



The Hester Hornbrook Academy Classroom Youth Worker Research Project

Final report

July 2019

Professor Robyn Broadbent
Dr Karen Hart
Professor Theo Papadopoulos

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Foreword

Melbourne City Mission's Hester Hornbrook Academy is an independent school that provides the Victorian Certificate in Applied Learning (VCAL) in a flexible learning environment. It aims to re-engage young people in learning, who have disengaged from mainstream schools.

A key part of the Academy's model is having both an educator and youth worker in each classroom. An independent evaluation of the Academy (formerly the Melbourne Academy) found that "the teacher-youth worker pairs in each site are the greatest asset for the Melbourne Academy."

We embarked on this research project to deepen our understanding of the role of a youth worker in an educational context, and to assess the impact of having youth workers in the classroom on young people's engagement with education. This project contributes to the emerging evidence base about innovative approaches to engaging young people in learning.

We are driven by the notion that 'Obtaining a quality education is the foundation to improving people's lives' (Sustainable Development Goal 4), and we believe that many young people need a context with enhanced supports to engage in education and develop that foundation. The Academy program seeks to provide both the education and the additional supports.



Tim Knowles
Principal
Hester Hornbrook Academy



Dave Wells
Founding Principal
Hester Hornbrook
Academy

THE
HESTER HORNBOOK
ACADEMY

mcm.
melbourne city mission

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Executive Summary

About the Academy

Six years ago the (then) CEO of Melbourne City Mission (MCM) sat on the front steps of Frontyard¹ next to a young man. Together they talked about his life and future. The young man revealed he had been exited from several schools and so, with limited educational success, his life goals now seemed unattainable. Saddened by this, the CEO took action and so began a vision for a school that would aim to ensure every young person had the opportunity to complete a secondary qualification.

This new school, now known as the Hester Hornbrook Academy (the Academy), provides supportive, flexible education options to reconnect young people with schooling. This is often the most important step to getting them back on track. The students who attend the Academy are typically disengaged from any other education options. They present with a mix of mental health issues, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, juvenile justice exposure, family breakdown and/or very low personal agency and social capital.

Building on the evidence of what works, the Academy aims to remove barriers and link young people with a range of social and education supports to help them achieve their goals (MCM, 2018). The Academy has adopted a unique model with a youth worker in every classroom working collaboratively alongside a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered educator. Anecdotally, teaching staff say that when youth workers are in the classroom, there is an educational 'lift'. MCM wanted to confirm this belief through a formal research evaluation. Consequently, MCM commissioned researchers from Victoria University (VU) to conduct an evaluation of the classroom youth worker model. The findings from this evaluation are presented in this report.

About the research

The approach taken to evaluate the role of the Academy youth worker centres on collaborative practice, working alongside practitioners, students and other stakeholders to reflect on roles, what works and what could be enhanced. The nature of this collaborative research ensured that school staff and students, alongside their managers and other stakeholders, could steer the direction of the data collection process and help interpret the themes that evolved.

The research aim was to understand the practice of youth work in the classroom and the contribution that this practice makes to educational outcomes. This was designed to inform current practice and help the Academy staff to continue to improve and enhance the model².

¹ Frontyard is an integrated youth services hub that supports young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, run by Melbourne City Mission and based in Melbourne's central business district (CBD).

² For further information refer to the evaluation done by Kitty Te Riele and Merryn Davies from the Victoria Institute at Victoria University: *Passport to Learning*, (2015), published by Melbourne City Mission.

A mixed method approach was adopted in this evaluation, using both qualitative and quantitative tools, as follows:

- A literature review was completed to help provide some context and understanding about the risks associated with young people not completing their schooling, the role of youth work and the various models that have been applied in education.
- Qualitative research methods used were interviews and observations. These gave students, staff and other stakeholders the opportunity to articulate their own insights on the model.
- Three sourced case studies were also developed from educational institutions using similar models to that applied in the Academy.
- Quantitative data: more student perspectives on the Academy model were collected through a survey.

What does the literature review tell us?

The literature review provided some very clear ‘guide ropes’ for the practice of youth workers in schools. It was determined that four fundamental scaffolds are required to support good practice and, more importantly, to help understand why having youth workers in schools works so well. These are as follows:

- Youth work is an educative practice. For decades, with the use of non-formal and informal learning, youth work has built personal, social, civic, employment and academic agency in young people. Youth work’s own history is based on the skilling of young people in the context of their broader welfare.
- Youth workers clear the young person’s journey for learning, or what Kitty Te Riele simply calls, ‘clearing for learning’ (cited in McGregor, et al., 2017). In essence, youth workers take a holistic approach that focusses on removing barriers to attending and engaging in school.
- Youth work is a relational pedagogy and practice and is key to their work with young people.
- Being aspirational for every student can “leapfrog” multiple barriers.

What does the qualitative and quantitative research tell us?

The student interviews revealed nine areas of importance to the Academy students. These relate to both the model of education and the youth worker role within it. These areas are:

- Positive introduction to the Academy
- I am valued
- Youth worker educative role
- I am respected
- Youth workers facilitate learning
- I am not judged
- The difference a youth worker / educator blend makes within the model
- The impact of youth workers in a classroom
- My youth worker believes in me

Students were able to provide a robust critique of the various aspects of the Academy model. They understood the roles of educators and youth workers, articulating that the two roles often merged. Their experiences with the Academy are overwhelmingly positive, discussing their own sense of safety and their improved wellbeing. The Academy model

builds much needed social capital for young people. This contributes to the development of robust foundational life skills.

Young people were now seeing themselves through a different lens because of this new-found individual worth and purpose. The majority could discuss plans in the context of their future once they finished school. This creates a powerful narrative and, for many, a very different life to that imagined before entering the Academy.

The student survey results were overwhelmingly positive, reinforcing what was articulated in interviews. Around 75% or greater of the students indicated they felt the youth worker was somewhat effective or very effective in achieving the listed outcomes. This is at the top end of the Likert scale. Students were able to identify the role of the youth worker and the benefits that role brought into the Academy classroom. Work output was the most frequent theme (44%) indicated by students in their written responses. While much less specific than some of the other themes, an increased work ethic and a general sense that more work is achieved with the addition of the youth worker in the classroom was clearly felt by the students.

Students reaffirmed the importance of the role in removing whatever personal barriers they faced. However, they also talked about the educative role, which improved classroom learning. Students noted that youth workers directly assisted with academic work or ensured the classroom was calmer. This data aligns with findings from the literature about the importance of the relationship, or the 'clearing for learning' role discussed above, as well as supporting the aspirations of students. Students indicated that youth workers assisted them in forming future goals around education.

Staff have a clear understanding of what works in the Academy and why. At the top of that list would be the matching of youth workers and educators. Staff relayed at length the importance of a relationship built on trust and shared values. **The key here is that these traits are seen in the professional context. Trust, for example, means professional trust, a trust that you will know what to do in a critical incident fundamental to everyone's safety and that you will operate in an ethical manner with each young person.** The key discussion points gathered during staff interviews and observations are as follows:

- Functional environment: This meant the physical environment with space for food, private chats and celebrating projects.
- Shared values / relational: This is particularly important that the Youth Worker and the Educator have a good professional relationship with shared values.
- The importance of the collaboration between youth worker and educator: The two professionals need to trust each others judgement and know when to step in to support the other.
- Recognition of specific youth work and educator skills, qualities and knowledge by both the educator and the youth worker: There are distinct skill sets in this model that both professionals contribute to. Understanding those skill sets will lead to greater collaboration.

The case studies, included in Appendix 1, illustrate the importance of an educational and social pedagogy for marginalised young people, articulated from multiple perspectives. In conclusion, the unique Academy model is clearly focussed on providing education opportunities to vulnerable young people, staff defining the youth worker role as a one-stop-shop, with students able to access one-on-one support. This model, discussed in the report through the voices of young people and staff, creates the educational 'lift' observed

anecdotally by staff. This 'lift' was confirmed by staff and students alike throughout the research. What is fundamental to the model is the duality of roles in the classroom - youth worker and educator. Other important elements of the model are the physical environment, the professional team that works collaboratively with each individual young person, as well as the leadership that supports them. The Academy continues to work to embed a strong framework of practice that utilises the specific expertise of youth workers and educators to gain the best possible outcomes for young people. What is needed now is continuing to collaborate with staff to progress the model and build the educational outcomes.

Program logic

A program logic model was constructed for the Academy. This provides a more succinct account of what the inputs and activities are and also what outcomes, both long and short-term, the Academy wishes to achieve. It is, in some ways, a theory of change, as it connects the achievements/activities to the outcomes of the model.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, developed from the research, encapsulate the voices and experiences of the classroom, from both staff and student perspectives.

1. To attract youth workers with the right expertise, the Academy should seek to recruit future youth workers with the following professional profile:
 - a. A minimum qualification of a Bachelor of Youth Work;
 - b. Evidence of an understanding of a youth worker's role in educative practice, using informal and non-formal learning;
 - c. Experience or capability to facilitate classroom-based activities;
 - d. Capacity to articulate what underpins their practice, including their knowledge of the Code of Ethical Practice, their understanding of professional boundaries and ethics, and their understanding of youth work as an educational practice.
2. To support the development of positive professional relationships between staff, the Academy should increase opportunities for staff collaboration onsite and across different sites, for instance through additional opportunities to observe each other's practice and undertake shared reflective practice.
3. To enable youth workers to exercise greater professional scope, the Academy should factor in additional time and supports for youth workers to:
 - a. Assess young people pre-enrolment, and complete more detailed, appropriate and extensive case planning;
 - b. Develop high level risk reduction, risk management and safety planning to avert crises escalation;
 - c. Enhance outreach practice to re-engage young people who are not attending; and
 - d. Establish appropriate processes and tools for sharing confidential student information between youth workers and educators.
4. The Academy should support ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff in trauma-informed practice.³ This will build expertise in understanding the complex behaviours of some young people, and in working towards removing their barriers to learning. Experience in providing trauma-informed practice should be a requirement for all new staff.

³ MCM are already in the process of implementing this training for all staff.

About the Academy

Six years ago, the (then) CEO of Melbourne City Mission (MCM) sat on the steps of Frontyard⁴ next to a young man, talking about his life and future. This young man revealed he had been exited from several schools and, as a result, had limited educational success. Because of this, his life goals now seemed unattainable. Saddened by this, the CEO began to express the desire for MCM to create a school for their young clients.

This school would be designed specifically to re-engage young people who faced multiple and complex barriers to education participation. It would facilitate educational goal setting and belief in every young person, building their aspirations and aiming to ensure they had the opportunity to complete a secondary qualification and create a future. And so the MCM established the Melbourne Academy (the Academy for short), a community education program delivering the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). In 2017, this was formalised with the registration of a new company and a new school called the Hester Hornbrook Academy (still known simply as the Academy). By 2018, the Academy was educating 190 students across five sites: the Visy Cares Hub in Sunshine; MCM in Braybrook, where one of two young mums' groups are located; Frontyard in the Melbourne CBD; MCM North Fitzroy; and an MCM leased facility in Prahran, which houses three classrooms and the other young mums' group.

The Academy provides supportive, flexible education options to reconnect young people with schooling, which is often the most important step to getting them back on track. The students who attend the Academy are typically disengaged from any other education options. Their exclusion has come through both formal and informal expulsion through a school's action, non-action or suggestions to consider other options, as well as through a student's own choice to simply exit a mainstream school. These students typically present with a mix of mental health issues, homelessness, drug and alcohol use, juvenile justice exposure, family breakdown and very low personal agency and social capital. Building on the evidence of what works, the school aims to remove barriers and link young people with a range of social and education supports to help them achieve their goals (MCM, 2018).

The Academy has a unique model with a youth worker in every classroom working collaboratively alongside a Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) registered educator. This collaboration builds on mutual respect for the professional skills each brings to the classroom. While the youth worker and educator have distinct roles, these roles must be dynamic, adapting to situations as they arise and prioritising the skills of the professional best suited to address that situation. The youth worker may finish an education task with a young person as the educator checks behaviour. The youth worker may have an educative role but they also play a key part in a 'wraparound' service. This, in essence, means supporting the young person to remove or minimise the impact of barriers to learning, whether that be housing, mental health, family relationships, income, or any number of other challenges.

⁴ Frontyard is an integrated youth services hub that supports young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, run by Melbourne City Mission and based in Melbourne's central business district (CBD).

When it works well, this unique collaboration can lead to outstanding success. True collaboration is built on mutual respect, professional intuition, flexibility, quick thinking and strong problem solving skills. For The Academy, collaboration means a mutual understanding and shared values focused on the best interests of every young person in the room.

About this research project

Anecdotally, teaching staff in the Academy say that when youth workers are in the classroom there is an educational 'lift'. Drawing on this anecdotal evidence, MCM wanted to understand more about the practice of youth work in the classroom and the contribution that this makes to educational outcomes. Consequently, MCM commissioned researchers from Victoria University (VU) to conduct an evaluation of the classroom youth worker model. The findings from this evaluation are presented in this report.

The approach taken to evaluate the role of the Academy youth worker centres on collaborative practice, working alongside practitioners, students and other stakeholders to reflect on roles, what works and what could be enhanced. The nature of collaborative research ensured that school staff and students, alongside their managers and other stakeholders, could steer the direction of the data collection process and help interpret the themes that evolved.

Methodology and methods

A mixed method approach was adopted in this evaluation, using both qualitative and quantitative tools. This approach allowed the researchers to collect both objective and subjective insights into the effectiveness of the Academy classroom model. Qualitative research methods (interviews, observations and case studies) gave students, staff and other stakeholders the opportunity to articulate their own insights on the model. Walter (2006) highlights the importance of using qualitative data collection tools to allow for the emergence of social patterns and social meanings that can lead to the development of new ways of examining social phenomena. Quantitative data were collected through student surveys. A literature review was also completed to provide some background and context for the evaluation.

Literature review

The literature review was completed to help define the critical elements of youth work practice and the role of youth workers in education settings. The review examined projects that had used this model or similar models. This assisted in identifying the key aspects of success and how these aligned with the model and key pillars used in the Academy. These key aspects of success, such as the importance of the relationship and being aspirational informed the sort of questions we asked young people.

Qualitative data collection: Interviews and observations

Individual interviews were conducted with four to six young people from each site. Interviewees were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that participants could be specifically rather than randomly selected to ensure the involvement of a diverse group of young people. This diversity was based on the length of time they had been at the Academy and their current and previous experiences.

A large forum was also held with educators and youth workers. This focussed on gathering data about key achievements and strategic changes, as well as elements of the model that staff believed could be enhanced going forward. The forum also gave strategic insights into

what staff thought were key indicators of a successful youth worker and educator classroom partnership.

Information was also gathered through observations in each setting, conducted by both a group of final year VU youth work students and lead investigators, Robyn Broadbent and Karen Hart. A number of quotes from young people and significant material for case studies were captured during these visits.

The qualitative data collected throughout the project was analysed using a 'thematic approach'. Thematic analysis codes the data 'line by line' and then generates patterns of the descriptive themes that arise (Thomas & Harden 2008). This form of coding is empowering as it ensures that participant voices around central themes are clearly articulated and easily heard. We will hear student and practitioner voices later in this report. Pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

Quantitative data collection

A survey of students was conducted via a questionnaire of 13 questions. This gathered demographic information and specific student perceptions of the Academy model. The survey was completed online by the students.

Ethical research

Any research involving young people must be reviewed through a rigorous ethical process before the study can begin. This ensures that there are no risks to research participants or that any potential risks are mitigated. Ethics approval for this project was granted by the VU Human Ethics Research Committee. This enabled the researchers to hear student and educator voices on what elements of the Academy make for an effective classroom model.

Summarising the literature review findings

One of the defining features of the education model of the Academy is that each classroom has a youth worker and an educator working collaboratively with each young person. As already indicated, anecdotally, staff believe that this model makes a difference to the educational engagement and attainment of young people in the classroom. The literature review explored the benefits of having youth workers in a flexible learning class for vulnerable young people. Below is a summary of the review, the full review of literature can be found in Appendix 3.

This literature review has provided some very clear 'guide ropes' for the practice of youth workers in schools. The literature investigated drills into what youth practice looks like in an everyday context in a school. What became apparent was that there are four fundamental scaffolds to support good practice and, more importantly, to understand why youth workers practicing in flexible learning centres works so well.

First, youth work is an educative practice. For decades, youth work has built personal, social, civic, employment and academic agency in young people with the use of non-formal and informal learning. Youth work as a profession grew out of concern for the skilling of young people in the context of their broader welfare.

Second, youth workers help clear the barriers to a young person's learning. These barriers include mental health issues, a lack of financial support or safe housing, and family violence, among many others. Taking a holistic approach, it is the youth workers role to support the young person so that they are safe, healthy and able to learn.

Third, youth work creates a relational pedagogy. The term speaks to the importance of the relationship between youth worker and young people. The research outlines how integral it is for that relationship to be built on trust, honesty and integrity. It is clear to all that relationships are fundamental to the successful transitions of young people. A focus on the building and maintaining of relationships is a key component of youth work practice. For many young people, these relationships provide stability, consistency and a mentor role that they may not have had in their life.

Finally, multiple research reports over the last decade have turned their focus to the importance of aspirations, or in the case of the Academy, being aspirational for each individual student. What is critical here is to understand the importance of having a strong relationship with an important 'other' for an individual young person. The research identifies how this has a substantial impact on young people framing their aspirations. It is a significant finding in this research and a real 'game changer' for young people at the Academy.

The literature review has focussed on the youth worker in the school; it was clear in the research that they cannot be the only functioning factor in a flexible education setting. Teaching pedagogy that works with individual interests and skill sets, has relevant and accessible curriculum, caring educators, fair and consistent boundaries and a flexible approach were consistent in the literature as essential components of a successful education experience.

This complete literature review began by identifying the numbers of young people not completing Year 12. Given the significance of these numbers, this review also ends on that topic. In the face of school non-completion, an alarming number of young people are at serious economic risk, destined to occupy low paid jobs or remaining unemployed as these jobs quickly disappear. This will condemn many to a lifetime of precarious economic instability, faced with all the negative factors associated with living near, on, or below, the poverty line. It is our civic responsibility to provide young people with every opportunity to succeed, achieve, and share in the wealth of this country.

The Voices of Academy students

This section of the report presents the demographic findings from the survey of students, plus the comments from the interviews and conversations with students and staff. Through the process of deduction, a number of themes and patterns emerged, highlighting the salient aspects of the Academy model.

We begin with an understanding of the particular student cohort, gathered from both the quantitative and qualitative data. We hear their personal stories of disadvantage and marginalisation that led them to the Academy. This is followed by an analysis of student perspectives on the Academy itself. We then examine the perspectives of staff, as gathered from the focus group. Comments from the VU student classroom observations⁵ are dispersed throughout the student interview and staff focus group responses, to substantiate the views expressed by participants.

The Academy student cohort

In our survey of students, we asked about their backgrounds to get a sense of this group of students. We learned that more than 90% of students were born in Australia, and only 13% speak a language other than English at home. One third identified as a cultural group other than Australian and less than 10% are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Just over one third of students have a disability. Only 19% of the students were living with both parents, with 39% living with a single parent, 17% living on their own and 13% living with other family or relatives.

More than half of our student sample are female, with 35% male and a small but significant portion of students (less than 10%) identifying as a non-binary gender. The students in the MCM program were between the ages of 15 and 23 at the time of the survey, with the majority in the 16-17 and 19-20 age brackets.

Only 16% of students indicated they were studying part-time, with the remainder (except for two non-responses) studying full-time. More than half of the students were unemployed, actively searching for work but not working. A further 34% were not employed and not looking for work. Of the 15% of students who were working, the majority were in part-time or casual employment.

