youth coalition of the ACT

Safe & Connected Youth

March 2021

Evaluation
Safe & Connected Youth Program

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, as well as past racist policies and actions that continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern-day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory. The Youth Coalition's vision is for an ACT community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

The Youth Coalition receives funding for peak activity (policy development, sector development, advocacy & representation) from the ACT Government – Community Services Directorate.

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COVID-19

The year the Youth Coalition undertook this evaluation was far from ordinary. Early 2020 saw the emergence of a global pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19. The ACT's Health Minister declared a Public Health Emergency in March and restrictions were imposed by the ACT Government on people's movement and activities to limit the spread of the disease. Schools moved to teaching online and non-essential activities and businesses were temporarily closed. Many community organisations changed their practice to protect staff and clients from the risk of exposure.

This COVID-19 "shutdown" in the ACT had two impacts on the S&CY evaluation:

1. Interviews with S&CY clients were conducted via telephone rather than the preferred face-to-face method
2. The evaluation was delayed as other, more pressing, matters arose in the context of COVID-19 and its impact on the community sector.

The COVID-19 shutdown also impacted the S&CY program. Throughout shutdown the program became more important than ever with vulnerable groups more likely to experience the negative effects of social isolation. The team all worked from home, most (if not all) contact with clients was conducted via phone conversations or text, and there was ongoing uncertainty around program funding. Despite these challenges, the S&CY program continued to support young people and their families to reduce the risk of homelessness.

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Executive Summary

The Youth Coalition of the ACT undertook an evaluation of the Safe and Connected Youth (S&CY) program. This evaluation was split into two phases which assessed the processes and outcomes of the program.

The process evaluation assessed the extent to which the S&CY program has been implemented as intended: have all the components been implemented and if not, what are the reasons or barriers to this and how might they be overcome?

The outcomes evaluation assessed whether or not the S&CY program has made a positive difference to clients: are S&CY clients better off as a result of the implementation of the program?

Findings

The evaluation indicates that the S&CY program has successfully implemented and delivered its intended processes and addressed the proposed outcomes. The primary aim of the program is to reduce the risk of homelessness for young people and the evaluation demonstrates that it does this and more. Through the program, young people and their families are supported to have improved outcomes across a range of domains such as housing, education, and mental health that positively effects the lives of young people *and their families*.

Process evaluation

The process evaluation found that the S&CY program was implemented as intended. All of the activities stated in the Program Logic have been undertaken, and because of the developmental nature of the program, barriers and challenges to implementation have been overcome as they have arisen.

Of all the activities, the therapeutic case management, mediation, temporary accommodation, and Weekly Assessment Meetings stand out as the most valuable. These activities form the core of the program and, together, provide a comprehensive service that goes beyond reducing the risk of homelessness for young people to improve family functioning, educational outcomes and mental health. Additionally, these combined activities provide a comprehensive outreach service that coordinates and optimises a broad range of services to "wrap around" S&CY clients.

Outcomes evaluation

The outcomes evaluation found that the S&CY program has made a positive difference to clients, and they are better off as a result of the program.

The program delivered all intended short-term outcomes including reducing the risk of homelessness, improving access to support and services, improving motivation to change, increasing family communication, and improving the integration and coordination of services and supports.

The S&CY program has had the greatest impact on young people and families through the ability to work with, and advocate for, the whole family and provide them with the tools and strategies to improve communication and decrease conflict. The program sought, navigated and managed a broad range of services to meet the clients' needs while providing an intensive, therapeutic outreach service that worked with young people and families in their own homes.

The evaluation found that the biggest challenges to the success of the program were uncertainties around continued and ongoing funding and the lack of program resources and capacity to service young people and families who need a safe place to stay longer-term.

The S&CY program is the only early intervention, targeted, youth homelessness program in the ACT that works with young people and their families to reduce the risk of homelessness. Young people and their families are better off through participating in the program, and the Youth Coalition recommends that the S&CY program receives ongoing funding from the ACT Government as part of a coordinated service response.

Glossary

ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service
ACT Together	ACT Together is a consortium of services that provides out of home services for children and young people who come into care
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CRCS	Capital Region Community Service
CRS	Conflict Resolution Services
CYPS	Child and Youth Protection Services (sometimes referred to as Care and Protection)
FSP	Family Support Program
FV	Family Violence
Junction Youth Health Service	The Junction Youth Health Service is run by Anglicare and provides free primary health care and support services to young people aged 12 to 25, along with their dependent children.
Karralika	Provides up to 12 months of residential rehabilitation within a therapeutic community setting for single adults and couples with AOD problems.
Menslink	Menslink offers free counselling, volunteer mentoring and education programs for boys and young men.
Next Step	Next Step is a free psychological support service which helps people over 16 years access mental health support.
NSET	Network Student Engagement Teams

Onelink	OneLink is the central information and access point for human services for the ACT
Our Place	Our Place provides supported accommodation to young people, with or without children, who are either studying, or employed
Canberra PCYC	Police and Community Youth Club
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
Restorative Justice	The ACT Restorative Justice scheme is a victim-centred response which prioritises the safety and interests of people who have been impacted by crime.
S&CY	Safe and Connected Youth
STEPS	STEPS is a residential program run in partnership between CatholicCare and CAMHS for young people between 13-18 years old experiencing moderate to severe mental health distress
TCW	Therapeutic Case worker
Ted Noffs	Ted Noffs offers a range of treatment and services for young people with drug and alcohol problems
WAM	Weekly Assessment Meeting
YDAP	Youth Drug and Alcohol Program
YEAN	Youth Emergency Accommodation Network

Introduction

The Youth Coalition of the ACT has undertaken an evaluation of the Safe and Connected Youth (S&CY) program. This Evaluation Report provides the findings from the two phases of the evaluation. Phase one is the process evaluation of the S&CY program which examined the extent to which the program has been implemented as planned. Phase two is the outcome evaluation which assessed the progress of the S&CY program towards meeting the short-term outcomes.

Background and Context

In 2018 the Youth Coalition, Families ACT, ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter developed an Action Plan to Prevent Child Homelessness, which proposed a service model responding to the gap in appropriate services and supports, including accommodation, for children aged 8-15 who are experiencing or at risk of significant harm and/or homelessness. Critically, while addressing the shortfall in accommodation services for children under the age of 16, the proposed model responded to family conflict and breakdown which is the primary risk factor leading to child and youth homelessness. Interventions that aim to improve family functioning continue to have the most promising evidence base for preventing youth homelessness. Young people who become homeless have better outcomes if they maintain contact with their families, where safe and appropriate.

In response to this Action Plan, the ACT Government funded the Safe and Connected Youth program pilot. The aim of the program is to address gaps in services for children aged 8-15 experiencing or at risk of homelessness, while developing a sustainable service model. The initial stages of this service model include the provision of early therapeutic outreach support to families, supported by family mediation, to prevent children and young people from becoming homeless. Young people receiving this support may also access respite accommodation provided by a community-based service.

This service model has currently been piloted since October 2019 by a limited number of young people and families. The S&CY program is working towards both upscaling existing supports to respond to need and establishing a longer-term service model for young people who require accommodation. This evaluation will identify what is required for a coordinated service response.

About the S&CY program

Family conflict is the leading cause of youth homelessness. Many researchers believe that family conflict and youth homelessness are inextricably linked.[1] However, research also suggests that, where safe and appropriate, maintaining relationships between

[1] See Roche & Barker 2017 for a comprehensive review of the literature on family conflict and homelessness: *Youth homelessness and its relationship with family conflict: Models for policy and practice*. Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University, and Melbourne City Mission.

young people and their families leads to improved short- and long-term outcomes. This program aims to prevent youth homelessness through addressing family conflict.

The aim of the S&CY program is to provide children and young people aged between 8-15 years and their families with targeted support to improve family functioning and reduce the risk of harms from homelessness. The program works with children at risk of or experiencing episodic homelessness (in and out of family home) using a child centred, family focused approach. The program provides a flexible and person-centred approach to address the spectrum of experiences of homelessness for children/young people. It works with children and their families to improve parent-child relationships and family functioning to reduce risk of homelessness.

Through a comprehensive assessment process, utilising a number of tools, the program team identify the child/young person's and family's strengths, the areas for development, and create with them a comprehensive case plan to address the intersecting and often interdependent needs. The initial goal of the program is to assist and support them and, where safe and appropriate, reconcile and strengthen family relations.

Evaluation Framework

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

Underpinned by the Program Logic (see page 15), the Youth Coalition prepared an evaluation framework that outlined key evaluation questions relating to the various inputs, activities, outputs and short-term outcomes of the S&CY program, along with appropriate performance indicators and data sources and data collection methods.

The evaluation is split into processes and outcomes. The process evaluation assesses the extent to which the S&CY program has been successfully implemented as intended and identifies key issues and lessons learnt to inform a longer-term service model. The outcome evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of the S&CY program to date, asking the question: how much has the S&CY program achieved its desired outcomes? evaluation used a mixed methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data which was triangulated to evaluate both the program's processes and outcomes.

The timeframe for this evaluation is the pilot phase of the program which began June 2019 and ended June 2020. The program did not begin taking clients until October 2019, so data included in this evaluation is from that 10-month period. We have included some data from after the pilot end date where it is relevant to the evaluation, such as case studies and process developments.

