

## **Workshop 14:** **Youth Justice Assessment Framework**

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## **Introduction**

The advent of specialist youth justice services and a new detention centre has given rise to greater opportunities for collaborative practice to occur in Queensland. A project is currently being trialled between Caboolture Youth Justice Service, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and the Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre (Education Queensland). Using a multi-agency approach, a youth justice assessment framework (YJAF) is being developed to assess, prioritise and target the risk and protective needs of young people in the child protection and youth justice systems.

This paper will attempt to highlight the importance of collaboration situated in a multi-systemic context and in particular demonstrate the interlocking relationships between the Department of Families and other service delivery partners.

The purpose of this discussion paper is twofold:

- to strengthen YJAF through discussion and feedback; and
- to offer information to leaders interested in launching or enhancing their existing approach to case planning.

Research revealed in Australia that it was not possible to identify a comprehensive continuous assessment and intervention tool that had been developed or was being used for

families as their children/young people moved between the different statutory and non-statutory agency systems.

Coordinated case planning is a concept that is widely known and supported but it means different things to different agency groups. There is no commonly accepted definition or model of coordinated case planning. It is also implemented in many different ways.

The current understanding is that there is, at minimum, an acknowledgement that children, young people/families may have more than one case plan and that workers should communicate and share information about the needs of the family and their children. Given that there is neither a common definition nor a standard model of coordinated case management means that YJAF intends to achieve the following:

- A system of case planning that provides a single departmental framework for family member referral;
- Team development and communication to perform the following:
  - Children, young person and family assessment;
  - Development of a coordinated service plan;
  - Provision of a holistic repertoire of interventions;
  - Case management, review and resolution;
- A continuous planned process for young people transferring between child protection, youth justice, detention centres and adult correctional systems or common to these systems.

This paper also focuses on ways to ensure continuity of care through the establishment of statutory and non-statutory community-based partnerships and development of case plans that target all systems from which young people require support and monitoring.

YJAF provides a conceptual framework and practical guidelines to implement continuous case planning to achieve a family-focused and strengths-based model through coordination of the various departmental services and service delivery partners.

The implementation team has not focused on creating the perfect assessment model but rather oriented attention on sharing assessments, using technology to make information available to workers and partnership agencies, having an emphasis on young person/family/kinship contact and status, and making the service plan understandable to all involved.

In the design the team has tried to limit the tool to a core set of critical questions and create a platform for interdisciplinary collaboration between the various departmental services and other service delivery partners.

## **Background**

The partnership between the Department of Families Caboolture Youth Justice Service, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre through an intensive process developed a strengths-based assessment tool within a continuous service context. It is envisaged as young people move between the child protection and or

alternative care system, the youth justice and detention centre systems that critical assessment and intervention information is current and accessible.

YJAF is informed by the knowledge that it is necessary to adopt a consistent approach to family management that recognises continuity of management and effective use of resources by minimising duplication of processes regarding vulnerable children, young people and their families.

The Department of Families is currently testing the framework and working to define how YJAF can best be blended within the existing service system. A Reference Group and Implementation Committee comprised of stakeholders meet regularly to share work accomplished and lessons learned.

Continuity of case planning is the lynchpin of the Department of Families effort to offer continuous, coordinated services to vulnerable children, young people and their families. The purpose of this is to understand the fit between the identified static and dynamic risks and associated lifestyle issues, the strengths (protective factors) and their broader systemic context.

YJAF has the capacity to assess these risk factors as well as their relationship with a network of interconnected systems that encompass family and extra-familial factors such as peer, school and community.

In the spirit of ongoing action and learning the Department of Families in reshaping the Department as a learning organisation, endorsed a shift from:

- Being rule driven;
- Resisting change to embracing change;
- Comfort zone to seeking challenges;
- Management to true leadership;
- A focus on the past to a focus on the future possibilities; and
- Rigid structures to flexible structures.<sup>1</sup>

To achieve these changes it is necessary to review the array of various and often complex, practices and procedures that have developed in the work such as systems and processes for assessment, case planning and management and management of risks, amongst others, that have risen to meet emerging needs.

