

Youth voice

Shaping the Beaches' Future

Engagement and Insight Report
Connecting the dots through collective sensemaking



northern
beaches
council

Acknowledgement of country

Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of these lands and shows its respect to the Elders past and present.



Artist credit

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Over 18's People's Choice Recipient
ArtDecko 2021

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Executive Summary

Overall, young people think the Northern Beaches are a great place to grow up.

Young people are active contributors and essential to a thriving and vibrant community. They are our current and future leaders, innovators, creatives, and environmental caretakers. The experience of young people on the Northern Beaches is constantly evolving.

Northern Beaches Council's Better Together Social Sustainability Strategy 2040 was adopted in August 2021. It committed to identifying the unique challenges we face over the next 20 years and building on the many strengths that exist on the Northern Beaches.

A key action outlined in the strategy was to develop a youth discussion paper. The Youth Voice Shaping the Beaches' Future - Engagement and Insight Report is a vital part of this process to capture the views and voice of local young people and inform the delivery of youth development. These programs will build capacity and resilience of a diverse cross section of young people and local youth services.

This Engagement and Insight Report provides the research and consultation feedback gathered during the development of the Youth Voice Action Plan. It provides the evidence base for decision making and informs the actions identified to improve youth participation.

During extensive consultation across a range of activities, over 1,000 young people participated, contributing over 1,100 comments and ideas. This feedback highlights young people's current experience across eight focus areas and provides the evidence base for how we can all work together to achieve positive change for young people. The responses tell us what matters to young people and how we can make sure that they remain a critical part of community life as the decision makers, innovators, and caretakers of our world today and tomorrow.

Overall, young people love growing up on the Northern Beaches and express a deep desire to continue living here as they transition to adulthood.

"Sense of belonging is I was born here. It's the best place ever to grow up"

"The Northern Beaches has facilities and events for young people (teenagers) to go out with friends and enjoy themselves"

"What's great is there are plenty of places to hang out and great beaches"

"I'm worried that i'll have to move away from the place I grew up where all my friends and family are"

Nine key insights emerged from the engagement that explain the current state of youth participation:

- 1 Role modelling**
- 2 Mental health**
- 3 Decisions for the future**
- 4 Assumptions about young people**
- 5 Belonging**
- 6 Skills and education**
- 7 Support systems**
- 8 Connection**
- 9 Financial literacy**

These insights together create an overall story that depicts how social and cultural drivers of behaviour impact on young people's ability to participate in a wide range of ways.

We heard from young people that **the adequacy of their life skills impacted on how they experienced the transition to independence**, and ultimately to being an adult. The skills developed through adolescence and young adulthood correlate to how they experience participation in community life. Over time **the experience young people have in community life (either positive or negative) contributes to their sense of self, belonging and overall wellbeing.**

When youth wellbeing suffers, **the perception of young people in the community is impacted and ultimately either re-enforces or challenges subconscious bias of community attitudes and behaviour about young people.** Not everyone experiences this cycle in the same way, however young people have overwhelmingly told us that the community incorrectly perceives the outcome of this cycle as young people not caring about or wanting to participate. When this happens, **young people further isolate themselves and withdraw from many facets of community life.**

A positive outcome of this is engagement is the recognition from young people that change is already occurring. They talked about many bright spots that are making a difference to how they can participate in community life. This project focuses on identifying and acting on these bright spots to secure young people's place on the Northern Beaches.

When we secure youth's future - we secure everyone's future, ensuring we have the diversity and skills we need to maintain the lifestyle everyone enjoys on the Northern Beaches. A place where we are better together.

Part 1

Engagement methodology

Adapting systems theory for engagement

“The youth voice project was the perfect opportunity to take an active role in improving my local community. I wanted to leverage local voices and provide innovative solutions to situate my local Council at the forefront of our state and country.”

Member of Youth Voice Steering Group

Collective sensemaking

A conversational event where people intentionally come together for the purpose of using their varied perspectives to make sense of an issue or problem they are mutually facing

The system

The experience of young people living on the Northern Beaches is shaped by many interconnected factors that impact on their ability to feel safe, included and connected to the community they live in. The interaction between these factors, and their complex interdependencies is what we have called “the system” in this project.

Feedback loops

Feedback loops are the visual depiction of the process where factors in the system are circled back and used as inputs.

Wicked problem

A wicked problem is a problem, usually social or cultural, that is challenging or impossible to solve because not enough is understood about the problem, the number of stakeholders involved, the number of varying opinions, the economic burden, or the impact of these problems with other problems.

Insights

Represent significant points that contribute to youth participation in community life. Insights serve as an entry point to these significant experiences and allows for the reader to zoom in and explore the many interconnected elements.

Systems map

The systems map is not just a visual representation of a place. In this case it serves as a function of navigation.

Participatory systems mapping

Methodology that creates a shared language and comprehension between stakeholders that collates and represents the diverse experiences of the people involved in the process.

Focus area

Eight topics which represent an area identified by young people as of importance.

Classification system

Process used for mapping elements of the key focus areas.

Abbreviations and acronyms

YAG

Youth Advisory Group

Collective sensemaking

*A conversational event
where people come together
sharing their varied
perspectives to make sense
of an issue or problem*

1.1. Project background

Northern Beaches Council's Better Together Social Sustainability Strategy 2040 was adopted in August 2021. It committed to identifying the unique challenges we face over the next 20 years and build on the many strengths that exist on the Northern Beaches.

A key action outlined in the strategy was to develop a youth discussion paper. The Youth Voice Shaping the Beaches' Future - Engagement and Insight Report is a vital part of this process to capture the views and voice of local young people to inform the collaborative delivery of youth development. These programs will build the capacity and resilience of a diverse cross section of young people and local youth services.

1.2. Structure of this section

This report provides an overview of the processes and outcomes of the engagement program for the Youth Voice project. The purpose of this report is to demonstrate how engagement activities, output and insights informed and shaped the development of the five-year Youth Voice Action Plan.

This section includes:

- Engagement methodology
- Engagement processes and tools
- Findings
- Engagement reflections and lessons learnt

Methodology

2.1. Engagement objectives

The project's engagement objectives included:

- Engage with young people, the Northern Beaches Youth Interagency, other local service providers, education, business, and the broader community.
- Determine the current challenges and opportunities for young people.
- Identify strategies and actions to further build capacity and resilience of young people.

2.2. Adapting systems mapping for engagement

A framing question was established to help focus the research and consultation on understanding the experience of young people on the Northern Beaches within the context of a system. Throughout the mapping journey we were seeking to answer this question.

What factors impact on how young people living on the Northern Beaches participate in community life?

Responding to this question led to the development of a detailed systems map and uncovered nine insights that articulate how young people on the Northern Beaches experience participation.

2.3. Project engagement process

Complexity is at the heart of examining big problems that are challenging to solve for a range of reasons, including:

- not enough is understood about the problem
- the number of stakeholders involved
- the number of varying opinions
- economic burden
- the impact of these problem with other problems.

Attempting to analyse the intricacies of these problems can become overwhelming for one person and miss the interconnectedness between problems. By looking at it together we get to the root cause of experiences and have a better opportunity to identify effective solutions.

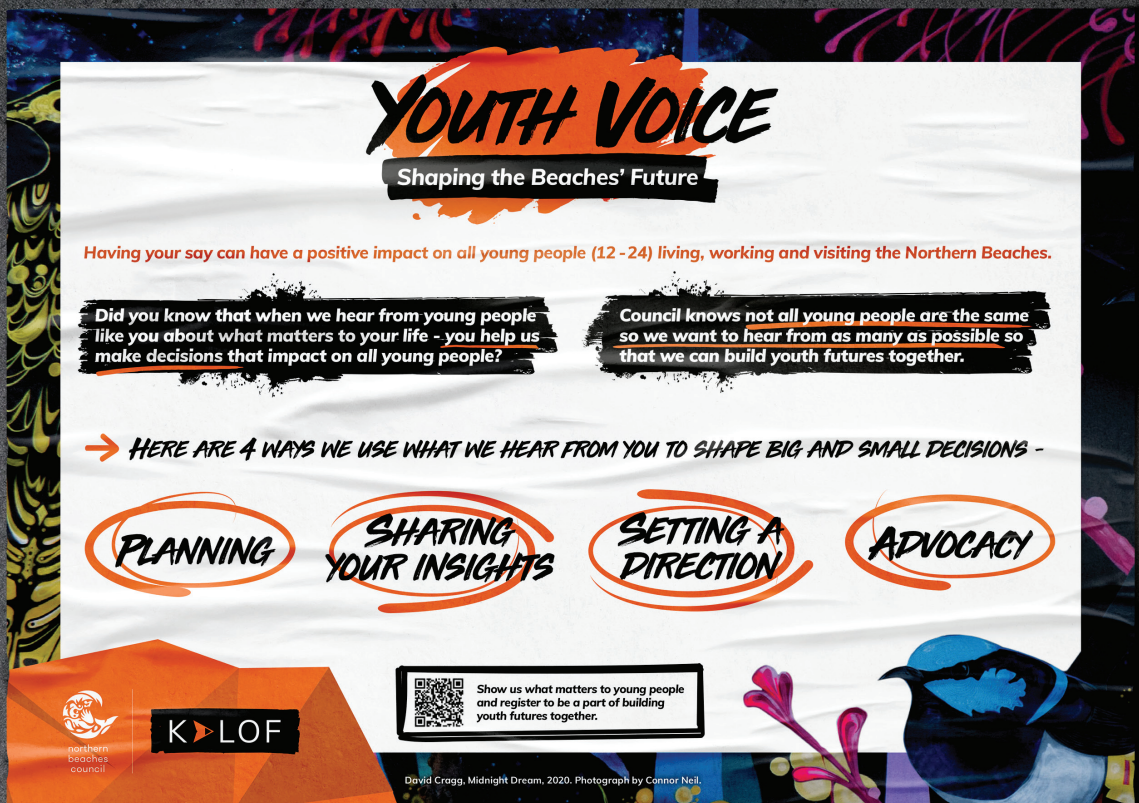
The key to successfully navigating this project was selecting a methodology that would allow us to develop a holistic and shared comprehension of the problem in partnership with young people, and steer stakeholders collectively to a solution space outside of their normal frame of reference. To overcome action bias and challenge our own assumptions Council designed the engagement methodology as a systems inquiry to help understand what the challenges and opportunities were before jumping in and creating an action plan.

