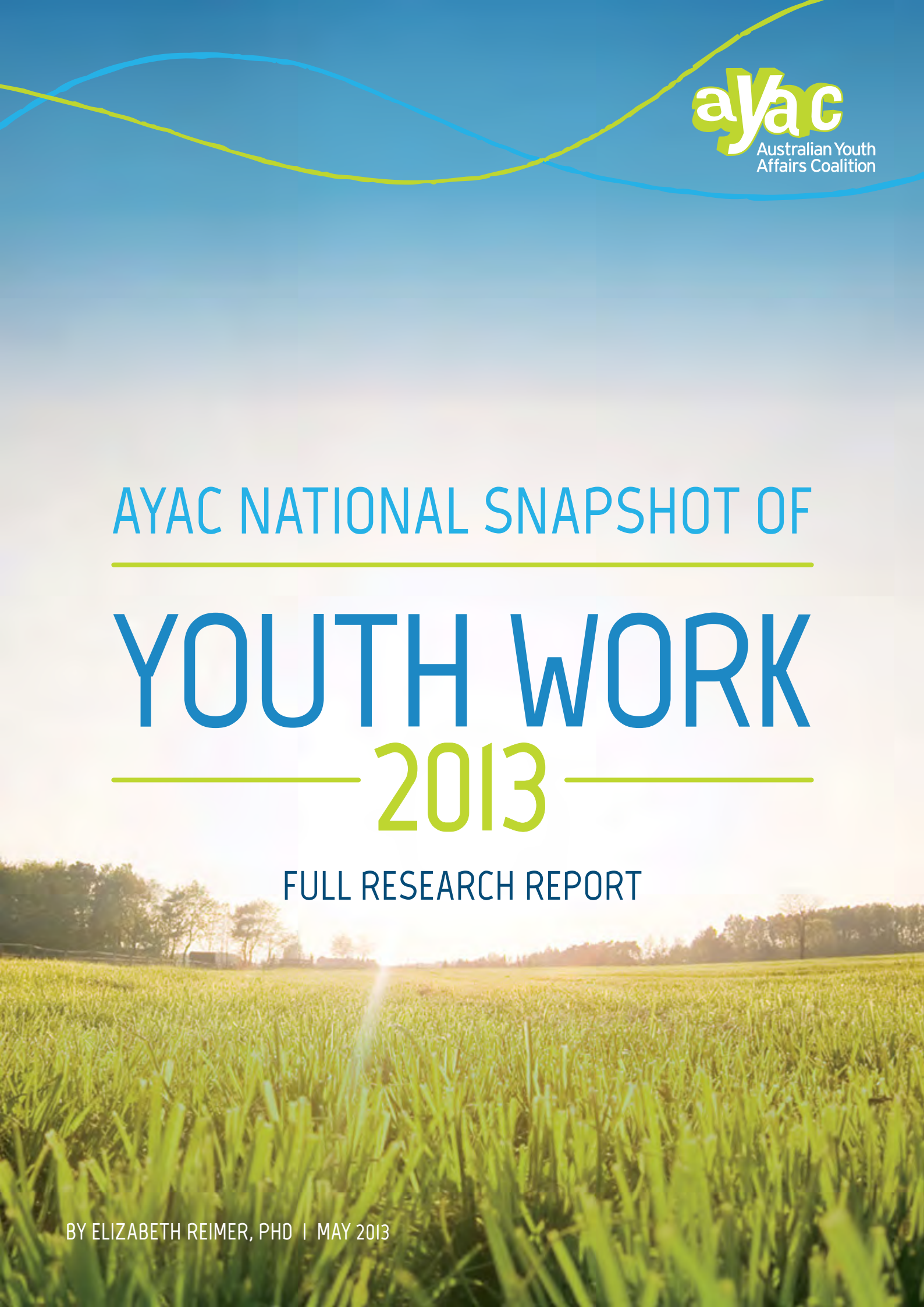
Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

AYAC NATIONAL SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH WORK 2013

FULL RESEARCH REPORT



BY ELIZABETH REIMER, PHD | MAY 2013

ABOUT AYAC

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is Australiaîs non-government youth affairs peak body, which represents young people aged 12-25 and the sector that supports them.

AYAC represents a diverse membership of State and Territory youth peak bodies, national youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who are all passionate about creating an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs ýeld in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs ýeld, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs ýeld

AYAC and its members are committed to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms which allow them to make decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AYAC wishes to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of country across Australia, and their continuing connection to their land, culture and community. It is on this land where youth work happens. We pay our respects to elders past, present and future.

AYAC celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and all they give to our society. We recognise that all our success as a nation is built upon a land with a rich history that spans many thousands of years.

Our shared history ýlls us with pride in what we have all achieved, sorrow over the many injustices that continue until the present day, and hope that together we can build a stronger and fairer future.

É The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, May 2013

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AYAC wishes to acknowledge our funding body, the Ofýce for Youth in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, our hardworking AYAC staff members Andrew Cummings, Reynato Reodica, Jacqui McKenzie, Kieran Adair and Roslyn Venables, our good natured friends at Boheem Design, AYACîs Policy Advisory Council members for their advice and guidance as well as our sister youth peaks in each state/territory for getting the word out to their networks.

Finally, AYAC applauds all the wonderful youth workers around Australia who took the time to undertake the survey. This oneîs for you.

Dr Reimer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Associate Professor Mark Hughes for data analysis support, Ms Samantha Kendal for proofreading and the team in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at Southern Cross University.

FOREWORD

For many years, the youth work sector across Australia has been speaking about the barriers they face in providing the best possible support to young Australians in need. But throughout this period, there has been no body to take their chorus of stories and experiences and paint a clear picture of what it is to be a youth worker é until now.

The AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 has been created to address this gap in our collective knowledge of youth work and build a solid evidence base to assist in driving forward positive changes for young Australians and the sector that supports them.

The AYAC Snapshot 2013 will provide a strong foundation for the work of AYAC work in the coming years as it represents the interests and needs of the youth work sector across Australia, signiýcantly contributing to the following goals in the AYAC Strategic Plan 2011 ï 2015:

Strategy Two: Support the Sector

The knowledge contained in the AYAC Snapshot 2013 will contribute to our goal of a youth support sector that is uniýed, well-resourced and professional. It contributes to debates on key industry issues including continuing education and professional development, pay and conditions, the recognition of youth work and promotes the importance of the unique role that youth workers and the youth sector play in the lives of young people. The AYAC Snapshot will allow AYAC to better advocate for and support the development of a national youth sector workforce development framework and lobby governments to ensure the sector is appropriately resourced and recognised.

Strategy Four: Drive Research for Better Practice

The AYAC Snapshot 2013 represents our major contribution to our goal of undertaking and supporting research and development activities that lead to better services for young Australians. The AYAC Snapshot is an important collaboration between AYAC and the research sector, undertaking insightful research about the sector that supports young people, guided by our membership of youth support services. The research places AYAC at the cutting edge of issues facing the youth sector across Australia and builds upon our reputation as experts on issues affecting young people and the youth sector.

This summary report is also available in pdf on the AYAC website, along with the AYAC National Snapshot - Full Research Report, which contains even more data and useful information. See http://www.ayac.org.au/projects/AYACsnapshot2013.html for further information and downloads. We hope you ýnd this information useful.

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CHAPTER 1 – *Introduction*

The AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 (AYAC Snapshot) is an Australia-wide proýle of the Youth Work sector. Believed to be the ýrst nationwide exploration of the Australian youth work workforce, the AYAC Snapshot presents a robust proýle of youth workers who are employed to work with young people aged 12-26 years across Australia, and who self-identify as members of the Youth Work sector.

As such, it is designed to contribute knowledge of the Australian youth sector workforce and assist the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) to progress its social policy mandates and develop the Youth Work sector across Australia. Beneýts to the respondents include providing AYAC with current and relevant information about the Youth Work sector across Australia, which AYAC will use to continue advocating for ongoing government and community support of the youth work profession.

The following report provides selected ýndings of this research, which AYAC will use to develop discussion and response with government, the community, private stakeholders, young people and the Youth Work sector across the country.

The chapters that follow present the ýndings of the research for each question asked in the survey, limiting the account of the data to an overview level. It does not include details pertaining to the speciýc regions less than at a State and Territory level across Australia.

Chapter 2 – Demographics, provides the basic demographic information gleaned from the data. This includes characteristics of youth workers throughout Australia such as age, gender, cultural background, and locations of work (in terms of urban, regional, rural/remote locations).

Chapter 3 – Employment Profile, addresses issues concerning employment options for youth workers across Australia, and includes how youth workers identify themselves by title, the types of organisations they work for, and the types of employment contracts workers are employed under. It also includes the kind of work conducted in a typical week and the kinds of issues workers might expect to address when working with young people.

Chapter 4 – Workforce Sustainability, relates to issues of sustainability of a youth work career, such as how the sector supports workers in terms of remuneration, professional development and supervision. It also includes respondentsû motivations for becoming youth workers, satisfaction regarding working in the sector and ideas about longevity in the Youth Work sector across Australia.

Chapter 5 – Improving Youth Work, provides the qualitative data on worker perceptions of the youth sector across Australia, and their suggestions for how it might be improved.

METHODOLOGY *and methods*

A cross-sectional survey design and self-report questionnaire[1] were utilised to gather descriptive data on youth workers working across the youth services sector throughout Australia, in order to answer the research brief and develop a current proýle of those employed in youth work across Australia.

The principal investigator, Dr Elizabeth Reimer from Southern Cross University (SCU), designed the research questions in consultation with AYAC representatives, in order to ensure that the terminology used in the survey matched that used in the sector, thus increasing credibility and maximising the value of the questions to AYACîs work. A draft survey was then piloted with AYAC Policy Advisory Council members and a redrafting process occurred to incorporate this feedback to develop the ýnal questionnaire (Appendix 1).

Questions covered topics such as:

- demographic information,
- locations of work,
- types of work undertaken,
- levels of education and ýelds of study,
- training & professional development activities undertaken,
- levels of experience,
- employment conditions,
- employment pathways,
- workforce sustainability,
- worker satisfaction,
- perceptions of youth work as a distinct profession,
- perceptions of the youth support sector more generally,
- professional ethics in the Youth Work sector,
- suggestions for ways to improve the Youth Work sector.

The anonymous survey of youth workers was available to undertake from 14 December 2012 until 7 February 2013 via the *Qualtrics* online survey platform, along with a pdf format version of the survey, which was available to be mailed at participantsî request or downloadable from the AYAC website (www.ayac.org.au). Where respondents were unable to complete the survey online, AYAC provided resources for respondents to email or mail a request for a hard copy version of the survey. Where requested, AYAC mailed printed copies of the survey and a stamped self-addressed envelope, with the principal investigator as the return address. The results for both of these options remained anonymous.

The researchers employed a combination of purposive, snowball and sequential sampling methods to reduce sampling errors. Participants self-selected into the survey and were eligible to participate if they were paid workers who were employed to provide support and/or development opportunities for young people aged 12 - 26 years, and who identify as youth workers. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques included targeting youth workers across Australia, who are a specialised population, via comprehensive dissemination through AYAC networks. This included the youth peak bodies in each state / territory, partner organisations, social media and member groups, and individuals in the youth affairs sector. AYAC also implemented a number of strategies to achieve maximum participation in the project. This included sending an initial email to 965 unique subscribers to the AYAC email list via the Campaign Monitor online platform on 14 December 2012. A follow up email was sent to 1,133 subscribers on 21 January 2013, and a ýnal email was sent to 1,111 subscribers on 4 February notifying them of the extension of the ýnal closing date for the survey until 7 February 2013. AYAC also advertised the survey in the AYAC January newsletter, of which there were 1,029 recipients. Furthermore, participants were also encouraged to forward the details about the survey throughout their professional networks. The number of youth workers accessed via this process is unknown.

The advertising material explained the rationale for the survey and directed people to the URL for the survey they were to complete. Along with introducing the survey, the emails alerted recipients to the prizes on offer for two successful

[1] C. Robson, Small-Scale Evaluation: Principles and Practice (London: Sage, 2004).

respondents, which was offered as incentive for people to complete the survey ï that is, to go into the draw to win one of two Apple iPadsÉ totalling $1,078 including GST. A further incentive was offered to rural, regional and remote youth workers, providing two entries into the Apple iPadÉ draw for all youth workers living outside of the capital cities.

A self-report questionnaire provided a way to gather information as efýciently as possible from as many youth workers working across Australia as possible. It also mitigated access and equity issues such as those related to costs (ýnancial and other) associated with participating, time limitations for respondents to engage in the research, and remoteness from the researcher. The research was granted ethics clearance through the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and responses were kept conýdentially in both a *Qualtrics* and *SPSS* database in a secure folder on the SCU network. Participants could withdraw without consequence at any stage of the process. Research participants were also offered a means to leave their contact details for the purposes of receiving information about the outcomes of the study. Contact details were collected separately from the survey responses, so that anonymity could be maintained

An information sheet and consent form provided at the beginning of the survey informed participants of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential beneýts of the research. Participants were to complete the survey individually ï a process that was expected to take approximately 30 minutes. The survey consisted of 40 questions relating to the data to be gathered and some other questions relating to entering and exiting the survey. However, no participant was required to complete all of the questions, as ñskip logicò and ñdisplay logicò was employed to skip/show certain questions depending on answers provided to previous questions.

Once the survey closed, the principal investigator downloaded the raw quantitative dataset from *Qualtrics* into *QSR NVivo* and *SPSS* data analysis software and prepared it for analysis. The principal investigator then analysed the qualitative data using *QSR NVivo* software and the quantitative data using *SPSS*. Associate Professor Mark Hughes from SCU assisted with checking the analysis.

RESULTS *and Limitations*

The total number of youth workers across Australia eligible to complete the survey is unknown. As previously noted, eligible workers were paid workers who were employed to provide support and/or development opportunities for young people aged 12 - 26 years, and who identify as youth workers.

1725 people began the survey and of these 1563 met the eligibility criteria. In addition to those eligible, 56 respondents reported they were volunteering in such positions in an unpaid capacity, 78 reported that this is the kind of work they have conducted previously and would like to again, and 28 reported having not undertaken such work but hoping in the future. Three-quarters of the eligible respondents completed more than half of the questions and their results were used for analysis (75.8%, n=1563).