The Securing the Care Project pertaining only to detention centre practices originated from the abovementioned changes in relation to the number and complexity of these processes in youth detention. The Securing the Care Project subsequently developed systems and practices that are:

- integral to the work practices of multi-disciplinary team members and young people alike
- efficient and coordinated
- conducive to participation of young people, their families and Family Services Officers; and have,

- purpose and intent<sup>ii</sup>

This paper highlights the need to move beyond the current approaches regarding assessment, case planning and management and reviews of interventions in child protection, youth justice and detention centre work where families, children/young people requiring services could participate across systems all of which have a single framework orientation.

For example, families and their young people often have to agree to participate in a different plan for each service/program. Each service/program has its own focus and goals with particular requirements and established time frames. Sometimes the programs/services have similar content while at other times the programs can be so distinct that family members may not even realise they are receiving a service.

There is no doubt that endeavouring to resolve the sometimes-conflicting interest of young people, their families, the youth justice system, education, vocational education, health care including mental health and substance use systems is a challenging task.

The Securing the Care Project sought major improvements to the coordination, effectiveness and efficiency of these challenges in youth detention so that they were more purposeful and sophisticated, yet simpler to administer and understand.

YJAF builds on the work of the Securing the Care Project which, as mentioned, was peculiar to youth detention. In particular the Securing the Care Project brief sought to:

- Improve practices to assess the factors that contribute to each young person's anti-social behaviour and allow for the development of targeted interventions to effectively address these factors; improve practices to ensure that the full range of young people's support needs are addressed including any risk or self-harming behaviours.
- Develop closer integration of the above systems and processes under a single framework for practice that is more efficient, effective and understandable to both staff and young people.
- Implement improved assessment and planning materials, recording systems and terminology to accurately and meaningfully describe for staff, young people and their families, the various assessment, planning, and intervention processes they encounter in detention; and
- Maximize opportunities for young people to responsibly participate in decision making about their lives so that they can build on their capacity for independence.

These same principles could also relate to the wider departmental systems. The collaborative development of a continuous service model as it relates to the various aspects of child protection and youth justice work has the potential to address and enhance service provision in the same ways that the Securing the Care Project enhanced detention centre practices.

YJAF has incorporated the intentions of the Securing the Care Project and in addition situated the principles within a multi-systemic framework.

Such a framework provides for continuous case planning that is thorough and comprehensive and avoids overlapping or conflicting assessments, plans, time limits and requirements. It will also provide a forum for interdisciplinary work, new networking possibilities, and innovative professional development services and influence the policies and other issues related to the practice of continuous service provision. It is also designed to enhance achievement of family self-sufficiency and stability thus supporting the best interests of the children and young people involved.

### **Evolution of the Youth Justice Assessment Framework**

Given the empirical evidence that serious early anti-social behaviour is determined by the interplay of individual, peer, family, school, work and neighbourhood factors, YJAF reflects children, young people and their families as being nested within this complex network of interconnected systems.

The framework intends to provide pragmatic and goal-oriented outcomes to specifically target those risk factors in each young person's network that are contributing to their unwanted behaviour while enhancing individual and family strengths/protective factors.

Hence there is a need to integrate information obtained from family members, teachers, referral sources, peers and schools that are contributing to the problem. The targeting of the interventions is then derived from the assessment hypothesis.

YJAF also focuses on the strengths/protective factors, otherwise children/young people and or families will not collaborate with interventions. Without significant family collaboration gains will be very difficult to achieve.

Focusing on family strengths has numerous advantages, including: decreasing negative effects, building a sense of hope, positive expectations, identifying protective factors, decreasing frustration by emphasising problem solving, enhancing confidence and sustainable lifestyle changes.

