



# CREATING A YOUTH-FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE AND VIBE

“Actually have young people there. First and Foremost.  
Or is that stating the obvious?”

JFY Peer Connector

**If young people in your peer network are to be actively involved, they must feel comfortable with the set-up and able to participate in ways that are right for them.**

If you are an organisation setting up youth peer networks, one of the questions to ask and answer is: are you a youth-appropriate organisation?

In its paper ***Keepin’ it Real***, the **New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development** states that:

“Being youth appropriate includes:

- making meetings at times that suit young people
- providing transport (or funding) to meetings
- providing food at meetings
- sharing information in the way they want
- ensuring they know how to participate in a formal meeting
- knowing when young people may be busy (e.g. exams, sport commitments)
- ensuring your organisation is accessible and comfortable for a diverse range of young people
- talking with young people about what you can do to make your organisation more youth-appropriate
- listening to what they have to say and acting on it.”



<http://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/about-mydp/publications/keepin-it-real/keepin-it-real.pdf>

So, what do we mean when we say that strong youth peer networks need to be “youth friendly”? It implies that you will need to give some thought about the environment, the energy, the accessibility, and the nourishment provided at the peer network.

Overall, the message seems to be: make it friendly, make it bright, make it inviting.

**YACVic** suggests five main tips to making things “youth friendly”:

1. Make young people feel welcome with positive energy
2. Keep a relaxed, friendly atmosphere
3. Create a communal set-up with no closed doors
4. Provide food and share it with everyone
5. Hold a social event before or after a meeting.



You can read more about this here:

<https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/build-skills/involve-young-people/planning-great-stuff-for-young-people>



Young people will often talk about a safe place or a safe environment where they can talk freely and openly, and this is a key part of JFY's thinking:

*"Culture is important. It is not about what you do, but HOW you do it. When you think about our point of difference: we have young people with lived experience on the ground and young people are being spoken with and not at."*

#### JFY Peer Connector

A JFY peer network member reflects that it is really hard to talk to people you don't know. In particular, she says that young people don't always feel comfortable disclosing sensitive information to a whole group. She suggests sometimes it is good to have specific topics with a guest speaker or smaller group discussions and even individual mentors who young people can go to, to share private information. Another Peer Connector agrees that it is important that network members know they have absolute choice over how little or how much they share.

## For more information

**YERP** by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:

<https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/get-started/involve-young-people/involving-young-people-guiding-principles>



The South Australian Government's **Better Together: A practical guide to effective engagement with young people**<sup>4</sup> states, "organisations who are youth friendly ensure participants are well informed and follow up". They also state that you need to be genuine, build trust, be transparent and be accountable. The next bead is on the string as you have thought about the way in which you can operate in a youth-friendly way.

Young people have told us that another key factor for success is the importance of language and communication. This doesn't mean pretending you are a teenager again – that will not win you any fans! Rather, it reflects that you have given some thought about ways to communicate. We look at this in the next section.

4 <https://www.yacsa.com.au/documents/item/318>

Take a moment to think about how you could re-energise the peer network. Is it simply time to invite a new guest along, show an interesting video, or hold a celebration in a new venue? Why not invite the members of your network in thinking about new ideas to re-energise the network?

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