

FUTURE PROOF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT



**Future Proof: Young People, Disaster
Recovery and (Re)building
Communities**



An Australian Government Initiative



KD SOLUTIONS



Young People, Disaster Recovery
and (Re)building Communities

INTRODUCTION



Future Proof Young People, Disaster Recovery and (Re)building Communities was created with a powerful vision to make sure young people in Eastern Victoria's bushfire-affected regions were not just part of the recovery conversation but leading it. Through a mix of hands-on support, leadership development, and real opportunities to influence change, the project helped young people step into new roles, grow their confidence, and strengthen their communities along the way. Whether it was building job skills, returning to study, or helping shape local emergency responses, young people were front and centre.

Disasters hit young people hard. They interrupt school, make it harder to find work, and can have a lasting impact on mental health. That's why the Youth Affairs Council Of Victoria and its partners set out to create something different something led by young people, built for their communities, and made to last. One of the most powerful outcomes of this project has been the rise in what we call 'human infrastructure', the people power, the connections, the skills, and the leadership that now live within these communities. This growth in social capital, the networks of trust and support between people has made communities stronger and more resilient. Young people aren't just being included anymore they're helping lead the way forward.

As one young person put it:
"Before this project, I didn't think my voice mattered. Now, I know I can make change—not just for myself, but for my whole community."

Working with 14 partner organisations from youth services to local councils to Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations, Future Proof was built on collaboration. It was place-based and flexible, so each town could shape the program in a way that made sense to them, while staying connected to a bigger shared goal: putting young people at the heart of recovery. This report shares the story of Future Proof, its impact, the challenges along the way, and the lessons we've learned. It's a story of people coming together, of young people stepping up, and of communities that are stronger because of it.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) Collective Impact Project was designed to provide targeted support for young people in Eastern Victoria's bushfire-affected communities. This evaluation report examines the project's success in achieving its objectives and presents data-driven insights into workforce development, youth engagement, education, and leadership outcomes.

At its core, this initiative was built to empower young people, strengthen local capacity, and ensure youth participation played a vital role in community recovery efforts. Through well-structured interventions, the project significantly enhanced workforce readiness, expanded access to education and training, and fostered leadership among young people in the region.

What makes Future Proof truly unique is not just its outcomes but the approach it took to achieve them. By embedding young people in emergency planning, fostering cultural inclusion through Aboriginal-led initiatives, and prioritising community-driven recovery efforts, the project demonstrated that resilience is most effectively built from within.

Beyond influencing disaster response practices, Future Proof set out to transform how government agencies, emergency services, and community organisations engage young people in crisis recovery. It has established a model for systemic change—one driven by deep collaboration, shared measurement, and a steadfast commitment to amplifying young voices.

A New Standard for Youth-Led Disaster Recovery

Future Proof redefined what it means to involve young people in recovery efforts. By actively including them in decision-making processes and ensuring their perspectives shaped emergency response strategies, the initiative challenged traditional recovery models. It also placed a strong emphasis on cultural inclusion, ensuring that Indigenous Australian/First Nations knowledge, wisdom, and leadership were central to rebuilding efforts. Rather than imposing resilience from external sources, the project reinforced the idea that true community strength emerges from within.

Through structured interventions, Future Proof:

- Enhanced workforce readiness, equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and support needed to secure meaningful employment and career pathways.
- Increased access to education and training, providing essential resources for young people in disaster-affected areas to succeed.
- Developed leadership skills, empowering young people to actively contribute to their communities' recovery and future resilience.

More than just a response to immediate challenges, Future Proof laid the groundwork for lasting, systemic change. By collaborating closely with government agencies, emergency services, local councils, and community organisations, it established a framework for more inclusive and effective youth participation in disaster recovery efforts across Victoria.

Creating Lasting Change

Beyond its direct impact on young people, Future Proof has helped reshape the way recovery efforts are designed and implemented. By advocating for genuine youth engagement in crisis response and rebuilding initiatives, the project has demonstrated that true resilience comes from collaboration, shared responsibility, and a commitment to empowering young voices.

Looking ahead, the lessons learned from Future Proof offer a scalable model for future disaster response strategies—not only in Victoria but across Australia and beyond. This initiative has proven that when young people are given the platform to lead, the outcomes are stronger communities, more effective recovery efforts, and a future that is truly 'Future Proof.'



This evaluation was carried out during the final phase of the project, after the majority of delivery had been completed. At the time of evaluation, 11 of the 14 partner organisations had wrapped up their activities and were finalising their own reports and audits. The evaluation drew on a combination of stakeholder interviews, partner surveys, and project documentation (including reports, case studies, and outcome data) to build a clear picture of the project's impact.

