Updating Young People’s Status: What young South Australians say about their Facebook use

YACSA Research Project 2013
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2. Updating Young People’s Status: What young South Australians say about their Facebook use.

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References


The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) is the peak body representing young people and the youth sector in South Australia.

YACSA is an independent, member-based organisation that works towards supporting meaningful improvements in the quality of young people’s lives.

YACSA creates policy, contributes policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community, and provides information, support and training and development activities for the youth sector and young people.
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Social network sites, such as Facebook, are used by many young Australians in their daily lives to communicate. Despite widespread media, political, and general debate about young people’s use of Facebook, young people’s own views about Facebook have not been paid enough attention.

The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) conducted research with 13-24 year old South Australians to find out about their use of and opinions towards Facebook. This report is based on the findings of an online survey with 158 respondents, and four focus groups with a total of 25 young people. The key findings from YACSA's research were:

• The majority of survey respondents had been using Facebook for more than 3 years, had joined Facebook to communicate with current friends, and had their profiles set to ‘private’. Nearly half of the survey respondents used Facebook for less than 10 minutes at a time. All except five respondents checked Facebook at least once a day or received notifications when something happened. Respondents accessed Facebook most often by their mobile phones.

• Things survey respondents liked most about Facebook were communicating with friends from outside of Facebook, organising to catch up with friends, and knowing what other people are doing.

• Things survey respondents disliked most about Facebook were advertisements, being invited to play games, and other people complaining.

• Nearly half of the survey respondents had felt stressed using Facebook, for many different reasons. Focus group participants suggested strategies for relieving stress relating to Facebook such as logging off, talking to a friend, blocking stressful people, and/or deactivating the account.

• Approximately 40% of the survey respondents had used Facebook to decrease their stress, often viewing it as a welcome distraction, particularly from study or work, or as a way of talking to friends or other people.

• Over half of survey respondents viewed Facebook as having a direct impact on their ‘offline’ lives. Respondents offered complex and contextually specific responses relating to how they and others acted on Facebook compared to ‘offline’.

• Over two thirds of the survey respondents were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities. When asked what they would do if their parents/guardians/caregivers were worried about their Facebook use, over 40% of survey respondents said they would reassure them, often by mentioning privacy settings, safety measures, and/or emphasising being a responsible user.

• Several young people disagreed with the negative opinions in the media about young people’s Facebook use, but many also suggested that there was some truth to these views.

Based on the findings discussed in this report, YACSA recommends:

• Use YACSA's research to start conversations amongst young people, youth sector workers, government workers, parents/guardians/caregivers, and other relevant parties.

• Support young people using Facebook and other social network sites.

• Provide training for youth sector workers, government workers, and other relevant parties.

• Conduct further research with young people about social network sites.

• Maintain ongoing dialogue with young people as technology continues to change.
Young people’s use of social network sites, particularly Facebook, has received significant attention in the media, within the political sphere, and in everyday debates. These views are often negative and inflammatory, well demonstrated by newspaper headlines such as ‘Facebook cyber bullies swarm schools’ (Starke 2012), ‘Student hate pages rife on Facebook’ (Starke and Marszalek 2012), ‘Schools battling Facebook’ (Haynes 2012), and ‘Facebook fear for girls’ (Swallow 2013). In ‘Cyber-safety: Keeping Children Safe in a Connected World. Guidelines for Schools and Preschools’, the Department of Education and Child Development recommends that educators ‘teach children and students (in an age appropriate way) how to identify and avoid inappropriate materials’ including pornography, hate groups, violence or illicit drugs, illegal activity, extremist groups and cults, social networking, online advertising, and online gambling (Department of Education and Children’s Services 2009, 15). Despite these fears surrounding young people’s social network site use—and allusions to (cyber) bullying, privacy issues, and time-wasting—there has been little research that asks young Australians about their use and attitudes toward Facebook.

Social network sites are usefully defined by boyd and Ellison as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (2007, 211)

While there are differences between the sites (Facebook, MySpace, and so on), it is these key functions that make them social network sites. It is important to clarify that the wording ‘social network sites’ is preferred to ‘social networking sites’, because these sites serve the unique and basic purpose of enabling communication between friends (existing network) rather than allowing for meeting new people or for contact between strangers (networking) (boyd and Ellison 2007, 211).

The recent and rapid rise of social network sites has been well-documented. A survey of more than 2,000 8-18 year olds in the US in 2009 found that using social network sites was the most popular computer activity, something that was not even included in their previous survey in 2004 (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010, 30). The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project has also gathered large amounts of data about internet use in the US, including that focusing on young people (particularly teenagers), and social network sites. One of their studies argues that:

Social media use has become so pervasive in the lives of American teens that having a presence on a social network site is almost synonymous with being online. Fully 95% of all teens ages 12-17 are now online and 80% of those online teens are users of social media sites. (emphasis added, Lenhart, et al. 2011, 2)

Currently, Facebook is the most popular social network site. A study by Madden et al. in the US found that 94% of the 802 teen social media users in their study had a Facebook profile, with 81% using it more than their other social media profiles (2013, 23). This was compared to 26% with profiles on Twitter (7% used this profile the most often), 11% on Instagram (3% used this the most often), and 7% on MySpace (none used this the most often) (Madden, et al. 2013, 23-24). Other studies have suggested that young people who do not have their own social network site profiles are also likely to visit these sites (Espinoza and Juvenon 2011, 708, passim; Madden, et al. 2013, 36). While it is important not to overemphasise the influence of social network sites in the lives of young people, it is clear that many are using them as part of their daily lives.

Despite the abundance of information from the US, there is little Australian data available about young people’s social network site usage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has yet to collect comprehensive data on social network site use. Some data is available on home internet activities, which shows that in 2010-2011 88% of 15-17 year olds and 86% of 18-24 year olds participated in social networking and/or online gaming (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, Table 5). However, the ABS conflates social networking and online gaming together and the data is limited to home internet use. ABS data focusing on younger Australians from 2008-2009 found that social network sites were visited or used by a total of 22% of 5-14 year olds (3% of 5-8 year olds, 11% of 9-11 year olds, and 48% of 12-14 year olds) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, Table 3).

Data from the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in 2012 found that, amongst the 1,511 participants, social networking sites were used in the four weeks prior to the study by 23% of 8-9 year olds, 45% of 10-11 year olds, 69% of 12-13 year olds, 86% of 14-15 year olds, and 92% of 16-17 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013, 7). These numbers increased when participants were asked if they had ever used social networking sites to 78% of 8-9 year olds, 92% of 10-11 year olds, 88% of 12-13 year olds, 97% of 14-15 year olds and 99% of 16-17 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013, 37). These sites were accessed more often via computers than mobile devices (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013, 8). YouTube was the most popular site for 8-11 year olds and Facebook was the most frequented site for 12-17 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013, 8).

Additional Australian data is available from smaller-scale studies. A study with 1004 Year 7-10 high school students in Victoria. YouTube was the most popular site for 8-11 year olds and Facebook was the most frequented site for 12-17 year olds (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013, 8). A study with 1004 Year 7-10 high school students in Victoria found that 94.7% of students used at least one social network site, with 93.4% of students using Facebook (de Zwart...
Lindsay, Henderson and Phillips 2011b, 1-2). Sensis and the Australian Interactive Media Industry Association (AIMIA) telephone surveyed 932 randomly selected people across Australia in March-April 2013 about their social network use. This included 76 14-19 year olds and 92 20-29 year olds (Sensis and Australian Interactive Media Industry Association 2013, 6). Of those who accessed social media, Facebook was used by 94% of 14-19 year olds and 99% of 20-29 year olds, more than twice as many as other social network sites (Sensis and Australian Interactive Media Industry Association 2013, 15). On average, 14-19 year olds accessed Facebook on 28 occasions per week, and 20-29 year olds accessed it 33 times (Sensis and Australian Interactive Media Industry Association 2013, 18). While these statistics provide a useful starting point, they should be used with caution as they are not representative of the Australian population. Furthermore, a consistent definition of a ‘social network site’ has not been used, and varying statistics were found in different studies.

**Research Objectives**

YACSA’s rationale for undertaking this research project was find out about young South Australian’s use of and attitudes towards Facebook. Such a study is particularly pertinent considering the negative attention given to young people’s use of social network sites which is often debated without the involvement of young people. While YACSA’s study is small and exploratory, we anticipate it will help reduce some of the myths and uncertainties around young people’s Facebook use, which have been exacerbated by the lack of research and consultations with young people in Australia which openly asks for their opinions.

Considering that Facebook is currently the most used social network site, it was an obvious choice for the focus of YACSA’s research and allowed us to narrow the scope of our study to one social network site. Thus, we are using Facebook as a case study because of its current popularity. YACSA is, however, interested in how young people use, negotiate, and understand social network sites rather than the specific functions of Facebook itself.

The next section situates YACSA’s research in context by providing an overview of existing research with young people about social network sites, with a focus on the Australian context. The following section outlines the methods and participants from YACSA’s research. The report is then divided into the key themes of the research: Facebook usage by the participants, the things liked about Facebook, the things disliked about Facebook, Facebook as a cause and reliever of stress, connections between Facebook and ‘offline’ life, parent/guardian/caregiver knowledge of and concerns about Facebook use, and responses to negative views about young people and Facebook. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations arising from the research.

