



# Evaluation of the Youth Advocate Program

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# 1 Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the Youth Advocacy Program (YAP) funded through Life Without Barriers (LWB) and operating in Sydney, New South Wales. It describes the key characteristics of the YAP, the model it is based on (the YAP Inc. model in the United States of America), the factors that contributed to its development, its key principles, how it works in practice, and Program outcomes.

The evaluation involved a brief review of the literature, interviews with young people who were or are YAP clients, YAP and LWB staff, and an analysis of administrative and entry/exit outcomes data.

The evaluation found the YAP model is judged by both clients and staff to produce positive outcomes in a time when young people are transitioning to independence. There is considerable enthusiasm for the benefits it brings to both clients and staff.

Factors contributing to the success of YAP include:

- regular, assertive and intensive contact between YAP staff and clients
- a person-centred and strengths-based approach designed to provide non-judgemental and unconditional support to the young person
- the use of individual service plans to identify and guide young people towards meeting their goals
- assembling the resources clients needed through working with other agencies and services
- young people playing an active role in setting direction and decision-making
- work with families and other significant people in the client's life to set up supports for when the program ends.

One factor influencing the impact of the program is the intensity of support. Having a designated advocate that met with clients regularly and was 'there for them' consistently and assertively engendered trust and respect.

One of the challenges for the program is clients disengaging, however drop-out rates were reportedly low. Another challenge appeared to be staff retention, with YAP workers on casual contracts with intermittent hours. The evaluation found evidence of high staff turnover, leading to changes in advocates which is potentially destabilising for clients.

The evidence on these types of interventions is that the transition period to independence for young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) is a crucial time, fraught with risk. Similar programs are being used in a number of locations in Australia (as well as internationally). Programs that provide support to young people leaving OOHC until their early to mid-20s in community settings have been shown to reduce some of the adverse outcomes associated with a history of OOHC. The findings of the current evaluation lend weight to findings from other studies of similar programs. In the future, LWB could develop more detailed outcomes indicators and conduct longitudinal data collection with current and former YAP participants (at entry, exit, and 12

months and 24 months after leaving the program). At the moment, the quantitative data is somewhat limited (to data collected at 'entry' and 'exit' points only) however the qualitative data indicated that clients and staff thought the program was an unqualified success. It is recommended that LWB continue to evaluate the program in order to have a sample size that reflects the size of the program. An embedded evaluation that collects data from entry to exit point and then at regular intervals in the first two years post exit would generate robust process and outcomes data.

## 2 Introduction

The aim of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Youth Advocate Program in achieving objectives, informing ongoing outcome measures as required, and, to determine the potential for the program to be expanded to include a broader cohort of young people.

Most young people receive family support in the transition to living as an independent adult. Typically, young people's moves towards independence are staggered and non-linear and involve the ongoing support of family and community networks (Ceurvo & Wyn, 2011). Young people require practical supports with learning to drive, securing a place to live and furnishing it, learning how to manage money for bills and rent, finding work or applying for tertiary education, and managing social relationships. Many turn back to their families of origin as a safety net if early attempts at independent living break down.

When young people leave OOHC, they do not always have this kind of family support. Yet the Minister, under Section 165 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, is required to "arrange or provide assistance to eligible care leavers until they reach 25 years of age where such assistance is considered necessary having regard to their safety, welfare and well-being" (FaCS, 2017:1). Aftercare services are an example of a service type established to provide young people leaving care with the supports that family-connected young people typically receive. The Independent Review of Out Of Home Care in New South Wales (also known as the Tune Review), publicly released in 2018, made several recommendations for the restructuring of the OOHC system – personalised support packages, an investment and commissioning approach, the establishment of a NSW Family Investment Commission, an extension of Keep Them Safe, and a review of care allowances. The Review argued that personalised targeted support delivered to vulnerable young people and their families would allow them to access supports across portfolios in order to reduce the intergenerational transfer of child abuse and neglect and maximise life chances.

The way that society cares for vulnerable children, both prior to and during OOHC, is a changing context. In NSW, the Their Futures Matter initiative is seeking to fundamentally alter the way children, young people and their families are supported to address risks, keep families together, and to better look after children who are placed in statutory care. Ultimately, improved stable and secure home environments, and positive connections with family – whether with birth families or OOHC placements – can alleviate the significant resource gaps young people who have been in OOHC face when they transition to adulthood.

The formal definition of leaving care is the cessation of legal responsibility by the state for young people living in out-of-home care under a child protection order from the Children's Court. At the current time, the national Home Stretch campaign seeks to change OOHC laws to enable young people to stay in OOHC until the age of 21 and thus for the state to have continuing responsibilities towards young people (The Home Stretch, n.d). This would bring their experience closer to that of most other Australian young people. In 2012, two-thirds of young people were still living with parents at 21 years (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2014). While a third had left home and were living independently, most would have been receiving important parental support.



Research in Australia and internationally has identified young people who have been in contact with the juvenile justice system and/or have been placed in OOHC as a highly vulnerable group. Outcomes for young people who have been in conflict with the law and placed in juvenile detention facilities or OOHC are considerably poorer than for young people generally (McDowell, 2013; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006, Mendes et al., 2016).

Young people who have been in OOHC are more likely to experience homelessness, leave school early, have contact with the criminal justice system, have children at an early age and are at greater risk of having their own children taken into care (Beauchamp, 2014; McDowall, 2009; Stein & Munro, 2008). In particular those who have experienced multiple placements while in care and those who left care at a younger age are at risk of poorer outcomes (Cashmore and Paxton, 2007).

These vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by the care system itself, which may provide limited support to young people transitioning out of care. Research has indicated that young people transitioning out of juvenile detention or from OOHC are more likely to experience unemployment, homelessness, mental health issues, poorer educational attainment, and health problems than the general population of young people, and that one-on-one support and mentoring can support better outcomes (McDowell, 2013; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Mendes et al., 2014).

Successful care-leaving is characterised by having stable, high quality care, at least one stable relationship, positive school experiences, the possibility to take part in decisions about oneself (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006; Stein, 2012) and a gradual transition from care (Stein, 2012). Feeling a sense of belonging to a family is important for care leavers (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006). This secure base can help care leavers to accept challenges, while leaving them the possibility to return if they feel unsafe (Hiles, Moss, Wright, & Dallos, 2013). The importance of both informal and formal support, such as social, emotional, financial and practical support, in the process of leaving care is clear (Stein & Munro, 2008), but in practice it is not always available as a matter of course. Research has shown that accepting and continuing to receive services after the age of 18 improves the likelihood of more positive outcomes but that the degree of success does depend on the stability experienced in care, having the capability to develop and utilise social support, being motivated, and the extent of various physical and mental health problems or substance abuse (Höjer & Sjöblom, 2014).

While support is provided for young people while in detention or OOHC such as access to a caseworker and other support services, this support often diminishes when they turn 18. The transition to independent living is a time of vulnerability. While caseworkers may be available after the young person turns 18, this is usually on an 'as needed' basis, sometimes for a time-limited period, rather than in a structured, personalised and consistent manner during the transition period. Johnson and Mendes (2014) identified four factors that appeared to make a difference for care leavers who had similarly complex biographies and challenging experiences –addressing substance abuse; improved family relationships; establishing meaningful relationships with professional support; and finding work. The four factors are often interlinked, but the key point is that whatever the catalyst(s), the resulting turnaround in the participants' lives was pronounced.

With the aim of reducing or mitigating poorer outcomes, increasing policy emphasis has been placed on providing support during the period of transition to independent living, instead of abruptly ending formal support at age 18. As young people may not have the experience or the neurological development to make sound decisions until their mid-20s, providing access to a caseworker or

mentor throughout this period is thought to assist young people to make better decisions and help guide them through the difficult transition period. Various Australian and international child welfare agencies have adopted programs designed to provide individualised support to young people prior to turning 18 into the early to mid-20s. These programs vary in length and name, but most programs share the common element of individual, intense support for the young person before, during and after transiting into independent living. Most programs include plans, including goal-setting and obtaining inter-sectoral assistance and appropriate resources to facilitate reaching those goals. Such plans typically actively involve the young person in decision-making (Beauchamp, 2014). Foster carers and other significant adults may also be involved, as well as professionals. Typically, programs cover core domains such as housing, health, education and training, employment or other activity, financial security, social relationships and support networks, life skills, identity and culture and legal matters (Beauchamp, 2014). Mendes et al. (2014) argue for an intensification of holistic support offered in both custodial settings and post care.

International studies of mentoring programs indicate that these can reduce or prevent negative outcomes during and after the transition into adulthood (CREATE, 2010; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002; Osterling & Hines 2006). Evaluations of UK and US aftercare programs indicate that these do lead to improved outcomes including in housing, education, employment, health, social connections, and in long- term use of services (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007; Johnson, Natalier, Bailey, Kunnen, Liddiard, Mende, & Hollows, 2009; Stein, 2012). DuBois et al.'s meta-analysis of 55 studies and evaluations found support "for the prevailing view that mentoring programs offer the greatest potential benefits to youth who can be considered to be at-risk (Freedman, 1992; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1992)" (DuBois et al., 2002: 189). They conclude that there is strong empirical evidence for utilising mentoring as a preventive intervention with youth whose backgrounds include significant conditions of environmental risk and disadvantage (DuBois et al., 2002). Another review by Spencer, Collins, Ward and Smashnaya (2010) was circumspect about the effect of mentoring generally for youth transitioning out of care but identified elements of mentoring that appeared to create more positive impacts including: duration (several years is best), consistency (regularity of contact, stable presence), emotional connection (stronger connections lead to better outcomes), and program support. However, they also drew attention to macro factors that affect outcomes such as lack of policy support – in particular, underfunding, and time-limited programs (Spencer et al., 2010). They also pointed to systemic issues, concluding that:

... the mentoring approach, particularly one-to one mentoring, remains an individual-level solution to what are inherently systemic problems. Families involved with the child welfare system struggle with poverty, mental illness, domestic violence, homelessness, and other social problems primarily rooted in systemic challenges related to social class, racism, and sexism. A sound mentoring program may prove to be a key ingredient to helping some youths to achieve a successful, healthy, productive adulthood, relatively free of these types of social problems. Yet disproportionate attention to mentoring as a solution might continue to prohibit the enactment of more comprehensive solutions to the problems plaguing vulnerable families. (Spencer et al., 2010: 232).

Other evaluations emphasise the cost-savings to government of providing support to young people leaving care (Raman, Inder & Forbes, 2005) as opposed to no intervention, which implies higher costs later due to increased future likelihood of homelessness, criminal justice involvement, and hospitalisation.

The National Standards for Out-of-Home Care in Australia require that transition planning commence at age 15. However, as Mendes, Johnson and Moslehuddin note, the quality of preparation for leaving care in Australia is “inconsistent, and varies both within and across the different states and territories, as well as within non-government organisations” (2011: 65). There have been a number of pilots of intensive support programs for young people leaving care. A NSW program funded through FACS and delivered by the SWITCH consortium provided assistance to young people leaving care in northern NSW. The qualitative evaluation indicated positive outcomes across a range of domains including housing (notwithstanding challenging housing market conditions), drivers’ licences, training courses in literacy and numeracy, budgeting skills and mental health (based on data on 59 clients). The level of satisfaction with the program was found to be very high amongst the small number of clients interviewed (N=10). Clients valued the emotional as well as the practical support received from caseworkers. The evaluation found “clear delivery of tangible positive results both in terms of the housing outcomes achieved by individuals, stabilised income security support and employment or education re-engagement for some, together with self-reported improvements in quality of life and hope for the future” (Westwood Spice, 2013: 42).

In Victoria, the Stand by Me pilot program offered intensive case management support program for young people transitioning from OOHC, adapted from the UK Personal Advisor model. It provided assistance to a small group of young people transitioning out of care between January 2013 and December 2015 with accommodation, living skills and development of sustainable social and community connections (Beauchamp, 2014). The Personal Advisors coordinate services, implement and review leaving care plans, and maintain contact with young people to provide information, advice and referral until 21 years of age (Purtell, Mendes, Baidawi & Inder, 2016). The evaluation of the program by Purtell et al. (2016) compared outcomes for program clients (n=8) compared with another group of care leavers who accessed standard supports on leaving care (n=8). They found that for the Stand By Me clients, the program appeared to have increased positive outcomes for nine out of the twelve young people supported by the program, (three young people in the program were less engaged and experienced less positive trajectories and could not be interviewed). They also found the non-Stand By Me client outcomes indicated increasing levels of complexity over time while the opposite was true for those in the program. They concluded, noting the limitations, that “this support is very promising in improving outcomes for young care leavers at the highest risk of homelessness and other poor outcomes” (Purtell et al., 2016: 14).

Another similar Australian program is the Towards Independent Adulthood (TIA) trial currently taking place in Western Australia. Under the TIA Trial, a non-government organisation, Wanslea, working with Yorgum, an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, has been funded to engage Personal Advisers to provide intensive, holistic supports and mentoring for young people for up to three years as they transition from formal care into adulthood (Department of Social Services, n.d.). Eighty eligible young people are being sought to participate in the trial. The trial will run from mid-2017 to mid-2020. An evaluation will occur after the trial and will compare the outcomes of participants in the trial to a comparison group of care leavers (Department of Social Services, n.d.)

Another such program is the Youth Advocate Program (YAP) which is the subject of this evaluation. This is a unique person-centred program, provided by Life Without Barriers (LWB) which connects young people leaving OOHC with paid and trained ‘Advocates’ who work with the

young person for up to 15 hours a week for six to nine months, assisting their transition, and supporting them to achieve other goals associated with their transition. This program is adapted from and nested within a well-established and externally-evaluated networked international model (Tilbury, 2015). An interim implementation evaluation was conducted by Griffith University in October 2015, in addition to a review of operational practice of YAP by Ross Beaton Consultancy in August 2016. LWB then wanted outcomes evaluation to be conducted – with the aim of assessing its effectiveness in achieving objectives, informing ongoing outcome measures required and to determine the potential for the program to be extended to a broader cohort of young people. This evaluation, conducted by SPRC in 2018, follows on from this previous work.

## **2.1 Program description**

The Youth Advocacy Program model is based on a rigorous evidence base drawing from various studies. Three were external University-based studies, commissioned by a public agency, and one was an external study commissioned by YAP. Six of the studies used pre-/post- test designs (Centre for Outcomes Analysis, 2006; Comiskey, 2006; Jameson & Cleary, 2004; O'Brien, 2004; Travis, 2001, 2003). Four studies involved comparisons of YAP with similar community programs (Jones, Harris & Bachovchin, 1997, Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003; Tarrant, 2002; THINK, 2003). The comparison programs consistently delivered to young people with high risk and high service use. The evaluations consistently show that compared to other similar populations, young people who complete intensive holistic support programs have lower rates of placement into juvenile justice facilities, recidivism, and instances of being reported AWOL. In addition, there are improvements in: residential stability; quality of life; positive results in education; enhanced links with community activities; and improvements in social behaviour.

The terms advocacy and mentoring are often used interchangeably in the literature. Mentoring typically refers to support that occurs informally through social networks and may provide positive role modelling through unstructured contacts, youth at-risk of institutionalisation or youth returning to the community from placement require a structured and more formal approach to this kind of support.

In the YAP, formal mentors are called Advocates; they are paid and deliver 15 hours a week of service based around the development of the young person's sense of agency and autonomy. The mentoring commitment covers a six to nine-month period. Young people are matched with an Advocate and they negotiate jointly chosen activities. They meet at a mutually convenient time and place, meetings can vary in length (according to the young person's needs).

### **2.1.1 Program principles**

YAP serves as a creative, community-based program of intensive interventions with high-risk youth and their families. The philosophy behind this program stems from these basic beliefs:

- 1) That an individual's successful functioning is related to the resources, those already identified and those that the advocate assists the youth in connecting with, available through the family and community.
- 2) That youth and family-focused social services should move from a specialised service delivery paradigm toward a support-oriented holistic service delivery paradigm.

- 3) That because poverty is a pervasive underlying issue faced by substantial numbers of clients served by human service agencies, an important task is to improve employment opportunities and income levels of individuals and families. The YAP model identifies natural leaders in the community and employs them as advocates and directors, recognising them as the real experts on the community's needs, and thus creating employment opportunities within the neighbourhood.
- 4) That all persons, even those who face substantial difficulties, have capabilities and strengths that can and must be developed.

## 2.1.2 YAP approaches

The **Wraparound approach**<sup>1</sup> is YAP's foundation stone and primary method of case assessment, service planning, and service coordination in working with high risk youth and their families. Within wraparound practice, young people and families are provided with access, voice and ownership of their own highly individualised service plans. Non-traditional services that build upon a young person's interest and assets are employed. Strength-based and solution-focused strategies are also utilised by staff to facilitate engagement and active participation. Identification of "exceptions" to problem behaviours occurs immediately. Positive and productive behaviours are reinforced and built upon through new opportunities.

Engaged and sustainable family teams are at the heart of the wraparound approach. Staff seek to identify the 4-6 members of the community in addition to professionals to serve as team members for families in trouble. The family team helps in the development of the services plan and provides a natural support system for the family as challenges arise. The cultivation of the team over the course of service delivery is a key priority, designed to ensure that gains made during service provision are maintained post discharge.

YAP's Wraparound Advocacy Model is based on Ten Core Principles:

1. **Individualized Service Planning:** Individualised services are tailored for the unique needs and strengths of each family. Individual Service Plans (ISPs) include behavioural intervention as needed.
2. **Cultural Competence:** Staff are recruited from local communities and matched with youth and families to ensure cultural competence.
3. **Partnership with parents:** A respectful partnership is developed with each family. The family members are productive collaborators in the intervention, Individual Service Plan development, and service delivery process.
4. **Focus on Strengths:** Identifying and utilising the strengths, assets and interests of all family members are essential to the success of the individualised service plan. For the involved youth, this focus on strengths will facilitate skill-application and positive

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<sup>1</sup> Wraparound Approach: Pioneered by Dr. John Vandenberg, wraparound is a family-led approach to case planning where an individualised service plan is built around the interconnected needs and strengths of each young person and family by accessing and mobilising formal and informal supports from within the youth's natural community. This approach ensures that families have a voice in developing their plan, access to their plan and ownership of their plan.

socialisation. Focusing on strengths will be a tool in identifying potential employment opportunities and training youth in job skills.

5. **Family Empowerment:** A goal of services is for families to experience psychological empowerment and gain materially from involvement in services.
6. **Teamwork and Mutual Assistance:** Formal and informal neighbourhood supports and services are organized and coordinated.
7. **Community-Based Care:** A goal of YAP services is to identify untapped, valuable community assets and connect families with them.
8. **Unconditional Caring:** YAP maintains a “no refuse” intake policy and a “whatever it takes” approach that fosters creative partnerships and strategies to address the most difficult case situation.
9. **Corporate and Clinical Integrity:** A spirit of optimism and shared accountability is fostered among staff and shared with families.
10. **Giving Back:** Young people and families are encouraged to give back services and supports to the community. (Life without Barriers and Youth Advocacy Program, Inc., 2017: 22)

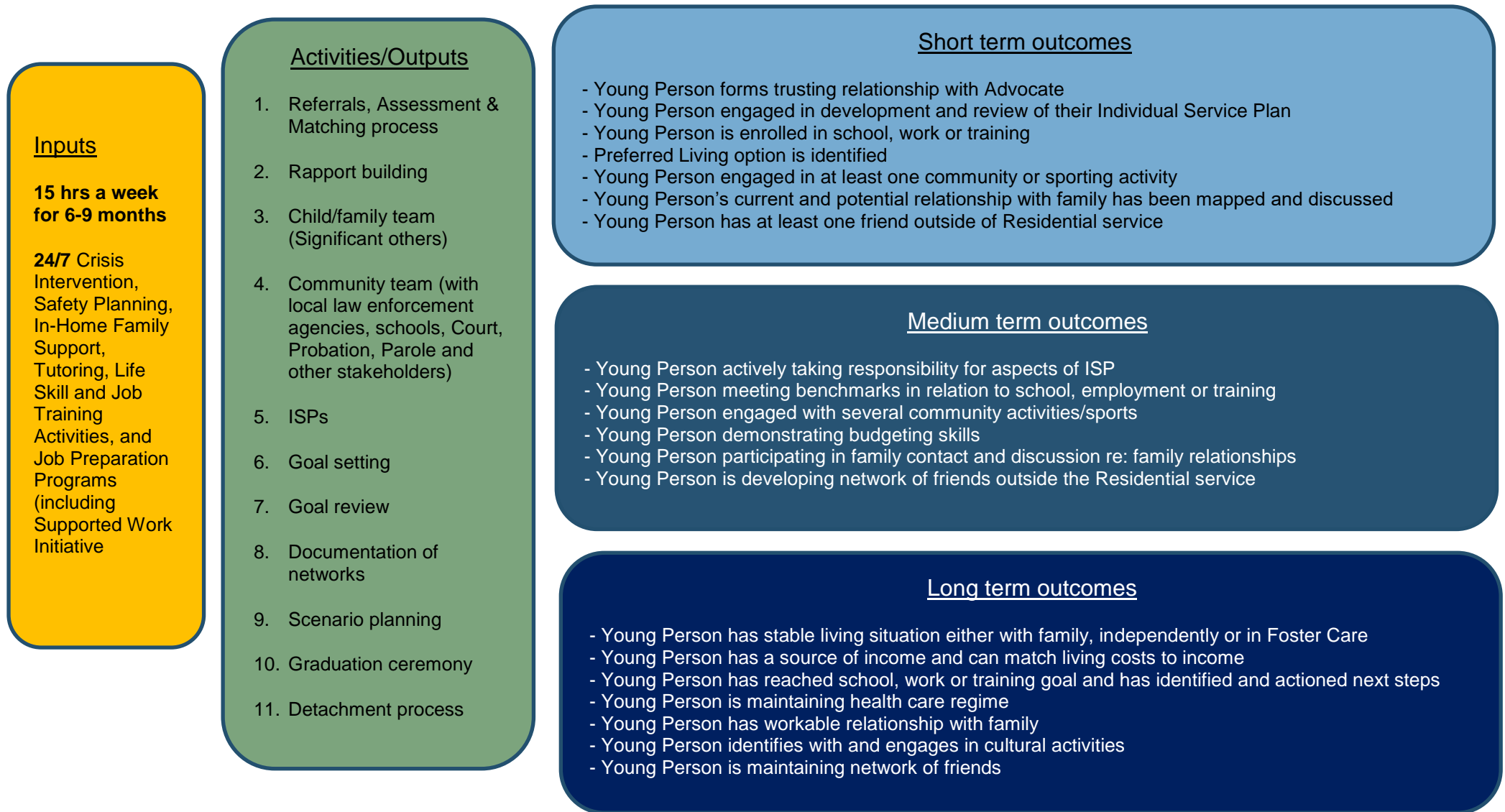
### 2.1.3 Program logic

A program logic is a tool used in planning and evaluation to:

- clarify and communicate intended outcomes and assumptions
- make causal assumptions explicit and test how they are supported by evidence
- provide a framework for monitoring or evaluation
- tell the story of how a program works.

The diagram on the next page offers a YAP-specific program logic developed from a review of YAP Program documents

Figure 1 Program logic adapted from Appendix D LWB YAP Program Logic draft



## 2.2 Program modalities

The program uses an array of tools/modalities to effect change in young people's lives and build their support networks and competencies:

- Assess the youth and his/her family to develop an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) to address the individual needs and strengths of each youth
- Partnering with local law enforcement agencies, schools, Court, Probation, Parole and other stakeholders to develop a community-wide (Community Team) prevention and intervention program for high-risk youth
- Assembling a Child-Family Team of adults from formal and informal community associations based on the needs, strengths and interests of the youth and family. These supports help to ensure community safety and the arrest-free return to court of each and also provide a forum for youth to both receive from and contribute to the local community
- Brokering and Advocating for each youth and family; Modelling for and Empowering families to broker and advocate for themselves, and
- Providing 24/7 Crisis Intervention, Safety Planning, In-Home Family Support, Tutoring, Life Skill and Job Training Activities, and Job Preparation Programs (including Supported Work Initiative). (Life Without Barriers and Youth Advocacy Program, Inc., 2017: 108-109)

### 2.2.1 Program activities

There are a series of clear step-by-step guides to the processes and activities that structure the relationship between the Advocate and the young person. These guide the Advocate's interactions with the young person, the YAP program, LWB child and family teams, and how the Advocate should position themselves in interactions between young people and third parties such as other professional or community support people or the young person and authorities. The processes and activities include:

- referrals and matching process
- rapport building
- ISP goal setting and wrap around resource identification
- goals review and renewal
- graduation
- detachment.

The policy and procedures manual is clear and thorough to guide practice.

### 2.2.2 Program fidelity

The YAP approach combines elements in a way that is unique and distinguishes it from other Multi-Systemic Therapies and Functional Family therapy programs.