SAFE & CONNECTED YOUTH PROJECT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	SUB EVALUATION QUESTIONS	INDICATORS	DATA COLLECTION
PROCESS EVALUATION			
To what extent is the project identifying and reaching the intended target group?	What are the characteristics of children, young people and families in the S&CY project?	Profile of service participants, referred families and families not accepted into the program Number of children and families participating in the program Number of children and families that have not engaged with or dropped out of the project	Project procedures and forms Analysis of administrative and program data
To what extent was the Project implemented as intended (outlined in the Program Logic)?	Is the project conducting the intended activities? What are the most valuable activities?	There are processes and implementation of activities outlined in the Program Logic Extent to which staff and stakeholders report various activities and processes being conducted as intended. Extent to which clients, staff and stakeholders report being satisfied with the activities and processes associated with the program and that they are appropriate. Extent to which families report positive working relationships with TCW The extent to which clients report positive changes in the families due to involvement in S&CY	S&CY Project Partner interviews Client interviews TCW focus group Program logic Program procedures
OUTCOME EVALUATION			
To what extent did the Program deliver the intended short-term outcomes (outlined in the Program Logic)?	To what extent have the intended outcomes for children, young people and families been achieved? To what extent are S&CY clients benefiting from the project? Has the S&CY Project improved the integration and coordination of services and supports? Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?	Reduced risk of homelessness Improved access to supports and services such as: • Education • Mental health • Family and youth services Improved motivation to change / hope for the future Increased understanding of family dynamics Improved communication within the family Integrated service system – improve service provision to provide support to Children,Young People & families experiencing family conflict and at risk of homelessness Improved coordination of services and supports The perceptions and experiences of clients, workers and stakeholders regarding any unintended consequences of the S&CY Project	Analysis of administrative and program data Client demographics Client interviews TCW focus group S&CY Project Partner interviews

Principles underpinning the evaluation

The evaluation framework was supported by a broad set of principles that are required to inform evaluation, including:

Utility: That the evaluation is useful and satisfies the needs of a range of evaluation users. In this case, the range of evaluation users includes the ACT Government, the non-government agencies funded by the ACT Government to deliver this service, and ACT people, including service participants who want the ACT to deliver effective services.

Feasibility: That the evaluation is viable and pragmatic, and that the evaluation design does not disrupt the target population or is otherwise unacceptable to it. This principle is linked with the following principle of ethical research and the Evaluation Plan is based on the importance of service participants and service providers being able to deliver and participate in the service without undue disruption.

Ethical research: That the evaluation is conducted with regard for the rights and interests of those who are involved and affected and aims to do them no harm. For example, participants require clear information about the research, its end use, constraints to confidentiality and any risks to them about their involvement.

Accuracy: To ensure credible findings, that design and reporting is accurate, complete and balanced, in turn requiring reliable and valid data collection and analysis.

Sharing: That the learning is shared with others, including with local people, groups, agencies and other levels of government.

Participation: That evaluation is a participatory process that includes the range of people and groups who are involved in the S&CY program, recognising that evaluation should occur 'with' participants and stakeholders rather than just being done 'to' them.

The S&CY Program Logic

A program logic model is a way of describing a program - tying together in a logical order the inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes involved in a program. The logic model encourages those responsible for the design and management of programs to think through, in a systematic way, what the program aims to accomplish in the short and longer term and the sequential steps by which the program will achieve its objectives. Importantly, the model provides the foundation for identifying a set of appropriate performance indicators and determines what outcomes can be reasonably attributed to the S&CY program.

The Youth Coalition developed a logic model outlining the key work areas undertaken as part of the S&CY program and identified the relationship between these work areas and the short, intermediate and longer-term outcomes. The model also describes the preconditions that must be met in order for these longer-term outcomes to be achieved. This model was developed in consultation with the S&CY therapeutic

caseworkers and other program partners and provides the baseline for this evaluation. The program logic includes the following:

- Program aim and objectives: The aim of the program and its approach.
- Inputs: Resources required to implement the program activities.
- Activities: program activities to be conducted.
- Outcomes: The short, medium and long-term changes expected once activities are completed.
- Values, principles, theories and assumptions: These are the expectations about what makes a successful program for the support of children, young people and families in the ACT, upon which the S&CY program is based.
- External factors: Environmental factors external to S&CY program services may affect demand for or provision of services. They are outside the control of the S&CY program and can affect not only demand and provision of services but also the fundamental structures and assumptions upon which the program has been built. It is important to note the existence of these factors as they can impact upon both the process of carrying out the evaluation and the results of the evaluation.
- Identified situation: This outlines the rationale for the program

SAFE AND CONNECTED YOUTH PROGRAM

Safe & Connected Youth

AIM: The Safe and Connected Youth Program provides children and young people aged between 8-15 years and their families with support to improve family functioning and reduce the risk of homelessness and the harms and risks linked to homelessness. The Project will work with children and families experiencing family conflict and at risk of youth homelessness to address their complex and intersecting risk factors through a child centred/family focused integrated service model. The Program aims to improve family functioning and address the diverse needs to improve outcomes for individuals and families and reduce the risk of family breakdown and youth homelessness

Inputs (what we invest)

Partnership between Woden Community Service, Northside Community Services, Conflict Resolution Service and Marymead

Staff:
- Experience
- Knowledge
- Values
- Qualifications

Community connections and partnerships

Funding

Supervision & Professional development

Travel costs

Technology (data collection, record keeping)

Research and practice resources

Planned work Activities (what we do)

Referrals

Intake

Allocation TCW

Weekly Assessment Meeting (WAM)

Contact with clients

Consent

Engagement and outreach

Assessment

Case planning

Provision of Therapeutic Casework

Case coordination and collaboration

Referrals out

Advocacy for children, young people and families

Case review

Mediation

Temporary accommodation

Step down/transition planning/exiting

Program administration, monitoring and evaluation

Program guidelines and procedures

Professional development and supervision

Outcomes

Short

For children, young people and families

Reduced risk of homelessness

Improved access to supports and services
- Education
- Mental health
- Family and youth services

Improved motivation to change / hope for the future

Increased understanding of family dynamics

Improved communication within the family

Service / System Level

Integrated service system – improve service provision to provide support to C,YP & families experiencing family conflict and at risk of homelessness

Improved coordination of services and supports

Medium

For children, young people and families

Reduced risk of homelessness

Improved engagement with supports and services

Improved family functioning

Improved parent/child relationship

Reduced family conflict (frequency and/or severity?)

Improved family safety

Improved help-seeking behaviours

Improved emotional regulation

Improved behavioural outcomes

Increased sense of self-worth

Service / System Level

Improved service system for children, young people (aged 8-15 years) and their families

Increased knowledge and awareness of service gaps

Stronger collaboration and partnerships to facilitate coordinated community response

Long

For children, young people and families

Reduced youth homelessness

Improved family functioning

Improved individual and family wellbeing

Service / System Level

A coordinated community response that reduces homelessness and improves family functioning

Values, principles, theories and assumptions:

wraparound - addressing complex needs by bridging silos through coordinated collaboration
collaboration - unified service system using cross-agency/team-based planning
child and adolescent development
child & youth centred/family focused approach
attachment
strengths based
harm reduction
child protection
understanding the impact of trauma
social capital
socio-ecological perspective
relationship based practice
motivational interviewing

External Factors:

funding agreement

policy changes

economic & social context

availability of skilled practitioners, services and supports

changing political priorities

changes in community sector

Identified situation:

Many children and young people face a range of complex and intersecting social, cultural and individual risk factors that place them at increased risk of adverse outcomes including youth homelessness. These risk factors include and can exacerbate family conflict. Family breakdown and conflict is the leading cause of youth homelessness. However, research also suggests that, where safe and appropriate, maintaining relationships between young people and their families leads to improved short- and long-term outcomes. This Project aims to support children, young people and families to address all of these risk factors and strengthen family functioning to improve outcomes including reducing the risk of youth homelessness.

Evaluation phases

The main purposes of the evaluation were to:

- assess the extent to which the program has been implemented as intended: have all the components been implemented and if not, what are the reasons or barriers to this and how might they be overcome? And,
- assess whether or not the S&CY program has made a positive difference to clients of the S&CY program: are S&CY clients better off as a result of the implementation of the program?

Given these main purposes, two discrete but linked parts of the program – processes and outcomes - were evaluated:

- Process evaluation which assessed the extent to which the program has been implemented as intended and makes suggested improvements on that basis. Phase one also looks at preliminary indications of outcomes for clients of the S&CY program; and,
- Outcomes evaluation which assesses the short-term outcomes specified in the program Logic.

Evaluation approaches and methods

This evaluation used quantitative and qualitative methods to triangulate data and assess both the program's processes and outcomes. Data was primarily sourced from program documents, a focus group with the S&CY program team, Weekly Assessment Meetings (WAMs) and interviews with S&CY clients. The approaches and methods are discussed in detail below.

Developmental evaluation[2]

Developmental evaluation is a structured way to monitor, assess and provide feedback on the development of a project or program while it is being designed or modified; that is, where inputs, activities and outputs may not yet be known, or may be in a state of flux. Developmental evaluation attempts to address the challenges of evaluating a program in that context by allowing a more responsive and adaptive approach.

While this evaluation uses a program logic and evaluation framework to measure processes and outcomes, the approach taken to the evaluation is developmental in nature. This means that the evaluation did not take place at the conclusion of the program. The answers to the evaluation framework questions have emerged throughout the program in a highly frequent, interactive and ongoing fashion, allowing for a continuous adaptation or improvement of aspects of the program.

