

# The Benefits of Family and Community Work

## OVERLAPPING BENEFITS OF A FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INCLUSIVE APPROACH

### Benefits for young people:

- Reduced AOD and offending related harms to promote better mental wellbeing
- Strengthened support system
- Space to feel seen and heard
- Create shared understanding

### Benefits for family and community:

- Build understanding and skills to support their young person
- Validates and supports family and community's experience
- Facilitates opportunities for communication
- Opportunities for collaboration

### Benefits for workers:

- Greater understanding of a young person's context
- Opportunities to share knowledge and skills
- Collaborative approach to care
- Builds community capacity
- Sharing power

## PRACTICE APPROACH

### Listen deeply: Understand what you're working towards

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to family and community inclusive practice given that each young person and their support networks have different identities, needs, strengths, challenges and goals. Access to opportunities and resources to meet these needs are not distributed equally and this directly impacts a young person, their family and community's access to services and supports. Our role is to deeply listen and work with the experiences of each young person, their family and community.

### Share practice wisdom: Explain your approach

We know that practice that is led by the young person, is grounded in respect for their choices, and invites conversations about how family and community are involved from the beginning, creates opportunities to facilitate meaningful conversations that can shift dynamics and strengthen connections and access to resources in a young person's life.

### Create a welcoming environment: Understand and adapt your practice

Benefits of this work for a young person, their family and community can only be achieved by creating a welcoming environment where all people feel comfortable to bring their whole self and share their experiences. Each young person holds unique identity dimensions and our practice needs to be attuned and responsive to what young people, their family and community need in order to engage and meaningfully participate in this work. Below are some questions to consider in your work with young people, families and communities:

- How do I make a young person, their family and community feel welcome in the space?
- How do I introduce myself and my practice?
- How do I ask a young person, their family and community about their needs and what's important to them?
- Am I making assumptions about child/parent relationships based on cultural background/other intersectional identities?
- How do I learn about a young person's identities and culture when I'm not familiar or it's different to my own?
- What internal/external resources or services could support my work?

### Identify connections: Facilitate family and community involvement

Part of listening for resources is listening for connections in a young person's life and the skills and learnings that may have developed in the context of these relationships. This allows us to assist young people to explore and make sense of what is meaningful to them. Some young people accessing YSAS services will be able to readily identify family or community members they'd like involved in their care. This provides YSAS workers with an opportunity to engage, educate, validate and strengthen existing relationships through proactive family and community inclusive work. For other young people these relationships can be more difficult to identify, or there may be reluctance from the young person or their family and community to be involved in their care. When this is the case we can still do 'family oriented work' alongside a young person. This work looks at repairing relationships and seeks to better understand the dynamics within a young person's family and community network even when the family is not physically present.

## BENEFITS OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PRACTICE

### Benefits for young people

- Provides choice, agency and control over 'who' and 'how' a young person navigates their experience of YSAS services
- Reduces AOD related harms to the young person by involving people who can provide ongoing support, including practical harm reduction strategies
- Provides a sense of connectedness, belonging and support from family and community
- Helps a young person navigate and strengthen interpersonal relationships
- Clear communication between the young person, their family and community to ensure that everyone involved is on the same page and working collaboratively toward a young person's goals
- Opportunities to share AOD harm reduction education, insight into adolescent development processes and build service knowledge
- Opens a space for a young person to articulate what they want and need in a safe and supported context and allows YSAS workers to advocate alongside them
- Creates a supported environment in which both the young person, their family and community are heard and supported to find a shared understanding of the strengths and challenges in a young person's life, even if there is conflict and tension

### Benefits for family and community

- Creates an environment that supports YSAS workers to identify how family and community members can be helped to better understand their young person's substance use and/ or other challenging behaviours and co-create strategies to support them
- Reduces stigma, social isolation and stress experienced by family and community members in relation to their young person's AOD use by validating their experiences, listening to concerns and providing relevant support
- Creates opportunities to establish a relationship with the young person's family and community that enables positive communication between members of a young person's support network
- Creates opportunities for YSAS workers to share their knowledge and educate family and community on AOD related practices including the stages of change model and adolescent development thereby creating a better understanding of behaviour within the young person's developmental context
- Family and community members are able to establish a relationship with a YSAS worker which builds trust
- Creates opportunities to work collaboratively with family and community to provide practical support to a young person such as getting to appointments, attending school or work or seeking employment opportunities

### Benefits for workers & the service system

- Provides an opportunity to share practice skills and ideas with family and community members which increases the resources and supports around a young person and reduces the reliance on workers
- Allows for bridging between the professional and personal structures of support for a young person which allows for a genuinely collaborative approach to care
- Families and communities add rich assessment information that can be critical in understanding a young person's developmental needs
- Broadens workers understanding of what is going on for and around that young person
- Encourages workers to reflect on personal values and the lens through which they understand family and community roles in a young person's life
- Provides insight into the young person's community context which allows YSAS workers to better understand and resource particular areas of a young person's life
- Allows for bridging between the professional and personal structures of support for a young person which allows for a genuinely collaborative approach to care



# Why include family and community in the work we do at YSAS ?

## Building resilience

Resilience based practice is at the heart of our work with young people and recognises that working with the strengths in the family and broader community system reduces risk, increases access to resources and builds networks for young people to continually develop their capacity to face, overcome and learn from challenges and life adversities . We know that young people, their family and communities hold a diverse range of intersectional identity dimensions and our engagement endeavours to take a culturally safe, inclusive and non-judgemental approach that learns from and celebrates all families and communities.

