

# Youth CONNECT Annual Investor Report

March 2023



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

Churches of Christ acknowledges the traditional custodians of the different lands on which we live and work every day. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of First Nations People. We further acknowledge and recognise the resilience of First Nations People.

# Message from the CEO.



I can't help but feel very pleased with presenting this report to stakeholders with vested interests in Youth CONNECT. Over 2022, we have seen how this program has matured, and the results improved year on year, in very trying circumstances. We began this program in 2017, long before any of us could conceive how our worlds would change so radically, through lockdowns and border closures. Now the crisis of COVID has past, the impacts are being felt with the ongoing housing crisis has been having a significant impact on many Queenslanders, and not just the participants of Youth CONNECT.

But life throws us challenges all the time and one of the key objectives of Youth CONNECT is to provide young people who have often been in unstable and changeable circumstances with the tools they need to meet the challenges they face.

Youth CONNECT is very proud that 2022 is the first time the program has more employed participants than those who are job-seeking. This is a great accomplishment and a credit to not just the staff who got the best out of the participants, and the people who invested in Youth CONNECT, and believed in the concept enough to back us to bring it to fruition, but to the participants themselves. Many have taken advantage of the job-seeker market and taken a chance they might not otherwise have taken.

Another exceptional figure is the reduction from 24 disengagements in 2021 (the number of participants who do not contact the program workers for 12 weeks or more) down to only 6 last year. To my mind, we learned a lot about how to engage our clients over the first five years of the program, and we can use those learnings to end this round of Youth CONNECT on a positive note.

Throughout this year of Youth CONNECT, we have had the valued input of Peter Innes from the School of Law and Society at the University of the Sunshine Coast, lending us their experience and knowledge of early intervention into youth homelessness. Having the program reviewed regularly has allowed us to adapt and improve Youth CONNECT as we saw the need.

We knew Youth CONNECT could work, and it is. It is a great example of a how a social benefit bond between corporate investors, government and us (as the service provider) can achieve small miracles, which will benefit the participants and the community for the long run.

As we enter the final year of this first round of Youth CONNECT, we leave with a sense of hope and optimism that we can continue this program going forward.

Sincerely,

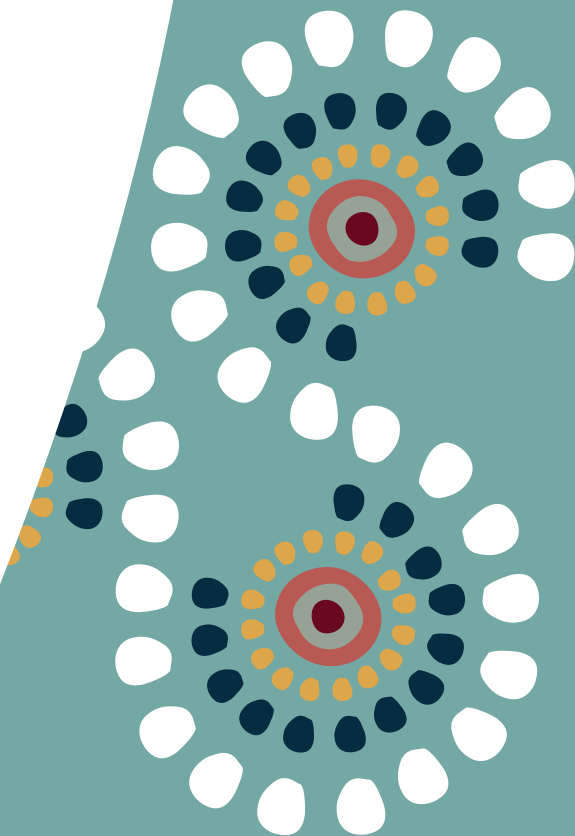
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Folland', with a stylized, cursive script.

**Mike Folland**  
Interim CEO

# Introduction.

Youth CONNECT has seen clients progress through the phases of the program and achieve great things during 2022. Since the last report, we have celebrated the graduation of 76 young people and recognised their achievements such as securing private rentals, starting new careers, welcoming children into the world, earning driving licenses, buying cars, and completing certificates and degrees. All of us here at Youth CONNECT are honoured to have walked alongside these young people as they've transitioned to adulthood.

This is the first year of Youth CONNECT's operation that we have seen more clients employed than those who are job-seeking. Young people are working in a myriad of industries including sales, hospitality, social work, disability support and construction. We have also seen the lowest rates of homelessness amongst our clients this year. Youth CONNECT held our second Homefulness Week event that saw our local community donate significant household items the team offered to client's for them to choose what they liked.



# Program referrals.

A nominal referral allocation number is attributed to each quarter, with a total referral allocation identified for each year of the Youth CONNECT program. Youth CONNECT delivers services across three locations—Logan/Gold Coast, Townsville and Ipswich—and accepted referrals from surrounding areas accessible to these locations. We met our threshold of 300 referrals in May 2021 and spent 2022 working with young people as they move through the four phases of the program.

As the Youth CONNECT program draws to a close we have seen clients progress through the phases. As of November 2022, all active clients are in the two later stages of the program.

**Table 1: Total number of service users by service location of the Youth CONNECT program**

Service Location	Year 1 Service Users	Year 2 Service Users	Year 3 Service Users	Year 4 Service Users	Total Service Users
Logan	28	49	60	29	166
Ipswich	19	28	26	14	87
Townsville	12	13	15	7	47
Total	59	90	101	50	300

At the conclusion of Year 5 there were 91 active service users engaged in the Youth CONNECT program.





# Program phases.

Youth CONNECT is a four-phase model of service delivery, with all being completed within a maximum three-year period. Each phase is underpinned by ensuring access to safe and stable housing and progressing employment, education and personal development goals with a focus on moving the young person from reliance to resilience and from dependence to independence/interdependence.

**Figure 1: Youth CONNECT FOUR-PHASE MODEL OF SERVICE DELIVERY**



**Table 2: Progress of each of the four cohorts across the lifespan of the program as of 30 November 2022**

Stage	Cohort 1 (2017–18)	Cohort 2 (2018–19)	Cohort 3 (2019–20)	Cohort 4 (2020–2021)	Total
Engage	0	0	0	0	0
Build	0	0	0	1	1
Practice	0	0	4	40	44
Demonstrate	0	2	41	3	46
Graduated Program	35	62	30	0	127
Non-Engagement	6	3	5	1	15
Disengagement	18	23	21	5	67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>300</b>



# Program update: Outcome measures.

Youth CONNECT has now gone through the first two Performance Payment Periods of the program. The team worked hard to get and organise evidence for clients who met successfully the program outcomes of housing stability and engagement in working, learning, and or personal development.

During the first Performance Payment Period in 2021, Youth CONNECT saw the success rate of 37.14% confirmed, exceeding the initial goal of 20%. The Independent Certifier finalised the report for Performance Payment Period 2 in March 2022, reporting a 46.3% success rate and achieving a Performance Band Target of High 1. This exceeded the results of Performance Assessment 1. The Youth CONNECT team are very proud of what our young people have achieved since the program began.

