



BoysTown



Federal Budget Submission

2010-2011

Authorised By:

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Overview

BoysTown is a front line service well aware of the current issues impacting on marginalised children, youth and families. This submission has been prepared to give voice to the contemporary issues impacting on those living on the fringe in our community and how the Australian Government can take action to alleviate their social and economic stress.

BoysTown wishes to highlight to the Australian Government the urgent need to provide responses to:

1. Women and their children who are fleeing domestic violence.
2. Children and young people who are being bullied, have mental health issues and/or are at risk of suicide.
3. Provide a 'fairer go' for Early School Leavers (ESL's) receiving services from Job Services Australia; and
4. The recently mooted changes to current input tax concessions for PBI's that could see increases in the cost of operations and subsequently lead to a direct reduction in services to the most disadvantaged in our community.

Key recommendations made in the submission include:

Recommendation 1:

That the Australian Government recognise the provision of domestic violence support services to be a core responsibility and that increased funding be allocated from the 2010-2011 budget to increase the availability and capacity of domestic violence support services to deliver safe accommodation, the availability of psychological support and medical and legal assistance.

Recommendation 2:

That the Australian Government establish collaborative partnerships with providers of online counselling and information modalities to research, develop and implement strategies that will increase help seeking amongst Australian children and young people in relation to bullying, suicide and mental health issues.

Recommendation 3:

That the payment structure to youth specialist JSA providers be modified to:

- 3.1 Enable full outcomes at either 13 and/or 26 weeks to be payable for the achievement of Certificate 2 courses for ESL clients or:**
- 3.2 Increase service fees to compensate for loss of outcomes and additional servicing for ESL young people**
- 3.3 Move all ESL's to minimum Stream 2**
- 3.4 Increase Employment Pathway Credits for ESL clients (or minimum S3 to enable increase support)**

Recommendation 4:

That input tax concessions not be withdrawn for NFPs working in the social service sector.

Introduction

BoysTown is a national organisation and registered charity which specialises in helping disadvantaged young people who are at risk of social exclusion. Established in 1961, BoysTown's mission *is to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life.* BoysTown believes that all young people in Australia should be able to lead hope-filled lives, and have the capacity to participate fully in the society in which they live.

During 2009 BoysTown responded to over 260,000 contacts from children and young people through Kids Helpline. In addition 6,000 young people were supported in engaging with education and/or employment including 300 young people that participated in our social enterprise programs. BoysTown also worked with homeless families, young parents and women and children escaping situations of domestic violence. A more detailed overview of BoysTown's operations is attached as Appendix 1.

Consistent with our mission and informed by our service delivery experiences BoysTown wishes to place before the Australian Government critical issues that we consider needs to be addressed in the forthcoming Federal Budget.

Issue 1:

The Australian Government needs to invest in accommodation and therapeutic responses to women and children in relation to domestic violence.

In the Australian component of the International Violence against Women Survey it was found that 57% of women respondents reported experiencing at least one incident of physical violence or sexual violence over their lifetime¹. Each year in Australia approximately 350,000 women will experience physical violence and 125,000 women will experience sexual violence². Almost one in four children in Australia has witnessed violence against their mother or stepmother³. New government research shows that each year, violence against women costs the nation \$13.6 billion⁴.

The impacts of family and domestic violence (DV) are significant. In addition to the practical impacts it can have on housing and financial situations, victims of DV also describe immediate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Long-term impacts on a victim's psychological health and well-being such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, poor self-esteem and guilt are also common⁵. For children who experience DV there is much empirical literature that indicates a host of problematic behaviour and emotional impacts in the short-term⁶. Social learning theory also suggests strong likelihood of intergenerational transmission in the longer term⁷.

However as the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children recently noted despite Australian Government's repeated statements of intent, little funding has been provided to support women and their children escaping domestic violence⁸. Current services are unable to respond to the rising incidence of reported domestic violence in our community⁹. The availability of

¹ Mouzos, J & Makkai, T 2004, 'Women's Experiences of Male Violence: findings from the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)', *Australian Institute of Criminology, Research and Public Policy Series*, vol. 56. Available: <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rpp/56/>

² Australian Federal Government (2009), 'The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women: Immediate government actions', April 2009

³ Australian Federal Government (2009), 'Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009-2021', March 2009

⁴ KPMG (2009) *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*. Safety Taskforce, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government

⁵ The Benevolent Society (2009), 'Moving Forward: Women's journeys after leaving an abusive relationship', *Social Policy and Research*, June 2009

⁶ Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, (2000), 'Children, young people and domestic violence', Issue Paper 2, 2000.

