

**Professional Ethics and Youth Work:  
A Model for Strengthening Youth Work Practice in the ACT**

A report to the Youth Coalition of the ACT

prepared by Dean Cocking and Carrie Fowlie

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## 1. Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Owners and continuing custodians of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT); and pay our respects to the Elders, ancestors and families.

This report encapsulates some of the findings from the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Project* (the Project), which was an extraordinary collaboration involving over 142 individuals and 44 programs and services in the ACT. Each were committed to supporting young people and to improving the services and systems set up to support them. In this case, they were particularly committed to reflecting upon and developing their personal practice as youth workers (please see Appendix 1 for a complete list of participating stakeholders).

Change comes largely through the pursuit of improvement; a belief that things could be done in a better way. This Project is an example of how the youth sector in the ACT has a culture of on-going improvement and that individuals within it are excited about the idea of improving their practice. The Project represents the maturity, confidence and strength of the youth sector to engage in processes to develop its ethico-professional practice.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs, provides great leadership to the youth sector - and the initiation and funding of this Project demonstrates this. They supported the Project at all stages and skilfully developed opportunities to support and engage the sector to reflect upon and develop its practice.

The Project happened because of a shared commitment by all involved that we can always do things a little better. We would like to thank everyone for their support, patience, insight and extraordinary commitment to young people.

Dean and Carrie

## 2. About this Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide the youth sector with feedback on their involvement in the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Project* (the Project);
- Describe the process and some key findings of the Project; and
- Describe a best practice a model to strengthen ethico-professional youth work practice in the ACT.

The Project commenced in 2008 after a series of preliminary discussions and consultations with the youth sector. It was conducted over a 12-month period, and sought to investigate the role of professional ethics in youth work and to progress ethical understanding and practice across the youth sector in the ACT. The Project was initiated by the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs, and was conducted by Dean Cocking and Carrie Fowlie.

We acknowledge that not everything that emerged from the Project is captured in this report - this is due to limited capacity, time and resources. The work of the Project could easily be someone's full-time job and the complete findings could fill a book. However this report represents the significant work that has been done by the youth sector in the ACT and lays a solid foundation for future work.

It is hoped that this report will be accessible to and widely used by diverse range of stakeholders including youth workers, managers, CEOs, policy makers, peak bodies, academics and researchers. It is also hoped that this report will inform youth policy, program and workforce / sector development in the ACT.

This report seeks to highlight some of the Project's theoretical developments and provide recommendations for future work in the area of professional ethics and youth work in the ACT. These recommendations especially relate to the further development of a code of ethics and other mechanisms aimed at promoting an overall better integrity system for the youth sector in the ACT.

This report is divided into eight sections:

1. Acknowledgements
2. About this Report (this section)
3. Introduction
4. About the Project
5. Some Key Findings and Theoretical Developments
6. Recommendations
7. Conclusion
8. Appendices

The Youth Coalition of the ACT commissioned this report, with report authors Dean Cocking and Carrie Fowlie providing additional in kind support.

If you would like further information about the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Project* or about youth work and youth affairs in the ACT please contact the Youth Coalition of the ACT, on:

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### **3. Introduction**

This section briefly contextualises the Project by discussing young people, youth work and ethics; professional ethics; and the youth sector in the ACT.

#### **3.1 Young People, Youth Work and Ethics**

Young people are a population group aged between 12 – 25 years. Young people are a distinct, but not homogenous group. They frequently experience disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to communal resources. This is systematically and systemically embedded at all levels, including individual, social, legal, cultural and political. These, and other compounding issues, can cause young people to be a discrete group that is frequently overlooked as having specific needs and interests.

However, young people's needs and interests are specific enough to justify specific services delivered by professionals who are both knowledgeable and skilled in working with young people and in youth affairs. Youth work is the only profession dedicated to, and with distinctive skills and knowledge in working with, young people.

Ethics is about our welfare, rights and interests. It is about how we should or should not be treated. In youth work, ethics is not only relevant in familiar 'ethical' cases, such as conflicts of interest or confidentiality, and not only relevant in crisis or extreme cases. Ethics is basic to youth work because it is about the welfare, rights and interests of young people.

Ethical thinking in youth work is about thinking about what one should do, how one should treat others, how it would be better or worse to relate to others, etc. Ethical youth work is about the reasons to treat others, and specifically young people, in certain ways.

Youth work does not have the professional status of other occupations – even those that work with young people. This has happened for several structural, historical, economic and ideological reasons, which are not discussed in this report. Within this context, one crucial challenge youth work has is to articulate its nature, values, goals and practices. However the youth sector in the ACT has embraced this challenge and the Project was one way in which they demonstrated this.

#### **3.2 Professional Ethics**

Professional ethics is concerned with the moral issues that arise because of the specialist knowledge and skills that professionals have. It is also concerned with how this knowledge and skill should be used, and governed, when providing a service.

It might be helpful if some of the underlying ideas of what lead us to professional ethics are unpacked a little bit below.

An occupational group is generally understood to deliver important services; make a commitment to provide these services; and have a specific relationship to the marketplace (i.e. receives an income for providing these services).

An occupation is generally understood to become a profession when a group of individuals, sharing the same occupation, organise to work in a morally agreed and recognised ways and / or to support an ideal - for example General Practitioners have organised to promote human health. These individuals then set and abide by agreed standards to carry out their work.

Therefore, a professional is generally understood to be a member of that occupational group who sees other members, including those who may work in other settings, as their peers or colleagues. They exercise judgment in the performance of the work, which is specific to their occupation, and they follow agreed professional standards in accord with socially and morally significant goals, such as human health for general practitioners or just legal process for lawyers.

By being a member of this profession, the individual has agreed to work in the collectively agreed way by their profession, which are described through mechanisms such as a code of ethics. All of this helps the individual clarify and define the objectives and obligations of their role. This also helps people who are not part of the profession understand what, how, and why the professionals do what they do in their work and what, as clients or consumers of these services, one might rightly expect.

The individual's professional obligations come from the profession itself through mechanisms such as the codes that govern it; and through external forces such as social expectations; history and traditions; contracts and laws; and the rules of our common morality.

A professional has obligations to a range of stakeholders, including their employer; clients / consumers; other professionals; and to society more broadly. These obligations (or responsibilities) are aligned with the individual's knowledge, skill, experience and position.

Therefore the role of professional ethics is to provide a living, collectively agreed, overarching governance framework for a profession. This framework can occur in the forms of codes; education and training; supervision, and; complaint and discipline mechanisms for members. This will be discussed in further details throughout the report.

### 3.3 The Youth Sector in the ACT

The youth sector in the ACT is made up of a diverse range non-government; government; and private practitioners, volunteers, programs, services and organisations who work with young people or have been established to benefit young people.

