

# ‘Speaking Up’ Young People’s experiences of Bushfire and Recovery:

A partnership between YACVic, DET and BRV



Youth Affairs Council Victoria (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 also have offices based on the lands of the Gunditjmara Nation in Warrnambool, and on the lands of the Wemba Wemba and Wadi Wadi Nations in Swan Hill.



YACVic's Bushfire Recovery work has taken place on the land of the Gunai Kurnai, Bidawal, Yorta Yorta and Taungurung People.

YACVic acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which the consultations and writing for this resource took place, and pay 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 the youth sector 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 on 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 and program 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 rural regional communities are met.

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This work was designed, developed, and implemented in collaboration with more than 12 young people from across East Gippsland, Towong and Alpine regions, youth workers, researchers, and other experts. YACVic is thankful for the support and expertise of everyone who contributed to this work.

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## Author's Note

This work was designed, developed, and implemented in collaboration with more than 12 young people from across East Gippsland, Towong and Alpine regions, youth workers, researchers, and other experts. YACVic is thankful for the support and expertise of everyone who contributed to this work.

The language throughout the report and in the resources we have

developed has been co-designed to reflect young people's preference.

For example, throughout consultations young people referred to the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian Fires as the 'Black Summer Bushfires' 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.

Authors: Carla Hall and Derm Ryan.

# Introduction

*“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*

**YACVic was engaged by Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) to engage directly with young people and community members in rural and regional areas about their experiences of, response to, and recovery from the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires across Eastern Victoria. This provided community, in particular young people, with the opportunity to share their ideas for recovery, rebuilding and preparation for a better future.**

For young people, the consequence of trauma from events such as these can change the trajectory of their lives, impacting mental health, education and employment, social development and connection with community and country. For the young people YACVic has worked with throughout the past 18 months in these rural and remote communities, the effects have been compounded by the multiple crises of bushfires, drought, floods, storms, and COVID-19.

Commencing in early 2020, YACVic produced a number of recommendations for response in the production and distribution of a youth-focused ‘Disaster Recovery Protocol’. Off the back of this work YACVic was then engaged to work in collaboration with BRV and DET to support young people from East Gippsland, Towong, and Alpine Shires to play an active role in their communities’ recovery. Through a four-stage approach, YACVic, BRV and DET collaborated to ensure that participation was accessible for all young people who were willing to contribute.

Disasters have a profound social impact on individuals and communities. Victoria’s regional and rural communities have been hit hard in 2019-21, with bushfires, COVID-19, drought, severe weather, and flooding. The United Nation *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (UN, 2015) highlights children and young people as disproportionately affected by disasters. Our instinct, in the face of disasters is to ensure the safety of vulnerable people, including children and young people. However, a vulnerability, risk, and resilience discourse in disaster management individualises young people’s experience and views them through a deficit-based lens as passive disaster victims without agency. As a result, young people are not actively involved in the design and implementation of disaster management.

YACVic has undertaken this work with the objective of upskilling the community to support young people’s meaningful participation in a safe and inclusive way, ensuring they are active in the recovery and planning space. YACVic has also developed resources to assist in

this process: a good practice guide to youth participation in bushfire recovery.

For young people, gaining a clear understanding of how they see themselves placed in the community, and their scope of influence, has been key to this. YACVic has actively sought their contributions to all levels of this work and has co-designed resources, training, and workshops to reflect this.

## Purpose

The purpose of this work was to:

- engage with young people, to genuinely seek their perspectives on the 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires and what is needed for recovery
- inform policy and the types of supports the government develops and contributes to for young people and local communities
- ensure student voice is valued and leveraged to shape future Victorian Government interventions
- develop new resources on good practice in engaging and supporting young people and local communities
- Build the skills of young facilitators to deliver workshops and training opportunities for young people in partnership with schools and local communities.

This included a focus on big picture and aspirational ideas, as well as identifying local vision statements, collecting stories, and providing an opportunity for young people to discuss experience and solutions in a safe and facilitated place-based environment.

*“Engaging young people in recovery activities and decisions will bring fresh ideas and ensure that our actions meet the needs of our young people so that they are supported and able to lead within their communities.” -*  
**Minister for Police and Emergency Services Lisa Neville**

YACVic consultations were complemented by a series of co-designed training workshops on youth participation for community leaders, volunteers and workers; youth advocacy and leadership workshops for young people, to develop and enhance their skills in advocacy, leadership, and decision-making; and consultations with young people to openly discuss their experience of bushfire disaster, covering a multitude of topics from reflections to expectations for the future. YACVic facilitated 18 youth consultations and training workshops with over 180 young people throughout this project.

# Background

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 in creating ethical and safe experiences for young people.

Individuals, families, and communities who experienced the Eastern Victorian 2019/20 bushfires, have lived through, and continue to experience, significant levels of distress and anguish. Before the fires some communities were already experiencing the impact of prolonged drought.

## **Key impacts from the 2019–20 fire season in Eastern Victoria:**

- five fatalities
- more than 120 communities directly impacted
- more than 300 homes lost in Victoria
- 400,000 hectares burned across Victoria, 230,000 in East Gippsland
- approximately 4,000 people forced to shelter on the Mallacoota foreshore as fire threatened the town; over the next two days almost 2000 of these people were evacuated by air and sea
- more than 60,000 people estimated to have evacuated East Gippsland as a result of the Victorian Government's State of Disaster declaration.
- an estimated 3 billion Australian animals injured or killed across Australia and more than 100,000 head of livestock perished
- a continuous fire front from southeast Queensland to eastern Victoria spanned 1,160kms

*“Beyond the statistics, what we know is that many people will have been deeply traumatised and will be suffering from a range of physical and psychological effects because of these bushfires.”* **Rob Gordon – Clinical Psychologist and member of the Premier’s Special Advisory Council**

Before recovery from the fires had barely begun, COVID-19 reached Australia in February 2020 and the country began to deal with a global pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 across the nation was profound, with Victoria enduring the most severe and protracted lockdowns, to date. At the height of the restrictions in 2020, COVID-19 divided the state, as a ‘ring of steel’ was introduced around Melbourne in July 2020 to prevent movement from metro regional areas, and was finally removed in November 2020.

*“Just as we took these masks off from the smoke, we put them back on again”* - **Young Person, East Gippsland**

Some Victorian residents endured restricted movement within 5 kilometres of home, a night curfew and were allowed to leave home only for essential items, exercise and caregiving. Schools and most workplaces moved to remote delivery and access.

Sport, a key community builder, in particular for young people in regional areas, was suspended. Community and social gatherings were suspended or moved online, which

removed an essential element for recovery – ‘social connection.’ Massive impacts were felt by the hospitality, retail, tourism and arts industries, and unemployment especially impacted young people in casual positions.

These changes and restrictions created a high level of stress and trauma for many people, and the cumulative impact was especially difficult for young people in regional areas and communities only just beginning to recover from the Black Summer bushfires.

*“The fires got forgotten with COVID-19 and home schooling/working. As a result, none of us have even talked about the fires. Nothing has been recognised after COVID-19; there has been very little opportunities to talk as a group.”* – **Young Person, Orbost**






Young people (from metro, rural, and regional areas) are now more often affected and concerned about long term issues such as drought, ongoing disasters and emergencies, and climate change. Young people often have more concerns about the future as a result, potentially contributing to ‘eco-anxiety.’

