Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

First Report
Aurukun & West Cairns
August 2016
Dear Treasurer

**Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee's First Report**

In March 2016 your government committed to taking action on the Griffith University's *Preventing Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun* Report with the establishment of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee (Committee).

The Committee has met four times to discuss this sensitive topic and to develop a better understanding of the impact and effects of this issue, specifically within the two locations of Aurukun and West Cairns. These meetings have provided opportunities to learn from several community members, representatives of peak organisations, senior government officials, and experts and researchers about the prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse and its effects on individuals and communities.

I am pleased to advise that the Committee’s work to date has informed the completion of the First Report which, in line with the agreed Terms of Reference aims to:

- ensure the effective and efficient implementation and coordination of activities of all tiers of government in Aurukun and West Cairns to address youth sexual violence and abuse; and
- quickly identify barriers to effective implementation and ensure these are addressed.

The next phase of the Committee’s work will include extensive consultation with community members in Aurukun and West Cairns, and look more broadly at the prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse across the state.

The Steering Committee’s final report will include recommendations for the Queensland Government’s consideration on how all sectors of the community can work together to prevent and respond to youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland.

Yours sincerely

Stanley Jones AO QC
Chair
Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee
The Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee supports and encourages the dissemination and exchange of information.

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Sexual violence and abuse has proved to be among the most difficult and confounding social problems of our time...
A unique opportunity now exists to put Australia, and Queensland in particular, at the forefront of international efforts to understand and address these problems.

Professor Stephen Smallbone
Table of contents

Foreword from the Chair of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee 1

Executive summary 2

1. Introduction 6

2. Background 6
   2.1 Griffith University report 6
      2.1.1 Research findings 7
      2.1.2 Report recommendations 7
      2.1.3 Next steps 7
   2.2 Establishment of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee and Membership 8
   2.3 Terms of Reference 9

3. YSVA program of work 9
   3.1 The YSVA Action Plan 10
   3.2 YSVA meetings 10
   3.3 Literature review 11
   3.4 YSVA Secretariat Survey approach and methodology 11

4. YSVA Action Plan implementation 12
   4.1 Summary of Action Plan 12
   4.2 Response to YSVA in Aurukun 13
      4.2.1 Wide range of responses across the comprehensive treatment model 14
      4.2.2 A need for a stronger focus on more effective services 14
   4.3 Responses to YVSA in West Cairns 15
      4.3.1 Wide range of responses across the health care continuum 15
      4.3.2 The comprehensive intervention model incorporates crime prevention 16
   4.4 Good practice outcomes 16

5. An effective and efficient response 17
   5.1 Strengthening of government coordination 17
   5.2 Strengthening of partnerships with non-government organisations 17
   5.3 Scope excludes actions of non-government organisations 18
   5.4 Barriers identified 18
      5.4.1 Lack of service funding 18
5.4.2 Poor coordination of service implementation
5.4.3 Limitations in recruiting and sustaining qualified staff
5.4.4 Community involvement
5.4.5 Environmental factors
5.5 Summary of barriers to effective implementation

6. Improvement strategies

6.1 Developing long-term funding strategies
6.2 Improving coordination of service implementation
6.3 Attracting, recruiting and retaining localised expertise and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander qualified staff
6.4 Increasing community involvement
6.5 Promoting an environment that supports personal and community safety

7. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Principles for service delivery improvements
Recommendation 2: Sustain focus on coordinating and integrating services in Aurukun and West Cairns
Recommendation 3: The need for community support to address the issue
Recommendation 4: Developing a shared understanding by defining YSVA consistently
Recommendation 5: The need for services to understand what YSVA is and how to respond
Recommendation 6: Fund effective responses for victims and perpetrators
Recommendation 7: Crime prevention is part of a holistic response to YSVA

8. Consultation

8.1 Community consultations
8.2 Youth consultations
8.3 Future consultations

9. Further work and linkages
Foreword from the Chair of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee

The commissioning of Griffith University, in 2012, to examine the incidence of youth sexual violence and abuse in the communities of Aurukun and West Cairns has set in train a body of work which informs how Government will respond to this issue where it is identified across the State. The work is far from complete. However considerable progress has already been made in implementing a number of the strategies suggested in the Griffith University report ‘Preventing Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun’ (Smallbone, Rayment-McHugh and Smith).

Underpinning this progress is the trust and confidence gained from the communities by the researchers of the Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS) despite the sensitivity of the subject. Such trust is not easily gained nor replaced. GYFS have adopted internationally recognised frameworks in identifying the problems and seeking responses which allow measurable outcomes.

The evaluation of this work will be important for us all to build on our understanding of what works in responding to YSVA in remote and marginalised communities. It is also critical that dedicated longer-term funding is provided to respond to YSVA in the two locations.

In areas where enhanced Government services could be deployed there has been significant progress, for example, increased Police patrols of ‘hot spots’ and work to reduce the risks in public places. Other initiatives, such as the establishment of the Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce and the Aurukun Round Table have also been effective in identifying underlying factors contributing to offending behaviour and, with continued effort, this work will influence the development of strategies to reduce the impacts.

Research indicates the circumstances that give rise to and permit youth sexual violence and abuse in any community are multi-faceted – socio economic disadvantage, dispossession and past government policies, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of suitable accommodation, unemployment, low educational attainment, violence in the home, lack of nurturing and pornography. Some of these features are deeply entrenched and of long standing. It is to be expected therefore that the elimination of the problems will take time and require the cooperation of governments, professionals, police, service providers and, above all, community members. The respectful relationship between the GYFS researchers, other professionals and influential members of the community will provide the basis for more direct engagement with communities to empower them to seek pathways by which these problems can be addressed.

The seeds for a healthy life are sown very early. Children must be nurtured, kept safe and educated. Child abuse and deprivation, particularly in the early years (0-4 years), is known to powerfully influence the later development of mental disorders and the propensity to violence. The importance of keeping children free from stressful environments which could impair their mental and emotional development cannot be overstated.

I wish to acknowledge the continuing work of the Griffith University team, the members of the Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce and the Aurukun Round Table, along with various government agencies and community organisations who have responded to the call to deal with the problem of youth sexual violence and abuse and to share their responses. To the secretariat of the Committee who have worked diligently and effectively in presenting the complex detail of the issues, I offer thanks and encouragement to keep up the good work. Finally, I acknowledge the contributions and, at times, the patience and forbearance of the Committee members who well know that the scope of the task has only just been defined and that success in the quest to eliminate youth sexual violence and abuse will remain a continuing challenge.

I commend this First Report to the Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport, and look forward to continuing to work with the Committee to seek a state-wide response to this issue and to provide a further report at the end of 2016.
Executive summary

Background

In March 2016, the Queensland Government released a report, prepared by Griffith University, which contained disturbing findings about youth sexual violence and abuse (YSVA) in Aurukun and West Cairns (specifically the suburbs of Mooroobool, Manunda and Manoora), two locations where there is a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. The report noted that YSVA was not limited as an issue to these locations and that youth sexual violence and abuse is recognised nationally and globally as a problem involving the health, wellbeing and safety of young people.

The work of the Committee

On 12 March 2016, the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee (the Committee) was established and Justice Stanley Jones AO QC, a former judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland, was announced as Chair. The Committee is comprised of senior officers from departments across the Queensland government, the Mayors of Aurukun and Cairns, community and peak body participants. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, is a member of the Steering Committee, however participation does not indicate endorsement or otherwise of the contents or recommendations of this report.

Since the Committee met for the first time in April it has: developed an understanding of actions in place in the two communities to respond to YSVA; drafted a Literature Review to support and supplement the research of the Griffith University team; and undertaken a survey of the services provided at federal, state and local government levels. The survey was undertaken to provide a status update on the implementation and coordination of activities by all tiers of government addressing YSVA in Aurukun and West Cairns.

Consultation

The Committee’s Chair visited Aurukun and West Cairns to speak about the Griffith University Report and the work of the YSVA Steering Committee with community Elders, community members and service providers including health representatives, school principals and police. YSVA, its prevalence and causes are difficult topics to discuss with a community, and engaging with young people is particularly problematic. The Committee will continue community engagement with the support of the community representatives on the Committee and draw on the experience of GYFS practitioners who have long established relationships with the communities through their works.

