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Evidence Review

Youth Work – Agency and Empowerment

**Section 4 - Highlighting good practice in
NSW**

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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.

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Contents

Highlighting good practice in NSW	1
Introduction	1
Background	1
How have we organised this data?	1
Key Insights	1
Services delivering supports relating to community, culture, and connection	2
Services delivering education, employment and training support.....	2
Services conducting youth work during COVID-19	2
Limitations	2
Services delivering health and wellbeing support	3
headspace & MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra)/SCARF Refugee Support ...	3
Resources	4
Project Youth.....	4
Save the Children	5
Resources	6
STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors)	6
Resources	7
Services delivering support relating to community, culture and connection.....	7
Humanity Matters.....	7
Peter Slattery	8
Resources	9
SSI (Settlement Services International)	9
Soulgen.....	9
StreetWork.....	10
Resources	11
Weave Youth & Community Services	11
Previous Weave CEO Shane Brown explains.....	11
Resources	11
Services delivering education, employment and training support.....	12
CREATE Foundation.....	12
Resources	12

Fairhaven.....	12
Resources.....	13
Southern Youth and Family Services.....	13
Resources.....	14
Services conducting youth work during COVID-19.....	14
NSW Multicultural Communication Service & SSI (Settlement Services International)	14
Resources.....	15
NSW Multicultural Health Service (ISLHD) & MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra)	15
Resources.....	16
References	17

Highlighting good practice in NSW

Introduction

This document highlights good practice that is currently happening in the youth work sector in NSW. The programs and interventions discussed exemplify practice that fosters agency and empowerment in young people aged 10-24 years.

Background

This document forms part of a broader evidence scoping review of youth work interventions that foster agency and empowerment for young people. In partnership with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, the research team at the [Research Centre for Children and Families](#) reached out to the youth sector in July 2022 for submissions to include as part of the review. A call out for submissions from youth organisations in NSW was made 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 research, but rather, to send through relevant existing documents highlighting their programs, practices and approaches.

How have we organised this data?

The team received a strong response from the youth sector, receiving 60 submissions from 17 different organisations, partnerships, and individuals. Information about the types of submissions received can be found in Appendix A. The types of data received ranged from peer-reviewed journal articles to online media releases. The team reviewed these submissions to detect key commonalities between services, and used an iterative process to identify four overarching categories:

1. Services delivering health and wellbeing support
2. Services delivering support relating to community, culture, and connection
3. Services delivering education, employment, and training support
4. Services conducting youth work during COVID-19

Many of the providers featured in this document offer wraparound, holistic support to young people via a range of programs and services that cut across all four categories. Due to the volume of materials received, this document reflects only a proportion of the total works shared by the individuals and organisations who submitted content. Readers are therefore encouraged to follow the embedded links to learn more about the range of services offered by providers.

Key Insights

Services delivering health and wellbeing support

These organisations offer a range of services to young people to support physical, mental health and wellbeing. Though each organisation delivering health and wellbeing support offers very different services to a diverse range of young people, they are all underpinned by the principles of person-centred and trauma-informed care. Creativity is central to the success of the programs run by the Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre and STARTTS in their respective Artspace and Capoeira

Angola programs. Save the Children and the headspace & MCCI partnership both effectively champion youth voice through civic participation activities designed to promote mental health and wellbeing. Project Youth's trauma-informed practice framework serves as an example of good practice for supporting mental wellbeing at an organisational level.

Services delivering supports relating to community, culture, and connection

The organisations and individuals delivering services in this category share a common goal: to foster authentic and meaningful connections with young people and their communities. Each uses a different approach to create connections, however there are some similarities between services. Humanity Matters and StreetWork both use outreach-based street work to meet young people where they are at, in their communities. Humanity Matters, along with Weave, both practice regular community outreach in the form of street festivals or celebrations where young people and communities can engage meaningfully in a pressure-free, informal setting. SSI and WEAVE both honour the culture of their service users by ensuring service-user voice and participation is at the forefront of their service planning and design. Peter Slattery and Soulgen both seek to enhance community strengths through strategic engagement through the provision of workshops and resources to persons and organisations working with young people.

Services delivering education, employment and training support

Each of the organisations in this category provide a wide range of services to young people, which include tailored supports for education, employment, and training. CREATE Foundation, Fairhaven and Southern Youth and Family Services all offer support to young people transitioning from school to independence, providing advice on either further education and training or employment pathways. Fairhaven and Southern Youth & Family Service both also offer supported training opportunities for young people which can serve as a stepping-stone to either employment or to mainstream employment support services.

