

Excellence in Practice

YES

YOUTH
SUPPORT +
ADVOCACY
SERVICE

Providing services that matter
for young people and families



We wish to pay our respects to the traditional custodians of this land. We honour their ancestors, elders, and all community members, both past and present.

As we stand here today, we acknowledge not only their connection to this land but also the beautiful relationship they have with the natural world around us. This land, rich in history and culture, is home to diverse plants that play a vital role in the ecosystem. We celebrate the harmony that exists between First Nations peoples and the environment, honouring the wisdom they share in caring for the land, the waterways, and the wildlife we hold dear. Let us recognise and respect the beauty of nature that surrounds us and the deep knowledge embedded in the traditions of its custodians.



YSAS YOUTH
SUPPORT +
ADVOCACY
SERVICE

*Written by the headspace Frankston and
headspace Narre Warren Aboriginal and Torres
Straight Islander holiday program group.*

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Foreword

This Annual Report reflects a significant milestone for YSAS. It marks the final year of our 2022–2025 Strategic Plan: Excellence in Practice and provides an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved together, alongside young people, families, communities, partners, and staff across Victoria and beyond.

Throughout this period, our focus has been on strengthening the quality, relevance, and impact of our work with young people experiencing serious disadvantage. We have continued to meet young people where they are, working alongside them to access the resources and opportunities they need to lead healthier, safer, and more fulfilling lives — this commitment is the heart of our purpose.

The challenges faced by the young people and families we support remain significant. Poverty, trauma, and discrimination have a pernicious effect on young people's opportunity to develop well. Every day our workers witness their extraordinary resilience, creativity, and determination in working through the issues that contribute to harmful substance use, mental health challenges, and justice system involvement.

Our Excellence in Practice strategy has provided a clear and disciplined framework for responding to this complexity. Across its four pillars, we have made meaningful progress.

We have strengthened our commitment to **walking with First Nations peoples**, supporting self-determination and deepening partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. The transition of Bunjilwarra to Aboriginal ownership and control, alongside our partnership with the Koorie Youth Council, are important steps toward more culturally grounded and responsive services.

We have continued **delivering more effective services**, adapting to emerging needs and expanding our reach. This includes the establishment of the North Queensland Youth Alcohol and Other Drug Service in partnership with local organisations YETI and Gindaja. This new initiative enables young people to access culturally safe care closer to home. We have also continued to strengthen our resilience-based practice through the integration of young person-centred clinical care.

Through **using our voices for greater social impact**, we have continued to advocate for policies and systems that better support young people and families, informed by lived and living experience and grounded in evidence about what works. This informs our ongoing commitment to research and innovative practice development.

To ensure that YSAS remains responsive and effective into the future we have focused on **enabling our people to achieve more**. This has driven investment in workforce capability, quality assurance, and systems that support effective and accountable practice.





Andrew Bruun
Chief Executive Officer



Judge Michael Bourke
Board Chair

We acknowledge how critical Youth Participation is to our ethos and purpose at YSAS. We thank all the young people, and now families, who share their lived and living experience to shape our services and help us to improve as an organisation.

We also thank our dedicated staff — frontline practitioners, managers, and organisational support teams — whose commitment and professionalism enable YSAS to deliver high-quality, evidence-informed care every day.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of our funders, partners, and peak bodies, and for the guidance and stewardship of our shareholder organisations: The Royal Children's Hospital, St Vincent's Hospital and Jesuit Social Services.

Finally, we acknowledge the contribution of our Board, and independent contributors to our committees, whose leadership and governance have supported YSAS through a period of significant growth and change.

As we close this strategic cycle, we do so with a clear sense of what we have learned. Young people are best assisted by evidence-informed services that are flexible, relational, culturally grounded and shaped to their needs and preferences.

These lessons have informed our next strategic direction as YSAS heads toward 2030. While this report reflects on what has been achieved, it also signals our continued commitment to working alongside young people and families to create a community where all young people are valued, included, and have every opportunity to thrive.

Our Approach

YSAS is a community service organisation committed to social justice and to creating the conditions in which young people, alongside their families and communities, can overcome — and even be strengthened by — adversity.

YSAS practitioners meet young people and families on their terms, facilitating access to practical and culturally meaningful resources and opportunities that enable them to:

- Prevent harm
- Meet their needs
- Fulfil their aspirations
- Manage life stressors that can contribute to health and behavioural challenges

We work to understand each young person's unique circumstances and how they respond to the challenges they face. While efforts to cope with adversity can sometimes lead to unintended harm, we do not tell young people what they must do or demand that they change. Instead, we support them to develop new ways of coping that lead to improved life outcomes.

YSAS programs and services are specifically designed to support young people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, substance use-related harm, mental health difficulties and involvement with the criminal justice system.

We recognise the strengths that young people, families and communities bring to our work, while also understanding the seriousness of the challenges they may be facing. Wherever possible, we intervene early to prevent problems from escalating or becoming entrenched.

YSAS provides practical support and evidence-based clinical care through outreach and care coordination, residential programs, and a range of community-based services. Across Victoria, we collaborate with other service providers in the best interests of the young people, families and communities we serve. Above all, strong and respectful relationships with young people and families remain at the heart of everything we do.

Our Vision

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



Our Directors and Shareholders



Michael Bourke

Board Chair
Appointed 30th August 2020



Margarita Frederico

Appointed 23rd June 2019



Dr Adam Pastor

Appointed 30th August 2020 -
23rd February 2026



Catherine Buckmaster

Appointed 25th August 2019 - 15th
December 2025



Jorden Lam

Appointed 30th August 2020



Sarah Ralph

Appointed 30th August 2020



David Murray

Appointed 14th March 2021



Caitlin Gill

Appointed 29th May 2023



Sandy Bell

Appointed 11th December 2023



Andrew Gay

Appointed 11th December 2023 -
26th May 2025



Hugh Tobin

Appointed 24th February 2025



Claire Hare

Appointed 18th February 2026



Connie Chong

Appointed 18th February 2026

Our Shareholders



Jesuit Social Services



St Vincent's Hospital



The Royal Children's Hospital

Our Services

YSAS provides services and programs across Victoria designed to help young people aged 12 to 25 and their families with:

- Harmful substance use
- Challenges related to mental health
- Justice system involvement

Here's a breakdown of the key services we run:

1. Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD) support

YSAS enables young people to recognise, reduce and/or cease harmful substance use. Outreach workers meet young people in the community or at home to support them in achieving their individual goals through counselling, assessments, practical support, referrals and family assistance.

Our open-access day programs provide support and community in a safe space, where young people can access food, showers, and laundry facilities, as well as life skills, development and education.

For those needing more intensive support, our residential withdrawal and rehabilitation services deliver structured, supportive inpatient programs that help young people to withdraw from substance use through case management, counselling and life skills development.

YSAS also runs AOD services tailored to specific populations, including:

North Queensland Youth Alcohol + Other Drug Services: A community-based AOD and residential rehabilitation program supporting young people in North Queensland, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families. Delivered in partnership with YETI, Gindaja Treatment and Healing Indigenous Corporation, Queensland Health and Education Queensland.

The Zone: An AOD program prioritising marginalised young people and their families from LGBTIQ+, African and Pasifika communities. Delivered by YSAS, Odyssey House Victoria and Drummond Street Services.

YoDAA (Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice) is a free, confidential AOD service that provides information, advice and support to young people, families and professionals. It offers telephone and online support, helps people understand their options, and connects them with appropriate local services, including YSAS programs and other treatment providers across Victoria.

2. Mental Health Support

YSAS is the lead agency for headspace centres in Frankston, Rosebud and Collingwood. Young people can access a range of youth-friendly health and wellbeing services, including:

- Mental health support and counselling
- Help with alcohol and other drug concerns
- Physical and sexual health care
- Education and employment support

Our headspace centres bring together multidisciplinary teams including psychiatrists, GPs, psychologists, social workers, counsellors and vocational workers to provide confidential assessments, support and referrals tailored to each young person's needs.

Our YSAS Mental Health AOD Nurse based in Bendigo provides sexual health testing, vaccination check-ups, referrals to AOD withdrawal and rehabilitation programs, pharmacotherapy and psychological interventions.

3. Crime prevention programs

YSAS runs several crime prevention programs aimed at diverting young people away from offending and supporting them to engage positively with their families, education and communities.

These include:

- **Youth Support Service (YSS):** An early-intervention program for young people 10-17 who have recently come into contact with police, helping them address underlying issues, work towards their goals and avoid ongoing involvement in the justice system.
- **PIVOT:** An intensive, tailored case-management and support initiative for young people with serious or repeat offending patterns, focused on building protective factors like education, employment and strong community connections. Delivered in partnership with Windana, Jesuit Social Services and Mission Australia.
- **Embedded Youth Outreach Program (EYOP):** A collaborative model that pairs youth workers with Victoria Police to engage young people after police contact, connect them with supports, and reduce the chances of future offending.
- **Putting Families First:** A program supporting complex high-risk families who are involved in the child protection and criminal justice systems. Run in partnership with OzChild, AAFRO, Charis and VACCA.



2022-2025 Strategic Plan: Excellence in Practice

In this year's Annual Report, we are looking back at what we've achieved from our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. The plan focused on achieving our purpose through Excellence in Practice, which means our programs and services are geared to respond to the complexity of each young person's circumstances. Our strategy includes acknowledging each young person's strengths, as well as the difficulties they are contending with.



This Annual Report is structured around our strategy's four strategic pillars.

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 of 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
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Our strategy has helped us deliver on:

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

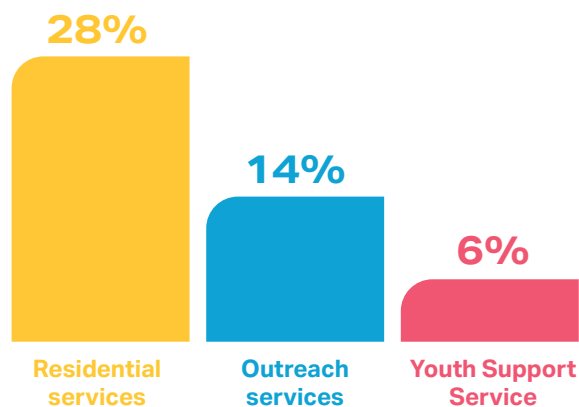
Read on to find out how we delivered on our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan: Excellence in Practice.

