



# Richmond Youth Hub:

Final Evaluation Findings Report

July 2023



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## Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings for the evaluation of Richmond Youth Hub, which was conducted between January and April 2023. The evaluation coincided with the conclusion of the funding agreement between the Yarra City Council (Council) and the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing (DFFH), which was established to operate a localised youth hub on the North Richmond public housing estate. This initiative was established as part of the State Government's Community Capacity Building initiative to address concerns for young people's safety and access to services in the North Richmond area.

The aim of establishing Richmond Youth Hub was to create a safe space for young people, which fosters social connection, encourages community involvement, and supports youth leadership. Richmond Youth Hub was also intended as a platform for strengthening service coordination between local agencies, to build locally based partnerships which would support the delivery of programs, services, and events on the estate. The evaluation found that Richmond Youth Hub has been successful across every dimension of this aim.

Young people reported that, because of the supports, programs, and opportunities offered at RYH, they not only feel safer but more visible in the community. There is a sense that young people now have a place to go where they are listened to, supported, and advocated for. On an individual level, this support has translated into young people developing a more positive self-concept and an increasingly optimistic outlook for their future. On a collective level, the shared connection to this space has strengthened young people's sense of community between themselves. Richmond Youth Hub has also fostered an organic interest in youth leadership as young people have begun pro-actively seeking out opportunities to contribute to their communities. To date, these opportunities have included applying for community grants and participating in the Youth Advocacy Group, as well as taking an active role in Richmond Youth hub through youth-led programs, projects, and activities.

In terms of service coordination, Richmond Youth Hub, via Council's leadership role, has been able to attract a diverse range of service delivery partners and other stakeholders onto the estate. Through Richmond Youth Hub, stakeholder organisations have expanded local service knowledge, built new referral pathways, and established trust relationships which have helped services to engage more successfully with the community, especially with vulnerable, often difficult to reach cohorts. Furthermore, the stronger working relationships between services has led to the development of new joint initiatives which address the community's needs in innovative ways.

From these findings, the evaluation makes the following five recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** That the State Government continues to provide core funding of \$304,303pa (indexed to CPI) to Council for the purposes of operating the Richmond Youth Hub for a minimum of a further four years from July 2024 to ensure the program continuity and stability required to leverage reported successes into enduring long-term social change.

**Recommendation 2:** That the State Government seeks to increase the budget for the Richmond Youth Hub by \$115,000pa (indexed to CPI) to create a new Youth Support Worker role (1.0EFT), which addresses young people's additional wellbeing needs, as well as to extend the Peer Youth Worker and casual Youth Services Officer roles by 0.3EFT to accommodate growth in demand for programs.

**Recommendation 3:** That the State Government provide an additional \$18,000pa (indexed to CPI) for a Youth Leadership Incubator program which will support young people to develop and deliver youth led projects that address community needs in partnership with Council, DFFH and community stakeholders.

**Recommendation 4:** That the State Government undertakes a review RYH's facilities and maintenance arrangements in the next 12 months to determine the viability of relocating to a larger space which better suits program growth and ensure that the space is appropriately maintained.

**Recommendation 5:** That subject to funding, Council and DFFH work collaboratively to develop a rolling formative evaluation framework which integrates into quarterly/annual reporting and measurement improvements.

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## 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings for an evaluation of Richmond Youth Hub (RYH) which was undertaken between January and May in 2023. The evaluation was conducted by Council's Evaluation and Research Officer who engaged with young people, service delivery partners/organisational stakeholders and Council staff (including leadership, RYH staff and representatives across Council involved in hub activities).

### 1.1 Evaluation Aims

The evaluation maps how RYH has changed the local area service delivery landscape for young residents of the North Richmond public housing estate (the estate). By considering the impact of these changes, the evaluation has been able to qualify how RYH has contributed towards both the health and wellbeing, and sense of social connection of young people on the estate. By identifying the strengths, which should be further capitalised upon, and gaps, which will need to be addressed, this analysis is expected to assist Local and State Government decision-makers to maximise the impact of future investment in this initiative.

### 1.2 Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation is guided by the following four key evaluation questions (KEQs):

1. To what extent has RYH provided a safe space for young people?
2. To what extent have RYH programs/activities/events engaged and inspired young people to get involved in the local community?
3. To what extent has the access to information, support and referral that has been coordinated by RYH improved the health and wellbeing outcomes for young people?
4. To what extent have the structures and processes implemented by RYH supported everyone to work towards a shared strategic vision?

### 1.3 Scope

This evaluation coincides with the completion timeframe for the medium-term outcomes which were established in the program logic. This is the first formal assessment of RYH because, due to the unforeseen circumstances surrounding COVID-19, a mid-project evaluation corresponding to the short-term goals was not able to be carried out. For this reason, the analysis presented in this report responds to both the short- and medium-term outcomes. The long-term goals are out of the scope of this evaluation because these pertain to broad population-level changes that are not expected to yield results until the initiative has been in operation for at least 3 years (as stated in the program logic document). Therefore, due to the short-term nature of this initial funding period, this evaluation is not able to deliver a more longitudinal study.

## 2. Background

The discussion presented in this chapter is divided into three sections, beginning with an overview of RYH's history which explains how this initiative was developed. The second section reviews contemporary hubs literature to define the model and qualify a set of best practice principles for evaluating the success of an initiative which implements this model. The final section provides a discussion of the policy context which RYH is operating in, this section helps to extend our understanding of success factors by considering best practice in terms of the State Government's current strategic priorities.

### 2.1 History of Richmond Youth Hub's Development

The need for a dedicated youth space in the estate was brought to Council's attention in May 2018 with the submission of a formal petition. The petition, which had been prepared by a group of young people, was the culmination of a grassroots advocacy effort to mobilise community support for a safe space to go after school. Although there had been numerous drop-in programs and other activities launched on the estate over the years few of these programs have been able to maintain their viability in the long term because of funding insecurity, turn-over of providers and staff, and low engagement. The young people outlined that this lack of a consistent program represented a concerning gap because, due to the prevalence of anti-social activity on the estate grounds, and the lack of available living space in their homes, they needed a more permanent safe space to engage with their peers and access services.

Council approved \$185,000 funding for RYH in the 2018/19 budget as a one-off capital grant to develop a localised youth hub on the estate. This funding was approved subject to the successful outcome of advocacy efforts to secure a State Government funding contribution towards the initiative. Following several meetings between former Mayor, Cr Daniel Ngyen, and Richard Wynne, then state member for Richmond and Minister of Housing, a formal letter was sent to the Ministers Office outlining a proposal for a localised youth hub. This initial advocacy effort sought funding for a full-time staffing position to "coordinate operations and provide additional activation of the youth hub space". In response, the State Government agreed to provide an initial \$122,500 funding to support the first 12 months of coordination. At the conclusion of the first 12-month funding another formal letter was sent to the Office of Richard Wynne, outlining RYH's initial successes and requesting \$657,000 to be paid over a three-year period to support the ongoing staffing costs. With the support of the Minister, DFFH approved this funding request in May 2022.

In 2019, whilst these negotiations were taking place Council prepared an internal business case in 2019 in consultation with DFFH and Drummond Street Services (The Drum), who facilitated young people's involvement in the process. This business case presented two potential locations suitable for developing a hub: The Factory (19-21 Belgium Ave) which was costed at \$385,000; and Community Information Centre (110 Elizabeth St) which was costed at \$261,500. Council approved the 110 Elizabeth site because it was young people's preference and offered the potential to create a youth precinct by activating the surrounding outdoor space. A co-contribution from State Government to cover these initial site development costs was sought through the Office of Richard Wynne and Council signed a funding deed which provided an addition \$185,000.

This development of the RYH site was impacted by the advent of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which delayed the opening of the facility until March 2021. COVID-19 disruptions continued throughout the first year of RYH's operation with lockdowns announced just before the hub's official opening, and other restrictions persisting until October 2021. Despite these challenges, Yarra Youth Services was able to employ a suitably qualified Hub Team Leader who commenced in February of

2021. Owing to the staff member's pre-existing relationship with community, having previously worked on the estate as a youth worker, they were able to mobilise their connections and local knowledge, working with other key partners such as The Drum, DFFH and Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House, as well as across Council, to generate community interest and establish working relationships with other service providers in the local area.

RYH was not only able to establish itself under difficult circumstances, but it also played an important role in supporting families on the estate to navigate the 2021 COVID-19 response. This role included formal activities such as distributing important health updates and working with bi-cultural workers to ensure that information was understood by the community, offering material aid (including access to required personal protective equipment) and working with North Richmond Community Health (NRCH) and Council staff to ensure that the vaccine roll-out was successful. Additionally, RYH became a general point of contact (via digital and face-to-face) which provided community members with informal social support to deal with the uncertainty of that time and linked young people and their families to formal supports.

At this point, RYH has been operating for almost 2 years, coordinating programs/services that are delivered by Yarra Youth Services and a range of other community partners including The Drum, Young Assets Foundation and Helping Hoops. In addition to activity programs RYH has also established partnerships with local social services such as Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), NRCH, and Jesuit Social Services (JSS).

## 2.2 What is a Hub: Best Practice Principles

In broad terms, a youth hub can be defined as a geographically "central place within a community" (Manis et al., 2022, p.105) which "brings together the diverse expertise of service providers in a "one stop shop" format" (Henderson et al., 2020, p.217). The purpose of this one stop shop is to reduce barriers to service access by creating a conveniently located youth-friendly space where a variety of services are co-located to provide young people with comprehensive supports. For this reason, it is best to consider youth hubs from two different perspectives: firstly, as a specific type of facility, and secondly, as a unique service delivery model.

### 2.2.1 Youth Hubs as Facilities

As a facility, the location and design of the physical setting are important success factors for youth hubs. Settiani et al. (2019) explains that hubs must "make settings accessible to youth, non-stigmatising, and youth-friendly" (p.11) to attract young people into the space and ensure that they feel comfortable for the duration of their visit to the space.

The concept of accessibility extends beyond ability-related concerns and considers how travelling outside of, or across, the local area creates barriers for young people due to the lack of available transport options and/or the prohibitive cost of travel. Manis et al. (2022) explains that hubs should be located somewhere that is a natural community meeting place such as "schools, corner stores, libraries, community centres" (p.105). The choice of location for the facility should be guided by the dynamics of the specific community being serviced.

This choice should also be guided by the need to create a non-stigmatising place that is youth friendly. In practical terms, a non-stigmatising location is one which will not frame attendance to the youth hub in deficit terms, hence why places like libraries or shopping centres should be considered, because these are space that all young people hang out in. Youth-friendliness is a design principle which re-enforces the non-stigmatising location by creating an "informal, non-clinical space where youth can spend time with peers" (Settiani, 2019, p.11). To achieve this effect, the interior design



of a youth hub should prioritise art, furnishings and finishings which make the space feel like it is intended for recreational use by young people. This should also extend to the amenity that is provided within the space, offering access to things like games (consoles, pool, or tennis tables etc.) and food (communal kitchen, community-run café etc.) as a way of fostering casual social interaction.

The literature reviewed highlights the importance of a youth-led co-design process to ensure that service providers not only get the details right but that young people feel a sense of ownership over and belonging to the space. The Youth Future's Foundation (2020) asserts that the lived experience of young people should be at the heart of the service design process to ensure that each hub is responsive to the unique needs of their cohort. As Gardner et al. (2019) explains, the practice of centring young people's lived experience should extend beyond the design of the physical space to encompass a shared governance model for overseeing the delivery of services which, as we shall see in the next section, has long-ranging benefits for the young people involved.

### 2.2.2 Youth Hubs as a Service Delivery Model

A youth hub is typically designed around a primary service function with the two most common being employment pathways, as outlined in Synergistiq's (2015) evaluation of the National Youth Hub Pilot, or mental health, as outlined in Settapani et al.'s (2019) scoping review. However, this primary service function cannot be the sole focus of a youth hub because achieving longer-term development goals requires a host of different support services which target both engagement and immediate needs. Settapani et al. (2019) asserts that a key advantage of working in this way is that it enables services to stage early interventions and/or work preventatively to maximise impact.

According to Synergistiq (2015) getting young people engaged in the primary service function often requires hubs to offer programming that uses recreational interests like "sport, art, and music as a 'hook'" (p.15) to get them through the door. The Youth Futures Foundation (2020) support this perspective, outlining that it is often unrealistic to expect vulnerable young people with complex needs to come to a service without engagement hooks that provide a safe entry point. However, once these young people have been attracted into a hub, it is equally unrealistic to expect that they will be able to work towards any sort of development goals without service interventions that "focu[s] on the[ir] immediate needs" whilst "also maintain[ing] a 'longer view'" (Synergistiq, 2015, p.28). This perspective is re-iterated by Settapani et al. (2019) who assert that hubs must offer services which range from "acute treatment to general case management" (p.12).

