

At what cost? The impact of funding cuts to the FReeZA program 2002

youthaffairs
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc
Level 6, 1 Elizabeth St, Melbourne VIC 3000
Ph: (03) 9612 8999 Fax: (03) 9620 4802
Website: <http://www.yacvic.org.au> email: info@yacvic.org.au

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| BACKGROUND TO THE FREEZA PROGRAM..... | 3 |
| THE POLICY CONTEXT | 4 |
| METHODOLOGY | 5 |
| SURVEY FINDINGS..... | 6 |
| REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER OF EVENTS..... | 6 |
| REACTION TO THE FUNDING CUTS..... | 6 |
| THE IMPORTANCE OF FREEZA..... | 7 |
| Entertainment..... | 7 |
| Engagement..... | 8 |
| Skill development..... | 8 |
| Community support..... | 9 |
| THE IMPACT OF THE FUNDING CUTS | 10 |
| REDUCTION IN THE TYPE AND QUALITY OF FREEZA EVENTS..... | 11 |
| Promotion..... | 11 |
| Bands vs. dance parties..... | 12 |
| Transport..... | 12 |
| LACK OF RESOURCES..... | 13 |
| UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE | 13 |

Introduction

Background to the FReeZA program

Young people consistently highlight the need for more recreational opportunities that are safe, affordable and relevant.

The lack of appropriate and accessible social, cultural and recreational opportunities for young people is a reoccurring theme that emerges from Victorian Youth Round Table discussions.¹ Young people consistently highlight the need for more recreational opportunities that are safe, affordable and relevant. The FReeZA program has successfully responded to this need and is valued by both young people and the wider community. However, ongoing concern about funding arrangements and recent cuts to FReeZA funding has put into question the Government's commitment to the program.

The FReeZA program, a state government initiative, is designed to assist young people and local communities to organise drug and alcohol free events, primarily featuring live bands and dance parties, across Victoria. The program actively involves young people in the organisation of the events and has been described as 'an excellent example of a project that is truly a partnership between government and the community'.² Across the state, 60 FReeZA providers ensure that events are organised regularly, that these are safe and accessible to young people and that they promote drug and alcohol free entertainment.

Funding arrangements

The State Government provides core FReeZA funding. Prior to the 2001/2002 budget, FReeZA was allocated \$2 million per year. From this, FReeZA providers were allocated approximately \$22,000 each to organise at least eight events over a twelve-month period.

Financial arrangements changed as of July 2001. In the 2001/2002 state budget FReeZA was allocated \$1 million to operate for six months to the end of December 2001. Service providers were asked to organise at least 4 events in their region over the six-month period. At this time, there was some concern about the ongoing funding of FReeZA.³ However, the Government made a commitment to continuing FReeZA at pre-budget funding levels.⁴ The Minister for Youth Affairs stated that the program played 'a vital role in promoting safe drug and alcohol free entertainment for the state's youth and our commitment to it has not diminished one iota since the budget'.⁵

In November 2001, FReeZA providers were informed of a cut to the program's budget. Overall the program experienced a funding cut of \$300,000 as FReeZA was allocated

¹ Victorian Youth Round Tables, a government initiative, provide a means for the Minister for Youth Affairs to consult directly with young people. At least four Youth Round Tables are held throughout the state each year in Metropolitan, regional and rural areas. Each Round Table involves fifty-seventy young people. See <http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/youth/roundtables.htm>

² Institute for Youth Education and community (IYEC) Victoria University (2001) [The Office for Youth FReeZA Program: Policy, Program and Service Delivery Evaluation Report](#), p7.

³ For example see: Cauchi, S. (25 May 2001) 'Madden warms to FReeZA despite cuts', [The Age](#); Freeman, M (30 May 2001) 'The Budget Blues', [Springvale Dandenong Leader](#).

⁴ Minister for Youth Affairs Media Release (1 June 2001) [Government Continues to Back Youth Program](#).

