

20242025

Annual Report



projectyouth.org.au



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We are grateful to the young people who have shared their stories with us this year. Storytelling continues to sit at the heart of our vision, shining a light on lived realities, challenging assumptions, and ensuring that young people's voices shape the decisions we make and the strategies we pursue. Your insights and experiences keep us grounded, reminding us why our work matters and how we must continue to evolve. The courage, resilience, and wisdom of young people are guiding us towards a future where youth homelessness does not exist.

At Project Youth, we deeply value and respect the Lived Experience of young people, parents, staff, and volunteers. We recognise that these perspectives are essential to our approach in designing and delivering programs. This report reflects the impact of lived expertise, including the insights, leadership, and advocacy of young people in shaping services that truly respond to their needs and aspirations. By centering and embedding these voices at every level of our organisation, we are building a culture of genuine partnership and shared leadership. Together, we aim to create a supportive and effective environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by young people experiencing homelessness and drives real systemic change.

*Names of young people have been changed in this report for confidentiality

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land on which we conduct our work, the Dharawal and Bidjigal peoples.

We acknowledge their ongoing connection to the land, ocean, animals and nature that surrounds us.

We acknowledge that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

We pay our respect to elder's past, present and future, as well as to all Aboriginal people on our staff team, in our community, and the Aboriginal young people we serve.

We are inspired by your stories, acknowledging you are the original story tellers from which we learn so much about caring for our oceans, land and each other in community.

We will walk gently on this land, honoring its history, conserving the environment, listening to the stories, learning the culture, and playing an active role in reconciling the past.

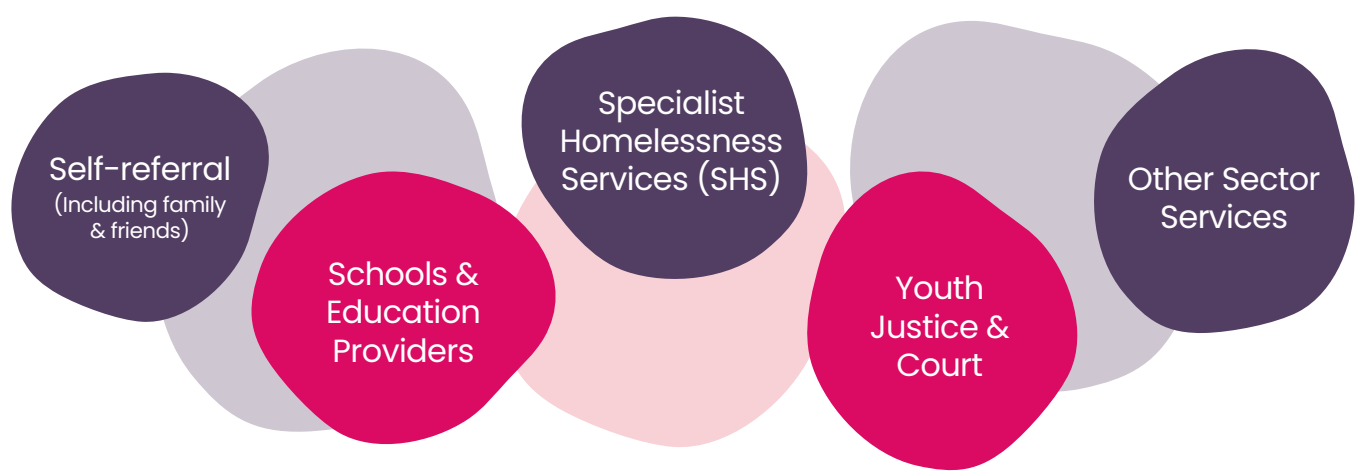
Thank you for walking with us in community to care for young people, and creating hope for a future with TREATY, VOICE and TRUTH.

Our Year in Review

Together, we supported **4,280** young people to be Connected, Safe and Achieving.



Main Referral Sources



Main Reasons Young People Needed Support from Project Youth



98 paid and unpaid team members at Project Youth

- 86% ARE PAID EMPLOYEES
- 31% ARE FULL TIME
- 12% ARE PART TIME
- 39% ARE CASUALS
- 10% ARE IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
- 26% ARE PAID YOUNG PEOPLE
- 12% ARE VOLUNTEERS



21,161 nights of accommodation were provided

\$52,532 in debt was recovered through Work Development Orders



Chair's Report

As I sit here reflecting on the past year, I am immensely proud of the work everyone at Project Youth has done to support young people in our community. Being on the Board of an organisation like Project Youth is deeply satisfying, but it also comes with challenges. We, like many in the sector, face rising costs, increased demand for our services, and an environment where funding is becoming harder to secure and sustain. In the past two years, one of the hardest realities we have faced is turning young people away (79% of our referrals for housing) simply because we do not have the vacancies or resources to assist. This remains one of the most difficult things for our staff to manage. Yet, despite these challenges, this year alone Project Youth supported over 4,000 young people with housing, education, employment, health, and community connection. That is something we can all be proud of.

We could not do this without the assistance of the funders, partners, and community members who walk this journey with us. From Zonta's ongoing commitment; to Shangri-La employing young people; NSW Young Lawyers choosing us as their charity of the year; and DCJ's continued support in the homelessness sector,

every contribution makes a difference. Together, we are building stronger futures for young people.

Young people themselves continue to tell us that one of their greatest challenges is finding housing after transitioning out of supported housing programs. Market rents are out of reach for many, and competition is fierce. In response, the Board approved the purchase of a unit that will provide two new exit beds to our housing options for young people. This is a first step, and we know much more is needed. Our next priority is to work alongside our community, partners, MP's and young people to co-develop creative and affordable housing solutions.

One of the most important commitments in our 2024–2029 Strategic Plan is embedding lived experience across all levels of decision-making at Project Youth. At a Board level, we have listened and co-designed pathways for young people to meaningfully be a part of Governance. We began by inviting young people with lived experience to observe our Board meetings and provide feedback. Another highlight was seeing YPAC (Young People Advocating Change) take centre stage



I am proud to report that this year we took a bold step forward by appointing two young people into designated **Lived Experience Director Roles**. This is the start of an exciting journey where young people are not only at the table, but are reshaping what governance can look like.



at our Annual General Meeting. They hosted the AGM and led a fireside chat with the Board where no question was off limits. This was such a powerful demonstration of power-sharing and accountability, and I am delighted that YPAC will continue to host our AGM in future years.

Our achievements extend beyond housing and governance. Through Café Social and our employment programs, young people gained job readiness training, placements, and meaningful work experience. Our education program supported those disengaged from mainstream schools to re-engage in learning and training. Our prevention programs helped young people and families address challenges before they escalated into crisis. These initiatives show that Project Youth is not only responding to homelessness but actively working to prevent it and create pathways out of disadvantage. It is equally important to acknowledge the challenges we encountered. We faced sharp increases in administrative costs such as insurance and electricity, expenses we cannot avoid. While we are fortunate to have reserves to draw upon for next year, this is not sustainable. We call on funders, government, corporate, and community alike to recognise that overheads are part of running safe, sustainable services and to shift towards funding the true cost of service delivery (see paywhatittakes.com.au).

Finally, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the young people who courageously share their stories, to our dedicated staff who walk alongside them every day, to the funders and partners who continue to back our vision, to our CEO Jodie for her leadership, our Company Secretary Sophie and to my fellow volunteer Board members – Tsae, Ben, Alison, Mel, Katherine, Tanya, and Vanessa – thank you. I also warmly welcome our newest Directors, Shirley and Aries, whose expertise and passion will enrich our work.

Together, we believe in a future where youth homelessness does not exist. And if it does occur, our commitment is to ensure it is brief and non-recurring.

Julie Robinson
Chair of Board

Our Young People

19%

of young people we support with housing identify as First Nations or Torres Strait Islander

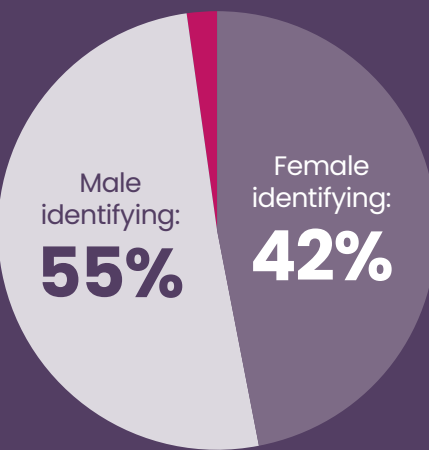
“I didn’t think I’d ever finish a course, but now I’ve got a **qualification and a job**. I’m proud of myself.”

Ages Supported

18-24 year olds
36%

12-18 year olds
64%

Non gender conforming/
non-binary identifying: 3%



90%

of the young people we supported with housing have previously or are currently accessing mental health services

12%

Percentage of young people in the care of the minister

“Having a safe place to sleep means I can focus on **school** instead of where I am sleeping tonight.”



About Us

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”
– Margaret Mead

At Project Youth, this belief drives us every day. For more than three decades, we have stood alongside young people facing homelessness, disadvantage, trauma, and mental health challenges. We know that with the right support, young people can overcome adversity, heal from trauma, discover their strengths, and create the futures they deserve.

Our vision is a future where youth homelessness does not exist and where every young person, no matter their circumstances, can thrive. We work with young people aged 12 to 24, offering safe spaces, trusted relationships, and holistic programs that address housing, education, employment, mental health, and wellbeing. Our services span the South Eastern Sydney region, including Dharawal and Bidjigal lands, with centres in Menai, Miranda, and Kogarah.

Since our establishment in 1992, Project Youth has grown into a comprehensive service built around three interconnected streams:

- Prevention – identifying early and preventing homelessness before it occurs
- Housing and homelessness support – ensuring safe and supported places to live
- Social impact through employment & training – creating pathways to sustainable independence

These streams are deliberately designed to work together, recognising that young people’s needs are rarely isolated. Central to this work is the inclusion of lived experience. Young people are not only participants in our programs, but they are also leaders, advocates, and decision-makers who shape the way we deliver services. By combining lived expertise with trauma-informed care, relational practice, and wrap-around support, we support young people to navigate challenges and strengthen their capacity to flourish.

This year also marked the conclusion of our 2019–2024 strategic plan, which guided us through significant milestones and laid a strong foundation for the future.

Building on these achievements, we launched our new 2024–2029 strategy. This bold roadmap strengthens our focus on prevention, ensures youth homelessness is brief when it cannot be avoided, and creates pathways so it does not reoccur. With this strategy, we are building on our past successes while driving toward an even greater impact for the future.

You can access the strategy at www.projectyouth.org.au/our-vision-and-strategy



Vision

A future where homelessness doesn’t exist

Purpose

To **PREVENT** youth homelessness from occurring, and where it does occur, ensure it is **BRIEF** and **NON-REOCCURRING**

Outcomes

Sense of **BELONGING & CONNECTION**
Minimising harm to promote **SAFETY**
Wellbeing through mental & physical **HEALTH**
Access to opportunities to **ACHIEVE**

Priorities

Lived experience is embedded in all decisions, design & delivery.
Sustainability to secure our future.
Youth **housing** is prioritised, and youth homelessness prevented.
Social impact and social enterprise creating new opportunities

Values

We are **courageous; creative; compassionate; & exceptional** and we promote belonging

Our Approach

At Project Youth, the foundation of our work is grounded in a comprehensive Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) framework. This framework was shaped by the voices of young people and families with lived experience, data from our programs, staff reflections, and research from trauma, psychology, social work, and youth work.

