



**What Young People Want:
Responses to a survey with young people
about Case Management**

Introduction

Case Management is a tool that is popularly used within ACT youth services to support young people with complex issues. With foundations in social work, and proven success in child protection, justice, health and mental health sectors, case management is commonly assumed to be the most effective support for young people – especially those deemed “at risk”.

Reflecting this belief, a majority of ACT youth services have, over the past 5 years, developed contracts with the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services to provide case management support whether they be centre-based, outreach or developmental in focus. Concurrently, SAAP services have also developed contracts that oblige service recipients to receive case management support alongside accommodation.

In 2003-4, the Youth Coalition of the ACT has been contracted to work with the local sector and young people in identifying how case management is being offered and the issues arising from its adoption. As part of its investigation, the Youth Coalition has spoken with young people who are currently engaged in, or have recently participated in case management processes to discover what they had experienced and how useful they found their engagement.

This paper draws together the major themes of these discussions as well as the findings of a number of focus groups that were held with young people around broader issues of service support. The Youth Coalition would like to thank Marshall I, Marshall II, Britney, Amy, Melissa, ‘C’, ‘D’, Aaron, Luke, Cassie, Lina and Jess. for their involvement in this project.

Defining Case Management

Most of the young people who were interviewed were aware of the term “case management” but weren’t exactly sure what it was. Some saw it as “them organising stuff for you” while others saw it as a “way of working out your problems”. One young person felt that case management was:

Dealing with a young person on a personal level where they have an assigned worker who looks at them as a person (‘D’, 18)

Though many did not define case management, this **personal aspect** of the tool was consistently identified.

That’s all some of them workers talk about! (Marshall II)

How young people were engaged in Case Management

Young people accessed case management services through a variety of mechanisms. Some were referred by parents, others by other services and others by request (after hearing from their peers the value of engaging in the process).

Many of the young people, however, reported that they first engaged in case management because they **wanted or needed support from a service** and felt that it was their only way of accessing:

When I went to the refuge you had to be case managed. To be there you had to have a problem or they’d kick you out (‘C’ 17)

They’re there to fix stuff – so they want to Case Manage you. Its your choice but if theres nothing wrong you get kicked out. That’s what they’re there for – and they don’t know what else to do except case manage you (Aaron, 14)

If you want something from them [the service] you have to do it (Cassie, 16)

Three young people weren't sure how they were referred; *"I didn't ask for it", "Someone just told me it would be good", "I dunno – I think they just got me to do it without asking"*.

Supports available

A range of supports were identified as being made available through case management including **budgeting, problem solving, "dealing with personal stuff", advocacy, "dealing with Centrelink" and finding accommodation.**

I got help with food and clothes; information about stuff I could get – help getting organised with centrelink again, help with school and stuff (Luke, 15)

Having someone to **support them in their "battles"** was also raised consistently:

There was a lady... who got to know me and fought for me not just because she was paid to but because she cared. She fought hard to make sure things were being done. She advocated strongly on my behalf (Melissa, 15)

Others felt that the support they received from their case managers gave them **"power"** – to find solutions, to deal with issues and to overcome the barriers they were facing.

Others valued the **opportunity to stop and reflect**: "he'd help me chill out and that's what I needed".

Young people also identified that they received a number of items through case management including shoes, money, pots and pans and "other stuff".

Things young people would have liked

Young people mentioned a number of things that they would have liked to have received through case management support. These included help **finding employment; help finding a better lifestyle; identifying options and someone to listen to their problems:**

Sometimes I just wanted someone to talk with me – not come up with ideas or solutions, just be there and listen so I could feel like someone was listening to me – not just my problems (Britney, 15)

Other young people wanted **someone they could rely on**, who would be available to them and to support them as they attempted to address the issues impacting on their lives:

Show me consideration and care – not just be about rules (Marshall II).

Things that young people didn't find useful

Young people were quite critical of a number of services and supports that they had received that did not meet their wants or needs.

In particular, young people articulated their concerns about supports, referrals and **decisions that were made without their involvement:**

One worker tried to get me to do family counselling because she thought it would be good for me. She just picked me up one day and took me there without telling me about it. But there was no way that it could work right then, and I knew that but she never asked. She just took me because she thought it “would be a good thing for you” (Lina, 16)

I've been taken to places and appointments thinking I was going to get some lunch or to see a movie. They were scared I wouldn't go so they lied to me (Aaron, 14)

On other occasions, young people were concerned that workers did not spend time with them identifying the real issues that were facing them or what parts of their lives they wanted to deal with:

Some workers tried to build a connection with me by being really harsh about my mother. They thought that would make it [our relationship] stronger. But it did the opposite – it made me not want to talk to them (Melissa, 15)

Young people found it disconcerting when their case plans were disorganised, or when a number of different workers from the same organization did things differently and in an unco-ordinated way:

There was a lack of consistency – everyone did everything different and I never knew what was going to happen. My life was already a mess and I needed some kind of order to be able to get it together (Amy, 16)

Young people also found it disconcerting when workers **focussed on the negatives**: the struggles and the difficulties without identifying solutions:

[I need] people who don't make a huge fuss or go 'poor kid'. Don't need sympathy – just need some help (Melissa, 15)

Young People and Decision Making

A large proportion of each of the interviews was focused on young people's involvement in decision-making. This was not because more questions were allocated to this area but because many of the young people were passionate about the topic and fed large amounts information into their responses.