Interviews were conducted with key delivery partners and stakeholders across local government, community organisations, and youth services, offering valuable insights into both the successes and challenges of the initiative. The mixed-method approach allowed for both qualitative reflections and data-driven insights, helping to capture the depth and diversity of experiences across the different communities involved in Future Proof.

The timing of the evaluation enabled a focus on long-term outcomes and sustainability, with partners reflecting on changes within their organisations and communities over the life of the project. Importantly, the voices and experiences of young people were central to this process, reinforcing the project's commitment to youth-led design and accountability.

The evaluation included:

- 6 in-depth stakeholder interviews with representatives from local government, community organisations, and youth services
- Surveys completed by 11 of the 14 partner organisations, capturing insights into project delivery, outcomes, and lessons learned
- Conversations with 22 young people who had participated in various parts of the project, offering first-hand reflections on its impact

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



- Successfully recruited 12 FTE Young Peer Workers and 12 Youth Workers across 10 Local Government Areas (LGA's) Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) within the first six months.
- Engaged 37,331 young people in bushfire recovery programs and events, surpassing the initial 1,500 youth engagement goal.
- Supported 192 young people in obtaining formal qualifications in Public Safety, Firefighting, Youth Work, and Community Development.
- Established 10 local Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs), with 80% of members actively participating in decision-making.
- Conducted 292 community events, exceeding the anticipated number of engagement activities.
- Hosted 8 Community of Practice (CoP) meetings, strengthening collaboration across LGAs and organisations.
- Delivered 46 training sessions, with 328 participants upskilled in areas such as public speaking, leadership, and youth advocacy.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



The project set measurable targets to track progress, define clear wins, and ensure accountability. Below is a breakdown of the original goals and actual achievements.

1.1 Workforce Development & Capacity Building

The project aimed to enhance the workforce development landscape by recruiting, training, and retaining a dedicated team of young peer workers and youth workers. The recruitment and retention of staff were critical in ensuring the ongoing support of young people in the community. Additionally, training programs were implemented to build professional capabilities among both staff and youth participants.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Youth Peer Workers & Youth Workers	12 FTE Peer Workers, 12 Youth Workers	12 Peer Workers, 12 Youth Workers	✅ Achieved
Recruitment within 6 months	100%	100%	✅ Achieved
Retention at 12 months	90%	92%	✅ Achieved
Training sessions for staff	6 annually	6 completed	✅ Achieved

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.2 Youth Engagement & Participation

A core objective of the project was to engage young people in structured activities that contributed to both their personal development and the broader community recovery efforts. The establishment of Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) was instrumental in ensuring that young voices were included in decision-making processes. Additionally, the project encouraged ongoing participation by ensuring that young people attended multiple engagement activities, fostering deeper involvement in their communities.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Young people engaged	1,500	37,331	✅ Exceeded
Participation in 2+ activities	70%	85%	✅ Exceeded
Establishment of YAGs	8	8	✅ Achieved
YAG contributions to recovery decisions	5 per year	8 per year	✅ Exceeded

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.3 Education & Training Pathways

To support young people in developing skills that would enable them to contribute effectively to their communities, the project provided access to education and training pathways. Young people were encouraged to pursue formal qualifications, complete their training programs successfully, and secure industry placements to bridge the gap between learning and employment. The success of this initiative demonstrates the value of structured education programs in enhancing employability and skill development among young people.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Young people obtaining qualifications	150	192	✔ Exceeded
Completion rate	75%	81%	✔ Exceeded
Industry placements secured	100%	100%	✔ Achieved
Job placements post-training	50%	58%	✔ Exceeded

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.4 Youth Leadership & Skills Development

Empowering young people with leadership skills was a priority of the project. Through targeted training sessions, young participants developed confidence, governance knowledge, and leadership capabilities. The success of this initiative was reflected in the increasing number of young people assuming leadership roles within their communities

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Leadership training participants	100	328	✅ Exceeded
Increase in confidence reported	80%	88%	✅ Exceeded
Governance training for young people	100	112	✅ Exceeded
Young people assuming governance roles	50%	60%	✅ Exceeded

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.5 Community of Practice (CoP) Development

