



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

Job Services Australia streaming of young people who access homelessness services: a survey of services

In this report, Homelessness Australia is drawing on responses to a survey conducted in November 2014 of youth and homelessness service experiences of streaming for Job Services Australia. This report provides recommendations from respondents about how to improve the streaming processes and the connection between JSA providers, Centrelink/Department of Human Services and service providers. It contains five key suggestions that assessors and JSA providers should have: a more tailored approach, better linkages with youth services, greater skills for working with young people, a faster streaming process, and a more responsive approach to changing client circumstances.

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Introduction¹

Young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience unemployment than the rest of the population.² Additionally, they have worse health outcomes and may have no income.³ In November 2014, Homelessness Australia conducted a survey of homelessness service organisations about their clients' experience with Job Services Australia (JSA) streaming.⁴ The streaming of clients affects the level of support that the client can access to gain employment. It also determines the activities that clients are required to undertake in order to maintain their support payments from Centrelink/Department of Human Services. This means that a client's stream has a significant effect on their lives.

In summary, young people are streamed into four categories for the purposes of JSA:

- stream 1 'for job seekers who are *work ready*';
- stream 2 'for job seekers with *relatively moderate* barriers to employment';
- stream 3 'for job seekers with *relatively significant* barriers to employment'; and
- stream 4 'for job seekers with *severe barriers* to employment'.⁵

A summary of the different types of support that are provided as a result is extracted in Appendix 3 of this report.

This paper draws together the responses of the 83 survey participants. It provides feedback on the effectiveness and quality of the streaming conducted for the purposes of JSA. Fundamentally, this paper confirms that secure housing is an important underpinning for a young person in finding employment and engaging with other support services.⁶

The report provides five key suggestions for how to improve streaming for the purposes of JSA to ensure the needs of young people experiencing homelessness are met. These are:

- 1) *The approach with young people needs to be tailored to their individual circumstances.***
- 2) *There needs to be better connection and communication between JSA agencies and homelessness services.***
- 3) *There needs to be increased and improved training for JSA and service workers.***
- 4) *Some respondents suggested that service speed needs to be improved.***
- 5) *There needs to be an improved system of alerts when the circumstances of a young person change (eg living circumstances, work, education or significant illness).***

¹ This report was produced by William Mudford based on the responses to a survey designed by Jennifer Clarke, the former policy and research officer at Homelessness Australia. Jennifer's work in driving the survey is most appreciated. Additionally Homelessness Australia would like to thank Ian Gough and Emma Robertson for their contributions to the survey design and this report. Also to the broader National Youth Coalition for Housing network for distributing the survey and making responses to the questions contained within.

² Paul Flatau et al (2015) 'The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study: Snapshot Report 1' (Swinburne University, University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, and Anglicare: NSW South, NSW West and ACT), p.5.

³ Ibid, p.5, 6.

⁴ More detail of the methodology and the limitations of the survey are outlined in Appendix 1.

⁵ Department of Employment, Australian Government (2013) 'Job Services Australia eligibility and how to register' <https://employment.gov.au/job-services-australia-eligibility-and-how-register#different-levels-of-support-to> Accessed 25 February 2015; Last modified on Thursday 19 December 2013; Emphasis added.

⁶ This is consistent with other research regarding the importance of housing for young people in relation to employment: Paul Flatau et al (2015) 'The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study: Snapshot Report 1' (Swinburne University, University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, and Anglicare: NSW South, NSW West and ACT), p.2.

Quality of streaming

Ten respondents stated that the JSA streaming process streams their clients 'reasonably well',⁷ fourteen stated that the process streams their clients 'neither well nor badly', and seventeen stated that their clients are streamed badly or very badly.⁸