This approach allowed youth to be embedded in the process and provide a reiterative mapping exercise that built upon the base, ensuring that minority experiences were not overlooked by more dominant experiences.

Table 1

Youth Voice engagement phase 1-4

	Timing	Purpose	Stakeholder engagement and map building	Key outcomes
Phase 0 Launch: Planning the journey ahead	Jun-Sep 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with internal stakeholders and the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to involve youth from the start of the project 	In partnership with youth gather existing evidence base and plan the engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight key focus areas Youth developed project name and branding Formation of youth steering group Consultation paper developed Baseline of youth development activities across other Councils
Phase 1 Gain clarity: Broad and targeted engagement	Jan-May 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a deep understanding of the system and build a map that captures the factors impacting on youth participation on the Northern Beaches 	Broad and targeted engagement program to understand cause and effect between key focus areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iceberg model diagram Draft systems map and key insights describing current state of youth participation Identified potential actions Youth profiles created for priority populations A touchpoint map across all internal stakeholders identifying youth engagement
Phase 2 Find leverage: Identify opportunities	Jun-Aug 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage key stakeholders in reviewing the system to identify the most promising opportunities for delivering support to young people Test and prioritise identified actions 	Identify emerging insights and how the focus areas are interconnected across the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a problem statement and future aspirational statement Identification of opportunities that can be used to deliver potential actions Key insights finalised by consensus
Phase 3: Act strategically: Co-develop an Action Plan	Sep-Nov 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-develop an action plan to act strategically in the system. Framing key performance questions 	Visualise the map after socialisation with stakeholders, combining the layers of complexity into one map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus on critical actions for delivery Plan for ongoing collaboration
Phase 4 Learn & Adapt: Evaluation	Post Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing evaluation and feedback with key stakeholders 	Living map updated as system impact is identified, and new factors emerge that impact youth experience of community life	



Poster co-designed in partnership with youth to communicate why young people should be involved in giving feedback about this project

2.4. Partnering with young people

Ensuring engagement is meaningful and not tokenistic.¹

To ensure that consultation delivered meaningful engagement with young people, nine indicators were selected that represent how this looks in practice. These indicators guided decision making around engagement, activities and the direction of the project over time.

Our commitment

Youth as partners - through partnership young people influence, challenge and engage with the process and the outcome

Table 2

Examples of indicators in practice from Youth Voice

	How we delivered during the project
Indicator 1 Young people engaged safely and freely in an unbiased manner	Range of options for participation including ability to post anonymous comments
Indicator 2 Young people involved in developing project and implementation from initiation	Young people involved in project planning workshop, including development of project research questions
Indicator 3 Representative youth group assisting to plan youth contribution in every stage	Youth steering group consulted on approach for Make the Connections workshop, including venue, activities and advertising
Indicator 4 Evidence of ideas and proposals from young people	Project reporting clearly articulates key ideas and proposals advocated for by young people
Indicator 5 Participatory engagement tools	Participatory workshops that utilised visual tools to assist youth to contribute in an equal way to other stakeholders
Indicator 6 Engagement includes young people as both representative and personal insight	Steering group consisted of representatives from across each of the identified priority areas
Indicator 7 Youth profiles created to ensure under-served youth represented in numbers of young people engaged	Youth profiles utilised in engagement and insight report to draw out key points of differences for these groups
Indicator 8 Feedback loops between Council and the Youth Steering Group	Ongoing communication and summaries provided to group
Indicator 9 Evidence of non-youth stakeholders adopting principles of meaningful engagement past the life of project	Proposed action with support to develop a set of agreed meaningful engagement indicators for sector

¹ Indicators adapted from the UNESCO "Meaningfully engaging with youth" (UNESCO, 2019)

2.5. Engagement methods and tools

The Youth Voice project has been grounded in youth participation and engagement from inception. **By adapting the methodology of participatory systems mapping as a process of engagement Youth Voice created a shared language and comprehension between stakeholders through developing a storytelling tool that collates and represents the diverse experiences of the people involved in the process.**

A range of communication and engagement activities were undertaken to inform, consult, and collaborate with stakeholders across the community. These activities placed young people at the heart of planning, delivering the project in partnership with young people.

Broad promotion of the project was achieved through a range of communication channels and community networks including:

- Social media promotion via Facebook, Instagram (KALOF and Council), and LinkedIn - reaching 81,052 community members
- E-newsletters including the wider community e-newsletter and communications to youth and parent specific databases with a reach of over 163,000 local subscribers
- News article in Northern Beaches Advocate featuring a young person involved in the program
- Advertising through partnership with a network of over 200 youth service providers.

Young people were engaged across a range of methods and collectively over 1,000 young people participated in engagement activities. Together they contributed over 1,100 pieces of feedback. Online methods offered alternative connection points for young people and community members.

A wide range of methods and tools were used throughout the engagement program. Table 3 - Engagement methods and tools is a summary of the activities, methods and participants.

Table 3
Engagement methods and tools

Delivery	Activity	How we engaged	Who we engaged
Mixed	Youth Steering Group	Steering group meetings x 4 Co: Lab workshops x 3 Ad-hoc conversations for advice and guidance relating to project December 2021 - June 2022	15 members
Mixed	Youth Advisory Group (YAG)	Youth voice sessions x 5 Online voting and feedback via Facebook September 2021 - June 2022	29 members
Online	Social Media	Used to promote engagement activities and direct people to the Have Your Say project play	81,052 reach
Online	Youth Voice photo competition	Photo competition promoted to young people through a range of channels	130 entries 6,778 reach
In Person	Make the Connections 18-24 event	Workshop specifically to engage with young adults living on the Northern Beaches who are underrepresented in engagement	8 young people attended
In Person	Targeted youth engagement	Targeted workshops with 6 priority groups x 7 workshops March - June 2022	48 participants across 6 priority groups 7 First Nations 5 living with disability 13 LGBTIQA+ 14 Multicultural 11 Mental health lived experience 8 from groups identified as a pocket of disadvantage. 110 comments contributed
In Person	School engagement sessions	10 school engagements (2 per ward) 23 March - 16 June 2022	562 Participants
In person	Broad youth engagement	Activations and workshops at broad range of events x 7 March - June 2022	265 participants
In person	Vox-pop DIY	Postcards created in plain English to allow young people to record and submit a vox pop at key events	8 vox pops
Online	Community sector workshops	Sector workshops held with Northern Beaches Youth Interagency x3	98 Participants
Mixed	Touchpoint mapping	Engagement with internal stakeholders across Council to identify youth touchpoints	18 Business units 69 Touchpoints identified
Online	YourSay thought board	An online platform to capture lived experience and associated thoughts about the key focus areas from across the community	42 comments contributed 2115 visits
In Person	Community Conversations	Five cafe conversations across the 5 wards	48 Conversations
In Person	Co-Lab- Participatory systems mapping workshops	3 participatory Co:labs held with stakeholders from across the system	3 Co:labs 11 Youth participants 14 Internal participants 13 Social service participants
Online	Socialisation workshops	Workshops with young people and youth service providers to socialise the systems map with those not involved in the Co:labs	2 Workshops 10 Young people 30 Youth service participants



Photo credit - Isabelle Stapf-Giannakis

Youth Voice Photo Competition - Belonging

"This photo was taken at my favourite beach during sunset, Freshwater, where I feel like I most belong"

2.6. Structuring the engagement conversations to build shared comprehension

The experience of young people living on the Northern Beaches is shaped by many interconnected factors that impact on their ability to feel safe, included and connected to the community they live in. The interaction between these factors, and their complex interdependencies is what we have called “the system” in this project.