Program documents indicate that there is:



1. A Family and Community Focus. YAP staff members work to develop new and fortify existing relationships between family members and youth, and between youth and supportive people, places and activities within their community.
2. A Relationship-Driven Model that Builds Informal Supports. Change occurs through the vehicle of the youth's relationship with his/her advocate and the formation of an engaged, action-oriented and sustainable youth/family support team.
3. Emphasis on Zip Code Recruiting and Cultural Competence: YAP advocates are often "natural helpers" recruited from a youth's family or neighbourhood. This approach offers local employment opportunities and assures that YAP staff members have a grassroots understanding of community assets as well as challenges. Advocate staff may have a GED or a Ph.D.
4. Other Community Investment. In addition to hiring local residents, YAP offers a supported work program. This program may provide wage subsidies and thus encourage employers to take a chance on engaging high-risk youth who may have very limited work histories. YAP advocates provide periodic support to clients during these employment training opportunities.
5. Longer Length of Service. Due to the importance of relationship-building and its emphasis on individualized services, YAP's length of service is on average four to six months, and can be extended when needed.
6. An Empowerment Model. YAP youth and families are called upon to help design and "own" their service plans. In addition, youth are provided with opportunities to "give back" to local organizations, improving their self- respect and community standing.
7. Flexible, "Non-Manualized" Approach. YAP interventions are designed around each family's unique needs, preferences and strengths rather than manualizing specific interventions for families that they may not need. However, YAP staff implement plans and tools that have been developed under a set of Gold Standards and YAP Wraparound skills which help ensure program fidelity, and cognitive and behavioural approaches/techniques may be used when needed. (Life Without Barriers and Youth Advocacy Program Inc., 2017: 100)

Elements 3 and 4 - Emphasis on local area (postcode/zip code) matching, and supported work programs, have not been implemented in the LWB Australia adaptation of the model.

## 2.3 Aims and research questions

Broadly, the evaluation aimed to identify whether and how LWB's adaption of the YAP contributes to positive outcomes for young people, their families and the community. The evaluation examined the outputs and outcomes of the program and aims to contribute to the evidence base and the development of future outcome measures in relation to the YAP.

The evaluation questions were as follows:

1. What were the placement status and needs of young people at entry to YAP?
2. What, if any, difference did YAP make to:
  - a. the young person's living arrangement

- b. linkages to community
- c. educational engagement, outcomes and aspirations
- d. vocational engagement and aspirations
- e. health needs
- f. relationship and contact with family
- g. involvement with youth justice system?

## 3 Methods

The research design was a mixed-methods one, although primarily qualitative. It involved:

1. a document review of program documents
2. an analysis of secondary quantitative data including deidentified client demographic information, and de-identified entry/exit survey data.
3. qualitative research with young people who had participated in the program, and with LWB staff involved in delivering the program (the Advocates), as well as other LWB staff who work with young people.

### 3.1 Document analysis

Relevant documents including annual reports, previous evaluations of the program, and other relevant background material about the program were collected and analysed. Specifically, documents analysed were:

- YAP core principles
- YAP Procedure Manual
- Individual Support Plan template
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Child welfare programs fact sheet
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Advocate Model fact sheet
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Youth Prison or a Youth's Community infographic
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Safely Home
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Strengthening Communities One Biography at a Time
- Youth Advocate Programs Inc. (US) Evidence Supporting YAP's Model.

Broadly the Australian-based YAP follows the US model quite closely. It contains the same core principles and the general program structure, with two variations:

- The US documents state “Emphasis on Zip Code Recruiting and Cultural Competence: YAP Advocates are often “natural helpers” recruited from a youth’s family or neighbourhood.” In the Australian version, the Youth Advocates are professional staff members, working out of a centralised office., There is a broad catchment area and staff work with clients in a wide variety of locations, necessitating travel across the metropolitan area. Postcode or location more generally is not a consideration when matching an Advocate to a young person.
- The US documents mention that “YAP offers a supported work program.” The Australian program works with the young person towards employment and training outcomes but does not sit within the same context and as such does not make use of supported work programs as a primary method of assisting the young person into employment.

## **3.2 Demographics and program outcomes**

LWB provided de-identified administrative data collected on 61 program participants (both active and inactive). This included demographic information such as age and gender, cultural background, care history, and identified issues such as disability, mental health issues, and drugs/alcohol use. It also included entry and exit outcomes based on surveys of 33 program participants (including information about primary source of income, living situation, engagement in education and employment, social connections, juvenile justice involvement and contact with family). This data was extracted from LWB's databases and provided to the researchers in Excel and other formats.

The Client Information, Reporting and Tracking System (CIRTS) database is the database client database used by Life Without Barriers. Data pertaining to individual research participants is held in the CIRTS system. This includes Individual Service Plans. As the amount of work that would have had to have been done to anonymise these was considerable, and due to the low number of possible consenting participants allowing access to individual case files, it was decided not to utilise these individual records but rather rely on the de-identified program data and qualitative interviews with YAP participants.

## **3.3 Staff interviews and focus groups**

Two focus groups and three additional interviews were held with key staff involved in directly delivering the YAP or in other capacities in LWB to support the researchers' understandings of how the program works. The two focus groups took place at the LWB Baulkham Hills office in June 2018. Ten staff participated in these (five in each). In addition, as some staff could not attend, three individual interviews were carried out with other staff. The total number of staff participants was 13. All sessions were audio recorded (with the permission of participants) for the purpose of transcription and analysis.

## **3.4 YAP participant interviews and focus groups**

All participants who completed Youth Advocate Program and were contactable were invited to participate in the evaluation (n=25). In keeping with an arms-length approach they were invited to participate by the LWB YAP Team Leader. If they consented to be contacted, the researchers were provided with their contact details and contacted the young people directly via phone or email.

Two focus groups with program participants took place. Both of these took place at the LWB Baulkham Hills office in June 2018. The focus groups comprised of a description of the purpose and procedures of research (including opting out), an explanation in plain language of the consent process, and group discussion. All sessions were audio recorded (with the permission of participants and/or their guardians where appropriate) for the purpose of transcription and analysis.

Numbers of consenting participants were low, and researchers worked with YAP to increase numbers offering flexibility in the place, time and mode of interview (e.g. their residence, a café, library, food outlet, or at where they lived or by phone interview). Efforts made to contact graduates of the program by the Team Leader. While some initially agreed to be contacted by the

researchers, and a small number of individual interviews were carried out, about half of those contacted did not commit to be interviewed or did not return calls or texts. After three attempts, we ceased recruitment. While the numbers are small (n=7), there was a high level of agreement on key issues across participants with quite different needs and starting points.

The numbers of participants participating in qualitative interviews were low, so when presenting quotes in this document we have only identified whether people are LWB Advocates, other LWB staff or young people. However, the participation rate in this qualitative work is similar to evaluations of like programs (such as Stand by Me) and it is complemented by administrative data analysis.

### **3.5 Limitations**

The evaluation had a number of limitations.

- A small sample size. This reflects the complexity of life for young people who have been in OOHC. Those who did participate were overwhelmingly positive about YAP and were generally able to differentiate it from other programs. It is possible that those who did not engage with the evaluation may be experiencing worse outcomes than young people who agreed to reflect on their experiences.
- No follow up data is collected by LWB to complement and provide information on medium and long-term outcomes. However, the LWB data provided on client demographics and entry and exit data was comprehensive.
- YAP graduate experiences were embedded in their experience of OOHC and typically reflected program fatigue (see section 5.3.2). While interviewers worked to refocus their comments on YAP, this research imperative had to be balanced with open listening to young people and reflecting back the validity of their experiences. Young people often conflated their experiences of YAP with their experiences of being on OOHC. This has been managed in the data analysis process through careful disentanglement of reflections that pertain to YAP. The findings presented in this report are focussed on YAP but as Section 5 suggest the boundaries between programs are more meaningful to service providers than they are to the young people that rely on services.
- A number of YAP graduate participants were wary about data collected about them and struggled to understand the difference between case file data and research data. This did not appear to impact on what was offered in interviews but did impact on the number of consents received and may have influenced participation rates in the study.
- The study does not analyse whether the program was experienced differently for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and workers.

## 4 Findings – quantitative

YAP collects data on demographic and other characteristics of program participants such as age, gender, number of foster care placements, and the presence of disability or mental health disorder. At entry and exit from the program, young people are asked various questions about primary source of income, living situation, education, employment, drug and alcohol use, community connections, and contact with family.

The following two subsections summarise administrative/demographic and entry/exit survey data collected by LWB on young people in the YAP program. The data summary presented in section 4.1 illustrates the demographic and other characteristics of participants in the YAP program, while section 4.2 summarises outcomes on entry and exit, based on surveys of YAP participants conducted by LWB. For more detail, see Appendix A.

### 4.1 Characteristics of participants in the YAP program

Life Without Barriers provided the researchers with data on the characteristics of 61 YAP participants, and 33 clients who entered, then exited, the program. The summary below provides demographic characteristics and outcomes data for all young people who have been through the YAP (past and present).

#### 4.1.1 Demographics and other characteristics

**Age:** Almost three-quarters (73%) of young people in YAP are aged between 16-18. Twenty-three per cent are aged 13-15 and only 3 per cent were aged between 9-12. This age profile is because YAP is aimed at young people who are close to transitioning out of care.

**Gender:** The proportion of males and females is nearly equal, with 30 females and 34 males as clients of the YAP.

**Cultural background:** Most clients are Anglo-Australian (62%), with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (20%). Young people from CALD background were less represented (17%).

**Mental illness:** Two-thirds or 65% did not have an identified psychiatric disability, 28% did, while for 4% this was unknown.

**Disability:** Nearly three quarters or 71% did not have a disability, while nearly a third or 28% did.

**Care history - placements:** Nine young people or 14% had only experienced one foster care placement, seven or 11% had experienced two placements, and a further seven or 11% had experienced four placements. Few had experienced five-10 placements. However, five young people or 7.8% had experienced 11 or more foster care placements

## 4.1.2 Outcomes on entry and exit

Below is a summary of the outcomes for participants in the YAP program, based on entry and exit survey data (collected from 33 clients). For detailed outcomes data see Appendix A.

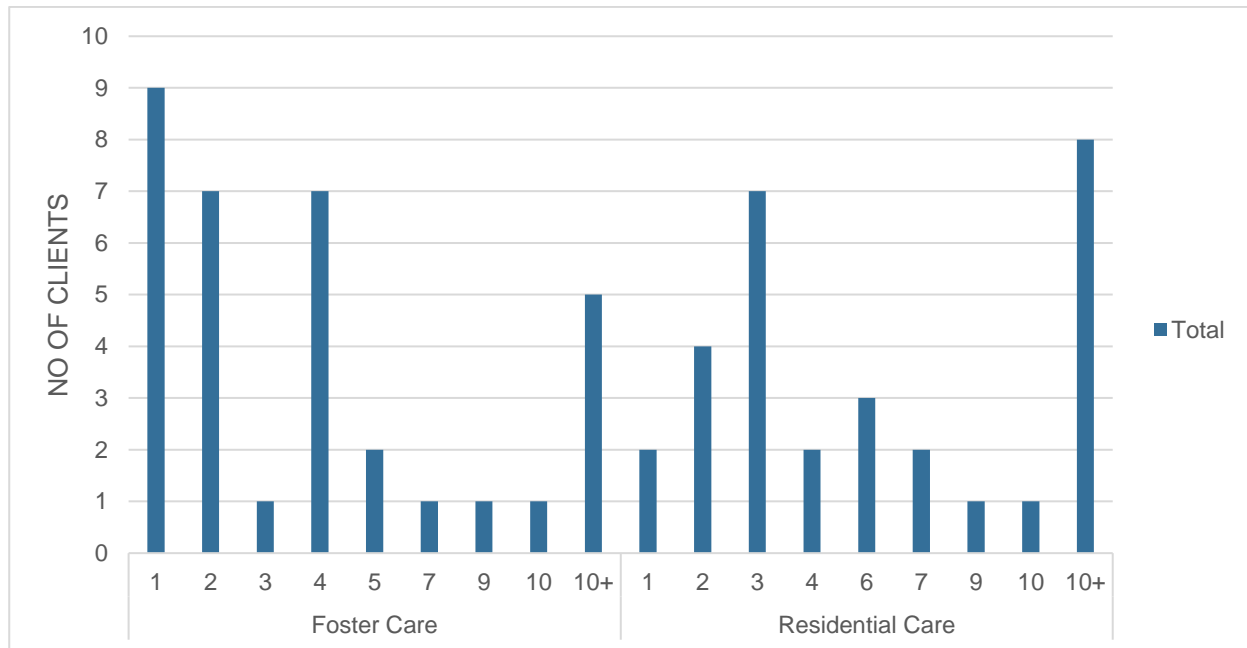
**Table 1 Key outcomes on entry and exit**

Indicator	Entry	Exit
<b>Overall achievement of goals</b>	n/a - goals set	78% graduated having achieved their goals, 9% graduated but did not achieve their goals, 13% did not stay with YAP.
<b>Main income source (16-18 year olds)</b>	39% - pocket money 36% - Youth Allowance 9% disability support 3% - employed 6% Newstart 6% - nil	9% - pocket money 39% - Youth Allowance 15% - disability support 9% - employed 24% - Newstart 3% - nil
<b>Service use</b>	n/a	73% increased their service use by exit
<b>Living situation (16-18 year olds)</b>	27% - foster care 51% - residential care 12% - self-placed (family) 10% - self placed (other)	0% - foster care 18% - residential care 10% - self placed (family) 9% - self placed (other) 15% - semi-independent living - 18% - restored to family 24% - independent living 3% - disability service
<b>Employment (16-18 year olds)</b>	27% - unemployed seeking work 51% - unemployed, not seeking work 3% - employed part time 18% - n/a	51% - unemployed seeking work 21% - unemployed, not seeking work 6% - employed full time 15% - employed part time 6% - n/a

Figure 2 indicates many of the young people had experienced multiple placements both in foster care and residential care settings. Most had experienced one to four foster placements, five had experienced more than 11 foster care placements. In regard to residential care, most had

experienced one to three placements, however nine people had experienced four to 10 placements and eight had experiences more than 10 placements in residential care.

**Figure 2 Number of out-of-home care and residential care placements**





## 5 Findings

“It was a phenomenally good program.” (young person)

### 5.1 The YAP program

LWB’s YAP derives its philosophical approach from the US model espoused by Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (USA). It focuses on complex need children, youth and families (that are the most at risk of, or currently in, institutional placement) by providing intensive, unconditional support through a wraparound/advocate model (YAP Inc., n.d.). The model is comprehensive and holistic, utilising best practices and core principles found in the wraparound, mentoring, restorative justice and positive youth development fields (YAP Inc., n.d.). Central to the YAP approach is working with young people and families to increase their ability to self-manage and safely problem-solve their needs by developing their competencies and network of community support. YAP uses a strength-based approach and is solutions-focused. It seeks to (re-) connect families to community supports, with opportunities to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways (YAP Inc., n.d.). Youth and families are provided with access, voice and ownership of their own highly individualised service plans. Ideally the work will be driven by the goals identified by the young person and is therefore client-centred (YAP Inc. n.d.; YAP Inc., 2017).

The Australian version of the YAP Program follows these philosophies, as well as policies and procedures, very closely (with the main differences being in operational matters). Advocates were asked how they understood the ‘YAP philosophy’:

So it’s a short-term intensive intervention that sets them up and makes them more self-reliant through building community connection and social connections. (Advocate)

We know with the Theory of Change and with what we do as Advocates is, we are there to teach a model and allow them to do it for themselves by the end of it. We’re not there to do things for them. (Advocate)

My understanding is that we’re, basically, a wraparound program, and we assist in restoring young people back to natural families or reunifying them with natural families. We also assist and support them to semi-independent or transitioning them to semi-independent or independent living. (Advocate)

Staff said that YAP was child-centred and child-driven. They positioned the young person at the centre of the process, Advocates assisting them to identify and move towards their goals: as “they’re not always aware what their needs are”. The Advocate tries to assist the young person become more aware of what they want and provide some guidance for goal setting while maintaining the choice and control of the client:

From what I’ve observed, working with these Advocates, there’s been a real respect for the young person’s goals and wishes, and just to make those happen. So really consultative with the young people. (LWB staff)

Consistent with an empowerment approach that aims to foster self-competency, staff used language that included ‘planting a seed’ for later on in life:

So it’s like internalising their ability to deal with the transition into adulthood. (Advocate)

They spoke about fostering community connections, assisting the young person to reach their goals, and transition to semi-independent and independent living.

While YAP's guiding aims include reconnection or restoration with family, this aim may not always be appropriate. The earliest iteration of the LWB YAP program was less accommodating of young people who were not necessarily 'ready' to re-engage with family. The aim of reconnection as a goal for all young people was identified as an issue in the 'pilot' phase of YAP. Some staff felt that efforts towards reconnection or restoration were not always in the child's best interests or were 'premature' (LWB staff). Consequently, as the YAP program has developed, this goal has become more nuanced to young people's circumstances.

In essence, YAP is an intervention centred on the individual within community, whereby the program "strengthens communities one biography at a time" (YAP Inc., n.d.). Its philosophy is tacitly based on the ideal of a functioning well adjusted resilient individual who can live independently, free of state support and control, supported in the community through social and familial connections. Thus, YAP focuses on relationship building, as well as skills, training and employment. These translated into the articulated aims of staff and into practice:

We want kids to be with their families or with more supportive informal supports in the community rather than in the care system, because at the end of the day, being in the community is more beneficial than being in a State-like care. (Advocate)

## 5.2 YAP principles

YAP principles have been outlined earlier, but in summary they are: Individualized Service Planning; Partnership with Parents; Strength-Based Work; Cultural Competence; Team Approach; Community-Based Care; Unconditional Caring; Corporate and Clinical Integrity; Giving Back (Life Without Barriers and Youth Advocacy Program Inc., 2017: 22).

Relationship building is at the centre of these principles. It allows for effective Individualised Service Planning. The ISP template document is the formal tool used to concretise goals from conversations an Advocate has with the young person when they enter the program. The ISP tool includes an overarching goal, then separate goals, a place to note strengths, and actions to be taken. It also provides for an alternative plan (or 'plan B'). It requires the final outcome be recorded.

While the goals identified in ISPs vary according to the individual, there is a strong emphasis on positive relationships. Advocates spend significant time with parents, where this is possible. Partnership with parents was evident in Advocate accounts of their day to day work:

I was going to say one of the biggest things is that we partner with families and their informal supports, because they're the ones who are going to be there longer term. We name that forever people. (Advocate)

Because that's one thing in our core principles when we partner with them is that we model our relationship that we have with that young person and show them that this is how you can speak with your child. This is what you can do. (Advocate)

In addition to modelling behaviours and parenting skills, Advocates also encouraged parents to support their child in their endeavours:

I would talk to mum about him and then she never seen him play AFL which he's an amazing AFL player. She got to go to her first game with him. This still makes me emotional to this day – the first time I seen him hug his mum and was so proud to have her there at that game, it was beautiful. (Advocate)

Advocates described working with parents including assisting them with securing housing where their children could visit for unsupervised contact. They also reported facilitating parental engagement with health professionals and mental health support as positive outcomes.

Young people appreciated the Advocates were working with their parent. One commented:

So when I was at school, he would help my mum with housing, or Centrelink, or something like that. (Young person)

YAP uses a strengths-based approach. This is described as focusing on capacities and possibilities, as opposed to taking a deficit approach. Thus, Advocates spoke about identifying strengths and interests of the young people they worked with, and fostering these strengths:

Even the conversations that the team has its always strength-based. Every time, we're discussing a young person or a situation and having reflective practice on how we can better work, it's always strength-based. We are always saying well, you know, these are the positives, this is how the family is working really well with the young person... It's just such a foundational aspect of YAP in every conversation we're having. (Advocate)

Staff thought that the YAP actually put a strengths-based approach into practice, in a very practical manner, by teaching clients, and empowering clients, to do things for themselves, and to recognise their own strengths, and using these to move toward their goals. They also described finding out what their clients were good at, what they liked, and what aspects of themselves could be developed:

I think just our workers focus on all the strengths. My experience with them with the young person that we had in common, was that she was really difficult, but they always managed to find what she was good at. (LWB staff)

Staff described rapport building as a process that enabled them to discover what clients' strengths and to use those strengths to identify activities that supported new skills or knowledge. Such an approach was described as 'integral' to the YAP and as a confidence-building exercise:

When interacting with clients I always point out and specifically identify their positive traits and their values, and I do life story work with young people to help them acknowledge all the people who love them and care for them, and all their strengths that they can bring to the community. (Advocate)

The team approach was also evident, insofar as staff worked with families and young people to connect them with the services they needed, as individuals and as families. For example, this may include connecting them with clinical supports.

Unconditional caring manifested in persistent, outreach-based interactions with young people and family members:

That's what the kids love the most, hey like, I've never had anyone that's never given up on me like you, so that's really important. (Advocate)

Participants were asked what makes a good Advocate. One young person replied: "Always being there for the people". Young people reflected also times when they had 'lost it' or been rude to their

Advocate but appreciated the development of mutual trust and 'respect'. Advocates reported modulations of behaviours over time, and also tried to model dealing with setbacks and challenges to young people.

## 5.3 Legacies of care

### 5.3.1 Identities and self-concepts

All interview participants expressed a strong self-image associated with having been in out of home care. Terms such as 'foster child', 'foster kids', 'resi kids' were used throughout interviews to refer to self.

The expression of these identities often foregrounded attributes and knowledge beyond what would be typically expected of someone their age.

At other times, young people's comments encapsulated a sense of being regarded as not worthy or valueless. Identities framed by doubt, fear and loss intensified as young people transitioned out of care were in evidence:

I was terrified. All that kept running through my mind was just how long I've been in care and how different it was going to be not being a foster child anymore. I was freaking out all the way up until my 18th birthday. I felt like I was losing a part of myself because I'd been there for so long and I didn't know anything other than that structure of having [someone to call] if something was wrong. I don't have that anymore. (Young person)

For some the YAP program supported narratives of competency and capability which offered a counterpoint to narratives of dependency that differed from similar young people in secure family contexts who also depended on supports into their adulthoods.

### 5.3.2 Program fatigue

"Australia sucks at caring." (Young person)

Most participants entered the YAP program with the view that the care system for young people was inadequate and disrespectful to young people. Singer, Cosner Berzin and Hokanson (2013) identify 'holes' in the supports available to young people in care and transitioning out of care, and in particular, they argue that it is common to get different kinds of support from different sources. For example, a young person may have an informal network that provides emotional support but not the kind of instrumental and appraisal support that one requires to secure a job. If informal support from their birth family, for example, is lacking during the transition to independent living, then formal support with independent living from the social services becomes more necessary (Stein, 2012).

For some participants, "case workers" and "programs" were viewed with distrust and a sense of fatigue.

In one focus group, young people discussed program overload:

Male 1: I just thought [YAP] was a generic

Facilitator: Okay so I'm really interested in what for you is the generic program. can you talk to me a bit more about that, like what sort of things do they often get you to do that don't help much?

Male 1: Well a lot of the stuff they set up are just one day things, almost like a course, you just go there, and they talk to you, and you know.

Male 2: Yeah well, it's just a bunch of – usually a bunch of people come and see you. They explain the company to you, tick all the boxes, it sounds good on paper, and then not deliver. That's usually what happens with these companies... Because I started YAP like four years ago, and before that there was a ton of them... (Young person)

In spite of program fatigue, young people were attuned to their own needs and the 'holes' in their resource packages (Singer, Cosner Berzin and Hokanson, 2013).

When programs promised to deliver skills they believed they needed, they were open to participation. It follows that open-ended programs that offered young people the support to identify what they might require were particularly valued:

I was pretty keen. I was told that the YAP program... would help me adjust to living with my dad. And I was like yeah! That sounds really nice, so I got involved like that, and I was excited. (Young person)

### 5.3.3 Trust

Many YAP participants had experienced multiple instances of placement breakdown and had internalised the blame or fault for these breakdowns:

I had different caseworkers quite a lot. But a lot of the time it was understandable, like, with - I went through quite a lot of caseworkers because of my behavioural issues. They couldn't handle me. Then eventually I found a caseworker that did and a carer that could, and it got better. (Young person)

Many participants had a heightened sense of being alone and being without support:

For a long time, I felt very alone in the situation, even though I have a lot of people around me it's, like, I felt very alone. (Young person)

This sense of being alone was exacerbated by a feeling that decisions concerning their welfare were made 'behind closed doors'. One participant recalled where DOCS (now FACS) had failed to intervene in a situation where she had a previous abusive carer:

I have friends who are foster kids and they tell me a lot about how their carer wasn't using the money on them like they're supposed to. They'll tell their DOCS worker and they don't listen. Or I had a physically abusive carer when I was younger and DOCS turned around and said, "She has an active imagination". (Young person)

Young people were concerned about how information about them was shared between different stakeholders. They were particularly concerned about the information in their case files. Many perceived this to be negative and that it would prejudice people against them. They believed that their case files could be shared without their knowledge and wanted some control over information about them. One young person noted that:

Case workers listen, they just listen to the wrong person. (Young person)

Young people were and had been engaged in multiple services all with different approaches and resource levels. Building the young person's trust in a service was a complex but critical task. Many participants acknowledged they were critical of caseworkers who were not proactive in making contact:

But it's a bad technique when there are kids that just ignore all the programmes that they get, because they don't trust people and stuff like that. (Young person)

If [caseworkers] don't check up on them and motivate them to come they're just going to be, like, "Okay". (Young person)

On the same issue another young person noted that:

I feel like if somebody was putting [a new program] in front of my face all the time that eventually I'd be, like, "Maybe this will be interesting. Maybe let's just try this". (Young person)

The intensity of advocate support appeared to alleviate this sense of being unsupported:

Then when I had someone checking up on me all the time actually showing that they care that made it easier to talk to [my Advocate]. (Young person)

The YAP is delivered to young people who have good reason to feel unsupported in the system. The intensity of the contact and strength-based approach of advocates helps advocates to break through the distrust young people carry from a range of family and system failures.