In their own voices, young people described their previous experience. A number of students recalled having to grapple with negative assumptions made about them and the issues that flowed from that experience. One student recalled:

I actually got expelled from school in Year 10 and it's taken me a couple of years to walk into a classroom like this where I don't feel judged or that people assume anything about me. I was bullied at school and no one took it seriously. It took me a long time to get over that. (Student)

⁵ Marked as Obs S

Young people who have experienced disadvantage and vulnerability in childhood often lack the supportive structures necessary for healthy development. This can lead to low personal agency, hampering their ability to trust their own decision-making and leading to a limited capacity to solve problems. Consequently, for many Academy students, the pressures of being at mainstream school were too difficult to face. Pressure levels were a recurrent theme among this cohort. One student outlined how their increased stress and anxiety grew to such an unbearable level, it resulted in them having to take a stance so that they could leave. The student noted:

Normal school just didn't work for me – I was stressed out all the time with the workload – you could never relax, you were confused and you didn't want to do the project – every part of it. It was gruelling. It was one big grind. My parents eventually took me out when I refused to leave my bedroom. I had a peaceful protest (laughs). Then they enrolled me into Youth-Worx and then here, it's better for me. (Student)

Other students referred to their experience of being treated differently by the educators in mainstream school, whilst being treated as a 'normal person' at the Academy. A student at one site stated:

They understand what's happening with you and at school they just teach you. Here its different, it's more relaxed and they treat you like a normal person and understand what you are like. (Student)

The recollection of not feeling accepted for who they are in their previous mainstream setting was a patterned response in the students' voices. That now lay in stark contrast to their experience at the Academy. One student stated:

At this school, I have never felt more accepted, more supported, that kind of thing. It's just an awesome space and I love coming in every day, whereas it was a struggle to get out of bed for school most days [laughter]. (Student)

The experience of disruptive schooling was also shared by a number of students, as well as a strong indication that little or no effort had been made to try and reintegrate them back into school once they had left:

I was at a mainstream school, but I didn't do well. I was good at some things but not maths. From Year 7 to Year 10 I was in and out. I wasn't really doing anything between Year 11 and 12. I went to another school but they assumed that I would struggle through Year 12 - I should have been put on a student loan, but they put me on disability instead and that messed me up because they assumed that there was something wrong with me when there wasn't. (Student)

Other students discussed how coming from a disadvantaged background made things very difficult for them, particularly when they were not able to go to school with basic items such as a school uniform:

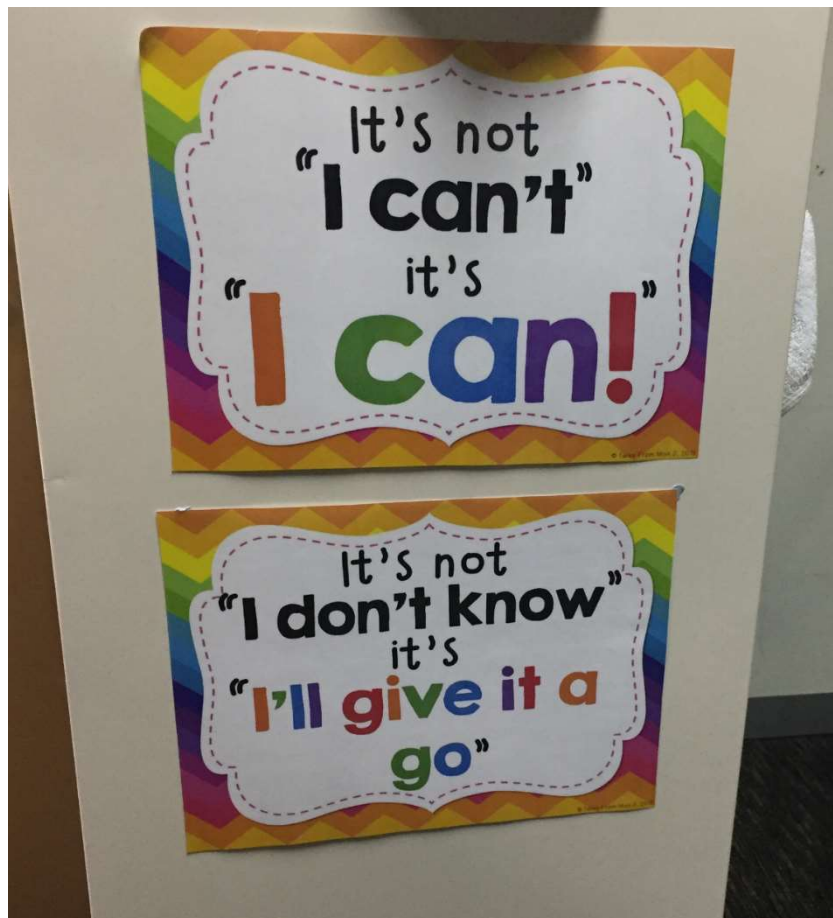
It's a lot less stressful than normal school which can cause a lot of mental health and all that. The school I went to was no good for disadvantaged youth, coming up as one of three kids from a single mum and it was hard for her to have every bit of uniform so we were wearing our blue winter

socks in summer. They would send us home ... yeah, just for socks and it was a stress when you know you were leaving home and going to school in the wrong socks and you would have thought that they would have just been happy that we showed up at all. (Student)

Student voices: Nine areas of importance in the Academy

This is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I wouldn't have the connections, I wouldn't have the support, the workers, they are awesome (Student)

The text on a filing cabinet pictured below expresses the tone of the educational context at the Academy. Students often reported that when they said they cannot do it they were met with a resounding, you cannot do it YET, by staff.



Nine key themes emerged from the student interviews as important to the Academy cohort. These are:

Positive introduction to the Academy

- I am valued
- Youth worker educative role
- I am respected
- Youth workers facilitate learning
- I am not judged
- The difference a youth worker / educator blend makes within the model
- The impact of youth workers in a classroom
- My youth worker believes in me

Each of these themes is examined in more detail in the sections below.

Positive introduction to the Academy

Knowing how the students arrived at the Academy was important to the youth work role. This helped identify the factors necessary for successful engagement in their new learning environment. Having the students articulate the challenges and barriers they faced in mainstream schools and how their individual challenges (e.g. learning difficulties, dysfunctional family circumstances, disadvantage and/or poverty) impacted their retention. This helped Academy staff focus in on the kinds of support they could provide, or had the potential to provide, which had been lacking for the students in larger, more impersonal educational institutions. The following comments highlight the student experiences prior to entering the Academy:

I actually got expelled from school in Year 10 and it's taken me a couple of years to walk into a classroom like this where I don't feel judged or that people assume anything about me. I was bullied at school and no one took it seriously. It took me a long time to get over that. The youth worker and the educator have both helped to get my confidence. (Student)

I wasn't here last term had a lot of stuff going on but the youth worker convinced me to have another go and it's like I was always here. They still had my other work so I could still keep trying to finish my VCAL. (Student)

I am valued

A student explained how students' personal issues can often be ignored in mainstream schools, but at the Academy, they are taken seriously and young people are supported through their anxieties. A student recalled that:

A lot of these different youth workers here really helped me all in different ways. When I first started here I had really severe anxiety throughout the day just all the time. And gradually, they've sort of helped me deal with that. And then once I got better I felt comfortable enough we could make plans ... (Student)

Linked to this was an observation of how the youth workers actively responded to the students' issues, making time to have confidential discussions so that the student felt better about re-joining the classroom:

The youth worker values opinions and the young people trust the youth worker in the space to not break the confidentiality. Young person told the

youth worker about a worry they had about the safety of another student and the youth worker was able to speak to all parties in a safe environment where the issue was resolved. (Obs-S)⁶

A young woman came to school drug affected. Two key things occurred here. The young woman was kept out of entering the classroom so as not to disrupt other students. Secondly, the youth worker could keep her safe whilst trying to keep the whole situation calm. The follow up was the next day taking time out to talk to that young person about her drug use and build a plan to support her. (Obs-S)

The youth worker has helped me with home, friendship stuff and just spending time with me to talk through goals and what I want to do. It has helped me to come to school and keep doing my work. I didn't have that at my old school. (Obs-S)

Youth worker educative role to facilitate learning

What we observed is that young people receive help and guidance in a whole range of areas, both personal and educative so they will often ask the youth worker in the space for assistance; they are sometimes able to help the young person and are able to support the student to guide their own learning.

Also in speaking with young people it was clear that each individual student has a learning plan tailor made for them. This meant that youth workers were observed just having conversations assisting a young person to think about the task that the educator has given them, where they might find information and how to order the task.

The youth worker's role is to broker between the personal and the learning experience, to pass on information about resources available to students, whilst reinforcing societal expectations, norms and ethics alongside a sense of what is appropriate. All of this is vitally important for the student's progress at the Academy and strengthens the trust and respect within the helping relationship. Students understood that youth workers are there to listen, advise and inspire confidence and hope among students. This is exemplified by the following observations:

I didn't know what a youth worker was when I started here but she is really cool. (Student)

In the VCAL class, each student has a number of practical tasks. In the case of one small group of students, this included organising an event for two of the Academy sites. The educator had established the task and the youth worker then supported students to organise the event. The students could articulate how the different roles of the youth worker and educator applied to them, such as:

My teacher sets the schoolwork but often the youth worker will help me doing the work. (Student)

There are numerous examples of how this worked in tasks and how students used the different skillsets of the education team they were working with. For example:

⁶ Obs – S refers to the final year Bachelor of Youth Work students who spent several weeks in each of the classrooms.

A student became interested in a public debate on whether religious schools have the right to discriminate based on a staff or student's sexuality or gender, and the youth worker was able to support them in finding information to later work with the educator to write a piece of work about it that was counted as a learning outcome. (Obs-S)

The youth worker role is used to facilitate a safe classroom, which in turn builds a productive classroom. Students commented:

I am considering my own sexual identity and have had a lot of mental health issues, I feel safe here which I didn't at my last school. (Student)

We often have other sessions on things like – you know would help us as mums. The youth worker brings people in to talk to us. (Student)

In one instance, the youth worker tried to navigate the issue of concentration and focus by looking at sensory activities that acted as a counter-distraction to students using their phones:

The youth worker was able to implement new sensory items (Playdough etc.) to encourage young people not to use their phones during class time, but instead to use sensory items to play with and touch. This was done because the youth worker talked about how they had done some research on sensory items positively impacting education as it can refocus young people.

The youth worker does make the flow of the room easier, in terms of when students are agitating, the youth worker does speak to the young people and this allows the educator to continue teaching without having to stop (Obs).

Youth worker always offers the students food or smoothies and she asks them if they would like to have a chat. Whenever they have a chat it is always done outside of the classroom to give privacy (Obs).

I am respected

Other students referred to the treatment they received from mainstream school educators and how different this was from what they experienced in the Academy. Here they felt treated as a 'normal person', with staff appearing to have a greater level of understanding and insight into who they were as people. Students would use the term normal person, but in essence, when you look at the full discussion, what they are saying is 'I am respected as an individual here'. Such comments were always provided in the context of their previous education experiences, during which they felt powerless and treated as a problem. Students repeatedly referred to the failure of their old school to recognise the challenges and barriers to learning they faced. Comments included:

They understand what is happening with you and at school, they just help you learn. Doesn't matter if you haven't been here a while ... here its different, it is more relaxed and they treat you like as an individual and understand what you are like. (Student)

When you are here you have a different set of rules. It's more relaxed, like you're treated like a normal person. (Student)

I think I like more the one-on-one -- the smaller space. You get much more of a connection with your educator, and it's awesome having a youth worker here because I've come from a very disadvantaged family, so it's nice to always have someone there that I can just talk to or just get that little bit of extra support that I need. I think it's really useful to have a youth worker in the schools, regardless if it's independent or a mainstream. Those people that do need the help usually do go and talk to someone. (Student)

If you are having a bad day, the youth worker can help you, if you are having trouble working it out, you can take your time, whereas at normal school you have to get it done, there's higher expectations and here you take time to get it done and to understand what you have done. (Student)

Two other students echoed the same sentiments, but also highlighted how the youth workers encouraged positive behavioural change through non-confrontational methods:

In normal school, they try to overpower you. Here they are like a friend, a role model rather than authority. If you swear, they don't treat you like a child. They talk to you with respect, which teaches you that you do not want to swear. (Student)

They don't put me under pressure, if you are not working they find out what the problem is and they find out what you want to do. They can just help us out easier because there are much less students to worry about. They make me want to try harder. (Student)

A young person had slammed a ruler against the table affecting the focus and attention of the other students around him. One young person in particular became highly stressed and anxious from this, resulting in her exiting the class. After 'tapping out' the youth worker had a follow up with this young person, guided her back in the room and assisted with her task. (Obs-S)

I am not judged

Students repeatedly said that they felt they were not judged for who they are, which was important given the barriers, experiences, unstable mental health and for some unstable housing many had faced.

At this school, I have never felt more accepted, more supported, that kind of thing. It's just an awesome space and I love coming in every day, whereas it was a struggle to get out of bed for school most days [laughter]. The Youth Worker makes it different. (Student)

Yeah, it's a lot different, but it's a good different ... It's mostly the environment that having a youth worker and an educator in the same room. (Student)

They put us first, stop what they are doing and help us for the best. (Student)

Well, my experience here has been amazing in the past two years. I could not ask for a better educator or youth worker and better classmates. It is just a really nice environment to learn in, knowing that it's judgmental-free.

In addition, there's no discrimination whatsoever, no bullying tolerated. It is just amazing. I love it! (Student)

Every single day, I come in and ... the youth worker that's here, no matter who it is, even if they're here every day, even if they're just relieving someone, they're absolutely there to encourage you and make sure they can support you in any way and just make sure that you're getting on with what you have to do. It is really awesome. Great atmosphere. I am going to drag it out a little bit longer because I just love it here so much, honestly. (Student)

The idea of 'I don't feel judged' was probably most evident in the classroom of young mums. The students articulated the value of the classroom, having other mums to talk to, and having staff to help them find relevant information, as well as role-modelling parenting based on their own experience. The Academy staff speak enthusiastically about children attending with their mums. Young mums have high attendance rates and terrific engagement. Many of the children who attend with their mums would be more isolated at home with their single parent. Instead, they are at school, where they are gaining important social skills and are stimulated in a dynamic environment. One student said:

I have been working on a quilt of all his baby things. It is really important to me because I wanted to keep some of those baby things from when he was very little. This is one of my VCAL projects. I have had a lot of help from my youth worker to do it. (Student).

Another young woman was very proud of her project, which had been set up for her in a dedicated space, as she said:

I have got a lot of help from the youth worker and the teacher here, especially cause she (her daughter) needs extra help and so being here with people to support us has been really good. (Student)

The difference a youth worker / educator blend makes within the model

All of the students noted a distinction between the educator and youth work roles and were able to articulate clearly what they could expect from each of those in accordance with their learning and support needs. Many of the students explained how approachable the youth workers were, as well as noting their capacity to be immediately responsive to their needs. These attributes enhanced their learning experience. A number of students' views reflect the importance of the youth workers' immediacy and attentiveness within the model, as follows:

Definitely. Most definitely. In mainstream, if you went to the educators with something, it wouldn't be dealt with. If you go to the educator and the youth worker, or just the youth worker, it gets dealt with so fast. (Student)

I've always had a youth worker throughout my life. But it's just so much easier when you're still having it in my school space, rather than having to go out of my way to go to an office, to talk to someone. Just having it there already and just having the support, even if it's just, hey, how are you going, you know what I mean? Just someone to have another conversation with. I feel like it's useful. (Student)

I think it's very helpful because you have your educator and then you have like a [wellbeing] youth worker in case you're not feeling comfortable or you need to talk to someone, which is good. (Student)

Aww, you can tell the difference in them, the youth worker asks how you are going and the educator is more admin and she teaches. (Student)

The impact of youth workers in a classroom

The students highlighted a range of peripheral benefits that connected them with the Academy as a result of youth worker input. Many of the students noted how the presence of holistic support from the youth worker within the model meant that they could have issues attended to that were obstructing their learning, or causing them great concern. These could be dealt with concurrently within their learning environment. One student provided the following examples relating to her partner and a health matter that had been troubling her and disrupting her learning:

With so many things, definitely. Earlier this year, my boyfriend went through court struggles and straight away, I was able to just go to the youth worker and say I was stressed out about it. And the youth worker helped me get into contact with a lawyer who sorted out my boyfriend's complete court, which we wouldn't have ever been able to do or ever get sorted out on anything. So he was able to actually not even get a conviction, thanks to the people who were able to help us. Another example was earlier this year, I wasn't able to receive dental care because I wasn't on a concession card or anything like that. But through this school, I was able to get a referral to the Royal Melbourne, and now I'm actually getting my wisdom teeth out as a concession. (Student)

Stable and safe housing for young people is instrumental in providing them with the platform to acquire other resources, such as the ability to commit to education. Two students discussed how, despite the fact that they were experiencing homelessness; they managed to continue to engage in their education, as the youth worker assisted in removing this barrier to their learning:

I've just gotten out of being homeless which the youth worker helped me with. I would drag all my stuff along with me every day and it just got too much. And I was a bit embarrassed. (Student)

What cannot be underestimated is the impact the youth worker has when there are either agitated young people or some type of incident in the classroom. If a young person is not happy, or is agitated or drug affected or is (as was observed in one classroom) simply determined to disrupt the classroom for attention, a skilled youth worker can manage and calm the situation, separate the young person from the rest of the class, or use their judgement to simply deal with whatever has arisen. Without such skilled personnel, the classroom would not be able to continue. On these occasions of disruption, what was observed was skilled teams working in tandem so that the young people who had come to school to build on their current projects could continue. A young person would get individual attention from a youth worker to address whatever was happening in their lives at that moment, while an educator would continue to help others in their work.

My youth worker believes in me

The concept of belief in the students, making them felt accepted, inspired and aspirational for their future, was another strong theme throughout the data. The students articulate this in the following comments:

Well, the sort of goal I would think that is a step after here was sort of looking at different art schools and things. I mean, yeah, simply put, I would love to do some further study in art school specifically. (Student)

I want to become a police officer. I would love to give something back and show students you can do what you want to do. This has helped me so much, this school. I suffer from mental illness and this place helps you to get out and socialise but learning at the same time. They have given me a lot and that's why when I am a police officer, I want to come back – there should be one of these in every suburb. Really an environment where young people can have a different kind of life, still dream of having a career and can also have kids. (Student)

One of the students said, 'I want to go to university after I finish at this place'. (Obs-S)

Yeah media, OH&S, teaching me to be more responsible, learning life skills. Whereas at mainstream, it was like, you're not good enough - see you later and instead of putting me in a normal classroom, they put me in a small room at the back of the school about this size, with a load of books. Made me feel unworthy. (Student)

I finally feel like I know what I want to do when I leave. (Student)

The Academy promotes the social integration of students through service linkages, thus providing the opportunity to increase their learning experience. The students in this context are the change agents, assisted and guided by youth workers through the process of establishing trust, honesty, transparency, negotiation, consent, agreement, planning, goal setting and reciprocity. The youth workers act as role models, even to the extent that some students can envisage themselves becoming youth workers. Students can relate to what the youth workers are trying to do for them. They are grateful and sometimes inspired to do this for others in similar situations. They feel they can exercise empathy, having had those lived experiences. As one student stated:

Well I want to become either a youth worker or an accountant. (Student)

Student perceptions of the Academy: The survey results

The student cohort was asked to complete a survey consisting of thirteen questions: six relating directly to student perceptions of the Academy model and seven relating to demographics. The full survey is provided at Appendix 2.

In this section, responses to the first six questions relating to the Academy model are analysed. There was a response rate of 35% of the students attending the Academy making it statistically relevant.

Question 1: Thinking about the role of the youth worker, tell us how effective the youth worker has been in assisting you in achieving the following outcomes ...

Students were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale how effective they believed the YW was in assisting them achieving the following range of outcomes relating to their experience inside the classroom, with choice of answer ranging from Very Ineffective, Somewhat Ineffective, Neither, Somewhat Effective and Very Effective.

The student responses are summarised in Figures 1, 2 and 3 below. Due to the highly positive skew of responses the Ineffective and Effective responses have been grouped, while very effective responses have been overlaid to highlight the upper margin of positive responses.