This three-way focus which combines development goals with recreational engagement and acute intervention forms the founding principle of hubs, that to support the positive development of young people, it is necessary to "meet young people where they are 'at'" (Synergistiq, 2015, p.15). To find where people are 'at' youth hubs must engage with young people on their terms by both appealing authentically to their interests, and ensuring that once engaged, the services take time to understand and address their immediate before shifting focus to more aspirational goals. Manis et al. (2022) argues that because of this emphasis on being responsive there is no one-size-fits-all way to define the mix of services required to set up a successful youth hub.

Without an off-the-shelf model to rely upon, Henderson et al. (2020) highlight that the success of a hub is predicated upon the hub leader's capacity to build up and mobilise a "high degree of social capital and strong ties", bringing local service providers, young people, and their families together into a community of mutual support. Henderson et al. (2020) asserts that building this level of trust requires "managerial patience" (p.224) to ensure that organisations don't rush outcomes ahead of relationships, whilst also allocating sufficient time, space, and resources to nurture them. This

argument is reinforced by Synergistiq's (2015) evaluation which concluded that the success of a youth hub is "highly relational" (p.16) and that building up sufficient relationship capital requires a long-term investment in the initiative.

Whilst building relationships with young people is a largely organic process which requires service providers to be available and establish familiarity over time, inter-organisation relationships require a far more structured approach. As the Youth Future Foundation (2020) explains, when bringing a variety of different services together into a shared space, governance and partnership management are the "key principles for effective co-location" (p.3) and fundamental for co-ordinating an integrated approach to care. Henderson et al. (2020) explains that fostering partnerships enables hubs to maximise service impact by seamlessly coordinating support for young people across multiple organisations to combine complimentary expertise into a unified and holistic approach.

However, achieving this outcome is not as simple as inviting services to outpost a portion of their business as usual into a shared facility in the hope that such collaboration will happen on its own accord (Synergistiq, 2015). Henderson et al. (2020) acknowledges that bringing together organisations with "different intervention processes" (pp.222-23) presents hub leaders with a significant challenge because they must establish a shared way of working that accommodates a diverse range of professional practices and perspectives. The Youth Future Foundation (2020) assert that governance is key to addressing this challenge through "the implementation of clear structures and active leadership" (p.3) that are underpinned by a strong strategic vision of what everyone is working together to achieve. By taking the time to work with organisations to build a shared sense of purpose and establish common processes it ensures that services are accountable and empowered to generate new service solutions through decentralised collaboration.

Whilst hub leaders are responsible for setting up and implementing these structures, the governance processes themselves should not be unilateral. Rather, decision-making power should be shared between the different organisational stakeholders who deliver services through the hub and the young people who attend. Henderson et al. (2020) explains that empowering stakeholders to "voice their ideas and disagree openly" to negotiate how the "sharing of resources would result in mutual benefit" (p.224) ensures sustainable service delivery partnerships. Youth Future Foundation (2020) emphasises that it is necessary for evaluation to run alongside service delivery and to be undertaken as a joint project involving all service delivery partners to ensure that this mutual benefit is aligned to community need.

However, without including the young people in this governance process, services cannot be confident that their work is responsive to young people's actual needs. Gardner et al. (2019) explains that by sharing decision-making power with young people through co-design, hub leaders are not only ensuring a more responsive service, but they are also empowering youth participants to "become experts on the issues which affect them most" (p.18). This emphasis on *becoming* experts highlights that for young people to be successful in this role they require support, training, and mentoring. This investment into shared governance has benefits beyond the hub itself because it supports young people to develop important leadership skills which have the potential to help them "advance in their personal career goals" (Garner et al., 2019, p.19).

### 2.3 Policy Context

To fully understand the policy context of the RYH, it is important to begin by unpacking North Richmond's unique demographic profile. One of the most significant aspects of North Richmond's demography is the over-representation of people living in public/social housing: 14.6% of total residents which is almost double that of rest of Yarra City Council (8.1%) and over six times than that

of Greater Melbourne (2.3%) (Yarra City Council, 2021a). The consequences of this difference can be seen in the household income of residents with 19.5% of North Richmond residents qualifying as low income, compared to 15.8% of the rest of Yarra City Council (Yarra City Council, 2021b). Interestingly however, when compared to Greater Melbourne, North Richmond is not a socio-economically disadvantaged area owing to a larger proportion of high-income households: 28.6% as opposed to 25.3% (Yarra City Council, 2021b). What can be deduced from these demographics, is that North Richmond is a socio-economically divided area, whose population is over-represented both in terms of advantage and disadvantage with less of a middle.

Another unique feature of the North Richmond area is the location of the State Government's Medically Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR), situated on the estate at the opposite end from RYH. This facility, which began as a 5-year trial in 2018, is a policy response to "North Richmond [having] been the main site for heroin use and related harms in Victoria for the past decade" (Medically Supervised Injection Room Review Panel, 2020, p.viii). The MSIR has a harm minimisation focus and provides drug users with access to "health and social support interventions including wound care, blood-borne virus treatment, alcohol and other drug treatment, mental health support, dental care, family violence support, social welfare, and material aid" (Department of Health, 2023, para.8). Since 2018, two independent reviews of the MSIR have been conducted: The Hamilton Review in 2020, and the Ryan Review in 2023 which recommended that the facility continue "as an ongoing service" (Medically Supervised Injection Room Review Panel, 2023, p.24). This recommendation was adopted by the State Government which announced that the MSIR would become a permanent service in a media release on the 7th of March 2023.

Beyond the MSIR, the DFFH Strategic Plan identified North Richmond as a focus area and cites "Investing in a thriving North Richmond" (Department of Families Fairness and Housing, 2022a) as a funding priority until the end of the 2025-26 financial year. Richard Wynne (19 April 2021) outlined the State Government's vision for this funding in a media release which included mention of RYH alongside other community programs, projects and services intended to not just create space to engage young people but also provide "access to valuable health and wellbeing information and support" (para.8). It is worth noting that this media release specifies a youth hub as the specific model to be implemented, a policy direction that is re-enforced in Our Promise, Youth Future: Victoria Youth Strategy 2022-2027 by a state-wide commitment to "partner with local government and the community sector to provide local youth hubs in priority areas" (Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 2022b, p.52). This plan affirms the value of youth hubs and highlights RYH's value as a case study example that is ahead of the policy curve.

In addition to these programs the media release highlights the important role that facility upgrades, and new housing developments will play in "ensur[ing] a bright and safe future for the area" (Wynne, 19 April 2021, para.1). This investment in infrastructure was formally announced as the *North Richmond Revitalisation* which is part of the *Big Housing Build* and includes upgrades to the area surrounding RYH (futsal and basketball courts, rotunda, public seating, pathways, and adjoining play spaces) (Homes Victoria, 2022). At the end of these works, the resulting amenity will create a dedicated space for family, youth, and children on the estate grounds surrounding RYH. With the ongoing issues of drug use and anti-social behaviour on the estate, the question of how this precinct will be activated to ensure it remains safe for the community is central to this revitalisation effort. RYH is best placed to lead this activation considering its placement on the estate, role as an organiser of programs and events and its established relationships with both services and families.

Beyond these geographically oriented concerns, it is also worthwhile considering how RYH fits into the strategic direction of the policy priorities outlined by DDFH (and the State Government more broadly). A comparative analysis of the themes presented in the State Government documents which have been cited for this policy context discussion revealed five key considerations for measuring the strategic alignment to State Government priorities. These are as follows:

- Inclusion and equity should focus on priority cohorts, including Aboriginal, LGBTIQ+, people living with a disability, the unhoused, survivors of family violence, women, children and youth. Efforts to work with marginalised cohorts should be strengths-based and informed by intersectional frameworks which acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of identity and structural conditions of marginalisation.
- Services and programs targeting young people should consider youth in terms of a developmental trajectory towards independent adulthood. To achieve this, a focus on pathways should guide service providers to support young people to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence and experience they need for realising their ambitions. In this context, pathways should be defined in broad terms to encompass education, service involvement, human development, personal growth, interests, and employment.
- Mental health is an important focus for health and wellbeing programs which should prioritise early-intervention and prevention to foster resilience and help people to develop positive life strategies for dealing with mental health challenges. Whilst this approach cannot replace acute intervention services, it should maximise opportunities to receive support before situations become critical.
- Services targeting young people should consider the uniqueness of each community by prioritising place-based ways of working. This represents a deliberate effort to move away from one-size-fits all solutions and towards embedded approaches which embrace local knowledge and make virtue of each community's own strengths and assets to develop localised approaches for tackling the challenges that people face.
- The governance of projects, programs and services needs to move beyond simply providing opportunities for young people to have their voice heard. Rather, there should be a shift towards shared decision-making power which is driven by governance structures that ensures the authentic inclusion of the young people who are most affected by the situation at hand. Key to the success of shared governance is ensuring that adult decision-makers are accountable to young people to ensure that feedback is acted upon.

These five priorities, alongside the best practice principles, which were outlined in the previous section shall be used to identify RYH's strength and successes as well as areas for improvement in the discussion which follows. However, before moving on it is worth outlining how this initiative fits into Council's own strategic directions as outlined in the Council Plan 2021-2025.

RYH contributes towards Council's strategic objective 'social equity and health' which aims to ensure that residents "have equitable access and opportunities to participate in community life" (Yarra City Council, 2021d, p. 39). To achieve this, Council has committed to developing explicit strategies which "support vulnerable communities and residents of public housing to thrive in the community" (Yarra City Council, 2021d, p. 41). RYH works towards this outcome by facilitating young people's access to services, supports and programs which address their wellbeing needs, assist them to engage in education and employment, and offer opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community.

### 3. Evaluation Method

The research for this evaluation, including participant recruitment, data collection and analysis activities was conducted between January and April of 2023. This process incorporated both desktop research and qualitative field research.

#### 3.1 Desktop Research

A literature review and policy scan were conducted using open access research and publicly available grey literature. The material for the literature review was sourced by searching Google Scholar for 'youth hub' or 'community hub' and filtering the results to exclude publications from the field of urban planning. This exclusion made it possible to focus on literature from the fields of health, education, social services, and youth or social work. From these sources we were able to assemble a loose conceptual framework for best practice which was instrumental to defining the thematic codes used to analyse the field data.

The policy scan focussed primarily on State Government strategies or plans relating to youth, DFFH and North Richmond. This helped to make meaningful connections between the theoretical concepts found in the academic research and the current political climate, with an emphasis on budgetary priorities. Owing to the distinctly place-based nature of a hub, State Government media releases from the Premier or local members responding to local issues and relevant newspaper articles were also consulted to provide a deeper understanding of North Richmond's unique social geography.

In addition to qualitative background research, a document review was conducted to quantify RYH's performance against the KPIs which were defined in the program logic. Participation figures were taken from the Youth Engagement Data tracking spreadsheet to measure the level of demand for programs and services. These numbers were cross-referenced with the written quarterly reports and Reference Group meeting minutes to establish their operational context. By triangulating these data sources, it was possible to identify trends which not only tracked general performance but also helped to extrapolate a deeper understanding of how RYH responded to the many challenges they faced.

#### 3.2 Participant Cohort and Recruitment

The selection of participants for the evaluation was undertaken in close consultation with the Coordinator Youth Services and the Team Leader of RYH, both Council employees. The cohort which was assembled consisted of five sub-categories:

- RYH Staff (including program delivery and leadership)
- Yarra City Council staff (focussing on other teams involved in service/program delivery)
- Representatives of Key Stakeholder Organisations
- RYH Youth Leaders
- RYH program attendees

The key stakeholder organisations (and their representatives) were nominated by the Coordinator Youth Services. This selection was based on organisations' level of involvement in RYH governance and program/service delivery and their historical connection to the local area. The chosen representatives were a mix of service delivery practitioners and leaders, or a combination of both, depending on the structure of the organisation. At times multiple staff within an organisation were engaged, this occurred when the nominated representatives referred other staff members to help provide a fuller picture. A full list of these organisations, including the names and titles of the

representatives has been provided in Appendix 1. This appendix also contains the list of RYH and Yarra City Council Staff who participated in the evaluation.

