

# YOUTH REBUILDING YOUNG LIVES INSEARCH

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP  
Treasurer  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

December 16, 2019

Dear Treasurer,

Young Australians are in crisis, with youth suicide the leading cause of death in people aged 15-24. In 2018, 24.2 per cent of young people experienced mental distress, up from 18.7 per cent in 2012. Alarming, for every suicide in this age group there are approximately 100 to 200 suicide attempts. The number one issue affecting young Australians identified by Mission Australia in its annual Youth Survey Report 2018 is mental health.

Australia's youth are desperate for help to break this cycle and offer them the tools and resources to turn their lives around. A proven and effective method to address these issues is to offer greater access to evidence-based early intervention programs to help young people navigate life and reach their full potential. Many studies have indicated that early intervention is more effective in addressing a problem to reduce its severity, than to try and undo a mental health issue or addiction once it has taken hold in later life. The importance of promotion, prevention and early intervention (PPEI) in mental health has been recognised in the Commonwealth of Australia's Health Department's previous plans. *Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health: A Monograph* and the subsequent *National Action Plan on Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention in Mental Health* remain key documents informing action in this area.

According to a 2019 report by the Productivity Commission, poor mental health is costing the Australian economy \$500 million per day. The report also found 3.9 million Australians have a mental health problem, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth 14 times more likely to die by suicide than non-Indigenous youth. Youth mental health issues are growing, and we are asking the Government to help address this issue in the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

This submission proposes a genuine Government – Community partnership that would see a reduction in youth suicide and address several societal issues, including youth unemployment and homelessness, addiction and family breakdown, while boosting education outcomes for young Australians and reducing welfare costs.

This proposal will see the expansion of Youth Insearch's successful and unique youth intervention programs in Australia.

The program continues to achieve the following objectives:

- Reduce self-harm and suicide in young people.
- Relieve the suffering and helplessness of young people affected by distressing issues.
- Break the cycle of family breakdown by giving young people some valuable skills essential to be a successful parent.
- Teach these young people positive values of life.
- Teach young people the value of education.
- Increase employment and create positive outcomes for the Australian economy by reducing the need for government support while contributing to Australia's future.

Youth Insearch programs operate in some of Australia's most marginalised and disadvantaged areas. We offer our program in areas where our work is necessary. We determine this based on information provided by government and local agencies to create lasting health, social and economic benefits.

Youth Insearch has identified an investment in early intervention programs specifically targeting mental health and wellbeing in young people as a priority in the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

With the support of the Federal Government, Youth Insearch can expand its program reach, and address the mental health crisis.

Increasing these programs around Australia will have a significant effect on suicide reduction in young people as well as the economic and social benefits to the community.

Youth Insearch's proven effective program model will support the central theme of the Federal Government's 5<sup>th</sup> Mental Health and Suicide prevention plans by strengthening regional integration to support a more effective, person-centred service system.

A modest contribution from the Australian Government of \$3 million (\$1.5 million 2020-21 and \$1.5 million 2021-22) will help Youth Insearch grow the positive community impact its programs are achieving for vulnerable young Australians by adding 12 Support workers in targeted areas that already have an established program including Wide Bay Burnett QLD, Greater Brisbane, New England NSW, Hunter and Coast NSW, Greater Sydney and Darling Downs Vic.

Youth Insearch has sought to be a collaborative, complementary service, working at the nexus of the existing range of government agencies and third sector organisations involved in the provision of health, welfare, education and juvenile justice services for young people at-risk.

During this time, we have worked hard to develop a clear articulation and documentation of our program's theoretical framework, to assist in continual improvement of our services, to increase transparency and to provide a clear evidence base for the benefit of external parties (e.g. Support Adults, potential funding agencies).

This submission is designed to present the theoretical framework and evidence base that underpins the Youth Insearch Program and, in so doing, to respond specifically to the issues raised by the Mission Australia Annual Youth Health Survey of how young people can be better protected from intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviour.

The evidence presented here is taken from earlier and concurrent research results concerning intervention programs for vulnerable young people, and evaluations of the Youth Insearch program carried out designed to investigate the efficacy of the Youth Insearch Program in meeting its stated objectives for at-risk young people.