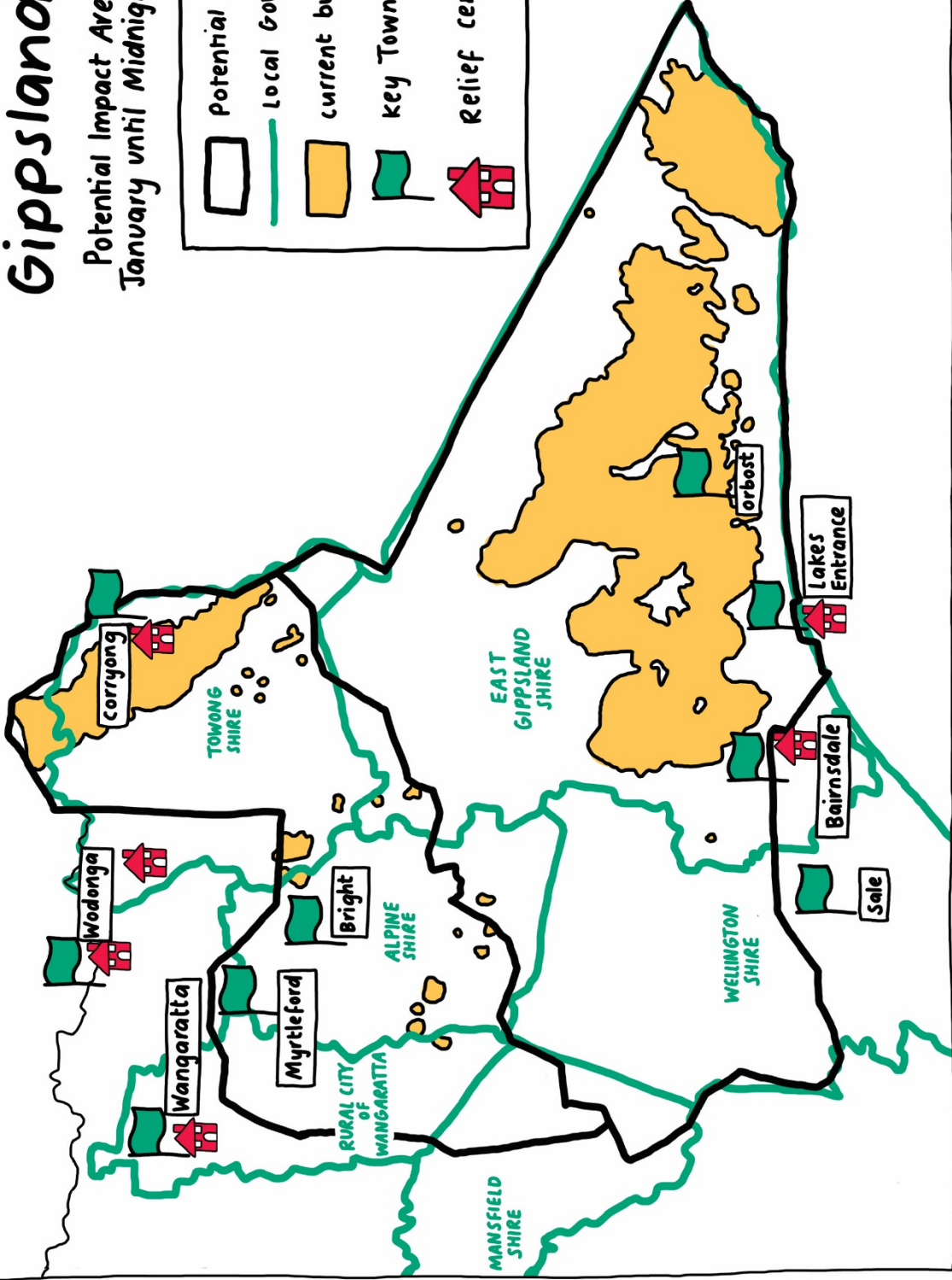
*“Is anyone doing research on the impact on the waterways? The runoff from the rain has been really bad, impact on fish, Tambo is really bad, up in Swifts. There is nothing to hold the topsoil and this can cause landslides. Which is really bad for all the wildlife and people that depend on that is really bad.”* – **Young Person, Swifts Creek**



# NE and East Gippsland Fires

Potential Impact Area from 2nd January until Midnight 4th January

	Potential impact zone
	Local Government area
	current burnt area
	key Townships
	Relief centre



Map of area affected by 2019-20 Eastern Victorian Bushfires where young people were recruited into YACVICs Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group. Source: <https://emergency.vic.gov.au/news-and-media/state-of-disaster-local-government-areas>

# Bushfire Recovery and Young People Timeline



# RURAL

November 2019 - February 2020

Eastern Victorian Fires: 60 fires start  
 Bushfire at Wingan River north-west of Mallacoota  
 Australian Navy evacuates Mallacoota  
 Development of Youth Bushfire Recovery Protocols

**All significant fires declared contained**

March - April 2020

COVID-19 first wave hits Victoria. First wave of restrictions begin  
 YACVic engaged by DET and BRV  
 Gippsland and Alpine regions hit by Floods

May 2020

Partnership agreement developed with BRV/DET  
 COVID-19 second wave hits Victoria. Ring of steel starts between metro Melbourne and regional Victoria

June-Sep 2020

Hire Rural Projects Coordinator  
 Recruitment and Induction of Bushfire Recovery Working Group  
 Stage 4 Covid-19 restrictions; second lockdown begins

Oct - Nov 2020

BRV workshop consultations for workshops 1 & 2  
 COVID-19 Ring of steel comes down  
 COVID-19 restrictions ease  
 BRV workshop consultations for workshops 3

Dec 2020 - Jan 2021

BRV Workshop Consultations 4 & 5

February - March 2021

Youth Advocacy Training delivered to young people  
 COVID-19 third wave, Victorians returned to third lockdown  
 DET Youth Advocacy and leadership training in schools

April - May 2021

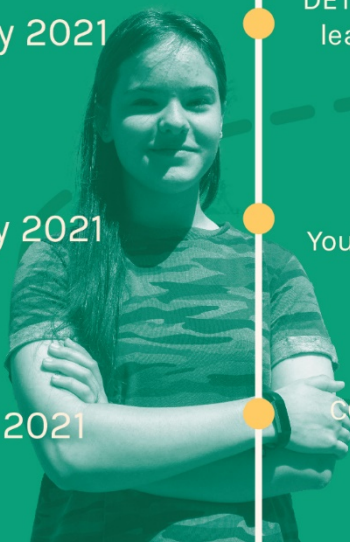
DET Youth Advocacy and leadership training in schools  
 COVID-19 fourth wave, Victorians endured fourth lockdown  
 Storms and flood hit Victoria

June - July 2021

Delivered 9 CRC trainings including Youth Participation 101, Child Safe Standards and Code of Ethical Practice  
 COVID-19 fifth lockdown

Aug - Sep 2021

COVID-19 sixth lockdown  
 Final Report and Resources developed and delivered





YACVic’s work throughout this program was guided by the National Principles for Disaster Recovery. These principles, outlined below, act like a checklist to inform actions, and ensure they meet community needs. Additionally, this approach complemented DET’s community-led approach to psychosocial recovery and the importance of hearing from young people what they require in recovery.

*“Bushfire recovery efforts should be community-led, responsive and flexible and build upon existing community resilience, strengths and knowledge.” - Minister for Education James Merlino*

Recovery is a process of addressing the disruptions and changes caused by a disaster. There is more than one path to recovery – the journey is different for each person and for their community.

**The principles:**

**Understand the context**

Successful recovery is based on an understanding community context, with each community having its own history, values, and dynamics.

**Recognise complexity**

Successful recovery is responsive to the complex and dynamic nature of both emergencies and the community.

**Use community-led approaches**

Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive, and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.

**Coordinate all activities**

Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated, and adaptive approach, between community and partner agencies, based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.

### **Communicate effectively**

Successful recovery is built on effective communication between the affected community and other partners.

### **Recognise and build capacity**

Successful recovery recognises, supports, and builds on individual, community and organisational capacity and resilience.

The journey to recovery will be different for each community, many of the impacted communities had an existing high level of resilience and will happen at a pace that reflects their needs, especially for communities that have faced the cumulative impacts of multiple disasters and stressors. These unique needs of communities must be at the heart of recovery efforts.

*“Recovery is ‘the restoring or improving of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities, of a disaster-affected community or society, aligning with the principles of sustainable development and ‘build back better,’ to avoid or reduce future disaster risk.” - Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience*

### **Rights of the Child**

Children have the right to give their views and opinions about decisions that affect them, and the right to be listened

to. Empowerment is about helping children to have their say. Acting to empower children should always guide the work of your organisation.

Participation is important for children because it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them. Children are more likely to speak up about their concerns about feeling unsafe, or make a complaint, if they feel their views are valued and welcomed.

### **The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector**

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector (the Code) is a framework to help anyone working with young people to think through ethical dilemmas. The Code is based on [human rights](#): things that all Victorians—including young people—can expect to enjoy, such as the right to freedom of expression or the right to take part in public life. The Code was first developed by YACVic in 2007, after consultation with the Victorian youth sector.

The Code includes a set of youth work principles and ethical practice responsibilities. It supports but does not replace workers’ legal responsibilities. Any person, group or organisation that works with young people can choose to use the Code.

# Case Study 1

## **Young people making mark on 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 must 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 captured by Thomas Feng, Media & Communications Manager, Youth Affairs Council Victoria

# Case Study 2

## The Sanctuary: Creating a Safe Haven for Young People after Bushfires and now COVID-19

The Sanctuary is a safe haven for Mallacoota's young people to be together, support each other and develop skills as leaders as they continue to recover from the fire events of the summer of 2020.

The Sanctuary provides teenagers and young adults with a platform to share their voice in this community. It is a place where participants can feel safe to express themselves and explore ideas. Mallacoota's youth use the space to study, play music, make art, play games, organise programs and events and run workshops. We spoke to Josh and Remy, two young men who were at the Sanctuary Mallacoota on Wednesday 10 March 2021 who share a special mentoring friendship.

*What is your connection to Mallacoota and the Sanctuary?*

Remy: We moved here from Melbourne in early 2019. The lifestyle here is amazing, I'm into the outdoors, the water and environment around here. Everyone was really welcoming, and I've liked growing up here, despite the challenges we faced last year with the fires. The Sanctuary has provided a space for connection with other young people and exploration for my passions like photography and music. This is our space where our voices and interests are heard.

Josh: I've grown up here my entire life and have been working here since I was a teen. I love fishing, boating, hiking, and also being involved in the community. I've started a group for young people here to play at the local badminton club too. I'll come to the Sanctuary when I'm not working or travelling to hang out with Remy and some of the others that come down here.

*How has the Sanctuary helped you speak up?*

Josh: No one was speaking up for our ideas or how we could have an input or have a say on Mallacoota. But now that the Sanctuary is here, it has empowered young people to speak up and pushed others in the community to listen to us.

Remy: I want to have a say on my community. We are the next generation, we are the next users of our town, our community and the land and we have to take care of it. We are important and part of the community, but without the Sanctuary we wouldn't be seen.

Josh: It's a big responsibility, young people will continue to face lots of challenges now and into the future. It's important that we know how to have an idea and how to



have a say now and that we know how to be involved when we're young, an understanding of how things were done, and how things can change and improve.

