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FINAL REPORT

**Family and Community Services
Housing NSW**

NSW Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation

**Final Evaluation Report for Project 2.22
Young People Leaving Care Support Service - North Coast**

21 February 2013



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List of Abbreviations

ADHC	Ageing, Disability and Home Care
AOD	Alcohol and other drugs
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
CRC	Community Restorative Centre
CSC	Community Service Centre
FaCS	Department of Family and Community Services
FNC	Far North Coast
FTE	Full time equivalent
HAP	Homelessness Action Plan
JJ	Juvenile Justice
MNC	Mid North Coast
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NILS	No Interest Loans Scheme
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
NRSDC	Northern Rivers Social Development Council
OOHC	Out-of-home Care
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Service/s
TILA	Transition to Independent Living Allowance
YP	Young person/s
YPLC	Young People Leaving Care



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"I am now ecstatic with where I am at with my life."

Young person interviewed for SWITCH evaluation

The Young People Leaving Care Support Service - North Coast (Project 2.2 2) is one of four HAP projects providing support for people exiting institutions which were selected for extended evaluation. Based on the Mid North Coast (MNC) and Far North Coast (FNC) the project is run by the SWITCH consortium which also operates in tandem the Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres North Coast (Project 2.21) project. The lead agency for the project is Community Services.

The consortium comprises two partner agencies: Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) and YP Space MNC. NRSDC took the lead on the SWITCH (YPLC) project and the project budget and outcomes were allocated on a 60:40 split.

The project is designed to provide strengths-based, person-centred case management support for young people leaving care aged 16-25 years in two streams:

- Early intervention; and
- Case management.

The project has a strong outreach focus, with caseworkers located at Lismore, Tweed and Grafton on the FNC and Kempsey, Coffs Harbour and Taree on the MNC.

The project aims are to:

1. Prevent homelessness for young people transitioning from care to independent living;
2. Improve social, economic, education and health outcomes for care leavers;
3. Increase collaborative service delivery across government and non-government agencies in responding to homelessness; and
4. Identify and resolve impediments to the effective provision of support services and make recommendations to reform the existing service system in the longer-term.

The total project target was 112 clients to 30 June 2013 with 37 of these to be Aboriginal clients. At 30 June 2012, the project had comfortably met its mid-way target (59 clients serviced compared with a target of 57). Referrals received by the service showed more demand for support for young people needing case management than early intervention and this was reflected in the relative numbers supported across the two streams (32 compared with 27 at 30 June 2012).

The service model is organised into three broad stages:

- Stage one is focused on stabilising accommodation and developing individual case plans;
- Stage two puts this into practice and includes medium-term planning and engagement with education, training and employment, as well as sustaining tenancies and developing skills for independent living; and
- Stage three consolidates gains and allows for transition to mainstream support services.



Key findings were that:

- The project was highly regarded, both by external stakeholders as well as project participants;
- For the young people, as well as reporting practical outcomes such as sustained tenancies, there was a strong message of hope being returned to their lives and increased confidence about the future;
- Existing networking and inter-service collaboration was strengthened, with a number of new joint activities undertaken;
- There was evidence of direct impact on service practice with one community service provider reporting a changed approach to service eligibility to better recognise the needs of young people who are homeless; and
- Brokerage gave the project flexibility to pay the costs for household establishment, specialist counselling and medical support, transport and education based on individual need.

Key success factors for the project included:

- The foundation of extensive networking and collaboration which the consortium partners brought to the project;
- Strong caseworker engagement with the young people in the program. This included the very successful use of Aboriginal junior caseworkers;
- Support duration of 12 months, enabling consolidation of skills learnt and stabilisation of housing and other complex issues, as well as time to recover from any failures or setbacks;
- The quality of casework staff and service management as reflected in their proactive approach and communication skills with all other stakeholders; and
- Joint project activities such as “Reality Rental” pilot programs.

The 2011/2012 financial data which was analysed showed an average cost per young person serviced at \$12,371.20, with an average brokerage expenditure of \$910.00 per person. Given that individuals in the program are serviced for a period of 12 months, each person is costing the program approximately \$1,000 per month of service.

Amongst the challenges which were identified by the project, the most salient was the lack of suitable, affordable accommodation for young people. This was exacerbated by the low levels of income support which are available to young people which further constrains their capacity to afford what little is on offer. Whilst the project made great strides in ameliorating factors such as private real estate prejudice and strengthened young people’s skills in sustaining tenancy, the fact remains that there are insufficient properties to meet demand.

It is clear that young people with complex service needs cannot navigate the service system alone. From issues such as sorting out entitlements from Centrelink to dealing with real estate agents, this support was acknowledged by the young people themselves.

“They made the phone calls. It’s easier for them. It’s hard for us.”

Young people came to the SWITCH program with their own complex histories of trauma and neglect, health and substance abuse issues, and deficits in skills needed to live independently and make their own way in the world. They faced a service system which is not only difficult to navigate but is not set up to meet their needs.



The lessons learnt from the project affirm:

- The need for services to exist which can provide intensive case management support and linkages to other parts of the service system;
- The need to include provision of strong advocacy for the needs of young people exiting institutions;
- The need for services need to be of sufficient duration that the sustainability of arrangements which have been put in place can be tested or repeated as necessary, including the staged approach which was particularly helpful; and
- That services must be proactive and flexible enough so they can develop tailor-made solutions to meet individual need.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of HAP

In 2009, the NSW Government released the NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014 (HAP). It sets the direction for state-wide reform of the homelessness service system to achieve better outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The HAP aims to realign existing effort, and increase the focus on prevention and long-term accommodation and support.

HAP also aims to:

- Change the way that homelessness and its impact on the community is understood;
- Change the way services are designed and delivered to homeless people and people at risk of becoming homeless; and
- Change ways of working across government, with the non-government sector and with the broader community, to improve responses to homelessness.

Under the HAP, there are three headline homelessness reduction targets, which are:

- A reduction of 7% in the overall level of homelessness in NSW;
- A reduction of 25% in the number of people sleeping rough in NSW; and
- A reduction of one-third in the number of Aboriginal people who are homeless.

The HAP includes approximately 100 NSW Government funded local, regional and state-wide projects which assist in achieving the homelessness reduction targets. As at June 2012, 55 of the projects were funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). The remaining projects include other programs or services that contribute to addressing homelessness.

The projects are aligned to one of three strategic directions:

- Preventing homelessness: to ensure that people never become homeless;
- Responding effectively to homelessness: to ensure that people who are homeless receive effective responses so that they do not become entrenched in the system; and
- Breaking the cycle: to ensure that people who have been homeless do not become homeless again.

Ten Regional Homelessness Action Plans (2010 to 2014) were developed to identify effective ways of working locally to respond to local homelessness and provide the focus for many of the HAP projects.

HAP Evaluation Strategy

The HAP Evaluation Strategy has been developed in consultation with government agencies and the non-government sector. It involves three inter-related components, which are:

- I. **Self-evaluations** – The purpose of self-evaluation is to gather performance information about each of the HAP projects across key areas in a consistent way, and to collect the views of practitioners about the effectiveness of their projects;

- II. **Extended evaluations** – The purpose of the extended evaluations is to analyse and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of 15 selected projects and the service approaches to addressing homelessness that those projects represent. The service approaches covered by the extended evaluations are:
- Support for women and children escaping domestic violence;
 - Youth foyers;
 - Support for people exiting institutions;
 - Tenancy support to prevent evictions; and
 - Long term housing and support.
- III. **Meta-analysis** – The purpose of the meta-analysis is to synthesise the aggregated findings from the self-evaluations and extended evaluations, as well as other evaluations available on HAP activities.

The HAP evaluation will assist with measuring progress towards meeting the HAP targets, as well as provide evidence of effective responses and lessons learnt that should be considered in the future response to homelessness in NSW.

1.2. Projects supporting people exiting institutions

The first strategic direction of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan is preventing homelessness. A key priority is to “transition and maintain people exiting statutory care/ correctional and health facilities into appropriate long-term accommodation”.¹ A number of projects were funded to assist these target groups and of these, four projects providing support for people exiting institutions were selected for the extended evaluations. The four projects are:

Project 2.8	Targeted Housing and Support Services (Western Sydney) (THaSS)
Project 2.10	Sustaining tenancies following exits from correctional facilities (Broken Hill) (Sustaining Tenancies)
Project 2.21	Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres (North Coast) (SWITCH [JJ])
Project 2.22	Young People Leaving Care Support Service (North Coast) (SWITCH [YPLC]) (the subject of this evaluation report)

Both projects targeting young people (“Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres North Coast” and “Young People Leaving Care Support Service - North Coast”) are operated by the SWITCH consortium. This created an opportunity for significant synergies between the two projects. Collectively, the two projects are known as SWITCH, with one arm of the consortium (YP Space MNC) delivering services on the Mid North Coast (MNC) and the other (Northern Rivers Social Development Council – NRSDC) servicing the Far North Coast (FNC). In this evaluation report, the project (Young People Leaving Care Support Service - North Coast) is referred to as SWITCH (YPLC). The remaining two projects are operated by the Community Restorative Centre (CRC).

¹ p 15 NSW Government 2009, *A Way Home: Reducing Homelessness in NSW NSW Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014* Sydney

1.3. Key contextual factors from the literature

Young people leaving out-of-home care have been described as one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. These young people experience higher rates of homelessness than young people in general. Major risk factors include family breakdown, neglect, conflict and abuse, mental health issues, unemployment, poverty, alcohol and other drug issues and crime.

The seminal longitudinal research conducted by Cashmore and Paxman (1996, 2007) finds that young people leaving care are required to negotiate a number of changes in their lives earlier and in a much shorter period of time than other young people of the same age.² Their research suggests that a young person's transition to adult life will be better negotiated when it is staggered (e.g. people have the opportunity to remain in care to complete their secondary education), when there is stable accommodation provided, and when there is financial help and social support after leaving care. Their insights into the predictors of likely success or failure in aftercare suggest factors such as poor educational attainment, marginal employment, short-term and poor quality accommodation, poor mental health and limited social support diminish life chances.

A recent report by Gaetz and Scott (2012)³ argues that in the strategic shift of emphasis towards prevention of homelessness for youth, a clear distinction needs to be made between youth homelessness and adult homelessness. As a result, different solutions are appropriate. They discuss the challenges of the expectation outlined by Cashmore and Paxton that young people can make a speedy transition to living independently. They argue that key variables are:

- Age - the younger one is, the more adolescent challenges complicate one's transition to adulthood, with youth thrust into adult roles at an accelerated rate. Impacting on this is:
 - neurological changes in adolescence impacting on cognitive development and effective decision-making; and
 - legal constraints on those under 18 years of age (such as levels of social security, ability to sign a lease);
- Poverty and discrimination - making it more difficult to access affordable and safe housing;
- Minimal or no family support;
- Very little experience with independent living; and
- Experiences with child protection services or involvement with the law.

They argue that young people need a service model that allows them time to grow and learn, and to make mistakes. This is particularly so for young people leaving institutional care, whether child protection or correctional care. These young people have underdeveloped life skills, inadequate education and lack of supports and resources (including income) that most young people rely on when moving into adulthood.

It is well established that experiencing homelessness early in life is a significant risk factor for long-term homelessness. With young people aged 12 to 24 years representing 25%⁴ of the homeless population in New South Wales, there is a clear need for sound effective prevention programs.

