

CARETAKER'S COTTAGE



Annual Report

2003

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I confidently conclude another year happy in the knowledge that we have continued to provide an increasingly professional and competent service to homeless young people and those involved with them. Caretakers has provided accommodation to 150 young people during the past year, an increase of 25 on the previous year, working with families being the largest area of growth. Both Entity and Caretakers have continued to receive significant funding from the Dept Community Services that has enabled to remain financially viable and able to pursue new and exciting avenues of support for the young people in our care.

Staff

The area of greatest change for the service has been with personnel, Caseworkers John Van Keppel and Sue Beckman have left the service with Jen Francis joining the team, and the youthwork team similarly has seen some comings and goings. Pol has left to pursue his studies while Sidsel has started teaching at Moria College and Gemma has taken a position at Australian Volunteers International. New to the youthwork team are Romani Blue, Alistair Grant, Pip O'Brian and Paul Kelly.

This has been the largest staffing upheaval that has occurred in any year and as such gives cause for some consideration. Although there has been some natural turnover as individuals follow their career paths it must be acknowledged that the job is getting tougher, we are working with more young people who fit the profile of having high and complex needs. The pressures of higher and higher levels of accountability and the endless demands to meet needs that we do not have the specialist skills to meet inevitably burn workers out or at least have them seeking employment in fields where they will receive greater recognition.

We will need to tap into more training and have regular internal staff development days to develop the service and our expectations of our capacity to meet the demands. More time than ever is being directed to supervision and I believe that this year we should look to developing a management committee staff committee to oversee hiring staff, disciplinary matters and staff appraisals.

A significant development has been the finalisation of the SACS award, a campaign in which Caretakers took an active and high profile position.

About Services to young people

The number of young people coming into our care directly from home has increased with the result being an increase in the amount of family support. New connections have been made with agencies offering family counselling and our

access to individual counselling has expanded. The casework team are regularly engaging in family reconciliation meetings and are frequently sought out by ex resident to provide aftercare support.

We have allocated additional money towards recreation activities and ensure that the weekends include some planned activities. On a more formal level we have been able to access more educational facilities giving our clients a broader array of options. The majority of clients are attending school however 2 residents have gained apprenticeships while a good proportion of others have gained employment in the local area.

Saap 4 and beyond

SAAP 4 is now being reviewed and plans developed for SAAP 5. The essence of this development is for the network of SAAP and other support services to be more thoroughly integrated with clear pathways for the care of our clients. It is important that Caretakers plays an active role in the development of SAAP 5 as we have experience and expertise that should assist in the process of addressing the gaps in service and hopefully generate some innovative responses.

We constantly hear about the need for a whole of government approach to Homelessness and SAAP 5 is an opportunity to encourage a bit more formal development of protocols between Health, Education and other departments and the SAAP field. Currently protocols are only notional and as such are only good for writing reports. SAAP has continued to be one of the more successful program areas for the Dept. and while SAAP continues to reflect well on DOCS, it is an opportune time to further commit the government to enhancing the scope of SAAP.

Tension between Out Of Home Care and SAAP

Out of Home Care is attracting a much greater focus and additional funding due to the crisis experienced since the collapse of the Usher plan some years ago. The result has been an obscene rush to generate a new "for profit" market place rather than a properly funded and planned response to the accommodation needs of young people in the care of the Department. I have reported on this issue for too many years however there is beginning to be recognition of this issue at a Ministerial level and the appropriate sub committee has been formed to review the issue.

While we wait for an OOHC plan to be developed SAAP services such as Caretakers continue to be overwhelmed with requests to accommodate under 16's who are clearly the responsibility of DOCS, 23% being under 15 with a further 77% being 15 to 17 years in 2002/3. The issue being that the SAAP system is clearly propping up the OOHC need for a residential response.

Entity

Entity has had another year of turmoil with changing demands and a lack of clarity about our future; we are currently concluding discussions aimed at changing our model to a crisis accommodation service, our 4th model change in 5 years!