The sector is funded by several sources including the ACT and Federal Governments; and private and philanthropic sources. The sector provides a range of services such as art, sport and recreation; education and training; case work and management; and personal support; housing and health.

We understand that the youth sector in the ACT is loosely defined and inclusive by nature. That presents both benefits and challenges. The best available definition of the youth sector is available through *The Big Red Book: A Handbook and Directory for People who work with Young People in the ACT* regularly produced by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. This resource profiles almost 100 programs and services in the ACT and makes brief reference to almost 50 others. However the profile of the workforce within these services is not available. It is extremely difficult to progress development initiatives, such as this Project, without this information.

Depending upon how one chooses to see the sector, for example whether or not government services are included, very much determines how to go forward with future discussions of professional ethics and youth work in the ACT. It was agreed early on that the Project would be inclusive of all individuals, programs, and services who worked with young people. Individuals self-selected to participate in Project activities or were approached as identified by key stakeholders.

Evidence shows that high quality services delivered by a skilled and confident workforce are essential to making a meaningful and lasting impact on young people's lives. It is well known that young people have to think highly of workers and services if they are to engage with opportunities that are both interesting and beneficial.

In order to conduct further quality improvement work, such as the recommendations in this report, we have to know who the youth workers are in the ACT, where they are based, and what their professional profile is.

A key challenge for the sector is to identify how to ensure that appropriately skilled and knowledgeable youth workers are based in local services which are designed and delivered to provide opportunities and services that both engage young people and improve their outcomes.

Continuing to drive up quality service provision in the youth sector means enabling more effective coordination and delivery of services by professionals from across the non-government, government and private parts of the youth

sectors; and to supporting and developing the workforce to employ the very best practice in working with young people. This inherently includes professional ethics.

## 4. About the Project

This section of the report describes the Project's purpose, target groups, team model, context, and methodology.

### 4.1 Purpose

The aim of the Project was:

*To develop, promote and support professional ethical understandings and practice in youth work in the ACT.*

The objectives of the Project were:

- To identify and analyse key ethical issues involved in working with young people;
- To better define the value and nature of youth work;
- To develop ways to embed these ethical understandings in youth work practice training and on-going professional development;
- To help raise this understanding of the nature and value of youth work in related government and non-government services and in the youth sector generally; and,
- To develop mechanisms for ongoing collaboration and dialogue between youth workers, services and key stakeholders to facilitate the on-going development of ethical understanding and practice in working with young people.

The Project sought to achieve this:

- Through ongoing seminars, discussion and collaboration with youth workers and services to further develop a model of professional ethics of youth work in the ACT; and
- By building on the work already done in developing codes of ethics for youth workers and youth work more generally.

The Project was small, equivalent to 1.5 days per week, and was funded by the Youth Coalition of the ACT with in-kind support from the Project Team. In the later part of 2009, the Youth Coalition of the ACT identified additional resources to commission this report, again with in-kind Project Team support.

## 4.2 Target Groups

The Project's target groups were individuals and groups in the ACT who identify under the following titles as:

- Youth workers;
- Youth services;
- The youth sector; and
- People who work with young people.

## 4.3 Team Model

The Project Team comprised of:

- Dr. Dean Cocking, an expert in professional ethics, based at the University of New South Wales; and
- Carrie Fowlie, an ACT youth policy and sector development specialist, and former youth worker, based at the Youth Coalition of the ACT.

Kylie Cocking, a social researcher and community work practitioner, also provided significant in-kind support in developing this report. Youth Coalition of the ACT staff provided invaluable insights and practical support, including organising seminars and workshops, and promoting the Project throughout the sector. The Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University, provided invaluable participation at the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium*.

The collaboration between the youth sector; the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the peak body for youth affairs); a practitioner; and a professional ethicist to design and implement the Project represents a unique partnership. This approach offered a collaborative pathway towards further developing professional ethics and youth work both in the ACT and nationally. This partnership also provided a model of best practice that relied upon processes of collaboration, cross-disciplinary / occupational partnerships, expert knowledge and professional / practitioner input.

## 4.4 Context

In 1997, after some fifteen years of debate and discussion, the West Australian youth sector led Australia in developing a draft Code of Ethics for Youth Work. The code was produced after extensive consultation by youth researcher, Dr Howard Sercombe.

The youth sector in the ACT had been part of those vigorous debates and over several years conferences, drafts, panels, debates and forums occurred. In 2003 the Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT) was agreed to by the sector and launched at the Youth Coalition of the ACT's biannual conference.

This code of ethics, modelled closely on the West Australian code, provided an early foundation for identifying what might be the distinctive values, goals and aspirations of youth work in the ACT. Some core values identified were:

- Regarding young people as the ‘primary client’;
- Regarding young people as ‘competent to make their own choices’; and,
- The importance of ‘empowering’ young people.

This Project commenced with a view to up-dating and developing the original statement of a Code of Ethics for Youth Work in the ACT. However, it soon became clear that the code and understanding of what its key values meant in practice required significant analysis and revision. The key values were open to varied and conflicting interpretations and these conflicting views were common across the youth sector.

Understanding and developing mechanisms for improving ethical and professional practice in any occupational area needs to work across a range of fronts. The development and on-going revision of a code of ethics is one important, initial front. However, a code needs to become ‘embedded’ in occupational practice if it is to be effective – and this implicates a much bigger picture concerning how youth workers and related services might work together to develop mechanisms for ongoing dialogue and development of stronger youth work practice in the ACT.

#### **4.5 Methodology**

The initial aim of the Project was to review the code of ethics and undertake a literature review. This initial undertaking soon revealed disparity across the literature and a lack of consensus with regard to how the broad values of youth work translate into practice. The literature also revealed that this area of inquiry (professional ethics and youth work) is in its early development and is often not well understood.

Analysis of the existing Code of Ethics for Youth Work (ACT) and interviews with key informants soon established that the code had not wholly achieved its aims, nor had it fully identified or articulated the key values distinctive of youth work.

These findings helped shape the overall design and methodology of the Project. In particular, the Project sought to build on the collaborative partnership model (between a professional ethicist, a youth worker, the peak body for youth affairs, and the youth sector); and by adopting an action research approach. This approach places particular emphasis on participatory and dialectic inquiry, collaborative endeavours and shared learning. Adopting a holistic approach to this inquiry – as opposed to a single method

of data collection – the Project was able to incorporate a range of methods, common to qualitative research paradigms.

These methods included:

- Literature review;
- Youth sector workshops;
- Interviews with key stakeholders;
- Consultations with youth workers;
- An end of Project symposium; and
- Cross-sector collaboration and partnerships.

