
From: Graham Pringle [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, 3 February 2022 11:57 AM
To: Mental Health Select Committee
Subject: Submission to the Mental Health Select Committee

I make this submission to the Mental Health Select Committee on behalf of Youth Flourish Outdoors Ltd (YFO), in which charity I am the Program Director.

I note, in making this submission, the National Mental Health Commission (NHMC) Vision 2030 Roadmap with its recommendations of significant overhaul to mental health policy including early intervention, increased roles for community organisations and changes to funding distribution.

For context; YFO is a health promotion charity delivering adventure as therapy to young people with complex mental health concerns. We view mental health through an holistic and integrated mind-body complex trauma perspective. Many of our young participants are refusing school, causing significant and de-stabilising stress within the family and some are involved with youth justice. Also, and significantly, about 50% show dissociative symptoms and we routinely deal with pathological levels of dissociative response amongst young people as young as 10 years. We also provide training in our practice framework and this is gaining in popularity in education, mental health, community services and youth justice professionals. The framework has been developed by YFO and is the subject of a PhD project due for completion this year. The framework is informed by best practice in working with young people with complex trauma and dissociation and applies to interdisciplinary approaches equally well.

Like professionals seeking our framework YFO staff are four year trained with a relevant degree and a year of adventure leadership training. The work is with groups and individuals. Several types of data are gathered and applied through a course of intervention. This data is clinical and not for research purposes. However, we can indicate general trends such as an average Adverse Childhood Experiences scale of 8 and feedback informed (FIT) score (for the entire team) of .8 which is a significant and moderate effect. This was explained by the academic (Dr Will Dobud) who provides team supervision and has helped us set up the FIT process, as effective as the typical psychotherapist is expected to achieve.

This indicates that:

1. Effective therapy can be delivered by a four year trained professional in the context of adventure as therapy for young people with complex trauma, and
2. The level of problem that this workforce can cater for includes some of the most serious mental health problems.

Further, the framework is used in other disciplines and portfolios effectively as indicated by customer feedback. These conclusions mean that a para-professional workforce can relieve the pressure on our registered therapists. Of not also is that young people complete their program . There is a miniscule dropout rate unlike the dropout rates reported by traditional psychotherapy as delivered under Better Access and by headspace and like organisations. YFO is as effective and all participants complete their intervention. The benefits to the social systems in which the young people move are significant.

The key ingredients are;

1. A human rights enhancing practice of delivering feedback informed services through activities that young people readily engage with.
2. A data driven intervention that is reflexive to changing needs, and
3. A workforce of four year trained (para) professionals.

The benefits of a larger workforce of this type in reducing the mental health burden are obvious.

Some other features of this type of work are that our staff work from home in community and go to the young people's homes/schools and and engage them in outdoor activity in community for 3 hour sessions. This approach enables an holistic intervention of psychoeducation, physical activity, community engagement, time in nature such

as suggested by the Vision 2030 Roadmap. The interventions are engaging and respond to the family's needs and routine outcome monitoring through feedback ensures that this is maintained at all times. No external oversight is required as the customer decides what is effective.

Of particular note is that YFO staff are employed at (SCHADS-SACS award 3.1 to 4.4) which is markedly less than the fee's of registered therapists and yet is commensurate with their level of training and responsibilities. There are significant savings and a greater completion rate possible by expanding this workforce. This would be popular as indicated by the varied professionals who access our training.

Problems that prevent this approach from succeeding:

1. Funding, is typically driven toward 6 -7 year trained registered therapists who are expensive and as effective as the proposed para-professional workforce but tend not to engage young people through to completion. The cynic would say that governments are paying for something that they are not getting under the current funding structure.
2. An available cross trained workforce is possible but is created by organisations rather than systemically. For example Teachers, Social Workers and Youth Workers are training in adventure and/or our trauma informed framework and effectively applying the framework with demonstrated impact. There is no cross training process being driven by government. The Vocational training system has courses that would create this cross trained workforce however they do not align well between training packages, YFO intends to create a cross training package of adventure based youth work. Other cross trainings are possible. But this is driven by need at the organisational level and is not systemic.
3. A para-professional workforce is not worked into current policy. In the NDIS (for example) a one year trained Support Worker costs about \$29 hr and a registered therapist \$190 hr. Our four year trained staff receive about \$44 per hour. Yet this para-professional workforce delivers outcomes, as demonstrated in our 2021 data, that is more effective than support work and more engaging than talk therapy by a registered therapist. Unfortunately the charge out rates within the NDIS price guide do not cater for the middle group. The price guide expects a one year trained worker or a 6-7 year trained registered professional. YFO operates as a fee-for-service charity with no 'funding'. Instead we are growing on the back of our effectiveness and relevance but are restricted in that the funds are not always available, at the deserved wage level of our staff, in NDIS participants plans. The systems do not encourage a para-professional workforce.

Solutions:

1. Invest in training a para-professional cross trained workforce
2. Provide payment systems that encourage fee-for-service employment of this para-professional workforce
3. Require routine outcome monitoring and holistic interventions that engage and respond to changing needs of young people and families

I am available for detailed explanation if required

We wish the Committee every success.



Graham Pringle
Program Director

Youth Flourish Outdoors Ltd
PO Box 280 Mapleton QLD 4560
www.yfo.org.au | www.facebook.com/youthflourishoutdoors

YFO is proud to work on Country and to acknowledge Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture, ancestors and Elders