Trauma-Informed Practice is not an optional layer; it is the DNA of how we operate. It recognises the pervasive impact of trauma and ensures that safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and choice are embedded across every aspect of our organisation. These principles are reflected in our services, policies, leadership, recruitment, governance, and strategic planning.

This year, we deepened this commitment through the launch of our Rising Together Lived Experience Strategy and new governance initiatives, including shared leadership with YPAC (Young People Advocating for Change) and the appointment of more young people into decision-making roles across our organisation. By embedding lived expertise alongside professional expertise, we are reimagining what leadership and accountability look like, ensuring our practice is not only trauma-informed but also shaped and driven by those who have lived it.

Research consistently highlights the benefits of trauma-informed approaches in improving outcomes and engagement. Harris and Fallot (2001) describe TIP as a framework that acknowledges the prevalence and impact of trauma while prioritising safety, empowerment, and trust. SAMHSA (2014) similarly identifies trauma-informed care as foundational for better wellbeing outcomes, while more recent research shows the value of co-production and lived experience leadership in driving meaningful systems change (Byrne et al., 2019; Wallcraft, 2012).

Our framework is built around three core elements:

Principles

Trauma-informed and lived-experience principles sit at the centre of our work, shaping how we engage with young people, families, partners, and each other

Standards

Embedding consistent, evidence-based and co-designed practices across the organisation, ensuring our services remain accountable, relevant, and safe

Roadmap

Applying these principles and standards in practice with young people and families, supported by continuous reflection, co-leadership, and evaluation.

What We Believe

All young people deserve the right to thrive despite the disadvantages they may face

- Young people are experts by experience and the diversity of their lived experience is critical for service design, delivery and decision making
- Housing, education, employment, wellbeing, justice and social connections are all essential elements of ending homelessness
- Relationships that are based on trauma-informed and trauma-healing principles provide the foundations for effective evidence-based practice with young people
- Intervening early for targeted young people using evidence-based programs is cost effective.



Our Work

At Project Youth, we place safety, trust, and connection at the centre of everything we do. Our wrap-around support model ensures young people are met with compassion and linked to the right supports, whether through our own programs or with trusted partner services in the community.

Our services are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and trauma informed. Young people, their families, peers, or professionals can refer with the consent of the young person. From there, we walk alongside each young person to co-create safety, build trust, understand their goals, and co-design the most effective pathway forward. This process empowers young people to recover from trauma, strengthen their wellbeing, and build the foundation they need to thrive.

Throughout 2024–2025, over 4,000 young people engaged in multiple programs across Project Youth. This reflects both the complexity of their needs and our commitment to providing holistic, coordinated support. Research highlights that wrap-around and multi-service approaches are most effective in addressing disadvantage, reducing the risk of homelessness, and improving long-term outcomes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2023; SAMHSA, 2014).

Our programs remain focused on breaking cycles of homelessness and disadvantage while amplifying young people's strengths and lived expertise. Through our new Rising Together Lived Experience Strategy and governance pathways such as YPAC (Young People Advocating for Change), we are embedding lived and living experience at every level of our work, program design, service delivery, and organisational decision-making.



“

“Before Project Youth, I felt invisible. Now I feel like my **voice matters**. They helped me when I didn't even know I what kind of help I needed.”

In the past year, our work centred on five key areas:

- **Prevention** – Proactively identifying and addressing challenges before they escalate, ensuring early supports are in place to reduce the risk of homelessness.
- **Housing & Homelessness** – Providing safe and immediate responses to housing needs while building long-term housing stability and exit pathways.
- **Social Impact through Employment & Training** – Creating opportunities for education, skill development, and employment, enabling young people to achieve independence and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing** – Embedding trauma-informed, relational, and therapeutic supports across all programs to address mental health challenges and promote recovery.
- **Peer & Lived Experience Leadership** – Empowering young people with lived expertise to shape services, influence governance, and co-lead systemic change.

Through these strategic areas, we are creating meaningful and lasting change. Each young person we support is not only accessing services but also contributing to a movement towards a future where youth homelessness does not exist.

Preventing Youth Homelessness

At Project Youth, we know that preventing homelessness is not only possible, it is essential. Evidence consistently shows that intervening early reduces the likelihood of crisis, strengthens protective factors, and delivers long-term social and economic benefits (Hallett & Corbett, 2016; Masten, 2014; AIHW, 2023). Yet despite the research, systems continue to underfund prevention and focus on crisis responses. This imbalance is reflected in the fact that 958 young people in our region were turned away from homelessness services in one year. This is not a failure of young people, it is a failure of systems that wait until crisis before acting.

Our prevention work is built on four core areas:

1. Family Work

Family conflict, breakdown, and domestic violence remain the most common reasons young people are referred to Project Youth. Research shows that addressing family dysfunction early is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of youth homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008).

Our programs centre the young person within their family situation, while working with families to strengthen relationships, build skills, and increase safety. This includes family counselling and tailored support to address conflict and prevent breakdown, alongside ensuring protection where violence is present.

2. Youth Justice

We supported 312 young people with court issues in the last financial year, both at youth court in Sutherland and through our drop in court hub. Without early support, these challenges escalate and increase the likelihood of homelessness (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Our prevention work includes providing access to legal information, advocacy, and pathways that reduce systemic barriers for young people and their families, ensuring they are

not trapped in cycles of disadvantage. This support goes beyond addressing immediate legal concerns, it helps young people understand their rights, navigate complex systems, and resolve issues before they get into crisis. By intervening early, we reduce justice involvement, strengthen protective factors, and provide connections to further support.

Culture and Identity as Prevention: For Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander, Māori and young people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, identity and connection to culture are critical protective factors. Culturally safe prevention work strengthens resilience, fosters belonging, and builds pride, creating a foundation for positive life outcomes (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Across all our programs, we embed cultural safety and ensure young people's voices and identities are respected and celebrated.

3. Mental Health

Mental health is both a driver and a consequence of homelessness. National data shows that over 80% of young people experiencing homelessness have current or previous mental health conditions (AIHW, 2023). For the young people we support, that figure is closer to 90% for the young people we house. Early intervention in mental health, through counselling, peer support, and



building emotional regulation, helps prevent crises from escalating into homelessness. Research demonstrates that resilience-building in adolescence creates long-term benefits across health, education, and employment (Masten, 2014; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).

4. Education

Education is a strong protective factor against homelessness. However, many of the young people referred to us have already been disengaged from school for months, or even years. Long periods away from education limit future employment opportunities and increase vulnerability to homelessness (Mission Australia, 2020). Our education-focused prevention program provides flexible, supportive pathways back into learning, ensuring young people can rebuild confidence, gain qualifications, and transition successfully into employment or further study. Importantly, this support does not stop with the young person, we also work with their families to address the challenges that contributed to disengagement from education in the first place. By providing wraparound support to families as well as students, we strengthen relationships, reduce conflict, and create the stability needed for education to be sustained.

Our Approach

At Project Youth, prevention means more than reducing risks; it means actively building protective factors. By connecting young people with safe adults, strengthening families, ensuring access to education, providing legal advocacy, supporting mental health, and embedding culture, we give young people the best chance to thrive.

In 2024–25, our Prevention team supported 659 young people. Each of these interventions represents a step away from crisis and a step towards stability, resilience, and independence. We remain clear: prevention must be a national priority. Governments must shift funding and policy settings from crisis to prevention if we are to end youth homelessness. Until that happens, Project Youth will continue to lead, disrupt, innovate, and act, driven by the evidence and the lived expertise of the young people we serve.



Our Prevention Programs in 2024/25 Included

Family Work Programs

1:1 Family and Young Person Support

Individualised support for young people aged 12–24 and their families, focusing on building protective factors and strengthening family relationships. By working closely with both the young person and their family, this program helps improve communication, reduce conflict, strengthen relationships and create a more supportive environment.

Family Therapy

Delivered by a Family Therapist, this program provides counselling to young people and their families together. Outcomes are most effective when all family members actively participate in sessions, enabling healthier dynamics and long-term change.

Parenting Course

Run four times each year, this course equips parents of young people aged 12–24 with practical strategies to better understand and support their child. Parents build skills in communication, boundary setting, and positive parenting, helping to reduce conflict and strengthen relationships at home.

Grandfamilies

Tailored, individualised support for grandparents caring for young people aged 12–24. Assistance can be provided directly to the grandparent carer, the young person, or both, recognising the unique challenges grandfamilies face in providing stability, guidance, and care.

THRIVE

A weekly program for young mums, led by both a Support Worker and a Peer Worker and funded by Big Sister Foundation. THRIVE provides a safe space for young mothers to connect with peers, build confidence in their parenting journey, and access community resources, while reducing social isolation and fostering resilience.

Legal & Justice Prevention Programs

Court Support

Our workers attend Sutherland Court to walk alongside young people appearing before the Children’s Court. Every young person is supported to access Legal Aid and connected with local services, ensuring they do not face the justice system alone and have the right supports in place.

Culture Connect

A targeted group program for Pacific Islander and Māori young people aged 12–24. Culture Connect provides a safe space to explore cultural identity. By fostering pride, belonging, and understanding, the program helps strengthen protective factors against disadvantage.

Fusion Festival

Planned for October 2025, Fusion Festival will bring communities together to celebrate the richness of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Pacific Islander, and Māori cultures. This event highlights shared values and traditions, while promoting unity, inclusion, and respect across cultures.

Graffiti Program

Delivered in partnership with Sutherland Children’s Court, this program provides young people referred for graffiti offences with a positive alternative to entering the Youth Justice system. Participants are supported to take responsibility, develop new skills, and engage in restorative and creative pathways.

Work Development Orders (WDO’s)

All young people with accumulated debt, and who are supported by Project Youth, continue to have access to the Work Development Order scheme (WDO). Under the WDO scheme ‘disadvantaged people who have accumulated fines can clear their debts by undertaking activities which benefit them and their local community’.

Mental Health Programs

Emotion Skills

Delivered in partnership with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Emotion Skills is a group program built on the practical tools of Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT). It is tailored to meet the needs of young people at risk of homelessness, equipping them with strategies for emotional regulation, resilience, and improved wellbeing.

Swell Being Surf Camp

Piloted in 2024, Surf Camp provided young people with the chance to strengthen their mental health and wellbeing through the therapeutic benefits of surfing, ice baths and connection. By combining physical activity, connection with nature, and peer support, the program offered a creative approach to building confidence and emotional strength.

Education Program

Project Educate

Project Educate is a program designed for young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. Delivered in partnership with Sydney Distance Education, it enables young people to complete Year 9 or to obtain their RoSA qualification. The program provides flexible, supported learning tailored to individual needs, ensuring young people can re-engage with education, achieve qualifications, and progress to further study, training, or employment. To sustain Project Educate we are grateful for the generous support from a range of funders including: Club Central, Waratah Education Foundation, Shangri la, Big Sister, Zontas and the James Kirby Foundation.