Office of the Children's Guardian

The major work task of the past year has been to engage in the process of accreditation with the Office of the Children's Guardian. This has proven to be a time consuming and expensive process though will lead to recognition of our service meeting a high standard of service for our residents. Angela Taylor has carried most of the burden of this project and has helped us to make sense of the process. Without her guidance we would be struggling to manage this project.

Change of model

Entity has been pushed once again to change our model of service to now to provide crisis accommodation in conjunction with the new Metro Central ISS team. This may well be the prevailing need of the department however we are to take this in good faith, as there is no forum to debate or plan for the future of Out Of Home Care in the Area. While the "for profit" services proliferate in an environment of "commercial in confidence" it remains impossible for us to determine the relative value for money of the programs funded by the Department or provided by us.

The process to arrive at this model is lacking though we are being offered an opportunity to develop a model of service that will gain greater recognition and be more highly valued than any previous arrangement. In fact we have returned to the model originally proposed by Caretakers to the Area in 1998 following the closure of Minali. The staff will need more training and support as the pace of work increases

Move to Turon Ave

The Dept Community Services is keen to provide new premises in Turon Ave Bexley when we confirm our new crisis accommodation status. This has been fortuitous as our neighbours in Dora St have endured our presence for long enough. This move will also free up the money expended on rent to extend staffing to 2 workers on duty on the weekends.

Staffing

The team has remained basically intact with the exception of Owen who has taken on a position of Youth worker at Exodus House; Janine Wilkie has had a

baby while Janine Hallet has married as will have Kathy by the time of our meeting.

The new crisis model of service will require some well targeted training and I would expect that greater demands would be put on financial support for in house training. We will be able to access some training provided by the OCG and it is likely that we will be able to access departmental training for OOHC.

Review and then what next for Entity

Management need to set the agenda and be part of the ongoing debate about the future direction of the service, our crisis model will be reviewed for the end of our current funding agreement in June 2004. A further 3 year funding agreement should be sought with limited scope for adjustment of the model. Management need to be familiar with the current directions of OOHC an to that end I recommend that a OOHC sub committee be formed to develop the knowledge and participate in the debate on our evolution in the field.

Consolidation

It is necessary to focus on staff training and development of a team that is confident to embrace the job at hand; to that end they need to be reassured that the model of service will remain constant and that there is fair recognition of their efforts. The team is to be congratulated for taking up and trialling a crisis response and I am sure they will be rewarded as the crisis model is keenly sought after by DOCS workers. All members being engaged on a permanent basis and the development of a casual worker pool to cover relief shifts and day support program will enhance the team.

Interagency developments

I have broadened our involvement with the network of agencies with whom we work in an attempt to align more support option for our clients, Jen has been attending the Eastern Suburbs Youth Interagency while I have joined the Board of YAA and St Laurence House. Additionally I have joined a steering committee for Exodus House and am actively involved with the DOCS Area SAAP planning processes.

Currently we have no forum for Out Of Home Care at a DOCS Area level so we have no input into planning and development that directly affect the work, for example we have change our model of service to crisis accommodation at Entity due to a perception of need identified by the Department in an environment where we have no knowledge of the way in which the department is currently funding foster and other out of home care programs in the Area. We need to demand greater transparency in the decision making process.

Our accommodation links have remained strong with St Laurence house, Bondi Youth Accommodation, Lillians, and Stepping Stone though our area of greatest development has been in the education area. We have more options than ever with WAYS offering both links to learning and go with the flow while Bernie continues to be ever supportive at Key College. New programs such as Exodus House and others are continuing to emerge enabling us to access appropriate programs.

Acknowledgements

I am keen to acknowledge the contribution of the Management committee who continue to support the work of the service and give their time and expertise for the belief in our common vision of enhancing the lives of the young people who come into our care. Our workers who endure a constantly changing work environment and continue to maintain the focus of providing valuable outcomes for our clients and to all those young people who inspire us with their will to take on the world.

Our funding body, the Dept Community Services have continued to support our work and have enhanced funding in some areas. The network of support agencies that include Key College, Ways, St Laurence House, Exodus House, Rosemount, and the Prince Of Wales Adolescent Unit have continued enable us to offer a complete program of supports to our young people and their families.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the young people with whom we work and continue to draw hope from; it is their smiles and joy for life that make our role worthwhile.