Note: In this report we use the term ‘young people’ to refer to the age of the participants in the research—13-24 years old.¹

¹ YACSA’s young membership is open to young people who have turned 12 years old but who are not yet 25 years old (Youth Affairs Council of South Australia 2008, 2). It was deemed necessary to exclude 12 year olds because Facebook’s official policy states that 13 is the minimum user age (Facebook 2013).
Existing Research with Young People about Social Network Sites

Despite the relatively recent rise of social network sites, there is a plethora of existing research about young people’s use of them. However, YACSA was unsatisfied with the current literature which remains US-focused, largely quantitative, and often with little room for young people’s views, even when they have been involved as participants. This section sets YACSA’s research project in the context of the literature by providing an overview of previous research with young people about social network sites. Considering YACSA’s interest in Facebook as an exemplar of a social network site, this section includes previous research about social network sites in general and other social network sites (such as MySpace) to provide a broad contextual background. A brief overview is provided of the social network sites examined, locations, methods, disciplinary fields, and age groups followed by the key topics, with specific attention to research conducted in Australia.

Many previous studies discuss social network sites generally, or focus on Facebook and/or MySpace. Few studies have examined other forms of social network sites (such as Bebo).

Significantly, more than half of the existing studies conducted with young people about social network sites are from the US. Thus, many of the findings in the literature may be specific to a US context. There are relatively few studies conducted in Australia, with a dearth of research currently identified as being from a South Australian context (McCarthy 2009; 2010; Vivian 2011; Vivian and Barnes 2010; Wood, Barnes, Vivian, Scutter and Stokes-Thompson 2010).

The most common method for asking young people about social network sites is surveys (often online but sometimes on paper). Focus groups and interviews with young people have also been conducted. A range of other methods has been employed such as setting up Facebook pages for education purposes and diary-like measures. Some studies use more than one approach to gather data by combining methods such as surveys and focus groups or surveys and interviews.

Many of the existing studies come from psychology or computer/technology fields. These fields tend to be quantitative and often focus on statistical analysis rather than open-ended questions where young people’s voices are included.

Studies commonly involve young people in their mid to late teens (upper high school) and/or in their late teens to early 20s (often at undergraduate university level). Research tends to focus on either teens [sometimes also including younger people from age 8] or older youth at an undergraduate level. There is little research spanning the age spectrum. In addition, a significant amount of the research is with (US) undergraduate students, which means that young people who do not attend university are often absent from the research.

Topics and Findings from Previous Research

Previous research about young people’s use of social network sites has tended to focus on two key broad topics. A great deal of research has focused on online safety, (cyber)bullying, sharing personal information, privacy, and/or risk. Much research has also considered friendship, social capital, and connections, communication, and communities. Two significant studies have covered additional topics specifically in Australian research.

Many studies focus on what are often viewed as interconnecting issues relating to online safety, (cyber)bullying, sharing personal information, privacy, and/or risk, for example, Australian Communications and Media Authority 2009a; 2009b; 2013; Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspoll 2013; boyd and Hargittai 2010; boyd and Marwick 2011; Brennan...
Existing Research with Young People about Social Network Sites

2006; Christofides, Muiše and Desmarais 2012; De Souza and Dick 2008; 2009; de Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson and Phillips 2011a; de Zwart, et al. 2011b; Henderson, de Zwart, Lindsay and Phillips 2011; Kwan and Skoric 2013; Lenhart and Madden 2007; Lenhart, et al. 2011; Lindsay, de Zwart, Henderson and Phillips 2011; Marwick and Boyd 2011; Madden, et al. 2013; O’Dea and Campbell 2012; Robards 2010; Rosen, Cheever and Carrier 2008; Third, Richardson, Collin, Rahilly and Bolzan 2011; Tufekci 2008; Ybarra and Mitchell 2008; Young 2009. What many of the studies argue is that these issues are usually less of a concern than has often made out to be in public discourse. However, several of these studies do suggest that there are still some potential risks associated with social network site use.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority’s (ACMA) Like, post, share quantitative and qualitative research reports involved Australians 8-17 years old and their parents, asking questions about the internet with a focus on social media. These reports include discussions about usage, risk, (cyber) bullying, (cyber) safety, privacy, and parental concern. ACMA found that young people were aware of potential risks with social networking sites, but they were often not using this knowledge in practice (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2013, 3). One of their findings indicates that (cyber) bullying was most prevalent for 14-15 year olds, but that (cyber) bullying was usually not reported (Australian Communications and Media Authority and Newspil 2013, 110). This research follows on from ACMA’s Click and Connect reports (Australian Communications and Media Authority 2009a; 2009b).

Lindsay, de Zwart, Henderson and Phillips (2011) consider (legal) risk, privacy, and bullying in relation to social network sites generally (see also de Zwart, et al. 2011a; 2011b; Henderson, et al. 2011). This research pays attention to legal aspects of risk as well as conducting empirical research using surveys and focus groups with students from Victorian high schools and surveys with teachers and parents. They found that the young people in their study had very little awareness of the potential legal implications and risks relating to their online activities.

De Souza and Nick (2009) examine information disclosure and understanding of privacy about MySpace amongst Sydney high school students age 12-18 (see also De Souza and Dick 2008). They found that students who valued privacy in their ‘offline’ lives were more likely to value it online and were less likely to reveal sensitive information, that younger students were more likely to disclose information, that there was a gap between what parents thought was safe and appropriate and what their children were doing, and that people who disclosed sensitive information on social network sites shared certain characteristics.

Robards (2010) looks at privacy and friendship on MySpace and Facebook, drawing on research with undergraduate students on the Gold Coast. He argues that ‘friending’ practices on social network sites are diverse, and there cannot be a single model of online privacy. His findings also support the argument that social network sites are used for existing relationships rather than to meet new people.

Another project examined the intergenerational attitudes of social networking and (cyber) safety, which included a ‘living lab’ where four young people age 17-21 showed parents age 42-53 the processes of social networking (Third, et al. 2011). This research found that by using this method adults gained an increased understanding of social networking and would therefore be able to assist their children with their use of it.

O’Dea and Campbell (2012) conducted a study with 400 young people (mean age 14.31 years), looking at (cyber) bullying and contact with strangers. They found that those who used social network sites had a much higher frequency of contact with strangers than those who did not use the sites.

The second topic covered in depth in previous research is the connected themes of friendship (Larsen 2007; Manago, Taylor and Greenfield 2012; Reich, Subrahmanyan and Espinosa 2012; Subrahmanyan, Reich, Waechter and Espinosa 2008; Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten 2006; West, Lewis and Currie 2009), social capital (Ahn 2012a; 2012b; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007; Peil, Arjan and Zaphiris 2009; Steinfield, Ellison and Lampe 2008; Valenzuela, Park and Lee 2009), and connections, communication, and communities (Arnold and Paulus 2010; Boyd 2007; Greenhow and Robell 2009; McCarthy 2009; 2010; Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley 2009; Notley 2009; Reich 2010; Van Cleeemput 2010).

The Australian studies provide examples of what this kind of research looks like. McCarthy examines the benefits of using Facebook to immerse first year students in Adelaide into university culture, drawing on a pilot study (2009) and a follow-up study (2010). Both studies used Facebook for a university course and asked students to complete a pre-semester and post-semester survey. He found that Facebook was useful to enable students to interact with their peers and feel like they belonged to a learning community (McCarthy 2009). Using Facebook in this way also allowed for connections between local and international students (McCarthy 2010).

Notley (2009) conducted research with nine 15-18 year olds in Queensland considered to be ‘at risk’, focusing on how they participated in society via online networks (including social network sites). She found that the participants used online networks to participate in society and valued the social benefits they derived from this.

Other Australian research has focused on a range of different topics. This includes several studies about social network sites and...
Existing Research with Young People about Social Network Sites

This section has outlined the previous research conducted with young people about their engagement with social network sites, focusing on research in Australia. The existing studies provide a useful background for YACSA’s research but also highlight there are still many gaps in research with young people about Facebook. YACSA’s research aims to contribute to addressing these gaps by giving space to the opinions of young South Australians aged 13-24 with a focus on their Facebook use and views about the site.
YACSA’s Facebook research project involved young South Australians age 13-24. This report is based on the findings from an online survey with 158 young people and four focus groups with a total of 25 young participants. Prior to releasing the survey and conducting the focus groups, some young people were consulted about the questions used in the research.

Pilot Focus Group and Consultations
YACSA conducted a pilot focus group, with particular attention to feedback about the focus group questions. The pilot focus group involved seven 15-18 year olds (three female, four male) from a FLO (Flexible Learning Options) program in a Western suburb of Adelaide. This pilot was set up using YACSA’s contacts. During this session, YACSA conducted a pilot focus group using the questions designed for the research and, upon completion of this, asked for feedback on each of the questions. All participants were given gift vouchers for their involvement. In addition to the pilot focus group, two young part-time staff members and one placement student at YACSA were consulted about the questions for both the survey and the focus groups. As a result of the pilot focus group and consultations, some survey and focus group questions were re-worded or changed, and additional options were added to multiple-choice questions for the surveys.

Online Survey
YACSA developed an online survey made up of 26 questions, with a combination of single-choice, multiple-choice, ranked, and open-ended questions. The survey asked for background demographic information (e.g. age, sex, study/work status), Facebook background and usage information (e.g. motivations for joining Facebook, number of ‘friends’, privacy settings, usage information), and responses to particular issues about likes and dislikes, the relation between Facebook and ‘offline’ life, whether Facebook increases or decreases stress, parents/guardians/caregivers and their knowledge of respondents’ Facebook use, and negative media reports about young people and Facebook.3 The only compulsory question was age. The survey was administered using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. See Supporting Documentation for a copy of the survey.

