WE HEAR YOUTH

TRAINING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE LODDON AREA AS PEER RESEARCHERS

thorne
harbour
country

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ABOUT US

Thorne Harbour Country provides support, counselling, rapid HIV testing, resources and information around LGBTI wellbeing, HIV, Hepatitis C and sexual health across the Loddon Mallee. Operating out of the Community Hub in Bendigo, Thorne Harbour Country provides a safe place for the LGBTI community to connect and access information resources and referral services.

Thorne Harbour Country aims to celebrate and support the many communities and community initiatives that embrace and support LGBTI people and PLHIV whilst also responding to the identified barriers, working towards a more supportive and safe space for all.

Together with the Department for Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH - Loddon Area), Thorne Harbour Country has previously delivered a Rainbow Youth in Out of Home Care project and the Pathways to Pride webinar. Committed to youth voice, the We Hear YOUth project has been the next step in our partnership with DFFH Loddon and in our work supporting regional young people, in all their diversity, to inform the design, delivery and evaluation of youth projects and initiatives - to ensure these are more inclusive and representative of diverse youth voices from the region.

OUTCOMES, PRACTICE AND EVIDENCE NETWORK

As part of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CFECFW), the Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network (OPEN) supports Victorian child, youth and family services to use and build evidence from research, practice and client experience to deliver better outcomes for children, young people and families.

The We Hear YOUth Project Worker connected with Dr Mandy Charman at the beginning of the project; initially providing advice and guidance on the development of the project theory of change and monitoring, evaluation and learning framework, Mandy then led the delivery of the project evaluation, assisted by Ella Perry and Dakhina Mitra.

We Hear YOUth: End of Project Evaluation Report

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OVERVIEW

The We Hear YOUth project, funded by DFFH Loddon and delivered by Thorne Harbour Country, ran from July 2020 - July 2021. The project's aim was to upskill a small group of young people in the Loddon Area in peer interviewing, so as to provide DFFH Loddon with an additional avenue for consulting young people in the region to inform place-based project and initiative design, implementation and evaluation, as part of the Department's adherence to the Client Voice Framework.

This end of project evaluation report provides insights into the project delivery - both practical steps and rationale, as well as assessing impact and providing insight into key reflections and lessons learned.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Youth-informed delivery approach was a key success factor

High level of achievement and progress towards short, mid and longer term objectives

Participants developed strong research skills

Participants reported improved confidence and insights into leadership and interpersonal skills

Participants and steering committee (even) more committed to youth voice

Strong group bonding and connections

Increased recognition of young people by organisations

Employment and pathways achievements

Participants reported deeper systems and organisational knowledge

SUMMARY OF KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Strong participatory model, with youth input and direction at the centre

Underpinning of strong partnerships and collaboration

Combining technical learning with practical work experience

Inclusion of leadership, interpersonal and group building activities

Focus on reflective practice and ethics

Level of commitment and passion of all involved

INTRODUCTION

The We Hear YOUth Project commenced in July 2020 as a 12-month project with the aim of providing high quality and youth-centred training to build a pool of trained and skilled youth peer interviewers from across the Loddon Area (Campaspe Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, City of Greater Bendigo, Loddon Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire and Mount Alexander Shire), as part of the DFFH's commitment to the Client Voice Framework. These participants would then be commissioned by government, council, and local organisations to activate youth voice in order to inform local policy, service design and delivery.

An additional aim was to build the capacity and work experience history of the youth participants, in order to better enable them to access tertiary education, training or employment pathways.

The We Hear YOUth Project commissioned OPEN, CFECFW to develop a formative evaluation at the completion of the project to examine progress towards outcomes, the effectiveness and learning from the partnership delivery model, as well as identify recommendations and lessons learned to inform next steps in establishing a sustainable, peer researcher network able to fulfil the full objectives of the Project.

This document outlines key features of the Project, provides a project logic model, evaluation objectives, key evaluation questions, data collection methods, analysis and reporting processes and timelines.

RATIONALE

The DFFH Loddon Population, Health and Community Wellbeing Unit (PHCW) has funded a number of youth-focussed projects within the Loddon Area, all of which aim to embed youth co-design and client voice principles within project governance, design, implementation and evaluation to ensure that they are strategically and operationally driven by young people for young people.

It had become evident, through these project efforts to consult with young people, that some young people prefer to talk to other young people when contributing their voice and views to projects. The PHCW identified a lack of young people trained with the skills and knowledge required to safely and ethically conduct interviews with their peers, which would help break down the barrier for some young people to participate and inform the development of place-based projects, programs and initiatives within the Loddon catchment area.

Indeed, contemporary research identifies that best practice for gathering the views of young people to inform projects, policies and research is through a peer-to-peer approach, as most young people prefer to talk to other young people. Peer interviewing is seen as an effective method to create a safe, secure and youth friendly environment and to enhance youth engagement rates (YACVic, 2018).

Further, the importance of ensuring engagement and input by young people in the development of policy and practice is embedded within government policies and frameworks, such as in the DFFH Client Voice Framework, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which highlights children and young people's right to participate in decision making that affects their interests.

PROJECT GOALS

The objectives of the We Hear YOUth Project were to:

1. Develop knowledge, skills and capacities of youth researchers (peer interviewers) in order to:
   - Provide young people with the option to communicate with another young person when contributing their voice, views and ideas to inform place-based projects and initiatives in the Loddon Area; and
   - Provide government and local community organisations with a channel for engaging more young people in local decision making.

2. Develop and enhance young people's capacity and work experience history.

3. Be a learning pathway into a range of training, education or employment trajectories.

4. Over time, create clear channels for youth voice to inform and direct place-based projects, programs and initiatives (including in the areas of project governance, design, implementation and evaluation), making them more relevant, effective and appropriate as well as providing a safe and nurturing support and services environment for young people in the region.

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Impact

More young people in the Loddon Area participate in projects, benefiting their health and wellbeing.

Social policy and place-based projects, programs and initiatives within the Loddon Area are informed by client voices and, in turn, are more relevant, effective and appropriate, providing a safe and nurturing support and services environment for young people in the region.

Youth education, training or employment rates increase for the young people who participate in this project.