The purpose of this Report

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the Committee is providing the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee First Report (the Report). The Report details and analyses findings so far, outlines key principles to underpin future service delivery, and make recommendations to enhance government and community responses to YSVA. The work to date will inform the second phase of the Committee’s work where this issue will be investigated more broadly across Queensland.

The Report highlights the findings of a Literature Review which notes that YSVA is a global issue. However, it is acknowledged there is little conclusive evidence of successful responses to address YSVA. What is clear from the research is that remote communities and marginalized communities are more vulnerable and the rates of YSVA in the communities examined by the Griffith University Report supports this assumption.

There is evidence that the GYFS framework is successful in some cases. The GYFS practice model considers: (potential) offender/s, (potential) victim/s, situations and communities and across three levels of intervention – primary, secondary and tertiary. The findings of the Literature Review are supported by the World Health Organisation’s recently released framework INSPiRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children.

The analysis of the Action plan and the service responses took into account both the GYFS framework, the responses by government and non-government organisations and the more holistic approach of the World Health Organisation framework to determine current levels of effectiveness and efficiency.
Action plan and analysis

To ensure a comprehensive response to YSVA in Aurukun and West Cairns the Queensland Government had brought together and/or prioritised a range of actions which sought to increase access to therapy supports and services in Aurukun and West Cairns for victims and perpetrators. The Action Plan supports strategies to reduce re-victimisation and remove impediments to service referrals and utilisation have been implemented. Immediate community safety improvements in Aurukun (including installing CCTV and upgrading the PCYC). Improving government coordination in Aurukun and future strategies, such as the statewide sexual health strategy and the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016-2021, will contribute to Action Plan outcomes.

Analysis of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementation of the Action Plan highlighted that strengthening of government coordination has progressed in both Aurukun and West Cairns, including specific discussions on YSVA at forums such as the Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce. Agencies are working collaboratively across many responses and this contributes to a greater understanding of the issues and factors influencing YSVA.

Barriers identified included lack of continuous service funding for effective responses leading to inconsistency in strategies and programs. Also, some services have limited capacity for coordination and recruiting and sustaining qualified staff. Interventions were predominantly at the primary and secondary levels of services and further focus is required to implement effective tertiary responses to YSVA. Primary and secondary responses and interventions could be better targeted to local environments. Service improvements must ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are included in service design and implementation of all programs to enable culturally responsive services to be implemented locally. Several programs are undergoing evaluations which will inform future work. Critically, engagement with the community is required to gain an insight of how to effectively address the causes of YSVA.

The Committee’s recommendations

Marginalised and remote communities are more vulnerable to experiencing YSVA. Its causes are deeply entrenched, long-standing and multi-faceted. Responding to YSVA requires both immediate, situational / safety responses and long-term approaches to improving life outcomes, with a particular focus on the early years and support for positive parenting.

The YSVA Steering Committee has made seven recommendations across three themes: improve service effectiveness, raise awareness and resourcing.

Improve service effectiveness – based on analysis of Government actions and approaches to service delivery, the Committee is recommending:

1. Principles for service delivery improvement
   - Responses should be evidence-based and linked to the Griffith University framework.
   - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be involved in the design and delivery of services, preferably local people (including capacity building and skills development opportunities).
   - Services should be field based delivered via outreach minimising travel by participants, with appropriately qualified staff engaged in delivery.
   - Services should take account of culture and historic issues relevant to the community.
   - Staffing needs to be appropriately gender balanced, trained to understand cultural safety by local people and supported to understand local issues.
   - Treatment plans should take account of cultural heritage, local language and protocols, cultural values, beliefs and practices.
   - Treatment plans should be holistic and suited to the young person’s development and environment and be non-stigmatising.
   - Crime prevention responses that focus on environmental design to ensure community and personal safety should be supported.
2. The need for a sustained focus on coordinating and integrating services in Aurukun and West Cairns
   
   – In order to succeed, continue to focus on coordinating and integrating services using current mechanisms such as the Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce, with government agencies working together, and liaising with Manager of Government Coordination and the Senior Government Coordinator, appointed to Aurukun in 2015 and 2016 respectively by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

Raise awareness – based on the premise that communities need to understand an issue in order to start to address it, the Committee is recommending:

3. Community support to address the issue
   
   – In order to combat the ‘normalisation’ of YSVA it is critical to have a strong focus on empowering young women and changing attitudes about the role of women, and consequently, the behaviors and the attitudes of offenders (mainly young men). The Committee recognises the importance of community buy-in and will support engagement with the communities in both locations in the near future and a community led response.

4. Develop a shared understanding by defining YSVA consistently
   
   – The Committee recommends government adopts a consistent definition of YSVA in order to support a shared understanding of the problem, focus service providers on responding to the issue and assist researchers.

5. Services must understand what YSVA is and how to respond
   
   – Queensland Government agencies involve community leaders, parents and community organisations in the design and delivery of programs and services that seek to address YSVA. This should occur across the spectrum of responses and interventions, that is, prevention, early and secondary intervention and tertiary responses.

6. Effective responses for victims and perpetrators need to be funded including:
   
   • That responses for victims need to be individual and location-specific, long term and aim for higher levels of retention
     
     – young people who are victims of sexual violence drop out of treatment programs more frequently than children who are receiving services for other reasons. For victims, this requires responses to be individual and location specific and long term.
   
   • That responses for perpetrators need to be youth-specific and comprehensive
     
     – The factors that contribute to YSVA are a complex set of inter-related personal and environmental issues. This requires a response which is specific to an individual’s behaviour, of which a criminal justice response may be a part.
   
   • That technological responses need to be explored
     
     – Tapping into initiatives such as the fast-tracking of 4G into Aurukun to implement technological responses including video conferencing and e-health to address isolation of communities and staff could be explored.
     
     – In addition to addressing isolation of staff in remote areas, this would be useful to disseminate information such as educational campaigns on healthy sexual relationships.

7. That crime prevention is part of a holistic response to YSVA
   
   – There is evidence that environmental factors are contributing to YSVA and crime prevention strategies should be considered as a core part of the response, including CCTV and patrolling ‘hot spots’ of offending and, where appropriate, the redesign of schools and public areas.
The future work of the Committee

The recommendations are an approach which can be used to guide conversations particularly with the communities of Aurukun and West Cairns about how to effectively respond to YSVA in these locations.

The Committee will undertake consultations with communities and young people to support preparation of a final report on broader prevalence of YSVA and a range of options to address it. A report on this second phase of work will be produced at the end of the year.

The Committee notes the links between this work and the other work of the Queensland Government supporting family violence reforms, child protection reforms, sexual health strategies and early childhood development and will consider research on holistic strategies across the spectrum of this work and provide recommendations on maintaining this focus into the future.

The World Health Organisation’s *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children* – highlights that holistic responses are important because all violence is related. Being a victim of child maltreatment can increase the risk in later life of becoming a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence and youth violence and children who witness intimate partner violence against their mother or stepmother are also more likely to experience violence in later life – both as victims and perpetrators.

The research reveals that several common risks, such as family dysfunction and low social cohesion within the community, place children at a greater risk of being vulnerable to violence. Societal risk factors include social norms that create a climate in which violence is normalised. The research indicates violence can share common root causes. Exposure to violence at an early age can impair brain development and damage other parts of the nervous system, lead to mental health problems, delay cognitive development and result in poor school performance.

These factors contribute to the cycle disadvantage caused by lack of education, unemployment, early pregnancy, increased risks of violence and contact with the criminal justice system.

Significant research supports the effectiveness of a holistic approach to ensuring healthy adult relationships and addressing disadvantage. There is an urgent need to ensure that the foundations for healthy lifestyles and relationships are laid very early in life by providing services that improve parenting skills. The Committee considers that much more needs to be done to address the entrenched disadvantage in these communities to ensure the future health and wellbeing of all residents, but particularly the new generation of children.
1. Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse (YSVA) Steering Committee require a First Report to be provided to the Queensland Government.