Being involved in decision making was identified as being essential to positive case management support and young people reported being pleased in instances when they did participate:

I felt important. I felt like she [the worker] was listening to me. It made me feel better than I had in ages (Marshall II)

Young people who felt like they were involved in decision-making reported **feeling valued as an individual** and not a “case”:

When they don't ask, they see you as a case that they have to fix – so you're more like a project than a person. When they do ask, you know that they think you're a human (Amy, 16)

Young people need to feel in control and to feel in control they have to be part of the process – otherwise you are isolated and you feel useless (Melissa 15).

When you make choices you're like more powerful, you feel like you're someone again (Britney, 15)

As well as feeling valued, many young people felt that being involved in decision-making was also beneficial as it **helped develop their skills**:

A good caseworker teaches you the skills to deal with your problems and to make decisions, not just do it for you. (Amy, 16)

It's very difficult having to make decisions on your own but its not a solution for someone doing everything for you and you not being involved in making decisions. You learn nothing and you get nowhere (Melissa, 15)

In such cases, young people felt like they were **being encouraged**:

She's not like a parent, she's there to support you, guide you – not force me on to the path but help me to get there (Marshall, 16)

A number of young people felt that they were quite capable of making decisions and doing things in their own best interests but that they did not have the **information** or needed support to present their case:

Caseworkers have to give you options not make you come up with them – sometimes you don't know what choices you've got – you don't know whats available. Workers've gotta let you know whats out there – and then you can choose (Britney, 15)

All I want is for someone to take me around and do the stuff I want to do, to be a mate, a youth worker, not pressure me into doing s*** but to help me out. I'm smart – I can work this stuff out but I got to get them to give me the info so I know what, like my choices are – so I can do it myself (Marshall II, 17)

Young people spoke positively about times when they had a worker support them and their right to make decisions when third parties were involved. One young man saw this as **“giving them a leg in”** and **“backing you up”**.

A number of young people, however, shared experiences of times when they felt that they were not listened to nor involved in decision-making:

[Negative experiences included when workers were] Treating you badly – not listening [and when they were] Taking away your power – they've got the power and authority and they hold it over you (Cassie, 16)

They don't work with you, they just tell you to do stuff ... [They] Intimidate you and used punishments and threats – you don't do little things and they chuck you out. You have no right (Luke, 15)

People were putting things in place for me not with me (Jess, 14)

We should be in charge [of case plans and services] and tell them what we want and tell them to f***ing keep out of it cos it sux when they make all the decisions or force us to do s*** we don't want to do (Marshall II)

Listen more to us. It's our lives and we know what's happened. It's not fair when they say "we've decided this stuff for you" and then they say "what do you think" and you say "it sux" but they don't change it – they just walk off pissed off [because we didn't go along with their plan]. It's our lives! (Marshal II)

[Young people] need more people helping – not turning their backs on them: people not pushing you places you don't want to go cos then you can't or don't want to get help from them or anyone, and you need it. You should be able to do stuff the way you want to do it (Marshall I)

Young people need to come up with their own goals, that workers listen to, record and look back on. Workers should take every step with these goals in mind (Amy, 16)

You shouldn't get through the process and ask yourself "did I ask for this?" (Melissa, 15)

Some young people asserted that some young people **sometimes needed for workers to take the lead**, take control and put in place supports with limited input from young people. In particular, young people interviewed felt that this was important in times of crisis:

When you first start, things are very overwhelming, so you just ride with it. Its all about outcomes, so the workers can do everything and that's ok (Melissa, 15)

Though having a worker take on this role was seen as legitimate, a number of young people felt that this needed to be negotiated with the young person:

Some young people need others to get them through but others don't. Workers need to ask or find out which one's which (Cassie, 16)

Not being involved had negative impacts on how connected a young person felt, how they were able to keep to case plans and, ultimately, how effective they were:

When stuff is done without your input you're unclear on what they're doing (Lina, 16)



Confidentiality and Sharing Information

Young people saw confidentiality as a vital aspect of good case management practice, believing it to be the **foundation of a trustful, respectful relationship**. They believed that unless that confidential relationship had been developed many young people would not access supports or share their stories:

People won't go to them [workers] with personal problems if they know they are going to tell others (Lina 16).