⁵ Ibid.

\$700,000 for six months to June 2002. This cut translates into around \$2500 for each service provider. FReeZA providers will now receive \$7500 between January and June 2001, and they are expected to implement a minimum of three events in this period. Service providers receive less money but their responsibilities are also ostensibly reduced.

The Policy Context

FReeZA engages young people and local communities, provides increased opportunities for young people and promotes drug and alcohol free entertainment. In this way, the program encapsulates popular themes of community capacity building, community development, early intervention, harm minimisation, engagement, accessibility and community regeneration.⁶ The program is therefore aligned with the key policy principles and priorities outlined in the recently launched *Growing Victoria Together* framework.⁷

For example, the aims of FReeZA include:

- To provide opportunities for youth development and community development.
- To provide expanded recreation and leisure options for young people in local communities.
- To provide opportunities for youth leadership, work experience and skill development in the entertainment and contemporary music industries.⁸

Similarly, *Growing Victoria Together* prioritises the issues of:

- Building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities.
- High quality accessible community services.
- More jobs and thriving, innovative industries.
- Growing and linking Victoria.

Growing Victoria Together envisions communities that provide 'a safe, healthy environment and active and inclusive social, cultural and volunteer networks'.⁹ A key priority for the Government is 'rebuild(ing) Victoria's social infrastructure... the recreational and cultural resources which are the basic building blocks of prosperous and sustainable communities'.¹⁰ There is also recognition of the need to enhance community participation and engagement in cultural activities. The Government has made a commitment to fostering 'a community building approach based on listening to local experience, supporting local connections, providing responsive services and investing in the infrastructure which makes communities good places to live and work'.¹¹

FReeZA already encompasses much of what the Government aims to achieve and the program objectives clearly link to those of the Government. For this reason, it is of concern to YACVic that a program that contributes to community building and that engages and values young people loses a third of its core funding over a six month

⁶ IYEC, p36.

⁷ Department of Premier and Cabinet (2001) [Growing Victoria Together: Innovative State, Caring Communities](#).

⁸ Office for Youth (2000) [FReeZA Program Guidelines 2000/2001](#), p.3.

⁹ Ibid, p.22.

¹⁰ Ibid, p16.

¹¹ Ibid, p.22.

period. Indeed, a key recommendation arising from an independent evaluation of FReeZA was that the program should receive increased and recurrent funding.¹² YACVic believes that the FReeZA program should be developed rather than diminished, particularly in light of the current policy context.

The reduction in FReeZA funding has generated further concern about the viability of the program. Following news of the cut, several members contacted YACVic expressing concern about the impact to their service. In response to these concerns, YACVic undertook research to identify the impact of the funding cuts to the sustainability of the program and on the ability of service providers to contribute to the Government’s vision. This report sets out the results of the research.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to identify and assess the impact of the recent reduction in FReeZA funding. To do this, YACVic conducted a telephone survey of FReeZA providers across Victoria in the second and third weeks of January. Due to the timing of the survey, some FReeZA coordinators were on annual leave and could not be contacted. Of the 60 providers listed on the FReeZA website, 53 were contacted. The following table provides a breakdown by region of the providers that were contacted.

| Region | Number of providers in region | Number of providers contacted |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Eastern | 6 | 6 |
| Northern | 7 | 7 |
| Southern | 7 | 7 |
| Western | 6 | 6 |
| Barwon South West | 7 | 4 |
| Central Highlands Wimmera | 6 | 4 |
| Loddon Mallee | 8 | 8 |
| Goulburn North Eastern | 7 | 7 |
| Gippsland | 6 | 4 |

In each area, the FReeZA coordinator was contacted. They were asked if they had received a cut to their FReeZA funding and what impact this cut would have on their service.

As the survey was conducted during school holidays, we were unable to contact the FReeZA committee members to identify young people’s response to the funding cut. However, several FReeZA coordinators were able to report on the response of the young people they had spoken to about the issue.