Long-term outcomes

There is an increase in the number of young people contributing their voice and views to inform social policy and service design and delivery.

Intermediate outcomes

There is a network of trained and skilled youth peer interviewers within the Loddon Area, who are actively called upon by the sector to provide the option of communicating with another young person in social policy and service design and delivery.

Trained and skilled young people have increased confidence and can articulate their competencies, and are more able to access tertiary education, training or employment pathways.

Immediate outcomes

Young people complete the training course and gain skills that enable them to safely and ethically conduct interviews with their peers to capture youth voices.

Outputs

A training course is identified or developed, and delivered by an RTO, which builds capacity in peer interviewing techniques to research and ethico-legal standards.

Inputs

Relationships with DHHS, LGAs, peer organisations, youth networks and service providers

Funding and non-financial support, such as Steering Committee and sharing of information and resources

Key assumptions

The most effective way of developing relevant and appropriate projects, programs and initiatives is to actively listen to client voices.

The economic, political, cultural and social environment is conducive to delivering the project.

A peer approach to interviewing and information gathering creates a safe, secure and youth friendly environment and enhances youth engagement rates.

Capacity and skills development leads to greater employability and personal development outcomes.

VALUES STATEMENT

The We Hear YOUth Project delivery model was underpinned by 10 core principles

The articulation of these was the result of at discussion at a steering committee meeting.

As a result, the Project Worker compiled a list of 10 values and principles, inspired by the project brief and informed by research into best practice in meaningful youth engagement and participation.

These values and principles guided the design and delivery of the We Hear YOUth Project, as well as providing a governance framework for the project.

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WE HEAR YOUTH PROJECT

Values and principles

1 WE SEE YOUNG PEOPLE AS EXPERTS

Young people's lived and intersecting experiences are unique, and their voices and views are crucial for developing relevant, appropriate and effective social policy and place-based projects.

2 PEER RESEARCH PRODUCES HIGH QUALITY DATA, INSIGHTS AND FINDINGS

The We Hear YOUth project will ensure young people are skilled to relevant peer research standards. We recognise their experiential knowledge and inside understanding of the issues being studied can enhance the richness and nuance of the inquiry.

3 WE ARE COMMITTED TO PEER RESEARCH AS A GENUINE PROCESS FOR CLIENT VOICE

The We Hear YOUth project will provide a framework for how to involve peer researchers as part of client voice, including in research and tool design, data collection, analysis and reporting back findings to their peers to 'close the loop'. We will ensure peer research is not extractive, transactional or tokenistic.

4 THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF PEER RESEARCHERS IS PARAMOUNT

We will carefully consider legal, ethical and data issues when designing and implementing the We Hear YOUth project, and will take both a proactive and protective approach.

5 PEER RESEARCH CREATES IMPACT

We will evaluate the We Hear YOUth project's research outputs, data quality, participant experience and wider societal or policy impact, to build the evidence base and demonstrate the value of peer research.

WE HEAR YOUTH PROJECT

Values and principles

6 **YOUTH PARTICIPATION MUST BE MEANINGFUL, AGE APPROPRIATE AND RESPECTFUL OF DIVERSITY**

The We Hear YOUth project will consider flexible options for participating, how to create safer and brave spaces, and tailor the project to the age and stage of participants.

7 **WE PROVIDE SUPPORT TO OUR YOUTH PARTICIPANTS**

Mentoring, coaching and general support will be provided to create an inclusive and accessible environment for effective and meaningful participation.

8 **WE VALUE PEER RESEARCH (YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH)**

YPAR is seen as an effective, appropriate and meaningful social research approach, with peer interviewing as one effective qualitative data collection method within this broader framework. The data and findings from this process will be taken seriously, to ensure young people's voices and views are heard and listened to.

9 **WE WANT TO HEAR FROM LESS HEARD VOICES**

Peer researchers will enable us to include the voices and views of those who may not otherwise have been reached in community consultation processes. This is important for the development of representative and inclusive social policy and place-based projects and initiatives.

10 **WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLE OF CO-BENEFIT**

Peer research has the potential to benefit those who participate by providing them valuable work experience and training that may increase their employability in the future. The We Hear YOUth project will look to provide recognition of prior learning. It will also provide mentoring, skills building and broader support for the youth participants in understanding their strengths and core competencies, and build their confidence.

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EVALUATION PURPOSE AND METHOD

The next section of this report provides the key findings of the We Hear YOUth Project evaluation.

The evaluation's purpose was to assess:
1. What was delivered as part of the Peer Interviewer model?
2. To what extent was progress made towards the key objectives, both in the short and medium term?
3. What were the key success factors and lessons learned?

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, with data captured throughout delivery and at the completion of the training course. Data was drawn from multiple sources:
- Review of project documentation
- Youth participant interviews and surveys
- Youth participant focus group
- Steering committee interviews and survey
- Project Worker Reflection Log

Thematic analysis was undertaken. Overwhelming, the views collected were consistent in identifying the same outcomes and opportunities for improvement. As such, key findings statements, unless otherwise stated, were confirmed by multiple sources.

The evaluation takes a developmental approach, appropriate for the We Hear YOUth Project's innovative and interactive nature. This means that internal data collection and evaluation support occurred throughout the project, in order to inform adjustments made to the model during implementation, alongside an emphasis on capturing success factors and learning to inform next steps (AIFS, 2018).

¨Developmental Evaluation (DE) is an evaluation approach that can assist social innovators [to] develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. [...I]t facilitates real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to program staff thus facilitating a continuous development loop. [...]

- *Development evaluation is particularly suited to innovation, radical program re-design, replication, complex issues, crises;*
- *In these situations, DE can help by: framing concepts, test quick iterations, tracking developments, surfacing issues.*¨

Source: 'Developmental Evaluation', BetterEvaluation

QUESTION 1:
WHAT WAS DELIVERED AS PART OF THE PEER INTERVIEWER MODEL?

The We Hear YOUth Project commissioned Victoria University (VU), in partnership with YLab, to develop and deliver a fully subsidised Peer interviewing training course for young people aged 15-25, involving a total of 13 sessions and one practical task. The course was delivered to six participants between February and July 2021.