Strategic Pillar One: Walking with First Nations Peoples

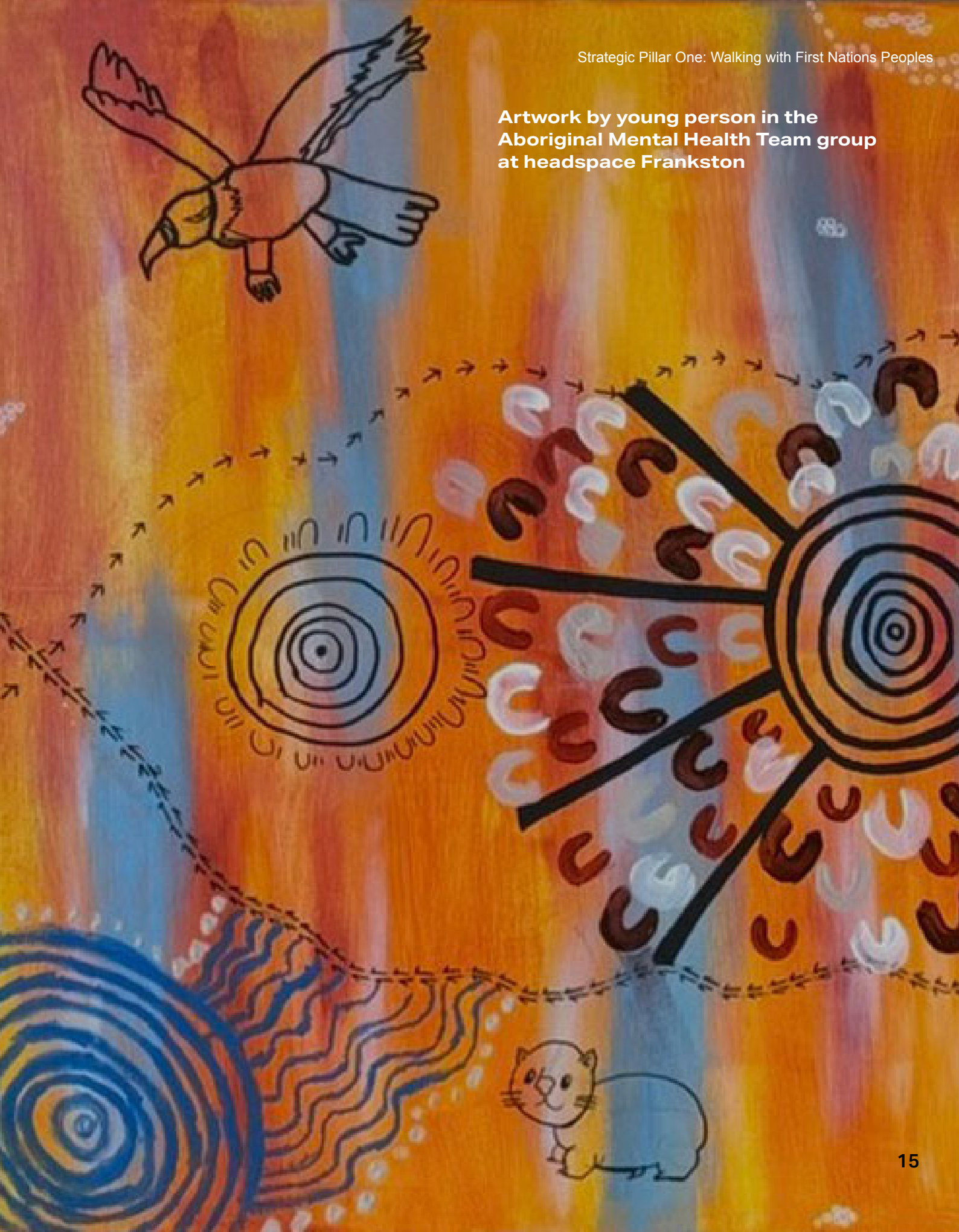
Walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is central to YSAS's commitment to social justice and culturally-responsive practice. First Nations young people are significantly overrepresented in the youth justice and alcohol and other drug service systems. In some regions where YSAS works, Aboriginal young people represent a substantial proportion of those accessing support. That's why it's so important to have culturally safe services that recognise the strengths, cultures and leadership of Aboriginal communities.

We are proud of the work we've done over the last three years to improve the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people receive support and care. This work includes our collaboration with the Koorie Youth Council, the transition of the Bunjilwarra Residential Rehabilitation centre over to First Nations ownership and control, the establishment of Far North Queensland's first residential AOD treatment service, and the continued strengthening of connections with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Percentage of clients identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander at YSAS services in 2025



**Artwork by young person in the
Aboriginal Mental Health Team group
at headspace Frankston**



Jess's story: Healing Through Culture and Creativity

When Jess* first discovered she could use art to express her emotions, it was a powerful moment. The young Indigenous woman was working with Sharmila Austin, an Aboriginal Health Team worker at headspace Frankston, who brought her along to an art therapy class. "Talking can be very confronting, and it can retraumatise you," Jess says. "With art you are able to release it. You don't have to tell anyone, you can just paint a picture."

Before YSAS, then 15-year-old Jess was going through a difficult time. "I had lost my daughter through DFFH [Department of Families, Fairness and Housing], and I was struggling with depression, anxiety and substance use as well," she says.

She remembers her first appointment with Sharmila from the Aboriginal Health Team. "They were very accommodating," she says, "and they made sure that if I was uncomfortable, I didn't need to go into too much detail."

Sharmila focused on building trust and connection, and over time, Jess began to open up. "Rather than focusing on everyone else, Sharmila got me to take time out, make a life plan and start moving forward to reach each of my goals," Jess says. Those goals were to get her daughter back and to stop using substances.

After going through withdrawal, Sharmila helped Jess stay focused on her goals when things got difficult. "She would say, 'Look at how far you've come without it [the substances], look at the goals and where you've gotten to.'"

Sharmila taught her that progress can be slow, and that every small step matters. "It's like a hill," Jess says, "You're climbing up slowly, and you're doing what you need to do."

Through the Aboriginal Health Team group programs at headspace Frankston, Jess met other young First Nations people. "I learned a lot more about different people's stories and how everybody comes from different backgrounds, and that we're all pretty much reaching for the same goal," she says.

Jess also became involved in school holiday programs, Aboriginal art classes and NAIDOC-related activities. "It was amazing," she says. "I learned a lot about Aboriginal art and the story behind the artwork."

She'll never forget the feeling of getting her daughter back. "It was one of the best feelings," Jess says. "Sharmila was there through each step, and it made it a lot less nerve-wracking having her in the care plan meetings."

Jess hasn't had any involvement with DFFH for three years, and she is now studying Community Services to help other young people like her. "Young people I know who are going through hard times, I'm sending them over to headspace, and if they're Aboriginal, I'm getting them to give Sharmila a call."

She says the value of First Nations-focused programs cannot be overstated.

*name has been changed.

**"We're able to tell our stories
in whatever way we feel we need to, and we also get to
learn about things we might not know, like our culture."**

Working together for Aboriginal Young People: our partnership with Koorie Youth Council

In 2025, YSAS began a partnership with the Koorie Youth Council (KYC) to strengthen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and support more culturally safe, youth-led practice. The partnership brings together shared values around advocacy, community connection and meaningful youth participation, with learning flowing in both directions. Through site visits, knowledge sharing and relationship-building, KYC provides advice on improving cultural safety and engagement, while YSAS supports greater awareness of services across Aboriginal youth networks.

KYC CEO Bonnie Dukakis said: "working with like-minded organisations that truly value the voices and participation of young people is how we create better outcomes for young mob."



Bunjilwarra: Stronger in Aboriginal Hands

Pete Dawson understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have often been excluded from decision-making that directly impacts them.

That's why the transition of the Bunjilwarra Aboriginal Youth Residential Rehabilitation Centre from YSAS to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) was so significant. "To be in the transition meetings with the VAHS team, with a really strong Aboriginal presence and wisdom around the table, it felt like things were right," says Pete, the Clinical Lead involved in the transition.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 16 to 25 can stay at Bunjilwarra and receive treatment for alcohol and other drug issues, with wrap around cultural mentoring and support. The service follows an Aboriginal-defined notion of healing and is the only one of its kind in Australia.

Uncle Pat Farrant, a proud Muthi Muthi Elder and Cultural Lead at Bunjilwarra, says the team works hard to establish trust with the young people there. "I see the young people when they come in, and let them know you're in a safe place here," he says. "This is a place where you can engage with our culture."

Pete Dawson says the importance of transitioning Bunjilwarra to an Aboriginal organisation cannot be overstated. "This country owes a lot to Aboriginal people. It takes genuine partnerships, listening to Aboriginal people and working alongside, not imposing or directing things from a white perspective."

While it was always the intention for YSAS to hand over the lead agency role of Bunjilwarra to VAHS, the process took many years of hard work and encountered several challenges including the pandemic. The failed 2023 Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum proved to be an important catalyst. Pete says: "it started a renewed conversation about what it might look like".

From that moment the hand over process took over two years to finalise and involved significant work across both organisations. "There are a lot of moving parts at Bunjilwarra, and there are differences in approaches between VAHS and YSAS, so coming together to problem solve was really important," says Pete.

The transition was completed at the end of 2025. Many Aboriginal staff remain working there, including Uncle Pat. "He's still talking about retirement, but we'll see," says Pete. Uncle Pat says the service is working well to support young people. "These young people don't know the way forward unless they've got a place where they can do some work on themselves and make a better day for tomorrow."

There are also some exciting projects on the horizon, including two new units for families and cultural practitioners. "They'll also be used by young people transitioning out, to provide a level of independence for moving between Bunjilwarra and the community," says Pete.

