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**RECONNECT PROGRAM
2005/2006 ACTION RESEARCH REPORTS
SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS**

***REPORT TWO: QUESTIONS OF NATIONAL
SIGNIFICANCE REPORT***

PORTER ORCHARD & ASSOCIATES

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1. Introduction

This report summarises ninety-four Reconnect services Action Research (AR) contributions, which have been taken from the Self Evaluation Reports, prepared for FaCSIA. One hundred and sixty eight AR contributions have been summarised for analysis in this report.

Last year saw a significant departure in the methodology and structure, of this equivalent report. In the preceding three years, the report had utilised the Questions of National Significance (QNS) as the basis for investigation of themes and the structuring of the report. In a continued attempt to increase the access of services to the different strategies that might be employed by services this years report adopts the same format for analysis as the 2006 report.

2. Methodology

Each of the 168 AR questions has been categorised as per last year according to target group, target organisation, issue, and methodology as well as providing a summary of each AR strategies planning and action. This information is then recorded in a database with the same format as was created in the previous year.

This database was developed to both provide ready access for services and the Action Research Committee (ARC) to the questions that were tackled in the 2005-06 year as well as to assist the analysis of their content.

The database takes each organisation's AR questions and summarises them using the fields specified in Table 1. Included in the table is a descriptor of each field.

Table 1: Database fields

Field name	Descriptor
Agency code	Unique identifier to each Reconnect service provided by FaCSIA
Target Group 1	Primarily identifies the family members that are being worked with or targeted in response to the AR question
Target Group 2	Identifies the cultural background amongst other aspects of people that are worked with or targeted in response to the AR question
Target Agencies	These are organisations that are particularly targeted as part of the response to the AR question
Issue 1	Is an issue that the AR question is seeking to address
Issue 2	Is an issue that the AR question is seeking to address
Method 1	Is one of the ways in which the service has tackled the issue
Method 2	Is one of the ways in which the service has tackled the issue
Summary of Planning & Action	This attempts to try and capture in brief what the service has planned and undertaken as part of the AR question
Summary of Observations & Reflections	This attempts to try and capture in brief what the service has observed and reflected as part of the AR question. A comment about the absence of client feedback or the details of an evaluation that was undertaken was made when these were not provided.

Providing this information within a database enables services and the ARC to conduct their own investigation into areas that might be of interest. Each of the field types

such as Agency Code through to Target Agencies has a “filter” attached to the set of data within that field. By clicking on the filter, a searcher can select one of the options within that field to search on. When a field is selected, only those AR questions that contain that field appear. For example, selecting *Young people* in the Target Group 1 filter will bring up all of the AR questions that targeted *Young people* only. The searcher will then have the option of refining this search further by clicking on the filter for Target Group 2 and selecting a cultural group eg *CALD Chinese* and this time the searcher will only see those AR questions that were targeted at *Young people* from a *CALD Chinese* background.

The searcher could also further refine the search by selecting a target agency and method types using the filters at the head of those columns. However in order to commence a new search, the searcher must return to each of the filters that were used previously and select *show all* in each filter. (Porter Orchard & Assoc 2006)

2.1 Limitations of the methodology

The limitations of this process for collecting and analysing AR contributions are the same as for the previous years report and so the following comments have been extracted from that report:

A clear constraint in this process is the extent to which different initiatives have been evaluated as part of their AR cycle, that is observations collected from a range of stakeholders, data gathered on outcomes for young people and so on. Fewer observations can make it more difficult to provide a meaningful reflection, on the acceptability and/or effectiveness of an approach. This then makes it difficult when doing an analysis to make suggestions about whether group work might be a better bet in response to a particular issue rather than individual work and so on.

Also the extent to which Reconnect services have investigated the effectiveness of an approach in the first instance can also add weight to whether or not using this sort of intervention is likely to make a difference.

The limitations on the database that has been created are that the target groups, issues, and others have not been selected by the service carrying out the AR question, but rather imposed after the fact by an external consultant that was not directly involved with the project. This could mean that the different categories such as target group and issue that have allocated have been incorrectly identified. It is more likely however that this will be more the case with the issues and methods rather than the target groups and organisations. Where this does occur, the actual information about what was done is not altered, rather the clustering of different questions will be changed and hence comparisons of what works for different issues could vary.