This partnership came about through the Project Worker meeting with a number of potential Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), after having identified both the key components the training would need to incorporate, as well as the preferred youth-friendly and youth-informed delivery mode.

Two youth advisors, who had participated in previous DFFH youth voice projects, and the Youth Multicultural Commissioner who sat on the We Hear YOUth Steering Committee, worked together with the Project Worker to co-develop interview questions for the top three selected RTOs. The proposal from VU and YLab was particularly well-received, with the youth advisors recommending them as the preferred delivery organisations for the We Hear YOUth course.

OUR APPROACH

The We Hear YOUth Project utilised a dual delivery model:

- Partnership approach involving Thorne Harbour Country, Victoria University and YLab, as well as a steering committee comprised of representatives from each LGA, DFFH, LLENs and youth representatives

- Strengths-based, youth participatory action research (YPAR) approach; where the youth participants inform iterative, collaborative learning that feed back into the content and delivery

Diagram 1: The YPAR model proposed by VU & YLab
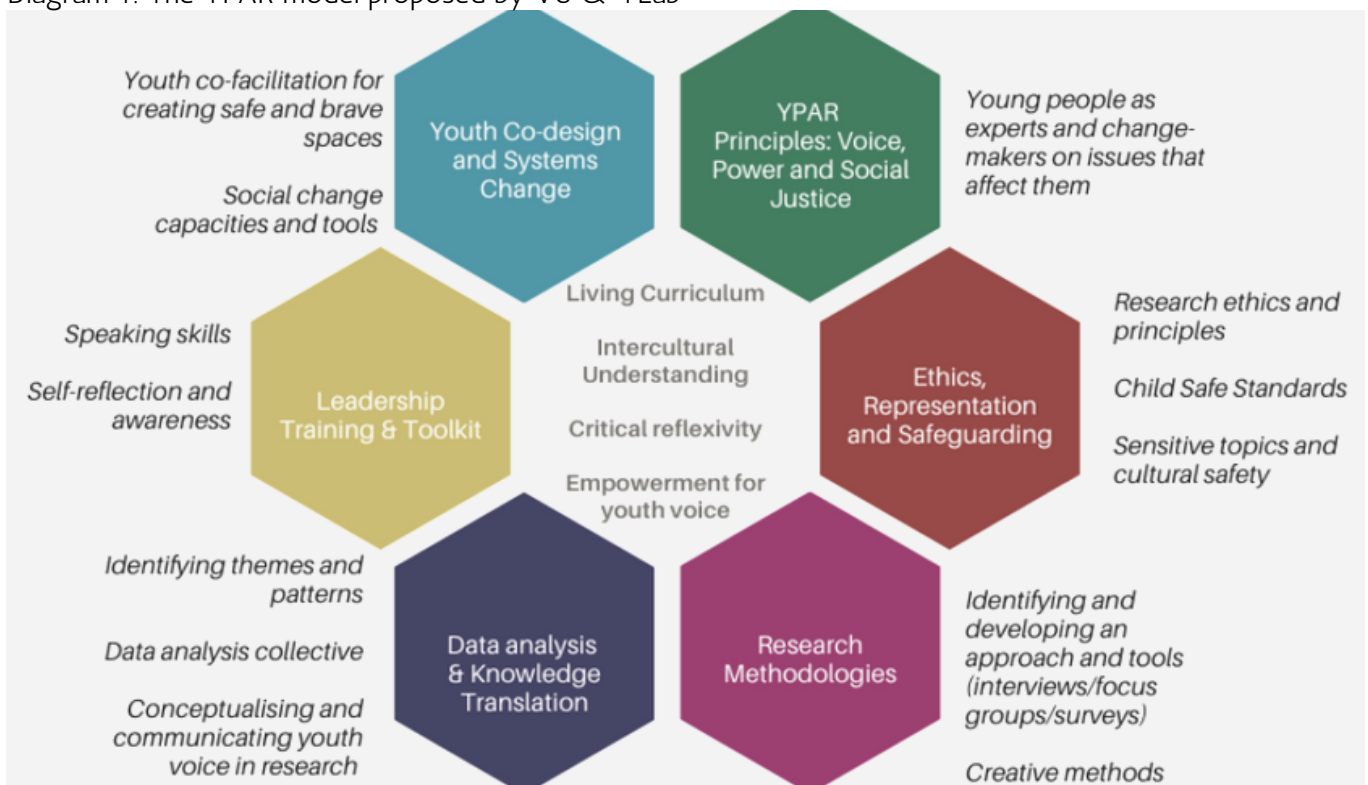
PROGRAM FEATURES

The We Hear YOUth training course provided research theory, leadership skills, parallel practice exercise and additional training sessions directed by the peer interviewers.

Features of the program included:
- Nine core training sessions, with a hybrid delivery model (online and in-person), covering each step in the peer interviewing process - see Annex 1 for detailed outline of learning areas and outcomes;
- Comprehensive Youth Peer Interviewer Handbook and four video modules, created by VU;
- Provision of the YLab youth participant leadership toolkit and portfolio as a key reference tool; and
- One practical exercise undertaken, with Campaspe Shire Council, to deepen learning through practice. The practical task provided in the field experience in engaging with a client, as well as assessing and delivering on the brief. Training for the practical exercise was embedded in core training sessions and was supported through additional shorter sessions.

Image description: Three of the We Hear YOUth participants standing outside the Goods Shed Arts building after their second in-person training session.

PRACTICAL TASK COMPONENTS

A key part of the project was the opportunity for the youth researchers to conduct a small peer interviewing project in response to a brief from a local government agency.

As part of this task, the We Hear YOUth participants had the opportunity to:

- Conceptualise the problem to be investigated and develop a research aim and questions in response to the broad brief provided by Campaspe Shire Council;
- Identify appropriate research methods to respond to the research questions and consider youth friendly research methods;
- Co-design the research tools (survey; interview schedule);
- Consider and enact ethical principles in conducting research with young people;
- Conduct one or more interviews with young people from the Loddon Campaspe region;
- Analyse the qualitative interview and survey data as part of the collective data analysis process (led by VU);
- Present the preliminary report for data validation to the Campaspe Youth Advisory Group and key Council members;
- Provide feedback on the final report; and
- Present the findings to Campaspe Shire Council

Image description: We Hear YOUth participants and the VU team analysing the Campaspe Shire 'community conversations' brief at the in-person training day in Echuca.

