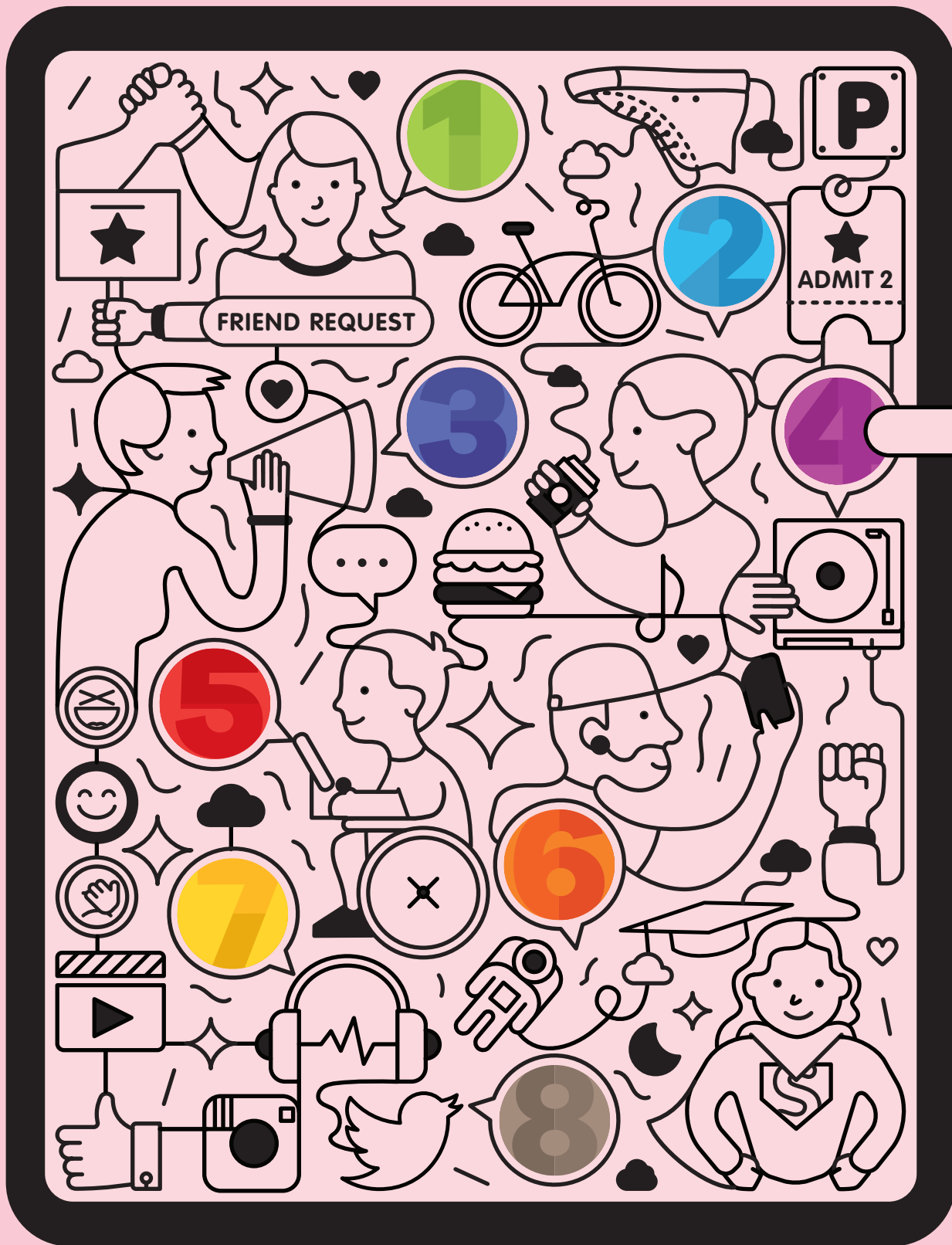
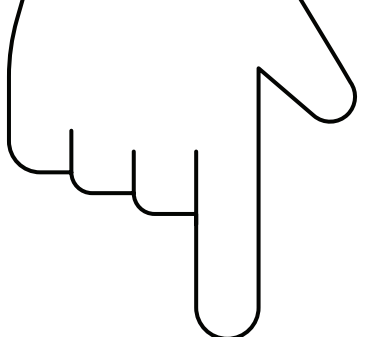


STRONG YOUTH PEER NETWORKS



STRONG YOUTH PEER NETWORKS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This workbook has been co-produced in collaboration with a group of young people who are passionate about peer networks and the benefits they bring.

In particular, we acknowledge the contribution of the following people:

- Bradley Bettens (Peer Connector)
- Kathryn Mills (Julia Farr Youth)
- Georgia Horgan (Julia Farr Youth)
- Jocelyn Neumueller (Julia Farr Youth)
- Madde McKenzie (Peer Connector)
- Nick Schumi (Peer Connector)
- Angus Fowler (Julia Farr Youth)
- Jackie Hayes (JFA Purple Orange)
- Robbi Williams (JFA Purple Orange)
- Jala Burton (JFA Purple Orange)

This workbook complements the ***Strong networks: connecting the beads together*** guide and sits alongside existing online resources on the Peer Connect website www.peerconnect.org.au.

This work is funded by the NDIA in partnership with ANZSOG.

June 2019



PeerConnect respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia. We are committed to inclusive communities.

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WELCOME



Welcome to this workbook, a resource created in collaboration with young people who run peer networks in South Australia.

This workbook is designed for:

1. People who want to set up a youth peer network and are looking for ways to engage young people
2. People already involved in youth peer networks who are looking for ways to keep their peer network strong.