They also asserted that it was **uncomfortable and demeaning** when they were aware of or believed that others were sharing their stories without their permission:

People don't want to share information for the whole world to know – they want it worked out. (Marshall II)

Its like they think that you're not important [if they share your stories] and that they don't need to ask for your permission (Britney, 15)

It's not ego boosting to know that people are telling your story everywhere (Jess, 13)

For peace of mind. It's an issue of trust (Marshall II)

Young people, however, identified a number of situations where it was appropriate for a worker to share information with others without permission. This included when **the information was positive**:

It's ok for the person to talk about the positives. People just don't want the negatives to be relayed on to other people (Melissa, 15).

When young people were **going to hurt themselves** or others, or when the **worker was unsure as to how best support the young person**:

It's OK about suicide and stuff (Amy, 16)

When the case worker is having trouble – not sure what the right thing to do is... when they haven't dealt with stuff before and need some help... (Marshall II, 18)

Its OK if they don't know how to deal with you or the s**** that's going on in my head (Marshall 1, 19)

Young people had varied reactions to the idea of consent. Some were quite supportive:

There is an amount of information other services need to know (Cassie, 16)

It's good cos then I don't have to go through my whole life again (Luke, 15)

Others were more sceptical:

It's OK but I know that they share s*** about me that they don't need to. Its like its ok to gossip and bitch about you because you've signed some paper (D, 18)

Sometimes its like "whoa look at the s**** that's gone down with him" (Marshall I)

A few young people felt that, in some cases, they preferred not to know that workers were sharing their stories:

I wouldn't want to know if people were talking about me. I just trust that if they need to they will (Melissa, 15)

Ultimately, however, confidentiality was seen as being incredibly important and something that helped define their relationship with their worker.

What young people want from their workers

Young people wanted workers who had the skills to best support them. They described good workers as those with an **in-depth knowledge of issues and services; a willingness to listen and respond on a personal level – to respond to basic human needs; and develop a sense of calm.**

Good listening skills were also seen as being important. Many young people felt that being heard was more important than a worker solving their problems:

It's important for someone to just sit and talk not just sit there listening so that you can pick up problems that you can find solutions for. Young people just need to be heard sometimes. (Lina 16)

People who listened and supported – they were there to make sure I was OK (Jess, 13)

Young people valued workers who were **hopeful and who inspired that hope** in them:

They need to give you something to live for (Melissa, 15)

If they write you off you've got nothing to live for. They need to help you see that the good things so that you can keep going. And they have to believe that its gonna work out cos if they don't we never will (Marshall II, 17)

Happiness Drives You (D, 18)

Identifying strengths and opportunities were also important for many young people who needed workers to help them recognise the positives in themselves and their situation:

Be optimistic: point out strengths and use those strengths to get there, be hopeful (Amy, 15)

You need to know that you're OK. People tell you all the time you're c*** and you need someone to tell you that you're not (Luke, 15)

My dad told me that there's always a way out – you just gotta look at it different. You gotta find ways of making something s**** go good for ya (D, 18)

Young people also wanted workers who did **not let stereotypes or pre-conceptions cloud their practice** with clients. They offered the following insights and suggestions:

For some reason they think we're all the same and think all this stuff about us before they even know.

[A bad practice is] Writing clients off as being irresponsible or immature and then treats them that way (Amy, 16)

Don't assume anything.. even if you do, none of us are losers, just something's gone down and we're in it... and we need help to get out – not for someone.. to make it better not worse... or look down on us because we don't have everything together (Amy, 16)

Acknowledge me as an individual
Listen to me as an individual
Respond to me as an individual
Work with me as an individual (Melissa, 16)

Young people called on staff to **be respectful** in their dealings with clients. They saw respectfulness as “treating you like you're worthwhile”, “not judging you”, “talking to you like you're human” and “giving a s**** about you”.

Young people felt that being respectful was important because:



It builds up your confidence: having someone respect you lifts you up (Marshall II)

When you're getting help you've probably hit rock bottom and feel pretty crap about yourself. If your worker don't show you respect that's f***ed because that when you need it most (Marshall II)

Unfortunately, many of the young people reported on times when they had been treated disrespectfully:

I left cos they talk to me like I'm nothing (Britney, 15)

If I treated them the way they treated me, I'd be kicked out (Marshall II)

Many young people valued workers who were able to **identify resources and supports** within the community. In particular, they were keen to have workers help them address issues in their **families**:

I wasn't getting on with my mum and dad but I wanted that bad. They're part of my life and it was really good that [my worker] made sure they stayed involved (Cassie, 16)

Some workers reckon that if we're out of home its because we hate our folks. That's not right – we just need time out. They've gotta help us keep up with our families, keep em involved, or they've got it all wrong (Luke, 15).

