

Every
child,
every
opportunity



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Preface

These program guidelines have been developed as a project resource for the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) for the period 2009–11.

Part A provides background information about the School Focused Youth Service and its development.

Part B provides guidance for schools and agencies participating in School Focused Youth Service including:

- project governance
- service boundaries
- regional strategic planning
- target group
- brokerage, and
- accountability and reporting.



Part A: background

1. Introduction

The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) reflects the importance of strengthening partnerships between communities and schools to improve links between health and welfare services so that all children and young people are supported to have every opportunity to succeed, no matter where they live or their socioeconomic circumstances.

The transition from childhood to adolescence is a time of great change. During this period, young people experience significant physical and emotional development. They are confronted with many issues where they need to obtain new skills and their peer groups have the greatest influence on their lives. They often look to friends and family members for information and support as well as key adults within school.

Most young people transition through their adolescence well; however, some become more vulnerable and, through a combination of their circumstances and risk-taking behaviour, are at risk of not realising their potential.

The School Focused Youth Service aims to strengthen the support for 10–18-year-old vulnerable children and young people by facilitating partnerships and coordination of services between schools and community service organisations at a local level.

These improvements in service system collaboration are expected to result in:

- improved **planning** at a local level to ensure children and young people are well connected to schools and services
- better **connected** school, health and welfare services that support vulnerable children and young people
- improved **identification** of children and young people who require prevention and early intervention strategies to assist their engagement and re-engagement into education.

2. Background

The School Focused Youth Service was established in 1998 as a joint initiative between the Department of Human Services and the then Department of Education.

The original aim of the SFYS program was to identify the risk factors contributing to suicide and to make recommendations on appropriate strategies to prevent and minimise suicide risk factors. This aim required addressing the fragmentation of service responses to young people with complex needs that placed them ‘at risk’ of self-harm.

Since it was established, SFYS has developed significant expertise in local planning, early identification of vulnerable children and young people, and innovative responses to reduce risk. Recent Victorian government initiatives, such as the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) and Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians 2006–10 (2006), provide new and strengthened policy directions for SFYS and other long-standing initiatives.

The Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (the Blueprint) recognises that partnerships between schools, health services, local government and non-government organisations offer opportunities for developing shared and collaborative strategies to support vulnerable children and young people to complete their education.

The SFYS is inclusive of the school sector of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV), and the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria.

3. Policy Context

Key government policies

A number of key Victorian government policies have been implemented since SFYS’s inception. The policies effectively build on each other and provide a context for the work of the SFYS. The most relevant are:

- Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (Victorian Government, 2008)
- Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians, 2006–10 (Victorian Government, 2006)
- Effective Schools are Engaging Schools: Student Engagement Policy Guidelines (Victorian Government, 2009)
- A Fairer Victoria (Victorian Government, 2005)
- Protecting Children... the next steps (Victorian Government, 2005).
- Growing Victoria Together (Victorian Government, 2001 and 2004) outlines the Government’s commitment to building cohesive communities and delivering high-quality access to health and community services and high-quality education and training for lifelong learning.
- Putting children first... the next steps (Victorian Government, 2004)
- Children First (Victorian Government, 2002) highlights the need to link services to improve the early identification of children at risk and improve outcomes for children and their families.

The Blueprint sets out the Government’s five-year agenda for learning and development from birth to adulthood. It is the next generation of reform to improve outcomes for children and young people and recognises the significance of engagement with parents and communities as the first and most enduring influence on the development of

children and young people. It also signals the importance of partnerships between education and services supporting children, young people and their families to improve their learning, development, and health and wellbeing outcomes.

A consistent theme in recent government policies has been the focus on collaboration between community, government, non-government, commercial and non-commercial industries to develop locally tailored solutions to meet identified need. The SFYS program is consistent with this direction as it aims to provide a coordinated response for young people between 10 and 18 years of age who are at risk of developing behaviours that may make them vulnerable to self-harm, disengagement from school, family or community, or who are displaying behaviours that require support and intervention.

Links to other networks

To maximise the capacity and impact of the School Focused Youth Service, it must fit strategically within the range of education, youth, community, health and local government services. Strategic local planning networks and regional educational networks may be used to support the development of coordinated and integrated approaches to prevention and early intervention strategies for vulnerable children and young people at risk of disengaging from school and developing behaviours requiring support and more intensive intervention.

The School Focused Youth Service links with Better Youth Service Pilots, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), the school improvement agenda, regional educational networks and local area youth services planning.