Respondents were informed on the first page of the survey that their completion of the survey indicated their consent to participate in the research. Respondents aged under 18 were asked to discuss their involvement with a parent/guardian/caregiver. Survey respondents were not asked for their name or contact details and IP addresses were not collected.

The survey was distributed and promoted via a number of avenues: YACSA’s Facebook page, YACSA’s website, YACSA’s Twitter account, email distribution to YACSA young members, email distribution to YACSA’s members (e.g. youth organisations in South Australia), and on YACSA staff’s personal Facebook pages (which was, in turn, distributed further by Facebook ‘friends’ of YACSA staff members). A reminder about the survey was sent out via the same networks the day before the survey closed. The survey was open for three weeks during March-April 2013.

3. Some survey questions asked respondents to choose three options. Unfortunately the online survey tool could not be limited to three options so occasionally some participants selected more than three or less than three options. This limitation mirrors that of a paper and pen survey.
Methods and Participants

The open-ended survey responses were analysed by first being sorted into general responses where possible (e.g. yes, no, mixed, unsure, not able to be coded). Themes were then generated relating to the particular content of each response. Responses were then sorted into each theme. When responses related to more than one theme they were coded more than once. The relatively small number of participants allowed for the inclusion of several open-ended questions in the survey, which were then analysed and coded in detail according to theme.¹

A total of 158 young South Australians took part in the survey. The respondents were spread across the 13-24 age spectrum, with the highest amount of responses from those ages 22 and 24 (see Figure 1).

01

Age of survey respondents

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02

Sex of survey respondents

69.6% (110) of respondents were female, 28.5% (45) were male, and 1.9% (3) did not answer this question²

4. Typed survey responses have been left as entered by respondents so may contain spelling or other errors. If responses were unclear they have been explained in square brackets.

5. While more females participated in the survey than males the balance was almost even for the focus groups.
The survey respondents were involved in a range of study and work situations. 32.3% attended university (27.2% of all respondents attended full-time, 5.1% part-time), 31.0% attended secondary school (27.8% full-time, 3.2% part-time), 8.2% attended TAFE (4.4% full-time, 3.8% part-time), and 3.2% were in another form of study (deferred or yet to commence university, full-time university and part-time TAFE, HYPA—Helping Young People Achieve, or trainee). A quarter of respondents (25.3%) were not studying. (See Figure 3.)

44.3% (70) of respondents were in part-time (or casual) work, 18.4% (29) were in full-time work, and 2.0% (3) were in other work situations (volunteer). 35.4% (56) did not work. (See Figure 4.)
Methods and Participants

Focus Groups

YACSA conducted four focus groups across South Australia involving a total of 25 young people in April–May 2013. The purpose of the focus groups was to expand on the findings from the surveys—to further discuss findings that were unclear or unanticipated, particularly in the open-ended questions. In addition, we viewed the focus groups as enabling discussions and debate about similarities and differences in Facebook use and opinions that were not possible within the surveys.

We contacted organisers of established Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) to ask if we could conduct focus groups as part of meetings with interested young people. Three of the focus groups were organised this way. An additional focus group was set up when a youth sector worker contacted us asking if he could get some of the young people he worked with involved in the research. We had originally advertised the focus groups via the survey, inviting anyone interested in participating to contact YACSA via email or phone. We did not receive any responses and decided that drawing on existing networks was a more efficient way to recruit participants.

All participants were asked to sign a consent form, with those under 18 also requiring the consent of a parent/guardian/caregiver. At the start of each focus group, participants were given a brief background about YACSA and the purpose of the research was explained. The participants were asked a series of questions, some similar to the surveys, and others expanding on the survey data, including some discussion of the survey findings. See Supporting Documentation for focus group question schedule. The focus groups were co-facilitated by the researcher and YACSA’s Executive Director (aside from the Eyre and Western focus group which was run solely by the Executive Director).

A total of 25 young people (13 females, 12 males) took part in the four focus groups. Each focus group had 4-8 participants. These groups were made up of people of mixed ages from 13-23 (see Figure 5). The focus groups were conducted in different locations across South Australia, with their general geographic location as follows: Eastern Adelaide, Western Adelaide, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, and Eyre and Western. Each focus group took 40-60 minutes. All participants were given gift vouchers for their involvement.

Age of focus group participants

The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data from the focus groups was used to complement and extend the findings from the surveys, and thus was grouped into relevant themes relating to the analysis of the survey data.

6. The geographic areas of South Australia have been determined by the 12 regions set by the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (2011).
ACSA sought information about the participants’ Facebook background and usage to both provide data about Facebook use in South Australia and to establish a context for their responses. The information detailed here relates to joining Facebook, Facebook ‘friends’, Facebook profiles, privacy settings, and usage. Most of the data is drawn from the survey responses, but some issues were explored further in the focus groups in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the survey findings.

### Joining Facebook

The majority of survey respondents had a profile on Facebook for more than 3 years (78.0%, 117 respondents). Others had their profile for 2-3 years (17.3%, 26), 1-2 years (3.3%, 5), or 6 months-1 year (1.3%, 2). No respondents had a Facebook profile for less than 6 months. (See Figure 6.)

![Graph showing Facebook profile duration](#)

- **6 months to 1 year**: 1.3%
- **1 year to 2 years**: 3.3%
- **2 years to 3 years**: 17.3%
- **More than 3 years**: 78%
- **Less than 6 months**: 0%

The main reason the majority of respondents joined Facebook was ‘to communicate with current friends’ (73.5%, 111). Less common reasons were ‘to reconnect with old friends’ (6.0%, 9), ‘to communicate with family’ (5.3%, 8), ‘to make new friends’ (2.6%, 4), or other reasons (12.6%, 19) (see Figure 7).

![Graph showing reasons for joining Facebook](#)

- **To communicate with current friends**: 73.5%
- **To make new friends**: 2.6%
- **To reconnect with old friends**: 6.0%
- **To communicate with family**: 5.3%
- **Other**: 12.6%

Focus group participants were asked their age when they first joined Facebook. This varied amongst the participants, and also depended on how old they were when Facebook became popular. A few participants expressly waited until they were 13 years old until they joined because this is Facebook’s stated minimum age [Facebook 2013]. There were also a couple of participants who stated that they had put in a false date of birth so they could join before they were 13. This tended to occur at age 12, but one participant said she did this when she was 7 or 8. Some participants framed joining Facebook before age 13 as doing something ‘illegal’. One participant questioned Facebook’s actual concern with the age of its users, suggesting that it makes little effort to follow up on the 13 and older rule:

> I don’t think Facebook’s very smart because I was using it when I was 12. And then I turned 13 and I’m like, ‘oh, I might as well change my birthday’. And I changed it and it said ‘have you been using this illegally before you were 13?’ and I was just like ‘no’ (14 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

Only a few of the participants said they discussed getting a Facebook profile with their parents/guardians/caregivers, although others had input from their mothers in terms of privacy settings and advice over what they should and should not post and put on their profiles. Two participants said their mothers had set their account up for them. For example:

> Mum helped me set mine up. Cos she was on it first. I didn’t know anything about it until I saw her use it. And I’m like ‘oh, can I do it? Can I do it?’ It just looks fun’. And, yeah, she was there with me and helped me set it all up. (18 years old, female, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)
Nearly a quarter of the survey respondents reported having more than 500 ‘friends’ on Facebook (24.5%, 37). Respondents had varying amounts of ‘friends’, although less than 10% had under 100 ‘friends’ (9.9%, 15). (See Figure 8.)

Who these 500 ‘friends’ might be was explored in the focus groups. One participant explained that these ‘friends’ ‘built up over time’ (16 years old, female, Eastern Adelaide focus group). For example, aside from friends, family or friends of friends (‘mutuals’), participants described their Facebook ‘friends’ as being people from school, university, parties/gatherings, encounters out in town, networks, old jobs, work, sports, Facebook groups, Scouts, church, their country town, other towns, and their home country. As one participant described it, each aspect of her life (such as school, university, and so on) was ‘a whole new world’ with a new set of people to add to Facebook (23 years old, female, Eastern Adelaide focus group).

In addition, the number of ‘friends’ can partially be explained by young people moving through different education, work, recreation, and social settings as they grow older.

Several focus group participants said that they had met all of their Facebook ‘friends’ in person, with the common requirement being that they had met each ‘friend’ at least once. The few examples given of people who participants had not met ‘offline’ were ‘friends’ who liked the same band and Tumblr followers.
Most survey respondents reported having a photo of themselves (96.7%, 146) and their full name (86.1%, 130) on their profile page. Over two thirds had their current city (71.5%, 108) and current place of study/work (68.2%, 103), and half had their hometown (53.0%, 80). Over half included their relationship status (60.9%, 92). Less than half included their email address (41.7%, 63) and relatively few listed their mobile phone number (13.9%, 21). (See Figure 9.)

From the focus groups it was apparent that several of the participants had thought about what they included on their profile page. In one of the focus groups it was clear that parents could influence profile content, and there could be gender differences in how much information was displayed:

16 year old female #1: I can’t have my face as my profile but that’s purely because my mum’s rule, there’s creeps out there
16 year old female #2: I can’t put like too much personal information so I can’t put like where I live or what school I go to and stuff
19 year old female: Yeah I leave that blank too because I interact with a couple of groups for bands that I like and, you know, there are fans all over the world and I really don’t want them to know what TAFE I go to, [others agree] or what my hometown is. It’s pretty much nicer to keep it vague
19 year old male: I reckon it’s easier like as a guy as opposed to a girl. Like, I just put whatever. I don’t think there’s no, no one’s going to stalk me or anything

(laughs)

[...]