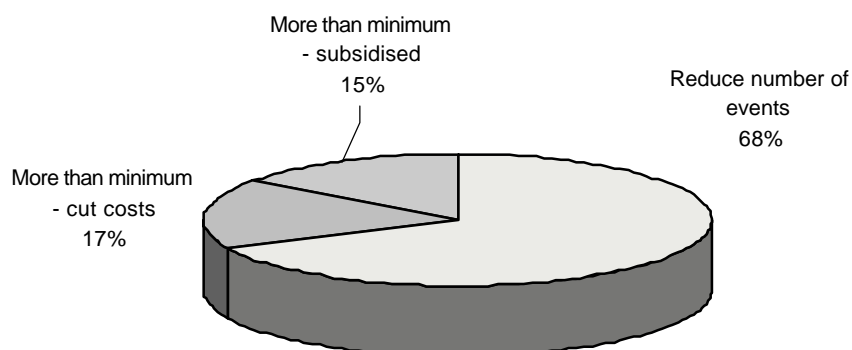
¹² IYEC, p.111.

Survey findings

Reduction in the number of events

The new funding arrangements require FReeZA providers to hold a minimum of three events in the first six months of 2002. This equates to a reduction of one event in comparison to previous funding arrangements. Service providers can organise more events if they are able to. As shown in the following graph, 68% of FReeZA providers will reduce their service to the minimum number of three events. 17% of the providers are planning to hold more than the minimum number of events but will cut costs to provide the extra event(s). This may represent a reduction in the quality and diversity of events. 15% are able to hold more events due to cross-subsidising from previous events, expected good ticket sales or through additional support from the auspicing agency or other organisations.

The impact of funding cuts



Reaction to the funding cuts

The evaluation of FReeZA indicated that 'there would be significant distress in (the providers') communities if the project was diminished in any way'.¹³ The results of this survey concur with this finding. FReeZA providers were overwhelmingly disappointed by news of the recent funding cuts. One thought that 'instead of acknowledging young people's efforts, they're taking away from it. It brings morale down' (metro). Another explained that 'it will have a big impact. We totally rely on FReeZA funding' (rural). There was general disappointment that the Government appears to have ignored the recommendations of the FReeZA evaluation report. One provider said that 'it's disappointing that despite the review, the Government is not putting more effort into it' (rural).

¹³ IYEC, p.109.

For some providers their disappointment related to an inability to build the FReeZA program in their regions. One said 'we had hoped to get bigger and better this year but not now' (metro). Another said 'perhaps this year we would've done more than required but now we won't' (rural). And finally, a worker in rural Victoria explained that 'we were planning to spend more money on live events this year but we will have to rethink that now' (rural).

For others, their disappointment was for the young people in their region. Although only a few workers had spoken to their FReeZA committees, as the funding announcement coincided with school holidays, they were able to provide an indication of the responses of young people. Typical responses included 'cheesed off', 'pretty dark', 'outraged' and 'there is a lot of anger'.

The importance of FReeZA

The funding cuts have attracted these responses because of the important role that FReeZA plays in many communities across Victoria.

Entertainment

In a recent Youth Round Table discussion, entertainment was one of the top four items mentioned in relation to access to youth services.¹⁴ The young people participating in the consultation said that there were few activities available to young people other than to go to pubs. A key recommendation was the provision of more entertainment.¹⁵ FReeZA gigs were particularly popular. Some young people at the Round Table 'cited FReeZA as the only source of music events in their local area'.¹⁶

The need to provide entertainment was also voiced by young people at other Round Table discussions. Participants suggested that a lack of entertainment opportunities 'contributed to boredom and disillusionment' resulting in more young people 'hanging out' on the streets, using drugs and alcohol and possibly getting involved with the police'.¹⁷ A key recommendation from a discussion about drugs and young people was to 'provide young people with an opportunity to participate in local recreation and sporting opportunities to overcome issues of boredom and increase connection with the local community'.¹⁸

The FReeZA providers surveyed as part of the current research echoed these views. All noted the importance of FReeZA in their area and this was particularly true of outer-Melbourne and rural areas. One said that 'it's so important for young people because there is nothing else on. We always get asked to run more events' (rural). Another explained that FReeZA 'gives young people something productive to do' (rural). A FReeZA coordinator in metropolitan Melbourne said the program is 'incredibly valuable for young people in my area'.