ITERATIVE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Additional features of the program, which were identified through the intentional iterative learning and developmental evaluation process, and implemented across the Project lifecycle, included:

Provision of further training and support to build participants' confidence and experience

1.Provision of further training and support to build participants' confidence and experience with research techniques and provide additional practical work experience. This was identified through participants noting that a short course is a good start but it is not sufficient to support them to easily manage paid work for organisations on their own.

Actions:

- Three additional sessions were held after the formal course ended (June-July 2021), allocated to respond to needs identified by participants. This provided opportunity for peer interviewers to direct their learning needs; and
- The Project Worker utilised budget underspend to book the youth participants into external trainings they identified, such as working with multicultural communities, and linked them into existing youth peer networks (e.g. YACVic) for ongoing peer mentoring and coaching support.

2. Support and skill development in administration and management of Activate Youth Voice's service offering: promotion, negotiation around responsibilities, appropriateness, assessment and management of risk, and payment were all identified as being needed to establish the local peer interview service delivery model.

Support and skill development in administration and management of AYV's service offering

Actions:

- The Project Worker facilitated a number of sessions June-July 2021 to co-develop and design the Activate Youth Voice promotional brochure, Client Conversation Checklist and planning for next steps; and
- The Project Worker drew upon Steering Committee members' connections and expertise, linking AYV up with potential auspicing bodies and a paid internship.

"The journey from 'We Hear YOUth' to 'Activate Youth Voice' (AYV) was really interesting. The youth participants decided they needed a name as a collective of youth peer researchers, and came up with AYV.

To me, this really demonstrated a key difference in the perspective from clients – who want to hear youth voice and views – and the youth researchers themselves, who want to help activate youth voice so that more young people are listened to and have a say in their community and for broader social outcomes."

We Hear YOUth Project Worker, reflections during evaluation key information interview

DELIVERY PROCESS

Key steps in the delivery process prioritised youth direction and oversight at each stage, and engaged local organisational partnership via the steering committee and community consultations in supporting the project.

These steps included:

- Establishing youth advisors to support the selection of training providers, in order to ensure the appropriateness and alignment with project values and principles;
- Involving youth advisors and local organisational partners to support recruitment of participants;
- Responding to youth direction and needs through the delivery and finessing of the course content;
- Jointly delivering and supporting the course by VU, YLab and Thorne Harbour Country, each bringing their unique skills, experience and competencies; and
- Establishing a Steering Committee of representatives from DFFH, local councils, youth representatives and NCLLEN. The Steering Committee provided governance oversight and direction for key decisions, and also built interest and commitment from local organisations enabling them to learn through the journey.

See Annex 2 for a more detailed breakdown of additional project delivery features.

"THE PROCESS WAS IN-DEPTH AND INFORMED ME ABOUT PROPER CONVERSATION – IT WAS A DEEPER PROCESS THAN ANY OTHER ONES AND GAVE ME GOOD KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO GO ABOUT [PEER RESEARCH]."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

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TIMELINE

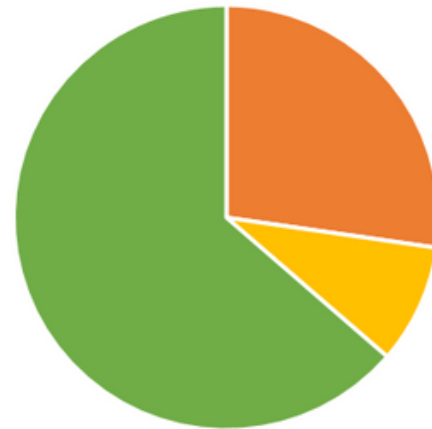| DESCRIPTION OF WORK	START DATE	END DATE
PHASE 1 • Consultation and relationships building • Course/RTO scoping	July 2020	Sept. 2020
PHASE 2 • RTO confirmed • Participant recruitment • Course curriculum design • Practical experience scoping with Steering Committee members	Oct. 2020	Dec. 2020
PHASE 3 • Participant selection • Training course delivery & practical experience • Mentoring and support	Jan. 2021	May 2021
PHASE 4 • Additional program features, informed by identification of needs by participants • Continued mentoring and support • Evaluation	June 2021	July 2021

YOUTH RECRUITMENT

Recruitment for the We Hear YOUth Project took place November 2020 to January 2021. 14 applications were received, representing five of the six LGAs in the Loddon Area. Given the timing of recruitment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and specifically at the end of the long lockdown in Victoria, this was seen to be an excellent result.

The Project Worker intentionally focused on ensuring applications to, and promotional materials for, the course were youth-informed, highlighted diversity and inclusion, and were accessible.

INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

LGBTI+ | Youth with a disability | Unemployed, underemployed or struggling to find work | Living with mental illness | Young carer

Age

■ 12-15yo   ■ 16-18yo   ■ 19-25yo

Reasons for applying

I want to learn skills related to research, change-making and leadership

I am looking for an opportunity to increase my skills and employability

I am passionate about making sure young people's voices and views are heard by the people who make decisions about our services and programs

This course complements what I am studying / the work I am already doing

I am looking for a bridging opportunity in the community services / youth work space