23 year old female: I think that’s true. I think if I’m in a relationship, I’ll put my relationship up if, or I’ll leave it blank, I won’t say single, that’s something I’ll avoid like the plague. I think I’ve become a lot more lax because of the positions I’ve been in, it’s pretty much common knowledge sort of that I live in [area] and like I’m promoting [area] youth stuff and this and that

(Eastern Adelaide focus group)

In another focus group some participants discussed Facebook as a site to store their personal information, which was useful for their own personal reference, such as when they needed a photograph for a resume. This group also spoke about how they negotiated the usefulness and ease of access to information alongside potential privacy issues. In particular, they discussed Facebook’s ability to sync with mobile phones, where phone numbers displayed on profiles pages are automatically added into phones:

19 years old, male: I don’t have like my phone number available to the public to see. It’s only, it’s only there in my private information
17 years old, male: And that’s only if you’re friends with someone. I don’t, if I’ve got anyone on Facebook, I’ve, I’ve synced my phone so I have all their numbers too so I, I think that’s actually good to have your number up there because phones it’s pretty important now to be able to contact people. So I needed to call my auntie and I was like ‘I wonder if I have her number’ and I was like ‘oh, yes I do, I’ve got her on Facebook’ kind of thing, so I’ve got mine up there but not to the public, only if I’ve added them and trusted them
18 years old, female: Also, too, people who you can think are like nice and stuff, like if you have something in common, that’s what I use it for as well, like, a band, I’ll add them and then when I go to sync my phone now I’ve got all these people from China and Indonesia and like all their numbers too and I’m like ‘wow, if you can access that, that easy’ then like so I would never put my phone or, you know, your address or anything how like people do
(Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

Thus, young people are dealing with the complexities that information sharing on Facebook allows for. This information sharing can both enhance the ability to communicate with people while also presenting potential risks to privacy.

Privacy Settings

Over three quarters of survey respondents had their privacy settings selected to...
'private', where only their 'friends' can view their full profiles and posts (77.5%, 117). Under a fifth had a combination of some private and some public (17.2%, 26), very few had their profiles set to public (2.6%, 4), and only four people were unsure of which settings they had selected (2.6%, 4). (See Figure 10.) While we are cautious to make generalisations because of the small number of respondents, it appeared that females were slightly more likely to have their Facebook profile set to private than males. There were no clear age differences in relation to privacy settings.

What privacy settings do you have selected for your Facebook page?

Privacy settings were further discussed in the focus groups, with several participants saying they had a private profile while others had theirs set to a mixture of private and public or fully public.

One participant explained the influence of his teacher in explaining to him that he should set his profile to private:

Mine used to be on public but then one of my teachers he talked to me about it, and he said some like strangers, you know, can count on stuff like that, and then as soon as he told me I went home and set it to private (15 years old, male, Western Adelaide focus group)

An issue that participants viewed as closely related to privacy settings was how secure their profile password was, including how often they changed their password. This ranged from one participant once having set a password 32 characters long to another not having changed his password since joining Facebook approximately 3 years ago.
Usage

Survey respondents frequently ‘checked’ or logged onto Facebook, with all except five respondents stating they checked it at least once a day or received notifications when something happened. 19.9% (30) received notifications and 41.7% (63) logged onto the site more than 5 times a day. 29.1% (44) checked it 2-5 times a day and 6.0% (9) checked it once a day. 2.0% (3) checked it several times a week, only one person (0.7%) said they checked it once a month, and an additional person (0.7%) said they checked it less than once a month. (See Figure 11.)

Most survey respondents spent a short amount of time on Facebook each time they checked it. Half of the respondents spent less than 10 minutes on Facebook at a time (49.0%, 74), and another 31.8% (48) spent 10-20 minutes on it at a time. 7.9% (12) used it for 20-30 minutes at a time. Few respondents used Facebook for more than 30 minutes at a time (6.0%, 9 for 30-60 minutes and 5.3%, 8 for more than 60 minutes). (See Figure 12.)

One of the focus group participants explained the way in which posting statuses on Facebook worked. He suggested people posted at particular times of the day when they knew that many other people would also be on Facebook and would therefore be more likely to look at their posts and respond to them:

Facebook’s like traffic. There’s a peak hour and a non-peak hour. Like, it’s like a general rule because a lot of my friends make statuses just for likes. There’s a general rule post between 6 and 9 [pm] and that will be in your 80s. Post before then and you’re lucky to get 20 kind of thing. People just don’t go on […] because that’s when people get home from school, they finish their homework, they’re doing it in between dinner kind of thing and when you check your newsfeed you go all the way down to the last thing you read, that’s what I do (17 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

The newsfeed is central to Facebook and, when asked to name the three things activities engaged in most often when using Facebook, the majority of survey respondents named ‘check news feed’ (83.7%, 123). Respondents were also likely to ‘chat privately’ (51.0%, 75), ‘post comments in response to an update/photo etc by a “friend” – i.e. “public” communication’ (45.6%, 67), and ‘send inbox messages’ – i.e. private communication (42.9%, 63). (See Figure 13.)
Facebook was accessed most often via survey respondents’ own mobile phones and their own laptops. 57.1% (84) used their mobile phones most often to access Facebook, 23.1% (34) used their laptops, and 12.2% (18) used their home desktop computers. Only 7 people (4.8%) did not access Facebook using their mobile phone. Respondents rarely used Facebook using a school, work, or university desktop computer. (See Figure 14.)

The use of mobile phones to access Facebook was made even more apparent during the focus groups where most people discussed accessing Facebook via their phones. During the focus groups it became clear that one of the reasons why Facebook was preferred over other forms of communications (such as text messaging) was because it is free. As one participant said, Facebook is ‘like the poor man’s texting’ (14 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group). Several focus group participants said they would use more mobile phone credit if they did not have Facebook. In addition, it could be just as fast as texting to communicate:

19 years old, male: It’s basically just a substitute for my phone, ah like, if I’m out of credit or whatever
Several: Yeah
19 years old, female: Yeah, that’s the benefit you know, the messages are free and it’s...
19 years old, male: Everyone’s got a smartphone so they’ll get it straightaway, just like texts
(Eastern Adelaide focus group)

Facebook’s increasing presence as a feature on smart phones, alongside a general increased use in these types of phones, meant that many young people spoke about their dependency and comfort with having their phone with them, even when sleeping:

Male: You go to sleep with, you go to sleep with your phone in your hand, you wake up with your phone in your hand, that’s how it basically works
Male: My phone charges next to my pillow, I literally cannot go to sleep unless my phone’s next to my pillow
Male: Same
Female: My phone’s on my pillow
Male: It’s more, it’s more of a comfort thing than actual using it, I just want to know where it is
(Eyre and Western focus group)

The ability to access Facebook in all sorts of settings, including on one’s phone in bed, can influence the ways young people connect with others via Facebook. However, Facebook is not limited to phones, computers, or the other devices we asked about in the survey. Participants in one of the focus groups named even more devices on which Facebook could be accessed, such as Xbox, PlayStation, T-Hub, and smart televisions (Eyre and Western focus group).

As one participant put it, he checked Facebook ‘anywhere where there’s internet’ (male, Eyre, and Western focus group).
Above all else, Facebook was viewed by the participants as a tool to communicate, mostly with friends they knew outside of Facebook. In the focus groups when we asked why young people used Facebook, we were met with the obvious response, ‘to communicate’, on several occasions. This was also reflected in the surveys, where respondents commonly viewed various ways of interacting with ‘friends’ as the best aspect of Facebook. For the survey respondents, Facebook was often used to communicate with friends who were seen outside of Facebook, along with old friends, friends living elsewhere or travelling, and family.

Survey respondents were given a list of 20 options to select the three things they liked best about Facebook (they were also given the option of adding their own). Two thirds of respondents liked ‘communicating with friends you have contact with outside of Facebook’ (66.0%, 95). Other popular activities included ‘organising to catch up with friends’ (40.3%, 58), ‘knowing what other people are doing’ (36.1%, 52), ‘staying in touch with old friends’ (31.3%, 43), ‘communicating with people who live interstate or overseas’ (29.9%, 43), ‘getting invited to events’ (26.4%, 38), and ‘looking at other people’s photos’ (26.4%, 38). (See Figure 15.) Therefore, Facebook’s functions, particularly those which were most popular amongst survey respondents, can be seen as enabling young people to communicate and interact with others.
While our research did not focus on the negative aspects of Facebook, the survey asked young people what they disliked most about Facebook. Functions of Facebook (such as advertising) were disliked, along with aspects of interactions with others (such as being invited to play games, people complaining), and additional things (such as it being a distraction from other things).

Survey respondents were asked to choose three things they disliked most about Facebook from a list of 18 (they were also given the option of adding their own). Nearly half of the respondents named ‘advertisements’ as something they disliked most about Facebook (47.6%, 68). Other things people commonly disliked included ‘being invited to play games’ (46.2%, 66), ‘people complaining’ (43.4%, 62), ‘distracting from other things’ (38.5%, 55), bullying (32.2%, 46), and ‘being contacted by people I don’t know’ (30.1%, 43). (See Figure 16.)
Survey respondents were asked both whether they felt Facebook was a cause of stress and if it was a reliever of stress. YACSA wanted to unpack the complexities of stress and Facebook rather than focusing solely on the negative aspects of Facebook. Respondents were divided approximately in half as to whether Facebook was a cause of stress. They were slightly less likely to have used Facebook to decrease their stress. The topic of stress was explored in more depth with the focus group participants, who were also asked what they would do if Facebook made them feel stressed. Overall, while Facebook could be both a cause and a reliever of stress, it was more emphatically spoken about in a negative way than a positive way in relation to stress.

