



THRIVE YOUTH SPACE RECOMMENDATION REPORT

This report has been written by the Thrive Youth Space Project Team
as part of Leadership Great South Coast's 2024 Community Leadership Program.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the Gunditjmara people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work in Portland. We pay our deepest respects to Elders past and present and recognise their enduring connection to the land, waters, skies, and community. We honour their resilience, rich cultural heritage, and ongoing contributions, and we commit to listening and learning as we explore the needs of young people in Portland and surrounding areas.



Leadership Great South Coast Inc (LGSC) provides an annual Community Leadership Program (the program) for aspiring and emerging leaders from all sectors of the Great South Coast region. The program builds relationships and networks between sectors, allowing participants to benefit from a variety of perspectives when considering the nature of leadership and the future of our community and its economic prosperity.

A key aspect of the program focuses on project management, engaging participants in a community project and the action learning cycle. Participants work together to develop a project to benefit communities within the Great South Coast, applying project management skills through their community project.

APPRECIATION OF SUPPORT

Thank you to the members of the Community Reference Group who gave their time and expertise to help guide the program participants in delivering this project. We thank

- Meghan Bennett** Glenelg Shire Council
- Melissa Smith** Glenelg Shire Council
- Tina Biggs** Glenelg Shire Council
- Tiana Richardson** Glenelg & Southern Grampians LLEN
- Kane Forbes** Hands Up Casterton
- Nicole Carr** United Way Glenelg
- Lee-Anne Nelson** VicPol
- Catherine Darkin** Leadership Great South Coast

Thank you to everyone involved for your participation, cooperation, and invaluable support in making this report possible.



Thrive Youth Space Project Team Members:

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The Leadership Great South Coast Thrive Youth Space Recommendation Report is an initiative of the program. Information gathered for the purpose of this report reflects a point in time and falls within the scope of phase one of the project brief.

Executive Summary

Thrive Youth Space Recommendation Report

Prepared by the Thrive Youth Space Project Team
Leadership Great South Coast 2024 Community Leadership Program participants.

Purpose of the Project

The Thrive Youth Space Project aims to assess the need and interest of community in establishing a dedicated youth space in Portland.

This report captures the key findings and insights gained from the survey data, identifying the need for a space in Portland where young people (ages 12-25) feel safe, connected, and empowered.

The report also includes recommendations to assist the local community to progress a youth space concept (phase two).

Identified Needs and Benefits

Portland young people face challenges, including high disengagement from education and employment, social isolation, and limited access to safe recreational spaces.

A dedicated youth space may help address these issues by providing:

- Social and Drop-In Spaces for connection and recreation.
- Inclusive, Safe, and Creative Spaces that reflect diverse culture, identities and interests.
- Mentorship and Connections to Support Services promoting education, positive mental health, and life skill development.

Community partnerships and consultation with young people will be critical to creating a vibrant, inclusive youth space that supports Portland's young people into the future.

Community Support for a Youth Space

214 Responses 90% Support

From the 214 survey responses, there was strong community support, with 90% of participants affirming the need for a youth space in Portland.

Both young people and adults recognise the benefits, including enhanced safety, increased social connections, and opportunities for skill development.

This support aligns with priorities in local and state plans, such as the Glenelg Shire Community Plan and Victoria's Youth Strategy.

Key Recommendations

- 1. Establish a Steering Committee:**
Recruit a diverse group of community members to lead phase two of the project. A key role of this committee will be to select the preferred governance model.
- 2. Increase Awareness of Youth Space Benefits:**
Launch initiatives to inform young people about potential activities, programs, and support available.
- 3. Promote Involvement of Young People:**
Ensure young people have a voice in planning and decision-making to create a space aligned with their needs.
- 4. Youth Led Programming:**
Offering flexible options for younger and older participants, including designated times for those over 18.
- 5. Create Inclusive Youth Programs:**
Recognise, celebrate and reflect the diversity of young people living in Portland.



PROJECT AIM

This project aims to determine the need and desire for a dedicated youth space in Portland, where young people (aged 12-25) can feel safe, supported and celebrated.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Phase One: (LGSC involvement)

Establish a Community Reference Group to assist with the delivery of Phase One of the project.

The Community Reference Group will consist of community members, businesses, and organisations, who work with or are linked to youth in the Portland area.

Engage with community to gain insights on the need for a youth space and develop a Recommendation Report, summarising key findings, proposing a governance structure for a youth space, and establishing a Steering Committee or Advisory Group to guide the project development to the next phase.

Phase Two: (post LGSC)

The Steering Committee or Advisory Group will lead the second phase, taking ownership of the project's implementation and sustained progress.

HOW YOUTH SPACES SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Youth spaces are a hub for social connection, personal growth and community wellbeing, offering a safe supportive environment for young people. By offering fun, flexible, and meaningful experiences, research¹ shows these spaces reduce social isolation whilst empowering young people to explore recreational, creative, and educational activities and develop life skills whilst forming meaningful connections within their community.

THE NEED

Portland faces significant challenges, including above-average disengagement from education and employment, elevated crime rates, rising mental health concerns, widespread social isolation, and a male suicide rate of 31% higher than the Victorian average². This project seeks to determine the need for a dedicated youth space and lay the groundwork for solutions.

WHY A YOUTH SPACE?

A dedicated youth space seeks to reduce risks associated with loneliness, homelessness, and crime, with potential to strengthen social networks and improve overall well-being of young people and the broader community³.

A youth space would serve as a critical support system in Portland, helping young people reconnect with community, education, and employment. A youth space would increase pathways for young people to access support, and provide opportunities for them to explore their interests, talents and passions.

Recent studies in the UK have shown that not only do youth spaces reduce truancy and anti-social behaviour such as consuming alcohol, but these young people were also more likely to have good health and want to go to university⁴.

There was also evidence that these positive changes persist over time; when they reached age 20, young people who had attended a youth space were more likely to be engaged in education and to volunteer in their free time.

1. Report Youth Connection Project - Themes and Opportunity Areas for Action.pdf

2. Disengagement by age | Glenelg Shire | Community profile (id.com.au)

3. Youth provision and life outcomes: a Youth Evidence Base report for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Publication type February 1, 2024

4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fac3c33703c42001158f03f/Strand_1_Report_-_Youth_Evidence_Base_-_SQW_v13-accessible.pdf

RATIONALE

Disengagement from Education and Employment

Young people living in Portland face high levels of disengagement at 11.6%, above the regional average⁵. A dedicated youth space would help re-engage young people through access to study spaces, job skills development, and creative exploration, offering flexible learning opportunities at their own pace.

Disadvantage and Homelessness

Decline in young people attaining Year 12 or equivalent, increased homelessness, and financial hardship remain persistent throughout the region⁶. These challenges disproportionately affect marginalised young people, including young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and First Nations communities. By offering access to free internet, food, cooking facilities, creative spaces, and flexible recreational activities, a youth space would help reduce persistent barriers hindering Portland's young people from completing their studies and forming social connection.