By drawing on the experiences of peer networks and the young people involved, this workbook will take you through a range of ideas about how to get young people engaged in your network. This includes having a safe space for youth and promoting open youth-to-youth interactions. The significance of language and communication, together with creating a youth-friendly atmosphere and energy, is so important when it comes to enhancing leadership development amongst young people.

This is not a recipe book. It is a guide to support you in getting started and help you to think through how your network is going, along with what you can do to make it stronger.

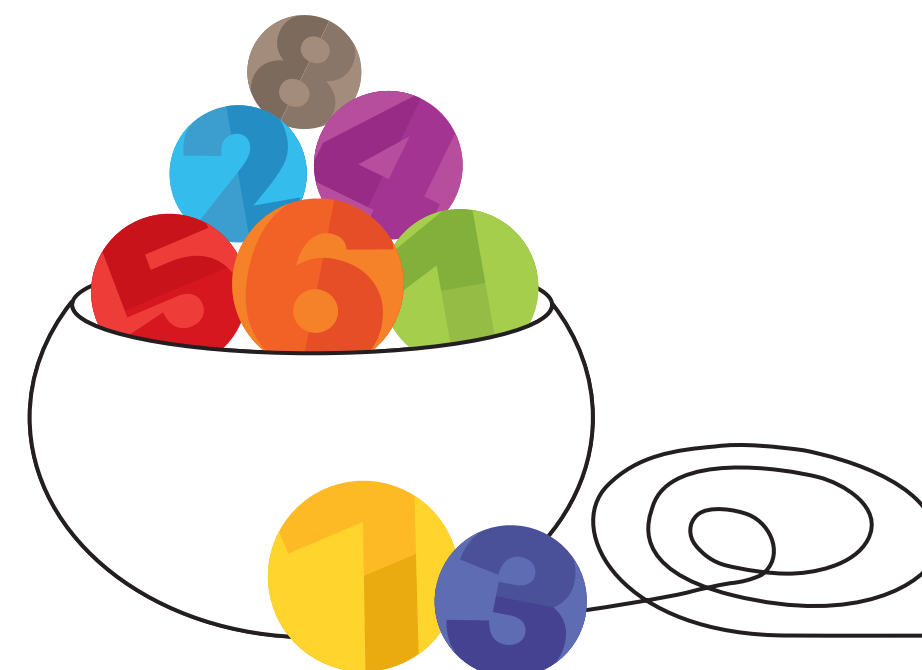
To help you find your way around, the workbook is organised into eight sections:

1. Why peer networks are important
2. Starting a youth peer network
3. Keeping young people engaged
4. Creating a youth-friendly atmosphere and vibe
5. Importance of language and communication
6. Using motivational tools and empowerment approaches with young people
7. Using diverse media to get the word out
8. Developing leadership

STRINGING THE BEADS TOGETHER

This workbook organises these eight sections into beads onto a string, making it easier to move from one to the next. As you read through you might be looking at how to start a youth peer network or you may already have one but want to learn more about language and communication, for example.

Each bead represents an aspect of youth peer networks you might want to work on. You can either work on all of them, one at a time starting from the beginning, or you can go straight to the bead that makes most sense to your situation.



1 WHY PEER NETWORKS ARE IMPORTANT

What is a peer network?

A peer network is where young people with similar experiences or circumstances come together as equals, to provide support for one another. A peer network presents an opportunity and safe space for young people to offer informal support to their like-minded peers.

Peer power is a thing

Young people can benefit from connecting with others, especially those they see as going through similar events and issues. Peer support usually comes from forming relationships and trust between individuals, the development of a common purpose or focus, and a sense of solidarity. It can be informal, taking many forms, such as face-to-face meetings or online.

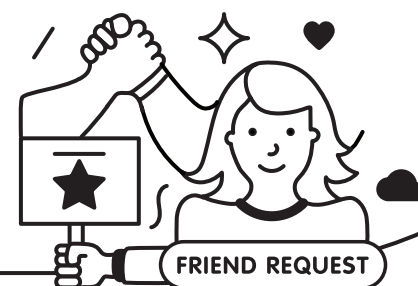
Peer support is becoming increasingly important because it acknowledges and utilises the power of lived experience. This reaps many benefits, for both individuals and the wider community. People become more confident, capable and informed. The impact of this goes beyond, to their lives outside of the peer group. It doesn't replace "experts" or professionals but it is a way of achieving positive outcomes.

In particular, peer networks are seen to provide a safe space for young people to be free from judgement, misunderstanding or formal authority.

Supportive peer networks also increase social connectedness, creating a sense of belonging.

The **Centre for Adolescent Health's *Paying Attention to Self (PATS) Programme Guide 2006*** is clear about the importance of peer networks:

*"Peer support programs are based on the premise that bringing young people together in a group format can reduce feelings of isolation, provide an opportunity to meet new people and establish friendships. They assist young people to be aware that there are people their own age with similar experiences and issues. It is hoped that this awareness increases the sense of belonging and social connectedness."*¹



¹ https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/cah/Paying_Attention_To_Self_PATS_Programme_Guide_2006.pdf

Paying it forward

A key benefit people get from a peer network is that each member is giving and receiving help from others.

Peer support has the potential to be mutually beneficial for all parties involved. A member of the peer network gets support from the group, but it is also likely that, at some point, they will assist another member. This will boost their own confidence as they have valuable experiences to share, helping another person along.

Partners in policy, and a framework for feedback

Another important gain is that peer networks represent a powerful channel for information and feedback about emerging policy and practice.

