



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

—
Research Centre
for Children and
Families

Evidence Review

Youth Work – Agency and

Empowerment

**Section 2: Types of youth work
interventions**

Research Centre for Children and Families

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

October 2022

Acknowledgement of Country:

The Research Centre for Children and Families acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we now all share, and pays respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

Prepared by:

Amy Conley Wright, Laura Metcalfe, Rebecca Mawad, and Suzanne Pope

The Research Centre for Children and Families was commissioned by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to conduct a scoping review of youth work interventions that foster agency and empowerment. Funding and resourcing for the study was provided by DCJ. The research team would like to thank Youth Action and Youth Work NSW for their engagement and feedback.

Contents

Types of youth work interventions	1
Overview	1
Introduction	1
What did the evidence review find?	2
Methods.....	2
Scoping review	2
Youth work interventions searches and results.....	2
Key findings	3
Youth work interventions by procedural category	4
Creative youth work.....	4
Outdoor or physical activity-based youth work.....	5
Informal education and learning-based youth work	7
Digital, remote and mobile youth work.....	7
Mentoring	9
Crime prevention	9
Interventions for particular subsets of vulnerable young people	10
Interventions targeting runaway, homeless and/or street-connected youth.....	10
Interventions targeting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) youth.....	11
Interventions targeting youth at-risk for suicide	11
Interventions targeting domestic violence-affected youth	11
Interventions targeting youth transitioning out of out-of-home care or custody	12
Interventions targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people	12
Interventions distinguishable by their procedural elements.....	12
Interventions distinguishable by their target outcomes	13
Limitations	15
Best practice principles in youth work.....	15
Considerations for service design and delivery	16
References	18

Types of youth work interventions

Overview

- Youth work interventions have a dual focus on transformation of both the young person in their social and environmental context, and transformation of that context.
- Synthesis of literature and sector responses relevant to ‘Types of youth work interventions’ revealed a number of predominant subcategories of youth work interventions. Some of these subcategories captured a procedural aspect of a youth work intervention category, while others coalesced around their focus on a particular subset of vulnerable youth.
- Types of interventions, programs and practices (by procedural qualities) include:

Creative youth work	Crime prevention and diversion youth work
Outdoor or physical activity-based youth work	Case management youth work
Education or learning-based youth work	Mentoring youth work
Digital, remote and mobile youth work	Detached youth work

- Types of interventions, programs and practices (by targeted subset of vulnerable youth) include interventions targeting:

Runaway, homeless or street-connected youth	Youth at-risk for suicidal ideation or suicide
CALD youth	Youth affected by domestic or family violence
Youth transitioning out of out-of-home care or custody	

- There is a lack of research exploring youth work interventions for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people. A number of references targeting this cohort were identified and interventions classified into those distinguishable by their procedural elements, and by target outcomes respectively.
- Overall recommendations for best practice principles and approaches are synthesised in the concluding section.

Introduction

Youth work practice is focused on addressing and responding to a young person’s needs and personal development goals in a variety of contexts and circumstances. Some young people are considered vulnerable or transitioning through a sensitive life stage. This may be due to a range of contextual and individual risk factors such as educational disengagement, neighbourhood disadvantage, abuse or neglect coalescing to reduce the capacity of young people to achieve positive trajectories and socio-emotional wellbeing (Moensted, Day & Buss, 2020).

Evidence on risk-taking among young people suggests that risk-taking behaviours such as sexual activity, smoking, alcohol consumption and illicit drug use increase from childhood to youth, reaching its peak during youth, before decreasing during adulthood (Holmes et al, 2017). Holmes et al, (2017) explored

risk-taking behaviours among young people growing up in rural and regional settings in NSW, Australia and found, in line with national (Redmond et al, 2016) and international (Curry et al, 2012) research, that the transition from primary to high school is a period of increased risk-taking for young people. This finding indicates the importance of early and collaborative intervention between youth work stakeholders and schools: ‘Cross-cutting early intervention and prevention involving youth work as well as education, health and social work which builds young people’s resilience is likely to assist in development of health-protective behaviours’ (p. 143). These risk-taking behaviours have negative short- and long-term health impacts. In these contexts, youth work practice tends to move beyond a deficit-oriented view of youth and risk-taking behaviours and instead, considers young people’s behaviours in their social and environmental context and foregrounds transformation of that context.

This summary presents a synthesis of youth work interventions, programs and practices that target young people aged 10-24.

What did the evidence review find?

Methods

Scoping review

This scoping review involved a series of searches conducted across academic databases, youth studies journals and grey literature databases. Reference selection and characterisation were performed by two independent research team members. The searches yielded 696 references, varying in terms of purpose, methodology and detail of reporting. These references were screened according to established inclusion and exclusion criteria (documented in Appendix A), leaving a final 428 references included in this review. All included references were iteratively mapped into broad topics and conceptual categories, including 1) ‘What is youth work?’; 2) ‘Youth work interventions’; and 3) ‘Youth work interventions that foster agency and empowerment’. The aim of this scoping review was to examine the extent, range and nature of research in the youth work space.