*You have a special friendship and bond despite Josh being a few years older. How important is mentoring and having a role model?*

Remy: Josh has been a second mentor to me, besides from my parents. Unfortunately, not as many young people my age have that connection, so I feel really lucky that I've been able to have Josh around the past 18 months. He will make an effort to hang out or come down here for a chat and take me around and I really appreciate that.

Josh: It's important to support and include people rather than divide yourself into random groups. We often divide ourselves apart into cliques and groups for no particular reason other than age! When I first met Remy, I felt he was very mature, and he's got similar passions: fishing, photography and getting outdoors. We clicked straight away, and I remember meeting him and just saying, wow I love this kid! I've taken him under my wing since.

*Recently, the Sanctuary was able to host its first outdoor cinema, as well as advocate for a new skate park in Mallacoota. Why do you think the Sanctuary has been successful in its advocacy?*

Josh: What the Sanctuary are doing is perfect. In the past, change was crawling like a snail, but this feels different, people are making change rapidly and encouraging other young people to get involved. Other community members, including older people in power, in council are starting to take note. When we say we want something by ourselves, our voices often won't be heard. But with the support of the Sanctuary and the collective voices of young people, we are being taken seriously now.

*What is your hope for Mallacoota and the Sanctuary?*

Josh: I don't want to be an outsider; I want to be involved and have a say. It's given me options and chances and connect with other people who I haven't had a chance to speak with properly in years, whether it be due to fires or due to life changing its course.

Remy: I'm hoping to continue my passions of activities like fishing, boating and outdoor adventures. In the long-run, I want to finish school and go to uni. The Sanctuary is an easy, relaxed way to learn with your friends. Learn skills that you wouldn't learn at school, and really follow what you want to do. It's like a school away from school for me. But there's no rules. You can come when you want, leave when you want and it's super chill to make new friends.

**This story is part of YACVic's 'Learning from COVID-19' series, featuring the creativity and adaptations of young people and youth workers.** Story captured by Katia Pellicciotta, Youth Engagement Resource Coordinator, Youth Affairs Council Victoria

# Resource Development and Recommendations

## Findings

Young people's experience of disaster can be vastly different and unique compared with those of adults; and these experiences can have a profound impact on them in both the short and long-term. Young people are particularly vulnerable in times of disaster; however, they are also on the journey to recovery, and this journey can be as vast and different as the communities they come from.

As experts in their own lives, young people have the right to participate in all aspects of disaster preparedness and recovery. Past disasters show that priority needs to be given to the voice of young people during the recovery process for as long as this journey takes. As communicated by the Community Recovery Committees throughout our trainings and consultations, each community is at a different stage in their recovery journey and the need to support programs and initiatives identified by these communities rarely aligns with funding timing and guidelines. YACVic encourages governments to continue with regular funding rounds to support youth-led and co-designed place-based initiatives.

Arising directly from both our quantitative and qualitative research, the recommendations in this report explore how government and non-government organisations can both incorporate young people in disaster preparedness and recovery, and support them during and after disaster events. It is important to note that the recommendations articulate young people's needs and views as expressed by them to YACVic.

It is not the case that government departments and non-government organisations did not take or do not continue to undertake significant work in disaster preparedness, prevention, and recovery. This report shows how young people perceived and experienced those actions; it is the truth according to them.

It is an overarching principle governing this work to reflect that truth. Now it is our collective responsibility as a society to explore how these truths manifest themselves practically.

Young people from regional and rural areas certainly had elevated levels of resilience, were aware that bushfires are a reality facing the communities they live in, and have some understanding of

preparedness. But no one could have anticipated the sheer size of the Eastern Victorian fires, and the compounding impacts of the global pandemic and the toll this has taken on these young people, their families, and communities.

- *Journey to recovery considers that people respond to disaster in different ways and over different time frames. The figure below illustrates the psychosocial experiences people may go through immediately after a disaster. Responses range from feeling heroic and a sense of community cohesion to feelings of*

*disappointment, anger and frustration as clean-up and reconstruction commence, finally moving to reconstruction and a new normality. It is important to realize that, just as actions in the recovery domains are not necessarily linear nor sequential, people and communities may move through these phases at different paces, meaning they are ready for new recovery actions at different times.*

*Page 17.*

<https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/sites/default/files/NBRA%20-%20Journey%20to%20recovery.pdf>

# People

Recommendations by young people and by YACVic based on young people’s expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from youth consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><i>Create local teams of generalist youth workers who can run activities and events where young people can gather for some normality and social connection, but also be subtly assessed and referred for other needs.</i></p> <p><i>This should be a medium-term investment (i.e., five years), recognising the need for continuity, and that issues will continue to emerge over time for traumatised communities.</i></p>	<p>Local youth services are trusted in the community, as well as being easier to access, so are generally a better investment than fly-in-fly-out models of support, or bigger services in regional centres providing outreach.</p> <p>In the mid- to long term, other community youth services can also play a key role as lead agencies for recovery and rebuilding work with young people. Youth services can operate in/via a multitude of environments (local council, community, school, health, sport, and recreation, etc), and ideally the services would be funded to be located within, or be able to travel to easily and regularly, each affected town, so that the young people are being supported by trusted community members who are there for the long term.</p>	<p><i>“The fire was the excuse to set up the Sanctuary [youth space in Mallacoota], other towns don’t have excuses like the fire to set up things like this, but other towns don’t have this because they didn’t have a fire. That sucks because they need a focus point like we have here. We need more staff to help, and [*Deidentified worker] can’t do it all”.</i></p> <p><i>Young people know what’s going on but get shut down. It’s even harder when you don’t have access to social networks i.e., under 12.</i></p> <p><i>Peer youth mentors will help to change some of this and elevate the voices for young people (U12) and they can advocate for them.</i></p>

## People – Continued

Recommendations by young people and by YACVic based on young people’s expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from youth consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><i>Invest in local service providers and community members to become accredited instructors in Youth Mental Health First Aid training, to support young people in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, and to build the resilience of the community for the recovery and rebuilding stage, and future disasters.</i></p>	<p>Flexible models of service delivery are ideal, and multiple providers meet diverse needs of communities -but must be coordinated and deliver an integrated service model that engages with other health services and education providers.</p>	<p>“Everyone in the community was complaining about how they were impacted. Young people felt responsible for the destruction if they were in the fire response but couldn’t get to a particular property in time to save it. We had no time to reflect, no recovery time, no follow up counselling, because of fire. We didn’t even know how to process or talk, it was shock and raw, then no follow up counselling because of COVID-19. It’s word of mouth and everyone thinks someone else is worse off and then they don’t seek help. Kids are raised here to be tough; you don’t just go to a counsellor. School counsellor is not confidential. Everyone knows if you go to that room.”</p>

# Employment and Skills

Recommendations by young people, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from youth consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><b><i>Incorporate youth-specific roles and responsibilities into Emergency Management planning.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>In the case of bushfires, fund the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Junior Volunteer Development Program (JVDP) (Junior Brigades) across all branches, to encourage and train local young people to join the CFA.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Provide apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities for young people while they assist with rebuilding, or help with community services, to allow local skills development as a silver lining on the disaster. Apprenticeships within agriculture and industry, and traineeships in youth work and mental health, would be particularly useful.</i></b></p>	<p>Participants identified a range of career pathways and opportunities that could exist in the community immediately following the disaster response, in locally driven locations such as relief centres. It was clear from what young people told us that they were not well informed of any overall local or area wide plan for local recovery that included industry employment options that were tied to initial or longer-term recovery. Involving and consulting with local young people remains an area that is overlooked and could be improved.</p> <p>The opportunities in local communities to provide upskilling for young people in these regions were identified across a range of industries through non-traditional pathways including volunteering, work experience, mentoring and non-accredited training via neighborhood houses 'learn local' and school-based opportunities.</p>	<p><i>“When the only safe place in your community is to sleep next to the water, that hits fricken hard. Laying near the water wondering if your neighbours that are like family are alive/safe hits hard, laying there wondering if your horses and animals have outrun the fire or if they are alive and laying there wondering if your family home has burnt down. This isn't good. If fire management plans had been followed through by those with the power who made those plans followed through my safe place wouldn't have just been next to the ocean.”</i></p> <p><i>“Junior programs can lead into summer crew (DEWLP). Apply and hope that you get it. But no CFA programs for young people specifically”.</i></p>

## Employment and Skills - Continued

Recommendations by young people, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from youth consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><b><i>Establish Young Thinker-in-Residence Internships with Emergency Management, to give young people the opportunity to research and report within a given area/topic or discipline on a particular issue that they care passionately about. The aim is to inject the voices of young people into sector conversation, policy, and action. Such internship opportunities for young people could be established by YACVic via partnerships with DEWLP, CFA, SES, Local Gov etc. This program would aim to also add to young people's opportunity to gain experience, qualifications and career pathways into emergency management and response.</i></b></p>	<p>Young people offered many solution-based ideas and strategies that benefit them personally but also provide assistance and advantages to local communities in response to the crisis and in recovery and rebuilding efforts. A coordinated and area wide approach that includes young people's ideas would further improve community cohesion.</p> <p>Barriers identified by young people for participating in skill development and employment included: lack of experience, a young person's and regional reputation/stigma in the local community, lack of transportation, reliance on volunteers, Covid restrictions and bureaucracy. Not including young people in the community response can result in them feeling disconnected and lead to a lack of pride in their local town. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.</p>	<p><i>“Could summer crew (DEWLP) be an opportunity for young people to participate in and get skill development as part of that, like chainsaw, drive a manual car”.</i></p> <p><i>“There needs to be more local opportunities for these positions. Need to be more locals in the rangers and summer crew could be focused on young people”.</i></p>