The next Outcome Measurement Period in March 2023 is approaching and staff are compiling evidence to demonstrate our clients' successes.

## Exited Clients

### PROGRAM NON-ENGAGEMENT

Non-engagement occurs where multiple attempts are made to contact a referred young person however they cannot be contacted within 20 business days from the date the referral is accepted or, when contacted, the young person chooses not to participate in the program.

### PROGRAM DISENGAGEMENT

Disengagement refers to those young people who consent to participating in the program, but subsequently withdraw or who we cannot contact for over 12 weeks.

The anticipated non-engagement risk is 10% and the anticipated disengagement rate is 15%. The government accepts the first 5% of the non-engagement risk and this will not affect program outcomes. Anything over 5% will affect program outcomes. The cumulative impact at the end of Year 5 is 5% non-engagement, and 22.3% disengagement. It is not anticipated these disengagement rates will impact future Payment Periods, as later cohorts had smaller rates of disengagement.



**Table 3: Program non-engagement and disengagement, Years 1–4 and combined**

Year 1				Total Service Users		59
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	1	1	2	2	6	10.2%
Disengagement	8	5	4	1	18	30.5%

Year 2				Total Service Users		90
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	0	3	0	0	3	3.3%
Disengagement	5	3	3	12	23	25.6%

Year 3				Total Service Users		101
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	1	1	3	0	5	5%
Disengagement	7	8	4	2	21	20.8%

Year 4				Total Service Users		50
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-Engagement:	0	1	0	0	1	2%
Disengagement:	4	1	0	0	5	10%

Combined				Total Service Users		300
Year of Exit:	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	6	3	5	1	15	5%
Disengagement	18	23	21	5	67	22.3%

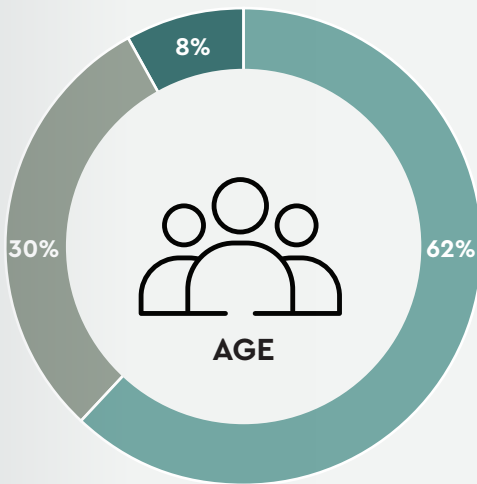
# Youth CONNECT demographics.

Youth CONNECT has finished Year 5 with 91 Active clients. The majority of these clients are between 20–22 years of age (62%; N = 56); 30% of clients are between 18–19 years of age (N = 28); and a small percent (8%; N = 7) is older 23 years. The youngest Youth CONNECT client is 18 and the oldest is 29. 49% of Youth CONNECT clients are male (N = 45), 47% are female (N = 43), and another 4% (N = 3) are non-binary or transgender.

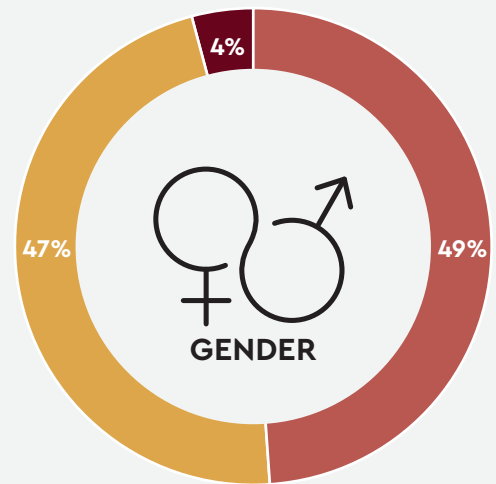
Our Youth CONNECT client cohort represents similar rates of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as we observe across the Queensland child protection sector, with 40 young people (44%) identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This rate is higher in Townsville, with 72% of young people identifying as Indigenous.

Youth CONNECT works with a significant number of young people with disabilities (intellectual and physical). Eleven active clients live with a disability and access NDIS support. This assists in developing strong case plans and coordination to ensure that their needs are met while they are supported in Youth CONNECT. However, there are currently an additional nine active clients who have disabilities that significantly impact their day-to-day life who are without NDIS support. Youth CONNECT has worked intensively to advocate and support young people living with a disability to apply for access to NDIS and this has required strong advocacy. The team identified in early 2022 the NDIS application process is an area of growth for our program. Team members took part in an NDIS assessment writing workshop in June 2022, and several staff completed NDIS applications successfully for clients as a result. Accessing sustainable support is vitally important for young people living with a disability and the need for support will most likely be lifelong.

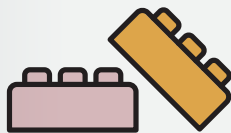
There are 17 (19%) young people who are parents of infants and young children engaged in the Youth CONNECT program at the end of Year 5. An additional four young people or their partners are pregnant. Working with young parents can impact service delivery and case management due to the different dynamics within family systems. Having their first baby or growing their family changes the overall dynamic of the couple or the individual. This requires the family unit to be addressed as a whole, not only as individuals. The Youth CONNECT program fosters resilience and self-care when working with our young parents to establish connections. Staff have trained in working with young parents and support them as they navigate first-time parenthood. Currently, the majority of parents in the Youth CONNECT program have primary care of their children without the need for statutory intervention. This is a great outcome for all involved.



- 20-22 years of age
- 18-19 years of age
- older than 23 years



- Male
- Female
- Non binary or transgender



**19%**

young people who are parents of infants and young children. An additional 4 young people or their partners are pregnant

**91**

**Active clients**



**44%**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (72% in Townsville)

**22%**

of active clients are living with disabilities

No access to NDIS support

45%



**NDIS SUPPORT**

55%

Access NDIS support

# Finding community.

**When 17-year-old Paul\* commenced with Youth CONNECT he was in the process of completing high school and felt unsure of where his life was heading.**

While he had recently moved in with his father, this relationship was at times unpredictable, characterised by arguments, and Paul often sought solace in a small group of friends. Paul was very private about these relationships and was reluctant to talk about his friends to his care team. Paul did not engage with services available to him through his NDIS package, and various different workers struggled to build rapport with Paul. Paul became more and more closed off. When at home he would stay in his room and was verbally unresponsive, and would also spend stints of time out of his father's home without saying where he was going.

Although Youth CONNECT struggled to engage with Paul in the initial months, we persisted as one of the few constants in Paul's life. He had seen many workers come and go, and appeared to have become disheartened with efforts of support. Paul's case manager knew it was important to show Paul that he would be consistent in checking in and offering help. Paul's case manager looked for any opportunity to connect with both Paul and his father to help build Paul's independence.