### Feeling Stressed using Facebook

Nearly half of the survey respondents said they had felt stressed using Facebook (45.6%, 54) and a small amount provided a mixed response where they gave a more complex response [11.8%, 14]. Over 40% of respondents reported they had not felt stressed using Facebook [42.0%, 50]. [See Figure 17.]

Respondents provided numerous reasons for why using Facebook had been stressful. The most common reason related to other people making inappropriate or offensive comments, causing trouble, or being ‘stupid’ [9 respondents].

A few of my friends have extreme religious beliefs that apply to homosexuals and abortion and continue to post close minded rubbish. I find it difficult to enter a discussion on these topics as they would rather delete comments than respond to them. I should probably delete them. (24 years old, male, full-time university student, part-time work)

Some respondents were stressed by bullying/ (cyber)bullying [5 respondents]:

- yes due to watching my mates fight or talking about doing things silly or when i have been told im going to die and getting bullied. (16 years old, male, part-time secondary student)

Some [5] reported that Facebook made them compare themselves to and/or feel jealous of others. The following respondent also mentioned feeling stressed about the need for other people to ‘like’ their photographs and other Facebook activities:

- Yes. The feeling of not getting many likes on photo’s etc. I find myself comparing myself to a lot of people which can be quite annoying. (16 years old, female, full-time secondary student, part-time work)

Other reasons for stress when using Facebook included things being taken out of context and the difficulty in expressing emotion or tone [4], seeing things about people they did not want to know [4], people posting information or photos about them that they did not want others to see [4], that it was distracting and wasted time [4], and technical issues (e.g., connection and loading errors) [4]. Some respondents felt stressed about particular situations or interactions [3] and when interaction with others was not quick enough or low (e.g., people did not reply to messages or did not reply quickly enough) [3]. There were numerous other additional reasons given by one or two respondents why Facebook had been stressful for them.

The respondents who provided mixed responses to the question suggested that Facebook was only sometimes or occasionally stressful. Many of the reasons they provided were similar to those outlined above. Other respondents discussed similar issues but did not think these could be described as being ‘stressful’.

The diversity of responses about what young people find stressful about Facebook suggests that the current focus on themes of bullying and privacy in the media ignores other issues that are of concern to young people.

Of those who said Facebook was not stressful, and provided an answer why, some explained this was because they did not care what happened on Facebook or said it was not a stressful website [4]. Others mentioned that it was a casual setting or comments and photos were random [2], it was good to talk to friends or they used it to talk to close friends [2], a positive offline social group meant a positive online social group [1], they did not use it enough to feel stressed [1], ‘OS’ schooling [open schooling] meant they were sheltered from negative situations [1], and Facebook helped them to calm down [1]. Therefore, it should be emphasised that many young people do not view Facebook as stressful.

Facebook use as a cause of stress was explored further in the focus groups. The reasons why using Facebook could be stressful were similar to those discussed by the survey respondents above, with focus group participants more likely to believe that Facebook could be stressful at times. Focus group participants discussed strategies for relieving stress relating to...
Facebook as a Cause and Reliever of Stress

While nearly half of the survey respondents said they had felt stressed using Facebook, it would be misleading to focus only on Facebook as a cause of stress. 40.3% (48) of survey respondents reported they had used Facebook to decrease their stress and a small number (9.2%, 11) provided a mixed response. Nearly half of the respondents said they had not used Facebook to decrease their stress (49.6%, 59). (See Figure 18.) Focus group participants also discussed the ways in which Facebook could be useful to decrease their stress.

Relieving Stress using Facebook

When one participant said that while in theory she would lessen her Facebook use (by not receiving notifications) to decrease stress, she would be unlikely to actually follow through with this. Others in the group agreed with her point:

19 years old, female: What like, the whole, everything piling up on you kind of thing? Um, probably, log off
16 years old, female: Yeah, I’d try and get away from it if it gets too overwhelming
19 years old, female: I’d disconnect the um the account from my phone so I wouldn’t get the notifications
Okay, so you’re not getting them every minute, but just when you are at home
23 years old, female: I think I’d say I’d do that but I probably wouldn’t
A few: Yeah

Discussions in the focus groups involved participants interacting with each other when debating ideas, illustrating the value in bringing young people together to discuss such issues and to share the strategies they use. The following exchange shows how various solutions to the problem of stress were suggested by different participants:

19 years old, male: Facebook’s always had this option where you can block, you can block people, you can stop them viewing your newsfeed and stuff, and I think people tend to forget that, if they’re having like an issue with someone they’ll just keep carrying it out where they can just type in the name, hit block, and they don’t have to deal with them ever again. [...] And if all else fails, yeah, you just sort of delete it, like deactivate your account for a while and wait till things cool off
18 years old, male: You can hide certain people, if you get really annoyed at some people’s statuses you can like hide their stuff from your timeline, so you can still have them on Facebook but you don’t have to look at it all the time
19 years old, male: You don’t have pointless statuses every two minutes
14 years old, male: Facebook’s like a bad part of town. It’s like, ‘I better block him for a while’
[laughs]
14 years old, male: It’s not forcing you to read it
18 years old, female: True, you can just keep scrolling

The participants also highlight that it is too simplistic to say that they would stop using Facebook completely because, for many of them, their lives and connections to others are intricately linked to it. Thus, telling young people to stop using Facebook may only be a short-term solution if it does not deal directly with the stressful issue. It is more likely to cut young people off from the positive aspects of their Facebook use, such as communicating with friends. Our research shows that it is useful to focus on which aspects of Facebook use are stressful for young people, and what strategies may be used to address these issues.
Facebook as a Cause and Reliever of Stress

There were two key ways in which Facebook helped people to decrease their stress: as a welcome distraction, particularly from study or work (20 respondents) or as a way of talking to friends or other people (often privately) (17):

Yes, all the time. If I’m feeling stressed from study I do go on Facebook to just chill out and then I get back to it. (23 years old, female, full-time TAFE student)

Yes, as it distracts from other stressful events, allows me to talk to friends and decrease my stress! (17 years old, female, full-time secondary student)

Yes when I have had a bad day and just want to talk to my mates or girl friend. (16 years old, male, part-time secondary student)

Survey respondents used Facebook to decrease their stress by looking at posts, memes or other things to cheer them up or make them laugh (4), because they found it relaxing and mundane (4), by posting about stress or letting feelings out (3), by seeing what other people were doing (3), and by playing games (2).

The survey respondents who provided mixed responses also tended to point to Facebook as being a welcome distraction or providing the means to communicate with friends as ways to decrease their stress. A couple of respondents said Facebook provided some outlets but did not exactly relieve stress.

Few survey respondents who said Facebook did not decrease their stress provided reasons for their answers. Of those who did, respondents said that they had better ways of decreasing stress (6 respondents) or that it increased their stress rather than decreased it (5).

The focus group participants also discussed ways in which Facebook could be used to decrease stress. Some participants discussed using Facebook as an outlet for their emotions, which was a theme that was rarely mentioned by survey respondents:

19 years old, male: I use it to vent, like if, if something’s got me down or whatever, I can put it on that page, and I know that at least maybe one person’s read it [...] It sort of saves me bottling it up inside and just um releasing it in other ways. [...] Um, a few times during ah exams and stuff, when everything’s and teachers and school just got to me and I was like ‘F this I’m out’ and then just leave that for a good couple of, a good couple of hours and come back and if I still feel the same way I’ll leave it but if I don’t feel the same I’ll delete it straight away so then people don’t think I’m a negative person [...] and I really couldn’t care who reads it, likes it, comments it, it’s just, it’s pretty much just a place I can store all these sort of emotions and stuff, it’s weird, it’s yeah, it’s helpful though

19 years old, female: That’s what I used to do but then mum added me on Facebook and then she got annoyed at me for saying stuff and I’m just like ‘Oh my God, don’t delete me or whatever. Delete me I don’t care’

19 years old, male: Do you find it, do you find it easier than her like probing at you ‘what are you feeling?’ ‘What’s got you down??’

(Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

Another participant discussed how a Facebook page relating to his university course helped him when he was stressed with assignments:

This is just from personal experience, but, like, lots of law students have like their own sort of like Facebook page, like just a bunch of lawyers, like law students, they’d have like a group. You know, like, if it’s during assignment time, you’d ask questions and people would answer you, sort of just like a chat group. It’s always a good way like to reduce stress, you know. If you’re stuck on something, someone has already asked that question and they’ve got the answer, it’s like, yep, too easy

(19 years old, male, Eastern Adelaide focus group)

Facebook can be both a cause and a reliever of stress for young people. Indeed, the same people can find it stressful and a way to de-stress.

What our research also found is that there were numerous different ways in which Facebook could be stressful.

The most common reason stated—other people making inappropriate or offensive comments, causing trouble, or being ‘stupid’—was only shared by nine respondents. Again, this highlights that it is important to consider young people’s different experiences of Facebook.

