

YSAS

Excellence in Practice



YOUTH
SUPPORT +
ADVOCACY
SERVICE



YSAS acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and water on which we rely.

YSAS acknowledges the inherent cultural strength and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their vast experience in caring for the social emotional wellbeing of their community.

We are committed to supporting Aboriginal self-determination.





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Excellence
in practice

Foreword

I've met many young people over the years who are on very challenging paths. They all, every one, want and deserve a much better future.

Every year, YSAS supports thousands of young people to navigate complex issues, often symptomatic of serious disadvantage. Their needs are diverse, and YSAS responds to each person's situation, seeing them for who they are, and want to be.

I'm very proud to have joined the Board of YSAS and to Chair this fantastic organisation because I know how deeply young people need the expertise, the respect, and passion that YSAS brings.

This Strategic Plan takes our almost 25 years of outreach, practice, progress and experience and propels us forward. We know we can do more, engaging well with First Nations Peoples and many rich, diverse cultures, developing our multi-disciplinary practice, and raising the voices, needs and perspectives of young people.

On behalf of the Board, I invite you to explore our Plan, and to join us on the path to a better future for young people experiencing serious disadvantage.

Judge Michael Bourke
Board Chair

I feel both enthusiastic and optimistic as I consider how we go about implementing our new Strategic Plan.

In setting our direction for the next three years we have consulted widely, examined our organisation's strengths and weaknesses, and sought to understand the landscapes that we have to navigate to reach our agreed destination – that is to be an organisation capable of delivering the best possible care for the young people and families that we work with.

I thank Jesuit Social Services, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, who are our shareholder organisations, and our Board for creating the conditions that make the implementation of this plan possible.

I also recognise our Managers, frontline workers and support staff who come together every day to fulfil our purpose and the young people and families that participate in efforts to help us improve.

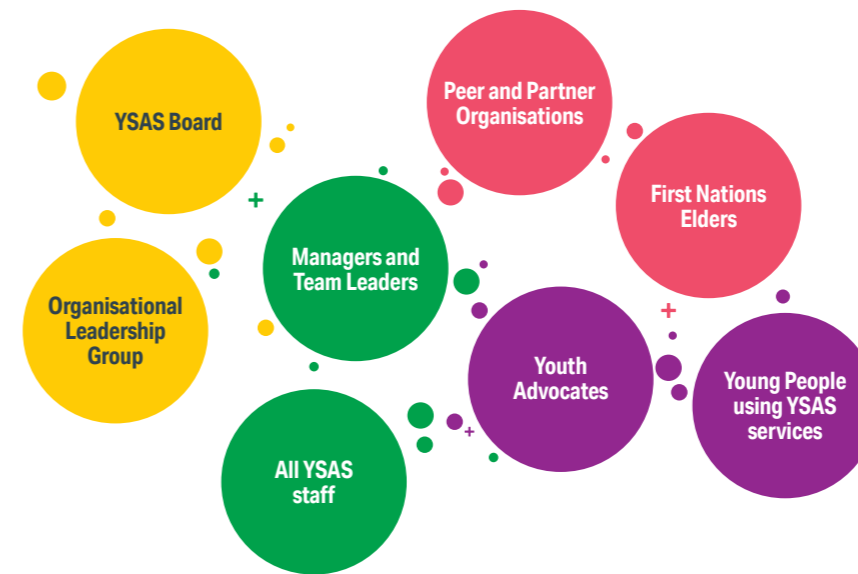
It is an honour for all of us to further a tradition established by great people like Professor Glenn Bowes, our first ever Board Chair, who guided us through our early years with grace and helped establish the foundations that YSAS stands on today.

Andrew Bruun
Chief Executive Officer

Co-creating our Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan is a product of collective effort involving our Board, Youth Advocates and young people accessing our services, and over 350 YSAS staff. We've also benefited from guidance and input by First Nations Elders, peers and partners.

