



RECOVERY SUPPORT SERVICES EVALUATION - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Recovery Support Service (RSS) is SHARC's peer-led, abstinence-based, recovery-orientated supported accommodation and day program for young people (aged 16 – 25) with severe addiction related problems. The goal is to help young people stabilise and initiate long term recovery by providing secure, drug-free accommodation and a day program of meaningful activities with emphasis on life skills, personal development and fostering enduring, healthy, peer-based social networks.

SHARC engaged Turning Point to conduct an evaluation of RSS from September 2012 to January 2015. The evaluation was funded by the federal Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program (NGOTGP) as part of SHARC's service development work.

The aim was to evaluate whether RSS was delivered as described, to determine how well the program matches best practice and to assess outcomes for the RSS residents. A Utilisation-Focused Evaluation framework resulted in a mixed-methods evaluation design that included:

- Review of key program documents and the academic literature to examine implementation and delivery of RSS and its alignment with best practice.
- Analysis of ADIS data, pre-post structured interviews and qualitative interviews to explore resident outcomes and experiences of RSS.
- Qualitative interviews and a focus group with staff to understand staff perceptions and experiences of the RSS program.

Client profile: The majority of residents were aged between 20 and 24 years (82%), with a small number aged 25-29 (12%), and 15-19 (3%). Residents' 'primary drug of concern' was: amphetamines (36%); alcohol (23%); cannabis (22%); and heroin (14%). The main 'other drugs of concern' were: alcohol (76%); amphetamines (60%); cannabis (66%); and benzodiazepines (48%).

RSS Model

RSS residents live in community housing, funded by their Centrelink benefits and managed by RSS staff. Residents are required to attend the day program and not work or study, although they are assisted to work towards achieving these goals. Once a resident is ready for work or study they are considered ready to leave the RSS program and are helped to find alternative accommodation such as Oxford Houses.

RSS's day program includes:

- **Group Meetings:** community meetings several times a week and weekly as households.
- **Community Lunches:** residents take turns to shop and prepare twice weekly lunches.
- **Personal Development Workshops:** weekly, facilitated by the SHARC family therapist.
- **Food for Thought:** weekly sessions focussed on pragmatic life skills such as budgeting, healthy eating and engaging with mutual aid.
- **Recreation activities:** residents engage in a program of social and recreational activities.
- **The Outdoor Experience (TOE):** annual Bush Adventure Therapy venture.
- **Mutual aid meetings:** residents attend mutual aid meetings such as NA four times a week.

Evaluation outcomes

The evaluationⁱ found that RSS successfully achieves each of its program objectives.

Objective 1: Deliver a residential recovery program that facilitates the achievement of positive change in key life areas by:

- a) Providing a daily structured education and activity program to promote the personal and social growth of residents.
- b) Providing family support services (via FDH) that facilitate the healing of family relationships and better connect family members to the recovery process.
- c) Giving opportunities for graduate residents to participate in program activities as a relapse prevention strategy and support to maintain strong recovery linkages

The evaluation identified the importance of the day program as a means of promoting the personal and social growth of residents. RSS's five-day a week day program is particularly unique in the world of AOD supported accommodation and contributes to the cultivation of a sense of community and social connection amongst residents, who may be living in different locations. The development of an active alumni group, who are actively engaged in the program, provides residents with additional support and inspiration. Current residents reported maintaining connection with graduate residents outside of the program and is testament to the depth of social connections that are forged in RSS.

Objective 2: Adopt an integrated approach to service delivery

RSS provides an holistic and integrated approach to care that focuses not only on maintaining abstinence but also on broader health, wellbeing and life goals of residents. The existence of working relationships with a number of agencies and organisations supports the ability of RSS to deliver integrated care.

Objective 3: Manage services within a Quality Improvement Framework

With proactive and timely processes in place, RSS demonstrates a commitment to continuous quality improvement and a quality improvement framework. Quality improvement initiatives at RSS involve consumers and have been informed by their input.

Objective 4: Reduce use and harm

RSS participants reported a number of positive outcomes in relation to reduced use and harm. Over 82% of residents learnt relapse prevention strategies and many reported successfully maintaining abstinence from their primary drug of concern.

Objective 5: Improve health, well-being and connectedness

Participants reported gains in a range of health, well-being and connectedness domains, particularly in quality of life, physical and psychological health, social relationships, the environment in which they live, social/communication skills, reduced offending, increased self-efficacy and the resolution of presenting crisis situations.

Qualitative data also highlighted other positive impacts including the cultivation of supportive social networks and engagement in meaningful activity (employment, education, volunteering etc.), considered integral for the maintenance of progress in the longer term.

Opportunity

RSS is well positioned to contribute to the evidence base in relation to interventions for young people's recovery. Very few services exist for young people's recovery and fewer still are adequately researched and disseminated. RSS can play a role in building this evidence base and consolidating its expertise as a recovery service for young people. Given that recovery has become more prominent in the reformed adult AOD treatment system, there may be growing demand for service delivery models that have a recovery focus. Another option may be to establish an adult equivalent program.

Note: the full copy of this report can be accessed via SHARC's website www.sharc.org.au.

ⁱ Mackenzie, J. Best, D., Savic, M. Hunter, B. & Bailey, E. (2015) *Evaluating the effectiveness of youth peer-based addiction recovery support program*. Turning Point, Eastern Health, Fitzroy.