

## Minutes

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

**9:30am – 11:30am, Tuesday 24 June 2014**  
**Reception Room, City of Fremantle**

**Interim Chair:** Lianda Gibson, AndMe Consulting

**Participants:** Maria McAtackney (CEO, Nyoongar Patrol Outreach Service); Craig Green (Youth Worker, Fremantle PCYC); 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); Catherine Duce (Y-Shac, Anglicare); Christine George (Youth Project Officer, City of Fremantle); Ian Jorritsma (Team Leader, Department of Housing); Michael Carter (Perth Indigenous Coordination Centre, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet); Dee Skuza (Community Development Officer - Youth, City of Melville)

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

**Apologies:** Claire Heffernan (Manager, South West Metropolitan Youth Justice Services); Katharine Ingram-Sheno (Consultant, Behaviour and Attendance South Metropolitan Education Region); Karin Mac Arthur (SWMPF Community Partnership Broker)

#### **1. Welcome**

Lianda welcomed all participants to the South West Metropolitan Partnership Forum's working group meeting, which is dedicated to supporting vulnerable and at risk 8 – 13 year olds in the local government authorities of Cockburn, Fremantle and Melville.

#### **2. Approval of the minutes of meeting 10 June 2014**

Minutes were approved without change.

#### **3. Business arising from the minutes**

The working group discussion took off where we ended at the last meeting, namely around the identification of the schools that would be selected to take part in the project in each of the 3 LGAs. See agenda item 4.

#### **4. Identification of schools to be invited to take part in the project in each of the 3 LGAs**

A suggested list of schools, kindly compiled by Katharine at the Department of Education on the basis of their school attendance data in the three LGAs, was provided to the group before the meeting. The group determined it needed to review more detailed data from the Department of Education on school attendance for the 8-13 year old age group in the suggested schools. This because:

- i) The group was not able to identify what the 'at risk' factors were, ie NAPLAN, ethnicity, disability or other factors?
- ii) Without any specific attendance figures, or anyone with access to the figures or knowledge of the school to talk about attendance, it was not possible to know if attendance was particularly problematic in one year group or more, or across the board. That is, whether it was a small group of children consistently not attending or rarely attending or if the problem was more widely spread with a lot of children with poor/mediocre attendance. The group also wished to know if attendance was generally getting worse or better (or stable) in the schools.
- iii) In the absence of a representative from the Department of Education, it was not possible for the group to know what type of strategies/programs are currently being implemented (if any) or have been tried in the past (if any) to increase attendance, either working with children or families, or both. The group agreed it was critical not to spend time developing a project to find that this has been done before, nor to approach the schools in ignorance of their current or past programs and strategies.

The group also discussed looking at strategies used by schools across the 3 LGAs that have succeeded in increasing attendance.

The group agreed that any approach to schools to participate must highlight 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.

Christine advised that she was aware of some work that Hilton Primary School and South Fremantle SHS had done a few years back to increase attendance. She was unsure of the exact nature of this or how it was funded.

Dee advised she knows the Principal at Caralee Primary School and advised that she could have an informal chat about the project and invite suggestions and feedback. The group agreed this would be valuable.

## Actions

- Karin to request further information from Department of Education regarding attendance figures of children in the identified primary schools, broken down by year group and with more detailed information about patterns of attendance and specific programs/strategies currently being used in the schools (if any) to address this.
- Karin to ensure attendance by Department of Education representative at the next and future working group meetings.
- Julie to invite Mark Gilbert from Port Community School who works with ages 12 and up to provide insight into reasons for and patterns of non-attendance.
- Christine to try to find information about the attendance project between Hilton Primary School and South Fremantle SHS.
- Dee to have a talk with the principal of Caralee Community School about the project.

## 5. Discussion re-engagement strategy to ensure the needs of vulnerable and at risk 8-13 year olds are driving all project initiatives

The group found it difficult to move forward significantly with developing engagement strategies without getting clarity on the nature of the attendance issues in the schools. The group was not yet clear whether the project will be working with children and young people who are primarily not attending school, in which case an outreach strategy in the homes and involvement with the families would be required; or if the project will be working with children who are disengaging from school, but still there to some extent, in which case an in-school project will work.

There was also discussion around how any projects with the schools would be resourced. The group did not know if the SWMPF had funding for this project. It was agreed that if the group is going to be asking schools to implement a project, then they need to know if we will be able to assist with resources, or if we would be expecting the school to be able to roll something out with their existing resources, in the knowledge that these are scarce.

The meeting also discussed the possibility of child-friendly surveys or fun interviews/in person questionnaires that could be used peer to peer; however, it was acknowledged that these would be unlikely to work if the young people are not attending school at all.

There was discussion about the need for these 'at risk' children and young people to have a positive experience of school when they get there. Maria advised that what she hears from children and young people who are not attending school is that they find school "boring". It was acknowledged that children disengaged from school are also more likely to be the ones getting in trouble, being excluded and so on . So if they are not finding it a positive,

rewarding place to be, then they are less likely to attend, especially if compounded by family factors, such as parents who do not support school attendance, or have themselves had poor experiences. To break the cycle, school needs to be a positive experience for these students.

There was discussion around the transition year and its effect on attendance of at risk children and young people. This is the last year when year 7s will be considered part of the primary education level. Therefore some schools that have already implemented the transitional change for high school will have to be considered in order to capture year 6s and 7s that have already been listed at the schools.

### **Actions**

- Karin to further inform the group about resourcing for the project.

### **6. Any other business**

The group very briefly discussed the draft working project name suggested by Karin. This item will be discussed further at the next meeting when Karin can provide the background.

### **7. Volunteer to take minutes at next meeting**

Thank you to Catherine Duce who volunteered to take the minutes for the next meeting.

### **8. Date and venue of next meeting**

The next meeting of the working group will be held at 9:30am – 11:30am on Thursday, July 24 at the City of Melville.

Note: The meeting will be in a month's time due to school holidays and many members being on leave. This will also give enough time for relevant members to undertake their allocated actions.

Many thanks to the City of Fremantle and Christine George for hosting our meeting and to the City of Melville for hosting our next meeting!