AYAC 2013
NATIONAL YOUTH AFFAIRS CONFERENCE
CONFERENCE EVALUATION REPORT

YOUTH PARTICIPATION | ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE | SUPPORT THE SECTOR | DRIVE RESEARCH FOR BETTER PRACTICE
A message from the team.

The AYAC 2013 National Youth Affairs Conference brought together over 200 delegates from around Australia for 3 days from the 5th-7th of August 2013 in Adelaide, South Australia.

The conference was a major focus for AYAC in 2013. Planning was conducted by AYAC staff and commenced in late 2012, in consultation with the broader youth sector and young people. We were very grateful for the support of those steering committee members from AYAC Policy Advisory Council, the state and territory peak bodies and many more for the effort in guiding and promoting AYAC’s conference.

We also thank all of our sponsors, without whom we wouldn’t have been able to hold the conference.

The diversity of representatives was truly wonderful, enabling high levels of energy and enthusiasm throughout the conference - in workshops, plenaries and during the breaks. AYAC 2013 saw delegates from every state and territory, from a variety of cultural backgrounds, regional and rural areas, as well as a diversity of work experience.

AYAC 2013 also had an overwhelming online presence, generating over 5,000 tweets using the #AYAC2013 hashtag, which reached an audience of over 4,300,000.

These events are invaluable in creating solidarity and sense of purpose for those who attend. It provides the opportunity to join together and share learnings and experiences across the country, across sectors, between young and the not-so-young, and build the ‘bigger picture’ of which we are all a part of. This alone is a brilliant outcome.

The following report offers a summary of AYAC 2013 and the experiences and feedback of its attendees, whom we thank for their solid suggestions towards creating a bigger, better AYAC 2015.

AYAC held its first ever national youth affairs conference in 2011, following on from a national conference in 2007 that was the joint effort of various state and territory peaks, in the absence of AYAC as a funded national peak. AYAC 2013 grew immensely from the foundations of its predecessor in 2011, and we expect AYAC 2015 to be even better.

Our thanks,
AYAC gives a big thanks to all of those who sponsored AYAC 2013:

**Conference Principal Partner**

Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

**Community Partners**

[Logo of REACH OUT.com]

[Logo of National Eating Disorders Collaboration]

**Delegate Subsidy Sponsors**

Government of Western Australia
Department of Local Government and Communities

[yacwa.org.au]

Supported by
Government of South Australia
Office for Youth

**Change Making Daily Program Partner**

Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

**Other Supporters**

[Logo of ACYS]

AUSTRALIAN CLEARINGHOUSE FOR YOUTH STUDIES
# About AYAC 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Audience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# The Role of Young People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning AYAC 2013</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference Partners</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenters, Keynotes and Panelists</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYAC 2013 Program</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Participant Feedback - At a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Learnings: what was useful?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Learnings: what needs to be changed?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
About AYAC 2013

Rarely do all four corners of youth affairs in Australia have a chance to converge on a national stage to advance debates on young people and youth affairs, to connect, and share learnings from the most innovative, creative, and practical aspects of research, programs and projects. It is crucial for youth affairs in Australia to continue to build links, network, and share knowledge in order to advance the vibrance and identity of a nationally connected and supported sector, and to best support the needs of young people.

AYAC 2013 was guided by AYAC staff, Board and Policy Advisory Council, including a steering committee with representation from young people, research, youth work and the youth sector more broadly.

AYAC 2013 attracted a number of speakers of national and international standing, as well as workshops and presentations from young people, youth workers, advocates for young people and the sector, academics and many more, based on the issues canvassed in the AYAC Policy Platform. The workshops and presentations were then aligned to the broader conference themes, with applicants asked to nominate which of these themes best link to their proposed presentation. Workshops and presenters also nominated the target audience for their workshops and presentations, in an attempt to ensure an appropriate spread of workshop content options for every participant across all three days.

Location

Previous conferences had been held in 2007 and 2011, in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. As a national body, it was important that AYAC spread the event to other locations outside the south-east coast of Australia. As such, and with much exploration, Adelaide was nominated and selected for AYAC 2013.

Target Audience

Based on previous conference attendance and AYAC’s existing membership & stakeholder groups, six key audiences were identified as anticipated to attend the conference. It was acknowledged that these groups are diverse and have varied needs from AYAC generally, as well as from a conference specifically, and care would be required from the conference organisers to ensure that the conference was relevant to all groups wherever possible.

The six groups identified were:
1. Young people engaged in youth-led or youth-focused organisations
2. Young changemakers interested and active on social issues that AYAC works on
3. Youth service workers - including youth workers, youth development workers and other professionals that work to support young people
4. Youth service managers
5. Youth policy workers - including government representatives, youth-related peaks bodies, etc.
6. Youth researchers and academics

While not a comprehensive list of all the groups and individuals that attended the conference, these audiences formed the basis of program planning, and was provided to potential workshop presenters in order to make clear the intended audience(s) for sessions.
**Attendance**
234 delegates registered for the conference from metropolitan, regional and remote Australia. There were 109 conference dinner registrations.

