Australia's Youth Engagement Strategy

A submission to: The Office for Youth, Australian Government

yourtown is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, long-term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, as well as support for those experiencing domestic and family violence. **yourtown** has evolved to helping hundreds of thousands of young people each year by powering a range of service offerings that support them through difficult challenges.

Our services

For over 60 years, **yourtown** has been supporting children, young people, and families across Australia. Our track record includes:

- Employment, education, and social enterprise programs to help long term unemployed young people re-engage with education and/or employment
- Kids Helpline, providing professional counselling and support to 5–25-year-olds across Australia since 1991
- Kids Helpline @ School and Kids Helpline @ High School, which deliver early intervention and prevention programs through primary and secondary schools
- My Circle, a confidential, private, online peer support network for 13–25-year-olds to share information and build coping skills
- Mental health service/s for children aged 0-11 years old and their families, with moderate mental health needs
- Domestic and family violence refuge, accommodation, and therapeutic supports for women and their children, including post-refuge support
- Accommodation and therapeutic supports for young parents and their children at high risk
- Parentline, a telephone and online counselling and support service for parents and carers in the Northern Territory and Queensland
- Expressive Therapy interventions for young children and infants who have experienced trauma and abuse, or been exposed to violence, and
- Young Parents Program providing parenting support to help with child development, life skills and health and wellbeing activities in safe, supportive environments.

Kids Helpline

yourtown's Kids Helpline is Australia's only free and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for any young person aged 5 to 25. It offers children and young people a range of care options that are right for their needs and circumstances.

Our commitment to being there anytime, and for any reason, has meant that we have responded to more than 8.7 million contacts from children and young people nationally in the 32 years since our service was first established, whilst also providing tens of millions of self-help interactions via our website and social channels.

In 2022, our Kids Helpline counsellors responded to nearly 145,000 contacts from children and young people across Australia, including 5,026 crisis responses for children and young people at imminent risk of harm.

Youth Participation

yourtown's Youth Participation team engages a diverse and active range of young people, including those with direct experience with **yourtown** services including Kids Helpline (current or previous). Their engagement creates opportunities to use their time, energy, lived experience and critical thinking to make things better for other young people and to advocate for change within **yourtown**, as well as their communities. Our Youth Advisory Groups are formed for specific topics including First Nations, lived experience, LGBTQIA+, and employment services.

yourtown welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Australian Government's consultation on a Youth Engagement Strategy. **yourtown** strongly supports the Government's commitment to: "...provide young Australians with strong and formalised engagement in government and policy making" recognising that "young people need and deserve a say on the issues that impact them".[1]

yourtown welcomes the development of a new Youth Engagement Strategy to improve how the Australian Government engages with young people, both now and into the future. This submission is in two parts. The first part sets out **yourtown**'s organisational response drawing from our experience, learnings and understanding from over 60 years as one of Australia's leading charities working with children and young people. The second part provides a response to the main discussion questions from young people in **yourtown**'s Youth Advisory Group.

Issues that are important to young people

Voice of young people

Of foremost concern to young people – is that their voice is heard and taken seriously.

Issues will change, fluctuate and emerge as different opportunities and/or barriers emerge. However, the cornerstone to a youth strategy that stands the test of time, is the foundational voice of young people themselves. They want to be able to express themselves, voice their ideas, and provide solutions that positively impact policies and programs.

They want their voice to be heard on an equal basis with others. Unfortunately, the wording and design of the consultation paper questions appears to have prioritised the voices of workers and organisations, over those of young people. The discussion paper opens with four questions for public consultation, including an invitation for feedback from young people. However, the last two pages provide more detailed questions specifically directed towards 'those who work with young people'. The obvious questions that arose within our Youth Advisory Group were 'why were only the workers or organisations being asked these questions? Why weren't these also directed towards young people?'

In reading the discussion paper - what our young people immediately felt is that their voices and opinions were never going to be as important or as valued in this process as those who are 'working with' children and young people.

Taking young people seriously, means letting their voice be heard on an equal basis. It also means taking them seriously at the very beginning of every consultation process, re-thinking consultation designs and questions, and shifting away from old engagement habits. This requires recognising and respecting that young people have much to say on the way that people work with them, just as workers or organisations do.

