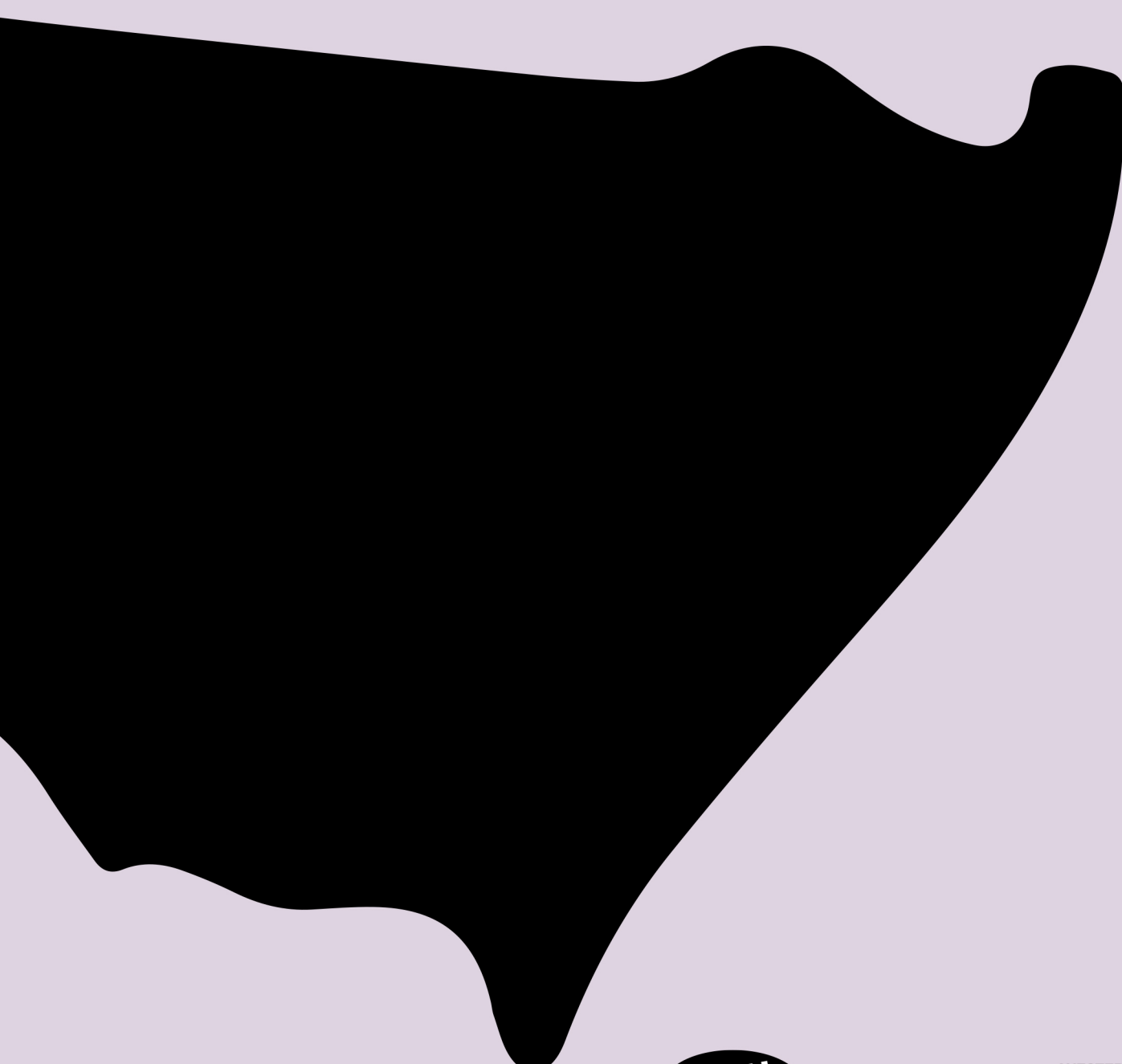


SNAPSHOT NSW YOUTH SECTOR

20
20



intergener8
LIVING LAB

**WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY**

Young and Resilient Research Centre

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the land, past, present and future, across NSW. We are committed to a positive future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their communities.

The Youth Action office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and we acknowledge their traditional custodianship.

The Intergener8 Living Lab at Western Sydney University is located upon the land of the Darug people of the Darug Nation and we acknowledge their traditional custodianship.



About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.



About Intergener8 Living Lab, Western Sydney University

Intergener8 Living Lab is an initiative of the Young and Resilient Research Centre, within the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) at Western Sydney University. We bring together community, industry, government, academia and young people to co-research and design for resilience.



Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

CEO MESSAGE	4
KEY FINDINGS	5
RECOMMENDATIONS: Realising the Value of the Youth Sector	8
BACKGROUND	12
INTRODUCTION	14
METHODOLOGY	16
FINDINGS: The State of the NSW Youth Sector	19
Youth Services	20
Youth Workers	35
Young People Accessing Services	46
Change Impact and Adaption	55
Challenges and Opportunities	63
LIST OF FIGURES	65

CEO Message



For the past few years, the NSW youth sector has been calling for evidence of the everyday experience, challenges and strengths of services across the state. In response, Youth Action and Western Sydney University partnered on a study of the youth sector in NSW. As organisations working in advocacy and research to achieve better outcomes with young people, we also see ourselves as part of the ecosystem that makes up the broader youth sector in NSW.

In late 2019, we conducted an online survey with CEOs, executive and regional service managers, team leaders, coordinators, youth workers and other frontline roles, as well as administrative staff. The survey was open for four weeks and had 488 respondents. It sought to understand the state of the youth sector in NSW by gathering data on youth services, the youth sector workforce, youth work as a profession, young people attending youth services, how services are adapting to the digital age, as well as future opportunities for the sector.

This study highlights that the youth sector in NSW is a vibrant, diverse and active sector. It's a sector driven by expertise, a focus on strengths and commitment to support and make a positive difference in the lives of young people aged 12 to 25. More than the job title and allegiance to a particular profession, this is a workforce motivated to put young people first.

We also see youth services working over capacity with insufficient funding and in the context of unmet demands and persistent issues, such as homelessness and mental health concerns.

The youth sector workforce is dedicated, skilled and effective at responding to and engaging with young people in crisis on a regular basis. There is scope to significantly leverage digital technologies to enhance youth services and their benefits for young people and their communities. There is also a growing diversity of young people that seek out youth services and a diverse workforce that is well placed to support them.

The youth sector is the greatest untapped resource for the government and the community to understand how best to meet the needs of young people and better address the complex social problems that affect them.

We need a sector resourced, valued, and supported to enable young people in NSW to thrive. In order to do this, young people need the right opportunities and supports, at the right time, when and where they need them most.

The youth sector puts young people's needs, views, and experience at the heart of what it does and we call on the government and wider community to do the same.

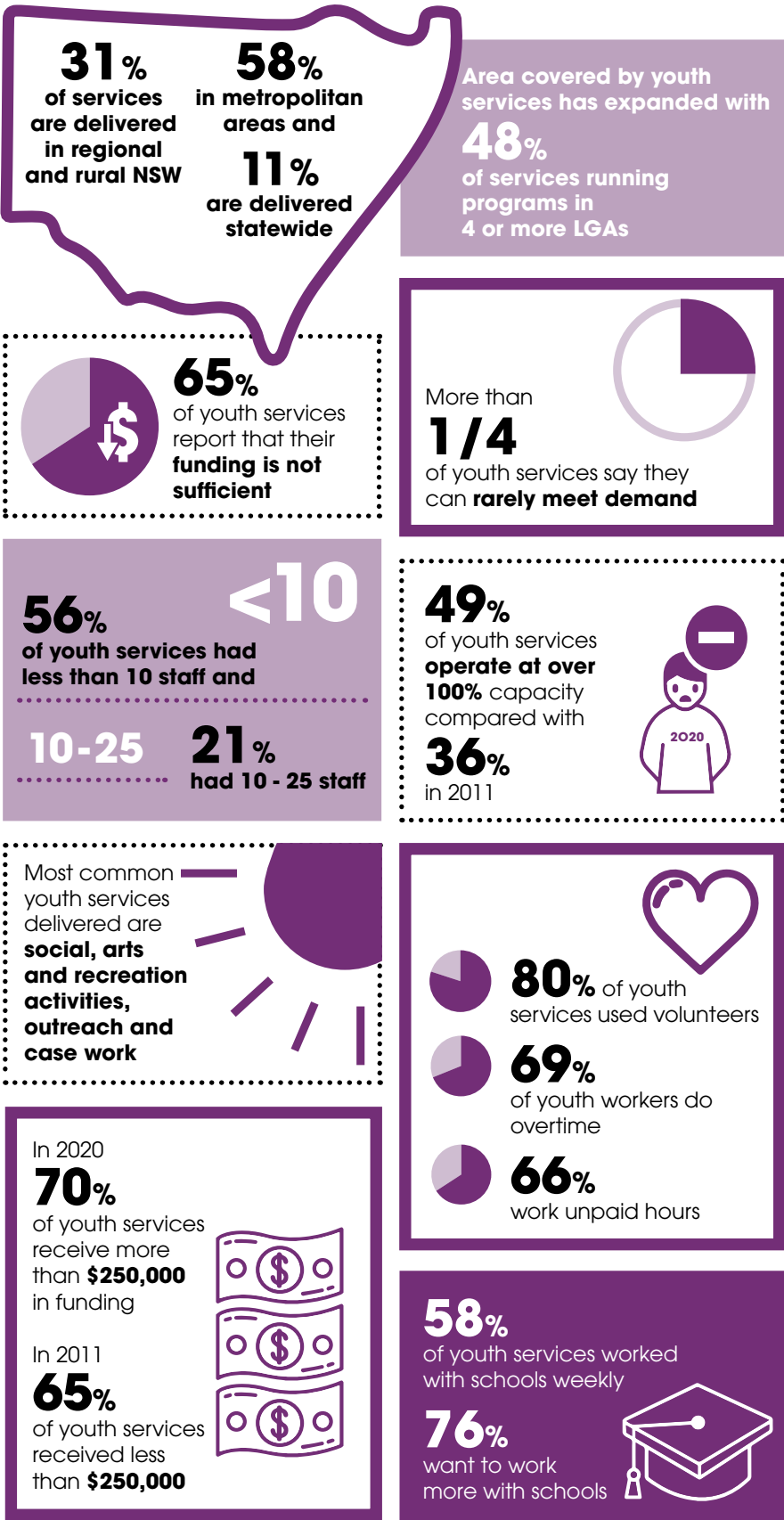
Katie Acheson
CEO Youth Action

Key Findings

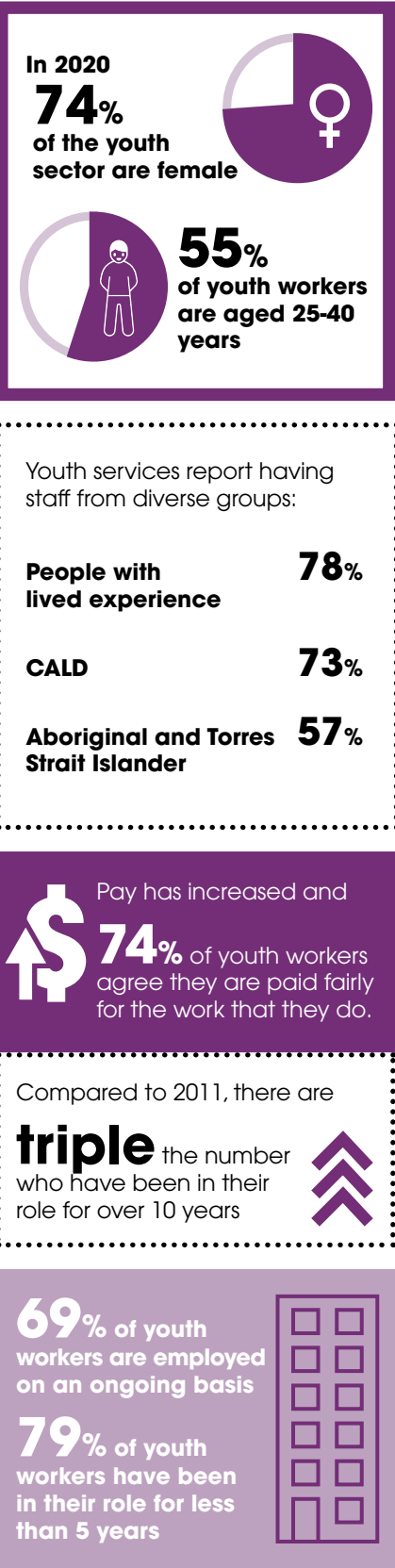
Snapshot 2020: Key Findings

According to survey respondents:

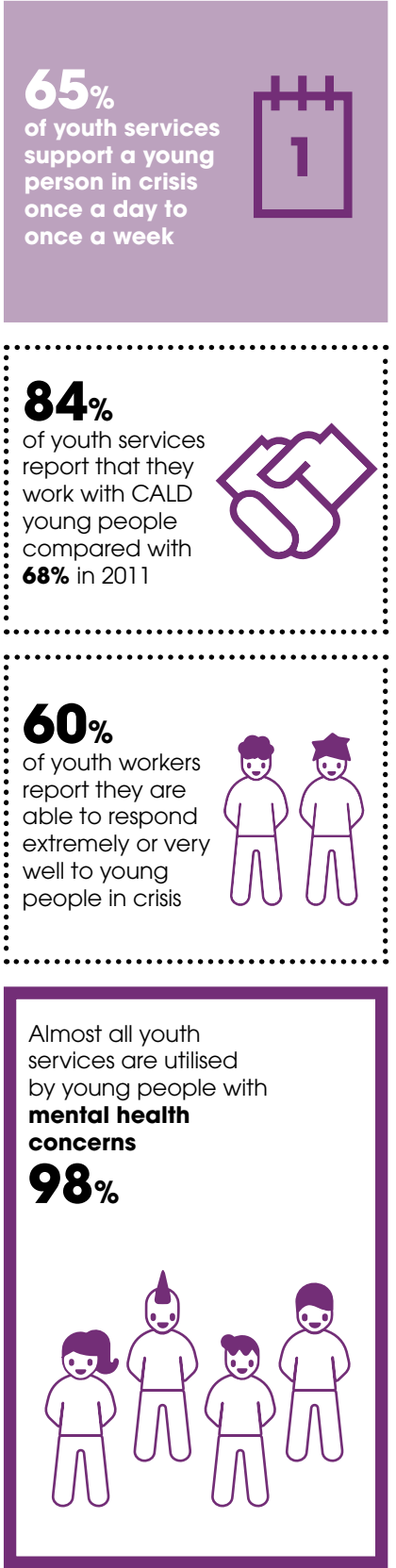
THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUTH SERVICES



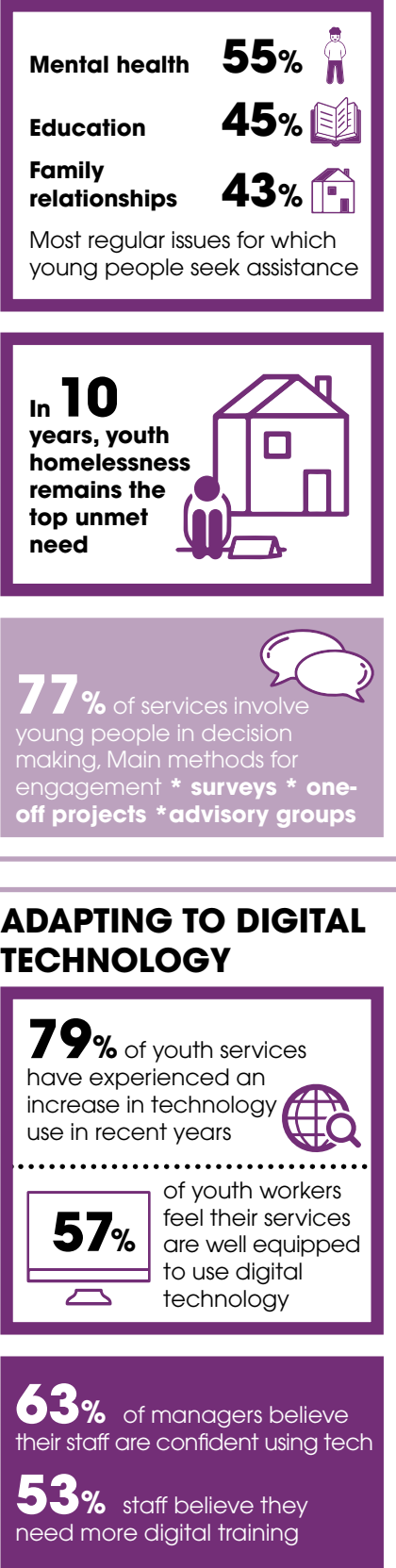
YOUTH SECTOR WORKFORCE



YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUTH SERVICES



YOUTH ISSUES



Recommendations

Realising the Value of the Youth Sector

The youth sector in NSW is committed to working with young people and delivers important services that assist young people to achieve social, economic and cultural participation and wellbeing.

However, the sector is increasingly under strain to support the growing numbers of young people experiencing crisis. Current resourcing is not sufficient to meet the persistent and growing demand for services.

These services intervene at a critical point in the lives of young people and we risk losing a generation of young people who are at the centre of key structural changes in society if they can not access opportunities and help at the right time. Those who work in the sector call for new policy approaches to address the drivers of homelessness, mental health concerns, and learning and working in a changing world.

The data reported here shows that the youth sector workforce is committed, skilled and effective at working with young people who are in need. The report shows that young people seek out youth services and want help to address basic and unmet needs. Workers report that their work makes a positive difference to the young people they work with, although there are misconceptions about the practice, value and impact of youth work as a profession.

Those working in the sector highlight there is a need to improve the understanding and value of the NSW youth sector and more can be done to conceptualise and monitor the impact and change the sector contributes to in the short and long term.

To maximise the role of youth services in NSW in helping all young people achieve their potential, we make the following recommendations:

A SUPPORTED AND RESOURCED SECTOR

- **Adequate, secure and equitable government funding and support** to address the needs of young people experiencing crisis.
- **A coordinated government policy and sector strategy** to shift from crisis management to crisis prevention.
- **Recognise and incorporate the expertise of the youth sector** in policy development and best practice service delivery for young people in NSW.
- **Build on sector collaboration** to integrate and develop journey pathways between services from soft-entry points to greater support and therapies when needed.
- **Recognise and create structural supports for youth service collaboration** with other sectors, groups, and institutions in the community, especially schools.
- **Increase investment for monitoring and evaluation**, including the development of youth-centred impact indicators that can be tailored to different contexts and changing circumstances. Evaluate the impact of scale in service models to ensure that, as services deliver to wider geographical areas, effective tailoring is taking place to meet local needs.
- **Build service capacity for innovation and best practice** in youth participation and the application of digital technologies for greater impact.

VALUED AND IMPACTFUL PROFESSION

- **Set up a professional body** for the youth sector to support and promote clarity of practice, purpose and impact.
- **Develop minimum standards** of training and skills in working with young people.
- **Understand and support the mental health and wellbeing of Workers in the sector** particularly those working with young people in crisis.
- **Ensure services have a tailored framework for standards** in youth service delivery.
- **Leverage and grow strong, positive and collaborative relationships**, especially with the NSW Government and education providers including schools.

SKILLED AND EMPOWERED PROFESSIONALS

- **Address working conditions**, including frequent overtime, unpaid work, and insecure positions for new staff in the sector.
- **Provide accessible, relevant and ongoing training.**
- **Ensure all Workers have access to regular supervision** (internal and external).
- **Support the growing workforce diversity** that responds to young people from similar backgrounds, including cultural responsiveness for all Youth Sector Workers.

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND CRISIS

- **Centre young people and their needs in decision-making** processes at all levels of policy, service and programs.
- **Develop a state-wide strategy for responding to young people in crisis**, especially to reduce and prevent youth homelessness and mental health concerns.
- **Introduce greater investment in service delivery** to address homelessness, early intervention and accommodation supports.
- **Develop a shared understanding of all forms of youth participation** as inclusive practice that can be tailored and applied in different contexts.
- **Foster youth participation across the spectrum** from engagement in decisions that directly affect their lives through to involvement at the highest levels of policy making.