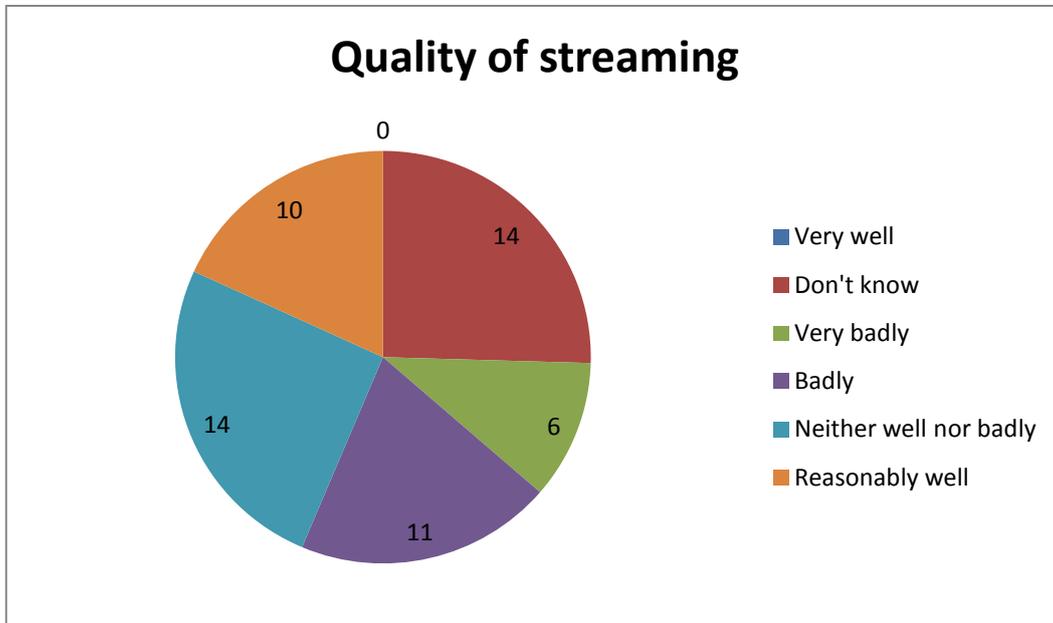


Figure 1: Number of respondents with each response to the question - have all of the young people who use your service and who are eligible for JSA assistance been 'streamed' for JSA purposes (using the JCSI)?

Two possible reasons for the variation are:

1. There is some qualitative variation between different JSA providers, their offices and officers.
2. The different services (respondents) have different client types, which are streamed well or not to varying degrees.
 - a. This could be a result of client-centred issues. For example, some clients may not be forthcoming about their circumstances; or
 - b. It could be a system-based failing, rather than caused by the idiosyncrasies of individual clients. For example, the assessment tool may not be sensitive or flexible enough to evaluate client responses. It may also be an issue with the manner in which assessments are conducted, and which particular questions get asked of applicants.

The majority of respondents appear to have most of their clients requiring a higher level of support (ie, their clients should be allocated to streams 3 and 4). A problem arises when these

⁷ For example one respondent who said JSA streaming matches reasonably well stated: 'JSA streaming demonstrates an awareness of the obstacles for young people experiencing different levels of homelessness'.

⁸ A service which responded saying JSA streaming matches very badly stated 'It appears Centrelink automatically place young people at a stream 2 when they should all be placed under a stream 4. If our young people are in our service it should be a given that they would be a stream 4'.

clients, with higher needs, are allocated into stream 2 (or even 1). The greater the percentage of clients streamed into 2 (or 1), the more likely a respondent (the service) appears to report that JSA ‘streaming’ does not match the circumstances of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This explanation is supported by a respondent who reported that ‘[c]lients experiencing homelessness are usually placed in “stream 4”, and why their opinion is that the JSA streaming of those clients matched the circumstances of those young people reasonably well.

A respondent that stated that the streaming process streams reasonably well, qualified this by stating ‘some young people seem to fall through the gaps of the assessment process and are placed in a stream that is too difficult for them to maintain the requirements of’ (emphasis added). This is of concern when the young person loses their income support payment, rather than getting re-streamed and receiving the increased support that they require.

Secure housing underpins a young person’s employment success

One respondent said that the programs, services and supports that best assist young people who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness to secure employment ‘depends on where the young person is at in terms of their homelessness’. For example:

‘for young people that gain transitional accommodation where there is stability of accommodation for more than 6 months, [the respondent] found that providing general support around resume building, education around how to search for employment, and how to present at interviews has assisted young people to gain employment’.

The key to success in that circumstance is having a significant period of stability. Accommodation is an important foundation from which young people can access and utilise other services.⁹ One may infer that this foundation has allowed them to focus on their next set of needs within Maslow’s hierarchy of needs,¹⁰ rather than the most basic need of safe accommodation.

This is supported by another respondent who said:

‘[s]ome young people, do not explain their situation well, therefore service provision is diminished. [The [r]easons [for this] are generally the thing foremost in [the young person’s] mind is access to a bed that is safe [. Further,] the longer that a young person has been homeless the harder it is for them to rely on any one service.[Finally, disengaged persons] under 17 [that] have been asked to complete Cert II in [a] course that they have no interest in [to] maintain their income [will find it too] difficult to do.’