#### CONCLUSION

Treasurer, we ask that you increase access and locations of community based early intervention programs that focus on youth mental health prevention, promotion and education.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr Stephen Lewin



Chief Executive Officer

Mr Gary Rothwell



Chairman

cc The Hon Zed Seselja MP Assistant Manager for Treasury, Charities and Electoral Matters

The Hon Greg Hunt MP Minister for Health

# YOUTH REBUILDING YOUNG LIVES INSEARCH



## Youth Insearch Foundation

2020-21 Federal Government Pre-Budget Submission

# 1 RESPONDING TO THIS CRISIS

The Council of Australian Governments' *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020* emphasised the importance of enhancing access to appropriate support services for recovery, where abuse and neglect has occurred, and aimed to improve support for young people leaving care.

However, a new level of collaborative service provision is now required. Tailored service models for young people that have experienced abuse or neglect could include:

- flexible, community outreach teams linked to clear referral pathways;
- dedicated positions in specialist mental health services linked to statutory services;
- inclusion of family therapy in treatment plans;
- intensive therapeutic services for children and young people in care; and
- models for greater involvement from general practitioners and other health professionals working with families with young children.

Addressing mental health issues of highly vulnerable children and young people is a critical aspect of an integrated response to improve their life chances. Children and young people who have experienced family violence, sexual abuse and other trauma are more likely to develop mental health problems than those who have not.

## 2 PROGRAM SUMMARY

The highly successful and evidence-based Youth Insearch program has come from the young people themselves, who with the organisation's founder, devised the program in 1985. They identified their need to:

- have the opportunity to talk about their issues and concerns in a truly caring and trusting environment;
- be listened to and affirmed by their peers, thereby getting a sense that they are not alone (a crucial step for those contemplating suicide);
- have the opportunity to gain insights into their own lives by listening to the experiences of others; and
- be part of the solution, empowering them to solve their own problems into the future.

The Youth Insearch program is based on the principles above and has been refined over time. It is an award-winning, proven, comprehensive early intervention program of counselling, support, mentoring and empowerment, for at risk young people aged 14-20 years, delivered through weekend workshops, support groups, peer support, leadership, and individual care.

The program intervenes early, allowing young people to deal with their issues as they appear. It works by allowing young people to confront and deal with the reality of the pain in their lives. By drawing on the resources of other young people who have experienced the same issues, and addressing the real

problem or underlying issue, the young people seek positive alternatives within themselves, turning away from a life of despair and destructive behaviour.

In 2019 the program provided over 2,951 instances of support in its weekend workshops and weekly support groups. Youth Insearch has a significant impact in the lives of young people who participate in the program.

### 3 2019 SNAPSHOT- WE ARE GETTING RESULTS

Metric	FY2018	FY2019
Number of volunteers (youth leaders, adult leaders, support adults)	201	218
Volunteer hours (youth leaders, adult leaders, support adults)	242,406	262,908
Number of weekend workshops	21	20
Number of support locations (support groups/mentoring)	45	56
Number of participations	1,247	1,402
Instances of support	2,227	2,951

### 4 PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Youth Insearch participants are from diverse cultural backgrounds. Approximately 30 per cent of participants are Indigenous and 10 per cent are culturally and linguistically diverse. Our youth leaders are from diverse cultural backgrounds and are trained in cultural sensitivity.

Many young people enter the program with significant problems. Independent reviews have reported the following:

“Multiple and diverse risks factors, and a high incidence of multiple at-risk indicators, among the young people in the program.

“This included a high prevalence of broken and dysfunctional families, drug and alcohol abuse, trouble with police and crime, self-harm and suicide, struggles with education, and low self-esteem” (Urbis: 2003: pg.12 & pp.65-66).

“The majority have experienced, or are experiencing, problems stemming from broken and dysfunctional homes, sexual and physical abuse, drugs & alcohol, grief and other traumatic events” (Urbis: 2008: pg.6).

“There is a relatively high prevalence of drug and alcohol use and of a perpetration of violent behaviour and crime among young people attending the [program]” (Urbis: 2008: pg.8).

