



NSW Youth Advisory Council

Annual Report
1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023

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Foreword – Melik Ibrahim



Before I begin, I would just like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land in which the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) met so often: the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

It is a privilege to introduce the Youth Advisory Council 2023 Annual Report. The children and young people involved in this year's YAC have worked incredibly hard! I am proud of the work our YAC have done and I'm sure we can all join in on congratulating not only the amazing young people on the YAC, but also all young people across the state for their continued work in advocating for each other.

This year, the children and young people of NSW faced some hardships, particularly associated with the increased cost of living, and the ongoing mental and physical health impacts of the Northern Rivers floods. Nevertheless, children and young people have continued to have hope and determination in the face of adversity!

We thank the members of the NSW Cabinet who approved the membership of the outgoing 2022/2023 YAC, and especially thank the then Minister for Families and Communities, the Honourable Natasha Maclaren-Jones, for attending our first meeting to discuss how the YAC can best serve Parliament. She provided the YAC with a wealth of knowledge and was eager to provide a way for both parties to collaborate, especially around the areas of this year's YAC, the health and wellbeing of young people, given the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones' experience as a registered nurse.

We would also like to thank the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, Zoë Robinson, for championing the YAC! Zoë works incredibly hard behind the scenes to make sure children and young people across the state are heard in all areas of government. We thank Zoë for her commitment, attending all YAC meetings and providing regular updates regarding her work in her capacity as the Advocate. Furthermore, all the work that the YAC and Zoë have done cannot be separated from the incredibly passionate team at the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP). The team at ACYP work incredibly hard to support, facilitate, and organise meetings for the YAC, as well as other events across the state. The team at ACYP have worked especially hard to balance many requests from external agencies to meet with the YAC, as well as organise a meeting in a rural/regional town for this year's YAC.

The YAC were involved in many projects this year, notably, being involved in the NSW Department of Education's curriculum review where the YAC provided feedback on how the voices of children and young people could be heard in the future. This also formed the foundation for the NSW YAC Project, which is a report with recommendations for ACYP, schools, and the Department of Education on how best to involve children and young people's voice in the education sector. It has been fulfilling to know that the YAC took up the request from the Department of Education and are now delivering a report on the topic.

This year's YAC has continued to go above and beyond to fulfil their duties and to advocate for the children and young people across NSW! Each member has a unique set of skills and an even more unique experience that they bring to the table. Furthermore, their uniqueness has driven great discussion – their respect for each other has also been a testament to their continued pursuit of having the voice of young people across NSW heard about decisions that impact them. I praise their commitment and remind them all that ACYP is always here to support their future prospects!

Finally, I would like to extend thanks to some of the organisations who met with the YAC: the Department of Education, NSW Ministry of Health, Sonder, NSW Education Standards Authority, and Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University. I would also like to acknowledge all other organisations that sought feedback and input from the YAC. Each and every one of these organisations, by seeking feedback, have demonstrated what it means to be an organisation committed to having the voice of children and young people heard. We challenge you to continue this hard work by involving young people as key stakeholders in all aspects of organisational decision-making and appreciate the effort!

Being a part of the YAC back in 2017 was an eye-opening experience to the work being done to help children and young people. Being invited back, but as the Chair this year, has been a great honour, and I have infinite gratitude for the team that has supported me. Being the Chair has given me the platform to ensure other children and young people have an equal opportunity to share their experiences. As the outgoing Chair, I am proud of every young person in the state who has participated in advocacy, remembering that no matter what community you are a part of, we have all contributed to advocacy in one way or another.

Children and young people will continue to be change advocates – we are commonly seen as the future however, decisions impacting children and young people's present often omit us. We continue to learn the importance of incorporating children and young people in decisions relating to us and are excited for a future filled with meaningful participation!

Melik Ibrahim

2022/2023 Chairperson of the
NSW Youth Advisory Council

Role of the Council

The NSW Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is established under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014* (the Act). The YAC provides young people with the opportunity to participate in the development and consultation of government policies that concerns them.