Pete now works at headspace Rosebud but still stays in touch with Bunjilwarra. "Having that direct experience at Bunjilwarra for the last 8 years was incredible for me, it is more than just going to work," he says.

Uncle Pat says there needs to be more places offering culturally safe support for Aboriginal people, by Aboriginal people. "It's clear to see we need more places like Bunjilwarra, because this is the only one in this country that operates the way we do."



North Queensland Youth AOD Service

For many years, young people in Far North Queensland who needed residential AOD treatment had to travel hundreds of kilometres away from home. This often meant separation from family and community, and limited opportunities for services to fully meet young people's cultural needs.

The establishment of the North Queensland Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs Service (NQYAODS) marks a significant shift in how support is delivered in the region. Launched in late 2025, the service provides local, culturally safe treatment options for young people across Cairns and surrounding communities, enabling them to remain closer to home while accessing specialist care.

The Queensland service is a collaborative partnership between YETI, Gindaja Treatment and Healing Indigenous Corporation and YSAS. Further, the Cairns Hospital & Health Service assists by providing mental health care and the Queensland Department of Education runs a school at the Residential service.

Within this partnership:

- YETI delivers community-based supports.
- Gindaja provides cultural governance and oversight.
- YSAS operates the residential unit, which supports up to 10 young people aged 13 to 18 for stays of three to six months.

The residential service is on the lands of the Gimuy Walubara Yidinji people. A defining strength of the service is Gindaja's leadership, given that many young people accessing the program identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. As Residential & Primary Care Services General Manager Aji Akintola reflects, "It's about self-determination. We need to run a program that is culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate."

While the service is culturally grounded, it is inclusive of all young people in the region. The service is a safe, respectful and therapeutic environment for every young person and their family, no matter their culture, identity or lived experience.

YETI invited YSAS to join the partnership because of its strong reputation in youth AOD residential rehabilitation. "There were also some statistics showing that most of the young people they'd be working with would be Indigenous," says Aji, "and YSAS has strong connections with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations like VAHS in Victoria." Aji is sure that, "the service is starting to show the difference it can make in a community that's never had any youth AOD services."

The service was developed through extensive collaboration between YSAS, YETI and Gindaja, including workshops to co-design the model of care and operational processes. YSAS Practice, Compliance and Quality Lead Dee Carey says lead organisation YETI "held everyone together really well and really fostered a collaborative approach".

Although it is still early days, the YSAS Residential Intake Manager Emma Hartney says the hard work was well worth it once young people started using the service. "We were actually on site for the first young people being admitted," she says. "That was a pretty special moment for all of us."

NQYAODS is a culturally grounded, collaborative model that keeps young people closer to home, and offers real hope for change in Far North Queensland.



Supporting First Nations Young People in Bendigo

YSAS Bendigo has developed a positive, long-standing relationship with the local Dja Dja Wurrung peoples. Around 22% of their clients are First Nations young people, something Community Manager Maggie Hamilton is very proud of. "It's the best feedback when young people are referring themselves and encouraging their friends to come and see us," she says.

The team have a close working relationship with Bendigo & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC), with collaboration and consultation occurring almost daily. "We link young people into BDAC services, and likewise they link young people into us," says Maggie. "We have a lot of young people starting their journey exploring their background and cultural heritage who we refer to BDAC."

Maggie says it's invaluable to get advice from local Aboriginal people. "They're the experts," she says, "and they know what their young people need." "It's really important to us that YSAS is seen as a safe, trustworthy and welcoming place for young Aboriginal people to come in and get some support."



**Artwork
created by
local Bendigo
Aboriginal
young person**



Strategic Pillar Two: Delivering More Effective Services

YSAS is committed to continually improving the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of the services we provide. This includes strengthening clinical practice, developing innovative models of care, and ensuring services respond to the complex realities of young people's lives.

The stories in this section highlight how this commitment comes to life across our programs. Our accreditation work demonstrates the systems and standards that underpin safe, high-quality care. Dr Megan McNicholas reflects on the importance of integrated mental health and substance use treatment in youth withdrawal services. At headspace Collingwood, the introduction of a Single Session Model is reducing wait times and helping young people access support sooner. We also highlight specialised work with young people in Out of Home Care and the family-centred approach of the Putting Families First program.

In 2025, YSAS supported...

2200

Over 2200 young people throughout
Outreach, Residential and YSS programs

3000

3000 young people across headspace
Collingwood, Frankston and Rosebud

Diversity of our clients

Outreach services

14%

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander

6%

Pacifika

5%

African

14%

other cultural
backgrounds

Residential services

24%

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander

9%

Pacifika

2%

African

1%

other cultural
backgrounds

Youth Support Service crime prevention program

26%

other cultural
backgrounds

7%

African

7%

Pacifika

6%

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander



Emily's story: Finding Stability at Birribi



When Emily* first came to Birribi, one of YSAS' residential rehabilitation sites, she was deep in drug use, including ice and juice. This led to her family cutting off contact. "I ended up in really bad psychosis," she says. "Then I tried coming off the juice and I ended up in a coma for four and a half days. I'd had enough and I wanted to get clean."

Emily first went to a YSAS Residential Withdrawal Unit to help her withdraw from the drugs. "They were really good there, all the staff were really supportive," she says. Then she came to Birribi, where she found the staff and drug education programs extremely helpful.

"They've helped me a lot to be able to deal with triggering situations and cravings," she says. "And the peer support communications group has helped me to build healthy relationships and navigate them, because that's quite hard sometimes," she says.

She also found it really helpful to have a dedicated key worker and care coordinator. "I was actually going to go bankrupt when I first came here, and my worker sat down with me and figured out that I didn't actually have to do that," she says. "I've gotten thousands of dollars cleared from my name, which is good."

Staff at Birribi also referred Emily to a psychiatrist through the Hamilton Centre. "Honestly, having a psychiatrist has really helped me," she says. "I got my meds sorted and my mental health sorted, which has been something that has needed to be done for a long time."

While she was at Birribi, Emily experienced a relapse after taking some leave to go home. "I overdosed and ended up back in hospital in a coma again," she says. "The staff at Birribi — lucky I had them, because they saved my life. Even though I messed up, they let me come back to Birribi and start again, and I'm proud of that."

Emily says a lot has changed since her time at Birribi. "I can function now, and I know what real happiness is," she says. "I was so far gone when I was on the drugs — I couldn't see properly, I couldn't walk properly. Now I've reconnected with my family and I'm healthy again."

Emily says she'd recommend Birribi to any young person looking to turn their life around. "Birribi won't fix your life, but it will give you a stable, safe environment in which to do so yourself," she says. She can't thank the staff there enough. "You guys are amazing and you're all doing an amazing job."

*name has been changed.

**"Birribi won't fix your life,
but it will give you a stable,
safe environment in which
to do so ourself."**



Excellence in Care for Young People: Accreditation and Compliance at YSAS

Every three years, YSAS meets rigorous quality, safety and governance accreditation standards across all our services. These standards are a key requirement for government funding and grants, giving funders confidence that services are delivered safely, responsibly and effectively.

All YSAS programs are accredited under the Quality in Care (QIC) Standards. Our mental health programs, including headspace and Bounce Back, are accredited under the National Standards for Mental Health Services (NSMHS). headspace Frankston, Collingwood and Rosebud are also accredited against the headspace Model Integrity Framework, while our Youth Health Clinics at our headspace sites are accredited under the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Standards.

At YSAS, accreditation is not treated as a compliance exercise, but as a reflection of how we deliver high-quality services every day. During our most recent accreditation in 2024, YSAS was commended for the strength of our family-inclusive practice and our deeply embedded youth participation, both of which consistently receive strong feedback from assessors. Assessors also regularly note the breadth of services delivered by YSAS, including our ability to provide accessible, bulk-billed health care to some of Victoria's most marginalised young people.



Community of Practice: Bringing Families into the Conversation

When Traineeship Coordinator Esther Benz first began as a youth worker, she remembers not feeling confident working with family members. "I really learnt along the way, and I learnt the most from family members themselves and the loved ones of young people," she says.

So when she and Senior Trainer Kellie Ferris were asked to put together regular professional development for staff, they knew they wanted to focus on families, carers and those close to young people. "It should be part of everything that we're doing and considering when we work with young people," Esther says.

When working at YSAS's Youth Drug and Alcohol Advice service (YoDAA), Kellie says workers would often call her about their work with families. "I would hear about their work, or they just wanted to throw an idea around," she says. "And I thought, everybody needs to hear what great work this person's doing."

And so the YSAS Family and Community: Community of Practice was born. It's a monthly online meeting for staff, family members, young people and partner organisations, where the group discusses a wide range of topics including harm reduction, stigma and isolation, and concepts such as 'unconditional love' and 'normal parenting'.

"It's really honouring that we're just in the young person's life for a short period of time," Esther says, "and that they have ways to become the person that they want through relationships with others, throughout their whole life journey."

Kellie says the space aims to centre the wisdom of family members and young people by bringing their perspectives into the discussion. "It also includes the ways and ideas that might arise from working with different communities."

At its core, the space is about learning together. "Learning isn't always from books or training or professionalised knowledge," Esther says. Kellie agrees. "I'll hear a perspective from somebody that I really align with," she says, "and then somebody says something that's a different way of looking at it, and I think 'oh, actually, good point, now I'm not sure'".

Youth Worker Laura Slink wasn't sure what to expect when she first joined a Community of Practice session, but she quickly found them invaluable. "It's like a large reflective practice," she says. "I can take some part of conversations and little reminders of best practice, and then go out to appointments and implement them."

Laura remembers a particular Community of Practice session on Child Protection, during which she was working with a mother whose young child had been removed from care. "I was able to get some ideas off people in that meeting, and that helped me develop a plan moving forward," she says.

A Youth Peer Advocate who attended a Community of Practice says the session made her feel hopeful. "As a young person myself, it's really great to know there are people out there that exist and give a channel for [young people] to communicate with family when it gets really hard."