## 5.4 YAP practices

### 5.4.1 Referral process

LWB is a multifaceted service provider with a number of different programs. The YAP is a program available to a subset of one client group, those in OOHC. The program is for those who need extra help transitioning out of care, for example where a foster placement has broken down. The referral processes may start with a casual conversation between staff members but then must go through a formal process. Prior to this, caseload and other considerations are taken into account. The steering committee must approve referrals. In terms of criteria, referral is based on need and a judgement about whether a young person could benefit from the program. For example, a young person who has experienced a placement breakdown and is refusing to return to foster care, and approach their 18th birthday, may be a good example of the type of young person who requires extra and intensive support as they transition towards independent living. A residential care worker explained what the process was from their end:

At any one point if a child looks like their life is at a point where a YAP referral might be of assistance, we would bring that up. We would talk about it. We would perhaps have a conversation with the YAP coordinator to talk about whether the child's suitable for the program and I think that it's just we have those conversations a lot more frequently as we are discussing the child and what supports we can put around them to help them at whatever transitional phase they are. Whether that being returning to home to the care of their parents, whether it be ageing out, coming up to ageing out of care, whether it be transitioning to a new area or school or if they're requiring some assistance within the community, any of those sort of phases in their life, we talk about whether it's relevant. (LWB staff)

A young person who was referred to YAP explained the process from his perspective:

I think it was my caseworker that said that they wanted me to try the programme because they think it would help me a lot with all the goals I was struggling to do on my own. Then I just kind of said, "Sure", like, it was kind of a - just a quick decision. Because I was pretty much up for anything that was going to help me while leaving care, because I was freaking out. (Young person)

Another also agreed to give YAP a try:

But YAP was pretty easy to get into. I was asked by [staff member] "do you want to do it, do you not want to do it?" I said "I'll give it a try. If it works for me, I'll tell you, if it doesn't, I won't." Basically, it worked for me, sort of thing. (Young person)

While YAP felt easy to get into for young people, it was limited in length and some young people expressed the view that they would like it to last longer or to get into it again. This is discussed in section 5.4.10, Detaching and transitioning out of YAP.

## 5.4.2 Matching of Advocate to young person

I got along with her really well and I could talk to her really easily. We formed a bond pretty quickly and it was helpful because I don't form bonds with people easily. (Young person)

The quote from a young person above shows the importance of good matching because some young people believed they did not form bonds easily and were distrustful due to their experiences of impermanence and multiple foster care situations.

Another young person discussed bonding directly. She also indicated she got on with her Advocate from the beginning:

There's normally a little wall there to just be sure. But with [Advocate] she's just really easy to talk to and understanding and always really happy which made it really hard to be sad around her, which was good. It is easy to send her up and have a laugh. I don't know, she just genuinely made me feel comfortable. (Young person)

Another young person described 'connecting' with his Advocate and having 'respect' between them. Similarly, another mentioned that his assigned Advocate was a 'perfect fit' and 'more than a youth worker' – a friend that he could 'turn to' when he needed to and who he saw regularly throughout his transition to independent living.

The process for matching a young person with an Advocate was outlined as follows: the Team Leader considers current caseload and, staff availability and then meets with the young person first, either with family members present, by themselves or with a Case Manager. At this meeting the young person is asked about their everyday life, and what their likes and dislikes are, and what they are looking for in an Advocate, and what types of supports they think they need. An assessment is made about the various Advocates and capacity and one is chosen to work with that young person. However, where the team is at capacity or the young person has a strong relationship with a residential worker, the residential worker maybe brought into YAP. Advocates with service knowledge or skills are matched with young people who may benefit from those particular knowledges or skills. Cultural factors and gender also influenced choice of Advocate best suited to the young person.

The postcode matching element of the YAP model (USA version) was not implemented in the Australian version. There is no evidence to suggest that geographically-based matching would significantly improve the program. No Advocate indicated that they were overburdened by travel time to young people.

Young people were ambivalent about cultural matching. One young person suggested that cultural matching was not important and indeed held a false premise that young people would be automatically better served by someone who shared their broad cultural background. He flagged the diversity within cultural categories. Nevertheless, when he discussed his Advocate it was clear that they did share some orientations that could be described as cultural.

Gender was identified as important to some young people. One (male) participant requested a female and described their assigned Advocate:

You know, she was a smart - smart lady and, yeah, like, I knew straight away she was going to help me good. Not because she was a girl, but I do work better with females than males. (Young person)

The relatively small pool of Advocates suggests that there is only so much matching that could take place in the context of existing caseloads.

Young people indicated that emotional support was an important benefit derived from the program, so rapport building was vital. While interests and personalities need to align as much as possible, being shown respect was commonly mentioned feature of good relationships.

### **5.4.3 Rapport building and doing fun things**

The first four weeks of the program are rapport building time. The strategies that supported rapport building were persistence in making contact, tackling trust issues with care, active listening and demonstration of respect, and balancing social activities with goals-driven activities.

Engagement could be difficult sometimes and one Advocate said that the first four weeks could just be spent trying to meet up with the young person:

I think that four weeks in the beginning is vital to build any sort of rapport with a young person. You kind of lose them, and I don't think you're going to get them back. Thankfully, it hasn't happened yet. I think they've done a good job of matching everyone together. (Advocate)

The young people in the program were experienced service users and brought this experience to their relationships with their Advocates. As noted in Section 5.3.3 Trust section of this report, many of these previous experiences presented a barrier to developing a productive relationship:

It's kind of like – here's just another one. You don't really you know care about them that much. Don't you know, you don't expect anything of them, except disappointment. (Young person)

Advocates were well aware of this initial barrier. The program itself had established a reputation as more appealing than a 'normal LWB program' according to a staff member:

They see YAP as more fun, will do more stuff for them, will sort things out for them whereas I think some of the kids - not all of them - are a bit disgruntled towards care teams ... the YAP are brought in to do the stuff the care team can't. (Advocate)



This idea of being armed against the disappointment of having a poor relationship with a support worker was a recurring theme. Young people were familiar with workers who were less experienced in the out of home care system than they were:

To be honest it doesn't really – I don't really care if people can relate with [having been in OOHC] or not as long as they can help me. Sure, relating helps, but if they can help me regardless that's good. But yeah, she just was a very big advocate for me and tried as hard as she could, so I was happy with that. (Young person)

Some young people used these prior experiences to generate a productive agency in their relationships with support workers. One young man noted:

My first Advocate was my only Advocate. It was really funny because I was her first. So she was very new and I tried to exploit that as much as I could. But she was human, which helps. But yeah, she was just a cool person. Got along with her you know. It was she was just easier to get along with, made things 10 times easier. (Young person)

This theme of being shown respect resonated for many of the young people. One noted that bonding happened when the Advocate demonstrated that:

Your feelings can be justified. That people will listen if you tell them something, and that not everyone is going to just shut you down. (Young person)

Just like you can always be listened to if you find the right person. If you don't then your voice might not be heard. But you've always just got keep on going. (Young person)

Young people liked being able to tell the Advocate their story in their own words rather than them reading it in a file (although they were aware their Advocate had probably read their file before meeting them):

Male 1: [The Advocate would say] "Okay, let's talk. Talk to me about your story". They can just go online. But some do; they go read that and then they come to us and they go, "Okay, now, what's your story?"...

Facilitator: But does it help when people know your story?

Rapport building was also important so that Advocates could deliver harder messages without alienating the young person:

But, I guess, you and I both know, that when you build enough rapport with someone, you can actually say things that you may not be able to say. I've had situations where you've actually told them straight you can't be doing that, or you can't be smoking marijuana. If you don't have rapport, a young person could just turn off to you because you've mentioned that. (Advocate)

One rapport building device was to listen to a young person's anxiety about something, for example, eating out alone, and then for the Advocate to describe a similar situation they had been in that had made them uncomfortable and how they got over it or it got easier:

That's part of our training as well, the biggest thing in our basic Advocate training is that you have those professional boundaries but also you allow the young person to feel comfortable and show them that you're human as well. (Advocate)

Activities included going to the movies, watching sport, eating out, going shopping, were important as well as 'doing the hard stuff' as well. Young people commented:

They motivate - they help you in the process as well. So, it's not all fun and games but there is a little bit of fun and games. So, doing fun stuff as well. (Young person)

It was fun when I wanted it to be and serious when it needed it to be which is just a balance sort of thing. (Young person)

Having this 'balance' between more social activities as well as goal-setting fostered good relationships between Advocates and young people. Young people valued the persistence, and professionalism, of Advocates:

The dude was very organised, you know, he knew what he was doing with his job. (Young person)

The rapport building period was a critical element of the YAP process. It involves 60 hours of getting to know young people. While some advocates and young people achieved a lot in this period, other matches spent the time finding shared times to meet. In both circumstances the advocate was communicating to the young person that they had the time and interest in building an effective relationship. This is the foundation from which all other aspects of the program could work.

#### **5.4.4 Goal setting and the Individual Service Plan**

Young people in the YAP program had quite different experiences of goals setting processes. For some, goals setting was at the centre of their experience, while for others, this was something they knew to be in the program but was a minor or unremarkable part of their experience. Due to the sample size, it is not possible to identify any patterns in this variation of experience, except to say the young people who valued goal setting processes and experiences were oriented towards specific tangible goals, and, those that did not were more focussed on relationships.

We asked both stakeholders and young people about how goals are set within the YAP program and the process for doing this. Once Advocates have built rapport with the young person assigned to them, they begin goal setting, using the Individual Service Plan. The Individual Service Plan identifies goals, resources and the actions needed to get there. Goals are written down and may be ordered into short-term and long-term goals, with easier goals that are quickly achievable tackled first, while longer-term goals can be worked towards. This happens quite early in the program:

We either slip a piece of paper under their nose or from those conversations, we collect those conversations and add to their tools and their goals. (Advocate)

The YAPper comes in and is just for them and lets them kind of call the shots. They organise their own goals. They work towards their goals. Those YAPpers are helping them to achieve those goals. It's very person directed. A lot of our kids in this environment get told by us - get told what they have to do and where they've got to go in placements and houses that they live in. This way they've kind of got a bit more freedom. (Advocate)

Goal setting is an ordered way to create a sense of achievement and cultivate competence, as goals are reached:

When the young people achieve the goal ... that's actually confidence that you can't give to a young person any other way than by achieving a goal. (Advocate)

The YAP program is time-limited so there is motivation to move forward with goals through the program and make progress towards goals. Advocates reported this did motivate them:

- Staff member: I've got six months to get s\*\*t done with this young person so I'm going to push myself to...
- Other staff member: You've got to make that happen.
- Third staff member: If they've got a certain goal and they've got a certain time - I think it can be extended out because I think there are kids that need further - but the whole point of YAP is that they've got a set of goals identified. They've got a certain timeline and it means that every catch-up hour...
- Fourth staff member: Has to be meaningful. (Advocates)

These conversations often took place in informal settings like food courts or cafes, somewhere that was comfortable and involved having something to eat. For some young people this was their first experience of planning things or setting goals.

For young people, the process involved articulating their goals and then writing them down. In this way goals are visualised and made concrete. One explained the physical process of doing this:

And he came down and sat down with a big board of paper and scribbled out things that he's going to help us with. Then he located me with [staff member] who's left now and [he] pretty much helped me and my family out with pretty much all of the things that we pretty much wrote down on that board. (Young person)

When asked what his goals were, a YAP client told us:

Getting tickets for work, attending all appointments, think positive, respect, well-mannered and stay under the radar. (Young person)

Another young person did not want to attend school but with practical support and the provision of a refurbished iPhone he did improve attendance and learnt other skills as well:

He [the Advocate] pushed me to go and he helped me, he'd actually take me to school by picking me up in the morning early, and when he even getting paid to take me there. He'd drop me off at school and then in the afternoon I'd make my way home and - or, like, because he'd be out with my mum helping my mum. So he did help me with my goal. Then he eventually taught me, "Okay, let's travel train you as one of your goals." Travel training was one of my goals and I did travel training and now I know how to catch a train anywhere. (Young person)

Recognising the limitations of this study (the small number of young people interviewed), none of them indicated that the experience of goal setting off-putting or overwhelming. However, it should be noted that those who disengaged from the program may have left for other reasons. In general, the young people in this evaluation did not find the process too demanding or time-pressured:

Well, she pushed me to achieve my goals, but I never took it, like, the wrong way. (Young person)

I don't normally like doing goals, but I didn't really mind it because I didn't see it as like - the thing with YAP meetings they're not very full-on. Case meetings are full-on. You have to get straight to the point. Whereas you can just chill with - you chill out with YAP meetings. That's when I can talk about what I want to do, and it was just easy-going, sort of thing. (Young person)

Advocates presence and persistence were key to staying on track with goals. This young person identified that consistency was important.

But then when I met [Advocate] it all changed and I think kids like, me personally I struggle to find the motivation to do my goals. [She] was really motivating on trying to get me to do them and get them done. That helped a lot. They were very persistent with getting my goals done and, like I said, that's what a foster child needs; consistency. (Young person)

Goals are reviewed regularly, and progress noted, as a young person related:

You have a goal in the middle of it and you, like, brainstorm and, you know, like, you just write out things and at the end of the week see how many of these you achieved; look at what's done. (Young person)

Undertaking the goal setting process also instilled understanding of systematic actions leading to outcomes. This young person, when asked what three things he had learned from his Advocate, replied:

Male 1: Work hard.

Facilitator: Work hard.

Male 1: Always do your goals that you want to plan out.

Facilitator: Always plan your goals, yeah.

Male 1: And then finish them.

Facilitator: And then finish them. What did you learn from your mentor?

Male 2: To do good... I don't know. Always think positive and - because, like, some - I was very negative if you know what I mean. (Young person)

Some goals were easier to meet, such as enrolling in TAFE. Where goals were 'big' goals such as gaining employment, while young people tried to attain these (working on their resumes, applying for jobs), sometimes these goals could not be met, through no fault of their own – macroeconomic conditions (such as high competition for entry-level jobs) sometimes impinged on outcomes.

Some young people in the program were reconnecting with family. Setting goals around relationships may be more fraught than tangible instrumental goals (such as enrolling in TAFE). It is widely assumed that people have the interpersonal skills to just 'get on' with people, and there is stigma attached to not knowing how to do this.

The following excerpt captures some of the complexity of being guided in relationship building:

I feel like she didn't help me like adjust to living at home, but she was really fun to hang out with. (Young person)

Most of the stuff that I had goals for we accomplished. Like I went to an [extracurricular activity], I got [to a health provider] I got closer with my brothers. So those are all things that we were able to in like the six months I was with her. So that was really good. (Young person)

When we probed the relationship building with her brothers, it was clear that the Advocate had made a significant contribution to the adjustment to living at home:

Facilitator: So can we just talk for a minute about getting closer to your brothers? So did you say [to the Advocate], "I've got these older brothers, I've never met them, we weren't kids together, and now they just spend three hours a day in their room, how am I going to get closer to them, and she would say?"

Female: She came into the house all the time and would just casually talk with my brothers and me at the same time and it got us just conversing and stuff. So she was really casual. She didn't often talk about like formal things. She'd talk about games, and movies and stuff. Yeah, it helped me talk to my brothers, because I started to find out what they were interested in and stuff. (Young person)

For this young woman, the goal of adjusting to living at home was too big to be a goal. Thinking about relationships in terms of explicit and achievable goals potentially brings too much evaluative thinking into interactions. Nevertheless, it is clear that she learnt much about establishing relationships and family connectedness:

When I did have the occasional goal they were helpful, but most of the time I didn't. So it was basically like having someone to talk to that is trying to understand how you are – and like not just saying and this is this, and this is this, but having someone to talk to that even if they were in a program they were still there. (Young person)

This young woman's Advocate worked with her in a way that suited her preferences. She stated that she did not like the writing down of goals and was:

Never was given a piece of paper at all throughout the entire thing. (Young person)

Finally, and importantly, some young people were unclear about the different responsibilities of OOHC case workers and carers and YAP Advocates. Even though the YAP Advocates were prepared to do goal setting with them, they felt that it was the responsibility of the case worker who had guardianship:

Male: But I mean with things like short term goals that you just complete kind of by yourself. I wanted to get my [certificate] - I got that. You know that's not really a skill you can carry on with.... They helped me a lot with the goals and stuff, but just not really setting up a skill for long-term, like for me being able to use them afterwards. So I'm very reliant upon them, themselves.

I want to be able to plan a lot better than I do now. I'm very – I guess you could say spontaneous, no I'm just not good at organising things, and that's not really YAP's job, to teach me that. I mean it's all just personal skills.

Facilitator: Why not?

Male: Because YAP is youth advocating program and I live in a residential home, and they should be teaching me. They are required to life skill us and planning is part of life skilling, so that should be their job, it is their job. (Young person)

This demarcation between case worker and Advocate was an important one for this young person. Adequate support from the organisation that had guardianship was critical to his sense of being looked after. He did not want all the responsibility to be taken up by the YAP program which held no actual responsibility for him. It may be that part of the role for Advocates is to ensure young people receive the care they are entitled to from whomever or whatever organisation has statutory responsibility.

### **5.4.5 Advocate-client contact**

Assertive contact is central to the YAP philosophy. Advocates contact clients regularly and meet up with them. Young people due to suffering trauma and lack of trust will not always reach out on their own so proactivity and persistence is essential:

Interviewee: She texted all the time, well, texted me first to make sure that I wanted to see her. Then I'd ring her because I'm not a big texter; I prefer phone calls. If she was aware that I was sick she would check to make sure I'm okay and stuff like that.

She did check up a lot.

Facilitator: And that's good?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Facilitator: It makes you feel like someone's actually there.

Interviewee: Especially for a foster child because that's the one thing I know I felt for a long time is very alone in the situation, even though I have a lot of people around me it's, like, I felt very alone. Then when I had someone checking up on me all the time actually showing that they care that made it easier to talk. (Young person)

Young people were aware that Advocates had their own lives, but all said they would feel comfortable calling their Advocate if they really needed to, even after hours.

Frequency such as weekly meetings are part of YAP practice:

The YAP program it's more frequent so we did it every week. We met. So I was there on Tuesday... So we'd meet up every week, go do something. Whatever came up we would go do. We'd sometimes have days off where we'd be like you want to go do something? We went to aqua golf for example. (Young person)

Initiating contact, consistency of contact and moving towards goals was valued by young people.

## 5.4.6 Focusing on strengths

The YAP program builds the strengths of the young person and family into a plan of care and looks to the young person's community and neighbourhood for assets which can be mobilised. It emphasises strengths rather than risk factors. This approach can be a significant departure from the approach other professionals have taken with the young person. This begins in the rapport building stage and continues throughout the life of the program.

One staff member reflected on a time when they deviated from the YAP training. They opened the reflection noting their YAP training:

One of the features of the YAP Advocate training that is given at the beginning is that we don't look at the file, we wait until after, because our clients aren't based on their files. (Advocate)

In this case, the staff member was encouraged to read a file by a co-worker:

They were "here read this file". I'm like, "I don't normally read files" and they were like, "you have to on this one". So I listened, I'm like okay that's not normally how I do things but things are different. I read this file and it was all negative. There was not one positive in this kid's file and I'm like, 'how am I going to deal with this kid?'. Normally I would walk in and use the YAP model. [Reading the file] made me on edge that this was this naughty kid and had done all these bad things. I think I would have handled it in a different manner if I didn't read her file. I would have done the YAP way of getting to know her myself and make my own opinion and how I can work on her strength base and not the negative. (Advocate)

As noted in Section 5.3.3 Trust, young people are aware that their files are powerful documents and sway the opinion of people they will encounter in the future.

Enabling a fresh start in the relationship between Advocate and young person is one of the strengths of the program and allows young people to build trust in the Advocate before revealing aspects of self that may be associated with trauma or shame:

Because of our strength based [approach], you are looking at all the positives of them. When they are given to you it's like, oh well they do this, they've got behavioural issues, they abscond all the time, they do this and that. Yeah, sometimes I'm sitting there and I'm like, that's not the kid I know. (Advocate)

These fresh eyes allowed young people to be recognised differently and for that gaze on their strengths to become embedded in their sense of self:

Well, she was always giving me good feedback and, like, make me strong, like, you know, to strive. (Young person)

Young people themselves were often aware of their strengths but carrying expectations that others would not see their strengths. One young person noted that they had developed strengths from being 'in the system':

A lot of people say 'unfortunate', but at the same time I learnt a lot from being in the system as well. I know a lot more things that ...a lot of people don't expect me to know at 18 years old. I learnt that from growing up in the system. So I don't completely regret being in care. (Young person)

The child protection system is founded on the idea of risk factors and deficits in environments which amplify risks. While it is important to redress deficits in environments, there is often a slippage and the deficits come to be associated with the young person themselves (McElvaney & Tatlow-Golden, 2016). A strengths-based approach recognises responsibilities towards young people who face many risks, it creates opportunities, builds skills and assets and empowers youth to assume leadership roles in order to foster positive development. The following excerpts show that the programmatic discipline of always focussing on strengths helped staff stay true to a strengths-based approach. In the following quote, the staff member expresses that even the conversations the Advocate team has are strengths-based. This suggests that it is still not 'business as usual' to use a strengths-based approach when discussing young people outside of the YAP program:

Even the conversations that the team has its always strengths-based. Every time, we're discussing a young person or a situation and having reflective practice on how we can better work, it's always strengths-based. We are always saying these are the positives, this is how the family is working really well with the young person. It's just such a foundational aspect of YAP in every conversation we're having. (Advocate)

Furthermore, these practices were reinforced through ritual processes which supported this approach to become embedded in the professional culture:

We have monthly YAP meetings with our young people and their families. At the very start of every meeting, everyone goes around and introduces themselves, but at the same time they need to say a strength about the young person in the meeting. It could be a strength about them for that month, it could be the first meeting and it could be a general overall strength. It doesn't matter if you don't know the client, it's the first time you've met the client, you need to say something positive about that young person. I think that's really uplifting

and refreshing as well for those young people because then you start to see them actually engaging in their meetings. (Advocate)

Focussing on strengths is the foundation of the program and is essential for establishing open communication and for fostering the resilience for young people to tackle difficult tasks and goals.

### 5.4.7 Fostering competency

The strengths-based approach enabled young people to have more control over the conversations about them and this was central to gaining a sense of competency in their life planning:

A strengths-based perspective is that we give them the opportunity to run their own meetings as well. It's about them, and it's about people coming together to work on their goals and completing their actions for those goals. So, if the young person wants to sit there and run their meeting and say – 'well mum, can you help me with this?', '[staff member] can you help me with this?' or 'hey, JJ Officer, can you help me with this?'. It's giving them that power, that autonomy to put decisions and do things for themselves and make others do things for them as well. (Advocate)

Another Advocate noted that:

It's not about what we do for them, but it's about them recognising what they can do for themselves and then just saying to them – 'that wasn't me, I only taught you that, that was you going that extra mile and doing it for yourselves'. So, strengths-based is quite refreshing. (Advocate)

Young people were supported to develop the skills before they practiced on their support teams and then to review their practice later through watching again how the Advocate ran a meeting. They enjoyed sitting in a position of control and could see how these skills could be converted into employment skills at some later date:

I got to run one. [Advocate] got to run one and then - so he told us - he showed us first how to do one because we had three, I'm pretty sure. The first one he did and then the second one we did and the third one [Advocate] did so yes it worked out perfectly. Because I think it's because we're going into youth work and we said we need to work on these types of skills as well to talk to people. (Young person)

### 5.4.8 Setting boundaries

The young people who participated in the evaluation indicated that their relationships with their Advocate was qualitatively different to other relationships they had with case workers. The weekly time allocation allowed a greater emphasis hanging out and having fun and the program itself encourages young people to seek support of whatever kind they need.

Some young people described the interpersonal dynamics with their Advocate as a welcome change from those they typically associated with professionals. One young person described the relationship as follows:

Male: It depends on the YAP worker, but I could give her cheek.

Facilitator: Did you ever have a fight with her?

Male: Yeah of course but the best thing about it is she didn't - like a lot of carers - just give up and just walk away.



Facilitator: So can you tell me about a fight, what does that look like between a young person and...

Male: Like me not agreeing with them and getting very loud.

Facilitator: Oh but you'd say like, 'you're not listening to me, you're all the same?'

Male: Yeah and start yelling, yes... it could have been over the phone, it could have been whatever. We did it quite a bit. But you know it wasn't often. But she didn't give up, that was the best part. Yeah, because carers or foster carers, that was my biggest thing, whenever you have an argument – 'stuff this, I don't have to deal with this. I can just call it placement breakdown and boom, you're out of here'. (Young person)

Being able to express emotion, make mistakes and continue to build a relationship were valued by most participants.

Although none of the young people we spoke to reported any serious disagreements with their Advocate, there were others who did not wish to participate in this evaluation who may have had other perspectives or disengaged from the program.