² p127 Cashmore, J and Paxman, M 2007 *Longitudinal Study of Wards Leaving Care: 4-5 years After Leaving Care* Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, Sydney.

³ Gaetz, S, & Scott, F 2012 *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth - A Framework for the Foyer in Canada* The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, Toronto.

⁴ ABS 2011 Census figures.



The literature suggests that while housing is a critical dimension in responding to care leavers' needs, the presence of reliable, sustainable social relationships is also important.⁵ In responding to the multiplicity of interlinked factors that face young vulnerable people, effective case management is critical. A key dimension of this is the development of positive relationships between workers and service users, involving the development of trust and the promotion of choice for young people.

The literature confirms that other important dimensions of effective service delivery include:

- Collaborative work (Kang et al 2005, Kidd 2003);
- A strengths-based approach which is flexible and forgiving (Cauce et al 2000);
- Individualised assessments, goal setting and planning;
- Capacity building, both of the young person and staff (Bruce et al 2009); and
- Continuity of care (Crimmens et al 2004).

The service task is not only to resolve practical immediate requirements for stable and suitable accommodation, but to identify and address underlying psychological, emotional and social needs and foster greater independence and self-determination. The research shows that individuals who have experienced volatile transitions are more likely to be successful where they have addressed their substance abuse issues, developed improved relationships with family, found the right support and found employment.

With respect to young people leaving care in NSW, it was recently reported⁶ that:

- Only 18% of 15 to 17 year olds in New South Wales had a leaving care plan despite it being a legislative requirement of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998;
- Less than 60% of young people in New South Wales out-of-home care knew about the access to Transition to Independent Living Allowance; and
- 35% of young people become homeless within the first year of leaving care.

This suggests that there is a need to assist young people leaving care with the negotiations around their leaving care plans and accessing their entitlements, as well as the more fundamental support to secure and sustain stable housing and time to learn what it is to live independently.

⁵ Johnson, G. et al. (2010) Pathways from out-of-home care, AHURI Final Report no 147, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.

⁶ McDowall, J 2011 *Transitioning from care in Australia: An evaluation of CREATE's What's the Plan? Campaign (CREATE Report Card 2011)*, CREATE Foundation, Sydney.



2. EVALUATION SCOPE AND METHODS

This section of the report describes the key evaluation questions, ethics considerations, evaluation methods used and the limits of the evaluation.

The key evaluation questions for the extended evaluations were the following:

1. What is the impact of the project on a reduction in homelessness?
2. What is the project potential to achieve sustainable reductions in homelessness into the future?
3. What is the impact of the project on service system change and improvement?
4. What is the extent of influence on service integration and how this was achieved?
5. What is the impact on client outcomes (intended and unintended)?
6. What are the critical success factors and barriers? and
7. What is the cost effectiveness of each project?

2.1. Ethics process

Whilst Community Services, the lead agency for the Young People Leaving Care Project, did not have a mandated ethics approval process, the scope of the ethics approvals from the University of New South Wales for other HAP evaluation projects was sufficiently broad to cover the evaluation of the projects providing support for people exiting institutions.

In addition, there was a specific approval from the Juvenile Justice Research Steering Committee for the sister SWITCH project - Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres North Coast which was granted on 18 September 2012. While the research committee is not an ethics committee, the Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres project was accepted without specific ethics approval based on the fact that the research was using the same research protocol which is being used for all projects involved in the extended evaluation of the NSW HAP which had received approval from the University of NSW Human Research Ethics Committee and Corrective Services NSW.

This research committee approval included a plain English information sheet and consent form which had been modified by WestWood Spice from a standard document provided by Housing NSW. This was adapted for the SWITCH (YPLC) project and signed by all clients interviewed. No young people's names have been used in this report.

A \$30 gift card was provided as an incentive to the clients interviewed.

2.2. Summary of methods

The evaluation has involved the following activities:

1. A brief literature review focused on what is known about what works in supporting people who are exiting institutions.
2. A review of a range of documentation sourced from SWITCH - young person and service provider pamphlets, young person exit interview template, risk assessment tool and referral form.
3. Initial briefing meetings with key informants including Housing NSW and staff from the project's lead agency staff (Department of Family and Community Services – Community Services), both in Sydney and in the region.



4. Presentation and discussions with a specially convened meeting of the Northern Regional Homelessness Committee in Coffs Harbour – (this involved all three consultancies for HAP extended evaluation projects which are located on the north coast and in New England).
5. Development of data collection and interview instruments reflecting evaluation questions.
6. Review of relevant administrative data:
 - a. Portal data submitted quarterly to Housing NSW for each of the four quarters of 2011/2012. As figures were cumulative across the financial year, the June 2012 figures were used for the analysis of 2011/2012 outcomes;
 - b. Self-evaluation data provided by SWITCH (YPLC) to Housing NSW;
 - c. A number of the reports submitted to the lead agency as part of a regular teleconference reporting and monitoring;
 - d. Financial acquittal data for 2011/2012.
7. SWITCH consortium interviews and service visits:
 - a. Consortium partners joint interview (Coffs Harbour);
 - b. Visit to NRSDC in Lismore;
 - c. Visit to YP Space MNC in Kempsey;

The service visits afforded an opportunity to see the main offices for the project on both the MNC and FNC and meet with staff (in Kempsey a focus group was conducted with the majority of staff following a regular team meeting; and in Lismore individual interviews were held with staff, including one of the Aboriginal junior case managers). In the case of Lismore, face-to-face interviews were also held with a number of young people in the program as well as external stakeholders.

- d. Client interviews;

SWITCH staff introduced the evaluation to a number of clients and obtained their permission to be included in the evaluation. Four clients were interviewed face-to-face at the SWITCH offices in Lismore and six clients were successfully contacted and interviewed by phone across the Mid North Coast. Amongst these, seven were in the SWITCH (YPLC) stream, and all three from the SWITCH (JJ) program were also young people leaving care. Two other clients who originally volunteered to take part in the evaluation were facing major issues in their lives, which meant they did not continue with their participation.

- e. External stakeholders consulted:
 - i. Life Without Barriers - YPLC caseworker;
 - ii. Real Estate Agent - Lismore;
 - iii. Community Housing Provider - Coffs Harbour Accommodation Brokerage and Housing Support Service;
 - iv. Neighbourhood Centre - Kempsey;
 - v. Centrelink - Social worker;
 - vi. Housing NSW - Private Rental staff.
- f. Regional lead agency staff:
 - i. Director Partnerships and Planning and Community Program Officer staff from MNC and FNC;
 - ii. Community Services – Out-of-Home Care Managers.



2.3. Limitations

The findings of the evaluation, while strongly indicative of a range of positive outcomes in relation to factors associated with reducing homelessness in the target group, have a number of limitations:

- The evaluation is of necessity largely descriptive in nature and the data is mostly qualitative and based on consultations with a cross section of key stakeholder groups, including clients of the service and a range of service providers;
- The sample of young people interviewed for this evaluation is small and while it has provided strong qualitative feedback about the program, it does not claim to be a statistically representative sample of the whole population of clients serviced by the program. This limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. There was a mixture of current and exited clients amongst those interviewed;
- Difficulties of contact meant that it was not feasible to include individuals who had been referred to the program but who had decided not to proceed with the referral. This means that their views have been unable to be included; and
- To enable comparability across the HAP extended evaluation projects, it was agreed that 2011/2012 detailed statistical data from the HAP portal reports would be used. Some information was also drawn from the self-evaluation reports which were completed before the final 2011/2012 data was available. This means that there are some inconsistencies and gaps in the information available. Some client demographic data includes information to 30 November 2012. It should be recognised that as the program was ongoing beyond June 2012, there will be changes to client outcomes since the report which are not reflected in the analysis or outcomes presented.



3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This section of the report provides information about the origins of the service, and the establishment of a consortium for its conduct, its aims and objectives, target group, service model and details of the individual services provided as well as eligibility and referral processes, partnership arrangements, brokerage, governance, staffing and budget.

3.1. Service origins and description

The North Coast Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2010–2014 included the two priority projects focused on young people leaving institutions which have been described in section 1.2. (Young People Leaving Care Support Service - North Coast (Project 2.22) and Young People Exiting Juvenile Justice Centres North Coast (Project 2.21).

While the plan recognised that the Mid North Coast and Far North Coast communities had varying priorities that needed to be reflected in service delivery approaches, it also recognised that the NPAH pilot projects presented an important opportunity to trial new service delivery approaches, to better improve integration and coordination across the regional homelessness system.

The SWITCH consortium was created to tender for both projects and was successful. With project partners in both the MNC and FNC, the SWITCH consortium provided the capacity to service both regions with a consistent model, but with flexibility to meet local needs. This gave the projects the potential to deliver an important contribution to overall system improvement in homelessness prevention.

The SWITCH (YPLC) project included specific targets for Aboriginal young people. This meant that it could also play a role in strengthening responses to Aboriginal homelessness.

The FNC project partner, Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRDSC) took the lead on the SWITCH (YPLC) project. Based on figures of higher numbers of young people in out-of-home placements in the Far North Coast, the proposal was organised on a 60:40 funding split.⁷ More details about the consortium partners are provided in the section under program management (Section 3.5).

From the outset, the two projects were set up with common processes, including staffing structures and standardised tools and data collection.

The SWITCH service model was described as “a strengths based, person centred case management support service focused on building foundations skills and support for independence through planning the transition to appropriate housing options”.⁸ Other elements included:

- Developing connectedness to family, friends, community education and employment;
- Early identification of needs for successful transition;
- Determining level, intensity and duration of service delivery according to individual needs;
- Use of outreach and home visiting;
- Locating out-posted staff with other youth services;
- Development of partnerships to increase appropriate and stable accommodation options available to young people in the local area;

⁷ YP Space MNC took the lead on the tender for project 2.21 SWITCH (Juvenile Justice).

⁸ p8 NRDSC & YP Space MNC Consortium document.

- Using brokerage to purchase additional supports; and
- Identifying service system and policy issues that contribute to youth homelessness.

3.2. Aims and objectives

The project aims to:⁹

1. Prevent homelessness for young people transitioning from care to independent living;
2. Improve social, economic, education and health outcomes for care leavers;
3. Increase collaborative service delivery across government and non-government agencies in responding to homelessness; and
4. Identify and resolve impediments to the effective provision of support services and make recommendations to reform the existing service system in the longer-term.

3.3. Target group

While the target group for this project was young people leaving care, with an age profile 16-25 years of age, and the target age group for the SWITCH (JJ) project was a younger cohort (13-19 years of age) there was overlap with potential clients of the SWITCH (JJ) project. This was because a significant proportion of young people who come into contact with the juvenile justice system have an out-of-home care background. Had the SWITCH (JJ) project tender been unsuccessful, some of these young people could have potentially been assisted as part of the SWITCH (YPLC) project. By the time of the second round for the SWITCH (YPLC) project, there were young people leaving care who were entering the project via referral from Juvenile Justice.

Amongst the 10 clients who were interviewed for the evaluation across the two projects, there were four individuals who could have belonged to either category.

3.4. Service model

The SWITCH program operated largely as an integrated service model across the two projects (YPLC and JJ) with common staffing and model features. This allowed for balanced caseloads and good geographic coverage, in turn allowing speedy responses to young people, irrespective of program stream. The key differences related to the referral pathways into the program (a closed pathway in the case of Juvenile Justice), conditions attached to brokerage (SWITCH [YPLC] is unable to fund emergency accommodation), the scale of the project (larger client target numbers in SWITCH [YPLC]) and the separation of SWITCH (YPLC) clients into Early Intervention Case Management Support and Case Management Support.