Safe and Supportive Space

A dedicated youth space offers a safe refuge for young people in Portland, where crime rates are higher than in metropolitan areas. A youth space would provide a stable,

welcoming environment for young people experiencing social exclusion, including financial constraints, family violence, lack of access to safe spaces, limited opportunities, mental health challenges, bullying, and other social issues⁷.

A youth space would not only offer a safe space that is warm, supervised, supportive and culturally safe, but would also promote healthy behaviors, encourage positive choices, and foster a sense of security and well-being, helping to alleviate young people's stressors that might otherwise lead to negative outcomes⁸.

Loneliness

Many young people experience loneliness, which is linked to serious health issues like anxiety, depression, and weakened cognitive and physical development⁹. A youth space would create opportunities for social connections and provide a sense of belonging, helping to reduce these risks.

Suicide

With a male suicide rate 31% higher than the state average¹⁰, a youth space could offer information about mental health support and build community resilience by promoting emotional well-being, social connectedness, and engagement with local community.

Victorian Government Initiatives

The Victorian Government's recent funding initiatives underscore a strong commitment to creating safe, inclusive spaces that meet the needs of young people across the state.

Key programs, such as the Youth Hubs Grant Program for 2022-2023 and the Engage! 2025-27 grants, support the establishment or enhancement of youth spaces across Victoria. These programs focus on construction, upgrades, and youth-centred co-design. These programs address critical needs by promoting well-being,

social connection, and skill-building, especially in rural and regional areas where resources are limited.

Aligned with Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027, these programs reflect the government's dedication to empowering young people and strengthening community engagement. This proactive investment creates stable, developmentally supportive spaces, which contribute to long-term resilience and engagement for young people living in Victoria.

Local and State Plans

Establishing a youth space in Portland aligns with priorities as outlined in the 2040 Glenelg Shire Community Plan and Vision, and Glenelg Shire Council Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025, Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027, and Beyond the Bell GSC's Youth Conversations Report: 2040 Glenelg Shire Community Plan and Vision (Appendix 1).

5. Glenelg Shire Council disengagement by age <https://profile.id.com.au/glenelg/disengagement-by-age>
6. Great South Coast 2020 Health & Wellbeing Profile
7. Mission Australia - Major study reveals when young people are socially excluded their mental health suffers
8. Crime Statistics Agency <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/crime-statistics/latest-crime-data-by-area>
9. Data & Statistics - Lifeline Australia <https://www.lifeline.org.au/resources/data-and-statistics/>
10. Glenelg Shire Municipal Health & Wellbeing Plan 2021 - 2025
11. Nillumbik InfoCouncil; Victorian Government Connect; Family Fairness Housing; YacVic

METHOD

To achieve the objectives of phase one, the Project Team consulted with a Community Reference Group, made up of local Portland representatives who work with, support or are involved with young people who live in Portland and surrounding areas.

The purpose of this initial consultation was to gather:

Relevant local statistics, surveys, and/or data from the past 6 months to 3 years to evaluate existing community sentiment regarding a youth space in Portland.

Information on existing youth hubs/spaces or programs in Portland and surrounding areas.

Endorsements or anecdotes highlighting the need for a youth space.

Community contacts for broader engagement.

Findings from this consultation found there was no current data available to allow the Project Team to ascertain if there was a need and interest for a dedicated youth space in Portland, resulting in the decision to conduct further community consultation via the Thrive Youth Space Survey.

Survey Development and Distribution

Through consultation with the Community Reference Group, the survey was designed to answer key questions to identify the community's need and desire for a youth space in Portland. The survey used conditional logic to tailor each question to the respondent's focus group.

Demographic data was gathered to ensure the survey captured a representative mix of respondents with a strong youth voice.

The survey was distributed through a range of channels including social media (Facebook and Instagram), local school newsletters, emails to stakeholders (see appendix 2),

handouts at a local Portland Blue Light Disco, posters in shop windows across Portland, and workshops at two local schools.

This outreach strategy ensured strong community participation and provided valuable feedback.

THRIVE YOUTH SPACE SURVEY



Focus Groups

Respondents were divided into

6 Categories:

**Youth
(12-25)**

**Parent/
Guardian**

**Grand
parent/
Carer**

**School/
Teacher/
Youth
Worker**

**Organisation/
Business/Club
Representative**

**Other/
Community**

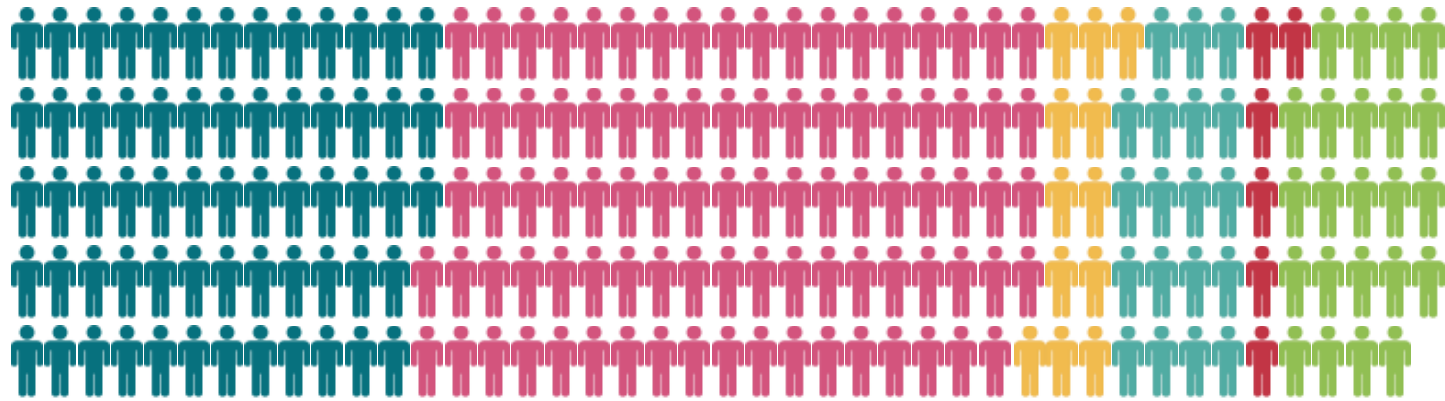
Youth(12-25)
63 Responses - 29%

This age group constituted 29% (63 individuals) of the total respondents, demonstrating strong engagement in discussions about establishing a youth space.

Parent/Guardian
91 Responses - 42%

Parents/Guardians accounted for 42% of respondents (91 individuals), reflecting significant interest from primary caregivers and close family concerned about the needs and well-being of young people living in Portland.

**Grandparent/
Carer**
12 Responses - 6%



A total of **214 community members** participated in the survey.

**School/ Teacher/
Youth Worker**
19 Responses - 9%

Representing 9% of the responses (19 participants), this group indicates that educators and youth service providers view the youth space initiative as crucial for the community's development and support for young people.