“

A Speech from a mother of a student at Project Educate – Graduation in December 2024

“Hi, I’m a mum of a student here. Essentially, I want to speak about gratitude. And a little about pride.

When Project Youth worker Tiana told me at the end of 2022 about their program that worked with kids who were disconnected from the school system and suggested I apply for my daughter to attend, I wept. The journey to that point had been challenging to say the least....My beloved daughter like so many of our children was anything but compliant. She had spent six months at the end of year eight refusing to attend school. Like never. Not one day. For six months.

Every morning was filled with tension... Along with the truanting were concerning risky behaviours that came from hanging round during the school day on the streets and in shopping centres.

I did everything I could...I was at my wits end.

Our kids, like all of us humans, have challenges, whether its brain chemistry or traumas or both, but thanks to Project Educate and the team at Distance Education they have a chance to shine, to feel pride in themselves and their journey in developing into successful healthy young adults.

My kid started going to school, her destiny like a big ship on the ocean turned around slowly but surely.

My pride in her is immense. She’s well on her way to establishing the career she dreams of and achieving her goals. She’s designed a hoodie range, works in an incredible job, is dedicated to her health and wellbeing, enrolled in a great TAFE course for next year and she’s passed Year Ten. Project Educate was instrumental in this.

Watching her transformation has been one of my life’s great blessings.”



Key Highlights for 2024/25

1669 interventions were provided to families & young people	40% of appearances at court were first time offences
36 young people completed a Work Development Order (WDO)	11% of young people at court were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
\$52,532 in debit was recovered through WDO's	50% increase in young attending the Culture Connect Program
The majority of young people are in more than one program	21 young people were supported to stay out of the legal system with a graffiti program
137 young people were supported with 1:1 support	89% of young people attending the Surf Camp were from First Nations cultures
34 parents attended a Parenting Course	192 referrals for 1:1 support could not be met (60% unmet demand)
299 young people were support at Youth Centre Support	100% of students in Project Educate have a mental health diagnosis
313 young people were supported to reduce risks of homelessness	

Families average **4 sessions** of family therapy

100%

of students graduated year 9 or 10 in the Project Educate program



Ensuring Youth Homelessness is Brief Through Housing & Homelessness Support

Youth homelessness remains a critical challenge in New South Wales and across Australia. Over the past year, Project Youth supported **515** young people aged 12 – 24 through our housing and homelessness prevention programs. Despite this reach, demand continues to significantly outstrip supply, with **79%** of requests for support for housing not being met, reflecting the critical shortage of refuge accommodation for young people needing immediate safety when they first become homeless.

Project Youth's supported refuge accommodation offers a safe and stable alternative, yet with only 10 available beds, too many young people are left with no safe options. Without access to a supported refuge, they are forced to remain in unsafe housing, couch surf, or stay in violent, abusive, overcrowded, or otherwise risky environments, exposing them to further trauma and compounding the barriers to stability. This unmet demand highlights the urgent need for expanded crisis and transitional responses alongside long-term affordable housing pathways to ensure young people have both immediate safety and the opportunity to rebuild their futures.

Current Context and Demand

Recent data underscores the scale of youth homelessness and the pressure on crisis accommodation. In 2023–24, Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) assisted nearly 38,600 young people presenting alone, making them the third-largest group and comprising 14% of all SHS participants. Alarmingly, many were already experiencing homelessness at first presentation, with 29% couch surfing, compared to 15% across all participants.

Despite the support provided, outcomes remain deeply concerning. By the end of their support period, around 8,900 young people were still homeless, including 4,500 continuing to couch surf. Only 2,700 secured private rental housing and 1,100 accessed public or community housing, highlighting the acute shortage of safe and affordable options.

These figures reveal the urgent demand for refuge accommodation that is safe, supported and set up for young people when they first become homeless. Without supported housing, too many remain in unsafe or unstable situations, compounding trauma and reducing their chances of long-term stability.



515 young people supported.
Yet **79%** turned away due to
lack of housing.

Our Housing Options

Project Youth offer a continuum of housing solutions designed to meet both immediate and longer-term needs:

- **Refuge Accommodation** – Immediate refuge housing in 24/7 staffed properties, providing intensive support to ensure safety and stability for young people when they first become homeless.
- **Transitional Housing** – Medium to long-term supported housing with individualised plans to help young people prepare for independent living.
- **Tanderra** – Affordable long-term units for young people with stable employment who need support and time to transition to private rental.
- **Rent Choice Youth Subsidy (RCY)** – Financial assistance and support to access the private rental market, though increasingly this option is limited by rent caps.
- **Tenancy Support** – Practical assistance to manage tenancies, build rental ledgers, and ensure young people are prepared for sustainable independent housing.

Key Challenges

Despite the strength of our housing continuum, systemic barriers are increasingly limiting outcomes for young people.

The current youth homelessness crisis remains an ongoing issue across Sydney and for the young people supported by Project Youth. Not only is it becoming more difficult to maintain employment and keep up with the rising cost of living, but viable exit options after finishing a transitional stay are diminishing rapidly. This is especially challenging in the Sutherland Shire and Georges River LGAs, where most of our young people have built support networks, found employment, or enrolled in education and moving away is detrimental to maintaining these vital connections.

Even when young people fully engage with our programs, gain employment, build their living skills, and keep up with rent, the private rental market in our catchment areas remains out of reach. As a result, they are often forced to look outside their communities, move into overcrowded and unsafe share houses, or return to family situations that may not be safe. Competing in an oversubscribed private rental market is simply not a viable or affordable option.

On top of these structural barriers, many young people are also managing the impacts of trauma, mental health challenges, and the instability that homelessness itself creates. Insecure housing often intensifies anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions, making it harder to sustain education, employment, and tenancy.

Without safe and stable accommodation, recovery from trauma is compromised, the cycle of homelessness is more likely to continue, and risks increase including worsening mental health, alcohol and drug dependency, and youth justice involvement. A Housing First approach, with wrap around support, is essential if we are to end youth homelessness.

To give young people the best possible chance, we focus on building strong rental ledgers, supporting achievable payment plans, and helping them clear any arrears well before they exit. At the same time, we provide wrap-around support that extends beyond tenancy, connecting young people to mental health services, peer and community networks, and opportunities to build resilience and confidence. This dual focus on practical skills and personal wellbeing helps young people not only secure housing but sustain it long-term. We also explore alternative exit pathways, including Rent Choice Youth, My Foundations, family restoration where safe, and co-tenancy options with peers, ensuring that every young person has access to the most realistic and sustainable housing option available.

However, with RCY increasingly out of reach due to unrealistic rent caps, the shortage of affordable rentals in our LGAs, and the lack of long-term options, we are actively exploring ways to develop sustainable exit housing solutions within Project Youth in conjunction with our community and corporate partners. This would not only create realistic pathways into independence but also ensure that young people leave our programs with the stability, skills, and wellbeing they need to thrive.



Our Youth Homelessness and Housing Programs in 2024/25 Included

Crisis Refuges (Penny’s & Willow House)

Operated across two properties, Pennys in Penshurst and Willow House in Sutherland. Each site has the capacity to house five young people aged 14 to 19, in single bedrooms and is staffed 24/7 by a dedicated team of three full-time and two part-time staff. Over an average five-month stay, young people receive wrap-around support to identify goals, build independent living skills, and plan their transition into their next housing option.

Some key changes in 2024/25:

- In December 2024, the program moved from The Bridge property in Sutherland to the newly developed Willow House. Inspired by the resilience of the willow tree which can bend without breaking, this name reflects emotional strength, adaptability, and transformation.
- At Pennys, extensive capital upgrades were completed with support from a range of funders. Community grants provided new wardrobes in bedrooms, DJC funded a new kitchen along with new carpet and curtains, and Project Youth invested in a complete repaint of the property. These works ensure safe, supportive, and welcoming environments for the young people we serve.

As one young person reflected after their stay: *“I felt like staff really saw me for who I am now, not just what happened before. It gave me a fresh start.”*

Transitional Housing Program

We support young people in 65 transitional beds across the Sutherland Shire, Georges River, and Bayside local government areas. Each young person, aged 16–24, is assigned a Transitional Housing Support Worker who provides tailored trauma informed support. Rent is charged at a percentage of a young person’s income, ensuring affordability and stability, while we help break down barriers to education, employment, and longer-term housing options.

As one young resident shared shortly after moving in: *“I get to stop stressing. Everything feels more calm... at the moment I just get to be me.”*

Tanderra Program

Our Tanderra program is a standalone unit block in the Sutherland Shire that can cater for up to ten independent young people aged 16–24. We support young people in this program for up to five years and offer them a flat rent rate to prepare them for the private rental market. Young people are eligible for this program if they have stable employment, a high level of independence, but still need an affordable housing option and benefit from a longer-term support approach. A dedicated Housing Support Worker oversees the program, and each young person develops an individualised support plan to help achieve their goals.

Rent Choice Youth

RCY provides targeted financial assistance to help young people aged 16–24 access and sustain private rental housing. Through this program, eligible young people receive a rent subsidy for up to three years, which gradually reduces as their capacity to pay rent independently increases. Alongside financial support, our workers provide support to ensure young people not only secure housing but also build the skills and confidence to sustain it

long-term. For many, RCY offers a bridge into the private rental market that would otherwise remain completely inaccessible. However, in practice, most young people can no longer access RCY in the Sutherland Shire, Georges River, or Bayside LGAs because there are virtually no properties available within the rent cap set by the program. This gap highlights the mismatch between policy settings and the reality of the housing market and underscores the urgent need for government to adjust rent thresholds and invest in affordable housing for young people. Without this reform, RCY risks becoming an option in name only, rather than the critical pathway it was designed to be.

Tenancy Support

Our dedicated Tenancy Worker plays a crucial role across all our supported housing programs. They establish and manage tenancy agreements under NSW tenancy law, manage rent, and provide support to the housing support workers. By embedding tenancy support into our housing model, we not only help young people maintain stable accommodation, but also prepare them with the practical skills needed for future independent living.



Ella’s Story

“I came to Sydney from the UK for a gap year, hoping for adventure and new experiences. Things didn’t go as planned. I faced some big challenges and before I knew it, I had nowhere safe to stay. Suddenly, I was homeless in a country far from home, with no idea what to do next.

When I got to Willow House, the staff listened and supported me straight away. They helped me connect with the UK consulate to get an emergency passport and flights home. Because I couldn’t return to my family, they also linked me with a local homelessness service back in my town, where I’ll have access to a long-term supported program.

Even though my time in Australia was short, the staff wanted me to leave with good memories. They took me to the Blue Mountains, gave me tickets to the Easter Show, and helped me explore places like Newcastle and Kiama. They even made sure I had warm clothes from the COMPASS Collective because I’d only packed for summer. Leaving wasn’t easy, but thanks to Willow House I’m not going back alone. I feel supported, connected, and ready for the next chapter of my life.”

Simone’s Story

“I first connected with Project Youth when I was 15. At the time, life felt unstable, and I needed somewhere safe to land. Over the past two years, I’ve stayed in their refuges a couple of times, then Transitional Housing as well. Each step gave me the stability I needed to move forward.

