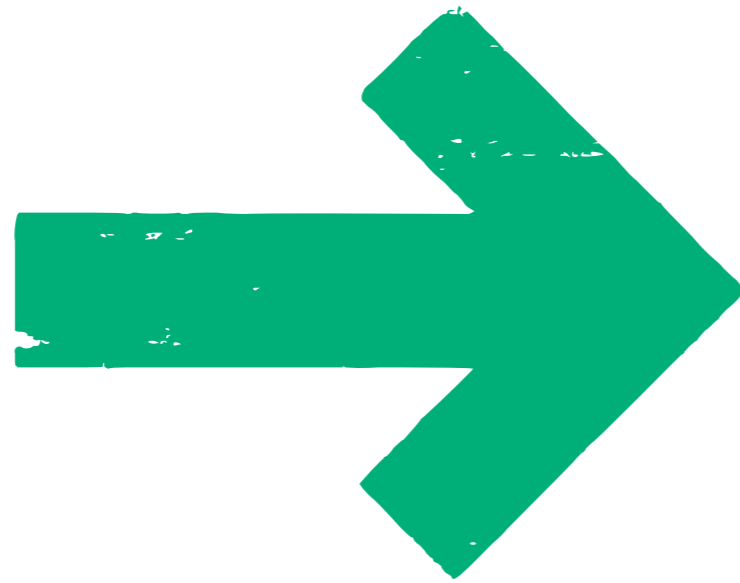


A COMMUNITY FOR HEALING

Youth Residential Recovery Services

Youth Outreach
Recovery Service
Practice Approach





PREPARED BY

Rebecca Spies, Rebecca Egan, Grace McLoughlan, Cristal Hall

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM

Young people and staff from Neami's YRRS

DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report is indebted to the contributions of young people who have accessed YRRS/YORS, YRRS staff, and referrers who participated in interviews and focus groups with the report authors. We thank them deeply for the expertise and time they shared with us.

CONSUMER NAMES

No names of consumers have been used and identifying details have been altered to protect the identities of consumers whose experiences are shared here.

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Neami acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land we work on and pays its respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



Neami celebrates, values and includes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document describes the practice and impact of the Youth Residential Recovery Services (YRRS – formerly Youth Residential Rehabilitation Services) and Youth Outreach Recovery Service (YORS) delivered by Neami National and funded by the Victorian Department of Health.

As a specialist community mental health provider Neami National (Neami) supports people's agency to experience, achieve and do things that matter for a fulfilling life - as guided by their strengths and values. Neami operates in five states and one territory, and from over 60 service locations across Australia, supporting over 27,000 individuals each year via services spanning community mental health, residential mental health, suicide prevention and homelessness.

This document outlines who accesses the YRRS and YORS, the approach that guides team practice and their ways of working, and the outcomes achieved by young people through their engagement with these services.

What are YRRS and YORS and who do they work with?

YRRS are state-funded community mental health programs that provide accommodation and intensive psychosocial support to young people aged 16-25 who have significant mental health challenges.

YORS is a supplementary model, introduced in 2021, to provide support to young people aged 16-25 years with mental health challenges pre and post entry to a YRRS and as an alternative to a YRRS placement.

More than housing or outreach support, the YRRS and YORS are spaces to reset foundations, which can have lifelong implications across many aspects of a young person's life. Many young people enter these services with a history of trauma and complex struggles that deeply affect their sense of self and others. Young people are a population doubly marginalised for their age and their experience of mental health challenges (Delman, 2012), and trauma histories can compound disenfranchisement.

In recognition of this context, YRRS and YORS support is centred around empowering young people through real relationships which can change their sense of hope and possibility in significant ways. YRRS and YORS are important steps in a journey to healing.

What has been achieved?

Certain types of support at certain points in the lifespan have genuine transformative impact. The YRRS is one of these. YRRS engagement does not eliminate distress – an impossible goal – but it provides a safe, secure space for young people to feel supported as they do the hard work of recovery and healing. As young people foster a sense of self-worth, they build new relational templates and transform their sense of hope and possibility. Through discovering or reconnecting with their strengths and values, young people are seen, valued, and celebrated for who they genuinely are, something some young people may not have previously or consistently experienced.

This basis of relational safety in both YRRS and YORS enables other important outcomes:

- Improved sense of connection and belonging
- Increased independent living skills
- Deeper sense of meaning and purpose
- Improved psychosocial functioning
- Young people become the experts of themselves

How has this been achieved?

YRRS offer a unique combination of longer-term psychosocial and residential support to cultivate a sense of home, community, and healing. YORS extends this relational approach across transition periods and into the community.

Trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate support is delivered by a team with interdisciplinary backgrounds in line with the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM) and the Egg Model, and their key constructs, described below.

Change occurs across an evolving YRRS journey. Support domains shift in and out of focus over time as young people and staff engage in a dance of support, choreographed to the young person's needs and values.

YRRS support is delivered in recognition that it is the staff's workplace, but the young people's home. This home is a dynamic milieu where the needs of all members must be cared for. The result is a peer community defined by relationships of care and mutual support.

CRM MODEL

Collaborative, relational coaching stance

Ecological systems perspective

Foundation of human rights

Valuing diverse knowledges

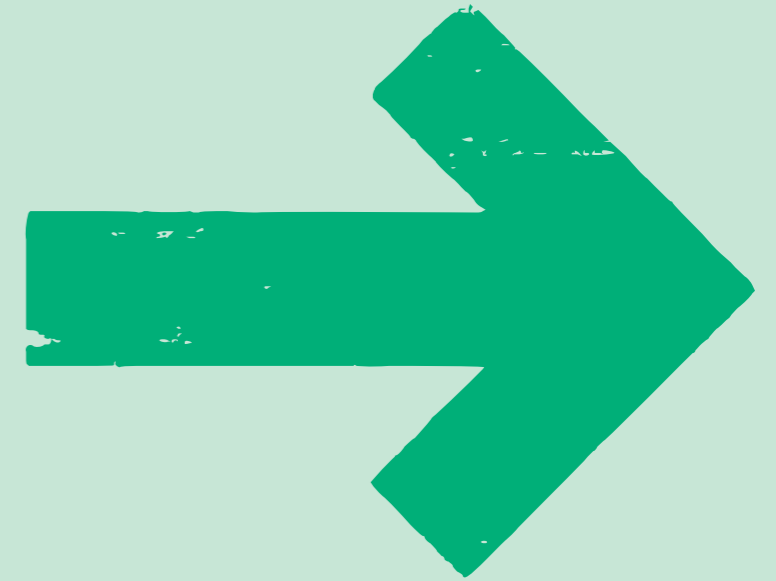
EGG MODEL

Real relationships

Feeling safe, known, and belonging

Building skills and directions for my future

Becoming the expert of me





WHAT ARE YRRS?

Youth mental health support

Adolescence and early adulthood are dynamic periods marked by social, emotional, and vocational development. They are also periods when the emergence of mental health challenges commonly occurs (McGorry et al., 2013). Reflecting the spectrum of severity and need amongst this cohort, a suite of service offerings is available to young people, and where appropriate, their families/carers/supports.

Whether they operate in community-based, outreach, or residential settings, mental health services exist alongside education, vocation, alcohol and other drug, and out of home care services to support the holistic needs of young people.

Mental health services range from low intensity/early intervention supports such as primary health, school-based, and digital supports, to progressively more intensive offerings such as headspace and publicly and privately funded clinical supports, to more intensive services that provide inpatient or residential therapeutic care.

Youth Residential Recovery Services

YRRS sit at the more intensive end of this spectrum and through the provision of a mental health recovery service in a residential setting, represent a unique service option for young people aged 16-25 with significant mental health concerns. Despite traditional connotations linking the original YRRS descriptor 'rehabilitation' with alcohol and other drug (AOD) supports, YRRS are not withdrawal or treatment programs. Whilst many young people engaging with YRRS do have co-occurring AOD issues, AOD support is a component rather than the focus of the recovery-oriented care provided. Unlike local therapeutic residential care models, YRRS eligibility is not dependent on involvement with statutory services (McLean, 2018). The mental health focus of YRRS differentiates them from vocational/education-centred Youth Foyers. And young people with acute mental health needs are often supported in clinical settings such as hospital inpatient units or short-term Youth Prevention and Recovery Care services (YPARCs), which differ to YRRS in that they provide short-term (up to 28 days) integrated clinical/ psychosocial support (Green et al 2019). As such, psychosocial residential support alternatives that offer medium- to long-term milieu-based recovery-oriented support for young people experiencing mental ill-health are relatively unique.

Across Victoria there are 18 YRRS operated by seven non-government organisations. There is considerable diversity in operational and staffing models due to local need, accommodation type, and unique provider approaches. Staffing presence can vary from 12-24 hours and some providers collect a small service fee to contribute to utilities (State of Victoria, 2021).

“YRRs stand out as offering something extremely unique and valuable” (REFERRER)

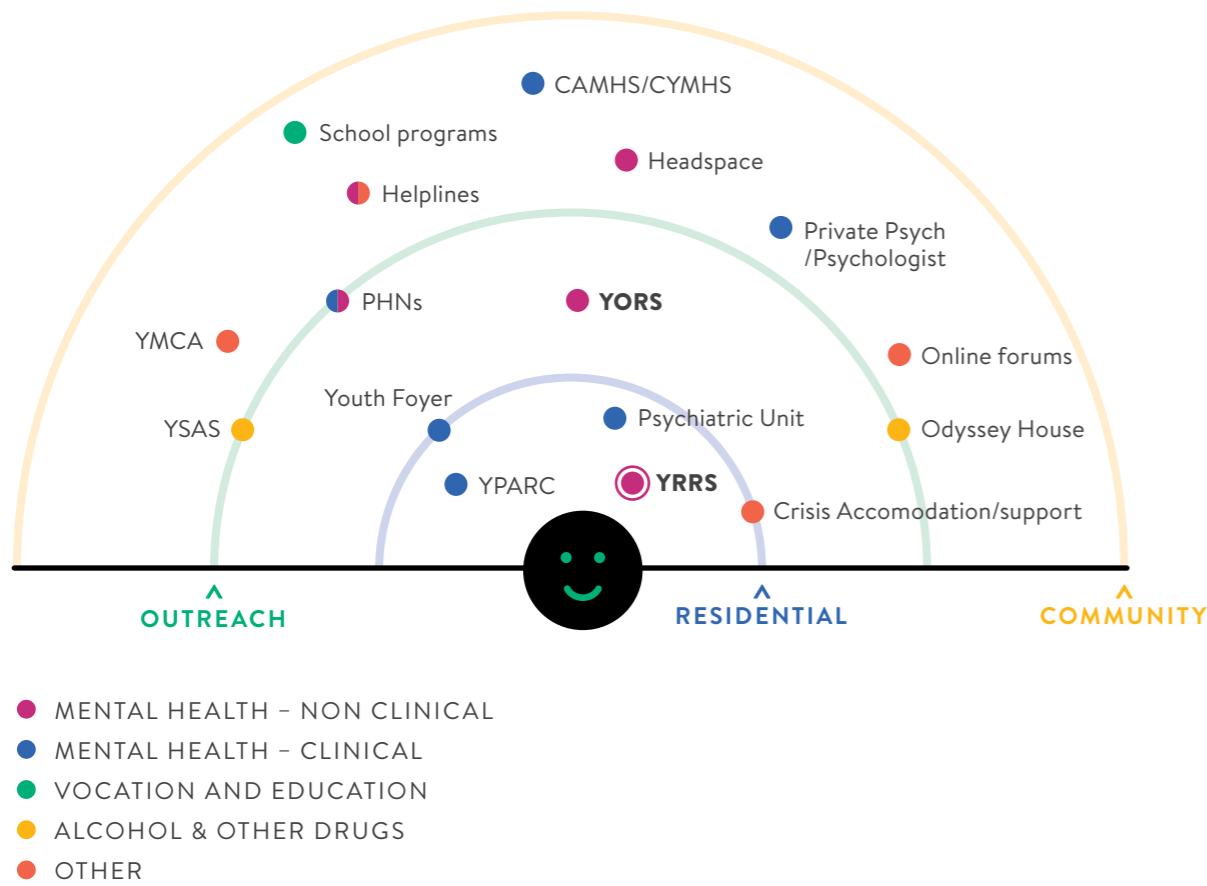


FIGURE 1. LOCATING YRRS & YORS IN THE SERVICE SYSTEM

The mental health service system is complex. It can be challenging to understand the different roles services play and just where they sit in relations to other types of support. This figure maps out some key services available in Victoria to young people experiencing mental ill-health. The colours of the dots represent the focus of each service, and their position indicates if they are residential, outreach or community-based services.

FIGURE 2. RESIDENTIAL YOUTH SERVICES IN VICTORIA

This table compares the eligibility and support structure of the Residential Youth Services. The YRRS offer a unique approach to support focused on mental health

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	STAFFING	DURATION OF SUPPORT	SUPPORT MODEL	AGE	NUMBER OF RESIDENTS
NEAMI YRRS					
Experiencing mental ill-health/ psychological distress. Commitment to participating in YRRS program	Up to 14 hours/ day, with on call support overnight	12 months	CRM/Egg	16-25	8-10, depending on site
YOUTH FOYER					
Risk of houselessness Commitment to engaging in work or study	24 hrs	2 years	'Advantaged Thinking' to identify and cultivate capabilities and independence	16-24/25 depending on site	16-98 units depending on site
YPARC					
Need for brief, intensive mental health support to prevent hospitalization (step-up), or support transition from inpatient setting (step-down)	24hrs	Up to 4 weeks	Integrated clinical and wellbeing support with a focus on recovery, therapeutic environment, and family engagement	16-25	10-20, depending on site

What's important in residential youth mental health care?

