



MELBOURNE CITYMISSION REVIEW OF THE YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING INITIATIVE (YEETI)

*Less Worries & More Inclusion: Focus Groups Conducted
with Service Users Granted YEETI Funding*

February 2007

This review was undertaken by David Crawford, YEETI Project Worker, Melbourne Citymission.

Acknowledgements

The purpose of this Review was to include the voices and perspective of YEETI service users in Melbourne Citymission's overall review of YEETI.

Thanks to:

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“It’s really meant so much...it’s hard to say in such a short amount of time. I wanted to come here to talk to people from the program, and be able to tell you how much it has meant.”

Participant in one of the focus groups.

1. Background

YEETI Program

The Youth Employment Education and Training Initiative (YEETI) is a Youth Homelessness Action Plan (YHAP) first stage initiative that aims to directly assist young people to develop their own vision and a workable individual plan to participate in employment, education and training and thereby move towards independent living. Agencies are able to access YEETI brokerage funds to purchase activities and equipment, and provide subsidies that directly support a young person to effectively access, participate and/or maintain employment education and training.

YEETI service users are the young people SAAP providers across the State nominate for YEETI funding according to the following criteria:

- Aged between 15 - 24 years
- Homeless or are at risk of homelessness
- Not in sustainable employment
- Have experienced long term difficulties in maintaining stable accommodation and overcoming barriers to participation in employment, education and training
- Have high support needs

As of December 2006, 1273 applications had been made for YEETI funding of \$1.7 million. Further information and reports on the YEETI program are available at www.YEETI.org.au

YEETI Service User Review

In April 2006, the Office of Housing agreed to expand the YEETI brief by funding consultation with the sector regarding the impact of the YEETI in relation to young people and broader sector development. Melbourne Citymission engaged a project worker for 9 months to undertake data analysis, consultation and a range of capacity building activities.

This review sought to listen to the views of young people in the Homelessness Service System who had been granted YEETI Funding, through a series of focus groups. This Service User Review is the third of four phases Melbourne Citymission is undertaking to review the impact and effectiveness of the YEETI.

Phase 1 - Applicant Data: Victoria University completed a number of reports to identify the characteristics of young people applying for YEETI assistance and how this assistance is being utilised.

Phase 2 - Program Review: Investigated the impact of YEETI assistance by surveying programs that utilised YEETI funding.

Phase 3 - Service User Review: Investigated the impact of YEETI by conducting a series of focus groups with young people that had received YEETI assistance.

Phase 4 - Forums: Report on findings and undertake sector development activities

2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this Service User Review was to include the perspective of service users in Melbourne Citymission's overall review of YEETI.

The objectives of the Service User Review were to:

- record the usefulness of YEETI from the perspective of service users;
- identify issues in accessing YEETI funds and gaps in its use;
- assist in understanding the needs, issues and barriers faced by homeless young people accessing employment, education and training;
- and assist in the advocacy for better services for young people experiencing homelessness.

The Service User Review also aimed to build on the information collected through Phase 1 and Phase 2, to assist in giving an overall perspective on YEETI and to contribute to the Department of Human Services (DHS) evaluation of YHAP Stage 1 initiatives.

3. Method

Initially two rural and two metropolitan programs from four DHS regions were approached to assist in running a focus group with service users who had been granted YEETI funding. These programs were identified as being high users of YEETI for clients in their region. It was hoped that by targeting programs with a greater number of applications this would provide access to a larger number of young people. Due to a range of factors, one of the rural programs was not able to undertake a focus group. A third Metropolitan focus group was consequently organised.

Each participating program was asked to invite 5-6 young people who had been granted YEETI funding to attend a focus group to discuss the funding they had received. The focus groups were conducted at each agency to provide familiar surroundings for service users. Each young person received a \$20.00 Coles-Myer Gift Card and was offered travel expenses. The Focus group facilitators were Lucinda Jordan from Melbourne Citymission's Research and Social Policy Unit and David Crawford, the YEETI project worker. A worker from the program was asked to attend to ensure participants were comfortable and to assist discussion. The focus groups were conducted between October and December 2006.

