**Green Flags Episode 3: How to Support Young People Beyond COVID-19**

**♪ Chill guitar plays ♪**

**Narrator:** Green Flags: tips by and for regional young people. Episode 3: How to support young people beyond COVID-19.

In Morwell, on Gunai Kurnai land. In this episode, we’re back with The Y's Latrobe Youth Space, with Catherine and Danni from the Youth Group Committee (YGC) and youth worker Kylie.

When lockdown pushed all their youth-led social groups and activities online, the YGC made supporting ALL young people a priority – that means including young people of diverse sexualities, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic bakcgrounds, ages or living situations. Let’s hear their experiences about what young people want to feel supported beyond COVID-19.

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**Kylie:** We had a huge diversity amongst the team itself. Culturally, LGBT, ages, we had an elder from the trans community that was a bit of a mentor to our young rainbow club... And then everybody brings something to the table, which helps with which programs to develop, because of these, you know, directions to take.

**Catherine:** You can get in those situations where everybody goes, 'Oh, you're, you know, the 16 year old, 17 year old, so they're like, oh, you're just a kid’

 **Danni:** you’re just going through a phase!

**Catherine:** ‘you don't know.' That was never the vibe! It was like, you all have something really important to contribute, you all have these amazing experiences. And you're all really invaluable. And it just felt like a space where you always had something to bring to the table.

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**Kylie:** We also were very mindful of the social groups we had, because they would come in once a week and meet. So we decided to do private Zoom groups so they could all come into a private and safe group, like they had a private and safe group in real life.

**Catherine:** We've had young people who've been in households where they're not necessarily out to their families. So ensuring that they have a way to chat. And at the start of each session, we talked through our Zoom policies, and all of our guidelines and Code of Conduct stuff.

But we also mentioned, if you aren't feeling safe to chat, like verbally, you can put yourself in the comments and we can ask questions for you, we can like, voice that.

And so if people are quiet, if they're having a tough time, we very much utilise the chat function. We message them individually and ask what's going on. We've had young people tell us from that, like, 'Oh, I'm actually in a new home and I don't know if these people are supportive of me.' And so we've been like, oh, that - no, that's totally fine, you know, feel free to ask your questions here, use the chat function. And we've helped them to then have that voice in the group and still maintain that connection with other people as well.

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**Catherine:** One of the major things is just being visible, that you are an ally, because particularly in regional spaces, young people often only hear the negative, there's not as much active ally behaviour. Even visuals like, you know, wearing your badges and things like that. So I think even just being visible was pretty radical in a regional area. But it wasn't just like a surface thing. We made sure that we really thought about the way that our spaces were structured, that we made sure that we communicated that information to young people.

Being responsive, like we had a lot of young people put in different requests, we ran polls, to try to understand what young people actually wanted to see and what they were interested in. And we tried to respond to those at every stage.

**Danni:** Yeah! And it was mostly, you know, learning to constantly ask for feedback to make sure we were delivering on what they wanted.

I think another thing is you come across a lot of people that are trying to get them to talk constantly, like, you know, 'how do you feel about this? What do you think?' trying to get them to express themselves. Don't push them, because that will push them away.

 **Kylie:** You want that engagement, you want the educational and you want that learning and development for young people. But at the end of the day, it's about what they want. And a lot of them just wanted to come somewhere that they feel safe and included, and have a bit of fun.

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**Catherine:** We don't want to disrupt young people's normalcy. That was the whole point of continually putting out all that content online and making sure that we were there for young people was that during a time that was so uncertain, young people needed that lifeline, they needed something that was normal in their lives, they needed something that was consistent and regular.

This is going to have a lot of ripple effects, because young people have unfortunately had to be home a lot more. And they're not always from positive or inclusive households. So they've had more prolonged trauma, I think, than they would have been subject to under non-COVID situations.

I think the biggest thing that we can do is just ensure that there are those positive connecting spaces for them to continually go through that front door because this idea that young people are just going to go, 'I have a problem, I need a referral' is - that's not - a lot of the time, there are so many barriers to young people even identifying if they have an issue. They might just think that's normal, or they might be so scared to open up and talk about those things. Like, the number one is that they have those supportive connections that they feel they can open up to.

**Danni:** Just letting them know like, we're always around. We might not be here, but we might be there. Like they might be going through something you don't understand, but also on top of that going back to normal, which is going to be another huge hurdle, so just be there.

 **Catherine:** It's not just like, 'we're the future.' We're the present! Like, we're here now. We're making changes now. We're contributing now.

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**Narrator:** Green Flags is part of YACVic’s [Learning From COVID-19 Series](https://www.yacvic.org.au/training-and-resources/covid-youth-work/). To see more stories like this, visit [YACVic.org.au/Green-Flags](http://yacvic.org.au/Green-Flags)