## 5 PROGRAM AIMS

We aim to have a sustained positive impact on young people's:

- behaviours – including self-harm, suicide, violence, crime, drug & alcohol abuse, family relationships, engagement in education and employment; and
- wellbeing – measured by mental health measures such as self-esteem, hopelessness, motivation, anxiety, depression and stress.

## 6 PARTNER REFERRALS

Youth Insearch works in partnership with primary service providers, deepening the work with their young people and providing a means for real change to occur. The program provides environments (such as the weekend workshops, support groups and positive peer support networks) in which young people can address the issues in their lives which they may have been avoiding. Services find this particularly beneficial for resistant young people and those with deep trauma.

Examples of service providers include:

- Department of Education (Schools & TAFEs)
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Police, judges and magistrates
- Youth refuges and shelters
- Youth and social workers
- Counsellors and psychologists
- Community centres
- Youth services
- Out of home care agencies
- PCYC
- Life Without Barriers
- Anglicare
- Headspace
- Pathways
- Wesley Mission.

## 7 TARGET GROUP

Recognising that at risk young people have diverse needs and multiple problems, the program takes a holistic approach dealing with a wide range of issues, with a focus on strengths and wellbeing. While the principal target group is at risk young people, any young person may attend the program to increase their self-awareness, self-worth or to help others. In fact, the crossing of experiences is a valuable learning tool for all participants. Youth Insearch is often successful for young people who have failed to improve through other programs or counselling.

Youth Insearch's principal target group will ordinarily be coping with a wide range of issues including:

Bullying	Sexual identity	Grief and loss	Family conflict or separation	Domestic violence
Low self-esteem	Anxiety and depression	Emotional abuse	Sexual abuse	Neglect
Drug and alcohol abuse	Committing crime	Violence towards others	Self-harm	Homelessness
Truancy from school	Lack motivation	Social isolation	Suicidal ideation	Uncooperative with authority

The most prevalent risks for this group include: depression; alcohol abuse; mental disorders; antisocial behaviour; sexual abuse; physical abuse; poor peer relationships; suicidal behaviour by friends; family discord; family suicidal behaviour; unsupportive parents; living apart from parents; and social contagion. Risks of suicidal behaviour increase in adolescence and young adulthood, particularly for the socially marginalised.

## 8 EMPOWERMENT

Youth Insearch is a unique program that offers young people a weekend away to reflect honestly on their lives and connect with peers.

Mentoring is provided in between weekend workshops by peers, leaders, support adults and community coordinators, providing support and direction to the young people. Offering a pathway to heal from the past, develop skills and move forward with their lives can make all the difference to a young person wanting to better themselves.