Through regular catch ups, Paul began to open up more about his circumstances. Youth CONNECT facilitated sit-down conversations between Paul and his father, and dialogue was opened such that both could understand each other's point of view. It was during one of these meetings Paul had the courage to open up about his life. We learned one of Paul's friends had been exploiting him financially, and had coerced Paul to have his financial guardianship removed, resulting in thousands of dollars being redirected to the 'friend's' account. Youth CONNECT worked with Paul, his father and Centrelink to have this matter addressed. Paul shared that this was an important learning experience around unhealthy and abusive relationships. Regular education around healthy

relationships took place with Paul following this event, and he began to identify the 'green flags' of friends who had his best interests at heart.

During this time Paul had only accessed around 9% of his NDIS plan funds, as each attempt to encourage him to take on opportunities were declined. His plan was coming up for review and at risk of being voided. Youth CONNECT made a concerted effort to reframe the purpose of the plan to Paul and presented creative options of what could be available to him. We saw Paul's attitude towards disability support shift. As a consequence, new initiatives were developed with his coordinator and care team. Youth CONNECT provided a Functional Capacity Statement to the NDIA, and Paul's plan was granted a full rollover.

Paul has since been participating in a range of capacity building exercises—something that had not occurred 12 months ago—and is thriving as a result. Paul gets along well with new support workers who motivate him to try new things. Paul has also started therapy and has developed a strong relationship with his psychologist. Having changed Disability Employment Providers has also been to be a positive step, and Paul is now entering the School Leaver Employment Scheme. Paul also joined the local gym; but one of the most interesting developments in Paul's life is his newfound interest in archery!

Paul graduated the Youth CONNECT program in late 2022 with significantly more support than when he started. We saw Paul develop a deeper relationship with his father, escape a financially abusive friendship, and engage more fully in his life as a whole. Paul's story is an example of the work Youth CONNECT provides outside of our major aims of helping young people secure stable housing and engage in work and learning. We are excited to see what comes next for Paul.

\* Name changed for privacy



# Housing strategy.

As clients enter the later stages of the program, unstable housing rates become lower. In 2022 only a few clients experienced homelessness in the form of couch surfing. We finished the reporting year with no clients homeless.

Youth CONNECT has slowly stopped using Head Leases as part of our wind-down plan. It has been more difficult for the program to find suitable properties, and young people have not been able to take over the leases at the end of their Head Lease due to increasing rent prices. We end 2022 with no clients in a Head Lease. However, should a Head Lease be the most appropriate housing for a client in 2023 we will work to make this happen.

**Table 4: Current active clients' housing status**

Housing Type	Cohort 2:	Cohort 3:	Cohort 4:	Total:
Living with Support Network	2	22	18	42
Private Rental	0	7	4	11
Self-Identified Share-House	0	3	10	13
Public Housing	0	11	9	20
Supported Accommodation (eg, NDIS funded SILs)	0	0	3	3
Transitional Accommodation	0	0	0	0
Homeless	0	0	0	0
Detention*	0	2	0	2*
Total	2	45	44	101

\*Youth CONNECT continues to support young people who are incarcerated with face-to-face visits (when appropriate), emails and phone calls. Youth CONNECT also liaises with other stakeholders for these clients to continue to plan for their release.

# Current Rental Crisis in Queensland.

Youth CONNECT has unfortunately seen the impact of the current national rental crisis with operational regions seeing vacancy rates below 1%. Clients have reported being declined for upwards of 50 rental applications despite having rental histories and reliable incomes. We are networking with real estate agents known to support our mission so our clients can apply directly for available properties with increased success.

There has been a 10% increase in clients living with support networks, and the majority of clients are living with known support people compared with 2021 data. Young people are more often living with family members, significant others' families, or previous carers and pay rent there rather than living in the private rental market. This is due to the current rental market, which is observing decreasing rental vacancies and increasing rental prices, making it more affordable to live with others. Living with loved ones is common for this age demographic and we acknowledge many of our young people were removed from family and lost that connection. Research shows these social support networks are protective factors against homelessness and the Youth CONNECT team aims to bolster those supports when possible, and support young people develop and maintain healthy relationships.

There was an increase in Youth CONNECT clients accessing departmentally-funded housing during this past year. Clients accessing departmental housing has increased over the past 12 months from 14% to 22%. Out of the 20 young people currently in social housing, six are primary caregivers of young children and two have in-home NDIS support. Several of these young people are living with family members who reside in public housing. When clients enter departmentally-funded accommodation, Youth CONNECT negotiates with the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy for continued work with these clients as needed. Youth CONNECT's Senior Support Worker also provides targeted support to these young people and explores alternative housing, where appropriate.

We work with clients to find the most appropriate, safe and stable living arrangements for the individual. Team members have developed a variety of methods to help clients establish a sense of 'homefulness' in their places of residence. Homefulness is a concept discovered by our work with the University of the Sunshine Coast's social research team, as an undertaking for at-risk youth to create a safe space of wellbeing, to help them feel at 'home' when they have secured accommodation. Strategies team members use to support clients in their housing journeys include researching appropriate rental properties, attending rental inspections and helping with application forms. Team members also assist clients with budgeting, household management and conflict management coaching when co-living occurs to help them maintain their accommodation.

# Engagement in activities.

**Table 5: Youth CONNECT clients engagement in activities**

Education	No Activity	Employment	Job-seeking	Personal Development
Cohort 2: 0	Cohort 2: 0	Cohort 2: 1	Cohort 2: 1	Cohort 2: 0
Cohort 3: 1	Cohort 3: 2	Cohort 3: 16	Cohort 3: 16	Cohort 3: 10
Cohort 4: 4	Cohort 4: 0	Cohort 4: 19	Cohort 4: 9	Cohort 4: 12
High School – 1 Full-Time TAFE – 3 University – 1	2 Service Users are currently incarcerated and not involved in any activities.	Full-time – 11 Part-time – 3 Casual – 7	YC have confirmation that 24 of these clients are registered with Job Active.  Goals of attaining employment in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprenticeship</li> <li>• Carpentry</li> <li>• Retail</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> </ul>	Parenting – 10 Disability – 11 Other PD courses – 1
<b>Total: 5</b>	<b>Total: 2</b>	<b>Total: 36</b>	<b>Total: 26</b>	<b>Total: 22</b>

For the first time in the program, in 2022 we saw more Youth CONNECT clients employed than job-seeking. This is a huge accomplishment and we were very excited to see so many young people find work this year. This is in part due to clients progressing through the program and meeting goals, however we recognise the current job market and low unemployment rates are offering more opportunities to our clients. Youth CONNECT saw an 11% increase in clients finding employment compared with 2021, and a 10% decrease of clients working with job agencies.

# Outcomes Star.



From its inception, Youth CONNECT has used the Outcomes Star—Young Person's Star as our primary case management and goal-setting tool, as well as an outcome measurement tool across a variety of domains. The Young Person's Star was developed to use with young people aged between 15–25 who are moving to independent living, including those leaving care or detention, and those who have experienced homelessness.