In total, fourteen young people (nine female and five male) participated in the focus groups: five young people attended the Hume focus group; and three young people attended each of the Eastern, Southern and Western metropolitan region focus groups.

Ethics and Principles of Research

This project met the requirements of Melbourne Citymission's research ethics process. Information was kept confidential. Applicants, workers and programs that accessed YEETI funding and participated in the focus groups are not identified in the reporting of this Review. This Service User Review is available at www.YEETI.org.au

4. Findings

4.1 YEETI Grants

Service Users were asked to identify the items their YEETI grants had funded. These items are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Items funded by YEETI

Items Funded	Number of items funded*
Secondary School Costs - Including: enrolment, course fees, extras, excursions, VTAC applications, uniform, text books	13
Computer Equipment Includes computers, internet connection, software	9
TAFE Fees Including short courses	7
Transport (Tickets)	5
Learning to Drive - Including: Learners and Probationary licence, driving lessons, drivers test, car registration and insurance	5
Sports & Recreational Activities Includes boots and uniform, gym membership, social activities	4
Clothing Includes work uniform, everyday clothing	2
Graphics & Art Supplies	1
Glasses	1

*Note: Items funded exceed the number of participants as participants may have been funded for several items

Items funded for the focus group participants were similar to those commonly funded by YEETI¹. Secondary school and TAFE costs, computer equipment, transport tickets and driver training were the most commonly funded items for these service users. Other items included sports and recreational activities and clothing.

4.2 Usefulness of YEETI Funding

The focus group participants were asked in what ways the YEETI funding had been useful and what it had helped them do. The main responses have been organised around key themes in Table 2.

Participants were enthusiastic about the usefulness of items funded through YEETI. They often returned to the usefulness of YEETI funding and what it had enabled them to do in subsequent questions.

Participants identified that meeting education costs was particularly important for being able to reengage and continue with their education. Funding for key necessities such as textbooks, fees, uniforms and excursions were seen as critical to enable this. In addition, some participants reported that funding for computer equipment had assisted with focusing on school and improved study time.

¹ Broadbent, R. 2006, *Implementation of the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative*, available at www.YEETI.org.au

Smaller items such as glasses and work uniforms were also essential items for participation in employment, education and training.

“I wouldn’t be able to do year 12 if my fees and text books hadn’t been paid for.”

Transport tickets not only assisted participants to get to school but also with other important travel needs such as health appointments. For many, an important impact of funding for transportation was being able to avoid fines and associated debts. One young person described accruing \$750 worth of fines in the previous school year. Learning to drive also provided participants with independent means of transport and assisted with attending interviews, university and visiting family and friends.

“Tickets are good because it means I can get to school without getting busted.”

Table 2. Ways YEETI funding was useful to participants

Ways YEETI funding was useful
Education Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enabled me to go back to school - helped me complete school so I could get work - having my own books means: don’t have to work at the library anymore; don’t have to worry about putting books on hold; helps with exams.
Computer Equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gave me more time for school work - saved time and increased motivation - don’t have to travel long distances just to do homework, can study at home rather than at school - better communication / contact with people (had no phone line previously)
Transport Tickets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can now get to health appointments and get to places - no more fines on public transport
Learning to drive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - easier to visit family, attend interviews, get to uni and get around
Sport & Recreational activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gym membership helped me build up body and strengthen weak back - enabled me to attend an important and memorable event
Clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enabled me to buy everyday clothing - enabled me to buy work uniform

4.3 Other ways YEETI Funding Assisted

The focus group participants were asked whether their YEETI funding helped in other ways. Participants’ responses are recorded into key themes in Table 3. Despite YEETI grants mainly being used for practical items like computers, transport tickets and course fees the funding had significant value in many additional ways.