We value honesty, accountability, empowerment and respect at YSAS. These values have been upheld by everyone involved in developing this Strategic Plan and will underpin its implementation.



- + Setting expectations and providing direction
- + Helping us to listen and reflect on how people experience our work and what they expect and need from us.
- + Helping us to explore the future and define our priorities and commitments to 2025
- + Keeping us focused throughout on what matters

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Excellence in Practice

Our Vision

"A community where all young people are valued, included and have every opportunity to thrive."

To thrive, young people require space and support to learn how to meet their needs and adapt to challenges that arise as they develop. Success in navigating the transition to adulthood is determined not only by a young person's motivation and capabilities but also the capacity of their family, community and culture to provide guidance and vital resources.

Resources and opportunities are not distributed equally in our society. Children and young people facing the greatest adversities are not as well protected by valuable social scaffolding and access to resources that reduce exposure to risk. Poverty and experiences of discrimination and exploitation put young people at higher risk of poor health and developmental outcomes.

Many young people and their families (including chosen family or non-familial carers) are resourceful in finding ways to cope with such serious disadvantage, but circumstances can become overwhelming.

Complex issues can manifest and entrench serious disadvantage. Issues such as homelessness, harmful drug and alcohol use, interaction with the criminal justice system, compromised mental health and entanglement in cycles of violence, abuse or trauma. These issues often co-occur and interrelate.

And this is where YSAS steps up.

In 1996, when the Victorian Premier's Drug Advisory Council recommended a Youth Substance Abuse Service (the original name for YSAS) be established, they understood that young people experiencing difficulties with their drug use commonly faced other difficulties.

From the outset, our services were required to have "...the capacity to address the variety of other problems that beset young people who use drugs" and to engage "...young people who are 'hard to reach' and who may be involved or at risk of being involved with the juvenile justice system".

For almost 25 years our focus has been on these most vulnerable young people. The drug and alcohol programs we offer has adapted and expanded to meet the specific needs of young people. Today, we are experts in youth-specific services that reduce crime and increase young people's meaningful participation in our community. We know that if we intervene early, we can improve the overall health and wellbeing of young people, including their mental health.

As the world around us evolves, and our services continually advance, our vision remains clear. We work together to create a community where all young people are valued, included and have every opportunity to thrive.

Excellence in practice requires a team effort, extending to every area of our work, from our services, to our advocacy on social change, to the systems and teams that support our daily purpose, and our vision for the future.



Our purpose

"To enable young people experiencing serious disadvantage to access the resources and support they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives."

Our strategic plan focuses on the achievement of our purpose through excellence in practice.

Excellence in practice means that our programs and services are geared to respond to the complexity of each young person's circumstances. This includes acknowledging each young person's strengths as well as the difficulties they are contending with.

Excellence requires us to create connections and conditions for young people and their families to access and make the most of resources and opportunities. We must act with respect, inclusivity and equity in all that we do.

Our responses must be culturally meaningful, supporting young people and families of all backgrounds and identities in ways that work for them.

Excellence in practice demands that we continually learn from our experiences and apply the best available evidence about what works. In striving for excellence, we seek constant evolution rather than perfection. The perspective of young people and families using our services is an essential aspect in measuring excellence. Valuing lived and living experience in this way helps us better understand the reality of challenges faced, co-create solutions and drive improvement.

Those with lived and living experience fundamentally shape our advocacy to confront the pernicious stigma and discrimination that so many young people experience when seeking help, or dealing with complexities around substance use and mental health.

Excellence in practice is a team effort. To achieve this, we know that intentional and accountable leadership matters. We want everyone to understand how important and valuable their work is to achieving our shared purpose.

Together, we create, nurture and deliver excellence in practice.

Our commitment to First Nations Peoples

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work. They were the first to establish sovereign Nations and that sovereignty has never been ceded.

We are enriched by the continuing cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We pay respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging.

We are steadfast in our belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a right to self-determination and justice. As such, we are committed to learning from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) how best to support them in fighting for justice and creating better futures for First Nations communities.