Day Program

A day program has been devised to engage young people who are placed at Caretakers and have no planned activities such as schooling. The program is largely educational with a basic curriculum based on science, aboriginal studies, maths and English with a good proportion of sport and recreation. The purpose of this program is to encourage young people towards activity as soon as they arrive at Caretakers and be preparing them for reintegration into school or job training. It is also a diversion from the risks associated with young people with nothing to do.

It is hoped that this program will also engage residents of Entity however the financial basis for this program is yet to be resolved.

Conclusion

I am confident that our service remains responsive and vital to the needs of homeless young people and their families. Our staff teams are developing in stature and professionalism and are ready to meet the challenge in an background of greater demand and complexity.

We work in a tough environment where challenges abound nevertheless in this atmosphere of corporate welfare and economic rationalism we have continued to serve our young people with enthusiasm and achieved many great results. We are up to the challenge ahead. We will become a greater public voice for the people that we are committed to supporting by broadening our networks and participation in the debates in planning and developing our response to the needs of homeless young people.

Table 1: Support periods, informed consent obtained from client

	Number	%
Yes	149	99.3
No	1	0.7
Not answered	0	-
Total	150	100.0

Table 2: Support periods, length of support period

	Number	%
Less than 1 day	0	0.0
1 – 3 days	42	28.0
4 –7 days	18	12.0
> 1 – 2 weeks	26	17.3
> 2 – 4 weeks	22	14.7
> 4 - 13 weeks	38	25.3
> 13 - 26 weeks	3	2.0
> 26 - 52 weeks	0	0.00
> 52 weeks	1	0.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 3: Support periods, source of referral/information

	Number	%
Self	38	27.7
Family	2	1.5
Friends	1	0.7
Teacher/school/other educational institution	4	2.9
Community Services Dept	52	38.0
Police	6	4.4
Youth training centre/Juvenile Detention Centre	1	0.7
Hospital	1	0.7
Telephone/crisis referral agency	3	2.2
SAAP agency/worker	11	8.0
Casual acquaintance	1	0.7
Other government department	5	3.6
Other non-government department	12	8.8
Not answered	13	-
Total	150	100.0

Table 7: Support periods, gender of client

	Number	%
Female	79	52.7
Male	71	47.3
Not answered	0	-
Total	150	100.0

Table 8: Support periods, indigenous status of client

	Number	%
Not Aboriginal or T.S.I. person	125	83.9
Aboriginal person	22	14.8
Torres Strait Islander person	1	0.7
Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	1	0.7
Not answered	1	-
Total	150	100.0

Table 9: Support periods, labour force status fo client before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
Employed full time	1	0.7	3	2.0
Employed part time	4	3.0	7	4.8
Employed casual	5	3.7	6	4.1
Unemployed (looking for work)	45	33.3	45	30.6
Not in labour force	80	59.3	84	57.1
Not answered	15	-	3	-
Total	150	100.0	150	100.0

Table 10: Support periods, primary income source of client before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
	N	%	N	%
No income	51	38.0	41	27.9
Registered/awaiting benefit	5	3.7	6	4.1
Newstart allowance	1	0.7	2	1.4
Youth allowance	50	37.3	69	46.9
Disability support pension	2	1.5	2	1.4
Any other type of allowance –independent not at home	10	7.5	3	2.0
Other Government Support Allowance	4	3.0	7	4.8
Don't know/no information	1	0.7	5	3.4
Not answered	16	-	3	-
Total	150	100.0	150	

Table 11: Support periods, supplementary government income before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
	N	%	N	%
No payments	74	82.2	101	94.4
Family payment	4	4.4	1	0.9
DSS rent assistance (Commonwealth)	2	2.2	0	0.0
Mortgage/rent relief (State/Territory)	1	1.1	0	0.0
Pharmaceutical Benefits	2	2.0	0	0.0
Disability/child disability payment	1	1.1	0	0.0
Proposed Crisis Payment (Commonwealth)	1	1.1	0	0.0
Don't know/no information	4	4.4	4	3.7
Not answered	62	-	43	-
Total support periods	150	-	150	-