The following reports only on the proýle of these 1185 respondents employed in youth work positions at the time of the survey and who substantially completed the questionnaire.

CHAPTER 2 – *Demographics*

This chapter reports on the research ýndings relating to the basic demographic information of youth workers across Australia. This includes age, gender, cultural background, experience and qualiýcations of youth workers, as well as languages spoken in their work with young people and locations of work categorised by State and Territory and a range of urban and rural contexts.

AGE

Youth workers were asked to identify their age and the responses were grouped into the categories outlined in Figure 1. As shown, at the time the survey was conducted, 16% of the respondents were 25 years or under (n=1039), where the two youngest respondents were 18 years old at the time of the survey. Almost one-quarter were aged 26-30 years (23.9%, n=1039). Of the 54 respondents over 55 years of age at the time of the survey, eighteen were 60 or more years old, where four respondents were 65-66 years old. Furthermore, at this time, the average age was 35 years, where the two most common ages of workers were 27 and 28 years (5.6% and 5.0% respectively, n=1039).

GENDER

Youth workers were asked whether they were Female, Male, or preferred not to say. Figure 2 shows that just over two-thirds of respondents were Female (67.9%) and approximately one-third were Male 32.1% (n=1135). Fifty respondents preferred not to provide their gender.

FIGURE 2: The gender proýle of surveyed youth workers across Australia (n=1135)

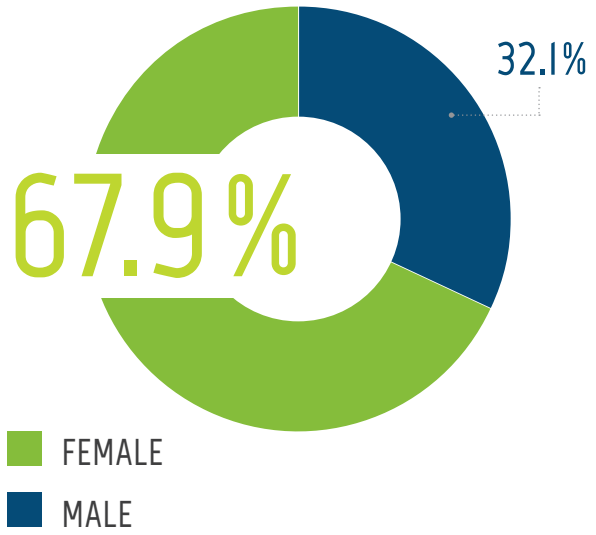
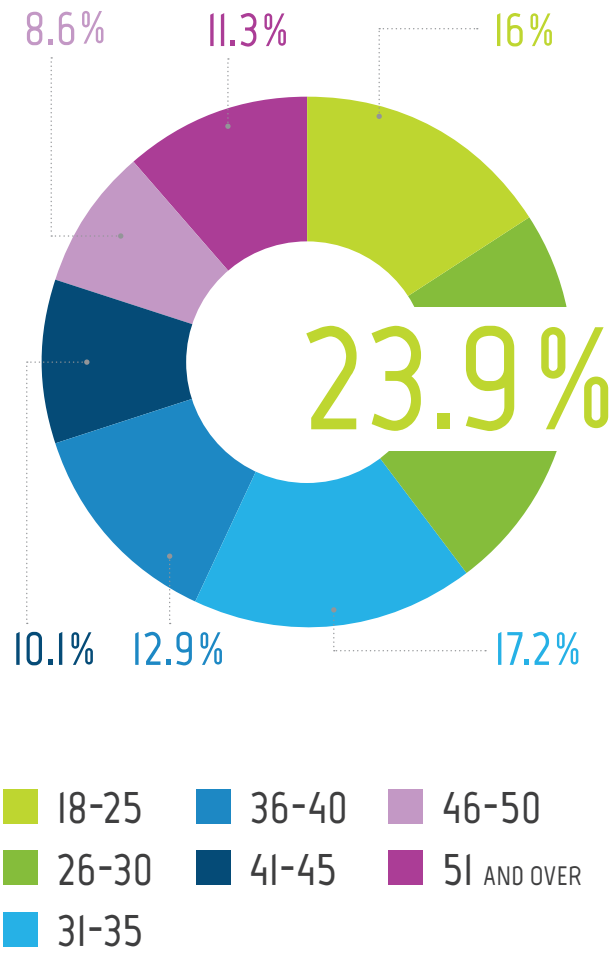


FIGURE 1: The age proýle of surveyed youth workers across Australia (n=1039)



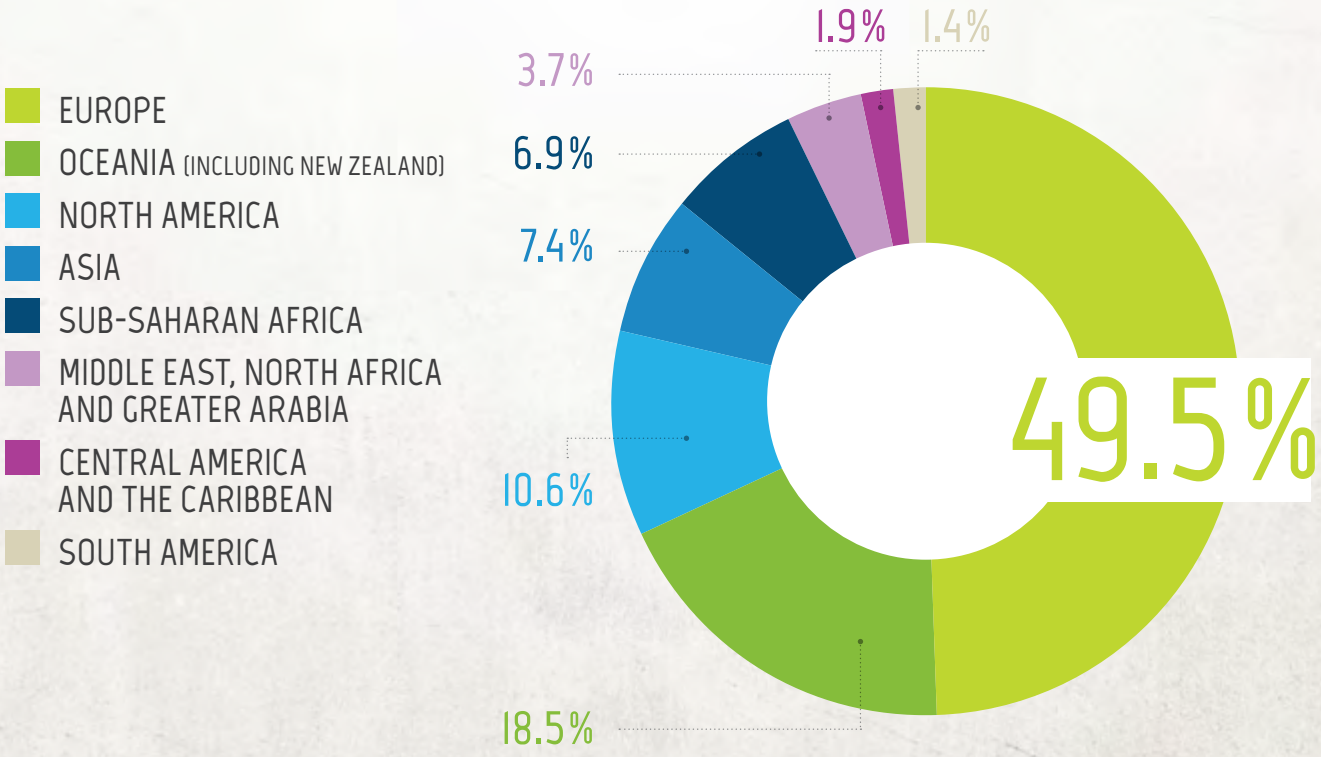
CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Youth workers were asked if they were from an Aboriginal background, Torres Strait Islander background, or both. Most respondents did not identify as coming from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island background, with only 3.4% (n=1146) identifying in this way. Of these respondents, 36 identiýed as coming from an Aboriginal background solely. One person reported that they came solely from a Torres Strait Island background and one other person identiýed that they came from both an Aboriginal and a Torres Strait Islander background.

Respondents were also asked to indicate if they were born in a region of the world outside of Australia and, if so, which region. Possible regions were Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Greater Arabia, Europe, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Oceania (including New Zealand). Just over 80% of respondents were born in Australia (80.9%, n=1146). As shown in Figure 3, of those who reported they were born outside Australia, the most common place of birth was Europe (49.5%, n=216). Most respondents reported only speaking English when speaking with young people at work (93.5%, n=1168), while only one person reported that they do not speak English at all at work. Just over 6% speak English and other languages when speaking with young people at work.

Of those respondents who indicated that they speak both English and languages other than English with young people while at work, 44 reported speaking one or more Australian Indigenous languages (3.7% of total respondents, n=1168), 18 an Arabic language, 5 a Chinese language, and 3 reported using sign languages. Other languages spoken with young people at work include Spanish, a variety of African languages, French, Japanese, Maori, Paciýc Islander languages and languages from a variety of other South East Asian and European countries. No respondents indicated speaking languages from North America, or Central America and the Caribbean.

FIGURE 3: The percentage distribution of places of birth of those surveyed youth workers born outside of Australia (n=216)



WORK LOCATIONS

As represented in Figure 4, the greatest number of respondents worked in New South Wales and Victoria (29.1% and 26.0% respectively, n=1180), where the least number worked the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Australian Capital Territory (4.0%, 4.0% and 2.8% respectively, n=1180).

Respondents were asked to select the options within a table that best described where they focus their work. They could select ñcapital cityò, ñmajor metropolitan cityò, ñregional city, town and/or areaò, ñrural town and/or areaò, and ñremote or very remote town and/or areaò as they deýned these terms. Since they were able to select as many options as suited their situation, some respondents reported working in more than one geographical location, including across more than one State or Territory. Hence, the numbers in Table 1, cannot be totalled across rows or columns.

As shown in Table 1, youth workers were employed to work with young people across a variety of population area types. This includes highly urbanised capital and metropolitan cities, more sparsely population regional and rural areas, and remote and very remote towns across all States and Territories. Very few respondents focused their work across all of Australia, including across all States and Territories and all urban and rural locations (less than 1% for all population areas, n=1185). At the other end of the spectrum, the highest percentage of respondents worked in major metropolitan cities throughout Victoria and in regional NSW (both 11.5%, n=1185).

Within the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia most respondents worked in the capital city (2.4%, 4.0% and 7.8% respectively, n=1185). Within Queensland and Victoria, most respondents worked in major metropolitan cities (4.7% and 11.5% respectively, n=1185), while in New South Wales and Tasmania, most respondents worked in regional cities, towns and/or areas (11.5% and 1.8% respectively, n=1185). It was only in the Northern Territory that most respondents worked in remote or very remote towns and/or areas (2.2%, n=1185).

FIGURE 4: The percentage distribution of surveyed youth workers according to States and Territories (n=1180). (n.b. rounded to the nearest percentage)

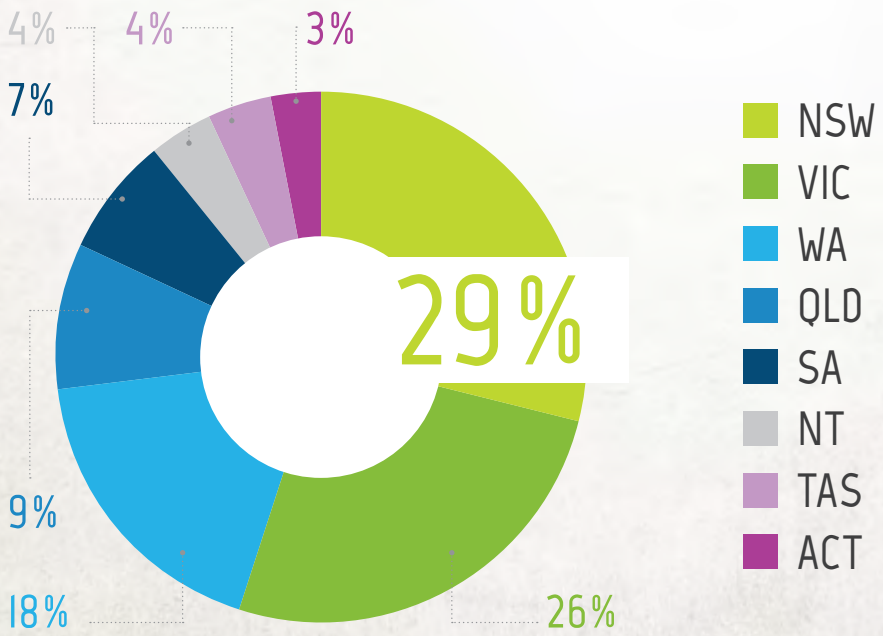


TABLE 1: The distribution of work locations of surveyed youth workers across Australia, including States and Territories according to region (n=1185)

