



Youth  
Homelessness: case  
studies of the  
reconnect  
program

**Final Report**

Prepared for the department of  
family and community services

Ceri Evans and Sheila Shaver

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**Social Policy Research Centre**

**University of New South Wales**

***July 2001***

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Case Studies of the Reconnect Program**

*Ceri Evans and Sheila Shaver*

Report prepared for the Department of Family and Community Services by  
the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales as part of  
the SPRC commissioned research program for 2000

**FINAL REPORT**  
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## **1. Introduction**

The recognition of youth homelessness as a social problem has been well documented over the last 20 years and more. Recent approaches to the problem put particular emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies. Integral to such approaches are the supply of income transfer payments and the provision of services aimed at the target group. The case studies in this research look at one such initiative aimed at youth homelessness, the Reconnect program supported and administered by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Introduced in 1999, the Reconnect program provides for the development of community-based early intervention services aimed at family reconciliation for young people and their families.

The research comprises a study of the support provided under the Reconnect program to young people and the families of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The project investigates the articulation of and relationship between programs providing different types of support to young people at the local level. The work studies the co-ordination of support to different groups and to young people where the need is for support in crisis, or where there is a need for longer-term support. The study was designed to explore the initial development of the Reconnect program by focusing on the system of support for young people as it is operating in four localities (see below for a description of the four areas). The choice of four localities enabled the research to examine the development of services in urban, rural and regional areas within two states and to compare of services at different stages of development.

The project also provides information about the co-ordination of support provided by commonwealth and state authorities. This research thus provides feedback at an early stage of the life of the program about the extent to which the key result areas of Reconnect are being addressed (Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce, 1998).<sup>1</sup> Although this investigation is primarily exploratory, it will contribute to an understanding of the program's role in building community capacity for early intervention with regard to youth homelessness.

The report is in five main sections. This first section describes the objectives and methodology of the project. Section 2 outlines the key aspects of the work of each of the four Reconnect services with regard to the development of prevention and early intervention capacity within four areas. The second section ends with brief descriptions of the other services indicated to be in the networks of the four Reconnect projects. Section 3 explores how the services relate at a local level by analysing in detail the service networks as they are developing in each of the four areas. Section 4 discusses key issues which arose from the fieldwork with regard to the development of prevention and early intervention capacity in the four network areas. The concluding section of the report summarises the findings of the research and the issues it raises for the development of early intervention services to homeless young people and their families.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

Following the brief given for the research, the study focuses on the following two groups of questions:

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<sup>1</sup> See the Reconnect program evaluation strategy for more details.

First, how do various forms of support articulate ('join up') with one another at a local level? The research has been concerned with this question both in general and in the particular terms of the relationships (and the nature of the relationships) between support services/interventions in different locations including Reconnect, income support, Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), Job Placement Employment and Training Program (JPET), schools, youth services, state welfare agencies.

Second, how does Reconnect assist in developing early intervention capacity within a community? There are a number of particular aspects to this question:

- How do Reconnect services perform their roles as service providers and builders of community capacity? What approaches do they use in 'building capacity' through their impact on existing networks and developing new networks? How do these roles interrelate?
- What role do Reconnect services play in assisting young people and parents through the income support assessment process?
- How do Reconnect providers present themselves to the other support services in the area?
- How do other key 'first-to-know' players perceive the role of Reconnect, and how important are they (particularly state agencies) in determining that role?
- Are there differences between the way Reconnect services operate in different locations, and why? To what extent are these due to geography, state differences, and length of time that the Reconnect service has been in place?

## **1.2 Methodology**

The project includes a brief literature review focusing on the issues regarding prevention and early intervention services for young people, in particular, those at risk of early home leaving or homelessness.

The empirical study comprises four case studies of services to young people at risk of homelessness and their families, in different types of locality. The local areas were chosen to allow comparison between a recently introduced and more established Reconnect service, and between established services operating in urban, regional and rural areas. In addition, the areas selected cover two states, Victoria and New South Wales. The fieldwork was conducted during October and November, 2000 and so provides a snapshot' of the services as they were operating at that time.

Lists of participants in each of the four areas were developed from information provided by the four Reconnect services. Interviews were carried out with a range of individuals, services, and agencies in the four areas. Respondents included representatives from Reconnect services, representatives from the range of 'first-to-know' agencies such as schools and community based youth and family services, and representatives from Centrelink offices, JPET, SAAP services and state welfare departments. Interviews followed a discussion guide (set out in

Appendix 3) and generally took about 60-90 minutes to complete. Subject matter covered in the interview discussions included, as relevant:

- the nature of working relations between service providers to young people in the area;
- the coordination of services delivered by government and the community sector;
- the use of Youth Protocol agreements by state welfare departments in assisting young people;
- the involvement of funded services in assisting young people and their parents through the income support assessment process;
- the use of strategies to achieve or sustain engagement of young people in education, training, employment, and community participation;
- the experience of the strategies being applied from the perspective of first-to-know agencies and service providers; and,
- the participation of Indigenous communities in the use and development of early intervention services.

Data collection also included the use of a pro-forma designed to map the networks of contact and interaction between local service providers, including: first-to-know agencies, income support services, early intervention assistance services, crisis support, and long-term support to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The analysis of the data proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, a portrait of the service system was constructed for each locality, including all relevant agencies in the area which are part of the current Reconnect linkages and network. This included a qualitative assessment of the services being developed and their effectiveness with respect to the key result areas for Reconnect schemes. This portrait includes the development of a composite picture of the networks of services developed in each area to assist young people and their families at risk. Analysis of the roles played by income support and assistance services in those networks was undertaken. These portraits provided the basis for answering the first research question identified above.

In the second stage, these local systems were compared and contrasted, and those factors which appear to explain differences between them have been identified. This analysis provided the basis for answering the second set of research questions. The significance of state government policies, urban, regional and rural location, and the comparison between new and established services for service integration was considered in this analysis.

## **2. The Development of Early Intervention Capacity Within A Community**

The section below describes how the four Reconnect programs studied in the research perform their roles as services providers and builders of community capacity through their networks with other agencies in the local community.

The study was designed to comprise four case studies of Reconnect programs having as their objective the prevention of and early intervention in early home leaving and homelessness. The four programs chosen for study are:

- Regional Extended Family Services Inc. (REFS), Ringwood, Victoria;
- Reconnect West, Werribee, Victoria;
- Vinnies Reconnect, Deniliquin, New South Wales; and
- Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (RAFT), Wollongong, New South Wales

These programs were chosen for their location and for the stage of development that they had reached at the time of the study. REFS and Reconnect West are in outer Melbourne, Victoria. Vinnies Reconnect is in country New South Wales, and RAFT is in Wollongong, regional New South Wales. Reconnect West is a newly established Reconnect service, the other three having been established for some time. Taken together, the selection of these four programs allowed for case studies contrasting service provision in two states, in outer urban and rural settings, and in new and established developmental stages.

The following section describes the early intervention services these agencies offer to youths and their families in the community where there is a risk of early home leaving or homelessness. Section 2.2 describes the range of other services present in the four Reconnect networks as detailed in the information provided by the Reconnect services. These form the network of services developed to provide early intervention capacity in the local community, analysed in detail in section 3.

### **2.1 Regional Extended Family Services Inc.**

Regional Extended Family Services (REFS) have been operating in Ringwood in Eastern Melbourne for more than ten years. REFS were one of the pilot projects set up under the Youth Homelessness Pilot Programme (YHPP) and were successful in tendering for the first round of Reconnect funding awarded in 1999.

REFS offer a range of family-oriented services to young people and their families to prevent or intervene early in situations of possible early home leaving and homelessness. The service appears very well integrated within their area, which covers some or all of the local government areas of Maroondah; Knox; Manningham; Shire of Yarra Ranges; Whitehorse; Monash; and Boroondara. The service is most heavily concentrated in Maroondah, Yarra Ranges and Whitehorse.

REFS began as Ringwood Extended Family Services but the service changed its name to Regional Extended Family Services to better describe the increasing geographical spread of the agency over recent years. REFS now have offices in other parts of Victoria, in New South Wales and Queensland. The service developed with the support of the local Lutheran Church and Lutheran Children's Home, which provides subsidised premises and financial assistance.

### *Mediation and Family Support*

The YHPP and Reconnect funding enabled REFS to extend and refine their services to young people and their families in the area. Key aspects of REFS work with regard to the prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness are quick response, flexibility in service provision, and a range of family relations approaches to reconcile families and prevent the escalation of family conflict.

At the heart of the REFS program is mediation. Mediation is an effective way of enabling people in conflict to clarify issues, explore options and resolve disagreements through negotiation. It empowers people in their personal and joint decision making processes and teaches people skills which can be utilised in other social contexts (<http://www.jeack.com.au/-refs/refs.html>).

REFS has successfully developed a co-mediation model using both an adult and a 'young' volunteer mediator. The 'young' mediator works alongside the adult mediator to encourage the involvement of young people in family mediation. It has been found that young people are more likely to engage in family mediation with another young person present as they do not feel like the parents and adults are 'ganging up on them'.

Mediation often offers a way into REFS for young people and their families. People can be reluctant to attend counselling or therapy, and mediation does not have the same stigma attached that these more traditional services do. REFS family workers have found that once people access mediation, it is easier to persuade them to undertake therapy and counselling where they can be given more intensive support.

Mediation can in some circumstances also act as a 'gate-house' to other services REFS offers. It is much easier to move families to family therapy after mediation because we have built up trusting relationships with the family and the family feel more comfortable dealing with some of the difficult issues. Mediation creates pathways and after they have engaged with one service, they are more likely to engage with other services. The added advantage is the family do not have to repeat their story. (*REFS Family Worker*)

REFS also provide mediation training to professionals across a wide range of occupations.

Immediacy of response is seen as important in prevention and early intervention approaches. The availability of advice and support to a young person and/or their family at the earlier stages of conflict and difficulties may prevent the escalation of problems which can lead to early home leaving and homelessness. Crucial to the work of REFS is the speed and responsiveness of their family workers to young people and their families experiencing problems which may lead to a young person leaving home or who has already left home. One of the key factors which enables REFS to respond quickly and effectively is the use of a full time intake worker who is available to take calls from young people, parents, other family members, schools, local agencies etc. The

intake worker is in a position to offer immediate support in a situation which may deteriorate without such support. In order to ensure their service is fully accessible, REFS use a pager service for clients to contact a worker out of hours, 24 hours a day if needed.

One of the important elements of the REFS approach to early home leaving is their ability to offer a range of services focused on their clients, and to combine these with appropriate referrals to other agencies in the area. REFS have been working in the area for a number of years, and they are well networked with other agencies in the area. During the YHPP phase REFS worked at developing links with other local agencies to ensure the Reconnect program was well publicised. On the whole, the work REFS does is well known and a number of agencies make regular referrals to the REFS workers for assistance and support for a young person and their family.

### *Schools*

As a key first-to-know agency, schools are a common source of referrals to services in the area. REFS have developed strong relationships with a number of the schools in the area that enable REFS to become involved with young people and their families in a prevention and early intervention capacity.

A key aspect of REFS prevention and early intervention work with regard to children at risk of leaving home early is their development of Schools Training Programs. REFS works with both staff and students in a number of schools in their area providing training enabling both staff and students to deal with issues which arise. The training in schools works in a number of ways. It:

- trains school personnel including teachers and counsellors in the skills to be able to deal with young people and help them with issues they may be facing;
- trains young people in areas such as peer mediation, leadership skills, self-esteem and bullying; and
- increases the profile of REFS within the school system, enabling staff and students to access REFS services more easily and giving REFS credibility within the school.

REFS also offer a range of one-day Train the Trainer days for teaching staff to facilitate programs for students in areas such as anger management, bullying and self esteem.

REFS are increasing the number of programs they run in primary schools. REFS workers annually run Building Relationships with Adolescents evenings in one of the primary schools in the area to provide parents with information regarding children and the transition to secondary school and adolescence. Another program for primary schools which REFS is involved in is the Seasons for Growth course. This is a grief and loss education program run in Years 3 and 4. It was noted by a number of participants that prevention and early intervention work can happen earlier than the current Reconnect age group of 12-18. The Seasons for Growth program was developed and used in primary schools to give children the skills to cope with grief and loss, as more research is showing that early attention to these issues can prevent future problems. The work that REFS is involved with in schools is directed at building resilience among children and young people by encouraging openness and discussion of issues before they become serious.

Running such courses enables parents and young people to deal with some of these problems on their own account.

The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) is a statewide Victorian initiative jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services. The program began in response to the National Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force Report. The SFYS is aimed at suicide prevention and early intervention for students at risk. The REFS area covers three SFYS sites:

- City of Maroondah
- City of Knox
- Shire of Yarra Ranges.

SFYS funding is available to schools, and has enabled REFS to work closely with the schools in their area by providing training which the SFYS officers coordinate and facilitate.

#### *Parent Support Groups*

REFS run regular support groups for parents with adolescents. These groups provide parents with peer support, education, information and advice on parenting adolescents. The parent support groups enable parents to discuss issues and problems they are having with their children. REFS staff and other parents are able to offer support and advice which may avoid family breakdown and irreconcilable conflict.

Parents can discuss their children with workers and other parents, they can get reassurance that their problems are not so unusual and they are on the right track. They are relieved to find out that they are not the only ones having problems, they learn to understand the issues a bit more, and then they might not be so hard on their children. (*REFS worker*)

The service has organised a number of other parenting projects recently including a public parenting forum and sessions on conflict resolution skills.

#### *REFS Long-term Supported Houses and Community Placements*

REFS provides long-term supported accommodation for homeless students where it is not appropriate or possible for them to return home. The supported housing allows REFS to continue working with young people while giving them a stable supported environment in which they can continue their studies and in most cases, complete their VCE. REFS are also able to offer a very small number of community placements in times of crisis to give families some 'breathing space' and 'time out'.

#### *Mental Health Needs*

REFS caseworkers have regular secondary consultation sessions with a senior mental health worker from Maroondah Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). This worker suggests appropriate approaches staff might take, which assists in alleviating some problems and can prevent some conditions from worsening. These sessions are invaluable to REFS workers and their clients, and have the potential to prevent exacerbation of problems which may

have gone unnoticed or unchecked while the client waited for an appointment with a mental health service. The technique also avoids the stigma of approaching a mental health service which is experienced by most people and can delay interventions.

## **2.2 Reconnect West**

Reconnect West are based in the Western Region of Victoria between Melbourne and Geelong. It is responsible for providing early intervention services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and to their families in two municipalities in the Western Region:

- Wyndham City, including the towns of Werribee and Hopper's Crossing;
- The City of Hobson's Bay, which includes Altona, Laverton, Newport and Williamstown.

The service is a consortium of three agencies working across the local areas of Wyndham and Hobson's Bay: Werribee Support and Housing Group, based in Werribee; Anglicare, also based in Werribee; and BayWest Youth Housing Group, which has offices in Newport and Altona, Hobson's Bay. Reconnect West was created as part of the third round of funding provided under Reconnect in 2000. Reconnect West is in its early days and is currently establishing itself within the local area.

As with the three established Reconnect services included in the study, Reconnect West has arisen out of services already existing in the area and as such is not a newcomer to issues of early home leaving, youth homelessness, and family conflict. The nature of the planned Reconnect West service builds on the strengths of the three agencies involved to provide services to the area with a specific focus on prevention and early intervention of youth early home leaving and homelessness. The section below details what the Reconnect West partners are currently doing as well as their plans for increased prevention and early intervention services.

### *Mediation and Counselling, and Critical Linkages*

Werribee Support and Housing Group (WSHG) have a long tradition of providing youth and family mediation in the municipality of Wyndham. As part of Reconnect West, WSHG will offer mediation services to young people and families to provide a preventative intervention service to people in their area. The agency also has funding from the Victorian Department of Human Services to operate a youth and parent mediation service. The Reconnect program requires WSHG to extend their services eastward to cover the population living in the Hobson's Bay area. The distances involved meant that people living in Hobson's Bay rarely accessed services in the City of Wyndham. Reconnect funding requires the services to work in new areas with larger distances involved.

WSHG have started looking at providing mediation training to professionals who work with young people and families. The service has trialed one program for professionals including student welfare coordinators in the area, and this was considered a success.

Counselling will play an important part in the work Reconnect West do with young people and their families in the Wyndham and Hobson's Bay areas. The counselling service will be provided by Anglicare Werribee, who also have a long history of providing counselling services

to individuals and families in the Werribee area. Anglicare also offer a range of other family support services.

The third aspect of Reconnect West's work in the area is the work they have called Critical Linkages. A proportion of the Reconnect funding is being put towards employing a person to develop strategies to constantly monitor and review the services people receive from Reconnect West. BayWest Youth Housing is the third partner in Reconnect West's joint initiative and this new position will be based with BayWest Youth Housing in Hobson's Bay. The work will involve collecting information and data on the service and provide opportunities for feedback from clients and providers.

### *Schools*

All three of the agencies involved in Reconnect West have experience of working with local secondary colleges in their respective areas. The Reconnect funding has allowed the service to start doing group work in some of the secondary schools in the Wyndham area. These sessions are developed in partnership with the schools and focus on the needs of the school and what is happening in the schools themselves. Workshops so far have included conflict resolution and peer mediation. The work in schools is designed to produce benefits for young people and their relationships with peers, in school, with family and the broader society. WSHG have also worked with four primary schools in the Wyndham area in running parenting programs. The Reconnect funding is currently being used to develop peer mediation programs in primary and secondary schools in Wyndham and Hobson's Bay.

In the school link parent support program WSHG focused on young people in the transition from primary school to secondary school as this stage was identified as often problematic for young people and their families.

A school focused youth service operates in the area as a joint Wyndham and Hobson's Bay service. The service facilitates contact between agencies in the two municipalities and funds programs for schools in the area.

### *Parent Support*

In terms of support for parents of adolescents, WSHG have run courses including their Parenting Teenagers Program, which has recently finished. As mentioned above, they have also run parenting programs in some of the local primary schools.

### *Accommodation*

WSHG have been providing SAAP funded youth accommodation in Wyndham for a number of years. WSHG auspice Bridges, the Adolescent Community Placement Program which provides community based placements for young people from respite to long-term accommodation. BayWest Youth Housing is the youth SAAP provider in Hobson's Bay. Anglicare in Werribee have been funded to provide foster care and adoption programs in Wyndham and Hobson's Bay.

### *Mental Health Needs*

The child and adolescent mental health service in the area has provided secondary consultation to WSHG in the past regarding young people with possible mental health problems.

### **2.3 Vinnies Reconnect**

Vinnies Reconnect is located in the country town of Deniliquin, in southwest New South Wales. The Vinnies Reconnect service arose out of the Deniliquin Emergency Accommodation service auspiced by the St Vincent de Paul Society. As one of the YHPP pilots it was funded to serve a rural and isolated community and to put an emphasis on local Indigenous communities. The area that Vinnies Reconnect covers is considerable, stretching south to Moama on the Victorian border, north past Hay to Booligal, east including Finley, Tocumwal and beyond, and west to cover Balranald and Tooleybuc (see Figure 3.4).

Vinnies Reconnect offer a range of services to young people and their families who are experiencing problems at home or in other aspects of their lives which may lead to early home leaving. These services include counselling, assistance with education, training, health, and income support benefits, and mediation services. The services Vinnies Reconnect offer are flexible and adaptive to the individual needs of young people and their families. Vinnies will meet young people and their families wherever they feel comfortable. One of the problems for the Reconnect workers in a small rural community is the maintenance of confidentiality and privacy. Vinnies Reconnect workers are aware that if their assistance is to be accessible, their workers should be available to people where they feel at ease.

Vinnies Reconnect focuses on family solutions to problems and helps normalise family conflicts. The emphasis is on counselling, either individually or in a group. The workers use a technique called the Solution Focused Framework which encourages people to develop skills to help them solve problems through empowerment. The workers sometimes use family mediation, and some of the workers who are with Vinnies were trained by REFS. Vinnies are currently arranging mediation training for the newer staff.

