

Strategic Plan 2026-2030

YESAS

YOUTH
SUPPORT +
ADVOCACY
SERVICE



Acknowledgement of Country

YSAS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies and waters on which we live, work and play on.

We recognise the cultural strength, Lore and wisdom within First Nations communities and the connections and responsibilities we have, to walk respectfully with First Nations Peoples across many Lands and communities.

We are enriched by the continuing cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their vast experience in caring for the social and emotional wellbeing of their community. We pay respect to their Elders past, present and future.

Read more about our commitment to walking with and learning from First Nations Peoples within this plan.



Contents

YSAS Strategy 2030: Foreword	4
Creating our YSAS Strategy 2030	6
Commitment to walking with and learning from First Nations Peoples	7
Commitment to inclusion and equity	8
YSAS today	9
Who we work with	10
The world around us	12
What young people and families are telling us	15
YSAS Strategy 2030	18
What and how we will achieve by 2030	20
Outcomes and impact	22
Putting our plan to action	23

YSAS Strategy 2030: Foreword

Since it began (now almost 30 years ago), YSAS has sought to care, listen to and respect every young person we engage with. It is the important and decent thing to do.

Complex drivers and circumstances of serious disadvantage shape the lives of many thousands of young people and their families. These challenges are not simple to solve and are not the fault of the young people needing help and support. They are our society's shared challenges, ones that we need to collectively care about and act upon.

As we look to 2030 and picture the future, we know that the work of YSAS matters. It requires continued advocacy and allyship, for policy and change creating better conditions for young people to thrive. Our expert support and services provide a much needed multi-disciplinary and integrated approach.

I'm proud to be part of YSAS, which I see making a real difference every day in the lives of young people and their families. On behalf of the board, I hope you will join us in your own way. The aim is a brighter 2030 for those young people who need and deserve it.

Judge Michael Bourke
Board Chair

As we've envisaged YSAS to 2030 it has been a privilege to reflect, engage with, and listen to the many people who shape who we are and why we matter.

We have grappled with challenges, recognised our strengths and achievements, appreciated what people most value about the way we work, and found clarity in what we most want to achieve.

It is hard to single out individuals, but I do want to thank the young people who have contributed to and reviewed this plan, and our organisational partners who have generously shared their perspectives.

We've set ourselves three areas of development. We will make our services more accessible to the young people and communities who most need them. We will build on our expertise in providing high-quality services that are shaped according to the unique needs and circumstances of each young person and family that we work with. Finally, we'll advocate effectively with and for young people to reduce the impact of serious disadvantage in their lives and create the conditions for them to develop well.

Our plan is ambitious but achievable. We have a fantastic team of nearly 400 people who bring diverse lived experiences, expertise, passion and talent to their work. I'm really proud of them and looking forward to the work ahead.

Andrew Bruun
Chief Executive Officer



Creating our YSAS Strategy 2030



Our Strategic Plan brings together the voices of many

We have reached out to over 350 YSAS staff, listened to and reflected with young people and families who engage with our services, and sought feedback and insight from valued peers and partners. Our Board and senior leadership team have benefited from these many perspectives in shaping the plan.

We have also integrated lessons and insight, drawn on research and data, and tested our purpose, commitment and ambition to envisage the future we want to see.

We are committed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

We are honoured to have the opportunity to listen to and learn from First Nations leaders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) about how best to support them in fighting for justice and providing safe and effective care for their young people and families.

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.

When we listen to the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and learn of the shameful treatment they have lived through, we can start to comprehend how devastating it is for them to witness the over-representation of their children and young people in Out of Home Care and justice systems. It also strengthens our resolve to support the efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to protect and improve the social and emotional well being of their people.

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.

With thanks to our relationships over many years, we have continued to walk with and learn from First Nations Peoples and organisations. In recent years we have:

- Established a formal partnership with Koorie Youth Council, who provide us with extremely helpful support and guidance
- Developed robust connections with ACCOs in the local communities where we provide services
- Partnered with the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in delivering Bunjilwarra, a Koorie Youth healing service with an excellent model of care and team
- Worked closely with VAHS to ensure that the contract with the Victorian Department to Health to deliver Bunjilwarra is now fully in Aboriginal Community Control
- Worked on more culturally safe and effective residential Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) care with over 1 in 5 young people accessing our services being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Established a meaningful partnership with Gindaja Treatment and Healing Indigenous Corporation in far North Queensland

There is much that we still want and need to do.

