

Futures for Young Adults Program Evaluation

Disability Services Division



Institute of
Disability Studies



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Service providers in the Future for Young Adults program.

Officers of the DisAbility Services, Victorian Department of Human Services, centrally and in the regions.

Representatives of advocacy organisations.

Representatives of peak bodies.

Officers and teachers of the Victorian Department of Education, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools in Victoria.

Individuals with experience as advocates and workers in the program.

Thanks are also extended to the Advisory Committee members, who responded regularly to issues raised by the research team and gave helpful and informed advice at all stages of the project.

A further list of the advisory committee and contributors is found in Appendix 1.

Disclaimer

The views represented in this report are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Victorian Government. The recommendations in this report are intended to inform the processes, policies and priorities of DisAbility Services Division and must be considered in the context of existing initiatives, competing priorities and alternative perspectives.

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Executive Summary

The Futures for Young Adults (FFYA) program was implemented in November 1996 to support young adults with disabilities in their transition from school to post-school options, in order to maximise their chance to reach their adult potential and enable them to participate more fully in the community.

The Institute of Disability Studies at Deakin University was selected to undertake an evaluation of the FFYA program in October 2000. The program evaluation is to accompany the Destinations Evaluation of FFYA, undertaken by Logos Pleiades Consulting in 2000. Logos Pleiades Consulting also participated in the present evaluation.

Terms of Reference

1. Consider the processes used by the regions in managing all aspects (identification, assessment, reassessment, transition planning, placement and review) of the FFYA program from November 1996 to November 2000.
2. Examine the way participants and their families and carers participated in the decision making processes leading to adult options.
3. Consider the ways in which service providers and other stakeholders have responded to the needs and preferences of participants.
4. Make recommendations for the ongoing provision and management of adult options for young adults with disabilities moving from school to work and community life.

Program Directions

The following directions for the program, identified from the initial documentation, were central to the design of the evaluation:

- To involve students, their parents and carers and teachers in the transition process.
- To provide clients and their families with the choice of a range of service options, which include existing services but also new services created for that purpose.
- To enhance access to further education, training, employment and recreational opportunities.
- To support the development of a flexible, client-responsive service system, tailored to the developmental needs of the individual and offering pathways for the client to other service options.
- To ensure quality services that meet the aims for young adults to experience improved and enhanced lifestyle opportunities.
- To provide services that support the individual in a successful transition to adult life, that maximise their chance to reach their full adult potential and that enable them to participate more fully in the community to achieve their maximum independence.

Key Stakeholders

This evaluation identified the key stakeholders as comprising:

- Young adults participating in FFYA.
- Their parents and carers.
- Service providers.
- Schools.
- Department of Human Services staff responsible for managing and administering the program.
- Disability organisations, including advocacy groups and peak bodies.

Key Themes

The themes emerging from the key directions of the program were:

- Goals and expectations of FFYA.
- Information and communication.
- Needs assessment.
- Transition process.
- Options—choice and flexibility.
- Self-determination and participation of the young adults and their parents and carers in decision making.
- Resourcing.

Positive Features

The evaluation found that all stakeholders supported the goals and directions of the FFYA program. They believed that the situation for young adults with disabilities as they move from school to adult life has improved since the program's introduction in the following ways:

- Young adults and their families now know there is something to move to and a program to support this; there is a 'future'.
- The portability of funding allows for flexibility, and has succeeded in offering services to young adults who previously had been left in school or on service providers' waiting lists.
- The existence of assured and continued funding for participants enables service providers to develop innovative and appropriate programs to meet the needs of young people moving to adult life.
- When young adults and their families are encouraged to participate in decision making, the program offers great potential for the development of self-determination and participation.

The Review found many examples of young adults and their families who were happy with FFYA and the way it was working for them. People were happy with the program when the following factors existed:

1. Young people and parents had sufficient information to feel they had control over the choices they made.
2. The young person was happy in their chosen program.
3. The Support Needs Assessment was conducted with sensitivity, and its purpose was understood (including what it was *not* designed to do).
4. Department of Human Services transition staff took in reports from the school's Program Support Group (PSG) and teachers' opinions.
5. Department of Human Services transition staff had accurate knowledge of the available services and programs.
6. Department of Human Services transition staff emphasised the positive, rather than the negative, in their discussion of options and the potential to move to further options, including employment.
7. Department of Human Services staff listened willingly to families and treated their requests and concerns with respect.
8. Service providers responded positively to the comments of young people and families about the program and requests.

Emerging Issues

The FFYA Program Evaluation is timely, given that it is now into the fifth year of operation. It has provided the opportunity to stand back from the operational demands of the program and look at outcomes for young adults and their parents and carers.

The Review found that committed and knowledgeable Department of Human Services staff, in both the regions and central office, administered the program. It was obvious that the future for young adults with disabilities has improved since before the program was implemented.

Unmet Aims

The Review found that some of the intended outcomes (implicit in the early documentation) had not been fully achieved. Respondents suggested many reasons for this, including:

- The speed of the program's implementation.
- The lack of clearly defined outcomes.
- The lack of clear and consistent information about processes.
- The lack of regular reviews of the program as a whole.

Many of the identified problems areas are currently being addressed. The Review found that regions were continually adjusting their processes as part of regular quality improvement measures. It is hoped that the Review's recommendations support those initiatives and provide regional staff with the encouragement to continue to reflect on practice, and implement measures to improve the program.

Key Transition Points

The Review found that the program has enormous potential for improving the lives of young people with disabilities by supporting them in transitions from post-school options to further adult options. The FFYA program recognised the need for intensive support at the key transition stage of school to post-school option.

The Review identified the issue of whether or not there is a completion of transition. The name of the program itself highlights this issue, as the words ‘young adults’ and ‘future’ are problematic. Parents and carers in particular saw the program as a continuing one, and many posed the question ‘What would we do if there wasn’t the Futures program?’ There are a number of transitions in life for all people (for example, starting school, leaving school and moving to adult options, moving out of home, starting and ending work, establishing relationships and moving into aged care). Many people with disabilities require additional support at these times. Support must continue for those young adults who will not become independent, and who will require continuing support at a consistent level.

A Transition or Ongoing Program?

A major issue for the administration of FFYA is the lack of an exit policy, so that each year, more young adults join the program, but few leave it. Related to this are the criteria for entry, via the Department of Education Employment and Training’s Disability and Impairments Program, which, because of changing diagnostic trends, is attracting increasing numbers of young adults. The Review recognises the budgetary consequences of this tension between a *transition* program, with its major purpose being to support young adults moving from school to post-school options, and an *ongoing* program, which continues to support adults as they move through their lives. One way of addressing this tension is to develop better strategies for moving those young adults who are able to reach some degree of independence to supported and open employment. There must also be the means of identifying those young people who are no longer accessing services and who have ceased to seek FFYA funding for some reason. The maintenance of records of people’s continuing need for and use of services is important, and would facilitate planning that includes outcomes and reviews.

Any answers to the question of whether the FFYA program, its name notwithstanding, is a transition program or a lifelong support program lies beyond the scope of this Review, but the question is acknowledged as extremely important to stakeholders. The issue is partly addressed in the *Draft State DisAbility Plan* (Department of Human Services, 2001), which identifies a key challenge as ‘supporting people with a disability across different life stages and at key life transition times’ (Department of Human Services 2001: 19). The Plan emphasises the importance of ‘helping people plan for the future, particularly at key transition points in their lives’ (Department of Human Services 2001: x). The development of an integrated support system that takes account of ongoing needs should be the subject of further investigation and consideration.

The Review recommends renewed attention on participation of young people and their families in transition planning, with stated outcomes, regular reviews and the possibility of further options. Increased attention to employment outcomes, and ways of facilitating these, will result in advantages for the young adult, and in a reduced need for funding from the FFYA program. Ways of encouraging options that provide independence and social inclusion, such as employment, should be explored, with the recognition that young adults should not be disadvantaged if such moves to greater independence do not work out.

Parent Concerns

Parent respondents to the Review expressed their fear of losing support should their young adult's move to greater independence and employment not be sustained. They expressed the need for a 'safety net' that would ensure support at a later stage or transition—if needed. Currently, if a young adult has not been on the program for two years or more they are excluded. The Review suggests that such a requirement should be softened to allow for renewed eligibility under special circumstances. Removing the fear of exclusion might offer more encouragement to move young people to independent options and consequently to a reduced need for program support.

Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the themes that directed the questions to respondents, and are therefore not presented in priority order. The conclusions about each theme that led to the recommendations are discussed in Section C: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Overarching Recommendation: Futures Demonstration Project

The Review recommends that a demonstration project be initiated, in which any number of the recommendations outlined below could be implemented in a controlled way to demonstrate their effectiveness (or otherwise) in relation to the objectives of the FFYA program. For example, the Review found a need to encourage those young adults with aspirations and capacity for work to move from school to training options, and then to part-time or full-time supported employment or open employment. It also found a number of brokerage services that offer young adults a number of supports in following this course, including planning, case management, workplace support and advocacy. Such approaches could be formally encouraged in a demonstration project, and the data collected and analysed for cost and other outcomes. It could also have both process (formative) and summative evaluation.

Summary of Recommendations

Key Area	Number	Recommendation
1 Goals and Expectations of FFYA	1.1	That Futures for Young Adults, with a change of name, be retained as an essential and creative program to support young people with disabilities in their transition to adulthood.
	1.2	That the vision for the program, its goals and operational guidelines, be affirmed by all stakeholders, with particular focus on those which support self-determination and participation.
	1.3	That the staffing requirements of the program be monitored, to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of skilled staff to support the transition planning and review processes recommended by this Review.
	1.4	That the goals of the program, in particular, the focus on empowerment, participation and transition to adult life, be emphasised in induction and professional development programs for staff working in the program.
	1.5	That the name of the program be changed to remove the word 'young' in order to capture the age range of adults with disabilities requiring support during transitions.
2 Information and Communication	2.1	That a review be undertaken of the information provided by Department of Human Services to young adults eligible for FFYA, their parents and carers, schools and service providers, to ensure that it meets their needs for accessible, personalised and relevant information.
	2.2	That a statewide information strategy be developed, and that this include key contacts in each region with responsibility for consistency, updating of information and liaison with the central administration.
	2.3	That all information, including the attitudes and values on which the program is based, be available in languages other than English; and that ethnic communities and advocates be supported in their task of providing information to young adults and their families.
	2.4	That Operational Guidelines for the program be provided to Department of Human Services staff as part of an induction program, and that these guidelines be regularly reviewed to ensure currency and appropriateness.

	2.5	That there be a review of expos to identify the factors that contribute to their success, with a view to maximising the opportunity provided by these events to inform, educate and provide advice, and that consideration be given to providing follow-up advice to young people and their families.
	2.6	That Central Office coordinates the establishment and maintenance of a data system to ensure consistent record keeping across regions.
	2.7	That a reference group be (re)established with membership drawn from advocacy groups, disability peak bodies, DEET, the Disability Advisory Council and independent experts, with its brief being to provide advice on policy and practice to program administrators.
3 Transition	3.1	That the Transition Report and an outcomes-based Transition Plan, with information relating to behaviour, specialist needs, educational and vocational aspirations and motivation, be regarded as central to the assessment of needs and the transition process; and that professional development be provided to relevant personnel, schools and Department of Human Services to assist in the preparation of these.
	3.2	That transition processes be revised to reflect the following operating principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start raising awareness of post-school options with teachers, parents and the student early in the student's school career, and by Year 9 (or the equivalent) at the latest. ▪ Emphasise planning for transitions, ensuring that Transition Plans include proposed actions and outcomes (in the manner of service and case plans). ▪ Encourage appropriately high aspirations for the student and positive expectations in significant others. ▪ Focus not just on education and vocational areas, but the full range of adult requirements, including recreation, leisure and relationships. ▪ Throughout secondary schooling, increasingly focus on preparation for the world of work, further education, and appropriate adult options. ▪ Ensure access to flexible work experience where appropriate. ▪ Offer workplace learning within the school if work experience options are not available. ▪ Ensure that the young adult is aware of the pathways to adult options, including, for some, the path from work preparation to increasingly open employment options. ▪ Ensure regular reviews of placement options for their continuing relevance and effectiveness. ▪ Assist the young adult to exercise choice in changing their programs, their directions and their support people as required/desired.
	3.3	That the roles of people involved in transition be reviewed to ensure that young adults and their families have a consistent contact person who is able to assist the family as appropriate.
	3.4	That career structures for personnel working in transition be enhanced to reflect the levels of skill and knowledge required, and that induction programs and ongoing professional development programs be provided for personnel working in the program.
	3.5	That the age of eligibility of eighteen years remain as recommended, with the provision that the small number of students who are ready to move to an adult option at an earlier age be able to access the program.
	3.6	That a special consideration process be established to consider the needs of young adults who have been out of the school system or the FFYA program for more than two years, but who require support for transition to an adult option.
	3.7	That there be short, non-invasive annual reviews of a young adult's option for up to three years after the initial placement, conducted independently of the service provider; and that funding be reapplied for at the time of review only if there is a clear need for change which cannot be met with the current funding.
	3.8	That when a young adult has moved to an option that provides some independence, such as employment, they exit the program, with the possibility of re-entry after a review to ascertain the extent of additional transition support required, and the preparation of a new outcomes-based Transition Plan (see Recommendation 5.7).
	4 Needs	4.1

	4.2	That the processes for assessing needs be changed, where necessary, to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The purpose of the Support Needs Assessment, its relationship to the transition process, and the procedures for review are clearly explained to all stakeholder groups. ▪ The initial Support Needs Assessment (SNA) is conducted after the Transition Report and the Transition Plan have been completed, to ensure that the individual's abilities, ambitions and life circumstances are given high priority. ▪ Any request for a review of the SNA for a young adult is met willingly and within the time limit stated in the current program guidelines (five days following a request by any party). ▪ The young adult and parents and carers are present when the SNA (or a review) is conducted, unless there is agreement between the parties as to the need for alternative arrangements.
5 Options—Choice and Flexibility	5.1	That Department of Human Services DisAbility Services participate in the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to support links between services and that networks of disability service providers be established and supported.
	5.2	That service providers be actively encouraged to share resources, in order to provide greater access to a variety of activities and programs, including recreational and after-hours programs.
	5.3	That any redevelopment of the FFYA program include the capacity for self-management by the young adult, their parents, carers or advocates, with clear processes to ensure accountability to the Department of Human Services for funds spent.
	5.4	That brokerage, when the broker is independent of the funders and service providers, be regarded favourably as a model for assisting young adults to find appropriate options.
	5.5	That employment outcomes be included in Transition Plans where possible; and that regional staff, TAFE providers, parents and carers and the community be encouraged to consider employment as an achievable option for young people with disabilities.
	5.6	That young adults who move into part-time employment be supported in pursuing other options in addition to employment.
	5.7	That those who leave Commonwealth-funded employment for appropriate reasons be able to re-enter training or daytime programs until they have re-acquired appropriate work-readiness skills.
	5.8	That mechanisms be established to ensure that pre-vocational training programs address Commonwealth employment competencies.
6 Self-Determination and Participation	6.1	That the principles of self-determination and participation be emphasised in the information about the program provided to stakeholders; and that young adults and parents and carers be given every opportunity to exercise choice.
	6.2	That the information strategy (Recommendation 2.2) makes specific provision for communication with young adults and their families, including those with special communication requirements and those culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
	6.3	That a representative group be established to mediate between parties when there are unresolved disputes related to the program.
7 Resources	7.1	That funding guidelines be clarified and made consistent, yet flexible, and that this information be disseminated to all stakeholders as part of the information strategy (Recommendation 2.2).
	7.2	That the notion of flexible funding be maintained and enhanced, and that this be related to annual reviews of a young adult's option, for up to three years, after which, reviews be undertaken every three years unless additional reviews are requested or required.
	7.3	That the further development of recreation and after-hours programs, service provider networks and other cooperative strategies be encouraged, with the aim of building inclusive communities that support social networks for young adults with disabilities.
	7.4	That support networks of service providers to develop cooperative approaches to transport, and that recreational programs be established.

Section A: Introduction

1 Overview of the Evaluation Report

1.1 Structure

Section	Content	Chapters
A	Outlines the background for the Evaluation, including a description of the Futures for Young Adults (FFYA) program as it operates in Victoria. This section also outlines the Evaluation methodology.	1–3
B	Presents the stakeholders' experiences of the program as they were presented to the Review.	4–10
C	Draws conclusions about the findings, and makes recommendations for the further development of the program.	11–13

1.2 Background

1.2.1 The 18+ Transfer Project

During the 1980s, many states, including Victoria, recognised the need for transition programs to assist students with a disability to move from schools to post-school options (Community Services and Ministry of Education, 1989: 5). The 18+ Transfer Project (1990 to 1994), which was the predecessor to the FFYA program, was not an individual transition program, but was referred to as the 'whole-of-school' transition, and moved whole groups of students to adult settings.

Following the 18+ Transfer Project, there were further discussions between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education (DoE) to generate responses to the increasing number of young adults with disabilities still in the school system. In 1994, in the context of the student exit policy (at eighteen years), the DoE implemented the Transition Support Project, a Commonwealth Special Education Intersectoral Project. This aimed to explore statewide processes for the transition of students with disabilities in mainstream schools to post-school options. The project produced excellent transition resources for teachers, and the findings informed the development of the next initiative, the FFYA program.

1.2.2 The FFYA

The FFYA was launched in November 1996, as a joint initiative of the Department of Human Services and the DoE. It was designed to support young adults with disabilities, aged 18 years and over, in their transition to post-school options, including post-secondary education and training, employment, day support services, and recreation and leisure activities. At the time, there were 1,270 young adults over 18 years in state schools.

While there are no documented objectives or outcomes for the FFYA, the Minister's speech (Dr Denis Napthine, *Hansard*, 13 November 1996) suggested these key directions for the program:

- To involve students, their parents and carers and teachers in the transition process.
- To provide clients with the choice of a range of service options that include existing services, but also new services created for that purpose.
- To enhance access to further education, training, employment and recreational opportunities.

- To support the development of a flexible, client responsive service system, tailored to the developmental needs of the individual, which offers pathways to other service options.
- To ensure quality services that help young adults to experience improved and enhanced lifestyle opportunities.
- To provide services that support the individual in a successful transition to adult life, which maximises their chances to reach their full adult potential and enables them to participate more fully in the community to achieve their maximum independence.

The key themes of this initiative were consistent with initiatives elsewhere, in Australia (Queensland, NSW and WA) and overseas:

- Involvement
- Participation
- Choice
- Access
- Quality of services.

Both the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services were responsible for the program's speedy implementation, in order to ensure that the first cohort of students were in place by January 1997. The timing of the implementation of this first stage placed considerable pressure to make hasty decisions on schools, families and young adults, especially when the details of how the program would work were unknown. However, the general response to the program was positive—participants reported that there now seemed to be a 'future' for young people who, up until that time, had had few options. Other participants expressed concern and anger, as some young adults and their parents found the transition to a post-school option they had just planned (for example, to a school-initiated 18+ Program) was now redundant, forcing them to start again, this time under the FFYA processes.

There were four processes identified as being basic to the implementation of the program at that time:

1. **Individual transition planning**, in which the young adults and their families were to be full participants. This process was to include a formal review of each young adult's initial choice, and a review of their needs over time.
2. **Interagency collaboration and flexibility**, in particular, Department of Human Services and Department of Education collaboration.
3. **Recurrent and ongoing client-centred funding**, in which the funding would travel with the young adults as they moved between service providers.
4. **Service sector development**, with the involvement of existing service providers and the introduction of new service providers and new models of service delivery (Department of Human Services, 1998: 6).

1.3 Review

A review of Stage 1 of the implementation was undertaken in May 1998 (Department of Human Services, 1998), although the review report was not widely disseminated, and there was no implementation plan for its recommendations. There has been no review of the program since then, although individual regions have evaluated aspects of the FFYA program at various times (for example, Barwon South-West, Southern Metropolitan and Loddon Mallee regions).

The present evaluation builds on this earlier review to describe the extent to which the objectives have been achieved and to identify any other outcomes.

In reviewing the program for the Department of Human Services, the research team was required to:

- Consider the processes used by the regions in managing all aspects of the FFYA program (identification, assessment, reassessment, transition planning, placement and review) from November 1996 to November 2000.
- Examine the way participants and their families and carers participated in the decision making processes leading to adult options.
- Consider the ways in which service providers and other stakeholders have responded to the needs and preferences of participants.
- Make recommendations for the ongoing provision and management of adult options for young adults with disabilities moving from school to work and community life.

1.4 Program Opportunities

Since its implementation in 1997, the FFYA program has assisted approximately 3,300 students to move to adult options. A further 900 young adults with disabilities were eligible for assistance in 2001.

The available options are:

- Adult Training and Support Services (ATSS).
- TAFE's (disability and open courses).
- Universities.
- Supported employment.
- Open employment.
- Attendant care.
- Community programs.
- Independent arrangements.
- A combination of all these.

The States and Commonwealth have different responsibilities for employment. The Commonwealth–State Disability Agreement (CSDA) provides a national administrative framework for service provision to people with a disability. Under the provisions of the CSDA, the Commonwealth Government has responsibility for funding employment-related services, while the states and territories are responsible for the administration of accommodation, independent living training, respite and other support services. The State receives funds from the Commonwealth (through a memorandum of understanding) to provide employment assistance for FFYA clients. These arrangements have been a source of confusion for many people involved in supporting people with disabilities in moving to employment. The Commonwealth and states are currently reviewing them.

2 Methodology

In the development of the methodology and research questions, the research team was advised by an Advisory Committee comprising representatives from:

- A peak body.
- An advocacy group.
- The FFYA regional coordinators.
- A parent/carer.
- An FFYA participant.
- The Department of Education.
- Department of Human Services central.
- An independent academic

Appendix 1 contains the full membership list.

The aim of this research was to evaluate the performance of the program against a set of goals and directions. These were drawn from the initial documentation for the program (described in the section 'Background', above).

Two approaches to collecting data were initially considered: survey methodology and qualitative research. The survey methodology was to have included the administration of at least one general questionnaire to each stakeholder group (young adults, families and carers, service providers, schools, Department of Human Services, and so on), followed by targeted questionnaires and interviews. The qualitative research methodology was to have used interviews with representatives of the various stakeholder groups by members of the research team.

Survey methods were considered inappropriate for a number of reasons:

- It was believed that some stakeholder groups might find questionnaires to be 'unfriendly' and intrusive.
- There was evidence from previous surveys and questionnaires that response rates were likely to be low. The research team heard understood that in some regions, participants, particularly the young adults and their families and carers, were 'surveyed out'.
- The time available for the evaluation would prevent adequate coverage of the research goals. A traditional survey approach would have required, as a minimum, an initial piloting phase, in which key themes were identified, a main survey round, and then a follow-up round of further questions to more deeply explore issues raised by the main round.
- It was felt that it would not be cost-effective, as a questionnaire was likely to yield poor response rates or biased responses, reflecting participants' frustration at having to complete yet another survey.