In addition to the services listed above, Vinnies are able to offer practical assistance to young people and their families with things such as food, clothing and transport costs provided through the St Vincent de Paul Society.

### *Schools*

Vinnies try to work closely with the schools in their area in supporting young people to stay connected to school and family. School staff such as teachers and counsellors often act as a 'doorway' which enables the Reconnect workers and students to make contact. Vinnies access the schools in the area and, when this is what the young person prefers, often meet students in the school.

The distances within the area can sometimes make working with the schools quite difficult, as this requires a substantial amount of travelling. Although schools normally have the same counsellor each week, they do not have permanent counsellors based in individual schools. Instead, schools operate within a system of itinerant counsellors, each of whom has a number of schools which they visit weekly.

The area lacks non-school based education and training opportunities for young people who have left school. This is a particular problem for some of the young people that Vinnies are involved with who have problems at school. The Reconnect workers have been able to arrange a small number of work-based opportunities for some of their clients with local employers but there is a limited number of such openings in the area. The local TAFE has recently provided some non-school based training as an alternative to Year 10 for a small number of local young people.

### *Accommodation*

Vinnies Reconnect arose out of the emergency accommodation service which had existed in Deniliquin for a number of years under the auspices of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Vinnies Reconnect and the Deniliquin Emergency Accommodation Program operate from the same premises and work closely together in providing accommodation. The SAAP-funded program has undergone some changes recently with the introduction of a 24 hour emergency accommodation service. The Department of Housing funds the running costs for Vinnies and the police to coordinate emergency accommodation across the area for women and children choosing to leave a domestic violence situation.

Vinnies Reconnect are not able to access youth specific accommodation for their clients who are under 16. When alternative accommodation is required, young people often have to leave the area to access such services. This can be problematic when a family may only need some time-out; the young person has to go outside the area to do this, and risks becoming estranged from the local community. Young men over 16 can access the homeless men's accommodation. In circumstances where the young person is over 16 and able to live independently, Vinnies can sometimes organise unit accommodation through the emergency accommodation service.

### *Indigenous Communities*

Vinnies Reconnect covers an area in which there are a number of Aboriginal communities including Balranald to the west, Cummeragunja to the south, and in Deniliquin itself. The service has found it quite difficult to establish relations with the local Indigenous communities, which is discussed in more detail below. Vinnies have recently organised an art exhibition of works from residents in one of the local communities to increase the service's profile in the area and begin to address issues for young people and families. The art exhibition enabled Vinnies to make contact with local people on an informal basis and start building up trust of the service among the local Indigenous community.

## **2.4 Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team**

The Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (RAFT) were another of the YHPP pilot projects funded to provide services to the City of Wollongong and surrounding areas. As part of the Reconnect funding, RAFT have extended their coverage down into Shoalhaven by opening an office in Nowra. As with the other Reconnect services, the area RAFT covers is extensive, reaching north to Helensburgh and south as far as Durras.

RAFT are auspiced by Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS) Association Inc.<sup>2</sup> SYFS provides a wide range of services within Wollongong and its surrounds. In addition to providing

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<sup>2</sup> Until 2000, SYFS was Wollongong Youth Accommodation and Support Association Inc.

services under the Reconnect program, RAFT workers are able to refer their clients on to a wide range of services from within SYFS and the wider community of agencies. The ability to refer clients on to a partner agency within the same association makes for speedy and appropriate referrals of cases.

As discussed above, immediacy of response to situations is critical in prevention and early intervention work if a young person leaving home is to be avoided. RAFT recognises that problems and conflict often occur at night and on the weekends when most services are closed. RAFT provide after-hours support by part funding the Lifeline counselling manager at Lifeline South Coast, an organisation that operates a 24-hour telephone helpline. This also provides a useful source of referrals. The counselling manager collects relevant data on calls to Lifeline, referrals, and cases dealt with by the telephone counsellors. The RAFT funding also part funds training and updating of other Lifeline counsellors on the Reconnect service to ensure appropriate support and referrals are given to young people and their families. The telephone number of Lifeline is provided on RAFT's answer-machine message for after-hours support.

As part of SYFS, RAFT workers are able to access a range of services run by the association such as the JPET program and the youth refuge. In addition, the association has offered services to young people in Wollongong and the surrounding areas for a number of years. Consequently, the association and its workers including RAFT have well developed network relationships with other services and organisations in the area including state welfare and income support services, mental health services and schools. For RAFT, supporting young people involves both offering clients the services of RAFT together with providing appropriate referrals to other services in the area. RAFT actively networked with a number of local services including welfare agencies, income support services and schools during the YHPP phase to develop their links and ensure the Reconnect program was well publicised. Consequently, a number of these agencies make regular referrals to the RAFT workers who themselves refer cases out to other agencies for various types of support to young people and their families.

RAFT Family and Adolescent Support Workers concentrate on family counselling and support to young people and their families who are experiencing problems and are at risk of leaving home early or have left home. The workers generally support young people who are either still at home or have left home fairly recently, i.e. within the previous six weeks. In cases where the young person has been away for longer than six weeks, RAFT workers can refer onto the SYFS Family Counsellor located in the same building or a number of other family counselling services based locally.

RAFT workers offer a highly flexible and responsive service to young people and their families in the area and are able to react rapidly to situations which arise and intervene early in possible situations of early home leaving. RAFT workers will meet young people and their families wherever is suitable and convenient for their clients, including at homes, school, cafes, youth clubs or anywhere where the young person feels comfortable. An important aspect of the way in which RAFT provide a flexible and responsive service to people in the area are their operating hours of 10am to 7.30pm. These evening opening hours enable parents who work to use the service without having to take time out of work. These hours also make it easier for young people to use the service either after school or work.

### *Schools*

The pilot phase of the YHPP allowed RAFT to develop close links with a number of schools in the area, enabling RAFT to access some of the key first-to-know workers in touch with young people and their families across the area. RAFT are currently trialing outreach clinics to two of the schools in the area. In these clinics a RAFT worker spends half a day once a week working with students identified by the school welfare staff as RAFT cases. The outreach clinics mean the RAFT workers are able to work closely with students and staff in these schools and provide support and assistance as needed. The clinics also improve RAFT's profile among students and staff in these schools, increasing accessibility and approachability through word of mouth.

### *Parent Support Group*

RAFT was initially involved in setting up self-help support groups for parents in the area. These groups have subsequently become self-sustaining and RAFT workers have withdrawn to allow parents to continue the groups on their own.

### *Accommodation*

The ability of Reconnect services to access accommodation for its clients is an important part of prevention and early intervention work. RAFT workers have access to a number of accommodation options to offer young people if needed, provided by the SYFS Association. The accommodation options are varied and range from crisis to long-term housing. The ability to offer crisis accommodation to Reconnect clients can be valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, crisis accommodation can offer some time-out for families experiencing conflict and tension while RAFT services provide support and assistance to the individuals. Secondly, showing clients crisis accommodation can be what workers called a 'reality check' for young people and can work to encourage some young people to stay at home and work through the problems. SYFS also provide a range of supported medium and long-term housing options for young people who are unable to return home.

### *Mental Health Services*

A prevention/early intervention service for young people aged 15-25 experiencing first episode psychosis has been operating in the south east region of NSW for three years. A number of such services were funded through the Federal Government's Burdekin Enhancement Fund set up in response to the Burdekin Report. The service is based in Wollongong and is part of the Area Health Authority. For a number of months this prevention and early intervention service was co-located with RAFT, and during this time the services developed a collaborative relationship in working with young people in the area. The services continue to collaborate and as part of their current relationship RAFT workers are able to refer cases to this mental health service which will facilitate access to mental health services for young people. RAFT also work closely with the mental health service in developing case plans for some of RAFT's clients with mental health problems. As in the case of REFS, the mental health worker provides secondary consultation on relevant cases and in some instances, carries out joint assessments of clients.

## **2.5 Local Services, Agencies and Partners**

As discussed in the section above, the Reconnect services work with a number of other local services in their respective areas. The section below briefly describes the types of agencies and providers which were identified by the Reconnect services as being part of their service networks. It is important to note that the lists provided to us by the Reconnect services were by no means exhaustive; they represented only the primary first-to-know agencies in their areas. Figure 2.1 illustrates the presence of these services as identified by the four Reconnect providers.

### *Schools*

Secondary schools form part of the network in all four Reconnect services. Each service has a varying number of schools in their network. REFS also listed some primary schools in the area.

### *Income Support Services*

As represented by Centrelink offices, income support services are present in the four Reconnect areas. The local Centrelink office in Deniliquin is not able to make decisions about youth allowance; these decisions are made in the Albury office of Centrelink.

### *State Welfare Agencies*

The Department of Human Services (DHS) in Victoria and the Department of Community Services (DoCS) in New South Wales operate in the Reconnect areas of their respective states.

### *Youth Services*

Youth services are varied and cover local community services, local government funded services and state department funded services like the SFYS in Victoria discussed above. Local government funded youth services are present in the Victorian services and represented by SFYS providers. Youth services are currently being improved in the Vinnies network with the establishment of a youth action group who have received funding from the local council to organise youth specific activities. While RAFT do not receive referrals from the local network of youth services, they do access the recreational options for young people and refer to young people to the services. As part of their action research work, RAFT are looking into ways of accessing the local youth services in the Shellharbour area.

### *SAAP*

All four Reconnect programs are networked with SAAP services, although to differing degrees (see section 4 below). RAFT and Reconnect West have access to SAAP-funded youth specific accommodation from within their own organisation. REFS identified a number of SAAP-funded providers in their network and they also receive some SAAP funding for family reconciliation.

### *Juvenile Justice Department and Police*

In New South Wales, the Juvenile Justice Department funds a number of intervention programs aimed at working with young offenders to prevent them re-offending. RAFT indicated that the Juvenile Justice Department has a program in the Wollongong area, auspiced by the SYFS.

Workers can refer Juvenile Justice clients to the Reconnect services where appropriate, although Reconnect cannot refer cases to the Juvenile Justice program. The field evidence found that there were programs operating in the other three areas which were fairly weakly attached to the Reconnect services networks. REFS have provided training to local Juvenile Justice officers. However, the Juvenile Justice program has not been a source of referrals to the Reconnect service. The same point can be made about Vinnies and Reconnect West. Conversely, Vinnies and Reconnect West both identified local police departments on their network lists. Reconnect West identifies the local police as a source of referrals and are currently developing protocols with the local police for referring cases. As part of their inter-agency work, WSHG are involved with the police and legal aid agency, training workers and volunteers to work with under-18 years olds in the community. BayWest Youth Housing have worked with local police in the Hobson's Bay area. RAFT and REFS did not identify the police as a first-to-know agency. However, RAFT has received referrals from the police and works closely with them on some cases.

**Figure 2:1 Services in the Four Reconnect Networks**

	<i>Schools</i>	<i>School Focused Youth Services</i>	<i>Income Support Services</i>	<i>State Welfare Agencies</i>	<i>Youth Services: Council/Community</i>	<i>SAAP - Youth</i>	<i>Juvenile Justice Department</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>JPET</i>	<i>Other Services</i>
<b>REFS</b>	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†
<b>Reconnect West</b>	†	†	†	†	†	†	(† )	†	†	†
<b>Vinnies Reconnect</b>	†	†	(† )	†	(† )	(† )	(† )	†	†	†
<b>RAFT</b>	†	†	†	†	(† )	†	†	(† )	†	†

† Provider in network

(† ) Provider offers less than full service, or is not well connected to network

† Provider not identified/available in network

### *Job Placement, Employment and Training*

The JPET program is for young people aged 15-21 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It aims to assist young people to overcome problems which prevent them from maintaining stable accommodation and entering into full-time education, training or gaining employment. Reconnect West and RAFT listed local JPET programs in their networks. There are two different JPET services in Wollongong; one is run by the SYFS youth refuge and the other by Mission Australia. REFS has strong links with another local youth education and employment provider, KYM, which they included on their list of contacts.

### *Other Services*

The range of other services available in the four Reconnect areas is broad, ranging from the specialist adolescent mental health services to the *Job Pathways Program (JPP)* to Strengthening Families.

Various health services feature in the four lists and form key aspects of the networks. These range from general community health centres in rural areas to specialist services such as drug and alcohol, mental health and sexual assault.

JPP is funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. It works with 15 to 19 years olds who have left school and assists them in making the transition from school to work. The local JPP were on lists provided by both Victorian Reconnect services but were not identified in the two New South Wales service areas.

A number of parent support organisations operate within local communities. Parentzone was included on REFS list. Auspiced by Anglicare Victoria, Parentzone has offices in the Eastern Metropolitan region of Melbourne. The agency provides a range of services including free information and support to parents in the local area, training and consultancy to professionals in facilitating parenting groups, and links to other services.

Victoria and New South Wales state governments both have prevention and early intervention initiatives for families raising children, the Strengthening Families Program in Victoria and Families First in New South Wales. Of the four areas studied in the research, only Reconnect West has such an initiative working in its area. The Strengthening Families program in Western Melbourne is provided by ISIS Primary Care and covers the municipalities of Hobson's Bay and Keilor to the north; it does not cover Wyndham.

A range of non-government organisation support services are present in the four Reconnect networks. REFS include the Wesley Contact Centre, Reach Out for Kids (ROK) and Yarra Ranges Community Christian Care, who provide a wide range of services to young people and their families. Reconnect West listed a number of local agencies such as Lifeworks Werribee, Migrant Resource Centre, and Uniting Care and Care and Concern. Included in Vinnies network list were McKillop Family Services in Balranald (the only permanent service in the town), Family Support Services and Deniliquin Council for Social Development. RAFT did not include many community based services in their network list.

As discussed above, they work closely with Lifeline South Coast and are linked to a range of other youth services through their auspicing body, SYFS. Many of these agencies offer counselling services. In addition, a number of specific counselling services were included in the network lists including Centacare and The Listening Place in Deniliquin.

A feature of the network list from Vinnies was the presence of two Aboriginal organisations, Balranald Land Council and Viney Morgan Aboriginal Health Centre.

### **3. Reconnect Local Service Networks**

One of the main objectives of the research was to look at how the various forms of support services are linked together at the local level. This involved uncovering the nature of the relationships between different support services in the four locations and included income support services, SAAP, schools and state welfare agencies. This section uses a network analysis to describe how local services are related. See Appendix 2 for a general description of social network analysis.

Inter-agency relations exist at a variety of levels, ranging from interaction in the course of assistance to individual young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness or to their families, to common membership in local service co-ordination groups, and to formal inter-agency contacts in planning and service development. While the present study is concerned with all of these, we regarded inter-agency contact in the provision of assistance to young people and their families as offering the best indication of the way in which services are linked together in an area. The aim of Reconnect is to strengthen the role of preventive and early intervention activity. The rationale for our focus on referral is that these contacts provide the most direct and reliable measure of working inter-agency relationships; in consequence, patterns of inter-agency contact at this level give a useful indication of the local foundations for the development of preventive and early intervention roles.

In preparation for the research, each Reconnect service was asked to provide the researchers with a list of local agencies, organisations and services dealing with young people at risk of homelessness in their area. Most of these were organisations whose work makes them potentially the first to know that a young person may be at risk of homelessness. Typically, these lists included Commonwealth and state agencies such as Centrelink, and the DHS in Victoria or DoCS in New South Wales, local government and non-government providers of health, counselling, accommodation and other services, and schools and education and employment services. The Reconnect services each included schools in their lists, the number of which varied between services. Representatives of most of the organisations on these lists were interviewed in the course of the research.

One section of the interview focused on inter-agency relations in work with young people and families where actual or potential homelessness was a concern. Respondents were asked to talk about the referral of cases within local service networks and the frequency of contacts of this kind. For this purpose, referral was defined as the referral of a client, ie. a young person or family, or of the management of such a case. Respondents were provided with a list of the agencies and asked to identify those with which they had contact of this kind as frequently as once per week, once per month, less frequently than that, or not at all. They were then asked whether there were other agencies with which they had contact, and if so to add these to the list and indicate the frequency of these contacts. We have used the information generated from this section of the interview to map the networks of support and assistance to young people at risk of homelessness in each of the four Reconnect areas.

To do so, we have regarded two services as directly linked in the network if representatives of one or both of the agencies concerned mentioned the existence of a referral relationship between them. The networks reflect relationships between agencies rather than individuals, and where more than one representative of a given agency was interviewed we have combined their contacts. In interpreting respondents' comments, we defined weekly contact very strictly, so that weekly contacts are recorded only where at least one respondent was sure of such frequent interaction. We were more generous in the interpretation of comments

about monthly contact. Where two respondents differed about the frequency of contact between their agencies, we have taken the most frequent measure. The use of a list of agencies to prompt recall has encouraged respondents to mention links with others on the list. This practice, and the rules of interpretation used to interpret the data, have the effect of potentially over- rather than under-stating the connectedness of network members and the frequency of contact among them.

The referral networks operating in each area do, of course, include other agencies not included in the original list. Because representatives of these other agencies were not interviewed, their linkages to others in the network had a lower likelihood of being observed, and for this reason we have analysed these parts of the networks separately. These lists of contacts allow us to examine the possibility that the initial lists of agencies excluded service providers serving as important hubs in the structure of local services. In this context, we were interested in identifying agencies which though not on our list were in touch with a number of respondents and understanding whether there was any significance in their omission from the list. (It should nevertheless be noted that the lists requested from Reconnect agencies were not expected to be exhaustive and that there is no necessary significance in the inclusion or exclusion of particular agencies. It is the general pattern of network relations that is significant.)

The service networks in each of the four Reconnect areas are shown in Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5 to follow. These figures show the links between each pair of agencies included in the original list of local agencies serving young people and their families, with the representation of the link shaded more darkly according to the frequency of contact between them. The discussion to follow will consider each of these in turn.

### **3.1 The REFS Reconnect Network**

The network of services for young people and families in the area served by Reconnect provider Regional Extended Family Service (REFS) is the strongest and most closely connected of the four examined in the study. This network is shown diagrammatically in Figure 3.1 below, with additional contacts given in an associated listing.

REFS, including in its role as Reconnect provider, has very good working contact with virtually all other services in the network. It has weekly referral contact with almost all of the first-to-know agencies interviewed for the study. These agencies appear to understand what REFS offers, and to regard it highly.

With one exception to be discussed below, the network is well integrated in functional terms. There appear to be regular contacts between the providers of advice, support, counselling and family mediation, and the providers of accommodation, income support, employment, and health services. There appeared to be few difficulties associated with the provision of income support and the assessment and verification of claims for youth allowance at the rate for those unable to live at home. Centrelink social workers in Ringwood and Lilydale offices seemed to have at least monthly contact with most other agencies in the network, and weekly contact with some of them. REFS and other key agencies had frequent contact with the Victorian DHS.

Education and education-related services are particularly well connected. REFS provided a list of over 20 secondary schools with which they have varying degrees of contact. Interviews were conducted with the student welfare co-ordinators from two secondary schools, and with the School Focused Youth Workers attached to three local government authorities. All were well connected with each other, and with relevant local services. REFS

has good contact with all these agencies. REFS are well networked with KYM, which provides education, training and employment for young people and manage the JPP. REFS have had contact with the local JPET program in the past although not so much recently. More than 80 per cent of REFS clients are still at school and so REFS do not have a regular need for the JPET program.




The main exception to this general pattern is in the area of Knox, where some levels of the network are much less well connected. In commenting on the draft report, REFS have informed us that they receive and act on a substantial number of referrals from the Knox district. These referrals come via schools, from young people and their families and from other agencies in the Knox area. However, it can be seen in the network diagram that there is a relative lack of contact of network members with both the Centrelink office in Knox and the City of Knox Youth Service. One reason for the weakness of the network in this part of the Reconnect region is the existence of an alternative, and in part competing, network hub for services to young people centred on Harrison's Youth and Community Services. Harrisons have a parent/adolescent mediation and family support service based in Knox and up until recently were located in the same building as Centrelink Knox. Although Harrisons was not on the list of local services given to respondents, a significantly large number of them recognised its omission and added it to their list of contacts. We understand the weakness of the Reconnect network in Knox may also in part be due to geography. On one hand, Knox is not far from Ringwood and the geographical centre of the Reconnect region. Transport connections are good, and travel from Knox to Ringwood takes only fifteen minutes. Although REFS had a Knox office for a time, they found that Knox clients were as or more likely to attend in Ringwood and they have since closed it. At the same time, however, the Knox location of Harrison's seems to have made it the natural referral choice of some cases for other agencies in Knox. REFS also point to the relative size of the Knox area in comparison to Yarra Ranges which they consider to have far greater needs for additional adolescent and family service than Knox, hence their increased focus on this area of identified high need.