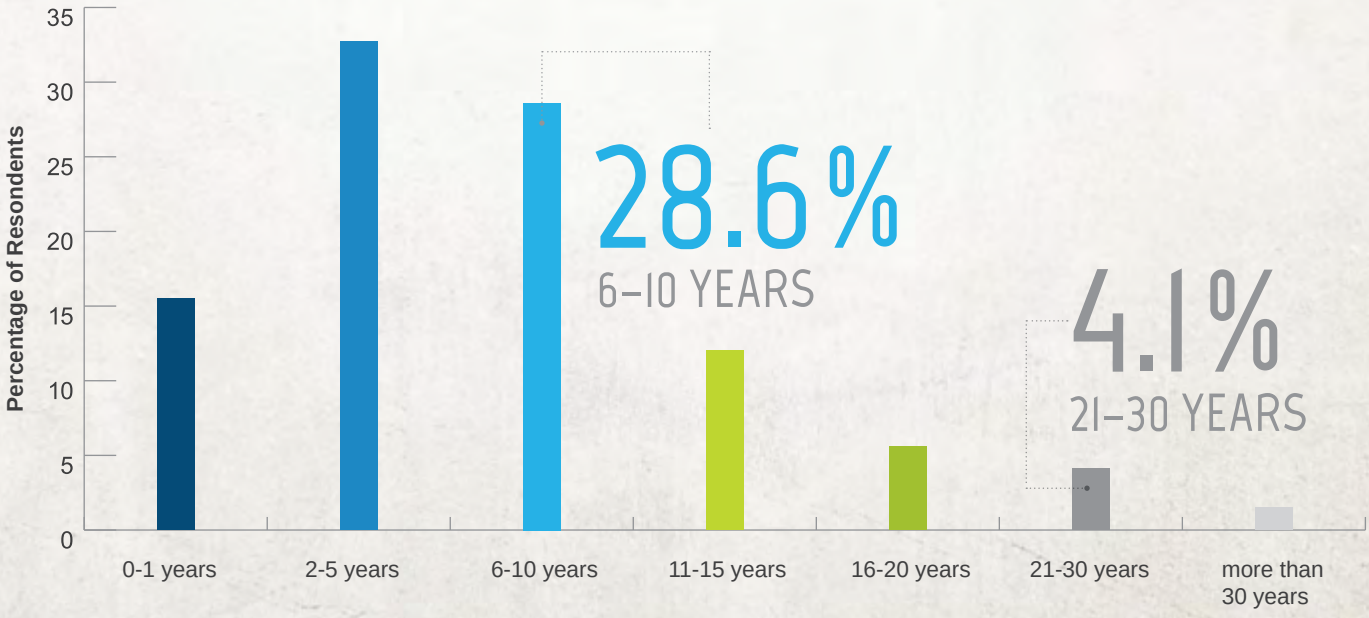
	ACROSS ALL OF AUSTRALIA n (%)	AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY n (%)	NEW SOUTH WALES n (%)	NORTHERN TERRITORY n (%)	QUEENSLAND n (%)	SOUTH AUSTRALIA n (%)	TASMANIA n (%)	VICTORIA n (%)	WESTERN AUSTRALIA n (%)
CAPITAL CITY	8 (0.7)	29 (2.4)	85 (7.2)	18 (1.5)	25 (2.1)	47 (4.0)	17 (1.4)	104 (8.8)	92 (7.8)
MAJOR METROPOLITAN CITY	7 (0.6)	8 (0.7)	108 (9.1)	7 (0.6)	56 (4.7)	28 (2.4)	9 (0.8)	136 (11.5)	87 (7.3)
REGIONAL CITY, TOWN AND/OR AREA	7 (0.6)	7 (0.6)	136 (11.5)	17 (1.4)	42 (3.5)	24 (2.0)	21 (1.8)	98 (8.3)	65 (5.5)
RURAL TOWN AND OR AREA	5 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	101 (8.5)	14 (1.2)	14 (1.2)	19 (1.6)	12 (1.0)	62 (5.2)	37 (3.7)
REMOTE OR VERY REMOTE TOWN AND/OR AREA	6 (0.5)	1 (0.1)	27 (2.3)	26 (2.2)	4 (0.3)	11 (0.9)	9 (0.8)	21 (1.8)	26 (2.2)

EXPERIENCE

Regarding experience, respondents were asked to report the number of years they have worked in youth work positions. Figure 5 shows that just under two-thirds of respondents have worked between 2 and 10 years in youth work (61.3%, n=1185).

Furthermore, almost half the respondents had ýve or fewer years of experience, with a third of these having less than 2 years experience in youth work.

FIGURE 5: The percentage distribution of the number of years surveyed youth workers have worked in youth work (n=1185)



Almost 85% of respondents reported having been employed in other types of jobs prior to working in youth work, with 15.3% of all respondents answering that youth work was their ýrst job (n=1185). Furthermore, almost 23% of respondents had worked in other types of social and human services jobs previously. Apart from these, the most common occupations youth workers had previously undertaken included retail and hospitality jobs, and completing qualiýcations as students (30.5% and 28.3% of respondents respectively). Furthermore, it is clear that the Youth Work sector employs people with quite an eclectic range of previous employment experience. This includes small numbers of workers having worked in creative arts (2.6%), police and/or defence (2.3%), outdoor sports and recreational work (1.1%), business (1.1%), law (0.8%) and a mix of other jobs including banking and accountancy, communications/journalism, government positions, human resources, public relations, information technology, research, security, transport and tourism.

QUALIFICATIONS

Most respondents had completed post-secondary school qualiýcations (94.6%, n=1176). Of the respondents, 9.8% had completed a TAFE Certiýcate I or II, 40.1% a TAFE Certiýcate III or IV, 40.4% a Diploma, 7.6% an Advanced Diploma, 48.2% a university Bachelor degree (with or without Honours), and 17.1% a post graduate university degree (n=1176, where values total more than 100% due to some studying more than one qualiýcation) (Figure 6).

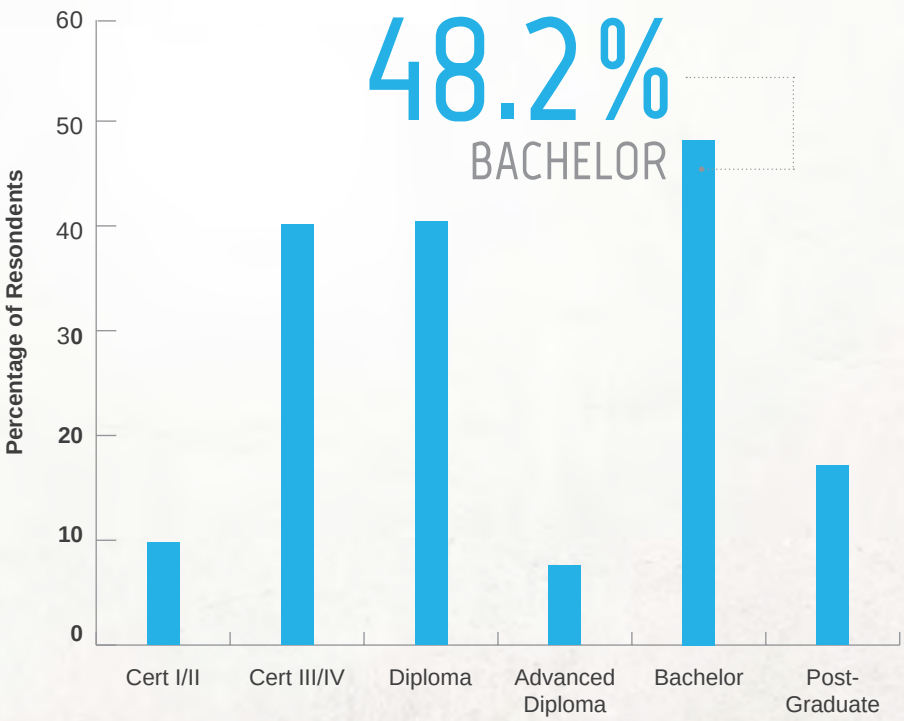
Over one-third of respondents had specialist youth work qualiýcations (39.2%, n=1176), ranging from Certiýcate III/IV to post-Graduate qualiýcations in youth work. As shown in Figure 7, of those respondents with specialist youth work qualiýcations, one-quarter had completed a youth work speciýc qualiýcation at university (n=461).

In addition, 44.6% of respondents said their qualiýcations related to the human sciences more broadly; such as social work, social welfare, community development, social science and psychological sciences (n=1176). (See Figure 8 for the distribution of these qualiýcations). Furthermore, of those, 17.4% also had qualiýcations related to youth work (n=524).

One-third of respondents were studying, at the time of the survey, for a formal qualiýcation (33.9%, n=1154). Respondents were studying across a wide range of qualiýcations and disciplines. For example,

- 5.6% were studying a Certiýcate III or IV (including youth work = 1.3%, social science-related = 0.8% and psychological science-related = 0.2%)
- 7.3% were completing a Diploma or Advanced Diploma (youth work = 1.4%, social science-related = 1.7% and psychological science-related = 1.7%)
- 11.9% were completing a university Bachelor degree (with or without Honours) (youth work = 3.2%, social science-related = 4.8% and psychological science-related = 1.4%)

FIGURE 6: The percentage distribution of the post-secondary school qualiýcations of surveyed youth workers (n=1103)



- 8% were completing a post graduate university degree (youth work = 1.2%, social science-related = 2.2% and psychological science-related = 1.9%) (n=1185).

The respondents who were studying at the time of the survey rated on a ýve-point scale the extent to which a number of statements described why they are studying (see Table 2). Just over half agreed that they were motivated to study at the moment as doing so will help them gain a pay rise/promotion within the

TABLE 2: Rating of reasons why surveyed youth workers are currently studying

	I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)	I AGREE n (%)	I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)	I DISAGREE n (%)	I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)	TOTAL n =
I WOULD LIKE TO UPGRADE MY SKILLS / QUALIFICATIONS	278 (68.8)	113 (28.0)	6 (1.5)	6 (1.5)	1 (0.3)	404
I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN SKILLS SPECIFIC TO WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE	142 (37.1)	148 (38.6)	43 (11.2)	45 (11.7)	5 (1.3)	383
I WOULD LIKE TO JOIN A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION	74 (19.9)	90 (24.2)	106 (28.6)	74 (19.9)	27 (7.3)	371
DOING THIS WILL HELP ME GAIN A PAY RISE AND / OR PROMOTION WITHIN THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR	84 (22.5)	118 (31.6)	54 (14.5)	82 (22.0)	35 (9.4)	373
DOING THIS WILL HELP ME GAIN ANOTHER POSITION IN THE YOUTH WORK SECTOR	94 (25.0)	144 (38.3)	68 (18.1)	55 (14.6)	15 (4.0)	376
DOING THIS WILL HELP ME MOVE TO ANOTHER SECTOR	58 (15.7)	122 (33.0)	78 (21.1)	84 (22.7)	28 (7.5)	370
MY EMPLOYER WANTS ME TO DO IT	34 (9.2)	95 (25.7)	64 (17.3)	103 (27.8)	74 (20)	370

Youth Work sector (54.1%, n=373). It is noteworthy that while 44.2% agreed that they are studying because they would like to join a professional association, the remainder were fairly evenly split between disagreeing that this was their reason, or having no opinion about this being their reason (27.2% and 28.6% respectively, n=371).

Of the respondents who were not currently studying (see Table 3), over half of the respondents agreed that they would like to complete further study (54.8%, n=640). This interest in increasing formal qualiýcations is supported by the small number of respondents who thought studying was not worth the time and effort because any wage increase they may gain is not worth the effort (25.3%, n=648). With this in mind, two-thirds of the respondents reported that their workplace would support them to complete further study (where only 15.9% agreed with the statement, ñI would like to but am not supported to in my workplaceò, n=651). Rather than lack of workplace support, the majority of respondents answering these questions agreed that of the suggestions available, lack of time was the biggest barrier to study (74.0% agreed and 9.1% had no opinion, n=667), closely followed by limited ýnancial capacity to participate (68.2% agreed and 13.4% had no opinion, n=666). The other two choices related to accessing study opportunities were considered much less of an issue than lack of time and money. Approximately one-quarter of respondents agreed that ýnding appropriate youth work speciýc courses and courses near where they live were issues (25.2%, n=640 and 22.5%, n=636 respectively). Furthermore, more respondents selected the ñno opinionò option as their reason for not studying than they did for the time and money options. Finally, 28.8% agreed they were not currently studying because they have recently completed studies, so do not need to do any more just at the moment, but half (50.8%) felt that they disagreed that this was the case for them (n=653).

FIGURE 7: The percentage distribution of levels of specialist youth work qualiýcations amongst surveyed youth workers (n=461)

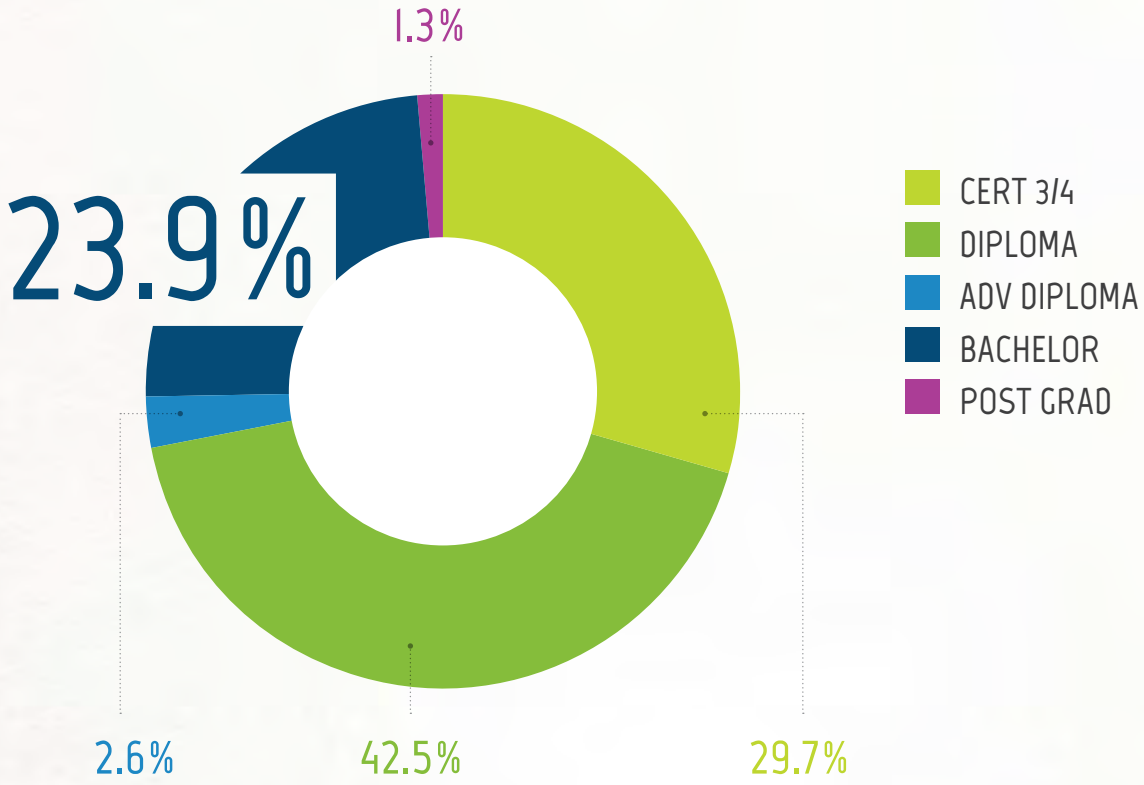


FIGURE 8: The percentage distribution of levels of specialist human services qualiýcations amongst surveyed youth workers, excluding specialist youth work qualiýcations (n=524)