We accept the truth of this country's colonial past and recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience systemic racism in Australia today. We remember that the authorities in Australia used force to steal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, inflicting an overwhelming trauma that current and future generations have to find ways to live with. When we confront this shameful truth and listen to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we can start to comprehend how devastating it is for them to witness the over-representation of their children and young people in the out of home care and justice systems across the country.

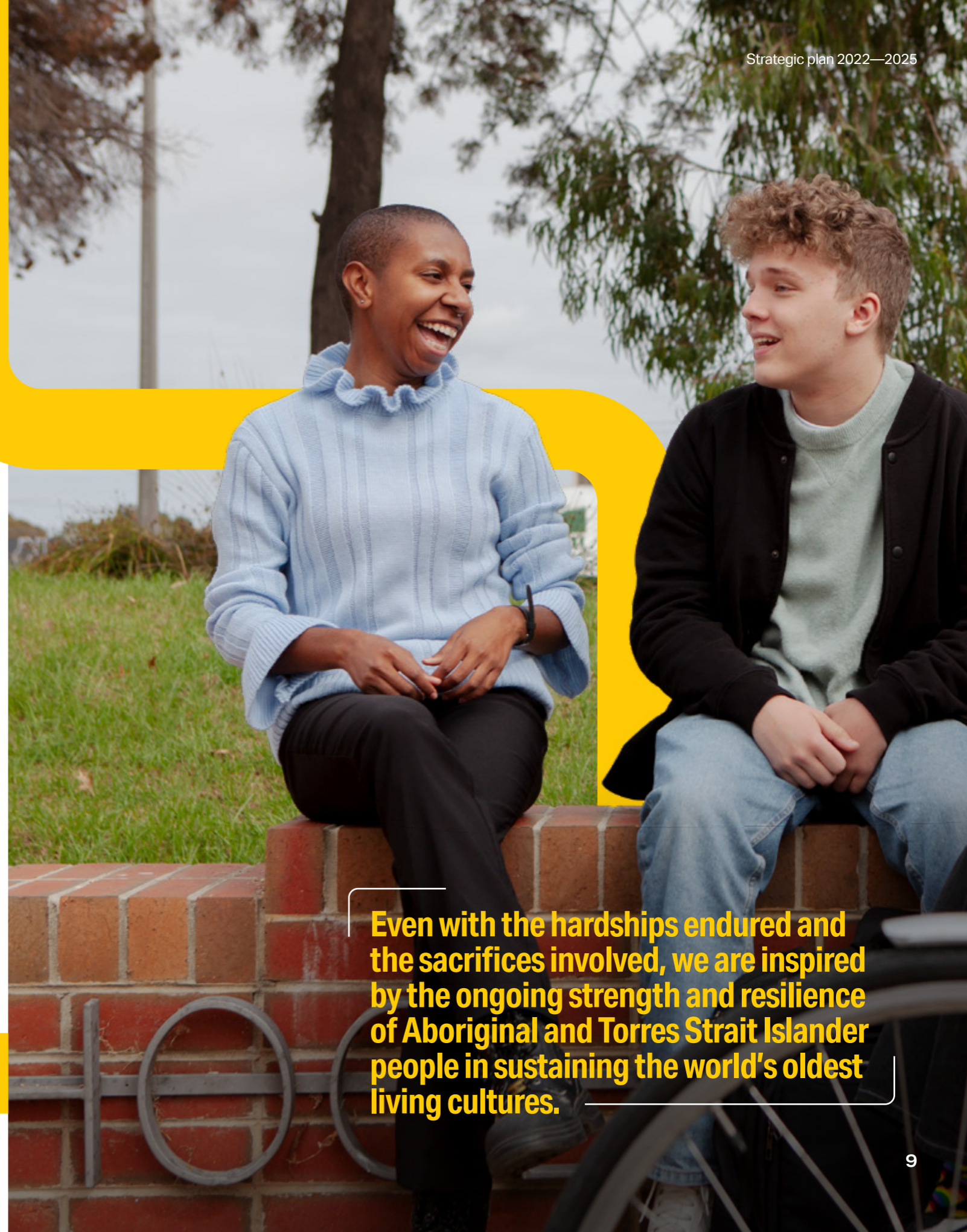
Structural change is needed to 'Close the Gap' between social, economic and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-indigenous Australians. This emphasises the importance of the 2020 National Agreement on 'Closing the Gap'.