Young people want to be involved. They want to have an equal say, and want to be heard, particularly in matters that are specifically about them.

Key social issues

The key issues identified as important to young people in the discussion paper (Mental health and access to healthcare; Promoting equity and removing discrimination; Climate change and the environment; Cost of living and housing; Access to a quality education; and

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[1] See Labor's new youth engagement model (2021). Accessible at:
https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fpartypol%2F8047454%22;src1=sm1

Employment opportunities) all align with the issues identified during **yourtown**'s engagement with young people across a range of fora over the past few years.

In **yourtown**'s 2021 Your Voice Report young people told us that they faced multiple, varied, and complex issues in all aspects of life, including:

- how their mental health has been impacted by COVID-19, particularly the multiple and long lockdowns, and the fear and uncertainty about COVID-19's long-term impacts to health and society
- the many barriers they face in accessing appropriate and timely support; and how services (particularly, mental health services) are not always designed to 'meet their needs', with practitioners often lacking an understanding of how to help or work with them
- how the education system leaves them stressed, and they don't have the supports they need to help them achieve their best now and into the future
- how they feel under-prepared to enter the workforce, and are worried about finding a job that will pay enough to support them
- how they feel financially stressed by the high cost of living, including housing and transport, particularly if they rely on welfare, while they are unemployed or studying
- how they do not feel safe
- how those from diverse groups often struggle with accessing assistance and preparing themselves for the future
- that they felt hopeless because of climate change, and uncertain about what government was doing about it and its priorities, and
- that they had generalised lack of knowledge and trust in government and its processes.[2]

yourtown's feedback on the Australian Government's consultation on Measuring What Matters similarly identified the following issues:

- Affordable and accessible healthcare – including both physical and mental health
- Cost of living – affordable, essential necessities in particular, groceries and housing
- Infrastructure – including access to nature, reliable public transport, and accessible spaces
- Financial and job security
- Support networks – including friends, family, and community support[3]

Top three issues to be prioritised

The discussion paper has proposed identification of 3 top issues for prioritisation. While all the issues identified are critical, it is recommended 'promoting equity and removing discrimination' should underpin all areas, and should be prioritised in:

  a. Mental health and access to healthcare,
  b. Cost of living and housing, and
  c. Employment opportunities

The following priorities set out what young people have told us should be prioritised through a range of engagement activities that we have undertaken with them over the last few years.

Mental health and access to healthcare

The specific outcomes that should be achieved in these areas should focus on achieving fair and equitable access to youth focused mental health services, such as:

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[2] **yourtown**. (2021). Your Voice Recommendations Report Prepared October 2021
(https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/yourvoice-Recommendations-Report-Oct2021-WEB.pdf).
[3] **yourtown**. (2023). Measuring what matters – second consultation process

- affordable and timely healthcare sessions that are designed to meet the needs of young people. There needs to be availability afterhours (for those who cannot attend appointments during work or school hours) and be able to meet gaps in rural and remote areas.
- investment in community based virtual and face to face mental health services that are embedded in the broader mental health service system
- greater investment in services for the 'missing middle'(ie., for those who are too complex for a GP, but not severe enough for an admission to hospital), and
- a focus on prevention and early intervention strategies that address age and developmental needs, are holistic, and have consideration for ecological factors (including family, school, transition periods and community contexts).

Cost of living and housing

The specific outcomes that should be achieved in these areas should focus on achieving fair and equitable access to housing and support for cost of living, including:

- income supports and allowances that are realistic and keep pace with inflation and the cost of living. When young people engaged with **yourtown** on the Your Voice project, they recommended that income support and allowances should be increased, with regular reviews to ensure that they are sufficient, flexible, and equitable to meet basic needs[4].
- housing policies tailored to young people and their situations. With targeted strategies, specialist accommodation and housing solutions, specific for young people who are experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness. Housing solutions and integrated supports should be designed to meet the preferences and needs of young people. During our Your Voice engagement young people told us that a lack of affordable housing meant many were couch surfing, rough sleeping and experiencing unsafe housing situations[5], and
- access to transitional housing for women and young people escaping domestic and family violence (DFV). The lack of social housing and long-term affordable housing means that many women and their children are faced with the unenviable choice between homelessness or returning to their abuser[6].