Youth work interventions searches and results

In addition to general ‘youth work’ searches conducted across academic databases, youth studies journals and grey literature databases, targeted searches for youth work interventions were conducted across the following academic databases:

Social Services Abstracts	JSTOR
Sociological Abstracts	PsycINFO
FAMILY-ATSIS	Google Scholar
Family and Society Studies Worldwide	ERIC
Informit Family & Society Collection	Web of Science

Youth work terms including “youth work*”, “youth and childcare work*”, “child and youth care*”, “youth care” and “youth work practice” were combined with intervention terms including intervention*,

program*, treatment*, service*, activit*, practice* and “program evaluation”. Where applicable, results were limited to English language, peer-reviewed literature published from 2000-2022.

The research team also conducted keyword and topic page searches across the following grey literature databases and peak body sources:

Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA)	CREATE Foundation
Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)	Early Intervention Foundation
Analysis & Policy Observatory (APO)	National Youth Agency
Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY)	What Works for Children’s Social Care
Australian Youth Affairs Coalition AYAC	Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)
Campbell Collaboration	Youth Affairs Council Western Australia (YACWA)
Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare	Youth Affairs Network Queensland (YANQ)
Child Family Community Australia (CFCA)	Youth Endowment Fund (YEF)
Closing the Gap Clearinghouse	Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT)
Cochrane	Youth Action
Council of Europe	Youth Coalition of the ACT

All search results were title screened according to established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The remaining results were then abstract screened for relevance according to review topics and organised into subcategories including: types of interventions (general), interventions focused on agency, empowerment, advocacy or participation, and interventions focused on relationships. Note, this summary reports on the literature organised into the ‘types of interventions (general)’ category. The results from this targeted search were combined with all other searches conducted as part of this review to accrue all references that speak to types of youth work interventions.

A call out for submissions from youth organisations in NSW was made in July-August 2022 to gather materials not publicly available and that speak to local work in this space. Youth organisations were not asked to prepare any materials specifically for this evidence review, but rather, to send through relevant existing documents highlighting their programs, practices and approaches. Submissions received from youth organisations in NSW were screened for relevance to this review topic and included in the final number of references for this summary.

Key findings

Cumulatively, 310 references were identified from the searches with relevance to types of youth work interventions. This includes 200 journal articles, 10 books and/or book chapters, and 100 grey literature sources.

Additionally, of the 60 submissions the research team received from 17 youth work organisations, partnerships and individuals, 33 submissions pertained to youth work interventions in NSW and were

categorised into the ‘types of interventions (general)’ subcategory. These submissions were received from the following youth work organisations, partnerships and individuals:

Blue Mountains Women’s Health Resource Centre	Project Youth
CREATE Foundation	Save the Children
Fairhaven	SSI (Settlement Services International)
Headspace , SCARF Refugee Support & MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra) [partnership]	STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors)
Humanity Matters	Soulgen
MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra) & Multicultural Health Service (Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District) [partnership]	Southern Youth and Family Services
North Sydney Youth Health Promotion (under NSLHD)	StreetWork
NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service & SSI [partnership]	Weave Youth & Community Services
Peter Slattery	

Submissions received included the following documents/resources: Submissions received included the following documents/resources: evaluation report ($n=10$), video ($n=6$), webpage ($n=6$), practice framework/standards ($n=5$), book ($n=4$), flyer/brochure ($n=4$), journal article ($n=4$), practice paper ($n=4$), program outline ($n=3$), summary document ($n=2$), factsheet/infographic ($n=2$), application form ($n=1$), case studies ($n=1$), logic model ($n=1$), magazine article ($n=1$), service overview ($n=1$), project evaluation ($n=1$), scoping report ($n=1$), training materials ($n=1$), media release ($n=1$), and online news article ($n=1$).

Synthesis of the 343 references (including 33 submissions) relevant to ‘Types of youth work interventions’ revealed a number of predominant subcategories of youth work interventions. Some of these subcategories captured a procedural aspect of a youth work intervention category, such as *Education/learning-based youth work* which involves informal learning activities undertaken with vulnerable young people. Others coalesced around their focus on a particular subset of vulnerable youth such as *homeless or street-connected youth*.

Youth work interventions by procedural category

Creative youth work

Youth work interventions that fall within the *Creative youth work* category comprise a creative component with relational or experiential learning. For example, a global youth work project that aims to engage young people in social issues via hip-hop activities was found to increase consciousness for global social issues while developing self-esteem among participant youth (Brown & Nicklin, 2019). Similarly, Wilson, Perez-y-Perez and Evans’ (2017) exploration of hip-hop activities across youth work

sites in Christchurch, New Zealand found hip-hop activities run by youth trusts working with young people in the community to include graffiti, dance or music production practices. This variety of activities diversified programs' appeal to different groups of young people and most activities incorporated both informal gatherings and formal events (Wilson, Perez-y-Perez & Evans, 2017, p1398).

Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre: Artspace – a clinical program combining creative arts with physical and mental health care for young women

What is it? Artspace comprises weekly visual arts sessions alongside a youth health clinic offering drop-in appointments with a nurse, GP and counsellor.

What are its impacts for young people? A qualitative evaluation undertaken by Brooks, Hooker & Barclay (2019) was conducted between 2016 and 2017. The evaluation demonstrated particularly beneficial outcomes for clients with considerable exposure to social adversity and trauma, and who were experiencing related serious health impacts. Participation in Artspace facilitated their recovery by enabling equitable access, social inclusion, creating a 'holding environment' and through therapeutic benefits of artist-led arts practices.