Services conducting youth work during COVID-19

Organisations in this category worked to adapt their practice and messaging quickly and effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. The projects completed by the NSW Multicultural Communication Service & SSI partnership and the Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion team both produced accessible, relatable resources for young people relating to mental wellbeing during the pandemic. The partnership between NSW Multicultural Health Service & MCCI resulted in an effective COVID messaging campaign led by young people from CALD backgrounds as 'COVID Warriors' for their community.

Limitations

The scope of this review of youth work interventions that foster agency and empowerment for young people was limited to those which could generally be categorised as 'early intervention'. This limitation was extended to the submissions received by the team. Categories of youth work that have therefore been excluded from this scoping review include those relating to housing and accommodation, practice occurring in intensive care settings such as residential care, psychiatric wards, emergency departments

and juvenile or migration detention centres. These are specialised kinds of youth work which would require their own separate reviews.

Services delivering health and wellbeing support

Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre (BMWHR)

The [Blue Mountains Women's Health Resource Centre](#) (BMWHR) is a community-based drop-in centre for women, trans and non-binary persons of all ages. The centre offers a range of health supports ranging from traditional and holistic health services from general practitioners to massage therapists, and psychosocial supports such as yoga and knitting groups (BMWHR, 2022).

Artspace is a weekly program for persons aged 12-25 that runs during after-school hours (BMWHR, 2022). Materials for artmaking and craft are provided by the centre for participants to create a safe space alongside a youth work practitioner who facilitates the group and 'holds space' for reflection and recovery (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019). The program is run at the same time as the weekly health practitioner clinic hours. This programming enables young people to access health services in their own time, at their own pace, should they wish to do so. Importantly, free childcare (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019) is provided for young parents visiting Artspace to enable them to relax and focus on their own needs.

In 2016-17, researchers conducted a qualitative evaluation of Artspace that highlighted positive outcomes which were "particularly beneficial for those clients who had considerable exposure to social adversity and trauma and were experiencing related serious health impacts." (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019, p. 391). Positive outcomes identified in the study included improved access to health care which participants may have been otherwise unable to access via mainstream services, and social inclusion (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019).

Time, trust, and facilitator skill underpinned successful outcomes for participants. Several participants took months to build a sufficient sense of trust, safety and connection with staff and the centre before deciding to see a health practitioner (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019). During this time, attending Artspace enabled young people to practice therapeutic creativity which supported a shift in self-perception from "person struggling to survive adversity, to someone who can care for others and be a leader" (Brooks, Hooker & Barclay, 2019, p. 396). In this sense, Artspace functions as a safe and supportive space in itself for persons who may not be ready to engage with health care practitioners.

headspace & MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra)/SCARF Refugee Support

[headspace](#) is a nation-wide mental health service for young people aged 12-25 years old. There are over 150 headspace centres in Australia which offer low-cost or free of charge services (headspace, 2022).

[MCCI](#) is a large community organisation that supports persons from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds living in the Illawarra/Shoalhaven and ACT/Queanbeyan regions (MCCI, 2022).

[SCARF Refugee Support](#) is an organisational branch of MCCI that supports humanitarian refugee migrants in the Wollongong/Illawarra area (SCARF, n.d.). MCCI offers a range of services including "aged care, youth development programs, stakeholder engagement, community capacity building, volunteering and training services" (MCCI, 2022, para. 2).

In 2021, headspace Wollongong and MCCI/SCARF partnered on a joint project to create a worksheet resource called '7 Tips for a healthy headspace'. The project involved the recruitment of two teams of Arabic and Swahili-speaking young people who translated a low-literacy, basic English worksheet resource that had already been developed by the headspace Wollongong youth reference group (submission from headspace and MCCI/SCARF, July 27, 2022).

The goal of the worksheet resource was to address the access gap for information about mental health wellbeing and services among newly arrived migrants and/or persons with limited to no English skills (submission from headspace and MCCI/SCARF, July 27, 2022). Specifically, the resource sought to: "[e]ncourage early helpseeking [and] [e]ncourage the adoption of healthy behaviours to support healthy habits for healthy mental wellbeing" (submission from headspace and MCCI/SCARF, July 27, 2022, p. 1).

The creation and translation of the '7 tips' worksheet resource was a youth-led process, in line with the principles of co-design (submission from headspace and MCCI/SCARF, July 27, 2022, p. 2). Benefits of the project included the creation of a useful and accessible resource for young people from CALD backgrounds and their families, and the empowerment of the young people involved the project.

One young person commented "I feel so proud that I did it in Arabic, like, I translated something in Arabic" (Mane Collective, n.d., 3:08). The '7 Tips' project won the 'Outstanding Youth Participation' award in the NSW Youth Work Awards 2021, hosted by national peak Youth Action (Youth Action, n.d.).

To read more about work conducted by MCCI, see 'Services conducting youth work during COVID-19'.

