

# ‘A seat at the table’

Young People and Disaster Recovery  
A Guide to meaningful Youth Engagement,  
Participation, and Inclusion

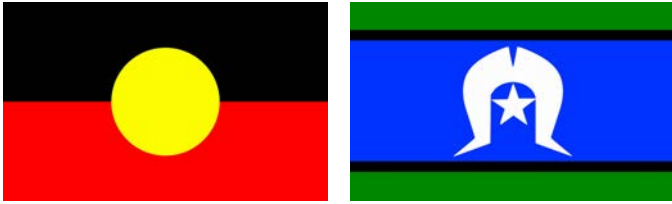


**RURAL**



Education  
and Training





YACVic works across the entire state of Victoria. YACVic's head office is based on the lands of the **Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation in Naarm (Melbourne)**. We have offices based on the lands of the **Gunitjmarra Nation** in Warrnambool, and on the lands of the **Wemba Wemba**, and **Wadi Wadi** in Swan Hill.

YACVic acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands of which the consultations and writing for this resource took place, and pay our our deepest respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present for their wisdom, strength, support and leadership.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria, and stand in solidarity to pay respect to the ongoing culture and continued history of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations. Sovereignty has never been ceded, and this always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

**Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading advocate for young people aged 12–25, and youth workers in Victoria.**

Our vision is that the rights of young people in Victoria are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

We lead policy responses to issues affecting young people, represent the youth sector to government, resource high quality youth work practice, research and advocate on youth issues. We value our members and prioritise their needs.

**YACVic Rural** is our advocacy arm for young people in regional and rural communities and the rural youth sector, expanding on our state-wide advocacy to ensure the needs of young people living in regional communities are met.

Language contained in this document has been codesigned to reflect young people's preferences. For example, young people throughout consultations referred to the Eastern Victorian Fires 2019/20 as the 'Black Summer Bushfire's and young people and local community have reflected on their experiences as 'flame affected' or 'fire affected' to negate the need to elaborate on specific details of their experience.

YACVic is thankful for the support of everyone who contributed to this resource, including the project's youth-led Bushfire Recovery Working Group, and individuals who authored and edited this document. YACVic acknowledges that many similar resources related to youth participation already exist, and this document is intended to complement rather than replace the work of other youth organisations.

Level 2, 235 Queen Street Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

[www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au) | [info@yacvic.org.au](mailto:info@yacvic.org.au)

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# Contents

Introduction	4
<b>‘Having a Seat at the Table’ or ‘Having a Voice’?</b>	<b>5</b>
• At what tables should young people have a seat?	
• Beyond ‘hearing the voices of young people’	
• Consultation and codesign	
<b>Why do young people need a seat at the table?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Young People have the Right to be at the table</b>	<b>9</b>
• The benefits – For young people	
• The benefits – For the community	
• What does having a seat at the table mean to young people?	
<b>Language Matters!</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Resources for Engaging Young People</b>	<b>17</b>
• Pathways to Participation	
<b>The Do’s and Don’ts of youth engagement</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Youth Engagement Checklist</b>	<b>24</b>
Engaging young people in Disaster Recovery – Case Study	
<b>Citations</b>	<b>31</b>

# Introduction

YACVic was engaged by the Victorian Government, Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) to hear directly from young people and community members in regional and rural areas, about the response and recovery from the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires across Eastern Victoria, their experiences, and ideas moving forward through recovery, rebuilding and preparation for the future.

Young people are experts in their own lives and have important and equal contributions to make in bushfire recovery and rebuilding efforts. DET's and BRV's engagement of YACVic demonstrates an understanding that enabling young people's agency also contributes to their mental health and wellbeing in relation to the traumatic events. It is also important for community leaders to understand and embrace good practice in youth participation and creating ethical and safe experiences for young people.



YACVic conducted a wide series of consultations with young people in bushfire affected communities and it became clear that the many young people felt their voices were not being heard, valued or sought, especially young people who live in remote locations, young people facing multiple challenges, and young people from diverse backgrounds i.e. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people, Aboriginal young people, young people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ young people.

**"I can't get involved with [my local CRC] because you need a lot of experience." – Young Person, East Gippsland**

This resource aims to provide an accessible guide to assist committees, community leaders and other decision makers to ensure that young people are safely and meaningfully included in disaster management and recovery committees, decision-making, project design and implementation, governance and evaluation.

The guide explains why youth participation is important, the key principles you should follow, and resources for further assistance.

The guide aims to generate greater opportunities for young people to have their ideas heard and understood by policy makers and service providers when designing or reviewing disaster initiatives that directly impact them and their communities.

# ‘Having a Seat at the Table’ or ‘Having a Voice’?

Leaders who support young people and advocate for them to join leadership and community committees (have a seat at the table) and support them to speak up (have a voice) will empower young people to demonstrate their important and equal contributions in disaster recovery, resilience and rebuilding, efforts and ideas.

Young people have an important stake in the future, and a clear vision of what that future should look like. They want to speak up for that vision, even when they’re uncertain, and have it realised clearly and passionately so that others can see it, stand with them, and join them in achieving it. Therefore, if you are in a position to advocate for a young or new leader to have that seat, or support them in speaking up – take that responsibility seriously!

Building a path to a leadership role, using your voice and being the new person on the team is not easy, particularly for a young person, especially when they are driving change or sharing an unpopular point of view. Without support, this can be intimidating and disempowering.

Support, reassurance, and a strong dose of humility are essential; a young person needs to know there is a reason they’re in the seat and there is a lot they can contribute and learn if they use their voice. Encourage and support them to make it a habit to speak up and ask questions, and ask them for their ongoing feedback. These practices help them to continually hone their voice and build ongoing rapport and confidence.





## At what tables should young people have a seat?

### Community Recovery Committees

Community Recovery Committees (CRCs) keep local voices, know-how and expertise front and centre during recovery planning and delivery. Taking this place-based, community-led approach ensures projects, grants and support programs developed over the months and years following a disaster will be the right fit for that community. There are 21 CRCs across Eastern Victoria following the 2019/20 bushfire event.

### Management Committee / Board of Management

A management committee, also known as a 'council', or just a 'committee', consists of people elected by an organisation's members to represent and advance their interests.

### Advisory Board

A group of people who have been selected to bring their expertise to an organisation or initiative, and sometimes help champion it, by advising and supporting on any number of matters.

**"I hear a lot of adults saying 'what young people need is' but there is not a lot of opportunities for them to be involved or say what they want" – Young Person, Orbost**

## Beyond 'hearing the voices of young people'


Involving young people in co-designing and contributing to emergency management and disaster recovery is essential to ensure outcomes are relevant and responsive to the needs of young people. Despite this, many barriers exist to meaningful involvement. Young people are typically viewed as passive victims of disasters, however, in the last ten years the narrative has been shifting to include a focus on the capabilities of young people to contribute to all phases of emergency management.

### Consultation

Consulting with young people isn't simply asking young people to approve a youth project or service. Young people have broad interests and concerns. Just like any other community members, young people will have opinions on all issues that affect their community – not just on 'youth issues'. Consultations can be conducted via surveys, interviews, focus groups and workshops.

### Co-design

Co-design adds even more value – it is a participatory tool for problem-solving that brings those with technical expertise and lived experience together, on equal ground, to explore ideas and design solutions. Teams that include young people bring their lived experience, and often very valuable technical expertise too, into projects and critical decision making.



# Why do young people need a seat at the table?

Youth participation actively involves young people in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Youth participation is a way to remove barriers and allow young people to step into their potential in safe environments to learn, grow and contribute to strengthening communities. This is especially important in communities affected by disaster.

Everyone has the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect them; what these processes usually lack are the structures to enable young people to input and/or the relevant information and supports to feel confident in doing so.

Youth Participation as a construct is about values. Whose voice do we listen to? Whose voice do we value? Are we valuing the voice and contribution of young people?