The tendency to network division has probably been exacerbated by competitive tendering for human service provision; it is relevant that both REFS and Harrison's sought to be the Reconnect provider. This legacy is currently being addressed in the development of a joint proposal by REFS and Harrison's to provide the early intervention component in a new program for the support of young people leaving care. This pilot is now well established and working well.

The geographical spread of the network is a further source of weakness. The region is large, and the network stretches across sub regions on both the eastern and the western sides. While REFS appears to bridge these divides, other agencies are much less likely to cover the whole area. Something of this can be seen from the list of Other Agencies in Contact that follows the diagram. Agencies on the western side of the region tend to refer to other agencies in, for example, the municipality of Whitehorse. The main significance of this geographical divide is for agencies operating on the eastern side, where the region extends into the semi-rural area of Yarra Ranges and the mountain towns of Healesville and Yarra Glen. Needs are much more thinly served in this area. Public transport to Ringwood is expensive. Agencies tend to refer to others in the locality. REFS operate an office in Lilydale providing mediation and outreach services, and have plans to extend their reach further into the Yarra valley this year. Yarra Ranges Community Christian Care serves as an alternative service providing accommodation to young people and families.

**Figure 3.1 The REFS Referral Network**

1	1 REFS/Reconnect
2	2 Centrelink – Ringwood
3	3 City of Maroondah SFYS
4	4 Anglicare Parentzone
5	5 Wesley Contact Centre
6	6 Wesley 121
7	7 Maroondah Hosp Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
8	8 Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault (ECASA)
9	9 Reach Out for Kids (ROK)
10	10 Family Access Network – SAAP
11	11 DHS Eastern Region
12	12 Centrelink Knox
13	13 City of Knox Youth Service
14	14 KYM Employment Services
15	15 Centrelink – Lilydale
16	16 Yarra Ranges Community Christian Care
17	17 Yarra Ranges Shire (Youth Works)
18	18 Croydon Secondary College
19	19 Ringwood SC

	Contact at least weekly
	Contact at least monthly
	Less frequent contact

### **Other agencies in contact**

- Parent Network (REFS/Reconnect)
- 20 other schools (REFS/Reconnect)
- Department of Education (REFS)
- Community Policing Squad (REFS)
- Uniting Care, Family Fix Program (REFS)
- Knox Counselling Service (REFS)
- Ringwood Magistrates Court (REFS)
- Rotary Club (REFS)
- Harrison's Community Services (Centrelink Knox) (Knox SFYS) (Centrelink Ringwood) (JPET) (KYMS) (ROK) (Croydon SC)
- City of Whitehorse YAB (KYMS) (ROK)
- Knox Community Health (Centrelink Knox)
- EDAS (Centrelink Knox) (Centrelink Lilydale) (ECASA) (YRCCC) (Shire of YR) (City of Maroondah SFYS)
- Open Family (Centrelink Knox)
- Anglicare Strengthening Families (Centrelink Knox) (Knox SFYS) (Lilydale Centrelink) (Parentzone)
- Upper Yarra Comm House - JPET (KYMS) (Lilydale Centrelink)
- East Burwood Centre (ROK)
- Uniting Care Connections (ROK)
- Eastern Tenancy Housing Ltd, public Housing (ROK)
- Salvation Army Eastcare (ROK) (Centrelink Maroondah)
- Camcare (ROK)
- Eastern Access Community Health (ROK) (ECASA) (Shire of YR)
- Whitehorse Community Health (ROK)
- Youth Substance Abuse Service (Wesley 121)
- Yarra Junction JPET (YRCCC) (Shire of YR)
- HICCI Healesville (YRCCC)
- Anglicare Lilydale (YRCCC) (Shire of YR)
- Financial Counselling (YRCCC)
- Material Aid (YRCCC)
- CAB Lilydale (YRCCC)
- Vineyard Church (YRCCC)
- Maternal and Child Health (Parentzone)
- Maroondah Citizens Advice Bureau (Centrelink Maroondah)
- Wesley Youth Services (Centrelink Maroondah)
- Stepping Out (Centrelink Maroondah)
- Youth for Christ (ECASA)
- Ranges Community Health Service (Shire of YR)
- Yarra Valley Community Health (Shire of YR)
- Community Houses (Shire of YR)
- Anglicare Box Hill (Ringwood SC)
- Women's Health East (Ringwood SC) (City of Maroondah SFYS) (REFS)
- Maroondah Social Health (Ringwood SC)
- Anglicare Croydon (Croydon SC)
- Youth Homeless Outreach Team (Croydon SC)
- Assertive Parenting Group (Croydon SC)
- Manningham Youth and Family Services (City of Maroondah SFYS)

### 3.2 The Reconnect West Reconnect Network

Reconnect West is only now taking up its Reconnect role. The network of services in the Werribee region, therefore, reflects the patterns of interaction 'before' Reconnect services were funded, ie, without the added network development that Reconnect is intended to achieve.

Not surprisingly, the Reconnect West network is much less well developed than was the case in the area served by REFS. The two main Reconnect partners, Werribee Support and Housing Group and Anglicare Werribee, are both well known and highly regarded in the region. Respondents from the partner organisations reported regular contact with most of the other agencies in the network, including both first-to-know agencies such as schools and mainstream youth services. Contact of the Reconnect partners with other agencies is reported as mainly monthly, as compared with the REFS area, where REFS had weekly contact with a number of agencies. In our view, the number and frequency of referral relationships shown in Figure 3.2 overstate the role of the Reconnect partners in the network, at least as it operates at the present time. Respondents representing the Reconnect partners tended to estimate their contact with other agencies as more frequent than the other agencies did, and some of these other agencies reported that they had no contact with at least one of the Reconnect partners.

While less well integrated than its REFS counterpart, the Reconnect West network is adequately so. There are established linkages between the providers of support, counselling and family mediation, and the providers of accommodation, income support, employment, and health services. WSHG appear fairly well connected to Werribee police, and BayWest Youth Housing has worked with the local police (although this is not identified in the network due to a lack of network list from this partner). The Reconnect partners have some accommodation resources, though these are apparently limited in Hobson's Bay. In Werribee at least relations with Centrelink and other agencies give the capacity to respond when the risk of homelessness is imminent. However, connections with the Victorian DHS, located outside the area in Footscray, are patchy, and accessible resources to address sexual health needs and adolescent mental issues are less apparent than in Ringwood. On the other hand, there were strong connections with Strengthening Families, represented by ISIS Primary Care in Hobson's Bay.

Respondents in the Reconnect West region included student welfare counsellors from five schools in Wyndham, school focused youth workers covering both municipalities under the auspices of the Hobson's Bay City Council Youth Services, and the Job Pathways Program. Werribee West's list included six schools in Wyndham however, it did not include any schools in the Hobson's Bay area. Bay West Youth Housing would have more contact with schools in the Hobson's Bay area. Education-based services are not as well integrated in the network as was the case in Ringwood. JPET, based in Footscray, has become more closely integrated in the region since it responded to increasing demand by opening a Werribee office for one day per week.

Like the REFS network, the Reconnect West network is stretched over a large area having socio-economically diverse communities. Its two main partners are based in Werribee, and its network is much better connected in its western areas of Werribee and Hopper's Crossing than in the northern area of Laverton and especially the eastern areas of Hobson's Bay. The inclusion of BayWest Housing in the consortium may help to develop its reach into this area. At present, the network has almost no penetration into Williamstown, which with its mixture of heavy industry, public housing and gentrifying waterside suburbs is probably more

closely associated with urban Melbourne than its western fringes. Schools in Hobson's Bay were not included in the initial network list. Williamstown High and Bayside Secondary Colleges were contacted during the fieldwork and interviewed to gain the perspective of schools which it would appear that the Reconnect group as a whole have not yet established links with.

A further difficulty for the Reconnect West network is the location of some of its key resources in Footscray. The nearest branch of the Victorian DHS and JPET provider Melbourne City Mission, for example, are located in Footscray, as is the region's Juvenile Justice Program. Although just beyond the northern border of the Werribee East region, Footscray is socially and culturally very different from Werribee. Respondents describe Werribee clients as intimidated by the greater cultural diversity of Footscray and the area's and reputation as a centre of drug use and drug dealing.

**Figure 3.2 The Reconnect West Referral Network**

1	1 Werribee Support and Housing Group/Reconnect
2	2 Anglicare Werribee/Reconnect
3	3 Centrelink Werribee
4	4 Wyndham City Council Youth Services
5	5 ISIS Primary Care - Wyndham
6	6 Lifeworks Werribee
7	7 Mental Health Services for Kids and Youth -MH Sky
8	8 Migrant Resource Centre, Hopper's Crossing
9	9 Uniting Care and Concern Werribee
10	10 Werribee Legal Service
11	11 JPET – Melbourne City Mission Werribee
12	12 Job Pathways Programme Werribee
13	13 Werribee Police
14	14 The Grange SC, Hopper's Crossing
15	15 Galvin Park SC, Werribee
16	16 Werribee SC
17	17 Hopper's Crossing SC
18	18 Laverton SC
19	19 Youth Outreach Team, Footscray
20	20 DHS Western Region
21	21 Bay West Youth Housing
22	22 Centrelink Newport
23	23 Hobson's Bay SFYS
24	24 ISIS Primary Care Hobson's Bay
25	25 ACP, WS&HG

	Contact at least weekly
	Contact at least monthly
	Less frequent contact

### **Other agencies in contact**

- Altona SC (ACP WS&HG) (Centrelink Newport)
- Bayside SC (ACP WS&HG)
- Williamstown High (ACP WS&HG) (Centrelink Newport)
- Sunshine SC (ACP WS&HG)
- Sunshine Teaching Unit (ACP WS&HG)
- WestCare ACP (ACP WS&HG)
- WestCASA (ACP WS&HG) (Laverton SC) (Centrelink Newport)
- MAPS (ACP WS&HG)
- Footscray City High (ACP WS&HG)
- Anglicare Yarraville (ACP WS&HG)
- MacKillop Family Services Strengthening Families (ACP WS&HG)
- Legal Aid – Sunshine (ACP WS&HG)
- Hoppers [Crossing] Specialist School (ACP WS&HG)
- Werribee Hospital (ACP WS&HG)
- Hobson’s Bay School Focussed Youth Service (Anglicare) (Werribee SC)
- Gatehouse (Laverton SC)
- Werribee Youth and Parent Mediation (Grange SC)
- Pt Gellibrand Girls (Centrelink Newport)
- Bayside SC, Paisley Campus (Centrelink Newport)
- Altona Police, Community Policing Squad (Centrelink Newport)
- NRC Westgate, Altona (Centrelink Newport)
- Western Suburbs Legal Service (Centrelink Newport)
- Front Yard, Melbourne Youth Support (Centrelink Newport)
- Metro West Housing (Centrelink Newport)
- Police, Altona (Centrelink Newport) (Bayside SC)
- Newport Community Policing Squad (Centrelink Newport)
- Caroline Chisholm Society (Centrelink Newport)
- Travellers Aid (Centrelink Newport)
- Open Family, Footscray (Centrelink Newport)
- ISIS Family Counselling (ISIS Primary Care, Wyndham)
- MacKillop Secondary College (Werribee Support & Housing) (Anglicare Werribee) (Centrelink Werribee) (ISIS Primary Care) (Uniting Care and Concern) (JPET MCM) (The Grange SC) (Werribee SC) (Hobson’s Bay City Council Youth Worker) (ISIS Primary Care HB) (ACP WS&H)
- Relationships Australia (MH Sky)
- Crisis Assessment Team (MH Sky)
- Older Adolescent Service (MH Sky)

### 3.3 The Vinnies Reconnect Network

The Reconnect network serving the Deniliquin region is sprawling and loosely connected. Most differences in character from those in the REFS and Reconnect West areas are clearly associated with its rural location.

Vinnies Reconnect gives a strong centre to this network, having regular and mainly at least monthly contact with virtually all its members. Vinnies has satisfactory links with the provision of income support through Centrelink, and at least monthly contact with health services, counselling services, and some of the Aboriginal community organisations. There is frequent contact with DoCS in Deniliquin. The police and juvenile justice programs appear to play a far larger role than in the Victorian networks although their involvement in prevention and early intervention is limited. Except for Centrelink Deniliquin, employment and training services have little presence in the network

The network as a whole is very different from those in the other Reconnect regions examined for the study. Even at first glance it can be seen that Vinnies maintains relationships with a much wider range of other agencies than does almost any other network member. With two or three exceptions, there are few direct links between other services in the network. This includes Centrelink social work services other than in Deniliquin. This pattern implies that while Vinnies Reconnect is in good touch with the range of youth services and first-to-know agencies in its region, it bears a relatively heavier burden of responsibility for assistance to young people and families than the other Reconnect providers considered in the study. The functional integration of the network is accordingly less developed. This is exacerbated by the shortage of accommodation appropriate for young people either *refuge/short-term* emergency or medium to long-term accommodation options.

Integral to the network and a factor that sets it apart from the urban networks is the presence of community health centres in a number of the towns including Deniliquin, Hay, Barham, Finley and Mathoura. A particular feature of rural areas, community health workers are central in any network of services in a community. Vinnies' connection with these community health workers is variable across the network with the health centre closest to Vinnies (Deniliquin) having the greatest degree of contact.

Vinnies Reconnect has reasonably good relations with all of the four secondary schools where we conducted interviews, although there have been some issues about its acceptance into one of the schools. Of the high schools, only Deniliquin is well connected with other services in the region. Links with the office of the Department of Education and Employment in Deniliquin are, to some extent, a reflection of the thinness of other resources in the region for the support of young people and their families. This office coordinates school counsellors and other assistance for young people with special needs, and has started to develop peer mediation programs in schools in the area. There are no JPET or Job Pathways providers in the region

Perhaps the most significant feature of the regional network is its geographical fragmentation. Thinly stretched across a vast area, this is effectively a loosely connected aggregation of more or less distinct networks based in the town centres of Deniliquin, Hay, Balranald, Barham, Finley, and Echuca-Moama (see Figure 3.4). These local sub-networks are clearly shown in the list of the contacts agencies have with others not on the list presented at interview, where interviewees have added other agencies in their own locality.

This is clearly due to the distance and travel time involved in maintaining contacts across the region. The pattern is replicated within Vinnies Reconnect itself, in the management of Reconnect work on a locality basis.

This geographical fragmentation takes sharpest form at the New South Wales border with Victoria. Here the Reconnect region extends to Echuca-Moama on the Murray River border, where young people from Echuca and Moama attend secondary school and draw on services such as Centrelink in Echuca. However, although Vinnies have provided support to some young people in Echuca, this is beyond their contractual boundaries which only go as far as Moama. Administrative boundaries stemming from state government administration are a further source of fragmentation in support to these young people and their families particularly with regard to health services.

**Figure 3.3 The Vinnies Reconnect Referral Network**

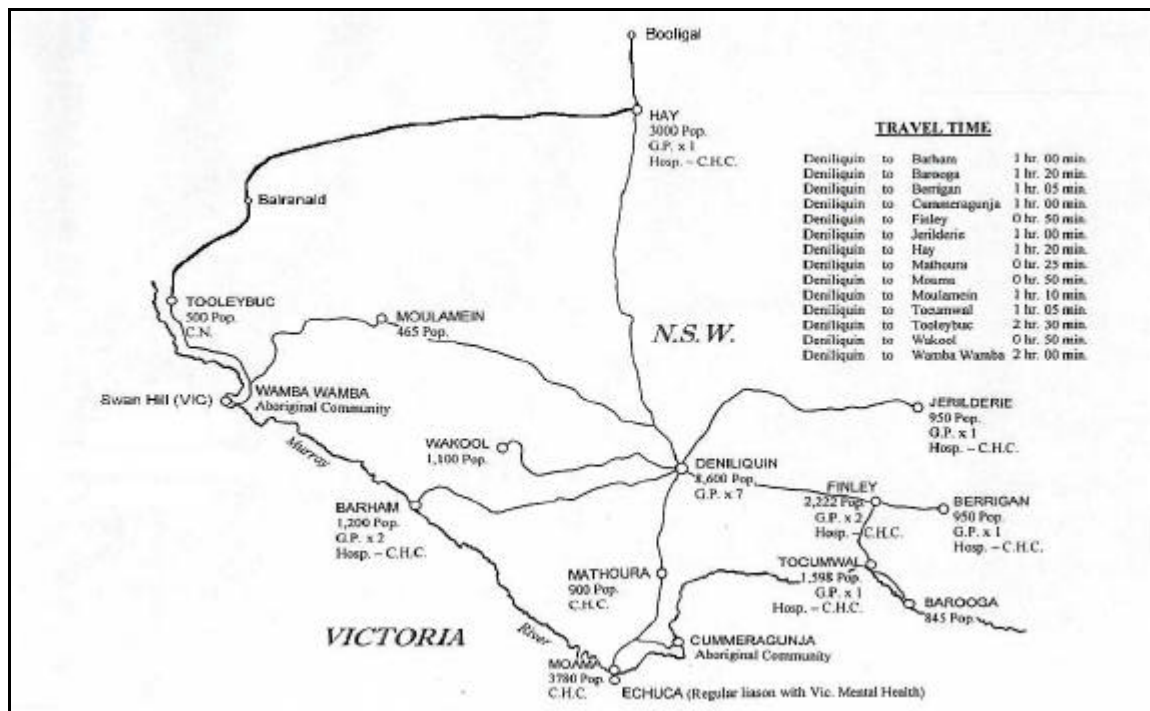
1	1 Vinnies Reconnect																
2		2 Centrelink Echuca															
3			3 Deniliquin Community Health														
4				4 Family Services – Echuca													
5					5 Barham Community Health												
6						6 McKillop Family Services Balranald											
7							7 Hay War Memorial School										
8								8 Deniliquin High School									
9									9 Hay Community School								
10										10 Centacare – Deniliquin							
11											11 Balranald Aboriginal Land Council						
12												12 2 Hay FM					
13													13 Mathoura Community Health Centre				
14														14 Greater Murray Community Health – Finley			
15															15 Deniliquin Police		
16																16 Jerilderie Police	
17																17 Echuca Secondary College	
18																18 Deniliquin Council for Social Development	
19																19 The Listening Place – Deniliquin	
20																20 Family Support Services – Deniliquin	
21																21 Barham High School	
22																22 Dept of Education and Employment	
23																23 DoCS Deni	
24																24 Viney Morgan Aboriginal Health Centre.	
25																25 Centrelink – Deniliquin	
26																26 Juvenile Justice - Deniliquin	

	Contact at least weekly
	Contact at least monthly
	Less frequent contact

## Other agencies

- Hay Police (Vines)
- Balranald Police (Vines)
- Centrelink, Albury (Centrelink Deniliquin)  
Hay Community School changed to Hay Community Health (Townsend, DET)
- Centrelink Hay (Hay Community Health)
- Southern Riverina Rural Advisory Service (Centacare)
- Relationships Australia – Shepparton (Centacare)
- Griffith Adolescent and Family Service (Centacare)
- Centacare Bendigo (Centrelink Echuca)
- Echuca Police (Centrelink Echuca)
- DET – Victoria (Centrelink Echuca)
- Juvenile Justice, Deniliquin (DoCS Deniliquin, Centrelink Echuca)
- CPIT (Sexual Assault Workers, Dei Community Health Centre)
- Mental Health (Sexual Assault Workers, Dei Community Health Centre)
- Family Support Service (Sexual Assault Workers, Dei Community Health Centre)
- Balranald Central School (Balranald Land Council)
- Balranald Hospital (Aboriginal Health Worker) (Balranald Land Council)
- DoCS Gol Gol (Balranald Land Council) (MacKillop Rural Community Services)
- Centrelink Swan Hill (MacKillop Rural Community Services) (Barham Community Health) (Juvenile Justice, Deniliquin)
- Barham Police (Barham Community Health) (Barham High School)
- Murray Mallee Training Employment Service (Barham Community Health)
- St Vincent de Paul (Deniliquin Police)
- Oznam Shelter (Deniliquin Police)
- Human Services Victoria (Deniliquin Police)  
[Barham?] Anglican Church (Barham High School)  
[Barham?] Baptist Church (Barham High School)
- St Lukes (Bendigo) (Echuca SC) (Echuca Centrelink)
- Centrelink -Echuca (Echuca SC)
- Cumeragunja (Echuca SC)
- Njernda Co-op (Echuca SC)
- Health House (Echuca SC)
- Moamaland (Echuca SC)
- Centrelink Albury (Greater Murray Community Health)
- Finley Police (Greater Murray Community Health)
- Deniliquin Aboriginal Land Council (Juvenile Justice Deniliquin)
- Community Health Echuca (Echuca Centrelink)
- Youth Worker Echuca (Echuca Centrelink)
- Women’s Health Service Echuca (Echuca Centrelink)
- Juvenile Justice Echuca (Echuca Centrelink)
- Drug and Alcohol Services Echuca (Echuca Centrelink)
- Tooleybuc Central School (Reconnect/St. Vincent de Paul) (Deniliquin Community Health) (Deniliquin High School) (Deniliquin Police) (Juvenile Justice Deniliquin)
- Finley High School (Reconnect/St. Vincent de Paul) (Deniliquin Community Health) (Deniliquin High School) (Greater Murray Community Health) (Deniliquin Police) (Echuca Secondary College) (Centrelink Deniliquin) (Juvenile Justice Deniliquin)

**Figure 3.4 Towns in the Vinnies Reconnect Region**



Thanks and acknowledgments to the Riverside Centre, Deniliquin for the basis of this map

### 3.4 The RAFT Reconnect Network

Like REFS in Ringwood, the Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (RAFT) that has responsibility for providing Reconnect services in the Wollongong Region has a strong and well developed network of relations with other agencies in the region. This network is shown in Figure 3.5 below. Like REFS, RAFT has frequent contact, at least monthly in most cases, with most of the other agencies on the list provided for the study. Other agencies in the area are well informed about RAFT and the counselling and support services it provides to young people and their families. RAFT's participation as a Youth Homeless Pilot Project has also contributed to network development.

