



Outcome and Impact Model

Research Summary



Our Outcome and Impact Model

At Youth Focus, we work to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young Western Australians aged between 12 and 25.

Our vision is to create a world where a young person's mental health does not get in the way of them being who they want to be.

Impact is a key pillar of our **2023-2026 Strategic Plan** – our commitment to making a measurable difference, and demonstrating the credibility, value and meaningful impact of our services. In line with this, we invest in and continuously improve how we understand and measure the outcomes and impact of our services for young people, their carers and families, and their communities. The purpose of our work in this area is to ultimately develop and improve our services, leading to better outcomes and impact.

Our **Outcome and Impact Model** underpins this work, embedding outcomes and impact into how we plan, deliver, assess, develop and report on our services.

It allows us to meet the changing needs of young people, while remaining connected to our core purpose and strengths as an organisation.

As part of the model, we use three types of evidence to understand and demonstrate the connection between our services and our organisational outcome and impact areas: research, service and lived experience expertise, and outcome measurement

This document summarises the academic and best practice research we use to understand and demonstrate our outcomes and impact. We continue to review and add to our research base as required.



Positive experience of help seeking

At Youth Focus, we're committed to ensuring that all young people who access our services have a positive experience of seeking help for their mental health.

This includes feeling safe, heard and supported, and empowered to make progress towards their goals (Westberg et al., 2022). We want young people's experience of accessing our services to empower them to seek help when they need it in future.

Research shows that young people are significantly more likely to continue seeking support when they feel listened to, understood, and free from judgment (Rickwood, 2005). This psychological safety is essential in establishing a therapeutic alliance between young people and the staff that support them — a key component of effective treatment (Rickwood, 2005).

Recognising that each young person has distinct goals and experiences (Mei et al., 2020), Youth Focus adopts a person-centred approach that prioritises their active involvement in their care. This is in line with a shift among youth mental health services to adopt approaches that prioritise the clients' involvement in the treatment process (Boardman & Dave, 2020). Centring the young person empowers them to identify treatment goals and guide decisions about the direction of their care.

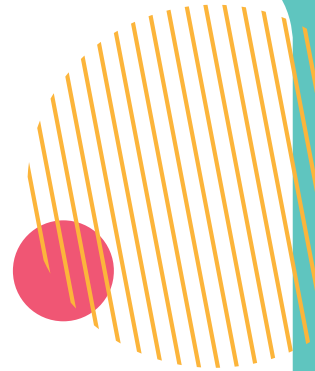
By focusing on shared decision-making, we recruit evidence-based practices to align with The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018) and the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2008). Common in these frameworks is the need for organisations to proactively encourage young people, their families and friends, to engage in decision-making in their own care.

Ultimately, research tells us that a strong relationship built on trust and collaboration not only promotes positive help-seeking experiences but also encourages young people to remain engaged and motivated throughout their mental health journey, leading to improved outcomes (Karver et al., 2018).

Many of Youth Focus' services operate using a Single Session Thinking approach, ensuring that we make the most of each encounter with clients by treating each contact, but especially the first, as though it may be the only one (Bloom, 2021). This solutions-focused process is led by the young person's self-defined needs and goals.

The empowerment young people get from progressing towards their self-defined goals not only reinforces their sense of agency, but also promotes autonomy within their mental health journey, which is vital for young people to progress towards their goals beyond the therapeutic context (Westberg et al., 2022). This enhances their self-efficacy to access mental health support in future if they need to (Mei et al., 2020).

When our services are delivered in remote communities, such as at Youth Focus Meekatharra, we carefully consider the cultural safety of our services, to ensure that all young people have a positive experience of help seeking. We do this in line with the Aboriginal Social and Emotion Wellbeing model of care first published by Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly (2014), as well as local consultation. The model is considered a multidimensional concept of health, including mental health and wider aspects of wellbeing such as connection to country, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family, and community (Danto & Zangeneh, 2022).



Mental health challenges have a reduced effect on young people's lives

At Youth Focus, we work to support young people to better understand their mental health and build their capacity to support themselves, to ultimately reduce the

Our focus on providing accessible health promotion and early intervention services is informed by the knowledge that seeking help in the early stage of a mental health challenge can lead to improved functional and overall wellbeing outcomes in the long term (Snowden et al., 2023).

Supporting young people early in their mental health journey helps us to prevent and minimise the negative effects of delayed access to treatment and prolonged periods of untreated mental health concerns, including increased risk of chronic or comorbid mental health concerns, suicidal behaviours, and the need for complex and costly interventions (Mahdanian et al., 2022; Snowden et al., 2023). The long-term consequences of untreated mental illness can include reduced quality of life, poor overall health, productivity losses, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Snowden et al., 2023).