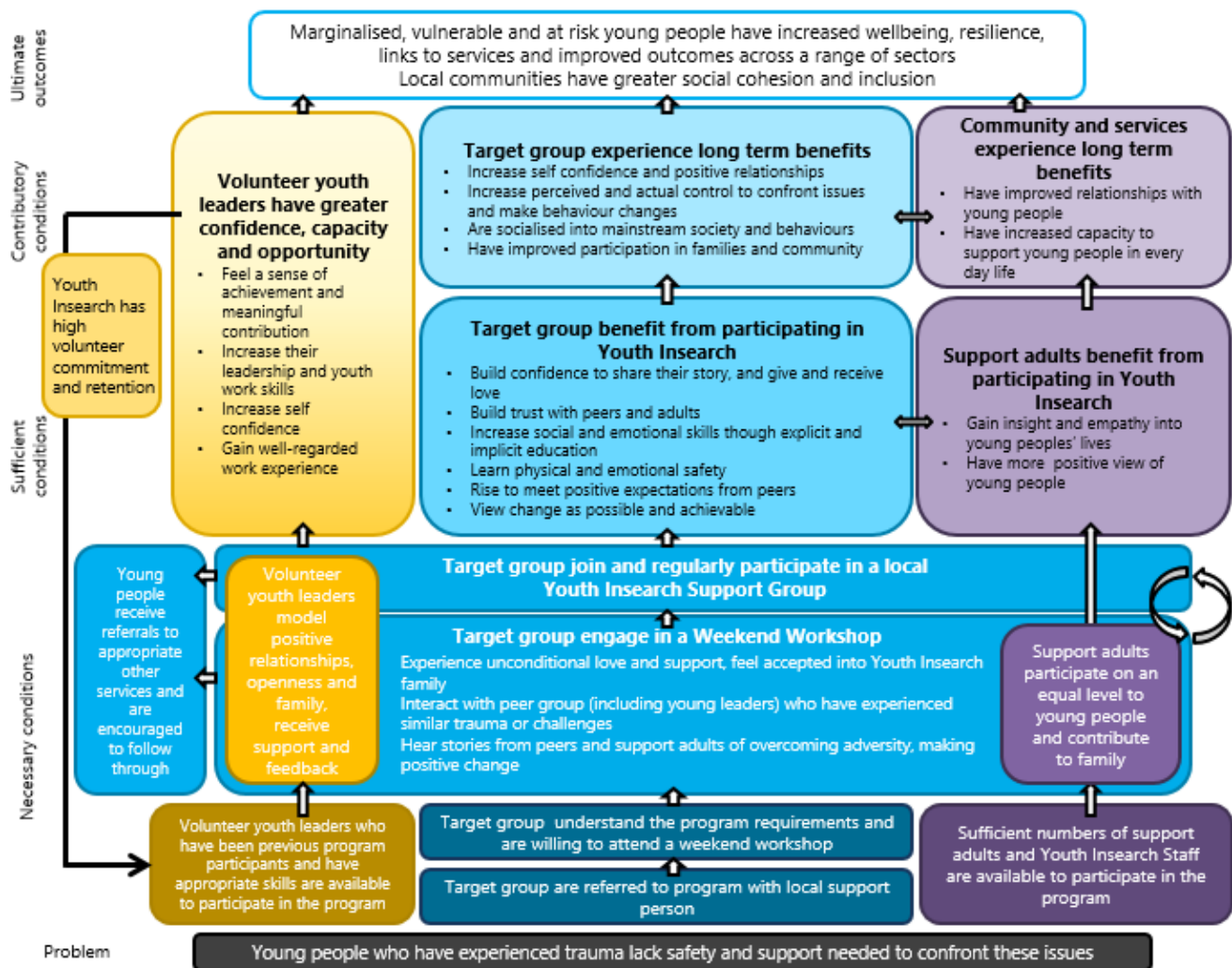
WEEKEND WORKSHOPS	INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT	SUPPORT GROUPS
<p>Workshops are weekend retreats, which present young people with a place they can share their life challenges with peers and be guided by other young people who have similar life experiences, with adults as support.</p>	<p>Young people are mentored by volunteer support adults who attend the weekends and support groups with the young people.</p> <p>Community coordinators are also employed by Youth Insearch to support the young people.</p>	<p>Support groups are regular local meetings where young people can build a positive peer support network with other young people in their local areas, discuss challenges and set goals for themselves.</p>
<p>Workshops run across a weekend, from Friday evening through to Sunday afternoon.</p> <p>A roughly equal ratio of participants to youth/adult leaders and support adults attends.</p> <p>The workshop program includes set sessions on life skills, fun events, and group counselling where young people share and work through any difficulties they have experienced.</p> <p>The workshops are run by specially trained youth and adult leaders – individuals who have either been through the program themselves or share the Youth Insearch mission.</p> <p>Every workshop is overseen by a psychologist.</p>	<p>Support adults are often the assigned support worker within referring service providers.</p> <p>Support adults or community coordinators also refer young people to specialist counselling if required.</p> <p>Immediately after each weekend, community coordinators review the evaluation surveys completed by the participants and any issues identified are followed up accordingly.</p> <p>Community coordinators work closely with the support adults to ensure young people receive support for anything raised through the program.</p>	<p>Support groups are a forum to continue the discussions from recent workshops and discuss personal challenges and victories.</p> <p>They are run by our specially trained youth and adult leaders, with support from our support adults and coordinators.</p> <p>The groups provide an opportunity for participants to remain in contact with program peers, community coordinators and support adults.</p> <p>They occur locally within a few days of a workshop, and then weekly or fortnightly.</p> <p>Attending at least three support groups between each workshop is encouraged.</p>

# 9 PROGRAM LOGIC

The program logic diagram below is a visual representation of the important components of Youth Insearch and how these components are intended to work together to bring about change for young people.