### **5.4.9 What makes a good Advocate?**

The continuity and intensity of contact was the key structural dimension that enabled Advocates to be effective or 'good':

It helped because obviously she had heard from asking me a few questions I'd kind of been carer, carer, carer; caseworker, caseworker, caseworker. So it was nice to have one continuous person there and not have to worry about that changing. That was good with me and [Advocate] getting along, because a lot of the reason my caseworkers and carers changed was because we didn't get along. It was nice to have someone there, especially towards the end when I was freaking out the most, to have that one continuous person that was there. (Young person)

When asked about what makes a good Advocate, young people drew our attention to a range of attributes, attitudes and practices. They are as follows:

- Hard working
- Not lazy
- Attentive
- Not on their phone
- Nurturing
- Trustworthy
- Respect
- Consistency
- Continuity
- Not giving up on them
- An actual relationship

- Will listen
- Know how to talk to you
- Individual focus on them

Young people appreciated that Advocates shared personal experiences and challenges they had faced also:

She taught me about I'm not the only one going through something, that I can talk to other people. She talked to me a lot about her childhood and her teenage-hood and how she was when she was younger. So that helped me open up about myself, about what happened to me. (Young person)

#### **5.4.10 Detaching and transitioning out of YAP**

The detachment and transition process is critical in the YAP model. Some participants in the evaluation had clearly bonded to their Advocates in spite some attachment failures in the past. There was evidence of clear professionalism in the way the YAP model was implemented as well as evidence that there was an authentic 'fondness' between most of the young people and their Advocates.

Detaching is therefore a critical event in the young person's learning through YAP. Young people described their relational contexts as one where people always leave and how this impacted on them toward their YAP graduation:

I formed a bond with my clinician and my caseworker and then they left. Then I formed a bond with my [Advocate] before they left. Then my Evolve worker just changed as well, like, literally the same time as my [Advocate]. So I was, like, so now this new person that I'm supposed to be bonding with is leaving and I was just all over the place. (Young person)

Growing up in care I had a lot of people that I thought loved me just leave, and then it kind of reminded me of the experience. But they were still - they still actually cared. It was just really, really hard to let go. (Young person)

A good detachment process was described by young people as an incremental withdrawal:

Towards the end of me leaving her, my caseworker and my clinician didn't call me as much. They kind of backed off a bit. But I think for maybe the last month of the programme the kids should just slowly realise that they can't see each other as much and stuff like that. (Young person)

Young people who had been in residential care felt that YAP was particularly appropriate and could be delivered until the young person left care because of the emotionally isolating nature of residential care:

That was one of the most annoying things about YAP the fact that it actually ends. Because I was very dependent upon them, and when I graduated from the program things just went back to the way they were before. Sure, I benefited a lot from it, got a lot of things done, but you know just without them now it's different. (Young person)

They were not critical of detachment processes but felt the program was too short to be of maximum benefit to young people in residential care:

I'm in residential care, and it's very odd setting, those places. Residential care has workers, but we don't get to connect with many of them. There's four permanent workers, and endless... shifts and... every couple of days, and there's just an endless list of casual staff. I don't know, it's just not the same as being a foster carer. It's just work. You show up on shift, you do – you write a report on the kids, make sure they don't kill each other, stuff like that, support them when they need to be supported. You know it's not a home. But and when I really needed help with things, the house wouldn't really support me with – or just refuses to support me with – YAP were always great advocates for it, or just helping me with it directly. Yeah. It's gone back to how it was before now. (Young person)

It is important to note that there is a mechanism that allows LWB to buy a second round of YAP for young people in residential care. This possibility of increasing the length of time in the program allows for support to be genuinely individualised and it is recommended that this be extended to other young people who have the need of such support.

## 5.5 YAP outcomes

These outcomes relate to the small number of young people who participated in this project. For outcomes for the entire YAP cohort, see Section 4 for a summary, and Appendix A for detailed data.

### 5.5.1 Housing/accommodation

The YAP exit data indicates 100% of YAP graduates all had somewhere to live on exit. No data however is collected after this point (for example, 12 months after exit) but staff believed, due to contact with former clients, that most maintained suitable accommodation situations. Among the small number of young people who participated in this evaluation, most were living independently in various rental situations, mainly renting transitional accommodation from social housing providers including Hume Housing and Evolve. This ensured their accommodation was secure (for three, or five, years) and rent was affordable in the medium term. Under this model, rents rise over the term of the transitional housing arrangement - for example one young woman was paying \$106 a week in rent, which will rise to \$245 by the fifth year. Rent Choice (subsidy for private rent) is available to YAP clients, as is Commonwealth Rent Assistance, depending on circumstances. Some were in social housing transitional properties and were sharing with others – another young person, or a sibling. Another person was living with their partner and was working full time, and they were renting from family. One was in residential care after living with a parent for a while after leaving foster care. Another was in private rental and working.

YAP workers mentioned challenges with finding housing options for their clients, and in particular, managing client expectations:

Young people these days want a swimming pool with four bedrooms and the bar fridge, and it's hard to satisfy a young person. At the same time, when someone is working really hard from Housing [NSW] to get you into a placement and they say no, then, it's a two-way thing. I think they're doing an amazing job at Housing [NSW]. They can't do any better than they are. There's not enough housing and there's not enough housing that matches – it's our job to try and convince young people that this is probably a really good place for you.  
(Advocate)

YAP workers gave practical support in obtaining housing and in the moving process:

Actually, my YAP worker and my other workers from Lives [sic] Without Barriers helped me find this apartment and helped me settle in and stuff like that. Like, they helped me moved and they, like, helped me with moving and stuff like that, like, putting all the stuff in the car and drove me over here on the first day I moved in, and my YAP worker helped me unpack, which helped a lot. (Young person)

Young people described their current housing costs as manageable or affordable and were aware of the subsidy arrangements including length of the subsidy period. Often utility bills presented a bigger issue than rent:

Interviewee: It's affordable because obviously we don't have a job right now so I'm on Centrelink which is 25 per cent of my income which isn't much. Obviously if I get a job then it'll go up but right now it's not so...

Facilitator: But you can pay bills and...

Interviewee: Oh yes. Bills are easy. It's just budgeting really, and I need to know that as well. It's just learning, yes. (Young person)

Some experiences challenges living on their own without a parental figure present, such as staying up too late, having irregular sleep patterns or spending a lot of time playing on gaming platforms. Conflict with co-inhabitants was inevitable on occasion and young people had to learn the skills to negotiate domestic conflicts. Paying utility bills required forward planning but the young people we spoke to were aware of having to plan ahead to pay bills and set money aside each week via Centrepay to cover future bill costs.

The housing was generally well located, near shops and public transport:

It's a great spot to live in, close proximity to train, whatever, close to shops obviously, lots of stuff around and it's a great place to live. (Young person)

Local educational facilities on the region were being accessed by at least two participants we spoke to. In general, the young people we spoke to were all in affordable and relatively stable housing situations.

Some housing required young people to have shared living relationships which was challenging but welcomed by young people:

Then once you were in the housing and you had your own place, then they organise the flatmate; Evolve does. ...I knew my first housemate so that made it a bit easier, having someone that I know to live with as well. (Young person)

## **5.5.2 Education, training and employment**

Educational engagement is an important goal within YAP and built into young people's plans. Various strategies were used by YAP Advocates including ensuring they had what other students at the school had (including items such as phones – one young person was very appreciative of a refurbished iPhone that was provided).

Young people discussed their involvement in various courses (mainly at TAFE), and were either attending or had attended and planned to return to study:

Yes, I was in Year 12 and then I turned 18 which is pretty much about HSC time... so then I really had that already set out, but then they helped me with TAFE, like getting to what I needed to be in. (Young person)

Young people were attracted to courses which they felt suited them and their own experiences – particularly to those in ‘the helping professions’ such as early childhood education and youth work, and even aspired to work with children who were in OOHC in the future in a professional role:

...like, with me I can at least turn around and say to the children, ‘I grew up in this system and it wasn't like I was in it for a short time. I was in it my entire life. I know exactly how you feel. I may not know your exact circumstances but I definitely know what the system's like and how messed up it can be and how alone you can feel.’ (Young person)

Two young people we spoke to were enrolled in TAFE. Cost was not a barrier to attending TAFE because as care leavers, enrolment is free of charge. Another was working part time ‘packing boxes’ and was getting part payment from Centrelink. However, he was thinking about getting another job or going to TAFE. Another person was working in an industrial facility in a position of responsibility.

Often looking at community services work because they can see how their life experience becomes an employment asset:

When I was younger when the workers would tell me they know how I feel and then I'd ask them, ‘Did you grow up with your parents?’ Like, with me, I can at least turn around and say to the children, ‘I grew up in this system and it wasn't like I was in it for a short time. I was in it my entire life. I know exactly how you feel. I may not know your exact circumstances but I definitely know what the system's like and how messed up it can be and how alone you can feel.’ I think a lot of the time, even - personally for me, I don't know if it's all kids, but sometimes a foster kid just needs to know they're not alone and have someone that can prove that they can be trusted and they stick around. That's just what a foster child needs; just one consistent person in their life that cares about them. (Young person)

Young people indicated that they needed to be in a stable situation to complete education and training:

...with my community services course I didn't want to go back to that. I want to go back to it when I'm in a more stable frame of mind. Definitely. (Young person)

Securing employment is challenging for all young people and much more so for those who have unstable housing and connections to family safety nets:

I was doing a traineeship but they decided at the end of the week - they hired me on a Monday and then by the Friday they were, like, ‘We want more experienced workers so we have to let you go’.. But I'm still looking for work because I'm up for different jobs; retail, pharmacy assistance, pretty much anything. Then waitressing jobs as well. So hopefully I'll hear back from someone. (Young person)

My employment services requires that by the 28th of every month I have to provide them with 20 jobs I've applied for. I just finished that last night and it was the biggest relief. It was, like, ‘Yes, I don't have to do this for another month’. (Young person)

The scattergun approach to job seeking of dropping a CV into local businesses is a relatively ineffective method for accessing employment opportunities. Most young people who find work in their early working lives do so through their social networks (Skattebol, Hill, Griffiths & Wong, 2015). One of the program elements in the US model is a supported work program. This element did not appear to be operationalised by LWB. Supported work might be of value to young people who appeared to be using ineffective work search strategies and becoming discouraged. The guidelines indicate that this program may provide wage subsidies and thus encourage employers

to take a chance on engaging high-risk youth who may have very limited work histories. YAP Advocates could provide periodic support to clients during these employment opportunities.

### 5.5.3 Living skills, health and wellbeing

Young people discussed where they learnt their living skills. Some had picked up skills through different foster carers but many had reached the YAP program with gaps in their living skills. One young person noted that they did not have much self-regulation around video games and had worked on setting a bedtime with their Advocate. They explained:

I moved in with my brother and didn't have the father figure or anything or the mother figure that could tell me you have to go to bed now, you have to do this. So, me being a teenager, I'd just be playing on the Xbox till the early hours which kind of did my sleeping pattern a bit... He'd come here eight o'clock in the morning and make sure I'd be there and make sure I knew that he'd be there. If he had to stay there for 30 minutes, he would. He also made sure that I knew that if he was waiting too long he had to go, he had other places to go so obviously... other clients as well so obviously – yes, just make a time and stick to it. (Young person)

Young people had a range of health issues although none identified that they had a serious health issue. A couple of young people mentioned misdiagnosis for mental health disorders, or identified they did have a diagnosed condition. One alleged she was over-medicated by a former carer and had since reduced her medication. She said that if she required and new medication or counselling her Advocate would help her access it. Advocates assisted young people getting doctor's appointments or accessing specialists:

So basically he [the Advocate] sat down, had a chat with me and we sorted out what do you want to do about it sort of thing, and he suggested Headspace which is what I do right now. So basically, that's helping me a lot sort of thing, yes. (Young person)

Physical health needs were also on the agenda for young people and Advocates, for example getting braces on teeth.

Some of the young people we spoke to were active in local sports teams and described themselves as fit and valued sport:

It helps me - not when goals get scored against us - no. It helps. It helps. Physical activity has always been my go-to really. (Young person)

Another young man played Australian Rules football.

Some young people described having disrupted sleep or not going to bed early enough, which resulted in tiredness. One smoked tobacco and linked this to stress.

In terms of the way relations with family members contributed to wellbeing, young people who participated in the evaluation appeared to be making good decisions and happy with their progress in reconnecting with family. Some young people had chosen to limit contact with certain family members including parents or step-parents. One explained his decision: "I want to do good for myself and not get put down, if you know what I mean" (Young person). Young people sometimes chose to leave a situation where they were living with a parent if they felt it was not good for them or if their parent was 'messy'. This screening or insulation let them feel better about themselves

indicating that restoration was not always desired. In another case, a young person described a positive relationship with a parent, but they still made a decision to live separately.

#### **5.5.4 Social relationships and contact with family**

Several young people acknowledged that they had difficulty forming relationships with people including with their family. Several noted that they had developed their new skills with strangers:

I used to [have a tantrum] and it wasn't the best way to tell people that I couldn't work with them. But now I just have a more grown up approach. (Young person)

I'm willing to meet anyone that they ask me to, but if I feel uncomfortable, I will speak it now instead of chucking a fit to scare the crap out of the person. (Young person)

Others were focussed on other aspects of their own development:

I said no to family contact. I don't see that as a priority now.... it's not something that I feel like I need right now. I'm only just settling in and getting TAFE – obviously I want to see them in the future but now it's not the be-all [and] end-all really. (Young person)

Young people were encouraged to consider goals that supported them to become reconnected to family:

One of mine [goals] was to see my mum like frequently enough so we like start talking again. Yeah, that helped. We do that now. (Young person)

Perhaps the strongest example of Advocate support with relationships is that where an Advocate modelled daily interactions with siblings for a young woman who was restored to her family (discussed in Section 5.4.4).

There was little discussion about building broader community networks or broader community and neighbourhood networks. This is potentially because this program goal may take longer to achieve than the program period.

#### **5.5.5 Program and employment issues**

As noted in the discussion to date, young people frequently received support through YAP that they did not receive through the OOH system. While this is positive, there remained resentment toward carers, case workers and residential care providers about care not provided. The relationship between YAP and LWB was not clear in the eyes of most young people. They saw it as a distinct organisation, which allowed them to begin afresh with YAP, but at the same time this allowed them to separate the positive things they gained through YAP from the care they received through LWB. Ultimately, they wanted LWB to deliver the things they needed as LWB is their statutory carer.

Overall LWB staff were positive about their work, workmates and level and quality of supervision received. However, we encountered evidence of frequent staff turnover among those on casual contracts which included all of the Advocates in the YAP. Staff in these roles indicated casual employment meant insecure and fluctuating income, creating a disincentive to continuing in the role in the medium to long term. By the time this report was finished, none of the Advocates who took part in this evaluation remained as employees at LWB, and the Team Leader had just taken on a new role and was about to depart LWB.

## 5.5.6 Staff roles, responsibilities and supervision

It was important to young people that the YAP staff were different to the case workers, particularly as they transitioned out of care:

Because the whole point with the YAP programme, like, with the aftercare thing, it makes it so much easier to not be scared without your caseworker if it's a different person. I was scared to not have my caseworker and stuff around, and [my Advocate] being a different person that wasn't a caseworker and stuff it was just easier to process. Because, say, if my caseworker was my YAP worker as well, I would not have processed being out of care properly because they still would have been around. So [my Advocate] being there and being a separate person definitely helped as well. (Young person)

Advocates are expected to do complex client work:

We do quite heavily specialised work where there is a bit [of] knowledge base around. There's a lot of learning and development that you have to do. (Advocate)

The role of team meetings where Advocates met with case workers and residential care staff clinicians was an important mechanism of information exchange and boundary-setting around roles and responsibilities. LWB residential and clinical staff and Advocates expressed the importance of this mechanism for the effective delivery of supports to young people.

YAP staff were positive about the quality and level of supervision they received. Staff engage in monthly supervision meetings however 'the door was always open' to their supervisor and many chose to de-brief or discuss issues with the team leader as needed. Central to supervision was checking on staff welfare as a first priority, rather than only focussing on cases and caseload:

Going to supervision, it's not: 'how are your clients, what is your ISP?' It's like – 'how are you doing?' (Advocate)

Workload seems to be adequately monitored and some staff indicated that there were times when they asked for, or had been offered time off, or had their caseload reduced, if need be. In addition to the supervisory structure, the YAP team seemed close-knit and identified strategies of support amongst each other.

I think our team is different. I've never worked in a team environment where we've supported each other through anything, really. I think that's what's helped the most for me. You ask a question, and everybody is quick to throw you answers, and you just go, where did all of these come from. (Advocate)

## 5.5.7 Staff training and professional development

The training manuals offer strong scaffolding for staff to have safe work strategies. There was no indication that Advocates were having difficulties setting boundaries with young people or entering in unsafe environments.

Advocates have an eight-module training package they work through covering aspects of the position including day-to-day responsibilities of an Advocate, client resistance, working on goals and putting together Individual Service Plans, as well as self-care. YAP staff were positive about the training and said they found it useful. In addition to this core training, staff accessed external training as needed. For example, staff had done Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, care training, training on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and other topics.



Non-YAP staff (for example, clinical staff and caseworkers in other areas of LWB) did not necessarily know about YAP and identified that more information about the program (as well as LWB's many other programs) would be useful in any induction process for new LWB staff.

### **5.5.8 Working with colleagues and other services**

Strong working relationships and integration was evident between LWB staff and Advocates. The boundaries between clinical work with young people and Advocacy work were outlined by both groups separately, and as already noted, case meetings provided a regular forum for role differentiation and information exchange.

However, some Advocates felt that their role needed to be established as different from Youth Workers. One staff member noted that LWB staff sometimes thought that:

...all we do is transport and supervised contact when we're more than that. We're a specialised program that works on certain areas and goals for young people. (Advocate)

Yet in spite of the tendency for allied professionals interviewed as part of this evaluation to have a hazy view of the YAP role, the Advocates felt able to assert their distinct role:

Our role is very specific and often it might get a bit colluded [sic] with case managers. We actually have to have a voice and say, 'no that's not our role'. (Advocate)

### **5.5.9 Staff wages and conditions and retention**

The evaluators found evidence of staff turnover due to the casualised nature of the Advocate role. Staff in these roles are only paid for the work they do. Therefore depending on their caseload, they may work 15 hours a week, or 35. During the evaluation at least one staff member left LWB. By the time of report finalisation, the entire team, including the Team Leader, had left LWB. Staff reflected that the intermittent working hours resulting in fluctuating earnings undermined their long-term commitment to the role:

You can't really justify racking up a lot of hours during the week, which makes your income really unsteady, which is of course going to make you look for other employment opportunities that are more stable, and I'm sure that contributes to our high turnover of YAPpers. (Advocate)

Yeah, look I just started in Case Management, I would have much preferred to stay in YAP forever but unfortunately I had to make that decision that I needed a full time job. (LWB staff)

Such work arrangements dissuaded more experienced persons from applying, or staying, in the roles:

You know that that's why a few Advocates have left, because it's not consistent work. It's casual. You don't just want Advocates that are looking for casual work straight out of university. You want people who are committed. (LWB staff)

High staff turnover erodes the skills and consistency of the YAP pool of workers. For staff members who require consistent income and have responsibilities such as children and housing costs, the role was not seen as meeting their needs due to the intermittent income. In addition to fluctuating hours, the YAP staff were not provided with a car (or car allowance), phone or laptop, like some other LWB staff. Although staff clearly valued the work that they did, and the team

appeared close-knit and mutually supportive of each other, they did not feel as valued by the organisation:

It's being in an organisation where you're at the bottom of the food chain and every time middle management changes you kind of have to sell or justify yourself within that context. (Advocate)

A staff member indicated that the entire program felt like a 'pilot' because of uncertainty, short term contracts, and fluctuating hours (even though the program is meant to be ongoing).

Given the amount of training the organisation invests in, high staff turnover creates an undue training burden on the organisation.

The flow on effect of all of this for clients is worth considering also as the program goal of 'consistency' may be compromised by high turnover of staff. This may erode trust and detracts from the experience of consistency:

When you change workers on a young person, they're not going to trust the service anymore. That's a really key helping relationship. So when you say oh, your YAPper has actually gone, here's a new one, you're basically starting from scratch. So just supporting the amazing work they do in a way that reduces turnover would have a really positive impact on our clients. (LWB Staff)

Young people who participated indicated their preference for consistency among caseworkers and Advocates, especially when they were matched with an Advocate that they liked and had good rapport with.

Young people in the program were aware and critical of high staff turnover. There was a high degree of consensus about the importance of consistency of staff because of young people's histories of broken trust and turnover of adults:

They've had a bit of staff turnover, [the reasons are] casual [contracts], their money. (Young person)

I think it should become a programme with consistent workers. [There are] casuals working for them right now, but I think later on in time they should definitely have specific workers for that programme. (Young person)

Finally, some staff reported tensions between what was good for young people and the outcome indicators that YAP staff were under pressure to meet, particularly in the area of restoration. One LWB staff member noted a case early on in the infancy of the program where a young person in the YAP program was pushed into reconciliation with their family when the young person and the family were not ready:

the YAPper's only instruction was restoration. These are our undertakings delivered through the Children's Court, we need to follow through the undertakings. Even when the undertakings were a bit flimsy. [So] instead of supporting the mum to reach the undertakings we still had this situation [of restoration] where I think we were setting people up to fail. (LWB staff)

The staff member felt there were two issues that contributed to this failure:

One is that the young person was referred into the YAP program and the other issue is that the YAP program has these outcome indicators that staff are under probably an ordinary workload pressure to meet. So was that young person - is the problem that the young

person was referred into the YAP program or is the problem that the YAPper was trying to meet outcome indicators that were not closely aligned to the young person. (LWB staff)

However, this problem was in the early stages of the implementation of the YAP program and was not identified as an ongoing issue.

## **5.6 Overall program effectiveness**

### **5.6.1 How young people see YAP**

Without exception, the young people interviewed valued the YAP program. Some, but not all, contrasted their positive experience in YAP with a negative experience with LWB as their care provider and with FACS as a care provider. Others had a positive experience of care and felt looked after and connected.

Some participants found it difficult to separate their OOHC experience from their YAP experience when they were asked open-ended questions about trust and so on. They needed to be reminded in the interview that we were asking about their experiences of the YAP program, not of OOHC. With these cues, they were typically able to separate out global experiences of being in care with specific experiences of the YAP program. This is an important finding nevertheless, as it speaks to the strength of the backdrop of being in OOHC and how it can overshadow small, albeit transformative interventions.

We asked young people for three words that described the program. The following two examples offer the key values articulated by all participants.

Trust, friendship. (Young person)

Definitely fun, easy going, but motivating. Nurturing. (Young person)

In general, young people expressed confidence that YAP would respect their opinions and wishes.

### **5.6.2 Intervention effects – what does YAP make happen that would not otherwise happen?**

The active outreach and assertive contact from YAP Advocates combatted the potential social isolation that could be experienced by young people when becoming independent. The following excerpt sums this up:

[Without YAP] I definitely would not be out of my room right now. Like, I do spend a lot of time in my room, but I would lock myself in there and never leave. Like, I would be an emotional wreck and not really know what to do. I definitely know that as a teenager I would not go to therapists to talk about it because I struggle to talk about it as it is... my old housemate when she moved out it was a good two months - two, three months before I got a new housemate. It was really hard because I was dealing with a lot of emotional stuff and sitting in my house by myself. I felt like I was losing my mind and, honestly, if [Advocate] had not been there I would have, like, [she] was just there. She was just there for that whole three months. Even - she was calling me every day to make sure I'm okay and that I'm not doing anything that I shouldn't be doing, like, self-harming and stuff like that, to make sure I'm in a stable frame of mind, and basically to let me know that everything's okay, which helped a lot. (Young person)

Other key achievements of the program were to keep young people moving towards their goals, from small to large, and assisting them obtain the resources they needed to do so. This could include talking through education and career options with them, assisting them to enrol in TAFE or University, ensuring access to schemes for waiving fees, helping them apply for transitional housing, and taking them to appointments with health professionals including specialists. Advocates work with families is also important for developing the long-term relationships that would extend beyond the program.

### **5.6.3 What works well**

Staff thought YAP was achieving its goals at least in the short term – finding accommodation for young people, linking them back in with community and family, and establishing connections with, or reconnecting, young people with longer term support people.

YAP successfully assists young people at a most stressful time of transition and provided the intensive support required:

Normally kids don't really have that sort of support. But that's why it's good for me, I'm really happy at the moment because I have those supports. I've established that, sort of thing.  
(Young person)

Several young people stated that if it were not for the Advocate's support, they would feel lost, not know what to do, or be having a much harder time adjusting to greater independence.

Importantly, the 'dosage' of the program of 15 hours a week appeared to allow for progress on both instrumental, relational and psychosocial goals. This intensity delivered at the right time for the right length of time is critical to the program's success. As noted in Section 5.4.10, the program would be improved by greater latitude for case teams to decide to extend the length of time for individuals in the program. It is reasonable to expect that the work of building relationships with families and communities requires lengthy interventions for young people who have experienced broken attachments.

### **5.6.4 What could be improved**

When asked 'what could be improved?' the young people we spoke to struggled to identify anything. A common response was literally 'nothing'. For them the program had 'worked' and they would 'definitely recommend' it to others. Young people felt being consulted about how the program runs is one way of improving the program:

They should frequently ask the kids if there is anything, but you know, if there's a major flaw or something they should self-reflect, Life Without Barriers should take notes from that as well (Young person).