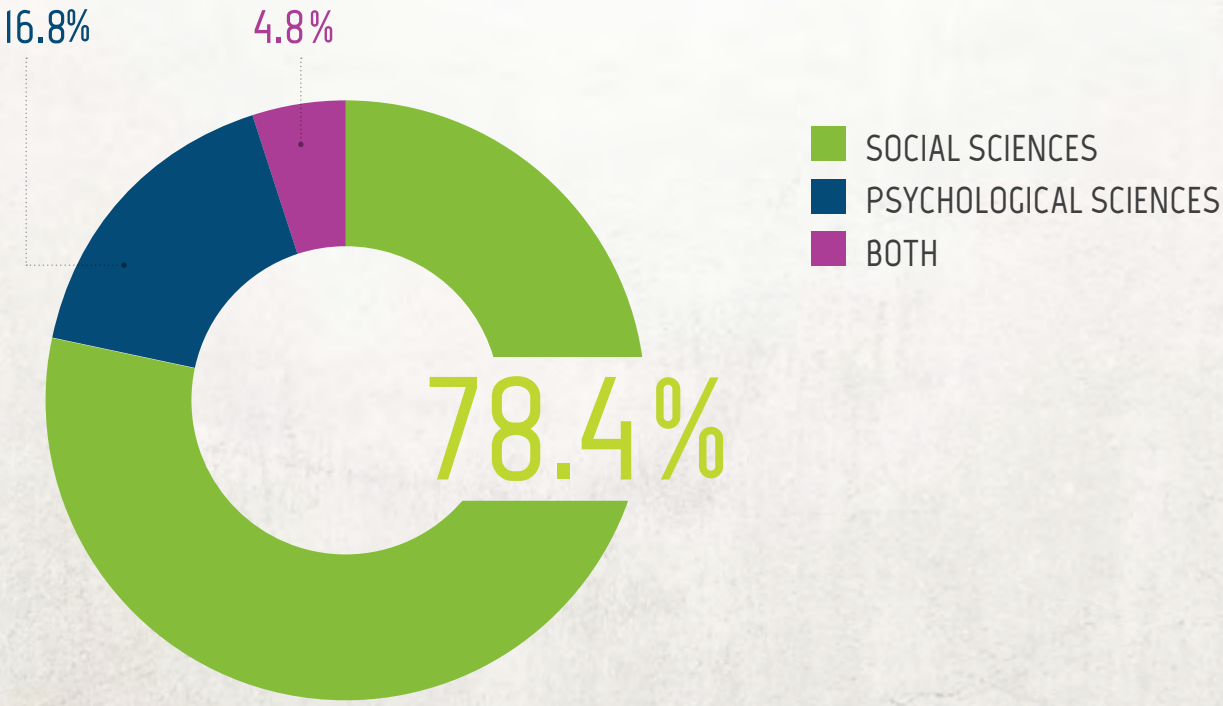


TABLE 3: Rating of reasons why surveyed youth workers are not currently studying

	I AGREE VERY MUCH n (%)	I AGREE n (%)	I HAVE NO OPINION n (%)	I DISAGREE n (%)	I DISAGREE VERY MUCH n (%)	TOTAL n =
I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY MORE BUT IT IS TOO EXPENSIVE	219 (32.9)	235 (35.3)	89 (13.4)	87 (13.1)	36 (5.4)	666
I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY MORE BUT DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH TIME	187 (28.0)	307 (46.0)	61 (9.1)	80 (12.0)	32 (4.8)	667
IT IS NOT WORTH THE TIME AND EFFORT TO STUDY MORE – ANY WAGE INCREASE I MIGHT GAIN IS NOT WORTH IT	42 (6.5)	122 (18.8)	133 (20.5)	212 (32.7)	139 (21.5)	648
I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS RELEVANT COURSES AND TRAINING PROVIDERS SPECIFIC TO YOUTH WORK	28 (4.4)	133 (20.8)	151 (23.6)	246 (38.4)	82 (12.8)	640
I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT AM NOT SUPPORTED TO IN MY WORKPLACE	21 (3.2)	83 (12.7)	120 (18.4)	275 (42.2)	152 (23.3)	651
I AM NOT INTERESTED IN DOING ANY MORE STUDY AT THE MOMENT	74 (11.2)	137 (20.1)	89 (13.4)	253 (38.2)	110 (16.6)	663
I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCESS RELEVANT COURSES AND TRAINING PROVIDERS WHERE I LIVE	46 (7.2)	97 (15.3)	119 (18.7)	257 (40.4)	117 (18.4)	636
I HAVE RECENTLY COMPLETED STUDIES SO DO NOT NEED TO DO ANY MORE JUST AT THE MOMENT	77 (11.8)	111 (17.0)	133 (20.4)	226 (34.6)	106 (16.2)	653

CHAPTER 3 – *Career Options*

This chapter reports on the type of employment options available to youth workers across Australia. This includes the type of labels / titles youth workers are known by, organisations they work for, and employment contracts they work under and have previously experienced. It also reports on the number of hours youth workers have worked when employed under various contracts, including what hours they were actually contracted to work, compared to both paid and unpaid overtime work conducted. Finally, the chapter includes information about the time youth workers spent on tasks and the kinds of issues young people sought assistance about.

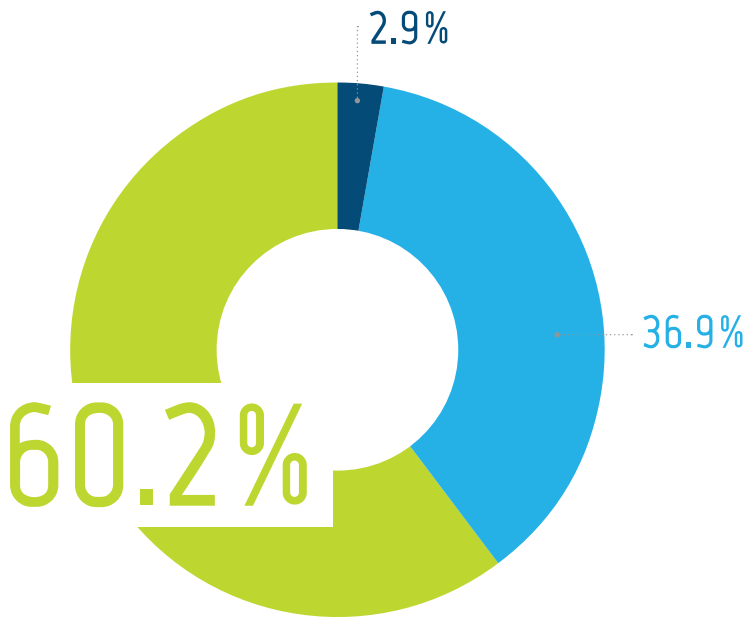
TITLE OF POSITION AND TYPE OF ORGANISATION

There were 574 different position titles given, ranging from very general titles such as ñyouth workerò, ñcase managerò and ñcase workerò to very speciýc, indicating the very eclectic way in which youth workers across Australia identify themselves.

At the time of the survey, most of the respondents were employed in one organisation in one youth work job (83.3%, n=1180), with just over 5% of respondents employed in more than one organisation but only engaged in 1 youth work job, and less than 1% self-employed (5.1% and 0.8% respectively). In addition, 11% of respondents were engaged in more than one youth work job (n=1180), with most of these employed in two youth work jobs (89.7%, n=68) and none indicating they were employed in more than three youth work jobs.

Figure 9 shows that approximately two-thirds of respondents worked for a non-government organisation (63.1%, n=1170), with most of these working for a non-proýt making non-government organisation (95.4%, n=738).

FIGURE 9: The percentage distribution of the types of organisations surveyed youth workers work for (n=1170)



TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

Regarding types of employment contracts youth workers experience, respondents were asked to think about their youth work career, and all the youth work jobs they have had over this career, despite how long each job was held.

They were asked to estimate how many of these positions were either casual, part time ýxed / short term contract, full time ýxed / short term contract, permanent part time, permanent full time, voluntary, and/or self-employed[2].

As shown in Figure 10, almost two-thirds of respondents had worked in permanent full time youth work positions (61.6%, n=1173) where just over one-third have worked in permanent part time youth work positions (37.3%, n=1178). Likewise, just over one-third have worked in casual jobs over their youth work career (38.3%, n=1179), where most of these (28.2%, n=1179) have held 1-2 casual positions. Approximately one-quarter of respondents have held part time and/or fulltime contract positions (24.7%, n=1174 and 23.2%, n=1185 respectively) and 29.4% have worked as volunteer youth workers (n=1162) where 4% have been self-employed in youth work positions (n=1184).

Furthermore, most respondents were employed in 1-2 youth work jobs under various employment contracts over their careers, where some, albeit a few, have experienced eleven or more jobs in youth work.

Respondents were also asked to report the number of hours worked during the week prior to completing the survey across various types of employment contracts. This data is shown in the tables below, where Table 4 refers to the ordinary paid hours worked, Table 5 refers to the paid overtime hours worked, and Table 6 refers to the unpaid overtime hours worked. Regarding the number of hours conducted across the various types of work, approximately 10% of respondents worked in casual youth work positions during the week prior to undertaking the survey (10.4%), where 5.6% of respondents completed 30 or more hours as casual employees (n=1148). Very few respondents conducted paid overtime casual work during the week before they completed the survey (0.7%, n=1181). However, of the 8 respondents who indicated that they did, three of them worked between 15 and 29 paid overtime hours. Also, very few respondents worked unpaid overtime in a casual position during the week before they completed the survey (3.1%, n=1173).

Almost 15% of respondents worked on a contract (either a ýxed term or short term), where 7.5% worked between 35 and 43 hours last week and 9 people (0.8%) worked more than 60 and up to 80 hours (n=1182). In addition, 3.0% of those working on a contract worked paid overtime hours (n=1184), where over 5% worked unpaid overtime while on a contract (5.2%, n=1185).

Almost one-quarter of respondents worked on a permanent part time basis during the week before they completed the survey (23.6%, n=1180). Furthermore, 11.5% of respondents worked 15-29 hours and 8.9% worked between 30 and 39 hours (n=1180) permanent part time. One per cent worked 40 or more hours permanent part time in the week prior to completing the survey, the greatest number of hours being 74 (n=1180). Furthermore, 5.3% received paid overtime while working permanent part time (n=1184), while 7% did not receive payment for the overtime work they completed, where most worked up to 7 hours unpaid overtime (6.1%), however 1 person worked 22 hours unpaid overtime (n=1183).

At 52%, just over half of the respondents worked on a permanent full time basis during the week before they completed the survey, however 2.5% of respondents worked less than 30 hours during the week prior to the survey (n=1178). Most of those working permanent full time worked 30-39 hours (78.0%), while 17.6% worked 40 hours (n=613). Fifteen per cent of the respondents working on a permanent full time basis completed paid overtime (n=1180) while just over ýfteen per cent of those employed on a permanent full time basis completed unpaid overtime (16.9%, n=1180). Of those permanent full time employees who worked unpaid overtime in the week prior to completing the survey, almost three-quarters worked between one and seven hours, just under one-quarter worked 8-14 hours without pay, while the three remaining worked 15 or more hours unpaid overtime (70.5%, 24%, 5.5% respectively, n=200).

Finally, 1.2% of respondents were in self-employed positions in youth work (n=1185). Furthermore, over one-third of respondents would like to work more paid hours in youth work than they currently do (37.6%, n=1096).

[2] Part time was deýned as working less than 35 hours per week and full time was deýned as working 35 hours or more per week.

FIGURE 10 The percentage distribution of the types of employment contracts surveyed youth workers experience

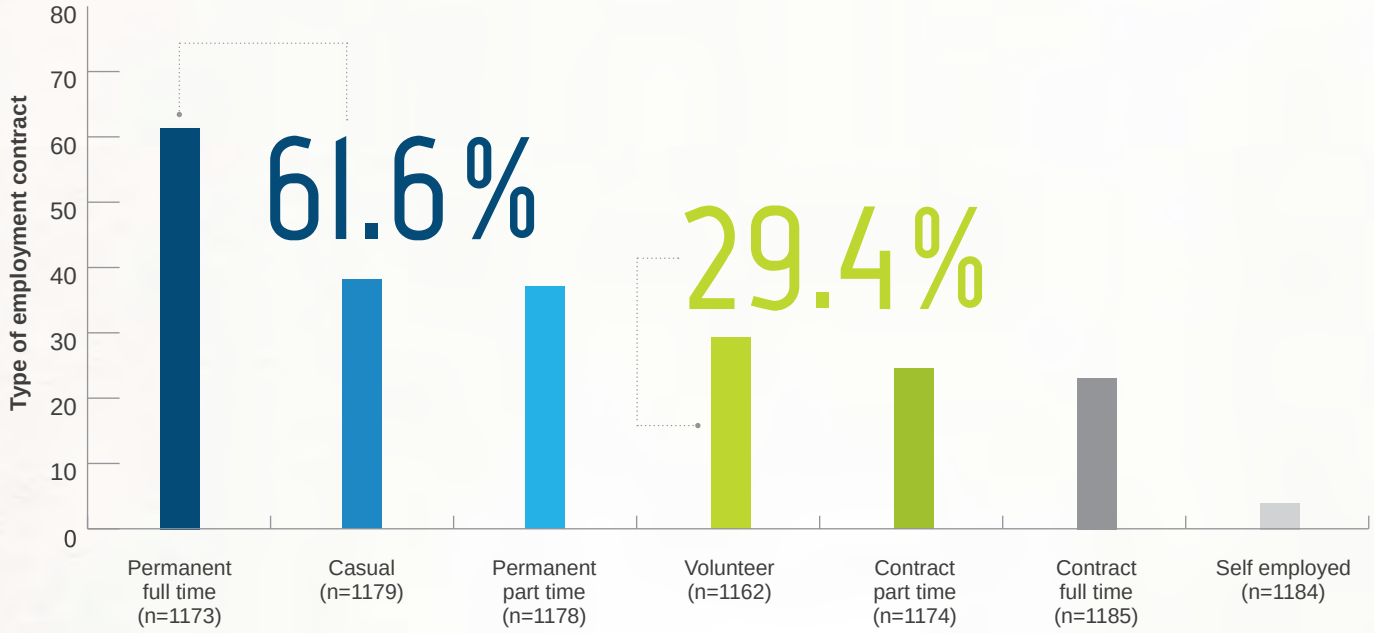


TABLE 4: The distribution of ordinary paid work hours completed by surveyed youth workers during the week prior to the survey in different types of employment situations (not including overtime)