**State and territory breakdown of Australian participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Target audience attendance**
*Please note: These figures are provided in order to give an indication of the conference audience only, as some attendees identified as having more than one characteristic (e.g. young person and youth worker), and there is a double-up in several responses to conference dinner ticket sales.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth sector worker</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth focussed organisations</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person (aged 12-26)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government representative</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth sector manager</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth researcher</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non government policy and peak</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth led organisations</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (consultant, lecturer, communications, principal, commissioner, volunteer)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program
The conference and its program was themed in accordance with AYAC’s strategic plan. The strategic plan itself is founded in a robust and national consultation on the most important and pressing issues for young people and the youth sector. This resulted in core themes in relation to youth participation, advocacy for change, driving research for better practice and supporting the sector.

Workshops and presentations where also structured in accordance with AYAC’s Policy Platform. That is, expressions of interest (EOIs) were asked to address an issue featured in AYAC’s Policy Platform, as well as addressing which core theme (youth participation, advocacy for change, driving research for better practice and supporting the sector) the workshop or presentation would advance.

AYAC 2013, therefore, featured 44 workshops, in addition to a lineup of 22 international and national keynotes and panelists.

The conference keynotes, panels and workshops covered a variety of topics, including employment and education, self-care, youth participation and engagement, rural and remote young Australians, Indigenous Australia, justice, mental health, creating change, sector development, youth work development, disability, and much more.

The Role of Young People
Young people were a significant part of every facet of the AYAC 2013 conference, contributing to the planning of AYAC 2013, taking part in the conference steering committee, being conference partners & presenters, having youth focussed sessions throughout the program, actively participating in the conference and contributing to the evaluation. This was a strength of the conference.
Planning AYAC 2013
AYAC 2013 was guided by a conference steering committee, formed by open invitation to all members of the AYAC Policy Advisory Council. The committee was representative of perspectives from young people, youth peaks, practitioners, youth organisations, and research. This group was crucial to the formation of the conference - providing advice and feedback on items such as the conference themes, costs for young people and the broader target audience, timing of the conference, targeting audiences, workshop timings and length, expressions of interest, sponsor opportunities and more.

Conference Partners
AYAC was keen to involve the expertise of young people in every aspect of the conference. This meant that when looking at partnerships and providers for various aspects of the conference, we looked to young people. AYAC worked two youth-led organisations to assist AYAC with crucial parts of the conference, as paid engagements. AYAC partnered with OurSay to provide an online platform in order to engage a broader audience in conference discussions, specifically, in the two panels on education and employment. AYAC also contracted the youth-led organisations Vibewire Youth Inc. to film and produce conference content. Both agreements with these youth-led organisations formed significant outlays of the conference budget.

Presenters, Keynotes and Panelists
AYAC proactively sought the expertise of young people and youth led representatives as presenters, keynotes and panelists when building the conference program. This resulted in the views, opinion and expertise of young people being represented across all three themes, across all three days, and in a number of workshops. This included, for example, a keynote on the first day, a panel dominated by young people on day 1, majority of keynote speakers in the morning session of day 2, and as part of a panel on day 3.

Young people were presenters of a variety of workshops throughout the program as well, as encouraged through the expression of interest process.

AYAC 2013 Program
Careful planning, scheduling and review by AYAC’s conference organisers and conference steering committee resulted in a program that was tailored to meet the needs of the conference’s younger target audience: young people engaged in youth-led or youth-focused organisations as well as young people interested and active on social issues that AYAC works on. In the expressions of interest to present at AYAC2013, applicants were asked to respond to a series of questions, including nominating which target audiences their presentation/workshop was aimed at, as well as how the contributions of young people were to add value to the session (e.g. what information was to be presented by young people directly, how were young people’s views incorporated and linked to the topics that were to be discussed, whether quotes from young research participants were to be used, etc.). EOIs were both self-nominated by various people and organisations (and selected given the strength of the application to meet the conference needs), as well as approached by AYAC to ensure we met the needs of target audiences.

Every EOI was reviewed by the range of perspectives on AYAC’s conference steering committee, to ensure their suitability to the conference target audiences.
The conference organisers, through various rounds of EOIs and scheduling processes, were thereby able to ensure that at each point in the conference, a workshop or presentation was scheduled that was targeted to all audiences, including young participants.

**Participants**
In a breakdown of the conference attendees (as above, under ‘target audience’) young people were a significant part of the part of the conference, and relative to the other targeted segments.

Understanding that conference costs, and travel can be a barrier to the attendance of young people, AYAC undertook a large proportion of work to solicit financial assistance for young participants. For example, a generous provision of funds from the South Australia Office for Youth, as well as from the Western Australia Department of Communities and YACWA, provided the opportunity for 15 young people to attend all conference events. AYAC approached several other agencies, both government and non government, in order to provide delegate sponsorship for young people, however AYAC was unable to secure the levels of subsidised places it had anticipated.

