

Youth Plan

2021-2023

Summary

Yarra Ranges resident, 16 years old.

The Youth Plan 2021-2023 provides an interim Youth Strategic Action Plan (YSAP) for Council and key stakeholders to identify and respond to priority areas for young people and their families. With a focus on COVID-19 recovery, the key priorities to improve outcomes for young people are:

 Coordination and Advocacy

 Mental Health

 Employment



This is a summary of key points from the Youth Plan 2021-2023. The full Plan can be requested from the Youth Development Team
Contact youth@yarraranges.vic.gov.au





Acknowledgement of Country

This work has been proudly collated and prepared on Wurundjeri Country. We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal Community elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the longest surviving culture on the planet.

The impact of COVID-19 requires a strategic response to support recovery and rebuilding to ensure the wellbeing of young people. The Youth Plan follows on from findings of the Yarra Ranges Council Youth COVID-19 Impact Assessment conducted in May 2020 and aligns with the Yarra Ranges Council Covid-19 Recovery Framework; ensuring recovery is at the centre of youth planning. Likewise, the Plan was developed with consideration of the Yarra Ranges Council Gender Equity Vision and the Gender Equality Act 2020 principles.



The Youth Plan was developed in consultation with key stakeholders including:

- Yarra Ranges Council departments including Community Wellbeing, Economic Development and Investment, Strategy and Transformation.
- Youth Round Table – a leadership group of youth and community services that support young people in the Yarra Ranges including community health, youth service providers, police, education and mental health services.
- Youth Ambassadors – young people who provide a youth voice in planning and decision making.

Evidence shows that youth voice in decision making is a key strategy for supporting resilience, particularly following a disaster such as COVID-19. As such, this was prioritised in the development of the Plan and in the resulting recommendations.

This is an interim Youth Strategic Action Plan (YSAP). The development of the new Plan has been postponed until we are better placed to understand, analyse and respond to the significant internal and external variables that young people are currently facing.

With a focus on youth COVID-19 recovery, the following priorities have been identified as the way forward to creating an improved system, service and response to improve outcomes for young people and families in the Yarra Ranges.

Key Priorities:

Coordination and Advocacy

- Improve processes for **local data collection**
- Refine **governance structures** to support system response
- Develop and implement an **advocacy platform** to support youth recovery based on evidence and data
- Embed **youth voice** in all stages of recovery

Mental Health

- Increase **social connection** and building resilient behaviours through a place-based approach
- Increase **service access, navigation and coordination with a strong consideration** on intersectionality and inclusion
- Decrease the **stigma around mental illness** and accessing services/seeking help

Employment

- Increase **understanding** of youth employment barriers and opportunities
- Commit to **local and regional opportunities** to invest in youth employment, capacity and skill building opportunities

The Evidence:

Young people are experiencing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic differently and disproportionately compared to other age cohorts. A review of youth survey results, stakeholder consultation and recommendations from relevant peak bodies, as well as state-wide research, show that the key issues faced by young people now and over the coming years are mental health and employment.

In the Yarra Ranges, evidence shows that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2017), 38% of Yarra Ranges residents aged 18 and above had been diagnosed with anxiety or depression at some point, compared to 27% across Victoriaⁱ. This ranks Yarra Ranges highest on this indicator within metropolitan Melbourne.

Contributing factors to poor mental health outcomes in the Yarra Ranges include lack of access to health and mental health services, limited social connection, poor transport options and stigma of mental illness particularly in regional areas where a lack of anonymity and privacy can create barriers to support.

Mental health impacts for young people in the Yarra Ranges have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and a severe storm event that impacted areas of the Yarra Ranges in June 2021.

Based on modelling by Orygen and Melbourne University, it is estimated in the Yarra Ranges that an additional 2,875 children and adults may be experiencing mental health issues each year as a

result of COVID-19, with approximately an additional 640 young people aged between 12-25 yearsⁱⁱ.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and excluded many young people from education, work and the community. Young women, young people with a disability, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, new migrants, LGBTIQ+ young people and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders will continue to face distinct challenges above that of the general population. While we lack local data in this space, we have opportunities to engage with our community and explore what meaningful and inclusive recovery looks like. An intersectional gender lens should be applied when considering nuances within community recovery.

Young people are active citizens who use many of Council's services and spaces and have the right to be involved. Including young people in decision making processes, enables shared learnings of their unique and rich expertise and in turn supports improved decision making of governments.

The Youth Plan identifies the need and opportunities to embed youth voice in decision making as a key strategy to increase resilience and support COVID-19 youth and community recovery.

Next steps:

- An annual implementation plan will be developed that will identify key actions to address these priority areas. These will be actioned through a collective impact and partnership approach with stakeholders and key groups including the Yarra Ranges Youth Round Table, State and Federal Government, Council, young people, families and carers.
- Council will provide a mechanism for reporting and accountability through the Pandemic Governance Structure (Social Recovery and Economic Recovery).
- The Youth Plan will be formally reviewed by June 2023, with the intent to develop a new Youth Strategic Action Plan.
- In the delivery of all objectives and actions, we commit to prioritising youth voice and applying a gender and intersectional lens.



