

CREATE Foundation's Youth Expert Advisory Group (YEAG) 2024 Youth-led Forum

YEAG is comprised of passionate young people who have a care experience dedicated to improving the transition from care services for young people across Victoria. YEAG is supported by CREATE in partnership with DFFH and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Every part of the the day was youth-led!

5 Better Futures and Transition from Care Supports



How did we get here?

13 WORKSHOPS, DRESS REHEARSALS &
LOTS OF DISCUSSIONS



Over the course of 6 months, YEAG with support from CREATE in partnership with DFFH, planned a Youth-led Forum (which is really unique in our sector). They did this through a series of 13 workshops (39 hours worth of discussion!) where Young Consultants co-designed everything:

Agenda & invites

planning out EVERY minute of the day and how it was captured including photography!

Guestlist

and even the food and drinks their guests could enjoy throughout the day!

Presenting

public speeches, some played the role of MC for the day, and some of them even pulled together animated video and poems.

Exploring Connections: How can you shape my tomorrow

Our Young Consultants focused on identifying their target audience and chose to reach out to a broader group they don't typically engage with from an advocacy standpoint.

They decided to focus on service providers involved in transition support, selecting topics they are passionate about and believe need improvement in both practice and daily experience. Transition supports can impact the trajectory of their lives and good supports set them up to achieve their goals and thrive.

Young Consultants wanted to reach people who come into contact with care experienced young people but aren't necessarily fully embedded in the care system.





We all have the power to make a decision that might just change the world for one person...



What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 1: HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Young Consultants spoke to the need for consistent efforts to support them to access sustainable housing, highlighting that “without having somewhere to go that is safe and sustainable every other aspect won’t be sustained, it is THE FOUNDATION, and I can say that through experience.”

Young Consultants spoke about the need for holistic services and appropriate referral pathways:

“Wrap around services are needed to look at their needs in a holistic way – including mental health supports.”

“Referring young people to psychologists that are affordable and offer consistent support.”

“Creating proper links to services such as doctors and community services.”

Young Consultants want consultation and active involvement in decision making:

“Create space and allow us to fail by not rubbing it in our faces when we do instead come back to the drawing board with us.”

“Actively involve young people in decisions about their housing and offering them different options and resources to make informed decisions. Educate them on their rights... as a tenant.”

“Look at non-verbal cues when interacting with young people and notice what is not said. Also take the time to validate what the young person is feeling in the moment.”

Long term goals?

- Shift away from viewing housing as a commodity and see it as a human right!
- Dismantle the idea of housing as an investment.
- Affordable rental rates should sit between 25-30%.
- Consult young people on their needs (including a need for community) to find long-term housing solutions.



What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 2: MENTAL HEALTH (PANEL DISCUSSION)



Young Consultants were asked how their mental health impacted their transition from care:

“Because my mental health was never addressed, when I transitioned from care to my grandparents, it means I can’t talk to them like I used to. There is just this gap. Additionally it is not just me but also my little sister she used to be so outgoing. When we transitioned she changed a lot but her workers actually got her diagnosed (autism and anxiety). She struggles with doing simple things without me. It leave us with a sense and lifestyle of isolation.”

“My mental health during my transition led to me being extremely isolated... I was highly capable sometimes but not all the time. My social battery – I would have to remove myself from situations and it impacted on my relationships with my family.”

Young Consultants discussed how their experiences in care, combined with the stigma around mental health, impacted them:

“...I stigmatised myself personally. I would get picked on because I was a resi kid. There is a lot of misconceptions about resi kids. Everybody struggles with things differently and there is no right or wrong way to deal with things.”

“because of how the world has created and shaped us... I have so much internalised stigma. Ideally people are more aware of mental health...”

“The stigma around reaching out for help – I remember reaching out for help from a mental health service and it was good until they found out I had a care experience... when I finally did receive advice and saw a therapist, even she was very judgmental, but again mental health services aren’t always the silver bullet.”

Young Consultants were asked what should people be aware of when supporting a young people with a care experience:

“Polyvagal theory – fight, flight or freeze – understanding where the young person is at.”

“I am a registered nurse and 21 – the one think that gets me is adult jargon!”

“Don’t underestimate the people you are working with, they understand mental health struggles. When you are in a heightened state it feels worse like it has never been like this before. Let the young person know – you have gone through this before and got through it and it might actually be easier now you have dealt with this before.”



What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 2: MENTAL HEALTH (PANEL DISCUSSION)

Young Consultants were asked what should people be aware of when supporting a young person with a care experience:

“Pay attention to changes in behaviour and personality – it can really be life changing if you take note of this... try to approach as kindly, carefully and patiently as you can. When I have these changes I close off and people assume that I don’t want to talk and they give up. Small things like spending time and finding a space where young people are comfortable and talking about your days... in my case there was a loss in contact because people thought I gave up and so they gave up on me... just continue reaching out and showing that you are there and care about them.”

“It’s important to remain aware that young people are strong and resilient not vulnerable – show them this and that they can get through the challenging times and use strength-based language e.g., how can I help you, what can we do to make this better?”

