



Australian Youth
Affairs Coalition

Submission in response to

*The National School Chaplaincy Program 2011
Discussion Paper*

March 18 2011

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, which represents young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC represents a growing membership of State and Territory youth peak bodies, national youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field

AYAC and its members are committed to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

Introduction

Our organisations welcome the opportunity to contribute to a national discussion on the National School 2011 Chaplaincy Program.

This submission has been prepared in consultation with AYAC's Policy Advisory Council, which comprises all youth State and Territory peak bodies, as well youth and youth-led organisations, and specialist organisations with a youth focus, in areas such as mental health, drug and alcohol, multicultural youth, academic bodies, and other relevant organisations. Due to AYAC's broad membership, there has been a diverse range of views expressed during this consultation. AYAC has taken all care to be as inclusive of these views as possible, while recognising that divergence is natural, particularly in this area.

Our response is based primarily on AYAC's Guiding Principles, which follow:

- **Human rights and social justice:** Working towards an Australian community that respects and promotes the human rights of young people.
- **Participation:** Promoting the valued inclusion of young people in all aspects of the Australian community and educating the community about effective youth engagement strategies.
- **Collaboration:** Engaging stakeholders in a collaborative manner and establishing a meaningful dialogue with partners to build a coalition around the positive development of Australia's young people.
- **Social inclusion:** Ensuring universal access to all aspects of community life for young people and working to eliminate inequalities faced by Australia's young people.
- **Closing the Gap:** Working to eliminate inequalities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young Australians.
- **Young People in Context:** Recognising that young people are influenced by their environment, which may include family, peers, health professionals, youth workers and/or educators.
- **Sustainability:** Promoting the need for sustainable development to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- **Evidence base and resources:** Promoting evidence-based practice and providing adequate resources appropriate to the needs of young people.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring that young people have access to adequate and appropriate programs and services, regardless of their geographic location, race, gender, level of disability and social, religious and economic circumstances.
- **Independence and accountability:** Operating as an independent and vocal advocate and functioning in a transparent and accountable manner.

Based on the above principles, AYAC supports the allocation of additional funding being to Australian schools for a broad-based youth support program and acknowledges the important role that many chaplains can play in the school setting.

However, we propose recommendations in this submission that clarify and strengthen the important role of 'additional support' in schools, ensuring the rights of all Australian children and young people are upheld.

Our submission is not opposed to chaplaincy in schools, and nor do we oppose religious organisations. Such organisations have a long history of providing youth programs in Australia. However, what AYAC *is* critical of in relation to the NSCP, is the mismatch between the stated aims of the program and the way in which it is delivered. This is not a criticism of the organisations that provide school chaplains, but of the lack of clarity from the government on what the chaplaincy program is trying to achieve.

If the school chaplaincy program was primarily about religious instruction, then religious organisations would be best placed to provide this. However, the NSCP explicitly states that the role of chaplains is *not* to provide religious instruction, and in fact they are forbidden from promoting their own religious beliefs. Furthermore, the aims of the program are primarily based on a youth work approach, and the proposed qualifications are those required for youth workers. This strongly implies that the NSCP is primarily a youth work program. If this is the case, it stands to reason that youth work organisations are the ones best placed to deliver it. This would not exclude religious organisations with a strong track record in delivering youth work programs, but would open the program to non-religious providers of youth work. This in turn would make the program attractive to schools that have so far shied away from utilising the program because of its religious basis.

AYAC sees the benefit of the work carried out by many school chaplains in Australia. However, AYAC is concerned about the lack of minimum required qualifications and the methodology of the evidence presented in the report 'The Effectiveness of Chaplaincy: As provided by the National School Chaplaincy Association to the Government Schools in Australia'. AYAC acknowledges that capturing and measuring wellbeing must go beyond quantifiable data but also wishes to highlight the need for a sharper focus on what works well in Australian schools. To that end, AYAC is concerned about the limitations of this report.

Additionally, AYAC strongly advocates for a holistic approach to support in schools. That is, an approach that is not solely limited to school chaplains or one that is tied to a religious faith-based framework. Part of the solution must include suitable youth work programs that are adequately researched and resourced and work in partnership with a range of services both within the school setting and the broader community.