Engagement conversations were structured around eight focus areas, exploring young peoples’ experiences and perspectives within the context of the Northern Beaches.

The systems mapping process helped stakeholders embrace the complexity of the system, build a shared understanding of youth experience, and ultimately steered the conversation towards an opportunity and solution space.

The process of engaging with stakeholders to co-create the map through collective reflection and discussion was the vehicle that allowed for a shared understanding of the challenges and experiences facing young people living on the Northern Beaches today.

The map provides an important collective representation of those that engaged in the participatory process. It demonstrates collective insights gathered from those within the system and forms part of the evidence base for developing the Youth Voice Action Plan, along with supporting qualitative and quantitative research.

3.1. Feedback summary

The engagement process gathered feedback from primarily young people aged 12-24 years old, from a range of backgrounds. Table 4 provides a breakdown of engagement participation by stakeholder group.

Table 4
Engagement participation by stakeholder group

Young people (12-17)	1026
Young people (18-24)	90
Parents and carers	13
Community members	57
Local youth services	30+

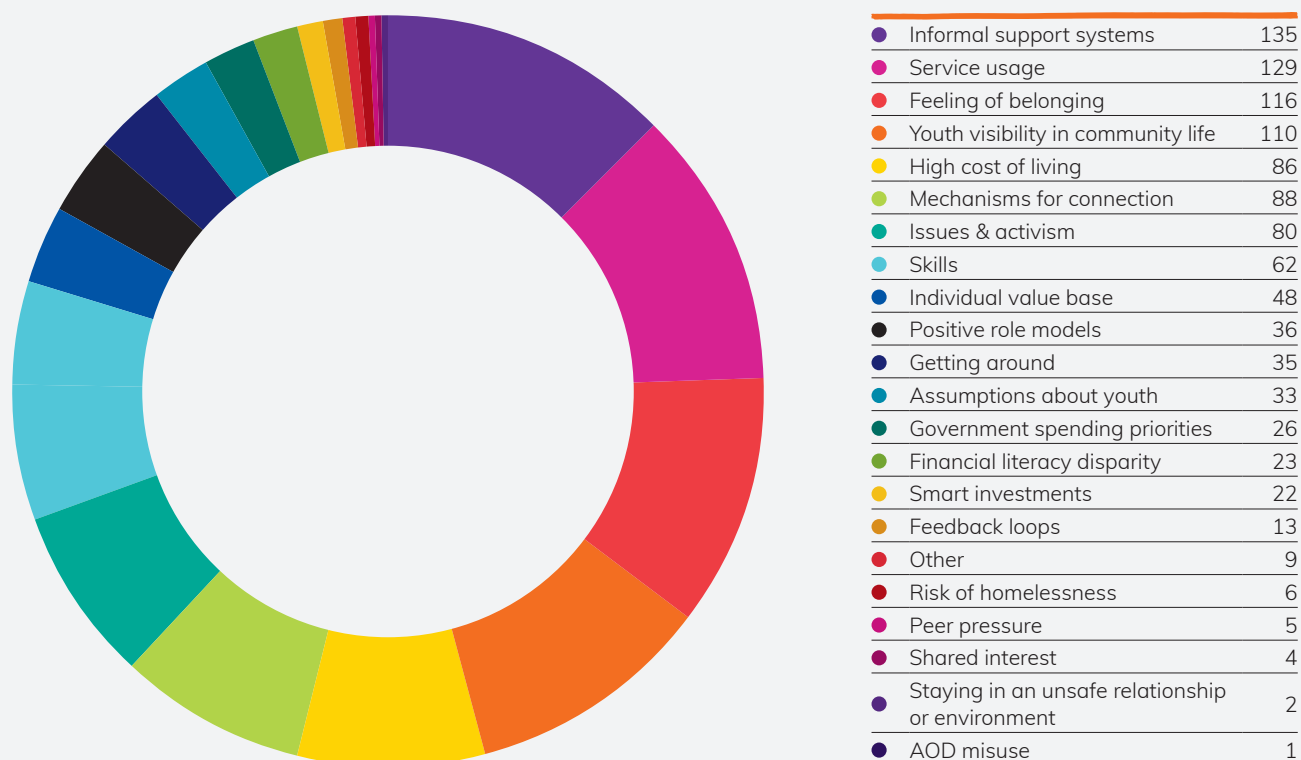
The summary of engagement outcomes in Figure 1 and 2 reflects the feedback received in comment form throughout the engagement. It should be noted that young people in general submitted their thoughts across multiple focus areas, so the number of comments is not indicative of number of participants.

The six identified priority groups for young people (living with disability, mental health lived experience, multiculturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTQIA+, First Nations, pockets of disadvantage) were directly engaged through targeted workshops. Figures 3 and 4 provide a high-level summary of the top 10 themes for these groups to compare to overall response and understand the different experience of these cohorts.

Young people talked a lot about informal support systems and issues around service usage, and provided comments around belonging and overall visibility of youth in community life. Other themes that emerged included concerns about high cost of living, the mechanisms and ways young people like to connect, issues they are passionate about, personal and collective values, and challenges for getting around the local area.

In total feedback was collected on 21 themes. 138 comments were coded as out of scope. Where appropriate, these comments will be given to alternate Council teams to consider for future planning.

Figure 1
Feedback themes



The feedback collected provides further knowledge around what Council heard from young people through the Better Together 2040 engagement undertaken in 2020/21.

Figure 2
Overall top 10 engagement themes

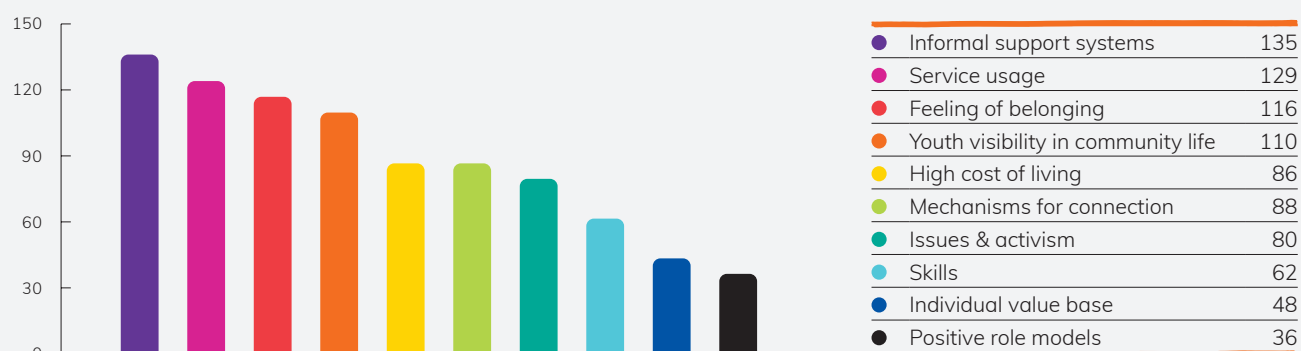


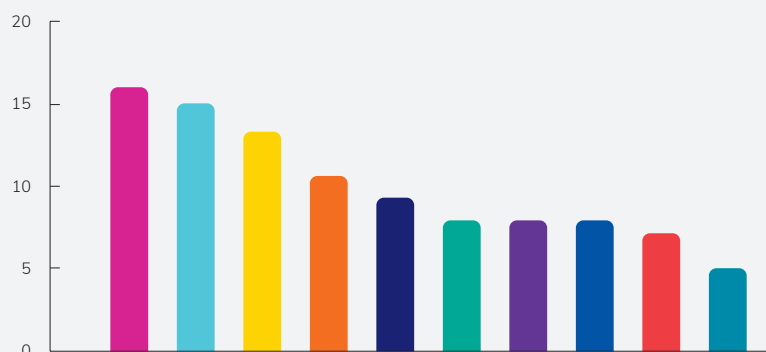
Table 5
Breakdown of engagement themes

Themes (# Comments)	Key ideas
Informal support systems (135)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top theme for 12-17-year-olds (16%) • Informal support systems closely tied with their sense of belonging • Friends and family are a main source of informal support systems
Service Usage (123)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top theme for 18-24 (16%) • Barriers for young people accessing mental health services included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost - Accessibility - Long wait times - Previous bad experiences • Some young people do not know where or what services are available. Kids helpline was a frequently cited source of where a young person would go if they needed support
Feeling of belonging (116)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When young people feel they are not included in conversations they do not feel like they belong • Young people love living on the Northern Beaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They feel safe - There is a kind community - Sport teams - Outdoor space • Issues of inequity affect young people's feelings of belonging
Youth visibility in community life (109)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall strong feeling of missing diversity of youth in community life, especially representation and visibility of youth from multicultural and LGBTQI+ backgrounds • Those from multicultural background reported unconscious bias from community members • Visibility relates to several aspects of community life including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - Engagement and participation - Events of cultural significance - Cultural outlets - Equal opportunity • Unbalanced representation of youth demographic at the decision-making table
High cost of living (86)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Especially important issue for young adults 18-24 (14%) • High cost of living threatens young people's feelings of economic security • High cost of living is often associated with issues around housing and ability to build a future on the Northern Beaches • Key issue cited as one of the reasons young people would consider moving from the area • Perceptions of housing affordability is closely linked with high cost of living concerns and ability to be economically secure
Mechanisms for connection (86)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms for connection involve having space for young people to connect • Young people connect in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outdoors such as bushwalking and the beach - Sports - Spaces where they can do physical activities - Libraries - Local shopping areas - Social media - Online spaces