Figure 1

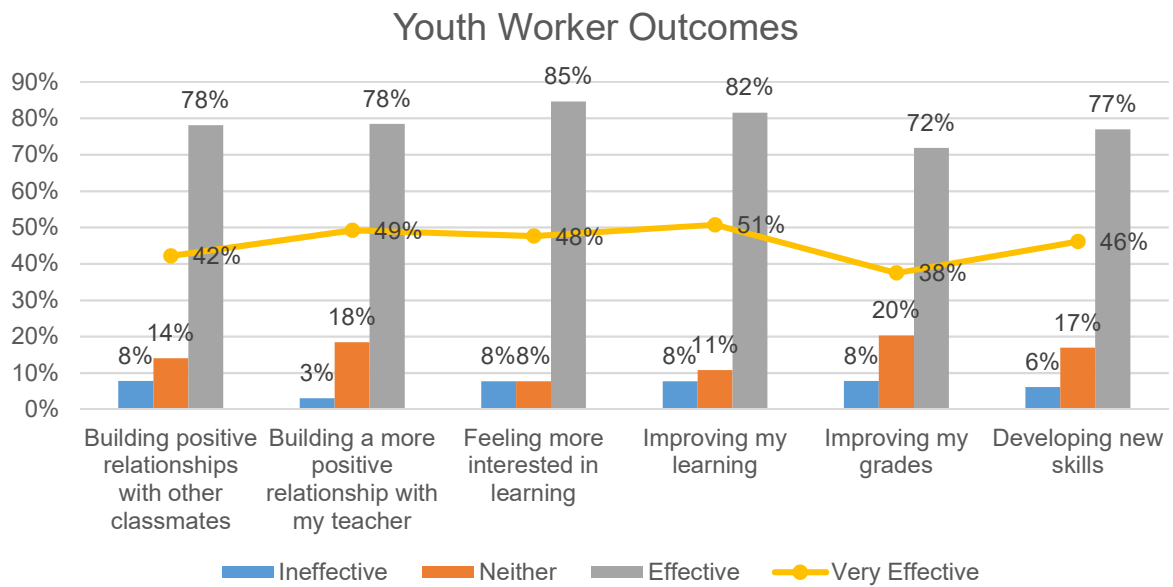


Figure 2

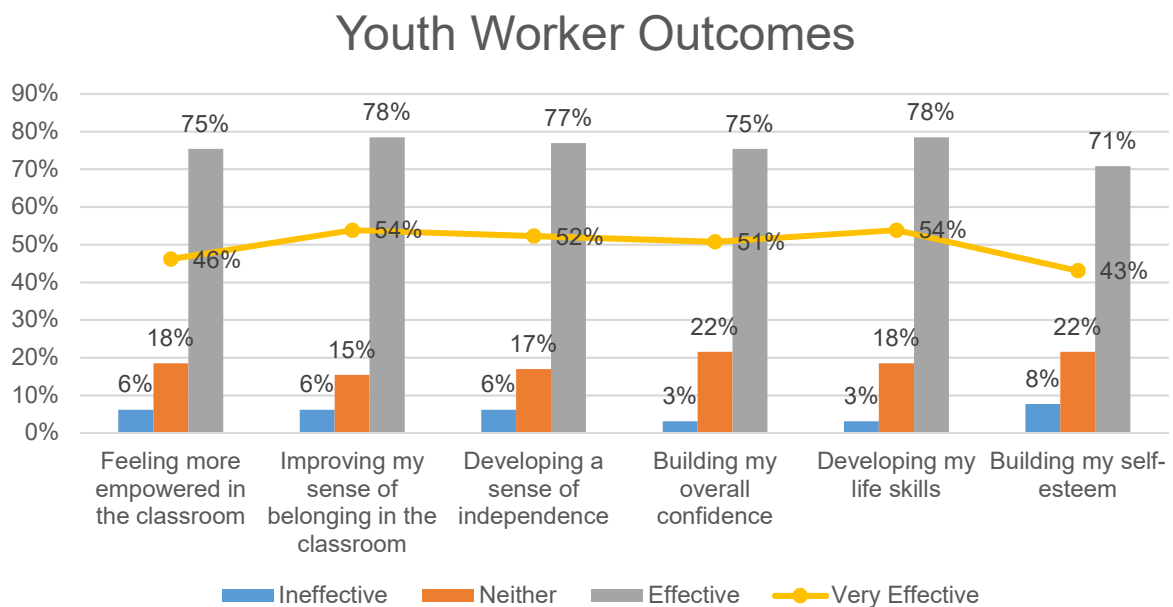
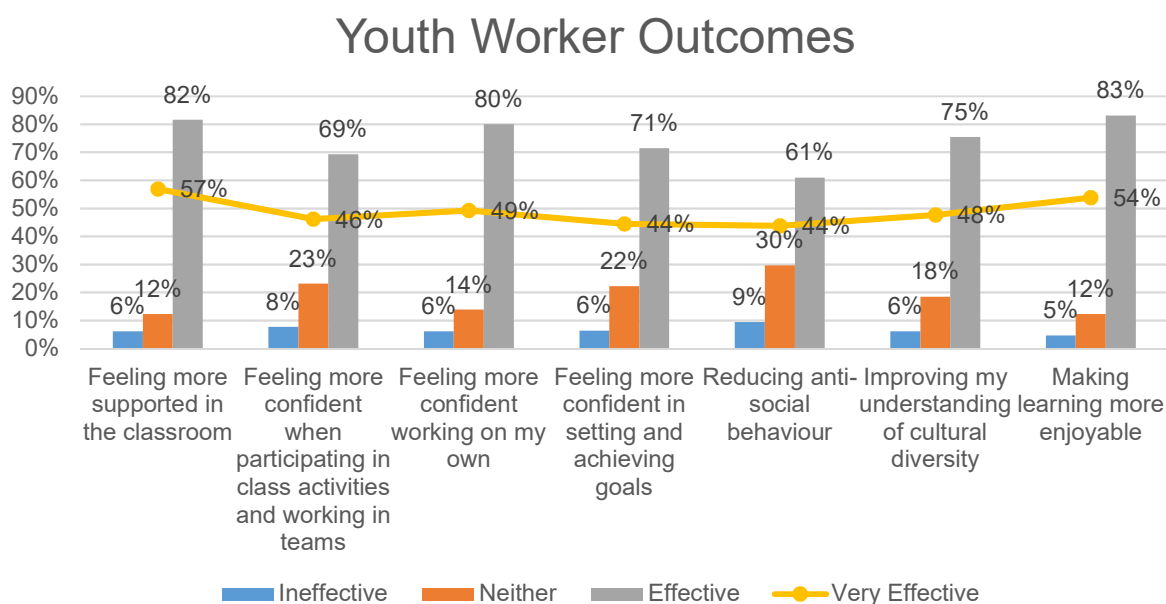


Figure 3



These indicate that, on average, there was a very positive response to the effectiveness of the youth worker and the classroom experience, with only a few exceptions. Around 75% or greater of the students indicated they felt the youth worker was somewhat effective or very effective in achieving the listed outcomes. Further, the combined line chart highlights that, on average, 50% of students considered the youth worker very effective. Negative responses were uniformly distributed without any significant highlights. No outcomes received more than 5% for very ineffective responses or 10% for either somewhat or very ineffective responses.

Some of the strongest outcomes, with consistently high effective and very effective response rates, include students learning in the classroom, such as feeling more interested in learning, improving their learning, and making learning more enjoyable. Other strong outcomes include feeling more supported in the classroom, feeling more confident in the classroom and feeling more confident working on their own.

These positive results correlate with the themes that emerged in the written responses, highlighting the benefits of the youth worker's additional support role in the classroom, including one-on-one support, personal support, and support with schoolwork.

Question 2: Thinking about your relationship with the youth worker, tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Students were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale how much they agreed with the following statements relating to their relationship with their YW, with choice of answer ranging from strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree and strongly agree.

As with responses to Question 1, the answers relating to students' relationship with their youth worker were very positive and almost as uniform. The results are shown in Figures 4 and 5 below. Disagree and Agree responses have been grouped, while Strongly Agree responses have been overlaid to highlight the upper margin of positive responses.

Figure 4

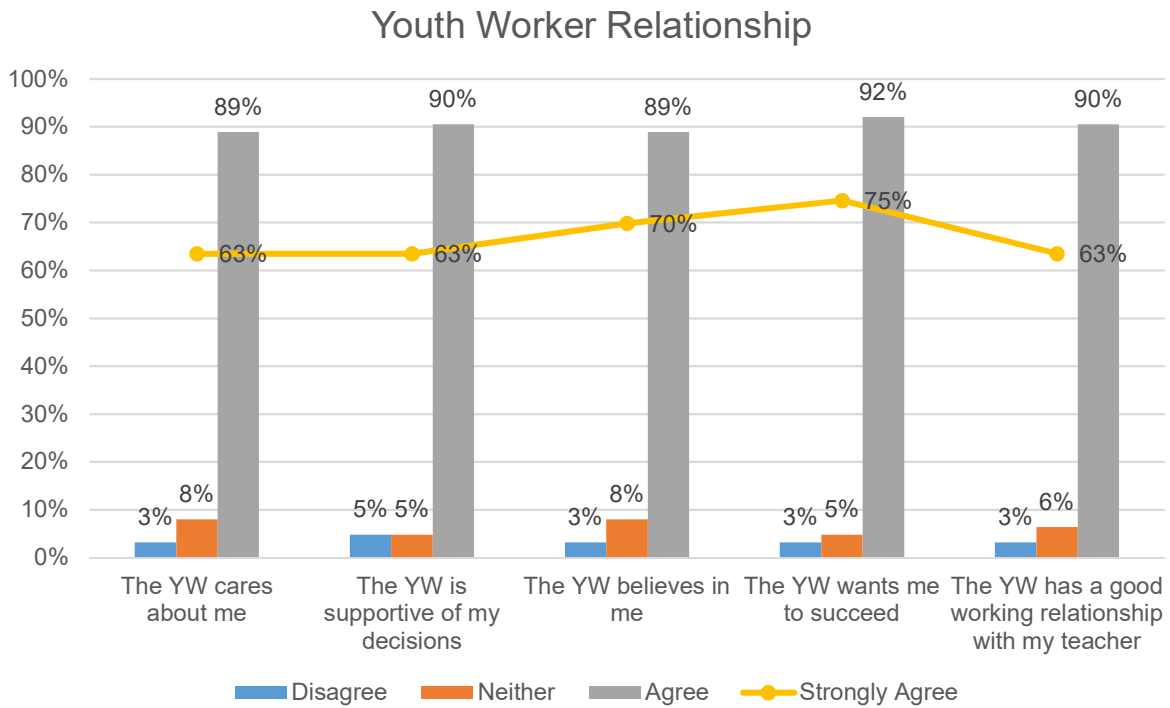
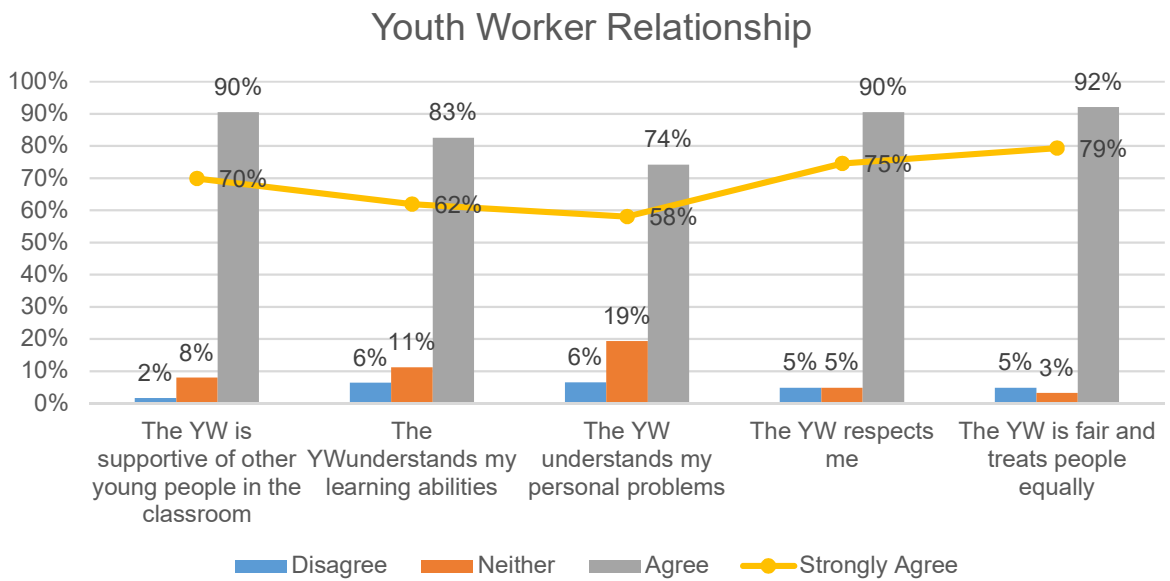


Figure 5



On average, there were almost 90% agree or strongly agree responses, with no question receiving higher than 6% disagree responses. The statement that the youth worker has a good working relationship with the educator is a crucial one and was positively perceived by students, with 90% in agreement. This is also evident in the written answers, with students making particular note of the fact that the youth worker and educator work well together logistically, being able to better manage workloads and help individuals as the needs arise.

The responses again correlate with other themes, including the creation of a calmer and more positive classroom atmosphere, as well as more respect and personal support. This

indicates that students felt a level of trust with their youth worker, beyond the rapport of a regular educator or authority figure, and overwhelmingly believed that their youth worker was there to help them in the classroom.

Question 3: Thinking about the role of the youth worker, tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements

Students were asked to indicate on a 5 point scale how much they agreed with the following statements relating to the role of the YW, with choice of answer ranging from strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree and strongly agree.

Figures 6 and 7 below show the responses to this question. Disagree and Agree responses have been grouped, while Strongly Agree responses have been overlaid to highlight the upper margin of positive responses.

Figure 6

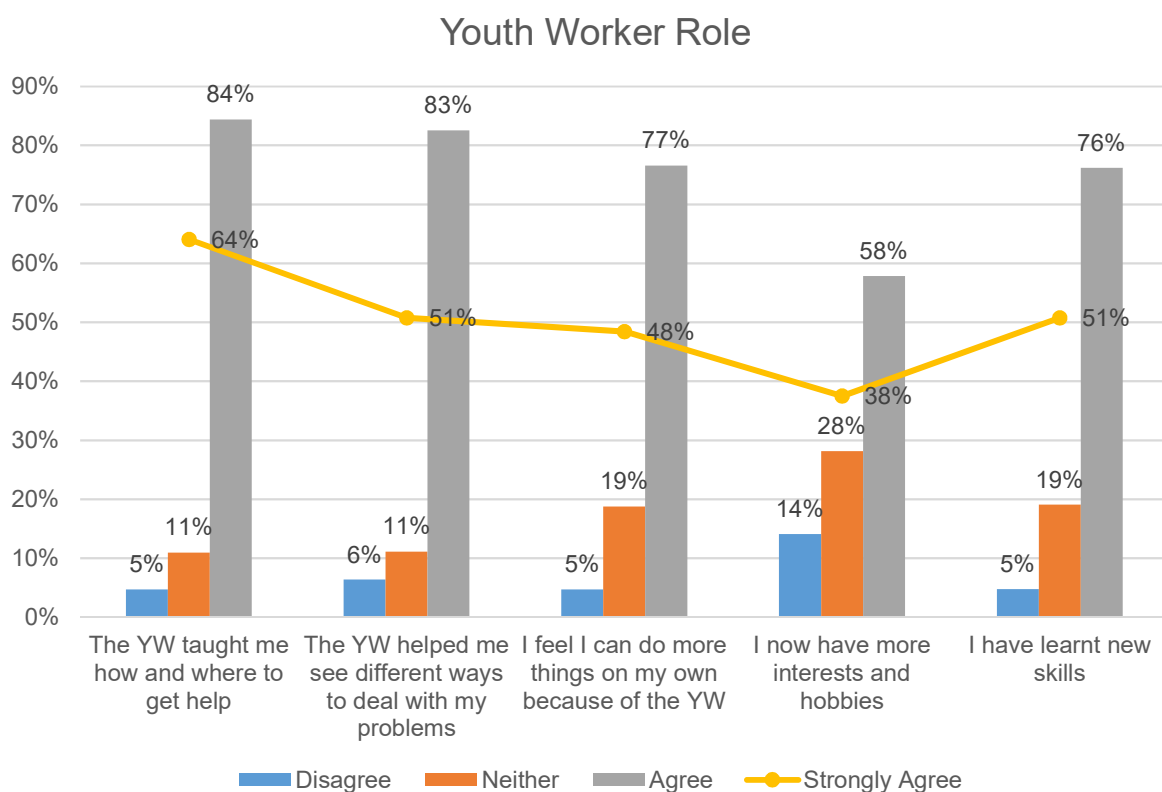
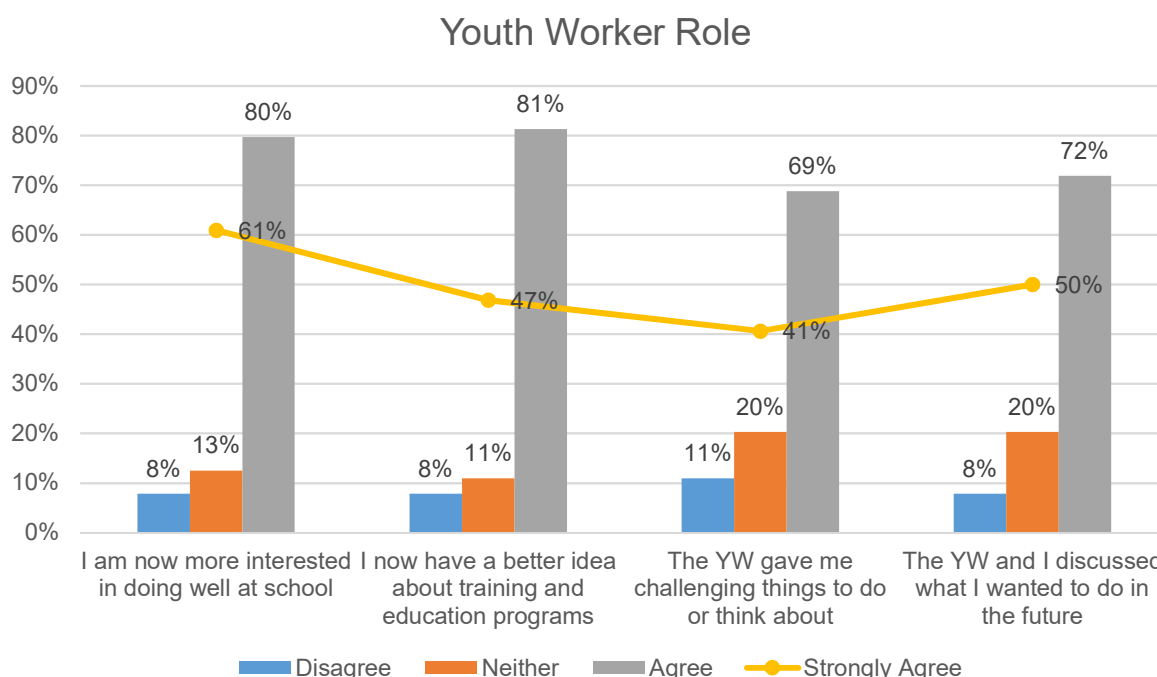


Figure 7



The figures show there was a very positive response to the role of the youth worker in schooling and education related statements, with an average of 75% of students somewhat or strongly agreeing (50% strongly agreed). The majority of students felt that the youth worker was helpful in teaching them how and where to get help if needed and to help them see different ways to deal with their problems. Students agreed they were more interested in doing well at school and did discuss what they wanted to do in the future, but did not discover any newfound interests or hobbies as a result of the addition of the youth worker role.