The final choice of a qualitative research methodology was motivated by three factors:

1. The evaluation was concerned not only with merely identifying the presence or absence of particular processes, but also with exploring the experiences of those involved. Describing the details of whatever processes had been put in place was only a beginning. The experiences of stakeholders reflected the key program directions of self-determination and participation, the provision of flexible options, and the degree to which the transition process evidenced flexibility and client choice.
2. The qualitative approach offered the advantage of allowing for a follow-up to be incorporated into the single approach, as people could be asked for more detail or to clarify their comments.
3. Compared to the anonymous contact presented by a questionnaire, the personal contact offered by the qualitative methodology could demonstrate an individual commitment by the research team in particular, and the Department of Human Services in general.

Qualitative research methodology includes a variety of approaches, instead of a single, well-defined method. A number of taxonomies have been proposed for distinguishing among different methods. Tesch (1990) suggested that the research goal be used as an initial distinguishing characteristic. A set of specific qualitative methods involves the goal of discovering the themes and linkages ('regularities') in what is said and what has been done.¹ This goal describes the current research.

The data was collected from interviews with all groups in the FFYA program, written and verbal submissions to the evaluation, attendance at meetings of representative groups, and faxed questions to some groups.

2.1 Interviews

Field research team members conducted interviews with young adults and their parents and carers. Wherever possible, interviews were conducted face to face. Phone interviews were used only when it was logistically impossible to meet face to face, or when a preference for telephone contact was expressed by a respondent. Most interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. The single largest group of interviews was carried out with young adults and their families and carers. Team members carrying out these interviews had all previously undertaken interviews with people with disabilities and those supporting them. They were sensitive to the communication difficulties of many young adults, and took time to ascertain the intention of their responses. However, despite this sensitivity, and the desire of the research team to represent the feelings of those with limited communication, there were a number of young adults who were nonverbal, whose parents and carers suggested they not be interviewed. It was not possible, given the time and other limitations of the Review, to use observation over time to ascertain the levels of satisfaction with FFYA of these participants. Future research into the effects of support programs on participants should make every effort not to disenfranchise these groups.

The interviews with all participants were semi-structured and based on a set of research questions (see below), determined in consultation with the Advisory Committee. Soon after commencing interviewing, all members of the field research team were involved in a review of the questions. The aim of the Review was to ensure the appropriateness and effectiveness of the research questions. The Review found that the questions did not need any further modification.

¹ Tesch (1990) suggests that the other kinds of goals addressed by qualitative research involve examining the characteristics of language, typically the province of ethnography, understanding what is meant by actions or words, and formalised reflection on experience.

2.2 Submissions

An invitation to submit to the evaluation was sent to agencies, advocacy organisations and peak bodies. In response, a number of written and verbal submissions were made to the evaluation from both individuals and groups. These are listed in the Appendices.

2.3 Other Methods

- Members of the research team attended meetings of representatives of stakeholder groups.
- A brief questionnaire was faxed to schools, TAFEs and universities.

2.4 Research Questions

The process of determining the research questions began with the research team reviewing the goals of the program. The approach taken was, ‘Given that these were the aims of the program, how has it performed?’ Formulating the research questions was made difficult because there was no formal record of the goals or objectives of the program, and they had to be gleaned from a number of sources, including the Minister’s speech to Parliament announcing the program, and the early information bulletins published by the Department.

A process of discussion within the research team, with the Department, and with the Advisory Committee, identified these seven broad areas of focus for evaluation:

1. Goals and expectations
2. Information and communication
3. Transition
4. Needs assessment
5. Options—choice and flexibility
6. Self-determination and participation
7. Resourcing.

Specific research questions were then formulated around each of the areas of concern. The final set of twelve research questions (Appendix 2) were selected from a larger pool, following further discussion among the team and with others, particularly the Advisory Committee.

These questions were adapted according to the respondent group. The evaluators used them as a basis for free-flowing conversations about FFYA with participants and their parents and carers. They were careful to use plain English, and to check for understanding, and they rephrased questions when required, and spent time talking about the issues, in order to obtain a view from the respondents. When interviewing participants with little or no verbal communication, the researchers observed nonverbal communication. They also relied on the interpretation of parents and carers. As has been noted above, this is a weakness in the methodology. Reliance on the interpretation of others can affect objectivity and produce bias in findings. The challenges in obtaining accurate information for people with disabilities should be taken into account of in future research design.

2.5 Feedback and Analysis

The interviews were carried out over a period of five months, between February and June 2001. During that time, five roundtable discussions were convened for the field research team and data analysts. The roundtable discussions were the primary means by which interview data was made available for subsequent analysis. This method was adopted, rather than working directly with interview records, for several reasons. Based on experience, the research team rejected making any audio recordings of interviews, as they could have inhibited some comments and deterred some participants. Interviewers took notes in as unobtrusive way as possible.

An obvious criticism of the approach was that the results could reflect at least as much about the views of the research team as it would of those interviewed. Several points need to be made about this. The criticism ignores the professional ability of the team members to make a distinction between their own views and those of the people interviewed. Members of the team were selected for their experience in both the disability field and with interviewing. Although more subtle biases might play a part, the scope for more obvious biases was not significant. In addition, team members interviewed members of all or most of the major stakeholder groups. Therefore, by asking interviewers to represent the views of others, it was possible to explore explicitly any consistency in themes associated with individual interviewers, and account for such biases.

Similarly, even though purely 'objective' data might be a goal, it cannot be achieved in practice. Any kind of recording will involve a distillation of all the evidence available. For example, an audiotape recording misses nonverbal cues, and the researcher must choose which, if any of those cues, are entered into the final record. Therefore, instead of ignoring the role of researcher, this approach makes that role explicit.

Interviews were carried out with all the significant participants involved in the FFYA program:

- The young adults, which were the primary participants in the program.
- Their families and carers.
- Schools: special, Catholic and independent mainstream.
- Service providers, such as ATSS, TAFEs and universities.
- Regional coordinators from the Department of Human Services.

The single largest group of interviews was with the young adults and their parents and carers. The research team decided that, wherever possible, interviews with a young adult should be matched by an interview with their family or carers. This was designed to allow for cross-matching of issues raised by each party.

A great deal of care was taken to ensure the representativeness of the interviews within each grouping. For the young adults and their families and carers, a stratified, random sampling process was designed, which identified strata and then randomly selected representatives within those strata. Combinations of region, cohort, SNA and gender of the young adult formed the strata. These characteristics were selected as being of the greatest interest. This generated a possible 216 strata (nine regions x four cohorts x three SNA² groupings x two gender groups). However, not all of the 24 possible groups were actually represented in each of the nine regions.

² Based on the evidence from the report of Part 1 of the *FFYA Review—Destination Report*—the six levels of the SNA were collapsed into three groups: low SNA (1, 2), mid SNA (3, 4), and high SNA (5, 5.5).

Based on the results of the *FFYA Destinations Report*, it was possible to identify 180 actual representative groupings across the program. Using these groups, a list of young adults and their families was constructed. Table 1, below, shows the numbers of young adults and parents and carers in each of the groupings identified for contact, actually contacted requesting an interview, and then actually interviewed. Attempts were made to contact all these young adults and their parents and carers. In some regions, the FFYA coordinators requested that they make contact with the identified young adult and their family, introducing the project and requesting an opportunity for an interview. In other regions, the Department of Human Services research team member made this contact.

As Table 1 shows, 101 (56 per cent) of the 180 interviews sought were met with responses. Seventy (69 per cent) of the 101 responses were then translated into actual interviews. As Table 2 shows, there was considerable variation in the response rates across regions, varying between 100 per cent in three regions (Grampians, Hume and Loddon Mallee), to very few interviews recorded in Western and Northern Metropolitan Regions. Several attempts were made to contact those sampled. Those that were missed did not return calls within the time allocated for the interviews.

Table 1 Targeted Requests for Interviews of Young Adults and their Families/Carers

	Cohort				SNA			Gender		Total Targeted for Region		Requests Accepted	
	1996	1997	1998	1999	Low	Mid	High	M	F	Number	Per cent	Number	Rate
Barwon-South West	3	6	6	6	7	7	7	11	10	21	12%	13	62%
Eastern Metropolitan Region	6	6	6	6	8	8	8	12	12	24	13%	14	58%
Gippsland	6	4	5	5	8	8	4	10	10	20	11%	6	30%
Hume	1	6	5	6	6	7	5	10	8	18	10%	10	56%
Loddon Mallee	1	6	5	6	6	7	5	9	9	18	10%	10	56%
Northern Metropolitan Region	3	6	6	6	7	7	7	12	9	21	12%	11	52%
Southern Metropolitan Region	2	7	6	7	7	9	6	11	11	22	12%	15	68%
Western Metropolitan Region	2	6	6	6	6	6	8	10	10	20	11%	10	50%
Grampians	2	5	4	5	6	6	4	7	9	16	9%	12	75%
Total	26	52	49	53	61	65	54	92	88	180		101	75%

Table 2 Interviews Carried Out

	Cohort				SNA			Gender		Actual Interviews	
	1996	1997	1998	1999	Low	Mid	High	M	F	Interviews	Rate
Barwon–South West	2	4	4	2	3	5	4	6	6	12	92%
Eastern Metropolitan Region	2	2	4	3	4	4	3	4	7	11	79%
Gippsland	1	2	2	1		3	3	4	2	6	100%
Hume		4	3	4	2	6	3	5	6	10	100%
Lodden Mallee	1	2	2	5	3	4	3	4	6	10	100%
Northern Metropolitan Region	1			2		2	1	1	2	2	18%
Southern Metropolitan Region	1	2	3	2	1	4	3	7	1	8	53%
Western Metropolitan Region			3	1	1	1	2		4	4	40%
Grampians	2	4	2	5	5	5	3	7	6	12	100%
Total	9	20	20	24	18	33	22	37	36	73	74%

Table 3 Interviews Conducted Showing Gender, SNA and Cohort

		Interviews	Interview Rate
Cohort	1996	9	12%
	1997	20	27%
	1998	20	27%
	1999	24	33%
SNA	Low	18	25%
	Mid	33	45%
	High	22	30%
Gender	Female	37	51%
	Male	36	49%

The results summarised in Table 2 provide good evidence for confidence in the representativeness of the sample of young adults and families and carers interviewed across all but two of the regions (Northern and Western Metropolitan). In these regions, the low response rates are a source of concern. However, the interviews conducted in these regions were entirely consistent with the results of equivalent interviews. Furthermore, analysis of the patterns of results across all other regions, cohorts, SNA groupings and genders found a clear set of themes and linkages emerging early on, which remained consistent over all interviews analysed. Therefore, the research team believes that across seven of the regions (excluding Northern and Western Metropolitan Region), the pattern of results reported is a valid representation of the views held by the population of young adults and their families and carers.

Although caution is needed in extending that conclusion to young adults and their families and carers in the Northern and Western Metropolitan regions, the research team could find no evidence that a similar conclusion could not also be reached. The causes of the low response rate in the Northern and Western Metropolitan regions are difficult to ascertain. Initially, half the selected families in both regions agreed to be interviewed when telephoned by the Department of Human Services research team member. In both regions, three families initially refused to be interviewed, and five and six respectively could not be contacted. Subsequent attempts by the Deakin researchers to contact these also families failed. The rate of refusal to the original request was very low, the highest being Southern Metropolitan Region, with two refusals.

All other stakeholders (schools, service providers, TAFE colleges and disability organisations) were interviewed on a regional basis; that is, wherever possible, representatives from each group in each region were invited to interviews with the research team. Both regional coordinators and some central office Department of Human Services staff were also interviewed.

During the roundtable discussions, the researchers summarised the viewpoints of the participants. They were not asked to provide verbatim accounts of the interviews, but rather to represent the views, issues, concerns and overall attitudes of their interviewees. The strategy was designed to help identify the key themes emerging from the interviews, leveraging the considerable experience of field research team members in working with issues around disability. These discussions were recorded (using audiotape) and then transcribed for analysis.

The researchers also presented their written field notes on each interview. These were used to supplement the discussions where field team members believed that issues had not received adequate airing, and where direct quotes and examples were believed to add significantly to the content.

Analysis of the material was then performed using the NVivo (QualSoft, 1998) software package, a highly flexible, searchable database designed for qualitative research. All individual comments were initially identified in terms of the following characteristics:

- Name of the researcher representing the view.
- Stakeholder grouping as source of comment (young adult, parent or carer, school, and so on).
- Region.
- Cohort, SNA level, and gender, in the case of the young adult or their family or carer.

This then allowed subsequent analysis results to be cross-tabulated against any of these characteristics.

A second round of processing was then performed, in which themes or issues were identified in the content of comments. For example, if a researcher identified an issue as having been expressed several or more times, or was expressed strongly, the corresponding text in the database was 'coded' as representing that theme. Individual passages could be coded more than once. For example, a comment that gaining access to information about expos might be coded once, in terms of an 'access to information' theme, and second, in terms of a 'expo' theme. All passages were coded against at least one theme and many passages gained multiple codings.

A third round of processing then sought relationships among the themes and across the characteristics. For example, NVivo made it possible to determine if some kinds of themes were more prevalent in regional, cohort or other groupings. Similarly, it was possible to determine if two or more themes were closely associated. Three reports were prepared during the project, based on the results. These reports summarised the issues and themes that emerged from the analysis. The reports were presented to all members of the research team for comment. Comments were then used to further refine subsequent passes at this third round of processing.

3 Key Features of Futures for Young Adults

3.1 Eligibility

Young adults are eligible for FFYA if they are enrolled in a Victorian Government, Catholic or independent school, and have been funded, or are eligible for funding, through the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments; and are turning 18 years by 31 December of the current school year.

In March–April of each year, the Department of Education (DoE), the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools in Victoria provide the Department of Human Services Disability Services with details of students eligible for FFYA in the following year. The DoE confirms their list of eligible students following the bi-annual school census in late February. Once eligibility for FFYA is confirmed, the transition process begins.

3.2 Transition Process

The transition process is intended to support students in moving from school to the adult options of their choice, to ensure that the move from school is as smooth as possible. The *Business Rules* (Department of Human Services, 1998) identifies the aims of the process as:

- Students and their families or carers have sufficient information about the range of available options to enable genuine choice.
- The adult options to which a student moves reflects, as far as possible, the choices and decisions of the student and their families or carers.
- The student's move from school is planned to minimise disruption to the student and their families or carers.
- The service providers have appropriate information to enable them to provide programs that meet needs.
- Students and their parents and carers have access to grievance procedures if they are dissatisfied with the transition process.
- Students have the opportunity to pursue an alternative adult option if their original choice proves inappropriate or their needs change over time.

It is clear that the aims of the transition process reflect the intentions of the FFYA program; that is, to increase choice, involvement, and access to quality services.

The transition process includes:

- The school's Transition Report (developed by the Program Support Group).
- The individual's Transition Plan prepared by the Department of Human Services transition worker (or equivalent).
- The Support Needs Assessment (SNA).

3.3 Support Needs Assessment (SNA)

A Support Needs Assessment (SNA) is undertaken for each student, in order to determine their level of support need. The SNA was developed in response to the need for a quick and efficient measure of the needs of people in day program centres. Since its original development in 1991 (as the ATSS Client Support Needs Assessment) it has been evaluated and further refined to incorporate items relating to high support needs, including physical and behavioural needs. The current SNA tool aims to determine, consistently and reliably, the support needs of people receiving funding in a group setting. It rates the characteristics of people that impact on recurrent costs of providing support. It identifies the broad level of need for a person, and is not intended to be a substitute for individualised program plans or transition plans. Participants are allocated one of six benchmark-funding amounts, commensurate with their SNA level. The benchmark funding levels range from \$7,014 for a Level 1 participant to \$19,554 for a client assessed at Level 5.5.

3.4 Transition Report

This is to be prepared by the school and includes the additional information about the young adult's needs, social skills, behavioural issues and aspirations. This information is intended to supplement that collected by the SNA, in order to provide guidance to the transition planning process and the future service provider.

3.5 Transition Plan

This is to be prepared by the Department of Human Services transition worker (variously called a transition facilitator or a transition support worker), and should provide the basis for the program provided by the adult option.

3.6 Placement in an Adult Option

Using a Request for Information process (commenced in 1996), the Department of Human Services identifies organisations interested in providing services to young adults with disabilities. They include post-secondary education and training organisations, employment services, community day programs and recreation organisations.

Transition staff help to identify those organisations that can deliver the option nominated in the school Transition Report, and provide information to the young adults and their families to help them choose. This includes providing booklets listing all providers, and organising regional expos where service providers promote their services. The Department of Human Services then negotiates with the service provider on behalf of the young adult.

Some young adults—particularly those living in remote areas or with multiple disabilities or significant medical conditions—also require individual packages incorporating access to a number of supports..

3.7 Review of Adult Option

A formal review of the option is to be provided six to twelve months after commencement. It is intended that the young adult, family, service provider and Department of Human Services will be involved in the review. A young adult and/or their parents and carers can also request a review at any stage by contacting the Department of Human Services.

3.8 Grievance and Dispute Process

These are outlined in the *Business Rules* (Department of Human Services 1998: 6), and the Department of Human Services has attempted to make young adults and their families aware of these procedures.

Section B: Findings

4 Overview

This section describes the responses to the research questions from each of the major groups, that is, the young people, parents and carers, Department of Human Services, service providers, schools, and other groups. The findings emerge from the following major themes that informed the research questions:

- Goals and expectations of FFYA
- Information and communication
- Need assessment
- Transition
- Service options—choice and flexibility
- Self-determination and participation
- Resourcing.

The conclusions and recommendations are grouped under these themes in Section C.

Respondents were also asked to identify the things they liked most about the FFYA program, as well as things they thought needed changing.

5 The Young Adults

5.1 Goals and Expectations

After talking with Ben for about half an hour, he leant across and said to me, 'I want to work in the future'. This was not a statement of agreement; there were no leading questions. When asked what he would like to do, he said 'times work' (maths). He was uncertain why he would like to work, but was very clear that that was what he wanted. (Researcher)

The researchers spent time talking to the young adults about what they wanted to do, in order to get a sense of their expectations and aspirations.

Many of the young adults with whom they spoke were happy in their current activity and saw themselves continuing what they were doing, or couldn't think of anything else they would like to do. One young woman doing a TAFE course in hospitality thought she might work in a coffee shop that her mother, along with other parents of young adults in her course was planning to set up. Her mother had heard of a project funded by FFYA in another region, where a group of people with disabilities was assisted to run a service providing lunches. Another young woman doing a library course wanted to work in a library and travel overseas when she completed it. Another young man said he would like a job gardening. Another was not sure what he wanted to do in the future, but that he would like to travel more and eventually move out of home.

Most had not heard of FFYA, had not met any FFYA staff, and were not aware of processes such as transition. One young woman who had not heard of FFYA said:

Mum looked everywhere for jobs for me and she got no help or anything. She found my job herself.

5.2 Information and Communication

The young adults were focused on their activities and had little to say about the organisation of the program. They commented on how they felt about the programs they had chosen. They had received information about options from their teachers and their parents. Some had attended an expo organised by the region, where service providers had set up a display stand and promoted their services.

Some young adults had attended open days at TAFE colleges. One young woman with mild intellectual disability said:

It was quite hard to decide from just a visit.

Young adults had the opportunity to visit service providers as part of the work experience organised by the special schools. These visits were usually organised after the option had been chosen and served to familiarise the young adults with the service (and vice versa).

5.3 Transition

The young adults were unaware of transition planning processes. Some commented on the SNA and the options they had to choose from.

None mentioned active involvement in a planning process that looked beyond their initial placement. When asked further about how they had made their decisions, some referred to their parents' role in this.

Some young adults who had had work experience in their final school year said that they assumed they would do this work on leaving school, but this had not happened. For example, a young man was very keen on gardening, and had done a gardening work experience placement, but was not considered for a supported employment placement in a gardening service because of a 'perceived challenging behaviour'. As a result, his family bought a number of different mowers and he now spends his time at home mowing.

5.4 Needs Assessment

Generally, the young people were not aware of the Service Needs Assessment (SNA) having taken place — or of having being told the outcomes of this. It was reported by others that in many cases the young people were not present when the SNA was completed.

5.5 Options—Choice and Flexibility

The young adults talked about whether or not they liked the program they were in, but did not indicate the extent of the choice they had been given.

The majority of young adults interviewed were attending an ATSS, and had an intellectual disability. It seems that the proportion of young people interviewed with an intellectual disability exceeded the proportion in the population of FFYA participants. It is not clear why this occurred. Possibly, by chance, young people with an intellectual disability were over-represented in the sample, or perhaps more people with other types of disabilities declined to be interviewed.

While respondents made comments about what they enjoyed doing and how happy they were, they were not able to give detailed responses to questions about how well the service met their needs. When asked about what they did in their program, a number of young adults could identify only one or two activities.

One young woman reported very positive experiences at TAFE, but very negative experiences at university, due to the university's lack of awareness of her needs and lack of flexibility in response to these.

Many young people told the researchers what they liked doing, for example, swimming, music and gardening were mentioned by a number. When asked further about these activities, a number said they were not able to do these things in their day programs.

5.6 Self-Determination and Participation

The majority of young adults interviewed were attending an ATSS. As has been noted previously, they were able to talk about what they enjoyed doing, but they were not able to give much information about the role they had had in choosing their current option.

5.7 Resourcing

The young people had no views on resourcing, other than in the context of what they liked doing and what they wished they could do more. Again, swimming, gardening and music were frequently mentioned.

6 Parents and Carers

6.1 Goals and Expectations

The responses to questions about the goals of the program and their expectations varied according to the level of parents' awareness of the program. Some parents were very well informed about FFYA. They tended to be parents who had good links and support networks with other families with children with disabilities, or worked in human service-related fields and knew the system because of their jobs. One mother commented:

It must be so much more difficult if parents don't have the insight and get up and go.

On the other hand, there were a number of parents who were not aware that their son or daughter was in the program, and had imagined that the support provided at school had simply continued.

Parents who had been involved from 1996, when the first cohort was inducted, stressed that FFYA was better than what had existed before. A small number of parents had in-depth information about the implementation of the program, as they had been involved in a legal (and at the time, public) controversy about the previous program.

However, the majority of parents and carers were not aware of the program's goals. Empowerment and self-determination were recognised by the 'aware' parents as being important to the program's conception, although they viewed this as 'self-management'. They believed that the funds provided were their entitlement, and that they should have more control, and more knowledge, about how decisions were made.