In building the fee structure for the event, AYAC significantly discounted registration fees for young people.

AYAC also financially supported the participation of 6 young people and youth-led representatives as keynotes and panelists.

Young peoples participation was further facilitated via social media, with AYAC providing free internet to all conference participants. Workshops and presentations were encouraged in the EOI process to ensure the involvement of young people in their delivery.

Future conferences will be focussing on developing strategies to further strengthen the attendance and participation of young people.

**Evaluation**
AYAC noted the participation of young people in the conference evaluation survey. Their feedback was largely positive and constructive, and they have provided information that will contribute to an even better conference in 2015. We look forward to engaging with more and more young people in developing and delivering future AYAC conferences.
Participant Feedback - At a Glance

How did you hear about AYAC 2013?

- AYAC Newsletter: 17%
- Promotional Email from AYAC: 33%
- AYAC Twitter: 31%
- AYAC Facebook: 8%
- Word of mouth: 4%
- Other: 3%

Main reasons for attending AYAC 2013?

- Program Content: 37%
- Networking: 29%
- Professional Growth and Development: 22%
- Speaker: 8%
- Other: 4%
How well did AYAC 2013 fulfil your expectations?

When asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 10 about how well AYAC 2013 fulfilled these expectations, the participants were divided, with 67% rating the fulfillment of their reasons for attendance between 7-10, and 33% with a rating of 6 and under.

Overall experience at AYAC 2013?

Rating their overall experience at AYAC 2013, again, 67% of participants rated their experience between 7-10 and 33% rated their experience as 6 and under.
Would you attend AYAC 2015?

90% of participants would attend an ‘AYAC 2015’ conference.

Rating of various aspects of the conference, on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).
Key Learnings: what was useful?

In asking AYAC 2013 conference participants what was useful, a few key themes emerged.

People overwhelmingly enjoyed the interactive aspect that AYAC 2013 offered. While the diversity of the program and attendees was challenging, this also clearly came through as an aspect that was of much use to attendees. Participants also commented on raised energy levels after attending.

On networking:

“Networking and inspiring plenary sessions. It's such a relief, as a relatively isolated worker, to get together with other youth workers from across the sector who, even though they have different areas of focus, are thoughtful, reflective, and looking at the big picture.”

“Networking and creating solidarity in the youth sector. Hearing about best practice and examples of great programs. Being uplifted and inspired by young people. Meeting and academic and professional celebrities.”

“Great networks and new connections. I enjoy it when everyone can get together to collaborate and been more informed about the sector at large, too often it is only focus on the individual organisation that you work in. “

“Meeting of other youth workers, hearing about other programs across Australia. Making direct connections with people who will be of support and provide knowledge in areas which may be of benefit in our own community. Hearing personal stories of young people who are now successful and paving the way for other young people.”

“Chance to network, learn about sector developments in other states and national context. “

On diversity:

“The variety presented in the conference streams: there was something for everyone most days, most sessions.”

“Lots of things - the range of different sessions, the mix of people from different work backgrounds and locations in Australia, the participatory aspects of sessions...”

“The diversity of skills and experience of participants, learning from each other, networking, so many absolute legends in the room, being able to have fun together as well as tackle the hard stuff, the dance party....”

“Speaking to people who had different ideas, different thinking.”
Key Learnings: what needs to be changed?
Conference participants were very diverse in their responses throughout. What was least enjoyable for one person, was rated highly by another.

However, a few themes did emerge, including the need for a much more participatory approach in both concurrent sessions and plenaries. Participants felt that presentations were merely showcasing their project or work, and that the plenaries involved too much talking without enough audience participation. Participants want to see a practical level focus on solutions, not just issues, and a greater focus on key learnings and collaboration with and for the audience.

Participants noted throughout there was some confusion around the key audiences for the conference. While some commented that they felt a lot of the content was geared towards young people, other people commented that there wasn’t enough content for young participants, not enough youth participation, and that the conference was too focussed on the youth sector.

Participants were frustrated when sessions clashed, particularly the AYAC run ‘Youth Work Definition Lockdown’, forcing them to choose between this and other concurrent sessions.

Participants also felt that long breaks for morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea were the least useful. Others commented that workshops were too short, which left little time for presenters to dig deep into topics. Some thought the days too long, and the conference could be run across 2 days not 3.

Others felt that workshop descriptions in the program weren’t accurate, or didn’t reflect what occurred in sessions.
Various sessions and plenaries were commented on specifically, but no overall themes relating to any one session or plenary emerged here.

Costs of the conference were also mentioned at different points. Although it was conceded that the conference was much cheaper than any corporate equivalent, the combined cost involved with travel, accommodation and registration was a large price for the sector, especially so for young people. This could be linked to the confusion around target audiences.