Together, RAFT and six of the other agencies interviewed as members of the SYFS Association<sup>1</sup> I have the capacity to provide a full spectrum of services to young people and their families from counselling and early intervention assistance to crisis accommodation and long-term support. These agencies form the core of the Reconnect network in the Wollongong region. Most of the agencies belonging to the Association are well linked, both to each other and to other key providers of youth services. In turn, these services have frequent contact with social workers in the Wollongong and Shellharbour offices of Centrelink; contacts with social workers at the Corrimal office of Centrelink are less frequent, and indeed many locals do not have such contact. There are some tensions in these relationships about the relative roles of Reconnect and Centrelink officers in the verification of circumstances supporting allowances at the rate for young people unable to live at home. Members of the Association also have frequent interaction with the three offices of DoCS serving the area, though the discussion of these relationships reported a good deal of frustration in making contact and especially in securing assistance for a young person aged 15 or older. The network has two adolescent mental health services, one of which provides early intervention in mental health problems.

Links with schools and education services are more uneven. Not all schools view themselves as having a welfare role, and this is reflected in the pattern of their network connections. We interviewed school counsellors in two schools in the area. RAFT and some other SYFS agencies have links with both, but the strength of these relations and the frequency of RAFT's contact with them are rather different. Two SYFS member agencies provide JPET services to young people and are well connected with RAFTS and local high schools. Mission Australia also operates a JPET program, but this appears less well integrated in the network.

The location of SYFS in Wollongong centres the network in that city, some distance from the northern end of the region in Helensburgh, but it is notable that RAFT workers will meet young people and their families in their own area. The telephone service operated by Lifeline Southcoast helps to extend network coverage to outlying areas as well as to provide support out of hours.

As Reconnect provider, RAFT have extended their coverage considerably further down the south coast, with Durras marking the southern limit. Because this coverage is only recently established, this research did not examine network development in the new territory. The office RAFT has opened in Nowra will give it a presence in the new area. The concentration of existing network resources in Wollongong and greater needs for services suitable to Aboriginal families and young people will be problems for network development in this new territory.

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<sup>1</sup> SYFS have a total of 13 services, 6 of which were identified as part of the research: JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge, Independent Living Situation, RAILS, Youth Refuge, Link Inn Housing, and Young Independent People in Housing

**Figure 3.5 The RAFT Reconnect Referral Network**

1	1 RAFT/Reconnect												
2	■	2 JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge											
3	■	■	3 JPET Mission Australia										
4	■	■	■	4 Independent Living Situation									
5	■	■	■	■	5 Rails – Juvenile Justice Program								
6	■	■	■	■	■	6 Child and Family South – Corrimal (DoCS)							
7	■	■	■	■	■	■	7 Community Services Shellharbour Square (DoCS)						
8	■	■	■	■	■	■	8 Lifeline South Coast						
9	■	■	■	■	■	■	9 Corrimal High School						
10	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	10 Dapto High School					
11	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	11 DoCS Intake Wollongong				
12	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12 Early Psychosis Service				
13	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	13 Adolescent Mental Health Service				
14	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	14 Centrelink Wollongong				
15	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	15 Centrelink Shellharbour				
16	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	16 Centrelink Dapto				
17	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	17 Wollongong Youth Refuge			
18	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	18 Link Inn - Housing				
19	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	19 Young Independent People in Housing				
20	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	20 Centrelink Corrimal				

■	Contact at least weekly
■	Contact at least monthly
■	Less frequent contact

### **Other agencies in contact**

- Illawarra Youth Housing (Centrelink Shellharbour) (Centrelink Wollongong), (Centrelink Dapto), (Independent Living Situation (ILS)), (RAILS), (DoCS Woll.) (Early Psychosis Centre)
- Juvenile Justice (Centrelink Shellharbour) (Centrelink Wollongong) (Centrelink Dapto, RAILS) (Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Barnardos (Centrelink Shellharbour)
- St Mary's Wollongong (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Illawarra Senior College (Centrelink Wollongong)
- DoCS Substitute Care (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Eddie's Place (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Community Health Adolescents in Need (CHAIN) (Centrelink Wollongong), (RAILS), (ILS), (Corrimal High School), (DoCS Wollongong.)
- Illawarra Legal Centre (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Northfields Clinic, Woll. Uni (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Kadash House D& A (Centrelink Wollongong) (Centrelink Dapto)
- Orana D & A (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Sexual Assault Service (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Touchstone -Relationships Aus Adolescent Counselling (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Relationships Australia (Dapto High)
- Resourcing Adolescents to Gain Equipment RAGE (Independent Living Situation)
- Community Tenancy Service (Independent Living Situation) (RAILS)
- Anglicare (Independent Living Situation) (RAILS)
- Youth Drug and Alcohol (Independent Living Situation)
- St Vinnies (RAILS)
- Salvation Army (RAILS)
- Youth Centre (RAILS) (DoCS Woll.)
- Barkley Neighbourhood Centre (RAILS)
- Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre (RAILS) (Corrimal High School)
- Access Community Group (RAILS)(DoCS Woll.)
- Tree House (RAILS)
- Department of Housing (RAILS)
- Smith Family Educate (Corrimal High School)
- Family Planning (Dapto High)
- Unifam (Lifeline Southcoast)
- Mobile Treatment Team (Lifeline Southcoast) (Adolescent Mental Health Service) (Early Psychosis Service)
- Police (Lifeline Southcoast)
- Illawarra Housing Trust (Early Psychosis Service)
- A & E (Early Psychosis Service)
- Edmund Rice College (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollong Youth Refuge) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Kanahooka High School (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge) (Independent Living Situation) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Lake Illawarra High School School (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge) (Independent Living Situation) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Full-Services School Shellharbour District Office (Dapto High School) (Centrelink Wollongong)
- Illawarra Sports High School (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Bulli High School (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge) (Child and Family South) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service) (Centrelink Dapto)
- Warilla High School (RAFT/Reconnect) (JPET Wollongong Youth Refuge) (Independent Living Situation) (DoCS Wollongong) (Adolescent Mental Health Service) (Centrelink Shellharbour)

### **3.5 Factors Accounting for Differences in Reconnect Networks**

Comparison of the networks of the four Reconnect projects considered in the study shows that a number of factors contribute to the development of strong and effective networks.

#### *Time and Continuity of Focus on Youth Homelessness*

REFS, RAFT and Vinnies were Youth Homelessness Pilot Projects, and have long and continuous histories of work in this area both as organisations and in the staff giving leadership. Their networks are better developed, and we would suspect also function more reliably, than those in regions where Reconnect has been established more recently. The only exception may be with regard to Vinnies which, although offering a valuable service and the only one of its type in the whole region, are circumscribed to a certain extent by the size of their area.

One factor which has worked against the development of strong networks and a particular issue in the urban schemes has been Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). CCT is antithetical to any network approach in the provision of services as it explicitly encourages competition between service providers. The issue seems to have abated slightly for Victorian services with the change of state administration but improvements in some relationships may be slow to appear.

The networks of the Reconnect provider rest, of course, on those of the auspicing agency. In the Werribee region, the partner agencies of Reconnect West have local networks on which a stronger system of inter-agency relations will be able to be built in time. REFS, RAFT and Vinnies history shows, continuity is potentially undermined by breaks and delays in Reconnect funding. In REFS' case temporary funding from the auspicing agency enabled the program to be sustained through such a period while Vinnies were able to rely on the St Vincent de Paul Society. However, it cannot be assumed that non-government organisations will always be able to do this.

Finally, the retention of skilled and experienced staff by the Reconnect provider, and indeed by all agencies, clearly makes a difference to the development of relations between agencies. Continuity of funding is also important in this respect.

#### *Location and Geography*

In our view, the networks of all four providers were required to be stretched across areas that were too large and diverse to be well served. The resulting service systems require young people and families either to travel to areas outside their familiar social environment, and/or expect workers to maintain inter-agency relationships in areas beyond the natural reach of their work. In Deniliquin, the area is affected by the administrative boundaries of state government and the lack of services for some border towns.

As is clear from the discussion of Deniliquin-based Vinnies Reconnect, this is especially problematic for service in a rural or regional area. However, it was also evident, though to a lesser degree, in the area REFS covers to the east, where it extends into the mountains and countryside. Reconnect West which now stretches into the City of Hobson's Bay is expected to establish completely new areas of networks some distance away from the service itself. We found this to be a particular problem with schools in Hobson's Bay, which had minimal or no knowledge of the Reconnect program as yet.

Already existing services are expected to cross historical and natural boundaries while establishing networks in new areas. The networks providers are required to develop and maintain are to some extent artificial. The size of the Reconnect areas requires workers to spend a considerable amount of time travelling which they could otherwise be spending helping clients. REFS are attempting to cover unserved areas in a number of ways. There is a satellite office in Lilydale to reach East into the Yarra Ranges. However, such alternatives are expensive and other services may not be able to afford this.

It was suggested by a few that the distances involved in serving the rural network placed immense pressure on workers in these areas and had led to some staff turnover in the Reconnect service. In some areas, the new staff had not yet made contact with some of the other agencies in the area. The same observations can be made of other services in the rural areas, some of which also experience quite high staff turnover. This point was made in particular with reference to school counsellors.

It may not be appropriate to attempt to develop what is essentially an urban model of working in rural areas which are so spread out and diverse. The increasing cost of petrol was seen by many as affecting the rural communities immensely because of the driving involved in accessing services. The lack of public transport is a huge problem for the rural communities. It means that many young people and their families cannot access services without their own transport, which many cannot afford. Vinnies have used the Home and Community Care Program (HaCC) funded Community Transport to transport young people to appointments. However, this is dependent on there being space, and a service directed primarily to the elderly is not necessarily congenial for young people.

A number of respondents in the rural areas pointed to a difficulty in recruiting staff to services, which can create problems for the continuity of service to young people and their families and the development of networks in the area. In one example, a community health centre had lost their counsellor and although they had advertised the position, they did not have even one application. The post has been unfilled for a number of months and in the meantime, there is no permanent counselling service located in the area.

Workers don't want to come to the country and people in country areas have a hard time accessing services. Basically rural communities do it hard. (Community Health Worker)

In rural communities, the vast majority of services operate on a sole-worker model. Consequently, if the sole worker is not there, the area has no service. Also, many services are provided by outreach because of the distances, so that workers do not often have a local presence in the communities they cover. Importantly, outreach makes it difficult for workers to respond quickly as they are often some distance away from the young person or family in need of support.

### *The Variety of Services Available*

The strength of a network depends vitally on the nature and variety of services available within it. As Figure 2.1 above showed, there are gaps in the services available in some areas. The gaps in services in the rural area served by Vinnies Reconnect stand out clearly, as does the absence of School Focused Youth Services in the New South Wales education system.

### **3.6 Perceptions of the Reconnect Services**

Analysis of the network relations in the four areas shows that the Reconnect providers are generally perceived positively by the other support services in their areas. The introduction of a prevention and early intervention program was received positively by service providers in the four Reconnect areas. A considerable number of participants pointed out that the Reconnect services are the only services of their kind in the areas and are considered invaluable in the network of services for young people and families. As discussed above, the research found some tensions in certain networks which are primarily related to competing services and a lack of information. At the time of the research, there were some differences between the established services and the new service which are largely explained by the newness of the developing service. Reconnect West are aware of the need to develop stronger links with some of the other agencies and first-to-know services in the area and are currently working to build links.

On the whole, the Reconnect services' role in early intervention is well understood, particularly among the key first-to-know agencies in the networks. Schools in the Reconnect networks are especially aware of the role of Reconnect, although the services have generally had problems integrating some local schools into the network. As the discussion above points out, the state welfare agencies and income support providers are key agencies in the four Reconnect networks both as sources and receivers of referrals. The research found some tension between the Reconnect services and the state welfare agencies which regard to expectations of the Reconnect providers. Section 4 analyses these issues in more detail.

The research showed that good practices could make effective contributions to network functioning. Such practices included:

- meetings among members of the local network, held regularly and at convenient times, particularly for members from schools;
- information exchanges within and between agencies;
- regular updates and reminders;
- realistic expectations; and
- appropriate referrals.

## **4. Issues in Prevention and Early Intervention**

Sections 2 and 3 have described the network of services that are available in the four areas covered by this study. These networks of services play an important role in the provision of support and assistance to young people at risk and specifically, those at risk of early home leaving or homelessness. In Section 4 we discuss some of the issues which have arisen from the fieldwork with regard to the provision of prevention and early intervention services for youth homelessness. Section 4.1 looks at how each of the four Reconnect services are placed on a continuum of prevention and early intervention services for this group of young people. Section 4.2 discusses in more detail the issues these services and networks face in providing a prevention and early intervention approach to young people and their families in the area.

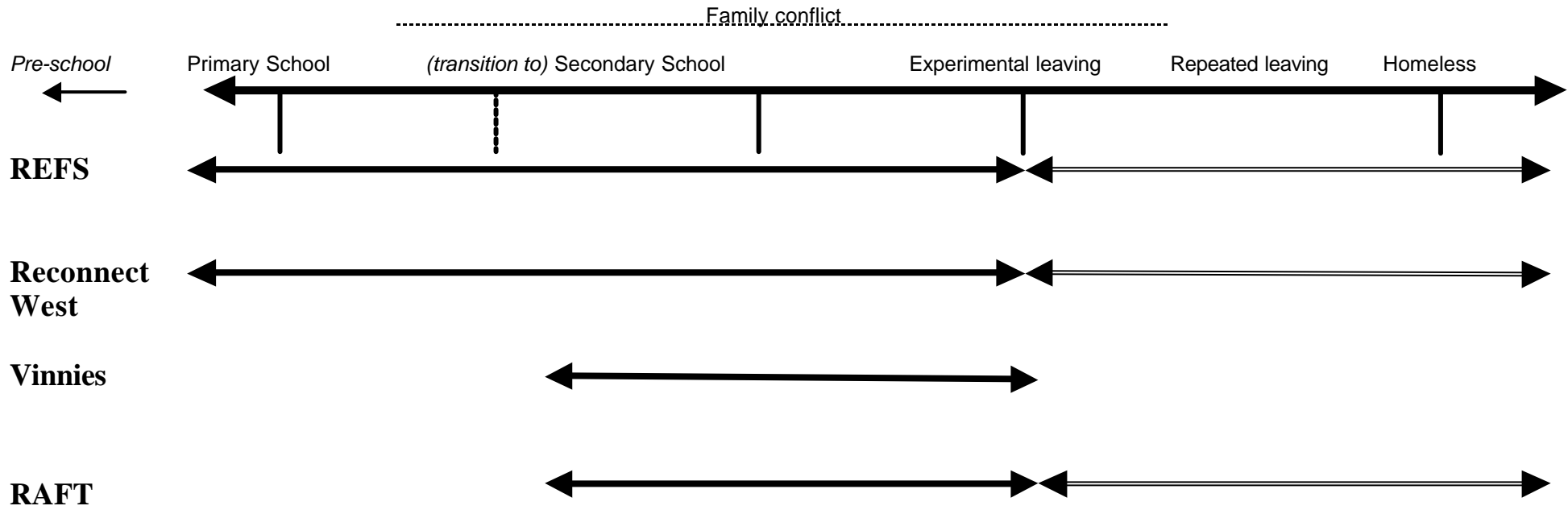
The issues raised in this research complement and extend many of the findings from the evaluations of the YHPP, particularly in regard to schools, income support services and the police (Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce, 1998). In Section 4.3 we look at issues regarding the concept of community capacity and how it is being perceived and put into practice in the four Reconnect networks.

### **4.1 Continuum of Prevention and Early Intervention Services**

It is possible to place the Reconnect service and its network upon a continuum of services for youth homelessness. Figure 4.1 illustrates where each of the four Reconnect services currently fits on such a continuum of prevention and early intervention services. Their location on the continuum is determined by the services they offer through the Reconnect program and as part of their organisation's wider work with young people and their families.

The Reconnect program is funded for 12-18 year olds and their families. However, some of the services also work with primary schools. In Figure 4.1 it is shown that through their work in primary schools REFS and Reconnect West cover the widest span on the continuum. The ability of REFS and Reconnect West to offer accommodation through the wider organisation (in REFS case) and the consortium partners (in Reconnect West's case) is illustrated by the hollow line. Vinnies occupy a smaller position on the continuum of services; Vinnies work in secondary schools, counselling and support, but there is no provision of accommodation for young people in their area. Like REFS and Reconnect West, RAFT offer a broad continuum of support for young people and their families in the Wollongong area from work in secondary schools to accommodation for the homelessness provided by the broader Association, hence the hollow line. However, RAFT does not operate in primary schools in the area and so starts its prevention and early intervention work slightly later than REFS and Reconnect West.

**Figure 4.1 A Continuum of Prevention and Early Intervention Services for Youth Homelessness**



As already noted, many respondents thought that the stage for prevention and early intervention could be earlier than the current Reconnect remit of 12-18 years old. In terms of factors such as mental health, behavioural problems and criminal activity, workers in these areas thought the services should also be working with young people below 12 who may show signs of problems which can lead to family conflict and possible home-leaving and homelessness<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the continuum shows how services can develop prevention and early intervention work at primary school and even earlier, moving through secondary school and family conflict into different stages of homelessness.

#### **4.2 Problems and Barriers for Prevention and Early Intervention**

The section below outlines some of the problems identified in the research for the development of prevention and early intervention services.