As noted by the Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) (YAPA), strong partnerships between schools and local and community support services are an *effective* and cost efficient way to support young people to remain engaged in school and to transition to further work, studying or training. It is these partnerships that engage young people, reduce student disengagement and assist students with social and emotional wellbeing¹.

Thank you for considering AYAC's response. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss further the issues presented in this submission. We also strongly advocate for young people to be involved in any feedback or future consultation. Young

¹ Youth Action & Policy Association (2011) *Supportive Schools and Communities Partnership Program*

people have unique experience and knowledge, and are often best placed to articulate the issues impacting on their lives and identify appropriate solutions.

Response (Appendix D of the Discussion Paper)

While we welcome the injection of funding into Australian schools in principle and support its intent, we submit comments and recommendations designed to strengthen and clarify support for our schools. These are outlined in detail below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not wish for my name/organisation name to be published
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not wish for my submission to be published

School / Organisation

Name (will be made public unless requested otherwise)

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

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Responses

Do you support the introduction of minimum qualifications for school chaplains?

- Yes
 No
 Unsure

Do you support the introduction of a minimum Certificate IV (Associate Diploma) in Youth Work or similar (e.g. pastoral care, community services)?

- Yes, depending on the support worker's role in the school
- No, I think the minimum qualification should be lower
- No, I think the minimum qualification should be higher
- No, I don't think there should be minimum qualifications

What should be the minimum entry qualifications?

- High School Certificate
- Certificate II or III
- Certificate IV
- Bachelor / University Degree

What elements are most important for minimum qualifications for school chaplains? (you can select more than one option)

- Youth work
- Referral expertise
- Theological expertise
- Negotiation skills
- Recognition of life experience
- Counselling skills
- Other: (please provide details)

It is important that the support person who is working with the school has the necessary experience and qualifications to fit that particular school. For example, student support staff working in rural and remote areas of Australia need experience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, and working with children and young people who are disengaged from school (either due to boredom or lack of transport or other family / life barriers), whereas schools in urban areas may have completely different needs. Such support workers need to complement the sets of skills provided by school counsellors and other support staff with their own unique view of children and young people, particularly those who are marginalised or 'at risk'. In all instances, support workers *must* be adequately qualified and well equipped to understand their own limitations - particularly when referral is necessary. Support workers should have a well-developed network for this purpose, both inside and outside of the school.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the qualifications of chaplains?

Youth work qualifications provide the best basis for the chaplaincy role as described in the aims of the program. However, as noted in the Discussion Paper, currently, chaplains'

qualifications are inconsistent at best and youth work qualifications are not necessarily a component of chaplain qualifications. The only State/Territory that has a minimum set of qualifications is Victoria. ACCESS Ministries requires their chaplains to have a degree in teaching, theology or counselling. However, these degrees are inconsistent with the role of a support worker. Support workers are *not* teachers and should not be fulfilling that role. While a counselling role may enhance the role of a support worker, a support worker with young people is not a counsellor. A theology degree is also inappropriate, as support workers should work with youth from a secular perspective.

Do you support the introduction of minimum standards for service providers under the program?

- Yes
 No
 Unsure

What elements are most important for minimum standards for service providers?

Service providers should have a minimum of a Certificate IV in Youth Studies. The role of support workers in schools is *not* to counsel. Therefore, degrees in psychology or counselling should not be a minimum standard.

As discussed previously, service providers should be cognisant of when to refer children and young people to other support workers / services (within or outside the school setting) and this can only be gained through experience and appropriate training. Therefore, the referral process is a critical element of minimum standards, particularly as it was raised in the Discussion Paper that this type of activity is one that that chaplains identified as carrying out the least.

In the particular instance of school chaplains, they should all be trained in their own code of ethics and be held accountable to that code, so as to ensure the spirit of their service is upheld and the youth support work they provide remains ethical and unbiased by their particular religious beliefs and values.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the minimum standards for service providers?

There needs to be clarification about whether school chaplains / the NSCP is fundamentally a youth support program or a religious instruction and/or a support program. *If* it is primarily a youth support program, then this must be reflected in the minimum qualifications and selection of staff.