The model begins at the bottom with the problem to be addressed and is linked to the ultimate intended outcomes at the top through a series of short, intermediate and longer-term outcomes.

Each box in the model is a condition that is thought to be necessary to move towards the following outcomes. In combination, the conditions are thought to be sufficient (with certain assumptions and notwithstanding external factors) for ensuring the outcome occurs. While the model is a simplification, it is useful as it focuses on the 'ends' rather than the 'means' and makes explicit the expected outcomes in a causal chain that can be tracked over time to identify any weak links. As understanding about the program matures or the important elements change, the diagram may be updated.



## 10 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE AT A YOUTH INSEARCH PROGRAM

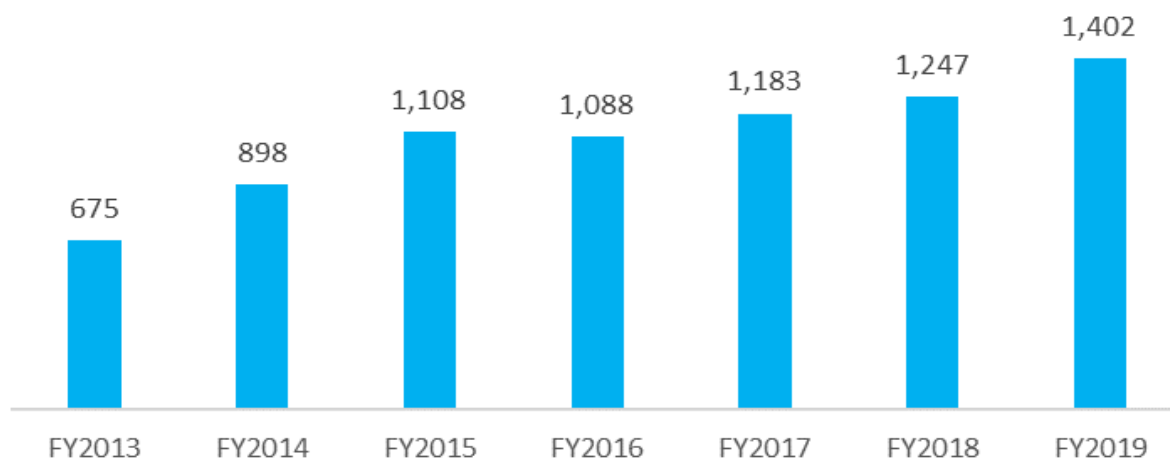
Acceptance	Appreciation	Awareness	Boundaries	Communication
Confidence	Conflict resolution	Connection	Forgiveness	Friendship
Healing	Listening	Love	Patience	Reflection
Respect	Responsibility	Sharing	Trust	Understanding

## 11 PROGRAM REGISTRATIONS

Total attendance at the program continued to increase in 2019, further evidencing the increasing reach and demand for the program.

Metric	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019
Total registrations per year	675	898	1,108	1,088	1,183	1,247	1,402

