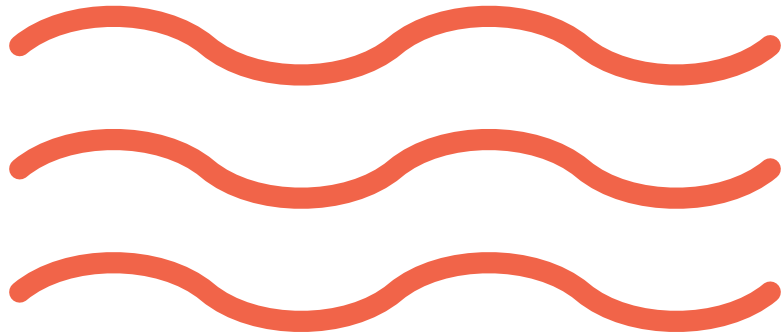


CONNECTION, COLLABORATION, CARE

YFLEX Practice Approach



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DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This report is indebted to the contributions of young people who have accessed YFlex, their families/carers, YFlex staff, and referrers and other stakeholders who participated in surveys and/or interviews. We thank them deeply for the expertise and time they shared with us.

PARTICIPANT NAMES

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

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DESIGN

Design by Cristal Hall



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.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
What is YFlex and who do they work with?	5
What has been achieved?	5
How was this achieved?	6

What is YFlex?	8
Funding	8

What does YFlex do?	10
Multidisciplinary support	11
Flexible, tailored support	14

Who accesses YFlex?	16
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How do people access YFlex?	24
Program Logic	26

What does YFlex achieve?	28
Immediate outcomes	29
End of service outcomes	38
Long term outcomes	45

Recommendations	48
Duration of support	49
Expand YFlex	49
Enhanced promotion	50
Enhanced collaboration and community engagement	50
Groups	50
Shared resources	51
Streamlined reporting	51
Longer-term funding	51

“I feel that YFlex represents all of what we want mental health services to be. **They are flexible and collaborative, easy to access and connect with,** always open to liaison and finding solutions to supporting consumers.”

(stakeholder 32)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document describes the practice and impact of YFlex, an intensive, multidisciplinary youth support service delivered by Neami National (Neami) and funded by the Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (EMPHN).

Neami is a specialist community mental health provider supporting people enhance their agency to experience, achieve, and do things for personally living well, 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 YFlex, the approach that guides team practice and their ways of working, the outcomes achieved by young people and families/carers through their engagement with this service, and the impacts for system integration.

What is YFlex and who do they work with?

YFlex provides free clinical, recovery-focused support to young people aged 12-25 who are experiencing emerging to complex mental health issues. YFlex offers centre-based and outreach support to young people and their families/carers across the City of Whittlesea and the southern parts of Murrindindi and Mitchell Shires.

Many young people accessing YFlex have emergent mental health challenges and need support to understand what is happening for them. Other young people regard YFlex as a last resort after previous poor engagements with the mental health system.

Young people accessing YFlex rarely described their needs as mental illness, instead referring to experiences of feeling 'stuck', shame at not feeling 'normal', and finding it hard to eat or leave the house. Overwhelmingly young people wanted someone impartial and non-judgemental to talk to and help them feel less alone. YFlex walks alongside young people as they build the skills, confidence, and relationships to live lives of self-defined meaning and purpose. Families/carers are also supported on this journey, deepening understanding and improving dynamics. Positive experiences of support through YFlex restore faith in service system.

What has been achieved?

YFlex provides young people and their families/carers with a positive experience of mental health support at a crucial period of development, which can have transformative effects for the rest of their lives. Young people are supported to make sense of their experiences and cultivate practices and relationships that help.

Between service entry and exit, young people recorded statistically significant improvements to K10 and HONOS scores, and along with families/carers and stakeholders, report:

- Improved sense of hope for the future
- Deeper understanding of their own mental health experiences
- Improved wellbeing and psychosocial functioning
- An emergent sense of mastery and control
- Improved family dynamics
- Greater trust in the system

How was this achieved?



Multidisciplinary team

Staff are skilled across a range of clinical interventions to support diverse and complex needs, including integrated access to the team's consultant psychiatrist.

Recovery-oriented approach

Clinical support is nested in strong, trusting, empowering relationships where young people connect to strengths, hopes, and new possibilities.

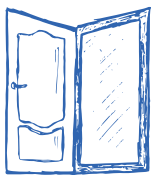


Youth-friendly approach

Staff adapt their language and approach to ensure young people are active partners, not passive recipients, in their support.

Family-inclusive support

As much as possible, families/carers are engaged as care partners, which mutually enhances both their and staff's ability to tailor and embed support.

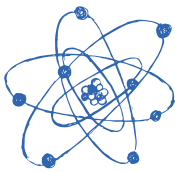


Ease of intake

Open, direct, and accessible referral pathways streamline service access. Bridging support ensures support during wait periods.

Intensive, flexible support

The frequency and intensity of support is tailored to individual need, and could include weekly or fortnightly sessions, or frequent text message or phone call check-ins.



Interagency collaboration

Staff work holistically with schools, GPs, and other services to ensure an integrated, collaborative approach.

System navigation and advocacy

YFlex's extensive networks and rich understanding of service systems means young people are efficiently connected to relevant additional supports.



Outreach approach

YFlex meets young people where they're at - both physically and emotionally - to enhance equity within a vast catchment.

“I have had a **100% positive experience with all of my (many) interactions with YFlex.**

I always feel very reassured that the young person and family will be getting a *quality, creative, and thoughtful service*, appropriate to their areas of challenges if we refer them to YFlex”

(stakeholder 32)



WHAT IS YFLEX?

Funding

YFlex is commissioned by the Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (EMPHN) to provide clinical, recovery-focused support to young people aged 12-25 who are experiencing emerging to complex mental health issues. The funding is part of the Commonwealth Government Youth Enhanced Services initiative to address the gap between primary and secondary mental health services and tertiary mental health services.

YFlex delivers support across the City of Whittlesea and the southern parts of the Shires of Mitchell and Murrindindi. Other areas within the EMPHN catchment are supported by the Youth Engagement and Treatment Team Initiative (YETTI), delivered by Eastern Health and Austin Health.

Funding has been offered on a yearly basis since YFlex's inception in 2017. In April 2022 YFlex funding was extended for 12 months until June 2023. YFlex received non recurrent funding to respond to a surge in demand for service related to COVID-19 which enabled YFlex to increase the team of allied health clinicians by 1 FTE for the 2021-22 financial year.

A note on data

Discovery and recovery are deeply personal, non-linear, context-specific processes, making them hard to capture quantitatively. Scores which appear to represent a deterioration in wellbeing may be understood as an improvement when context is considered. For example, K10 scores may increase after young people engage in psychoeducation as they recognise their experiences and symptoms in ways they haven't previously. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods helps develop a richer understanding of service experience and outcomes. As such, this report draws on a range of data sources:

- **Routinely collected data:** demographic, service use, and outcomes data from the period January 2019 to February 2022. YFlex uses three quantitative outcomes measures:
 - The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10): a ten-item self-report measure of psychological distress. The K10 is offered to young people every three months.
 - Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment (SOFA): clinician-rated measure of social and occupational functioning on a scale from 0-100, with lower scores representing lower functioning. YFlex staff complete the SOFA every 3 months.
 - The Health of the Nation Outcome Scales (HoNOS) or Health of the Nation Outcome Scales – Children and Adolescents (HoNOSCA): these clinician-rated measures encompass behaviour, symptoms, daily living, and social functioning. YFlex staff complete these measures every three months: the twelve-item HoNOS is for consumers aged 18 or over; the fifteen-item HoNOSCA is for consumers under 18.
- **Qualitative interviews:** with 7 young people, 3 families/carers, and 2 YFlex staff completed in late 2021.
- **Experience surveys:** completed by 36 consumers, 9 family members/carers, and 39 stakeholders between October 2021 and February 2022.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF YOUNG PEOPLE, CARERS, AND STAKEHOLDERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS EVALUATION, EITHER THROUGH A SURVEY OR INTERVIEW

CONSUMER

Method	Survey	Interview
Participant numbers	36	7
Still engaged with service?	Yes: 77% No: 23%	Yes: 71% No: 29%
Current duration of engagement	Up to 3 months: 41% 3-6 months: 26% More than 6 months: 33%	Not collected

FAMILY MEMBERS/CARERS

Method	Survey	Interview
Participant numbers	9	3
Still engaged with service?	Yes: 100%	Yes: 100%
Current duration of engagement	Up to 3 months: 43% 3-6 months: 14% More than 6 months: 43%	Not collected

STAKEHOLDER

Method	Survey	Interview
Participant numbers	39	NA
Forms of engagement	Made referrals: 92% Recieved referrals: 26% Shared care: 33% General collaboration: 26%	NA

“People can get a lot more in one place... People finally find a place where they can get some support in a way that feels comfortable for them”

(staff 2)

**WHAT DOES
YFLEX DO?**

Multidisciplinary support

YFlex is delivered by a dedicated multidisciplinary team of social workers, occupational therapists, a peer worker, and a consultant psychiatrist. Reflective of consistently high service demand, Neami received non-recurrent surge funding to increase team FTE from 4.9 to 5.9 for the 2021-22 financial year.

YFlex staff are supported through a range of professional development activities and reflective spaces – both formal and informal. This includes individual clinical supervision, external group supervision, fortnightly professional development sessions with the service manager, and informal debriefs. Reflective practice sessions have been adapted into internal skill-shares; an adaptation responsive to the emotional needs of the team and made possible by their rich multidisciplinary expertise. Sessions are brief, relevant, and highly applicable; a way staff find to “support each other to learn and grow in the roles” (staff 2).

This team of “highly competent, skilled, and passionate clinicians” (stakeholder 37) deliver clinical interventions with the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM) weaved throughout the whole process. 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 in which people are nested – both enabling and constraining – 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.

FIGURE 1 | YFLEX TEAM FTE DURING 2021-22 FINANCIAL YEAR
1 SERVICE MANAGER [1FTE], 5 CLINICIANS [4.3FTE], 1 PEER WORKER [0.5FTE], 1 PSYCHIATRIST [0.1FTE]

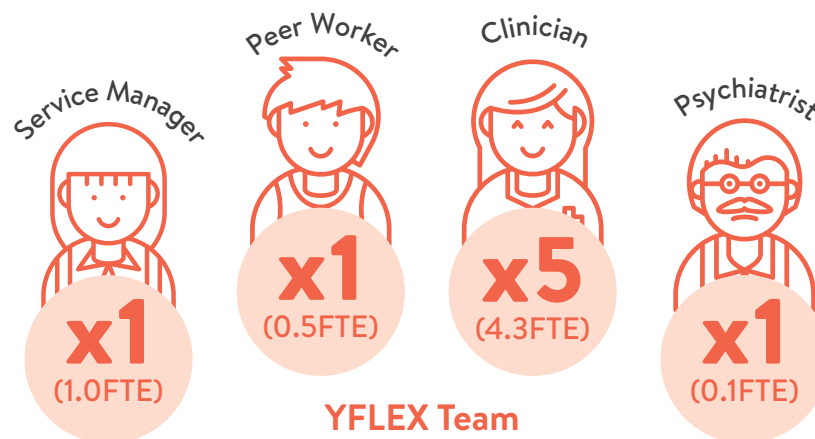


TABLE 2 | CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS INCLUDE

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)	Graded exposure	Emotional regulation
Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)	Narrative therapy	Diagnostic assessment
Psychoeducation	Neami Family and Carer Prompt	Medication management
Single session family therapy	Peer support	Advocacy & system navigation
Risk assessment, planning, & management	Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)	

The **fusion of clinical and recovery-oriented approaches** sees staff moving between clinical and youth languages to deliver support safely and inclusively. This relational stance, which “*always kind of felt like a conversation*” (young person 6), ensures support is not disempowering and done to young people but a participatory and informal process of connecting and activating values, priorities, and abilities done with young people.