This collaborative tool involves young people and workers identifying progress across the key areas of: accommodation, work and learning, people and support, health, how you feel, choices and behaviour, money and rent and practical life skills. The results provide a picture of how the young person, and their support network, assess achievement and progress throughout their journey to independence.

The first Star for a client is conducted approximately three months into the program, and identifies the current state of need for the young person, and sets the initial goals. Subsequent Stars are completed every six months (at a minimum) and measure progress through motivational interviewing techniques to support the individual's five-scale journey of change, moving from 'stuck' through to 'independent'.

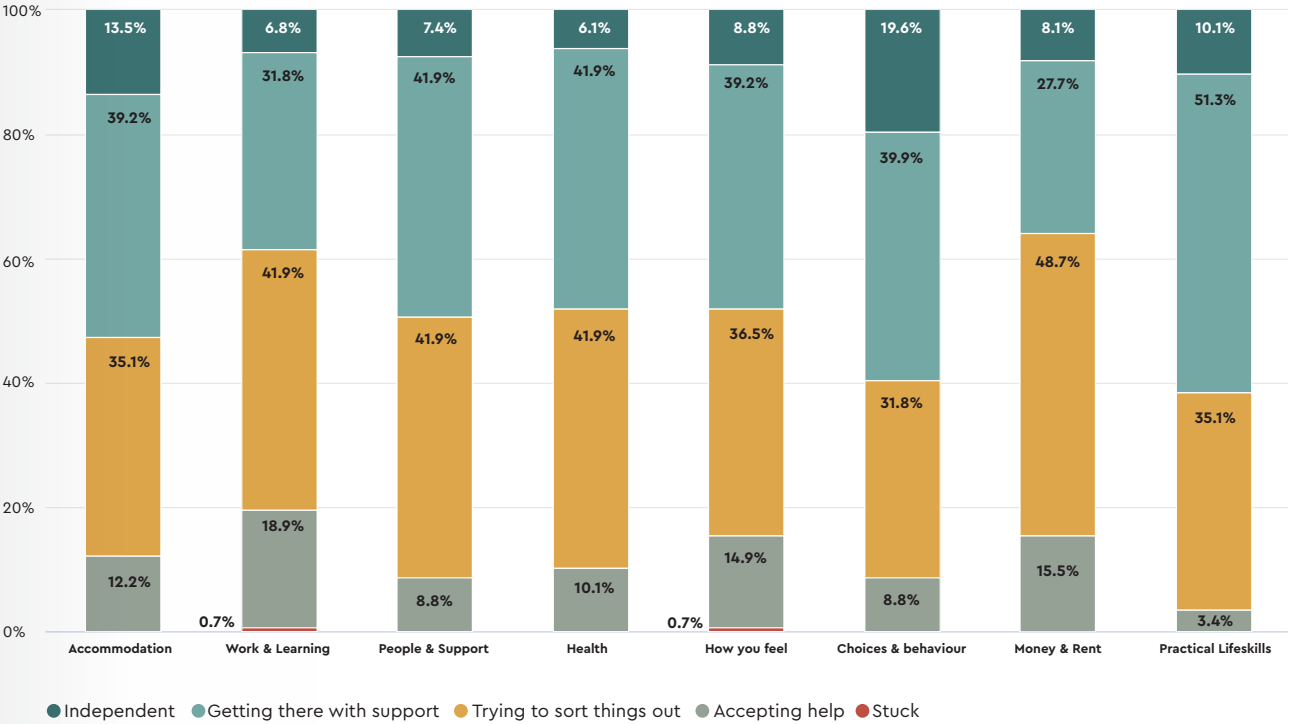
The graph on the following page, shows a snapshot of where young people are currently rating themselves across the eight domains during 2022.

We've seen growth in all domains in 2022 as young people move through the program. Compared with 2021 results, there's been a significant decrease in clients in the first two stages 'stuck' and 'accepting help' across all domains. There is only one person expressing being 'stuck' in two different domains, who is currently in detention.

The most significant growth has occurred in Work and Learning. This is reflected in our Engagement in Activities figures, with more clients employed than job-seeking. Young people are taking advantage of a job-seeker market and have tried different employment opportunities. We've also seen multiple people complete a qualification and find employment in their chosen field. The domains People & Support as well as Health have also seen significant improvements compared with 2021 results. Overall, young people are reporting feeling more connected to their community during 2022, in large part to lockdowns ending and finding more opportunities to connect.



Figure 2: Star online snapshot report: What stage are people at on the Journey of Change?



# Outcomes Star in practice.

**The Outcomes Star tool has the benefit of providing a visual representation to a person's growth and progress towards independence. This can be shown in Cody's\* Star (see page 17).**

Cody entered the Youth CONNECT program in late 2019 after being incarcerated in a juvenile detention centre for over a year. While Cody has been in and out of detention throughout his adolescence, this was his longest sentence. Cody shared that this was rock bottom for him, and when released was determined to turn his life around.

Youth CONNECT met a very motivated Cody in 2019. He was able to move into a transitional housing support service after being released from detention. He found employment at a local café and we saw a dramatic shift in Cody at this time. It was clear how proud Cody was that he was earning his own income. Cody often spoke about how much he loved working as a barista and his employer raved about Cody's work ethic.

Cody's extended time in detention left him without several skills his peers had. Youth CONNECT helped Cody find a local doctor for regular health checks. His case worker also helped him develop his financial skills, budgeting and future planning. Cody was enthusiastic about learning how to cook, as he survived predominantly off microwave meals. His support worker helped Cody budget for groceries, meal prep and prepare nutritious meals. Cody also joined a local gym and particularly enjoyed boxing classes. His progress in *Practical Life Skills* is shown on his Outcomes Star (see page 17), moving from 'accepting help' to 'independent' during his time with Youth CONNECT.

