Youth in Power Program

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

The Youth In Power Program (YIPP) is a comprehensive youth engagement initiative combining activity-based group challenges with tailored case management support. In collaboration with local schools and community networks in Logan, Settlement Services International (SSI) delivered YIPP as a two-year pilot program. Over a period of ten to twelve weeks per cohort, young people take calculated risks, navigate challenges, face and overcome fears and anxiety, develop positive relationships with adults and peers and experience a sense of community and belonging in a safe, encouraging and supportive group environment. In addition, regular one-on-one meetings with YIPP facilitators allow young people to share their challenges, goals and emotions with a trusted adult in a confidential context. The intended program outcomes are broad and comprehensive and include developing a range of key social skills and personal qualities in participants as a precursor for improved education engagement and achievement, enhanced socio-emotional wellbeing, better social and community connections and positive life trajectories.

Findings of our evaluation of program implementation from April 2023 to June 2024 demonstrate that, overall, YIPP is successful in achieving its stated aims and objectives. Qualitative and quantitative data consistently demonstrate that young people develop a range of social and leadership skills as well as personal qualities through their participation in YIPP. During weekly group activities, participants acquire communication, planning, teamwork and peer-mentoring skills and increase their confidence, resilience, hopefulness for the future and openness to attempt new experiences. Their understanding of their own capabilities shifts and their motivation and belief in their capacity to make desired changes in their lives improves. These positive changes are reflected in young people's increased attendance and engagement at school, improved inter-personal relationships and friendships and clear plans for post-school pathways.

In consolidating our findings, we identify several opportunities for continuous refinement and tailoring of the YIPP program and model. An extension of the program, in particular the case management component, combined with a flexible delivery would further support young

people's transition into and out of the program and ensure that their needs can be met and goals can be reached in a sustainable manner. The cultural competence of SSI and the YIPP facilitators is an asset to the program and the culturally and linguistically diverse community of Logan. Funding security would allow SSI to further develop YIPP in a culturally safe manner, integrate the program in partner schools and implement a comprehensive strategy for engaging with parents, families and the community as part of an inter-agency, place-based response to youth disengagement in Logan. We see great potential in YIPP and strongly recommend ongoing funding to allow SSI to grow the program and continue its success.

1. Purpose

This report presents and discusses the findings of the evaluation of YIPP (Youth in Power Program), an innovative activity-based youth engagement initiative delivered by Settlement Services International (SSI), Logan. Findings are based on 15 months of implementation of this pilot program funded by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources' Safer Communities Fund.

2. Project Background

2.1. The YIPP Program

In response to an identified need for engagement opportunities for vulnerable young people at risk of antisocial behaviour and disengagement from education and community in Logan, Settlement Services International (SSI) has developed and is implementing Youth in Power (YIPP) as a pilot program over two years. YIPP is a comprehensive youth engagement program combining adventure-based group challenges with tailored case management support. Local schools and community networks refer young people who are assessed as showing signs of antisocial behaviour and disengagement and being at risk of adverse outcomes to the program. In groups the participants engage in a series of weekly challenges aimed at fostering confidence, courage, resilience, leadership, teamwork and relationships with peers and the YIPP facilitators. In addition, program participants are offered individualised case management support to develop and work towards their future goals and address current challenges and needs.

Through the integration of experiential engagement and learning opportunities with tailored and individualised support, SSI aims to achieve a range of positive outcomes for program participants. Building young people's capacity and fostering their sense of responsibility is a key objective of YIPP. This includes increased school attendance and engagement, the pursuit of other education or employment pathways and the development of crucial skills for working towards their goals and aspirations. In addition, the program aims to promote participants' wellbeing, in particular, improved self-esteem, mental health, resilience, confidence and hopefulness for the future. Opportunities for leadership skills development have the potential to assist young people with identifying their interests, passions and short and long-term goals, improving their life skills, evaluating their choices and behaviours,

developing problem solving skills and working successfully as a team. Finally, increased community connections and participation is another important envisioned program outcome. It is expected that after completing YIPP, young people will have experienced a sense of belonging in the group, built new friendships and increased their social network. Ultimately this will support them to engage with people, groups, programs, services and their communities in positive ways. The extent to which these ambitious envisaged program outcomes are achieved over the course of the pilot program is the focus of this evaluation.

2.2. Literature Review

Adolescence is a distinct developmental period characterised by profound physical and socio-emotional growth and change. Neuroscientific insights explain young people's increased interest in and seeking of opportunities for risk taking behaviours during this life phase (Icenogle & Cauffman, 2021). Research from the field of complex, developmental trauma explains how adverse childhood experiences can compromise healthy brain development leading to a range of cognitive, emotional, and social challenges and vulnerabilities (Hambrick et al., 2018). Young people who experience childhood adversity without strong attachments to and relationships with supportive adults experience toxic stress which, over time, harms their development across all domains, leading to difficulties with emotional competence and executive functioning (Perry, 2009). Thus, young people who experienced childhood adversity and relational poverty are at risk of a range of adverse outcomes over the life course.

Concerns regarding the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians feature prominently in public discourse. In 2018, Australia's leading youth mental health organisation, Headspace (2018), conducted a national youth mental health and wellbeing survey of 4,065 young people aged 12-25 years. Close to one third of respondents (32%) were experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress at the time, however, only one in ten (11%) reported accessing support from a mental health professional. The most recent nation-wide inquiry into the state of young people's mental health was conducted by Mission Australia in 2022. Of the 18,800 young Australians aged 15 to 19 who participated, 29% reported high emotional distress, almost one quarter (23.5%) disclosed feeling lonely all or most of the time and just over half (53.4%) revealed that they had needed mental health support at some point in their life (Mission Australia, 2022). Recent discussions have highlighted growing concerns in relation to the mental health of young people, linked to contemporary challenges such as the influence of social media and mobile

devices and prolonged school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021a, 2021b; Headspace, 2020, 2022). Evidently, a considerable proportion of Australia's youth are facing mental health and wellbeing challenges and need support.

Further contributing to poor mental health and compromised wellbeing of young people in Australia is the marginalisation of certain cohorts, including those coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD). It can be much more difficult to adjust to a different sociocultural context in this phase of life as young people are less equipped with the social and emotional capacities needed to navigate the stress associated with moving countries and adjusting to new social norms (Buchanan, et al., 2018). Furthermore, experiences of racism and discrimination add to acculturation stress and poor mental health (Gomez et al., 2011). Therefore, programs which aim to engage culturally and linguistically diverse youth need to be able to understand the particular experiences of this cohort and respond in culturally competent and safe ways.

Growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, early adversity and poor mental health can lead young people down a path of disengagement from schooling and positive community connections towards engagement in high risk and, at times, anti-social behaviours. In Logan, Southeast Queensland, the youth unemployment rate (16.7 %) is 6 % above the Queensland average of 10.8 % (Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2023). Juvenile crime linked to high-risk behaviours such as the unauthorised use of motor vehicles is a significant social issue in Southeast Queensland with chronic and re-offending being concentrated in socially disadvantaged areas (McCarthy, 2019; Vujkovic, 2022). Furthermore, educational disengagement tends to be more prevalent and entrenched in low-socioeconomic areas and amongst students who have experienced significant adversity (Assmann & Broschinski, 2021; McFarland et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2004; Sherwood, 2015; Tilbury, 2010). To address these concerns, programs aimed at supporting young people's healthy development in adolescence are required.

Experiential and adventure-based group programs are a promising approach for promoting young people's mental health and wellbeing and supporting positive developmental trajectories. These programs give young people opportunities to set goals, plan ahead, collaborate with others, persevere, develop problem solving and social skills and learn to identify and manage their emotions (Queensland Government, 2015; Youth Flourish, 2017). In addition, they provide a safe and supported context for thrill seeking and navigating risk, an important component of adolescent development (University of California Los Angeles

Centre for the Developing Adolescent, 2024). The Outlook Model is an example of an adventure-based youth intervention developed by the Queensland Government for young people involved in the youth justice system. In groups of six to eight young people with two trained staff, participants engage in activities such as hiking, canoeing, ropes courses and camping which require a high level of group interaction and cooperation (Queensland Government, 2015). Through structured opportunities to work together, young people can learn to trust and care for others, give and accept support and take responsibility.

Adventure-based learning and youth development programs have been evaluated extensively with promising results. Meta-analysis of studies evaluating experiential and adventure-based education opportunities demonstrate the positive health and wellbeing outcomes of these programs, particularly for young people (Gass et al., 2020). Participants reported positive life transformations such as enhanced emotional regulation, personal agency, interpersonal relationships and social connections, goal achievement, pushing personal boundaries and overcoming fears, relief from boredom, feelings of joyfulness and enhanced quality of life (Clough et al., 2016). Research investigating the impact of outdoor adventure programs for at -risk young people highlight benefits including improved self-concepts and confidence and reductions in substance misuse and other harmful behaviours and emotional dysregulation (Clough et al., 2016; Harper, 2017; Russell, 2003). Evidently, adventurous physical activity in a safe and supported context has the potential to enhance participants lives and mitigate some of the challenges posed by early adversity and disadvantage.

Strong and trusting relationships with safe, caring, and supportive adults are a key component of healthy adolescent development (Bowers et al., 2015; Henderson & De-Cuir-Gunby, 2016). The relational poverty of many young people with a history of adversity points to a need for programs which prioritise intensive, individualised support in the context of positive and enduring relationships between young people and adult mentors (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). Early intervention youth coaching creates a safe and confidential space for young people to share their strengths and goals as well as challenges and needs and empowers them to develop independence through connection (Mazzola, 2022; Ryom et al., 2017). Skilled coaches provide encouragement, motivation, guidance and targeted support, are led by the young person and seek to balance power dynamics in the coaching relationship (Buick et al., 2016). By combining experiential, adventure-based learning opportunities with intensive one on one support, YIPP is a comprehensive and promising program for facilitating positive developmental trajectories for young people in Logan.

3. Methods

3.1.   Research Overview and Methodology

The aim of the research informing this report is to comprehensively evaluate YIPP, an adventure-based youth engagement and support program. The effectiveness and sustainability of individual youth engagement and early intervention strategies are dependent on rigorous and methodologically sound evaluation processes which include the voices of young people who participate in these programs (Allard et al., 2007; Burns, 2019). It is expected that the outcomes of this evaluation will be significant on a micro and macro level, providing evidence for a place-based approach to youth engagement in meaningful activities in Logan and informing the broader academic literature on experiential and adventure-based learning and youth development programs.

Adopting a case study design, this project drew on multiple sources of data to investigate the following questions:

- How are participants, parents and guardians, program staff and stakeholders experiencing the program?
- How are participants benefiting from the program?
- What is the effectiveness of the adventure-based group activities in engaging young people and fostering their development?
- What is the effectiveness of case management practices in addressing young people's need, supporting them to overcome challenges and assisting them with identifying and pursuing their goals and aspirations?
- How could the effectiveness of the program in achieving its aims be improved?

Case study research seeks to gain deep and holistic insights into phenomena and contexts of interest through an intensive and systematic investigation of natural settings (Crowe et al., 2011; Heale & Twycross, 2018). This methodology has found wide application in social and education research in general and in program evaluations specifically (Grinnell et al., 2019; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Hancock et al., 2021; Johnson, 2021). This in-depth and place-based approach made case study design the most appropriate methodology for this research.

This project has undergone ethical review by the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee and received unconditional approval (GU Ref No: 2023/196).

3.2. Participants

This evaluation project sought to gather the perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders involved in YIPP. Of the 60 young people who participated in the program from April 2023 to June 2024, nine participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences. The YIPP facilitators introduced the evaluation project to program participants and connected young people who expressed interest in being interviewed to a member of the research team. The research team member explained the interview purpose and process to each young person, read the informed consent material with them, answered any questions they had and supported them in their decision whether or not to participate. In addition, the YIPP facilitators participated in regular focus group conversations with another member of the research team (n=4) during which they shared their experiences with the program and reflected on their observations of young peoples' engagement with YIPP and their practices. Furthermore, two parents and representatives of the stakeholder network (n=4) participated in semi-structured interviews and shared their thoughts on YIPP, including perceived benefits for young people. All interviewees and focus group participants were provided with informed consent materials and provided written consent prior to their participation in the evaluation.

Observational data in relation to the adventure-based experiences was gathered through overt participant observation of the facilitated activities. A member of the research team participated in the group activities on nine occasions and introduced themselves and their role in the project evaluation to participants and program staff. In addition, young people and families were provided with information sheets about the evaluation.

3.3. Data Sources and Collection

In accordance with case study research, this evaluation collected and analysed data from multiple sources of evidence (Crowe et al., 2011). Information in relation to pre-and post-outcomes measures was gathered as secondary data. Young people who engaged in YIPP completed the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1997) and the Youth Wellbeing Common Assessment Tool (CAT) (Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 2018) with one of the facilitators prior to and after the completion of the program and SSI provided this data in de-identified form for analysis. Complementing this information, SSI provided de-identified data in relation to adventure-based activities, referral sources and other case management information. The YIPP facilitators and representatives from the schools who had referred young people to the program completed individual

customised outcome evaluation measures, based on the aims of the program, for each participant and SSI supplied this data in de-identified form. The quantitative data was complemented by qualitative data from interviews with young people, parents and stakeholders, focus groups with program staff and observations of adventure-based activities to develop a comprehensive understanding and thorough analysis of the impact of YIPP for young people in Logan. Table 1 provides an overview of the different data sources for this evaluation.

Table 1. YIPP evaluation data sources

Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
• Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1997)	• Interviews with young people (n = 9)
	• Focus groups with program staff (n = 4)
• Youth Wellbeing Common Assessment Tool (CAT) (Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 2018)	• Interviews with parents and stakeholders (n = 5)
	• Observations of adventure-based activities (n = 9)
• Goal attainment and outcomes data (customised and provided by SSI)	

3.3.1. Pre- and Post-Outcome Measures

Children's Hope Scale

The Children's Hope Scale, is a six-item, self-report measure for children and young people, typically aged 8-16 (Snyder et al., 1997), in line with the Adult Hope Scale which was developed by Snyder et al. in 1991, as a scale which has proven psychometric properties of internal consistency and convergent, discriminant and incremental validity. In addition to providing an overall score or measure to determine any changes pre- and post-intervention, it contains two subscales – agency (odd numbered items) and pathways (even numbered items) (Snyder et al., 1997). The six items include:

1. I think I am doing pretty well.

2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.

3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age.

4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.

5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.

6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.

Snyder and colleagues (1997) noted that positive and negative emotions such as hope and hopelessness are not only relevant to health outcomes, but moreover, are critical to the attainment of goal pursuits in the immediate term. In this context, the concept of (self) agency and pathways-related thinking (to goal achievement) are considered key, and thus sub-scale measures for both agency and pathways were calculated and compared in addition to pre- and post-analyses of the overall measure of 'hope'.