“We meet people where they’re at developmentally as well as recovery wise. That’s a real skill and challenge of the service. We’ve got to provide mental health support and connect with, explain something that a 12-year-old can wrap their head around, not just vaguely understand but participate in. You’ve got to know the stuff but also be able to explain it in a very accessible and digestible way”

(staff 2)

92%

OF STAKEHOLDERS

strongly agree or agree YFlex staff members are effective at tailoring the support they offer to meet the individual needs of young people.

The provision of integrated multidisciplinary clinical support with a focus on trust and relationship means that YFlex offers **continuity of care** across a broad range of needs and clinical intensity. Integrated, free access to a psychiatrist is especially unique and valued given significant waitlists and costs to access one elsewhere.

“Because I’m trans... it was really hard for me to be able to change my name in the school roll... I needed a letter from the psychiatrist, which [he] provided. And at a time where I couldn’t be in person with my psychologist, I talked with [YFlex psychiatrist] about upping my medication because it wasn’t working”

(young person 4)

“CAMHS... obviously have a few more things... when you get to the more critical stages, but we weren’t there, and they weren’t necessary. The relationship that [young person] and [staff] have built far outweighed having access to services that we may never need or never use.”

(carer 3)

Access to **peer support** is highly valued by young people keen to know they aren’t alone in their distress. A sense of mutuality and relatability bolsters young people’s hope that things can get better.

“The peer worker that I saw briefly, just a couple of times, and I think meeting with her was really good for - especially at that time for just my confidence and getting out of the house and trying to talk to strangers. It was really good for that, but also to see someone close to my age be, like, yes, this is hard, but you can do it sort of thing, and, like, we don’t all live the same life. Like, it was really good to see someone real and my age and just be sort of honest and raw like that. That was really helpful”

(young person 1)

“I particularly love that they have a peer worker who can connect with the young people immediately. This is quite a unique offering of YFlex and I feel one of the greatest strengths (among many) of the service”

(stakeholder 32)

The work to foster connection and hope led by the Peer Worker is supported by the **psychoeducation and gradual skill-building** approaches employed by all staff underpinned by the CRM. Experiences of distress are normalised, supporting young people to know they are not broken, their feelings are valid, and that accessing support is brave. Young people feel held in a trusted care partnership with someone to think, experiment, and deepen knowledge of self with, *“until there’s not really anything stopping me from just helping myself”* (young person 3).

Families/carers are actively engaged with the service, with the extent of family/carer engagement negotiated with young people to promote agency and safety. One parent described the value of being involved at service entry to help ease his son’s transition into the service. Regular updates mean that families/carers know young people are getting the support they need, and they can more deeply witness and support the changes young people make. Family/carer support includes individual sessions with parents, single session family therapy (which may be completed several times throughout the support period), psychoeducation, relational mapping, Neami’s Family and Carer Prompt to identify and plan for family/carer support needs, and advocacy to forge intentional connections with needed services.

YFlex was designed to reach young people with mental health needs who were not accessing services for a range of reasons. **Advocacy and system navigation** support ensures young people and families/carers have a trusted advocate with deep awareness of, and connections across, the local service system. This means families/carers aren’t exhausting precious energy and hope on navigating overwhelming complexity and that young people are connected to the specific services they need.

83%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE strongly agree or agree they had the opportunity to have my family, friends, or significant others involved in my support if I wanted.

100%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS strongly agree or agree; They had the opportunity to be involved in the support of the young person at YFlex.

They felt listened to and validated in discussions regarding the support of the young person.

“We’ve waited a little bit to worry about us. But there is definitely support there for [parents]... to check base and make sure that we’re all on the same path”

(carer 3)

“Just being able to have somebody that knows how to navigate the system, so that we’re not. Because I’ve spent hours on Google. Hours on Google trying to look up services that could help. Because we can get a counsellor. We can walk into a GP tomorrow, and we can get a counsellor. But that’s not where our needs are. So being able to have somebody that can navigate the system, that can give us referrals out. Not actual referrals, but say, “These guys can help you with this. These guys can help you with that.” ...Just absolutely above and beyond. Things that I wouldn’t be able to do. Things that I would be too overwhelmed to do. I don’t know where to start with half of this”

(carer 3)

Flexible, tailored support

The **frequency, nature, and location of support is tailored to individual needs**. Support is paced to build confidence and capacity, with recognition of the 'small' victories which lead towards the 'big' ones. Most young people begin with weekly appointments, tapered to fortnightly which one young person (2) said, "gave more room for events to happen". The flexibility and availability of support is highly valued by young people, as it offers a safety net in times of need.

"They're flexible with times. Like I more recently have gone from weekly in to fortnightly. But the first week of the fortnightly, I had something happen, and I had to see my worker a week earlier than I was meant to. And they were really flexible, they got me in and all that. And they said that if I ever needed them again, just to text them, and they can book me in whenever"

(young person 5)

"On a good week we only have that one hour. On a rough week, or a confusing week, we could speak to [staff] for two or three hours per week, just involving different bits and pieces... The fact that we were able even to have those weekly appointments is absolutely fantastic. I thought we would have maybe one or two per month and they'd be 45 minutes"

(carer 3)

Support is available in a **location and format that suits the young person**. This includes in person at YFlex's Mill Park office or via outreach, or remotely via phone call, text message, or video call. Outreach locations can include a young person's home, a library, youth centre, or a park. Whilst Covid-19 restrictions meant that remote contact was the only possibility from April to August 2020, young people valued the connection they were still able to create with their worker.

"Over Zoom, it was a little harder for us to work. Which is why we ended up going back to face to face, because I wasn't coping with just doing Zoom calls. And obviously she couldn't completely understand what was happening with me and all that through the screen"

(young person 5)

"It was pretty good to start [with zoom] because we ended up talking about heavy stuff. Both being at home kind of helped me be able to rattle on and on and on and get stuff out that maybe I wouldn't face-to-face, but it did feel pretty supported. I understood that was the best that they could do at the time. I think I got in pretty quickly anyway to see someone, so I was just thankful I could see anyone"

(young person 1)

97%

OF STAKEHOLDERS
strongly agree or agree

YFlex staff have a good understanding of the specific needs of young people experiencing mental health issues within the catchment area.

92%

OF STAKEHOLDERS
strongly agree or agree

YFlex is able to meet the needs of young people experiencing significant and complex mental health challenges.

“Just the fact that it was flexible..

If I wanted to go to the office, I could. Or like if I had to meet in [outer suburb] I could, like to cancel appointments last minute, that’s ok. And stuff like that. Like that was really helpful. And I could just reschedule or something, it was pretty easy”

(young person 4)

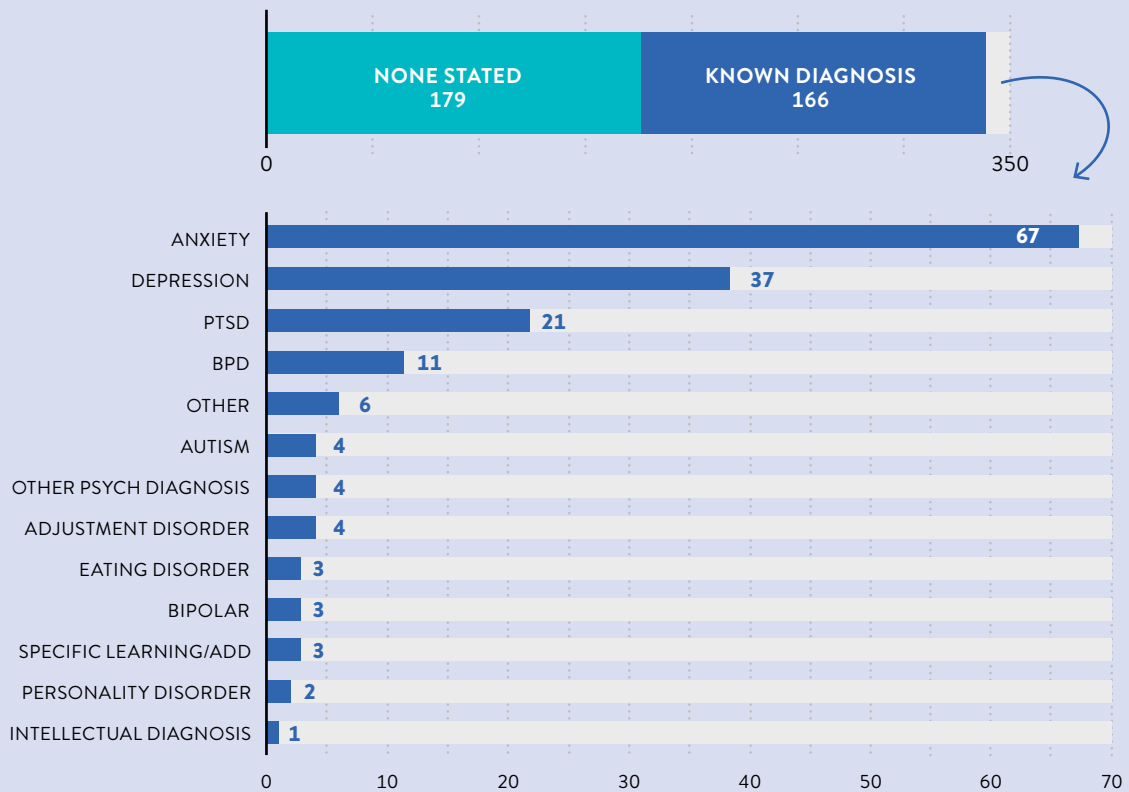


WHO ACCESSES YFLEX?

Service data from the period January 2019 – February 2022 helps to provide a picture of the young people accessing YFlex. YFlex supports young people with emerging to complex mental health needs, resulting in over half of the young people entering the service with no recorded diagnosis. YFlex focuses on supporting, not diagnosing, young people. However, for some young people, gaining a diagnosis through YFlex was helpful and provided access to different forms of support or prioritised access to higher acuity supports.

FIGURE 2 | PRIMARY DIAGNOSIS AT SERVICE ENTRY (n=345)

OVER HALF OF YFLEX CONSUMERS ENTER THE SERVICE WITHOUT A DIAGNOSIS. OF THOSE WITH DIAGNOSES, ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION ARE THE MOST COMMON.



Young people and families often describe their presenting needs in non-clinical ways, instead focusing on behaviours, emotions, and impacts on life.

TABLE 3 | WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBE THEIR PRESENTING NEEDS

School disengagement	Struggling, or not wanting, to leave the house
Not being able to sleep or eat	Daily panic attacks at work
Wanting to feel comfortable talking with other people	Struggling with family

Needing support to cope and someone to talk to

“I needed someone there to talk to. Because I was just in a really, really, bad place. I was on the verge – I had a date that I was going to you know... So, they – everyone was worried about me”
(young person 5)

Feeling stuck

“I was really stuck in my head that I wouldn’t focus on anything that’s happening around me. I was really paralysed”
(young person 6)

Shame, wanting to feel ‘normal’, and managing frustration and powerlessness

“It was really hard for me to kind of get myself together because I couldn’t really focus. I was so embarrassed that I couldn’t basically live life”
(young person 6)

Having a bad headspace and feeling at risk to self and others

“Due to not being in a really good headspace. I was on my last legs, I was going to do something really stupid – because of other stuff that was going on in my life, with friends and family and all that”
(young person 5)

Wanting help to make sense of their own experiences and identity

“I think I was always kind of trying to find myself... I’m always trying to find answers”
(young person 6)

“I just really hated myself and I couldn’t really work out why, and it was super distressing, like why - and in my head, there’s two versions of me, like the person I could see in the mirror and that voice in my head, and I was always like, why can’t we be a team and work together?... I just couldn’t fucking work out why I couldn’t let myself do anything nice”
(young person 1)

“I think I had anxiety for a really long time, and I didn’t know what was going on”
(young person 3)

In recognition that the acuity of some young people's distress could be minimised by the language used to describe it, YFlex also explores behaviours and risk factors to build a richer picture of what is happening for young people. Understanding both individual and contextual factors helps staff work with young people and their families to holistically tailor support to their specific needs.

