

Appendix 2:
Survey report - Young people’s views on the Codes of Ethics

In March 2014, AYAC conducted an online survey of young people about their views and experiences with Youth Workers, including a series of questions on principles commonly identified as relating to ethical practice in Youth Work. 136 young people across each state and territory responded to the survey over a two week period, with most respondents aged between 15-25 years.

Figure 1: What is your age range?

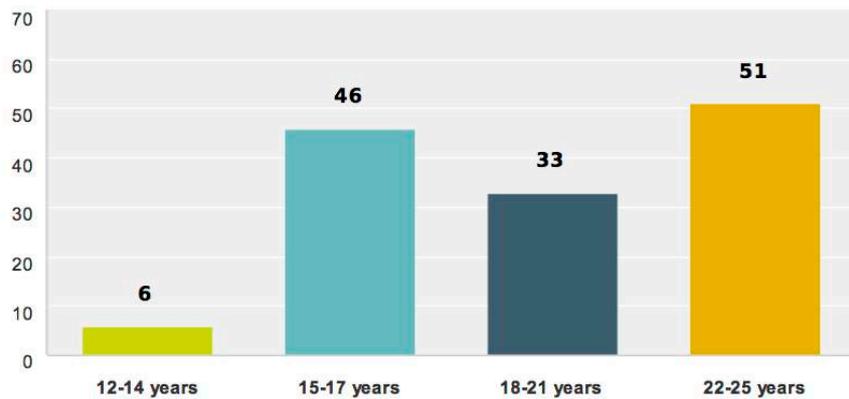
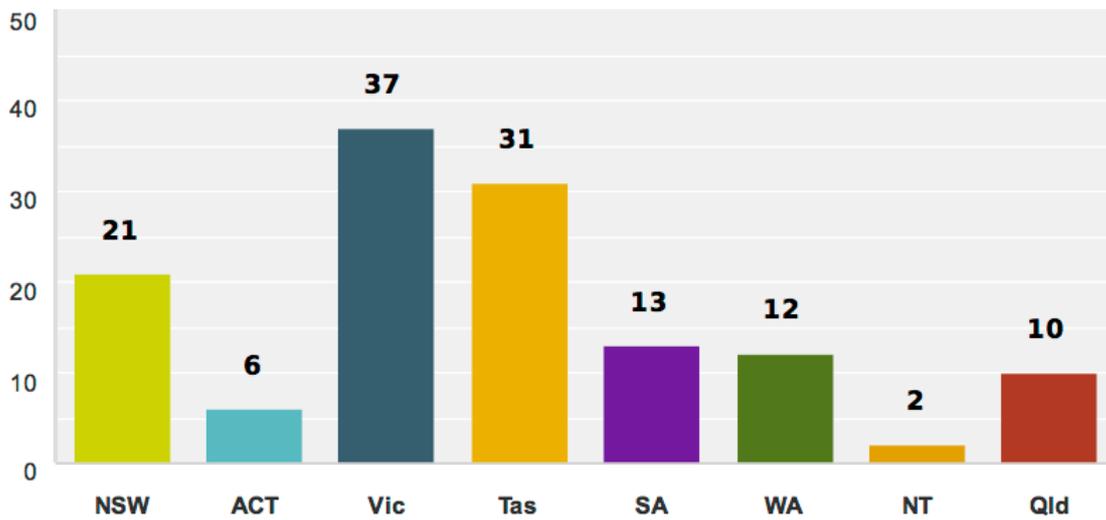


Figure 2: In what state / territory do you currently live?