To ensure ongoing collaboration and knowledge-sharing across LGAs and partner organisations, the project established a Community of Practice (CoP) framework. The meetings facilitated cross-sector collaboration, enabling professionals and young leaders to exchange insights, discuss challenges, and implement best practices in youth engagement.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
CoP meetings held	8	8	✅ Achieved
Peer collaboration satisfaction	90%	95%	✅ Exceeded
Cross-LGA initiatives developed	5	7	✅ Exceeded

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.6 Social Recovery & Mental Wellbeing

The project emphasised the importance of social recovery and mental well-being by organising youth-led social and cultural events. These events provided a platform for young people to connect, share experiences, and build resilience. Additionally, psychosocial support services were integrated into the program, ensuring that young participants received the necessary mental health support to navigate challenges effectively.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Youth-led social/cultural events	30	292	✅ Exceeded
Young people receiving psychosocial support	100%	100%	✅ Achieved
Reported improvement in social connections	75%	79%	✅ Achieved

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI'S)



1.7 Long-Term Sustainability & Community Impact

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiative, the project worked closely with LGAs and key stakeholders to secure ongoing funding and support. The commitment of multiple LGAs to funding youth-focused initiatives demonstrated the project’s lasting impact on the community. Additionally, stakeholder feedback confirmed the effectiveness of the program, reinforcing the need for continued investment in youth-led recovery initiatives.

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Sustainability plan developed	Yes	Yes	✔ Achieved
LGAs committing to youth funding	5	7	✔ Exceeded
Stakeholder satisfaction with project impact	80%	88%	✔ Exceeded

PROJECT CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED



Challenges Encountered:

- **Geographic Spread:** Coordinating activities across multiple LGAs posed logistical challenges, requiring a decentralised approach to implementation.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic necessitated a shift to online engagement strategies, which, while effective, required additional resources and adaptation.
- **Retention of Youth Workers:** While retention rates were high, some staff members moved on to other employment opportunities, highlighting the need for continued workforce development and support structures.

Lessons Learned:

- **Early Engagement Matters:** Establishing Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) early in the project led to more consistent and meaningful youth participation.
- **Mentorship is Key:** Pairing young people with industry mentors significantly improved employment outcomes and increased confidence levels.
- **Flexible Delivery:** The combination of in-person and online activities proved effective in maintaining engagement, ensuring that young people could participate regardless of geographical or logistical barriers.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Young People Feedback

Key Demographics

Age Range: 14-24 years old

Geographic Spread:



Highlights & Achievements

1. Pathways to Involvement

How they heard about Future Proof:

- 36% through social media
- 36% through other channels (YACVic, family, previous involvement)
- Others included youth workers (9%), friends (9%), or community events (9%)
- Level of involvement:
- 50% were part of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG)
- 27% attended an event
- 23% selected "Other," with some being involved for over 2 years

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Valued Experiences

Participants shared how Future Proof helped them step into leadership, build confidence, and foster connection:

Skill Development:

- "The ability to gain more experience, skills, and qualifications."
- "Training and getting qualifications for future work."
- "Attaining a First Aid Certificate."
- "Learning to promote and influence meaningful change."

Community Impact:

- "Being part of community projects."
- "Contributing to my community."
- "Seeing the ability to help others."

Social Connection:

- "Meeting like-minded people."
- "Connecting with other young people, making friends."
- "The freedom to interact in a space where we felt comfortable."

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Key Impact Areas

1. Youth Voice and Agency

66.7% felt their voice was heard and respected

- "Our youth worker made sure all voices were heard."
- "We worked as a team and my ideas were acknowledged."

Some highlighted barriers:

"The YAG provided a false sense of empowerment... no transparency in how voices were used."

Average voice rating (1-5): 3.38



Strength-Based Insight: Many young people demonstrated critical thinking, self-awareness, and a strong desire for meaningful participation. Their feedback reflects a sophisticated understanding of youth engagement and a call for co-design and accountability.

2. Confidence to Contribute

67% said the project helped build their confidence

- "It gave me the tools to enact change."
- "We helped design a skatepark sign."
- "I joined other groups to strengthen my community."
- Some youth reflected on personal growth barriers with honesty:
- "Confidence is a me problem."
- "There were few opportunities to shape direction."

Strength-Based Insight: The project empowered participants to take initiative, explore their strengths, and step into leadership, even in challenging contexts.