Employment opportunities

The specific outcomes that should be achieved in this area should focus on achieving fair and equitable employment opportunities for young people, including:

- employment strategies that are developed and delivered in tandem with education strategies. To ensure there are clear pathways for young people to move from education to employment.
- an employment services model that is overhauled and re-designed, adopting a human-centred design approach with young people.
- employment service models that incorporate a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing to address critical barriers to employment for young people and
- place-based, integrated approaches to employment and education services to ensure the development of localised employment and training opportunities and pathways for young people.

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[4] **yourtown**. (2021). Your Voice Recommendations Report Prepared October 2021 (https://www.yourtown.com.au/sites/default/files/document/yourvoice-Recommendations-Report-Oct2021-WEB.pdf).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Mission Australia (2019), Out of the shadows – Domestic and Family violence: A leading cause of homelessness in Australia

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> **Recommendation 1:**
>
> **That the Australian Government:**
>
> - **ensure that young people are engaged equally on matters that relate to them**
> - **Prioritise 'promoting equity and removing discrimination' in the areas of:**
>   - **Mental health and access to healthcare**
>   - **Cost of living and housing, and**
>   - **Employment opportunities**

Youth engagement model

The discussion paper has raised the question as to how the new Youth Engagement Model (the Model) can be used to ensure meaningful engagement with young people, and what additional programs or initiatives this should involve.

The Model is currently comprised of the Office for Youth, a Youth Steering Committee, Youth Advisory Groups and the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC). However, one of the challenges already experienced in implementing this model, is that there is insufficient resourcing to enable youth organisations such as **yourtown** to engage directly with our young people on behalf of any of these engagement groups. **yourtown** has had to fund young people to engage in this process from our own limited resources to support this consultation process. Because of this, we were only able to engage a handful of young people and provide them with an honorarium for their time. This is to be compared with the potential reach of our Kids Helpline website and social media (over 2.3 million and 5.8 million respectively in 2022 alone) should funding be available to support a broader engagement with Australian young people.

The engagement model and principles underpinning it will fail, if no (or insufficient) funding is provided to young people or to organisations to engage with the young people they work with. Organisations and young people cannot be expected to bear the cost of the government's consultation without fair and equitable funding and support, and young people cannot be expected to be engaged in a consultation process without fair and reasonable compensation for their time and effort.

It is important the Strategy also considers the engagement of children and young people already occurring in Australia. For example, the Children's Commissioners in each State and Territory currently facilitate their own engagement with young people using mechanisms such as Youth Advisory Groups, Youth Councils, Committees, Ambassadors, and Surveys. The Strategy should take a shared learning approach where the information gained from engagement with young people at a state level is also shared and heard at a federal level. This also ensures that young people do not have to repeat their stories, opinions, and ideas.

> **Recommendation 2:**
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> **That the Australian Government commit to providing adequate funding both to the Office of Youth, and also to youth based organisations to support meaningful engagement with young people throughout Australia, and compensate young people for their time and effort.**

Embedding Youth Engagement

The discussion paper has raised the question of best practice engagement models, and lessons learnt. The model should be centred primarily upon human-centred design[7] and co-design principles[8]. A best practice model should:

- adopt a whole-of-government human-centred design approach to addressing issues within services and system as a key principle of youth participation
- facilitate the independent, fearless and unmediated voice of young people
- conduct regular pulse checks to determine what's happening 'now' with young people on the ground,
- commit to long term investment in relationships of trust within the community and working with young people to deliver co-designed solutions that work,
- embed child safe principles and practice within the model, and
- embed a transparent feedback process to close the loop, so that young people can see their input reflected, or understand why it has not been taken on board.

Lessons learnt

In 2021, **yourtown** engaged in a human centred design project to better understand the ways young people and parents seek help. Through focus groups, in-depth studies, surveys, and interviews, we received more than 1,500 responses. When asked about barriers to help-seeking young people raised the following concerns:

- anxiety about talking to someone
- concerns related to privacy
- not realising they need help, and
- difficulty navigating the many and varied systems at the same time

Through this process we were better able to understand how young people seek help, and their experiences have led to a number of changes to our existing services, the development of future service options and informed our digital transformation process.