**"Young people need to be involved as they are going to be here for the long-term, they have lots of ideas and it's just important." – Young Person, Mallacoota**

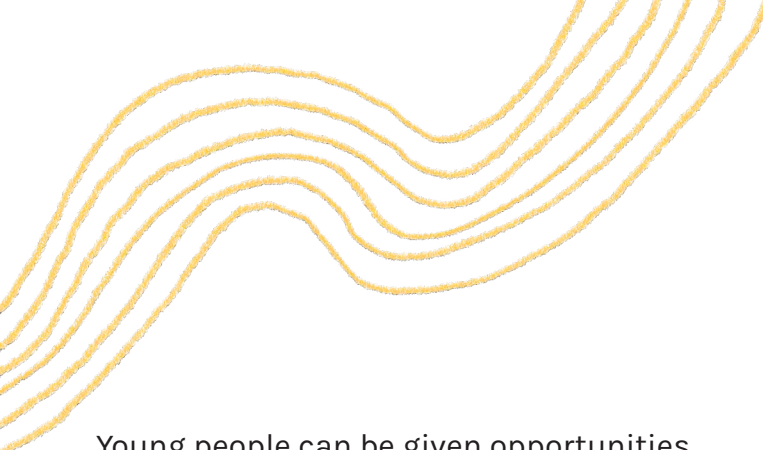
**NOTE:** This applies at a strategic or macro level, and not every young person can and should step into every single environment - it is important to consider the appropriateness of inviting young people to participate on an individual or micro level. However, the drive should be there to make environments as accessible as possible.

Excluding young people from community responses can result in them feeling disconnected and alienated, and lead to a lack of pride and engagement in their local town or area. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development and wellbeing, and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

Examples include:

- being consulted about their ideas and opinions.
- being supported to research issues that affect their lives.
- planning or leading community activities or events.
- taking part in youth committees or action groups.
- taking part in adult-defined decision-making bodies.





Young people can be given opportunities from a very early age to provide real and meaningful feedback on issues that are important to them. While the tools provided in this guide will improve youth participation and engagement, the most effective way to reduce barriers and increase participation is to make this a normal and expected experience, starting in early primary school.

Young people need to feel that they have been listened to, and to believe that their feedback is important and appreciated. They have the right to be included in decision making that impacts their lives - this includes listening to and acting on their feedback and actively involving them in initiatives regarding disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. They need to understand how their feedback has been used, and wherever possible the outcomes that have been achieved because of their involvement and contribution.

**"We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us"**

— Young Person, Corryong



# Young People have the Right to be at the table

"Young Victorians will have important insights about recovery to bring to the table – it's vital they have a way to have these ideas and concerns heard."

- Member for Northern Victoria Jaclyn Symes

## Participation is, on all levels, a human right:

### International - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

It is a human right for children and young people to be able to voice their opinion. Young people should be recognised as experts in their own lives and experiences. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account (Article 12). It also says that children have the right to get and to share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or to others (Article 13).

### Federal - National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Principle 2 in the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations state that children and young people should be informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and be taken seriously.

Organisations have an obligation to empower children and young people, and to uphold their human right to participate in decision-making that affects them.


### State - The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities

The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act established the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner and provides an overarching legislative framework designed to encourage and support a shared commitment towards children in Victoria.

Section 17 of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) recognises the family unit as a fundamental part of our society. It also recognises that children may need particular protection, to ensure the way they are treated is in their best interests. The Charter applies to public authorities in Victoria, such as state and local government departments and agencies, and people delivering services on behalf of the government. Section 18 of the Charter protects the right to take part in public life, whether directly or through a representative. It also protects the right to vote in state and local council elections, and to access public services.

### Victorian Child Safe Standards

All organisations in Victoria that provide services or facilities for children are required to comply with Child Safe Standards, to ensure that the safety of children is promoted, child abuse is prevented and



allegations of child abuse are properly responded to. The 11 Standards set out minimum requirements and outline the actions organisations must take to keep children and young people safe. They provide more clarity for organisations and are more consistent with Standards in the rest of Australia.

### **Sector level – Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector**

This eight-page booklet explains the Code's youth work practice responsibilities, issues around duty of care and legal obligations, and how to challenge unethical behaviour. The booklet unfolds into a poster showing the full youth work practice responsibilities.

### **Working with Children Check**

The Working with Children Check is a screening process for assessing or re-assessing people who work with, volunteer or care for children in Victoria. It is mandatory for all workers and volunteers working with children and young people.

### **Youth Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol**

The Protocol establishes a framework for Federal, State and Local Government emergency and recovery services and committees, institutions, local youth services, youth workers and others who engage with young people in disaster affected areas. It provides guidance on key matters for consideration and inclusion of young people in post-disaster recovery and rebuilding, and to ensure positive outcomes for young people aged 12-25 who have been affected directly and/or indirectly by a disaster.

If you have immediate safety concerns about a child or young person, please call 000.

If you have general safety concerns about a child or young person, please contact the Child Protection intake office where the child lives: <https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts>

### **Important resources to learn more:**

- **Child Safe Standards:**  
[ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety](https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safety)
  - **Code of Ethical Practice:**  
[yacvic.org.au/code-of-ethical-practice](https://yacvic.org.au/code-of-ethical-practice)
  - **Working with Children's Check:**  
[workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au](https://workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au)
  - **Youth Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol**  
[yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/Youth-Focused-Disaster-Recovery-Protocol-February-2020.pdf](https://yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/Youth-Focused-Disaster-Recovery-Protocol-February-2020.pdf)
  - **Child Protection:**  
[services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts](https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/child-protection-contacts)
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# The benefits – for young people

Young people can play a central role in determining how resources can be utilised to ensure the strongest outcomes. Young people can have a dedicated and specific role on local, state and national recovery committees and advisory bodies, and need to be appropriately supported to undertake these roles. It is vital that young people are considered and included in any economic and infrastructure planning / rebuilding on which a local community, state or national body may be working, and that their views are included in both immediate and long-term modelling and/or impact statements.

Giving such opportunities to young people to have a voice and be valued in their communities leads to them feeling connected and able to contribute to disaster prevention, preparedness and community recovery post disaster. Youth involvement leads to youth agency, a move beyond listening, to active engagement.

**"Develop opportunities for young people in [deidentified town\*] to meet with council to tell them what's going on here"**

– Young Person, East Gippsland

There are many benefits to providing these opportunities, including preventing young people from feeling marginalised and alienated, pre, during and post disaster.

Youth engagement and participation can provide significant benefits to young people, some of these benefits include:

- Increased self-esteem and empowerment
- New relationships
- Increased coping mechanisms and wellbeing
- Strengthened resiliency
- Increased ownership for one's own care
- Personal growth and identity development
- Increased critical thinking broadened and strengthened social networks
- Improved academic performance and reduced school dropout rates
- Enhanced leadership skills
- Greater control and empowerment over their lives
- Improved and more relevant services for young people
- Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

# The benefits – for the community

Involving young people in community disaster response and recovery ensures that their unique experiences and perspectives, and their often innovative ideas, are considered and included in planning and action. This creates richer and more relevant outcomes, that address the needs of all members of the community.

It also builds a culture of intergenerational cooperation, trust and respect – this culture will improve community safety, morale, cohesion and civic pride. Young people who are valued as active contributors to a community are more likely to serve their area or become local leaders.

Strong community ties can influence young people to remain in or return to their local area – sustaining the community and contributing to the area's long-term recovery, resilience and success. Involving young people sets great standards for any community – it's an essential part of an inclusive, democratic society!

**"We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us."**

– Young Person, Mallacoota

Youth engagement and participation can provide significant benefits to young people, some of these benefits include:

- Improved individual and community outcomes
- Stronger service systems that are flexible, responsive, inclusive, accountable and meets the needs of young people
- Improved trust between the community and policy makers
- Improved understanding of problems being faced by young people
- Increased public value for money, by distributing funding to programs and services that are required, which young people will use
- Removed negative stereotypes of young people
- Development of skilled workers
- Development of community pride and personal responsibility
- Better informed planning and decision making
- Better public policy
- A more engaged community
- A more inclusive and responsive community



# What does having a seat at the table mean to young people?

- Making a difference to their own lives and the lives of others
- Shaping decisions which will affect them, their peers and their communities
- Having new experiences
- Learning new skills or developing talents
- Professional learning or career opportunities
- Meeting new people or hanging out with friends

"Programs exactly like yours [YACVic's] need to be implemented in schools without doubt. As I definitely found it beneficial to reflect on a really, really hard time without feeling that I was being pushed to talk about it/judged."  
— Young Person, Orbost

"Young people need to be involved as they are going to be here for the long term, they have lots of ideas, and it's just important"  
— Young Person, Bairnsdale



# Language Matters!

What we say to and about young people has immediate and profound effects. Consider carefully the words you use to advocate for young people, and educate those around you to know why some words are more empowering than others.