Themes (# Comments)	Key ideas
Mechanisms for connection (cont.) (86)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people don't only want to connect with other young people - they want to connect with other generations and their families • Spaces and places are talked about primarily as a mechanism to allow people to connect, rather than planned activities • 12-17-year-olds access information about opportunities from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media - School - Word of mouth
Issues and activism (79)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health (20) • Discrimination (14) • Climate change (13) • Life issues (10) • Housing security (7) • Having a say (6) • Safety (4) • Bullying (3) • Equity (2) • Body image (1)
Skills (61)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth identify many different skills that they require for the future. Some of these are significantly different from the skills previous generations would have learned which has led to a gap in how young people are taught skills around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to undertake financial admin required when you are an adult - Entrepreneurial and business financial skills - Foundational money skills - Social skills and how to talk with other generations - Coping strategies - Smart investments that increase earning capability
Individual value base (43)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people talk about the below as being part of their value base <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standing up for what matters to them - Having a place to live - Having money and a job - Everyone should get a fair opportunity - Respect of others - The right to feel safe doing things you enjoy
Positive role models (36)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive role models impact on young people's development of identity and attitudes as they transition to adulthood. • Young people told us there were many things that they learn from role modelling these included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial literacy - Interpersonal skills - Values - Attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol and other drug taking - Self-care • Positive role models are found in many places including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sport groups - Parents and friends - School - Older people

Figure 3

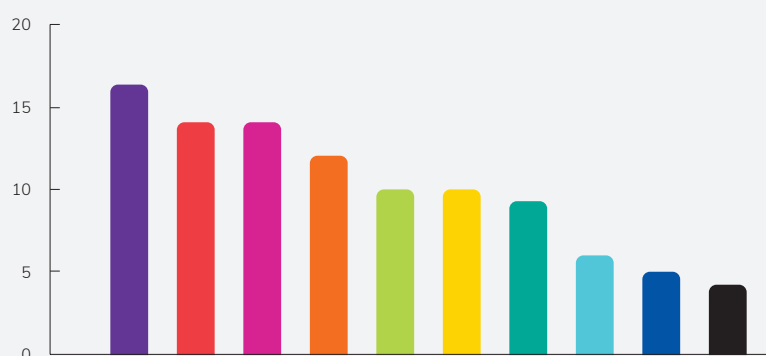
Top 10 themes 18-24 year olds as a percentage



Service usage	16
Skills	15
High cost of living	13
Youth visibility in community life	11
Getting around	9
Issues & activism	8
Informal support systems	8
Individual value base	8
Feeling of belonging	7
Assumptions about youth	5

Figure 4

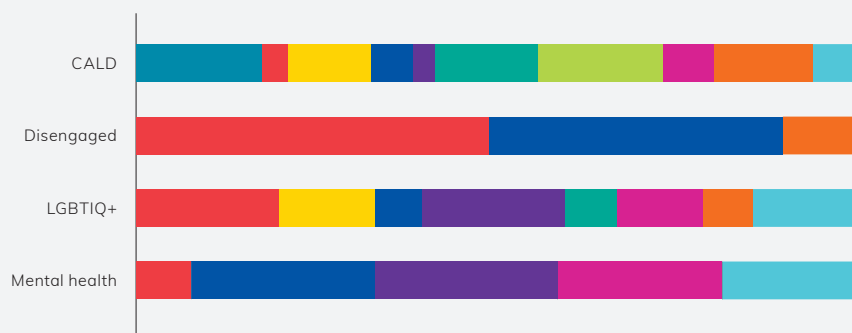
Top 10 themes 12-17 year olds as a percentage



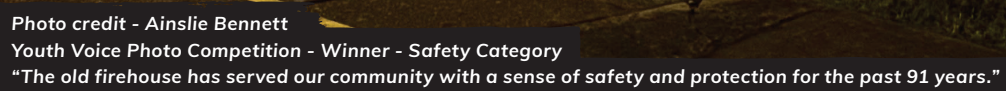
Informal support systems	16
Feeling of belonging	14
Service usage	14
Youth visibility in community life	12
Mechanisms for connection	10
High cost of living	10
Issues & activism	9
Skills	6
Individual value base	5
Positive role models	4

Figure 5

Top 10 issues identified priority populations



Skills
Youth visibility in community life
Service usage
Mechanisms for connection
Issues & activism
Informal support systems
Individual value base
High cost of living
Feeling of belonging
Assumptions about youth



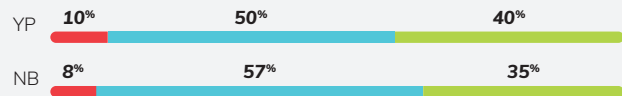
3.2. Wellbeing of young people compared to Northern Beaches

In March 2022, 1,227 Northern Beaches community members completed a liveability and wellbeing survey. There was 59 young people aged 18-25 that completed the survey and these are a summary of their results.

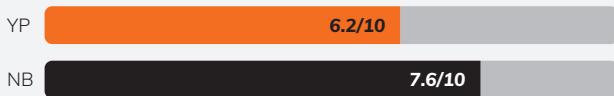
How would you rate your physical health - average score



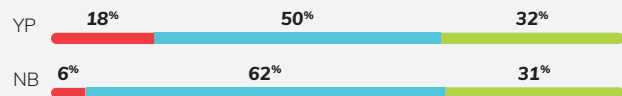
When asked if they thought their physical health would get worse, get better or stay the same over the next year



How would you rate your mental health - average score



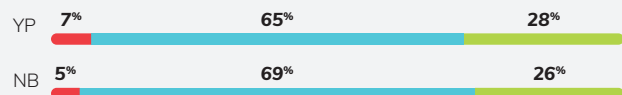
When asked if they thought their mental health would get worse, get better or stay the same over the next year



How would you rate your social wellbeing - average score



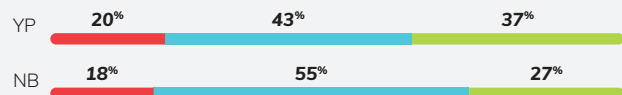
When asked if they thought their social wellbeing would get worse, get better or stay the same over the next year



When asked how they would rate their personal financial circumstances - average score



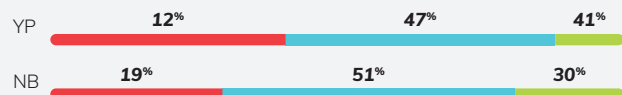
When asked if they thought their personal financial circumstances would get worse, get better or stay the same over the next year



When asked how often if ever they are late in meeting financial commitments



When asked if they thought the economic situation in their local area would get worse, get better or stay the same over the next year



Key

- Young People
- Northern Beaches
- get better
- stay the same
- get worse
- always late
- often late
- sometimes late
- never late

When asked how they would rate their personal financial circumstances - average score

Young People

- 1 Natural environment 2 Affordable decent housing 3 Feeling safe 4 Public transport 5 Connectivity

Northern Beaches

- 1 Natural environment 2 Feeling safe 3 Public transport 4 Sense of community 5 Shopping, leisure and dining



Photo credit - Linus Wang

Youth Voice Photo Competition - Belonging

"The sunrise at Mona Vale Beach is always breathtaking, the sun slowly rising over the horizon marks a new day."

- This engagement went beyond the traditional youth engagement pathways and reached a diversity of young people, including those from the identified priority populations.
- We have an amazing, articulate, and thoughtful population of young people living on the Northern Beaches who enrich community life immeasurably.
- The engagement program was co-designed with young people with indicators of meaningful participation helpful in framing conversations and decision-making processes throughout the project.
- Story telling is a powerful tool when creating a shared understanding and breaking down barriers between youth and other stakeholders.
- Having a process that challenges the project teams' assumptions is critical in creating an accurate and meaningful outcome of engagement. The reiterative process meant that assumptions were challenged throughout the project.
- There are significant differences between the needs of those aged 12-17 and 18-24. This needs to be considered when designing engagement activities and actions. Those aged 18-24 remain disengaged with the KALOF brand. By finding new ways of working with this group and identifying opportunities and topics of interest to this group we will strengthen our understanding of this group's unique needs. The YourSay thought board was unexpectedly successful in engaging with this group which indicates that when the topic is of interest 18-24 year olds are being reached in general engagement channels and will engage.