Please see Appendix 1 for a list of stakeholders engaged in the Project; Appendix 2 for an overview of Project activities; and Appendix 3 for the Project symposium agenda.

The Project questions were concerned with examining the nature of youth work, identifying the values attached to youth work and the guiding aims or goals of youth work. Such questions also considered how youth work practice might best be guided, developed and made accountable to its proper nature, values and goals.

## 5. Some Key Findings and Theoretical Developments

This section describes some key findings of the Project Team, particularly as they relate to the Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT) and the delivery of other ethico-professional supports to strengthen youth work practice in the ACT.

### 5.1 Introducing the Findings

The findings from the Project demonstrate a clear need to continue the momentum of promoting professional ethical practices and awareness across the youth sector in the ACT. There is significant interest from workers to see a range of initiatives developed that better promote ethical understandings across the delivery of youth services. In particular, the sector would like to see a revised code of ethics and other mechanisms developed and embedded across the ACT.

Our overall analysis suggests that while there are exciting theoretical developments and the literature demonstrates an emerging recognition of the importance of ethico-professional sensibilities across youth work practice, this has not yet translated to a coherent code of ethical practice or to the sector more widely. We understand that across Australia there is a degree of ambivalence and uncertainty about some key issues of professional identity for this occupation. Hopefully the upcoming publication, by the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, *Concepts and Methods of Youth Work*, volume one of three volumes in the *Doing Youth Work in Australia series*, edited by Rob White for the youth work sector, will progress some of this understanding. However a key challenge for the ACT youth sector is how to progress these understandings through systematic local development and action.

Neuroscience, trauma studies, child and youth development, youth studies and ethics are all areas where information and new research offers exciting new developments and understandings for the youth sector. This rapidly emerging information has clear implications for the way in which youth work can be understood, shaped and practiced.

Our findings, and recommendations in Section 6, reflect awareness of these emerging trends and information sources where they have clear purchase in relation to understanding the nature of youth work in the ACT. For instance, understandings concerning, say adolescent development, have clear implications for the way in which certain key youth work values, such as dependence, autonomy and empowerment (of the client), ought to be interpreted and so understood and applied by youth workers across individual cases.

## 5.2 Developing the Core Values of Youth Work

The Project focused on the practical realities of youth work to show how better understanding the nature of the work and its key guiding concerns can practically inform and guide its practice.

However, in order to identify the professional standards and accountability mechanisms appropriate to youth work in the ACT we first needed to identify the nature, values and goals of youth work. The current Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT) identifies the following as key core values:

- The young person as the primary client;
- The young person as competent to make their own choices; and,
- The importance of empowering young people.

As part of the Project we conducted a number of sector-based workshops which involved an examination of how these core values were interpreted across different cases. Often the answers were not straightforward and were open to conflicting interpretation and judgement. Below we have provided some examples of these variances.

### 5.2.1 *'Primary Client'*

The first value of the existing code of ethics frames the young person as the youth worker's 'primary client'. It became apparent that in practice there were several ways in which this value was interpreted, two common examples included:

1. A youth worker primarily regards the concerns and the interests of the young person holistically and critically. They support the young person to identify options, resources and support; and they do this through working with the young person to critically reflect on their individual circumstances and context; and provide practical supports.
2. A youth worker understands this value as a licence to not engage with other workers / supports / systems involved with the young person or with the young person's family. They advocate for the young person's views without critically reflecting on the consequences, positive or negative, with the young person; and they do not work with other stakeholders.

The second interpretation represents a clear misunderstanding and reflects a narrow appreciation of the young person's interests and concerns, such as the exclusion of other key considerations (i.e. family, school and other supports). It also assumes that young people live in a vacuum and that their interests and needs are not embedded in a range of family / social systems that may require a range of responses.

Here too, simple problems with interpretation concerning primacy of the client also have practical implications. For example, it can reflect siloed approaches; introduce problems of duplication of supports or services; promote a lack of communication and coordination; and contribute to a lack of common understanding regarding the nature of the young person's / client's concerns. Such problems with interpretation also implicate a range of concerns to do with confidentiality and the privacy of the young person and how these values might be respected.

### 5.2.3 *'Empowerment'*

Similar variances of interpretation may be said about the other core values in the code of ethics, for example, the interpretations of 'empowerment'. It was agreed that 'empowerment' was essential to good youth work practice. However, many individuals found it difficult to explain what was meant by the value 'empowerment' and how this looks within the practice of youth work.

Workers who had been in the youth work field for several years were able to articulate how empowerment was embedded in their practice, which included critical reflection with the young person; embedding living skills into all aspects of their work; clearly explaining situations and options (or lack of) to the young person; being honest, reliable, consistent and accountable; working with young people to identify their strengths and resources and to build upon them; and supporting young people to access information, support and resources to make decisions.

However, some workers expressed frustration in not being able to put 'empowerment' into practice within their occupational setting - as many were based within programs, services or structures that were not youth work specific or young people focused.

They therefore had to advocate for systemic and structural changes, even within their own teams, whilst doing their practice. It is acknowledged that addressing systems power imbalances is a value reflected in the current code of ethics. However, this created a range of challenges for workers, particularly articulating the importance, significance and difference of youth work practice to other professional roles. Youth work does not have the professional status of other professions; and youth workers do not have an agreed canon to provide justificatory grounds for their interpretations and judgments. Therefore individuals often struggled to advocate for their youth work practice and what, in their professional judgment, support young people may need / want.

Others experienced significant challenges in understanding how 'empowerment' looks in practice and, almost as a default position, it was often understood in terms of not creating situations of dependence (i.e. the young person forming dependency upon the youth worker or service). This interpretation was often passed down through services and workers; and was frequently reinforced by program criteria, culture, structure, funding contracts and guidelines, such as young people only being able to access a service for three months despite an identified need and no alternative options.

Many workers did not have the mechanisms in place to foster critical reflection of how their practice or service models may or may not reflect the values of youth work. For example, if a young person requires emergency relief more than once a month (as say determined in the organisational policy), and the resources are available, why are these resources then not made available to the young person? Often the justification to cases such as this was not based on an individual assessment of benefit and harm, but rather not wanting to foster 'dependence' of the young person on the resources.

These expectations are clearly not realistic, as often the young people in question had no, or limited, alternative access to resources – and it is unclear how denying young people practical support fosters 'independence'.

The failure of workers / supports / systems to take appropriate interest or to provide various practical supports upon which young people depend will invariably not empower them towards independence – except perhaps in dysfunctional and undesirable ways.

Alternatively, supporting young people to foster positive *inter-dependent* relationships; alternative and / or supplementary access to resources; and actively supporting their transition from services into other services and / or non-service based relationships; may be outcomes that better reflect the core values of youth work.