There was also a sense that if LWB and other care providers could operate more in line with the YAP philosophy that the care experience in general would be improved. One young person suggested all young people in care should be offered YAP:

Separate the programs or the kids in care are all to run through the YAP. (Young person)

There could be better guidance for Advocates to get the right balance between a relaxed non-explicit approach and a structured more explicit approach. While some young people were clearly

well suited to a relaxed approach, they were typically less able to clearly identify their own learning achievements in a metacognitive sense (what we know about our own learning styles). Without metacognitive awareness, it is more difficult to adapt or draw on previous learnings in new situations. A key example of this was offered in Section 5.4.4 with the young woman who had a very relaxed hanging out relationship with her mentor. While she had learnt to socialise with her siblings through observation, she was unable to see this clearly as a learning experience with goals, strategies and activities.

Furthermore, not all Advocates were able to identify and match the style of their young person. One young man commented:

It could be that lighter, a bit more walk in the park with the dog, a little bit chitchat, go to the beach, have a nice coffee? You want the relationship without that kind of boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, goals, goals, goals. (Young person)

The program is still quite new and Advocates appear to be just hitting their stride in terms of knowing how to manage relationships and improve outcomes for young people. There is reason to believe that as they consolidate their skills and have a good command of basic principles and activities that Advocates will be able to be more flexible and individualised in their implementation.

The 'embeddedness' of the program could be improved by LWB committing to its ongoing place as one of its repertoire of programs, and by guaranteeing staff some 'core' hours, or guaranteed part time or full time roles, to better retain staff.

Finally, the program philosophy and principles could be visibly and linguistically aligned to current policy platforms in NSW and Australia, such as Their Future Matters, which would allow LWB to galvanise findings from this and future evaluations to inform policy.

## 6 Conclusion and recommendations

The evaluation questions were:

1. What were the placement status and needs of young people at entry to YAP?
2. What, if any, difference did YAP make to:
  - the young person's living arrangement
  - linkages to community
  - educational engagement, outcomes and aspirations
  - vocational engagement and aspirations
  - health needs
  - relationship and contact with family
  - involvement with youth justice system?

The evaluation found the YAP model is judged by both clients and staff to produce positive outcomes in a time where young people are transitioning to independence. There is considerable enthusiasm for the benefits it brings to both clients and staff.

Factors contributing to the success of YAP include:

- regular, assertive and intensive contact between YAP staff and clients
- a person-centred and strengths-based approach designed to provide non- judgemental and unconditional support to the young person
- the use of individual service plans to identify and guide young people towards meeting their goals
- assembling the resources clients needed through working with other agencies and services
- young people playing an active role in setting direction and decision-making
- work with families and other significant people in the client's life to set up supports for when the program ends.

The intensity of support played a major role in the success of the program. Having a designated Advocate that met with clients regularly for 15 hours a week and was 'there for them' consistently and assertively engendered trust and respect. While the eligibility criteria involves assessing client 'readiness' for the program, the blocks of intensive support need to be longer for some young people – for example some young people, and staff, offered that a 12 or 18-month timeframe might be more appropriate.

Another key success in the program is the strength-based approach which has a significant impact on the way young people experience their relationship with their Advocate. A strengths-based approach requires a change in the professional cultures which mark the OOH sector which is currently based in a model of vulnerability and risk.

YAP Advocates were generally well trained in the structures of the program and had a sound knowledge of how to handle most contingencies. As Advocates become more experienced and the program matures, more flexible decision-making is occurring enabling greater degrees of personalisation.

One challenge for the program is clients who disengage, however drop-out rates were reportedly low. A better understanding and accountability trail for those that disengage would allow continuous improvement in this area.

Another challenge is staff employment security with YAP workers on casual contracts with intermittent hours. The evaluation found evidence of high staff turnover leading to changes in Advocates and co-ordinators which is potentially destabilising for clients.

The broader research evidence indicates that the transition period to independence for young people leaving OOHC is a crucial time, fraught with risk. YAP, and similar programs, are being used in a number of locations in Australia (as well as internationally). Programs that provide support to young people leaving OOHC until their early to mid-20s in community settings have been shown to reduce some of the adverse outcomes associated with a history of OOHC. The findings of the current evaluation lend weight to findings from other studies of similar programs, and as an area for further research, LWB could develop more detailed outcomes indicators and conduct longitudinal data collection with current and former YAP participants (at entry, exit, and at 12 months, and 24 months, after leaving the program). At the moment the quantitative data is somewhat limited (to entry and exit) however the qualitative data indicated that clients and staff thought the program was an unqualified success.

## **6.1 Recommendations**

### **6.1.1 Program documents**

The program documents are confusing and repetitive.

- Review and streamline YAP procedure manual with attention to signposts about how the philosophy, beliefs, four pillars of practice, service delivery process fit together.
- Develop a single document which clearly outlines core philosophy of the program and the procedures and explicitly aligns the program to National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 and current state initiatives.

### **6.1.2 Involve young people as experts in programs delivered to them**

Young people were pleased to take part in the evaluation of the program. They felt they were listened to and valued. This involvement could become a structural element of all programs delivered to young people – recognising their expertise and building their knowledge about how systems and programs work and are improved.

- Develop a feedback mechanism to young people from this evaluation.
- Build in a program evaluation module that collects young people's views of YAP.

### **6.1.3 Modify the program for specific cohorts**

The YAP program was originally designed for young people transitioning out of residential care and was strongly living skill based. The program is now delivered to clients who have various pathways (young people exiting foster care as well as residential care). Foster care cohorts are sometimes younger than those exiting residential care, and, in general have different assets and resources. The sample size for this evaluation make it difficult to make any claims about the program for different cohorts. However, it is useful to track cohort differences in future evaluations. For now it will suffice to say that younger cohorts appeared to experience the program quite differently to those who were transitioning out of residential care. The Advocates appeared to work age appropriately with younger cohorts but there is little in the guidelines to steer this work. The younger cohort appeared to be more engaged in relationship-based and restoration-based goals than some of those from residential care. Intervention earlier may mean that many of the practical living supports can be delivered by families. Families may need mentoring around parenting through periods of reconnection and the support required by young people in the transition from school to work. This could be delivered by Advocates who have some training in education to employment transition issues and resources. Furthermore, the high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the program warrants an evaluation component focussed on their needs. This was out of scope for this evaluation.

- That LWB conduct a future evaluation that utilises a more diverse range of methods, has a focus on different cohorts and has ethics approval for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and workers to determine how culturally appropriate the program is and how to strengthen this aspect of the program.
- That a future evaluation consider what adaptations might be required to best support a younger cohort who have been in foster care and are transitioning back to family.

### **6.1.4 Resources for resilience from histories in out of home care**

Young people with protracted histories in out-of-home care are often distrustful and have reactive attachments. The YAP program offers to ameliorate some of this distrust through intensive contact, clear guidelines and practices, and its positive youth development approach. YAP focusses on building both internal assets (like competency) and external resources (like social networks).

There is an emerging literature focussed on the importance of narrative in the development of young people who have been in out of home care. This literature suggests that when young people develop internal assets (of self-efficacy, coping skills, a sense of competence) alongside external resources (parental support, adult mentoring, social networks) they are able to overcome the adversities of childhood.

Internal assets can be developed by careful reframing of experience of being placed in OOHC. Bengtsson et al. (2018) argue that when young people could hold a view that their time in care made sense and was necessary in their lives, they were more able to navigate to a sense of wellbeing and self-reliance. This sense is typically retrospective and may involve acceptance of their placement or as having been given a second chance. In reframing the experience from one of loss and unfairness, to a more global one of being looked after, young care leavers are better able to understand the often traumatic event of being placed in OOHC and start to reframe their time in



care in a less negative way. This inner process of re-framing of experiences of societal care may over time help to promote resilience. This sense of being looked after obviously requires clear experiences of having been looked after to anchor the reframing.

Young people have told us that a program like YAP does offer the resources necessary to feel looked after. It is therefore a potential anchorage space in which to support reframing care experiences. It may be worth working with young people to construct narratives about the program and what it has delivered in terms of being looked after, and how it differs from other programs (where they both have and have not been looked after). When young people can recognise the conditions that allow them to thrive, they are more likely to be able to make independent decisions about the resources they want to seek out and create in their own lives.

- LWB should develop Advocate literacy about how the program can be differentiated from other programs. LWB could perhaps conduct a review of what has worked in the past and how YAP is different.
- That LWB develop tools that allow young people to narrate their own personal change and the conditions that enable them to thrive.

### **6.1.5 LWB employment practices**

The evaluation found evidence of high staff turnover in part due to casualisation and intermittent hours. This can create instability for the young persons if their Advocate changes as the point of the program is to provide consistency over the 6-9 month period.

- LWB to review its employment practices to ensure staff have greater job security, adequate income and career path so that staff can be retained. Advocates could be employed on a fractional of full-time basis.

### **6.1.6 Information for other LWB staff about the YAP program**

Staff working in other roles within LWB said they did not really understand what YAP was or did, and only found out about YAP over a period of time. It was suggested that new LWB staff are briefed on the range of LWB programs, including the YAP program.

- That more information about the program (as well as LWB's many other programs) be provided in any induction process for new LWB staff.

### **6.1.7 Program - length**

The YAP program documents need to reflect the flexibility of program length and its potential to be adapted for younger people, those in foster, residential care, and for those with precarious family and community connections. While it can be extended, the program default length of six to nine months may be too short.

- The YAP program could be offered for up to 18 months, where a client's situation warrants this.

## 6.1.8 Overall program effectiveness

As noted in the opening comments in Section 5.5. young people frequently received support in through YAP that they did not receive through the out of home care system. While this is positive, there remained resentment toward carers, case workers and residential care providers about care not provided. The relationship between YAP and LWB was not clear in the eyes of most young people. They saw it as a distinct organisation, which allowed them to begin afresh with YAP, but at the same time separated the positive things they gained through YAP, from the care they received through LWB. Ultimately, they wanted LWB to deliver the things they needed as LWB is their statutory carer.

- LWB to consider integrating YAP in LWB casework so that it becomes part of the care offered by LWB.

## 6.1.9 Future research should be longitudinal and access more data

Any future study should build in a more longitudinal approach that collects outcomes data at regular points: on entry to the program, during and after having exited the program. Evaluation opportunities could be built into existing events that resource young people in the program – e.g. an event that focusses on employment opportunities.

- That evaluation data be collected on entry, at five months and on exit of the program
- That further outcomes data be further collected from former YAP clients (with their consent) at 12 and 24 months after leaving the program

This evaluation did not have access to completed ISPs. The ISPs are the main record of work that is conducted with young people. As such, they are valuable source of data to support professional development of advocates and indeed to analyse for program fidelity.

- Future evaluations to obtain consent from young people to enable their ISPs to be used in evaluations.
- That LWB utilise ISPs as a way of continuous service improvement through analysis of how effectively the ISPs match the young person's competencies, interests and support them with appropriate goals.

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# Appendix A Program data – demographics and entry-exit outcomes

## Characteristics of participants in the YAP program

Figure 3 indicates almost three-quarters (73%) of young people in YAP are aged between 16-18. Twenty-three per cent are aged 13-15 and only 3 per cent were aged between 9-12. This aged profile is because YAP is aimed at young people who are close to transitioning out of care.

**Figure 3: Age range**

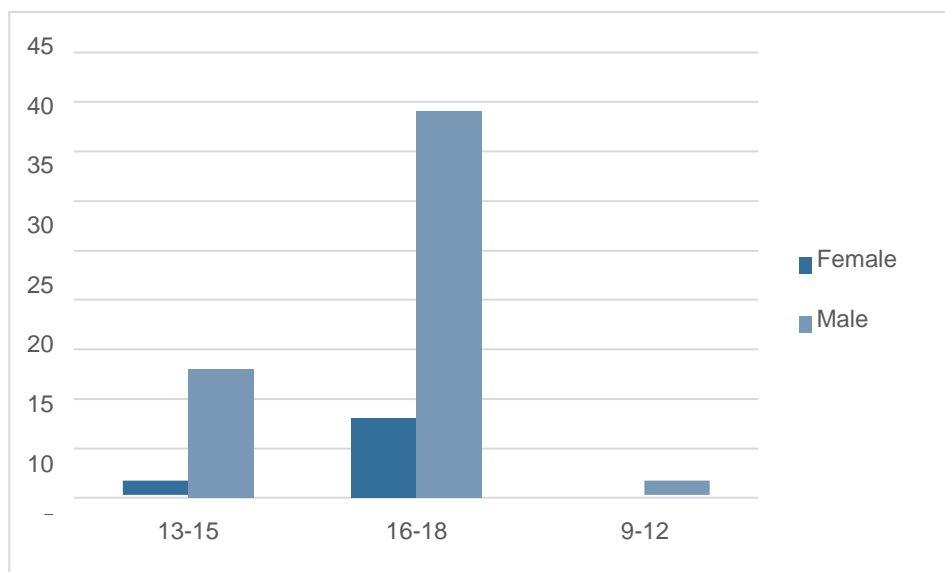


Figure 4 indicates a gender balance - 30 females and 34 males as clients of the YAP.

**Figure 4: Gender of YAP participants**

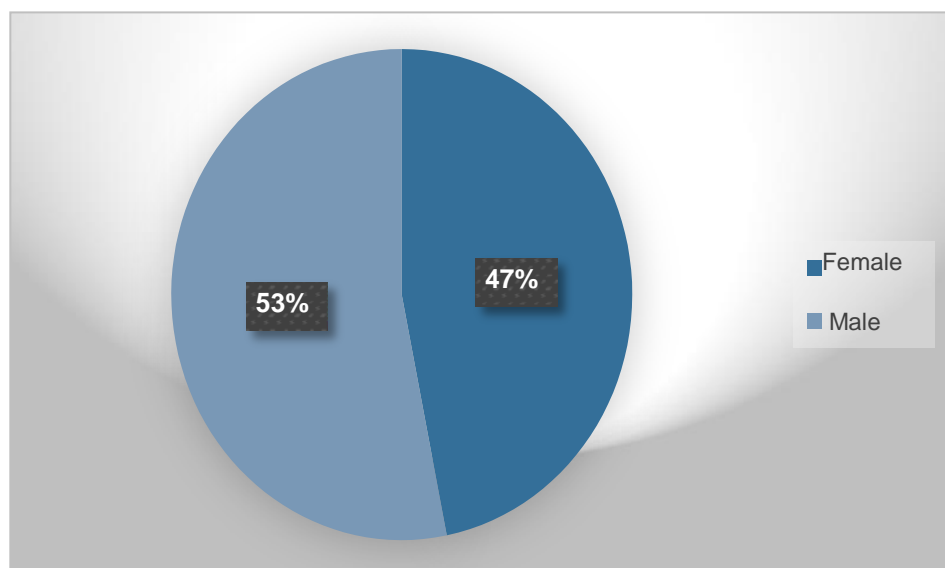
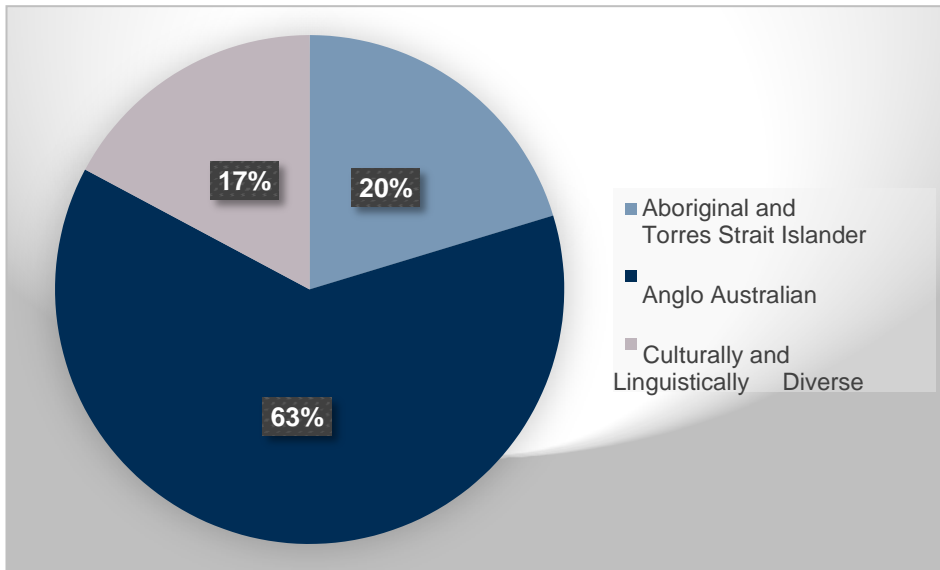


Figure 5 indicates most clients are Anglo-Australian (62%), with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (20%). Young people from CALD background were less represented (17%).

**Figure 5: Cultural background of YAP participants**



In terms of other attributes of young people on entering the program, Figure 6 indicates that two thirds or 65% did not have an identified mental illness, 28% did, while for 4% this was unknown.

**Figure 6: YAP participants with an identified mental illness**

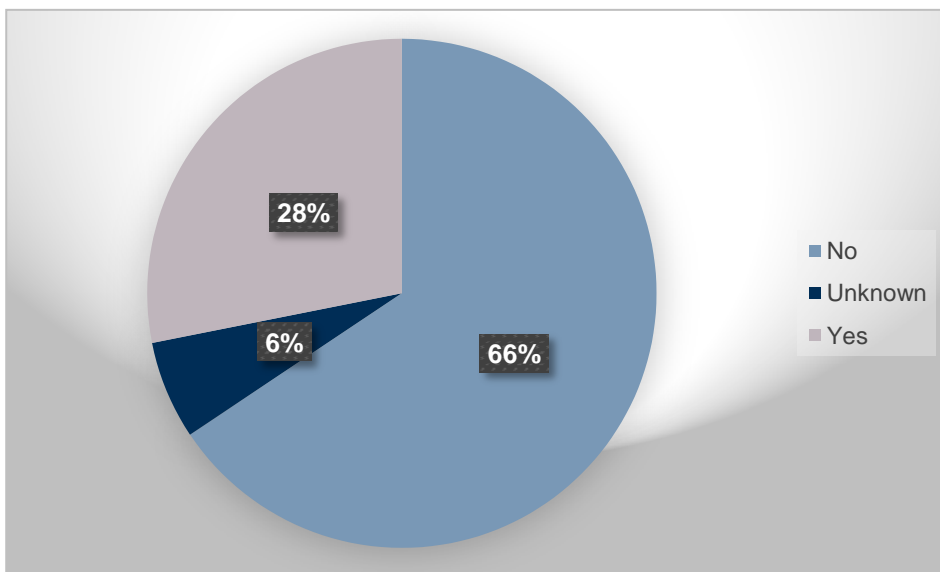




Figure 7 indicates that nearly three quarters or 71% did not have a disability, while nearly a third or 28% did.

**Figure 7: YAP participants with a disability**

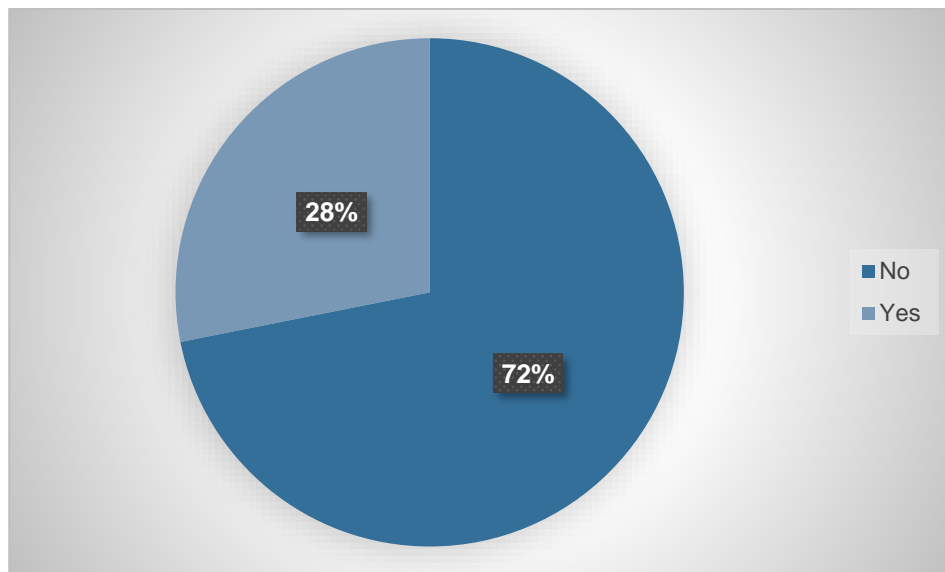
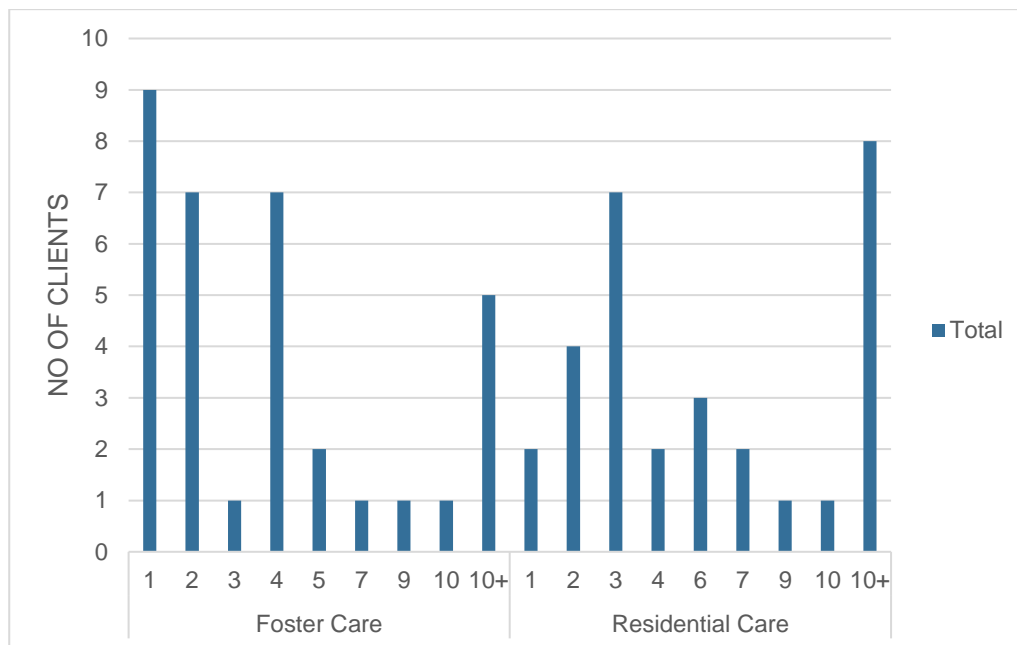


Figure 8 indicates that nine young people had only experienced one foster care placement, seven had experienced four placements, and fewer experienced 5-10 placements – however five young people had experienced more than ten foster care placements. Residential care placements were not dissimilar but young people in residential care were more likely to have experienced more placements.

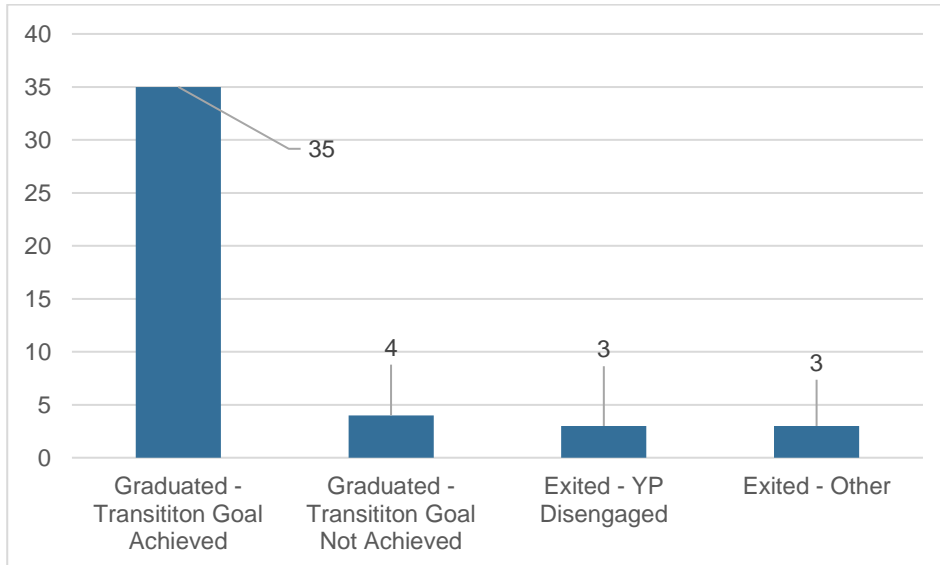
**Figure 8: Number of foster care placements at time of entry into program**



## Overall achievement of goals

Figure 9 indicates that 35 people graduated having achieved their goals, while four graduated but did not achieve their goals. A further six did not stay with YAP, either disengaging or leaving for some other reason.

**Figure 9: Number of YAP participants achieving their goal**



## Income

Figure 10 indicates that for younger children aged between 9-15, pocket money was the main income source. This declined somewhat as they got older.