Part 2

Key insights

Looking beyond statistics to stories

“I believe it's extremely important young people all over The Beaches get involved in this project as it's our future, it's where we have grown up and want to grow old in. So, if we aren't speaking up on our needs and options now I believe it'll be too late when our kids are experiencing the same issues we see today as young people”

Member of Youth Voice Steering Group

Each of the nine key insights contain information to provide localised insight and evidence based on what we heard through the project.

1. What we heard - key insights from engagement
2. Evidence of why this insight is important, and existing knowledge base
3. What makes it a challenge for the local context
4. Opportunity space - where we can use existing strengths to make change

Insight 1: Role modelling

What we heard

A persistent story we heard in relation to a variety of life skills, behaviours and attitudes was the role of adults in positively modelling these. This is significant for all young people and can contribute both positively and negatively to their experiences.

Positive role models emerged in the top 10 themes from consultation with young people.

Positive role models are found in many places including sport groups, parents, friends, school or higher education, and work.

Young people told us there were many things that they learn from role modelling from adults of significance in their life, these included:

- Attitudes and behaviour around alcohol and drug use
- Attitudes around what success looks like, including the belief that home ownership defines personal and professional success
- Financial skills²
- Interpersonal skills
- Values
- Attitudes and behaviour including self care.

Any changes and work in this area can take a while to manifest but are powerful when they occur.

An example to demonstrate this is alcohol usage. As young people transition to being adults and will begin role modelling their positive learned behaviour to the next generation of young people. It is not until this transition to positive behaviour occurs over a generation that you can see the true impact of positive role modelling in adolescence. This could potentially be 10+ years for the modelling and behaviours to sufficiently change how young people experience alcohol usage.

“I think friends can have a big influence on how we behave, but it depends on the individual. Kids also needs adult role models, like coaches and nice teachers to help us grow”

Young Person 12-17 years, Targeted Workshop (Disengaged from school)

² (West, de Zwaan, & Guest, 2020)

Key insights from priority populations

Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds told us that continuing to live with your parents is culturally acceptable but comes with the expectation of helping your parents.

Those at risk of disengaging from schools said that adult role models like coaches and teachers are very important in helping to learn skills and grow.

First Nations young people spoke about the need for opportunities to connect across generations, especially through storytelling. First Nations young people identified the need for role models in the community who can provide mentoring to young people and help them access services when they need them.

Those living with mental illness said that having positive relationships and role models can have a big impact on their development and behaviour.

Why we know it is important

We learn from those around us from an early age. Young people indicated that targeting role modelling in childhood, in addition to adolescence, may be the most effective approach to create significant change in this area. This was particularly expressed when exploring financial skills and attitudes. This finding stems from discussions with 18-24-year olds who were able to acknowledge the value and impact role modelling had on their financial behaviour and attitudes. Almost all young adults who participated in the Make the Connections workshop acknowledged the importance of role modelling for financial skills, but equally acknowledged that this realisation had only happened after transitioning to early adulthood³ and they had the benefit of hindsight.

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- Wider culture around ideas of success, homeownership
- A tolerant drinking and substance use culture specific to the Northern Beaches
- Role models lacking the skills needed to effectively demonstrate and share financial literacy with young people
- Lack of formal role modelling programs for mentoring and skill development.

Opportunity space

1. Utilising intergenerational connection to increase role-modelling opportunities.
2. Challenging social and cultural drivers of behaviour around substance use to impact learned coping habits.
3. Finding new ways of utilising workplaces as natural intergenerational connection points that can provide role modelling for many skills.

³ (West, de Zwaan, & Guest, 2020)

Insight 2: Mental Health

What we heard

We heard a lot from young people about how they experience mental health. These conversations highlight that where there are negative attitudes and stigma around mental health the community is less likely to be open and supportive of help seeking behaviours. This may mean young people are less likely to speak about how they feel and seek support when they need it. They may even experience increasing levels of shame about their untreated mental illness, which can lead to poor decision making⁴ and development of unhealthy coping mechanisms such as risk taking and substance abuse⁵.

Comments relating to service usage made the top three themes across both age categories of young people. Overall, 24% of comments received from young people related to support systems - formal support services (12%) and informal support systems (12%).

There is progress being made within the community to shift this insight to a more positive place. However, stakeholders identified a persisting challenge is the impact of parents' attitudes and behaviour towards young people using alcohol and other drugs. We know that alcohol and other drug use is a significant risk factor for mental ill-health. Many parents believe that drug and alcohol use is a normal part of growing up⁶ and this impacts on how they model behaviour.

This is not a phenomenon isolated to the Northern Beaches. However, unlike other similar contexts the Northern Beaches is not reporting the same general trends of decreasing⁷ youth alcohol use. Health providers shared their perspective that in comparison to other areas they service such as Northern Sydney, the Northern Beaches has a noticeably higher prevalence of alcohol and other drug issues presenting.

The embedded social norms around substance use provides challenges for services working with young people and their families. Due to parents and carers exposure to the social normal of substance use, they can often minimise the harm and risks associated with alcohol use to young people⁸.

For those aged 12-17 years, informal support services was the most significant theme from the feedback, for those aged 18+ service usage was the most frequently commented on.

Stigma can also be associated with treatment itself, with young people hesitant to engage in ongoing treatment. This coupled with barriers such as financial costs and availability of professional help confirm existing knowledge about the complex array of factors that contribute to young people's decision to seek, or not to seek, professional help.

When asked what issues were important to young people 25% of comments were related to challenges around mental health.

⁴ (Kesby, 2022)

⁵ (Kesby, 2022)

⁶ (Oldham M, 2020)

⁷ (Oldham M, 2020)

⁸ (Mitchell S. C., 2022)

“I think mental health for young people is getting worse and it's a problem that needs more looking into”

Young person 12-17 years, School engagement session

Overwhelmingly young people reported the two biggest barriers to accessing mental health support was accessibility of service and inability to afford the cost of treatment. A correlation can be seen with young people who then fill the gap with informal support systems.

Other barriers spoken about included:

- Prior bad experience
- Long wait times
- Lack of knowledge about how to access.

Young people and service providers both expressed the compounding effects of a high cost of living and the ability to maintain treatment costs including therapy and medication.

“There's little support, and it's often hard to get. When finding things, there are often few options available”

Young person (12-17 years), School engagement

This is especially prevalent for those transitioning from either state or family support into adult services. This issue was raised as a major source of inequity between young people and other people living on the Northern Beaches.

Why we know it is important

Stigma and community attitudes towards mental health impact on how cultural norms about help seeking behaviour are messaged to young people. How the public recognise and advocate the importance of mental health has contributed to a decrease in the stigma experienced by some young people living with mental illness. Young people who experience less community stigma, are more likely to self-refer⁹ to mental health services within the system and display evidence of help seeking behaviour¹⁰.

⁹ (Radez, 2021)

¹⁰ (Rickwood D, 2012, p. 180)

Those from underrepresented groups often experience higher levels of discrimination and untreated mental illness. They also are more likely to talk about the role cultural and psychological safety plays in accessing services and participating in community life.

In general, stakeholders acknowledged that the Northern Beaches community has made meaningful progress towards shifting the stigma around mental illness and seeking help.

While there is strong evidence of increased public awareness and understanding of mental illness, young people still report increasing rates¹¹ of mental illness and at times a reluctance to seek help.

To further tackle the stigma experienced by young people around mental illness and treatment, experts advocate for action to reduce the public stigma, as well as targeted intervention to “improve young people’s knowledge of mental health problems and available support, including what to expect from professionals and services”¹².

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- Overall high cost of living
- Parental perception and normalisation of drug and alcohol use as inevitable
- Limited access to crisis and acute care places within the LGA
- Young people over the age of 18 are treated in adult system, often with little transitional support.

Opportunity space

1. Strengthening facilitators of mental health through improved psychological safety and removing barriers to treatment.
2. Building on positive change already achieved in challenging community stigma around mental health.
3. Supporting cultural and identity competence within workplaces and broader aspects of community life to remove some of the barriers to mental health treatment.

¹¹ (Aguirre Velasco, 2020)

¹² (Radez, 2021)



Photo credit - Emilia Sachs
Youth Voice Photo Competition - Connection
"A connection between you and a pet is all you need to be happy."

Insight 3: Decisions for the future

What we heard

The high cost of living, and highly publicised housing affordability challenges have left young people in a position where sometimes they are not able to choose where they want to live.