⁷ Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Smutzler, N. and Sandin, E. (1997), 'A Brief Review of the Research on Husband Violence. Part II: The Psychological Effects of Husband Violence on Battered Women and their Children', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 2, 2, 179-213.

⁸ Time for Action, The National Council's Plan for Australia to reduce violence against women and their children 2009-2021. A Snapshot, March 2009.

⁹ Australian Federal Government (2009), 'Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2009-2021', March 2009: 75

psychological support to women and children, which is essential to respond to the unresolved traumas related to the experience of violence, is limited.

A new development being experienced across domestic violence services is the referral of newly arrived migrant and African families. For example in the BoysTown Domestic Violence Program 9% of women and children were African and 7% were of Pacific Islander nationality¹⁰. The need to address the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people and children adds to the operational costs of domestic violence programs.

Adequate and sustained funding is required to develop facilities which will offer a holistic approach to meet the needs of families who have experienced domestic and family violence. This means to strengthen service and workforce capacity; increase the access to safe accommodation; and ensure equitable access to services to cater for refugee families, those with disabilities, or those who speak another language.

Recommendation 1:

That the Australian Government recognise the provision of domestic violence support services to be a core responsibility and that increased funding be allocated from the 2010-2011 budget to increase the availability and capacity of domestic violence support services to deliver safe accommodation, the availability of psychological support and medical and legal assistance.

¹⁰ <http://www.boystown.com.au/downloads/rep/BT-Evaluating-BoysTowns-Domestic-Violence-Service.pdf>

Issue 2:

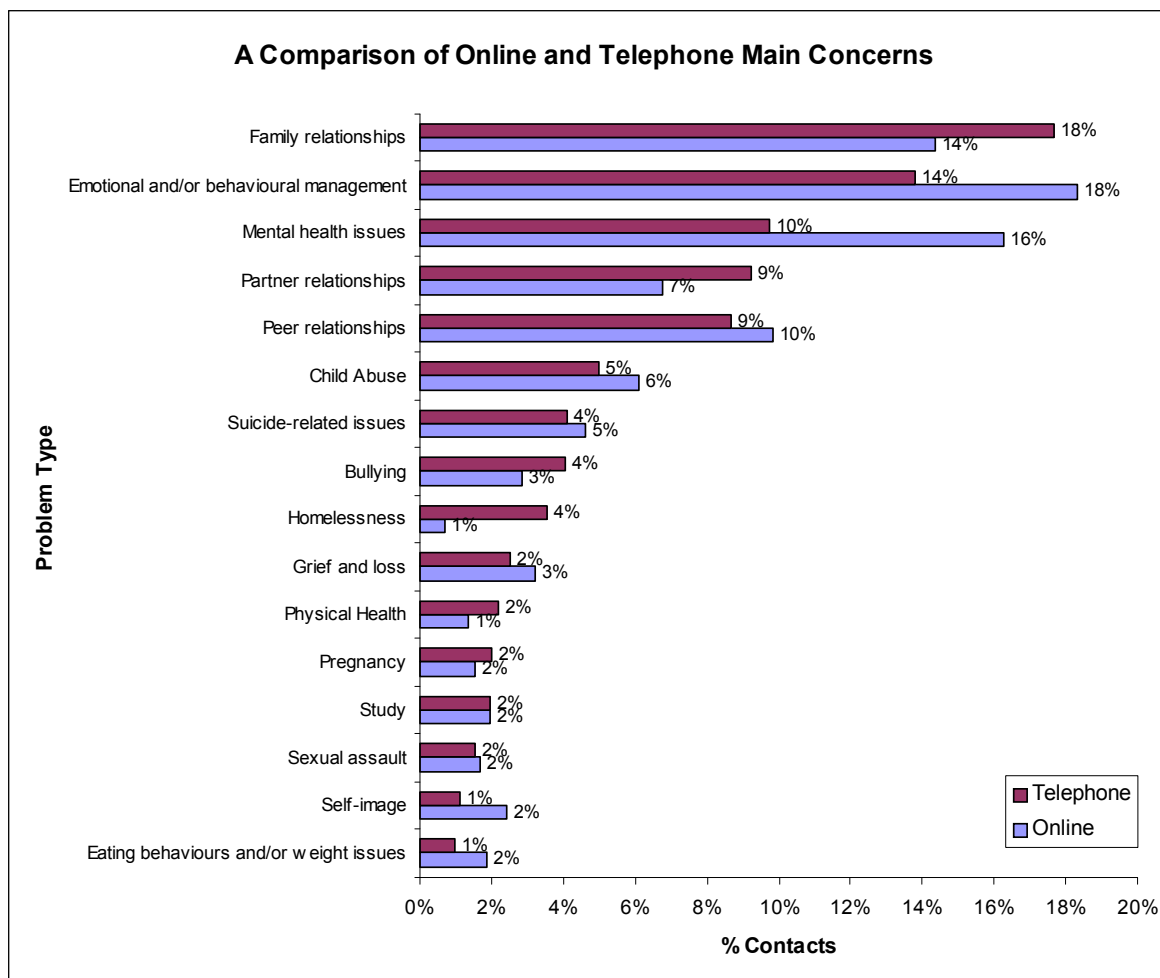
The Australian Government needs to enter partnership arrangements with providers of online counselling to more effectively support children and young people in overcoming bullying, suicide and mental health issues.