A clear picture is building in the literature (Thomson, McArthur & Winkworth, 2005; Bath, 2008; James, 2011; McLean 2018; Green et al 2019) of what's important in residential youth mental health care, including:

- individualised care...
- underpinned by a coherent model of support...
- connected to other supports and services...
- delivered by skilled and supported staff...
- in a place that feels like a home...
- where safety, hope, and autonomy are centred.

Neami's approach draws on several key theoretical approaches to deliver what's important, including:

Trauma-informed care

Support is delivered in line with the core principles of safety (including cultural safety), choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, transparency, and empowerment (Fallot & Harris, 2009; SAMHSA, 2014). We honour the healing potential of belonging, safety, and connection through cultivating communities of real relationships in a homely setting (Rivard, Bloom, McCorkle, & Abramovitz, 2005; McLoughlin & Gonzalez, 2014; Pecora & English, 2016; Smith & Spitzmueller, 2016).

Attachment theory

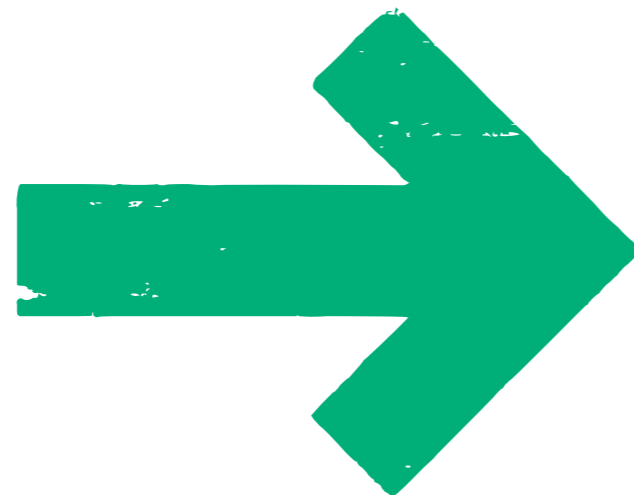
Early experiences of care have lasting impacts on engagement styles. Young people can develop new relational templates through restorative relationships attuned to their needs.

Developmentally appropriate, recovery-oriented care

A strengths-based approach to tailoring support in recognition that trauma or other experiences may have impacted a young person's development relative to their age (SAMHSA, 2014). A recovery orientation promotes hope, self-belief, agency, identity, and connection (Rayner, Thielking, & Lough, 2018).

Youth-friendly approaches

Participatory approaches which promote self-determination to empower young people as active agents in their care. Care is connected, family-sensitive, holistic, hopeful, and considerate of the personal, systemic, and macro systems in which young people are nested (Hughes et al., 2018; Rayner, Thielking, & Lough, 2018). Young people's lived experience is honoured and they are supported to use this to inform program design and delivery.



What are Neami YRRS?

Neami National runs 4 YRRS in metropolitan Melbourne, supporting up to 38 young people at a time. Young people live on site whilst participating in the program for a period of up to 12 months. These young people present with a range of mental health concerns including but not limited to severe anxiety, depression, PTSD, and early psychosis, with many having histories of complex trauma.

The accommodation may be a cluster of one- or two-bedroom units or a single dwelling with up to 10 bedrooms and shared communal spaces. They are staffed for up to 14-hours per day by support workers who deliver strength-focused support through structured group programs and individual coaching. The structured routine includes morning check-in and a weekday group program collaboratively developed by staff and young people. Weekends regularly feature excursions including bushwalking and shopping.

The group program encompasses topics of health and wellbeing, independent daily living skills, psychoeducation, self-development, employment, education, community connections, socialising, and recreation.

Young people also attend twice-weekly individual support sessions with an allocated support worker. During their time in the YRRS, they work on key areas of self-development to support them to feel capable and confident to live a life of self-determined meaning and purpose.

Some areas of self-development can include:

- Self-responsibility
- Understanding behaviours and emotions
- Self-care
- Enhanced coping skills
- Independent living skills.

The YRRS program may also assist young people to develop and maintain links with their local community, family, social networks, and support them to pursue educational and vocational opportunities.

The YRRS are facilitated through The Egg Model and the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM).

YRRS Summary

YRRS

- 18 YRRS Funded by the Victorian Government's Department of Health
- Neami operates 4 metropolitan Melbourne sites

Neami YRRS

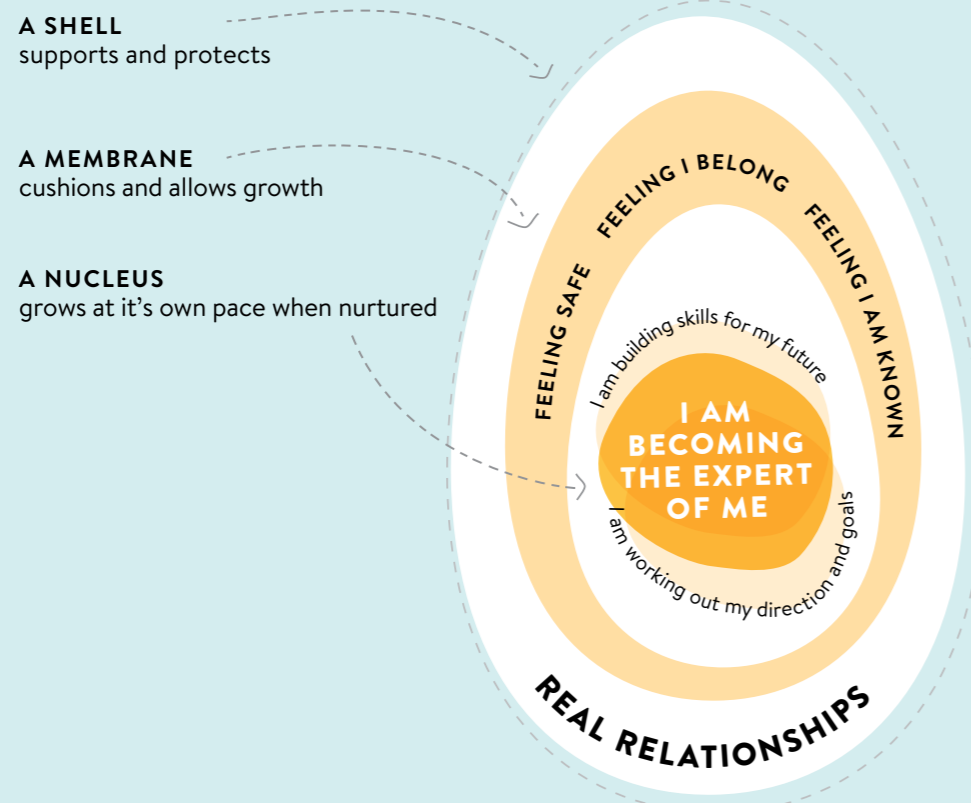
- Capacity to support up to 38 young people at a time
- Eligibility 16-25 with significant mental health concerns
- Young people live on site for up to 12 months

The support

- Staffed for up to 14-hours per day
- Strengths focused support
- Facilitated through The Egg Model and the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM).
- Structured routine including morning check-ins and weekday group program
- Regular weekend excursions

The group program and individual support

- Developed collaboratively between young people and staff
- Twice-weekly individual support sessions to support self-development



The Neami YRRS practice approach

The Collaborative Recovery Model

The CRM is Neami’s theoretical framework to support the delivery of trauma informed, culturally responsive, diversity appreciative practices using cross-disciplinary expertise. The CRM offers an ethical, human, and relational foundation for practice, where diverse knowledges are celebrated, and the unique contexts -both enabling and constraining- people are nested in are explored. The CRM assists young people in their recovery journey by using a person-centred coaching approach. This approach supports people to identify their values and goals, and to make progress towards them. Often this progress is assisted by connecting with formal and informal community supports.

The Egg Model

The Egg Model is a co-produced theoretical framework for the YRRS. Built upon the three layers of an egg, it metaphorically captures what matters to young people at the YRRS, demonstrating how different components combine to allow healing to take place.

At the centre of the egg is a **nucleus** – representing young people becoming the experts of themselves. Young people come to the YRRS determined to use their time there to clarify their goals and directions, and to work towards building skills for what they want from their future. The environment of the YRRS is imagined as the **membrane** that cushions and allows growth. Central to this membrane is an environment that allows young people to feel safe, feel they belong, and feel that they are known. The membrane is supported and protected by the shell of real relationships. These real relationships – with staff, other young people, and with people outside the YRRS – are critical to creating a space that is protective, supportive, and allows for healing, in which the nucleus can grow at its own pace.

Young people need flexible support over their year in the residential setting that is characterised by three key factors:

- 1. A good transition means a great start:** Young people need a warm, supported transition into the YRRS. Important to this transition is receiving information regarding the program, meeting the staff, and beginning to build a relationship all prior to entry.
- 2. Dance of support – the right support at the right time:** Young people have a fluctuating need for support over time. This is dependent on individual levels of coping skills, and points of crisis in their lives. It is a dance between young people doing for themselves and staff doing for, and with, young people – a dance between not supporting enough and supporting too much. These relationships need to find a rhythm, where the ultimate aim is both people knowing the steps and able to dance their part. It is not always the same person that leads. Not every dance will look the same as every dancer brings their own strengths and challenges, biases, values, prejudices, past experiences, and stages of development.
- 3. Exiting with the skills and resources they need:** Timing is crucial in supporting people to develop the skills and to have the resources they need for a good transition from the program. Exit plans need to be held in mind from the beginning of the stay, so that skills can be developed at the right time, and for learnings to be consolidated. However, in order to have these discussions, young people need to feel secure in the YRRS. For many, beginning to plan for housing needs to happen early in the stay, and for some young people, 12 months is not long enough to heal from a life that has involved much trauma and upheaval.

Research undertaken on the YRRS has revealed some guidance about what staff needed to know and do about the environment to create the shell and membrane that can nurture healing and growth for all young people:

Recognition that it is the staffs’ workplace but the young persons’ home.

Young people regard the YRRS as their home and feel strongly about creating and maintaining a comfortable, safe space for themselves. It is important to young people that staff remember that although this environment is their workplace, it is also the home of the young people. Changes, where they have no control, could be very unsettling.

Our home needs to work for everyone.

The YRRS are complex operating systems where staff are working to hold the wants and needs of individual young people while simultaneously considering the needs of the whole group. This is a balancing act that can sometimes feel unfair from the perspective of a single individual. It is also about young people realising that living together, and building relationship skills, involves compromise. Developing skills for compromise and tolerance in relationships is a work in progress and for many young people they require support from staff to achieve this balance.

Understanding that ‘the work’ happens all the time.

For young people, the work of recovery happens all the time; in the small, everyday routine activities, in conversations, in incidental moments, and planned structured activities. Every interaction has the potential to become a teachable moment and help equip young people with the skills and resources they need to live independently.

A team of people who care

Neami YRRS are delivered by a team including a service manager, support workers, and peer workers, whose qualifications span social work, psychology, peer work, youth work, occupational therapy, art therapy, and alcohol and other drugs. This interdisciplinary approach creates a care community where staff can “make decisions together about balancing individual and collective recovery” (staff).

Staff are trained in trauma-informed practice, the Collaborative Recovery Model, applied suicide prevention skills, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, transgender and gender diverse inclusivity, and first aid. In recognition of the complex work they do, individual and group supervision provides staff “a space for the grief and a space for support and a space for challenging and a space of reflection” (staff).

Honouring the identities and lived experience of staff fosters a culture of authenticity and relatability that filters through the whole service. Through openly sharing their recovery stories, peer workers can foster hope and possibility for young people, demonstrating “we’re not here just spouting theory at them, we’re showing them it is possible, recovery, whatever it looks like for you” (staff). The role modelling of peer workers in safe sharing also supports a lived experience culture where all staff feel safe to discuss how they bring themselves to work and the impacts it has on them.

In line with trauma-informed principles, the Egg represents a support framework for young people and staff alike. Staff highlight their own need for safety, belongingness and feeling known, without which burnout becomes a real possibility. A culture of learning and growing – where everyone is a work in progress – affirms the journey of each member of the YRRS community – and staff feel seen for their strengths, supported in their areas for development, held as they make mistakes, and encouraged as they take responsibility.

The service benefits of safe and satisfied staff are multiple. Intake processes improve as staff shift their focus from managing risk to readiness and motivation. Relational trust develops with clinical providers and other service partners, which can streamline service pathways especially during crisis. Staff retention increases, resulting in greater consistency in the YRRS program, relationships, and culture. Victoria’s mental health and wellbeing workforce strategy 2021–2024 identifies ‘Supporting the safety, wellbeing and retention of the mental health and wellbeing workforce’ as one of its 4 priority areas (State of Victoria, 2021). Over half of the YRRS staff cohort have been with Neami longer than 3 years and the service has had a consistently low yearly turnover rate of 3% or less over the past 3 years. This is particularly important as young people are keenly attuned to staffing inconsistency, which can be destabilising either through broken relationships or uncertain program structure.

Safe and satisfied staff



STAFF QUALIFICATIONS: social work, psychology, peer work, youth work, occupational therapy, art therapy, and alcohol and other drugs.



STAFF ARE TRAINED IN: in trauma-informed practice, the Collaborative Recovery Model, applied suicide prevention skills, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, transgender and gender diverse inclusivity, and first aid.



PEER WORKERS FOSTER HOPE AND POSSIBILITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: “we’re not here just spouting theory at them, we’re showing them it is possible, recovery, whatever it looks like for you” (STAFF).