Finally, it is, of course, not Facebook itself that is stressful (apart from the occasional technical difficulty as noted by 4 respondents), but communications and interactions with other people. Patterns in the ways young people decreased stress were clearer than the ways Facebook could cause stress. It also proved useful to consider the ways in which Facebook could be used as a tool to reduce stress rather than just cause it.
In the media, political sphere, and general debate, there is sometimes a distinction made between online and ‘real life’. YACSA wanted to explore whether such a divide was often conceptualised by young people. We narrowed this down to two questions in the survey—’Does what you do on Facebook have direct impact on your ‘offline’ life? How/why?’ and ‘Do you think how you act on Facebook reflects how you act when you’re ‘offline’? How/why?’. These themes and more were explored in the focus groups, including asking the participants which terms they would choose to describe the time when they were not using Facebook. We decided to use ‘offline’ for this report because this is the term we used for the survey questions (after reading previous research) and, likely at least in part for this reason, it was repeated back to us in the survey responses.

Exploring these questions of connections between Facebook and ‘offline’ life, we found that young people had very different views on how the two fitted together, ranging from complete separation to being indistinguishable from each other. Even the same young people viewed it differently depending on the context of the discussion.

### Facebook Impacting ‘Offline’ Life

Survey respondents were asked if what they did on Facebook had a direct impact on their ‘offline’ lives. Just over half agreed that it did (55.0%, 66) while just over a third said it did not (35.8%, 43). A small number of respondents provided mixed responses (6.7%, 8) while two were unsure. (See Figure 19.)

As the explanations to these responses below show, this question was interpreted in several different ways. Nearly a third of respondents who thought Facebook had a direct impact on their ‘offline’ lives related this to ‘offline’ events and arranging to meet and catch up with people [21]:

Yes, Facebook events/private messages are the main ways I communicate with friends in order to catch up or hang out in real life. Unlike calling or texting friends it’s free, and it has a lot more benefits than plain old email.

(21 years old, female, part-time work)

Yes, as most friend related events are exclusively talked about and exist on Facebook only. And this is the only medium I have of contacting and or receiving information on such events. In addition to this, I have a Facebook group for each of my Year 12 subjects, and using Facebook is an important way to keep updated and ask urgent questions with near instant responses from peers and the teacher. (17 years old, male, part-time secondary student, part-time work)

Several respondents (10) wrote that Facebook had an impact on their ‘offline’ lives because it was a distraction from other things:

Partially, it distracts me from school work sometimes. Other than that, it has no effect

(16 years old, male, full-time secondary student, part-time work)

Some respondents (9) stated that gossip, news, and events mentioned on Facebook were also discussed ‘offline’:

Yes, definitely. ‘Offline’, we (my friendship group) talk about what’s been happening on Facebook. (23 years old, female, full-time university student, part-time work)

A number of respondents (9) were aware that...
they could be judged about how they acted on Facebook, which could have an impact 'offline':

Yes - because I am facebook friends with some colleagues, I need to remain professional on facebook, uploading drunk pictures is something I try to avoid for instance - it looks bad for my company as well. (22 years old, male, full-time university student, part-time work)

Some respondents [8] showed how communicating with groups on Facebook, particularly for work and study, directly impacted their 'offline' lives:

Yes. The I use Facebook to communicate and plan/organise events/work/meetings etc. because I can do it quickly. I know [that] people will check it, I can see when they've gotten my message. My online profile is a showcase of the hard work I wouldn't normally get credit for. I have been invited to speak at events and had many many many professional development opportunities offered to me because of the way I act on Facebook. (20 years old, female, part-time work)

Survey respondents mentioned a range of other ways in which Facebook had a direct impact on their 'offline' lives.

Other respondents believed that Facebook did not have a significant impact on their 'offline' lives, but still suggested it had connections in terms of events and seeing friends, and talking about what had been posted on Facebook.

Of the respondents who stated that Facebook did not have a direct impact on their 'offline' lives, some said this was because they did not post statuses or use Facebook very much (4) or they did not get distracted by Facebook (3).

The focus groups also provided some examples of when an occurrence on Facebook had a direct on people's 'offline' lives. A particularly illustrative example came from a 19 year old female participant who had posted a photograph in support of a political issue which offended a relative. Even though she had thought he would not be able to view the photograph, for some reason it still pops up on their thing cos there are several relatives [on Facebook] and one relative will talk to another. She explained that now I've got to make it up to him because he felt her posting the photograph 'was an attack on him'. Since this incident she said:

I’ve just been a bit more wary in what I allow my family to see. My friends are pretty good-natured, you know, they don’t get offended too easily. I don’t really post anything offensive, offensive anyway, so I’m just a bit more wary. (Eastern Adelaide focus group)

On reflection, this participant had learnt that something that she posted on Facebook could be taken to be offensive and have 'offline' repercussions.

Other discussions showed the complexity of friendship formation on Facebook, where closeness on Facebook did not always translate to 'offline' life.

The second participant shows the potential disconnect between Facebook and 'offline' life, where the medium of Facebook allowed for connections that may not have been possible otherwise, but which did not translate to 'offline' life.

How People Act on Facebook Compared to ‘Offline’

Participants were also asked about how they and others acted on Facebook compared to ‘offline’. This question received diverse responses, and the complexity of these views became even more apparent in the focus groups. As mentioned earlier in the report, nearly a fifth of survey respondents [19.6%, 28] said one of the three things they disliked about Facebook was when people acted differently compared to how they acted ‘offline’.

Survey respondents were asked ‘Do you think how you act on Facebook reflects how you act when you’re “offline”?’. Approximately half of the respondents [50.4%, 60] believed how they acted on Facebook reflected how they acted when they were ‘offline’ and more than a fifth provided mixed responses [21.8%, 26]. Approximately a quarter of respondents believed they acted differently on Facebook compared to ‘offline’ [24.4%, 29]. [See Figure 20.]

Of those who believed how they acted on Facebook reflected how they acted ‘offline’, the most common response [22] was that respondents did not act differently or that they acted the same on Facebook and when they were ‘offline’. Some respondents were more specific, for example, suggesting that this was because they acted like themselves [3], they only spoke to people they knew ‘offline’ [3], they were...
a private person which was reflected ‘online’ (2), and that they used it mainly for private messaging (2).

Several respondents discussed the complexity of how they acted on Facebook compared to their ‘offline’ lives. Many of these mixed responses also highlighted the complicated idea of the Facebook/‘offline’ divide, with respondents providing both yes and no answers that were difficult to sort into clear patterns or themes. For example:

Yes, I’m the same person. Mostly. I’m so much funnier when I’m online. But I still want to save the world just as much online as off. (20 years old, female, part-time work)

Yes but a better version. Its the same but the best of me. (22 years old, female, full-time university student)

In a way yes, I very rarely talk to people on Facebook that I would not talk to in real life, and most interactions, personal ones in the very least, share a symmetry to those I perform when offline. And I do feel that although my name is clearly displayed online, I have a certain level of (anonymity), that allows for comments made online to often have no impact what-so-ever on my daily offline life. (17 years old, male, part-time secondary student, part-time work)

A few people explained why they thought they acted differently on Facebook compared to when they are ‘offline’. This included being more interactive ‘offline’ (3) or being more open ‘offline’ (2). Others suggested they were more candid or honest on Facebook (1), they had more confidence ‘online’ (1), they were more politically aware ‘online’ (1). Many people seemed to find this a difficult question to answer in the surveys so we discussed it further in the focus groups. We began with a broader discussion of whether young people thought that others acted the same on Facebook as they did in person, and then asked how they felt they acted. For some of the participants it appeared there were negative connotations associated with the suggestion that they or others might act differently on Facebook compared to ‘offline’.

It was difficult for many of the participants to reflect on how they acted on Facebook. Indeed, how people act depends on context. When using Facebook people are likely to act differently when they are using different functions (e.g. inbox compared to public posts), using it at different times (e.g. when they are in different moods), communicating with different people, and so on. The inconsistent views put forward by the participants is well illustrated by a 19 year old male participant who commented, before we had come to this topic, that: ‘I tend to be a little bit more confident online because no-one’s judging (laughs). There’s not people looking at me and judging me. I feel I can just sort of branch out a little bit more’. However, when we specifically asked this focus group if they thought they acted on Facebook reflected how they acted ‘offline’, the same participant said: ‘I think so, it’s just, it’s me here and it’s me in that little screen and it’s, it’s just me, pretty much’ (Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group). Rather than being negative, this incoherence more accurately reflects people’s changing perceptions of themselves and their use of Facebook depending on context.

Indeed, one of the focus group participants noted that Facebook could never truly capture emotions and the complexity of people:

Facebook can never be real life. There’s emotions but I use them to make stories, I don’t use them to display my emotions because you can’t, you can never personalise exactly who you are, because your emotions are too difficult, you’re too complex, a computer can’t get that (17 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

While, participants found it easier to discuss whether other people acted the same on Facebook as they did in person, the responses were still varied. One person said others acted ‘cooler’ and ‘think they’re better’ (15 years old, male, Western Adelaide focus group), while another suggested that ‘your personality definitely comes out a lot more strongly on Facebook’ so, for example, ‘if you’re a quiet person in real life you probably will still be quiet on Facebook but you’ll still probably talk about your emotions more’ (22 years old, female Western Adelaide focus group).