Through peer networks, young people come to understand that their opinions and voices matter and can influence decision-makers directly. Peer networks will succeed if they "recognise and harness the passion, expertise and potential that young people have to improve the lives of others and society more broadly."²

The importance of resources and supports

While much of the energy of peer networks is generated and held within each peer network's membership, youth peer networks do need access to resources and supports. Included amongst these are peer-led community agencies, who provide a key role in assisting peer networks to emerge, stay focused and deliver value to their members.

"Young people interact less with their parents and other adults and move more toward their peer group during adolescence and teens, meaning that information provided by their peers will seem far more relevant and potentially more credible than that provided by adults including parents."

<http://mypeer.org.au/planning/what-are-peer-based-programs/benefits/peers-have-credibility/>



Go to the link wherever you see this symbol



The first bead is on the string, and you have given some thought about why the peer movement is important and significant for young people.

The next stage is to think about how you will start a youth peer network and how to get people along to the first meeting. We look at this next.

² https://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Australia_2010_National_Youth_Strategy.pdf



STARTING A YOUTH PEER NETWORK

Why start a youth peer network?

Peer networks are where people with a common interest meet up to make something good happen. They are not segregated day programs or special groups. They support and do not replace a person's roles and relationships in other parts of their life.

Peer networks come in all shapes and sizes. A peer network might be a group that meets regularly at a community centre. It may be a Facebook group – sharing information and providing online support. It might involve three people catching up regularly over coffee and cake to talk about things.

It does not matter what your peer network looks like. What is important is that the peer network is clear about how it is helping its members. This might be by assisting people to make new connections, and to learn from each other, so that each member is better able to deal with the issues or goals they have.

Evidence shows that people who are members of peer support networks gain friendships, information, increased confidence, social connections and leadership skills. Peers say one of the best things about peer support is that people with similar experiences help one another as they provide each other with support.

Peer networks can help people to have a shared voice about common concerns, influencing disability services and systems (such as the NDIS). Peer networks can also influence mainstream services, like health and education, and help local communities be more welcoming and accessible.

What is the purpose of your new peer network?

Peer networks work better when the network has a clear purpose, and this makes it easier to attract new members. People are more likely to come if they know the network is working on things they care about.

This does not mean you have to write up a big document. Just think through what you want the peer network to do.

Here are some examples of reasons why different peer networks might start:

- To talk about how to make something better, like making schools more inclusive, or buses more accessible, etc.
- To learn about new things, like learning about rights, decision-making, self-advocacy, or the NDIS, etc.
- To make new connections, like meeting people with similar experiences and learning from each other.

Where can you get help with resources and save money?

Most peer networks will need help with things like a meeting venue, transport, refreshments, sending out reminders, and so on.

Some of these resources might come from your peer network's own members. You could even share the jobs so everyone is involved, including ride-sharing, a "tea-and-biscuits" roster and a host roster where members use each other's houses to meet.

But sometimes the peer network may need other help. Most Australian communities have resources available to local people, like council-run community centres, meeting rooms at local clubs, or free Wi-Fi at local cafés.

Take a moment to think about what types of resources your new peer network might need, and how you can find those resources.

Have a look at the **Peer Connect Quick Guide: Understanding what resources will be needed for the group to operate** here:

<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/establishment/why-would-you-set-one/> 

Also, here's a link to something called **The Art of Asking**, which could help you think about how to approach people for help.

<https://www.family-advocacy.com/resources/the-art-of-asking/> 

How do you invite people to your first peer network meeting?

First, think about the ways you can tell people about the meeting, such as:

- a notice on your local shopping mall notice board
- a social media post
- word-of-mouth: telling your friends to tell their friends, who tell their friends, and so on
- a community advert in the local free paper
- posting information, and talking with staff, at venues and services where there are likely to be young people.

There are other ways, too. Think about which strategies best fit your network. For example, if your new network is about inclusive education, you might ask your local schools to put the invitation in their newsletters.

You could try making an invitation that just talks about what will happen at the first meeting. Remember that people might not have heard a great deal about peer networks and may not have met you before. They might be unsure about committing to meeting regularly, and with someone they don't know.

Think about the difference between these two sample invitations:

INVITATION TO JOIN
A PEER NETWORK

We are setting up a peer network to talk about the problems for people living with disability finding proper work. We are going to meet on the first Monday night every month. The first meeting is 7pm next Monday at the community centre in the high street.

We hope you can be a regular; we can all help each other.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK
ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING
WITH DISABILITY FORCED TO
LIVE IN NURSING HOMES

We think young people living with disability should have a home to call their own and live with people they choose. If this is something you agree with, we'd love to talk with you. We are having a meeting at 7pm next Monday at the community centre in the high street.

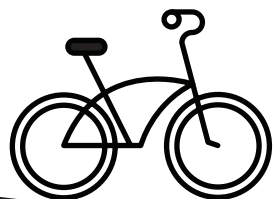
Let's talk about what could be better; we'll all learn something and we might be able to make something happen.

In the first invitation, people are asked to make a regular commitment. In the second invitation, people are invited to have their say about an issue. They are not being asked to commit beyond one meeting.

The first invitation may get fewer people, but those who are there will be your peer network because they are ready to meet regularly.

The second invitation might get more people to your first meeting, but many may not be ready to commit to a regular meeting.

You are in the best position to decide which type of invitation is best suited to your situation. Whichever way you go, don't be discouraged if you don't get many young people turning up to the peer network. Sometimes, this can take time, so stay with it. Also, even a small network of two to three people can do good things.



How do you make the first meeting a success?

However you invite people to your new peer network, it is important the first meeting is a success. You might think about success in these ways:

- Everyone in the room was welcomed
- Everyone in the room had the chance to have their say and to be respected
- Everyone in the room felt like they learnt something
- Everyone in the room got the chance to meet someone new
- The conversation finished in a way that led to people want to come back for more.