# Community

Recommendations by Young People, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from Youth Consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><b>Establish, via a whole-of-government response, youth-friendly spaces for both economic and social development, and critically, greater connection and belonging. Options could include youth-specific 'youth space' facilities, pools, skate parks, mountain bike tracks, toboggan runs and festivals.</b></p> <p><b>Coordinate young people to take on projects and local campaigns to help their communities to rebuild and recover. Projects could include a simple mental health campaign encouraging young people to seek help and look out for each other when they are struggling, or projects that highlight the positive aspects of living in the local areas. Young people should be remunerated for their time and expertise.</b></p>	<p>Young people have identified unanimously across the bushfire affected communities a need for physical spaces to facilitate a sense of belonging and connection. Community place-based 'youth spaces' are one such recommendation that was identified.</p> <p>Consultations conducted in communities with a facilitated 'space' for young people (i.e., The Sanctuary Mallacoota and Corryong Neighbourhood Centre) indicated that young people had a greater connection to peers, and the bushfire recovery efforts. Consultations in communities without place-based physical locations, and without a local youth worker, highlighted the disconnection that young people may feel and their desire to have access to a space and connect to their peers and the local community.</p>	<p><i>"Mountain bike track - making little tracks on hills around town, wanting a mountain bike trail to be built here, young people are now really interested, Corryong boys, wanting to form a little trip to Bright. Going to Bright or Omeo to ride their tracks and talk to the people who built them".</i></p> <p><i>"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?"</i></p> <p><i>"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. We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us."</i></p>



## Community - Continued

Recommendations by Young People, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from Youth Consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><i>Develop a thriving network of youth work professionals who are committed to empowering young people through youth participation, youth engagement and supporting the voice of young people.</i></p> <p><i>Develop a Community of Practise model which brings together young people and youth workers who are actively involved in place-based local community recovery projects. This will enable direct access for young people seeking to be involved and seeking resources.</i></p>	<p>There is an opportunity for local communities to listen to, engage and act on the suggestions of young people on how to include young people in spaces that engage them.</p> <p>Rural communities are made up of incredible, resilient people – many of whom are driven young individuals who are passionate about where they live.</p>	<p><i>Bring community together, to talk about what we need to do. Like a town meeting for everyone to have input into a community plan, like knowing if the fire gets here X, we will put in a fire break. Key community can take on key roles, like helping neighbours who are less mobile, old or disabled”.</i></p> <p><i>“Town needs a youth worker. Need to be discreet, need an outsider, maybe an outreach worker but regular days and times”.</i></p>

## Education

Recommendations by Young People, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from Youth Consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><b>Position schools to facilitate more opportunities for student support and consultation programs.</b></p> <p><b>Deliver relevant disaster preparation activities annually in schools, appropriate for each year level, and involve young people in creation of the resources, planning, and delivery.</b></p>	<p>Educators have expertise and extended contact with young people and are often a key support in preparing them for natural disasters. They may act as first responders during a disaster, and also play a key role in identifying those young people who may require additional assistance in their recovery. Educators often play an important role in re-establishing routines and creating a sense of safety post-event and supporting long-term post-disaster recovery.</p> <p>Participants across all five consultation sites highlighted the desire for education settings to facilitate greater opportunities for student support and consultation programs. Some young people communicated that this project was the first opportunity they had to even talk in a school setting about the fire events. Others noted that disaster education is sporadic and only delivered to certain year levels.</p>	<p><i>“Classes for people to be self-aware about their emotional response. Mental health it's like just complain about for a minute and then just get on with it. There is no way to express it. My mates don't know what's involved in counselling or how to even talk about what happened. We need classes on how to do this. Wearing a mask makes it harder, and therefore further isolates people from working together.”</i></p> <p><i>“Open, positive space to be, a safe space, provide group discussion spaces, sausage sizzles and food, chill space and a place for YP to meet and chill and hang out but also to talk”.</i></p> <p><i>“A place to be educated and not reminded of what has been lost. A place where authorities will listen and act on their words”.</i></p>

## Future Investment

Recommendations by young people, and by YACVic based on young people's expressed needs (and endorsed by them)	Additional information from youth consultations and YACVic	What young people said
<p><b><i>Commit to long-term investment in research and new initiatives to build an evidence-base to support ongoing recovery work, and to build capacity to respond in a timely manner when communities face future disasters.</i></b></p>	<p>Young people are clear that they want to be actively involved. Applied and transitional research that investigates and demonstrates how to achieve the active involvement and empowerment of young people in disaster risk reduction and preparedness, and the value that brings, would be valuable.</p>	<p><i>“We want it known that the biggest hurdles we face are bureaucratic. We can get a lot more done with less bureaucracy. Why is there a need for so much paperwork?”</i></p> <p><i>“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.”</i></p> <p><i>“We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us.”</i></p>

## **Youth services in local communities**

Local youth services are trusted in the community and have local knowledge, as well as being easier to access, so are generally a better investment than fly-in-fly-out models of support, or bigger services in regional centres providing outreach.

Many such youth services are based in Local Government Agencies, which take the lead on recovery and rebuilding efforts – this positions youth support and action as a key part of recovery and renewal. The work of youth services can be remedial, such as on-the-ground generalist support and early intervention mental health services, or recreational, with programs to ensure young people have some semblance of a normal life and stay connected to their communities and with people who understand what they have experienced. Importantly, youth services can also coordinate, support and fund young people to play a key role in contributing to recovery and rebuilding efforts, and rebuilding community cohesion.

It is critical that young people are consulted and empowered to take a lead in determining the support that they need, the projects that they can lead and contribute to, and how they would like to see their community (including infrastructure and economic prospects) be rebuilt. Youth services play a role in supporting and coordinating young people's safe and effective participation in such decision making. It will also be vital for young people to be involved at the centre of decision making for recovery and rebuilding for their communities, to ensure their perspectives and lived experience inform

decisions such as rebuilding of community facilities, and the creation of jobs. It is also as a matter of respect, as they are essential citizens for the health and future of the communities.

Youth Development Officers in the LGAs are ideally placed to coordinate young people's involvement, working collectively with other local services, and supported by workers skilled in psychosocial support and by organisations such as YACVic and other state peak bodies.

For immediate / quick action, grants to each affected local council should include an amount specified for youth services, to ensure that the unique needs of young people and the role they can/do play in the community are addressed. Structures exist in most communities that would allow quick and expert deployment / utilisation of funds.

Based on consultation undertaken by YACVic with colleagues and members, we would advise that immediate funding is best placed via allocations to each affected Local/Shire Council, to increase and build capacity of local staff and services, including an understanding of trauma recovery approaches, and to local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO). In addition to having existing mechanisms to distribute equitably and quickly, they are best placed to know what is happening on the ground. We would also recommend that the funding is specifically identified and allocated for youth services and overseen by a Youth Development Officer at the Council (rather than health services, which tend to be more narrowly focused and can be stigmatising).

In the mid- to long-term, other community youth services can also play a key role as lead agencies for recovery and rebuilding work with young people. Youth services can operate in/via a multitude of environments (local council, community, school, health, sport, and recreation, etc), and ideally the services would be funded to be located within, or be able to travel to easily and regularly, each affected town, so that the young people are being supported by trusted community members who are there for the long term.

Flexible models of service delivery are ideal, and multiple providers can meet the diverse needs of communities - but must be coordinated and delivered via an integrated service model that engages with other health services and education providers. YACVic recommends the development of a collective impact

model which brings together young people and youth workers who are actively involved in their place-based local community recovery projects. This will enable direct access for young people seeking to be involved and seeking resources, and a platform for information sharing, collaboration and local resource development.

It is often difficult (emotionally, financially, or due to transport availability) for young people to travel to other towns for services and activities. Local investment will have enormous economic and social benefits and could potentially save millions in tertiary end services. Professional youth workers have specific skills that are often not fully recognised and are also incredibly good at stretching dollars to deliver great outcomes.



## **School Based Recovery**

Consultations with young people revealed an inconsistent recovery response from schools in Eastern Victoria. The consultations contained within this report form part of DET's response to the bushfires to better understand the needs of young people. DET takes a community-led approach in psychosocial supports and services, and adheres to the *National Principles of Disaster Recovery*, so some inconsistency across schools and regions is to be expected given the complexity of responding to each individual educational community.

Issues highlighted with individual school-based recovery work for students can be attributed to a number of compounding factors – some local, some state and some national. No wellbeing programs are mandated to Victorian schools and Principals have autonomy to opt-in to supports offered, depending on the needs of their individual school community.

Schools play critical roles in a young person's experience of disaster. They provide:

- a familiar and safe environment, predictable routines, and access to trusted adults
- emergency response during the event for shelter in place buildings, evacuation points, response centres and accommodation
- referral pathways to allied health services including support and mental health services
- disaster preparation education.

Some young people felt that not enough was done to highlight and respond to

bushfire impacts, whereas others were able to point to key things that their local school did to respond.

COVID-19 followed directly after the bushfires, and this had an extremely disruptive impact on processing and responding to the fires.