Esther hopes the space will continue to evolve and improve over time. "It really can be a space where people can put forward very differing views, but where all is valid and heard," she says. "Because we all do agree on one thing, and that is that we care about the lives and futures of the young people that we're here to work with."

YSAS Family Reference Group - Special Thanks to the Felton Bequest

The Felton Bequest makes annual donations to Victorian charities, particularly those benefiting women and children. We were extremely grateful in 2024/25 YSAS to receive \$100,000 for our Family Reference Group.

Our Family Reference Group brings together caregivers of young people experiencing challenges related to substance use and other risk factors. The group offers mutual support for caregivers, who also contribute to the co-design of resources and service improvements. These insights have enhanced our support for families, shaped practice tools and informed our advocacy efforts.



Dr Megan's story:

A Holistic Approach to AOD Withdrawal

Dr Megan McNicholas is passionate about working with people struggling with substance use. "They're often underrepresented and undersupported across healthcare services," she says. "This work gives us the opportunity to practise truly holistic, patient-centred, trauma-informed care."

Megan is a psychiatry trainee currently working as a registrar at the YSAS Residential Withdrawal Unit in Fitzroy and sometimes in Geelong. Once a young person has been admitted to the unit, Megan works with the nursing team to conduct a comprehensive medical, psychiatric and substance-use assessment.

"We review their risk of withdrawal and how to manage it safely, while also addressing underlying comorbid mental health issues and unmet physical health needs."

Young people also receive sexual health screening and treatment if needed. "That's often a valuable opportunity to engage young people, because sexual health is such an important part of their overall wellbeing."

Treatment is tailored to each young person's individual experience. "Some people tolerate withdrawal symptoms relatively easily, whereas for others it can be much more challenging."

As a psychiatrist, Megan is passionate about integrating mental health and substance-use care, as the two are often closely linked. "We treat both together and integrate care so their needs are being met from both perspectives," she says.

Megan has seen many positive outcomes during her time at the withdrawal unit. She's particularly proud of the team's work supporting young people transitioning out of psychiatric wards. "They may have experienced an acute psychotic episode, and while their psychotic disorder has been treated and stabilised, underlying substance-use issues can remain," she says.

"Supporting young people to have both their mental health and substance-use needs addressed in sequence gives them the best opportunity for stability when they return to the community."

The team has also supported pregnant women to withdraw from substances successfully, including one woman who detoxed during her second trimester. "We worked closely with other services, including the maternity service at the Royal Women's Hospital," she says.

"This work gives us the opportunity to practise truly holistic, patient-centred, trauma-informed care."



Making Every Session Count at headspace Collingwood

Two years ago, the team at headspace Collingwood were puzzled by one piece of data. Their mental health clinicians were spending huge amounts of time assessing young people — sometimes over several months — to prepare them for a standard course of six counselling sessions. This approach was blowing out wait times, with young people waiting an average of 87 days to see a clinician.

But the research revealed something stark: most young people were attending just one session.

Clinical Team Leader Damian Philp says that single data point sparked a major overhaul of how the centre works. “The idea is, if they’re here for just one session, how can we be most helpful?” he says.

Enter the Single Session Model. Within two to three weeks of referral, young people can now access a single 90-minute session with a clinician. Damian says the focus is on one or two key issues, and on providing practical, tangible skills to address them. “We ask the young person: if we’ve only got time to talk about one thing today, what’s that thing?” he says.

“I think the model really aligns with putting young people at the centre of care,” says Centre Manager David Hay. He says it works particularly well for young people experiencing situational stress — such as issues at school, with family or with peers — who need immediate support. “Only about 10 per cent really need that level of comprehensive history that can take months to collect,” he says. “And from a trauma-informed perspective, assessment for assessment’s sake isn’t helpful.”

The Single Session Model isn’t designed to replace brief interventions — quite the opposite. Young people at headspace Collingwood can still access ongoing counselling, either through multiple single sessions or a block of six brief intervention sessions. Every single session also includes a follow-up phone call, in which the clinician and young person discuss next steps. “There’s still therapy that happens over a long time, and there’s still a lot of value in that,” says Senior Clinician Liam O’Neill.

Getting the new model up and running wasn’t without its challenges. “With any change comes a bit of resistance,” Liam says. David adds that the idea of a single session challenges what many clinicians are taught at university about the value of ongoing therapy. In response, the leadership team invested significant time in talking through the change with staff, including a full day at headspace Frankston. “It was about unpacking the myths and preconceptions around single sessions,” David says, “and listening to the doubts, and working through them together.” He says collaborating with headspace Frankston, which already uses the Single Session Model, was key to getting the project off the ground.

Liam has seen firsthand how effective the model can be. “It works because we’re able to get into the work much sooner, and that feels good for both the client and the clinician.”

He recalls one young person, Sam*, who had a long history of mental health support — the kind of client who would previously have taken months to assess. Instead, three weeks later, Sam was in a single session with Liam, talking about how they were doing well overall but wanted help creating a plan around exercise and socialising, which helped manage their anxiety. "We spent an hour and a half celebrating wins and setting up a maintenance plan," Liam says. "They walked out feeling really validated."

Sam isn't alone. In the first three months of the Single Session Model, young people rated their satisfaction at around 9 out of 10, with many leaving positive comments. "I was really happy with how easy the session was to access," said one. Another wrote: "I found the single session very helpful, not only in addressing the situation I wanted to work on, but also in acknowledging other factors contributing to my wellbeing." "The feedback was glowing," Damian says, "and hearing the client voice so clearly was incredibly powerful."

David says the model has been so successful that headspace Collingwood has received additional funding to expand the program. "We'll bring on two new access workers, which will allow us to have dedicated single session champions," he says. The team is also committed to formally reviewing the program for at least three months each year. "It's been such a success," David says, "and we really want to make sure we can sustain it and keep improving."

*name has been changed.

"It works because we're able to get into the work much sooner, and that feels good for both the client and the clinician."



Michael's story: Someone in His Corner

When Michael* first connected with YSAS, he was feeling pretty lost. "I wasn't really growing and I wasn't becoming happier," he says. "I needed guidance from an outside source."

His living situation had become unsafe, and he turned to drugs to cope. "My house that I was living in wasn't really a home," he says. Michael and his partner, who was pregnant, made the decision to leave. "We were homeless for about five months."

On top of all this, Michael had been dealing with a sense of cultural dislocation for years. His parents are both Cambodian and fled war to live in Australia. "I had a lot of challenges growing up," he says. "I've dealt with a lot of racism and not being accepted. I guess I've always been trying to fit into a country that I don't really feel like I belong in."

Then Michael met Rose Deng, an AOD Outreach worker with YSAS's Transformer program. The program is specifically for young people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and the workers themselves are culturally diverse. Rose is a refugee from Ethiopia, so she knows firsthand what it's like growing up as a non-white child in Australia. "She was just more relatable, and I think she understood my struggles," says Michael.

Michael and Rose met once a week to talk through whatever issues he was facing. "She basically helped rejuvenate me into a functioning member of society," he says. "It was helpful having someone to talk to about my problems, and knowing that I'm not alone. She taught me how to empower myself from the things that I've gone through."

Rose also helped Michael address some of his mental health issues for the first time. "I used to self-medicate, I didn't really go to doctors and all that," he says. "She took me to my first appointment in a really long time."

Michael says finding the right support made all the difference. "I think finding the right person really helps," he says. "I didn't have a real mother figure, so having her and her kindness really helped me. And just having someone to talk to that I wasn't getting high with."

*name has been changed.

"I think finding the right person really helps," he says. "I didn't have a real mother figure, so having her and her kindness really helped me. And just having someone to talk to that I wasn't getting high with."



Working alongside young people in Out of Home Care



Over the past three years, YSAS has continued to do significant, positive work with young people in Out of Home Care (OOHC).

South East AOD OOHC Manager Geoff Bayldon says young people in OOHC are often dealing with significant trauma and life disruption. "The stuff they've been through includes abandonment, attachment issues, trauma and abuse," he says. "And the fact that they keep turning up is amazing — they're profoundly resilient."

Senior Youth Drug & Alcohol Consultant Kathrine Topilnicki says young people in OOHC often have negative experiences with services, so earning back that trust is essential. "A lot of it is relationship-based — just trying to build that rapport with them," she says.

She recently worked with a young person who she stayed consistent with, even when they missed a few appointments. "It was about not giving up straight away, and continuing to take the time to call and check in," she says.

Geoff says the resilience-based model of care YSAS uses is effective because it focuses on the needs that substance use is trying to fill, whether that's safety, stability, agency, connection or identity. "You can do really meaningful AOD work by looking at better ways to meet those needs," he says.

Geoff recently worked with a young person who told him he was the first person who genuinely believed in him. "My work with him was to help him see that actually, he is a pretty awesome, worthwhile human being," Geoff says. "Then there's something more generalisable post-care — that help-seeking is a worthy endeavour."

Geoff has a background in adventure therapy, and has taken many young people on outdoor trips, where they develop a sense of resilience and confidence in themselves. "This kid can paddle down the Mitchell River and support all their mates to get down safely," Geoff says. "They are absolutely legends."

YSAS also does a lot of work supporting the broader OOHC sector. Last year, YSAS OOHC worker Pete Stockton was asked to work with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to look at better ways of responding to young people's drug use within residential care.

"During the consultation, Child Protection and community service organisations providing care said they felt they lacked AOD knowledge," Pete says. "Staff also sometimes felt they might exacerbate a young person's drug use...by not saying the right thing." Pete is currently developing a statewide guideline, which he hopes will improve the experiences of young people in care.

Kathrine participates in a monthly panel in Melbourne's west that brings experts together to discuss a small number of high-risk young people in OOHC. "I'm there as an AOD representative, providing referrals or supports that will help the young people," she says. Kathrine has also delivered training with OOHC residential workers. "I give them resources and advice on how to talk with young people about drugs and alcohol."

**"A lot of it is
relationship-based
— just trying to build
that rapport with them."**

Putting Families First program: Strengthening the Networks Around Young People

There's a simple premise that guides the work of the Putting Families First program: young people don't exist in isolation. "We don't just focus on the child," says Mary Khairallah, a PFF practitioner who works for OzChild. "We focus on the whole family unit — because that's where the change actually happens."