The introduction of Statewide Treaty in Victoria will see us continue to walk with First Nations peoples and organisations to build better opportunities, and address needs, imbalances and injustices.

Commitment to walking with and learning from First Nations Peoples

Commitment to inclusion and equity

An inclusive and equitable organisation matters

At YSAS, our Inclusion and Equity Framework formalises our commitment to inclusion and equity for anyone we interact with. This includes young people, families, carers, friends, service partners, staff and volunteers.

Our Framework was developed with the insights of workers and young people across YSAS. It sets out our commitment to prioritising genuine connection, employing an open, curious and listening mind, and to bridging historical barriers and forming strong, authentic relationships.

Our commitment is activated through continuous and embedded work, such as strengthening our governance, reviewing our services, and investing in staff learning and development. Feedback from different avenues, along with data provided by staff and young people who use our services, help us continually reflect on and adapt our services, places and spaces.

We recognise that systemic injustices and oppression remain prevalent in Australia and internationally for many groups, and we continue our commitment to being an inclusive and equitable organisation.

The strength of lived and living experience

Almost half of our employees identify as having lived and living experience of adversity or challenges that may have brought them into contact with services like ours and other agencies. We see this as a strength within our workforce.

In recognition of such valued experience, we seek to integrate this expertise in respectful, useful, safe as possible and systematic forms.

Integrating lived and living experience and expertise into youth work practice requires us to adapt current practices and make changes to organisational culture, structures and systems. This is so that these adaptations become sustainable.

To facilitate this, we are guided by our YSAS Lived and Living Experience Workforce (LLEW) Framework, our learnings from the Department of Health funded LLEW Learning Collaborative 2025, and other developments to effectively sustain a LLEW.

As we consider our strategic focus and future, we have reflected on YSAS today and on who we work with and support.

We are proudly a youth-specific community service organisation and one of Australia's largest. Each year we support over 5,000 young people and families in Victoria, and in 2025 commenced working with partners delivering a Youth AOD service in far North Queensland.

We provide evidence-based clinical care and practical support through outreach and care coordination, residential programs and a range of community-based services.

We intervene as early as possible to prevent problems from escalating or becoming entrenched.

As we establish our new strategic plan for 2026 and beyond, we employ close to 400 skilled staff across multiple communities. Our service delivery and organisational culture is strengthened through the lived and living experience amongst our workforce.

The relationships that we form with young people and families will always be at the heart of our work. We recognise the creativity and resilience of young people, families and communities dealing with serious disadvantage. We also understand that at times the adversity experienced by young people and families can be overwhelming, and we are committed to providing the resources and care that enable them to cope and thrive.

YSAS services are multi-disciplinary and impactful. Since 2022 we have supported:

10,000

More than 10,000 young people with mental health care.

3,500

Over 3,500 young people interacting with police and justice systems.

4,500

More than 4,500 young people with outreach and support for AOD use.

1,200

And over 1,200 young people with residential programs providing intensive AOD support.

We continually seek feedback on the experience and impact of our support and programs. We know that the above statistics are much more than a number. We make a real and often life-changing difference to the lives of many thousands of young people and their families.



YSAS today

Who we work with

We work with young people who experience serious disadvantage resulting in, and placing them at greater risk of harmful substance use, justice system involvement, and challenges related to mental health.

Many young people we engage with at YSAS also experience poverty, housing instability, and are, or have been, exposed to cycles of violence or abuse.

We make a concerted effort to ensure that our services are safe and effective for all young people. There are groups who are more likely to be affected by inequity, discrimination and social exclusion.