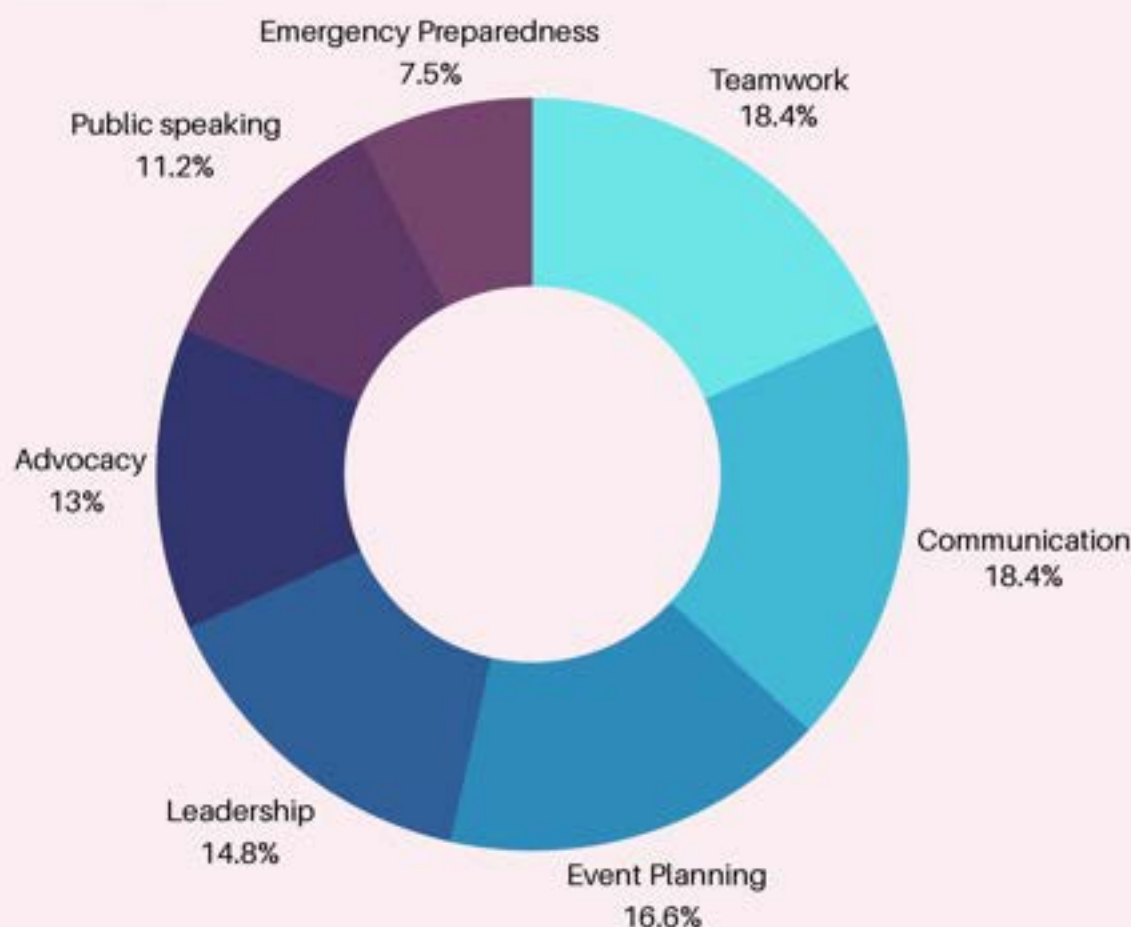
SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



3. Skill Development

71% said they gained new skills

Top skills gained:



Additional examples:

Grant writing, media literacy, feedback delivery, youth advocacy

Licence qualifications (e.g., Heavy Rigid)

Supporting others with diverse lived experiences

Strength-Based Insight: Participants acquired both practical and interpersonal skills that will benefit their future pathways and amplify their civic contributions.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

4. Safety and Support

86% felt safe and supported

Areas for improvement:

- "Monitor for homophobia, transphobia, racism."
- "Group direction became unclear; intentions felt misused."

Strength-Based Insight: The project created brave spaces for many young people, and feedback demonstrates a proactive desire to improve safety and inclusivity for others.

5. Disaster Preparedness and Resilience

29% felt more prepared for future disasters

57% said "Maybe"

- "It made our community stronger and more resilient."
- "I now know what to do in a disaster."
- "We helped create a community event from our own idea."
- "Young people smiling despite everything - that's strength."
- "I realised how important a strong community is to disaster resilience."
- "Seeing the younger generation continue to grow and smile despite all they've been through."
- "It helped me think about how connection and support matter more than planning alone."
- "I now think more about how we recover as a community, not just individually."
- "The project made me more aware of the mental health impact of disasters and the need for emotional support."

Some noted that while the project didn't directly prepare them for disasters, it strengthened community ties and personal resilience.