The program is run by multiple agencies, including YSAS, and works with families whose lives are shaped by complexity — youth justice involvement, intergenerational trauma, migration, poverty and isolation. Referrals come when a young person has begun offending, or when a family is at risk of entering the justice system.

But the work quickly moves beyond the behaviour that triggered the referral, addressing factors including peer pressure, intergenerational trauma, cultural dislocation and family stress. "A lot of the time," Mary explains, "mum is already managing so much. How can she focus on the young person when she's in crisis herself?"

The program is collaborative in every sense. Workers come from many different organisations, including YSAS, OzChild, AAFRO and Charis, ensuring the program operates from a broad base of knowledge and cultural understanding. PFF Lead Practitioners work closely with parents and carers to unpack family relationships, build an understanding of child development, trauma and attachment, and strengthen communication. PFF Community Connectors help families re-engage with schools, community, services and everyday life, so they are not reliant on the program long-term.

PFF's work is also culturally grounded. Families from African, Pacific Islander and Burmese communities are a significant part of the program, and cultural understanding is not an add-on — it's foundational. "Understanding culture is really understanding how a family lives their life," Mary says. "It changes how you talk about parenting, conflict, family violence and healing."

Wai-Zea Man, a YSAS PFF practitioner, says the family-first approach feels more meaningful and sustainable than working with young people alone. "Young people are so reliant on their guardians," she says. "When you support the adults to make changes, you start to see real shifts for the young person too."

One family Wai worked with included a 17-year-old who had become involved in serious offending. Rather than isolating the young person as the 'problem', Wai worked with the entire household, slowly rebuilding trust with parents who had lost faith in services. Over time, family relationships strengthened, communication improved, and the young person disengaged from harmful peer groups, finished Year 12 and stopped offending.

Mary recalls another family where the work centred on a mother experiencing family violence that had been normalised within her community. Through gentle education and consistent support, Mary helped the mother understand the abuse, regain confidence as a parent, and begin to create a better future for herself and her children. "She's finding joy again in being a mum," Mary says. "That matters."

PFF is not neat or predictable. "We're always working in chaos," Mary says. Plans shift. Crises emerge. Progress is rarely linear. But within that complexity, practitioners see something powerful: families beginning to feel capable again. "You see the lightbulb moments," Wai says. "You see parents adapting how they talk to their kids. You see hope returning." And that, ultimately, is what Putting Families First is about — not fixing families, but walking alongside them as they find their own way forward.

In 2026, after a successful pilot, the Putting Families First program was absorbed into the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Restoring Families program. Service delivery continues with the PFF practice approach being absorbed by this new program.

"When you support the adults to make changes, you start to see real shifts for the young person too."



Lara's story:

The Courage to be Imperfect

When Lara* first realised she had a talent for studying, it felt like a gift. At the time, she felt isolated at school and was struggling to make friends. "I created this identity around it," she says. "Even though I got bullied a bit for it, it was something I was good at, so it set me apart."

But by Year 10, her love for study had turned into paralysing anxiety. "It would have me freeze in front of my laptop screen for hours at a time, unable to get up," she says. "My brain was yelling at me to write something, but then I would write a word and delete it because it wasn't good enough."

Lara would regularly stay up until 3 am in these freeze states, and her grades started to slip. The anxiety fed into depression, and at times she felt like she couldn't go on. Then headspace Collingwood did a presentation at her school. Her parents weren't keen for her to go to therapy, but she was able to convince them because the service was free. "The fact that it was free was 100% the most important part," she says.

Over the last few years, Lara has worked with several different therapists at headspace Collingwood, and they've all taught her valuable skills. One therapist used exposure therapy to help her work through her issues with perfectionism. "I had a lot of difficulty with the idea of failing or doing something badly," she says. Her therapist encouraged her to leave a mistake in her work. "I managed to do that, and it was the first step towards letting go a little bit."

Lara has long experienced strong emotions, but often felt they were a burden to others. "In therapy, I could say how I was feeling, and they wouldn't be affected," she says. One therapist taught her the five-senses grounding meditation technique, where you mindfully focus on five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two

things you can smell and one thing you can taste. "I use it when I'm panicking, when I'm trying to go to sleep but my mind won't stop going, when I'm crying," she says. "It's been pretty revolutionary."

Two years ago, Lara joined the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) at headspace Collingwood, where young people provide feedback to the service and advocate for issues they care about. One of her highlights on the YAC was sitting on the Consortium, the general governing board of headspace Collingwood. "You're up there with important people from the Austin, St Vincent's, Jesuit Social Services and YSAS," she says. "It was amazing. I was actually listened to, I was heard, and my ideas were added to the minutes."

Lara's experience at headspace Collingwood was so positive that she's now studying to become a psychologist herself. She says she wants to work in the public service because that's where the need is. "I genuinely do think that headspace saved my life," Lara says. "It was a no-brainer to become a psychologist once I saw that impact."

Lara is amazed by how far she's come. "I have completed high school and a bachelor's degree, I'm working on my master's degree. I have a fulfilling, loving relationship of almost five years, and I have fantastic friends. Every step I've made has been because I've had the support of places like headspace. That's made the difference — not money or opportunities — but access to things like therapy."

*name has been changed.

**"It was the first step towards
letting go a little bit."**



Strategic Pillar Three: Using Our Voices to Deliver Greater Social Impact

YSAS works to create change not only through direct service delivery, but also by contributing to research, shaping policy and amplifying the voices of young people. By sharing evidence from practice, partnering with researchers and advocating for better responses to complex social issues, we aim to influence systems so they work more effectively for young people and their families.

This section highlights how YSAS is contributing to that broader impact. Our research initiatives are helping strengthen evidence-informed policy and practice. Our advocacy work spans youth justice reform, crime prevention and harm reduction, including the delivery of Victoria's first drug checking service. Central to all of this is youth participation: through Ideas Days, Youth Peer Advocate projects and groups such as The CREW, young people are shaping services and speaking directly to the issues that affect their lives.



Guiding Research with Purpose

Research Reference Group

The YSAS Research Reference Group provides strategic guidance and oversight for research across the organisation, ensuring alignment with YSAS values, priorities and practice. The group includes senior leaders, operational representatives and youth voices, and external academic experts Professor Joanne Bryant (UNSW), Professor Sarah McLean (La Trobe University), and Emeritus Professor Margarita Frederico (La Trobe University and YSAS Board Member).

Youth AOD Census

In 2025, YSAS partnered with La Trobe University to deliver the Youth Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Census, capturing data from 893 young people across 13 youth AOD organisations. The census provides a contemporary snapshot of young people's needs and experiences, highlighting opportunities to strengthen service responses.

As part of this work, YSAS produced a dedicated census snapshot of 543 young people accessing its services on 5 May 2025, supporting service planning and continuous improvement.

Report: Learnings from the Youth Support Service

In 2025, YSAS completed an evaluation of the Youth Support Service (YSS), with support from Swinburne University of Technology and La Trobe University. Using a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation strengthened our understanding of core YSS practices, including wraparound support and a focus on desistance (measures that help young people stop offending).

Report: Responding to Young Men's Use of Intimate Partner Violence

YSAS partnered with Drummond Street Services, No To Violence (NTV), the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and Swinburne University of Technology to complete a multi-year research project to improve responses to young men's use of intimate partner violence. The research highlighted significant service gaps that currently exist for young men using intimate partner violence, describing experiences of "referrals with no hope" due to limited specialist service availability. The research found young men were also informally seeking help from non-family violence services like youth AOD, because they were the only services available.

The report was launched through a national panel discussion in 2025 and recognised as one of Australian Policy Online's Top 10 Social Issues Resources of 2025.

Policy Submissions

In 2025, YSAS made its second submission to the Australian Parliament for the National Inquiry into Youth Justice and Detention. This submission builds on YSAS's earlier 2024 submission and reflects a growing advocacy presence in policy reform spaces affecting young people.

Partnership with No To Violence

YSAS has maintained a training and practice partnership with No To Violence (NTV) since 2020. This collaboration has been showcased nationally and has included conference presentations, co-designed training delivered nationally and across Victoria, joint research initiatives, and shared advocacy. YSAS is now a member organisation of NTV.

Current Research Projects

GRACE Study

The GRACE study, led by Orygen in partnership with YSAS and funded by the Victorian Government. It aims to explore the effects of a medicine called extended-release guanfacine (guanfacine XR), which we think may help young people with cannabis use when combined with treatment-as-usual.

Mapping Capabilities in Youth AOD Care

Led by Professor Joanna Bryant (UNSW) in partnership with Ted Noffs Foundation and YSAS, this research seeks to better understand the values of young people accessing Youth AOD services, to support them in achieving their goals and enhancing their wellbeing beyond substance use. A co-designed poster from this project won the Best Poster Award at the APSAD Conference in 2025.



Advocacy at YSAS

Smart Justice for Young People

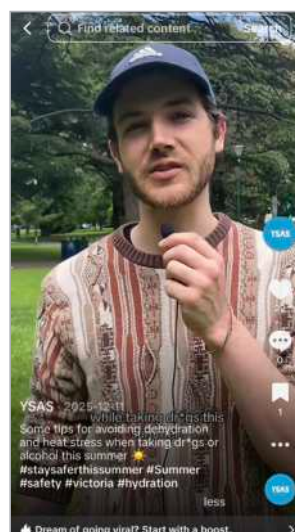
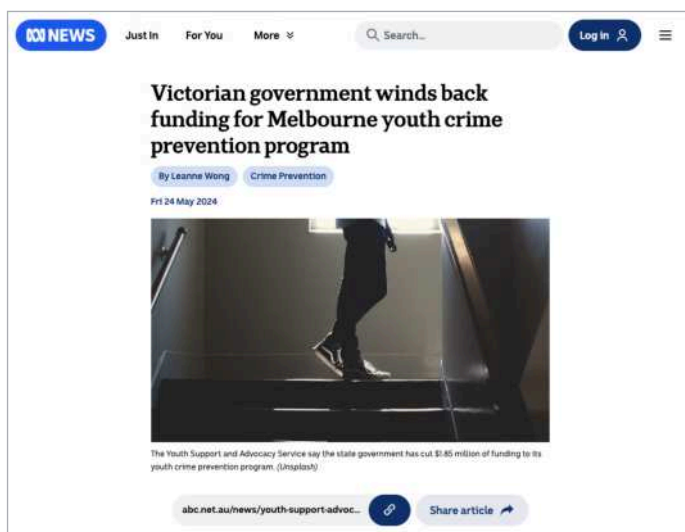
YSAS is a proud member of the Smart Justice for Young People coalition, which brings together more than 40 leading organisations working to create change for children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system. The coalition spans social services, health, legal, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and youth advocacy organisations, united in their efforts to shift political and public attitudes, advise government on innovative, evidence-based approaches, and challenge policies and practices that harm young people.