(Porter Orchard & Assoc 2006: 5)

2.2 Further points of clarification:

Before beginning the analysis of the AR contributions it is necessary to make mention of the following caveats as they provide further insight into the material provided by services. These points include:

- That the majority of services did not directly address in their self-evaluation reports their key insights and learning and/or changes to service delivery as a direct consequence of their action research. Most of the commentary that is made in this report has been unpacked from services' reflections or observations that have been recorded within their AR questions. There were a number of services whose reflections were on the action research process rather than what was uncovered through the action research,
- That generally case studies prepared by services were not incorporated into the AR analysis as many were casework examples and did not offer insight into particular strategies that were trailed through the AR framework,
- That although the majority of services offered two AR contributions for analysis some services were exploring as many as five AR questions. and
- That although some services were clearly building on and developing the previous years AR explorations in this years contributions a few others seem to provide the same AR contribution at the same point of progress as in the previous year.

3. Analysis of the four database fields

The collation and analysis of AR questions has been examined as previously mentioned across four main categories and includes:

- Target groups,
- Target organisations,
- Issues, and
- Methods of response.

These areas are consistent with last year's categories so as to allow for easy comparisons between the two reporting periods.

3.1 Target Groups

The target groups listed for target group 1 are seen in Table 3.1. The number of AR questions being explored by services for each target group is also listed in this table

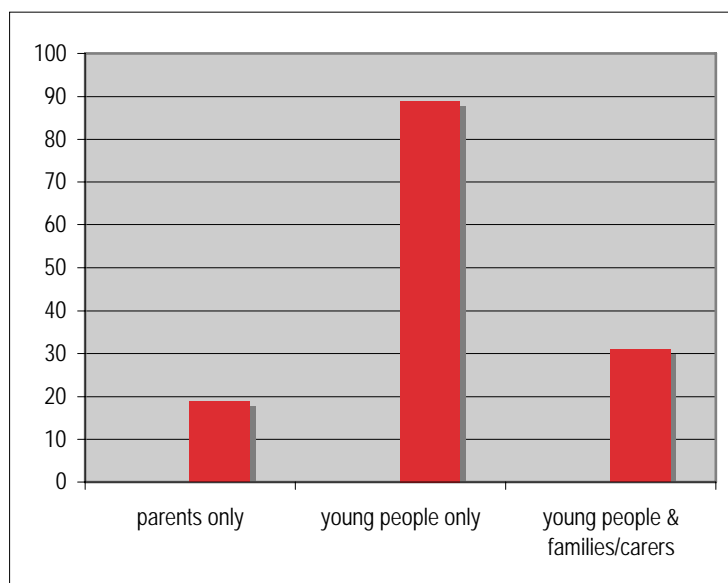
Table 3.1: Number of AR questions for target group 1

Target group 1	Number of AR questions
Young men	13
Young women	10
Young people	66
Parents	17
Young mothers	1
Young men & fathers/significant others	3
Young people families/carers	31
Temporary carers	1
Not specified (usually organisations)	26
Total	168

As might be expected the single largest target group where AR questions are being explored is with *young people* only with 66 questions being addressed by services. *Young people & families/carers* with 31 AR questions being explored make up the next largest group followed by *parents* only where 17 AR questions are being addressed.

The combined number of AR questions targeting *all young people* is actually 89 i.e. 13 AR questions addressing *young men* only, 10 AR questions targeting *young women* only and 66 *young people* only, representing about 53% of all the AR questions being explored by the Reconnect services. The combined number of AR questions being explored by *parents/carers* only is 19 questions, representing just 11% of the total number of AR questions being explored. This ratio was similar to last year's scenario. Figure 3.1 illustrates clearly the comparisons between these three main target groups.

Figure 3.1: Comparison of the number of AR questions targeting parents only, young people only and young people families/carers.



As was mentioned in last years analysis, it is not possible to draw conclusions as to whether the difference between the numbers of AR questions involving young people only as opposed to parents only is a reflection of the extent to which each Reconnect service is family sensitive or family friendly. However it might be useful for services to reflect on this and to ask themselves what would it take to become more family sensitive or family friendly. The range of strategies that services employed to work with parents and/or young people will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

3.2 Responding to specific cultural or other groups

Some services, especially specialist Reconnect services tackled AR questions that targeted young people and families from very specific cultural groups or indigenous backgrounds. Others chose to target those who identified as GLBT or lived in rural areas. Table 3 shows the number of AR questions that were specifically targeted towards assisting these groups. As can be seen in Table 3.2 the largest number of these AR questions, which is 24, has been targeted toward young people and/or families from *indigenous* backgrounds. When all of those AR questions targeted at those young people and/or families from *CaLD* backgrounds are combined a total of 13 is recorded

The most salient point to note is that the great majority of services AR questions i.e. 67% did not specify or target a cultural group, or any other of these often disadvantaged groups listed in Table 3.2. A similar scenario was also noted in last year's analysis of AR questions. It might be worth services reflecting on this and considering why this might be the case. Is it that different cultural groups, indigenous, or GLBT young people and/or families are catered for in the course of everyday service delivery or is it because services are not focusing specifically on servicing these groups and perhaps should be?