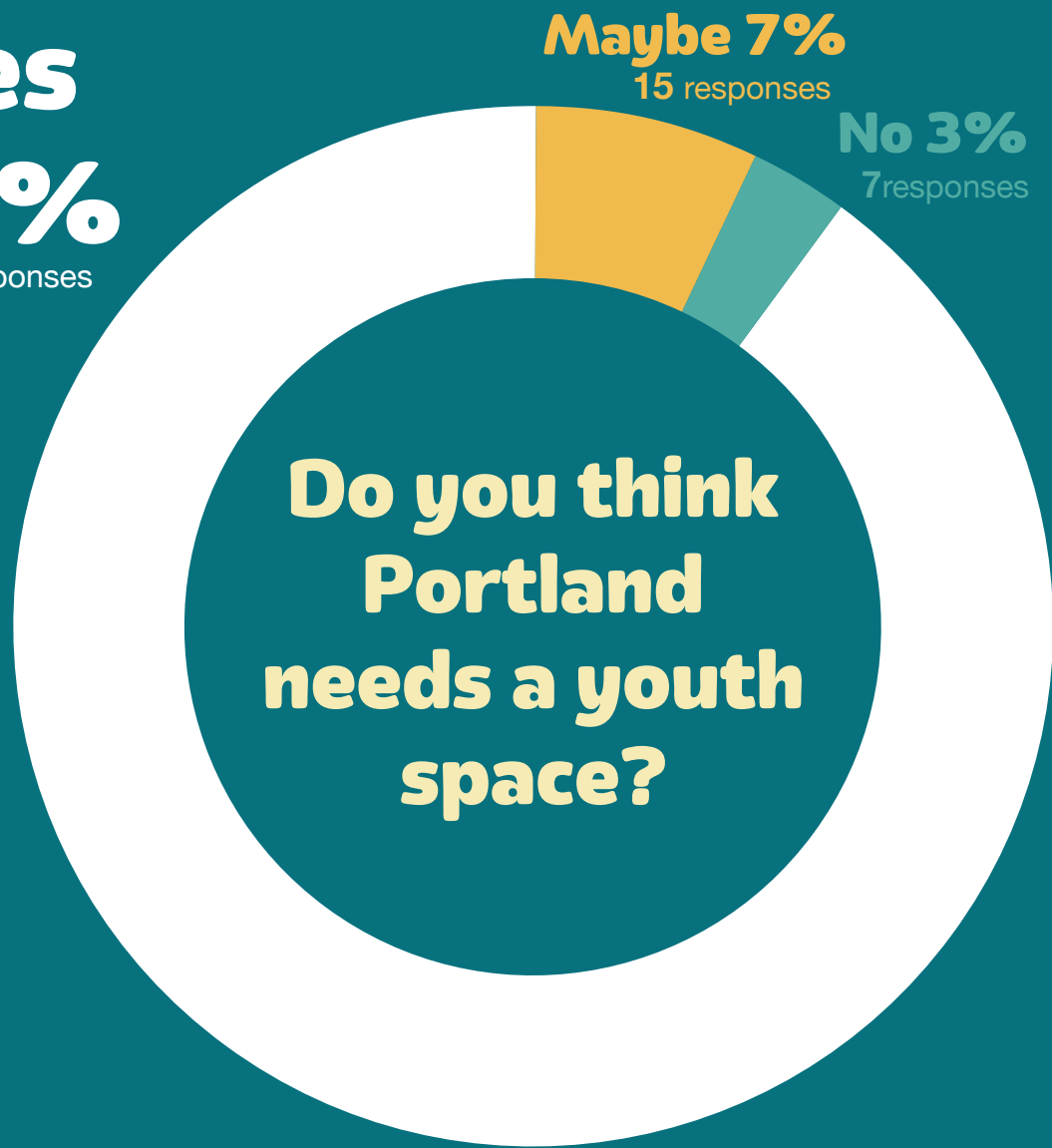
**Organisation/
Business/Club
Representative**
6 Responses - 3%

**Other/
Community**
23 Responses - 11%

Survey Results

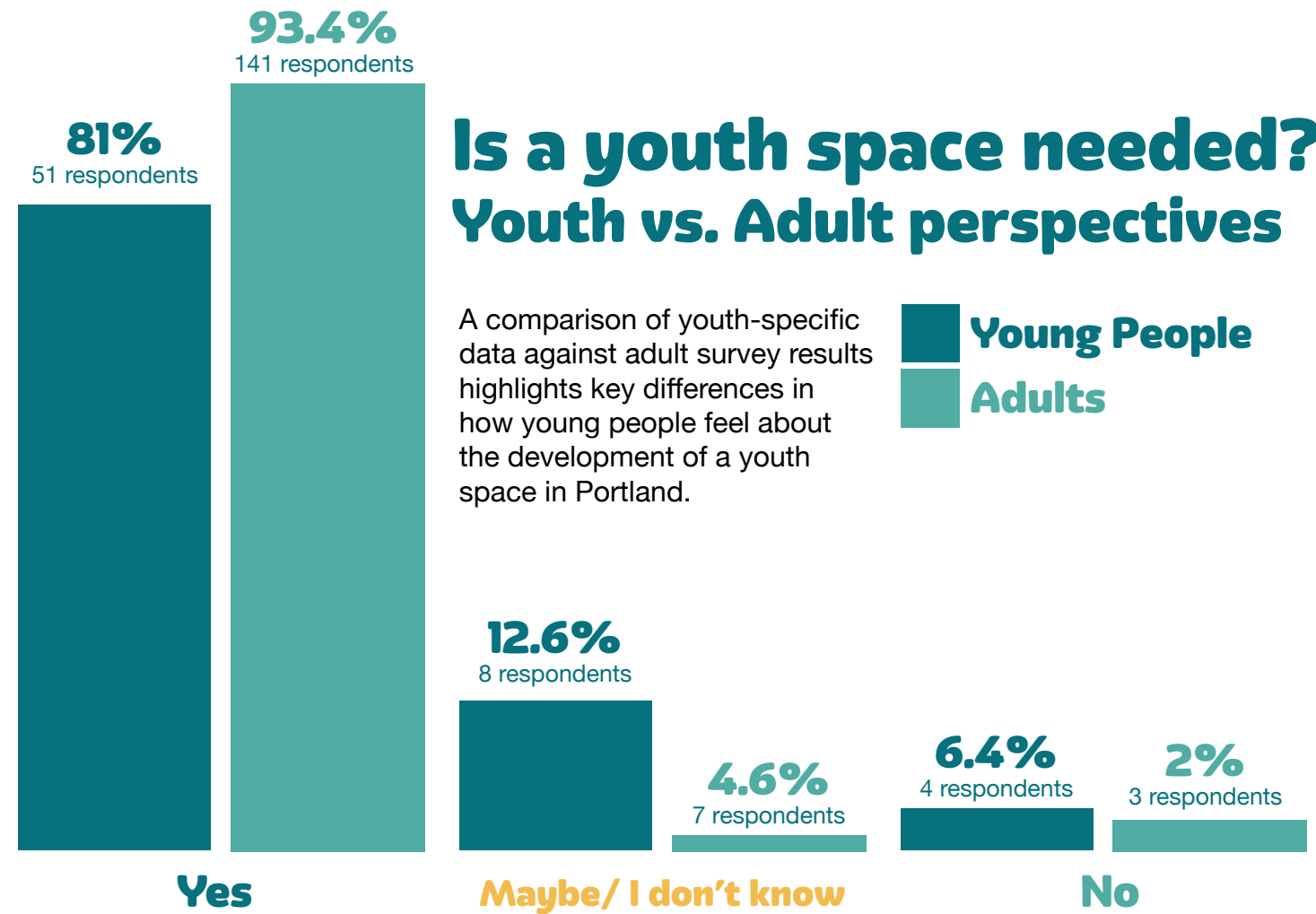
A total of **214** community members participated in the survey.