A great meeting happens when people join a conversation about something really important to them. It may be to listen to a guest speaker, to hear from others about their views and experiences, or to voice their concerns about an issue that impacts them.

As the network builds momentum, the group can encourage its members to take turns at performing different tasks, such as sending out the reminders, lining up the guest speaker, making sure the venue is available, bringing the pizza, and so on. This helps all members share the ownership of the peer network. This makes it become stronger and longer lasting.

Case study – Julia Farr Youth peer network

A South Australian peer network called Julia Farr Youth (JFY) started like this.

There was a word-of-mouth invitation that there was going to be a meeting about issues for young people living with disability. A small number of young people living with disability showed up at the meeting. There was a good conversation, and by the end of the meeting there were still some things people wanted to talk about. They agreed to meet again to finish the conversation. At the second meeting, the young people there started to talk about how it would be good to hear from other young people living with disability, so they put the word out for people to come to a third meeting. And so on.

The JFY network has now been running for more than ten years, and has created a lot of benefits for its members and for young people living with disability generally. And it started with an invitation to one meeting. JFY's voice and ideas are reflected throughout this workbook.



For more information

For more tips and ideas, have a look at the **Peer Connect Quick Guide: What is the purpose of your peer network?:**



<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/establishment/why-would-you-set-one/>

Centre of Excellence In Peer Support – Mental Health has great resources about peer support. There is a document about setting up a peer support group, which you can find in the resources section here:



<http://www.peersupportvic.org/index.php/2014-12-15-22-42-49/2014-12-16-02-22-27/Resources/>

See the **Peer Connect Quick Guide: How to make sure the first meeting is a success:**



<https://www.peerconnect.org.au/setting-and-running-peer-networks/first-meeting/how-make-sure-first-meeting-success/>

The ***Our Youth IMPACT Project*** is a powerful example of our commitment to supporting young people by helping them to find their voice and to identify and apply their influence. This is key to young people developing their personal wellbeing:



<https://www.syc.net.au/wellbeing/young-people/impact-project/>



Hopefully, this section has given you some useful ideas about setting up a youth peer network. We have used the second bead to represent the initial stage of a peer network. It is seen as the first connecting thread; the bringing of people together.

The next thing to consider is how to keep young people engaged; what will keep them interested and coming back to the network? We look at this next.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about setting up a peer network. Why are you starting it up? What do you think your local youth community would want from it? What resources will you need? How will you invite people to come along to the first meeting?

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KEEPING YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED

Once you have a crowd or just one or two young people to turn up to your first meeting, the next thing to consider is how you will keep them engaged, and, even more importantly, how to make that engagement meaningful.

“Meaningful youth participation is not just about opportunity; it is about seeing young people as partners and equipping them with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively participate.”



<https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/youthparticipationfinalinteractive.pdf>

The key here is to ensure the peer networks are run by and for young people. The **Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)** talks about youth participation as “a doing word”. Young people want to be active, and YACVic lists the three key principles of youth participation as:

Empowerment: Young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

Purposeful engagement: Young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

Inclusiveness: Ensuring all young people are able to participate, regardless of background, culture, where they live, their gender or sexuality.³

A JFY peer network member says that meeting new people and having a voice is key to keeping people engaged in their peer network.

“Peer networks are great because they give young people a chance to meet new people and talk about issues you have and you can say whatever is on your mind.”

However, that network member also warns against resting on your laurels and says facilitators need to mix it up to keep people engaged. This might be by changing venues, doing something completely different and making sure the network is vibrant and grabs people’s attention.

Peer Connectors

JFY employs Peer Connectors to facilitate their peer support network meetings. They consider this to be a crucial part of why the peer network meetings are so successful. The Peer Connectors have lived experience of disability and are passionate, enthusiastic and positive young adults who are active citizens in the community.

The Peer Connectors provide guidance and leadership to young adults living with disability who participate in the JFY peer support networks. The role involves facilitating group meetings of young adults living with disability and their support people, including some preparation and review work. Meetings are themed on topics of interest that are identified

by members, such as employment, education, sexual health, the NDIS, or self-advocacy. The Peer Connectors are positive role-models, who share their knowledge and life experiences with the members.

The role requires good written and verbal communication. In taking on this position, the Peer Connectors have gained valuable experience when it comes to facilitating group events.

The **Youth Affairs Council Victoria** has also developed an online toolkit about involving young people. It stresses the need to take an informal approach and to think about the reasons why young people will want to get involved with a peer network. This might include:

- making a difference or change in their own lives
- making a difference in the lives of others
- having new experiences
- learning new skills or developing talents
- professional learning or career opportunities
- meeting new people or hanging out with friends.

That is not to say that your peer network has to be all these things to all people (but if it is – outstanding work!), but it does need to provide an opportunity for all or some of these elements, so that the young person considers it worth turning up.

Canada’s **Apathy is Boring** is a leading national, non-partisan, youth-led charitable organisation that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy, with the aim of increasing youth voter turnout, increasing youth engagement in the democratic process, and building a sustainable dialogue between youth and elected officials. One of their central messages is about belonging.

“Youth are looking to belong. We’re looking for opportunities to build community, gain skills, and contribute to something meaningful.”

Apathy is Boring’s Youth Friendly Guide

This guide also talks about what young people NEED to stay engaged. To stay involved in any cause, youth need:

Meaning: To be doing something that matters

Control: To make real decisions, and actually be heard

Connectedness: To be part of a community.

This is a reminder to re-visit the first section and to remember WHY you are running the peer network and what it will give to the young people.