Advocating for young people involved in the criminal justice system

Over the last few years, YSAS has done significant work advocating for young people involved in the criminal justice system. Since 2018, we have been a key member of the Raise The Age of Criminal Responsibility Campaign in Victoria. Following years of advocacy from major human rights organisations, the Victorian government increased the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 in 2024. We continue to call for the age to be raised to 14.

In 2023 and 2024, YSAS campaigned to help maintain state government funding for our Youth Support Service programs in Sunshine and Dandenong. This included significant media coverage highlighting the essential role therapeutic, relationship-based supports play in diverting young people away from crime. We continue to advocate for increased funding to crime prevention programs as the most effective way to improve the lives of young people and keep the community safe.





Youth-led social media and advocacy

2025 was a big year for digital growth at YSAS. Our social media platforms continued to expand, reaching hundreds of thousands of people across our online channels. Over the past year, we also worked closely with the Victorian Pill Testing Service to help promote awareness of the new service, and to inform the community about potentially harmful substances through drug alerts.

We also used our platforms to educate young people on how to stay safer when it comes to alcohol and other drugs, advocated for the continuation of effective YSAS programs such as EYOP, and shared key findings from the 2025 Youth AOD Census Report.

The introduction of the teen social media ban presented new challenges; however, we worked closely with young people to ensure they could still learn about and access YSAS services. Throughout the year, our digital presence remained focused on sharing YSAS's purpose and promoting our services, helping young people across our communities connect with the support they need.

Victoria's first drug checking service: A health-led approach to drug safety

In 2025, YSAS partnered with The Loop Australia, Harm Reduction Victoria, Youth Projects, Melbourne Health and Metabolomics Australia (University of Melbourne) to deliver Victoria's first-ever drug checking service, funded by the Victorian Government. The service provides free, confidential and anonymous drug checking alongside non-judgmental health and harm reduction advice, supporting people to make safer, more informed decisions about drug use.

The Victorian Pill Testing Service operates through both mobile services at selected festivals and events, and a fixed site in Fitzroy. The service analyses the contents and strength of most pills, capsules, powders, crystals and liquids, including the detection of high-risk substances such as fentanyl and nitazenes. Results are explained by healthcare and peer workers, who provide tailored harm-reduction information and referrals where needed.

Sarah Hiley, who leads the service's implementation, says drug checking is a practical and evidence-based response to reducing harm. "Prohibition hasn't stopped people from using drugs. If someone is going to take drugs, let's try to reduce the risk as much as possible," she says. "Being able to give people credible, factual information so they can make informed decisions is incredibly powerful."

The service launched at Beyond The Valley music festival over the 2024/25 New Year's, testing more than 600 samples. Over 70 per cent of patrons reported it was the first time they had a judgement-free conversation about drug safety with a health professional, and 40 per cent said they would reduce the amount of drugs they planned to take after receiving their results.

The fixed site expands access beyond festivals, ensuring more Victorians can use the service year-round. "It's a huge leap forward for Victoria," Sarah says, "and another step in the right direction for harm reduction."

The Victorian Pill Testing Service is integrated with Victoria's drug early warning systems, issuing public alerts when higher-risk substances are detected and contributing to state monitoring and rapid response efforts. The 18-month trial represents a significant milestone in Victoria's health-led approach to reducing drug-related harm and saving lives.

"Being able to give people credible, factual information so they can make informed decisions is incredibly powerful."

What's in your drugs?

Free. Legal. Confidential.

 Victorian
Pill Testing
Service
Confidential drug checking

YSAS

 The Loop
Australia

 HARM
REDUCTION

Youth Participation

For our services to meet young people's needs, young people must be involved at every level. Our practice is grounded in shared power and meaningful participation, with young people who are current or former service users actively involved in decision-making across the organisation.

For more than a decade, YSAS's Youth Participation team has supported young people to advise boards and research, contribute to strategic planning, participate in recruitment, and provide feedback on services. The team includes a Youth Participation Practice Leader and Youth Peer Advocates who are all young people with lived experience of YSAS services. Each Youth Peer Advocate works on a passion project throughout the year.

The Youth Participation team also runs Ideas Days as part of our annual Youth Partnership Month. Ideas Days are annual discussions about the service held in September with young people across YSAS. Ideas Days amplify young people's voices to drive strategic, organisational, and local program change. September 2025 marked the 10th anniversary of YSAS's Ideas Days. 94 young people from diverse backgrounds shared their insights, experiences and ideas, helping shape YSAS into the best service it can be.

YSAS also supports The CREW and three headspace Youth Advisory Committees (YACs), made up of young people with lived and living experience of YSAS services who provide informed feedback to help shape and improve our programs and practice.



2025 Youth Peer Advocates and their projects



Georgia Willmott

2025 Youth Participation Practice Leader

Our wonderful, and inspiring colleague Georgia Willmott left YSAS in 2025. Their deep commitment to young people's meaningful involvement in YSAS decision-making had a profound impact!

We are extremely grateful for their creativity, insight, and inclusive approach, and for being a strong advocate for trauma-informed, intersectional, accessible Youth Participation, governance and practice. They supported The CREW, advised our Board, informed the strategic plan, guided our Safeguarding work, lead the Youth Participation Policy review and wrote the new policy, managed Ideas Day 2024 (the first held right across the organisation) and wrote the report, and created a suite of Feedback & Complaints resources including posters, brochures and a series of learning videos. This is a small list from the vast body of work they undertook with a quirky creative flare, grace and kindness.

We wish them well in their future endeavours.



Lucia

2025 Youth Peer Advocate



In 2025, Lucia delivered Visual Voice, an arts and advocacy program for migrant and refugee young people based at YSAS Sunshine. The program provided a safe, weekly space for young people to explore and express issues they care about through creative arts. Through the program, participants explored themes such as identity, prejudice and stigma, with one young person creating a powerful poem and collage reflecting the immigrant experience. Lucia describes the strongest impact as the connections formed and the creation of a space where young people felt safe to speak honestly and creatively.



Daniel Robinson Croft

2025 Youth Peer Advocate

2026 Youth Partnership Facilitator



In 2025, Daniel launched Let's Budvocate, a new online platform dedicated to providing cannabis consumers with tools and resources to assist them in creating more conscious and intentional relationships with cannabis.

The website provides tailored tips across different cannabis consumption methods, addressing a gap in accessible, practical resources. The platform also provides resources for consumers looking to cut back their consumption, but who may not want to quit cold turkey.

Developed by Daniel as an independent project, Let's Budvocate reflects his broader commitment to offering consumer education grounded in lived experience, care and understanding.



Kayla

2025 Youth Peer Advocate

Kayla's story: From Residential Rehab to Youth Leadership

In 2025, Kayla had a full-circle moment. She was sharing her experiences of overcoming alcohol dependence with a group of young people at Birribi Youth Residential Rehab. "It was very surreal," she says, "and it made me a bit emotional." Just three years earlier, Kayla was a resident there herself. Now, she was showing other young people that change was possible.

Like many young people, Kayla started drinking to cope. She was dealing with difficult family relationships, unstable housing and, at 22, a major relationship breakdown. Life felt overwhelming. She dropped out of school and struggled with her mental health, leading to several hospital stays. Kayla wanted to change — she just didn't know how. Eventually, during a hospital stay, she was referred alcohol and other drug withdrawal service. After that, she spent three months at Birribi — a YSAS residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation program for young people. Her time there changed her life.

"I didn't know how to have fun sober anymore," she says, "and that was something I got to experience at Birribi." Some of her favourite memories there include discovering a talent for stand-up paddleboarding and jumping in the pool with the other residents. She also learned skills around urge surfing and harm reduction.

After Birribi, Kayla began receiving ongoing support from YSAS AOD worker Cody Cochrane-Weiss. He helped her find non-drinking activities she enjoyed, like playing Zelda, and supported her to build her self-esteem. "There were times when I'd be calling everyone thinking, 'I've ruined things, I'm an idiot,'" she says. "And he'd be like, 'No — you can actually do this on your own.' He believed in me."

Cody encouraged Kayla to return to study, and she completed her Certificate IV in Youth Work. After a year volunteering with The Crew — a group of young people with lived experience of YSAS services — someone suggested she apply for the Youth Peer Advocate role at YSAS. She did and was successful. One of the highlights of her work

has been the annual Ideas Days, where the Youth Participation team talk with young people about how YSAS can improve.

When Kayla started as a Youth Peer Advocate, she knew she wanted to establish peer support groups. During her first inpatient stay in a mental health unit, she had met a peer support worker who, she says, 'changed the game' for her. "I was very stuck," she explains, "and he was able to connect with young people and share his story. It made me want to do the same thing."

In 2025, Kayla ran a series of peer support groups with young people at Birribi. They explored topics such as coping with stress and anxiety, identifying triggers and managing cravings. Throughout the sessions, Kayla shared her own lived experience. A key focus was on helping young people create relapse-prevention plans. "People are very hard on themselves when relapse happens," she says, "and the guilt and shame can be overwhelming. I let them know it's okay — things do happen. What matters is getting back up."

Kayla's main advice for other young people is to connect with support. "I didn't have strong family connections at the time, so support workers were what I had," she says. "You need strong supports, you need to connect — because that's what saved me and helped me through."

