



# **ADOLESCENT FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**TIME FOR YOUTH**

*BEST PRACTICE REPORT TO DHS*

## AGENCY CONTEXT – TIME FOR YOUTH

*Time for Youth* is a 'not for profit' community organization that has been working with at risk young people and their families for 23 years.

*Time for Youth* aims to '**minimize youth homelessness and create opportunities with young people and their families**' by providing a range services and supports including youth housing and accommodation, crisis accommodation and youth and family interventions, as well as a number of programs including nutrition and an outdoor education mentoring program.

In particular the *Youth and Family Options Team* provide 'innovative' youth and family friendly responses to young people who are experiencing difficulty living at home.

*Time for Youth* also assists young people with information, referral and linkage on youth specific issues, to the wider service system.

Traditionally *Time for Youth* has been a SAAP funded agency working with young people at the tertiary end of the service system. Specifically, young people who have been 'homeless', have been the clients of the agency.

The *Youth Accommodation Support Service* incorporates emergency and crisis housing, access to transitional housing and medium to long term housing and support:

- City Limits refuge provides accommodation for up to six weeks in a residential supervised congregate setting to 65 young people each year who are in crisis and have no safe housing options. Residents are allocated an accommodation support worker to provide continuity of care upon exiting the refuge. City Limits works collaboratively with other youth agencies in the region to facilitate optimum outcomes for young people
- 6 Transitional Housing properties all two bedrooms, managed by Barwon Youth with support from Time for Youth, who nominate young people with some independent living skills to reside in these properties
- Kids under Cover houses and bungalows are used on a flexible basis as longer term accommodation, as the need presents
- Support to four Office of Housing properties for young people leaving transitional housing

- Staffing assistance to the collaborative Office of Housing Opening Doors Youth Homelessness Entry Point auspiced by Barwon Youth

Time for Youth also hosts the Creating Connections Coordinator Position for the Barwon South West Region, exploring service gaps across the service system for homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness.

### **Cafe Meals**

Cafe Meals is a nutrition based program which works innovatively with young people to provide them with healthy meals and community connectedness. Instead of take away meals for \$3, a young person can purchase a meal for \$3 in a number of local cafes and eateries. Meals are subsidized to the value of \$12. Referrals come from a variety of sources such as other youth and community agencies, schools and friends and family of young people. Cafe Meals also undertake research into the nutrition of young people, provide skills development for young people around meals and nutrition and host free breakfasts for homeless or vulnerable young people.

### **XTG**

XTG is an outdoor education, mentoring and leadership program which takes internal referrals from the YASS and YAFO teams, of vulnerable young people who may benefit from the program. The uniqueness of this program is that it offers other interventions for young people at risk and complements the traditional work of the counselling, support and mediation. Young people are involved in a range of activities and individual and group goal setting with excellent outcomes both young people and their families which include increased connectedness to education, employment, families and their community. There is often increased self esteem and decreased family conflict.

### **Youth and Family Options Team**

The Youth and Family Options team comprises four programs:

#### **Finding Solutions**

- A program funded by DHS where young people are diverted from the Child Protection System to Family Services agencies to work with the young person and the family

#### **Integrated Family Services Previously Innovations:**

- A program funded by DHS assistance to families where young people are 12 – 18 and at risk of homelessness or reporting to DHS

### SAAP Youth and Family Reconciliation:

- This program works with young people 15 – 25 and their families where the young person is homeless or at risk of homeless with the aim of reconciliation or increased connectedness to family

### Reconnect

- A federally funded program for 12 – 18 year olds to prevent youth homelessness. Time for Youth host the mediation component of the program.

Referrals come to the YAFO team from a range of sources. Time for Youth are part of the Barwon Child First Alliance and receive referrals of adolescents and young people from Child First.

### *Emerging themes of Family Violence*

More recently Time for Youth have observed through our client statistics and data, observations and feedback, particularly where the young person was still connected in some way to their family, that generally, in a majority of situations, that family violence and conflict was occurring in some form.

Specifically Time for Youth staff found that while working with young people and families, violence featured strongly, with young people at a heightened risk of homelessness or involved in escalating conflict which would result in referral to Child First or reporting to Child Protection.

Sometimes the violence occurring included violence from one partner to another or a parent being violent towards a partner, children and/or young people. Time for Youth has contact with young people in a variety of family contexts including young people still living with a single parent, step family situations or a two parent family situation and across the socio economic spectrum. Through our focus on those young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, there are young people who have in fact left home and family because of family conflict in some form.

Another observation was also apparent. Young people were also part of the violence and were at times being violent towards parents, carers, siblings and pets. This 'adolescent family violence' could include verbal, physical or emotional violence. Some young people living now in a single parent family (often Mum as the only parent) had experienced family violence themselves as a younger child but appeared now to enact the aggressive behaviour that they

had been a victim of. Other young people became abusive when there was no experience of violence in their background.

### **The Enigma of Adolescent Family Violence**

Traditionally women, children and young people are seen as victims of Family Violence with males the main perpetrators of violence. Research verifies that in the majority of cases this is true.