When this is achieved the multi-disciplinary team will work with families and their children/young people to improve the family's discipline practices, enhance family-effective interventions, and decrease association with negative/criminal peers. The work also must focus on increasing associations with pro-social peers, improving education/vocational education/employment performance, recreational outlets and develop local support networks of extended family, neighbours and friends to help family members achieve and maintain changes.<sup>iii</sup>

Everyone benefits when youth justice, child protection services, education/vocational education, health providers including mental health and substance use and other service delivery partners are communicating with each other and strategically coordinating services for children, young people, their families and kin within a continuous service framework. This provides for the delivery of rolling services by multiple providers, working collaboratively to increase the likelihood of successful transitions between areas of care.

The most effective work must therefore be founded in this continuous multi-disciplinary service approach where those who are comfortable with and knowledgeable about cultures, families and systems provide a consistent integrated approach to family care across the areas of child protection and youth justices services.

The YJAF will contribute to a greater effectiveness of service delivery, accountability for service providers and rationalise costs.

### **Assessment, case planning and management**

Given the complex risks, needs and strengths of identified families it is important to strategically assess and plan to ensure that interventions will generalise and be maintained. To facilitate these outcomes YJAF interventions aim to empower families to address current and future risks and problems with the support of a local, social network of friends, neighbours and extended family. In contrast with most other assessment and intervention frameworks changes are made by family members with workers acting as consultants, advisors and advocates. In this way the model will always be in active refinement.<sup>iv</sup>

The primary purpose of the assessment phase is to understand the fit between identified risks and strengths and their broader systemic context in that:

1. Interaction with young people and their families should emphasise the strengths/protective factors, and use systemic levers for change;
2. Interventions should be designed to promote responsible behaviour among all members of the family, and be present focused and action oriented, targeting specific and well defined problems/risks;
3. Interventions should target sequences of behaviours within and between multiple systems that maintain them; be developmentally appropriate and fit the need of the young person;
4. Interventions should be designed to require daily or weekly effort by family members<sup>v</sup>.

A continuous and multi-systemic influence would continue to target the multi-determinants of static and dynamic risks and strength/protective factors within a familial, social, education and community milieu across systems and throughout the various transitions between departmental and other stakeholder service provision.

Intervention effectiveness can then be continually evaluated from multiple perspectives with service providers assuming accountability for overcoming barriers to successful outcomes.

The assessment and intervention processes should be designed to promote generalisation and long-term maintenance of change by empowering family and kin networks to either address young people's needs across multiple systemic contexts or support them to action the same approach.

### **Cultural considerations**

The cultural and/or developmental appropriateness is supported in several ways. It is believed that a multi-systemic approach to assessment and intervention is equally effective with

Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous families, as with younger adolescents and older adolescents.

In addition, Henggeler (1994) proposes that as Family Services Offices and case workers view the family members as collaborators in the assessment, planning and intervention and review processes with goals being driven by family members such collaboration decreases the likelihood that intervention goals are driven by biases of the dominant culture, and increases the probability that interventions are appropriate to the family and their identified child/young person<sup>vi</sup>.

However, the YJAF is also underpinned by the guiding principles contained in the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement.<sup>vii</sup> These principles acknowledge Indigenous participation in decision-making as well as understanding that program and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are best delivered in partnership with them.

### **Collaborative systems**

The ability of young people to make use of the gains they make while engaged in departmental interventions/programs is dependent on the development and staging of wraparound community service plans. Simply making available supports, individual service assessments, intervention services and/or health care is not enough to ensure successful transitions between child protection services, youth justice services and detention and/or alternative care services.

Therefore it is recognised that the existing departmental systems require enhanced organisational structures that would allow workers to work more in teams and collaborate in relation to resources and solutions regarding case planning and management including risk management. The difference between a centre-wide practice and a service wide practice is its capacity to be seamless.

YJAF's objective to achieve a seamless approach to service provision has translated into the development of a common assessment infrastructure with common standards and the consolidation and re-use of the best-of-securing the care processes and computer applications.

It is recognized that more commonality in the system is required so that transferring family members between, or having family members in common with, the child protection and the youth justice systems should be the same set of systematic processes. Obviously there will be local documentation, case-specific language and regulations but the basic processes of managing information and/or assessment, case planning and management practices between systems should be the same.