For more information

YERP by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:



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

Canada's **Apathy** is Boring:



http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf



The third bead is on the string and hopefully people are turning up to your network because it is interesting and engaging.

Another key consideration for young people is that the peer network needs to be fun and enjoyable. In the next section we look at how to do this: creating a youth-friendly atmosphere and vibe.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about keeping young people engaged in a youth peer network. How will you ask them what they want? How are they being empowered? Are your meetings inclusive, and does everyone have a chance to participate? Could you use Peer Connectors or similar?

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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-mydlpublications/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**⁴ 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>

Reflection

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?

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced, thin grey horizontal lines across its entire width. The margins are uniform on all sides, creating a clean space for writing or drawing. There are no titles, logos, or other markings present on the page.

5 IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Young people are receptive and sensitive to language and the way we communicate. They can probably spot it a mile off if you are being disingenuous or trying too hard. They will also pick up on an atmosphere or energy.

A JFY Connector rated language and communication as being in the top two most important things alongside having young people with lived experience running the peer network. He reflects that:

"If you say it in a way that doesn't resonate with people, you lose them."

YACVic, however, warns against trying to copy young people and be like them:

"It's important to be yourself. Young people are good at spotting fakers – but always keep things respectful and appropriate."

Young people look for good common sense, a down-to-earth approach, with a focus on key points. Avoid long, complicated and dull documents. Avoid jargon! Humour is a great way to build trust and support.

Another way of engaging is to make conversations ideas-based. For example, you could start by looking at current events or ideas such as inclusive education. Give young people a space to talk about what's going on and what they think about it. Allow them to have differing opinions, but make sure they treat all opinions with respect.

For example, Seed is Australia's first Indigenous youth climate network. They are building a movement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for climate justice with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition.

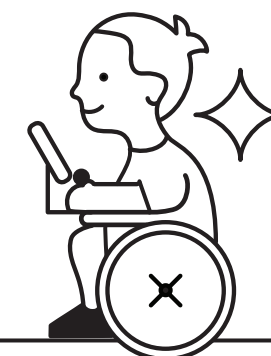
Its vision is for a just and sustainable future with strong cultures and communities, powered by renewable energy. Its network is based on a common goal and passion:

"Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity, but we also know it is an opportunity to create a more just and sustainable world."⁵

Think about your use of language, and use creative, bright, engaging, plain language wherever possible. Consider whether you need to use interpreters, or have written information translated into other languages.

Use of bright colours can be good but also using black and white imagery can give things an edge that often appeals to young people.

Young people, who are known for their energy, curiosity and passion, want a free atmosphere where their opinions not only gain an audience but also count toward something.



Try and create environments in which young people feel comfortable enough to express their opinions freely – especially when they hold contrary views. Story-telling is another way to get people engaged and avoid the use of too much small-talk. In the TED talk, *How to turn small talk into smart conversation*, the advice is to ask for stories not answers:

*"Aim for questions that invite people to tell stories, rather than give bland one-word answers."*⁶

Film and animation can be used to communicate and engage with children and young people. For some young people, videos on YouTube and similar platforms can be appealing and relatively easy to produce, if finances permit.

"All the initiatives, programs and strategies you initiate must be underpinned with positive attitudes and the belief that youth are valuable partners, and not problems to be solved or simply a group to be served."

Apathy is Boring's *Youth Friendly Guide*

For more information

YERP by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:



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

Youth Friendly:



<http://youthfriendly.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/youth-friendly-documents>

Apathy is Boring developed the ***Youth Friendly Guide*** to help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organisations:



http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf

This booklet looks at teen leadership:



https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/cyi_2017_4h_teen_leadership_curriculum_web.pdf



Once you have an engaged peer network, and young people are turning up and participating, they will hopefully start demanding they take **CONTROL**: to make real decisions, and actually be heard.

There is quite a lot of theory about empowerment and motivation of young people. We consider these in the next section. Ultimately, the best way to find out how to empower and motivate the young people you are engaging with is to ask them.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about the language you are using to communicate with young people. Could you change it? What positive attitudes and beliefs can you bring to the network?

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, and the page is completely blank except for the lines themselves.



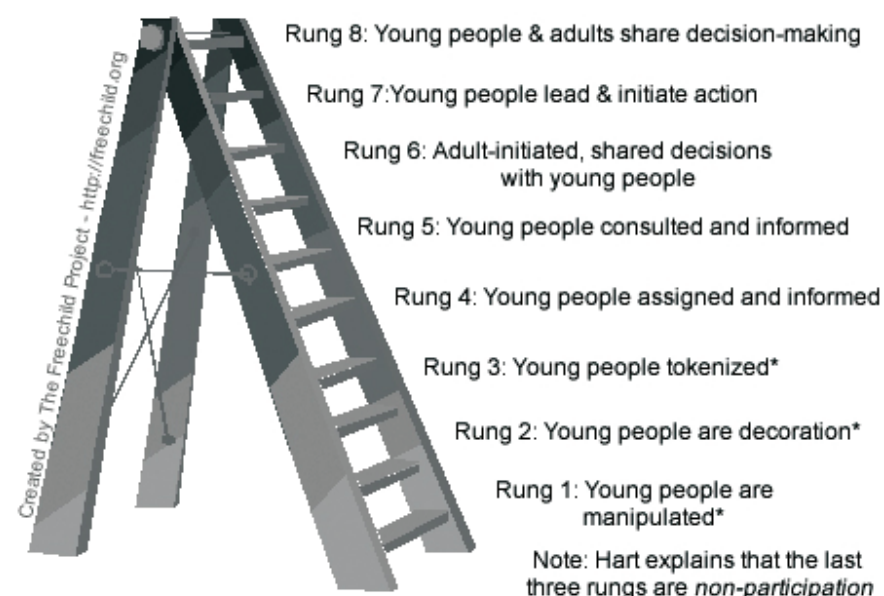
USING MOTIVATIONAL TOOLS AND EMPOWERMENT APPROACHES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

When setting up a youth peer network, expect young people to ask, "What's in it for me?" Not only will young people want to participate, they will also want to have control, be decision-makers and have the opportunity to develop skills and build their capacity for leadership.