Empowering young people to take a proactive role in their mental health journey has been shown to reduce the duration and severity of their mental health challenges over time (Mei et al., 2020; Salaheddin & Mason., 2016). Therefore, by providing person-centred mental health support at a critical stage, we can support young people to minimise the long-term effects of their mental health challenges (Westberg et al., 2022). This aligns strongly with our vision – a world where young people's mental health doesn't get in the way of them being who they want to be.

By providing accessible, supportive services, we help young people build a foundation of resilience and understanding of their mental health (Westberg et al., 2022). In alignment with the definition of wellbeing set out by the World Health Organisation (World Health Organisation, 2020), best practice mental health services build young people's capacity to cope with daily stressors, recognise their abilities, and fulfil their mental health goals, improving their overall quality of life.

Research shows that reducing mental health challenges requires a multifaceted approach to address negative mental outcomes for young people and ultimately promote recovery (MacDonald et al., 2018). At Youth Focus, we design our services to address young people's diverse needs at every stage of their mental health journey.

The improved functioning and confidence that effective early intervention support provides can lead to young people experienced increased confidence and engaging more effectively with work and study (Baxter et al., 2022). Sustainable, meaningful employment is a powerful factor in mental health recovery, but young people experiencing mental health challenges experience significant barriers to employment (Modini et al., 2016; Drake & Wallach, 2020). Our work and study support services are designed to assist young people experiencing mental health challenges to obtain and sustain employment that they are interested in and passionate about.

Carers and families can better support young people

For many young people, their family will be a primary source of support and guidance.

There is strong evidence that understanding family contexts and including family in young people's care, with the young person's consent, can lead to positive outcomes in a range of health and welfare settings (Hayes et al., 2021; Scully et al., 2020). At Youth Focus, we prioritise family inclusive practices across all services, recognising the pivotal role carers and family can play in a young person's mental health journey, from help seeking to experience of service to recovery.

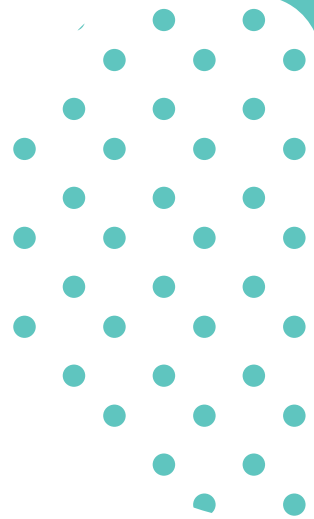
Family inclusive practice is an approach to service design and delivery that acknowledges the significance of family in a young person's life and actively promotes and supports their involvement in the treatment process (Strawa, 2022). It draws on research that shows involvement of family in a young person's mental health treatment can contribute to improved psychological adjustment and quality of life, a quicker recovery process, improved family interactions and decreased parental stress (Foster et al., 2016). Engaging with the family of young people also acknowledges the important role that family plays in the young person's life and helps to better support family to care for the young person outside of the professional care setting (headspace, 2022).

Recognition of the supportive role family can play in improving a young person's mental health has made family inclusive practice a focus of mental health strategies, practice and service guidelines and research. The Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan emphasises the centrality of young people and their families in how care is planned, delivered and implemented (Australian Government National Mental Health Commission, 2017).

The inclusion of families can look different for each young person depending on their context, needs, and preferences (Hoadley et al., 2017). Single-session family consultation is an example of how Youth Focus applies family inclusive practices for young people accessing counselling, where appropriate. It is an approach to a structured meeting involving a young person and their nominated family members and support people, designed to be brief and help young people and families identify and address relational and communication issues that may contribute to distress and conflict (Hopkins et al., 2017).

Active inclusion of family in young people's care gives carers and families a chance to better understand mental health and support young people, including other family members (Park et al., 2018). This has been shown to improve engagement and outcomes for young people (Fitzgerald & Galyer, 2007).

We also recognise that carers and families play a significant role in young people's help seeking behaviours. Young people are most likely to talk to family or friends as the first step in help-seeking, and family is often the first to notice a change in a young person's emotions or behaviour that may signal the onset of a mental health or substance use problem (headspace, 2022). As part of Youth Focus health promotion and community engagement activities, we deliver mental health education sessions to carers and families, equipping them with the awareness and skills they need to support young people's needs and identify the need for external support.



Communities are healthier and more engaged



In Australia, 15% of young people aged 18–24 experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in 2017–2018 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020).

This figure seems set to rise as Mission Australia and the Black Dog Institute found that young Australians aged 15–19 years experienced an increase in psychological distress, from 18% in 2012 to 26% in 2020 (Wyn, 2022). Despite substantial evidence showing the elevated prevalence of mental health concerns among young people, many do not seek professional help due to stigma, lack of awareness and other barrier to access (Radez et al., 2021).

