work from an understanding that problems are not isolated from other aspects of a Participant's life. This means:

- viewing a person's situation in the context of employment, education, family and community participation;
- working with families rather than just individuals; and
- experienced case managers with a "tool box" of interventions such as counselling, group work, mediation, family meetings and practical assistance.

Working Collaboratively

This involves working with a range of core services in the early intervention network including:

- schools, community agencies, (such as family support agencies and generalist and specialist youth services), income support agencies, and state/territory community service departments; and
- specialist services such as cultural-specific and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, drug, alcohol and health services including community and mental health.

Service providers are required to devote a proportion of their time to networking and developing effective working relationships with other agencies. Working together can extend to case coordination and the integrated case management of individuals and families where multiple providers are involved.

Four key features of good practice in engaging other agencies in collaborative early intervention work have been identified:

- a clearly defined task or issue that needs to be addressed;
- mutual benefit to be gained;
- organisational commitment to working together; and
- good relationships with individuals in other agencies.

Culturally and Contextually Appropriate Service Delivery

Flexibility in responding to the different needs of different communities is good practice. Promoting a service, assessing needs and issues and providing support, require a sensitive approach to cultural and contextual differences.

Contextual considerations may include:

- geographical location (urban, rural or regional);
- distances to be travelled; and
- key issues affecting families in the community being served.

Cultural considerations may include:

- the effects of migration on families;
- the different values within diverse cultural groups and in particular, the difference in the culture of the country of origin and the new culture (conflict between parent and young person);
- differences in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and between generations; and
- language issues (potentially requiring bilingual staff, translation and interpreters).

Review and Evaluation

Ongoing review and evaluation is important in ensuring that early intervention services are effective and responsive to the needs of participants. Evaluation methods such as participatory Action Research assist service providers to provide flexible services. Building in regular feedback from participants and other agencies should enable adjustments to service delivery.

Sustainability

Building sustainability is an important principle of good practice because it recognises the importance of ensuring continuity of support for individuals and families, e.g. by identifying gaps and barriers in services over the medium to long term. It also means working in a way that empowers individuals and communities by developing their knowledge and skills so they can sustain their own change processes.

In addition to these principles, there are several important partners with which a specialist early intervention service needs to work; these include:

- schools;
- state/territory agencies responsible for the care and protection of young people;
- income support agencies; and
- other government and non-government community agencies.

9 Budget Line Items

These line item definitions are included as a guide:

9.1 **Staffing Costs** – direct service delivery staffing costs, including:

- Staff salaries and on-costs / staff accruals;
- Professional development;
- Staff supervision costs;
- Training and conference expenses;
- Workers compensation;
- Superannuation; and
- Job advertising.

9.2 **Operational Costs** – costs associated with direct service delivery to program participants and divided as a proportion of all the funding received by the organisation:

- Service delivery expenses;
- Insurance premiums;
- Activities expenses;
- Consultancies for the purposes of service activities;
- Community education;
- Delivery of training to clients;
- Information sessions, marketing / promotion and advertising;
- Support activities and other program development costs;
- Translation and interpreter services;
- Expenses for Action Research / Reflective Practice, service and program evaluations; and
- Travel costs including travel expenses, cost associated with staff travel and motor vehicle leases for those vehicles used for direct service delivery.

9.3 **Administration Costs** – administrative costs related to in delivering a service as a proportion of all funding received by the organisation:

- Management Service Fee;
- Electricity and gas expenses;
- Telephone;
- Postage, printing, photocopying, stationery;
- Office equipment;
- Depreciation, maintenance and repairs of office equipment;
- Stores and other admin / operating costs;
- Computer software;
- Meeting costs;
- Equipment insurance;
- Legal expenses;
- Amenities;
- Library;
- External audit and accounting services;
- Finance costs, bank charges and interest paid on overdraft;

- Organisational memberships and levies including that of peak bodies and other social services organisations and other operational expenses;
- Property costs: those costs associated with accommodation, rent, building insurance, cleaning, maintenance and repairs of buildings and grounds, rates and taxes, depreciation (property); and other property expenses; and
- Insurance.

9.4 Establishment costs for new services

- Establishment costs are intended for new services or services that have minimal infrastructure and are provided at FaHCSIA's discretion.

10. Glossary

Indigenous Person:

A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.

Access:

Australian Government policy is aimed at ensuring that government services:

- are available to everyone who is entitled to them;
- are free of discrimination and irrespective of a person's country of birth, language, gender, disability, culture, race or religion; and
- take into account the needs and differences of Program participants.

Action Research:

Applying the cycle of observation, reflection, planning and action to ensure service delivery is continuously improved and remains relevant to key stakeholders. It enables greater understanding of what works, when it works and why. Referred to as Participatory Action Research throughout guidelines.

At Risk Groups:

Groups or individuals identified as possibly having, or potentially developing, a problem (physical, mental or social) requiring further evaluation or intervention.

At Risk (of Homelessness):

See section 8.1 Definitions.

Audit:

An examination and verification of the accounts, records, procedures etc, of a Service provider and conducted by a registered independent auditor, accountant, or official.