The purpose of the Report is to:

- ensure the effective and efficient implementation and coordination of activities of all tiers of government in Aurukun and West Cairns to address youth sexual violence and abuse
- quickly identify barriers to effective implementation and ensure these are addressed.

The Report provides an analysis of the progress to date:

- Action Plan implementation
- Effective and efficient coordination
- Strategies to improve services
- Recommendations.

2. Background

This Report considers the level of coordination across federal, state and local governments to implement the current range of activities for Aurukun and West Cairns. It categorises each action response into the crime prevention and public health model framework used by Griffith Youth Forensic Service (GYFS) which is a well known framework for addressing comprehensive issues in disadvantaged populations. The GYFS framework is based on determining primary, secondary, or tertiary levels of response for victims and offenders, across the categories of (potential) offender, (potential) victim, situational and communities.

Government action response will be aligned to the identified GYFS actions to assist in determining the effectiveness and efficient coordination of the activities. Continued input is required from the Queensland Government senior officer YSVA Network to achieve a full service systems response and its efficiency. This work is also linked to the phase two work of the Steering Committee where all levels of government, including the non-government sector, work together to prevent, respond and reduce re-victimisation and its efficiency.

2.1 Griffith University report

In 2012 the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) commissioned Griffith University to examine Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse (YSVA) in West Cairns (suburbs of Manoora, Mooroobool and Manunda) and Aurukun. Information was gathered on individual (offender and victim); ecological (family, peer, organisational and community); and situational factors (criminogenic features of the physical environment).

Data was obtained from official records (police and health); case files (Family Responsibilities Commission and Griffith University); interviews (local professionals, adult and youth community members); and direct site observations. While Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (Child Safety) data was not available for the two locations due to data limitations, the report noted discussions about data would continue.
2.1.1 Research findings

The Griffith University report found the two environments posed an extreme risk for future and widespread YSVA due to:

- Individual offender profile: Family, peer and schooling issues (domestic violence, substance misuse, gang-type social groupings, disengaged from school).
- Local physical and social ecology: Physical environment conducive to YSVA and social/peer relations that ‘normalise’ sexual violence and degrading attitudes to women.

The research indicated the combination of these two risk factors meant that many other young people were at risk of YSVA now or in the future.

The YSVA Steering Committee considers that the insights and expertise of the Griffith University team have been particularly valuable in informing its work and will assist in providing a dedicated focus on the issue and help the Committee build on the work that the GYFS team has been undertaking. It acknowledges that the relationships of trust built by GYFS through many years of work in Aurukun and West Cairns and a long history of clinical work will be of particular benefit to the Committee in establishing respectful working relationships with the communities.

2.1.2 Report recommendations

The report suggested a range of interventions to address offenders, victims, situations (physical environments) and communities at a primary, secondary and tertiary level. It noted implementation of interventions would require further community consultations to prioritise what was most achievable and would have the biggest impact.

The Australian Government provided funding between 2013 and 2016 to GYFS to both respond directly to YSVA in the two locations as well as research the effectiveness of those interventions:

- A teacher training program – to improve teachers’ knowledge of child sexual behaviour and capacity to respond.
- A therapeutic program – for children 6-12 displaying persistent sexual behavior.
- Designing out YSVA, Aurukun – audit of physical design of school to identify changes to reduce opportunities for problem behaviour.

2.1.3 Next steps

Funding for Griffith University’s involvement ends in September 2016. However, there remains a clear need to continue to respond to the issues raised in the report. An evaluation of the Australian Government funded response, also being undertaken by Griffith University, has only recently commenced. The Committee looks forward to seeing the results of this evaluation.

The Committee recognises the Griffith University team includes some world leaders in the field of preventing youth sexual violence and abuse and its work is closely aligned with the World Health Organisation’s strategies for preventing violence against children. The value of the relationships built by the team with the communities of Aurukun and West Cairns cannot be overstated nor can the trust established as a result of many years of consultation and engagement with the community.

Funding to continue a comprehensive response to YSVA is a critical issue for consideration and decision over the next months for the Australian and Queensland Governments.
2.2 Establishment of the Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse Steering Committee and Membership

At the request of the researchers, the Griffith University Report was embargoed by the former Queensland Government. The Committee understands this was to avoid stigmatising the young people in the communities of Aurukun and West Cairns and to implement strategies in the communities, including the Safer Streets initiative, to develop and establish a way forward. During this time, Griffith University was working with the two communities to build relationships and deliver services which were to specifically address youth sexual violence and abuse.

On 12 March 2016, the establishment of the YSVA Steering Committee and appointment of the Chair, Justice Stanley Jones AO QC, were announced by the Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Sport, the Honourable Curtis Pitt MP and a redacted version of the report was released.

The Committee understands that the redactions cover information that may be personal, that would identify individuals and some statistics in the research that are low numbers in a small community, which although may not reasonably lead to the identification of individuals may, none the less, constitute a risk.

In making this announcement, Minister Pitt said the Palaszczuk Government has decided to release the report “so we can have this important conversation in the open and address individual and community concerns”.

The Chair visited Aurukun and West Cairns to speak about the Griffith University Report and the work of the YSVA Committee with community Elders, community members and service providers including Queensland Health representatives, school principals and police. The Chair also met with Directors-General and senior officers of the Departments of the Premier and Cabinet; Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services; Education and Training; Health; State Development and the Queensland Police Service.

The Steering Committee’s membership includes senior officers from all levels of Government, including the Mayors of the respective areas, peak bodies and members of the community.

State Government representatives include:
- Department of Premier and Cabinet Director-General, Mr Dave Stewart
- Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships Director-General, Ms Clare O’Connor
- Queensland Health Director-General, Mr Michael Walsh
- Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Director-General, Mr Michael Hogan
- Queensland Police Assistant Commissioner, Mr Paul Taylor.

Australian Government representative:
- Associate Secretary of Indigenous Affairs with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Mr Andrew Tongue.

Local Government representatives:
- Cr Dereck Walpo, Mayor of Aurukun
- Cr Bob Manning OAM, Mayor of Cairns Regional Council.

Community and Peak organisation participants:
- Mr Noel Pearson, Founder and Director of Strategy, Cape York Partnership
- Ms Natalie Lewis, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd
- Ms Pattie Lees, Injilinji Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Children and Youth Services
- Mr Bruce Martin (from the Aurukun community)
- Ms Rowena Bullio (from the West Cairns community).

1 The Australian Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, is a member of the Steering Committee, however participation does not indicate endorsement or otherwise of the contents or recommendations of this report.
2.3 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference outline the scope and purpose, key dates, deliverables and governance arrangements the Queensland Government requires of the YSVA Steering Committee.

By mid-2016, deliverables were:

- The Steering Committee was to ensure the effective and efficient implementation and coordination of activities of all tiers of government in Aurukun and West Cairns to address youth sexual violence and abuse.
- Quickly identify barriers to effective implementation and ensure these are addressed.

By the end of 2016, the Steering Committee will have investigated the prevalence and impact of youth sexual violence and abuse in other locations across Queensland; and taken advice from experts in the field of youth sexual violence and abuse, to consider and make recommendations about:

- The appropriateness of the Queensland Government’s current legislative, policy and resourcing response to youth sexual violence and abuse.
- How all levels of government, the non-government sector and the community can work better to prevent and respond to youth sexual violence and abuse and reduce re-victimisation.

3. YSVA program of work

The YSVA Steering Committee was established for a period of 12 months, during which the Queensland Government tasked the Committee to oversee the coordination and implementation of the Action Plan that included initiatives commenced by GYFS and Queensland Government services in Aurukun and West Cairns, and identify barriers to effective implementation.

In addition to the oversight of implementation of the Action Plan, the Queensland Government tasked the Committee with the following work program:

- Meet regularly (commencing April 2016).
- Produce first report based on the Action Plan implementation.
- Produce a final report in December 2016 based on a broader assessment of the prevalence and responses to youth sexual violence and abuse.
- Make recommendations to the Queensland Government on the appropriateness of the current responses and how governments, non-government and community sectors can better work to prevent and respond to youth sexual violence and abuse.