The parents who made individual submissions to the evaluation praised the potential of the program to meet the needs of young adults with a wide range of levels and types of disability, and the way that the program could allow for portability of funding and flexibility of service provision. Even when these respondents were critical of aspects of the program, they stressed the its importance, and the huge leap forward it represented over what had existed before, as well as the potential for further benefit.

When asked about the future, two themes emerged. Depending on the severity of their young adult's disability, parents mentioned the possibility of the young adult moving away from home, and continuing their lives independently from their families. They also mentioned the possibility of profitable employment. There were also parents and carers who did not expect their young adult to be able to live independently or participate in employment, but wanted their child to move out of home into a residential care unit at some point in the future. The prospect of their young adult living away from home, in some cases without attendant care, was one of the reasons some parents and carers were determined that their young adult receive training in social and living skills.

The corollary was a lack of vision for the future. A number of parents and carers described the overwhelming circumstances of the present that prevented them from seeing beyond the 'here and now'. A number of parents were exhausted with the stresses of their lives, and expressed their concerns for the future. The transition of their young adult from school had been a traumatic experience for them, reinforcing their concerns for the long-term future. If a goal was discussed it was usually in terms of continuing in the current placement or in similar placements with FFYA funding.

6.2 Information and Communication

I know there's something out there for my child, but I don't know what it is. (Parent)

Nearly all concerns about information focused on either the experience of *lack* of information or frustration with the *inaccessibility* of information. Many comments reflected a profound lack of knowledge about FFYA—what its goals are, what it could do for them and their child. These people had not sought information because they did not know that there was information (or support) to be had. However, some respondents indicated frustration at being unable to get information about FFYA, which should or could have been available, stating:

We have never seen the Futures person.

It was clear from comments that the special schools played a vital role in providing information about FFYA and the transition process. Parents commented on the lack of a trusted contact person as they had experienced in the school. The comparison of contact with the region with the ease of communication with the special school was frequently made.

A related concern to that of accessibility of information was the absence of, against the perceived need for, case management. Many of the comments indicated there was no person who acted as a single point of contact representing FFYA. There were regional differences here, and those who reported positively on their familiarity with FFYA commented on the easy and consistent access to a person they knew and trusted. However, parents who did not know who to contact for advice about FFYA cited this as a problem.

Parents and carers were confused about the SNA and the associated level of funding. A number claimed that they had received a letter informing them of their child's SNA level, while others had no idea. A number of parents with some knowledge of FFYA had asked questions about funding levels and allocation to services, but were confused by the responses from FFYA personnel. They found the notion of the funding level being a 'benchmark' and not an 'entitlement' confusing.

Several parents were in contact with parents in other regions, and were concerned about inconsistent funding levels, and what the funds could purchase for their child. For example, they reported that some regions allowed FFYA finds to be used for transport, while other regions did not. One parent commented that the FFYA representatives had given information contradictory to that contained in an FFYA pamphlet.

Ten parents who made separate submissions to the evaluation had concerns about communication with FFYA staff. They reported that staff regarded parents as interfering and overprotective, rather than having real and useful knowledge of their child. They spoke of their efforts not to antagonise staff by being seen as a 'nuisance'. One respondent said that parents who fight for the rights of their child can be identified by the 'corns on their belly'. They expressed the view that many staff were young, inexperienced and lacked empathy for families who had been managing their child with a disability for many years and through many stages. Representative comments included:

They never return my calls.

There's never the same person on the end of the phone.

Most families knew they could ask for a reassessment of the SNA or a review of the program if they were not happy, although they were unsure about whose responsibility this was—the Department of Human Services or the service provider. Few had actually asked for this. No

parents spoken to were aware of the formal grievance procedures (outlined in the *Business Rules*), which are available in cases of dispute.

6.3 FFYA Expos

Most metropolitan, and some rural, regions had organised expos to allow service providers to provide information to parents and carers of young people. While many parents accepted that this was a useful way of getting information about services, there were a number of negative comments about the expos, of which these were the most common:

- The approach to service provision presented by the expos was a commercial model—getting customers to buy a service. This model was disliked.
- The number of services represented was confusing, and the lack of categorisation of services for different kinds of need was unhelpful.
- Parents of young people, particularly those with minor disabilities, felt very discomfited being grouped with those with more severe disabilities. In some cases, the young adults were unaware they had disabilities.
- The full range of options was not represented.

6.4 Transition

Transitions from school *as a process*, involving several steps figured little if at all in most parents' experience of FFYA. For most, it was the ongoing support from service providers, or lack of it, that was the visible face of FFYA. For them, the experiences were more often a move from school to the next placement without transition activities taking place.

Few parents and carers remembered interacting with a transition worker, facilitator or planner. However, they may not have known the 'person from the region' by this name. In the few cases that transition workers were mentioned and commended, parents expressed very positive views:

We couldn't have done it without —(the worker)

Where the transition worker was well known in the region, (to Department of Human Services, service personnel and participants), they had a reputation for being caring and dynamic, following up participants over six-month periods and reviewing their placements.

Parents were aware of the planning processes that take place as part of the school's Program Support Group (PSG), but they were less sure about planning processes when their child moved into FFYA. Many parents claimed no awareness of a Transition Plan as such. If they were aware of a planning process, they were unsure about the status of the plan. Parents whose children were attending an ATSS knew about the Individual Program Plan (IPP), and in some cases confused this with the term 'transition plan' when asked about it. Respondents did not have the notion of a plan that included goals and outcomes and a regular review.

Special school staff were praised by parents and carers for their help in the process of moving their child into a post-school activity. It was even mentioned in a few cases that, if the parents or carers had an issue with the placement they would turn to the special school for assistance, rather than to the Department of Human Services worker, with whom they did not have a working relationship.

The success of a young adult's transition in many cases seemed to rely on the advocacy skills of parents and carers. Comments suggested that parents and carers who monitored their child's

transition closely and actively seek information on their rights and options available, were more likely to attain the best outcomes for their child. For example, a woman from a country region found the options offered did not suit, so she had to find other options herself, even though that took her out of the geographical area. In another example, there was no attempt to accommodate a young adult's love of music in his program, or to assist a young woman to gain independent living skills as she moved into a semi-detached flat. The young woman needed a cleaner for her flat who could teach her cleaning skills, but was unable to fund this through FFYA.

Parents reported confusion about the new knowledge required of them, that is, about sectors such as tertiary education and day programs. They felt foolish about asking the Department of Human Services staff to explain these things, and thought that displaying their ignorance might jeopardise their chances of receiving funding.

Several parents reported that it became difficult if they did not choose the options offered by the regional transition worker. The following comments are representative of this perception:

It saps your energy going to the Department of Human Services again and again.

'Proactive parents' is a euphemism for a pain in the neck for DHS.

If I hadn't gone in [to the day program] unannounced I would never have known that they weren't doing what they had agreed to do. If I told them I was coming, they would have covered up.

In addition, parents who were very involved with their child's transition, and kept abreast of their child's activities in a placement, were likely to take the initiative to find another placement if they were dissatisfied with their current one, or take action to resolve the problems.

Several parents commented on how helpful parents could be to the transition workers—if only they were encouraged to be involved in the transition process:

Parents' involvement can help make the system work—it needs their input.

It needs a family-centred approach.

6.5 Transition Review

There was almost universal dissatisfaction with the provision of feedback or review. Some parents and carers with young adults in the first cohort remembered a review of placements in the first year (the *Business Rules* advised a review six months into the program), but said there had been nothing since then. While some parents said that there had been follow-up phone calls after placement, others did not recall this happening. Others said they were aware they could ask for a review of the placement.

The majority of parents interviewed had no knowledge of Transition Plans or any follow-up on their implementation. A small number of parents said they had sought the opportunity to comment on or complain to the Department of Human Services about their experiences, and had had their concerns actively rejected. In fact, these parents and carers expressed fear about 'rocking the boat', in case they became unpopular with the FFYA regional staff, and their child missed out on funding or opportunities as a result. The issue of case management was raised in this context. The parents expressing this dissatisfaction stressed the need for a stable case manager to provide a channel for concerns and complaints that currently find no outlet. There was little evidence from the interviews that parents and carers knew of the existing formal grievance procedures.

Parents of young adults attending an ATSS knew of the reviews that took place as part of Individual Program Plan (IPP) meetings. These take place annually, and are an opportunity for parents and carers and staff to assess the young adult's program and, if necessary, make changes. There were mixed views about the results of the IPPs. Some parents and carers stated that their suggestions for program change were being considered, but others complained that their input had no effect. It is important to note here that the purpose of the IPP is to review the program the person is doing at the ATSS—not to consider alternative placements.

There were some examples of positive interaction between families and transition staff. There were cases cited in which transition workers had worked with families and the young people in ways that empowered the parents, and sometimes the young adults, in the process of choosing options. Positive aspects mentioned were:

- The transition staff knew the family circumstances and were sensitive to them.
- The transition staff applied flexibility and went 'outside the rules'. For example, in one case, a region obtained funds to support a young man to leave school before he was eligible by 'doing an exchange deal' with DEET until he reached eligible age and could access FFYA funding.
- The transition staff knew the services and their programs well, and could negotiate a combination of providers, as well as providers in more than one region.
- The transition staff had knowledge of kinds of disability, including those hard to categorise, such as autism and Asperger's Syndrome, and they applied this knowledge in planning options.

In contrast, parents who were concerned about the transition process made the following points:

- There was little involvement of parents in transition unless they insisted on this. (They were, however, involved in the PSG in the school, and thus part of the transition discussions at that point.)
- Transition staff had limited knowledge of service types and options available, and whether or not the funds available could purchase the desired option. Transition staff in some regions told families that therapy, recreation activities and transport could not be funded by FFYA, while in other regions there was contrary advice.
- Transition staff often made assumptions about the young adult's abilities and limitations, judging these in the narrow context of the school. They did not always listen to parents who knew their child in all contexts.
- Transition staff appeared to have no interest in trying to 'customise' a program according to a young adult's needs.
- Transition staff lacked knowledge of the needs of the family as a whole.
- In some cases, the transition process needed a parent advocate present to support the family.
- It was difficult to contact Department of Human Services staff:

They never return our phone calls.

[They] are too busy to talk to us when they visit our area.

- There was an emphasis on problems:

We kept on being told what *can't* be done.

- Parents, rather than transition staff, had to ask potential services the hard questions about funding, support and expectations, and they felt this might compromise their relationship with the service provider. They would prefer it if the regional staff asked these questions.

6.6 Needs Assessment

There was widespread disquiet about the SNA process. This related to both the way the assessment was carried out and the tool itself.

6.6.1 Administration

As has been reported above, many parents were generally confused about the purpose of the SNA and its process. Concerns about the administration of the SNA were:

- Assessors lacked sufficient experience in both administering the instrument, and in knowledge of disabilities.
- Assessors did not collect the required amount of relevant and accurate information.
- Special school staff often tried to present the young adult as more able than the parents or carers believed they were.
- In many cases, the young adult, or their parents and carers, were not present when the SNA was conducted.
- Parents reported that they were confused about the SNA. Some reported receiving a letter from the region telling them the level assessed, but with no information about what the level meant, both in terms of future service provision and in terms of their young adult's capabilities. Others could not recall receiving information about their young adult's SNA Level.
- There was no provision of Auslan interpreters or signers for young adults with hearing impairments.
- There was disquiet about going through an assessment procedure when the actual funding level is not tied to the person:

Just a benchmark, so why do it?

6.6.2 The Tool

In criticising the tool, respondents said that the SNA ignored relevant information such as challenging behaviours and medical conditions. It was not able to reflect the needs of young adults with conditions such as autism and Asperger's Syndrome. It did not assess aspirations, interests, plans or goals, all of which have some bearing on future options, and therefore on support needs.

Many parents were unaware that they could request a review of the SNA. Parents who requested a review found the waiting time unacceptable, given that in the meantime their young adult was not receiving what they saw as appropriate support. Several parents from one region had been discouraged from requesting a review, being told that 'it is likely to be a lower one if you pursue it'. One parent said of the same region:

They just won't budge—it is a waste of time asking them.

6.7 Options—Choice and Flexibility

For quite a number of parents, getting into the chosen option was a real problem. Parents expressed concern about the range of choices available to their young people.

Parents who wanted to have some management of their young adult's program found it difficult to arrange a number of different options to make up a full program. The inclusion in the young adult's program of different services and activities was time consuming to manage and cost more. One parent said they had to work out, 'how to make the dollar stretch the full week'. However, the few families who were self-managing supported this approach (examples were found in Southern Metropolitan Region, Eastern Metropolitan Region and Gippsland). These parents were required to keep detailed records of purchasing, although processes for auditing these records were not clear. In other examples, parents and young people used a brokerage service to manage a varied program. There were positive reports of this approach from Barwon-South West and Gippsland regions.

Some parents claimed that the transition staff had encouraged them to place their children in TAFE, despite their misgivings about its suitability.

[They] pushed us towards TAFE.

They claimed that a TAFE college could be a distressing experience for young adults with disabilities, as the support structures differed from those at school, and the young adults were not ready for the new level of independence required. However, the reverse also applied, with some TAFE respondents claiming that it was the *parents* who often pushed the TAFE option, believing that attendance at a college of TAFE reflected well on their young adult. Some parents claimed they had been pushed towards a service provider, and that:

There are cosy arrangements between Department of Human Services and service providers.

Some parents in some regions praised FFYA staff for their flexibility and lateral thinking, in finding ways to make the funds work and being willing to reassess need. One parent who had experienced more than one region said:

The difference between the regions which were helpful and the one that was not was that the 'good' region looked at the young adult as a person, while the 'bad' just saw the funding level.

The opportunities for choice differ between rural and metropolitan regions. For example, some parents and carers in rural regions expressed a desire for their child to attend TAFE, but described the process of finding an appropriate course within a reasonable distance as too difficult, particularly when transport could not be funded. There are also limited numbers of ATSSs that young adults and parents and carers can choose from in rural areas. In isolated parts of rural regions, there is often only one ATSS available.

Most parents and carers who had a young adult in an ATSS reported that they were satisfied with the staff and program. However, there were concerns related to the system, rather than the services, which were mentioned by the majority of parents and carers. These are summarised below:

6.7.1 Fees

There was a great deal of frustration expressed about ATSS fees, many of which had not been expected or explained to them. Parents were confused about the variation in fees from one service to another, and about the need to pay fees for services that had been cost-free under DEET, for example, transport and therapy. Some were further confused when they realised that the fees varied from one service provider to another, and from one region to another.

6.7.2 Therapy Services

Parents and carers complained that the activities that were sustaining and developing their child at special school, such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, literacy and numeracy, were missing in the ATSS. They felt that their children were losing instead of gaining skills. They did not understand that the FFYA funding system was different from that under the education system.

6.7.3 Transport

Parents and carers felt very strongly about having to pay for transport when it had been provided for school attendance. It was a major factor in limiting choice of option. Some services could support transport costs, while others could not. Some regions accepted transport as legitimate for FFYA support, while other regions did not.

6.7.4 Timetable

A common comment was the times of operation and the vacation breaks. Many reported an ATSS as starting at 10.00 am and finishing at 3.00 pm, which made family work commitments very difficult. Some mentioned concerns about having to use respite care to fill the gap, but this is not the subject of this Review. One parent said he and his wife had solved this by choosing an ATSS that was an hour's bus journey away, so that it fitted in with their work arrangements.

In addition to the above, a minority of parents and carers mentioned the following issues:

6.7.5 Program Development

The young adults were participating in the same program for more than one year, rather than a year's program being viewed as a stepping-stone to opportunities for the development of new and different skills. The lack of richness in the activities being offered at some ATSS was also perceived as a 'downward step' from the special school experience.

6.7.6 Staff

The staff at the ATSS were perceived as being underqualified or inadequately trained for their roles as service providers to young adults with disabilities. In addition, there was seen to be a high staff turnover, and therefore insufficient knowledge of the young adult's disabilities, medical conditions and behaviours.

6.7.7 Size of ATSSs

Smaller is perceived as being better, for example:

It's too big for good communication with staff—the bigger it gets, the worse it gets for my child.

6.7.8 Focus on Young Adult's Future

The young adult's behaviour was the focus of IPP meetings, with no discussion of the young adult's development and program. There was little emphasis on pathways to future options.

6.7.9 Employment Skills

Pre-employment skills were seen as low priority, and parents wondered about the availability of programs that would emphasize these skills. The presence of older people (the 'core clients') worked against a greater emphasis on pre-employment skills.

6.7.10 Employment Services

Parents and carers were happy with these services, in particular, those whose young adults were included in multi-service packages. There were logistical issues (including transport), which caused some pressure.

6.7.11 High Support Needs

Some parents reported a lack of support for young adults with high support needs. There was one case of serious abuse of a young adult, as his funding did not provide for one-to-one support when lots of other people were around, yet it this was when he was most vulnerable to physical attacks.

6.8 Self-Determination and Participation

Only parents who are aware of the importance of self-determination demanded it. Many parents seemed surprised that their young adult's involvement in decision making was an intention of the program. They expressed their assumptions about their child's lack of ability to participate.

Many parents said that they and their young adult had not been present during the administration of the SNA, even though they saw the SNA as crucial in allocating the funding level, and therefore for the services that could be purchased.

A number of parents commented that they were actively discouraged from participating in discussions about the programs. These parents cited examples of transition staff imposing their own views on the young adults. For instance, one young adult with limited concentration span, hand coordination, mobility and multiple eye problems, was reportedly told, 'of course you'd like computers'. These attitudes were exacerbated when staff had insufficient knowledge of disabilities or the potential of programs to meet special needs.

Parents wanted to be listened to and to have their knowledge of their own child valued. Examples given included lack of acknowledgment of safety issues (such the ability to cross the street), and the past work experience of a young adult not being taken into account (such as being pushed towards an ATSS in spite of having enjoyed previous 'real work'). There was an example of an failure of an ATSS to note that a person was actually working part-time while attending the ATSS, which had been arranged by parents quite separately.

6.9 Resourcing

FFYA can't pay for that.

The general thrust of responses from parents and carers was that funding was appreciated, and seen as essential. However, there were serious concerns about distribution in terms of equity, adequacy and efficiency.

Criticisms about perceived inequities revolved around concerns about the amount of money, regional differences in the ways in which money was spent and concerns about different policies. For example, in one region, money was given to a young adult for a holiday, and in another region there was a block on any funding for social or evening activities.

Parents and carers who were aware of the level of funding attached to their young adult's SNA expressed frustration with the difficulty of accessing that funding for their young adult's needs. Many parents and carers alleged that they had not received what they were expecting to get. Being made aware of the benchmark figures often led to concern about whether or not their child was being 'short changed'. While some parents and carers were aware that the funding attached to an SNA was a benchmark figure, they could not see the point in an individualised SNA. Moreover, their frustration was so great that some commented they would prefer to be ignorant about the level of funding rather than discover they had been given substantially less than they had expected.

The adequacy of resources for clients with high support needs was also a major issue for parents and carers. Funding—even for the highest support needs—is not enough for the type of one-on-one support needed by some young adults with challenging behaviours or serious medical conditions. Some parents and carers of children with such behaviours and medical conditions described the difficulty of gaining an ATSS or TAFE placement. Parents would also like support for care outside standard hours and for social activities.

Many parents criticised the lack of accountability in expenditure of funds. They wanted to know that the money was being spent on their son or daughter. For example, a parent who knew that her child was not using all of the 'bench mark' amount wanted the 'leftover' funds to go directly into service development and be used as a top-up for young people's needs in that area—not 'creamed off to overall regional programs or services for other people in the region'.

The four families who were managing their own young adult's funds were keeping records of purchases, but there were no clear guidelines for this.

Parents' comments indicated a lack of transparency of fund expenditure within the service providers, and concerns about cross-subsidisation of other service users. They wanted details of the costing of elements in the program, including administrative costs.

Some parents commented that resources bought with DEET funds for school support (for example, adaptive computer technology or software) were often retained by the school when the person for whom they were purchased moved on. In one case, the parent noted that no other student had a need for particular specialised aids, and they had been put away in a cupboard.

7 Department of Human Services

7.1 Goals and Expectations

The overarching goal of the program, as expressed by Department of Human Services staff, was to support young adults with disabilities in their transition to post-school options. This support included funding to purchase appropriate services, and transition support to provide information about options and to assist young adults and their families with decision making. The Department of Human Services respondents saw FFYA as an enormous improvement on the previous schemes.

There were two broad categories of goals identified by the regional coordinators and transition workers: outcomes relating directly to young adults (referred to as 'clients' by this respondent group) and those relating to the FFYA process. Within the client outcomes, Department of Human Services staff specified:

- **Transition:** The main goal in relation to transition is to assist students with the move from school to post-schooling and other adult activities.
- **Options:** There are two major goals in relation to options. The first is to increase the range of options for incoming young adults making the transition from school to the adult world. The second goal involves the expansion of options to accommodate the transition between placements.
- **Addressing needs:** Another major goal of the FFYA program is to assist young adults with their requirements for entering the adult world after they leave school. Several regions suggested that it was time for the program to have a name change, as the needs continued long past 'young' adulthood.

Among the process outcomes, there were specific goals relating to budgets and the development of options, and those that were more systemic, such as a shift to a service-oriented culture, and the effect of the program as an agent for change. These goals can be expanded as follows:

1. **Program development:** This goal is to develop more programs for clients (with any disability type), and thus increase their range of choices.
2. **Budgetary:** The key issues in relation to budget are successful management and transferability of funds between placements.
3. **Service culture:** The overall perception of service delivery was to expand the network of service providers and break any monopolies that currently exist. In addition, there was a desire to provide holistic case management that covered issues unrelated to further study or employment.
4. **FFYA as change agent:** Workers in FFYA will drive the suggestions for the further development of the program in relation to policies and service providers.

7.2 Information and Communication

The regions provide information in a wide range of forms:

- Information sessions are provided for special and mainstream schools.
- Transition workers arrange for the administration of the SNA, and then inform students and families of results, sometimes via meetings at the school.
- Expos are held, at which service providers provide information about their services.
- Transition workers encourage the family to look at options during the year before the expo.
- Booklets are prepared that list the service providers and contact details.
- Meetings in schools take place with Department of Human Services transition staff, the young adult and family, and teachers.
- If the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS) conducts the SNAs, there are regular meetings between CRS and regional staff.

Department of Human Services respondents were concerned at the views on lack of information expressed by parents and carers. They acknowledged that the operation of FFYA is complex, and that for some parents, information from service providers and the Department of Human Services may be confusing.