¹⁴ Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), (2001), Victorian Youth Round Table No. 5: Designing Accessible Youth Services, p.10.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.10.

¹⁷ Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), (2001), Victorian Youth Round Table No. 3: Opportunities for rural young people for self-expression and participation through music, the arts, recreation and sport, p.5.

¹⁸ Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), (2001), Victorian Youth Round Table No. 2: Drugs and Young People, p.2.

Several service providers noted the connection between boredom and the use of drugs and alcohol. One provider told of a public forum concerning young people and binge drinking that had been held in her region last year. The participants at the forum recommended the provision of more free events for young people to reduce the level of binge drinking amongst young people.

The workers also stressed that FReeZA provides young people access to affordable entertainment in a safe environment. These two issues were also raised at Round Table discussions. Participants at these have highlighted 'the need to ensure the availability of low cost entertainment'.¹⁹ Young people also want to feel safe whilst engaged in activities'.²⁰ Several providers also said that FReeZA provides a comfortable environment to chat to young people informally, particularly those at risk of problematic drug and alcohol use.

Engagement

*FReeZA is
'more than an
event'*

The overwhelming view of the service providers is that FReeZA is 'more than an event'. It provides an opportunity for young people to become involved in the planning and organisation of the gigs and to develop links with the local community. The skills afforded to committee members were particularly valuable. The opportunity for young people to get involved in the planning and organisation of FReeZA gigs was seen as one of the main strengths of the FReeZA program. Several providers said that committee members enjoy attending planning meetings because 'FReeZA is a huge part of their lives' (rural). In many areas, committee membership is somewhat of a status symbol and providers are often overwhelmed by requests from young people to be involved in the committees. Engaging young people in this way can have additional positive benefits. For example, consultations with young people have indicated that 'providing young people with opportunities to participate in the planning and managing of youth activities' was vital to reduce the impact and use of drugs.²¹

Skill development

FReeZA enables young people to learn event management and music industry skills. Involvement in the events has resulted in some current and ex-committee members studying or working in the music industry or as event managers. In addition, schools in at least two regions have incorporated the FReeZA program into the music curriculum. This demonstrates the high regard for the program and suggests that FReeZA may assist the Government in its goal to make education more relevant for young people to increase retention rates.²² The link to education, training and employment pathways is explored in greater depth in the evaluation report.²³ Although FReeZA does promote skill development, one provider also stressed that 'importantly, it's also about promoting fun' (rural).

¹⁹ DEET, Round Table No. 5, p.17.

²⁰ DEET, Round Table No. 3, p.p8.

²¹ DEET, Round Table No. 2, p.p2.

²² DEET (2001) Knowledge, Innovation, Skills and Creativity: Achieving the Goals and Targets for Victoria's Education and Training System.

²³ IYEC, p.79 – 86.

Community support

Young people often feel undervalued and believe that ‘the broader community perceives (them) negatively and treats them with suspicion’.²⁴ Young people feel the ‘need to be recognised as valuable community members and supported to get involved in decision-making processes’.²⁵ The evaluation of FReeZA concluded that the program ‘has enabled young people to contribute to their community and ensured that they are seen as contributors to their community’.²⁶ The program ‘provides a number of entry points to young people to ensure greater connectedness to their community’.²⁷

One of the strengths of the program is the support it enjoys in most local communities. One provider said that in her region ‘the whole town gets behind the events’ (rural). Of particular importance is that ‘parents love the program’ because they know it is a safe environment for young people and that the events are well run. Several providers noted that FReeZA’s good reputation has developed gradually over a period of two to three years.

