

Younger People in Residential Aged Care Evaluation Report



Government of South Australia
Department for Communities
and Social Inclusion

May 2012

Younger People in Residential Aged Care Evaluation Report - “The Closest Thing to Home”

The Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) program was a five-year joint initiative of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments aimed at reducing the prevalence of younger people with disabilities being inappropriately placed in residential aged care facilities.

Whilst the program was monitored and evaluated at a national level with a focus on higher level indicators and broad questions relating to program operations, the South Australian YPIRAC program was the subject of a specific evaluation by the Department for Community and Social Inclusion’s (formerly DFC) Business Affairs Research Unit, which was undertaken to explore issues relating to the impact of the initiative on program participants. Representatives from the Research Unit commenced the study and evaluation in November 2009, with the preliminary report completed in June 2011.

Outcome of the Evaluation

Through the YPIRAC program, supported accommodation options were developed for ninety-one (91) participants, providing alternatives for people with disabilities either living in, or at risk of admission to, residential aged care. Shared housing and cluster sites were developed, which were designed to be physically appealing, homelike and more personalised, with greater scope for choice and decision-making.

Provision of cluster and shared housing was a deliberate strategy of the program, aimed at maximising available resources and providing an alternative to residential aged care for as many people as possible. Those who moved into shared or cluster accommodation represented the largest group, and were therefore the main focus of the evaluation report.

The study provided an important insight into the experiences and perspectives of the clients, their families and staff. Most participants were happy with their new accommodation and support, and claimed that their quality of life had improved, as they were better able to contribute to day-to-day choices and decisions, thereby increasing their sense of control over their own lives.

Participants indicated a feeling of being liberated from the restrictions of residential aged care settings, and had a sense of being closer to a “normal” lifestyle that allowed them to achieve a greater level of independence, choice and control over day-to-day supports and activities, despite their physical constraints.

The evaluation highlighted some of the factors that contributed to positive client outcomes. These included:

- The quality of staff recruited to provide support.
- Less institutional, more homelike purpose-built environment.
- Careful matching of residents in shared arrangements or at cluster sites.
- Provision of environments that facilitated clients’ ability to have control over their lives, make choices and participate in decision-making.
- Opportunities for social interaction and activities.
- Location of housing that facilitates recreation and social interaction (through proximity to relatives, friends, local community, transport, open spaces/recreational facilities).

Recommendations and further considerations emanating from the evaluation

- A number of program participants with high support needs who were at risk of admission to residential aged care were transitioned to cluster accommodation. While some grieved the loss of independence and moving from their own home, and expressed a preference for independent living, they appreciated the advantages of cluster housing over residential aged care accommodation.

On this basis, the study recommended future consideration and exploration of a range of service and support models into the future. This is the subject of ongoing work by Disability Services in developing new accommodation and support models.

- The evaluation highlighted a need to maintain a strong focus on a rights-based model of practice and Person Centred Active Support (currently being implemented across Disability Services and non-government support agencies).

Staff training and supervision across Disability Services and non-government service providers was therefore an important element in the ongoing success of the supported accommodation options offered through the YPIRAC program.

- Many of the evaluation participants had not been in their accommodation for long.

A follow-up review may be useful in identifying any issues that were not apparent at this early stage of study.

The area that may require particular attention relates to opportunities for social interaction and engagement. The evaluation did not examine this aspect in any depth, instead relying on participants' general impressions.

While the majority were satisfied with their situation and compared it favourably to their previous experiences, this may need further more objective assessment.

It is critical to ensure these initial positive experiences are sustained.