These studies have highlighted the capacity for an activity with widespread appeal among young people, such as hip-hop, to bring diverse and heterogeneous young people together. The importance of bringing young people from different backgrounds together was also foregrounded in an evaluation of a cross-jurisdictional, collaborative theatre project which took place in Hong Kong, Australia

and New Zealand (Aubrey, 2015). This theatre project, CLICK, facilitated exploration of issues of diversity and identity via arts education and theatre activities.

This selection of *Creative youth work* programs and interventions suggests that combining creative program components with experiential or relational learning can bring together diverse groups of young people in the pursuit of 'expressive and authentic conditions for learning' (Howard, 2021) that are grounded in young people's experiences.

Outdoor or physical activity-based youth work

Outdoor or physical activity-based youth work involves learning, play, exercise and recreational activities that take place in outdoor settings.

Sports participation programs, including interventions involving organised sports or physical activity as a platform for engaging youth in additional interventions, have been found to promote positive youth development, build self-esteem, prosocial behaviours, social networks and facilitate advancement of life skills and academic achievement (Gaffney, Joliffe & White, 2021a). A systematic review of studies (n=61) reporting on the efficacy of secondary and tertiary sports interventions for young people found that sports interventions have a significant positive impact on offending, externalising behaviours and aggression (Gaffney, Joliffe & White, 2021a). This review also documented increases in self-esteem and academic performances and reductions in internalising behaviours. Heterogeneity among the reviewed studies meant that the overall evidence rating for these evaluations was relatively weak.

An earlier synthesis conducted by Ware and Meredith (2013) focused on the effectiveness of a range of sports and recreation programs for supporting and building healthy communities across diverse geographic regions. The authors noted the substantial body of evidence linking sports activities with improvements in physical and mental wellbeing, social cohesion and educational engagement (Ware & Meredith, 2013, p. 4). Crisp (2020) sought to understand ‘what works’ in effective sport intervention programs via interviews with experienced sport coaches (n=10). These interviews highlighted the capacity for sports interventions to develop leadership roles and community level empowerment among young people which in turn facilitates individual behavioural changes.

Outdoor play and learning programs, including forest and nature schools, wilderness therapy and ‘walkshops’, allow for growth and development through outdoor learning experiences. Forest and nature schools include nature-based games and exploration, and inquiry-based learning that can be unstructured or facilitated. For example, in Canada, children in forest and nature schools often attend a half-day or multiple full-days in an outdoor setting and engage in student-centred activities that revolve around play-based learning (Harper, 2017).

STARTTS: Youth Camps – indoor and outdoor program that aims to bring young people of refugee background together to learn communication and interpersonal relationship skills

What is it? The Youth Camp program involves residential camps for young refugee people that run for 3 nights during school holiday periods. Aims of this program include: develop social skills; encourage teamwork; enhance self-esteem and confidence; promote positive relationships with other individual youth and camp leaders; engage participants in a range of positive recreational and educational activities; and develop young people’s sense of responsibility.

Research has shown that children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds who attend outdoor programs experience improved wellbeing and resilience (McArdle, Harrison & Harrison, 2013). Positive impacts on stress, competence, social relationships and attention have also been reported (Chawla, Keena, Pevec & Stanley, 2014). In an Australian context, Indigenous bush knowledge programs such as the Wanga Indingii Program established in 2006, involve camps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth incorporating traditional activities like spear-making and storytelling (Korff, 2021). The program aims to ‘get kids off the street and actively involved in things’ and establish positive role models in the youth’s lives. The Wanga Indingii Program monitors young people’s school attendance and behaviour, and assists youth facing problems at school or at home via life-skills and leadership training (Korff, 2021).

A more targeted experiential learning approach is encapsulated in Spier’s (2013) evaluation of a park design ‘walkshop’ in which young people participated in a simulated consultation walk designed to engage them in the hypothetical redevelopment of an urban park. Spier found, from consultation with the young participants, that the walk enabled a creative sensory-based experience prompting consensual discussion and ideas for improving the park (2013, p. 19). The students also reported that the walk enabled them to realise their creative agency as actors empowered to shape public spaces. Cumulatively, these studies demonstrate the benefits of incorporating outdoor settings and contexts into learning programs.

Informal education and learning-based youth work

There has been considerable research demonstrating the efficacy of informal youth work in building 'democratic education' via youth-centred dialogue with young people on the streets and in community-based settings (Sercombe, 2010; Coburn and Wallace, 2011). A qualitative study of informal education delivered by youth workers or as college-based further education in Scotland revealed that young participants (n=10) were able to access individually tailored supports not otherwise provided to them in formal school environments (McPherson, 2020). Similarly, research evaluating community-based youth work in educational spaces outside of formal school contexts including after-school programs, out-of-school programs and youth educational organisations has found that these informal learning programs are able to engage students via relevant and culturally responsive curricula (Baldrige, 2018; Baldrige, 2020).

An evaluation of a community-based, peer-led youth program conducted with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Australia found that social learning was achieved via simple, repetitive and conventionalised practices brokered by peers (Buus & Moensted, 2022). This delivery mode allowed young participants to recognise and address their own and others' vulnerabilities.

In light of the reported benefits of community-based youth work and informal learning, there has been a push for stronger partnerships between formal and informal learning sectors as a means of embedding youth work in otherwise formal learning environments (Deuchar & Ellis, 2013). Deuchar and Ellis (2013) explored the impact of a school and youth work partnership focusing on data from a small-scale educational intervention for young people (n=35) with a history of disengagement, criminal behaviour and school exclusions in Glasgow, Scotland. This intervention involved youth worker-facilitated workshops conducted in school environments where young people explored social issues and developed moral reasoning and team-building skills. The authors found that youth participants demonstrated a change in their self-reported participation in anti-social behaviour and an overall increase in social capital (Deuchar & Ellis, 2013). These findings substantiated previous research that demonstrated the capacity for school and youth work partnerships to improve young people's ability to work in a team, collaborate effectively and increase self-esteem and social and emotional capital (Scottish Executive, 2007).