Yes
90%
192 responses



These findings underscore a strong community interest in establishing a dedicated youth space in Portland.

Is a youth space needed? Youth vs. Adult perspectives



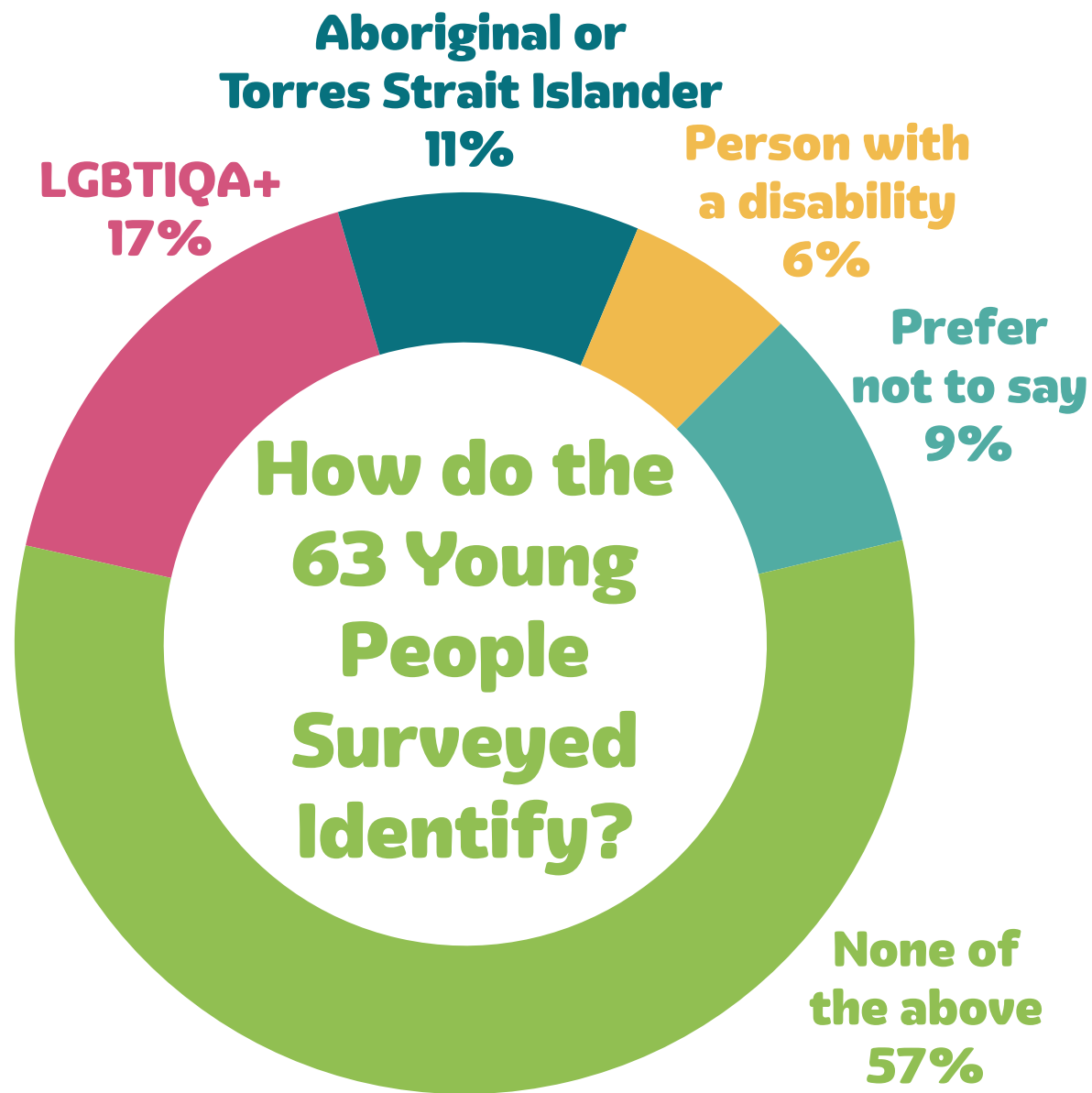
Key Observations:

<p>Yes</p> <p>Out of the 214 total survey respondents, there was an overwhelming indication that both young people and adults strongly support the idea of a youth space in Portland.</p>	<p>Maybe/ I Don't know</p> <p>There was a higher proportion of young people (12.6%) who responded with 'maybe/I don't know', compared to adults (4.6%). This may be an indication of young people's unfamiliarity with the concept of a youth space.</p>	<p>No</p> <p>Slightly more youth (6.4%) opposed the idea than adults (2%), though numbers remain small in both groups.</p>
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Insights

Young people generally support the idea of a youth space, though more responded with "maybe" compared to adults, suggesting some uncertainty about what the space could provide in terms of activities, programs, or resources.

Did we capture diverse young voices?