The S&CY program is well suited to this responsive and adaptive style of evaluation because it is aimed at young people and families where there is a great deal of complexity, uncertainty, numerous crises and progress is rarely linear. Developmental evaluation relies on a timely feedback loop that allows for adjustments to the program as necessary. The Weekly Assessment Meetings (discussed in detail below) provided this feedback loop by providing frequent updates on the S&CY team and clients. Consequently, the Weekly Assessment Meetings have become an integral aspect of the successful development of the S&CY program.

The evaluator is part of the S&CY program team and does not sit outside the program. Therefore, in keeping with developmental evaluation practice, rather than take an objective view of the program, the evaluator was emersed in the program's development. This approach leads to a more informed and accurate evaluation than might be gained from an external evaluation.

Phase 1: Process evaluation to assess the implementation progress of S&CY program

The process evaluation assessed the extent to which the S&CY program has been implemented as intended between June 2019 and June 2020.[3] It identifies areas for consideration that will inform the continuation or expansion of the program.

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[2] For more information see https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/developmental-evaluation

[3] Some information included in this evaluation extended beyond June 2020. For example, the case studies below draw on information from October 2020 to December 2020 to provide a complete picture of S&CY clients' experience of the program.

The main process evaluation questions and sub-questions were:

- To what extent is the program identifying and reaching the intended target group?
    - What are the characteristics of children, young people and families in the S&CY program?
- To what extent was the program implemented as intended?
    - Is the program conducting the intended activities as outlined in the Program Logic?
    - What are the most valuable activities?

The process evaluation aimed to:

- Carry out a process evaluation based on the processes and activities outlined in the S&CY Program Logic
- Identify knowledge gained from the implementation process to inform the continuation and/or expansion of the program.

The ways in which each of these key questions may be answered for the process evaluation are found in the Evaluation Framework above.

Phase 2: An analysis of the progress towards the S&CY program meeting the stated short-term outcomes

This phase looked at preliminary indications of short-term outcomes for clients of the S&CY program as specified in the Program Logic. The outcome evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the S&CY program by examining how much the S&CY program achieved its desired outcomes.

The main outcome evaluation questions and sub-questions were:

- To what extent did the program deliver the intended short-term outcomes
    - To what extent have the intended outcomes for children, young people and families been achieved?
    - To what extent are S&CY clients benefiting from the program?
    - Has the S&CY program improved the integration and coordination of services and supports?
    - Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?

Sources of data for the process and outcome evaluation phases

Focus groups with S&CY team

The evaluator conducted a focus group with people involved in the development and delivery of the S&CY program.

The focus group was conducted face to face and via telephone/teleconference and recorded digitally and with handwritten notes. Recordings were transcribed and analysed to identify key themes and issues. The focus group aimed to elicit views regarding:

- the extent to which the S&CY program has been implemented as intended,

- service coordination and integration,
- processes and implementation of activities outlined in the Program Logic, and
- how and the extent to which the S&CY program meets the needs of their client group.

Participants were also asked to identify any preliminary observable outcomes that have been delivered as a result of the program, and whether the program has had any other consequences.

Interviews with S&CY clients

The evaluator conducted semi-structured interviews with young people, and their parents/carers involved in the S&CY program. The aim of the interviews was to elicit information from S&CY clients about

- their experiences in the program,
- how S&CY differs from previous services they may have engaged in,
- what they think about S&CY (including its strengths and what could be improved),
- what they have gained from participating in S&CY, and
- what they think has changed as a result of participating in S&CY

The therapeutic caseworkers invited clients to participate in the interview (including providing a copy of the plain language information sheet). The evaluator then worked with the caseworkers to schedule telephone interviews with the client at a suitable day and time.[4] The evaluator contacted the caseworker 24-48 hours before the scheduled interview to confirm that the client was still happy to participate and identify if there were any barriers to the family members participating in the interviews in a meaningful and safe way (for example, major/disruptive events, crisis response situation).

The client was given the option of having someone accompany them during the interview to provide emotional support and had the option of speaking to a male or female interviewer.

Analysis of administrative and program data

The evaluator collected information about each family that was referred to and/or participated in the program including:

- referral source
- the number of referrals made to the S&CY program
- the number of referrals that resulted in participation in the program
- the number of families that were unable to participate in the program
- socio-demographics of clients and their families (for example, age, gender and Indigenous status)
- program participation information (for example, length of engagement in the program)
- types of services provided to clients during their engagement with the program.

[4] Interviews were conducted over the phone rather than face-to-face because of the COVID-19 restrictions active at the time.

The evaluator requested all completed assessment tools of clients participating in the S&CY program which may include Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.

Additionally, the evaluator reviewed all S&CY program documents including the program procedures, program logic, evaluator's notes from weekly assessment meetings and minutes from S&CY Reference Group meetings.

All research conducted by the Youth Coalition is informed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and evaluation projects are consistent with Australian Evaluation society Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations.

Process evaluation

The S&CY program has been implemented as intended. All of the activities stated in the Program Logic have been undertaken, and because of the developmental nature of the program, barriers and challenges to implementation have been overcome as they have arisen.

Of all the activities, the Weekly Assessment Meetings, mediation, temporary accommodation and therapeutic case management stand out as the most valuable. These activities form the core of the program and, together, provide a comprehensive service that goes beyond reducing the risk of homelessness for young people to improve family functioning, educational outcomes and mental health. Additionally, these combined activities provide a comprehensive outreach service that coordinates and optimises a broad range of services to "wrap around" S&CY clients.

The process evaluation questions will be addressed in turn below. These findings are structured based on the questions and indicators in the Evaluation Framework (page 12) and activities and outcomes in the Program logic (page 15).

1. To what extent is the program identifying and reaching the intended target group?

1.1 What are the characteristics of children, young people and families in the S&CY program?

The S&CY Program commenced service delivery in October 2019, which included establishing procedures for coordination and referral between partnering agencies. During this pilot phase, referrals were received exclusively through the Conflict Resolution Service (CRS) Family Support Program (FSP).

Table 1 below provides a succinct snapshot of the factors at play in these young people's lives demonstrating that the S&CY program is reaching the target group. Violence, couch-surfing and disengagement from education are factors shared between nearly all the young people involved in the program and are strong risk factors for homelessness. The clients have a wide range of risk factors that highlight complex and overlapping needs.

Table 1: S&CY program client characteristics

Name	Age	CYPS	Homeless	DFV	AOD	Mental Health	Police involvement	Youth Justice	Education disengagement
Jane	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Ben	15		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes
Suzie	13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Rachel	15		Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes
Clare	15	Yes	Yes		Yes				
Nat	15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Tony	14	Yes		Yes		Yes			
Jonah	16			Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
James	15			Yes					Yes
Archie	16	Yes		Yes		Yes			
Ryan	15		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Hope	15	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			
Travis	15	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes			Yes

On December 2019, there were 30 young people/families known to the FSP (either as active clients or on the waitlist) who would have been eligible for the S&CY Program. Of these:

- 9 families were active clients of the S&CY Program, receiving support from TCWs and FSP
- 10 families were active clients of the FSP, but unable to receive support from the S&CY Program due to limited resources
- 11 families were on the FSP waitlist

Due to the intensity of the casework, the 2 TCWs, each employed at 0.8 FTE, had capacity to work with five cases (young person and their family) at one time. The number of referrals to S&CY was restricted to these manageable caseloads until the number of TCWs could be increased.

Between December 2019 and June 2020, the number of young people and their families considered eligible for the program did not change. However, CRS reported a sharp increase in the complexity of families being referred to the program during the COVID-19 crisis. Most of these families sat beyond the scope and capacity of the S&CY program as demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Characteristics of families on the waitlist for the S&CY program

YP	CYPS	Homelessness	DFV	AOD	Mental Health	Police involvement	Youth Justice
14 Female	Y	Y			Y	Y	
13 Male	Y				Y		
15 Male	Y			Y			
14 Male	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y
13 Female	Y	Y	Y			Y	
15 Male					Y		
15 Male		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
13 Female	Y			Y	Y	Y	
14 Male		Y	Y		Y		
13 Male							
14 Male	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y
14 Female	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
15 Male	Y						
14 Female			Y	Y	Y		
15 Male		Y	Y		Y		

Between October 2019 and June 2020 there were 13 families involved in the S&CY program. Two families were exited due to disengagement. Of the remaining 11 young people / families involved with the S&CY Program during the evaluation period:

- The young people were aged between 13 and 15 years
- 7 of the young people experienced homelessness
- 6 of the families had previous involvement with CYPS
- 7 of the young people experienced domestic and family violence
- 6 of the young people had police involvement, with two of these young people being involved in Youth Justice, one having been incarcerated in Bimberi Youth Detention Centre
- 8 of the young people used alcohol and other drugs
- 7 of the young people experienced mental health issues

2. To what extent was the program implemented as intended (outlined in the program logic)?

2.1 Is the program conducting the intended activities?

The program's intended activities are listed in the Program Logic (see page 15). The extent to which the program has conducted these activities is discussed below, including changes made to activities through the developmental evaluation process.

Referrals in

Referrals are received exclusively through the Conflict Resolution Service, Family Support Program (FSP). The system is working well as the FSP manager (who is also the S&CY mediator) attends the regular Weekly Assessment Meetings where referrals are discussed by the S&CY program team. As sector knowledge of the program increases, referrals have been coming from CYSP and community organisations directly to the Youth Coalition. These referrals have been rerouted through CRS.