Table 3. Other ways YEETI funding assisted participants

Other Ways YEETI Funding Assisted
<p>Reduced Anxiety and Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can now afford text books and excursions and spend money on food, bills and other necessities - now I get an income, no longer stress about money for food and clothes - reduced anger and anxiety around affording important items - not at risk of breaking law because can now afford transport tickets - easier to travel to school - avoid stress mum has to go through - knowing YEETI is available takes away stress - I can be like everyone else and have the same opportunities
<p>Provided Motivation / Direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - (YEETI funded course) helped get me out of bed, it gave me direction - made easier to move forward and gave momentum with study - I want to go to school now because I can participate
<p>Provided Real Opportunity with Education & Career Pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - will now be able to finish Year 12 - can now go to university - can now follow vocational interests - gave opportunity to try something new & make own decisions about life direction
<p>Confidence & Self esteem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - purchase of clothes helped me feel better about self & be able to go outside now - sense of completion and achievement for finishing school - helped gain support & encouragement from family, they are now proud of me - can have a social life as I no longer have to work to afford high school fees - was able to attend the Deb Ball which was really important
<p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the gym is helping me to quit smoking - exercising will help my health - exercising helps me to deal with stress

A central theme that was strongly reported by participants was that YEETI funding reduced stress and worry, particularly in relation to debt. Participants reported that as YEETI grants were funding educational expenses they were now able to meet essential living expenses reducing their anxiety and further debt.

“Now there is more money to spend on bills, rent and food, which means less stress.”

YEETI funding also assisted by providing motivation and direction to participants. The YEETI grants assisted in opening a range of options and choice of possible career pathways. Responses reflected a greater involvement in decisions and increased opportunity in education. This was also demonstrated in the range of courses currently being completed by participants.

“I actually want to go to school now.”

Participants’ responses also demonstrated that being able to now afford items related to employment, education and training had led to improved confidence and self-esteem. For example, YEETI funding had assisted one participant to attend a Debutante Ball assisting her connection to school and enabling involvement in an important social and community event.

“Going to the Deb was the best night ever, and I could enjoy it as I didn’t have to worry about getting into debt to pay for it.”

One participant discussed the importance of now being able to afford his own clothes.

“The new clothes were really good, a confidence thing. I won’t go outside now and get called a hobo.”

Another participant reported that funding for her education costs allowed her to concentrate on her VCE and have a social life. This young woman had been working from 14 years of age to fund her education and living expenses, which is far removed from community expectations that casual work for young people is for extra pocket money.

“Its good to be able to concentrate on study and my social life rather than having to concentrate on how to pay for it. I was working as a waitress at 14 so I could afford my school fees and text books.”

Funding for gym memberships and other recreational activities had assisted participants to develop a healthier lifestyle, which for some participants had enabled them to quit smoking and cope more effectively with the stress of their current situation.

4.4 Barriers young people in Homelessness Service System face accessing Employment, Education & Training

Focus group participants were asked what would help keep them on their current employment, education and training path and about the barriers other homeless young people face. It was hoped that this would identify both the key aspects that assist current service users as well as barriers to accessing the YEETI. Responses from the focus groups are arranged in key themes in Table 4.

Table 4. Barriers to employment, education and training

Barriers to Employment, Education & Training
Education Fees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - courses are too expensive - don't have money to pay for things - can't afford to complete VCE - pressure on making the right decision first because of the financial cost
Knowledge & Access to Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support through VCE - assistance with making personal plans
Feelings of Other Young People in Homelessness Service System <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stressed out about situation - some annoyed that we got grant and they didn't, say we don't deserve assistance - share our funded items with others
Knowledge of YEETI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hard to find out about YEETI program - YEETI funding process is confusing to understand - figuring out what you want to do is the hardest part - YEETI provides so much choice

The main barrier identified was that the costs of education are prohibitive for young people in the Homeless Service System. Participants reported that costs of education were too expensive, restricted access to completing school and impacted on living expenses. It was also reported that education costs increased pressure to be certain of a choice due to the financial commitment involved.

“Costs get in the way so much, courses are just so expensive. You can be saving for years just to be able to study what you want to study. It’s so hard for anyone who doesn’t have any money.”