Resources

- A video about the '7 tips' project, featuring interviews with members of the youth translation team can be viewed [here](#).

Project Youth

[Project Youth](#) is an organisation based in South Sydney that supports young people aged 12-24. Project Youth has three service streams: early intervention; education, employment and training, and housing and homelessness (Project Youth, 2022). The early intervention stream features programs to support social connection, creativity and wellbeing and more targeted programs to support mental and physical health. Psychological supports offered by Project Youth include family therapy and a Dialectical Behavioural Therapy group which runs 5-week-long course cycles for young people aged 12-15 (Project Youth, 2022). Project Youth also offers a physical fitness and mentoring program called 'Kick Start' for young men before school, which additionally provides breakfast and transport to school to facilitate attendance (Project Youth, 2022).

Project Youth have developed a robust trauma-informed framework for practice that informs work conducted across the three service streams. The Project Youth Practice Framework serves as the foundational document upon which the organisation's processes and procedures are based. The

Practice Framework features 7 key trauma-informed principles for practice (submission from Project Youth, 7 July, 2022, p. 2):

Safety	Collaboration	Culture
Trust	Empowerment	Peer Support
Voice and Choice		

The Project Youth Practice Framework Roadmap stresses that service engagement is voluntary at all times and that the cyclical model of casework used by Project Youth is “not a rigid and formal process; it is flexible and will always focus on trauma informed principles to promote healing and recovery” (submission from Project Youth, 7 July, 2022, p. 5).

Finally, the Project Youth Practice Standards function as an accountability measure for the trauma-informed practice principles to which Project Youth has committed. Project Youth understand that “the journey to becoming and sustaining a trauma informed organisation is long, complex, slow, dynamic, evolving and multilayered” (submission from Project Youth, 7 July, 2022, p. 3). Thus, the Practice Standards have been designed for staff use to self-audit their practice and to identify areas for improvement and development.

Save the Children

[Save the Children](#) is a national branch of multinational aid and development organisation, Save the Children International, which focuses on the provision of support to children and young people and promotion of their rights (Save the Children, n.d.). For its work in Australia, the organisation has recently been renamed [54 reasons](#), which is a reference to the 54 articles that comprise the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

54 reasons programming targets child protection, family support, family violence support and early intervention programming such as supported and/or multicultural play groups, youth work groups and activities and school-based programs. The organisation also runs a unique program called ‘Our Voice’ which strives to promote the participatory rights of children and youth to meaningful engagement with their communities in disaster-planning and response contexts (see link in ‘Resources’ below).

‘Journey of Hope’ is a psychosocial support program developed by 54 reasons that is delivered to children and young people during school hours. Journey of Hope (JoH) is a “globally evidenced post-disaster recovery program” (Alexander et al. 2021, p. 7) which was recently evaluated in NSW schools following the 2019-20 bushfires, COVID-19, and regional flooding events (Alexander et al., 2021).

JoH is an eight-week program delivered by 2 trained facilitators for one hour per week in groups of 8-10 students (Alexander et al., 2021). Different modules have been developed for different age groups to ensure content is age-appropriate, for toddlers through to 18-year-olds. There is also a module for parents and caregivers (Alexander et al., 2021). Though activities vary between age groups, modules generally involve “structured games, stories and creative play” (Alexander et al., 2021, p. 7).

Four key objectives inform the program: the normalisation of trauma, the development of positive self-regulation strategies, the promotion of protective, prosocial behaviours and the reduction of behaviours associated with risk (Alexander et al., 2021). JoH is underpinned by Cognitive-Behavioural Theory principles (Alexander et al., 2021).

Researchers from The University of Melbourne evaluated data from 21 NSW schools running the JoH program from late 2020 to early 2021 (Alexander et al., 2021). Research evidence indicated: “statistically significant improvements in students’ report of difficulties in their daily lives, in their attitudes to and relationships with others, and in their use of positive coping strategies, which were greater than natural improvements over time” (Alexander et al., 2021, p. 5). Evidence did not indicate a reduction in the use of negative coping strategies used by students, however this will be considered for future program planning and review (Alexander et al., 2021).

Resources

- A summary of the Journey of Hope evaluation can be found [here](#).
- Read more about how 54 Reasons promotes the rights of children and young people to participate in their communities through the [Our Voice](#) program.
- See this [link](#) for ‘54 reasons’ child-friendly interpretation of the articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment & Rehabilitation of Torture & Trauma Survivors)

[STARTTS](#) is a support organisation that provides services for asylum seekers, refugees and refugee-like backgrounds who have experienced torture and/or trauma (STARTTS, 2021). These services range from the provision of specialist mental health treatment for individuals and group-based programming, to training and professional development for practitioners and organisations. STARTTS also conducts research and advocacy work to inform sector-wide concepts of best practice and to inform policy makers (STARTTS, 2021).