Major problems for a prevention and early intervention approach are caused by a lack of resources available in other services and agencies in the network. One example is in regard to mental health services. Workers in all four areas have problems accessing mental health services. However, many identify mental health problems as one of the causes of family conflict and possible breakdown. The early identification of mental health problems is crucial to avoid a young person leaving home or being thrown out of home. However, early identification and diagnosis is affected by the paucity of mental health services and specifically, services for adolescents in the Reconnect areas. The biggest problem is waiting times, the very nature of which are antithetical to a prevention and early intervention approach. As discussed above, some of the Reconnect services use inventive ways to by-pass some of these waiting times, by negotiating secondary consultations with mental health experts in their areas. Such arrangements are viewed positively by both sides. However, if a mental illness is diagnosed, treatment can still be slow to become available, and in the process family relations can worsen. For the rural areas in NSW, Sydney is the nearest hospital for a psychiatric assessment and although tele-conferencing assessments have been carried out, a number of respondents questioned the appropriateness of such a technique for children and young people. The issues with regard to mental health problems are replicated in situations where either the young person or another family member has a drug and/or alcohol problem.

##### *Education and Schools*

Schools are a critical element in any prevention and early intervention approach for children and young people. Schools are one of the key first-to-know agencies in any network of services to young people and as such, have an integral role to play strategies for early identification and response.

Schools have long varied in their approach to welfare issues of its students. Some schools place significant emphasis on their role in the health and welfare of their students. The same schools tend to be more community minded and to seek integration with the community as a whole. Other schools concentrate on more academic aspects of their work, and give less attention to welfare issues. The position of schools with regard to welfare issues can be an indicator of how they work with other agencies and the extent to which they fit into a network which promotes prevention of risk and early intervention into

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<sup>1</sup> Families First in New South Wales and Strengthening Families in Victoria are prevention and early intervention programs which target children at antenatal stages and families with young children. These are current examples of how 'early' early intervention programs can begin to minimize risk factors and build resilience.

emerging issues for young people. Integration of schools, as key first-to-know services in the early intervention network is considered vital in the development and operation of the Reconnect program. As discussed in section 2, the Reconnect services are working hard in a number of schools to develop relations and include schools in the networks.

In the study, the position of schools on what could be called the academic-welfare continuum was varied. The method of sampling schools from lists provided by the Reconnect services imposed certain biases towards those schools which were, to differing degrees, working with the Reconnect services. It is likely, therefore, that more welfare oriented schools are disproportionately represented in our data. Even so, there were notable variations among the schools which participated in the study.

Different state education policies in New South Wales and Victoria can explain one of the major differences between the four Reconnect areas with regard to the schools. These differences were evident in a number of ways, the most important of which was the position of a school welfare counsellor (SWC) in schools<sup>2</sup> As key first-to-know people, SWCs are in the position to identify students at risk and in need earlier than most others. The same was said of school nurses in a number of cases. There was a marked difference between the amount of time SWCs had allocated to them, with SWCs having a larger and increasing role in Victoria than their counterparts in New South Wales. Many of them also had teaching responsibilities, though these had generally decreased as their counselling role had increased. Teaching responsibilities were seen as good because they meant SWCs stayed in touch with students in a 'non-welfare' capacity while also 'keeping a hand in' with teaching.

In New South Wales, except in secondary schools where there are more than 500 girls, the schools use what is called an itinerant system where counsellors are responsible for a number of schools in an area. The itinerant system means that counsellors divide their time between at least two and often more schools, and these schools are generally a mix of primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools with more than 500 girls also have a Head Teacher of Student Welfare who is at the school full-time and a member of the senior management team.

A number of problems were raised with the itinerant system. Trust is an important element of working with young people, and often trust comes from familiarity. Students have to feel comfortable to approach people for support and they are more likely to do this with people they already know. The itinerant system often means that counselors spend as little as one day per week in each school and so take longer to become known and familiar to the students.

Schools in New South Wales were more variable with regard to their position on the academic-welfare continuum. Most of the schools which participated in the study have a strong welfare component to their work, while a few others are less welfare oriented. It was the impression of some Reconnect workers that certain schools in their areas are not open to the prevention and early intervention of problems and question the role of schools in a Reconnect network. The differences in schools may depend on the outlook of key individuals; in particular, if the Principal is not welfare or community minded then this strongly influences the overall nature of the school. Clearly resources are an issue, and teachers were quick to point out that any extra responsibilities they are expected to acquire must not be simply added to their existing responsibilities.

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<sup>2</sup> In Victoria there are Student Welfare Coordinators (SWCs) and in New South Wales, school counselors. For ease, we will use SWC to discuss these positions in both states.

The position of Catholic schools on the academic-welfare continuum is of note. The Catholic school system is quite large, particularly in Victoria. The study involved the participation of one Catholic School the details of which were not provided on the original list from the Reconnect service but contacted during the course of the field work. Although only one school, it is interesting to note developments in that school with regard to welfare issues. As with the Victorian schools in the study more generally, the Catholic school was committing notable resources to the welfare positions and a number of staff were enrolled on a diploma in counselling. The Catholic School system has its' own network of services to refer young people and their families to for support such as counselling and mediation. Consequently, the Catholic school which participated in the research was not part of the Reconnect network.

Another distinction between the services in the two states is the existence of the school focused youth services in Victoria. In the established network of REFS the SFYS play a crucial role in linking schools with agencies in the local communities. Brokerage funds are used to develop programs and address unmet needs in schools.

### *Income Support Services*

Income support services as represented by Centrelink, are potential first-to-know agencies in any network of youth service providers. As the key provider of income for young people who cannot live at home or have left home, in the assessment and payment of the Unreasonable to Live at Home (UTLH) rate of youth allowance, Centrelink social workers come into regular contact with young people in their area.

The role of Centrelink in prevention or early intervention approaches to youth homelessness was viewed with varying degrees of support within the various offices which participated in the study. A number of Centrelink social workers maintained that by the time a young person comes to Centrelink for support, they have often already left home and were not potential clients for Reconnect services. In these situations, social workers did not consider themselves to be well positioned for a preventative or early intervention role. However, the same social workers stated they would refer to a service like Reconnect if they considered a family relations approach was appropriate and reconciliation was possible. There is no doubt that Centrelink social workers were positive about the Reconnect program and welcomed a prevention and early intervention service in the area.

Centrelink offices were invariably part of the Reconnect network, although there were variations between and within the four areas. In each of the Victorian areas studied, there was one Centrelink office which was not integrated into the Reconnect network.

In one case, this reflected geography and the distance of the office from the Reconnect service; in the other, it was a result of the misdirection of information and communication from Reconnect. These gaps were being addressed during the time of the study. There were problems in one of the New South Wales areas due to the dual factors of staff turnover in the Centrelink office and socio-economic characteristics of the area which meant very few referrals were coming from that area as a whole.

In all four of the areas studied, Centrelink social workers made referrals to their local Reconnect service on a fairly regular basis. In some cases social workers referred young people and their families to Reconnect for support such as mediation or counselling when they thought the family would benefit from such an approach. Referrals from Centrelink to Reconnect were also used to acquire third-party verification of the young person's home situation. SWCs are regular sources of third party information as they are often aware of

the problems the young people are facing. If the Reconnect service is already working with the young person and the family, the young person might indicate that the Reconnect workers could provide information for the assessment. In situations where there are no other sources for third party verification, Centrelink social workers may refer the young person to the Reconnect service for a report on the family situation. Centrelink staff generally thought well of the information provided by Reconnect workers on a young person's home situation. Although one social worker would have preferred Reconnect to be clear and make a decision as to whether it was unreasonable for a young person to stay at home, others believed the information provided was adequate for them to make their own assessment. During the study we were told that some social workers were making the assessment of the allowance dependent on a young person's participation in the Reconnect program. The Reconnect services were concerned that some agencies were forcing young people to attend what is fundamentally a voluntary service<sup>3</sup>. Such compulsion may potentially negate the value of any help the service may offer the young person and divert resources from other cases.

In most cases, social workers were positive about the work Reconnect did with the families they had referred for support. There was one exception where a social worker was disappointed with the Reconnect service's involvement in the case. In the social worker's opinion the Reconnect worker appeared relatively inexperienced and unable to handle the family situation. The family were very disappointed with the service and frustrated with the social worker for referring them to it.

Reconnect staff expressed no major concerns about their involvement in the assessment process although in certain cases it caused problems for them. The time spent on preparing the assessment reports can be quite consuming. There are issues of confidentiality, and the workers generally ensure they discuss their report with the family before sending it to Centrelink. Reconnect workers found there was still a certain degree of suspicion among some parents who thought services such as Centrelink and Reconnect encouraged young people to leave home. Reconnect are very clear in this respect and provide a factual report of relations in the family and the home situation. It was considered important that Reconnect tell the family what they put in their report to Centrelink to 'set their fears at ease'. There were cases where a young person has been supported by Reconnect through the assessment process and have received the allowance.

Within a few months, with Reconnect's support, the young person returned home and came off the allowance after having had some time out and worked on reconciling with the family.

Reconnect workers are in a key position to help young people and their families through the income support assessment process. In a number of cases, Reconnect staff acted as advocates for young people in their dealings with Centrelink regarding the UTLH allowance. This often involved explaining the process to young people, giving them information, helping them complete the application and accompanying the young person to their appointment at the Centrelink office. We also found a number of others in the network, particularly SWCs and SAAP youth workers, who advocated with Centrelink on behalf young people.

An issue raised by a number of people was the slowness of the assessment process, which adversely affects work aimed at prevention and early intervention. Workers assisting

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<sup>3</sup> The issue of compulsion was also a problem for one of the Reconnect services with regard to a local magistrate's court that was making involvement with the Reconnect service a requirement of the court.

young people through the income support process were concerned that if the process is too slow, the young person may leave home, leave school, possibly leave the area and become homeless. In such cases, Reconnect cannot work with the family to reconcile relations. These workers argued that if income support is provided quickly, the young person can move out while various people such as Reconnect family workers and SWCs are actively involved with them, and hence may be able to facilitate an early return home. Some SWCs suggested that Centrelink could have an emergency fund which they could use in certain situations. The fund would provide young people with an income to enable them to maintain connections with family, school and community while the case is assessed.

It is not clear from the study what role Centrelink counter staff have in a prevention and early intervention approach. Counter staff are in a potential first-to-know position when young people enter Centrelink offices and ask for advice regarding youth allowance. Field evidence from the study suggested they were not fully integrated in the system of referrals to Centrelink social workers and other services in the locality. It was clear that a young person presenting to them with the claim that they are unable to live at home and need youth allowance should be referred to the Centrelink social work team and that this is the established procedure. After fieldwork was concluded new guidelines have been issued enabling staff to also make other referrals.

The issues regarding accessing income support services in rural areas were slightly different. For people living in rural areas, distances and transport are a problem when accessing all services, and Centrelink is no exception. The added problem for people in Deniliquin and the surrounding area is that there are no social workers at the Deniliquin Centrelink office. All decisions for UTLH allowance are made in the Albury office with applications being made via telephone and/or fax.

### *State Welfare Departments*

As with schools and income support services, state welfare departments are well positioned as one of the first-to-know that a child or young person is at risk. The two state systems are very similar in their approaches to welfare with both receiving notifications of risk and abuse of children and young people.

DHS in Victoria and DoCS in New South Wales are a regular source of referrals to all four of the Reconnect services. If a notification of abuse has been made by another individual or agency in the community, state welfare departments can contact the Reconnect services for information about the case if the Reconnect workers are involved with the family. Although the Reconnect services are legally bound to disclose information, this is problematic for them as they assure confidentiality to clients when they work with them. In such situations Reconnect workers cannot get client permission from the young person as this may affect the investigation. DoCS and DHS can also ask Reconnect to keep them informed of the family situation.

In other cases, state welfare departments can directly refer the case to the Reconnect service for family relations work as part of their investigation. Participants from state welfare departments welcomed the presence of an early intervention service for young people in their area and were very positive about the work their local Reconnect services had done with families. However, the three established Reconnect services expressed concerns about some of the referrals coming from state welfare departments. There was a perception, particularly with the DoCS referrals, that the Reconnect service was being used inappropriately, being called on in cases where prevention and early intervention family relations approaches were not necessarily suitable. In such cases, reconciliation within the

family is not viable and ensuring the young person remains at home is not the safest option for them. Reconnect staff thought that a lack of resources within the state welfare departments is forcing them to refer cases to other agencies in the network such as Reconnect. Some Reconnect workers felt that they were being expected to do the state welfare department's jobs for it. There may be a need for clearer guidelines as to what the Reconnect services are funded to provide in the area.

At the time of the study, Reconnect services were not mandatory notifiers under legislation in either of the two states. However, if workers consider a young person is at risk, they will notify the state welfare department. Workers from agencies within the four areas expressed problems with making referrals and notifications to DoCS and DHS. There were two main issues raised. The first was that it is proving incredibly difficult to actually make notifications to the welfare department as the intake system is constantly busy. This was particularly the case in the Wollongong area. In addition, the experience of a large number of people working with young people in the four areas was that DoCS and DHS are unlikely to respond to notifications involving a young person over the age of 14. This situation proves frustrating for the services working in the area who are expected to respond to DHS' and DoCS' requests for information and support but are not able to receive the same response back. DoCS officers were aware of this situation and argued that with their limited resources, they had to make decisions which inevitably prioritise children over young people. The lack of response by state welfare departments can, in some cases, jeopardise a prevention or early intervention approach.

A number of participants in New South Wales, particularly those from DoCS offices, discussed the impact new legislation being implemented then would have upon services in the area. *The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* has a separate section on youth homelessness. From December 2000, any service working with children and young people, including Reconnect services, have become mandatory reporters in NSW under the new legislation. One of the other major impacts of the new legislation in New South Wales will be an increasing role for services offering mediation and dispute resolution, such as Reconnect.

The commonwealth and state/territories Youth Protocols for the Case Management of Unsupported Young People 1994 confirms state and territory governments' statutory responsibility for meeting the needs of:

- Young people up to the age of 17 years (8 in some states) who are at risk of significant harm through abuse or neglect; and
- Young people under 15 years of age who are homeless or unsupported

The subject of the youth protocols did not arise very often during the fieldwork and when they did, views of them were varied. Income support and state welfare staff were generally supportive of the protocols and found them useful in ensuring workers in the 'opposite' agencies are aware of their responsibilities. However, there were issues regarding some workers' understanding of the protocols which made some cases unclear. We were told of one case where a DoCS worker had to write a letter to the income support agency on behalf of the young person outlining Centrelink's responsibilities under the protocol. Conversely, we were also told about cases where DoCS workers withdrew financial support to a young person and required Centrelink to provide the support. Workers in other agencies had varying levels of knowledge of the protocols, ranging from no awareness of them to a good understanding of the requirements. Some of the Reconnect workers have noticed a change due to the protocols, in that whereas a few years ago welfare agencies

would not have financially supported a 14 year old, under the protocols they now must do so. Reconnect staff in one of the areas find the protocols useful in some cases for ensuring that the income support and welfare agencies involved met their responsibilities.

### *Accommodation and SAAP*

SAAP placements are an integral part of any network of services for young people in a community. The program offers various forms of accommodation from refuge and crisis to long-term placements. SAAP funding is also available to provide other forms of assistance to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. As mentioned in section 2, REFS receive SAAP funding for family reconciliation. SAAP-funded accommodation was evident to varying degrees in each of the four Reconnect areas although their integration into the Reconnect network was varied. As an early intervention and prevention service, Reconnect would ideally not have need for SAAP provision since this would indicate that the young person had left home. However, in reality, Reconnect services work with SAAP services for a number of reasons. In some cases, it is not always appropriate for the young person to stay at home or return home. In such cases Reconnect workers attempt to find suitable alternative accommodation for the young person. In other cases respite accommodation may be sought to give the family to have some time out from each other.

SAAP providers were a source of referrals to the Reconnect service as well as to other agencies in the area such as mental health, drug and alcohol and income support. There were questions as to how appropriate the Reconnect program is for some SAAP clients. One SAAP provider found it difficult to refer cases to their local Reconnect service as most SAAP clients have multiple problems and have been out of home too long for an early intervention approach to be appropriate<sup>4</sup>.

The major problem for all services with regard to SAAP provision was the lack of youth specific accommodation. The problems posed for Reconnect were two-fold; there was a lack of suitable short-term accommodation and a paucity of more medium to long term accommodation where required. The key requirement of any youth accommodation service in a prevention and early intervention model is access to accommodation that is suitable and appropriate. It has to be safe for young people and not expose them to any extra risks, and must ensure that young people are able to maintain contact with family and/or school, friends and community. Workers in all four areas highlighted the lack of such accommodation as a major problem in working with young people in a preventative or early intervention way. One SAAP worker told us that there is a need for safe and suitable accommodation for some young people available that is not part of the crisis accommodation system. In crisis centres, they will come into contact with older homeless people with potentially more serious concerns such as drug and alcohol use and mental health problems. In such an environment, young people who are initially 'green' may be attracted by this alternative life-style. When this happens, chances of reconciliation with the family are slight and they may enter the world of chronic homelessness.

The REFS supported accommodation program for students was held in high esteem and considered a useful model for the Reconnect program. The service is invaluable as it enables young people to stay in contact with their families, school and local communities. However, there are a limited number of places.

The lack of community placements for young people was also raised as an issue in all four Reconnect areas. The impression was that although people in the community are prepared

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<sup>4</sup> The explicit move to prevention and early intervention of homelessness in the new SAAP IV agreements may increase the amount of contact between Reconnect services and SAAP providers. See Crane, P (2000)

to provide placement for children, very few offer placements for teenagers and adolescents and the situation is worsening. This situation poses a major problem for services trying to find accommodation for young people in the local community, for crisis through to long term. Services informed us that not all young people, especially those 14 and above, want to reside in another family home, although in some cases this may be their only alternative to becoming homeless.

The situation is exacerbated in Deniliquin and its surrounds as there is no youth specific accommodation available for under 16 year olds and limited options for the over 16s. In Deniliquin there is emergency accommodation for domestic violence cases and a house for homeless older men, but there is nothing in other towns such as Hay and Finley. This makes it difficult for young people to maintain links with family, school, and community if they leave home. In rural areas young people who leave home tend to stay with friends and relatives. This is not considered ideal, but it does mean they can remain in the local area.

Bridges, the adolescent community placement program in Werribee, is able to offer a limited number of placements for young people. WSHG and Anglicare can provide some accommodation in the Wyndham area. There are few accommodation options for Reconnect West to consider in Hobson's Bay, and young people needing a place to stay have to go outside the area to Footscray and beyond. This not only works against the Reconnect program but is a daunting thought for young people living in the area.

Of the four Reconnect areas, RAFT has the most opportunities for providing accommodation to young people. RAFT has direct access to a wide range of accommodation options provided by the SYFS Association, including a crisis refuge, medium-term and long-term accommodation. There were some, as yet unanswered, questions from workers assisting young people outside Wollongong city as to whether young people from outside central Wollongong would use refuges in Wollongong.

### *Youth Services*

Youth services such as youth centres and youth community services have a potentially crucial position in any prevention and early intervention approach. Workers involved in youth centres are potentially first to know that a young person is experiencing problems and may be at risk. However, youth services such as local youth centres have proved to be variable as sources of referrals to Reconnect services.

For a time, RAFT had a worker co-located in one of the local youth centres but young people did not approach the worker and so RAFT terminated the arrangement. It was suggested that such a setting was not congenial to young people as it lacked confidentiality. Community centres came up as alternative sources of support for young people in the Wollongong area, but they were not part of the Reconnect referral network.

Wyndham and Hobson's Bay City Councils both have Youth Services departments which are active in the area providing a range of services to young people covering many facets of support from counselling to leisure and social activities. Hobson's Bay Youth Service has close links with BayWest Youth Housing, who provide information and support to young people in the area. There is potential for the better integration of youth service within the Reconnect West area, and it would appear services are moving in this direction. As discussed above, the SFYS covers both municipalities and is working at increasing the linkages between schools and agencies across the area. At the same time, there was concern that the Reconnect programs not duplicate the work of the SFYS.

