



Building a shared Framework

Report

October 2005

Dr Sarah Russell

Acknowledgements

Between July and November, 2005, I worked with young people, staff and management at YSAS' Brunswick Street site. Nich Rogers and Peter Wearne created a supportive work environment in which I could work to the best of my ability. Staff and young people were extremely open in sharing information with me – we shared memorable conversations about a variety of issues. I would particularly like to thank the day program for sharing their space, food and warmth with me; Erica Evans, Vanessa Morphea, Hayley Wiesner and Georgia Cockram for collecting data from young people; Andrew Reid and Michelle Albrecht for teaching me things that are not found in text books; young people for trusting me with their personal stories; and Crystal Preen for having the patience and kindness to teach me to strum a guitar, and for sharing her art work on the cover of the “You said it” report. Also thank you to Donna Masterton for assisting with the production of the final document.

As always, I am grateful to my research colleagues at Research Matters, Dr Jan Browne and Dr Clare Carberry, for their insights and wisdom. Finally, I offer my thanks to the local cafes for ensuring that my caffeine levels remained within a therapeutic range.

Summary of Report

YSAS is a youth drug and alcohol service. It employs staff with a range of qualifications and experiences. This research project was designed to identify the theoretical frameworks that staff use to underpin their practice at the Brunswick Street site. This report documents the findings and presents some ideas for change. The report focuses on the leadership and organisational processes that support staff to provide the best possible services for young people.

Between July 29th and September 21st, 2005, twenty one (21) staff and seven (27) young people participated in semi-structured interviews. They described different aspects of the drug and alcohol service. They described what works well, and what does not work well *from their perspective*. It is a complex, and often contradictory, picture.

YSAS philosophy

YSAS' philosophy of relationship building, respect, empowerment and harm minimisation is highly valued. Staff and young people are attracted to YSAS because of its reputation and documented philosophy. This philosophy drives staff's engagement with young people. However, principles of relationship building, respect, empowerment and harm minimisation are also required in staff's relationships with each other and management.

Brunswick Street site

The co-location of medical, social and research services in one site brings many challenges. Although tensions were identified between staff and management, outreach and day programs, workers and administration, health care professionals and youth/AOD workers and researchers and 'subjects', there were also many examples of productive collaborations. Data indicates that staff in street outreach, case management, day program, home withdrawal, GP clinic, mental health services, administration and management require structural/organisational support to all work together. This includes access to information, effective consultation and clear explanations for changes in the workplace. It also requires the ethical sharing of information that is respectful of young people, staff and people in management.

Models and frameworks

YSAS is committed to adopting the social model of health as a unifying framework. Implementing the social model of health at YSAS is in the developmental stage. Formal and informal discussions about the social model of health will assist staff to become more aware of how the social model of health informs, and underpins, their practice.

Although this research sought to clearly document the ‘YSAS practice model’, staff rely on an eclectic mix of theoretical models in practice. Staff use whatever works best at the time for the individual young person. This diversity is a strength of the organisation. However this diversity can be underpinned by a shared framework.

Supervision

Data indicates that some staff were ‘flying by the seat of their pants’. This was particularly the case for those who had been employed at YSAS for less than a year (approximately half the sample). This suggests a need for the organisation to review its induction, role modeling, mentoring and supervision processes. Improving these processes will improve the consistency of the service for young people.

Continuity of care

Data indicates that continuity of care is an issue for young people. Factors that contribute to continuity of care were the staff attrition rate and the number of casual employees working without formal supervision in the day program. Young people identified a need for an organisational process to help young people have ‘closure’ when staff leave the organisation. This process could be something as simple as a farewell lunch with perhaps a small thank you speech.

Integration

The introduction of new services and the process of integration have caused staff to be confused about their work roles. To successfully work together, staff require a shared understanding of what “integration” means for them. Data indicates that organisational, environmental, and cultural factors impact on integration. These factors can support, or hinder, integration.

Shared vision

Bringing staff together to discuss, debate and evaluate their practice, will foster understanding and respect across the different services. It will also help staff to clarify their common goals. Currently, YSAS' organisational goals, mission and vision are not widely understood by either staff or young people. This is a major barrier to integration.