Coordination and Advocacy

Youth Voice:

“I think the government and everybody who’s older than us forgets that we’re the future... we’re the ones who are going to make that change later on. We’re the ones who are gonna continue on this life and change it... I guess we need to have more conversations and really have our voices heard... nobody’s really listening.”

Young person quoted in UNICEF Report ^{viii}

“These days we are seeing more and more young people getting a seat at the table, however, we often find ourselves having to question whether it is an act of tokenism. Young people want their words to not only be recognised, but also implemented in a tangible way.”

Yarra Ranges Youth Ambassador



Leading 4 the Future Graduation Celebration (May, 2021)

future

Prior to COVID-19, young people were more **optimistic** about the future than older generations and were confident about building a better future for themselves and the next generations ^x.

hope

73% of young people said their level of hope for the future is good or very good (June 2021) This shows early signs that the pandemic may have left some young people with a new positive perspective and resilience ^{viii}.

input

One in four young people in Australia (26%) reflected that there is no clear way for young people to input into discussions about the virus impacts and response ^{viii}.

resilience

Youth voice and involvement in decision making is a key strategy for supporting resilience for young people following a disaster ^{xii}.



Mental Health:

“(COVID-19 has) isolated me and removed my freedom and coping mechanisms”

“(Since COVID-19 I have) Lost my job and relationships have weakened. My mental health has been negatively impacted also.”

“The uncertainty is making me anxious.”

Anonymous survey responses from Yarra Ranges young peopleⁱⁱ

1 in 4

One in four young people in Australia have a mental health problem

It is estimated that around one in four young people (aged 16-24 years) and one in seven children and adolescents (aged 4-17 years) have a mental health problemⁱⁱⁱ.

24%

Higher levels of mental distress reported for young women in Australia

Growing evidence shows that young women in Australia are reporting higher levels of mental distress than young men in relation to COVID-19 (24% compared to 21%)^v. Please note that data for gender diverse young people is limited.



Young women, young people with a disability, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, new migrants, LGBTIQ+ young people and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to face distinct challenges above that of the general population.

30%

30% predicted increase in new cases of mental health disorders per year in Victoria. Modelling suggests a second wave of mental health impacts as a result from the COVID-19 pandemic, peaking by 2023. Self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide are expected to rise along with this curve^{iv}.

56%

56% of Yarra Ranges young people ranked mental health and coping with stress as top concerns after the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. These scored higher than the Victorian average (47%)^{vii}.

38%

38% of Yarra Ranges residents felt higher levels of anxiety and depression compared with the Victorian average (27%) in 2017ⁱ.

2,875

2,875 additional Yarra Ranges residents are estimated to experience mental health issues each year as a result of COVID-19. Of that, 640 will be young peopleⁱⁱ.

13%

13% of Yarra Ranges young people sought help. Common reasons for not seeking help included not knowing where to go, not feeling 'needy enough' and not wanting to take the place of someone more 'worthy' (May, 2020)ⁱⁱ.

impact

Mental health impact of severe storm event Mental health impacts for young people in the Yarra Ranges have been further exacerbated by the severe storm event that impacted areas of the Yarra Ranges in June 2021. In response to the event, residents have reported experiences of trauma, increased anxiety, concern, fatigue and stress.



Employment:

“It’s kind of scary to think that after this there may not be job security moving forward - being in Year 12 and wondering how HSC is going to pan out, and how university offers are going to pan out. And then adding onto that fact, there may not even be like a workforce to join after all of this happens.”

Young person quoted in UNICEF Report ^{viii}

“Young people are feeling hopeless when it comes to employment because they feel their options are becoming more limited”

Yarra Ranges Youth Ambassador

18.2%

Victorian Youth unemployment rate reached a peak of 18.2% in October 2020, almost double the 9.4% unemployment rate of the previous year ^{ix}.

At this time data from the National Skills Commission (2020) showed young Australians accounted for 45% of the decline in employment but are only 16% of the population.

14.1%

Youth unemployment rate dropped to 14.1% in Victoria by June 2021, however underemployment has increased ^{ix}.

8.4%

The number of hours worked decreased by 8.4 per cent in Victoria (June 2021) highlighting the extent to which people in Victoria had reduced hours or no work through the lockdown, without necessarily losing their jobs ^{ix}.