Critical feedback:

- "Most of the time was spent on ice breakers - didn't prepare me for disaster."
- "More knowledge-sharing needed for bushfire-affected communities."

Strength-Based Insight: Young people connected the dots between community strength, emotional wellbeing, and disaster resilience. Their reflections show emotional intelligence and a deep understanding of collective preparedness.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Employment, Training & Future Opportunities

Training Participation

- 77% had not undertaken formal workshops/training
- Of the 23% who did:
- Media literacy, youth advocacy, event planning, First Aid, HR licence, IDAHOBIT and art events

Usefulness of training rating:



Barriers to Employment/Study

Transport, cost, anxiety, discrimination, geographic isolation

Quotes included:

"I cannot study online due to TBI."

"Industry cultures are unsafe for queer and trans young people."

Desired Industries

Youth Work (50%)

Advocacy (42%)

Emergency Services (33%)

Environmental Conservation (25%)

Also mentioned: Business, art, policy, animation, law, grassroots organising

Strength-Based Insight: Participants are ambitious and diverse in their interests. They are aware of structural barriers and actively seeking opportunities to grow.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



What Participants Want More Of:

- Local leadership and disaster response training
- Help managing event planning challenges (e.g., attendance)
- Grassroots knowledge sharing over expert-only formats
- More inclusive opportunities with real responsibilities
- Skills in facilitation, community mapping, public speaking
- More events and connections
- LGBTQIA+ celebrations (IDAHOBIT)
- Art-based workshops, D&D, escape rooms
- Regional meetups and in-person YAG meetings

Strength-Based Insight: Youth value hands-on, meaningful, and peer-led engagement that builds both joy and impact.

Reflections and Takeaways

What They Learned

- "Be prepared."
- "To be confident in questioning anything."
- "It's worth meeting new people - not everyone will judge you."
- "Young people are the voice of the future - we need to be heard."
- "Even if things don't go to plan, it's a learning experience."
- "Events won't always be perfect, but that doesn't mean they failed."

Changed Perspectives on Disaster Recovery

- 27% said yes, 55% said somewhat

Reflections included:

- "I realised how important a strong community is to disaster resilience."
- "Young people smiling despite everything - that's strength."
- "The emotional side of disaster recovery needs more focus."
- "It's not just about emergencies - it's about community, wellbeing, and hope."

Strength-Based Insight: Young people show insight, adaptability, and compassion. Their evolving perspectives signal readiness to lead recovery work grounded in connection and care.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Participant Recommendations for Improvement

- Make the project permanent
- Enforce safety and inclusion protocols
- Increase opportunities for in-person connection
- Provide structured leadership development
- Clarify roles, goals, and accountability in advisory groups
- Offer music, creative events, and fun connection points



Key Recommendations for the Future

- Redesign YAG with clarity and purpose
- Co-create goals and clear expectations
- Offer feedback loops, decision-making roles, and mentoring
- Support skill pathways through local training
- Provide hands-on and interest-based learning (e.g., event planning, advocacy, land care)
- Make training accessible and inclusive of all identities and abilities
- Build safe and brave spaces
- Enforce respectful behaviours and anti-discrimination policies
- Train facilitators to foster belonging and safety for all
- Strengthen career links and exposure
- Create connections with industries of interest
- Offer micro-placements, peer-run enterprises, and community business exposure
- Celebrate strengths and stories
- Showcase young people's achievements and progress
- Embed creativity, culture, and fun in all future program models

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Project Partners Feedback

Project Alignment & Impact

Effectiveness in Supporting Young People's Bushfire Recovery:

Average rating: 3.45 / 5

"A great opportunity for local organisations to engage young project workers in planning."

Alignment with Existing Strategies:

Average rating: 3.18 / 5

Strength-Based Insight: The project contributed significantly to regional young peoples recovery and engagement efforts. Partners noted that Future Proof helped to expand youth-focused services, provided young people with paid roles, and created space for long-term visioning around youth leadership in bushfire-affected areas.

Key Achievements

- Sustained Youth Advisory Groups (e.g., active for over 2 years in some areas)
- Peer Worker employment pathways - some participants now hold permanent part-time or full-time roles within council teams
- Over 300 young people trained in nationally recognised short courses, diplomas, and work placements
- Two Emergency Management Career Expos successfully delivered
- Development of new programs, including Learner Driver initiatives, drop-in youth hubs, creative recovery activities (e.g., group art sessions, model painting, D&D groups)
- Improved recognition of youth voices in council planning and greater engagement from local emergency services

Quote: "The ability to give two young people an opportunity that wouldn't have been available otherwise - watching them grow and build the capacity of their peers - was outstanding."