While I was with Project Youth, I managed to finish a Certificate III and then a Diploma in Community Services. I even secured a job, something I never thought I’d be doing. I also got my driver’s licence and bought my own car, which gave me so much independence.

One of the biggest changes has been in my mental health. I used to need weekly appointments with my psychologist, but now I only need to check in monthly. That feels like a huge step forward for me.

Right now, I’m living independently in a small studio. It’s affordable and I love it. For the first time, I feel like I can live independently without support. Looking back, I know it’s my determination and hard work that got me here, but I couldn’t have done it without the support from Project Youth.”



Key Highlights for 2024/25

515 young people were supported in our housing & homelessness programs

79% of referrals for housing could not be met

79 young people moved on from Project Youth accommodation in this period

39 young people were housed in crisis refuges

87 young people were supported in transitional accommodation

18,111

interventions were provided to young people

16 young people were supported in long term accommodation

74 young people were supported with brief interventions (when we could not house them)

142

young people were provided with **accommodation**

76% of young people transitioned into safe housing

90% of young people in our housing had mental health service involvement

295

Support Plans were created throughout the year with young people

Ensuring Youth Homelessness is Non-Recurring Through Employment & Training

Access to training and employment remains one of the most powerful pathways out of homelessness and disadvantage. Research shows that young people who leave school early face significant challenges in securing and sustaining employment, which in turn impacts their health, wellbeing, and long-term stability (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Rothstein, 2004). By contrast, gaining qualifications and meaningful work is strongly linked to breaking the cycle of homelessness and achieving independence (AIHW, 2024).

In Australia, young people continue to experience disproportionate barriers. While the national unemployment rate sits at 4.2%, youth unemployment is more than double at 9.8%, with underemployment at 14.1% (ABS Labour Force, July 2025). Compounding this, nearly 37% of people experiencing homelessness are under 25 (AIHW, 2024). Limited access to education, training, and supportive employment pathways significantly undermines opportunities for young people to exit cycles of disadvantage.

At Project Youth, our Social Impact Team, is aligned with the non-reoccurring pillar of our strategic framework working with young people to overcome barriers to employment through targeted education, training, and employment support. We take a flexible, trauma-informed approach that recognises the interconnectedness of skills, confidence, peer connection, and trusted relationships. This year, despite systemic challenges such as restricted access to Smart and Skilled funding for those most vulnerable, our team responded with innovation, introducing new initiatives including a music program and the Certificate II in Workplace Skills program.

The impact has been significant. In 2024/25, we supported young people through accredited courses, work placements, peer-led programs, and social enterprise employment. 73% of young people transitioned into permanent employment, while over 90% reported that Project Youth made a significant difference in their lives. Importantly, 100% said they would recommend Project Youth to a friend, with most reporting stronger social connection, resilience, and confidence as a result of their involvement.

Our work this year has also highlighted the importance of relationship and connection. Providing young people with qualifications and work experience is critical, but equally vital is the opportunity to build supportive peer networks and trusting relationships with adults who believe in them. Whether through Café Social, training programs, COMPASS, or the launch of our Beyond Homelessness podcast, we have witnessed young people transform with greater confidence, resilience, and hope for their future.



Looking ahead, we remain committed to expanding employment pathways, advocating for more equitable access to training subsidies, and scaling youth-specific employment programs. Sustained investment is essential if we are to continue providing young people with the opportunities, they need to secure meaningful work, strengthen their social and emotional wellbeing, and build a sustainable future.

Our EET Programs in 2024/25 Included:

Café Social & Hospitality

After more than a decade of serving young people and our community, Café Y, later known as Café Social, Project Youth's first social enterprise, has paused operations to reimagine the next generation of employment pathways.

Since opening as Café Y in 2013, the café has grown into far more than a place to have a coffee. It has been a life-changing program, providing trauma-informed, supported employment opportunities for young people facing homelessness and disadvantage. Over 12 years, Café Social supported 348 young people, including 45 young people employed directly, 12 formal traineeships completed, and nearly 50,000 hours of paid youth employment. Beyond the numbers, the café created a place of belonging, connection, and purpose for both young people and the community.

Its impact extended well beyond hospitality skills. Young people gained confidence, qualifications, and hope for the future, while customers and volunteers helped build a genuine community hub sharing stories, celebrating achievements, and standing alongside young people as they transformed their lives.

Importantly, cost-avoidance modelling showed that each young person supported through Café Social potentially saved government systems upwards of \$43,000 per year in avoided justice, housing, and welfare costs. This demonstrates not only the social but also the economic value of investing in supported employment pathways through social enterprise.

This strategic pause comes at a time of minimal disruption, with all current participants transitioned into employment or moved on to their next life stage. The café's strong legacy continues through our broader employment initiatives, including 1:1 coaching, industry training (such as RSA, White Card, and Forklift certification), weekly COMPASS employment drop-in sessions, and alternative education pathways.

While Café Social's doors may be closed for now, its legacy remains a powerful reminder of what is possible when young people are given opportunity and support. We are proud of what has been achieved and excited for the next chapter of social enterprise at Project Youth.

“

When it gets too much, I know I've got somewhere **safe to go**. Learning skills to calm down has really helped, I actually feel like I can cope.





45 young people employed directly



60

volunteers contributed their time and skills



Nearly 50,000 hours of paid youth employment (an average of 4,200 hours per year)

298 young people engaged in job readiness and industry training



109,000 customers served, creating community connection & belonging



12

formal traineeships completed



Over **100,000** coffees served (approx. 8,300 per year)

Beyond Homelessness: Conversations that Matter

A Podcast by Project Youth



This year we launched our storytelling podcast, Beyond Homelessness: Conversations that Matter. The podcast builds on our music courses, where young people used songwriting and lyrics to process and share their experiences. Recognising the power of storytelling as a tool for healing and influencing change, we created a platform for young people with lived experience of homelessness and disadvantage to share their stories directly with the community. The podcast was officially launched on Youth Homelessness Matters Day in April 2025.

In its first season, the podcast released four episodes on Spotify and YouTube, providing an honest and powerful insight into the lives of young people navigating housing instability, trauma, resilience, and recovery. Several more episodes were recorded but held back with care, recognising that not every story is ready to be shared publicly. For some, simply speaking their truth in a safe space was a valuable step and was enough.

The impact of Beyond Homelessness has already been significant. It has been used by YPAC as a tool for advocacy, played for Members of Parliament to raise awareness of youth homelessness, and shared widely in the community to challenge stigma and increase understanding. Feedback shows it has helped build empathy and a stronger sense of solidarity with young people experiencing homelessness.

Importantly, the podcast is also an employment pathway. In its first season, a young person co-hosted the series and another trained in sound engineering, gaining technical skills in podcasting and digital production. Each year, young people will continue to be engaged in hands-on roles building confidence, skills, and real-world experience in media.

Beyond Homelessness is a platform for young people to lead conversations, challenge narratives, and take ownership of their stories. This is only the beginning. We look forward to expanding this space in partnership with young people in 2025/26, continuing to show the power of storytelling and lived experience in driving change.



Training & Employment Program

In 2024/25, our Social Impact Team delivered four targeted training programs designed to support young people experiencing homelessness or disadvantage to build qualifications, job-readiness, and confidence in a supportive environment. This was made possible through funding from the Office of Responsible Gambling and Stronger & Resilient Communities funding.

The programs included:

- Certificate II in Music (in partnership with TAFE NSW)
- Certificate III in Hospitality (in collaboration with Quality College)
- Music Course focused on practical music-making and creative expression
- Certificate II in Workplace Skills to strengthen core employability capabilities

Together, these courses provided formal education, industry-recognised qualifications, and real-world skills, while also creating opportunities for young people to connect with peers and build supportive networks.

A highlight of the year was the successful integration of a peer worker across all four courses. Bringing lived experience and a deep understanding of the challenges young people face, the peer worker offered practical assistance, emotional support, and encouragement throughout the learning journey. Their presence helped participants overcome personal barriers, boosted confidence, and created a learning environment where young people felt heard, respected, and supported.

This peer-led approach fostered stronger connections within each course cohort, building a sense of community and belonging. It not only enhanced individual outcomes but also strengthened the overall impact of the programs by making learning more inclusive, responsive, and empowering for participants.

This year we had to end our music certification program due to the funding ending. We are grateful for the opportunity to have delivered such a transformative program over the last two financial years. The course built confidence, developed industry skills, fostered peer connections, and opened new employment pathways in a field that is otherwise difficult to access. Music was not only an employment pathway, but also a powerful enabler for healing, recovery, and storytelling, outcomes we rarely see so vividly in other courses. The heartbreaking reality is that we had the studio, infrastructure, and strong evidence of impact, yet without ongoing funding to cover wages and program costs, the program had to close.

This highlights how competitive and uncertain funding has become, even for cost-effective programs with proven results. At Project Youth, we know that real change happens when young people have access to opportunities across different supports, like someone in housing being able to take the music course and then gain part-time work in our café. For young people who have faced trauma, mental illness, and disadvantage, it is this wrap-around formula, not just housing alone, that makes it more likely they can exit cycles of homelessness and succeed in building independent, stable futures. We will continue to seek funding to re-establish our music program, as we see the immense potential of our studio and the opportunities it offers young people, and we welcome partnerships and investment to help make this vision possible.





Story for Employment
Peter's Story

"I first connected with Project Youth through Project Educate, where I finished Years 9 and 10. That gave me the chance to succeed at school when I'd struggled before. I went on to complete a Certificate III in Hospitality with over 30 hours of work experience, which really boosted my confidence.

Music has always been my passion, and through Project Youth's Music Program I recorded my raps and performed live for the first time in front of my family and community, a moment that changed a lot for me. Later, through The Edge, I discovered podcasting and even shared my story live on Youth Homelessness Matters Day in front of MPs.

Today, I'm proud to be employed at Project Youth and to be the first young person and First Nations member of the Reconciliation Action Plan group. I share my culture, build my skills, and keep looking forward. Project Youth believed in me, and now I believe in myself."

Josh's Story

"When I first came to Project Youth in Year 9, I was struggling with school and felt like I didn't fit in anywhere. Project Bass gave me confidence and showed me I had talent as a musician.

When school didn't work out, Project Youth supported me through Hospitality and Music courses, and this year I became the very first student to complete their new RoSA pilot program. I also learned music production in the studio and helped create Project Youth's first podcast.

Now I'm studying Pro Tools and youth podcasting, and next year I plan to start TAFE to do a Certificate III in Music. Project Youth believed in me when others didn't, and now I believe in myself. My dream is to become a music engineer, and I finally feel like it's possible."



Key Highlights for 2024/25

This year, Project Youth supported young people through a wide range of employment, training, and education initiatives, from accredited courses and peer-supported programs to paid work placements and social enterprise employment.



young people completed accredited or targeted training courses

11 young people gained paid employment through Café Social

6 young people were employed or trained through the Beyond Homelessness Podcast

41 young people undertook structured work placements

52 young people accessed education and employment support through COMPASS

160 days of training delivered by Project Youth

3,687 hours of paid employment

660 hours of work experience provided

The impact of these opportunities is reflected in outcomes reported by young people:

100% would recommend Project Youth to a friend

100% rated our support 5/5 on "How did we treat you?"