**Figure 10: Primary source of income (9-15 year olds)**

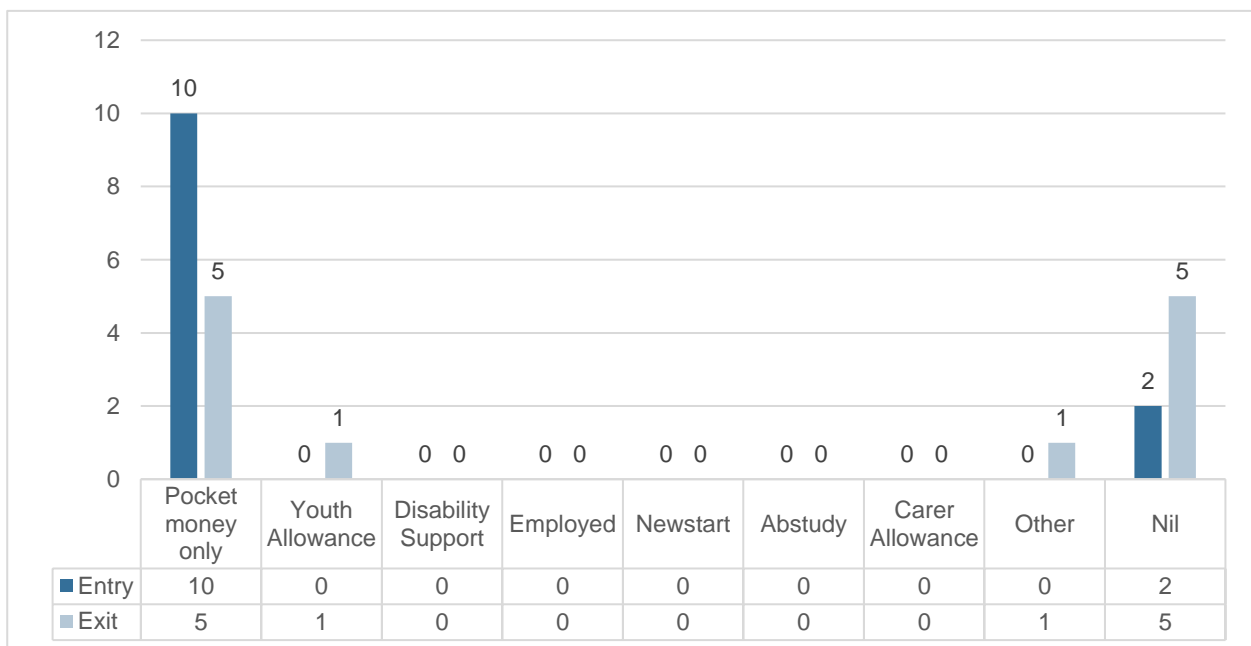
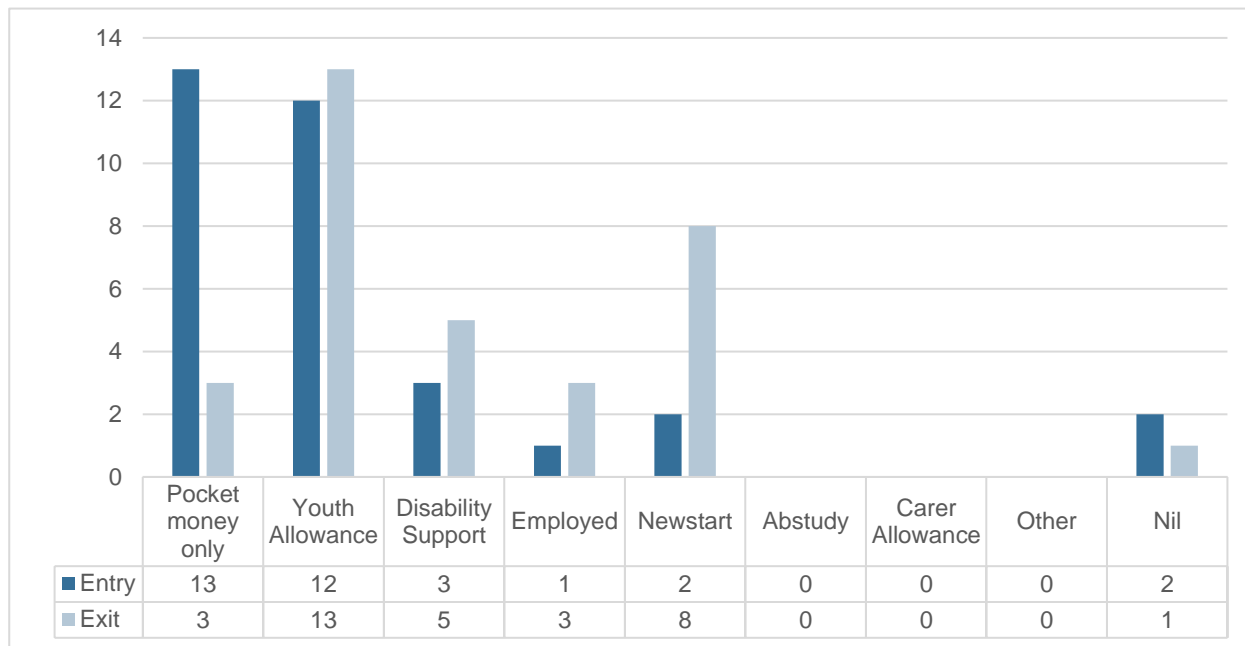


Figure 11 indicates that for young people aged between 16-18, there was a reduction in pocket money as source of income between entry and at exit, indicating the move towards financial autonomy. Around equal numbers were on Youth Allowance at both entry and exit, with smaller numbers obtaining income from Disability Support Pension and Newstart. Increasing numbers relied on Newstart on exit. There was a small number of young people obtaining income from employment, rising slightly in number from entry compared with exit.

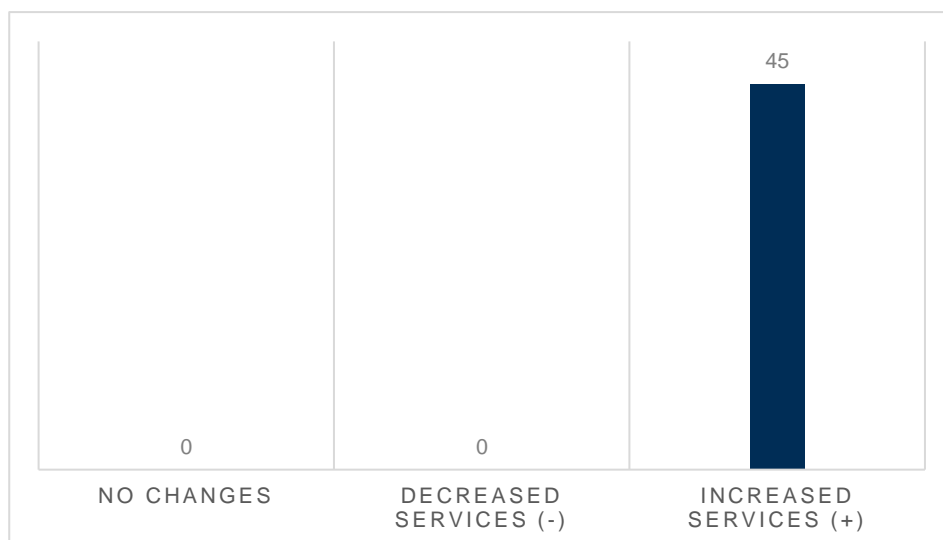
**Figure 11: Primary source of income (16-18 year olds)**



### Service use

Figure 12 indicates, unsurprisingly since part of the YAP's rationale is to link young people to services, that service use increased for all participants. Forty-five increased their service use between entry and exit.

**Figure 12: Services (entry versus exit) (+/-)**



## Services utilised

Figure 13 shows that the younger children (aged 9-15) were most likely to be in touch with a LWB clinician, both at entry and exit. On exit, some were in touch with mental health clinicians, Centrelink, an employment service, youth worker, cultural support organisations, and other services.

**Figure 13: Services utilised (9-15 year olds)**

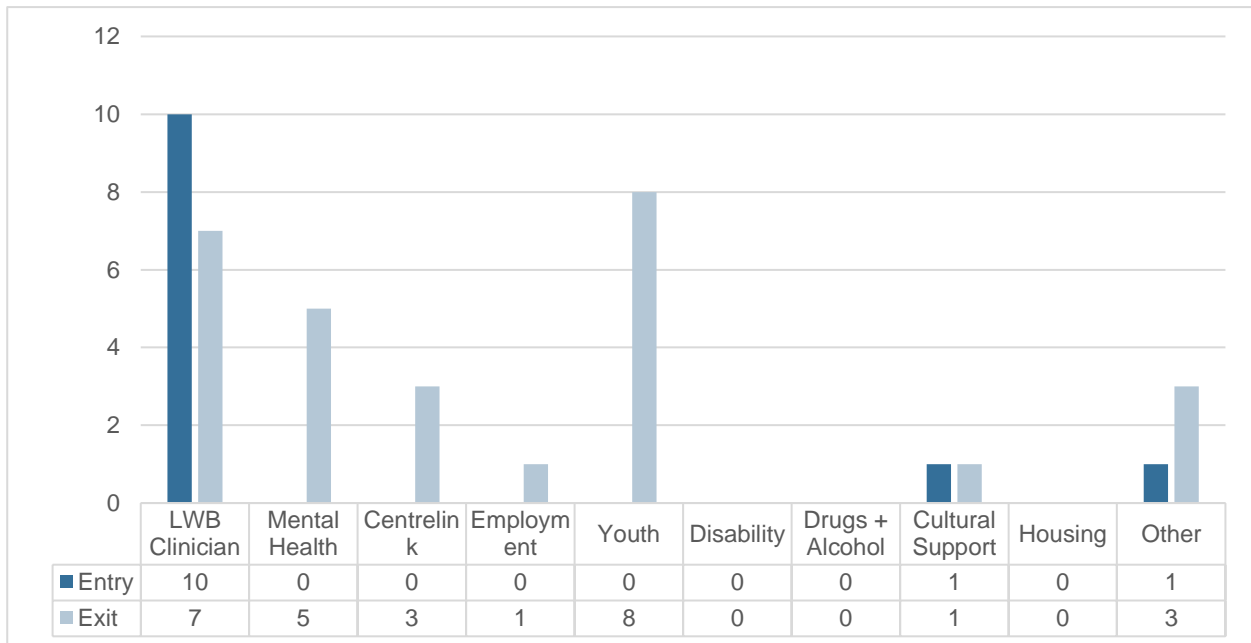
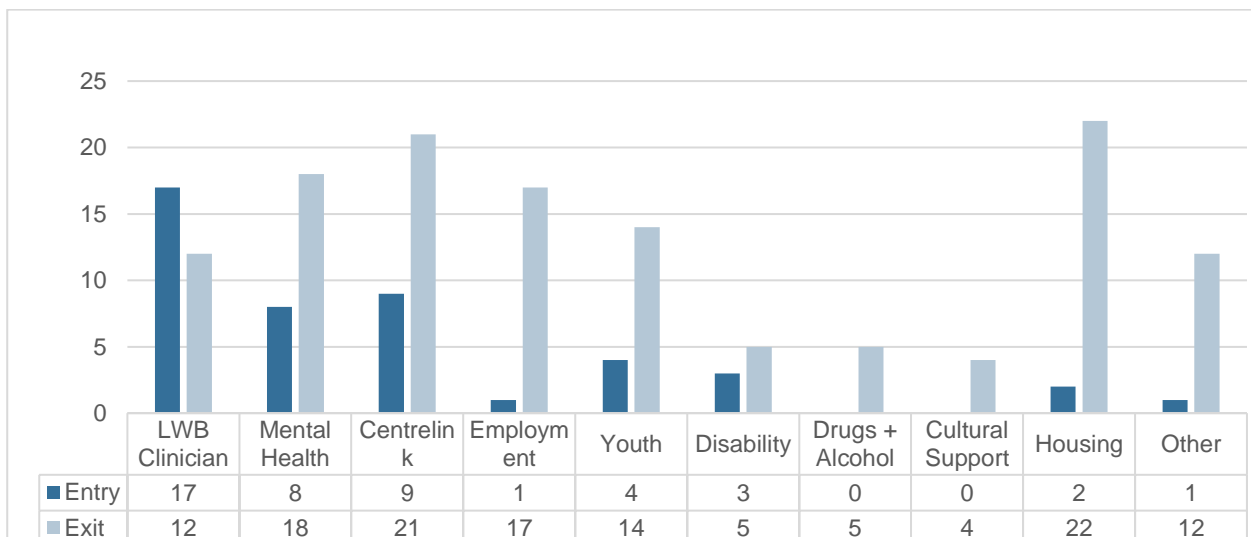


Figure 14 indicates that the older age cohort (16-18) were utilising a range of services on entry and exit, including services associated with their moves towards independent living such as Centrelink, and in particular, employment services.

Unsurprisingly, on exit, housing services were a major point of contact, given the imminent move into independent living. Young people were also in contact with mental health clinical supports at exit.

**Figure 14: Services utilised (16-18 year olds)**



## The young person's living situation

Figure 15 indicates that for the younger children, living situation was more likely to be in foster care at entry or self-placement with family members (six and four respectively), although the numbers of self-placed with family slightly declined at exit (from six to four). Five were restored to family at exit.

**Figure 15: Living situation (9-15 year olds)**

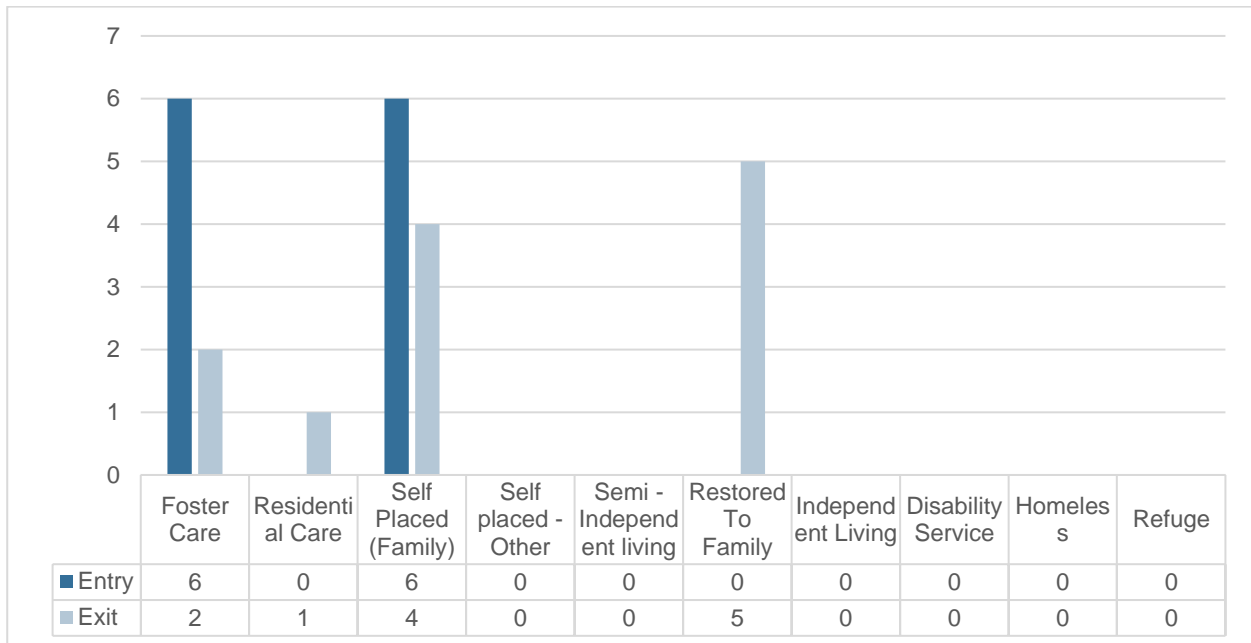


Figure 16 indicates that for the older age group (16-18), on entry 26 were in foster or residential care and seven were self-placed in other situations. On exit, three self-placed with family, four self-placed with other (non-family) other, six were restored to family, five moved into semi-independent living and eight moved into independent living. None were in foster care at exit.

**Figure 16: Living situation (16-18 year olds)**

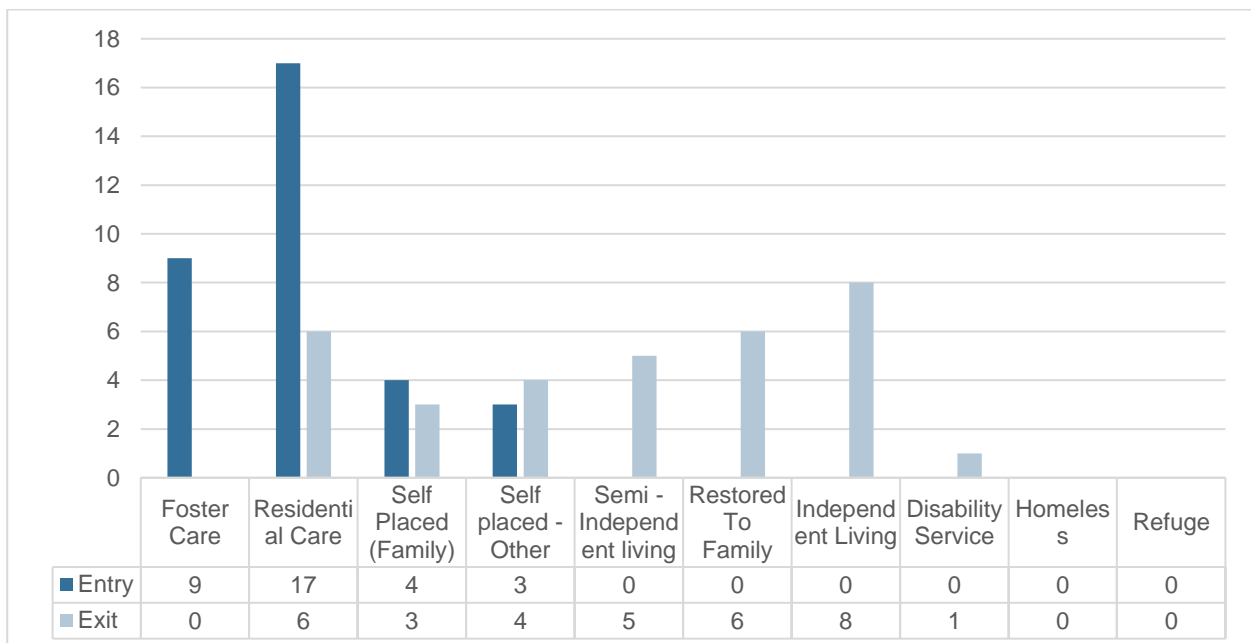
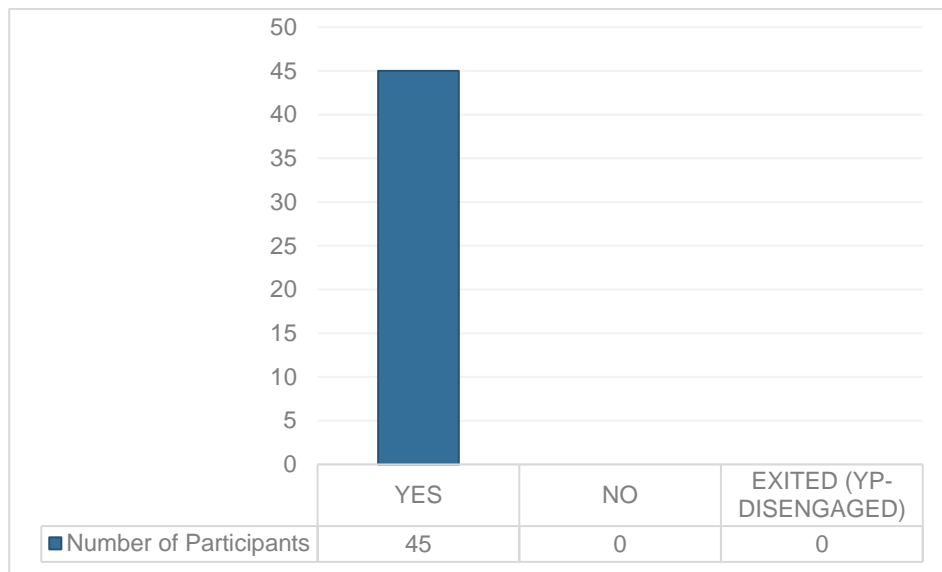


Figure 17 shows that for those who completed the YAP, 100% had accommodation at exit. This in some instances was subsidised social housing, providing affordable and stable accommodation.

**Figure 17: Number of participants with accommodation at exit**



### Linkages to community

Another goal of YAP is to build community linkages and social networks. Figure 18 indicate community connections for the youngest group, the 9-15 year olds. Connections increased over the course of the YAP program in each category.

**Figure 18: Community connections (9-15 year olds)**

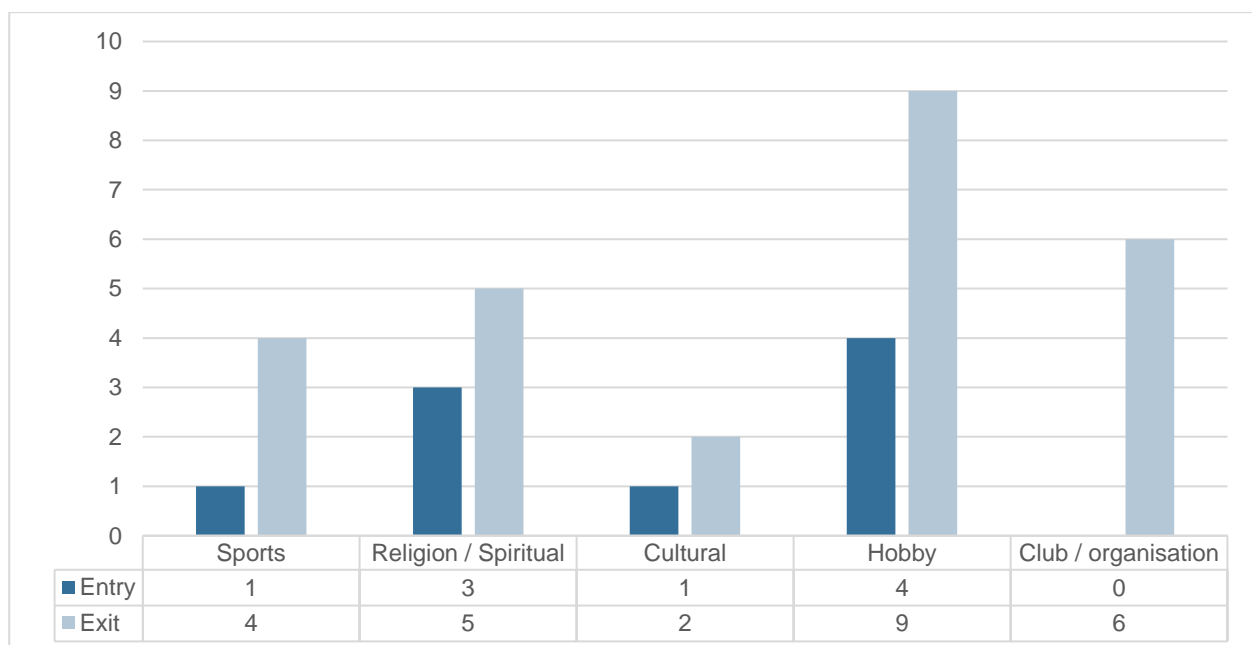


Figure 19 indicate community connections for the older group, the 16-18 year olds. Connections increased over the course of the YAP program in each category (except for religion/spiritual, where it remained the same).