Research has been conducted in Australia looking at the experiences of disadvantaged and marginalised students who attend alternative education schools that cater to youth excluded from mainstream schools. The research found that when youth workers treat schooling disengagement as a product of socio-economic deficit rather than an individual deficit, students achieve positive outcomes (McGregor, 2017; also see Mills & McGregor, 2016).

Digital, remote and mobile youth work

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growth of digital and online forms of youth work. Digital youth work offers youth workers an alternate mode by which they can deliver one-to-one

support or outreach by using technology. Youth workers also support young people to develop their digital literacy and a positive online presence (Cohlmeyer, 2014).

Pre-COVID-19, digital youth work primarily supplemented in-person programs and services. An evaluation of a youth work intervention combining offline counselling with online group activities for young people not in employment or education in Finland found that the online counselling component was most beneficial for youth who identified as lonely and had difficulties participating in in-person group activities (Kivijarvi, Aaltonen & Valimaki, 2019). This research demonstrates the potential benefits of online delivery modes for young people whose circumstances, personal preferences or geographic location make difficult or preclude, in-person contact.

Since COVID-19, youth work organisations have had to pivot their services from in-person, relationship-based service models to remote and digital modes of engagement. An exploration of one youth work organisation's transition to COVID-constrained services found that service model innovation impacted both delivery and service orientation with staff working more with families at a basic level of intervention (Shaw, Brady & Dolan, 2022).

Earlier research undertaken in the UK draws attention to the gap between adult perceptions of youth and technology, and young people's relationship with the digital world (Jaynes, 2020). While a quick transition from in-person to online service models is likely to reveal issues with how digital technologies are negotiated and articulated in professional practice, research has generally highlighted the benefits of online youth work for vulnerable young people (see Szekely & Nagy, 2011; Blazek & Lemesova, 2011).

Save the Children Australia: Our Voice and Journey of Hope – an online adaptation of the Our Voice and Journey of Hope services

What is it? Our Voice foregrounds the voices of children and young people in discussions around emergency preparedness, response and recovery involving local councils, service providers and communities. Young people who have experienced disasters are able to give feedback about local emergency management and share ideas about what would work best for their peers in the community.

Journey of Hope is a school-based group-work intervention for young people who have experienced a collective trauma such as a natural hazard or disaster. The program aims to help them identify and process emotions and identify positive coping strategies that can be used to manage current and future emotional challenges.

What are its impacts for young people? An evaluation report undertaken by Mavros et al, (2021) presents outcomes, lessons learned and recommendations from the Our Voice and Journey of Hope services jointly delivered by Save the Children Australia and the Paul Ramsay Foundation between August 2020 and July 2021. This report concluded that Our Voice represented an innovative and promising approach to promoting the voice of children and young people in emergency planning and recovery. Additionally, the authors found that children were able to engage in difficult conversations in online group chats in the Journey of Hope online adaptation which assisted with the overall aim of facilitating collective healing from trauma.

Mentoring

Youth mentoring in the context of youth work is characterised by a consistent, prosocial relationship between a young person and youth worker intended to support that young person’s positive development.

Youth mentoring is often divided into informal mentoring, involving ‘natural’ mentors such as family members, acquaintances and older peers, and formal mentoring, involving structured or unstructured programs with a mentoring component.

Quality mentoring, contingent in large part on the relationship between mentor and mentee, is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including enhanced mental health and reduced delinquency (Gaffney, Farrington & White, 2021b). Additionally, positive outcomes associated with mentoring include: improved relationships with adults, academic functioning and performance, positive behavioural choices, and feelings of self-worth and life skills (New Zealand Youth Mentoring Network, 2016, p. 24).

Streetwork Australia: KickStart Mentoring Program – program that provides support to vulnerable young people

What is it? KickStart Mentoring Program provides unique support to every young person engaged with StreetWork via one-on-one mentoring and case management. StreetWork works with at-risk young people aged 11-18 who are experiencing challenges including: suicidal ideation, self-harm, severe disengagement from school, youth homelessness, substance misuse and youth crime.

What are its impacts for young people? Research by PwC indicate that 85 percent of StreetWork’s young people graduate from the program and achieve their goals (from a study of the 2020 cohort). Additionally, a 2021/2022 Social Impact Report documents outcomes from young participants between 2017-2022 and found that participants in the program significantly improved in life skills factors including employment, education, housing, daily life skills as well as financial management and goal setting. Positive shifts were also documented in resilience factors including determination, pride, passion, managing setbacks, increased sense of meaning and finding solutions.

Crime prevention

A number of different interventions, programs and services that fall within the remit of youth work have been documented to have a diversionary effect on youths’ criminal behaviour. A systematic review of evidence-based programs that divert young people from gang involvement and violence found that skills-based programs were among the most robustly evaluated and effective approaches for preventing criminal behaviours among vulnerable youth (O’Connor & Waddell, 2015). The skills taught included demonstrations, practice and activities and family-focused programs including home visiting and parent training. The authors identified mentoring programs, community engagement and gang-specific approaches as promising but with limited evidence; and deterrence and disciplinary approaches as potentially harmful (2015, p. 14). A more recent systematic review explored the efficacy of afterschool

programs for reducing delinquency among disadvantaged young people and found these programs to be moderately effective (Gaffney, Farrington & White, 2021a).

