

The 'Workforce development' provides a framework for organisations, sectors and the government to approach sector wide development in Australia. Much of the workforce development literature focuses on the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Sector in Australia. However, it is important to consider the relevance of this framework for the youth sector as both the AOD and youth sectors have a focus on early intervention and holistic approaches.

Workforce development aims "to ensure that the responses we develop stem from, and are implemented and sustained by, a well informed and highly skilled workforce who operate within supportive environments and systems designed to sustain and optimise efforts".<sup>1</sup> Therefore the approach is best described as "a comprehensive systems-approach not an individually orientated approach"<sup>2</sup> as it recognises that "the strategies required to develop an adequate workforce response to alcohol and drug problems extend well beyond the narrow traditional notion of 'training'. Systemic and sustainable changes within key organisations and agencies are also essential".<sup>3</sup>

Changes and development should concentrate and be addressed on three separate levels<sup>4</sup>:

1. Systems (legislation, policy, funding, recruitment and retention, resources, support mechanisms and incentives)
2. Current workers (formal education, training, workplace training, mentoring, on-the-job learning, on-line learning and best practice guidelines)
3. Future workforce (recruitment strategies, offers of education and training, affordable and accessible education and training, ensuring adequate service funding to employ staff and supporting and facilitating policies)

Workforce development is a holistic, evidence-based approach that the Youth Coalition and many stakeholders have agreed is a highly valuable concept as effective sector development is rarely confined to addressing one of the elements in isolation. "Sector development interventions need to be designed with an awareness of all the forces that operate within systems to facilitate or inhibit the changes that are desired, and should address as many of these as possible in a comprehensive fashion".<sup>5</sup>

Therefore the shift from thinking in the youth sector, of focusing and / or relying on training to develop the sector, to a 'workforce development' approach is timely for youth sector development initiatives pursued by the ACT Government, youth sector and the Youth Coalition.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Roche (2002). Workforce Development Issues in the AOD Field: A Briefing Paper for the InterGovernmental Committee on Drugs p7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p2

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p2

<sup>4</sup> Ann Roche (2001) 'What is this thing called workforce development?', in A Roche & J McDonald (eds), *Systems, settings, people: workforce development challenges for the alcohol and other drugs field*

<sup>5</sup> Penny Mitchell (2000) *Valuing Young Lives: Evaluation of the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne,

A workforce development model can provide the theoretical basis for decisions made around sector development initiatives that are delivered and those that need to be advocated for.

This will ensure that all possible areas that impact on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the work that the sector is doing with young people are addressed, from changes and developments that may need to occur with individual workers, through to organisational and systemic change.

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### **The Youth Coalition is committed to:**

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- ◆ Utilising a workforce development model when delivering sector development initiatives
- ◆ Advocating for appropriate funding required to build and maintain high quality workforce development programs.
- ◆ Advocating for a workforce development framework to be developed and delivered for the ACT youth sector
- ◆ Advocating for free or heavily subsidised Government training / professional development opportunities for workers / services that work with young people and their communities
- ◆ Lobbying the ACT Government for the allocation of recurrent funding to the Youth Coalition for sector development activities. This would facilitate the ongoing professional development and training of the not only the youth sector but also the AOD, mental health and family support sectors who the Youth Coalition has developed good working relationships with.