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION	HOURS							
	0 n (%)	1-7 n (%)	8-14 n (%)	15-21 n (%)	22-29 n (%)	30-39 n (%)	40 OR MORE n (%)	TOTAL n =
EMPLOYED ON A CASUAL BASIS	1029 (89.6)	7 (0.6)	14 (1.2)	21 (1.8)	13 (1.1)	58 (5.1)	6 (0.5)	1148
EMPLOYED ON A CONTRACT (EITHER FIXED TERM OR SHORT TERM)	1009 (85.4)	1 (0.1)	9 (0.8)	22 (1.9)	19 (1.6)	99 (8.4)	23 (1.9)	1182
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT PART TIME BASIS	901 (76.4)	5 (0.4)	21 (1.8)	64 (5.4)	72 (6.1)	105 (8.9)	12 (1.0)	1180
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT FULL TIME BASIS	565 (48.0)	4 (0.3)	5 (0.4)	11 (0.9)	11 (0.9)	478 (40.6)	104 (8.8)	1178
VOLUNTEER	1156 (98.1)	17 (1.4)	2 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	1178
SELF EMPLOYED	1171 (98.8)	8 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	1185

TABLE 5: The distribution of paid overtime work hours completed by surveyed youth workers during the week prior to the survey in different types of employment situations (paid with either money and/or time)

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION	HOURS							
	0 n (%)	1-7 n (%)	8-14 n (%)	15-21 n (%)	22-29 n (%)	30-39 n (%)	40 OR MORE n (%)	TOTAL n =
EMPLOYED ON A CASUAL BASIS	1173 (99.3)	5 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.1)	2 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1181
EMPLOYED ON A CONTRACT (EITHER FIXED TERM OR SHORT TERM)	1149 (97.0)	27 (2.3)	6 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	0 (0.0)	1184
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT PART TIME BASIS	1121 (94.7)	51 (4.3)	7 (0.6)	2 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	2 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	1184
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT FULL TIME BASIS	1003 (85.0)	145 (12.3)	26 (2.1)	3 (0.3)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	1180
VOLUNTEER	1185 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1185
SELF EMPLOYED	1184 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1184

TABLE 6: The distribution of unpaid work hours completed by surveyed youth workers during the week prior to the survey in different types of employment situations

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION	1-7 n (%)	8-14 n (%)	15-21 n (%)	TOTAL n =
EMPLOYED ON A CASUAL BASIS	32 (2.7)	5 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	1173
EMPLOYED ON A CONTRACT (EITHER FIXED TERM OR SHORT TERM)	42 (3.5)	18 (1.5)	2 (0.2)	1185
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT PART TIME BASIS	72 (6.1)	7 (0.6)	3 (0.3)	1183
EMPLOYED ON A PERMANENT FULL TIME BASIS	141 (11.9)	48 (4.1)	8 (0.7)	1180
VOLUNTEER	35 (3.0)	8 (0.7)	3 (0.3)	1185
SELF EMPLOYED	2 (0.2)	2 (0.2)	2 (0.2)	1184

KINDS OF WORK CONDUCTED IN A TYPICAL WEEK

Respondents were asked to report on how many hours they conducted various types of activities in a typical week.

These tasks, as shown in Table 7, were working directly with young people, with other professionals focused on issues for young people, or on administrative tasks, research/policy tasks relating to young peopleûs issues or management tasks. Tasks unrelated to these, and listed as ñotherò, involved driving to activities or providing work-related transport, cleaning, planning activities/tasks, and sleep over shifts.

Most respondents reported that in a typical week they worked directly with young people for the vast majority of the time (95.5%, n=1174), which involved tasks such as providing a service to young people, attending services with young people, and running group work sessions. The most common number of hours of direct work was typically 15 to 21 hours per week (31.1%). A ýfth reported typically working directly with young people more than this (20.4%), however almost half worked less than 15 hours directly with young people (48.4%, n=1174, including those 53 respondents who did not work directly with young people at all).

Again, most respondents reported that in a typical week they worked with other professionals focused on issues for young people (88.5%). Such tasks included networking, working on partnerships / collaborations, and sharing resources with other workers / organisations. By far most worked 1 ï 7 hours per week (63.2%) and only 1 per cent worked more than 21 hours with other professionals (1.2%, n=1170).

Almost all respondents reported conducting some administration tasks, such as ýlling out forms / applying for grants, attending meetings, in a typical week (94.5%). Most reported conducting between 1 hour and 14 hours administration, where 44.8% reported they completed 1-7 hours and 36.1% reported they completed 8-14 hours in a typical week. Only 1.9% reported they completed more than 21 hours administration in a typical week. (n=1173).

Research and policy tasks relating to young people issues included conducting local research into youth issues, and advocating for changes to government policies affecting young people. Where 42.9% reported they did not spend any time on such activities in a typical week, just over one half of respondents (51.0%) reported they typically spend between 1 and 7 hours on such activities each week (n=1164).

Management tasks, such as supervising staff, and conducting both professional development activities and sector development, were reported to be undertaken by 58.1% of respondents in a typical week. Most of those reporting such activities estimated spending 1-7 hours per week on them (42.4%, n=1166).

TABLE 7: The distribution of hours spent by surveyed youth workers undertaking roles/tasks completed during a typical week

ROLES/TASKS	HOURS							
	0 n (%)	1-7 n (%)	8-14 n (%)	15-21 n (%)	22-28 n (%)	29-35 n (%)	36+ n (%)	TOTAL n =
WORKING DIRECTLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE	53 (4.5)	229 (19.5)	287 (24.4)	365 (31.1)	154 (13.1)	60 (5.1)	26 (2.2)	1174
WORKING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS FOCUSED ON ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	135 (11.5)	739 (63.2)	219 (18.7)	63 (5.4)	4 (0.3)	5 (0.4)	5 (0.4)	1170
ADMINISTRATION TASKS	65 (5.5)	526 (44.8)	424 (36.1)	135 (11.5)	14 (1.2)	5 (0.4)	4 (0.3)	1173
RESEARCH/POLICY TASKS RELATING TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES	499 (42.9)	594 (51.0)	53 (4.6)	12 (1.0)	4 (0.3)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)	1164
MANAGEMENT TASKS	488 (41.9)	494 (42.4)	117 (10.0)	50 (4.3)	9 (0.8)	2 (0.2)	6 (0.5)	1166

KINDS OF ISSUES YOUNG PEOPLE SEEK ASSISTANCE ABOUT

Respondents were asked to use a ýve-point rating to estimate how often young people seek assistance about a 25 different wellbeing issues. The options, which are shown in Figure 11, were listed as issues presenting in clients:

- *regularly* (where young people ask about the issue at least every week),
- *often* (meaning at least every month),
- *sometimes* (only a couple of times every 6 months),
- *not often*, for example maybe a couple of times per year, and
- *never* as far as the respondent could remember.

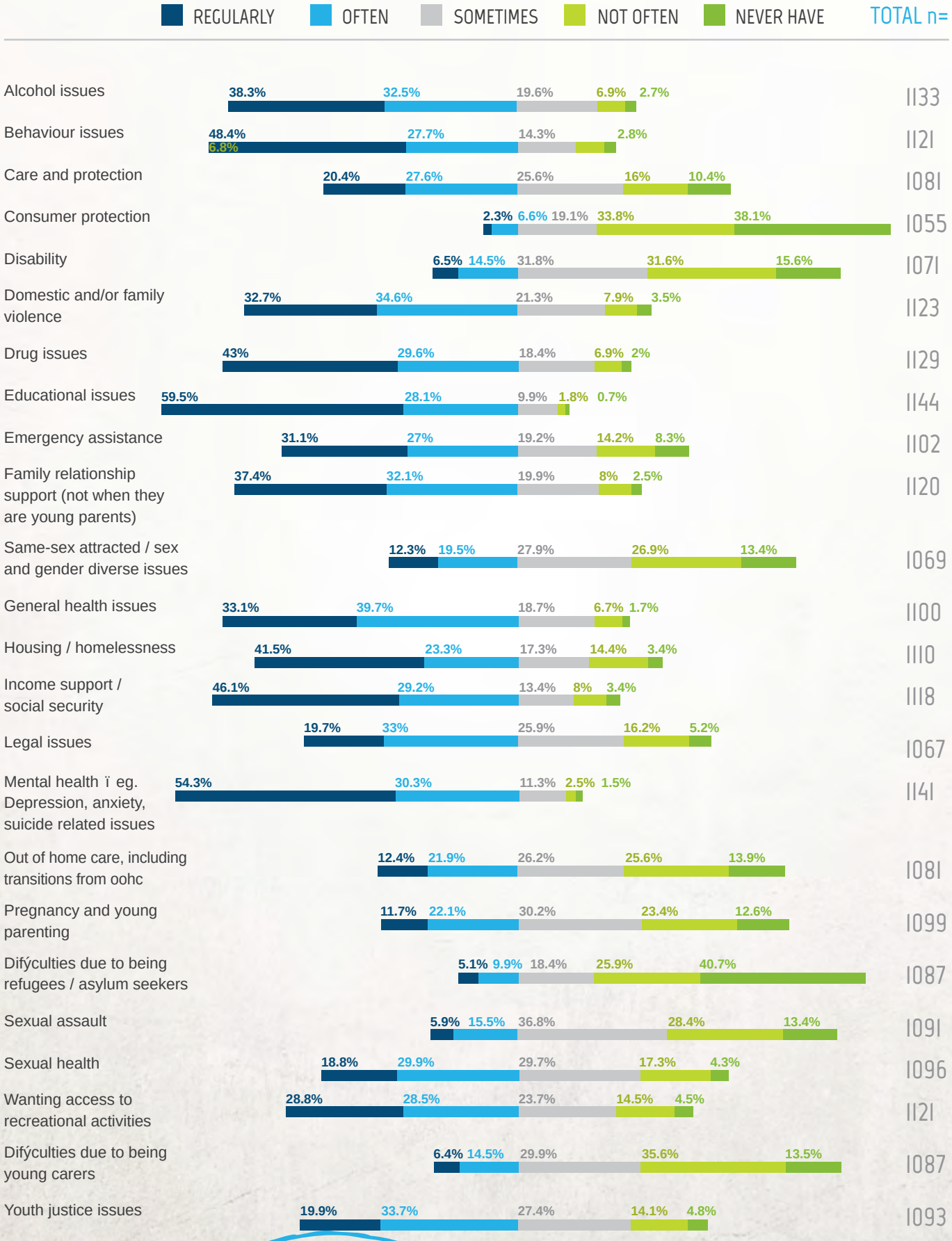
The ten most commonly reported issues that young people regularly sought youth worker assistance for were:

1. Education (59.5%, n=1144)
2. Mental health (54.3%, n=1141)
3. Behaviour management (48.4%, n=1121)
4. Income support/social security (46.1%, n=1118)
5. Drugs (43%, n=1129)
6. Housing/homelessness (41.5%, n=1110)
7. Alcohol (38.3%, n=1133)
8. Family relationships (but not including when they are parents themselves) (37.4%, n=1120)
9. Domestic and/or family violence (32.7%, n=1123)
10. General health (33.1%, n=1100)

The ten issues reported by respondents most as being raised by young people least often, that is, raised by young people only maybe a couple of times per year were:

1. Difýculties due to being young carers (35.6%, n=1087)
2. Consumer protection (33.8%, n=1055)
3. Gambling issues (33.0%, n=1056)
4. Disability (31.6%, n=1071)
5. Sexual assault (28.4%, n=1091)
6. Same-sex attracted / sex and gender diverse issues (26.9%, n=1069)
7. Difýculties due to being refugees / asylum seekers (25.9%, n=1087)
8. Out of home care, including transitions from out of home care (25.6%, n=1081)
9. Pregnancy and young parenting (23.4%, n=1099)
10. Sexual health (17.3%, n=1096)

FIGURE II: Rating by surveyed youth workers of the kind of issues young people seek assistance about



CHAPTER 4 – *Workforce Sustainability*

This chapter reports on the ýndings of the study relating to remuneration, ongoing professional development, support and supervision, motivation, satisfaction, and perceived career lifespan.

REMUNERATION

Respondents selected their gross annual wage from a number of categories. As show in Figure 13, while youth workers were represented across all wage categories, most youth workers earned $52,000 - $77,999 annual gross wage (41%, n=1171).

Over half the respondents reported earning less than $51,999 gross income per year (52.9%, n=1171) (see Figure 12). Just over two-thirds of respondents earned $41,600-$77,999 per year gross income (68.1%, n=1171). Only 6.1% earned over $78,000 per year (annual gross wage).

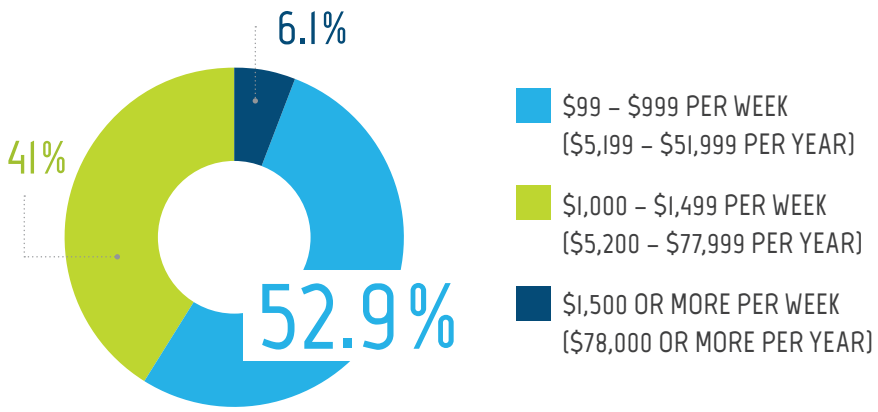


FIGURE 12: The percentage distribution of annual wages of surveyed youth workers by below average, average and above average annual wage brackets (n=1171)[3]

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Three-quarters of respondents had attended work-related professional development training in the past 12 months (75.5%, n=1185). Figure 14 shows the percentage distribution of 895 respondents who attended professional development up to ýfteen times. Please note that Figure 14 does not show responses from six respondents whose attendance numbers were higher. Two people reported attendance as 20 times in the past 12 months, while the remaining respondents attended professional development on 17, 22, 25 and 40 occasions respectively.

