



YFS Ltd Submission

A stronger, more
diverse and
independent
community sector

November
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About YFS

YFS is a not-for-profit, community services organisation based in Logan, Queensland.

We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to thrive.

We work alongside people backing them to overcome adversity.

We support individuals and families through a mix of government, philanthropic and self-funded initiatives.

We work together with others to promote inclusion, advocate for justice and influence changes to the service system.



YFS respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people as Australia's first peoples and the traditional owners/custodians of the land on which we meet and work. We recognise the important role they have within community and country, and we pay our respects to the Elders of this land past and present.

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Introduction

YFS Ltd (organisation ID 1-1J9-51) is a place-based community service organisation delivering services in Logan, Queensland and surrounding areas. For almost 40 years YFS has backed young people, families and individuals in Logan and surrounds to overcome adversity and to thrive. We help people improve housing stability, financial wellbeing, family functioning, safety, work readiness and engagement with family and community.

YFS currently offers a number of Australian Government-funded services, complemented by programs funded by Queensland Government and philanthropic support.

Department of Social Services funding

Family and Relationships Services (FaRS): our Step by Step Young Families team achieves the FaRS purpose of strengthening family relationships, preventing breakdown and ensuring wellbeing and safety of children. Our team provides non-clinical counselling and education through our family resourcing model, which provides practical support alongside capacity-building activities. In line with the FaRS emphasis on early intervention and prevention targeting critical family transition points, our team supports young parents aged 25 and under to establish positive family environments where both children and parents can flourish. ...

Specialised Family Violence Services (SFVS): YFS' SFVS plays a critical role in Logan. The funding allows us to employ a domestic violence specialist worker to work with Queensland Police Service in a co-location model with the Logan Vulnerable Persons Unit through an initiative called Project Hera. The Project Hera worker receives referrals from police and supports women and children to access resources, address practical barriers and increase skills and confidence as they move to safety.

Financial Wellbeing (DSS): YFS receives funding under four activities:

- Money support hubs
- Financial counselling and financial capability
- Financial counselling problem gambling
- Emergency relief.

YFS has combined these resources to create an integrated service staffed by a team of Financial Counsellors and Financial Capability Workers. This means we are able to respond to a range of financial issues which a focus on building financial literacy and capacity.

Other Australian Government funding

- ParentsNext (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations)
- Safer Communities youth justice early intervention pilot (was Department of Home Affairs, now administered through Department of Industry, Energy, Science and Resources)
- Women's Leadership and Development Program for an employment mentoring pilot for women impacted by domestic violence and homelessness (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet)
- Funding for a community legal centre through the National Legal Assistance Partnership
- Funding for homelessness support services through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement.

1. Meaningful working partnership

1.1 Partnership approach

YFS' experience partnering with DSS has been very positive. DSS uses a workplan-based approach that enables flexibility within the funded activities. This has enabled YFS to design services that respond to local needs and opportunities.

For example:

- we have focused our Family and Relationships Service on young parents after Logan Together identified them as a local priority group who were not receiving focused attention. Logan is a hotspot for young parenthood, and young parents face unique challenges.
- we have leveraged our FaRS funding with philanthropic funding to develop and trial a multi-disciplinary integrated team to back young parents to thrive. Over the past two years this project has helped us better understand how to improve outcomes with young families.
- our SFVS funding has enabled a co-located response with police. It was designed with our local police and stakeholders, and has been shown to improve women's engagement with support after domestic and family violence incidents.

Recommendation: continue the flexible approach

1.2 Information sharing

This partnership approach has been more challenging when dealing with crisis responses. For example the information sharing requirements for COVID emergency relief and flood financial counselling have been more onerous. It is difficult to mobilise extra data collection and reporting capacity for short-term projects, and ad-hoc reporting/ information requests can be challenging to deliver on.

Recommendation: the department could consider standardised reporting arrangements for crisis responses, or give partners more notice of the information it will be seeking to avoid retrospective data trawling at short notice.