The nature of, and way young people communicate their needs reinforces the importance of YFlex's relational, empowering, recovery-focused stance which creates supported spaces for young people to make sense and meaning of their own experiences, cultivate a felt sense that they're not alone, and honours the hope young people place in the service by nurturing reflection and hope in themselves and their futures.

Families, as much as possible, are engaged as both care partners and recipients. Staff work with young people in their contexts and seek to support families to care for their loved ones in ways that strengthen the family unit and improve dynamics for everyone.

"In the actual sessions with young people we're using as much of their language as possible... the young person said they want to work on confidence, so it's not talking about anxiety or depression or symptoms, tell me about confidence, what does that mean for you, what would it look like if you were more confident"

(staff 2)

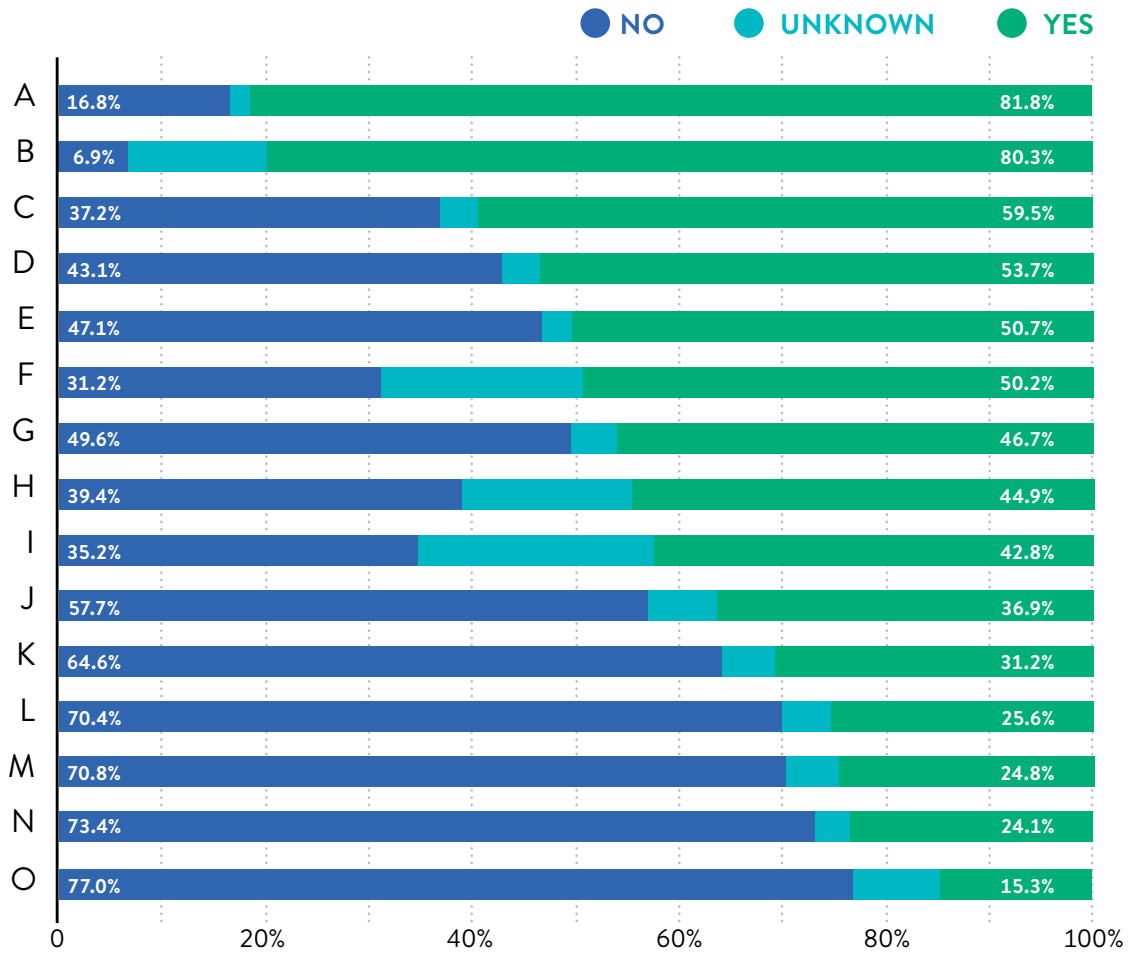
"The more friendly approach, instead of looking down on me as other supports have, allowing me to talk and understand me"

(young person survey 9)



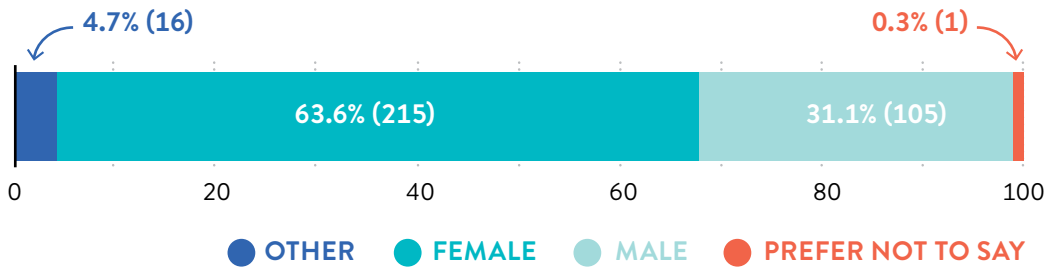
FIGURE 3 | CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED AT SERVICE ENTRY (n=274)

YFlex explores a range of challenges young people may be experiencing at entry to build a clearer picture of the breadth and intensity of need. Over 81.75% of young people experienced suicidal ideation and 59.49% reported self-harm. Family contexts are also important, with 80.29% reporting family histories of mental ill-health.



- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| A Suicidal ideation | J Anger and aggression |
| B Family history of mental illness | K Self care issues |
| C Self harm | L Perceptual disturbance |
| D Social isolation | M Alcohol use |
| E Interpersonal conflict | N Drug use |
| F School disengagement (n/a removed, n=231) | O Problematic AOD use |
| G Disordered eating | |
| H Family violence | |
| I Vocational disengagement (n/a removed, n=145) | |

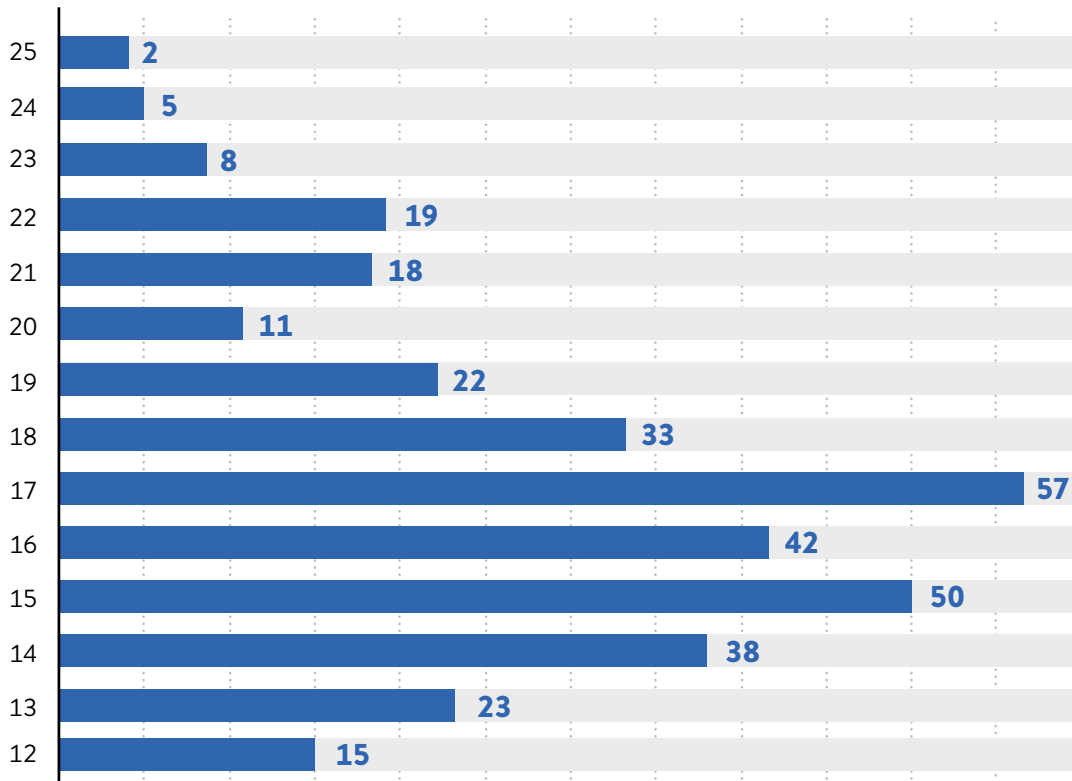
FIGURE 4 | GENDER IDENTITY AT SERVICE ENTRY (n=337)



ALMOST 5% OF YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFY THEIR GENDER AS OTHER THAN FEMALE OR MALE

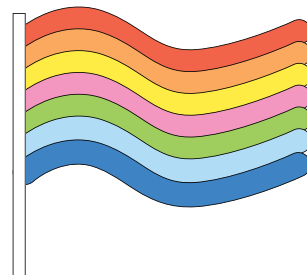


FIGURE 5 | AGE AT SERVICE ENTRY (n=343)



17.5% OF YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED AS **LGBTIA+**

AT SERVICE ENTRY, HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY AFFIRMING SUPPORT.



Age and Gender

Higher numbers of females used the service (62.6%), and almost 5% of young people identify their gender as other than female or male (figure 4).

Young people aged 12 to 25 accessed YFlex (the full spectrum of the eligible age range). Highest uptake of the service was made by young people aged 14-18 at their first entry to service (53% of overall young people where age was identified). 36.7% of young people commenced with the service when they were aged under 16 (figure 5).

It is worth noting that 20 of the 343 (5.8%) young people accessed the YFlex service for a second time while they were still in the eligible age range. For this subgroup, the mean number of days between periods of service engagement was 230 days, ranging between 59 and 728 days between periods of engagement.

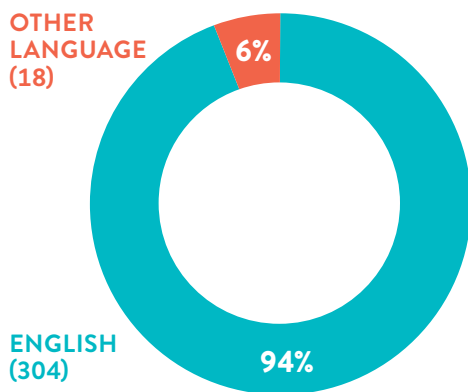
Indigeneity

Over 9% of YFlex consumers identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Given the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of the City of Whittlesea in the 2016 census was 0.8%, it appears YFlex is seen as a culturally safe mainstream support option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This could be due to dedicated activities to foster connection with local Aboriginal communities and organisations, as well as flexibility with service contact requirements so young people can attend to cultural needs and events such as Sorry Business.

8.4% of young people identify as Aboriginal

1.2% identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

FIGURE 6 | LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME (n=322)



Language spoken at home

Overwhelmingly, the primary language spoken at home is English, although this does not reflect the diversity of young people's cultural backgrounds, with 17.5% of young people identifying as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Despite promotional work to build awareness of the service within the community, primary language spoken at home data reveals that some young people, especially with linguistically diverse backgrounds and/or a refugee experience may be underrepresented in relation to local demographics.

17.5% of young people identify as having a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME

ARABIC - PERSIAN (EXCLUDING DARI)
 VIETNAMESE - GUDJAL - HINDI - MALAY
 MALAYALAM - MANDARIN - TAGALOG

OF A SAMPLE OF 322 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ACCESS THE YFLEX SERVICE, 94% SPOKE ENGLISH AT HOME AND 6% SPOKE A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME.