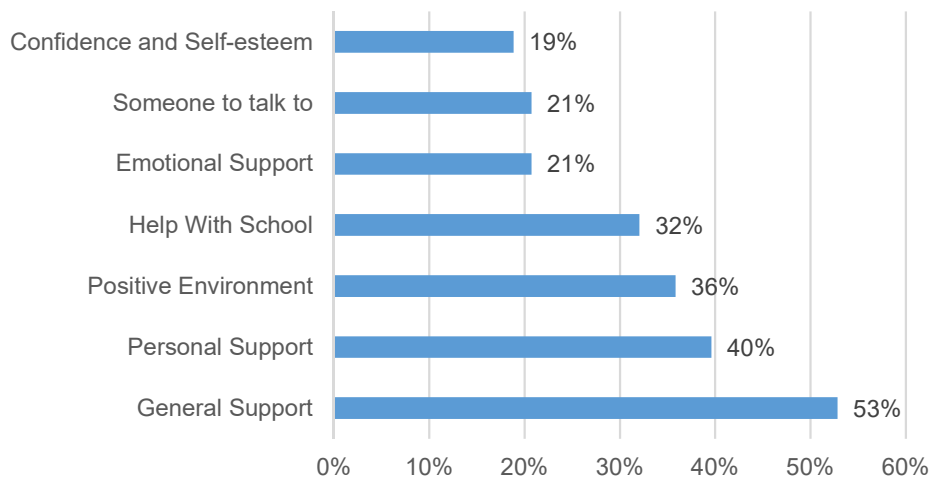
We can see from the charts that youth workers were able to fill in gaps of support, not only through referrals to outside sources but also by providing support within the classroom with a more informal and personal approach. Students were receptive to this personal level of support. Students also provided strong responses to statements about the youth worker making school more enjoyable and discussed what they wanted to do in the future. This correlates strongly with the emerging themes in the written responses and indicates that the youth worker role did serve to make their learning more effective and enjoyable.

Question 4: Thinking about the role of the youth worker in the classroom, what are the three best things you got out of their involvement and briefly explain why?

This question was designed to explore students' perceptions of the role of the youth worker in the classroom. Respondents were asked to identify the three best things they got out of the youth workers involvement and briefly explain why. This was not from a pre-determined list but their own individual responses. The results presented in Figure 8 below illustrate the many perceived benefits of the youth worker's involvement in the classroom. These benefits ranged from general schoolwork support, to personal and emotional support, as well as a positive atmosphere, among other things.

Figure 8

Benefits of Youth Work



As illustrated in Figure 8, personal and school related interaction with the youth worker was considered of major benefit to the students inside the classroom. Many students expressed a sense of relief at having personal support from an authority figure who they could talk to about their life outside of school. This, in turn, allowed them to focus on their classwork. This support ranged from emotional and general life advice, to simply the relief of having someone to talk to and listen to their problems within the classroom environment.

The most common response theme related to generic 'general support'. While students obviously perceived the benefits of having a youth worker in the classroom, many generalised their answers. Although a simplification, these general responses accounted for more than half of student responses relating to a tangible support benefit in the youth worker role.

Personal and emotional support were also common themes, comprising 40% and 21% of answers respectively, and were some of the most specific and detailed. Looking at some of the comments below we can see the significance of individuals of having an authority figure to talk to about personal issues and their insecurities within the classroom, allowing them to focus on their schooling. Comments included:

Support - because I went through some of biggest issues in my life with the support of my Youth Worker and it made it easier to deal with.

Having a youth worker in class helps me a lot when I'm having problems out of school and she can help me fix or work on those problems so I can go on with work and get good grades.

The identified themes blend a variety of responses, all of which portray a more positive and amicable classroom environment. Students' answers commonly showed they felt the youth worker's presence served to calm their classroom atmosphere, with 36% of students perceiving a more positive environment. Students also saw the youth worker as giving more direction and structure to the learning experience. Comments included:

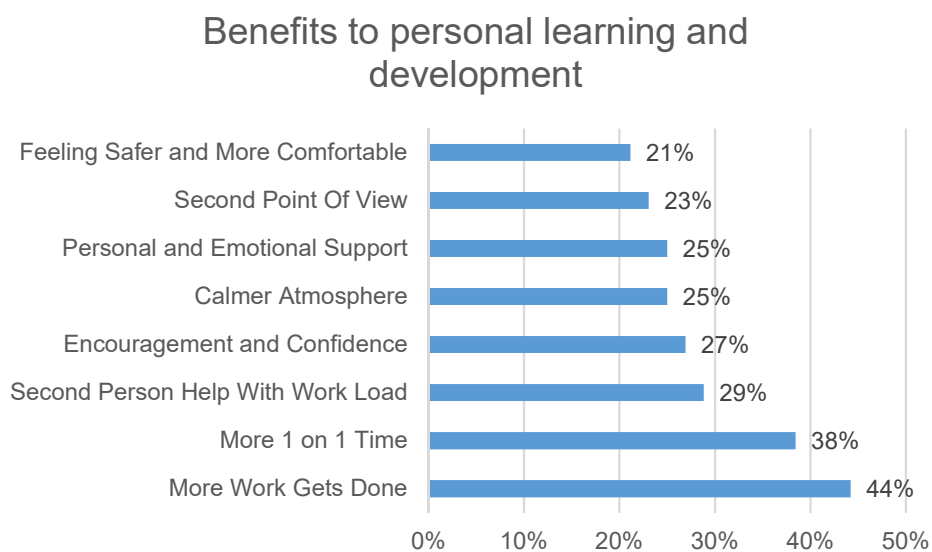
Feeling a sense of worth in myself and in my classroom.

Building a stronger bond with myself and my peers.

Question 5: Thinking about your personal learning and development, list the three best things about having both an educator and youth worker in the classroom and briefly explain why.

Students were asked to think about their own personal learning and development and list the three best things about having both an educator and youth worker in the classroom. As we can see in Figure 9 below, their answers highlight various perceived benefits, including an increase in work ethic and work output, additional one-on-one support, and the opportunity to get a second opinion from the youth worker versus that of a regular educator. All of these benefits combined help students to learn and come to grips with their work more easily. They also create a vast improvement in atmosphere, with the classroom feeling more like a safe space for students.

Figure 9



Work output was the most frequent theme (44%) indicated by students in their written responses. While much less specific than some of the other themes, an increased work ethic and a general sense that more work is achieved with the addition of the youth worker in the classroom was clearly felt by the students. Not only did the students themselves feel they were achieving more but they perceived an improvement in the educator’s role because of the extra support. Comments included:

I feel less anxious asking for help because there is less stress on the educator.

Get more work done, you get lots of help to achieve more work.

The increased work output is clearly a direct product of having a second authority figure to share the workload. Respondents regularly noted that having a youth worker able to attend to individuals needs on the fly allowed the educator to maintain progress and ensure students were not falling behind. Nearly 40% of students indicated they benefited specifically from having increased individual support. One-on-one learning with the students was clearly indicated as being of high importance, particularly via the youth worker, with whom they could more easily relate in a more informal and personal on-one-on interaction. Students wrote:

Having a youth worker helps me to explain stuff to my educator when I don't understand the work.

The educator can't do everything at once in a classroom, so having a youth worker can pull weight off the educator's shoulders.

One of the more strongly conveyed benefits was that of an improved atmosphere. While 25% indicated the youth worker created a calmer classroom atmosphere, a further 21% also noted they felt safer and more comfortable. Students were often more descriptive in their answers regarding atmosphere. A combination of two separate authority figures, as well as the youth worker being a more relatable presence, resulted in many students feeling safer and less stressed in the classroom environment. Students did seem to have some preconceptions regarding their own abilities and individual 'voice', but the role of the youth worker gave many students greater confidence. Students wrote:

Having an added empathetic, open-minded and patient figure in the space has been helpful so far to my learning and coping capabilities, and has lessened my anxiety towards both classroom and outside.

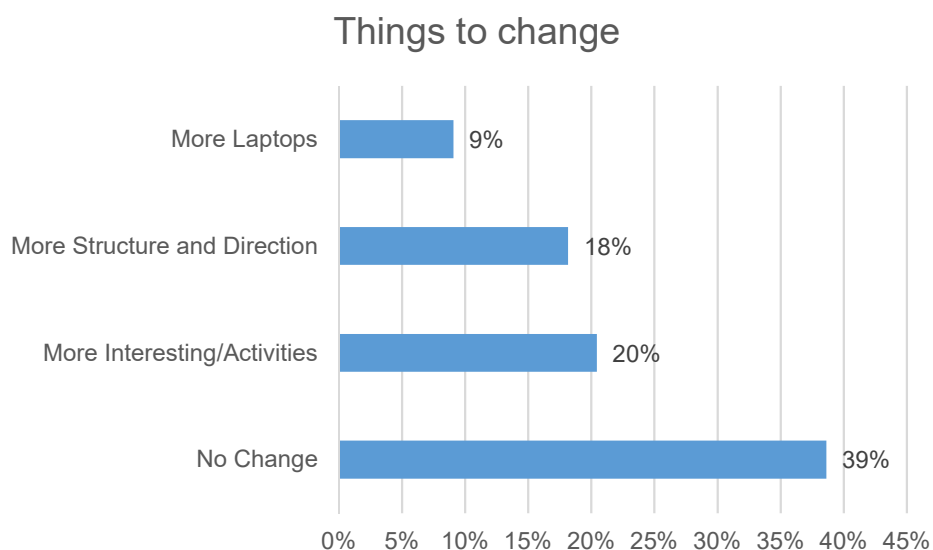
I feel safer in the space because there is someone there for me to talk to if I am not feeling up to scratch and the educator is busy.

There is a sense of calmness, because we have two authority figures the classroom is more respectful.

Question 6: Thinking about the roles of the educator and youth worker, list three things you would change to help improve the classroom environment and your learning and development and briefly explain why.

Students were asked to think about the educator and youth worker roles and list three things they would change to improve the classroom environment and their learning and development. The responses were grouped under themes, as summarised in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10



There was less variety and a lower number of responses to this question, with most students indicating they were happy with the addition of the youth worker in the classroom and that

they would not change anything. We can see from Figure 10 that 39% of students indicated they were happy, wanting no change to the youth worker role, more than double the frequency of the next most common responses.

Outside of this positive feedback, some suggestions for improvement were indicated, including a desire for more interesting work and/or activities and the need for more structure and direction.

While it is evident at this point that the role of the youth worker is effective in making students' learning more interesting and enjoyable, there may be further potential for changes in structure and in the content of schoolwork.

Summarising the results of the student survey

The data collected through the survey reiterates and substantiates the findings from the qualitative data collection, as well as highlighting the indicators identified in the literature review. Consistent themes include the importance of the relationship with the youth worker, the benefit of having an adult who is aspirational and believes in the student, and having someone else to ask about both schoolwork and personal challenges. It is also evident that students can articulate the difference between the classroom roles and identify who is the best person to go to for assistance. Finally, it is pleasing to note that students have articulated the belief that the presence of a youth worker keeps the classroom calmer. This adds to the growing evidence base to support the idea that youth workers provide an educational 'lift' when working with educators in a classroom.

Staff voices

The staff team (both educators and youth workers) were asked to share their insights around four specific questions relating to the model. These were:

1. What are the three critical factors that are key to the model?
2. Why does a youth worker in a classroom make a difference?
3. What do we need to do more of?
4. What two key improvements need to happen?

What are the three critical factors that are key to the youth worker in a classroom model?

In the staff forum, each staff member was asked to name what they considered to be three critical factors that are key to the youth worker in the classroom model. Staff discussed a number between themselves before individuals committed to their top three. They were then asked to write on a sticky label and put their ideas on a board. The text boxes capture the sticky labels and the commentary captures the discussion.

Functional environment

Open communication, Collaborative goal setting, Acknowledging young people's goals together and working together to achieve those, Planning the teams carefully, Careful and deliberate team forming between the educator and the youth worker, therapeutic, tone and vibe in the classroom, Comfortable space, Supportive environment for everyone involved.

Staff referred to a functional environment as one in which there was recognition that the working partnership between the youth worker and educator was instrumental to determining classroom success or otherwise. This required *careful and deliberate team-forming* between the educator and the youth worker. Other staff members highlighted the need to ensure compatibility in matching the youth worker with the educator and urged that it is in the planning of the classroom teams that this has the greatest impact. The need for *open communication and transparency* between the youth worker and the educator was a part of this discussion. Included in that was the need to *acknowledge the young people's goals together* in order to work collaboratively to set and achieve these goals.

For staff functional environment also meant the physical environment with room for private conversations, appropriate learning space, kitchen area and room to display educational success. These are all components of a positive learning space for the students.

Shared values / relational

Trust, Shared vision, Valuing the individual, Building a rapport with each individual student, Emphasis on relationship, Role modelling positive behaviour, Consistency, Rapport, Flexibility, Respect and transparency, Relationship between educator and youth worker, Respecting each other's expertise and having Role Clarity, Recognition of the duality of expertise / skills in all staff (both educators and youth workers), Positive relationship between the educator and youth worker in the classroom, Youth worker / Educator relationship - consistency, empathy

Staff emphasised the importance of shared values. This was considered fundamental to the successful relationship between educators and youth workers. This highlighted the need for *trust, value of the person, consistency and respect for each other*. Staff highlighted how those values underpin the work that needed to be done in the classroom, with a clear emphasis on relationships, particularly the three-way relationship between the educator, youth worker and student.

Respect for each other's expertise as professionals was also considered an important aspect of a successful working relationship between the educator and the youth worker. There was an expectation that the duality of expertise each brought to the relationship should be acknowledged, combining youth work and educator skills to create synergy within the classroom. The best analogy of this relationship is a tree with separate and shared branches. At its roots are shared values and a strong student-centred focus, ensuring that each individual is provided every opportunity to fulfil their learning goals. While each profession has distinct knowledge and expertise, their synergy is such that both can step into each other's *shoes* if required, perhaps seeking advice from the other. This may occur when an educator has a particular relationship with a young person, becoming more engaged in the life planning of that young person. Similarly, there are projects set by educators that play to a youth worker's skills, such as the organisation of themed events as part of a VCAL project.

One observer pointed out the importance of role duality in action and the compatibility and complementarity of the educator and youth worker roles in creating a positive learning environment for the students:

The North Fitzroy classroom works really well together as they have a strong dynamic, working effectively both as a team and as individuals. This enables the classroom to have an effective work environment, where the young people feel safe, included and purposeful (Obs).

Pivotal to the success factors cited by the staff within the model was *trust*. It was apparent from responses that trust forms the foundation from which beneficial relationships are shaped and maintained between the three key players. It was also evident that part of the process of trusting someone was contingent on *open lines of communication, confidence building, learning to take constructive criticism* and having a safe and *confidential space*. This was critical to students, allowing them to feel comfortable and able to speak and be listened to without interruption, to make and take ownership of decisions, and to negotiate and navigate the opportunities available throughout the Academy model.

What is evident in the above explanation are subjective professional traits that make for a successful collaboration in the classroom. **The key here is that these traits are seen in the professional context. Trust, for example, means professional trust, a trust that you will know what to do in a critical incident fundamental to everyone's safety and that you will operate in an ethical manner with each young person.** This is a summary of the staff voices on this issue:

I trust that you know that your role is to support the education of these young people in a way that facilitates their learning and enables me to do my educator role. This team requires you to collaborate with me to build a productive classroom. Constructive criticism in the professional sense is to be able to have hard conversations, be a reflective practitioner who thinks about how the Academy staff could have handled that situation better. You have to be flexible to respond to every situation that may arise, and they may all do so in the same day. That means listening to each other when we do not agree so that we can share our professional viewpoints in a constructive manner and try to see the other's points. Both of us need to be able to admit when we made a mistake (staff voices).

Many of these skills are developed through education, in building a professional portfolio. Each of these professional groups would have supervised placements in a degree program, helping them to build an understanding of what it is to be a reflective practitioner, having practiced some of the more difficult conversations. Each professional would have also built particular knowledge, such as skills in numeracy and literacy in the case of the educator, as well as VCAL requirements and learning theories. In the case of the youth worker, such knowledge would relate to drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, trauma-informed practice, as well as honed skills as an advocate, in case management and an understanding of the service system available to young people.

Some observations in relation to this are:

Young people seem to work better with a youth worker present or around as they tend to trust the environment more, I feel as knowing they have extra support. (Educator)

We just know each other now so can trust decisions made often just absolutely on the run. (Educator)

It is just really important to get it right. (Youth worker)

Why does a youth worker in a classroom make a difference?

Provision of immediate support, Availability to provide some crisis support, Seen as positive in class, Offers young people space to engage if not ready to learn, Modelling positive relationships, Gives support to address barriers so they can engage in education, Offer practical support, Holding space, 'Lifeline', Modelling healthy relationships, Front line holistic support improves engagement, Easily accessible emotional support, Supporting challenging behaviour to increase capacity to engage, Building trusting, healthy and positive relationships, A reason other than education to attend school, Provides a link between the young person and the education, Trust building, Relationships and community, Connectedness

The staff highlighted the *provision of immediate support* and how this instant attention to student need was seen as a positive asset for the model, particularly when staff needed to defuse a crisis or provide easily accessible emotional support for the students. Staff stated that *it offers young people the space to engage even if they are not ready to learn. It is a strength of the model.*

A recurrent theme was that staff modelled positive and healthy relationships and that this was instrumental in providing *front line holistic support that improves engagement*. These relationships between classmates and staff can increase a student's capacity to engage as well as *providing a reason other than education to attend school*. Many of the young people at the Academy do not have positive role models in their lives. They also may have adults around them who are making poor life choices and do not have healthy relationships with peers, family or partners. Young people know this but can only recognise it when they are a part of a healthy environment with healthy relationships.

Catalano et al. (2004), undertook research on risk and protective factors in relation to young people. Much of what they found has been canvassed already in this research, particularly that school can be a key protective factor. If school is the place where respectful relationships occur, rules are consistent, the student's presence is valued and they build connections with staff and other students, then a young person will return because this is one of the few consistent contexts in their life and they feel safe within it.

The staff also indicated that the presence of a youth worker provided a link between the young person and their education in terms of building a (human) bridge, being a conduit or holding space that provided the motivators and enablers for learning. This bridge is created through the provision of direct support for personal issues, trust building, and an understanding that what happens in the student's outside personal world and the inside world of the learning environment are different but connected. This, in turn, is instrumental in connecting and building readiness for the students to engage effectively in their learning.

Such interactivity benefits manifested in the *youth workers' ability to smooth the road to make education a happier (positive and encouraging) experience* for the students, where they were not there to explicitly teach, but rather *to model things like good communication, respectful relationships and even issues such as financial literacy*.

There was a recurrent perception that the youth worker contributed a raft of knowledge about the social system, with particular reference to expert insight into the youth services *and external supports* available. This then allowed them to link students to 'wraparound' support services to bolster their learning. Youth workers said they provided *warm positive support and encouragement along with holistic care*. Typically, this is not present in a mainstream model that does not include youth workers. Staff defined the youth worker role *as a one-stop-shop*, with students able to access one-on-one support.

Another key benefit articulated by a few of the youth workers themselves was the distinction between the type of youth work required in an educational setting like the Academy and mainstream youth work practice within a case management or recreational environment. In the former, youth workers have *the opportunity to know the young people on a more intimate basis*.

One prevailing theme shared by the students, staff and observers was the ability of the youth workers to *de-escalate student behaviour before they disengage*. All pointed to the important role youth workers play in preventing incidents, but also in encouraging the retention of young people in the classroom setting.

What do we need to do more of and what key improvements need to happen?

Staff were asked to consider how they would progress and improve the classroom youth worker model. They discussed a number of key approaches that they believed would not only improve their own team collaboration but also the effectiveness of the youth worker role in the classroom. Firstly, both the educator and youth workers believed that youth workers should have more time to assess a young person. This would allow them to have a better understanding all of the issues they will present in a classroom setting. Secondly, staff expressed the need for a *more detailed, ethical, appropriate and extensive* pre-enrolment case planning process, again, to ensure greater familiarity with the issues those students would be presenting. Thirdly, risk reduction and risk management also featured strongly and it was noted that there *should be high-level, best-practice risk assessments and safety planning (before crisis) rather than having students 'held' by staff outside classroom programs*.