**Youth** is best used as an adjective in phrases like ‘youth-led action’ or ‘youth-focussed report’ rather than as a noun which is used by media in predominantly negative reporting – ‘youths’ is particularly alienating. ‘Young people’ is a more respectful way to talk about a group or cohort.

**Engagement** should be used carefully, to ensure it does not sound othering (ie creating an ‘us and them’ dynamic). It can also suggest that it is the young people who are ‘disengaged’, which invites major assumptions about the young people, when the actual problem could be that the systems and activities are not engaging.

**Participation** is overused, paternalistic and hierarchical, but it is based on human rights and citizenship. It is often the best option. Many organisations aim to work towards partnership rather than participation, which focusses on creating a more equal relationship.

**Co-design** is a specific approach to participation, putting consumer experience at the centre of the solution design in partnership with those with the power to make change. Learn more about co-design here: [designkit.org/methods](https://designkit.org/methods)

**Pronouns** are words that refers to either the people talking (I or you) or someone/ something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, he, and this) without using their name. Pronouns like he, she and they specifically refer to the people that you are talking about. It is important to respect people’s pronouns. You can’t always know what someone’s pronouns are by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone’s pronouns is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for gender identity. [Learn more here](#)

**Flame Affected/Fire Affected** - Young people and local community often reflect on their experiences as ‘flame affected’ or ‘fire affected’, to negate the need to elaborate on specific details of their experience. Never push a young person into talking about their specific experiences, and be aware that if they do it may be triggering for them, and they may need support or debriefing.

**Inclusiveness or Inclusion** means making sure youth cohorts such as disabled young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds feel safe, respected and included.

**Diversity** - No young person is the same as another. Each has unique abilities, skills and talents, and different experiences to draw on, including experiences with institutions and people that hold power. They each also relate to other people, see the world and share their thoughts and feelings in different ways.

## Language can affect our experience

The way adults involve young people can be empowering or disempowering.

Think about ways to ensure that every young person can have a positive experience. Young people can feel disempowered and unsafe in organisations and environments where they experience discrimination, harassment or abuse on the basis of their culture, identity or background. They may also feel disempowered when organisations don't tailor supports to meet their unique abilities or needs.

Some groups of young people are more likely to experience disempowerment, discrimination, harm, or abuse. These include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Young people from culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, including refugees and migrants
- Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ+)
- Young people with disability.

## Cultural safety

Cultural safety is 'an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.' (Williams, R. 2008) To start conversations with Aboriginal people, find out who the Traditional Owner groups, Registered Aboriginal Party or Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisation is in your area, and seek their input. Recognise the impact of the past, and respect and embrace Aboriginal culture in every aspect of your organisation and activities.

Respect for Aboriginal cultures, values and practices is at the heart of creating a culturally safe organisation. Every organisation should create a physical environment that is respectful of Aboriginal culture as a first step.

The Victorian Government developed the Aboriginal Inclusion Framework to assist with this, posing questions that relate to Leadership, Policy, Programs, and Communications. The Framework is available on the Aboriginal Affairs' website: [aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au](http://aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au)

The Commission for Children and Young People has also created a tipsheet for creating cultural safety for Aboriginal children [here](#). We've linked this and other resources below.

### Find out more here:

- **Co-Design:** [designkit.org/methods](http://designkit.org/methods)
- **Pronouns:** [Brophy Family & Youth Services](#)
- **Aboriginal Inclusion Framework** [aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au](http://aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au)

### • Tip sheets on Cultural Safety

- [ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/tipsheet-cultural-safety-aboriginal-children.pdf](http://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/tipsheet-cultural-safety-aboriginal-children.pdf)

# Strategies for inclusion

## Your organisation can use these strategies to ensure your organisation or group demonstrates a zero tolerance of discrimination:

- ensure your policies and procedures specifically address cultural inclusion, sensitivity and competency
- provide training and development on cultural sensitivity and competency
- be respectful, inclusive and welcoming of families from a range of backgrounds, abilities and identities
- ask children, young people and families about their culture and cultural support needs
- provide an access key to your organisation, meeting or event, that will explain to disabled young people what is in place to make it accessible, and provide a way for them to communicate their access needs
- recognise occasions which are important to different cultures, and accommodate suitable dietary requirements
- ensure the physical environment reflects a positive and welcoming approach to diverse cultures, identities and abilities through decoration and artwork
- employ staff who are representative of the diversity of your local community
- employ staff who display cultural sensitivity and cultural competency
- ask families and young people about their preferred format for the provision of information, including translation or interpreting into community languages and audio-visual formats

- ensure complaint and grievance processes are easily understood and provided in culturally relevant and sensitive ways
- ensure promotional materials for your group or event reflect diversity of cultures, identities and abilities

## Trauma

A traumatic event is something that threatens your life or safety, or the lives of people around you. It is an experience that is stressful and has a significant impact on your emotional state. Experiencing some trauma is common, with up to 65% of Australians experiencing a traumatic event at some stage in their lives (Copeland et al. 2007; McLaughlin et al. 2013). Trauma can be especially challenging for young people as they are still learning about themselves, establishing their identity, and gaining independence. Young people respond to traumatic events in many different ways, and this depends on their past experiences, personality, levels of support, level of exposure to trauma and the nature of the event. Not all disaster events will necessarily have a traumatic impact on young people in a community but being informed and prepared to respond is the responsibility of everyone in care of young people.

## RESOURCE HINT

Headspace have developed a number of resources supporting young people after exposure to traumatic event:

[headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/supporting-a-young-person-after-exposure-to-a-traumatic-event/](https://headspace.org.au/friends-and-family/supporting-a-young-person-after-exposure-to-a-traumatic-event/)



# Resources for engaging young people

There are lots of different ways you can engage and involve young people in committees, organisations and communities. These don't have to be limited to formal, structured processes. In fact, less formal approaches are sometimes better. Creating a range of different opportunities will help build relationships with young people and make them feel they can contribute.

## Ways to involve young people

- Advisory or reference groups - ensuring young people have a seat at the table and a dedicated role
- Community mapping - supporting young people to document local resources or activities that are relevant to them
- Consultations
- Commissioning - supporting young people to identify local needs and decide how to use available resources to best meet them
- Participatory design (or Co-design) - involving young people in the design stage of a project or piece of research, or in the design, event, activity or venue.
- Co-production - working in equal partnership with young people to plan, deliver and review services and activities for young people
- [Celebrations](#) - parties, events or BBQs to mark special occasions
- Decision making groups
- Interest groups - either online or real world
- Mentoring - either adult-youth or peer-to-peer. [Check out the Youth Mentoring Hub](#)
- Performances - of music, drama, poetry or dance
- [Research](#) - into issues facing the community or organisation
- Skills-sharing - younger and older people teaching each other new skills

**"We need to be listened to and confirmed before the event as to what the event is actually about and what the conversation is meant to achieve so we can be listened to."**

— Young Person, Mallacoota

## RESOURCE HINT

Yerp is a resource to help you start and make change: [yerp.yacvic.org.au](http://yerp.yacvic.org.au)  
**Youth Mentoring Hub** is a resource on all things mentoring: [youthmentoringhub.org.au](http://youthmentoringhub.org.au)

## Why young people will get involved

Remember, young people will get involved in organisations or community groups for a combination of different reasons. YACVic's Yerp resource explains some of these reasons.

Whatever their reasons, each young person will be looking for an opportunity that:

- Making a difference to their own lives and the lives of others
- Is meaningful, with a clear, realistic purpose and outcomes
- Challenges them with real responsibilities
- Is enjoyable!
- Values their skills, knowledge, and experience through remuneration

**"The awareness campaign created a culture where people are encouraged to be good, to help others, we saw that with the fires, acts of kindness helps others"**

— Young Person, Sarsfield



## Creating trauma-informed interactions and environments

Disaster events will not necessarily have a traumatic impact on everyone in a community. However, it is important to remember when working with anyone from a disaster impacted area, particularly young people and vulnerable groups, that trauma-informed care is essential to successful participation.