A clear challenge for the youth sector in the ACT is to develop structures and mechanisms by which values, such as empowerment, can be translated into in practice. The recommendations in this report provide a framework for this, and therefore would enable youth workers to have the tools available to them to engage in ethical decision-making and for them to then be accountable to these.

### **5.3 The Complexity and Diversity of Youth Work**

Such problems to do with interpretation are not made any easier by the territory of youth work itself. Youth work is not a straightforward practice. Definitions of what constitutes youth work are typically open to dispute and lack of clarity (i.e. Is someone who hosts an after school basketball program for young people at the local gym a youth worker?).

Unfortunately, the answer was sometimes yes and sometimes no. Often how youth work was regarded depended upon the program, service or organisation within which it was based – not necessarily upon the practice itself.

Alternatively, the understanding of youth work was based upon the individual - for example 'Sam' is a youth worker and therefore practices youth work in all settings. Both of these scenarios present inconsistencies and challenges for the sector.

It was therefore, a necessary outcome of the Project to clarify just what constitutes the nature of youth work. In doing so, it became clear that one of the defining aspects of youth work is that young people do have specific and specialised needs and warrant specific and specialised (i.e. professional) support.

The range of complex concerns, needs and issues that typically featured across youth work cases – in particular the need for the youth worker to promote positive practical and therapeutic outcomes for their clients – also requires some specialisation (education and training) of youth workers to better serve in this complex and diverse sector.

Youth work is a highly complex and diverse occupational area. For example, youth workers are expected to have a working understanding of a range of discrete and generalised needs and issues to do with young people. They are also expected to have practical skill sets, particularly being able to engage with the young person and their family / support structures. This can and often does implicate a host of issues, such as housing, education, health, family, friends, community, safety, etc. Added to this is the often significant amount of time (in many cases, years) required to effectively engage and work with some young people.

These complexities are compounded by the often time-limited nature of youth services; with youth workers therefore finding themselves in particularly challenging contexts where young people may not be receiving the support they need / want.

As such, the nature and role of youth work is atypically broad in scope and complexity when compared to other occupational groups. For example, youth work is unlike the dentist or nurse whose occupational interests are usually limited to their patient's dental or health care needs. In contrast, youth work and the complexity that attaches to youth work is both broader in scope, often including safety, legal, health and a raft of other issues, and of a specific sort given its focus on young people. On both counts it is quite distinct from other occupational areas or sectors.

This distinctive nature is further complicated by the fact that young people are not yet fully autonomous, independent people in their own right. As such, while a young person may be the youth worker's primary concern, their rights, interests and needs will typically intersect, or even conflict with, the rights, interests and responsibilities of parents, carers, services, institutions, or the State.

As mentioned earlier, ethico-professional developments in youth work are still in development and much of our discussion with the sector reveals key problems to do with:

- The minimal or nominal entry requirements, qualifications or credentials that typically attach to youth work;
- The lack of a professional association or agreed set of professional education standards;
- The lack of a governing / regulatory body or system of accreditation;
- How to identify and interpret the core values distinctive of youth work;
- The lack of coherence and consensus concerning the nature of youth work and identification of the key values and aspirations of youth work;
- How this lack of clarity works to prevent the elucidation of a distinct professional identity; and
- Intra and inter-sectoral and public confusion concerning the role of youth workers.

Youth workers are rarely considered 'experts' in their area, yet they are frequently expected to effectively engage with some of our most vulnerable young people. These young people might be experiencing homelessness, mental health, and / or alcohol and other drug issues; living away from their families and support structures; based in correctional facilities; be in situations of domestic or family violence; or located in residential settings.

The very nature of this work implicates a range of skill sets (importantly both practical skills and appropriate therapeutic understandings) that youth workers must competently possess if they are to properly engage the values of youth work and undertake the purpose of their role.

Our findings suggest therefore that youth work is an area that requires a broad and demanding range of professional knowledge and *practical skill* - especially in regards to being able to relate well with young people.

Youth work is an area that features great complexity and diversity and so requires specific and discrete expert knowledge and skill to professionally meet the vast and varied interests of young people.

## **5.4 Ethics and the Professionalising of Occupations**

Applied ethical investigations into occupational areas are typically concerned with identifying and articulating the distinctive nature and key values attached to each occupation.

However, understanding and developing an appropriate professional ethic for any particular occupational area is not a 'one size fits all' enterprise. Many occupational areas have significant ethical, socially institutionalised purposes, such as within medicine (to promote human health) and law (to promote justice and legal rights).

However, as we have indicated, the issue of professionalising the youth work sector is much more in its emerging days and so is open to misinterpretation. There has been some resistance across the sector in response to calls to better professionalise youth work. Concerns typically highlighted problems of formality; the inadequacies to the task of purely educational / tertiary requirements; power imbalances (between young person / client and worker); and problems to do with elitism and exclusivity.

We addressed these concerns through Project workshops and the symposium (though, due to limited resources, not sufficiently in this report) and as such we set out below a proposed holistic integrity system for the youth work sector in the ACT.

Such a system, we argue, would offset many of the expressed objections / concerns associated with professionalising youth work, through the incorporation of key design features that emphasise accountability, reporting and monitoring mechanisms. And which also, most importantly, recognise the varied set of practical skills that are central to good youth work practice.

## **5.5 Developing a Holistic Integrity System for Youth Work**

A code of professional ethics for an occupation is about setting out the distinctive key values, goals and aspirations of the particular occupational area. For example, the promotion of justice and / or our legal rights is a central value and aspiration of the legal profession. However, those in the legal profession need to be able to put such values and aspirations into practice. And this requires relevant skills of judgement and interpretation of how best to do so in particular cases.

How well one might be able to put the values and aspirations of youth work into practice similarly depends upon having well developed sensibilities of relevant professional interpretation and judgment. This is how, for instance, values such as empowering young people must also be put into practice in particular situations.

Key findings from the end of the Project's symposium point to a distinct need to design and shape a range of professional ethical mechanisms (in conjunction with a revised code of ethics) to better support such professional interpretation and judgement. For example, regular sessions between mentors and youth workers could be developed; more dialogue about ethical and professional ethics in youth work within services could be encouraged; and practical placements for training youth workers could be developed to better embed the practical skill base of youth work.

Simple codified ethics or rules of conduct do not in themselves engender or embed ethical understandings or practices. We cannot regulate ethics into existence, nor expect an ethical code to do all the educative work, or provide ready answers to cover every unforeseen event or possibility. In order to better embed the occupational goals, values and aspirations reflected in a code of ethics it is necessary to also develop better on-going ethical, professional education, training and development opportunities to complement and reflect the key values and aspirations that have given rise to the agreed upon code.

