



Government of **Western Australia**
North Metropolitan Health Service
Mental Health, Public Health and Dental Services



An Innovative Approach to a Youth Reference Group

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Youth Mental Health

North Metropolitan Health Service, Mental Health, Public Health and Dental Services

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YouthLink and YouthReach South

YouthLink and YouthReach South (Youth Mental Health-YMH) provide flexible, (including long-term) trauma-informed psychological therapy, case management, and psychiatric treatment to young people aged 13-24 years in the Perth Metropolitan area, with significant barriers to accessing “mainstream” mental health services. Barriers may include:

- Homelessness or transience;
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity;
- LGBTQ+ identity;
- Comorbidity with mental health and other issues, including substance use problems, and some neurodevelopmental disorders.

Youth Reference Group (YRG)

The YRG is open to consumers of YMH, and provides opportunities for participation in a range of activities:

- YMH service development, implementation and evaluation co-design and consultations;
 - Policy development and review;
 - Consultations at local, State and National levels;
 - Service and project co-design with other government and non-government organisations;
 - Development of creative group-based activities and projects within YMH.
- Young people participating in consultations are remunerated for their time.



Innovative Features of the YRG

- Functions as an “open” group; any consumer may join simply by signing up to the YRG email list;
- Current membership is around 40 young people, who receive regular email invitations to join forthcoming activities;
- Participation in any activity is entirely voluntary - this is to accommodate individuals’ interests, availability and current capacity to engage;
- Creative and innovative projects and activities are devised and developed by the YRG, with support from clinical staff;
- The projects are mental health-themed and designed to provide an adjunct to therapy and treatment received through YMH;
- There is a focus on building participants’ skills, competencies and social connectedness, and on developing their sense of their own capacities and potentials.



YRG Activities and Projects (2016 – 2021)

Some examples of projects and activities undertaken by the YRG include:

- State-wide Youth Photography Competition “What Self-Care Means to Me” - Entries later compiled as a book (2016 – see image);
- Skills-development workshops “Telling My Story Safely” and “Peer Support Worker Skills” (2016 and 2018);
- Youth Music Performance and Art Exhibition Events for WA Mental Health Week (2017, 2019, 2020);
- Writers’ Workshop series “Finding my strength and resilience”. Works presented at local, national and international conferences (2018 -2019);
- “Pecha Kucha” Slide Show: “Images of Recovery-Young people tell their stories” presented at local and national conferences (2017- 2019);
- Youth mental health art mural installed at YouthLink (2019 – see image);
- Development of supportive group for consumers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2020-2021).





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