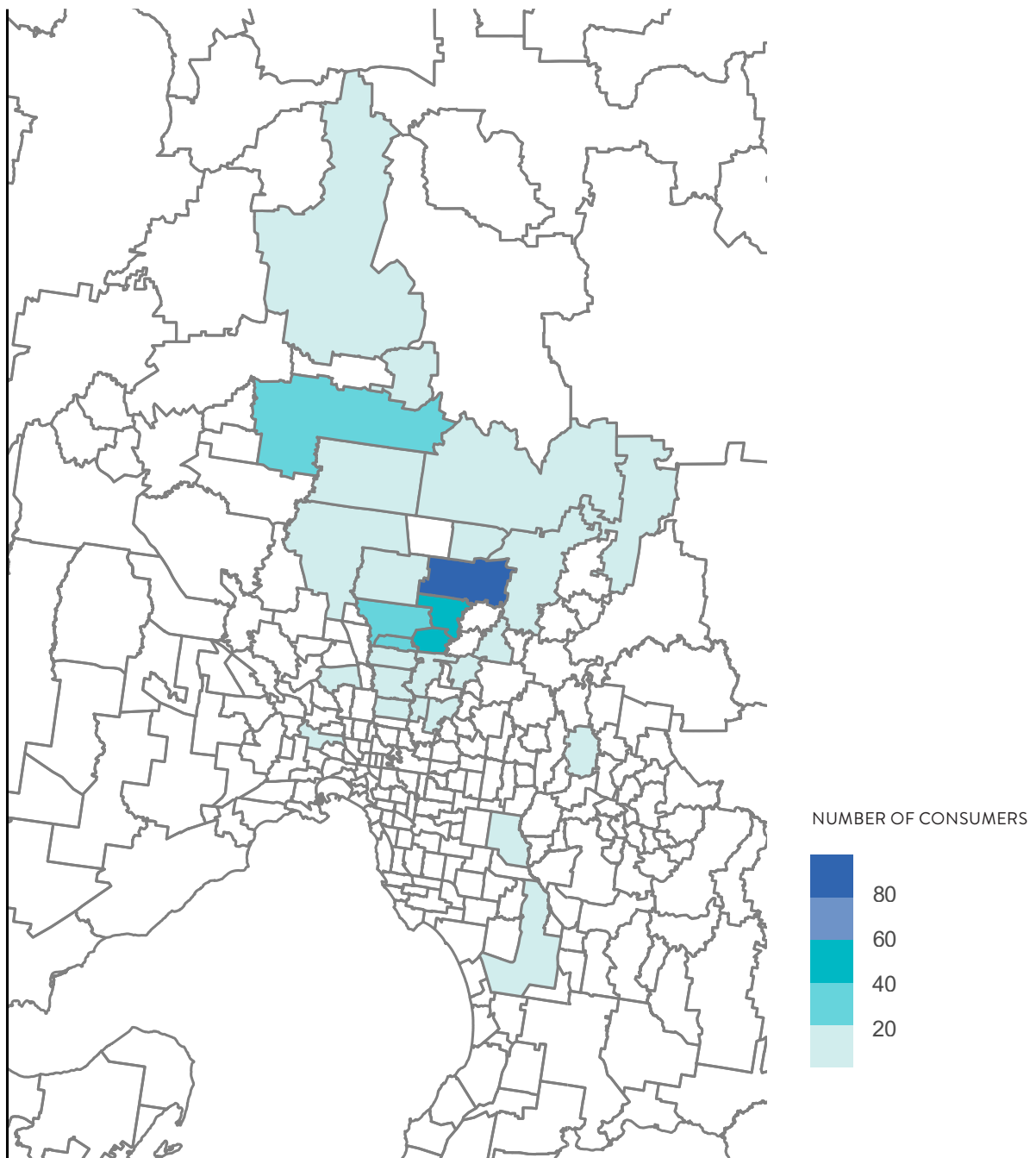


Spread across catchment

YFlex supports young people across a vast catchment area. Young people who reside outside of the YFlex catchment area may be eligible if they have strong links within it, as evidenced by consumers in postcodes outside of the Whittlesea Council and Mitchell and Murrindindi Shires.

FIGURE 7 | CONSUMER LOCATIONS

This heat map depicts the geographic spread of YFlex consumers. The postcodes with the highest number of YFlex consumers are 3754 (Mernda & Doreen), 3752 (South Morang), & 3082 (Mill Park).



Length of support

YFlex offers two streams of support, with service engagements approximately equally split across them:

Brief intervention

Up to ten sessions. Young people in this stream may have lower acuity needs, a single support focus, or have alternate supports in place which aren't currently meeting their needs. In this case, YFlex will offer brief support, develop recommendations, and share these in a referral to alternate supports.

Active engagement

Up to 12 months intensive support. Many young people and stakeholders engaged in this stream expressed a strong desire for the option of an additional 6 months of support to consolidate gains whilst being held in the trusted relationships developed at YFlex.



HOW DO PEOPLE ACCESS YFLEX?

Significant promotional outreach work at service commencement enabled YFlex to build its profile and footprint within the community. It is through the relationships formed with schools, headspace, clinical teams, and other local service providers that the majority of YFlex referrals are received, although young people may also self-refer. Staff note that “word is well and truly out... [YFlex] is starting to be a more well-established name in the community” (staff 2), with an increase in word of mouth referrals because of its positive reputation.

The ease and responsiveness of the referral process stands out as a key strength of the program for young people, families, and other stakeholders. Open, accessible, and direct referral pathways streamline service entry and ensure young people aren’t made to repeat their story.

YFlex’s commitment to accessibility is a response to the strong and prevalent service barriers for young people in Whittlesea. Direct referral means that young people without a health care plan or GP can access supports. Whilst family engagement is encouraged, YFlex doesn’t rely on a parent’s willingness and capacity to engage.

The outreach model means that YFlex goes to meet young people where they feel most safe and comfortable, not the other way around. Appointments can be at home, school, the YFlex office, or walking around a park or mall.

92%

OF STAKEHOLDERS strongly agree or agree as a service provider, it’s easy to find relevant information about YFlex.

95%

OF STAKEHOLDERS strongly agree or agree YFlex intake and referral pathways are open and accessible.

“To remove barriers to access is so important. We see people who otherwise won’t be seen... We’ve had situations in the past where family have not been approving of mental health support or not wanting to access it and that’s not going to be a barrier for us”

(staff 1)

“I need someone, or I need a support that can come here because my kids don’t want to go outside. I’m so glad to know that there are these programs where the support comes to my house”

(carer 2)

“[the most valuable part is] the commitment, outreach, and experienced staffing. Such a valuable program working alongside schools and other services... Local outreach mental health component so valuable!!!!”

(stakeholder 8)

“It was really smooth. It was so easy...
one second I was crying,
and the next I was at YFlex”

(young person 3)

YFlex’s holistic multidisciplinary approach means “you might not necessarily need to get referred out; people can get a wide range of support in one place” (staff 2). And if YFlex is not the right fit or able to meet someone’s support needs, staff help to find appropriate alternatives.

This flexibility means that YFlex connects with young people who won’t be seen otherwise because the system allowed them to slip through the gaps.

“Being able to call [YFlex] directly and discuss potential referrals has been a fantastic resource. If the client is not suitable for YFlex [staff] have always been helpful making other suggestions. We have appreciated as a team the flexibility and commitment of YFlex”
(stakeholder 39)

“YFlex have been able to engage with and facilitate a positive experience of mental health service for some young people that have had previous attempts at support, both tertiary and private, that haven’t worked for them. These young people would have otherwise fallen through the gaps.”
(stakeholder 37)

90%

OF STAKEHOLDERS
strongly agree or agree

YFlex is specifically well-equipped to engage with and meet the needs of young people who have previously found it difficult to engage with the service system.

YFlex prioritises communication with key stakeholders from the outset, setting a foundation of transparency and collaboration which continues across the young person’s support journey. Importantly, this includes clear information about the service, entry wait times, and the offer of bridging support from the Peer Worker for young people on the waitlist.

“The initial support provided by the peer worker is great and young people feel listened to and understood from the start”
(stakeholder 37)

“[I most valued] that they can put young people on a waitlist but still work with them at this point which is very important”
(stakeholder 33)

Program Logic

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES	WHAT WE DO	IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES
Trauma-informed care	Open, accessible, and direct referral pathways, with bridging peer support for waitlist	Positive first engagements
Developmentally appropriate support	Recovery-oriented clinical interventions, tailored to the needs of young people and their supports	Young people have access to flexible and holistic support
Citizenship and human rights focus	Flexible support options (centre-based, outreach, telehealth)	Young people feel respected heard and validated
Recovery orientation	Highly skilled multidisciplinary team	Young people identify and begin to develop skills for independent living
Inclusion and diversity	Supported opportunities to participate in activities and connect with community	Satisfied, supported, optimistic, and engaged staff
Seeing the whole person in context	Active family/carer engagement, including single-session family consultation	Young people feel supported to make of what is happening for them
Co-location with existing youth service (EDGE)		
Strong connections with the service system		

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES	END OF SERVICE OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES	END GOAL
Young people feel safe and known	Enhanced mental wellbeing and self-worth	Young people are becoming experts of themselves	Young people have enhanced agency to experience, achieve, and do things for personally living well
Reduced social isolation	Improved psychosocial functioning		
Emergent sense of hope and self-mastery	Young people are engaged in activities and relationships that have purpose and meaning to them	Young people are hopeful for their future	
Improved and better integrated services for young people	Young people (and their families/supports where appropriate) are connected to their communities and the right supports	Young people are nested in trusted care networks	
Families / carers have increased understanding of young people's experiences and how to support them	Increased trust in the mental health system		
Young people (and their families/supports) build an understanding of their strengths and values	Improved family dynamics		

**“I feel really comfortable there,
and I think that’s why I’m able
to actually talk about things”**

(young person 7)

**WHAT DOES
YFLEX ACHIEVE?**

Immediate outcomes

Positive first engagements

YFlex aims to establish a positive connection and genuine collaboration from the outset of care. Authentically curious and empathic staff cultivate a sense of welcome for young people and their families/carers, inspiring trust and confidence that they're in the right place.

Young people will participate in support they think benefits them. A felt sense of relevance precedes engagement, which precedes outcomes. YFlex's commitment to building real relationships alerts young people that this service is different and lays the foundation for change to occur.

“It was the degree of empathy. Straight off the bat they talked about tailoring a course of therapy for [young person] ... rather than ‘this is how we do things’... That degree of flexibility really stuck out to me, as saying we’re actually here for you.. there wasn’t that medical or professional lack of empathy... I felt that they were listening and they wanted to know and get a really good picture of exactly what was happening with [young person]. Not only with [young person], they also talked to me and wanted the big picture stuff too... I always came away knowing that, feeling that [staff] knows what he’s doing, he’s good at what he does, and I was really happy that [young person] was under his care”

(carer 1)

“People listen to me when I talked, which is something that was kind of new to me... she’d actually be paying attention to me and like not staring off into the distance or just ignoring me. And not caring what I said or something”

(young person 4)

“At [other service], it was very cold. It didn’t really seem like he cared to be honest. It just seemed like ‘I’m being paid, so that’s fine’... because of that I wasn’t really keen to go there. I wasn’t really keen to participate in stuff. But at YFlex I feel like I’m being cared for, so it’s much easier to say what I actually would like to say”

(young person 2)

“The first people that tried to support them and help them, they don’t like it... They don’t like seeing the psychologist. My son doesn’t like the idea. But now, my son is asking, “Mum,” he’s always asking about his appointment, which is good. So, I’m thinking that he likes it, and I’m thinking that maybe he thinks that it’s helping him... He always looks forward to Tuesdays, of talking”

(carer 2)

95%

of stakeholders strongly agree or agree that they find YFlex easy to work collaboratively with.

Young people have access to flexible and holistic support

The flexibility and availability of YFlex staff is widely valued as it demonstrates to young people that the service cares, is welcoming, and sees them as the priority, no matter who they are or what their needs are.