A culture of learning and growing – where everyone is a work in progress

Benefits of safe and satisfied staff:

- Intake process improves
- Stronger relationships with clinical providers and service partners
- Consistency in YRRS program, relationships and culture

YRRS EMPLOYEE LENGTH OF SERVICE AND CURRENT ROLE

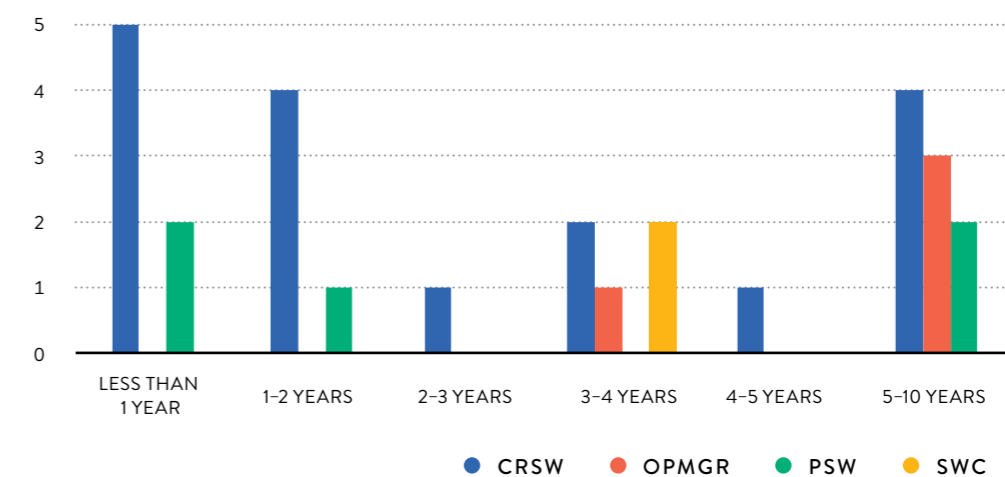


Table created from Neami YRRS Employee Position Data as of 01-Dec-2021.

Acronyms: CRSW – Community rehabilitation & support worker, OPMGR – Operational Manager/Team Leader, PSW - Peer support worker, SWC – Other Support Worker or Coach

YRRS staff retention data from January 2019 – December 2021

Annual turnover rates over the last three years of 2.9% (2021), 3% (2020), and 2.4% (2019).

Who accesses YRRS?

YRRS support young people aged 16-25 who are experiencing a psychiatric disability. For some young people, their hope in accessing the service “was to stay alive” (young person – YRRS). Whilst concerns about mental health and independent living skills are central, many referrals are prompted when a young person’s accommodation is jeopardised.

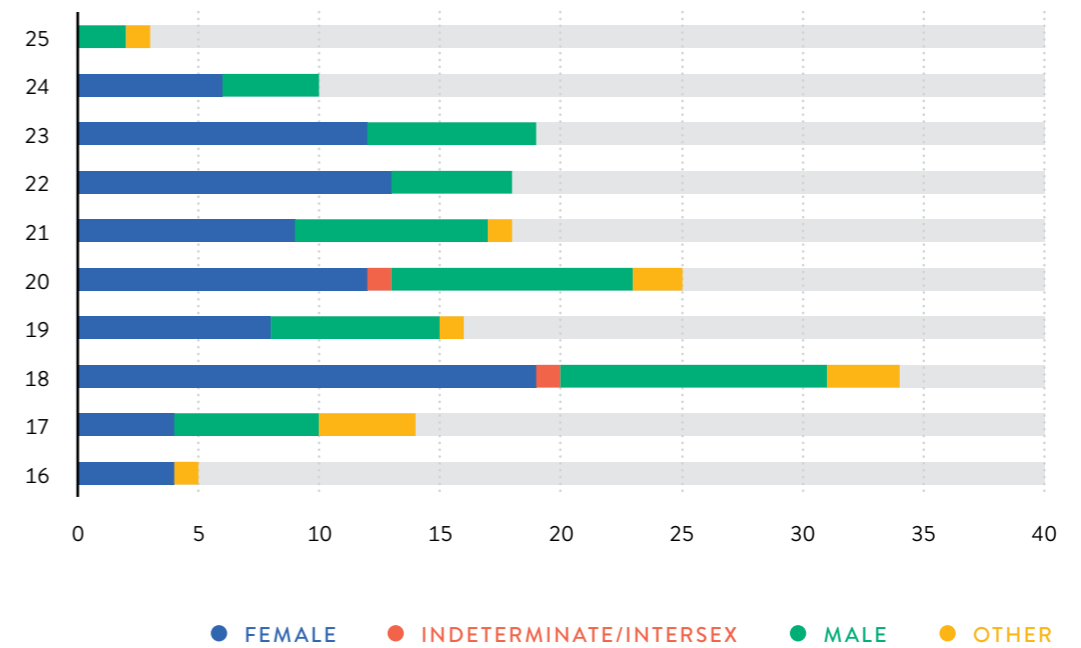
“People are wanting a safe space to get away from their parents who just don’t agree with who they are, whether they identify as transgender, or just a number of things, they’re not allowing that young person to become an adult in the way that they want to be. Or the absolute rates of abuse and neglect that their parents are perpetrating” (STAFF)

Eligibility is not bound by location – young people can access a YRRS without living in its catchment area, although this may impact their ongoing eligibility with existing supports.

Referrals can be made by clinical services, other professionals, young people themselves or informal supports. They are processed through a central intake function and assessed by a monthly review and triage panel with YRRS managers, a Child and Youth/Adolescent Mental Health Service clinician, and intake worker. Young people are allocated to vacancies according to their needs and the current YRRS site dynamic. A site-based psychosocial intake assessment explores the young person’s readiness and fit for the program. Some sites invite young people to write a letter/song/collage/picture before they move in about what they want to achieve to humanise the process and encourage them to ‘own’ the referral rather than the referrer.

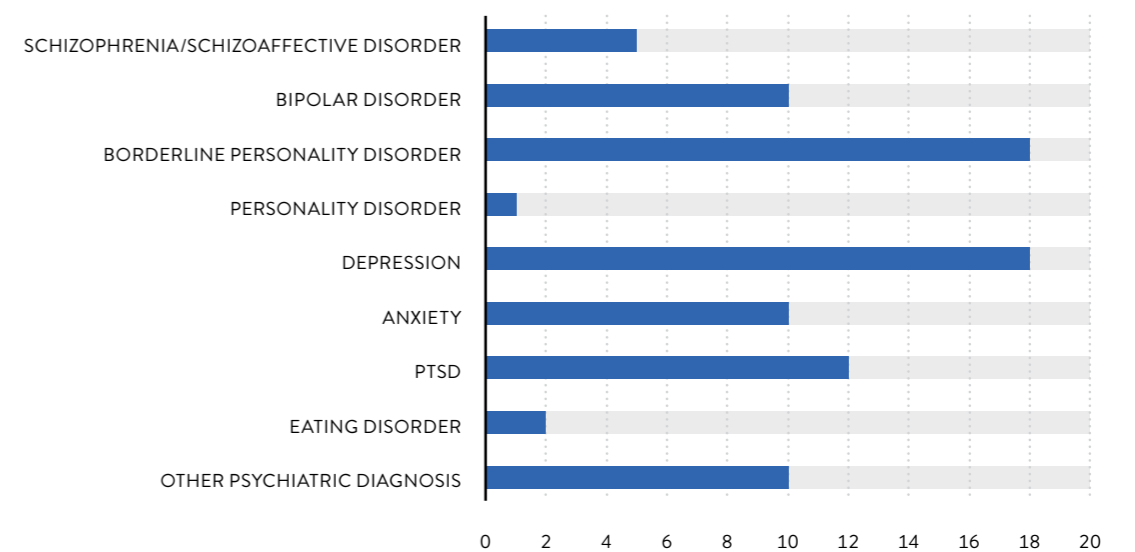
Due to the unique residential nature of YRRS, the needs and dynamic of the whole YRRS community are considered during intake. This means that admission may vary according to acuity depending on the current cohort at the YRRS. Whilst this enables access for young people across the spectrum of significant mental health need, it can be experienced by some referrers as an inconsistency in the terms of reference or favouritism. Whilst clarity is crucial to minimise such concerns, the relatively broad eligibility requirements may facilitate access for young people whose needs are frustratingly seen as either too acute or not acute enough for other services. The YORS program has been introduced in part to fill this need, by offering young people the preliminary support that readies them for YRRS engagement.

FIGURE 3. AGE/GENDER AT SERVICE ENTRY



Generated from QDC data collected at entry to services between January 2018 – October 2021. We acknowledge that intersex people can be any gender, and that some genders and experiences may be invisibilised by the term ‘other’.

FIGURE 4. PRIMARY DIAGNOSIS



Generated from QDC data collected at entry to services between January 2018 – October 2021.

What is YORS?

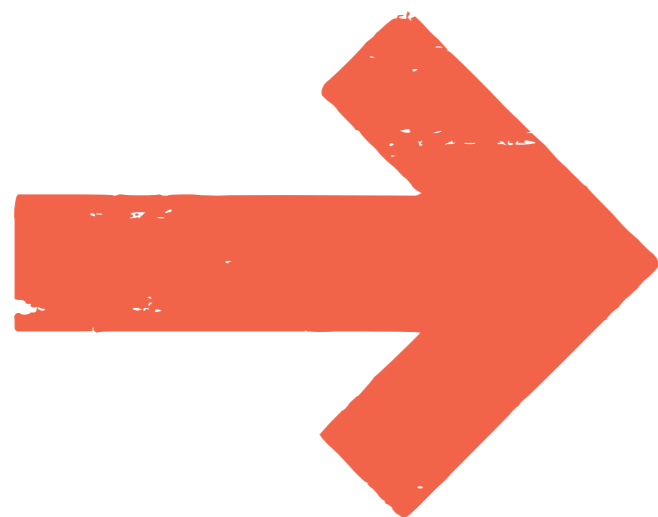
In 2021, the Youth Outreach Recovery Service (YORS) was introduced to complement YRRS. Funded by the Victorian Department of Health, YORS supports young people for the 6 months pre and post YRRS engagement, as well as providing an outreach alternative to a YRRS placement. As with the YRRS, young people aged 16-25 requiring psychosocial support and experiencing mental ill-health, suicidality, and/or multiple disadvantage and unmet needs are eligible for the service. The intensity of support is guided by the young person's needs and can vary from twice a week to fortnightly or less.

As with YRRS, the YORS model varies across providers. Neami delivers YORS in three catchment areas, through an integrated staffing structure with the YRRS. This means that young people remain connected to the same staff during their engagement with the services, minimising disconnection.

“YORS has made a huge difference... to know there's ongoing support with the same person... it's been amazing” (STAFF)

YORS is a welcome addition to the service system, addressing findings that transitions into and out of the YRRS program can be stressful and overwhelming (Spies et al., 2021). Through the extension of support, young people can commence their YRRS placement better acclimatised to the program and their hopes for it, whilst gains can be consolidated by exiting with transitional support without disconnecting from the secure relational attachments developed in the YRRS. The non-residential option ensures young people are supported to maintain their independence alongside their mental health.

“I've been in therapy for a long time so I have that side of things covered, but what I was really missing was that ongoing support around the day-to-day things that my anxiety affected”
(YOUNG PERSON - YORS)



Program Logic YRRS and YORS

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES	WHAT WE DO	IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	END OF SERVICE OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES	END GOAL
Trauma-informed care Lived Experience approach Citizenship, human rights Recovery orientation Inclusion & diversity Seeing the whole person in context Strong relationships with service systems	YRRS & YORS Warm, safe and flexible individual support Co-designed group program Diverse, well-supported staff team Extensive community networks Support to connect with family (where appropriate) and community supports	Consistent and connected support shaped by young people's perspectives	Feeling safe, known and belonging	Emergent sense of hope and self-mastery	YP are becoming experts of themselves	Young people have enhanced agency to experience, achieve and do things for personally living well.
		Optimistic, engaged, and genuine staff	Understanding own strengths and values; challenges and possibilities	Enhanced mental wellbeing and self-worth		
		Appropriate referrals and timely intake	Building skills and routines for living well and managing wellbeing	Access to safe housing upon exit	Young people are engaged in activities that have purpose and meaning to them	
		Supported opportunities for community connection	Feeling seen and celebrated by trusted staff and peers	Improved psychosocial functioning		
		YRRS Up to 12 months accommodation	Welcomed into a supportive community of real relationships	Enhanced relational skills	Young people have a model and expectations for safety	
			YORS Outreach support	Feeling prepared to enter / exit YRRS	Consolidate YRRS achievements	



WHAT IS BEING ACHIEVED?

Neami uses a range of ways to understand and demonstrate the outcomes young people achieve in the YRRS. This diversity is reflected in the diverse data sources this evaluation draws from; please see the Appendix for further details on our method. Quantitative measures include the RAS-DS+, the YES survey, and DoH's MHCSS YRRS Outcomes quarterly data collection tool (see page 28).

Given the time-limited nature of the YRRS, outcomes must be understood in the context of a young person's journey more holistically.

“

Some people ring back after two years, and they say they're doing something meaningful. While they were here, it was nowhere near that, and we were just struggling to maintain their life. (STAFF)

Things can look like, for example, not great on paper. I'm just thinking of one young person in particular... but if you really explore the reality of the journey, things have gone really well. There's been an enormous amount of personal growth and change, which has led to things looking like they've gone badly, because she's just gone "Stuff you all." It could look like we failed her in some way, but she's found her voice. (STAFF)

Neami’s commitment to a holistic, relational approach means there is a focus on “sensing, feeling and acknowledging change”, not just measuring it (staff). Change is thus also recorded and celebrated in deeply relational ways, including:



MILESTONE MEETINGS – quarterly reflections from all staff about a young person to recognise their efforts, reflect on achievements and plan next steps, “because it means a lot when someone noticed that they have actually changed a little bit... they’re moving towards something” (staff)



STAFF OBSERVATIONS – of a young person’s efforts and accomplishments are shared back to them, no matter how big or small, to show they are seen and valued



PANCAKE CEREMONIES, LISTENING CIRCLES, AND PIZZA DINNERS – spaces for young people to reflect on what they’ve achieved and hear what others hope for their future or see as their unique strengths



WISDOM FOLDERS – scrapbooks where exiting consumers can share reflections on their recovery journey



EXIT LETTERS – a written reflection from a support worker about a young person’s journey, covering support themes, observed changes, strengths, achievements, hopes, and questions to prompt ongoing reflection



SITE VISITS – where former residents return to share updates of where they’re at or facilitate a group program



STUDENT PLACEMENTS – some former residents return to do a placement for their Peer Work, community services, or mental health studies

These rituals and artefacts honour the unique context of the YRRS community by reflecting that change is ongoing and happens within relationships. Complementing quantitative tools with relational ones helps to minimise a sense of performance, obligation, or even exploitation. They acknowledge that for some young people, “the anecdotes are more key than the statistics” (young person – YRRS) – mementoes and memories are the tangible and emotional keepsakes of recovery.