Youth Wellbeing Assessment Common Assessment Tool (CAT)

The Youth Wellbeing Assessment, Common Assessment Tool (CAT) Guide was developed and licensed (under a creative commons attribution) by the Queensland Government Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (2018) and is freely available for use and adaption, primarily to assess young person's relative strengths and needs, inform their support planning and monitor change over time. The questions and domains assessed in the CAT have also been previously adapted for use in the evaluation of a career readiness program for young parents in Western Australia (Atkins et al., 2022).

The tool assesses risks or strengths and needs across 11 domains:

- My Housing
- My Schooling or Work & Income
- My Family Relationships
- My Social Connections (peer relationships)
- My Physical Health
- My Drug & Alcohol Use
- My Mental Health
- My Culture (applicable to identified Indigenous or CALD young people)
- My Parenting & Children (applicable to young persons who are pregnant or parenting)
- My Disability (applicable to young people who have a disability or a potential undiagnosed issue)
- My Safety & the Law (applicable to young people who have contact with Youth Justice or Correctional Services).

It is suggested that good practice involves the young person and support person completing the assessment together, but if this is not possible, the support person can use their professional judgement to complete the assessment. The CAT uses a scale of 1 to 5 where:

1 = Can be a lot better

2 = Can be better

3 = Ok (but can be better)

4 = Doing well

5 = Doing great.

Given the tool identifies risk levels across 11 different domains, scores for each domain were dichotomized to reflect higher and lower risk levels (Jenkins, 2021) and the change in risk level was therefore able to be determined. Thus, a score of 1 or 2 was considered to indicate higher risk levels and scores of 3 to 5 were assigned to the lower risk category. This ensured pre- and post-test analyses could determine if there were any significant changes in young people's risk profiles as a result of their participation in YIPP.

3.3.2. Qualitative Data Sources

Field Observations

A member of the research team engaged in the adventure-based group experiences on nine occasions and collected data in relation to young people's participation and engagement in and feedback about the program as a participant observer. This information included observations and informal conversations with participants and was recorded as field notes. To facilitate structured and focused observations of the activities, an observation template tailored to this evaluation had been developed. As an overt participant observer, the role of the research team member was disclosed to YIPP staff and participating young people. Field notes in relation to young people's engagement in the program were kept general in nature, for example, observations in relation to the types of activities offered, how they were facilitated and how young people individually and as a collective responded to them. In addition, the researcher engaged in casual conversations with young people about their engagement with the program. Program feedback provided by participants was documented in field notes after explicit verbal consent had been obtained. Only information that was directly related to the research questions guiding this evaluation was recorded.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Separate interview guides had been developed for semi-structured interviews with program participants, parents and guardians and members of the stakeholder network and focus groups with program staff. All potential interviewees were provided with an information letter explaining the purpose and objectives of the research, the interview process, anticipated benefits and risks of the research and mechanisms for safeguarding privacy and confidentiality. An attached consent form emphasised the voluntary nature of participation, including participants' right to withdraw their consent at any time without explanation or consequences. Information letters and consent forms for young people had been written in clear and plain language using simple sentence structure to ensure that they were appropriate for and accessible to youths with varying levels of language and literacy skills.

The researcher read through the informed consent materials with each young person, clarified information as required and answered any questions that arose. Interviews with young people were conducted at a place and time convenient to them. YIPP program staff participated in regular focus group conversations (n=4) facilitated by a member of the research team. Parents and members of the stakeholder network were invited to participate in interviews in the second half of the first year of the program at a time and location convenient to them. Individual interviews were approximately 30 minutes and focus groups at least one hour in duration. Interviews and focus groups were recorded with permission of the participants. Recordings were transcribed as soon as practicable after the interviews and subsequently destroyed. Participants' names and other potentially identifying information were replaced with pseudonyms during transcription.

3.3.3. Additional Secondary Data

In addition to pre- and post-outcome measures, SSI provided de-identified secondary data in relation to client demographics and referral sources as well as information about the instances and types of adventure-based group activities and attendance numbers. Young people's goal attainment and program outcomes were assessed by YIPP and school staff in collaboration with young people using customised outcome measures templates. This data was entered into a spreadsheet and provided by SSI in de-identified form.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

All data were transferred from Excel to SPSS (Version 29.0) and screened prior to analysis. Pre- and post-test analyses were undertaken on the Hope Scale, both for subscale measures, and the overall score using the non-parametric test, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Pre- and post-comparisons were also undertaken for the Youth Wellbeing Common Assessment Tool (CAT) using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Confidence intervals were set at 99 % for the analysis of Hope and CAT scales.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Interview and focus group data were analysed thematically to understand similarities and differences for each group (program participants, staff, parents and guardians and members of the stakeholder group) regarding their observations and perceptions of young peoples' engagement with and potential impacts of the program.

Data gathered during the fieldwork component of this research was analysed thematically with an emergent design. Fieldwork and analysis were conducted concurrently with preliminary insights informing data collection in the field.

Other secondary data provided by SSI in de-identified form throughout the program (participant demographics, referral sources, attendance numbers and program outcomes) were analysed using qualitative (e.g. thematic and narrative analysis) or quantitative (e.g. descriptive statistics and frequency distributions) methods as appropriate.

4. Findings

In this section we present the findings of our evaluation of the Youth in Power Program. First, we describe insights gained through nine field observations of adventure-based group experiences. Next, we present outcomes of the analysis of secondary data, including pre- and post-outcomes measures and the customised outcomes evaluation tool completed by YIPP facilitators and school staff in collaboration with young people. Finally, we present findings from interviews with program participants, focus groups with YIPP facilitators and interviews with stakeholders and parents. Each subsection concludes with a summary box highlighting key findings.

4.1. Field Observations of Adventure-Based Group Experiences

Each YIPP cohort consists of a group of up to 12 young people and one or more support practitioners from the referring school or community network. Over the course of two to three months the groups participate in a range of team building and adventure-based experiences designed to develop skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, healthy relationships, leadership, problem solving, resilience, respect, self-awareness, confidence, reflection, teamwork and creativity.

The activities are diverse and include rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing, paint ball, art, ropes courses, hiking and a range of team building and trust exercises and games. Two key components of the program are an adventure day program during which participants navigate a range of group challenges in different outdoor terrains, and the three-day hiking camp toward the end of the program. The program concludes with a graduation and celebration event for young people and their families.

This sub-section presents findings from field observations conducted over the course of one YIPP cohort from August to October 2023. The key themes identified include **building the group and developing relationships**, **challenging young people and growing their potential and making the implicit explicit**. For the first two themes we discuss processes and evidence of outcomes we observed.

4.1.1. Building the Group and Developing Relationships

Process

Several processes which support group cohesion and relationships among participants and between young people and adults (support workers and YIPP facilitators) were observed:

- The first two sessions consisted of ice breaker activities, trust exercises and small group challenges, which allowed young people to get to know each other and initiated a team building process prior to embarking on the bigger and more challenging tasks.

- The collaborative development of a group agreement as a living document in the second session established the group as a democratic forum and allowed young people to define concept such as respect, trust, safety and vulnerability together.

- Intentional use of language was promoted. The YIPP facilitators encouraged young people to use positive language, celebrate courage and share vulnerabilities. Conversely unhelpful comments, which were rare, were addressed promptly with a clear explanation and links to the purpose of the program and the group agreement.

- The YIPP facilitators and support staff frequently shared stories of their own vulnerabilities and challenges they had faced and participated in the activities with the young people as equals. Having activities externally facilitated further balanced power between YIPP workers and young people and promoted equal relationships.

- Outside of the structured activities, participants were provided with opportunities to "hang out" and casually get to know each other during breaks, shared lunches and before and after the challenges.

- Whenever possible during activities, the YIPP facilitators stepped back to allow young people to negotiate, communicate and collaborate on their own terms and develop the group organically. However, at times, the facilitators also stepped in intentionally and provided assistance by asking questions or providing prompts rather than offering solutions.

- Support staff from the young people's school with whom the participants seemed to have a positive relationship supported group processes and the development of relationships amongst young people.

- Having a minimum of two, and at least one male and female, YIPP facilitators present during all sessions allowed the team to respond to challenges and support the group as well as individuals.

- The YIPP facilitators gave frequent positive feedback regarding group cohesion and successful collaborations.

Frequent changes to group composition and fluctuating attendance numbers were identified as potentially compromising group cohesion, relationships, and collaboration. The YIPP facilitators attempted to address this challenge by reminding young people that this program required commitment to establish safety and trust and encouraging them to make a conscious decision about their participation and follow through as much as possible. They also asked participants to share any concerns regarding their weekly attendance with a team member so that they could work out solutions together and provide assistance as required.

Evidence

There was ample evidence of group cohesion, positive relationships and successful collaborations over the course of the observation period:

- The young people seemed very comfortable with each other after only a few weeks and they seemed to enjoy spending time with each other during the activities and outside of them. During break times and lunches there was a lot of engagement with young people sharing music, singing, dancing and joking together. During a shared breakfast one participant introduced the group to her culture by cooking a Polynesian dish for the group, which was much appreciated by everyone.

- During the group challenges young people worked together, encouraged and reassured each other and celebrated every attempt at an activity with cheers, claps and high 5s. Over time the group increasingly started to strategize and use effective communication to plan and approach a group task. Communication between young people was positive, respectful and encouraging and no conflicts were observed.

- Increasingly, the young people made sure that everyone was included and different perspectives were heard, for example, by asking quieter participants for their opinions. There were active efforts to assist participants who were struggling with a particular task and there seemed to be a general recognition that challenges are experienced differently by the young people, with participants congratulating each other for trying no matter the outcome.

- A strong culture of support and positive relationships amongst young people was clearly noticeable after a few weeks and continued to grow throughout the program. Young people were looking out for others during group tasks, making sure that everyone could keep up and helping each other, for example, by holding on to and supporting each other to climb out of the mud pit challenge at the day program. In another example, during the treetop challenge, which was not a group challenge per se, young people formed small groups unprompted and committed to staying together on the high ropes course to be able to help each other out.

- Over time the relationships between the YIPP facilitators and young people appeared to grow stronger as well. Their relationships did not seem to have the same power imbalance as, for example, teacher-student relationships and there was a lot of friendly banter, sharing of personal stories and mutual support and encouragement between young people and adults.
- The importance of group cohesion and positive relationships was apparent in young people's comments who shared that working together as a group and receiving encouragement from others helped them to persevere and ultimately led the group to success:
  "I didn't think I could do the backwards jump but when I saw others do it safely and heard everyone encouraging me I changed my mind".
  "We worked together really well."
  "We relied on each other."
  "We had each other's back, literally."

While there were some fluctuations in attendance, there was a core group of six to seven young people who attended almost every week. When several new young people joined the program after a few weeks there was less coordination of activities and less effective communication and consequently the group found it more difficult to succeed in the group challenges. The YIPP facilitators navigated this challenge by providing more assistance during the tasks, revisiting the group agreement with young people and reminding everyone of the importance of commitment to the program and consistent attendance.

4.1.2. Challenging Self-limiting Beliefs and Growing Your Potential

The activities and group challenges were designed to create opportunities for young people to exercise agency, experience empowerment, confront self-limiting beliefs and grow their potential in a safe and supported group context.

Process
A range of intentional processes seemed to support young people's ability to push beyond their comfort zone and embrace the challenges:
- The concept of "challenge by choice" was a key component of the program and YIPP facilitators reminded young people frequently that participation in the challenges was voluntary and there was no expectation that they should attempt each task. Young people's fears and concerns were validated and respected.

- The YIPP facilitators created a predictable routine for each activity which involved a detailed introduction to the task, including any safety aspects, attempting the challenge, allowing multiple attempts whenever possible, and reflecting/ de-briefing the experiences at the end.
- Young people were repeatedly encouraged to commit themselves to the experiences and consider stepping outside of their comfort zone. Overcoming self-limiting beliefs to achieve their potential as a key aim of the program was explicitly explained.
- After attempting an activity, the YIPP facilitators encouraged young people to remember the feeling they experienced after they had persevered and did something hard and remember it when they are faced with challenges in the future. This created relevance of the program for young people's lives.
- Young people were in charge to the greatest extent possible. The YIPP facilitators stepped back intentionally to create space for young people's agency and self-regulation. This extended beyond the adventure activities to include break times and shared lunches, with young people being in charge of cooking for the whole group.
- The school staff and YIPP facilitators participated in the activities instead of leading them. They seemed to intentionally limit advice and suggestions to allow young people to lead processes and challenges and reduce power imbalances between young people and adults to the greatest extent possible.
- The program offered diverse activities to create different types of challenges to ensure all young people had opportunities to push themselves out of their comfort zones. For example, the creative art project seemed to be a challenge for some participants who may not have been as challenged during the physical tasks.
- Most of the activities were externally facilitated. Some of the external facilitators had training and experience in the fields of youth work and trauma informed practice. The encouragement and socio-emotional support these practitioners were able to provide to young people stood out to the observer.

Evidence

It was evident that young people were committed to the program and embraced the opportunity to challenge themselves and grow their potential:

- Young people demonstrated tremendous levels of commitment and endurance during the activities. This was particularly evident during the full-day physical experiences such as the treetop challenge. Young people demonstrated grit trying challenges multiple times and attempting ropes courses with varying degrees of difficulty over several hours.