Children, young people and women are then the victims who are vulnerable because of their size, financial dependence, developmental stages and their inability to be able to protect themselves against male perpetrators.

Clearly research reinforces this and children, young people and women must be protected both by raising community awareness and appropriate legislation and service response across the sectors.

The concept of Family Violence too, sits within Marxist Feminist theory and framework which reinforces the concept of male perpetrators of family violence in the majority of cases. Therefore even the discussion of the concept of adolescents and young people as perpetrators of violence within the family does not sit comfortably within the theory of Family Violence or systemic response which has been formulated in recent years.

### **Agency Undertaking of further exploration and Research**

Time for Youth leadership and management met to determine a strategy to further investigate the issue of adolescent Family Violence.

Successful applications for Best Practice funding from Department of Human Services allowed for further exploration and a plan to develop the learnings in this area within a local context.

### **Time For Youth Steering Group**

A steering group was formed from both internal staff and staff from another agency with which Time for Youth have an alliance and a history of working collaboratively - Bethany Community Support also based in the Barwon Region.

The steering group comprised:

- The CEO Time for Youth

- Manager, Client Services Time for Youth
- Team Leader, Youth and Family Options Team Time for Youth
- Manager, Community Programs Bethany Community Support
- Team Leader, Child and Youth Programs, Bethany Community Support
- Former staff member with academic interest in the area
- Program and service Adviser, DHS, SAAP and Family Violence
- Regional Integrated Family Violence Coordinator

This committee formed a brief on the area of work to be covered and the strategy about how this was to be undertaken.

The initial questions that were put to the Steering Committee were:

1. What research is there in the area of Adolescent Family Violence?
2. Who is currently involved in research or service delivery on the area of Adolescent Family Violence?
3. How prevalent is Adolescent Family Violence in the Barwon Region given the observations of workers within the agency?
4. What is the appropriate response to Adolescent Family Violence in the Barwon Region. How do professionals currently respond to this issue?

The Steering group set out terms of reference for the initiative. The Manager, Client Services was to chair the group with meetings monthly or as needed. The Team Leader of the YAFO team was the principal project worker for the initiative with other members of the steering committee to contribute their expertise, linkage and any other relevant information. A literature review also formed part of the research. A student within the Youth and Family Options Team also participated in initial research for this initiative and other staff participated as the initiative progressed.

### **Project Outline and Focus**

The outlines and focus were decided by the Steering Committee:

- Attendance at Integrated Family Violence network/other networks as relevant
- Project Officer role taken by the YAFO Team Leader / other staff involved as the project develops

- Project officer to undertake training through the Integrated Family Violence Network
- Train the Trainer model to be used to train Time for Youth/Bethany Staff. Time for Youth and Bethany to collaborate where possible with this project
- Review of other projects on Adolescent Family Violence
- Review of current literature on Adolescent Family Violence
- Undertake Focus groups/questionnaire for young people
- Undertake Focus groups/questionnaire for parents
- Feedback from staff re experience and observation with Adolescent Family Violence
- Development of Resources
- Other possible outcomes
- Evaluation

### **Continuing Progress of the Adolescent Family Violence Initiative**

#### Client Survey

A survey was devised and undertaken with families that were engaged by the Youth and Family Options Team and any families engaged and available with Bethany Community Support. All families involved were comprised of those who had an adolescent within the family.

This was a snapshot survey over the period of one week from the 3/6/08 – 4/7/08 and included all families involved with the services through this week. The survey focused on gathering information around the frequency and prevalence of family violence and more specifically, adolescent family violence.

Results from the initial surveys were analysed and overwhelmingly adolescent family violence featured in some capacity in every survey!

#### Information booklet for Parents

The focus was to include information for parents who are experiencing adolescent family violence.

- Myths and common beliefs
- The reality of adolescent family violence
- Definitions
- Strategies to deal with these issues in the family
- Community linkages and support
- Non judgemental resource focusing on positive solutions

### Information for Young People

This was focused on providing a snapshot of information about easy to use basic techniques to manage their emotions as well as providing them with brief information about support services and linkages to more positively manage their anger and emotions without blame.

### Linkage to Family Violence Networks in the Barwon Sth West Region

An unexpected outcome from this initiative was the positive linkage that occurred to the Regional Family Violence Networks and extra information and support that was provided through these and also support from the DHS Office of Housing Program Advisor and later Child Youth and Family Services

The project coordinator and leader of the YAFO team received extensive Train the Trainer training in Family Violence and was also available to distribute this information through professional development across the region.

Ongoing links with the Regional Family Violence networks have continued and Time for Youth is also now involved in the Working Party for the roll out of the Family Violence, Family Services, DHS Child Protection Partnership agreement.

### Identifying other Professionals working in the Area of Adolescent Family Violence

Research identified that Meridian Youth Services and Eddie Gallagher were the main agencies and professionals involved in work in the area of adolescent family violence in Victoria but the literature search also identified other research and resources as well.