Two key interrelated theories underpin STARTTS’ scope of works:

- the biopsychosocial systemic approach and the complex interaction model. The biopsychosocial systemic approach “recognises that clients from refugee backgrounds can experience trauma signs and symptoms on the biological, psychological and social levels” (Quintero & Naguran, 2021, p. 46).
- The complex interaction model first proposed in 1994 by Aroche & Coello (as cited in Quintero & Naguran, 2021) acknowledges the impact of a multitude of overlapping stressors experienced by refugees and asylum seekers settling into a new country. This cohort must contend with the anticipated stress of settling in a new country, often with a different language and culture, in addition to processing the trauma they have experienced and persistent concerns for family and community they may have left behind. In the context of young people, these significant stressors are further complicated by the “normal” challenges of emerging adulthood such as puberty and schooling.

Delivering programming through schools with high numbers of students with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds enables STARTTS to provide both targeted and universal early intervention supports. STARTTS in Schools comprises three service streams: the School Liaison Program (SLP), child and adolescent counselling and a team of youth work specialists (Quintero & Naguran, 2021). The SLP functions as a “coordination interface platform” (Quintero & Naguran, 2021, p. 34) between schools and children and young people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. The SLP can facilitate referrals into STARTTS programs and services, provide training and consultation support to teachers and administrative staff and assist with resource development, among other responsibilities (Quintero & Naguran, 2021).

The youth work specialist team uses “youth-centred, relationship-based, and collaborative approaches in its interventions and works with clients to build on their personal strengths such as leadership, self-esteem, self-awareness and identity in order to increase participation in the community” (Quintero & Naguran, 2021, p. 36). The team offer a range of programs for persons aged 10-24 years old including camps, after school programs and various sports and creative pursuits (Quintero & Naguran, 2021).

STARTTS ‘Project Bantu Capoeira Angola’ is one such program whose positive outcomes are supported by research (Momartin et al., 2018). In Capoeira, “[t]he movement gives young people a chance to connect with their own bodies and surroundings within a safe environment” Momartin et al., 2018, p. 155). “[R]espect for self and others, self-discipline and sense of responsibility” (Momartin et al. 2018, p. 157) are core values taught through Capoeira Angola.

Observations and reports of participants of the Capoeira program indicated “significant reductions in emotional and behavioural problems ... [an] increased number of new friendships ... [and] improved relationships with teachers” (Momartin et al. 2018, p. 158).

Resources

- The Capoeira study conducted by [Momartin et al. \(2018\)](#) is available for free.
- STARTTS offer a range of programs for children and young people including [regional school holiday breaks program](#), [youth camps](#), [Sporting Linx](#), [Capoeira](#) and the [South Sudanese Young Ambassadors Program](#).

Services delivering support relating to community, culture and connection

Humanity Matters

[Humanity Matters](#) is a community organisation based in Western Sydney that uses street-based engagement to connect with young people. Street-based engagement is an outreach approach (a form of detached youth work) which involves practitioners meeting with young people “on their turf and on their terms” (submission from Humanity Matters, July 10, 2022, p.). Humanity Matters seeks to engage young people who have become disengaged or disconnected from mainstream services and society. By developing relationships with young people based on trust, mutual respect and participation, Humanity

Matters supports young people to re-establish their relationships, community connections and engagement with employment, education, or training.

Humanity Matters uses a 2-stage model of engagement; street-based engagement (stage 1) followed by re-engagement (stage 2) (submission from Humanity Matters, July 10, 2022). Both stages are characterised by their occurrence in the community – the goal of street work is not to redirect young people off the streets and towards centre-based activities (Ellerton, 2020). Rather, it is to shift their engagement from a disaffected relationship with the local community, to a positive relationship, characterised by prosocial behaviours.

During stage 1, staff meet with youth in locations where they are known to gather (public places such as skate parks, shopping centres, etc) to develop a relationship and build rapport. Once trust and familiarity have been established, staff will work in partnership with the young person to formulate a case plan for re-engagement, guided by the needs and goals identified by the young person (Ellerton, 2020, p. 39). During this second stage of re-engagement, staff work to connect young people to the services they need, which tend to be related to housing or legal issues (Ellerton, 2020, p. 39). During this process of re-engagement, “[a] streetworker acts as the **conduit** between detached young people and their families, education, existing services and the community” [original emphasis] (submission from Humanity Matters, July 10, 2022).

Additional options for engagement and giving back to the community are also available to young people through Humanity Matters’ community-held street festivals, serviced by the organisation’s ‘Humanity United’ food truck.