- Young people demonstrated maturity and diligence in the use of the safety equipment and adhering to safety rules.
- In casual conversations, young people shared strategies they used when faced with challenges such as trying not to overthink it, taking deep breaths, and singing their favourite song to help them remain calm and "go for it".
- During the camp preparation session, young people shared some concerns about having to spend two nights away from home and potentially having limited access to phone and internet reception. Despite these worries, six participants attended the camp of this group for the three days and participated in the challenges.
- During the de-briefing and reflections sessions at the end of the activities young people shared their personal growth with the group:
  "I didn't think I could climb up there but I did."
  "It got easier every time I tried."
  "I pushed myself and tried new things."
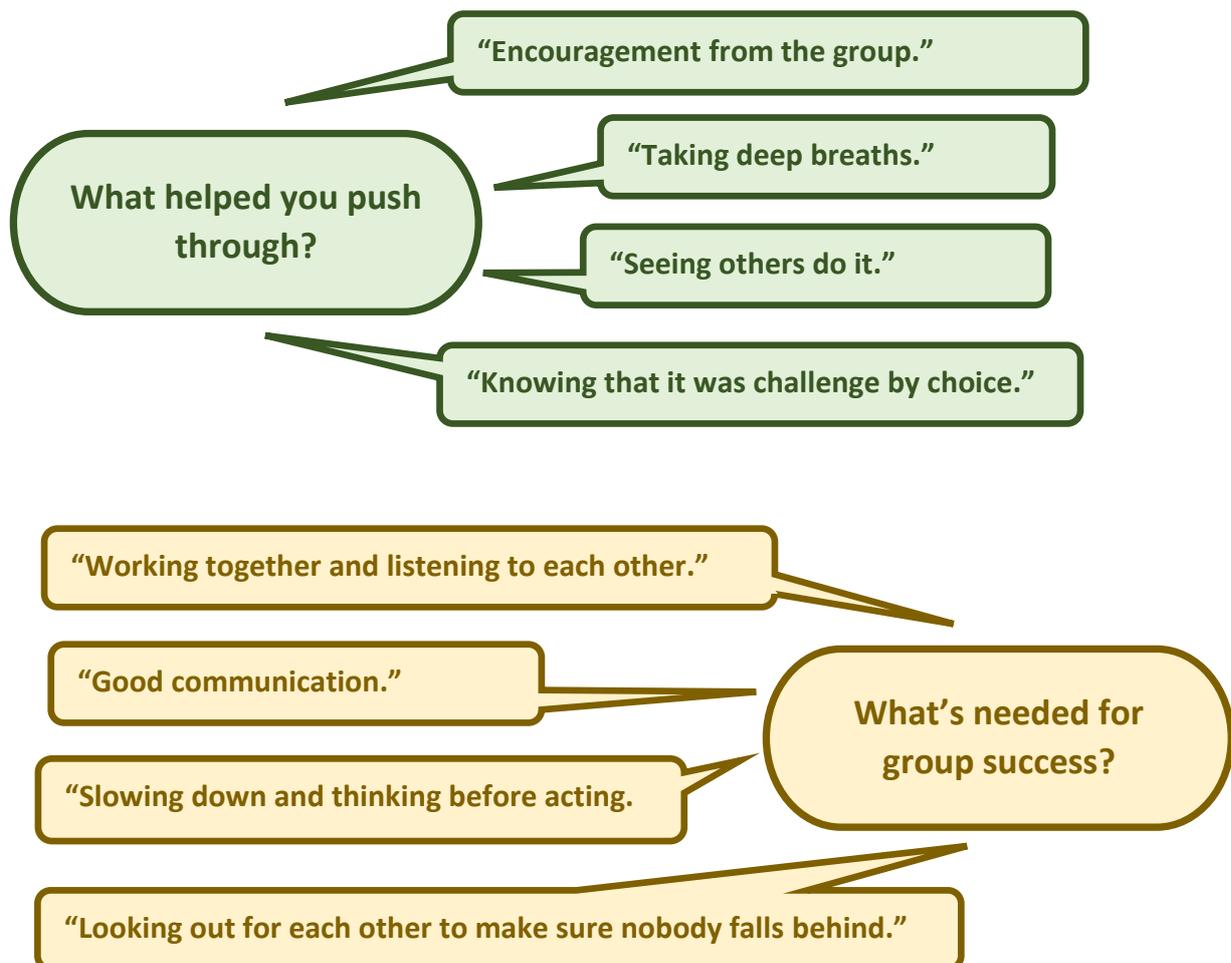
4.1.3. Making the Implicit Explicit

The YIPP facilitators' commitment to transparency in the way they communicated the aims and purpose of the program to young people stood out during the observations:
- At the first session, young people seemed to have limited information about YIPP.
- The aims of the program and individual activities were repeatedly explained (for young people to push beyond their current limits, try new things, face challenges and persevere in a supportive group with positive relationships). The use of explicit language and terms such as "team building", "leadership" and "collaboration" and relatable phrases such as "having each other's back" facilitated this transparency.
- The key messages repeatedly communicated to young people included: Challenge by choice, challenge looks different for every person, working together as a team, assisting and supporting each other, pushing beyond boundaries, growing confidence and self-belief, building relationships, feeling safe and trusting each other.
- In addition, the concept of empowerment (i.e. young people being in charge) and the aim of developing equal relationships among young people and between young people and adults were highlighted frequently.
- The YIPP facilitators intentionally linked values, skills and personal qualities demonstrated by young people and the group, such as perseverance, trust, confidence, relationships, social skills and communication, to positive future trajectories for the participants.

Facilitated and intentional opportunities for de-briefing and reflection after each activity created a forum for the explicit discussion of leadership, group work and personal growth:

- During these de-briefing sessions, the success of the group as well as the contributions and achievements of individuals were highlighted, discussed and celebrated.
- The YIPP facilitators explicitly shared the growth they were observing in participants and the group and encouraged young people to share their experiences with and reflections about the program during the de-briefings.
- Facilitated experiences such as the glass jar activity assisted young people with teasing out the values, skills and personal qualities they observed in themselves and others and giving positive feedback to each other. This group affirmation process served as a celebration of individual and group successes and growth and was very well received by the young people.

The following comments from young people during de-briefing sessions exemplify the process of making the implicit explicit during reflective group conversations.

"Encouragement from the group."

What helped you push through?

"Taking deep breaths."

"Seeing others do it."

"Knowing that it was challenge by choice."

"Working together and listening to each other."

"Good communication."

What's needed for group success?

"Slowing down and thinking before acting.

"Looking out for each other to make sure nobody falls behind."

Key findings: Field observations of adventure-based group experiences

- Processes and practices such as the collaborative development of a group agreement, facilitated trust exercises and small group challenges and the intentional use of positive, team-oriented language supported the development of group cohesion and positive relationships amongst participants and between young people and the YIPP facilitators.

- Positive relationships and group dynamics enabled young people to work together, encourage, reassure and support each other and celebrate individual and group successes.

- A group environment which encouraged safety, mutual support and trust built a foundation for young people to step outside their comfort zones, navigate challenges and grow their potential.

- Young people's empowerment and agency were at the heart of every aspect of the program.

- The purpose and aims of the program were explicitly discussed by the YIPP facilitators and young people were provided with ample opportunities for reflecting on their experiences with the program in an effort to make the implicit aspects of personal growth and skills development explicit.

- There was a good balance between activities that required participants to challenge themselves individually (e.g. abseiling) and activities which required young people to work together as a group (e.g. mud challenge), reflecting the dual focus of YIPP of creating a safe group culture as the foundation for growing young people's confidence in their own abilities.

4.2. Program Outcomes (Secondary Data)

The quantitative analysis of pre- and post-program Hope and CAT scale data allowed the research team to assess the impacts of YIPP across the entire cohort of participants. However, we caution that data quality decreased over time with significant missing data evident, particularly for the last cohort and in relation to the Hope Scale.

4.2.1. Self- and School-Reported Outcomes Data (n=60)

The available self-reported outcomes data suggest the majority of participants (n=23) feel that their goals have been met and they have seen significant improvements as a result of their participation in the program. A further 18 participants reported a partial change or that they improved somewhat, and the remaining three participants reported that they had not had any positive changes. Data was missing for 16 cases, however, these results echo ratings from the participants' school where school support workers reported significant improvements for 25 participants, with partial changes noted in 13 participants and no changes observed for the remaining two participants. These results indicate that there are high levels of consistency in the ratings obtained from participants themselves and school-based stakeholders, (i.e. good inter-rater reliability). Figures 1 and 2 provide a visualisation of positive outcomes in relation to two key indicators – goals attained/needs addressed and school engagement.
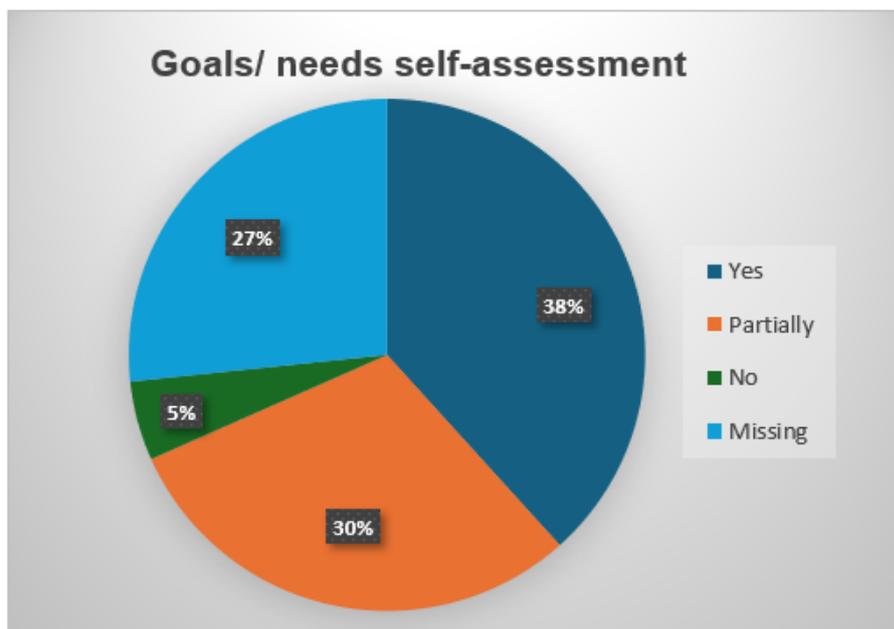

Figure1. Young person's goals or needs have been met (self-assessment) (n=60)
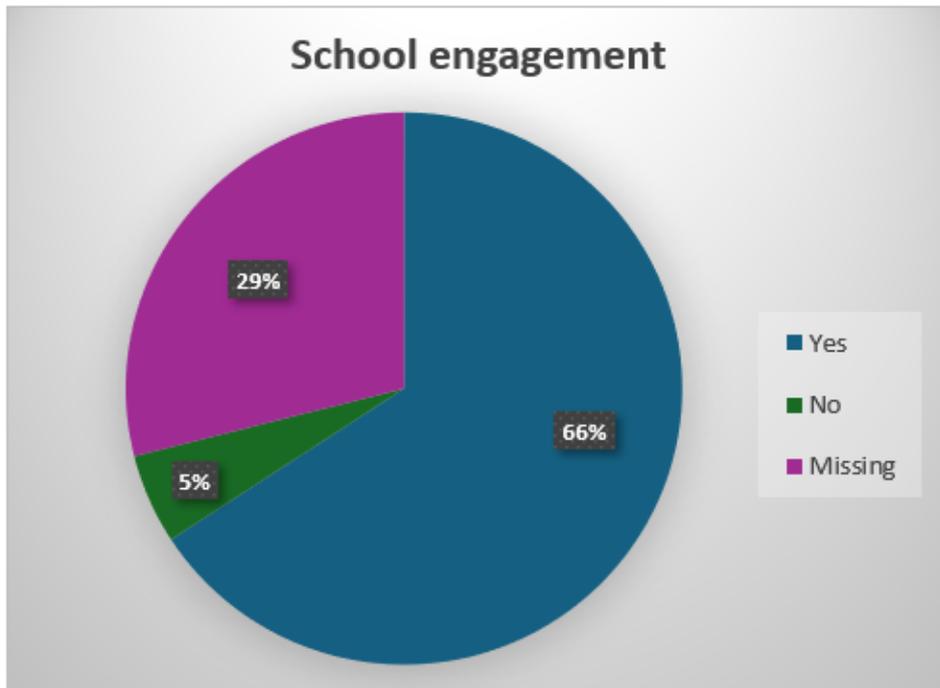
Figure 2. Increased school engagement (school-reported) (n=38)

4.2.2. Hope Scale Outcomes (n=60)

Overall significant differences were observed pre- and post-test, for the Hope Scale although there were 16 missing cases in this data set. As indicated in table 2, the median or average score on the agency and pathways subscales and total score all increased, with the difference between pre- and post-results found to be significant (W = -4.736, p=0.001). It should also be noted that positive change increased with higher median scores for both Hope Scale subscales and total scores evident at the completion of the program compared to the interim evaluation results which were based on the first four cohorts. This indicates that the effectiveness of the program may have increased over time. However, we caution that due to the small sample size and missing data we were unable to test for statistical significance of these improvements.

These results mirror both the interim and final pre- and post-analyses of self-reported responses collected by program staff (n=49) in relation to participants' desire/motivation to make change (W = -3.162, p = 0.002), and belief in their capacity to make change, (W = - 3.317, p = 0.001). Note that the consistency of scores from like measures across different time points demonstrate the reliability of the data (i.e. parallel forms reliability).

Table 2. Pre- and post-test results for Hope Scale

	Pre-test (baseline)			Post-intervention results		
	Median	25% quartile	75% quartile	Median	25% quartile	75% quartile
Agency	13	11	15	15	13	17
Pathways	12	10	14	14	12	16
Hope	24	21	29	29	26	32

4.2.3. Youth Wellbeing Assessment (CAT Outcomes) (n=60)

All data elicited through the CAT was screened to check data quality, and there were 11 missing cases in this data set. Furthermore, some domains were not able to be analysed as they were only associated with a few cases. For instance, there were no parents in the sample, only one participant reported that they have a disability and only two participants had involvement with the law. Although cultural considerations were not reported to be relevant for all participants, there were 25 participants for which this data was available and this domain was able to be analysed.

As outlined in the Youth Wellbeing CAT Guide, "scores of 1 and 2 in any of the components should be a flag that the issues is or has the potential to be an imminent risk/serious need for the young person" (Queensland Government, 2018, p.7). In order to determine if the program has been successful in meeting young people's needs and reducing their risks, the data was therefore dichotomized so scores of 1 and 2 were used to indicate people 'at risk' and scores of 3, 4 and 5 were recoded as 'not at imminent risk'.

Based on pre- and post-test analyses, using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, significant changes at the program level were observed in relation to most of the CAT domains. Again, larger effects were observed for the total cohort compared to the interim evaluation findings. Significant improvements included schooling, work and income (W = -3.317, p = 0.001), family relationships (W = - 2.236, p = 0.025), social connections (W = -3.162, p = 0.002), and mental health (W = -2.333, p = 0.020). There were no significant differences or changes observed in relation to the housing (W = -1.414, p = 0.157), physical health (Z = -1.732, p = 0.083) and cultural domains (W = -1.000, p = 0.317) (table 3). It should be noted that there were only a smaller number of participants for which cultural domains were reported to be relevant so findings in relation to this domain may reflect a lack of statistical power. Given the aims of the program, the significant changes observed for domains more directly influenced or addressed through program planning and implementation relate to school, social and family connections and mental health as opposed to the more distal factors

addressed through case management approaches (e.g. housing and cultural considerations) which were less evident than the adventure therapy components. The observance of change across domains that were given priority in program planning and consistency of scores measuring like constructs also demonstrate content and construct validity. Furthermore, the validity of these findings is further established when considering how they mirror results for a similar cohort and pilot program (i.e. Resolve project) in the Logan area (Harris et al., forthcoming). This suggests the statistical findings also have external validity.

Domain	W-Score	P-Value*
Housing	-1.414	< 0.157
Schooling (or work and income)	**-3.317**	**< 0.001**
Family relationships	**-2.236**	**< 0.025**
Social connections	**-3.162**	**< 0.002**
Physical health	-1.732	< 0.083
Mental health	**-2.333**	**< 0.020**
Cultural connections	-1.000	< 0.317

Table 3: CAT Outcomes   * **P-Values <0.05** are considered statistically significant

4.2.4. Content Analyses of Facilitators' Perspectives Pre and Post

In addition to assessing young people's goal attainment and program outcomes quantitatively using the Hope Scale, CAT assessment and customised outcome measures, the YIPP facilitators provided comments regarding key areas of concern at pre-assessment and key areas of improvement at post-assessment for some young people. These comments have been analysed using basic qualitative content analysis and frequency counts and findings are summarised below (see figures 3 and 4).