**Figure 19: Community connections (16-18 year olds)**

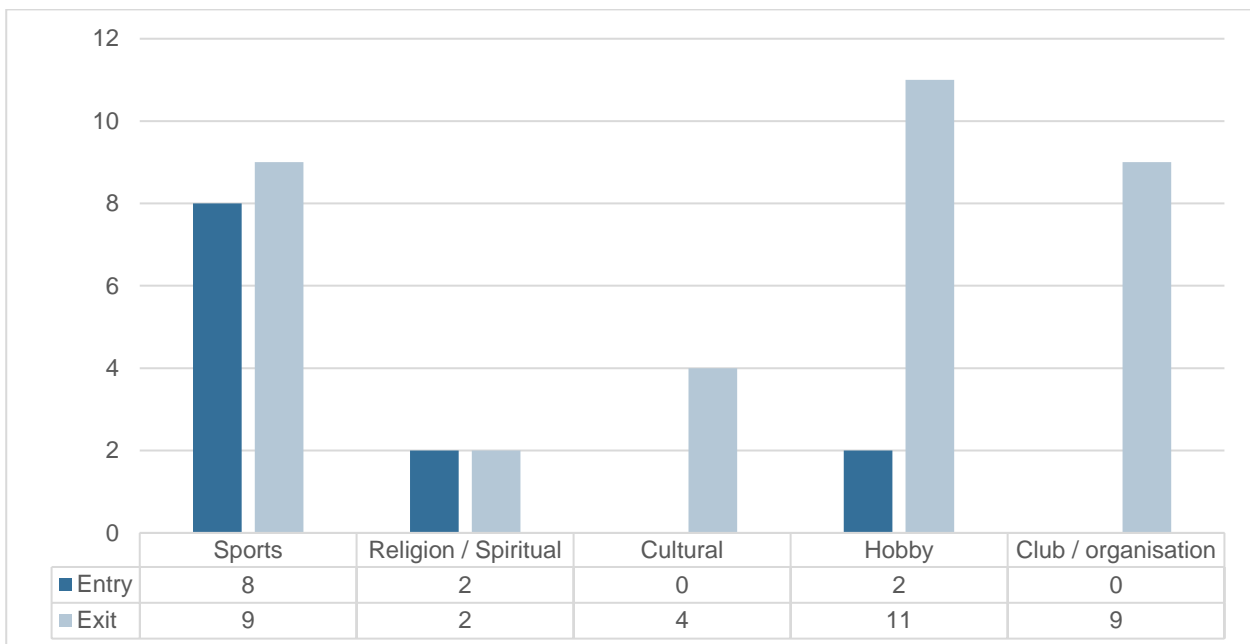
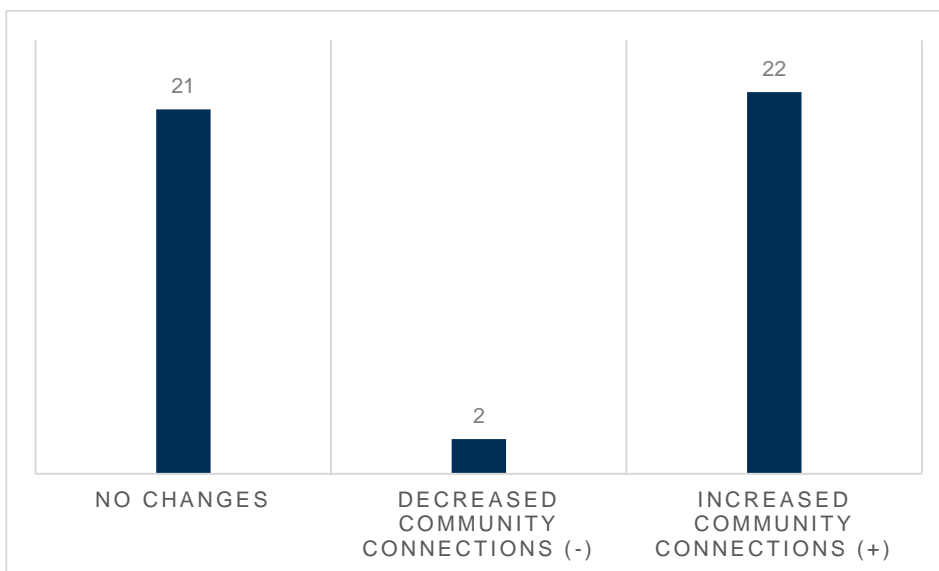


Figure 20 indicates whether community connections increased, decreased or stayed the same (entry vs. exit). For about half there was no change, and for the other half community connections increased.

**Figure 20: Community connections (entry versus exit) (+/-)**



## Involvement with the juvenile justice system

Most YAP participants did not have involvement in the juvenile justice system. Figure 21 indicates that among the youngest age group (9-15 year olds) only one person had any type of juvenile justice involvement.

**Figure 21: Involvement in the juvenile justice system (9-15 year olds)**

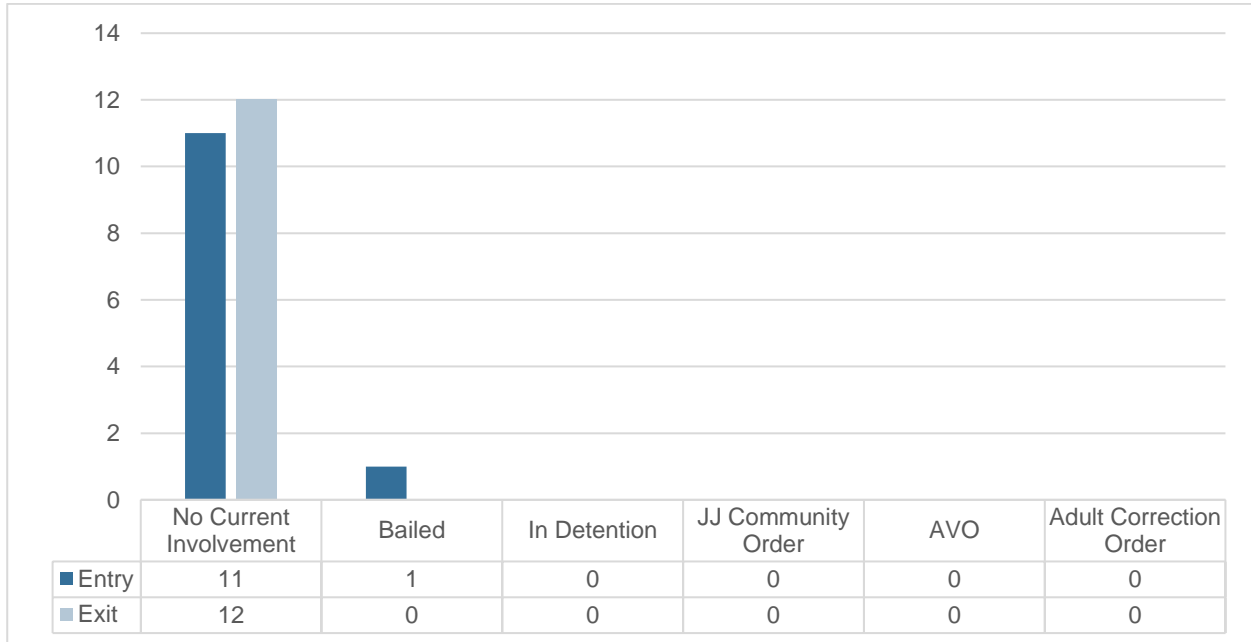


Figure 22 indicates that among the older age group (16-18 year olds) while the majority did not have any involvement, on entry five were on bail, three were on a juvenile justice community order, two had an Apprehended Violence Order taken out on them, and one was in detention. On exit, juvenile justice orders decreased a little, however two young people had an adult correction order issued against them on exit.

**Figure 22: Involvement in the juvenile justice system (16-18 year olds)**

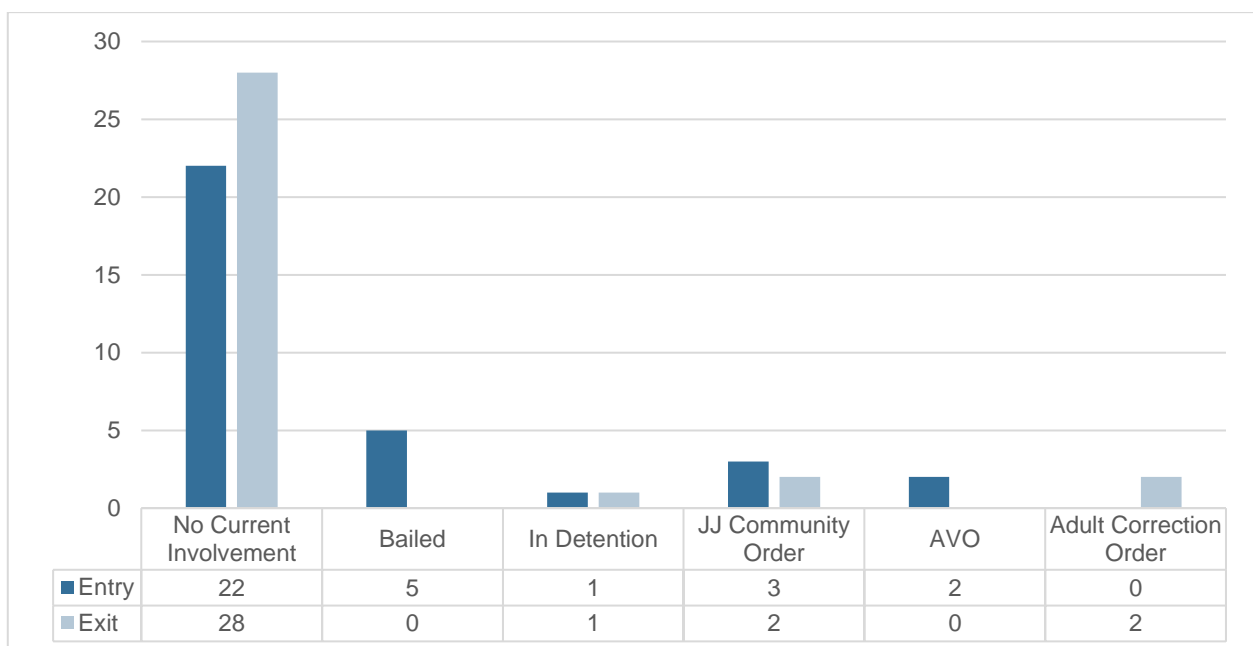
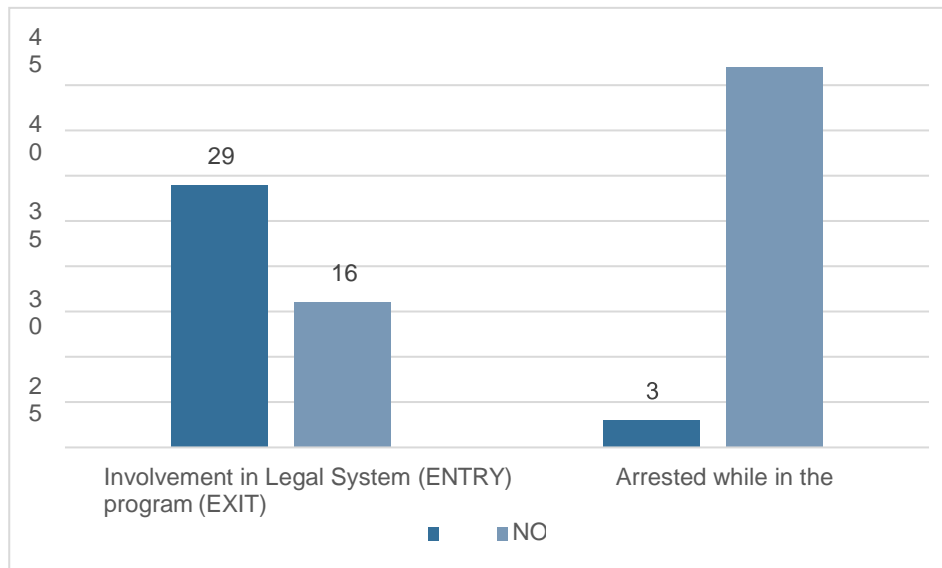




Figure 23 further illustrates involvement in the justice system (offending) on entry and exit. It indicates that on entry, the majority did have some previous involvement in the juvenile justice system. The second indicator shows only three incidences of arrest over the course of the YAP program. Most young persons were not arrested while in the program.

**Figure 23: Involvement in justice system at entry versus number arrested while in program**



## Education

The following should be qualified by noting that LWB data is limited because LWB could not find a valid way of determining engagement levels in a non-subjective manner, for example, a young person may have been enrolled in school but not attending but by the end of the program was attending. Current data collection means that this would show no change. As most young people were leaving care at 18 they were also likely to be finishing their schooling, but may not have moved into further education in the 6-month timeframe.

Figure 24 indicates younger children (aged 9-15) were in school while one was in TAFE. There was little difference at entry and exit (12 in school at entry and 11 in school, one in TAFE at exit).

**Figure 24: Education situation (9-15 year olds)**

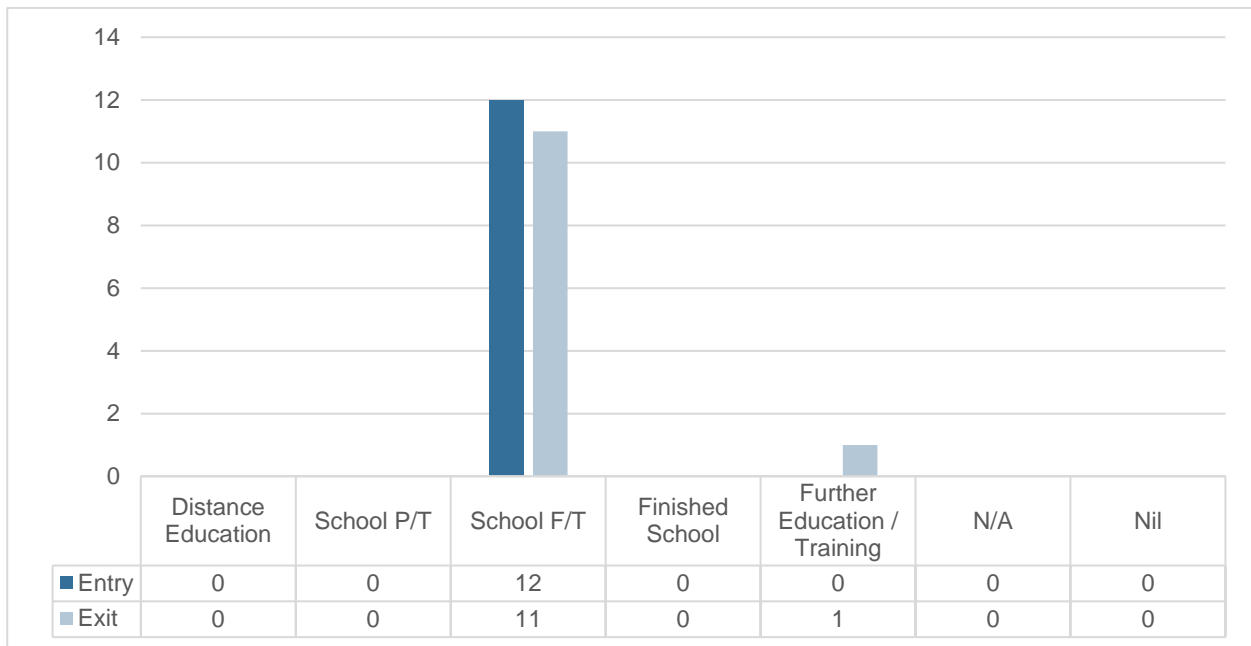


Figure 25 indicates the older age group (aged 16-18) were in a variety of situations. On entry, reflecting their younger age, 12 were in school either full or part time, seven had finished school and eight were in further education/training. On exit, fewer were in school (six), nine were in further education/training, and fourteen were not in any kind of education.

**Figure 25: Education situation (16-18 year olds)**

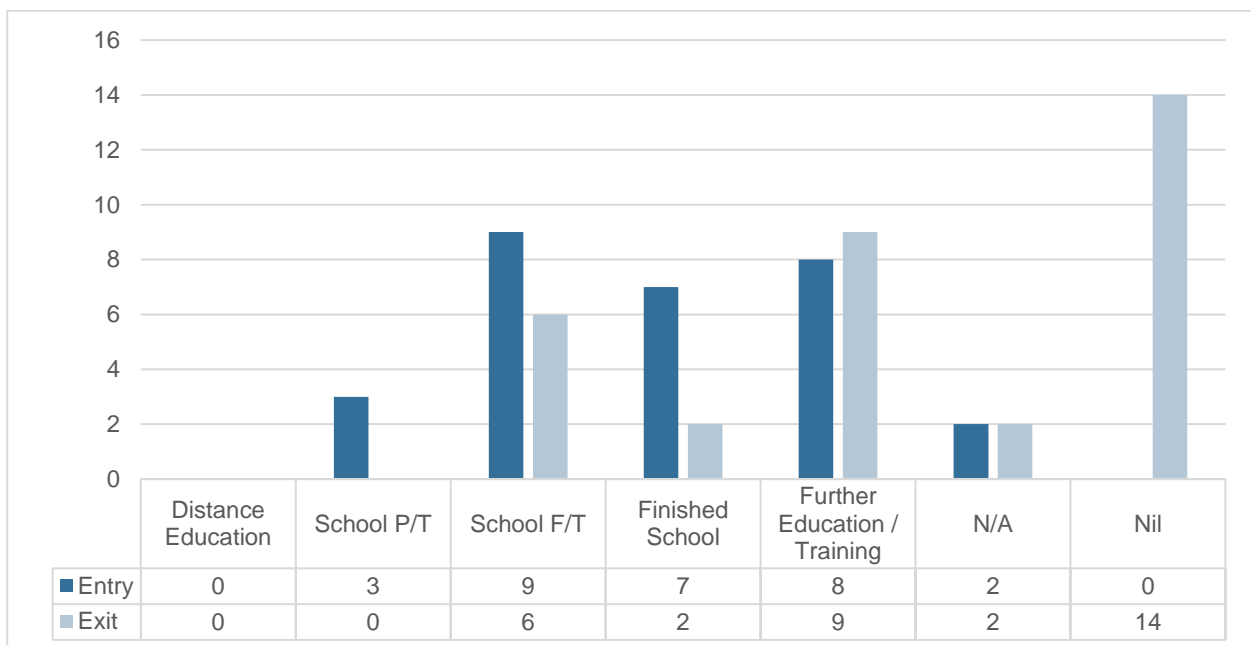


Figure 26 indicates for the younger age group (aged 9-15), that there was little difference in educational services utilised on entry and exit. Most did not utilise these (which may simply indicate they did not need to).

**Figure 26: Education services utilised (9-15 year olds)**

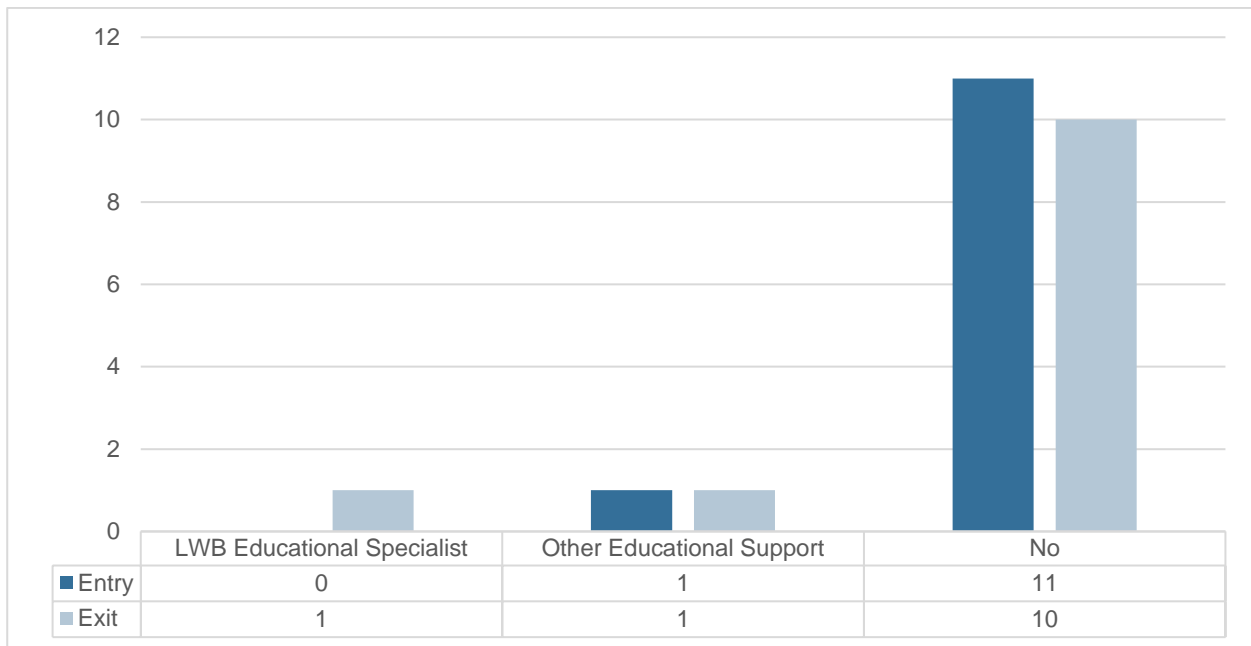
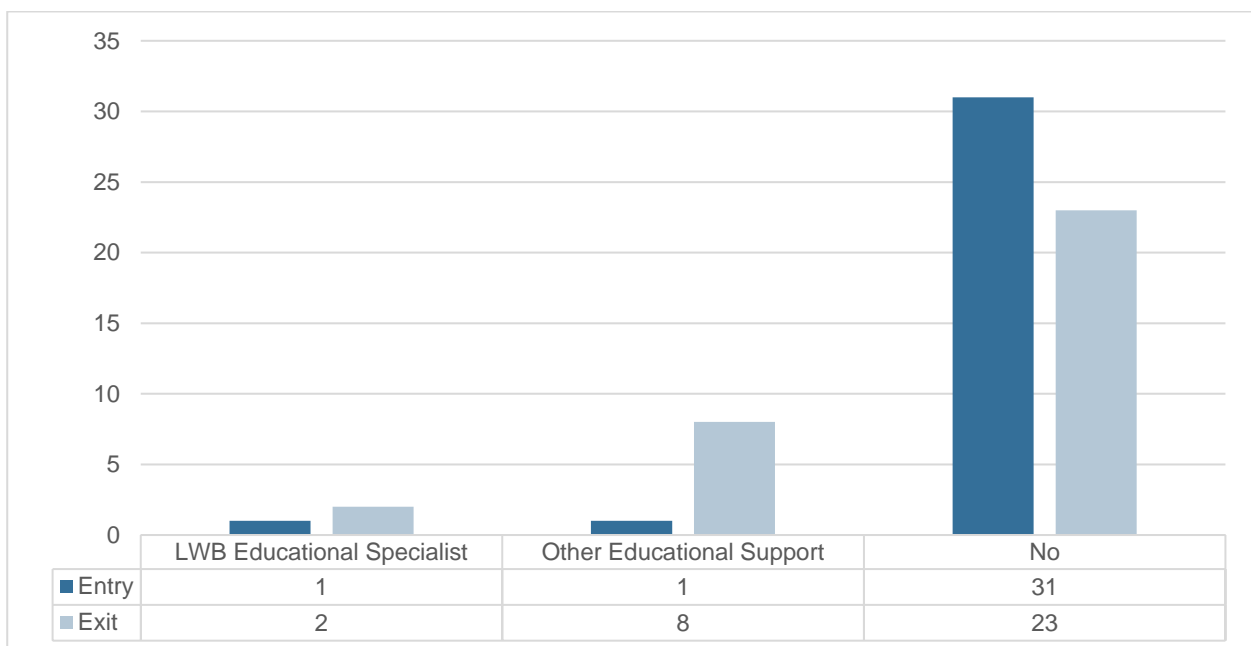


Figure 27 indicates for the older age group (aged 16-18), that there was an increase in educational services utilised on entry and exit. Most did not utilise these (which may simply indicate they did not need to) but this was lower on exit than on entry, indicating referral to such services through the course of the YAP program.

**Figure 27: Education services utilised (16-18 year olds)**



## Employment

Figure 28 indicates that the younger age group (9-15 year olds) were mostly in the 'not applicable' category, reflected in their ages and engagement in school, rather than the workforce. Only a few were classified as 'unemployed, no seeking work' and this increased slightly at exit.

**Figure 28: Employment status (9-15 year olds)**

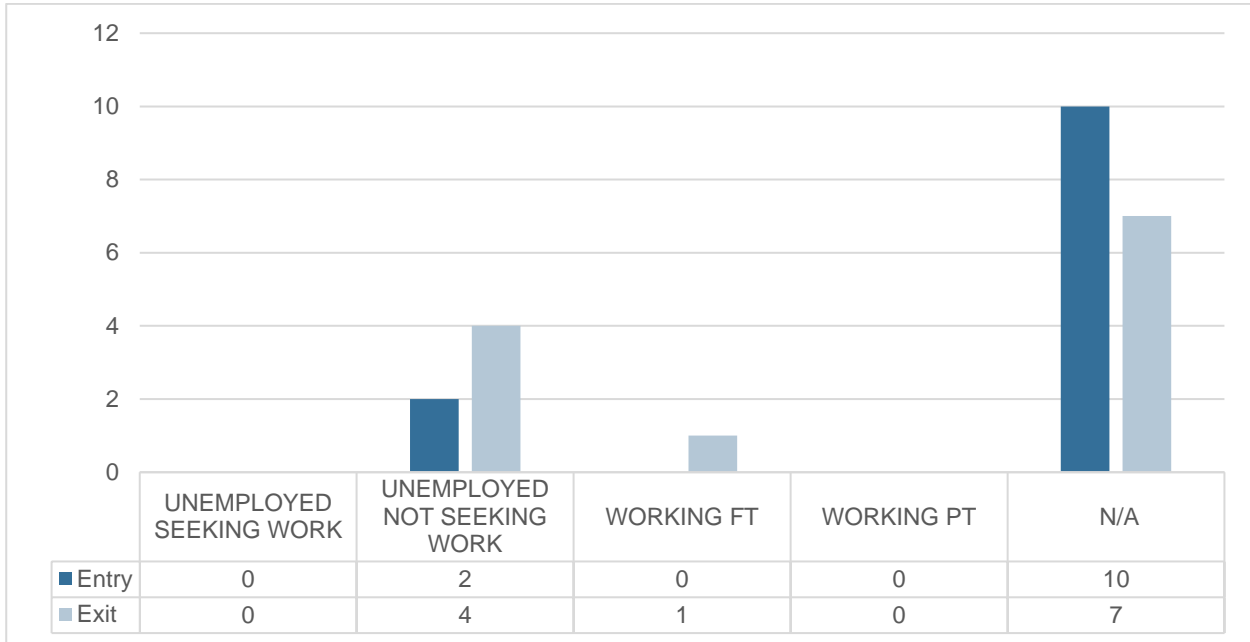
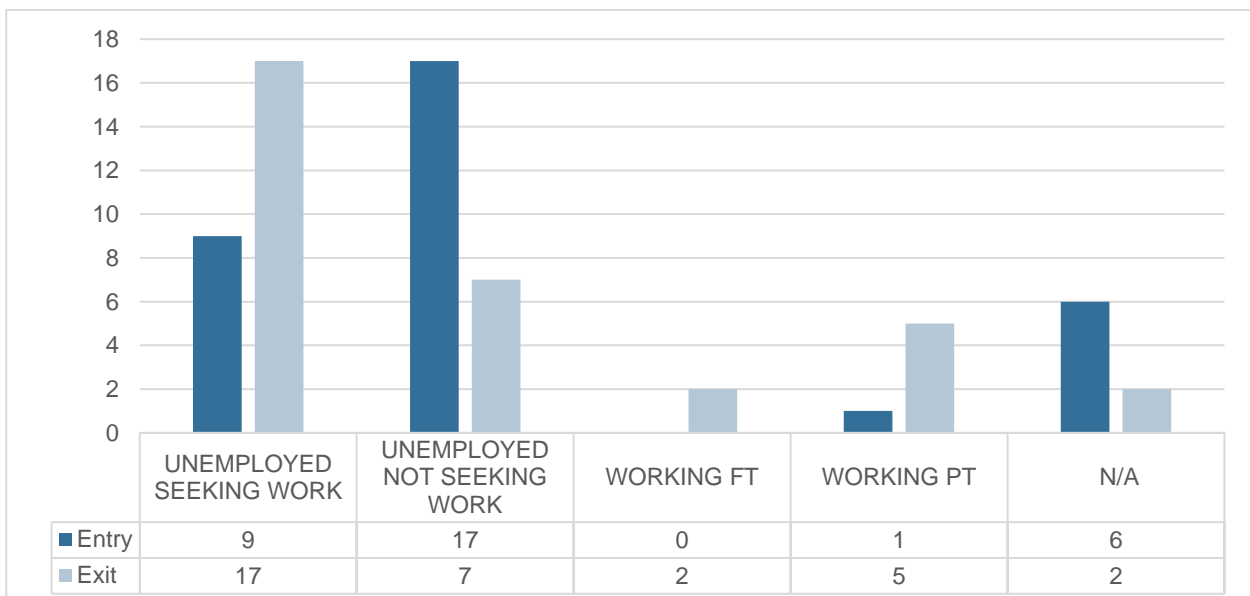


Figure 29 indicates that the older age group (16-18 year olds) were on entry most likely to be 'unemployed, not seeking work' and 'unemployed, seeking work' categories, reflecting their transition into the labour market. One was working part time and none were working full time at entry. On exit, there was an increase in the 'unemployed, seeking work' category (from nine to 17) and a converse decrease in 'unemployed, not seeking work' (from 17 to nine) reflecting the move into greater financial independence and jobseeking. There was an increase in those working part time (one to five) and full-time (zero to two) on entry and exit.