Those services that are specifically targeting the needs of these groups through their AR questions are generally doing so because they have become aware that their

service has not been servicing these groups or not servicing them well and were keen to not only build their understandings of specific groups, but also their capacity to respond to them.

It would seem (as was the case in the previous years analysis) that the level of expertise held by some Reconnect services such as Indigenous focused services, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and other CaLD specific workers within some Reconnects as well as GLBT specific services, is very under utilised by other more generalist Reconnects. This reinforces again the need for an effective way to readily communicate information and expertise between the services in a format that is easily searchable or transferable.

Table 3.2: Number of AR questions recorded in Target group 2

Target group 2	Number of AR questions
CaLD	5
CaLD Cambodian	1
CaLD Chinese	1
CaLD Iraqi	1
CaLD Horn of Africa	1
CaLD Sudanese	1
CaLD Vietnamese	3
GLBT young people	6
GLBT young people & families	1
Indigenous	24
Rural	12
Sub total	56
Not specified	112
Total	168

3.3 Target organisations

Table 3.3 shows the number of AR questions being explored by Reconnect services with specific targeted organisations. As was the case last year the majority of these questions or 39 of the 70 AR questions are being explored with *secondary schools*. This is none to surprising given that schools have been identified as primary sites for the early intervention of homeless for young people. Generally services are working with schools to improve the uptake of young people from schools into their service. The next largest category identified is the AR questions that target other *service providers*. The other service providers group may include other welfare services, health services, housing services or even some of the target organisations already listed. The rest of the 70 AR questions are spread reasonably evenly across a variety of organisations.

It is important to see Reconnect services collaborating with other organisations when exploring the issues that affect young people and their families. Obviously when

resources are shared and services work together to improve outcomes for young people and their families the chances of success must be greater.

Table 3.3: Organisations that are targeted as part of AR

Target organisations	Number of AR questions
Centrelink	4
Department of Housing	1
GLBT services	1
Indigenous organisations	2
Juvenile Justice	2
Own organisation	2
Primary Schools	1
Referring Schools	1
Secondary Schools	39
Secondary schools & primary schools	1
Secondary Schools & service providers	2
Service providers	13
Service providers & indigenous orgs	1
Not specified	98
Total	70

3.4 Issues

Whilst there are two columns of issues, identified as *Issue 1* and *Issue 2*, there is in reality no distinction between them. As was done last year they have been arranged in two columns so that more than one issue can be recorded against any one AR question. The name of the issues, and the allocation have tried as best as possible to reflect the nature of the issues spoken about in each AR question. They have also tried to be consistent where possible with the way in which issues were categorised in the previous years analysis.

Of the 168 AR questions being explored by services 9 were not allocated an issue. For the most part this was because no issue was specified by the service and it was difficult to specify one from the information provided by the service. The 32 different issues documented in services AR and recorded in the database along with their frequency of occurrence are listed in Table 3.4. Thirty-two services had two issues that they were dealing with in their AR explorations and these were recorded as such. Often these issues are connected and hence need to be thought about jointly, for example drug and alcohol issues and risk taking or drug and alcohol issues and family conflict.

It was difficult at times to decide from the information provided by services what the most pressing issue for a particular young person was when multiple issues were noted. Generally the issue/s that seemed to represent all of them most accurately was chosen.

Table 3.4: Issues that were the focus of the AR questions

Issue 1	Number of AR questions	Issue 2	Number of AR questions
Anger / violence	10	Access incl wait times for services	2
Behaviour	2	Complex issues	4
Connection to community	18	Consumer participation	3
Cultural enrichment opportunities	1	Coordination of services	6
Family conflict	17	Drugs & alcohol	4
Independent living skills	1	Education assistance	1
Lack of engagement	5	Gambling	1
Lack of ways of measuring outcomes for clients	1	Health	1
Mental health issues	7	Juvenile Justice issues	1
Mother in prison	1	Lack of accommodation	2
Parenting	8	Lack of activities	1
Referral pathways	9	Lack of support	6
Resilience	3	Not linked to Educat'n, training & employm't	3
Risk of leaving school	14	Self identity	4
Risk taking	5	Support to rural & remote	18
Uptake of service	27	Transition to secondary school	4

As is apparent in Table 3.4 the most common issues for AR exploration is the *uptake of the service* or the lack of uptake, which was the focus for 27 questions. This is usually work done by the service to encourage early help seeking behaviour by young people and/or families. It is important to consider this issue alongside *referral pathways*, as at times it was difficult to decipher the real difference between these issues from the information provided by services. If we combine these issues we note that 36 questions are concerned in some way with assisting young people and their families with their connection to a service or services, which is very similar to the 33 questions AR recorded for the previous year.