At pre-assessment presenting concerns related to school/work, family relationships, social connections, mental health, culture, desire/motivation and belief in capacity to make changes. The domains of schooling and employment included behavioural issues, low motivation, struggles with school work and low attendance. In the community cohorts, several young people found it difficult to find a post-school pathway. Family relationships were strained by conflict with parents, a perceived lack of trust, support and understanding, parental separation and family responsibilities and expectations. A lack of social connections included limited friendships and social activities, negative peer group influences and feelings of disconnection from culture. Many young people struggled with mental health, specifically

anxiety, stress, depression, anger, ADHD and a lack of support. A limited sense of belonging and acculturation stress were the main concerns in the cultural domain. A significant number of young people were reported as struggling with low motivation and confidence.
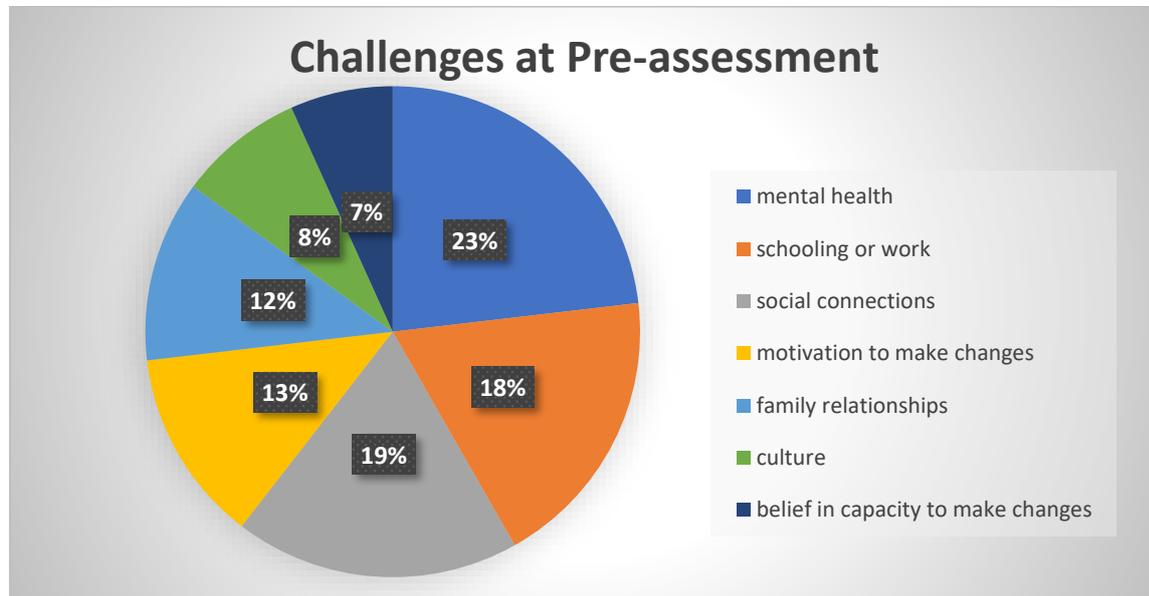

Figure 3. Frequency of presenting concerns at pre-assessment in each domain

At post-assessment practitioners reported improvements in the areas of schooling/work, social connections, mental health, culture, desire/motivation to make changes and belief in capacity to make changes. In the domain of schooling and employment, participants had improved engagement at school and fewer behavioural concerns.. Their attendance had increased, they were more confident about school and had found a positive peer group. Some young people also expressed motivation to find employment and others had developed a clearer future career pathway. Young people's social connections had increased and they had developed positive peer relationships based on trust. Improved communication and interpersonal skills had increased their confidence in social situations. There were also some gains in young people's mental health and self-care. Some participants felt less anxious and stressed, had improved their resilience and were more trusting of others. Increased sense of belonging and identity were the main improvements in the domain of culture. Finally, the practitioners reported significant improvements in young people's motivation to make positive changes in their lives. Participants demonstrated leadership, an increased sense of responsibility, teamwork skills, self-awareness and the ability to trust others. Some had developed clear goals for their futures. The practitioners also reported significant gains in confidence as a consequence of young people overcoming challenges and fears and gaining an increased understanding of their capabilities.
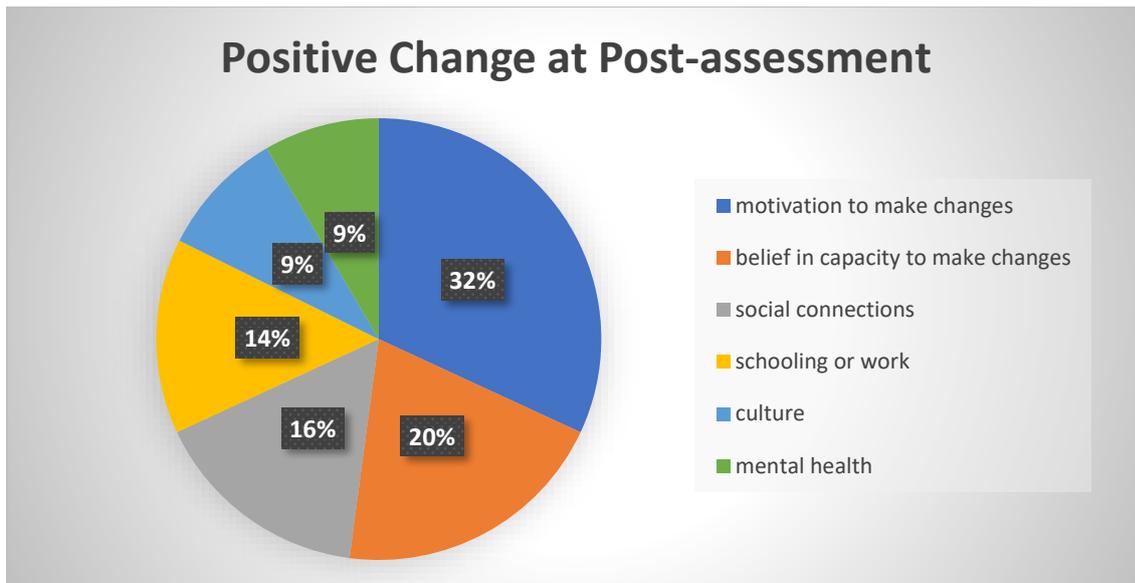
Figure 4. Frequency of positive change at post-assessment in each domain

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Key findings: Program outcomes (secondary data)

- Both participants and school-based stakeholders reported improved outcomes for the majority of participants

- Results obtained from the Hope Scale suggest significant improvements in relation to participants' self-agency and confidence and their abilities to achieve their goals, mirroring self-reported results obtained by YIPP facilitators

- Significant improvements were identified in relation to most domains of the Youth Wellbeing CAT with gains observed in relation to schooling/work and income, family relationships, social connection and mental health. There were no significant changes observed in relation to housing, physical health and cultural aspects (although cultural considerations were only applicable to a smaller number of participants).

- Positive change in Hope and CAT scale results increased from the interim report to the final evaluation suggesting the effectiveness of the program increased over time.

- Results suggest the findings are both statistically reliable and valid. For instance, quantitative results accord with findings from content analyses of YIPP facilitator perspectives in relation to social connections and school engagement, and gains in self-confidence and agency.

4.3.   Young People's Perspectives (Interviews)

Of the 60 young people who participated in the program from April 2023 to June 2024, nine participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences. Young people's narratives about engaging in YIPP centred around seven themes:

- **Challenging oneself**
- **Exploring leadership**
- **Helpful things**
- **Relationships and growing together as a group**
- **One-on-one support (case management)**
- **Positive change**
- **Ideas, improvements and feedback**

In this subsection we discuss these themes supported by quotes from young people and outline how the development of trust, safety and relationships in the group supported young people to push beyond what they thought they could do and gain new perspectives on their potential and capabilities.

4.3.1.   Challenging Oneself

All interviewees experienced challenges and had to push through anxiety, fear and discomfort during their participation in YIPP. The mud and tunnel activities, camp, abseiling and hiking were the most challenging aspects of the program for participants.

> "The tunnels at the (name of external provider), we had to crawl through, I was very scared, because of my fear of small spaces. I almost opted out. That one was very difficult for me" (I4).

Young people shared some of the strategies they used to overcome their fears such as gaining control of the mind, taking time/ pausing, breathing, positive self-talk and consciously stopping themselves from overthinking. Persevering with an activity despite discomfort and anxiety led to positive feelings which young people described as "amazing" (I1), "rewarding" (I3) and "exhilarating" (I5). Several participants described how their understanding of their own capabilities shifted over the course of the program.

> "Sometimes I thought I had reached my limit but then I just kept on going and I thought maybe my limit is not that small" (I5).

By taking risks and overcoming fear young people increased their confidence in their own strengths and potential.

4.3.2. Exploring Leadership

Concepts related to leadership were mentioned frequently during the interviews. Through their participation in a variety of group challenges, young people had opportunities to exhibit leadership.

> "I learned that I was quite a good leader. I was able to guide my peers through the challenges and I didn't' know that I was capable of that" (I6).

The program also encouraged participants to reflect on their understanding of what it means to be a leader.

> "I learned a lot about leadership, like it's about taking charge but not commanding, but more trying to help others along as well as myself. My understanding of what it means to be a leader has changed" (I4).

This collaborative and supportive approach to leadership was role modelled by the YIPP facilitators who were seen as being committed to bringing out the best in people by encouraging, motivating and assisting them as required.

With a fresh perspective on the concept of being a leader, young people were able to identify leadership in themselves and others.

> "I learned that a leader doesn't have to be big and loud. Anyone can be a leader. I realised that all of us are leaders in our own ways and in our own communities. We can all lead each other to success" (I7).

Throughout the program, evolving understandings of leadership created opportunities for different young people to step up and lead the group through challenges.

> "Leadership changed, like, at the start there were a few very strong personalities who took the lead. Others were a bit more shy. Later on some of the early leaders struggled a bit more and some of the shy people stepped up and became a lot more encouraging, cheering everyone on" (I6).

Evidently, concepts of leadership were redefined over the course of the program, allowing all participants to see themselves as leaders.

4.3.3. Helpful Things

Overwhelmingly, young people agreed that doing the challenges in a group and receiving support and encouragement from others was the most helpful thing for persevering with a task despite feeling nervous, fearful or exhausted. The participants described a spirit of camaraderie amongst the group which made everyone feel valued, included and respected.

> "The big hike was very challenging but we got the team spirit together, started singing and encouraging people to get everyone's mood up" (I3).

Sharing vulnerability and seeing others struggle and demonstrate courage had a motivating effect on individual young people.

> "The tunnels at the (name of external provider) we had to crawl through, I was very scared, because of my fear of small spaces. I almost opted out but I got motivated back into it by some of the guys in the group. We were all going through the same thing, it was good to know I wasn't alone" (I4).

More than anything else, receiving encouraging words from fellow participants enabled young people to muster the physical and mental strength to push through.

> "The girls were by my side going 'come on you can do it' and it really felt like they all believed in me, and that made me feel like I can really do it" (I5).

The group dynamic created a supportive and safe environment for taking risks and reaching new heights.

The second most commonly mentioned source of support were the YIPP facilitators. Young people appreciated the guidance they provided and described them as welcoming (I8), motivational (I2), respectful (I4), understanding (I4), helpful (I10) and authentic (I5).

> "The YIPP workers felt more like people than instructors. They were human. They were doing all the activities with us and they were also scared sometimes. We would motivate them and help them and they would motivate us and help us. They were with us every step of the way" (I4).

Young people felt that the YIPP facilitators believed in them and saw leadership potential in them which increased their confidence and perseverance.

Moreover, the facilitators normalised feeling scared for the participants and encouraged them to express and work through their feelings.

> "The YIPP workers acknowledged our feelings and helped us overcome our fears rather than just pushing them aside. They said its normal to feel scared and they really connected with us so that we weren't so scared anymore" (I5).

It became evident that the facilitators connected with participants on a human level, sharing their vulnerabilities and creating a space where it was safe to express emotions.

In addition to encouragement and support from fellow participants and adults, young people shared a range of other helpful things for tackling the activities. Knowing that each task was "challenge by choice" had a reassuring effect on young people and made them feel empowered.

> "Being in charge, not being told what to do, was a bit confusing at the start but it was also substantial. I felt free and I love freedom" (I1).

Starting the program with trust exercises and small group challenges allowed participants to ease into the group context and prepared them for the more challenging tasks. The collaborative development of a group agreement was highlighted as a key ingredient for the program's success.

> "Everybody could share their ideas and thoughts of the group work and their limitation and their boundaries and everything like that. I think it was very easy for me to get along with the group since we did have all the specific boundaries, all the specific information of other people about what they're sensitive about or stuff that we think is not appropriate or appropriate as a group" (I9).

Opportunities to have fun together, good communication and feeling welcome and understood were also considered crucial for the success of individuals and the group.

4.3.4. Relationships and Growing Together as a Group

It took several weeks for young people to bond with each other and to grow together and function well as a team. Initially, participants were anxious about joining a group of people they did not know well.

> "The mat activity at the start of the program made me pretty nervous, because I didn't' actually know everyone and we had to touch each other" (I6).

Some interviewees appreciated doing smaller activities and trust exercises at the beginning to break the ice and start developing relationships and the team.

> "It was good to start small, so we could get used to working with each other and gradually get bigger, like the mud and tunnel activities, rock climbing, abseiling and the camp" (I4).

These small challenges prepared them for the more complex and demanding activities later.

There was broad consensus that facing challenges together was what made their bond grow stronger and improved their collaboration and communication. The group adventures allowed young people to get to know each other on a deeper level, share vulnerability and develop trust.

> "The challenges made us boys closer. We were a small group and the activities required us to communicate with each other and work together. In the canoeing task, for example, three people were working together in a boat so we had to connect, make memories together and be close to each other – we were literally in the same boat" (I7).

Participants felt that they could be themselves in the group and share their emotions openly. They noticed that the team was functioning well when they respected each other and were able to resolve issues and miscommunication and still get along and be friends afterwards. By the time of the camp (the final challenge) young people described the group as "one big family" (I3), "brotherhood" (I4), "close mates" (I4) and "as if they had been friends for years" (I3). Several interviewees shared that they had made news friends in the program and were still in regular contact with some of the other participants.

4.3.5. One-on-one Support (Case Management)

All interviewees appreciated the opportunity to have regular one-on-one chats with the YIPP facilitators who they described as friendly, relaxed, funny, trustworthy, joyful, nice, down to earth, good at listening, focused on the young person and excited about being with participants.

> "I liked the one-on-one chats, they were really listening and focused on me and were trying to put themselves into my shoes" (I5).