7.3 Record Keeping

Although record keeping is good for identifying young people's eligibility, it does not effectively track them during transition and follow their placements. The lack of consistent record keeping across all regions was noted in the *FFYA Destinations Report*. There is currently no consistent documentation of client outcomes. The researchers were told about 'missing Futures clients', for whom funding was still being allocated, but who were no longer accessing a service. Similarly, there were reports that in the past, in some regions no historical records were maintained, while the currency of records in other regions were questioned. All disability services currently use the Disability Client Information System (DISCIS), but this system lacks the flexibility required to track FFYA clients with complex histories. The system does not have the capacity to document primary disability, information that would be useful for purposes of cost analysis and future policy development.

7.4 Transition

Regional staff stated that the aim of the transition process was to empower clients and their carers to make decisions based on information about a broad range of relevant and accessible services. A corollary to this aim is to make the parents and carers aware of the options in the FFYA program, and the potential for young adults to participate in a broader range of activities than parents and carers had previously expected. They stated that the young adults and the parents and carers were the decision makers in transition planning, and the transition workers facilitated the process by providing information.

It is difficult to describe a single model of transition, as it is managed differently in each region. Agencies, schools, and Department of Human Services workers are responsible for transitions. The roles of these three in transition vary across regions, for example, in Loddon Mallee and Hume, all transition processes are contracted to non-government agencies.

All regions described the first part of the transition process as the delivery of student lists from DEET to the Department of Human Services, followed by meetings and information sessions in the schools for clients and families and carers.

Northern Region contracts the SNA process to Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (CRS), while Southern Region does so for mainstream schools only. Most regions use the CRS for reviews of the SNA, while at least one (Grampians) uses both regional staff and CRS for reviews, giving parents the choice. In at least one region there had been dissatisfaction expressed by parents and carers about the remote (telephone) method used by the CRS.

The transition worker completes transition planning in all regions except Loddon Mallee and Hume (where the whole of transition is contracted to agencies), and in Gippsland (where CRS assist in the process). The intention is to build on the transition work that has begun in the schools. Some respondents saw transition work as similar to case management in its need to see the young person in the context of the whole family and to provide follow-up. For example, in Barwon–South West Region, the FFYA work is integrated into case management. Here there is not a discrete FFYA team, and workers have a diversity of roles.

Some respondents, (for example, in Grampians Region) highlighted the trauma of the transition from school to post-school options for the young adults and their parents and carers:

It's a period of grieving for them, and parents are very needy at this time.

In this region, as in Barwon–South West, the transition workers take on case management responsibilities.

All regions review Transition Plans and the chosen options when requested to do so. Some regions reviewed plans six to twelve months after placement (Grampians and Eastern Metropolitan Region in the first two years of FFYA, with current plans to complete the backlog). Southern Metropolitan Region uses letters six months after the initial placement to inform parents of possibility of a review. In the regions that contract outside agencies, (Loddon Mallee and Hume) parents and carers are contacted every six months. Respondents identified uncertainty about the focus—whether it was on client need or the deficiencies in the service being provided.

Regions were aware of the importance of encouraging greater independence in making choices than was possible in schools:

We need to allow the young person to grow up.

7.5 Needs Assessment

Regional FFYA staff recognise the necessity for a relatively simple tool to assess funding levels. However, they identified limitations of the SNA similar to those identified by other groups. Regional staff described the limitations of the SNA as follows:

- The SNA cannot account for the effect of environment on disability or the possibility of change. The context for the SNA is the familiar environment of the school, at a particular point in time, and it was not possible to predict difficulties that may occur in different situations. Despite this, the tool was trying to assess 'future support needs'.
- The tool cannot accommodate all types of disability and medical conditions, including hearing impairment, Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), autism and Asperger's Syndrome, epilepsy.

- The SNA is oriented to young adults with an intellectual disability, and does not reflect the needs of those with sensory impairment. For example, a young person with hearing impairment moving to further education may need support for interpreters, but the SNA could not reflect this.
- The language of the tool is negative, and focuses on what the young adult cannot do, rather than what they can or may be able to do, with support.

All regions reported that they accept requests for reassessments. These are usually carried out by CRS, but it is unclear whether these are conducted within the timeframe set out by the Department of Human Services in their *Support Needs Assessment Handbook* (that is, requests acknowledged within 24 hours; urgent requests conducted within two working days; others within five working days). Service providers can also make requests, although this usually occurs later, at three to six months into the placement.

Regions differed in their attitudes to having the young adult present during the SNA. Most regions (except Southern) included the young person most of the time, although they expressed concern about the negativity of the language of the tool.

In contrast to all other respondent groups, respondents from central FFYA administration emphasised that the SNA was not intended to provide information about specific disabilities, or educational aspirations. They maintained that it was not part of the Transition Plan, but simply a means of placing an individual within an appropriate broad funding band. The levels were based on the costs of supporting individuals in group settings. They stated that it had never been the intention to have the young adult or the parents and carers present at the assessment.

The information on the SNA provided by Department of Human Services states:

The assessment is not a comprehensive assessment of an individual, and is not to be used to develop individual programs or to make decisions about appropriate adult options. The Support Needs Assessment is a tool which provides a quick, reliable and consistent method of assessing the overall support needs of people with a disability (*Information Leaflet*, December 1996).

7.6 Review and Grievance Procedures

All regions stated that the SNA could be reviewed at any time on request, but requests were rare. In the early years of the program, reviews of the SNA were to be undertaken by the CRS, but this was no longer consistently done, as parents and carers expressed dissatisfaction about the remote (telephone) method used by the CRS.

Grievance procedures are detailed in Department of Human Services leaflet (August 1997), and the *Business Rules* and can be used in cases of disagreement about any of the elements in transition, including the SNA.

7.7 Options—Choice and Flexibility

The FFYA regional staff stated that there had been improvements in the delivery of services since the FFYA program was implemented. They reported that there were more services being offered, and that there was ongoing contact between the service providers and their clients, producing a culture of growth and development.

Although they believed there was more innovation in service programs, they also stated that there was a need for further service development, particularly for young adults with high and complex needs, as choice for these young adults was limited. They suggested that the lack of choice of services discouraged participants and families from changing options. An exit policy

was also suggested—one that included the possibility of re-entry, should this be needed, which might encourage a more active consideration of other options, including employment.

Respondents suggested that there was a need to develop a seamless service system that looked at lifelong planning. More flexible ways of funding needs should be considered, for example, the funding of recreational and community-based programs, which would help to develop communities that are more inclusive. Western Region cited an example of an agency that provides a day program for the Vietnamese community. The region is assisting the agency to acquire land for a community garden.

Transport was cited as an impediment to choice of options, particularly in rural regions. There were examples (Grampians, Barwon–South West and Gippsland) where a flexible approach to the allocation of funds had allowed clients to access programs and services (including transport), which met many of their needs.

Regions have approached further education service provision in different ways. Southern Region, for example, had a particularly strong relationship with the TAFE colleges, with approximately 100 clients attending. Because it provided direct funding to TAFE colleges, the region could have input into service delivery. There are three TAFE colleges in Southern region, and they all offer programs with a different emphasis. An exit policy is included in the contract with each TAFE, and regional transition staff deal with non-attendance by returning to transition planning. Southern Region also reported that by funding specific courses, it retains control. Other regions expressed some concern about the courses provided, and one region indicated that young adults were leaving TAFE with insufficient workplace skills. They were then moving from TAFE to an ATSS to develop those skills. In such a case, the question of whether TAFE was the appropriate option was raised, respondents admitting that there was often pressure from parents to place their young adult in a TAFE when they were not ready for that level of independence.

There are examples of effective service brokers in the regions. The term ‘service broker’ is used loosely here, as organisations offer a variety of services, from straight purchasing of services for the client, through to management of the client’s program, advocacy, and supported work experience. Examples include:

- Employment services organisations that provide vocational training and then assist the young adult to find supported or open employment, building networks of support. For example, the Gippsland Regional Training Unit, originally federally funded, is now jointly funded by federal and regional FFYA. This is unique to Victoria. It delivers services to 39 young people, prevocational and vocational training, with large numbers moving to job placements. Another example is Disability Employment Action Centre Inc (DEAC), which is centrally located and accesses services in all metropolitan regions.
- Organisations that administer the funds and case manage. For example, Leisure Networks in Geelong and Priority Care Plus in Gippsland offer case management, encourage linkages to existing services, deliver services, including personal care and support, coordinate services, and operate as a banker when required.
- Individual programs, such as Wheelchair Athletes Victoria, which manages the funds for a client in Southern Metropolitan Region; and ethnic specific groups that support the families to manage their young adults’ programs.
- Personal advocacy organisations, where a person or group acts as the advocate for the young adult who wants to self-manage their options. For example, Personal Agents for Young Adults is an organisation that empowers the young adult to develop a personal plan and to set up a group, such as a ‘micro board’, for ongoing support. The notion of a ‘circle of friends’ would perform a similar function, without being a legal entity like a ‘micro board’.

- Eastwork's Service Coordination (based in Eastern and Southern regions) offers young people access to employment related services, including advocacy support and Individual Service Planning.

There are also advocacy groups that work with families to empower them to connect with services, for example, Network Life, in South Gippsland, which empowers a group of families. In this example, each young adult has a steering committee, comprising representatives from the special school, the Department of Human Services, the local secondary school, and ATSS, which brokers services, including TAFE courses.

Regions voiced some cautions about brokerage. Funding brokers necessarily diverts funds from the direct purchase of services. Regions emphasised the importance of brokers being independent of funders and service providers.

There were a number of examples found of families self-managing the FFYA funds (in Southern, Eastern and Gippsland regions). The research team did not actively seek examples of this model, and there may be other examples in these and other regions. There are no guidelines for managing this approach, and regions are developing their own. In Southern Region, for example, families are paid directly, with accountability measures that include:

- Annual meeting to sign off plans that include the number of hours for each program or service.
- Six-monthly reviews.
- Record keeping, including receipts and bank statements.

Regional staff currently managing these individualised packages emphasised the need for statewide guidelines to support regions in managing individual packages, and identifying in particular issues related to legal liability and taxation.

All regions accept the advantages of partnerships and network support for service providers. With the end of the competitive tendering environment established by the previous Victorian government, there is now a more positive approach to cooperation between services. Brokerage services are accessing community resources, some ATSS are sharing transport and programs, and there are partnerships developing between local government and agencies (for example, the Spastic Society and a leisure centre supported by local government in Southern Region).

7.8 Self-Determination and Participation

The Department of Human Services documentation on FFYA stresses the importance of self-determination and participation for the young adults and their families. Regional staff reported that there was a change in parents' knowledge of services, and that there were now a number of parents who wanted to manage the FFYA funding themselves. This was cited as evidence for the greater participation of families in choosing options for their young adults. It was acknowledged that the extent to which the young adults can participate is dependent on the level and nature of their disability.

Department of Human Services staff reported a lack of services that could meet the needs of young adults with complex disabilities. It was then a case of fitting the young adult to the service, rather than finding the service that was just right for the young adult. This affected the degree of autonomy that could be exercised by families.

7.9 Resourcing

Some Department of Human Services staff reported difficulties in explaining to parents and carers the notion of the SNA as an indicator of a 'benchmark funding range'. One reason proffered was that a number of service providers and parents and carers continued to believe that the benchmark figure represented a unit cost, and therefore the total amount that could or should be spent on the young adult's program. Department of Human Services staff felt that some of the confusion on the part of parents and carers may also be due to the differences in the way regions allocated funds. It was suggested that some regions seem to be able to manage the benchmark funds for FFYA as well as support other complementary initiatives, including service development.

Some regions commented that currently, FFYA funding is unequally distributed among clients with different disability levels. They acknowledged that FFYA for many clients is not a transition program, but rather a lifelong program of care. Some respondents suggested that the bulk of FFYA funding should be allocated to clients whose disabilities restrict them from participating in continuing education or supported and open employment. Such high need clients would benefit from increased funding, as their day activities and residential care units could be improved to increase the diversity and the quality of their care. Conversely, clients with fewer needs (many of those currently on SNA Levels 1-2) and opportunities to become independent in the future, should receive little (or no) financial support. Some regional staff argued that young adults able to pursue further education and participate in employment could be funded or subsidised by other funding resources, such as the Commonwealth. It was suggested that if the Commonwealth funds disability employment (as it may in the future), then FFYA funding should be decreased or dropped for Levels 1 and 2, and increased for Level 3 and above.

8 Schools

8.1 Goals and Expectations

Schools generally stated that FFYA was designed to support young adults with disabilities in their transition from school to post-school options. Although few mentioned that self-determination was an underpinning ideal, they all had Program Support Groups (PSGs) in which the young adult played a part.

8.2 Information and Communication

Information about the FFYA processes comes from the regional FFYA teams. The majority of special schools have staff with special responsibilities for transition of students to FFYA. They believed that the schools provided excellent information about the FFYA program and the options available. Special schools held information nights for parents, and in the majority of cases, this involved regional FFYA staff. The majority of special schools reported excellent relationships with regional FFYA staff and confidence in the accuracy and amount of information provided to families.

Schools that commented on the expos gave mixed opinions. Some said they were a successful way of 'showcasing' the service options, while others believed they were too big, and were overwhelming and confusing to families who had no idea of what options they might choose.

Secondary colleges—government and non-Catholic independent—were less aware of the information provided by the Department of Human Services and DEET. Many of these had little experience of FFYA, having had only one or two eligible students. The secondary colleges saw further education, TAFE in particular, as the most likely destination, and were less aware of the other options available. The booklets in the Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments provide helpful information for schools in determining eligibility of students for support and in planning a student's pathway through school; however, the information about FFYA is brief (contained in Booklet 4: *Educational Planner*).

In contrast, schools in the Catholic sector with a number of students who qualified for FFYA had good knowledge of the assessment and transition processes and post-school service options, and supported this with information booklets and timelines for families. The Catholic Education Offices in all regions provided excellent information about the program and support for teachers and schools.

8.3 Transition

Special schools indicated that transition is conducted as part of the existing planning processes organised within the PSG, and involved teachers, parents and young adults.

The majority of special schools organise visits to service providers for families and students. The students then have regular visits to their preferred option, using a work experience model. In a small number of cases, the work experience is implemented for the last two years of school. However, in the majority of cases, it is during the final year only, usually the final school term. Transition Plans are then handed to the service providers, usually via the regional FFYA personnel.

Attention to transition is less evident in government mainstream schools. Here, there is the assumption that the students will move to TAFE, and in some cases, university. Teachers are aware of the processes for students with disabilities undertaking the VCE, but are less aware of other options such as day programs and supported employment. They report little contact with the Department of Human Services. A related problem was that parents often had higher expectations of their child if they were integrated, and were therefore disappointed when an ATSS was the only option suggested.

Independent schools vary in their approaches to transition, with some schools having a commitment to offering programs for students with disabilities. These schools have a dedicated program and staff for young adults with disabilities, and liaise with regional FFYA staff.

The Catholic Education Offices in all regions have a strong commitment to supporting students with disabilities and support schools in their development of transition programs. They see their relationship with regional staff (or those undertaking the transition, for example, the broker in Lodden Mallee) as an important factor in smooth transition.

A common comment in relation to secondary schools in all sectors was that it 'depended on the experience' the school had with students with disabilities. Having only one or two students who qualified for FFYA meant that the school put few resources into managing the transition process.

8.4 Needs Assessment

The majority of special school respondents assessed the SNA as good. All special school staff who responded were actively involved in the administration of the SNA.

Levels of participation by young adults and their parents and carers in the SNA administration varied. Some respondents pointed out that the experience could be distressing for the young adult or their parents and carers, due to the negativity of the language and deficit orientation of the items, and that this was a reason for their exclusion.

Mainstream and independent schools did not have strong opinions about the SNA, with some indicating no opinion. The two schools that thought the SNA fulfilled its function well had a good relationship with and respect for the Department of Human Services staff administering the SNA.

8.5 Options—Choice and Flexibility

Special schools were happy with the choices available to transitioning graduates, and believed their transition strategies helped students and families to make informed choices. They had a good knowledge of the services they recommended to families.

Mainstream schools tended to expect students to progress to TAFE and further education. They had limited knowledge of other options. Those schools only have one or two students who are eligible for FFYA, so they do not necessarily have well-tried processes.

8.6 Self-Determination and Participation

Special schools reported involvement of the student and the parents in the Program Support Group (PSG), and believed that the PSGs encouraged students and their families to participate in decision making. However, some admitted that the SNA and transition carried out by the Department of Human Services (or contracted to CRS) frequently excluded the young adult.

Mainstream schools claimed that the young adults and families participated in the PSG. The young adults were commonly excluded from the SNA process. Several respondents noted the

irony of excluding 18 year old adults from participating in a process which would lead to choice of their adult options.

8.7 Resourcing

Schools had no views on the amount of funding provided. However, the special schools made the point that they did all the transition work for students in the final years of school. This included identifying the most appropriate options for students, arranging for work experience and liaising with the Department of Human Services and parents throughout the transition process. A large number of special schools expressed the belief that they should receive additional funding to support this transition work.

9 Service Providers

9.1 Goals and Expectations

9.1.1 ATSS

Responses to the question about expectations and goals from this group varied. Many of them made passing references to ‘improved options’ and ‘choice’ and ‘portable funding’, but were more concerned with the difficulties they had with the FFYA system. They stated that FFYA was introduced in response to the increasing number of older students with intellectual disability in special schools. There had been a short timeline for the implementation of the program, and this had put pressure on them to have their services included in the provider lists. While some acknowledged the aims of self-determination and participation, they stated that they had experienced antagonism to their work from sectors that were ideologically opposed to segregation for people with disabilities.

In a number of cases, the question about ‘goals of FFYA’ was understood as goals of their ATSS program (many of which were called the ‘Futures Program’), and was responded to in these terms.

9.1.2 Further Education

Representatives from the TAFE and university sectors stated that FFYA was established to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities who were being retained for too long in school settings.

They commented on the expectations of mainstream schools—that students with disabilities should be directed to further education, to the TAFE sector in particular. Many respondents thought TAFE was not necessarily the best place for these students, and that TAFE colleges were under increasing pressure to provide programs without sufficient funding for development and support.

The goal of self-determination was raised, sometimes in the context of problems. For example, one respondent said that TAFE had become a ‘de facto minding service’ and that students who were better suited to day programs were not gaining much, many in fact suffering a ‘de-skilling’ and reduced self-esteem. Another respondent said that FFYA was a:

...poorly conceived attempt to get a cohort of older students with intellectual disabilities out of the system.

Another respondent commented that FFYA is:

...trying to cover up the fact that the community is unable to take responsibility for these young people.

Inequity was created because there were other people with disabilities who were not eligible for the kind of funding that FFYA provides. These included adults who had missed out on FFYA eligibility because of their age, because of the time they had been absent from school, or because their disabilities had been sustained in their post-school lives. The needs of the latter—young

adults with ABI—were complex. While such students could access some support from their tertiary institutions (via Commonwealth funds) they were often ‘right out of the FFYA loop’. There was a similar dilemma for students with mental illness, the onset of the disability most often occurring after they had left school.

9.2 Information and Communication

The principal concerns from the ATSS- about information provision were timeliness and transparency. Several service providers reported receiving information in December about expected clients, with costings required before Christmas. This was particularly difficult, given that it was not always possible to know what services would be available in the following year. In relation to transparency, service providers wanted more information about changes to placements and variations in global budgets.

Service providers also mentioned that there was insufficient information provided by the Transition Plan, when there was one. They often started the year with no more information on a client than the SNA level. This information was often misleading, as it did not reflect special needs caused by challenging behaviours and medical conditions. Additional information relating to the family environment was important, but did not come from the Department of Human Services. Service providers gathered the information through their contact with the special schools and their own contact with families. They believed that the region should know more about the needs of the young adult and the family as a whole.

9.2.1 Information from Service Providers to Parents and Young Adults

In general, the service providers believed that they provided comprehensive information about their programs. They provided information to Department of Human Services for inclusion in the information booklet given to families by the regions. They welcomed visits from families prior to choices being made. They participated in the expos. Some stated, as did the parents, that the expos were daunting. Some ATSSs suggested that some regional staff gave prominence and priority to some services above others, even to the extent of their not being invited to participate in the expos.

They commented on inadequate information about FFYA and their services within mainstream schools, together with an integration policy that encouraged young adults and families to see TAFE as the most appropriate post-school option.

The services reported that they often had to explain the funding arrangements to parents who were confused and sometimes angry about differences between the funding provided when their child was at school and the funding under FFYA. They also found themselves having to explain differences between state and federal funding. They stated that misleading information was sometimes given to families by Department of Human Services regional staff about programs and associated costs. Several commented that Department of Human Services promised things that the services ‘could not deliver’, and that:

Department of Human Services people talk funding, not programs.

9.2.2 Further Education

The Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) in TAFE colleges and universities reflected the views of other service providers. They said the usefulness of information from Department of Human Services depended on the region and the relationship the institution had with FFYA staff in that region. Some said that they did not know which students were receiving FFYA funding unless they specifically asked. They were confused about how the funds could be used. Some obtained

non-recurrent funding from FFYA for items such as computers. Others used their knowledge of funding to obtain flexibility, for example, the provision of transport for a student at a rural regional TAFE college.

9.3 Transition

The ATSS service providers suggested that no one seemed to take overall responsibility for transition, and yet transition should be central to the FFYA program. They made it clear that they were not funded for transition, and that it needed to be undertaken by the regions.

They stated that transition reports were inconsistent in quality, with confusion about the audience for these reports. They thought the information should be for parents and the young adults, but they were not written that way. They suggested that a template for transition reports and plans would help. Because there was no review of Transition Plans (and feedback to writers), the plans were not improving:

Often the 'notes' that come from the regional transition worker were inadequate about needs, and hid the facts, for example, in relation to challenging behaviours.

All groups of service providers reported little experience of follow-up on transition planning by Department of Human Services staff. They maintained that many transition workers did not have knowledge of the FFYA program, and the reasons for its introduction, nor of contestability and purchaser-provider practices. The schools knew about service providers, but there was no follow-up from schools once the students had left. None of the various models of FFYA ensured links between the stages in transition.

A serious problem for some ATSS providers was the belief that, in addition to their ignorance of programs offered, some regional staff actively promoted some services at the expense of others. They suggested that Department of Human Services staff should visit services regularly and follow up placements of young adults, which would help them maintain their relationship with the young adult and their family, as well as give them a thorough knowledge of the available services and programs.

Employment services in particular felt that they were not highlighted enough as options for young people. They cited ignorance (on the part of parents and transition workers) of the Memorandum of Understanding between state and federal governments in relation to employment funding (Victoria funds employment assistance for FFYA clients, managed through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Government). One employment organisation that offers a broker service, which puts young adults in touch with suitable employers and supports them in and out of the workplace until they are work ready, claims it has been deliberately excluded from information sessions at the local TAFE, as it is seen as potentially 'poaching' clients (and their funding). Another employment training organisation claimed that some providers hold on to young adults too long, focusing on what the young adults cannot do, rather than on their potential.