⁹ Young people will struggle to find work unless they have a safe place to live: Paul Flatau et al (2015) ‘The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study: Snapshot Report 1’ (Swinburne University, University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, and Anglicare: NSW South, NSW West and ACT), p.2; Additionally having a safe place to live allows young people to continue to access education: Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain, ‘young people’ in Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson (eds) *Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction* (UNSW Press and Council to Homeless Persons, Sydney and Melbourne, 2014), pp. 117-134, at p. 127.

¹⁰ Maslow originally published his research on human needs in 1943: A. H. Maslow (1943) ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’ 50(4) *Psychological Review*, 370-96.

Additionally, '[y]outh workers or community agencies that have long term and flexible engagement/case management' were reported as best able to assist young people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness to secure employment. This supports the idea that young people experiencing homelessness need stability and support over a longer period in order to ensure that their needs are met and long term positive outcomes are achieved.

Suggested methods to improve streaming for JSA purposes of young people experiencing homelessness

Respondents were asked to provide their opinion about how 'streaming' for JSA could be improved for the young people who use their service. Generally, assessors need to speak to young people more effectively, by asking what their currently living situation is etc rather than expecting young people to be forthcoming about this information. In a similar manner a respondent reported that *services* need to be pragmatic and confirm with the young people about the circumstances that affect streaming instead of taking it for granted that assessors have conducted the correct streaming.

There were five types of suggestions for improvement:

1. The approach with young people needs to be tailored to their individual circumstances.

As examples from respondents:

- Young people need more freedom to choose their JSA provider, including the ability to remain with a single provider, despite where they might move.
- JSAs could assess clients more thoroughly and then cater an employment plan that actually meets the needs, skills, strengths and desired employment outcomes of the young person.
- Greater outreach support, enhanced assessment through all aspects of their lives, contact with other case managers working with each young woman, and importantly conducting an assessment regarding family violence with timely and supported referrals to specialist services where this is the case.
- To have a specific service like the old JPET that solely works with youth at risk.

In a similar manner, one respondent reported that JSAs need to provide more direct assistance for clients to find work. This may be suggested instead of simply sending the client off to apply for jobs on their own.

2. There needs to be better connection and communication between agencies and homelessness services.

Methods suggested for this by respondent services include:

- Opening up lines of communication with the JSA's initially so there is better communication between services.
- [Specifically] JSAs should talk to young people's support workers to get more information [when conducting the streaming assessment].
- Get the JSA to work with the people who are providing housing for young people and find out what the issues are before placing them in certain streams.
- JSA assessors need to have direct contact with [all] clients' workers. This will allow JSAs and services to work together to better meet the needs of the client.
- Having 'care team meetings with JSA and case managers' as part of the team.
- Link and network [generally in the geographic area, and more widely to organisations doing similar work] to ensure best practice outcomes for young people.
- Referral forms and information or brochures need to be provided to services, and by services to JSAs.
- [After an assessment is conducted] [i]f a young person is linked to a homeless service - the JSA should contact the housing service to have input into case plans and advise what services are available to that young person from JSA.
- JSAs need to liaise with [all] other professionals involved in the situation of the client.

3. There needs to be increased and improved training for assessors, JSA providers, and service workers.

Respondents explained that the training should be designed to:

- a. Gain specialist studies in youth work to be able to successfully engage young people in the program and provide intensive case management;
- b. Ensure that all workers are committed to working alongside young people;
- c. Increase understanding of homelessness, especially tertiary homelessness and the barriers for young people experiencing it;
- d. Help workers and clients understand the streaming process better. This should include ensuring that all organisations have:
 - i. Shared definitions of what characterises a person as being in a particular stream; and
 - ii. Knowledge of what each stream is entitled to as a result.

4. Some respondents suggested that service speed needs to be improved.

The two forms of speed improvement suggested were:

- Quicker turn around for request to change streams; and
- Make the streaming an easier process, as sometimes this can be a long process and in the mean time the young person is facing many barriers.

5. There needs to be an improved system of alerts when the circumstances of a young person change (eg living circumstances, work, education or significant illness).

These changes should prompt a reassessment of the needs of the client including which stream best meets their circumstances.

Conclusion

Overall there are a number of ways in which the JSA streaming process and its implications can be improved. Assessors, JSA providers, and services need to improve their communications between each other. The needs of young clients must be foremost in the minds of all involved. Each process and service should be tailored to the needs of each individual young person, rather than the person doing the assessment, providing the service, or conducting the bureaucratic process. Both JSA providers and homelessness/youth service workers should receive ongoing training with particular focus on working collaboratively and the nuances of the streaming process.