We also commend the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria for their efforts in establishing the foundations for a Nation-leading Treaty between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria and the State Government. We are also hopeful that the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' will soon be enshrined in the 'Constitution of Australia'.

Even with the hardships endured and the sacrifices involved, we are inspired by the ongoing strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in sustaining the world's oldest living cultures.

Finally, and importantly, we thank our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, partners and friends for helping us learn how best to walk alongside and support First Nations peoples.

Even with the hardships endured and the sacrifices involved, we are inspired by the ongoing strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in sustaining the world's oldest living cultures.





Our commitment to Inclusion and Equity

Our commitment to inclusion and equity for people of all backgrounds and identities.

We are committed to people of a diversity of backgrounds and identities being included, represented, and having the opportunity to participate equally in the life of our organisation and the communities in which we provide our services.

While it is not possible to fully comprehend the complexity of all human experience, we learn so much through including and building relationships of mutual trust and respect with First Nations peoples, people with disabilities, people who are LGBTQIA+, people of colour, and people from various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. We are also committed to gender equity.

Being open to learning helps us to understand how systems of power and privilege can significantly contribute to marginalisation, disadvantage, and long-term harm.

At YSAS we strive to create the conditions where people of a diversity of backgrounds and identities feel safe, enfranchised and valued.

Our organisation is greatly enriched when everyone’s life experiences and communities can contribute to the way that we interact with each other and our work.

To this end, we commit to prioritising inclusion and equity in everything that we do, including the enactment of a YSAS Inclusion and Equity Plan. We will learn and reflect on the implementation of the identified priorities, adapting as needed, and enabling our organisation to become more inclusive and equitable over the next few years and beyond.

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Operating context

Population growth & areas experiencing serious disadvantage

Victoria's population is projected to increase by half a million people over the next four years across both metropolitan and regional areas.

Dropping off the Edge 2021 analysis identifies the top forty most disadvantaged communities and locations in Victoria. When we understand how growth and disadvantage affect demand for our services, we can better plan for services to reach young people most in need.

A changing economy & rising cost pressures

Australia has entered a period of economic recovery and change, driven by domestic and global instability. Households and organisations are contending with rising costs of living and operation, with even further inflation on the horizon. This is unsettling, bringing both opportunities and challenges in how we meet needs.

We can anticipate that governments will require and scrutinise evidence on service value and impact. We will need to adapt to employment markets and rates of record high employment to make sure we continue to be a great place to work and meet employee expectations. And we know that these economic shifts will affect the young people and families we work with, compounding social and financial disadvantage.

Digital transformation

Rapid technological evolution continues to transform the way we work, connect with, and access services. The development of telehealth is just one example.

The way young people connect and engage is underscored by ever-changing digital platforms. Unfortunately, too many young people also experience abuse and harm online, and serious cyber risks exist.

To take advantage of the benefits, and respond to the risks in a digital era, we can offer flexibility in how we work, explore effective modes for engaging with and supporting young people and their families, build smart systems and data-led processes that empower our work.

Tackling difficult social issues

We are in an era of reflection societally, with Inquiries and Commissions exploring subjects that not so long ago were too complex or taboo to investigate and reflect on in depth. Family violence, child abuse, mental health, and the inter-generational impact of colonial settlement on First Nations Peoples are just some of the issues being tackled.