Opportunities remain for schools and DET to create a coordinated response to disaster management, and better involve and include students in the development and implementation of those supports. YACVic's engagement is an example of a response that involves and includes students in the development and implementation of their bushfire recovery responses.

Some schools that were heavily impacted by the Black Saturday fires of 2009 have developed award winning programs for disaster response which include students in better understanding, preparing, and responding to future disasters. These programs have real benefits for students and the whole of school community, and can be more clearly explored for utilisation in schools and communities impacted by the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian fires, and more broadly to other schools in high fire risk areas.

The DET Trauma Recovery Team has developed strong links to schools and works closely with Principals, teachers, allied health staff and local place-based area staff and leadership. DET has an advisory group with members with lived experience from the Black Saturday fires and experience in disaster recovery and resilience building (Prof. Lisa Gibbs, Dr Rob Gordon, David Younger, Jane Heyward). The advisory group

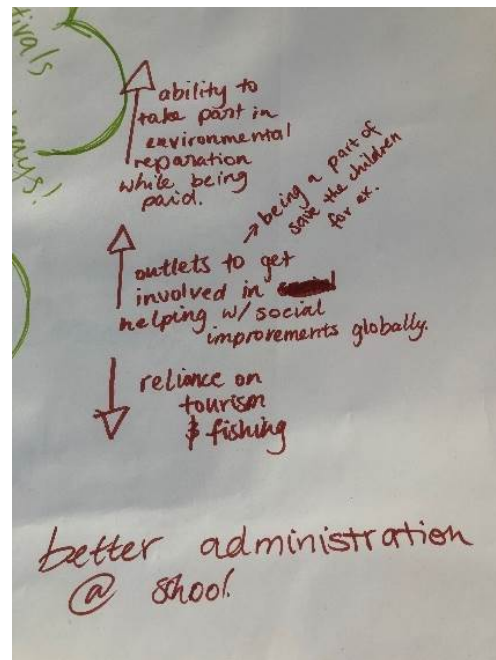
provide advice and strategic leadership to the Trauma Recovery Team.

Participants across all five sites in YACVic's consultations highlighted the desire for education settings to facilitate greater opportunities for student support and consultation programs. Some young people communicated that DET's and BRV's engagement of YACVic to deliver these workshops was the first opportunity they had had to discuss their experiences of the fire events in a school setting.

Specific recommendations from young people were:

- more assistance for the students impacted the most
- providing regular mental health check-ins with students
- the need to learn about different disasters and what to do in disaster situations.

Young people agreed that school was an ideal setting for this to occur. Young people reported that this education would not only assist them with knowing what they should do, it would also help them remain calm when faced with a disaster situation. Young people spoke about wanting both practical knowledge about how to respond in an emergency, as well as a deeper knowledge about how disasters occur, to ensure they had an opportunity to actively participate in disaster response and recovery in the future.



## Employment

Young people identified many ideas and aspirations for skills and jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts, or that should be considered as part of the long-term strategy for affected communities.

Around half the participants were engaged in part-time employment, with the majority in hospitality and retail, arts (paid gigs locally), babysitting and many in farming and agriculture. Participants identified limitations to ongoing employment in these regions, with the majority expressing they would need to relocate following secondary education for further education and employment. Young people described existing employment and voluntary roles and the opportunities that are available to them. They spoke about the skills and benefits that are gained via local employment and training as well as some of the barriers that exist, including the need to travel and how many people still need to permanently leave a rural community to

access further education and to start a career. They told us about the importance of connection to local community and how 'knowing someone' assists in facilitating employment opportunities. Traditional employment roles identified by workshop participants included:

- Retail
- Hospitality
- Farming and agriculture
- Cleaning
- App development and administration
- Childminding
- Arts/music
- Volunteering
- Tourism
- Laboring

Participants identified opportunities to provide upskilling for young people in local communities across a range of industries, through non-traditional pathways including volunteering, work experience, mentoring and non-accredited training via neighborhood houses, 'learn local' and school-based opportunities.

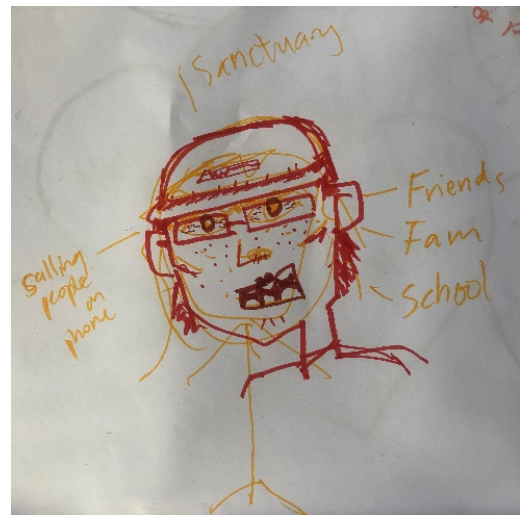
The young people offered many solution-based ideas and strategies that would benefit them personally but would also help and give advantages to local communities in response to the crisis, recovery, and rebuilding efforts.

Participants also identified opportunities to build community and school-based collaborations for skill development through volunteering, traineeships, apprenticeships, and work experience.

Barriers identified by young people for participating in skill development and employment included: lack of experience, a young person's and regional

reputation/ stigma in the local community, lack of transportation, reliance on volunteers, COVID-19 restrictions and bureaucracy.

When discussing barriers to employment it became clear from what young people said that they were not aware of any overall local or area-wide plan that included industry employment options tied to initial or longer-term recovery. Involving and consulting with local young people remains an area that can be improved.





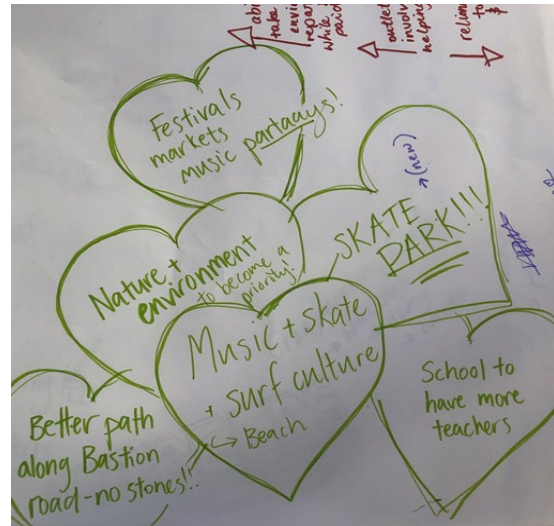
## Community Recovery

Young people told us about where and how they sought relief and support immediately following the crisis. They told us about the challenges that they and their families faced in the aftermath and how this could be improved. They also spoke of the emotional burden that they experienced and the challenges they had and still experience because of the fires. Creating a space in both the short-term and long-term for young people to gather, gain information and to both provide and receive structured professional and peer support remains an unmet need for many of them. Not including young people in the community response can result in them feeling disconnected and lead to a lack of pride in their local town or area. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development, and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

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

This last comment highlights the need for collaboration to ensure direct feedback and comments from young people can support local Community Recovery Committees to include young people in their committee structure in a meaningful and supported way.

*"We want you to know that the biggest hurdles we face are bureaucratic. We can get a lot more done with less bureaucracy. Why is there a need for so much paperwork?"* -  
**Young Person, Mallacoota**



Young people explored unique needs and ideas for recovery and rebuilding of affected communities within the broader community and school settings.

To do this, we spoke to young people and asked them about: Access to services/youth specific spaces, access, and connection to peers (outside of school time) and access to information.

A consultation participant early on in this work clearly identified that our approach should be contextualised moving forward, saying *"stop asking us to think outside the box, when we don't know what the box is."* This sentiment was echoed by many young people – both those connected to services and those who had limited involvement in recovery efforts – and confirmed by the YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group. Young people have identified unanimously across the bushfire affected communities a need for physical spaces to facilitate a sense of belonging and connection. Community place-based youth spaces are one such recommendation that was identified. Consultations conducted in communities with a facilitated 'space' for young people (i.e., The Sanctuary Mallacoota and Corryong Neighbourhood

Centre) indicated that young people had a greater connection to peers, and the bushfire recovery efforts. Consultations in communities without place-based physical locations, and without a local youth worker, highlighted the disconnection that young people may feel and their desire to have access to a space and connect to their peers and the local community.

There is an opportunity for local communities to listen to, engage and act on the suggestions of young people on how to include young people in spaces that engage them.

*“Mountain bike track – making little tracks on hills around town, wanting a mountain bike trail to be built here, young people are now really interested, Corryong boys, wanting to form a little trip to Bright. Going to Bright or Omeo to ride their tracks and talk to the people who built them.” - Young Person, Corryong*

### **Mental health support and stigma**

Consultations also highlighted Mental Health support, community involvement and peer to peer supports as important. Where communities have access to youth spaces and ‘passive activity’ outlets it also provides opportunities for health promotion, needs identification and referrals, and information, in a trusted space without pressure or stigma.

Many of the participants throughout these workshops, and in the previous bushfire recovery workshop held by YACVic ‘Looking Back,’ consistently raised the need for increased mental health supports, and the importance of these services being local, confidential, ongoing, trusted, and discreet. Young people identified there was a stigma

attached to accessing the mental health services provided to them via the schools, and the desire to increase the variety of services beyond the school counselors, due to the perceived lack of confidentiality and stigma.