It is understood and appreciated the challenging task that assessors perform when assessing young people. Government department have a responsibility to ensure their staff teams are as well equipped and informed as possible to make these important and difficult decisions. This includes having the understanding and ability to recognise the changing circumstances of young people experiencing homelessness. JSA providers, Centrelink / the Department of Human Services, and homelessness or youth services could easily and quickly implement many of the recommendations from respondents. Homelessness Australia would be happy to assist in facilitating this.

References

Chamberlain, Chris, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson (eds) *Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction* (UNSW Press and Council to Homeless Persons, Sydney and Melbourne, 2014)

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Accessed 25 February 2015; Last modified on Thursday 19 December 2013

Flatau, Paul, Monica Thielking, David MacKenzie, Adam Steen, Alicia Bauskis and Kathleen Nolan (2015) 'The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study: Snapshot Report 1' (Swinburne University, University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, Salvation Army, Mission Australia, and Anglicare: NSW South, NSW West and ACT)

Maslow, A. H. (1943) 'A Theory of Human Motivation' 50(4) *Psychological Review*, 370-96

Appendix 1 – Methodology of research and limitations of the survey

Methodology

The Survey Monkey online tool was used to conduct the survey during late 2014. The survey was targeted at services with youth clients (12 – 25 years of age). The survey asked 11 questions (listed in Appendix 2) designed to find out the opinions of respondents as to the quality of Job Services Australia streaming, and if needs be, how it could be improved to meet the needs of young people experiencing homelessness. The questions were developed in conjunction with experienced people in the youth sector to ensure that they could be understood by the participants. Eighty-five services responded to the request to be surveyed on this topic.

Limitations of the survey

The survey is largely qualitative in nature and is dependent on the particular services that responded to the request to complete it. The survey may have been responded to by some services who did not meet the exact targeted 'youth' demographics.

The sample was not randomised amongst the target population. The survey was sent to services that are on email lists of the organisation conducting the survey. Additionally a 'snow ball' technique was used whereby those who had received the email forwarded the survey on to other interested services. This helped to get more responses, but may have meant that similar respondents answered the survey. This may have skewed quantitative results.

Appendix 2 – Survey questions

1. Approximately what proportion of people who use your service are aged 15-24?
2. Does your service provide accommodation directly to young people in this age group?
3. Approximately what proportion of young people who use your service are eligible for Job Services Australia (JSA) assistance?
4. Are any young people who use your service eligible for other employment assistance (eg from Disability Employment Services)?
5. To the best of your knowledge, have all of the young people who use your service and who are eligible for JSA assistance been 'streamed' for JSA purposes (using the JCSI)?
6. Do you know which JSA job-seeker streams young people who use your service are placed in?
7. Approximately what proportion (%) of young people who use your service who are eligible for JSA assistance are allocated to each of the four streams?
8. How well do you think JSA 'streaming' matches the circumstances of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?
9. Please provide below any information that explains your last answer.
10. What services, programs or supports do you think best assist young people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness to secure employment?
11. How could JSA 'streaming' of young people who use your service be improved?

Appendix 3 – Job Services Australia streaming

The text below briefly outlines the types of training and support provided to persons based on which stream they are placed in.

It is published on the Australian Government Department of Employment web page 'Job Services Australia eligibility and how to register'.¹¹

Different levels of support to suit your needs

Once Centrelink has assessed your situation and determined your eligibility for Job Services Australia, you will be placed in a 'stream'. Your Job Services Australia provider will tailor the support you receive so it's appropriate to your circumstances and needs.

There are four streams in Job Services Australia that help guide the level of support you might be eligible for. These are:

- Stream 1, for job seekers who are work ready
- Stream 2, for job seekers with relatively moderate barriers to employment
- Stream 3, for job seekers with relatively significant barriers to employment
- Stream 4, for job seekers with severe barriers to employment.

If you are in Stream 1, you will receive help with your résumé, help with job searching, a skills assessment and training.

If you are in Streams 2 or 3 you will receive more intensive support to help you become work ready. This could include help to develop your skills, training in job search techniques, programmes to help with English, programmes to help with reading, writing and maths, or help to overcome personal barriers preventing you from getting a job.

If you are in Stream 4, you will receive integrated, intensive assistance combining pre-employment and employment assistance. Your provider will deliver a range of services to address your vocational and non-vocational barriers, including providing or organising assessments, counselling or professional support, referral and advocacy and other support services.

¹¹ <<https://employment.gov.au/job-services-australia-eligibility-and-how-register#different-levels-of-support-to>>
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