Youth Focus strives to reduce barriers by creating spaces where young people can have open conversations about mental health in their communities. Young people can access our services at no cost to them or their carers, without a referral. We partner with schools and other services to ensure we are meeting young people where they are, when they need us. By prioritising these elements, we not only support young people to achieve meaningful outcomes, but encourage active participation in their communities.

Improved mental health among young people has a community-wide impact, by enhancing their ability to make meaningful contributions to their communities using their unique skills and experiences (Baxter et al., 2022).

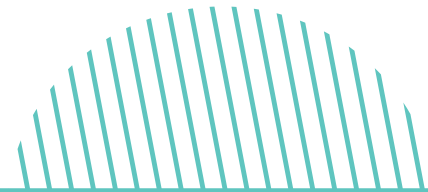
Accessible youth mental health services have been linked to stronger community engagement and social connectedness, which offers a sense of belonging, purpose, and social support for young people (Schiavo, 2021). Not only does this benefit the community, but it optimises young people's wellbeing and creates more connected communities (Schiavo, 2021; Uhlhaas et al., 2023).

Positive, early help seeking and treatment enhance young people's abilities to use healthy, adaptive coping mechanisms to manage everyday life (Wyn, 2022). Conversely, untreated mental health challenges can lead to unhealthy coping behaviours and trauma responses, including substance misuse, aggression and, in turn, incarceration (Mahdanian et al., 2022; Australian Law Reform Commission, 2018). As such, addressing the barriers to help seeking is therefore critical not only for improving the mental health of young people, but also for fostering healthier communities overall.

With improved mental health, young people are more likely to model healthy behaviours, help seeking and coping mechanisms to their families and peers (McGorry et al., 2008).

This can lead to reduced mental health stigma at a societal level and contribute towards a decreased sense of isolation in communities (Kellezi et al., 2019). At Youth Focus, we know that mental health stigma can be particularly prevalent among certain groups, such as young men and those living regionally, where cost and distance to services are additional barriers. Our annual M8D8 campaign encourages young men to support each other by talking, listening and sharing how they look after their mental health.

When we work with and listen to young people, and encourage them to be leaders in their communities, we pave the way for healthier, more resilient young people, and more engaged, connected communities.



Western Australia's mental health system is more effective



Youth Focus can't achieve our vision, a world where young people's mental health doesn't get in the way of who they want to be, without working as part of a collaborative and connected system of care.

We believe that all young people should be able to access the care they need, when they need it, in a place or format that suits them. We know we will not be the right service for every young person, which is why we work to enhance the sector's capacity across the board through partnerships, collaboration, research and advocacy.

As outlined already, early intervention mental health support for young people reduces negative outcomes in the long term, including the risk of developing more severe, long term disorders, requiring complex and costly interventions (Mahdanian et al., 2022; Snowden et al., 2023). By addressing mental health challenges early, mental health services not only enhance the wellbeing of young people but also alleviate pressure on specialist and crisis services, enabling these resources to operate more efficiently and effectively (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Where early intervention strategies are not appropriate, seamless referral pathways to partner services are essential for an effective mental health system (National Mental Health Commission, 2021).

According to Lawrence et al. (2018), streamlined referral pathways lead to quicker access to care, which is crucial for young people who may be reluctant to seek help. When support systems are clear and accessible, young people are more likely to remain engaged with mental health services and receive the help they need before their challenges escalate (National Mental Health Commission, 2021; Westberg et al., 2022). To facilitate effective referral pathways processes, youth mental health services must develop strong relationships and partnerships with schools, communities, and health services (National Mental Health Commission, 2021). Effective, strong partnerships enable team-based care, which is critical in ensuring young people have access to the range of disciplines and supports that may be relevant to their needs (Orygen, 2021). Youth Focus uses warm referrals, colocation and service integration to reduce transition barriers between services, to ensure young people can access the most appropriate care as their needs change.

Evidence underscores the importance of integrated mental health service delivery, which facilitate seamless transitions between different levels of care and support (McGorry et al., 2024).

By focusing on early support and establishing effective referral processes through collaboration with other services, mental health services contribute towards a more robust mental health system for young people and communities (Collishaw, 2014).

Youth Focus works with a broad range of partners to establish integrated service models, which are shown to be more accessible and deliver better outcomes for young people than standalone services (McGorry et al., 2008). At a local level, each of our centres works closely with like-minded service providers in their regions.

We are committed to championing the mental health needs of young people and seek opportunities to raise young people's voices and concerns to influence policy and research, through partnerships with government, peak bodies, universities and research institutes. By centring young people, focusing on accessible, early support and establishing effective referral processes through collaboration with other services, we contribute towards a more robust mental health system in Western Australia.

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