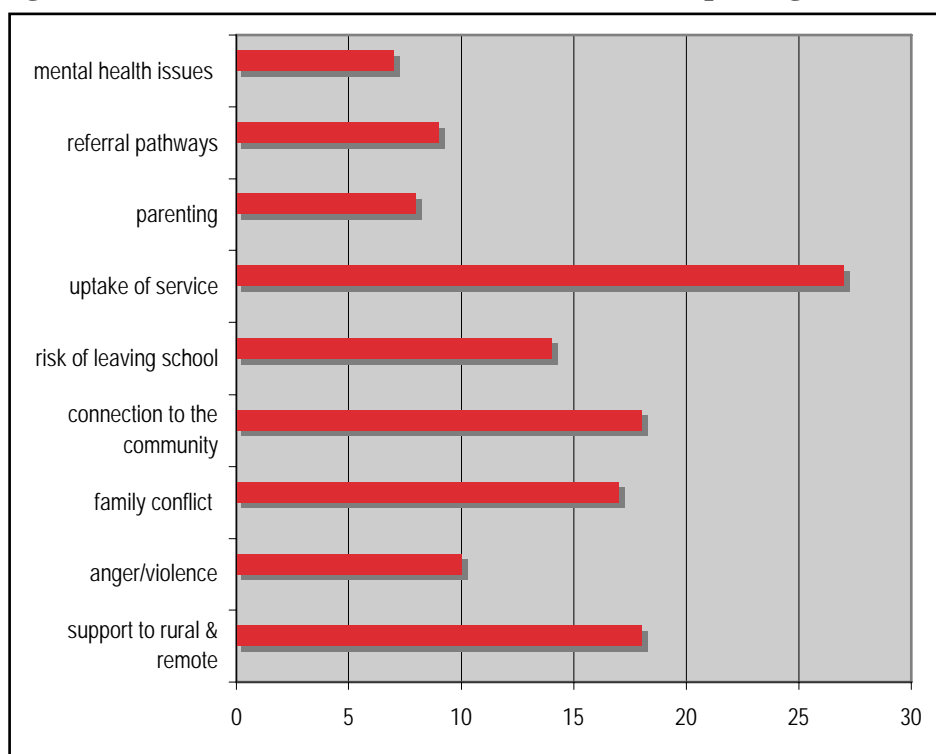
The *lack of connection to community* for young people and at times their families is another important issue that services are grappling with in their AR explorations. There are 18 AR questions attempting to address this issue of marginalisation within the community, unsurprisingly 13 of these are aimed at young people most of whom are indigenous or from CaLD backgrounds. By creating opportunities for young people to feel involved in their schools, cultural, social and/or sporting lives they are trying to remedy the situation. The methods of creating these opportunities have generally been varied but include, engagement of key services, investigation, activities and community capacity building.

The lack of support services in rural and remote communities is an issue that many services (especially those located in rural areas) are trying to deal with. The huge distances that services have to travel to meet the needs of these communities is problematic as it means that services are using large amounts of time in travel rather than in actually working with young people and their families. This scenario has led to services being both active and creative in their AR explorations in efforts to achieve the best or most efficient ways that they can utilise their resources in servicing as many as possible in these remote communities. This year saw 18 AR

questions being explored by services in this category of *support to rural & remote*, with the key methods of achieving these goals being through the *engagement of key services, investigation* and *service promotion*.

There were 17 AR questions that identified *Family conflict* as the issue they were addressing. Without doubt issues of family conflict often involved many other issues such as drugs and alcohol, anger/violence, behaviour or risk taking by young people and/or their parents. Generally speaking most families that services are working with may be experiencing some level of conflict. Once again a multitude of different methods are being tried to assist families in conflict, the most common being *investigation* or *use of model/framework*. Figure 3.4 illustrate more clearly the most common issues being dealt with by services graphically.