The Strategy should set the standard that services should be designed to meet the needs, communication styles and preferences of children and young people living in the 21st Century; to meet them 'where they are at' and prepare them for transitioning to adulthood. This includes designing services that:

- 'don't feel like services', whether through peer-to-peer approaches or similar mechanisms
- enable ongoing connectivity and availability of services
- embrace the environment of digital natives and facilitate online access, whether through multi-channel use, or ongoing connectivity and availability of services
- provide reassurance of trust between the service provider and young people
- enable young people to tentatively reach out and 'try before they buy'
- enable privacy,
- are safe places, and
- equitable and fair access to services, for example, for early intervention and prevention of mental health issues, and ongoing wellbeing.

At **yourtown**, we have learned to embrace young people's right to participate in decision making processes that affect them. In 2022, over 2.3 million unique users accessed our Kids Helpline website. This significant traffic gave us the platform to conduct 'state of the nation'

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[7] A problem solving technique that places real people at the centre of the development process, enabling the creation of products and/or services that resonate and are tailored to the audience's need.
[8] Design process that is participatory, in which community members are treated as equal collaborators in the design process.

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real time pulse surveys and collect timely data on young people's views and pressing concerns. This has also enabled us to engage with a diverse range of young people enabling them to use their time, energy, lived experience, critical thinking, and dedication to make things better for all young people and to advocate for change in their communities.

Further, engagement needs to be flexible and consistent, enabling constant understanding and tracking of issues that are relevant to young people both now and into the future. The engagement model needs to include mechanisms to regularly check the 'pulse' of what is happening with young people, and issues that may be impacting them. This is particularly important following times or crisis, or major events (such as bushfires or floods). It is also important that the model includes a range of engagement methods, such as face-to-face and digital modes.

> **Recommendation 3:**
>
> **That the Australian Government prioritise a human centred design approach to embedding youth engagement. Where young people are fully engaged in the design and implementation of the strategy.**

Barriers for engaging with young people

The discussion paper has raised the question regarding the barriers young people experience when engaging with Government and how they could be removed.

Some of the known barriers for young people include:

- fear of giving open and honest feedback due to potential personal repercussions
- not knowing how to engage, or that engagement is possible
- being underestimated in relation to either interest in engaging, or capacity to engage
- those leading the engagement do not have the right knowledge and skills to engage with young people pertinent to their age group
- lack of flexibility in approaches to engaging with young people (eg., not using platforms/venues where young people are, or engaging them 'where they are at')
- lack of incentives for young people to participate, including recognition for their time
- lack of feedback or closing of the loop on the engagement process
- engagement only on issues that are 'pre-determined'
- lack of support/capacity building, or confidence in the young person to engage effectively, and
- restrictions on engagement with young people under the age of 18

One means of ensuring honest and courageous engagement is using independent facilitators who can consult directly with young people, supporting them to voice their issues and concerns. As an example of this, to ensure courageous feedback when re-designing its services, **yourtown** hired independent consultants to work directly with young people to obtain their feedback and ideas about what worked, or didn't work in our services. Digital engagement methods may also support a level of anonymity that increases confidence in being honest in feedback and engagement processes.

It is also important that engagement fits within the eco-system that young people live. The engagement model needs to ensure it 'meets' young people where they are at. This includes consideration of their communication styles, developmental needs, and preferences. This is particularly important for those who are hard to reach, disengaged or disconnected from systems where engagement could occur (e.g., education, health or youth groups).

Importantly, facilitators engaging with young people need the appropriate skills and knowledge of how to work with, and best engage the participation of the age group that they are working with.

> **Recommendation 4:**
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> **That facilitators for youth engagement:**
>
> - **have the appropriate skills and knowledge for engagement with young people**
> - **undertake engagement within the ecosystem that young people live, and**
> - **reduce known barriers for youth engagement where possible.**

Engaging with diverse young people

The discussion paper raised the question regarding what safe and inclusive engagement looks like, and how to engage effectively and sensitively with young people from diverse backgrounds.