For the participants these individual conversations were mainly about having someone to talk to, rather than doing things together or taking actions towards their goals. They shared that it felt good to talk about challenges and emotions in a confidential context and get really good advice. Young people talked about their life goals, future, their growing potential, positive change and their experiences in the program with the YIPP facilitators. For the participants the YIPP facilitators became mentors and engaged with them in line with what could be considered a coaching framework.

Knowing the YIPP facilitators from the group activities made the one-on-one sessions more comfortable for the interviewees.

> "He was just so down to earth and really nice, During the group activities we got to know him as a person and so, I felt like I could open up to him" (I4).

The individual meetings allowed young people to get to know the YIPP coaches even better and further solidify their relationship. The group and one-on-one sessions seemed to compliment each other and had a mutually reinforcing effect on the relationships between young people and adults. The significance of having an adult to confide in for some of the young people in the program is captured in the comment of one interviewee:

> "I have never been able to talk to adults like that. I didn't think that's something you did. It feels good, being able to express how you are feeling" (I1).

Generally, the participants believed that there was a good balance between group challenges and individual meetings.

4.3.6. Positive Change

The participants identified a wide range of positive outcomes as a result of their participation in YIPP. Social skills and leadership qualities were two key areas of positive change. Interviewees reported better communication with family and friends and increased friendships. Several young people shared that they are a lot more confident in social situations in general, including talking to people they don't know.

> "I have gotten a lot more confident in myself, I even did a speech in front of my whole school the other day" (I6).

In addition, young people's activity levels had increased. They had "come out of their shell" (3)/ "comfort zone" (I5)/ "hiding place" (I7) and were "doing more fun stuff" (I1) with others. Furthermore, young people had improved their leadership and teamwork skills. They reported taking initiative more often and being a leader by supporting, encouraging and mentoring and helping others.

> "I have learned leadership skills from YIPP and am now using them in real life. In group sports and at school I am mentoring some of the younger students" (I3).

For the participants, the YIPP program had a significant impact on the way they engage and work with others and they were able to transfer skills developed in the program to other life contexts.

In addition to social and leadership skills young people developed a range of personal qualities throughout the program. These included increased perseverance, goal achievement, confidence, self-awareness, courage and resilience and better organisation and planning skills. Further, young people reported taking on more responsibilities and being less argumentative, calmer and more collected at home.

> "I get into less arguments with the guy I live with. I can stay calm now and be the bigger man" (I2).

One interviewee shared that YIPP had helped her to "stop overthinking everything, and instead, listen to her gut" (I5). This enabled her to overcome her fears and feel more secure with herself and others even beyond the conclusion of the program.

Other interviewees described how YIPP had opened their mind to try new things and changed their mindset to one where anything is possible. As a consequence, young people's goals and future aspirations had changed or expanded.

> "My goals are different now. In addition to working, earning money and buying a house, I want to start a homeless shelter. I want to help other people in need" (I1).

Similarly, another participant had strengthened his resolve to pursue a degree in social work.

> "I am planning to do social work at uni, to help my own community. I want to lead migrants and refugees to success in life and create opportunities like youth programs to help young people who think that they will never make it in life" (I7).

Another participant described how her renewed confidence and commitment to try things had helped her re-engage with education.

> "I was saying, I'm not going back to school, because I feel like it's really hard. Then on the other hand I'm like, if I don't go to school, what am I going to end up like? I don't have a career, that was going to be me. So, I was just like, let me have an opposite mind, try something first before I give up. So I want to do nursing now" (I8).

For these young people, helping others, pursuing meaning education pathways and giving back to their communities had become key components of their future vision. Evidently, for the participants positive change was substantial and far reaching. Figure 5 presents an overview of program outcomes as identified by participants in the interviews.
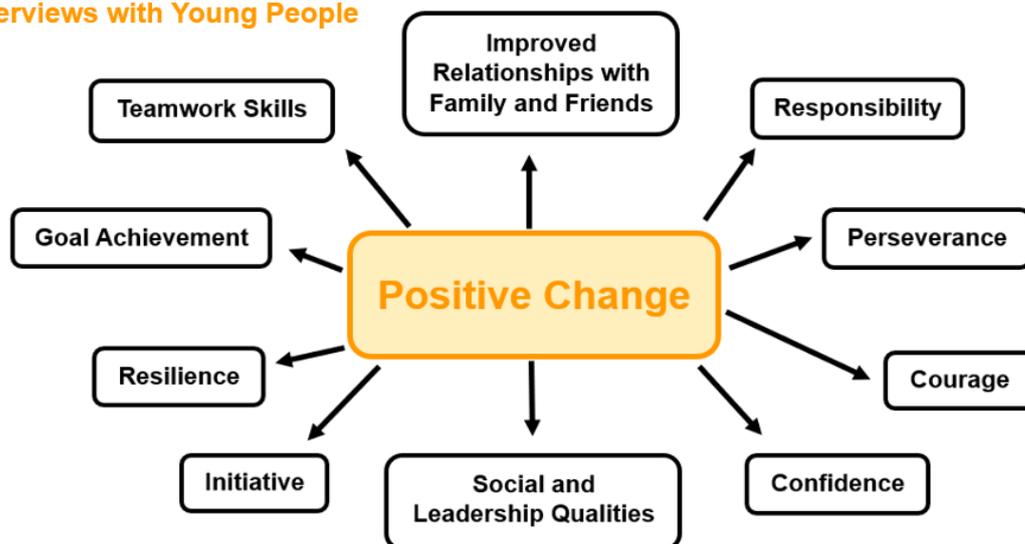

Figure 5. Positive change identified by young people

4.3.7. Ideas, Improvements and Feedback

The findings thus far demonstrate that young people's experiences with YIPP were highly beneficial for their development and lives. Other positive feedback related to the diversity and range of activities. Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in a variety of group adventures, including mud and water challenges, hikes and tasks involving heights and art. A range of activities allowed everyone to experience and push beyond personal boundaries and overcome anxiety and fear. The interviewees also believed that there was a good balance between group activities and one-on-one meetings with the YIPP coaches.

When asked about their ideas for improving the program, young people made several suggestions. Most participants would have liked the program to run for longer with more sessions, activities and challenges. One young man suggested integrating YIPP into the school curriculum to make it more accessible for students and ensure its continuation.

> "Every school should at least have one program like this. YIPP should be the norm and all kids should have access to it. It could be part of school" (I1).

Committing to attending every week was a challenge for some young people and early morning start times created access barriers for participants who did not have transport options to their schools as the pick-up and drop-off location for YIPP activities.

Several comments related to group size and consistency. Interviewees reported that their groups shrank considerably from approximately twelve participants at the beginning of the program to about six at the camp.

> "The number was higher at the beginning of the program and dropped as it goes further, especially down at the camping time. Because it was a three-day activity, it was one of the best experiences, but that was actually a shame that some people because of some circumstances, maybe it's family, maybe it's school or anything, they couldn't participate" (I10).

This participant suggested that the YIPP facilitators could have spent more time having conversations with young people's families, reassuring them that their children would be safe during the camping experience. There was consensus that a smaller and more consistent group would have been better for working together and building trust and relationships. Finally, one participant suggested giving young people more opportunities to spend time together casually outside of the activities and another would have liked participants to have more input in the design of the program and the activities offered.

Key findings: Young people's perspectives (interviews)

- Facing challenges and overcoming anxiety, fear and discomfort during their participation in YIPP was a rewarding and exhilarating experience for participants.

- Trust, safety and supportive relationships in the group enabled young people to push beyond their comfort zones and gain new perspectives on their potential and capabilities.

- The program facilitated a mutually reinforcing relational process in which shared activities promoted group bonding and group cohesion supported young people to challenge themselves.

- The program encouraged participants to reflect on their understandings of leadership and allowed them to see leadership qualities in themselves and others.

- The YIPP facilitators were role models for democratic and collaborative leadership and provided encouragement, reassurance, and support.

- Young people felt empowered to navigate through their program at their own pace and in their own way.

- One-on-one conversations with the YIPP facilitators allowed young people to share their challenges, goals and emotions with a trusted adult in a confidential context.

- Young people's participation in YIPP led to a range of positive outcomes, particularly in relation to the development of social and leadership qualities. Participants reported improved relationships with family and friends, increased confidence in social situations, better teamwork and taking responsibility and showing initiative in their lives.

- Participants gained personal qualities such as increased confidence, perseverance, goal achievement, courage and resilience and were able to transfer skills developed in the program to other life contexts.

- Many interviewees would have liked the program to continue for longer and some suggested increasing access, for example, by offering it as part of the school curriculum.

- Inconsistent attendance patterns amongst group members negatively impacted group cohesion and collaboration for some participants.

- More opportunities for spending time together casually outside of the activities and more input from young people in the design of the program were other suggestions for improving YIPP.

4.4.   YIPP Facilitators' Perspectives (Focus Groups)

The analysis of reflective focus group conversations with YIPP program staff yielded five themes:

- **Supporting young people's engagement in the program**
- **The YIPP way of working with young people**
- **The impact of the program for participants**
- **Navigating systemic imperatives and challenges**
- **Program learnings**

In this subsection, we elaborate on these themes and outline how, in the views of the practitioners, the YIPP practice framework creates a safe, supported and encouraging context for young people to learn new skills, grow their potential and achieve positive change.

4.4.1.   Supporting Young People's Engagement in the Program

How to successfully engage all participants throughout the program was a key consideration during the staff reflections. Establishing direct communication channels with young people and their families allowed YIPP staff to pass messages on effectively and efficiently without having to rely on the referring schools as third-party communicators. Generally, engaging parents as early as possible was considered crucial for supporting and sustaining young people's participation in the program.

> "Parents backing them up and supporting their participation is very good for them to engage in the program; knowing that they will benefit something out of it."

In addition to parents, schools played an important role by providing students with information about YIPP and encouraging them to attend the sessions. Having a school representative (chaplain or youth worker) present at the activities facilitated young people's engagement, particularly in the early phase of the program. Family and school support had a significant impact on young people's engagement patterns.

The practitioners agreed that the first three weeks of the program were crucial for creating a safe environment, explaining the purpose and aims of YIPP and initiating a group development process which drew young people into the program and made them want to come back.

> "The first three sessions are crucial for developing an understanding of safety, so those session have to be attended; at least two of them".

At the core of these early sessions was the development of trust amongst the group.

> "The trust activities during the initial 3-hour sessions worked well. They helped participants to create mateship. Students have expressed that they have seen themselves as more trustworthy and have trusted people for the first time."

When young people feel safe and comfortable and have a clear understanding of what they can gain from being part of YIPP they can make an informed decision regarding their participation and commit themselves to the process.

4.4.2. The YIPP Way of Working with Young People

The focus group conversations created a forum for the practitioners to express, reflect on and further develop the practice framework guiding YIPP. At the heart of the program are outdoor adventure-based experiences and challenges which invite young people to step outside of their comfort zone, try new things and deconstruct self-limiting thoughts to grow their potential. One key element of the program is "challenge by choice" which symbolises the voluntary and empowering nature of YIPP.

> "We don't say you must do this. It is trauma informed. We say you can choose what you like, however, respect is something we do need. So, you can choose not to be here or do some of the challenges, and we won't judge you."

This approach gives young people the opportunity to take responsibility for the way they engage in the program whilst adhering to principles of trauma-informed practice.

Activities are intentionally designed in a way that promotes teamwork and shared leadership.

> "All activities and discussions are purposefully planned to remind the students about teamwork, problem solving, respect, group deals, and team building."

During group challenges young people have to problem solve together and share responsibility, knowledge and ideas with each other to achieve a desired outcome. This creates a natural context for encouraging each other and experimenting with being a leader.

> "A young person who was quiet and disengaged during the first sessions started showing leadership and enthusiasm during the mud and tunnel activities and rock climbing."

The non-hierarchical structure of the groups invites diverse young people into leadership roles and promotes collaboration.

Another key strategy employed by the YIPP staff included an intentional effort to remain de-centred and only step in to provide assistance or support after the group had been given an opportunity to find their own solutions to problems or challenges.

> "Yeah, about this incident. So even afterwards, after having that conversation with the young people, we went back to the group and gave them the power to decide whether they still wanted them in the group. They were able to make the decision, not us making the decision, not the school."

Knowing when to step in to help resolve a situation or incident was a delicate balancing act which required careful consideration and reflection amongst the practitioners.

> "There's that real fine line of, when do we step in and say something? When do we step in and get the group to say something? Or when do we get to that next level, and almost be that authority and be like, hang on, no, you've gone too far now. So, it is a real balancing dance and I think we did all get better at that, and work out what that looks like and means, because a lot of our reflections were around that."

When they intervened, the practitioners were mindful of the need to respond in-trauma informed ways.

Related to appropriate ways of intervening is the concept of risk management. The adventure-based experiences and nature of the program more broadly meant that a degree of risk was an inevitable and indeed a fundamental component of YIPP. While the practitioners were communicating with the referring schools regarding particular needs, requirements or circumstances of individual program participants they were also intentionally refraining from labelling young people or treating them differently.

> "Yeah, by labelling them. So that's - yeah - we go with the flow and we want to go in without having that in the back of our mind. We just treat them the way they are - you know, without labelling them."

Having school staff at all of the activities was seen as an important risk mitigation strategy.

> "We do encourage the schools to send a staff member to the activities and camp. It does help because the staff members have worked with these young people longer than we have and we've been encouraging that to happen more often."

In addition, school staff, due to their ongoing presence in the lives of young people, were regarded as important for sustaining positive change beyond the conclusion of the program. Managing risk, without stereotyping young people, was seen as important and support staff from the schools could play an important role in this process.

Ongoing intensive efforts to engage even the most hesitant and disengaged participants were highlighted as a key component of the YIPP approach. To achieve high levels of engagement, the YIPP team adopted a youth-centred and individualised approach.

> "To encourage the participation of disengaged young people, you need to understand their issues, and work closely with them to ensure they are still apart of the group. We were also aware of their challenges and their weaknesses."

This comprehensive and tailored engagement strategy led to positive outcomes for highly disenfranchised young people.

> "Like there is one person at (name of school) who was very, very disengaged at school. Didn't really stay towards anything and she's been coming to everything even though she's complained about it at the start. She's still participated in everything."

When young people felt heard, seen and included they were able to commit to being a part of the group.

Finally, the provision of regular opportunities for de-briefing and reflection complemented the YIPP way of engaging with youth. The activities were structured by providing a brief introduction to the challenge and connecting it to the purpose and aims of the program (i.e. growing one's potential and identifying and reducing self-limiting thoughts), followed by an experience linked to these concepts and concluded with an opportunity for reflection and feedback. This led some young people to develop profound insights.

> "One of the things that came up in the debrief was somebody saying that this program has kind of *'made me learn to shut up, because if I just said everything that came out of my head, oh my God, there would be so much and it wouldn't be nice. I have just learned when to speak and when to stop'* ".

