

Minutes

Meeting of the SWMPF Working Group on Vulnerable and At Risk Children and Young People

9.30am – 11.30am, Wednesday 10 June 2014
Fremantle PCYC, Paget Street, Hilton

Interim chair: Karin Mac Arthur, Community Partnership Broker, SWMPF

Participants: Craig Green (Youth Worker, Fremantle PCYC); Christine George (Youth Project Officer, City of Fremantle); Julie Fitzgerald (Team Leader, Responsible Parenting Services, Department for Child Protection and Family Support); Russ Eldean (Youth Liaison Officer, WA Police); Bobby Mizen (Youth Outreach Officer, City of Cockburn); Ian Jorritsma (Team Leader, Department of Housing); Catherine Duce (Y-Shac, Anglicare); Claire Heffernan (Manager, South West Metropolitan Youth Justice Services); Michael Carter (Perth Indigenous Coordination Centre, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet)

Facilitator: Lianda Gibson (AndMe Consulting)

Observer: Melanie Bisnauth (Intern, St Patrick's Community Support Centre)

Apologies: Maria McAttackney (CEO, Nyoongar Patrol Outreach Service); Michelle Champion (Youth Services Manager, City of Cockburn)

1. Welcome

Karin welcomed Michael Carter. Michael works with the Perth Indigenous Coordination Centre and brings a wealth of invaluable experience to the group.

The group also welcomed Lianda Gibson to the meeting. Lianda is a consultant who specializes in involving children and young people in decision-making. Lianda will be helping the group develop our engagement strategies and ensure children and young people are driving the project.

Karin noted that there had been some changes in the working group's composition, as a result of the group's decision to focus on the 8 – 13 year old age group.

The working group agreed that we needed to have a representative of the Department of Education given the project's focus on improving school attendance.

Karin asked members to advise if they had any recommendations as to other services working with the 8-13 cohort who could be invited to join the group.

In addition, Karin recommended that a youth worker from the City of Melville be invited to join the group given the project will be working with students in each of the three LGAs.

It was agreed to change the working group's name to 'Vulnerable and At Risk Children and Young People' to better reflect the focus on 8 – 13 year olds.

Action:

- Karin to contact Department of Education re appointing a new representative to the group.
- All members to advise Karin of other service providers (government or non-government) working with 8-13 year olds who might be invited to join the working group.
- Christine George to follow up with City of Melville re having one of their youth workers join the working group.
- Karin to send working group updated list of members.

2. Approval of minutes of meeting 28 May 2014

No comments were received so, although this item wasn't raised at the meeting, we can consider these to be approved (if not, please let Karin know!).

3. Business arising from the minutes

The working group discussion took off where we ended at our last meeting, namely around the identification of the children and young people we would be working with, and how best to engage them in scoping and driving our project.

The working group agreed that the best way to work directly with vulnerable and at risk children and young people, without their feeling stigmatized, was to work with the schools.

It was agreed that Karin would obtain data from the Department of Education on school attendance (8-13 year olds) in the 3 LGAs. The working group would then review this data to identify which schools had low levels of attendance among the 8 – 13-year-old cohort.

The information obtained from the Department of Education would be supplemented by information from other agencies, such as the Police and DCPFS,

regarding what they consider the major issues to be (in limiting school attendance).

The group also agreed that in addition to working with schools experiencing the highest truancy levels among the 8 – 13 year old cohort, we would also ask the Department of Education to identify schools, operating in comparable socio-economic areas, that have achieved a significant improvement in school attendance. These schools would provide an important ‘control’ group. We could also draw on the strategies they have implemented to inform our work. Christine mentioned South Fremantle and Hilton have done some good work in this area.

We would invite the identified schools to volunteer to take part in the project (acknowledging that we may need to approach more than 3 to find willing partners). It will be critical to approach these schools in a way that highlights the positive and unique nature of this project. Importantly, that we are not seeking to duplicate work already being undertaken by individual agencies and that our objective is to use our collective resources to help schools to engage students who are not attending.

4. Discussion on how the working group will engage young people to ensure their needs are driving all initiatives undertaken

It is clear that the children and young people we are targeting will not be at the identified schools on a regular basis and for that reason we need to develop strategies to ensure that these are the people driving the project (as opposed to the high achieving students).

At the same time, we have to be very mindful of how we frame our questions, given that many children and young people have been ‘conditioned’ not to respond to such questions as ‘why don’t you attend school’ and ‘what would encourage you to attend school’. It was agreed that we needed to take a strengths-based approach, highlighting the assets that children and young people bring to the project. We need them to tell us what they want the project to involve, and what incentives would encourage them to participate. They might conduct the interviews themselves among their peers in order to get the information we are seeking. They may elect to form their own working groups.

The engagement tools we use to get the identified schools on board, as well as the young people and their families, will be the subject of discussion at our next meeting.

5. Prioritization of possible initiatives to be undertaken – refer draft action plan and notes from SWMPF Planning Day

The group discussed the need for greater clarity around the project’s purpose. While the 4 outcomes agreed at the last meeting would be used as a guide, it was acknowledged that these might need to be refined as we agree on the initiatives

to be undertaken (driven by the children and young people themselves). However, the first outcome, regarding improved attendance at school, remains a priority of this project. Karin acknowledged that the different approach being adopted, whereby we are seeking the target group to scope the project and identify outcomes and initiatives, is taking us all out of our comfort zones but that that is what we need to do in order to test this new methodology to achieve better outcomes.

Lianda spoke of a successful project undertaken in the UK to increase school attendance, which was driven by the students themselves. She would obtain information about the process involved and share this with the working group.

Michael spoke of some pilot projects being undertaken by the Commonwealth government to improve school attendance in remote schools. He would obtain information on these and share any learnings with the working group.

He added that school attendance is a key priority of the Commonwealth Government and this could be used to leverage our discussions with school principals.

Actions:

- Lianda to share information with the working group re the successful case study in the UK;
- Michael to share information with the working group re the pilot projects under way in remote WA to increase school attendance.

6.Appointment of permanent working group Chairperson and proposal to rotate minute taking among all members

This item was not discussed. However, Lianda Gibson kindly agreed to chair the next meeting (as Karin will be overseas) and Melanie Bisnauth to take the minutes and convene the following meeting.

7. Any other business

- Many thanks to Fremantle PCYC for hosting our meeting!
- And many thanks to Christine George and the City of Fremantle for hosting our next meeting, which will be held at 9.30am on Tuesday 24 June in the Reception Room, City of Fremantle.