3.4.1. Services offered

Under the umbrella of intensive case management support to address individual young people's needs, the SWITCH model is based on a staged process of providing support:

- Stage 1: Initial work is focused on housing and stabilising accommodation. Individual case plans are written and input made to Leaving Care Plans where these are underway, followed by activities to meet the complex needs of clients and to achieve their goals (average duration approximately two months);

⁹ NSW Homelessness Action Plan – Submission For Regional Projects (Young People Leaving Care Support Service).



- Stage 2: Focused on medium term planning and engagement with education, training and employment, as well as sustaining tenancies (or re-housing if required) and developing skills for independent living (approximate average duration six months); and
- Stage 3: Provides continuation with support services and consolidation of gains for the final four to six months of support. This allows room for recovery from set-backs and for transition to mainstream service supports. It includes linkages to ongoing support services (e.g. community mental health, trauma counselling, AOD counselling).

Support packages are tailored to the individual. The table below provides an overview of the types of services which can be offered.

Table 1: Overview of services provided by SWITCH (YPLC)

Services offered	YPLC	
	Early intervention	Case management
Planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Liaison with OOHC provider in development of Leaving Care Plan ▪ Coordinated assessment and case planning ▪ Provision of information, advice and guidance ▪ Child protection support 	✓	✓
Income support/ financial assistance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sorting out identification documents ▪ Assistance with access to entitlements - Centrelink, FaCS, TILA 	✓	✓
Housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support to locate and secure appropriate housing ▪ Support to sustain tenancies ▪ “Reality Rental” courses (based on “Rent it Keep it”) ▪ Household establishment, furniture etc 	✓	✓
Other services provided		
Relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support to maintain or re-engage with family/ family mediation ▪ Protective behaviours training ▪ Cultural connections (Aboriginal) 	✓	✓
Education and training: Support to access or re-engage with education, training and employment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Liaison with education authorities ▪ Skills training in resumes, job applications & interviewing ▪ Support & preparation for interviews 	✓	✓
Independent living skills training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial management & budgeting ▪ Shopping and meal preparation ▪ Driver education/ assistance obtaining driver’s licence 	✓	✓



Services offered	YPLC	
	Early intervention	Case management
Counselling & referrals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dealing with drug and alcohol issues ▪ Trauma counselling ▪ Anger management ▪ Domestic violence support ▪ Disability support 	✓	✓
Medical and dental health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assistance with appointments ▪ Access to sexual health services 	✓	✓
Mental health: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referrals ▪ Support and symptom management 	✓	✓
Court/ legal support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JJ Case conferencing support ▪ Legal aid referral ▪ Victim's compensation 		✓
Other services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transport ▪ Brokerage ▪ Advocacy 	✓	✓

3.4.2. Eligibility, referral processes and assessment criteria

Eligibility:

The key eligibility criteria for the project were young people:

- Aged 16 to 25 years;
 - in statutory or supported care; or
 - previously in a care placement and homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This created two streams for the program: Early Intervention and Case Management. There were separate target numbers set for each of these two streams, as well as targets within each subcategory for Aboriginal clients.

Referrals:

With an effective pilot duration of two years, and a service model which provided a benchmark of 12 months of support to each participant, two intake rounds were planned.

The first round was staggered. This matched the start-up of the project. Given the notional allocation of 10 clients per caseworker (across both the YPLC and JJ projects) at any one time, as staff joined the project and service capacity expanded, more round one clients were assessed and accepted. As vacancies arose through client exits, more places were offered.



Round two was treated as a one off round. This was thought necessary in light of the end date of the pilot at June 2013 and a desire to offer participants their full complement of support. To make this possible, there was an increase in the number of case managers employed. This meant SWITCH operating with seven caseworkers in FNC (four x f/t and three x p/t) and six (f/t) in MNC. (See Section 3.6 for more detail on staffing.)

Referrals came from a variety of sources (unlike the SWITCH (JJ) project, where the referral pathway was restricted to Juvenile Justice). The original project plan envisaged a priority allocation of two program places per round for each Community Services Centre (CSC) in the project catchment area. For the MNC this was Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Taree and Coffs Harbour and for the FNC, Ballina, Clarence Valley (Grafton), Lismore, Tweed Heads. Additional CSC referrals were assessed and accepted subject to the availability of spaces in the program.

Other sources of referral were non-government organisations and other government services, notably Centrelink. SWITCH (YPLC) also accepted self referrals. The fact that there were a number of self referrals) was, in the words of one external stakeholder:

“Testimony to the high regard in which the program is held amongst young people themselves.”

At least 10 self-referrals were identified by the evaluation.

SWITCH developed a comprehensive assessment form for completion by referring agencies. This covered the following areas:

- Referrer information;
- Young person snapshot profile;
- Accommodation/ housing;
- Emotional well-being;
- Legal issues;
- Family contact and social networks;
- Health care;
- Behaviour;
- Skills;
- Education and vocational;
- Culture and identity; and
- Other.

Risk Assessment:

Prior to acceptance into the program, the team leader met with the young person and completed a SWITCH young person risk assessment. This encompassed the domains of the young person's history and behaviour, family history and experiences with other service providers. The assessment resulted in a risk assessment outcome, assessing safety for a sole worker around the provision of outreach services, safety in an office environment and the provision of transport in a work car.

3.4.3. Coordination structures

Coordination structures are discussed under partnerships below. There were no multi-lateral, multi-client referral coordination components to the project.



3.4.4. Formal and informal partnerships

Both consortium partners were able to access relevant activities and programs of their parent organisations through internal referrals and informal working arrangements. In FNC, this included the “Reconnect” program and “Getting it Together” - a drug and alcohol service for young people. In MNC, there is capacity to access crisis accommodation on a “fee for service” basis and two transitional accommodation units at YP Space MNC. YP Space also manages two exit units in Kempsey (Crisis Accommodation Program [CAP] properties). Within the SWITCH (YPLC) project young people have been housed in YP Space transitional units and exit units over the duration of the project.

Both consortium partners were already well-known and involved in extensive networking in the region. The program presented the opportunity to strengthen some of these partnerships through the delivery of joint activities.

A successful and well-received example of this occurred on both the FNC and MNC with the delivery of “Reality Rental” courses. Initially run as pilot courses for young people, SWITCH partnered variously with Housing NSW staff, Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre, Tenants Advice Services and local real estate agents (as guest speakers) on both the MNC and FNC to streamline and target the course content to the needs of the SWITCH client group.¹⁰ The course has been run twice now in each location. Subsequently, the real estate agents supported the project by assisting SWITCH clients in securing tenancies. One real estate agent interviewed for the evaluation explained that:

“Young people have no idea about how to represent themselves in a way which will suit the expectations of property owners.”

The course provided education about this, about how to fill out the application form, about social boundaries and budgeting. He summed it up as:

“It’s empowering for participants - it makes their life easier.”

Successful completion of the course delivered 20 points towards 120 points for a real estate identification, which assisted with priority listing for housing.

YP Space MNC is the lead convenor of the Kempsey Youth Accord project. This project is a partnership between Housing NSW, Community Housing Limited, YP Space and other community agencies. Two SWITCH (YPLC) young people are currently housed through the agreement.

Informal partnerships with key players in the service system were delivering results. For example:

- SWITCH caseworkers worked closely with Housing NSW staff to help people access private rental properties. One Housing NSW informant said that she assisted 10 young people into housing over the last nine months through collaboration with SWITCH. She also assisted with priority housing assessments;
- A joint collaboration between SWITCH, Housing NSW and Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) secured an urgent place in a caravan park for a young person with an intellectual disability who needed to leave town because he had been threatened; and

¹⁰ The “Rent It Keep It” training package developed by Housing NSW has been used to guide the development of the “Reality Rental” course.

- SWITCH caseworkers worked closely with Centrelink staff. These connections enabled individuals to access income maintenance and allowances to which they were entitled and to be confident that these were at the appropriate rates of payment for their circumstances. Social work staff concerned that individuals were safe and linked to services reported that they worked collaboratively with SWITCH on issues to reduce vulnerability; for example, in organising referrals to mental health support.

Such networks allow for good cross sharing of information and for other informal benefits e.g. sharing information about a potential property vacancy which might be suitable for a SWITCH client.

Co-location of out-posted casework staff with other youth organisations brought benefits of access to office space in the establishment phase, as well as cost savings and greater collaborative synergies. For example, space was initially shared in Coffs Harbour with another youth service and the Taree team is co-located with the Samaritans.

In some instances, specific use was made of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). In the MNC, an MOU covering transitional housing and joint case management enabled a specific property managed by Coffs Harbour Accommodation Brokerage and Housing Support Service to be earmarked for SWITCH.

The community housing provider described the outcomes from this arrangement as a “*fantastic success*”. A 12 month history of stable rental enabled the client to enter the private rental market with the assistance of SWITCH. At a more systemic level, the partnership resulted in a modification to the eligibility criteria for this community housing to include ‘couch surfing’ and temporary accommodation. These changes better reflect the circumstances of young people who are at risk of homelessness. A second benefit of the partnership was an increased focus on securing additional properties which could be used for other SWITCH clients.

3.4.5. Brokerage

The project budget included a notional brokerage allocation of \$1,000 per person. Access to this money was by caseworker recommendation to the project team leader. A fundamental criterion was that all other avenues to secure funding had first been exhausted.

A key source of funding for young people who are exiting statutory out-of-home care can be the financial provisions which are made as part of their leaving care plan. Under Section 165(2) of the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*, funds can be made available to a young person who has left statutory out-of-home care to assist with a range of costs associated with transition to independent living. Funding for education support can be accessed within the first three years of leaving care and other funding up until the age of 25 years. This assistance is not an automatic entitlement and is based on assessment of needs. However, the complex situations and vulnerabilities of some YPLC have meant that some SWITCH clients could potentially access significant funds. Two examples were one of \$13,000 and another of \$27,000. SWITCH caseworkers play an advocacy and practical role in assisting young people in the program with negotiating access to this support and the approval processes.



Other avenues of financial support which were pursued included Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA),¹¹ NILS®loans,¹² access to therapeutic counselling through the Medicare system including Mental Health Plans and advances from Centrelink.

A sound reason for the brokerage request and its proposed benefit to the young person was required. Key categories which were considered included:

- Pursuing education;
- Therapeutic counselling over and above the Medicare program;
- Tenancy establishment e.g. assistance with household furnishings and setup costs; and
- Transport access e.g. pushbike purchase.

Brokerage for the YPLC program was not available for emergency accommodation. This was in contrast to the sister JJ program where young people who otherwise may not be able to access bail and faced the prospect of entering a custodial facility because they are homeless, could be assisted through brokerage to access emergency accommodation.

SWITCH workers took the opportunity presented by access to brokerage to generate a learning experience for the young people being assisted. Through the process of making choices and compromising amongst options, budgeting and skills development were enhanced.

3.5. Management and governance arrangements

The model is delivered by a consortium using the name SWITCH. It is a partnership between two agencies:

- Northern Rivers Social Development Council (NRSDC) which is headquartered in Lismore (lead partner); and
- YP Space MNC in Kempsey, which operates a youth refuge under the SHS program.

