



Strong Futures: Draft SA Youth Action Plan 2020 Consultation

Introduction

YACSA is the peak body in South Australia representing the interests of young people, youth workers, organisations and networks throughout the non-government youth sector. Policy positions are independent and not aligned with any political party or movement. YACSA supports the fundamental right of all young people to participate in and contribute to all aspects of community life, particularly the decision-making processes that impact them.

YACSA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Draft SA Youth Action Plan 2020-2022. YACSA had consistently advocated for a long-term youth strategy that is based on robust and widespread consultation and articulates and responds to the needs of young people and the sector that supports them.

In responding to the consultation, YACSA has consulted a range of our members to inform this submission. Feedback from YACSA members outlined concerns that broadly, the plan makes general statements of intent without details, milestones, non-government partners or a funding commitment and as such, there is uncertainty about what the impacts of the plan will be. There is also concern about how the plan will adapt to the changing needs of young people as the impacts of the COVID-19 virus unfold.

Responses to the survey questions

3. Do you have any feedback or comments on the new Strong Futures projects in the draft Plan?

Strong Futures Project 1: Build the foundation skills and participation of young people not in full time work and or/study.

With South Australian youth unemployment and underemployment rates a significant and growing issue for young people (there are currently 19,700 young people competing with 32,800 other unemployed people for only 11,500 available jobs^{1 2}), finding and maintaining a job that pays for the necessities of life, is becoming increasingly out of reach.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Job Vacancies, Australia, November 2019 ABS cat. no. 6354.0. Canberra: ABS, 2019.

² Ibid.

There is also uncertainty about how COVID-19 will impact upon present and future unemployment rates (although we have seen young people employed in the hospitality, retail and leisure industries already affected by business closures), particularly for young people employed within the current precarious employment market³. In this context, young people may need to access supports that are less to do with building foundation skills for employment and more about supporting them with isolation, education, mental health supports, supports to assist with day to day living, housing and income.

When we consider that unemployment in South Australia is more about a dearth of available jobs and shortage of stable work that pays a living wage and less about a lack of skills and employability, how will the plan adapt to the changing needs of young people, particularly considering current events?

Strong Futures Project 2: Grow opportunities for young people to engage in intercultural understanding and respect for the histories, cultures and languages of Aboriginal communities.

YACSA supports all young people developing a growing understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, languages, culture and history. YACSA members suggested that this project should be informed and guided by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth steering group as well as guided and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations. This will ensure that any programs, training or promotions are culturally appropriate and appropriate for young people.

Some YACSA members also considered the worth of expanding this idea to increase understanding amongst young people of other cultures and cultural practices/languages and traditions.

Strong Futures Project 3: Develop practical actions that support social and economic outcomes for young people in regional South Australia. For example, projects informed by regional young people and stakeholders that fit in the context of their regional communities.

YACSA welcomes government addressing the unique issues that impact young people who live in rural and remote areas. Young people frequently report that the lack of transport options in their area impacts their ability to study, work, access health and community services and connect with family and friends. Unemployment is also a significant issue in regional areas significantly impacting the ability of young people to live independently.

Young people and workers who deliver services to young people report that many rural and remote regions have either no or limited mental health services. This leads to delays in effective diagnosis and treatment for mental health issues⁴.

Again, with the present and future impacts of COVID-19 not fully known, there may be significant social and economic impacts for young people that will require support and services from government and

³ A Davies. Job losses from Australia's coronavirus shutdown will be 'devastating' *The Guardian*, 23 March 2020. Viewed 25 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/mar/23/job-losses-from-australias-coronavirus-shutdown-will-be-devastating>, 2020.

⁴ Black Dog Institute, "Facts & figures about mental health", viewed 25 April 2018, https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/docs/default-source/factsheets/facts_figures.pdf?sfvrsn=10

the youth sector. As such, government will need to support and maintain connections with young people and youth sector organisations to stay informed about the changing needs of young people now and post-pandemic.

Strong Futures 4: Invest in the capacity of youth services to deliver high quality services to young people, including in regional South Australia. For example, training opportunities for service providers such as trauma responsive practices.

YACSA welcomes a government commitment to increase the capacity of youth sector organisations to deliver services to young people. Services are already reporting that they are delivering services to young people (such as mental health supports) that they are not trained nor funded to deliver because of service gaps across the state.

We caution however that many youth sector organisations report already being at capacity, so any training opportunities should assist in delivering work within existing funding and service agreements.

Strong Futures Project 5: Invest in prevention approaches that tackle the key issues affecting young people's wellbeing. Focus areas include:

- *address the drivers of violence against women*
- *reduce problem gambling harm and improve financial literacy*
- *promote help seeking and reduce stigma*
- *support positive mental, social and physical health*
- *promote social inclusion and improve suicide prevention*

YACSA supports the prevention approaches the government has committed to in Strong Futures Project 5 and advocates for the importance of prevention and early intervention responses for health and wellbeing over the lifespan.

Unfortunately, we know that service gaps, particularly in rural and remote locations impact on the access that young people have to a range of health services. Mental health services, in particular, have been identified by young people and the youth sector as either scarce or non-existent in many rural and remote regions, leaving young people with limited options for mental health diagnosis or treatment⁵.

Income has also been identified by young people as a significant barrier to greater health seeking behaviours⁶, as well as low rates of health literacy and a lack of appropriate youth related health services, particularly in rural and remote locations.