The work of the YSVA Steering Committee is supported by the YSVA Secretariat funded by contributions from several Queensland Government agencies and hosted by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.
3.1 The YSVA Action Plan

The YSVA Steering Committee will also oversee the implementation of the current Action Plan and then undertake a broader assessment of the prevalence and responses to youth sexual violence and abuse and make recommendations to the Queensland Government.

The Action Plan sought to:

- Increase access to sexual violence and abuse therapy supports and services in Aurukun and West Cairns for current victims and perpetrators, support strategies to reduce re-victimisation and remove impediments to service referrals and utilisation.
- Implement immediately the community safety recommendations of the Aurukun Roundtable including:
  - developing a new Community Safety Plan
  - installing CCTV in Aurukun
  - finalising the PCYC build
  - implementing a co-designed, community led awareness and community education campaign in English and Wik language, on sly grog, community violence, domestic and family violence and child protection (including health sexual relations and YSVA).
- Strengthen the capacity of Family Responsibilities Commission through amendments to the Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008 and further collaborative work with Welfare Reform partners.
- Highlight existing work which will support addressing the issues raised. For example: Stronger Families reforms which are scheduled to be rolled out in Far North Queensland forthcoming state wide sexual health strategies included and the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan 2016–2021.
- Improve Government coordination, through appointing new senior staff in Aurukun and supporting them from Weipa and regional offices. DATSIP appointed a Manager of Government Coordination in October 2015, and a Senior Government Coordinator in June 2016.

3.2 YSVA meetings

The YSVA Steering Committee members have met four times in both Brisbane and Cairns and agreed, from the first meeting, the shared focus is the protection of children. In addition to developing the working definition of youth sexual violence and abuse, key considerations agreed or discussed by the Committee were:

- To undertake its work effectively it would need to build on the work of Griffith University and conduct further research into youth sexual violence and abuse and the factors that contribute to its existence and continuation.
- The need to develop a consistent definition of youth sexual violence and abuse and to improve awareness of the issue.
- The importance of community engagement and buy-in and change being driven by the community. The Committee noted it would be undertaking further work in this area.
- The need to engage with and understand the views and experiences of young people.
- The importance of using and enhancing existing governance mechanisms, in order not to duplicate effort and allow those that are working well to continue to do so.
- Change needs to be driven by the community and underpinned by deep and meaningful engagement, especially with young people.
- Consideration of other governance models and available literature on responses to youth sexual violence and abuse will inform decisions and proposals to improve the sharing of information across government.
3.3 Literature review

The Secretariat undertook a literature review in support of the Committee’s work. It found YSVA is an issue across Australia and the globe, with research highlighting the vulnerability of marginalised and remote communities (Rayment-McHugh, Smallbone and Tilley 2015; Smallbone, Rayment-McHugh and Smith 2013a). In light of this, the literature review focused on Indigenous Australians and their compounded vulnerability as a result of a variety of complex socio-political, environmental and contextual factors that expose Indigenous youth to increased likelihood of both victimisation and offending behaviour (Allard et al. 2016; Funston 2013; Graffam and Shinkfield 2012).

Despite longstanding awareness of YSVA, a lack of consistent research has hindered development of effective treatment and intervention frameworks. However, recent efforts to address YSVA through holistic frameworks that look beyond individual-level offending behaviours and explore the social and ecological context of YSVA have shown promise.

These frameworks combine public health and crime prevention models – a comprehensive treatment framework - to provide holistic support to clients with demonstrated success in Indigenous and non-Indigenous samples. In acknowledging the vulnerability of Indigenous Australians, the literature highlights the importance of upholding cultural safety in the delivery of services to empower communities beyond consultation, incorporating their worldviews into service delivery.

3.4 YSVA Secretariat Survey approach and methodology

The YSVA Secretariat conducted a survey of the entities responsible for funding each response outlined in the Action Plan to determine their current status. It should be noted that the agreed Action Plan was updated to include activities at the local government level.

Responses were received from Departments of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services; Education and Training; Justice and Attorney-General; Queensland Health; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Queensland Police Service.

The Cairns Regional Council and the Australian Government Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet which funds Griffith Youth Forensic Services also contributed.

The questions covered a range of topics including an update on the status of each activity, who was involved in its delivery, barriers to service implementation and coordination, strategies in place to reduce these barriers and any identified gaps within the Action Plan that addresses YSVA.

Given the prevalence of YSVA identified in the Griffith University Report, the YSVA Secretariat used a comprehensive treatment framework model, covering crime prevention and public health care, as described by GYFS, to conduct the analysis of the Action Plan. This process required categorising each activity into prevention, primary, secondary, or tertiary level of response across the four categories of the GYFS practice model which includes: (potential) offender, (potential) victim, situations and communities. An additional category of “other” has been incorporated into the model to capture the governance and employment activities that are being implemented.

Within a practice context, ‘situational’ refers to the activities that focus on making the environment and surrounds safer or less high risk. The term ‘communities’ focuses on mobilising and enabling local concerns and building the capacity of the local systems to reduce youth sexual violence and abuse.

There are three levels of intervention: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary intervention targets whole populations or locations and aims to prevent the development from the outset. Secondary intervention targets at-risk people, groups and places and aims to slow the transition of the issue from risk status to problem status. Tertiary intervention targets individuals or places identified with the problem and aims to reduce harm associated with the problem and/or preventing further recurrences.

The benefits of this approach is to align the current government service responses with a model already in practice, particularly as the work of the Steering Committee is directly informed by the Griffith University Report and secondly, to develop an understanding of where the service responses are being delivered within a clinical treatment context.
4. YSVA Action Plan implementation

4.1 Summary of Action Plan

Actions under the YSVA Action Plan sought to improve coordination of existing service investments and actively support the ongoing work of GYFS in Aurukun and West Cairns. The YSVA Steering Committee was tasked to oversee the coordination and implementation and to identify areas where improvements could be made.

There are sixty (60) responses outlined in the Action Plan spanning across Aurukun and West Cairns. They are delivered by the following Queensland Government agencies:

- Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
- Department of Education and Training
- Queensland Health
- Department of Justice and Attorney-General
- Queensland Police Service
- Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

The Australian Government funded responses are delivered by GYFS and localised responses are sought from Aurukun Shire Council and the Cairns Regional Council.

In recognition of the different environments, there are 41 location-specific responses in Aurukun and 19 in West Cairns. Responses range from prevention and intervention treatment aimed at targeting (potential) victims and (potential) offenders, through to addressing the situational factors that contribute to the risk of YSVA in each area. These are also community based responses that aim to mobilise the interest and level of awareness within members of the community.

Table 1 (below) shows the number of activities per response level for both communities using the GYFS intervention framework.

The table also highlights the effort of the local, state and federal governments in responding to youth sexual violence and abuse in Aurukun and West Cairns. Griffith University identified that the nature of youth sexual violence and abuse is vastly different in each community. However, as Table 1 shows, the Government’s response, including activities of GYFS, is similar in both communities with the majority of activity occurring within the ‘situational’ response category.

Table 1: Number of activities by response level for Aurukun and West Cairns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response level</th>
<th>Aurukun</th>
<th>West Cairns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders/potential offenders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders/victims</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders/victims/communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations/communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims/potential victims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: material supplied to YSVA Secretariat from the Local, State and Federal Government entities.
4.2 Response to YSVA in Aurukun

In Aurukun, the survey shows that there are 41 activities that either directly or indirectly address youth sexual violence and abuse, all of which sit within the full spectrum of the comprehensive treatment framework.

**Table 3** (below) provides an overview of the location-specific actions within the eight Action Plan areas:

- Improving government coordination of existing service investments to include personal and community safety
- Improving government coordination and monitoring
- Providing therapeutic responses to victims and perpetrators
- Engaging children and young people in learning
- Empowering girls and young women
- Griffith Youth Forensic Services
- Improving community safety and harmony
- Employment and skills
4.2.1 Wide range of responses across the comprehensive treatment model

There are forty-one activities provided in Aurukun. Of these the majority (23) are within the prevention and early intervention range of responses, as shown in Table 2 (page 13).