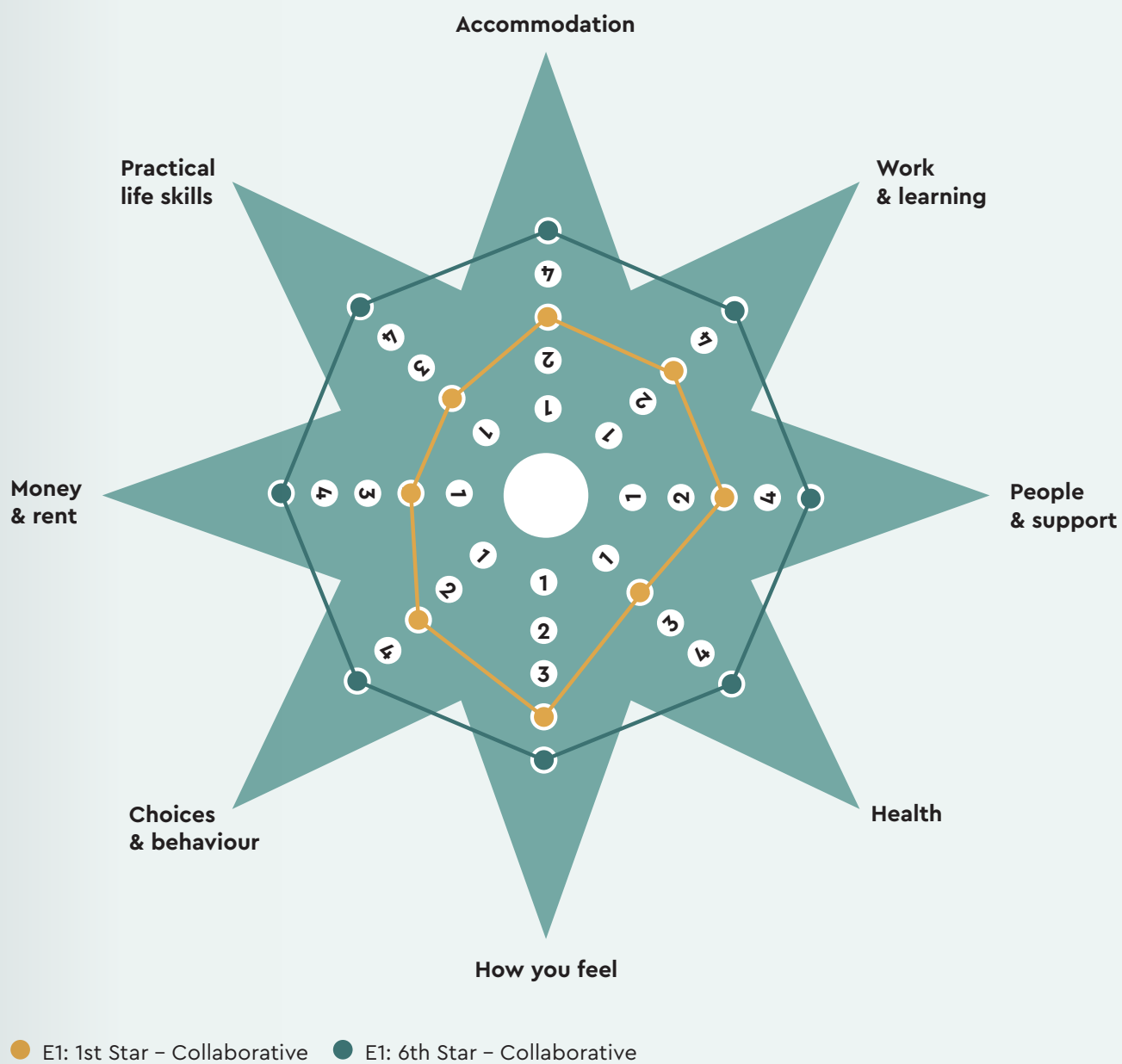
During the *Practice Stage*, Cody shared his goal of joining the Army. Cody went through the interview process and was accepted. He completed his training and moved into Army accommodation. Youth CONNECT saw just how independent Cody had become and how much progress he had made while in the program. His last Outcomes Star shows Cody as 'independent' across all domains. He no longer needs any sort of service support.

Cody graduated from the Youth CONNECT program in late 2022, he's enjoying his work in the Army, and his long-term goal is to run his own café. Cody has accomplished a significant number of goals over the past three years, as reflected in his Outcomes Star. His support team is very proud of Cody and everything he has achieved.

\* Name changed for privacy



**Figure 3: Cody's Outcomes Star showing Cody to be 'independent' across all domains**



# Evaluation Report: Client feedback.

The University of the Sunshine Coast published the Process Evaluation Report on Youth CONNECT in 2021. This included analysis of feedback from more than 80 stakeholders through interviews, focus groups and surveys, as well as analysis of administrative data from the client management database. Included here is a brief summary of some of the feedback collected from clients around their opinions of the Youth CONNECT program.

## Fit for purpose (relevance)

Participants referred to what helped them most on the program. Throughout the phases, the presence of case workers being there as a backup was highly valued by participants as shown in the following responses:

- knowing that I have my case manager there at all times whenever I may need
- support: overall, in times of struggle and depression, while attending meetings, with tasks
- having someone to talk to, to help me navigate adulthood, to talk to people for me, to ask important questions, to help me not to be scared to go to an appointment, to remind me of my priorities, to remind me support is there if needed, to (get me to) think for myself (combined responses)
- coming to visit me every two weeks, focusing on (a) couple of things at a time.

Staff reported that support needs ranged from three to 15 hours a month, while some participants only needed the professional community around them. Participants mostly reported that they received sufficient support.

- They try their best and work hard.
- She always keeps me posted and keeps in contact.

This section has been adapted from Crane, P., Norton, M., Stubbs, R. (2021). *Youth CONNECT Process Evaluation Report*. University of the Sunshine Coast. [https://research.usc.edu.au/discovery/fulldisplay/alma99611508202621/61USC\\_INST:ResearchRepository](https://research.usc.edu.au/discovery/fulldisplay/alma99611508202621/61USC_INST:ResearchRepository)





## Relational practice

Most young people spoke of their positive relational experiences with Youth CONNECT case managers and support workers as involving a genuine relationship, feeling respected, treated as an adult and feeling supported and cared for. Respect is built through young people's descriptions of getting along, feeling a bond, having fun together, sharing interests and not feeling like the time spent together was 'work'. Young people gauged the relationship through being able to communicate with their case manager and rely on them.

- They make good conversation when catching up and have normal conversation, not a business or work thing.
- They could take a joke and had fun.
- My worker came out to spend my birthday with me which showed she cared.
- I like how they are lenient, like how they treat you respectfully.

## Cultural practice

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who participated in interviews and surveys, said they felt their culture was considered in how they were supported. Some had received support, and others had been offered support but did not want it at the time.

- (My case manager) is going to give me information about programs for Aboriginal mums and link me up with Aboriginal workers which might help to learn about my culture, I know bits but don't know the whole thing... [They've also offered] support to do a family tree to know where my mob is from, map out family. I don't know anything other than who I was raised by.
- (I was) offered cultural support but I don't want to look into it because I have a sense of belonging where I come from. I don't feel an interest in exploring that more at this point in time but I know it's there.

## Developing and maintaining relationships and social inclusion

A number of young people spoke about being supported to make and sustain connections with partners, parents, siblings and friends. It was evident support was not only seen by some young people as important for family of origin relationships, but their current and emerging relationships were also important and central to their lives. Participants said Youth CONNECT staff supported them with communication, boundaries and conflict resolution.

- I wanted someone there to support me with family... I see mum now and then. We're starting to have a bond that we lost and I see my little brother.
- They helped me put down ground rules with my mum and sisters, helped to work on relationship and communicate boundaries. Mum says I've come a long way and my sisters will come now and talk to us....
- Youth CONNECT worked with me and my partner together and sat with us to resolve conflict and understand each other better. It saved our relationship... Without Youth CONNECT I wouldn't have the relationships I have now.