A consortium agreement was signed on 13 December 2010 and this provides the details on aspects such as its purposes and guiding principles, how the consortium will operate and lead agency roles.

Both partners have a long history of providing regionally based services for youth, but YP Space MNC is the only project partner with the capacity to directly provide crisis and short-term accommodation. This is limited to Kempsey.

¹¹ TILA is a one-off payment of \$1,500 available from the Australian Government to young people who are leaving Care aged at least 15 and less than 26 years to help meet some of the costs involved in moving to independent living.

¹² NILS®loans are provided by a network of community groups and charities under a support arrangement from Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service with support from the NAB bank and the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Typical loans are in the \$800 – \$1,200 range and enable low income households without access to savings or credit to purchase essential household items, white goods, furniture or medical appliances. There is no interest on the loan and it is repayable over a 12-18 month period.



Consortium Partners

Northern Rivers Social Development Council

NRSDC was incorporated in 1985, and is a larger organisation than YP Space MNC. Its key purpose is community development. As well as operating a range of youth and other community services programs and providing training for workers in the health, social and community services sectors, the organisation has an advocacy, promotion and research role. NRSDC is structured into two branches; Delivery and Client Services (where the SWITCH program is located) and Development and Innovation. Overall staffing numbers are in excess of 37.

YP Space MNC

YP Space MNC is a Homelessness Assistance Youth Service that was previously funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and has been operating in the Macleay region of NSW for over 27 years. The service restructured in 2008 to provide a comprehensive case management model. It continues to operate crisis accommodation and two transitional housing units in Kempsey, two exit units (Crisis Accommodation program [CAP] properties) as well as a range of youth focused programs.

Community Services (FaCS) - Lead Agency/ Funder

The lead agency for the YPLC Support Service is Community Services. Project monitoring is organised regionally. There is no formal steering committee for the project; instead, Community Services and the consortium partners participate in a bi-monthly tele-link on project progress. Community Services also informs itself through regular portal reporting arrangements (see below). In addition, there is direct involvement with the service through the Child and Family Director (Child Protection) and the Community Service Centres (CSCs) who may refer individuals to SWITCH.

Regional Homelessness Committee (RHC)

Established concurrently with the North Coast Regional Homelessness Action Plan (2010-2014), the North Coast RHC has a role in providing oversight of the HAP projects under the plan, including the YPLC Support Service - North Coast. The committee's composition includes key government and non-government agencies of relevance to homelessness issues. Meeting quarterly, it has a mandate to consider what members can do to support the HAP projects which are part of the North Coast Action Plan. It is not clear whether the committee will have a life beyond the projects.

Portal Reports

Each HAP project was required to complete quarterly statistical reports for submission to Housing NSW, known as Portal reports. As well as providing quantitative information about the project, the reports allowed for commentary about issues in interpreting the data, and for lessons learnt and key challenges faced.

3.6. Staffing

The initial staffing model for SWITCH (YPLC) was a 0.5 FTE Senior Caseworker (Team Leader), two FTE caseworkers in both the MDC and FNC, a (part-time) Community Development Officer position (0.4FTE) and a minimum of one (FTE) Aboriginal trainee caseworker position in each location.

Across both MNC and FNC there was some turnover in the casework staff, but each location had a core of at least two caseworkers who have been involved for the duration of the program. In 2012/2013, there was also a growth in staffing numbers to respond to the increased caseload occasioned by the size and timing of the second intake and program under-spend in the previous financial years in the sister project SWITCH (JJ).

During the program, a key project which the MNC Community Development Officer had undertaken was completed (Identifying Blockages in Mainstream Service Systems¹³) and this person became the team leader for the MNC. Her involvement in the project from the outset, together with the YP Space Manager, maintained program continuity.

The Team Leader for the FNC Division changed during the project and this brought a strengthened approach to service partnerships and casework practice.

SWITCH staffing worked across both programs - JJ and YPLC, and the caseload mix was determined more by referral patterns and demand, matched to the geographic coverage of caseworkers, than project type.

Each caseworker carried a target caseload of 10 clients, whilst the Team Leaders were also expected to have a partial caseload of up to 6 more complex clients. The notional hours of support related to client stage was as follows:

Stage 1 (High needs): Approximately eight hours per week

Stage 2 (Medium needs): Approximately five hours per week

Stage 3 (Low needs): Approximately three hours per week

As at November 2012, SWITCH Staff and their locations are as shown in the table below:

Table 2: Details of SWITCH staff

MNC			FNC		
Staff location	#/type of staff	Also covers:	Staff location	#/type of staff	Also covers:
Kempsey	Team Leader 2 x Caseworkers (f/t)	Port Macquarie, Wauchope, Bonny Hills, Lauretin, Lake Cathie, Nambucca Heads, Macksville, South West Rocks, Crescent Head; Telegraph Point; Bowraville	Lismore	Manager/ Team Leader 2 x f/t Junior Caseworkers (Aboriginal) 2 x Caseworkers (f/t)	Casino/ Kyogle
Taree	2 x Caseworkers (f/t)	Forster, Tuncurry, Wingham, Gloucester	Clarence (Grafton)	2 x Caseworkers (p/t)	
Coffs Harbour	2 x Caseworkers (f/t)	Woolgoolga, Toormina, Sawtell, Bellingen, Urunga, Nambucca Heads	Tweed	1 x Caseworker (p/t)	

¹³ See Section 7.4 for a summary of this project



3.7. Project budget

The YPLC Support Service (2.22) total project budget was \$1.86m, with an expectation that a total of 112 clients would be served over the life of the project to 30 June 2013 (56 in 2011/2012 and 56 in 2012/2013.) In 2011/2012 payments were \$863,225.

4. ANALYSIS OF CLIENT AND SERVICE SYSTEM OUTCOMES

This section of the report provides information about the services provided, client numbers and outcomes as well as feedback on the impact of the SWITCH project on the service system on the North Coast.

4.1. Client services and outcomes

4.1.1. Number of clients assisted and demographic profile

Overall, the project target was 112 young people. With the delay to the project start, this was divided almost equally between 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 at 57 and 55 individuals respectively for each year. Project targets were split 40:60 across the MNC and FNC. The split was based on a higher number of young people leaving out-of-home care in the FNC. Thus overall, FNC had a target of 67 (39 Aboriginal) and MNC a target of 45 (18 Aboriginal).

Within the project targets there were additional sub-targets relating to the early intervention and case management streams. There were also designated Aboriginal client numbers within each stream. The Aboriginal targets are shown in brackets in the table below.

Table 3: Overall project targets

	2011/2012	2012/2013	Total
Early intervention	44 (15)	43 (14)	87 (29)
Case management	13 (4)	12 (4)	25 (8)
TOTAL	57 (19)	55 (18)	112 (37)

Aboriginal Clients:

The overall project target for Aboriginal clients (37/112) represents one-third (33%) of places. The 2011/2012 portal data indicates that of the 59 clients assisted, 29 were Aboriginal, i.e. 45% of the total clients. The program is clearly exceeding its Aboriginal targets (running at 150%). One factor assisting this is the service model's inclusion of Aboriginal junior caseworkers. This trend has continued in 2012/2013. (Aboriginal caseworkers are discussed further at 4.2.2. below.)

As the table below shows, the actual program delivered more intensive case management than was originally targeted and less early intervention. This confirms the feedback from SWITCH that case management is the area of greater need.

Table 4: Client numbers against targets

	2011/2012				2012/2013 ¹⁴			
	MNC	FNC	Total	%	MNC	FNC	Total	%
Target (Full Year)	23	34	57	100%	22	33	55	100%
Actual	35	24	59	104%	24	30	54	98%
(Early Intervention)	17	10	27	61%	14	17	31	72%
(Case Management)	18	14	32	246%	10	13	23	191%

¹⁴ To 30 November 2012 for actual data.



The table below shows the distribution of clients across the sub regions within each of the two regions of the project (Mid North Coast and Far North Coast) from project commencement to 30 November 2012. As there was some movement of clients across the coast, these locations have been selected as at the point of entry to the program.

Table 5: Geographic distribution of clients from program commencement to date

MNC				FNC			
Kempsey	Taree	Coffs Harbour	Lismore	Ballina/ Byron	Clarence Valley	Tweed	Other
26	14	19	16	6	12	6	14

Client age, gender and Aboriginal status

The following tables provide additional information on the age, gender and Aboriginal status of the young people who have been supported by SWITCH (YPLC) from commencement to 30 November 2012. Table 6 relates to the MNC and Table 7 to the FNC.

Table 6: MNC age, Aboriginal status and gender mix from program commencement to date

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Under 16	1	0	0	0	1	0
16-17	9	13	8	9	17	22
18-19	1	7	4	1	5	8
20 and over	0	1	5	0	5	1
Total people served in program on MNC to date = 59; 32 male; 27 female; 28 Aboriginal; 31 non-Aboriginal						

Table 7: FNC age, Aboriginal status and gender mix from program commencement to date

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Under 16	0	0	1	0	1	0
16-17	5	7	7	8	12	15
18-19	7	7	2	8	9	15
20 and over	0	6	3	1	3	7
Total people served in program on FNC to date = 62; 32 male; 30 female; 25 Aboriginal; 37 non-Aboriginal						

From both tables it can be seen that across the SWITCH (YPLC) client group, there are slightly more males than females amongst those served (53% males compared to 47% females - MNC and FNC combined). With respect to age, clients on the MNC tended to be younger with 66% of clients in the 16-17 year age range compared to 44% on the FNC. Those aged 18-19 years, comprised 22% of MNC and 39% of FNC clients. Both locations had relatively few clients 20 years or older (10% and 16% respectively). In each location there was only one young person under the age of 16.

For females, those on the MNC are almost twice as likely to be Aboriginal as non-Aboriginal, whereas amongst females on the FNC and males in both locations, approximately one-third are Aboriginal.

4.1.2. Services and supports provided

Section 3.4.1 presents the range of services which are offered by SWITCH. With the majority (66%)¹⁵ of young people entering the program in housing crisis or at imminent risk of homelessness (even amongst the early intervention stream), securing and maintaining housing is the first priority.

From the self-evaluation report, which relates to 50 of the 59 2011/2012 clients, the numbers receiving services (other than housing-related) are as follows:

Table 8: Non-housing services received by self-assessment clients in 2011/2012

Service/ support type	#'s	%
Financial	45	90%
Drug & alcohol	20	40%
Education, training & employment	40	80%
Legal	8	16%
Mental health	14	28%
General health	40	80%
Family & relationship counselling	14	28%
Disability support	1	2%
Other	4	8%
Family & parenting support	1 ¹⁶	2%
General counselling	10	20%
Living skills	2	4%
Recreational activities	10	20%

As can be seen in the variety in the table above, each person receives a complex mix of support tailored to individual needs. A more detailed breakdown of the services received by the ten specific young people who were interviewed for the evaluation is presented in Table 10 later in the report.

¹⁵ 2011/2012 HAP portal data.

¹⁶ The portal data did not appear to reflect the level of parenting and child support delivered by the program. Additional information about family and parenting support for the 2011/2012 year from SHIP records shows 24 direct occasions of assistance or referral in core areas relating to raising a child on the FNC.



4.1.3. Housing outcomes

Despite a number of challenges involved in securing suitable and stable housing for young people in the region, the program was able to provide initial responses to the crisis housing situations of all individuals in need who accepted a referral to the program. Following this, the project had transitioned or was actively involved in transitioning accommodated clients to longer-term stable accommodation.