The YAC's functions under the Act are:



- a.** Advising the Minister and the Advocate on government policies and programs concerning young people.



- b.** Consulting with young people, community groups and government agencies on issues and policies concerning young people.



- c.** Monitoring and evaluating legislation, government policies and programs concerning young people and recommending changes if required.



- d.** Conducting forums, approved by the Minister, on issues of interest to young people.



- e.** Providing the Minister and the Advocate with information on issues and policies concerning young people.

Administration of the Council

Administration of the Council



At the time of appointment, the Hon. Natasha Maclaren Jones, Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, and the Hon. Benjamin (Ben) Franklin, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Minister for Regional Youth and Minister for the Arts, administered the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*.

In April 2023, the Hon. Rose Jackson, Minister for Water, Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Youth, and Minister for the North Coast, took carriage of the Act.

Secretariat support for the Council was provided by ACYP.

Council members have met on nine formal occasions during their 2022-2023 term:

- August 27 & 28
- October 16
- December 3
- February 19
- April 14, 15 & 16
- July 22 & 23

The members also met online for workshops, consultations and to work on their YAC project. There were approximately nine additional online meetings where the members came together.

Recruitment of the Council

The 2022-2023 YAC was recruited in early 2022 via an extensive recruitment and selection process.

YAC applications were open from 31 January 2022 to 13 March 2022, with more than 495 applications received. The Advocate for Children and Young People, Ms Zoë Robinson, read all the applications with senior members of the Participation team, and determined a shortlist of 135 applicants.

Shortlisted applicants were invited to an online information session that was held on 2 May 2022, in which they were addressed by then Minister for Families, Ms Natasha Maclaren-Jones, and the Advocate, as well as members of the 2021-2022 Youth Advisory Council. During the session, the applicants were provided with an insight into:



The work of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.



The role and responsibilities of the NSW Youth Advisory Council.



The work and highlights of the current NSW Youth Advisory Council.



A live Q&A session with the Advocate and the Chairperson of the 2020-21 NSW Youth Advisory Council.

Online group activities were held across two days, on 3 May to 4 May 2022. To aid the selection process, shortlisted applicants were allocated to the online sessions based on age.



Participants were asked for their views on consultation questions provided by various NSW Government Departments (Department of Education, Transport for NSW, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Customer Service, Department of Communities and Justice and the NSW Ombudsman).

Members of the ACYP team and non-government organisation (NGO) representatives observed the applicants while they discussed their thoughts and ideas – as a group – on what they would recommend to the departments.

Following the online group activity sessions and further analysis by ACYP, the ACYP Participation team selected 34 candidates to take part in a face-to-face recruitment event on Friday 27 May 2022 at the State Library of NSW in Sydney. Participants took part in a mock YAC meeting, a tour of the State Library of NSW and a Q&A panel with NSW Government and business representatives.

Following the face-to-face recruitment event and further analysis by ACYP, the Advocate determined the 12 candidates to be recommended to the Minister for review and concurrence, which then received Cabinet approval in August 2023.

Membership of the Council

The members of the 2022-2023 NSW Youth Advisory Council were appointed under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*.