Good Youth Work Qualities

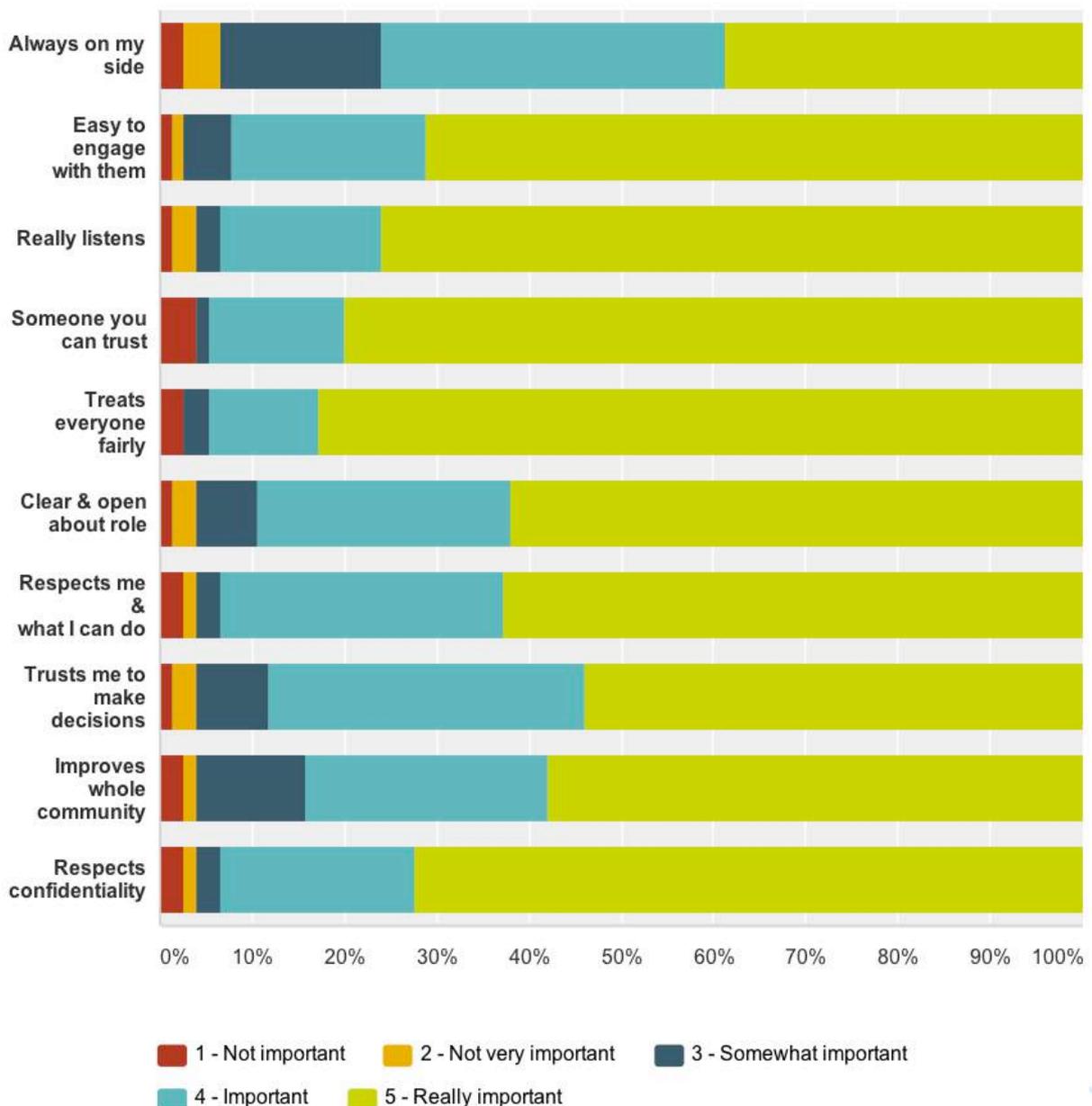
Survey respondents were asked to rate a number of statements relating to ethical practice for Youth Workers, and their importance of each quality for making a good Youth Worker, as follows.

“A good youth worker...

- ...is always on my side and puts me and my interests first
- ...makes it easy for me and other young people to engage with and relate to them
- ...really listens to me
- ...is someone you can trust and isn't just in it for themselves
- ...treats everyone fairly and doesn't discriminate against me or anyone
- ...is clear and open about what they can and can't do with/for me
- ...respects me and the things I can do for myself and for others
- ...trusts me to make decisions for myself
- ...works to improve things in the whole community for young people
- ...respects my privacy / confidentiality in whatever I tell them

Respondents were given the option to rank each as “Not important”, “Not very important”, “Somewhat important”, “Important” or “Really important”. Their responses are shown in the chart below:

Figure 3: Thinking about your relationships with youth workers, how important are each of these qualities to you for making a good youth worker?



The chart shows that for most of the statements provided, over 80% of respondents believed that the statement was either “important” or “really important”. The exception to this was the statement that a good youth worker “is always on my side and puts me and my interests first” which attracted 76.0% of responses in these two categories. When asked why they answered in this manner, responses included:

- “I put ‘somewhat’, because although it is good to have someone that you can go to talk to and make you feel better about the situation that you may be in, it is also important to me to get the youth worker’s views. Although disclosure of information can be hard for the youth worker, I think it is really important to get the youth worker’s world view on the things I discuss with them.”
- “they shouldn’t always be on my side because I may be wrong, but it’s extremely important to see it from my point and if I’m wrong address it nicely in a way where it doesn’t make me feel stupid”

Less than 7% of responses to each statement rated them as either “not important” or “not very important” on the scale, showing that each of these statements relating to ethical practice is important on some level to the vast majority of young people who responded to the survey.