A different focus group discussed the complexities of Facebook, with one person suggesting that how people acted on Facebook should be viewed as reflecting part of their personality ‘offline’ as well:

17 years old, male: my friend’s a bit of a dick but people like him in person. On Facebook everyone thinks he’s a tosser but that’s only because he’s mean to people on Facebook just because he thinks it’s funny to, when he’s mean to people but then in person he’ll be really nice to people. Not, not in a bitchy way he’ll, like he’ll say it to their face (…) 18 years old, male: I know some people, like one of the people I’m friends with on Facebook, like they’ll like constantly like, they’ll like complain they’ve got nothing to do, then they’ll go out with their friends, but then the whole time they’ll complain how bad it is, but when you ask them in person just after they’ve posted it they’ll go ‘oh, everything’s fine’

14 years old, male: Like what [17 years old, male] said how he’s bad on Facebook but he’s good offline, if a person’s willing to do that online, then like that’s kind of a part of their personality like offline as well if they’re willing to do that (Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group)

While it was often difficult for participants to discuss Facebook/‘offline’ connections, there were two ‘types’ of Facebook users that were viewed as primarily only occurring ‘online’. Two of the focus groups discussed ‘keyboard warriors’ and one group also discussed ‘Facebook fiends’ which illustrated how people acted differently on Facebook compared to ‘offline’. ‘Keyboard warriors’ were described as ‘bullies’ who sit there (and) they can be as mean and nasty as they want behind the keyboard but as soon as they sort of, as soon as you confront them they just, they’re a totally different person’ (19 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group). One participant described a Facebook ‘fiend’ as ‘someone who’s hilarious on Facebook and they spend a lot of time knowing exactly what to comment on to make people laugh and it’s not, it’s not always offensive […] and then they’re not funny in person’ (17 years old, male, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island focus group).

For the young people in our research, there appeared to be neither a distinct ‘online’ Facebook world and an ‘offline’ world, nor was Facebook seamlessly integrated into people’s lives. There was little consensus on these issues and the answers differed depending on who we asked and how they explained it or what they were talking about at the time. It is also likely to depend on how much individual people have invested in Facebook. These complex responses should not be viewed as negative, but rather illustrative of the complexity of Facebook’s intricacies and its various relationships to people’s lives. The themes examined in this section need more unpacking in further research and work.
YACSA felt that it was important to examine some issues relating to young people’s views about their Facebook use and their parents/guardians/caregivers, while avoiding repeating questions about concerns such as bullying and privacy that are often focused on. We narrowed this down to two key questions about how comfortable young people were with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities, and what they would tell them if they were concerned about their Facebook use. The survey provided sufficient data on this topic so these themes were not explored further in the focus groups. (We decided to spend the short amount of time we had for each focus group exploring other issues.)

Comfort with Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Knowledge of Facebook Activities

Over two thirds of the survey respondents expressed that they were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities (67.2%, 80) or provided mixed responses (16.0%, 19). Few respondents stated that they were uncomfortable with this (16.0%, 19). (See Figure 21.) Respondents tended to have strong views either way—they were often either ‘very comfortable’ or ‘hated’ the idea of their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing what they did on Facebook. While the survey included 13–24 year olds, there were not any clear age differences in the responses to this question across the age range.

How comfortable are you with your parents/guardians/caregivers knowing what you do on Facebook?

- Comfortable: 67.2%
- Uncomfortable: 16%
- Mixed: 16%

67.2% of survey respondents were comfortable with their parents/guardian/caregiver knowing about their Facebook activities.
Several respondents said they were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities because they did not post anything inappropriate, were responsible, and/or did not have anything to hide (15):

I am completely comfortable with them knowing what I do. I am friends with my parents and my extended family on Facebook and everything I do is visible to them. I don’t have anything to hide, and strongly believe this is the way Facebook should be used. If you are uncomfortable with any one person reading something you said or did, then you should not have done or said it on the internet. [21 years old, female, full-time university student, part-time work]

Doesn’t bother me. I don’t believe I act inappropriate or have to hide things that I don’t want them to see. [17 years old, female, full-time secondary student]

Some respondents said they did not mind or care if their parents/guardians/caregivers saw what they put on Facebook (6), they did not post anything they did not want them to see (5), and they did not do or say anything ‘online’ that they would not do or say in ‘real life’ (5). Two people stated that it was their parents/guardians/caregivers who told them to use Facebook or made the account, and another two were comfortable because they themselves were adults.

Some respondents who were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities stated they were ‘friends’ with them (11) and/or ‘friends’ with family generally or other family members (5). Three respondents said their parents did not have Facebook, with two stating that their sibling(s) did so their parents could see their page via them.

Other respondents were less comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities. Three respondents were somewhat comfortable, but were concerned about not being able to control other people’s posts and comments:

Semi comfortable. I always control what I post, but I can’t control what photos/things my friends post about me. [19 years old, female, full-time university student, part-time work]

Two respondents explicitly said they were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers seeing everything except for their private messages.

A small amount of respondents were uncomfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing what they did on Facebook. Four respondents said they had blocked their parents or family members from their Facebook profile. The main concern was that young people did not want parents/guardians/caregivers to see what they did (4):

Not overly comfortable. Especially if there is a photo of me out drinking or getting close with another girl. Even though I’m 18 and everything it’s still weird having my parents seeing it. Dad doesn’t have Facebook and I have blocked my mum so problem solved. [18 years old, male, part-time work]

I don’t really like how my parents keep on checking my wall. The status I put up are for my friends who haven’t seen me in a while, not for my parents who can just ask me how I am in person. [13 years old, female, full-time secondary student]

Two people were worried that parents would judge their friends or see what other people post. Other concerns included that parents would ask about things they saw on Facebook, they would make a ‘big deal’ out of what they saw, and that it would limit freedom with friends. One respondent did not want to be ‘friends’ with her parents/guardians/caregivers, but thought they would be ‘super offended if I didn’t add[ed] them’ [21 years old, female, part-time work]. Another respondent wrote that it was not appropriate to be ‘friends’ with one’s parents:

I don’t add my parents, and think people who do are strange. I don’t invite my parents out to parties with me, so why would I give them access to 150+ people who could say just about anything? [24 years old, female, part-time university student, part-time work]
Survey respondents were also asked what they would tell their parents/guardians/caregivers if they were worried about their use of Facebook. The most common ways that young people responded to this question were by reassuring them (43.3%, 48), suggesting an action or change in their own behaviour (18.0%, 20), suggesting that it would not be something that would happen (8.1%, 9), disagreeing with the concern (7.2%, 8), or stating that they were unsure of how they would respond (6.3%, 7).

The most common response was for respondents to reassure their parents/guardians/caregivers about their Facebook use (43.3%, 48). This was most often done by discussing privacy settings, safety measures, and/or emphasising being a responsible user (15) (eight mentioned privacy in particular):

My parents are very cautious of Facebook, but are satisfied that I know how to maintain my privacy. If they were concerned I would look into further as I know they respect me. (20 years old, female, full-time work)

I would tell them not to worry because I try to avoid having photos in my school uniform, I do not have my school, email, or mobile number on there, I never post where I am going until after I have been there (for example, when I went to an Ed Sheeran concert, I posted afterwards when I got home that I had been there, rather than posting that I was currently there and telling everyone where I am), my hometown/city is listed as ‘Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry’ and I only add friends who I know in real life (e.g. people from school, my cousins, people that I have met at different things). The only fights I see on Facebook are my friends or other people fighting - I do not participate in arguments over Facebook because I think that if you want to say something important or offensive, saying it through a computer screen is not that way to do it. (16 years old, female, part-time secondary student)

12 respondents wrote that they would offer general reassurance to their parents/guardians/caregivers—like ‘not to worry’ or to ‘chill out’—and 9 respondents would tell them they were old enough to look after themselves. Other respondents offered a variety of different reassurances.

Nearly a fifth of respondents (18.0%, 20) suggested an action or change in their own behaviour if their parents/guardians/caregivers were worried about their use of Facebook. Eleven of these respondents said they would let them look at their Facebook page or profile:

I’d just log into my account and let them look around, I don’t have anything to hide in my Facebook account. My mother already has my password. (19 years old, female, full-time university student and part-time TAFE student, part-time work)

If the concern was content related I would let them look at my facebook account If the concern was time related I would probably say it’s justified that I should spend less time looking at facebook and more time doing other things such as studying, jobs, hanging out with friends/family! (21 years old, female, full-time university student)

Three respondents said they would deactivate their account or ‘delete’ [presumably their account but possibly just a post].

9 (8.1%) respondents suggested their parents/guardians/caregivers would not be worried about their Facebook use, with a further 8 (7.2%) respondents saying they would disagree with them. 7 (6.3%) wrote they were not sure what they would do or they would not know until it happened.

Overall, survey respondents were most likely...
to say they would reassure their parents/guardians/caregivers if they were worried about their Facebook use, which suggests that young people are confident with their Facebook activities and wish to keep using it. Some respondents showed they were very careful in how they used Facebook. The fact that two thirds of respondents stated they were comfortable with their parents/guardians/caregivers knowing about their Facebook activities also suggests that many young people are using it in ways they feel are responsible. We are aware that young people may have been writing what they thought we wanted to hear, but the anonymous online format of the survey meant that many respondents could feel comfortable giving their opinions.

**Responses to Negative Opinions about Young People and Facebook**

Young people’s use of Facebook has tended to receive negative attention in the media, from politicians, and in other arenas. YACSA wanted to find out about young people’s responses to this negative attention. The survey focused on media reports specifically, while the focus groups asked participants more generally about negative views in the media and from politicians, and asked them if the issues of bullying and/or privacy, which are often focused on, were also issues of concern to them. Although several of the young people disagreed with these negative views, many also suggested there was some truth to them and that not all young people used Facebook responsibly all of the time.