SERVICES THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

- **Enable all services to adapt to the digital age** by promoting and supporting use of technologies to improve youth services.
- **Introduce more capacity building and access to training for Workers and Services** in the sector to ensure digital technology can be used to leverage opportunities and benefits for young people – as well as help them to manage risks.
- **Develop a better sector-wide understanding of digital youth work** and its implications for the Sector and Workers. In particular, how to integrate everyday digital practices to assist creative and responsive youth work practice into the future.
- **Develop technology-based strategies** to better support young people to navigate the service ecology, promote coordination across the Sector, and enhance the way services respond to young people in crisis.

GAPS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- To achieve a complete view of the youth sector and the young people it serves, the current study should be complemented by research on the following:
- How high is the level of crisis outreach and intervention that is not captured in current funding? In which regions is this work being done and how can it be better resourced?
 - What is the impact of capacity and demand issues highlighted in this report on the youth sector workforce? What is driving high staff turnover and what are the opportunities to support and retain Workers in this context?
 - What are the experiences and perspectives of young people who access youth services? How can the system better meet their interests and needs? How can their views better inform service design, policy, advocacy?
 - How is technology being used by the youth sector? What is the innovative practice and where are the gaps that are negatively impacting service delivery and youth outcomes?
 - Call for more comprehensive mapping of the sector and data on the number of services and Youth Workers in NSW, and the locations in which they deliver.

Background

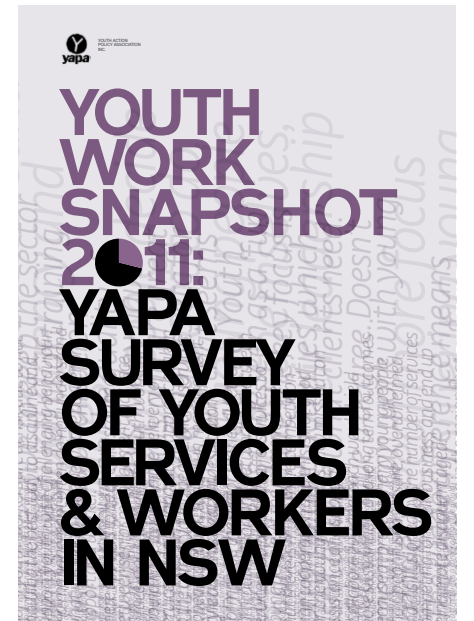
Debates about the Australian youth sector and its value, standards, and professionalisation have varied over the past two decades.

These debates have taken place in the context of changing governments, funding cuts, and the closure of youth work tertiary education options.¹ One of the persistent challenges for understanding the dynamics and contributions of the youth sector has been the shifting boundaries and definitions of who a youth sector worker is, what a youth service is, what they deliver and where.

Developments in codes of ethics and definitions of youth work² have aided and challenged practitioners and services within an ever-changing employment and education context.³

This has led to a sector that struggles with both internal validation and 'confusing expectations',⁴ as well as external recognition and state support.⁵ Attempts to evaluate and demonstrate the value of the youth sector for young people and society must take the context into account and focus on the experiences and perspectives of youth sector workers and the young people they serve.⁶

Insights into the state of the youth sector from youth sector managers and workers is needed to better articulate and communicate the impact and value of youth services to policy makers and the sector at large. This study is one step in meeting that challenge by focusing on the Services and Workers who serve the young people of New South Wales (NSW).



- 1 Bessant J & Webber R, 2003, 'Youth workers, professional identities and narratives of workplace change: A preliminary report', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 78, pp. 25–38; Evans G, 2015, 'Ethical codes in youth work: A comparative analysis', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 420–426; Emslie M, 2012, 'It's time': A case for the professionalisation of youth work', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 16–24; Ranahan P, 2018, 'De/valuing youth work: Revealing tensions in professional identity development while enhancing and applying mental health literacy', *Child & Youth Services*, Vol. 39, No. 2–3, pp. 137–157.
- 2 Reimer, E. (2013). Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) National Snapshot of Youth Work. AYAC: Sydney.
- 3 Ranahan P, 2018, 'De/valuing youth work: Revealing tensions in professional identity development while enhancing and applying mental health literacy', *Child & Youth Services*, Vol. 39, No. 2–3, pp. 137–157.

- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Emslie M, 2009, "Please sir, I want some more": Securing better pay and conditions for youth workers in Australia', *Youth Studies Australia*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 32–40.
- 6 Cooper S & Gretschesel A, 2018, 'Evaluating Youth Work in its Contexts'. In Pam Alldred, Fin Cullen, Kathy Edwards and Dana Fusco (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Youth Work Practice*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Introduction

Snapshot 2020 provides a current picture of the youth sector in NSW, outlining the services, workforce, and the young people they serve, how services are adapting to the digital age as well as future opportunities for the sector. All of this is in the face of considerable challenges and uncertainty that young people face in the state of NSW.

Nearly ten years ago, the NSW youth peak, Youth Action (then Youth Action and Policy Association, or YAPA), conducted research to establish baseline data on the state of the NSW youth sector in 2011.⁷ Since then, a national definition of youth work has been developed⁸ and reforms to the way governments fund services have been underpinned by increasing demand for services to meet the needs of young people experiencing crisis.

In NSW, the top issues young people are experiencing and concerned about are mental health, housing and homelessness, and employment.⁹ The first Australian Youth Development Index in 2016 identified that there has been a decline in the Health and Wellbeing domain for young people in NSW. There is an urgent need to understand how young people are being supported to navigate these challenges – as well as how they access spaces, people, and resources where they can socialise, learn new skills, play, explore and express themselves. These are universal human rights, essential to growth, development, citizenship, and healthy societies.¹⁰

With renewed state-level interest in strengthening the social and community services sectors, it is critical that rigorous evidence is generated on the scope, impact and value of the work of the youth sector to the lives of young people and the community. The NSW Government has also prioritised improvements to service delivery in the community sector and understands that the strengths and challenges of the youth sector are a critical part of improving the quality of services that young people receive.¹¹

This study contributes to this effort by asking the following questions:

- What is the capacity of the youth sector and how does it meet the needs of young people?
- Who is the sector supporting and how are services working with young people?
- How are services and Youth Sector Workers responding to the digital age?
- What are the key challenges for the sector to achieve greater impact? How could these be addressed?

In some areas, we are able to provide comparisons with the 2011 data to glean what continuities and changes characterise the services and professionals who work in them. This is crucial evidence to inform policy making and sector reform, as well as identifying ways to build on the strengths of the youth services sector.

Youth Action and Western Sydney University are pleased to present this research on the capacity and value of the youth sector, workforce characteristics, and the role of the youth sector in the lives of young people across NSW. In particular, this report aims to:

- Enhance public and political understanding of the state, value, and impact of the youth sector in NSW.
- Inform state government reforms and policy making for the sector, specifically relating to the Premiers' Priorities and the Targeted Early Intervention reform.
- Contribute to monitoring how changes to resourcing and context impact youth work in NSW.

⁷ Youth Action (2011) *Youth Work Snapshot 2011: YAPA survey of youth services and workers in NSW*. Sydney.

⁸ Reimer, 2013

⁹ Youth Action (2019) *A NSW for young people: Beyond 2019*, Youth Action

¹⁰ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948); *International Convention on Civil and Political Rights* (1966); *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989).

¹¹ NSW Government (2018) *Forecasting Future Outcomes – Stronger Communities Investment Unit 2018 Insights Report*. Sydney.

Methodology

The primary data collection for this study was conducted through a survey of Managers and Workers in the youth sector. Both surveys were open for almost four weeks in total, from 12 November until 13 December 2019 and responses from 488 completed surveys are used for this report.

The *Snapshot 2020: NSW Youth Sector* research was conducted in New South Wales, Australia, through an online survey to youth services across the state. The survey questions were developed by Youth Action and researchers at Western Sydney University, and drew from the questionnaires used in the *YAPA Snapshot 2011: Survey of Youth Services and Workers in NSW*.

An advisory group of youth sector representatives was convened to provide input and advice on the nature of questions to make sure the data being collected was relevant to the youth sector.

The survey also included new questions to capture data on additional topics, such as youth participation and adapting to digital technology. Compared to *Snapshot 2011*, the *Snapshot 2020* survey collected less data on the young people the sector serves and more on the people who work in the sector.

The survey gathered specific information from Managers and Chief Executive Officers, as well as from youth sector workers and staff working directly with young people. A paper-based survey was developed and made available on request.

In the absence of a register of youth services or Workers in NSW, the survey used a snowball sampling method, supported by a communications strategy that encompassed social media engagement, email and direct phone calls targeting organisations and staff working with young people in NSW.

In total, 641 people commenced the survey. There were 225 unsubmitted surveys, some of which had all but the final question submitted. Surveys with 50% or more answers completed were included and cross-checked for duplication. As a result, 488 surveys were included in the final analysis. Of these, 57 were Managers or CEOs (henceforth 'Managers'). The remaining 431 were from people working in the sector who identified as a coordinator or team leader of a youth program, youth worker, social worker, case worker, educator, support worker or administration or office worker (henceforth called 'Worker'). Questions were not mandatory and so the number of responses (referred to hereafter as n) varies across questions and we have indicated in the text what the n is for each set of responses reported.

The survey gathered data on the current state of the youth sector in NSW, including descriptive data on services, the workforce, impact and change, adapting to the digital age as well as trends and engagement with the young people they serve. Quantitative and qualitative analysis

was used, depending on the nature of the question. For ease of reading we have rounded up to full numbers when reporting percentages.

In addition to thematic analysis, we used Leximancer software for some qualitative questions. Leximancer generates a semantic map of prominent, overlapping, and related concepts and themes through co-occurrence, and links to comments around those themes by relevance. Apart from formatting, the text is unedited, representing frontline Youth Sector Workers 'in their own words' and the resulting themes are not influenced by the aims and objectives of the research team beyond the thematic direction set by the wording of the questions.

Case studies were developed on key themes highlighted in the research. Survey respondents could voluntarily opt in to be a case study at the end of the online surveys and informed consent was provided through the youth sector manager or worker. Existing documentation informed case studies on key themes. In some cases, the content used to develop the case studies was collected by Youth Action and for others it was provided by youth services. Portraits of Youth Sector Workers were taken at the Youth Sector Conference in 2019, during which we asked specific questions of Workers and consent was obtained for the use of their information for this report.

LIMITATIONS

As with all research, this study had some limitations. While every effort was made to ensure all Services and Workers were aware and able to participate in the survey, the sample is self-selecting and may be skewed. We also note that the survey was conducted and promoted during the start of the most catastrophic bushfire seasons in NSW history. This may have had an impact on the capacity of Services and Workers to respond to the survey.

As there is no clear data on the number of services and Workers in the youth sector in NSW it is difficult to determine how representative the sample in this study is. The Manager survey is a small sample. We note, however, that there is representation from all regions of NSW. Where possible, we have sought to compare findings with the 2011 survey results so as to situate the validity of the results reported here.

Unfortunately, there were also a few limitations in some question logics. Specifically, respondents could only select parents born overseas or in Australia, but not both. This may have affected results for a small number of questions. Also, pay rate questions had overlap in the upper and lower number in the 'before tax' brackets, which affects the clarity of the results.

TERMINOLOGY

Youth Sector refers to any organisation, service, program, or project that is broadly intended to engage and support young people.

Youth Organisation refers to an entire organisation that is focused on supporting young people. It may include multiple youth services, youth programs, or be focused on sector development, or policy and advocacy activities.

Youth Service refers to a community-based service with a specific focus on opportunities, activities, and support for young people. It may include multiple youth programs and projects.

Youth Program refers to a co-coordinated set of activities for young people with its own name, funding, staff, aims, and outcomes that sits under an umbrella organisation, such as a youth service or other organisation.

Youth Project describes co-coordinated activities with distinct goals that may be part of a larger youth program and sits within a youth service or other organisation.

Young people refers to anyone aged 12 to 25 years, unless otherwise specified.

Supervision refers to professional meetings held between Workers and Supervisors or Managers to receive support, education, a chance to reflect on their practice and discuss work/life impacts.

External supervision refers to coaching and mentoring, such as encouraging continual improvement of competencies and fostering personal growth for professional gain. It also involves a relationship between a practitioner and a supervisor who usually possesses greater skills, knowledge and/or experience.¹²

Youth Development refers to the process of enhancing the status of young people and empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It enables them to contribute and benefit from a politically stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens.¹³

In this report we also use the following shorthand terms:

Manager is used to refer to those respondents to the survey who said they were a manager of a service, a CEO, or a Director of an organisation.

Service is the term used when referring to the responses that Managers provided about their organisation, service, program or project.

Worker is used in the report to refer to survey respondents who identified as coordinator or team leader of a youth program, youth worker, social worker, case worker, educator, support worker or administration or office worker.

Findings
The State of the
NSW Youth Sector

12 <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-adolescents-supervision>
13 Australian Youth Development Index (2016)
Australian youth development index: 2016 report. Woolloomooloo.

Youth Services

Youth services are located across the state. There has been an increase since 2011 in state-wide service delivery, and a decrease in the number of services delivered in regional and rural NSW. The geographical areas that services cover have also increased, and the trend is for services to cover more Local Government Areas (LGAs) or deliver services state-wide.

LOCATION AND TYPE OF ORGANISATION

Managers were asked to identify the regions where their organisations delivered services and could select as many as they liked.

- Managers reported that, of all services delivered, more than half were delivered in the Greater Sydney Region (58%) and regional and rural NSW (31%). Only 6% of services delivered by Managers participating in the survey were in Murrumbidgee, Western or Far Western NSW (figure 1).
- When compared with the 2011 study, there was a notable increase in state-wide service delivery, from 2% to 18%. There was also a significant drop in services delivered in only 1 LGA, from 55% in 2011 to 23% in 2019. In 2019 48% of services operated in between four LGAs to state-wide, suggesting growth in scaling services to deliver to larger areas and numbers of young people (figure 2).

Figure 1 Geographical regions where services are delivered (n=57)

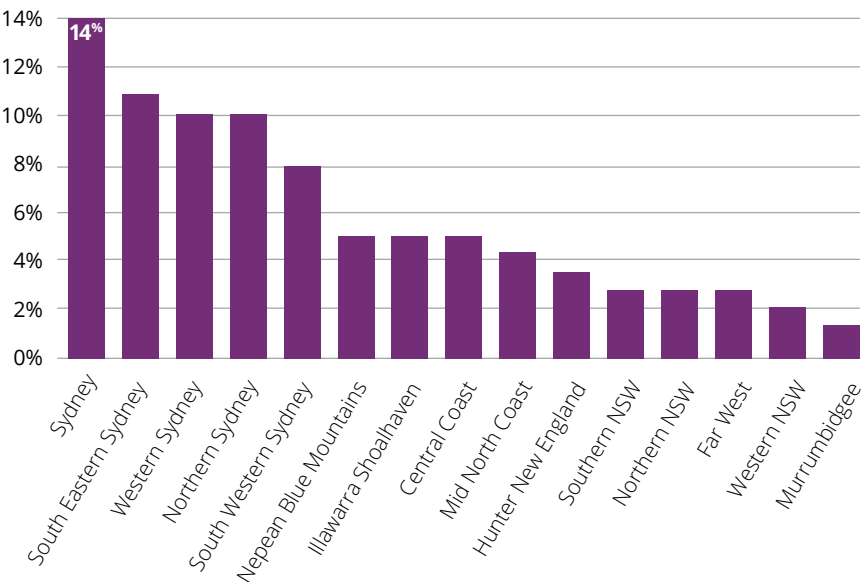
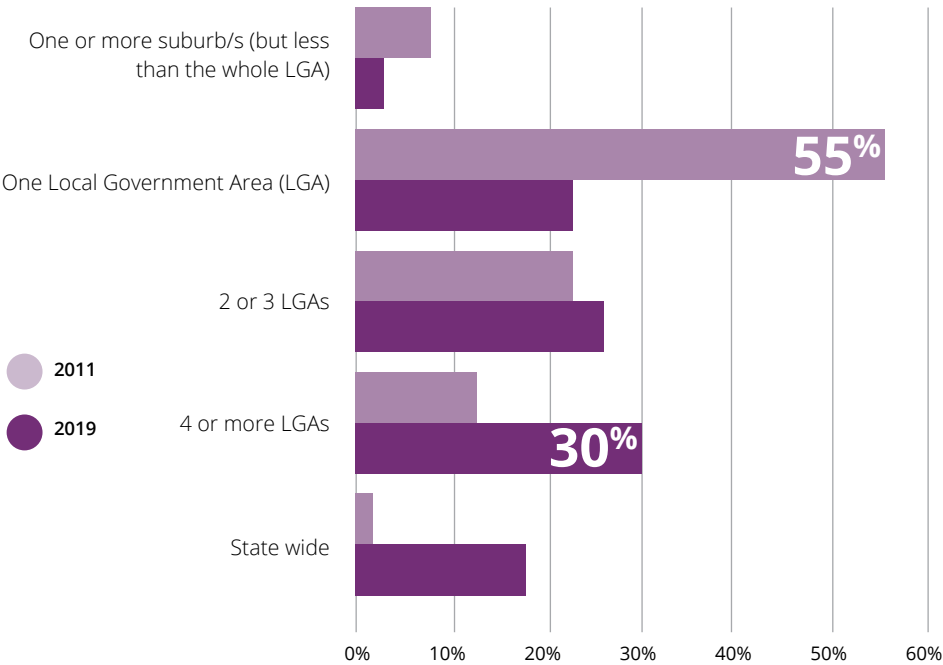
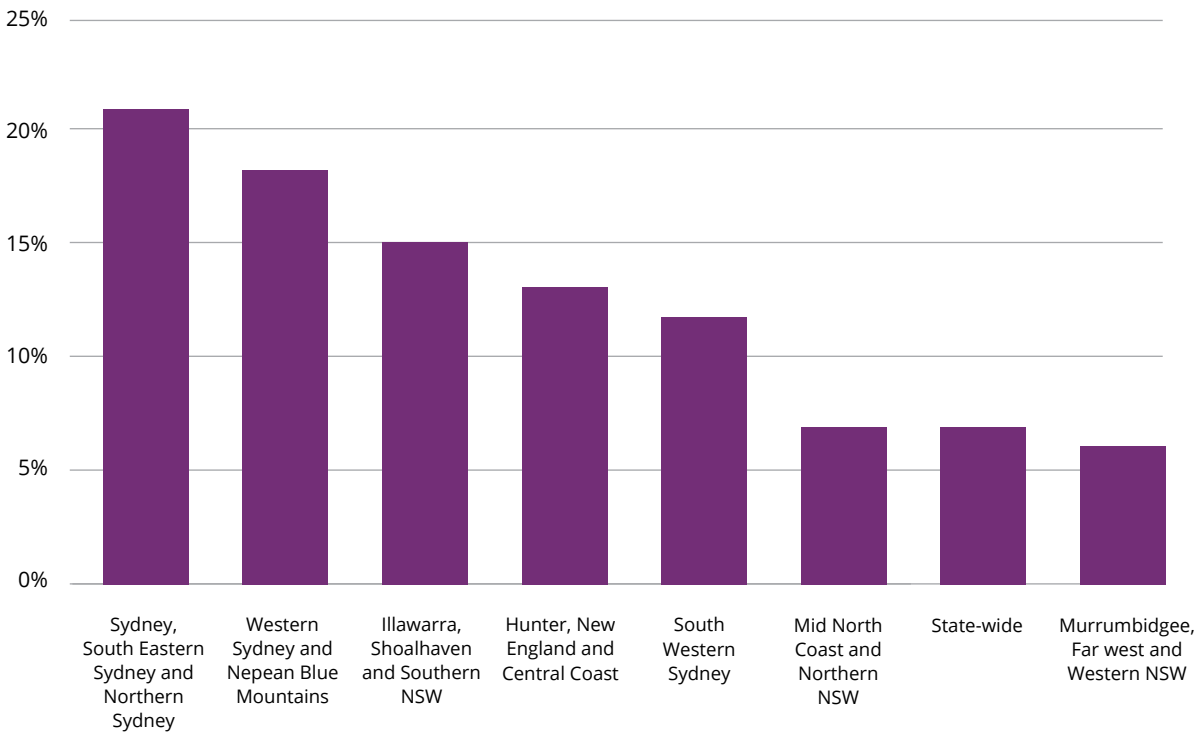


Figure 2 Size of area covered by services: 2011-2019 comparison (n=57)



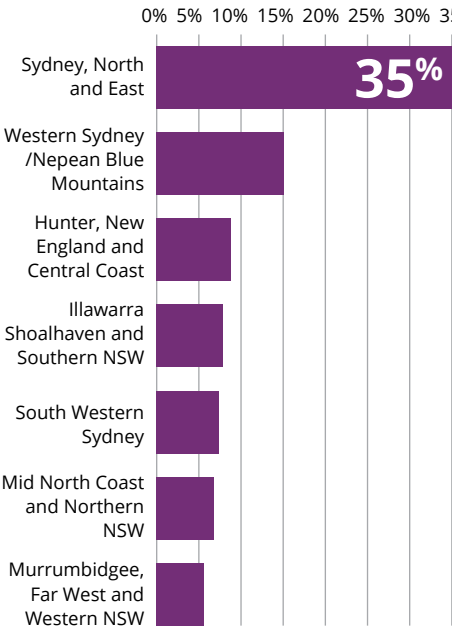
- Not considering state-wide services, a lower number of services were reported to be delivered in regional and rural NSW (31%) compared with in 2011 (50%). In the absence of comprehensive data on all services and their locations in NSW, it is impossible to know if this is an accurate reflection of the delivery of services. It may reflect a skew in the 2019 sample arising on the basis of self-selection, or it could indicate that the regional and rural communities are being increasingly serviced by state-wide organisations. What it does suggest is that more comprehensive mapping of where and how youth services are delivered in the state is needed.
- Workers were asked about the region where most of their work was based. Of the Workers who responded, the majority were in Sydney, South Eastern Sydney and Northern Sydney (21%), followed by Western Sydney and Nepean Blue Mountains (18%) and then the Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Southern NSW (15%). The fewest respondents worked on the Mid North Coast and Northern NSW (7%) and Murrumbidgee, Far West and Western NSW (6%) (figure 3).