There are not many options with regard to young services in Vinnies area, although there have been some improvements recently with the establishment of a youth action group. Some funding from the local council has meant the group have organised and/or funded activities for young people in the area such as a skate ramp, a music festival and an art project. This funding contributed to the TAPE's alternative to Year 10 course mentioned in section 2. However, the lack of many youth based activities in the area was identified as a problem for the local community. As well as being a potential source of referrals to the Reconnect program, youth work in small rural communities such as Deniliquin gives an outlet for young people which may avoid problems arising in their relations with others either at home, school or in the wider community.

REFS covers a number of different local government areas, all of which have youth services departments. The main form of contact between these has focused on the SFYS program. REFS have recently assumed responsibility for the Youth Adult Bureau (YAB) in Nunawading to their west. YAB is a resource centre providing youths in the area with a range of supports from basic facilities for the homeless to recreation and leisure activities.

### *Police and Juvenile Justice*

Potentially, the police are in a position to be important first-to-know agencies. In all communities, and particularly in smaller, rural ones, the police are often one of the first to know that a young person is having problems that are being played out in risk-taking and/or criminal behaviour. Community policing squads were mentioned by all four of the Reconnect services. However, contact with the police has been variable. The normal pattern of contact was either that the Reconnect services were working with a young person who was also in trouble with the police or that the police were in the network of services. For example, a Deniliquin police officer was on the same local domestic violence committee as a member of the Reconnect staff. WSHG describe themselves as having a good referral relationship with the police in Wyndham and work closely on a number of community agency projects. Reconnect West is currently developing referral protocols for Reconnect clients with the police services in the two municipalities.

The police are not a common source of referrals to the Reconnect services at the moment. More work is needed to bring the police into the Reconnect networks and develop a strong referral relationship. As mentioned, Reconnect West are addressing such issues at the moment. One police officer suggested that Reconnect could attend police training days organised by Education Development officers and held every few months. At these training days, the Reconnect services could to explain their services to police officers and discuss issues such as appropriate referrals. We were told that the police training program now includes community placements and RAFT regularly take police students from the local academy; this development is helping build understanding and awareness from all sides.

The juvenile justice department is funding programs for young offenders in all of the four Reconnect areas we studied. These programs work to prevent young people offending again and re-entering the juvenile justice system. Of the four Reconnect services, RAFT seem to be doing most work with juvenile justice cases, providing a family relations based approach to try and maintain the young person's links with their family.

In one of the areas, there was a question over whether magistrates courts were using the Reconnect service appropriately in making its use a compulsory requirement of a young person's conditions of court.

## *Indigenous Communities*

The final discussion in this section concerns the involvement of Indigenous communities in the Reconnect program. As noted above, Vinnies Reconnect area includes a number of Aboriginal communities. In addition, there are Indigenous communities in and around Wollongong and particularly in the Shoalhaven area where RAFT have begun working this year.

It is too early to report on the involvement of Indigenous communities in the Shoalhaven area, although the worker responsible is gradually building up links with the various communities in the area. Over ten per cent of RAFT's referrals are from Aboriginal communities in the Illawara area. RAFT are able to tap into the Aboriginal community through the Association's attendance at the Aboriginal inter-agency network. Identified Aboriginal services such as Aboriginal Health do not refer young people and families to RAFT in large numbers.

The fieldwork in Deniliquin and the surrounding area raised a number of issues for any Reconnect scheme regarding the provision of services to Indigenous communities. Workers in Aboriginal communities found there were quite high levels of suspicion of mainly Anglo services among Indigenous communities, making it difficult for them to provide support to the local communities. Respondents considered entry into Aboriginal communities took time for trust and confidence to develop. This process is hampered by staff changes in a service, which make it necessary for new relations to be developed all over again.

It was suggested that the employment of Aboriginal workers would enable a service to be more successful<sup>5</sup>. Vinnies consider that their growing acceptance in one of the local Aboriginal communities is connected to the employment of an Aboriginal worker. However, there were concerns that inter-community conflict may make this difficult. It may be that employing staff from a different Aboriginal community than the one they will be working is more problematic than having non-Indigenous workers. The lack of suitably qualified Aboriginal workers is a further problem. A number of interviewees questioned the appropriateness of a service for homeless youth in Indigenous communities who do not use such a concept. It was argued that in situations where young people leave home early they stay with friends or family and are not considered homeless. At the same time, it was suggested that if workers demonstrate respect for Indigenous communities and share cultural differences, good relationships can develop between Reconnect services and Aboriginal communities in time.

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<sup>5</sup> In is our understanding that a number of the Reconnect projects funded in Round 3 plan to employ Aboriginal workers.

### 4.3 Community Capacity

In the interviews, participants were asked about the development of community capacity to respond to youth homelessness in the area. The issue of community capacity raised as many questions as it brought answers. Most saw community capacity as a form of community development and the building up of links with other individuals, agencies, and organisations in the area. Some were not sure what was meant by community: the local community of people, a community of service providers, the business community? There was some discussion of the Communities That Care model in a small number of the interviews (though not with Reconnect staff). The Communities That Care model arose in the United States in the 1980s as a response to alcohol and drug abuse among young people. It is a prevention model that uses the concepts of risk and protective factors to enable communities to develop programs to prevent drug and alcohol problems in young people<sup>6</sup>. The ideas are similar to those developed and extended in the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (Mitchell, 2000).

For the Reconnect services, the idea of community capacity mainly involved the development of networks which assist and complement the work of Reconnect in prevention and early intervention. Reconnect staff pointed to the development of positive relationships with key agencies in communities such as schools, welfare services and income support providers. It is also clear that through the development of such networks, Reconnect programs are not only providing a service to young people and families, but also developing the ability of a community to address themselves some of the issues which can cause family conflict and early home leaving. For example, through its programs in schools, REFS work to develop the community's capacity for dealing with issues of family conflict and youth homelessness. This happens by developing the skills amongst students, parents and staff to enable them to address problems and issues which may lead to early home leaving.

Their work supports the development of resilience and protective factors among communities. The focus on schools is complemented by other programs like Parenting Support, which aims to give directly to parents the skills to manage problems they may have with their children and adolescents. Vinnies consider their approach is based on utilising the resources individuals, families and communities have themselves. Vinnies are also currently developing ways of involving local clubs and businesses in youth issues in the area and hoping to develop a scholarship program for young people to access alternative education opportunities. Reconnect West are planning to use the Critical Linkages worker to assess the services' community capacity development. What was clear in the field evidence was that the development of community capacity will not replace the position of professional workers in providing support and assistance to young people and their families.

Any discussion of community capacity must take into account the delicate balance many community based organisations have between providing a service and going further and developing some kind of structural change in the local community. The Reconnect services, through their developments of networks, is playing a crucial part in increasing awareness of prevention and early intervention approaches among providers. How much Reconnect can influence awareness in a wider sense outside the provider and stakeholder network is unclear. At the end of the day, all services have limited resources and the provision of service is after all, a crucial aspect of their role.

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<sup>6</sup> For further information see the discussion in the literature review in Appendix 2

Reconnect workers in the three established services raised the issue of action research during the discussions on community capacity. Opinions towards action research were very positive and the staff considered it an invaluable aspect of their work for young people and families in the area. They clearly saw a link between the on-going process of action research and developing the communities' capacity for addressing issues for youth at risk. Further work with regard to community capacity is necessary as lack of time in the interviews meant these issues were not fully addressed in the research.

## **5. Summary and Conclusion**

The research has been centrally concerned with the early development of Reconnect services oriented to early intervention in the context of their local areas and area needs. It has had particular focus on the approaches taken by the Reconnect services included in the study, their place in a larger local network of services and support arrangements for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, and some of the factors that bear on the development of effective and well integrated support at the local level. The research has also sought to examine the roles of Reconnect services in building the capacity of these supports to understand and respond to opportunities for early intervention in the needs and circumstances of young people and their families before homelessness has become an established problem. The findings of the research and the issues arising from them can usefully be addressed under these themes.

The basis of these findings is a set of case studies of Reconnect services and the networks of relationships linking them with other sources of support and assistance to young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and their families in the area served by Reconnect. Four Reconnect services were included in the research: Regional Extended Family Services, Inc. (REFS), based in Ringwood, Victoria; Reconnect West, in Werribee, Victoria; Vinnies Reconnect, in Deniliquin, New South Wales; and Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (RAFT), in Wollongong, New South Wales. Taken together, these comprised two Reconnect services operating in outer metropolitan areas and one each working in regional and rural settings; two services in each of Victoria and New South Wales; and three well established and one newly developed service. These contrasts allow some conclusions to be drawn about the development of early intervention services and their networks in different social and geographical settings.

The case studies found wide support for the Reconnect programs in each of the four areas. The clear consensus was that without the Reconnect services, there would be nothing else like it for young people and their families in the community. This was particularly apparent in the rural area. Section 2 of the report outlines the range of provision which is available in each of the four areas in prevention and early intervention approaches to youth homelessness. It is clear from the fieldwork that the three established Reconnect services are working well at providing a family relations approach for young people at risk of early home leaving. The newly introduced project Reconnect West in Wyndham and Hobson's Bay is beginning to develop the prevention and early intervention work building on their existing profiles in the area.

### **5.1 Reconnect Services and Approaches to Early Intervention**

The overarching question informing this study has been, how does Reconnect assist in developing early intervention capacity within a community? The research addressed this question in terms of both the nature of the work that the four Reconnect services do, and of how Reconnect and its work are understood by other individuals and organisations in the area who are also concerned with young people at risk of homelessness and their families.

- How do Reconnect services perform their roles as service providers and builders of community capacity?

The approaches to early intervention covered in the study are largely a consequence of the selection of particular Reconnect services for inclusion. Of these, two provide early intervention services mainly in the form of family mediation, including peer and co-mediation. Two others rely more centrally on individual and family counselling. In both cases, the services deal with young people who are either still at home, or have left home only recently, and with the parents of young people in these circumstances.

All services stressed the need for immediate and flexible response to the needs of young people and families with relationship problems, and the various Reconnect services have developed a variety of strategies to achieve this. REFS has a full-time intake worker; both Vinnies and RAFT make their services accessible out of business hours and in the places where their clients are comfortable. Reconnect West is only beginning its work as a Reconnect provider, and has not yet addressed this issue. Its plans for a Critical Linkages element focus on the need to monitor and review need and service performance.

Discussions of prevention and early intervention during the interviews led a number of participants to argue that programs using such an approach could start earlier than the current remit of Reconnect. Some of the Reconnect services studied in the research are working in primary schools and/or during the transition to secondary school, although the Reconnect funding is for the 12-18 years old group. However, this was not consistent and it may mean that extra support is needed for Reconnect programs to widen their target group.

- How do Reconnect providers present themselves to the other support services in the area?

All of the Reconnect services covered in the research also undertake significant outreach activities. All four Reconnect services have given particular attention to their relationships with schools; REFS and RAFT, with continuity from the Youth Homeless Pilot Program, have achieved significant depth in these connections. REFS provides training to school personnel and young people, while RAFT are developing outreach clinics responding to the needs of students and their families. Reconnect West is also providing mediation training in schools. Although the remit of Reconnect services does not extend to children of primary school age, some of the services are also running programs in primary schools. REFS is a leader in this respect. Distance and the lack of resources in rural areas have hampered the ability of Vinnies to work with schools to significant degree.

Three of the four services have run support groups for parents, REFS and RAFT with the parents of adolescents and Reconnect West with adolescent parents. REFS and especially RAFT also maintain close links with mental health services in their areas. Relations with other services are discussed in section 5.2 below.

- What role do Reconnect services play in assisting young people and parents through the income support assessment process?

Reconnect staff are called upon to participate in the income support assessment process both immediately, in support of young people and parents whom they refer to Centrelink, and secondarily when Centrelink ask them to assist with the verification of information.

In a number of cases, Reconnect staff act as advocates for young people in their dealings with Centrelink regarding the UTLH allowance. This often involves explaining the process to young people, giving them information, helping them complete the application, and accompanying the young person to their appointment at Centrelink. In the rural area served

by Vinnies Reconnect staff face particular difficulties associated with the lack of social work staff in the Deniliquin office of Centrelink. Decisions for UTLH allowance are made in the Albury office, and contact and advocacy must be conducted by telephone or fax.

Centrelink social workers in all four areas make referrals to Reconnect services on a fairly regular basis. Some of these referrals are made to gain third-party verification of the young person's home situation, most commonly in circumstances where Reconnect has already been working with the young person. In situations where there are no other sources for third-party verification, Centrelink social workers may refer the young person to the Reconnect service for a report on the family situation. Although this is voluntary, it is necessary for the assessment process and hence difficult for the young person to refuse. During the study we were told that some social workers were making the assessment of the allowance dependent on a young person's participation in the Reconnect program. The Reconnect services were concerned that this contradicts the voluntary basis of participation necessary for successful early intervention work. In some cases social workers refer young people and their families for support such as mediation or counselling, although in other cases Centrelink social workers regard a young person's claim for UTLH as evidence that it is already too late for reconciliation strategies to be pursued.

Reconnect staff expressed no major concerns about their involvement in the assessment process, although in certain cases it caused problems for them. The time spent on preparing the assessment reports can be quite time consuming. Confidentiality is an important issue, and the workers ensure they discuss their report with the family before sending it to Centrelink. Reconnect workers have found there is still suspicion among some parents that the support to young people encouraged them to leave home. Reconnect staff are very clear in this respect and provide a factual report of relations in the family and the home situation. They consider it important to tell the family what they have put in their report. Centrelink staff appeared to think well of the information provided by Reconnect staff.

Some of the field evidence suggests the need for improvement in the awareness of Centrelink staff of their role in a prevention and early intervention approach. There is a particular need for greater clarity of understanding of whether and when it is appropriate to refer a young person or family member to mediation services once a young person has left home. The research also suggested a lack of clarity about whether counter staff have a role as possibly first to know of the prospect of homelessness. We understand that this has been clarified in guidelines enabling counter staff to make referrals.

Reconnect staff noted that the slowness of the assessment process can have adverse effects on prospects for reconciliation between parents and young people. When the process is slow, the likelihood is increased that the young person will leave school and perhaps the area. When it is quicker, there is more opportunity for a period away from home to serve as 'time out' and for Reconnect workers to negotiate an early return home.

- How do other key 'first-to-know' players perceive the role of Reconnect, and how important are they in determining that role?

Reconnect services have been positively received in the four areas studied. On the whole, the Reconnect services' role in early intervention is well understood, particularly among the key first-to-know agencies in the area. A considerable number of participants pointed out that the Reconnect services are the only services of their kind in the areas, and that they are considered invaluable parts of the local service system.

The research found some tension between the Reconnect services and the state welfare agencies with regard to the latter's expectations of the Reconnect providers. Interviewees from DHS in Victoria and DoCs in New South Wales were very positive about the work that Reconnect has done with families in their areas, and regularly refer young people to Reconnect Services. However, the three established Reconnect services expressed concerns about some of the referrals coming to them from state welfare departments. They considered that some of these families are not suitable for work seeking reconciliation, and that remaining at home may not be safe, for the young people concerned. At the same time, Reconnect workers reported difficulties in referring young people to these departments, especially in New South Wales. It was their experience that both DoCS and DHS are unlikely to respond to notifications involving a young person over the age of 14. It is as yet unclear what will be the impact of new legislation in New South Wales for mandatory notification of young persons at risk of harm.

The commonwealth and state/territories Youth Protocols for the Case Management of Unsupported Young People 1994 was not often mentioned in interviews, but when these did come up for discussion respondents had varied opinions about them. Income support and state welfare staff generally find these protocols helpful in ensuring, workers in the 'opposite' agencies are aware of their responsibilities. However not all workers understand the protocols, and we received reports about workers having to take action to ensure responsibilities under the protocol were fulfilled.

Police are potentially important as first-to-know agencies, especially in the case of young people playing out their problems in risk-taking behaviour. They were mentioned by Reconnect staff of all four services included in the study, but most frequently in the country area of Deniliquin. However, police were not reported as a common source of referrals to Reconnect services in any of the areas. Similarly, there were fewer mentions of connections with juvenile justice programs than might have been expected.

- Are there differences between the way Reconnect services operate in different locations, and why? To what extent are these due to geography, state differences, and length of time that the Reconnect service has been in place?

The research suggested that a number of factors affect the way Reconnect services work with the other local sources of support and assistance to young people at risk of homelessness and their families.

Time and the continuity of focus on youth homelessness is one such factor. Three of the four Reconnect services included in the study have long and continuous histories of work with young people and homelessness, both as organisations and in the staff giving leadership to them. REFS and RAFT, both of which were Youth Homelessness Pilot Projects, are particularly strong examples of effective service development. The significance of continuity for service and network development points to the importance of retaining skilled and experienced staff by the Reconnect provider, and to continuity of funding (two Reconnect services had had to depend on their auspice agencies for support during gaps in funding).

Location and geography also matter for the effectiveness of Reconnect services. These factors stood out most sharply in the case of Vinnies, and the difficulty of serving a large and poorly provided rural area. Reflecting the costs of time and transport, service provision tended to work in the sub-areas of the towns rather than as an integrated area system.

The size of the area to be served is nevertheless a problem for all four of the Reconnect services we studied. In our view, all are attempting to stretch themselves across areas that are too large and diverse to be well served, and which may also extend across social and geographical boundaries. Moreover, the size of the areas requires workers to spend a considerable time travelling which they could otherwise be spending helping clients. We consider all the Reconnect services we examined as required to serve too large a territory.

We also found differences in Reconnect services associated with differences in service provision by state and local governments in New South Wales and Victoria. The Victorian SFYS provides a natural point of connection for Reconnect services which is not available in New South Wales. Similarly, the youth services departments of local government authorities seem better developed in Victoria than New South Wales, and able to create better pathways to early intervention assistance in that state.

## **5.2 Reconnect Local Service Networks**

One of the main objectives of the research was to identify and describe the patterns of relationships between the main providers of support and services to young people and their families in the areas where Reconnect services operate. In each of the four areas, Reconnect services have working relationships a variety of other services. The strength of these networks, as evidenced by the number and range of services with which they are connected and the frequency of contact between them, is an important indicator of both their on-going work in assisting clients and their wider work in building community capacity for assisting young people and their families.

Inter-agency relations exist at a variety of levels, ranging from interaction in the course of assistance to individual young people or their families, to common membership in local service co-ordination groups, and to formal inter-agency contacts in planning and service development. For the purposes of the present study, we took inter-agency contact in the provision of assistance to young people and their families—the referral of clients, and the referral of clients to them—as offering the best indication of the way in which services are linked together in an area. We have traced networks of relationships between agencies on the basis of referral of clients as frequently as once per week, once per month, less frequently than that, or not all.

Detailed discussions of the networks of service provision for young people, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and for their families are provided in section 3 of this report.

- How do various forms of support articulate ('join up') with one another at a local level?

All four Reconnect services have connections with a wide range of first-to-know agencies and providers of other services, and in addition these other agencies and service providers also have relationships with one another. However, the strength of these local networks varies. Both REFS and RAFT have strong, well connected networks, the REFS network being visibly stronger than the RAFT one. In both cases, Reconnect services have regular and often weekly contact with a wide variety of other services and agencies in their areas, and in addition, many other agencies and services are also in regular contact with one another. The network of Reconnect West is less well developed, reflecting its new status as a Reconnect provider. Built on the pre-existing relationships of the three agencies making up the Reconnect West consortium, this network comprises weaker relationships and less frequent contact than the REFS and RAFT networks. Many of the other agencies and

services had links to one another, but contact between these was not frequent. Vinnie's local service network is the least well connected of the four. Vinnies' Reconnect is in touch with a variety of first-to-know agencies and providers of complementary services, but generally those other agencies and providers have little contact with one another.

Generally, the Reconnect local service networks are well integrated in functional terms. There appear to be established bonds between the providers of advice, support, counselling and family mediation, and the providers of accommodation, income support, employment and health services. In general, there do not appear to be systematic cleavages between services provided by different levels of government, or by government and non-government providers<sup>1</sup>. Most weaknesses in connections between different parts of the service system seem to reflect local issues such as geography and the availability of services in the area. Thus network fragmentation in the Knox area of the REFS network appears to reflect the existence of an alternative, and in part competing service in that area and a residue of tension following the competitive tendering of Reconnect services. Besides general network under-development, gaps in the Reconnect West network reflect the location of DHS services outside the local area and fewer accessible resources especially in the areas of accommodation and sexual health services. The fragmentation of the Vinnies Reconnect network is undoubtedly a product of its rural location, exacerbated by divisions of responsibility between the Victorian and New South Wales governments at the state border.