Participants reported that another barrier to employment, education and training for other homeless young people was knowing about services that could provide support and then being able to access that support. Other responses identified difficulties experienced by homeless young people trying to develop plans for the future and attempting to complete their schooling without support.

“My housemate wanted to go back to school but couldn’t afford it. She couldn’t complete VCE as she couldn’t afford it.”

A small number of participants reported YEETI was not well known which prevented other young people from accessing the support.

4.5 Other help with Housing and Employment, Education and Training

The focus groups were asked what else would assist with housing, employment and education pathways. Responses from the participants are outlined in the following table:

Table 5. Other help with Housing Employment Education and Training which would be useful

Further Assistance Required
Study Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - preparation for study - someone to help with study workload - routine of study - completing course work
More Financial Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - centrelink was not enough for living expenses, regularly short of food, stationary and go without all the time - reapply to YEETI for more courses I want to complete
Affordable Accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - huge stress having to move to other accommodation that is dearer - have own place / home - stable accommodation
Assistance with Employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - searching for jobs - help to use a computer - Internet site to help find work, networks for kids, online / interactive advice
Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information on how to get assistance

An important issue identified by participants was the need for support and preparation when returning to study. Responses recognised the need for preparation prior to commencing study, support with the workload, developing a routine and completing tasks.

“Tutoring would be a good idea and someone to help you work out your timetable and how to manage your time.”

Several focus group participants reported that further assistance was required with accommodation. These young people reported their concerns about obtaining stable and affordable accommodation. Participants also expressed desire for their own home, which acknowledges feelings and differences between having accommodation and a home.

The need for ongoing financial assistance and affordable accommodation are similar to needs regularly identified by the sector. Addressing the cost, and then obtaining a place in a course were

raised as an area where further assistance was required. Participants again reported stress and worry about finances and housing, but the YEETI grants had assisted in their reduction.

“Centrelink money is not enough for living expenses. (I) get \$240 per fortnight, but rent comes out of that.” (Which means he has \$60 left to live on for food, study and other spending per week)

Participants in the focus groups identified that more support and information on accessing assistance was required to assist with housing and education. Some participants reported that help with searching for work and with computers was required to maintain their current pathway. Important ideas to provide other assistance suggested by participants were information being available online and an interactive website for young people to share experiences and knowledge.

4.6 Future Goals and Plans

The focus groups were asked about goals and where they would like to be in a year or two years time. Responses have been organised into key themes in Table 6.

Table 6. Future goals and plans of participants

Future Goals
Secondary Education
- will still be studying
Training Courses
- Graphic Design
- TAFE
- Animal technology
- Food Process
- Apprenticeship and doing a TAFE course.
- finish school & get into photography or Diploma of Multimedia studies
- Embalming course
- finish current course
- reapplying for a course
University
- Psychology degree
- Nursing, I'll have my degree in 2 years time
- studying by correspondence
- studying at university
Employment
- get a job / working
- Hairdresser
- Event Management
- running own business, lots of ideas but don't have funding
Activities
- get fit
- keep playing soccer
- volunteering
Independent Transport
- get a car
- have a licence
Independence
- being able to make choices
- having a normal routine & being active
- living in own place, not staying with someone else

Participants had considered goals and plans about where they would like to be in the future. The following response demonstrated this planning but also options to move forward depending on how plans unfolded.

“Get an apprenticeship and do a TAFE course. If I don’t get an apprenticeship as a Chef then, (a) Diploma of Kitchen operations”

The majority of participants in the focus groups expected to be studying with most expecting to be completing courses at TAFE or University. Seven of the service users hoped to be working, with some in positions as hairdressers, chef apprentices, nursing and running their own business.

A range of other plans were reported by participants including having independent transport and maintaining activities for personal and community interaction. Important hopes for independence, activities, feelings, accommodation and volunteering were also reported. Responses suggested confidence and high participation in peer networks, local communities and employment and education pathways.

“YEETI is great, it’s really been a big help. It’s given me direction on where I want to go in the future.”