Trauma-informed care is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. (Hoppers, Bassuk and Oliver, 2010)

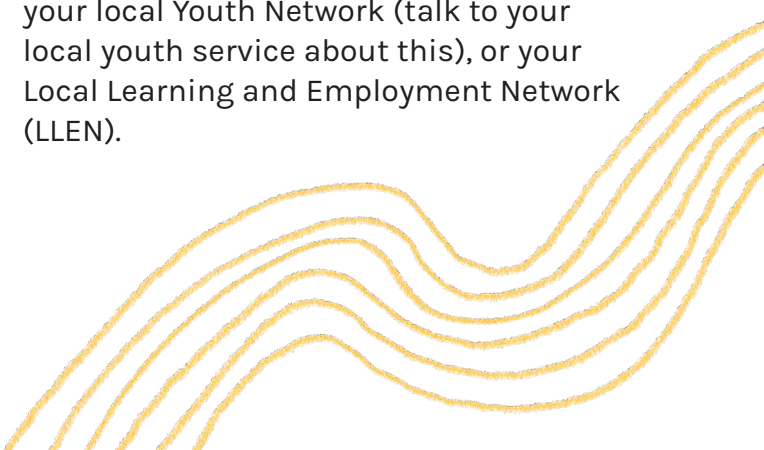
Key elements include: Trauma awareness, promote safety, rebuild control, focus on strengths, promote connection and belief in recovery.

It is important to embed trauma informed practice within health and human and recovery service systems, to provide appropriate trauma-informed care services to those needing them. For further information and education opportunities: [www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery/](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery/)

**TIP:** Think about how you can contact the diverse groups of young people in your community – are there other organisations that work with specific groups related to age, gender, culture, or sexuality? Can you collaborate or partner with another group or organisation?

## How to get the word out

Getting the word out means communicating and promoting the opportunities you want to offer young people. There are a few things you can do to take the information to young people:

- Get young people involved in your promotional activities, for example through designing or distributing materials. Directly including young people in any articles or stories that you are producing for newsletters or newspapers in promotional material gives strength to your initiative and demonstrates your commitment to participation.
  - Advertise in the local press and distribute posters or flyers in local public spaces young people use.
  - Use social media to promote the opportunities, you're offering.
  - Ask young people who are interested to spread the word to their friends. Don't know where young people hang out, or how to contact them? Your local youth service can help.
  - Promote through other organisations, networks or partnerships.
  - Speak with organisations, networks and services that young people access, such as schools, TAFEs, universities, libraries, or sports centres. Speak with networks who are connected to young people, like your local Youth Network (talk to your local youth service about this), or your Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN).
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## Recruiting young people

Involving young people in recruiting others will help make things more inclusive and exciting others.

- Young people will have great ideas on how other young people can be recruited – where to go and how to make it attractive to them to be involved.
- Young people may have a greater sense of ownership if they are involved in the recruitment or selection processes.
- The presence of young people already in the project or group can make other young people more comfortable to join in.

## Tips for successful promotion

- Focus on ‘what’s in it for me’ through a young person’s lens. Will it lead to opportunities? Will it be fun? Will I meet other like-minded young people?
- Use online and offline methods – in other words, make good use of social media and email lists and newsletters such as [YACVic Announce](#), but don’t forget that posters, postcards, snail mail and flyers can also be effective.
- Speak directly with young people at established youth groups to talk about opportunities and answer questions.
- Make the information accessible and easily understood – [read this article on communicating with young people](#) for some help.

- Involve young people in the design of any promotional materials you use – this will make them appeal to other young people. There are lots of young people who have skills in art, design, writing, marketing and social media – make use of them!
- Build good relationships with the local community, so parents, guardians and other community members are aware of the opportunities you’re promoting and can support young people to engage with your opportunities (but make sure adults don’t interfere too much!).
- Remove barriers that may prevent young people getting involved – considering disability and cultural access, time, costs, space and diverse needs will help you to [really support young people](#) to join in.

### Learn more about...

**YACVic’s Announce Newsletter:**  
[yacvic.org.au/sign-up-for-our-newsletters](http://yacvic.org.au/sign-up-for-our-newsletters)

**Yerp - Communicating with young people**  
[yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-relationships/involve-young-people/communicating-with-young-people](http://yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-relationships/involve-young-people/communicating-with-young-people)

**Yerp - How to really support young people:**  
[yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-skills/involve-young-people/how-to-really-support-young-people](http://yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-skills/involve-young-people/how-to-really-support-young-people)

## Building passion and maintaining interest

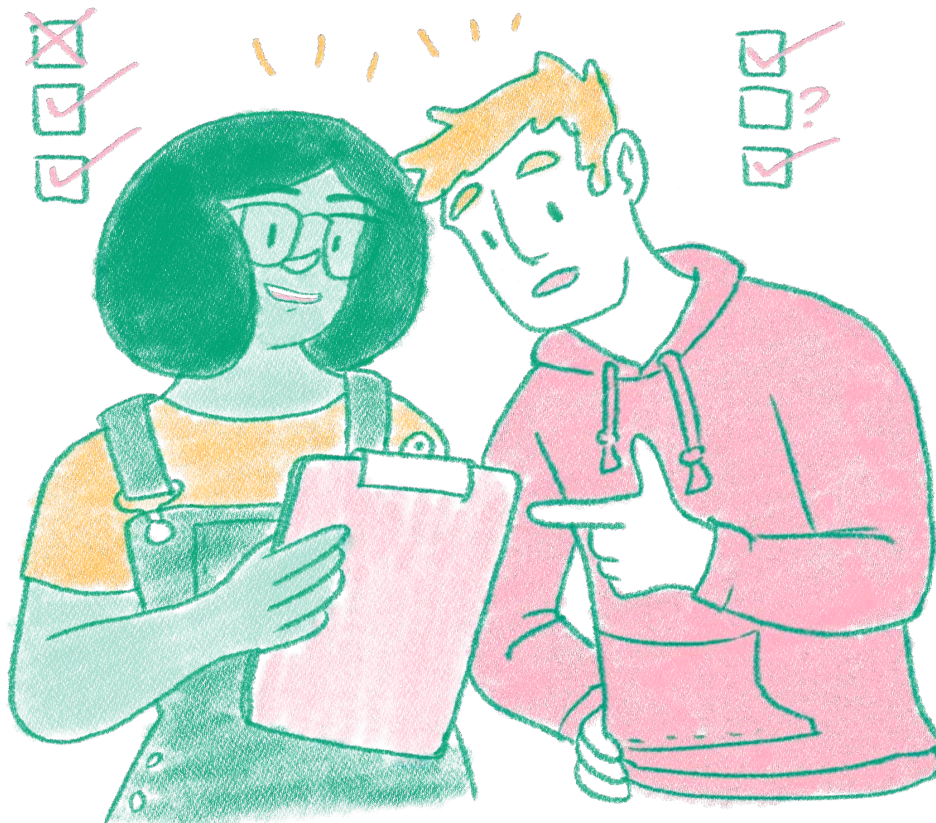
Young people will keep coming back if they are having fun, developing good relationships with others, and feel like they're learning something or doing something that matters to them and their community.

Being passionate about something will make young people more motivated to keep doing it. Young people build passion when there are:

- [clear goals](#)
- difficult but achievable challenges
- safe environments for them to be heard and supported
- opportunities for immediate, constructive feedback.