2021 Youth Advisory Group. A group of diverse young people from across the Yarra Ranges who work with Council and within the community to ensure young people’s voices are heard

50%

50% of young people surveyed in the Yarra Ranges reported lost work as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic ⁱⁱ. (May 2020)

Uncertainty

Young people aged 18-25 were **experiencing anxiety and were particularly worried about the uncertainty relating to education, employment, and their future ⁱⁱ.** (May 2020)

Youth Priority Areas



PRIORITY AREA 1: Coordination and Advocacy

| Objective | Strategic Action |
|--|---|
| 1.1 Improve processes for local data collection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a consistent, strategic approach to collecting local youth data (including capturing gender and intersectional data). • Collect Middle Years data to more effectively plan and improve cohesion between the middle years (8-14 year olds) and youth (12-25 year olds) priorities. • Consult with the community in inclusive, accessible, and creative ways to better understand the needs of identified priority cohorts (e.g., young people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, LGBTIQ+, CALD young people). |
| 1.2 Refine governance structures to support system response | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine purpose and identify role of the Youth Round Table in youth Covid-19 Recovery, ensuring a commitment to gender equity and intersectionality • Contribute to state and federal youth strategy, advocacy and partnerships. |
| 1.3 Develop and implement an advocacy platform to support youth recovery based on evidence and data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an advocacy platform through the Youth Round Table considering a focus on priority groups in the Yarra Ranges (e.g., young women, young LGBTIQ+ people) • Seek funding opportunities to support youth recovery, based on evidence and best practice. • Support key recommendations from peak bodies and contribute to the development of the Victorian Government Youth Strategy. |
| 1.4 Embed youth voice in all stages of recovery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a youth advisory group (with a gender balance, that is representative of the diversity of Yarra Ranges communities) to provide youth engagement and participation. • Support and expand the Youth Ambassadors program including opportunities for young people to participate in decision making processes internally and externally. • Explore and adapt best practice frameworks to ensure youth voice that is authentic and inclusive, including a youth engagement framework with a gender and intersectional lens • Facilitate youth input into Yarra Ranges Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other key strategies and plans. • Continue to advocate for youth of all genders and backgrounds to be represented on committees, boards and reference groups across Yarra Ranges Council and with our partner organisations |



PRIORITY AREA 2: Mental Health

| Objective | Strategic Action |
|---|--|
| 2.1 Increase social connection and building resilient behaviours. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with our partners to deliver meaningful opportunities for young people, their families and carers to build social and community connection, utilising a place based approach. • Activate community spaces to increase youth access and inclusion, ensuring these are designed with a gender and intersectional lens. • Deliver a range of options for young people to engage including social, recreational and capacity building including opportunities for middle years, youth and young adults. |
| 2.2 Increase service access, navigation and coordination with a strong consideration on intersectionality and inclusion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective communication, partnerships and capacity building across the youth and community sector. Provide opportunities for services to build capacity and understanding of intersectionality and inclusion principles. • Improve service access, navigation (including promotion and development of Connect Us). • Incorporate the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Mental Health Services in Victoria. |
| 2.3 Decrease the stigma around mental illness and accessing services. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and develop information, education and initiatives that address barriers and stigma to accessing support. • Prioritise strategic work in the settings that young people spend their time (e.g., work with schools, parents) • Challenge gender stereotypes that influence help seeking behaviour |



PRIORITY AREA 3: Employment

| Objective | Strategic Action |
|--|--|
| 3.1 Increase understanding of youth employment barriers and opportunities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide intelligence and input to Council's Pandemic Economic recovery committee.• Collect and share evidence on employment trends, gaps and opportunities.• Work with partners to develop a better understanding of youth barriers to employment, and how to best consult/engage with young people who are looking for work/study options. |
| 3.2 Commit to local and regional opportunities to invest in youth employment, capacity and skill building opportunities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work collaboratively on strategic initiatives to support youth engagement and employment.• Yarra Ranges Council explore investment in youth employment and skill building opportunities within Council including employment, apprenticeships, traineeships, mentoring, and work experience with a focus on investing in priority groups (e.g., young women, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders)• Deliver a range of youth capacity building activities to improve skills and experience, including recognition of soft skill development across existing programs. |



ENDNOTES

- i. The Victorian Population Health Survey 2017, Department of Health and Human Services
- ii. Yarra Ranges Youth COVID 19 Impact Assessment 2020
- iii. Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven De Haan K, Sawyer M, Ainley J, Zubrick SR (2015) The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Department of Health, Canberra.
- iv. <https://www.orygen.org.au/About/News-And-Events/2020/Modelling-predicts-an-additional-82,000-young-Vict>
- v. ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, July 2021
- vi. Kabatek J (2020) Jobless and distressed: the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on young Australians, October 2020
- vii. Mission Australia, Youth survey 2020 with 172 respondents from the Yarra Ranges
- viii. UNICEF Australia (2020) "Living in Limbo" How COVID-19 is impacting young people in Australia
- ix. ABS Cat no. 6291.0.55.001 Labour Force, Australia
- x. IPSOS (2018) Global Youth Outlook Poll, Gates Foundation's
- xi. Productivity Commission (2020). 'Mental Health: Report no. 95', Canberra, p 97-98; UNICEF (2021). 'Children's Voices in a Changing World: 2021 UNICEF Australia Young Ambassador Report.' Sydney: UNICEF Australia.
- xii. OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (2020) Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience, 11 June 2020; Masten, A.A. & Motti-Stefandid, F. (2020) Multisystem Resilience for Children and Youth in Disaster: Reflections in the Context of COVID-19, Adversity and Resilience Science, volume 1, pp. 95-106; Yourtown and the Australian Human Rights Commission (2020).

Youth Plan Summary