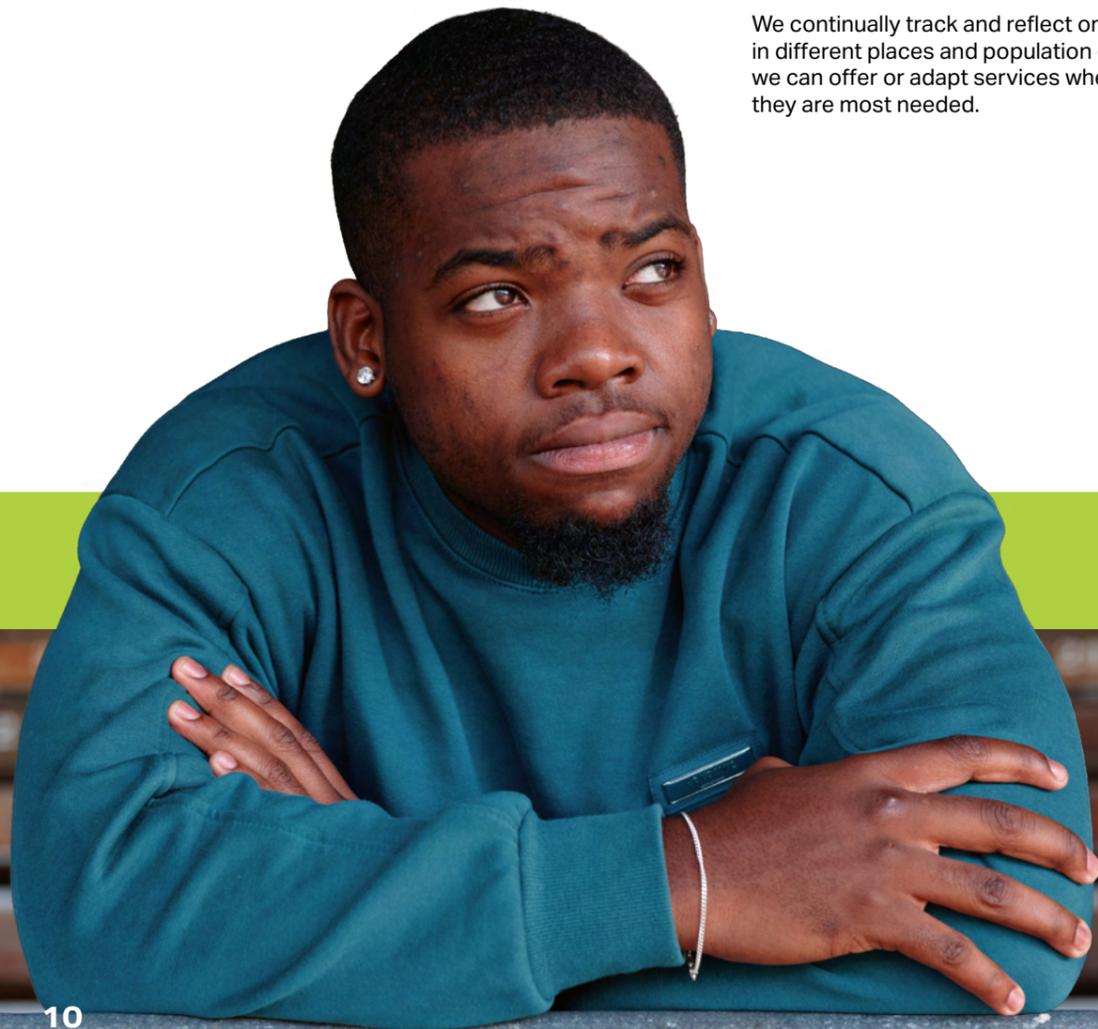
Our priority populations are:

- First Nations young people
- LGBTQIA+ young people
- Young people from migrant communities with difficult resettlement experiences, including refugees and asylum seekers
- Justice system engaged young people
- Young people living in Out of Home Care

We continually track and reflect on emerging needs in different places and population groups so that we can offer or adapt services where, and to whom, they are most needed.

Young people in the priority populations we work with are significantly over-represented in YSAS services against population norms because they experience higher rates of serious disadvantage and discrimination.

We act to counter this inequity.



The world around us

As we have developed our strategic priorities, we have considered the ever-changing world around us and factors that shape both YSAs and the young people we support.

Young people want to feel engaged and heard by our political systems.

Current societal challenges including (but not limited to) cost-of-living pressures, a housing crisis, and growing inequity and disadvantage will have ripple effects for years to come. Our work to advocate effectively with and for young people remains ever critical.

Legislative and regulatory reform is something we continually monitor.

Recent and forthcoming changes of note include:

- Victoria's Statewide Treaty 2025
- Justice Legislation Amendment (Community Safety) Bill 2025
- 2025 changes to bail laws
- Victorian 10-year AOD Strategy 2025 - 2035
- Youth Justice Bill 2024
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility
- Introduction of psychological risk regulations (OH&S law)
- Updated National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- Review of Working with Children Check systems and policies
- Continued introduction of Mental Health Royal Commission recommendations

Victoria's population is projected to grow by approximately 620,000 people over the next five years. The 15 - 29 age group continues to grow rapidly.