In 2011/2012, 39 housing placements for young people engaged in the program were organised and 43 maintained stable accommodation throughout the year. Amongst these, however, five people remained in housing options which were transitional (two in SHS services and three residing temporarily with family/friends). The other category includes young people engaged in the SWITCH project who were supported to remain connected or were reconnected to existing appropriate kinship placements or to foster care placements. It also includes individuals who were boarding with their family under an informal arrangement, where the young person did not have any tenure per se or hold a written agreement from the family. However, it would have been inaccurate to classify the arrangement as “temporary” in terms of the HAP portal options as the arrangement was ongoing. There was one person in the “other” category who was residing in a mental health unit at the time of the portal report. The table below shows the numbers and types of housing secured.

Table 9: Types of housing secured

Housing type	Initial	At 30 June 2012
Social housing	9	11
Private rental	13	14
Temporary accommodation (e.g. motel)	2	
SHS accommodation	2	2
Temporary with family/ friends	2	3
Other	11	13
TOTALS	39	43

Sustaining private rentals

The existence of the program was a factor in increasing access to private rental tenancies. It was reported that the confidence of real estate agents in letting properties to young people was enhanced by both the knowledge that there was a service involved which would be visiting twice weekly and the fact that there was somebody to contact other than the tenant. Another critical factor was the persistence of the caseworker in physically taking people to see real estate agents.

An innovative tool used by the MNC caseworkers was a bracelet USB for use by clients to store their detailed documentation and references to support a real estate application.



4.1.4. Non-housing outcomes

As described in Section 4.1.2 young people received a wide variety of non-housing services and supports, resulting in the achievement of a range of outcomes, including improved physical and mental health, reduced drug and alcohol issues, successful parenting, reconnection with family, and employment and educational outcomes.

A number of young people secured employment. There were nine young people on the MNC in entry-level part-time employment at 30 June 2012. Jobs included car wash attendant, trolley collection employee, retail employee, fast-food employee, farm hand, receptionist, café staff and call centre worker. Information on numbers of clients securing employment on the FNC was not routinely collected until late 2012.

- Completion of Leaving Care Plans

A number of young people leaving care referred to the program had become disengaged from Community Services and had no Leaving Care Plan established. This involved SWITCH in advocacy work to facilitate the development of these plans. In 2011/2012, there were two young people on the MNC who had no plans in place after leaving care. On the FNC, there were at least 10 people with incomplete or no plans who were assisted in the development and /or completion of their Leaving Care plan with the intervention and advocacy of SWITCH. An important benefit of a leaving care plan for a young person is the practical strategies it can contain to assist with transition to independent living. This includes access to financial support from Community Services with housing and rental costs and other assistance e.g. driver training.

- Support for dependent children, pregnancy and child care

A number of young women in the project were pregnant and/or delivered children during their time as clients in the project. On the FNC there are six Leaving Care clients with children and another four clients with confirmed pregnancies who are due to give birth before the end of the program. On the MNC, there are 16 dependent children of young people associated with SWITCH (YPLC). Across both locations there are six more children associated with the SWITCH (JJ) stream.

Project support to these clients included assistance with family planning and support and preparation around the birth of the baby. As well as direct benefits to the children (such as assistance with housing), support also included parenting skill development. This has additional benefits of reducing issues of neglect or abuse. On the FNC, two young people had taken responsibility for the provision of kinship care to young children and one person was supported to access a child who had been removed from her care at birth.

- Legal solutions

Some individuals were provided with support to access legal advice and assistance around issues such as phone contracts, leases and to seek victim's compensation payments.

- Assistance with management of fines

YP Space on the MNC is an authorised Work and Development Order (WDO) Agency.¹⁷ This enables the organisation to assist young people to address their fine debt through a connection to counselling and case management. This can function as a good incentive to engage young people in the SWITCH program and achieve outcomes quickly. This is a process which can strengthen the young person's connection to the agency and demonstrate in a practical way how support can be helpful.

- Securing engagement through the use of creative solutions

One of the challenges in working with the target group of SWITCH (YPLC) is to develop solutions which work for the young person. Effective examples included using a gym program to enable difficult conversations to happen with the young person while they were using the treadmill, and the use of music as a tool to assist young person to overcome feelings of self-harm. In providing support for a young person to deal with issues of childhood trauma, use was made of both art therapy and music therapy.

- Improved ratings of quality of life

The section which follows provides more information about the individual clients who were interviewed for the evaluation. Across the group of young people interviewed, it is noteworthy that all reported improved confidence and hope in the future.

Universally, when asked to rate their quality of life compared to 6 or 12 months previously, clients interviewed responded with views such as:

- "100 to 200% better than before";
 - "100% better - way better than before";
 - "it's 9/10";
 - "my quality of life is 70% better than it would be if I were on my own."
- A source of support and improved self-esteem

Another common theme was the importance of caseworkers in providing "someone to talk to about your problems". One person described how the service had assisted them:

"The way they looked after me. They care about young people themselves. They ask you if you need help."

The level of satisfaction with the program was very high amongst the clients interviewed. This was reinforced by the finding that no one was able to give suggestions as to how the program could be improved.

¹⁷ Work and development orders (WDO) are made by the Office of State Revenue to allow eligible clients reduce their fines through unpaid work with an approved organisation and through certain courses or treatment. Approved activities can include voluntary unpaid work, medical or mental health treatment, educational/ vocational or life skills course, financial or other counselling, drug or alcohol treatment and a mentoring program (for persons under 25 years).



From the client interviews conducted, other non-housing outcomes which were evident included:

- Strengthening engagement with education through the provision of stable accommodation which enabled the young person to focus again on their school studies, rather than where they would sleep for the night;
- Assisting with sitting the learner's licence test, and ongoing support to undertake driver training and ultimately secure a driver's licence;
- Referral and support to undertake TAFE training courses in literacy and numeracy;
- Budget skill development and planning to enable previous debts to be fully repaid; and
- Reengagement with the local mental health team and renewed medication compliance.



Client interviews

In addition to the overall program client outcomes, additional insights about the effectiveness of the SWITCH program were gained through interviews with a small number of SWITCH clients. In total, there were 10 clients interviewed, with seven of these in the SWITCH (YPLC) stream. The remaining three were also individuals who could have belonged in SWITCH (YPLC) as they were also all individuals who had been in the care of the Minister and amongst the SWITCH (YPLC) stream there were another two who could have been in the SWITCH (JJ) stream.

Table 10: Summary background information: SWITCH clients interviewed for the HAP evaluation

Questions	FNC				MNC					
	Client 1	Client 2	Client 3	Client 4	Client 5	Client 6	Client 7	Client 8	Client 9	Client 10
Current age	17	19	19	17	19	18	18	17	19	16
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age first homelessness	Est 15	14	13	N/A	N/A	N/A	17	16	15	12
PROGRAM	YPLC	YPLC	YPLC	JJ	YPLC	YPLC	JJ	YPLC	YPLC	JJ
Could they have been in the other program? ¹⁸	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Aboriginal status	Aboriginal	Aboriginal				Aboriginal				Aboriginal
Young parent?	No	No	Yes	Unknown	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Client status	current	current	current	current	exited	current	exited	current	current	current
Time in program ¹⁹	10 mths	2 mths	4 mths	1 mth	12 mths	4-5 mths	12 mths	3-4 mths	6 mths	1 mth
Housing arrangements:										
At program entry	Unsuitable foster ²⁰	Step-family	With unstable parent	Couch surfing	Evicted private rental	Private rental	Emergency accommodation	Couch surfing	Couch surfing	Rough sleeping
Current housing arrangements:	Soon to transition to new foster care	Tent in caravan park (at interview)	Motel (at interview) Now share house	In hospital	Private rental flat	Living with aunt	Private rental flat	Transitional housing	Community housing bedsit	Caravan park

¹⁸ JJ, but out-of-home care background; YPLC with offending history.

¹⁹ At time of interview.

²⁰ Child at risk.



The table below provides a picture of the other supports which were provided to each of these clients. Universal support's included advocacy and provision of transport e.g. driving individuals to appointments such as medical. All clients received some brokerage assistance and these details follow.

Table 11: Details of other supports provided

Other supports provided:	MNC										
	FNC	Client 1	Client 2	Client 3	Client 4	Client 5	Client 6	Client 7	Client 8	Client 9	Client 10
Centre link assistance		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Assistance to get drivers licence	√		√			√		√		√	
Budgeting		√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Reality Rental course (based on "Rent it/ keep it" course)										√	√
Shopping/ cooking/ independent living skills training	√	√	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Assistance with medical & dental issues		√	√			√		√	√	√	√
Assistance with mental health issues		√	√			√		√	√	√	√
Drug and alcohol support			√			√	√	√		√	
Family reconnection	√	√	√				√				
Return to school	√										
TAFE/ further education training	√	√		√	√	√	√			√	√
Job assistance	√			√	√	√	√				
Assistance with court issues	√	√	√	√						√	√
Recreation activities	√						Football	Motor-cross	BMX riding	Art & creative	
Transport	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Other supports	Child protection, counselling	Counselling	Custody issues	Mobile phone	Access to counselling	Cultural connections				Sexual health support with gender dysphoria	



Table 12: Details of brokerage payments

Brokerage										
Total brokerage spent on client \$	\$161	\$1900	\$626	N/A	\$1470	\$135	\$2556	\$274	\$2912	\$150
GOODS										
Household goods	√	√	√		√		√		√	
Grocery/ food		√			√	√	√		√	
Transport e.g. bicycle/ petrol/ taxi/ fares		√	√		√	√	√	√		
Health items			√						√	
SERVICES										
External counselling		√								
PAYMENTS										
Housing related (e.g. Bond/ rent arrears/ utilities)			√		√		√		√	√
Other (employment items)							√		√	



Case Studies

Client 1: This 17 year old young woman came to the program from an unsuitable foster placement with child at risk issues. SWITCH had been involved in child protection intervention, and had organised child abuse counselling. She described her life as having been completely changed around - from being a sad and unhappy person, to looking forward to finding her own place to live and being set up properly. She received assistance to help budget and cook and to get around by bicycle. She reported very much appreciating caseworkers support in staying with her when she did her theory test for getting her drivers "L" plates. It was clear that the emotional as well as the practical support she received from her caseworker was very important.

Client 2: This young person was unable to continue living with her step family at the time of referral and was initially living in a tent in the local caravan park. Through SWITCH she gained a share tenancy with another client. She described the project as helping her with food and equipment and being really supportive. She now felt she was *"going somewhere in life"*.

Client 3: This young person learnt about SWITCH from her Community Mental Health worker. Her family background was unstable, with significant mental illness. Following a period of crisis accommodation in a motel, she had been placed in a shared accommodation arrangement. She described the program as: *"one of the only ones willing to help me. I haven't come across anything else like them"*. The project reported that her own unstable mental health issues and significant violence to others continued to place both her and her workers at significant risk.

Client 5: This young person was referred to SWITCH by an OOHC service after a "Notice to Leave" was issued for the private rental property he was living in. He moved to Taree as his preferred location and was supported into transitional housing for a period of three months. After this, SWITCH supported his transition into a private rental property - which he had maintained for over nine months. At program entry he had limited living skills and limited literacy and numeracy skills, and was experiencing mental health difficulties due to past trauma. He said that SWITCH also helped link him up to a Jobseeker provider, and to get his "P" plates.