Finally, an evidence and gap map (EGM) that documented research exploring diversionary approaches for children at-risk of violent behaviour identified a number of critical gaps in the evidence-base for what works in crime prevention with young people (YEF, 2021a). From a synthesis of over 2000 evaluations and systematic reviews, this EGM found substantive research and evidence documenting effective approaches for working with parents and carers, mental health and therapeutic interventions and socioemotional wellbeing programs (2021a, p. 6). Conversely, the evidence base is lacking in areas of contextual safeguarding (i.e., an approach to safeguarding that responds to young people's experiences of harm outside of the home); child criminal exploitation; child-focused criminal justice approaches; and approaches that consider systemic changes to services and systems that engage children and young people.

Interventions for particular subsets of vulnerable young people

Interventions targeting runaway, homeless and/or street-connected youth

A number of studies examined interventions and programs targeting young people who had run away from home, were homeless or street-connected. For example, Gwadz et al, (2018) conducted a cross-sectional qualitative descriptive study of programs for runaway and homeless youth in New York, USA. The authors found that effective services for these populations needed to be specifically tailored to their circumstances and needs. A systematic review found no significant differences between the outcomes observed for 'standard services' including drop-in centres and case management compared with therapeutic interventions with this cohort (Coren et al, 2019).

STARTTS: Project Bantu Capoeira Angola – program for refugee youth at risk of developing psychological and behavioural complications

What is it? Project Bantu Capoeira Angola aims to assist refugee youth better settle into school life and build resilience via kinaesthetic movement and an individual-strengths-based approach to personal growth and recovery. Capoeira Angola provides training in a mix of dance and martial arts grounded in an ancient art form with a rich cultural heritage. To maximise accessibility of these services, STARTTS works in close partnership with the education system and with school communities via the Schools Program.

What are its impacts for young people? A qualitative evaluation undertaken by Momartin, Miranda, Aroche & Coello (2018) sought to establish the program's impacts on young participants' psychological and social issues. The authors reported positive changes observed by participants and teachers to refugee young people's resilience, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and school attendance.

Interventions targeting culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) youth

Southern Youth and Family Services: Approaches to reducing youth homelessness and disadvantage – an online adaptation of the Our Voice and Journey of Hope services

What is it? This study explores effective practice for assisting young people to avoid or exit homelessness and contributes to the evidence on what works well in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

What are its impacts for young people? The Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS) operating model offers multiple interventions with dispersed entry points and pathways across more than 40 services including youth specialist and family-centred practices as well as whole-of-community engagement. Evaluation of this model found that past SYFS clients' current housing circumstances are significantly improved.

Young people from CALD backgrounds may face unique challenges associated with feelings of displacement, recovery from trauma, discrimination, migration stress and lack of social supports (Kaur, 2014). Conversely, young people from CALD backgrounds may benefit from protective factors that build resilience such as kinship, hopefulness and cultural identity (Babic, 2015). These risk and protective factors are not homogenous across all CALD youth. Consequently, youth work interventions and services targeting these cohorts must consider the

individual circumstances of each young person. There are numerous interventions, programs and services that can support CALD youth to thrive (see Babic, 2015 for an overview of evidence-based reports, resources and practice examples for working with CALD young people as well as resources to support professionals in child, family and community welfare sectors).

Interventions targeting youth at-risk for suicide

A systematic review undertaken in Australia demonstrated the positive impact of increased employment of youth workers in schools and extension of school-based youth work programs and online virtual youth services on reductions in suicides among school-aged youth (Cooper, 2015).

Interventions targeting domestic violence-affected youth

Specialist youth services for youth who have experienced or been affected by domestic or family violence have been shown to benefit young participants' socioemotional wellbeing. For example, Coburn & Gormally (2014) evaluated a youth service for domestic violence-affected youth in the UK and found that one-to-one support and group work sessions assisted the youth to foster empathy, better understand domestic abuse and feel safe about working through their emotions and making prosocial connections.

Interventions targeting youth transitioning out of out-of-home care or custody

A systematic review assessing effectiveness of interventions that improve outcomes for young people leaving out-of-home care found that the overall evidence-base was not robust enough to draw any conclusions or recommendations. Certain policies and programs such as extended care showed promise (Tyler et al, 2021).

WEAVE: Creating Futures – intensive support service for young people leaving custody or involved in the criminal justice system

What is it? Creating Futures is an intensive support service for young people leaving custody or otherwise involved in the criminal justice system on bail, community orders or court diversion. It provides court support and advocacy and wraparound casework tailored to the needs and goals of each young person.

What are its impacts for young people? An evaluation report undertaken by Schwartz & Terare (2020) demonstrated that the Creating Futures program had positive impacts on recidivism rates among its clients, as well as supporting more than half of them in areas of brokerage, court support and housing.

Interventions targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people

There is a paucity of evidence evaluating youth work interventions targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people. This is partially attributable to limitations in the area of youth work scholarship more generally (see Limitations section) and partially a reflection of a general lack of research exploring issues impacting, and programs targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth and communities. The section below documents a number of interventions organised by their procedural elements and by their target outcomes, which are geared towards supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people.