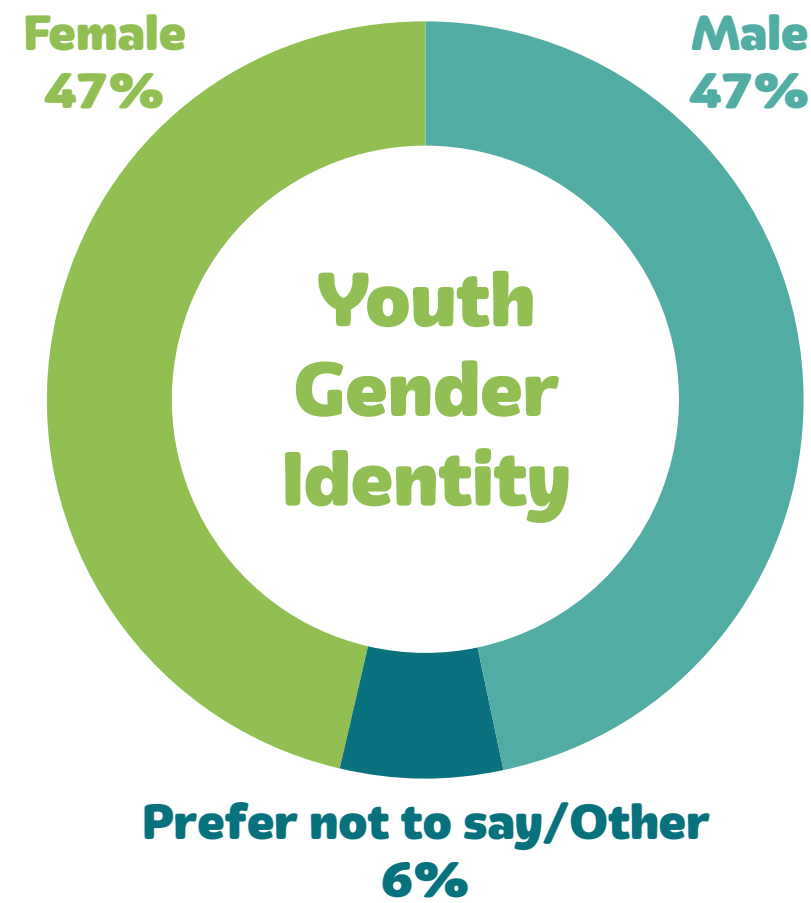
LGBTIQ+:
17% of respondents identified as LGBTIQ+, reflecting a diverse array of sexual orientations and gender identities among the young people surveyed.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander:
11% of respondents demonstrated representation from Indigenous communities.

Person with a Disability:
6% of respondents identified as having a disability.

Prefer Not to Say:
9% of respondents preferred not to disclose their identity, reflecting the need for safe and welcoming environments.

None of the Above:
57% of respondents indicated that they do not identify with any of the survey's demographic categories.



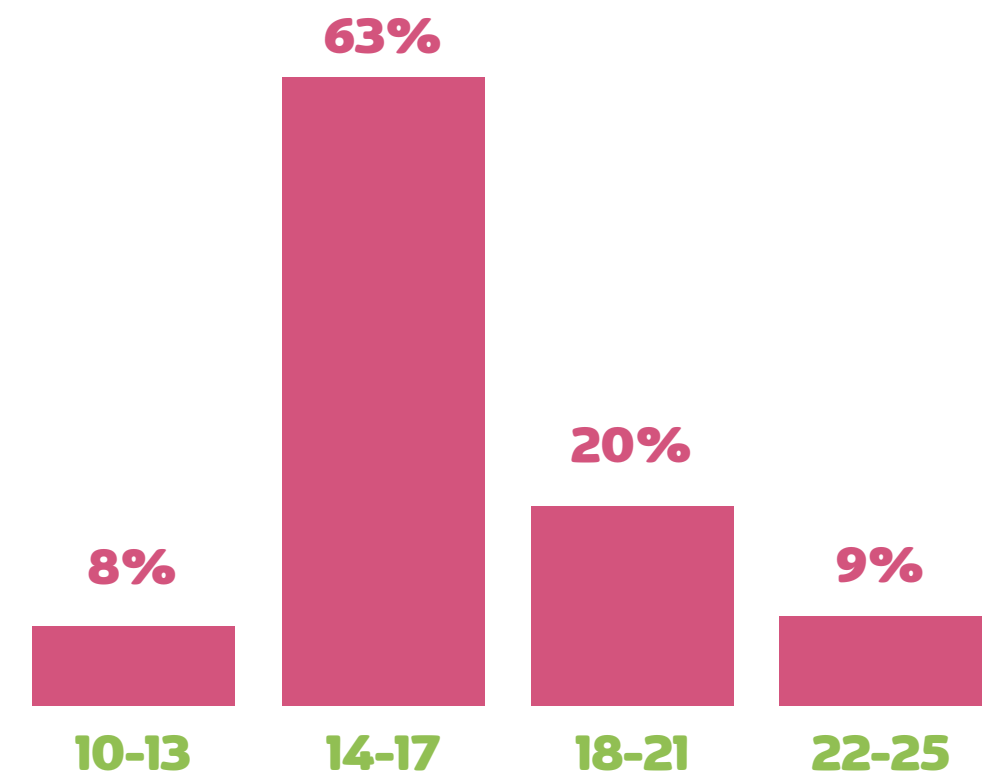
The survey revealed an equal distribution between female and male respondents, each making up 47% of the total.

A smaller number, 6%, identified as "Prefer not to say" or "Other," reflecting diversity in gender identity and shows that the survey successfully captured a representative sample of the population.

Youth Age groups

A significant proportion (63%) of the young people who responded to the survey were aged between 14 and 17 years.

It is uncertain at this point to know if the high response rate of 14 -17 year olds is indicative of future participation in the youth space or simply if our survey better targeted this age group. Further consultation with young people across all age groups in phase two of the project will help confirm this target age group.



Preferred Types of Spaces

Young People versus Adult Priorities

Young people showed the highest interest in a youth space relating to recreational and social activities that foster belonging by providing support and sense of safety and offer opportunities to prepare and eat food.

This suggests a need for informal social settings, emotional support, and reliable access to food. Cost is also a significant factor for youth, who prefer low-cost or free spaces to avoid social exclusion due to financial constraints.

Adult survey respondents placed greater emphasis on spaces that offer the opportunity for young people to express themselves and explore their creativity as well as support young people with personal growth and building skills. Adult survey respondents appear to view the youth space as an opportunity to support Portland's young people to develop life skills, confidence and a sense of purpose.

Both young people and community survey respondents indicated they placed high value on social and recreational spaces as well as supportive and safe spaces, highlighting their shared desire to have spaces for Portland's young people where they can feel safe, connected, and accepted. In addition to being essential in fostering well-being and a sense of belonging, these shared priorities suggest that inclusive, emotionally supported spaces are highly desired and needed among the Portland community.

Opportunities for Community Involvement

Different perspectives of young people and the broader community create a unique opportunity for further multigenerational collaboration and involvement.

Community involvement can help enrich structured programs that align with young people's needs, while assisting with affordability and accessibility. Community members of all ages will have the opportunity to become mentors and/or volunteers.

These insights demonstrate the importance of designing a youth space that addresses both immediate needs (safety, socialising, and access to food) and long-term goals (re-engagement with education and employment).