In addition, YACSA members suggested including drug and alcohol use amongst young people and supporting young people in drug and alcohol affected families to the focus areas. Government should

⁵ Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, Inquiry into the Accessibility and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia, viewed online, 8 April 2020, <https://www.yacsa.com.au/publications/rural-mental-health?rq=mental%20health%20>, 2018.

⁶ Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, Select Committee on Poverty in South Australia, viewed online, 8 April 2020 <https://www.yacsa.com.au/documents/item/617>, 2018. Youth Affairs Council of South Australia, Submission to the Extent of Income Inequality in Australia Inquiry, viewed online, 8 April 2020, <https://www.yacsa.com.au/documents/item/529>, 2014.

also ensure that non-government organisations working in the prevention and early intervention spaces included in the plan are engaged and guide the implementation of the plan.

Strong Futures Project 6: Invest in providing the right information to young people, through the right means, at the right time. For example, work with young people to review current government service information.

To develop a project that seeks to engage young people in the work of government through information dissemination, it is crucial that government continually explores the ways in which young people consume and respond to information. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to engage a range of young people to inform and guide government in the continuously evolving ways that young people communicate.

This engagement with young people should be continuous, involve a range of young people and use a variety of mechanisms, both physical and online. Young people already use an array of online tools to communicate and access information (such as Snapchat and Instagram) but the COVID-19 pandemic is instigating other online communication mechanisms that could also be utilised to engage young people.

Strong Futures Project 7: Provide young people with opportunities to influence decision making in their life and communities. For example, youth representation on climate change initiatives.

YACSA supports recognising the contributions that all young people make in their communities and the importance of providing opportunities for young people to engage in the decisions that affect them.

However, COVID-19 will impact significantly on the ability of young people to participate in sports, volunteering, and other public events at least in the short term. As such, it would be valuable for government to partner with young people and the non-government youth sector to explore and respond to the ever-changing needs of young people during the pandemic. Government will also need to plan beyond the pandemic as education, employment, housing and social interactions may be impacted for some time.

YACSA members suggest that government utilise a range of options to engage young people in decisions that affect them. This can include models like the UN's World Programme of Action on Youth⁷, which imbeds youth development and engagement across governments, the UK's Select Youth Committee⁸ that provides young people with the opportunity to engage in government decision making and Lisboa+21 that is informed by the UN World Program of Action on Youth and provides

⁷ United Nations. World Program of Action for Youth. Viewed 23 March 2020, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>, 2010.

⁸ British Youth Council. Youth Select Committee. Viewed 23 7 April 2020, <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/youth-select-committee>, 2020.

opportunities for young people and youth organisations to impact decision making across the Portuguese Government⁹.

The Youth Action Plan provides government with an opportunity to promote and imbed youth development across government as well as giving young people opportunities to influence decision making processes and engage in shared decision making in their communities.

4. Do you have any specific ideas how your sector could partner or be involved in the delivery of the Plan?

Rather than inviting the youth sector and related organisations to inform and guide projects and other work related to the plan on an ad hoc basis, YACSA members advocate for a more permanent steering group to oversee the implementation of the entire plan. A steering group that involves all relevant government departments, local councils, key youth sector organisations and other NGOs, would assist in overseeing the implementation of the action plan and to garner multi-sectoral buy-in and commitment.

However, YACSA also supports the development of project teams (set out in the draft plan) that includes government agencies, local government, non-government organisations, private sector representatives and young people with specific knowledge and expertise to work on discreet projects. As we outlined in earlier responses, YACSA and our members would like to see a commitment by government to approach, define and describe these partners in the plan with particular emphasis on projects related to regional and remote young people, prevention and early intervention approaches and projects related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Young people and the youth sector must be enabled to guide and inform projects and work related to the implementation of this plan.

5. Do you have any specific ideas about how young people can stay involved in the delivery and review of the plan?

In order for the plan to be relevant, responsive and informed, young people need to be involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this action plan from the outset to the conclusion. Engagement from both the sector and young people should go beyond YourSay, the planned youth action plan website or other static engagement processes and explore more sustained and representative youth engagement that changes over time and provides opportunities for as many young people as possible.

Young people should be viewed as equal stakeholders in the implementation process with their knowledge, experience and expertise valued. Importantly, engagement with young people should involve shared decision making and they should be supported throughout the engagement processes to mitigate power imbalances as much as is practicable.

⁹ World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth 2019 and Youth Forum. About the conference and forum. Viewed 7 April 2020, <https://www.lisboa21.gov.pt/en/content/conference/about/ab.html>, 2019.

Ensuring young people are involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of the plan means that projects, and other strategies can be informed by lived experience and will more effectively reflect the ideas, opinions, expertise and needs of young people¹⁰.

6. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about the draft Plan?

YACSA members highlighted that much of the consultation with young people that underpins the development of the plan is based on secondary sources. Only a relatively small number of young people have actually participated in the development of the youth action plan so far. YACSA members are concerned that the youth engagement described in the draft plan does not conform to best practice models and as such may not accurately reflect the needs of young people across the state.

Finally, as the youth action plan is meant to be adaptive and agile, YACSA and our members would like to see a priority, or Strong Futures Project that describes how government will support young people and the youth sector to deliver their services through the next 6 - 12 months, as the growing impacts of COVID-19 will become apparent.

¹⁰ Mission Australia. Youth Mental Health and Homelessness Report. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/news-blog/news-media/youth-mental-health-homelessness-report>, 2017.