I would, definitely, want a group photo, I’d want to keep in touch with everyone here. There’s this one girl who comes here every now and again... and that’s really cool, I really like that... she just comes and stops by and talks to people.

(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)



My last day here, I read out a speech that I’d written – because I’m a writer – to all the staff at their staff meeting, to say thank you to all of them. Because I know that in this field of work, they’re often the bad guy. They’re the one telling you something you’re not ready to hear. Or telling you you need to work harder in your recovery... So they don’t actually get “Thank you” very often. Like properly. So, I did that, and then some of them cried, and then that made me cry. It was very – it was like happy tears. It was very emotional exit, but it was good. It was like “We did it,” and they were like “No, you did it,” and it was like “Well, thank you for being here when I did it.

(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

I love doing [reflections], because it really gets you to think... how has this person grown? It really is a nice moment to sit down and really think about that person and the positive steps that they’re making. And, there’s always something, there’s never nothing, you can never not think of anything, yeah. And, I guess the young people, they’re kind of like you know how people when they’re praised, a lot of these young people haven’t experienced that, and they’re really nervous and uncomfortable. So, it’s really important that they do it with their keyworker, because they can be vulnerable.

(STAFF)

Quantitative outcome measures explained

Neami uses three quantitative measures to track outcomes and gather feedback about young people’s experience of the service. Recovery can be difficult to capture as it is a deeply personal, non-linear, and context-specific process. What looks negative when plotted on a graph may be understood as positive when context is considered. For this reason quantitative measures are used alongside what we’ve been told by young people and staff about what works in the YRRS.

Recovery Assessment Scale – Domains and Stages (RAS-DS+)

The RAS-DS is a self-report measure, consisting of 38 statements which are graded by consumers on a 4-point scale from ‘untrue’ to ‘completely true’. The statements are grouped into 4 domains; ‘Doing things I value’, ‘Looking forward’, ‘Mastering my illness’ and ‘Connecting and belonging’. The scores for the 38 statements can be added up for a ‘total recovery score’ or broken down by domains to assess progress in each area.

Neami introduced the RAS-DS in October 2020 after consulting with young people about what was important to record and reflect on during their recovery. The domains within the RAS-DS aligned well with young people’s responses. The use of the RAS-DS has evolved at the YRRS – it was originally offered at 3 and 9 months, increasing to entry, exit, and quarterly in between.

As of October 2021 there were 20 matched pairs which could be analysed for this report. Due to the low sample size this measure will not be used to draw any conclusions.

The RAS-DS will become a more reliable outcome measure with time as the sample size increases. It will enable Neami to track how the YRRS are delivering on end of service outcomes related to; improved psychosocial functioning (‘Mastering my illness’), hope and self-mastery (‘Looking forward’) and enhanced mental wellbeing and self-worth (total recovery score).

YES Survey

The Your Experience of Service (YES) survey is a voluntary anonymous online survey to gather feedback about young people’s experience at the YRRS. They are intended to track if the YRRS are meeting the immediate and short-term outcomes of the program (see program logic). Consumers are asked to rank a series of statements on a scale. It includes open text to provide further detail and feedback if needed. The questions focus on the young person’s experience of safety, relationships with staff, the YRRS environment and the effect of the support on areas of their life.

Neami asked young people using the YRRS to complete a YES survey to contribute to this report. Twenty young people completed the survey between December 2021 and January 2022.

DoH’s MHCSS YRRS Outcomes quarterly data collection tool (QDC)

Quarterly Data Collection (QDC) is an initiative of the Department of Human Services to collect statistical information about service users and service providers to meet Commonwealth and State Government reporting requirements. The YRRS collect QDC data for all consumers accessing the service. This tool is useful in tracking progress on end of service outcomes (see program logic). At entry demographic data is collected and each quarter a set of 16 outcome indicators are ranked on scale by the young person’s key worker. The tool includes questions about life skills, employment and education engagement, involvement in activities, relationships with friends and family, management of physical and mental health, use of supports and risk.

This report draws on QDC data from young people who entered the service from January 2018 to October 2021.

Stable accommodation for 12 months

Many young people entering a YRRS have a history of precarious unsafe housing. Although the YRRS are not classified as a housing service, some young people who engage with the service have a history of homelessness, and others have accommodation within a familial environment that is not ideal for their recovery (see figure 7). Though housing insecurity is not an admission criterion, the YRRS does provide a unique space where for up to 12 months young people can experience safe, secure, and affordable housing alongside therapeutic support for emotional distress. For a year the service is “taking out the accommodation issues for people working on their recovery” (staff) and is reflective of the Housing First for Youth principles, where the emotional work of recovery and building a future is rendered more complex without a secure physical housing space. This is a foundation for enabling the recovery process within the YRRS. As stated by a staff member, the housing provided by the YRRS “might be the first time for them where they have some sense of stability”.

The YRRS also serve the purpose of providing a familial structure, where it is possible for young people to learn and practice interpersonal effectiveness, boundaries, compromising and other communication skills. One staff member observed, “We’re emulating a supportive social environment, and sometimes a family, it’s often mentioned as kind of a family place, and so having unconditional positive regard, having encouragement, having somebody that tells you the truth, that doesn’t yell, that deals with conflicts in a positive way, like having that safe space, means that a young person can then unpack what’s going on for them, because the space is safe”. The familial environment is highlighted in the context of the YRRS being the young person’s home, whilst being a workplace for staff. As one staff member reflected, “I work where they live, they don’t live where I work [...] I remind myself this is their house and I’m lucky enough to be in their home... It’s great we’re not clinically focused because it has to feel like a home for people, not just housing”.

A safe space away from previous or current trauma is also an integral part of creating a safe and supportive YRRS. Many young people enter the YRRS with a history of being traumatised. A secure environment that allows the young people to feel an embodied sense of safety is key to recovery. Feeling safe is an integral part of trauma recovery and a secure house with consistent and supportive people provides this necessary sense of safety. One staff member commented, “I think one of the primary purposes we serve is for young people to have an experience of a different way of being, where it’s kinda safe and accepted, feeling accepted [...] being in an environment where mental health recovery is a possibility. I think in a lot of instances, where these young people come from, it’s not an option, like they live in trauma.” The consistency of a stable home allows for young people to prioritise their recovery and know that for a year they can focus entirely on their own healing without concerns surrounding accommodation.

FIGURE 6. ACCOMMODATION SETTING PRIOR TO ENTRY AND ON EXIT

Generated from QDC data collected at entry to services between January 2018 – October 2021.



	PRIOR TO ENTRY	ON EXIT
PRIVATE RESIDENCE (RENTAL)	9	24
PRIVATE RESIDENCE (OWNED INCL. WITH FAMILY)	16	7
SUPPORTED OR TRANSITIONAL	13	7
GRAND TOTAL	38	38

Emotional and physical safety

A place to heal, connect, and restore

More than just a physical space, the YRRS provides an emotional environment that promotes safety and healing. As outlined previously, many young people enter the YRRS from challenging home environments. The YRRS' unique combination of physical and emotional support allows young people to experience "a completely different way of being... a completely different existence" (staff) and achieve outcomes not possible in outreach.

"I can't think of one person who's come from a safe, supportive home into our service... Every young person that comes in here experiences acceptance and safety and things that they've never experienced before... that's essentially the guts of what happens, that's the magic that happens here" (STAFF)

"Coming in here and being able to normalise my emotions. Emotions are normal and natural and, "You're not a bad person for being emotional, you don't have to hide things," it's all natural. And, sitting with your feelings and your moods and stuff, and not always being great, being able to express that." (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

Safety is enabled through processes, spaces, and relationships. Person-led support maximises choice and control. Risk management processes and boundaries are embedded in a relational approach where young people feel valued, trusted, and a sense of mutuality. The delicate balance of feeling held and feeling free fosters the homely vibe of the YRRS and allows young people to be safe to be themselves.

"Young people see us every day, they're in their pyjamas, there becomes a certain element of comfort around each other, you get seen in all the different iterations of yourself day to day" (STAFF)



"I think it's just the peer-to-peer interaction you have with keyworkers. With therapists it's sometimes very clinical, and there's not that sort of day-to-day help. But I think all the staff here are very good at just – you come to them, you're honest, you tell them what you're struggling with, what you need help with, and they'll just work on that."
(YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

"[staff saying that] 'everything is led by you' was really reassuring... they listened to my side of the story... It's been really good to have my family involved the way I specifically wanted."
(YOUNG PERSON - YORS)

New possibilities emerge through felt experiences of safety. YRRS are sites for "identity exploration, experimentation, and consolidation" (Ennals et al., 2021), but this is only possible when young people feel safe enough to look forward *and* back and start to heal from past traumas. It's from this safe relational and physical base that YRRS support young people to cultivate new trajectories.

"When I do a site visit with somebody it's like this is a safe space for you to actually work on your recovery, to find out who you are, who you were, who you want to be and to work on your mental health without having to worry about all those daily stressors that they have to generally because of the family dynamic." (STAFF)

Cultivating safety takes time

Cultivating safety is not quick or easy. Young people are often experiencing distress when entering the YRRS, arriving from complex settings where safety was absent.

"It took me weeks to move in because I was processing it. I was ready to end my life. No one cared. And then someone was like "We want to offer you a spot in our 12-month program." (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

Entering the YRRS is a process, not an event, a reality that the longer-term duration of the program enables, and one supported further by the introduction of YORS. YORS eases young people into the YRRS – intake paperwork can be completed before entry, leaving time and energy to focus on adjusting to the new environment, routines, and shared living arrangements. YORS doesn't make these changes easy, but young people are comforted by the established connection they have with their worker.

Unconditional positive regard

Many young people enter the YRRS unaware of their strengths and equipped with coping strategies tailored to unsafe settings. Staff bring a trauma-informed lens to understand behaviours in context. The duration and intensity of support the YRRS offers means these behaviours can be explored through restorative not punitive responses:

“We look for the reason why they might be using substances – it’s not a zero-tolerance approach. We can sit with that complexity, we can sit with understanding why people are using things, we’re not here to penalise anyone. [This] allows us to support young people struggling with harder things that might see them kicked out of other services.” (STAFF)

“You’re not going to get yelled at... you just get told “That’s not acceptable,” and actually explain why it’s not acceptable rather than like, “Rah” and just craziness.” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

A trauma-informed stance of unconditional positive regard does not mean that any behaviour is acceptable. YRRS have defined rules and expectations and some young people are exited from the program based on the choices they make. It does, however, recognise that relational challenges are common on a journey of self-discovery, healing, and practicing new strategies (Spies et al., 2021). Learning to live with boundaries – with a sense that someone can value you as a person whilst noticing some behaviours as problematic – can be disarming and takes time (Spies et al., 2021). YRRS are uniquely well placed to hold young people through this healing process.

“I was like “I’m going to get kicked out. It’s going to happen. [Neami] don’t care. They want me gone. They want me out of this program. I went into this full – and it lasted for a few weeks. And I was speaking to [manager] once or twice a week, and I was just beside myself. I was like – I got to the point where I was self-sabotaging. I was like “Just kick me out.” I’m like “I know you want to, so just do it. Just rip the band-aid off.”

I was literally pushing [Neami] so hard, and I’m so grateful that they are able to sit with those moments, because at the end of the day, I wasn’t doing anything wrong. I was just kind of having that “leave before they leave you” kind of thing.

That fear of rejection. And I was like “You don’t care.” And they were like “We do.” You know. They just sat with that. And they sat with my little meltdown for a few weeks because they knew that they had to just prove that they weren’t going anywhere. And after that few weeks, it’s that painfully right, we’re still here, we do care, and nothing in your head can tell you that we don’t care, because we’re still sitting here. We’re still talking to you. We haven’t kicked you out. We’re not going to kick you out as long as you don’t do the list of red card things” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

Safety enables engagement

Safety is the foundation from which program engagement is possible, and it is a collective responsibility. For some young people, trust and safety is fostered through understanding staff motivations and values by asking them “Why do you do your job? What’s important?” Other young people support safety by sharing how they found safety at the YRRS, “vouching” for the service to build confidence for others. Increasing trust, reciprocity, and participation can indicate safety with staff, other young people, and the program as a whole.

“There’s the more easily measurable changes, which is that they get back into education, or they start work, or that they re-engage with some community supports. But for me, I think the more important changes is that they feel valued, they feel that they’re worthwhile, that they felt that they had a place that was safe and encouraging for them, while they were here.... [these] feel like the bedrock which you build the other stuff on. So many young people we’re emulating a supportive social environment, and sometimes a family, it’s often mentioned as kind of a family place, and so having unconditional positive regard, having encouragement, having somebody that tells you the truth, that doesn’t yell, that deals with conflicts in a positive way, like having that safe space, means that a young person can then unpack what’s going on for them, because the space is safe” (STAFF)

Safety and engagement are enhanced by individualised support delivered by a team with multidisciplinary backgrounds across a range of modalities, including one on one, groups, and arts-based approaches:

“If a consumer doesn’t talk very easily or is on a loop with their talking, not really developing, art gives that outlet” (STAFF)

The unique nature of YRRS support – homely, informal, longer-term – means staff build an understanding of the whole young person, which can enrich engagement across care teams:

“We can get disclosures from young people that clinicians don’t have the time to get or don’t have the time to build the relationship that can hold those types of disclosures” (STAFF)

It also means that young people build a sense of safety in being honest about the challenges they face, because the stigma associated with certain thoughts and behaviours is removed.