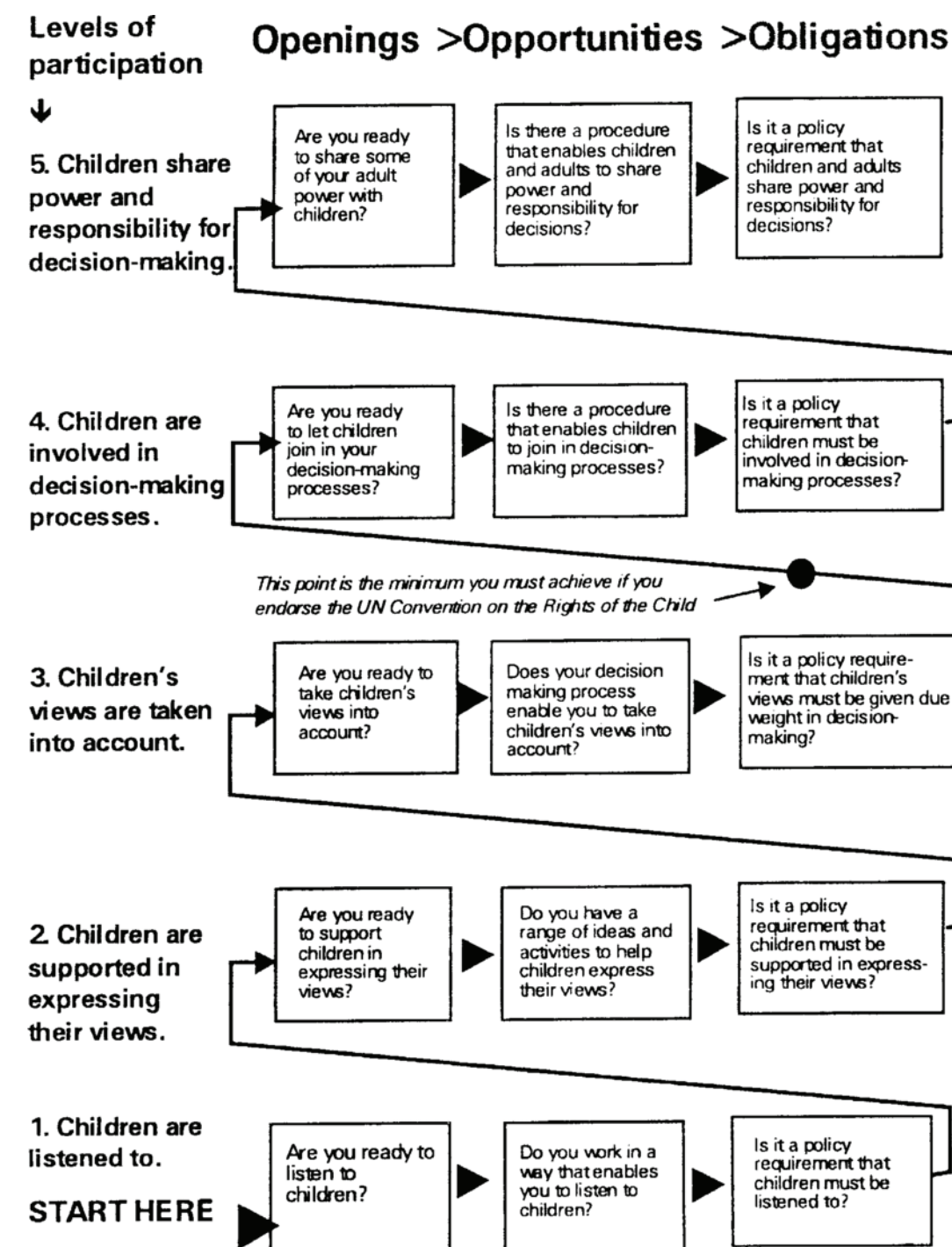
In order to motivate and empower, the level of participation has to be as high as possible. One way to explain what is required is to consider Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation. The aim is to get as high up on the ladder as possible, so that ultimately young people and adults share decision-making. A peer network on rung eight will be run for and by people, empowering young people, while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experiences and expertise of adults.

The point has been made that while rung eight might be the ultimate goal, what is more important is getting as high up the ladder as possible, without falling off. Ultimately, it would be for the peer network itself to decide what works best.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.



https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ASTC/00e37246-8bd9-481f-900c-ad9d6b6b3393/UploadedImages/Ladder_of_Participation_1.pdf

Adapted from: Shier, H (2001) *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations*, Young People and Society, Vol. 15, John Wiley and Sons Ltd: United States of America, pp. 107-117.

Reaching a point where young people and adults share all the decision-making will take time and commitment. Being prepared to give it time and effort and work alongside young people will mean being open and flexible with a willingness to re-think an approach.

As one JFY Peer Connector explains:

“The easiest way is not always the best way to do it. Julia Farr Youth is built on real lived experience. Peer Connectors live with disability and bring that notion of shared experience. We have become champions of our own lives and have the experience so it’s not about what you can do for us but you should be asking what we can do for you.”

Another model that is often referred to is Shier’s Pathway to Participation, which views participation as a process rather than a specific event or project. The pathway presents a series of levels and questions by which an organisation can assess its readiness to develop more effective youth engagement and participation.