*“We needed more mental health support. We had very limited access to Mental health. One off mental health, they saw us once and never came back, they were only here for a month. We only had one counsellor at school. They always get on with the little children or the teachers, but not teenagers.” - Young Person, Orbost*

YACVic would encourage all workers and volunteers undertaking consultation, training, guidance, advocacy, or support for young people from bushfire affected areas to undertake training in Youth Mental Health First Aid and to understand trauma-informed Care.

*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... Implementing TIC requires a philosophical and cultural shift within an agency, with an organisational commitment to understanding traumatic stress and to developing strategies for responding to the complex needs of survivors. (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010)*

## **Development of Youth Participation Resources**

YACVic, with the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group, combined the outcomes from the Bushfire consultation series with YACVic's deep expertise in youth participation to co-design and produce resources for young people and communities related to disaster response, recovery, and planning. These include:

### **1. *Guide to Good Practice in Youth Participation and Inclusion***

The guide is a succinct and accessible resource to assist committees, community leaders and other decision makers ensure that young people are safely and meaningfully included in deliberations, committees, decision-making, project design and implementation, governance, and evaluation. The guide explains why youth participation is important, the key principles that should be adhered to, and resources for further assistance. It includes guidance on making sure often-marginalised 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 and included.

### **2. *Fact Sheets***

#### **i. *Effectively Engaging, Including and Consulting with Young People***

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

#### **ii. *Opportunities for Young People in Recovery and Rebuilding***

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

#### **iii. *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.

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12. Youth-Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol 2020
13. Advocate for Children and Young People NSW 2020, Children & Young People's Experience of Disaster 2020,.

# Appendix I: Youth Consultations, Workshops, and Training

ORGANISATIONS	DELIVERY METHOD/LOCATION	WORKSHOP	NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE	LENGTH
BRV/DET	4 x Online 1 x face-to-face, Corryong Neighbourhood Centre, Youth Space	Looking Back	40 (10 x 12-15 yrs., 6 x 16- 19yrs, 4 x 20+ yrs., 20 age unknown2). 14 x East Gippsland, 2 x Towong, 4 x Latrobe Shire)	2-3hrs
DET	1x Online	Student Co Design Network	12 (10 x 12-15 yrs., 2 x 16-19 yrs.). 1 x Bright SC, 3 x Corryong College, 7 x Bairnsdale SC, 1 x Lavalla CC)	4hrs
SAVE THE CHILDREN IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face, Community Centre, Cann River <sup>3</sup>	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	4 (4 x 12-15yrs, from Cann River area)	1hr
IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face, The Sanctuary, Mallacoota	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	10 (3 x 12-15yrs, 6 x 16- 19yrs, 1 x 20+yrs, from Mallacoota area)	1.5hrs
IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face, Orbost Education Centre	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	6 (3 aged 12-15yrs, 3 aged 16-19yrs, from Orbost area)	1.5hrs
DET	1 x face-to-face Bairnsdale SC	Student Co Design Network	6 (6 aged 12-15 yrs.) Bairnsdale and Surrounds	1hr
IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face workshop, Gippsland East LLEN, Bairnsdale	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	3 (3 x 12-15yrs, from Bairnsdale area)	1.5hrs
IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face, Corryong Neighbourhood Centre, Youth Space	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	11 (6 x 12-15yrs, 4 x 16- 19yrs, 1 x 20+yrs, all from Corryong Area)	1.5hrs
IGEM/BRV/DET	1 x face-to-face workshop, Bright Skate Park	The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes	0	

BRV/DET/IGEM	Online via Survey Monkey	Young People and Bushfire Recovery Survey	8 participated aged 14-26	
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop Mallacoota P-12	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	14 students yrs. 7-9	3hrs
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop Corryong/Tallangatta SC	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	22 Students yrs. 7-10	3hrs
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop Bairnsdale SC	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	7 students yrs. 7-9	3hrs
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop Orbost/Lakes Entrance /Swifts Creek SC	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	28 students' years 7-10	3hrs
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop East Gippsland Specialist School	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	17 year 11&12 Students	3hrs
DET/BRV	1 x face-to-face workshop Falls Creek, Young people in Politics Camp	Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training	10 young people aged 14-24	3hrs
Total	18 events		183 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.

[Read the Youth Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol here](#)

### **Rural Young Activators 2020/21**

The 2020-21 Rural Young Activators are young people aged 15-25 from bushfire-affected communities, leading projects and advocacy to support bushfire recovery and animal welfare with support from RSPCA Victoria.

[Learn more about Activators here](#)

# Appendix II: Process and Methodology

## Project scope

Young people in rural and regional Victoria have unique insights and face different challenges from those in metropolitan Melbourne. YACVic Rural advocates on issues that affect rural and regional young people, and works to strengthen community participation and self-advocacy. It is for this reason that YACVic undertakes a co-design approach.

After the devastation of the Black Summer/ 2019-20 Eastern Victorian bushfires, communities and individuals needed to rebuild and recover. In the response to the bushfires, there was a gap in the engagement, involvement, and inclusion of young people in contributing to community recovery.

Young people have the capacity to form an opinion about decisions that affect their lives, and they have the right to voice that opinion. As experts in their own lives, they have experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation. As a result, they can tell adults things that adults do not know. Young people's perspectives can also lead to more creative and relevant solutions and services. It is both the role and responsibility of YACVic to reflect and facilitate recognition of

these experiences in all sectors of the community.

Opportunities for young people to activate meaningful change in their communities are often limited, and this was evident in the response to the Black Summer bushfires, with young people reporting feeling overlooked and unheard.

## Methodology

YACVic adopted a four-stage approach to our young people and bushfire recovery work, disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery.

### Stage 1 - Engagement

YACVic recruited, engaged, trained, and consulted with the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group. This included developing strong relationships with key networks and partners in Bushfire recovery across East Gippsland, Towong and Alpine Shires.

### Understand the context

**Successful recovery is based on an understanding of community context, with each community having its own history, values, and dynamics.**

### Recognise complexity

**Successful recovery is responsive to the complex and dynamic nature of both emergencies and the community.**

#### Stage 2 - Consultation

YACVic conducted face-to-face and online consultation workshops with young people and administered individual surveys. YACVic communicated key themes and emerging issues with community and partner agencies throughout this stage.

#### Use community-led approaches

**Successful recovery is community-centred, responsive, and flexible, engaging with community and supporting them to move forward.**

#### Coordinate all activities

**Successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated, and adaptive approach, between community and partner agencies, based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs.**

#### Stage 3 - Training

YACVic upskilled Community Recovery Committees (CRCs), place-based youth workers/services, and young people impacted by the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian bushfires, to ensure youth participation of young people is

prioritised in a safe and inclusive way, and that young people are confident and knowledgeable about how to ensure they are participating in disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery.

#### Recognise and build capacity

**Successful recovery recognises, supports, and builds on individual, community and organisational capacity and resilience.**

#### Stage 4 - Resource Development and Recommendations

YACVic worked with the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group and other young people to develop resources to aid in the inclusion of young people in disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery. YACVic listened to what young people in these affected communities had to say and developed recommendations based on their views and opinions.

#### Communicate effectively

**Successful recovery is built on effective communication between the affected community and other partners.**



## Stage 1 Engagement

YACVic commenced Stage 1 Engagement with the recruitment of a place-based experienced Rural Youth Worker to lead the advocacy and research work locally, bringing with them their local knowledge and understanding, well established local youth and service networks and a lived experience of the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian bushfires.

YACVic then engaged to participate in the bushfire recovery work by promoting opportunities in several online streams:

- emails directly to schools, youth service organisations, local government, bushfire recovery committees
- social media including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and twitter
- via the YACVic Website
- via online newsletters, and networking platforms.

Young people self-nominated to participate in opportunities offered by YACVic. Due to the global pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, many of these workshops and other engagement opportunities were delivered online via Zoom. Participation was affected by online fatigue, moving to and from remote and on-site learning, and a general lack of motivation toward participation in online environments.

COVID-19 restrictions also made it difficult to engage with Aboriginal young people and young people from the CALD community. Although communication was established between coordinators and supporting agencies, only a small number of young people from these communities opted to engage.

Over 18 months of working in bushfire affected rural and regional communities – running workshops and training with young people, and collecting evidence of young people’s experience of response, relief, and recovery – YACVic built trust and authentic relationships with young people and community organisations.

Young people told YACVic that they want to take an active role in recovery, working with adults to strengthen their community connections, contribute ideas, lead community efforts, and build community resilience and preparedness for future events. They also want meaningful inclusion in decision-making at local, state, and national levels. The evidence that YACVic has captured clearly shows that young people want to be actively involved in recovery and disaster management, enabling young people’s meaningful involvement in local, state, and national decision-making.

One of the strengths of YACVic as the peak industry body in Victoria’s youth

sector is the breadth of our networks across government, the youth sector, community, and health sectors. This includes close working relationships with the Commission for Children and Young People, and as convenor of several sector networks including the Victorian Youth Participation Practice Network. While much of the focus of the project is within the three affected LGA's, decisions made at the local, state, and national level have a significant impact on young people's participation in disaster management.

#### YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group

The YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group established for this work consists of 12 young people aged 12-25, currently living in rural and regional parts of eastern Victoria impacted by the Black Summer fires (East Gippsland, Towong, Alpine and beyond). YACVic provided the Youth Working Group with training in facilitation and advocacy and met with the group monthly.