Auspice Body:

A non-government organisation that manages government funded Programs and is legally responsible for implementation and reporting requirements.

Brokerage:

When a service provider pays for the services or goods of another organisation to assist a Program participant with particular needs.

Capacity Building:

The process of developing knowledge and skills to enhance a community's ability to meet challenges. This may involve committed leadership, consultative decision making, networking and the effective use of economic, environmental and social resources.

Communities:

A social unit with common rights or interests within a larger society; they are not only defined geographically.

Community Capacity:

A community's commitment, resources and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities.

Community Collaboration:

Being involved in community based collective action and community development activities to improve community well-being.

Community Development:

Process by which communities and outside agencies plan, organise or implement improvements to community resources, facilities, economic conditions etc.

Community Strength:

The extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance individual and collective well-being in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, fulfilment of needs, self-reliance and social responsibility.

Consent Obtained:

A Program participant provides consent to the collection of data relating to their personal demographics and circumstances.

Cost Per Case:

Cost per case is based on FaHCSIA calculations derived from analysis conducted on current cost trends within the program. These figures are then aligned with the ARIA categories determined by the Department of Health and Ageing.

Data:

Information collected for a specific purpose.

Disadvantage:

A social relationship in which the position of one person is worse because the position of another person is relatively better. People may be disadvantaged in many ways; in relation to poverty, the term refers to resources, opportunities and distribution of power.

Early Intervention:

See section 8.1 Definitions.

FaHCSIA:

The Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

FaHCSIA Contract Manager / Project Officer:

The FaHCSIA State/Territory Office staff member who liaises with service providers on Funding Agreement requirements and monitors service performance.

Family:

Two or more people related by blood, marriage, adoption or fostering, who may or may not live together. For some cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, family may also include those classified as 'extended family'.

Financial Year:

The twelve-month period from 1 July to 30 June.

First-to-Know Agencies:

Agencies likely to be the first to identify young people or families having difficulties.

Freedom of Information:

The principle that government activities are open to public scrutiny, as far as is reasonably possible, and permits public access to information held by the government.

Funding:

Public money given to a service provider delivering the service outlined in the Funding Agreement and includes interest earned on the money.

Funding Agreement:

The legal contract between FaHCSIA and the auspice body/service provider that outlines service delivery, accountability and reporting requirements.

Good Practice Principles:

The processes or procedures that contribute to achieving the outcomes of a Program/Service Type.

Holistic Service Delivery:

Approaches to service delivery that recognise the range of factors affecting the lives of young people and their families.

Homeless:

See section 8.1 Definitions.

Indigenous Person

A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which they live.

Newly Arrived

A person who has been in Australia less than five years.

Not for Profit:

An organisation where any profits generated are returned to further the work of the organisation, and not paid out to individuals or shareholders.

Organisation:

Legal entity in the non-government sector.

Out-of-Scope Client:

An '*Out-of-Scope*' client is a person who requests to engage with a Reconnect service and does not meet the program definitions of a target client. Additional information regarding this can be found in the '*Out-of-Scope Process Guide*'.

Performance Assessment Criteria (PAC) Trac:

Forms part of the Reconnect Online Data System (RODS) and consists of a set of criteria against which services are measured to ascertain whether they are meeting their milestones as set down by their Funding Agreements. The PAC Trac provides *Reconnect* workers and FaHCSIA with the means to assess past performance and track the ongoing progress of an outlet's service delivery.

Parent:

A natural, step, adoptive or foster mother or father.

Performance:

The extent to which objectives or targets are achieved, the efficiency with which resources are allocated and the probity, equity and fairness with which outcomes are achieved.

Performance Indicators:

A set of measurements designed to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a service in meeting objectives, producing outputs and achieving outcomes. In the FaHCSIA accrual accounting framework, performance indicators are made up of price, quantity, quality and, depending on delivery, funding criteria.

Prevention:

The implementation of activities to assist and support young people, families and/or communities before problems arise.

Probity:

Conformity with standards of ethics, integrity, honesty, and propriety.

Program:

Refers to *Reconnect*.

Program Evaluation:

Evaluation of the process, effectiveness, cost benefit, or impact of Programs, projects or services.

Program Funding:

The funding received from the Australian Government to provide the Program.

Program Guidelines:

A set of directions for the administration and delivery of the Program.

Program Participant:

Recipient of a FaHCSIA funded Program or service delivered by a service provider.

Refugee:

See section 8.1 Definitions.

Risk:

The chance of something happening that will have an impact on objectives and is measured in terms of consequences and likelihood.

Service Delivery:

The activities undertaken by a service provider.

Service Provider:

The organisation (local government, community based, not-for-profit or for profit) funded by the Australian Government to provide a service to young people in accordance with a Funding Agreement.

Service Type:

The type of Program, ie *Reconnect*.

Stakeholders:

Individuals, organisations or networks that have, or potentially have, a relationship or interest in the work undertaken by service providers.

Target Group:

A target group is a group of people with a particular characteristic or set of characteristics which a Program or service seeks to assist.

Tool Box:

The range of approaches and interventions used by service providers to assist young people and their families.