Fostering meaningful relationships is well evidenced as being central to creating a caring and supportive environment through which young people can continually build resilience and navigate the distinct developmental processes throughout adolescence.

The YSAS Resilience Based Framework sets out six interrelated domains that are integral to all young people's development:



### YSAS Resilience Based Framework

- **Safety** Protection from harm and the capacity to respond to crises.
- **Stability** Security and the capacity to meet basic needs.
- **Agency** Control over health compromising issues and behaviours (e.g. substance use).
- **Participation** Engagement in satisfying, socially valued activity.
- **Connections** Helpful relationships with people, culture and places.
- **Identity** A coherent sense of self and ones place in the world.

## Building connections

Including family and community throughout a young person's engagement with YSAS provides invaluable opportunities to promote connection by assisting young people to identify and develop networks that can provide ongoing care and support long after their involvement with YSAS services. A young person's family and community possess valuable knowledge and expertise unique to their young person, which can be strengthened and built upon through engagement, education and support alongside YSAS workers. Working collaboratively provides opportunities to see challenges from multiple perspectives within a young person's network and gives YSAS workers a more clear understanding of where support will be most helpful.

For a range of reasons a young person's family or community may not be interested or have capacity to be involved in the work. Despite this, we know that asking about a young person's family and community context and network of support helps us to understand their relational experience and identify areas for support which is useful information for care planning. Adopting a position of respectful curiosity and listening to a young person describe their relationships is helpful for gathering information and painting a clearer picture of family and community involvement in a young person's life at that time.



## PRACTICE EXAMPLES

01

**You can use these prompting questions/examples below when exploring with young people what information and how they would like it to be shared with their family and community.**



• Would you like me to talk with \_\_\_ about this?

• What are you happy for me to share with \_\_\_?

• Would it be helpful to share this bit with \_\_\_?

• We are hoping to work with you and your family and community toward your goals because ...

02

**You can use these prompts to guide you when opening up a conversation with a young person's family and community about including them in a young person's care.**



• At YSAS we hope to work with you to see how we can support you and your young person on a journey to some positive outcomes.

• Hi \_\_\_\_\_, I am \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. I have been working with your child and thought it would be good to introduce myself and talk a bit about what we've been doing.



# Creating Welcoming Services

## Our commitment to young people, families and communities:

YSAS is committed to delivering services that consider the wellbeing of young people in relation to practice that is responsive to and inclusive of young people, families and communities who hold a range of intersectional identity dimensions. We engage respectfully in this work by acknowledging that we do not have all the answers and instead we seek to share power through co-creating solutions and outcomes with young people, families and communities.

## Continuous learning: Developing our practice

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## Critically reflecting: Campitalise identities, power and privilege

We reflect on our own identities, worldview, and biases as a point of departure and are mindful not to impose our own culturally specific values about parenting or care giving onto families and communities we include as part of a young person's care. In proactively working with young people, families and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds and identities, we listen deeply and actively seek to understand and incorporate their perspectives into our work. We recognise that no group is homogeneous and each young person, their family and community has its own particular culture that needs to be worked with to ensure effective engagement and support. **Given this, if we make a mistake, we acknowledge it, take responsibility and do our best to learn from our experiences.**

### Practice Tips for your work with young people, families and communities:

I am checking in with the young person, family and community about how our work is going and adapting our practice as needed throughout our engagement.

I am adopting a position of respectful curiosity when listening and engaging.

I am curious about the family's prior experiences of services and this influences my practice.

I am curious about establishing collaborative partnerships with organisations that work directly with the community the young person identifies with.

I am actively looking for resources to educate myself about certain beliefs, cultures and experiences as a way of continuing to expand my practice to be responsive to the young person, family and community I'm working with.



# YSAS

## Trauma responsive practice:

In all our work we are mindful that young people their families and communities may have experiences of trauma which effect individuals, family relationships and their wider communities. We recognise the compounding effects of multiple experiences of oppression and marginalisation and aim to create a supportive environment that promotes healing and access to a range of supports and resources. We recognise predictability and consistency as central to trauma responsive practices and ask young people, their family and community directly how else we can contribute to a sense of safety when accessing YSAS services.

### Trauma informed practice principles when working with young people, families and communities:

- **Safety** Our practice is predictable, consistent and guided by the young person, family and community, their timing and what they are comfortable to talk about.
- **Trustworthiness** We are open, upfront and transparent about the process and what we are thinking.
- **Choice** We provide a number of options as to how you can work together. There is choice in the timing and when it might be right for them to participate.
- **Collaboration** We work together with young people, family and community as the experts.
- **Empowerment** We acknowledge strengths, knowledge and capability of the young person, their family and community.