Peter Slattery

[Peter Slattery](#) has been working in partnership with young people for 35 years and has amassed a wealth of readily accessible practical tools and resources. In addition to his publications, Peter also runs workshops and training days for organisations and staff working with youth (Slattery, 2022). The central theme of Peter’s work is authentic engagement and connection with young people through conversation and relationship-building: “engagement is about... relationship, relationship, relationship” (submission from Peter Slattery, August 5, 2017). Peter argues that the key to youth wellbeing (and human wellbeing broadly) is through “a sense of BELONGING and CONNECTION ... [a] strong sense of self and IDENTITY ... [and] GOOD SOLID RELATIONSHIPS” [original emphasis] (submission from Peter Slattery, August 5, 2017).

Peter has developed 12 adaptable conversational ‘frames’ for engaging well with young people. Peter explains that a frame provides “a structured way to have a meaningful and purposeful conversation in an unusual, fun, and at times, a challenging way, so together you can find out how a young person is and what is happening in their life” (2017, p. 4). Applying the frames is intentionally flexible; there is no set length of time for the conversation and importantly, the adult/youth worker approaches the conversation with an attitude of genuine curiosity rather than an agenda to work towards a preferred outcome. Open-ended questions suggested in each frame provide the opportunity for young people to practice reflection and self-awareness.

Resources

- Frames 12 Fabulous Ways of Talking with Young People is available for free as a digital download - <https://peterslattery.com/product/frames/>

SSI (Settlement Services International)

Settlement Services International ([SSI](#)) is a large community organisation and social business that operates in NSW, QLD, Victoria and internationally (SSI, n.d.). SSI work alongside Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to “empower people to change their lives” (SSI, n.d., para. 2). SSI also provides employment services and acts as an NDIA Local Area Coordinator for Sydney and South-West Sydney. SSI offers a range of programs and services for young people, ranging from domestic violence support, early intervention, multicultural foster care, and the Youth Collective.

The Youth Collective is an initiative which connects youth workers employed by 21 agencies within the [NSW Settlement Partnership](#) (NSP) (Swain & Dimond, 2020). The NSP is a consortium led by SSI whose membership comprises Migrant Resource Centres and various community organisations in NSW (Swain & Dimond, 2020). In 2020, SSI conducted an internal review of the Youth Collective, reviewing the years from inception in 2015 to 2018. The Youth Collective has 3 primary goals: to engage youth from migrant and refugee backgrounds in various aspects of service provision, to connect youth workers from different organisations and to conduct targeted advocacy (Swain & Dimond, 2020).

The Youth Collective engaged local youth from CALD backgrounds in two ways, via programming and youth representation on the steering committee. Between 2015 and 2018, four youth symposiums were held by the Collective, ‘20voices’, which centred on themes of accommodation, education and training and wellbeing (Swain & Dimond, 2020). 20voices symposiums provided a platform for young people to advocate, collaborate and act on issues of importance to their community. The education and employment symposium for instance, led to the development of a work experience program ‘Gateway to Your Future’ through which two young people were subsequently employed (Swain & Dimond, 2020).

The review also highlighted various challenges encountered by the youth representatives on the Youth Collective steering committee. These related to concerns about the accuracy of community representation, and the quality of the representatives’ involvement on the committee, which could have been enhanced by greater scheduling flexibility and the inclusion of professional development training. By conducting a detailed internal review of the Youth Collective and investigating areas for future improvement, SSI has highlighted their commitment to authentic and meaningful engagement with young people, which exemplifies good practice.

To read more about work being done by SSI, see their collaboration efforts with the NSW Multicultural Communication Service in ‘Services conducting youth work during COVID-19’

Soulgen

Good youth work practice is underpinned by good youth work research. [Soulgen](#) is a social-enterprise consulting service that specialises in fostering community connections and working with young people.

Participation through co-design and creativity characterises the Soulgen approach to working with individuals, organisations and communities (Soulgen, n.d.). Soulgen uses an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) methodology, which Soulgen founder Dimitrios Papalexis, explains focuses on “what is strong within a community and not what is wrong, ABCD is an approach that builds on the strengths and assets of young people and communities and uses those assets as the building blocks for sustainable community development” (2020, p. 6).

In 2020, Soulgen prepared a preliminary scoping report for [Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre](#) that gauged community interest in the development of a social enterprise for young people living in the local area (Papalexis, 2020). Soulgen employed a range of age-appropriate data collection techniques to ensure authentic participation and representation. During the school holidays, “Discovery Workshops” (Papalexis 2020, p. 8) were held for younger children at a local PCYC featuring dance, theatre, and magic. Young people in their mid-to-late teens were involved in the data collection by assisting with public outreach in key local activity hubs.

