

**For better or worse:
Perspectives of service-connected young people on
the value of relationships in addressing their needs**

Rachael Green

Research Fellow, YSAS

Research Associate, National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University

Contact email: rgreen@ysas.org.au

Penelope Mitchell

Senior Research Fellow, YSAS

Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Health Policy, Programs and Economics (CHPPE), The University of Melbourne.

Andrew Bruun

Director, YSAS Research and Education Unit

YSAS (Youth Substance Abuse Service)

- o AOD focused youth service
- o 15 sites across Victoria
- o Young people 13-21 years
- o Holistic service model

Programs include:

- o Residential withdrawal units (short stay)
- o Residential rehabilitation (stay up to six months)
- o Community-based programs (outreach, day programs, young parents program)
- o Indigenous-specific service
- o Supported housing

Client presentations

YSAS client
statistics
2009-10:

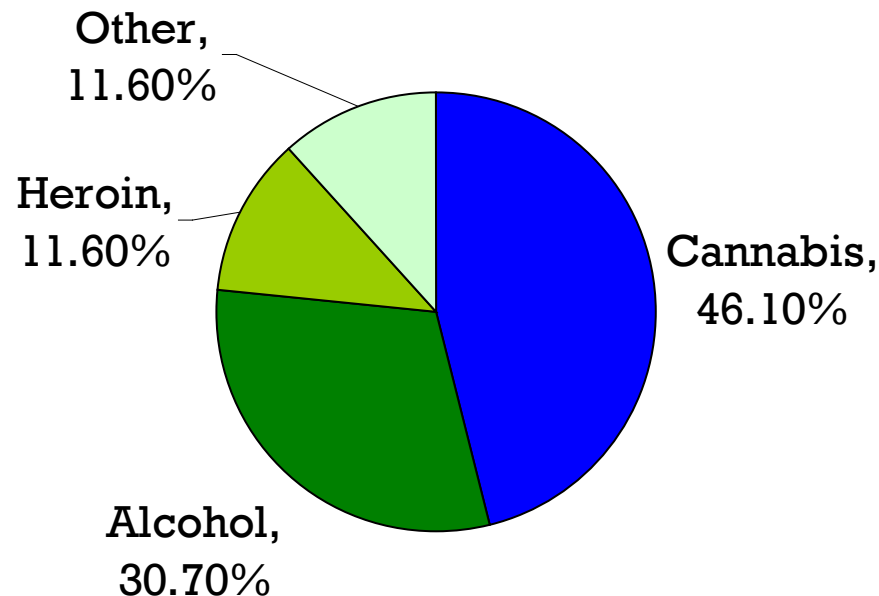
1,299

individual
clients

3,038

episodes of
care

Primary Drug of Concern



Data collection method

Semi-structured individual and group interviews:

N=42 participants

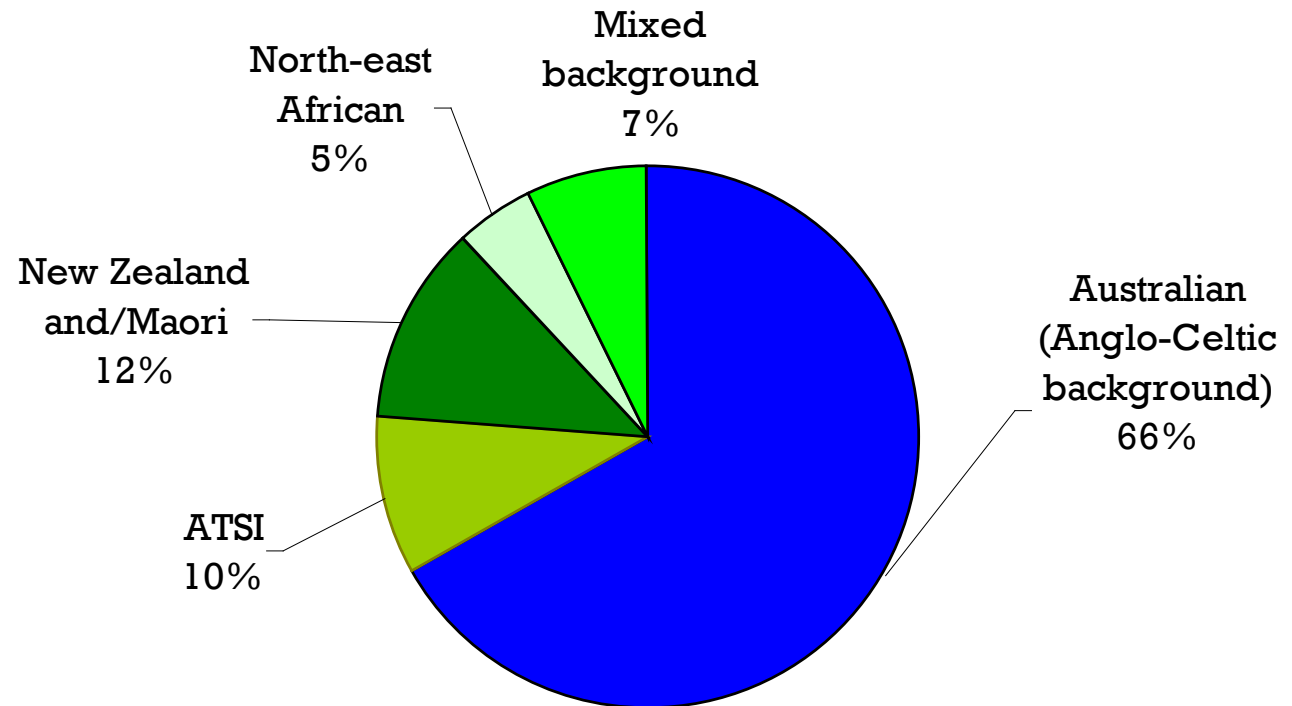
- o 16 individual interviews
- o 5 group interviews (N=31)