Consideration is paid to which staff member young people are paired with. This commitment to connection supports the development of strong therapeutic relationships, as young person 5 demonstrates: *“We had personalities that connected really well, and I was just able to start talking to them. Where if it had been someone else that was like a polar opposite to me, it probably would have been harder for me to open up”*.

At YFlex, the young person sets the pace and content of support. Ideas are explored safely and on the young person’s terms, which means that the process is less overwhelming, and they have ownership of learnings.

“In the past I’ve had a little trouble making appointments with psychiatrists and stuff, because they always seem really busy, but YFlex always seems to be available whenever I need an appointment... If I’m not able to come to an appointment, or I don’t feel up for it, they’re super supportive of that kind of stuff, so it takes a lot of pressure off me”

(young person 7)

“Total acceptance... You don’t feel judged at all”

(young person 5)

“I like how they were always open for me. It was nice”

(young person 2)

“She wouldn’t push. So, like if I had told her some stuff, and then I’d stopped, she wouldn’t be like, “Continue talking.” She would be like, “Okay, this is a sensitive topic. You can move on, or we can sit in our feelings for a moment and continue to talk when we feel more comfortable.” She learnt to read my body language as well... she made a real effort to make me feel as comfortable as possible... I like getting given time to open up, instead of being like - forced into it. I found that really good - because I hadn’t even told her that, and she was giving me this time to just process it, and be like, “Okay, I can talk about this.”

(young person 5)

“We work with people who have selective mutism. We don’t expect them to talk but other services will. We don’t expect them to do something that’s uncomfortable for them. We have expectations they engage but we interpret that differently. We don’t make people conform to our model. ‘It’s not your goal so it’s not our goal.’ We work with people to understand their previous experiences of what did or didn’t work. One young person hasn’t spoken but there’s good rapport and engagement... There’s no expectation to communicate verbally. It’s not, ‘if you don’t speak, we can’t work’”

(staff 1)

97% OF YOUNG PEOPLE strongly agree or agree

The support provided by YFlex is accessible and flexible enough to meet my needs.

100% OF FAMILIES/CARERS strongly agree or agree

The support provided by YFlex is accessible and flexible enough to meet the needs of the young person they support and care for.

Additionally, young people value the choice YFlex staff afford them in how, when, and with who collaboration occurred. Even in circumstances where information sharing is mandated, staff support young people's agency.

Young people feel respected, heard, and validated

YFlex endeavours to provide support that feels like care, not a transaction. Several interviewees contrasted YFlex with other services and clinicians who they felt were just doing a job. As young person 7 said, *"I've had a few crappy experiences with psychiatrists in the past, but I'm not seeming to have those problems here... I just feel like a lot of my problems are understood at YFlex, and the people there actually care."*

Young people use conversational and behavioural cues to test the safety of topics and relationships, and that the ability of staff to 'read' these cues made them feel seen and safe. Remembering and revisiting narrative threads from previous appointments makes young people feel important and cared for.

"DHS are involved... they have to know pretty much everything, which doesn't sit right with me... but [my worker] doesn't tell them every little thing, because I've asked her not to"
(young person 5)

"The YFlex team consistently go above and beyond to ensure that young people feel comfortable and respected, making their experience with the program a positive one that is guided by the young people themselves"
(stakeholder 9)

"He senses something more special in the approach the Neami YFlex people are giving... Maybe because it's not like a medical kind of thing where - it's more like a friendly approach, yeh. And he thinks that they give importance to how he feels. He was listened to without the feeling of being attacked"
(carer 2)

"I just didn't want her to look at me with pity, and she never does"
(young person 3)

"It felt like what I was actually saying meant something... It felt good that there was at least someone that wanted to know what's going on in my world. It was nice"
(young person 2)

"She was just the first person who seemed to genuinely even just seem interested in what I was saying, and she picked up on all my cues of when I was dissociating or when I was having difficulty, or even when I was hiding something... And she would just bring it back up: "you said this. Do you want to talk about that?" I felt like she could read me really well... she seemed authentic and that vibe just really rubbed off on me. Like, I felt secure talking to someone who seemed so secure"
(young person 1)

95% OF STAKEHOLDERS
strongly agree or agree

The support provided by YFlex to young people and their families is flexible and accessible.

97% OF YOUNG PEOPLE
strongly agree or agree

They felt supported to make their own decisions around mental health goals and recovery at YFlex.

Young people identify and begin to develop skills for independent living

The gentle pacing of YFlex support means that young people identify and achieve small goals that contribute to much larger ones.

“She said, ‘Just start with one thing, the smallest thing.’ And from there, it was just starting out as folding the clothes. And it got me on to learning to touch type and then calling back on trying to get a new job and then - yeah, it kind of got me into doing everything”

(young person 6)

Satisfied, supported, optimistic, and engaged staff

Neami clinicians are genuinely positive, passionate, and engaged professionals who are dedicated to their work, something clearly evident to both consumers and their families.

YFlex is delivered by a small, close team with little staff turnover. A values-based approach to recruitment promotes team cohesion from the outset, and staff satisfaction and optimism is sustained by a suite of support structures including clinical and internal supervision and reflective practice. The flexibility within the model empowers staff to individually tailor support, promoting deep investment in young people’s commitment and achievements.

“We receive overwhelmingly positive feedback from students and families regarding the support provided by YFlex. Everyone at the service is highly approachable, responsive, and supportive. This is a testament of the dedication and commitment of the staff who work there, and the processes in place”

(stakeholder 16)

“YFlex is really purposeful about recruiting people with high energy and passion, and a values alignment for the role. This creates a very cohesive staff team who can learn and support each other, and there’s different spaces to reflect, learn and process collectively. Staff are energised by the resilience, creativity, and willingness to sit in a difficult place of the young people coming through. Staff are so engaged in the work because of the young people, the passion the young people are bringing. Seeing the changes they make keeps staff motivated”

(staff 1)

Young people feel supported to make sense of what is happening for them

Young people value having an impartial, non-judgemental someone to talk to. YFlex prioritises creating a sense of companionship where young people have the space to unpack challenges, name fears, and feel held and heard.

“A lot of young people feel very othered. We try to decrease that feeling”

(staff 1)

“I needed someone to talk to, someone to basically - yeah, just to guide me and - yeah, just kind of bring me back down after being stuck in my head for so long”

(young person 6)

In supporting young people to deepen understanding of what's happening for them, YFlex sees the possibilities in young people, not the problems. This hopeful stance empowers young people on their own journeys of meaning making, recognising that young people are more engaged when they are building their own expertise, not relying on someone else's.

"I was more comfortable to express how I felt because I knew what I was feeling now because I was getting guided instead of given more answers"

(young person 6)

"[Staff] would just be like, 'Okay, we'll try again.' That's okay. It just really helped for that to happen. And I still think about – I guess if I do relapse, I'm just like, 'It's okay. Survival process. I'm allowed to do that'"

(young person 4)

86%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE

rate their understanding of their own mental health experiences as much better or better compared to before they came to YFlex.

(100% exited consumers; 81% current consumers)

Short term outcomes

Young people feel safe and known

YFlex's trauma-informed stance is reflected in what young people say cultivates felt safety. Commitments to confidentiality and collaboration lay the foundations of relational trust upon which young people feel safe to explore their experiences.

"I had someone to talk to that wasn't you know, like family, or – they weren't kind of compelled to tell everyone else. It was just us two people in a room. It was confidential. If they were really, really worried about me they would do something, but they would work through the other stuff and no one else had to know. So, I had trouble trusting people obviously, I was – I'm paranoid that I'm getting recorded 24/7. So, my worker was really like, 'It's just between you and me.' So then obviously I opened up and told her some stuff that I have never told anyone else. And we worked through it, which took a lot of weight off my shoulders"

(young person 5)

"I have a space to speak my mind without everyone in my family finding out"

(young person survey 9)

A stance of mutuality and power-sharing – where staff acknowledge the young person's competency – leads to authenticity, agency, and empowerment.

"...some doctors really get pissed off if you're pissed off. But even if I pushed back, it was good. She understood when to push me and when to not push me and understand the frustrations and stuff like that. It really did feel like, like for once someone was actually seeing me as a person and wanting to help me and actually cared in, like, a nice way. Like, everyone, even when I walked in, like, everyone was nice"

(young person 1)

"[She] didn't try to force any opinions on me... She would tell me what she thinks, but it's never to attack me or anything. It always helps me guide my thought process"

(young person 6)

YFlex staff make young people feel that they matter by engaging with deep presence: in the therapeutic moment, in follow-up, and in an enduring stance of availability. Staff are supported to maintain this presence through the strong team culture and values, which promote flexibility, creativity, collaboration, and authenticity. For young people and families/carers, knowing that they can call when they need to – not just for scheduled appointments – fosters feelings of safety, worth, and reliability.

Staff are supported to maintain this deep presence by cultivating their reflective capacity and professional development, which builds their ability to sit comfortably in difficult spaces with young people and their families, whilst maintaining presence and hope.

“One thing that was helpful was me knowing that I could tell him anything... He took all of it, would listen to it, and would always remember or write it down so the next week, he would ask about how that was going... It felt like I was being prioritised for once. It was nice”

(young person 2)

“So, if we have any concerns throughout the week, any red flags or anything we need to question, we’re able to text or call and [staff] generally gets back to us really, really quickly. We had a concern with medication of Friday. I sent a text, then they gave me a ring back and we talked through options. And then a follow-up phone call yesterday as well, just to see how we went over the weekend”

(carer 3)

“Rather than rolling out an intervention, its being able to sit in that space of discomfort – we acknowledge and validate that things are hard and gruelling. We allow the young people to feel... The interventions come, but it’s about knowing when – after young people feel heard and understood – because then there’s less resistance as its not seen as inappropriate”

(staff 1)

100%

**OF YOUNG PEOPLE,
FAMILIES AND CARERS**

always or often experienced a feeling of safety and trust engaging with YFlex workers.

A commitment to LGBTIQ+ affirming support ensures young people’s identities are seen and honoured. That one young person described this as an anomaly in their life demonstrates the importance of relationships where young people are safe and celebrated for who they are.

“I know I’m not going to get dead named... [they] used my correct name and pronouns. But that doesn’t happen very often, so it was really nice”

(young person 4)

Reduced social isolation

Young people and families/carers describe how YFlex helps them feel less alone, not just in terms of improved relationships with others, but how a changed relationship to self can improve community and social connectedness. YFlex supports young people to feel less alone in their experience by normalising, but not minimising, their distress.

[most important things about being supported by YFlex is] “making sure I don’t feel alone...And [worker] always made me feel like I wasn’t alone. I know it sounds shit, but there’s, like, a million other people in this world who have got the same – not the same, but similar problem to me. And I’m not by myself... It’s a universal problem. It’s not just a me problem. And she just clarified that”

(young person 3)

“There are other young kids like you who are also in the program. At least they know that... They’re not the only ones”

(carer 2)

Some young people change their relationship to the idea of relationships and connection. Relational mapping can support young people to identify helpful/harmful relational dynamics and craft safe boundaries. Young people begin to feel less isolated because they build a different vision of what relationships can be.

Emerging sense of hope and self-mastery

Therapeutic and psychosocial support helps young people to shift perspectives, create new ways of relating to self and others, challenge negative thoughts, and slowly strengthen the skills and routines for living well and managing wellbeing.

Young people feel empowered and hopeful as they make life-long changes through YFlex's gradual, capacity-building approach.

Sometimes support takes the form of gentle challenges towards self-compassion, as young people come to realise they are worthy of self-love.

Improved and better integrated services for young people

The complex landscape of mental health service provision can cause confusion and frustration for those seeking help. One young person, who had attempted to engage other early intervention services had grown despondent until finding YFlex.

YFlex provides an important alternative for young people who need a holistic, adaptable service tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Their collaborative stance is especially valued by stakeholders in promoting consistency of care.