Youth Leaders were selected by the RYH Team Leader in consultation with their staff. The 10 young people who were chosen were selected because of their level of involvement in the initial facility co-design process, their ongoing contribution to planning and running regular activities, and their participation in broader community projects. Care was taken to ensure that the group was broadly representative of the range of ages, cultures and genders of the young people who regularly attend RYH. That said, the size of the group was kept relatively small to prioritise sufficient time for deep conversations to be conducted with each respondent.

Program attendees were approached over the course of three Thursday Drop-In sessions and invited to participate in an informal vox pop-styled conversation. The evaluator approached everyone who was present on each day and 15 young people agreed to participate in the process. After consent was given the age and gender of participants was recorded but participation was kept otherwise anonymous.

### 3.3 Field Data Collection

The collection of field data consisted of semi-structured and vox pop conversations which were conducted in situ at RYH wherever possible, as well as site observations which were recorded in a notebook after each visit. Being on site at RYH was fundamental for developing a deeper understanding of the space and establishing sufficient familiarity with the community to enable the interview process. For this reason, whenever feasible, additional project activities such as planning discussions and official meetings were conducted at RYH.

Separate semi-structured interview guides were developed for RYH Staff, Yarra City Council/Stakeholder Organisations and Youth Leaders to cater for the different interests and needs of each cohort. Consistency was maintained across each template by mapping the questions from each to the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs), however, the line of inquiry was left intentionally open to create space for participants to guide the direction of the conversation. A cut down version of these questions was also prepared for use with vox pop respondents. For reference, copies of all these interview guides are provided in Appendix 2.

Due to young people's and stakeholders' reluctance to grant consent for interviews to be recorded, handwritten notes were taken during conversations. In addition to ensuring that participant felt comfortable to talk candidly during their interviews, this approach proved to be far more practical because of the often chaotic and noisy setting. Whilst making written notes, the evaluator took great care to directly record the respondents' words as accurately as possible, taking direct quotes wherever phrasing or word choice was significant.

It is worth noting that to successfully conduct extended interview conversations with young people it was necessary to take an unconventionally flexible approach to scheduling. Unlike stakeholders, who were accustomed to corresponding via email to negotiate a mutually convenient meeting time and location in advance, young people were used to operating in a more fluid manner that took advantage of the moment. Additionally, because of the complex needs of many of the participants, it was often not possible for the young people to plan reliably in advance. To minimise participation barriers for young people the Team Leader was given access to the evaluator's Outlook calendar and permitted to book interviews without prior notice on the proviso that there was at least 30 minutes notice to prepare and travel to RYH. By the evaluator being 'on call' for the duration of the fieldwork

the Team Leader was able to take advantage of gaps in the calendar when the young people were present and had sufficient time to participate in the process.

### 3.4 Field Data Analysis

To preserve the fidelity of the written notes, a data management spreadsheet was set up before data collection began, and all records were transcribed electronically as soon as the interview had concluded. The spreadsheet was organised by KEQ, and an initial judgement was made at the time of transcription regarding which question best applied to the information being entered. After the first few interviews had been conducted, some common themes started emerging and so codes were developed to group like data under each KEQ. These codes, as well as the KEQ designation of individual pieces of information, continued to change and evolve as more data was collected. Once all the interviews and vox pops had been conducted the spreadsheet was reviewed and the allocation of KEQs and thematic codes was finalised for the whole dataset. Following this process, a second order of thematic tags was developed to describe the trends within each of the themes.

After the initial analysis process, indicative weightings for the relative significance of each code were developed by ranking themes and sub-themes according to their quantity of associated data. These weightings then informed the drafting of a results summary document which described the results and helped to establish the findings by explaining the interconnections between the different sub-themes. The evaluator then attended a meeting of the RYH Reference Group to present the findings outlined in this document and seek feedback to sense check the data analysis. The RYH Reference group brings together representatives from Council, DFFH and stakeholder organisations as well as young people to provide governance oversight to the hub. This group meets regularly to review the activity that is taking place at RYH, raise and respond to emerging issues, and guide the strategic direction of the initiative. The RYH Reference Group's feedback was sought at this point in the process because of the group's possess a unique perspective which combines a detailed understanding of both the strategic objectives and operational realities of the hub.

## 4. The Program Logic

The program logic<sup>1</sup>, which was developed collaboratively between DFFH and Council, was written before the fit-out of the physical space was fully designed and installed. Owing to this timing, the activities, outputs, outcomes, objectives and aims correspond to the work of making the hub a reality which, at the time only existed as an idea. Beyond its value as an evaluation tool, this program logic constitutes a useful historical document which outlines the different steps and stages of work involved in setting up a youth hub. In particular, the actions and outputs, which are mostly concerned with getting the RYH ready to open, focussing on the fit-out, set up of essential business systems, launch of the space and development of the initial program schedule.

This work was guided by an overarching goal:

*To provide a safe space for young people to engage in programs, activities and events, as well as get access to information, support and referral to other services.*

Underpinning this goal was a series of objectives, which foreground the importance of creating a suitable space, establishing youth-led governance, and working collaboratively with stakeholders to improve the quality of life for young people on the estate.

These objectives are:

- Design and build a cohesive space that is suitable for the needs of young people and partner organisations.
- Create and implement a governance model that allows for co-design with young people.
- Work collaboratively with stakeholders in the delivery of programs and services that are engaging and inspiring for young people.
- Enhance young people's health, wellbeing and sense of safety.
- Increase young people's knowledge of, and access to, youth services.

The overarching goal and objectives were further distilled into sets of short-, medium-, and long-term goals, each corresponding to different stages in RYH's development. The short-term goals (6-12 months) are concerned with establishing RYH within the community, fostering peer relationships between young people, and working relationships with stakeholders that will improve access to services. The medium-term goals (1-2 years) are concerned with leveraging these relationships to improve the health and wellbeing of young people and contribute to better service outcomes. Finally, the long-term goals (+3 years) describe social changes relating to young people's place within the community, outlining aspirations which should guide the direction of day-to-day planning towards a bigger picture.

In addition to these goals, the program logic established a set of KPIs in the output section which define the expected service standard of RYH. These targets, which are listed below, formed the basis of the quarterly reporting framework which was developed collaboratively by Council and DFFH and implemented to progressively capture the development of RYH and track performance metrics.

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the program logic document will not be reproduced in the body of this discussion. For reference, a copy of this document has been included on Appendix 3



Formal reports were prepared by Council and submit to Manager, Yarra Community Capacity Building at DFFH. The KPIs which were reported against in these reports are as follows:

- Deliver 5 programs/activities/events per week (including activities during school holidays).
- Engage 150 young people per quarter.
- Make 400 contacts with young people per quarter.
- Engage 3-5 organisations to deliver weekly activities.
- Engage 4-6 organisations to be involved in events and other services.
- Hold 6-8 reference group meetings per year.
- Engage 4 young people in the reference group.
- Facilitate the involvement of 40 young people in community consultations.

RYH's performance with regards to these KPIs and a discussion of the extent to which this performance has satisfied the program aims and objectives will be presented over the next three sections. The first section responds to the short-term goals, followed by a section addressing the medium-term goals. These discussions are informed by the field data which was collected through interviews, vox pops and site observation. The final section responds to the KPIs through an analysis of quarterly reporting metrics and other sources of participation data. These discussions are followed by a conclusion which returns to the best practice principles to qualify the degree to which RYH has satisfied the overarching aim and objectives.

## 5. Short-term Outcomes

The short-term outcomes listed in the program logic measure the degree to which young people:

- feel connected to the hub.
- have increased their knowledge of leadership and governance through involvement in the reference group.
- have improved their skills and abilities.
- have greater knowledge of local youth services.

These outcomes also measure the degree to which organisations:

- have improved their capacity to deliver programs and services.
- have delivered services and programs that are accessible and appropriate.
- have delivered programs that respond to choice, culture, identity circumstances and goals.

### 5.1 Discussion of Short-term Performance

The following discussion has been divided into themes that reflect how these different aspects of RYH's performance are inter-related.

#### 5.1.1 Sense of Connection

From the data which was collected it is apparent that young people feel a strong connection to RYH. When referring to RYH, young people frequently describe it as *"an extension of my living room"* or *"another home"* demonstrating that, more than connection, attendees feel a strong sense of ownership over the space. This is testimony to how successfully RYH has created a youth-friendly atmosphere through the design and management of the physical space as well as all the work undertaken with stakeholders to ensure that the activities, programs, and services delivered are responsive to young people's needs.

The design of the physical space resembles an open plan living area with an adjoining kitchenette with attached breakfast bar where food is served and eaten. This main activity space opens out onto an enclosed patio area which is well utilised for socialising and play. This layout gives the impression of a homely rather than an institutional place. The furnishings add to this impression with couches arranged in ways which encourage casual social interaction dominating much of the activity floor. The space itself is filled with games and other recreational equipment such as a PlayStation, mini-basketball hoop, and ping pong table. Stacked on shelves are a selection of tabletop games and art materials for drawing or writing.

Whilst overall young people are satisfied with this space, there are some concerns regarding building capacity and maintenance. Young people, staff and other stakeholders remarked that there are ongoing building issues such internet access, hot water and electronic locks which are unresolved due to a lack of clear administrative processes and slow response times. It should be noted that whilst several of these issues have now been resolved, such as internet access, maintenance response times have continued to be an issue with the subsequent building issues that have arisen. There is also concern that the size of RYH is insufficient because during programs the space often gets overcrowded. This is an issue for young people who attend programs because, as one young person explained *"it gets so packed in here that it's quite overwhelming."*

That said, despite the obvious challenge which building capacity presents for future growth, this unexpected level of utilisation should also be viewed as a measure of how successfully RYH has connected with young people. Participants who were attending the youth drop in run prior to the opening of RYH reflected on this success, explaining that *“two years ago not even 10 people were attending but now [...] we are outgrowing this space because of word of mouth”*. Staff reiterated this point, explaining that participants believe so strongly in the value of RYH that they actively promote programs and encourage their friends to attend which is leading to a steady increase in community interest. This growth is reflected in the quarterly reporting of contacts through programs and activities, as well as attendance at events and holiday programs, which has been analysed in the Program Attendance and Participation Trends section of this report.

Addressing building capacity limitations, should be a priority because feedback describing the nature of young people’s connection to RYH has highlighted three key functions which are dependent on the availability of adequate space. These are defined as RYH’s capacity to provide:

1. amenity
2. respite
3. informal social support

Amenity refers to young people’s access to safe free space and recreational equipment which they are unlikely to have access to at home. This extends beyond the indoor spaces to encompass adult supervision of outdoor spaces such as the basketball or futsal courts to ensure these areas are safe. Young people also defined amenity as access to the internet and/or a quiet space where they can do their homework without disruptions. Another important aspect of amenity is access to food which plays a dual role, making a material contribution to nutrition whilst creating a social ritual that brings everyone together through the sharing of a communal meal.

Access to this amenity through RYH plays an important role in young people’s lives because it supports them to engage in education, involve themselves in constructive and fun activities that foster positive development and build stronger social connections with other young people. Youth respondents explained that RYH is necessary for these reasons because their apartments are small and often overcrowded, and the estate grounds feel unsafe. Therefore, young people lack privacy and often have no access to space where they can socialise, play and study on their own terms. This is especially challenging for older adolescents who require private space to establish their independence.

Young people also emphasised that RYH is important because it offers respite. Many respondents characterised RYH as a sort of sanctuary away from the stresses of their everyday lives which including intra-familial tension, issues at school and incidents on the estate. Many workers emphasised that this respite serves an important therapeutic purpose which helps young people to process the trauma of incidents experienced on the estate. Young people explained that neither school nor home was necessarily safe space for processing these experiences and so a *“third place”* which *“takes your mind off the bad things that are happening in your life”* or offers an opportunity to *“relax and detox from what is happening in your life”* is needed.

Activities, both in terms of formal programs and opportunities for informal play, are fundamental to respite because they offer a moment of much needed fun which helps young people to recharge emotionally and bolsters their resilience. The therapeutic impact of fun was frequently commented on by RYH staff and other service providers who described young people as *“thriving”*, explaining that *“all the different opportunities offered at Richmond Youth Hub bring joy and meaning which*

*helps young people value life*". Many respondents asserted that over time these experiences have translated into a cohort of young people who appear "more confident" and "excited about life". Or, in the words of a young person:

*"You can come here and enjoy life with your mates, life is more enjoyable because you have a place to spend time with your friends and the youth workers are very friendly."*

That said, these wellbeing gains would not be possible by virtue of fun alone, on the contrary they are supported by RYH's capacity to offer a high degree of informal social support to the young people who attend. It should be noted that this support exists independent of formal service involvement and is founded upon the quality of trust relationships that have developed both between peers and with adults. Owing to the strength of these relationships a culture of mutual support has emerged which ensures that, no matter what is going on in their lives, young people can always find someone with a supportive ear to work through their problems with.