Figure 3 Workers by region (n=398)



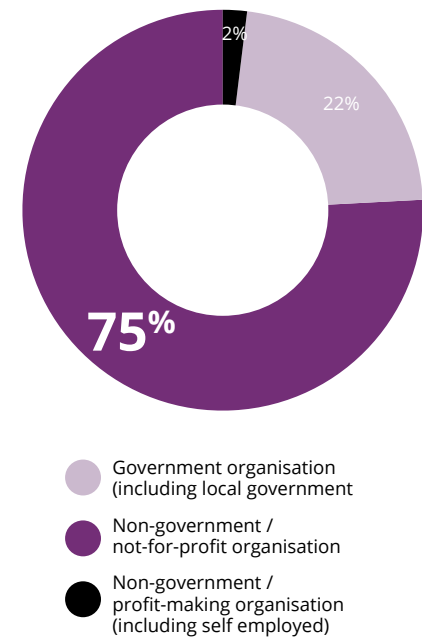
- Based on the proportion of services delivered in different locations there appears to be a fair spread of Workers across regions (figure 4). The results broadly reflect the proportion of young people in different regions within NSW. A third live in regional and rural areas. Two thirds of young people live in Sydney metropolitan areas (66.7%), which includes a third in Western Sydney LGAs.¹⁴

Figure 4 Consolidated regions where services are delivered (n=57)



- Most respondents (n=450) worked in non-government and not-for-profit organisations (75%) and 22% worked for a government organisation, including local government (22%). A very small number worked for for-profit organisations (including being self-employed) (2%) (figure 5).

Figure 5 Organisation type that respondents work for (n=450)



The majority of respondents reported working within youth-specific organisations, services and programs. When asked to select the option that best described the organisation where they worked, respondents (n=488) identified that:

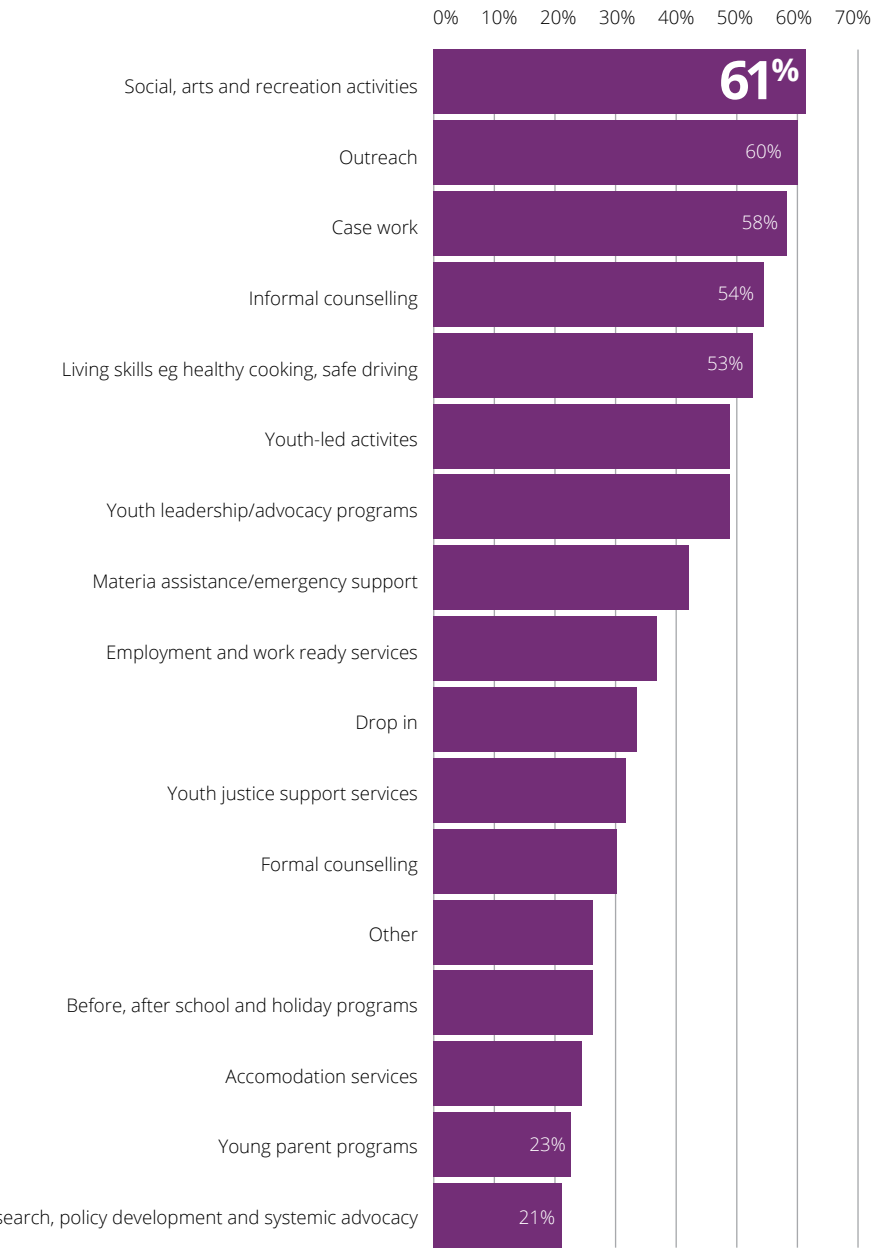
- 32% worked at a Youth Organisation
- 32% worked at a Youth Service
- 29% worked for a Youth Program
- 7% worked on a Youth Project.

There are a wide range of programs, activities and supports delivered through youth services in NSW. The main types of services delivered include social arts and recreation activities, as well as before and after school programs. The activities that use the most amount of staff time tend to be early intervention and crisis support work as well as ‘soft’ entry points. This highlights the important dual function of the youth services sector: providing fun, safe engagement pathways for young people as well as further support and crisis services as required.

TYPES OF YOUTH SERVICES DELIVERED

- Managers were asked to select the full range of services that are provided (as many that apply). The top results were social arts and recreation, outreach, case work, living skills (e.g. healthy cooking), safe driving and informal counselling (figure 6).

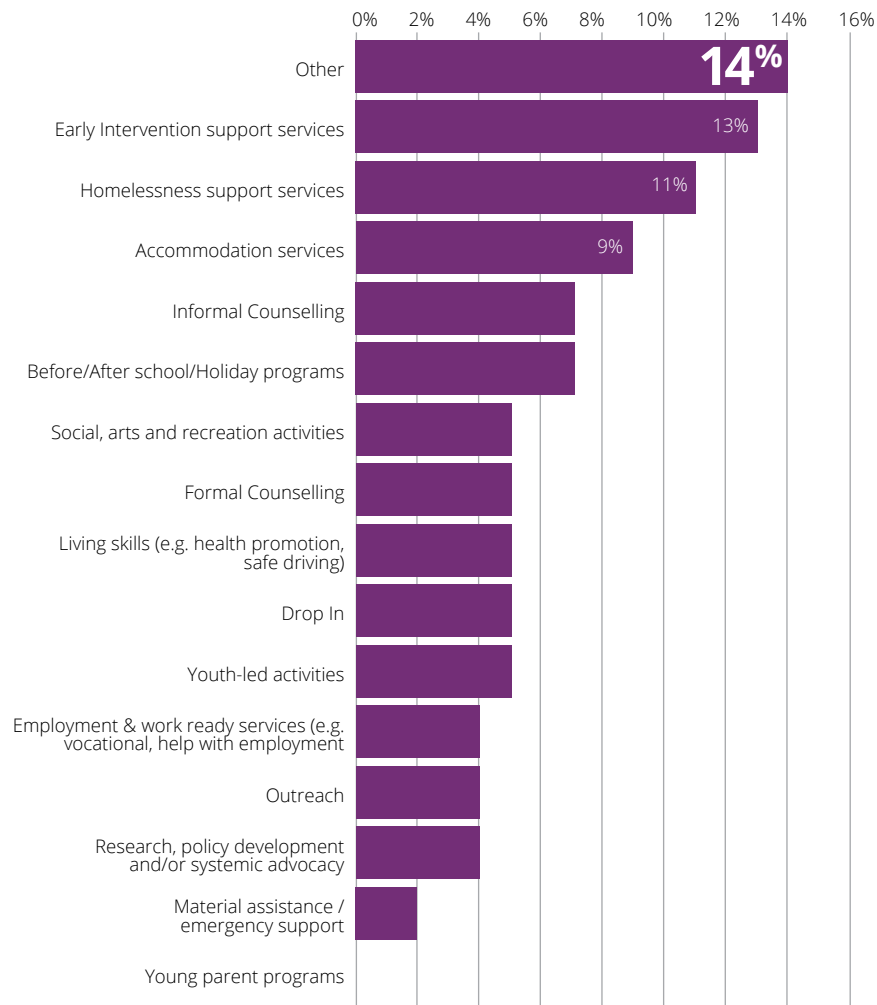
Figure 6 Types of services delivered (n=57, multi-answer)



¹⁴ Australian Government, 2020, *Youth Snapshot*, <https://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/about-us/youth-snapshot>, accessed 18 Feb 2020.

- Managers reported that the activities that use the most amount of staff time were early intervention (13%), homelessness support (11%) and accommodation services (9%) (figure 7) as well as a mix of other services, including mentoring, alcohol and other drug services, and out of home care (14%).

Figure 7 Main use of staff time (n=56)



Respondents were asked about the diversity of Workers, which relates to cultural diversity, whether staff identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTQIA+, with disability, or with lived experience. According to Managers, there is a high level of staff diversity as well as a commitment to promoting diversity in the workplace. Services also aim to ensure staff support young people with backgrounds that are similar to their own.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

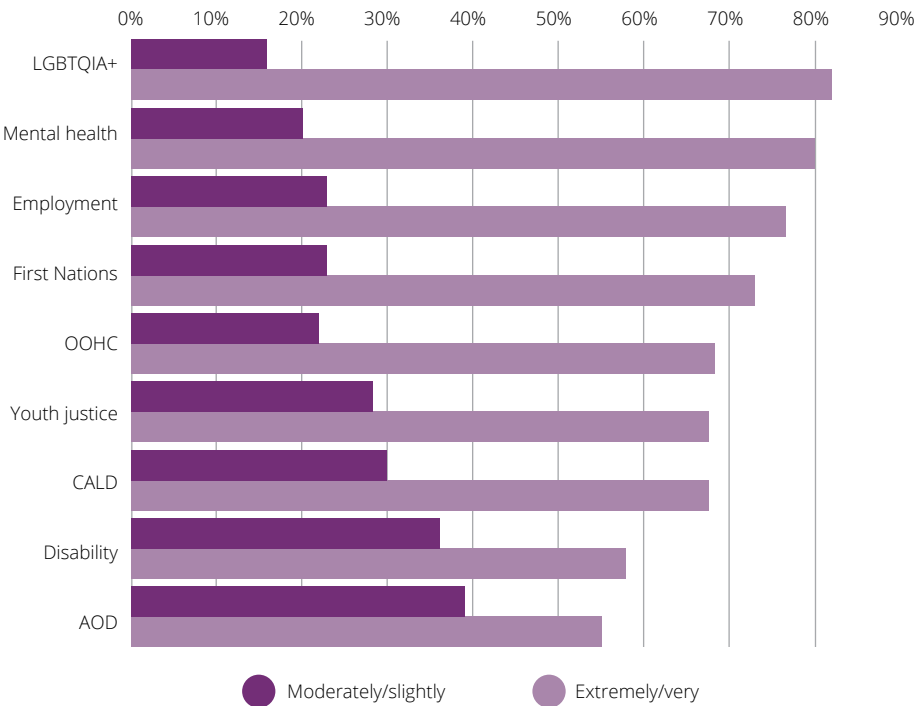
- Of respondents (n=56), 48% already had a workplace diversity strategy and 30% were working towards one.
- There was a rich diversity of backgrounds of youth sector staff. Managers highlighted that a very high proportion of services had staff with lived experience (78%), were culturally and/or linguistically diverse (73%) or LGBTQIA+ (73%) (table 1).
- In addition, 57% of services had staff who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- The youth sector had strong representation of Workers with disability (35%).

Table 1 Services with members of staff who identify as from the following groups (n=51)

Experience	%
People with lived experience	78
Culturally and/or Linguistically diverse	73
LGBTQIA+	73
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	57
People with Disability	35

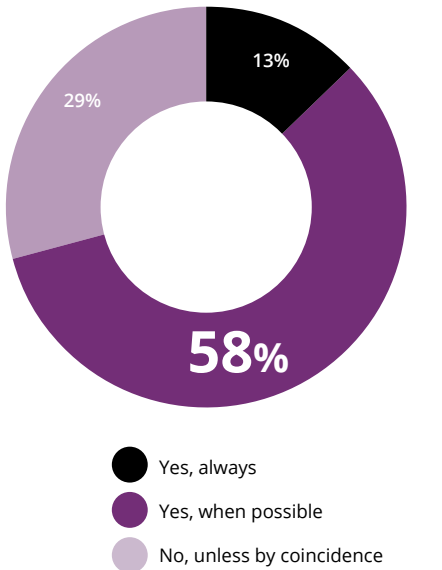
- When asked how capable staff were at working with young people from diverse groups, service managers had a high level of confidence that staff were skilled and knowledgeable in working with the groups of young people who access their services (figure 8).

Figure 8 Staff capability working with young people with specific backgrounds and lived experience (n=56)



- In particular, Managers reported that their staff were very or extremely capable when working with LGBTQIA+ and First Nations young people, as well as young people with mental health concerns or youth justice needs.
- 71% of Managers (n=55) reported that paid staff always or when possible had a specific role working with young people from the same group or background (figure 9).

Figure 9 Paid staff with specific backgrounds and lived experience who work with similar young people (n=55)



More services are being delivered by larger organisations, but the majority said that their funding was not sufficient to meet demand. The number of services saying they were working over 100% capacity was higher than a decade ago. More than a quarter of services report they rarely meet demand.

FUNDING AND STAFFING

To meet demand, many people in the sector were working overtime, often unpaid. The weekly hours worked by staff increased compared to 2011 and the majority of respondents were doing overtime at least some of the time. Volunteers also play a significant role in the delivery of youth services, with the vast majority of services using volunteers to meet their basic administrative and programmatic needs.

There are changes in the funding and resources with which services work and results suggest that the sector is characterised by an increasingly large proportion of funding going to large organisations.

- The majority of services (56%) were small, with less than ten staff. One third (33%) of services had less than 50 staff and 11% have more than 50 (table 2).

Table 2 Number of paid staff working at youth service according to Managers (n=57)

Number of staff	%
less than 10 staff	56%
around 10–25 staff	21%
between 25–50 staff	12%
between 50–100 staff	2%
more than 100 staff	9%
Total	100%

- The annual revenue of services in the sector shifted since 2011, with 70% of services now receiving more than \$250,000 whereas in 2011, 65% of services received less than \$250,000. Almost one quarter (24%) are operating on \$50,000–\$250,000 (table 3).

Table 3 Total annual revenue of youth services from all sources in 2018–2019 (n=54)

Annual revenue	%
Less than \$25,000	4%
\$25,000 to \$50,000	2%
\$50,000 to \$250,000	24%
\$250,000 to \$500,000	19%
\$500,000 to 1 million	16%
\$1 million to \$2 million	15%
over \$2 million	20%
Total	100%

- At the other end of the spectrum, large organisations with an annual revenue over \$2 million make up one fifth of the sector (20%).
- The increase in funding is encouraging. However, 64% of Managers reported that their funding was not sufficient, a further 32% said it was somewhat sufficient, while only 4% reported funding as sufficient (figure 11).
- A proportion of services received federal government funding (19%) or funding from trusts, foundations, fundraising or donations (17%). Compared with 2011, the biggest shift was the increase of non-government fundraising from other charitable sources or donations (19%) (figure 10).

- The mix of revenue streams varies widely across the sector. Some organisations received all or almost all funding from federal or state governments, or trusts and foundations. Others had a significant mix across all sources.
- The majority of services receive some funding from the Federal, State or Local Governments (55%). The mean funding received suggests a wide range and variety in funding, with some services fully funded and others receiving no funding at all from all the listed sources.

Figure 11 sufficiency of service funding (n=57)

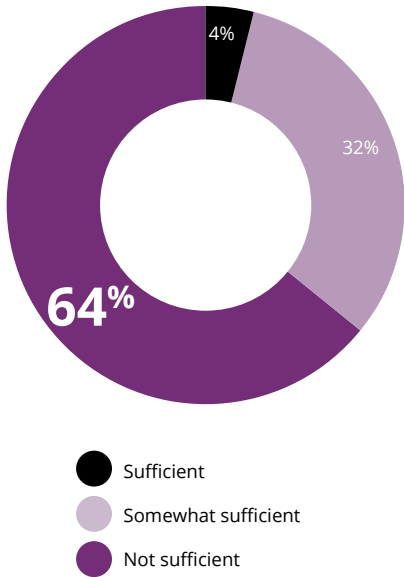
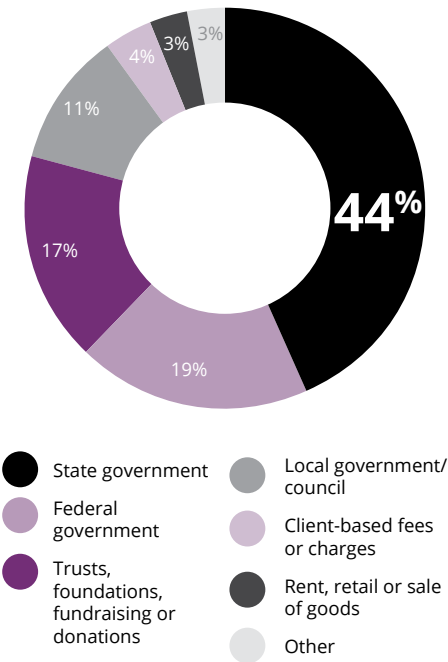


Figure 10 Youth services sources of funding (n=57)



CASE STUDY

EVOLVING SERVICES TO MEET COMMUNITY DEMAND



‘Seeing our organisation grow, you’re able to take on a lot more within our community instead of having just a small focus on a certain group or a certain age group of kids.’

DARREL SMITH
MIYAY BIRRAY, MOREE

Miyay Birray has worked hard at building relationships with the community and participating in community life, while also expanding service provision to include a broader age range. These achievements have been the results of discussions with young people and the wider community.

While offering individual casework support for young people and educational opportunities, Miyay Birray also support the wider community where they can through

programs such as an Aboriginal father’s group. The nature of Darrel and Miyay Birray’s work in a regional area means that support for young people is often extended beyond this age range into the wider community. For example, Miyay Birray assisted during a local funeral by transporting community members and providing some food for the funeral. They recognise that an increase in broader community wellbeing will contribute to an increase in young people’s wellbeing benefitting everyone.

More services reported that they were working over 100% capacity than a decade ago. More Workers are working overtime – often unpaid – and most services also depend on volunteers to help with basic administrative and program delivery needs.