Amelie Paech, 12
Female
Regional – Walla Walla
Albury



Billy Bofinger, 12
Male
Metro – Caringbah South
Cronulla



Amelia Sedwell, 14
Female
Metro – Epping
Epping



Shelby Mitchell, 16
Female
Regional – Gladston
Oxley



Ruken Onay-Gurbuz, 16
Non-Binary
Metro - Greystanes
Granville



Kale Puata, 16
Male
Regional – North Avoca
Terrigal



Hal Canute, 16
Male
Regional – Bowral
Wollondilly



Dylan Farr, 17
Male
Regional – Walgett
Barwon



Brady Endemi, 18
Male
Regional – Calala
Tamworth



Melik Ibrahim, 20
Male
Metro – South Granville
Auburn



Ben Regan, 21
Male
Regional – Wollongong
Wollongong



Sereena Zanuso, 22
Female
Regional – Girards Hill
Lismore

Work of the Council

Summary of Meetings

**Saturday,
27 August 2022**

The first meeting of the 2022-23 YAC was held over a weekend in August at the ACYP office in Sydney. The Saturday meeting started with an introduction to all 12 members of the YAC and areas of interest in their local communities. The YAC Code of Conduct, outlining how to work together as a group and expectations from ACYP, was discussed. The Advocate briefed the YAC about their calendar, also outlining major projects the ACYP team was currently working towards, including the LGBTQIA+ report, a focus on vaping, Children's Week 2022 and Youth Week 2023. The YAC underwent media and advocacy training as a group to develop skills integral to their role in the Committee.

At the start of their term, the 22-23 YAC discussed potential topics that they would like to work on in developing a YAC Project. The main topic centred on education, including mental health and measuring the success and quality of teachers. Volunteering, out-of-home care and youth crime were all also suggested as potential project topics.

As part of the School is for Everyone (SIFE) campaign, the YAC provided feedback on a video, noting that the audience of the video needed to be better addressed.

**Sunday,
28 August 2022**

At the start of the second day, the YAC debriefed about the previous day and again, individual members shared 'big issues' in their local communities that were affecting children and young people. The Annual Report from the previous YAC was summarised and the current YAC provided feedback about how they would like their term to be with ACYP.

The YAC met with the then Minister for Youth, the Honourable Natasha Maclaren-Jones, who outlined the portfolios she covered. The members had the opportunity to ask questions regarding OOHHC and Youth Justice.

**Sunday,
16 October 2022**

Following on from the previous day, the YAC Project continued to be discussed. Areas of interest, expectations of the project and SMART goals were covered, to support the YAC in defining their version of success for the project. It was decided that the YAC would need to be broken down into smaller working groups to fulfil the project needs.

Group photos and introduction videos were filmed. In the afternoon, the whole YAC participated in a KYUP! workshop to build confidence and help them find their voice.

A common theme in the local issues segment of the meeting related to school stress and mental health. Also discussed were the high rates of youth crime, drug usage and vaping in regional and rural areas of NSW.

There was an in-depth talk about vaping and a policy briefing about the strategies schools use in order to reduce the usage of vapes within their grounds.

The YAC talked about consent issues that had been raised in the media, and the work ACYP is doing around this. A YAC member provided a presentation about "What traits a good teacher can project".

Members brainstormed ideas about the YAC project. These included: a report for the Department of Education (DoE), a consultation with the DOVES group, a video/infographic, a survey and raising awareness of what services already exist. YAC members narrowed it down to producing a survey about student voice for school students to complete. The YAC split off into two groups, one producing the survey and one doing desktop research about student voice.

YAC members were asked to read over the strategic plan and discuss any issues that interested them. The YAC then thought about the theme for the upcoming NSW Youth Week and were judges for the City of Creatives Art Competition.

**Sunday,
4 December 2022**

The Advocate provided the YAC with an update regarding what the ACYP team had been working on, including the release of the LGBTQIA+ report, and the formation of a Resilience team in response to the recent floods.

The YAC discussed a wide range of hot topics, including the high prevalence of vaping by young people, flooding and the greater impact to not only infrastructure but wellbeing, young people driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol, emerging youth crime, support services for year 12 students, lowering the age of voting and the understanding of consent.

YAC members presented research that they had completed on their project of Student Voice in Schools that focused on student voices and the welfare of students in schools. The ACYP team talked about examples of student voice programs, both internationally and domestically before talking about how these programs benefited the wellbeing of the students and their ability to learn effectively. The YAC brainstormed ideas about a special project that could raise awareness about student voices and provide opportunities to achieve this.

The YAC talked about how they could improve the YAC recruitment process, coming up with suggestions that included increasing the number of attendees to the face-to-face recruitment day and not completing the online event.