Workplace

Staff and young people describe how an unsupportive workplace can hinder achievement. The recent restructure, changes in management personnel and lack of resources are listed as factors that may contribute to the current low morale. Morale may be improved by changes in internal communication processes, respectful work practice in all levels of the organisation, transparency and including young people in decision-making processes.

Evaluation

Evidence is required to show that YSAS is an effective service. Any evaluation must recognise that young people engage with YSAS for a range of reasons. It is rarely just about their alcohol and drug use. Staff welcome processes to evaluate their practice, provided evaluation processes are meaningful to them and young people. As such, staff and young people need to be involved in the process of criteria identification. Staff consider feedback from young people as an important component of any evaluation. Staff also recognise that young people need options to ensure that the feedback process suits their individual style.

This report concludes with some practice principles that currently inform practice. These principles are grounded in the data. It is suggested that these practice principles be used as a starting point in designing relevant evaluation indicators. Young people, staff and management could work together to develop and implement evaluation indicators that are relevant to both practice and funding/policy requirements.

Appendices

A complete set of appendices is included with the report, including time-lines and questionnaires. This will enable the project, or parts thereof, to be replicated as required.

What has been learnt from this study?

As part of the staff engagement process, staff were asked to give their feedback on a confidential draft report. This process enabled participants to ensure that their views were documented as they wanted them to be heard. It also gave staff who had not been interviewed an opportunity to contribute to the data and make recommendations.

Apart from four (4) participants who are no longer employed at YSAS, participants all provided formal and informal feedback. One staff member who had not participated in an interview also contributed to the feedback. It was unanimously decided that the document should be tabled.

Staff feedback

Nat Joyce

This report shows the importance of open communication, transparency and getting young people involved. It was good to read quotes from young people. I will make changes to my practice by being more inclusive of staff in the day program.

Terry Vella

I recognise that staff are disaffected and there are obvious reasons for this. I wonder how different this report would be in 6 months time. I think some staff have had little work experience and do not realise that YSAS is a far better organisation than most.

High staff attrition rate

I don't believe that the YSAS attrition rate would be any different if compared to like services. Clients will always find the changeover of staff difficult due to their own life experiences of mistrusting adults, and rejection/abandonment themes.

Ombudsman

Young people have an ombudsman and it makes sense that the ombudsman is not a part of the organisation.

Youth participation

A policy around how we could include young people more throughout the organisation would be beneficial – I think it requires a lot of thinking and structure for it to happen. A mentor system at the Day Program would be great.

Management

I think the points made about “distant” management are appropriate. I would recommend that management look at strategies to be more involved with the staff group. It is not necessary for management to do shifts – we know that they are mostly from youth work type backgrounds and have done one-on-one work with young people.

Casual staff

Casual staff do have access to a casual email. All casual staff can access emails sent to mail groups.

How to create a better service and work environment.

1. Begin to look at ways that young people can be included in YSAS process and assist with evaluating services. This should be done on an organisation level not on a site level.
2. Consult staff on a range of changes that have a direct impact on them or clients. Be clear that there are some things that need to occur that would not involve consultation.
3. Develop a better communicative relationship with management. How do staff think this could occur? What is reasonable? I think you look at existing feedback mechanisms – enhance them and add.

Examples

Rumour Mill - have a worker at each program area who is willing too take responsibility for putting together information for the newsletter. Have management and staff define what goes into the newsletter and what doesn't. Give staff the opportunity to own the concept. Use newsletter in a way that management can highlight the efforts of staff. Have a staff tribute section for any worker or client who wants to farewell staff members. Newsletter could also flag current thinking at board level and ask staff to contribute ideas. Have good news stories re clients.

Organisational activities – have quarterly YSAS events – eg Agency Day / Trivia Night / Xmas party / ...this shouldn't be too difficult to organise.

4. Ensure that management provide feedback on anything that staff are asked to contribute to in terms of surveys. Revive the skills audit idea and ascertain just how resourceful staff are and how these extracurricular skills could be utilised. Have a committee for this made up of staff and management.