CAPACITY AND DEMAND

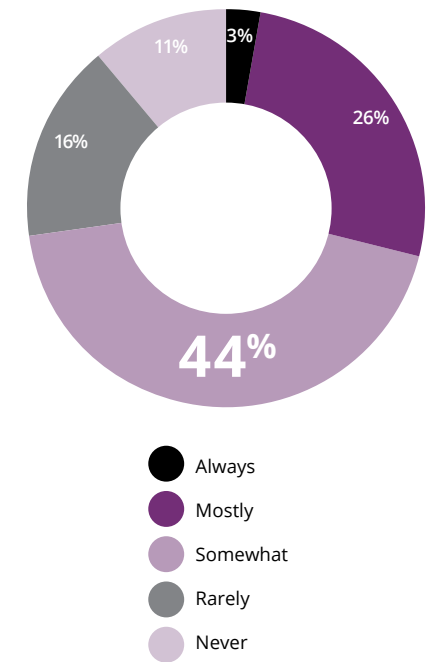
Overall, the sector is trending toward larger funded organisations but, given the increase in services reporting that they are over capacity and that their funding is not sufficient to meet demand, there is a question as to whether the consolidation of service funding is benefitting the sector – and the young people it serves.

Managers were asked to describe the capacity at which their service was working on a typical month.

- Nearly half (49%) said that they are working ‘Over 100% – we are over capacity.’ This is compared with 36.5% of Managers in 2011 reporting their service was running over capacity.

- One fifth of services were running at 100% capacity (21%) or with a little spare capacity (23%), while only 7% said they were operating under capacity.
- When it comes to meeting community demand for the services they offered, Managers were most likely to say that they were ‘somewhat’ (44%) or ‘mostly’ (26%) able to meet demand. Only 3% said they could ‘always’ meet demand and 27% said they could rarely or never meet the need for their services (figure 12).

Figure 12 Frequency with which services can meet community demand (n=57)

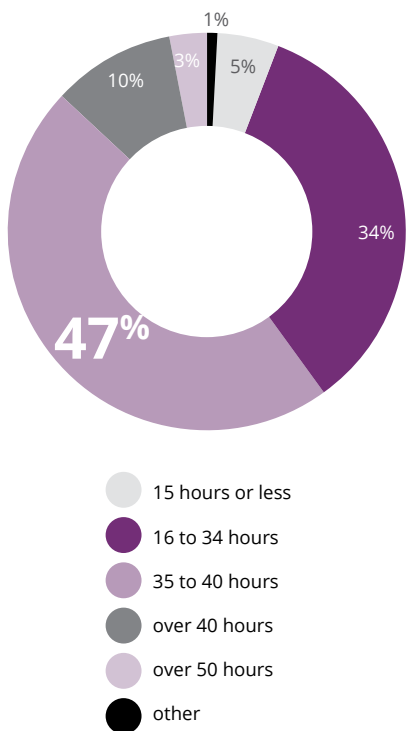


To meet demand, many people are working overtime, often unpaid. The weekly hours worked by staff has increased compared to 2011, most respondents are doing overtime at least some of the time. There is a heavy reliance on unpaid labour, with the majority of services engaging volunteers.

EXTRA HOURS AND VOLUNTEERS

- A significant proportion said they work less than 35 hours per week (39%) (figure 13).
- Of all respondents (n=443), 70% reported that they do overtime at least sometimes, and of these, many do so most of the time (21%) or all of the time (9%).

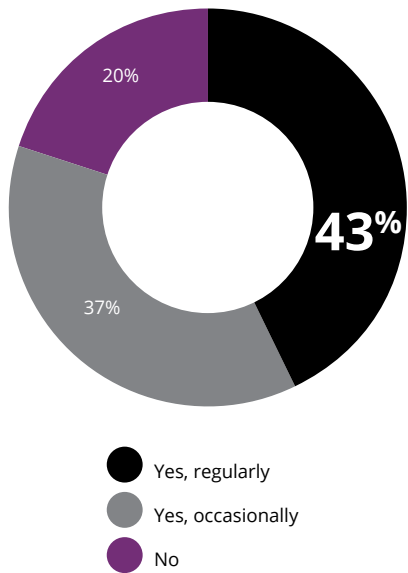
Figure 13 Hours worked by staff in a typical week (n=455)



- Somewhat more concerning is that 63% of respondents reported doing unpaid hours at least sometimes and, of these, 13% always undertake unpaid hours in typical week.
- In total, 80% of Managers said that their service regularly or occasionally had volunteers (figure 14).

- While 50% of services had less than 12 volunteers in a year, some services had very large numbers of volunteers per year. Common volunteer contributions were supporting events and administration, mentoring, and program support. Some services had very large volunteer-based programs involving over 1000 volunteers every year.

Figure 14 Frequency of volunteers at youth services (n=56)



The youth sector has a high level of collaboration with other agencies, services and community groups. The most essential partnerships were with various NSW Government departments and agencies, other local services, and schools.

WORKING WITH OTHER SECTORS

The sector has considerable expertise and a real-time understanding of the issues and opportunities for youth development and wellbeing in the state, which is under-optimised by the NSW Government for policy making.

Three quarters of services are funded by the NSW Government and nearly two thirds advocate to the government on policy matters affecting young people. However, fewer than half of all Managers said they were consulted by the government or asked to contribute to policy development (figure 15).

RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

Many managers are positive about their relationship with the NSW Government, however, nearly two thirds described it as either negative or neutral, demonstrating there is significant room for improvement. Governments, both local and state, are listed as an essential partner for the youth sector.

Managers were specifically asked about the relationship their service had with the NSW Government:

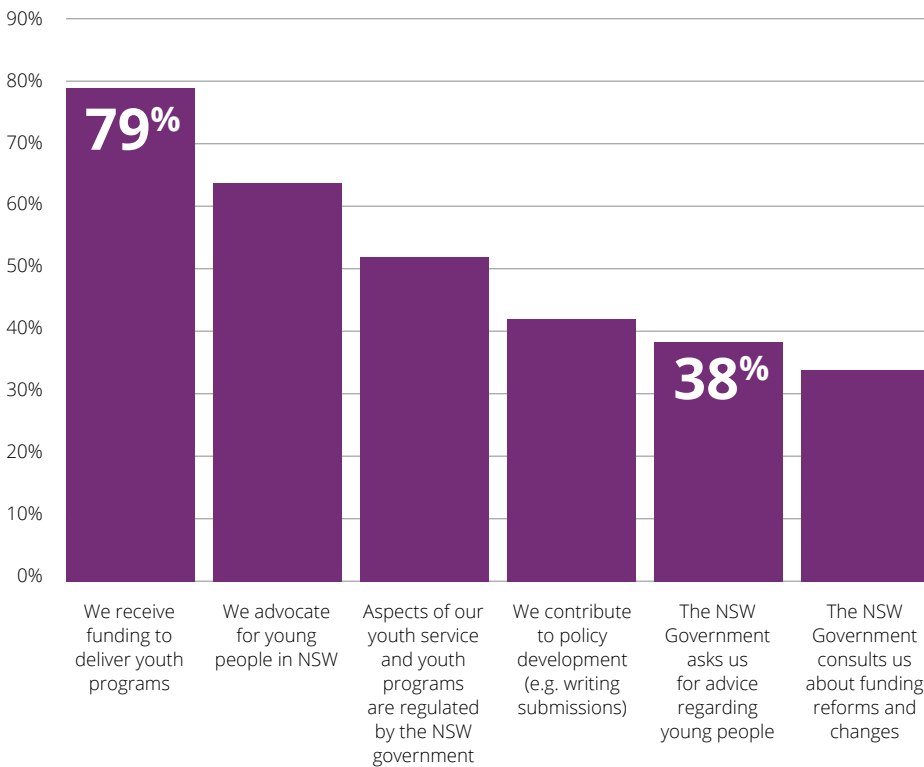
- According to Managers (n=55), local and state governments emerged as the most essential partner (35%), followed by other local services (20%), and schools (19%) (table 4).

Table 4 Most essential partner (n=55)

Most essential partner	%
Government	35%
Local services	20%
Schools	19%
Business	6%
Health	6%
Other	4%
Police	4%
Community	2%
Legal services	2%
Young people	2%

- Three quarters of services received some NSW Government funding (79%) and a high number of them advocated to the government (63%).
- Fewer than half were consulted by the government (33%), were asked for advice (38%), or contributed to policy development (42%) (figure 15).

Figure 15 Services relationship with NSW Government (n=52, multiple answer)

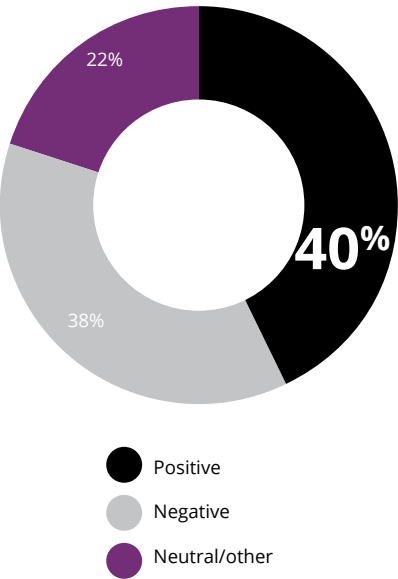


'It is difficult to break through the bureaucracy. The rhetoric of programs does not match the funding and support, particularly for transition to new models. In conversations with Government it becomes all about the dollars rather than them taking real responsibility for critical community issues that go to the heart of the social fabric of our society.' – Manager

Managers were also asked to characterise the relationship their service has with the NSW Government. Managers provided free text answers that were then coded twice by two researchers.

- While 40% of managers characterised their relationship with the NSW Government as a positive one, 60% were either negative or neutral (Figure 16).

Figure 16 Quality of relationship with NSW Government (n=45)



'They are our regular funders, we are known as an expert in our field. We have lobbied for changes. We are confident in the programs we deliver, and the ability to achieve outcomes on behalf of the NSW Government.'
– Manager

'We have a good relationship with our funders... however they consistently tell us how much they love our work but don't have more money to give us.'
– Manager

'We don't get enough money to do the work they ask for, and they know it. So a disrespectful relationship at best.'
– Manager

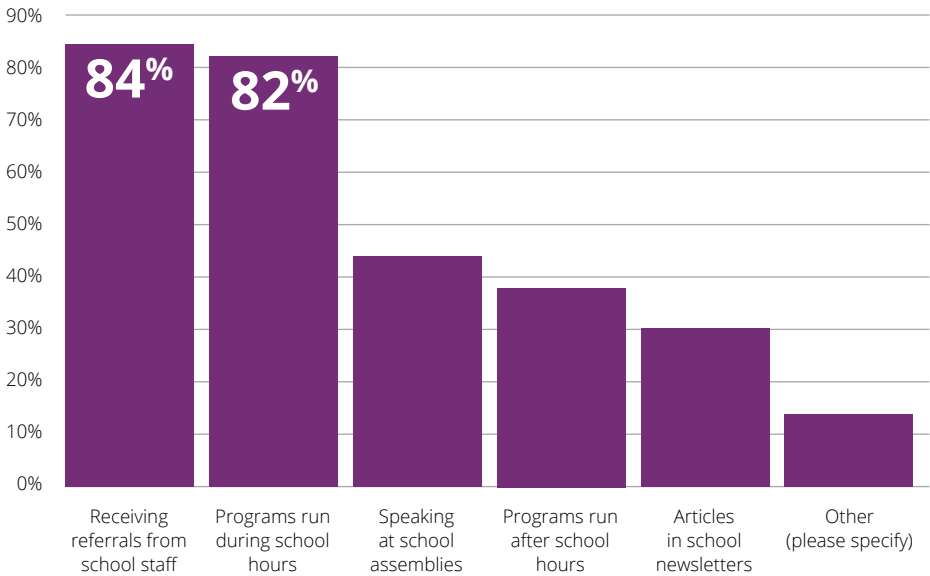
Collaboration can involve co-location and coordination to deliver services, policy development, and case management. Across the board, services and workers would like to enhance collaboration and coordination, especially with the education sector, in order to achieve more in terms of early intervention.

YOUTH WORK IN SCHOOLS

Youth services were asked about how, and how often, they worked with schools.

- For 58% of services, working with schools was a weekly activity. The remaining services worked infrequently with schools, with 35% engaging with schools only a few times per year or not at all.
- When services did work with schools, it was mainly receiving referrals (84%), to deliver programs in school hours (82%), and speak at school assemblies (44%) (figure 17).
- The majority of services wanted to increase the work they do with schools (76%) (n=55).

Figure 17 Types of work undertaken with schools (n=50, multiple answers)





‘I used to be a client of these services as well because I’m a refugee who has only been in Australia for four years now.’

KANE ALKORAGHOOLI
YOUTH WORKER

Kane works at a number of different migrant resource centres in Western Sydney. As a refugee to Australia, he says that he got into youth work as a result of his own experiences of a service recipient when he first arrived in Australia. Kane says that diversity within the sector is important as young people themselves are incredibly diverse. It’s easier for young people to build trust when the people who they are working with have a similar background, speak the same language, or have similar experiences. The youth workers then also become role models for young people – and young people are better able to see the possibilities of what they can achieve through the youth workers.

Focusing on youth leadership and peer education, Kane works to give young people a platform to talk about what they are passionate about, including educating others on different cultures and religions. Kane says there are challenges working within this specific sector, including limited funding to work with individuals under specific visa classes. But he notes that the rewards outweigh these challenges when you know that you have supported a young person who needed help because that might have been you at one point.

Youth Workers

The youth sector workforce is aging, with a big drop in the proportion of workers under 30 years. However, the median age remains 31–40 years old. Gender diversity remains an issue, with female workers still making up the vast majority of the youth sector workforce. There are only marginally more workers in Sydney metropolitan areas compared to regional and rural areas.

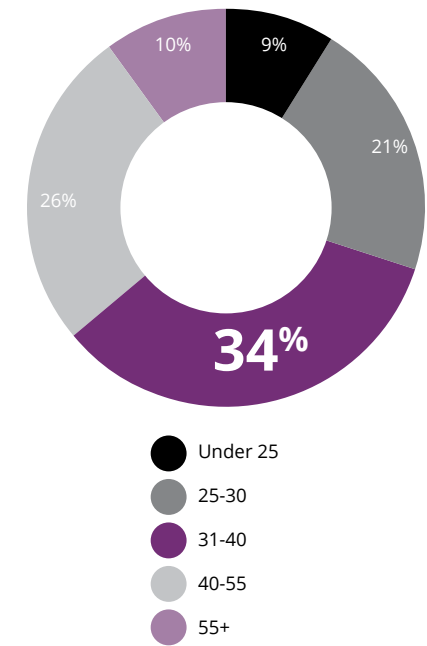
DEMOGRAPHIC OF WORKERS

- The largest proportion of Workers involved in the survey were 31 to 40 years old (34%), compared with 25 to 30 years old (32%) in 2011. Only 29% were aged under 30 years, compared with 48% in 2011, a drop of almost 20%.
- The gender split has not changed markedly in a decade – women are overrepresented (74%) as they were in 2011 (71%). The workforce is feminised at all levels of the sector, from youth workers, social workers or support workers (61%) to CEOs or Executive Directors of youth-serving organisations (81%).

Gender	
74%	female
22%	male
1%	Non-binary
2%	Prefer not to say

- 51% of Workers were based in the Greater Sydney Region and 41% were in regional and rural areas and 7% work state-wide.

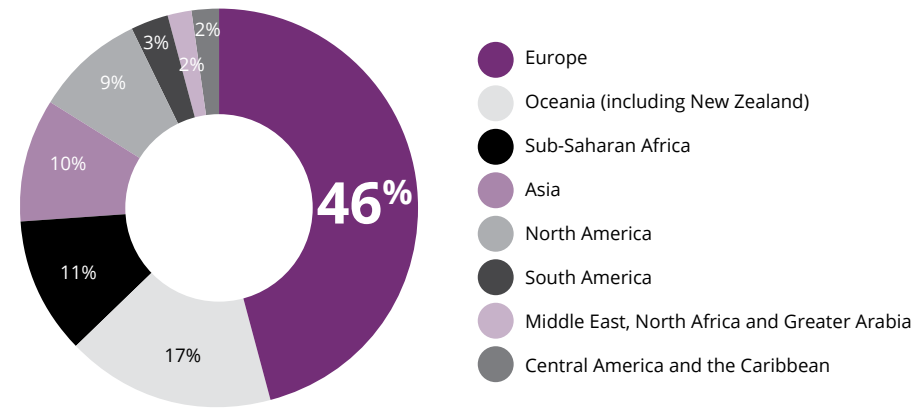
Figure 18 Age group of Workers (n=417)



Cultural diversity appears to be increasing, with 40% of workers having parents born overseas and almost a quarter born overseas themselves.

- Managers reported that, where possible (58%), staff work with young people from a similar background to them.

Figure 19 Place of birth of Workers born outside Australia (n=91)



CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- The majority of Workers (78%) were born in Australia and 40% of all respondents had parents born overseas.
- Almost a quarter of the respondents to the survey were born overseas and, of those, the top two regions represented in responses were Europe and Oceania (figure 19).

Workers have a broad range of education, skills and backgrounds, which they bring to their role within the youth sector. There is a slight decline in the level of tertiary qualifications held by Workers and a rise in Workers with only high school certificates. Workers in the sector bring a range of expertise with qualifications ranging from Community Services and Welfare, Youth and Social Work to Health and Education.

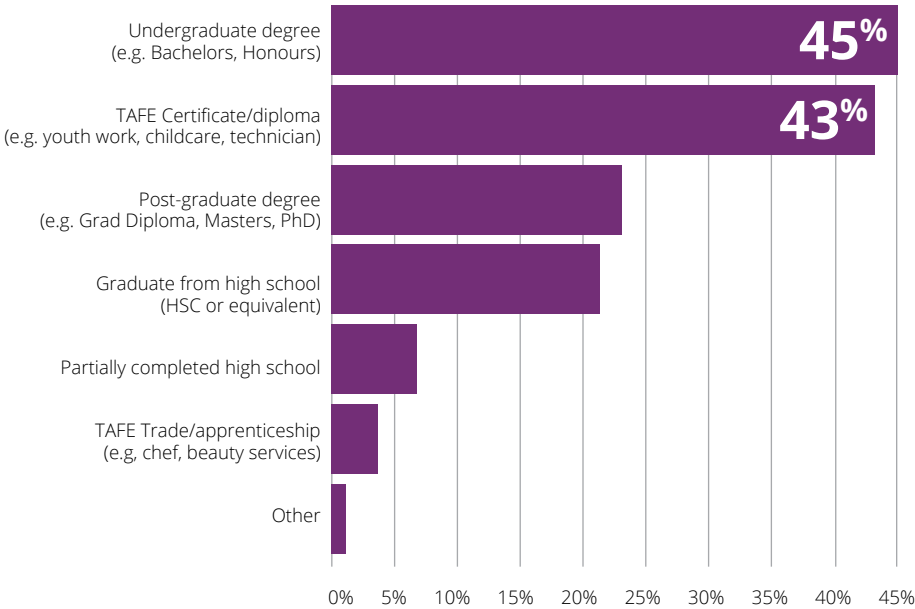
QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

- Respondents (n=441) could nominate all the different levels of education they had completed, with 45% having an undergraduate degree and 43% having completed a TAFE Certificate/diploma (figure 20).
- The diversity of tertiary qualifications in youth sector workers reflected the diverse pathways to and roles in the youth sector. All respondents (n=419) were asked to identify the focus area for their post-secondary qualifications and the top two were Community Services and Welfare (22%) and Youth Work (17%) (table 5).

Table 5 Focus of post-secondary (TAFE or University) qualifications (n=419)

Top 10 areas of post-secondary study	%
Community Services, Welfare	22%
Youth work	17%
Social work	12%
Social Science, Social Policy	11%
Psychology	7%
Arts, humanities	6%
Education	3%
Health, Nursing	3%
Law, Legal Studies	2%
Disability	1%

Figure 20 Different levels of education completed (n=441)



- Overall, when survey respondents who had completed post-secondary education (n=420) were asked how well their formal qualifications prepared them to work with young people, only 14% selected extremely well. The majority of respondents (70%) indicated that their formal studies prepared them very well (34%) or moderately well (36%).
- Overall, studying Community Services and Welfare prepared people better than Youth Work, with 53% of respondents indicating that it prepared them extremely well or moderately well, versus 48% that indicated that studying youth work prepared them extremely well (31%) or moderately well (16%).
- When comparing with those that studied youth work as the focus of their post-secondary studies, there was a vast increase in the sense of preparedness, with 31% indicating that their formal qualifications prepared them extremely well for working with young people.

There is a relatively high turnover in roles within the youth sector, but other factors suggest stability in the way Workers are employed and in the most common type of employment. Managers report that around one third of workers are on casual or fixed-term contracts and two thirds are in permanent full or part-time roles. There is a shift towards people remaining in roles for longer. Workers report that they are committed to their jobs but are worried about their future employment.

YOUTH SECTOR CAREERS

Across individual careers, the tendency is for permanent, ongoing roles in one youth sector organisation. The majority of Workers also plan on being in the same role in a year's time. There appears to be a trend toward stability in employment type and an increase in the length of time Workers stay in roles, with triple the proportion in their role for over 10 years.

- Workers were optimistic about their prospects for career development whilst also expressing concern about the future of their job.
- The majority of Workers had been in their role for less than five years, which may be attributed to the length of funding cycles for youth services, but further research would be required.
- The sector is becoming a more experienced workforce. Since 2011, there was a reduction in proportion of Workers that had been in the youth sector for less than five years.

79% are in one youth sector job
28% most common length in role 3–5 years
76% in agreement that they have good prospects for career advancement
More than half indicate they worry about the future of their job

Managers (n=55) were asked to identify the main employment type for paid staff at their service.

- The majority (69%) were permanent/ongoing employees, almost a quarter of staff were in fixed-term contracts, and only 7% were casual (Table 6). The casual rate is comparable to that of 2011.
- When respondents were asked about different roles throughout their career, on average they had three different types of youth sector jobs. At 64%, employed permanent full-time was the most common response, followed closely by 56% employed on a casual basis and 51% employed permanent part-time (Figure 21).

Figure 21 Different types of youth sector jobs ever held by Workers (n=431)

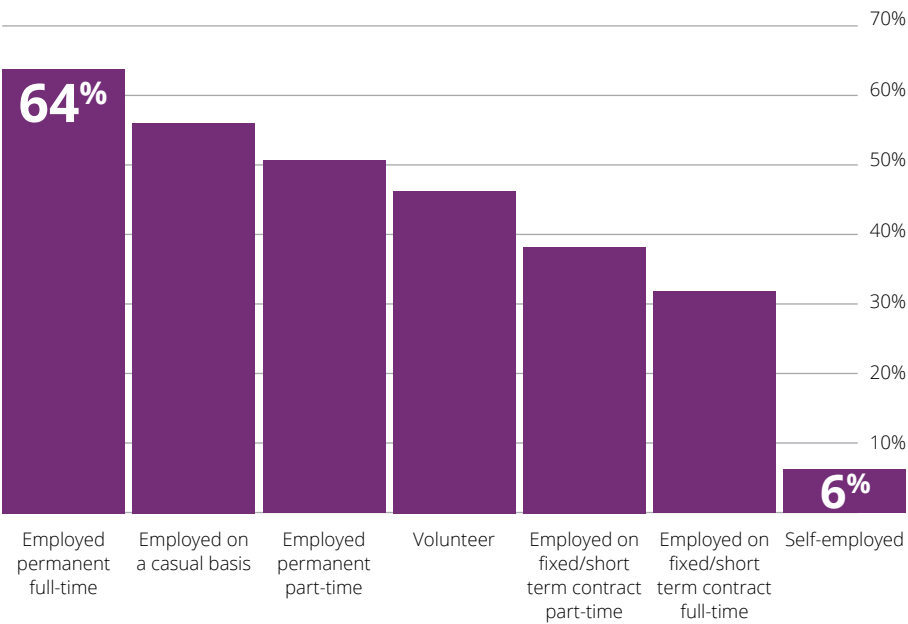
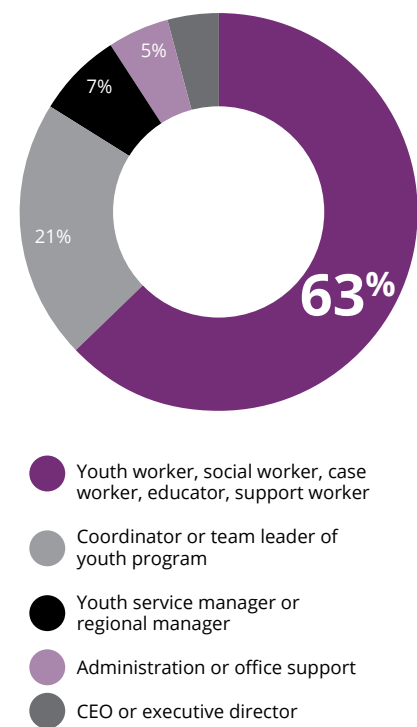


Table 6 Main employment type of paid staff (n=55)

Role type	%
Permanent/ongoing	69%
Fixed term contract	24%
Casual	7%
Total	100%

Figure 22 Current main role in the youth sector (n=488)



- Frontline Workers continued to be the largest proportion of Workers within the youth sector at 63%. In total, 84% identified as either youth worker, social worker, case worker, educator, support worker or as coordinator or team leader of a youth program (figure 22).
- The vast majority (79%) of respondents (n=403) described their current work situation as employed in one youth sector job (table 7).

Table 7 Current employment status (n=403)

Work situation	%
Employed in one youth sector job.	79%
Employed by more than one organisation but this is the only job where I am employed in a youth sector job.	7%
Employed by more than one organisation in more than one youth sector jobs.	9%
Working in more than one youth sector job.	5%
Total	100%

- In 2019, 44% of respondents (n=485) had been working in the sector for five years or less whilst in 2011 it was almost 60%.

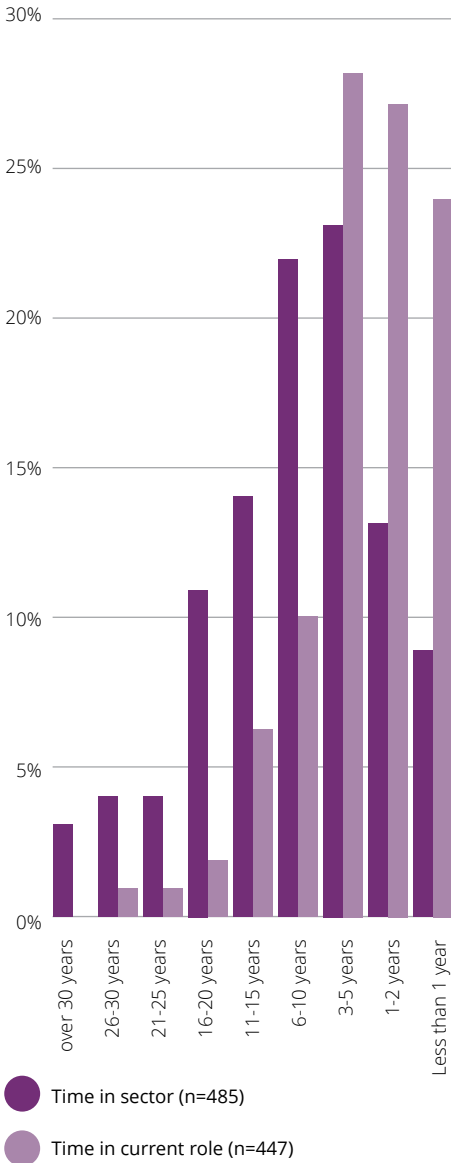
All survey respondents were asked how many years they had been in their current role. If they held multiple roles, they were asked to answer for the role they have been in for the longest time.

- **The top 3 time periods were:**
 - 28%** 3–5 years
 - 27%** 1–2 years
 - 24%** Less than 1 year

- The sector has a high degree of turnover, with 51% of respondents having been in their role for two years or less.
- Compared to 2011, there was two and a half times the number of respondents who had been in their role for over 10 years, with 4% in 2011 and 10% in 2019.

- When respondents were asked how long they had been in the youth sector, 22% nominated 6–10 years.
- A total of 36% of respondents had been in the sector for over ten years, more than double the result from 2011 (figure 23).

Figure 23 Time in the Youth Sector and in current role



Pay before tax appears to have increased since 2011. Almost a quarter of respondents were earning between \$65,000 and \$75,000 in 2019, whereas in 2011 less than 3% earned over \$65,000.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

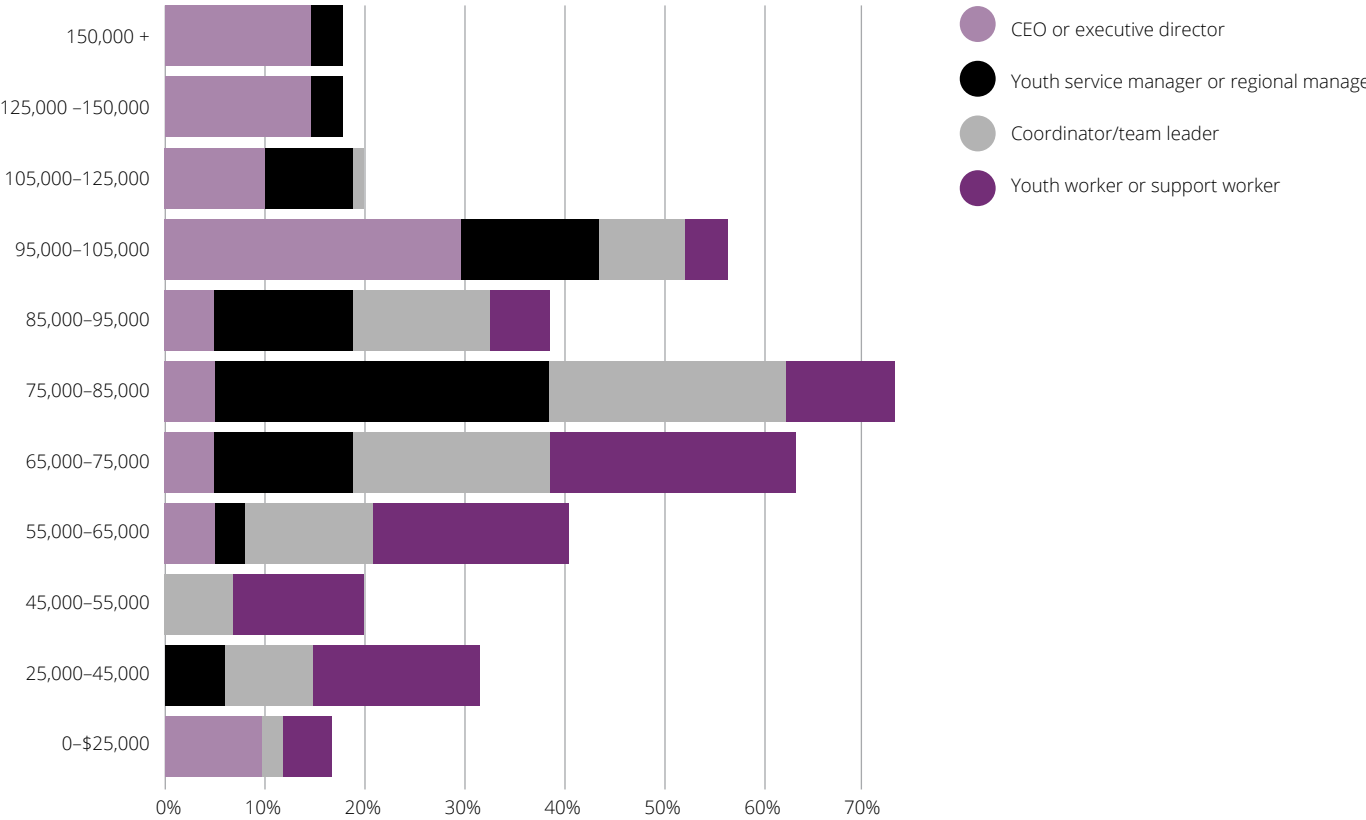
The majority of respondents were in agreement that they were paid fairly for the work they do. When pay is divided by role, it reveals the most common pay scale for different role types:

- Youth Service Manager and Admin Support roles earned \$75,000 to \$85,000.
- CEO and executive director roles earned between \$95,000 to \$105,000.
- Youth Workers earned \$65,000 to \$75,000.

- Respondents were asked to identify the employment award under which they were paid and 68% identified that they were paid under an industry award, such as the Local Government (state) Award or the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award.
- When the pay rates and length of time in youth work were cross-tabulated, we saw a high rate of turnover, with most Workers in their position for under three years. In addition, 100% of those on pay rates of \$25,000 per annum or less were casually employed (figure 24).¹⁵

74% of Workers agree they are paid fairly for the work that they do

Figure 24 Pay before tax by main role (n=435)



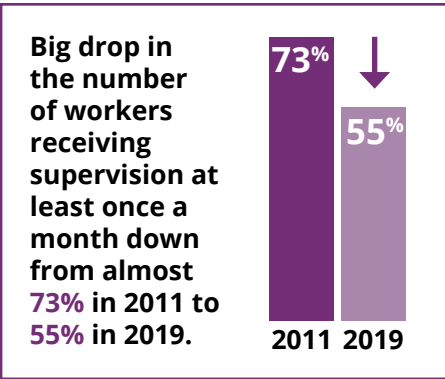
15 Some Managers reported having no employed staff suggesting that some at this level or independent business owners who provide contracted service to the youth sector which may explain the very small percentage of Managers earning up to \$25,000 in their role.

Supervision, support and feedback are important avenues through which Workers can grow, reflect and develop their skills. However, the results show that these are not consistently available across the sector. In some cases, Workers are not getting any regular supervision, external supervision, or annual staff appraisals.

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

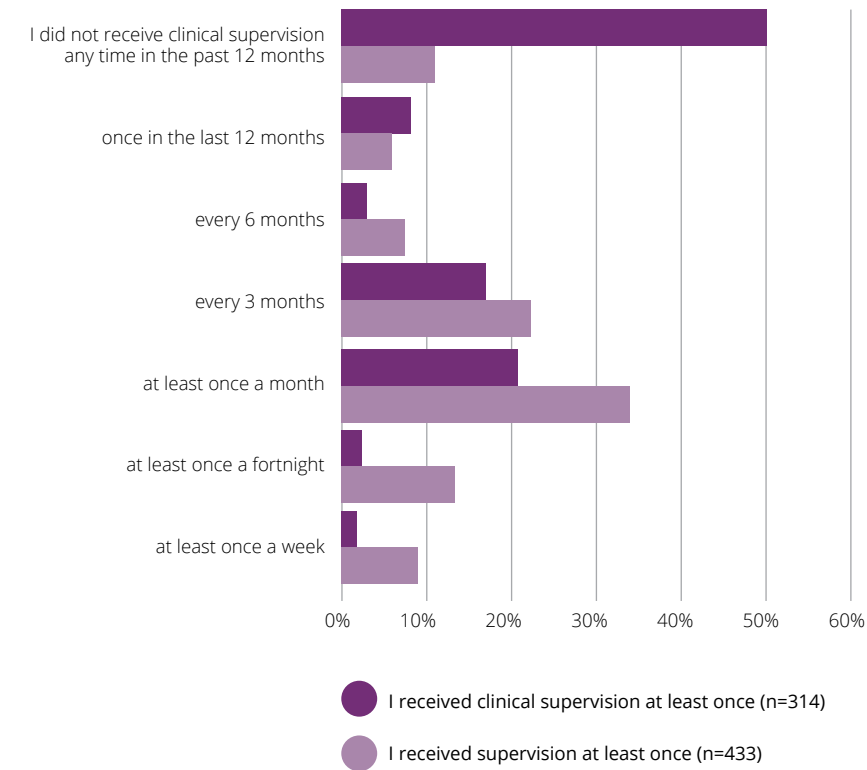
Since 2011, there was a reduction in both the proportion of respondents receiving formal staff appraisal and staff receiving supervision at least once a month, coupled with a high proportion that do not receive external supervision. In spite of these results, the vast majority feel supported in their workplace.

- 43% did not get an annual staff appraisal.
- In relation to supervision, the results show a huge variance in the level of supervision Workers receive. There was a slight increase since 2011 in the number who did not receive any supervision in the past year to just over 10% of respondents in 2019. Monthly supervision remained fairly stable since 2011, with 2019 respondents (n=433) also reporting the monthly supervision as the highest frequency of supervision that respondents received (33.7% in 2019 down slightly from 34.4% in 2011). The second highest frequency for supervision was quarterly (22%) (figure 25).



- There was a reduction in the number of Workers receiving supervision at least once a month down from almost 73% in 2011 to 55% in 2019. Regarding external supervision, it is concerning that almost 50% of Workers did not receive clinical supervision at any time in the past 12 months. Of those that did receive supervision, the most common was monthly (20%) followed by quarterly (17%).
 - At the lowest end, just over 5% of respondents only received external supervision yearly.
- Respondents (n=430) were asked whether or not they had received a formal staff appraisal in the past 12 months. While 57% confirmed that they had, there were still 43% of respondents who did not get an annual staff appraisal. This represents a drop since 2011 of almost 15% in the number of staff receiving formal staff appraisals.
- Overall, 86% of respondents were in agreement with the statement 'I feel supported in my workplace' while, at the same time, 60% agreed with the statement 'I feel emotionally drained from my work.'

Figure 25 Frequency of internal and clinical supervision in past 12 months



The majority of Workers believe that their organisation is dedicated to their professional development and that they were satisfied with the job-related training their organisations offers. However, there was a decline in the average number of training days since 2011 and just over half of the respondents indicated barriers to professional development. Cost and budget are key factors that limit Workers' opportunities for training.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Half the respondents (51%) faced barriers to training and professional development.

- In total, 68% strongly agreed or agreed that their organisation was dedicated to their professional development.
- A quarter felt their organisation was not dedicated to their professional development. A further 17% responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed that their organisation supported their professional development.
- All respondents (n=435) were asked whether they agreed that they had the tools and resources to do their job well and 67% strongly agreed or agreed and just over a quarter indicated they somewhat agreed.
- Almost 61% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I am satisfied with the job-related training my organisation offers' and 21% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- There was a drop in the number of training days from an average 9.3 days of training in 2011 to 7.5 days of training in the past 12 months.

- In the past 12 months, almost 60% of Workers had between one and six days of training or other professional development, with highest grouping receiving between four and six days (32%) followed by those receiving one to three days (26%). A further 15% received 10–12 days. The lowest score was 4% of Workers, who received no training or professional development (Table 8).
- Those that reported that they did face barriers were asked about the barriers to accessing training. Of the list, respondents could select all that applied to their situation. The responses (n=628) highlighted the following as the top barriers to training:
 - 21% Cost of training too high
 - 19% Not enough money in the training budget
 - 13% Too far to travel
 - 12% Lack of priority from management
 - 12% Times when training is held
 - 8% Not enough information on what training is available
 - 10% Relevant training not available

Table 8 Number of training days attended in the past 12 months (n=428)

Consolidated training/PD days	%
0	4%
1-3	26%
4-6	32%
7-9	9%
10-12	15%
13-15	4%
16 or more	10%
Total	100%

- A total of 51% of survey respondents (n=440) identified that they faced barriers to training and professional development, a slight drop compared to 56% in 2011.

Average of 7.5 days of training in a year, which is 1.8 days less than those surveyed in 2011.

CASE STUDY

CLARITY IN YOUTH WORK



MONIQUE READY
YOUTH WORKER,
THE JUNCTION
COMMUNITY CENTRE

Monique says she fell into youth work through a placement for her TAFE course. After six years, she's still going strong and loving it. She recognises some challenges, such as taking the hard stuff home with you and creating a work/life balance, which is why the support of a team and being able to access

supervision is important to her. For her, building rapport, creating safe spaces and being consistent with young people are all key to supporting good outcomes, and are a component of best practice for working with young people.

'It took me a while to understand what youth work was. We were playing lots of different games, pool, PlayStation, and things like that. I was wondering, "OK, so what's the purpose of all of this? How am I actually even working right now?" And then after a while you start having those conversations and building relationships with young people and you understand it's like "OK, that's why we do what we do." It makes sense now.'

Youth sector workers are motivated by making a difference in the lives of young people. There is a high level of satisfaction amongst respondents as well as a feeling that the role matches their skills and abilities and that they are supported in their workplace. They bring with them a wealth of prior work and life experience, with only a very small proportion having youth sector work as their first job.

MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION

- The most common motivation to work in the sector was to make a difference in the lives of young people **84%** (n=434).
- The work was personally rewarding for of respondents **88%**.
- Only **5%** reported youth work as their first job.
- Respondents (n=434-5) indicating strongly agree or agree that their work:
 - Makes a difference in people's lives **88%**
 - Gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment **85%**
 - Makes good uses of their skills and abilities **70%**.

UNDERSTANDING THE YOUTH WORK PROFESSION

Although youth work can be misunderstood and undervalued by external sectors, there is a common drive amongst those working in the youth sector that working with and supporting young people is a priority in their work. Respondents highlighted that young people should be central to services, programs and initiatives that affect them. Across multiple questions, respondents reflected a passion and commitment to working with young people and appear less concerned with the specific job title and identity as youth workers. Almost half of respondents identify with the statement 'working with young people is my career.'

Respondents (n=460) were asked to reflect on the identity and perceptions of the youth sector and the youth work profession in NSW. The results show strong support for professionalisation and ensuring young people are central to any program or initiative. This highlights the ongoing challenge of youth work being undervalued

and misunderstood by external sectors and the community. Workers in the youth sector identified themselves in different ways and had a huge variety of titles beyond 'youth worker,' so identifying who is and is not a youth worker may be challenging for external assessors.

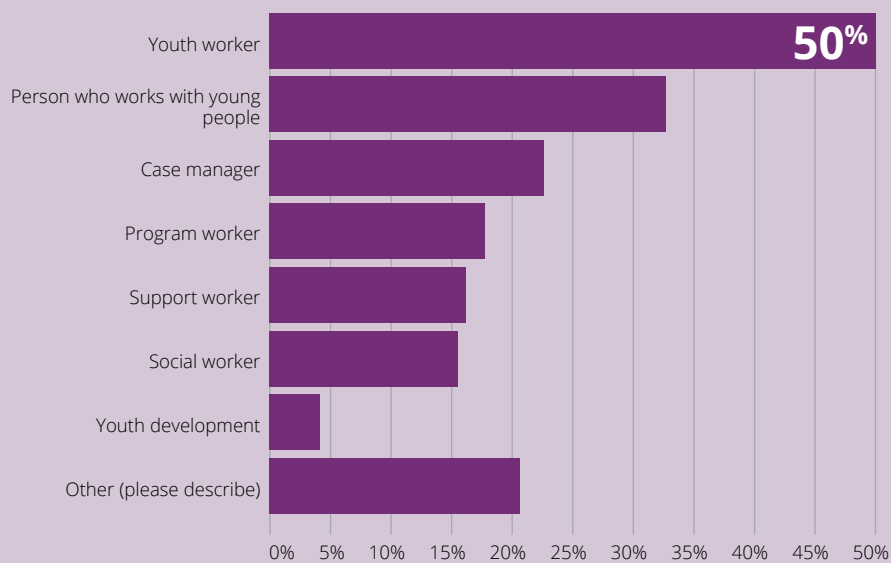
There is strong support for a NSW professional association for youth work, with 88% indicating they agree with the need for such a body.

WHAT IS YOUTH WORK?

- **Puts young people at the centre:** There is significant agreement that ‘young people should always be placed at the centre of any program, support or intervention,’ with 91% indicating they either strongly agreed or agreed.
- **A worker-inclusive approach to who is in the youth sector:** Overall, 57% of respondents (n=460) strongly agreed or agreed that anyone who works with young people works in the youth sector. A further 29% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- **Youth work is different to social work:** When asked whether ‘youth work and social work are pretty much the same thing,’ 62% either disagreed and almost a quarter strongly agreed or agreed.
- Youth work is misunderstood and undervalued:
 - By government: A resounding 89% agreed that ‘youth work is misunderstood and undervalued by governments.’
 - By the community: Almost 50% disagreed with the statement that ‘youth work is understood and valued by the general community.’ Just over a third strongly agreed or agreed that the community understood and valued youth work.

- **A youth worker can have many different role titles:** There is a great diversity in what youth sector workers are actually called, making it challenging to identify who is and is not a youth worker. When Workers (n=360) were asked about their position title there were 240 different names occurring 358 times.

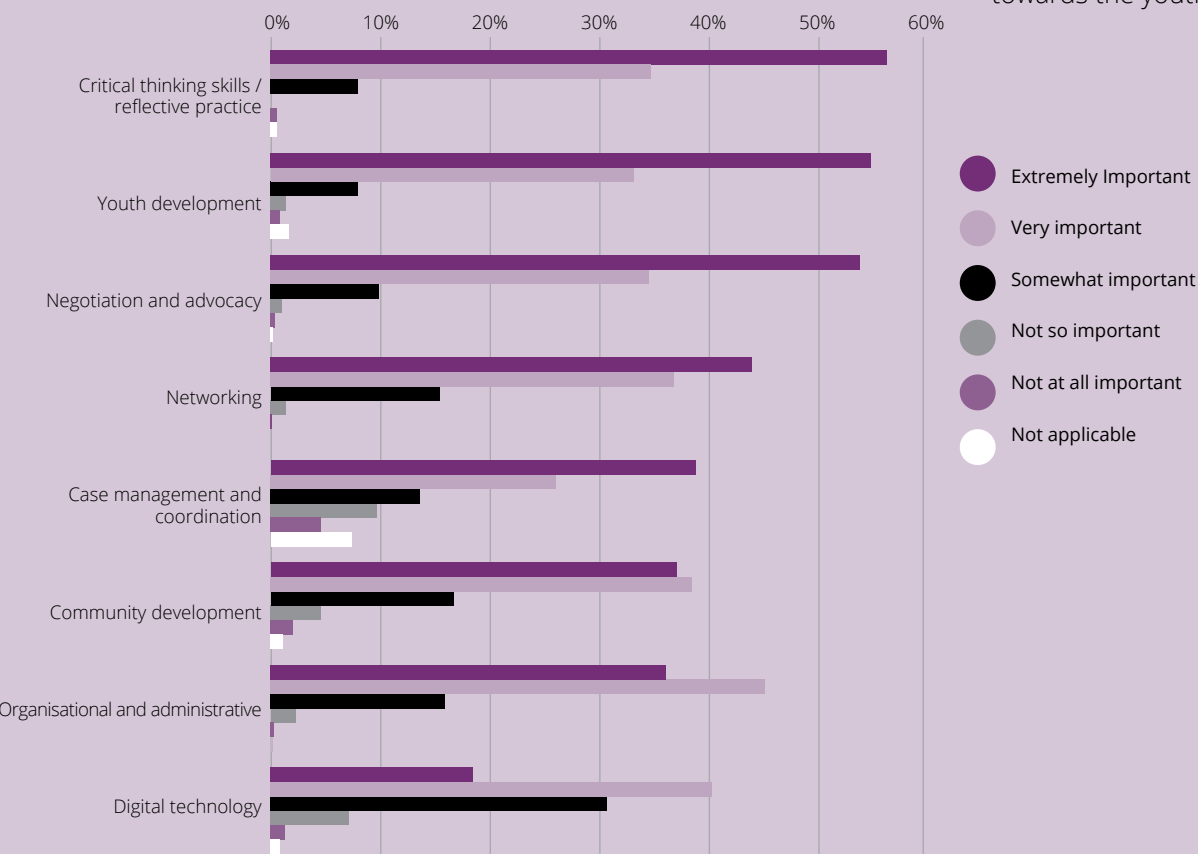
Figure 26 Ways of professional identification in the Youth Sector (n=396)



- **Half identify as Youth Workers:** Workers (n=396) were asked to select all the different ways they identify their role and 50% of respondents selected that they identify as youth workers. Again, the concept of Workers identifying as a ‘person who works with young people’ ranked as the second highest result (33%). The ‘other’ field yielded 21% of responses with varied responses, which again highlights the huge variety in the way workers identify themselves and their role (figure 26).
- **Youth sector skills:** When all survey respondents (n=437) were asked how important certain skills were in relation to their role in the youth sector, the top three that were ranked as extremely important were (figure 27):
 1. Critical thinking skills/reflective practice (56%)
 2. Youth development (55%)
 3. Negotiation and advocacy (54%).

- **Working with young people is a career:** When asked to pick a statement that describes how they feel about their job in the youth sector, overall (n=403) almost 50% selected ‘working with young people is my career, regardless of the sector or job title.’ Notably, ‘working in the youth sector is one of many different kinds of jobs I have had’ (21%) ranked above ‘youth work is my career’ (18%). A much smaller percentage were using youth work as a stepping stone to another job (4%), road testing youth work to test their suitability (2%), and just over 2% only intended to stay in the youth sector temporarily. A bit over 3% were ambivalent in their feelings towards the youth sector.

Figure 27 Importance of key skills in youth sector roles (n=437)



Young people accessing services

There is increasing cultural diversity amongst young people attending youth sector services and there is a parallel increase in staff diversity in terms of ethnicity identity and with disability. Staff are supporting young people from similar backgrounds as much as possible.

There is great variation in the size and scope of youth services and organisations but, on average, young people aged 15–17 are the largest age group accessing these services. Since 2011, the number of young people in the middle years (aged 8–14) remains fairly stable.

DEMOGRAPHIC OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Managers (n=57) were asked to describe the young people that use their services in a typical month. This included roughly how many young people in different age groups, as well as young people from different backgrounds, attended the service.¹⁶

- The numbers of young people that services support range in size from quite small (serving ten young people a month) through to very large (serving 8000 young people a month). On average, services reported that the main group of young people accessing their services were aged 15–17 (45%), followed by 12–14 (20%) and then 18–21 (20%) (table 9).

- The proportion of young people aged 8–14 attending services was similar to a decade ago, with young people 8–14 making up 24% compared with 27% in 2011.
- While some services report low or no young people attending their service who are under the age of 14, there are others that have large numbers each month in this age group (up to 400).

There was greater cultural and/or linguistic diversity amongst young people attending youth services than a decade ago.

- More than three quarters of services reported that they worked with CALD young people (84%; n=47) in 2019, compared with 68% (n=102) in 2011.

- Services were asked to identify which regions of the world (excluding Australia) their clients came from. Services reported that other than young people from Australia, service users mainly came from Pacific Islands/Polynesia (80%), New Zealand Aotearoa (71%), and North Africa, near and the Middle East (57%) (figure 28).
- Half of all services work with young people with backgrounds in South-East Asia (53%), Southern and Central Asia (51%) and Mediterranean and Eastern Europe (49%).
- In a typical month, services reported that they engage with a diverse range of young people. Respondents had the option to select any option that applied to their service. Almost all services are utilised by young people with mental health concerns (98%), young people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (95%), and young people who face education or employment difficulties (95%) (figure 29).

Figure 28 Services who work with young people from different regions (other than Australia) (n=49)

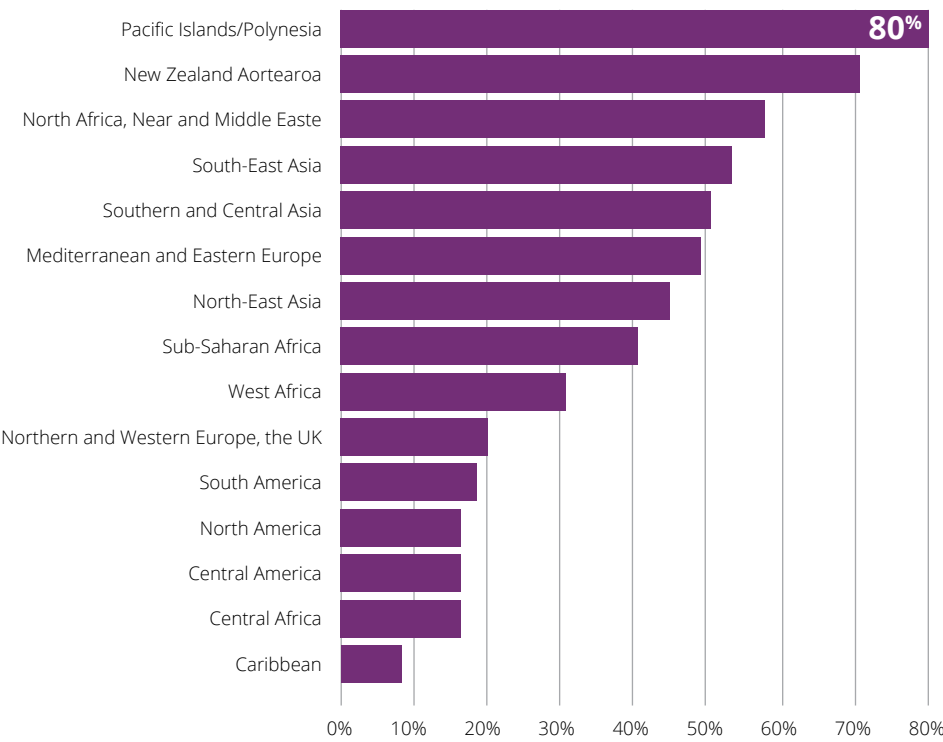
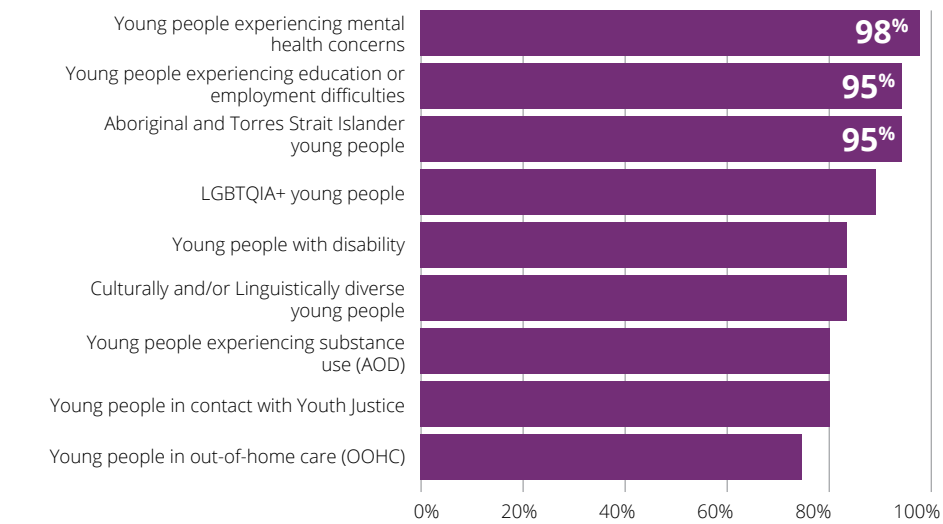


Figure 29 Service use by young people from different groups in a typical month (n=56)



16 While these numbers do not represent all youth services in NSW, they provide an indication of the age profile of the young people many services support.

Young people experiencing crisis are frequently seeking support from the youth sector, with homelessness and mental health concerns top issues facing young people. Youth services are essential sites of support for young people. Youth sector staff are well equipped to respond effectively but many services are unable to meet demand.

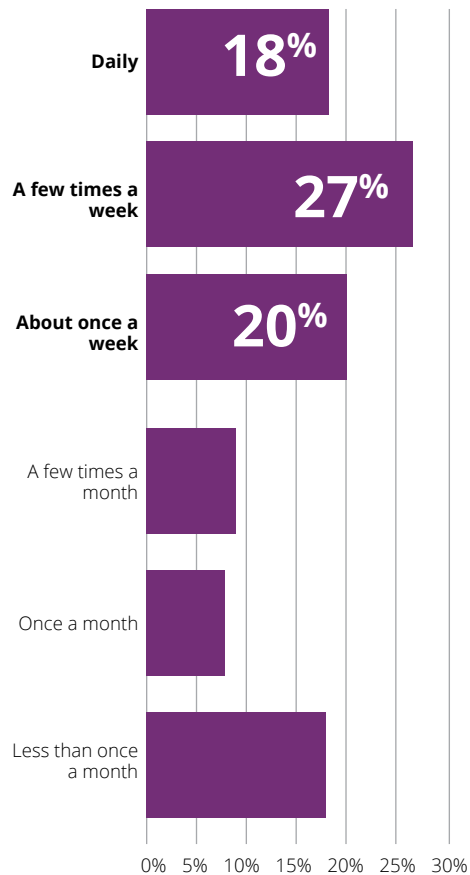
YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CRISIS

Managers were asked if the young people who access their services come voluntarily or whether their attendance is required (e.g. by compulsory service attendance, such as a court order). They were also asked whether they work with young people who are in crisis, how often they do so, and how responsive Managers feel their service is.

- Overall, Managers reported that the majority of young people over the past year had engaged with youth services voluntarily. For 79% of services surveyed, young people engaged with youth services voluntarily all or most of the time. A further 14% of services had young people engage voluntarily some of the time and the smallest proportion (7%) reported young people attended voluntarily about half of the time.
- In total, 65% of Managers (n=55) reported that their youth service responded to a young person in crisis ranging from once a week to daily. A much smaller proportion see young people experiencing crisis only a few times a month (9%) or once a month (7%) (figure 30).

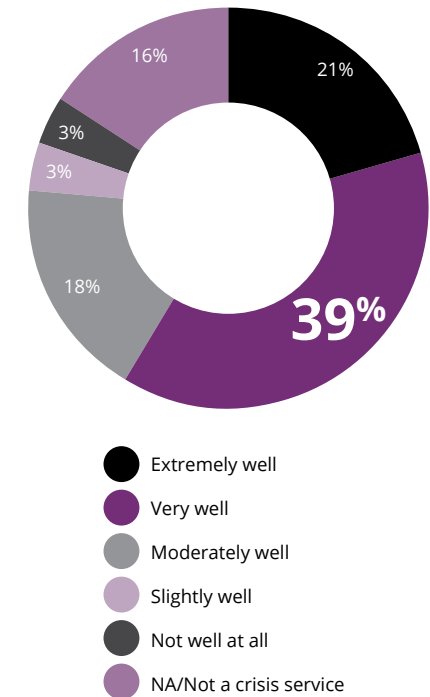
- There is great variation in the types of services that responded to the survey. Although 18% of Managers (n=55) reported that their services responded to young people in crisis less than once a month, of these only 16% reported that they were not a crisis service.

Figure 30 Frequency services support young people dealing with crisis in a typical month (n=55)



- Where services provide crisis support, 60% reported they were able to respond very well or extremely well to young people in crisis (figure 31).

Figure 31 How well youth services respond to young people in crisis (n=57)



Mental health, homelessness, education, employment and relationships are the most common issues for which young people seek support.

SUPPORT NEEDS AND ISSUES

As in 2011, homelessness remains the most common issue where services are unable to meet demand.

Youth services were asked how frequently young people seek assistance with different issues, what the most common issues were, and the areas in which they were unable to meet demand.

YOUNG PEOPLE SEEKING ASSISTANCE

According to Workers (n=456), the top 10 most regular issues for which young people seek assistance are:

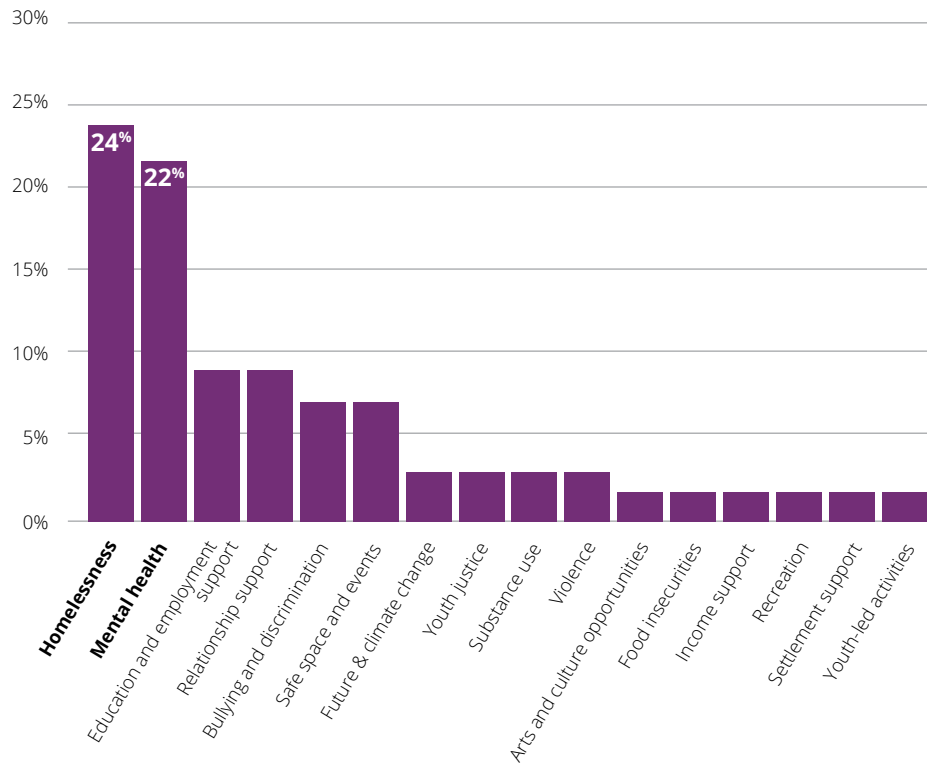
- Mental health (55%)
- Education (45%)
- Family relationships (43%)
- Behaviour (34%)
- Housing and homelessness (34%)
- Recreational activities (32%)
- Domestic and/or family violence (31%)
- Drugs (30%)
- Income support/social security (29%)
- Emergency assistance (21%)

- According to Managers, one third of services regularly saw young people seeking assistance with income support/social security (36%) and housing and homelessness (36%). Wanting to access recreational activities was also a common reason for young people attending youth services (33%).
- When comparing the top issues that Managers and Workers reported as the most regular issues for which young people seek assistance, there was a notable difference in the fourth top issue. For Managers, domestic and/or family violence was the fourth issue, whereas for Workers it was behaviour.

COMMON ISSUES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE

- According to Managers (n=57), the three most common issues that young people raised in a typical month were homelessness, mental health and education or employment supports (figure 32).
- According to Managers, young people were also presenting with concerns regarding relationships, discrimination and safety. The future, climate change, justice, violence, and substance abuse issues were less common but regular concerns for some young people attending some services.

Figure 32 Most common issues that young people raise (n=57)



CASE STUDY

YOUTH PARTICIPATION



NATALIE CHIAPPAZZO
MANAGER, BLACKTOWN
YOUTH SERVICES
ASSOCIATION

Natalie has been the manager of Blacktown Youth Service Association (BYSA) for the last ten years. Natalie believes that the success of BYSA has come from involving the young people themselves and the dedication from staff to ensure young people are front and centre.

Over the last five years, BYSA has adjusted how they work with young people to ensure that young people are leading the way through every aspect of engagement: design of the space, programs offered, and service delivery model.

Placing young people at the centre and ensuring opportunities for authentic participation are crucial in the youth sector. For BYSA,

Natalie noted that there have been challenges and learnings along this journey. Asking young people what they want was important but ensuring that they have the necessary information to make informed recommendations is equally important. Ensuring that all young people have an opportunity to have a voice, including those who don't always speak up, is a key part of the BYSA model. Being creative and flexible with how they involve young people – through informal conversations, online discussions, and being flexible and creative with how information was discussed and captured – are key to BYSA's success.

'When a young person comes and says, "I need this," and you can't offer it, where do you go? How do you find a solution? My advice is to work it out together with the young person. Even a young person experiencing a crisis can be empowered to contribute to the decisions we make.'

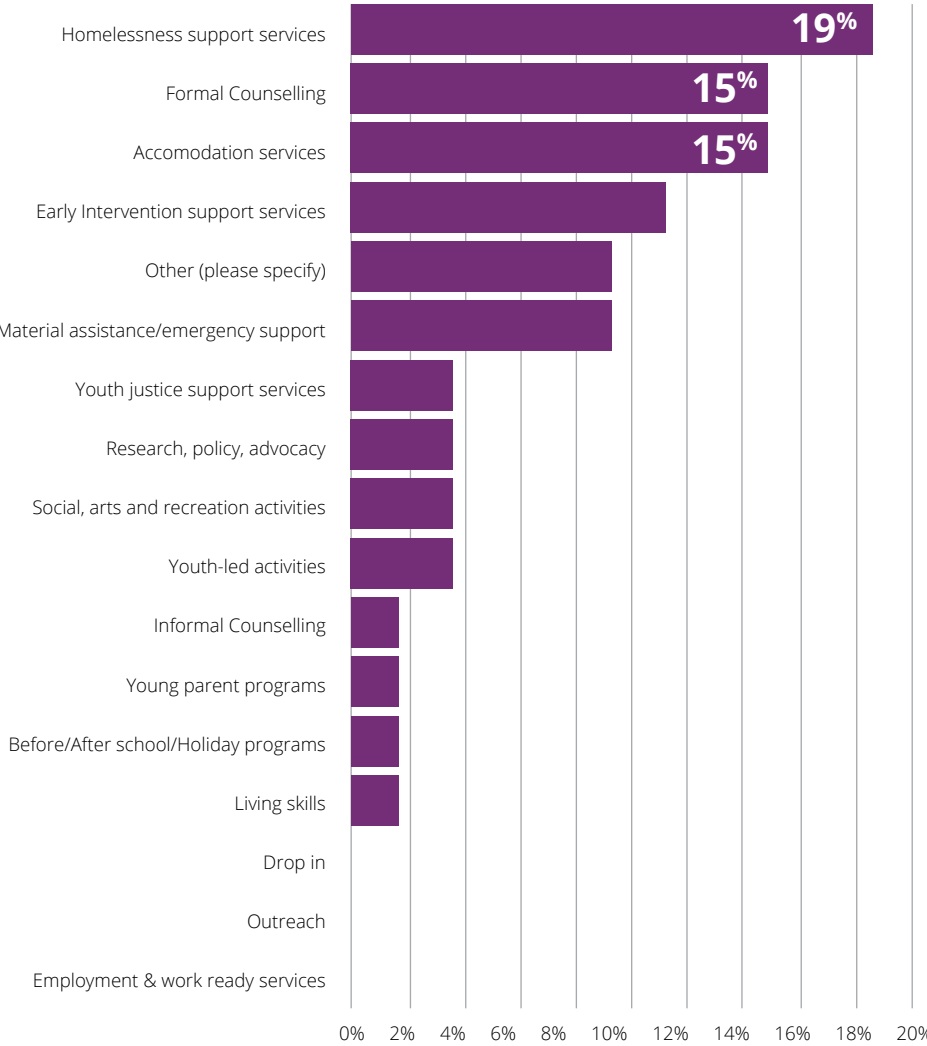
The most common issue for which youth services were unable to meet demand was homelessness, followed by early intervention support services and accommodation services.

**UNMET NEEDS FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE**

There is some overlap between homelessness and accommodation services. If the result from these two issues are combined, it highlights a significant and critical area of unmet need for young people in NSW. Notably, the *Going Home, Staying Home*¹⁷ reform was implemented in 2012 by the NSW Government but homelessness remains a top issue for respondents.

- As reported by Managers (n=54), the areas of greatest unmet demand were in homelessness support services (19%), formal counselling (15%) and accommodation services (15%) (figure 33). Compared to 2011, homelessness remains the most common issue for which services are unable to meet demand.
- The two most common issues that young people sought assistance for from youth services were also the two areas in which Managers reported the greatest unmet demand: homelessness and mental health concerns.

Figure 33 Areas of greatest unmet demand (n=54)



¹⁷King, D. 2013, Going home staying home. *Parity*, Vol. 26, No. 8, pp. 17-18.

The youth sector strongly supports young people being central to decision making. Responses to questions relating to youth participation highlight the importance of developing a shared understanding of all forms of youth participation, specifically that practice must be inclusive, tailored, and applied in different contexts. This should include fostering youth participation and empowerment at the most basic level of young lives, through to pathways for greater representation at the highest levels of policy making.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SERVICES

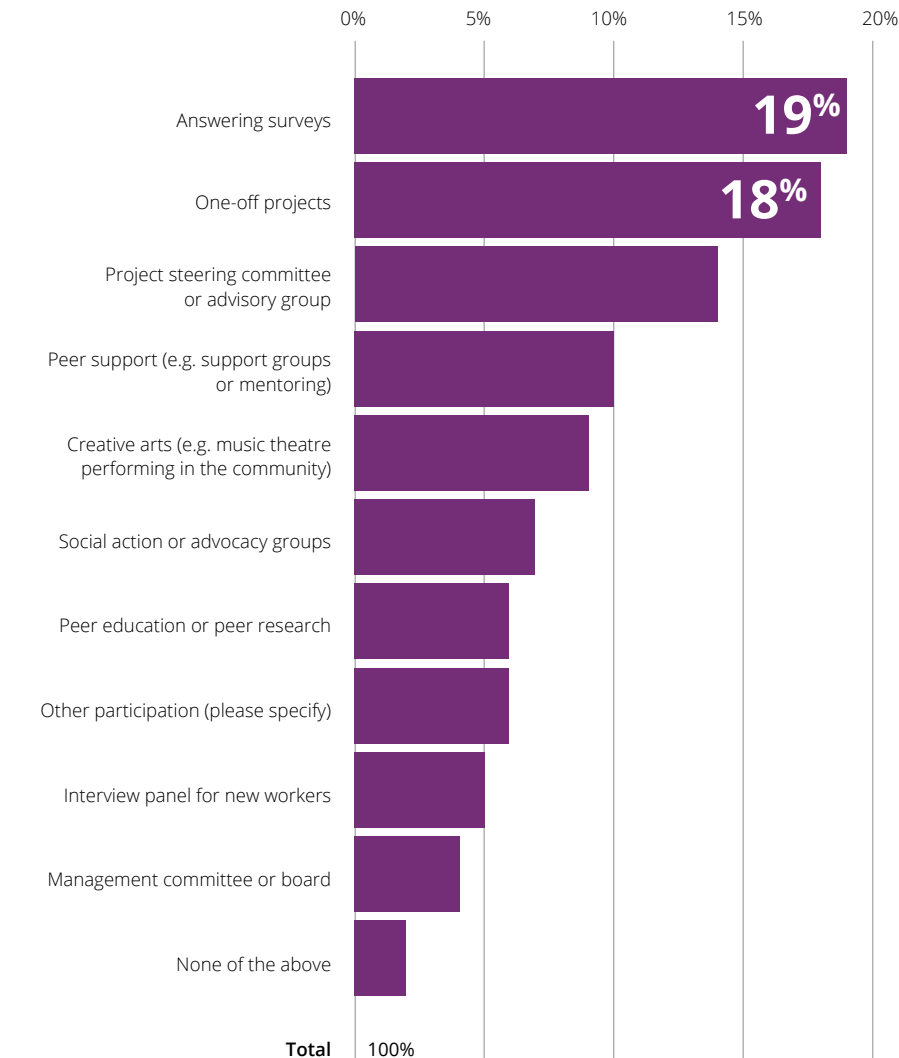
One of the key barriers amongst respondents was that many young people were experiencing a crisis and so were unable to engage in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, most respondents (93%) involved young people in their service in some way, although the frequency varied.

- There was strong agreement in the youth sector that young people should be involved in service development, with 91% of respondents (n=460) stating they strongly agreed or agreed that young people should always be placed at the centre of any program, support or intervention.

‘Cohorts moving through quickly hampering the ability to establish strong relationships. Young people who use the service tend to be in crisis and are unable or unwilling to participate.’
 – Youth Service Manager or Regional Manager

- When asked how often young people participate in decision making at their service, Managers responded that they usually (49%) or sometimes (28%) involved young people, while only 16% always involved young people.
- Only four Managers out of 57 responded that they rarely (5%) or never (2%) involved young people.
- Managers responded that answering surveys, one-off projects, and involving young people in project steering committees or advisory groups were the main ways services engaged young people in decision making (figure 34).
- Managers were asked to highlight the barriers and benefits of young people participating in decision-making processes at their youth service. According to Managers (n=45), the biggest barriers to youth participation was staff time and service capacity (31%), followed by policies, procedures and organisational culture (18%) (figure 35).
- Managers also highlighted that the young people attending their services were in a crisis situation they were not in a position to engage in decision-making processes.

Figure 34 Main ways services engage young people in decision making (n=57)

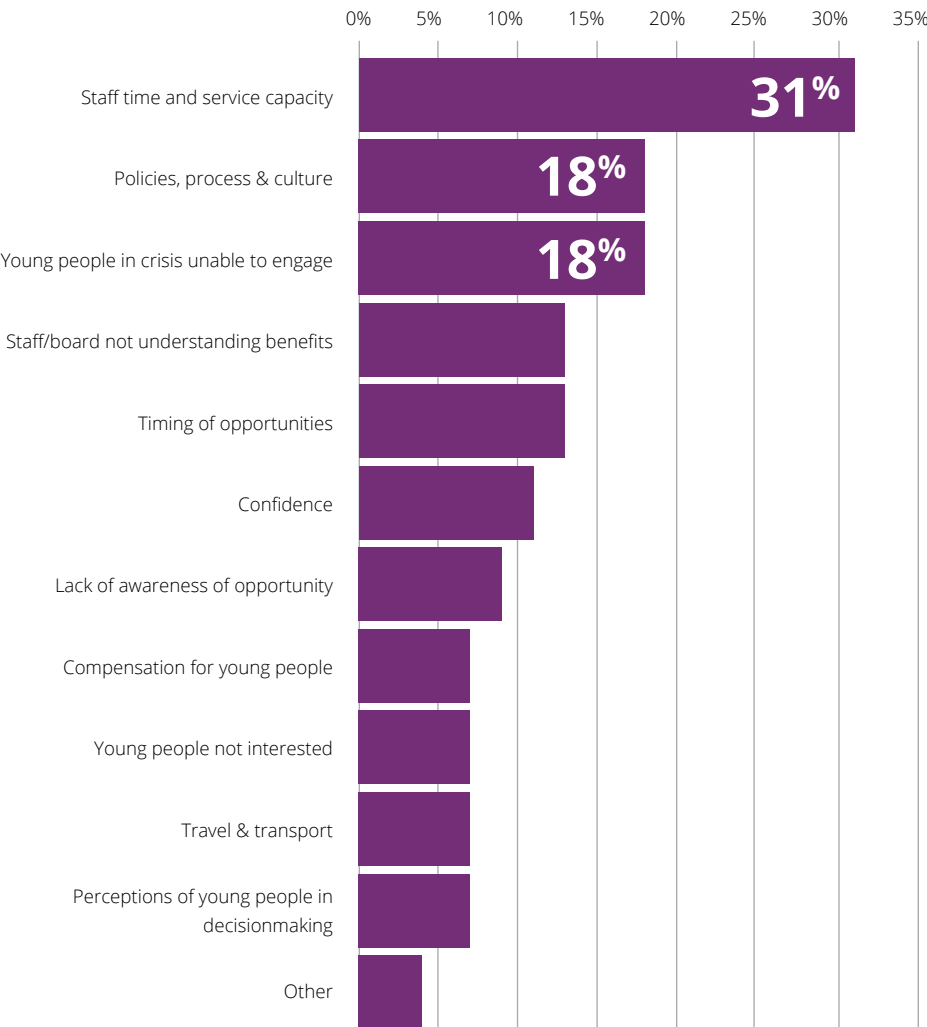


‘Limited time and staff expertise in how to effectively and genuine create real opportunities for highly marginalised young people to participate authentically (not just tokenistically or for the purposes of ticking off a youth participation box).’
 – Youth Service Manager or Regional Manager

‘Organisation resistance to empower young people to participate in all levels of decision making’
 – Youth Service Manager or Regional Manager

‘Most young people we work with are just taking life a day at time. Where is the next meal? Is there violence or drugs and alcohol at home? Will the police harass me today? Where will I sleep? When this is happening in your life it is challenging to think about other stuff... we do try and we do have some success, it's just tough.’
 – CEO or Executive Director

Figure 35 Barriers to youth participation (n=45)



'I think the benefits of young people participating in decision making processes can be incredibly empowering under the right conditions. But I truly believe that kids need to be out of crisis or survival mode first before they can begin making good decisions for a youth service as a whole.'

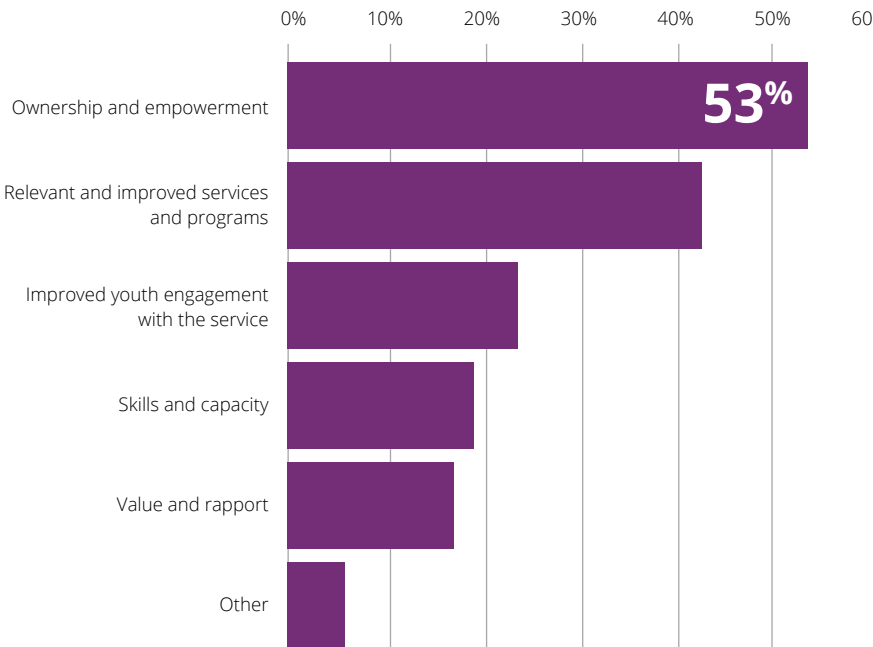
– Youth Service Manager

- Over 50% of Managers (n=47) highlighted that the top benefit to engaging young people in decision making was ownership and empowerment, followed by services and programs becoming more relevant and improved as well as the increasing engagement and attendance at the service (figure 36).

'Improved quality of programs. Programs more effective. More young people participate when they are involved in the planning and facilitation of events.'

– Youth Service Manager

Figure 36 Benefits of youth participation (n=47)



'If young people are able to participate in more aspects of the organisation then it will truly be an organisation for young people. All too often funding requirements, needs of workers and visions of senior staff direct much of the service. If young people are able to participate more then we are really fostering ethical relationships with young people across our organisation'

– Youth Service Manager

Change, Impact and Adaptation

The youth sector is operating in the context of many significant changes that shape the lives of young people and what Workers and Services are able to do for them. Three key areas emerged from the data that will shape the sector in the coming years: the need for more crisis prevention, the role of digital technologies, and addressing the complexity of challenges and opportunities that prevent the sector from increasing its positive impact on young lives.

CRISIS PREVENTION

The youth sector is playing a critical role in supporting young people in crisis. The findings indicate that more young people are in need of crisis support than ever before. With this trend towards increasing demand for crisis support, Managers and Workers identify crisis and holistic support as a key area of work not captured by existing funding arrangements. They call for improved funding and service models that effectively meet crisis demands, but also help the state of NSW to stem the growth of young people who are becoming homeless, needing mental health support, and requiring guidance through and out of the justice system. Youth sector workers identify that strategies to support collaboration with schools and community health services could also help improve the sector achieve greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

While the sector is doing an excellent job of meeting the needs of young people, in free text responses Managers (n=28) highlighted that the impact on young people when services are unable to meet demand is considerable because unmet demand happens in areas where there is greatest potential to make a difference, specifically:

- Homelessness
- Incarceration and contact with the justice system
- Compounding issues because of a lack of early intervention.

Despite significant demand to support young people (and their families) who were in crisis, Workers and Managers wanted to be able to contribute more to crisis prevention. As the sector confronted frontline needs, there was a clear call for a coordinated policy and sector strategy to shift from crisis management to crisis prevention.

According to the respondents, there needs to be a clearer understanding of crisis outreach and intervention, which is not captured in current funding arrangements.

'Holistic family support and advocacy is becoming a much larger part of our service, out of necessity, as is our purchase of food from Foodbank for youth and families to use. These are not adequately covered within our budget and could be much more efficiently provided for with more funding.'

– Youth Sector Worker



ALEX LONG
CEO OF MYAN NSW.
STATE-WIDE SERVICE

As the CEO of MYAN NSW, Alex thought that there had to be a more efficient way of completing necessary admin and still be able to deliver great opportunities for young people. With a team made up of mostly part-time staff and outreach staff, there had to be a way to ensure inconsistencies were avoided and collaboration was prioritised. She also realised that, while they had a database, it wasn't capturing what they needed. She invested in a consultant who engaged with the team to ask them what they needed to make their admin work easier. The conclusion

was that they invested in two software programs to support their admin work, allowing them to coordinate their finances better as well as keep better track of young people who they were involved with. An online project management system allowed for more efficient communication between the team as well as more collaboration. Once the team were trained and used to both new programs, it reduced admin time, which meant the team could spend more time building better programs.

'The less time we spend doing painful admin, the more time there is to support young people, build better programs and do better monitoring and evaluation.'