### WEEKEND WORKSHOP REGISTRATIONS BY YEAR



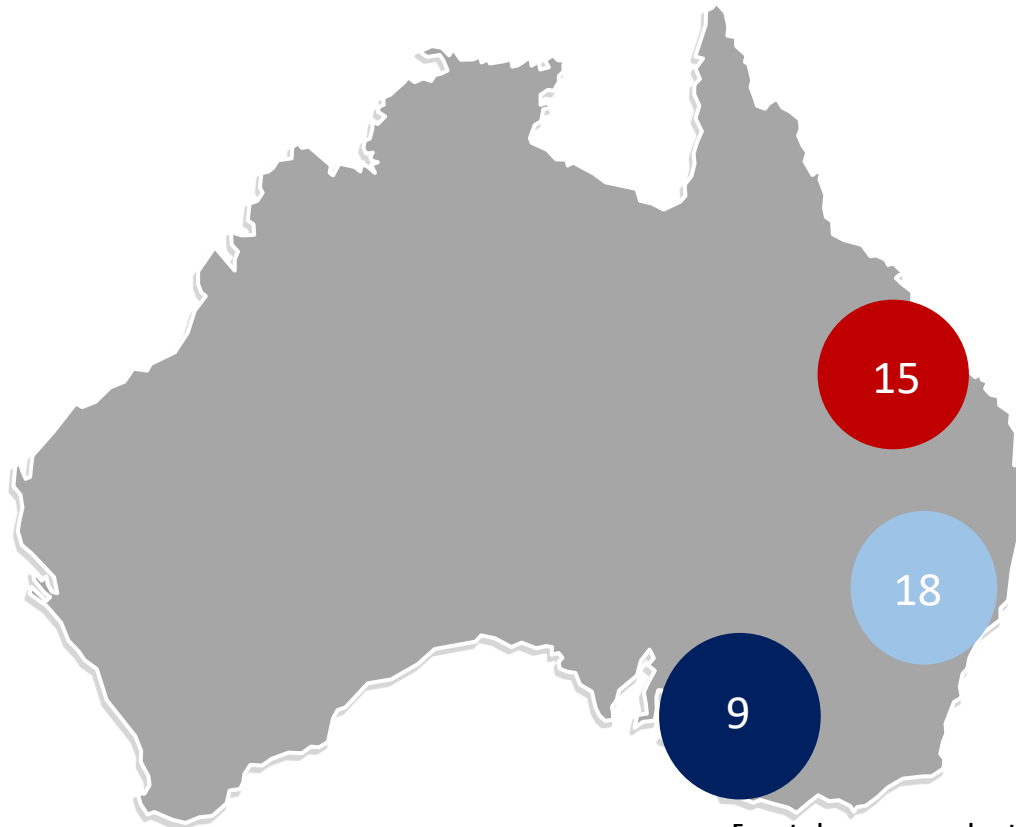
Support groups help build and maintain connection between young people and their support network. Leaders and support adults attend support groups in their local areas, offering a real sense of belonging and care for young people in the weeks between each weekend workshop.

During FY2019, Youth Insearch operated in 237 communities across New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, and ran support groups out of 56 separate locations. This represents over 2,500 support group sessions and volunteer hours. Support groups are usually one-hour sessions run either weekly

or fortnightly, serving as a place for young people to reconnect, share wins, challenges, experiences, and set goals for the week, month and year ahead.

With the support of the Federal Government we are planning sustainable growth over the next few years to reach as many young Australians as we can. This unique will make an enormous positive impact and support the Government's *Mental Health Action Plan*.

## 12 YOUTH INSEARCH PROGRAM LOCATIONS



### Expected new program locations 2020-23

#### NSW

##### **Leaders retreat**

- Collaroy

##### **Leaders training**

- Elanora

##### **Weekend workshop**

- Central Coast
- Lake Keepit

##### **Support group**

- Warrawong
- Castle Hill
- Riverstone
- Coonabarabran
- Portland
- Newcastle
- Central Coast

- Narrabri

- Inverell

- Gunnedah

- Tamworth

- Armidale

- Port Macquarie

- Barraba

#### VIC

##### **Weekend workshop**

- Forest Edge

##### **Support group**

- Bairnsdale
- Maffra
- Latrobe Valley
- Stockland Traralgon

#### QLD

##### **Weekend workshop**

- Bundaberg

- Duckadang

- Lesley Dam

##### **Support group**

- Dysart

- Gympie

- Kingaroy

- Hervey Bay

- Bundaberg

- Chinchilla

- Toowoomba

- Dalby

- Tara

- Roma

- Miles

- Dubbo

- Nowra

- Ballina

- Tweed Heads

- Byron Bay

- Queanbeyan

- Cooma

- Yass

- Strathpine

- Salisbury

- Cairns

- Townsville

- Mackay

- Gladstone

- Rockhampton

- Gelong

- Ballarat

- Bendigo

## 14 OUR RESULTS

Our results are impressive and widely acclaimed. There have been thousands of remarkable turnarounds in young people's behaviour and attitudes to life as a result of their involvement in the Youth Insearch program. This is supported by four independent reviews and our internal statistics. The real-life testimonials tell the story the best and can be viewed here <https://youthinsearch.org.au/latest-news/tags/testimonials>

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (2009) found:

"Cumulative data from independent reviews and program evaluations evidence the program has a success rate of 80% in that most young people return to their communities challenged for change and the results are long lasting" (pg.6).