I want to access an opportunity that is for young people in my area

This course would help me see if this is an area I would like to work in

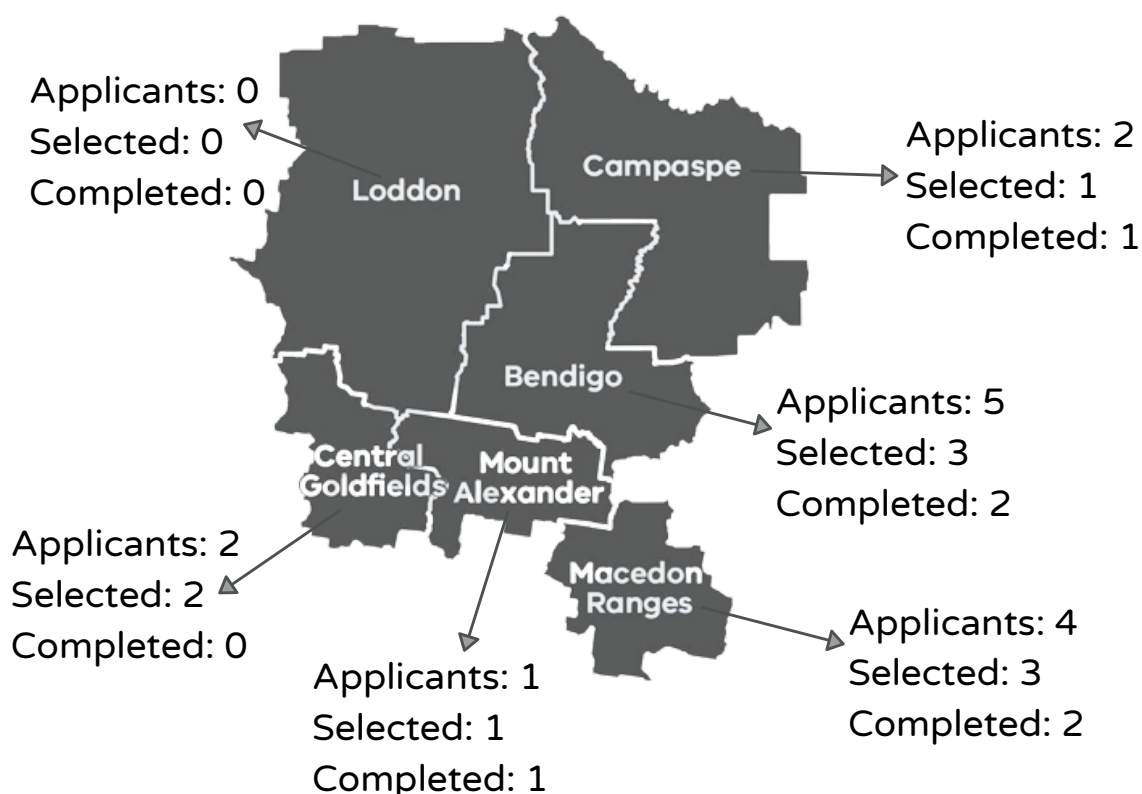We Hear YOUth: End of Project Evaluation Report

PARTICIPANT RETENTION

A total of six participants completed the course:
- All participants were between 20-24 years old;
- Two thirds of the group were currently studying at University or TAFE, with the other two working part time but indicating intent for further education; and
- Two thirds of the group had previous leadership experience in advisory or community organisations.

Further:
- Young people who were not selected either opted out themselves after attending the introductory session, or did not respond to emails regarding their application;
- The course commenced with 11 participants, with five young people withdrawing within the first few weeks (15-19 year olds) due to competing school, sports and volunteer commitments. This provided a key learning as discussed further below.

Applicants: 0
Selected: 0
Completed: 0

Applicants: 2
Selected: 1
Completed: 1

Applicants: 5
Selected: 3
Completed: 2

Applicants: 2
Selected: 2
Completed: 0

Applicants: 1
Selected: 1
Completed: 1

Applicants: 4
Selected: 3
Completed: 2

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QUESTION 2:
TO WHAT EXTENT WAS PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS OBJECTIVES?

Key short- and medium-term objectives were achieved by the project, with some progress towards longer term outcomes also achieved.

Outcomes reported included:

- *Improvement in the participants' confidence, skill development and capacity across a wide range of competency areas;*
- *Increased capacity and work experience history; and*
- *Clear contribution to building educational and employment pathways, along with actual employment opportunities.*

Progress toward longer term objectives has also been made, with the Project demonstrating the potential and need for peer interviewers to activate youth voice in order to support more relevant effective and appropriate project, policies and initiatives.

These effects are likely to more fully felt overtime, but the availability of skilled peer interviewers and the increased recognition of their value within local organisations is a positive step towards the longer term objectives of the project.

It is likely that, for these benefits to be fully felt going forward, consideration will need to be given to how to support the operationalisation of the peer interviewing model into practice within the Loddon Area, for instance through continued learning and implementation support.

OUTCOMES DELIVERED

Overall, when asked to capture their experience with a single word, participants used terms such as:

- *"Empowering"*
- *"Educational"*
- *"Passionate"*
- *"Life changing"*
- *"Bonding"*
- *"Non-tokenistic"*

More specifically, participants reported gaining understanding and skills in key research skills such as interviewing, understanding a brief, planning questions, coding and reporting.

"MASSIVE AWARENESS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND ITS POTENTIAL – FOR EXAMPLE I USED TO SEE PEOPLE TAKE PHOTOS – THOUGHT THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR GALLERIES – BUT I HAD NO IDEA THAT IT CAN BE A DATA SOURCE."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

"RESEARCH INTERVIEWING SKILLS. BUILDING ON WHAT I ALREADY HAD - I COULD SEE MYSELF IMPROVE AS I DID MORE INTERVIEWS. BY THE END I WAS LIKE 'NOW I'VE GOT IT'."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

Reasonably enough they felt that this knowledge would be further consolidated with more practice and exposure, particularly in ethics, coding and analysis, but saw this as a natural part of the process.

CONFIDENCE

Participants reported gaining improved confidence and insights into leadership and interpersonal skills.

> "CONFIDENCE IS BIGGEST – NOT JUST MY OWN BUT TO SEE OTHER'S CONFIDENCE GROW AS WELL …. AGE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN ISSUE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE - WE MAY NOT BE CONSIDERED SERIOUSLY BECAUSE OF OUR AGE - BUT NOW I AM CONFIDENT THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER – I HAVE EXPERIENCE IN THIS."
>
> *We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion*

Specifically, participants reported improved confidence in expressing themselves, speaking publicly, working together and reflexive practice.

There were also many comments about gaining insights into themselves and others, inspired by better understanding of the power dynamics between people and how to challenge assumptions by asking: 'What am I not thinking of, who isn't here - what would they say?'