Support is also evident in the commitment that many local councils have made to FReeZA. Councils provide both financial and in-kind support. Many councils pay the FReeZA worker’s salary, offer administrative assistance, promote events, supply transport and provide free use of venues.

In general, the wider community is also supportive of the program. This is evident in the partnerships which have developed between FReeZA providers and the community. For example, several providers have brokered sponsorship deals with local businesses. FReeZA’s reputation has also helped workers to form partnerships with local security firms and health care centres that provide the security and drug and alcohol counsellors that must attend each event. One worker said that ‘the minute we tell them it’s a FReeZA gig, the local security firm gives us a discount’ (rural). There are also many volunteers across Victoria who assist in the implementation of FReeZA events. In several regions volunteers provide transport to and from the events. One worker explained that people volunteered ‘because they know the event is so well run’ (outer-metro).

*the community
has learnt to
respect young
people for all
their effort*

FReeZA clearly presents a positive impression of young people. As one provider noted, ‘the community has learnt to respect young people for all their effort. It’s great to see men in overalls (eg. electricians) taking orders from the young people when they are setting up for an event’. The importance of young people working with the electricians, caterers, security firms etc was also noted in the evaluation report. The report suggested that this ‘resulted in young people being seen in another light’ and enabled young people to work with positive adult role models.²⁸

Thus, FReeZA is clearly much more than an event. Indeed some providers said that although their events may not attract large audiences, they were committed to the program because of the additional benefits. Overall, providers said that FReeZA is ‘a really worthwhile program to keep going’ and many expressed concern that the reduced funding may mean ‘opportunities are going to be cut severely’ (outer-metro).

²⁴ DEET, Round Table No. 3, p.9.

²⁵ Ibid, p.9.

²⁶ IYEC, p59.

²⁷ IYEC, p.6.

²⁸ IYEC, p.61.

The impact of the funding cuts

The importance of four events

In light of the importance of FReeZA, the funding cuts are seen to have a substantial impact in most communities. Several providers spoke of their disappointment at only being able to afford three events. These providers said that the provision of at least four events was vital to the sustainability of FReeZA.

Funding for four events allows providers to organise regular gigs. One worker said that ‘young people want the fourth event because it’s so popular. They always want to know when the next event is and they plan their social lives around it. They say to their parents, ‘I won’t go out for two weeks if I can go to FReeZA next month’ (outer-metro). Another explained that the four events allowed her to ‘space them out every six weeks. If it’s not there the young people notice a gap’ (outer-metro). Several providers also noted that funding for four gigs enables them to organise events in both the summer and winter months. This was important to occupy young people during the school holidays when little else was available.

Several providers said that more regular events attract a larger audience ‘because young people know when they’re on so we don’t even really need to advertise them. They just know to turn up every six weeks’ (rural). Overall, it was felt that fewer events would make it more difficult to attract a regular following. Several providers stressed that ‘to get the attendance you need to keep to it regular’ (rural). One provider was particularly concerned that if there are fewer events less young people will attend and it may appear that they are not interested in the program. The importance of young people having a clear understanding of what to expect from services has been raised previously.²⁹ Regular events assist this understanding.

Several providers were concerned about the effect of the reduction of events on the longer-term credibility and viability of FReeZA. One said ‘it’s taken two and a half years to build the credibility of FReeZA and if we cut events now we might lose that’ (rural). This view was echoed by those providers that have committed to organising more than the minimum number of events. One said ‘you have to stick with four events because you can’t keep the interest with just three. Three events every six months is not enough’ (outer-metro). In fact regularity is an issue addressed in the FReeZA guidelines that state that service providers are required to ‘ensure that events occur regularly and are accessible to a broad range of young people’.³⁰

Missing out

Because of the reduction in the number of events, four service providers indicated that FReeZA gigs would now be distributed unequally across their region. For example, one worker who oversees the program across eight communities explained that one of those communities will now miss out on FReeZA this year. Last year, the eight gigs were shared equally across the region. Similarly, in another rural area, there was already debate about how to divide the events between two communities. Last year both communities had two gigs each. This year, one community will only hold one event and there is ‘heated discussion about who misses out’ (rural).