Another young person spoke about Youth CONNECT helping her leave a domestic violence situation and support her to have family with her while she was in a mental health facility. Youth CONNECT also supported her partner to find other accommodation, indicating that relationship support can also be provided to a young person by supporting key others in their life.

# Financial update.

## Youth CONNECT

### 1 December 2021 – 30 November 2022

Operating expenses for Year 5 of the Youth CONNECT program were lower than the original budgeted expenses. This result was due to a planned reduction in referral numbers into the program and the subsequent operating costs that were linked to the initial engagement and case management of young people in the program. As young people exit the program or move towards the 'Practice' and 'Demonstrate' phases of engagement, operating costs have reduced. Forward projections of the financial position of the program demonstrate cost neutrality as the program enters its final stages.

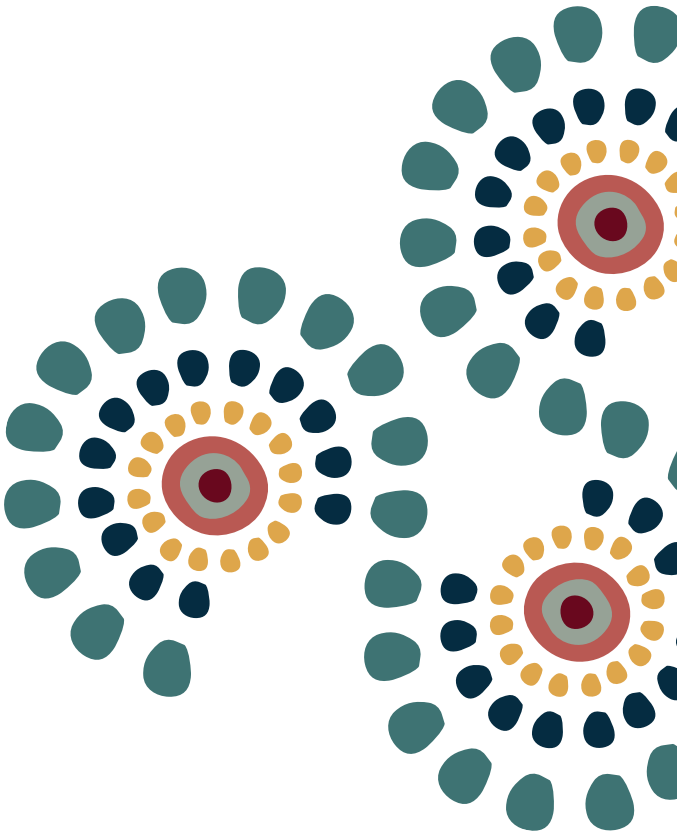
**Figure 6: Youth CONNECT Operating expenses: 1 December 2021 – 30 November 2022**

Year Five						
Operating Expenses	This Quarter actual	Budget/plan this Quarter	Last Quarter actual	YTD actual	YTD Budget	Cash in Reserve for program needs
Quarter 1	\$368,041	\$413,378	\$416,630	\$368,041	\$413,378	\$45,337
Quarter 2	\$379,171	\$430,625	\$368,041	\$747,211	\$844,002	\$96,791
Quarter 3	\$310,928	\$353,538	\$379,171	\$1,058,137	\$1,197,540	\$139,401
Quarter 4	\$255,283	\$307,248	\$310,928	\$1,313,421	\$1,504,788	\$191,367

# Staffing.

As Youth CONNECT begins reducing client caseloads we have seen several staff members move on to new and exciting opportunities. We currently employ:

Service Manager	1
Team Leaders	1
Case Managers	3
Senior Support Worker	2



# Professional development and training.

Churches of Christ in Queensland has an extensive curriculum of training and professional development available to employees. This includes Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Sanctuary training, Domestic and Family Violence training, Outcomes Star training, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness, as well as organisational orientation.

Our team participated in a number of professional development opportunities throughout 2022, including:

- Writing NDIS Functional Assessment Workshop
- Love Bites Training
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Well-Being workshop
- Leadership Essentials program
- Pasifika Community Men's Group Facilitator Training



# Finding home.

**In May 2022, Cooper\* advised Youth CONNECT that he and his girlfriend Daisy\* had made the decision to take steps to move into more independent accommodation.**

At the time, Cooper and Daisy were living with Cooper's mum, but they were eager to become more independent and find their own place.

Cooper contacted several housing services offering housing assistance. However he was advised there were no vacancies in their regions due to the current rental crisis and high demand for housing in Queensland. Cooper and Daisy talked their options over with Youth CONNECT. Initially they were hesitant to try the private rental market due to the housing crisis and their lack of rental history, but they agreed to give it a shot with help from Youth CONNECT. Both Cooper and Daisy were working full-time, and able to come to an agreement around their rental affordability. Youth CONNECT had also seen Cooper's practical skills improve since he started with the program, and could see the couple were prepared to maintain a tenancy.

Youth CONNECT supported Cooper and Daisy to search for rentals that matched the couple's affordability and location preferences that were close to their places of employment. One property in particular stood out. Youth CONNECT supported the pair to complete the necessary steps in order to book a rental inspection with the real estate agent, where Cooper and Daisy were able to view and apply for the property.

There was much celebration when the real estate agent contacted Cooper to let him know their application had been successful. Youth CONNECT helped the couple plan and prepare for their big move, and saw Cooper and Daisy move into the property in mid-June 2022, signing a six-month lease. Youth CONNECT sourced some big furniture items for the couple, and both Cooper and Daisy were enthusiastic about making their new place feel like home.

Youth CONNECT held their annual Homefulness Week in late June 2022, paying Cooper and Daisy a visit during the event. Cooper and Daisy were



able to identify house items that they would need to create their vision of 'homefulness'. Thanks to the generosity from organisations, local church groups and the wider community, who donated items and provided financial assistance to Homefulness Week, Cooper and Daisy were provided with identified items like a vacuum, coat hangers, and cleaning products to maintain their tenancy, as well as household décor items that helped improve a sense of home in their first private rental.

Cooper and Daisy were given positive feedback from the real estate agent during their six-month tenancy, even noting the couple's kind community spirit of helping neighbouring houses with putting out their bins on bin day. Due to Cooper and Daisy maintaining the property to a high standard, the real estate has provided Cooper and Daisy with a lease renewal for a further 12 months. Cooper and Daisy love their place and happily re-signed their lease.

Cooper is getting ready to graduate from Youth CONNECT. Cooper has achieved so much during the past few years. He entered Youth CONNECT homeless and in a state of crisis, and is graduating with full-time employment, a strong relationship with his partner, a new home and has not used drugs in over a year. We are excited and proud of all that Cooper has achieved and look forward to seeing what the future holds for him.