The ability to consciously pause, think and evaluate in social interactions is a life skill this young person learned over the course of the program and shared with others during a moment of vulnerability and honesty in a facilitated group reflection.

4.4.3. The Impact of the Program for Participants

The practitioners identified significant and far-reaching observable positive outcomes for YIPP participants, particularly in relation to the development of personal qualities and social skills. Experiential and adventure-based learning opportunities enhanced young people's problem-solving skills, such as breaking larger tasks down into smaller achievable steps. In addition, participants were guided to recognise their own worth and potential as a basis for interrupting negative thoughts and self-concepts.

> "So all those other elements, creating a safe space, communication – all that kind of stuff we do so that they can be in that environment and begin to realise, okay, I'm actually worth more than this, or I can do this."

This meant that young people were able to create different narratives about themselves which featured the confidence, resilience and responsibility they developed by attempting, persevering with and mastering challenges.

Opportunities for connecting with nature provided alternatives to participants' usual routines.

> "Taking them out of their everyday environment and providing an opportunity to connect with nature. A few young people shared that it is their first-time camping and expressed interests to do more in the future."

These outdoor adventure-based activities allowed participants to learn life and survival skills such as cooking meals, setting up tents and navigating challenging terrain.

> "They've also learned survival skills so, yeah. For most of them, it was their first time being out there and being away from family."

The camp stood in stark contrast to young people's regular day to day lives and thus was the most challenging but also most rewarding experience for many participants.

The group context, an inherent feature of YIPP, fostered communication skills and pro-social relationships amongst participants. Young people learned ways to support, encourage and trust each other and demonstrated peer leadership and role modelling.

> "One of the students couldn't swim. During the canoeing activity, she fell into the water. But with peer support from the people who were sharing the boat she did not show any fear or panic. Because of the support she was receiving from the rest of the group, she really managed to keep calm until she was pulled out of the water."

Over the course of the program participants grew together as a group and were able to recognise growth and positive change in each other.

> "The purpose of the art project was to show the concept of giving and receiving to young people. We did this by sketching palms on a canvas together and drew in each other's palms what we believe each other contributes to the group. The noticeable difference was the togetherness of the group. Young people who were not talking to each other, where noticed having conversations."

In essence, young people were able to create a new community within YIPP.

4.4.4. Navigating Systemic Imperatives and Challenges

Navigating different school contexts (public and alternative education) to deliver the program and communicate effectively with young people was a complex undertaking. Getting buy-in and the support of schools was seen as crucial for sustaining young people's engagement in YIPP.

> "So (name of YIPP facilitator), I believe, went to (name of school) this morning because (name of school) has a little bit of a history of pulling out at the very last minute. They were supposed to do this big ending hike with the boys' group and they planned it all. They pulled out at 5:00 pm the day before. They did it for two of the activities as well in the boys' group."

The purpose, aims and philosophical and practical foundations of the program had to be explained to schools to ensure that school staff could promote the empowering, youth-led and choice-base practice framework espoused by YIPP. When YIPP and school staff worked together and supported each other the program was running much smoother.

> "(Name of school), their youth worker, all the students like her, she is really pro-active, she is the one calling the parents. We have a really big ally in her, which makes a huge difference. It probably halves our workload."

Experiences of collaborating with schools varied and the practitioners did not shy away from advocating for the program and young people with key school staff.

Celebrating young people's achievements at the school level was considered important to ensure the sustainability of positive change beyond the program. There were some concerns that participants' personal growth and accomplishments may go unnoticed in the busy school environment with many competing priorities.

> "Even if they are changing in a positive way, that may not reflect at school. They might have changed their mindset, their potential, their story. But they go back into that school and that negative story is a hard coat of paint on the back and the teachers won't see the change."

Sharing information with schools and individual teachers was also challenging.

> "And when I reach out individually by phone, most of them don't respond to the message or the phone call. And some of them will be really honest and say, I am really busy."

The practitioners endeavoured to make recommendations to the schools on how to continue to foster healthy socio-emotional developmental trajectories in YIPP graduates.

4.4.5. Program Learnings

During the focus groups the practitioners identified several areas of improvement and refinement for YIPP. Successful and sustained engagement with young people required a multi-level strategy involving school staff, parents and participants. Whilst it was acknowledged that coordinating sustained communication with multiple stakeholders and across several contexts was challenging and time consuming, without it, young people's

ongoing participation in the program was jeopardised. In the reflective sessions, the practitioners contemplated ideas for increasing the involvement of schools in YIPP and celebrating young people's achievements at the school level.

> "So, I think that's why we are going to create certificates and videos, that maybe they can present during an assembly. Even if it's the principal or deputy principal who can hand out those certificates during assembly."

Generally, the YIPP facilitators identified a need to develop a clear process for transitioning young people out of the program.

> "When we have seen such change and growth in the first group it was difficult to let that go, we didn't have a clear plan for exit strategies."

These reflections demonstrate the practitioners' commitment to continuous practice development.

Many of the YIPP facilitators' insights during the focus group conversations involved the case management component of the program. The short-term nature of the program required an intentional and purposeful approach to intensive one-on-one support. This included building rapport quickly and conducting initial needs assessments early.

> "The first-time round, we were like, 'let's not ask intrusive questions until they get to know us'. That was why the pre-assessments were done so late, but this time we did the pre-assessments straight up."

Over time the practitioners' approach evolved from case management towards coaching methods, which involved getting to know young people quicky and engaging with them in empowering, non-clinical, solution-focused and personalised ways. In addition, the practitioners considered it important to have a realistic vision regarding what could be achieved in a service provision period of two to three months.

> "Realising we are short term case management and embracing the reality of what this program is and then maybe trying to be more structured in the case management, to ensure it is the most effective."

To increase the impact and sustainability of case management outcomes the practitioners stressed the need to make referrals to other services and organisations as early as possible and provide schools with key recommendations to enable teachers to continue to support students on their positive trajectories.

Key findings: YIPP facilitators' perspectives (focus groups)

- Establishing effective collaboration and communication with young people, parents and key school staff facilitates the successful implementation of the program and enhances participant engagement.

- A strong focus on safety, trust and group development over the first three weeks of the program creates a solid foundation for young people's engagement and success in the experiential adventure-based challenges.

- Outdoor adventure-based experiences invite young people to step outside of their comfort zone, try new things and deconstruct self-limiting thoughts.

- The YIPP activities are designed in a way that promotes teamwork and shared leadership.

- The program facilitators aim to remain decentred, thus, encouraging young people to embrace the concept of "challenge by choice" by navigating through the program at their own pace and in their own way.

- Managing risk collaboratively and without stereotyping young people is a fundamental component of the YIPP practice framework.

- Ongoing intensive efforts to engage all young people in YIPP and providing continuous opportunities for de-briefing and reflection are key pillars of the program.

- The practitioners identified significant far-reaching observable positive outcomes for YIPP participants, particularly in relation to the development of personal qualities and social skills such as confidence, perseverance, resilience, problem solving, responsibility, leadership, collaboration and communication skills.

- Navigating different school contexts to deliver the program effectively was a complex, time intensive and, at times, challenging undertaking.

- Celebrating young people's achievements at school and providing recommendations to teachers on how to continue to foster healthy development in YIPP graduates is important for ensuring the sustainability of positive change beyond the program.

- The short-term nature of the program requires an intentional and purposeful approach to case management and the setting of realistic and achievable goals with young people early in the process.

4.5. School Stakeholder and Parent Perspectives (Interviews)

The perspectives of four stakeholders from the two referring schools and two parents (n=6) were gathered in semi-structured interviews and their analysis generated five themes:

- **Benefits for young people and families**
- **Effectiveness of the YIPP approach and activities**
- **YIPP in the context of an integrated service delivery model in Logan**
- **Barriers, gaps and challenges**
- **Suggested changes and ideas for improvement**

Below we discuss these themes and describe the relevance and success of YIPP in the context of interagency collaboration as well as present recommendations for improvement proposed by the stakeholders.

4.5.1. Benefits for Young People and Families

Both school staff and parents saw tremendous growth and positive change in young people as a result of their participation in YIPP. Many of the positive outcomes related to young people's education. Stakeholders from the schools observed higher levels of motivation and engagement in learning. Students worked harder in class and had fewer behavioural challenges.

> "He hasn't been sent out of class in the last few weeks as well, and the teachers have also commented on how much his positivity's changed and he doesn't talk back if he feels like he's right or if the teacher's wrong." (School stakeholder)

One parent also noticed improvements at school, with their child working harder to achieve good grades, being able to concentrate better, enjoying studying more and receiving awards for their accomplishments.

> "He is improving. Even, I got an email from his teachers that he is getting a better grade, and he is concentrating on his studies, and he is trying very hard". (Parent)

Several program participants achieved the milestone of completing year 12, despite great adversity, and graduating with their friends.

> "It was great to see him graduate with his peers. That's a huge accomplishment for a kid who statistically should be in gaol by now, like, everything about his life would have predetermined terrible outcomes for him." (School stakeholder)

Evidently, young people's attitudes towards school and learning had changed for the better.

In terms of post-school trajectories, some participants had begun to carve out a pathway that was meaningful for them.

> "So, he was doing an alternative program and certificates. He was working and doing a traineeship to accrue graduation points for his QCE. It was the motivation for him to complete year 12." (School stakeholder)

Other young people were working towards obtaining, or had already found, employment.

> "There is one student who has been putting his resume in and, I believe, he's just picked up a job. Then another student has just got some work experience with Rebel Sport. Prior to that (YIPP), he hadn't actively gone out and sought work or work experience." (School stakeholder)

One participant got his learners licence in preparation for transition to independence and another young man connected with long-term services for ongoing support. The school stakeholders credited YIPP for building young people's courage, confidence and motivation to pursue positive pathways and accept support along the way.

Much of the positive change identified by school staff and parents involved social skills and positive relationships. Program participants were observed to be more confident in social situations and open to having conversations with peers and adults, which was described as young people "coming out of their shell".

> "He was a kid who was sort of 'head down' and wouldn't say much to anyone. But he got on the bus, and I asked if he could sit in the front seat next to me. No worries. He sat there and engaged in a conversation with me. How was your day? What did you get up to today? What are you doing on the weekend? Just that conversation, it was like a different person compared to prior to that." (School stakeholder)

This increased social confidence paired with better communication skills promoted positive relationships with peers.

> "That really was one of the standout impacts, was the relationships between the students, because they had that shared experience and most of them had no real friendship beforehand or prior to the program". (School stakeholder)

The parents also observed improved relationships in the home environment.

> "Before he was very silent, rude. He was sitting in his room. But now he is not like that. He tries to be with his sisters. Like, he sits with his sisters, plays with them, and talks with them. He even studies with them. That's what I am seeing, that he is changing." (Parent)

For the participants, the YIPP program enhanced their ability to engage with others in pro-social ways which increased their social networks.

Related to the development of social skills and positive relationships was the concept of peer leadership. The practitioner spoke of young people "finding their voice" and encouraging and supporting others to achieve and experience success.

> "We've seen some of those students really take on more of a leadership role in our school. A couple of them are becoming peer leaders." (School stakeholder)

How young people learned to think of themselves as leaders is captured in the reflections of one of the school stakeholders:

> "He became a very vocal leader by the end of it. He was great at motivating others and he often said that he needed encouragement from others to find encouragement within himself. For him to see himself as a leader was massive."

For the interviewees, YIPP offered leadership skills development opportunities to diverse young people.

Other identified benefits of YIPP included improvements in young people's mental health and overall sense of wellbeing. One parent was delighted to see their child become happier, friendlier, more physically active and less anxious and fearful.

> "I can say that he's really changed and he's not as scared anymore. He wants to do a lot of things now and he is really happy. Even now he is saying that if there's any camping or anything, he would love to go". (Parent)

School staff concurred and noticed that YIPP participants grew more confident and courageous and abandoned negative and self-limiting beliefs and thoughts. They realised that they can overcome their fears and barriers and achieve their goals and aspirations.

> "He was a child living in fear, so I think that being able to conquer that fear in that environment with the support of people made him realise that he can overcome anxieties and what being brave means. In all honesty I really believe that YIPP was the only time in his life he felt good about himself." (School stakeholder)

The profound impact of the program was summarised in stakeholder comments such as "his whole demeanour changed for the better" and "it was a life-changing experience for some students".

4.5.2. Effectiveness of the YIPP Approach and Activities

The stakeholders and parents discussed how the key program features, activities and practice framework guiding YIPP allowed young people to achieve the positive change described in the previous section. School staff believed that adventure-based outdoor activities like camping, hiking and rock climbing create a natural context for skills acquisition.

> "Outdoor education draws students together and allows them to experience success. In the practical learning environment they could acquire skills which they were lacking in a school setting and work on leadership, teamwork and social skills; in a small group with lots of supervision and support." (School stakeholder)

By putting young people in situations they have never experienced before and encouraging them to be self-directed, YIPP allows them to organically find their voice as team members, collaborators and leaders.

> "On camp, they had small groups and they had to navigate their way through the bushlands. One person was chosen in each group to be the leader. Then they had to communicate together. When they got lost [laughs], they had to figure it out, problem solve together and talk to each other to find the way." (School stakeholder)

Mastering diverse outdoor challenges together required participants to work together, negotiate, communicate and consequently develop a sense of trust, safety and belonging.

For stakeholders and parents, the YIPP practitioners' engagement and facilitation strategies contributed significantly to the program's success. They provided a tremendous amount guidance, encouragement and support to help young people build confidence, attempt challenges, overcome anxieties and grow their potential. School staff saw positive, equal and trusting relationships between YIPP facilitators and participants as a fundamental pillar of the program's effectiveness.

> "Because they're not teachers and they're outside people without judgement, the students were able to already feel at ease. It was not a teacher-student relationship. It was a support person and student relationship." (School stakeholder)

Parents experienced YIPP staff as kind and helpful role-models who showed young people how to respect each other and work together. The "challenge by choice" concept underlying young people's participation in YIPP was appreciated by one of the parents.

> "This program was great for my son. He said they were very kind and didn't push or force him to do things, but they said '*it's good for you, you can do it*'." (Parent)

The facilitators' practice was guided by an intentional effort to encourage perseverance, build confidence and develop skills in participants.

The school stakeholders valued the cultural competency of Settlement Services International and the YIPP facilitators.

> "With Access/ SSI we are having a culturally appropriate program that would respond to the needs of our kids from diverse communities. We find that a lot of, I guess, regular services that we access don't have that cultural support available." (School stakeholder)

An example of this was the way in which YIPP acknowledged and responded to specific cultural requirements in relation to gender.

> "Part of the decision for gendered groups is cultural. It's far more appropriate for our First Nations and many of our CALD students. Our Samoan students particularly, they have a word for it – [vā] - the literal translation is sacred space. It's the respect held between men and women or male and female, demonstrated by the way male students will distance themselves emotionally or physically from female students. That means no touching and respecting physical space." (School stakeholder)

Culturally responsive practice contributed to the creation of a safe space for the participants.