Breaking down communication barriers and enabling inter-agency collaboration is critical to the success of the intended state-wide project that will eventually include youth justice services, area offices and detention centres. Team initiative will provide much improved stakeholder consultation, information delivery, case planning and case management including risk management and will significantly improve inter-disciplinary and multi-agency communication and teamwork.

The Reference Committee and the Implementation Committee aim to work toward fully enabled planning and regulatory services by the development of systems where they do not already exist; establish a set of standards for assessment, planning, intervention services and practice review by delivering a series of toolkits to enable local youth justice services and area offices to implement a state-wide system in a cost effective manner.

### **Outcomes-based thinking**

Outcomes-based thinking is an alternative thinking that requires a paradigm shift. As authority and responsibility in departmental services steadily devolve from discreet service area responsibility to concepts of collaboration and seamless-ness a fundamental change is occurring.

At the same time outcomes-based thinking is showing momentum in departmental work as the different areas try to measure the progress in the work of improving systems, practices and the well-being of vulnerable children, young people and their families in broader ways than the more traditional focus on trying to understand how well programs and services are working.

What multi-systemic service provision is seeking is simple: healthy neighbourhoods and communities, families that contribute to and benefit from a strong community life, the right to live in places that are safe, and harmonious, access to high-quality education and employment opportunities and to ensure that family members have equal opportunities for happy, healthy fulfilling lives.

The role of the Department of Families and service delivery partners do work towards these outcomes and while the organisations have important roles in assisting people the extent of the potential for contributions by children, young people, families and the communities themselves is also recognised. There is enormous energy and capacity for change inherent in the spirits and talents of the families and communities.

Multi-systemic outcomes regarding increase in family ownership, decrease in juvenile offending, decrease in rates of out-of-home placements, and improved access to education and family functioning, service and cost effectiveness is associated with this approach because case workers/Family Services Officers avoid doing for the family members and concentrate on skill building in the child's/young person's natural environment where possible.<sup>viii</sup>

How we critically think about the various departmental and service delivery partners and any subsequent work affects how we go about designing and evaluating it.

Outcomes-based thinking and therefore the work of YJAF in Bullen's, 2003 opinion must focus on what is trying to be achieved in terms of what difference will this youth justice assessment framework make for the community of families, departmental practitioners and service delivery partners.

In the various planning stages of the YJAF model it has been useful to conceptualise the process as a series of outcomes which are achieved, each one building on the next until the overall outcome is achieved.

Bullen's tool provides some processes for thinking about YJAF in an outcomes context, for example:

- Within the context of the vision, values and purpose of the project, how are the needs of the family members identified?
- Within the local community context how are initiatives developed to meet these needs?
- What are the outcomes, which if achieved, will meet these needs?
- What are the strategies to achieve the outcomes?<sup>ix</sup>

To achieve each of these outcomes a series of strategies were required for example:

### Youth Justice Assessment Framework

Vision/Values/Objectives of Youth Justice Assessment Framework	Outcomes	Strategies
<p><b>Vision:</b></p> <p><b>Safe children and young people; connected families and communities; effective services</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in family ownership regarding family skill development;</li> <li>• Decrease in rates of out-of-home placements;</li> <li>• Decrease in juvenile offending;</li> <li>• Improved access to education and vocational education; Increase in family functioning; Increase in integration and coordination of services;</li> <li>• Increase in the interface and capacity of communities to respond to family needs;</li> <li>• Increased cost effective services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a community of practice team (Implementation Team) that included the different departmental specialist workers with expertise.</li> <li>• Literature reviews of best practice initiatives in relation to assessment, case planning and management.</li> <li>• Explore the feasibility of a collaborative approach across systems and agencies.</li> <li>• Review the outcomes of Securing the Care Project.</li> <li>• Develop a model informed by the literature review and the Securing the Care Project.</li> <li>• Develop and establish an infrastructure plan for child protection, youth justice services and</li> </ul>