²⁹ DEET, Round Table No. 5, p.16.

³⁰ Office for Youth, p.7.

the reduction in the number of FReeZA events is clearly resulting in inequitable distribution across Victoria

For many young people, particularly in outer-suburban and rural areas, there is little opportunity to attend events in neighbouring shires due to a lack of transport. Thus, if their town misses out on a FReeZA gig, there are few alternatives available. As pointed out at a Youth Round Table, 'access to all youth services therefore depends upon a geographic location where all young people (have) easy and affordable access to public transport'.³¹ This is not such an issue for providers in inner-Melbourne. One metropolitan worker said that he was planning more events over the next six months as he expects young people from neighbouring councils to attend events in his area as FReeZA gigs are being reduced in surrounding suburbs.

Overall, the reduction in the number of FReeZA events is clearly resulting in inequitable distribution across Victoria. This contradicts the Minister for Youth's commitment to 'working towards appropriate and equitable service delivery'³² and the Government's commitment to promote 'caring safe communities in which opportunities are fairly shared'.³³

Decentralised events

In several outer-suburban, rural and regional areas, there was a strong commitment to holding events in smaller towns. As larger suburbs and towns often provide other entertainment options for young people, it was seen as very important to decentralise FReeZA to reach more marginalised areas.

Providers have experienced varying degrees of success in this endeavour. They have been successful in reaching more isolated communities but the smaller crowd attendance may mean these events make a loss financially. However, the FReeZA workers have generally remained committed to decentralising the events to ensure they are accessible to *all* young people. As one provider said, 'centralised events are harder for more marginalised young people to get to and they're the ones who generally lack entertainment anyway' (outer-metro). Another provider explained that as there is 'no transport between towns here so we need to spread events around to make sure everyone gets a go' (rural).

Decentralised events often cost more because of the additional expenses associated with transporting bands and equipment. Thus, the reduction in funding has also impacted on the ability of providers to continue reaching smaller towns. One worker said 'we want to get out into smaller towns but we need extra funding to support this' (outer-metro). Another said that 'we have worked hard not just have events in central areas but to take them out to smaller areas. This has been a huge success but now might have to be reviewed because of the additional costs it presents and FReeZA funding does not begin to cover these extras' (rural).

Reduction in the type and quality of FReeZA events

Promotion

Several FReeZA providers said that they would now limit the promotion of the events. Reducing promotion may be problematic however. As noted at a Round Table discussion 'a lack of access to information on events or activities severely limits young

³¹ DEET, Round Table No. 5, p.11.

³² Minister for Youth Affairs, (April 2000) Youth at the Centre: Governing with Young Victorians, Ministerial Statement, p.3.

³³ Department of Premier and Cabinet, p.6.

Reducing costs typically means reducing the type or quality of an event.

people's knowledge, choices, options and opportunities'.³⁴ Rural providers in particular said appropriate promotion was vital to let young people know about the events. One worker believes that 'young people in Melbourne may be able to email each other about events and word gets around. However, most young people in my region don't have access to email and so we rely on advertising to get them to the events' (rural). Without adequate promotion, there is a concern that the events may only attract small numbers of young people and that this will affect ticket revenue and the credibility of FReeZA.