5. Discussion of Findings

Improving access to Employment Education and Training

Financial Assistance for secondary school, TAFE costs, computer equipment and transport tickets were identified as the main items YEETI funded for participants. Most participants were now studying and their future plans involved further study or employment. YEETI was assisting these young people to participate in employment, education and training programs through assisting them to engage and continue their education.

Another financial issue identified in this review was that YEETI freed participant's to fund essential living expenses such as food, clothes and bills. In conducting a review of YEETI applications, Broadbent states that costs are prohibitive for accessing and maintaining employment, education and training and "without financial support for fees, uniforms, books and equipment, many young people had little money left for essentials like rent, transport, food and bills"².

The costs of employment, education and training are expensive and a significant barrier to young people in the Homelessness Service System. YEETI applicants have limited income available to afford employment, education and training, with approximately half recording Youth Allowance as their sole source of income for living. YEETI data has consistently shown around 10% of young people applying for YEETI have no income or are awaiting benefits. Assisting young people with limited income and without secure accommodation to participate in employment, education and training is an important aspect of the YEETI program.

Accessing employment, education and training funding for this client group can be difficult due to young people being transient, moving on quickly and maintaining contact. It raises further concerns about the availability of funding through the Job Network for young people, particularly those that are most vulnerable by not having supports or housing. It remains problematic that differences between the SAAP definition of homelessness and the Job Seeker Assessment for being 'vulnerable' may restrict eligibility for extra funding resources for employment, education and training.

A small number of responses suggested that the YEETI was not well known. Current resources of the YEETI program are targeted at SAAP and youth programs. Young people are reliant on the worker being aware and supporting the young person with a YEETI application. Improved partnerships with the Department of Education and Training are required to address the gap in accessing funding for those not connected to government housing programs and therefore not eligible for a YEETI grant.

Suggested ideas for online information and an interactive website reinforce the need for the YEETI program to update pathway models for the Homelessness Service System and explore information currently available. This would assist in ensuring information was also available for young people who are homeless both with, and without support.

This review emphasises the many barriers that disadvantaged young people face in the lack of choice and opportunity to participate in employment, education and training. The high cost of education, lack of accommodation and greater support requirements reported by participants highlights the need for ongoing partnerships across the Homelessness Service System and employment, education and training sectors.

² Broadbent, R. 2006, *Implementation of the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative*, p. 17, available at www.YEETI.org.au

Stress & Anxiety

Findings from the focus groups reinforced the need to look beyond practical items funded for participation in employment, education and training and to appreciate the other ways YEETI funding impacted on the lives of participants.

An important impact and reoccurring theme of the focus groups was that YEETI funding helped to relieve the stress and anxiety experienced by participants. This raises concerns about the burden of stress and anxiety being carried by these young people and also the possible consequences on their health. It should hardly surprise that the lack of housing, associated issues and causes result in significant levels of worry and anxiety for young homeless people.

A key criteria for the YEETI applicants is that they are homeless or at risk of homelessness and not in sustainable employment. Most young people granted YEETI funding are receiving Centrelink benefits but around 10% have no income or are registered and awaiting benefits. In her study of YEETI applicants, Broadbent (2006) found the majority of young people applying were those most recently homeless³. Those in crisis accommodation and most transient also utilised YEETI funding. Preparing for employment and participating in education without secure accommodation, often with associated support issues, is a significant achievement. This is likely to be stressful and many young people in this position require additional resources.

Hopes for Independence

Support received through the YEETI and SAAP programs was found to be an important contribution to the personal development of participants in the focus groups. Important hopes for independence were recorded, as were plans for their own transport, home, activities and volunteering. Participant's dreams and aspirations to have their own job, car or home are typical of many young people. Attending a Debutante Ball and funding important extras are reminders of young people's need to fit into school and with their peers. Involvement in peer groups, employment, education and training and local communities are important for overcoming isolation. It was found that YEETI was assisting participants to develop confidence, self-esteem, and social skills which are important ways of enabling ongoing involvement in employment, education and training. Building confidence, independence and self-esteem, and providing options for the future are also vital in assisting young people in their pathway out of homelessness.