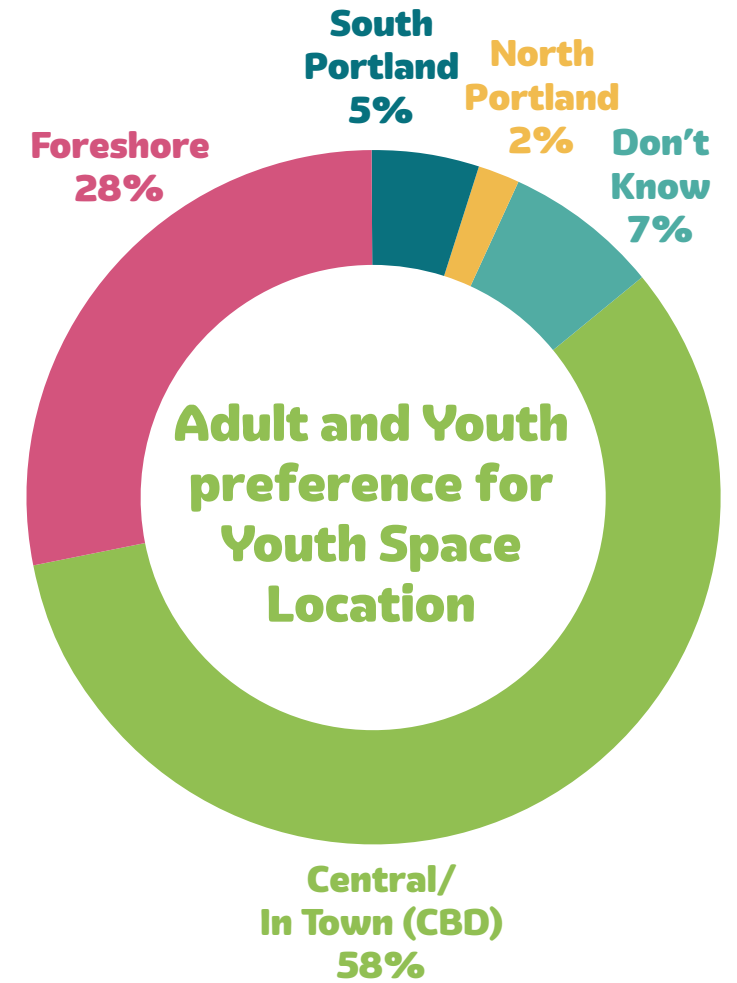
Involving young people in the planning and design will ensure the youth space truly meets their needs and interests, removes barriers to accessibility, and fosters a sense of ownership and belonging.

By balancing informal social areas with structured, skill-building spaces, this kind of environment can foster connection, personal growth, and well-being, creating an inclusive and impactful space for both young people and the community.

"They want a space they can call their own and have a say in what activities they want to do and how the space is run."

"Having mentors available. Some kids don't have a good mentor in their life to learn from."

"A place to hang out with their friends so they don't have to always be outside at the skatepark or walking the streets."



86% of respondents prefer the location of a youth space to be in the Central Business District (CBD) or Portland Foreshore.

Conclusion

The data demonstrates strong community support for the development of a youth space in Portland. Collective backing from a variety of key stakeholders, including young people, underscores the importance of creating a space for young people that addresses their needs effectively.

Key Recommendations

From analysis of data collected during Phase One, the Thrive Youth Space Project Team make the following recommendations:

1. Establish a Steering Committee

Establishment of a Steering Committee or Advisory Group to represent the local Portland community to progress Phase Two of the youth space project with the aim to establish a youth space in Portland.

2. Increase Awareness of Youth Space Benefits

Raise community awareness of the project, including information about what a youth space is, its benefits and what it can potentially offer.

Suggestions for further community engagement include:

- Workshops.
- Information sessions.
- Outreach activities targeting young people e.g. Visits to secondary schools, TAFE and sporting clubs.

3. Promote Involvement of Young People

Following the formation of a Steering Committee, establish mechanisms to ensure young people can actively engage and contribute to the planning and development of the youth space. Involving young people in the decision-making processes ensures the space is established as an environment reflecting their needs and interests and increases the chance they will engage with the youth space once established.

4. Youth Led Programming

To maximise engagement of young people across the 12-25 age group, develop strategies to address the differing needs and interests of both the younger and older cohorts. For example, offering separate times and programs.

5. Create Inclusive Youth Programs

Recognise, celebrate and reflect the diversity of young people living in Portland and promote a culture of acceptance, inclusion and belonging.

Suggested actions include:

- Initial consultation and ongoing engagement with established local LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and disability services, schools, organisations, groups and networks.
- Provide accessible and inclusive environments to ensure young people with a physical disability can easily access the youth space.
- Incorporate low-sensory environments within the youth space to cater to young people with high sensory needs.
- Be guided by the 'Social Model of Disabilities'¹² to ensure sustainability within the youth space that meets young peoples diverse needs.

12. <https://url.au.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/ZOJbCk81wAfELRDH2f8HGmzKB?domain=pwd.org.au/>

Governance Models

Once a Steering Committee has been established, a governance model should be considered.

A desktop review has identified the three most common governance models for youth spaces across the state are Local Government Area (LGA) administration, auspice or incorporated association.

This review includes insights from 43 members of the Youth Hub Network (Victoria) and three local case studies (Appendix 3).

Local Government Area (LGA) Administration:

Youth spaces operating under an LGA administration governance model offer Council-led programs. Benefits of an LGA administration model include access to established policies and procedures, insurance, and potentially stable funding. This model requires establishing how decision-making and program flexibility would look. As the graph above shows, this was by far the most popular governance model for youth spaces.

Auspice:

Youth spaces operating under an auspice model involve having an arrangement with an established organisation, who receives the funding and enters into relevant agreements on behalf of the youth space. An auspice model provides access to established policies and procedures, insurance, resources and support. Protocols for decision making and program flexibility would need to be established between the auspice organisation and youth space personnel.

Incorporated Association:

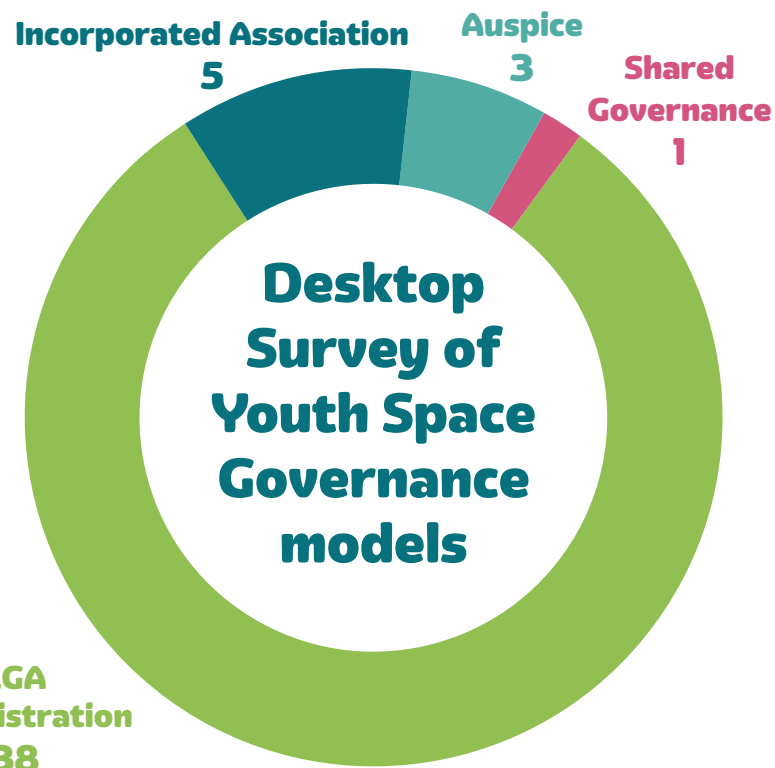
Youth spaces operating as an incorporated association allows for complete autonomy and program flexibility, tailored to community needs. An incorporated association model requires significant administrative effort and may face challenges in securing sustainable funding.