Young people really value RYH as a place to get support from their peers because the diversity of the cohort allows them to "meet all sorts of new people and learn from other people's experiences of the world". They are also comfortable approaching adults for informal support because they feel accepted and supported unconditionally. As one respondent explained:

*"I don't need to be scared to ask for help, like no matter what I've done, I know I won't be judged and people will support me."*

### 5.1.2 Awareness of Youth Services

This informal turn-up-and-talk-to-someone attitude to seeking help has not occurred on its own, rather it is driven by RYH staff who set an expectation with service providers that they should be present in the main program delivery space proactively interacting with attendees rather than waiting in the consulting room for young people to come to them. RYH staff work to facilitate these interactions by making sure everyone knows each other by name and welcoming all to participate in the activities that are taking place. As a result, the services involved in RYH are much more than just organisations, they are real people with faces and names who have a human connection with the young people who attend.

Young people consider the adults who are present in RYH to be safe because they regard their presence as a sort of vetting by virtue of their having been allowed to enter the space. As a result, workers from external organisations are regarded as people "who you can trust, who you can talk to about personal issues". This has flow on effects for formal service delivery because it has improved young people's awareness of the range of different supports which are available to them.

Barriers to access have also been reduced because referrals are less an intimidating and confusing administrative burden and more a friendly chat with a trusted community member. Many of the young people noted during their interviews that prior to RYH they were not only unsure who was safe to approach but had little idea where help was even available. However, as one service provider commented, once young people got to know the services, they not only have the knowledge and confidence to initiate their own involvement, but they have also begun referring their own friends and family, increasing the broader community's knowledge of services.

RYH's success at connecting young people and organisational stakeholders, demonstrates that relationships are key to delivering quality service outcomes. A unique strength of the youth hub model is that it provides a place and time which empowers services to look beyond organisational

requirements and prioritise relationship-building. As we shall see in the discussion of medium-term outcomes this shift towards an organic relationship-driven process leads to better service results. It is important to note that one of the greatest intangible assets owned by RYH is the relationship capital that has been built up between everyone who is involved in the space.

#### 5.1.3 Capacity to Deliver Accessible, Appropriate and Responsive Programs and Services

RYH staff have leveraged this sense of mutual obligation to strengthen external stakeholder organisations capacity to deliver programs and services that are accessible, appropriate, and responsive to the unique needs of the cohort by, as one stakeholder put it *“pushing us [service providers] to work in a more co-designed, collaborative way”*. RYH staff have led by example and embedded the practice of ‘asking young people first’ in everything that they do, as one service provider observed:

*“Every conversation that [Hub Team Leader] has with young people is consultation aimed at understanding what young people need and finding ways to make it possible.”*

As a result, the needs of young people are better understood and catered for, and planning for programs has been able to be more coordinated and strategically responsive. This has led organisations having a deeper understanding of *“community knowledge”* which *“has made it easier to target what young people really need”*. This shift towards working in a more authentically youth-led way has not just helped to better focus existing programs and services but fostered partnerships between organisations and with young people that have led to completely new programs. Two relevant examples of new initiatives which were developed are: The Seed Network’s Skate Club, a youth-led program that taught participants how to skateboard, and the fortnightly Alcohol Awareness activities which are featured during ‘Living it Up’. These activities are planned and delivered by young people in partnership with NRCH.

#### 5.1.4 Skills, Abilities and Leadership Capability

These examples demonstrate RYH’s success at creating opportunities for young people not only support service delivery but also help them improve their skills and abilities. This is because RYH is not a place where workers do everything for people but rather, as one young person observed, *“workers give young people big shoes to fill, they push us to become a leader by giving us responsibilities”*. These responsibilities include a range of everyday activities, including asking attendees to teach others about their skills/interests by running activities, helping to prepare or serve food during programs and looking out for shy members of the cohort who need encouragement to get involved. They also include special one-off opportunities such as supporting young people to lead the planning and delivery of special events like the end of year party.

Delegating these sorts of responsibilities to young people not only helps them develop new skills and abilities but, as one worker reflected, it *“shows that they are valued, and capable of making a valuable contribution that matters”*. Making this effort to use youth-led projects as a way of valuing young people’s capacity to contribute helps to build confidence because, as one young person explained, it *“helps us to see our own talent”*. And it is this confidence in their own abilities which is fundamental to the culture of youth leadership which has emerged. In the words of one young person:

*“Through all the opportunities I got at RYH, the team built up my confidence as a leader, they also listened to all the ideas I had about the community and what we could do for it.”*

This approach, of using everyday activities to continuously build up young people's confidence in their own leadership ability, has established RYH as a platform for youth voice. Through RYH young people have been involved in a myriad of leadership opportunities including contributing their voice to community, Council and State Government decision-making through co-design and community engagement and securing grant funding to launch their own youth-led community initiatives. Four young people have also been recruited into Yarra Youth Services' official Youth Advocacy Group.

An emphasis on these more organic youth leadership opportunities took precedence over young people's involvement in the RYH Reference Group which was initially set as a KPI. Although young people's involvement in formal reference group activities lacked some momentum, RYH's success with youth leadership more broadly demonstrates that this KPI should be expanded in future to better recognise the range of youth-led activities undertaken by participants. Furthermore, it would be advisable to leverage this solid foundation to develop an innovative approach to youth governance which consolidates young people's contributions to their community whilst also safeguarding organisational accountability towards young people's voices.

## 5.2 Short-term Outcomes: Conclusion

Overall, RYH has been successful at creating a place for young people which they feel connected to. Young people value RYH because it provides them with amenity, respite and informal social support which enriches their lives. The strength of their connection to RYH is evidenced by the high degree of ownership that young people express through their self-directed efforts to promote programs/activities/services, their willingness to contribute to the functioning of the space and their enthusiasm for youth leadership.

This connection has resulted in strong interpersonal bonds both between young people and with the adults who represent co-located services. The sense of community has been actively facilitated by RYH staff efforts to establish a relationship-based and youth-led culture. This culture has helped services deliver accessible, appropriate, and responsive programs by increasing their understanding of the community. There is evidence that young people have also found it easier to engage with services and have greater knowledge of the supports available to them. That said, there are two areas of concern which have been identified.

Firstly, the issues relating to the physical structure of RYH building, in particular, the capacity limitations and maintenance request response times. The data highlights a potential need to relocate RYH to a larger program delivery space to service growing participant numbers. It is recommended that the State Government commit to reviewing the current accommodation arrangements and consider the feasibility of relocating RYH. The choice of alternative facilities will need to consider RYH's role in the activation of the family precinct when deciding where this space should be located on the estate. Furthermore, this process should also review the current maintenance policies and procedures to ensure that the proper accountabilities are clearly documented, and that response times are adequately supported by the systems in place.

And secondly, youth-led governance would benefit from mobilising the energy that is generated from the culture of youth leadership by creating formal structures which mandate RYH's accountability to young people's voices. A Youth Leadership Incubator model should be considered which has an emphasis on building young people's skills and knowledge to undertake their own community projects. Incubator participants would still be able to support conventional governance because the group could function as a touchpoint for youth consultation and co-design activities on a needs basis. However, it is important to recognise that the success of this youth leadership model

is dependent on management team attention, to ensure organisational support of youth-led projects, and access to a discretionary budget, to ensure that projects are properly resourced.

## 6. Medium-term Outcomes

The medium-term outcomes listed in the program logic measure the degree to which young people:

- feel safer.
- have become more involved in the wider community.
- feel engaged and inspired.
- report increased levels of satisfaction and wellbeing.
- have greater access to local youth services.

These outcomes also measure the degree to which organisations:

- have been able to deliver their broader strategic objectives.

### 6.1 Discussion of Medium-term Performance

The following discussion has been divided into themes that reflect how these different aspects of RYH's performance are inter-related.

#### 6.1.1 Sense of Safety

The data indicates that an increased sense of safety has been instrumental for progress towards medium-term outcomes. Young people's responses illustrated that, from their perspective, safety was defined in terms of the impact that crime and drugs in North Richmond has had on their lives. At the heart of young people's safety issues was the sense that, as the quote below indicates, young people did not feel welcome on the estate:

*"before, all the drunk and drug people made it too hard [to play outside]"*

Interviewees indicated that the prevalence of alcohol/drug-related issues and anti-social behaviour on the state has produced two different types of scenarios which frame young people's understandings personal safety. In some instances, the feeling that young people are unsafe outside on the estate grounds has translated into a pervasive sense of social isolation. And in the other instances, the prevalence of anti-social activities on the estate has drawn young people into an anti-social lifestyle which brings with it many risks to their safety and wellbeing. With this in mind, a response to personal safety must consider how to foster stronger social connections between young people and how to provide socially constructive alternatives for how young people spend their time.

Young people explained that, for the most part, they *"didn't see any young people in the area"*, because they were confined to their homes. Due to this confinement many respondents described their lives as disconnected:

*"I used to just come home, shut myself up in my room and do gaming, I got to a really bad point where I realised I needed to do something with my life."*

Whilst for others, this unsafe environment influenced them to get involved in the anti-social activities that were taking place. In the words of one young person:

*"It used to be that after dark all you saw was people doing bad stuff [...] this changes how you feel about what you want to do. I used to want to be out there with the people getting up to bad things."*



Young people who were involved in these anti-social activities reflected that they did so because, other than *“hanging out and getting into trouble”* there was a lack of options for how to spend their time. This was re-iterated by adult interviewees who noted that many of these youth issues *“were related to the boredom of not having the money to do normal things that other kids take for granted”*.

Unfortunately, attempts by parents and law enforcement to improve young people’s safety by managing the impact of this antisocial environment compounded people’s sense of social isolation and exacerbated family tensions in the home. Firstly, because parents felt compelled to restrict their children’s freedom to prevent them from becoming another *“hooligan running around outside”*. Secondly, because these youth crime issues led to an increased likelihood of police involvement for all young people. Respondents reflected that, rather than increase their safety, police attention increased the risk that they would be implicated in situations they could not control because *“we didn’t have a clue about law & order stuff so we didn’t know how to protect ourselves if we were approached by a police”*.

As a consequence of these complex safety issues, respondents explained that there is a tendency for young people who live in the estate to stay in their apartments and avoid going onto the grounds, this has led to difficulties with engaging with, or being involved in, the community. In this sense, outcomes relating to safety are inextricably linked to those pertaining to young people’s connection to, and involvement in, the broader community. This is because their lack of involvement has impacted their mental health by making it difficult for young people to have hope for their future, as exemplified by statements made by young people such as:

*“six months ago [before attending RYH], I thought I was going to end up in jail”*

This lack of hope has led to a negative feedback loop which can perpetuate people’s involvement in anti-social activities and further re-enforce the issues relating to safety. However, interviews with staff, organisational stakeholders and young people have illustrated that RYH has been able to affect a positive change in young people’s negative self-concept by acting as a circuit breaker which interrupts these patterns. It should be acknowledged that RYH cannot claim sole responsibility for this outcome because it has operated alongside a range of other DFFH, Victoria Police and other non-government/community-led efforts to improve the quality of life on the estate.

Important examples of these broader programs include the Peacemaker project delivered by Victoria Police in partnership with the Neighbourhood Justice Centre who work collaboratively with with community to develop alternative approaches to dispute resolution based on restorative justice. DFFH’s public amenity upgrades which have improved the quality of outdoor spaces on the estate to encourage pro-social activities on the grounds. DFFH have also made empowered the community through North Richmond Precinct Community Grants which fund community-led projects focussed on public safety, health & wellbeing, community participation and economic revitalisations. RYH has worked in concert with these and many other efforts to address public safety on the estate in several ways.

Firstly, by leveraging the strong connection that workers have with young people, RYH has been able to perform an important preventative function by diverting people away from antisocial behaviours. Fun activities and engaging programs have been instrumental to diversion because they *“steer them [young people] away from finding bad places”* by providing a constructive alternative. As one young person commented, *“now they [young people involved in anti-social activity] come here and chill, play cards or talk to their friends so they are not up to no good”*. RYH staff members further

supported this, explaining how now young people are less likely to be involved as victims or perpetrators because they *“aren’t outside mixing with whatever trouble is happening”*.