\* Names changed for privacy

# Contract risk management.

The Youth CONNECT program has continued to employ a robust governance framework to ensure the sound and effective management of the program throughout Year 5. Risk management is a shared responsibility of the following governance bodies:

- Youth CONNECT Internal Reference Group (Churches of Christ)
- Youth CONNECT Joint Working Group (Churches of Christ and State Queensland/ Queensland Treasury)
- Youth CONNECT Research and Evaluation Reference Group (Churches of Christ and University of Sunshine Coast)

The Joint Working Group meeting is now scheduled quarterly to align with reporting. Any areas of risk are raised and discussed at these meetings as a standard agenda item along with the program performance measures as agreed in the Youth CONNECT Operations Manual.

# Program risk management.



## IN YEAR 5 OF THE YOUTH CONNECT PROGRAM SEVERAL RISKS AND ISSUES WERE IDENTIFIED AND STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO RESPOND APPROPRIATELY.

**Issue: Low residential vacancy rates within the private rental market** One of the issues that has the potential to affect outcomes for the Youth CONNECT program is the current private rental crisis in Queensland. The housing crisis has come about through unprecedented population migration, rising house prices, supply issues and several significant weather events. 2022 has brought even lower residential vacancy rates than 2021, with the current Queensland vacancy rate sitting at 0.7%. This has been particularly felt for Youth CONNECT clients, who have low incomes and limited rental histories. Youth CONNECT documented a small rise in clients living with support networks and accessing social housing which appears to be linked to the current housing crisis.

**Action:** Youth CONNECT continues to help young people find suitable housing, and have seen our lowest rates of homelessness this year. While the rental crisis is significant, we have seen young people rely on their social networks to help find accommodation that meets their needs. Many young people have re-connected with extended family, and have built relationships with their partner's families too. Youth CONNECT works with clients to identify next steps for independent living, including looking for ways to increase earning potential and working on savings plans for rental bonds and household goods. Youth CONNECT also helps young people navigate interpersonal difficulties with household members, and at times workers have mediated conflicts to help young people communicate.

Youth CONNECT continues to support young people to access the housing market, including assisting in searching for properties, attending inspections, and submitting applications. Throughout the lifespan of Youth CONNECT

the team has been able to build collaborative relationships with community housing services and real estates to help link clients in with property managers.

Youth CONNECT has also seen a rise in clients who are accessing social housing. As previously stated in this report, these clients appear to have more complex needs when compared to the wider Youth CONNECT cohort, including being single parents or living with ongoing disabilities. It is our hope with Youth CONNECT's support, these clients will be able to enter the private rental market during their time in the program (where appropriate for their life circumstances).

**Issue: Reduction in staffing figures** The program is operating with lower staffing figures than initially anticipated. In line with the program winding down and reduced service user numbers, staffing figures have gradually declined throughout the year. Although current staff are meeting service delivery needs and case-loads remain stable, there is a risk that reduced staff numbers may impact meaningful engagement for service users and lead to increased disengagements.

**Action:** To mitigate this risk, strategic planning for the continuity of care has been prioritised. The Senior Youth Worker along with Permanent Case Managers positions, who will remain until the conclusion of the program, have started building relationships with a wider range of service users. This will help provide a continuity of care, as they will have established relationships when changes in staffing occur. In addition, adequate timeframes for staffing changes are communicated to ensure the smooth transition of service users to case managers.

# Youth CONNECT

## Participatory Action Research and Evaluation.

In keeping with the Churches of Christ value of continual innovation, Youth CONNECT incorporated a research component within practice from the very inception of the program. This research includes Participatory Action Research (PAR) as well as Developmental Evaluation. PAR is an approach to the program's continual development and learning and gives voice to all participants involved in Youth CONNECT, from managers to young people. Youth CONNECT has partnered with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and is grateful for the expertise of Chief Investigator Dr. Phil Crane, Chief Evaluator Peter Innes, and Research Assistant Rachael Stubbs, all of whom have been paramount to this process.

USC published the Youth CONNECT Process Evaluation report in early 2022 after extensive evaluation work including surveys for clients, their stakeholders, staff and community members, data analysis and case reviews. The report was distributed in the sector to share Youth CONNECT learnings. The nine-chapter report covers funding, literature review, the Youth CONNECT program design, developing practice, evaluation framework and plan, primary and secondary data analysis, findings, and recommendations.

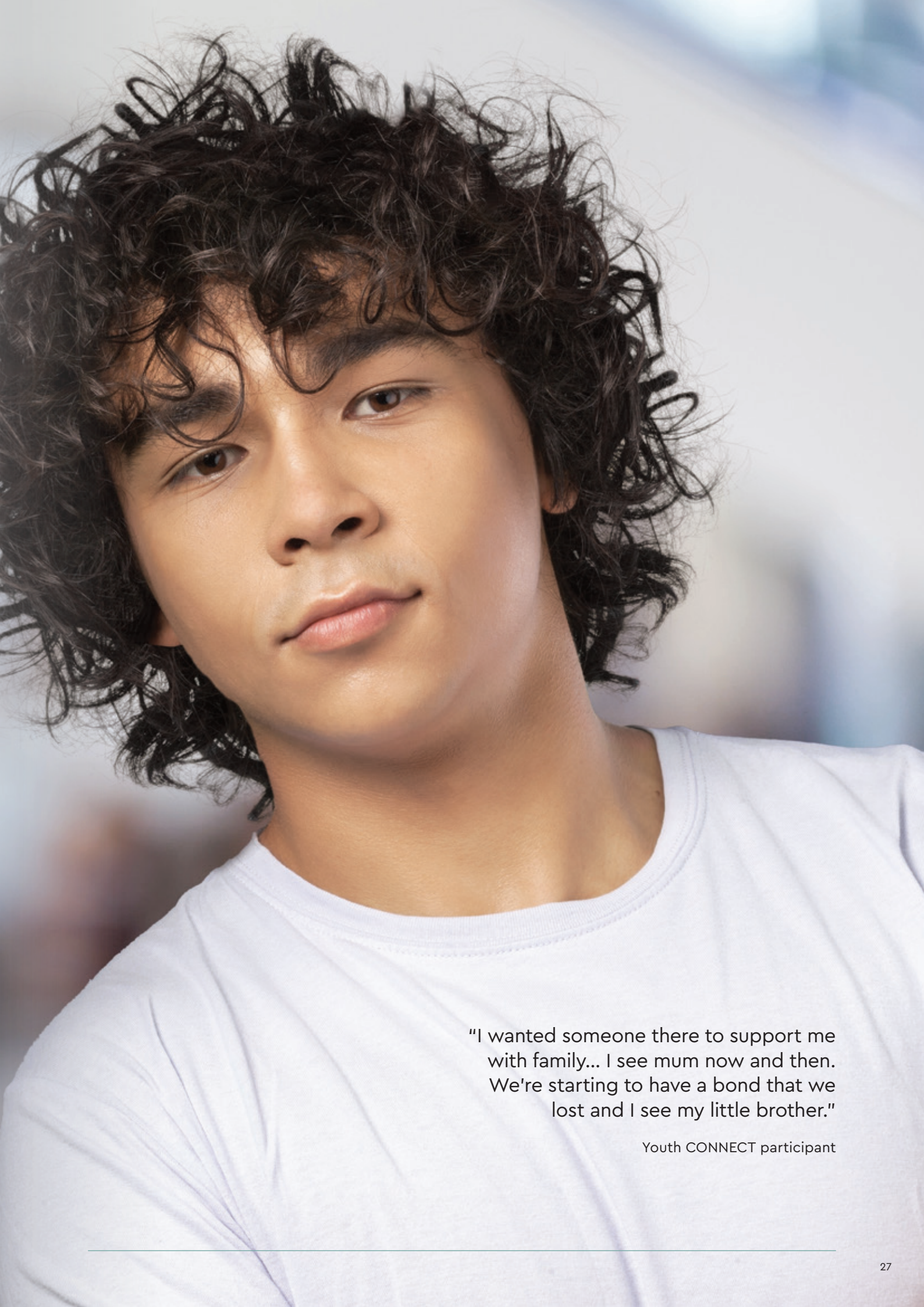
A second evaluation report commenced 2022 and will be published in late 2023. USC and Churches of Christ have worked together to gather data, including pre-referral data, housing journeys through the duration of the program, continuous participation timelines, and extensive case notes. The outcomes evaluation report will analyse this data and evaluate the outcomes of the program. Youth CONNECT will distribute this report once finalised.