It is particularly noteworthy that participants facing difficulties and pressure in the Homelessness Service System identified that YEETI provided the opportunities, direction and increased momentum for their participation in employment, education and training. The young people acknowledged that YEETI had provided real opportunity with education by assisting them to reengage, continue and progress to higher levels of education. Many participants were completing university despite barriers of income and accommodation, challenging a single stereotype of 'homeless youth'. The responses from the focus groups illustrated that young people who are homeless have the desire and ability to go further with their education, and are able to gain significant achievements when the appropriate support and opportunities are provided.

³ Broadbent, R. 2006, *Implementation of the Youth Employment, Education and Training Initiative*, p. 20, available at www.YEETI.org.au

“YEETI funding assisted his education and provided his own computer which really increased his confidence around his learning and about himself. Previously he would not have been able to even come to a focus group like this, let alone talk.”

SAAP worker assisting one of the focus groups.

6. Appendices

6.1 STATEMENT & PURPOSE (Survey Cover Letter)

SERVICE USER REVIEW: Information for Participants & Consent Form

Melbourne Citymission is undertaking a review of how YEETI is working. As part of this we will be conducting focus groups with service users from four programs across Victoria during October 2006. This will be done with the assistance of Lucinda Jordan from Melbourne Citymission's Research and Social Policy Unit. We are asking each participating Agency/Program to invite 5-6 young people that received YEETI funding to an afternoon or evening catch up with us.

How

- Each agency will select 5-6 young people to be invited to be part of a focus group to discuss the funding they received
- An agency worker, Lucinda and the YEETI worker will facilitate the focus group
- Each young person will receive a \$20.00 Coles-Myer Gift Card plus travel expenses.
- This project will meet the requirements of Melbourne Citymission's research ethics process.
- Young people, workers and programs that accessed YEETI funding will not be identified in the reporting of this Review.
- The interview is **completely confidential**, we will not be recording your name. Taking part in this study is voluntary - whether you choose to take part or not is completely up to you. The answers you give will have no effect on the assistance you get from agencies now or in the future.
- If you have any concerns about this study, please discuss them with Lucinda or myself. If at any stage during the focus group you decide you no longer wish to participate, please let us know and you are free to leave.
- If you agree to take part, it is very important that you think about each question carefully and answer as accurately and fully as you can. If you are unsure about a question, please ask.

A summary report of responses will be provided to each Agency. The Program Review will be available through the YEETI website and is part of four phases that will assist in providing feedback and enhancement of YEETI. For further information see www.YEETI.org.au.

Why

Your views are really important and they will:

- Record the usefulness of YEETI.
- Identify issues in accessing YEETI funds and gaps in its use.
- Assist understanding of needs, issues and barriers faced by homeless young people accessing Employment, Education and Training.
- Assist advocacy for better services for young people experiencing homelessness.

If you have any further questions regarding this research or how the findings will be used please contact David Crawford, YEETI Project Worker, Melbourne Citymission on 9680 8249.

Thanks for your assistance,

David Crawford
YEETI Project Worker
Melbourne Citymission

I agree to participate in the project and give my consent freely to be interviewed. I understand that the project will be carried out as described in the information statement, a copy of which I have kept. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate is my decision and will not have any effect on the services I receive from Melbourne Citymission or YEETI. I also realise that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. I have asked the interviewer any questions that I have regarding the study, and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

..... Date:
Participant

..... Date:
Investigator

6.2 Focus Group Questions

1. What did you receive the YEETI funding for?

2. In what ways was it useful? What did it help you to do?

3. Did this funding help in other ways?

4. Barriers:

Some of you spoke about how YEETI funding helped you, so what would help keep you on this path?

Do you have friends that haven't received YEETI funding...what barriers do they face trying to access education or training?

5. What else would help with housing or Employment, Education and Training?

6. Do you have some goals? Where would you like to be in a year or two years time?