Governance Model Recommendation

After assessing the governance model options and in collaboration with the Community Reference Group, it is recommended to advocate for a youth space in Portland under an LGA administration or auspice model, with the long-term goal of becoming an incorporated association.

Operating under an LGA administration or auspice model during the first stages would balance support and flexibility by providing access to established infrastructure such as policies and procedures, insurance, and administrative resources, while reducing the immediate burden for the Steering Committee.

Following additional scoping for funding and capacity of both the steering committee and the chosen model, this approach would allow the youth space to operate without the complexities of incorporation, offering time to grow and develop its vision under the guidance of an experienced and well-resourced organisation before merging to an incorporated association model.



STEERING COMMITTEE AND FUTURE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



10 community members expressed a direct interest in joining a Steering Committee or Advisory Group. 54 respondents indicated a 'maybe' and/or a desire for further information.

Furthermore, 46 respondents provided their email addresses and offered various forms of support, demonstrating strong community engagement and willingness to contribute.

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND FUTURE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community members who provided their email address will be invited to an event, where they will have the opportunity to complete an Expression of Interest (EOI) if they wish to join the Steering Committee to drive forward Phase Two of the project.

The strong interest from community and diversity of offers of support as noted in the graph, highlights the community's commitment to ensuring the success of this initiative.

Community Reference Group members from Victoria Police (VicPol), Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network (GSGLEEN), Glenelg Shire Council, and Thrive Youth Space Project Team participant Kim Ayling have made a commitment to join the Steering Committee.

Kim Ayling will coordinate a first Phase Two Steering Committee meeting by early 2025, leading the next steps for the initiative. All interested Reference Group Members will receive an invitation to attend, with details provided closer to the date.

Interested in joining Advisory Group or Steering Committee



APPENDIX 1

LOCAL AND STATE PLANS

Glenelg Shire Council, Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025

Goal 1: Objective 1.2 – Building Mentally Well Communities

- Support mental wellbeing and mental health education.
- Encourage young people to seek help early and support early intervention.

Goal 2: Objective 2.2 – Building Resilient and Socially Connected Communities

- Strengthen belonging and community pride.
- Support volunteering recruitment, retention and recognition.
- Address issues of loneliness.
- Provide opportunities for social connection and community participation.

To consider further with youth consultation:

Goal 1: Objective 1.1 – Initiating opportunities for healthy and active living

- Provide healthy food options.
- Address issues of food security.
- Provide access to sport and informal recreation opportunities.
- Support smoking cessation.
- Reduce harmful impacts of drug and alcohol use.
- Deliver health promotion programs.
- Support healthy and active ageing.

Goal 2: Objective 2.3 – Support Participation in Education, Lifelong Learning and Employment

- Address school retention and readiness.
- Build pathways for employment opportunities.
- Provide formal and informal learning opportunities and upskilling.
- Support financial stability.

<https://www.glenelg.vic.gov.au/Our-Community/Health-and-Wellbeing/Health-and-Wellbeing-Plan>

Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022 – 2027:

- Priority 1** Young people are healthy and well.
- Priority 2** Young people are safe and secure.
- Priority 4** Young people are respected and involved in decisions in their communities.
- Priority 5** Young people are confident and strong in their identity and culture and are supported in their community.

We will:
Provide young people with more ways to connect to their communities and celebrate their culture and diverse identities.

Key actions:
Provide local youth hubs in priority areas, co-designed with young people.

<https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-youth-strategy-2022-2027>

Youth Conversations report Beyond the Bell GSC

Recommendation 1:

Strengthen and expand innovative programs linking community engagement and education provision:

Work with young people, schools and community organisations to identify and build on local examples of innovation where young peoples key connections to their community are being integrated into their schooling program and leading to improved educational attainment and outcomes.

Engage with young people, schools and community organisations to identify opportunities for the development of new initiatives and programs leveraging the region's unique range of sports, arts, culture and events that have been identified by young people as important to their community connection.

Document and strengthen the community's wider understanding of the positive impacts on personal, community and educational value of these innovative programs.

<https://btb.org.au/2021/07/05/youth-conversations-final-report-2021/>

APPENDIX 2

The following stakeholders were contacted to complete the survey:

KEY STAKEHOLDERS, SCHOOLS, ORGANISATIONS, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY:

Categories	Stakeholder
Community Organisation	Members of the Community
Organisation	Are Able Portland
Organisation	Beyond the Bell Great South Coast
Organisation	Brophy Family and Youth Services
Organisation	Dept Education & Training
Organisation	Glenelg Shire Council
Organisation	Hamilton Youth Victoria Incorporated
Organisation	Hands Up Casterton
Organisation	Headspace
Organisation	Koori Academy of Excellence
Organisation	Portland Blue Light
Organisation	South West Community Foundation
Organisation	United Way Glenelg
Organisation	VicHealth Local Government Partnership
Organisation	VicPol
Organisation	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.
Organisation	Western District PHN
Organisation	Windamara Aboriginal Corporation
Organisation	Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd
Organisation	Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YacVic)
Service Provider	FReeZA Program
Service Provider	Glenelg P2E
Service Provider	Live4Life Glenelg
Service Provider	Seachange (Portland)
Service Provider	School Welfare Group (PSC)
Service Provider	Standing Tall (Heywood)
Service Provider	Wellways Portland
Service Provider	YUMCHA Youth Diversity Group
Service Provider	Youth Hub Network (coordinator Youth S's)
Youth	Bayview College
Youth	Casterton Secondary College
Youth	Heywood Secondary College
Youth	Kyeema Support Services Portland
Youth	Portland Bay School
Youth	Portland Re-Engagement Program
Youth	Portland Secondary College
Youth	South West Tafe (Portland)

APPENDIX 3 CASE STUDIES

Hands Up Casterton – Youth HQ Auspice model managed by Casterton Memorial Hospital.

Casterton faces challenges common to rural areas, including limited services for young people. Kane Forbes, from Hands Up Casterton, established Youth HQ a youth centre supported by the community and local organizations through an auspice agreement with the local hospital.

Youth HQ provides a welcoming, unstructured space for young people aged 12-25 to socialize, participate in activities, and enjoy a safe environment. It also includes a structured component, allowing youth to connect with community leaders, build relationships, and share their skills and talents.