Changes to the activity:
The S&CY team and partner organisations have made a greater effort to ensure other services and organisations are clear on the single referral pathway

Intake

Generally, the intake process through CRS/FSP has worked well, as most of the S&CY clients that have been assessed as suitable for the program have indeed been suitable. However, limitations in this intake process emerged in May-June 2020 when one client critically stressed the resources and capacity of the program. The young person was spending multiple nights in respite accommodation and had no wish to return home. The young person's family were unclear of the program's objectives and, while they wanted the young person to return home, it was deemed by the TCW as unsafe to do so. This situation placed the TCW under a great deal of stress and highlighted the need to review the intake process.

This case also highlighted the importance of ensuring that young people and families were committed to the aims of the program. Some parents/carers or young people stepped back from involvement once the program began, or in some cases, reunification was not wanted by either or both parties. To avoid both of these situations, the intake process needed young people and parents/carers to demonstrate their willingness to participate (see changes to the activity below).

An additional challenge to intake was the uncertainty of continued program funding. Following the initial 12-month pilot, the program was funded for six months in June 2020 and again in December 2020. The funding for these periods was ad-hoc, and funding materialised at the last minute. This uncertainty left the TCWs unsure of the continuation of their jobs and hindered the intake of new clients. Client intake stalled at the ends of these funding periods despite having suitable young people and families on the wait list.

Changes to the activity:
The Youth Coalition held two planning days for the program team to develop a more robust intake process which now involves a two-step process.

1. Clients are assessed by both CRS and TCW. The TCW then conducts intake with the potential client.
2. Clients are re-assessed one month after beginning the program to confirm their suitability for the program.

This new process has been included in the updated Program Procedures. In collaboration with the S&CY team, the Youth Coalition developed a Family Agreement form, used in the intake process, that collects the signatures from both the young person and their parent/carer.

As the title suggests, this form requires an agreement from both young people and parent/carer to actively participate in program activities that decrease family conflict and improve communication and relationships.

During intake, it is now a requirement of the S&CY program that clients read and sign the forms included in the Client Information Pack. This pack includes forms on:

- Privacy and confidentiality
- Family Agreement
- Rights and Responsibilities

Allocation to TCWs
Allocation to TCWs is done effectively through the Weekly Assessment Meetings discussed below. At these meetings, the CRS mediator presents recent referrals to the program and the team asks questions, assesses their eligibility and decides whether to assess them further. Allocation is usually based on the current capacity of the TCWs and matching male or female clients to the male or female TCW where appropriate.

Weekly Assessment Meetings (WAMs)
With few exceptions, WAMs have been conducted every week since the program began.

The WAM serves a range of functions for the S&CY program including:

Information sharing
At each WAM the workers discuss their current caseload and clients. This allows the program to monitor workloads and ensures that more than one worker knows about the clients. It also enables a joint case review process - to share knowledge and support decision making for clients. This support is valuable to workers to provide ongoing professional development and confidence in their practice.

At a service level it also facilitates the ongoing development and refining of process. This information sharing also allows workers to debrief and be supported by others doing the same job and with expertise in this area of practice.

Allocation
The WAM is also the mechanism by which new clients are allocated to workers from the FSP waitlist

Program Development
The innovation of the S&CY program requires close monitoring to refine processes and ensure high quality implementation. This is key to being evidence based and, at the same time, committing to ongoing improvement. The WAM allows the program to continue to develop and refine processes and address emerging issues as they occur and respond to the needs of the workers. The WAMs also monitor and document the development of the program.

Monitoring and Evaluation
The WAM provides weekly updates on the program's processes in practice. This embedded developmental evaluation is tied to the ongoing improvement of the program.

Reporting
The information sharing, discussion and ongoing program development and service improvement that occurs at the WAMs facilitate the reporting that is required to Community Services Directorate and the Minister

Systematic and individual advocacy
The knowledge and information collected in the WAMs allow partner organisations to conduct advocacy for ongoing program funding. It increases the awareness of the service gap and it informs advocacy through real-life experiences of the young people and families involved in the program.

Changes to the activity:

- Regular WAMs are an obvious benefit to the program's development, allocation of clients, and opportunity for TCWs to speak openly and decompress in a safe environment. However, the method has attracted scrutiny regarding the time they take (some WAMs extend beyond two hours) every week and the private nature of their content. While an effort is made to keep WAMs within two hours there have been times where both TCWs had particularly complex clients. With

the arrival of further part-time staff, the team made the decision to shorten the WAMs and hold them every other week. This arrangement proved unsustainable as TCWs felt they went too long without debriefing and, as a result, the fortnightly meetings ran overtime. At the request of the team the WAMs reverted to weekly meetings, that run for one and a half hours.

- TCWs and the Youth Coalition are not obliged to report on WAM activities and so outputs from meetings are not made public or shared with other program partners. Because of the sensitive subject matter, WAMs are not minuted. This issue was discussed at length with the team, and it was decided that being free to speak candidly about clients (using real names) and organisations was what they valued most about the WAMs. Recording minutes would potentially jeopardise the integrity of the WAMs and remove the safe space where TCWs can express the difficulties of their job.

Initial contact with clients

Following allocation, young people and families are engaged by CRS who explain the S&CY program and initially assess suitability. Following this, the young person/family are introduced to the TCW with a face-to-face meeting. Where this process is unsuitable, phone contact is made by the TCW to contact the young person/family to arrange an alternative initial contact.

This initial contact happens within two weeks from allocation. Following the initial meeting, the TCW then meets with the clients at a place of the clients choosing. Phone contact is made to arrange in-person meetings.

Consent

All clients had verbally consented before participating in the program. However, the process for written consent was not always followed.

Changes to the activity:
It is now a requirement of the S&CY program that clients read and sign the forms included in the Client Information Pack. This pack includes forms on:

- Privacy and confidentiality
- Family Agreement
- Rights and Responsibilities

TCWs must ensure that all clients understand the forms and consent to participate in the S&CY program.

Engagement and Outreach

According to the S&CY Procedures, it is expected that TCWs will meet with clients three times per week initially and then when appropriate according to the client's circumstances. Interviews with clients indicate that the TCWs have been meeting or exceeding the expected contact with clients.

However, the Procedures suggest that "Where possible, initial *home visits* should be attended by two team members to ensure the safety of the worker and families." With

only two TCWs employed for the S&CY program, the two-worker policy has not been possible.

Changes to the activity:
Since expanding the number of TCWs in October 2020, most clients are now visited by two S&CY team members. Where appropriate team members now "shadow" each other so clients have a primary TCW and an additional TCW that they are familiar with if their primary TCW is on leave or unavailable.

Assessment
After being assessed for suitability for the S&CY program by CRS, clients are subsequently assessed by the TCW after allocation. See case planning below for more information

Case Planning
While the S&CY program does not prescribe how to undertake case planning, TCWs tend to use the following method. TCWs work with clients to establish where they need support across a range of domains such as education, mental and physical health, AOD (Alcohol and Other Drugs), legal and criminal issues and relationships. Based on these domains, the TCWs and clients determine goals that will lead to improvement in these domains. Actions and strategies are then created to reach these goals.

While the young person remains the primary client, the TCWs work holistically with families to provide a safe, supportive environment for the young person, involving key family members, and the young person themselves in the case planning process.

The majority of S&CY clients are in the 14 – 15-year-old age group where it may be more appropriate to have separate case plans for the young person and the family. The Procedures suggest that this may be the case, however, to date no TCWs have created a separate case study for the family on the basis that the young person is the primary client.

For the pilot phase of the program, TCWs were expected to draw on their own methods of case planning. As such the Procedures are not prescriptive regarding case planning and offer no specific methods. It does however mention a "case notes template" to be used by case workers which is uploaded to a shared drive with a view to sharing notes between case workers and the Youth Coalition. This system proved onerous for case workers early in the program and was not maintained.

Changes to the activity:
At a team planning day, it was suggested that a standardised case planning template might be useful for new TCWs joining the program and for consistency in service, and monitoring and evaluation.

In collaboration with the S&CY team, the Youth Coalition developed a new case plan template that uses the Personal Wellbeing Index to assess clients and establish where the client needs improvement across several wellbeing domains.

Once the domains for improvement are established, the TCW and client create goals to work towards improvement. The goals become the basis for developing a case plan. The TCW and the clients agree on a plan that includes the actions and strategies that will help achieve those goals.

While the method is not that different from what the TCWs already use, standardising the process will improve monitoring of individual clients and evaluating client progress and outcomes across the whole program.

Provision of therapeutic casework

Between October 2019 and June 2020, Staffing resources for the S&CY program included two Therapeutic Case Workers (TCWs), each employed at 0.8 FTE. They are employed by Woden Community Service and Northside Community Service. Between October 2019 and June 2020 Therapeutic Caseworkers (TCWs) had spent over 700 hours with families.

The TCWs deliver many of the traditional aspects of casework such as developing case plans, providing practical support, and skill development, and linking families with appropriate external support services. The work they do reflects the principles of therapeutic casework which is relationship oriented, family inclusive, holistic, and is delivered primarily as outreach.

Case coordination and collaboration

All client cases in the S&CY program require coordination and collaboration with other services. S&CY clients were referred to services for support in domains such as housing, education, mental health, justice, and alcohol and other drugs (see referrals list below). After engaging these services, the TCWs became the "service manager" for the client by working with the services to meet the needs of the client. Practical examples of case coordination are demonstrated in the case studies below.