A holistic integrity system for the youth work sector would look at the overall loose assemblage of relevant laws, institutions, policies, regulations, monitoring bodies and collaborative arrangements that together make up the delivery of services in the youth work sector. This assemblage, working together well, forms the overall integrity system for the delivery of services for young people that works to promote stronger, ethical practice. A code of ethics then, forms one important component in this overall design for improved practice.

Such a design seeks to avoid siloed approaches through collaborative and accountability systems; and processes that promote information sharing, transparency, professional development and better directed ethical practices. The design would also be concerned to develop / embed the right kinds of values and understandings more broadly across the occupational culture.

Key design features we found should be considered in developing an integrity system for youth work would entail:

- A code of conduct (more prescriptive than a code of ethics);
- Articulated service policies and procedures (including between services);
- Partnership agreements and memorandums of understanding;
- Interagency / service collaboration;
- Information sharing protocols;
- A code of ethics;
- Conduct, complaints and discipline procedures;
- Commitment to reporting, monitoring and accountability practices;
- Supervision and mentoring;
- An oversighting / governing professional structure;

- Training and professional development, in particular with a practical placement focus; and
- Professional accreditation.

There is a need for the proper use of relevant ethico-professional skills. Notably, capacities to identify and analyse issues and problems in individual and often complex cases in the area of youth work. The proper exercise of these capacities involves the need for significant professional autonomy, interpretation and discretion.

It also strongly implicates good supervision and mentoring practices. Effectively identifying and responding to a young person's needs or concerns depends upon individual workers and their organisation being properly guided and informed by the relevant occupational sensibilities, understandings, values and interpretations.

An integrity system in this area should therefore be concerned to give primacy to such features of the occupational role and how they can be designed to promote greater professional integrity and ethical consistency across all spheres of youth work practice.

In summary, fundamental ethical values provide justificatory grounds for interpretation and judgment and so are crucial to developing decision-making procedures about how to put the values specific to youth work into better practice. The right mix of ethical, professional mechanisms in accord with the nature of youth work and the values underscoring it represent a best practice model for youth work in the ACT.

Therefore, in light of the need to better embed the ethical nature, values and goals of an occupational area in to practice, it is clear why the Project had to develop broader purchase than just the focus on up-dating and revising the Code of Ethics for Youth Work (ACT).

## **5.6 The Professional Alliance: The Centrality of a Certain Kind of Relationship in Youth Work**

Our findings, along with the literature, strongly suggest that the professional alliance (between the youth worker and the young person who is their client) plays a crucial role in the promotion of positive client outcomes. This is not a new or recent finding. Common factors literature and psychology have long espoused the therapeutic relationship as a key factor in promoting successful client outcomes.

While other factors can also play a key role in the promotion of successful outcomes (such as the young person themselves, their family, friends, community, etc.) a successful working relationship between a youth worker and their client is typically crucial and will rely significantly upon time, trust, reciprocity of feeling and genuine engagement.

Young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable, can be difficult to engage. Being able to connect with a young person and to maintain their engagement over time requires significant interpersonal or relational skills. It also requires (on the part of the young person) a willingness to engage and a perception of their youth worker as dependable, trustworthy, approachable and useful. But what sort of relational skills should youth workers be concerned with, and how might such skills be employed and promoted?

Our findings suggest that in light of the overwhelming research that points to the significant benefits derived from positive client / worker relationships or alliances, the youth sector can actively seek ways to better illuminate and highlight the key attributes of the positive working alliance. A key attribute of the positive alliance is the development of relational or interpersonal skills. This has enormous practical application for the sector and for on-going training and development.

Relational skills, including empathy, attending, care, humour and concern can all be fostered through core relational activities, namely peer mentoring, supervision and on the job training / guidance. Relational skills need to be developed in relation with others and with strong guidance from those with more experience, skill or qualifications. Watching how others interact, how they handle confrontation, awkwardness, strong emotions and so forth is crucial to the transference of such practical skills to those with less experience or confidence.

The territory of youth work is not only broad and complex but also requires engagement that is relatively unusual across professional roles. For example, one's lawyer does not need to show an interest in how one is feeling - but a youth worker does. Moreover, they typically need to do more than just show it. Usually, in an occupational sense, for the relationship to work they will actually need to care or be interested. This is why we give some primacy in our recommendations to the practical skill base of youth work and the need for any training and accreditation programs to reflect this.

We believe that recognising the practical skill base of youth work significantly helps to address the scepticism of many in the sector about formalised accreditation systems for youth work. This scepticism is rightly placed - as formal educational approaches can be limited because to be good at working with young people a youth worker has to be able *to relate to young people*. This skill base may come from varied backgrounds.

The mixed nature of the role also muddies the waters for defining the scope of the professional role. It is, for instance, commonly objected of the youth worker "What are they doing having coffee at the shops... acting like friends?" However, youth work is neither about being friends with clients nor well captured by more narrow, circumscribed accounts of professional responsibilities typical in other occupational areas. To help clear up such

misunderstandings, the complexity of the territory of youth work and the need to form relationships involving some levels of broad concern and interest in the client need to be identified and further highlighted.

Youth work requires a holistic approach to meeting what are typically complex client needs and being able to do so with appropriate levels of engagement and interest.

## **5.7 Revision of the Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT)**

One of the early outcomes associated with the Project has been the identification of conflicting, contested and confused understandings associated with the core values of youth work. There is no universal agreement with respect to the identification of these core values, nor is there consensus across the sector with respect to how any or all of the values might be interpreted and applied in practice.

In addition to the problem of diverse and conflicting interpretations of the key values identified in the current code, these values as they are, do not distinguish youth work from many other occupational areas. For instance, the primacy of the client, as articulated in the current code of ethics is identified as the core distinctive value of youth work. In addition to the fact of commonly conflicting interpretations of what this means in some standard sorts of cases, the real problem is that the value of regarding those to whom one provides certain occupational or professional services as one's primary focus is not distinctive of youth work. For example:

One's lawyer is expected to give primacy to one's legal interests and rights; and one's general practitioner is expected to give primacy to one's health needs. In these fields, the core value of primacy or partiality to the interests of one's client is given some specific substantive content (i.e. it is focused on legal and health interests respectively).

However, this more substantive content about what primacy of the client in youth work means is simply not reflected in the current articulation of the Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT). Where primacy of the client is regarded as a core distinctive value of youth work, then it follows that the sector needs to provide some specific, substantive content to better capture what is distinctive about the nature and value of giving primacy to the client in youth work – just as the medical, legal and other professions have done.