Table 12: Support periods, student status of client before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
	N	%	N	%
Not a student	67	48.9	67	45.6
Primary school student	1	0.7	2	1.4
Secondary school student	67	48.9	72	49.0
Post-secondary student	2	1.5	1	0.7
Not answered	13	-	3	-
Total	150	100.0	150	100.0

Table 13: Support periods, reasons for seeking assistance

	All Reasons		Main Reason	
	N	%	N	%
Usual accommodation unavailable	38	24.0	18	12.0
Time out from family situation	26	17.3	18	12.0
Time out from other situation	20	13.3	17	11.3
Relationship breakdown	58	38.7	36	24.0
Bereavement/death in family	1	0.7	1	0.7
Interpersonal conflicts	19	12.7	5	3.3
Physical/emotional abuse	18	12.0	4	2.7
Domestic violence	6	4.0	3	2.0
Recent arrival to area with no means of support	14	9.3	7	4.7
Previous accom ended/asked to leave	20	13.3	9	6.0
Eviction	10	6.7	4	2.7
Emergency accommodation ended	8	5.3	3	2.0
Drug/alcohol/substance abuse	6	4.0	2	1.3
Psychiatric illness	3	2.0	1	0.7
Recently left institution	6	4.0	4	2.7
Itinerant (moving from place to place)	15	10.0	8	5.3
Not answered	0	-	0	-
Total	150	-	150	100.0

Table 14: Support periods, living situation of client before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
	N	%	N	%
With both parents	5	3.6	7	4.8
With one parent & Parent's Spouse/partner	8	5.8	4	2.7
With one parent	20	14.4	14	9.6
With a foster family	5	3.6	2	1.4
With relative(s) – temporary	5	3.6	5	3.4
With relative(s) – long term	2	1.4	2	1.4
With spouse/partner	2	1.4	0	0.0
Alone	11	7.9	3	2.1
With friends – temporary	18	12.9	15	10.3
With friends – long term	1	0.7	2	1.4
With other unrelated persons	62	44.6	88	60.3
Not answered	11	-	4	-
Total	150	100.0	150	100.0

Table 15: Support periods type of housing/ accommodation before & after support

	Before Support		After Support	
	N	%	N	%
SAAP crisis/short term accommodation	87	63.5	49	33.3
SAAP medium/long-term accommodation	7	5.1	16	10.9
Other SAAP/CAP funded accommodation	1	0.7	3	2.0
Living rent free in house or flat	25	18.2	48	32.7
Renting independently in the private rental market	2	1.5	0	0.0
Renting in public housing dwelling	2	1.5	3	2.0
Hotel	1	0.7	0	0.0
Sleeping rough (street, park, long-grass)	3	2.2	0	0.0
Other non-SAAP housing accommodation	2	1.5	6	4.1
Hospital	1	0.7	1	0.7
Psychiatric institution	1	0.7	1	0.7
Youth training centre	1	0.7	0	0.0
Other government residential arrangement	1	0.7	3	2.0
Detoxification unit/rehabilitation centre	2	1.5	6	4.1
Other institutional setting	1	0.7	2	1.4
Not answered	13	-	3	-
Total	150	100.0	150	100.0

Table 16: Support periods, duration of current period of homelessness

	Number	%
At imminent risk	27	19.0
Less than one week	37	26.1
1 week – 1 month	24	16.9
1 – 3 months	18	12.7
3 – 6 months	14	9.9
6 – 12 months	6	4.2
1 – 2 years	5	3.5
2 – 5 years	7	4.9
More than 5 years	2	1.4
Don't know/no information	2	1.4
Not answered	8	-
Total	150	100.0

Table 21: Support periods in which accommodation was provided, duration of supported accommodation

	Number	%
1 day or less	28	19.4
2 – 3 days	16	11.1
4 – 7 days	17	11.8
> 1 – 2 weeks	26	18.1
> 2 – 4 weeks	20	13.9
> 4 – 13 weeks	35	24.3
> 13 – 26 weeks	2	1.4
> 26 – 52 weeks	0	0
> 52 weeks	0	0
Total	144	100