Referral out

Between October 2019 and June 2020 TCWs have made referrals to:
STEPS
Next Step
Onelink
Menslink
Youth Emergency Accommodation Network
CAMHS
PCYC
Youth Drug and Alcohol Program
Act Together
Ted Noffs
Karrilika
Next Step
Our Place
CRCS
Bulk billing General Practitioners
Victims of Crime

Rape Crisis Centre
Restorative Justice
ACT Education Directorate
ACT Community Services Directorate
The Junction Youth Health Service
Emergency Department
NSET
Flexible Education
Social workers
Private psychologists
Centrelink

Advocacy for children, young people and families
Advocacy is a demonstrably strong component of the S&CY case work. This is discussed in detail on page 33 and in the case studies below.

Case review
The Procedures state that case review should occur in three-monthly cycles over a 12-month period. At a TCWs workshop in June 2020 it was noted that this system is challenging for a number of reasons:

- While the program was initially funded for 12 months it was four months before the first intake of clients, effectively making it a nine-month program. TCWs had to adjust the timing of case planning accordingly.
- The program was funded for a further six months in June 2020 and again in December 2020. This ad hoc funding made planning difficult for the TCWs, including knowing when and how often to review case plans.
- S&CY clients may require more or less than 12 months in the program, and so case reviews need to be performed on a case-by-case basis.

Changes to the activity:
The Procedures have been amended to reflect the feedback from TCWs regarding the length of case work needed. Reviews are now based on a case-by-case basis and subject to clients meeting certain criteria:

- Mediation for all families in the S&CY program is now a requirement in the first 12 weeks.
- Clients must engage with the program and comply with the terms expressed in the "Family Agreement".

Mediation
Conflict Resolution Service provides family mediation through the Family Support Program. Between October 2019 and June 2020 CRS conducted over 16 hours of mediated sessions for S&CY clients. Mediation is discussed in detail below.

Temporary accommodation

Marymead is providing temporary respite accommodation as needed, to young people engaged in the program. Between October 2019 and June 2020 Marymead provided 30 nights of accommodation.[5]

Four of the 11 young people used the temporary respite accommodation:

- Two young people stayed briefly before returning home to their families. For these young people and their families, respite provided an opportunity for them to gain some perspective and re-evaluate and reconsider what their options and hopes were. An improvement was seen in the parent-child relationship and family functioning, reducing the risk of homelessness and conflict and improving safety.
- Another young person stayed at Marymead one night a week for an extended period of time. For this young person and family this ongoing arrangement has eased the pressure at home and provided the space for each of them to address other compacting factors that were adding further strain to their relationship. This respite has led to a reduction in family conflict that will hopefully facilitate an improvement in family relationships and functioning.[6]
- One young person stayed at Marymead four nights per week and spent the other three nights on a friend's couch because it was not safe for them to remain at home.

Changes to the activity:

The model of temporary accommodation offered through Marymead has placed a financial strain on the program funding. The average cost of accommodation is $1065 per night, per client. While the model works well for short-term one-off interventions, it becomes very costly if a client needs to stay on a regular or long-term basis.

This problem has been partly addressed by restricting the intake to clients who can, and want to, live at home with the rationale that these clients will use respite for one or two nights or not at all. However, this more restrictive intake process excludes potential clients that need more intensive respite accommodation. While this exclusion is necessary for the sustainability of the S&CY program, it leaves a gap in youth homelessness services.

Step down/transition planning/exiting

Feedback from the WAMs suggested that TCWs found it difficult to determine the best time to exit some clients. The complexity of clients often meant that progress towards reducing the conflicts at home was not linear. While families might be going well one week, the next week they might need intensive casework. Additionally, if young people could not remain or return home TCWs deferred exiting the clients without securing appropriate long-term residential support.

Changes to the activity:

[5] This number rose to 143 nights by the end of December 2020 due to two clients that needed accommodation support while they transitioned to independence

[6] With the support of the TCW, this client has since transitioned to independence

A workshop with TCWs, CRS and the Youth Coalition established that existing clients should be determined on a case-by-case basis that ensured a long exit and warm referrals to appropriate services.

Program administration, monitoring and evaluation
Program administration, monitoring and evaluation has benefited demonstrably through the regular feedback loop provided by WAMs. When information about how processes worked or did not work arose at the WAMs the issue was given time for discussion and canvassing solutions. This process allowed a regular discussion within the team of any aspects of the program or processes that needed to be modified.

Program guidelines and procedures
Program guidelines and procedures were developed before the pilot program began. Due to the systematic feedback on program processes and outcomes provided by the WAMs these documents have regularly been reviewed and changed to better reflect the needs of the program.

Professional development and supervision
The S&CY team attended a training session on the roles and processes of CYPS and Safety and Risk Assessment (SARA) training. The S&CY team received supervision through their respective organisations, and through the WAMs (discussed above) which provided an extra level of peer support and informal supervision

2.2 What are the most valuable activities?

The following discusses four aspects that have proven most valuable to the S&CY program. These particular aspects were repeatedly mentioned by S&CY workers and clients as having had the biggest impact on the success of the program. While these aspects are beneficial to the program, they also pose unique challenges to its successful implementation and to the workers, particularly the TCWs. These benefits and challenges are outlined below.

Provision of therapeutic casework and advocacy for children, young people and families
Arguably the biggest strength of S&CY is the involvement of families in therapeutic case work and advocacy. In some respects, this aspect of the program is less explicit than providing respite accommodation and mediation services. Working with families is not a specifically listed activity. However, throughout the pilot period, the main successes in the program have come about through working with the young person *and their family*.

Benefits

- Working with the whole family gives the workers intimate knowledge of each family members' individual issues and each individual's perspective. This meta-knowledge allows the worker to build a comprehensive case in support of the families' needs.

- For some S&CY clients the workers made daily phone calls to advocate on behalf of their client. Where some clients had no success with self-advocacy, the TCWs were able to make progress. S&CY workers and clients agreed that workers have much more clout in these situations because they are attached to a known organisation. Clients felt that services or organisations were more accountable to decisions if they had the support of the S&CY program and were less likely to "pull the wool over their eyes".

Challenges

While working with families is the biggest strength of the S&CY program it is arguably the most difficult aspect for the workers. S&CY workers rely on evidence-based practice to reinforce their work with families; however, they can still encounter barriers:

- Regardless of whether the workers are parents themselves, a large part of their job is to support parents/carers to be better parents/carers. For S&CY workers, the challenge of instilling this advice when they are not a parent can cause tensions between the worker and parent and can make the workers doubt their expertise and ability.
- Workers tread a fine line between being honest with a person's parenting skills without sabotaging the trust they have built with the parents/carers. Understandably, parents/carers can become defensive when their parenting is criticised which diminishes the relationship between parent/carer and S&CY worker and ultimately jeopardises the effectiveness of the S&CY program. S&CY workers emphasised the importance of not judging the parent/carer and simply having to "sit in the space no matter how toxic". Parents/carers can often feel like they're losing control but according to S&CY workers this is a necessary step to changing behaviours in the families. When parents/carers are feeling vulnerable and less defensive, they are more likely to work with the TCWs towards making real change in the family dynamics.
- Workers also tread a fine line between helping them be better parents/carers while avoiding becoming a surrogate parent themselves. In some cases, parents/carers have swiftly relinquished care of the young person, leaving the S&CY working in a position where they are regularly intervening in and resolving the young persons' poor behaviour. This role switch compromises the workers ability to support and advocate for the young person as they become the person who is "parenting" the young person when the young person does not want or need another parent.
- The parents/carers and young people have not always "bought in" to the program. This lack of engagement exacerbates the problem of parent surrogacy mentioned in the point above and almost guarantees the failure of the young person and family to enjoy any benefits of the program.
- Parents/carers can be hostile to the program, particularly in situations where the young person does not what to return home and the parent/carer had an expectation that the outcome of the S&CY program would be the young person returning home.
- Maintaining confidentiality can be difficult. S&CY workers work hard to gain and maintain trust with all members of the family. Sometimes information comes to light that places the workers in a situation where they need to break a

confidence – usually the young person's. The skill of the S&CY workers in ameliorating potential conflict is paramount. Workers mentioned that the ability "to wear different hats and speak two different languages" is necessary to have difficult conversations with both parents/carers and young people while "remaining everyone's friend so they trust you".

- It is no surprise that working intensely with these families takes an emotional toll on the workers. Most of the families have high needs and, in many ways, become dependent on the workers for periods of time. In turn the workers become invested in the well-being of the families and suffer the ups and downs along with the family over their time in the program. As one worker pointed out, working with these families is more intense than "just one crisis per day" and workers need to make sure they are not working more than they should. Strictly keeping work hours can be difficult when clients have access to the workers' mobile phones and emails. It is not uncommon for workers to check their phones after hours and see that they have several missed calls and multiple text messages from clients.

Mediation

Family mediations facilitated by CRS as part of the S&CY program are structured processes that bring young people, their parents, and other family members together to discuss issues affecting the family and create workable solutions.

Through mediation participants are encouraged to recognise the individuality and rights of all parties and in turn receive recognition themselves. As experts in their own lives, participants are asked to take responsibility for their past and future actions and decisions regarding the best way to resolve their issues and concerns.

Mediation is a stepped process, with each step having clear expectations and goals. The first step is to welcome the family members and ensure everyone is comfortable and ready. The mediator will outline the consent form, the mediation process, their role as mediator, and set ground rules for the session. After Introductions, each family member is asked to briefly state what has brought them to mediation and what outcomes they are hoping to achieve. Once the mediator has heard the statements from each family member, they summarise back what they heard each individual say. The mediator will then create an agenda, or list of issues, which provides a framework for the family's ongoing discussion during mediation.