Experiences with Youth Workers

Survey respondents were asked if they ever had a good/great experience with a Youth Worker, and alternatively if they had ever had a bad experience with a Youth Worker. 88.7% of respondents indicated that they had a good or great experience with a Youth Worker, while 37.7% of respondents stated that they had a bad Youth Work experience.

Figure 4: Have you ever had a good / great experience with a youth worker?

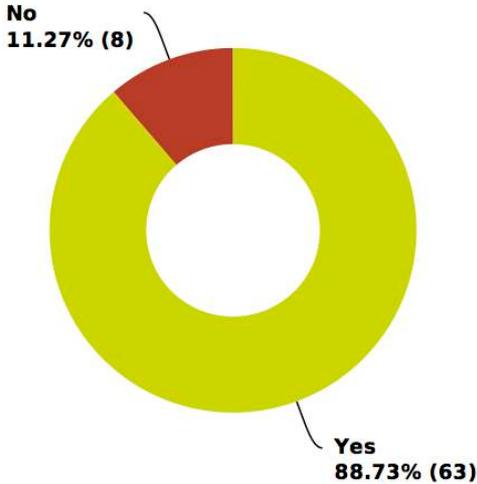
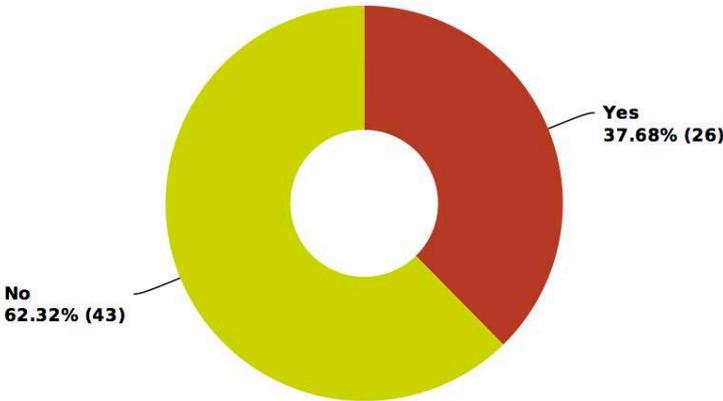


Figure 5: Have you ever had a bad experience with a youth worker?



Respondents were asked to provide further details on their experiences, which included the following:

- “My experience with a good youth worker was a great experience. The youth worker listened to me and worked with me to find a hostel that would get me off the streets and into some stable accommodation. By actually listening to my story and my worries, they were able to get me on track for accommodation and as a result I was able to continue at school and work to get to where I am today.”
- “They were genuinely interested in me and seemed to encourage my participation and input into the project we were working on. I also really liked it how she was kind and supportive and positive to my younger brother and his mates. Its like she was just that sort of person who likes all young people and was really genuinely interested in hearing about their thoughts, aspirations and ideas. She was very encouraging. She followed up with stuff that was raised in our conversation- she didn't have to, but she did- that thoughtfulness was fantastic. I felt she really believed in us. Anyway, even though I knew she was the youth worker, I felt as though we were a team, working alongside each other, working together.”

Some of the details of bad youth work experiences were as follows:

- “I met a youth worker once at the youth centre at an event - she was a guest or something. I felt as though she was really bossy and had her own agenda and it was all about her. I felt as though she really judged others who didn't agree with her position or beliefs - it was a bit full on.”
- “I have had some terrible experiences with youth workers, who acted selfishly and utterly incompetent, picking favourites and turning on the young people they were meant to protect. They could have just been better human beings.”
- “they didn't listen to me and made me feel belittled, they shut down any ideas I came up with and didn't try to reason with it, they would tell us their ideas and it was their way or the highway, no leeway”
- “I remember I went to the hostel after being on the streets and I said I'm so glad I have a place to live and this youth worker said ‘honey, you're still homeless’”