Collaboration between schools and YIPP facilitators was perceived as largely positive and constructive by the stakeholders. School staff were consulted from the beginning, had access to the program framework and were provided with opportunities to share their ideas on how the program could be best implemented in adherence to the educational requirements of the school. In addition, the YIPP practitioners visited students at school throughout the program for intensive one-on-one coaching sessions. They advocated for participants with the school and provided support for students and advice and recommendations for teacher in relation to behavioural and engagement concerns. Finally, school stakeholders valued conducting the YIPP graduation ceremonies at school.

> "The graduation events are an opportunity for the students to feel that celebratory success and share that with their parents and families. The video testimonies of those students were really powerful. From their own perspective they have identified what they learned and what they took out of the program and for some of those students it was really a life changing experience." (School stakeholder)

Schools were involved in the implementation of YIPP from the planning phase through to the graduation of participants.

4.5.3. YIPP in the Context of an Integrated Service Delivery Model in Logan

The school stakeholders agreed that YIPP is a valuable and highly relevant addition to the current service delivery context in Logan. They were not aware of similar programs in the area and stressed the importance of services collaborating with schools to maximise the reach and engagement of at-risk youth. The intensive nature of the YIPP, weekly group and individual sessions, allowed the facilitators to journey alongside participants and give them hope by constantly reinforcing positive messages.

> "I think for a lot of these kids it might be the only time they ever have someone speak positively to them. Having someone come to them and tell them each week, *'you can do it, don't give up, you've got an awesome purpose in life, we see so much in you, you've got leadership qualities'.*" (School stakeholder)

Consistent positive reinforcement and encouragement has the potential to counteract some of the adverse and disempowering circumstances young people find themselves in. The parents also stressed the positive impact YIPP had on their child and believed that more families in Logan would benefit from a permanent and comprehensive roll out of the program.

4.5.4. Barriers, Challenges and Learnings

School staff highlighted cultural differences between students' homes and the school environment as a key challenge in their collaboration with YIPP, in particular in relation to supporting young people's engagement in the program. The student cohort at the referring schools is highly diverse.

> "At (name of school) we're about 44 per cent Māori and Pacific Islander. We're sitting at at least 15 per cent First Nations and amongst that we also have about 65 per cent of our students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds or culturally and linguistically diverse communities". (School stakeholder)

For these students, their identities are not reflected in the curriculum and processes and procedures of the Australian school system.

> "We're guided by the national syllabus and sometimes due to the cultural or personal experiences of the student, they are struggling to see themselves visible in that curriculum. They are learning Macbeth in English, you know, culturally very isolating things, and also the ways schools operate is isolating for them." (School stakeholder)

Consequently, culturally and linguistically diverse students may feel uncomfortable and unsafe at school leading to disengagement from classroom learning as well as any program that is linked to the school.

The school's role as the referring agency, whilst seen as important, was also marred by difficulties. The school-based engagement team nominated students they believed would need and benefit from YIPP. This approach caused some students to feel targeted and pushed to join the program which was antithetical to the voluntary and youth-led framework espoused by YIPP. The flaws of this referral process were reflected on in the interviews.

"The students were school identified, which meant that it was really about our needs or our perceptions of who needed the program the most." (School stakeholder)

An alternative approach suggested by one stakeholder was to extend a broad invitation to join YIPP to all students and refer young people who expressed their interest. This idea, however, raised concerns that vulnerable students, who need and would benefit from the program most, may miss out.

Irregular attendance patterns and the school's disciplinary procedures, which predominantly affect at-risk students, created another barrier to referring vulnerable young people in need of support to YIPP.

"Some of the students that we felt would have benefited from the program were suspended. They had issues with connecting in class, attendance, and so because they rarely came to school, we just couldn't connect with them to sign the forms or support them to show up to the activities". (School stakeholder)

School staff acknowledged that student engagement was complex and difficult to predict.

"So (name of student), once he got through the first three weeks, he never missed an activity. It really worked for him. But then we had the other boy (name of student) do the first three or four weeks and then he was just in and out. He didn't benefit as much as the others from the program, not because of the quality of the YIPP but because of where he's at - you know." (School stakeholder)

Overall, the school representatives would have liked to see more students connect, persevere and succeed with the program. In the interviewees' narratives, there was a tension between ensuring regular attendance and referring student they felt needed the program the most, as well as an acknowledgement that working with disengaged youth is challenging and uncertain.

4.5.5. Suggested Changes and Ideas for Improvement

Parents and school stakeholders were unanimous in their support of YIPP. While the parents felt that the program was highly beneficial in its current form and no changes were needed, school staff offered some recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of YIPP. The stakeholders suggested that parent engagement from the beginning would significantly improve young people's commitment to the activities and appreciated the YIPP facilitators' efforts to reach out to families.

"I think they have engaged parents in the second round a lot more than what they did in the first round which, I think, is really important." (School stakeholder)

Additionally, schools would benefit from having access to resources which would allow them to implement some of the principles of YIPP in the classroom.

> "It would have been great to have some resources from them to focus on having a common language. If we could adapt some of that for students who are in the program, who are struggling at school, we could use that same language which I think is really powerful." (School stakeholder)

For the stakeholders, strengthening connections between YIPP, schools, families and the community would create a comprehensive engagement strategy for at risk youth.

Another recommendation related to administrative barriers. School staff saw opportunities for streamlining referral and consent procedures. In particular, obtaining parental signatures for every activity separately was a very tedious and time-consuming process.

> "Every week we might have a different form for a different activity. I'm not sure if there's any way around that, but if we had all the forms in advance - which I think they did this term with the new group - parents don't have to sign different forms every week, but I understand it's hard." (School stakeholder)

The school stakeholders acknowledged and appreciated that YIPP staff were aware of this challenge and were taking steps towards making parental consent easier and more efficient. Navigating paperwork requirements from external service and activity providers further complicated the administrative burden.

Stakeholders from both schools advocated for an ongoing and comprehensive roll-out of the pilot program. To maximise benefits for participants, YIPP should be implemented over a longer period of time for each cohort.

> "To continue with the program and even potentially maybe have the same amount of activities and excursions out to do things, but over a longer period of time to have more time to build on those learnings and those experiences." (School stakeholder)

If the program was a fixture in the Logan community and expanded, schools would feel less pressured to target the most vulnerable young people and could extend the benefits of YIPP to all students as part of a prevention and early intervention strategy.

> "Then we would actually probably invite a far broader number of students to participate and make it a process where the students choose to be in the program." (School stakeholder)

Evidently, for the school stakeholders, YIPP was a valuable and highly beneficial program which should receive ongoing funding.

Key findings: Stakeholder perspectives (interviews)

- Parents and school stakeholders identified tremendous growth and positive change in young people and linked these outcomes to their participation in YIPP.

- Young people's motivation and engagement at school increased significantly and behavioural concerns reduced substantially.

- Some participants had begun to actively pursue meaningful post-school pathways.

- YIPP facilitated the development of social, communication and leadership skills and positive relationships and improved young people's mental health and overall wellbeing.

- Mastering diverse outdoor challenges together required participants to work together, negotiate, communicate and consequently develop a sense of trust, safety and belonging in the group.

- The YIPP facilitators' engagement practices encouraged perseverance and built confidence in participants and their commitment to guiding and supporting young people contributed significantly to the program's success.

- The school stakeholders valued the cultural competency of Settlement Services International and the YIPP facilitators.

- Schools were involved in the implementation of YIPP from the planning phase through to the graduation of participants.

- Cultural differences between students' homes and the school environment, inconsistent attendance patterns of young people, the school's disciplinary procedures and the targeted identification of potential participants based on perceived needs created challenges for referring schools.

- Engaging and working with disengaged youth is a complex and uncertain undertaking which requires strong connections and effective communication between YIPP, schools, families and the wider community.

- The administrative complexity of the implementation of programs such as YIPP requires careful consideration.

- The school stakeholders and parents agreed that YIPP is a valuable and highly relevant addition to the current service delivery context in Logan and advocated for an ongoing and comprehensive roll-out of the pilot program across Logan.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Youth in Power Program (YIPP) and provides an assessment of this pilot program's impact and outcomes after 15 months of implementation from April 2023 to June 2024. The intention of YIPP is to combine adventure-based group activities with case management to develop young people's confidence, courage, resilience, leadership, teamwork and relationships with peers and work towards their future goals and address current challenges and needs. In this section, we discuss the findings in the context of the aims of the program and suggest implications for policy, practice and further research. An overview of our assessment of YIPP outcomes in the context of the program's aims is provided in table 4 and a summary of our findings against the evaluation questions is provided in table 5.

Findings from young people, practitioners and stakeholders consistently demonstrate that YIPP is successful in developing a range of social and leadership skills as well as personal qualities in young people. Indeed, the reliability and validity of findings, across measures and different stakeholders is remarkable. Through their participation in weekly group activities, participants acquired communication, planning, teamwork and peer-mentoring skills and increased their confidence, resilience and openness to attempt new experiences. Their understanding of their own capabilities shifted and their motivation and belief in their capacity to make desired changes in their lives improved. These positive changes are reflected in young people's increased attendance and engagement at school and improved inter-personal relationships and friendships which builds the foundation for positive futures. Therefore, the approach to experiential adventure-based learning adopted by YIPP facilitates positive outcomes confirmed in much of the literature on outdoor education (Clough et al., 2016, Gass et al., 2020; Queensland Government, 2015; Youth Flourish, 2017). The remarkable consistency between all of the qualitative and quantitative data sources supports the validity of and our confidence in our findings. It is evident that the empowering and youth-led practice framework espoused by YIPP creates an environment in which young people feel safe, encouraged and supported to face challenges, persevere and experience personal growth.

A key outcome of the program is a heightened sense of social connectedness and an increase in pro-social peer relationships amongst participants. Together the YIPP facilitators and young people create small communities characterised by a sense of belonging and mutual respect, trust, support and care. During the formative years of adolescence, strong

and trusting relationships with safe, caring and supportive adults are a crucial component of healthy adolescent development (Bowers et al., 2015; Henderson & De-Cuir-Gunby, 2016). In addition, peer relationships are becoming increasingly important, with a solid network of reciprocal and lasting friendships forming a pillar of young people's socio-emotional development (Schwartz et al., 2021; Veenstra & Laninga-Wijnen, 2023). Many of the positive peer relationships which formed during YIPP endured beyond the program, thus increasing young people's social networks and addressing the relational poverty some youths experienced prior to joining the program.

By design, YIPP encourages participants to take calculated risks in a safe and supported environment. During adolescence young people demonstrate an increased interest in and seek out opportunities for risk taking behaviours (Icenogle & Cauffman, 2021). The provision of age and developmentally appropriate experiences which involve an element of risk allows young people to step outside of their comfort zone, persist with challenges, acquire new skills and learn to trust their own capabilities and others who encourage and support them (University of California Los Angeles Centre for the Developing Adolescent, 2024). In the context of a societal shift towards risk aversion over the last few decades, it can be argued that YIPP creates a counter space in which young people can indulge their desire to experience thrill and challenge themselves whilst being encouraged, supported and kept safe (Ball et al.,2023). We maintain that without this commitment to navigating rather than avoiding risk, the positive impact of the program would have been compromised.

Adventure-based learning opportunities benefit from young people's contributions to program design and implementation. When young people feel included in the development of experiential activities, they have a sense of ownership of the program which increases their commitment and engagement (Bowler et al., 20221). Successful co-design initiatives require a considerable investment of time and resources to ensure the perspectives of diverse youth can be included whilst remaining within the aims and purpose of a program (Learning in Places, 2021). The YIPP facilitators provided some opportunities for young people to exercise agency and choice, for example in relation to the collaborative creation of group agreements and in the way they engaged with the pre-planned challenges and activities. We observe that the relatively short timeframes for each cohort prohibited the implementation of a comprehensive co-design process with young people prior to commencement of group activities. However, we also note that creating opportunities for co-design in the planning stages would have paid dividends later on in terms of increased attendance, participation and completion rates.

In addition to adventure-based group experiences, YIPP provides case management support to each participant for the duration of the program. In these one-on-one meetings with YIPP facilitators, young people are encouraged to reflect on their participation in the program and share their needs and goals in a confidential setting. While participants appreciated the opportunity to have these meaningful conversations with a trusted adult, the short duration of the program and some difficulties with coordinating and conducting frequent case management meetings meant that addressing young people's specific needs and working towards goals in a comprehensive way was not always possible. It is therefore important for practitioners and participants to have realistic expectations regarding what can be achieved in a short timeframe. Changing developmental trajectories for vulnerable young people requires high levels of relational support with multiple touch points over time (Hambrick et al., 2018; Perry, 2009). We assert that young people with more complex needs or psychosocial histories would benefit from longer case management periods and an intensification of support.

The relatively tight timeframe of ten to twelve weeks of program delivery per cohort has implications for the effectiveness of YIPP in engaging and achieving positive outcomes with disenfranchised and vulnerable youth. Neuroscientific evidence demonstrates that patterned, repetitive activation of the neural systems is required for as long as it takes to build new pathways, hence short-term programs that do not consider the notion of how the brain repairs itself are likely to fail in the long term (Perry, 2009). Inconsistent attendance, lack of engagement and participant drop-out where challenges discussed by practitioners, stakeholders and young people. Our evaluation of a similar initiative in Logan demonstrated that significant, early and prolonged investment in building rapport, relationships and trust through outreach work prior to commencing formal activities led to high levels of self-referrals and commitment to and completion of the program (Harris et al., forthcoming). In addition, the development of a comprehensive process for transitioning young people out of the program would ensure that important information is shared with key stakeholders and referrals to follow up services can be facilitated and supported.

Engagement with schools, in this case a large secondary school and a small alternative school, as a point of referral for the first four cohorts proves to be an enabler as well as having some constraints. Using a socio-cultural perspective, schools can compensate for absence of resources needed for young people to build resilience and leadership skills by working in collaboration with other parts of the social system (Henderson & De-Cuir-Gunby, 2016). The collaboration between schools and SSI works well as a referral point as they know the young people and their contextual circumstances. This helps the facilitators of the

program to have a starting point for building trust with participants. Any referral strategy which involves opportunities for young people to self-select needs to ensure that the target population (in this case at-risk, disengaged youth) can be reached. To foster buy-in and commitment from students the facilitators may need to spend more time at the schools to get to know the young people and to speak to them directly about the program so that students can make an informed decision regarding their participation.

Community partners are another important source of referrals and collaboration for YIPP. For the final two cohorts, SSI utilised existing service networks in Logan to connect with young people, introduce them to the program and support them in their decision regarding participation. Bond (2010) highlights the value of integrated approaches to youth work through partnerships, the creation of service networks and the co-location of support services for facilitating access and supporting and sustaining positive relationships and promoting communication between stakeholders and young people. Working within community networks provides opportunities for extended engagement with young people in the context of an integrated model of service delivery. Working with a large secondary school, a small alternative school and community services requires flexible participant recruitment and engagement strategies which are responsive to contextual differences of the referral sources.