Secondly, on occasions when young people have found themselves in trouble which couldn’t be avoided, respondents explained that RYH has helped to ensure everyone’s safety by playing an important de-escalation role. To illustrate through a recent example, when a group of young residents were robbed by people from outside the community, *“rather than retaliate and escalate the trouble, their first reaction was to come here [to RYH] because they associate this as a safe space where they will be protected”*. This helps to keep the young people safe in the immediate situation because it gives them a way to minimise further consequences by extricating themselves and debriefing with staff to develop constructive strategies for managing the issue.

As well as diffusing acute situations, these debriefs facilitate positive behaviour changes which help to keep all young people safe on the estate. One respondent reflected that because staff *“don’t judge people”* young people feel comfortable to *“have deeper conversations with them [workers] and work with them to figure out what they need to learn from what happened and what would be better to do next time”*. As a result, workers have observed that *“there has been a shift in the decision-making processes”* whereby now *“rather than respond with violence when things go wrong, they [young people] tend to reflect on the situation and try to de-escalate”*.

The debriefing process also supports young people’s emotional needs. To ensure that young people are supported emotionally staff check in with young people proactively after any incident to invite them to talk. This approach, which relies upon the strength of relationship between RYH attendees and the staff/service providers, has helped to minimise the psychological impact of incidents. As one young person explained:

*“we are exposed to a lot of extreme experiences on the estate but I don’t think it was until we started talking to some of the adults here that we even realised we had trauma that we needed to address.”*

The numbers of young people who debrief at RYH extends beyond those directly involved in the incidents and includes witnesses, people related to/friends with those involved and others who, upon hearing the news, feel unsafe. As one worker explained, now because of these efforts, when an incident happens young people *“instinctively present here in order to receive emotional and social support”*. The extent to which young people seek out this support illustrates how the impact of these incidents can ripple across the entire community causing long-ranging consequences for mental health and wellbeing. RYH helps to deal with these wellbeing consequences by using debriefs as a touchpoint for formal referrals which ensures that young people have access to the services they need to deal with their experiences.

It should be acknowledged that the success of such a responsive approach relies upon sufficient human resourcing to provide staff the time required to attend to young people’s emergent needs whilst also keeping up with day-to-day workload. At present, staff are undertaking this work on top of their regular duties and self-organising to support each other so that everything gets done. Whilst, with the current levels of demand, this has been adequate, such an arrangement presents a risk for planning to meet future growth because this workload is not being tracked. This lack of formal institutional recognition does not place RYH in a good position to advocate for the importance of these efforts in the future. It would therefore be advisable for RYH to investigate a means for formally recording the level of demand and outcomes which have been achieved through this work to ensure that the provision of this support can meet demand.

That said, the data collected for this evaluation provides evidence of the impact that RYH's work has had on the community safety. In interviews young people, staff, and organisational stakeholders alike all expressed a belief that RYH has had a positive impact on the crime rate and frequency of incidents taking place on the estate. As one young person observed:

*"I feel like the crime rate has gone down, at least in my experience, lots of my friends who were doing crimes and getting in trouble are coming here and less bad things are happening in the community".*

This anecdotal account was supported by an organisational stakeholder who had recently met with Victoria Police where it was reported that *"this year the level of youth offending [on the estate] is the lowest they've recorded"*. RYH staff have recorded a similar trend with regards to incidents which, according to their records, have been declining since the hub had opened. This impact on community safety, however, cannot be entirely attributed to strategies which respond to acute situations because this is only half the equation.

As many respondents commented, the programs, activities and events that are operated through RYH play another important role in making the estate safer by activating public outdoor space. These efforts have created a family-friendly precinct by leveraging the benefits of two infrastructure projects. Firstly, the Big Housing Build infrastructure upgrades, which have improved the aesthetic presentation of the grounds and added a lot of extra amenities. And secondly, the MSIR, which has provided the drug-using community with a place to go that is away from residents' homes. This space which has been vacated by the drug using community has been activated by RYH through nightly youth-focused activities and special one-off events. Through this RYH has *"ma[de] children and young people more visible"* on the estate which has helped them to feel an increased sense of ownership over the grounds. As one young person observed, since RYH and the MSIR were established, there is a sense that everyone has space on the estate because *"they [drug users] have the injecting room and we [young people] have Richmond Youth Hub"*.

During visits to the estate, I observed that the grounds consist of two informally demarcated spaces with the young people and families occupying the central courtyard between housing towers and drug users congregating on the grounds around the NRCH building. This re-configuration of the estate's social geography is accepted by both cohorts and ensures that they can co-exist because *"drug related behaviour is not pushing everyone else out of the space"*. This is immediately apparent when walking around the central courtyard where nowadays *"you see young people riding around on their scooters and playing alongside parents and older people who are out exercising"*. Reflecting upon this, a RYH staff member remarked:

*"RYH is the seed that has allowed the housing estate to flourish, previously this corner was a dark and dangerous place but now it has transformed into a community space. There is a positive atmosphere and both young people and families are out and about. It has activated the area."*

### 6.1.2 Engaged, Inspired and Involved in the Community

This comment, that the estate is now flourishing, hints at another effect of RYH's space activation efforts, that the prevalence of positive experiences has begun to challenge many people's internalised stigma, leading to improved wellbeing as well as deeper engagement with the community. Programs, activities, and events are central to this sense of improved wellbeing in three ways. Firstly, by changing the narrative about life on the housing estate. Secondly, by encouraging participants to take part in new experiences that expand their view of the world. Thirdly, by

improving young people's self-concept through positive risk-taking that inspires them to work towards a future they want.

Putting all this together in the words of the young people, RYH has *"changed people's perceptions of the place from a depressing negative place to a positive place where it is possible to grow"*. This increased sense of hope for the future stems from activities which *"get us [young people] out trying new things and help to develop confidence and courage"*. Through these experiences RYH challenges young people to *"see our own talent and supports us to try and turn passions into real world opportunities"*. In doing so, RYH *"helps the community [of young people] realise what options exist and what opportunities there are"* where previously only a limited future felt possible. As a result, young people are far more engaged and involved in the community both in an everyday sense, and in a bigger picture sense of community leadership.

Many young people commented that because of the confidence they built up and the support they received they *"have gotten jobs and gotten back into school. None of this would have been possible without Richmond Youth Hub"*. Respondents felt that they were better able to engage with school or enter the world of work because they now have adults in their lives who *"will advocate for [them] if [they] are having any problems"*. RYH staff and other service providers also offer a lot of incidental life-skills training, helping young people prepare CVs, write cover letters etc., and brief intervention support, assisting with filling out forms and navigating administrative processes such as acquiring a TFN. One respondent commented that these supports *"solv[e] all the barriers we [young people] come up against in the process"* which is especially necessary because many families are recently arrived in Australia, so parents often lack the knowledge required to help with these everyday hurdles.

At present, this impactful work is once again being undertaken as an additional duty that is performed on top of people's regular workloads. Whilst staff should be commended for taking the time and care to be so responsive to the emergent needs of the young people, it is important to recognise that this level of commitment comes at a cost to the workers themselves. As one worker remarked:

*"Currently, I cannot concentrate on my job because every time program is running and a young person presents with welfare needs it falls on me to deal with it [... meaning that] I am continually being taken away from my actual work"*.

To ensure that this support is sustainable, particularly when considering RYH's potential for future growth, it will be important to reflect this work in future workforce planning. Such planning must provide adequate EFT to meet community demand whilst considering who within RYH is best placed to undertake this role.

This work is especially important from a pathways perspective because, as one young person explained, *"Richmond Youth Hub is helping [us] transition into becoming an adult"* by fostering successes that help young people to think more ambitiously about their own futures. This shift towards a more positive outlook was evident in many of the interviews where young people explained how before they *"didn't know what to do with [their] lives but being here and seeing the work that was done"* had inspired them to pursue a professional career in health, youth work or community development because, in a young person's own words, *"I want to give to other the life changing support that I received"*.

Beyond paid employment and future career pathways, young people were also inspired to pursue current youth leadership opportunities to contribute to the community such as MCing at youth events or running youth activities. These undertakings are significant because they make young people's positive contributions publicly visible to the wider community. RYH staff and other service providers facilitate this by ensuring that young people are not just inspired but empowered to act. They do this firstly by listening to young people and demonstrating that their ideas are being taken seriously which helps to spur people to action because, as one respondent reflected:

*"All the things they do at RYH shows young people that they believe in them. If you feel taken seriously and believed in you don't want to let people down, not because you feel like there will be negative consequences but because you feel inspired to live up to what people see in you."*

Secondly, once young people feel that their ideas are viable, workers ensure that young people have opportunities to put them into practice by seeking out grant opportunities and helping young people to apply, workers also introduce young people to representatives of community groups and other organisations who share their interests to establish partnerships and find ways for young people to test out their ideas within RYH itself. The success of this multi-pronged approach is exemplified by fact that in 2021 a young person from RYH, Raghda Adam, won the Young Person of the Year Award (Yarra City Council, 2021c). In her interview for this evaluation, Raghda had this to say of RYH's role in her achievement:

*"RYH links us all up with lots of people and different opportunities to help us advocate for community issues, it was these opportunities that led to me winning Young Citizen of the year."*

Supporting young people to not just act as leaders within their community but to seek recognition for their efforts has a flow on effect for all young people because, as one young person explained, it *"doesn't just build them [the award recipient] up, it inspires everyone else around them to want to make a positive contribution"*.

### 6.1.3 Service Access and Strategic Priorities

Improved access to services is a key contributing factor which enables young people to make such important contributions to their community. As one young person said whilst reflecting on what they've achieved, *"the staff got me in touch with the workers I needed to turn my life around"* and because of this *"I am really proud of where I am now"*. The location of RYH plays a role in ensuring that young people have access to the services by being on the estate at the foot of one of the housing towers, which means that the community *"ha[s] access to services in their backyard"*.

Beyond proximity, RYH ensure good outcomes for young people by bringing together the right mix of services. To ensure this, staff have used their knowledge of the sector to carefully select what one stakeholder described as a *"raft of specialist services that ensure young people can get access to the specialised help they need"*. The diversity of expertise that is offered through this 'raft' has been achieved by being pro-active in *"attracting new services which haven't previously worked on the estate"* as well as *"br[inging] back some services who had worked there previously but moved away"*. These efforts have obviously had a significant impact on the range of services available in the community.

Furthermore, the hub approach of co-locating these services to cultivate inter-organisational relationships has been able to maximise the value of this mix by fostering a collaborative culture which has increased each organisation's service knowledge. Service knowledge has improved

because, by being in such proximity, service providers can learn from one another by *“ta[ping] into a wealth of knowledge and experience [...] about which orgs are operating in the local area and who is getting good results”*. Furthermore, by establishing working relationships with one another, services are better placed to promote themselves and each other *“to ensure that more people know about what is happening and can access the opportunities”*. One service provider commented that this emphasis on service promotion has not just improved service access but also upskilled workers by *“train[ing] us to be better communicators with the youth”*.

By working more closely together, services have been able to enhance care coordination and increase the number of referral pathways available to young people who are engaged in case management. Interestingly, multiple service providers observed that informal, incidental interactions between workers are valuable for these sorts of collaborative case management efforts *“because the other providers are just there so you can talk to them directly”* which has removed unnecessary obstacles from the coordination and referral process. By reducing these barriers RYH has helped to not just improve service knowledge and coordination but also facilitated the delivery of more tailored services by providing opportunities for service providers to share *“knowledge about the different families in the community [... which] helps me make better case management decisions”*.

Whilst this has helped to significantly improve young people’s on-the-ground access to services, the spatial constraints of RYH’s current location place unfortunate limitations on organisations’ capacities to properly attend to young people’s needs. In particular, the lack of desk space in the office combined with access to only a single consulting room has meant there are a lack of spaces appropriate for confidential discussions. There are three major consequences of these spatial limitations which have a significant impact on service delivery. Firstly, that there is a hard limit on the number of different services which can be working alongside one another at a given time because the lack of office space cannot accommodate everyone’s administrative needs. Secondly, the lack of private consulting space imposes wait times on young people who need to have confidential discussion with workers, this also hampers general productivity when staff need to vacate the office to allow a second confidential conversation to take place. Thirdly, due to the lack of space and wait times young people often make highly confidential disclosures to workers in public spaces surrounded by other people which is obviously inappropriate and unsafe.

