



## **SYC Youth Focus Group: *Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People***

### **Report to Child Development Council, May 2019**

#### **Introduction:**

SYC was pleased to be invited by the Child Development Council to host a Focus Group, providing an opportunity for young clients of SYC to have their opinion heard about a mechanism that will ultimately measure how South Australian young people are faring.

SYC is a not-for-profit organisation centred on employment, training and youth services, with a core purpose to positively affect the lives of people in need. Last year SYC helped more than 55,000 people in the areas of Learning, Wellbeing, Home and Working. Of those Australians SYC worked with, over 17,600 were young people below the age of 25 years.

At SYC we aim to empower the people we work with to create a life without disadvantage, to build sustainable independence and to experience positive wellbeing in all areas of their life. Included in this, is allowing the people we work with to have agency and be self-determining. The opportunity for SYC's client base to provide feedback to a framework that will ultimately have impact and influence on public policy, relating to children and young people, is both important and empowering.

Nineteen young people, aged 13 to 18 years, who are currently involved in SYC's Alternative Learning Programs, participated in the Focus Group process. Eleven of the nineteen, additionally participated in the formal SYC Youth Focus Group, held on 9 May 2019.

#### **About the participating cohort:**

Participants in the SYC Focus Group were students from SYC's Alternative Learning programs – HYPA Bolt and Studio-West. Both programs utilise South Australian Department of Education *Flexible Learning Options* funding. They are group based alternative education approaches for young people who have become chronically disengaged from mainstream educational options, but who are happy to learn in a group setting with additional learning and wellbeing support services in place.

Utilising a positive psychology approach, SYC Alternative Learning focuses on an individual's strengths and establishing personal values as a basis for education. We seek that students build confidence to be an active participant in the classroom and succeed in their learning and wellbeing.

Participants have likely not enjoyed their past schooling experience, they may be dealing with trauma, current or in their past and require additional levels of support and flexibility in their learning, than what is typically available in a mainstream school. Participants in SYC's Alternative Learning programs may be experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, have engaged or are at risk of engaging with the youth justice system, and/or experiencing high levels of anxiety, depression or mental health challenges. As a result these students are usually significantly disengaged within

one or all of the three dimensions referred to within the Department of Education's *Student Engagement Matrix* – wellbeing, relationships and involvement in learning.

*Please see Appendix 1: Lived experience and geographical location consultation matrix, specifically outlining the participating cohort's lived experiences.*

### **Focus Group Structure:**

In initial discussions with the Child Development Council it was discussed that a formal focus group would pose a central question, "What is your opinion on what indicators and measures are important to establishing whether a young person is developing and thriving?" In further breaking down this question, the following areas would be considered:

- Health: to understand that young South Australians are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy;
- Safety: to understand that young South Australians are safe and nurtured;
- Wellbeing: to understand that young South Australians are happy, inspired and engaged;
- Education: to understand that young South Australians are successful learners;
- Citizenship/transition to adulthood: to understand that young South Australians participate actively in society e.g. are involved in their community, transition well as they grow up and prepared for their lives as adults.

In consultation with SYC Alternative Learning, it was appropriate to reframe the central question, utilising more accessible language to the cohort. Additionally, participating SYC Alternative Learning participants were provided with a week of exposure to the *Outcome Framework* and central question, to support their understanding and engagement in what was being asked of them. This allowed participants to have thinking time to form their opinions.

*Please see attached Appendix 2: SYC Youth Focus Group: Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People, collateral provided to participants, outlining purpose, questions and schedule for the formal Focus Group session.*

In summary, the central question was reframed, as follows:

**We want your opinion on what a successful, happy or thriving young person looks like.**

**How would you describe that?**

**Currently, how do you think the areas of health, safety, wellbeing, education and transition to adulthood are described and measured in terms of success?**

**Could this be done better and what would be more accurate? e.g. do report cards accurately measure a young persons level of success at school?**

The formal Focus Group was held on Thursday, 9 May 2019, and on Monday to Wednesday of the same week, the *Outcome Framework for Children and Young People* was a point of discussion for a short period on each day.

### **Focus Group Outcomes:**

From notes taken during class time and during the formal Focus Group session, the following thoughts were captured.

### **HEALTH/WELLBEING**

Note: During the preliminary class discussions and in the formal focus group session, the areas of health and wellbeing were talked about together, as this is a key component of day-to-day discussions within SYC Alternative Learning.

Describe a young person who is mentally and emotional healthy:

- Happy – smiling;
- Socialising;
- Engaging in activities/communities/other social groups;
- Energetic;
- Ability to self-regulate;
- Being able to leave the house;
- Ability to access relevant support services;
- Higher social intelligence;
- Sound support network – healthy relationships;
- Feeling valued/understanding own value;
- Safety, stability, predictability;
- Attendance at school.

Describe a young person who is physical healthy:

- Engaged in physical activity – be able to regularly exercise;
- Decreased engagement in smoking;
- Knowledge and application of maintaining healthy eating;
- Maintain healthy sleep hygiene;
- Weight isn't a relevant factor in determining a person health due to complexities impacting on body weight e.g. you can be skinny and still not healthy;
- Eating healthy food;
- Looking after yourself and looking well.

Currently what is measured?

- Grades e.g. SACE;
- Behaviour records e.g. suspensions;
- Who is accessing services;
- Engagement in social media/screen time;
- Engagement in sporting groups/community groups;
- Time spent outdoors;
- Engagement in class/attendance at educational facility ( what's going on below the surface);
- Weight e.g. being overweight may be a sign of being unhealthy, however shouldn't be relied upon;
- Visits to the hospital/doctors.