5. I think the next step for the organisation is to be able to go to a tertiary stage re responding to young persons needs and I believe this is happening. YSAS is not an island...we have more autonomy than most services. The Episodes of Care may be arbitrary but the key indicators are great. Staff usually are drawn to the service and genuinely want to be with and assist young people – they often don't like structured ways of doing their work. This needs to change. There needs to be more clarity about how we get to this tertiary stage and not all staff are going to like the changes. There are lots of contradictory views in the report and this will always be the case. Verbal communication is always going to be a problem and email and written communication is the more effective in terms of time constraints. It may be worth looking at a rights and responsibilities charter between staff and management???
6. Overall, I think that we need committees made up of staff and management to look at all these things and we need to work out how we include clients in our processes.

Andrew Reid

The thing that stands out to me from this study is that at the Brunswick St. site we lack shared clear ideas about what we are doing and why we are doing it a particular way. This can be stressful for staff and sometimes confusing for young people.

The report is good because it makes public and “puts on the table” issues that have only been talked about behind the scenes for too long. This is summed up by the quote “We have a culture of having little conversations. But we don't bring these issues up in a big group.” This needs to change, we need to debate issues openly, understand that there will be differences of opinion and respect each other in this, focusing on the issues and not being personal.

I would like the report to be made available as an internal document within YSAS to all.

We all need to focus on using the information in this report in a positive way. We need to focus on ways we can improve service to young people and staff support. We need to commit ourselves to being part of dealing with issues and creating solutions not just complain about problems or emotionally reacting to things that have been said that we may not like. Management and staff both need to be involved in this. Some kind of time and space need to be arranged to do this. Young people also need to have input through the Youth Participation Project.

The practice principles would be a good starting point for discussion.

Our aim should be to develop a written induction document for new staff clearly and simply stating what we are about.

The Youth Participation Project needs to be supported to continue and grow to allow young people to have input into the future of YSAS. THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, IF NOTHING ELSE WE MUST DO THIS!

Day program:

- Young people identify staff attrition and lack of consistency as an issue.
- We need to improve supervision, mentoring, training, team building and induction.
- We need to resource senior staff and create time and space to do this.
- We need to recruit more experienced staff and casuals, with the right attitude, skills and knowledge. This is difficult but we need to try to improve the situation.
- We also need to develop an induction document for staff specific to the Day Program.
- Issues also need to be openly debated at the Day Program, the “no neg rave policy” is an example.
- We need to revisit the Activities Program and Services available and involve young people through the Youth Participation Group. This will be an ongoing process, needs to be done every three to six months and the program varied and new things tried.
- Shopping and Cooking need to be addressed. System needs to be changed to allow young people to be involved in the shopping and young people need to be given the opportunity to learn and be involved in the cooking and possibly do some introductory hospitality training.
- Many more issues to look and debate, but if we get Youth Participation right the rest will follow.

Molly O'Shaughnessy

The report is certainly a page-turner. Your report is representative of my viewpoint, which is both unexpected (in my experience of agency reports in general) and gratifying. My only feedback is that I wonder whether you would get any understanding of the work or the service if you weren't reading it from the point of view of a YSAS staff member. I guess I feel that maybe an objective perspective of the service could be incorporated as

well, although clearly not at the expense of the staff or client's viewpoint. I expected to get a better understanding of how you, as an unbiased outsider (or not, as the case may be), saw the work that went on here. This, however is only a very minor point. Overall I have loved what you have done with this project and I think it will have a lasting effect on the service and the staff.

Evan McAllister

I found the report to be fantastic. I don't believe that the managers will find it too attacking because of the manner in which you softened the negative manager information. It has been really interesting to read the views of other workers (although it was frightening at times). The tabulated information placed the information previously read into context well. I also found the information you quoted from previous annual reports to be fascinating, due to the fact that I have never read an entire annual report. They are not reader friendly (especially considering they omitted me from the most recent one).