Local Government Areas of Wyndham, Casey, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea, Greater Geelong, Cardinia and Mitchell will see the highest population growth in this cohort.

Additionally, we know that many regional and rural communities experience higher levels of disadvantage and difficulty accessing expert youth services and support. Responding to growing need and innovating to offer services in new places and formats is imperative.

The current profile of rising youth crime is ill-informed and stigmatising.

We reject sweeping characterisations about young people and crime and know that the evidence tells a different story. We actively address underlying social and generational disadvantages and trauma and will continue to advocate for policies that support prevention and early intervention, outreach and support for populations overrepresented in the criminal justice system.



The world around us

Economic conditions are requiring governments to be more judicious in how funding is invested in social and community services.

The need for evidence of impact and return on investment in services is critical and we must continue to build a data-led picture on the value and effectiveness of what we do.

Further, these same conditions are impacting the young people, families and communities we work with, and the need for empathetic, effective services and clear advocacy is paramount.

Family violence continues as a prevalent harm.

Family, domestic, intimate partner and sexual violence create significant immediate and ongoing risks, harms and impacts on the lives of children and young people.



1 in 4 Australian women has experienced violence from an intimate partner since the age 15. More than 1 in 3 men are reported as having used intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

There is a continued need for investment, recognition and action to end violence, and meaningful opportunities for safety and change for children, young people, their families and communities.

Widening socio-economic inequality is putting increasing pressure on the social and emotional well-being of young people, families and communities.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) identifies that a young person's mental health is more likely to be impacted in lower socioeconomic groups, regional and remote areas, and demographic groups experiencing further inequalities.

Disadvantaged young people are disproportionately likely to bear harms associated with substance use. The most vulnerable groups are from low socio-economic and rural or remote areas and from Indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Further, substances are known to be used by young people to cope with increasing mental health pressures, housing instability, unemployment, and digital stress.

Mental Health Australia (2025) identifies key priorities for youth mental health as being integrated care, digital supports and expanded service access.

The constant emergence of new technologies and our societal norms around them will continue to evolve at pace.

Young people are digital natives and fast adopters, while also facing vulnerabilities that may require targeted support.

- Artificial intelligence will continue to change the way we work, learn and act.
- Data and cyber security, including data governance and privacy are now everyday matters.
- The rise of misinformation and disinformation is now recognised as a top global risk.
- The dark web is a source of harm for young people, including for access to illicit and unregulated substances.
- Changes to social-media access and use by young people under the age of 16 are occurring. There is much to learn about the benefits, risks and impacts of these changes.
- Digital and hybrid service design will continue to grow, creating opportunities for us to develop innovative access to services and supports.

YSAS has a long-established practice of Youth Participation to work in partnership with young people who bring their lived and living experience, knowledge and expertise. Young people inform our policies, strategies, practice, service delivery and decision making.

As a component of our year-round engagement and commitment, each year we commit to a youth partnership month of YSAS Ideas Days. We listen to ideas and feedback from young people about their experiences, our services, and the need for changes. 2025 marks ten years of YSAS Ideas Days.

Our youth partnership month in 2025 expanded to encompass every service site, Youth Advisory Committees, and Youth Peer Advocates (designated lived experience roles).

The Ideas Day Report 2025 has shaped our strategic direction and accompanies our Strategic Plan 2026 - 2030.



What young people and families are telling us

What young people and families are telling us

Family inclusive practice

At YSAS we use the term 'family' broadly, and to mean anyone who plays an important role in a young person's life and that the young person sees as important. This could be relatives, friends, caregivers, siblings or community leaders.



We understand that many relationships around a young person are important and can be supportive in different ways – not just the relationship that we develop with them.

We adopt a holistic, compassionate, and adaptable approach to supporting young people by understanding their relationships within a broader family and community context.

Our family consultation spaces enable further feedback and insight about family members' experiences when a young person is facing challenges and accessing our services. We see how family members help each other in these spaces. We listen to their insights as we shape our services to be more family inclusive.

"When you have a young person who's experiencing challenges of some description and you reach out to services for support, I see it as a wrap around. So, by having family work as part of the service, it wraps around what the family and the young person are trying to achieve."