“We try our best to provide opportunities for that sharing to occur. These are safe things to share about, we’re not gonna be embarrassed or diss on you if you’re still cutting or you know. It means there becomes a culture of open communication, not ashamed of talking about some of the more difficult parts of mental health” (STAFF)

LGBTIQA+ safety

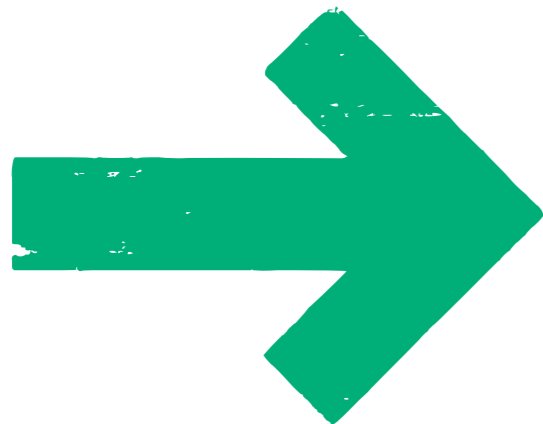
LGBTIQA+ young people are at higher risk of adverse mental health outcomes than the general population, attributable to social environments marked by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination (Hill et al., 2021). LGBTIQA+ young people are over three times as likely to self-rate their health as poor, compared to the general population aged 15-24, and 81% of *Writing Themselves In 4* participants reported high or very high levels of distress on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (Hill et al., 2021). Almost one quarter of this cohort had experienced at least one form of homelessness, of which the top two perceived causes were mental health and rejection from family (Hill, et al., 2021).

“I can only speak to them when their parents aren’t there. They’re trans and if that was disclosed there is risk of family violence. Support is limited while they stay in that space” (STAFF)

There is a need for safe and affirming services which address the psychosocial *and* residential needs of LGBTIQA+ young people whilst celebrating their identities. It’s crucial that mainstream services can offer this support, as there can be safety in the anonymity that generalist spaces provide. Through their relational, holistic, and non-clinical approach, YRRS are uniquely well placed to support this need.

From the outset, Neami communicates that LGBTIQA+ young people are welcome. When young people visit the YRRS, staff share their pronouns and respectfully ask young people about theirs. Sites have all gender bathrooms and visual markers such as pride flags. Staff don’t make assumptions about the gender, sexuality, or number of a young person’s partners. Staff clarify that discrimination is not accepted. LGBTIQA+ staff act as role models and supports, especially crucial if young people are questioning themselves or haven’t had an adult in their life they can ask questions to.

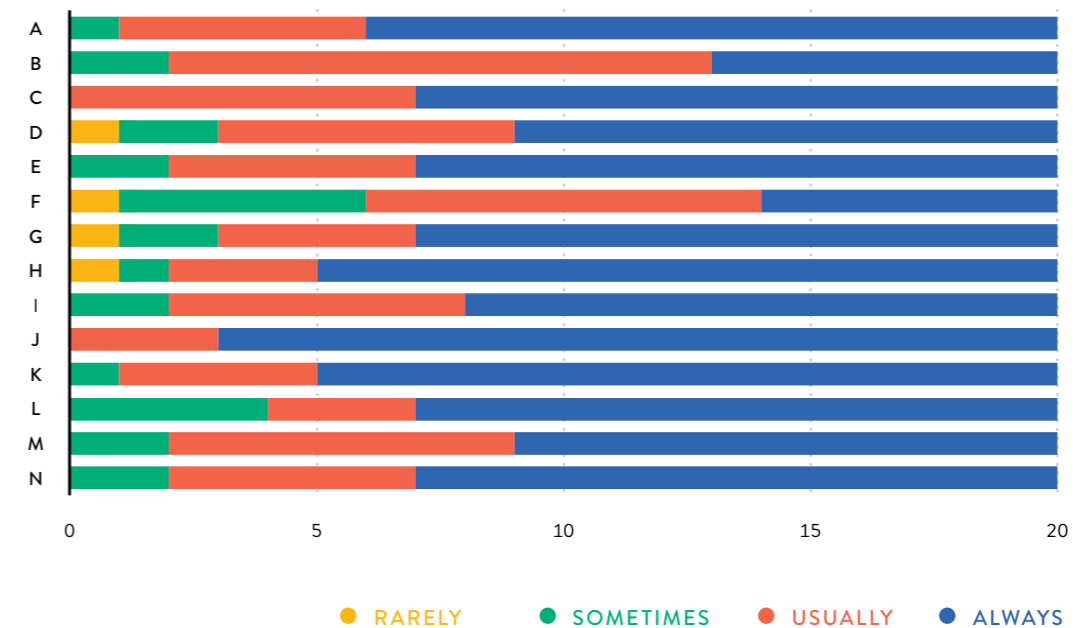
Without any targeted promotion, Neami’s Hawthorn YRRS has seen a significant increase in referrals from LGBTIQA+ young people, clearly building a reputation as a safe space amongst this cohort.



UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE – EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY

To capture how young people currently using the YRRS felt about their experience of the service Neami asked them to complete a voluntary anonymous online survey. Twenty young people provided their responses between December 2021 and January 2022. The first group of questions reflect how young people felt about their physical and emotional safety at the YRRS. The responses were overwhelmingly positive particularly those that ask about feelings of safety, respect, and the relational approach of staff.

Thinking about the care you have received from this service within the last 3 months or less, what was your experience in the following areas:



- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| A You had opportunities for your family and carers to be involved in your treatment and care if you wanted | E You were listened to in all aspects of your care and treatment | I Staff made an effort to see you when you wanted |
| B There were activities you could do that suited you | F The facilities and environment met your needs (such as cleanliness, private space, reception area, furniture, common areas, etc.) | J Staff showed hopefulness for your future |
| C You had opportunities to discuss your progress with the staff supporting for you | G Your opinions about the involvement of family or friends in your care were respected | K Your privacy was respected |
| D Staff worked as a team in your care and treatment (for example, you got consistent information and didn’t have to repeat yourself to different staff) | H You believe that you would receive fair treatment if you made a complaint | L You felt safe using this service |
| | | M Staff showed respect for how you were feeling |
| | | N You felt welcome at this service |

Feeling known and belonging within a peer community

Young people are seen and celebrated

YRRS are peer communities where young people have supported opportunities to practice real relationships. Many young people enter the YRRS without a template for what a safe, caring, mutual relationship can be. The effect is that many young people don't feel valued, which affects their ability to connect with others. When young people feel cared for it becomes easier to care for others:

“I think when my new housemate moved in, I just tried to make her feel as welcome as possible just to talk to her and let her know about how things run here and how I felt when I first moved in ‘cause I think having someone talk to you – like their experience of them when they first moved in, it’s reassuring. ‘Cause when you first move in its – I think it’s a bit daunting because you’re in a new space, you’re in a space with new people, you’re living with someone you don’t know. I think being able to have someone talk to you and make sure you don’t feel as alone, it’s a lot more welcoming” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)



YRRS create a culture where each young person is seen and celebrated in all their complexity. Staff are genuinely curious and interested in learning about each young person, which helps them “develop their interests and learn who they are” (staff). Young people come to feel known, a sense of belonging, and that they are worth something. This culture is modelled by staff and adopted by young people, creating a milieu of trust, mutuality, and care.

“It was like the first time actually being heard, and listened to and, taken seriously” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

“The workers are like “You did this and you did that” and you’re like “Oh my god, I did do that, and that was actually really important.” I am proud of myself for doing these sorts of things... and just seeing other people’s opinions on a situation is just quite a big deal, because you’re not just like, ‘Oh, one person’... you get different things from different people... I felt so loved and appreciated, and I think that’s so important” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

“It’s about knowing what kind of strengths they have and about building on those strengths and reflecting it back to them so if they’re feeling lost and overwhelmed your reflections can be genuine” (STAFF)

Many young people come to the YRRS with life experiences that make feeling seen and celebrated hard, and something that takes time to realise.

They were always on my side. And sometimes you don’t realise that. You feel like its you against a worker – that you’re fighting. But you’re not fighting. They’re actually just telling you something you don’t want to hear. It’s all it is” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

YRRS are spaces for connection

Entering the YRRS program means joining a community of peers and staff, where connection is a key goal. Fostering communication skills is a core focus, where young people “can listen to others so other people feel like they’re known, but how they also can communicate and disclose things in a safe way so that they can communicate who they are to others” (staff). A structured program of individual and group support gives young people supported opportunities to get to know, and care for, each other.

“That knowledge that someone’s expecting you somewhere, your participation’s valued, and actually genuinely appreciated, no matter what group it is, no matter if it’s only check in, or any sort of contribution, really helps foster feeling like you’re known, you belong here, I think personally. So just knowing that you have a reason to wake up in the morning, even if that’s just check in; which sounds stupid, but it does really make a big difference, I think, in terms of feeling like you’re part of something and there are people who are expecting to see you”. (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

“One of the really big things that people often get is the benefit from the social connectivity. Often a lot of the people we work with are really isolated and can struggle with social cognition, social communication skills, interpersonal skills in general and being in that environment where there’s other people around is often just wonderful for them to help get them connected, to give them confidence, to socialise with other people, to start developing some relationships just makes the world of difference for people” (REFERRER)

YRRS offers groups that may be psychoeducational, vocational, exercise, meditation, social, excursions, music, or therapeutic. The varied group program aims to develop skills and understanding about mental health and independent living, as well as provide spaces for fun and connection. This balance of therapeutic and social groups is crucial to sustain the homely atmosphere and allow young people to build the safety and comfort to be vulnerable and participate in the YRRS community.

“Now we have groups like walking to the cafes or like fire group where we just sit ‘round a fire and talk to each other and just chill. I think that’s where I got to know people and got to know their personality and that really made me feel comfortable and come out of my shell and talk to them more. I think I just really enjoy that company and just – where it doesn’t feel like oh I have to go to a group and like sit here for an hour and then retreat back to my room. Like even art group, it’s just relaxing and you talk about your day and that kind of thing. Just having some of those groups where people can just chill and be together. I think that opens doors to people like being social with each other” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

Many young people enter the YRRS from challenging family settings, and grant staff no or emergency only consent to speak with family. For some young people, YRRS and YORS support can help reset dynamics with family in a restorative way:

“I’m a lot better with my parents. We used to argue pretty much all the time. I couldn’t spend much time at home. Now we get along. We’re a happy, loving family and all that... At home, was just always arguing, parents were always ridiculing me for choices I made so I never – I felt safe, like physically, but just never really felt comfortable. I just felt like I was a bit of a nuisance, a bit of a drag on the family” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

“[Mum’s] attitude completely changed after she found out about my diagnosis... because of our cultural background we don’t talk about it [mental health]... She needs someone with authority to tell her... Mum listens to my key worker but I want her to be able to listen to and understand me. We have been working on this with my keyworker” (YOUNG PERSON - YORS)

For other young people, the YRRS peer community is a demonstration of new relational possibilities, including cultivating a family of choice.

“I think that engaging in communities and groups that sit outside the family unit, but are very important to the young person, I think that that might be the place where they could potentially draw a lot of positive stuff” (STAFF).

YRRS culture is infused with lived experience values

The lived experience approach modelled by staff creates an atmosphere invested with peer values of hope, mutuality, equality, empathy, respect, authenticity, and belonging. Young people express comfort knowing that everyone else at the YRRS is going through something, and in a community where “people are at different stages of their recovery journey, a lot of sharing can happen” (staff).

The YRRS program is structured to minimise concerns about excessive or inappropriate sharing. This includes staff modelling boundaries and supported opportunities to build young people’s skills in safe sharing such as morning check-ins and community meetings. As this capacity grows, “there’s a lot of unofficial peer work that happens between the young people, [which helps to] break down stigma, [and challenges the idea that] somehow they’re inherently flawed, [helping folks to] feel less alone” (STAFF).



BUILDING A PICTURE OF CHANGE – CONNECTING AND BELONGING



We used a range of more objective measures to understand people’s sense of connection and belonging. There was a significant increase in the RAS-DS domain *Connecting and Belonging*, which speaks clearly to the safe, inclusive, homely environment the YRRS provides. Young people coming into the YRRS with difficulties maintaining social relationships show the most improvement, those with good relational skills on entry have less need for change in this area.

RAS-DS data for the domain ‘Connecting and belonging’ showed a significant positive increase ($t(19) = 2.351, p = 0.0297$)

*limitation small sample size.