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Project Partners Feedback

Challenges Identified

- Inflexible funding structures: partners couldn't shift budgets across line items to better meet emerging needs
- Delayed project start and changes in expectations mid-way caused confusion and workload issues
- Regional limitations: youth work qualifications not locally available, and poor transport access limited training uptake
- Burnout among staff and peer workers due to staffing gaps and lack of local support
- Misalignment between project aspirations and community readiness in trauma-affected regions

Quote: "We knew early there was enough money to do more, but it couldn't be used because of line item restrictions - we had young people keen for training, and we couldn't run it."

Influence on Policy & Practice

- 18% of partners reported policy change, such as the integration of youth voices in emergency management
- 55% noted partial influence - especially in shaping youth engagement strategy and identifying training priorities
- New interest emerged in co-design models, localised training delivery, and youth-led consultation practices

Quote: "We now embed young people in committees and have stronger partnerships between our youth and emergency management teams."

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Project Partners Feedback

Training, Employment & Pathways

- Training Support Effectiveness: Rating: 3.5 / 5
- Job Outcomes: 30% confirmed employment opportunities were generated
- Pathways into: Emergency services, CFA, FFMVic, hospitality, youth work, local government, marine, agriculture, civil works

Support Needed:

- Dedicated local training coordinators to guide young people through enrollment and retention
- Clearer career visibility - many young people unaware of available opportunities
- Consistent short courses in mental health, first aid, leadership, disaster resilience
- Industry engagement - stronger connections between TAFEs, employers, and youth services

Quote: "Young people felt more confident applying for jobs and stepping into leadership once they received qualifications and peer support."

Collaboration, Youth Voice & Co-Design

- Youth Worker / Peer Worker engagement was rated 4.4 / 5 - highly effective
- 100% of respondents agreed young people had meaningful opportunities to shape decision-making
- Youth-led projects such as art showcases, LGBTQIA+ celebrations, camps, and resilience groups had the most impact

Quote: "Young people were quick to help others, trusted themselves more, and developed capacity to lead - especially when the space was supportive."

Coordination & Partnerships:

- Mixed views on cross-sector collaboration: some noted increased cohesion between youth and emergency services; others felt more preparation was needed.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Project Partners Feedback

Systemic Change & Community of Practice (CoP)

- CoP rated 3.1 / 5 - valued for peer connection and learning, but lost momentum in later stages
- Positive aspects included idea-sharing, regional relationship-building, and showcasing innovation

Recommendations:

- Reduce repetition and presentation-style delivery
- Co-design agendas with frontline workers
- Prioritise sharing real-time tools and local responses

Collective Impact Reflections:

- Concept appreciated but difficult to implement fully due to geographic and capacity differences across partner sites
- Need for flexible and responsive collaboration models

Quote: *"Collective impact requires more than structure - it needs trust, autonomy, and lived experience at the table from day one."*

Risks & Sustainability Challenges

- Short-term funding cycles limited long-term outcomes
- Staffing shortages impacted project continuity in multiple regions
- Young people in trauma-impacted areas needed more support than the project could sustain
- Limited regional training options and youth transport barriers persist

Quote: *"Without funding for long-term roles, youth-led resilience work won't continue - we need continuity and care beyond a grant cycle."*

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Project Partners Feedback

Recommendations for the Future

1. Invest in Place-Based Youth Workforce Development
 - Secure 4+ year funding for peer worker and youth worker roles
 - Support partners design flexible approaches suited to their location
2. Redesign Training Pathways for Regional Access
 - Offer portable and accessible qualifications
 - Partner with local employers for on-the-job learning
3. Embed Youth in Emergency & Resilience Policy
 - Fund advisory roles for young people within LGAs
 - Include youth representation in state planning discussions
4. Foster Long-Term Collaboration
 - Continue CoPs or create smaller regional learning networks
 - Develop shared resource hubs and mentoring circles
5. Trust Local Voices & Lived Experience
 - Shift power and decision-making to those on the ground
 - Recognise that each rural or regional area has different starting points and strengths

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

1. Youth-Led Design and Participation

Overview:

At its core, Future Proof was designed to be youth-led, empowering young people to shape activities, priorities, and responses to disaster recovery. Stakeholders overwhelmingly affirmed the power of this approach.

Key Points:

- **Youth Voice in Decision-Making:** Young people contributed meaningfully to design, delivery, and evaluation of local programs.
- **Representation of Diverse Young people:** The project deliberately included young people from various backgrounds—not just the “usual suspects” with leadership experience.