Interventions distinguishable by their procedural elements

Sports and recreation programs: The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse has published a number of evidence reviews exploring particular youth work interventions and programs and their effects on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth. One such review synthesised findings from over 30 studies evaluating a range of sports and recreation programs and their impacts on surrounding communities (Ware & Meredith, 2013). The authors found that sport and recreational programs have been shown to benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth in areas of school retention, physical and mental health and wellbeing, connection to culture, crime reduction, attitudes towards learning, social and cognitive skills, and social inclusion and cohesion. Importantly, Ware and Meredith (2013) noted that sport and recreation activities linked with traditional culture, such as hunting, are more likely to be engaging to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth.

Arts programs: A more recent review similarly reported on the benefits gleaned from a range of arts programs on supporting and building healthy communities (Ware, 2014). This review found that arts programs involving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth have improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, increased social inclusion and cohesion, as well as validation of, and connection to culture, improved social and cognitive skills and had some observable impacts on school retention, attitudes towards learning and crime reduction. As with sport and recreation programs, the efficacy of arts programs is hypothesised to be attributable to their capacity to divert youth from otherwise antisocial behaviours and provide alternative and safe opportunities for risk-taking.

Mentoring programs: Mentoring programs that consider and are grounded in Indigenous teaching and learning styles have been heralded as a culturally appropriate intervention for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth. A review of mentoring programs in Australia found that mentoring integrated with other interventions generate a greater level of positive change including impacts on behavioural, academic and vocational outcomes for at-risk youth, and contact with juvenile justice systems (Ware, 2013). The relationship between mentor and mentee is at the crux of successful mentoring programs.

Interventions distinguishable by their target outcomes

Socioemotional wellbeing and mental health: A mixed-methods study of a pilot Family Wellbeing program designed to foster socioemotional wellbeing among young Aboriginal men found positive impacts on capacity to manage relationships, engage in education and employment as well as mental and physical health (Whiteside, 2016). Additionally, one Closing the Gap Clearinghouse review focused on programs that foster socioemotional wellbeing among Aboriginal people of all ages (Dudgeon et al., 2014); and one book chapter extracted effective elements of programs that deliver social and emotional learning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (Dobia & Roffey, 2017). Dudgeon et al. (2014) examined effective strategies to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people via a review of Australian literature and government health, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing policies and programs. The authors found, firstly, that there is minimal research relating to the mental health and socioemotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians. Second, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people view mental health and social and emotional wellbeing differently to non-Indigenous Australians. Differences in traditions, values and health belief systems as well as the social and cultural circumstances surrounding health and wellbeing can mean that policy and service provision are not always culturally appropriate for Aboriginal cohorts. Despite these limitations, the authors noted a number of program and service delivery principles that are common amongst effective health and wellbeing programs. Swan and Raphael's guiding principles contained within the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2004-09* (SHRG, 2004) remain critical in guiding design and delivery of these programs. The principles emphasise the importance of:

- Focusing on the physical, spiritual, cultural, social and emotional connectedness of the individual, family and community
- Strengthening cultural values and commitments, systems of care and control and responsibility;
- Working in partnership with the Indigenous community-controlled sector

- Recognising the profound effects of colonisation as the starting point for addressing Indigenous people’s grief, loss, transgenerational trauma and ongoing stress and dislocation.

WEAVE: Speak Out – program for young people with coexisting challenges related to mental health and alcohol and other drug use

What is it? Speak Out works with young people aged 12-28 with co-occurring mental health and alcohol and drug-related challenges, and uses a holistic model of care that responds to the issues identified by young people as their priorities. The program includes supports around housing, justice system engagement, employment and education, family relationships and social and cultural connection in addition to supports for achieving mental health and alcohol and drug outcomes.

What are its impacts for young people? An evaluation report undertaken by Ryan & Gold (2021) found that approximately 75% of Speak Out clients identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. According to program participants, Speak Out is successful in achieving improved access to services, reduced problematic alcohol and other drug use, improved self-management of mental health and wellbeing and improved engagement with education and/or employment.

Dobia and Roffey’s (2017) chapter on social and emotional learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth summarised an evaluation of the Indigenous adaptation of the KidsMatter initiative. KidsMatter is an evidence-based social and emotional learning program for children and young people. One of eight schools that underwent pilot evaluation for an Indigenous adaptation of the KidsMatter program was demonstrably successful in engaging Aboriginal students in social and emotional learning. This was attributed to their adoption of a cooperative learning strategy framed around four core agreements that foster respect and inclusion (Gibbs, 2006). This approach was seen to benefit young people who were shy, and facilitate inclusion and responsible behaviours. Other aspects of the program delivery that were seen to be effective include:

- Program flexibility was found to be essential to support engagement
- Active involvement of Aboriginal facilitators was similarly essential for engagement and for development of social skills and responsible behaviour
- The ‘right to pass’ or offering students a choice in whether and when they wish to contribute to group discussion was found to be valuable for overcoming shyness and encouraging ownership and agency
- Acknowledging and working with differences in communication and relationship styles
- Sharing planning and co-facilitation between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous teachers.