“The thought of making friends is very easy now to me. I didn’t even think of making friends with people. I just thought everyone was out to get me. Not out to get me, but I was always the victim. And that other people are just living their lives and no one really cares”

(young person 3)

“She helped me guide through my thought process... she wasn’t really trying to tell me what to do... she kind of just helped me guide my thinking... And it’s helped me kind of make decisions a little bit better”

(young person 6)

“Having someone to help explain the biology around my trauma made it easier for me to understand and work through”

(young person survey 17)

“I’ve been through so many different kinds of therapies and things that - it’s helped a little bit, but it just makes me go back. But the treatment I’ve gotten with [staff] kind of - it feels more long-term because it’s got to do with my self-talk. I’ve learnt a lot of lessons”

(young person 6)

“I’m significantly happier. I’m about two months clean self-harm. I don’t know, I’ve just been able to cope with shitty things a bit better. Or a lot better”

(young person 4)

“Well something that’s stuck with me, is my worker continuously says, “Focus on yourself, before you focus on others.” I’ve started to look after myself a lot more, you know? And I’ve started doing things that I wanted to do. Like self-love type of things”

(young person 5)

“Headspace wasn’t helping, medication wasn’t helping, and then I just sort of had one last big panic attack and that was - like, that’s it ... too many services, too many doctors - this is my last one... I went into the (YFlex) appointments, the first couple, really upset and angry at the system, and they were just super understanding”

(young person 1)

“The skill level of staff in the YFlex team is incredibly valuable as a sector stakeholder who engages and supports young people. YFlex are flexible and adaptable to the needs of young people when often the mental health and medical systems are not. Staff are friendly, easy to collaborate with, and build capacity of young people, their families, and the service systems they access”

(stakeholder 30)

Integrated access to a psychiatrist enables some young people to engage with a crucial clinical support that would not have otherwise been possible due to significant waitlists or financial expense. Families/carers in particular speak of the benefits made possible by access to medication, including improved quality and consistency of sleep, improved mood, and increased energy and appetite.

Respondents identified that YFlex staff went above and beyond other services, and routinely stated that they couldn't recommend the service enough.

Families/carers have increased understanding of young people's experiences and how to support them

The availability of direct support, feedback, updates, and psychoeducation to families/carers helps deepen their understanding of the young person's distress, the role they can take in supporting wellbeing and affirming the young person's identity, and how to resolve issues in ways that strengthen the family unit. Families/carers learn to go at the young person's pace and recognise the achievements they are making.

Compared to before engaging with YFlex:

67%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS rate their understanding of the young person's mental health experiences as much better or better.

78%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS rate their confidence in their ability to support the young person as much better or better.

"I would say it was a major help. I could not promote this enough than I possibly could. It was amazing. I can't really think of a bad thing about it to be honest. It was a nice place with honestly nice people... compared to the other places, it helped me so much more. It was more warmer, it was nicer. I felt like I was actually being cared for. It felt like I was being listened to for once"

(young person 2)

"Me, myself, I am anxious too. In order for me to help them, I also seek for help. Because I said if there's nothing I can give, it's very hard for me... I always tell them that I'm very proud of them, because even if they're anxious, they're depressed, still, I can see that they're still trying their best... I also learn some things from [YFlex]. I learned more about my kids that I don't know before..."

(carer 2)

"We've spoken to [staff] about pronouns and the correct way to address [young person] at home and things like that. He's a lot happier. He's a lot – he calls it euphoric when we refer to his correct name and his correct pronouns and things like that. And these were things that we weren't doing prior to having YFlex support. They were things that were, "Oh, when we get there, we get there." We didn't realise how big of a deal it was. We've never experienced anything like this before, especially as parents. So being able to offer the small things to [young person], it's a huge thing. And we wouldn't have had that correct direction without the support that we've been getting at YFlex"

(carer 3)

Having care partners for their children relieves expectations on parents that they must be perfect or have sole responsibility as they navigate experiences of distress and complex health systems. YFlex gives them someone to worry with, who offers therapeutic and practical support to complement their own love and care. Parents express relief at knowing both young people and they have access to consistent, reliable support for their individual and collective needs.

Young people (and their families/ supports) build an understanding of their strengths and values

YFlex supports young people to do the important, complex work of naming and connecting with their own strengths, values, and principles, and cultivating their strength, courage, and confidence to live in line with those. Stigma, social expectations, and mainstream norms can all be barriers to living authentically, making unlearning as much an aspect of support as learning, as young people build their own definition of, and relationship to, what's normal.

“It has literally been a weight off my shoulders knowing that we’ve got somebody in our corner that is fighting just as hard for our kid as we are. It has been really, really, really fantastic... It’s like we can breathe again for the first time in six months”

(carer 3)

“I feel I’m always blaming myself before, and I feel like I’m not helping them enough... After my son [accessed YFlex], that’s when I realised that I’m doing the best I can...”

(carer 2)

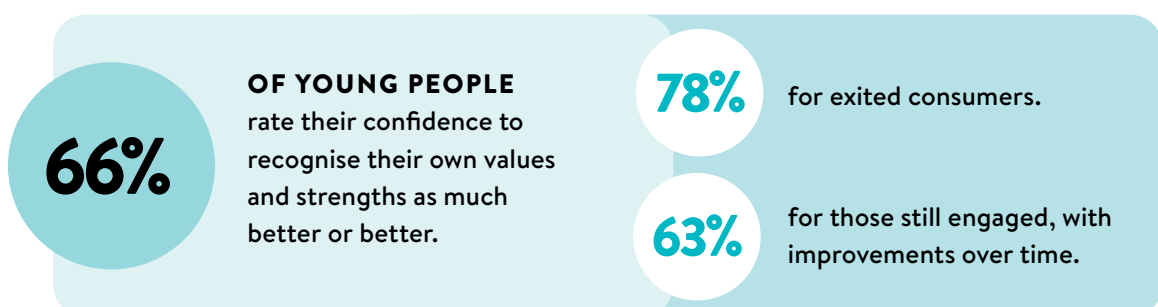
“I definitely was just unlearning everything I learned from my childhood, the values and principles that somebody else had put in my head, that when I was out living my own life, I didn’t agree with them. So, when I was living against somebody’s else’s values it creates such conflict in me, because to me, there’s nothing wrong with me working four hours in a day and spending time with my dog, because that makes me happy and I can do that. But the little voice in my head goes, no, you need to either be a mother or work nine to five. You’re not working hard enough. You need to bring this much money in. You need to buy a house. You need to be this person, but that voice wasn’t mine and it never was, and we have values you don’t believe in. Unconsciously, it’s hard to identify why you’re not living authentically”

(young person 1)

“Even if it was a small time, the time I had with [staff] was possibly the best kind of support I could have gotten... I’ve been in and out of psychologists since I was 15. They were always trying different types of therapies on me. But I think all I really needed in the end was someone to help me know what I was thinking instead of someone trying to give me the answers”

(young person 6)

Compared to before accessing YFlex:



End of service outcomes

Enhanced mental wellbeing and self-worth

Young people’s wellbeing increases as their knowledge of self, their own emotions, and how to best respond deepens. YFlex supports young people build the hope and skills to know that whilst living with mental health challenges isn’t always easy, it is possible. In cultivating understanding, trust, and self-knowledge, young people are safer to be themselves.

77%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE say their ability to manage their own mental health and wellbeing is much better or better compared to before starting engaging with YFlex.

Young people want to feel better for themselves, but want that witnessed and celebrated by others, reinforcing the importance of YFlex’s relational approach to support and recovery.

56%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS rate the mental health of the young person they support and care for as much better or better.

This rate increases with service engagement.

83%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS engaged for over 3 months rated the mental health of the young person they support as much better or better.

“I came in and was like ‘I want a diagnosis’ because it’s not just that I’m depressed. It’s not that I’m just anxious. There’s something else... My talking is not helping me, just like, give me the diagnosis. Give me whatever meds you’re supposed to give me, and I don’t want to talk to you anymore. That’s how I went into it but coming out of it was completely different. Like, not needing the diagnosis towards the end of it was the best part, I think... I just thought, like, a diagnosis would fix me and that it would be different, but it wasn’t... It was sort of just a question why did I want a diagnosis so bad and why was the medication the only thing I thought that would help. It was sort of digging into, like, what has conditioned me to think that there’s just one path to healing or to mental illness all together?... The [YFlex] support was sort of more about accepting with or without a diagnosis, I’m still a person who is worthy of normal life, and worthy of having nice things, even if I don’t think I deserve them, and that getting to the point where I was like, yeah, I do deserve nice things”

(young person 1)

“[I needed] clarity that I wasn’t going insane, or that I was alone. And help, obviously... I definitely feel like I have clarity now. I know a lot about it. If I need help – I know where to go. And [worker] gives me all these great tools, and she gives me such great advice, and it’s really what I needed, I think”

(young person 3)

“I just want someone that I could talk to, that can come up with a second opinion on stuff. And just make sure that I’m trying to – what I wanted really was validation that I was actually improving. And I got that. I was validated that yeah, I am doing good. He helped me slowly take steps to improve”

(young person 2)

87%

OF STAKEHOLDERS strongly agree or agree that the support provided by YFlex results in improved mental health outcomes for the young people they support.

Improved psychosocial functioning

Young people and families/carers describe valuing outcomes such as developing self-awareness, self-connection, self-control, mastery, independence, and shifting perspective. YFlex actively engages young people's strengths, values, and perspectives in support, so they build an understanding of what's happening for them and how they might respond to this in ways that support long-term wellbeing.

This includes coping skills... **...self-awareness and self-compassion...**

...and **confidence, community connection, and empowerment.**

“A lot better. Because before, I couldn't handle anything... I was just always not in my body. I was just kind of in my head all the time. I couldn't focus at all”

(young person 6)

“I'm in a lot better moods recently. I've been like that for about three months, I think. Things overall have been kind of getting better”

(young person 7)

“It was it was really helpful to learn about the type of relationships that I'd formed with myself... And how to not repeat the cycle”

(young person 4)

“So before, I had really bad social anxiety. I struggled to even get out of the house. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't speak to anybody. I was having panic attacks even leaving the house. I had really bad separation anxiety from my mum. Feelings of hopelessness, and just – I had a really bad couple of weeks when I was just having panic attacks, or an anxiety attack every day. And I couldn't do anything... And now I'm able to just understand that it's a feeling, and that it shouldn't impact on my life. And that I have to acknowledge the feelings, and that there's something wrong... So yeah, it took time. I do think [worker] helps me a lot to understand what I was thinking, and actually trying to – what I was trying to say”

(young person 3)

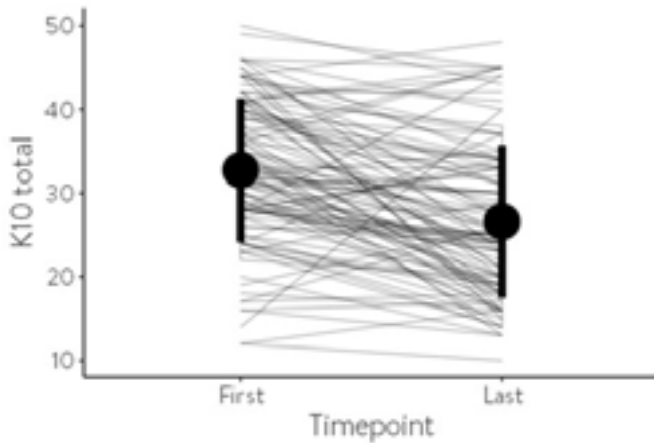
“When times were at its worst, I would not go – if I would go to school I'd throw up three times a day. It was really bad. I wouldn't eat. Sleep was horrendous. Then after YFlex and antidepressants started kicking in, I gained more confidence. I gained more normality. I started to go hang out with friends. I hadn't vomited since then, so that was nice. My sleep was returning back to normal. I was eating a ton more. When times were at its worst I think I was 58kg. Wasn't really eating. And I weighed myself a couple of days ago, I think I'm in the 70s now”

(young person 2)