"I didn't have strong family connections at the time, so support workers were what I had."

Ideas Days 2025: What young people said about YSAS and advocacy in 2025

Young people consistently praised the YSAS workforce for being relatable, understanding, competent, and inclusive. Workers with lived or living experience were highly valued for building trust and connection. Strong communication, active listening, persistence, and access to knowledge and resources are also highlighted. Young people report that the quality of relationships with YSAS staff is central to their confidence in services and ability to achieve positive change. YSAS's diverse services and welcoming environment contribute to a sense of safety and support.



Top 3 Opportunities for Service Improvement

1. Mental Health Support: Young people want easier, more frequent, and longer-term access to mental health support from a more diverse workforce with lived and living experience who are equipped to understand their experiences and backgrounds. An integrated mental health/AOD service was also highlighted as important to providing more holistic care that made a difference in the long term.

2. Employment and life skills: Practical help with finding and preparing for work, accessing education and training to increase employability, and building essential life skills to sustain employment and study are top priorities for building independence and self-esteem.

3. Communication and community: Clearly communicated service information, more opportunities for social connection and group events, and reducing the barriers to service access (especially for those who feel excluded or isolated) are vital for young people's wellbeing.

Other priorities included drug-use support, rehabilitation services, and housing and accommodation support.

Top 3 Advocacy Priorities

1. Improved Mental Health & AOD user service access and support: Young people called for better access to services and for addressing issues such as poor communication, long wait times, stigma, and inaccessible service locations. This was particularly important for young people in regional and rural areas. Further, integrated and holistic approaches that connect substance use services with mental health treatment and other stabilising supports, such as housing and employment.

2. Stability for healing journey: employment, education, and life skills. Young people advised YSAS to advocate for wraparound support so that healing is not only possible but likely. Access to secure work facilitates access to safe and stable housing, and together these are viewed as protective factors for healing. Key to this is addressing the barriers to securing work and improving access to job training and practical life skills, with an emphasis on reducing stigma associated with mental health, neurodivergence, AOD use and criminal histories. Life skills coaching and ongoing support as young people transition to stable, self-directing lives is seen as critical in diverting them away from the criminal justice system and risk of homelessness.

3. Access, Equity & Inclusion: Young people called for more affordable, inclusive, and easier-to-access Alcohol and Drug with AOD services, mental health services and other community services such as transport, housing, and healthcare. Young people experience long wait times, financial, geographical and systemic barriers, and stigma when seeking support for change in their lives. In particular, young people with criminal histories, First Nations or migrant and refugee backgrounds, and those leaving care or exiting withdrawal or rehabilitation services report facing significant barriers to gaining the support they need both within community and in service settings. Systemic social discrimination and judgment within healthcare services, potential employers, Child Protection, Police and the Justice system hamper their efforts to access the services and support they need.

Nathan's story: Finding his Voice

Nathan has long felt passionate about harm reduction, but he hasn't always had a place to channel that energy. Then he found out about The CREW. "I'm a very outspoken person, and I was talking to a YSAS worker about harm reduction and stigma and Naloxone because of a recent death that was easily preventable," he says. "I just kind of started ranting and they said - sounds like you'd be really good for The CREW."

The CREW is a group of diverse young people with lived and living experience of our services, who support the development of YSAS through feedback, decision-making and advocacy. Nathan remembers feeling a bit intimidated when he first joined the group, but his fear quickly disintegrated. "It's a very welcoming and understanding environment," he says, "and you quickly learn that YSAS will actively work with you no matter your barriers."

The CREW does a wide range of work for YSAS, including developing flyers, reviewing reports and working on Ideas Days, where young people from sites provide feedback. "We get to go directly out to sites and speak to young people and listen to what they have to say," he says. "I think it's really empowering for young people to have a say."

Nathan remembers one year when young people told YSAS that there needed to be more support for young mums. "The next year, there was a parents meeting for young mums set up," he says. "So that was a really cool thing."

All The CREW members have lived and living experience, but there is a lot of diversity in the group. "I really appreciate hearing from people who do have different experiences," Nathan says, "because I think it's really important having a range of different intersectionalities so you can help everyone."

Nathan's favourite memory from The CREW was when he influenced the design of a feedback and complaints pamphlet form being sent out to young people. "I thought it would be a good idea to add a chart so young people could indicate if it's a small piece of feedback or something big that's really important to them," he says. "The next flyers had that on it, and I felt euphoric. This was my idea, and something that I directly saw change."

Nathan says The CREW has given him a huge amount of purpose. "I was already very politically and socially active, but this has given me somewhere to express that," he says. "Whenever I even do just one thing a week at YSAS - whether that be cocreating an agenda, doing meetings, doing a social media video - it will drastically change the way I feel about myself."

"I think it's really empowering for young people to have a say."



Strategic Pillar Four: Enabling Our People to Achieve More

The impact of YSAS's work depends on the strength, capability and wellbeing of our people. By investing in staff, systems and organisational culture, we aim to create the conditions that allow our workforce to deliver the best possible support for young people and their families.

This section highlights how YSAS is strengthening the foundations of our work. The introduction of a new client information system is improving how we capture data and understand service impact, while initiatives such as the Leading Teams program are supporting stronger team culture and leadership. We also share updates on new and improved service spaces, the impact of specialised AOD traineeship programs and insights from the 2025 Employee Engagement Survey.



A Shared Head Office with Youth Sector Partners

In 2024, YSAS relocated our head office to the Telstra building in Melbourne's CBD. Telstra generously supported us to sub-lease the space, which is close to public transport and fully wheelchair accessible. It has great facilities, including undercover bike storage, built-for-purpose meeting rooms and large shared spaces.

We now share the floor with youth not-for-profits Kids Under Cover, YACVic and YDAS, creating a youth hub that fosters stronger collaboration, knowledge-sharing and sector connection.

A co-led design project involving YSAS young people is currently underway, helping to ensure the space is youth-friendly and reflects the diversity of our community. This has included creating a sensory space and installing youth-created artwork.



New Spaces, Stronger Services

Over the past few years, YSAS has relocated several of its sites to more purpose-built spaces that better support staff and young people. These moves have been complex and resource-intensive, requiring significant collaboration between local teams, IT, and the executive team. The result has been safer, more accessible, and more functional environments that strengthen service delivery.

Dandenong

The former Dandenong site required substantial repairs and was no longer financially viable. After months of planning and preparation, including four weeks of packing, the team relocated in February 2025.

The new site is located in the heart of Dandenong, directly opposite the Plaza, making it easy for young people to access. It is well serviced by public transport and close to a range of complementary local services, including headspace, the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA), and Anglicare.

Disability access has significantly improved, with lifts now available. The site also includes modern, purpose-designed consulting rooms, improved office spaces with excellent natural light, and a more welcoming overall environment for staff.

New suicide prevention funding has gone towards a community hub within the space called Third Place, in collaboration with several other services. This has created an additional drop-in space operating two days per week, expanding opportunities for young people to gather and connect.

Recognising that many young people had developed a strong sense of safety at the former site, significant effort was made to ensure they felt safe and included in the transition. Young people actively contributed to decisions about how the new Day Program space would look and function.

Gippsland

The Gippsland team relocated to a new site in mid-2025, following ongoing issues with the previous site. The new site is co-located with Quantum Support Services in Gippsland and is directly across the road from the train station, improving accessibility for both staff and young people. The site offers increased office space, purpose-designed consulting rooms, and abundant natural light, supporting a more functional and comfortable working environment.

Rosebud

In February 2026, YSAS relocated its headspace Rosebud satellite site. Feedback from young people indicated that the previous location was difficult to access, particularly by public transport.

The new site is purpose-built and co-located with a range of youth-focused services. It also hosts alternative schooling. The location is close to three major schools, the aquatic centre, and public transport, making it significantly more accessible.

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) played a crucial role in providing feedback on the previous site and supporting the move, helping ensure the new space is welcoming, accessible, and genuinely youth-friendly.



Y-CIS: A New Era of Client Information

In 2024, YSAS introduced a new client database called Y-CIS (Youth Client Information System), which supports about 75 per cent of YSAS programs in AOD community and residential settings. Y-CIS provides a secure, central location to record information about the young people we work with and the services delivered to them.

Y-CIS has been configured to meet extensive funding and reporting requirements, capturing demographic information, intake and assessment data, service progression and outcomes. This allows us to understand service demand better, identify system bottlenecks and gain high-level insight into the effectiveness of funded programs.

Workers have particularly valued the ability to upload and securely store documents, improved case noting, and greater visibility of client work. Y-CIS represents a significant organisational achievement, made possible through coordinated effort across governance, management and frontline teams, and marks an important step forward in strengthening data-driven practice at YSAS.



Leading Teams: The Power of Honest Feedback

Several years ago, YSAS employee Hannah* realised she'd lost her spark at work. "I was experiencing a lot of difficulty in my own personal life," Hannah says. Hannah was working less hours, and struggling to stay connected to a job she used to love. "I felt like I was letting the young people down."

One day, she joined a team building session with Gavin Mahony from Leading Teams, which helps organisations strengthen their leadership and team cultures. Gavin ran an activity with the team using a "bus" metaphor to explore engagement at work. Team members reflected on whether they were "driving the bus" (highly motivated and leading), "on the bus" (committed and contributing), "on and off the bus" (inconsistently engaged) or "off the bus" (disconnected from the role). To Hannah's dismay, her team ranked her as "off the bus".

"It hit me so hard," Hannah says. "I had colleagues saying that young people who used to ask for me when I was on shift weren't asking for me anymore." But even though it was painful, Hannah also felt seen by her colleagues for the first time in a while. "It made me realise they actually did notice me, and they did care, and that made me want to try harder."

The next week, Hannah's headspace was totally different. "I actually felt more connected with my team and more empowered," she says. "I was suddenly getting on the floor a lot more, having these really meaningful conversations with young people and building relationships again."

Hannah started to feel a lot more satisfied with work. "I remember getting into the car at the end of the day and thinking 'I feel like I've done some really good work today'".