YAC members held a consultation with NESA on curriculum review. Multiple important points were raised including:

- The majority of young people do not know how to participate in policy development, young people should be considered as stakeholders within their own education.
- Awareness of NESA and their role only occurring in year 11 and 12. NESA should focus on disengaged young people in school earlier on, and why students are deciding to leave.
- NESA should consult everyone when making decisions, going beyond the regional task force and have a higher presence in rural areas.

Finally, YAC members consulted on the Child Safe Action Plan being developed by the Ministry of NSW Health, making very important points that children and young people should be more aware of the services available to them such as emergency care, including emergency dentists and hospitals.

**Sunday,
17 February 2023**



To begin, the Advocate updated the YAC on the current work that the ACYP team was completing, including ongoing preparation for Youth Week, work on the Cost of Living report, and continued consultation with NSW Police and Youth Justice.

The YAC then moved to discussing key 'local issues', which included mental health issues, the rising levels of youth crime, concerns around the cost of living and housing affordability.

The YAC then met with the NESAC Curriculum Review team, to discuss how best to approach the rising level of disengagement in schools and support early school leavers. They provided insight into their own personal experiences and viewpoints as students around these issues, and the main contributing factors.

Members then discussed and planned the next steps of the YAC Project on the lack of voice for young people in schools. This included establishing the purpose and focus of the report and creating a timeline. Members were assigned different focus groups to work on particular sections and plan how to conduct the survey of young people's experiences.

The YAC members also met with members of the Sonder App team, who presented and discussed their product and its features. The YAC then participated in a group discussion about the platform, highlighting both the benefits and potential improvements that could be made.

Finally, the YAC helped develop General Practitioner (GP) fact sheets and information for the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People. They discussed potential key inclusions for the fact sheet as well as general feedback for GP consultation. Some of the things the YAC discussed included:

- Better conversational skills, supports and understanding when discussing mental health.
- More sensitivity around BMI and healthy eating and exercise, including making it more of a conversation and using other methods to measure health.
- Accepting suggestions from the patient on which services they would like referrals to.
- Building better relationships with patients.
- Less judgement from doctor about their patients.
- Being included in conversations that are about you – not being asked to leave.
- Better conversations around sexual health.
- More time available to patients.
- Believing patients.

**Friday,
14 April 2023**

The YAC attended their first meeting outside of Sydney in Albury, regional NSW. Once they landed, the members visited the Retro Lane Café, which they used as the meeting space over the course of the weekend.

The Friday meeting started with a Welcome to Country. Following this, the Advocate gave an ACYP update with regard to a team of six new staff members located in the Northern Rivers to support young people in flood affected areas. Zoë also announced two new ACYP staff members with lived experience of the Youth Justice system had joined the team. During the local issues discussion, various topics came up, including CYP mental health, flood affected areas, exam stress, and cost of living issues.

Next, YAC members reviewed two fact sheets sent by NSW Health regarding vaping targeted at children and young people. These fact sheets were designed to target CYP who might be patients in a GP context. The fact sheets revolved around vaping, smoking, and cigarette usage, and were aimed at CYP in the 12-25 age bracket. Specific feedback revolved around the content, clarity, suitability of tone, and effectiveness of both the vaping and smoking and the e-cigarettes fact sheets.

**Saturday,
15 April 2023**

Saturday was an early start, and an action-packed day with the 'Boys to the Bush' service in Albury. To start the day, the members were given a tour of their HQ, and were also provided with some insight into the formulation of the organisation and the programs they run across regional NSW.

Following the tour, the members spent the day at a local farm, learning about the farm and the work that happens there with Boys to the Bush. The members were also able to help out with planting trees and learning about culture through a local Aboriginal group.

**Sunday,
16 April 2023**

YAC members were consulted on the current cost of living crisis and how this specifically affects young people. For this reason, younger members of the YAC left the room to run a separate consultation regarding the YAC Recruitment event. The cost of living consultation was framed as an informal discussion where members shared their personal experience regarding the cost of living. Interestingly, similar concerns were raised across the group despite the diversity of the YAC members.