Over 90% said we made a significant difference in their lives.

73% transitioned into permanent employment

94% reported increased social inclusion and connection

94% reported increased self-reliance and resilience

88% reported improvements in their social and emotional health

Embedding Peer Support & Lived Expertise Throughout Project Youth

At Project Youth, we believe the most powerful insights into ending youth homelessness come from young people who have experienced it firsthand. In 2023/24, we laid the foundations for embedding lived experience across our programs, governance, and leadership. In 2024/25 we deepened this commitment, moving from participation to genuine power-sharing and leadership at every level of our organisation.

As YPAC put it: "This year, we didn't just have a seat at the table, we continued to build a new one. At this table, lived experience isn't an afterthought or tokenistic, it sits at the centre alongside leadership, decision-making, and systemic change. We are not passive participants in programs designed for us; we are leading, designing, influencing, and reimagining the very systems meant to support us. True impact happens when young people are trusted with real power. When we're listened to, backed with resources, and treated as equal partners, we create change that's innovative, bold, and grounded in lived experience. YPAC isn't about inclusion, it's about disruption. Power is being rebalanced. Systems are being reimagined. Tables are being built."

This vision came to life across Project Youth in 2024/25. We employed a **Youth Worker with lived experience** to lead our new central referral point, ensuring every young person who comes to us is met with empathy, credibility, and real-world support. We embedded lived experience into governance with the appointment of a **young person as Company Secretary of our Board** and committed to the creation of **two new Youth Board Director roles**, a positive step in sharing decision-making power. Through YPAC, young people led **17 major decisions**, co-designed the **Rising Together Lived Experience in Governance Framework**, and shaped program delivery, advocacy campaigns, and funding priorities.

Our workforce has also expanded, with **two full-time lived experience roles, seven lived experience workers employed through YPAC, and one Company Secretary with lived experience**. The result is decisions that reflect lived realities, services that are dignified and trauma-informed, policies shaped by those most affected, and a leadership model that redefines what shared power can look like in practice.

This year we also proudly welcomed our first Project Youth Ambassador, Ethan. Having journeyed through our programs and then worked with us as a Peer Worker for 18 months, Ethan has now moved forward in his career in another industry while choosing to continue his connection with Project Youth. Ethan wanted to keep giving back and supporting both our organisation and the young people we serve. As an ambassador, he will attend events, engage with funders, and share his lived experience to bring to life the realities of youth homelessness. Ethan's journey is a shining example of resilience and leadership, and his continued involvement as an ambassador will inspire other young people while strengthening our advocacy and community impact.

By embedding lived expertise into service delivery, governance, and leadership, Project Youth is not just delivering services for young people, we are building a future with them.



Peer Support & Lived Expertise for 2024/25:

Young People Advocating Change (YPAC)

YPAC is our young person led advisory and decision-making group, ensuring that lived experience sits at the centre of leadership, strategy, and service design.

In 2024/25, YPAC continued to evidence what happens when young people are trusted with shared power:

- 17 major decisions were made by YPAC using their co-designed decision-making framework
- A young person with lived experience was appointed as Company Secretary
- 18 young people supported through short courses and driving lessons
- Across all YPAC decision's 300 young people have been supported
- Launched the COMPASS Collective – a free, young person designed clothing, accessories and toiletries 'shop'. It's more than just 'emergency resources' it provides dignity and choice.
- Introduced peer-supported exit surveys, giving young people the option to reflect on their service experience with a peer worker. This has created space for safety and deeper learning, helping us listen better and improve our programs where it matters most.
- Built a new communication system across Project Youth that ensures young people in all programs have access to timely, relevant information. This system has already helped young people secure jobs, enrol in courses, and access urgent resources. It's simple, cost effective and designed for equity because information is power, and access should never be a barrier.

This year also saw YPAC play a central role in co-designing our new **Lived Experience Framework called 'Rising Together'**, ensuring it reflects the voices of young people who have navigated support systems first-hand. Alongside this, **peer work was formally embedded into our Practice Framework**, recognising lived experience as vital expertise that guides how services are delivered at every level of Project Youth.

YPAC is redefining what shared power looks like in practice. It demonstrates that when young people are listened to, resourced, and trusted, they drive outcomes that create lasting change.

Community Outreach & Education

In 2024/25, our Peer Team played a pivotal role in driving community engagement across the Georges River and Sutherland Shire areas. Through proactive outreach and education, the team worked to raise awareness of youth homelessness and provide communities with the tools to respond with empathy and support.

Peer workers led school presentations and community sessions on topics such as **youth homelessness** and **'How to Help a Friend'**, equipping young people, educators, and community members with practical strategies to identify risks early, offer support, and challenge stigma.

A standout initiative was **Youth Homelessness Matters Day on 16 April 2025**, led by the Peer Work and Social Impact team at Cronulla. This event marked the launch of our new podcast, Beyond Homelessness: Conversations That Matter. The day featured live interviews with politicians, funders, and young people with lived experience, creating a unique platform to share stories, amplify young voices, and drive collaboration on solutions.

Across the year, Project Youth engaged **1,152 community members** through outreach and education initiatives. These efforts are central to our vision of a future where youth homelessness does not exist, building awareness, challenging stereotypes, and fostering stronger, more supportive communities.

Peer Education (PlaySafe Summer)

The 2024/25 PlaySafe Summer season was an example of effective peer-led education across the Georges River and Sutherland Shire areas. Delivered in partnership with NSW Health, the program builds on more than 20 years of collaboration, engaging young people in conversations about sexual health, harm reduction, mental health, and wellbeing.

Across the summer season, trained Peer Educators delivered outreach sessions between December and April in key locations including Cronulla, Miranda, Sutherland, Hurstville, and Brighton Le-Sands. Each shift lasts three hours and uses a range of engagement tools, from QR code surveys and community information cards to the distribution of safe sex packs to spark conversations and promote healthy behaviours.

In 2024/25, Peer Educators recorded 1,522 meaningful interactions with young people. They also expanded their reach by participating in community events such as the **Sutherland Shire Battle of the Bands, Youth Week activities**, and **Westfield Hurstville's Community Stalls**, increasing visibility and reinforcing positive health messages.

The season demonstrated the value of peer-led, community-based education in supporting young people's wellbeing. By providing young people with trusted, relatable information, Peer Educators are helping to reduce stigma, promote healthy choices, and empower their peers to take control of their health.

COMPASS Drop-In

COMPASS is a peer-run weekly **drop-in program** supporting young people aged 12 to 24 to navigate and access essential services including housing, mental health, youth justice, and employment. With funding from Sutherland Shire Council COMPASS, operates every Friday at our Miranda Youth Centre, COMPASS provides a safe and inclusive space for young people facing homelessness, disadvantage, and complex challenges to receive personalised, strengths-based support from peers who have experienced the systems themselves.

At the heart of COMPASS is our **peer support model**, where trained peer workers with lived experience provide guidance, advocacy, and supported referrals. This approach ensures support is both relevant and trusted, while also creating meaningful employment pathways for young people with lived experience.

In 2024/25, COMPASS supported **113 young people**, delivering **169.5 hours of peer support**, with each participant engaged for an average of **1.5 hours per visit**. Most of the support provided related to **education and employment**, reflecting the strong demand for pathways to stability. Other key areas of support included housing, mental health, access to emergency resources, and legal matters.

By bridging the gap between young people and community services, COMPASS helps prevent crises from escalating and fosters long-term connection, confidence, and wellbeing. We are proud to share that COMPASS has secured funding through the **Sutherland Shire Community Grants for 2025/26**, ensuring this vital program will continue to provide young people with trusted support, stronger connections, and pathways to independence.

COMPASS Point (The Hub)

In one year Project Youth faced the heartbreaking reality of turning away **958 young people** due to limited vacancies and resources. Too many young people seeking support were left without a clear pathway forward. In direct response, we launched **COMPASS Point – 'The Hub'** in September 2024, a centralised referral point to ensure that every young person who comes to us can access information, advice, and guidance (IAG), even when immediate vacancies are not available.

Led by a Youth Worker with lived experience, and funded through Youth Opportunities funding, the Hub supported

510 young people in its first year of operation. Through 1:1 guidance, young people and families were guided through the referral process, connected with available services, and when services were at capacity, provided with practical information, advice, and guidance. This ensures that no young person leaves without support or direction.

What makes The Hub unique is its foundation of **lived experience leadership**. Having navigated similar systems themselves, the Youth Worker can offer not only professional expertise but also authentic empathy and understanding. This allows for deeper trust, stronger connection, and more effective support.

The Hub represents a significant shift in how Project Youth responds to unmet demand. While systemic shortages remain, this initiative ensures that young people are never turned away without guidance and always have someone walking alongside them as they seek the help they need.



Tastes Like Home

In 2024/25, Project Youth launched Tastes Like Home, with funding from IMB Foundation. Tastes Like Home is an innovative, young person led initiative designed to support young people who have experienced homelessness by helping them build confidence and capability in the kitchen. Funded through the IMB Bank Community Foundation, the project delivers practical, accessible online resources focused on food, wellbeing, and connection.

The program features **12 easy-to-follow recipes**, each paired with step-by-step cooking videos available on our website and YouTube, as well as nutritional guidance and a mindful eating toolkit in both video and written formats. Co-designed by young people with lived experience, alongside a professional nutritionist and chef, the content is realistic, empowering, and tailored to the needs of its intended audience.

For many young people without stable housing or access to role models, learning to cook has not been possible. One young woman involved in the project reflected on feeling embarrassed and judged for not knowing how to cook, highlighting how inaccessible mainstream food online content can be for those starting from scratch.

Tastes Like Home aims to change that by providing simple, inclusive, and supportive guidance that builds everyday skills, from boiling pasta to understanding portion sizes.

This initiative is more than just recipe videos; it is a tool for empowerment. By making healthy eating approachable and achievable, Tastes Like Home helps young people gain independence, improve self-esteem, and understand the strong link between good nutrition and mental health.

Mental Health First Aid Training (YMHFA)

In September 2024, four members of our Peer Team became accredited **Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) facilitators**. Since then, Project Youth has delivered **four sessions**, reaching **47 community members**, including young people, all of whom had the opportunity to obtain their YMHFA qualification.

Mental health support is vital for young people. Research shows that most mental health conditions are diagnosed before the age of 25, and for the young people we support, this is compounded by trauma, with **100% having experienced trauma** and up to **90% living with a current or previous mental illness**. Without the right support, these challenges increase the risk of homelessness, housing instability, and poor long-term outcomes.

YMHFA equips participants to recognise early signs of distress, provide immediate support, and connect young people to professional help. It also reduces stigma, encourages open conversations, and strengthens community responses to mental health needs. This initiative has a particular impact for young people living in shared housing environments, whether in transitional housing or the private rental market, where understanding and supporting a flatmate's mental health can be crucial to sustaining safe and stable accommodation.