Every proposed engagement with a young person needs to consider will that young person 'feel' safe, and 'be' safe. To do this, also requires thinking about whether the engagement, process and methodology used, will ensure safety in a multiplicity of contexts, including with those from First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, or rural and remote backgrounds. The diverse experiences and needs of all young people cannot be captured through categorising or lumping young people into a homogenous group; namely 'young people'.

Primarily, a trauma-responsive lens should be used when engaging with young people. Every engagement process should from the very beginning identify who will be involved and choose the right participatory approach. While young people are extraordinarily resilient, trauma among young people is a very common experience. Therefore, engagement should be 'trauma informed' but have sufficient mechanisms inbuilt so that if a person is triggered, there are mechanisms built in to respond to and ensure the young person in distress is appropriately supported.

The strategy should also prioritise mechanisms that facilitate the independent, fearless and unmediated voice of young people to be heard. Prioritising long-term investment in engagement will help to develop a space where young people feel comfortable to engage. The Strategy needs to be sufficiently flexible to take the long 'journey' of learning, improvement, and change, particularly where issues take time to explore and address.

> **Recommendation 5:**
>
> **That the Australian Government prioritise mechanisms in the Strategy that:**
>
> - **ensures a trauma-informed approach to engagement with young people, and**
> - **facilitates the independent, fearless and unmediated voice of young people to be heard.**

We welcome the opportunity to explore these ideas with you in further detail. Should you require further information about any issues raised in the submission, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Marion Byrne, Head of Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy at yourtown via email at mbyrne@yourtown.com.au.

yourtown's Youth Advisory Group response
"Just Ask Us"

E. Bevan, M. Cora, C. Dirou, Z. Keath, K. Taka, L. Trumbull, J. Young

Background

Youth Participation at **yourtown** is committed to seeking opportunities for genuine participation and co-design with young people. We achieve this through the establishment of Youth Advisory Network, a national network of young people who form a range of working and advisory groups for specific topics relevant to young people.

This response to the Office for Youth is an example of this commitment. Young people from the Youth Advisory Network in New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland, agreed to co-write this response. It has been written, edited and produced by young people, along with **yourtown's** Youth Participation Coordinator.

The discussion paper received from the Office for Youth is in two parts, the first is for young people to provide a response and the second is for those who are working with young people in that space. Young people felt it was impotent to embed their voice in both parts, and so young people have responded to both sections of the discussion paper. The Youth Participation Coordinator has then responded to their input in parts. Importantly, it is the voice of young people that is given privilege and space in this response.

Young people also wanted to share our process with the Office for Youth as a way of providing a working example of how to conduct such consultations. The response was produced over several online meetings with young people. Importantly, these meetings were held at times that work for young people, not staff, and were in the evenings. When young people were not able to attend, other meetings were scheduled with them, to ensure that the process fitted for them, not the other way around.

Quotations, including the title of our response, are directly from young people as provided during the meetings and they serve to highlight the importance of inclusion of voice, while bringing to life the reality and circumstance of young people in Australia today.

Summary

As reflected in the title chosen by young people, they said that in all things that impact them, they want to be consulted more and in ways that makes sense to them. They add this this is true for all diverse groups and that a greater focus on inclusion would mean more creative consultations and ways to genuinely hear from them.

Young people also said that there is an extremely high level of general uncertainty with a worsening cost-of-living crisis, housing insecurity and climate change. They note that all of these issues will impact them more significantly than they will for older people. Young people add that while they see some change and improvement in the increasing frequency of consultation with them and other vulnerable groups, they nevertheless still feel systematically excluded from meaningful discussion and solution making processes.

1. What are the top issues that the Government should work with young people to address?

"Young people are far less likely to be secure"

Overwhelmingly, young people said that housing security and cost of living were the most significant issues government needs to address as a matter of urgency. This is not new information, and young people have consistently raised these issues in any consultation or co-design process. For example, these issues featured in the Mental Health Book (2022) that they developed and the LGBTQI+ art show (2021, 2022), and the Under 25's podcast (2021, 2022) all developed and co-designed with young people and all as a direct result of their lived experience and concerns for the growing mental health and housing crisis they see arising in Australia currently.