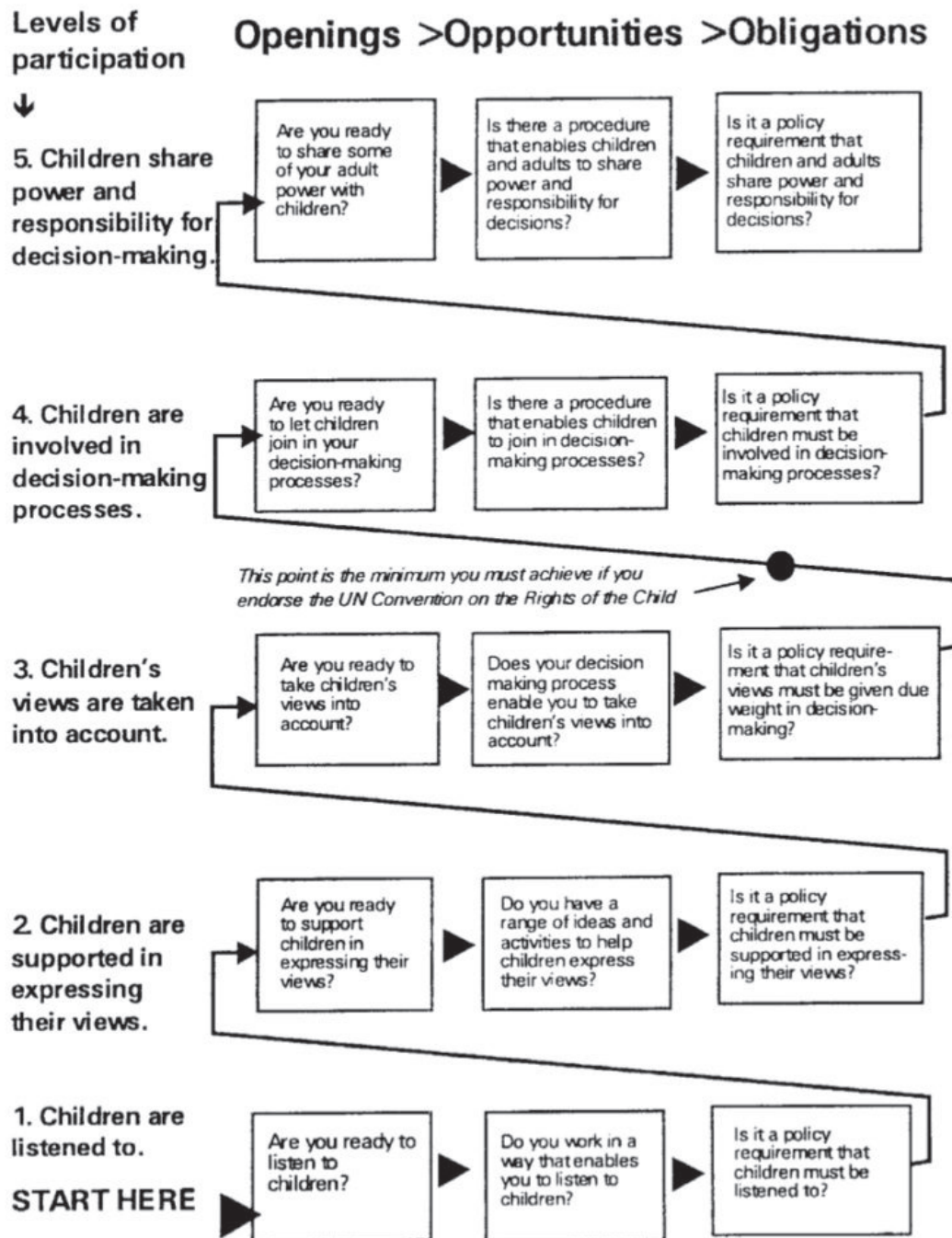
**"We should have had a big debrief, group chats for young people that were facilitated."**

— Young Person, Orbost



# Pathways to Participation

Harry Shier's Pathways to Participation model describes five stages of youth participation, leadership, and decision-making in organisations and communities. This framework can help organisations and groups to identify what research and upskilling they need to do in order to build empowering environments for young people to thrive.



Above: The original illustration of Harry Shier's Pathways to Participation model as it appeared in *Children & Society* in 2001.

# The Do's and Don'ts of engaging young people

## The Do's

- ✓ Encourage and provide pathways for young people to engage from an early age
- ✓ Ask young people for their opinions regularly
- ✓ Communicate/promote engagement opportunities
- ✓ Remove physical and cultural barriers that may prevent inclusion and access
- ✓ Provide young people info on purpose of the engagement and expectations
- ✓ Make spaces and activities accessible for different abilities
- ✓ Let young people have a say and listen to them
- ✓ Use multiple engagement techniques to meet needs of young people
- ✓ Be flexible in your engagement to meet needs of young people
- ✓ Show appreciation for the contributions of young people
- ✓ Consider using incentives to acknowledge participation
- ✓ Include them in establishing group guidelines or agreement for engagement and participation
- ✓ Tell young people how their feedback will be used
- ✓ Use language they can understand and explain complex or adult terms
- ✓ Provide contact details and ways that the young person can obtain further information following the consultations
- ✓ Explain decision making processes and timelines and be transparent about any restrictions on involvement
- ✓ Build trust with young people
- ✓ Follow through with what you say and be honest
- ✓ Share feedback and results with young people
- ✓ Take young people and their opinions seriously
- ✓ Be open to all of the opinions of young people and reinforce there are no "wrong answers"
- ✓ Respect the privacy and anonymity of young people
- ✓ Make engagement fun, interesting and relevant for young people
- ✓ Make sure young people feel safe and comfortable in the space
- ✓ Act on what young people tell you will make them safe - Child Safe Standards
- ✓ Be understanding and respectful when discussing sensitive topics

## The Don'ts

- ✗ Make young people feel scared, nervous, or embarrassed
- ✗ Retraumatise young people to meet your own objectives
- ✗ Ignore young people
- ✗ Lessen or reject a young person's opinion
- ✗ Force or intimidate young people to engage
- ✗ Keep the results of engagement a secret
- ✗ Be boring
- ✗ Assume you can engage all young people the same way
- ✗ Judge or disrespect young people or their views
- ✗ Shame or belittle young people
- ✗ Breach a young person's trust
- ✗ React negatively to young people or their opinions
- ✗ Be dishonest about how feedback will be used
- ✗ Be unrealistic about the impact of their feedback
- ✗ Raise young people's expectations of what can be achieved from the engagement process
- ✗ Think all young people are the same, or that they will engage the same way
- ✗ Let others intimidate or control a group engagement process
- ✗ Use jargon or acronyms that young people may not be familiar with
- ✗ Follow through with what you say and be honest
- ✗ Forget to share feedback and results with young people
- ✗ Try to use slang to make yourself look cooler or dumb down how you speak to a young person
- ✗ Play young people off against each other

**"This was a place where [I thought I was] so not valued; [we were] being made to feel that we were in the way."**

— Young Person, Orbost

# Youth Engagement Checklist

## Engagement Purpose

- Are you clear about the purpose of the engagement?
- Have young people been involved in the planning?
- Are you clear about the questions you will ask?
- Have you determined what level of engagement is required? (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating or empowering)
- Have you asked the young people how they would like to be communicated with and determined the most appropriate way to engage with them? (face to face, SMS, survey)?
- Have you decided how you will communicate with young people about their role in the engagement activity? (e.g. managing expectations)

## Location

- If a location is required, is it familiar to the young people participating?
- Is the location appropriate for all participants (e.g. access, facilities, travel, etc)?
- Is the location youth friendly (i.e. comfortable and safe with appropriate equipment, etc.)?
- Do young people need transport support to be able to attend this venue?

## Facilitators

- Do the facilitator(s) have appropriate qualifications and skills? (e.g. Working with Children's Check, trained in active listening, non-judgemental, encourage participation, can manage conflict, trauma informed)
- Are there opportunities for young people to co-facilitate or lead some activities?
- Do the facilitator(s) have existing rapport with the young people?
- If the facilitator(s) are not known to the young people, will safe and inclusive trust building activities be used?

## Timing

- Have you determined the duration of the engagement activity? (e.g. one-off, ongoing, or over a specific time period)
- Have timing considerations such as holidays and religious festivals been taken into account?
- Does the day, time and date suit the participants? (e.g. after or during school, sporting activities)

## Budget

- What is the available budget (if there is one)?
- What are all the resources required to run the event?
- Have you considered all resources that may be required and the available budget? (e.g. cost of facilitator, location expenses, materials to conduct engagement activities, acknowledgment of participation and promotion of activities, etc)
- Can you get any of these resources donated by another organisation or youth service?



## Participants

- Have you determined the target group(s)?
- Is the purpose of the engagement relevant?
- Have you considered how the topic relates to young people and is your approach it easy to understand?
- If young people are the main contributors, have you spoken to them before other stakeholders?
- Have you decided how to recruit participants?
- Have you determined how you will ensure a diverse range of young people are consulted? (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, abilities, locations, socio-economic status, etc)
- Have you determined how many young people you would like to recruit/consult with?
- Have you engaged with relevant local organisations (e.g. service providers, community groups, schools, etc) to facilitate access to groups of young people?
- Have you obtained the necessary consent (young people and parents/guardians) to participate?