Case Study: CityKids

CityKids is a successful example of young people choosing issues they find important, finding a safe space, and helping one another strengthen their community. The organisation helps them gain leadership skills and a close-knit peer group, and it sends a positive message to youth throughout the community.

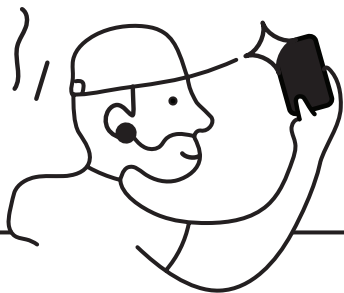
The CityKids motto is:

We empower, engage, connect, and inspire young people to skilfully lift their voices and be heard.

Our motto has always been:

**Each one reach one, Each one teach one,
Each one pull one into the sun.**

Thinking about the “ladder” of participation will help you think about where your peer network really is and then contemplate where you would like to be in terms of youth participation. This ladder was not created to suggest that we all have to be “at the top” rung all of the time, but, rather, that we ought to be aiming to get off of the lower rungs of non-participation and think of ways to genuinely engage children and youth.



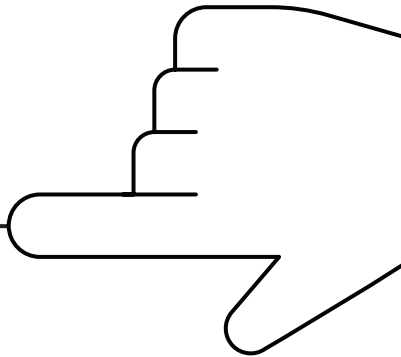
For more information

Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation:

https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/ASTC/00e37246-8bd9-481f-900c-ad9d6b6b3393/UploadedImages/Ladder_of_Participation_1.pdf



Shier, H (2001) *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations, Young People and Society*, Vol. 15, John Wiley and Sons Ltd: United States of America, pp. 107–117.



The next bead is on the string and you have a vibrant, engaged peer network where young people are the decision-makers.

You will want to let people know how well it’s going. One of the key ways young people are able to hear about what’s going on and what’s interesting is through their friends and connections – it’s word of mouth but in an age of technology and “sharing”. It is likely that young people will turn to social media and then base decisions on what is happening, being talked about and “liked” by their peers. It becomes important for the peer network to use diverse media to get the word out and that is the topic of the next section.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about how much ownership young people have in your peer network. Where do you sit on the different levels of participation? How can you move up a rung? Are you prepared to give full decision-making control over to the young members?

[illegible]

USING DIVERSE MEDIA TO GET THE WORD OUT

Promotion is seen as key to a successful peer network. One peer network felt that people needed lots of notice and constant reminders that an event was happening and good promotion as to why it was worth turning up.

"Promote, promote, promote, make the posts engaging and conversational with good use of images and not too many words! Ask your peer members to tell their friends."

JFY Peer Connector

Apathy is Boring sees the online presence as playing a central role, and it's worth taking the time to assess and monitor what works well. Ask your young people and get them involved in designing and owning the promotion.

"Your organisation's online presence is your face to the world. Most people, but especially youth, turn to social media first when seeking information about an organization. Your online presence therefore plays a central role in spreading the word and forming first impressions. A sloppy, ad-hoc online or social media presence can make you look out-of-touch or lacking in credibility. Trust us: there IS such a thing as bad publicity online."

Apathy is Boring's *Youth Friendly Guide*

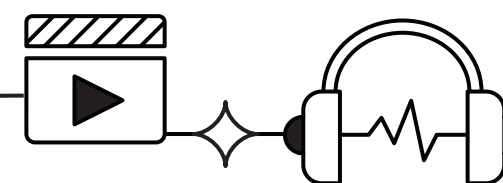
In order to assess whether your social media campaigns are successful, key metrics to measure include the following:

Engagement rate Are your followers engaging with the content you post? Look for trends and re-post your top content to improve your engagement rate and to show up in more feeds.

Clicks How many social media users are clicking on the links to your ticketing page?

Sales If you use Eventbrite, you can see how many sales each social media channel has driven in your event reports.

Return on investment If you're using paid advertisements, be sure to monitor your ROI (return on investment) to make sure your spend is paying off.



For more information

YERP by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:



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

Youth Friendly:



<http://youthfriendly.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/youth-friendly-documents>

Apathy is Boring developed the *Youth Friendly Guide* to help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organisations:



http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf

This blog on **Eventbrite** shares twelve essential steps to take to promote your event on social media:



<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/blog/promote-event-social-media-12-steps-ds00/>

Build Social Consulting:



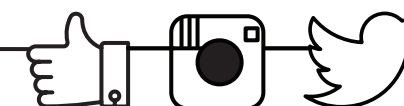
<https://buildsocialconsulting.com/youth-engagement-social-media/>



The next bead is now on the string as word spreads about the peer network and the great things it is doing. As Oscar Wilde once said:

“There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about and that is not being talked about.”⁸

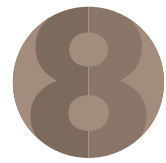
The next section reminds us that it is important to take opportunities to step back so that the young people themselves can lead the peer network. The section looks at how those leadership skills may develop.



Reflection

Take a moment to think about the language you are using to communicate with young people. Could you change it? What positive attitudes and beliefs can you bring to the network?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

Peer networks provide a real and authentic opportunity to develop leadership skills and capacity in young people. While some may not want that label, or see themselves as leaders, they are certainly able to influence peers, make connections and impact decision-makers.

It is important that youth peer networks are driven and owned by young people, and that young people are the actual leaders.