Youth Working Group members assisted in the development of new resources to support young people and local communities. They have consulted with young people and community about the fires and what is needed in the recovery response, co-delivered local workshops, and participated in a number of training opportunities with young facilitators in partnership with local communities.

YACVic acknowledged these young people as experts in their own lives and remunerated them for their time and contributions to this work.

## Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders came primarily from the impacted geographic areas of Alpine, Towong and East Gippsland. YACVic used a range of methods to invite communities, organisations, and young people to participate in the work.

We established good working relationships with organisations and networks including but not limited to:

- East Gippsland Youth Focus Network
- Mallacoota Children and Youth Recovery Network
- Towong People and Wellbeing Recovery Working Group
- Corryong Neighbourhood Centre
- Gippsland Youth Engagement Network
- East Gippsland Mental Wellbeing Network
- Murray PHN Emergency Response: Northeast VIC Bushfire response (hosted on Basecamp)

Communication with these networks was established via emails, social media, face to face/online participation at network meetings, newsletters, and media.

Recruitment of young people to participate was established through existing youth networks, workers facilitating youth advisory groups, schools/TAFEs and through border community bushfire recovery networks.

Youth Advisory Groups included but were not limited to:

- East Gippsland Youth Ambassadors
- Headspace Youth Advisory Group
- Mallacoota Sanctuary
- Upper Murray Youth Group
- Cann River Youth Group

To facilitate inclusion of hard-to-reach cohorts such young people with disability, CALD, LGBTIQ+, Koorie Youth, YACVic utilised existing networks and partnerships with Youth Disability Advocacy Service, Koorie Youth Council, HEY (Healthy Equal Youth) Partners and Centre for Multicultural Youth to reach young people on the ground.

Schools played a key role in accessing students for both training and consultation, this was supported by the DET Trauma Recovery Team Community Engagement Lead, DET Bushfire Recovery Practitioners, and Bushfire Recovery Victoria. Schools included but were not limited to:

- Mallacoota P-12 College
- Orbost Secondary College
- Swifts Creek P-12 School
- Lakes Entrance Secondary College
- Bairnsdale Secondary College
- East Gippsland Specialist School
- Tallangatta Secondary College
- Corryong Secondary College
- Bright P-12 College

## The Project Team – YACVic, DET and BRV

From the beginning, YACVic approached this project as a partnership, aligning with the AIDR principal ‘coordinate all activities’. We believed that the best way to ensure the desired outcomes were achievable was through contributions from a range of expertise (community, service provider, academic and government). This was needed to capture the complexity of the post disaster environment and to achieve results that would generate meaningful outcomes.

The success of this project was due in large part to the collaborative partnership between the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), and Department of Education (DET). This working group met weekly throughout the design, implementation, and evaluation of this project to share insights both internally and externally with key partners such as DET, Department of Health, Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning etc. The group provided ongoing guidance and advocacy and support throughout, ensuring effective communication and accountability.

Members of the working group included:

- **Derm Ryan** - Manager, YACVic Rural, Youth Affairs Council Victoria
- **Carla Hall** - Rural Projects Coordinator, YACVic Rural, Youth Affairs Council Victoria
- **Marnie Marin** - Principal Advisor, People and Wellbeing Recovery, Bushfire Recovery Victoria

- **Belinda Burns** - Project Support Officer, People and Wellbeing Recovery, Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- **Kayla de Bondt** - Senior Program Officer, People & Wellbeing Recovery, Bushfire Recovery Victoria
- **Mazzy Star** - Community Engagement Lead Trauma Recovery Team, Inclusive Education Professional Practice Branch, Schools and Regional Services (SRS), Department of Education and Training

The People and Wellbeing Recovery Branch within BRV strives for community-led recovery. Young people are a large part of the community, and their views are often overlooked. The Victorian Government sought to hear directly from young people about their experiences and opinions with regard to bushfire response and recovery, to ensure action was based on their views, expertise, and experiences.

The DET Trauma Recovery Team (TRT) was established in January 2020 in response to the 2019-20 Eastern Victoria bushfires to provide psychosocial support to schools and early childhood settings in recovery. The TRT partnered with YACVic and Bushfire Recovery Victoria to understand the unique needs of children and young people throughout the disaster lifecycle. The result of these consultations will inform their ongoing work to engage children and young people in their school and local communities’ recovery.

## Stage 2 Consultation

### Workshop Design

The Consultation Workshops were co-designed with members of the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group, who also assisted in the delivery of this series. YACVic facilitated these workshops face-to-face in the bushfire affected communities of Cann River, Mallacoota, Orbost, Bairnsdale/Sarsfield, Corryong and Bright (*Please refer to attachment 1 for participant details*). Mental health services and debriefing opportunities were incorporated into the workshop design.

The Youth Working Group provided invaluable input into the design of all the tools and workshops and provided guidance on locations and how to improve participation. The Consultation Workshops were held in spaces and places that were accessible for young people, and in which they felt safe and included: Youth Centres, community education spaces and even outdoors at the local skate park.

The Youth Working Group also assisted YACVic to identify the evolution of local language used by those affected by the fires. An example of this was flame affected/fire affected: participants were able to identify their level of impact whilst not having to disclose individual experiences that could be triggering. This use of language was also helpful for community to self-

manage their own perceived guilt if they were not directly flame affected whilst acknowledging that they were still very much fire affected.

### Mental Health Considerations

Facilitators were trained in Mental Health First Aid and worked with local partners to establish appropriate mental health referral pathways. YACVic staff also adhered to trauma informed protocols when working with impacted young people and communities.

### COVID-19 Considerations

All stakeholder engagement was conducted in a COVID-Safe manner according to restrictions identified at the time of delivery.

### Workshops

#### Workshop 1 - 'Looking Back'

In this first workshop, our objective was to explore and unpack how the bushfires had impacted young people's lives, study, jobs and relationships, in the immediate aftermath and then in the months following the active fire; to engage with young people, and genuinely seek their perspectives on the fires and what is needed for the recovery

YACVic asked young people:

- When the recent Bushfire first happened what was helpful for you, your family, friends, and other people in your community?
- What are the things that you wish would have been around at the time of the disaster that would have been helpful to you, your family, friends, and other people in the community?
- How did this disaster differ from previous disasters in your region i.e., drought, floods etc.?
- What was the emergency response like during the bushfires?

An overview and key findings from this consultation can be found via the first report [HERE](#) or via the YACVic website <https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/Emerging-Themes-Consultation-1.docx>

*“Programs exactly like yours [YACVic's Consultation Workshop] 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*

### **Workshop 2 - Good Practice Guide consultation**

This workshop provided participants the opportunity to create and design resources to support youth participation in bushfire recovery and rebuilding efforts. These workshops were facilitated online and were co-designed and delivered with the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group members. Resources are available via the YACVic website.

YACVic asked young people:

- What content do we need to have for engaging with young people affected by bushfires specifically?
- If you were to pick up a document like this, what information would you find most useful?
- How can we make this accessible for young people and orgs to use?
- What would it look like?

*“Develop a guide for how communities can hold these conversations”. - Young Person, Bairnsdale*

### **Workshop 3 - ‘The Silver Lining’**

In this workshop, our objective was to identify ideas and aspirations for jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts, or that should be considered as part of the long-term strategy for communities.

YACVic asked young people:

- What are the main employment options young people traditionally have in your area?
- What jobs can flow on from Recovery and Rebuilding?
- What roles do you think young people can hold in local industries?
- What are the barriers to young people gaining employment in your area?
- What are the solutions to these barriers?
- What about education and training, how could that help you to gain employment?

## Workshop 4 – ‘Rising from the Ashes’

In this workshop, our objective was to explore young people’s unique needs and ideas for the affected communities within the broader community and school settings.

Young people identified unanimously across the bushfire affected communities a need for physical spaces, to facilitate a sense of belonging and connection. Community place-based youth spaces are one such recommendation that was identified.

It is important to note that our project observed that where a consultation was conducted in communities with a facilitated ‘space’ for young people, it was clear that young people had a greater connection to peers, and the bushfire recovery efforts. Consultations in communities without place-based physical spaces for young people and without a local youth worker highlighted the disconnection that young people felt and their desire to have access to a space and connect to their peers and the local community. Additionally, young people wanted the opportunity to input into the creation of such a space.

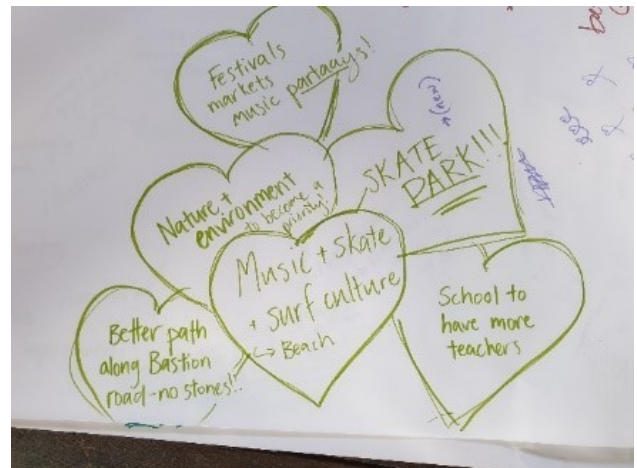
### YACVic asked young people:

- If you came back in 15 years, what would you hope to find here in your community?
- What do you wish was available now that would make your community better?
- What would you like to see your community create, improve, or encourage in your area/town/school?