1.3 Program design opportunities

Program design processes that involve multi-pronged approaches to increase engagement will generate best results. For example, current consultation to redesign the ParentsNext service, although rushed, has sought input from service users, providers, stakeholders through submissions, forums and targeted consultations.

Note that service users often need support to engage in these processes. YFS supports the Logan Young Parents Influencer group, and helped this group develop a submission for the ParentsNext redesign process to ensure the voice of young parents was included.

Recommendation: allow time for meaningful engagement, and seek out service users via their supporters.

2. Grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services

2.1 Adequate and flexible funding

Funding needs to be sufficient to fund at least a small team with a leader. Funding also needs to consider the full cost of an FTE. For YFS this currently sits at around \$150,000 - \$160,000 per FTE covering all staffing and overhead costs. YFS has two grants for financial counselling that do not cover the cost of a full-time worker. It can be very challenging to recruit part-time staff, and also makes it difficult to provide coverage so the community can rely on the service.

Recommendation: chunk funding up to fund small teams rather than small grants. Consolidate funding under broad streams (e.g. all financial capability and counselling funding could be grouped together rather than separate grants for problem gambling, floods, hubs etc). Consider funding in multiples of \$150,000 minimum.

2.2 Administrative and overhead costs

The costs of leadership and management are often ignored when allocating grants. This is most apparent in the financial and SFVS areas, where grants tend to be small. At YFS we can pull single-worker programs under another group (state-funded) to provide management support, but this would not be an option for smaller organisations or for new activities in an organisation.

Specialist functions (e.g. specialist family violence or financial counselling) need expert supervision and professional development. Our financial hub brings together five grants (hub, FC, PGFC, flood, ER) to allow critical mass to have a manager oversee the team and to enable us to tailor the right response to each person. Reducing this funding will make that impossible.

The cost of implementation is often missed in new funding. Resourcing activities such as design, recruitment, system set up, evaluation planning and delivery are all important but often not funded.

A significant example is emergency relief funding. Using ER purposefully as a way to foster financial capacity and connect people with services requires well-trained workers or volunteers who can link people with the other supports they may need. The costs of providing and administering ER, coordinating and resourcing staff and volunteers, and collaborating with local services should be recognised by including adequate staffing funds in the grant.

Recommendation: use a “fund what it takes” approach instead of a “see what they can do with this” approach

2.3 Rising operational costs

Wage increases plus workforce shortages and retention challenges mean we have to offer more to attract and retain staff. For example we have recently increased the award level our family workers are paid at to reflect the increasing complexity of the families they work with. Ultimately this will reduce the number of FTEs we can employ.

Other costs are also increasing rapidly, such as petrol and energy costs.

Recommendation: consider all cost increases when calculating indexation

2.4 Supplementation and indexation

We commend the Australian Government's commitment to improve the approach to supplementation and indexation and the increases to funding for this.

Issues include:

- Indexation has not covered increased wages
- Indexation rates are announced well after we have prepared budgets and finalised staffing
- Programs funded through Commonwealth-state agreements don't get the same rate of indexation
- Last year's additional supplementation, while welcome, was advised very late in the financial year and not added to the base for these grants.

As a result, all our DSS-funded programs have effectively gone backwards in terms of buying power.

Recommendation: announce indexation rates at Budget time as the state does so we can plan for the year knowing how much money we will have. Increase equity for programs funded through Commonwealth-state partnerships.

2.5 Equitable and responsive distribution of funds

The department's state-based staff cover large regions and diverse contracts. It would be great if they were more actively engaged with local services and communities but we understand capacity is limited. Where the department has convened provider forums they have gained insights into emerging needs and trends.

It would be good for the Commonwealth and states to work together to understand local needs, target funding and reduce duplication e.g. financial counselling and capability are funded by both levels.

Recommendation: create opportunities to engage with providers and state-based departments to identify needs and opportunities.

2.6 Streamlined reporting requirements

Requirements for DEX data collection have increased over time starting with the voluntary partnership approach. It would be good to have more clarity about where the department is heading with this.

Feedback on our reports is often very delayed. The data the department collects is not shared to help us see what is happening nationally and to compare ourselves with others or with agreed benchmarks.