Impact of a Code of Ethics

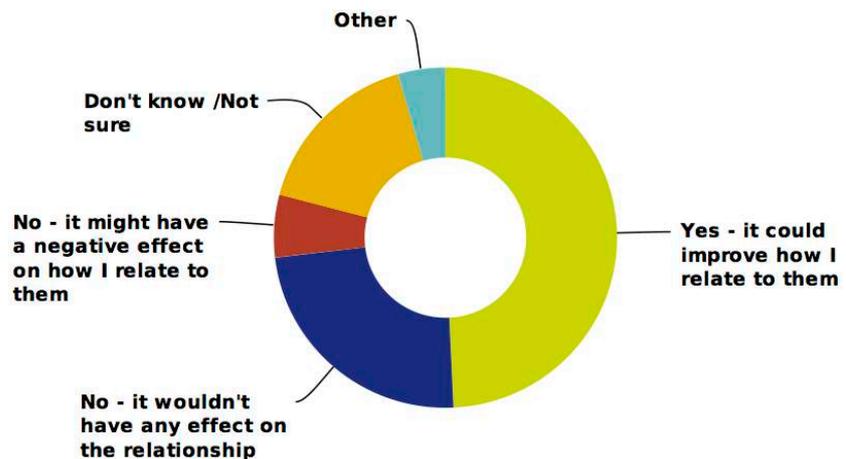
Finally, respondents were provided with a list of common principles contained in a Code of Ethics and asked to imagine if a Youth Worker had told them that they had signed up to such a Code, would that knowledge improve their relationship with the Youth Worker.

As shown in Figure 6, below:

- Almost half of respondents (49.3%) believed this could improve the relationship
- 16.4% didn't know or weren't sure of the effect
- 23.9% believed it wouldn't have any effect on the relationship, and
- 6.0% believed it might have a negative effect on the relationship.

There were also three “other” responses, who specified “kind of”, “as long as their actions met the stated words in the Code of Ethics” and “Signing a contract is one thing, actually applying the code of ethics in-session is what really matters” as their responses to the what they believed the impact would be on their relationship.

Figure 6: Imagine if a youth worker told you they had signed up to a Code of Ethics... Would knowing they had signed up to this improve your relationship?



Respondents were also asked to expand on their response to the question above. Several of the respondents whose answer was either of the two “No” options indicated they saw some value in the Code, although with notable reservations. For example:

- “Even though I would probably find the youth worker more trustworthy, it would probably have a negative effect on the relationship because I would feel that the only reason the youth worker is listening to me was because it is their job and they signed a stupid form, not because they legitimately wanted to be there for me”

- “For me personally, I don't think that it would have any difference if a youth worker told me they had signed a code of ethics. The youth workers who I have engaged with in the past and currently have been extremely good at engaging with youth, and I personally know that although they are extremely friendly they are getting paid to be a youth worker, they are professionals and they have to follow rules.

But with that being said, I think in terms of referring to services it might be good to tell youth that they have a code of ethics, but I don't think youth between the ages of 12 - 18 will really care and then youth my age 18-25 will just be put off.

I think the way youth workers engage with youth is the most important part of this we don't need to be told that the youth worker is following this set of ethics/guidelines/rules because a good youth worker will be able to tell you when he/she can't do something due to him/her being a youth worker.”

- “Just because they sign a code of ethics doesn't mean they'll stick by it. If [you] weren't going to stick to a code of ethics then why would you sign it? I think the workers have their own version of ethics and would stick by them”

Others interpreted the question in the context of their current relationship with a good Youth Worker, rather than a hypothetical work, which resulted in responses such as the following:

- “Because Jess already does all of those things”
- “My youth worker is always upfront about how they work with me”

Expanded responses from young people who were unsure about the impact included:

- Most organisations have a code of ethics of some description, however not all workers appear to be monitored to ensure that they are being followed or respected. There needs to be a system of monitoring and feedback to ensure clients are reaping the rewards.
- Maybe if they told me this before we started working together, I'd be able to hold them to account if I felt like they weren't working to those values. But this could be hard to do/depending on relationship. Most workers already do this anyway.

Reasons provided for believing that knowledge of the Code of Ethics could improve the Youth Work relationship included:

- “The code of ethics specifically lists commitments to problems I experience with youth workers.”
- “They should all do this.”
- “Because it makes them feel like one of us, not just some person that wants to hear our problems”
- “I think it shows their hand, it shows that they will be open and honest with you and that they respect you.”
- “By having a youth worker sign a Code of Ethics you know they are genuinely wanting to help you, and you feel better knowing that if they are not obliging to the Code, then they will be in trouble depending on the severity of the misconduct.”
- “I think it could improve if people took the code seriously. A lot of people sign it, and talk the talk but never actually walk the walk and carry it out on a daily basis.”
- “Because you would have an extra boost of comfort and reassurance that they are in it for the right reasons and always willing to help you out.”
- “If a young person was concerned about anything it would open up the opportunity for them to know it was safe and even if a youth worker had to be honest and say they couldn't help then at least they would know up front”

Finally, one of the three respondents who listed “other” as their response to the question explained their reasoning as follows:

- “All of the items in the Code look great and when they happen it's fantastic. I reckon youth workers should sign up to a code for themselves so they know what young people need and expect. I answered the way I did (I said "other") and "as long as their actions met the stated words in the Code of Ethics", because I think you need to ACT that way - it's not just words on paper!”