An important issue for transition was that planning was often based solely on an assessment tool (the SNA), which was not designed for this purpose. The SNA was designed as a tool to assess level of funding required for group settings, and thus focused on mobility and physical functioning, rather than at aspirations, educational motivation and skills. Unless there was a detailed Transition Plan, the service providers missed important information.

The majority of service providers mentioned the issue of challenging behaviours. Their programs and staffing levels were affected when they had no accurate picture of needs. They cited examples of clients with SNAs and transition reports indicating moderate needs, when in fact they had challenging behaviours and required one-to-one supervision. This had staffing

implications. When the SNA had 'got it all wrong' in this way, by giving unrealistic information about challenging behaviours or other factors, there were lengthy delays while reassessments were requested, followed by attempts to set up programs that better met the needs of the young adults. This caused additional stress on the young adult and the family at a time when they were already experiencing the trauma of leaving the relatively comfortable and secure special school setting.

Several service providers suggested that some service providers had an over-emphasis on keeping the client rather than actively looking for ways of moving the client on. To support this, they gave examples of providers who had substantially increased their client numbers. In voicing this concern, they suggested that young adults made decisions late in their final year of school, and by the time they started in a program, their needs (and wants) may have changed. Changes caused disruption to service providers' programs, and made it difficult to plan for staff. There was a tendency, therefore, for providers to aim for stability of client numbers and of programs.

Service providers also mentioned problems associated with verification of placements and variations. Because of the way funding is provided by Department of Human Services, it was impossible to track variations. Therefore, the service providers found that the funding was often changed, but they did not know why.

Service providers believed that families need to be involved earlier in the transition process, and that this should include visits to service providers. They commented on the lack of provision of accurate information to parents, and were concerned that they were the ones that ended up explaining to parents the details of funding and the differences between the service and the school environments. They felt that they received criticisms that could have been avoided if regional staff had explained these differences clearly.

Several service providers stated that mainstream schools did not have the knowledge of the service options available (other than further education), and so were not helpful in providing information about options. This meant that students from mainstream schools might be recommended to a TAFE, when an ATSS may be more appropriate.

9.3.1 Brokerage of Transition

There are two examples of regions contracting agencies to manage transition. In the Loddon Mallee region a support services organisation is contracted to manage clients' needs assessment, transition planning, placement and review. Providers were happy with the services provided here. There were two examples of families who were not satisfied with the broker's service, but their dissatisfaction was associated with distance and lack of availability of suitable providers. One provider made the comment that distance was a factor:

Geographical connection is important in building good relationships with families and providers.

In the Hume region the SNA and transition planning is contracted to one agency, and the implementation and monitoring of the Transition Plans is contracted to another. One service provider in the region (one that brokers a range of programs for the young adults) identified some issues that are general to providers who offer (and broker) a range of services:

- Young adults' wishes change, and are often different from those identified in the Transition Plan.
- Lateness of documentation of Transition Plans and details of funding makes planning for a range of programs difficult.

- There is confusion about travel costs and whose responsibilities these are.
- There is a lack of incentives for increased independence of young adults.
- There is need for case management.
- There is insufficient emphasis on transition in terms of the connection between what came before and what will come after a placement.
- Young adults and families are not all aware of the possibility of changing options.
- There is no follow-up by the Department of Human Services to ensure plans are being followed.
- Agencies need to involve young adults as much as is possible in ongoing evaluation of programs and in future planning.

9.4 Needs Assessment

Each SNA level gets the same funding, but each individual's needs are different. (ATSS)

The respondents reported widespread dissatisfaction with the SNA—both in its administration and as a tool.

A major concern expressed by service providers was that the SNA provided no information on behaviour, social skills, literacy and numeracy needs, emotional states or levels of motivation. It also ignored important information relating to family background and the young adult's goals. There was no assessment of potential, and no acknowledgment of changing needs. It therefore was often quite misleading in its indication of the level of support required. For example:

A person with an SNA Level 4 might present with challenging behaviours requiring one-on-one support, but Level 4 funds were inadequate for this kind of support.

They stated that there was a lack of consistency in the administration of the SNA. It could be conducted by school staff, the CRS, Department of Human Services transition workers and case managers, or by contractors. It was at times done insensitively; the young adult being asked personal questions relating to hygiene and toileting in a confronting manner. SNAs were commonly conducted over the telephone.

Service providers were aware that the SNA could be reviewed, and had assisted parents to request this.

The overwhelming view was that the SNA, by itself, was 'inaccurate' and 'difficult to work with'. Service providers commented that they had insufficient information for developing programs that would meet individuals' needs. While they acknowledged that they could apply to the region for additional, or special needs support funds, this had to be done at short intervals. The time for reapplication for these funds varied from region to region. One respondent said:

As if the need for one-to-one support for aggressive behaviour is going to disappear in six weeks!

9.5 Service Options—Choice and Flexibility

Things are better than they were before FFYA; the benefits outweigh the problems. (ATSS)

Service providers reported an improvement in service provision compared to the situation prior to the FFYA program. Continuity of funding allowed for forward planning. They believed that high support needs could be met, but only when the SNA accurately reflected needs. When it did not, and additional funds were required, service providers could apply to the region for special needs funding. In the majority of cases, this was forthcoming, although the need to reapply regularly for funding was an administrative burden. There was one negative comment in relation to special needs funding for a particularly challenging client, for whom the highest SNA level was grossly inadequate:

If the Department of Human Services does not respond to these crises-driven needs, then we are forced to cooperate with other services in a general refusal strategy.

In this case, the purpose of this strategy was to force the Department of Human Services to provide additional funds or to reassess the funding level assigned to an individual.

Despite the perceived improvement in services, assisted by portable funding, a number of the service providers consulted did not believe that the system as a whole encouraged service development. One respondent said:

When we develop a new program, the region isn't interested in looking at it, much less supporting it.

Another stated:

The system does not provide the security for long-term growth.

Some ATSS respondents suggested that their image is often not as positive as it could be, for example:

We are often seen as providing a child minding service.

To support this claim, the ATSS gave evidence that the young adults are sent to the ATSS even when sick:

The accommodation service roster is after ATSS hours only, so they can't stay at home.

Some respondents reported that many parents 'shopped around'. Often, their dissatisfaction with a service was due to their unrealistic expectations:

Parents had to accept the realities of 'reduced' and 'different' levels of service from those provided by the schools. For example, one-to-one support was not always possible.

Those consulted believed they were doing very well under a number of constraints summarised as:

- Parents did not always know what they wanted for their child, or what the service could offer. Many were drawn to 'school-like' settings, as these seemed familiar and safe.

- There was no encouragement to develop new programs, and it was easier to be conservative:

It's difficult if your service doesn't fit into the Department of Human Services model for the booklet.

- Some parents viewed the funding as their entitlement, and could not understand the economies of scale that governed the management of the service. They did not realise that the service had to apportion dollars to administration as well as to programs. The services believed that parents should trust them to do the right thing, and realise that:

FFYA funding [brings] with it responsibilities as well as rights.

Parents need to adjust to the fact that the one-on-one staffing provided at school can't be continued.

- Some young adults had much higher needs than the SNA Level or the Transition Plan acknowledged, including multiple disabilities and challenging behaviours, and these required additional resources. While they could (and did) apply for special needs funding, this had to be done at short intervals, despite the fact that 'challenging behaviours are ongoing'.
- Different kinds of services require different funding. There were changing staff profiles, including an increasingly casualised workforce. The types and conditions of awards also differed, and this has led to management issues, as some awards covered some permanent staff, while others were employed casually.
- With regard to vacancy management, unit costs demanded some continuity and assurances in terms of the number of FFYA clients and their SNA Levels. For example, an ATSS might organise staffing around a high needs person who then leaves, taking the funding with them, without being replaced. Agencies could not afford to keep changing programs in reaction to needs and changing numbers.
- In some regions, there was a long waiting time for global funding, and this made budgeting and forward planning difficult.
- A small number of service providers commented that FFYA created discrimination against the core clients, as FFYA clients were often able to 'jump the queue' because of the funding that came with them.

Respondents stressed the difference between the needs of students with intellectual disabilities and those with other disabilities such as sensory (hearing and vision impairment), physical (impaired mobility, cerebral palsy), and those with autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

9.5.1 Further Education Sector

A number of respondents from the TAFE sector commented that, for some students with disabilities, a TAFE college was not the right place, for example:

The further education option is not always right for those who choose it—TAFE is becoming a de facto child minding service.

Some colleges were coping with a large number of FFYA students who often stayed for many years. They suggested that students were assessed by an 'inadequate tool' (the SNA) at a time when 'they don't know what they want to do', and that the SNA is 'useless as an educational

assessment tool'. The support required changed from subject to subject, and as students moved from one course to another within TAFE their needs were often not met.

One respondent commented that there was a:

...problem with the definition of a service—the ATSS within TAFE gets less money than other ATSSs because of the different TAFE funding arrangements.

A number of respondents commented on the expectations of the TAFE environment, for example, independence and freedom, and the anxiety this caused parents after their experience with schools. They acknowledged the difficulties for families caused by the long TAFE vacations, and suggested that there was a need for better relationships between TAFE and other services. A common comment was:

Where do they go after TAFE?

The Certificate of Work Education was thought to be most appropriate for young adults with low SNA levels. There were some examples of program development (for example, Certificate 1 in Transition Education, and Certificate of Work Education—Preliminary), which incorporated individual learning plans, so that the students could experience some success, some achievement of goals, however gradual this might be.

9.5.2 Employment Services

The response from employment services was mixed. They felt that they were being discriminated against because of the different Commonwealth and State funding arrangements, as they could not access FFYA money.

Respondents believed that participants are being 'captured' by TAFE colleges and ATSSs, rather than being encouraged to move on to employment options. They cited ignorance (on the part of parents and transition workers) of the Memorandum of Understanding between the State and federal governments in relation to employment funding. One particular example provided a disturbing insight into the attitudes of employers. A personable young man had 'sailed through' a sequence of interviews for a job with a major supermarket group. When he started the job, however, the managers discovered he could not read, and began proceedings to terminate his employment. The position was rescued by the trainer from the employment service, who stepped in, made the employer aware of the legal implications of the intended action, and offered to work with the young man on the job. With this support, the young man developed the required job knowledge and skills. This respondent reported an increasing reluctance on the part of organisations to employ young people with disabilities.

The days when the hairdressing and child care industries employed young people (usually girls) with disabilities have gone.

A number of respondents commented that the regional transition staff were reluctant to place young adults in employment training services, showing a preference for ATSS and TAFE. Some of these services use a brokerage approach, in that they manage the young adult's program, moving them from training into supported work experience and then to employment, including open employment. Some young adults can very quickly move off FFYA funding and onto Commonwealth funding (via Centrelink). At least two service providers stated that their region was actively discouraging this flexible approach to service delivery, with the regional contact person wanting to control the purchasing of services.

The employment services reiterated parents' concerns about the lack of emphasis on pre-employment skills, for example:

They waste their time in Mickey Mouse TAFE and then come to me. I try to train them to be job ready, but by then it can be too late, the person is 25 years old.

9.6 Self-Determination and Participation

Futures does not empower, the dollar does. (ATSS)

The majority of service providers stated that they believed that young adults and their parents and carers were consulted throughout the transition planning process. There were some, however, who believed that there were parents and carers who felt disempowered in the process. They suggested that regional processes worked against maximising participation for families. Factors mentioned were:

- Lack of transition workers' knowledge of the range of services, and their tendency to suggest services they were more familiar with rather than exploring others.
- Lack of appreciation, on the part of the transition workers, of the potential for growth and development of the young adult.
- Lack of review of services.
- Reluctance on the part of some regions to reassess young adults in order to find options that are more appropriate.

9.6.1 Further Education

In general, respondents supported the principles of self-determination and participation of the young adults in their programs. However, they were not involved in the SNA and transition planning process, and therefore had no direct knowledge of the degree of self-determination. They stated that, because most of their students had been assessed at Levels 1 and 2, the expectation of self-determination and participation in decision making was greater.

Disability Liaison Officers work within processes designed to maximise independent learning for students. Their staffing ratio does not allow for the type of close monitoring of students that occurs in the schools.

9.7 Resourcing

In relation to resourcing, service providers again expressed their concerns about the inadequacies of the SNA. When the needs of a young adult were not accurately assessed, it created pressure on staffing and programs. They were often not able to meet needs without applying for special needs funding.

Service providers reiterated the concerns of other groups about lack of funds for transport. The larger services were able to buy one or more buses (or contract a transport service), and then charge parents and carers a percentage of their mobility allowance. There were some cases mentioned where regions (for example, Grampians and Gippsland) had found the funds to enable participants to travel long distances to the chosen option.

In response to parents' concerns that certain activities were not provided when, 'on paper there was the money for it', service providers said it was difficult to explain to parents the costs of running a service.

The issue of eligibility was mentioned in relation to resources. There were examples of young adults who were ready to leave school before they turned 18, but FFYA could not provide for them. Such students were at risk of dropping out of the system and not re-entering it. Some regions were praised for finding creative ways of managing such situations, for example, arranging an 'exchange' of support funds with DEET to bridge the gap until the eligible age was reached. Respondents suggested that there might be a large number of such young people who should be accessing FFYA funds, but are now ineligible because of the 'two-year rule'. Once a young adult has been out of FFYA for two years, they are ineligible to rejoin the program.

9.7.1 Further Education

TAFE and the universities have Commonwealth funds to support students with disabilities (for note-taking, assistive/adaptive technology, and for the counselling and support provided by Disability Liaison Officers). Some institutions also manage to access FFYA money, and use it for non-recurrent items such as laptop computers. Overall, institutions believe they are not funded sufficiently to provide all the support that students with disability require. They can make submissions to the State Government for additional money each year, but this does not provide adequate funds to meet all institutions' needs.

Some respondents had the view that the dual funding leads to inequity—there are some students missing out because institutions had not realised that FFYA money can be accessed. In addition, some institutions claim FFYA students as new Commonwealth funded places, so that they can maximise the funding sources.

10 Organisations

For the purposes of this Report, the findings from advocacy organisations and individuals, and from peak bodies, have been grouped. There are some differences in their roles and constituencies, and where differences in their perspectives exist, this is indicated.

10.1 Goals and Expectations

Organisations had a much clearer view of what the goals of FFYA were than did parents, young adults and mainstream schools. They mentioned the intended benefits, such as the provision of greater support to families, wider range of options than had previously existed and greater self-determination for families. They also mentioned the outcomes identified by the regional coordinators and transition workers; that is, program development, and the gradual changing of the service culture. They stressed that the intention of the program was to empower families and, at the time of the program's implementation, applauded the establishment of a Consumer Advocacy Reference Group (CARG). The CARG had had a significant impact on the early shaping of the FFYA program, and respondents decried its disbanding in the first year of FFYA.

10.2 Information and Communication

Most respondents acknowledged improvements in the provision of information over the four years of the FFYA. However, they stressed the importance of accurate and accessible information, and stated that problems in this area exacerbated problems at all other stages of the program. The criticisms were directed at both the timing and the comprehensiveness of information.

Advocacy groups reported that the expos were confusing for many families, who were unaware of the range of options and the differences between programs within options. A common comment was:

They don't know what questions to ask.

All organisations participating in the Review expressed the view that, despite the information provided about FFYA by the Department of Human Services, many families remained confused about funding levels and what could be purchased with the funding. There was particular dissatisfaction and confusion when services provided in schools, such as therapy and transport, were no longer available under FFYA. Families wanted continuity of service, in particular, speech therapy and physiotherapy programs, and this was affected by the change from one funding system to another.

Organisations commented on the inconsistency in information about funding provided by regions. For example, some regions did not fund transport, therapy and recreational activities, while other regions did. In some regions, there appeared to be little information about grievance procedures. There were also reports of inconsistent information from within a region, for example, contradictions between information given by Department of Human Services staff and a region's own published material. They reported frequent changes of FFYA personnel and a lack of experience in the operation of FFYA in some regions.

Young adults from ethnic backgrounds were particularly vulnerable to the consequences of poor information. Often the families had no knowledge of the FFYA program, and even if they were

informed, they did not understand the intentions of the transition process. These intentions were sometimes at odds with the family's culture and values, and so the young adult was drawn back into the family without access to FFYA support. There were a number of eligible young adults (particularly in Western and Northern regions) who were not receiving FFYA support—either because of ignorance or because the culture of the family was resistant to drawing the young person out of the family into the community.

10.3 Transition

Respondents from all of the organisational groups noted a number of issues that were also identified by parents and carers. These are summarised as follows:

- Transition should be seen as a *process*, not a *placement* event.
- Transition workers do not always have specialist knowledge of the range of disabilities. Particularly lacking is knowledge of autism and Asperger's Syndrome, both of which require special programs. In relation to young adults who are deaf or hearing impaired, there is no provision for the transition worker or any others involved in transition planning to be proficient in signing.
- The program of choice is not always available.
- Constant change to transition staff makes communication and continuity difficult. It prevents the worker from developing a relationship with the young adult and their family.
- Transition workers often lack knowledge about the young adult's home environment and the impact of decisions on the family.
- In some regions the families must do the often-stressful transition work of making contacts, arranging visits and so on. They find it difficult to ask the right questions about funding, services and expectations, and feel that this role can jeopardise their future relationship with the service.
- Some regions at times allowed the number of transition workers to drop (to one worker in one case), and this affected the availability of staff to support people.
- The transition worker's role should be to empower families to make their own decisions and to build relationships with service providers.
- Transition workers should aim to create pathways for young adults, and use reviews of Transition Plans to ensure that young people's skills continue to develop.

10.4 Needs Assessment

All respondents reported widespread dissatisfaction with the SNA—both in its administration and as a tool. Their comments were similar to those made by parents and carers and service providers already noted in this Report, and strengthen the suggestion that the purposes of the SNA, and its place in the transition process, are not understood. They were concerned that the SNA:

- Provided no information on behaviour, social skills, literacy and numeracy needs, emotional states or levels of motivation.
- Ignored important information relating to family background and the young adult's goals.
- Could not assess potential, or level of need in alternative environments.

- Was often quite misleading in its indication of the level of support required.
- Was administered in different ways and by different people in different regions.

10.5 Service Options—Choice and Flexibility

Respondents from the advocacy and disability support groups made the following comments about choice and flexibility:

- Funding levels restrict choice. Many families were disappointed to find that the funding level they received did not buy promised programs. They had believed that portable funding would allow them to pick and choose services, including part-time programs or activities and after-hours supports and options.
- There is a lack of integrated and inclusive options. Young adults coming from varied and innovative school programs, including those within integrated settings, often find themselves ‘going backwards’ or becoming de-skilled as they move into adult day programs.
- Parents who have complained about the limitations of a program or the push towards an ATSS have been dealt with in a ‘take it or leave it’ approach. Some parents have complained that the ATSS was offered by Department of Human Services transition workers as an ‘automatic and logical progression’.
- Lack of choice is a particular problem in rural areas. With transport not being funded in some areas, the choice is reduced to the local—and often the only—service.
- There is limited opportunity to vary the young adult’s activities during the week, except for activities within an existing ATSS program.
- There are limited opportunities for young adults with an intellectual disability to access employment programs within the community. Reasons for this include:
 - Assumptions that are made about young people’s abilities and transition planning often ignore options for skill development that might lead to ‘real work’. Access to and support for Commonwealth-funded employment services is frustratingly difficult and often non-existent.
 - There is a lack of ongoing monitoring and support for employment placements.
 - Employment placements are usually funded at a lower rate than the young adult’s SNA Level, and there is no way of accessing the difference between the two amounts for other, complementary needs.
- There is a lack of follow-up from Department of Human Services, so that parents are discouraged from conveying their satisfaction or otherwise with a service. It is difficult for families to try to change options when they are not encouraged to give feedback about them.
- There is a gap between the services provided by ATSS and TAFE. Many young adults have developed good vocational skills in the school setting, but are not yet ready for a TAFE program with the greater autonomy expected of the students. Despite this, the day services do not always pay enough attention to the ongoing adult educational needs, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There is a need for more transition courses that can bridge the skills gained in the ATSS and those required at TAFE.

- TAFE as an option varies across regions. Issues mentioned were:
 - The Department of Human Services has sometimes discouraged TAFE because Certificate of Work Education has a time limit, and thus this option creates the need for further transition.
 - Even when there are support staff for young adults with disabilities in TAFE, the level of support is often insufficient for students with an intellectual disability and complex needs. These students can be exploited or ridiculed, and their self-esteem, which has been carefully built up in the school setting, might be destroyed.

10.6 Self-Determination and Participation

Advocacy groups stated that there is only token commitment to self-determination and participation in decision making. In many cases there is no choice of service provider because of location or number of services available.

Advocacy groups suggested that contact with families by transition staff occurs too late in the young people's school life, and therefore they do not have the detailed knowledge of families, which would support participation.

The degree to which services invite families to participate varies with the service. While there are many service providers who welcome input from families and set up processes to encourage young people's participation in program design, some discourage family involvement and limit their contact to sending home various forms and requests for payment slips for activities. The Individual Program Plan (IPP) in an ATSS is an annual program review, and may not involve the parents in the way that the school PSG does.

Some commented that young adults of this age without disabilities would usually be independent (emotionally and financially), or at the least be able to make their own choices about what they want to do with their money, job prospects and leisure time.

10.7 Resourcing

Many of the comments made by advocacy and disability support organisations about resourcing (funding and fees) concerned issues of transparency and consistency within and between regions and service providers, rather than with sufficiency, summarised below:

- Some regions have responded flexibly to young adults' need, allowing not only students in need onto the program early (before they turn 18), but also providing additional funds (above SNA Level).
- Families are often not informed about what amount of funding their son or daughter receives, and this causes frustration and anger.
- The young adults (and sometimes their families) are often not involved in decisions about how funding is spent.
- Some regions make families feel as if they have to 'go to war' to gain additional support. This is demeaning, and places unnecessary stress on families.
- There were differences between regions in the way they managed FFYA funds—some used the funds to support other complementary initiatives, while others used them to top up FFYA allocations to young people.
- Some services will not accept young adults at Level 4 and over, as they believe the level of funding is not adequate to provide appropriate care or supervision.