Young Consultants reflected on examples of positive action that someone around them had taken that benefited their mental health:

“Back in high school there was an education support worker who listened to me and kept me line – this impacted the way I look at education and mental health. Someone being there and showing up – actions are much louder than words.”

“Maybe you can’t be there for the person all the time but if you help them with their hobbies/if they don’t have any help them find hobbies to do on their own. My dance therapist did something amazing – didn’t focus on the situation I was in they focused on the future. This was important because a lot of conversation focus on what I was trapped in. Share looking to the future together. Please share the vision of the young person’s future.”

Young Consultants offered their guests one last reflection to walk way with:

“See people as more than just the one thing and care about the other parts.”

“Don’t judge us before you know us.”

“We all walk along different pathways but what brings us together is our collective want to help young people.”

“You can make a difference to our lives as young people. Young people are the future but you are the ones shaping us.”



It is not just about education it's about doing something in life that brings you joy.

What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 3: EDUCATION

Young Consultants spoke about the multiple and compounding barriers to accessing education:

"My first resi place was an hour away from my school... I was refused transport. It was distressing at first, but became comforting to disconnect from education."

"I was breached on school uniform policies because I was trying to cover my self-harm scars... I was provided with brand new uniforms and transport... I was so so strongly advocated for by someone who saw the potential in me... She was adamant in her mission to make the school a safe place and environment for me."

"If you didn't have somewhere safe and stable to live education doesn't become a priority... Dealing with illness fractured my belief in myself and the norms in my life changed. My biggest fear was not going to school and being homeless which happened anyway."

"When I was 17 years I left home and went to a community school which helped me to engage even though I didn't finish my VCE... I didn't want to get out of the car on the first day – the principal came and met me and offered for me to do admin tasks and gave me money for lunch... basically bribing me which was unorthodox but it worked..."

"...unless something changes we are still going to be here explaining this to you. My journey in care was marked by change – over 70 placement changes; went to 4 different high schools. Constant changes fractured my sense of identity and made it hard to engage with studies. I missed 3 years of school..."

"My DFFH worker rocked up at my house and said I could go to school. I had no uniform. He dropped me at school with no uniform and left. I was genuinely the odd one out."

"Things improved dramatically when I had the right support (I had a learning mentor). She played a crucial role in my education journey... her patience, understanding and unwavering support. It's not a normal life but she made it normal. She also made sure my academic efforts were paramount."

There is no one size fits all solution... We all need someone to believe in us for most kids it would be their parents but we don't always have that and that's why we invited you all here today."

"My violin teacher didn't make me feel outed and taught me like other students."

Practice solutions:

...as an educational professional you should take a collaborative approach with young people. Focus on the young person's advantages not disadvantages.

Something that would have helped is having a tutor come to the house to help with homework.
&
TAFE has helped me to re-engage with education.

...professionals build strong supportive relationships with young people, recognise the systemic issues young people in care face. Develop supportive policies and procedures; foster a culture of understanding that supports diversity and inclusion.

What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 4: ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS (AOD) AND YOUTH JUSTICE

Young Consultants shared deeply moving stories of how their lives have been impacted by their own use and others use of AOD.

Young Consultants reflected on interconnectedness of safety and use of AOD by adults in their lives:

“My dad was a heavy drug user... He used to extort my mum for money and we wouldn't have money for the lights or food. The only time I ever felt safe was... at school... I felt helpless and alone... I ended up getting introduced to drugs and followed in my dad's footsteps of drugs and crime. I used drugs to numb my emotions.”

“Young people with a care experience often do drugs and crime because they are trying to find a sense of belonging, acceptance and identity, not because it's fun or because it's enjoyable, because it's not.”

Anyone can be the person who tell young people in out-of-home care you can do it.

Young Consultants want the space to be able speak about their experiences:

“My experience of out-of-home care was s***... I do realise this isn't helpful or strength based but sometimes it is cathartic to express the way you feel.”

“I was reunified with my mother at 12 years... I re-entered into foster care at 13 after my mother kidnapped me from my grandparents home. I was reunified again... I began using drugs to cope with being at home.”

“The unpredictability and instability created barriers for my transition to independence.”

Young Consultants suggested practice changes based on their experiences:

- **Build relationships and shared experiences:** “Do things with young people to help them to discover good things in life that they can experience.”
- **Consistency:** “When drug use is normalised it can mean young people have their guard up. It is so important to be a consistent person in their life. It is never too late from them, they just need to be shown something different.”
- **Support young people to prepare for their transition:** “I didn't have years to prepare for the horrors of being an adult... I was simply forwarded a letter that said I was well supported in the community and would be considered an independent minor. I didn't expect this to be the last time I heard from them.”
- **Talk about safe relationships:** “I think if I knew what safe relationships looked like I would have accepted anything less.”

I work in a small team with the best people who go above and beyond to ensure young people transitioning from care have the supports and opportunities to not just survive, but finally thrive too!



What we discussed

PRIORITY AREA 5: BETTER FUTURES AND TRANSITION FROM CARE SUPPORTS

What is Better Futures?