The following are my views on street outreach:

I believe that street outreach has potential to become the driving force of client access that it once was. But for this to happen many changes need to be made. These changes do not only apply to YSAS. A lot of it is dependant on police presence through the City, Footscray and Richmond. Due to the Commonwealth Games starting in March 2006, the police presence in the city has been very heavy. Raids have been conducted through the arcades of Russell St on numerous occasions by both uniform and undercover police. This has lead to a downfall in the amount of people buying and selling drugs on the streets. The alternative to doing so has caused the City's drug culture to go "indoors". This results in people driving into the city, buying and driving off before stopping and using (on many occasions, this has lead to people driving heavily substance effected). Conducting street outreach has now become increasingly difficult because workers can't access indoor dealing. Further frustration has been caused by the Melbourne City Council closing down or destroying most of the squats in the city. Where as this used to be a great way to make contact with young people in need, it has now become a guessing game as to where all the homeless kids have gone. I believe that this will change post Commonwealth games. On the YSAS front, the only manner in which I can see the near

future of street outreach becoming more productive is for the time frame of shifts to be changed. I believe that a lot of the dealing has moved to later at night, thus, shifts would need to be from 7:00pm to 3:00am (in saying this, I have no desire to work these hours).

Min Seto

Firstly I would like to thank you for highlighting the fact that we can have a shared framework that does not require us all to think and respond in the same way. I believe you clearly showed how the "social model of health" framework fits well with the way YSAS currently works, and love that it allows for an eclectic approach that is diverse yet inclusive. So for me, this was the most important part of your report.

I also really appreciated the practice principles as outlined at the end of the report.

As for the middle of the report... I believe these are things that needed to be said by staff (and young people), and that it has been a valuable exercise for staff (and young people) to be given a forum to say these things, but I'm not sure how open management will be to hearing them. It is my hope that the negativity of many of the comments does not close management's eyes to the worthiness of your report.

I would also say that people will take the opportunity to vent if given it (particularly on a bad day), and that taken out of context, this can look bad. I do not feel that there was an even representation of all of the positive aspects of working at YSAS, and that if people had been encouraged to talk about all of the great things they do and achieve, then maybe the report would have looked different?

I found it interesting to hear what my colleagues had to say, and was even a little surprised by some of their opinions (particularly around abstinence and harm minimisation), which made me wonder why they were working at an organisation like YSAS and not in a 12 step program.

Overall though, I would like to say that it was nice to be involved in a research program that was conducted in an ethically sound way, and I enjoyed participating. Furthermore, I would be happy to participate in a follow up research report in the future.

Therese Lindau

I would like to delete some parts of my quotes because I feel too identifiable. Now that they are deleted, I am happy for this report to be read by others in YSAS.

Horace Wansbrough

I loved the report, and I promise it will be a 'living document' in my hands for quite some time. I loved the way you painted a snapshot of a transitional point in time, with so many diverse views. I don't even know if I will always believe in all the things I said in the transcript/ interview, but it was great to try and share something about how I work, and read how others approach this field. The feedback from young people is brilliantly challenging and insightful.

Some preliminary remarks:

- It is interesting that young people are wanting peer support, yet there is little, if any group work in Fitzroy YSAS, apart from resi doing recreational outings.
- I wish there was more feedback for street outreach - though I guess this could be a project in itself!
- Great stuff in the GP Clinic section. Given the fact that some staff don't think they do primary health, could you recommend some orientation/training as to the meaning of our current models.
- For staff to see the introduction of mental health services as a 'clash of paradigms' really shows how far we need to go to include a youth friendly/YSAS friendly mental health arm. It highlights one of the major 'tensions'.
- The staff member's suggested indicators are problematic for another reason that they do not reflect YSAS' values. In some cases, particularly where there has been a history of childhood trauma, substance use is serving a function of masking that trauma, and when abstinence, or decreased substance use reveals these traumas, incidences of self harm and hospitalisations might actually increase for a time! How would that look in the stats if that was all we measured?!
- I don't see too great a clash of paradigms between evidenced-based and action research. With proper processes to ensure rigour and supporting documentation, action research is 'evidence' that can be recognised by funding bodies.

Evaluation indicators:

I see these as a great starting point. We would probably need some discussion to develop these.

What I have learnt...