"By including family members early in the process, we're also able to learn new skills about how to support them so that down the track we are then well equipped and maybe not have to go back to the service. Maybe we'll be able to hold that person ourselves next time. But without including that as part of the initial service, it's not really giving people the opportunity to stand on their own two feet at different times."

Views of family members of young people engaged with YSAS services



YSAS Strategy 2030

YSAS Vision

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

YSAS Purpose

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

YSAS Values

Honesty | Empowerment | Accountability | Respect

Who we work with

We work with young people experiencing serious disadvantage, and their families.

The young people who use our services are resourceful and creative in finding ways to cope with serious disadvantage.

Even so, the number and severity of issues they face can be overwhelming and put them at risk of harmful substance use, justice system involvement, and challenges related to their mental health.



What we will achieve by 2030

We provide practical, evidence-informed assistance through outreach and care co-ordination, specialist clinical care, residential programs, and a range of community-based services.

To grow our impact, we will advance:

1. **Access and reach:** Make our services more accessible by extending our reach into places and populations where need is rising.
2. **Expertise and outcomes:** Embed evidence-informed practice and excellent clinical care to maximise positive outcomes.
3. **Leadership and advocacy:** With and through others, lead the evolution of more equitable and effective systems of care.

How we will achieve

Achieving our objectives requires an inclusive organisational culture with a focus on performance:

- Our people are YSAS. We develop sector leaders and build the skills, systems and supports that our team need to thrive.
- We value lived and living experience and partner with young people and their families to create change.
- We create an inclusive and equitable workplace and prioritise wellbeing for different backgrounds and identities.
- We seek out and deliver in respectful partnership and integration with other services.
- We develop and value data and other forms of evidence to inform our practice and advocacy.
- We effectively govern and manage our financial security and sustainable future.

The impact we will have

We are focused on key outcomes, and will track our achievement and contribution to:

1. Access to person-centred care
2. Thriving and empowered youth
3. Social and economic participation
4. Community health and safety
5. A healthy and sustainable organisation



What and how we will achieve by 2030

We will achieve by advancing:

1 ACCESS AND REACH

Make our services more accessible by extending our reach into places and populations where need is rising.

- A) Expand services in areas of population growth and where there is high disadvantage and need.
- B) Intervene early to address disadvantage with priority populations in ways that work for them.
- C) Continue to make services more family inclusive, including engaging with young people who are parents or carers.
- D) Enhance service access options including increased opportunities for safe digital and virtual connection.

2 EXPERTISE AND OUTCOMES

Embed evidence-informed practice and excellent clinical care to maximise positive outcomes.

- A) Integrate high-quality specialist clinical care with our relationship-based, needs-led approach to services.
- B) Increase and sustain lived and living experience and expertise in our practices and workforce.
- C) Shape future practice and deliver valued services, drawing on more extensive and real-time feedback in multiple formats and sources.
- D) Establish better pathways for young people accessing our services to pursue meaningful education and employment opportunities.

Achieving our objectives requires an inclusive organisational culture with a focus on performance:

We develop sector leaders and build the skills, systems and supports that our teams need to thrive.

We value lived and living experience and partner with young people and their families to create change.

3 LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

With and through others, lead the evolution of more equitable and effective systems of care.