“[exit] was a bit rough for a little bit, but I sort of realised, like, I kind of know the skills - I have the skills to sort of deal with a lot of the stuff I would be talking about, and towards the end of it... I would say a problem and then I would say, “but this is the skills that I use to cope with it and this is how I reflect on it” and at the end, like towards the end, our last couple of sessions, she [staff] sort of said, like, “you're sort of answering your own questions now”. So, it did feel like I was pretty ready to go”

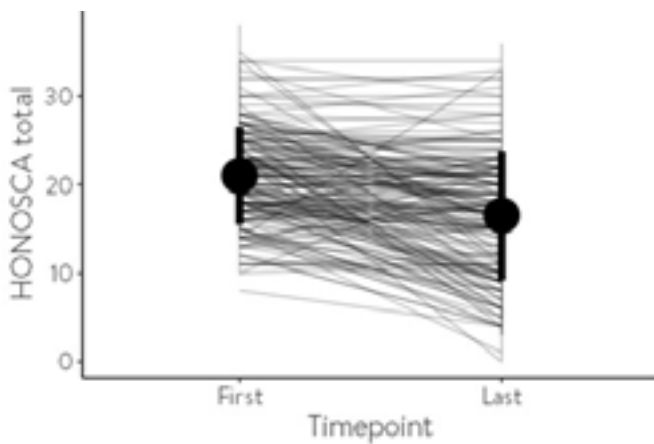
(young person 1)

FIGURE 8 | INDIVIDUAL AND MEAN CHANGE IN K10 FROM FIRST TO LAST MEASUREMENT



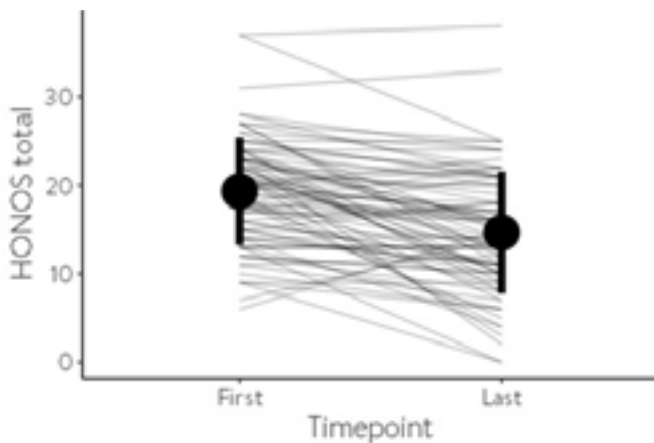
Improvements are marked by a decrease in K10 scores over the period. Within the data there were 110 paired K10 results, the average First score was 32.73 (SD = 8.6), and the average Last score was 26.58 (SD = 9.14). This difference is statistically significant, suggesting that this difference is unlikely to be due to sampling variation alone ($t(109) = 7.28, p < .001, d = 0.69$).

FIGURE 9 | INDIVIDUAL AND MEAN CHANGE IN HONOSCA FROM FIRST TO LAST MEASUREMENT



Improvements are marked by a decrease in HONOSCA scores over the period. Within the data there were 186 paired HONOSCA results, the average First score was 21.01 (SD = 5.54), and the average Last score was 16.52 (SD = 7.31). This difference is statistically significant, suggesting that this difference is unlikely to be due to sampling variation alone ($t(185) = 9.11, p < .001, d = 0.67$).

FIGURE 10 | INDIVIDUAL AND MEAN CHANGE IN HONOS FROM FIRST TO LAST MEASUREMENT



Improvements are marked by a decrease in HONOS scores over the period. Within the data there were 86 paired HONOS results, the average First score was 19.33 (SD = 6.08), and the average Last score was 14.67 (SD = 6.91). This difference is statistically significant, suggesting that this difference is unlikely to be due to sampling variation alone ($t(85) = 7.34, p < .001, d = 0.79$).

Young people are engaged in activities and relationships that have purpose and meaning to them

Many young people and their families/carers describe pride at reconnecting with school, employment, sports, and social activities. YFlex support is much more than managing symptoms to enable a young person's return to work or study. YFlex's strengths-based approach means that young people's engagement in activities is sustained by a self-determined sense of value, meaning, and purpose. As a result, many young people described reconnecting with education and employment – on their own terms. This also helped shift family expectations towards more gradual, achievable goals.

“It was, like, the biggest achievement ever because I did not - I was prepared to not go back to work ever, because I thought I couldn't, and now I've gone and I worked four hours and I talked to people and, yes, I threw up before and I might have cried a bit, but, like, I did it, and then - like, it's a good ending to it, I went and did this program for 12 months and then I did have a goal and I sort of - I got the goal”

(young person 1)

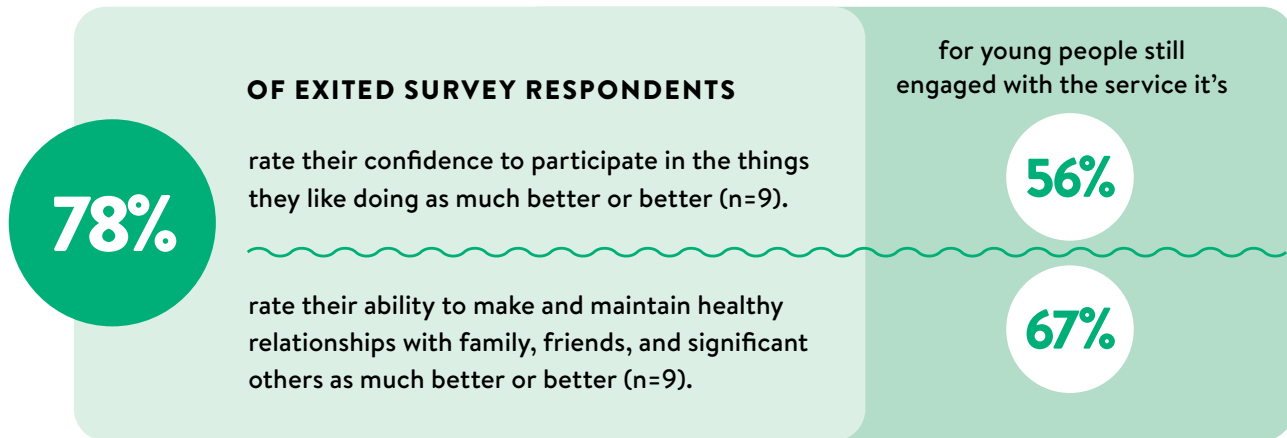
Young people value learning relationship skills as this underpins a sense of confidence and capacity to connect with others and be in the world.

“My relationships have changed because that was one of my biggest things. Was we work a lot on my relationships. So obviously my relationships have changed drastically because I've gotten support in that department... I am a very, very giving person. Which is obviously not healthy, because I give, and I give, and I give, until I have nothing left. And I find it hard to say no and stuff. So, having like boundaries and resilience in that department is what we've been working on a lot”

(young person 5)

YFlex introduces and explores new possibilities with young people, expanding horizons of possibility for their lives. One young person appreciated learning about community housing – something they'd previously never heard of – and exploring what independent living might mean for them.

Compared to before accessing YFlex:



Young people (and their families/ supports where appropriate) are connected to their communities and the right supports

The previous three outcomes culminate in young people feeling like they have a place and purpose within community – as defined by them. In the adjoining quote, one young person describes the journey to feeling safe to be in a shopping centre.

“It’s so different. It’s like I couldn’t even look people in the eye. I couldn’t even go shopping by myself. I couldn’t – I would literally run through the shopping centres, to get out as fast as I could. I was just walking around today, like normally today, and talking to people, you know? It was nice”

(young person 3)

As young people build this safety, connections are explored to nurture it into the future. For some, this is fortifying their connection to self and the learnings they achieved during YFlex engagement, for others this is connecting to community or other therapeutic services. Regardless, the period of transition out of the service is honoured, in recognition that it takes time to come to terms with leaving YFlex and the strong relationships formed within. As evidenced by the adjoining quotes, service exit has challenging implications for some young people.

“I haven’t really identified what would be useful leaving the service because I’m still processing leaving the service”

(young person 5)

[in relation to moving onto new service]
“Scared.... Scared but ready... [I’m scared about] telling someone else my problems... we’re doing a transition thing”

(young person 3)

“Really anxious. I just don’t like new things. And I’m comfortable with [worker]”

(young person 4)

Staff recognise this complexity – preparing to exit is not only the practical provision of referrals and linking young people into ongoing supports, it’s honouring the emotional labour invested in the process and the relationships developed. Staff cultivate a practice of recognition and celebration across the entirety of service engagement, which culminates in a personal letter written to the young person, reflecting on their time together and the young person’s achievements.

“I celebrate by acknowledging achievements, providing the young person a space to hopefully let them come to that acknowledgement and talk about what it means to them, for their hopes, relationships with family and friends, who in their life was aware of what it took to do that. Asking them what they did do to celebrate, or what they might do.” Less about ‘you’ve pleased me’. It’s very like ‘you mentioned that was important to you and you’ve done all these things to work towards it. Well done to you on living up to, working towards your hopes... I rarely hear about the letter, but I did have a parent get in touch with me once who said ‘Thanks so much for your work. The young person has kept your letter in their special box of special stuff’, so it’s nice to know they are meaningful for people”

(staff 2)

95%

OF STAKEHOLDERS

feel confident and comfortable about recommending young people and their families to YFlex.

Increased trust in the mental health system

Several young people and carers describe YFlex as a “last resort” after previously seeking support from services including GPs, psychologists, school counsellors, headspace and CAMHS. Staff hear young people describe some other experiences with the mental health system as “distressing and invalidating”, leading to disconnection because they feel judged or misunderstood. Young people in this critical period deserve support that is affirming of their experiences, hopeful for the future, and that minimises rather than perpetuates distress.

“It was sort of the last time I thought I was going to try really hard to - try really hard to get better, I suppose. I was like, just too many services, too many doctors. Like, this is my last one, and I went into the appointments, the first couple, really upset and angry at the system already and was really ready to judge them, and I think, yeah, they were just super understanding in that, when I told them how many doctors I’d been to before them, and they weren’t as dismissive either”

(young person 1)

YFlex gives young people a positive experience of the mental health support, which can then cultivate trust in the broader mental health system.

“Confidence in knowing that unlike the psychologist, I was confident that [young person] would get the help that he needed, the right kind of help, and the right kind of support that he needed. I didn’t feel confident with the psychologist”

(carer 1)

YFlex’s holistic approach – which encompasses advocacy and system navigation – offers a positive experience of the mental health system, shows what is possible, reduces stress and frustration, and gives people an experience of the support they deserve.

“At the end of the appointment [staff] basically said, “I’m quite concerned for [young person]’s state of mind right now. I would recommend that you go to the hospital... They wrote a letter so that we could hand that in at Emergency and it had [young person]’s history on it, so I didn’t then have to go and explain it to three, four, five different doctors. Then we ended up back at the Children’s the following day to see their psychology unit there. They pulled some strings for us and got a psychiatrist to come up from ED. And [YFlex staff] and [staff] at the Children’s have actually been communicating and linking each other in on where [young person]’s at at the moment as well. So, there’s definitely been collaboration advocacy on our behalf, just taking a load from us, which has been – I didn’t expect that. I really didn’t expect that, so it’s been amazing”

(carer 3)

Improved family dynamics

Ripples of benefit are created through YFlex’s holistic approach, where young people, and families/carers are supported to be human, hopeful, fallible, capable of change, and empathic. Some families describe changed expectations of their children, expressing pride at who they are, not who they are expected to be, because of a deeper understanding of the effort their children are putting in.

“I realised, sometimes they also get tired, they’re also not in the mood, they’re also - I compare them to myself as well. I ask myself, me myself also, sometimes I’m anxious, I’m tired, sometimes I feel lazy. And that’s when I - little by little, I understand them... And the home now is very different from before... it’s more peaceful”

(carer 2)



Long term outcomes

Young people are becoming experts of themselves

Becoming expert is an emergent and ongoing process of learning and unlearning, growth and consolidation, change and struggle.

