



28 March 2008

Community Development & Justice Standing Committee
Parliament of Western Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into Collaborative Approaches in Government

Please find enclosed Mission Australia's written submission to the Community Development & Justice Standing Committee's Inquiry into Collaborative Approaches in Government.

We are pleased to be able to present this contribution to the Commission's important work and look forward to the publication of the findings in due course.

For any enquiries regarding this submission please do not hesitate to contact me on

Yours sincerely



Mission Australia



Mission Australia

**Community Development
& Justice Standing Committee**

**Inquiry into
Collaborative Approaches in Government**

**Submission prepared by
Mission Australia
31st March 2008**

Contact person:

1. Introduction

Mission Australia is a national non-profit organisation that delivers community, employment and training services in communities throughout metropolitan, rural and regional Australia. Our vision is *to see a fairer Australia by enabling people in need to find pathways to a better life*. In 2007, we supported over 300,000 Australians through over 450 services which can be grouped under five broad headings:

- Children & family
- Youth
- Homeless
- Employment
- Training

Mission Australia has a strong presence of community and employment services in WA, with a particular focus on support for young people, children and their families.

Mission Australia welcomes this Inquiry into Collaborative Approaches in Government. While recognising the importance of each of the Inquiry's terms of reference, this submission will primarily concentrate on the third TOR, based on our extensive experience of delivering community services:

- (3) the use of citizen centred services – how different jurisdictions are transforming and integrating government processes around the needs of the citizens to improve service delivery and improve well-being.

This submission will also look at the first TOR:

- (1) models of partnership between public (including local government) and private sectors for the development of policy and the delivery of services, with particular emphasis on human service and community development

We understand 'private sectors' here to include the non-profit sector, who have a key role to play in delivering human services and community development.

This submission will use a case study example to highlight how inter-sectoral collaboration can work in practice, the benefits gained and the challenges to be overcome. The case study is our new integrated drug and alcohol youth service in Perth, DAYS, (Drug and Alcohol Youth Service) an innovative model of collaboration between government and Mission Australia services. It provides a basis for reflecting more broadly on collaborative approaches across a range of government activities.

2. DAYS (Drug & Alcohol Youth Service)

There are currently three primary drug and alcohol services for young people in Perth - Mission Australia's Youth Withdrawal & Respite Service (YW&RS), a detox unit supporting safe withdrawal from drug and alcohol addiction; Yirra, Mission Australia's residential rehabilitation service; and Next Step Youth Service (Next Step), a community based support service of the Western Australian Government's Drug & Alcohol Office, which provides counselling, and family and therapeutic support. While each provides a different service, they all deal with the same target group and often the same clients. This has led to much discussion between the services over the last four years about how to work more collaboratively, to improve effectiveness, reduce costs, save time, and increase sustainability.

Collaboration between the services began with a Joint Assessment Process Tool, to allow Mission Australia and Next Step to assess clients together and work together on joint clinical pathways. However, this proved to be resource intensive and was abandoned. A continued dialogue between the services led to the development of ideas about how to integrate more closely. This began with a release of information, which involved asking clients to agree to have their information shared between the three services. This collaboration further developed into a decision to physically co-locate the services, and operate as one joined-up service with different 'branches'. Refurbishments to enable the physical co-location are currently underway, for completion in June 2008. This will involve YW&RS and Next Step sharing premises at the Hill Street site in East Perth which YW&RS currently operate from. Yirra, as a residential service, will remain at their Carlisle site. However, they will be integrated with the other two services in a variety of innovative ways.

In practice, the three services will become a 'one-stop shop' for young people in need of drug and alcohol services in Perth. There is one telephone line 1300 number for clients, which eases accessibility. Only one assessment now takes place, carried out at Hill St with duty shared between staff of each service. The three services meet regularly to make treatment plans for clients post assessment, which usually include one or more of the services as appropriate. Once the co-location is established further integration between the services will take place, including one shared file system. Policies and procedures will be adapted to suit the combined service. A common database will also be implemented, to ease sharing of information. Each client will have one case worker, instead of a possible three.

3. Why inter-sectoral, collaborative partnerships are important

There is a growing recognition that community services need multi-dimensional solutions to address multi-dimensional problems. Issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, housing and poverty are all highly complex with a number of factors attributing to and sustaining them. Many clients also face a series of interconnecting issues at the same time. They also may face different difficulties at different times as they move into new

phases of their lives. Therefore, to work effectively to address such problems requires solutions which are holistic, long-term, and collaborative. DAYS recognises this and has thus sought to integrate the detox, rehabilitation, and community based support services to work together to address client's needs more effectively. The client's needs are thus put at the centre of service delivery.

This joined up approach has also been influenced by the increased impact of holistic approaches and systems thinking. Systems thinking means understanding a system by examining the linkages and interactions between the elements that comprise the entirety of it. A systems approach therefore recognises the complex, interconnected nature of the environment we live in. The current focus on social inclusion to understand and confront social disadvantage is in line with this, as it represents a more systemic view of the nature of poverty and disadvantage.