However, despite these limitations RYH been able to extend service access beyond the physical capacity of the building by helping organisations form new partnerships. As one service provider explained:

*“RYH has connected all the service providers together and “created a platform where they can work together to prepare joint applications for program delivery funding to create new initiatives”.*

Joint initiatives are important for ensuring service access because, as one service provider commented, individual funding agreements are *“not sufficient to achieve what the funding bodies expect so we share the load with other organisations who are in a similar situation”* and in doing so, necessity breeds innovation. New opportunities, such as the expansion of the Jesuit Social Services employment pathways support program into the NRCH community hub, or the rollout of mental health first aid training to students at Richmond High School, have been launched from the collaborative platform the RYH provides. Collaborations like these not only *“improve what [services] young people have access to”* but also support each service delivery partner to work towards their own strategic objectives.

The service providers emphasised that, by bringing them together and helping them gain deeper access to the community, RYH supports strategic objectives by making it easier to meet service delivery targets. As one respondent commented:

*“our program had very specific targets [...] and without RYH I don’t know how we would have ever connected with the young people like we did and have the success we had.”*

Service providers explained that their capacity to meet these strategic objectives by engaging hard to reach communities and maximising contact with their clients is also supported by RYH in four ways which have already been covered in this discussion. Firstly, by providing workers with a physical location within the community to raise the profile of services. Secondly, by RYH staff being generous with the local knowledge and relationships to help services establish their own connections with the community. Thirdly, by bringing organisations together to facilitate mutually beneficial strategic partnerships. Finally, by establishing a culture of youth-led service delivery to help services work in a more tailored and responsive way.

To conclude this discussion of RYH’s performance it is important to return to the wellbeing of young people to re-iterate how these various activities have made a tangible impact to people’s actual lives. Firstly, by helping to change the way that young people think about themselves (and the way that they are perceived):

*“Thanks to RYH I’m not just seen as a disadvantaged kid, I am now just a kid. I feel like a normal kid again.”*

And finally, by supporting young people to see a more hopeful future for themselves:

*“Even though I don’t spend as much time here as I used to because I am moving on to the next chapter of my life [finishing year 12] I know I can always come back here whenever I need something.”*

## 6.2 Medium-term Outcomes: Conclusion

Overall RYH has been successful at improving young people’s sense of safety and increasing their engagement and involvement in the community. Young people indicated that RYH has been able to circuit break community safety issues by providing a space to debrief which helps to de-escalate critical incidents. The activity/event programming that RYH offers also contributes to community safety by activating spaces in family-friendly ways and providing young people with constructive alternatives for how to spend their time.

In addition to this, these activities and events support young people to get more involved in the community by offering enriching experiences and opportunities for positive risk-taking which challenge people’s perceptions of the estate and themselves. Through developing a more positive self-concept many young people have opened themselves up to the possibility of working with services to re-engage with education and/or enter the world of work. They also felt inspired to get more involved in community projects which could help to improve the local community’s perceptions of the estate.

Underpinning this outcome is an increase in access to services which helps to support young people to overcome the issues they are facing and start thriving. RYH has played a role in increasing service delivery partners’ capacity to reach the community by bringing them together to share knowledge, establish strategic partnerships and promote one another. This, in combination with and increased

sense of safety and deeper involvement in the community, has improved young people's sense of wellbeing and satisfaction with their lives on the estate. That said, two areas of concern have been identified.

Firstly, at present the level of additional work being undertaken by RYH staff to be responsive to young people's incidental needs is not formally recognised. Whilst debriefing during critical incidents and brief intervention support makes an important contribution to safety and youth engagement, it is labour intensive, and currently it has not been provisioned for in the current staffing model. Currently there are no RYH staff who are tasked with the responsibility of addressing these needs, and considering the volume of work involved, it is recommended that a new full time Youth Support Worker position. This role would be responsible for responding to critical incidents, debriefing with young people and offering informal social/emotional support alongside the provision of impromptu referrals and brief intervention.

And secondly, the spatial constraints of the RYH building are impeding the potential for service delivery partners to work to their full capacity expanding access to services within the community. As outlined in the Short-term Outcomes Conclusion section (see p.19) there is a need to review the accommodation arrangements for RYH, and it is recommended that this review consider the needs of program/service delivery partners as well as programme attendees. These considerations might include looking for a self-contained space which includes a larger office, as well as multiple consulting rooms to allow for confidential client conversations to take place in private alongside program delivery. If this is not deemed feasible, it might be necessary to consider providing extra office spaces and/or client consulting rooms in a separate location to the program delivery space.



## 7. Participation and Engagement Trends

The Youth Engagement Data spreadsheet which tracks the program/service numbers recorded into Yarra Youth Services' case management database forms the basis of this analysis alongside the written quarterly reports and meeting minutes for the RYH Reference Group. Using these sources, it has been possible to evaluate RYH's performance against the KPIs (summarised on page 17) which have help to flesh out our understanding of how young people and stakeholder organisations participated in the different programs/services which have been offered over the past +2 years. However, before looking at these numbers, it is necessary to consider the unique operating context which has shaped this participation.

RYH opened at the end of the first quarter in 2021 during the onset of an unexpected lockdown with case numbers rising after what many had thought was supposed to be the end of COVID-19. This was a time of great uncertainty in which the norms of community program/service delivery had been disrupted, a symptom of the global lack of clarity regarding how a post-pandemic society should operate. In this context, RYH was forced to pivot away from their core focus of program/service delivery and towards the provision of material aid and social support to residents on the estate. This situation posed a challenge for RYH, making it difficult to progress towards the longer term post-COVID-19 goals because, instead of ending, this lockdown initiating another year of rolling restrictions which persisted until October 2021.

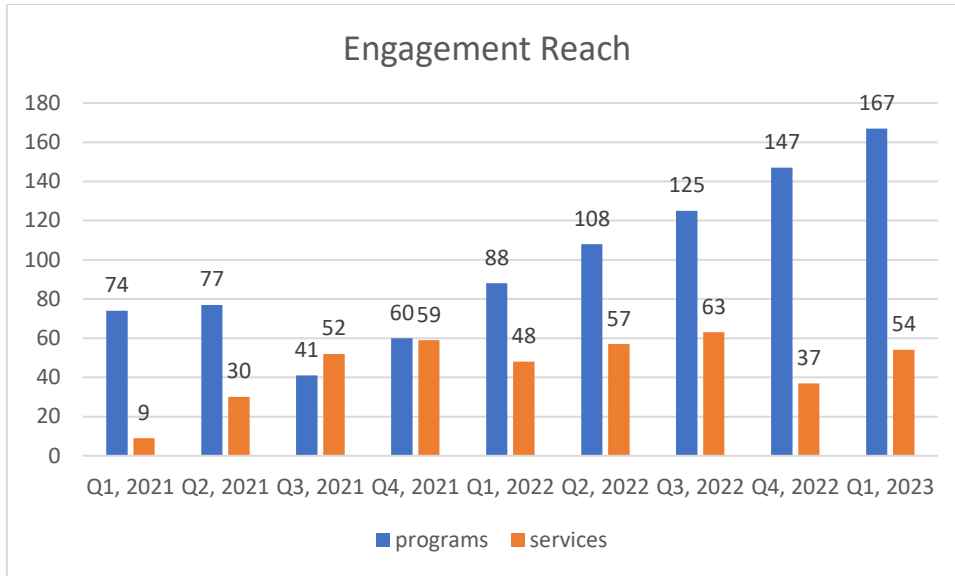
This situation is particularly pertinent to an analysis of participation and engagement data because it highlights that RYH's development has not followed the sort of linear progression that is assumed when developing program KPIs. RYH has had to deal with and adapt to changing circumstances which have continuously redefined not just the possibilities for working with young people, but the needs of the young people themselves. This is not to say that RYH was unable to meet the KPIs but rather that shifts in this data offer valuable insight into how COVID-19 has impacted the community, as well as how these impacts were dealt with by RYH staff and stakeholders.

### 7.1 Engagement

Based on the KPIs which were published in the quarterly reports, RYH was expected to engage 150 individual young people each quarter. From these 150, RYH was expected to have 400 contacts, meaning that each young person was expected to participate in multiple activities during each reporting period. From looking at these figures it is possible to understand:

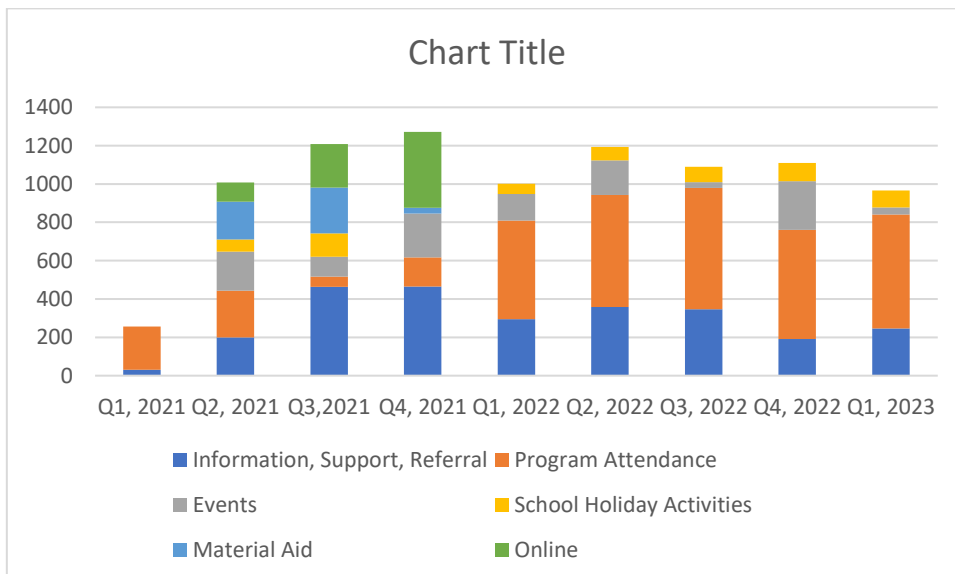
- Engagement Reach: The number of young people participating.
- Level of Demand: The number of contacts each young person has had with RYH.
- Type of Demand: The number contacts per activity type.

Quarterly reporting recorded the numbers of young people involved in programs and services separately. Program numbers were derived from the registration process which is completed when a young person attends RYH for the first time, these figures do not account for attendance at one-off events or holiday activities. Service involvement numbers were also collected from service delivery partners, these figures account for requests for information, support, or referral but not extra-special COVID-19 supports (material aid, online inquiries etc.). These have been plotted in the below chart:



Overall, program registrations (blue) are the best indicator of reach because almost every young person who is engaged with services is registered to attend programs. The first three quarters of 2021 are exceptions, because lockdowns forced all engagement online, making registration difficult, and blurring the distinction between program interaction and support. Looking at these quarters in context of the chart demonstrates the impact of COVID-19 which significantly disrupted the trajectory of growth in program registrations for the majority of 2021. That said, the ease with which RYH was able to recover by the beginning of the following year and commence its growth trajectory is significant. It is also recognised that, despite these setbacks, RYH was able to exceed the reach target by the beginning of 2023.

The full picture of RYH’s impact is evident in the number of contacts, which show the level and nature of demand as can be seen in the chart below:



This chart counts the total attendance recorded for all programs and services, counting every person each time they attend, as well as attendance at holiday programs and events. In addition to this, the number of contacts also includes people who presented at RYH to access material aid or who engaged with staff online during restrictions. What these metrics reveal, is that whilst COVID-19

prevented regular program delivery from occurring in a traditional sense, the level of RYH's contact with the community increased during this time.

RYH accommodated the increased demand for support services, which is evidenced by a sharp increase in service contact which overtook all other activity category totals in Q3 and 4 of 2021, reaching over 400 contacts per quarter. The provision of material aid was also introduced in Q2, 2021 and continued until the end of Q4 resulting in 240 contacts at its peak in Q3. During this time, the inability to deliver traditional programs was compensated for by online engagement (including a weekly games night/group video chat) which grew to almost 400 contacts by Q4 when lockdowns ended. The end of lockdowns brought a seemingly counter-intuitive drop in contacts, which was due to the cessation of online programming and material aid. It is worth noting that these activities were able to facilitate a higher volume of contact than traditional in-person activities because they were not constrained by physical space and/or could be fulfilled in a brief moment.