In April 2022, USC and Churches of Christ collaborated to contribute to the CREATE foundation conference. The theme of the conference was 'Voices in Action: Resilient, Resourceful, Remarkable', and the topic presented was 'Supporting and building resilience through putting relationships and young people at the centre of practice'. USC and Churches of Christ created a pre-recorded presentation around the topics of: workers relationships with young people; connection to culture; homefulness; shared housing with known networks; and organisational culture and spaces that enable practice to happen. Young people in Youth CONNECT also contributed to the presentation through pre-recorded filming. The presentation itself included a live question and answer component where Youth CONNECT and USC staff answered questions from the audience. The conference was a positive experience and we were honoured to contribute to such a significant forum.

As Youth CONNECT winds down and staffing numbers have reduced, the remaining PAR groups (culture and homefulness) were combined into one group which meets every six weeks. This is working well as all staff members are actively engaged in all PAR processes. An important workshop saw a small group of Youth CONNECT staff commence a client engagement project aimed at advancing understanding of how to build relationships with young people, especially those experiencing barriers to engagement. This focus group explored strategies staff used to build relationships with young people displaying various behaviour and engagement with the service. Staff engaged well in this focus group and shared useful insight.

Youth CONNECT has valued our working relationship with the USC highly and are proud of the projects and publications that have emerged from the partnership. As the program winds down, we anticipate several more publications that summarise our findings and learnings across a variety of themes, but most significantly homefulness and cultural practice.



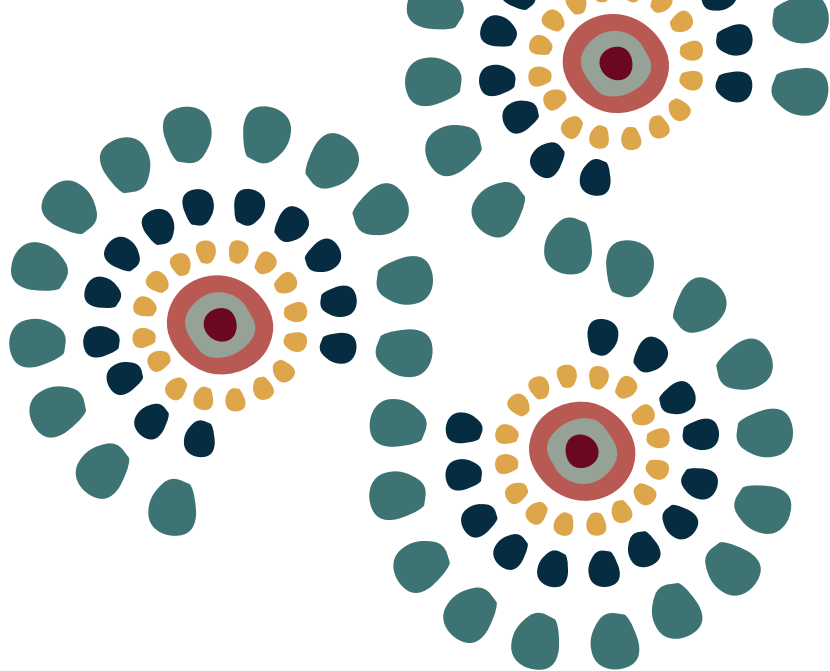


"I wanted someone there to support me with family... I see mum now and then. We're starting to have a bond that we lost and I see my little brother."

Youth CONNECT participant



# About us.



**Churches of Christ in Queensland has been an active part of the community since 1883. We have a significant presence across Queensland and Victoria, with over 300 services in more than 100 communities. Thanks to the support of almost 4700 staff and 1000 volunteers, we impact tens of thousands of lives through our services to assist families, the elderly and people in need.**

Since 1970, we have responded to community needs and grown into a leading service provider of early childhood education, family-based care, transition to adulthood and family support services. Through each of these services, our dedicated staff strive to give voices to the children, young people and families who are experiencing vulnerabilities and calling on us in their time of need. Through listening to their experiences and understanding their journey, we support them to belong, grow, connect and thrive.

We are currently one of the largest providers of alternative care in Queensland, supporting over 20% of children and young people in state care.

We are also a leading provider of housing solutions for those facing housing stress and homelessness. As a registered housing provider, we have been delivering responsive housing outcomes for people and communities for more than 35 years. We currently manage a portfolio of over 1300 properties in Queensland, accommodating over 3000 people.

Youth CONNECT supports young people, who have exited or are exiting statutory care and are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to build their resilience to homelessness. The program has a housing-first approach and emphasises education, employment and connection to community, which can influence their future trajectory towards achieving sustainable 'homefulness'. Through our team's dedication to providing holistic case management, housing, education and workplace support, we support this cohort of vulnerable young people as they transition to adulthood and independence.

Social Outcomes has acted as the intermediary for the design and development of the Social Benefit Bond. Social Outcomes is managing the registry and are the point of contact for investors.

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Churches of Christ in Queensland ARBN 147 481 436 (incorporated in Queensland) is a legal body incorporated under the Letters Patent issued pursuant to the Religious Educational and Charitable Institutions Acts 1861–1959. Churches of Christ Housing Services Limited ABN 25 604 517 026 and is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Churches of Christ in Queensland.

"Youth CONNECT worked with me and my partner together and sat with us to resolve conflict and understand each other better. It saved our relationship... Without Youth CONNECT I wouldn't have the relationships I have now."

Youth CONNECT participant



Every child, young person and family deserves to grow, belong, connect and thrive in their community.

Connect with us at  
**cofc.com.au/youthconnect**  
or call **1800 314 417**



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