Limitations

It is well-established that youth work scholarship is limited by a lack of documentation and synthesis of practice-oriented knowledge (Moensted, Day & Buss, 2020). Veerman & Van Yperen (2007) partially attribute the paucity of experimental studies in youth work academic literature to difficulties associated with evaluation of non-standardised interventions that characterise much youth work practice. These gaps in available literature preclude this summary from being an exhaustive outline of available youth work interventions and programs. For example, a number of references respectively exploring case management and detached youth work interventions were identified in this review, however, due to the small number of these references, these interventions were not canvassed in this summary. Additionally, it is highly probable that many additional, and effective, youth work interventions operate to support vulnerable young people, but that these interventions have not been evaluated or identified in our searches of academic databases, grey literature and stakeholder submissions. These deficits in youth work scholarship are particularly pronounced for youth work targeting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people, and CALD youth more generally.

Best practice principles in youth work

The findings of this summary have implications for the design and delivery of youth work interventions for vulnerable young people. A number of studies have sought to synthesise components of best practice in youth work. For example, Bruce et al (2009) explored youth work targeting 10-19 year-olds in Christchurch, New Zealand to identify key practices that enhance work in the youth sector as well as gaps and needs in service provision. From a series of focus group discussions and interviews with youth advisors and stakeholders, the authors distilled four components of best practice in youth work. These include:

- Connectivity: development of programs and services that are long-term, sustainable and relationship-based birthed and sourced from within the community
- Strengths-based approach: embracing notions of independence and autonomy among services for young people
- Capacity building: ability to build capacity in terms of staff professional development, effective research, evaluation and information gathering and sharing, and leadership in the area of governance and management
- Contextual and systemic considerations: consideration of macro-contexts including economic, political and social and cultural factors.

STARTTS: STARTTS in Schools strategy – program providing trauma-informed and recovery-focused individual and group work interventions to young people with refugee backgrounds

What is it? The STARTTS in Schools strategy (SIS) comprises a School Liaison Program which operates as an interface between NSW schools and STARTTS' programs and facilitates systemic changes at the school environment level that support SIS aims. SIS is delivered through internal collaboration with the School Liaison Program, Child and Adolescent Counsellors and the Youth Team, and external partnership with the Department of Education and Catholic Education Office. This integrated delivery model expands STARTTS' reach across schools and students in NSW. Supports provided through SIS include: individual and trauma-informed group-work interventions, professional learning for school staff, development and support of clusters of schools to promote partnerships and implement whole-of-school approaches, and personalised consultation for school staff.

What are its impacts for young people? In line with Bruce et al (2009) outline of 'effective youth work practice', STARTTS' approach involves connected services, adopts a strengths-based approach, is focused on capacity building and facilitates contextual and systemic changes to the school environment.

Considerations for service design and delivery

From this analysis, the authors developed a non-exhaustive series of guideline questions that can be used to determine the extent to which youth work programs reflect this model of best practice:

1. 'Is the youth service community-based, birthed and sourced?
2. Is the youth service one that has worked with young people for a significant period of time and which has, during that time, sought to develop strong relationships with young people and other youth sector stakeholders?
3. Are there signs of community life, connectivity and collaboration?
4. Does the youth service have a strengths-based approach to working with young people in terms of helping young people develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will benefit them
5. Does the youth service seek to develop independence/autonomy within young people through empowerment and youth participation?
6. Does the youth service foster acts of generosity and social responsibility?
7. Is the youth service place high value on the training of youth workers, leaders, etc.?
8. Is the youth service committed to capacity building?'

These principles of best practice youth work outlined in Bruce et al (2009) are reflected in youth work scholarship more generally. For example, Moensted, Day & Buus (2020) conducted interviews with 12 youth practitioners as well as a focus group with an additional 8 practitioners to explore their work in supporting positive transitions with and for disadvantaged young people in Australia. The authors found that having an ecological focus, encouraging personal agency, and fostering alternative possibilities

were components of best practice youth work and critical to facilitating practitioner dialogue and supporting young people’s positive life trajectories.

Best practice principles have also been identified in for youth work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people by Reed-Gilbert and Brown (2002, see adjacent text box, ‘WEAVE*: Our Place’).

WEAVE*: Our Place: *stories about good practice in youth work with Aboriginal young people*

Reed-Gilbert and Brown’s text, ‘Our Place: Stories about good practice in youth work with Aboriginal young people’ offers practical best practice tips for youth workers and organisations working with First Nations young people and communities. For example:

- Cultural and historical awareness: Non-Aboriginal workers must be aware of both the cultural values and norms they bring to their work as well as those of the First Nations communities with whom they work. Where possible, workers should involve the elders and community members in their work with young people (subject to young person’s consent). Additionally, workers must understand the nature of intergenerational trauma resulting from the ongoing systemic oppression experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.
- Communication: Several key differences exist between First Nations and Western communication norms. In some Aboriginal cultures, it is considered rude to look elders directly in the eye when speaking to them. Conversational styles can also vary and be less direct than Western styles. Workers need to commit to spending time yarning and building authentic trust with young people rather than trying to rush into identifying a ‘problem’ and ‘solution’.
- Learning styles: Western learning traditions characterised by individuality and learning through written and spoken instruction are not always a good fit for First Nations people with different ways of knowing and learning. Traditional ways of learning are typically experiential and less structured than that of a classroom setting. Youth workers need to be flexible and creative in their work to ensure that provision of information is inclusive and accessible to all.

*Book published under ‘South Sydney Youth Services’, now known as ‘Weave’.