However, in terms of RYH's core business (face-to-face programs, services, events, holiday activities) there has been a gentle re-alignment of demand which followed the acute experience of the COVID-19 restrictions. Levels of service contact remained elevated throughout the majority of 2022 before dropping back to levels more aligned to the pre-lockdown demand. Whilst demand for programs grew at an accelerated rate over the course of 2022, peaking in Q3, before dropping back to pre-lockdown levels of demand. It is important to note that these re-adjustments do not represent a decline in growth because, as we saw in the previous chart, the numbers of registrations for programs have increased steadily over the same period. Rather, what these trends demonstrate is that during lockdowns the community became overly dependent on RYH for support and social contact due to a lack of other options, but this has gradually returned to normal over 2022 as things have opened back up and people have adjusted to life after lockdowns. Whilst the chart shows a lower number of contacts overall, the quality of post-lockdown engagement is less episodic and reactive and more meaningful contact, based upon regular participation in group programs and/or specialised individual support.

## 7.2 Program Delivery

Obviously, this engagement success is predicated on the strength of the regular activities offered at RYH which are designed to attract young people into the space. This was reflected in the KPIs which included a target of 5 activities to be delivered weekly, as well as additional activities to be offered during each school holiday. To determine RYH's performance in relation to this target, the quarterly reports were reviewed to tally the activities which were listed. According to the data provided by these reports RYH was able to meet this target each quarter with 4-5 weekly and 2-3 fortnightly activities running each quarter, as well as 2-6 scheduled activities each school holiday. The only exception to this being Q3, 2021 when all face-to-face activities were shut down completely. During this quarter activity programming was replaced by a weekly online games night and the holiday program was replaced by a showbag designed to keep young people occupied whilst they were confined to their homes.

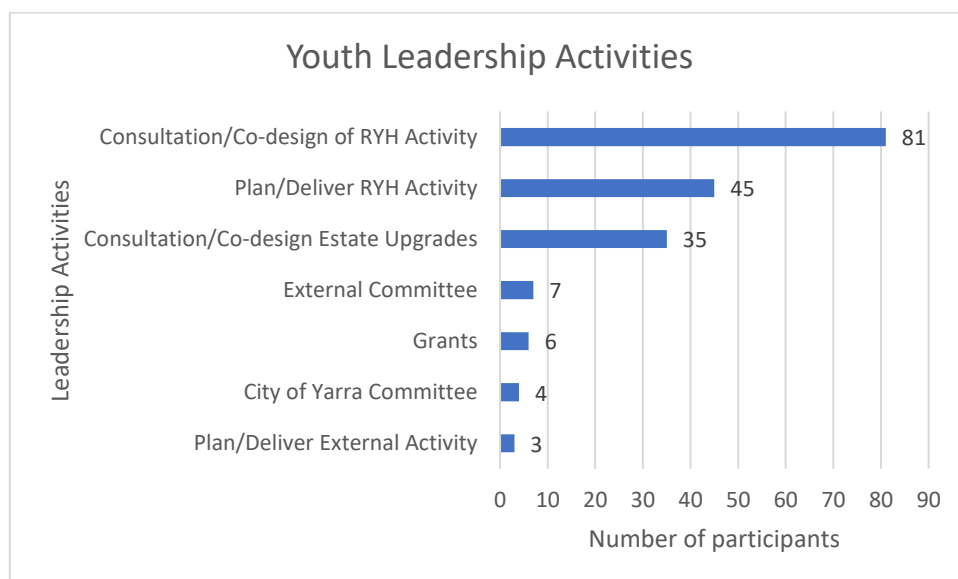
Another target associated with program delivery which is outlined in the KPIs is the number of stakeholder organisations involved in either weekly activities or events/other services. RYH was required to engage 3-5 organisations in the delivery of weekly activities and 4-6 organisations involved in events or service provision. The quarterly reports indicated that RYH consistently exceeded these targets engaging 5-11 organisations with the delivery of weekly activities and 6-12 organisations in events and service provision. This involvement included a range of different sorts of activities such as providing outreach, running their own program activities and support services,

mentoring young people and offering support to pre-existing initiatives. As the discussion of both short- and medium-term outcomes explained, this success has been instrumental to improving young people’s knowledge of and access to services by creating a platform for fostering trust relationships between the community and organisations.

### 7.3 Governance and Youth Leadership

Youth leadership and shared governance was identified as a core activity of RYH in addition to delivering programs and coordinating improved service access. On reflection, the targets which were identified in the KPIs to measure success in this area were restrictive, limited to the number of reference group meetings to be held (6-8/year), the number of young people to be involved in the reference group (4) and the number of consultations which RYH should facilitate youth involvement in (40). This lack of scope caused two issues with reporting, both stemming in part from an over-emphasis on due process. Firstly, the attempt to quantify leadership in terms of meetings held and attendance at meetings meant that progress was too easily derailed by COVID-19 disruptions. Secondly, the emphasis on young people slotting themselves into institutionally defined processes left little opportunity to recognise how young people were demonstrating leadership on their own initiative.

The impact of COVID-19 disruptions is immediately apparent in the quarterly reporting on these KPIs with regards to the number of reference group meetings which fell short at 8 meetings over two years with 1-2 young people present at most, but not all, meetings. As explained, this result is misleading because it does not accommodate the breadth of leadership activities which young people were involved in that contributed directly to improved youth-led governance outcomes which are represented in the chart below:



RYH has been successful at facilitating young people’s involvement in formal co-design and consultation activities. However, it should be noted that the figure cited in the above chart does not reflect the full extent of young people’s participation in consultation, as a review of quarterly reports and reference group meeting minutes revealed that young people were also consulted informally as an organic part of everyday program/service delivery. Similarly, whilst young people may not have participated in the RYH reference group, this does not mean that young people were not active on governance committees related to their community. On the contrary, 7 young people were involved

in external committees run by either DFFH or stakeholder organisations and 4 young people joined Yarra Youth Advocacy Group that is facilitated by Council.

Young people from RYH were not just involved in supporting adults with the planning of organisation-led projects, programs, and services. Rather, with the support of staff, a significant number of people have led the planning and delivery of their own events and activity programs for RYH. Some young people have even had the opportunity to work with/for stakeholder organisations to lead the development of programs external to RYH. Inspired by these successes, young people from RYH have even begun working with staff to seek out, apply for and secure grant funding to develop their own independent community projects. A great example of this is the Seed Network podcast series<sup>2</sup> which secured a Council Youth-led Grant in 2022 to produce a regular podcast series focussed on giving a voice to diverse young people from African communities and initiating a conversation regarding their experiences of navigating Australian culture and society. This demonstrates a genuine appetite amongst young people to move beyond traditional models of youth leadership towards independent youth-directed activities.

#### 7.4 A Final Comment on RYH's Reporting Framework

This evaluation found that RYH is not well served by the current reporting framework, which mainly focusses on quantitative measures with insufficient linkages to the qualitative impacts of the initiative. The KPIs which were derived from the program logic outputs rather than outcomes, resulted in process-driven framework. This is best exemplified by the numerous tasks, such as appointing a Team Leader, developing operational policy, or delivering a launch event, which are not appropriate measures of long-term success. Of the more appropriate KPIs, the tendency to prescribe strict target metrics for numbers of programming activities, partnerships, consultations, and meetings per quarter did not leave sufficient space to consider the impact of these activities.

Quantitative targets are important for ensuring proper accountability when establishing a baseline for service delivery which defines a minimum participation threshold for maintaining a program. Obviously, these numbers help to gauge the scope and reach of an initiative which is a necessary part of reporting, however, they cannot measure the impact of these activities. Without enough of a focus on impact, reporting risks becoming an exercise in simple compliance which distracts organisations from taking stock of how the work being undertaken is generating social value.

To address this, it is recommended that Council and DFFH revise the KPIs so that they are more closely aligned to outcomes and prompt critical reflection into the impact of the work. To support this change Council and DFFH should consider reviewing the reporting templates to move beyond accounting for what is being done by challenging staff to articulate how these activities contribute to improved outcomes for the community. Furthermore, the role of evaluation should be re-defined to better support deeper critical reflection by establishing an ongoing process which is conducted alongside program delivery and, if possible, integrated into quarterly reporting.

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<sup>2</sup> This podcast series can be found on Spotify (<https://open.spotify.com/show/7oozbBCuhYz7uFTwvBDaZQ>) and YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@theseednetwork4004>)

## 8. Conclusion

To conclude, this section examines the Key Evaluation Questions and the extent to which RYH has fulfilled the overarching aim:

*To provide a safe space for young people to engage in programs, activities and events, as well as get access to information, support and referral to other services.*

Success is defined in accordance with the best practice principles, which are outlined in the Background chapter. These principles encompass both the academic models, which determine the core components of a successful hub, and State/Federal policy priorities, which contextualise core components in the present-day political landscape.

### 8.1 Best Practice Principles Revisited

From an academic perspective, youth hubs must provide a space that is youth-friendly in its aesthetic presentation and located somewhere central and non-stigmatising. Programming should provide a mix of recreational activities, acute intervention services and developmental programs to ensure that young people are engaged and that both their immediate wellbeing and longer-term development needs are supported. Most importantly, planning for the delivery of programs and services must be guided by the needs of the community and prioritise relationships. To ensure that the delivery of these services is properly coordinated, a hub must have clear processes which enable collaboration and accountability. These processes must be underpinned by a strategic vision which is developed through shared governance involving stakeholders, young people and the community.

In terms of the RYH's specific policy context, it must focus on improving the safety of young people and their families by activating the estate through positive activities, events, and programs. Space activation should also contribute to a stronger sense of community by building relationships between residents. Additionally, RYH must improve young people's access to the support services they need for healthy development by attracting service delivery partners into the community. To ensure maximum impact, RYH must prioritise prevention and early intervention and make a targeted effort to engage the most vulnerable and hard to reach groups within the community. RYH must avoid applying a deficit lens and adopt a strength-based approach which makes virtue of the community's diverse knowledge, abilities, and assets. Finally, this work must all be accountable to a shared governance model which gives young people real decision-making power.

### 8.2 Key Evaluation Question Responses

With regards to the four evaluation questions which were outlined in the Introduction chapter of this report, the evaluation has reached the following conclusions.

#### 8.2.1 To what extent has RYH provided a safe space for young people?

RYH has successfully created a safe space for young people which epitomises the principles of a youth-friendly, central, and non-stigmatising. Key to this success is the location, which places RYH right at people's doorstep. The designs of the interior, enclosed courtyard and building facade have also played a role in helping people feel safe by establishing a casual and fun atmosphere which makes young people feel welcome. The co-design process which kept young people involved throughout the development of RYH was pivotal to this success because it has ensured that the resulting space suits their needs. It is important to recognise that a building and interior design alone cannot be credited with the sense of safety which has been created in RYH. Rather, it is the

welcoming and non-judgemental attitude of the staff, and their open and responsive way of working with young people which has helped them to feel at home.

Furthermore, the safety gains associated with RYH are not confined to the building itself because staff have leveraged this space as a launch pad for activating the surrounding grounds. Observational data and participant interviews illustrate how events and programs have made families feel more visible on the estate, helping them to be comfortable occupying space outside in the open space between towers 108 Elizabeth Street and 110 Elizabeth Street. It should be noted that, in part, this outcome has been facilitated by the MSIR which has provided an alternative space for the drug using community which redirects anti-social activity away from the outdoor spaces that adjoin the residential towers.

The evaluation did reveal some issues with the current space which need to be addressed. Firstly, maintenance request response times are slow, resulting in people having to make do without essential building services like poor internet or hot water. Secondly, due to the small size of the main activity delivery space RYH lacks the capacity to accommodate growing demand for programs and services. Thirdly, the lack of office space and consulting rooms limits access to private spaces appropriate for confidential client/worker conversations. Furthermore, the small size of the current office space constrains the number of services which can be present on site at any given time.

#### 8.2.2 To what extent have RYH programs/activities/events engaged and inspired young people to get involved in the local community??

Participation data demonstrates that the level of engagement in RYH's programs, activities, and events is above the standard set by the KPIs. RYH's commitment to providing opportunities for young people to influence programming decisions has helped to ensure that a diverse and representative range of interests are catered for. Young people's sense of ownership over these recreational 'hooks' have helped to engage hard to reach cohorts because the programs, activities and events are promoted by their peers creating a safe entry point into RYH. This approach has been beneficial for young people's sense of belonging on the estate because they have been able to strengthen their relationships with one another.

As a result, RYH has been able to perform a preventative function by engaging young people in constructive activities which not only build relationships but also expand people's horizons, promote positive risk-taking and challenge negative self-perceptions. This helps to mitigate the risks that young people might get caught up in anti-social activity and inspires participants to make positive contributions to their community. The success of this approach is evidenced by the numerous youth-initiated and -led activities and events which have been launched through RYH with staff support.