This era brings opportunities. For reflection, for reform, for real change to systems, policies, and services. As a respected, longstanding provider of services for young people in Victoria, it is so important that we listen, contribute our voice, partner with others, and seize new opportunities.



Climate change

The impacts of a changing climate are a serious threat to today's children and young people. This generation will be affected first and worst by the climate crisis. Globally, they will experience political, economic and social disruption. Locally, this will be coupled with impacts such as more frequent and extreme weather events and disasters, bringing massive upheaval. People already experiencing factors of serious disadvantage will be most impacted.

Young people seek climate justice. We witness the distress that it causes for so many of the young people we talk to and work with. They need their voices to be heard and they want those in positions of power to listen and act. We acknowledge that our work and advocacy cannot be silent on climate justice.

Our strategic aims for 2022-2025 respond to an ever-changing world. Diverse factors shape our decisions locally and globally. Responding to our operating context will be critical to how we deliver and adapt our services for young people, their families and carers.

Our strategic aims

2022-2025 Strategic Plan: Excellence in Practice

Our strategic plan focuses on the achievement of our purpose through Excellence in Practice

Excellence in practice means that our programs and services are geared to respond to the complexity of each young person's circumstances. This includes acknowledging each young person's strengths as well as the difficulties they are contending with.

Excellence requires us to create connections and conditions for young people and their families to access and make the most of resources and opportunities. We must act with respect, inclusivity and equity in all that we do.

Our responses must be culturally meaningful, supporting young people and families of all backgrounds and identities in ways that work for them.

Excellence in practice demands that we continually learn from our experiences and apply the best available evidence about what works. The perspective of young people and families using our services is an essential aspect in measuring excellence.

Valuing lived and living experience in this way helps us better understand the reality of challenges faced, co-create solutions and drive improvement.

Excellence in practice is a team effort, extending to every area of our work, from our services, to our advocacy on social change, to the systems and teams that support our daily purpose.

To achieve this, we know that intentional and accountable leadership matters. We want everyone to understand how important and valuable their work is to achieving our shared purpose.

Together, we create, nurture and deliver excellence in practice.



Our Vision

A community where all young people are valued, included and have every opportunity to thrive.



Our Purpose

Helping young people experiencing serious disadvantage to access the resources and support they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.



Our Values

- Honesty
- Empowerment
- Accountability
- Respect

Walking with First Nations Peoples

- 1 Pay respect and support self-determination
- 2 Listen to Aboriginal Peoples and learn
- 3 Seek opportunities to collaborate and do better



Delivering more effective services

- 1 Advance services that respond to the evolving needs of young people and families
- 2 Develop partnerships that lift our impact
- 3 Track the quality and impact of our services



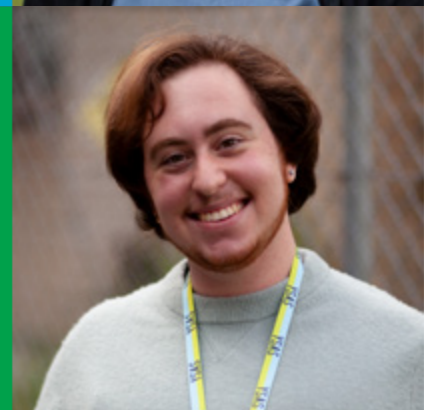
Using our voices to deliver greater social impact

- 1 Integrate lived and living experiences
- 2 Advocate for social conditions that empower young people and families
- 3 Demonstrate and call for practice that works



Enabling our people to achieve more

- 1 Build our capability and workplace to be our best
- 2 Develop a more sustainable financial future
- 3 Strengthen our practice with improved systems and processes



Walking with First Nations Peoples



We aim to

Pay respect and support self-determination

Why this matters

We live and work on Aboriginal Country. It always was, always will be. We are committed to continued improvement on how to best pay respect and acknowledge Aboriginal Peoples and their cultures, and how to support Aboriginal self-determination.