Staff discussed the importance of outreach and for youth workers to have time to re-engage young people who are not attending. The complex lives that some young people have means that their engagement with the school can be inconsistent. What is important is that young people know that the door is always open to them and they can return and continue according to their learning plan. Making contact by phone is always useful, but staff believe that visiting a student is a component that will make the difference between returning to school or staying out of school. Staff firmly believed that they could improve attendance and engagement if this was more frequent.

The complex topic of confidentiality for young people was discussed and *educators having access to a shared database in order to open lines of communication and share confidential information*. For youth workers, this is a key tenet of the professional Code of Ethical

Practice so will need to be navigated carefully. The final say should always be with the young person.

In Summary

In summary staff were able to articulate the strengths of the model and “unpack” why it is working. They noted the range of professional skill sets required in both an educator and a youth worker. Both agreed that the professional relationships remain key to a successful classroom. The functional environment staff referred to included the physical environment, teaching area, kitchen, private space as well as the human interactive????dynamics inside the classroom.

Program Logic

This program logic model provides a succinct representation of the Academy model by illustrating the connection between program activities and expected outputs and outcomes.

Inputs/Activities	Outputs	Outcomes – Short Term (Proximal)	Outcomes – Long Term (Distal)	Impact
Domain: Instrumental/Skills				
<p>Enrol young people in Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) at one of the The Academy schools</p> <p>Enrol students in Accredited Training (VET - MCM RTO)</p>	<p>Number of young people enrolled in vocational and other training</p> <p>Number and percentage of young people completing vocational and other training</p> <p>Number and percentage of enrolled young people completing their VCAL, Year 10 and/or year 12</p>	<p>Number of young people completing Certificate II, VCAL Foundation (Year 10) and/or VCAL Intermediate/Senior (Year 12)</p> <p>Improved literacy, numeracy and personal development skills</p> <p>Develop education and training pathways: number and percentage of young people continuing to further studies or training including TAFE, bridging courses to University and apprenticeships</p>	<p>Broaden employment options</p> <p>Increase in opportunity to gain life-long employment</p>	<p>Young people have better economic and social opportunities to: share in economic growth; live healthier lives; contribute to community and national wellbeing.</p>
<p>Flexible curriculum tailored to each individual's interests and goals</p>	<p>Customised learning plans</p>	<p>Improved interpersonal skills at the conclusion of education and/or training</p>	<p>Increased knowledge of education and employment that</p>	<p>Young people have an increased sense of optimism and security about the future</p>

Co-designed individual education plan (IEP) which include individualised learning plans (ILP) to work towards completing Foundation and/or Senior VCAL.		Improved academic achievement Increased interest in learning	match interests and abilities	
Practical project-based education programs connected to real world employment skills		Improve employability skills	Improved problem-solving, planning, decision-making and critical thinking skills	Improved ability to manage life transitions
Support of an Educator and a Youth Worker in every classroom to provide a combination of learning and wellbeing support	Number and percentage of young people regularly attending classes Reduced absenteeism	Improve educational outcomes Young people report: a sense of emotional engagement with key workers and the school; a youth centred curriculum that students evidence progress and follow through the required tasks to meet educational outcomes; high student satisfaction ratings of educational program, educators and key workers. Participation in extra curricula activities.	Broaden educational interests and opportunities for life-long learning. Improved personal agency, mental health, life skills and engagement in community. Stable life pattern	Improved connections to community and friends. Engagement in activities outside of school Improved long-term outcomes of participating in civic and economic life.
Domain: Developmental/Agency				
Inputs/Activities	Outputs	Outcomes – Short Term (Proximal)	Outcomes – Long Term (Distal)	Impact
Providing outreach education and small group-based workshops	Utilisation of MCM services, including family worker, individual counselling, housing service, connection to a lawyer, drug and alcohol	Young people report a reduction in one or more of the following: consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drugs, education avoidance, suspension, bullying,	Improved personal agency that contributes to sustaining a stable life pattern	Young people participate in civic and community life, and are better served by local and national institutions Improve lifelong outcomes in

	service.	delinquency, violence and gang membership Young people report an improved sense of empowerment, resilience, emotional well-being, self-esteem, self-acceptance, independent living skills, and positive self-standards (positive identity)	Resolving personal barriers to assist young people to have the building blocks to establish a stable and productive life pattern	mental health, crime and violence Reduced reliance on income support
Domain: Enabling Environment				
Classrooms are based in the heart of communities and co-located with other youth services Provision of safe spaces (physical and psychological)	Number of young people utilising MCM youth services Personalised support plan for young people requiring additional services	Increased feeling of safety in their physical environment Young people report that ACADEMY provides an emotionally supportive environment Feel free to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings Increased opportunities for prosocial involvement in the community.	Improved personal agency that contributes to sustaining a stable life pattern Improved peer, family and community engagement Decrease in social isolation	Young people play active roles in civil society, and are less involved in gangs and crime Enhanced social connectedness, cohesion and experiences in the wider community

A summary of the findings

The professional skills of youth workers

This project started with a question about the educational impact of having a youth worker in a classroom at the Academy. To provide some context, we conducted a literature review that focussed on understanding the practice of youth work and how this could be linked to the research question. A central source of information was the work of Jeffs and Smith (1987), who are widely regarded as ‘grandfathers’ in the youth work field, providing youth work with a professional identity and framework. They discussed education and welfare as key tenets of youth work, citing multiple examples of youth workers seeking to educate young people about themselves, their identity, careers, employment and their community. Jeffs and Smith (1987) argued that youth workers could be friendly, accessible and responsive while still acting with integrity. Youth workers who have faith in young people provide safe spaces in which youth can improve their personal and social development.

The 2013 report by Cooper et al. also referred to the range of skills and knowledge important to youth work practice, including their educative role, whether that be through informal or non-formal learning. Youth workers at the Academy assist young people to learn about themselves, as well as their wellbeing, life skills, problem solving, working with others, communication skills, and presentations skills, amongst other important areas of focus.

Staff and student voices aligned with the research contained in the literature review. Youth workers have a role that is both educative and supportive. A focus on ‘clearing for learning’ (Kitty Te Riele cited in McGregor et al., 2017) means that youth workers join the young person’s learning journey and help them to remove any barriers in the way of them being academically successful. This may involve helping them to stabilise their mental health, their housing, or their family relationships, or address such issues as outstanding fines or legal matters, and much more.

A successful classroom model

Students noted that they felt safe in their classroom. This is more complex than it seems, as students talked about safety and feeling respected in the same context. Students also talked about rebuilding their sense of worth and actually feeling more optimistic about their future. Clearly, the Academy model enhances opportunities for young people, helping them build their own identity and confidence and fulfil important educational goals.

The model works because of the relationship between young people and youth workers. Youth work is a relational practice, with the foundations of the relationship built on honesty, mutual respect and integrity. Young people referred to feeling valued and respected, supported by someone who believed in them. That aspirational component is essential to academic success.

Almost all of the young people in this study talked about what they were going to do after they finished VCAL. This included further study, apprenticeship options and employment, options that would have seemed well beyond their reach before coming to the Academy. In their work on risk and protective factors, Hawkins and Catalano (2004) argued that being aspirational for young people can be a catalyst to ‘leapfrog’ over the barriers faced by disadvantaged and marginalised young people. It was evident that both educators and youth

workers at the Academy are aspirational for each individual young person. The belief in their ability to succeed is to be applauded as it is critical to success.

Staff at the Academy were asked to identify the critical components needed for a successful classroom. They commented on a functional environment, kitchen, private space and a learning environment that had some flexibility. The most central point to this discussion was the match between the youth worker and the educator. Here staff discussed the need for shared values and establishing a positive professional relationship. Staff also spent time on discussing the components of a professional relationship. Central to this was respecting their individual expertise.

Staff discussed the need for greater staff collaboration onsite and across sites, including shared planning that would include the youth work team. From the staff perspective, this meant not just setting planning days but having the opportunity to observe each other's practice at least as part of an induction process.

The impact of a youth worker in a classroom

Young people shared their perspectives on the impact of having a youth worker in a classroom. They talked about not feeling judged by staff, which translated to feeling that school was a safe space. This was particularly important for the number of young people at the Academy facing complex issues, including rebuilding their own personal agency and gender identity, or dealing with mental health issues or family breakdowns. Having access to a youth worker in a safe environment made a tremendous difference in their lives. Young people were able to articulate the difference between the youth worker and educator roles and felt the responsiveness of the youth worker to what was going on enhanced their learning in the classroom.

Staff also discussed the importance of the current youth worker and educator classroom model. There was universal agreement that the model provided quick responses to the needs of young people in a classroom. Youth workers could support the educator in more formal learning or work on their 'clearing for learning' role. All staff believed the model had integrity and improved educational success of young people.

The evidence base at this point is a mix of both the practical and the subjective. When two professionals work this closely together with very vulnerable young people, there are scenarios that require mutual understanding and agreement and, most importantly, the flexibility to switch roles as needed. The subjective nature of this relationship means that naming success is more complex. However, success comes when there is an obvious mutual response and when the crossover of roles is intuitive and seamless. Many examples of this were observed at the sites. Clearly the more experienced the team is in working together, the more seamless they become. Trust was identified by staff as an important component of the mutual relationship. The educator trusts that the youth worker knows what to do in a critical incident, the youth worker trusts that the educator can facilitate education and stimulate a productive classroom. As professionals, they must be reflective practitioners and be able to think through with honesty what they could have done differently.

Classroom environments in the Academy can change several times in the same hour, so the youth worker needs to be professional and flexible to respond to those changes. Every professional working in these complex settings will make mistakes and they need to own them, unpack them and move forward. This is so integral to the success of classrooms at the Academy and is built from the elements discussed, such as retaining trained and professional youth workers and the educator understanding their role and training. As argued by Jeffs and Smith (2005), good professional practice depends upon the ability to

make complex judgements and good ethical decisions. In an Academy classroom, this means being able to make such judgements and decisions often when the young person is there with you.

Is there an academic lift in the classroom when a youth worker is present?

The key focus at the forefront of this project was to determine the validity of the anecdotal evidence that youth workers bring an academic 'lift' to the classroom. In some of the case studies completed for this research, what was evident was how quickly the classroom can change when the youth worker is no longer there, often resulting in disruption. In one instance, an educator was running a lesson for about five young people, with a young man engaging in disruptive behaviour in the background. This whole lesson would have disintegrated if there had not been a skilled youth worker there to deal with the young man. This was not an isolated incident, there were a number of situations where young people displayed challenging behaviours, and the youth worker managed the situation. In each instance, the class and the individuals within it were all progressing on their academic work. As discussed, this is not the only role of the youth worker, but it is integral to the model.

There were, of course, a number of times observed where the classroom was calm and individuals were working on their projects. There were times where young people had their tasks and were working on them and everyone was focussed. On each of those occasions, however, the youth worker was sitting quietly with a young person assisting them, keeping them on task and generally being encouraging. That also facilitates a productive classroom, and a productive classroom culture or habit. There were times when the youth worker met with an individual young person, clearing their barriers for learning as well as sitting with others to help them with project work. On any one day, both would happen. The Academy classrooms are complex environments containing multiple dynamics that sometimes seem on a collision course. Management of such an environment requires patient and skilled educators, negotiators, relationship experts, learning facilitators, and great communicators, all with a firm belief that all young people have a right not only to education but to educational success. So at times the academic 'lift' is dramatic, with skilled youth workers responding to young people who are distracting others, or who are upset, drug-affected, and/or exhibiting challenging behaviours. What was also observed was the skill of educators to be across all of the set individual learning plans and help the young people build on their current work, building passion and commitment to their learning.

In conclusion, the very nexus of the success of the Academy model is professionals understanding their primary role while being able to seamlessly move through each other's professional landscape. The youth worker understands their primary role is to build the personal agency of young people while clearing their barriers for learning. This helps the individual while also contributing to the productivity of the classroom. Classrooms can work seamlessly, staying focussed on achieving academic outcomes without compromising the relationships youth workers have established with individual young people. Fundamentally, this enables the educator to do fulfil their primary role and use their own specific expertise.

This unique model is focussed on providing education opportunities to vulnerable young people. What is fundamental to the model is the duality of roles in the classroom - youth worker and educator. Other important elements of the model are the physical environment, the professional team and how they work together and the leadership that supports them. The Academy leadership understand these mechanisms and continue to work to embed a strong framework of practice that utilises the specific expertise of youth workers and educators to gain the best possible outcomes for young people.

Recommendations

1. To attract youth workers with the right expertise, the Academy should seek to recruit future youth workers with the following professional profile:
 - a. A minimum qualification of a Bachelor of Youth Work;
 - b. Evidence of an understanding of a youth worker's role in educative practice, using informal and non-formal learning;
 - c. Experience or capability to facilitate classroom-based activities;
 - d. Capacity to articulate what underpins their practice, including their knowledge of the Code of Ethical Practice, their understanding of professional boundaries and ethics, and their understanding of youth work as an educational practice.
2. To support the development of positive professional relationships between staff, the Academy should increase opportunities for staff collaboration onsite and across different sites, for instance through additional opportunities to observe each other's practice and undertake shared reflective practice.
3. To enable youth workers to exercise greater professional scope, the Academy should factor in additional time and supports for youth workers to:
 - a. Assess young people pre-enrolment, and complete more detailed, appropriate and extensive case planning;
 - b. Develop high level risk reduction, risk management and safety planning to avert crises escalation;
 - c. Enhance outreach practice to re-engage young people who are not attending; and
 - d. Establish appropriate processes and tools for sharing confidential student information between youth workers and educators.
4. The Academy should support ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff in trauma-informed practice.⁷ This will build expertise in understanding the complex behaviours of some young people, and in working towards removing their barriers to learning. Experience in providing trauma-informed practice should be a requirement for all new staff.

⁷ MCM are already in the process of implementing this training for all staff.

Appendix 1: Case studies

This appendix documents some examples of other organisations using a similar model to that used in the Academy. The Pavilion school and Edmund Rice flexible learning centres (19 in total) have adopted the model of placing a youth worker and educator together in a classroom, using a much more holistic or ‘wraparound’ approach. The McKillop specialist school model is slightly different. While they do use youth workers in the school, they are not assigned to each classroom.

Case study: The Pavilion school

This case study was developed from a description of their own model provided by members of the Pavilion school. This was then verified by the organisation.

The Pavilion school, based in Preston and Epping, has a similar ‘wraparound’ model to the Academy, using youth workers in classrooms. Operational since 2007 they were once co-located with Whittlesea Youth Services. The pressure on space has only recently seen them move to a larger building.

The Pavilion school provides an educational option for young people who are disengaged from education and training or who have been excluded by schools or education providers. Students present with a complex range of risk factors, behaviours and life situations. The school is a campus of Charles Latrobe College and Pavilion students enrol through the college. The program works in partnership with local agencies and youth services and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria. Family, youth services and welfare agencies, as well as schools, refer students to the school, but many students refer themselves after having heard of the school from friends. Student cohorts are culturally and educationally diverse, with about 20 per cent being Indigenous students. Students work towards the VCAL. There were 195 students enrolled across both campuses in 2013, 205 enrolled in 2014, and 220 in 2019.

The Pavilion school is built on the vision that everyone has the right to education. The school aims to provide a positive educational experience for all students by offering a relevant and individually tailored program in a calm and therapeutic environment. The strategic intent of the program focuses on five key areas: student learning, student wellbeing, engagement, student pathway, and transitions. Pavilion staff endeavour to create a safe and supportive school with flexible and individualised learning plans, tailored to individual education needs combined with personal support from a multi-disciplinary wellbeing team. Staff focus on the psychosocial rehabilitation of each student so that the whole person can develop safely and apply the principle of unconditional positive regard. There classes contain between 10-15 students, with one teacher, one counsellor and one youth worker. Class cohorts are formed on the basis of who will work best with each other or through a unifying factor, such as the class group of young mums. The Pavilion school philosophy is to start with where the student is and build an educational program around the needs of that student so they can learn to succeed within the new school environment.

Students 15 years or older study VCAL at Foundation, Intermediate or Senior level and participate in two-hour classes three to five times a week. Students under 15 years participate in morning classes from Monday to Friday based on the Victorian Essential

Learning Standards (VELS). The curriculum was created to cater for the Pavilion student cohort. Elective subjects are provided for students who are able and willing to participate in a more complete timetable, such as personal training, boxing, music, visual art, film-making, sport, cooking and warehousing. The Pavilion school also offers Certificate II in Construction and Community Services and links to school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. Students may also be linked to other accredited programs or part-time work and traineeships. Each student collaborates with staff to create their individual student learning plan with academic, personal, transitions and pathways goals, which they review together each school term.

Case study: Edmund Rice flexible learning centres

Again, this case study was developed from a description of the model provided by flexible learning centre staff, it was then verified by the organisation.

Flexible learning centres are part of Edmund Rice Education Australia's national initiative, Youth+, responding to the needs of young people in our communities. These centres provide young people with an opportunity to re-engage in education in a flexible supported learning environment. Each flexible learning centre operates classrooms with a teacher and a youth worker. There are 19 flexible learning centres around Australia, with two in Victoria.

The young people who attend the schools have typically experienced one or more significant and complex educational, social, developmental, psychological, health, legal or familial situations, which demand unique responses. Such interventions are embedded within an educational framework but also typically involve medical, multi-disciplinary, legal and/or social support personnel network systems.

Each flexible learning centre is a registered school and offers educational pathways for young people in Years 7-12 who have difficulty accessing mainstream schooling for a variety of reasons. The centres work with young people to:

- Improve cognitive and academic skills
- Enhance social and emotional competency
- Strengthen cultural and spiritual life
- Help find employment or further training
- Build community connection

Flexible learning centres are generally small schools. The approach of flexible timetabling, smaller learning groups, strong staff/young people relationships and relevant curriculum enables the delivery of creative teaching responses to individual young people's learning needs, incorporating their cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Youth+ services offer flexible learning choices characterised by a focus on:

- Individual needs of young people
- Developing a learning community
- Learning that is critically reflective
- Promoting a culture of success

A fundamental component of flexible learning is an emphasis on relationship development. Complementing this process is the provision of a values and relationship education program, which draws on the common ground principles and relates to the life experiences of young people. These principles are:

- Respect
- Participation

- Honesty
- Safe and legal

The purpose of a Youth+ flexible learning centre is to empower young people to take personal responsibility for their actions and learning, feel enhanced wellbeing, and achieve greater autonomy and self-reliance, to engage in the transition to further education and/or employment and to negotiate positive steps to adulthood.

The philosophy of Youth+ has a clear commitment to social justice and stands in solidarity with disenfranchised people of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Learning experiences are holistic and address the social and emotional needs of young people, promote wellbeing, and develop cognitive and academic skills.

Learning experiences are linked to educational outcomes of state, territory and national curriculum frameworks in middle school and senior subjects, in addition to nationally accredited vocational education and training courses. Central to the practice established in flexible learning centres is operation by the common ground principles indicated above. These give a framework for a democratic and inclusive community to operate in a way that respects the rights of all and enables meaningful educational engagement. These principles guide group relationships. They represent broad directions for group practice and establish a common ethical framework that promotes appropriate learning and personal relationships. The young people and staff use them to:

- Encourage learning
- Build personal relationships
- Resolve conflict

Case study: MacKillop specialist schools

This case study does not match the model of the other two exactly, however, these specialist schools do use youth workers but they are not assigned to each classroom. The model has had some success recently and shares many common components with the other examples. Again, this case study was developed from a description of the model provided by staff, which was then verified by the organisation.

MacKillop specialist schools aim to provide a positive learning environment to support students who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging from school. These specialist schools are suited to students with social and/or emotional behaviours that cannot be managed in a mainstream setting. MacKillop schools aim to cater to a student's learning and wellbeing needs whilst developing a flexible, individualised program to prepare them academically and socially to return to mainstream education.