High cost of living especially affected 18-24-year-olds and impacts on their experience living on the Northern Beaches with more than 1 in 10 comments from this group being around the challenges in achieving economic security and having the capacity to engage in activities outside of work.

While these impacts are being talked about now for the general population, young people have been experiencing this at a micro level even before the current concerns around rising costs - evidenced by the large amount of young people still living at home.

“The cost of living at the moment is very concerning as a young person. I would love to move out of home and become more independent, but it is too expensive for me while I am at uni”

Young adult (18-24 years), YourSay comment

In many instances, the outcome of remaining at home can be a positive one - allowing young people to establish themselves in early adulthood with additional support from parents or carers while they are studying or in entry level jobs. However, the negative impacts are most strongly felt by those who feel trapped by high cost of living to remain in toxic relationships or unsafe environments. Several elements impact on the choice to stay including a chronic shortage of social housing, lack of financial and general skills about how to acquire private rentals, and fear of moving from the Northern Beaches away from primary support systems.

Why we know it is important

Young people and the youth services sector indicated that the high cost of living on the Northern Beaches was a factor in young people remaining in domestic and family violence situations. It was also identified that there is an unknown number of young people who are couch surfing.

The correlation between living costs and being able to leave a bad situation is also being discussed at a wider level. Domestic violence services are starting to speak about the impact of rising cost of living affecting many settings broader than housing options. This includes things like petrol if you need to move around for safety or to access essential services like a GP¹³ when looking to leave an abusive relationship.

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- A comparatively higher cost of living than most areas, with young people naturally falling in lower income categories
- A shortage of affordable housing with no magic fix
- With people living longer and young people and young families leaving the area, the Northern Beaches has an ageing population
- Breakdown in social support structures as people move out of the area.

Opportunity space

1. Using the development of life skills to assist young people to gain knowledge about rental and housing information where gaps in this knowledge are providing barriers to independence.
2. Building evidence base of couch surfing to demonstrate need and to impact on the government spending priorities.
3. For those with reduced support networks, especially those transitioning to adult services at age 18, there are often gaps in support structures for key life skills such as acquiring and using identification and how to access and use online portals like Centrelink and MyGov.
4. Most adults learn their money skills from parents, so finding a way to support those that do not have this traditional pathway will increase their financial wellbeing.

¹³ (Pridham, 2022)

Insight 4: Assumptions about young people

What we heard

Assumptions about young people is one of the primary reasons for young people feeling excluded from community life. Young people have been viewed as “intruders” and a “threat” in public spaces sporadically over the past 40 years and work began in the early 1970s to unpack the impact of this¹⁴.

Work has continued in the decades that followed to further understand the impact on young people’s experiences of urban life. The feedback from young people we talked to throughout the process indicates that the work done in this space remains relevant. Some factors and experiences that stem from assumptions made about youth interacting in public space can lead to feelings and experiences of exclusion¹⁵.

Assumptions about youth made the top 10 themes for young adults and visibility of youth in community life was in the top 4 themes for all young people.

These experiences included feeling like their needs were minimised regarding the physical environment, high costs associated with activities and spaces of interest to young people, restriction on access due to poor transport infrastructure, and lack of places considered safe.

One of the biggest barriers young people talked about to participation in community life, was the assumptions drawn by older members of the community about youth. Often young people expressed this as older people dismissing their opinions and voice for a variety of reasons. This results in young people wanting to withdraw from community life as they do not feel valued or safe to participate in conversations and decision making.

“I feel like sometimes young people are overlooked and viewed as if our opinions don’t really matter and we are often not asked serious questions, therefore our voices aren’t heard”

Young person (18-24 years), Targeted workshop

This intergenerational tension may also have contributed to the increasing invisibility of youth in community life as they move to places they consider safe such as their homes and the homes of friends. With a lack of places young people feel welcome, they are pushed to hang out in inappropriate locations. It also feeds into the growing frustration of young people about inaction on topics that are important to them.

Overall, there is a strong feeling of missing diversity of youth in community life, especially representation and visibility of youth from multicultural and LGBTQI+ backgrounds. Those from multicultural background reported experiencing unconscious bias from community members.

¹⁴ (Tienda & Wilson, 2004)

¹⁵ Ibid

“Equal representation of all demographics - maybe even within Council through quotas”

Young adult (18-24 years), YourSay comment

Visibility relates to several aspects of community life including:

- Education
- Engagement and participation
- Events of cultural significance
- Equal opportunity.

The assumption that young people prefer digital connection is also impacting their inclusion in community life¹⁶. This creates a challenge for information accessibility as relevant information and opportunities are primarily circulated using methods that young people are not engaging with. As a result, it appears that young people are withdrawing from community life. This is often interpreted as disinterest but is more likely that they have not seen the opportunity or do not understand how it relates to them.

While young people have told us that they turn to online forums to connect with others, feelings of exclusion are commonly reported due to unsafe spaces for young people to fully explore their ideas, and how they feel about contemporary issues.

Key insights from priority populations

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds expressed that they felt their voices were not valued and previous attempts to speak up, including at school, have not been listened to. They also feel there are times they are unfairly treated due to their age or race and are frustrated at being stereotyped.

¹⁶ (Weston, Lumly, & Curvers, 2018)



Photo credit - Oliver Czerwenka
Youth Voice Competition - Winner - Mental Health
"Strength in friendship - hold on tight and enjoy the ride."

Why we know it is important

Mission Australia's annual youth survey highlights that between 2019 and 2020 the percentage of young people identifying equity and discrimination as an issue of national importance increased from 25% to 40%¹⁷.

Young people want to be heard and are getting increasingly frustrated with inaction about topics that are important to them. An example is the increasingly visibility of young climate change activists. Young people across the world are using their voice to advocate for change. Their participation in the debate can and does make a difference.

In July 2021, a landmark case in the federal court of Australia, brought by eight schoolchildren and an octogenarian nun, ruled that the Australian government must take reasonable care to avoid causing personal injury or death to Australians under 18 arising from emissions of carbon dioxide into the earth's atmosphere". This is one example of young people having big impact.

What makes this is a challenge for the local context

- Belief that young people do not understand the complexity of issues
- Entrenched belief about young people's role in the decision-making process and how their views should be considered
- Inadequate world/national/state response to issues of global importance that will have the greatest impact on future generations
- Negative stereotypes of youth in public spaces.

Opportunity space

1. Using intergenerational connection to challenge perceptions of young people.
2. Intentional processes for including young people in decision making.
3. Focus on creating better systemic structures that challenge long held views that youth should be in different spaces. By addressing unintentional points of exclusion, we create an environment that supports inclusion.
4. Include young people in design, planning and delivery of opportunities to activities, programs and events that enable participation.
5. Strengthening the use of digital connection to communicate with young people and increase their participation in both online and in person events.

¹⁷ (Mission Australia, 2021)

Insight 5: Belonging

What we heard

One of the most positive aspects young people talked about was their love of the Northern Beaches and the sense of belonging to the area. This underpinned what was one of the biggest drivers of wanting to stay on the Northern Beaches, despite the high cost of living.

A feeling of belonging was the second most coded theme for those aged 12-17 years.

It is worth noting that this insight reflects elements of all the insights, likely because of the critical role belonging plays in the development of young people's identity and values. When young people feel their individual value base is misaligned with greater community values it affects young people's sense of place and value within the community.

“What matters is having a job that ensures there is a future for us”
Young person (18-24 years), Make the Connections workshop

A feeling of belonging underpinned many of the stories about how young people experience community life. This shows us that a feeling of belonging is strongly linked to young people's belief that they matter. When a strong feeling of belonging is experienced, this allows for a development of a strong social identity, which results in stronger feelings of identity within the broader community and increased resilience.

Themes around individual value base, and how it contributes to feelings of belonging, especially when in misalignment with perceived community values, was a top 10 theme across the consultation.

One of the most frequently cited experiences for young people was the impact of not having a visibly diverse community. Cultural and psychological safety is a foundational facilitator for the participation and the authentic inclusion of cultural and other diversity.

Young people talk about the below as being part of their value base:

- Standing up for what matters to them
- Having a place to live
- Having money and a job
- Everyone should get a fair opportunity
- Respect of others.

Currently we are seeing a breakdown in developing a sense of belonging because of the impacts relating to the other insight areas, especially around decision making. This is leading to increasing numbers of young people lacking belief about their place on the Northern Beaches.

Young people have told us that lack of cultural diversity is impacting on their ability to feel culturally and psychologically safe.

Key insights from priority populations

Young people living with disability told us that they have a great sense of connection and belonging to the Northern Beaches.

Why we know it is important

Belonging represents a subjective experience, but one that is important as it relates to connecting both to others and to place. It is different to connection itself as having a sense of belonging does not necessarily depend on participation with others or in groups. "Belonging comes from a perception of quality, meaning and satisfaction with social connections."¹⁸

We also know that belonging is especially important to young people. We know from studying the brain in adolescents that "peer groups and the need to belong become important for social identity, transition into adulthood, psychosocial adjustment along with coping-skills and resilience"¹⁹

Development of young people's value base is also important. It recognises the role of adolescence and early adulthood in forming an individual's value base. This also contributes to the development of future social and cultural norms that are present in the system.