- How can you be involved/advocate to make it happen?

*“Things like this [the YACVic consultation workshops] need to be brought in as a whole school approach rather than being mentioned and forgot about or only focussed at individuals”.* **Young person, Orbost**

An overview and key findings from this consultation can be found via the [second report here on the YACVic website](#).



## Survey

### YACVic, Young People and Bushfire Recovery – Online Survey

YACVic utilised an online survey for participation by young people who were unable to attend the workshop series held online and face-to-face. All of the questions in the survey reflect the questions asked throughout the workshop series.

The survey was held open from December 2020 – May 2021; however, it was difficult to secure engagement. The survey was

advertised for participation in all correspondence with schools, recovery networks, YACVic social media platforms and the social media platforms of key partners.

This included over 50 online platforms/networks notifying young people of the survey. Despite this only 8 young people between the ages of 14 to 26 completed it. Answers and responses were included in progress reporting.

During 2020/21 we heard regularly from young people across Victoria about the consultation and survey fatigue that they were experiencing, which combined with the survey opening almost one year on from the fires, may have led to the lack of engagement.

### **IGEM – Consultations**

#### **Communication and Emergency Response ‘How did you know what was happening?’**

YACVic facilitated Workshops 3 and 4 concurrently with a workshop commissioned by the Victorian Inspector-General of Emergency Management (IGEM). This ensured a youth-centred approach, so that young people were not consulted multiple times by different agencies about their bushfire experience, this aligned with the AIDR principal ‘understand the complexity and coordinate approaches.

Participants were reimbursed for their time and contributions to their work. Outcomes from the IGEM workshops have been delivered to the Inspector-General of Emergency Management, who wanted to hear from young people about the effectiveness of community-facing relief and recovery following the 2019-

2020 Eastern Victorian bushfires. The IGEM report shares young people's views, insights, and perspectives.

The report may be made available to the community at the discretion of the Inspector-General of Emergency Management.

For further information with regard to YACVic’s work with IGEM, please contact Sam Champion, YACVic Participation and Development Manager, who supervised the project undertaken by Research/ Project Coordinator Dr Fiona McDonald, at [schampion@yacvic.org.au](mailto:schampion@yacvic.org.au).

### **Community Workshops**

#### **Getting on the Same Page Workshop**

The release of the first report on *Young People and Bushfire Recovery* by YACVic, provided community organisations an opportunity to come together and dissect the emerging issues and themes and ask, ‘*What can we all be doing together to continue to build resilience in our communities as they recover?*’

The workshop included an overview of the first report and a facilitated discussion related to the opportunities for community recovery.

*“We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us.”* – **Young Person, Bairnsdale**

Key themes emerging from the report included young people identifying ideas and aspirations for skills and jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts. Additionally, they want to be included as an integral part of the long-term strategy for their local communities. Young



people provided unique ideas for the recovery and rebuilding process across a wide range of areas, prompting services providers and government agencies to ask themselves a number of questions:

- **People and wellbeing**

How do we better harness young people's enthusiasm and capabilities into future and ongoing structures, to ensure that we are creating community cohesion?

What ideas can we progress that build skills, and develop both community and organisational capacity that further strengthens resilience into the future?

What are the opportunities to bring students and school communities together with the larger community going forward? Mental Health? Student Voice? Schools/TAFE-based projects in community? What is the role for training and RTO providers?

- **Aboriginal Culture and healing**

Recovery efforts need to ensure that communities are stronger and that we are reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience. We all want to make sure that our activities and processes, both intentional and unintentional, do not exclude groups of people. Given the sparse numbers of Aboriginal young people and agencies that have been involved to date in activities, what more can be done to better include them and ensure that we are taking an approach in line with the principles of self-determination for Aboriginal people?

How do we meaningful include First Nations people and their knowledge into our collective recovery and prevention activities for future

emergency management responses?

## **Environment and biodiversity**

Young people spoke about the impact to local environment in the first emerging themes update report. Some of the suggestions regarding employment, training, and inclusion dovetail nicely to themes previously identified.

Who are our partners in building a comprehensive response that incorporates local biodiversity and the environment?

How can these activities support our aims in prevention, and further build resilience in our local communities?

- **Business and economy**

It was clear from what young people told us that they were not well informed of any overall local or area wide plan for local recovery, that included industry employment options tied to initial or longer-term recovery.

What opportunities can we progress that truly include young people in rebuilding local economies, and how do we bring in local business groups/ training providers? Are there new apprenticeships that could assist here?

Young people who attended these consultations identified ideas and aspirations for skills and jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts, or that should be considered as part of the long-term strategy for affected communities.

- **Building and Infrastructure**

Infrastructure that brings people together is a high priority for the young people we spoke to. Young people want local infrastructure that meets their needs and provides opportunities for

them to socialise and be connected. Many local ideas and projects have commenced in some towns and communities – how do we continue to include and engage young people in these projects as they progress?

## Stage 3 Training

### Youth Advocacy and Leadership Training



YACVic held youth advocacy workshops to give young people skills, knowledge, and leadership confidence to lead change in their community and be heard by decision makers.

This workshop informed and inspired young people to create change on issues they care about! Using real world examples and providing various tips on engaging with the greater community, this workshop helps shape what advocacy might look like for young people.

Workshops were held in bushfire affected communities throughout East Gippsland, Towong, and Alpine Shires. Young people were from Mallacoota, Orbost, Swifts Creek, Lakes Entrance, Bairnsdale and surrounds, East Gippsland Specialist School, Tallangatta, Corryong Falls Creek, Mount Beauty, Mansfield and more. To date 76 young people have received this training.

Through learning a mixture of advocacy concepts combined with reflective and group activities, the participants delve deep into decision-making, stakeholder engagement and public advocacy. Topics covered included:

- Explore the different components of advocacy
- Identify aspects of decision making and leadership
- Identify certain strategies to overcome barriers
- Explore the many ways of driving stakeholder and community engagement
- Reflect on the next steps in your advocacy journey

*(Please note YACVic will still be implementing this training throughout 2021 in East Gippsland and Alpine)*

*“Thank you so much for that workshop, it was awesome and done in all the right ways. I just thought of a couple more things. Not sure if it will help but I’ll tell u that ... Things like this need to be brought in as a whole school approach rather than being mentioned and forgotten about, or only focussed on individuals. Thank you so much, can’t wait for you to come back and for everyone else to take part in the workshop” - Young person from Orbost*

## **Training for bushfire Community Recovery Committees and workers supporting bushfire affected young people**

BRV commissioned YACVic to deliver a series of workshops on engaging with young people, to be made available to Community Recovery Committee (CRC) members across Eastern Victoria. The workshops aimed to assist CRCs in developing engagement strategies when working locally with young people on recovery-based activities. The workshops were delivered to CRCs across (Towong, Alpine and East Gippsland local government areas) by young facilitators and YACVic staff and provided them with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to safely include young people in their recovery work.

*“Involving young people in recovery because it doesn’t just make the program better, it makes the community stronger, because young people really feel like they have had a voice in their recovery and that is the most important thing. I think that I have found, having a voice in recovery has helped my own personal recovery from what happened. Through the working group, just bringing more light to it”* **Young Person, Bright.**

Workshops were postponed twice due to COVID-19 restrictions and clashes with conflicting community priorities, so YACVic approached the community with a survey to determine how they would prefer to undertake the training opportunities offered to them. It was identified that the wider community preferred to have the training delivered online via zoom and at varied times throughout the work week.

Nine workshops were delivered online throughout July 2021. These workshops were attended by CRC committee volunteers, youth workers and staff from local government across the three identified LGAs working directly with young people affected by the 2019/20 Eastern Victorian Fires. Workshops were delivered at varying times throughout the day (morning, afternoon, evening) to reflect the identified preferences of CRC workers who responded to the YACVic survey.

Participants were required to register online to participate; however a substantial number who registered failed to attend with no reason provided. However, it is notable that these workshops may be more effective in the Preparedness space, rather than the Recovery space, due to volunteer fatigue and capacity issues. YACVic would recommend youth service providers communicate with emergency management services to undertake these workshops in preparedness for future disaster events to ensure youth participation in disaster management planning.

46 of the allocated 270 opportunities (30 per workshop) were accepted by the community. YACVic will facilitate ongoing access to members of the community to participate in training opportunities online via YACVic’s fee for service training for the remainder of 2021.

*“Traditionalist attitudes and parents are barriers for young people to get involved. Lack of transport, you’re too young, you don’t know what going on or what to do as a response is a big issue from older people.”* – **Young Person, Mallacoota**

The following three topics were covered in each workshop:

### **1. Youth Engagement and Participation**

Workshop Description: Find out how to involve young people in decision-making processes. Examining theory and practice, this workshop uses interactive strategies for participants to reflect on how the work of their CRC impact on 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 were equipped with the fundamental theories, strategies, and resources to help engage young people in bushfire recovery work, to strengthen the voices of young people in the work of organisations and in the wider community, whilst increasing the confidence of participants working alongside young people.

### **2. Child Safe Standards**

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.

Since 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 can be found at:

<https://www.yacvic.org.au/about-us/child-safe-standards/>

### **3. Code of Ethical Practice**

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 covered 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 or organisation.

#### **Topics we covered**

- 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?