Figure 3.4: Most common issues that services are exploring with AR questions



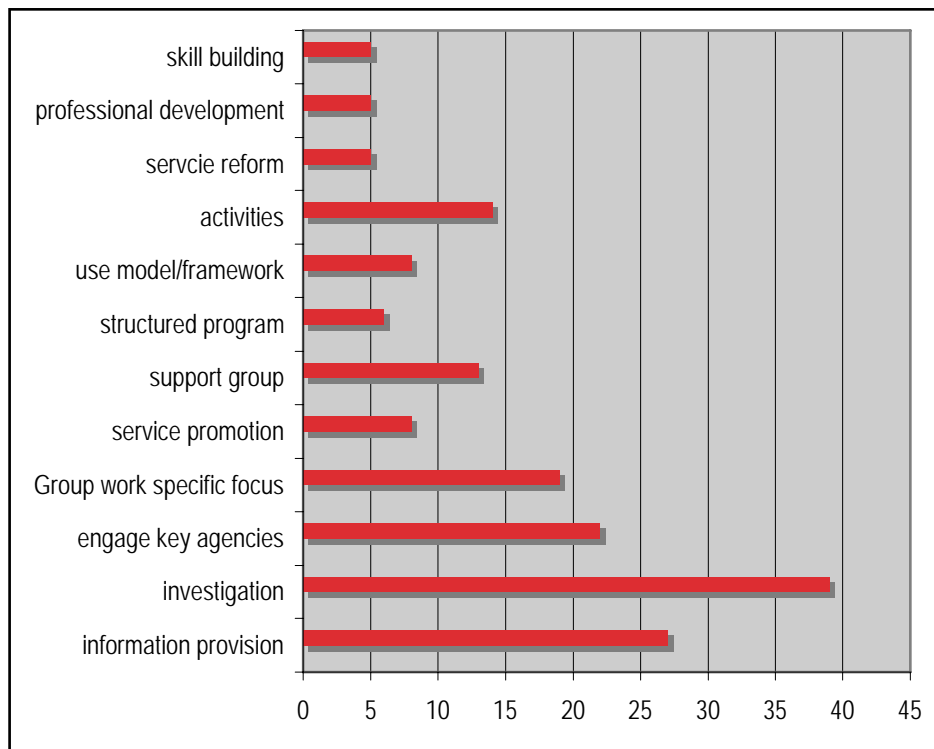
3.5 Methods of responding to issues

As per the previous year two columns were allocated for the different methods (or strategies) used for responding to various issues by services through their AR. However the rationale for this is the same as for issues, in that it allows for the inclusion of more than one method being used as part of any single AR question. Almost 30% of all AR questions included more than one method/strategy for responding to particular issues. As can be seen in Table 3.5 33 different methods have been identified as being used by services for responding to the issues of young people and their families.

Table 3.5: Different methods of responding that were used as part of AR

Method 1	Number of AR questions	Method 2	Number of AR questions
Activities	4	Activities	10
Art Therapy	3	Adventure program	2
Capacity building	7	Camp	3
Cultural activities / celebration	2	Creative Arts	1
Education / homework program	1	Engagement	4
Engage't of key agencies	22	Group work; specific focus	2
Family / Community activities	1	Information provision	15
Forum	8	Investigation	39
Group work; specific focus	17	Professional development	5
Information provision	12	Skill building	5
Mentoring program	1	Support group	13
Parenting program	4	Target group specific workers	1
Peer support training	2	Use model / framework	8
Resource tool	3		
Service promotion	8		
Service reform	5		
Structured program	6		
Telephone support	1		

The single largest response to issues by services through their AR is via some kind of investigation. This is none to surprising given the necessity to fully understand and come to grips with an issue before trying to fix it. Much of this investigatory work has been through research processes such as surveys, interviews, focus groups etc. A number of these services begin with this approach and then trial a different method as they move into the next AR cycle. Figure 3.5 depicts the top twelve methods of responding to issues (combining method 1 and 2) that were employed by services as part of their AR.

Figure 3.5: Twelve most common methods of responding to issues

The next most common way services responded to issues through their AR is through *information provision*, where 27 questions included this approach. This strategy included running information sessions for parents on, drug and alcohol, young people and violence, gambling in the community or meeting with school staff and providing information on local community services for young people amongst others. Alternatively information has been provided to specific groups i.e. parents, teachers, service providers etc through the creation of printed matter or even web sites.

The third most common approach used by services is through the *engagement of key agencies*, where 22 AR questions included this approach. Often services when confronted with an issue not so common to them or cultural groups they may not have worked with before they look to those agencies or services currently involved with or specialising in working with these issues or groups. For example when trying to increase the uptake of indigenous young people and families into Reconnect services many have engaged in meetings or activities with Indigenous organisations to improve relationships and to better understand how to engage with and service indigenous people.

The provision of *group work with a specific focus* is another significant category that services employed to address specific issues that were presented by young people and families. There were 17 AR questions using group work processes, (as compared to 20 in the previous year) some of which included the delivery of programs for young people in resiliency, life skills, self-harm, or literacy & numeracy. Although group work with a specific focus was generally run for young people they were also used to meet the needs of parents, for example structured parenting programs.

4. Effectiveness of the more commonly used methods

This part of the report examines some of the more commonly used methods or strategies so as to better understand them and to garner some direction from the experience of service users with regard to the effectiveness of these approaches.