Through **peer-led training and early intervention**, Project Youth is helping to build a more informed, supportive, and resilient community. We are also exploring opportunities to expand into **Teen MHFA**, recognising the importance of young people supporting one another with the right tools, knowledge, and confidence.

This program not only empowers individuals with vital skills but also contributes to our broader mission of ending youth homelessness by creating environments where young people feel seen, supported, and safe.



Lived Experience in Governance

In 2024/25, Project Youth took a bold step forward in embedding lived experience at the heart of governance. Together with our Young People Advocating Change (YPAC) group and our Board of Directors, we co-created the **Lived Experience in Governance Framework**, a structural commitment to authentic power-sharing, equity, and shared leadership.

This framework ensures that young people with lived expertise of homelessness and systemic barriers are empowered to actively shape strategy, policy, and decision-making. It introduces multiple pathways for influence, from YPAC reviewing Board papers, to governance roles for young people, to trauma-informed protocols that make Board spaces safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive.

Key features of the framework include:

- Dedicated Board seats for young people with lived experience, with pathways for observers, advisors, and Directors.
- A pay framework that recognises the labour, time, and expertise of young people, ensuring equity compared to traditional voluntary governance models.
- Trauma-informed governance practices, such as buddy systems, optional debriefing, and voice-and-choice protocols that respect the ownership of young people's stories.
- YPAC as a "House of Review", ensuring proposals are shaped by lived expertise before Board decisions are finalised.
- Mentorship, training, and induction, equipping young Directors and advisors with the skills to engage meaningfully while strengthening collaboration across the Board.

This is structural reform, and it is cultural change. By embedding lived experience into governance, Project Youth is not only aligning decisions with the realities of young people's lives but also modelling what ethical and innovative governance can look like for the broader sector.

As one young person reflected during the co-design process:

"It's about having a real say in decisions that affect us, not just ticking a box. Don't placate us with advice, hand over some of that responsibility, we can hold it with you."

The establishment of this framework marks a turning point. It ensures that those most impacted by youth homelessness are not just heard but trusted with real power to lead the solutions.

Youth Participation

At Project Youth, we believe that young people's voices, choices, and lived experiences must shape everything we do, not just within our Peer Team, but across ALL of our programs. To make this a reality, we collect and analyse data on how young people participate in decision-making and service design. This ensures that their perspectives are embedded into our daily practice, guiding program improvements, partnerships, and advocacy.

This approach is critical as it ensures that services remain relevant, trauma-informed, and responsive to what young people need. It also creates opportunities for young people to contribute in different ways, from offering feedback, to co-designing initiatives, to leading campaigns.

In 2024/25, young people engaged with Project Youth in a variety of ways, reflecting different levels of voice and leadership:

- Consulting: **93** young people provided input through surveys and program feedback
- Contributing: **66** young people shared their experiences through interviews and storytelling

- Partnering: **121** young people worked alongside staff to co-plan and co-design initiatives
- Leading: **114** young people took the lead in campaigns, presentations, and decision-making

This data tells a powerful story that young people are influencing **what** we do and leading **how** we do it.

Examples of participation this year included:

- Co-designing improvements to the **Emotional Skills Program**
- Co-designing **school excursions** in Project Educate
- Leading the **Youth Homelessness Matters Day campaign and event**
- Sharing lived experience as **youth speakers** across schools in the Sutherland Shire
- Producing and hosting a **podcast** to elevate stories and challenge stereotypes
- Helping to secure a **new partnership with the NSW Young Lawyers Society**
- Co-producing a **partnership video** to raise awareness of youth homelessness
- Writing policy, strategy and frameworks
- Service innovations included the **COMPASS Collective**, peer-led exit surveys, and a youth-designed communication system.
- **17 major decisions** led by YPAC shaped programs, advocacy, and funding priorities.
- **10 meetings with MPs** and a **958-word open letter** drove systemic advocacy to end youth homelessness.



At Project Youth participation is not symbolic, it is a core part of how we operate. By embedding lived experience in meaningful ways, we ensure that young people are not just consulted, instead they are shaping, influencing, and leading change.

Key Highlights for 2024/25

Reach and Support

3,322	young people supported through peer and lived experience programs	510	young people provided with referral information, advice, and guidance through The Hub
1,152	community members engaged in youth homelessness awareness through outreach	1,522	young people reached with sexual health, relationships, and harm minimisation education
254	hours of Peer Education delivered in the community	113	young people supported through COMPASS
25	young people obtained Youth Mental Health First Aid Qualifications	169.5	hours of peer support delivered

Employment and Governance

NEW		
lived experience Ambassador appointed		Young people sit on every recruitment panel
2	full-time lived experience roles established at Project Youth	7 lived experience workers employed through YPAC
1	Company Secretary role held by a young person with lived experience	2 lived experience Directors recruited for the Project Youth Board
30%	of our workforce are now young people with lived experience	

Outcomes and Impact

394	young people engaged in shaping Project Youth, from consulting to leading	Improved ability among young people to recognise, understand, and manage mental health
80%	increase in knowledge and awareness of youth homelessness	Increased awareness of issues impacting young people in the community
Expanded employment pathways for young people with lived experience		Increased youth participation in governance, advocacy, systemic change, and fundraising
Stronger peer connections and service engagement		Improved access to emergency and crisis resources
Strengthened education around sexual health, relationships, and alcohol and other drugs.		





Stories for peer work and lived experience

Jai's Story

"A few years ago, I was referred to Project Youth and moved into long-term housing. People think once you have a roof over your head, everything falls into place, it doesn't. Housing is a huge step, but not the whole story.

One Friday, I walked past Project Youth in Miranda and, on impulse, went in. A Peer Worker welcomed me with no judgment, just a safe space, a meal, and someone to listen. That moment made all the difference.

Living on my own has been tough with bills, groceries, and just keeping my head above water. The support from COMPASS helped me link with food services, mental health support, and even start working toward my employment goals.

Now I drop in every few weeks. Every time I leave feeling lighter, more grounded, and reminded I'm not alone. That sense of connection and safety is something I'll always be grateful for."

Shirley's Story

"I'm Shirley, and I've been part of Project Youth since early 2024. I joined as a Peer Mentor and became an active member of YPAC (Young People Advocating for Change). While studying for my Diploma in Community Services and drawing on my own lived experience, I've become a passionate advocate for youth homelessness and making sure every young person has access to a safe and secure place to call home.

Throughout 2024 and into 2025, I've had the opportunity to attend and speak at several events, including Youth Homelessness Matters Day and the Trusted Business Network Fundraising Event, where I shared my story to raise awareness and push for real change. Over the past year, I've really built my confidence in public speaking and in stepping into spaces where young voices are often underrepresented. I've grown both professionally and personally, not only through my work at Project Youth but also at a peak body level, where I've been proud to represent and be a voice for other young people who may not always get the chance to be heard.

I look forward to future opportunities that I will have with Project Youth and continue to be a voice for young people experiencing youth homelessness"



Diana Scholarship

Each year Project Youth provides a scholarship for a young person engaged with Project Youth to access support for their education. This could include fees for courses, university or TAFE, equipment to assist their study, or brokerage related to their education.

The scholarship is in honour of a Project Youth staff member, Diana Regan, whose life was tragically cut short in 2020 due to illness. Diana will be remembered as a strong advocate for young people and someone who was passionate about ensuring that young people were given opportunities to pursue their educational goals. This year, the scholarship has been awarded to three inspiring young people, each taking important steps in their learning and development. One recipient is using the support to cover TAFE course fees, helping them build the skills they need for their chosen career. The other two are using their scholarships to purchase essential items such as industry equipment, a study desk, and a printer all tools that will make it possible for them to succeed in their studies. Education is a gateway to stability, independence, and opportunity, and through this scholarship, Project Youth is breaking down barriers so young people can fully engage with their education.

As a previous recipient shared: *"Having the scholarship meant I didn't have to stress about how I was going to pay for the things I needed for my course. I would never have afforded this without the scholarship, and I probably would not have finished my course."*

Project Youth is privileged to be able to support young people in education, and we look forward to seeing the amazing things they achieve.

“

I've gone from being scared every day to actually looking forward to what's next. It feels good to be around people who understand, people who've been through the same things I have.



Our Future

2024/25 was the first year of our new 5-year strategy and we achieved more than we set out to. Guided by young people with lived expertise, we disrupted systems, grew our evidence base, and pushed beyond expectations because the urgency to end youth homelessness demands nothing less. While we know youth homelessness will not end within the lifetime of this strategy, we are determined to PREVENT it, and when it does occur ensure, it is BRIEF, and NON-REOCCURRING.

What we learn from Year One

Year one showed us that bold goals create momentum. We embedded lived experience into governance and leadership at levels never seen before in our organisation. We delivered evidence-based programs, strengthened advocacy with government, and developed innovative housing pathways through our property investment plans. We proved that when young people are given power, evidence, and trust, they lead us to solutions we could not have designed alone.

At the same time, we learnt just how difficult the financial landscape has become. Rising costs, increasing demand, and short-term competitive funding cycles are placing unprecedented pressure on our organisation. Despite achieving more than we set out to, we are doing so in an environment where it is getting harder to secure the resources needed to sustain and scale this work. This challenge only strengthens our resolve to advocate for funding models that match the scale of youth homelessness and ensure stability for the future.

Where we are going next

As we enter 2025/26, we are focused on six areas that will drive the next phase of our strategy:

- Government Engagement: We are convening a roundtable with local MPs and partners to generate housing innovation and accountability at a local level. Our goal is to ensure young people’s voices shape policy and that all levels of government work with us to end youth homelessness in our community.
- Housing Pathways: We are building on our first property purchase and investment strategy to expand exit housing and develop sustainable, youth-specific housing options with our partners. By creating a continuum of refuge, transitional, and independent housing, we aim to close the gap that leaves too many young people without safe accommodation.
- Lived Experience Leadership: We are further embedding our ‘Rising Together’ and ‘Lived Experience in Governance’ frameworks, creating formal roles, co-decision-making structures, and a distributed leadership model that continues to innovate. Our focus is on ensuring young people not only have a seat at the table but real power to shape decisions.
- Social Enterprise Innovation: With Café Social now paused, we are reimagining how social enterprise can deliver stronger employment outcomes, create community impact, and generate sustainable revenue for Project Youth. We are exploring models that combine training, social return on investment, and pathways into growth industries.

- Prevention Models: We will continue to strengthen early intervention programs that keep young people connected to family, education, and community. By building evidence around prevention, we will demonstrate that supporting young people earlier is more effective, less costly, and critical to breaking cycles of homelessness.
- Evidence and Impact: We are building our own evidence base to show “what it takes” to end youth homelessness, ensuring every program is data-driven, outcome-measured, and contributing to systemic advocacy.
- Workforce Wellbeing and Culture: We continue to invest in staff psychological safety, wellbeing, and fit-for-purpose structures and spaces so that our teams can sustain this critical work into the future.



Our commitment

We will not settle. We will continue to stretch, disrupt, and reimagine what’s possible, challenging short-term funding cycles, advocating for youth-specific housing and mental health systems, and creating programs co-designed and co-led by young people. Our vision is clear: a future where youth homelessness does not exist. And while that may not be realised within the lifetime of this strategy, we will leave the system changed, the pathways stronger, and the voices of young people permanently embedded at every table where decisions are made. Each step takes us closer, ensuring our next strategy moves us even nearer to making this vision a reality.