How could it be done better?

- More measures of screen time;
- More focus on mental health, not just physical health;
- Social workers accessible in schools, doctors' practises;
- Quizzes can be unreliable – just click to get through it rather than give it any other thought;
- Surveys with better opportunity to respond – not just yes/no responses;
- Community involvement;
- Focus Groups;
- Educational and effort engagement reports;
- Young people need to understand the value behind their responses;

- Need education around why it is important to participate;
- Open ended questions rather than yes/no responses;
- Choice, agency, sense of purpose – understanding why data is being collected and how it will make a difference.

## **SAFETY**

### What do young people need to feel safe?

- Connected to and supported by family;
- Home, safe, stable – feel nurtured and able to focus on other aspects of your life, rather than safety;
- “Being safe and feeling safe”: whilst you may feel safe, does that mean you are? If you are physically safe, is it still ‘thriving’ if you don’t feel safe?
- Routine, predictability;
- Relationships and connection to community including good/positive relationships with teachers and staff at school;
- Trustworthy adults/support networks – understanding who they can trust;
- Access to safe and supportive educational facility/supports at the learning facility.

### Currently how is this described or measured?

- Bullying statistics;
- Homelessness stats;
- Crime rates;
- Record data on interactions with police, complaints procedure, positive and negative experiences with Police;
- Access to education where they feel safe: add data on proportion of young people who access support services/ have someone they feel safe talking to on site.

### How could this be done better?

- Surveys;
- Negative experiences with police – they can be viewed as unsafe and untrustworthy;
- Failures of the justice system;
- Programs at school to address safety;
- Negative experiences with teachers and staff at school, who seem to be not interested in student wellbeing.

## **EDUCATION**

### What do young people need to be successful learners?

- Respectful relationships between students and teachers and school staff;
- Regular and consistent attendance;
- SACE is an advantage but not everything/not sure of the true value of SACE;
- Understanding course work without necessarily being good (excelling) at it;
- Feeling safe to ask for help;
- Need diverse and inclusive access to education/learning opportunities - can be successful with part-time engagement – could be a larger contributing factor to determining whether or not the young person is successful.
- Young people can gain success in education without completing SACE. Not every young person learns in the same way. Very narrow measure of intellect.
- Young people don’t also understand the relevancy of SACE in their world/life.

- Do you need SACE to continue to further education? If so why is this the case?
- The system of SACE doesn't always acknowledge the creative approaches of young people. Don't feel as though it caters for diverse needs of learning for young people. What life skills does SACE equip young people with that will support them in being prepared for adulthood?
- Inspiration to learn – being motivated and enjoying what you are learning;
- Education holds value to becoming an adult.

Currently how is this described or measured?

- Attending all school days that you are required to or meeting flexible attendance requirements;
- Feeling safe enough to approach teachers/seek support;
- Higher level of participation in learning activities;
- Feeling connected to education;
- Focused;
- Priority placed on English and Maths;
- Engaged in a meaningful educational pathway that caters for individual needs and still provides access to further education;
- Preparedness for adulthood – preparedness to be able to be a successful community member.

How could this be done better?

- Grades – problematic – doesn't give true indication of engagement in education. Pigeon holes students. Has an adverse impact on many young people as grades don't always reflect the amount of effort/level of engagement. Ways that assessment tasks are presented don't cater for diverse needs – grades don't reflect the diverse learning abilities/talents of young people.
- IQ/intelligence;
- SACE completion/graduation;
- Attendance record;
- Effort grade;
- Respectful relationships between staff and students;
- Greater variety of subjects, with a greater agency in education;
- Ways to measure engagement through creative outlets.

*Further notes:*

SACE does not feel relevant to many young people – there is a lack of understanding about the importance behind why they need to achieve SACE.

In order to achieve the proposed measurable outcomes in education, young people need to be feeling safe, have adequate mental, physical and emotional health and feel a sense of connection with their place of education for more than just learning.

Attendance shouldn't be limited to mainstream schooling/further education or measured by full time attendance, young people should be measured on their engagement in some sort of education – don't limit the measure to full time equivalent.

## **CITIZENSHIP/TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD**

Note: In an early iteration of the *Outcomes Framework*, SYC believes “Citizenship” was referred to as “Transition to adulthood”. We felt that “Transition to adulthood” was more accessible language to the SYC Focus Group participants – and this was utilised during the Focus Group.

### What do young people need to prepare for transitioning to adulthood?-

- Knowledge of:
  - Budgeting;
  - Expected bills and how to pay them;
  - Preparedness for Employment – resume writing, cover letters, how to access employment services, applying for a job, interview skills, gaining employment;
  - Taxes;
  - How to access services, Medicare, Centrelink;
  - Bank accounts;
- Driver’s license: support to get it;
- Public transport, how to navigate your way using public transport;
- Computer literate;
- How to get a rental house/property, e.g. access to support services like HYPAs Get-a-place;
- Money literacy;
- IDs, birth certificate, tax file number – how to get these documents;
- Preparation for employment;
- Support with enrolling to vote – including understanding why it is important to have a voice;
- Knowledge of worldly events in state and country;
- Access to Government services e.g. Medicare and Centrelink;
- Understanding insurance.

### Currently how is it described or measured?

- Employment and unemployment rates;
- How much money an individual makes – savings and spending;
- Qualifications.

### **For further information, please contact:**

Lauren Dimas  
Head of Strategic Partnerships  
Email: [ldimas@syc.net.au](mailto:ldimas@syc.net.au)  
Mobile: 0478 404 457