4.1 Investigation

As mentioned the investigation method used by services is usually concerned with exploring the needs of a specific group or a specific issue. This strategy often begins with gathering observations at the outset of an AR question and hence some of the questions that used this approach had not completed an AR cycle. Some of the investigations included examining past statistics, Internet research, conducting surveys/interviews or simply discussing observations with the staff team or consultation with stakeholders.

Seven AR questions used the investigatory method to explore how they might better engage indigenous young people and their families in their services or how they might more generally respond to the needs of the indigenous community in their local areas. These investigations often involved discussions or forums with the indigenous community or indigenous organisations. In a few instances those indigenous young people already involved in a service were interviewed to better understand how the service might improve their uptake of referrals of other indigenous young people. One of these services was very concerned about the issue of petrol sniffing amongst indigenous young people and so in collaboration with other relevant services a community forum was held to come to grips with the problem and try and develop a plan of action for the future. From this investigation a community Drug Action team was formed and will continue to explore this issue and keep it on the wider communities agenda.

Some of the other services were investigating the issues of young men and violence, young women and self harm, the needs of marginalised youth and the needs of their local school community. Unfortunately much of these investigations are in their early phases and hence conclusions are not easily drawn from the work that has been done or these conclusions or new directions for the future have not been reported by services. Noteworthy however for one service is that after investigations with a group of marginalised young people it was found that they had not lived in the housing estates for long were bored and felt excluded from most youth events or activities as they were not attending school and were nervous about attending police organised events. Also poor infrastructure in the local area limited their ability to participate in much that was going on. The service is now actively working with these young people and other service providers to create activities and events that these young people might more easily be part of.

4.2 Information provision

Similar to what was found last year a number of services have used this approach to respond to particular issues. Information provision as mentioned has been defined as activities that specifically provide information about topics to young people and/or families whether it is indirectly or directly. This has included a variety of formats such as verbally providing information i.e. through forums, in meetings with other services, through to specific groups for parents on drugs and alcohol or health issues.

It has also included producing printed information packages on such topics as gambling (which included where to get help cards and phone numbers), parenting resources and resource lists for teachers and parents on ADHD. Although parenting programs also provided information, these were treated as a separate group because of the number and significance of these. In general printed materials when developed by services in the form of resource lists or fact sheets were delivered in information sessions, support groups or meetings.

As many as 13 of the 27 information provision strategies that were provided by services targeted Secondary schools within their local catchments. When we examine some of these information provision methods more closely we are able to see that as many as 7 information sessions (some ongoing) on a variety of issues were provided for secondary schools, either to teaching staff, school counsellors, students or parents. Much of this work also involved continual liaison with school staff and regular attendance at key school meetings. In fact it is important to note that many of the information sessions provided to Secondary schools happened alongside other strategies and often included printed materials on the said topic or were delivered inside support groups. A good example is provided where staff from a Reconnect service became aware of the increasing numbers of young people in Secondary Schools with ADHD through meetings with schools, they then liaised with a specialist ADHD service (LADS) in the area and jointly delivered information sessions to staff about the issues of ADHD and how best to work with it, resource lists and fact sheets on ADHD were then developed and distributed to schools.

Many services noted the increase in referrals from schools that occurred post the delivery of information sessions. Also mentioned in a number of cases was that the continued presence of services within the school through the delivery of information sessions has improved the robustness of the relationship with the school and hence the confidence in the school in working with the service in the future.

Another good example of information provision as part of an AR cycle is where one service in collaboration with other service providers (including a domestic violence service) had become concerned with the extent of violence from young people to parents. After some consultation with the parents who had suffered the violence it was discovered that these parents wanted more information on the issues and how to help change their children's behaviours. They also wanted support groups for themselves and their children. This service was able to develop information sheets and resources for parents and initiated a support group for the women involved in the violence. This service concluded that through this work they have increased their profile within the community with adult services and improved their ability to engage and work with parents.

4.3 Engagement of key agencies

The engagement of key agencies is another common strategy employed by services to tackle a variety of issues. This strategy is often used in the initial phases of the AR cycle when services are trying to better understand a specific issue/s or group that they are dealing with. Early engagement of other services especially those relevant to the issue is a useful way of coopting support around the issue and building on the experience of the service around an issue or a particular group. The engagement of services does not usually happen in a vacuum and is usually part and parcel of a wider

strategy or a number of small strategies. In general Reconnect services were concerned with the engagement of other service providers when employing this strategy. Many of these other service providers were spoken of in general terms i.e. a housing provider, a mental health service, or a health service. As well they were often concerned with the engagement of more than one service provider. For the purposes of this analysis Secondary Schools have not been described as agencies and hence not included in the engagement of key agencies discussion.