'Clash of paradigms'

We need to come to some position where we can find a place for mental health services in YSAS. Mental health is such a feature of our client group, so for me it's about how we can have mental health support finding a place in our diverse YSAS culture.

Feedback

We should embed youth feedback into our work practice, and monitor our therapeutic relationships. It's not just a day program thing, let's get young people (and staff!) reporting to management, the CEO, The Board!!!

Organisational processes.

YSAS management are really brilliant at resourcing and promoting YSAS with government agencies and giving us such a strong profile, but why the deficiencies in communication and knowledge of our on the ground work practice?

Trudy Froud

Firstly I would like to say that I think you did a fantastic job. You have taken both the negative and the positive feedback and presented it all in a really smart way that makes all the feedback look really good, so Thank you.

I found this report really interesting to read overall. I thought it was really interesting to read all the different responses and it has been a really good reflective practice exercise for me. I have changed my opinion on a couple of work ethics that I used to have especially around how I felt about staff all working on the same wave length and by the same textbook. I now realise that it is important to have several workers that work independently at times as it gives young people more opportunities to reach their goals.

I also realised when reading over some of my quotes that I was a bit negative at times and that I need to learn to bring up more of my concerns and issues with management. For example, it was also my responsibility to ask for more supervision and debriefing.

This report also gave me a broader understanding of the different roles we as Day Program workers play as oppose to outreach workers and how hard it may be on them to be able to shift roles form outreach to Day Program.

Another main theme that I noticed in this report is that not only myself but many other workers may have been felt a lot different about all the proposed changes if we were all consulted sooner rather than later and there had been the opportunities to have input from the start.

On of the best things about working at the Day Program was the relationship that we build with young people as the days go by and I don't think we should ever loose sight of this. It was mentioned a lot throughout this report that young people really like the relationship that staff build with them. I am also concerned that all the new mental health screenings may break the relationship down. Maybe our psychologist could these screeners so it was keep separate from the initial assessment. Otherwise it may seem that we are a dual diagnosis agency rather than drug and alcohol agency.

I also noticed throughout this report that we need to be evaluating our practice more, especially with young people. I also feel that young people need to be involved in decisions that create change in the agency.

Georgie McRae

'Building a Shared Framework' represents an attempt to address issues stemming from the core of YSAS' values as an organisation. By consulting with staff and young people in a collaborative process, this research exemplifies respect for the expertise of the people who attempt to put into practice the organisation's plans. What I learnt from the findings of this research highlights that this empowering process is a deviation (in the right direction) from the YSAS norm. The findings also show that it is the many opinions that

first and foremost need to be listened to and sifted through before finding any commonality that can be considered a 'YSAS way'.

The frustrations and discontent that comes across in many of these opinions are reflections of a system that has been functioning with inadequate communication processes. I also translate these opinions as opportunities for change and improvement of YSAS' organizational processes and practices.

Unfortunately, communication breakdown often creates an environment for a culture of negativity to grow. Personally, I believe this is the current situation at YSAS, and that phenomenon needs to be worked on by everyone, in addition to process and practical change. From this document I have learnt that the majority of people at YSAS want the organisations way of working to reflect the values that we have toward working with young people. Therefore we all need to work from a strength-based framework to move towards a new phase of organisational life.

Michelle Albrecht

This report highlights the extraordinary talented staff. It was wonderful to read about our diverse views and different approaches to work. We certainly have an amazing bunch of people working here.

I had expected the report to be more negative about management processes, because staff's morale is low. I had also expected more critical comments about supervision processes which definitely need to be improved for both day program and outreach workers. I would like to see more 'clinical' supervision, staff supervision, support and debriefing to all staff who work one-to-one with young people. To date, I have not adequately received this at YSAS. In fact, prior to the psychologist, I had never had clinical supervision at YSAS. I think clinical supervision is very important. For example, the psychologist's expertise and insights helped me to deal with some clients with whom I had been struggling. She gave me strategies which really helped me. I also really hope that management recognises the value of providing a cleaning service to the day program. We really can't go on like this – vacuuming and cleaning toilets at the end of a busy shift.

Simon Arandt

Management must read this, but it is disappointing that you sugar coated it.