- Better Futures is the Victorian statewide program that provides support to young people transitioning from care between the age of 15 years 9 months and 21 years.
- These supports consist of:
 - a development coach who works with young people to develop life skills and supports them to achieve their goals & aspirations through a coaching practice rather than case management.
 - a community connector who works to provide various opportunities for young people to access across 5 domains (education, employment, health & wellbeing, housing & living skills, and connection).
 - Funding to support young people's housing needs and flexible funding to support young people to achieve their dreams, aspirations and talents.
- What really makes a difference is the framework that underpins Better Futures practice i.e., 'Advantaged Thinking'.

Impact?

- In 2017 the pilot program started by helping 50 young people transition from care.
- Today, Better Futures has now helped over 4,000 young people transition from care.

Instead of looking at a person for their trauma, disadvantages or through a deficit lens we look at people for their skills aspirations and talents.

7 Tests of Advantaged Thinking

- 1 We will talk about people without stereotyping them
- 2 We will understand people by what they can do and aspire to be
- 3 We will work with people by coaching growth & positive risk
- 4 We will invest in people to promote their potential to thrive
- 5 We will believe in people
- 6 We will involve people so experience can shape solutions
- 7 We will challenge ourselves & others to promote advantage thinking

"In my first month in the role a young person said to me 'no one can thrive in system that doesn't accommodate for them and their needs'. Better Futures ensures young people are at the centre of their practice. We are all here to ensure that there are adequate supports so young people can finally thrive too."



Q&A

YEAG FORUM

Are there certain words or phrases that workers use that you do not find helpful or judgemental:

“When you have a practitioner or worker and they talk to you in the same way that they write their case notes! When we say youth-friendly language we say this because its helpful and contributes to meaningful engagement.”

“People say disadvantaged rather than has experienced disadvantage.”

“Treated me like a child when I am an adult.”

“Tone and body language – arms crossed and phone in hand; seeming disinterested.”

“Approach with someone – when you approach young people – try not to tell them only good or bad news... they mean well but if that is all we hear you say we associate you with being a news reporter and it builds a negative image.”

What is the significance of YEAG:

“Advocating on behalf of other young people in my position.”

“I didn’t want to feel like a cog in a bureaucratic wheel.”

“We are a family to each other ”

“CREATE saved my life at the end of the day.”

“Civic participation... it stops with us. Gives me purpose in my experiences”

“Better than not doing it at all, it takes a long time, I can see the negatives and positives.”

“We are all like a piece of thread together... we make a great grand tapestry for all the young people and generation after generation.”

What’s next?

Young people were so inspired by the event and are even thinking about how this could be turned into a national tour!

“We all stand here today to break barriers so young people can finally have a service that accommodates them and their needs.”

What did our guests think?

PROFESSIONALS ACROSS A RANGE OF SERVICES, INCLUDING CARE PROVIDERS, EDUCATION, MENTAL HEALTH, YOUTH SERVICES AND MORE...



“It was one of the most moving and impactful forums that I have ever been to. It was incredibly brave to share such personal stories and reflections and I had conversations with others who indicated that they were going to change their practice as a result of hearing their experiences, including the things that made a difference. Your passion, commitment to change and creativity shone throughout the day.”

“I felt incredibly privileged to be in the room, and every moment was incredibly valuable. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and delivering such an engaging and informative day. You are all amazing!!”

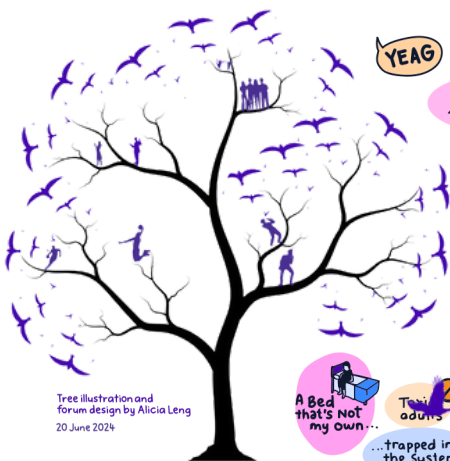
“I want to work with YEAG!! I think you are all amazing and brilliant young people who I would love to give more opportunities too. I'm already thinking about other engagements where I might be able to have YEAG speak on similar or other Youth-focused topics and really want to create more opportunities for them to continue to shine!”

If you want to get involved with CREATE or YEAG, email victoria@create.org.au

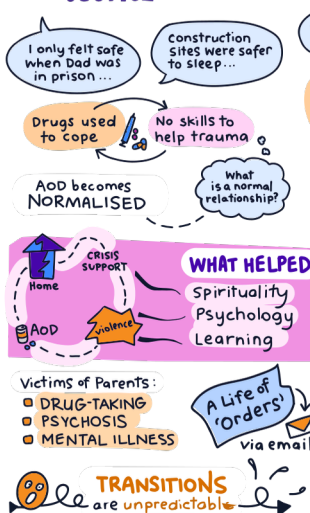
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VISUAL SCRIBE

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS HOW CAN YOU SHAPE MY TOMORROW?



AOD & YOUTH JUSTICE



EDUCATION



BETTER FUTURES



Q&A