The literature review demonstrates that this model is most effective for preventing potential victims from exposure and potential offenders from committing a first offence. In Aurukun, where the rate of YSVA is 6.6% higher than the Queensland state average, and where nearly 43% involved a young person under 18 years of age as the alleged offender, this type of response needs to be reconsidered. Given the results of the Griffith University Report, there needs to be a stronger focus on tertiary strategies.

Of the 41 responses, Table 1 shows the highest level of activity is towards providing a situational response (14), followed by providing community response (13).

Within a situational response, this type of intervention focuses on the settings in which YSVA offending and victimisation occurs or is likely to occur. Responses in the Action Plan that demonstrate progress in this area are the ten actions listed in Table 3 (page 13) within the action area of ‘improve community harmony’. Examples of these activities include the introduction of CCTV, the construction and reopening of the PCYC, and community night patrols of ‘hot spots’, and the provision of peacemaking services.

A community response focuses on mobilising local concerns and building on the capacity of local social systems to reduce contributing factors to youth sexual violence and abuse. The Action Plan identifies that many of the 13 responses (refer to Table 1, page 12) address factors contributing to youth sexual violence and abuse, such as high levels of unemployment, creating awareness about respectful relationships and alcohol misuse. Activities that focus on engaging children and young people in learning via a community level response include the provision of culturally appropriate and supervised activities during holiday periods, raising community appreciation of the benefits of school, and involvement with school activities.

4.2.2 A need for a stronger focus on more effective services

Having noted the need for a stronger focus on tertiary strategies, it is also important that intervention and treatment responses are specific to the environment and structured around the individual, community and societal influences which shape offending behaviour. The results of the survey demonstrate the 23 prevention and early intervention strategies need closer examination to determine their efficacy.

The difficulty of providing a comprehensive and coordinated service delivery model in a remote community should not be underestimated. This is further supported by the literature review which outlines that specialist intervention services are not consistently available, particularly in remote locations. The research outlined in the literature review also suggests that treatment for youth sexual violence and abuse is effective when comprehensive individualistic and holistic approaches are taken. The challenge for government service providers is to look at their delivery model to determine if an individualistic and localised approach could deliver greater value for money.

As a result, the number of responses is higher in Aurukun (41) than West Cairns (19), and broader-ranging across areas of engaging children and young people in education, therapeutic services, and employment and skills development.
4.3 Responses to YVSA in West Cairns

In West Cairns, the results of the survey demonstrate that there are 19 activities that either directly or indirectly address youth sexual violence and abuse, all of which sit within the full spectrum of the comprehensive treatment model.

Table 4 (above) provides an overview of the count of activities delivered per action area within the full spectrum of responses.

Again in recognition of the different environments, there are location-specific actions. In West Cairns, there are 19 actions that focus on:

- improve coordination of existing service investments to include personal and community safety
- increasing safety and wellbeing of children and young people
- engaging with hard to reach groups
- providing therapeutic responses to victims and perpetrator
- empowering girls and young women
- Griffith Youth Forensic Services (GYFS).

4.3.1 Wide range of responses across the health care continuum

The approach by GYFS is “based on a comprehensive sexual abuse prevention model developed by Smallbone, Marshall and Wortley (2008), which draws primarily on public health and crime prevention concepts and models” (p 36, Preventing Youth Sexual Violence and Abuse in West Cairns and Aurukun by Smallbone, Rayment-McHugh, Smith, Griffith University 2010)

Of the intervention strategies in West Cairns, the majority (9) are within the prevention and early intervention range of responses. The literature review demonstrates that this model is most effective for preventing potential victims from exposure and potential offenders from committing a first offence. In West Cairns, where the Griffith University Report identified the rate of YSVA as 2.2 % higher than the Queensland state average, and where about one in four of alleged offenders is a young person, this type of response mix needs to be reconsidered.

The other categories of responses are fairly close in numbers across the public health approach to intervention, with five activities delivered at the tertiary level, four activities at the secondary level and three for the other category which includes governance and employment responses. This current service mix suggests a broad range of activities across all of the action response areas.

In West Cairns there are four activities within the secondary intervention response level which targets potential offenders and persons at risk of victimisation. The Griffith University Report identified the West Cairns environment as particularly problematic with factors such as poorly lit pathways and open parkland.
4.3.2 The comprehensive intervention model incorporates crime prevention

Of the activities outlined in the Action Plan in West Cairns those aligned to ‘situational’ aspects of the crime prevention model are all completed. These services work towards reducing the areas or situations that were identified as high-risk scenarios within the Griffith University report and includes GFYS’ programs of Designing Out YVSA and Adapted Police Patrol. Other YSVA activities completed under this response include the introduction of the Community Services Hub at Mooroobool and Manoora and the Cairns Regional Council’s activities of installation of 20 CCTV cameras monitored by council security staff, with direct live feed to Queensland Police Service.

The Cairns Safer Street Taskforce works collaboratively with several government agencies to implement strategies that target crime prevention as included in the above responses. The literature review shows that a broad approach to youth sexual violence and abuse to address crime risk factors, such as high levels of violence and antisocial behavior, could increase effectiveness.

4.4 Good practice outcomes

There are several activities within the YSVA Action Plan that will have long term effect on reducing youth sexual violence and abuse in Aurukun and West Cairns and its impacts. These are explored below.

Addressing sexual health

The Queensland Government released the North Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexually Transmissible Infections Action Plan in May 2016. This five year strategy addresses the issue of sexually transmitted infections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants by providing increased screening and additional sexual health staff. This is a clear opportunity for health professionals to discuss safe sexual practices as well as ways of minimising further infections or unwanted pregnancies and unsafe sexual activity. This strategy is critical to reducing the impact of youth sexual violence and abuse. The Griffith University Report identified significantly higher notifications for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Cairns and Aurukun between 1 January 2000 and 30 June 2012. While separate statistics are not available for West Cairns, the rate of STIs reported in Cairns was 3.3 times the Queensland rate, with over one quarter attributed to people under 20 years of age (p16). The rate for the same period in Aurukun was an alarming 56 times the state rate (p25). This initiative is a direct example of a response that provides therapeutic services to victims and perpetrators of youth sexual violence and abuse.

Empowering girls and young women

The review of the Action Plan shows that there are four activities within this response area that are currently being implemented, ranging from a positive lifestyle and self defence program (Get out, Get active program in West Cairns) through to planning of age-appropriate cultural instruction for boys and girls concerning sexual development and a respectful relationships program, being coordinated by DET, with local leaders. This program is currently being trialed within three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools and will soon be implemented in Aurukun.

Providing a coordinated and targeted response that aims to empower girls and young women is critical to addressing youth sexual violence and abuse. Over time, the desired effect would be to reduce the higher number of births to young mothers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women, who have a higher level of representation than young mothers of other cultural backgrounds. For example, the Griffith University report noted "between January 2001 and June 2012, there were 530 births to mothers under aged 18 who resided in the Cairns region, including 84 births to mothers aged 13 to 15 years. Almost half (46%) of new mothers under the age of 20 in the Cairns region were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons" (Griffith University report, p16). In Aurukun, the number of birth to young mothers was not disclosed due to identifiable data.

Victim services

The YSVA Steering Committee also notes that it is the ongoing work of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships to identify why services are not being utilised by victims and to escalate issues to relevant government agencies and the YSVA Steering Committee for action. As a result of this activity and by working with GFYS, the department was able to identify and improve referral processes within the Family Responsibility Commission’s practice and is working to improve access to other programs, such as the parenting program in Aurukun.

Engaging children and young people in learning

There are eight responses in place to increase the level of children engaging with learning in Aurukun. These range from providing transitional support service post boarding school, through to case management of disengaged children, to the delivery of an Allied Health in Remote Schools program that provides developmental and therapy needs assessments for students, and supports increased school participation and build teacher capacity.
There are also programs designed to support local efforts to supervise and engage children in cultural activities on homelands outside school terms. Not only do these strategies aim to maintain students’ level of engagement with learning, the school environment provides an opportunity for the delivery of services that address the needs of (potential) victims/ (potential) offenders.