4. Partnership Approach

The SFYS partnership approach is to strengthen the capacity of local services, communities and schools to collaborate, develop and better coordinate stronger prevention and early intervention strategies as part of a service continuum for vulnerable children and young people.

Services derive many benefits from forming partnerships that bring together expertise and experience in local planning, including the ability to develop collaborative responses to supporting children and young people's engagement in school and community. These benefits are confirmed by international experience and the government's statewide evaluation of Best Start (Final Report 2006), which shows that a strong and effective partnership platform is essential for effective planning and service collaboration.

Effective partnerships are characterised by:

- a shared vision
- an understanding of the value of effective partnerships
- support for innovative approaches and projects
- working with, and valuing, organisations' cultural differences.

For the SFYS this is achieved by:

- building partnerships between schools, community services and health organisations that facilitate collaboration and identification of key issues
- facilitating service linkages with schools to build innovative approaches to prevention and early intervention strategies for vulnerable children and young people
- building the capacity of local planning networks to better support service integration for vulnerable children and young people

- identifying gaps in local service delivery and purchasing services to meet those gaps
- promoting and marketing the program via direct personal contact and electronic communication.

Partnerships between school, community services and health organisations

Building partnerships between schools and community service organisations facilitates collaboration and strengthens the structural interface between schools and communities. Working together, they are better able to mobilise resources to support vulnerable children and young people to positively engage with schools.

The SFYS Evaluation (2007) indicated that there was 'A significant improvement in addressing the needs of "at-risk" young people as a result of functioning collaborative structures and mechanisms between schools and relevant community agencies'.

Facilitating service linkages with schools

Facilitating service linkages with schools to build innovative approaches to prevention and early intervention strategies for vulnerable children and young people is a Blueprint commitment.

Developing a common understanding of risks and vulnerability, and sharing information about strategies to reduce risks, increases the ability of schools and youth services to work together more effectively. Building stronger links between the sectors produces a greater awareness of the benefits of working together to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

The development of linkages and collaboration between schools and services is regarded as an area of strength of the SFYS. Results from the school survey indicated that SFYS was assisting schools in multiple ways. This included implementing wellbeing programs to run across schools, networks or clusters, development of memorandums of understanding between partnering schools and stakeholders, and protocols or referral pathways to external services and agencies (SFYS Evaluation, 2007)

Building capacity of local planning networks

Local service networks in Victoria support greater integration of service systems by building the capacity of local planning networks to promote a culture of flexible service delivery to better meet the needs of young people.

The SFYS is one of a number of funded networks that provide a platform for improving service access through informed communication, evidence and understanding of local issues and priorities.

Community agencies reported similar changes within their organisations – improved planning and better use of referrals, better provision of information, improved resourcing of staff and more partnerships with schools (SFYS Evaluation, 2007).

Identifying gaps in local service delivery

The identification of local service gaps highlights emerging issues for services and schools. It also improves service collaboration and better aligns services to the needs of vulnerable children and young people, particularly those at risk of disengagement from school.

It also allows services and schools to consider purchasing services to meet those gaps if they cannot be filled by current resources.

Activities undertaken by SFYS to identify service gaps and develop responses have been strengthened by regional and local planning processes that are conducted across the state (SFYS Evaluation, 2007).

5. Evaluation

The SFYS Evaluation (2007) identified the programs strengths and highlighted areas for improvement. Evidence from all sources suggested that SFYS activities are leading to positive impacts for young people; both directly and indirectly through capacity building in the community, community service organisations and schools.

In regards to the SFYS range of interventions for young people, there was evidence that priorities for actions addressed local need, including gaps in services, and identified local and regional priorities.

Whilst the evaluation identified the need for further development of quantitative data to highlight the program outcomes, qualitative evidence gathered from the evaluation suggested that the program makes a significant contribution towards:

- improved knowledge about issues and services in the community and school
- development of partnerships, planning and programs between education and community sectors at the local community level
- better peer relationships and communication skills
- more positive attitudes to self, peers, teachers and school
- positive changes in behaviours

- improved attendance and engagement with school
- significant improvement in the current service system as a result of the identification of gaps and subsequent service development and/or purchase.



Part B: Guidance



6. Evidence-based Strategies

The Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination is committed to adopting evidence-based approaches and innovative practices to improve the outcomes for children and young people. This means that policy decisions will be based on solid quantitative and qualitative research and local data, and contain measurable outcomes that are re-examined and reworked as evaluations require.