YSAS has invested in Leading Teams workshops across many parts of the organisation, including with our executive leaders. It's all about giving our people what they need to do their best work. Gavin says many youth workers haven't had leadership training before. "Many of them have really embraced it, and used it for their own personal and professional development."

Gavin says the health of a team's culture directly impacts its performance. Strong, aligned leadership is essential, and leaders aren't just those in formal positions. "I've had different people say 'I'm not a leader', but if other people see you as a leader, then you're a leader because people will follow you."

The strength of a team's relationships can also make or break performance. "Conflict is part of life," says Gavin. "What separates out the mediocre from the really high performing teams is how we address those issues and move forward."

Gavin knows feedback can be challenging, but the process pays off. "It can be some of the most powerful conversations that we have in the workplace, and I don't think it's a stretch to say it changes people's lives." Hannah agrees. "Having these honest conversations again helped me grow significantly," she says. "It's been so nice looking forward to coming to work every day."

*name has been changed.

"It made me realise they actually did notice me, and they did care, and that made me want to try harder."



Ric's story: Strengthening Clinical Pathways

Before Ric Haslam arrived at headspace Collingwood, the service hadn't had a psychiatrist for several years. As a medical specialist there, he supports the service's clinicians and the day-to-day work of supporting young people aged 12–25 with their mental health.

"My door is open, and clinicians will come in with questions or problems," Ric says. "I've probably brought some clarity around simplifying or diagnosing, helping clinicians understand what might be going on so they can make decisions about what to do."

With years of experience working with young people who are acutely or chronically unwell, Ric brings a calm and grounded presence to the team. "I don't have all the answers, but just talking it through with someone who has been there can be useful," he says.

Ric's background is in paediatrics and child and adolescent psychiatry. Most of his career was spent in hospitals, where the medical model dominates. Coming to headspace Collingwood was a change — one that's pushed him to blend his medical lens with a more holistic understanding of mental health.

"When I came here, my language was very clinical and much more about diagnosis," he says. "Coming to YSAS, we talk as much about 'practice' as 'clinical', so it's been a bit of a journey since I got here combining those languages. But I've always been open to that more mental health systems framework."

One of Ric's biggest contributions has been helping develop new service pathways — including a new ADHD pathway designed to make diagnosis and treatment more accessible. Many headspace clients, he says, show signs of ADHD but can't afford the high costs of private assessments.

"For those young people, they are usually very distractible, so they have huge difficulties with concentration at work and with study and assessments," he says. Through the new pathway, Ric and headspace's GPs and clinicians can support young people to get accurately diagnosed and treated with both medication and psychosocial supports.

During his first few months, Ric helped eight young people receive a diagnosis and treatment. "All of those that we started on medication had a really good response, and there was a lot of gratefulness," he says. "Many of them will describe with medication, their brain is a lot clearer and calmer, and they can just lock in."

Ric has also helped Damian Philp, the Clinical Team Leader at headspace Collingwood, bring in the Single Session Model — a new approach that ensures every new young person at headspace Collingwood can access a session within weeks. It's designed to cut wait times and give young people more immediate support.

"The clinicians have really taken to it, and the clients on the whole find it fantastic," Ric says. Sessions often focus on small, tangible actions that can make a big difference. "For example, for people with low mood and anxiety, doing regular exercise — just 20 minutes four times a week — is shown to help," he says. "It can be quite simple, but young people have forgotten that when they used to do X, they felt better."

After a year and a half in the role, Ric says he's loved being part of a dynamic, forward-thinking team. "In this short time, we've introduced single sessions, brought new staff on board, developed new training sessions and the ADHD pathway," he says. "There's a lot of flexibility and opportunities to do things a bit differently here."

And for Ric, the real reward is setting young people on a path to recovery and being there for his colleagues. "If clinicians have got questions that are coming to me, that's pretty satisfying, and hopefully useful for them as well."

**"I don't have all the answers,
but just talking it through with someone
who has been there can be useful."**



Employee Engagement Survey 2025: Insights from Our People

In 2025, YSAS conducted an Employee Engagement Survey to better understand staff experiences and identify opportunities to strengthen our organisation. Of the 220 survey participants, 97 per cent agreed that the work we do at YSAS is important and almost half identified as having lived and/or living experience, highlighting the depth of experience across our workforce.

The survey highlighted opportunities to strengthen our professional development and support systems, so we can continue to develop our staff's capabilities. Demographic data gathered through the survey will help guide initiatives aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable organisation.



Laura's story: Finding Her Place at YSAS



Laura Slink's journey to YSAS started almost by accident. While studying a Certificate IV in Youth Services, she happened to meet a YSAS worker named Ebony on New Year's Eve. "She was like, I'm so glad you're getting into the field - it's a good place to work," Laura recalls.

At the time, Laura had never heard of YSAS, but after that encounter, she made it her mission to get a student placement there. A few years later, she's now working at YSAS Morwell—and Ebony is her team leader. "She was like, 'Oh my god, we met five years ago completely by random!'"

From her first day of placement at YSAS Morwell, Laura felt like she belonged, despite never having worked in the industry. "I just felt like I fit right in," she says. "I couldn't believe that at YSAS, everyone's so nice." On one of her first days, she was asked to drive a young person across Gippsland. "I rang Terry—it was one of her clients—and she goes, 'Do you mind driving him to Traralgon?' So it kind of threw me in the deep end straight away, but it was great, we had a great chat."

During her placement, Laura was shocked by the level of social inequality and disadvantage she witnessed. Growing up, she was raised with a more punitive view of wrongdoing. Her time at YSAS shifted that perspective. "Whilst I don't condone criminal behaviour, I can understand where it's coming from, and I can try and help turn their life in a different direction," she says.

Throughout her placement, Laura was exposed to a variety of YSAS programs, including AOD Outreach and the Youth Support Service, which works with young people involved in criminal activity. She also learnt about therapeutic approaches like narrative therapy and family practice. "I got to really think about what particular direction I might want to go down," she says.

What impressed her most was YSAS's supportive and advocacy-based model. "We get to voluntarily

work with young people and advocate for them," she says. "We're not a threat to them, whereas so many other services have a different responsibility." Now working in the YSAS Morwell team, Laura still can't quite believe her luck. "I guess it must be like my dream job, because I actually have fun, like, all the time," she says.

A country girl at heart, she loves incorporating nature into her work. "You can use nature as part of your own healing, which not everybody has access to down the city way." She recalls taking one young person to a quiet natural spot after suggesting, "Have you ever gone and just sat by the river?" "She was like, 'I love this, I'm going to come back here all the time.'"

Laura's advice to anyone considering a YSAS placement is simple: go for it. "There's a lot to learn, and all of the YSAS workers across all the sites have a wealth of knowledge," she says. "The YSAS values are taken seriously, so become familiar with them and hopefully they align with your own values." As for her future? Laura's committed. "YSAS is just full of supportive, helpful people," she says. "I don't see myself doing anything else—not for the next 10 years at least."

"I just felt like I fit right in," she says."

Environmental Responsibility at YSAS

During the 2025–26 financial year, YSAS continued to take steps to reduce its environmental footprint. There were decisions made to sell some organisational vehicles, replace a few with hybrid vehicles and identify any that were surplus to operational needs.

In addition, a solar power system is operational at the Birribi site, reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources.

YSAS is committed to continually strengthening its environmental practices, including exploring opportunities for solar installations at new sites, sourcing renewable electricity and ongoing upgrades to our vehicle fleet.



AOD Traineeships: Building Pathways into the Sector

In 2024, YSAS delivered a government-funded traineeship program designed to create employment pathways into the AOD sector, particularly for people facing barriers to work. The program supported three trainees to work and study at the same time, all with lived experience of mental health and AOD challenges.

The trainees were placed at YSAS sites in Frankston, Ringwood and Dandenong, also completing their AOD qualifications while on placement. Supported by site mentors and traineeship coordinator Esther Benz, they shadowed workers, attended conferences and gradually took on small caseloads, becoming active contributors to team meetings and case reviews.

Drawing on their lived experience, the trainees were able to build strong connections with young people and bring valuable perspectives to practice. Trainee Cassie described the impact of feeling supported at YSAS, saying, "I don't think I've ever had a job before that I actually enjoyed getting up in the morning and going to work every day."

Cassie thrived in the program and is continuing her career in the sector. Building on this success, YSAS supported four new trainees in 2025, reinforcing its commitment to developing a diverse, skilled and values-driven workforce.



Celebrating Impact at the 2025 YSAS Conference

The 2025 YSAS Conference provided a valuable opportunity to recognise and celebrate the important work being done across YSAS with young people and families. It was especially impactful to be joined by colleagues from partner organisations and government, strengthening connections across the sector.

The conference opened with a Welcome to Country by Wurundjeri Elder Perry Wandin, followed by opening remarks from the Minister for Mental Health, Ingrid Stitt. Our YSAS Youth Peer Advocates, Kayla and Lucia, then shared powerful insights on the importance of embedding youth participation and lived experience in program design and organisational decision-making.

The program was structured around four key streams — AOD Community, Mental Health, Residential Services and Crime Prevention — and focused on what is working well, current challenges and barriers, and best practice solutions. Sessions highlighted themes such as co-located and wraparound models of care, family-inclusive practice, early intervention, culturally responsive services, and strong cross-sector partnerships.

Three key publications were launched at the conference, each highlighting the impact of our work and informing future practice. These included the *2025 YSAS Youth AOD Census Snapshot*, the *Learnings from the Youth Support Service (YSS) Report*, and the *2024 Annual Report*.

The day concluded with a collective reflection session, bringing together lived and living experience voices and key learnings from each stream. Feedback on the conference was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees particularly valuing the voices of young people and families, the strong focus on youth participation, and the quality of the breakout sessions.





THANK YOU

YSAS would like to thank all the partners and funders who make our work possible. Together, they represent a diverse network of organisations spanning all levels of government, health and mental health services, education providers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, legal and justice agencies, philanthropic foundations and businesses. Their support enables us to provide the services and opportunities young people experiencing serious disadvantage need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.



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