In a review commissioned by the NSW State Government, Urbis (2003) found positive outcomes across multiple behaviour and well-being measures and that the program had a sustained positive impact on these issues over time. (pg.40-50). This included significantly:

- Less trouble with police and crime (for 83%)
- Higher self-esteem (for 65% immediately, increasing to 76%, 6 months after)
- Improved family relationships (for 70%)
- Reduced suicidal thoughts and attempts (65% no longer suicidal, 80% no more suicide attempts)
- Reduced alcohol and drug use (e.g. 66% increase in not drinking, 71% no longer using drugs)
- Better attendance and attitude to education (for 58%)
- Improved life skills (range of factors)
- Improved confidence and control (range of factors)
- Less violent (for 37%)

It also found "... other lasting changes ascribed to the program, both immediate, and 6 months after" (pg.67):

- More stable relationships with friends and close contact with friends from the program
- Being more expressive, open about experiences, feelings, emotions, in touch with their feelings
- Motivated to change
- Feeling good about themselves and their lives, being calmer, more relaxed, controlled, less agitated and anxious
- Being more mature, cooperative, better behaved, more participative
- Being more social, communicative, less of a 'loner', having less conflict with peers, more positive interactions
- Having better relationships with support adults
- Having a clearer perspective on their life/problems
- Trusting more
- Being more comfortable seeking help
- Gaining employment

The Urbis (2008) review (commissioned by the Federal Government) confirmed these results finding:

“[There is] a broad range of positive immediate outcomes ... in particular making new friends and meeting others with similar problems, feeling loved and respected as well as feeling respect for others and having support”.

“A range of positive behavioural outcomes ... such as increased school attendance, a sizeable reduction in drug and alcohol use, and a reduction in the perpetration of physical violence”.

## 15 RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Every dollar given to Youth Insearch has the immediate effect of keeping young people in school, in jobs, and away from destructive behaviours. Over time, the value of social welfare payments not needed, income tax paid and mental health services not used, is immense.

80 per cent of Youth Insearch participants make positive changes in their lives that enable them to be fully participating members of our communities across Australia by:

- becoming self-supporting and moving away from destructive living environments;
- getting jobs, going back to school, TAFE or university; and
- improved wellbeing and needing less support from mental health professionals.

Even without counting the value of crimes not committed; law enforcement not needed; and no drug and alcohol related hospitalisation, over 10 years, we calculate an 18 times multiplier effect for every dollar invested in the Youth Insearch program.

## 16 TRY, TEST AND LEARN – DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

The Commonwealth’s Try, Test and Learn (TTL) fund: Tranche 2 grants, fund new or innovative approaches that support people at risk of long-term welfare dependence through small-scale trials aimed at improving workforce participation, or capacity to work, for those people at risk of long-term welfare dependence. Youth Insearch has been funded under TTL to deliver the Dependence to Independence project that is based on the Youth Insearch model. The focus is on delivering the Youth Insearch program to young people at risk of long-term welfare and evaluating the impact of the program on building young people’s participation in and capacity to work. Youth Insearch’s model is seen as an innovative way of working with these young people.

A core deliverable of the project is a research study undertaken by the University of Sydney and University of Melbourne in the form of a cooperative enquiry, which will identify the mechanisms that work in our peer to peer approach and their impact on young people. This will be coupled with our outcomes evaluation framework to provide a comprehensive description of the impact on the young people and how the program achieved this impact. This will be provided to the Government as evidence of what works for the young people.

This is a chance to shape how Australian government policy responds to the issue of unemployment – and what better way than using the Youth Insearch model which addresses some of the underlying causes of the problem (mental health, values, beliefs, support, education) rather than only the symptoms (welfare for those unemployed).

## REFERENCES

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>

<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/research-impact-policy-advocacy/youth-survey>

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/annual-report-2009-10/export>

<https://youthinsearch.org.au/programs/results>

<https://familyconcernpublishing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/PPEiMentalHealth2000.pdf>

<https://headspace.org.au/assets/Uploads/Evaluation-of-headspace-program.pdf>

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/mental-health#draft>

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

<https://youthinsearch.org.au/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4CPu26kumE>

<https://youthinsearch.org.au/programs/independent-review>