Recommendation: work with providers to clarify reporting requirements and identify improvements

3. Longer grant agreement terms

3.1 Length of grant agreements

5 year agreements provide certainty and stability

3.2 Timeframes for advice of changes

We lose staff in the six to eight months leading up to the end of a contract if we don't have confirmation that the grant will be renewed or extended. Ideally we would like 12 months notice for significant changes (eg re-tendering or program termination) and six months minimum for extensions and other changes.

3.3 Funding flexibility

DSS contracts have provided flexibility to develop services that best meet local needs through innovative approaches.

3.4 Acquittal flexibility

Innovation involves uncertainty about the outcomes – at times CSOs might need benchmark adjustments to implement change.

3.5 Variation processes

We have found the department flexibility and open to discussion about variations.

4 Grant funding to a greater diversity of CSOs

4.1 New and emerging organisations

Options to foster development of new and emerging organisations include special funding rounds for innovation or projects. DSS seed funding for our R4Respect youth-led violence prevention initiative was key to establishment of this ongoing initiative.

Encouraging consortium approaches can also enable local and specialist organisations to partner with others. An example is the Logan-Beaudesert emergency relief consortium which YFS leads. We have recruited a number of small local providers to work in discrete communities where they have a strong local presence and volunteer base.

4.2 Capacity building for smaller organisations

Unfortunately many of the capacity building opportunities for small organisations are beyond the organisations' capacity to apply for, such as grants from foundations. The best examples we have seen of this are philanthropic organisations such as Hand Heart Pocket (the charity of Freemasons Queensland) which works with emerging organisations and links them with mentors or consultants who can help them develop strategy and systems.

4.3 Larger CSOs supporting smaller CSOs

The Logan-Beaudesert emergency relief consortium is an example of this. YFS takes responsibility for reporting and administration, and provides training and support for the smaller agencies. Together the organisations have established clarity about who offers what type of support to reduce

duplication and maximise impact. This approach leverages the available resources by harnessing the power of grass-roots organisations to engage with communities.

5. Trusted community organisations with strong local links

5.1 Place-based funding approaches

YFS is a place-based organisation that provides a range of services in Logan and surrounds. We believe services are best provided by trusted local organisation with deep connections in the community. We appreciate DSS' commitment to funding place-based services.

It is particularly important to complement national services such as financial or DFV hotlines with local face-to-face opportunities for people to get the support they need. It is also critical for services to be joined up so they can respond to the complex needs and goals of the people we support. This may be internal integration or referral relationships, but it works best when the linkages are well-supported.

5.2 Innovative approaches to fund trusted local community organisations

Options include:

- asking the community who the trusted local providers are
- asking for references from local Elders groups and other local leaders
- structure grant proposals to test the depth of local knowledge and connections.

5.3 Duplicative funding or gaps

The main opportunity for improvement is greater coordination between state and Federal funding and programs.

Needs-based funding processes that rely on data about local needs and demographics can inform investment decisions to ensure funding goes where it is most needed.

5.4 shared accountability in community-led change initiatives

Our experience in Logan is that community-led change in large urban areas is most effective when it is focused on particularly small areas or cohorts.

We are not sure that the administrative impost of shared accountability would strengthen service delivery.

6. General questions for each focus area

6.1 and 6.2 Challenges overlooked/ other solutions

Greater integration of services rather than program silos is a real opportunity to increase traction. For example, work preparation services like ParentsNext or Transition to Work would be much more effective if they were designed and delivered in consultation with service users and stakeholders that provide other supports needed by the target groups. Rolling work readiness and employment mentoring in with social services could give both more traction in addressing disadvantage.

6.3 What does success look like?

Success looks like services that are designed and resourced to equip people to thrive, not just overcome crisis. Services need to build people’s capacity and knowledge and connections. YFS’ Theory of Change sets out how we aim to achieve real change with the people we work with through a combination of practical support, capacity building and advocacy, grounded in deep understanding of each person’s goals and in evidence about what works.