As key first-to-know agencies, the place of schools and education-related services in Reconnect service networks has particular importance for early intervention and prevention strategies. All four Reconnect providers have links to many of the schools in their area, with varying degrees of contact with counsellors and social welfare co-ordinators. There were variations in how well developed relations with schools were in each of the four Reconnect areas, and in at least one area the research found schools lacking links to the Reconnect provider. Of the four providers, REFS is most strongly linked with schools, but schools in the Reconnect West area also are well linked to other services. Victoria's school focused youth service is important in facilitating these connections. Both of the New South Wales providers included in the research, RAFT and Vinnies, also have clearly established relations with schools in their area; more of those in the RAFT network than in the Vinnies network have direct contact with other local services. Reconnect West need to develop the program in Hobson's Bay schools, many of which have programs of their own for young people at risk but who could benefit from the resources of a specific early intervention service.

### **5.3 Building Community Capacity for Early Intervention**

- What approaches do Reconnect services use in 'building capacity' through their impact on existing networks and developing new networks? How do their roles in direct service provision and developing community capacity interrelate?

Reconnect services find it difficult to separate their work in developing community capacity for prevention and early intervention from their primary roles as direct service providers. This work brings Reconnect workers in contact with other services, and in the course of this work they have the opportunity to increase the understanding of other local service providers of the part that these other agencies can play in prevention and early intervention strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> There are, however, tensions about the relative roles of Reconnect and Centrelink officers in the RAFT network, and problems with access to DoCS services.

Reconnect staff emphasise the importance of developing positive relationships with key community agencies such as schools, welfare services and income support providers.

Reconnect services also pointed to the enhancement of community capacity through the development of networks which assist and complement their own work in prevention and early intervention. Through the development of such networks, Reconnect programs are not only providing a service to young people and families but also developing the ability of a community to address themselves some of the issues which can cause family conflict and early home leaving. For example, through its programs in schools, REFS work to develop the community's capacity for dealing with issues of family conflict and youth homelessness. This happens by developing the skills amongst students, parents and staff to enable them to address problems and issues which may lead to early home leaving. Their work supports the development of resilience and protective factors among communities. The focus on schools is complemented by other programs like Parenting Support, which aims to give directly to parents the skills to manage problems they may have with their children and adolescents. Vinnies consider their approach is based on utilising the resources individuals, families and communities have themselves. Vinnies are also currently developing ways of involving local clubs and businesses in youth issues in the area and hoping to develop a scholarship program for young people to access alternative education opportunities. Reconnect West are planning to use the Critical Linkages worker to assess the services' community capacity development.

What was clear in the field evidence was that the development of community capacity will not replace the position of professional workers in providing support and assistance to young people and their families. Any discussion of community capacity must take into account the delicate balance many community based organisations have between providing a service and going further and developing some kind of structural change in the local community. The Reconnect services, through their developments of networks, is playing a crucial part in increasing awareness of prevention and early intervention approaches among providers. How much Reconnect can influence awareness in a wider sense outside the provider and stakeholder network is unclear. At the end of the day, all services have limited resources and the provision of service is after all, a crucial aspect of their role.

Reconnect workers in the three established services raised the issue of action research during the discussions on community capacity. Opinions towards action research were very positive and the staff considered it an invaluable aspect of their work for young people and families in the area. They clearly saw a link between the on-going process of action research and developing the communities' capacity for addressing issues for youth at risk. The Communities That Care model developed in the United States during the 1980s was also of interest to some interviewees, though Reconnect workers were not among these. Further work with regard to community capacity is necessary as lack of time in the interviews meant these issues were not fully addresses in the research.

#### **5.4 Other Issues**

##### *Auspice Organisation*

It was apparent from the case studies that the base of established services provides important support for the development of early intervention services by Reconnect. In this case Reconnect services are implemented by a service that already has a presence in the area. An important element of the established services was the support that is provided to them by the auspicing organisations: the Lutheran Church for REFS; Southern Youth and Family Services for RAFT, St Vincent de Paul Society for Vinnies Reconnect, and the

three consortium partners for Reconnect West. Without the support of these organisations, none of the services would be able to operate as effectively as they do. The support of auspicing agencies has been critical to the survival of early intervention services through discontinuities in funding. REFT could have lost their staff during the period between their existence as Youth Homelessness Pilot Projects and the commencement as Reconnect provider. The same transition also caused financial problems for Vinnies.

### *Accommodation*

Early intervention to reduce the prospects of youth homelessness is assisted to an important degree by access to accommodation services appropriate to the needs of the young people concerned, ranging from short-term respite accommodation to long-term supported accommodation. Such accommodation enables young people to maintain connections to their family, school and local community. In all four areas, there are needs for greater access to youth specific accommodation than is available at present. This need is greatest by far in Deniliquin and its surrounding area, but there is also unmet need in the Hobson's Bay area served by Reconnect West. The lack of community places for young people was also raised as an issue in all four Reconnect areas. On the other hand, the REFS supported accommodation program for students is held in high esteem and considered a useful model for the Reconnect program. However, there are a limited number of places.

### *Schools and State Differences*

Different state education policies in New South Wales and Victoria can explain one of the major differences between the four Reconnect areas with regard to the schools. There was a marked difference between the amount of time SWCs had allocated to them, with SWCs having a larger and increasing role in Victoria than their counterparts in New South Wales. Many of them also had teaching responsibilities, though these had generally decreased as their counselling role had increased. Teaching responsibilities were seen as good because they meant SWCs stayed in touch with students in a 'non-welfare' capacity while also 'keeping a hand in' with teaching. In New South Wales, except in secondary schools where there are more than 500 girls, the schools use what is called an itinerant system where counsellors are responsible for a number of schools in an area. The itinerant system means that counsellors divide their time between at least two and often more schools, and these schools are generally a mix of primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools with more than 500 girls also have a Head Teacher of Student Welfare who is at the school full-time and a member of the senior management team.

Another distinction between the services in the two states is the existence of the school focused youth services in Victoria. In the REFS network, and the Reconnect network also to some degree, SFYS play a crucial role in linking schools with agencies in the local communities. Brokerage funds are used to develop programs and address unmet needs in schools.

Schools vary in the relative weight they give to welfare and social development and to academic achievement. The position of schools with regard to welfare issues can be an indicator of how they work with other agencies and the extent to which they fit into a network which promotes prevention of risk and early intervention into emerging issues for young people. Because of the methodology employed in which contacts were drawn from the agencies that Reconnect services were in touch with the study has done more to reflect the views of welfare oriented than academically focused schools. Even so, there were notable variations among the schools participating in the study. Schools in New South Wales were more variable than those in Victoria with regard to the relative weight they

accord to student welfare and academic performance. It was the impression of some Reconnect workers that certain schools in their areas are not open to the prevention and early intervention of problems and question the role of schools in a Reconnect network. There is a need for more consistent approaches to welfare issues in schools, particularly in New South Wales.

### *Indigenous Communities and Young People*

The most effective way of providing early intervention services to Indigenous young people and their families was not a specific focus of the present study. Such as insight as it is able to provide is an indirect result of the presence of Aboriginal communities in the areas of Vinnies Reconnect and RAFT.

Reconnect workers considered that their prospects of providing effective service to Indigenous communities takes time for trust and confidence to develop. This process is hampered by staff changes. It is considered that the employment of Indigenous workers is important for acceptance in Indigenous communities, as is intended in the Round 3 funding of Reconnect services. It was also noted, however, that employing staff from a different Aboriginal community than the one to be served may also be problematic, and that there is a shortage of suitably qualified Aboriginal workers. There were also suggestions that the concepts of service provision and early intervention and service provision developed in 'Anglo' contexts may not be appropriate in Indigenous communities, and that there may be a need to develop approaches grounded in Indigenous cultural beliefs.

## **Appendix 1: Review of the Key Literature on the Prevention of and Early Intervention in Youth Homelessness**

Literature on homelessness has been prolific, with the focus on youth homelessness growing over the last 15 years or so. The literature covers definitions of homelessness, measurement of the extent of homelessness, the causes of homelessness and solutions to homelessness. Some recent texts include Neil and Fopp (1992); Hutson and Liddiard (1994); Downing-Orr (1996); Encel and Sitsky (1997); and Burrows et al (1997); although this list is not exhaustive. Literature on the prevention and early intervention into youth homelessness is a fairly recent addition to the long established work on the general subject of homelessness.

The main purpose of the literature review was to inform the design of the primary research instrument while providing background information salient in prevention and early intervention into youth homelessness. This review provides an overview of certain key issues and texts in the field. It draws primarily on the small number of publications which focus on youth homelessness and prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness. A number of texts with this focus informed the research: Sykes (1993); Crane and Brannock (1996); Pinkney and Ewing (1997); Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998); the Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce Report (1998), and MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1999). The section below outlines the main aspects of these sources, while drawing on other publications where relevant.

### **A1.1 Background**

For many years, the literature has focused on homelessness among men or families<sup>1</sup>. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) point to the recognition of the problem of youth homelessness in Australia. The Senate's Report on Homeless Youth (1982) was the first 'milestone' on the itinerary of youth homelessness to public recognition as a social problem. (1998: 7)

However, it was only with the publication of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) Report *Our Homeless Children*, widely known as the 'Burdekin Report' after the Chairperson Brian Burdekin, that the problem of youth homelessness became widely recognised. Sykes argues that the Burdekin Report

stripped away the social veneer covering the extent of youth homelessness and the experiences of homeless children. It documented these experiences vividly in the words of the children themselves. It also documented the inadequacy of government and community responses. Since the release of the Burdekin Report there has been a new urgency generated about the needs of homeless young children. (Sykes, 1993: 1-2)

Crane and Brannock (1996) provide a very thorough discussion of background issues in youth homelessness. They note two identifiable policy responses to homelessness among young people. One has been to respond to homelessness itself by providing crisis and transitional accommodation (SAAP) together with some attempts to improve access to longer term housing tenures. The second policy response identified by Crane and Brannock has a preventative focus and involved a range of policies and strategies. The most tightly focused of these aim to minimise the number of young people who leave home before they

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<sup>1</sup> The literature is immense and beyond the scope of this review however, some starting points might include: Bartholomew (1999), Burke (1998); Burrows et al (1997); Coleman (1997); Cultrane and Homburg (1997); Encel and Sitsky (1997), Hutson and Liddiard (1994), Neil and Fopp (1992).

have the resources to sustain an independent or shared household. The authors argue that an examination of the policy literature during the 1990s shows the emerging 'home retention' policy agenda which is in some respects an extension of the central youth policy objective of the 1980s, school retention. (Crane and Brannock, 1996: Ch 4) The Reconnect Program fits squarely within this policy agenda of enabling young people to remain at home and school.

## **AI.2 The Shift Towards Early Intervention**

Crane and Brannock identify a precursor to Reconnect in the commonwealth government's *Youth Social Justice Strategy*, a family mediation approach started in 1989 in response to the Burdekin Report. In 1989 the commonwealth government announced the *Youth Social Justice Strategy* which included a specific focus on the prevention of homelessness. Over four years, \$5.5 million was dedicated for adolescent/parent mediation services' directed at preventing young people leaving home through intervening at an early stage in the cycle of family conflict.' (Crane and Brannock, 1996:29) There was an extension of existing marriage counselling services to family counselling with adolescents with the goal of creating avenues for young people to return to their family, or at least to ensure that lines of communication were sufficiently open to maintain support between the family and the young people. Other strategies announced in the package included: innovative health care services for disadvantaged and particularly for homeless young people; additional funding to allow the development of innovative supported accommodation models, particularly those which provided medium to long-term accommodation to young people; and increasing numbers of Youth Access Centres supplemented by grants to rural community groups to establish information services for young people. Themes of increased coordination, co-location of services, the use of outreach strategies, and the targeting of services to "at risk" young people underpinned the package. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:29)

Crane and Brannock point to 1994 as marking a policy shift when the *Working Nation* policy framework further consolidated the place of education retention and vocational training as the central strategies for the commonwealth's response to disadvantage among young people. The most significant feature of this policy was the elevation of case management as the principal mechanism for improving the access of disadvantaged young people to the labour market. Centrality of a case management approach in framing early intervention and prevention can be seen in the Commonwealth Government's response to the Morris Report. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 1995). Case management is presented as an adequate framework for early intervention and prevention. The second shift of relevance in the *Working Nation* policy was the absence of homeless young people as a specific group experiencing specific disadvantage and therefore warranting specific targeting. Crane and Brannock argue there was also evidence of this shift in the place of young people in social justice policy: *The Social Justice Statement* 1995-1996 does not specify young people as a target group as did the Youth Social Justice Strategy 1989. Young People were now subsumed in the context of other social indicators (Crane and Brannock, 1996:30).

MacKenzie and Chamberlain argue that it was in fact the Report on Youth Homelessness by the Senate Handling Committee in 1982 that was important in raising the issue of youth homelessness. They argue that this was followed by a period of rigorous advocacy during which the supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP) came into being, consolidating Commonwealth and state programs. The Burdekin report was to follow. However, agreeing with Crane and Brannock, MacKenzie and Chamberlain argue that it

was not until the 1990's and the *House of Representatives (1995) Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*<sup>2</sup> that the notion of early intervention gained force:

The potential of early intervention was proposed in the following terms: 'early intervention is probably the one area of social policy which could deliver the greatest returns in terms of increased social cohesion through the reduction in the levels of family breakdown and long-term welfare dependency. (MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 1999)

Crane and Brannock point to the 1995 Commonwealth Government policy statement, *An Agenda for Families* as a shift in policy to prioritising family reunification or family restoration. The policy stated:

The Government's first priority is to reunite the young person with their family and through family mediation seek to resolve the issues which have led to the young person leaving home. If this is not possible, income support, accommodation and help to stay at school or find employment or training are available for young people. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:30)

An important factor discussed in some of the literature on youth homelessness is the role of income support policies. The Brotherhood of St Laurence conducted some work in the early 1990s looking at income support provision for young homeless people (Taylor, 1993; Thomson, 1993; Tasker, 1995). However, there has been little discussion of the role of such policies in a prevention and early intervention approach. In addition, the organisation of income support provision has changed over the last few years. The independent homeless rate is administered by Centrelink on behalf of the Department of Social Security which also administers the student homeless rate for the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The current term for the homeless rate is the Unreasonable to Live at Home allowance. In 1993 the Commonwealth and State/Territory welfare departments adopted the youth protocols which were developed to improve coordination of services to unsupported, homeless under 18-year-olds (Crane and Brannock, 1996:30).

Prevention and early intervention approaches have gained prominence in many aspects of public policy. Recent policies include the Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (Mitchell, 2000); and the National Mental Health Strategy (AUSINET, 1999; Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000; Davis et al, 2000). The current SAAP IV program requires providers to 'contribute actively to homelessness prevention' (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, 1999b; Crane, 1999).

Crane and Brannock argue that in the literature, 'the terms prevention and early intervention are used interchangeably, inconsistently, and with little specificity (Crane and Brannock, 1996:14)<sup>3</sup>. The authors discuss the work of MacKenzie and Chamberlain, Carter, and Hargreaves and Hadlow in developing definitions of prevention and early intervention. A layering approach is common in the literature, 'a primary focus aimed at strategies which would prevent the emergence of a problem, a secondary focus which would address problems identified in their early stages, and a tertiary focus which would address mitigation of their most damaging effects' (Crane and Brannock, 1996: 14 quoting Hargreaves and Hadlow). Crane and Brannock developed and utilised definitions of prevention and early intervention incorporating Carter's four levels of prevention where early intervention exists as one level of prevention (Carter, 1993:140). The definitions used by Crane and Brannock were:

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<sup>2</sup> Known as the Morris Report

<sup>3</sup> See this section in Crane and Brannock for a thorough discussion of the definitional issues.

- **Prevention** involves the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies which address structural or external factors contributing to youth homelessness, or which focus on factors which are both protective and situational. These responses are not targeted to specific individuals or families on the basis that they are considered vulnerable to homelessness.
- **Early intervention** involves the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies which address situational factors affecting specific young people. These a) respond to a perceived difficulty or crisis which may be a precursor to a specific instance of homelessness, or b) respond after homelessness has occurred, but before such time as the shift to chronic homelessness has taken place (Crane and Brannock, 1996: 15).

In Crane and Brannock's research, a number of policies and programs oriented towards addressing youth homelessness prevention and early intervention were identified. These were divided into four types:

- Family relations services;
- Services targeting particular young people;
- Universal protective services at the situational level; and
- Social policy and service delivery infrastructure.

The literature regarding youth homelessness sits within the broader area of work looking at youth at risk (see Withers and Russell, 1998 and Withers and Batten, 1995). Crane and Brannock (1997) discuss the literature on risk and protective factors at length, as do Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998). Crane and Brannock found a lack of consensus and large variability in the use of "at risk" terminology as it applies to young people. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:15) Chamberlain and MacKenzie found the concept elusive and being used in many different ways and for many different purposes.

Sometimes it has been used to refer to the likelihood of young people taking up harmful practices such as drug and alcohol abuse; in other contexts it has been used to refer to young people experiencing 'social disadvantage', and sometimes it has not been clear what it refers to. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:89-90)

There are also connections with the Communities that Care (CTC) model developed in the United States which developed a framework of risk and protective factors for young people (Hawkins et al, 1992). The CTC model focuses on prevention and early intervention approaches to a range of risk taking behaviours among young people such as juvenile delinquency offences, substance abuse and homelessness.

It is as if we were providing expensive ambulances at the bottom of a cliff to pick up the youngsters who fall off, rather than building a fence at the top to keep them from falling in the first place. This book is about building that fence. (Hawkins et al, 1992:xii)

The strategy is based on more than 10 years of research into the social factors which exist in the community that place young people at increased risk of developing problem behaviours during their adolescence. It has been applied successfully in more than 400 communities in the United States and is being trialed in the United Kingdom. (Victorian Community Care Division, 2000:34)

A similar framework has been developed in Victoria by the Department of Human Services which conducted a survey of young people in 1999 (Victorian Community Care Division, 2000).

One of the new approaches to the prevention of young people's problem behaviours is the risk-focussed approach to prevention. This approach is based on a simple premise: To prevent a problem from occurring, and to enhance the resilience of young people, we need to find ways to identify the factors which **increase** the risk of that problem developing and identify the protective factors that **decrease** the risk of that problem developing. We need to look at prevention strategies, which minimise the risk factors and maximise the protective factors. (Victorian Community Care Division, 2000: 12)

### **A1.3 Measuring the Extent of Youth Homelessness**

One area of work within the literature on youth homelessness is measuring the extent of the problem.<sup>4</sup> Chamberlain and MacKenzie point to 'the extensive literature on the difficulties of counting the homeless population (Rossi 1989, Ch.3; Wright 1989, Ch.2; Appelbaum 1990; Momeni 1990), and the main problems are widely recognised.' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:38) As part of the Burdekin Inquiry, the Commission initiated an exploration into the extent of youth homelessness which estimated that between 50 and 70 thousand young people between the ages of 12 and 24 were homeless. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:9). As Chamberlain and MacKenzie point out. 'The number of homeless youth was an important signifier in the public debate and it continues to be a salient issue' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:10).

One area of research with regard to the number of homeless people is measuring the extent of homelessness among school students.<sup>5</sup> The argument propounded by Chamberlain, MacKenzie and others is that:

If the number of homeless schools students is substantial, then schools become potential sites for early intervention, where it is possible to take action before young people have made a transition to chronic homelessness. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998:73)

Consequently, in 1994 a national census of schools was carried out in the final school week to collect information on homeless students in schools. The results of the Census identified 10,440 homeless school students in that week across Australia. This represented nine out of every 1,000 students.

### **A1.4 The Role of Schools in Prevention and Early Intervention**

According to the literature on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness, schools are crucial in any such approach. The current work in prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness is heavily centred on schools and the education system.