		<p>detention centres to have complementary systems/procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and apply a framework for YJAF that includes service delivery partners.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Values:</b></p> <p><b>Service, diversity, learning and integrity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in interdisciplinary and multi-agency team and collaborative practice;</li> <li>• Increase in families as collaborators in the change process(s) and solutions;</li> <li>• Increase in workers who embrace change, seek challenges, are results driven through: evidence-based practice; and participation in a learning culture</li> <li>• Increase in interdisciplinary and multi-agency accountability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the capacity of departmental workers and other service delivery partners to deliver a seamless service through the recommendations of the Reference Group.</li> <li>• Provide ongoing training to departmental workers and service delivery partners with an emphasis on a multi-systemic approach to assessment, case planning and management, taking cultural considerations into account.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for community input.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p><b>Develop a consistent assessment, case planning and management framework that incorporates risk/strengths-based principles in the provision of a seamless service</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the identification of early intervention strategies;</li> <li>• Increase in an multi-agency approach to interventions/ programs that address targeted risks and needs;</li> <li>• Increase in continuity of case plans</li> <li>• Increase in sustainable case plans that continue to support the young person/family post-multi-agency interventions;</li> <li>• A greater capacity for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft of the YJAF finalized for departmental consultation.</li> <li>• Consultation with Indigenous workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery partners.</li> <li>• Presentation of model to senior departmental management.</li> <li>• Circulate draft to departmental stakeholders.</li> <li>• Test validity and reliability of YJAF.</li> </ul>
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	<p>interdisciplinary and multi-agency effective communication;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved equitable access for better life outcomes for families;</li> <li>• Increased participation by young people and their families in decision-making processes that builds on their capacity to influence their own solutions;</li> <li>• Increase in sharing knowledge and information technology with service delivery partners;</li> <li>• Improve mechanisms to monitor, evaluate and review strategies, policies, programs and practices to ensure that they are based on sound evidence of performance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collation of feedback.</li> <li>• Promote the need for a Reference Group to oversee the implementation process.</li> <li>• Train Family Services Officers and caseworkers in the model.</li> <li>• Implement the trial YJAF.</li> <li>• Prepare an evaluation framework including data collection methods.</li> <li>• Disseminate recommendations.</li> <li>• Develop strategy for state-wide implementation.</li> </ul>
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YJAF is an optimistic contribution to collaborative practice that draws on evidenced-based management practice that recognises the following:

- The potential of collaboration is greater than the sum of the economic value of the contributing services;
- Regardless of the different organisation/agency roles services seek common goals for families and communities and usually strive for the same results; and
- Organisations/agencies expect funding to be spent effectively.

## Conclusion

The provision of a multi-systemic approach to assessment, case planning and management including risk management circumvents barriers to service access that often characterises families with child protection concerns and youth offending. An emphasis on family member empowerment to modify the social networks of the children and young people facilitates the maintenance and generalisation of intervention gains.

The search for common purpose across the systems of intervention, education and vocational education, health services including mental health and substance use service provision

should encourage families and communities and service delivery partners to achieve success on multiple levels and also enable all parties to share credit for the hard won outcomes.

YJAF is a one solution to collaborative practice that invites statutory and non – statutory agencies to accelerate time, enhance interdisciplinary departmental and stakeholder planning, case planning and management including risk management and increase worker and work place efficiency. YJAF will link systems, processes and workers and enable multi-community and multi-geographical collaboration.

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Families, *Families News*, May 2003

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Families, *The Securing the Care Project: The Title Denotes the Challenge*, October 1999, page 7

<sup>iii</sup> Henggler. S. *Multi-systemic Therapy*, University of Colorado, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*

<sup>v</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vii</sup> Queensland Government, 2001. *Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement*.<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>viii</sup> Henggler. S. *Multi-systemic Therapy*, University of Colorado, 2002.

<sup>ix</sup> Bullen, P. *Management Alternatives*, U.S.A. 2000.

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