- Some services feel they are not responsible for transport costs over and above the Mobility Allowance, and seek these additional funds from parents. Some FFYA recipients have been able to have some transport costs paid out of FFYA funding, and others have been told this is not possible.
- ATSS fees have been steadily increasing in many services, therefore some young adults miss out on activities their families cannot afford.
- There is inequity in fees, as young adults under 21 years do not receive a full pension, but are expected to pay the same ATSS fees as other clients on full pensions.
- The more flexible options are often more expensive, incurring, for example, additional transport costs.
- In general, high level needs are not being met. Challenging behaviours requires 'a level of its own'. Applying for special needs funding is 'a hassle—the needs don't change every few months'.

Section C: Conclusions and Recommendations

11 Overview

The Evaluation found overwhelming support for the existence of the program, and an acknowledgment of the importance of its goals and directions. All stakeholders confirmed that the situation for young adults with disabilities as they move from school to adult life has improved since the program's introduction in 1997. As the literature review shows, the FFYA program is not an individualised disability support model, as purely defined. However, it includes characteristics of such models (the portability of funding, for example) and stakeholders value these characteristics. The program is highly valued for the following reasons:

- Young adults and their families now know there is something to move to after school. There is a 'future', and choice of programs to support this.
- The portability of funding allows for flexibility, and has succeeded in offering services to young adults who previously had been left in school or on service providers' waiting lists.
- The existence of assured and continued funding for participants enables service providers to develop innovative and appropriate programs to meet the needs of young people moving to adult life.
- When young adults and their families are encouraged to participate in decision making, the program offers great potential for the development of self-determination and participation.

11.1 Positive Features

There were high levels of satisfaction with the program when the following factors existed:

- Young people and parents had sufficient information to feel they had control over the choices they made.
- The young person was happy in their chosen program.
- The Support Needs Assessment was conducted with sensitivity, and its purpose was understood (including what it was *not* designed to do).
- Department of Human Services transition staff took in reports from the school's Program Support Group (PSG) and teachers' opinions.
- Department of Human Services transition staff had accurate knowledge of the available services and programs.
- Department of Human Services transition staff emphasised the positive, rather than the negative, in their discussion of options and the potential to move to further options, including employment.
- Department of Human Services staff listened willingly to families and treated their requests and concerns with respect.
- Service providers responded positively to the comments of young people and families about the program and requests.

11.2 Emerging Issues

The Review found that committed and knowledgeable Department of Human Services staff, in both the regions and central office, administered the program. It was obvious that the future for young adults with disabilities is improved since the implementation of the program.

11.2.1 Unmet Aims

The Review found that some of the intended outcomes (implicit in the early documentation) had not been fully achieved. Respondents suggested many reasons for this, including:

- The speed of the program's implementation.
- The lack of clearly defined outcomes.
- The lack of clear and consistent information about processes.
- The lack of regular reviews of the program as a whole.

Many of the identified problems areas are currently being addressed. The Review found that regions were continually adjusting their processes as part of regular quality improvement measures. It is hoped that the Review's recommendations support those initiatives and provide regional staff with the encouragement to continue to reflect on practice, and implement measures to improve the program.

11.2.2 Key Transition Points

The Review found that the program has enormous potential for improving the lives of young people with disabilities by supporting them in transitions from post-school options to further adult options. The FFYA program recognised the need for intensive support at the key transition stage of school to post-school option.

The Review identified the issue of whether or not there is a completion of transition. The name of the program itself highlights this issue, as the words 'young adults' and 'future' are problematic. Parents and carers in particular saw the program as a continuing one, and many posed the question 'What would we do if there wasn't the Futures program?' There are a number of transitions in life for all people (for example, starting school, leaving school and moving to adult options, moving out of home, starting and ending work, establishing relationships and moving into aged care). Many people with disabilities require additional support at these times. Support must continue for those young adults who will not become independent, and who will require continuing support at a consistent level.

11.2.3 A Transition or Ongoing Program?

A major issue for the administration of FFYA is the lack of an exit policy, so that each year, more young adults join the program, but few leave it. Entry criteria are also related to this, via the Department of Education Employment and Training's Disability and Impairments Program, which, because of changing diagnostic trends, is attracting increasing numbers of young adults. The Review recognises the budgetary consequences of this tension between a *transition* program, with its major purpose being to support young adults moving from school to post-school options, and an *ongoing* program, which continues to support adults as they move through their lives. One way of addressing this tension is to develop better strategies for moving those young adults who are able to reach some degree of independence to supported and open employment. There must also be the means of identifying those young people who are no longer accessing services and who have ceased to seek FFYA funding for some reason. The maintenance of

records of people's continuing need for and use of services is important, and would facilitate planning that includes outcomes and reviews.

Any answers to the question of whether the FFYA program, its name notwithstanding, is a transition program or a lifelong support program lies beyond the scope of this review, but the question is acknowledged as extremely important to stakeholders. The issue is partly addressed in the *Draft State DisAbility Plan*, (Department of Human Services, 2001), which identifies a key challenge as 'supporting people with a disability across different life stages and at key life transition times' (Department of Human Services 2001: 19). The Plan emphasises the importance of 'helping people plan for the future, particularly at key transition points in their lives' (Department of Human Services 2001: x). The development of an integrated support system that takes account of ongoing needs should be the subject of further investigation and consideration.

The Review recommends renewed attention on participation of young people and their families in transition planning, with stated outcomes, regular reviews and the possibility of further options. Increased attention to employment outcomes and ways of facilitating these will result in advantages for the young adult and in reduced need for funding from the FFYA program. Ways of encouraging options that provide independence and social inclusion, such as employment, should be explored, with the recognition that young adults should not be disadvantaged if such moves to greater independence do not work out.

11.2.4 Parent Concerns

Parent respondents to the Review expressed their fear of losing support should their young adult's move to greater independence and employment not be sustained. They expressed the need for a 'safety net' that would ensure support at a later stage or transition if needed. Currently, if a young adult has not been on the program for two years or more they are excluded. The Review suggests that such a requirement should be softened to allow for renewed eligibility under special circumstances. Removing the fear of exclusion might offer more encouragement to move young people to independent options and consequently to a reduced need for program support.

11.2.5 Outcomes-Based Transition

The Review suggests that planning for transition should be outcomes-based, with increased attention on employment outcomes, especially for young adults with lower support needs. With a focus on participation, outcomes based transition planning and reviews of these plans, the flexibility of the program and opportunities for changing options and moving towards greater independence will be encouraged. The Review suggests that a demonstration project be conducted to allow the controlled implementation and evaluation of suggested changes to processes.

The conclusions and recommendations are organised into the themes that informed the research design:

1. Goals and expectations
2. Information and communication
3. Transition
4. Needs assessment
5. Options—choice and flexibility
6. Self-determination and participation
7. Resourcing.

12 Recommendations

The conclusions are based on the findings of the evaluation, that is, the range of views about the operation and outcomes of the FFYA program held by the stakeholders, and they should be read in conjunction with the findings in Section B of this Report.

The recommendations present the Review's suggestions of ways of building on the good practice observed, in order to ensure that the program can achieve its outcomes and are cost neutral in most cases.

Overarching Recommendation: Futures Demonstration Project

The Review recommends that a demonstration project be initiated, in which any number of the recommendations outlined below could be implemented in a controlled way to demonstrate their effectiveness (or otherwise) in relation to the objectives of the FFYA program. For example, the Review found a need to encourage those young adults with aspirations and capacity for work to move from school to training options, and then to part-time or full-time supported employment or open employment. It also found a number of brokerage services that offer young adults a number of supports in following this course, including planning, case management, workplace support and advocacy. Such approaches could be formally encouraged in a demonstration project, and the data collected and analysed for cost and other outcomes. It could also have both process (formative) and summative evaluation.

12.1 Goals and Expectations

Several of the goals and directions of the FFYA program have been achieved. Respondents strongly affirmed that the situation for young adults with disabilities as they move from school to adult life has greatly improved since the program's introduction. Significant reasons for this include:

- The availability of funding dedicated to supporting young adults in post-school options has provided services to young adults who previously had been left in school or on service providers' waiting lists.
- The portability of funding has allowed for flexibility and the potential for changing options.
- There has been an increase in the number and variety of services, and there are examples of the development of innovative and creative options.³

³ There were no quantitative measures available to determine the degree of change that has occurred, and the evaluation relied on the views of stakeholders. There were reports that service options have increased, but this cannot be quantified. Also, it was reported that some existing services have developed innovative and responsive programs, but again, this cannot be quantified. As with other issues, there were varying views about changes in the service system, and in this instance, it might have reflected different rates of change in different areas. The evaluation found examples of services developing innovative programs, particularly in the employment area. For example, Melbourne East Group Training is working with Catholic schools in a pilot program to place students in work experience and prepare them for employment. Eastwork Employment Inc broker services for young people moving to employment. In other cases, organisations

- The program offers great potential for the development of self-determination and participation for young adults—and for the young people and their families who have been encouraged to participate in decision making this potential has been realised.
- Young adults and their families now know there is something to move to and a program to support this; there is a ‘future’.

Along with this widespread belief in the program’s success, the findings also suggest that the original vision for the program has faded in some respects. There is a lack of a coherent view, shared by all stakeholders, of the program’s goals and expectations. For example, there is little evidence that principal goals of the program (self-determination and involvement of the young adults and their families, with a resultant increase in a sense of worth, and a belief in a future) are being reflected in the perceptions of the other stakeholders. The significance of these goals is highlighted in the discussion on transition below.

The program appears to have outgrown its infrastructure, one that was set in place very quickly. The operational structures were adapted to meet needs as they arose, and these needs differed in each region. The Report suggests that such a shift in the perceptions of purpose and goals is to be expected in such an ambitious program after over four years of operation. The Department of Human Services, in commissioning this evaluation, has provided a timely opportunity to revisit the program, and to evaluate its achievements.

Some of the factors that have contributed to the changed vision of the program are:

- The pressures of the day-to-day administration of the program are considerable.
- There are different practices in different regions, (not in itself negative, as different contexts require different approaches, but confusing for young adults and their parents and carers).
- The program was implemented with great speed.
- There were no clearly articulated outcomes for the program.
- Many of the Department of Human Services staff who had been involved in the program from the outset and had a firm sense of the intentions of the program have left the program, and new staff without this historical context have moved into their roles.
- Although the Department of Human Services conducted an FFYA Implementation Review in 1997, the findings (many of which have been confirmed by the present review) were not disseminated, and that review’s recommendations were not implemented.

Self-determination for young adults and their families was central to the original vision of the program. It is difficult for a large bureaucracy to promote and preserve self-determination and empowerment for participants. Administrative imperatives associated with placing young adults in services have, in some cases, dominated the preservation of choice and flexibility.

Self-determination and participation have the potential to lead people towards self-management, and this has been difficult for bureaucracies to encompass. The Review found some examples of young adults whose families are managing their programs. Some regions are presently grappling with the processes required to support self-management, in order to ensure accountability and flexibility. They should be encouraged to continue.

provide an ATSS service, as well as supported and open employment. Knoxbrooke Inc, for example, targets each client’s needs in relation to their nursery enterprises, and the transition to employment is well supported. Students from the local secondary school can also participate in the businesses through VET.

In recommending a return to the original intentions of the program (in the light of the findings of this Review), and a consequent re-conceptualisation of the program, the Review recognises that all children and young adults, whether or not they have disabilities, require additional support during key life transition points. At a minimum these points are:

- Commencing school.
- Moving from primary to secondary education and into adolescence.
- Moving from school to post-school education.
- Training or employment.
- Retiring from the workforce.

Other important life transition points are:

- Leaving home and attaining independence from parents.
- Entering personal relationships.
- Having children.
- Losing life partners.
- Moving into aged care facilities.

For people with disabilities, these transition points can bring enormous changes and need for support.

A civil society aims to build inclusive and responsive communities, which can nurture the wellbeing of all its citizens, with special care for the most vulnerable. The present government's public policies support growing of stronger citizens, families and communities. This Review therefore recommends that the FFYA program be reconceived as a program to support key life transitions for people who require this. There needs to be an increased emphasis on planning for transitions, stating outcomes and reviewing resource allocations to support new circumstances for a person, where applicable. The purpose of FFYA should be to provide intensive support during the transition from school to post-school options, with the possibility of either reducing support when outcomes are achieved, or continuing to provide intensive support for those who require this.

There needs to be renewed attention on participation, outcomes-based planning, flexibility and ease of changing options, and regular review of an individuals options. There also needs to be a renewed commitment from DEET to provide active support for the transition process, in tandem with the Department of Human Services.

Increased attention is also needed in transition planning on outcomes—including moving young adults to employment services—so that some will be able to separate from the program and participate more fully in the wider community. The possibility of re-entry, following a review to ascertain changed needs, will provide a safety net by removing the present fear of moving on to independence. It will also strengthen the flexibility of the program.

Related to the need to regenerate people's understanding of the goals of the program is the need for a change of name. 'Young adults' does not accurately define the group currently involved in the program. The retention of the word 'future' is important for reasons of familiarity, the program universally being referred to as simply, 'Futures'.

Recommendation 1.1

That Futures for Young Adults, with a change of name, be retained as an essential and creative program to support young people with disabilities in their transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 1.2

That the vision for the program, its goals and operational guidelines, be affirmed by all stakeholders, with particular focus on those which support self-determination and participation.

Recommendation 1.3

That the staffing requirements of the program be monitored, to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of skilled staff to support the transition planning and review processes recommended by this Review.

Recommendation 1.4

That the goals of the program, in particular, the focus on empowerment, participation and transition to adult life, be emphasised in induction and professional development programs for staff working in the program.

Recommendation 1.5

That the name of the program be changed to remove the word 'young' in order to capture the age range of adults with disabilities requiring support during transitions.

12.2 Information and Communication

Lack of knowledge about one's rights and responsibilities is disempowering. When, for whatever reason, people do not have information about the intentions of FFYA, the processes of transition, the way that the funding works, the processes for review or even the name of a person to contact, then it is difficult to achieve the intended outcomes for young people.

All groups contributing to the Review, with the exception of special schools, reported that information from Department of Human Services was often lacking in sufficiency and accuracy, and was difficult to access. The special schools said that they were happy with the information provided to them from the Department of Human Services. The primary role played by special schools in providing information to young adults and families is not surprising, given their relationship with the students and their families over a long period of time. The approach of the special schools to provision of information provides an important model; the information is timely, and is presented in ways that meets the special needs of the young people and families.

The effectiveness of information provision in special schools notwithstanding, families from ethnic communities, with limited facility in English language are particularly disadvantaged. For many groups, the culture of a support program for children with disabilities is not understood, and many families are resistant to what they see as interference in their private family problems. Their feelings about their children with disabilities can also make them reluctant to seek support from their own communities. Advocacy groups (and individuals) from ethnic communities need to be given both financial and moral support in the work they do.

As the responses from Department of Human Services regional staff show, there is a great deal of information about FFYA available. All regions make special efforts to ensure that the processes and associated deadlines are documented. The research team was given numerous fliers, leaflets, flowcharts and newsletters prepared by a wide range of people and organisations involved in FFYA. Despite this, many parents and carers (and those young adults who were

aware of the program and their part in it) spoke of either the lack of information or its inaccessibility.

There is a clear need for a rationalisation of information both between organisations within and across regions, which should be overseen by the central Department of Human Services administration. This need not prevent differences in approach that arise in response to needs in particular environments, but consistency of information is important in some aspects, such as what FFYA funds can be used for, and how the assessment of needs is translated into financial support.

The Review also suggests that the approach to service provider expos be reviewed, and factors contributing to participant satisfaction (high satisfaction levels being reported by several regions) be shared across regions. The expo model, while useful and appropriate for school leavers without disabilities and their families who require information about courses and careers, may be less appropriate for young people who require an individualised approach. Services need an opportunity to provide information about their programs, but the size of such events (in some cases) has overwhelmed families, and in these cases, the events failed in their intention to promote choice. The Review is not suggesting that expos be abandoned, but finds that families need to be guided through such an event, so that they know what questions to ask.

Effective provision of information includes having access to a known and reliable contact person. The majority of parents and carers and young adults experienced excellent relationships with staff of special schools. When there is no post-school equivalent, that is, an easily identifiable contact person in the region, they feel the difference keenly. Confusion about Transition Plans and the transition process as a whole, including the purpose of the SNA and associated funding, is exacerbated by the lack of a contact person. Where there is an accessible (and known) contact person there were positive comments about the program.

At the time of the introduction of FFYA there were strategies in place to provide information. The Communication Strategy (Department of Human Services, 1998) aimed to ensure a quick response to problems as they arose at both statewide and regional levels. It was reported as being successful, and included:

- A commitment to a rapid response by Department of Human Services staff to problems.
- Information bulletins written for schools, parents and carers and young adults, and translated into languages other than English.
- Information packages for schools.
- The *Framework for Transition for Adult Students with Disabilities 1996* was provided to regions, which contained details about timelines, funding, elements in the transition process, service identification, review and grievance procedures.
- Regional forums for parents and young adults.

Even with this planned information campaign early in the program's implementation, there was confusion. One reason appears to be the speed with which the program was implemented. It was announced in November 1996, and transition and placements for most of the young adults had to be completed by January (for some) or June of the following year (1997).

The legacy of this hasty implementation remains. It has been exacerbated by frequent changes to staff over the four years of its operation, and some current staff of Department of Human Services and day options are unaware of the original guidelines and intentions of the program. The lack of procedural guidelines and common documentation of objectives outcomes has allowed the program to develop in its own way in different regions, influenced by the administration of different program managers.

The Review found that Department of Human Services FFYA staff have a strong commitment to making the program work as well as it can for young adults with disabilities. However, it is troubling that there were reports from some parents and carers that staff from some regions often did not return calls, or responded to parents in patronising and adversarial ways. Some parents have interpreted the lack of continuity in staffing as evidence of a lack of Department of Human Services commitment to their particular needs. When not all staff (for whatever reason) are fully aware of the details of services or of the sensitivities and pressures on families with children with disabilities, the possibilities of inappropriate or poor service delivery and inequities are increased.

A related information issue, although not specifically concerned with FFYA, was the reported lack of knowledge about other support programs (for example, Home First and Making a Difference). One parent said

It would have made things so much easier if I had known way back when my child was born that there would be support programs at different stages in her life. It would have given me some comfort to see the whole picture of support.

It may be that Department of Human Services could consider ways of presenting such information. It is certainly accessible on the Department's website, and in some high quality information brochures. However, it is difficult for some people to see the connections between programs and between divisions within the Department itself.

Finally, there is a need for an information system to support reliable record keeping across regions. Knowledge about trends in service development, achievement of client outcomes and spending patterns would enable informed decisions to be made about funding and policies.

Recommendation 2.1

That a review be undertaken of the information provided by Department of Human Services to young adults eligible for FFYA, their parents and carers, schools and service providers, to ensure that it meets their needs for accessible, personalised and relevant information.

Recommendation 2.2

That a statewide information strategy be developed, and that this include key contacts in each region with responsibility for consistency, updating of information and liaison with the central administration.

Recommendation 2.3

That all information, including the attitudes and values on which the program is based, be available in languages other than English; and that ethnic communities and advocates be supported in their task of providing information to young adults and their families.

Recommendation 2.4

That Operational Guidelines for the program be provided to Department of Human Services staff as part of an induction program, and that these guidelines be regularly reviewed to ensure currency and appropriateness.

Recommendation 2.5

That there be a review of expos to identify the factors that contribute to their success, with a view to maximising the opportunity provided by these events to inform, educate and provide advice, and that consideration be given to providing follow-up advice to young people and their families.

Recommendation 2.6

That Central Office coordinates the establishment and maintenance of a data system to ensure consistent record keeping across regions.

Recommendation 2.7

That a reference group be (re)established, with membership drawn from advocacy groups, disability peak bodies, DEET, the Disability Advisory Council and independent experts, with a brief to provide advice on policy and practice to program administrators.

12.3 Transition

The Review's conclusions about transition and its recommendations for change have been made in the context of the original intentions of the transition process, as documented in the *FFYA Framework for Transition for Adult Students with Disabilities* (Department of Human Services, 1996) and the *Business Rules* (Department of Human Services, 1998). Both these guidelines stated that transition should ensure that:

- Students and their families and carers have sufficient information about the range of available adult options to enable them to make genuine choices about their future.
- The adult options to which a student moves reflect, as far as possible, the choices and decisions of the student and their family and carers.
- The move from school to adult options is planned to minimise disruption to the student and their family and carers.
- The service providers of the student's adult options has appropriate information to enable them to provide programs that meet the individual needs of a student.
- Students and their families and carers have information on and ready access to grievance procedures if they are dissatisfied with the transition process.
- Students have the opportunity to pursue an alternative adult options if their original choices prove inappropriate or their needs change over time.

Also influencing the Review's recommendations for transition are the principles encapsulated in the Transition Support Project (TSP) *Opening Pathways* (Department of Human Services 1994–1996), which laid an important foundation for the FFYA. This project emphasised the importance of:

- Program Support Groups in all schools.
- Embedding transition in core education processes in schools, and starting the transition planning two or three years prior to the final year.
- The development of a comprehensive range of resources to assist schools and other key participants in the transition process (for example, the *Pathways* CD-ROM).
- The establishment of directories of contact persons in services and agencies, and the involvement of service providers in work experience for young adults to prepare them for adult options.
- The measuring of outcomes regularly through the accountability processes required of the agencies.

- The preservation of the concept of ‘pathways’ for each young adult, with impetus for those who can move increasingly to employment as training is delivered in the training institutions and specialist programs.
- The establishment of networks in the school and broader community as key structures for nurturing transition imperatives.

The Review findings suggest that an understanding of the intention and spirit of transition encapsulated in these documents and projects has been lost.

Responses from all groups indicated that transition is not widely understood as a *process* that takes place over time, but rather as a *placement* procedure. This is supported by the lack of evidence of knowledge of the purposes of the SNA, and awareness of Transition Reports, Transition Plans and Transition Plan reviews.

Respondents identified three factors militating against effective transition:

1. Insufficient information about the processes in transition, and the purposes of various elements.
2. Insufficient knowledge and skills of some transition workers. Skills mentioned were:
 - Knowledge of disability types (for example autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, sensory disabilities).
 - Adequate knowledge of the young adult and family as a whole.
 - Writing of adequate reports and plans.
3. Lack of links between service providers that might encourage multi-service packages or facilitate changes of options..

It is clear from the findings that when transition workers have appropriate knowledge and skills, and have an ongoing relationship with the young adult and their parents and carers, transitions empower young adults and families. It is also clear that when the person managing the transitions understands the stress for the young person and the family of this key transition point, then the relationship is a productive and supportive one.

There is a relationship between the lack of shared vision of the goals and intentions of the program and perceived problems in the transition process. There appears to be little shared understandings of what transition as a process should be doing, or what transition could be achieving, for example, self-determination, the experience of empowerment, and the understanding of pathways to a future. When ‘successful transition’ is mentioned, it is often related to a successful placement. Other outcomes, such as empowerment, a positive sense of self, increased confidence and optimism, are not mentioned. The emphasis often appears to be on the difficulties in making transitions, rather than on a vision about what transition could be.