A school environment also provides an opportunity for school-based resilience building programs to be delivered, along with the delivery of the GYFS Teachers Training Program which improves teachers’ knowledge of child sexual behaviour and capacity to respond to concerning sexual behaviours.

5. An effective and efficient response

This section of the report looks at the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation and coordination of the Action Plan. The YSVA Secretariat surveyed agencies for each response outlined in the Action Plan to assist in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation and levels of coordination across federal, state and local governments.

All three tiers of government contribute to the current service approach in Aurukun and West Cairns to either directly or indirectly address youth sexual violence and abuse. Additionally, there are a number of non-government service providers who also respond to youth sexual violence and abuse.

There are several factors which have hindered a more comprehensive analysis at this time. Amongst non-government organizations and across government agencies, there is considerable inconsistency of output data. This hinders determining the effectiveness of services as measures cannot be compared accurately.

Currently, several of the programs are undergoing evaluations. Agencies awaiting the results of evaluations were constrained in disclosing information about efficiencies and this further hindered the research as conclusive findings could not be made.

The following comments were obtained by the survey material received, along with an understanding of the Action Plan implementation.

5.1 Strengthening of government coordination

The results of the survey demonstrate that government coordination of agency responses through existing service investments to include personal and community safety have progressed in both Aurukun and West Cairns. The high level discussions required of all three levels of government have commenced and will continue via existing coordination mechanisms such as the Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce and reporting back to YSVA Steering Committee, as well as community-specific discussion on YSVA at the Aurukun Round Table. Progress in this action area will be ongoing and will be strengthened by the recent appointment of the Senior Government Coordinator in Aurukun.

Other areas of strengthened government coordination at tertiary response level include:

- The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to provide local community based therapeutic victim services with a focus on preventing re-victimisation.
- The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to establish a ‘community of practice’ framework in Aurukun to address YSVA.
- Queensland Health implementing the North Queensland five-year regional health strategy to address the rate of sexual transmitted infections.
- The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships will continue to examine integration and coordination of services to develop improvement in service delivery.

5.2 Strengthening of partnerships with non-government organisations

The survey demonstrated that the majority of responses are delivered collaboratively across government agencies and / or in partnership with non-government organisations. For example: Queensland Health has established community partnerships in West Cairns on the health and wellbeing of young children; service mapping has commenced; and a school trial of incorporating education on sexually transmitted infection and healthy relationships into the curriculum is under development.
The benefits of a collective approach leads to greater understanding of the issues and factors influencing YSVA and assists in tailoring an effective and targeted government response. However, it also creates challenges to ensure that duplication of services is reduced, information sharing of process and outcomes is coordinated and consistent, and that a collaborative approach leads to a reduced response time to problematic situations.

5.3 Scope excludes actions of non-government organisations

This report is an overview of the implementation of the responses listed in the Action Plan, as provided by the three tiers of government. Actions and responses delivered by non-government organisations addressing YSVA (with the exception of GYFS) were not included in the scope. An analysis of community-led responses would provide greater understanding about the needs of the client group, identify service delivery gaps and highlight weaknesses across the service system. This could be included into phase two of the Committee’s work.

5.4 Barriers identified

5.4.1 Lack of service funding

Comments from the survey included:

- Strategies and programs aimed at improving community harmony and safety are commonly reliant on existing funded services. Opportunities to obtain additional funding are required.
- There is a primary focus on crime prevention, community and cultural involvement and community health and wellbeing; not directly on YSVA. Further education of the funding agencies, services providers and the public is needed.
- Facilities and Community Service Hubs have been funded from within agency budgets, which puts additional pressure on services.
- Lack of funding for recruitment of qualified and appropriate staff in support roles impacts the effectiveness of achieving community harmony.
- Insufficient funding for a balance of male and female support roles is problematic. This balance of, for example, gender-specific interventions is essential from a socio-cultural perspective to improve community outcomes.
- Limited funding for the continuation of important inter-agency work.

5.4.2 Poor coordination of service implementation

Comments from the survey:

- Undefined inter-agency agreements and limited focus on collaborative practice outcomes have impacted on the coordination of services.
- In some circumstances, lack of communication between agencies has impacted on the ability to determine efficacy of existing programs and services.
- Many services available for children and young people to access respite and personal safety are predominantly referral and information services as opposed to therapeutic services.
- Difficulties in locating comprehensive data and service information from the Australian Government.
- Challenges in ascertaining resources to sustain important work between several government agencies.
- Feedback from the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services on West Cairns stated “The Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce work program does not specifically focus on YSVA. The gap in the Action Plan is the implementation of programs focusing on changing sexual culture and behaviours and positive and appropriate sexual relationships. These programs are a core task for the Griffith Youth Forensic Service.”

5.4.3 Limitations in recruiting and sustaining qualified staff

Comments from the survey:

- Concerns for safety and the practicality of expected interventions to address community unrest impede employing and sustaining adequate staff to provide programs and services.
- Culturally appropriate interventions for individuals involved in or affected by YSVA are hindered by the absence of a balance of male and female staff; this is heavily influenced by lack of funding.
- Staff engaged for the provision of referral and information are not qualified to provide therapeutic services in relation to personal safety and respite.
5.4.4 Community involvement

Comments from the survey:

- Ability to ensure and measure community involvement and engagement in the implementation of services can present challenges. Inappropriate engagement efforts could result in loss of opportunity or even failure.
- There is currently a lack of community input on the strengths and weaknesses of how services are implemented.

5.4.5 Environmental factors

Comments from the survey:

- Insufficient space within facilities impedes provision of programs and services.
- Lack of safety parameters; for example, CCTV and the support to deliver safe and secure night-time activities within facilities.
- Limitations in services and resources due to the remoteness of communities.

5.5 Summary of barriers to effective implementation

In summary, key barriers that have been identified are:

- the need for dedicated, long-term funding for a sustained, comprehensive, whole-of-government response.
- the need for improved coordination of services.
- difficulties in recruiting and sustaining qualified staff.
- the need for greater community involvement.
- environmental factors within communities, including facility and location safety.

6. Improvement strategies

The key strategies to overcome the implementation barriers are described below and include: pursuing further funding at departmental levels and seeking further grants; prioritising practice partnerships and inter-agency collaboration including improved communication; and implementing several recruitment rounds to employ suitable staff. Furthermore, the use of news and social media platforms to engage members of communities and the importance of building positive relationships between agencies and communities have been highlighted.

6.1 Developing long-term funding strategies

Strategies proposed:

- Reach an agreement about funding between Australian and Queensland Governments – a clear and specific agreement is required.
- Seek new opportunities for partnerships and grants to facilitate additional service funding, for example, with non-government and not-for-profit organisations and the philanthropic sector.
- Secure agreement for funding at departmental level and seek additional across-agency partnerships and grants to ensure long-term strategies are funded to completion.
- Ensure grant providers introduce / increase accountability methods to ensure that their culturally specific grant funding is being expended in the intended manner to achieve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

6.2 Improving coordination of service implementation

Strategies proposed:

- Prioritise communication as a ‘whole-of-agency’ responsibility, as opposed to an individual’s role so that information is shared and connections are not lost.
- Seek opportunities to increase communication opportunities across agencies by utilizing teleconferencing / videoconferencing.
- Ensure a greater level of community involvement in decision making and service delivery processes.
• Promote practice partnerships and inter-agency collaboration to encourage inter-agency coordination and communication.

• Develop meaningful relationships and a better understanding of existing frameworks to facilitate inter-agency collaboration.

• Engage with Australian Government officers and funded service providers to obtain relevant comprehensive information.

• Explore opportunities to partner across government agencies in both funding and service delivery.

6.3 Attracting, recruiting and retaining localised expertise and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander qualified staff

Strategies proposed:

• Implement support services for practitioners and staff working in remote communities to enhance their roles and provide important feedback.

• Source adequate funding to recruit qualified staff in therapeutic support roles to ensure appropriate services for victims and perpetrators of YSVA.