Client 6: This young person was 18 years old and was referred by his Community Services worker. At the time of referral he had been evicted from a property and moved in temporarily to live with an aunt. The program helped him to secure a private rental property. Although he had a history of contact with the Police and juvenile justice system as a result of aggressive behaviour, he was in the YPLC program. He is Aboriginal, but had limited connection to his cultural heritage. SWITCH supported him to build these connections, helped him to join a literacy and numeracy group, and to work towards getting his "L" plates. SWITCH also taught him to shop and eat healthily. He welcomed the transport assistance he was provided.

Client 8: This 17 year old found out about SWITCH from her school counsellor. She had been couch surfing for the previous 6 months. Both her parents and she had some mental health issues and home was not a safe environment for her. She was still engaged in education on referral and had developed her living skills as she had been the primary care giver for herself and her mother when living at home. She said the program had helped her with her rental application, and to get a pushbike which facilitated a part-time job and volunteer work. At the time of the interview she was in temporary accommodation while she was looking for a rental property. She described this as helping her to do better at school as she now had somewhere to keep her books and to study. She was now able to focus.

Client 9: This client first experienced homelessness at age 14 years. Now aged 19, he had been in and out of out-of-home care since he was 8 years old, following extreme abuse and trauma. He found out about SWITCH when he had a mental health crisis. His background also included extensive AOD use and he was addressing gender dysphoria. SWITCH helped him to secure a community housing bedsit, and to “*get on top of five years of debt*”. He was pleased to have just received his first pay when he was debt free. He acknowledged his severe mental health issues, and appreciated the referrals which had been made on his behalf.

4.1.5. Other client outcomes.

Most young clients who entered the program received dental and optical assistance. This appeared to be an area of need which had not been adequately addressed during their time in care.

The program supported one young person with a disability to access an ongoing support package from ADHC and SWITCH will have an ongoing role in supporting this person using the package.

4.2. Impact of the project on preventing homelessness

4.2.1. Impact of the project on homelessness

More than 66% of young people had entered the program homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. With all young people in the project in some form of housing and a majority in options which are long-term, from the perspective of the individual young people in the program, there has been a direct impact on reducing their homelessness. The 2011 Create report card stated that 35% of young people become homeless within the first year of leaving care. Within the program, it was more difficult to obtain a picture of the proportion of young people who had become homeless within their first year of leaving care as there was no specific field to collect this information in the HAP portal. A caseworker may not have asked the question, or a young person may not have viewed their situation as homelessness (e.g. couch surfing seen as staying with friends, temporarily sleeping in a car). Nevertheless, service provider records appear to indicate that approximately 25% of young people in the YPLC program had experienced homelessness in their first year of leaving care. Furthermore, a similar percentage had experienced an episode of homelessness whilst they were still in care. These young people had either disengaged from a foster care placement, disengaged from a residential OOH service, disengaged with FaCS, or not accepted the placement offered by them.

At a broader systemic level, the success of the project has demonstrated that for these individuals, notwithstanding their complex needs, past trauma and disconnection to family, intervention with a comprehensive package of support through a project such as SWITCH (YPLC) can deliver outcomes which prevent homelessness.

As noted by one informant:

“Community Services needs to appreciate that without these sorts of services, these young people will become the future long-term homeless.”



4.2.2. Supporting Aboriginal clients

One of the strengths of the program was its effectiveness for Aboriginal young people. In recognition of the high proportion of Aboriginal people amongst the target group for the program, from the outset, the program model included provision for an Aboriginal youth worker trainee position in each division. Together with the SWITCH (JJ) project, this approach gave capacity for two trainees in each location.

At the time of the evaluation, across the projects, three Aboriginal workers were still employed and had graduated into junior casework roles and had their own caseloads. One of the external stakeholders commented: *“it is unusual to find a service which has managed to attract and keep such workers”*. This theme was discussed in the interview with one of the Aboriginal workers to better understand why the role was attractive. Key factors identified were:

- The traineeship and an opportunity to learn new things, including mentoring from senior case staff;
- The opportunity to connect with young Aboriginal people and make a difference;
- The strong positive program reputation;
- The role not being desk-based; and
- The surprise factor associated with first meeting a SWITCH young person and that person’s joy in finding that there is an Aboriginal staff member.

Other external stakeholder feedback suggested that a real positive was that program was “mainstream”, while concurrently having Aboriginal staff. This meant that Aboriginal young people felt both supported and at the same time not singled out from other young people.

In terms of program service delivery, good engagement with Aboriginal clients was supported by flexibility and the program’s “strengths-based” approach to building on client interests. For example, it was reported that distance education classes which a number of clients would access on a Thursday/ Friday operated with one of the Aboriginal junior caseworkers as a teacher aide. It also included fishing on a Friday, with the clients able to take home the fresh fish they caught.

4.3. Service system and delivery outcomes

Many stakeholders consulted for the evaluation described the service as essential. The capacity of the program to provide comprehensive case support to Aboriginal young people leaving care was particularly highlighted. It was suggested that in the program's absence, there would be a gap in the services available.

One way in which the project has influenced system change was in its impact on increasing the awareness of young people's needs with other service organisations. One very tangible example of this was the impact on the community housing service described earlier (see Section 3.4.4) where there has been a specific change in receptivity to the needs of young people, including a broadening of service eligibility criteria.

The impact on the broader community profile of young people and homelessness was less clear.



4.4. Staffing issues

4.4.1. Impact of staffing issues on the project

There was some staff turnover, impacting on program continuity at an individual level, but this was not major. Both divisions of SWITCH had a change in team leader during the project. In the case of the MNC, although this was an externally recruited appointment, the successful applicant for the team leader position had been involved in the project from the outset. This, together with the role played by the YP Space Manager maintained program continuity.

The Team Leader for the FNC Division changed during the project and this brought a strengthened approach to service partnerships and casework practice.

4.4.2. Staff skills and experience

Staff came to the program with a variety of professional and clinical backgrounds. These ranged from bachelor degrees in Social Sciences, Certificate IV in Youth Work and mental health, grief and trauma training. Many had a large number of years' experience working in related areas, including experience in a women's refuge, long-term youth work, drug rehabilitation and Juvenile Justice.

All staff employed within the SWITCH project were required to undergo a Working with Children check and Federal and State police checks, in line with the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

4.4.3. Staff training

The program was committed to professional supervision and team support for its workers. In each location, team members met together monthly for group supervision and to share new ideas.

The Aboriginal trainee staff were provided with on-the-job training through mentoring with caseworker staff. Trainees were also enrolled in Certificate III Youth Work courses.

4.4.4. On-call roster

The SWITCH model has a 24/7 response capacity. On the MNC this capacity comes from a pre-existing arrangement through the YP Space Manager; on the FNC there is an on-call roster shared across the youth programs staff.

5. COST ANALYSIS

This section of the report provides information about project budget and expenditure, issues with expenditure, client costs based on 2011/2012 financial data and use of brokerage funding.

5.1. Total project budget and expenditure to 30 June 2012

The program for the SWITCH (YPLC) project was initially planned for commencement on 1 January 2011. However, it was not until April 2011 that contracts were signed and funds received. Effectively, this meant that the program was not fully functioning until the 2011/2012 financial year. The table below shows budgets and expenditure to 30 June 2012.

Table 13: Budget and expenditure details

	2010/2011 Budget ²¹	2010/2011 Expenditure	2011/2012 Budget	2011/2012 Expenditure	Total Budget	Total Expenditure
Client service staff	\$441,820	\$76,173	\$441,820	\$466,127	\$883,640	\$543,300
Admin and management staff	Current project budgets do not make separate provision for administration & management staff; rather, these costs are subsumed within the management fee for the project.					
Other admin expenses (non staff)	\$91,500	\$136,905	\$91,500	\$263,773	\$183,000	\$400,678
Brokerage - goods	For budget purposes, brokerage is treated as a single line item. Estimates of goods and services proportions and examples of types of brokerage expenditure is provided in the brokerage sections (3.4.6 & 5.4)					
Brokerage - services						
TOTAL BROKERAGE	\$85,000	\$0	\$85,000	\$53,714	\$170,000	\$53,714
Financial Year Totals	\$749,000	\$213,078	\$749,000 (2011/2012 grant)	\$783,615	\$1,236,640	\$997,692

Total expenditure to 30 June 2012 was \$997,692 which represents 80% of the grant money available for expenditure in the two year period 2010/2012. It would appear that half of the remaining funding is from the brokerage line item.

5.2. Issues with expenditure

As mentioned in section 5.1, the delayed start to the project resulted in only a portion of the first year's financial year grant being paid to SWITCH. Of the funds which were received, \$19,569 was rolled over into 2011/2012.

5.3. Client costs (based on 2011/2012 data)

For comparability across the HAP evaluations, Housing NSW requested that detailed project costings be considered for the financial year 2011/2012. The costing template for 2011/2012 for the SWITCH (YPLC) project can be found at Appendix 1.

²¹ From original project submission budget - note that only a part payment of 2010/2011 grant was made to SWITCH.

Total expenditure for 2011/2012 excluding brokerage is \$729,901. The brokerage component is \$53,714.

With 59 clients assisted this means that the average cost per client serviced is \$12,371.20. This is reduced by the average brokerage expenditure of \$910.00 per person.

Given that individuals in the program are serviced for a period of 12 months, each person is costing the program less than \$1,000 to service for each month of service.

This evaluation did not include any financial analysis of the other inputs which the program has been able to leverage on behalf of the individuals served (e.g. access to mental health counselling, other financial entitlements and adjustments e.g. to Centrelink payments, TA from Housing NSW) nor any cost savings through areas such as possible decreased hospital admissions.

The qualitative picture which has emerged from the evaluation shows clear delivery of tangible positive results both in terms of the housing outcomes achieved by individuals, stabilised income security support and employment or education re-engagement for some, together with self-reported improvements in quality of life and hope for the future (please see client interview Section 4.1.4).

5.4. Effectiveness of brokerage funding

Brokerage funding in the program was very targeted and only used when all other avenues of support for the young person had been exhausted. As described earlier in Section 3.4.5, one of these other sources was financial support made available from Community Services for young people who have left statutory out-of-home care. Both Community Services staff and other external service providers reported that SWITCH had a thorough understanding of what funding entitlements might be available and a strong advocacy approach in accessing these.

This was an important skill in ensuring that brokerage funding which was made available was used to best effect and targeted in a complimentary sense, rather than duplicating existing options. It also underscored the value of SWITCH as a source of information and support to assist young people leaving care to access their entitlements. As noted in the literature,²² for example, it has been shown that less than 60% of young people leaving care in NSW knew about TILA. Within SWITCH, of 59 young people on the MNC, seven had accessed TILA in a previous year or with the support of another agency and 22 were supported to access TILA. There were another 15 individuals not yet ready to access TILA and information was not available²³ in respect of the remaining 15 individuals. On the FNC, aggregated information on TILA access was not available.

Another major strength of the brokerage component of the program was the immediate responsiveness which access to this funding allowed, e.g. clothes shopping ahead of a job interview or real estate appointment and spectacles following vision assessment to improve functioning in the classroom. Many young people were assisted with a mobile phone purchase to ensure that they were contactable.