What makes this is a challenge for the local context

- Belonging will mean different things to different people, making it harder to target high impact action
- Cost of living and housing unaffordability making it difficult for young people to feel they belong.

Opportunity space

1. Creating clear and meaningful processes to ensure youth have an equal place at the table.
2. Improve our cultural competency as a way of demonstrating change and progress on matters of high importance to youth to increase their sense of safety and belonging.
3. Capitalise on shared values between young people and the wider community (such as environmental concerns) to work to solve greater social challenges and foster a shared sense of belonging.
4. Youth development work can focus on youth-led programs and activities that enable young people to learn how to articulate and engage effectively.
5. Give tools to young people that allow them to participate more, leading to stronger visibility and representation of youth voice in decision making processes.

¹⁸ (Allen, 2019)

¹⁹ *ibid*

Insight 6: Skills and education

What we heard

Skills and education are a critical element of many of the conversations had with young people. The knowledge and capabilities young people need to effectively participate in community life, cross traditional forms of education and training also related to the basic life skills required to transition effectively into adulthood.

Feedback about skills was in the top 10 themes for both age categories, with it being in the top two for those aged 18-24 years indicating significant importance.

“Outside of education, uni and TAFE, practicing life skills are still considered majorly taboo and looked down upon”

Young Person (12-17 years) Targeted workshop (LGBTQI+)

Basic life skills discussed within the other insights such as budgeting, saving, how to prepare and apply for a rental property, social skills for relationship building, and navigating government systems and processes are important to young people. Programs that provide these skills would be highly valued by young people however they expressed that high school is probably not the right place for this.

Young people know that to achieve economic security and financial independence they need to engage in further education. This does not look the same for each young person. It could involve attending university, undertaking a trade or skilled base profession, or taking advantage of employment opportunities.

For those undertaking a trade, skills such as how to run a small business are recognised as important for the future. How young people experience the challenges of studying differs as to the support available to them. For those who do not have financial support from family to help with the high cost of living articulate the difficult balance of trying to work and study.

Young people, particularly those 18-24 years, have talked about education, training and employment more in the context of the broader life decision making and choices they have available. The interrelationship between education, career, future earnings, and the choices that creates their future is front of mind for young people when thinking about their future.

Youth identify many different skills that they require for the future. Some of these are significantly different from the skills previous generations would have learned which has led to a gap in how young people are taught skills, such as:

- **How to undertake financial admin required when you are an adult**
- **Entrepreneurial and business financial skills**
- **Foundational money skills**
- **Social skills and how to talk with other generations**
- **Positive mental health coping strategies**
- **Smart investments that increase earning capability.**

Another key point is the ability for young people to access courses, training, apprenticeships, or jobs that they would like. If a course is offered at a university that would require them to move away, the associated costs of moving out and supporting themselves while studying will limit the ability of young people to choose those courses. The same is true for employment and apprenticeships. Having the ability to remain in the family home and continue to receive support is critical to young people being able to complete education and training.

Why we know it's important

Young people's ability to juggle the competing priorities of working to earn money and completing education or training impacts on their ability to make decisions about where they live and who with. This can have flow on effects to their immediate and long-term safety and emotional wellbeing.

Trying to juggle these competing priorities also impacts on their social life and the important connections and support structures that lead to resilience. This can be due to lack of time or money but is also impacted by values and attitudes of people as they grow and change.

The job and career choices available to young people on the Northern Beaches impacts on what they can choose to do now and into the future. For some young people this means moving away from the area and all of the support structures they have established.

Education and training is a predicator of long term wellbeing²⁰. The ability of young people to establish a strong foundation to build on as they grow.

²⁰ (Raghupathi & Raghupathi, 2020)

“Education is a powerful agent of change, and improves health and livelihoods, contributes to social stability and drives long-term economic growth”

Global Partnership for Education²¹

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- Availability of higher education, training, apprenticeships, and jobs close to home
- Competing demands of work and study and the impact this has on young people’s mental, physical, and social wellbeing
- Availability and cost of appropriate housing which impacts on young people ability to move out of home and be closer to work or education
- Lack of programs and supports that provide the basic life skills young people are seeking
- High cost of housing on the Northern Beaches and impact of this on decision making for the future, impacting young people’s education and career choices.

Opportunity space

1. Utilising role modelling and mentoring to assist young people develop their social identities and develop foundational life skills for the transition to adulthood.
2. Leverage skill development through engaging in education and training to strengthen visibility and representation of youth voice in decision making processes.

²¹ (GPE20, 2022)



Photo credit - Nishka Tolani
Youth Voice Photo Competition, Winner - Belonging
"This photo is from North Curl Curl beach."

Insight 7: Support systems

What we heard

Over a quarter of all feedback was linked to this insight.

Young people spoke both about the formal and informal support systems they accessed when they needed them. They highlighted a number of weaknesses in the efficacy and availability of support systems and the relationship this can have on increased mental health issues for young people.

Informal support systems and how this fosters a sense of belonging were frequently spoken about together (38% of the time).

Formal support systems include services provided by professional, trained employees like psychologists and GPs. Driven by a perception that 'we don't have that problem on the Beaches' and an increasingly competitive tendering environment, there are a range of factors impacting on the availability and visibility of support services.

Disengagement with services has so far been identified in two key ways - inadequate service availability and a breakdown in referral processes allowing services to identify young people in need. Government spending priorities are a major influence in how successful, innovative, and the number of services available.

Young people told us they often rely on their informal support systems when they need help. Family and friends, teachers and sporting and interest groups were identified as alternative support points. The feedback highlights that when young people disengage from formal support services their reliance on informal support systems increases. We also know it's important to ensure that these informal support systems, often young people themselves, have adequate skills to ensure their own wellbeing^{22 23}. When young people don't have these, or their support systems don't know how to provide support, they can be disadvantaged.

Informal support systems were especially important for those aged 12-17 years and indicate that when young people disengage from formal support systems, they then rely on informal support systems to meet their needs.

"I feel safe at school and in the community because there is a nice and loving community, and so many people you can talk to and make you feel comforted and safe"

Young person (12-17 years), School engagement session

²² (Headspace, 2022)

²³ (YSAS, 2022)

Some young people also acknowledged the role teachers play in both directly providing support and directing them to the support services available. Research acknowledges this and indicates that teachers and school counsellors, in addition to GPs and youth workers, are likely to act as gateways to mental health services for young people. Making sure these are available is an important aspect of creating successful support systems.²⁴

When we get support services right, we have a better chance of engaging with those who need it most.

Key insights from priority populations

First Nations young people identified the disconnect between young people and support services. They felt there is a need for greater availability of services on the Northern Beaches. It was identified that access to services seems to be impacted by economic status and an ability to afford services.

Parents and carers of young people living with disability told us that they need to have additional skills in understanding how funding works and how best to utilise the funding that they have for support.

All the priority populations referenced the importance of support from informal support networks or social support groups that they perceive as a safe place to get the support they need

Why we know it's important

Mission Australia's annual youth survey highlights the importance of providing support to young people while they experience periods of significant change and transition. When asked who they go to for support around half of young people indicated they would go to their relative/family friend (45.9%), brother/sister (45.3%) or partner or significant other (45.3%) for support with important issues in their lives. In addition, close to four in 10 (37.7%) young people would turn to a GP or health professional as a source of help with important issues.

These results echo what young people told us. Firstly, that we need to support young people's informal support networks to provide the right kind of support to young people. And secondly, that we need to continue to advocate for formal support services to be available on the Northern Beaches.

Research shows that while there is a high prevalence of mental health problems that develop in adolescence and early adulthood, young people tend not to seek professional help. Young people are more inclined to seek help if they have knowledge about mental health issues and sources of help, and if they have established relationships with potential help providers²⁵.

We also know that research shows access to social support networks is important to enable financial wellbeing²⁶.

²⁴ (Rickwood, Dearne, & Willson, 2007)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ (ANZ, 2021, p. 19)



Photo credit - Thomas Mikhail

Youth Voice Photo Competition - Mental Health

"COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on the mental health of society. By channeling your stress into a world of detail, anxiety can be relieved."

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- Government funding model and priorities impact on the support services available locally
- Stigma associated with accessing services
- Location of services
- Negative experience of service interaction
- Perceived lack of culturally appropriate and safe services
- Ability of the service system to effectively support young people and their diverse needs
- Gaps in service provision where responsibilities of government departments stop and start, leading to young people falling through the cracks.

Opportunity space

1. Utilising new types of services that act as a soft entry point to service delivery.
2. Better service collaboration.
3. Better engagement with young people in service design and delivery.
4. Location of services across the beaches to improve access.
5. Training for young people and teachers to be effective informal supports.
6. Better promotion of services.