Similar comments may be said about the other related key core values currently outlined in the Code of Ethics for Youth Work (ACT). The various workshop discussions held throughout the Project usefully highlighted problems in interpretation across all the values outlined, and again, like the primacy of the client, none of these values as they stand, are distinctive of youth work. It is then clear that the current Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT)

requires significant development within the context of the development of additional ethico – professional mechanisms for the youth sector in the ACT.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Project* conducted with the ACT youth sector in 2008. They relate to the ethico-professional development of youth work by developing a holistic integrity system for youth work in the ACT. We therefore recommend:

1. That a Committee is established to lead and oversee the development of youth work practice in the ACT, which would include: broad membership from non-government and government representatives (including frontline workers); a terms of reference; secretariat and project management support; specific funding; a workplan; a governance and reporting structure; and the implementation of these recommendations.
2. That a comprehensive workforce profile be conducted of the youth sector so as to better define the nature and extent of the youth work workforce, its professional and qualification profile, to support youth sector workforce planning and development initiatives, such as these recommendations.
3. That industry collaborations and partnerships are enhanced or procured with tertiary institutions, such as the Australian Catholic University and the Canberra Institute of Technology, to strengthen syllabus design and assist in the accreditation / training process and other initiatives to better professionalise youth work in the ACT.
4. That the Project's best practice approach to ethico-professional development, which used collaborative, cross-disciplinary/occupational partnerships including expert knowledge and professional/practitioner input, be utilised for the further development of the youth sector, including the implementation of these recommendations.
5. That 'buy in' is sought from the youth sector, the ACT Government, leadership groups, such as the Youth Coalition of the ACT, to design, fund and implement a holistic integrity system for youth work in the ACT with particular emphasis given to professional autonomy, interpretation and discretion. This would include:
  - 5.1 The revision of the current Youth Work Code of Ethics (ACT) – including the identification and analysis of the core youth work values.
  - 5.2 The development of a youth work code of conduct (more prescriptive than a code of ethics); to complement the suite of accountability mechanisms available to the overall design of the holistic integrity system.

- 5.3 The development and design of effective and consistent complaints and discipline procedures at professional, sectoral and organisational levels.
  - 5.4 The development and design of professional entry requirements in consultation and partnership with key stakeholders, while giving primacy to the practical skill base of youth work and so, for example, requiring significant placement training / on-the-job training.
  - 5.5 The design of education, training and on-going professional development opportunities and resources for the youth workers in collaboration with key stakeholders, including other occupational groups/disciplines.
  - 5.6 The design of mechanisms for supervision, mentoring, monitoring and reporting practices, including to independent bodies and young people / 'client' representation.
6. That youth work skill development, with a particularly focus on relational skill development, be promoted and embedded in training and practice opportunities across the youth sector through:
    - 6.1 The development of peer mentoring, supervision and professional development, including on-the-job training, workshops, conferences, and student placements within the youth sector;
    - 6.2 The further development of youth sector organisational policies and procedures; and
    - 6.3 The strengthening and formalising of interdisciplinary collaborations between the youth sector, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the ACT Government and tertiary institutions.
  7. That professional ethics become embedded in existing core youth sector activities, such as the Youth Coalition of the ACT's eBulletin and monthly forum; and other professional development opportunities.
  8. That regular promotion and advancement of professional ethics and youth work practice are undertaken through regular Youth Coalition of the ACT, and other sector-wide, seminars, workshops and conferences and through other opportunities for collaborative engagement and development.
  9. That opportunities to promote skill sharing and sector collaboration of youth workers with other disciplines/occupations such as policing, juvenile justice, care and protection services, alcohol and other drug, mental health services, etc, are developed through:

- 9.1 The increasing establishment of collaborative partnering, shared case management and case conferences;
- 9.2 The development of collaborative service agreements and protocols, such as Memorandums of Understanding, between programs, services, individuals and government departments.
10. That additional complementing targeted strategies, such as e-lists and blogs, are developed to reduce the professional isolation of youth workers based in non youth work settings.
11. That regular seminars, workshops and other engagement activities aimed at youth workers in particular, and the human services sector in general, are conducted to promote greater awareness of the breadth, complexity and values of youth work.
12. That mechanisms are developed to evaluate, monitor and report upon the implementation of these recommendations.

## 7. Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this report, the youth sector in the ACT has significant strengths upon which to build in order to address the challenges of ethico-professional development in youth work.

The findings from the Project demonstrate a clear need to continue the momentum of promoting professional ethical practices and awareness across the youth sector in the ACT. There is significant interest from the workers to see a range of initiatives developed that better promote ethical understandings across the delivery of youth services. In particular, the sector would like to see a revised code of ethics and other mechanisms be developed and embedded across the ACT.

Our findings and recommendations implicate a range of undertakings and future commitment from the youth sector, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, the ACT Government, and tertiary institutions if they are to come to fruition. This commitment to action and development must also be accompanied by appropriate resourcing.

The integration of the sort of ethical, professional mechanisms outlined in this report would then work together to provide an overall integrity system for accountable, ethical and professional practice in youth work in the ACT.

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Stakeholders engaged in the Project

142 individuals participated in the Project through interviews, consultations, workshops, seminars and a symposium. The stakeholders held a range of positions including youth worker, educator, lecturer, researcher, manager / coordinator, Chief Executive Officer. We would like to acknowledge and thank the 44 programs and services that participated in the Project, including:

1. ACT Alcohol and Other Drug Sector Project, Youth Coalition of the ACT
2. ACT Mental Health Consumer Network
3. AIDS Action Council
4. Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
5. Australian National University
6. AXIS Youth Centre Queanbeyan
7. Barnardos Transition Program
8. Canberra Institute of Technology
9. Canberra Youth Refuge
10. Community Education, University of Canberra
11. CYCLOPS ACT, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
12. Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Government
13. Domestic Violence Crisis Service
14. Galilee School, Galilee Inc
15. Gungahlin Youth Centre, Gungahlin Regional Community Services
16. headspace ACT
17. Homelinx, CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn
18. Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
19. JPET
20. Junction Youth Health Service, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
21. Lowana Youth Services
22. Messengers Program, Tuggeranong Arts Centre
23. Multicultural Youth Services
24. Mura Lanyon Youth Centre, YWCA of Canberra
25. Navigate, YWCA of Canberra
26. Northside Community Service
27. Pegasus Riding for the Disabled
28. Reconnect, CatholicCare Canberra and Goulburn
29. SCOPE Youth Service, YWCA of Canberra
30. Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT
31. Southside Community Service
32. Streets, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
33. TANDEM
34. Ted Noffs Foundation
35. Tuggeranong Youth Centre, Communities @ Work

36. U-Turn Youth Services, Belconnen Community Service
37. University of Canberra
38. Urayarra Program, Galilee Inc
39. Weston Creek Youth Centre, Communities @ Work
40. Woden Youth Centre, Woden Community Services
41. YARDS, Canberra Institute of Technology
42. Youth Coalition of the ACT
43. Youth Education Program, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn
44. Youth in the City, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn

## Appendix 2: Overview of Project activities

The information below describes the Project activities conducted with the youth sector in the ACT. Ten key activities were conducted, including:

1. Project Initiation and Project Team Establishment
2. Literature Review
3. Key Informant Interviews
4. Workshops and Seminars
5. Stakeholder Evaluations and Project Review
6. Contribution towards Developing the Core Skill Set of Youth Work
7. Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium Background Paper
8. Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium
9. Professional Ethics and Youth Work: A Model for Strengthening Youth Work Practice in the ACT Report (this document)
10. Professional Ethics and Youth Work: A Model for Strengthening Youth Work Practice in the ACT - Report Launch and Seminar

A brief description of each activity is provided below.