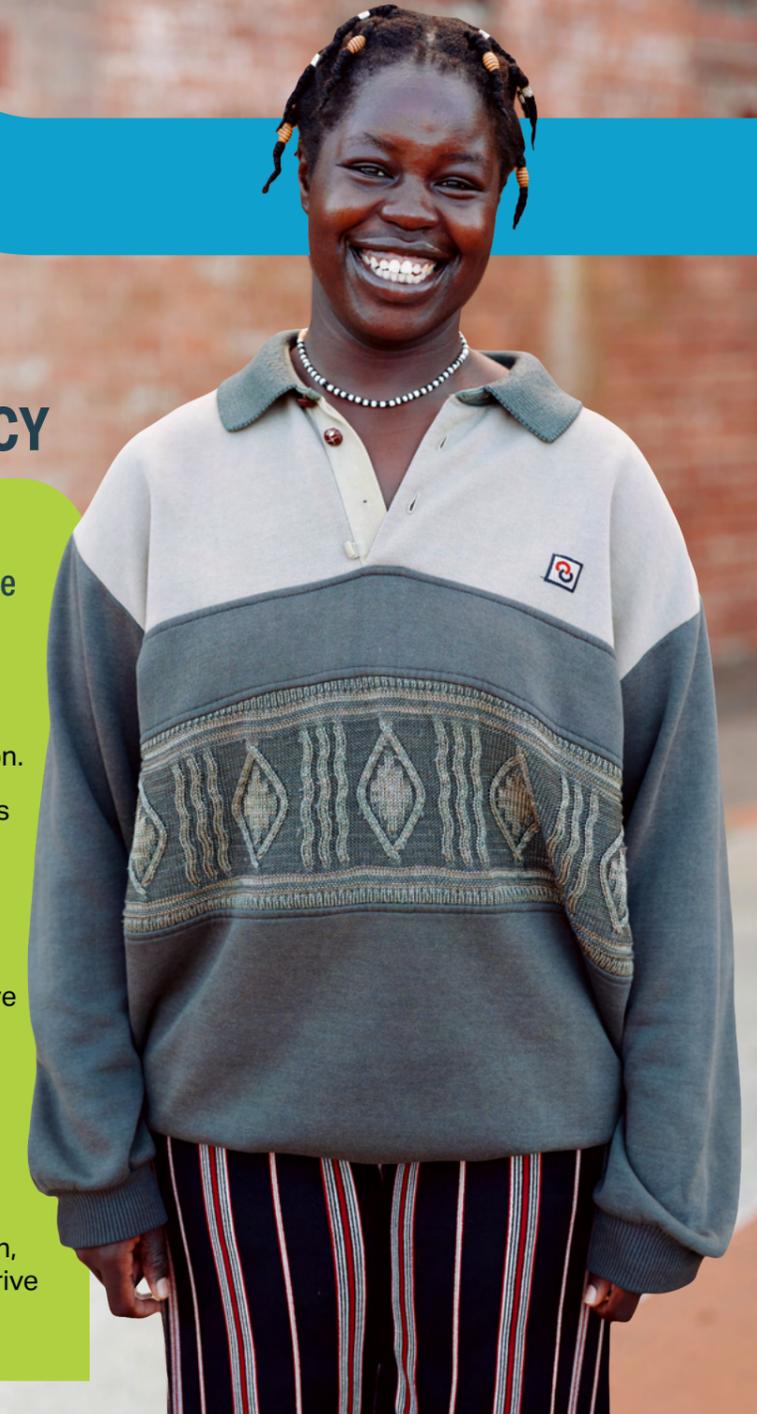
- A) Drive policy development to promote and prioritise harm reduction and early intervention.
- B) Expand opportunities and roles for young people in our leadership and governance to shape organisational and systemic decision-making.
- C) Demonstrate through collective action how a person-centred model of integrated care can achieve greater outcomes, including social and economic inclusion.
- D) Reduce the impacts of serious disadvantage through research, evidence and coalitions that drive innovation and change.

We create an inclusive and equitable workplace and prioritise wellbeing for different backgrounds and identities.

We seek out and deliver in respectful partnership and integration with other services.

We develop and value data and other forms of evidence to inform our practice and advocacy.

We effectively govern and manage our financial security and sustainable future.



Outcomes and impact

The outcomes we seek at YSAS are shared by many. Through our YSAS Strategy 2030 we have developed clarity on how we make a positive impact and contribution.

We will track progress and set annual targets with agreed indicators and metrics.



Access to person-centred care

- Use of services
- Experience of care
- Equity in treatment access



Thriving and empowered young people

- Inclusion
- Positive engagement



Social and economic participation

- Secure housing
- Pathways to education and employment



Community health and safety

- Integrated care
- Early intervention
- Harm reduction



A healthy and sustainable organisation

- Workforce Wellbeing
- Financial sustainability
- Partnerships

To achieve our strategic plan requires a committed and coordinated approach to governance, planning and measurement. We will enact and track achievement with:

- Annual plans that set priorities aligned to our objectives and commitments.
- Engagement with young people and staff to understand their experiences of the plan in action and the work still ahead. This includes consideration of new ideas, insight and recommendations to shape annual plans.
- Service plans which go deeper for continued adaptation and achievement in care for mental health and substance use, residential services, and crime prevention.
- Regular measurement and progress reporting against our outcomes.
- Governance and leadership to guide, encourage and pursue achievement of the plan.



Putting our plan into action