Listen to Aboriginal Peoples and learn

Why this matters

We must be open to learning from our Aboriginal partners, staff, and young people. We must listen to their stories and deeply understand inter-generational trauma and the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

We want to create more culturally safe and relevant service offerings for Aboriginal families and young people, and to create the right conditions to employ more Aboriginal people.

Seek opportunities to collaborate and do better

Why this matters

When we collaborate and build respectful relationships, we can ask our Aboriginal partners what they need from us and contribute meaningfully where we are invited to.

We can improve our practice for all young people by learning from Aboriginal practices in trauma-informed care and social and emotional wellbeing, and helping everyone at YSAS feel culturally connected.

To achieve these aims, we will:

With advice from Aboriginal Elders and community leaders, seek to form a Cultural Advisory Group* to inform our Board and leadership on matters including:

- 1 Development of our model of accountability for reconciliation action, and our work with First Nations Peoples
- 2 Creation of safe and relevant service offerings for Aboriginal families and young people
- 3 Cultural bridging, awareness and safety education for all staff
- 4 Development of reciprocal relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) local to our sites and programs
- 5 Development of a reciprocal relationship with Koorie Youth Council and strengthening of Aboriginal youth participation

*Terms to be co-created.

Indicators of progress

- A Cultural Advisory Group that contributes to our organisational strategic direction and cultural maturity
- An increase in organisational partnerships and agreements in place with ACCOs
- Increase in satisfaction with our services amongst Aboriginal families and young people



Delivering more effective services

2

To achieve these aims, we will:

We aim to

Advance services that respond to evolving needs of young people and families

Why this matters

We are guided and motivated by the fact that young people and families who use our services do so on their own terms. Creating and advancing local, safe, inclusive, and accessible services is critical to our success.

We remain focused on responding to need in communities where disadvantage is most likely to be encountered and want to better support increasing demand for services online. Co-creation with those who use our services will help us to do all of this work well.

Develop partnerships that lift our impact

Why this matters

Young people and their families have complex and diverse needs, and support comes in many forms. Because young people seek connected and holistic services, we complement our expertise and scope of practice through partnerships and networks.

To achieve the best outcomes, we need to ensure that each of our partnerships brings shared value and impact. We want to mature our approach here and in doing so, involve young people and families in the shape and evaluation of partnerships.

Track the quality and impact of our services

Why this matters

Our Model of Care is centred on the needs of young people and families and we value their assessment on the quality and effectiveness of our care.

We want to better understand how our work contributes to positive outcomes for young people and we're implementing new systems to do so. These systems will provide us with more robust data and enable us to continuously improve our performance as a learning organisation, and to evidence our impact over time.

- 1 Embed the YSAS Model of Care across our services, and implement supporting client management systems
- 2 Develop our services to be more family inclusive
- 3 Strengthen our services for young people in Out of Home Care, including support for their transition when leaving care
- 4 Review and adapt our services and spaces to ensure they are safe for people of all backgrounds and identities
- 5 Advance our approach to partnerships so that we can consistently assess their outcomes and value
- 6 Measure and report on our social impact

Indicators of progress

- Reduction in harm associated with substance use, mental health, and criminal justice involvement amongst young people
- Increase in service satisfaction amongst young people and families
- Increase in social and economic participation for young people
- Partnerships contribute to positive outcomes



Using our voices to deliver greater social impact

3

To achieve these aims, we will:

We aim to

Integrate lived and living experiences

Why this matters

Lived and living experiences of young people and their families drive positive change and enable the delivery of better outcomes. Embedding this expertise from young people and their families throughout our organisation will positively influence leadership, culture, practice and advocacy.

Advocate for social conditions that empower young people and families

Why this matters

By working in partnership with young people we can create the conditions and platform to advocate for actions that address their needs and concerns. This is at the heart of our work.

Our advocacy efforts are critical and multi-faceted. We are committed to fighting against the detrimental impact that stigma and discrimination have on young people and families where complexities around substance use and mental health arise. We are focused on earlier intervention and harm prevention, the availability of developmentally appropriate services, and leading change that will ensure young people live in a more just and equal society.