You can download a copy of our strategy: <https://www.projectyouth.org.au/our-vision-and-strategy>

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

At Project Youth, our RAP is not just a document, it means action. We are committed to building a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people feel culturally safe, supported, and empowered.

In 2023/24 we finalised our Reflect RAP, which laid strong foundations across relationships, respect, and opportunities. This included:

- Staff completed ‘Your MOB’ awareness training as well as trauma-informed cultural competency with We AI-li.
- Strengthened partnerships with Kurranulla Aboriginal Corporation, including co-located support in education and youth justice settings.
- Increased cultural visibility across all centres, embedding First Nations languages, maps, and acknowledgements.
- Supporting young people to successfully advocate for discriminatory curriculum changes through the Department of Education.
- Active participation in NAIDOC Week, National Reconciliation Week, and other First Nations-led community events.

These achievements provided the platform for the next stage of our journey: our Innovate RAP.

Moving into Innovate RAP

The Innovate RAP deepens our commitments and shifts us from building foundations to embedding reconciliation into the very core of our governance, programs, and workforce. Its priorities include:

- Strengthening governance by embedding reconciliation into leadership and strategy
- Expanding partnerships with First Nations organisations and Elders
- Increasing representation and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people within Project Youth
- Expanding culturally safe employment pathways
- Ensuring accountability through stronger tracking, measurement, and evaluation

Youth Leadership at the Centre

This year marks a significant milestone: two First Nations young people have joined our RAP Committee for the first time. Their voices will guide how reconciliation is embedded across our work. This is about shaping decisions, influencing practice, and holding us accountable to the communities we serve. We see this as a powerful step in ensuring reconciliation at Project Youth is youth-led, culturally grounded, and future-focused.

We also want to extend this approach further, by creating opportunities for more young people to be involved in our reconciliation journey, through consultation, co-design, and leadership roles.

Why this Matters

Reconciliation is not a destination we will reach, it is an ongoing process of learning, listening, and action. The Innovate RAP gives us a framework to move from reflecting to impact, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are active decision-makers in shaping services, systems, and futures.

By embedding reconciliation at every level of our organisation, we are working towards lasting impact for young people at Project Youth, for our broader community and for a more just and equitable Australia.



Systemic Change

Ending youth homelessness will not be achieved through service delivery alone. It requires bold reform, shared accountability, and a willingness to disrupt the systems that continue to fail young people. At Project Youth, we refuse to accept a status quo where over 958 young people in our region were turned away in one year. We have seen this replicated again in the last financial year with 79% of our referrals turned away due to insufficient resources, housing and funding. This is not a failure of young people, it is a failure of systems.

We believe that lasting change demands coordinated action across five critical fronts:

1. Housing Pathways

Young people cannot thrive without safe, stable housing. Crisis, medium and transitional beds are essential, but they are not enough. We need a National Youth Homelessness and Housing Plan, because where there is a plan there is focus, and where there is focus there is funding. Project Youth is already piloting innovative models, including our property investment strategy, but systemic change requires government to scale solutions to match the scale of the crisis. Young people need supported accommodation with wrap-around care, and funding must extend beyond short-term fixes. Programs that no longer meet needs, like caps on Rent Choice Youth, must be reviewed and reformed.

The NSW Government has announced major investment in social and affordable housing. While this commitment is welcome and urgently needed, the critical question remains: will young people see the outcomes of this investment? Without a clear, youth-specific housing strategy, young people risk being left behind in the broader rollout. Young people need dedicated exit housing options, supported accommodation with wrap-around care when they are homeless, and rental pathways into independence, not just promises that disappear into the general housing pool.



2. Government Engagement & Policy Reform

We are unapologetic in our call for governments to step up. In 2024/25, we brought young people with lived experience directly to State and Federal MPs, demanding urgent action on housing supply, employment, and mental health. We will continue to fight for:

- Increased funding for youth-specific homelessness services
- Investment in affordable housing stock for young people and youth exit pathways
- Integration of housing, education, employment, and mental health systems
- Policy reform that ensures equity

3. Lived Experience Leadership

Systems change must be led by those most impacted. At Project Youth, **lived experience is embedded in governance, workforce, and advocacy**. Through YPAC (Young People Advocating Change), young people are co-leading decision-making, managing budgets, and shaping strategy. They sit on recruitment panels, hold formal governance roles, and speak directly to MPs. YPAC has written to Homes NSW and State and National Ministers with their ideas and solutions, embodying their motto: “Not for us, without us.” Change does not happen through a one-off consultation or a survey that excludes marginalised voices, it requires **authentic, ongoing power-sharing** with young people at the table every time.

4. Funding Competitiveness & Sustainability

The fight to end youth homelessness is undermined by competitive funding cycles that pit organisations against each other rather than fostering collaboration. We call for a fundamental shift to **secure, long-term funding models that reflect the scale of youth homelessness and integrate with mental health, education, and employment services**. Funding must also cover real costs, including insurance, back-office infrastructure, and fair wages for staff. We cannot continue fundraising just to keep core services running. Outcomes-based contracts are needed; however, they should not be a way to cut corners, they must reflect the true cost of impact. Pay what it takes.

5. Prevention & Workforce Recognition

Youth homelessness is preventable. Investment must be directed toward early intervention and place-based responses that stop young people from entering homelessness in the first place. At the same time, we must recognise the impact this work has on the workforce. Staff and peers carry significant psychological load in walking alongside young people through trauma and systemic failure. Ensuring fair pay, strong supervision, and mental health support is essential if we are to sustain a workforce capable of delivering long-term change.

Our Commitment

We are clear about what needs to change:

- Youth-specific housing as a national priority
- Systemic reforms in funding, housing, and mental health
- Authentic power in the hands of young people with lived experience

Project Youth will not stay silent while young people are turned away, shut out of systems, or forced into unsafe environments. We will continue to disrupt, to innovate, and to fight for a future where youth homelessness is PREVENTED, BRIEF, and NON-REOCCURRING — until the day it is ended altogether.

Our Team

The Team Behind the Impact

This year, 98 staff, volunteers, directors, and young people united to drive forward our vision of ending youth homelessness. It takes a rare kind of team to do this work, people who are not only skilled and committed, but who bring compassion, resilience, and courage to everything they do.

Working for a charity like Project Youth is both a privilege and a challenge. It means living out our values every day and pursuing purpose-led careers that change lives. But it also means navigating uncertain funding, ever-growing demand, shifting government policies, and increasing competition for scarce resources. In the face of these challenges, our team remains steadfast in keeping our focus on the people we serve, walking alongside young people and families with lived experience of trauma, disadvantage, and homelessness.

Each member of our workforce brings something unique. They are storytellers, advocates, and practitioners. They build trust, create opportunities and safe spaces for young people as they heal, grow, and achieve their goals in education, employment, housing, and wellbeing. Together, they embody what it means to believe in a future where homelessness does not exist.

Words will never be enough to express our gratitude. To our staff, volunteers, and leaders, thank you for showing up every day with hope and determination. Thank you for embracing learning and growth, and for embedding trauma-informed practice at the heart of all that we do. Your passion is the driver of Project Youth's impact, and your dedication gives young people the support and belief they need to build their futures.



As of 30th June 2024, we had 98 paid and unpaid team members dedicated to the work of Project Youth, of which:

88% are paid employees



12% are part time

12% are volunteers

10%

are in social enterprise



31% are full time

26%

are paid young people

39% are casuals



2 board Observers

10 Board Members



Volunteer Spotlight – Tanya Hardy, Board Director

Volunteer Spotlight: Tanya – Championing Lived Experience and Systemic Change

At Project Youth, our volunteers play a vital role in shaping our organisation and advancing our vision to end youth homelessness. This year, we are proud to shine a light on Tanya, who has generously served as a volunteer Board Director for the past 10 years since 2015.

Tanya is a social worker with deep expertise in the youth, family and homelessness sectors. Throughout her time on the Board, she has been a strong and consistent advocate for young people, especially for those with lived experience to be recognised as leaders and decision-makers. Tanya has mentored new Board members, supported the development of governance practice, and ensured that Project Youth remain firmly committed to amplifying young people's voices at every level of the organisation.

Her leadership extends beyond governance. Tanya is a tireless advocate in the broader sector, continually challenging government, policy makers, and decision makers to be accountable for the systems that are failing young people. She brings courage to challenging conversations, ensuring that the realities of youth homelessness are not ignored and that systemic change remains firmly on the agenda.

We are grateful to Tanya for her dedication, wisdom, and advocacy. Her service over the past ten years has left a legacy, strengthening our governance, supporting our team, and most importantly, ensuring that the voices of young people with lived experience continue to shape the future of Project Youth.



“

Here is what Tanya has to say about her experience volunteering:

“I have a long history with Project Youth; I started working for the Bridge in 2001 and went on to work in several roles before joining the board in 2015. My ten years on the board have been some of the most intense, traumatic, stressful, joyful and hopeful of my life. I began on the board the year after the catastrophic “Going Home Staying Home” policy reduced many NSW homelessness services to rubble and permanently expelled decades of skills and experience from that field. Since then, homelessness has exponentially worsened and life has gotten harder for young people as the cost and accessibility of everything, not just housing, continues to rise. Globally, a poly crisis of climate breakdown and genocide fuelled by fossil fuel and weapons industries looms over us all, compounding the sense that all is not well, alongside a deepening understanding that all these ills are deeply linked.

As a board member with Project Youth, I have fully experienced the difficulties of being a little system, trying to swim against the tide of a much bigger system, and this has been the hope and joy, as well as frustration and hurt, for me in Project Youth. It has been truly wonderful to connect with other board members, staff and young people who care deeply about the health of the community, who believe in the inherent value of young people and the value of their lived experience and who want to work with these young people towards a future where homelessness does not exist. We don’t know in this moment whether we who have the fortune to be alive right now will be pall bearers for a version of the earth that is past saving, or if we will be the generation privileged with transitioning our social and economic systems away from being life destroying systems into life sustaining ones. By building community and solidarity we are investing in the best possible future for whatever comes. I am leaving Project Youth to dedicate more of my time to defending the peace and habitability of the home we all share by volunteering with the youth led climate action group Rising Tide. I look forward to watching as Project Youth supports and develops its youth leadership, and where that will take us and I wish Project Youth, and everyone connected with is all the very best with the difficult and incredible times ahead.”

”

Our Finances

As we continue to innovate and invest in embedding lived experience across Project Youth, our impact towards ending youth homelessness will deepen within the communities that we serve.

Project Youth demonstrated solid financial performance in 2025, despite a backdrop of significant economic pressure. I would like to acknowledge the critical role which our Financial Controller, Jade Bankier, has played in maintaining the overall financial strength of our organisation over a period of sustained cost inflation.

Income

Project Youth was grateful for the continued core government funding we received in 2025 which enabled the provision of core housing and youth homelessness support services. We were also extremely grateful for other sources of diversified income including donations generously gifted by our supporters, which were utilised to fund crucial wrap around support services for young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

Total income of \$5,531,906 represented an increase of \$503,917 or 10% on prior year. This variance was primarily attributable to Commonwealth grant income of \$404,071 not received in 2024.

