



Feedback to the *Come to the Table*: A Discussion Paper

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age and those who work with them. The Youth Coalition works to actively promote the well being and aspirations of young people in the ACT with particular respect to their political, cultural, economic and social development.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT warmly welcomes the *Coming to the Table* discussion paper on consumer and carer participation across Mental Health ACT. As the paper highlights, evidence strongly suggests that services delivery is increased when consumers and carers are involved in its design, delivery and evaluation. This is particularly the case for young people and the emphasis the paper placed on young people was very positive in recognising that young people often have different needs than other consumers and carers and as such need to be involved in ways which reflect this diversity.

As the peak body for youth affairs in the ACT, the Youth Coalition is strongly committed to youth participation and is keen to work closely with Mental Health ACT in endeavours to increase the participation of young people in mental health services across the Territory.

The Proposed Model

The proposed model is right in recognising that the community sector has existing successful programs that enable consumer participation and that any new initiatives for increasing consumer participation should begin by examining the possibility of building on existing programs.

Youth Specific Representation

Young people have experiences as consumers that are unique, differing in many ways for their adult counterparts. Similarly, when acting in self advocacy and in representative role, young people require supports that may also be unique. As such, we suggest that specific initiatives need to be built into the model to support young people to participate, particularly in forums such as the Consumer Advisory Meetings. While young people may be represented by others, as the discussion paper noted, advocacy is most effective when it is self advocacy. As such, the Youth Coalition recommends that there be youth specific initiatives in the model when aim to engage young people in issues at the 'systems' end of consultation within Mental Health ACT.

Recognition of Contributions

Consumers and Carers should also have their time, skills and experiences positively recognised and supported in order to enable them to participate fully and be fully appreciated for this contribution. As such, the Youth Coalition believes that the model must involve remuneration for those involved in all aspects of the consumer participation model, including for any young people who may be involved through subsidiary groups.

Actioning Issues

The model appears to be well integrated, recognising the integrated roles played by Mental Health ACT, peak bodies and the community sector. While the base of the model is broad and well grounded, outside existing available mechanisms, there seems to be only one forum where there is the ability to make actions on issues for consumers – the Consumer Advisory Meetings. Given the problems for young people's involvement in this

forum noted above, the model needs to either engage young people in meaningful ways with the Consumer Advisory Meetings or develop an alternative mechanism that gives young people a direct avenue to express issues they may have with Mental Health ACT.

Resources Required

The involvement of consumers and carers in mental health services is an endeavour that results in more effective and higher quality services. However, these benefits do require a level of resourcing that exceeds the capacity of many community sector organizations, given the imbalance of their funding and their demand. Effective participation strategies that are developed for services within government should also be resourced to be implemented within the community sector.

It is well known within the youth sector that engaging young people is a difficult and resource intensive endeavour and attempts to do this without adequate resourcing is likely to result in experiences which are tokenistic and this has no benefits for the young people involved nor for those who are seeking to engage with young people. As such, it is imperative that youth services are well resourced to implement strategies that are developed to interact with young consumers in ways that are meaningful and engaging for these young people. This requires a detailed plan and strategy for participation and a commitment from organizations to engaging young consumers.

Employment of Consumer and Carers

The model places value with those from the community sector through the funding of positions for community sector organisations in order to increase consumer participation in Mental Health ACT. The Youth Coalition supports the employment of consumers and carers in the community sector, recognising that the community sector and government have a close relationship and the interactions of those working in the community sector on consumer participation will also have close links with those in government, building closer connections between government and non-government organisations.

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