There is currently wide spread community concern about bullying, suicide and mental health issues amongst children and young people. Contemporary communicative behaviour of children and young people needs to be considered, in developing any preventative and intervention strategies to support Australian youth. Australian children and young people have embraced internet technology. A 2009 survey undertaken by the ABS indicates that an estimated 96% of children aged 12-14 regularly accesses the internet¹¹. Similarly 93% of those aged 15-17 and 85% of the 18-24 year old group are internet users. International research confirms that many children and young people will access the internet for information and support if their peers or family are unable to assist¹².

In the 10 years Kids Helpline has offered web and email counselling, greater proportions of young people have consistently sought help online for some of their more severe concerns. This trend continued in 2009. Mental health, suicide, emotional and/or behavioural management, self-image and eating and weight issues continued to be presented online at much greater rates than via telephone counselling (see following bar graph).

¹¹ Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2009. (ABS)

¹² Neal, D.M., Campbell, A.J., Williams, L.Y., Ye, L., Nussbaumer, D. (n.d.) "I did not realize so many options are available" : cognitive authority, emerging adults, and e-mental health. Unpublished research paper, University of Western Ontario, Ca.



2009: Kids Helpline Data

As noted, this help seeking trend is occurring internationally. Contemporary research involving international child helplines suggests that children with complex issues, such as thoughts of suicide, feel more comfortable in using online modalities for seeking help as it provides them with a feeling of greater anonymity and control over their communication. In terms of KHL counsellors' experience with online counselling modalities we find that web and email appear to be providing a door through which highly marginalised young people can have access to counselling.

Consequently any successful engagement strategy with young people in relation to these potentially life threatening issues must involve the encouragement of help seeking behaviour and the delivery of counselling and support through online modalities. The Australian Government needs to work with current providers of online counselling to increase the capacity of services to provide this response.

Recommendation 2:

That the Australian Government establish collaborative partnerships with providers of online counselling and information modalities to research, develop and implement strategies that will increase help seeking amongst Australian children and young people in relation to bullying, suicide and mental health issues.

Issue 3:

The implementation of the Compact with Young Australians unintentionally inhibits education and employment outcomes for the most marginalised of Australian youth.

The Compact with Young Australians seeks to increase the social inclusion of young people by ensuring that their educational qualifications are at least to a Grade 12 or equivalent level. BoysTown supports the intent of this policy. Through our Job Services Australia (JSA) centres and social enterprise programs BoysTown is actively partnering with Government in delivering services that are designed to achieve this objective.

However the current administration of elements of this policy through the JSA program is flawed and in fact mitigates against achieving educational and employment outcomes for these young people.