A good example of the engagement of key local service providers as an initial strategy in addressing the issue of poor coordination between services is mentioned by one service when they invited relevant players to be part of a meeting to discuss the necessities of setting up a youth interagency network that would meet regularly. The early engagement of services allowed for the sharing of both community information and service information and enhanced the ability for mutual trust such that when the parameters for the new network were discussed the players were better informed and more open and honest in their dialogue.

One of the Reconnect services involved in this strategy of engaging key agencies through the development of their African Youth Project offered some insights into why this strategy is so useful. These included the opportunity to build on previous work that has already occurred between agencies, that responses to issues or groups become well coordinated, that it is possible to build on the trust already forged by other agencies and also that work becomes more efficient as you don't have to reinvent the wheel, as you are simply building on the work that has already been achieved.

4.5 Group work; specific focus

Group work; specific focus refers to group programs that were run for young people and/or their families, with a specific issue in mind that needed addressing. Thirteen of the 17 AR questions using this strategy were directed at young people and often delivered through work done with Secondary schools. Many of the issues that services addressed through specific group work were varied and included the risk of leaving school early, issues of anger/violence and family conflict.

Many of the services commented on the success of the group work process rather than actual outcomes for those in attendance. It was noted on a few occasions that group numbers need to be small and group dynamics managed appropriately for success. Three services stated that the young people who had attended the group wanted further session or at least a follow up session later in the year. It was also mentioned a number of times how the forging of new relationships for many of these young people had definitely been positive for the participants self esteem.

One service who was working with a school and running two group sessions a week for year 8 and 9 students at risk of leaving school early reported some successes. Teaching staff noted attendance levels for these students had improved, and behaviours in normal classes had also improved. Respect from students toward the teaching staff had noticeably changed possibly because participants in the group had started to feel good about themselves due to some positive experiences at school. It was also mentioned that a few other students were keen to be part of the group work sessions.

4.6 Activities

Activities, the fifth most frequent method used by services with 14 questions, refers to the running of sport, arts based, recreation, cultural or other activities either as the primary focus or as part of other methods such as case work or information provision. The purpose of the activities varied from being short term attempts to occupy young people through to the activity being a means of engagement in order to try and link young people to workers and/or other services. If we combine the methods of camps with activities then 17 AR questions have explored these for young people and at times their families.

Some services used activities as a way of 'breaking the ice' with groups of young people prior to setting up a support group or specific group work program. This allowed trust to form and relationships to be built before forming as a regular group. Having fun together with other young people can break down barriers such as age, sex and culture.

Importantly through activities workers were able to bond with clients or possible clients in positive ways and had time to talk through some of the issues affecting their lives especially those of conflict with the family. Outings or activities allowed for real time out away from the issues of the family and this is positive as it allows for reflection. However for some young people the intrinsic value of the activity in and of itself is enough and may lead to better outcomes through increased self-awareness or self-esteem.

In general activities have been used to target young people rather than jointly with their families the exceptions to this is seen when services wanted to engage young people from CaLD backgrounds who have usually done this by working with young people and families jointly within their communities, or in a couple of examples where the activity was set up to allow young people and their families to share positive time together.

4.7 Support groups

Of the 13 support groups being run by services in their AR explorations 8 of these are being delivered to parents to support them with their children who they may be in conflict with. It was reported by services that many parents enjoy the informality of the support group and the friendship and advice offered by other parents. One support group has now been running for a number of years and reports being rejuvenated every so often with the influx of new parent participants

Two services report the development of support groups for parents and/or young people where their child might identify as GLBT and have more recently come out. One of these support groups has not yet begun however the other reports that many of the young people who attend the group are at significant risk of homelessness as a result of family perceptions of their sexuality or family breakdown and that the group has been a fantastic resource to make contact with these young people and provide early intervention to parents to prevent homelessness.

A support program was put in place for indigenous young people making the transitions from Primary school to Secondary school. The caseworker supporting the

group began transporting these young people to the Secondary school. Once these young people were actually attending the Secondary College it was soon identified that these young people did not have the skills equivalent to their school level. The support group has now evolved into the alternative education program and has offered many of these young people the opportunity to catch up on their education in a small supportive environment that meets their individual needs. The program has continued to evolve with greater emphasis placed on social skills and community involvement.

4.8 Use of model/ framework and service reform

As illustrated in Figure 3 there were 8 AR questions that employed the use of a new or improved model/framework and 5 that used service reform methods as ways in which to respond to a variety of issues and improve service delivery. These methods seem to have a good deal of overlap and hence they are being considered together. For example a service who was keen to be more family inclusive adopted a new model which was to work jointly in a co therapy model when working with families. In doing this staff had to undergo training in co therapy work and would also require greater supervision and further they must discuss all cases as a team. Clearly in the process of adopting this new model or way of working the service had been reformed.