Professional development training was fully funded by the respondentís employer on most occasions (71.4%), while it was reported as partly funded by the respondentís employer 12% of the time, and self-funded 7.1% of the time (n=1101). The other most common ways such training was funded were that it was free or funded by another organisation (written in the ñotherò column by 39 and 21 of respondents respectively).

The most common reasons for not attending professional development training included not having enough time to attend or not hearing about any courses (both 16.4%) and having no management support to attend (13.7%). These ýgures are based on respondents who indicated they were not attending professional development training (n=146). Other common reasons for non-attendance at such training included being either not employed in the current job, or newly employed in the job, engaging in other forms of youth work education, and being away from work at the time.

[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, Nov 2012 ABS cat. no. 6302.0, ABS, Canberra.

FIGURE 13: The percentage distribution of annual wages of surveyed youth workers (n=1171)

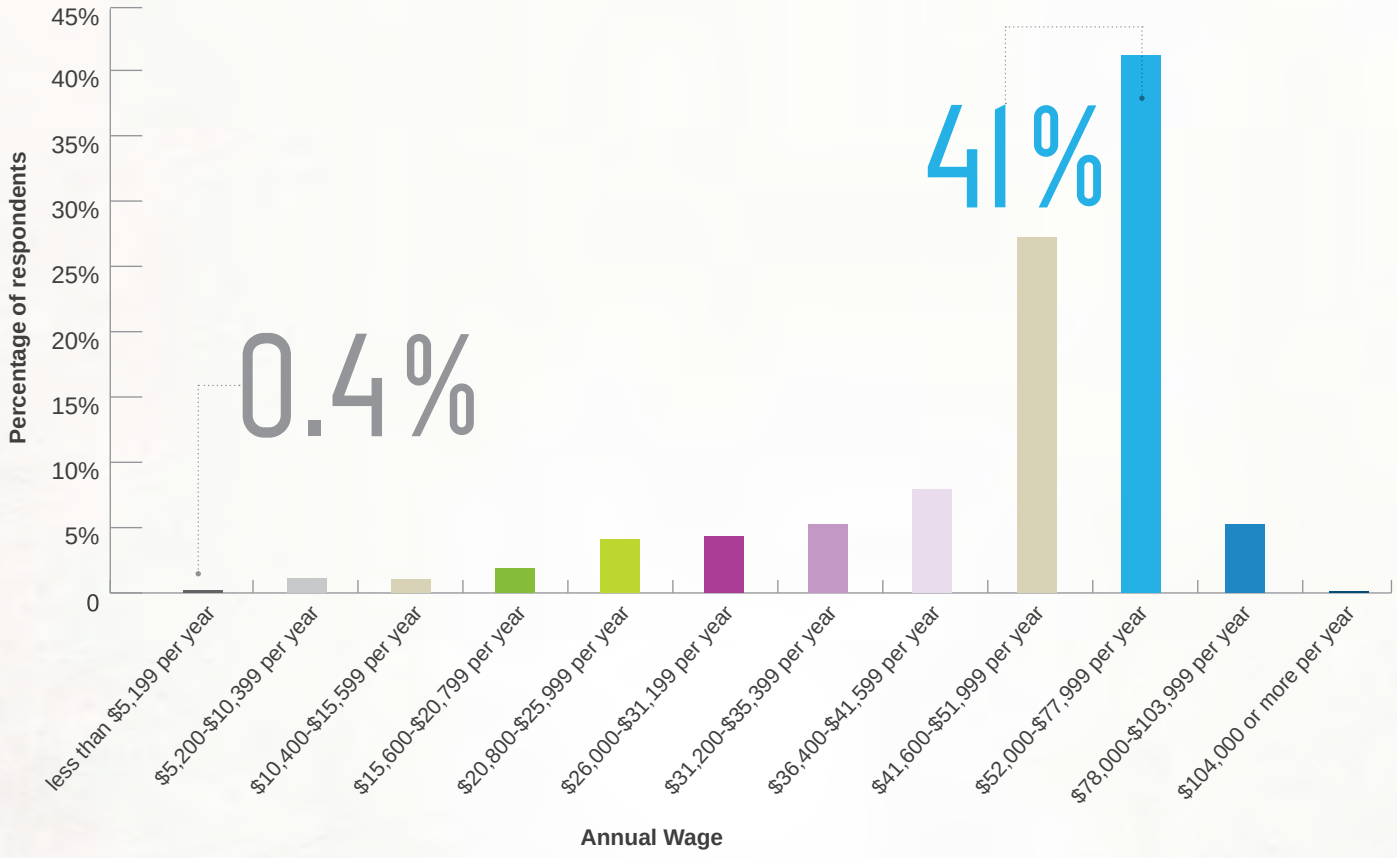
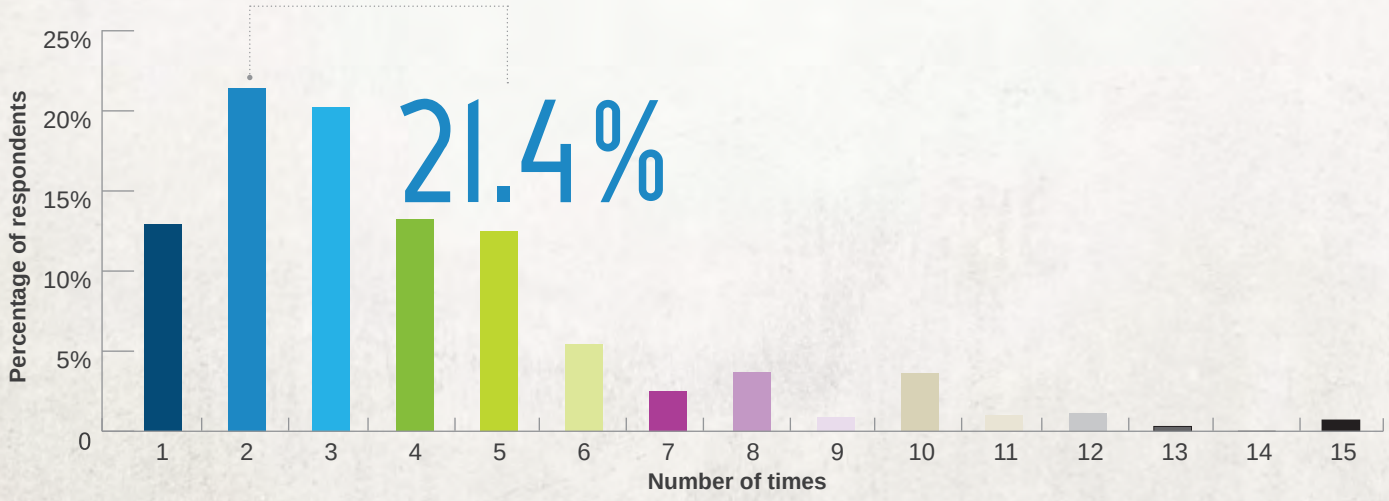


FIGURE 14: The percentage distribution of attendance at professional development training in the past 12 months by surveyed youth workers (n=895)



PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT/SUPERVISION

As shown in Figure 15, while 8.4% of respondents did not receive supervision on any occasion in the past 12 months, most received supervision at least once every three months (81.7%, n=1163). The most common supervision model was monthly (30%, n=1163).

Furthermore, of the respondents who received supervision at least once a week, ýve reported receiving daily supervision. In addition, three reported supervision being offered as needed, where one worker commented that this occurs over the phone as it cannot occur in person due to remoteness, and two respondents noted that they had to ýnd their own supervision.

MOTIVATION AND SATISFACTION WITH YOUTH WORK

Respondents could choose one of a number of reasons why they became a youth worker. The options were because:

- they wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people
- they were motivated by a personal experience
- the work matched their skills and knowledge
- the work matched their values
- they wanted to work at a particular organisation
- it appealed to them as a challenging and rewarding career option
- there were no other employment options where they were living at the time
- they just fell into it
- they don't know why

Most respondents provided a clear response as to why they became youth workers, where only one answered they did not know why (n=1183). As shown in Figure 16, most respondents reported choosing youth work because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of young people (42.3%, n=1183). In addition, 2.7% respondents selected ñotherò and provided reasons such as wanting to work with a particular target group of people, because it provided an opportunity to work in their own community and because they were motivated by someone they knew or respected encouraging them (n=1183).

As shown in Table 8, the respondents overwhelmingly reported being satisýed with their main youth work job. Key indicators for satisfaction seemed to relate to a sense of pride in the work they do (96.2%, n=1158), the varied and interesting nature of this work (93.2%, n=1159), and enjoying working with co-workers (93.1%, n=1158). Other factors that respondents seemed to equate with positive satisfaction related to a supportive work environment. In line with this, 85.5% of respondents agreed that their boss was supportive (n=1152), and just over three-quarters agreed that their working conditions were satisfactory, and that they have the right balance between choosing what work they can do and what their boss wants them to do (76.2%, n=1157 and 75.8%, n=1158 respectively). In addition, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that they feel supported and respected by their local community (64.4%, n=1154) and just over one half agreed that access to training and development speciýc to youth work issues is satisfactory (56.9%, n=1156).

Furthermore, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that their work is stressful (65.9%, n=1156). This might be related to having too much to do, a statement which just over half of respondents agreed with and just over one-quarter disagreed with (53% and 27.3% respectively, n=1157). In addition, just over half of respondents felt there were not enough workers employed at the workplace to deal with the workload (51.9%), however just under half disagreed, perceiving there were enough workers (40.2%, n=1155).

Finally, just under half of the respondents agreed they were satisýed with their career options in youth work (48.7%) however, over one-third are not (35.6%, n=1156). Around one-third were satisýed with their pay (36.6%), where 55.4% reported feeling unsatisýed about their pay (n=1160).

FIGURE 15: The distribution of numbers of workers attending supervision in the past 12 months by surveyed youth workers (n=1163)

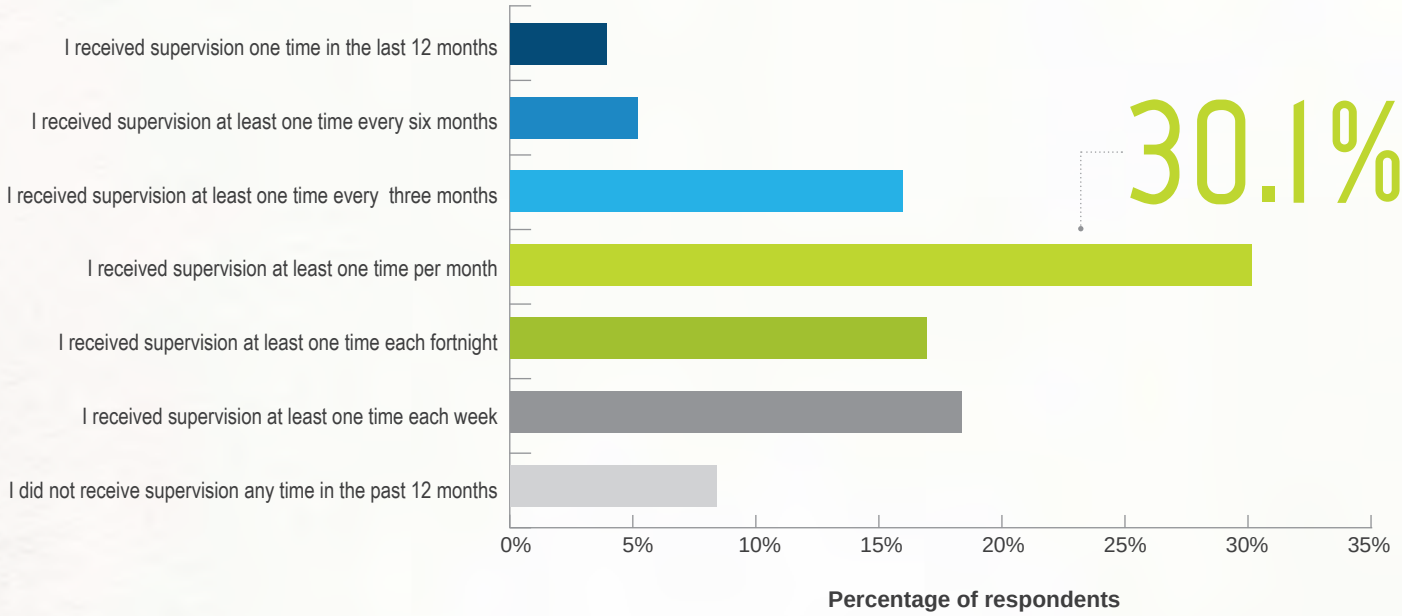


FIGURE 16: The percentage distribution of reasons for why the surveyed youth workers entered youth work (n=1183)