Five YSAS sites, three service types:

- o Community-based programs (outreach and day program)
- o Residential withdrawal
- o Residential rehabilitation

Basic sample characteristics

- o Age range: 15 to 22yrs
- o Average age 18.7yrs
- o Average age first access 16yrs
- o 20 females (47%)
22 males (53%)



Cultural Backgrounds of Participants

Interview schedule

Focus of interviews:

- o Reflect on life experiences and needs
- o What has helped them make progress or get their needs met
- o What has not helped, and
- o Why?

Five Life domains:

- o Basic needs (survival)
- o Crisis needs
- o Activity/time use
- o Health and wellbeing (AOD, depression, anxiety)
- o Connectedness/relationships

Main identified issues

- o Problematic drug use
- o Homelessness
- o Low levels involvement in education/employment
- o Involvement in justice system
- o Mental health and emotional disturbances

Most important relationships

- o Family/significant others
- o Friends/peers – “mates”
- o “Workers” – youth service providers

Family/significant other relationships

- o Multiple, significant problems, trauma
- o *However*, family also represented a connection to “the familiar”/ “people who know me well”
- o “Support”
familiar and steady relationships that provide security, structure and guidance

Friends/peers

- o Positives: Fun, company, validation, survival
- o Few friends/ few long-standing friendships
- o Negatives: AOD use and “trouble”
- o Ubiquity of AOD use among social networks
- o Difficulty in establishing and maintaining positive friendships

“Workers”/service providers

“Does anyone have a close relationship with their worker?”

“[name of worker] has been my worker for 10 years. [name of worker] is the bomb diggity!” (M 21yrs, group participant)

“yeah I love ‘em” (M 16yrs, individual interview)

“Who would you say are your closest relationships?”

“I’d say my worker, [name]. We have a pretty close friendship... he’s my worker of course, he’s not my mate, but he’s a friend in that sense, if you know what I mean? And then my brother.”

(M 18yrs, individual interview)

“Best parts” of relationships with workers

- o Genuine
- o Advocate
- o Listens, tries to understand
- o Shares time, shares self - “Get to know”
- o “Not too serious”

“[Name of worker] makes me feel welcome. I walk inside, it’s like she’ll walk up and start stirring me straight away – she’ll pick me out of the crowd before anyone else – to stir up, so... and I like that, it’s good! It’s a new thing for me anyway. Yeah, they’re good.”

(M 21 years, individual interview)

“What doesn’t help”

- o “treated like a number”
- o not listened to
- o inauthentic

“Or someone who feels they have to do it because it's their job when they really don't want to have anything to do with it. That pisses me off too”.

(M 20 years, group interview)

Respect

“I had no regard, no respect for no one, nothing, until YSAS brought it out and showed me to give people respect”

“... they’ve given me respect, and I’ll give them respect”
(M 19 years, group interview)

“if your worker isn’t here, one of the other workers will [...] go out of their way to do shit for you”
(F 18 years, group interview)

Fair and Consistent

“They don’t bring their own emotions into it”

(M 18 years, group interview)

... pretty much my anger wasn’t helping... there was nothing they could do to stop me from doing whatever I wanted to do and punch walls and that’s what I did, I put holes in all their walls and shit. Then the reason why I mean that I can change is that I felt bad after doing it all and then I went and painted the whole resi [residential withdrawal unit] up and plastered the holes up and shit so yeah, got a good relationship going on there with [name of worker].

(M 21yrs, individual interview)

Discussion

- oImportance of social connectedness and experiencing “support”
- oDoes emphasis on client centred care shift emphasis to individual psychology?

Three areas for consideration:

- oModelling of relationship skills
- oSupport from existing naturally occurring relationships
- oChallenge of forming new “bridging” connections

Implications...

- o Need to complement individual skill development with systemic interventions
- o Use of social networking mapping tools in assessment
- o Continued place for social-ecological models of care

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Contact details:

Rachael Green

rgreen@ysas.org.au

(03) 9415 8881

Funding contributors:

