



youth
coalition
of the ACT

Youth Worker Practice Network Evaluation

Final Report

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Owners and continuing Custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors. We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern-day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory. The Youth Coalition's vision is for an ACT community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people. The Youth Coalition undertakes policy development, sector development, research, evaluation, advocacy & representation.

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the Youth Coalition of the ACT received funding from the Snow Foundation and Hands Across Canberra through the Canberra Foundations Collaborative Grant Round to evaluate the Youth Worker Practice Network (YWPN). The YWPN is a community of practice for frontline youth workers, coordinated by the Youth Coalition as an ongoing sector development initiative. The aim of the evaluation was to better understand:

- the enablers and barriers to delivery and participation;
- who engages with the YWPN, and who does not engage with the YWPN, and why;
- the value of the YWPN to participants and the youth sector workforce; and
- how the ongoing delivery of the YWPN and other initiatives could be strengthened.

In doing so, this evaluation supports the Youth Coalition and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to strengthen professional development and other supports for the ACT youth sector workforce. The evaluation methodology drew upon components of process and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation questions examined how effectively the YWPN has been implemented, how well it engaged with the intended target group, and identified 'lessons learnt'. Outcome evaluation questions examined the extent to which the YWPN is achieving its intended outcomes. A mixed method approach to data collection and analysis was used, collecting both qualitative data and limited quantitative data to answer the evaluation questions.

Findings

Central to the evaluation findings, is that the YWPN is regarded as a valuable mechanism in the youth sector that brings youth workers together and plays an important role in sector development. Stakeholders are generally satisfied with the delivery of the YWPN. A diverse range of activities have been delivered through the YWPN since its establishment, informed by participants' needs, and leading to the development of associated activities, such as the Code of Ethics Sub-Committee. Particularly valued components of the YWPN include its focus on networking, the combination of formal and informal aspects, and on building the capability of the sector.

While the YWPN engages effectively with a range of community-based youth workers across a range of sub-sectors, it experiences particular challenges engaging with school-based youth workers. The membership of the YWPN has also changed over time, and often includes participation from a diverse group of youth sector representatives, including newer youth workers, more experienced youth workers, and those working in team leader or management roles. This may be an area for future consideration, regarding whether and how the YWPN can appropriately respond to the needs of these different groups. Barriers to participation include workload and capacity, organisational or management barriers, and logistical barriers regarding the time, date and location of the YWPN.

While the YWPN is seen to be well-positioned within the Youth Coalition, it does experience challenges related to resource constraints and competing priorities. Stakeholders regarded that it is appropriate for the YWPN to be positioned as a Youth Coalition-led activity. While the YWPN receives relatively sustainable financial resources through the Youth Coalition's core funding, it is unclear whether these are adequate. The absence of dedicated funding places limitations on the Youth Coalition team's ability to allocate required resources to it, due to broader resource limitations and competing priorities. Moving forward, it is necessary to update the governance and procedures of the YWPN to enhance the network's sustainability; and as part of revising and refining its intended purpose, goals and membership.

This evaluation included a limited outcome evaluation, in which participants self-reported the extent to which the YWPN achieves its intended outcomes at the individual level. Participants indicated that the YWPN does effectively achieve its intended objectives, particularly in relation to improving connections between youth workers and services. Unexpected or unintended outcomes included youth workers reporting increased pride in their work as a result of the YWPN, and improved reputation and trust in the Youth Coalition. In the future, more robust and ongoing outcome measures may need to be developed as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.

Future Considerations and Recommendations

A range of areas emerged through the evaluation findings to support and strengthen the future delivery of the YWPN. Primarily, it is important for the YWPN to consider its position within and relationship to the broader context of professionalisation of the youth sector. By doing so, the goals, activities and initiatives of the YWPN can become better aligned with the overall efforts aimed at enhancing professionalism within the sector. This broader perspective allows the YWPN to recognise the interconnectedness of various stakeholders, organisations, and initiatives working towards the professional development of youth workers and practitioners.

Additional areas for further development include clarifying and communicating the aim, activities, and intended outcomes of the YWPN, establishing governance and operational procedures, and improving communication processes. Longer-term monitoring and evaluation processes are also required.

Detailed recommendations are provided at the end of the report, and include:

1. Establish an ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee
2. Develop a Program Logic, Governance and Operational Framework and Procedures
3. Refine the YWPN session format and delivery
4. Strengthen communication processes and infrastructure
5. Improve engagement with school-based youth workers
6. Consider funding opportunities
7. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Acknowledgements

The Youth Coalition extends our gratitude to the Snow Foundation and Hands Across Canberra for providing funding through the Canberra Foundations Collaborative Grant Round, to enable this evaluation of the Youth Worker Practice Network.

Thank-you also to the youth workers, youth services and other stakeholders that participated in the evaluation of the YWPN, by sharing their insights and feedback to inform this report.

Introduction

In 2022, the Youth Coalition of the ACT received funding from the Snow Foundation and Hands Across Canberra through the Canberra Foundations Collaborative Grant Round to evaluate the Youth Worker Practice Network (YWPN). The YWPN is a community of practice for frontline youth workers, coordinated by the Youth Coalition as an ongoing sector development initiative.

This document is the final evaluation report. It describes the approach, methodology and findings, and puts forward recommendations regarding the continued development of the YWPN.

Background

The YWPN commenced in 2016 in response to a workforce profile research project conducted by the Youth Coalition in 2010. The research project showed that the youth sector workforce is young, highly transient, and faces significant barriers to attending formal training and professional development opportunities. It sought to address these issues by supporting the youth sector to improve the safety, supports and outcomes for young people accessing youth services.

The YWPN was established to enable the ACT youth sector to:

- Share knowledge and pass on skills to young or new workers in the sector
- Receive affordable and practical training and professional development, with an avenue for exploring the barriers to implementing new ideas and addressing those barriers as a sector
- Provide an opportunity for workers to discuss gaps in their knowledge or issues they face in their practice, and share ideas for addressing these concerns.

Participating youth workers work across community, government and school settings. The YWPN is the only ACT network that focuses specifically on youth workers.

Structure of this report

This report includes three key components: (1) Evaluation Framework and Methodology; (2) Evaluation Findings and (3) Future Considerations and Recommendations. The *Evaluation Framework and Methodology* component describes the evaluation approach, methods and limitations. The *Evaluation Findings* is further structured into two parts: Process Evaluation, and Preliminary Outcome Evaluation. Evaluation findings have been structured by the questions in the Evaluation Framework (see Attachment 1), with detailed answers provided to each of the key questions. *Future Considerations and Recommendations* synthesises and discusses the process and outcome evaluation findings to consider what improvements could be made to strengthen the YWPN.

Evaluation Framework and Methodology

This section describes the approach to evaluating the YWPN through the development of an Evaluation Framework, the methodology and methods. It also describes the ethical considerations and limitations of the evaluation.

Evaluation Framework

An evaluation framework (see attachment 1) was developed to inform the evaluation, which included process and outcome evaluation components. The framework identified the key evaluation questions and sub-questions, evaluation indicators, and the methods of data collection.

The evaluation sought to better understand:

- the enablers and barriers to delivery and participation;
- who engages with the YWPN, and who does not engage with the YWPN, and why;
- the value of the YWPN to participants and the youth sector workforce; and
- how the ongoing delivery of the YWPN and other related initiatives could be strengthened.

In doing so, this evaluation supports the Youth Coalition and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to strengthen professional development and other supports for the ACT youth sector workforce.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology drew upon components of process and outcome evaluation. **Process evaluation** questions examined how effectively the YWPN has been implemented, how well it engaged with the intended target group, and identified 'lessons learnt'. **Outcome evaluation** questions examined the extent to which the YWPN is achieving its intended outcomes.

Key process evaluation questions and sub-questions included:

1. How effectively is the YWPN delivered?
 - a. How was the YWPN intended to be delivered?
 - b. How is the YWPN implemented – what activities have occurred?
 - c. What changes have been made and why?
 - d. What are the barriers and enablers to delivery of the YWPN?
 - e. What works well or are the most valuable components of the YWPN?
 - f. What doesn't work well or are less valued components of the YWPN?
2. How effectively does the YWPN engage with the intended target group?

- a. Who is the intended target group for the YWPN?
 - b. Who participates in the YWPN, and why?
 - c. Who does not participate in the YWPN and why?
 - d. To what extent does the intended target group understand the purpose of the YWPN?
3. How effectively does the YWPN respond to the emerging or changing needs of participants?
 - a. How are emerging or changing needs of participants identified?
 - b. What changes or processes have been implemented to respond to participants' needs?
 4. Is the YWPN appropriately resourced and supported?
 - a. Does the YWPN receive adequate and sustainable financial resources?
 - b. How effectively does the governance and operational structure support the sustainable delivery of the YWPN?
 - c. What works well, and what are the challenges and risks in the governance and operational structure to deliver the YWPN?

Key outcome evaluation questions and sub-questions included:

1. What outcomes does the YWPN contribute to for the intended target group, services, and the service system (or other)?
 - a. What are the intended outcomes of the YWPN?
 - b. How effectively does the YWPN achieve these intended outcomes?
 - c. Are there any unexpected or unintended outcomes?

Findings from the process and outcome evaluation components were synthesised, to consider:

1. What needs to be considered in relation to the future delivery of the YWPN and support needs of the youth sector workforce?
 - a. How could engagement with the intended target group be improved or better supported through the YWPN?
 - b. How could delivery of the YWPN be improved or better supported?
 - c. What other internal and external processes and considerations are necessary to support the intended target group?
 - d. How could the sustainability of the YWPN be improved?

Methods of Data Collection

A mixed method approach to data collection and analysis was used, collecting both qualitative data and limited quantitative data to answer the evaluation questions. Qualitative data was collected to inquire about stakeholders' views and experiences. Methods of data collection included:

1. **Desktop review:** Existing YWPN documentation was reviewed to examine the extent to which processes and outcomes have been documented for the YWPN, and to identify whether these processes and outcomes had changed during the implementation of the YWPN. Documents were provided by the Program Coordinator, and included session plans, limited attendance records, additional resources, and background documents describing the development and purpose of the YWPN.
2. **Stakeholder survey:** An online stakeholder survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey to obtain feedback from people who currently attend the YWPN, have in the past or are a youth worker in the ACT. Forty-nine people participated in the online survey. The survey collected information from respondents about their perceptions of the YWPN, barriers and enablers to participation, the extent to which they thought the YWPN had achieved its intended outcomes, and how the YWPN could be improved. Responses were de-identified, and included a range of open and closed questions. Most questions were optional.
3. **Stakeholder interviews:** Ten interviews were conducted with key program stakeholders, YWPN staff, youth workers who are currently or were formerly engaged with the YWPN, and other stakeholders. With consent from participants, the interviews were audio recorded. Notes were also taken to record initial impressions of each interview.
4. **Focus Group Interview:** Sixty people participated in a focus group at a YWPN session. The focus group aimed to collect information from participants about their perceptions of the YWPN, barriers and enablers to participation, the extent to which they thought the YWPN had achieved its intended outcomes, and how the YWPN could be improved. Notes were taken to record initial impressions and answers to questions.

Evaluation Recruitment

An invitation to participate in the survey was distributed to over 300 attendees, through existing mailing lists, and using previous YWPN attendance lists. This dissemination method aimed to reach a range of staff working at practitioner, management and executive levels; who had either participated in the YWPN or who had participated in the past. The survey was also shared on social media as well as promoted directly to participants at YWPN meetings in 2022 and 2023.

Recruitment for interviews occurred after the survey had commenced; and sought to include YWPN staff, youth workers who are currently or were formerly engaged with the YWPN, and other stakeholders. Voluntary participation in the focus group was offered to those attending a YWPN meeting in 2022.

Evaluation Sample

Forty-nine stakeholders participated in the online survey. Sixty attendees participated in the focus group, and ten people participated in interviews. Over 53% of respondents had attended a session within the last 3 months and 77% had attended within the last year. Close to 65% of respondents were practitioner/front-line workers, and 25% were team leaders or middle management.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected through interviews, the focus group and survey were collated and analysed to identify recurring themes and emerging issues. Quantitative data from the online surveys was analysed using SurveyMonkey. Data included demographic information about respondents, and descriptive statistics to summarise information about respondents' perceptions related to outcomes. Throughout the full report, quotes from respondents are used to illustrate these themes.

Ethics

Evaluation findings have been de-identified in order to protect the identities of respondents, noting the limits of confidentiality within a small jurisdiction. As such, quotes from individuals included in this report are attributed to the source of data (i.e. Survey Respondent, Facilitator Survey Respondent, Interview Participant), rather than to their professional position.

Evaluation Limitations

Qualitative research is an effective way to examine and better understand the experiences and perceptions of research participants. However, caution should be exercised in making firm conclusions from qualitative data in determining whether the YWPN is achieving its intended outcomes. While this evaluation sought to ensure that the participant sample included representation from across service types and service regions, it should not be assumed that findings apply to the broader population of practitioners and services eligible to participate in the YWPN. Longer-term monitoring and evaluation, including the development of more robust outcome-measures, is required.

Evaluation Findings

This component of the report is structured by two parts: (1) Process Evaluation and (2) Outcome Evaluation. Findings have been structured by the Evaluation Framework (see Attachment 1), with detailed answers provided to each of the key questions and sub-questions.

1. Process Evaluation

The process evaluation assessed the extent to which the YWPN was implemented as intended and identified 'lessons learnt' to inform the further development or refinement of the YWPN.

1.1 How effectively is the YWPN delivered?

The YWPN is regarded as a valuable mechanism in the youth sector that brings youth workers together and plays an important role in sector development and enhancing the capabilities of the workforce. Stakeholders are generally satisfied with the delivery of the YWPN. A diverse range of activities have been delivered through the YWPN since its establishment, informed by participants' needs, and leading to the development of associated activities, such as the Code of Ethics Sub-Committee. The membership of the YWPN has evolved over time. While the YWPN is seen to be well-positioned within the Youth Coalition, it does experience challenges related to resource constraints and competing priorities. Particularly valued components of the YWPN include its focus on networking, the combination of formal and informal aspects, and on building the capability of the sector. Components requiring further consideration or improvement include the format of YWPN sessions and clarifying the broader focus of the YWPN. Further detail is provided to each sub-question below.

1.1.1 How was the YWPN intended to be delivered?

The YWPN was created as a response to a research project conducted in 2010, which examined the workforce profile of the youth sector. The research revealed that the youth sector workforce largely consisted of young individuals who frequently change jobs and encounter substantial barriers accessing formal training and professional development opportunities.

"There was no ongoing professional development opportunities that were affordable and there were no opportunities for youth workers to connect with other youth workers in the sector ... to share information, share resources and the sector would do that with each other"

[YWPN Interview Participant]

As a result, the "Youth Worker Community of Practice", later renamed the "Youth Worker Practice Network" was established. The aims of the YWPN were to:

- Share knowledge and pass on skills to young or new workers in the sector

- Receive affordable and practical training and professional development, with an avenue for exploring the barriers to implementing new ideas and addressing those barriers as a sector
- Provide an opportunity for workers to discuss gaps in their knowledge or issues they face in their practice, and share ideas for addressing these concerns.

This would be achieved by forming a community of practice that would provide:

- Monthly YWPN member sessions
- Bimonthly Youth Coalition Forums (including non-members)
- Monthly social events
- Additional resources created for sessions
- Mentoring networks
- Training and professional development

The network's primary focus was to cater specifically to front-line youth workers, prioritising the development of practice skills.

“Build their practice skills, find out more about their practice skills ... it may do it as a social event, capability building activities” [YWPN Interview Participant]

1.1.2 How is the YWPN implemented – what activities have occurred?

Since 2015, the primary activity of the YWPN has consistently been member sessions. These are practical group discussions focused on developing the practice of frontline youth workers. The structure of these sessions is centred around a topic led by a facilitator. The sessions included an opportunity for attendees to introduce themselves and provide an update on their program and/or service. Morning tea was provided after the session or during a break in the session to promote networking and connections.

In addition to the member sessions, the YWPN has organised:

- Broader Youth Coalition forums
- Online drop-in sessions (during COVID-19)
- Social events
- Debates
- Training
- Workshops
- Resources
- Presentations
- Sub-committees on specific topics or issues (see below for example)

Since its inception, the YWPN has been delivered using the Youth Coalition's core funding, making use of existing resources within the organisation.

Code of Ethics Sub-Committee

In 2022, members of the YWPN articulated the need for professionalisation in the youth sector. Development of an updated version of the Code of Ethics was identified as an integral first step in that process. A sub-committee to progress the development of an updated version of the “ACT Youth Work Code of Ethical Practice” (The Code) was established. The Code was launched in March 2023 and provides a framework for safe, ethical, and professional youth work practice. Following the launch, the committee has continued to meet to progress the next steps needed in professionalisation of the youth sector.

The Code of Ethics sub-committee has identified the need for an overarching advisory committee (as seen in diagram 1) to progress the professionalisation of the youth sector. Staff have suggested that this committee could play an important role in advising and informing the activities of the YWPN, as it would be ideally positioned to consider other initiatives and activities within the broader context of professionalising the youth sector. Working groups would also be established as needed to progress activities of the committee. When the YWPN was initially established, it was shown that there were limited professional development and training opportunities available for youth workers. However, over time, various forums and training programs have emerged to meet this need, the YWPN being one of them. The YWPN needs to consider its relationship with other networks, forums and activities, what makes it unique, and its role within the broader professionalisation of the youth sector. By understanding its place within this landscape, the YWPN can effectively focus its efforts.

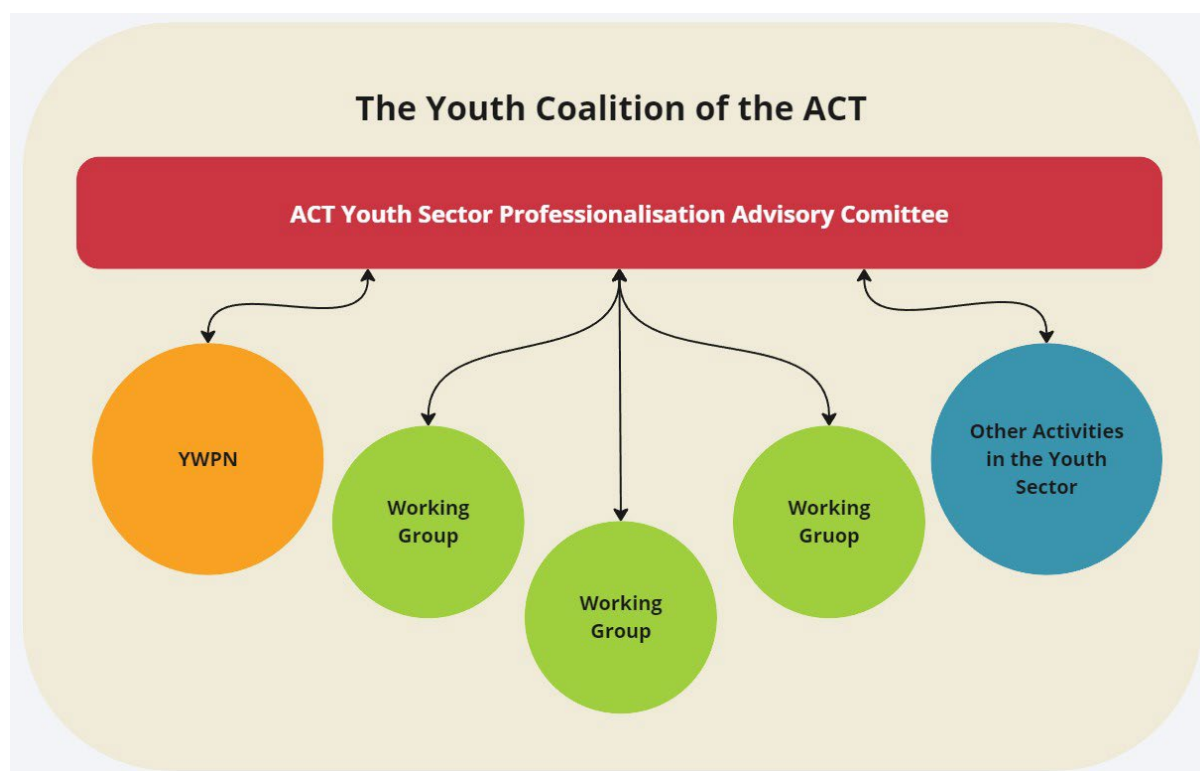


Diagram 1 – ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee

"We need to consider the YWPN within the broader context of professionalisation, rather than treating it as an isolated activity."

[YWPN Interview Participant]

1.1.3 What changes have been made and why?

Key changes made to the delivery of the YWPN relate to social events, the membership, youth sector forums, and presentations. These are described further below.

Social Events

Social events were held in earlier years, but due to limited resources and being perceived as a not a core priority, have been discontinued. Some stakeholders felt that social events held the least significance within the network, particularly without additional resources.

"Youth workers wanted to connect with each other outside of work hours."

[YWPN Interview Participant]

Membership

There appears to be less emphasis on being a YWPN "member" now than previously. Initially the YWPN appeared to be more exclusive, with specific events for members and non-members. A goal of the YWPN was to allow a safe space for front-line youth workers to share their experiences without team-leaders and managers. Limiting membership to the core demographic of front-line youth workers, assisted in creating that safe and open environment. Over time, membership of the YWPN evolved to include other people who work with young people, and also team leaders of youth programs, who saw value in bringing their teams to YWPN meetings. This has led to a more 'open' YWPN membership.

Youth Sector Forums

Youth sector forums were organised for individuals with an interest in youth issues in the ACT. These sessions were focused on a topic and usually involved a presentation or panel discussion involving guest speakers. These were often followed by a members' session for front-line youth workers to participate in a practical discussion on how the forum topic is reflected in or could inform the day-to-day practice of supporting young people.

This combination of sessions has been discontinued. Several respondents mentioned the idea of bringing back a version of the youth sector forum, which could be delivered at a larger venue and be targeted at the broader youth sector.

"I do wonder what its relationship would be to a youth sector forum ... a forum for the youth sector more broadly, not just those who identify as youth workers"

[YWPN Interview Participant]

The Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN) ACT, a network coordinated by the Youth Coalition has created a sub-committee that is progressing this concept. This forum is intended to attract a large number of individuals and services with an interest in youth affairs.

Presentations

There has been a shift recently towards hosting lecture-style presentations within the YWPN. These events feature invited individuals or organisations who present on specific topics of interest. These presentations have generated significant interest among the participants, resulting in a high number of attendees. Unlike youth sector forums, these are one-off events without a follow-up members' session and limited opportunity for discussion. Attendance at these events has attracted new attendees that have not previously attended YWPN events, thereby widening the YWPN's engagement within the broader youth sector and further broadening the membership

Code of Ethics Sub-Committee

The Code of Ethics sub-committee was established out of a need identified by members of the YWPN. This is discussed in *Section 1.1.2 - Code of Ethics Sub-Committee*.

1.1.4 What are the barriers and enablers to delivery of the YWPN?

Key barriers and enablers to the delivery of the YWPN both relate to the governance and operations of the YWPN. The positioning of the YWPN as a Youth Coalition activity is seen as a key enabler, while conversely, the limited resources and competing priorities able to be allocated to it are regarded as a barrier.

Enabler – Governance provided by the ACT youth peak body

Evaluation participants noted that despite the resource challenges, a key enabler to the delivery of the YWPN is the governance and operational support provided by the Youth Coalition to deliver it, as the ACT youth peak body. This is discussed further in *Section 1.4.1 Does the YWPN receive adequate and sustainable financial resources?*

Barrier – Resources and competing priorities

Noting that the YWPN is currently coordinated within the existing funding of the Youth Coalition, stakeholders identified that the time required to effectively deliver the YWPN is a key challenge. They noted that the delivery of the YWPN relies heavily on individual staff members who frequently have competing priorities. This dependency on staff can sometimes pose difficulties in the consistent provision of YWPN sessions, whilst maintaining a high level of value to participants. The YWPN often faces resource and attention constraints due to competing priorities within the organisation. Some stakeholders felt that reducing the frequency of YWPN activities could help to allocate resources more effectively and deliver more meaningful activities.

"I think doing it less frequently and more meaningfully would be better"
[YWPN Interview Participant]

1.1.5 What works well or are the most valuable components of the YWPN?

Stakeholders identified that the most valuable components of the YWPN include its focus on networking, combination of formal and informal aspects, and building the capability of the youth sector. These are described further below.

Networking

Respondents consistently highlighted that networking is a crucial part of the YWPN, emphasising that it provides them with valuable opportunities to establish connections.

"Connections. Explanations of what services actually provide. A better understanding of the breadth of supports available and how they work in a practical sense."
[YWPN survey respondent]

"Networking and furthering my understanding of the youth sector and what resources are out there."
[YWPN survey respondent]

Respondents said that the most valued aspect was the opportunity to connect with other youth workers. Respondents highlighted the importance of building relationships and knowing who to contact within a service, as it proved to be more beneficial than following regular referral pathways. They emphasised that having these connections enabled quicker and more effective referrals, ultimately enhancing their ability to support young people.

"It has built me connections for referrals for years, at the moment it keeps me connected to the sector and ensures what I am sharing in the classroom is hopefully relevant."
[YWPN Survey Respondent]

"Meeting new people in the sector, sharing knowledge, hearing from and about different services, reflecting on my own practice, presenting to the group..."
[YWPN survey respondent]

Respondents also expressed a heightened sense of confidence when making referrals, as they had a better understanding of services and the support they provide. They also felt more comfortable referring to someone they personally knew within the service.

Many respondents mentioned that they could obtain more information about programs and services during YWPN meetings, than they could online or through other sources. Some respondents noted that the youth sector relies heavily on 'word-of-mouth' communication, and they emphasised the importance of building connections in order to be an effective youth worker.

“Information on programs and services as well as an opportunity to meet new workers.” [YWPN survey respondent]

“A word-of-mouth sector” [YWPN Interview Participant]

Respondents highlighted that the YWPN provides a unique opportunity for them to connect and interact with other youth workers beyond their own organisation. They expressed that without the YWPN, there would be limited avenues available for such interactions.

*“I don’t feel like I have another opportunity to see any other youth workers outside of my organisation.”
[YWPN interview participant]*

Combination of formal and informal YWPN components

Several respondents commented that they like the mix of both formal and informal components within sessions. Some went further to explain that they felt that it assisted in creating the sense of a safe and welcoming environment for attendees.

“Formal aspect to it but still relaxed” [YWPN interview participant]

*“The informality, the planned training sessions are great, the afternoon tea”
[YWPN interview participant]*

“The mix of both formal and informal” [YWPN interview participant]

Building the capability of the sector

Several respondents expressed their desire to contribute to the selection of topics and discussions for the YWPN sessions. Some even shared their ideas and suggestions during interviews. Additionally, several respondents expressed a desire for more input and transparency in the process of selecting topics and discussions.

The Youth Coalition developed and piloted the ‘Talk to Them’ training in 2022. The training aims to support youth workers to develop the knowledge and confidence needed to open a conversation with young people about domestic and family violence (DFV). This year, expressions of interest were sought from individuals to learn how to deliver “Talk to Them” training to youth workers. Members of the YWPN participated in the pilot of the training, and were also invited to participate in the Train the Trainer process. This process has served two purposes. Firstly, it has facilitated the utilisation of existing expertise and experience within the sector. Secondly, it has provided individuals in the sector a valuable personal development opportunity by enhancing their skills and providing them the opportunity to deliver the training. Likewise, evaluation respondents noted that the YWPN could explore more methods to integrate sector expertise while creating avenues for capability building.

1.1.6 What does not work well or are less valued components of the YWPN?

Stakeholders identified that service updates are a key area that do not work well and may need further consideration in the future delivery of the YWPN. A broader lack of focus was also identified by participants. See also *Section 1.4* regarding the governance and resourcing for the YWPN.

Service updates

During YWPN member sessions, attendees are invited to introduce themselves and provide an update on their program and service. Most respondents saw the benefits of services updates for new workers as it provides an opportunity for them to become aware of other services, what they provide and referral pathways. However, individuals who had been actively involved in the YWPN for several years expressed that they no longer found value in the service updates. They described these updates as repetitive and noted that the information often being shared was no longer relevant. A suggestion was to ask individual services to do more directed and focused presentations on their services and programs.

“Small/ mini-presentations from each service.” [YWPN survey respondent]

Another suggestion put forward was to collect information from each attendee prior to the session and make it accessible to the YWPN in advance. This approach would save time during the session, providing more room for in-depth discussions.

*“There’s a template before the meeting, which services can fill out a submit that is sent to all participants ... then we get to [the meeting] it’s just a quick name introduction then we can get into the meeting.”
[YWPN Evaluation Interview Participant]*

If service updates are run during the session, it was suggested to provide participants with advance notice regarding the specific types of information that other participants would be seeking in relation to their program or service.

This finding also relates to broader considerations for the YWPN moving forward regarding its membership, as discussed earlier. As the membership of the YWPN has evolved over time, it now caters to the needs of both newer youth workers and more experienced youth workers and team leaders.

Broader focus for the YWPN

A number of respondents identified that while the individual YWPN sessions were valuable, there was a broader lack of focus within the YWPN itself. This may speak to an unclear broader direction or purpose of the YWPN for its participants. Further consideration may need to be given to both clarifying and communicating the purpose of a ‘Community of Practice’, and to working alongside participants to establish the direction of the YWPN.

1.2 How effectively does the YWPN engage with the intended target group?

The intended target group for the YWPN is front-line youth workers in the ACT and surrounding region. Findings demonstrate that the YWPN engages effectively with a range of community-based youth workers across a range of sub-sectors, but experiences particular challenges engaging with school-based youth workers. The membership of the YWPN has also changed over time, and often includes participation from a diverse group of youth sector representatives, including newer youth workers, more experienced youth workers, and those working in team leader or management roles. This may be an area for future consideration, regarding whether and how the YWPN can appropriately respond to the needs of these different groups. Barriers to participation include workload and capacity, organisational or management barriers, and logistical barriers regarding the time, date and location of the YWPN. Further consideration is required to clarify and clearly communicate the purpose and value of the YWPN.

Online Resources

Utilising analytics from the Youth Coalition's website, several session notes and resources attract online traffic. Notably, the session notes on ethical practice in youth work receive an average of 30 clicks per month from search traffic. It is important to note that we cannot determine from this information alone whether the visitors found the content helpful or had a positive influence on their practice. Since the traffic is generated through search queries, it is reasonable to assume that most of the traffic comes from people outside of the network, as they aren't accessing the resources directly through the website. However, it is worth noting that these topics align with broader trends that people are actively searching for online, which serves as a positive indicator of their relevance and interest.

1.2.1 Who is the intended target group for the YWPN?

The intended target group for the YWPN is front-line youth workers in ACT and surrounding regions. However, as discussed earlier and below, membership of the YWPN has changed over time, and is now attended by a range of newer youth workers, more experienced youth workers, and team leaders.

1.2.2 Who participates in the YWPN, and why?

Based on available attendance records, front-line youth workers are the main participants in the YWPN, from a range of sub-sectors. In recent years, there has been an increase in participation of team leaders and managers. It is not clear why this is, but potential factors may include a broadening of membership and unclear eligibility criteria. Furthermore, there is a core group of long-standing members who have taken on more senior positions, but still wish to remain actively engaged with the YWPN. Considering how the YWPN may need to respond to and support its changing membership is a key consideration for the YWPN moving forward.

1.2.3 Who does not participate in the YWPN and why?

Many respondents identified a range of barriers to participation in the YWPN, and also highlighted school-based youth workers as a primary audience that is not actively engaged with the YWPN. Furthermore, several respondents who were either school-based youth workers or new community-based youth workers, expressed a perception of being unsure if they were allowed to participate. They conveyed a sense of exclusion, unsure whether they were welcome to engage with YWPN activities.

"...As a younger youth worker I used to feel very uncertain whether I was allowed at events and found it hard to insert myself without an explicit invitation. I would love to see YWPN meetings grow bigger and for them to feel like a real youth worker hub." [YWPN survey respondent]

"I remember feeling unsure if I was able to participate in them, being based at a school. I definitely remember feeling a sense of difference between youth workers based in education, versus the community." [YWPN Interview participant]

School-based youth workers

Many respondents emphasised the necessity of involving school youth workers in the network, as they often receive referrals from school youth workers. They stressed the importance of ensuring that school youth workers can participate, in order to build stronger connections between education-based and community-based youth workers and supports. School youth workers identified that it can be difficult for them to attend during school hours as schools often do not see the value in their attendance.

"I would like to see schools allow more youth workers to attend regularly and hope that this can happen with the current restructure occurring in the Education Directorate." [YWPN survey respondent]

"Make it so youth workers from schools can actually come. I am not sure how you would go about this but a day where the Education Directorate puts aside where they can all attend would be fantastic." [YWPN survey respondent]

"Foster pathways for services to communicate with Education Directorate. A go to person to assist in liaising with schools to resolve issues that cannot be done so with the school leadership. Someone to connect with for education related issues who can give definitive answers to things." [YWPN survey respondent]

Other barriers to participant engagement

Participants identified a range of barriers to engagement, including workload and capacity; organisational or management barriers; location, time and dates of YWPN sessions; and mode of delivery. These are discussed further below.

Workload and capacity

Many respondents talked about how workload and capacity left them unable to attend regular meetings. School youth workers discussed the challenges they face in finding time within school hours to attend YWPN meetings.

"I stopped for a long time and only reconnected recently as my role and availability had changed." [YWPN survey respondent]

"I am the only Youth Worker in one of the biggest schools in Canberra. It is hard to be away for large blocks of hours." [YWPN survey respondent]

Organisational or management barriers

Some discussed the difficulties in convincing their managers of the importance of attending, if they did not see the value of the YWPN. Furthermore, they expressed the difficulties they encounter in persuading their managers of the benefits of their participants.

"Executive members not passing on opportunities and valuing attendance [is a barrier]." [YWPN survey respondent]

Some team leaders discussed not allowing their workers to attend if they felt the primary purpose was socialising with friends. They emphasised the importance of ensuring and communicating that each YWPN had clear intentions and provided value to their workers.

Some respondents said they attend YWPN when they feel it is appropriate. Respondents in a team leader or manager role felt that for some sessions, it was more appropriate for them not to attend, in order to allow a space for their employees to share freely. Others from government felt it appropriate to attend depending on the topic being discussed.

Time, Dates and Location

Many respondents noted that the time and day posed a barrier to their attendance. They questioned the rationale behind consistently scheduling the forum on the same day and time, emphasising that if they have a program running at that specific time, it becomes impossible for them to participate.

"Whilst I appreciate the importance of consistency, and the fact it has been running on Thursdays for a long time, my current working arrangements mean I'm unable to attend." [YWPN survey respondent]

"Work has been so busy, and so short staffed that it is very difficult to get away without letting the team down between 9 and 3." [YWPN survey respondent]

"I would like sessions to take place after the school day, after 3:05, that way I could attend as long as it wasn't on a day I run after school activities." [YWPN survey respondent]

Some respondents suggested exploring the option of holding YWPN sessions at different locations. They suggested this would reduce the travel burden for youth workers in some areas, making it more convenient to attend events.

Mode of delivery – In-person compared to online

Respondents expressed a preference for in-person sessions when it involved group discussions, emphasising the value of face-to-face interaction. Some recognised the potential benefits of recording sessions and making them available online for those unable to attend. While some respondents said they would like the option to join online, they also recognised that hybrid events are most effective for presentation-style sessions that do not heavily rely on interactive participation.

"Able to attend face to face and remotely." [YWPN Survey Respondent]

"It's so much better doing it face-to-face, as opposed to online. I like that there's a structure but also that it's relatively chill. The enthusiasm from the Youth Coalition staff is also fantastic." [YWPN Survey Respondent]

1.2.4 To what extent does the intended target group understand the purpose of the YWPN?

The intended audience exhibited a high level of understanding regarding the YWPN objectives, with nearly all evaluation participants demonstrating at least a fundamental understanding of its intended purpose.

"To support frontline workers, share information about services and best practice/development/training opportunities and allow the chance for workers to network." [YWPN Survey Participant]

It is important to note that a number of respondents identified that while the sessions were valuable, there was a broader lack of focus within the YWPN itself. Further consideration may need to be given to both clarifying and communicating the purpose of a 'Community of Practice'.

"Lacking a bit of focus" [YWPN Interview]

1.3 How effectively does the YWPN respond to the emerging or changing needs of participants?

The delivery and activities of the YWPN have evolved over time to respond to the emerging or changing needs of participants, such as through the delivery of online drop-in sessions during

COVID-19, and the development of the Code of Ethics Sub-Committee. Processes to identify participants' emerging needs in relation to the content of YWPN sessions is usually conducted informally by the Youth Coalition team. While this allows the YWPN to flexibly respond to the needs of participants, the development of formal processes that involve participants may improve how effectively participants' needs are identified and responded to.

1.3.1 How are emerging or changing needs of participants identified?

Identifying the emerging needs of YWPN participants is primarily conducted by Youth Coalition staff members. This information is gathered through informal and formal conversations and activities undertaken by the Youth Coalition, including during YWPN sessions. While the Youth Coalition team is well placed to do so to effectively address the needs of the members, it would also be valuable to establish formal processes to identify the ongoing and emerging needs of participants.

"...maybe a survey once every six months asking youth workers about what topics they want to talk about" [YWPN survey respondent]

*"...embedded systems so that it is always responsive"
[YWPN survey respondent]*

The Code of Ethics sub-committee was also identified as an avenue for establishing the needs of participants, although it comprises only a limited group of individuals. Read more about the committee in *Section 1.1.2 - Code of Ethics Sub-Committee*. In the future, the 'ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee' could take on this role.

1.3.2 What changes or processes have been implemented to respond to participants' needs?

Key changes and processes that have been implemented to respond to emerging needs of YWPN participants, included the delivery of online drop-in sessions during COVID-19, and the establishment of the Code of Ethics Sub-Committee.

Online Drop-In Sessions

During COVID, the Youth Coalition identified a need within the youth sector and responded by creating online drop-in sessions. Recognising the challenges faced by youth workers due to social distancing measures and limited access to in-person services, the YWPN adapted its approach by running informal online sessions. They acknowledged that maintaining support and connection during this difficult time was important. Hence, the creation of online drop-in sessions emerged as a practical solution to address the identified need.

Code of Ethics Sub-Committee

The Code of Ethics sub-committee was created from YWPN participants identifying the need for professionalisation of the youth sector. The committee was established as a first step in

re-developing the code. Read more about the committee in *Section 1.1.2 – Code of Ethics Sub-Committee*.

1.4 Is the YWPN appropriately resourced and supported?

While the YWPN is seen to be well-positioned within the Youth Coalition, it does experience challenges related to resource constraints and competing priorities. Stakeholders regarded that it is appropriate for the YWPN to be positioned as a Youth Coalition-led activity. While the YWPN receives relatively sustainable financial resources through the Youth Coalition's core funding, it is unclear whether these are adequate. The absence of dedicated funding places limitations on the Youth Coalition team's ability to allocate required resources to it, due to broader resource limitations and competing priorities. Moving forward, it is necessary to update the governance and procedures of the YWPN to enhance the network's sustainability; and as part of revising and refining its intended purpose, goals and membership.

1.4.1 Does the YWPN receive adequate and sustainable financial resources?

While the YWPN receives relatively sustainable financial resources through the Youth Coalition's core funding, it is unclear whether these are adequate. The absence of dedicated funding places limitations on the Youth Coalition team's ability to allocate required resources to it, due to broader resource limitations and competing priorities.

Opinions among stakeholders were divided regarding the adequacy and source of funding for the YWPN. While the majority of respondents agreed that dedicated funding would be advantageous, some individuals expressed strong views against obtaining additional funding, citing that it may come with potential limitations and that the YWPN should remain as solely resourced through the Youth Coalition's core funding.

"It's something that the Youth Co should protect. If it sat with a different funding body it wouldn't feel right. These are the things the Youth Co should be doing with their core funding." [YWPN interview respondents]

Some respondents did note the benefits of receiving funding, as it would allow the capacity of the YWPN to expand.

"Absolutely I think it should, I think that could allow for more guest speakers to come, who should be remunerated for their time, it gives scope to bring in external people outside of Canberra." [YWPN interview respondents]

1.4.2 How effectively does the governance and operational structure support the sustainable delivery of the YWPN?

The initial establishment of the YWPN governance and operational structure demonstrated careful planning and a strong foundation. However, due to resource constraints and competing priorities, there has been a lack of strict adherence to these governance structures. Moving

forward, it is necessary to update the governance and procedures of the YWPN to enhance the network's sustainability; and as part of revising and refining intended purpose and membership.

1.4.3 What works well, and what are the challenges and risks in the governance and operational structure to deliver the YWPN?

Numerous informal structures and procedures currently exist within the YWPN. As discussed earlier, these elements lack clear guidelines or defined frameworks. By examining and refining these informal structures, the YWPN can establish a solid foundation for its operations and ensure that its activities are conducted in a consistent manner that contribute to its sustainability.

Currently, staff from the Youth Coalition create session plans, develop resources and facilitate activities of the YWPN. Sometimes, other YWPN members are invited to contribute, but this occurs informally and at the discretion of Youth Coalition staff. This structure relies heavily on Youth Coalition staff. While this has allowed the YWPN to flexibly respond to issues as they arise, it creates risks regarding the ongoing sustainability of the YWPN.

Several participants suggested involving facilitators from the youth sector to assist with the delivery of the YWPN, to both improve its delivery and to provide valuable professional development opportunities. Potential advantages of including facilitators in the YWPN delivery model included (1) the potential positive impact on fostering a community of practice, (2) encouraging active participation, and (3) cultivating a stronger sense of ownership and buy-in from the youth sector. Respondents also acknowledged the importance of providing fair compensation for these facilitators. They also noted there might be complexities to consider in implementing this approach, and that further exploration and discussion would be necessary to assess its feasibility.

"I wonder as a smaller staff team, is it an option to provide it as a training or PD opportunity, a paid one, to have a small group of youth workers [delivering it]" [YWPN Interview Participant]

An additional idea was to seek out experts to present on particular topics or issues at the YWPN. By bringing in these experts, the YWPN could benefit from their insights, knowledge, and experience.

2. Outcome Evaluation

A limited outcome evaluation assessed the extent to which the YWPN is achieving its intended outcomes.

2.1 What outcomes does the YWPN contribute to, for the intended target group, services, and the service system (or other)?

This evaluation included a limited outcome evaluation, in which participants self-reported the extent to which the YWPN achieves its intended outcomes at the individual level. Participants indicated that the YWPN does effectively achieve its intended objectives, particularly in relation to improving connections between youth workers and services. Unexpected or unintended outcomes included youth workers reporting increased pride in their work as a result of the YWPN, and improved reputation and trust in the Youth Coalition. Moving forward, more robust and ongoing outcome measures may need to be developed as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.

2.1.1 What are the intended outcomes of the YWPN?

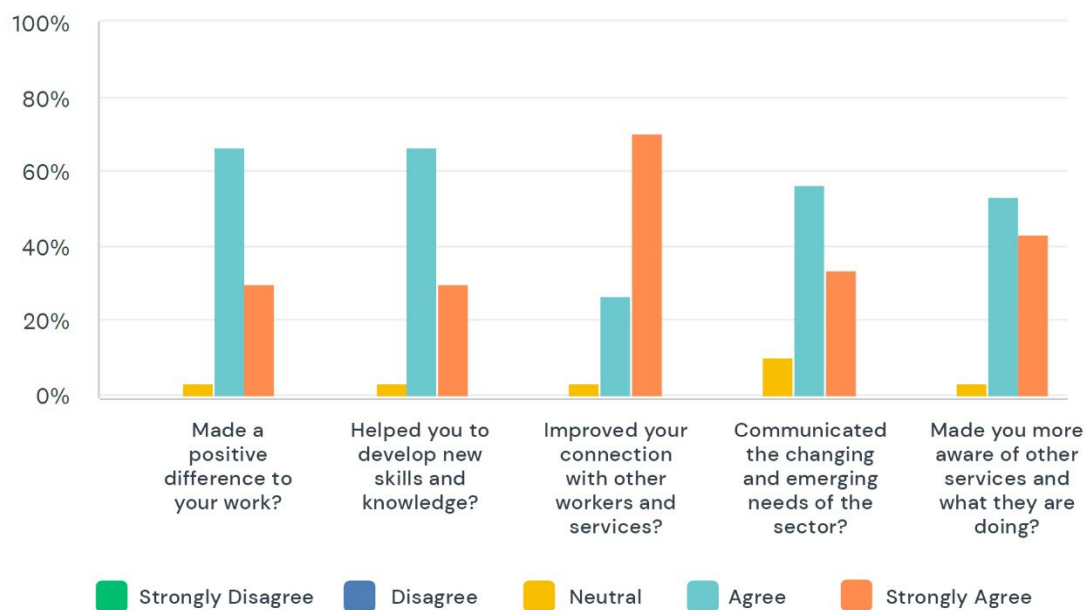
The YWPN aims to:

1. Make a positive difference to participants' practice;
2. Develop the skills and knowledge of participants;
3. Improve the connections of participants with other workers and services;
4. Provide participants with a better understanding of the changing and emerging needs of the sector; and
5. Support participants to become more aware of other services and what they are doing.

2.1.2 How effectively does the YWPN achieve these intended outcomes?

Through the evaluation survey, participants identified self-reported outcomes on a Likert scale (See Graph 1). A significant number of respondents indicated they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the YWPN has effectively achieved its intended objectives at the individual level. The outcome most positively supported was that the **YWPN improved their connection with other workers and services**. The development of more robust and ongoing outcome measures may need to be considered in the further development of the YWPN.

Survey Respondents Self-Reported Outcomes



Graph 1. Respondents self-assessed outcomes

During interviews, participants emphasised the **YWPN improved their connection with other workers and services** and that it **made them more aware of other services and what they are doing**.

“The YWPN has kept me in the loop with current research and information and sector developments. It has also allowed me to be part of other projects such as the Youth Worker Code of Ethical Practice.” [YWPN survey respondent]

It is important to mention that many participants frequently associate activities from all Youth Coalition forums, trainings, and activities with the YWPN, which means that certain outcomes may not solely be credited to the YWPN, but rather to the broader work of the Youth Coalition. It also highlights the interaction and intersection between these activities – the YWPN may act as a gateway for participants to other Youth Coalition activities, and likewise, participation in other activities may increase participation in the YWPN.

2.1.3 Are there any unexpected or unintended positive or negative outcomes?

Unexpected or unintended outcomes identified by stakeholders included an increased sense of pride in their work, and improved reputation and trust in the Youth Coalition.

Pride in their work

Many participants expressed that the YWPN has contributed to fostering a sense of pride in their role as youth workers. Through their involvement in the YWPN, they have experienced a heightened appreciation for the impact and importance of their work with young people.

"... I felt seen, valued and my profession celebrated. In a workplace that overlooks impact and often devalues your role, it was just the lift I needed. Thank you."

[YWPN survey respondent]

Improved reputation and trust in the Youth Coalition

Through attending the YWPN, participants have a better understanding and increased appreciation for work carried out by the Youth Coalition. Numerous stakeholders expressed their gratitude for the organisation's efforts.

"I love that you guys exist and really appreciate the massive advocacy work that you're doing! Keen to get more involved and be part of the process :)" [YWPN survey respondent]

"Awesome work team, you can be really proud of what has been made. I have had a few conversations with other community sector components that are envious of this group you have made." [YWPN survey respondent]

"Thank you to the whole Youth Co team for their work and support of our Sector and Young People." [YWPN survey respondent]

Future Considerations and Recommendations

Central to the findings of this evaluation, is that youth workers that participate in the YWPN highly value it as a mechanism to support improved connections and networks between youth workers and services in the ACT. Areas have emerged for consideration in the ongoing development of the YWPN, which are further described below. Recommendations are provided at the end of the report.

What needs to be considered in relation to the future delivery of the YWPN and support needs of the youth sector workforce?

A range of areas have emerged through the evaluation findings to support and strengthen the future delivery of the YWPN. Primarily, it is important for the YWPN to consider its position within and relationship to the broader context of professionalisation of the youth sector. By doing so, the goals, activities and initiatives of the YWPN can become better aligned with the overall efforts aimed at enhancing professionalism within the sector. This broader perspective allows the YWPN to recognise the interconnectedness of various stakeholders, organisations, and initiatives working towards the professional development of youth workers and practitioners.

Additional areas for further development include clarifying and communicating the aim, activities, and intended outcomes of the YWPN, establishing governance and operational procedures, and improving communication processes. Longer-term monitoring and evaluation processes are also required. Each of these areas for further development is described below.

How could engagement with the intended target group be improved or better supported through the YWPN?

Engagement with the intended target group could be improved through clarifying and communicating the aim, activities and intended outcomes of the YWPN (such as through developing a program logic); and improving communication processes. These are described further below.

Develop a Program Logic and evaluation processes

Stakeholders highlighted the need to identify clear goals and outcomes, to enable consideration about allocating appropriate resources to activities. This could be achieved through the development of a program logic. A program logic will support the YWPN to clarify its intended purpose and develop a well-defined plan to achieve that purpose, including within resource limitations. Stakeholders highlighted the need to avoid the pitfall of trying to cater to every possible need, emphasising the importance of maintaining focus and avoiding overextension.

*“It doesn’t exist in a vacuum ... think about how it is informed by a context ... it’s fallen into a trap of trying to be all things for everyone”
[YWPN Interview Participant]*

“The role and what we want to get out of it, and what the youth sector wants to get out of it needs to be clarified, so that we don’t slip to thinking, it needs to be other things” [YWPN Interview Participant]

Stakeholders discussed the need to ensure the YWPN is driven by the needs of the youth sector, and establishes clear procedures and guidelines to support it to attain its goals, within the available resources. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of developing and implementing an ongoing evaluation process within the YWPN. This would enable ongoing assessment, allowing for necessary adjustments and improvements to be made. Such a process would ensure that the YWPN remains on target and has the ability to adapt as needed, fostering continuous growth and development.

“... being able to evaluate the YWPN regularly (even through the use of this survey) might be useful to identify possible changes through ideas earlier in the year and ongoing throughout.” [YWPN survey respondent]

Create a Digital Home

Several participants expressed their desire for access to session recordings and resources following meetings. Therefore, an online record of topics, resources, session recordings, and past minutes would be beneficial. Currently, the process of archiving session recordings, resources, and past minutes seems to be done in an ad hoc manner without a designated place for it to exist online.

“Finding a way for people to have access to the information, even if they can’t take part in the network ... to be building up this bank of resources for people to use ... I think could be really valuable. However, we have to make sure that it’s worthwhile. [YWPN Interview Participant]

For the effectiveness of current online resources, see section 1.2 *Online Resources*.

Improve communication processes

Respondents expressed satisfaction with the format and effectiveness of communication within the YWPN. However, they highlighted the need for advanced planning of sessions, as many of them are involved in pre-planned programs. They emphasised that scheduling sessions well in advance would be advantageous. Additionally, some respondents mentioned that they appreciate receiving reminders closer to the events, indicating the value of timely notifications to ensure active participation.

*“Making sure you’re always on the front foot and prepared to get stuff out early, then those bump reminders as it gets closer is always really helpful.”
[YWPN interview participant]*

Respondents also highlighted the potential advantages of exploring new avenues for communication with the target audience. Expanding communications to other sectors and networks would be beneficial in attracting new members and ensuring that workers are informed about the YWPN. Some respondents highlighted that new workers often remain unaware of the YWPN unless their team leaders specifically inform them about it.

How could delivery of the YWPN be improved or better supported?

Delivery of the YWPN could be improved through establishing governance and operational procedures, and a ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee.

Establish governance and operational procedures

As discussed earlier (see Section 1.4.3), creating and implementing effective governance structures and operational procedures would be valuable to enhance the delivery of the YWPN and support its sustainability.

Establish a ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee

The Code of Ethics sub-committee identified the need for the establishment of a ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee. This committee could assist in informing and providing advice on the activities of the YWPN. Read more about the committee in *Section 1.1.2 – Code of Ethics Sub-Committee*.

Time, Dates and Location

As discussed earlier (see Section 1.2.3), exploring options for different time, dates and locations could facilitate greater participation from individuals facing attendance barriers.

Mentoring Networks

A few respondents expressed a desire to see the implementation of mentoring networks. This has been happening informally, but some respondents would like to see this organised and formalised. Stakeholders acknowledged that this would demand considerable resources, making it potentially infeasible without additional support.

“I would like to see mentoring opportunities for young youth workers to be linked, like a buddy system with more experienced YW in the field.”
[YWPN survey respondent]

What other internal and external processes and considerations are necessary to support the intended target group?

Longer-term monitoring and evaluation

This evaluation included a limited outcome evaluation, using self-reported perceptions regarding how the YWPN has improved their practice. In the continued delivery of the YWPN, it is advisable to develop and implement further monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the YWPN over time. Methods may include following up with YWPN members in the future to examine ongoing outcomes, collecting case studies from youth workers over time, and supporting ongoing participation and feedback processes.

3.1.4 How could the sustainability of the YWPN be improved?

The sustainability of the YWPN could be improved through the establishment of governance and operational procedures (described above), and considering how the YWPN can best meet the needs of participants within the available resources.

Do not create a demand that cannot be met

Respondents discussed the importance of being realistic with the available resources, capacity and capability, to avoid creating unrealistic expectations. It is important to manage expectations and allocate resources appropriately, ensuring that the YWPN can effectively fulfill its commitments.

YWPN attendance and membership

The number of attendees alone is not always the most reliable indicator of success, and furthermore, it will not be feasible for the YWPN to cater to all youth workers in the ACT. It is important to define the purpose and intention of the YWPN and each session to identify the optimal size and structure that will yield the most positive outcomes. By clarifying the objectives, the YWPN can determine the appropriate session format that aligns with its goals and facilitates meaningful engagement and interaction among participants. Quality and relevance should take precedence over attendance numbers when assessing the effectiveness and impact of these sessions.

"I think there was something really valuable actually in the smaller groups. I think people shared more, talked more, discussed more. There was one I came to last year where I had to sit outside where there were so many people, and you have to wonder, how many people are actually paying attention." [YWPN Interview participants]

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Establish a ‘ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee’

Professionalisation of the youth sector has emerged as an important undertaking that the YWPN would like to progress. The Code of Ethics sub-committee identified the need for an advisory committee to inform and progress the work needed to professionalise the youth sector. It is recommended that the advisory committee also provides advice and informs the activities of the YWPN, leveraging insights gained from broader professionalisation initiatives.

The Youth Coalition should establish a “ACT Youth Sector Professionalisation Advisory Committee.” The role of the committee would be to support and assist the youth to:

- Provide advice on further activities needed to progress the professionalisation of the youth sector, including development and implementation of associated strategies and plans.
- Set-up a professional body.
- Identify the changing and emerging needs of the sector.
- Examine how professionalisation has been achieved in different sectors and recommend relevant research and expertise.
- Identify gaps in professionalisation of the youth sector.
- Recommend the establishment of subcommittees needed to progress specific activities.
- Inform the activities of the YWPN.

The advisory committee would ideally be comprised of a diverse range of expertise, backgrounds, and experiences to provide a variety of perspectives and knowledge within the committee.

Recommendation 2 – Develop a Program Logic, Governance and Operational Framework and Procedures

Developing a program logic, governance and operational procedures would support the YWPN to clarify its aim, membership, activities and intended outcomes; and how these will be delivered within the available resources. Clarifying the purpose, membership and activities of the YWPN should consider the role of the YWPN as a community of practice, and its scope and capacity to provide other activities, such as a mentoring network or social events.

Improved governance and operational procedures will provide a framework for improved delivery, decision-making, accountability, transparency and consistency. Furthermore, governance and operational processes may consider alternative modes of structuring and delivering the YWPN, such as the possibility of engaging facilitators from the youth sector in the continued delivery of the YWPN. This could have a beneficial impact on fostering a community of practice, promoting active participation, and cultivating a stronger sense of ownership and buy-in from the sector. It’s important to also consider providing fair compensation for these facilitators. Furthermore, mechanisms may be established that enable

community members to actively contribute to the decision-making processes of the network, including the selection of topics and activities.

The program logic and other processes should be developed within the broader context of professionalisation in the youth sector, and enable the YWPN to operate with clarity, purpose and the necessary support to contribute to the professionalisation of the youth sector.

Recommendation 3 – Refine the YWPN Session format and delivery

To ensure the YWPN effectively engages with the target audience, the format and delivery of YWPN sessions may be further adapted and refined to respond to the needs of participants. This may include:

- exploring alternative options for scheduling activities, including different times, days and locations. It would be beneficial to experiment with different time slots and days of the week to accommodate the availability of different groups and individuals.
- Where appropriate, hybrid (online and in-person) events provide options and greater flexibility for participants.
- Exploring different formats within sessions, to provide more efficient delivery of service updates. One approach is to establish a process in which participants are encouraged to submit updates prior to the meeting. These updates can then be disseminated among attendees in advance, allowing more space within meetings for the presentation and discussion. This could potentially be linked to the Connect website.

It was noted that participants value the combination of formal and informal elements during sessions which should be maintained to foster an inclusive and engaging environment.

Recommendation 4 – Strengthen communication processes and infrastructure

Development of a Communications Strategy to clearly communicate the value, aims and activities of the YWPN may support improved engagement with the intended audience. The strategy should include:

- Strategies to engage and connect new workers into the YWPN
- Clear communications about membership, broadly within the YWPN and also where specific sessions are targeted at specific sub-groups
- Promotional materials that clearly articulate the intended purpose of sessions, what youth workers can expect from participating, and upcoming session dates.
- Methods for distributing promotional materials, including when they should be sent out to ensure adequate notice is provided, and regarding the format and medium of communication

A Communications Strategy should also consider the development of a 'digital home' for the YWPN. This could include the creation of an online space tailored specifically to the needs of YWPN participants, in which members can access resources, session notes and recordings.

Recommendation 5 – Improve engagement with school-based youth workers

The YWPN should explore ways to involve more school-based youth workers, taking into account their limitations and unique circumstances. When planning sessions specifically aimed at school-based youth workers, coordination with the Education Directorate is essential to ensure alignment with school policies and schedules.

Recommendation 6 – Consider funding opportunities

In considering funding opportunities for the YWPN, it is important to ensure that the YWPN is able to retain its autonomy and flexibility to adapt to the evolving needs of its members without limitations. Additional, dedicated funding may assist to support specific elements, objectives or activities of the YWPN; which aim to enhance the impact of the YWPN and more effectively utilise the available resources. Without additional funding, the YWPN needs to consider processes and structures that are able to be delivered sustainably within existing resources, to avoid overpromising and allow for commitments to be fulfilled.

Recommendation 7 – Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the YWPN will support the ongoing delivery of the YWPN and allow it to be further improved over time and respond to emerging needs. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework should include methods to assess how effectively the YWPN is implemented into the future, how it responds to emerging needs, and to assess the impact of further changes over time. It should also consider opportunities to embed more robust outcome measurement tools to assess how well the YWPN achieves its intended outcomes.

Conclusion

This evaluation has reported on the YWPN community of practice for frontline youth workers, coordinated by the Youth Coalition as an ongoing sector development initiative. The evaluation examined the effectiveness of the delivery of the YWPN, how well it engaged with its target audience, how it responds to the emerging and changing needs of participants and if it is appropriately resourced. Recommendations for future development and implementation have been presented for the consideration of the Youth Coalition and stakeholders moving forward.

Evaluation findings indicate that the YWPN is highly valued by participants, and it is regarded as important part of the youth sector. Participants self-reported positive outcomes, most notably that it made a positive difference in their work, assisted in developing new skills and knowledge and improved their connection to other workers and services. While longer-term and more rigorous outcome evaluation activities are needed, the findings suggest positive outcomes for youth workers.

The report has shown that professionalisation of the youth sector is an important undertaking. In the continued development of the YWPN, a key consideration is its role within the broader professionalisation of the youth sector. Further recommendations outline the need for clear governance and procedures, communications, development of a program logic and the need for long-term monitoring and evaluation.

Attachment 1: Evaluation Framework for the Youth Worker Practice Network

The Evaluation Framework outlines the key evaluation questions and sub-questions, indicators and sources of data. Data sources in have been colour-coded as per the table below, for ease of reference.

Data sources	
Program data and other documentation	<p>Program data and documentation such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents describing the history and governance structure of the YWPN • Session materials or minutes • Attendance records and mailing lists • Documents describing previous evaluation / feedback processes; and training and professional development needs of youth workers
Online stakeholder survey	<p>Stakeholder survey to seek the views of a broad range of stakeholders, including ACT youth workers across community and government services and sectors, Child, Youth and Family Services Program Practice Leaders and team leaders; and senior managers of child, youth and family support services. This will be conducted via SurveyMonkey.</p>
Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders	<p>Interviews with key stakeholders, including YWPN staff, youth workers who are currently or were formerly engaged with the YWPN, and other stakeholders. Focus groups for youth workers may be offered during a YWPN session and outside of the YWPN.</p>
Observation by evaluator	<p>The evaluator will attend YWPN sessions to observe the delivery of sessions.</p>

Evaluation Framework			
Key questions	Sub-questions	Indicators	Sources of data
1. How effectively is the YWPN delivered?	How was the YWPN intended to be delivered?	Extent to which the intended delivery of the YWPN is described in program documentation, including key activities and processes.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding how the YWPN was intended to be delivered, including key activities and processes.	Interview
	How is the YWPN implemented – what activities have occurred?	Extent to which the key activities and processes have been documented in program materials.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding what key activities and processes have occurred as part of the delivery of the YWPN.	Interview
	What changes have been made and why?	Extent to which the changes to the YWPN can be identified through program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding what changes have occurred to key activities and processes and why.	Interview
	What are the barriers and enablers to delivery of the YWPN?	Extent to which barriers and enablers to delivery of the YWPN can be identified through program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding the barriers and enablers to delivery of the YWPN.	Interview
	What works well or are the most valuable components of the YWPN?	Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding which components of the YWPN are most valuable.	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding which components of the YWPN are most valuable.	Online stakeholder survey
	What doesn't work well or are less valued components of the YWPN?	Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding which components of the YWPN do not work well or are less valuable.	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding which components of the YWPN do not work well or are less valuable.	Online stakeholder survey
2. How effectively does the YWPN engage with the intended target group?	Who is the intended target group for the YWPN?	Extent to which the intended target group for the YWPN is described in program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding who the intended target group for the YWPN is.	Interview
	Who participates in the YWPN, and why?	Extent to which YWPN participants can be identified through program documentation, such as attendance records and mailing lists.	Program data and other documentation

		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding who attends the YWPN (reflections on agencies, sectors, length of time in profession, and other factors).	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the reasons they participate in the YWPN.	Online stakeholder survey
	Who does not participate in the YWPN and why?	Extent to which eligible stakeholders who do not attend, or no longer attend, can be identified through program documentation, such as attendance records, mailing lists, and service sector lists.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding who does not, or no longer, attends the YWPN.	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the reasons why they do not participate in the YWPN.	Online stakeholder survey
	To what extent does the intended target group understand the purpose of the YWPN?	Extent to which the purpose of the YWPN is documented in program materials.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding the purpose of the YWPN.	Online stakeholder survey
			Interviews / focus groups
	To what extent does the intended target group understand the purpose of the YWPN?	Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding how satisfied they are with their experience of the YWPN, including the content, format and delivery.	Interviews / focus groups
			Online stakeholder survey
3. How effectively does the YWPN respond to the emerging or changing needs of participants?	How are emerging or changing needs of participants identified?	Extent to which YWPN processes or activities to identify emerging or changing needs of participants are reflected in program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding processes or activities used to identify emerging or changing needs of participants.	Interview
	What changes or processes have been implemented to respond to participants' needs?	Extent to which changes or processes have been implemented to respond to participants' emerging or changing needs are reflected in program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding what changes or processes have been implemented to respond to participants' emerging or changing needs.	Interview
4. Is the YWPN appropriately	Does the YWPN receive adequate and	Extent to which the existing financial resources for the YWPN are described in program documentation.	Program data and other documentation

resourced and supported?	sustainable financial resources?	Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding whether and how the YWPN is enabled or constrained by the financial resources it receives.	Interview
	How effectively does the governance and operational structure support the sustainable delivery of the YWPN?	Extent to which the governance and operational structure for the YWPN is described in program documentation and processes.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding whether the governance and operational structure of the YWPN supports its delivery.	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding how effectively the governance and operational structure of the YWPN supports its delivery.	Online stakeholder survey
	What works well, and what are the challenges and risks in the governance and operational structure to deliver the YWPN?	Extent to which risks, challenges and components that work well can be identified through program documentation.	Program data and other documentation
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding what works well, and what the challenges and risks are in the governance and operational structure to deliver the YWPN.	Interviews / focus groups
		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding what works well, and what the challenges and risks are in the governance and operational structure to deliver the YWPN.	Online stakeholder survey
	5. What outcomes does the YWPN contribute to for the intended target group, services, and the service system (or other)?	What are the intended outcomes of the YWPN?	Extent to which the intended outcomes of the YWPN are defined within program documentation, such as a Program Logic.
How effectively does the YWPN achieve these intended outcomes?		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding how effectively the YWPN achieves its intended outcomes.	Online stakeholder survey
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding how effectively the YWPN achieves its intended outcomes.	Interviews / focus groups
		Extent to which short-term outcomes can be observed during YWPN sessions.	Observation by evaluator
Are there any unexpected or unintended outcomes?		Views and perceptions of key stakeholders regarding unexpected or unintended outcomes of the YWPN.	Online stakeholder survey
		Views and perceptions of the YWPN Coordinator regarding unexpected or unintended outcomes of the YWPN.	Interviews / focus groups
		Extent to which unexpected or unintended outcomes can be observed during YWPN sessions.	Observation by evaluator

<p>6. <i>[Drawing upon the findings]</i> What needs to be considered in relation to the future delivery of the YWPN and support needs of the youth sector workforce?</p>	<p>How could engagement with the intended target group be improved or better supported through the YWPN?</p> <p>How could delivery of the YWPN be improved or better supported?</p> <p>What other internal and external processes and considerations are necessary to support the intended target group?</p> <p>How could the sustainability of the YWPN be improved?</p>
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