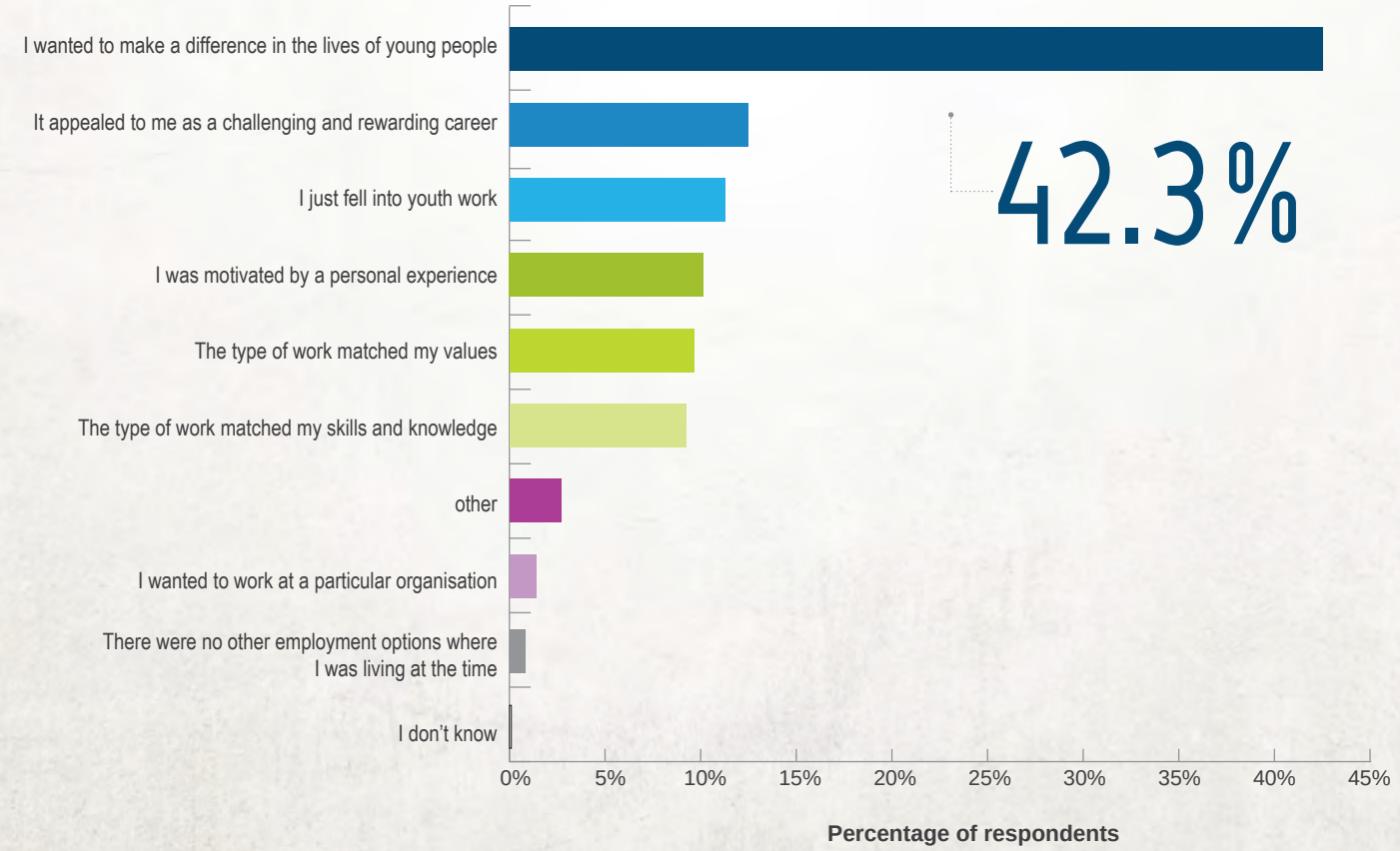


TABLE 8: Rating by surveyed youth workers of satisfaction with the conditions and type of work experienced as youth workers

I AM SATISFIED WITH MY JOB
I AM SATISFIED WITH MY PAY
I AM SATISFIED WITH THE WORKING CONDITIONS I EXPERIENCE IN THIS JOB
I HAVE THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN CHOOSING WHAT WORK I CAN DO AND WHAT MY BOSS WANTS ME TO DO
THE WORK I GET TO DO AS A YOUTH WORKER IS VARIED AND INTERESTING
I ENJOY WORKING WITH MY CO-WORKERS
MY BOSS IS SUPPORTIVE
I HAVE TOO MUCH WORK TO DO
I FEEL A SENSE OF PRIDE IN THE WORK I DO
MY JOB IS STRESSFUL
THERE ARE ENOUGH WORKERS AT MY WORKPLACE TO DEAL WITH THE WORKLOAD
I AM SATISFIED WITH THE AMOUNT OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTH WORK ISSUES I RECEIVE
AS A YOUTH WORKER, I FEEL SUPPORTED AND RESPECTED BY MY LOCAL COMMUNITY
I AM SATISFIED WITH FUTURE CAREER OPTIONS IN THE YOUTH WORK FIELD

CAREER LIFESPAN

Just over half the respondents had worked between two and ýve years in their current youth work position, and one-quarter had worked less than two years in their current job (54.2% and 24.9% respectively, n=1120).

Just over 5% of respondents had worked in their current job for eleven or more years, where one person had worked for 30 years in the same job.

In addition, most respondents agreed they will still be working in youth work in two years time (82.1%, n=1160). By far the two main reasons for this belief were that they will continue to make a difference in the lives of young people (39.2%) and because youth work will still be a challenging and rewarding career (27.9%, n=949). On the other hand, the two most common reasons selected for why workers believe they will no longer be working in the youth work in the next two years were because they think they can get better pay and conditions elsewhere (28.4%) and because they are seeking employment outside of issues related to working with young people (27.9%, n=204).

Furthermore, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with a number of statements relating to their motivation to keep working in youth work (see Table 9 below). The majority of respondents agreed with all of the statements, where seven of the statements each received agreement from approximately three-quarters of the respondents, and the remaining four statements each received agreement by approximately two-thirds of the respondents. With this in mind, approximately three-quarters of the respondents agreed that they would be more motivated to remain in youth work if they experienced a wider and more challenging range of job activities (72.8%, n= 1144 and 72.7%, n= 1139 respectively), along with improved:

- access to professional development (74.9%, n= 1146)
- wages (73.7%, n= 1146)
- relevant education and training (73.3%, n= 1140)
- career path options within youth work (71.6%, n= 1141)
- professional recognition (70.9%, n=1144)

In addition, approximately two-thirds of the respondents agreed that they would be more motivated to remain in youth work if they experienced improved:

- access to professional support (68.8%, n=1143)
- employment conditions (other than wages and job security) (68.6%, n= 1138)
- job security (65.4%, n= 1142)
- public perception of youth work (65.4%, n= 1144)

TABLE 9: Rating by surveyed youth workers of motivation to keep working in youth work

IMPROVED WAGES
IMPROVED JOB SECURITY
OTHER IMPROVED EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS (OTHER THAN WAGES AND JOB SECURITY)
IMPROVED PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION
IMPROVED PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF YOUTH WORK
IMPROVED CAREER PATH WITHIN YOUTH WORK
IMPROVED ACCESS TO RELEVANT EDUCATION AND TRAINING
IMPROVED ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
IMPROVED ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT
WIDER RANGE OF JOB ACTIVITIES
MORE CHALLENGING RANGE OF JOB ACTIVITIES

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Respondents were also asked to provide a response to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with eleven statements about youth work.

These questions were designed to better understand what youth workers across Australia think the role of a youth worker is, and their beliefs about notions of what it means to be a youth worker (see Table 10).

TABLE 10: Rating by surveyed youth workers of statements related to youth work

ANYONE CAN BE A YOUTH WORKER, THERE ARE NO QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED
YOUTH WORK AND SOCIAL WORK ARE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME THING
YOUTH WORKERS CAN BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO MAKE THEM THE BEST THEY CAN BE
YOUTH WORKERS ARE THERE TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE OFF THE STREETS
YOUTH WORKERS ARE BOUND BY PROFESSIONAL ETHICS IN THEIR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE
A NATIONWIDE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR YOUTH WORK SHOULD BE FORMED IN AUSTRALIA
YOUTH WORKERS MUST ALWAYS PLACE THE YOUNG PERSON AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR WORK, AS THEIR PRIMARY CLIENT
YOUTH WORKERS SHOULD INFLUENCE THE CONTEXT SURROUNDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVE (E.G. THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITIES)
ENGAGEMENT IN A YOUTH WORK RELATIONSHIP MUST ALWAYS BE ENTERED INTO VOLUNTARILY BY YOUNG PEOPLE
YOUTH WORK IS MISUNDERSTOOD AND UNDERVALUED BY GOVERNMENTS AND THE GENERAL COMMUNITY
A NATIONAL CODE OF ETHICS WOULD NOT DO MUCH TO FOSTER MORE ETHICAL CONDUCT AND PRACTICE BY YOUTH WORKERS

Regarding youth work as a profession, respondents overwhelmingly agreed that youth work is misunderstood and undervalued by governments and the general community, while less than 4% disagreed (91.3% and 3.9% respectively, n=1175). With this in mind, the respondents were quite certain of their strengths approach to working with young people (95.1% agreed, n=1177), and young person-centred approach, where 91.3% agreed that youth workers must always place the young people at the centre of their work, as their primary client, while only 6% disagreed (5.9%, n=1179)

In addition, 89% of respondents disagreed with the notion that ‘anyone can be a youth worker and there are no qualiýcations required’ (n=1176). Furthermore, just over two thirds (69.8%, n=1176) felt youth work is distinguishable from social work, (n=1176). When asked if they think a nationwide professional association for youth workers should be formed in Australia, 76.4% agreed, with a fairly even split between general agreement and strong agreement (42.3% strongly agree and 34.1% agree, n=1176).

When asked about whether youth workers are bound by professional ethics when working with young people, 95.3% agreed, where under two-thirds agreed very much (64.4%), and only 2.9% disagreed (n=1179). Regarding how to foster more ethical conduct and practice, respondents were very divided about whether there is some value in a national code of ethics to foster more ethical conduct and practice by youth workers. Just over half of respondents agreed (51.6%) but 30% believed such a national code would not do much to foster more ethical conduct and practice, and 18.4% respondents had no opinion on the matter (n=1177). Furthermore, there was a strong underpinning principle of client voluntarism, while just over three quarters of respondents (75.7%) agreed that engagement in a youth work relationship must always be entered into voluntarily by young people, while 17.5% disagreed (n=1177).

Regarding the role youth workers have with young people, almost three-quarters of respondents agreed that youth workers should inþuence the context surrounding young peopleís lives, such as their family, friends and community (73.6%), where 15.1% had no opinion of this (n=1174). Finally, 65.8% disagreed that one role of youth workers is to keep young people off the streets, where 22.4% agreed (n=1177).

CHAPTER 5 – *Improving Youth Work*

The following reports the ýndings of the single open-ended question in the survey, which asked participants to comment on what they thought could be done to improve conditions for workers in the Youth Work sector in Australia. Eight hundred and eighty eight people responded to this question and their comments covered a range of topics regarding young people, youth workers and the Youth Work sector nationally. Seven comments did not relate to the question so were not used in the analysis.

Broadly speaking, the respondents were concerned about matters relating to recognition as a professional sector, workforce sustainability and the establishment of a national youth sector body. The notion of recognition included exploration of issues such as acknowledgement, identity, respect, trust, what youth workers do, and how they undertake these activities. When discussing workforce sustainability, respondents also commented on issues relating to the need to develop a professional identity, with minimum standards and accreditation requirements. The general hope was that this would facilitate greater support for, and validation of youth work, and improve the quality of the workforce. Respondents also commented on how a more planned, supportive, needs-focused and better resourced approach to youth work throughout all of Australia would better support a sustainable sector and workforce. A key theme related to workforce sustainability involved discussion around the need for the establishment of a national youth sector body to meet these concerns and support the sector to be better recognised, respected and sustainable. Discussion of this proposed initiative will occur independently of the other issues of workforce sustainability raised.

RECOGNITION AS A PROFESSIONAL SECTOR

The need for greater recognition and respect for what youth workers do and how they do it was a recurring issue raised for improving youth work. As noted by one worker, ñyouth workers arenût taken very seriouslyò. When discussing concerns around such ideas, many respondents agreed that even though the work they undertake is complex, challenging, requires specialised skills and knowledge, and is valuable to Australian society; it is not well understood, and is rarely acknowledged as such. Many also commented that there is little trust amongst members of the community, social and human services profession and government that youth workers know what they are doing to meet young peopleûs needs, for example,

Traditionally Youth Work has been seen as people that throw a ball around with young people and keep them occupied. The complex and diverse case management and other skills required to work with young people is a highly skilled and understated career choice. Young people today are more highly at risk, more complex and further isolated by the expectations of today's society and the technology that sees some losing their face-to-face communication skills. (respondent 50)

Many respondents noted that youth work is diverse and specialised, being more than focused merely on the welfare needs of at risk young people. They argued that youth work involves working with young people across the risk continuum (from low to high), and, more broadly, across

developing the capacity of young people to þourish in many areas of their lives, in addition to meeting their welfare needs as noted,

Some members of the community believe that 'youth workers' only work with the bad 'youth'. We work with all youth; in schools, in local communities, on the streets, everywhere!
(respondent 968)

Youth work consists of a multitude of disciplines e.g. educator, carer, crisis management and activities co-ordinator – this can mean that the work is difficult to explain and categorise. This then causes confusion to the public about what we do.
(respondent 794)

Furthermore, many respondents noted that not only is youth work diverse and complex but that workers need to build relationships with young people who often exhibit distress, confusion and, at times, challenging and testing behaviour. They argued that this makes youth work emotionally intense and stressful work that requires specialised practical (ñhands onò) and conceptual (ñmind drainingò) skills, for example,

Broader recognition of the scope of youth work would be hugely beneficial - we're not all case workers. More than that, having the complexity of youth work… recognised would make the job a lot more fulfilling. The general mood within the workplace and the community is that this work is "soft" or "touchy feely"; that what we do is all "fun and games". This is very frustrating, as youth and community work are complex and challenging, demanding creativity, adaptability, and the ability to think very critically on top of being able to work with a diverse range of people and communicate effectively.
(respondent 580)

A number of respondents also argued that they believe that youth work is not highly valued by members of the Australian community despite it being ñvital to young peopleûs success through the continued support [youth workers] offerò. Others argued that youth workers ñassist young people to make thoughtful decisions to improve their position in societyò, and play a ñrole in assisting young people to be able to make sense and meaning of their livesò. One worker further sums up these sentiments as follows,

> MANY PEOPLE HAVE STATED TO ME THAT THERE IS NO WAY THEY COULD DO THE WORK I DO… MEANING WORK WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE I WORK WITH. YOUNG PEOPLE PUSH PEOPLE'S BUTTONS WITH THEIR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR AND THIS CAN SCARE OTHER PEOPLE. THIS FEAR IS EXTENDED AT TIMES TO THE PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH YOUTH.
>
> *(RESPONDENT 891)*