**Figure 29: Employment status (16-18 year olds)**



## Drug and alcohol use

Data is also collected on substance use. Figure 28 indicates, for the younger group (aged 9-15), that all except one indicated they did not use illegal drugs on entry. On exit, there was a small increase in substance use (cigarettes, alcohol and prescribed drugs). This may reflect greater exposure to substances by age 15.

**Figure 30: Drugs/substance use (9-15 year olds)**

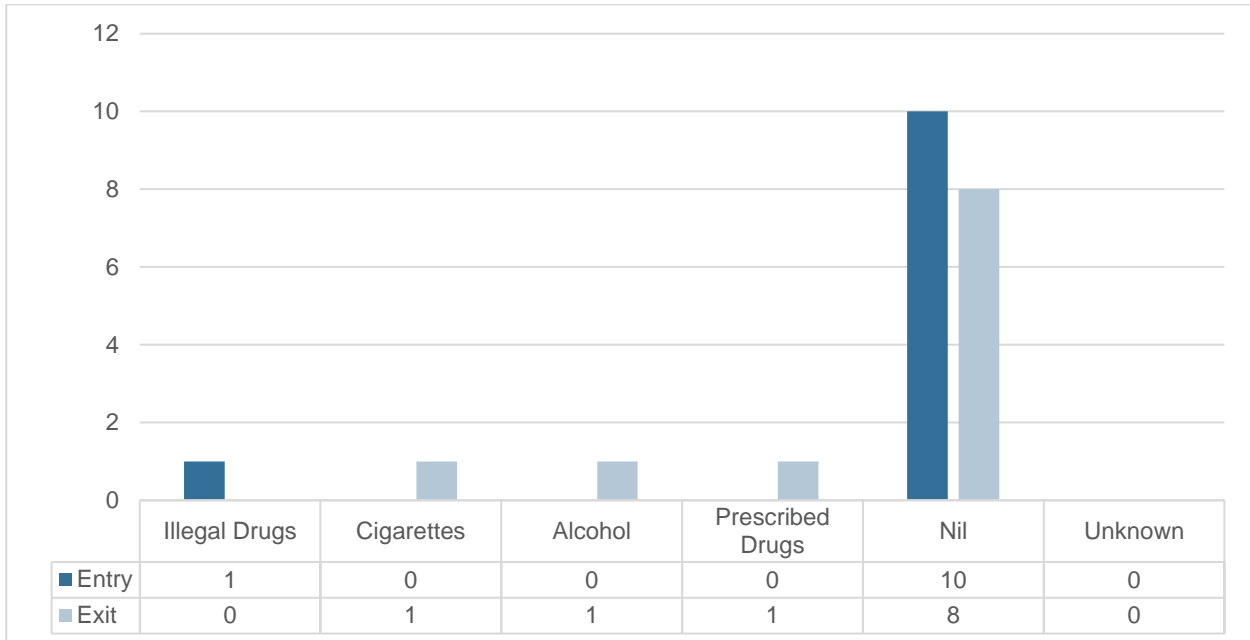
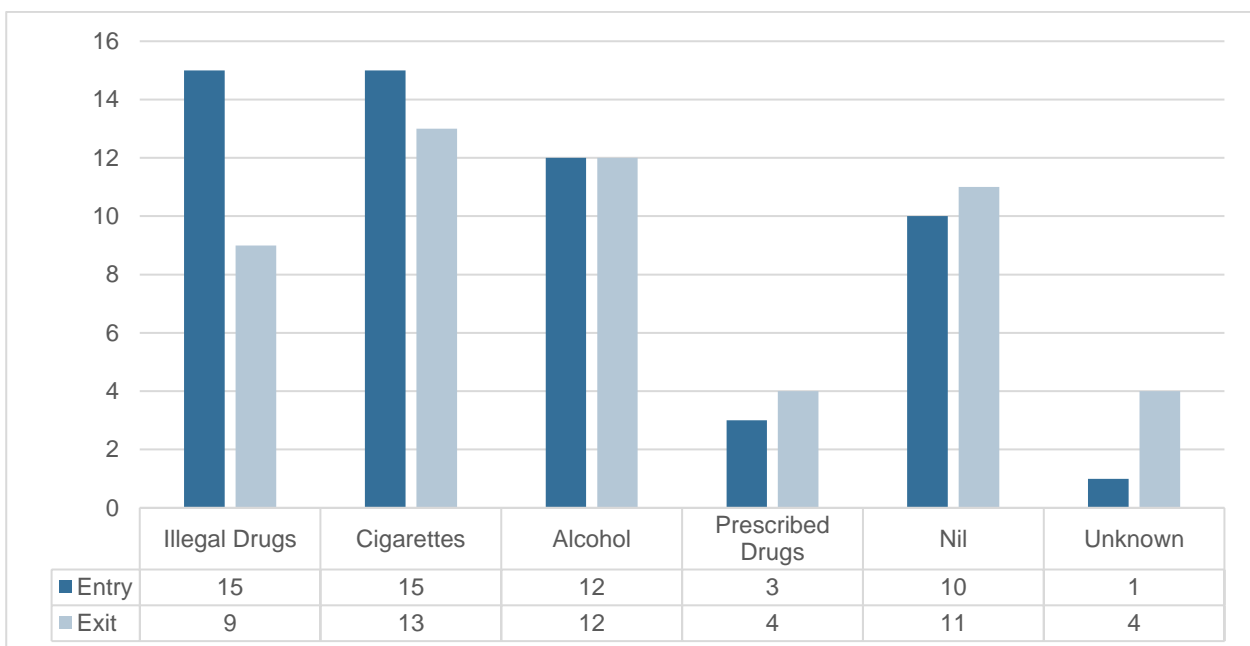


Figure 31 indicates, for the older group (aged 16-18), the data indicated a small decrease during the course of the YAP program for illegal drugs (from 15 to nine) and cigarettes (from 15 to 13), and no change for alcohol (12 and 12). Those using prescribed drugs increased at exit (from 3 to 4). Others claimed not to use any (10 at both entry and exit), or use was unknown.

**Figure 31: Drugs/substance use (16-18 year olds)**



## Relationship and contact with family

The YAP program also involves families and facilitates contact with family members. Figure 32 indicates that for younger children (aged 9-15) that unsupervised contacts increased over the program with both parents, as well as for sibling contact. On exit, there was an increase in residing with mothers, fathers, siblings and others, indicating restoration to parents, and also residing with siblings and others. There was a decrease in supervised contacts with both mothers and fathers by exit.

**Figure 32: Actual family contact (9-15 year olds)**

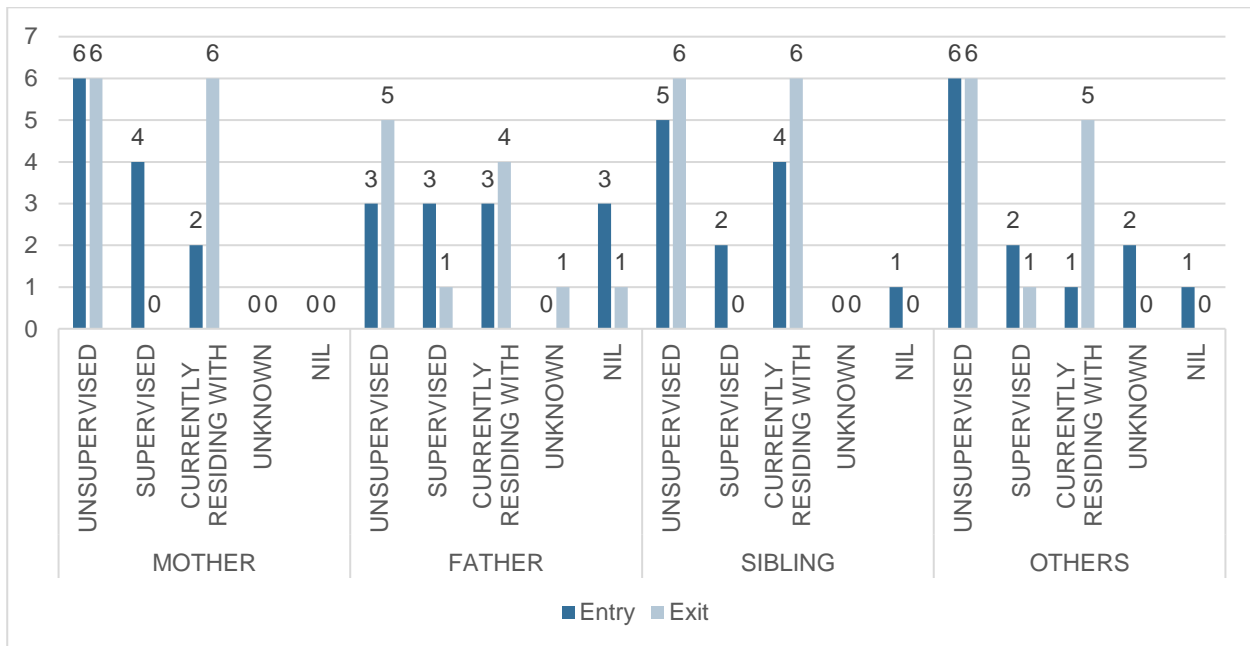
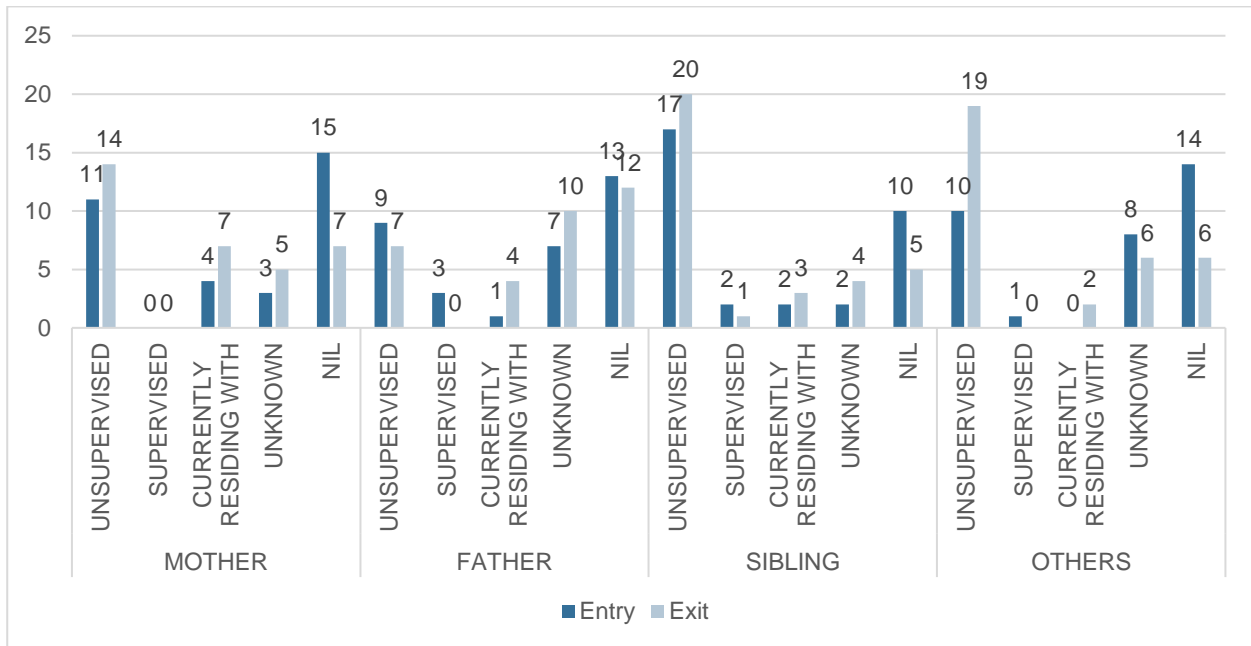


Figure 33 indicates that for the older group (aged 16-18) unsupervised contacts increased with mothers and siblings between entry and exit, but decreased with fathers slightly. On exit, there was an increase in residing with mothers, fathers, siblings and others, however numbers residing with family members was small. There was a reduction in nil contact with mothers by exit, but a smaller reduction in nil contact with fathers on exit. This indicates those in the YAP program had more contact with family members over the course of the program.

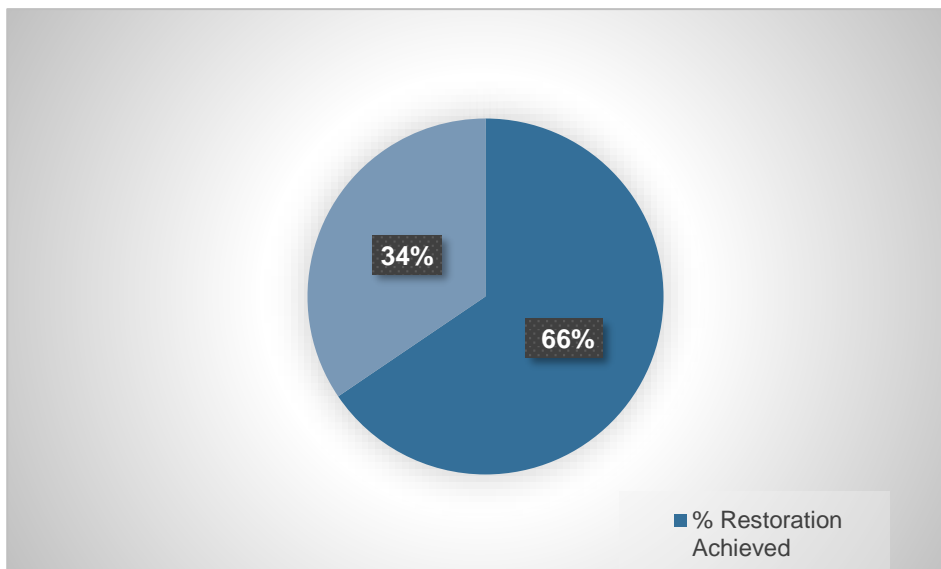
**Figure 33: Actual family contact (16-18 year olds)**



**Restoration**

The YAP program also involves families and may include a goal of restoration. Figure 32 indicates that for those young people who did have a program goal of restoration, this was achieved in two thirds (66%) of cases.

**Figure 34: Percentage of participants with a program goal of restoration where restoration was achieved**



## Appendix B Discussion guide – young people

### Preamble:

We have developed a range of activities that include warm ups, group brainstorming, individual data collection tools.

Workshop will involve two researchers so that one person is able to provide one-on-one support for young people throughout the sessions. Dr Jennifer Skattebol is a highly experienced researcher with children and young people and is trained in trauma informed research methods.

The purpose of these activities is to determine how young people evaluate the YAP program

The placement status and needs of young people on entry to the program and what, if any, difference did YAP make to:

- the young person's living arrangement
- linkages to community
- educational engagement, outcomes and aspirations
- vocational engagement and aspirations
- health needs
- relationship and contact with family
- involvement with youth justice system

### Introduction to project and session

- Researchers introduced and a brief overview of the project –why evaluation of programs are important for program improvement, why they as program participants are the best informants about the program, how we manage consent and confidentiality, how we will manage any criticism of the program in constructive and confidential ways, what outputs they can expect to see.
- Explain why we talk to young people as experts
- What the session will involve: structure of activities – why we move between individual and group activities
- Rules for the day (including that they can stop an any time etc) – treating each other respectfully
- Explaining consent and how children can opt out at any point in the process. Particular attention will be taken to ensure they understand they can withdraw work they have already contributed and we will keep their participation in the data collection confidential and they will still receive a voucher. Throughout the session, researchers will check



they still want to be involved asking them if they 'want to continue' and if they 'have had enough now'.

Drawing before and after experiences

## **Key tool:**

Paper and pens

## **How tool will be used:**

Each participant will be asked to write down and/or draw their experiences of the following before and after their connection with YAP. Responses can be posted in a sealed box so each young persons' story remains confidential in the group. These will be done one by one in order.

## **A bit about you**

How long have you been in the program or since you graduated? Goals of program

- Do you get support to enrol in school, or training, or with finding work?
- Are you involved in sport or other activities?
- Do you feel like you are supported to make changes towards being healthier?
- Do you have family contact and/or discussions about family relationships?
- Do you feel like you have a stable living situation?
- Do you have goals that you are going to pursue in the future?

## **Describing their personal experience of the journey**

Tool: Individual worksheet

Young people will be offered a worksheet that helps them clarify their own thinking about the program and answers will be posted in the box (with a code that links their answers to their previous work.

- What it felt like when they first were matched with an advocate?
  - Is there a trusting relationship between young persons and Advocate? Do you feel like they are available to you 24/7?
  - Were you involved in the development and review of your Individual Support Plan?
  - What was difficult about the process?
  - What was good about the process?
- Did they have conflict with the advocate?
  - What was it about?
  - How was it resolved?
- What did it feel like as they approached graduation?
  - What was difficult about the process?

- What was good about the process?
- What were three things they had learnt from having a mentor?
- Name three good things about the YAP Program?
- Name three things that could be changed or improved.

### **Group discussion**

Young people will be asked about program improvement.

- What makes a good advocate?
- What do advocates offer young people?
- Are there any aspects of the program that do not need improvement?
- What should LWB do to make a better experience for young people?

# Appendix C Discussion guide – staff

LWB YAP Evaluation Prompts for interviews/focus groups with staff Name:

Position:

Length in role:

Number of staff reporting to the role:

Number of young people supporting (if relevant):

Previous Evaluation – were you interviewed, what was that like, did anything come out of it that you'd like to highlight?

## 1 Describe your role

## 2 What is the underpinning philosophy of YAP?

What is your understanding of:

- The philosophy underpinning the YAP?
- Program fidelity?
- Theory of Change? Are you aware of this?
- What is the strengths-based approach?

[Revise YAP Core Principles]

How are they played out in practice? How does the YAP work for:

- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander young people?
- CALD young people?
- Young people with disability?

## 3 Professional development & self care

Training – what have you received?

Supervision and support? Vicarious Trauma

How do you work protectively for yourself, and for young people – what keeps everyone safe?

#### **4 Role**

How to know that the Advocate is the right match for young people? What happens if they are not?

Advocate – availability to young people

Who is the Aboriginal Advocate, how does that work?

Boundaries what do you understand about availability after hours?

How is your role delivered? Do you do more/less than the 15 hours per week for 6-9 months?

Family focused – how does this work with OOHC? Foster Carers?

Parents/family and community supports for young people who graduate – how does this work – who keeps them supported and connected?

#### **5 Outcomes for young people**

Is restoration the main goal, or what other outcomes would you like to see? What do you think YAP can make happen, that wouldn't happen otherwise? How do you measure this?

How is this used to improve the program – fed back to staff? To management? To YAP Inc?

The Care Team and the Individual Support Plans – how do these work – success, challenges?

Who has graduated from the program (young people) – where to? What happened for them? Any follow up support/track progress?

What systems are in place to help the program achieve best possible outcomes for young people? What are missing?

#### **6 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation**

What works well at the moment?

What could improve this?

#### **7 Management/governance of the program**

Steering Committee – US. What about Australia?

Management, delivery, fidelity, infrastructure?

#### **8 Key achievements, strengths and potential of the program?**

#### **9 Key challenges – ideas to overcome them?**

## Appendix D Roles and Responsibilities

### Roles and Responsibilities (from YAP procedure manual)

The **YAP Advocate** will work with each client, family and care team members to ensure they efficiently fulfil their advocate role:

The advocate will uphold the LWB and YAP values across all domains of their practice.

- ✓ Comply with all LWB and YAP Inc. policies, code of conduct, procedures and practices, external funding body requirements and legislation.
  
- ✓ Apply and uphold principles of equity and anti-discrimination in the workplace and adhere to organisational and legislative Health, Safety and Environmental requirements.
  
- ✓ All advocates will abide by *Children and Young Person Care Protection Act 1989 (NSW)* in particular in mandatory reporting and confidentiality.
  
- ✓ The advocate will maintain a maximum of 15 hours face to face contact and administration responsibilities when allocated a client. This will include but not limited to attending meetings and appointments with the client, contact with the family, weekly contact, advocate reports, ISP, reporting on CIRTS and training.
  
- ✓ Provide up to date information to YAP Field Supervisor, case managers, house managers, clinicians and any other relevant internal and external care team members.
  
- ✓ Contribute to a positive team environment by demonstrating best practice support of clients, proactive interpersonal skills and peer support.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will attend all relevant induction and training programs.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will attend an **Initial Meeting** with the YAP Field Supervisor, client and/or family to assist with explaining how the YAP service will be implemented.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will work with the client and family to complete necessary documentation including the YAP Tools, which will thereafter be clearly typed and documented in YAP Youth Advocate Reports, and uploaded onto CIRTS.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will work with the family to address basic needs. Emphasis should be on helping the family learn how to access resources on their own so that they are able to navigate their community and meet their own needs.

- ✓ The Advocate will work to develop a strong, genuine, trusting relationship with the client and family and demonstrate unconditional positive regard.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will begin preparing the client and/or family for graduation from first day of interaction.
  
- ✓ Every **four** weeks, Advocates will set up and facilitate a **Child and Family Team Meeting** (inviting all client chosen members) to review current goals progress, as well as set up specific new goals for the next 30 days.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will develop, with the client and other CFTM members an Individualised Service Plan (ISP) for the client based on the reason of referral.
  
- ✓ When required, the Advocate will make and attend all appointments relevant to the clients and/or family's ISP goals.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will adhere to the *short term* and *long term* goals set forth in the client's ISP and YAP Youth Advocate Report.
  
- ✓ Advocates will engage with relevant community resources and networks and create positive support networks within the community.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will set up and notify the YAP Field Supervisor of all meeting dates through calendar invites on Outlook.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will complete a fortnightly **Youth Advocate Report** and post it in the relevant client folder in the O Drive and on CIRTS, unless there is a crisis the YAP Field Supervisor will advise otherwise.
  
- ✓ YAP Field Supervisor to be advised of a crisis immediately. All incidents, and relevant information will be emailed to the YAP Field Supervisor and House Manager/Case Manager.
  
- ✓ When necessary, or as recommended by YAP Field Supervisor, Advocates will attend court and magistrate hearings with the client and/or family.
  
- ✓ If appropriate, the Advocate will work to mediate with (and if applicable between) the caregiver and external support networks (e.g., schools) to begin building a positive rapport between the two, so that genuine understanding and support can be established.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will communicate with all care team members as frequently as required, through phone and emails providing updates on any occurrences, information requests or to seek support.

- ✓ The advocate will complete all necessary documentation in a timely manner and CC the YAP Field Supervisor in all emails.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will attend fortnightly or monthly Supervision with the YAP Field Supervisor.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will attend all monthly YAP Team Meetings unless the Advocate has informed the YAP Field Supervisor otherwise.
  
- ✓ The Advocate will attend all required training and seminars unless the Advocate has informed the YAP Field Supervisor otherwise.