FIGURE 8. YES SURVEY RESULTS

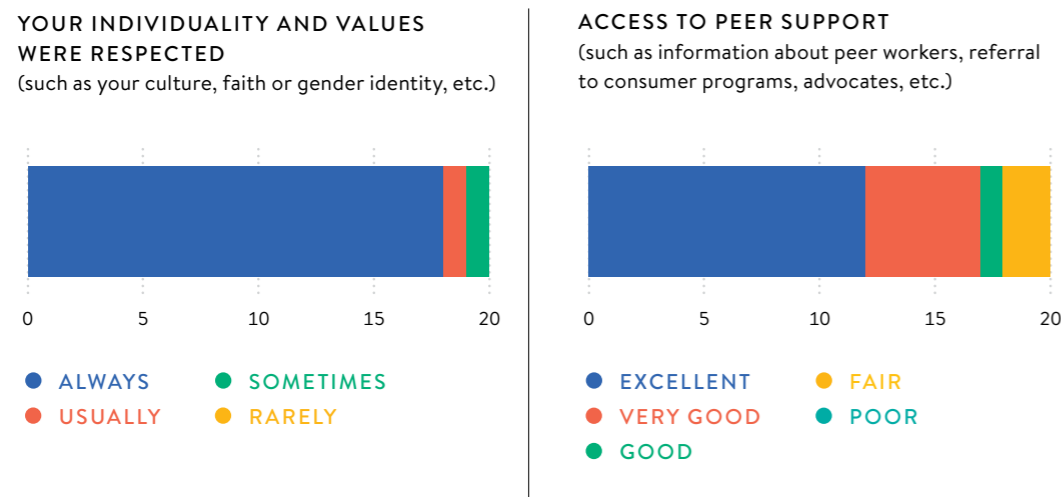
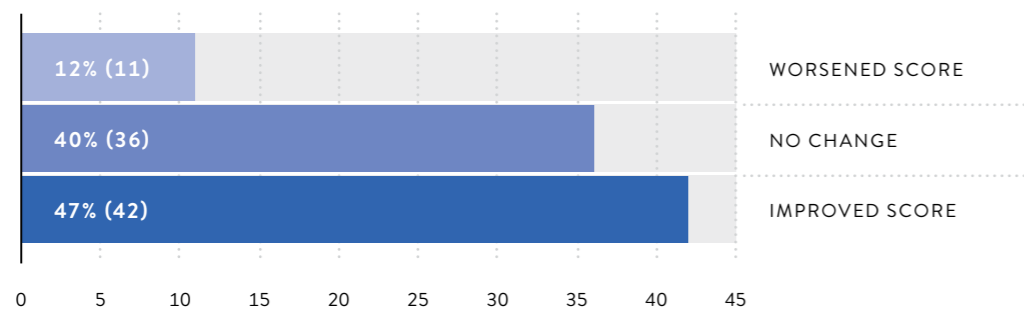


FIGURE 9. DOES THIS PERSON MAINTAIN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Ratings: Withdraws from interacting with others, Has moderate difficulty, May have some difficulties and, Actively maintains.



QDC results for consumers with at least two Outcomes forms completed, comparing first to last results

Building hope, skills and directions

Independent daily living skills

Some young people enter the YRRS with well-developed independent living skills. Others may not have had opportunities to learn things like cooking, cleaning, budgeting, hygiene, using public transport, and accessing healthcare. Others want to build the emotional independence to cope with life’s challenges. Through patient and persistent support, YRRS staff foster young people’s understanding, confidence, and capacity in the skills of independent living. The residential community both supports young people achieve and hold themselves accountable to their goals

“I’ve only ever lived with my mum and dad beforehand, so I didn’t even know how to wash my clothes before coming here. Since then, I’ve learned how to cook pretty well. I bake pizzas; I make the dough and I make pizzas... I love the experience” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

“When I first moved in... I couldn’t even walk to check-in. Workers would walk to the unit and walk me back to check-in and then walk me home after group... My anxiety was so bad when I first got here. Now I’m independent, I’m here at 9.30”

(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

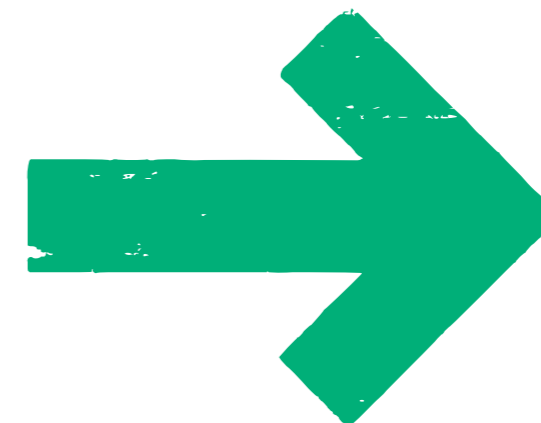
“There’s like pressure to get things done. You can’t just like hide from them because that’s like my old psychiatrists, I ended up hiding from them for weeks and I had to get exited” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

As competence increases, so too does a sense of pride.

“Having the responsibility and support to try and maintain their residence, then people get a sense of pride as well in terms of having their own place... that can be a really wonderful thing for them” (REFERRER)

“I think my routine is probably the biggest one. I guess I’m in a lot better mood than I was and I just compare my routine because I know exactly what my routine was when I moved in here and what it is now and it’s just like – it’s good to see... I guess I’m proud of myself”

(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

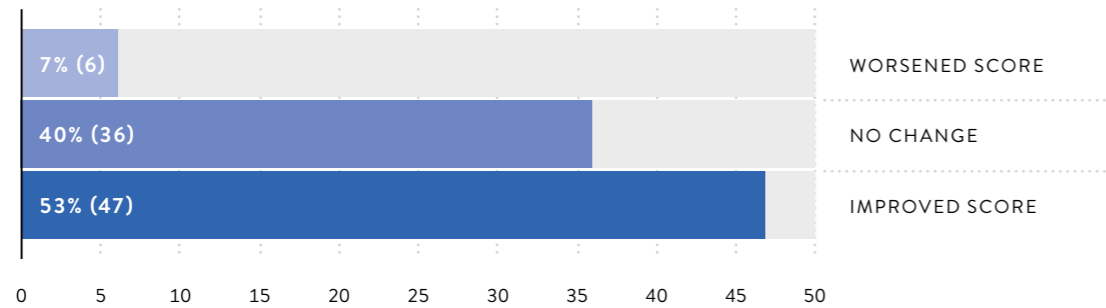


**BUILDING A PICTURE OF CHANGE
– LIVING INDEPENDENTLY**

Not all young people need to focus on independent living skills when entering the YRRS. Those with well-developed skills tend to maintain them. It's young people who enter the service with under-developed independent living skills that show the most improvement. There are a small group that have well-developed independent living skills and at some point in their stay require more support to maintain these. This fluctuation is a natural part of growth. As young people focus attention on the most pressing area of their life other areas may suffer. Getting the balance right takes time and practice.

FIGURE 10. DOES THIS PERSON HAVE WELL DEVELOPED LIFE SKILLS?

Ratings: Lives Independently, Some support required, Requires significant support, Depends on others for most daily living tasks.



For consumers with at least two Outcomes forms completed, comparing first to last results



Working towards a future filled with meaning and purpose

Alongside developing independent living skills, staff support young people to explore their hopes, goals, and directions. This act of supported meaning making – to build a sense of what matters and working towards this, means that young people vision a life that is guided by their genuine goals, desires, and strengths – not that which they think is expected of them by friends, family, or social norms – and as one YORS participant noted, giving “permission to go a little easier on myself”. Young people value this combination of support in “future building” and “finding yourself” (young person – YRRS).

“For me, when I first moved in, I really wanted to get an understanding of what I wanted to do, what was important to me. Do I have goals? Do I have an interest? What am I supposed to do with my life? Because I’d got a full-time job, I was living independently, I feel like I know how to cook and clean well enough, it was just more like... it was kind of everything else I was looking for... How do I cope with everything in my head, but also how do I find meaningful distractions?”

I think it was important because for me I couldn’t really think of a way to be okay with being alive if I didn’t figure those things out. I didn’t know how I was supposed to feel like my life is worth anything if I couldn’t contribute anything to the world, and I didn’t want to be a burden. So, for me it was important to do those things if I wanted to, I guess, keep living”
(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

It’s been eye-opening, I think ‘cause I think before I didn’t realise goals were – ‘cause I always used to think goals were very like structured and like you have to do this, this, this, that and then tick, you’re done. When you make goals for yourself like bettering yourself as a person it’s a lot more complicated and it’s a lot more self-reflective and that kind of thing and it’s not as easy as said as done ‘cause it’s not like a tick, tick, tick done like applying for work or finishing uni, it’s a lot more yeah self-reflective, I guess”
(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

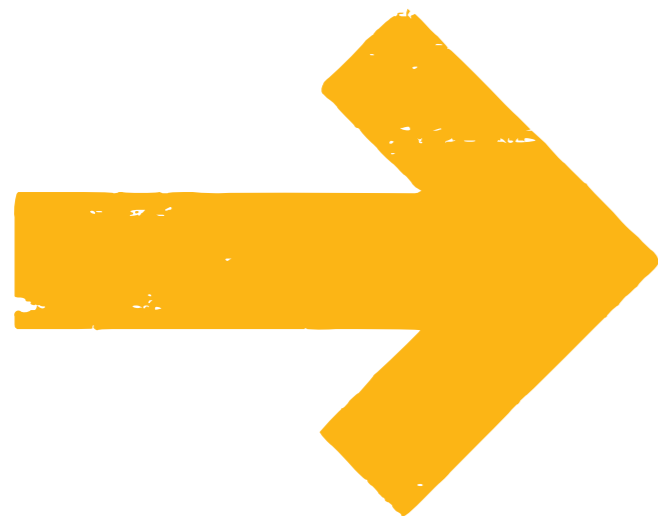
“I’ve always been able to just live in the present which is good but you still need to be able to look into the future and decide where you’re going, but I’ve never done that, Dad’s always been the one that decided where I was going and so when they said to me “What are you going to be doing from here, what are you going to do to fix this?” and I’m just like aahh. I almost felt like a breakdown right then and there when I realised. I’ve actually made like a plan now, I have something to look forward to, like what I’m doing”
(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS).

Building a sense of self

YRRS enhance young people’s ability to take up opportunities by strengthening a foundation of self-worth. Many young people enter the YRRS with their vision of themselves tarnished by trauma. Staff work alongside young people to shift this, supporting them “to know who they are and that they’re accepted and respected in this world, not by others but by themselves. They have a place in this world because they believe in themselves for who they are” (staff). This can set an empowering new precedent for young people, decreasing victimisation, and shifting expectations of their worth and what is possible for them. Young people can start to think “I’m well enough to start thinking about and contemplating uni, I’m well enough to get a deserving job and not to be abused by an employer” (staff).

“I think to me I’ve always done what other people have told me; I never really had an idea of what I wanted for myself. I think looking inwards that – I don’t know, I feel more at peace with myself, more acceptance with myself and I sort of – I’m able to be more present in the moment ‘cause before I’d always be worried about the past, worried about the future, I’d never spend time in being content at the moment. I think like if I were to like improve on looking inwards I think it would just be – I think that image would just be me being okay with myself because that’s a big thing that I’ve been pushing for something that I want to improve but I didn’t know how to but I think I’m – yeah, I’m hopefully working on that during my time here”

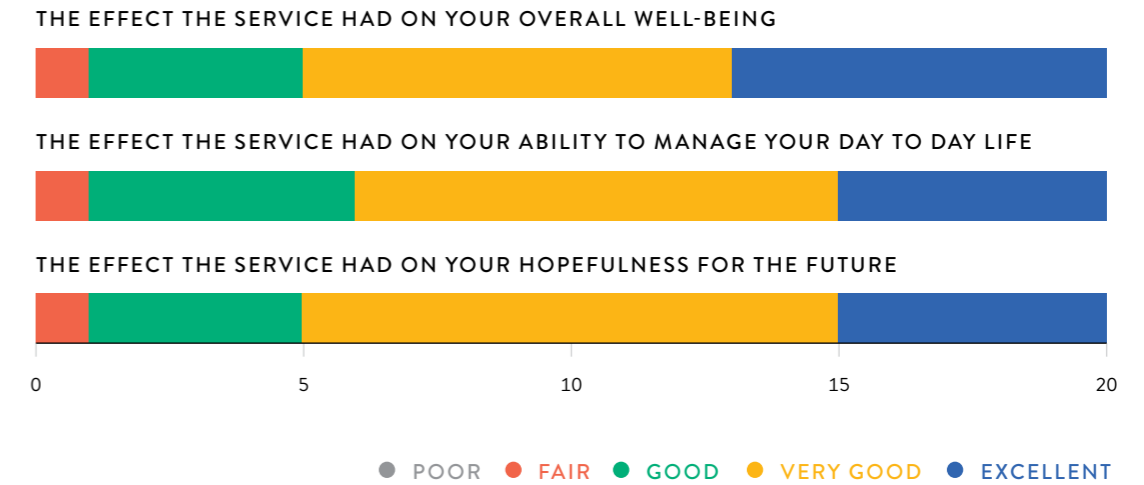
(YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)



BUILDING A PICTURE OF CHANGE – SENSE OF SELF

Young people feel overwhelmingly positive about the impact the service has on their well-being, hopefulness for the future and ability to manage their day to day life.