## Past Learnings

- Have the questions you would like to ask been asked before (this can avoid survey fatigue and trauma)?
- Has the group of young people participated in similar engagement activities before?
- Do you know, and are you building on, the outcomes of previous engagements?
- Is this engagement necessary?
- What are the lessons you can learn from the past engagement experiences?

## Engagement

- Have the questions you would like to ask been asked before (this can avoid survey fatigue and trauma)?
- Are the consultation / engagement methods appropriate for the age group(s) you are working with?
- Have you considered ways to encourage all young people (who have been identified as participants) to fully participate, and increase their confidence while participating?
- Will young people find the planned activities fun and rewarding?
- Are questions clear, age appropriate and free from jargon?
- Has a suitable timeframe been allocated to complete the activity?
- Is there flexibility in the engagement strategy to enable a variety of engagement options to enable a number of young people to participate, or to change your approach if it's not working?
- Have you considered whether an anonymous engagement process is required?
- Is it appropriate for parents/carers to participate directly in the engagement process? If not, how will you manage them?
- If gathering young people together, will you provide catering. What food do young people want at the event?
- If gathering people together, how will you do an Acknowledgement of Country?

## **Ethical Considerations**

- Have you provided the young person with age-appropriate information that allows them to make an informed choice and provide their informed consent to participate?
- Do the young people understand this information and are they able to understand the purpose and consequences of participating?
- Is the young person aware that their participation is voluntary and they can stop participating at any time?
- Is parental/carer consent required? If yes, has a method been put in place to obtain this consent? (e.g. the publishing of recordings or pictures and/or young people who can't obtain informed consent)
- Is consent required from the organisation that has responsibility for the young person at the time of the consultation? (e.g. school principal, parent/guardian)
- Where necessary, have parents or carers been informed about the engagement process, and the young person's participation and role?
- Child safe: have you provided an explanation of your commitment to child safe standards and how people can raise a complaint or query if needed?
- Have you determined how information will be stored?
- Have privacy and confidentiality issues been considered where appropriate?
- Are staff aware of their legal obligations around privacy, mandatory reporting and information sharing?
- Have you informed the young people how their feedback will be used?
- Be realistic about what is achievable from the engagement process. Have you determined how you will provide feedback to participants on the outcome of the engagement activity?
- Have you considered how feedback from young people will be stored?

## **Disclosures**

- Is there a documented process in place for dealing with disclosures?
- Are facilitators aware of what to do if they see or hear something that raises concerns about a young person's safety?
- If the discussion/activity might trigger trauma, are there supports for the young people?

## **Evaluation**

- Establish a way for participants to provide their feedback about the event/workshop. (This could be informal or formal, depending on what you feel will work best given the timeframe and what you're trying to achieve.)

## **Acknowledgement**

- Have you determined how you will acknowledge the contribution of young people's time and expertise? (e.g. award, certificate, remuneration or voucher, etc)

# Further Training to support youth participation

## Youth Engagement and Participation (YACVic)

Find out how to involve young people in decision-making processes meaningfully/ in a way that suits your needs. Examining theory and practice, this workshop uses interactive strategies for participants to reflect on how your work impacts young people, and how to engage young people's voices and perspectives throughout. Participants will commence development of a plan to ensure youth voice is included in key aspects of strategic and operational decision making, project design and delivery, governance, and evaluation.

Participants will be equipped with the fundamental theories, strategies, and resources to help engage young people in bushfire recovery work. This will strengthen the voices and participation of young people in the work of organisations and in the wider community whilst increasing the confidence of participants to work alongside young people.

### Benefits

- Understand fundamental benefits of youth engagement
- Support to embed the voice of young people within your work
- Learn more about YACVic's model of participation
- Share good stories, and workshop any challenges they may currently be facing
- Graduates are invited to join the Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN)

**RESOURCE HINT:** Yerp is a valuable toolkit to support young people to have an important role in shaping the present and future of Victoria. Head to [yerp.yacvic.org.au](http://yerp.yacvic.org.au) to find out more.

## Child Safe Standards (YACVic)

In Victoria, Child Safe Standards aim to protect children and young people from abuse in organisations, including physical violence, sexual offences, serious emotional or psychological abuse and/or neglect.

All organisations that provide services or facilities for children under 18 must implement the Victorian Child Safe Standards. The standards were introduced by the Victorian Government in response to the 2013 Parliamentary Betrayal of Trust Inquiry, which found that while many children were safe in organisations, there were inadequate and inconsistent approaches to child safety in organisations across Victoria.

The standards aim to drive cultural change so that keeping children safe from abuse is at the forefront of all practice.

From 1 January 2016, organisations that deal directly with children and young people must adhere to the standards. From 1 January 2017, the standards came into effect for other organisations that provide services or facilities for children but receive little or no government funding, such as sporting groups and child entertainment providers.

Basics of the eleven Child Safe Standards which, under the Victorian Government Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, are compulsory for all Victorian organisations that provide services or facilities for children and young people. [yacvic.org.au/child-safe-standards](http://yacvic.org.au/child-safe-standards)

For more details on the Child Safe Standards see the [Commission for Children and Young People \(CCYP\) website](http://www.ccypp.org.au).

## Code of Ethical Practice (YACVic)

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector (the Code) is a framework to help people who work or engage with young people to think through the ethical dilemmas that will arise. It is not prescriptive, because each situation will be different, but helps work through right or wrong, and what to do. The Code is based on human rights, and includes a set of youth work principles and ethical practice responsibilities. It supports, but does not replace, legal responsibilities.

The Code of Ethical Practice training strengthens youth work practice and how workers and volunteers interact with and support young people.

This workshop covers the foundational theories and guidance for using the Code in organisations with opportunities for discussion and reflective practice as well as strategies for developing ethical practice in participants role/organisation.

### Benefits

- Why is a Code of Ethical Practice so important for the youth sector?
- What are ethics anyway?
- Background to the Code
- Youth work Principles
- Youth work Practice Responsibilities
- How do I deal with an ethical dilemma at work?
- Graduates are invited to join the Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN)

## Mental Health First Aid

The Youth Mental Health First Aid Course is for adults working or living with adolescents (those aged between 12 and 18 years), however, the course can be relevant for those helping people who are a little younger or older. This course is particularly suitable for parents, teachers, sports coaches, and youth workers.

### What the course covers:

The course teaches adults how to assist adolescents who are developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. Course participants learn about adolescent development, the signs and symptoms of the common and disabling mental health problems in young people, where and how to get help when a young person is developing a mental illness, what sort of help has been shown by research to be effective, and how to provide first aid in a crisis situation.

To find a local course near you visit:

<https://mhfa.com.au/cms/youth-course-information>

# Engaging young people in Disaster Recovery – A Case Study

## Young people making their mark on a community's disaster recovery and long-term future - Quinn Obran and Errol Obran

Our community in Corryong in the Upper Murray has been in a stage of recovery ever since the 2019-20 bushfires, where huge amounts of farmland and bushland were destroyed by flames, and the town was evacuated.

After the fires, our community re-opened we were flooded with services and supports. Psychologists, counsellors, government officials, bushfire recovery agencies, you name it; suddenly, we had these different options for supports and heaps of organisations offering to run different programs for us.

It was so promising, but then COVID-19 hit, and it created a greater challenge. But we kept going, and the communities in the Upper Murray started up their Community Recovery Committees to start community conversations and began chipping away again. As those conversations began, various communities raised concerns that young people weren't being heard.

So, through the Corryong Neighbourhood Centre, we started a Youth Working Group that was run by young people, for young people in Corryong to have their say. With the support of Bushfire Recovery Victoria, it was the first platform for young people to have input on the decisions made about community recovery.

There were heaps of challenges, as often young people aren't perceived as experts in their own lives. But the youth today will be the people that will reap the most benefits long-term from any decisions made now, so youth advocacy within a small community is important.

The other hurdle we faced was that not many people, let alone young people understand how bushfire and disaster recovery works. Many of the young people we recruited had never been in a committee. We didn't know how much money was available for access, or how to understand what other youth wanted, how to advocate for funding.

You have to build young people's skills and help them advocate for themselves, so that's why we partnered with Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), the peak body for young people and the youth sector. YACVic ran workshops on advocacy, youth participation and how to speak up for ourselves.

They also involved us in consultations around bushfire recovery and created a safe space for young people to be included. We had so many ideas, and now we could bring them to the wider community.