Youth HQ operates as a community-led project, actively incorporating input from local youth on desired activities and events. Recently, Hands Up Casterton held a Youth Forum, facilitated by Brit Watts from Youth Affairs Council Victoria, where thirteen young people expressed interest in joining a formal Youth Advisory Committee to help shape Youth HQ's programs and events. This involvement empowers young people to take ownership of the space, ensuring that Youth HQ's offerings remain relevant, meaningful, and aligned with their interests and needs.

Youth HQ has positively impacted the Casterton community by:

- **Reducing social isolation:** The space offers a gathering place for young people, helping to reduce loneliness and isolation, which are common in rural towns.
- **Encouraging community involvement:** By providing youth a place to engage with peers and participate in local events, Youth HQ strengthens community bonds.
- **Supporting creativity and self-expression:** Creative workshops provide youth an outlet for self-expression, confidence-building, and skill development.

Youth HQ has also become a valued resource for the wider Casterton community. It serves as a gathering place during events like the annual Kelpie Muster, bringing together people of all ages and strengthening its role as an important community hub.

Kane praises the benefits of the auspice arrangement with Casterton Hospital, which includes access to established policies, child safety protocols, insurance, and staff support. However, he notes that delays in onboarding volunteers have posed a challenge. He also acknowledges the essential and ongoing support from local community members, businesses, and organizations, which has been fundamental in establishing and sustaining Youth HQ.

Youth HQ Testimonials

Henry (15 years old)

“Youth HQ is fun and entertaining, and it's a great place to catch up with mates with all the games and stuff. It's good to have somewhere to hang between school and footy training, especially on cold days. I'm really enjoying the Mini Motor Mechanics sessions as I'm learning life skills that aren't taught at school.”

Julie (Mum)

“I love it because it provides somewhere safe for the boys to hang with their mates after school and between appointments, especially since we live out of town. There is such a variety of activities to keep them occupied that it's often hard to get them home again, but I know they aren't wandering the streets getting into mischief. The movie nights and classes provide our rural kids with opportunities that they might not otherwise get to experience and increase their sense of independence.”

Sevan (13 years old)

“I love going there because I enjoy meeting up with friends after school and on school holidays. I love doing Just Dance and making food, and I also enjoy making milkshakes. I hope it grows and gets better so my little sister can enjoy it just as much as I do now.”

The Station Youth Centre LGA-run model managed by the Horsham Rural City Council.

Horsham, located in Victoria's Wimmera region, is home to nearly 4,000 young people aged 12-24. These young residents are essential to the community but face challenges, including limited transport, fewer education and career options, and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes.

Horsham Council introduced a Youth Strategy¹³ that has significantly benefited the community. Key outcomes include establishing a Youth Council to advocate on youth issues and appointing a Council Youth Officer. The Strategy also shifted Council from a traditional center-based model to an outreach approach, resulting in the transformation of the youth center into a flexible, multipurpose space.

Developed in collaboration with Council, youth, and community organizations, The Station Youth Centre serves as an inclusive space for socializing, learning, and connecting. Free for youth-focused groups, The Station hosts activities such as yoga, holiday programs, multicultural and LGBTQIA+ youth groups, gaming events, and the Pride Prom, supported by FReeZA, Engage!, HEY Grant, and Youth Fest Funding.

The Station plays an essential role in fostering youth mental health, social connection, and inclusivity in Horsham

Benefits of a Council-Run Youth Space

- **Stable Funding and Professional Staffing**
Council-run spaces may have consistent funding, allowing for well-maintained facilities and professional staff trained in youth development.
- **Integration with Community Services**
These spaces easily connect youth with other services (health, education, employment), creating a comprehensive support system.
- **Community Trust and Safety Protocols**
Council oversight provides accountability, child-safe protocols, and liability insurance, fostering community trust and security.
- **Youth Voice in Programs**
Councils often incorporate youth advisory groups, allowing young people to influence programs and keep the space relevant.

Challenges of a Council-Run Youth Space

- **Bureaucracy and Reduced Flexibility**
Formal council processes may limit adaptability to quickly meet evolving youth needs.
- **Potential Disconnect from Youth Culture**
Council priorities may not always align with youth interests, risking lower engagement.
- **Political and Budget Uncertainty**
Funding is subject to political and budget changes, impacting long-term program stability.
- **Perception of Formality**
A council-managed space may seem formal or authoritative, possibly discouraging some young people from fully engaging.

Stable Ground Incorporated model run by Hamilton Youth Victoria Incorporated.

Following the tragic loss of her son Joshua in a car accident in 2023, Lee-Ann Elms dedicated herself to establishing Stable Ground, a youth space in Hamilton, Victoria, under the newly formed Hamilton Youth Victoria Incorporated. This initiative aims to provide a safe, supportive environment for young people in the community.

The youth centre will be housed in a two-story red brick warehouse in Hamilton, previously considered for a craft brewery. The building, a former Cobb and Co Carriage factory, inspired the project's name, Stable Ground. Lee-Ann envisions a volunteer-led space that offers a haven for young people, helping to bridge gaps in local mental health support services. The centre will be situated next to a new Headspace office also being set up in Hamilton.

Lee-Ann spent months engaging with local community members and organizations and has been encouraged by the many offers and contributions of time, funds, and services.

While the incorporation process has been complex and lengthy—partly due to the need for support letters for grant applications—it brings advantages, including autonomy and the ability to establish clear governance aligned with Stable Ground's mission.

Lee-Ann is committed to setting up the incorporation properly so it can serve as a model for other towns looking to establish youth spaces. She aims to share the lessons learned from Stable Ground's setup, helping other communities create similar spaces that meet the needs of their young people.

To ensure Stable Ground reflects the needs and voices of Hamilton's youth, Lee-Ann is also working toward establishing a Youth Advisory Group. This group will provide ongoing input into the programs and services offered, ensuring the centre remains responsive and relevant to its youth community.

As Stable Ground works toward a fully developed space for Hamilton's young people, it currently offers occasional sessions and holiday programs at the Hamilton Baptist Church.

With the recent completion of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and the election of office-bearers, the project now has a formal structure. Despite challenges, Lee-Ann remains committed to honouring her son's legacy by building a resource that will serve Hamilton's youth for years to come.

13. <https://www.hrcc.vic.gov.au/Our-Council/Governance-and-Transparency/Public-Documents/Council-Publications/Youth-Strategy>

*“Back in the day, we had Mary’s.
Pool tables, pinball machines, Space Invaders,
and a jukebox that Mary kindly allowed me to load with 45s
(single vinyl records, in case you young’uns were wonderin’).*

*I don’t know what a youth space would look like in the 21st century,
but I know Mary’s was a safe space—a place where we could
connect and feel wanted. That’s what it was for me back then.
Grateful for those days.”*

Amy Saunders

Gunditjmara Mirring Protector, and Portland Resident



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