Finally, the YAC reviewed the NSW DoE's complaints web page and process. The YAC provided valuable insights into how children and young people might approach the page, and offered suggestions about practical changes that could be made to the wording, which might help improve the process of reporting from CYP.

**Saturday,
22 July 2023**

Due to this being the last face-to-face meeting for the YAC, this was a time to reflect on the year's work and celebrate the achievements they had been made.

To start the meeting, the members were able to have some time to participate in an art and craft activity at a local art café. At the café, YAC members created their own art work/logo to highlight their work and the importance of the NSW Youth Advisory Council.

Once back in the office, the members were given the task of selecting the NSW Youth Week awards winners. From the below categories the members discussed the nominated local council's applications, and selected their winners:

- Most Inclusive Youth Week Program
(Inner West Council)
- Most Innovative Youth Week Program
(Yass Valley Council)
- Best Local Youth Week Program *(Fairfield City Council)*
- Best Small Council with Most Outstanding Youth Week Program *(Gilgandra Shire Council)*

Following this workshop activity, the members spent some time on a reflections exercise and provided feedback to the ACYP team on their experiences and ideas about being on the YAC.

**Sunday,
23 July 2023**

The final meeting of the 2022-23 YAC began with a Welcome to Country and an update from the Advocate, including the welcoming of a new Aboriginal Advocate for Children and Young People, Shannon Thorne.

The YAC members started a discussion around local issues in their communities, with topics including vaping amongst young people, access to mental health treatments, youth crime and access to affordable housing for young people.

This was followed by further discussion and brainstorming around the referendum for the Voice to Parliament. The members discussed their current understanding of the referendum and their ideas and recommendations regarding ACYP's upcoming work on the topic. Members recommend ACYP provide more information on what the Voice to Parliament is and why it is important.

Members then reviewed their Student Voice in Schools project and developed recommendations for SRC, DoE and ACYP.

In the afternoon, the YAC met with the SIFE team and continued discussions on the Fostering Connection and Belonging in Schools project. The members provided their feedback on the two-phase survey project.

Finally, the YAC participated in some filming with the ACYP Digital and Communications team for an Advocacy video and other upcoming media projects. The day wrapped up with some final words and a gift presentation.

YAC Project: Student Voice in Schools



In August 2022, the newly appointed members of the 2022-2023 NSW YAC met in Sydney for their first in-person meeting at the ACYP office. The team at ACYP presented the YAC with the opportunity to work on a collective project during their term, a project to create meaningful change for the children and young people of NSW. Excited by the opportunity, several ideas about what this project might look like were put forth by the passionate YAC members.

By their October meeting, the focus of the project was agreed upon by the YAC: to promote greater, more meaningful student voice in the education system. In their own schooling experiences in rural, regional and metro NSW, all members of the YAC agreed that they felt unheard by their respective school systems. The group could see that this was their opportunity to create change.

Moving forward, the YAC were divided into teams to get the ball rolling on the project. Team 1 focused on desktop research to provide the group with background into what was already being done in the education system to provide students with the chance to have their voices heard. With support from the staff at ACYP, team 2 created a survey for the children and young people of NSW to directly capture their thoughts about whether they are being heard in their school and if the current methods of promoting student voice are effective. The 1,561 responses to the survey highlight how passionate the young people of NSW are about student voice – they wouldn't do the survey if it wasn't important to them.

All twelve members of the 2022-2023 NSW YAC contributed to the creation of this report on Student Voice in Schools, dedicating their time and energy to highlight how young people, with support from those in the education system, can create meaningful change.

Advice Given to ACYP



Youth Week 2023

August 2022

YAC members brainstormed ideas around Youth Week, and selected the Youth theme: *Connect, Participate, Celebrate*.