Young people are best equipped to advocate for their needs when creating and implementing policies and programs, to ensure youth-friendly peer networks.

Young people are more receptive to change, and younger leaders see things differently. They will have a much better sense of what resonates and what doesn't.

Young people will learn fast and will not be afraid to challenge assumptions. They are technologically savvy and will bring an unrefined passion for the cause.

"It is our capacity to be aware of how we are interacting with people, to engage their hearts and minds, and to speak to their strengths which will help us to inspire others to 'dream more, learn more, do more and become more' – to be successful leaders."

Leigh Tabrett



<http://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Leading-Change-Tabrett.pdf>

Peer networks offer a number of ways in which young people can start to develop their leadership skills. This might be through:

- mentoring other youth
- providing leadership for a project
- teaching others through sharing experiences
- attending leadership training and then using those skills in leadership roles
- facilitating conversations amongst peers
- identifying and addressing community and state-wide issues
- learning and developing self-advocacy skills.

Young people will need some initial support as they take on the leadership roles. This may be an adult advisor or staff member. This person will play an important role in the success of the peer network, not by running it themselves but by making sure the young people are the decision-makers and leaders.

Young people will need the support of a caring adult who challenges and supports their activities and guides them in the process. The support can be provided through several ways, such as coaching or mentoring, and mostly it might be through encouragement. It also comes through treating young people as equals and developing a partnership relationship.

JFY Peer Connectors

The Peer Connectors facilitating the peer support networks for Julia Farr Youth are clear about the benefits they received from the role and how empowering it was for them. This was a motivator for them, and they gained skills as leaders in their community.

"I never expected to become a PC and be capable of facilitating a meeting."

"I have been able to extend myself and co-host events. I didn't think I would be able to do that."

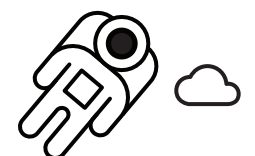
The Peer Connectors also spoke about the confidence they had gained from the role:

"I certainly feel more confident. I am getting to know the content, and getting to know who I am working with – both PCs and members. Having that confidence has enabled me to speak off the top of my head, which I couldn't do a year ago. It has helped me in professional contexts, such as going to a meeting or interview, and I don't feel anxiety over these situations so much anymore."

"In the last twelve months, I have been relying less on notes I have prepared or the agenda. I am able to speak more freely and talk to the audience rather than the paper."

The Centre for Adolescent Health's *Paying Attention to Self (PATS)* peer support program also stresses the importance of having peer leaders:

*"The peer leader is an important role model for the other participants. Being enthusiastic and welcoming is very important and observing the dynamics of the group and feeding this back to the worker can be very helpful. Often peer leaders will pick up on things, which are happening in the group that the worker may not be aware of or have noticed."*⁹



Case study: CanTeen

CanTeen was set up by a group of young cancer patients in 1985 and has young people involved at every level of the organisation.

"Not only do our young leaders ensure that we truly understand how cancer is different in a young person's world, they are developing the skills, resilience, and confidence to contribute meaningfully to the world around them through their experiences of leadership in CanTeen."

There are many opportunities for young people to get involved as valued contributors to the organisation. Every young person is empowered as an expert in their own wellbeing and can also sign-up to become a member (there's no charge) to exercise their vote on matters that affect them and the future of CanTeen.

Members participate in local leadership groups, which enable them to get involved (according to their interest and skill) in governance, advocacy and fundraising, as well as being a powerful support to one another online, in person and on programs.

For more information

***YERP* by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:**



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

Youth Friendly:



<http://youthfriendly.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/youth-friendly-documents>

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http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf

The **Centre for Adolescent Health's *Paying Attention to Self (PATS) Peer Support Programme Guide 2006*** has some great ideas about peer support:



https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/cah/Paying_Attention_To_Self_PATS_Programme_Guide_2006.pdf

Michigan State University:



https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/cyi_2017_4h_teen_leadership_curriculum_web.pdf



Reflection

Take a moment to think about the leadership opportunities that the peer network provides for young people. How will young people be supported to develop and extend their leadership capacity?

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**GOOD
LUCK**

This workbook has taken you through eight key stages to think about when setting up a youth peer network. Young people have told us that these eight things or beads strung together will help make a network strong and vibrant.

Once you have all the beads it should look like this:



The peer network may still have highs and lows, and you can take a look at the companion workbook ***Strong networks: connecting the beads together*** in conjunction with this one.

We have also made a short animated film about the life of a peer network, which can help explain some of the ideas in this workbook. You can watch it here on the **Peer Connect** website.



<http://www.peerconnect.org.au/>

The **Peer Connect** website also has lots of other Quick Guides about how to run a peer network and some of the stuff a peer network might talk about. We see this as a browsable library that you can dip into to get more information about what you need.

NOTES FOR ACTION



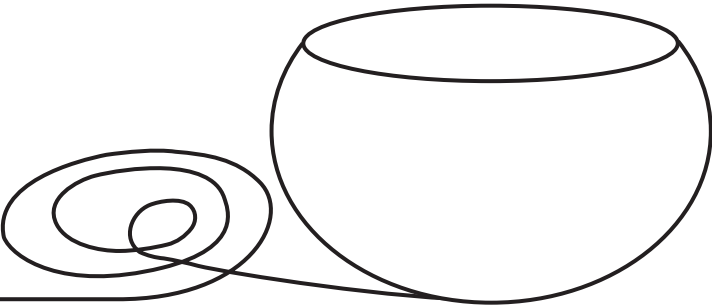
We hope you will have gained some useful, practical tips that you can now take away and put into action. Make a note of them here.

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peerconnect.org.au