YFlex supports young people to build understanding and new perspectives. Many young people come to the service feeling somewhat broken or ashamed at not being able to go to school or hold a job. YFlex staff gently challenge the idea of 'normal', support young people in recognising the validity of what they're experiencing, and build the trust required to address their challenges with persistence, rigour, and bravery. Instead of band-aids, YFlex helps young people identify and tend to underlying issues, whilst cultivating the skills and possibilities for a fulfilling future.

Some young people and families/carers report no longer needing services after accessing YFlex. They express confidence in knowing when reconnecting with services will be valuable, as well as confidence that they have the skills to manage on their own.

“It was just - it was very - the journey - it sounds so easy, but, like, the journey itself was so hard... And it's still going. That's the thing... I thought I'd come in, be diagnosed, and then I'd just flip a switch and I'd be better, but every day is a new day, it's a new journey, and I'm fine with that. Like, some days are hard, but it's just accepting that some days will be hard, and when hard days come, just sort of still living because - I don't know how to explain that. But, like, if I have a bad day, that's it. It's just a bad day. It's just a feeling. You still get to - the sun's still going to come up, everything is still the same. It's just a feeling and it will pass”

(young person 1)

“Like, a lot of the time I would just say I was feeling icky and I didn't understand what it was, and I might drink, or I might do something to push the emotion down. Now, I can say that I feel anxious and make room for it. Okay, I'm feeling anxious and what? Where? Like, in my stomach hurts. Okay, and just let it be for, like, two minutes instead of resisting so hard and blaming myself, trying to be normal. I just accepted that this is who I am and I can work with it, I can work with my health and a lot of letting my emotional brain versus my logical brain, and how do I identify who's taking the driver's seat a lot of the time? I think a lot out loud to myself now, because it really helps, like, with thought patterns and stuff like that. A lot of unlearning techniques, which really helped me”

(young person 1)

Young people are hopeful for the future

YFlex engagement inspires new work goals and vocational pathways for some young people, and by employing young people on YFlex staff recruitment panels, provides genuine opportunities to gain employment experience and influence the service.

Young people and families/carers speak to new hopes and possibilities that have emerged for them after engaging with YFlex.

Hope isn't ease or simplicity; it's knowing that adversity is inevitable and trusting your ability to manage it. It's feeling confident in the context of struggle. So, as one young person describes, when a bad day comes along, instead of feeling overwhelming distress there is acceptance that it is all part of an undulating journey and bad days don't make you a bad person. This hope is hard earned – the work young people do at YFlex is not easy, but the holistic approach to cultivate skills, understanding, and relationships reinforces solid foundations for the future.

“YFlex is the reason that I want to do that now, peer work, because it really was so helpful and I know I couldn't be a psychologist, couldn't be - do it that much, but I know I could be there for people like me, like my peer worker was. It was awesome”

(young person 1)

“[YFlex support has changed] my whole mindset to life... I'm in a lot better of a place now, than I was not even 12 months ago, like probably 6 months ago”

(young person 5)

“[my hopefulness for his future is] a million times better. One of the massive things that I came away with, if there's a positive to look at, it's the fact that it happened now and we're dealing with it now because this is going to set him up for his life... He's got the mechanisms in place now that are just going to set him up for an extremely happy life”

(carer 1)

“It still happens, but I know that it's like a work in progress. It's something I've been working on for a long time”

(young person 6)

“I'm not ashamed to live my life anymore”

(young person 1)

Compared to before engaging with YFlex:

63%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE

rate their hopefulness for the future as much better or better.

89%

OF EXITED SURVEY RESPONDENTS

rate their hopefulness for the future as much better or better.

(n=9)

100%

OF FAMILIES/CARERS

rate their hopefulness for the young person's wellbeing as much better or better.

Young people are nested in trusting care networks

YFlex's expansive service connections promote awareness and choice, and streamline access to options including health services, Centrelink, alcohol and other drug services, and employment services. As one young person (2) said "he gave me a wide selection of people I can go to, and it really helped out". Providing choice, transparency, and agency was especially valuable during periods of transition.

"[having information and being kept informed is] 110% important, because I don't want to feel in the dark, and I don't want to feel lost. And they don't make me feel in the dark or lost. Because I already feel that way by myself"

(young person 3)

"The service has been great in terms of referrals and letters and correspondence. We needed some help with correspondence to get [young person] enrolled in [education option] and the service was happy to oblige and were fast in writing that. So those kinda logistical issues, absolutely fantastic"

(carer 1)

88%

OF YOUNG PEOPLE

strongly agree or agree that staff were open and collaborative with me when preparing me for exit from the service.

Establishing networks and strengthening them prior to exit fosters confidence and means that young people and their families solidify care connections for the future.

"Obviously, all of the underlying issues are still there, but that's not an overnight fix. But yeah, definitely having that continuity of care now, it's just taken a lot of pressure off him and me and his dad as well"

(carer 3)

Improved relationships with self, friends, families/carers, and the community allow young people to weave nests of support fit for their individual needs. Young people craft their own templates for safety, support, and wellbeing.

"I was like some doctors - well, some people you see, - it's not like they're really listening. They're just trying to stick you into a box and give you a pill and send you on your way, and I was so used to it that I didn't know that I could - like, there was a few ways to heal sort of, yeah"

(young person 1)

"The biggest thing I learnt that it's okay not to be okay, if that makes sense at all. It's normal not to be good, but it's always important and good to have someone that can understand that and try and help you overcome and just make life that little easier every chat"

(young person 2)

“I work across two different
catchment areas and
I wish that YFlex were
available in both of them,
instead of only one”

(stakeholder 26)

RECOMMENDATIONS

YFlex receives consistently positive feedback, and when asked about possible improvements, one stakeholder (36) noted its *“hard to improve such a wonderful service”*. They weren’t alone, with many young people also challenged to offer improvements.

The following recommendations have been suggested to enhance the already high quality of YFlex’s support.

Duration of support

Several participants called for the option of a time-limited extension to YFlex support to consolidate progress for those not quite ready to exit at twelve months. Some stakeholders expressed disappointment at the short-to-medium term model of care, and that it can leave some young people *“feeling abandoned”* (stakeholder 15).

Whilst time-limited services do maximise the limited time available and prioritise the establishment of ongoing support networks, the option of an additional 6 months where needed would ensure continuity of care and honour the needs of individual needs of young people over rigid service policies.

Expand YFlex

Young people, families/carers, and stakeholders all laud the benefits of YFlex, and aspire for enhanced funding so it can be available to more young people. One stakeholder (30) calls for *“additional funding to increase the service capacity to meet unprecedented need and ensure minimal wait list times for young people”* and that *“investment in ongoing funding for this program is needed”*.

“It takes quite a while for me to open up, as I said. So it’s like – a couple months before you really, really get into the really deep stuff, and then the 12 months is ending by the time you’re getting in to the really, really, really deep stuff, and you kind of just have to cut it off... Even if it was just an extra 6 months on to the 12. It would probably be a lot better for other kids as well”

(young person 5)

“One year is NOT enough time for some of the young people in the program. Please resource it into the future so support can be extended in cases of need”

(stakeholder 7)

“Hoping YFlex continues to get funded!!! Cannot speak more highly of the flexibility and commitment to the young person I referred to YFlex”

(stakeholder 8)

Whilst young people and referrers noted that wait times were less than many other services, they called for increased service funding so they would be eliminated altogether. A small minority stated they had “*very little contact or check-in*” (stakeholder 35) whilst on the waitlist and hadn’t heard from the service “*for a really long time*” (young person 7), and whilst more respondents spoke to the value of the active support they received on the waitlist, these outliers serve as an important reminder of the need for consistency.

Respondents seek an expansion not just of YFlex’s current services, but of such a model across the state. One staff member (2) noted that “*every time I share something about the program with other services, they reflect that they wish there was more of that around*”. A stakeholder (24) called YFlex “*a unique service and one that I hope is one day scaled and expanded to other regions*”. As the adjoining quotes attest, the need for enhanced youth services is significant, and YFlex offers a highly valued template for effective multidisciplinary support.

In line with calls to expand YFlex and the acuity of consumer need, some stakeholders recommended upskilling staff to support young people with more intensive needs, as well as enhanced family systems expertise.

Enhanced promotion

Some young people, families/carers, and stakeholders advocated for enhanced service promotion and online information, so access isn’t determined by a proactive parent who knows how to search for services or a referral from a school, headspace, or other service.

Whilst service capacity necessarily limits promotional activities, limited service engagement amongst some cohorts, especially young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and/or with a refugee experience, suggests service equity could be enhanced through more intentional promotional activities and strengthening connections with representative local community groups.

“Access to YFlex for young people in other areas - particularly in Darebin! It really saddens me that just because someone lives in a particular council area, they miss out on the support they may desperately need. There is a huge gap between the support that is possible through Tier 2 (eg mental health care plan, headspace) and Tier 3 (CAMHS) and it feels extremely discriminatory that some people don’t have access to the support they need. Of all of the models of care or teams that provide support in that space between Tier 2 and Tier 3 YFLEX is the most effective and valuable model in my opinion. (I have worked in mental health Triage/Access for public mental health services (CAMHS for over 5 years in both this catchment and other area mental health services and I have never been as impressed as I am with what YFLEX offers)”
(stakeholder 32)

“I work in a state-wide service and I would feel that the young people I work with who have lived in out-of-home care would be well served by this service model state-wide. These young people currently have limited access to trauma-informed mental health supports as they are typically regarded as too complex for most services. It would be great for YFlex to be able to share their service model and approach more broadly across the state, especially as new funding and services become available with the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission”
(stakeholder 38)

“I didn’t know these kind of services existed. And I think it would be – I don’t know if this is – if they’re allowed to do this, but I think they should promote themselves a little bit more. I don’t know if that’s something – because I’d never heard of them, and I’d never seen anything online when I’d looked it up, like mental health services online”

(young person 3)

Enhanced collaboration and community engagement

Respondents overwhelmingly praised YFlex’s collaborative approach, however some stakeholders identified proactive care collaboration and inter-agency collaboration as areas for improvement. Such activities were possible and prioritised in YFlex’s early days; staff strengthened partnerships with Aboriginal organisations by attending community events, refugee communities by connecting with services such as Foundation House and Orygen’s Refugee Access Scheme, and headspace by co-facilitating therapeutic sessions in schools. With limited funding, YFlex’s current focus on direct practice means fewer opportunities to collaborate with partner agencies.

Groups

Some young people expressed a desire for peer support groups, both social and therapeutic, to foster mutuality and social connections. YFlex stopped offering groups prior to the pandemic Covid-19 due to low attendance but there may be renewed demand after two years of restrictions and isolation.

Shared resources

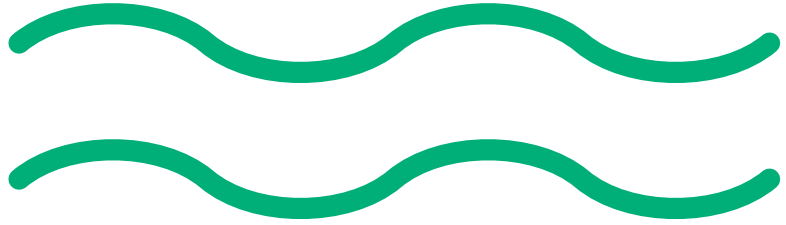
One young person (1) suggested that *“some sort of mental health library would be pretty cool. There were a lot of books that [staff] recommended and she gave me pages from, and I’d be like, yeah, I’ll go and buy the book, and it’s like a \$50 scholar book. I think some sort of library would have been cool”*.

Streamlined reporting

YFlex staff report into two data systems, resulting in a significant proportion of their time being dedicated to administrative duties and duplicate reporting. There is benefit in revisiting these requirements to free-up staff time towards direct support.

Longer-term funding

Since its inception in 2017, YFlex has been funded through 12-month contracts. Short-term funding negatively impacts staff confidence, job security, service planning, and recruitment. Given the evident need for, and benefits of, YFlex services, investment in longer-term contracts is recommended.



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