"Housing is challenging because we are young, don't have references and don't know how to do the things older people do, we cannot easily negotiate they systems. Landlords are more likely to rent to couples than to help young people set up a share house".

Young people point out that a lack of housing security due to both cost of living and a lack of regulation and safety for renters, means added distress which impacts their mental health.

"We don't have access to the systems".

Young people note that recovery is still occurring from the Covid-19 crisis (which is still impacts many) and on top of this, there is an increased sense of instability that remains unaddressed by policy makers.

"How do we get to shape policy, such as climate change, if we don't address it now, young people will inherit this in the future and it disproportionately impacts young people while the decision makers won't suffer the consequences, this goes for every group as well, the group doesn't get to make the decisions that impact that group."

Issues of feeling excluded from decisions that directly impact young people are often raised by them, as leading to increased feelings of disconnection as well as impacting their mental health. This is then further exacerbated by the lack of accessible and available mental health services nationally for young people.

Mental health and access to mental health services continues to be a significant issue for young people. Services struggling to deal with increased caseloads, and waiting lists, often introduce tighter 'gate keeping' processes which preclude young people (and other vulnerable people) from accessing them. The impact of this is that more young people do not receive services they need and fall through gaps that young people feel are created by the lack of available services.

Young people note that while telehealth and online services provide some level of support, they are not a preferred option for ongoing clinical mental health support. Young people say that telehealth and online services have become 'the norm', while what they seek is better access to face-to-face clinical services, with the same practitioner, who knows them and their concerns. Young people say that telehealth has a significant role to play in crisis, early intervention and counselling, but cannot be expected to fill the entire gap and that these must be supported by a greater emphasis on broad virtual and face-to-face mental health options for young people and for all people. They add that if there was a focus on teaching young people and children the important navigation skills required to access government and

other services, such as mental health services, employment services, housing etc., this would assist them to feel more engaged.

2. What is the Government doing that is working well to engage young people?

"The model sounds good, but we haven't got anything to base it off"

As noted above, young people say that there are improvements with government willingness to hear from young people, but they add that this is just a beginning. They said that as far as they are aware, the model sounds good and positive overall, but that they do not have anything to compare it with and they do not know what the next steps are. They add that while it is indeed positive, it is a minimum in terms of expected engagement.

"It feels like a tick and flick approach, and we see that for what it is"

Young people also added that on a local level, it is very difficult for young people or any the diverse group to have their voice heard tor to engage. They said that while there is a national focus beginning to occur, this needs to happen at local levels for young people (and other diverse groups) to be able to feed into that national engagement strategy in a meaningful way. While any improvement is better that what there was before, it remains a significant challenge for young people to engage because of structural issues such as times or engagement, processes and at what point young people are engaged. They also said that engagement must occur at time convenient to young people. Young people work, have families, study etc so times need to be negotiated. Additionally, processes and platforms need to be relevant to young people, and the stage at which young people are engaged must be earlier in the processes. All too often young people are called upon at the end of projects, or discussions impacting them, and this is tokenistic toward them.

"This is better than it was before, with no youth engagement. Youth advisory groups are only made of a small number of young people, and they tend to be particular young people, and may not have the same disadvantage of other young people, not homeless etc. at the time"

Finally young people said that it is important to be aware that Youth Advisory Groups are made up of young people who have access to the tools required to engage – computers, internet, phones, accommodation etc. They add that many other groups of young people – homeless, unstable, literacy issues, disabilities etc, have just as many important perspectives but are not heard because of their circumstances and this must be accounted for and ways to engages those young people created.

3. What are some of the ways Government can improve how we engage with young people?

For this question, young people had multiple solutions, these are presented below:

"More diverse voices and cultural representation. We need to see and hear people we can relate to. Organisations need to be supported to help young people"

Local organisations have established relationships with young people. If these are better resourced then a greater level and depth of consultation and engagement can occur.