### 1. *Project Initiation and Project Team Establishment*

In January 2008, with the support of the youth sector, the Youth Coalition of the ACT (the peak body for youth affairs) initiated a small twelve-month project to investigate the role of ethics in youth work and to progress ethical understanding and practice in youth work in the ACT. A project team was established which included Dr. Dean Cocking, an expert in professional ethics based at the University of New South Wales; and Carrie Fowlie, a specialist in ACT youth policy and sector development, and former youth worker, based at the Youth Coalition of the ACT.

This unique partnership provided a model of best practice that relied upon processes of collaboration, cross-disciplinary / occupational partnerships, expert knowledge and professional / practitioner input. A Project terms of reference and Project plan were developed; and limited funding was provided by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. The in-kind contributions of the Project team and the Youth Coalition of the ACT complemented this funding.

### 2. *Literature Review*

The Project was initiated following the first national youth affairs conference in ten years, *Are We There Yet?* ([www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)) in May 2007, where youth work and ethics were key themes. It was therefore determined that the Project had to review relevant literature and developments in the field, particularly the work that had been conducted by the youth affairs peak bodies in Australia over the past decade.

During February and March 2008 the Project Team conducted a literature review, which included a review and identification of previous work that had been conducted in the area of youth work and ethics; and a review of general youth work and professional ethics material.

### 3. *Key Informant Interviews*

From March – May 2008 the Project conducted semi-structured face-to-face key informant interviews. Key informants were identified through discussions with youth sector stakeholders; and the Project Team and the Youth Coalition of the ACT's networks. These youth sector experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, provided insight on the nature of youth work and ethics and gave recommendations for progressing the Project.

The interviews enabled the Project to collect qualitative in-depth information, engage in a free-exchange of ideas, and lend itself to asking more complex questions and getting more detailed responses. A wide range of individuals participated, including current and former youth workers, academics, managers, policy-makers and other professionals, who had first hand knowledge about youth work practice in the ACT.

Fourteen key informants participated in interviews that lasted between 1 – 3 hours.

### 4. *Workshops and Seminars*

From June to November 2008 the Project conducted 7 workshops and seminars with diverse stakeholders. These activities were developed and implemented through engaging with key stakeholders and utilising participatory action research methods. Participants were informed of Project activities and encouraged to participate through the Project Team and the Youth Coalition of the ACT's networks including the weekly eBulletin, monthly forum, and various working groups and forums.

Below is a brief summary of each of the workshops and seminars conducted with stakeholders. A total of 93 individuals from 26 programs and services participated. (See Appendix 1 for an overview of the stakeholders that participated in the Project.).

#### a) The Ethics of Youth Work: An Introductory Workshop (June 2008)

This workshop was conducted at a youth centre and aimed to begin dialogue with, and gain the contribution of, youth workers toward better defining the nature and value of youth work. It focused on some familiar examples and began to develop an account of better practice and of the values that might ground, and so guide, our work with young people.

Twelve workers attended the workshop, and an evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. A reflection of one participant was:

*"Ethics is basic in youth work. We have to think of a lot more than just one aspect of a problem."*

b) The Ethics of Youth Work: A Workshop Using Alcohol and Other Drugs Case Studies (June 2008)

As part of Drug Action Week 2008, this workshop was conducted at the Youth Coalition of the ACT to provide an opportunity for youth workers to discuss the ethics of youth work using alcohol and other drugs as case studies. Familiar examples were used to develop both better practice-based strategies and some understanding of the significant values or reasons that inform these strategies and working with young people more generally.

Twelve youth workers from diverse services that work with young people in the ACT participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. One participant reflected on the importance of the ethical dialogue to their practice was:

*"Communication within the sector inspires and empowers my personal service delivery."*

c) The Ethics of Youth Work: Professional Ethics and Youth Work 1 (July 2008)

This workshop focused on how we can understand professional ethics in relation to youth work. There has been significant scepticism in the sector about 'professionalising' youth work and the value of developing a 'code of ethics' for youth work; while also trying to develop better services, policies, practices and training for people who work with young people. This workshop looked at these concerns about how to identify, develop and embed better standards and practices for working with young people.

Fourteen workers from diverse services that work with young people in the ACT participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. A reflection of one participant on professional ethics and youth work was:

*"We need to work out how to teach more people the habit of good youth work."*

d) The Ethics of Youth Work: Professional Ethics and Youth Work 2 (July 2008)

This workshop was conducted at a youth service and focused on how we can understand professional ethics in relation to youth work. There is significant scepticism in the sector about 'professionalising' youth work and about the

value of developing a 'code of ethics' for youth work; while also trying to develop better services, policies, practices and training for people who work with young people. This workshop looked at these concerns about how to identify, develop and embed better standards and practices for working with young people.

Sixteen workers participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. Two participants reflected on the practical application of youth work:

*"It is important to learn how to look at ethics on a practical level."*

*"There needs to be more practical training for new youth workers."*

- e) The Ethics of Youth Work: Unpacking the Guiding Principles of Youth Work: "The Young Person as the Primary Client" (August 2008)

This workshop, conducted at the Youth Coalition of the ACT, focused on the guiding principles of youth work and sought to unpack principles such as "the young person as the primary client". How do we understand these principles? How do they relate to the ethics of youth work? How do these principles manifest in practice?

There has been significant scepticism in the sector about when, how, and in which contexts a young person can be the primary client. This workshop looked at these concerns about how to identify, develop and embed ethical standards and practices for working with young people.

Twelve workers from diverse services participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. One participant reflected on the 'greyness' of youth work:

*"Definitions of terms and roles are not explicit, what people's goals, etc are not explicit."*

Another participant reflected on the need to define youth work:

*"I am more informed about the need for development and discussion about the definitions of youth work."*

- f) The Ethics of Youth Work: Refining the Concepts 1 (September 2008)

This workshop was conducted at a youth service and focused on further refining our understandings of youth work and how it relates to professional ethics. This included discussing how the idea of the 'primacy of the client' is considered unique to youth work; and this relates to working with families.