²² McDowall, J 2011, *Transitioning from care in Australia: An evaluation of CREATE's What's the Plan? Campaign (CREATE Report Card 2011)*, CREATE Foundation, Sydney.

²³ Aggregated information on TILA is not collected in the HAP portal data and is not routinely collected other than in individual case notes/ records.



A third strength of the brokerage component of the program was its flexibility, using resources to secure program goals such as client engagement. An example of this was the use of brokerage funding to subsidise 50% of the price of camp participation for two SWITCH staff who partnered with four staff from EVOLVE re-create camp to support nine young people leaving care. Involving a one night pre-camp and 10 days of camping covering over 60 km, three of the nine participants became SWITCH clients.

Finally, the value of the brokerage component in creating learning opportunities for young people to develop competencies in balancing choices and making do on a limited budget should not be underestimated.



6. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MODEL

This section of the report describes the success factors for the project, including the use of Aboriginal staffing, and the challenges for the model.

6.1. Success factors

The evaluation findings suggest that amongst the success factors identified for the SWITCH project, there were three which are particularly critical. These are:

- The extensive service networking and collaborative approach taken by the service which allows the service model to deliver on its core feature of accessing other resources in the community, rather than duplication;
- The strong caseworker engagement with young people, including the use of Aboriginal staffing; and
- The 12 months program duration.

At the centre of the first two of these success factors is sound interpersonal relationships. Undeniably, the model structure itself is a facilitative and foundational component, but ultimately without the development of sound relationships with both the individual young person and across the service system, the needed collaboration to access system support structures and the young person willing to “give it a go”, success will not eventuate.

Both consortium partners brought strong and extensive social capital to their participation in the project. Feedback from external stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation created a picture of “high worth” reputation. The service leaders were proactive in their pursuit of solutions for individuals and for service improvement. They made it their business to be well-known. Others described them as having a sound reputation for commitment and collaboration.

“They are a diligent provider - they ensure that the views of youth are heard at all levels.”

Service providers were very positive about their networking and collaboration with SWITCH.

“I love the program. We have a very strong two-way relationship.”

“I haven’t had an inappropriate experience in 18 months.”

“The program has been amazing.” “They are very strong networkers.”

When asked to point to the success factors for the project, other external stakeholders described a key component as the quality of the casework staff. This was measured in terms of their good communication skills, their prompt follow-up, their openness and dedication to following the support plan and the proactive approach. This created “no surprises”, with issues raised before a crisis might ensue.

Staff reported that the model worked really well with the people who want to make a difference in their lives and that with a little bit of encouragement they can make amazing progress. They noted that most were willing to take the support when it was offered.

At the individual level, young people reported that they received support and affirmation.

In the words of one young person interviewed: *“They can’t do enough for you.”* Another said *“It’s easier for them. It’s hard for us.”* This reinforced the advocacy role which SWITCH is able to take on behalf of young people.

Other service providers also nominated key program success factors as including the respectfulness shown to young people, and the professionalism and strengths based approach of SWITCH staff.

“They do it really well – they have good caseworkers and good boundary setting.”

The service was described as particularly useful for those young people who have not previously engaged with Community Services.

Aboriginal staffing

Strong client engagement was also enhanced by the Aboriginal caseworkers employed in the project. External stakeholders commented that this was a major strength and success factor of the program. (This is discussed further in Section 4.2.2)

- 12 months project duration

One of the identified strengths of the SWITCH program was its capability to provide 12 months of support, with the option to extend this if needed. Whilst some young people leaving care have engaged with other support structures, for example, contracted caseworker staff support to develop leaving care plans, the involvement of these workers was quite time-limited, and their caseload numbers significantly higher than the SWITCH allocation of 10 clients at any one time. SWITCH worked very collaboratively with such programs to ensure no duplication of services and smooth transitions. Out-of-home care case managers spoke positively about the impact of this extended time, e.g. in building social skills, cooking, budgeting and other independent living skills. Staff commented that SWITCH had been the most constant element in the lives of many of the individuals in the program.

Other success factors:

- “Reality Rental” courses for young people (based on “Rent It Keep It”)

The approach taken to the Reality Rental courses is described in Section 3.4.4. There is a direct link between successful course completion and the successful housing outcomes of some SWITCH clients in both securing and sustaining tenancies. In the words of one real estate agent:

“It is very satisfying to see them make it through.”

6.2. Challenges for the model

- Accessing housing

A major challenge for the project was sourcing suitable affordable accommodation. Not only was this due to a general lack of affordable housing in the region, it was exacerbated by the fact that the majority of young people in the program were aged between 16 and 17 years and therefore on low levels of income support. Furthermore, they had no history of rental and may have had some negative family stigma of blacklisting to overcome. This can be particularly problematic in accessing private rental accommodation. Whilst YP Space MNC has access to its own crisis and short term accommodation in Kempsey, with respect to other locations such as Coffs Harbour, Taree and Port Macquarie, it faced the same challenges as the FNC provider.

Access to community housing was also problematic, not only because of its limited supply, but because the rental payment set at 25% of income means that young people were paying less than other tenants, which decreased their attractiveness as tenants.



- Dealing with crisis at program entry

Many young people were referred to the program within weeks of their due date for leaving care. It was frequently the case that no support had been received from their out-of-home care provider to identify and obtain external housing. This limited opportunities for early intervention.

Many young people entered the program already in housing crisis, or imminent housing crisis. The initial work with a young person involves a range of administrative tasks; in sorting out temporary accommodation, ID issues, and Centrelink arrangements for income support. It was suggested that the program could increase its efficiency by making this a designated role - this would strengthen the relationships which the position occupant would have with key contacts and allow for a focus on getting the practical elements in place. This person would work closely with the appointed case manager for the individual. An extension of this idea would be to have a model of shared case management, which would bring with it positive benefits for risk management and allow for continuity, for example during periods of staff leave/ turnover.

- Broad geographic target area/ transport challenges

The large geographic area covered by the SWITCH program meant that the issue of transport was a major one. Limited public transport options meant that caseworkers were frequently involved in direct provision of transport support to clients. This was exacerbated with more affordable housing frequently located on the fringes of towns and/or in more regional areas.

- Limited drug and alcohol rehabilitation and detox programs for young people, especially in the Far North Coast

The program referred one person to a youth-specific nine day residential program in Queensland which they successfully completed.

A last challenge for the model, and indeed for anyone working with the target group of this project, is the reality that some of the negative and destructive behaviours displayed by some young people are so entrenched that significant long-term support and intervention is required. This is made all the more difficult when behaviour is compounded by significant mental health issues, and decreased cognitive or intellectual abilities. A program strength is that it can offer 12 months of support. SWITCH has demonstrated some significant outcomes for individuals. But it needs to be recognised that this is the result of the considerable efforts of both the service and the individual concerned. There will be a handful of people who exit the program without achieving their goals and others who will require support beyond the 12 month period.



7. CONCLUSION

This final section of the report examines the key lessons learnt, implications for future responses for the target group and for the homelessness system on the North Coast, other insights and suggestions for future research.

7.1. Summary of key lessons learnt

- The importance of existing community connections

As described above in Section 6.1, one of the key success factors for the project was the extensive service networking and “high worth” reputation which the project partners brought to the implementation of the program. While this was strengthened through the course of the project, it remains that much of the connections which the project had to other parts of the service system were brought to the project at the outset. This gave the project the capacity to provide needed supports and referrals quickly, using existing connection. A key lesson for future projects is the need to pay particular attention to this. Thus it is recommended that any future funding grant require sound assessment of an applicant’s existing local community connections and/or a clear plan and an adequate timeframe in which to develop these/leverage those which exist.

- The necessity to be proactive

A related variable is the extent to which program staff are proactive in pursuit of their solutions for individual clients. Case managers used their knowledge of the system, their strong networks and intensive individualised supports to deliver outcomes for an individual which brought together the coordination of support needed to address individual needs. A key lesson is that this proactive, flexible and constructive approach contributes to the development of effective tailor-made solutions.

- Young people with complex service needs cannot navigate the service system themselves

Feedback from the young people themselves emphasised the importance of having someone to stand beside them to negotiate the system.

“She just got on the phone and made some calls and it all happened.” “They can do things that we can’t do.”

- It takes time to stabilise complex issues and secure sustainable alternatives.

Addressing the many complex issues which are faced by the young person accessing the project is a lengthy process. Staff in particular noted the importance of the “safety net” they could provide as the 12 month period of support was sufficiently long to allow for a setback or failure to be dealt with and resolved.

7.2. Implications for the future response to homelessness for young people leaving care

Young people came to the SWITCH program with their own complex histories of trauma and neglect, health and substance abuse issues, and deficits in skills needed to live independently. They faced a service system which was not only difficult to navigate but not set up to meet their needs. The

lessons learnt from the project affirmed the need for services to exist which can provide intensive case management support and linkages to other parts of the service system, including providing strong advocacy for the needs of young people exiting institutions. These services need to be of sufficient duration that the sustainability of arrangements which have been put in place can be tested or repeated as necessary. Here the concept of a staged approach was particularly helpful. Finally, services must be proactive and flexible enough to ensure that tailor-made solutions can be developed to meet individual needs.

7.3. Implications for the homelessness system in the North Coast region

Part of the challenge in solving homelessness for the client group supported by SWITCH relates to service system issues, some of which relate to the North Coast region; some of which are more broadly problematic.

In this latter category are the following:

- Current levels of income support for young people put them at a disadvantage when accessing affordable, sustainable housing. This disadvantage operates not only in the private rental market but also in accessing community housing where a person on a higher level of income payment can be favoured; and
- Insufficient appropriate housing stock available. Apart from affordability questions, there is also the consideration of the actual quantum of housing available compared to demand.

In the North Coast region, there are four property related implications arising from the project evaluation findings:

- The use of an MOU with a community housing provider related to allocating a particular property specifically to a young person in the SWITCH program worked well and could be replicated;
- More community housing properties could be targeted for the client group supported by SWITCH model programs;
- The impact of one successful HAP project in the region on the availability of affordable housing for other HAP project target groups (such as SWITCH/YP) suggests that a regional approach to likely housing demand across all funded homelessness projects/target groups in the region should be undertaken and possible solutions developed in a coordinated way. It may be that this is a role which could be taken on by the North Coast Regional Homelessness Committee; and
- Consideration could be given to the introduction of a “head lease” arrangement whereby providers such as SWITCH could manage the initial tenancy obligations associated with a property. Once a young person has demonstrated the skills needed to sustain the tenancy, the tenancy obligations could be handed over to the young person/s for the longer-term.



7.4. Other insights

There are two key insights from the project which need to be acknowledged in any future planning about how to provide services to the target groups of young people who were supported by SWITCH:

- Young people who are involved with the juvenile justice system are also highly likely to have experienced out-of-home care placement. Thus, there is significant overlap between the two SWITCH target groups. This resulted in movement across the projects, with some individuals referred by Juvenile Justice becoming active clients in the YPLC stream; and
- Early intervention for young people leaving care typically does not require the same level of intensive case management support as that required for young people who have already left care and who are facing potential homelessness. That this should be the case is testimony to the increased supports which have been put in place in recent times to assist young people to make this critical transition.

The SWITCH project also provided some research evidence of its own to demonstrate the on-going challenges experienced by young people on the North Coast who are facing homelessness in accessing support from the service system and from the housing sector in particular.