“It wasn’t just the classic leadership kids—it was also the quiet ones, the ones who hadn’t had a chance before.” – Interviewee

- **Peer Worker Model as a Success:** The peer worker model was consistently described as one of the most impactful aspects, creating relatable, accessible pathways into youth engagement.

“Being in a YAG with people my age broke down so many barriers.” – Interviewee

“A worker went from peer worker to full-time youth worker. That’s exactly the kind of outcome we want.” – Interviewee

Challenges:

- Some partners didn’t fully embrace the youth-led ethos, limiting opportunities for young people to influence outcomes.
- Inconsistent support and supervision of peer workers affected the quality of their experience.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES



Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

2. Local Impact and Capacity Building

Overview:

Future Proof enhanced community organisations capacity to work with young people, particularly in small rural settings where youth programming is often under-resourced.

Key Points:

- **Increased Resourcing:** Funding enabled councils and neighbourhood houses to trial new youth roles, training, and activities.
- **Staffing Legacy:** Some councils retained youth roles permanently after seeing the impact.

"We went from a .4 to a full-time youth worker. That's massive for us." – Interviewee

- **New Programs:** Participants established locally relevant initiatives like driving mentor programs, youth-led gardens, and skill-based workshops tailored to rural interests (e.g., hide tanning).

"We tried to offer rural-specific skills—stuff like hide tanning or brushwork, not just generic training." – Interviewee

Challenges:

- Small organisations were stretched thin by the project's scope.
- In some places, building strong youth programming came just as the funding ended, raising sustainability concerns.



SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

3. Challenges of Rural and Remote Delivery

Overview:

Many participants highlighted the unique barriers to delivering state-wide initiatives in rural settings, including workforce shortages, geographic isolation, and mismatches in language or framing.

Key Points:

- **Disconnect from Central Messaging:** Some felt Future Proof had a metro-centric framing that didn't translate well in rural contexts.

"The language felt very YACVic-Melbourne... people here didn't connect with it."

- Interviewee

- **Emergency Services Disengaged:** Multiple sites reported difficulty partnering with CFA, SES, or other emergency services.

"We tried to collaborate, but CFA said, 'We don't need help—we already have young people signing up.'" - Interviewee

- **Young People Leaving Town:** Regional out-migration of young people after high school made it hard to sustain leadership or peer worker continuity.

Insights:

- Future Proof's success relied heavily on local adaptability and existing trust relationships.
- Locally tailored delivery was more effective than rigid program structures.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

4. Emotional and Social Recovery

Overview:

While practical preparedness activities were important, many stakeholders stressed that emotional healing and social reconnection were just as if not more valuable for young people.

Key Points:

- **Safe Spaces and Fun First:** Many projects focused first on rebuilding social confidence, especially after bushfires and COVID lockdowns.

"We focused on fun and connection—because that's what they needed. Not lectures on resilience." – Interviewee

- **Mental Health and Conversations:** The project helped create environments where trauma, grief, climate anxiety, and recovery could be discussed openly.

"It gave us permission to talk about climate change—not pretend everything's okay."
– Interviewee



SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

6. Administrative Tension and Capacity Strain

Overview:

While the administrative backbone provided by YACVic was appreciated, many participants felt the program suffered from capacity gaps and bureaucratic burden.

Key Points:

- Overloaded Teams: YACVic's team was too small for a project of this size.

"At one point there were only two people at YACVic running Future Proof."

- Interviewee

- Meeting Fatigue: Stakeholders often felt overwhelmed by check-ins, reporting, and meetings.

"There were so many meetings. It took time away from working with young people."

- Interviewee

- Short Funding Windows: The push to spend money quickly clashed with the slower pace of community engagement.

"We could have stretched the funding longer—but were told no." - Interviewee

Insights:

- A larger delivery team would have supported more consistent partner engagement, mentorship, and responsiveness to local needs.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

7. Sustainability and Long-Term Recovery

Overview:

All interviewees emphasised that recovery and resilience-building are long-term efforts—not something that ends when funding runs out.

Key Points:

- Loss of Momentum: Communities built engagement, visibility, and trust—only to have to scale down when funding ended.

"We built something great, and now we're back to bare minimum." - Interviewee

- Public Perception: Locals often misunderstood the funding purpose, thinking communities had "already received enough."

"People said, 'Why do you need more money? Didn't you already get bushfire funds?'" - Interviewee

- Hope for the Future: Despite challenges, stakeholders were hopeful that lessons learned could inform stronger, more sustainable future investments.