Others tied the valuable function of youth work in Australian society to the preventative role it plays in reducing the need for more intense and expensive services when young people who have missed out on support early in the development of challenges and stressors and begin to behave in socially unacceptable ways, for example,

[Youth workers] know the benefits of community/family connectedness but the public at large don't … realise how youth workers can work as a conduits or connectors in the lives of [young people;] decreasing isolation, role modelling, believing in them and working with each one individually for the best outcome of each one.
(respondent 649)

Some respondents also tied the importance and value of youth work to a generally held negative perception about young people, lack of understanding of the increased complexity of modern life for young people, and difýculties young people have dealing with these complexities, such as,

More awareness on the issues that our young people face today, more acceptance, less judging and acknowledgement for who they are. Too often, I see 2 major issues with the young people I work with, mental health issues and victims of severe bullying, this is damaging and takes a lot of hard work to overcome on my clients behalf, if at all. I think parents and teachers need more awareness of the issues our kids face today and young people need to be taught empathy and acceptance, kindness and some boundaries...We need to work together as a society and as a community to see that our kids get the best start in life as possible.
(respondent 392)

My experience is that many young people are overwhelmed with the transition from home and school into work and developing independence. Often the stress of circumstances and the lack of appropriate support services makes it difficult to see or plan for a future.
(respondent 43)

Youth these days seem to have to grow up a lot quicker than they should and have a lot more responsibilities and I'm not sure that they will become the Adults that are needed to grow our community if they don't get the right support and guidance.
(respondent 599)

Furthermore, respondents argued that poor perception and respect stems from a misperception amongst members of the community, social and human services profession and government that youth workers are not knowledgeable, skilled, committed or professionals, and that how they look and what they do with young people is not appropriate. This was summed up the following way by respondent 524,

I guess all the recommendations I have made stem back to "public" perception of what we ACTUALLY do. It just needs more coverage and explanation, and the understanding that just because some of us don't "look" like professionals, does not mean we're not. It is even harder to allow your dress code and appearance to reflect that (i.e. jeans and T-Shirt, instead of a suit). The reason many of us choose to dress this way is so we don't intimidate our clients, as many of them already have low self-esteem and the stigma attached to suits for our clients' age group is a huge barrier to overcome. So, we dress to make our clients feel more comfortable, and that we are working and talking WITH them, not AT them! I have found personally, because of my choice to dress in a more approachable way, that I often

get looked down upon by others within my organisation, and other organisations, and therefore I am valued as "less" professional then they are. Perception of appearance is why most youth have "barriers" and that is why most of us Youth Workers, have a job. So, if we can attempt to again, explain, and point out why and how we do what we do, people might eventually learn not to judge a book by its cover, and one day we might be out of job.

In addition, some tied such misperception of youth work to misunderstanding about, and attitude towards, young people in general across the Australian community. They argued that a change in this perception would help youth workers feel more recognised, supported and valued as professionals, for example,

Investment in young people themselves will lead to improved conditions for workers. It's pointless to try and improve conditions for workers and the sector without first improving perceptions of young people first and demonstrating that they are worthy members of society and worth investing in.
(respondent 532)

Many also argued that how media outlets portray young people affects the perception of community members. Positive representations can be helpful for youth workers, and can be inþuenced by them, for example, as noted by respondent 891,

I have been blamed for the poor behaviour of young people. When I have named this and have been actively placing articles in the local media I have gained support and opened conversation.

However, negative representations of young people in the media can be very damaging, for example,

I think the issue [about the way youth work is perceived] is deeper. The perception of 'youth' by those in the community is often stereotypical and distorted due to the bad media young people get and all that is mainly reported. This then skews people's perception of a 'youth worker'.
(respondent 241)

Respondents who discussed such issues regarding government representatives and policy makers argued that misrecognition and poor support becomes apparent through limited opportunities for young people and youth workers to genuinely engage with government decision makers and advocate for the needs of young people. The consequences of this include decisions around policy, legislation and resourcing of service programs that do not satisfactorily meet young people's needs and do not adequately resource the Youth Work sector to implement the decisions. This particularly relates to limited focus within government on preventative solutions and unrealistic expectations of what is actually required to build relationships with, and improve the lives of, disadvantaged young people. As noted by respondent 760,

Government policy needs to recognise the essential service that is provided by youth workers that builds young people into contributing members of society and greatly reducing the cost burden of the state in areas such a justice and health. Recognition of the contribution and importance of the preventative role should be incorporated into policy that recognises and funds youth workers as well as encourages other government-funded programs and agencies to co-operate with youth services and see their role as important within the context of their own operations as well.

Some respondents noted that one way in which governments could better support the Youth Work sector, and provide more appropriate recognition of the complexity and diversity of the work, is through changing the way in which administrative roles seem to be given priority over relationship building and service delivery activities. This comes about through increased expectation by governments that youth workers engage in administration, such as meeting complex and multiple reporting requirements, yet not providing additional funding to conduct such activities. This means that workers must allocate time to such administrative roles and away from working directly with young people. Respondents agreed that some administration is necessary but that better balance is required, for example,

The move by government to offload responsibility to the NGO sector is prohibitive and in some instances is creating "accountant" rather than support workers. Acknowledging that each individual client or young person is unique and cannot fit into pre-determined boxes for analysis or "statistics" would be a major "strengths based" breakthrough. My experience suggests that young people in stress and or social trauma, need more time and empathy rather than being reduced to numbers to be entered into reporting frameworks!
(respondent 387)

> IT'S WRONG THAT WE HAVE TARGET FIGURES TO MEET AS IT'S ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES NOT NUMBERS. TOO MUCH RED TAPE, TOO MANY HOURS IN FRONT OF A COMPUTER. MONEY BEING WASTED IN THE WRONG AREAS.
>
> *(RESPONDENT 555)*

Following on from the sentiments of this worker, some respondents also noted that what they see as an increasingly bureaucratised nature of youth work is actually discouraging relationship building, as noted in the following response,

Moreover, relationship and human engagement (love and care) is the basis of good youth work I think. Bureaucracy, as well as disproportionate administration and/or record keeping practices, can be hugely detrimental to the core business of relating and human engagement. So, this needs to be constantly kept in check and balanced carefully. Administrating is servant of caring for the needy (core purpose, master), not the other way around.
(respondent 439)

Underpinning such concerns is a perception that government representatives do not fully appreciate the work that youth workers do or what young people need. This results in them developing unrealistic expectations of youth workers and increasingly expecting youth workers to both operate and be accountable in ways that are inþexible, unrealistic and not related to young peopleîs needs. According to some workers, it has even gotten to the point where some organisations are unable to employ staff at the times when young people are available, or prefer to access services, and that workers are not allowed to work where young people tend to congregate. All of these substantially reduce opportunities available to work with young people. Such sentiments are summed up as follows,

[Improvements will come though] better funding aimed at meeting young people's needs as opposed to meeting a community outcome (eg. funding to work one on one with young people to achieve goals instead of throwing small amounts of money at someone to work on an urban art project where the only aim is to get young people off the street, to reduce crime for that brief period they involved in the activity or out of view of the general public).
(respondent 484)

> [WE NEED] ABILITY AND FREEDOM TO WORK MORE ON WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO DO RATHER THAN WHAT FUNDING PROVIDERS OR MANAGERS WHO ARE NOT EVEN IN TOUCH WITH THE YOUNG PEOPLE THINK WE SHOULD DO.
>
> *(RESPONDENT 550)*

Minimise the red tape around funding and the administrative tasks that is demanded by funding bodies. Give youth workers more freedom to cater youth programs according to the needs of the local youth they work with NOT according to the needs of their funding bodies.
(respondent 477)

Regarding professionals in the social and human services sector, respondents reported there is limited recognition of youth workers as professionals and of the value of the work that youth workers do. The workers reported that this disrespectful and superior attitude, as it is perceived, leads to difýculties engaging in genuine collaborative relationships with other professionals when trying to advocate for young people. It also leads to a general feeling summed up in the following way,

I have on occasion had the statement "oh, are you just a youth worker" directed at me by other professionals who see themselves and their qualifications as superior. I feel that improving recognition of youth work as a profession would assist in dealing with other professionals and advocating for our clients.
(respondent 425)

In addition, some respondents singled out members of management within the Youth Work sector itself as having a problematic attitude towards youth work, particularly where youth work programs coexist with generalist organisations and managers are overseeing all aspects of the organisation.

WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY

The second area around which respondents raised issues and ideas for improvement related to sustainability of the Youth Work sector across Australia.

Broadly, respondents were concerned with the need for the Youth Work sector to develop a collective professional identity distinct from other sectors within the social and human services workforce, including how to achieve this. Other ideas related to workforce sustainability revolved around the need for more holistic and planned approach to service delivery, and suggestions of a range of ideas on how to support the workforce to achieve this.

COLLECTIVE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

At the moment many workers do not consider themselves as youth workers despite engaging with young people. It is concerning to me that there is lack of collective identity among sector workers, despite their common interest of working with and for young people.
(respondent 1)

The need for development of a collective professional identity is evident in the contradictory comments about the current professional nature of youth work throughout Australia. While there were many responses criticising the poor state of professionalism there were also many declaring the professionalism present throughout the workforce. Despite this, many did note that one way to improve recognition, worker quality and working conditions would be to develop a collective professional identity of youth work across Australia. Many respondents argued that without this the Australian Youth Work sector is vulnerable, and will continue to feel the kinds of issues related to misrecognition and lack of respect and support previously outlined.

A number of people argued that a nationally agreed deýnition of youth work is an important aspect of a collective identity. They argued that a deýnition should include a more coherent description of what youth workers do, and with whom, than currently exists, and that it should include how youth workers are distinguishable from other workers operating in the social and human services sector. Another factor related to the development of a collective professional identity includes building a sense of what it means to be a youth worker. This will include agreeing on what a career in youth work might entail, and what must occur to work together on issues related to the Youth Work sector and working with young people.

A HOLISTIC AND PLANNED APPROACH TO SERVICE DELIVERY

A more strategic approach [would improve the youth work sector]. It's very 'bitsy' with many organisations getting a small amount of funding to do little projects or provide basic services - often they don't even know what each other are doing. There is no incentive to partner as everyone is concerned about grant opportunities and staying afloat! It is not the creative or innovative environment I expected. There is a feeling of exhaustion and hopelessness. It can be quite depressing and wearing on full time staff, especially because they are usually quite driven which can over time lead to burn out.
(respondent 790)

Many respondents called for improvement to the youth sector across Australia through taking more of a holistically planned and appropriately resourced approach than currently exists. This stems from a belief that the current approach to delivering youth work nationally is not well coordinated and mainly focused on crisis mitigation. Respondents called for an approach that considers appropriately funded prevention and early intervention approaches, which are long term if required. Speciýcally respondents requested ñwhole population approachesò and, as previously noted, that there be greater recognition that youth workers should be funded and supported to work with all young people, not only those most disadvantaged.

Those commenting on such matters linked better support for prevention and early intervention services, including family support, to improved educational and employment outcomes and lower involvement in crime for young people. This includes greater support for generalist youth services to complement programs focused on particular needs, as noted by respondent 71,

There needs to be more funding for all facets of youth work across the continuum from prevention (alternative recreational opportunities, youth spaces, music, celebration events, mental health promotion etc), to tertiary responses to young people with complex issues and crisis services, including reinstating youth generalist support positions that are not issue bound.

According to respondents, foundational to the success of such an approach was improved funding of the sector, particularly in terms of increased long term and core funding to employ more staff and fund service delivery that is relevant to young peopleòs needs, and improving the way in which staff are supported.

FUNDING

Underpinning all concerns and suggestions related to workforce sustainability was a clear message that youth work in Australia is seriously underfunded, for example,

The current economic climate and funding restrictions have placed a lot of pressure on services and youth workers.

Programs have been defunded and left gaps in services that are trying to be filled by other existing services that are already overloaded and short of resources. This inhibits the ability of workers and services to provide the most effective services for clients and may lead to reduced outcomes for clients. Resourcing services in the youth work sector can assist to address issues experienced by young people and can lead to positive outcomes for youth, their families and the community as a whole
(respondent 178)

The three main factors related to funding were the need for more staff to be employed, changing from short term project based funding to long term program (core) funding, and providing more funds to provide direct services to young people to meet their needs. Some respondents raised concerns that more long term funding is essential as the current approach to project-only funding does not allow services to establish a long term and stable presence in the community.

Respondents argued that poor funding of a short term nature leads to overworked workers, which can lead to a great number of other issues such as:

- workers feeling increasingly stressed and overwhelmed, which leads to burnout and high turnover rates
- increased numbers of staff conducting unpaid overtime
- organisations hiring staff who are inexperienced, poor quality and do not have appropriate qualiýcations
- breakdown in relationships between organisations and community members due to poor quality staff and high turnover (particularly in remote Aboriginal communities)
- experience and knowledge being lost from the sector
- higher costs to organisations stuck in a cycle of recruiting and retraining new staff
- workers feeling stressed due to impermanent employment status which lowers their capacity to make personal life plans (for example with respect to their own families and acquiring housing stability themselves)
- limited capacity to build networks and conduct community development, which are important to building capacity in communities so they can feel empowered to meet their own needs
- focusing on funding, not their work with young people

These issues are particularly striking in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia. For example, respondent 4 noted that the situation is so dire in these areas a solution is to fund ña network of respite youth workers who are willing to come to communities so the permanent youth workers can take a break without the whole program stopping or falling down!ò Other solutions mainly involved calls for governments to better fund the sector through longer term funding contracts and more realistic allocation of funds; however, a few respondents suggested the sector needs better ways to reduce reliance on government and become self-funded instead, for example,

FUNDING IS ALWAYS AN ISSUE. YOU CAN WORK IN A PROGRAM, ACHIEVE GREAT RESULTS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION AND THEN FUNDING IS CUT, AND VALUABLE EMPLOYEES ARE LOST. THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE FOCUS ON ORGANISATIONS BECOMING SELF-SUSTAINING AND NOT RELYING ON FUNDING.

(RESPONDENT 483)