We established our group's identity and spread the word through t-shirts and beanies and giving it to young people who showed up (even if it was just once!). Now young people are having input on two exciting projects: redeveloping the current skate park so young people use it and we have five amazing 13-14-year-old boys working with Towong Shire, BRV and other recovery committees to revamp the Playles Hill Park for the community. These young people are from groups who typically are really hard to recruit and involve, but they can see the impact that this group can have for the community and have embraced us.

For young people who aren't interested or involved in popular social activities, we've also started doing a range of other activities to get them connected, like dungeons and dragons here! It's through these other activities that we also engage on community recovery outside of formal meetings. They also want to do a youth magazine to give young people the opportunity to share their story.

All of this has been interesting, difficult and rewarding to set-up, but our community has still been mourning. Mental health has been a huge challenge in our community, with Corryong losing too many young people in the past 18 months. Young people growing up in our parts are typically isolated from regional and urban facilities but if you add the stress of the bushfires and finding the strength to bounce back, to having to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, it hasn't been easy being young. All of your expectations around growing up, school, uni, making friends have been thrown out the window.

Our response has been to get young people to create a platform that encourages youth to understand the importance of their voice in benefiting the community, and ensure young people are connected to support services. We have created heaps of opportunities like snow trips, mystery tours, and other activities where young people from across our farming communities can connect. Our hope is for young people to want to be a part of community decisions and development and have a real influence on decisions the community makes.

Being the first youth working group, young people were reluctant to join because it had never happened before. We're allowing the youth, as well as the broader community to gain an understanding of where youth involvement can enhance the decisions within our town, and as we continue to progress with the working group, the importance of youth partnerships will continue to be greater acknowledged.

Limited professional avenues and educational opportunities means young people often have to leave town to find these. This impacts townies and farming families too. If more young people are involving themselves in the local happenings and are having their voices heard, young people will build skills for the future and community development. By enabling a platform where youth can have a say in projects and decision making in town, it may enhance their desire to move back and establish a lifestyle here post further educations, as it may strengthen their connection to home - which thus, may help promote the town's economy.

Young people aren't just important for our community's future, they're important for our present. That's a silver lining that all disaster-affected communities can all take from the immense challenges we have faced over the past 18 months.

Errol Obran is a youth worker at Corryong Neighbourhood House. Quinn Obran is a student who was a part of YACVic's Bushfire Recovery Working Group and the Corryong Youth Advisory Group. Story by Thomas Feng, Youth Affairs Council Victoria

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# Fact Sheet: Engaging, Including and Consulting with Young People

*How to engage young people, including young people from diverse backgrounds, through building mutual trust and respect. Includes tools and tips on running effective and engaging workshops and consultations.*

**“It’s important that young people can have a space to suggest how they can be involved” – Young Person, Bairnsdale**

**Consulting** with young people involves creating conversations about their opinions and experiences. Consultation can take place in various ways – including **forums, focus groups, reference groups, workshops, surveys, interviews, and peer research**. However young people are consulted, **they need to feel safe to express themselves openly, and that their contributions are valued, respected, and acknowledged.**

Just like any other community member, **young people have opinions on all issues that affect their community, not just on ‘youth issues’**. Empowering them to participate will assist in your work, and enable them to become future community leaders.

Youth consultation in disaster recovery processes will help you:

- **gather** and understand **new and unique perspectives**;
- make **better, more informed decisions**;
- provide **more suitable services and events**; and
- **strengthen community connections**.

## Planning a consultation

Successful consultations are well planned. **Involving young people right from the start** in design and delivery will make the whole consultation **more engaging, relevant and accessible**. It will also help with **attracting and engaging young people to participate**.

You’ll need to decide **who will be the best person** - or people - to carry out the consultation. Will it be someone from your organisation or someone independent? Could you **partner with a youth service or agency**? Can you **support young people to design and lead the consultation**? Whoever you choose, they must enjoy working with young people, **treat them with respect** and understand how to **communicate effectively with them**.

If you are running a broader community consultation, you can **use the same techniques** to ensure that **young people feel welcome and included, and safe and supported to speak up** and contribute their insights.

## Responding to needs

To ensure the consultation is **inclusive and accessible**, take time to consider how you can **address the needs of participants** and **really support young people** to be involved.

Be aware that **young people’s previous experiences** might impact on their participation in the consultation. Will it bring up **personal or potentially distressing issues**? Will they be intimidated or feel unsafe? How will you store young people’s information? Thinking about **ethics, safeguarding and consent** will help you plan **how you’ll respond** if a participant tells you something about their wellbeing or safety that you should act on.



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## Consultation methods

There are different ways you can carry out consultations. The best method for you (or combination of methods) will depend on your circumstances such as time, connections and resources you have.

### Individuals:

- Structured – surveys (on- and off-line), interviews, internet/social media discussions, hypothetical stories or situations
- Informal – casual conversations, comments/suggestion boxes

### Groups:

- Structured – forums, reference groups, peer consultations, arts programs, contacting young people's groups or organisations.
- Informal – group casual conversations, graffiti board, postcards, vox pops.

### Consulting with groups

A facilitator should direct group conversations, and give everyone an equal opportunity to speak. Think about how you could word things so that both young people and the community will understand. To make young people feel safe and comfortable, establish clear ground-rules together, from the start – like 'everyone should be heard and respected' or 'this discussion is confidential'. It's important to build trust between the consultant and the participants, and between participants, so keep the atmosphere light and informal where possible.

If the session covers a sensitive topic, or may trigger past traumas for participants, it is a good idea to partner with a local community organisation that has the expertise to manage such conversations and appropriately support participants.

### Longer consultations

Journey to recovery considers that **people respond** to disaster in **different ways** and **over different time frames**. Responses can range from feeling heroic and a sense of community cohesion, to disappointment, anger and frustration as clean-up and reconstruction commence. It is important to realise that **recovery actions are not necessarily linear nor sequential**, so people and communities may move through these phases at different paces, meaning they are ready for new recovery actions at different times. If consultations are held over a long period, use these strategies to keep young people engaged.

- Provide regular updates
- Celebrate efforts and gains, big or small
- Broaden young people's roles to engage them at different levels

### Incentives

Incentives can encourage young people to participate, and/or **provide recognition** for their **time, effort** and **expertise**.

**Young people might have to choose between attending your consultation and paid work commitments.**

You might offer to **pay** young people's **travel expenses**, or **compensate young people** with payment or a gift voucher.

This is **especially important** when **young people** might be **contributing alongside other community members participating as part of their paid employment**, which can create a **power imbalance**.

## Afterwards

**Create opportunities** for participants to **debrief**, especially if **personal** or **potentially distressing issues** have been raised. **Feed back** to young people and **acknowledge their contributions**.

Explain how the information they provided will be used. **Show them** the **outcomes** of the **consultation**. What **real impact** have they made? **Provide them with a copy of a report, or evidence that demonstrates outcomes**. A **thank you** email or letter will always be **well received!**

**Avoid over-consulting** with the same young people. There are **lots of young people out there**, who have **differing views and ideas!** Your local youth service can help you find them. **Deidentify** and **share** your findings with others so that **they can benefit** from what **young people have said** and use this to **develop their initiatives**.

# Fact Sheet: Opportunities for Young People in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery

*Information and ideas to explore regarding how young people might contribute to disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts, from participation in Community Recovery Committees, to consulting on issues of concern to young people, to leading community rebuilding projects.*

There are lots of different ways you can engage and involve young people in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. These don't have to be limited to formal, structured processes. Creating a range of opportunities will help build relationships with young people and make them feel they can contribute.

## Designated positions on Community Recovery Committees (CRCs)

Having a designated position/s for a young person/s on a CRC is important. Young people are not just the future, they have a lived experience of what being a local community member is right now, and bring unique ideas and perspectives.

Young people have direct access to their young peers who may not have the opportunity to contribute to community planning and recovery processes. Excluding young people from community responses can make them feel disconnected and alienated, and lead to a lack of pride and engagement in their local town or area. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development and wellbeing, and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

Young people may need to be encouraged to put themselves forward, and once selected, should be supported to make sure they feel welcome and equal, and understand the CRC processes and what is expected of them.

[Find your local Community Recovery Committee here](#)

## Consulting with groups

Youth Advisory Groups or consultation groups bring young people together to share their experiences, and co-design solutions to the challenges they face, in a safe and supportive environment.