Total Expenses

Total expenditure in 2025 increased in line with income by 10% or \$530,167 compared to 2024. While cost inflation eased in comparison to FY24 overall, there were material increases in insurances and employee benefits, due to a combination of additional resourcing and wage indexation of 3.75%.

Operating Deficit

In 2025, Project Youth invested strategically to strengthen our lived experience workforce and expand services. This included the creation of new lived experience roles and the introduction of new programs designed to close critical gaps in support. These investments contributed to an operating deficit of \$256,596, reflecting our commitment to sustainable impact and growth. Looking ahead, these foundations position Project

Youth to deliver stronger outcomes for young people in 2026 and beyond, ensuring that our services remain responsive, youth-led, and impactful.

Cash Flows

A net negative cash flow of \$404,583 for 2025 was reflective of increased operating costs and fluctuations in timings of grants received.

Financial Position

A net asset position totalling \$2,879,029 on 30 June 2025, represented a decrease of \$154,848 or 5% during the fiscal year. This was primarily attributable to a decrease in cash assets stemming from the budget deficit. Project Youth's balance sheet remains strong overall with nil debt and adequate cash reserves available to fund future investment activity.

Auditors Report and Financial Statements

SDJA has provided audited reports for a fifth year now and their feedback has been positive, with no significant issues or errors noted. We thank SDJA for their comprehensive reporting and assistance.

Vanessa Guez

Vanessa Guez
Treasurer



“

I get to stop stressing. Everything **feels calmer** and **I can think better**, as I feel like I have more time to think about things. I feel safer and I can listen to the music that I want to listen to. Everywhere else I've lived I've had to hide myself, at the moment I just **get to be me**, feels mad.

Project Youth
Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income
For the Financial Year Ended 30 June 2025

	Notes	2025 \$	2024 \$
Revenue			
Revenue from contracts with customers	4	4,739,695	4,358,293
Other income	5	792,211	669,696
Total revenue		5,531,906	5,027,989
Expenses			
Administration and other operating costs		(596,228)	(643,913)
Depreciation		(131,286)	(118,934)
Employee benefits		(4,444,254)	(3,890,372)
Fundraising costs		(8,535)	(1,783)
Lease payments for short-term and low-value leases		(198,103)	(203,454)
Net loss on sale of property, plant and equipment		(16,089)	-
Occupancy costs		(154,915)	(175,492)
Program and client support costs		(239,092)	(224,387)
Total expenses		(5,788,502)	(5,258,335)
Net deficit for the year		(256,596)	(230,346)
Income tax expense		-	-
Deficit after income tax		(256,596)	(230,346)
Other comprehensive income:			
Gain on revaluation of financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income		101,748	51,166
Total comprehensive loss		(154,848)	(179,180)

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Project Youth
Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 June 2025

	Notes	2025 \$	2024 \$
Assets			
Current			
Cash and cash equivalents	6	1,767,385	2,171,968
Trade and other receivables	7	38,291	87,257
Other financial assets	8	957,198	820,195
Other assets	9	55,581	9,824
Total current assets		2,818,455	3,089,244
Non-current			
Property, plant and equipment	10	873,608	818,394
Total non-current assets		873,608	818,394
Total assets		3,692,063	3,907,638
Liabilities			
Current			
Trade and other payables	11	230,690	305,706
Provisions	12	258,652	219,989
Contract liabilities	13	175,186	235,744
Total current liabilities		664,528	761,439
Non-current			
Provisions	12	148,506	112,322
Total non-current liabilities		148,506	112,322
Total liabilities		813,034	873,761
Net assets		2,879,029	3,033,877
Equity			
Revaluation reserve		182,949	81,201
Accumulated funds		2,696,080	2,952,676
Total equity		2,879,029	3,033,877

The accompanying notes form part of these financial statements.

Thank You

Thank you to our incredible supporters who have transformed the lives of young people facing homelessness this year.

Because of you, young people have been given the chance to flourish. Your support has created pathways to safety, stability, education, employment, and wellbeing. Together, we are not only changing individual lives but also safeguarding the future of our community by ensuring young people are safe, connected, achieving, and healthy.

Project Youth depend on the generous support of our funders and partners to make this work possible. Your commitment ensures we can continue to walk alongside young people, respond to rising demand for our services, and deliver programs that create real and lasting change.

It is a shared responsibility. Thank you for believing in young people, for investing in their potential, and for partnering with us in our vision of a future without homelessness.

Government Support & Funding

Department of Communities & Justice	Georges River Council	Homes NSW	Sutherland Shire Council
Department of Social Services	HARP unit NSW Health	Office of Responsible Gambling	

Philanthropist, Corporates & Business

Ainse (The Australian Institute of Nuclear Science & Engineering	Georges River Council	Menai High	Sutherland Rotary Club
Be Kind Sydney	Good 2 Give	McKreage Foundation	The Trusted Business Network
Big Sister	Gymea Bay Public School	NSW Young Lawyers Society	The Zonta Club of Botany Bay
Caringbah Rotary Club	Hurstville Rotary Club	O'Brien Glass	Thread Together
Club Central Hurstville	IMB	Quality College of Australia	Tomra - Return & Earn
Club Central Menai	James N Kirby Foundation	Rotary of Miranda	Tribe Social Fitness
Commonwealth Bank Menai	Jannali Toy Shop	Shangri La Sydney	Waratah Foundation
Cronulla Ladies Golf Club	Jannali High School	Snow Foundation	
Engadine Uniting Church	KK Technical Services	Specsavers	
ESG Asia Pacific	Mane St Hair Salon	Sutherland Shire Law Society	

Beyond financial contributions, the donations of goods, services, and time have made an extraordinary difference in the lives of young people. From warm blankets and handcrafted quilts to practical items like furniture, clothing, and bikes, every gift has brought comfort, dignity, and hope.

These contributions do more than meet immediate needs, they remind young people that they are seen, valued, and supported by their community. It is this collective spirit of care that strengthens our mission and fuels our belief that youth homelessness can be ended.

We thank every person, group, and organisation who has walked beside us this year. Your kindness is not only changing lives today but also building a more hopeful future for the young people we serve.

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”
– William James

Community Spotlight: Tribe Social Fitness x Project Youth

In July 2024, Tribe Social Fitness demonstrated remarkable leadership and community spirit in supporting homeless and disadvantaged young people across the Sutherland Shire. What began as a visit by Project Youth staff to share the challenges faced by local young people, quickly evolved into a meaningful partnership. A pivotal moment occurred when one of our Lived Experience Workers courageously shared their personal story, sparking a commitment from the Tribe team to take action.

Tribe’s response was significant. They launched a Spin Bike Challenge, with **84 members** cycling for up to six hours, raising more than \$11,000 in a single day. The event generated significant community engagement, with a pay-what-you-can coffee stall operated by one of our Lived Experience Workers, adding further energy and connection to the day.

Beyond fundraising, Tribe has extended their support to our **Project Educate program**, offering heavily discounted training sessions to up to 10 students. This initiative provides young people, many of whom would not otherwise have access to such opportunities, with the chance to build confidence, improve their health, and develop lifelong skills.

This partnership illustrates the powerful outcomes that can be achieved when businesses and community organisations work together. Tribe Social Fitness has not only raised vital funds but also built awareness, strengthened community connections, and created tangible opportunities for young people to thrive.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Tribe Social Fitness for their generosity and vision. Their partnership stands as an inspiring example of how local businesses can make a profound difference by investing in the potential of young people and supporting **a future where youth homelessness does not exist.**



Supporter Spotlight:

ESG Kurnell

Backing Local Young People



ESG Kurnell continued as a valued supporter of Project Youth this year, making a generous donation that directly contributed to improving the lives of young people in our local community.

Their support has helped us continue vital work across the Sutherland Shire and Georges River Area, providing young people with access to safe housing, education, employment opportunities, and mental health support. ESG's contribution has been more than financial, it's a clear show of belief in the potential of young people and the importance of community-led support.

We are proud to have ESG Kurnell standing with us. Their generosity reminds us of how powerful it can be when local businesses invest in their community, not just for today, but for the future.

Thank you, ESG, for helping us walk alongside young people as they work toward brighter, more stable futures.

When Partnership

Transforms Lives

From Supported Housing to the Shangri La

This year, we witnessed a powerful story of courage, growth, and possibility.

A young woman living in our transitional housing program, with English as her second language, began working part-time at our Social Enterprise, Café Social. Quiet but determined, she shared a dream with us, she had always wanted to work in a large hotel, specifically as a cleaner. It wasn't glamour she sought, but dignity, stability, and pride in her work.

With her permission, we reached out to our Embrace partner, the Shangri-La Hotel, to explore any opportunities. The team at Shangri-La welcomed the idea, interviewed her, and soon after, she was offered a role as a general cleaner.

What's followed has been truly heartwarming.

The Director of Operations said her confidence has grown remarkably. She shared that one of the highlights of her day is seeing her warmly greet staff each morning, something that once would have seemed unimaginable to her. Her English has improved, her sense of belonging has deepened, and most importantly, she loves her job.

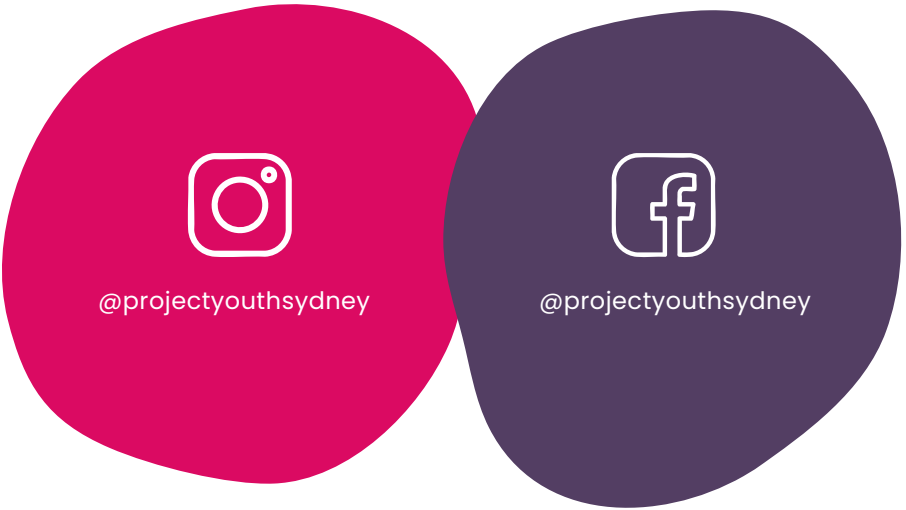
This story is more than a job placement. It's a reminder that when young people are given the right support, belief, and opportunities, they thrive.

We're incredibly proud of her, and very grateful to corporate partners like Shangri-La for seeing potential in young people.



Connect With Us

Questions? Send us an email: admin@projectyouth.org.au



You can also find us on Youtube or LinkedIn.
Just type 'Project Youth' into the search bar.



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