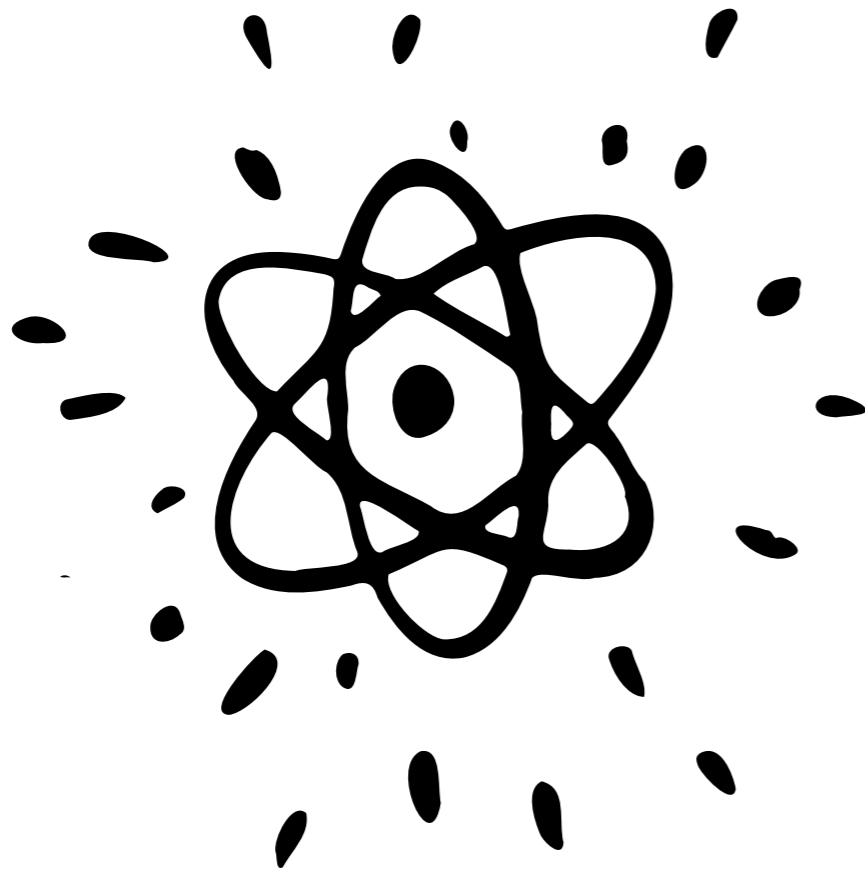
FIGURE 11. AS A RESULT OF YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE SERVICE IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS OR LESS PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING;



Employment and education engagement

YRRS offer young people supported opportunities to (re)connect to education and employment. This isn't always a linear pathway but having a trusted companion to reflect on attempts enables young people to deepen an understanding of what matters to them and what pathways they want to pursue.

“Kind of realising what goals you actually have... I always felt that I needed to study to get somewhere... I need to study to get a good job and what not, and it's not really the case. I've been so fixated on that for so many years and I just haven't been able to do it. Then realising that I could be working an apprenticeship and getting a really good qualification for myself as well as being able to do things I like, like go to have money to do things at least... I've been able to realise that I can actually do stuff while making a future for myself” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)



BUILDING A PICTURE OF CHANGE — EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Most young people will maintain or improve their level of engagement with employment and/or study while at the YRRS. Many come into the service completely disengaged from employment and this group sees the most positive change toward seeking or finding work. There is a larger group who enter the YRRS engaged in study and this group tends to maintain their level of study. A small group experience a decrease in engagement by leaving a job, course of study or ceasing to seek work or explore study options. It's important to caution against oversimplifying these scores as worsened=bad and improved=good. Context matters when trying to understand what is happening for young people in this period of their lives. A young person leaving a job because of unfair working conditions and returning to 'seeking work' would be interpreted as a 'worsened score' through this measure but the change may reflect the young person's growing ability to assess safety and support their mental health.

FIGURE 12. IS THIS PERSON EMPLOYED?

Answers: Full-time ongoing work, Temporary, part-time, casual, or ad-hoc, Seeking work, Not employed or seeking work

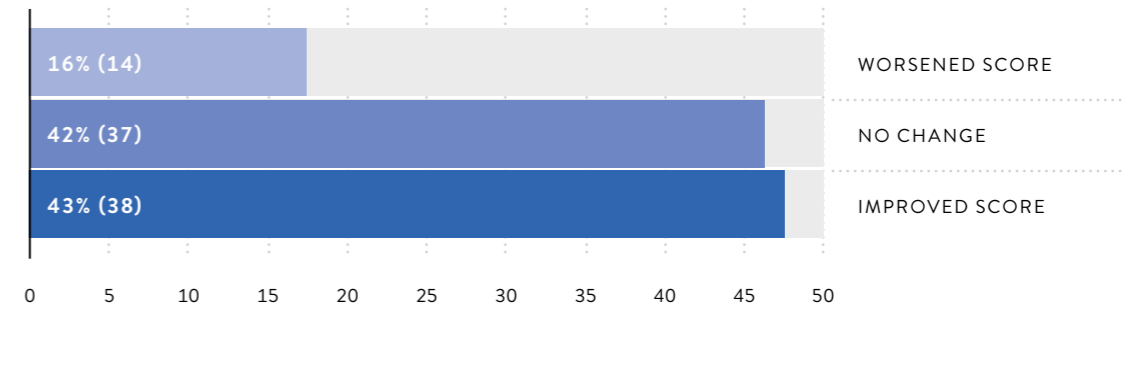
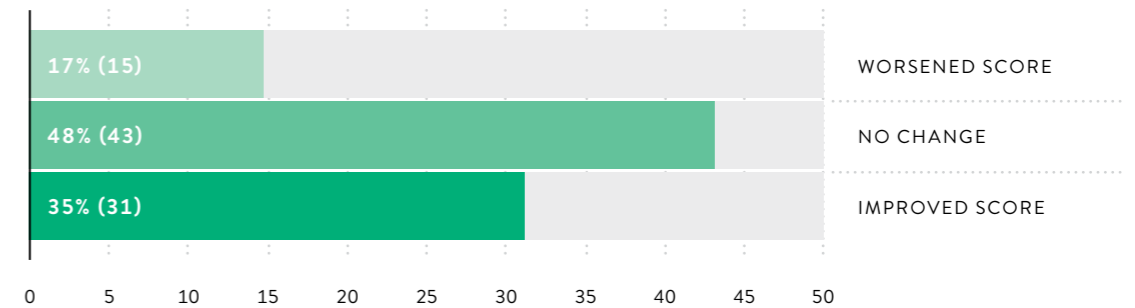


FIGURE 13. IS THIS PERSON ENGAGED IN FORMAL STUDY?

Answers: Full-time study, Part-time study, Investigating study options, Not engaged in or investigating study



Improved psychosocial functioning

As young people build the skills, routines, and self-defined purpose for living well, their capacity to manage distress and overwhelm likewise increases.

“I didn’t have any hallucinations for three months after being here. And that kind of led me to sort of not be in my own head and not be thinking and talking to myself and all that. And it led me to just become a little bit more boisterous outside and not very paranoid and worried. And I believe fully that it was a comfort level of me being not paranoid and not worried that led me to do these things and just talk to people and have the ideas that I want this to happen and I want it to happen like that. I could probably achieve that. I probably say this to such person and get it done because I’m not worried and paranoid and all that stuff” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

“Just talking with [support worker] and breaking things down to a thought-by-thought sort of process. I’ll be like, ‘I’m a bit in a shit mood today.’ And he’s like, ‘Why’s that?’ It’s like, ‘Oh, I spent the whole day watching Netflix.’ And he’ll be like, ‘So what about that action, what’s the process of you doing that to beating yourself up and being a bit depressed over it?’ So just breaking down pretty much every emotion and thing that sort of happens. And I’d say like as a teenager when I went to therapists or social workers or whatever, they’d ask me what the problem was, and I just couldn’t put my finger on what exactly it was. So, I never could really communicate, and felt like it was just a waste of time. But I feel like these days, when I go to a headspace appointment, I can just sort of be like, ‘Yep, this is what I want to talk about. This is what I want to solve. This is what I’m not so certain on.’ I can pinpoint what sets me off, puts me in a bad headspace” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

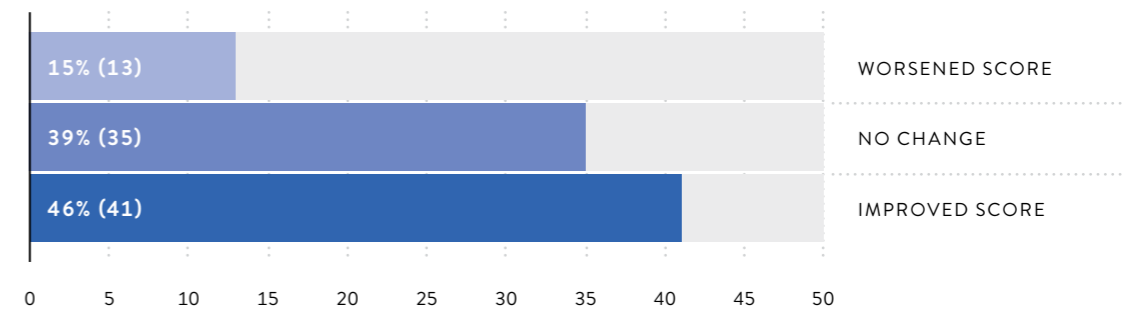


BUILDING A PICTURE OF CHANGE – PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING

Most young people experience a positive change in their psychosocial functioning while at the YRRS, and those who were not able to manage their mental health or require significant support show the most improvement in this area. Some young people experience a negative change. This is to be expected. Fluctuations are common through this stage of development as young people are grappling with major issues in their lives. By offering a space in which ‘not managing’ is okay it becomes safe to disclose what is really happening. Young people who present as ‘managing’ initially may need extra support as they become more comfortable to seek it.

FIGURE 14. DOES THIS PERSON MANAGE THEIR OWN HEALTH?

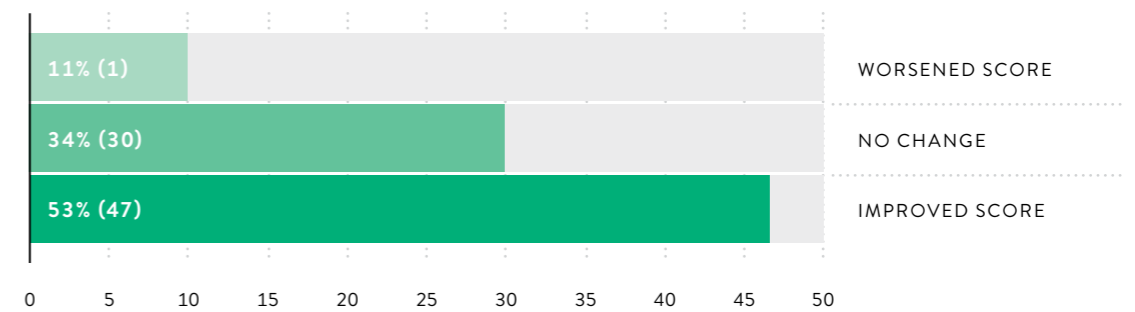
Answers: Actively manages mental health, Generally manages requires some mental health support, Requires moderate mental health support, Does not manage mental health



For consumers with at least two Outcomes forms completed, comparing first to last results

FIGURE 15. DOES THIS PERSON DRAW ON INFORMAL SUPPORTS?

Answers: Play a significant role, Can usually draw on, Provide only limited assistance, Not able to draw on



For consumers with at least two Outcomes forms completed, comparing first to last results

Co-designing program

In contrast to past environments where young people's opinions may have been punished, ignored, or denied, they are actively encouraged to shape the design and delivery of the YRRS program, either directly or anonymously. This includes sitting on interview panels to inform staff recruitment; designing and painting a mural; designing, delivering, and evaluating the group program; informing site rules and disciplinary structures; and being an active partner in shaping their individual support. Opportunities to influence the program and feel like your voice counts fostered a sense of belonging, connection, trust, and validation of young people's strengths and potential. Young people could see themselves in the program.

“I felt like I grew with the program, all these things came in when I was here, and I got to be part of it as well. They asked me my opinion and I even got a rule changed... [The staff] make you feel like your voice actually matters.... They weren't like “Oh, you're mentally unwell. I'm not going to trust what you say”. It's like being treated like a human” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)

“[The young people] actually say verbally to us, I want to give back to [Neami] because you've saved my life” (STAFF)

YRRS residents helped develop a Youth version of Neami's Health Prompt. The adapted tool features questions that young people want to be asked about their health – increasing the tool's relevance, and an artwork by a former resident supports an engaging feel.



I am becoming the expert of me

Young people consolidate a sense of hope, mastery, and autonomy

The YRRS journey is not a linear one towards recovery, nor is it discrete. A YRRS stay involves many ups and downs and is 12 months within a much longer healing journey. Yet as young people proceed through their stay, they build trust in their relationships and take a more active role in directing their support:

“I'm not leading the conversation, that they're actually leading the conversation... I had young people particularly that were struggling with asking for support. I feel that has changed significantly. Young people actually trust you and ask for your support and by supporting them they'll also put more trust in you because they feel supported” (STAFF)

Young people are empowered as their sense of hope and possibility changes. Over time, they consolidate their learnings and changes into a personal template for wellbeing – centred around a sense of control, autonomy, pride, and expertise. This template is grounded in the knowledge that recovery is hard work and involves struggle, but they can do it again because they've done it before.