4. Benefits of inter-sectoral collaboration

There are a wide range of benefits to be gained from an inter-sectoral collaborative approach, for both clients and service providers.

Benefits to the clients are substantial. Through an integrated approach to service delivery, services become centred around the needs of the client not the organisation. This facilitates an easier and more consistent experience for service users. Having one point of access at DAYS means that young people won't need to think about which service they should go to, which will encourage those in need to seek help. Easing the assessment process through one joint assessment also means clients get access to services more quickly and easily, reducing the risk of them opting out. With one case manager rather than potentially three, they will develop a closer, more constant relationship which should encourage greater mutual trust and respect. The focus is on what the client needs, and responding to this will no longer be limited to what each organisation can provide. While it is too early to accurately measure, this should hopefully result in better outcomes for DAYS clients.

Collaboration also enables service providers to be more effective and efficient, providing great opportunities for savings in terms of both time and money. In the case of DAYS, co-location will mean a reduction in rental costs for YW&RS and Next Step. In addition, marketing costs are now shared. Through sharing activities which would only be repeated by each service, particularly through the common assessment, much time is saved for staff and managers. This allows everyone to concentrate on their already busy workloads, and means roles are shared out more appropriately between the team. For example, currently the GP at YW&RS is carrying out tasks which clinical nurses should be undertaking, and the co-location will enable staff to return to their appropriate work. This collaborative approach will also allow each individual service to concentrate on their specialist area of work,

knowing that their partner services will cover other tasks that they are currently taking on.

Expertise will be shared and thus gained in different forms by each service. For example, the availability of clinical psychologists, GPs, music mentors, and Aboriginal mentors for each service will widen the care they can offer. As many of these specialist roles are expensive for services to contract, this provides ready access without burdening resources. Creating more time for the whole team can also lead to more innovative approaches, as the team have more time to think and act 'outside the box'. Also, having a wider, multi-disciplinary team between the services will lead to new input and a diversity of ideas, encouraging innovation and creativity. Managers' time has been freed up to focus on important activities which are often sidelined, such as networking within the sector. Conversely, as representation at forums and events is now shared between the managers of each service, the time committed to this for each individual manager is greatly reduced. More staff development and training is also enabled through the extra time available to them.

Another key benefit of this innovative collaborative approach is greater sustainability. As the integrated service will be centred around the needs of the client not the organisation, it should lead to improved outcomes, thus being more effective and sustainable in treating and tackling drug and alcohol misuse for young people. Also, as resources will be saved for each service through the shared assessment, the physical co-location, and the other shared activities, these funds can then be used to strengthen the services for the future in other ways.

5. Challenges

Establishing and maintaining a collaborative approach to community services delivery can be a challenging process. It requires a great deal of commitment from all partners, and can sometimes end up relying on key individuals' drive and personality. Each partner will have their own organisational goals, perspectives, priorities and culture. To maintain these whilst working towards a new common goal can be a challenge. This requires a clear, shared agreement as to the purpose of the collaboration. It is also important to recognise that it is a long-term process, which needs to be developed slowly and carefully to be sustainable. Clear communication is key, to help develop relationships of trust and understanding. At the core of the DAYS collaboration is the common goal of better outcomes for clients.

The process of setting up DAYS has been lengthy, with the co-location plans beginning two years ago. There have been a number of challenges along the way. It has been essential to gain support from all staff to ensure as smooth a process as possible. Times of change require steady management and strong leadership to ensure all members of the team have any queries or anxieties addressed. Extensive team building exercises have taken place, to

encourage the new wider team to get to know each other and how they will be working together.

The primary burden has been on the management of each service, as the development of new procedures, policies and organisation has been very time consuming and lengthy. Maintaining staff enthusiasm and momentum for the changes has been a challenge for managers over the long time period. However, the management of all the integrating services recognise the long term benefits of this extra effort. Collaboration needs to be recognised as a process as well as an output, and there is a need for a high level of commitment, transparency and shared accountability from all parties to ensure collaboration is successful and sustainable. However, the long-term benefits of increased effectiveness and efficiency are well worth it.

6. Summary and recommendations

In summary, Mission Australia welcomes the state government's collaboration in DAYS and would like to encourage the development of other similar partnerships. A cross-sectoral integrated service such as DAYS greatly benefits the government and NGO partners in terms of time and cost efficiency, and sustainability. Most importantly, it encourages a more effective response centred on clients' needs. The challenges of coordination and integration can be overcome through a shared clarity and agreement of purpose, and recognition that it is a slow, long-term process that will take time and effort to get right.

We recommend that the Committee recognises such cross-sectoral partnerships as an important element when reviewing and developing collaborative approaches and models in government. However, it is also important to recognise that such collaboration requires support in terms of time and expertise to ensure they are effective and sustainable, and the government needs to consider appropriate resourcing of such support.