MacKillop has two Victorian specialist schools:

- The Geelong school is available to students aged 5-16 years (Prep-Year 10)
- The Maidstone school (western metropolitan region) is available to students aged 5-12 years (Prep-Grade 6)

The teaching curriculum is underpinned by the ReLATE (Rethinking Learning and Teaching Environments) model, designed to provide a safe learning environment for children and young people impacted by trauma. It is a holistic, school-wide change model that targets at-risk students. MacKillop education's ReLATE model is a holistic, trauma-informed and responsive school culture change model.

Developed by MacKillop Family Services for the Australian education context, ReLATE creates a culture of safety, inclusion and wellbeing for optimal learning across the whole

school, informed by international trauma-informed education principles. At its core, ReLATE promotes safe relationships - not only for students, but equally for families, teachers and other staff who provide education and support services. In such a culture, safe and supportive learning environments are maintained in classrooms where students are not just known but understood. Stress is minimised and teachers are supported in their professional growth. ReLATE aims to create a whole school culture of safety and wellbeing, supported by practical strategies through four key components:

McKillop schools identify the model as a universal theoretical basis in trauma and educational theory that provides a lens for understanding culture, diversity and trauma-based behaviour. It is a values base for creating, maintaining and restoring safe school relationships and environments. The trauma-informed framework represented by the acronym S.E.L.F. (Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future) is designed to attend to common barriers to change and positive relationships.

A set of practical strategies have been developed for creating and maintaining a culture of safety and wellbeing in schools and classrooms. Since introducing the model at MacKillop schools in Geelong and Maidstone, evidence indicates that there has been marked improvement in students':

- social and emotional wellness
- achievement of learning goals and personal accountability
- behaviour and emotion management
- academic success
- attendance

Appendix 2:

The context of low educational attainment

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2017), young people who are not in education, employment or training (often referred to as the 'NEET' group, or 'NEETs' for easy reference) are completely disengaged from work and study. Low educational attainment and poor literacy and numeracy skills increase a young person's risk of being a NEET, with around 40% of NEETs in Australia never having obtained an upper secondary qualification (OECD, 2016a; 2016b). There is a strong correlation between low educational attainment and struggles in entering the workforce. Up to 37% of students who leave school in Year 10, end up not being in education, employment, or training, compared with just 11% of those with a tertiary qualification (Miles, 2018).

In 2016, according to the census, there were 356,000 young people in Victoria between the ages of 15 and 19 years. According to research conducted by VU's Mitchell Institute, 2015 Year 12 attainment rates in Victoria were 77%. By 2016 there was some improvement in a level of attainment rates for up to 24 year olds. In 2015 a change of state education policy recognised that a Certificate 11 was equivalent to a year 12 completion. Therefore, it is quite possible that much of the 14% improvement is due to young people undertaking low-level vocational qualifications. Poor educational outcomes are a measure of the vulnerability of young people in terms of their engagement in employment in the longer term. Based on the census data and the percentages highlighted above, we are left with a staggering figure of more than 40,000 young people who are at long-term risk of exclusion from employment opportunities, with only 14,000 15-19 year old youths gaining an apprenticeship (Mitchell Institute and the ABS and Victorian Government Education and Training report).

Percentage of 20-24 year-olds who have attained Year 12 or a qualification at AQF 2 or above.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Victoria	86.1	88.7	86.8	88.1	86.1	88.0	90.1	89.0	89.5	92.6
Australia	83.5	84.2	84.5	85.6	84.1	85.9	86.7	86.1	88.4	90.2

Source: ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW 2016)

Non-school completers and NEET young people are certainly represented in the cohort of students who attend the Academy. As discussed later in this report, Academy students spoke of their terrible experiences in mainstream education, which were not all related to their capability to do the work. Their experiences highlight the inability of many mainstream schools to deal with young people who are experiencing mental health issues and anxiety, as well as transgender young people and young people with learning difficulties or those on the autism spectrum. It was clear that many mainstream schools were neither equipped nor inclined to support these young people.

The practice of youth work

The Commonwealth Youth Development Index (2016) defines youth development as:

enhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It will enable them to contribute and benefit from a politically stable, economically viable and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries (page10).

In Australia, the peak youth affairs body, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC),

defines youth work as a practice that places young people and their interests first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights (2013).

A key ethical standard that underpins youth work, according to Banks (2010, p. 3), is the “promotion of social justice for young people and in society generally. Most youth work takes place in the context of social injustice, often with young people and others who are on the margins, excluded by a number of personal, cultural and structural barriers”.

According to the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Work, youth workers such as those at the Academy use human rights as the basis for their framework of practice (YACVIC, 2008). This practice is unique because it focuses on young people as the primary consideration. Youth work as a distinct body of knowledge and practice recognises that young people are disempowered simply by being young and many are disadvantaged because of the range of structural barriers they face. This can be because of poverty, geography, gender, race or disability. For many young people the barrier of poverty ensures that their life chances and choices are very different to those of others (Lamb, 2017). Youth workers are committed to closing the gap and empowering young people to take control of their own lives and participate in the decisions of a civic life (YACVIC, 2008).

The National Youth Agency (NYA) in the United Kingdom (UK) is one of the most established associations, setting minimum youth work standards and developing accredited courses that operate across the service sector. Here is how this organisation defines youth work practice:

The practice of youth work helps young people learn about themselves, others and society, through informal educational activities which combine enjoyment, challenge and learning. Youth workers work primarily with young people aged between 12 and 25. Youth work seeks to promote young people's personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole. Youth Work partners with young people because they are young people, not because they have been labelled or are considered deviant; starting with young people's view of the world; helping young people develop stronger relationships and collective identities; respecting and valuing differences; and promoting the voice of young people. (NYA, UK, p. 4)

Jeff and Smiths (2005) noted that “Youth work requires the capacity to make good judgements, to design and engage in complex and often diverse social interventions. It is multi-faceted, dynamic, often messy, unpredictable work that requires expertise that cannot be rote learned by following rules or formulaic recipes”. Youth work cannot successfully be divided up into distinct subsets of prescriptive behaviours, or discrete competencies (Davies & Durkin, cited in Cooper, 1992). While it is critical for practitioners to be able to perform certain specified skills, such as building relationships, informal counselling, or making referrals, good professional practice depends upon the ability to make complex judgements (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). This demands that youth workers develop wisdom rather than conditioned responses.

In Victoria, youth work has been identified as a profession since the development of a Professional Association in 1978. Bachelor degree programs have been available since 1976. Increasingly governments have recognised the importance of qualifications in work with vulnerable young people. This is evident in NSW where a degree is the minimum qualification to work in youth housing, in Victoria it is a diploma. In Victoria, if you wish to work in child protection, youth work is one of the preferred degree options. Youth work education needs to “prepare graduates who have a good understanding of the complexities of socio-cultural changes taking place, the policy environment as well as ethical capacity for good judgement. Only with such capacities will graduates be able to build and sustain youth work as a professional practice” (Cooper et al., 2013, pp. 12-13).

Widely regarded as being responsible for providing youth work with an identity and professional framework, Jeffs and Smith (1999) developed a set of principles to define youth work. These have been adopted by others and are summarised as follows:

- **Voluntary participation:** Young people have traditionally been able to freely enter into relationships with youth workers and to end those relationships when they want.
- **Education and welfare:** Contemporary examples include support groups, counselling, careers advice and information services relating to sexual health and housing. However, learning about being a part of a group remains a key element. Informal education (Brew, 1947), social education (most notably Davis & Gibson, 1967), experiential learning (Kolb, 1976) and, more recently, social pedagogy, all relate to youth work as an educative practice.
- **Association, relationship and community:** Building relationships has been central to both the rhetoric and practice of youth work. Relationships are seen as a fundamental source of learning and happiness. The aim is to work with young people in the community so that they might better relate to themselves, others and the world.
- **Being friendly, accessible and responsive while acting with integrity:** Youth workers should be all of the above, have faith in people, and seek to live good lives. Hirsch (2005) argued that the settings workers help to build should be convivial, the relationships they form should be honest, and the programs they are involved in should be flexible.
- **Sanctuary:** Creating a safe space away from the daily surveillance and pressures of families, schooling and street life is one of the fundamental elements of successful youth work practice.
- **Personal and social development:** Youth work promotes the personal and social development of young people. Youth workers start where young people are starting and then seek to motivate and support them to go beyond these starting points into new experiences and learning.

The only significant gap in the list of principles above relates to recent research on **trauma-informed practice**. Knight (2015) refers to this practice as an understanding of the impact

that childhood trauma can have on a young person. Such trauma will frame both certain youth behaviours as well as the youth worker's response and the way they rebuild the personal agency of the young person.

Actual practices and settings for youth work can and do vary widely. However, the focus of this research is youth work in educational settings and understanding the specifics of that role. Youth workers at the Academy give priority to the interests of young people and work towards the transformation of the young person in their social context. Critical to their practice is supporting young people to remove whatever educational barriers they face, whether that relates to housing, health and wellbeing, income, family, and/or employment.

Youth work is an educational practice

Youth work at the Academy, as with other contexts of youth work, is an education practice. Here, either in a non-formal or informal way, youth workers assist young people to learn about themselves, their wellbeing, life skills, problem solving, working with others, and communication and presentations skills, to name just a few. While supporting the educator in the *formal* classroom role, youth workers offer *informal* learning in and outside of the classroom, providing young people with the confidence to engage with their formal learning.

According to Stuart and Maynard (2015), non-formal learning is learning outside the formal school, vocational training or university system. It takes place through youth work activities in which young people participate. It is called non-formal learning because its planning and facilitation includes distinct goals and timelines, so it is similar to formal learning but it happens outside of a classroom. Devlin and Gunning (2009) agree that non-formal learning is structured and based on learning objectives.

According to Stuart and Maynard (2015), and Devlin and Gunning (2009), this contrasts with informal learning. This is learning that is unstructured, it happens in conversations, through recreational activities, through a restorative justice process or by resolving conflict. Informal learning has an intrinsic value because it builds a young person's capacity through engagement in activities. So informal learning refers to the skills acquired unintentionally through life and work experience, and the skills not gained in a planned or deliberate manner. Building opportunities for learning is central to good youth work practice.

The Academy creates opportunities for both informal and non-formal learning. Programs delivered may involve students organising an event, having a regular guest speaker or a set nutrition, life skills or health and wellbeing program. Informally, youth workers at the Academy are constantly looking for opportunities to build the capacity of young people to be confident formal learners.

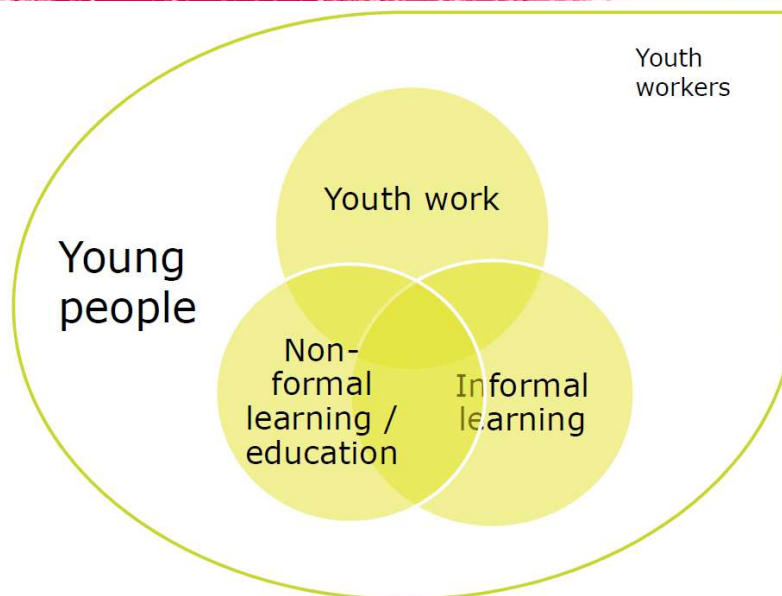
Devlin and Gunning (2009) undertook a research project in Ireland to define the benefits of youth work. As their starting point, they used the definition of youth work that was enshrined in legislation in the 2001 Irish *Youth Work Act*. According to the Act, youth work is a planned program of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation. The Act also identifies youth work as complementary to their formal, academic and vocational education and training. The research itself revealed that youth workers universally agreed on one thing: that the key purpose of youth work is primarily educational and developmental.

Reporting on youth work in schools in Northern Ireland, Morgan et al. (2008) cited the country's Department of Education vision, declaring that youth work plays a key role in connecting formal and informal learning. This includes the building of coherent pathways for learning for all young people. A project by Life Long Learning UK (2008) explored the

difference between voluntary participation in youth work activities and youth work in schools where young people were not attending voluntarily. The study concluded that youth work and informal education can make distinct and positive contributions to the personal and social development of young people. Youth work practitioners encourage and enable young people to 'influence the environment in which they live' and through the use of educative processes, practitioners seek to move young people from a position of limited power to one where they can exercise influence and make decisions for themselves. This resonates in the Academy model, with youth workers and educators working together dynamically in classrooms through a combined framework of non-formal and informal learning.

Every year in Europe, over 200,000 young people participate in Youth in Action (2014-2020) programs funded by the European Union Erasmus+. These programs use Youthpass, a recognition tool for the non-formal and informal learning that takes place in the context of youth work. The diagram below provides a visual representation of how youth workers and youth work activities link to learning.

Recognition in the field of youth



Source: Bergstein (2012)

Using this diagram, the work of Kezaite-Jakniuniene and Taylor (2018) highlights that everyday youth work practice helps young people learn about themselves and others, as well as improve their personal agency and understanding of how to manage in a society that has often accepted their marginalisation.

Woods (2011) states that amongst the myriad of roles they play and the contexts in which they act as informal educators, youth workers are primarily educators in both informal and non-formal settings. They use activities and conversations to contribute to the personal and social development of young people. Their core skill is in using informal education, an open approach to starting from where young people are at, and enabling them to move forwards and think laterally. What separates youth workers from other professionals engaged in welfare work with young people is this distinct commitment to education and learning. This,

along with the focus on the young person themselves, is a central cornerstone of the professional identity of the youth worker. Without it, the professional contribution will, at best, be muddled or, at worst, completely lost.

Commonwealth Education Ministers agree. At the twentieth meeting of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Nadi, Fiji in 2018, the final communique of outcomes stated:

Ministers noted with deep concern that youth in many Commonwealth Member States are vulnerable to drugs, gang violence and street crime and in certain societies extremism. Concerted efforts are required to impart global citizenship by inculcating universal and humanistic values through peace education, creating better understanding of social rights and responsibilities, and respecting cultural and religious diversity through formal and informal education and training. Ministers acknowledged the contribution of non-formal and informal learning in building the resilience of young people [and the role of youth and community workers](#) in delivering non-formal and informal education.

Youth work has always been an educational practice. Historically, according to the seminal work by Maunders (1998), youth work did not develop simply to 'keep people off the streets', or to provide amusement. Most of the early clubs grew out of wanting to provide working class young men and women with the opportunity to learn new skills. The sole focus of the YWCA was to provide courses and education for young women whilst considering their broader welfare needs. It was the same for institutions such as the YMCA and the Newsboys Club in Victoria (Maunders, 1998). Training courses and programs, classes, discussions, libraries and various opportunities to expand and deepen experience have been an essential element of the work since its beginnings. This interest in learning, often of the most informal kind, was augmented by a concern for the general welfare of young people.

In his book on youth work, Woods (2011) argues that youth workers are primarily educators who engage with young people in diverse settings, using different methods and activities to stimulate informal education and learning. They build and sustain open and trusting relationships in order to create conditions for learning. Their aim, wherever possible, is to see young people choose to engage in the learning relationship. Informal education is distinguished from other types of educational practice by its values and methods. The approach relies on starting where young people *are at* instead of using pre-determined learning outcomes and didactic teaching methods. It is primarily concerned with young people's personal and social development. This means improving their personal agency to make well informed decisions, build their relationship skills and their conflict resolution skills. It means building on their strengths and supporting new learning around building a successful future. Youth workers *purposefully intervene* in young people's lives, creating opportunities, activities and conversations that aim to enable young people to think, feel and act differently towards their social world.

Batsleer (2008) suggested that youth workers deliver a range of educational programs designed to promote the personal and social development of young people. At the Academy this has meant delivering complementary programs on issues such as health and wellbeing, parenting information for young mums in the Academy and/or supporting young people with specific issues. Through creative and engaging methods of working, youth workers expand a young person's life lens and promote confidence, helping in the acquisition of new skills. This contributes to a young person's personal and academic agency.

Youth workers are a part of a young person's learning network

In Europe, the role of youth work as a part of the learning network of a young person's life has been understood for some time. A study by the European Union in 2014 identified a focus on young people, personal development and voluntary participation as key components of a successful transition to adults and building strong civics and citizenship values. Quality youth work involves a combination of behaviours, attitudes and methods. The close relationship between the youth worker and the young person can mean active outreach to young people in need of help and support, or developing new learning opportunities, assisting with personal goal setting or a recognition of their achievements. The safe and supportive environments that youth workers provide enable young people to experience important life learning, such as making mistakes and participating with their peers in enjoyable and fun settings. Youth workers encourage the autonomy of young people, driving them to be experts in their own development, to create partnerships and collaborate with other actors, for example, in formal education.

A 2011 Council of Europe working paper on pathways to employment for young people reported that the informal learning opportunities created by engaging in activities run by youth workers means that young people learn while simply being active. The report referred to the social, cultural and building of a young person's personal agency, often called 'soft' skills. Soft skills, according to Deloitte Access Economics, consist of communication, teamwork, and problem solving, as well as emotional judgement or emotional intelligence, professional ethics and global citizenship.

All learning in the youth work field enables young people to acquire essential skills and competencies and contributes to their personal development, to social inclusion and to active citizenship. These are all important employability skills gained in non-formal or informal learning programs.

Youth workers 'clearing for learning'

Kitty Te Riele (cited in McGregor et al., 2017) coined the term 'clearing for learning' in her evaluation of flexible learning centres, meaning that to be able to engage in learning we must remove the barriers that young people face. Te Riele et al. (2015) argued that many young people who attended schools regularly confronted severe economic marginalisation. For example, Te Riele notes, it was not uncommon to meet young people who were homeless, could not afford regular meals and struggled to get by from day to day. Some of these young people were connected to their families and some were not. Some were very perceptive in their negotiations with the state, and various bureaucracies, but many more were not. In order to ensure that economic circumstances were not a barrier to learning, the sites studied by Te Riele sought to provide the basic needs of food and shelter, help students afford transport to attend school, ensure they were receiving their full financial entitlements from government and had access to a range of other services. Recognising the importance of meeting young people's basic needs, Te Riele highlighted that while there is always a focus on learning, as in the case of the Academy, health and welfare service support is also integral to successful learning engagement.

Alongside 'academic' lessons, in the centres Te Riele studied, a great deal of learning was designed to fill important voids in young people's life experiences and general knowledge. This included travelling independently, applying for jobs, looking after themselves (e.g. health, actions in public places, safe risk-taking), and knowing how to conduct themselves when meeting new people. This social learning is seen as crucial to progression in school

and the wider community, reducing the likelihood of further educational and social exclusion (Te Riele et al. 2015). Te Riele observed these practices at the Academy and St Joseph's flexible learning centre in Victoria in her research on flexible learning centres. These practices are still a part of the Academy today.

With similar findings, Mills and McGregor (2010) reported that flexible learning sites in Queensland catered for more than just the academic needs of young people. These centres also often provided counselling, assistance with finding accommodation and financial resources, as well as help with childcare and personal advocacy. These centres strongly resembled what have been termed as 'full service schools'.

According to de St Croix (2016), youth workers work professionally with young people to create and claim spaces for conversation, fun, challenge, relationships and collective learning. In their study, flexible learning education providers shared some core values, including: safety and care; the focus on positive relationships; choice and autonomy; a holistic view; advocacy and justice; and partnership and sharing. Quality flexible learning providers build these values into their staff selection, training and performance management systems. de St Croix (2016) added that key practices in flexible learning education focus on: staff-student relationships and interactions; relevant and engaging curriculum and pedagogy; agency and independence; attention to health and welfare; and skilful staff. In addition, high quality flexible learning education provision relied on common practices, as listed below:

- Positive regard for the young person
- Flexibility in programming
- Transitions were carefully planned
- Progress was regularly monitored
- Relationships were a learning goal in their own right
- Attention to space and place
- Safety and security were paramount

These common practices are evident as part of the practice of youth work at the Academy.