Most local councils in Victoria provide youth services and facilitate a Youth Council or other youth-led and coordinated program that provides local young people with the opportunity to work with local government to meet the needs and enhance opportunities for young people. To find out what exists in your area, first contact your local council's youth services team. They can also give advice for establishing a group yourself.

## Youth-led art, music, and cultural events

Hosting public activities and events to bring communities together and attract visitors back is an important step towards recovery for the whole community, especially young people. Centring young people at these events can assist in making them safe, fun and engaging. Whether it's a community BBQ or a youth photo exhibition at your local gallery, young people want to come together and connect with their community.

FReeZA is a fantastic Victorian Government program that gives young people aged 12-25 the chance to organise, lead and perform live music, dance parties and other events. [Learn more here](#)

## Volunteering Programs

Junior Programs boost volunteer emergency services capacity in local communities. Many programs exist within the CFA, SES, and Ambulance. Young people receive accredited, recognised training as part of their role, ranging from first aid, general rescue, chainsaw operations, community education, media training and much more. They also gain leadership and teamwork skills, confidence and a greater knowledge and understanding of disasters. Find out more below:

- [State Emergency Service](#)
- [Country Fire Authority](#)
- [St Johns Ambulance](#)

## Work Experience

Giving young people opportunities to undertake meaningful work experience adds value to the future of the local workforce and to initiatives regarding disaster preparedness, response and recovery. In these roles, young people need to be given real tasks, treated with respect, and trusted to do the job well. This will give them a taste of working life and help them learn new skills that aren't taught in the classroom, including:

- Solving real-life problems and seeing the impact of their work
- Researching market conditions and learning how they affect businesses
- Communicating with different people with different skill sets
- Learning about new technologies and how they're used in the workplace; and
- Working in different roles to see what they entail on a day-to-day basis

## Design workshops and events

Working with young people to design and rebuild community spaces and facilities is key to making them accessible. Young people can have great ideas for municipal planning, footpath development, libraries, local parks and community facilities – not just skateparks! Fun and creative design workshops and events can draw on/engage young people's design skills, artistic and creative abilities.

## Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Apprenticeships and traineeships provide a gateway to great jobs and real hands-on training in almost any field of employment. Young people earn an income while gaining a real experience and a qualification, and employers receive financial support for taking on new staff.

Young people in YACVic's bushfire recovery consultations have identified the need for skill development and career pathways in local industry, including local government, trades, retail, administrative services, and state government agencies. Apprenticeships and traineeships are an important way to meet this need, and the additional capacity and skills needed during disaster recovery operations provide an opportunity to think creatively about training and supporting local young people.

## Young Thinkers in Residence

A Young Thinker-in-Residence is a great way to bring youth perspectives into your organisation or project. Such an initiative supports one or more young people to spend dedicated time 'thinking' about a social, resilience, recovery or preparedness topic of their choosing. It can run for 12-16 weeks, and can include offering Young Thinkers a cosy desk at your HQ, with full guidance of your team and access to extended networks.

The end goal is to support the Young Thinkers to create a piece of research and/or advocacy. This might be a report, a video, a campaign, or something else entirely – any tangible, positive outcome for their dedicated issue. Your organisation can utilise this to inform policy or practice advocacy.

For more information about this model, contact YACVic or [visit the YACVic webpage on the Young Thinker in Residence](#)

# Fact Sheet: Including Young People in Committees and Governance

*Good practice in identifying, including, and supporting young people to take on positions on committees and other governance bodies.*

Committees and other governance bodies, such as Boards of Directors or Youth Action Committees are a great way for young people to share in decision-making and use their skills and lived experience to benefit others. Young people's lived experience of disaster, knowledge of community and youth culture, and fresh perspectives can benefit everyone, making services, events or decisions more relevant, appropriate and effective.

Just like any other community member, **young people have opinions on all issues that affect their community, not just on 'youth issues'**. Empowering them to participate will assist in your work, and enable them to become future community leaders.

Youth consultation in disaster recovery processes will help you:

- **gather** and understand **new and unique perspectives**;
- make **better, more informed decisions**;
- provide **more suitable services and events**; and
- **strengthen community connections**.

## Planning for when young people are on committees where they are...

### The majority

Usually used when young people have equal or most power in making decisions about the delivery of a youth program or service. It can be a particularly useful way for young people to learn to interact with more experienced committee or board members.

### Mixed with older people

If young people will be a minority on the committee, involve at least two young people. One young person on their own might find the environment intimidating and unfamiliar. In this situation, it's important to provide personal support such as mentoring and easy-to-digest information.

### 100% of committee

A youth-driven project where young people have complete decision-making power. They may still be receiving the support of other community members, depending on the role of young people in initiatives regarding disaster preparedness response and recovery. Clear communication and purpose required.

### Create your own model!

There's plenty of room for creative variations of the models above for initiatives regarding disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Any committee involving young people must find a way of working that meets their needs and purpose, reflects the type of structure they would like to be involved in, and gives them ownership over what happens.

Flexibility is good – it may be that the committee changes the way it operates over time. A committee may start with a formal structure and break that down into a more casual way of operating, or the other way around.

### Tips for planning effective CRC youth engagement:

- Give young people real, valued roles so that their participation influences outcomes
- Create a vision or mission statement outlining core values and goals, that is jointly agreed and regularly referenced by the committee
- Share decision-making among younger and older members
- Negotiate common processes; don't just expect young people to fit into 'adult' structures or expectations
- Empower younger members by providing resources and support for their personal and professional development
- Make it positive, optimistic and future-focused.

There are important responsibilities relating to involving young people on boards and committees. If young people's contributions aren't respected, a committee structure is not inclusive, or the young person is expected to regularly re-live their disaster experiences, participation can become very disempowering and/or unsafe.

Remember that young people are active, engaged members of a community – they have an interest and stake in as broad a range of issues as other community members, and have valuable contributions to make across more than just 'youth issues'.

## Ways to provide support to involve young people and maintain engagement...

### Trust and familiarity

Make time for committee members to get to know each other socially before they get down to the serious stuff. Short, fun warm-up activities can help everyone relax before the serious agenda.

Building familiarity is also useful for older committee members to resolve any external tensions, or revisit the preconceptions they may have about young people's participation. Induction packages or processes can also help members to know what they're expected to do and when to do it. Make sure that all the information provided is easily understood.

### Acknowledgement

Being acknowledged confirms the value of young people's contributions.

It's important to:

- Take time to acknowledge individual contributions.
- Publicly recognise young board members or committees of young people for the work they have done, or the information they have provided.
- Help young people see the outcomes they've affected – it's a great motivator to their continued involvement.

### Skill development

Consider arranging some structured skill development sessions or workshops outside of meetings, to support young people (and possibly older people!) to develop new skills. Some examples could be communication skills or public speaking. Read more about how to really support young people.

### Personal mentor and admin support

A mentor can be a useful anchor and reference point for young people, particularly if they're not familiar with this type of committee. A support worker or local youth service can provide admin support (e.g. arranging subsequent meetings, completing action tasks, etc.) to all the young people involved. Find out more on the Youth Mentoring Hub.

**RESOURCE HINT:** Yerp is a valuable toolkit to support young people to have an important role in shaping the present and future of Victoria. Head to [yerp.yacvic.org.au](http://yerp.yacvic.org.au) to find out more.

## Do you need some additional support to engage young people?

YACVic offers in-depth and longer-term fee-for-service support, based on your needs, including:

- **framework, policy and strategy design:** we can walk through this process with you and support you to create the documents you need to embed youth participation in your organisation;
- **Consultations:** we can design, host and deliver peer-led youth consultations;

- **Co-design:** we can support you to work alongside young people on designing and delivering solutions for your key projects;
- **Recruitment:** we can connect you with relevant young people to get involved in your initiatives. We'll support both you and the young participants through the process.

### Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN)

YACVic coordinates the YPPN, a thriving network of Victorian professionals committed to empowering young people. This community meets regularly, and members can access the group online to share resources, knowledge and seek advice and guidance. If you'd like to join the YPPN, please get in touch with YACVic.

For more information and to discuss how we can support you to work with young people please get in touch with [YACVic](http://YACVic) via our website or you can email us at: [info@yacvic.org.au](mailto:info@yacvic.org.au)







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