The report presented findings from a total of 6 organised community consultations and 60 surveys (Soulgen, n.d.). Papalexis reported 4 key themes that emerged from the consultations: “the environment and sustainability ... social connection and solidarity ... sport and creative activities [and] employment and volunteering” (2020, p. 3). From these themes and discussions, the idea of an environmentally focused social enterprise café emerged. A café would integrate elements of all four of the themes identified as a flexible, multipurpose space, which would successfully reflect the goals and the needs of the local community.

StreetWork

[StreetWork](#) is a North Sydney based organisation that provides early intervention support and prevention services to young people (StreetWork, n.d.). StreetWork provides tailored support to persons between the ages of 11-18 years old to address mental health and substance use concerns, school absenteeism, homelessness and criminal justice system involvement (StreetWork, n.d.). StreetWork’s scope of services comprise 3 key areas: outreach services, skill building programs and the Kickstart Mentoring Program. Outreach services range from ‘soft’ engagement opportunities such as after-school barbecues to the 24/7 availability of a volunteer police advocate to support young people who have been arrested (StreetWork, n.d.). Skill building programs offered by StreetWork include urban art programs, an anger management fitness class, sailing and weekly hip hop classes.

StreetWork’s Kickstart Mentoring Program is a 1:1 service that pairs a young person with a mentor who provides advice and support (submission from StreetWork, July 25, 2022). In each mentoring partnership, a contract and case plan are formed between the mentor and the mentee, to guide their work in partnership towards improved outcomes for the mentee (submission from StreetWork, July 25, 2022). Establishing a positive connection between a mentor and mentee is key to a successful mentoring partnership. Each partnership is created by “focusing on the needs of individuals ... [to] match young people with the most compatible professional youth case worker” (Huber Social, 2021, p. 7). In addition to the provision of casework and referrals to specialist support services, Mentors provide “positive role modelling of consistent behaviours, providing boundaries and through positive reinforcement with the aim of empowering young people to make good choices” (submission from StreetWork, July 25, 2022).

Resources

- Youth worker Tyson discusses the StreetWork Kickstart Mentoring program in this [video](#).
- CEO Helen Banu discusses StreetWork in this [video](#).

Weave Youth & Community Services

[Weave Youth & Community Services](#) is an organisation based in Sydney and Southeast Sydney that provides “a way up and a way forward for children, young people, women, families and communities facing complex social situations” (Weave, 2022, para. 1). Weave offers a range of supports that are community-led and trauma-informed, with programming that targets poverty, substance use, family violence and mental health (Weave, 2022). Types of support range from community development projects and early intervention supports such as social and creative activities to more intensive supports such as casework and counselling.

Although Weave is not an Aboriginal owned business, 66% of Weave service-users identify as Aboriginal (Weave, 2016, p. 3). As an organisation, Weave is deeply invested in empowering the local Aboriginal community which they have sought to achieve through the integration of community voice at all levels of service provision (Weave, 2016). Clients and members of the community are given opportunities to “become actively involved in Weave to shape the kinds of services that are delivered and how they delivered” (Weave, 2016, p. 10). This involvement takes several forms, ranging from leadership and volunteering positions to the hosting of community celebrations and meetings with Elders (Weave, 2016). By hosting or facilitating community events and celebrations, Weave provides an informal platform for gathering feedback and ideas from the community about any concerns or suggestions about service delivery.

Aunty Marcia Ella-Duncan OAM (Weave, 2017, 1:34) explains that “while we might be running a stall or running a little competition or face painting ... they’re capturing that information and bringing it back into the service and saying ‘hey, how can we do this?’”

Work conducted by Weave in partnership with service users is informed by a deep contextual knowledge of the local community, Aboriginal culture, and the effects of colonisation on culture. Staff are actively encouraged to spend time in the community to gain this knowledge and to build trust and rapport (Weave, 2016).

Previous Weave CEO Shane Brown explains that (Weave, 2017, 3:00): “[f]or organisations that are delivering services in communities they’re not part of you need to get out into the community, and you need to meet the gatekeepers ... When you’re embedded in the community and when you’re trusted, you can be available when crises happen.”

Resources

Weave has a large range of videos providing insights into their service, including the following:

- Connecting With Community: A Weave Case Study for the NSW Mental Health Commission: [link](#)

- Providing trauma-informed care: A case study of Weave Youth and Community Services: [link](#)
- Stories of Lived Experience: [link](#)
- Empowering Young People: A Weave Case Study for the NSW Mental Health Commission: [link](#)

Services delivering education, employment and training support

CREATE Foundation

[CREATE Foundation](#) is the national consumer body for children and young people with a lived experience of out-of-home care (CREATE Foundation, n.d.). A major component of the Foundation's work is to support young 'care-leavers' aged 15-25 in their transition from care to independence. To this end, CREATE has developed CREATE Your Future (CYF), a suite of workshop modules designed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive. The CYF program is a much-needed resource for young people whose learning capacity can be compromised because of trauma and placement instability (CREATE Foundation, 2020). "CREATE Your Future fills in the life lesson gaps that [care-leavers] may have missed" (CREATE Foundation, 2020, p. 12).