Do you support the current arrangements which require schools to attempt to employ a chaplain before being able to employ a secular pastoral care worker?

No. While AYAC recognises the work of chaplains in schools, provision of extra care and

support to children and young people in schools should be based on youth work principles, not religious affiliations. As noted in the Discussion Paper, 'One of the issues *consistently* raised by a *large number* of stakeholders has been a desire to allow non-religious / secular support positions (such as youth workers or social workers) without the need to first try and appoint a chaplain. Various stakeholder groups questioned why the program did not equally fund nonreligious positions (e.g. youth workers...) rather than chaplains and expressed that more schools would have applied for the program, or chosen these options, if the guidelines had allowed the appointment of secular positions from the outset of the program.' (p15)

Do you support modification of the program to give schools the choice of a non-faithbased support worker or youth worker?

Yes. Given that nearly 30% of the Australian community identify as having no religion (and additionally the Australian community is comprised of diverse faiths), and given that many schools would elect to opt-in to the program if it the program was non-secular, the government needs to broaden the program to include secular support workers. These workers should be adequately and appropriately qualified to work with children and young people in a school setting.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the choice of support worker?

Choice of support worker should also take into account the choice of agency chosen to employ the support worker. The extent to which an employer is able to provide appropriate professional support and supervision to workers will impact heavily on the quality of services provided to young people. There may be some question regarding the capacity of current religious/faith-based chaplaincy service providers to provide appropriate support to secular youth work professionals.

What models of administration would support innovative service delivery under the program?

Models of administration to support innovative service delivery include:

- Consideration by DEEWR of ways to maximise the impact of government funding and support the appointment of secular youth workers. Current funding for chaplaincy staff would not cover the costs of professional youth work provision in schools and, as such, this current model does not necessarily support innovation in service delivery.
- The NSCP has creatively drawn on a number of multipliers of government resources – for example, low wages, low overheads, chaplains volunteering personal time, churches fundraising to support chaplaincy for religious goals, schools fundraising to support extra days. While some of these multipliers would be available to secular youth work provision, not all would.
- Government needs to decide the balance of cost and capacity. The current funding arrangement of \$20000 is very low and therefore an expectation of high level (and innovative) support may be unrealistic. Either chaplains are no longer required to provide this kind of support, or funding needs to be better targeted.
- While professional support work is initially more expensive, AYAC believes that this

model would greatly enhance outcomes for both young people and the capacity of school communities to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

- This could include:
 - Better targeting of funding to schools with particular disadvantage, pooling funds to allow more time for support workers in individual schools.
 - Support workers working across a cluster of schools – current \$20 000 per school would provide approximately 1 full time worker across 5 schools when outsourced to the non-government sector.

What innovative models of delivery would support rural, remote and disadvantaged schools to maximise the effectiveness of funding they could receive under the program? (you can select more than one option)

- Cluster models
- Pooled funding
- Other (please provide details)

Are there any other comments you would like to make about innovative delivery models?

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the program?

The injection of significant funds to schools across Australia is welcomed by AYAC but needs to be broader in its vision and scope. It has long been recognised that, in many countries, youth workers have been involved directly or indirectly with schools, and as young people become disengaged or 'quietly disengaged', the added value of this type of work needs to be given increased recognition. Findings presented by Morgan et al. (2008)², suggest that provision of youth workers in schools elicited positive responses from young people...who were able to differentiate between youth workers and teachers in terms of learning and interventions' (p2).

AYAC strongly advocates for clarity about the *purpose* of the NSCP. If it is a youth support program, it needs to be broadened so that non-religious/faith-based service providers have equal access to tendering opportunities, based on clear selection criteria, minimum standards, qualifications and youth work experience. If the program is fundamentally a religious program, then this needs to be stated clearly and the emphasis on a broader youth support program with youth qualifications should be removed. However, if this were the case, AYAC would strongly question DEEWR's decision to prioritise the (public) funding of a religious program over a youth support program – particularly given many of the findings in the Discussion Paper – and AYAC would seek clarification regarding this rationale.

² Morgan T, Morgan P & O'Kelly B (2008) *Youth Work in Schools: an Investigation of Youth Works, as a Process of Informal Learning, in Formal Settings*, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, United Kingdom