There has been significant scepticism in the sector about when, how, and in which contexts a young person can be the primary client. This workshop looked at these concerns about how to identify, develop and embed ethical standards and practices for working with young people.

Thirteen workers from diverse services participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. One participant reflected on the challenges in explaining youth work:

*"We can vaguely articulate a sense of what it means to be a youth worker. Most [youth workers] seem to know what it means but have difficulty explaining it."*

g) The Ethics of Youth Work: Refining the Concepts 2 (October 2008)

This workshop was conducted at the Youth Coalition of the ACT and focused on further refining our understandings of youth work and how it relates to professional ethics. This included discussing the concepts of dependence, independence and inter-dependence.

There is debate in the sector as to what is meant by independence in the context of youth work practice. What does youth work mean by independence? How is independence and young people understood in the broader community? This workshop looked at these concerns about how to identify, develop and embed ethical standards and practices for working with young people.

Fourteen workers from diverse services participated in the workshop. An evaluation was conducted where positive feedback was received. Two participants reflected on the challenges youth work in the ACT is facing:

*"Complexity and importance of ethics in this field are very challenging."*

*"We need to learn how to look deeper into the ethics of youth work."*

5. *Stakeholder Evaluations and Project Review*

In order to ensure the sector was involved in the ongoing development and implementation of Project, informal and formal feedback was sought following each of the seven workshops and seminar; and opportunistically throughout the Project.

Workshop and seminar participants were actively involved in the development and delivery and were asked the four same questions following each session. Key themes began to emerge from these discussions, including:

- The value of sharing experiences, practice, successes and challenges with their peers;
- Building peer supports, including developing their practice experience;
- The lack of clarity regarding ethic's place within youth work and youth work's place in ethics; and
- The need for greater clarity, structures, and mechanisms to govern youth work.

Some examples of feedback and learnings from participants included:

*"It was great getting everyone else's thoughts and practices on youth work ethics."*

*"Was really useful to hear what other workers thought are about ethics."*

*"Ethics are not always clear cut."*

*"Ethics is not an easy matter."*

*"We're all in the same boat!"*

*"I got an even bigger understanding of the issues fused between various youth agencies and organisations."*

*"Common issues avail."*

*"Too many people call themselves "youth workers" but are only entertaining young people not working with them to improve their lives."*

*"Ethics is a minefield."*

*"It is interesting to learn that we all work in very similar ways."*

*"Hearing people's different views on youth worker roles was very interesting."*

*"I learnt a lot and it's difficult to put into words. Dean was fantastic and really gave me a lot to ponder and consider."*

*"I have increased awareness of the complexities of ethics."*

*"I am enlightened by the feedback of the youth workers."*

*"That basically all participants have similar ideas."*

*"Ethics shape a professional relationship that is built on trust and works to deliver the objectives and goals of the youth service."*

*"Exploring issues was really helpful."*

*"We have to stop working in silos and focus on the relationship with the young person."*

*"Youth work ethics is a VERY GREY AREA!"*

*"Its interesting that everyone basically focussed on the same streams of thought."*

*"General workplace ethics for youth workers needs to be developed."*

*"I appreciated learning and discussing everyone's opinion surrounding this topic."*

6. *Contribution towards the developing the core skill set of youth work*

Throughout the Project significant discussions took place in the sector regarding skill sets required for youth work and what opportunities were available to do so. It was identified that the available mechanisms, such as the Certificate IV in Youth Work, did not provide the skill set that youth workers, managers and organisations were looking for; and / or that the sector did not regard that as a valuable resource in its current form because graduates did not have the level of practical skills required to do their job, and significant on-the-job training (which was often unstructured) was required.

The Project engaged in several meetings with key stakeholders regarding its preliminary findings and how core skill sets and basic training interlink with a code of ethics for youth work and the further development of integrity systems.

7. *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium: Background Paper*

In November 2008 the Project Team developed a paper with the purpose of:

- Drawing together the theoretical developments identified through the Project to date; and
- Providing background information for participants of the Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium in December 2008.

This document was distributed throughout the sector through Youth Coalition of the ACT and other networks.

8. *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium*

In December the *Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium* was held and aimed to bring together a collective of experts in youth work practice in the ACT – both practitioners and researchers – to progress understandings of and the development of professional ethics and youth work. The symposium background paper discussed how youth work and youth workers in the ACT needed to ask themselves many questions. The purpose of the symposium was:

- To further engage youth workers and services in the development of professional ethics and youth work in the ACT;
- To raise awareness in youth workers of professional ethics and youth work;
- To contribute to the evidence base on professional ethics and youth work practice;

- To foster linkages between youth workers and researchers;
- To further incorporate practice based knowledge into the Project; and
- To further define and progress the Project.

35 workers from a range of government and non-government services participated through out the day. Please see Appendix 3 for the symposium agenda.

9. *Professional Ethics and Youth Work: A Model for Strengthening Youth Work Practice in the ACT - Report (this document)*

Please see Section 1 of this document for further information about this report. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, including the limited resources and capacity of the Project Team to engage with the initiative beyond 2008, this report could not be developed and completed until November 2009.

10. *Professional Ethics and Youth Work: A Model for Strengthening Youth Work Practice in the ACT – Report Launch and Seminar*

A launch of this report, which will include a seminar, is scheduled for February 2010.

### Appendix 3: Professional Ethics and Youth Work Symposium Agenda

Wednesday 3 December 2008

Agenda

Session 1	<b>Setting the Scene: Professional Ethics and Youth Work</b>
9am – 10:40am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome, introduction and background</li> </ul> Lecture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About professional ethics</li> <li>What have we learnt to date from the <i>Ethics of Youth Work Project</i>?</li> </ul>
10:40am – 11am: morning tea	
Session 2	<b>Defining Youth Work</b>
11am – 1pm	Panel discussion and workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the nature of youth work?</li> <li>What are the goals and values of youth work?</li> <li>What are the characteristics of youth work?</li> </ul>
1pm – 1:45pm: lunch	
Session 3	<b>Developing Ethical Decision-Making Procedures for Youth Work</b>
1:45pm – 3:15pm	Lecture and workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are ethical decision-making procedures?</li> <li>How do occupational areas develop and use decision-making procedures?</li> <li>What would be the key features of ethical decision-making procedures for youth work?</li> </ul>
3:15 – 3:30pm: afternoon tea	
Session 4	<b>Vision and Actions</b>
3:30pm – 5pm	Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is our vision for professional ethics and youth work?</li> <li>What are the challenges / barriers to making this vision a reality?</li> <li>What needs to happen to make this vision a reality?</li> <li>The next step</li> <li>Evaluation, acknowledgements and close</li> </ul>