Insight 8: Connection

What we heard

■ Almost a quarter of all feedback was linked to this insight.

Young people universally spoke about the need to connect with others²⁷. The way that connection occurs does not look the same for everyone, but overwhelmingly young people talk about connection being when they feel they belong to a group and feel close with other people.

Young people talk about the connection points with other young people through events and activities but express wanting more and better ways of connecting with wider community life, with a focus on cross generation opportunities.

“I think it's essential for young people to connect with older people as they need the support and connection with other older people”

Young Person 12-17 years, Culturally Diverse Workshop

Intergenerational connection through events and programs, work, interests, and volunteering were all identified as pathways to increase connection between young people and other generations. Current opportunity for connection cross-generationally is limited.

Assumptions about how young people prefer to connect has led to a perception by some that young people connect best online. While young people articulate that they do turn to online spaces to connect, especially throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this was more about being able to connect with peers who shared the same interests as them easily more than a preference for online connection.

The combination of COVID-19 and assumptions about online connection has led to young people withdrawing to private spaces, either physical or online. This change means that there is a loss of primary connection points to other generations within the community and overall, less visibility of young people in public spaces.

²⁷ (Greater Good Magazine, 2022)

Being able to get around is important especially to those 12-17 years who rely on public transport to connect physically with community life. Young people told us that they like to connect in the following ways:

- Outdoors such as bushwalking and the beach
- Sports
- Spaces where they can do physical activities
- Libraries
- Local shopping areas
- Social media
- Online spaces.

“The Northern Beaches is great for young people because there are so many opportunities to do things”

Young Person 12-17 years, School engagement session

Young people talked about increasing the number of and spaces and places available in the community for connection and improving the design and functionality would better allow young people places to connect. Young people do not only want to connect with other young people - they want to connect with other generations and their families.

Key insights from priority populations

First Nations young people spoke about the need for connection between young people, culture, and community to achieve a feeling of belonging.

For those at risk of disengaging from school or living with mental illness opportunities to connect include school, video calling and messaging and hanging out on the weekend at the beach or mall. These young people also want opportunities for accessible, free sport to help them build social networks and be healthy.

Multiculturally and linguistically diverse young people highlighted that their main points of connection were often through those from the same cultural background because they feel excluded at school and in social situations.

Why we know it is important

We know that connection is a core psychological need. Decades of research suggest that the quality of our social ties might be the single biggest predictor of our wellbeing.

For young people, social connection can pave the way to wellbeing in later life. A survey of 300 men for more than seven decades demonstrates that intimate relationships and “a loving childhood, empathy, and warm relationships as a young adult²⁸” were the best predictors of economic success, physical health and a happy life. Similarly, there is evidence that being socially connected “was a more powerful predictor of adolescents’ future happiness than academic achievement”.²⁹

What makes this a challenge for the local area:

- High cost of living and privatisation of activities placing them out of reach for many young people
- Infrastructure that allows ease of movement
- Assumptions that youth visibility in public space needs to be regulated due to crime.

Opportunity space

1. Focusing on connecting young people with established networks and groups, outside of youth specific contexts.
2. Use strong social connection in adolescence to increase the future social capital of tomorrow’s adults.

²⁸ (Greater Good Magazine, 2022)

²⁹ (Greater Good Magazine, 2013)



Photo credit - Adam Dekell
Youth Voice Photo Competition - Winner - Connection
"Connection with my friends during the pandemic."

Insight 9: Financial literacy

What we heard

Young people know that money matters. There is a general expectation that young people will learn how to manage money, especially when growing up in affluent households. This element seems to have less to do with young people feeling they have the skills and ability to be financially literate and more to do with the spending habits and financial attitudes of those closest to them.

Financial literacy includes foundational life skills that young people feel are assumed they have. These include budgeting, tax responsibilities, what smart investments are, credit card use and the requirements for applying for a rental or loan.

Young adults offered reflections that they can now recognise the value of learning financial life skills, but also acknowledged that learning foundational money skills did not seem important when they were in high school.

Young people aged 12-17 years could also articulate and recognise the need for these types of skills. While financial literacy did not make it into the top 10 themes for either group of young people, concerns about high cost of living did. Building skills and confidence in this area is one of the things that young people talked about as a way for them to feel more in control of their future.

“The more they (children) understand, the better they can make decisions and be financially independent in their adulthood. We need to start teaching kids about money early on, so they grow up with a good understanding of how to manage their finances”

Young Person (12-17 years), YourSay comment.

When young people were asked about equity, disparities between generations especially in relation to wealth, were identified as a leading cause of feelings of inequity.

Smart investments was a term we heard frequently, especially from those aged over 18. Modern trends such as using influencers such as the Barefoot Investor, were one of the many ways young people indicated they had picked up skills. Young people know that investing is a way to secure their financial security when housing, especially on the Northern Beaches, for most is off the table. However, many young people do not feel equipped to effectively invest.

Why we know it is important

Research shows that having money conversations are an important part of social support and financial wellbeing³⁰ and when parents do a good job of providing advice as young people are growing up it is strongly correlated with financial wellbeing. In the 2021 ANZ Financial Wellbeing survey only one third of Australians reported that their parents had discussed how to manage finances when they were growing up.

Financial wellbeing and people's resilience in sustaining financial shocks is closely linked to feeling secure for the future³¹. Having forward-looking behaviour traits such as "optimism, future orientation, impulsivity and frugality"³² have the most significant impact on financial wellbeing. Saving and spending behaviours were the most important behaviours to have for improving financial wellbeing.

What makes this a challenge for the local context

- Young people are reliant on access to adults with adequate skills in financial literacy to pass on this knowledge and skills
- Misconception that high wealth equates to money management skills
- Tendency of young people to not recognise the importance of this skill set until later in life.

Opportunity space

1. Cultivating forward looking behaviour traits to increase financial wellbeing and resilience to financial shock.
2. Strengthen role modelling and skill transfer through teaching adults how to talk about money matters with young people.
3. Explore the 'influencer' trend popular with young people, especially for financial skills and deliver education on spending and saving behaviours.

³⁰ (ANZ, 2021, p. 19)

³¹ (ANZ, 2021)

³² (ANZ, 2021, p. 3)

Appendix 1 - Lines of inquiry

List of co-designed questions used in consultation with young people

Focus area

Physical and personal safety

Why do young people tell us that they sometimes don't feel safe at home, in public and online?
How does this affect their ability to feel secure and participate in community life?

- Where do you feel safe and why?
- For people aged 18-24 what are the biggest barriers to feeling safe?
- How do we help young people to explore risk taking?
- What would you need to make you feel safe?

Focus area

Mental health and wellbeing support

Do young people have enough of the appropriate and effective support they need to protect and improve their mental wellbeing?

- Where would you go if you needed support?
- If you or someone you looked for support in the last 12 months what was this experience like?
- How do you hear about support services (like counselling) available in the community?
- What is the biggest gap in support services for young people on the Northern Beaches?

Focus area

Financial independence and economic security

What skills do young people need to feel secure, in control of their future and experience economic security?

- What does a secure economic future mean to you?
- What practical skills do you need or have needed to achieve that future?
- What opportunities outside of school/uni/tafe are there for learning and building practical life skills?

Focus area

Meaningful participation

What do young people need to feel included in the decision-making process?

- What makes or would make you feel heard?
- Where have you been when you have felt heard or taken action
- Why do you think there are times when young peoples views aren't being considered?
- How would you like decisions to be communicated to you
- What issues do young people talk about?

Focus area

Equity

How do young people describe the current state of equality on the Northern Beaches?

- What does equality mean to you?
- If you have experienced or witnessed unfair treatment of young people what happened?
- What enables you to experience equality?
- Are there things which stop all people having equal access to participate on the Northern Beaches?

Focus area

A sense of belonging

What does belonging mean to young people?

- What's great about the Northern Beaches for a young person?
- Do you feel you belong?
- When or where do you feel valued and engaged with your local community?
- Is there anything about the northern beaches that makes you feel like you don't belong?

Focus area

Housing affordability and homelessness

What are the capabilities and assets that young people need to be resilient against the challenge of housing affordability?

- Do young people still aspire to own their own property?
- What worries young people most about housing affordability?
- Would you know how to find affordable accommodation and what you need to do secure it?
- How can we help young people feel financially secure without owning a home?
- To what extent does housing affordability impact on your ability to have a future on the Northern Beaches

Focus area

Connection & cohesion

What helps young people connect with friends and family on the Northern Beaches?

- How do you connect with your friends and what sorts of things do you do?
- How can we support young people to better connect with friends and family?
- Who is best placed to support young people to participate, have fun and connect with their friends and family?
- What places or groups of people in the community would you like to be able to connect with more?
- Why is it important for young people to connect with older people in the community?

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