The next step involves assisting the family to discuss each item on the agenda. The mediator ensures that everyone contributes to the discussion, feels heard and hears what others have said. After each issue has been explored in detail, family members share their ideas and any solutions. The mediators will help the family to test these options and ensure they are workable and meet everyone's needs. When the family members at the meeting agree on which options will work best for the family, the mediator will record these agreements in an Outcome Statement for each family member to have a copy of.

Benefits

Family mediation is a valuable tool to assist in the improvement of communication, relationships, and overall functioning of the family unit.

- The involvement of S&CY TCWs often mitigates the inherent limitations of mediation. One of the most prominent limitations is that the agreements reached at mediation are not binding or enforceable. However, when mediation is part of the S&CY program, the involvement of the TCW places them in a unique position to hold each family member accountable for the agreements reached. Similarly, the mediator must remain neutral, while the TCWs role allows them to play a more active, participatory role in the process by introducing content, discussing agenda items, and advocating for the needs of all family members.

- The S&CY team mentioned that simply getting "everyone in the same room" was a benefit of mediation. This provides an opportunity to open up communication between the young person and parents/carers and lets the S&CY observe how the family operates.

- For CRS, one of the biggest advantages of the S&CY program is that the mediator always knows what is going on with mediation clients. Usually there is little contact with clients outside of mediation sessions, but with S&CY clients CRS get weekly updates during the WAMs and can contact the TCW anytime to get information about the young person or family. CRS have an excellent working relationship with the TCWs and have faith that they are doing their job.

- An unexpected benefit for CRS is that they are sharing clients with youth workers for the first time. This shared experience has been a positive experience for the CRS mediator who feels better supported and understood – especially around the challenges of working with parents/carers.

Challenges

- Not all S&CY families are suitable for mediation. Five of the 11 young people and families participated in mediation at some stage during their involvement in the S&CY program. For the remaining six cases where mediation is considered unsuitable or unnecessary, the TCWs do a type of "informal" mediation to help young people and parent/carers appreciate the other's perspective, improve communication and reduce tension in the home.

- Mediation can fail or, rarely, make matters worse if the family is not ready. Families are often complicated and fraught by hostile relationships. This complexity is typically seen in situations where the young person splits their time between two family members in two separate homes, or where there are large, blended families. The young person's well-being is not always central to the concerns of parents/carers when regular family conflict is so overwhelming. Similarly, mediators have different styles and personalities which may result in different outcomes for families, especially if they have multiple mediation session with different mediators.

- Mediation sessions are held Monday to Friday, during business hours which does not always suit young people and parents/carers who may need to work or attend school.

Temporary accommodation

Benefits

The temporary accommodation at Marymead has played a vital role in giving families a break. By taking a break young people and their families are able reflect and spend some time thinking about the situation at home. As one TCW described it, taking a break "releases the button on the pressure cooker" and de-escalates tension at home. The young person spends a night or two in a safe, supervised place which gives the parents/carers peace of mind. A couple of nights away also helps the siblings who benefit from the easing of tension within the home.

Temporary accommodation often gives the young person and family a different perspective of home life and highlights the reality of the situation at home. This realisation manifests in two very different ways for S&CY clients:

1. Some S&CY clients came to the conclusion that home is where they want to be, and they have no wish to remain or return to Marymead.
2. Young people decide not to return home and/or parents/carers decide that home is not the best place for the young person.

While both of these scenarios result in positive outcomes for young people in the S&CY program, they reveal some major limitations. The accommodation is not long-term and does not deliver onsite therapeutic casework for families and young people who need a safe place to stay. The act of taking a break is enough for some young people and families to ease tensions at home. In this group young people usually display a high level of willingness to remain at home and parents/carers want the young person to remain at home. For this group, a one- or two-night break at Marymead or friend's or relative's house will reinforce that willingness. However, for others the act of taking a break is not enough to change the circumstances at home and they will need extra time and therapeutic support. Ideally, for this second group, respite accommodation would involve a service that combines therapeutic support for both the young person and the family with a purpose-built residential facility.

For the four families who used the S&CY respite accommodation the outcome was largely determined by the circumstances at home. If there was a clear willingness for the young person to remain at home then the respite accommodation likely reinforced this, giving both the young person and family time to reflect and (ideally) miss each other. If the willingness for the young person to remain at home was less clear, then the respite accommodation had the opposite effect. The young person thrived in respite accommodation and was gradually transitioned to independent living.

Challenges

While the temporary accommodation plays a critical role in S&CY program, the current arrangement with Marymead does present some challenges:

- Throughout the pilot, S&CY clients were placed at Marymead's Ricky Stewart House and Coral Cottage which are designed to accommodate children and

young people with disabilities. Feedback from the S&CY clients was mostly positive regarding their stay at these facilities, however some suggested that the facilities had a clinical rather than homelike environment which they found intimidating.

- The accommodation is expensive with an average nightly cost of $1065 per young person per night.[7] The high cost is not sustainable if the young person decides not to return home or needs a longer period of respite. In some cases, the young person will be ineligible for Centrelink payments and will have no other financial means for independence. Young people in this situation either remain at home in a hostile environment or find various forms of temporary accommodation, such as couch-surfing, which greatly increase their risk of homelessness.
- Accommodation was only available Monday to Friday and not on the weekends.
- Some parents/carers used Marymead as a threat to de-escalate the young persons' poor behaviour, effectively reversing the therapeutic purpose of the accommodation. TCWs quickly came to understand that they needed to ensure that parents/carers did not use the temporary accommodation as a threat or to punish young people for poor behaviour.

Weekly Assessment Meetings (WAMs)

Of all the activities central to the developmental nature of S&CY, the WAMs have proven to be most valuable.

Benefits

S&CY workers found the WAMs to be useful professionally and personally. They spoke about the weekly meetings as a place where they could routinely reflect on practice in a non-judgmental environment. Especially appreciated was that the WAMs go beyond discussing process. Workers felt they were able to talk at length and in depth about the young people/families and this has several benefits:

- Workers could be brutally honest about their successes and failures in case managing complex young people/families without feeling like they were admitting incompetence or failure
- Workers felt comfortable asking for advice and help from the other team members
- Because the whole team was familiar with the families, they were able to offer different perspectives and offer suggestions the primary worker had not thought of
- When problems were brought to the group they were workshopped for solutions. This team consultation shared the burden of decision-making in some difficult situations
- Decisions and actions based on unanimous agreement from the team lends credibility and authority to those decisions and leads to better outcomes for young people and families

[7] In comparison, a purpose-built facility like Ruby's in South Australia costs $2000 per night and can house six young people, making the individual cost of accommodation around $340 per night.

On a more personal level, workers found the weekly meetings to be a therapeutic space to vent about the challenges of case managing complex families. They felt supported by the common understanding of those challenges and general nature of the work.

Challenges

Despite the obvious benefits of the WAM to the S&CY program and its team, the weekly meeting as a process of the S&CY program has raised some questions:

- As mentioned above, WAMs are not minuted and so senior staff at the partner organisations do not know what is being discussed and, subsequently, cannot make an informed decision on whether the WAMs are an appropriate and valuable use of their worker's time.

- In response, WAMs were held fortnightly via Zoom instead of face to face for a brief period of time. After three weeks with the new format, it was decided that the meetings were needed weekly and that they are more effective, and enjoyable, face to face. TCWs missed taking a weekly break from their case-work schedule to discuss cases with their professional peer group.

Outcomes evaluation

The outcomes evaluation found that the S&CY program has made a positive difference to clients, and they are better off as a result of the program.

The program delivered all short-term outcomes outlined in the program logic including reducing the risk of homelessness, improving access to support and services, improving motivation to change, increasing family communication, and improving the integration and coordination of services and supports.

The S&CY program has had the greatest impact on young people and families through the ability to work with, and advocate for, the whole family and provide them with the tools and strategies to improve communication and decrease conflict. The program sought, navigated and managed a broad range of services to meet the clients' needs while providing an intensive, therapeutic outreach service that worked with young people and families in their own homes.

The outcomes evaluation questions will be addressed in turn below. These findings are structured based on the questions and indicators in the Evaluation Framework (page 12) and activities and outcomes in the Program logic (page 15).

1. To what extent did the program deliver the intended short-term outcomes (outlined in the program logic)?

1.1 To what extent have the intended outcomes for children, young people and families been achieved?

The following discusses the short-term outcomes, as outlined in the program logic, based on the interviews with young people/and or families involved in the S&CY program.

Reduced risk of homelessness

The S&CY program has reduced the risk of homelessness for all clients. In two cases where clients were unable to return home, the program was able to steer them away from homelessness through the strategic use of respite accommodation or making alternative arrangements for the young person to stay with family or friends. In one case, this involved securing Centrelink payments for the young person through the "unreasonable to live at home" provision. The fortnightly allowance gave the young person extra independence and allowed them to pay an agreed amount of board to continue to stay at their friend's house. In another instance, the TCW was able to advocate for the young person to stay at a Youth Emergency Accommodation Network service while they helped them prepare for independence and transition to long-term residential accommodation.