Bowie (2002) suggests that youth work practice, in contrast to social or welfare work in schools, has less to do with individual focus, deficit or victim blaming and has more in common with a community development approach. He advocates a set of principles that focuses on the empowerment and human rights of young people both within school and in the wider community. Wyn and White (1998) suggest that the remedy to many policy solutions that see young people as the problem, lies in youth workers using a community development approach that focuses on a whole-school and whole-community approach. This sort of practice takes broader social justice and discrimination issues into account and resources communities to develop strategies and solutions that relate to their own circumstances. Their work culminated in 1999 with the Federal Government funding a national full-service school pilot.

Plows and Baker (2017), in their work on flexible learning programs, note the importance of the youth worker's 'clearing for learning' role. According to them, the intersection of social, economic and educational disadvantage was starkly apparent in the lives of young people attending these flexible learning education programs. Some were homeless, 'couch-surfing' or living in out-of-home care. Many had been suspended from their previous school because of their behaviour. Their complex lives included substance misuse, self-harm and poor mental health. A model such as the Academy can support young people to successfully manage such issues, with the ultimate goal of building sustained engagement in education.

The relationship remains central to youth work practice

Te Riele et al. (2015) stated that when asked to outline the strengths of their current schools, many of the young people in their study focussed on the relationships that mattered; they felt that the educators and youth workers cared for them. In the case of marginalised students, care and support are likely to involve solidarity expressed through curriculum and pedagogy that values, respects and builds upon the knowledge and cultural backgrounds of students. It should also support their capacity to engage with the kinds of learning that will contribute to success at school and beyond. This is a challenge faced by educators in both flexible learning and mainstream settings. However, for the former, educators need to find ways to engage young people in learning that do not involve repeating or reinforcing students' prior experiences of failure and, more importantly, that can be effective despite, or in the face of those prior experiences.

Zolkoski et al. (2016) argued that one extremely important element for participants in their study was having educators and youth workers who cared about them. Each participant gave examples of how their flexible learning school educators and youth workers showed they cared about their students. Participants felt their educators believed in them, were supportive, and wanted them to succeed. Moreover, the participants' ideal educator was one who is helpful, understanding, patient, and showed students that he/she cares.

In their study, Mills and McGregor (2010) found that students frequently used adjectives such as caring, small, community, family, respectful, equal, supportive, non-judgemental, and mutual responsibility when discussing their flexi school/centre. The relationships that were part of the broader environment in the school/centre were also reflected in the teaching/learning relationship within the various curricula offered at the sites. These relationships were identified by young people and workers alike as being central to the young people's ongoing engagement in the learning processes at the sites.

Baroutsis et al. (2016) argue that inclusive school practices that promote ownership and engagement, and evidence a respect for the views of young people are the most successful. Rainer and Matthews (2002) go further, arguing for the importance of enabling young people to become active in their own learning and experts in their own lives. Gardner and Crockwell (2006) suggest that a student's choice, voice, and shared authority in their learning are critical elements in most definitions of *ownership*. They join Rayner and Mathews (2002, cited in McGregor et al., 2017) to discuss how young people experience and value relationships with staff. In particular, they value those who: listen; are patient, are less formal; are fair and kind, but also firm about rules; are prepared to negotiate; have clear, high and achievable expectations; and see them as 'teachable' rather than as a problem.

Devlin and Gunning (2009), in their *Purpose and outcomes* report for the Irish government, found that youth work rests on the simultaneous operation of multiple types and levels of relationships. One is the relationship of young people with adult workers who may be the only adults outside their own families with whom they consistently engage in constructive and positive interactions. Youth work also facilitates the development of positive relationships between young people themselves.

The importance of being aspirational for individual students

Ansong et al. (2019) highlight the importance of personal agency among students. This has a direct impact on their aspirations and goal-setting around their learning. Ansong et al. (2019) also discuss the wide range of research globally focused on the notion that student belief in reaching an academic goal can be a primary determinant of the person's interest in a task or goal and, ultimately, task performance or goal attainment. People have little incentive to aim high or persevere in the face of difficulty, unless they believe they can produce the desired outcomes through their actions.⁸ Ansong et al.'s (2019) research sets out to understand how self-efficacy influences students' educational aspirations, their motivation to achieve goals, and their choice of, and commitment to, activities and behaviours needed to achieve their goals.

Youth workers play a critical role in establishing the goals and aspirations of every student, improving the personal agency of each one. Personal agency, according to Woods (2015), means building confidence and trust in your own capacity to make decisions, set a life course and believe you understand the steps to get there. It is the confidence to believe you can do it. This is what youth workers in classrooms do every day and, according to Jeffs and Smith (1987), they build personal agency and aspirations by believing in the young people they are working alongside.

As early as 1999, Schneider and Stevenson found that family and community social capital are important for raising educational aspirations, encouraging student belief in their ability to realise their aspirations and, eventually, reach their goals. Khattab (2015) found that aspirations can arguably help students improve their achievement, but they will be much more influential if they are also connected to high expectations. Homel and Ryan (2014), in their study for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on educational outcomes, found that aspirations have a significantly positive impact on educational outcomes. Numerous studies agree with the idea that aspirations are a cornerstone of success in education, including our own national Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) data.⁹ Homel and Ryan (2014) add an important dimension to this discussion, reporting that this aspirational context in an education setting tends to have a similar impact on outcomes across individuals, regardless of their demographic background.

Sikora and Saha (2011), in their work for LSAY, found that ambitious occupational plans formed in adolescence are consequential to young adults' attainment, particularly for an early entry into high-status employment. While a student's socioeconomic background facilitates the formation of ambitious goals, which help attainment, the effect of adolescent plans is independent of parent background. This means that there is an element of choice in the formation of student career plans. These findings add weight to the studies that stress the vital importance of comprehensive career guidance services targeted to the different needs of student subpopulations. Students with fewer economic and cultural resources might need more counselling support in pursuing careers that diverge from the educational and occupational background of their families, as they are at a greater risk of abandoning their initial expectations, despite having the academic potential to fulfil them. This is a significant attribute in the armour of second chances for young people attending the Academy.

⁸ Other studies that concur include two by the same set of authors, Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli (1996; 2001).

⁹ These studies include Marks, McMillan and Hillman (2001), Khoo and Ainley (2005), a series of studies by Marjoribanks (including Marjoribanks 2005a; 2005b), and Homel et al. (2012).

Appendix 3: Survey results

Question 1: Thinking about the role of the youth worker, tell us how effective (very ineffective, somewhat ineffective, neither, somewhat effective, very effective) the youth worker has been in assisting you in achieving the following outcomes:

- Building positive relationships with other classmates
- Building a more positive relationship with my educator
- Feeling more interested in learning
- Improving my learning
- Improving my grades
- Developing new skills
- Feeling more empowered in the classroom
- Improving my sense of belonging in the classroom
- Developing a sense of independence
- Building my overall confidence
- Developing my life skills
- Building my self-esteem
- Feeling more supported in the classroom
- Feeling more confident when participating in class activities and working in teams
- Feeling more confident working on my own
- Feeling more confident in setting and achieving goals
- Reducing anti-social behaviour
- Improving my understanding of cultural diversity
- Making learning more enjoyable

Figure 1

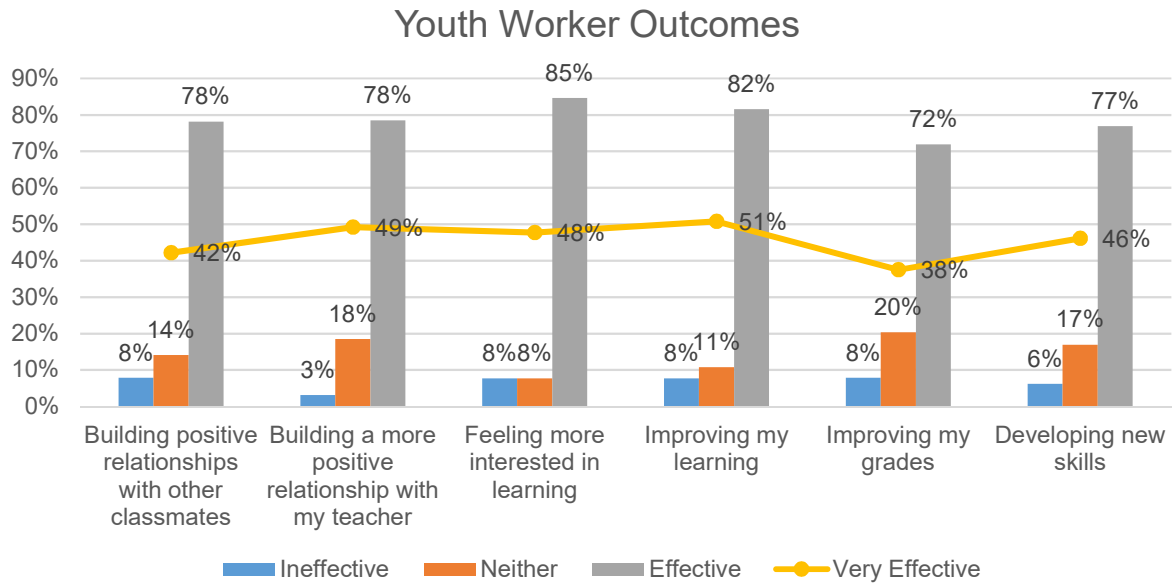


Figure 2

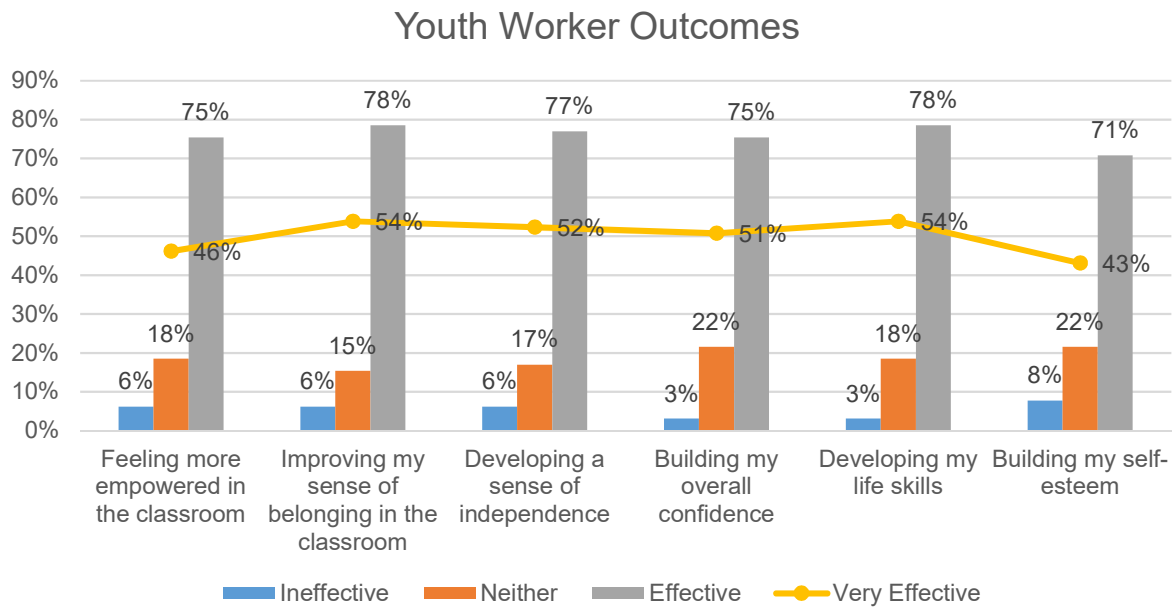
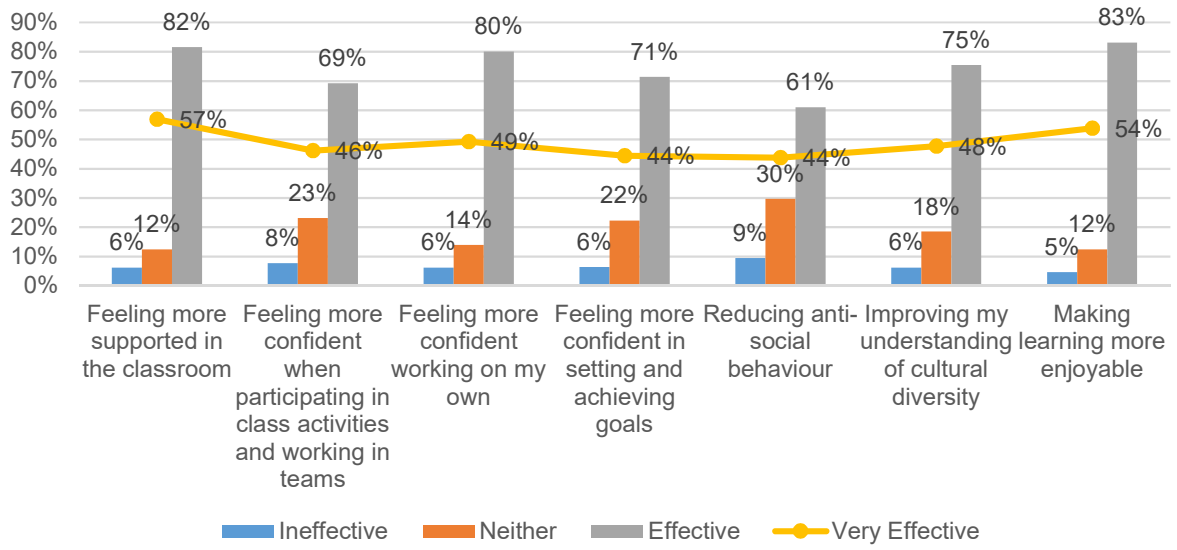


Figure 3

Youth Worker Outcomes



Question 2: Thinking about your relationship with the youth worker, tell us how much you agree or disagree (*strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree, strongly agree*) with the following statements:

- The youth worker cares about me
- The youth worker is supportive of my decisions
- The youth worker believes in me
- The youth worker wants me to succeed
- The youth worker has a good working relationship with my educator
- The youth worker is supportive of other young people in the classroom
- The youth worker understands my learning abilities
- The youth worker understands my personal problems
- The youth worker respects me
- The youth worker is fair and treats people equally

Figure 4

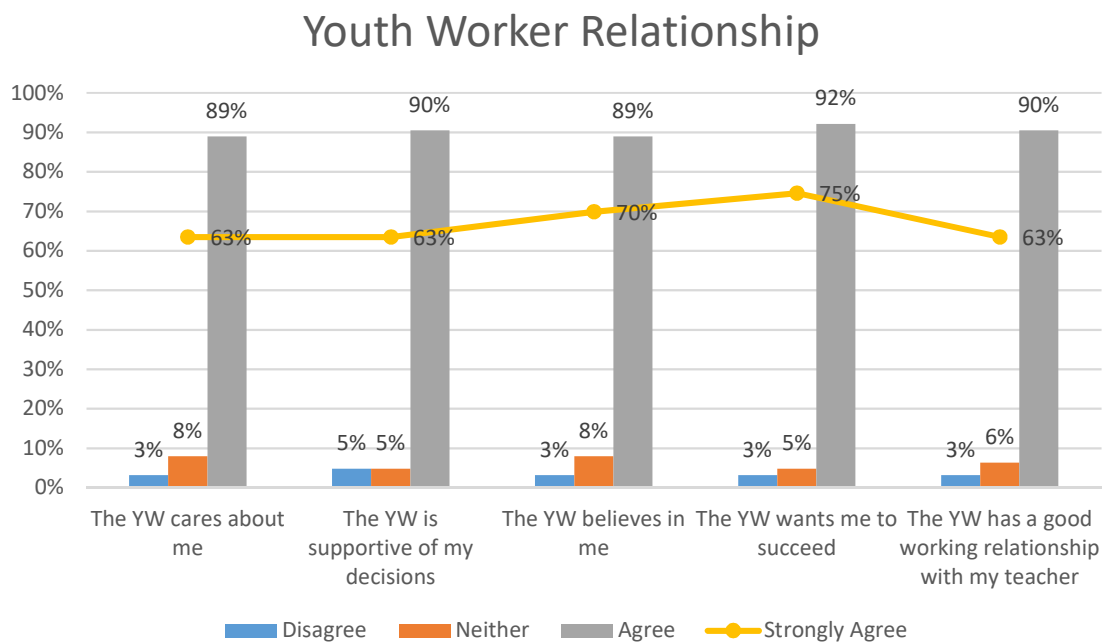
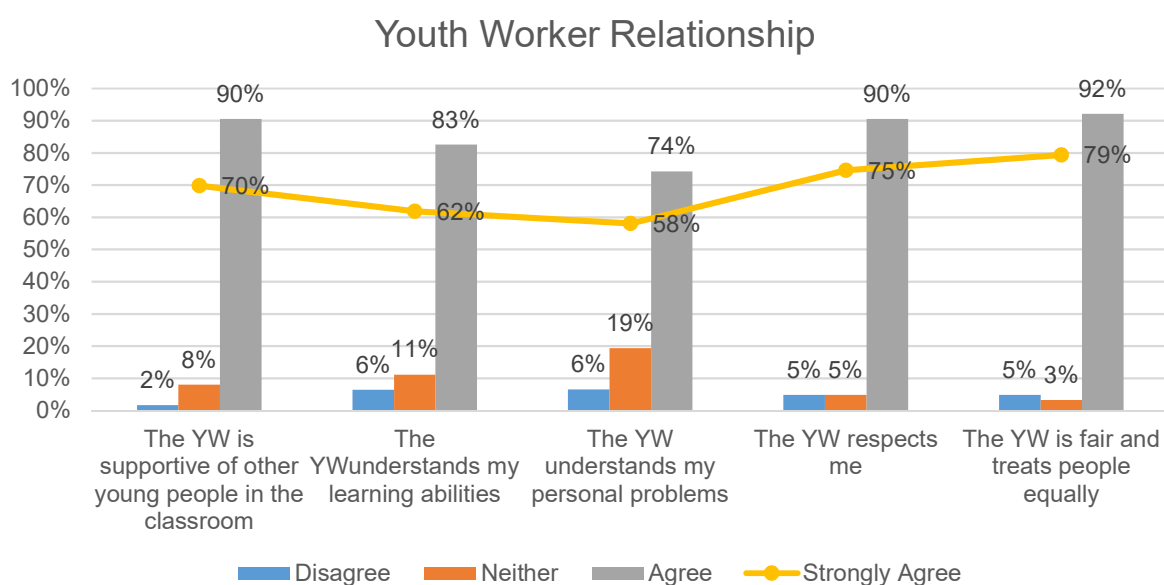


Figure 5



Question 3: Thinking about the role of the youth worker, tell us how much you agree or disagree (*strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither, somewhat agree, strongly agree*) with the following statements

- The youth worker taught me how and where to get help if I need it
- The youth worker helped me see different ways to deal with my problems
- I feel I can do more things on my own because of the youth worker
- I now have more interests and hobbies
- I have learnt new skills in this course through this program
- I am now more interested in doing well at school
- I now have a better idea about training and education programs that suit my interests
- The youth worker gave me challenging things to do or think about
- The youth worker and I discussed what I wanted to do in the future