Some of the other reforms or new initiatives carried out by services were the development of a new case management form and a new case management review form, the exploration over time of single session therapy as a way of curbing the wait time for potential clients, the use of the narrative approach in counselling work with families and young people and the use of work books for phone counselling for those in remote areas. It is early days for many of these changes but services are reporting some initial benefits. For example it would seem that young people and families are responding well to the single session therapy approach but also suggest that when the session ends the clients should leave armed with some new strategies to try when working through conflict with each other in the future.

One of the services who had been struggling to service their large rural catchment area well changed the way in which they allocated cases and other related work such that now each worker is allocated to a specific geographical region. This appears to be working well for both clients and other services. They report that the consistency of worker and the day in which the worker is in the area makes it easy to remember appointments and to form relationships.

After much consultation and collaboration with the Mens Outreach Service in Broome the Reconnect service has developed a new model for working with young offenders upon leaving Juvenile Justice institutions. The model is called the re entry program and is based on the adult re entry program run by Mens Outreach service. This is clearly a new position for the service and a new approach to their work. The model has not yet been implemented so the service was unable to provide evidence of its success as yet.

4.9 Service promotion

Service promotion refers to work done to promote an individual Reconnect service to its local community or communities. This year there have been 8 AR questions that used service promotion as a method for addressing a particular issue/s. Not

surprisingly in 75% of these cases service promotion has been used to increase the uptake of clients into the service. Some did this by visiting particular organisations including Centrelink, Indigenous organisations and Secondary schools and providing service information to key staff. Others began attending service network meetings more regularly or went to some lengths to engage particular target groups. For example one service has developed the Relink information sessions that targets indigenous young people in an attempt to promote both the Reconnect service and Centrelink services.

A couple of services have reinvented their promotional materials such as brochures and fliers so as to improve the awareness of the Reconnect service within the community. Most of these services used these new brochures when promoting the service at meetings and forums.

4.10 Forum

There were 8 AR questions that explored the use of forums as a mechanism for providing information to young people and/or their families and the wider community more generally. Although collected separately forums can be considered a subset of information provision, and have been discussed in some detail previously in this section within this category. In the majority of instances forums have also been used by services as a way in which to promote their service. In all but one case services have reported good attendance at their forums and noted the useful relationships that have formed as a result of delivering the forum/s. The outcomes for those in attendance at these forums are not clear from the information provided by services.

4.11 Professional development & skill building

There were 5 AR questions that explored methods of skill building and 5 concerned with professional development. These categories seem to overlap however for the purposes of this analysis they were collected separately. Professional development has been associated with the Reconnect service staff skill development and skill building where the service has provided training either for other service providers or the community at large as a community capacity building measure.

As part of AR Reconnect staff have undergone professional development in a variety of areas including grief and loss training, working with GLBT young people, understanding the impact of mental health issues for families and understanding the different ways young people learn.

All services note the value of specialised and regular training for particular staff such that they are able to up skill and meet the challenges that they are faced with in their work. Consequently services reported an increase in staff confidence in their abilities to deal with issues and managers increased confidence that they are providing a quality service to the community.

A number of Reconnect services have provided or co-opted other services to deliver some interesting training sessions across Australia. A couple of services preferred train the trainer approaches A good example of *skill building* is provided by a service that noted how stressed Secondary teachers are and were keen to assist them to develop better methods of coping in the classroom. So they developed a package for

teachers that provides for regular and professional supervision through their service. Sadly the outcomes of this supervision were not provided.

5. Conclusion

It is encouraging to read about the variety of ways in which Reconnect services throughout Australia are exploring and responding to the myriad of issues faced by young people and families within their local communities through their AR. What has become increasingly clear from these explorations is that there is simply not one best approach when working with young people and their families, but multiple. Certainly some approaches as we have seen are favoured more often by services than others, for e.g. information provision, investigation and engagement of key services.

However what seems to be the critical factor is more about *how & why* the approach was developed, implemented and then progressed, rather than the fact it was a particular approach or method. Generally speaking many of the more rigorous AR explorations demonstrate well that if the Reconnects Bests Practice Principles are used as the guiding force behind any given approach when working with young people and families then the chance of a successful outcome becomes likely. The reflective nature of the AR process allows services to continually appraise their approaches in the light of these principles.

By way of concluding and in so doing considering AR directions into the future it might be useful for services to reflect again on the different groups cultural or otherwise (e.g. GLBT and rural young people & families) that they are working with or even targeting. Such that specific groups will be appropriately represented within the work done by Reconnect services throughout Australia. Likewise that family inclusive and /or family sensitive practice continues to be at the forefront when working with young people within the Reconnect programs.