#### 8.2.3 To what extent has the access to information, support and referral that has been provided by RYH improved the health and wellbeing outcomes for young people??

RYH's service coordination has successfully brought together a diverse range of partner organisations which have not just improved young people's knowledge of and access to services but increased their willingness to engage with these supports. Core to this success is RYH's relationships-first approach which encourages workers from all organisations to establish rapport with young people and build their own personal connections by getting involved in the everyday life of the hub.

Through fostering familiarity between workers and young people RYH has been able to mitigate many of the barriers to accessing services because workers are regarded as trusted members of the community. This approach strengthens early intervention because workers' awareness of young people's everyday lives increases the opportunities to engage them sooner when the need arises.

This emphasis on relationships is also mirrored in the way that service providers work together as co-located colleagues, leveraging incidental everyday social interaction to facilitate better information-sharing, care team coordination, referrals, and inter-organisation collaboration.

This responsive, relationship-based service model is exemplified by RYH's open door policy which welcomes young people to ring the bell at any time that the centre is staffed (regardless of whether programs are in session). This invitation has shaped young people's perception of RYH as a place which is always there for them if they need help. Consequently, RYH has been able to work proactively, defusing family tensions, referring young people to specialist services, mitigating the impact of incidents and supporting young people to engage with school or work.

Whilst the positive impact of this approach is undeniable—with most interview respondents reporting that young people appear happier and more confident, with an increased sense of hope for the future—it is important to consider the workload associated with these outcomes. Building these relationships and being available/responsive to young people is done on top of regular duties and interviews have highlighted that, at times, this has placed staff under undue pressure.

#### 8.2.4 To what extent have the structures and processes implemented by RYH supported everyone to work towards a shared strategic vision?

It is important to acknowledge that RYH was developed in an open, iterative, and responsive way which prioritised the creation of space for community to influence planning. Rather than setting up the hub with pre-determined structures and processes the Team Leader and their staff invited young people to work with them right from the beginning to figure out what RYH needed to be and how it needed to work. Similarly, RYH has been able to foster a culture of collaborative innovation and authentically youth-led service delivery by allowing the working relationships with stakeholder organisations to guide planning and coordination.

Whilst at an organisational level formal structures such as a reporting framework exist, at a program level RYH has relied upon fluid, informal processes which emerge from interpersonal relationships. This flexibility has delivered many beneficial outcomes, however, there are risks associated with an ongoing lack of formal structure. Informal relationship-based ways of working rely on a fragile equilibrium which is easily disrupted if individual workers leave or a service delivery partner's funding arrangements change. In the case of RYH, such disruptions would likely impact youth leadership activities which are largely ad hoc or incidental, and reliant on the generative potential of individual relationships. Without an established process for documenting and evaluating this work there is a risk that RYH will struggle to communicate its true impact to decision-makers. This has program-level implications, hampering RYH's capacity to garner formal recognition for the achievements of the community, and material implications because, without an official of these achievements, RYH is not well placed to advocate for its own resourcing needs.

### 8.3 Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That the State Government continues to provide core funding of \$304,303pa (indexed to CPI) to Yarra Council for the purposes of operating the Richmond Youth Hub for a minimum of a further four years from July 2024 to ensure the program continuity and stability required to leverage reported successes into enduring long-term social change.

**Recommendation 2:** That the State Government seeks to increase the budget for the Richmond Youth Hub by \$115,000pa (indexed to CPI) to create a new Youth Support Worker role (1.0EFT), which addresses young people's additional wellbeing needs, as well as to extend the Peer Youth



Worker and casual Youth Services Officer roles by 0.3EFT to accommodate growth in demand for programs.

**Recommendation 3:** That the State Government provides an additional \$18,000pa (indexed to CPI) for a Youth Leadership Incubator program which will support young people to develop and deliver youth led projects that address community needs in partnership with Council, DFFH and community stakeholders.

**Recommendation 4:** That the State Government undertakes a review RYH's facilities and maintenance arrangements in the next 12 months to determine the viability of relocating to a larger space which better suits program growth and ensure that the space is appropriately maintained.

**Recommendation 5:** That subject to funding, Council and DFFH work collaboratively to develop a rolling formative evaluation framework which integrates into quarterly/annual reporting and measurement improvements.

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## Appendix 1: RYH, Yarra City Council and External Stakeholder Participants

### EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Organisation	Name	Position Title
Department of Families, Fairness and Housing	Ian Adotey	Manager, Yarra Community Capacity Building
Jesuit Social Services	Heidi Boardman	JVES Mentor and Employment Pathway Advisor
	Angela Angelopoulos	Education & Employment Programs Coordinator
Youth Support and Advocacy Services	Jordana Soso	Youth and Family Worker
Drummond Street Services	Marie Iafeta	Manager, Youth Services
	Christobel Elliot	Youth Development Practitioner
Uniting	Daisy Aitken	Youth Support & Advocacy Program Practitioner
North Richmond Community Health	Chantelle Bazerghi	Healthy Communities Manager
	Kuich Johnson	Health and Wellbeing Officer
GR8M8S	Phu Ngyen	Friday Soccer Program Facilitator
Helping Hoops	Teuila Reid	Executive Director

### RYH STAFF

Organisation	Name	Position Title
Yarra City Council	Malcolm Foard	Manager, Family, Youth and Children Services
	Rupert North	Coordinator, Youth Services
	Sandra Tay	Team Leader, Richmond Youth Hub
	Luciano Cornelius	Youth Development Officer, Programs & Engagement
	Iftine Omar	Peer Youth Worker
	Idil Ali	Youth Participation & Advocacy Officer

### YARRA CITY COUNCIL STAFF

Unit/Team	Name	Position Title
Family Services	Joao Goncalves	Family Support Case Worker
Library Services	Dylan Oosterweghel	Team Leader, Community Engagement and Outreach

## Appendix 2: Semi-Structured Interview Guides

### VOX POP QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Demographic Information:

1. Age

#### Programs

2. How often do you attend Richmond Youth Hub?

3. What programs do you participate in at Richmond Youth Hub?

4. What do you like best about these programs?

5. Is there any way these programs could be improved?

**General Feedback**

What is your favourite thing about RYH?

6. Can you think of any ways we can make RYH better?

## YOUTH LEADER INTERVIEW

Respondent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Background Information

1. What role did you play in establishing the RYH?

2. How have you been involved in the ongoing running of the RYH? I.e., governance committee.

### Impact of RYH

3. As a local resident, how do you feel the RYH contributes to the community? Issues it solves or benefits it brings?

4. From a personal perspective how have the programs/services at RYH supported you?  
How would you describe the impact on your life?

5. What opportunities has RYH provided you to take a leadership role either specifically within the centre or more broadly the community?



**Improvement Suggestions**

6. Are there any outstanding problems with how RYH operates which need to be resolved?

7. Can you identify any gaps in the current RYH model which should be addressed?

8. Any other improvement suggestions?

**RYH STAFF INTERVIEW**

**Respondent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Background Information**

9. What is your role at Yarra Youth Services?

10. How are you involved with RYH?

**Reflections on the Integrated Youth Hub Model**

11. What effect has embedding RYH in the estate grounds had on the delivery of Council Youth Services?

12. How has the co-location of different agencies at RYH changed the delivery of Council Youth services? Has it fostered a more collaborative way of working across the sector?

**Service Outcomes**

13. How has RYH contributed to improved service outcomes for young people in terms of health, wellbeing and social connection?

14. In general terms are there other ways that RYH has improved quality of life for young people on the estate?

**Improvement Suggestions**

15. Are there any outstanding problems with how RYH operates which need to be resolved?

16. Can you identify any gaps in the current RYH model which should be addressed?

17. Any other improvement suggestions?

**EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW**

**Respondent Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organisation Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Background Information**

18. Could you provide an overview of the services which your organisation delivers for young people in North Richmond?

19. What is your specific role in the delivery of this service?

20. How would you describe your organisation's involvement with RYH?

**Contributions to Service Delivery**

21. How does this involvement align with or contribute to your organisation's strategic priorities?

22. How has your involvement with RYH helped young people in North Richmond access to your service? What role has RYH played in facilitating this?

23. How has RYH's integrated hub approach fostered inter-organisation collaborations organisations which support better service delivery? i.e., referral pathways, service coordination, resource-sharing etc.

## Appendix 3: Program Logic

**Program title:** Richmond Youth Hub

**Program goals:**

To provide a safe space for young people to engage in programs, activities and events, as well as get access to information, support and referral to other local services

**Program objectives:**

- Design and build a cohesive space that is suitable for the needs of young people and partner organisations.
- Create and implement a governance model that allows for co-design with young people.
- Work collaboratively with stakeholders in the delivery of programs and services that are engaging and inspiring for young people.
- Enhance young people's health, wellbeing and sense of safety.
- Increase young people's knowledge of, and access to, youth services.

Situation	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (6 – 12 months)	Medium-term outcomes (1 – 3 years)	Long-term outcomes (3 years and onwards)
<p>The Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (SEIFA Index) shows that the geographic levels of highest disadvantage in Yarra are concentrated in the main public housing areas of Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy</p> <p>There are significantly higher proportions of people feeling unsafe in Abbotsford and North Richmond compared to other parts of Yarra (Yarra Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey 2015).</p>	<p>Project funding Venue Staff Relationships with stakeholders Promotional material Building materials Governance framework Networks Data Relevant regulation and policy</p>	<p>Design and build of Richmond Youth Hub Recruitment and induction of Team Leader and Youth Workers Development of policies, procedures, and systems for application in the hub Marketing and promotion plan developed and implemented Engagement with key stakeholders to coordinate partnership activities at the Richmond Youth Hub Consultation with young people Supporting activity for launch event at</p>	<p>Richmond Youth Hub building completed and opened (by Jan/Feb 2021) Team Leaders and Youth Workers appointed Relevant policies, procedures and systems implemented Marketing and promotion plan. Launch event delivered. 5 programs, activities and events delivered at the Richmond Youth Hub each week Activities and events delivered each school holiday period 150 young people engaged per quarter through</p>	<p>Young people feel connected to the Youth Hub Young people on the Youth Hub reference group increase their knowledge about leadership and governance Young people make social connections and meet new people Young people improve their skills and abilities Young people have greater knowledge of local youth services Organisations improve their capacity to deliver programs and services Services and programs are</p>	<p>Young people become more involved in the wider community Young people feel engaged and inspired Young people feel safer Young people report increased levels of life satisfaction and wellbeing Young people have greater access to local youth services Organisations deliver their broader strategic objectives</p>	<p>Young people are seen as leaders in their community Young people have enhanced education and employment outcomes Victorians are socially engaged and live in inclusive communities</p>



Situation	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (6 – 12 months)	Medium-term outcomes (1 – 3 years)	Long-term outcomes (3 years and onwards)
<p>Young people in the Yarra City Council have petitioned Council to enhance the safety of, and provide additional services in, the North Richmond Housing estate</p>		<p>Richmond Youth Hub Co-design governance model developed and implemented Hub Reference Group established and meeting regularly Networks established and maintained</p>	<p>services, programs, activities and events at the Richmond Youth Hub 400 contacts with young people per quarter. 3 – 5 organisations delivering weekly activities at the Richmond Youth Hub 4 – 6 organisations involved in events and other services/activities at the hub Hub Reference Group meetings held (6 – 8 per year) 4 young people involved in reference group 40 young people participating in consultation through the Hub.</p>	<p>accessible and appropriate Services and programs respond to choice, culture, identity, circumstances and goals</p>		

**Assumptions:**

- Launch event is well attended and targeted to its audience
- Marketing and promotion material communicates the appropriate messaging and reaches the right people
- The venue is safe and attractive to its target demographic
- Appropriate recruitment takes place and the incumbent co-ordinator and youth workers are a good 'fit'.
- Young people are engaged and motivated to participate
- Policies, systems and procedures are fit-for-purpose
- Positive and collaborative working relationships with stakeholders are established, including effective meetings and networks
- The programming is attractive to young people
- Governance model is fit-for-purpose.

**External factors:**

- Restricted funding environment due to COVID-19
- People less willing to interact and be in public spaces due to COVID-19
- Machinery of Government changes at DHHS diminish resources for, and ability to focus on, the project
- Young people's previous experience with local government leads them to question the value of co-design
- Partner organisations have reduced staffing levels as a result of COVID-19, which impedes their ability to contribute to the hub