Young people who have disengaged with education commonly have a range of issues that act as a barrier to further participation. In research currently being undertaken with Griffith University a profile has been developed of the most common barriers young people experience in reengaging with education or employment. These barriers are outlined in the Table below based on preliminary data from the ongoing research project:

Social Inclusion Barriers	Before BoysTown (n=99)	Benefits from Participation in BoysTown (n=122)
No work experience	46%	27%
Main source of income		
- Work	24%	50%
- Government income support payment	37%	35%
- Nil income	39%	15%
Offending behaviour		
- Time in detention	17%	3%
- Trouble with the police	39%	33%
- Difficulties with controlling anger	40%	13%
- Getting into physical fights	48%	13%
Regular substance abuse	29%	17%

Social Inclusion Barriers	Before BoysTown (n=99)	Benefits from Participation in BoysTown (n=122)
Lack of accredited qualifications	84%	58%
Literacy		
- Poor writing skills	35%	29%
- Poor reading skills	33%	21%
- Difficulties with daily tasks	43%	35%
Numeracy		
- Poor numeracy skills	52%	46%
- Difficulties with daily tasks	68%	45%
Lack of future aspirations	41%	7%
Poor wellbeing	32%	8%
Low self esteem	19%	7%

Young people who are early school leavers (ESL's) will not reengage with education unless intervention occurs in their social circumstances to ensure that they have both the necessities of life and a belief that it is possible to achieve a better future. This requires organisations such as BoysTown; working with marginalised young people to expend considerable resources to provide psychological support, advocacy, training and remedial education to develop the required pre-requisites for further engagement in the education system.

However the introduction of new participation requirements for young job seekers classed as Early School Leavers mitigates against the provision of this essential support to marginalised youth to achieve the educational outcomes intended in the Compact with Young Australians. In brief JSA providers working with marginalised young people can not claim sufficient payments through the JSA program to ensure consistent services to marginalised youth as:

- ESL young people are not in a stable enough living situation to commit to completing an education qualification that requires two (2) semesters of enrolment. Subsequently most young people opt to undertake a Certificate 2 course. This educational outcome if achieved does not provide the JSA service provider with a payable outcome. This reduces the level of support that the JSA providers can offer to marginalised young people.
- JSA providers who are youth specialist have high numbers of ESL registrations. It is not possible to collect sufficient Employment Pathway funds to offset both the costs involved in a young person participating in an educational course as well as the support required to ensure that the young person completes the course.
- If an ESL young person finds employment as an alternative to continuing education the JSA provider is unable to claim a brokered outcome payment. As stated this reduction in revenue means that marginalised young people can not be supported in the JSA system.

It is BoysTown's concern that the current implementation of the Compact with Young Australians through the JSA program will not be successful in achieving Australian Government's policy objectives. The current payment structure to JSA providers specialising in working with young people needs to be changed to

ensure adequate funds are made available to support ESL in achieving education or work outcomes.

Recommendation 3:

That the payment structure to youth specialist JSA providers be modified as follows:

- 3.1 Enable full outcomes at either 13 and/or 26 weeks to be payable for the achievement of Certificate 2 courses for ESL clients or:**
- 3.2 Increase service fees to compensate for loss of outcomes and additional servicing for ESL young people**
- 3.3 Move all ESL's to minimum Stream 2**
- 3.4 Increase Employment Pathway Credits for ESL clients (or minimum S3 to enable increase support)**

Issue 4:

Not for Profit organisations working with the most disadvantaged in our community should continue to receive input tax concessions.

The Productivity Commission's research report into the Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector canvassed the possible withdrawal of current input tax concessions for charities. The rationale for this removal of benefit was to ensure that competitive neutrality between Not-for-Profit and for profit organisations existed in sectors where there was perceived competition and to ensure transparency in the level of support provided by Government to the sector.

It is interesting to note that in the Productivity Commission report it was acknowledged that Government needed to continue its current level of financial support to the sector to ensure that services continued to be provided to the most disadvantaged. The issue under investigation is the mechanism by which this was to be undertaken. The report canvassed full cost recovery in funding contracts with Government and/or direct subsidies to the Not-For-Profit sector as possible options to replace the current input tax concessions.

BoysTown has submitted two (2) detailed submissions in relation to matters raised in the reports prepared by the Productivity Commission – please refer to <http://boystown.com.au/>. It is not intended to detail these arguments in this paper, however it should be stated that the withdrawal of tax concessions to the Not-for-Profit sector will seriously curtail existing service provision to the most disadvantaged in our community.