Improved access to supports and services such as: Education, Mental health, Family and youth services

All clients and their families received some form of support, organised by the TCW, adjacent to the S&CY program. Education and mental health are two areas in particular where S&CY workers repeatedly improved access. The TCWs ensured that clients remained engaged at school through accessing any support the school can offer and liaising directly with teachers and school social workers. The TCWs then become a critical part of the young persons' education team. In two cases the workers arranged for the client to attend a different school after prolonged bullying led them to totally disengage from education. Almost all clients are supported to obtain a mental health assessment and plan through a GP and supported by the worker to start and maintain counselling sessions.

Improved motivation to change / hope for the future

Interviews with clients indicate that motivation to change and hope for the future has increased as a result of the S&CY program. The following provides three examples.

1. One client was unable to return home and wanted to do a Vocational Learning Option (VLO) in early childhood education at CIT but needed stable accommodation as a pre-requisite to apply. The TCW persistently advocated for extensions to the client's temporary accommodation arrangement and worked with CAMHS and others to stabilise the Young Person's mental health. The client had been self-harming and hospitalised for attempted suicide. The TCWs attended the young persons' year 11 graduation at the end of 2020. The client completed the VLO and is doing work experience at a local Early Learning Centre.

2. A client who is transgender suffered significant trauma at home and bullying at school. After being permanently placed with his grandmother the young person was diagnosed with PTSD and suffered bouts of depression and could not control his anger at home. The TCW arranged to have the client transferred to another school where he worked with the teachers to develop an individual learning program for the young person. The TCW connected the young person with a CAMHS worker and Menslink and helped them work though destructive and violent behaviours. The client is now on track to graduate year 11 and is keen to study gender studies at university. At the time of interview, the young person was celebrating being out as transgender for four years with his grandmother and closest friends.

3. One client, absent from home for three weeks, developed significant drug and alcohol issues. When he returned home, he was violent toward his parents and refused any help. He disengaged from school and became further withdrawn. The TCW arranged for the young person to see a CAMHS worker and drug and alcohol rehabilitation through Ted Noffs. The TCW arranged for the young person to return to school for half days and developed a learning plan through the Aboriginal Learning Centre at the young person's school. The TCW arranged two night's accommodation at Marymead to give the family a rest from the mounting conflict at home and gave the parents strategies to de-escalate the

conflict. The client has graduated from year 11 and has been accepted into a mechanic apprenticeship starting 2021.

Increased understanding of family dynamics and Improved communication within the family

In cases where the young person was able to return home, the S&CY program markedly increased an understanding of family dynamics and improved communication at home. A critical aspect of the program is to assess and secure all the necessary supports for the young person and family so they can work together on the therapeutic aspect of case management. For example, one family was referred to the program because the young person was increasingly physically and verbally abusive at home. Despite getting support from two other services, the mother of the young person feared things were getting worse instead of better. Once the TCW had assessed the young person and family and appropriate services and supports were put in place by the TCW, the tension decreased enough at home to allow the young person and family to focus on communication. The young person also spent one night at Marymead where she missed her family. The break from her family gave her time to reflect and gain a different perspective on her life at home.

The mother felt that the TCW helped rebuild the relationship between her and her daughter by helping them understand each other's point of view. The program gave the young person the strategies to deal with her anger, depression, anxiety and self-harming and helped her communicate better with her mum.

Integrated service system – improve service provision to provide support to Children, Young People & families experiencing family conflict and at risk of homelessness

The S&CY program is an integrated program combining both therapeutic support and casework with family mediation and temporary accommodation. How this integration functions is discussed in more detail on pages 30 and 35.

Improved coordination of services and supports

Examples of how the S&CY program improved the coordination of services and supports:

- TCWs assessed families and connected them to the most appropriate services
- TCWs managed services for families which enhanced and supported the service provision and ensured there was no overlap or duplication of services
- The program optimised services through linking them to suitable young people and families with the most need who often miss out on services because they are "hard to reach".
- Workers felt that being part of a collaborative project gave the work they did more legitimacy and services were more likely to work with them. TCWs also felt that services were more accountable because of the high profile of the program involving three of the ACT's largest community service providers.

The S&CY team felt that the program is unique to the other casework that they do because it brings other services together to work with the family across several domains including:

- Holistic health
- Education
- Housing
- Legal/financial

These domains require the team to frequently interact with a broad range of services including:

STEPS	Flexible Education
Next Step	Private psychologists
Onelink	Centrelink
Menslink	NSET
Youth Emergency Accommodation Network	Flexible Education
CAMHS	Social workers
PCYC	Victims of Crime
Youth Drug and Alcohol Program	Rape Crisis Centre
ACT Together	Restorative Justice
Ted Noffs	ACT Education Directorate
Karrilika	ACT Community Services Directorate
Next Step	Junction Youth Health Service
Our Place	Emergency Department
CRCS	Victims of Crime
Bulk billing General Practitioners	
Rape Crisis Centre	

S&CY workers keep the lines of communication open across services and sectors, so everyone has access to the bigger picture of the young person and their family.

The perceptions and experiences of clients, workers, and stakeholders regarding any unintended consequences of the S&CY Program

TCWs observed several consequences of the program which they did not expect including:

- **The level to which parents/carers relinquished responsibility**. Parents/carers were often overwhelmed by "life" and their own personal issues and were often at a loss as to how to manage the young person's behaviour. They were so relieved to be getting support that they often gave over full responsibility and welfare of the young person to the TCW. As mentioned earlier in this report, this delegation of responsibility saw TCWs providing more of the consistency, regulation, safety and emotional support lacking in the young person's lives and less therapeutic care and support.
- **The influence of a collaborative program**. As mentioned above, the TCWs were surprised at the credibility the S&CY gave their work. Being part of a well-known

collaborative program opened doors and smoothed the path to other services within and outside the sector.

- **The respite function of the program was a big drawcard.** Families desperately seeking a break from the conflict at home were referred to the S&CY program through various pathways. The aim of the referrals was mostly about securing respite accommodation and less about improving family functioning and reducing the risk of homelessness. The S&CY team learned early in the pilot to underplay the respite component of the program to ensure the program remained aimed at families willing and able to meet the main criteria for inclusion.

1.2 To what extent are S&CY clients benefiting from the program?

Interview participants were overwhelmingly positive about their involvement in the S&CY program. None of the young people or families had received any previous therapeutic program support and were grateful for the support offered to them through the S&CY program. The following highlights some benefits for clients of the S&CY program. For greater detail please see case studies below.

Supporting families and not just the young person

Most families participating the S&CY program had issues extending beyond the young persons' risk of homelessness. Parents/carers were overwhelmed by a range of issues including poor health, poor finances, current or past domestic and family violence, drugs and alcohol and mental health. While the focus of the program is always the young person, many parents/carers were experiencing support for the first time as part of the S&CY program.

Clients benefited from the youth-focused, family-centred practice, which is at the heart of the program. According to one TCW, most families are experiencing "a family dynamics or relationship problem, not an individual problem".

The focus on the whole family helped parents/carers to support the young people they are responsible for. One client mentioned that the worker gave her knowledge to feel empowered to set better boundaries for her child. Knowing her rights and learning useful tools helped her deal with her child's behaviour and she felt she is a better parent through being involved in the program.

Tools and strategies

Young people often lacked the ability to regulate their emotions, lashing out in anger and frustration. The program gave them tools and strategies to recognise what they were feeling, why they were feeling it and how they could regain a sense of calm.

Similarly, parents and carers benefitted from the TCWs guidance and suggestions regarding parenting skills like being consistent and setting boundaries and rules.

Informal mediation

Young people and their parents/carers mentioned how much they appreciated the TCW not being on anyone's "side". The TCW were able to informally mediate when there was family conflict by making sure that everyone had a chance to speak and have their view considered. They were able to tell the young person whether their behaviour or

expectations were unreasonable, and likewise, tell parents/carers how they could better communicate with the young person to see their perspective.

Service navigation and management
S&CY clients appreciated having someone who could navigate and coordinate services, particularly mental health and education services. Young people were often linked to a CAHMS workers and social workers at school or elsewhere. The TCWs were able to facilitate a better connection between those services and the S&CY program. TCWs have an excellent understanding of the sector and how the system works. They were able to suggest other appropriate services for S&CY clients and/or advocate for the timely delivery of services, especially in cases where there were long waiting lists.

Outreach
S&CY clients appreciated not having to go to an office or particular place for appointments with the TCW unless they wanted to. Most parent/carers remained at home for meetings with the TCW, but young people often preferred to be picked up by the TCW and go to a café or other neutral place.

1.3 Has the S&CY program improved the integration and coordination of services and supports?

How the S&CY program integrates, and coordinates services and supports is discussed on page 30 & 42.

1.4 Are there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?

Clients reported no unintended outcomes of the S&CY program. However, the S&CY team observed that where young people or parents/carers do not "buy in" to the program or do not fully understand the purpose of the program they may not get the outcomes they expected. For example, a young person may decide not to return home, or it may be deemed unsafe to do so by the TCW. This decision may be unexpected and/or distressing news for a parent/carer that has not actively engaged in the program or who understood that the program would result in the young person remaining at home. This situation cannot always be avoided; however, the S&CY intake and assessment processes have been modified in an attempt to do so (see page 25).

Case studies

The following case studies were selected to tell an illustrative story about two of the young people and their families taking part in the program. The case studies provide a more detailed perspective that highlights the complexity of the young people's lives and their broader environment. They demonstrate two different, but positive outcomes of the S&CY program for Ryan who was able to return home and Jane who transitioned to independence.