Demonstrate and call for practice that works

Why this matters

Led by evidence, we've developed and adapted our services and model of care for the past 25 years. We want young people, families, and our staff to be further involved in promoting what works and providing their insight into our service design.

We need to use our experience and our voice to call for investment in practices that really work, and to better advocate for services that are specifically designed for young people and families.

- 1 Amplify the voices of young people and families in our advocacy efforts
- 2 Expand roles for young people to participate in our governance, service design and advocacy
- 3 Share evidence, experience and knowledge with partners and investors to extend our social impact
- 4 Lead and participate in advocacy campaigns addressing serious disadvantage for young people and families
- 5 Contribute to policy development and social change that creates conditions for young people to thrive
- 6 Build coalitions to drive better policy and fairer treatment of young people within the criminal justice system

Indicators of progress

- Participation of young people and families in review, co-creation, service design, and advocacy initiatives, or vocational opportunities with YSAS
- Young people in our Youth Participation initiatives are representative of the population accessing our services
- Contribution and influence to the development of legislation, policy and investment by governments to address social disadvantage and expand services for young people



Enabling our people to achieve more

4

To achieve these aims, we will:

We aim to

Build our capability and workplace to be our best

Why this matters

Our people are fundamental to success. We need to offer a contemporary and inclusive workplace that supports each person's development, performance and wellbeing.

To achieve this, we must support and develop leaders to nurture a great workplace culture. We must attract and retain people from backgrounds and identities that reflect the communities we work with. And we know that lived and living experience in our workforce matters. With each of these attributes in place it is not only our people, but the young people we work with, who benefit.

Develop a more sustainable financial future

Why this matters

We understand the need to further plan and invest with a multi-year horizon for our financial security and sustainability of our impact. To serve through an era of economic turbulence and fund essential services for young people, we want to diversify our revenue and improve our capability to plan for and respond to funding opportunities.

As a trusted provider, that advocates for the true costs of service delivery, we must call for better investment in high-quality, high-impact services.