The CYF comprises 8 workshop modules that each cover an important area of independent living: health and wellbeing; finances; relationships; civic participation; personal identity; housing; education and employment; and accessing support services (CREATE Foundation, n.d.). The modules are inclusive in design and use an experiential approach to learning to prompt young people to "explore their own knowledge, beliefs and experiences." (CREATE Foundation, n.d., p. 1).

In the employment and education module "Learn to Earn" (CREATE Foundation, n.d., p. 1), young people are supported in the decision-making process about their chosen education or employment pathways. For those pursuing further education and training, CYF offers information and resources for selecting a course and financial support options (CREATE Foundation, 2022). For young people pursuing employment options, the module includes resume-writing support (CREATE Foundation, n.d.). The CYF program also features a detailed website and offers an annual grant scheme (see 'Resources' below).

Resources

- CREATE has compiled a series of case studies for the CYF program: [Transition to Independence, Their Story.](#)
- The CYF program has a dedicated [website](#), featuring a range of information and resources for young care-leavers.
- Further information on the CREATE your Future Grants can be found [here](#).

Fairhaven

[Fairhaven](#) is a disability support provider and social enterprise based on the Central Coast. Fairhaven is the "largest provider of supported employment for people living with disability on the NSW Central Coast" (Fairhaven, 2022, para. 1) with two key sites: Fairhaven CoPack and the Fairhaven Op Shopping Village and Café (Fairhaven, 2022). Both facilities offer a range of employment opportunities for persons whose NDIS support package includes employment funding. Fairhaven services include NDIS support coordination, social support, various levels of home support and support for school leavers.

Recently, Fairhaven secured a Youth Opportunities Program grant which they used to run a work experience program for students from any school on the Central Coast (participants did not need to have a NDIS package) at no cost to participants (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022). The program was designed to deliver “a work experience opportunity for young people which provides a safe and supportive environment to get a taste of what work life might be like” (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022). The program began during a COVID-19 lockdown via online video conferencing between participants, which led to the idea and planning of the Fairhaven Planter Project (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022).

Once project participants met after lockdown, the group experimented with a range of box prototypes and prepared the workshop area for activity (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022). Over the course of four months, the team engaged in a range of activities required to create and sell a product. The activities included construction, sourcing of materials, and speaking with the retail manager of the Fair Haven Op Shop to discuss selling the planters upon completion (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022).

The Fairhaven Planter Project enabled participants to “have input into decision making, balanced with an understanding of some of the basic requirements of being a valued member of the workforce” (submission from Fairhaven, July 20, 2022).

Resources

- More information about Fairhaven’s School Leavers Employment Support program can be found on the Fairhaven School Leaver Employment Support [page](#) and on [Youtube](#).

Southern Youth and Family Services

[Southern Youth and Family Services](#) (SYFS) is a community organisation based in the Illawarra region of NSW. The primary service focus of SYFS is the provision of housing support to young people and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness (see exclusion criteria above in ‘Background’). However, SYFS recognises that housing alone is just one element of wellbeing. For this reason, SYFS offers a holistic, wraparound service for young people featuring a range of different programs that are delivered seamlessly to the young people they support (Keevers, 2015).

Research on SYFS conducted by Keevers (2015) illustrates the effectiveness of this holistic approach. Despite SYFS primary service offering being accommodation, when residents and service-users were asked about which elements of their experience with SYFS had the most lasting impact on their lives, “access to stable housing” (Keevers, 2015, p. 4) was not the most frequent response. The following responses ranked from first to third occurred more frequently than ‘access to stable housing’ which ranked fourth in number of mentions (Keevers, 2015, p. 4):

1. “The relationship with and the care practices of SYFS staff”
2. “Practices that assist young people learn to look after themselves, to become independent and live the life that matters to them”

3. “Experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness”

Education, employment, and training (EET) services are central both to the development of independent living skills in young people *and* in fostering belonging and connectedness through making friends and connections at their place of work or learning. SYFS offer a number of EET programs including NETWORK which is functionally similar to a job provider service but is tailored to support young people in a strengths-based and client-led way. SYFS is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) approved to deliver Certificates II and III in Hospitality. The [MET Café](#) is SYFS’ social enterprise café with a full catering kitchen that serves as the base of operations for the Hospitality Certificate courses.