Access to evidence-based interventions helps to ensure informed decision making by advisory groups for activities funded to support improved outcomes for children and young people. The SFYS is required to consider evidence-based strategies and, in the absence of an evidence base, expect to evaluate strategies to build an evidence base.

7. Project Governance

This SFYS guidance on project governance is consistent with best practice standards of strong and effective partnerships.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood staff are responsible for overseeing the delivery of the SFYS program in regions and for supporting agencies to meet the program requirements.

Partnership structure

Statewide Advisory Group

The SFYS Statewide Advisory Group (SAG) provides advice and support around program and policy development, communication strategies and development of program consistency.

Regional Advisory Group

Regions are encouraged to involve a Regional Advisory Group (RAG) to provide

high level strategic planning and to support the work of the Local Advisory Groups (LAGs).

The SFYS Evaluation (2007) commented that regional planning processes that identified service gaps and developed responses strengthened the region's capacity to improve responses for 'at risk' children and young people.

In order to maximise the planning capacity of the region, representation should comprise, at minimum:

- education services
- local government
- health services
- family support services
- youth services
- other representatives identified at regional level.

Some examples of additional partners may include police, secondary school nursing program, specialist youth services, Department of Human Services (DHS), and Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD).

Regional structure and service locations may impact on the capacity to develop a Regional Advisory Group. In regions where it is not practical to have a Regional Advisory Group, the DEECD regional office management can be consulted about an alternative planning structure (e.g. a LAG) to support a coordinated and high-level strategic planning approach.

Local Advisory Group

The Local Advisory Group (LAG) forms the basis of SFYS approach. Many benefits are derived from forming partnerships that bring together expertise and experience in local planning, service coordination and collaborative responses to support children and young people's engagement in school and community.

The Local Advisory Group has responsibility for supporting and

overseeing the work of the SFYS. It is responsible for guiding the planning and development of innovative responses to identified local need, including:

- developing a collaborative local plan, based on a needs analysis, local data and agreed priorities
- guiding the planning and development of innovative responses that are consistent with agreed priorities
- informing broader local area planning
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these approaches at the local level.

The LAG and the individual members are expected to support the work of the local SFYS by:

- providing local leadership
- contributing to local area planning
- supporting planning, prioritising of activities and supporting the agency responsible for the coordinator
- planning
- identifying service gaps.

Applying a community development framework that supports partnerships is the SFYS's core work. The planning process reflects the importance of the cross-service partnership work required of the SFYS.

Auspice agencies

The auspice agency is responsible for the delivery of the SFYS program within the agreed school cluster or local government area. This includes the employment of, and support of a program co-ordinator.

The auspice agency is responsible for engaging and developing a Local Advisory Group to assist with the implementation of the SFYS. In addition, the auspice agency is responsible for engaging with, and supporting regional planning processes.

8. Service Boundaries

The SFYS catchments for program delivery reflect priority areas for DEECD and recommendations by the SFYS Service Evaluation (2007). Key factors that may influence the realignment of boundaries include:

- DEECD regional network boundaries
- presence of other service and planning networks (e.g. Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs), Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), Child First, etc.)
- local government areas
- number of schools and student populations within each catchment
- presence of high-needs localities and populations
- geographical area and distance between agencies, schools and communities
- presence of growth corridors and areas with developing populations and few or remote services.

9. Regional Strategic Plan

The development of a formal regional strategic plan or other regional planning network as an operational template has the capacity to drive the work of SFYS within the region. Ideally, the document should be developed by the RAG as an outcome of the work of the region's key advisory groups, local networks and other services. It will also be designed to complement and be informed by any existing regional plans, and draw on the school improvement agenda, Local Learning Employment Networks Youth Commitments, Regional Youth Affairs Networks, and the local government youth strategy.

Strategic planning framework

1. Mapping

The aim of the mapping process is to develop a shared understanding of the profile of the community, young people, local service provision and schools. Mapping of children and young people should include:

- population density
- numbers and location of children and young people
- sociodemographic profiling, including measures of disadvantage
- scope of existing access and youth services and coordination mechanisms.

Mapping locations against those risk factors that are known to be associated with poor outcomes provides important information about areas of greatest need.

2. Consulting

Many communities have a range of initiatives identified through local networks and schools. It is important that consultations and needs analysis processes are coordinated and information is shared. This process will assist the engagement of service and schools and avoid duplication of effort.

3. Analysis

International partnership programs have demonstrated that it is important to share information and respond to identified issues or concerns as soon as possible. Responding to identified issues through the use of brokerage funding, provides credibility for services. The SFYS program is able to provide timely responses to local or regional concerns utilising the program brokerage funds. These initiatives should be practical, support vulnerable young people and encourage greater school involvement in activities supporting vulnerable children and young people.