> "I KNOW MORE THAN I THOUGHT BUT ALSO HELPING OTHERS WAS ALSO HELPING ME – LEARNED FROM EACH OTHER – WE ARE SITTING AND THINKING ABOUT WHO IS MISSING AND WHAT THEIR OPINIONS MIGHT BE – GETTING USED TO DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND HELPED US SEE WHAT KIND OF CUES DO WE HAVE TO WATCH FOR IN THE SOCIAL WORLD."
>
> *We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion*

ACTIVATING YOUTH VOICE

Participants reported gaining enhanced commitment to playing a role to activate youth voice and improve young people's connections and engagement to their community. They stated that part of the value of this to them has been understanding the value of collaboration and working together to build buy in to affect change.

> "I LEARNED ABOUT WORKING WITH OTHERS ... IT HAS BEEN A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH OTHER YOUNG ADULTS OF THE SAME AGE AND INTERESTS AND PASSIONS, CHARACTERISED BY A HIGH LEVEL OF CONTRIBUTION."
>
> *We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion*

GROUP BONDS

Participants forged strong and productive personal relationships with each other and identified this as having profound effect.

There were repeated comments of the amazing bonds and rapport developed within the group, which has been more recently reflected by their desire to continue to work as a collective going forward possibly through establishing the Activate Youth Voice group to support their work to activate youth voice.

> "I AM VERY CLOSE WITH OTHER PARTICIPANTS – THAT IS SUCCESS FOR ME – REALLY GOOD BONDS AND NETWORKS."
>
> *We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion*

SYSTEMS KNOWLEDGE

Participants reported gaining insight into how council and organisations work, and have built networks with organisations. They reported feeling more confident and capable both in communicating their views, adopting a more systems perspective and understanding operational considerations, such as what is appropriate and not.

These were new insights, and ones that were seen to be useful to position them to be more effective and influential in seeking change.

"I GAINED IMPORTANT EXPERIENCE 'IN THE FIELD', WHICH WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR EMPLOYMENT - THIS PROGRAM HAS GIVEN US FIELD EXPERIENCE [WHICH HELPS BECAUSE] OFTEN YOUNG PEOPLE GET REJECTED FOR INTERVIEWS AS THEY HAVE NONE. THEY TRY BUT WITHOUT EXPERIENCE IT IS HARD."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

"BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR PEERS. I WOULD SAY THE ABILITY TO HAVE A BROAD OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND STUFF LIKE THAT ... THE ABILITY TO SEE AND HEAR FROM PEOPLE FROM ALL DIFFERENT PARTS OF LIFE AND ... SEEING, LEARNING HOW THE WORLD OPERATES, SEEING THE EXCITEMENT OF PEOPLE TO TELL THEIR STORIES, THAT'S A BENEFIT."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

PATHWAYS

Participants reported gaining increased recognition of the range of opportunities available to influence and have a meaningful role in their local community. This has highlighted to a number of them the work opportunities available within their own communities, challenging the assumptions that they would need to move elsewhere for career purposes.

Participants also reported an increased interest in pursuing research and advocacy related in the futures with all participants interested in seeking further training in this area, adjusting existing course work to enable this and/or seek work opportunities.

> "I ALSO REALISED I LOVE RESEARCH EVEN MORE ... NOW I AM CONSIDERING CONSULTANCY AND ADVISORY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH WITH/FOR YOUNG PEOPLE."
>
> *We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion*

They all highlighted the value of these skills for their current education objectives, and/or how it has shifted their focus more on research and analysis roles as a career path. Participants mentioned an intention to pursue careers in research, peer interviewing, family violence roles, consultancy and youth advisory services. Participants also mentioned now being interested in working with councils or local organisations.

In addition:

- *Participants have been able to use the experience with peer interviewing as an experience on their resumes, with two participants successful in gaining employment during the training; and*
- *Participants are now interested in creating their own business directly as a result of the program to "work as a collective and go on to do peer interviewing …as a group and contract out to organisations."*

QUESTION 3:
WHAT WERE THE KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED?

A range of key success factors were identified as working well and contributing to the success of the project. These included:

1. The strong participatory and co-development philosophy that placed, at the centre, youth input and direction, as well as organisational partnerships.

2. The fact the young people have taken this project in their own direction, which demonstrates their degree of ownership over this process, and the project's success in activating and inspiring.

3. The focus on reflexive practice and ethics associated with identifying and managing power dynamics in the interviewing process. This was identified as a particularly strong aspect of the training model, which provided the participants a new way of examining and assessing themselves, their place in the world and supporting others to 'shine their voices'.

"I FELT LIKE WHEN I SHARED IDEAS THEY WERE HEARD AND THEY WERE RESPECTED, AND I FELT LIKE I WAS GIVEN THAT SPACE TO DO SO, WHICH THEN OBVIOUSLY HELPED A LOT."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

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4. The partnership and collaboration approach between Thorne Harbour, VU and YLab, and the steering committee.

This provided an opportunity for mutual learning and exchange across the organisations and resulted in the development of further peer interviewing opportunities within local organisations. It also provided the young people with improved networks, organisation understanding and recognition of the opportunities available to them in their local area, with one young person commenting that they were realising that it may not necessary to leave their local area to pursue further education or employment

Steering Committee members reported that the project, as it was DFFH funded and supported had increased awareness of peer interviewing and the importance of the youth voice amongst their organisations, which was a positive step. The formation of the Steering Committee had fostered local organisation networks, and the availability of trained peer interviewers would provide additional options to seek young people's input into local decision making.

"JUST THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT FROM VU AND KATE – EVERYONE – THEY WOULD HAVE MOVED MOUNTAINS FOR ANYTHING WE WANTED – AND IT MEANT THAT WE GOT A LOT OUT OF IT."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

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5. The peer interviewing model combining technical skill development, in parallel with a focus on building participants' ability to take on advocacy and leadership roles to drive overall change in the community towards youth activation.

This provided a broad value to participants and supported translating theory into practice in the field. It also responded to participants' differing learning styles.