• Provide education and training for therapeutic support roles and seek input from members of the community to identify the types of roles required in the local area.

• Tap into initiatives, such as the fast-tracking of 4G in Aurukun, to implement technological responses such as video conferencing, e-health etc to address isolation of staff and to disseminate information, eg educational campaigns on healthy sexual relationships.

• Responses to the survey noted some success in maintaining a suitable level of staff and drawing interest to available positions.

• It was also noted that some agencies had employed temporary staff members with significant experience within the community at a local level for the purpose of improved communication. For example, in Aurukun, the Department of Education and Training initiative to provide a sexual health curriculum program currently being trialed in three schools is soon to expand to Aurukun. Queensland Health has employed an Indigenous Health Worker who has previously worked in the community to support ease of communication.

6.4 Increasing community involvement

Strategies proposed:

• Increase the involvement of community members in inter-agency decision making to embed social and cultural protocols into practice.

• Increase access opportunities for young people to take advantage of services provided in wellbeing and family centres; for example, the ability to use internet services to access social media platforms and additional information.

• Prioritise reopening the Indigenous Knowledge Centre in Aurukun for young people to attend and access information and technology.

• Continue to utilise social media platforms and newsletters noted as being effective in sustaining community engagement through promoting good news stories and networking opportunities.

• Promote the relationships between agencies and communities as an important strategic approach to ensure community involvement and engagement.

6.5 Promoting an environment that supports personal and community safety

Strategies proposed:

• Build on the successes from the implementation of CCTV systems and patrolling of hot-spots within communities and extend these initiatives.

• Develop an association of services between remote communities and regional centres through the use of teleconferencing/videoconferencing facilities to help overcome the issues of remoteness.

• Consider relocating services, facilities or offices to a location that is more easily accessed by the community.
7. Recommendations

Based on the literature review, outcomes of the survey and further discussions, and consistent with the above analysis of effectiveness and strategies, the Committee is making seven recommendations in this first report, based around three themes: improving service effectiveness, awareness raising and resourcing. The literature review indicates, and the Committee notes, that responses to YSVA combining public health and crime prevention models are considered to be the most effective and have success in Indigenous and non-Indigenous samples.

Intervention and treatment needs to be specific to the environment and respond to influences which shape offending behaviour. This means, for example, if YSVA is normalised, prevention programs need to be tailored to the location and strong messages about empowering girls, and educating both girls and boys need to be different in each environment. The Committee’s seven recommendations are described below.

The YSVA Steering Committee has made seven recommendations to improve services and enhance responses to YSVA in Aurukun and West Cairns around three themes:

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**Improve service effectiveness**

- principles for service delivery improvement
- the need for a sustained focus on coordinating and integrating services in Aurukun and West Cairns.

**Raise awareness**

- the need for community support to address the issue
- developing a shared understanding by defining YSVA consistently
- the need for services to understand what YSVA is and how to respond.

**Resourcing**

- effective responses for victims and perpetrators need to be funded including:
  - that responses for victims need to be individual and location-specific, long term and aim for higher levels of retention
  - that responses for perpetrators need to be youth-specific and comprehensive
  - that technological responses need to be explored.
- that crime prevention is part of a holistic response to YSVA.
Improve service effectiveness

**Recommendation 1: Principles for service delivery improvements**

To support its Recommendations and to inform future work, the Committee proposes the following principles for service development and delivery:

- Responses should be evidence-based and linked to the Griffith University framework.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be involved in the design and delivery of services, preferably local people (including capacity building and skills development opportunities).
- Services should be field based delivered via outreach minimising travel by participants, with appropriately qualified staff engaged in delivery.
- Services should take account of culture and historic issues relevant to the community.
- Staffing needs to be appropriately gender balanced, trained to understand cultural safety by local people and supported to understand local issues.
- Treatment plans should take account of cultural heritage, local language and protocols, cultural values, beliefs and practices.
- Treatment plans should be holistic and suited to the young person’s development and environment and be non-stigmatising.
- Crime prevention responses that focus on environmental design to ensure community and personal safety should be supported.

**Recommendation 2: Sustain focus on coordinating and integrating services in Aurukun and West Cairns**

Coordinating and integrating services is an area where current efforts need to continue. The Cairns Safer Streets Taskforce, with government agencies working together, could advise how strategies might be focused to address YSVA. In Aurukun, the Committee notes the appointment of a Manager of Government Coordination in November 2015 and a Senior Government Coordinator in June 2016. This represents a significant, and necessary, commitment by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The Committee recommends this strengthened focus should be sustained.

**Recommendation 3: The need for community support to address the issue**

To support awareness raising the Committee recognises the importance of community buy-in and it intends to support engagement in Aurukun and West Cairns in the near future. The Committee has been briefed on the Queensland Government’s response to events in Aurukun, is supportive of that work and is committed to a community-led conversation amongst Wik people – a whole of community response – on how to respond to YSVA.

The Committee recognises a strong focus on empowering young women and changing attitudes about the role of women, and consequently, behavior and the attitudes of offenders, is critical.

The Griffith University Report suggests that YSVA has become normalised behavior in the locations considered. This means that elements of a comprehensive response to YSVA, for example, respectful relationships curriculums in the schools, child and family services, programs to empower girls and young women and to educate the community about healthy relationships need to be relevant and, therefore, designed locally. The Committee notes that a community may not have all of the expertise and resources readily available, therefore a process of sourcing expertise externally would occur and/or developing the capacity internally. The Committee notes designing services in this way is likely to have additional up-front financial implications; but notes the cost of responding to the consequences of YSVA also has significant personal and financial costs.

Of the survey responses, only eleven providers identified there were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives built into the design and delivery of the service system. This is problematic as the research highlights the importance of upholding cultural safety in the delivery of services to empower communities and support addressing Indigenous youth over-representation in YSVA as victims and offenders. Advice and guidance will be sought by the Committee from the Griffith University team and the community participants on the Committee to ensure sensitive and meaningful engagement with the communities and to ensure services include local perspectives and cultural safety.
Recommendation 4: Developing a shared understanding by defining YSVA consistently

The literature indicates the absence of a consistent definition of YSVA is a barrier to both developing a better understanding of the issue and an evidence base around how best to respond. Based on this, the Steering Committee agreed on a working definition as follows:

“Sexual contact between persons where either the perpetrator or the victim is under 18 years of age and where such contact is non-consensual, violent or illegal. Such contact is non-consensual if:

- either person is under the age of consent or lacks the capacity to consent
- a situation of imbalance of power exists, or
- there is present a threat or coercion to either person.

The causes of this violence should not be considered in isolation but also within the context of both the perpetrator’s and the victim’s family, peer, organisational and community systems and situations.”

The Committee recommends that the Government adopt a consistent definition of YSVA in order to support a shared understanding of the problem, focus service providers on responding to the issue and assist researchers in effectively examining how best to respond to YSVA in the various locations in which it occurs.

Recommendation 5: The need for services to understand what YSVA is and how to respond

Marginalised and remote communities are more vulnerable to YSVA. According to the literature, many of the risk factors associated with YSVA, for example, alcohol and substance abuse, low educational attainment, unemployment, and lack of suitable accommodation, are present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are overwhelmingly represented as both victims and offenders of YSVA. Best practice in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ensures local people are involved in the design and delivery of local services. Existing services need to be more cognisant of YSVA, and that service users may be a victim and / or an offender, and be prepared to respond accordingly.

The Committee recommends that Queensland Government agencies involve community leaders, parents and community organisations in the design and delivery of programs and services that seek to address YSVA. This should occur across the spectrum of responses and interventions, that is, prevention, early and secondary intervention and tertiary responses.

A comprehensive response, including respectful relationships curriculums in schools, child and family services and responses to family violence, needs to be locally designed and relevant to the environment. The specialised expertise of the Griffith University team would be particularly valuable in guiding the Committee in this work.