Formulating the plan

Agreed processes

Agreed processes reflect a commitment to change the structure and organisation of work practices to facilitate better links and coordination between services and schools, and improve access and responsiveness. Examples include protocols and agreements about better ways for services to work together.

Practice innovation

Practice innovation would include ways in which services and schools can work together to improve responses to vulnerable children and young people at risk of disengaging from schools.

Timing for strategic plans

The planning process will need to consider the strategic planning cycles of DEECD/Catholic Education Office/Independent Schools, DPCD, DHS and other key regional plans in order to complement these plans and avoid overlap of activity.

Implementing the strategic plan

Implementing the action plan requires the commitment of the Local Advisory Group. Implementation of service innovation priorities will require a communication strategy at a local level to offer information and advice to service providers.

Mechanisms for monitoring progress and measuring outcomes

The SFYS database provides quarterly reporting of initiatives and brokerage commitments. Regional DEECD staff will be responsible for overseeing and monitoring quarterly reporting processes and using program data to support and monitor the implementation of the strategic plan. Regional DEECD staff will

provide the quarterly reports to DEECD central office for statewide analysis.

Review

The RAG and LAG should alter activities and redirect funds as a result of monitoring project activity. Successful activities may be expanded and ineffective activity discontinued. Significant changes to alter financial arrangements must include discussions with the regional DEECD officer.

10. Target Group

The SFYS assists in the development of cohesive and effective support services within and across schools and agencies to work with young people aged between 10–18 years, with a focus on 10–16 year olds. This approach aligns with the broader government planning frameworks and service systems. It commits to identify and reduce early risk taking behaviour. It recognises the needs of young people within and outside the health and youth service systems and schools.

The target group of young people are considered vulnerable to one or more of the following risk factors:

- violence
- offending
- depressive mood and depressive disorders
- self-harm
- substance abuse.

The focus on intervention may also concern other children and young people considered to be vulnerable. The following list is indicative only of potential vulnerability:

- social and geographical isolation
- sexual behaviour

- early school leaving and school failure
- physical or psychological disabilities
- socioeconomic disadvantage
- family problems
- young people experiencing difficulties from Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.

11. Brokerage

These guidelines are designed to clarify the use of brokerage funds. They will assist Local Advisory Groups and Regional Advisory Groups in making decisions about appropriate use of SFYS brokerage funds. The allocation of brokerage funds reflects the recommendations of the Evaluation of the School Focused Youth (2006–07). This includes:

- strategic use of funds to create systemic change
- linking with service mapping and needs analysis of the targeted community
- application and allocation processes that refine the objective of each application and strengthen their link to the regional strategic plan.

Process

The management of brokerage funds is the responsibility of the SFYS service provider. It is independent of the DEECD but subject to terms and conditions of the Funding and Service Agreement. It is the responsibility of the LAG to inform the SFYS service provider of programs to be funded by SFYS.

The allocation of funding requires clearly developed criteria for funding that incorporates the LAG and RAG planned priorities. The criteria include:

- a local needs analysis, service mapping, data analysis, and local strategic plan

- clear, consistent and transparent brokerage application, allocation and evaluation processes
- an evaluation process based upon the capacity of the purchased services to satisfy the identified need, address the themes as detailed in the strategic framework, and lead to systemic change.

To respond to emerging community needs, each region is free to decide the amount of funding allocated to each activity/project. The decisions must respond to clear criteria; involve partners and be consistent with strategic plans.

For projects over \$15,000, three additional criteria apply:

- how it fits within regional priorities and needs
- sustainability of the project
- consultation with the DEECD Children and Youth Services Manager.

It is a requirement that all SFYS service providers ensure that all applicants for brokerage projects that will work directly with young people have a valid Working with Children Check, which provides a mandatory minimum standard across Victoria. Applicants should be informed of this requirement at information sessions and the details included on application forms.

For information on who needs to apply for a Working with Children Check information, visit <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/workingwithchildren>

What can be purchased

Criteria for brokerage should include the following elements:

- alignment with the priority objectives of the LAG/RAG and priority target group/s

- be of direct benefit to vulnerable young people
- offer opportunities for sustainability, particularly of partnerships with local agencies
- evidence-based best practice, which is innovative and offers opportunities for broad application
- includes two or more partners
- offers value for money
- projects that are sustainable beyond the initial funding.