### Training for Professionals within the Barwon Sth West Region

A full day of training was offered to professionals within the Barwon Sth West Region on 'adolescent family violence' using Eddie Gallagher as facilitator. Many youth and family service agencies identified adolescent family violence as an issue among families engaged in their service but workers were unsure often how to approach this situation and said they needed more information and strategies.

The training day was well attended and was held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

#### Specialist training for Time for Youth and Bethany Community support staff

Training was also provided by Eddie Gallagher on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> August for internal staff from Time for Youth and Bethany Community Support who were working with families with adolescents where the young people were exhibiting aggressive behaviour. This training specifically focused on the development and facilitation of groups aimed at parents who were experiencing AFV.

Training included:

- Assessing the suitability of participants for the groups
- Information needs for the facilitators
- Expose and definitions of AFV
- Structure of an 8 week program to ensure positive outcomes based on Eddie Gallagher's research
- Time for Youth was provided with a facilitator's manual
- Dates for follow up consultations with Eddie Gallagher
- The local context – Barwon South West Region

#### Pilot Program for Parents

In term 4 of 2008 an initial pilot program of 'Parent Power' commenced. This 8 week program was built on the 'Who's in Charge' group developed by Eddie Gallagher and focused on educating, supporting and providing options for parents. The group also looked at the impact of AFV on parents and the family as a whole, while not apportioning blame to either the parent/carer or the young person.

The pilot program accepted referrals of families that were involved with Time for Youth, Youth and Family Options Team and Bethany Community Support. The group was facilitated by experienced counsellors from Time for Youth and Bethany Community Support.

The program was formally evaluated at the completion of the pilot and reflected positive outcomes for the participants of the program. The parents reported

- An increased sense of optimism in their families
- Increased knowledge of strategies to help their family be more in control overall
- Some improvement in relationships with their young person
- Increased knowledge of and linkage to support services in their region

### Ongoing implementation of the Parent Power Group

Due to the success of the Parent Power Group, both in referrals and outcomes for the parents and young people, this group has continued to be conducted each term in 2008 and 2009. This has been endorsed by Time for Youth receiving some funding to facilitate this group in 2009 from the DHS Regional office in Barwon. Ongoing funding for Parent Power is currently being sought.

### Ongoing Focus of the Adolescent Family Violence Initiative

The Steering Committee was wound down at the end of 2008 but the focus on the area of Adolescent Family Violence continues within Time for Youth. While staffing changes across the agency impacted on the time frame for this initiative, the management and leadership team remain positive and enthusiastic about the need to continue to respond to this emerging issue and to better equip the community sector to deal with this issue.

### Outcomes for the Adolescent Family Violence Initiative

Overall, funding from DHS Best Practise Grants for the Adolescent Family Violence Initiative was effective in producing a number of outcomes that could not have been achieved without this Funding and providing the impetus for development of research, training and resources in the area of adolescent family violence, particularly in the local Barwon context.

Significant outcomes were:

- Development of localized and wider research on the area of adolescent family violence in the Barwon Sth West region highlighting adolescent family violence as a significant issue.

- Adolescent violence is not gender specific and may be inflicted by sons and daughters, while international research points to 75% of males and 25% of females exhibiting this behaviour, Time for Youth found that the percentages of males to females using violence in the family were quite similar in the Barwon Region
  - Adolescent violence in families happens across communities, social classes, cultural backgrounds and geographic locations. Middle class families have a higher incidence of adolescent abuse than do lower or upper class families
  - Some adolescents have been victims of family violence and may model this behaviour within the family, while other young people believe that they are owed or entitled to get their own way at all costs. It is indeed a complex issue!
  - While adolescent violence is most commonly directed to mothers it can be inflicted on fathers, step parents, carers, siblings and pets
  - 60% of adolescent violence towards parents occurs in single parent families and that mothers were victims of violent young people 97% of the time
  - Some parenting styles can encourage a young person to be abusive
  - Abusive adolescents make a choice to be violent – it is a learned behaviour
  - Adolescents can learn to control their behaviour
  - Other reasons for Adolescent family violence can include bullying, experiences of trauma, drug and alcohol misuse, societal influences eg the role of women, peer influence
- Development of resources for parents and young people responding to the issues of adolescent family violence
  - Training sessions held for Time for Youth professionals to better equip them in their work with complex young people and families
  - Training for other professionals in the Barwon South West Region unsure of how to deal with AFV
  - Launch of the Adolescent Family Violence resources at Skilled Stadium in 2009 attended by over 50 people from government, community and youth sector
  - Development and implementation of the Parent Power group offered to parents of young people 12 – 18 who are exhibiting violent behaviour within their family
  - Recognition from the Family Violence, community and youth sector in the Barwon South West Region that Time for Youth are a focus for this complex work and have developed expertise in this area

- Recognition of the effectiveness of the Parent Power group with Time for Youth receiving funding from DHS Child and Family Services Barwon
- Development and continued strengthening of community linkages in the area of Adolescent Family Violence and wider Family Violence in the Barwon South West Region
- Involvement of Time for Youth in the working party to develop the alliance between Family Services, Family Violence agencies, Child Protection
- Continued strengthening of the alliance between Time for Youth and Bethany Community Support

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