In particular:
- Technical research skills were combined with training in leadership, communication, facilitation and advocacy skills and practical 'in the field' exercises;
- Participants built networks within local organisations, actively demonstrating and communicating the value of youth voice and providing real experience in advocating and building organsiational buy in;
- Undertaking the theoretical and practical activities in parallel maximised understanding and provided an opportunity to apply new knowledge and strengthen skills development in a supported way. The theory was considered challenging at times but it was given meaning through its practical application; and
- The combination of theory and leadership, interpersonal and group building activities also supported the development of strong connections, trust and rapport amongst the participants. This was identified by them as one particular highlight of the course. It was fun and engaging.

"IT WAS ALSO VERY INTERACTIVE AND WE WERE BRAINSTORMING AND LEARNING USING VARIOUS METHODS – PROVIDED A DIVERSE ATMOSPHERE TO LEARN."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

LESSONS LEARNED

There were a range of key lessons and opportunities for improvement which were identified as emerging from project. These included:
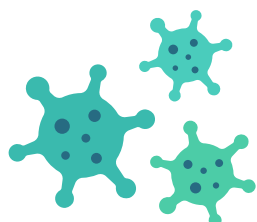
1.The effect of COVID on recruitment processes and delivery mode changing these activities from mainly face to face to include a high level of online delivery. This was identified as having an impact on applicant numbers, and opportunities for young people to engage with each other, interact with client organisations for briefings and access young people to interview in the practical exercises.

2. The project was ambitious in relation to timelines, with development and delivery being planned for one year. This is a short time frame for an innovative project, with a part time project manager. Impacts of the tight timeline included:

- Inability to build strong rapport, before the recruitment process, with organisations that could have supported diverse young people to apply. This rapport has now been built and has led to training and practical practical exercise opportunities, for instance with Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services (LCMS);
- The intense course load (over five months) appears to have contributed to the withdrawal of six participants within 2-3 weeks of commencement (although this was not the only factor); and
- The perception that some aspects of the project were a bit rushed and participants finding it difficult to catch up after missing sessions due to illness.

3. Smaller than expected number of participants and reduced diversity in applicants completing the course. Six participants completed the program from an initial starting group of 11. Those that withdrew were the younger participants (under 20). Factors which contributed to this were:

- Use of online promotion and the intensive program requirements making it difficult to recruit or retain applicants from diverse backgrounds and differing ages. It was observed that those 15-18 years old particularly may have a high load of high school and other commitments; and
- Course material may have been experienced as overwhelming by younger participants, along with feelings of being intimidated by older participants.

4. Course structure and content was considered excellent but it was acknowledged as intensive and that it would have been beneficial to have further practical and internship experience, as well as further time to consolidate learning and skills related to ethics, coding, analysis and reporting dimensions.

We Hear YOUth: End of Project Evaluation Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of suggested implications of key lessons

Overall, it is recommended to further develop and test the Peer Interviewing model developed through this Project, to build from the learnings to increase the number of participants, their diversity and age range. Further testing of the model would also enable for more conclusive findings about the effectiveness of the approach regarding the longer term objectives, as well as to make it replicable across different contexts. Recommendations include:

1.Longer time frame for undertaking recruitment, preferably face to face. The Project Worker has established strong foundations for diverse organisational engagement, which could now be built on.

2. Extend duration of the training course to 12 months, to maximise the opportunity for diverse young people to attend alongside their existing commitments, and to provide time for further practical exercises. This timeline is feasible given that the course has already been developed and tested. Previous graduates could become mentors to new participants ensuring ongoing sustainability.

3. Adapting and testing the course to ensure age appropriate course material, splitting delivery to 12-14, 15-19 and 20-24 year olds.

4. Exploring the potential to obtain recognition of prior learning or credit for course completion, for instance applying for the course to be certified (12-18 month process), and/or offering it as paid internship.

5. Provide further support to organisations to ensure clients understand requirements for engaging peer interviewers, such as what is appropriate, what constitutes sufficient direction and support, how to ensure opportunities for input are genuine and embody the key values and principles, managing ethics and safety consideration, and fulfilling requirements around remuneration. The Client Guidance Toolkit and Checklist have been co-designed with the participants to support this need, but will require ongoing testing and continued development to ensure it meets peer interviewer, interviewee and client needs.

CONCLUSION

The We Hear YOUth Project has been successful in developing the skills of a group of young people in peer interviewing and advocating for improved activation of youth voice.

It has demonstrated the potential value and need for the peer interviewing model among organisations within the Loddon Area. It has also provided benefits to the participants in providing them a valuable skill that they can, and have, utilised to support their education and employment pathways.

For the full benefits of this innovative model to be felt, further consideration now needs to be given to building the model into operation: what is required to support the youth peer interviewers to successfully activate youth voice through peer interviewing and drive improvement in local projects, services and social policy.

All involved in the project identified the need for a second delivery stage of the project, in order to scaffold and support the young people and clients to effectively and safely navigate service provision. They indicated it is not a reasonable expectation that the peer interviewers would at this stage be able to navigate this process themselves.

As such, the Project Worker has assisted Activate Youth Voice to connect with potential auspicing bodies as well as with a potential paid internship that would provide the continued support and mentoring to further shape the group and build on their skills and competencies.

"BEING PART OF THIS WAS EVERYTHING THAT I WAS PROMISED, EVERYTHING THAT WAS SAID WOULD HAPPEN, HAS ... AND IT WAS JUST FUN."

We Hear YOUth participant during evaluation focus group discussion

WHAT'S NEXT?

1 ## Activate Youth Voice (AYV)

AYV is now a group of four active graduates from the We Hear YOUth Project. They have developed a promo brochure and will be working next with City of Greater Bendigo to facilitate peer focus group discussions to evaluate the Youth Strategy, and continue working with Campaspe Shire Council. They are also exploring being auspiced and have joined a youth peer network for ongoing learning and mentoring opportunities.

2 ## Commitment from clients

Steering Committee members have provided a number of upcoming paid opportunities to Activate Youth Voice over the next 6-12 months.

3 ## Researching the Model

Victoria University has been conducting research on the model itself, and will publish an academic article late 2021.