Survey respondents were asked specifically what they thought of negative reports in the media about young people and Facebook. Over a third of respondents provided mixed responses (35.8%, 43). Nearly 30% of respondents agreed with negative media reports (29.1%, 32), while less than a fifth (17.5%, 21) disagreed. Only a few did not have an opinion about such reports (5.0%, 6) or were unaware of them (3.3%, 4). (See Figure 22.)

Of those agreeing with negative media reports, 7 pointed to bullying as being an issue. Others suggested that some Facebook users were too young or that young people should not have Facebook (6), that young people used Facebook negatively, inappropriately or immorally (3), that it was younger people who behaved inappropriately (4), and that parents/guardians needed to be responsible for (or aware of) what their children were doing (3):

- I think that facebook is often used in a negative way by young people and the media sometimes gets it very right. Parents and guardians need to be aware of what their children are doing on facebook. (23 years old, female, full-time university student)
- I haven’t seen/read many of these reports, but I imagine there is some truth to them. I think that some are too young for Facebook, and at young ages is quite likely to be used for bullying and other inappropriate activities. (22 years old, female, part-time work)
- Over a third of respondents provided mixed responses where they highlighted the complexity of the issue, often both partially agreeing and disagreeing with negative media reports. Some suggested that there is a problem, but the media make it out to be a bigger issue than it really is. (22 years old, female, part-time work)
It’s the new “kids today” thing. When I was in high school it was texting, in primary school it was game boy. There will always be a technology that appeals to young people, and there will always be older people who feel threatened by that. [24 years old, female, part-time university student, part-time work]

I thinkFacebook is a useful thing. And has changed society, so interactions are different. But that has changed through out generations and is not necessarily a bad thing. In terms of bullying - kids that bully, bully. Facebook isn’t the cause [22 years old, female, full-time university student]

Focus group participants were asked for their opinions on negative views about young people and Facebook more generally, and were more likely to disagree with these views. In particular, several were sceptical of the media and politicians and their motives for portraying these negative views. However, there was some agreement with the negative views, including that bullying did occur on Facebook, some people behaved inappropriately which ruined it for others, safety was important, and people should only be ‘friends’ with people they knew.

One focus group was particularly concerned about young girls posting semi-naked photographs of themselves on Facebook and felt that this issue should be paid more attention in the media. They also argued that Facebook should remove these photographs (which they knew was possible because one participant had a video he posted removed and they were disappointed Facebook were not censoring the right things) and be stricter about monitoring the minimum age of Facebook users:

Male: I think younger ones need to learn to stop putting pictures of- like half-naked pictures of themselves, uploading it up on Facebook and paedophiles, of course paedophiles are going to come on there have a look, oh yep, there you go, number one target. Their life’s gone already. And then when they try and find the person they’re not going to find them cos they could be in the next state and all the simple reason is because she put up a picture. That’s what I’m going to say is

Female: And in reality you can’t change it. Like, you can’t do anything about it because people are their own people it doesn’t matter how many laws you put down, they’re gonna do it anyway

Male: You can ban Facebook but someone will make something else, something else will come up

(Eyre and Western focus group)

The participants showed that some issues relating to young people and Facebook discussed in the media and by politicians are also of concern to young people. However, it needs to be remembered that the negative views debated in public are about a minority of young people. In addition, many of these issues are unlikely to be restricted to young people only. Further investigation into potentially negative issues about Facebook needs to involve consultation with young people and be focused on understanding young people’s use of Facebook, and move towards solving the issues rather than criticising young people in general. In addition, blaming individual Facebook users is also unhelpful and consideration needs to be given to the contexts of their behaviour, and their reasons and motivations for bullying, posting semi-naked photographs, and so on.]
Conclusions and Recommendations

YACSA’s research project has highlighted young South Australian’s opinions about Facebook. The views of young South Australians have formed the basis for this report, drawn from an online survey with both closed and open questions, and focus groups. This report has examined the views of young people in relation to background information and usage, things liked and disliked about Facebook, Facebook as a cause and reliever of stress, connections between Facebook and ‘offline’ life, parent/guardian/caregiver knowledge of and concerns about Facebook use, and responses to negative opinions about young people and Facebook. While this report has discussed the key patterns from our research, we have also highlighted that the use of and attitudes towards Facebook were complex and varying amongst the participants. This is important to remember when attempting to make any generalisations about young people and Facebook.

YACSA’s research shows that there can be both positive and negative aspects to Facebook use, which, where relevant, young people spoke about, celebrated, critiqued, and even offered solutions for. Our research demonstrates that calls for young people to stop using Facebook are over-simplistic and ignore the positive aspects to Facebook as well as the ways in which many young people access Facebook as a part of their daily lives. Considering the widespread usage of Facebook now—and likely other social network sites in the future—it is important for young people’s opinions to be heard about them, and for them to be able to be involved in open discussions.

YACSA proposes five key recommendations arising from our research about Facebook with young people in South Australia: use YACSA’s research to start conversations amongst young people, youth sector workers, government workers, parents/guardians/caregivers, and other relevant parties; support young people using Facebook and other social network sites; provide training for youth sector workers, government workers, and other relevant parties; conduct further research with young people about social network sites; and maintain an ongoing dialogue with young people as technology continues to change.

Recommendation 1:

Use YACSA’s research to start conversations amongst young people, youth sector workers, government workers, parents/guardians/caregivers, and other relevant parties

YACSA’s research involved a reasonably small number of participants so, rather than being a definitive account of what Facebook usage looks like amongst young people in (South) Australia, it is intended to open up a space for further discussions. We aim for YACSA’s research to help start conversations amongst young people, youth sector workers, government workers, parents/guardians/caregivers, and other relevant parties about Facebook. These conversations should include attention to the positive uses and experiences as well as the appeal of Facebook for young people.

In addition, we hope our research will help begin to foster a more open and non-judgemental environment in which young people feel more able to approach others about problems they may have with their social network site use. This environment would allow young people to talk about issues that they might otherwise feel are a) unimportant compared to the dominant issues of privacy and bullying, which may detract from other issues that are more stressful or pressing for young people or b) going to open up further criticism of Facebook and young people. Significantly, as we have found, these issues are likely to be wide-ranging, so adults should be open to discussing multiple topics with young people that extend beyond privacy or bullying.

Recommendation 2:

Support young people using Facebook and other social network sites

Our research has shown that some young people are concerned about issues to do with Facebook, but particular aspects of Facebook may, at times, be too complex for them to negotiate alone. Therefore, YACSA recommends young people should be encouraged to develop skills and be given opportunities to support each other, if needed. Importantly, a top down approach may be ineffective and may not be necessary considering that young people themselves are a wealth of knowledge about Facebook. Young people can easily talk about and learn from each other in relation to topics such as privacy and information sharing, coping with stressful people and things, dealing with friendship issues and bullying, and so on. As a part of this, it needs to be ensured that young people have the skills to support their peers in discussing issues about Facebook. Importantly, parent/guardian/caregiver responses to difficult issues should extend beyond simply restricting Facebook access; young people need to be provided with strategies to navigate difficult issues. These issues are likely to extend beyond Facebook to other social network sites.

In addition, parents/guardians/caregivers can be one source of support, particularly for younger people, and may need to be provided with tools to assist their child with any issues should they arise.

Recommendation 3:

Provide training for youth sector workers, government workers, and other relevant parties

YACSA recommends providing training for adults who work with or for young people. This should include a background to understanding how young people use Facebook as well as ways of talking with young people about their use of Facebook, and strategies for assisting young people with any problems they have should they arise. Research like YACSA’s shows that young people are adept at communicating how and why they use social network sites, and demonstrates both the appeal and potential problems of sites such as Facebook. By demystifying Facebook and the role it plays in young people’s lives, adults are better positioned to work with young people.
Recommendation 4: Conduct further research with young people about social network sites

More qualitative Australian research is needed that consults openly with young people to seek their views about social network sites. This research should maintain a focus on listening to the issues and opinions of young people. This report identifies the need for more research focused on how the online/offline divide is conceptualised by young people. Further research could also explore young people’s use of and opinions about Facebook with specific attention to numerous demographic factors such as age, gender, geographic location, specific contexts (e.g., schools), and socioeconomic background. It is also important for research to be shared and disseminated between the community and academic sectors, and for findings to be accessible for policy and practice purposes.

Recommendation 5: Maintain ongoing dialogue with young people as technology continues to change

Technology is rapidly changing and youth sector workers, government workers (and government policies), parents/caregivers/guardians, and so on may struggle to keep up. Therefore, it is imperative to keep an open dialogue with young people about their own issues and concerns about social network sites they use now and in the future. This includes being open to the benefits and appeal of such technologies, and thinking about how they can be used to engage young people (e.g. as participants discussed in relation to study groups) as well as for leisure. The best way to find out about issues to do with young people and technology is to consult young people themselves—both now and in the future, as social network sites continue to evolve and develop.

Following on from this research, YACSA intends to provide support for young people, the government, and other relevant parties in South Australia interested in learning more about young people and Facebook. This includes providing training for youth sector workers to equip them with the knowledge to confidently engage with young people around issues relating to Facebook, and to provide advice to government and policymakers about productive ways of using young people’s experiences in informing policy. YACSA is keen to be continued in future research and consultations with young people about their use of social network sites.
68. Updating Young People's Status: What young South Australians say about their Facebook use.

References