Engagement with parents and families is also important in working with adolescents. For young people to build resilience there is need for interdependent linkages between the family, school and community (Henderson & De-Cuir-Gunby, 2016). Establishing effective and ongoing communication with parents can be challenging for a range of reasons, such as, a lack of time, resources or previous negative experiences with schools or services (Naicker, 2023). Contemporary families experience a range of social and economic pressures which limits their capacity to engage in extensive consultations and collaborations with services (Batcheler et al., 2022). Furthermore, engaging with CALD families requires additional considerations in relation to cultural safety, appropriateness and flexibility (Crane et al., 2016). Information sessions and home visits by the facilitators are a good strategy, however this relational work takes time which was not always available to the facilitators in this instance. To improve outcomes in relation to parental engagement, this would need to be considered in any future development of the program.

Further to using a socio-cultural lens, it was noted by the stakeholders that the cultural competence of SSI and YIPP staff is a huge asset to the program. In the Logan community, young people come with many different backgrounds and lived experiences; their view of

themselves and the world around them can be very complex. Understanding cultural safety helps to build the reciprocal relationships between the facilitators and the young people in a way that is not always possible in mainstream services. The importance of the facilitators' lived experience cannot be underestimated when considering the stress responses of young people from CALD backgrounds (Buchanan et al., 2018). Support for young people to build a sense of belonging in a society that is not familiar to them or their families can lead to challenges in their behaviour and engagement. Hence, the cultural competence of services like SSI are necessary to provide a culturally safe experience.

Although the results from this comprehensive program evaluation demonstrate a remarkable convergence and tell a strong, consistent story, there are also some limitations which should be noted. For instance, the relatively small sample size of pilot program participants prohibited analyses or comparisons for different individual characteristics (e.g. disability status and different cultural backgrounds). Moving forward, more research is required to determine how the program suits diverse young people and which aspects of programming may need to be adapted depending on a young persons' religious background and preferences, disability status and/or extreme adverse childhood experiences. Eliciting parental perspectives proved challenging and despite different approaches, parents' voices remain comparatively under-represented in the data. Nevertheless, it is clear that the pilot program has overall been successful in achieving its stated aims and that there are opportunities for continuous refinement and tailoring of the program and model.

Based on the findings of the evaluation and established evidence we make the following recommendations in relation to the Youth In Power Program (YIPP):
   A. Adventure-based group experiences develop participants' confidence, resilience, teamwork and leadership skills. Allowing young people and facilitators to collaboratively navigate risk in an empowering, encouraging, safe and supported environment is a condition for program success.
   B. Positive, trusting relationships between young people and facilitators as well as peer relationship are a positive outcome of YIPP in itself, as well as a key facilitator of participants' engagement in the program. Therefore, it is critical to allow sufficient time for all young people to develop strong connections in the program.
   C. Creating and extending opportunities for young people to contribute to the development of the experiential learning program in the form of co-design would have improved participants' commitment to, engagement in and completion of YIPP. To ensure that envisaged program aims can be achieved, young people's co-design choices could be framed (i.e. surveys, brainstorming sessions, online polls) in line

with YIPP objectives. We advise that the time to do this well should be considered in any future funding and program design decisions. We further note that different approaches to eliciting young people's voices may be required to accommodate for diversity amongst participants.

D. In relation to case management support, we note that the short timeframe of the program creates barriers for addressing young people's needs and achieving long term goals comprehensively. We, therefore, recommend an extension of YIPP to include more extensive case management in line with a coaching or mentoring framework.

E. Further to extending timeframes for program delivery, we advise that a flexible, trauma informed approach to the implementation of YIPP will allow facilitators to dedicate time and resources to doing important relational work prior to commencing group activities and ensuring a successful transition out of the program for participants. We stress that funding should cover crucial preliminary work to support engagement as well as follow up work to ensure the sustainability of positive change.

F. Ongoing effective communication between young people and YIPP facilitators promotes attendance and allows facilitators to promptly and effectively respond to barriers to engagement. To achieve this, YIPP facilitators need to have access to young people's contact information and permission to communicate with them directly rather than via schools as intermediaries. This has been an important learning in the early stages of the program and should be a key consideration for current and future partner schools.

G. Schools are a key partner in the implementation of YIPP and provide opportunities for connecting with young people who may benefit from the program. When referring students to YIPP, it is important that they are provided with comprehensive information about the program to allow them to make an informed decision regarding their participation. We further recommend that students are provided with opportunities to self-select to join YIPP. We understand that opportunities to self-refer must be balanced with the need to reach the target population of at risk, disengaged youth and that strategies will depend on the referring context.

H. Further to collaboration with schools, we recommend that young people's YIPP successes and achievements are shared widely across the school community and with parents. This could be achieved through celebration events, school parades, program graduation meetings or transfer documents or outcome reports for each student. Without these measures, we are concerned that young people's positive change may go unnoticed and the sustainability of positive outcomes may be compromised.

I. Working with schools creates an avenue for an integrated provision of services and promotes young people's sense of connection to and engagement in both YIPP and school. We recommend that future efforts should focus on further expanding and embedding YIPP in Logan schools.

J. Communicating with and involving parents and families is important for supporting young people's sustained engagement in YIPP. A comprehensive approach to engaging families requires a considerable investment of time and resources. This should be a consideration for future funding decision.

K. In addition to formal parental engagement opportunities such as information events, stakeholder meetings and planned home visits, we recommend the consideration of informal points of contact. For example, a comprehensive engagement strategy could involve picking young people up and dropping them home at the end of the day. This could create additional, incidental opportunities for communicating with parents. This strategy was implemented for the final two community cohorts and should also be considered for school groups.

L. YIPP facilitators provided transport between schools as pick-up locations and the adventure-based activities for the school cohorts. Whilst this was valuable and important some young people found it difficult to get to schools for early morning start times. Transport assistance to and from participants' homes would address this challenge and make the program more accessible for young people and families in the school cohort.

M. Many of the YIPP participants are members of CALD communities. SSI and the YIPP facilitators possess the knowledge and skills to engage with diverse communities in culturally safe ways. We stress that this is a complex and sensitive undertaking which requires sufficient time and resources as determined by SSI.

N. Through YIPP, SSI has begun a process of bringing together young people, their families, schools and the community in an effort to achieve better outcomes for Logan youth. We see great potential in this collaboration and strongly recommend ongoing funding for YIPP to allow SSI to grow the program and continue its success.

Intended Program Outcomes	Evaluation Outcomes/ Evidence	Recommendations
Capacity Building & Responsibility		
Increased school attendance and engagement and fewer behavioural issues	Significant evidence for improved education outcomes across all data sources	Ongoing collaboration with schools to ensure sustainability of positive outcomes
Pursuit of other education or employment pathways	Some evidence in support of this outcome from stakeholder and young person interviews and quantitative data	Intensification of case management to work towards specific education or employment goals
Development of crucial skills for working towards goals and aspirations	Significant evidence for the development of key skills such as motivation, perseverance and planning particularly in the qualitative data	Intensification of case management to assist young people with applying developed skills to specific goals and aspirations
Demonstrate responsibility and independence	Some evidence for this outcome in observational, interview and quantitative outcomes data	Support young people to transfer skills acquired in the program to other contexts
Reduced barriers to engage in education and other meaningful activities	Indirect evidence for this outcome linked to increased educational engagement	Intensification of case management to identify and address specific barriers and needs
Improved wellbeing, mental health, resilience, confidence and hopefulness	Significant evidence for improved outcomes across all data sources	Persistent mental health or wellbeing concerns may necessitate additional support from specialist services
Leadership & Skills Development		
Identification of interests, passions and short and long-term goals	Some evidence of this outcome in quantitative data on case management (customised outcome measure)	Documentation of case management outcomes in summaries or transition statements/ exit plans for each young person
Life skills development	Significant evidence for improved outcomes across all data sources (see other items on the development of skills and personal qualities)	The term "life skills" may require further exploration and a detailed description of what it entails
Ability to evaluate choices and behaviours	Some evidence of this outcome in observational data on group de-briefings and interview data	Extension of the program and intensification of case management to create more opportunities for young people to reflect on their life choices and behaviours
Development of problem-solving skills	Significant evidence for improved outcomes across all data sources	Adventure-based group activities provide an excellent context for the development of problem-solving skills

Teamwork skills	Significant evidence for improved outcomes across all data sources	Adventure-based group activities provide an excellent context for the development of teamwork skills
Young people co-design program activities	Limited evidence of this outcome. This was highlighted as an area of improvement.	Create opportunities for young people to contribute to the planning of activities at the beginning. This may also improve young people's engagement.
Community Participation		
Increased sense of belonging at school and in the community	This outcome is reflected in qualitative and quantitative data in relation to increased school attendance and engagement	Stronger collaboration with schools and the community particularly whilst young people transition out of the program would further enhance this outcome
New friendships and increased social network	Significant evidence for improved outcomes in the qualitative and quantitative data	A comprehensive engagement strategy prior to the commencement of activities would allow particularly vulnerable young people with high levels of relational poverty to access opportunities for increasing their social network
Increased engagement with people, groups, programs, services and their communities in positive ways	Limited evidence of this outcome particularly in relation to engagement with external programs and services	A stronger focus on case management would allow YIPP to facilitate referrals for more young people and families who need additional support
Reductions in unsafe, criminal or disruptive behaviours	Some evidence of this outcome, however, this indicator was not relevant for all young people	Young people with significant disengagement and unsafe/ disruptive behaviours may require ongoing intensive support to achieve positive change
Increased feelings of safety and security among the peer group and broader youth cohort	Some evidence of this outcome in quantitative data on case management (customised outcome measure)	A more extensive strategy for interagency collaboration involving families, schools, services and the community would be required to improve safety at a community/ youth cohort level
Increase in collaborative and coordinated service system/ delivery	Evidence of an emergence of this outcome in the qualitative data, i.e. field observations, focus groups and stakeholder interviews	For this outcome to be achieved in a substantial manner the program would need to be expanded and receive comprehensive ongoing funding

Table 4. Evaluation outcomes and recommendations in the context of program objectives

Evaluation question	Findings
How are participants, parents and guardians, program staff and stakeholders experiencing the program?	There were remarkably high levels of consistency evident across all data sources (and stakeholder groups) regarding both satisfaction with the program and program outcomes which demonstrated the effectiveness of YIPP in achieving positive benefits for participants.
How are participants benefiting from the program?	Program participants significantly increased their sense of hope, confidence and agency (as measured by the Hope Scale). Significantly reduced risks were identified in relation to schooling (work and income), family relationships, mental health, and social connections as indicated by pre and post comparisons on Youth Wellbeing Common Assessment Tool.

Qualitative findings indicated that the program was effective in developing personal qualities and social skills such as confidence, motivation, perseverance, resilience, problem solving, responsibility, leadership, collaboration and communication skills as well as achieving improved outcomes at school (increased engagement, improved behavior and establishment of meaningful post-school pathways) and improved social connections and mental health and wellbeing. |
| What is the effectiveness of the adventure-based group activities in engaging young people and fostering their development? | Findings from this program evaluation suggest the approach to experiential adventure-based learning adopted by YIPP, facilitates positive outcomes for young people which builds on emerging evidence in relation to the utility of adventure-based programs.

As described by participants, these experiences encouraged young people to step outside of the comfort zone, try new things and deconstruct self-limiting thoughts. They promoted teamwork, shared leadership and resilience and encouraged young people to reflect on their achievements.

Adventure-based activities facilitated "challenge by choice", allowing young people to navigate through the program at their own pace and in their own way.

The mix of activities and approaches used enabled young people to identify and manage risk collaboratively (while being conscious to not stigmatize and reinforce negative stereotypes). |

What is the effectiveness of case management practices in addressing young people's need, supporting them to overcome challenges and assisting them with identifying and pursuing their goals and aspirations?	In relation to case management support, the evaluation team noted that the short timeframe of the program (10 weeks) presented some barriers for addressing young people's needs and achieving long term goals comprehensively. This was reflected in the fact that significant improvements did not occur across most life domains measured in the CAT (with only schooling, family relationships, social connections and mental health seeing significant improvements). It was however, observed that YIPP facilitators had an intentional and purposeful approach to their case management; setting realistic and achievable goals. However, based on staff reflections (facilitated by the evaluation team) and interim evaluation findings, YIPP program facilitators moved to more of a coaching model for later cohorts, with some evidence indicating that this approach was more effective. Indeed, more significant findings were evident for participants of the Resolve program who had more than twice as long to engage with their coaches.
How could the effectiveness of the program in achieving its aims be improved?	Stakeholders consistently identified the need for the program to be run over a longer period, and ideally embedded in the school system. For example, if offered as part of the school curriculum, it would ensure greater access to more young people as well as providing opportunities to build bridging social capital as well as bonding social capital among participants. Young people identified the need for more opportunities for spending time together casually outside of the scheduled activities. They also identified the need to elicit more input from young people in the design of the program. The administrative complexity and implementation of programs such as YIPP requires careful consideration, with opportunities to streamline reporting requirements to be explored. Successful implementation of the program and engagement of young people requires strong connections and effective communication between YIPP, schools, families and the wider community (and in this context, YIPP is a valuable and highly relevant addition to the current service delivery architecture of Logan).

Table 5. Summary of findings in response to the evaluation questions

6. Conclusion

The Youth In Power Program (YIPP) is a comprehensive youth engagement initiative combining activity-based group challenges with tailored case management support. Insights gained from the program evaluation demonstrate that YIPP is effective in achieving positive outcomes for program participants. Qualitative and quantitative data consistently demonstrate that young people develop a range of social and leadership skills as well as personal qualities through their participation in YIPP. These positive changes are reflected in young people's increased attendance and engagement at school and improved inter-personal relationships and friendships. The brevity of the pilot program (10 – 12 weeks) makes these positive impacts all the more significant. An extension of the program, in particular the case management component, combined with a flexible delivery which supports young people's transition into and out of the program would ensure that their needs can be met and goals can be reached in a sustainable manner. Funding security would allow SSI to further develop YIPP in a culturally safe manner, integrate the program in partner schools and implement a comprehensive strategy for engaging with parents, families and the community as part of an inter-agency, place-based response to youth disengagement in Logan. We see great potential in YIPP and strongly recommend ongoing funding to allow SSI to grow the program and continue its success.

We conclude with a comment from one of the program participants, who explained her motivation to participate in the evaluation:

> *"I really wanted to thank all of the people, especially [Name of YIPP facilitators] and everybody else who worked in the background to make this come true. Doing interviews like this is a little bit stressful, but the reason why I was so eager to do it was, because YIPP was so beneficial and helpful for me and I really wanted to try my best to help the activities and program to keep going, so other people like me can also enjoy it. Just finally in real honestly in the hustle and bustle of every day busy life, it was something to passionately look forward to."*

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