Image description: The 'Activate Youth Voice' logo, designed by the We Hear YOUth Project participants

ANNEX 1: WE HEAR YOUTH COURSE LEARNING AREAS AND OUTCOMES

LEARNING AREAS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Session 1: Introduction to Community Based Research for young people	- Develop an understanding of community-based research and its value - Learn about youth researcher's role in voice, representation and change in community settings - Identify and gather key information needed to understand a social issue in your community
Session 2: Creating a leadership roadmap and growing your voice (YLab)	- Investigate your leadership vision and how to activate change - Build self-confidence and self-awareness to lead social change
Session 3: Research methods for youth voice and ensuring safety in research	- Understand research methodology and its purpose in the research process - Be able to distinguish between different approaches and what they are used for (Qualitative/Quantitative) - Be familiar with a range of data gathering methods for research with young people (Interviews, focus groups, surveys) - Develop an understanding of key ethical principles guiding research with young people

LEARNING AREAS	LEARNING OUTCOMES
Session 4: Creating connections and building brave spaces (YLab)	• Explore what a diverse and inclusive space might look and feel like and how it contributes to creating a brave and connected space • Use the GROW framework to develop communication skills
Session 5: The art of the interview and youth friendly methods	• Develop an understanding of interviews as a method of data collection • Be familiar with youth friendly approaches to interviewing and the benefits of peer interviewing • Understand the informed consent process and safety strategies when interviewing young people • Co-design interview guide for research project • Practice your interviewing and facilitation skills
Session 6: Building your social change toolkit (YLab)	• Develop an understanding of co-design as a method for approaching social change work • Learn about the importance of Admiring the Problem, Building Solutions, and Scaling for Impact. • Engage with YLab's facilitation guide and reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses as a facilitator of social change

Learning Areas	Learning Outcomes
Session 7: Data analysis collective: Developing themes for youth voice and act	• Develop an understanding of qualitative data analysis and interpretation • Be able to identity key strategies for rigour and credibility in qualitative and community-based research • Analyse data collected as part of the brief using thematic analysis
Session 8: Crafting narratives for change: Translating findings into action	• Develop an understanding of different types of action and change (e.g., education and awareness raising, advocacy and policy change) • Identify key stakeholders for change • Develop an understanding of how to plan for change, including the medium for communicating findings and how to increase the reach of your research
Session 9: Telling the Activate Youth Voice story (YLab)	• Develop an elevator pitch for your youth research collective (Activate Youth Voice) • Envision next steps for Activate Youth Voice
Additional sessions based on topics identified by We Hear YOUth participants	• Evaluation • Facilitating peer focus groups • Paid volunteering, auspicing or consultancy? Business pathways for Activate Youth Voice

ANNEX 2: DETAILED FEATURES OF THE PROJECT DELIVERY

The We Hear YOUth Project encompassed a number of key features. The following provides a detailed breakdown of each step undertaken in the project delivery.

1. Identification or development of a youth peer interview training course, to be delivered by an appropriate training provider:
   - Background research on existing course, accreditation processes
   - Meetings with potential RTOs
   - Stakeholder outreach to:
     - Determine how We Hear YOUth might fit with their areas of work and/or existing projects in the region;
     - Whether they would be interested in sitting on the steering committee;
     - Any information on existing courses or ideas for course content;
     - Insights into issues and opportunities for young people in the region; and
     - Any potential practical opportunities they could provide.
   - Co-development with youth advisors of criteria for youth-friendly training provider
   - Youth panel interview of training providers to determine final selection

2. VU & YLab selected and contracted as the training provider, to deliver:
   - Training course: Nine sessions; three in-person and six online
   - Four video modules
   - Youth participant leadership toolkit and portfolio
   - Practical task delivery
   - 'Researching the Model' report

Image description: Still of the We Hear YOUth promotional video with Khayshie Tilak Ramesh, the Victorian Multicultural Youth Commissioner, a We Hear YOUth steering committee member

3. Promotion of the fully subsidised training opportunity to young people living within the Loddon Area catchment

- Development of promotional material (social media tiles, emails, video), informed by youth advisors
- Presentations to key groups across the region, e.g. Council youth advisory groups, headspace youth reference group
- Circulation via various groups and networks

4. Shortlisting of 10-12 young people aged 15-25 years to participate in the training course

- Application form focused on their reasons for applying, intentionally designed to be youth friendly and open to people from all skill levels and backgrounds
- Information session by VU & YLab to gain informed consent
- 1:1 meetings with the applicants and their parent/guardian to talk with them further about their learning style, understanding of and commitment to the project

5. Provision of study and general wellbeing support to the youth participants by the training provider and Thorne Harbour Country

- Check ins (mix of phone, text, email and Slack)
- 1:1 coaching upon request (eg reviewing job applications, providing a written reference)
- Offering wellbeing support via EAP and informal catch ups

6. Integration of action project as part of the training course for 'theory to practice' element of learning, via practical task assigned by Campaspe Shire Council

- Working with steering committee members to identify a practical task that was real and fitted within the project and client timeline
- The process facilitated with the youth participants included:
  - Analysing the brief
  - Determining research methods (peer interviews and youth survey)
  - Designing interview and survey questions
  - Conducting peer interviews
  - Dissemination of youth survey
  - Collective data analysis
  - Individual coding
  - Reflective logs and activities
  - Presentation of findings

7. Capturing of real time information and learnings about the project as it evolves:

- Early evaluation by VU after second training course session
- Mid-way evaluation by Thorne Harbour with project team and steering committee
- Observations captured via weekly project team meetings to inform delivery
- Presentations to steering committee on evolution of project design and delivery

8. Creation of a contact database to enable the DFFH to engage the trained youth peer interviewers in future DFFH funded place-based projects as required:

- Co-design session with youth participants in order to determine how they want to be engaged and contacted
- Co-creation of Activate Youth Voice booklet and launch event

9. Review of the project outcomes and learnings, via engaging the Outcomes, Practice and Evidence Network from the CFECFW.

10. Governance via steering committee:

- Confirmation of members
- Development of Committee Terms of Reference
- Six-weekly meetings
- Intentional support of Youth Co-Chair, utilising the "Toolkit for meaningful engagement of Young People on Boards and Committees"

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