NSW Children's Week

October 2022

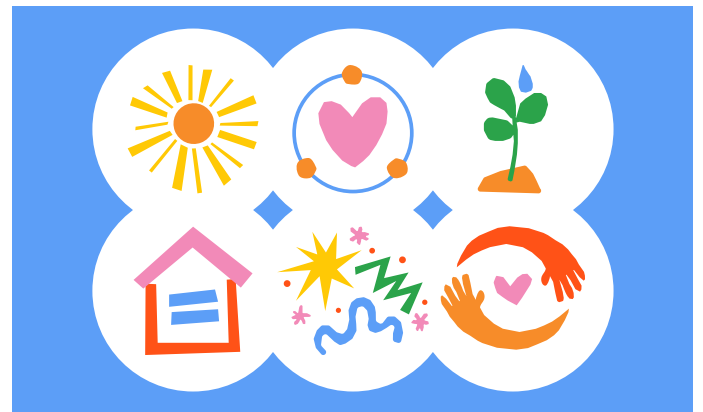
YAC members provided ideas and suggestions for Children's Week 2023 activities.



YAC Recruitment Process

December 2022

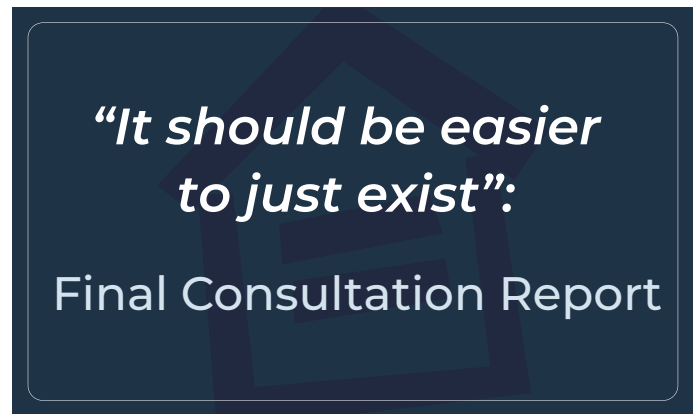
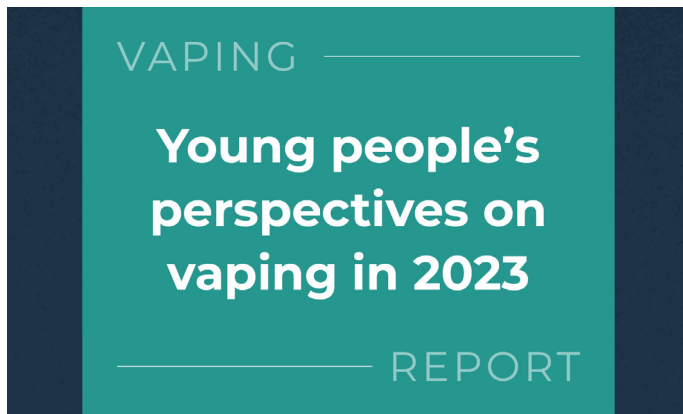
The members provided feedback and ideas for the recruitment process for the NSW Youth Advisory Council 2023-2024.



NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People

October 2022

The members developed a GP fact sheet and information as part of addressing the Strategic Plan; health and wellbeing priority areas.



Vaping Project

February 2023

In this session, the members reviewed the ACYP vaping consultation project on the proposed methodology and questions. The members provided their feedback and recommendations.

Cost of Living

In this session, the members reviewed the ACYP cost of living consultation project on the proposed methodology and questions. The members provided their feedback and recommendations.



YAC Annual Report 2022-2023

July 2022

In this session, YAC members began to write the YAC Annual Report with assistance from ACYP to design, finalise and publish the document in 2023.

YAC Reflections

Members provided their feedback regarding their experience of being on the YAC. This included their highlights, challenges and advice to ACYP on how all aspects of the NSW YAC could be improved.

Advice Given to External Agencies and Stakeholders



NSW Department of Education

27 August 2022

YAC members provided feedback on the “School is for Everyone” video. YAC members gave input about the messaging and content, the appropriate length of the video and its presentation to ensure the video was relevant and engaging for all children and young people in NSW.