## Creating welcoming spaces:

Creating services that are welcoming and engaging for families and communities includes consideration of the built environment as well as willingness of staff to be proactive and attuned in the ways we engage all important people in a young person's life. Opportunities for family and community to participate meaningfully in service development and improvement through verbal and written feedback are integral to ensuring that services are welcoming, flexible and responsive. The boxes below provide a starting point when considering how we create family and community inclusive spaces and work in ways that are respectful and welcoming.

- **Clear Communication**
  - Provide YSAS information in multiple languages and access to a translator.
  - Ensure that communication clearly welcomes and is inclusive of people of all identity dimensions and experiences.
- **Physical Space**
  - Visual images of inclusivity including flags, comfortable space with snacks, children's toys, prayer rooms and gender neutral bathrooms.
- **Active Inclusion**
  - Provide 'Welcome Packs' for family and community members at all sites, which clearly outline YSAS programs and what they can expect.
  - Provide questionnaires to all family and community members to capture positive feedback, suggestions and complaints.
- **Greetings/Welcome**
  - Warm and welcoming greeting either by phone or when people come into YSAS sites.
- **Food Offerings**
  - Providing food and drink where possible can help create a welcoming environment where people feel comfortable.
- **Partnerships with Other Organisations**
  - Draw on resources, secondary consults and ensure that referral pathways with external services are established and implemented as part of all service provision.
  - Actively building community connections through outposts, service visits and promotion about YSAS services.
- **Community Groups**
  - Reach out to a young person's existing external resources, including community, religious, sporting and cultural groups that can support them.



# Negotiating Consent, Confidentiality and Sharing Information



## When do we ask about including family and community in a young person's care?

Adopting a family and community inclusive approach involves asking a young person at the earliest possible opportunity about their wishes in relation to inclusion of family and community in their care. In all of our encounters we place the young person's experience of their family and community as central to the conversation and are curious about important relationships in their lives.

Consent and privacy should be re-visited as part of an ongoing conversation with a young person. The ways a young person would like family and community involved may change over the course of their engagement with YSAS services and should continuously be revisited and adapted based on these conversations.

## Using our professional judgement

It is important to use our professional judgement about how a young person is presenting when discussing consent, confidentiality and sharing information in relation to family and community involvement.

### Practice example: Residential withdrawal unit

In a residential withdrawal unit a young person may access the service substance affected or going through withdrawal and we need to consider the impact this may have on their capacity to consent. In these instances, it is important to use your practice wisdom and expertise in conversation with a young person to decide when it would be most beneficial to have this discussion. If a family or community member called the unit prior to obtaining consent from a young person, a worker could provide generalist information about withdrawal and harm reduction. However, it is essential not to disclose any information relating to the young person, including whether they're at the withdrawal unit, without prior consent.



Further guidance can be found in the YSAS Capacity to Consent Policy



# YSAS

## Mapping it out with a young person

As a starting point, we explain what 'confidentiality', 'consent' and 'privacy' mean at YSAS and ensure that young people have agency, choice and control over what can and cannot be shared at different times.

When negotiating family and community involvement we are clear about the intentions behind this work and map out with a young person what it could look like.

**We could do this by exploring the following statements:**



"The way we generally work is..."



"At YSAS we routinely include family and community because..."



"We believe that important people in your life..."

## What can we learn from a 'No'?

- If it's a 'No' we explore the details or conditions of family involvement, for example, "I'm happy for family to know this but not that"
- We are curious about safety in a young person's family environment and respond to risk as required
- We encourage young people to rethink who their community is and explore opportunities to strengthen sites of connection, recognising that some young people will need more prompting. We may ask a young person "who can you lean on" as a way of exploring this
- We are curious about whether a young person is not willing to have family and community engaged with YSAS specifically and explore whether there is another service we can link family and community in with
- We are curious about whether AOD stigma, shame or embarrassment about mental health conditions or offending behaviors are factors in a young person's reluctance to have family and community included and explore

## Remaining curious in our work with young people

If a young person has initial concerns about involving their family and community in their care, YSAS workers take the time to listen and be curious about why. Providing space to reflect can build insight and understanding of dynamics and relationships within their family and community. This guides how the worker and young person might identify potential avenues for strengthening connections and new ways of relating within their network.

**In practice we work in ways that:**

- Support a young person to express their feelings and concerns
- Are curious about where the reluctance for family and community involvement is coming from
- Ask permission to revisit these concerns throughout their engagement

## In Practice: Questions to explore with a young person



'We need to involve certain people in the work you do here, how would you like to do that?'



'Who can support you in moving forward in your life?'



'If you were in crisis who would you call?'



'Who are your people?'



'Where's your sanctuary? Where do you feel safe? Who is there?'



'How can we work together so it's OK for your family and community to be included?'