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<sup>4</sup> An analysis of the extent of youth homelessness was not an aim of this review, however it is useful to briefly summarise some of the issues at this stage and point readers to some relevant materials. Regarding the number of homeless people see Chamberlain 1999 and the Consilium Group Pty Ltd 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998: 69) point to a number of studies of homeless school students completed in the late 1980s and early 1990s including Lambert 1987; Maclean 1992; Morris and Blaskett 1992, and Sykes 1993.

There is also a body of work which looks at the costs of youth homelessness and the costs of school based interventions. Pinkney and Ewing estimate the economic costs to the community if young people leave home and school before they can support themselves independently. As they argue, taking Chamberlain and MacKenzie's census, a large number of young people leave home but remain in the school system long enough to be identified by welfare and teaching staff (10,440 according to the census):

This has significant policy implications. It underscores the possibility that support can be channelled to young people before they are forced out of school and long before they reach the street. (Pinkney and Ewing, 1997:1)

Daryl Dixon (1993) analyses the economic benefits of supporting homeless young people while Robyn Hartley (1993) discusses the social costs of youth homelessness (Sykes, 1993).

Crane and Brannock evidence research which indicates that young people who leave school at an early age also leave home early, and the connections between leaving school early and becoming homeless are strong. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:9). The factors noted as contributing to early school leaving include: inflexible structures in schools; poor quality of teacher-student relationships; rejection and neglect of underachievers; and policies of suspension or expulsion of difficult students. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:10)

The Burdekin Report recognised the role of schools in assisting homeless youths and children and their ability to identify and respond to difficulties faced by them. However, the Burdekin Report found that some schools can actually be part of the problem. 'The report catalogues the many ways in which schools have failed homeless children' (Sykes, 1993: 2). Crane and Brannock argue that despite the attention in the research to schools, 'there is little evidence that schools are assuming systematic measures to address the needs of the broadest cross-section of students' (Crane and Brannock, 1996:10).

Sykes refers to O'Connor who, having reviewed the statements of homeless children interviewed as part of the research for the Burdekin Inquiry, observed that 'for most of the young people interviewed their school experience was not a happy one. The process of marginalisation, rejection and exclusion experienced in their families was also reflected in their school experiences'. O'Connor found that almost all of the young people interviewed has severed all links with their schools before they had completed Grade 12. O'Connor concluded that the school system had failed those young people. (Sykes, 1993:7)

In response to the Burdekin Report, the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Prevention of Youth Homelessness Project (PYHP) was run between 1992 and 1997. Its aim was to explore ways of preventing youth homelessness in two Victorian communities. The research found that homelessness may be prevented by schools and community agencies intervening early to help young people who are at risk. With regard to schools, the project concluded 'The experience of the PYHP confirms that schools are strategically located to respond to the needs of young people at risk of homelessness' (Charman et al, 1997:xvi).

Chamberlain and MacKenzie point to *the House of Representatives (1995) Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* which highlighted the importance of welfare provision in schools. The 1995 Report stated:

The Committee tried to ascertain the number of counsellors in schools in States and Territories and their various roles and qualifications in order to establish a national picture. It was not possible, with the information available, to make any reasonable

assessment. What can be said, however, is that resources are too few and seem to be diminishing in some States, and our education system lacks any national approach to standards within the area of pastoral support for children. (House of Representatives, 1995:258)

In keeping with the House of Representatives 1995 report,

Many young people become homeless while they are still at school (about one-third of homeless youth at any point in time). Clearly, reaching as many of these young people as possible before they have reached the streets is preferable to interventions that are designed to respond to young people in the later stages of homelessness. (MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 1999)

Schools must embrace a broad responsibility for the education and welfare of young people in the 21st century and become full-service schools. Student support and welfare have to become a secure part of the curriculum and schools must work closely with community agencies. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998: 116)

The importance of schools became evident in discussions regarding youth homelessness. Prevention, that is, measures designed to build up the resilience of individuals and communities so that homelessness does not occur, became the aim of a number of programs, such as the school focused youth services in Victoria. The Youth Homelessness Pilot Programme and Reconnect which followed, explicitly acknowledged the importance of the education system in any prevention and early intervention model. Schools are integral to the Reconnect program as one of the key first to know agencies in contact with young people:

Building on the findings of earlier work in this area, the pilot programme highlighted the need for a broad network of first-to-know agencies, including schools, to be most effective in providing access to early intervention support for young homeless people. (Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce, 1998b: 19)

The literature with regard to schools and youth homelessness is placed within a longer tradition of work which has analysed the outlook of schools with regard to welfare and pastoral care. Schools vary as to how much emphasis they place on welfare issues and how important they consider schools in providing students with welfare support. Literature on prevention and early intervention points to the inconsistent approach schools take to youth homelessness. Sykes argues that:

The school has a special role to play as an institution with which all homeless children have some association, as a potential source of social contact and stability and as a means of personal and social rehabilitation. (Sykes, 1993:9)

Crane and Brannock's research found that schools were often considered part of the problem for youth homelessness.

A number of common themes emerged from the case studies. Schools are clearly conceptualised as part of the problem of young people becoming homeless.

- By what schools usually do (alienate many students by the content and processes commonly employed in secondary schooling) and,
- by what they usually do not do (provide opportunities for the sharing or identification of significant problems and a platform for response),

- the institution of secondary schooling is consistently cited by school personnel and community service providers alike as a significant part of the problem of young people becoming homeless. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:88)

Crane and Brannock's survey of service providers found that many considered the school curriculum too narrowly academic in focus and oriented to tertiary entrance which does not meet the needs of young people with diverse needs. There is variation among schools in their approach to issues such as homelessness. Sykes points to a number of schools which responded to the Burdekin Report and address issues such as homelessness amongst their students (Sykes, 1993). Crane and Brannock identify a number of school based programs which coordinate education and welfare services to better support young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and risk leaving school (Crane and Brannock, 1996:35-36). The premise of such programs is that schools 'can provide a stabilising and protective influence for students who are experiencing difficulties at home. Retention in school can itself be a protective factor against early home leaving leading to homelessness' (Crane and Brannock, 1996:88). The literature points to the notion that young people in school should have a positive and engaging relationship with at least one member of school personnel (Crane and Brannock, 1996:88). The move from primary school to secondary school is identified as an unsettling time for young people. In Chamberlain and MacKenzie's research it was found that schools vary greatly in their effectiveness in assisting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The number of school counsellors varies, and they are also responsible for many issues other than homelessness. The writers argue that most welfare staff cannot work effectively with a caseload of more than ten homeless students at anyone time (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1998: 84).

An important aspect of the literature on schools which links into the Communities That Care model is the work around full-service schools or school linked services. The concept centres on the idea that schools are in a position to provide much more than educational services through the introduction and coordination of education, health and welfare programs. The idea has been developed in the United States (Dryfoos, 1994). The Australian Centre for Equity through Education (ACEE) has published a number of pieces on full-service schools (ACEE 1996, ACEE, 1998)<sup>6</sup>. The idea of full service schools, as with CTC, is heavily embedded in a community based approach to issues such as mental health problems and youth homelessness:

The idea of full-service schooling appears to have gained momentum as one response to the fragmentation of some communities for various reasons. Coordination and integration of health and welfare service provision may assist in prevention and/or reduction of current problems facing many young people and their schooling, problems such as homelessness, drugs, violence, self -esteem, apathy, and emotional disturbance. (ACEE, 1998:19)

### **A1.5 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a program that supports homeless people including homeless young people. SAAP was developed as a joint Commonwealth and State/Territory to assist homeless people:

Up until 1985 policy and program reforms to homelessness in Australia were diffuse, and the States/Territories operated a range of independent programs. Since 1985, under bilateral agreements, the Commonwealth Government and the State/Territory

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<sup>6</sup> See also Semmens et al (1998) for examples of integration of services in the Port Phillip area of Victoria

Governments have jointly funded the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) to provide a nationally coordinated policy approach to address the social phenomenon of homelessness, and to provide support and services to homeless people. ([www.facs.gov.au/saap/supp-accom.htm](http://www.facs.gov.au/saap/supp-accom.htm))

SAAP recognised the role of early intervention in its services as early as 1993 (Crane and Brannock, 1996; Crane, 2000).

SAAP policy in the document Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Strategic Directions 1993 reveals a shift in the objective of SAAP to include early intervention as a strategy to prevent homelessness. (Crane and Brannock, 1996:30)

However, implementation of early intervention services in SAAP provision has been uneven and often reactive rather than proactive (Crane, 2000). In their research, Crane and Brannock found that some states had made funding available for specific positions within SAAP funded services to undertake early intervention and family reconciliation work (Crane and Brannock, 1996:33). Other models of support within SAAP found by Crane and Brannock were community placement programs and services for young parents. 'Community placement programs often include a goal of family restoration or reconciliation' (Crane and Brannock, 1996:33).

The Memorandum of Understanding of SAAP IV for 2000-2005 makes an explicit reference to prevention and community collaboration. All signatories to SAAP IV 'aspire' to:

Contribute actively to homelessness prevention through timely intervention and linking with other services with a prevention and early intervention focus to prevent the reoccurrence of homelessness. (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, 1999b).

There were concerns, prior to SAAP IV, that the implementation of prevention services by SAAP providers may divert resources away from the immediate need of crisis accommodation and support (Crane, 2000). It is expected that these issues will become clearer during the operation of SAAP IV.

#### **Al.6 Community Services**

Evident in much of the literature on prevention and early intervention is the importance of a community wide approach to the issue of youth homelessness.

Unless welfare support in schools and early intervention work through community agencies operates in a well-coordinated way at the community level, then early intervention will not yield its full potential. The most effective early intervention projects have adopted a realistic community-wide collaborative. (MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 1999)

As discussed above, a community approach is central to CTC and the full service school model.

In addition to the importance of schools in the prevention of youth homelessness as discussed above, The Brotherhood of St Laurence's Prevention of Youth Homelessness Project found that homelessness may be prevented by schools and community agencies

intervening early to help young people who are at risk. The Project suggested a number of ways community agencies could become more effective in assisting young people at risk of homelessness:

The Project's work with the young service users of community agencies also indicated that community agencies could have greater success in strengthening the attachment of young people to their families if they:

- involved family members in the case plan and other decision making at the point of referral;
- intervened earlier in the young person's life; and
- aimed more effort at family reconciliation, where appropriate (Charman et al, 1997:xvi).

The PYHP found that coordination was a problem for community agencies supporting young people and their families, especially for different levels of government. The project also found a number of areas which required further work including working with families where a member experiences mental illness, improving recreational opportunities for at risk young people and engaging with Aboriginal communities (Charman et al, 1997: xvi).

## Appendix 2: A Note on Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis began to be developed in the 1950s, initially by anthropologists seeking to extend the application of their discipline from small scale societies living in relative isolation to understand the ideas and actions of peoples living in more complex social environments. The network construct gave them a way of conceptualising the social environment of the individual person in the context of complex society. The essential idea of network analysis was first stated by John Barnes:

Each person is, as it were, in touch with a number of other people, some of whom are directly in touch with each other and some of whom are not. Similarly each person has a number of friends, and these friends have their own friends; some of anyone person's friends know each other, others do not. I find it convenient to talk of a social field of this kind as a *network*. The image I have is of a set of points some of which are joined by lines. The points of the image are people, or sometimes groups, and the lines indicate which people interact with each other (1954: 43).

This simple idea has since come to be applied across the social sciences, and to problems as diverse as social integration and the enforcement of social norms, social structure and the structuring of power and influence, communication and the spread of ideas, information and resources, national and international migration, and policy needs in transport, community health and family and community support to frail aged people (Wellman, 1999; Wellman and Berkowitz, 1988).

Network analysis is generally conducted as the study of the networks of a sample of individual people (ego-centered networks). Often, it takes the form of comparative study of individuals of differing social groups, or in differing personal circumstances. Such studies have pursued a variety of themes:

- *Studies of the size and composition of people's networks*, and the capacity of these networks to supply critical resources such as social support, economic assistance, and access to employment or training opportunities. Research may also focus on the spatial and behavioural dimensions of the networks of different social groups. In a classic Australian study, Jean Martin (1970) compared the networks of residents in three Adelaide suburbs, showing significant differences in the social content and geographical spread associated with social class and economic circumstances.
- *Studies of social integration*, and the role of networks in maintaining traditional patterns of relations between kin, neighbours and friends, and in facilitating change in these patterns in the context of new social and economic opportunity. One important finding in this area is that weak social ties may be more important than strong ones for social integration, since it is these which connect individuals across the cleavages of social difference including race, class and generation (Granovetter, 1973; Feld, 1997).
- *Studies of networks and social behaviour*, and the role of networks in shaping norms, values and expectations. Frankenburg (1966) showed how the closed networks of traditional British villages and urban working class neighbourhoods enabled their members to support one another but also to resist change; in contrast, the more open networks of urban and professionals provided little support but facilitated geographical and especially upward social mobility. A recent study showed that runaway and homeless young Americans whose networks contained strong affective and supportive relationships were less likely to engage in risky behaviours than those whose networks lacked such bonds (Ennett, Bailey and Federman, 1999).

- The network construct provides a powerful way of examining the *exchange processes that operate in social life*, and the operation of social power in the negotiation or imposition of (usually informal) exchange relationships. Such research is useful in the study of organisations and their informal structuring and the interaction of market and non-market incentives in shaping social behaviour (Blau, 1964; Lazega and Pattison, 1999).

There is a much smaller literature on study of the networks of organisations. This research has focused primarily on two themes:

- the structuring of *power in and among community organisations and private corporations*, and the elite that control them. The main interest in this research is to identify the hidden structures of influence and power operating in and through these organisations, and to link these with wider dimensions of social structure.
- the structure of inter-organisational relations and social systems. A relevant theme of this work is the examination of service delivery structures, and the factors that shape their structure and performance (Kahn, 1969; Shaver, 1977, 1979). The present report has been developed in this tradition.

The network idea is a common sense one, and even in the social science literature the term is often used informally and impressionistically. The power of the idea depends however on more carefully specified usage. While early studies were largely qualitative, contemporary network analysis is methodologically sophisticated. There are an established terminology and measures of network characteristics (Barnes, 1972; Wellman and Potter, 1999).

Data requirements are potentially exacting. The most basic requirement is to have information about each of the members of the network, and data describing the actual or potential relationship or pattern of contact between each pair of members. In some cases it is possible to use existing administrative or other data, providing this is systematic and appropriate assumptions can be made about relationships for which data are not available. Where new data are collected, it is possible to examine not only the existence or otherwise of relationships between members, but the frequency and character of contact between them and the direction from which it is initiated. It is desirable to be able to add new respondents to the data set as their connections with members of the network is discovered, and this inevitably requires a degree of backtracking to check what relationships these new individuals have with other members of the network. It is easy for the data set to become very large very quickly. For this reason, network data are frequently treated as samples of a larger underlying network of social relationships.

The resulting network data are represented in matrices with a cell to represent the relationship between each pair of network members. In a simple application, the study of this matrix may be sufficient, but the resulting network data is often subjected to statistical analysis. A variety of mathematical and statistical techniques are available (Muller, Wellman and Marin, 1999; Doreian 1999; Anderson, Wasserman and Crouch, 1999; van Meter, 1999).

The network construct is not itself a social theory. Conceptually it stands midway between a theory and a fully operationalised construct. The interpretation of social network data thus requires, implicitly or explicitly, a further set of concepts and arguments linking network form and social behaviour.

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## **Appendix 3: Discussion Guide**

### **Introduction**

*Establish who we are:* independent researchers from the SPRC at the UNSW

*and why we are interviewing them:* a project for FaCs providing an early analysis of a small number of Reconnect networks developed to respond to youth homelessness in four localities in NSW and VIC.

*Ensure confidentiality:* everything we discuss today is completely confidential. No individuals or organisations will be identified in the results.

The interview should last no longer than about an hour.

Ask if they mind if we record the interviews, for our own purposes only.

### **Background of the organisation and individual**

#### **The organisation**

Please could you tell me a little about \_\_\_\_\_ (the organisation). Eg, how long has the service been established? *How* many people are employed? What role(s) does the organisation serve?

#### **The individual**

Could you also tell me a bit about yourself? Eg, what is your position in the organisation? What are your main roles and responsibilities? How long have you been employed by the organisation?

#### **Networks**

One of the main objectives of this research is to develop a picture or map of the network in which you and your organisation are placed for responding to youth homelessness.

We are interested in what occurs at a number of levels. In this section we would like to talk about the referral of cases within networks, who is involved and the frequency of these referrals. *Check they understand what we mean by referral.* When we talk about referrals we mean the referral of a client (young person or family) or a case. We understand that this may only be part of what this service does for young people at risk of homeless or homeless and their families and we would like to talk about some of these issues later.

I am going to hand you a form which lists some of the other agencies which you may have had contact with in regard to young people, who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

On the form I would like you to indicate how regularly your organisation either refers young people and or their parents to these organisations or have received referral cases from these organisations. We would like to know about the timing of these referrals so please could you indicate whether these referrals are once a week, once a month or less frequently.

Please could you also add to the bottom of the list any agencies we have not listed and indicate the frequency of referrals to and from these agencies.

### Reconnect Referral Network List

Note participant name and organization:

Organisation, agency, Department	Frequency of referral		
	Once a week Please †	Once a month Please †	Less frequently Please †
Reconnect			
Centrelink I			
Local council I			
Parenting agency			
SAAP provider I			
Family support agency			
Child Adolescent Mental Health Service			
Sexual Assault agency			
Local community agency			
SAAP provider II			
State welfare department			
Centrelink II			
Local council II			
Employment/education/training services			
JPET provider			
School I <sup>1</sup>			

Please could you also add to the bottom of the list any agencies we have not listed and indicate the frequency of referrals to and from these agencies.

Describe your contact with other services? Prompt for government ie Centrelink, state Welfare Dept, and SAAP.

*(We want to know what happens ? We know whether cases are transferred but what else happens between services at the different levels ie, information and advice, meetings etc)*

<sup>1</sup> The methodology for schools varied between areas. REFS for example listed over 20 schools so we relied on interviewees to add any schools in their network to the list. Where a smaller number of schools were provided such as with Reconnect West who listed six schools, these were included on the list.

Are the organisation's services for young people and their families being coordinated with other network agencies? If so, how does this occur and to what extent? How much collaboration occurs? Do they use 'case management'? What do they mean by case management?

What practices do you feel are critical to a coordinated/partnership approach to youth homelessness?

If the Commonwealth and state/territory Youth Protocols are mentioned we want to know how it works, could it work better? If so, how?

## **Approaches to Youth Homelessness and Early Home Leaving**

### **Early intervention and prevention strategies**

How do you see yourselves fitting into an early intervention/prevention strategy? How is that strategy developing in this area?

Is it developing as you expected it to? If so, how and if not, why and how not?

*(Prompt for any changes in direction and development and if so, why and what.)*

Are there particular issues in this area which affect the strategy?

What do you think the role of Reconnect is in the prevention and/or early intervention of early home leaving among young people?

To what extent does Reconnect assist young people and their parents through the income support assessment process?

How do you see the role of other agencies in the prevention and/or early intervention of early home leaving among young people?

Community activity and 'capacity building'?

To what extent is the organisation contributing to building the local communities capacity for early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness?

What activities undertaken by the organisation build community capacity? Do you think these activities are right for the local area?

What are the most important factors in developing a 'community capacity' with regard to youth homelessness?

Are there any activities the organisation would like to undertake but can't at the moment? If so, what are these activities? Why can't they?

What do you think the impact of the Reconnect program has been on building community capacity in this area?

How do Reconnect perform their role as service providers and builders of community capacity? Are there any problems with this approach?

What are the most significant constraints faced by the service in providing an early intervention/prevention strategy?

**The future**

Where do you see the organisation in the future with regard to early intervention and/or the prevention of youth homelessness? What are the opportunities and barriers ?

Finally, do you have any suggestions as to how the Reconnect program could be improved?

Do you have any other comments to make?

Thank you for your co-operation

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