Resources

- To learn more about the good practice happening at SYFS, check out their [About Us](#) video.

Services conducting youth work during COVID-19

NSW Multicultural Communication Service & SSI (Settlement Services International)

[NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service](#) is a state-based service whose primary role is the provision of translated health materials to non-English speaking communities. The MHCS also provides consulting services to organisations to advise on the development and distribution of multilingual health information (MHCS, n.d.). Settlement Services International ([SSI](#)) is a large community organisation and social business that operates in NSW, QLD, Victoria and internationally (SSI, n.d.). SSI work alongside Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to “empower people to change their lives” (SSI, n.d., para. 2).

In late 2021, SSI partnered with MHCS to create a youth-led video as part of a Multicultural Community Wellbeing Campaign (SSI, 2021). The purpose of the video was to promote support-seeking behaviours to address mental health concerns (SSI, 2021). The testimonial-style video features 5 young people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds speaking in English, Nepali and Hazaragi with English subtitles (SSI, 2021). The young people in the video; Hala, Shaimaa, Subash, Achol, and Shahida, spoke about the everyday strategies they employed to support their mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic lockdowns (SSI, 2021).

The strategies proposed by the young people in the video included going for a walk outdoors with friend, writing poetry, healthy eating, keeping a routine and using technology to stay connected with friends and family (NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service, 2021). Importantly, the video was created and produced by the young people themselves. The group attended workshops about how to film and edit video using a mobile phone and several participants attended and spoke at the online launch event (SSI, 2021).

For information about more good practice from SSI, see ‘Services delivering support relating to community, culture and connection’.

Resources

- [Youth Well-being video](#)
- [Blog entry](#) from SSI about the process of creating the video

NSW Multicultural Health Service (ISLHD) & MCCI (Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra)

The [NSW Multicultural Health Service](#) (MHC) is a service within the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) whose core function is to ensure that CALD communities have equitable access to public health messaging, servicing, and care (ISLHD, 2019). MHC often work in collaboration with community partners such as MCCI. [MCCI](#) is an organisation that supports CALD communities in the Illawarra/Shoalhaven and ACT/Queanbeyan regions (MCCI, 2022).

Together, MHC and MCCI developed and implemented ‘Be a COVID Warrior’, a project which resulted in the delivery of approximately 40 “interactive and practical workshops” to 880 persons of CALD backgrounds in the Illawarra area (submission from MHC and MCCI, July 27, 2022). Workshops were conducted using a “strength based framework and a whole of community approach recognizing the roles CALD youth and seniors play within their families and their extended communities” (submission from MHC and MCCI, July 27, 2022). In addition to the workshops, the project trained 190 youth ‘COVID Warriors’ to spread best practice advice about managing transmission risk throughout their communities (submission from MHC and MCCI, July 27, 2022). Key objectives of the ‘Be a COVID Warrior’ project included increasing health literacy about COVID-19 hygiene, testing and vaccines, mythbusting and the provision of timely, accessible information to communities unable to access English-language resources (submission from MHC and MCCI, July 27, 2022).

Outcomes of the ‘Be a COVID Warrior’ project included an increase in health literacy among Illawarra CALD communities, increased access to testing and the “[e]mpowerment of CALD communities with accurate information, knowledge and skills to make safe decisions” (submission from MHC and MCCI, July 27, 2022).

Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion

The Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion team comprises a group of 12 young people aged 15-24 who are hired on a casual basis by the Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) as a part of the Youth Health Consultant Initiative (submission from the Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion team, July 15, 2022). The team play an active role in developing and evaluating various youth health initiatives in identified youth health priority areas including “tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, nutrition, physical activity, healthy relationships, as well as emotional, social and mental wellbeing.” A recent example of targeted public health messaging developed by the team, for a teen audience, is the [‘Rethink Energy Drinks’](#) infographic.

The Youth Health Promotion team also assist with the provision of advice as representatives of the local youth demographic in Northern Sydney: “[y]oung people are experts in their own lives, so it is vital they are meaningfully involved in the design and delivery of health care that affects them” (submission from the Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion team, July 15, 2022).

During Youth Week 2020, the Youth Health Promotion team did a “Twitter Takeover” of the official NSHLD Twitter handle (NSLHD, n.d.) and disseminated multiple resources, including a timely infographic titled Practical Tips to Deal with Self Isolation (linked below in ‘Resources’). The resource included the following 8 tips (Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion, n.d.):

Stay connected

Stimulate your brain

Embrace alternatives

Be active

Maintain routine

Get cooking

Be open (to receiving mental health support)

Things to avoid (alcohol, drug and excessive screen time)

Resources

- [Practical Tips to Deal with Self Isolation](#) – infographic by the Northern Sydney Youth Health Promotion Team.

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