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Trish Jenkins  
Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council  
PO Box 49  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

4<sup>th</sup> November 2010

### **Re: Environmental Scan – Youth Sector**

Dear Ms Jenkins

I am writing to provide a perspective from the youth sector in Australia towards the Environmental Scan for Community Services and Health. The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is the national peak body representing young people and the youth support sector in Australia. Our members include the state and territory youth affairs peaks, national and local youth organisations, young people and individuals with an interest in youth affairs.

Our contribution to the scan is based upon recent work that we have undertaken to better understand the demands on youth sector organisations, and includes mention of work we plan to undertake in the coming months on workforce development issues.

#### **How has the demand for or nature of services changed?**

During this year, demand and nature of youth support services has changed somewhat due to a number of factors. These include:

- Increased focus on and demand for mental health support services for young people, and a greater recognition of young people's mental health needs
- A loss of expertise in youth specific employment support for young people, as a result of the loss of JPET services through the move to more generic employment services under the current JSA contracts

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition is Australia's non-government youth affairs peak body, we provide an independent national voice for young people and the sector that supports them.

## **Workforce development challenges**

There is a wide range of challenges for the youth support sector currently. These include:

### Wages & Remuneration

- Wages in youth sector do not compare favourably with other industries, particularly given the nature of work and risk to community in many roles.
- Significant wages disparity in some roles between government and non-government employers and between different service models and settings.
- Limited ability to pay over-award and provide bonuses etc. to attract workers and encourage retention

### Industry Profile

- Limited sector and broader public understanding of the job roles and career opportunities
- Poor image of some sectors and roles
- Limited awareness of the size, diversity and predicted growth of the industries' workforces
- Inadequate recognition of the contribution industry workers make to individual well-being and community cohesion
- Highly feminised workforce – over 70% female workers

### Nature of Work

- Increasing Intensity of work and rapid changes in services and jobs
- Increasing complexity of work roles
- High proportion of casual and part-time roles in some sectors
- Some roles require 24/7 shift work, on-call and live-in role
- Exposure to stressful and distressing situations, such as death, emergencies, abuse, poverty, crime, etc
- Values and attitude of high importance in recruitment decisions

### Career Pathways

- Lack of career pathways – particularly in small organizations
- No consistent definition of youth sector and youth work practice

## **Addressing workforce development challenges**

The following things are recommended to help address the challenges outlined above:

### Wages & Remuneration

- Support national wage equity case for community service workers
- State and federal Governments to fully fund NGO's to implement any pay increase as a result of the national pay equity test case
- Establish wages equity between government and non-government employers
- Optimise use of salary sacrifice and salary packaging to improve the value of wages
- Identify non-financial benefits and incentives, and ensure these are promoted and supported
- Policy responses required to mitigate the impact of regional and rural labour draw within "boom" communities, such as in mining communities

### Industry Profile

- Raise public awareness through strategic communication of industry careers and workforce achievements
- Employer engagement in career promotion and longer-term recruitment strategies in addition to traditional vacancy promotion and recruitment. This includes careers expos, school partnerships, public awareness, community partnerships, etc.
- Employee recognition and reward strategies

### Nature of Work

- Focus on job role design, teamwork and workload management to ensure reasonable and rewarding jobs
- Incorporate incentives and compensations for non-standards shifts
- Employee assistance schemes, skills development, practice supervision and regular debriefing to support workers
- Employee health and well-being programs
- Effective management and leadership
- Provide the sector with access to an ethics training program to provide individual skilling and build capacity to contribute to the development/articulation of values based

youth work practice and recruitment framework

- Prioritise values and determine measurement and assessment for recruitment
- Engage the sector in the development and articulation of a broad evidence based youth work practice framework, including identification of core values and competencies

### Career Pathways

- Define Youth Work and its core skills and practice frameworks and promote within the youth sector and broader community sector
- Further research existing career pathways including across services and service types to inform future possibilities
- Create a 'career map' that shows entry points and qualifications, opportunities to cross sectors and career pathways to promote the youth sector
- Portable long service leave – increase chance of staying within community services sector

AYAC will be undertaking considerable work in this area during 2011. This will include an investigation of the decline in tertiary youth work courses and the impact this is having on the youth sector; and research into workforce development needs and issues.

### **The role of training packages**

The federally funded packages are seen to have limitations as they are too generic in their design. Some states also complain that there are insufficient places available. In Tasmania for example, anecdotal evidence suggests that 70% of potential trainees are turned away from Certificate III and IV courses and Diploma courses.

### **Responding to the new workforce development policy environment**

As mentioned earlier, more effort is needed in recruitment and retention of staff; defining and clarifying the role of youth workers; professionalisation of the sector; and in ensuring parity between staff in government and non-government agencies for equivalent roles.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this year's Environmental Scan. We look forward to working closely with CS&HISC to further define and address these issues.

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Cummings  
Executive Director