“Since I got here, with [my support worker], definitely just learnt so much more about myself and learnt what triggers me to do certain things, what puts me in a good mood, a bad mood, and just what makes me happiest... And just be at a place in my life where I know if I need support I can go out and find it. And if I start getting in a bad headspace, I know the steps to get out of it, and I'm much more aware of my own actions and thoughts and how to control them now” (YOUNG PERSON - YRRS)



“I’ve just really come out of my shell and just probably proud of how strong I actually think I am now... I’ve come so far, so many things I thought I could never do have just been achieved in this time being here. Just opening up topics that you’re like, “Oh, I didn’t want to,” and getting really deep” (YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

“I’ve got so many tools, it’s up to me now” (YOUNG PERSON – YORS)

This template sustains young people both during and beyond their YRRS stay:

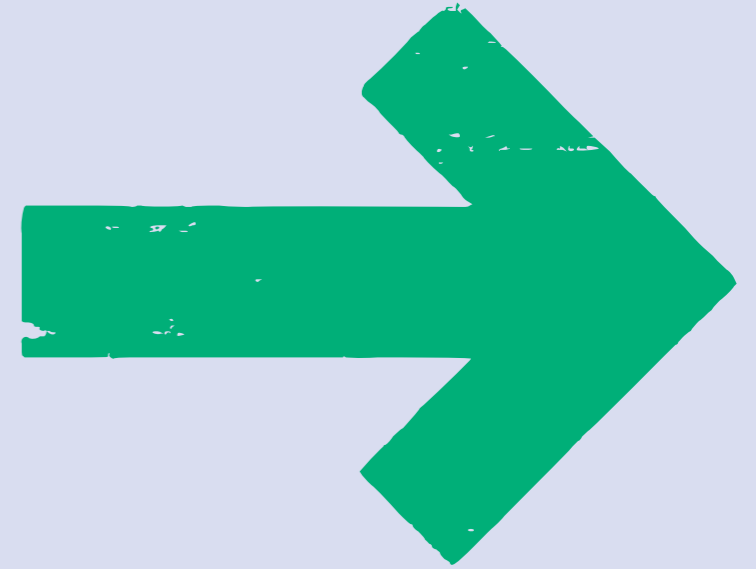
“And it is exhausting, and when you leave here, you’re like “Am I going to be able to do it on my own?” You’re like “Look at all this support and this team of people. Can I do this on my own?” And weirdly enough, it does. It’s just you don’t realise it’s happening. You’re like have your little moments, and the skills you learned kick in. You don’t even realise they’re kicking in, but you are managing a lot better than you would have a year ago. If I was couch surfing, even six months ago, I would be an absolute mess. I’d probably be hospitalised. I would have drove myself insane. But I’m like “Nah. I’ve come too far, completed the program. Didn’t come this far to throw it down the drain”

(YOUNG PERSON – YRRS)

YORS allows for a softer exit

Prior to the introduction of YORS, exit often meant “feeling frozen” and putting “the handbrake on” (staff). Young people spoke of the significant impact of separating from the relationships and routines that structured the previous 12 months of their life, and how more extensive transitional support could have assisted them to vision and enact the next steps in their recovery. Staff identify that YORS allows for a softer exit, ‘weaning’ young people off support as they practice the skills, strategies, and boundaries they developed in the YRRS. Young people can consolidate gains and manage challenges in the community whilst feeling held within a trusted, established relationship. This enduring support offers the chance for staff to see and celebrate young people accomplishing the goals they named in the YRRS.

There seems to be benefit integrating YRRS and YORS staffing to enable a continuing connection with a worker through transition periods. Neami sites with integrated YRRS/YORS staffing describe a more connected process than the site where YORS support is delivered by a different provider. This site reports limited YORS uptake, especially for young people with an established support system because it feels “like one more relationship”.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Resourcing what works

Funders are encouraged to continue to invest in youth residential models that include the following program elements.

Trauma-informed, youth-friendly psychosocial support

Support guided by an understanding of the prevalence and impacts of trauma means that the development of real relationships is prioritised, and behaviours are understood within context. Young people begin to feel seen, known, and celebrated for who they are, rather than being defined by the shame of things that may have happened to them. Support delivered through flexible, warm, empowering relationships is the heart of these programs and is encapsulated by the Egg Model.

Safe spaces for healing

YRRS offer a safe physical and emotional space, for an extended period, away from trauma, from which healing is possible. Having the time and space to focus on healing – rather than coping skills which may happen in shorter-term services – means that young people can rebuild their relationship to self and others and vision new futures not previously thought possible. Through trusted relationships, young people are supported to practice and develop the skills and connections to start to make these visions a reality.

Communities of care

YRRS don't just support individuals in a group setting – they foster a milieu of care to which all members tend. This requires a group program that balances therapeutic

groups with social ones so young people have opportunities to connect via interests not illness (Ennals et al., 2021). Drawing on lived experience values of hope, mutuality, and respect means that all community members – young people and staff alike – are supported to share their authentic, unique selves, and cultivate respectful interdependence.

Diverse, well-supported teams with low caseloads

It is the slow, intensive nature of the YRRS model that enables the achievement of expansive, long-term outcomes. Low caseloads not only allow this, they crucially provide the time and flexibility for staff support activities, including supervision, informal debriefs, team building, and uptake of professional development opportunities. The benefits of a diverse, supported staff team ripple throughout the whole YRRS community, providing opportunities for all members to be seen, known, and cared for.

Capturing the changes that matter

YRRS and YORS accompany young people for a small part of a much longer recovery journey. Support often involves re-establishing foundations broken through trauma and learning to trust in self and others. This is necessarily slow and multifaceted work and only happens in relationship. Qualitative tools capture some of the change effectively but the nuance is only seen in more narrative discussions and artefacts. A mixed methods approach to evaluation is critical.

Supported transitions and non-residential options

The transitional support offered by YORS is a welcome improvement to lessen the intensity of the stressful periods of YRRS intake and exit. Additionally, the YORS outreach alternative to YRRS means young people are supported to maintain their wellbeing, homes, relationships, and routines in the community. These additional supports strengthen, but cannot replace, the YRRS.

Strengthening through improvements

The following improvements may enhance the experiences of young people, YRRS/ YORS staff, and service partners.

Awareness of YRRS and YORS

Young people talk about the importance of YRRS supports, but that they often didn't know they existed. Enhanced promotion and awareness of this service type could connect vulnerable young people with the support they need when they need it. Increasing provider understanding of the spectrum of youth mental health supports, where YORS/ YRRS sit within this spectrum, alongside their confidence to refer into such services could also support service connection.

Intake processes

There is scope to improve the intake panel process, including transparency around decisions to ensure there is alignment with the terms of reference and that young people are not deemed ineligible before a comprehensive assessment. As the YORS program matures, the distinct eligibility requirements of YORS and YRRS could be clarified, as there is some tension between YORS staff and referrers who hold different expectations about YRRS readiness. At writing, Neami is introducing an Intake Coordinator to oversee referrals and service transitions, one strategy to address some of the above concerns.

Engagement with clinical providers

YRRS have extensive networks with other services to streamline access and support for young people's holistic needs. Whilst these relationships are generally strong, there is scope for continual improvement through enhanced engagement, collaboration, and problem-solving across services. If relationships with clinical providers are strong both staff and young people are more likely to have access to timely and relevant support at times when mental health needs are more acute.

Maintaining service integrity

Neami's integrated staffing model extends the continuity of care and relationship YORS enables. As a result, the flexibility and availability of staff at the YRRS alters.

“The engagement is more formal and less of that informal contact as it has to be more scheduled now and there's not the flexibility there was before to just reschedule key work if somebody misses it... things have to run according to the calendar you've set up... Unstructured hang out time is less now because people are out doing outreach. And if there's incidents there's potentially less people on site to jump in and manage it.... Our time is definitely divided now... It's a different investment in energies” (STAFF)

Appropriate resourcing across both the YORS and YRRS programs can sustain the unique elements of each and maintain the most crucial element – that young people feel held and valued within trusted relationships:

“I want to feel like the staff have time for me” (YOUNG PERSON – YORS)

Improved facilities

The physical space of the YRRS can be a tangible representation of worth. Damaged, cramped, or poorly maintained facilities damage the felt sense of safety and value that young people and staff work hard to create. Increased responsiveness to maintenance requests means staff can focus on supporting young people rather than chasing repairs. Additionally, as the YRRS expands with YORS delivery, additional space is required to meet with young people safely.

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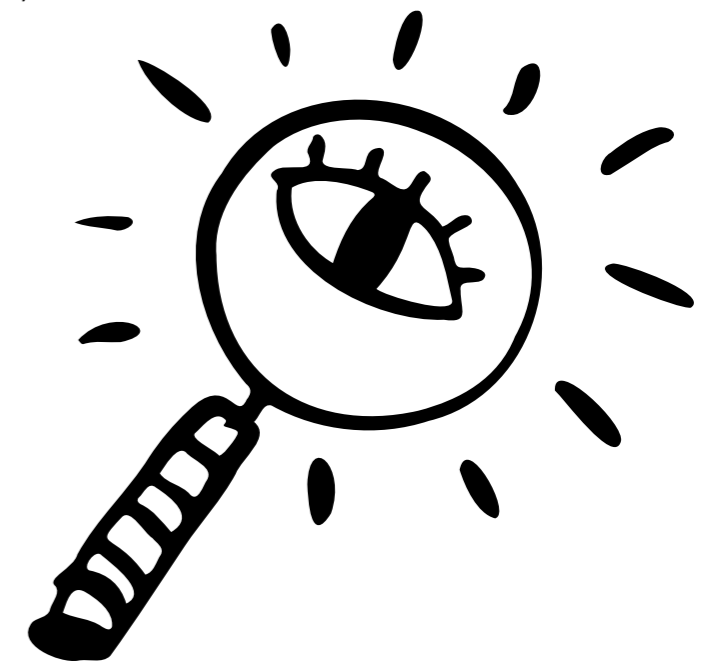
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APPENDIX

Evaluation method

This evaluation is constructed from a range of data sources. This includes:

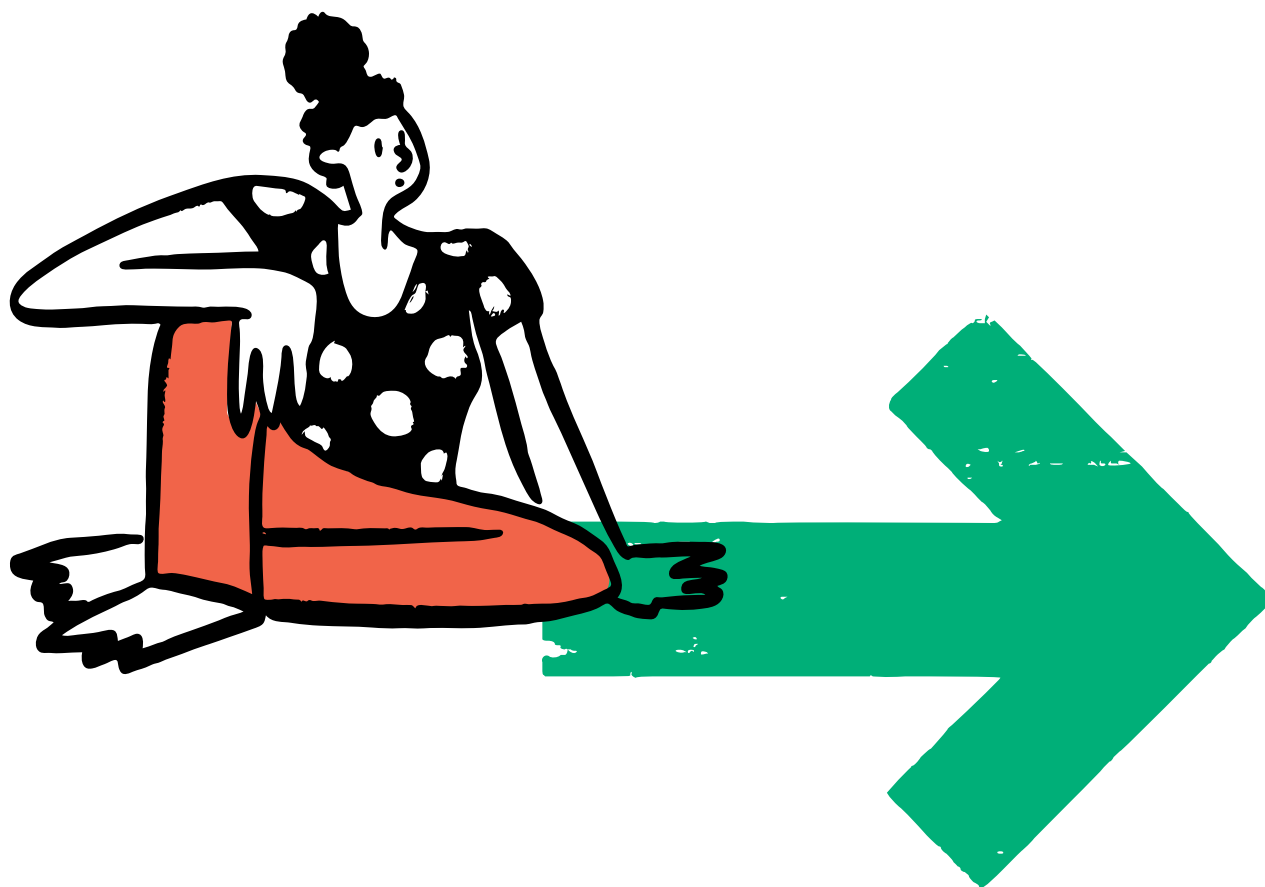
- A 3-year research project to understand what matters to young people living at YRRS. This project interviewed 32 young people and 29 staff over two rounds of data collection and was undertaken with research approval from the University of Melbourne Psychology Health and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee, reference 1 648 172. The Egg Model was developed from this research, alongside a deeper understanding of the phases young people move through during a YRRS stay. Two peer-reviewed publications were produced; see Ennals et al., 2021 and Spies et al., 2021 in the reference list for further information.

A core element of this project was the use of a co-production approach. This meant that young people were central members of the research team, influencing the design, delivery, analysis, and dissemination of the research. For additional detail on this approach, please see Spies R. et al. (2021) Co-research with People with Mental Health Challenges. In: Liamputtong P. (eds) Handbook of Social Inclusion. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48277-0_138-1

- Routinely collected data – including the Recovery Assessment Scale – Domains and Stages (RAS-DS), the YES survey, and Department of Health’s MHCSS YRRS Outcomes quarterly data collection tool (QDC).
- Interviews with 2 young people and 1 referrer, and focus groups with 14 staff. Tight timelines and COVID-related interruptions affected the number of participants recruited, and this is seen as a limitation of the report.

The data was analysed by the authors of this document, who include two Lived Experience Researchers, in consultation with staff and service managers. The team used a thematic analysis approach to break the data into categories, which through discussion were organized into key themes. Quantitative data was analysed using R and excel. Qualitative themes were considered in relation to the quantitative data, to build a deeper understanding of what changes may or may not be happening when and how.





CONTACT US

Rebecca Spies
Neami National, Research and Evaluation Lead
P 03 8691 5300 | research@neaminational.org.au

Neami National Head Office
4-8 Water Road, Preston, Victoria, 3072
P 03 8691 5300 | F 03 8678 1106
reception@neaminational.org.au

www.neaminational.org.au

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