The issue of competitive neutrality only applies to contestable markets. In the NFP sector contestable markets generally occur where Government decides to fund a particular social good. In this situation NFPs can compete with for profit services in tendering processes. However unlike for profit organisations, NFPs also operate in uncontested markets. In these circumstances there is an unmet community need that Government chooses not to fund due to competing claims on scarce Government monies. In these situations NFPs will seek to respond to these unmet community needs either through cross subsidisation of services via internal reallocation of resources and or fundraising. Some in both Government and the NFP sectors describe this as 'filling gaps'. The Productivity Commission found that most Not-for-Profit organisations involved in the delivery of social services received a third of their income from Government and the remaining two thirds through fundraising and fee for service activities.

Consequently any intention to withdraw input tax concessions from NFPs and replace these subsidies by providing full cost recovery in Government contracts including market based salaries for staff will only be compensatory to those organisations already predominantly involved in delivering Government services. For all other organisations reliant on their own fundraising efforts, this will have a devastating impact on their continued capability to deliver services to the most disadvantaged.

For example Kids Helpline, Australia's only national telephone and online counselling service for children and young people is able to currently respond to about 300,000 out of a total of 490,000 attempts to reach the service by children and young people. The barrier to responding to more contacts is funds. The Government contributes approximately one third of Kids Helpline's operating costs. Consequently despite there being an undeniable community need the service exists due to BoysTown's ability to raise funds from the community and corporate partners. The withdrawal of input tax concessions would result in

increased staff costs which BoysTown would be unable to fund. The inevitable consequence in this scenario is that Australian children and young people will not receive the level of support currently offered.

In relation to direct grants it is likely that this option will introduce a range of new complexities into funding arrangements with the Not-for-Profit sector. It is unclear how these arrangements would be more cost effective. Furthermore the independence of the Not-for-Profit sector would be severely compromised if this initiative was introduced.

Recommendation 4:

That input tax concessions not be withdrawn for NFPs working in the social service sector.

Appendix 1: Profile of BoysTown

About BoysTown

BoysTown currently provides a range of services to young people and families seeking one-off and more intensive support including:

- Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling and support service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues;
- Accommodation responses to homeless families and women and children seeking refuge from Domestic/Family Violence;
- Parenting Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young mothers and their children;
- Parentline, a telephone counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory;
- Paid employment to more than 300 young people each year in supported enterprises as they transition to the mainstream workforce;
- Training and employment programs that skill approximately 6,000 young people each year, allowing them to re-engage with education and/or employment, and
- Response to the needs of the peoples of the remote Indigenous communities of the Tjurabalan in Western Australia.

BoysTown has identified the importance of preventative interventions, aiming to build relationships with people using modalities that facilitate trust and consequently engenders disclosures about hidden and complex issues impacting on the well being of service users. Some of the most serious issues facing the young people who access BoysTown's services are mental health, self-injury and thoughts of suicide. BoysTown is able to support these young people through our mix of early intervention and crisis services that can be tailored to best suit each individual's needs.

Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only national 24/7, confidential support and counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. Since March 1991, young Australians have been contacting Kids Helpline about a wide range of issues: from everyday topics such as family, friends and school to more serious issues of child abuse, bullying, mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, self-injury and suicide.

Children and young people have direct access to a counsellor and can choose to speak with either a male or female counsellor. They are also able to arrange to speak again with the same counsellor to work through their issues. No other organisation speaks with as many young Australians.

Kids Helpline has a unique capacity to act as a safety net for vulnerable children and young people at risk of suicide. These young people often reach out when other services are closed or when suicidal thoughts become too much for them during the isolation of the midnight 'til dawn hours. For this reason, other agencies often include Kids Helpline in their safety plans for their young clients experiencing suicidality.

During 2009 Kids Helpline responded to over 260,000 contacts from children and young people up to the age of 25 years via telephone, email and web chat. Of

those, 53,111 were contacts of a nature that required a counselling type response. Eleven and a half percent (6091) contacted specifically concerning mental health issues (including diagnosed mental illnesses) and a further 15% contacted in relation to difficulty managing their emotions and/ or behaviours. In addition, counsellors recorded 4,564 contacts where the person was experiencing suicidal thoughts at the time of making contact and 8,166 contacts where they had recently self harmed.

Professionally trained Kids Helpline counsellors respond to these types of contacts by gently building trusting relationships, conducting risk assessments, identifying existing supports, discussing possible referrals with the young person and liaising with those referral agencies, offering ongoing counselling relationships with the same Kids Helpline counsellor and conducting "wrap-around care" in conjunction with other agencies in the young person's life.