Figure 6

Youth Worker Role

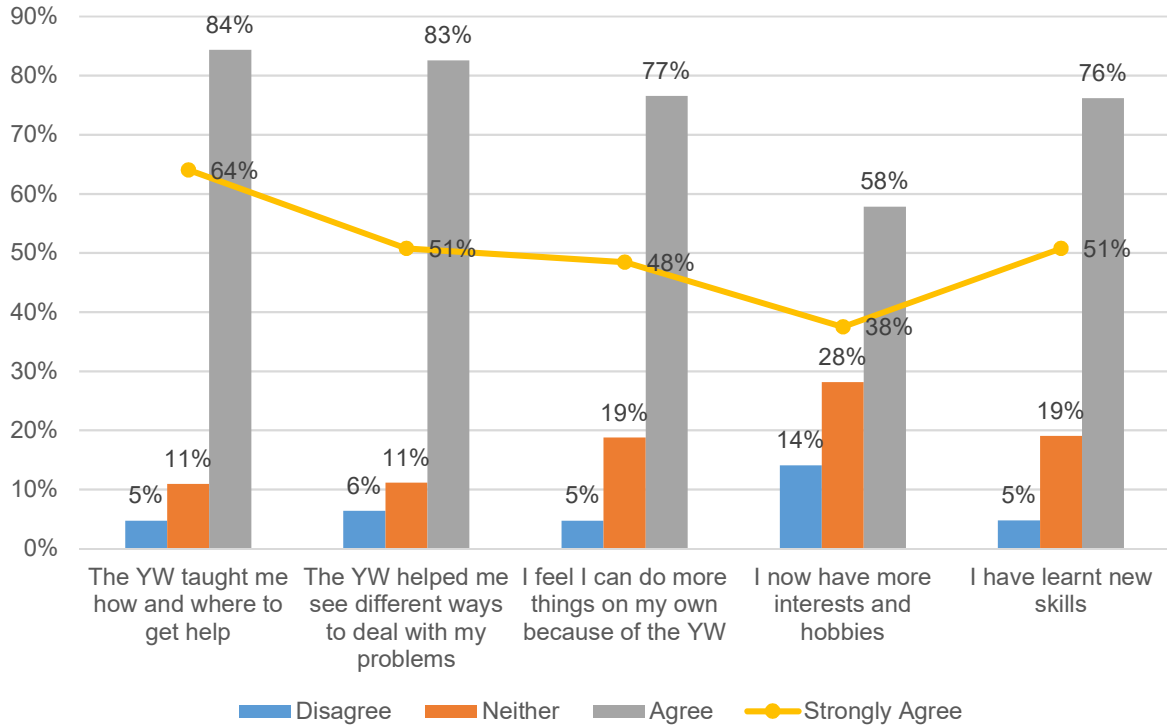
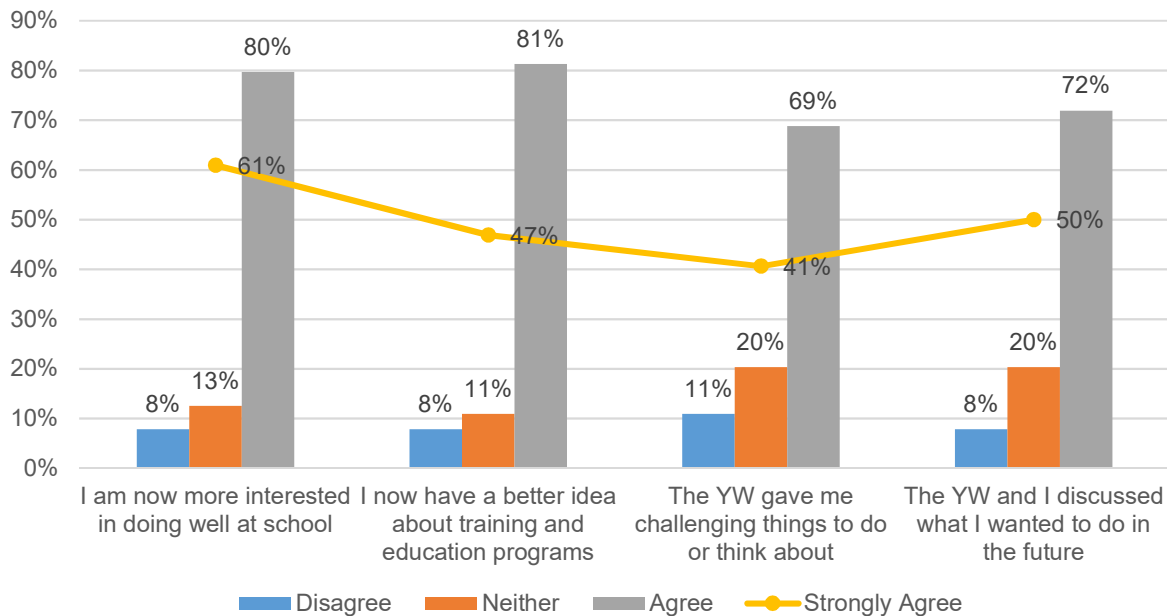


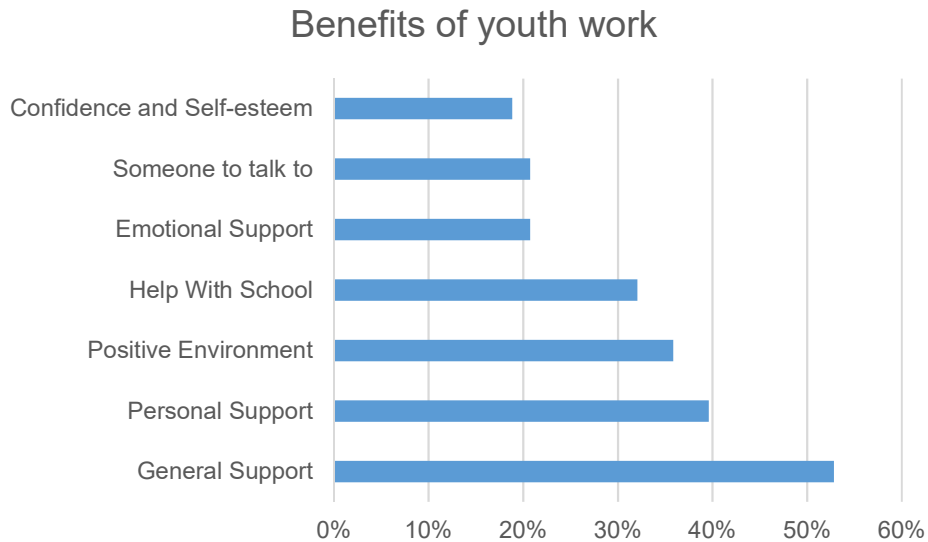
Figure 7

Youth Worker Role



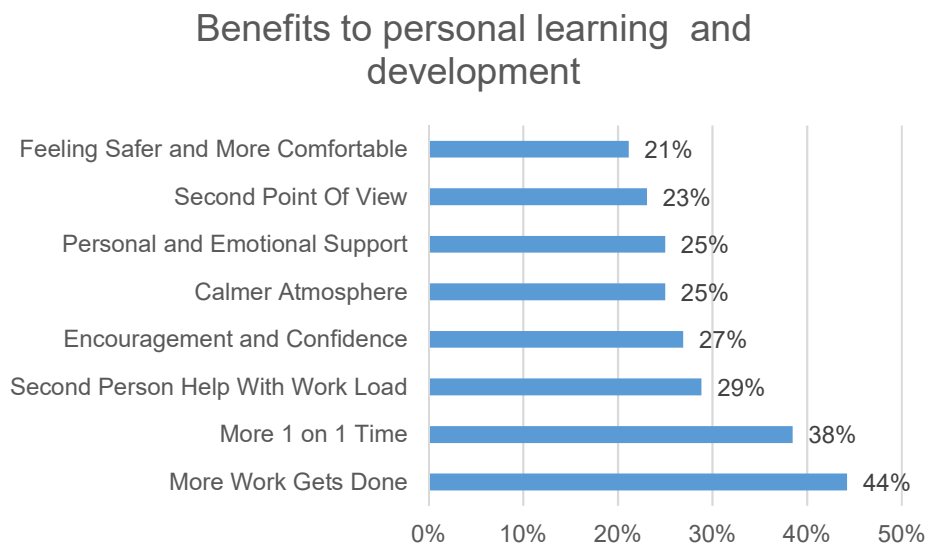
Question 4: Thinking about the role of the youth worker in the classroom, what are the three best things you got out of their involvement and briefly explain why?

Figure 8



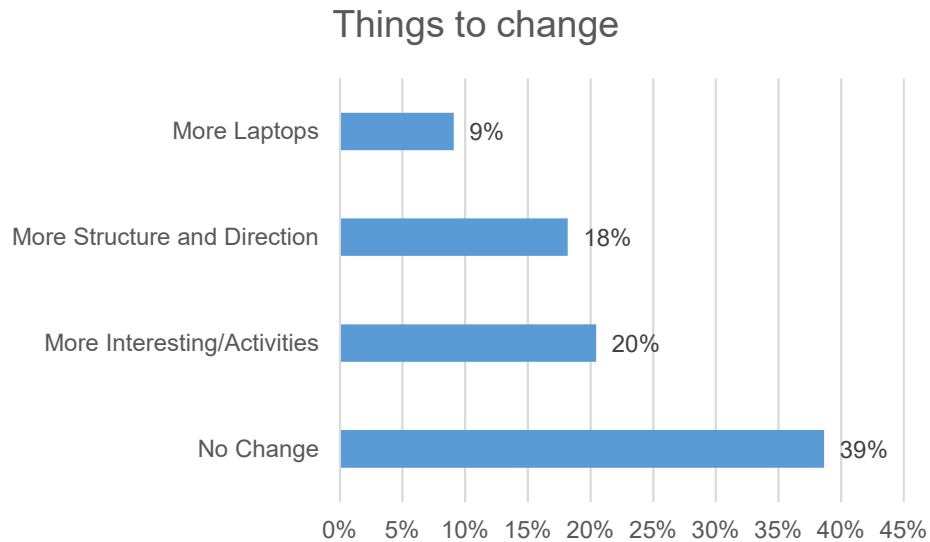
Question 5: Thinking about your personal learning and development, list the three best things about having both an educator and youth worker in the classroom and briefly explain why.

Figure 9



Question 6: Thinking about the roles of the educator and youth worker, list three things you would change to help improve the classroom environment and your learning and development and briefly explain why.

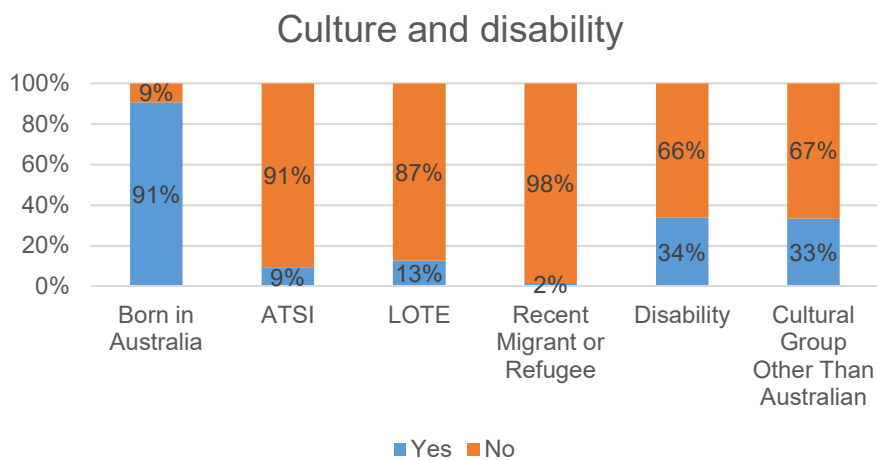
Figure 10



Question 7: Culture and disability. Students were asked to tick yes or no against the following:

- Born in Australia
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Speak a language other than English
- Recent migrant or refugee
- Disability
- Cultural group other than Australian

Figure 11



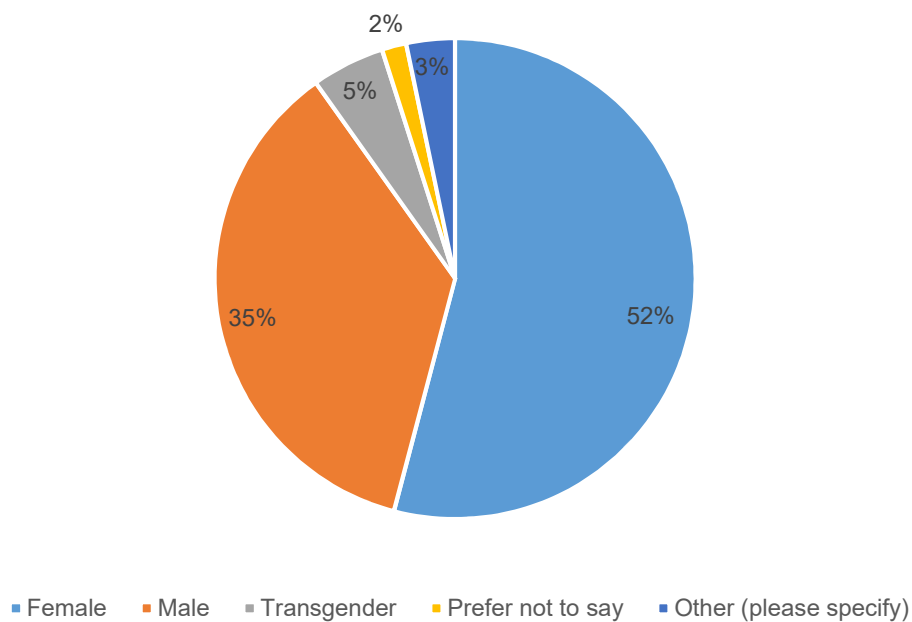
Question 8: Gender. Students were asked to tick yes or no against the following:

Looking at Figure 12 just over half of students were female with 35% male. There was a small but significant portion of students, less than 10%, that identified themselves as a non-binary gender.

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Figure 12:

Gender



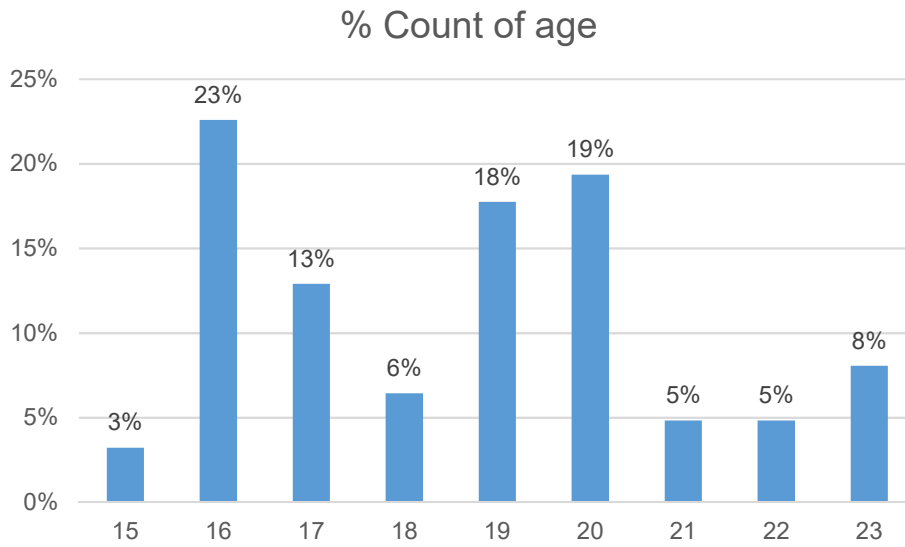
Question 9: Location. Students were asked to identify the site they were located.

Figure 13

Location	Count	%
Prahran	21	33%
Hester	3	5%
Hornbrook		
City Campus	13	21%
Sunshine	18	29%
North Fitzroy	8	13%
	63	100%

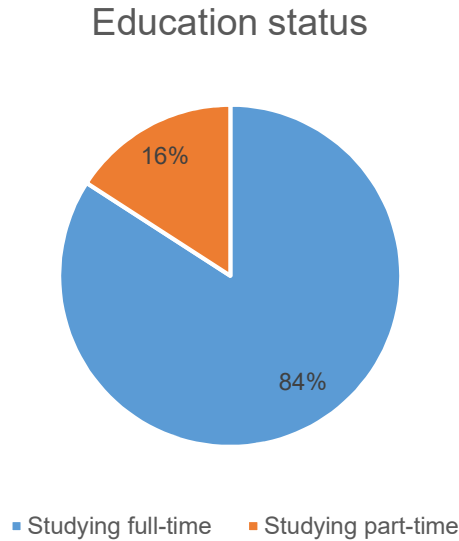
Question 10: Age

Figure 14



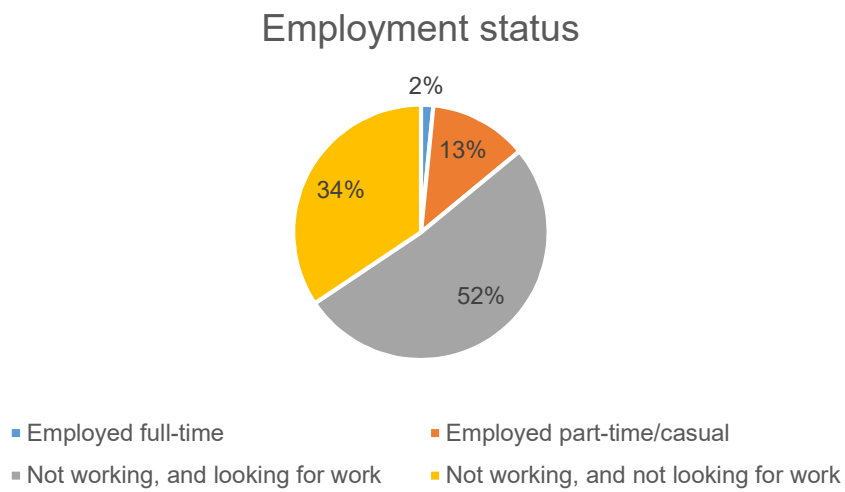
Question 11: Education status. Students were asked to indicate whether they were studying part-time or full-time.

Figure 15



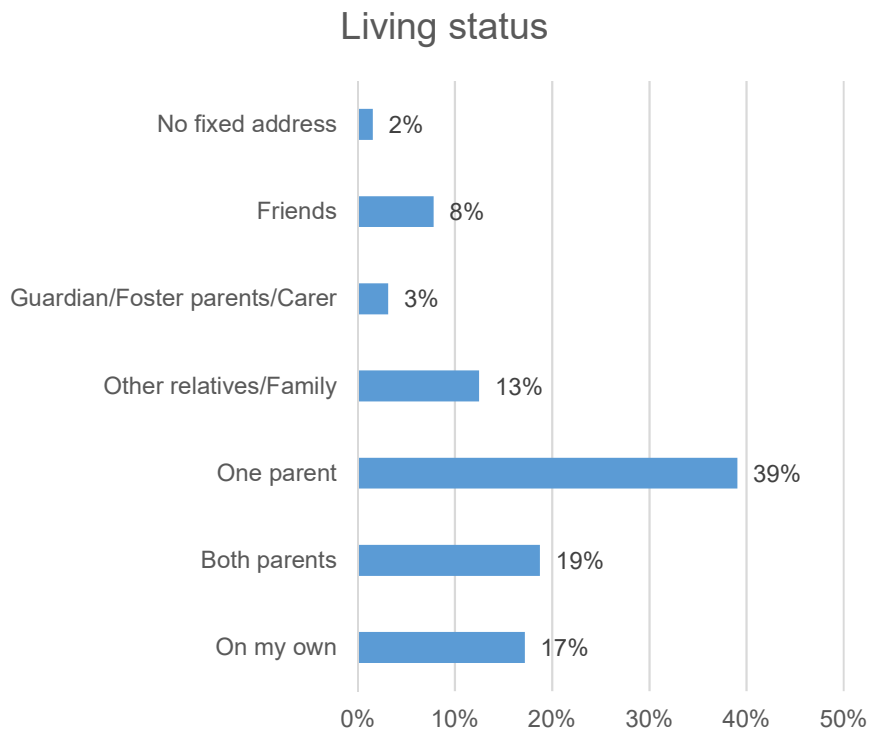
Question 12: Employment status. Students were asked to indicate whether they were working part-time, full-time or not at all.

Figure 16



Question 13: Living status. Students were asked to indicate where they were living and with whom.

Figure 17



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