Brokerage dollars should not be used for:

- the purchase of services for the indirect benefit of young people (for example, the professional development of SFYS staff, teachers, agency personnel or other stakeholders)
- the purchase of agency infrastructure (for example, computers, cars or office equipment)
- funding schools to work together without a community partner
- Fee for service projects from private business providers, unless they are sustainable or there is no appropriate community option.

Recurrent funding for projects is not available.

12. Accountability and Reporting

Information regarding accountability and reporting requirements is detailed in the Office for Children and Early Childhood Policy and Funding Plan 2009–12

Communication strategy

A statewide communication strategy will be developed to support sharing of information related to best practice.



At a local level, Local Advisory Groups (LAGs) work in partnership with the local SFYS provider to facilitate the development of effective communication strategies within their clusters. The LAGs may build on existing coordinating structures. This group also plays a key role in informing and implementing regional strategic plans and decision-making regarding the allocation of brokerage.

Appendix:

Links to Other Initiatives: Planning Frameworks and Resources



SFYS Website

An overview of the SFYS program and examples of funded activities are available at the DEECD Student Wellbeing website at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/sfyouthservices/default.htm> and Infoxchange SFYS website at: <http://www.sfys.infoxchange.net.au/>

Outcomes Framework

The Child and Adolescent Outcomes Framework is contained in the State of Victoria's Young People and can be downloaded from: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/children/annualreports.htm>

Adolescent indicators and evidence-based intervention strategies: A catalogue of adolescent indicators, together with a summary of strategies, is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/childyouth/catalogue/default.htm>

Student Mapping Tool

The student mapping tool of students at risk of disengaging is used by many schools to inform planning and responses by schools and is available from regional DEECD offices.

Further information on the Student Mapping Tool can be downloaded: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/mips/sar/default.htm>

Catholic Education Commission of Victoria

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) guides and supports schools in the implementation of a whole school approach to student wellbeing within the context of School Improvement. Schools are encouraged to develop a strategic approach to the implementation of key initiatives and strategies in the areas of student wellbeing and school community. The wellbeing of students encompassing their social, emotional, spiritual, physical as well as intellectual wellbeing, is strongly linked to improved learning outcomes and the CECV strategy is both informed by and predicated on, evidence based research supporting this central premise. Further information regarding the work of the CECV in this area can be found on: http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/swap/resources/publications/downloads/sw_

<http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/swap/resources/publications/>

Regional Youth Affairs Networks

The Regional Youth Affairs Networks (RYANs) support the youth sector and the broader community to improve outcomes for young people. They are key regional youth planning networks for all levels of government, and bring together community members, youth service providers, young people and government bodies with an interest in improving the lives of young Victorians.

The aim of RYANs is to provide strategic advice to state government on key issues for young people in Victoria to provide a key means for communication and consultation between the youth sector, young people and the Victorian Government.

Further information on the Regional Youth Affairs Networks can be downloaded: <http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/web21/ofy/dvcofy.nsf/headingpagesdisplay/regional+youth+affairs+networks>

DEECD Regional Networks

A key strategy of the DEECD's Government School Improvement agenda is the expanded role of regional networks. The composition of networks is aligned to one or more LGAs, with approximately 20 member schools per network. Each network has a regional network leader (RNL) responsible for the development and implementation of the network strategic plan and for principal performance. They provide advice and assistance to all network government schools and more intensive support to those schools where performance needs to improve. The most relevant component of the work of the regional networks to SFYS is their facilitation of partnerships with community, business and other agencies.

Smarter Schools: low socioeconomic status school communities' National Partnership

The Council of Australian Governments has agreed to address the issue of educational disadvantage arising from low socioeconomic status through the Smarter Schools – Low Socioeconomic Status School Communities National Partnership. Targeting government and non-government schools over seven years, the states and territories will develop implementation plans for low socioeconomic status communities with an aim to improve student engagement, educational achievement and entrenched disadvantage. The SFYS would be expected to work with these schools.

Further information on the Smarter Schools initiative can be downloaded from: http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-11-29/docs/20081129_smarter_schools_factsheet.rtf

Child First Catchments

The Victorian Government's vision is that every child should thrive, learn and grow, be valued and respected, and become an effective adult. The Government's aspirations, articulated in its *"Outcomes Framework for all Victorian Children and Youth"* are the same for vulnerable children and youth as for all children. The integration of Family Services and Family Support Innovation Projects provides a single entry point for vulnerable children and young people in local area catchments.

Further information on Child First Catchments can be downloaded from: http://www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/41730/ecec_child_first.pdf



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