Bands vs. dance parties

The types of FReeZA gigs vary within and between service providers. Some providers organise a combination of band and dance events. Others concentrate on one type of event. Dance parties are cheaper to run and some providers choose to hold more dance parties to save money. In this way, they may be able to hold more than the minimum number of gigs. In general band events appear more popular, particularly with older age groups. FReeZA gives young people an opportunity to see bands they may not normally have access to. As a participant at one Round Table noted, 'events all being in Melbourne is a barrier. We have no access to large events. They cost too much and we can't get there'.³⁵

However, many providers said that as a result of the funding cuts, they will now employ more local bands rather than headline acts. As one worker said, 'we can't afford a band from Melbourne' (rural). Another explained that 'we will either cut the number of events or we won't be able to build up to the number of big bands which young people here don't normally see' (rural). Finally, another who has been forced to introduce more dance events due to the funding cuts expressed concern that 'if that's not what young people want then the reputation of FReeZA will suffer' (rural).

Transport

The funding cuts have also jeopardised the additional services FReeZA providers have been able to organise in the past. Transport is a key service, which will be affected by the funding arrangements. As noted in Round Table discussions, young people are particularly concerned about the lack of transport to and from entertainment venues.³⁶ Young people indicated that 'a lack of regular and affordable public transport restricts rural young people's access to sporting, cultural and recreational opportunities'.³⁷

In some regions, particularly in rural areas, the provision of transport by FReeZA providers is vital to enable young people to access FReeZA events. In one area, the service provider organised transport to allow young people to attend who would otherwise not be allowed out after dark by their parents. However, as a result of funding cuts, many providers indicated that they would no longer be able to provide free transport. One worker said he would either cut transport or charge young people to use the buses. The extra cost of transport may make FReeZA unaffordable for some young people.

³⁴ DEET, Round Table No. 3, p.5.

³⁵ DEET, Round Table No. 3, p. 7.

³⁶ DEET, Round Table No. 5, p.11.

³⁷ DEET, Round Table No. 3, p. 5.

Lack of resources

*the level of
FReeZA funding
was already
inadequate*

There was a general consensus that the level of FReeZA funding was already inadequate and the most recent cuts would make it even more difficult to plan quality events. Several providers noted that '\$2500 doesn't cover the event anyway' (rural). One provider said that even with the additional funding last year 'we had to cut corners. It was always a struggle' (metro). The low level of FReeZA funding was seen to undermine the impact of the program.

Overall, the absence of FReeZA-funded workers was seen as problematic. One provider explained this in detail. 'To support young people properly takes a lot of time and resources but we are not funded to provide these resources. For example, FReeZA does not fund my time. But if you skimp on the project management, you ultimately skimp on the events and then you won't get the young people there. Then it looks like FReeZA is not popular but that's just not true. We don't get people there because we don't have the resources to organise the events properly. To run without proper management is like putting a noose around the neck of the event' (rural).

Local communities contribute significantly to the funding of FReeZA events. This may be in terms of worker time or in-kind support. One provider in metropolitan Melbourne who currently enjoys the support of her local council said 'if the council don't think it's enough to put on a decent event, then they will pull support and that will be the end of it'. Two workers said that because FReeZA is so important, their local councils are willing to subsidise events. However, the extra money will come from other youth programs 'so young people will miss out in the long-run anyway' (metro). The amount of time workers give to FReeZA may also impact on their other responsibilities. In one case, the youth workers who attend FReeZA events were given time-off-in-lieu as the council did not pay overtime. This meant that they had less time to devote to their other projects.

Uncertainty about the future

*The young
people are so
committed to
the program.
Does the
Government
have the same
commitment?*

There is great concern about the future of FReeZA beyond June 31st 2002. Many providers are concerned that FReeZA will be de-funded. Several workers said that 'if FReeZA goes there will be little else available' (rural). Another said that 'everything is in place for a great year but we have to wonder, is it all worth it considering we don't know what will happen after June?' (metro).

There is also concern about the inability to plan beyond six months. Workers want to plan the program of events at least twelve months in advance. One worker said that 'the current arrangements make it very difficult to plan beyond June' (metro). Another explained that 'the lack of clarity about the future makes it difficult to recruit workers' (rural). And finally, one worker believes that 'uncertain funding is unfair and it sends a bad message to the kids from the Government. The young people are so committed to the program. Does the Government have the same commitment?' (metro).