Ryan

Ryan was 14 years old when he joined the S&CY program. He was exhibiting sudden and inexplicable violence toward his mum and stepdad. There were two younger siblings in the home and the parents did not understand where the behaviour was coming from or what to do about it. After Ryan was particularly violent towards his stepdad, Ryan's mum phoned the police, but before they arrived, Ryan left home and didn't contact his family for three weeks. Ryan returned to the family home periodically over the following weeks, becoming more violent and withdrawn each time. Ryan's mum phoned CYPS and was eventually referred to Conflict Resolution Services where they assessed Ryan and his family as good candidates for the S&CY. A S&CY program Therapeutic Case Worker (TCW) provided support to Ryan, his mum and stepdad. Ryan's mum recalls her frustration finding help and her relief when she met the S&CY TCW:

> *I called Care and Protection myself. It wasn't like I'm doing anything wrong, it's like "where can I get some help, I need help". Because ... I had no idea where to start, what my rights were as a parent because you can't just ring the police for them to drag him home because they don't have to come home. We hadn't been involved with any [other service] because nobody else wanted to touch us. I was like "I need help" and [S&CY TCW] was the first one to go "OK, I'll help."*

As family conflict escalated in the home, the TCW organised for Marymead to provide temporary accommodation to Ryan and his girlfriend, who was homeless, for two nights. This safe and supported respite from the family home was critical to de-escalating the situation for Ryan and his family members. Ryan's mum was able to see the facility and talk with the staff about the kind of care Ryan could expect. With active support from Marymead staff and the TCW during this time, this break provided an opportunity for Ryan and his family members to individually reflect on the impact of their family conflict, while not under the pressure of the home environment. Ryan's mum recalls how it helped Ryan and the family:

> *I think with Ryan, it made him realise that [home] wasn't as tough as what he thought it was and that there did have to be rules and boundaries because there are other children in the house – it wasn't just Ryan. It sort of diffused the situation. The tensions were pretty high at that point when he went into Marymead. A couple of nights at Marymead was enough for me to go "OK, now I can breathe, I know Ryan is safe and I knew (TCW) was talking to him.*

With the support of staff during his time with Marymead, Ryan was able to identify mental health concerns he was experiencing and the TCW accessed support for this through ACT Health mental health services. This prompted Ryan to reduce his current drug use.

However, several weeks later Ryan was experiencing auditory hallucinations that was diagnosed as symptomatic of a drug induced psychosis. The TCW coordinated the CATT team, CAMHS ACT and Ryan to transport him to Canberra hospital ED. Ryan and his family had moved to the South Coast of NSW and Ryan had run away to be with his friends in the ACT where he had taken four points of crystal methamphetamine (ice). Ryan's mum recalls how the S&CY program helped when she could not be there.

> *Just having someone sit with him at the hospital all day ... and well into knock off time probably, knowing someone cared enough to do that for him ... I mean he was doing pretty heavy drugs, so the fact that [TCW] could even get him into the car to get him to the hospital was pretty astounding. But he was willing to do that with [TCW]. To have that sort of trust in a 15-year-old boy to go "Yeah okay, I'll go with you to the hospital" is a pretty big deal.*

The TCW continued to coordinate support for Ryan and his family through communications with CAMHS and Karralika AOD service, supporting the family to undertake the processes. The TCW organised a place with the drug and alcohol rehabilitation program at Ted Noffs.

Ryan did not stay for the duration of the program, but he has reduced his drug use and the situation at home has stabilised. Ryan's mum notes that his interactions are more positive, and Ryan is actively participating in sports and contributing actively around the home. With the help of the TCW, Ryan has had a psychiatric assessment with CAMHS NSW and regularly sees a counsellor from Karralika.

For Ryan's mum and stepdad, the program gave them the tools and the confidence to better manage Ryan before they reached crisis point, as Ryan's mum explained:

> *[the TCW] helped us sort out the things we need to do and the steps we need to take and if the consequences are that my son is angry with me then that's okay because I'm the parent." [TCW] has just given me a little bit more balls to be honest.*

Ryan's parents appreciated how the TCW focussed on the whole family, improving the understanding and relationship between family members and making everyone feel heard and valued.

> *I think [TCW] was just so good at communicating with all of us individually. Yeah, he made sure that we all understood everything that was going on and we all felt that we were being heard. It wasn't just making sure [young person] was being heard, it was me and my husband. It was more of a whole family thing for us with [TCW], which was fantastic, absolutely amazing, he just made sure that everyone was*

heard essentially and felt like we were all equally as important as each other, it wasn't just the focus on [young person].

At the end of 2020, Ryan graduated from year 11 and after doing work experience at a car mechanics in term three and four has been offered a mechanics apprenticeship beginning 2021.

Jane

Jane was 15 when she was referred to the S&CY program. Jane had left an abusive home and had been living, for a short time, with her mum's best friend. A S&CY TCW provided support for Jane and her mum's best friend but after rising tension in the home, Jane was asked to leave on Christmas Eve. Jane returned to her mum's house for two weeks and after attending hospital for self-harming, was admitted to STEPS which is a residential program for young people between 13-18 years old experiencing moderate to severe mental health distress. Shortly after Jane's admission, her mum left the ACT, and it became clear that there was no hope of Jane moving back home.

Jane stayed at STEPS for three months before being exited. Her mental health declined further during her stay. Her CAHMS worker had been on leave for an extended period, and she was not getting the medication she required. She began self-harming again and disengaged from school.

Jane had no friends or family support during this time. Her mum had withdrawn all financial support and Jane began selling nude photos over the internet. Jane had a boyfriend for a brief time who was also homeless and took what little money she had to buy marijuana. Jane began smoking marijuana most days and was also dealing. She was unable to work and had missed school for four months. Eventually, Jane was admitted to hospital after a suicide attempt.

Jane had no home to go to when she exited STEPS and spent two nights on the street. With the TCW's help she was given a place at the Youth Emergency Accommodation (YEAN) in Chisholm. A week later she was moved to the YEAN at Duffy where she stayed for nine months while on the waiting list for Our Place where she now lives.

A major benefit of the program for Jane is that her TCW didn't "just do things for her". The TCW helped Jane to do things for herself. The TCW encouraged Jane to get involved in other programs and enabled her to seek the help she needed through the simple act of loading a data plan on her phone. For Jane, this has had a profound impact on her life, as she states

If it wasn't for [TCW] I wouldn't have known how to contact Onelink and I would literally be sleeping on the streets.

Once Jane found accommodation, she desperately needed skills to gain independence and, with her TCW, developed a plan with goals to get her ready to be independent. Jane has what is known in the sector as service fatigue. She has dipped in and out of services for housing, education, mental health and financial help and has had to tell her story many times to many people. Yet she felt stuck in a downward spiral and felt she

was not being listened to or having her needs met. While in the S&CY program Jane says

> *With [TCW], I only had to tell her one thing, one time, and she was on it.*

The TCW took Jane grocery shopping to give her a lesson on how much further money can go on healthy food instead of buying fast food. The TCW helped Jane apply for Centrelink payments, accommodation and drivers' license, things Jane admits she did not know how to do on her own. The TCW helped her recognise and maintain healthier relationships.

After being with the program for nearly a year, Jane says she feels more resilient, confident and empowered. She feels like she can trust people again.

> *If it wasn't for the S&CY program I would be in an abusive home, on drugs, and not attending school. And I definitely would not have been able to maintain my place in accommodation for as long as I have. The program has had a major positive impact on my life*

Jane wants to be a teacher and has just graduated from year 11 with a Vocational Learning Option in early childhood education and care from Canberra Institute of Technology.

Conclusion

The S&CY program has successfully implemented its intended processes and delivered the proposed outcomes. The primary aim of the program is to reduce the risk of homelessness for young people and the evaluation demonstrates that it does this and more. Through the program, young people and their families are supported to have improved outcomes across a range of domains such as housing, education, and mental health that positively effects the lives of young people *and their families*.

As well as reducing the risk of homelessness, the program has improved access to support and services, improved motivation to change, increased family communication, and improved the integration and coordination of services and supports.

The program's therapeutic case management, mediation capacity and access to temporary accommodation provide a comprehensive service that improves family functioning, educational outcomes, and mental health. Additionally, these combined activities provide a comprehensive outreach service that coordinates and optimises a broad range of services to
"wrap around" S&CY clients.

The S&CY program has had the greatest impact on young people and families through the ability to work with, and advocate for, the whole family and provide them with the tools and strategies to improve communication and decrease conflict. The program sought, navigated and managed a broad range of services to meet the clients' needs while providing an intensive, therapeutic outreach service that worked with young people and families in their own homes.

The developmental nature of the program has captured challenges as they have arisen. Most of these challenges were dealt with at the time by altering processes and/or practice. However, two particular challenges have no quick fix and while one limits the full potential of the program the other lies outside its scope.

The first is the uncertainty caused by the lack of continued and ongoing program funding. Not knowing whether funding will be continued, and the short-term funding cycles makes planning difficult. This planning includes when and whether to take on new clients and how long TCWs will be able to work with them.

The second challenge is the lack of program resources and capacity to service young people and families who need a safe place to stay longer-term. The funding used for respite accommodation cannot cover extended periods of temporary accommodation which means that some families who would benefit from the program fall outside the selection criteria because they may require longer and more intensive respite accommodation.

Despite these challenges, the S&CY program is the only early intervention, targeted, youth homelessness program that works with young people and their families to

reduce the risk of homelessness. Young people and their families are better off through participating in the program, and the Youth Coalition recommends that the S&CY program receives ongoing funding from the ACT Government as part of a coordinated service response.