From May 2011 to May 2012, the SWITCH program undertook a survey to identify mainstream service system “blockages” for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the North Coast area. Specialist and generalist youth services and other community services were asked to complete a survey on each occasion they saw a new young person who had (in the past 12 months) or was currently experiencing homelessness. This collected information on areas of mainstream service access difficulty, the nature of the difficulty and the outcome/s of this difficulty. In total, 164 responses were received, with respondents able to indicate multiple areas of blockage where these existed. This showed each person experienced on average more than two blockages. Access to the Housing system presented the highest number of blockages: 55.5% related to difficulties with the private rental sector (typically discrimination); 46.9% to access to Housing NSW products (especially access to temporary or emergency accommodation) and 40.6% to community housing access. Other common areas of difficulty nominated resulted from a lack of identification documents (e.g. Centrelink, bank account and Medicare card access). In addition, 10% of young people were refused entry into education until their housing was stabilised. The top three responses selected relating to outcomes experienced as a result of the identified blockage were: increased experience of feeling the situation was hopeless (66%); increase in anxiety-related symptoms (46.7%) and financial difficulties (47.6%).

7.5. Future research that could strengthen the evidence of what works

An important question in the provision of intensive case management support provided by a program such as SWITCH is:

- Who are the individuals who should have priority of access?

The recent report by Gaetz and Scott (2012) highlights that the younger one is, the more adolescent challenges complicate one’s transition to adulthood. This suggests research should explore the differential benefits of access to intensive case management projects such as SWITCH for those people of younger age.



This suggests a further question:

- What is the appropriate program length?

With respect to the core SWITCH program, there were clear views that the program was filling a needed gap, as other support structures (e.g. Specialist homelessness services, Transition support programs etc) are of much shorter duration. This longer period of 12 months support appears to have been of benefit. However, the question remains whether an even longer period could enable more young people to avoid homelessness. This is consistent with the literature suggesting that young people need time to transition.

Another area of potential investigation relates to continuity of support.

- What is the contribution of continuity of service occasions, locations and workers to successful outcomes?

SWITCH provided outreach services to support young people in a variety of locations across the MNC and FNC and there was some staff turnover. Intensity of support was linked to individual need and model stage. Further research into the impact of these factors on successful program outcomes for individuals could potentially indicate areas for future service improvement.

- The experience of individuals who were not successful in the project

It was not possible within the scope of the evaluation to seek the views of clients who had not been successful in the project. Further research with these people may provide additional evidence about the changes which would be required to improve their chances of successful transition to stable accommodation and independent living.

A final area where additional research could be undertaken relates to the need for stability in housing and recognises the challenges which were faced by SWITCH in providing this in an environment where there were limited options available to young people.

- Would the provision of housing stock as part of the program improve program outcomes?

Investigations could consider both the provision of “head lease” arrangements which enable the young person to build a history of successful tenancy before taking on full property responsibilities and the provision of some transitional accommodation arrangements which provide opportunities to further develop independent living skills, such as shopping, meal preparation, budgeting, etc. in a more structured setting.

Lastly, any future research as well as program monitoring should include the development of a clear understanding and agreement with service providers around the specific quantitative data to be collected and the feasibility of this, the systems for collecting and reporting the data and ensuring its integrity, and its interface with any other internal and external reporting obligations.

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Senior Consultant
21 February 2013

APPENDIX 1: COSTING TEMPLATE FOR 2011/2012

NSW Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation - Cost Analysis					
HAP Project 2.22		2011/12 Units	2011/12 Quantity	2011/12 \$ Value	Percentage
Project income - Inputs					
Income	HAP funding			\$ 832,558	94.76
	HAP funding carried fwd			\$ 19,569	2.23
Income	Other Government funding-wages subsidies			\$ 14,300	1.63
Income	interest received			\$ 2,205	0.25
Income	Other			\$ 9,923	1.13
Total Project income				\$ 878,555	100
Expenditure					
Staff costs	Direct Client Services	Staff			0.00
Staff costs	Admin and support	Staff			0.00
Staff costs	Staff related on-costs			\$ 94,598	12.07
Staff costs	Project co-ord, employee support & supervision			\$ 6,917	0.88
Staff costs-wages & salaries				\$ 377,638	48.19
Total Staff costs	Total Staff costs			\$ 479,153	61.15
Operating costs	Meetings, workshop, catering			\$ 1,691	0.22
Operating costs	Staff training and development			\$ 11,154	1.42
Operating costs	Motor vehicle expenses			\$ 39,973	5.10
Operating costs	Other travel			\$ 6,235	0.80
Operating costs	Host Organisation Management Fee and Administration costs			\$ 109,615	13.99
Operating costs	Rent/property costs			\$ 41,684	5.32
Operating costs	Phone/fax			\$ 11,531	1.47
Operating costs	TILA			\$ 4,460	0.57
Operating costs	Other			\$ 24,405	3.11
Total Operating costs	Total Operating costs			\$ 250,748	32.00
Brokerage Outputs					
Goods		Clients assisted			0
Total Goods	Total Goods			\$ -	0
Services					0
Total Services	Total Services			\$ -	0
Payments		Clients assisted			0
Total Payments	Total Payments			\$ -	0
Other		Clients assisted			0
Total Other	Total Other			\$ -	0
Total Brokerage costs	Total clients assisted	Households		\$ 53,714	6.85
Total Expenditure				\$ 783,615	\$ 100

APPENDIX 2: CLIENT QUESTIONS²⁴

How long have you been involved with the SWITCH project?

- How did you find out about SWITCH?
 - What services have they helped you with?
 - Assistance provided: services, housing, case management, referrals
- Tell me a bit about the services which were provided to you directly and the ones which SWITCH organised for you?

What is your current housing situation? / Future housing plans?

- Permanent/transitional – please describe
- How long has this been for? How long have you been able to sustain your current tenancy?
- How well is your current housing situation working? /Do you expect to be able to continue with your current housing situation?
- What things have been particularly helpful in assisting you to sustain your tenancy?

How has your housing situation changed compared with before you joined the project?

- What was your previous experience of homelessness? (# of times homeless/ duration of homelessness?; age at time of first experience of homelessness?)
- What has made the biggest difference in helping you to change your housing situation?
- Do you now expect to be able to avoid homelessness for the foreseeable future?

What other things have you achieved from being part of the SWITCH project?

- I got my driver's licence
- I have learnt some new things - budgeting, shopping, cooking.
- Health improvements - mental health, physical health
- Family connections/ child restoration
- Social/community engagement
- My income situation improved - I got a job
- I have gone back to school/education/ studying
- Drug dependence reduction
- Sense of well-being
- Reduction in incidence of re-offending
- Other

How do you think your quality of life compares with 6 and 12 months ago? Why do you say that?

- What factors have made these changes possible for you at this time?

How confident do you feel that you can maintain the gains that you have made?

What is your overall rating of satisfaction with the service provided by SWITCH?

(very satisfied/ satisfied/ neutral/ unsatisfied/ very unsatisfied)

What suggestions do you have for how the services could be improved?

²⁴ Please note that these questions were used as a guide for the client interviews.

APPENDIX 3: STAFF QUESTIONS²⁵

UNDERSTANDING THE STAFF PROFILE

- What has been your role in the HAP (JJ/YPLC) project/s?

Positions	Attending	Establishment
Senior Casework Leaders		
Caseworkers		
Aboriginal Trainees		
Youth Housing Development		

- How long involved?/ new to org?/ existing staff?/ previous experience with client group?
 - Qualifications/ training provided?
 - How many JJ/ YPLC clients have you dealt with?

CHOOSING CLIENTS/ SERVICE ENTRY

JJ - Closed Referral Loop

YPLC

- What have been the key referral sources for SWITCH?
 - For both projects:
 - How well have these referral processes worked?
 - What would have improved the arrangements?
 - Were there sufficient referrals to meet service capacity?
 - What happens if there are too many referrals?
- What selection criteria were used to identify appropriate individuals?
 - How appropriate were these?

THE MODEL

- YPLC self-evaluation says “staff have a therapeutic framework in which to approach client need” - what does that mean for you in practice?
- Clients “resist engagement” - how does the service overcome this?
- Unpack the key features of the HAP (JJ/YPLC) model/s?

Feature	JJ	YPLC
Early Intervention Case Management Support (i.e. before person has left care)		√ For everyone? %? How early?
PLAN which guides service	JJ'S Case Plan?	Leaving Care Plan? Jointly developed?
Case Management Support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 months duration How many hours/ sessions per week direct support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √

²⁵ These questions were used as a guide



Feature	JJ	YPLC
Direct supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 1:1 IL skills training?/ group workshops? Details please ▪ Securing housing ▪ Accessing health/ MH/D+ A services? ▪ Accessing school/ TAFE/ employment ▪ Dealing with JJ system/ courts 		
Referrals to other services:		
Service linkages/ systemic advocacy		
Brokerage		
Other features?		

- What distinguishes the two models from each other?
 - Target group and service entry pathway
 - Intensity of support?
 - Anything else (bearing in mind individualisation for each person)?
- How does this differ from other models or ways of working to support YPLC/ exiting JJ who are at risk of homelessness?
 - JTAP - originally came with housing;
 - Duration of support?
 - Intensity of support/ wrap-around nature of support??

BROKERAGE

- Role of Brokerage?
 - Spent mainly on goods, not services
 - How important has Brokerage been?

OUTCOMES

Systemic

- What is the impact of the projects on a reduction of homelessness for this target group?
 - How well have the projects worked? Does it work with everyone who comes? Who does it work best for?
 - What would have improved the arrangements?

Wider impacts: self-evaluation identified a reduced level of demand on crisis accommodation - any others?
- To what extent have there been improvements in service systems for these target groups? What are these improvements? (e.g. better access to private rental? When the service winds up - what could be put in place to sustain this benefit?)



Individual level

- Apart from sustained housing, give me some examples about any other benefits and outcomes for the clients?
 - Health improvements – physical and mental health
 - Reconnection with family
 - Substance abuse reduction
 - Social integration
 - Other?
- What impact has the achievement of these outcomes had in reduction of recidivism?

SUSTAINABILITY

- How sustainable is this model as an approach to reducing homelessness in this target group?
 - What aspects can be integrated into ongoing service delivery?
 - What are the implications of this for future service delivery?

KEY CHALLENGES/IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Have there been any disadvantages of the model?
 - If so, what is the nature of these?
- What have been the challenges?
- What improvements can you suggest?



APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONS FOR OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS²⁶

Service provider questions

- What has been your role/the role of your service in/relationship to the SWITCH project?
- What is your opinion about the SWITCH model (JJ/YPLC) – how does this differ from other models or ways of working with this target group?
- What have you provided? How much and how? For how many clients?
 - What have been the service arrangements/referral pathways?
- How well has this worked for this particular HAP client group?
 - What have been the benefits and outcomes for HAP clients referred to you/more generally?
 - Have there been any disadvantages for clients? If so what have these been?
 - What are the success factors?
 - What are the challenges?
- What impact has this project/s had in reduction of homelessness for this group?
 - How has this made a difference?
 - What is the potential of the project for providing future sustainable reductions in homelessness?
- What changes have there been in service integration?
 - What are the implications of this for service delivery for you?
 - How sustainable are the changes?
- To what extent have there been improvements in service systems? Describe
- What suggestions do you have for improvements in the future?

²⁶ These questions were used as a guide.



APPENDIX 5: REFERENCES

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