Any transition in life involves challenges. Systems involved in transitions might also have problems. The focus of comments from service providers and Department of Human Services staff about transition was on the young adults being ‘problems standing beside system problems’. They saw the role of FFYA as being to fix problems, and this entailed ‘fixing’ the young adults. Young adults without disabilities also have to make a transition out of the secondary school system. However, for them it marks a significant change in their social lives, and one that is generally celebrated as marking the successful achievement of a milestone. For young adults in FFYA, this milestone is treated as a problem to be solved.

FFYA should help young adults to celebrate the achievement of completing secondary schooling.

To reiterate, the key elements in the original intention of the transition process in FFYA were:

- Information—to enable young adults and families to make genuine choices.
- Participation—of the student and their family and carers in decision making.
- Planning—to minimise disruption to the young adult and their family and carers.
- Information about a young adult's needs—to service providers, to enable them to meet individual needs.
- Grievance procedures—if young adults and families and carers are dissatisfied with transition processes or outcomes.
- Flexibility—to allow young adults to change options.

Some of the concerns identified about transition have been with the program from its inception. The draft report of the *Review of Stage 1 Implementation* (Department of Human Services, 1998) identified similar transition issues to those identified in the present Review:

- Lack of participation by parents and carers and young adults in the SNA.
- Varied quality of schools' or teachers' reports, including the fact that they were often completed in the context of the present environment, rather than considering future 'adult' environments.
- Varied quality of reports by some regional transition workers, much of this due to lack of knowledge of types of disability, youth and inexperience, as well as a propensity to underestimate potential for change in the young people.

The overriding transition concept is that it should be a process over time, not a single event. Just as students without disabilities are engaged in transition to adult options (pathways) from Year 9 (in many schools it begins in Year 7), and so it should be for students with disabilities. Career advice and work experience practices should also be consistent with those for students without disabilities.

The Review therefore recommends that transition to adult options in the FFYA program should begin at age 15 or earlier. For mainstream schools, this will mean cooperating with (and gaining information from) Department of Human Services FFYA program staff early in the student's secondary schooling (at least by Year 9).

The Review also recommends that there be a greater emphasis on the *planning* for transition, and that plans should include goals, outcomes, roles and responsibilities. There should be professional development provided to schools and to Department of Human Services transition workers in the preparation of transition reports, and plans that are detailed and strategic. The Transition Plan should be the basis for brief non-invasive annual reviews. After the young person has been in a stable placement for three years, reviews (with the option of a support needs assessment) should take place every three years, or as required. If needs have been met and a young adult exits the program, it should still be possible to re-enter the program at a later stage to receive support for transition to a changed option.

Young adults with disabilities and their families should have stable support from a person who has knowledge of the young adult, the family, the services and supports available. In many cases, the transition worker or the FFYA regional coordinator presently fulfils this role effectively. Services should strive to stabilise their workforce as much as possible recognising that continuity is important to families. When staff do move, procedures (such as good record keeping and introductions to new staff) should be put in place to minimise the disruption to clients. The Review recommends that all young people and their families have a contact person

who can have a case management role if required. In many cases, this person may be the present transition worker. In suggesting the need for a person with a closer relationship to the young person and family than is presently the case, the Review commends a number of brokerage models. There are elements of brokerage in a number of approaches, including:

- The Local Area Coordinator in the Western Australian program, (Post-school Options: Pathway to the Future).
- The case management offered in Loddon Mallee and Barwon–South West regions.
- The case management, advocacy and service coordination offered by a number of employment services in a number of regions (for example, Eastern and Gippsland).

The Review is also concerned that some young adults have ‘fallen through the gap’. If young adults left school before they were 18, or for some reason commenced an option and then dropped out, they might not receive needed support. In the program as it stands, if a young person has not been part of FFYA for two years, then they are ineligible for further support. Rigid adherence to this ‘rule’ ignores the reality of changing life circumstances.

Recommendation 3.1

That the Transition Report and an outcomes-based Transition Plan, with information relating to behaviour, specialist needs, educational and vocational aspirations and motivation, be regarded as central to the assessment of needs and the transition process; and that professional development be provided to relevant personnel, schools and Department of Human Services to assist in the preparation of these.

Recommendation 3.2

That transition processes be revised to reflect the following operating principles:

- Start raising awareness of post-school options with teachers, parents and the student early in the student’s school career, and by Year 9 (or the equivalent) at the latest.
- Emphasise planning for transitions, ensuring that Transition Plans include proposed actions and outcomes (in the manner of service and case plans).
- Encourage appropriately high aspirations for the student and positive expectations in significant others.
- Focus not just on education and vocational areas, but the full range of adult requirements, including recreation, leisure and relationships.
- Throughout secondary schooling, increasingly focus on preparation for the world of work, further education, and appropriate adult options.
- Ensure access to flexible work experience where appropriate.
- Offer workplace learning within the school if work experience options are not available.
- Ensure that the young adult is aware of the pathways to adult options, including, for some, the path from work preparation to increasingly open employment options.
- Ensure regular reviews of placement options for their continuing relevance and effectiveness.
- Assist the young adult to exercise choice in changing their programs, their directions and their support people as required/desired.

Recommendation 3.3

That the roles of people involved in transition be reviewed to ensure that young adults and their families have a consistent contact person who is able to assist the family as appropriate.

Recommendation 3.4

That career structures for personnel working in transition be enhanced to reflect the levels of skill and knowledge required, and that induction programs and ongoing professional development programs be provided for personnel working in the program.

Recommendation 3.5

That the age of eligibility of eighteen years remain as recommended, with the provision that the small number of students who are ready to move to an adult option at an earlier age be able to access the program.

Recommendation 3.6

That a special consideration process be established to consider the needs of young adults who have been out of the school system or the FFYA program for more than two years, but who require support for transition to an adult option.

Recommendation 3.7

That there be short, non-invasive annual reviews of a young adult's option for up to three years after the initial placement, conducted independently of the service provider; and that funding be reapplied for at the time of review only if there is a clear need for change which cannot be met with the current funding.

Recommendation 3.8

That when a young adult has moved to an option that provides some independence, such as employment, they exit the program, with the possibility of re-entry after a review to ascertain the extent of additional transition support required, and the preparation of a new outcomes-based Transition Plan (see Recommendation 5.7).

12.4 Needs Assessment

The Support Needs Assessment plays a central part in FFYA, as it is part of the transition process (*Business Rules*, 1998: 5.1). During the research design phase of the evaluation, it was identified as important, and respondents expressed strong views about both the tool and its administration.

The *FFYA Business Rules* (Department of Human Services, 1998) describes the SNA in this way:

Program Support Groups (PSG) will undertake an SNA for each young person... While there is overlap between the SNA and the Transition Report... their purposes are quite different.

The SNA is a tool that provides a quick, consistent and reliable means for assessing the extent of support needs. The SNA assesses the level of support provided to the student in the school environment in relation to their physical, social and safety support needs. The outcome of this assessment is the basis for allocating an appropriate level of resources to support each student.

It is intended that the FFYA Transition Report will provide the comprehensive assessment of an individual, which will be the basis for developing individual programs, and which will assist in making decisions about appropriate adult options.

The SNA should be administered only by individuals who have been trained in its use. Within the PSG, it is the role of the Transition Support Worker or other representative from Department of Human Services to provide expertise in relation to the administration of the SNA. (Department of Human Services, 1998: 5.3.3)

As outlined in Section A of this Report, the SNA tool is used to allocate a funding level to each eligible young adult, and a total amount is then transferred to the regions. This amount is regarded by the Department of Human Services as a benchmark figure, and may not be the actual amount spent on each individual. Thus, while the SNA provides a rationale for the funding allocation to the region, it does not prescribe the individual's program. It is the purpose of the Transition Report (prepared by the school) and the Transition Plan (prepared by the Department of Human Services transition worker or contracted agency) to describe the needs and the kinds of support required to meet these needs. It is intended that there is a match between the required support and the SNA derived level of funding available.

The findings indicate that there is considerable confusion about the purpose of the SNA. It is important to note that some of the concerns expressed were related to this confusion, and therefore should not necessarily be seen as proof of problems with the psychometrics of the tool. Nevertheless, all groups spoken to, with the exception of special schools, had serious reservations about the accuracy and usefulness of the tool, or the appropriateness of its administration.

There are consequences of the fact that the SNA was not intended to provide information about specific disabilities, or educational aspirations, but simply to be used to place an individual in an appropriate broad funding band. The SNA levels almost seem to determine the service option, with those at Levels 1 and 2 going to TAFE or university, and those with higher support levels placed in day training and support services.

When the SNA does not involve young people and their families, it gives the control to the professionals, rather than encouraging self-determination. When the SNA is conducted by people who do not know and in many cases do not even meet the young adult, it is more likely to be an inaccurate guide to both level and needs.

Finally, when transition planning documents are not well prepared, the SNA carries the main information about the young adult's needs to the service provider. This is clearly inadequate, and has led to the concerns about the SNA expressed by parents, service providers and advocacy groups.

All regions claimed that they had very few requests for reassessment. Given the number of parents who claimed no knowledge of the SNA level, this low request rate is not surprising. A more open attitude to reviewing the SNA might encourage greater participation of young adults and families and improve their understanding of its purpose.

In practice, across a region, there is a particular SNA profile (number of people at Level 1, number at Level 2, and so on), and funding is allocated on the basis of that profile. Therefore, the funding for a region is the product of the numbers of people at each level and their respective benchmark funding. Inevitably, that affects the provision of services to individuals, insofar as it sets the budgetary constraints within which the region (and services) must operate. The consequences of this filters down to each individual. To put it another way, the SNA determines the size of the overall cake, but not how the cake is cut. How the cake is cut should be determined by individual program planning.

The Review contends that a key reason for the widespread dissatisfaction with the SNA is its conflicting purposes, that is, of providing aggregate funding information in a program that has, in its goals and approach, many of the characteristics of an individualised funding model. It is a tool for determining funding at an aggregate level, and is not intended to be used at the individual level for purposes of determining an individual's needs and, therefore, their program planning. The problem has been confounded by the inadequate use of the tools that should support the SNA, that is, the Transition Report and the Transition Plan.

Assessment of need should be a process taking place over time, rather than a single event. The school's PSG accumulates valuable knowledge about the individual's needs over time. As the discussion on transition in the Report contends, the transition process should start much earlier, and the information gathered by the PSG and the regional support workers should contribute to the assessment of funding level. Appraisal of need should come *before* allocation of funds. In fact, experienced transition workers, developing the Transition Plans in consultation with schools and families, could assess the level of funding required without the use of the SNA at all.

In conclusion, the administration of the tool needs to be reviewed. This Review has been informed that the SNA is currently undergoing an independent review of its psychometric reliability. However, as the findings suggest, the assessment of need processes as a whole should be reconsidered, including the administration of the SNA and its place in transition planning. In the immediate term, the Review recommends that parents and carers in particular be provided with clear information about the purpose of the SNA and its place in the transition process. To assist in this, and to de-emphasise the perceived significance of the SNA, the Review recommends that the SNA is *not* the first stage in the transition process, and that reviews of the SNA be arranged willingly and quickly. The changes to the transition process recommended by this Review address the need for regular reviews of a young adult's needs in relation to goals and stated outcomes.

Recommendation 4.1

That the Transition Report and the Transition Plan, with information relating to behaviour, specialist needs, educational aspiration and motivation, be regarded as central to the assessment of needs, and that Service Needs Assessment be used only to assist with determination of funding levels.

Recommendation 4.2

- That the processes for assessing needs be changed, where necessary, to ensure that:
- The purpose of the Support Needs Assessment, its relationship to the transition process, and the procedures for review are clearly explained to all stakeholder groups.
- The initial Support Needs Assessment (SNA) is conducted after the Transition Report and the Transition Plan have been completed, to ensure that the individual's abilities, ambitions and life circumstances are given high priority.
- Any request for a review of the SNA for a young adult is met willingly and within the time limit stated in the current program guidelines (five days following a request by any party).
- The young adult and parents and carers are present when the SNA (or a review) is conducted, unless there is agreement between the parties as to the need for alternative arrangements.

12.5 Options—Choice and Flexibility

When asked about choice and flexibility, many respondents talked about service quality. However, it was not the intention of this Review to evaluate service quality, except as it relates to the relevant goals of the FFYA program, that is:

- To support the development of a flexible, consumer responsive service system, tailored to the developmental needs of the individual and offering pathways for the user to other service options.
- To ensure quality services that meet the aims for young adults to experience improved and enhanced lifestyle opportunities.

12.5.1 Choice and Flexibility

The *Destinations Evaluation* report found that there is little movement from one option to another. The respondents, few of whom spoke of pathways to future options, support this. There was a lack of evidence of links between service providers. The lack of attention to pathways was compounded by the absence of follow-up by transition workers or those responsible for the initial placement. Regular reviews of young adults' Transition Plans (Recommendations 3.7 and 3.8) would benefit both the young adults (by highlighting any changing needs), as well as the people undertaking the reviews (by increasing their knowledge of services and programs). It would also introduce some degree of accountability into service provision.

Whether or not portability of funding has achieved the objective of empowering families and increasing choice is difficult to confirm. The fact that the overwhelming majority of clients attend an ATSS may indicate that these services provide the most suitable option, rather than a lack of choice. Choice can be influenced by other factors, such as proximity to home, familiarity (often the young adults have completed work experience in the service) and advice from the school and transition workers.

Overall there are fewer choices for young adults in rural settings and for those with high and complex needs. The need for residential accommodation further restricts choice in rural areas. Families' consideration of the eventual shift to residential care is often occurring at the same time as transition from school, so the emphasis is on finding the residential placement first. The vocational placement is then determined by where the residential placement is located, and often there is only one option. This is also a concern for some metropolitan families where the young adult still lives at home but parents are looking ahead to the next couple of years when their young adult moves to a residential facility. This influences the choice of an ATSS.

There are issues, identified by respondents as problems, which are related to choice and flexibility. These are:

- High levels of frustration at fees for transport and activities, particularly when these had previously been provided within the school system.
- Attendance hours and holidays in both TAFE and ATSS created problems for families.
- Lack of recreational and after-hours programs.

Cooperation between service providers could address some of these issues. For example, transport services could be shared, at least in metropolitan areas. With an increased emphasis on individual need and interagency partnerships, creative solutions to the need for after-hours and weekend programs may be found.

Cooperative relationships between service providers can also result in increased variety of programs and flexible hours. There are some examples of this in metropolitan regions

(geographical proximity being an advantage in this), where one service has strengths in one area, such as a music program, and young adults from another service can participate.

The Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), established as a result of the recommendations of the report on Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (DEET, 2000) provide a model for greater collaboration and integration between providers of education and training, other government agencies and the community. In the same way, networks of service providers need to be supported by government to maximise the range and flexibility of delivery and support to suit diverse needs, and to encourage creative responses focused on pathways and outcomes. Closer links of FFYA with other service networks at both management and transition worker levels would facilitate the development of more alternatives for young adults. The linking with employment networks could be particularly productive.

FFYA providers should be part of these networks, in addition to establishing their own. The LLENs provide a model and an opportunity for this.

12.5.2 Service Development

The expectation that FFYA would encourage the development of a range of innovative services has been partly met, in that existing services have been able to use the guaranteed funding to develop additional programs. However, the Review found few examples of programs that had sufficient flexibility to meet a wide range individual needs.

The concerns about services can be interpreted in the light of the more general question about the goals of FFYA. Many young adults and parents and carers are satisfied with their ATSS, and are relieved that it will continue to be a reliable and caring resource indefinitely. For other parents, the ATSS is seen as a stepping-stone to a future option. If both of these goals are legitimate, then FFYA must serve very different purposes across its client base. The challenge is to develop the program so that it can fulfil these multiple primary purposes.

The Review found that some ATSSs felt anxious about the implications of losing clients and their associated funding. Client-centred funding means that an ATSS can only provide as many places as are funded by the money attached to their clients. Uncertainty about the number of incoming clients and the tenure of current clients puts great pressure on an ATSS and its viability. There were examples of small services closing while the larger ones grew. There were also examples of this growth encompassing residential services. An increase in collaborative arrangements between services would help maintain smaller or more innovative services, and should be actively encouraged by government. The current Best Practice Funding Initiative is a model for doing this.

The lack of integrated and inclusive options needs to be addressed. Many young adults coming from integrated school settings do not wish to move to a segregated adult setting, but would be better served by a combination of options. The choice is weighted towards an ATSS. As the Review findings discuss, there are a number of reasons for this, including the feeling of security for parents and carers, familiarity and encouragement from the special school. The SNA level also seems to be quite deterministic in placement choice.

FFYA should be able to support individually tailored support and assistance provision outside formalised human service and adult education and employment services.

12.5.3 Models of Service Delivery

The few parents who wished to manage their young adult's programs found this difficult, despite having advocacy skills and an awareness of available services. These parents questioned the notion of the SNA being a 'benchmark funding level'. They regarded the level of funding allocated as their young adult's entitlement, and wanted to manage the funds themselves.

However, there are no processes set down for this—the FFYA was not set up as an individual funding model. Given that self-determination and participation are embedded in the goals of the program, it should be possible to promote and support self-management, thus enhancing the potential for individuals’ dignity, sense of worth and inclusion in community life.

Parents who managed their young adults’ program claimed they could achieve variety and flexibility. Services that broker a variety of programs can also provide flexibility. For example, agencies that offer employment opportunities in addition to day programs enhance the variety and future opportunities for young adults. These services have the capacity to offer case management, a term used in a variety of ways by different people, but in general meaning stable support and mediation of services by a worker who knows the young adult and family well. In a similar way, many of the ATSSs have a de facto role in people’s lives as case managers, in the absence of any other agency to address an individual’s planning need. While this role can fill a gap in the management of young people’s daily activities, it can also lead to ATSS-mediated programs that address particular needs, rather than leading to a range of more generic options.

Regional staff, ATSS staff and TAFE colleges should be actively encouraged to move young adults to employment service options. Employment services have much to offer the young adult who aspires to work, and who may already have some work-readiness skills. These services often have good relationships with employers, and can offer on-the-job support to the young adult. Increased attention to moving young adults to these services should be considered. Not only would it help achieve the desired outcomes of the program, that is, independence and increased participation, but it would also exit the young adult from the FFYA program, and free up funds for others who cannot access this option.

Parents need education and guidance about the potential of innovative and varied programs, for example, a program ‘package’ where the young adult may be accessing two or three options in the week. The propensity of parents, who often decide on behalf of their young people rather than giving them a role in the decision making, to favour settings that are familiar and similar to school, militates against exploration of other options, including employment.

There is little evidence of planning for pathways to future options. There appears to be an emphasis on placement, and the perceived advantages for some stakeholders (ATSSs, parents and carers and, in some cases Department of Human Services) in making this placement permanent. Access to employment options for young people is limited, particularly for those with an intellectual disability. This study is premised on the idea that the opportunity to work is integral to people’s wellbeing, and that every opportunity to achieve this should be encouraged.

The lack of clear pathways to part-time and full-time employment options needs to be addressed. Service providers need encouragement to provide pathways from day programs and TAFE into full-time employment. It would be useful if all young adults were at an appropriate standard of work-readiness before they entered into employment. This may require better links with TAFE and the ATSSs to ensure training needs are addressed in a more formal manner.

Parents and advocacy groups commented specifically on the degree of employment readiness. For many young adults, work skills learned in a TAFE course or at an ATSS are not easily transferable. An increase in supported workplace training is needed. Increased attention on the national employment competencies in vocational training programs, including those in ATSSs, may provide better links between training and employment.

Recommendation 5.1

That Department of Human Services DisAbility Services participate in the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to support links between services and that networks of disability service providers be established and supported.

Recommendation 5.2

That service providers be actively encouraged to share resources, in order to provide greater access to a variety of activities and programs, including recreational and after-hours programs.

Recommendation 5.3

That any redevelopment of the FFYA program include the capacity for self-management by the young adult, their parents, carers or advocates, with clear processes to ensure accountability to the Department of Human Services for funds spent.

Recommendation 5.4

That brokerage, when the broker is independent of the funders and service providers, be regarded favourably as a model for assisting young adults to find appropriate options.

Recommendation 5.5

That employment outcomes be included in Transition Plans where possible; and that regional staff, TAFE providers, parents and carers and the community be encouraged to consider employment as an achievable option for young people with disabilities.

Recommendation 5.6

That young adults who move into part-time employment be supported in pursuing other options in addition to employment.

Recommendation 5.7

That those who leave Commonwealth-funded employment for appropriate reasons be able to re-enter training or daytime programs until they have re-acquired appropriate work-readiness skills.

Recommendation 5.8

That mechanisms be established to ensure that pre-vocational training programs address Commonwealth employment competencies.

12.6 Self-Determination and Participation

The Review found that involvement of young adults in the decisions about their future was limited, while parents and carers had varying degrees of involvement, depending on their awareness of processes and the level of their 'bureaucratic literacy' and advocacy skills.

The lack of detailed information about FFYA, its intended outcomes, funding, transition processes, and review and grievance procedures, is a cause of lack of involvement and self-determination. The other major cause is the failure to implement transitions consistently, according to the original intentions of the program.

In relation to this, the Review found that the frequency of complaints about the SNA, both the tool and its administration, pointed not so much to problems with the SNA, but to the absence of other consultative planning processes as part of transition planning and review.

The young adults consulted had limited experience of decision making. At their most effective, the PSGs in schools provide opportunities for students to participate in decisions affecting them. Some school communities also encouraged students to participate in decisions affecting groups

within the school, by encouraging involvement in student representative councils or parliaments.

Parents and carers who have advocacy skills are able to navigate the service systems and communicate effectively with service providers and the Department of Human Services. It is therefore important that service providers and Department of Human Services staff are aware that parents and carers and young adults have the right to be listened to with respect, and have their views taken into account.

Many respondents who had knowledge of the implementation of FFYA commented on the effectiveness of the Consumer Advocacy Reference Group (CARG), set up in 1997 to support young adults and their families as they grappled with the new system, and to provide advice to the program administrators. The group no longer exists. Respondents expressed a strong desire for the establishment of such a group. As has been made clear elsewhere in this Report, the advocacy organisations and peak bodies have a clear sense of the potential of FFYA to improve outcomes for young adults and their families. They have invaluable knowledge of the important issues for people with disabilities, their families and carers and the community as a whole. Roles for such a group could include provision of advice to program administrators and service providers, program evaluation and professional development. Such a group could have a key role in any redevelopment of the FFYA program as a consequence of this Review.