It could provide valuable advice on how to ensure a service is relevant to the location in which it is delivered and to understand how contact with clients would be made. Advice regarding the sustainability of an outreach service or office based approach should be sought through collaboration with people who have expertise in the area, particularly those who are working at a community level. It must start from the social norms within the community and incorporate an appropriate cultural worldview. The practitioner must have cultural understanding and be assisted to improve that understanding. Regular review is important to ensure the service is having the desired impact, whether it is seen as valuable by the community and if not, ascertain the reasons.
**Recommendation 6: Fund effective responses for victims and perpetrators**

The Committee recommends that dedicated longer-term funding is identified to respond to YSVA in the two locations. Significant funding has been found to address emerging priorities, for example CCTV, additional lighting and PCYC upgrades and community hubs, including the Queensland Government’s appointment of a Senior Government Coordinator in Aurukun. The Committee expressed the need for long-term funding commitments particularly when responding to long-term social and economic disadvantage. The Committee notes the Australian Government’s funding continues through to September 2016 and that it is considering future options in consultation with community members, Griffith University and the Queensland Government.

The Committee considered responses for victims, offenders and effective service delivery separately.

- Responses for victims need to be individual and location-specific, long-term and aim for higher levels of retention:
  - Victimisation has significant adverse effects - lifelong psychosocial problems of depression, aggression and antisocial behaviour. Complicating effective treatment for victims of YSVA is that young people who are victims of sexual violence drop out of treatment programs more frequently than children who are receiving services for other reasons. Research also shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are at greater risk of being victims of YSVA. An effective response to YSVA in places where prevalence is high requires an approach consistent with the methodology proposed by GYFS, noting their specialist expertise and knowledge of the local environment gained through years of community consultation and service delivery and their academic expertise.
  - Funding effective services for victims in the two locations requires a consistent and comprehensive treatment framework. For victims, this requires responses to be individual and location specific and long term. For offenders, a similar response is required, to aim for high retention in programs, with crime prevention as part of a holistic response. Attracting, recruiting and sustaining qualified staff is important to ensure the success of strategies.

- Responses for perpetrators need to be youth-specific and comprehensive
  - The factors that contribute to YSVA are considered to be a complex set of interrelated personal and environmental issues. This requires a response which is specific to an individual’s behaviour, of which a criminal justice response may be a part (noting the youth justice principle of detention as a last resort). The implications of this for Aurukun and West Cairns is that a comprehensive treatment model should be funded.

- Technological responses to be explored
  - Tapping into initiatives such as the fast-tracking of 4G into Aurukun to implement technological responses including video conferencing and e-health to address isolation of communities and staff could be explored. In addition to addressing isolation of staff in remote areas, this would be useful to disseminate information such as educational campaigns on healthy sexual relationships. Redesign of schools to prevent opportunities for YSVA and encouraging the reopening of Aurukun Indigenous Knowledge Centre as a resource for young people to access the internet for information, for example, as provided by sexual health campaigns, could also be explored.

**Recommendation 7: Crime prevention is part of a holistic response to YSVA**

There is evidence that environmental factors are contributing to YSVA and crime prevention strategies should be considered as a core part of the response to YSVA. This is an area where there is real potential for government and the communities to work collaboratively and co-operatively. The Committee notes specific crime prevention responses have occurred in both locations to address YSVA – ‘hot spot’ policing to disrupt anti-social and illegal activity and CCTV in Aurukun, through to refurbishing the PCYC-run Aurukun Sports Hall and establishing the Community Service Hubs in Mooroobool and Manoora.

The Committee considers these activities should continue. The Committee notes the Community Service Hubs in Mooroobool and Manoora are well located and the Hub in Murray Street particularly, where there has been a coordinator on-site, appears to have become an important community facility that supports local activity. The Committee recommends that ongoing funding be identified for on-site coordinators, preferably in both community hubs.
8. Consultation

The Chair and individual Committee members and the Secretariat have had discussions with academics, key services providers and community members. Wider public engagement will occur in the near future.

8.1 Community consultations

The Committee has agreed due to time restrictions and emerging issues in Aurukun, the YSVA Steering Committee could not conduct the community based conversations as planned. This activity would have provided the YSVA Steering committee with an opportunity to hear the community’s concerns and explore the effectiveness of the current responses locally. The analysis needs to be informed by local input and feedback from the community about what is working and where there may be gaps in services. Noting that there is representation on the Committee from people living in or with significant connections to Aurukun, and that relationships have already been established by the Griffith University team, the Committee is looking to support a community-led conversation amongst Wik people in the near future to seek agreement on how to respond to YSVA in Aurukun. Community consultation will also be held with key members of the West Cairns community.

The recommendations are an approach which can be used to guide conversations particularly with the communities of Aurukun and West Cairns about how to effectively respond to YSVA in these locations.

8.2 Youth consultations

The Committee has noted the importance of youth engagement and sought various ways to engage more broadly with youth to discuss the family’s role in establishing and re-establishing social norms in relation to youth sexual violence and abuse. Guiding principles were noted by the Committee for the purposes of youth engagement as:

- value and protect children
- increase community and individual awareness
- technology will continue to change the way young people interact
- family leadership is critical to the delivery of real and sustainable solutions
- families are the first protectors of children and will be supported to reclaim this role and re-establish norms
- community-driven solutions have a greater chance of success.

8.3 Future consultations

Consultations with young people in Aurukun and then in West Cairns will be progressed in the near future with the assistance of the Griffith University’s established relationships, key Indigenous service providers in the community and the leadership of the Committee participants from each community. The Committee acknowledges that careful and sensitive engagement is required and is taking appropriate advice to achieve this aim. Wider engagement with youth be undertaken to inform the second phase of the Committee’s work.
9. Further work and linkages

This Report focuses on developing strategies that are effective for the two communities of Aurukun and West Cairns. The next part of the Committee’s work is developing a state-wide strategy to address YSVA.

The World Health Organisation has recently released a Framework called INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children. It is a high-level framework which covers: implementation and enforcement of laws; norm and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services, education and life skills, as well as multi-sectoral actions and coordination and monitoring and evaluation. This is a useful framework for the Committee to inform its future work as it looks at broader factors such as family, domestic and community violence, all of which are indicated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the State. It aligns closely with the methodology of GYFS to provide a holistic response, and could provide useful focus for future work of the Committee.

A program logic has been drafted to support broader consultation, which includes a range of short and long term outcomes. These cover both quantitative measures such as a sustained reduction in the incidence of YSVA and young people with sexually transmitted infections; and an increase in the age of the mother with first baby; and qualitative measures such as healthy and age appropriate sexual relationships.

To support its work, and particularly during public discussion, the Committee intends to use positive language i.e. healthy, respectful sexual relationships, rather than continuing to refer to youth sexual violence. This will ensure a more strengths based approach while still keeping the space to have difficult conversations.

The Committee’s deliberations highlight the significant links between this work and reform agendas being pursued through domestic and family violence reforms and the child protection reform agenda and sexual health strategies. The presence of the Directors-General, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and Queensland Health will ensure the necessary links to this work are made.

The Committee will also take into account the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, as some of the academic work notes institutions are environments where there is a heightened risk of youth sexual violence occurring.

This first report focuses on developing strategies that are effective for the two communities of Aurukun and West Cairns. The next part of the Committee’s work is developing an understanding of the prevalence of youth sexual violence and abuse.

The research reveals that several common risks, such as family dysfunction and low social cohesion within the community, place children at a greater risk of being vulnerable to violence. Societal risk factors include social norms that create a climate in which violence is normalised and the research indicates violence can share common root causes. Exposure to violence at an early age can impair brain development and damage other parts of the nervous system, lead to mental health problems, delay cognitive development and result in poor school performance.

These factors contribute to the cycle of disadvantage caused by lack of education, unemployment, early pregnancy, increased risks of violence and contact with the criminal justice system.

Significant research supports the effectiveness of a holistic approach to ensuring healthy adult relationships and addressing disadvantage. There is an urgent need to ensure that the foundations for healthy lifestyles and relationships are laid very early in life by providing services that improve parenting skills. The Committee considers that much more needs to be done to address the entrenched disadvantage in these communities to ensure the future health and wellbeing of all residents, but particularly the new generation of children.