They presumed that I hated my mum but I didn't and it really hurt when they paid her out in front of me or took on some kind of "she was a crappy parent" kinda line thinking that's what I wanted (Melissa, 15).

Young people also wanted workers to **connect them with other supports**, especially when one service could not respond to all their needs.

We don't expect them to know everything and to be able to help fix everything. But we do expect them to find someone who can. That's why we're in the s*** cos noone's ever told us what options we've got or how we can get help (D, 18).

Young people needed for these connections to be **well coordinated**, with workers “getting their act together”:

They've gotta work together and, you know, come up with stuff that fits. It sux when everyones doing different s*** and noone knows whats really going on... including me. They reckon we're messed up! (C, 17)

Informing young people of their rights and supporting them to enact them were also regarded as important functions of good case management practice. In particular this was considered important around complaints mechanisms and advocacy:

They can help you get the stuff you have a right to (Amy, 16)

People listen to you when you've got a worker with you. Its pretty f***ed they don't listen to you when you're by yourself, but a worker can tell them what you need and they'll listen and give you the stuff you're allowed to get (Luke, 15)

Sometimes you need someone to tell you that you're in the right and that you deserve it better (Cassie, 16).

Additional Points

Young people were asked if there was anything they would like to add to the report. 4 of the young people called on an end to the war, one hoped for world peace and one reported that “I don't like George Bush – he's just a bogan with money”.

Conclusions

Young people were generally positive about case management as a process but felt that workers needed to spend more time talking about their needs and how to best respond to them. They felt that sometimes workers were more focussed on achieving outcomes in relation to the process than the young person themselves and argued that to be more responsive, workers needed to see them as the priority.

Young people stressed the importance of positive relationships with their case managers, and valued having someone to support them, care for them, be there for them, advocate for them and provide them with options. They wanted to be seen as more than just “a case”, and for workers to see through negative stereotypes and preconceptions.

Young people wanted to be involved in making decisions about their lives and for this decision-making to be real, valued and supported. They felt that making choices was life-affirming, skill-developing, respectful and most effective. They believed that they were often in the best position to make the best decisions but often were not provided with adequate information or options. Case management, therefore, provided them with more opportunities for informed decision-making.

Confidentiality and privacy were also important to young people with many expecting that workers would not share their stories without permission. When they did give consent, they hoped that workers would only share information necessary and that this would be done respectfully. Young people were generally happy for workers to share information with others if the young person was being hurt or if the worker needed help coming up with strategies to better support them.

Young people called for workers to have an in-depth knowledge of issues and services, to focus on their strengths, to be hopeful and to inspire hope and a sense of calm, and to identify and respond to their broad range of needs.

When workers could not respond to all their needs, young people hoped that they would find others who might and then work with the young person and these additional supports to come up with a co-ordinated and responsive plan. Families and other key people in a young person's life should, wherever possible, be involved in this process.

Young people were positive about many of their interactions with workers and services and were hopeful that others could work similarly with positive outcomes achieved. They valued the important part that workers played in their lives and were appreciative of those who had given them their time and energy.

APPENDIX: Case Management Interview Proforma

A name you'd like to be known as: _____

M/F _____ Age _____ ATSI/NESB _____

Case Management

1. Have you ever heard workers talk about "Case Management"?
2. Do you know what it is?
 - a. If yes, how did you find out?
 - b. What is it?
3. How did you get referred to your worker?
 - Referred myself
 - Parent
 - Other worker from an NGO
 - Government service
 - SchoolDid you ask for it?
Did you have any choice?

THE SERVICE:

4. What kinds of things does your worker help you with?
5. Are there any things that you wish that you could get help with but haven't been able?
6. What's the most valuable things you've got from being in the service?
7. Is there anything that hasn't been useful?
8. When making decisions about things that are going to happen, how much input do you feel you have?
 - I make the decisions
 - I'm a partner in making decisions
 - I'm asked my opinions but others end up making the decisions
 - I'm not asked my opinions – people make my decisions

Is this a good mix? Is that what you want?

9. What do you think confidentiality is?
 - a. Is it important? Why / Why not?
 - b. Do you think that information you've shared has been kept confidential?
 - c. When do you think its ok for workers to share information about you?

YOUR WORKER

10. How would you describe your worker?
11. What makes an effective worker?
12. What makes an ineffective worker?
13. What advice would you give a new worker on what they should / could / might do? How could they be a good worker and support young people best?
14. Are they respectful? How do they show that they respect you?
15. Is there anything else you want to add?