"Better engagement with the public and young people. Engage with young people in young people's spaces and on young people's terms"

This is a significant issue and one that is readily able to be managed. Engaging with young people must take account of their busy lives. Currently there is a privileging of the adult or organisational convenience, and this is no longer suitable for engagements. An example of this is that the current discussion paper could have been co-designed with young people, perhaps platformed differently using video or sound scaping. This could have been achieved by reaching out to several schools, or even one school and engaging students in this developmental and design stage. Young people add that often the reason given for not being inclusive at early stages is that of time. However, if young people were prioritised as a core stakeholder, then they would be consulted early as are many other stakeholders.

Young people again note the importance of connecting with and resourcing services already working with young people and building relationships. They note that this is a clear pathway to engagement by other with young people in environments that young people know and around people with whom they are comfortable.

<p align="center">"Social media presence"</p>

Ensuring social media used by organisation and other is suitable for young people is critical. This is not the same issue as safety but one of platforming. For example, young people no longer really use Facebook, as many adults do, young people use Instagram but many organisations do not communicate with that platform. In another example, the Youth Advisory Group at **yourtown** communicates with young people via Messenger as this was requested by young people.

Also, ensuring that content is diversified across relevant information channels and platforms and that it is voiced in ways that make sense to the specific demographic of young people and in ways that they are comfortable with is also very important. Providing content in ways that are relevant to young people, such as video or audio reels, on platforms they use daily will make communication far more targeted to them.

4. When have you felt your opinion or experience really mattered when working with the Government?

<p align="center">"I don't think I ever really felt heard nor really engaged due to no opportunity until now"</p>

Young people say that it is only recently that they have felt their views are regarded enough by policy makers that they have been engaged to share their experience. They add that while this is a positive step forward, it is not anything more than what is most often done with other stakeholders, and young people are aware that despite seeking engagement, they are often left to last.

<p align="center">"It seems our opinions only matters when things breakdown, it should be a regular feedback loop, intermittent feedback and 'check-ins'"</p>

Young people said that they often feel that they are only engaged when organisations feel that there is an advantage to engagement, and that this is focussed on the needs of others and not those of young people.

Closing feedback loops, ensuring that environments of engagement (platforms, spaces, times etc) are focussed on the needs of young people and not those of the adults or organisations, engaging young people beyond the advisory group level and feeding information back to young people who have shared their voice, are all vital elements of engaging young people in meaningful ways.

"If its important to them, then they talk to us, if it's important to us, we get ignored"

Finally, it is important to note that young people want to give and be involved more than most people believe. In general, young people are more proactive than many people believe they are, and this is reflected in their eagerness to engage in voice sharing. Further, young people have a much greater stake in positive outcomes because, as they point out, the consequences will be theirs to live with, if we do not ensure a safe future for them now.

What meaningful and relevant engagement should look like

Young people noted that there were a greater number of questions directed towards 'those who work with young people' under the submission guide, that were not directed towards young people. No part of youth engagement should exclude young people, there should always be space for them in matter relevant to them

The list of important issues in the discussion paper
- "Young people have less equity in the community and systems, these feed higher levels of anxiety and mental ill health issues"
- Need to be collaborative with young people.
- Housing is a link to mental ill health.
- We need a wholistic case worker model, not siloed approach.

Top Priorities
- Housing, Mental health, employment, and education in particular.
- Outcomes need to be wholistic, interchangeable approach with all 3 issues being managed by demonstrably interested people.
- "Intersectionality" - seeking streamlined approaches to working worth young people
- Addressing these issues is not one size fits all. "We have a homelessness strategy but not a youth homelessness strategy to address those unique pathways".
- Must acknowledge that young people (and all other groups) are unique with unique needs.
- Acknowledging and taking seriously what young people say and doing something with it.

Engagement model
- Accountable and checkable actions from government.
- Embedding youth engagement in everything that gets done.
- Wales in the UK has a future generations commissioner (Welsh participation Imperative Model).

Safe Inclusive Engagement
- Trauma informed principles
- Trust, listening.
- Sensitive – talk to them more.
- "Just talk to them and ask".
- Adjust to meet young people needs – like how we do our consultations etc.
- Don't make assumptions, don't condescend to young people, make it work for young people.
- Young people are expected to do a lot of unpaid labour. If young people are not paid for their time, then give something back to young people for their time.