The Review acknowledges the support given to young adults and their families by non-government organisations and individuals who act as advocates and representatives, and community groups.

Recommendation 6.1

That the principles of self-determination and participation be emphasised in the information about the program provided to stakeholders; and that young adults and parents and carers be given every opportunity to exercise choice.

Recommendation 6.2

That the information strategy (Recommendation 2.2) makes specific provision for communication with young adults and their families, including those with special communication requirements and those culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Recommendation 6.3

That a representative group be established to mediate between parties when there are unresolved disputes related to the program.

12.7 Resources

There were two dominant issues for all groups in relation to funding levels and resourcing. One was confusion about just what services could be purchased with FFYA money, with the need for support for transport and for recreation activities mentioned most often. The other issue was confusion about the funding level being a benchmark only, rather than an individual's 'entitlement'. Other issues included the 'flow-through' problem, that is, the program intake each year is exceeding the number of young adults who progress to other long-term funding arrangements. Some asked:

How long does a *young adult's future* last?

Certainly, transition from school to adult life needs to be supported, but the question of support for further transitions must be considered. As the discussion on transition in this Report has emphasised, a transition is a *process*, not a single event. Also mentioned was the perceived inequity created by FFYA clients bringing direct funds to programs (particularly in the ATSS sector) that they share with other adults ('core' clients) who are not part of FFYA. This problem affects service provision and perceived equity when queue jumping occurs.

There are important issues relating to the support required for transitions and ongoing support. The confusion for families about the notion of the funding being a benchmark amount, rather than an individual entitlement, needs to be addressed. Department of Human Services regional staff stressed that viewing the SNA funding level as a benchmark allows them to allocate funds flexibly in order to meet all young people's needs. Therefore, if the funds for one person are more than are required to meet that person's needs, then the difference can be used to top up the services for another who requires additional services. Funds can also be used for service development. As discussed earlier in this report, this practice gives flexibility to the Department of Human Services, rather than to the young adult and parents and carers, and has implications for the principles of self-determination and participation. At the heart of this is the tension between a 'transition' and a 'placement'—the journey and the destination.

Much of the frustration expressed by parents and carers about funding could be alleviated by improvements in:

- **Consistency:** between regions on funding for transport, recreation, therapy and other costs associated with programs.
- **Information:** related to funding, for example, assessment of need and SNA levels, benchmarks, costs of administering services.
- **Economies:** investigation of cooperative arrangements between services for sharing of services, for example, transport.
- **Recreation programs:** continued support (as in the current Best Practice Grants scheme) for organisations to increase flexible offerings by including after-hours community programs. This would also serve to create communities that are more inclusive, and that encourage the sharing of sporting and recreational facilities.
- **Review:** of individual needs.
- **Ongoing support:** the support for programs continues for young adults who are unlikely to be able to move to greater independence.
- **Employment options:** increased promotion of vocation education, leading to supported and open employment services. Where possible, outcomes in Transition Plans should include employment options and eventual exit from the program. However, it should always be possible for a person who leaves employment (and out of FFYA funding) to re-enter the program for further transition support

Recommendation 7.1

That funding guidelines be clarified and made consistent, yet flexible, and that this information be disseminated to all stakeholders as part of the information strategy (Recommendation 2.2).

Recommendation 7.2

That the notion of flexible funding be maintained and enhanced, and that this be related to annual reviews of a young adult's option, for up to three years, after which, reviews be undertaken every three years unless additional reviews are requested or required.

Recommendation 7.3

That the further development of recreation and after-hours programs, service provider networks and other cooperative strategies be encouraged, with the aim of building inclusive communities that support social networks for young adults with disabilities.

Recommendation 7.4

That support networks of service providers to develop cooperative approaches to transport, and that recreational programs be established.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Advisory Committee and Contributors

Advisory Committee

Name	Organisation / Origin
Mr Emile Barbara	FFYA participant
Ms Barbara van der Monde	Parents and carers
Ms Christine Scott	Advocacy groups (Victorian Advocacy League Intellectual Disability)
Ms Sue Jackson	Service providers (Council of Intellectual Disability Agencies)
Ms Christine Amos	Department of Human Services, Policy and Program Development
Mr Glen Jose	Department of Human Services, Metropolitan Region
Ms Sheryl Ryan	Department of Human Services, Metropolitan Region
Dr Elisabeth Ozanne (Social Work, University of Melbourne)	Independent academic
Mr David Newport	Department of education, Employment and Training
Dr Carmel Laragy	Department of Human Services, Performance Planning and Research

Contributors

Individuals	Schools
Maureen Curtis	Ashwood School
Catherine McBride	Bairnsdale SC
Janine Stacey	Ballarat SC
George Vasilou	Barwon Valley School
Robert Reid	Bayside SDS
Liz Wilks	Belvoir SDS (Wodonga)
Frank Lynch	Berendale School
Marie Farahone	Billanook Christian School
Ludmilla Regos	Brunswick SDS
Bev Joyce	Bulleen Heights School
Hewitt Family	Burwood East SDS
Toni Maddocks	Charo Christian School
Tony & Heather Tregale	Christian College Geelong
Frank Lynch	Concorde School
Judi Hollingsworth	Croyden SDS
Toni McDonald	Diamond Valley SDS
Ian Woodward	Echuca Special
Michelle Scholl	Glenallen School
	Hamilton SDS

Horsham SDS
 Kallamma Special (Bendigo)
 Mentone Girls' SC
 Maryborough Special
 Mentone Autistic
 Merriang SDS (Thomastown)
 Mildura SDS
 Monash SDS
 Nazareth College
 Nelson Park School
 Nepean School
 Oberon High
 Port Phillip Specialist
 Portland SDS
 Preston SDS
 St Helena SC
 Sale Specialist School
 Seymour SDS
 Skene Street (Stawell)
 Sunbury Downs SC
 Tintern Girls' Grammar
 Traralgon SC
 Traralgon SDS
 Wantirna College
 Wangaratta District Special
 Wangaratta District SS
 Warracknabeal SDS
 Yarrabah School

Educational Administration

Marilyn Rothery (DEET)
 Elaine Tingay (DEET)
 Catholic Education Office (CEO): Bendigo Diocese
 CEO: Ballarat Diocese
 (CEO): Gippsland Diocese
 (CEO): Gippsland Diocese
 (CEO): Melbourne Diocese
 (CEO): Warrnambool Diocese
 Association of Independent Schools in Victoria
 (AISV)

Further Education

Network meeting of Disability Liaison Officers
 Victoria University of Technology
 William Angliss Institute of TAFE
 Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
 Goulburn NE Institute of TAFE
 Deakin University

Department of Human Services Central	Department of Human Services Regional
Chris Amos	Kate Crombie: Southern
Kelly Ford	Pauline Wallace: Grampians
	Warren Butcher: Gippsland
	Christine Pattas: Eastern
	David Hocking: Northern
	Sheryl Ryan: Barwon–South West
	Glen Jose: Western
	Debbie Browell: Lodden Mallee
	Ian Swan: Lodden Mallee
	Transition workers from all regions
Service Providers	Advocacy and Disability Organisations and Peak Bodies
Adult Continuing Education (ACE)	ADEC (Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities)
Alpha Services	Attwell Associates
ATSS & community programs	Autism Victoria Inc
Broadmeadows Helping Hand	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Brunswick Employment Service	Council of Intellectual Disability Agencies (CIDA)
Cheltenham Action Centre	Down Syndrome Assoc. Inc
Colac CDA Arts Connection	EDAR
Colac Community Centre Inc.	Headway
Colac Community Development Association	Interchange
David House	Muscular Dystrophy Association
Disability Employment Action Centre Inc. (DEAC)	OZCHILD
Eastwork Employment Inc.	STAR Victoria Ltd
GATE Entreprises	Victorian Advocacy League Intellectual Disability (VALID)
Gateway Centre Inc	Victorian Coalition of ABI Service Providers (VCASP)
Gippsland Vocational training Unit	Victorian Council of Deaf People (VCOD)
Goulburn Access to Employment	Victorian Services for Deaf Children (VSDC)
Goulburn Options INC	Windermere Youth Services
Knoxbrooke Inc. Leisure Network (Geelong)	
Marrawa Centre	
Milparinka (Parkville, Richmond)	
Mulleraterong Centre Inc.	
Ozchild	
Ovens and King Community Health Services	
Peninsula Access Support and Training	
Sandy Beach Centre	

Appendix 2 Research Questions

1. Expectations of the program

- What were the expectations and did the program meet them?

2. Provision of information

- Was adequate information provided to all stakeholders prior to, during and after transition?

3. Flexibility of options

- Do participants have the opportunity to pursue an alternative option if their original choices prove inappropriate and/or their needs change over time?
- Does the FFYA program provide a greater choice of service?
- Is there adequate opportunity to change services as required?
- Are there clear guidelines for exiting the program?

4. Transition planning

- Do students and families and carers have access to grievance procedures if they are dissatisfied with the transition process?
- Does the existing structure and duration of transition planning meet the participants' needs?
- Does the transition planning minimise disruption to the participants and their family and carers?

5. Participation

- What is the level of participation in decision making for participants and carers/families?
- Are participants prepared and supported to make decisions?
- Do the adult options achieved reflect, as far as possible, the choices and decisions of the participant and their family and carers?

6. Service Needs Assessment

- Does the Service Needs Assessment (SNA) serve its purpose in identifying level of funding?

7. Resource allocation

- Are the FFYA resource allocation procedures contributing to the goals of the program?
- Are FFYA participants being required to pay for places that would be available to them if they were not on the FFYA program?

8. What aspects of the program should be changed and how?

Appendix 3 Letter to Participant

(Department of Human Services letterhead)

22 January 2001

Dear (participant)

The Futures for Young Adults Program Evaluation

You are invited to take part in an evaluation of the Futures for Young Adults program. We have chosen people at random to ask them about the program. Your family or carer has also been asked.

Over the past four years, this program has helped young people with disabilities move from school to adult options. The Government (Department of Human Services) wants to know what you think about the program so they can plan services for the future.

You don't have to be involved—but I hope you will. A researcher would like to ask if you are getting the services you want and if there are things you don't like and want changed. A researcher can meet you at home or at another place that would be better for you.

No one will be able to identify what you say because your comments will be combined with everyone else's in a report to the Government.

It is okay if you do not want to take part and it will not change any services you receive.

I would be grateful if you, or someone who assists you, would ring me on 9616 8440, email me on carmel.laragy@dhs.vic.gov.au or tell your local Department of Human Services worker if you want to take part. I will try to contact you again if I don't hear from you.

Yours sincerely

Carmel Laragy (Dr)

Appendix 4 Letter to Parents and Carers

(Department of Human Services letterhead)

22 January 2001

Dear.....(parent/s and/or carer)

The Futures for Young Adults Program Evaluation

You are invited to take part in an evaluation of the Futures for Young Adults program. We have chosen people at random to ask them about the program. The person on the program you care for has also been asked.

Over the past four years, this program has helped young people with disabilities move from school to adult options. The Government (Department of Human Services) wants to know what you think about the program so they can plan services for the future.

You don't have to be involved: but I hope you will. A researcher would like to ask if you are getting the services you want and if there are things you don't like and want changed. A researcher can meet you at home or at another place that would be better for you.

No one will be able to identify what you say because your comments will be combined with everyone else's in a report to the Government.

It is okay if you do not want to take part and it will not change any services received by the person you care for.

Ring me on 9616 8440, email me on carmel.laragy@dhs.vic.gov.au or tell your local Department of Human Services worker if you want to take part. I will try to contact you again if I don't hear from you.

Yours sincerely

Carmel Laragy (Dr)

Appendix 5 Consent Form for Consultations

Futures for Young Adults: Program Design Evaluation

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the letter dated 22 January 2001.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the letter.

I have a copy of the letter and the Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

Participant's name (printed).....

Signature

Date

Name of Witness (printed)

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher (printed)

Signature

Date

Note: All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.

Appendix 6 Third Party Consent Form for Consultations

Futures for Young Adults: Program Design Evaluation

(To be used for participants who cannot consent for themselves.)

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the letter dated 22 January 2001.

I give my permission for
(participant's name) to participate in this project according to the conditions in the letter.

I have a copy of the letter and the Consent Form to keep.

I understand that.....
(participant's name) is not giving up his or her legal rights by my signing of this Consent Form.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal the participant's identity and personal details if information about this project is published or presented in any public form.

Participant's name (printed).....

Name of person giving consent (printed).....

Category (strike out that which is not applicable):

Next of Kin

Agent under the Medical Treatment Act 1986

Guardian under the Guardianship and Administration Act

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher (printed)

Signature

Date

Note: All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.

Appendix 7 Further Education and the Futures for Young Adults Program

The Futures for Young Adults (FFYA) program is being evaluated.

We want to know if the program has achieved its goals and if there should be any changes. We are talking to all stakeholders about the program.

We are interested in the way the Disability Liaison Officers in the higher education sector manage the FFYA students and liaise with the regions and other service providers.

The Research Issues

The questions being asked of people and organisations involved in the FFYA program relate to the following broad research issues:

- The goals of the Future for Young Adults program.
- Policy: the implementation of the program in each region.
- Responsiveness of the service system to participant needs: flexibility and choice.
- Self-determination, participation of participants and families in decision making.
- Transition: planning and programs.
- Resource allocation (and the Support Needs Assessment).
- Future directions.

For the purposes of the consultations the FFYA program is referred to as the 'Futures' program.

1. Background Information

Name of Institution:.....

Contact name and telephone.....

Number of students involved in 'Futures'

2. Participants' Options

What programs are your 'Futures' students engaged in?

.....
.....
.....

Do your students stay in further education, or do they change to other service providers? What programs do they come from and where do they go after a TAFE program? Please give examples if you can.

.....
.....
.....

Does your institution run any special course for the Futures students. Please give details.

.....
.....
.....

2. Expectations and Goals of the Futures Program

What do you think are the goals of the program?

.....
.....
.....

Which of these goals are being achieved? Are there any that are not?

.....
.....
.....

3. Provision of Information and Communication

Describe the extent and nature of the communication with Department of Human Services in relation to Futures.

.....
.....
.....

Describe the extent and nature of the communication with other sectors in relation to Futures.

.....
.....
.....

What is your view about the provision of information to your students and their families and carers?

.....
.....
.....

4. The Service System: Flexibility and Choice

Were your students (as far as you know) given choices about what they wanted to do after leaving school?

.....
.....
.....

If they have changed their options, was this easy to do? How was this arranged? What is your role in this?

.....
.....
.....

From your knowledge of the system prior to the Futures program, do you think there is more choice than there was before the program?

.....
.....
.....

Is the program meeting diverse needs?

Do you know of any new service options that have been developed as a result of the Futures program? Within your Institution? Outside your Institution?

.....
.....
.....

5. Transition: Planning and Programs

How is planning for your students done prior to their coming to your Institution, that is the transition planning? Who has responsibility for transition planning? What role, if any, do you play in the transition planning of students?

.....
.....

Could the planning be improved? In what ways?

.....
.....
.....

Are students able to review their options? What is your role in this and how do you manage the process?

.....
.....
.....

6. Self-Determination and Participation in Decision Making

Do you think students are able to make their own decisions about what they want to do?

.....
.....
.....

7. Resource allocation (and the Support Needs Assessment)

Is the Service Needs Assessment an appropriate way to make decisions about funding?

.....
.....
.....

Are the funds from Futures adequate to meet your students' needs?

.....
.....
.....

For how long are 'Futures' funds provided to your students?

.....
.....
.....

What information are you given about the allocation of funds?

.....
.....

8. Future Directions

What are the best things about the Futures program from your perspective?

.....
.....
.....

What are the worst things about the Futures program from your perspective?

.....
.....
.....

Are there any aspects of the program that should be changed? Give details?

9. Do you have any other comments about the Futures program?

.....
.....
.....

Appendix 8 Letter to Principal

Institute of Disability Studies

Melbourne campus 221 Burwood Hwy Victoria 3125 Australia

Telephone (03) 9244 6481 Facsimile (03) 9244 6671

27 April 2000

Futures for Young Adults Program

Dear Principal

The Department of Human Services has commissioned a team from the Institute of Disability Studies, Deakin University, to conduct an evaluation of the Futures for Young Adults program, (hereafter referred to as Futures).

The evaluation seeks to describe the extent to which the program is doing what it set out to do. In general terms the objectives are:

- To involve students, their parents and carers and teachers in the transition process.
- To provide students with the choice of a range of service options that include existing services but also new services created for that purpose.
- To enhance access to further education, training, employment and recreational opportunities.
- To support the development of a flexible, consumer responsive service system, that offers pathways for the user to other service options.
- To provide quality services that support the individual in a successful transition to adult life, that maximise their chance to reach their full adult potential and that enable them to participate more fully in the community to achieve their maximum independence.

The evaluation is interested both in *what* has been achieved in relation to these objectives and *how* the program's operations/processes have affected the achievement or otherwise of the objectives.

We recognise the major role that special schools have in the transition process for young people moving from school settings to adult options. We would value your views about the program and the way it operates and would appreciate it if you (or other member/s of staff) could complete this short questionnaire. It should take about 10–15 minutes of your valuable time. We would appreciate you taking that time and faxing these sheets back to us on:

Attention: Lesley Hardcastle

Return Facsimile No. (03) 9244 6032

Respondent's Details

Name of School

Address

Telephone.....

Contact person for further queries

Region.....

Information and Communication

What information do you receive from Department of Human Services about Futures and how does this come to you? (for example, dates, the Special Needs Assessment process, etc.)

.....
.....
.....

How do your students and parents and carers find out about Futures and the relevant processes?

.....
.....
.....

How do your students and parents and carers find out about services and programs?

.....
.....
.....

With whom in Department of Human Services do you have the most contact and for what purposes? (no names required)

.....
.....
.....

Please comment on the quality and quantity of information and communication relating to Futures.

.....
.....
.....

In relation to information and communication are there any changes you would recommend?

Assessment and Eligibility

Who conducts the Special Needs Assessment (SNA) with your students?

.....
.....
.....

What is your opinion of the SNA and its usefulness for its purpose?

Poor Satisfactory No opinion Good Very good

Give reasons for your opinion:

.....
.....
.....

Do you have any comments on eligibility for Futures? (ie 18 years of age, from within the school system, etc.)

.....
.....
.....

In relation to the needs assessment and eligibility are there changes you would recommend?

.....
.....
.....

Transition Process

Is there a transition plan prepared? If so by whom and what happens to the plan?

.....
.....
.....

Do the students have an opportunity to experience the service they have selected? If so how is this arranged, and for what period of time?

.....
.....
.....

Is there any follow-up after a placement has been arranged, by you or by Department of Human Services? If YES please describe briefly.

What placements are most common for your students?

ATTS approximate numbers each year.....

TAFE Disability approximate numbers each year

TAFE open approximate numbers each year.....

Employment supported or open approximate numbers each year

Other (including flexible use of several program) approximate numbers each year

Are there opportunities to change the placement? If so, how does this happen?

.....
.....
.....

In relation to the transition process are there changes you would recommend?

.....
.....
.....

Thank you very much for your time.

If you wish to make any further comments please contact me by telephone, facsimile, post or email before May 18 2000.

Ms Lesley Hardcastle

Institute of Disability Studies

Deakin University

221 Burwood Highway

BURWOOD 3125 Telephone: (03) 9244 6486

Facsimile: (03) 9244 6032

Email: lesleyh@deakin.edu.au

Appendix 9 Letter to Principal or Integration Teacher

Institute of Disability Studies

Melbourne campus 221 Burwood Hwy Victoria 3125 Australia

Telephone (03) 9244 6481 Facsimile (03) 9244 6671

21 May 2001

Futures for Young Adults Program

Dear Principal and/or Integration Teacher

The Department of Human Services has commissioned a team from the Institute of Disability Studies, Deakin University, to conduct an evaluation of the Futures for Young Adults program. We are interested both in *what* has been achieved for young people with disabilities in transition from school to post-school options, and *how* the program's operations/processes have affected the success or otherwise of the program.

The evaluation is seeking feedback from all stakeholders. We would value your views about the program and the way it operates and would appreciate it if you or the relevant member of staff could complete this short questionnaire. It should take no more than about 10 minutes. We would appreciate you taking that time and either faxing or emailing the document back to us on:

Attention: Lesley Hardcastle

Return Facsimile No. (03) 9244 6032

Email: lesleyh@deakin.edu.au

Respondent's Details

Name of School

Address

Telephone.....

Contact person for further queries

Region.....

Number of students in 2001 who will be leaving school and eligible for the Futures funding:

.....

Information and Communication

What information do you receive from Department of Human Services about Futures and how does this come to you? (for example, dates, the Special Needs Assessment process, etc.)

.....
.....
.....

How do your students and parents and carers find out about Futures and the relevant processes?

.....
.....
.....

How do your students and parents and carers find out about services and programs?

.....
.....
.....

With whom in Department of Human Services do you have the most contact and for what purposes? (no names required)

.....
.....
.....

Please comment on the quality and quantity of information and communication relating to Futures.

.....
.....
.....

In relation to information and communication are there any changes you would recommend?

Assessment and Eligibility

Who conducts the Special Needs Assessment (SNA) with your students?

Conducted by:

Time of year:

.....

What is your opinion of the SNA and its usefulness for its purpose?

Poor Satisfactory No opinion Good Very good

Give reasons for your opinion of the Support Needs Assessment tool and process:

.....
.....
.....

Do you have any comments on eligibility for Futures? (for example, 18 years of age, from within the school system, etc.)

.....
.....
.....

In relation to the needs assessment and eligibility are there changes you would recommend?

.....
.....
.....

Transition Process

What decision making processes are used for transition? For example:

Who is involved? (students, teachers, parents, Department of Human Services personnel?)

.....
.....
.....

Is there a transition plan prepared? If so by whom and what happens to the plan?

.....
.....
.....

Do the students have an opportunity to experience the service they have selected? If so how is this arranged, and for what period of time?

.....
.....
.....

Is there any follow-up after a placement has been arranged, by you or by Department of Human Services? If YES please describe briefly.

.....
.....
.....

What post-school options are likely for your students?

- ATTS (Adult Training and Support Service)
- TAFE Disability (transition courses, work education, etc)
- TAFE Open
- University
- Supported employment
- Open Employment
- Other (including flexible use of several program)

Other issues and recommendations

Are there any changes to the operation of Futures that you would recommend?

Thank you very much for your time.

If you wish to make any further comments please contact me by telephone, facsimile, post or email before May 18 2000.

Ms Lesley Hardcastle

Institute of Disability Studies

Deakin University

221 Burwood Highway

BURWOOD 3125 Telephone: (03) 9244 6486

Facsimile: (03) 9244 6032

Email: lesleyh@deakin.edu.au

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