Tess McCall

The report is great – honesty is the best policy. It is a shame this project did not include Resi, Willum and Birribi. They too have organisational issues that need to be addressed.

Linda Barton

I have only had a chance to flick through it, but from what I heard at your presentation, I am very happy for it to be circulated. I was happy with my transcript, so I am OK with any quotes you used.

Fiona Delisle

I feel you did an excellent job with the report. I really enjoyed the quotes from staff and clients. I felt it to be very powerful in its context. Really varied points of views were put across. I am pleased for the report to go to managers and I feel if they read it carefully and realise that we want to work at making things better along with them, and not against them, we could get some great outcomes.

John Lamb

I found the report difficult to read, but it was a very honest report that accurately reflects how staff are feeling. YSAS needs to do a lot of work in terms of boosting morale among staff. They need to improve management communication relationships. Staff at Brunswick Street have a lot to contribute, but may not feel motivated because we do not feel appreciated. It is sad that our low morale is felt by young people. YSAS needs to be mindful that staff are valuable to the organisation and need to be treated as such when decisions are made about practice.

Serena Bates

The interview was a safe place for both staff and young people to bring up issues that some of us find hard to discuss. The report shows all these different views. It shows what is going on for us now. Management need to read it.

Claudio Villella

This report shows that the GP service needs to be better integrated into the rest of YSAS. It is important that the GPs do not sit on their own, but are integrated into what YSAS does. It is particularly important that health care professionals do not daunt staff. Staff's concerns about "medicalising" need to be addressed. There needs to be organisational process so the GPs can formally engage with workers and thereby provide them with a better understanding of what GPs do. Although the GPs' role at YSAS is mostly clinical, there needs to also be opportunities for GPs to build relationships with staff. We need to improve links and communication processes with different groups in the organisation, not only management and other health care professionals but also workers. The GP role is to complement work that is done by other staff in organisation, not to replace it. In my mind, GPs are just another part.

GPs are specifically trying to model a positive health care experience for young people and build relationships with them. If young people have good relationships with other workers in YSAS, we involve them. We also link young people with external organisations (e.g. counselors). We are all working together.

The GPs are working alongside nurses who have a strong connection with the organisation. It is important that they are resourced to provide adequate follow up.

Draft evaluation indicators

The practice principles discussed and illustrated in the report may be used as a starting point for designing and implementing an evaluation matrix. A matrix such as this can be completed by young people, staff and management at regular intervals.

Evaluation Statement	Achieved greatly	Achieved a little	Not achieved	Not sure
Young people drive the work.				
Create productive therapeutic relationships.				
Young people achieved personal goals				
Establishing relationships that are based on mutual respect.				
Creating an environment of control and choice.				
A strength based approach.				
Creating environment in which people act safely.				
Internal communication processes that keep management, staff, and young people informed.				
Processes of accountability that fulfill DHS and other funding requirements.				
Young people are involved in the organisation's decision-making processes.				
Staff have opportunities for reflective practice, such as supervision sessions.				
Young people trust staff.				
Staff trust each other.				
Staff trust management.				
Management trust staff				

Dear Nat

The “Building a shared framework” report is finished. Copies will be given to David Murray, Peter Wearne, Nich Rogers and Salli Hickford.

Copies of the complete final report (including both staff and young people’s report, and appendices) will be left at reception and in day program office. However, if you would like your own copy, I will leave an unbound copy with Donna Masterton at reception in head office. This copy can then be photocopied.

For your interest, I attach the report’s extra components:

- Acknowledgments
- Summary of report
- Staff feedback
- Evaluation matrix (for discussion)

I hope that the process of undertaking this action research project has been worthwhile for you, the organisation and young people who use the service.

Best wishes and many thanks. I have learnt a great deal in the last 4 months.

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Dear Terry

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Dear Molly

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Sarah Russell

Dear Tess

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Dear Simon

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Dear Ben

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Dear John

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Dear Linda

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Sarah Russell

Dear Rebekkah

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Dear Mike

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Dear Fiona

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Dear Stephanie

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Dear Claudio

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Dear Terese

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Dear Tammy

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