References

- Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Brunson, L. 2014. 'Creating settings for youth empowerment and leadership: An ecological perspective'. *Child & Youth Services, 35(3)*, 216.
- Boomkens, C., Metz, J.W., Schalk, R., & Van Regenmortel, T. 2019. 'The role of social environment in acquiring agency in Girls Work'. *Children and Youth Services Review, 104*, 104399.
- Boomkens, C., Metz, J.W., Schalk, R., Van Regenmortel, T. 2021. 'The girls work method: What is the role of empowerment in building girls' agency?' *European Journal of Social Work, 24(2)*, 224.
- Bramsen, I., Kuiper, C., Willemse, K., & Cardol, M. 2021. 'The creation of My Path: A method to strengthen relational autonomy for youth with complex needs'. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies, 4*, 31.
- Coffey, J., & Farrugia, D. 2014. 'Unpacking the black box: The problem of agency in the sociology of youth'. *Journal of Youth Studies, 17(4)*, 461.
- Crisp, P. 2020. 'Leadership, empowerment and coaching: How community sport coaches in the UK can effect behavioural change in disadvantaged youth through incrementally given roles of responsibility'. *International Journal of Sport, Policy and Politics, 12(2)*, 221.
- Hall, S.F. 2020. 'A conceptual mapping of three anti-adultist approaches to youth work'. *Journal of Youth Studies, 23(10)*, 1293.
- Harris, P. 2022. "'Just give up the ball": In search of a third space in relationships between male youth workers and young men involved in violence'. *Criminology & Criminal Justice, 22(2)*, 254.
- Hart, P. 2016. 'Young people negotiating and maintaining boundaries in youth work relationships: Findings from an ethnographic study of youth clubs'. *Journal of Youth Studies, 19(7)*, 869.
- Hart, P. 2017. 'The reality of relationships with young people in caring professions: A qualitative approach to professional boundaries rooted in virtue ethics'. *Children and Youth Services Review, 83*, 248.
- Hoffman-Ekstein, J., Michaux, A., Bessell, S., & Mason, A.J. 2008. *Children's agency in communities: A review of literature and the policy and practice context*. ARACY/ARC NHMRC Research Network Seed Funded Collaboration.
- Listen, Inc. 2003. *an emerging model for working with youth: Community organizing + youth development = youth organizing*. Occasional Paper on Youth Organizing No. 01.
- Lohmeyer, B.A. 2017a. 'Restorative practices and youth work: Theorising professional power relationships with young people'. *Young, 25(4)*, 375.
- McMillan, C., Stuart, C., & Vincent, J. 2012. 'Tell it like you see it: Youth perceptions of child and youth care practitioner interventions and outcomes in an alternative school setting'. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies, 2(3)*, 214.
- Metselaar, J., van Yperen, T., van den Bergh, P., & Knorth, E.J. 2015. 'Needs-led child and youth care: Main characteristics and evidence on outcomes'. *Children and Youth Services Review, 58*, 60.
- Moensted, M.L., & Buus, N. 2011. 'From treatment to empowerment: Conceptualising the role of young people in creating change processes for their peers'. *Child & Youth Services, 1*.
- Moensted, M.L., Day, C.A., & Buss, N. 2020. 'Youth practitioners' perspectives on building agency and supporting transitions with and for young people experiencing disadvantage'. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies, 3*, 293.

- Murphy, C., & Ord, J. 2013. 'Youth work, self-disclosure and professionalism'. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(4), 326.
- Naert, J., Roets, G., Roose, R., & Vanderplasschen, W. 2019. 'Youngers' perspectives on continuity in their contacts with youth-care services'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 49, 1144.
- Ozer, E. J., & Douglas, L. 2013. 'The impact of participatory research on urban teens: An experimental evaluation'. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(1-2), 66.
- Ramey, H.L., Lawford, H.L., & Vachon, W. 2017. 'Youth-adult partnerships in work with youth: An overview'. *Journal of Youth Development*, 12(4), 38.
- Ramey, H.L., Rose-Krasnor, L., & Lawford, H.L. 2017. 'Youth-adult partnerships and youth identity style'. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46, 442.
- Schwartz, S., & Suyemoto, K. 2013. 'Creating change from the inside: Youth development within a youth community organizing program'. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(3), 341.
- Sercombe, H. 1997. 'Power, ethics and youth work'. *Youth Studies Australia*, 17(1), 18.
- Sercombe, H. 2007. "'Embedded youth work": Ethical questions for youth work professionals'. *Youth Studies Australia*, 26(2), 11.
- Spencer, G., & Doull, M. 2015. 'Examining concepts of power and agency in research with young people'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18(7), 900.
- Spier, J. 2013. 'A walk in the park: An experiential approach to youth participation'. *Youth Studies Australia*, 32(3), 13.
- Veerman, J.W., & Van Yperen, T.A. 2007. 'Degrees of freedom and degrees of certainty: A developmental model for the establishment of evidence-based youth care'. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 30(2), 212.
- Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. 2013. 'The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change'. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(3-4), 385.
- Zeldin, S., Krauss, S. E., Collura, J., Lucchesi, M., & Sulaiman, A. H. 2014. 'Conceptualizing and measuring youth–adult partnership in community programs: A cross national study'. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 54(3-4), 337.
- Zeldin, S., Krauss, S. E., Kim, T., Collura, J., & Abdullah, H. 2016. 'Pathways to youth empowerment and community connectedness: A study of youth-adult partnership in Malaysian after-school, co-curricular programs'. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(8), 1638.