Strengthen our practice with improved systems and processes

Why this matters

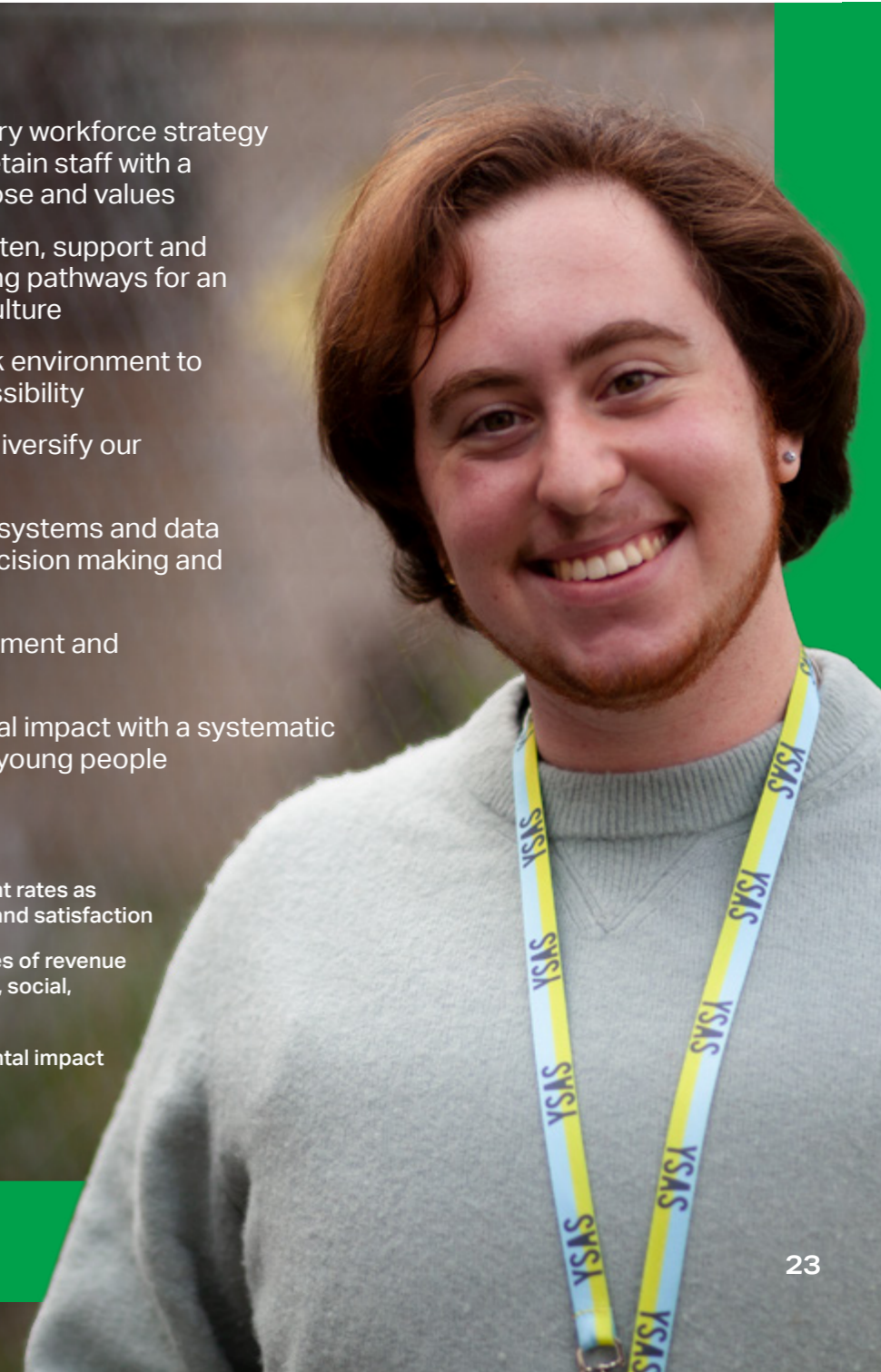
To achieve excellence in practice, our people need access to fit for purpose technology, infrastructure, and processes. We take our compliance seriously in a highly regulated environment, while valuing the need to plan ahead, work collaboratively, and share our stories. To track our performance, manage risks, and make informed decisions, we need sound data. We will invest in these areas to perform at our best.

With a longer term view, we must also acknowledge our responsibility to custodians of Country, young people today and their future generations in reducing our environmental impact and adapting to a changing climate.

- 1 Implement a contemporary workforce strategy to attract, develop, and retain staff with a commitment to our purpose and values
- 2 Develop our leaders to listen, support and develop others, reaffirming pathways for an inclusive and equitable culture
- 3 Audit and review our work environment to improve safety and accessibility
- 4 Pursue opportunities to diversify our revenue streams
- 5 Enhance our information systems and data sets to better support decision making and service delivery
- 6 Advance our risk management and compliance practices
- 7 Manage our environmental impact with a systematic response which involves young people

Indicators of progress

- Staff attraction and engagement rates as indicators of workforce health and satisfaction
- Increase and diversity in sources of revenue aligning with our environmental, social, and governance considerations
- Improvement in our environmental impact



Putting our plan into action

To put our strategic direction into action, we will take a whole-of-organisation approach. We will develop and deliver annual plans which operationalise our strategic aims, define how we measure success and track progress over the next three years.

We will move beyond quantitative data and include input and feedback from young people and their families, Youth Advocates, our Cultural Advisory Group, staff and YSAS partners who will be critical to our success.

It is likely that we will need to discover different and better ways of working and adapt as needed in our ever-changing operating context to excel in our practice for young people and families. We are ready for the challenge and look forward to making our plan a reality.