NSW Ministry of Health

4 December 2022

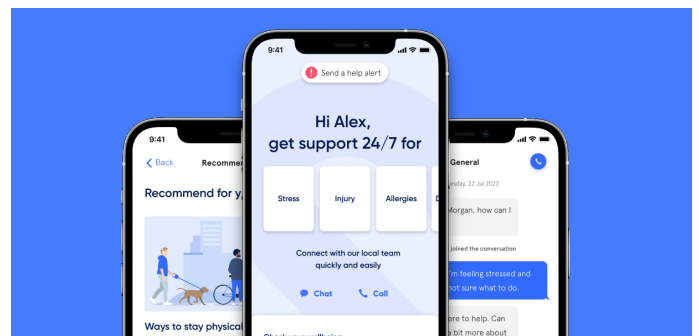
YAC members consulted NSW Health about how they can involve children and young people in decision-making about their own health, how healthcare is delivered and health messaging for children and young people. YAC members also provided input on how NSW Health should ask children and young people for their views.



NSW Department of Education: Curriculum Review

4 December 2022

YAC members discussed whether young people would be interested in participating in policy development, how NESAs can encourage high participation rates amongst young people, and how NESAs can ensure a diverse cohort of voices are heard in the curriculum review.



Sonder

19 February 2023

YAC members provided input on the user experience of Sonder, with a particular focus on whether the platform would be easily accessible for young people and whether young people can easily navigate the app.



NSW Education Standards Authority

19 February 2023

YAC members consulted with NESA to inform the newly developed syllabus and early school leaver pathways. YAC members provided real experiences and discussed current options for early school leavers, why young people would leave high school and how to better support young people who choose to leave school after year 10.



NSW Department of Education

14 April 2023

YAC members reviewed the complaints website and provided feedback on information about the complaint processes for young people if they have a complaint about their school.



NSW Ministry of Health

14 April 2023

YAC members provided feedback on a patient fact sheet for vaping and e-cigarettes. YAC members shared their ideas on how to make the fact sheets relevant and friendly to young people.



Centre for Children and Young, South Cross University – SIFE Project 2023

23 July 2023

YAC members were consulted on the research project, *School is for Everyone: Improving participation and wellbeing for every student*. The YAC members provided feedback on Phase 1 of the project findings about belonging and connectedness in schools and reviewed Phase 2, the project surveys, which focus on belonging with student and staff in schools.

Participation in Events, Projects and Activities

■ Training

YAC members had the opportunity to participate in advocacy training, media training and child rights training in order to develop their skills. These were supported by the Advocate and ACYP staff.

■ Issues Put on Agenda by YAC Members to Discuss

Some of the issues YAC members have spoken about and have requested policy briefs for include:

- Participation of young people in Australian democracy;
- Vaping;
- Drugs and alcohol;
- Youth crime;
- School;
- Sexual health;
- Mental health;
- Employment;
- Housing;
- Bullying;
- Floods;
- Discrimination;
- Cost of living;
- Social media and wellbeing;
- Young drivers – Learners and P-platers;
- Consent;
- Support pathways for young people after year 12;
- Partying culture;
- Recreational activities for young people in school holidays;
- Transport;
- Environment; and
- Voice to Parliament.



■ Events

YAC members attended a range of events throughout 2022 and 2023. These included:

2023 NSW Women of the Year Awards Breakfast

Female YAC members were invited to be guests of the Advocate for NSW Women of the Year Awards Breakfast held at the International Convention Centre.

Youth Advisory Council Recruitment Event 2023

YAC members supported the planning of the Youth Advisory Council Recruitment event at the NSW State Library. Two members were a part of a YAC Alumni panel sharing their insights and advice.

Photos

Photos





NSW Youth Advisory Council 2022-2023

With support from the Office of the
Advocate for Children and Young People

Report:

*NSW Youth Advisory Council 2022-2023
Annual Report 2023*

Date:

December 2023

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