Many services reported that they provide unfunded programs or support because without doing so there would be problematic gaps in delivery. Services, however, are clear: to improve crisis prevention in the youth sector, more funding and resources are required. Currently, services and Workers absorb much of the 'cost' to ensure the best possible support for young people. This is unsustainable and Managers highlight the need for a properly resourced and holistic approach.

'Lots of young people fall through the cracks and miss out on wrap around support and holistic interventions tailored to their needs. By the time these young people come to the attention of services down the track they have so many complex issues that it will be much harder for them to get back on track. I found it hard to complete the checklist before because what is needed is comprehensive, holistic support... so, most of those tick boxes. We need to be able to work with the whole person, not siloed issues.'

– CEO or Executive Director

The sector identified three key needs in order to address the growing challenges for young people in crisis. These were:

- A state-wide strategy for addressing key needs of young people in crisis, especially to reduce and prevent youth homelessness.
- Proper funding for services and programs to deliver a holistic care model that is focused on prevention and early intervention and driven by young people's needs and preferences. This includes the need for more outreach and out-of-business-hours services.
- Policies and funding structures that enable greater collaboration and partnerships with community health and schools that can support a more holistic model of service delivery and youth work practice.

'In an increasingly digital world, it's important that youth services maintain proximity to their users and the way they engage with the digital space. Digital technologies massively increase opportunities for reach, scale as well as the capturing of data to inform better service practice.'

– Manager

'A service funding model based on demographics and a direct link between services and schools with a clear support structure and mandate to provide actual earlier intervention for children and families.'

– Youth Sector Worker

Technology is increasingly shaping young people’s everyday lives and respondents highlight that technology use is on the rise within services. The role of digital technologies in youth services is uneven and, in many cases, underutilised. More research is needed to understand how it is being used within services.

Youth work practice works with young people where they are at and digital technology is a key engagement pathway for respondents. There are opportunities for digital technologies to be used to improve young people’s access and awareness of youth services.

Although Managers reported that their staff are well-equipped to use digital technology, the Workers highlighted the need for ongoing training to not only keep pace with young people’s use of digital technology, but to be a step ahead. Leveraging digital technology in the youth sector means first resourcing staff and services with appropriate training and infrastructure, then integrating digital technology into service delivery and promotion. The sector understands that young people’s use of technology can range from being highly connected and digitally literate to those who have poor digital inclusion and barriers to online engagement.

Managers were asked about the role of digital technology in their services.

USE OF DIGITAL TECH IN SERVICES IS ON THE RISE

- For the majority (79%) of Managers (n=57), the use of digital technology in their service increased. No Managers identified a decrease.
- Managers were asked if their service was well equipped with digital tools and infrastructure for helping young people in the digital age, meaning appropriate internet speed, up-to-date software, and the latest devices. Despite the increased use of digital technology, only 57% of Managers agreed that their services were appropriately equipped to meet this demand. Almost a quarter were undecided whether they are well equipped and almost 20% disagreed.

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIGITAL TECH

- Half of the Managers believed that digital technology was making it harder for young people today.
- Opinion is split amongst Managers (n=56) as to whether young people know how to navigate the risks and opportunities of digital technologies, with 43% in agreement and 39% indicating they disagreed

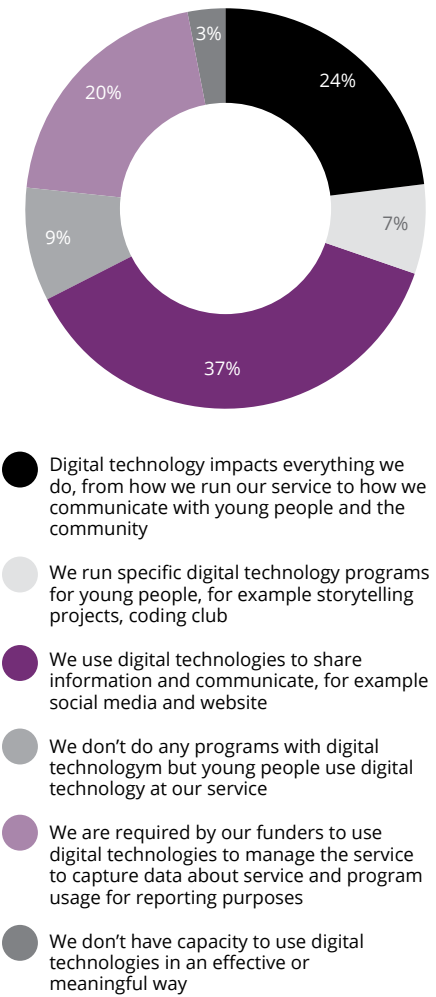
HOW SERVICES ARE ENGAGING WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The role of digital technologies was uneven across services.

- Many respondents reported that they used digital technologies to share information and

communicate, for example, through social media and their website (37%) and almost a quarter (24%) said that digital technology impacted everything – from how they run the service to how they communicate with young people and the community (figure 37).

Figure 37 Role of digital technologies in services (n=57)



- Nearly one fifth were required by funders to use digital technology for reporting and data capture (20%).
- Almost 10% did not deliver programs using digital technologies and 3% reported that they did not have the capacity to use digital technologies in an effective or meaningful way.
- Almost half the Managers agreed that they had access to the resources, skills or training needed to adapt to the digital age.
- Opinion was mixed in response to the statement ‘I find it hard to keep track of how digital technologies are impacting young people today.’
- Half of Managers reported that young people are not coming to services for support with digital technology.¹⁸

‘Constant, immediate, urgent, focused training, an urgency on training for digital youth workers to catch up to global youth work.’
– Worker

18 More than half the Managers disagreed with the statement ‘young people often come to us when they have questions or concerns about digital technologies, including social media.’

When Managers were asked to indicate how confident their staff were in using digital technology to support young people, 63% thought their staff were either extremely confident or very confident (Table 10).

A related theme from responses to how the youth sector could leverage digital technology revealed that a high proportion of the responses from staff (n=239) related to better resourcing staff and services and training to keep pace with digital technology.

Table 10 Manager perception of staff confidence in using digital technologies to support young people (n=56)

#	Answer	%
1	Extremely confident	9%
2	Very confident	53%
3	Not sure	20%
4	Not so confident	18%
5	Not at all confident	0.00%
6	don't know	0.00%
Total		100%

‘In our program we regularly utilise digital technologies to engage young people in learning opportunities such as online quizzes, or watching and sharing media content. We also gather evaluation feedback via online forms.’
– Worker

‘Provision of up to date technology and information – better informed staff. Availability of training for staff that is not cost prohibitive. Advocate for technology and wifi/internet for youth who have financial and educational barriers to accessing these.’
– Manager

‘Digital technologies allow for better and more efficient data collection, capturing outcomes in a meaningful way, and being able to create a story of the service/program over time. Technology in general is growing and it’s important to embrace it while we can and adapt practice as we go.’
– Manager

CASE STUDY

LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO
SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT AND
CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING



BLAKE TATAFU
PARTNERSHIPS OFFICER,
KIMBERWALLI

Kimberwalli, in Western Sydney, is a centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and community to focus on transition from school to further education or employment. A part of this process is ensuring access to available technologies as well as support to use them, and increasing digital literacy across the community. As such, Kimberwalli provides access to digital devices, internet and support to use the technology available. With services moving online, increasing digital literacy was identified as an important part of supporting the community.

Another aspect of digital technology that Kimberwalli has been investing in has been to preserve and share culture. After consulting with community, young people, and Elders, and researching into opportunities available, a project called 'Digital Custodians' was developed with Microsoft. The 'Digital Custodians' project is currently underway and aims to capture and share Darug culture using 'mixed technology'. By using these two different approaches to technology, Blake from Kimberwalli is hoping to increase digital literacy and share cultural practices.

‘Enabling and engaging community and young people with technology for their own benefit.’

‘In an increasingly digital world, it’s important that youth services maintain proximity to their users and the way they engage with the digital space. Digital technologies massively increase opportunities for reach, scale as well as the capturing of data to inform better service practice.’

– Manager

LEVERAGING DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGY IN THE
YOUTH SECTOR

All respondents were given the opportunity to answer openly about their ideas for leveraging digital technology in the youth sector and each element of the answers were coded against the emerging themes. The themes that emerged from both Managers and Workers were (figure 38):

• Resourcing staff and services

Respondents reflected on the need to not only keep pace with young people but be at the forefront of changes and developments in digital technology, through ongoing staff training, and investment in infrastructure enabled by greater management buy-in. This issue was of greater concern to those responding to the Worker survey (30%) compared with Managers (20%) (figure 38).

• Service integration and online connection

Slightly more Managers than Workers highlighted the opportunity to use digital technology for service integration and online connection with young people. Responses related to the need for online soft entry points, better use of technology in day-to-day service delivery, data collection, use of apps and websites to enhance the services, and supports and resources offered to young people.

• Resourcing young people

Both Workers and Managers wanted to see the youth sector playing a role in resourcing young people in terms of enabling technology access, building critical thinking skills, and the safe use

of digital technology. A minor but important concern in this theme related to the digital divide and the idea that although young people are seen as ‘digital natives’ not all young people are familiar with technology and face barriers even navigating online government forms.

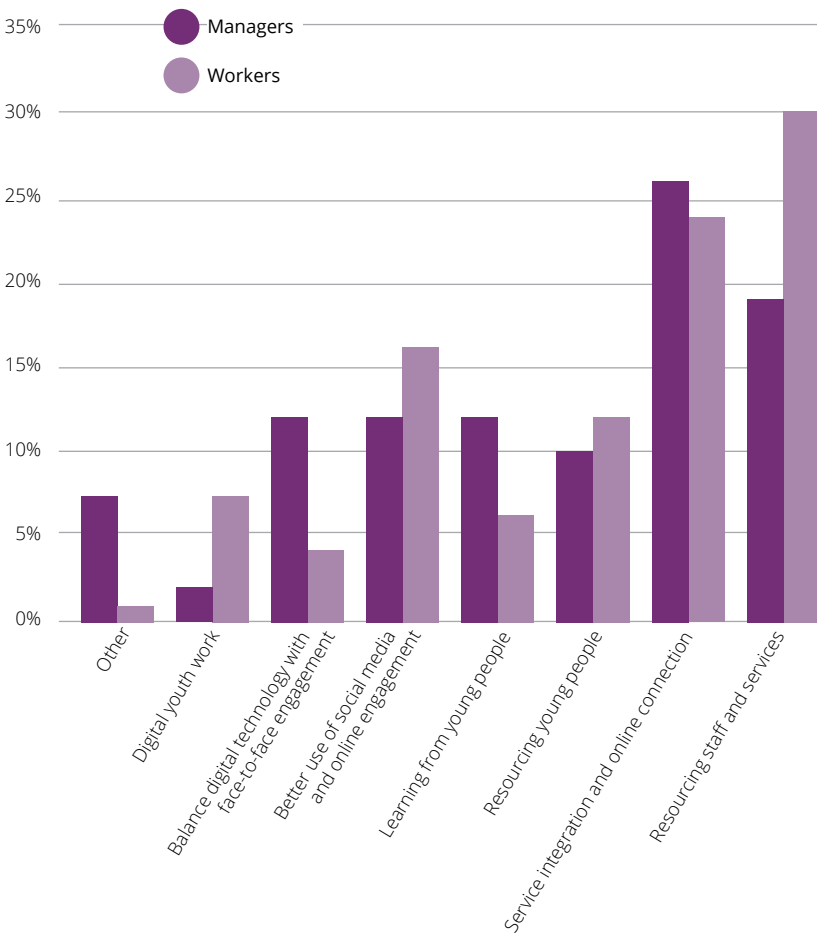
• Learning from young people

Twice as many Managers (12%) than Workers (6%) highlighted the need to learn from young people, recognise and be in constant contact with them in relation to the everchanging digital landscape.

‘By paying young people to lead it and create it. Older people use technology differently so if we want our content to be for young people, then young people need to create it.’

– Manager

Figure 38 How the Youth Sector can leverage digital technology Workers (n=239), Managers (n=32)



'We need to be actively incorporating all digital technologies as we move forward. This includes technologies outside of the box and probably technologies we are not even aware of yet. The key to this might be a better understanding of digital youth work and what exactly it means for us as a sector and as workers who are engaging in other types of digital technology every day. We should also be looking at youth work from this perspective as well.'

– Manager

- **Better use of social media, online engagement and communication**
More Workers than Managers (16% and 12% respectively) highlighted the need for better use of social media, online engagement, and using digital technology as a tool to communicate with young people outside of their service visits. The issue was discussed as a promotion and recruitment tool for young people to attend the service.

'Social media is the number one source of information that young people access day to day and I believe this is an untapped resource that the Youth Sector could utilise.'

– Manager

'Be in their space and know what they are using and share info through the appropriate platforms.'

– Worker

'I believe movement away from reliance on digital technology etc is most healthy for young people however, visual storytelling and linking with information is helpful.'

– Worker

- **Balance digital technology with face-to-face engagement**
Far more Managers highlighted the need to balance digital technology, including online engagement, with more face-to-face traditional youth programming. This theme had an undercurrent of caution about the dangers and social isolation from digital technology and the need for face-to-face relationship building.

'Role modelling having healthy boundaries with the amount of screen time we engage in. Demonstrating the importance of face to face communication.'

– Worker

- **Digital youth work**
The practice of youth work in an online setting was raised by a smaller proportion of respondents. Respondents highlighted the importance of keeping pace with developments and practices in digital youth work overseas.

'It enables us better contact with young people through Facebook and Instagram, we are able to get health promotion messages to them over this platform, which they may not otherwise have gotten.'

– Worker

'Constant, immediate, urgent, focused training, an urgency on training for digital youth workers to catch up to global youth work.'

– Worker

Challenges and Opportunities

Youth services and workers are operating in a time when we see a deepening in inequalities as well as structural changes to the nature of education and work, which will directly affect the lives of the young people they work with.

Workers at all levels have a nuanced and deep understanding of the key challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed in order to maximise the potential of the sector for positive impact in the lives of young people and their communities.

All survey respondents were invited to provide open-ended responses on the biggest challenges they face as youth sector workers and on what would help them – and the sector – to overcome these challenges.

CHALLENGES

Workers identified a very wide range of challenges. Many identified that funding and resourcing was an on-going challenge. For Workers there were significant issues with job security and burn out.

More broadly, funding for programs and services was seen as a major problem for the sector. Many respondents said they did not have the resources or time to deliver the work required, that the kind of services young people needed were not available, or that restrictive policies or funding rules often affected eligibility and ongoing support if a young person needed it.

Workers in the sector felt that a lack of understanding and value of the work that they do was a general impediment. The lack of dedicated youth policy or a Minister for Youth, stigma attached to young people they serve, and a shift away from a social model to a user-pays model in policy all made their work more difficult.

Workers identified that the structural issues facing young people were significant and contributing to the unmet demand in the sector. These issues ranged from changes and challenges with family, financial stress and unaffordable housing, cost of transport, poor employment opportunities for young people, and disengagement from formal education. Workers and Managers highlighted that the sector alone could not address these issues and that there was need for coordinated and comprehensive policy work to tackle the drivers of disadvantage.

Lastly, many said that the current service landscape is difficult for young people and workers to navigate, exacerbating the challenges of helping young people to access the best services for them at the right time.

List of Figures

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

Workers also identified a very wide range of strategies to address challenges in the sector. Increased funding was a common theme – specifically to meet demand, as well as address job insecurity and increase training and professional development. Improved flexibility and tailoring of services to local needs was a common response to address the negative effects of the competitive and outcomes-based funding model, which was seen to compromise the ability of services to deliver more accessible and appropriate services based on the needs of the young people in their area.

Many Workers proposed ways to address a lack of understanding about the current service landscape, which is seen as difficult for young people to navigate.

‘Simplify and demystify referral pathways, while encouraging help-seeking behaviours. The second doesn’t work without the first, it just breeds distrust and anger.’

– Worker

Workers emphasised the importance of providing support where most young people spend their time (e.g. in schools) and improving system navigation because too many young people fall through the gaps if services cannot effectively get them to the right support at the right time or provide follow-up.

Workers identified that improved service navigation and coordinated care could also be supported by the better use of digital technologies and would help both young people and services identify and access the most appropriate opportunities or supports. Many survey respondents specified funding and policy arrangements to support partnerships to deliver more programs in schools and improve referrals.

‘Placing dedicated youth workers in every high school on a permanent basis as a support point that isn’t focussed on counselling or mental health, that would increase the incidences of young people seeking support where they are.’

– Worker

A common theme for potential changes for the youth sector was for more prevention and early intervention to help the sector move away from an increasingly crises-driven model. To achieve this, however, Workers highlighted that state-wide strategies to address critical issues for young people – such as housing/homelessness and mental health – are urgently needed. Respondents said policies must address the causes of crisis.

Associated with this were recommendations for increased professionalisation and a set of youth work standards to ensure quality

across the sector. Respondents also identified that improved service mapping to understand where there were gaps as well as duplication in delivery is needed in order to inform decision-making in organisations as well as government. Some were concerned about the trend towards large organisations that are ‘top heavy’ and not always responsive to the needs of young people on the ground. Others noted that reducing the administrative burden on services of all sizes could improve the delivery and effectiveness of the sector.

‘Reduce the administrative burden on the youth sector by Government Agencies funding them... so much of their time, energy and resources are used up jumping through the hoops of successive government overhauls... just let the trained workers get on with the job.’

– Worker

Centring young people and their needs in decision-making processes at all levels of policy, service and programs was a common recommendation. Many respondents believed that enabling young people to have more of a say in the design of the systems and services that support them is necessary in order to overcome many of the challenges the sector faces.

Figure 1 Geographical regions where services are delivered (n=57)

Figure 2 Size of area covered by services: 2011-2019 comparison (n=57)

Figure 3 Workers by region (n=398)

Figure 4 Consolidated regions where services are delivered (n=57)

Figure 5 Organisation type that respondents work for (n=450)

Figure 6 Types of services delivered (n=57, multi-answer)

Figure 7 Main use of staff time (n=56)

Figure 8 Staff capability working with young people with specific backgrounds and lived experience (n=56)

Figure 9 Paid staff with specific backgrounds and lived experience who work with similar young people (n=55)

Figure 10 Youth services sources of funding (n=57)

Figure 11 sufficiency of service funding (n=57)

Figure 12 Frequency with which services can meet community demand (n=57)

Figure 13 Hours worked by staff in a typical week (n=455)

Figure 14 Frequency of volunteers at youth services (n=56)

Figure 15 Services relationship with nsw government (n=52, multiple answer)

Figure 16 Quality of relationship with NSW Government (n=45)

Figure 17 Types of work undertaken with schools (n=50, multiple answers)

Figure 18 Age group of Workers (n=417)

Figure 19 Place of birth of Workers born outside Australia (n=91)

Figure 20 Different levels of education completed (n=441)

Figure 21 Different types of youth sector jobs ever held by Workers (n=431)

Figure 22 Current main role in the youth sector (n=488)

Figure 23 Time in the Youth Sector and in current role

Figure 24 Pay before tax by main role (n=435)

Figure 25 Frequency of internal and clinical supervision in past 12 months

Figure 26 Ways of professional identification in the Youth Sector (n=396)

Figure 27 Importance of key skills in youth sector roles (n=437)

Figure 28 Services who work with young people from different regions (other than Australia) (n=49)

Figure 29 Service use by young people from different groups in a typical month (n=56)

Figure 30 Frequency services support young people dealing with crisis in a typical month (n=55)

Figure 31 How well youth services respond to young people in crisis (n=57)

Figure 32 Most common issues that young people raise (n=57)

Figure 33 Areas of greatest unmet demand (n=54)

Figure 34 Main ways services engage young people in decision making (n=57)

Figure 35 Barriers to youth participation (n=45)

Figure 36 Benefits of youth participation (n=47)

Figure 37 Role of digital technologies in services (n=57)

Figure 38 How the Youth Sector can leverage digital technology Workers (n=239), Managers (n=32)

Table 1 Services with members of staff who identify as from the following groups (n=51)

Table 2 Number of paid staff working at youth service according to Managers (n=57)

Table 3 Total annual revenue of youth services from all sources in 2018–2019 (n=54)

Table 4 Most essential partner (n=55)

Table 5 Focus of post-secondary (TAFE or University) qualifications (n=419)

Table 6 Main employment type of paid staff (n=55)

Table 7 Current employment status (n=403)

Table 8 Number of training days attended in the past 12 months (n=428)

Table 9 Estimated service users in an average month by age group (n=57)

Table 10 Manager perception of staff confidence in using digital technologies to support young people (n=56)