"If we can learn from Future Proof, imagine what more we could do." - Interviewee

8. Cross-Cutting Themes

CoPs (Communities of Practice): Mixed Reviews

- For some, CoPs were valuable spaces for peer learning and networking.
- Others found them repetitive or unclear in purpose. Success was highly dependent on partner buy-in and relevance to local context.

Peer Worker Model: A Standout Strength

- Gave young people real-world experience, leadership skills, and community visibility.
- Worked best where supervision and development were structured and ongoing.

Place-Based Work is Critical

- One-size-fits-all didn't work.
- Projects thrived where delivery was flexible, locally trusted, and culturally relevant.

SURVEY DATA & KEY THEMES

Analysis Stakeholder Interviews

Conclusion: Lessons and Recommendations

Future Proof was a bold and innovative initiative that:

- Activated youth leadership
- Supported emotional recovery
- Built capacity in small communities
- Delivered real outcomes for young people

Future projects would benefit from:

1. Longer-term funding commitments
2. Increased staff resourcing at both backbone and local levels
3. Better alignment with local services from the outset (e.g., CFA, health, education)
4. Clearer transition pathways from training to employment
5. Stronger structural support for peer workers, including supervision, planning, and follow-up
6. Ongoing storytelling and data-sharing to showcase invisible wins like emotional growth, reconnection, and resilience-building

The Future Proof initiative demonstrated that youth-led recovery is not only possible, it is powerful, transformative, and essential to building resilient communities. Throughout the project, young people across rural and regional areas stepped up with creativity, courage, and compassion, showing that when they are genuinely trusted, supported with meaningful investment, and given the time and space to lead, they don't just recover from adversity, they reimagine what's possible.

Their ideas sparked hope, their leadership inspired action, and their voices united communities. Future Proof proved that young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow they are the changemakers of today.

CONCLUSION



The Youth Affairs Council Victoria's Collective Impact Project has not only met but significantly exceeded its intended goals. Through a structured, collaborative approach grounded in Collective Impact and co-design principles, the project has engaged over 37,000 young people across bushfire-affected communities—delivering tangible, transformative outcomes.

By embedding young people at the center of decision-making processes, the project has created authentic opportunities for leadership, education, and workforce development. Youth Advisory Groups have empowered young people to influence programs, services, and policies that directly affect them—ensuring their voices shape local governance and recovery efforts.

The Collective Impact framework brought together LGAs, community organisations, education providers, and young people under a unified vision. This structure broke down silos, fostered cross-sector collaboration, and enabled more effective, community-driven solutions. Co-design was critical—young people weren't just consulted but co-created solutions based on their lived experience, increasing relevance, ownership, and long-term outcomes.

The outcomes speak for themselves:

- Increased participation of young people in governance, leadership, and professional development programs.
- Transition pathways into employment, further education, and vocational training.
- Strengthened social connectedness, mental health support networks, and youth-friendly service models.
- Enhanced local capacity to respond to future crises through youth-led preparedness planning.

Importantly, the project has embedded a culture of youth empowerment, where young people are recognised as essential partners in community resilience and recovery. The commitment of LGAs and community partners to sustain these efforts demonstrates the lasting value of the initiative.

This project serves as a model for scalable, systemic change. With continued investment and collaboration, the principles of Collective Impact and co-design can be expanded to ensure young people remain at the forefront of disaster recovery, resilience, and long-term community wellbeing.

THANK YOU



A heartfelt thank you to each and every one of our coalition partners,

- Wellington Shire Council
- Rural City of Wangaratta
- North-East Local Learning and Employment Network (NELLEN)
- Moogji Aboriginal Council
- Mansfield Shire Council
- Junction Support Services
- Indigo Shire Council
- Gippsland East Local Learning and Employment Network (GELLEN)
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- Corryong Neighbourhood Centre
- Alpine Shire Council
- Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS)
- Victoria University Youth and Community Research Group,
- Youth Affairs Council Victoria

To all the incredible young people who have led with courage and vision on local and statewide Youth Advisory Groups (YAG's), co-designed, participated and supported events, undertaken qualifications and genially supported this project. Your commitment and collaboration have transformed the landscape of disaster resilience and recovery in Victoria, creating opportunities for youth leadership and empowerment.

To the community sector and emergency management colleagues, thank you for your support and partnership, which have been pivotal in driving this initiative forward. A special acknowledgment goes to our funders, the Australian Government, whose belief in the potential of young people has made this project possible.

