

***Young People and Bushfire Recovery***

***Key Findings and Emerging Themes***

***Workshop 3&4 ‘The Silver Lining’ and “Rising from the Ashes’***

YACVic was engaged by the Victorian Government, Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) to hear directly from young people and communitymembers in rural and regional areas about their experiences of response and recovery from the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires across Eastern Victoria, and their ideas for recovery, rebuilding and preparation for a better future.

The People and Wellbeing Recovery Branch within BRV strives for community-led recovery. Young people are a large part of the community and their views are often overlooked.

The Government sought to hear directly from young people about their experiences and opinions with regard to bushfire response and recovery, to ensure action was based on their views, expertise, and experiences.

Consultations were complemented by a series of training workshops on youth participation for community leaders, and DET funded youth advocacy and leadership workshops for young people, developing and enhancing their skills in advocacy, leadership, and decision-making.

Young people are experts in their own lives and have important and equal contributions to make in bushfire recovery and rebuilding efforts. DET’s and BRV’s engagement of YACVic demonstrates an understanding that enabling young people’s agency also contributes to their mental health and wellbeing in relation to the traumatic events. It is also important for community leaders to understand and embrace good practice in youth participation and creating ethical and safe experiences for young people.

**Purpose**

The purpose of these consultations was to:

* engage with young people, to genuinely seek their perspectives on the 2019-2020 bushfires and what is needed for recovery
* inform policy and the types of supports the government develops and contributes to for young people and local communities
* to ensure student voice is valued and leveraged to shape future DET Trauma Recovery Team interventions
* develop new resources on good practice in engaging and supporting young people and local communities
* have young facilitators deliver workshops and training opportunities for young people in partnership with schools and local communities.

This includes a focus on big picture and aspirational ideas, as well as identifying local vision statements, collecting stories, and providing an opportunity for young people to discuss experience and solutions in a safe and facilitated place-based environment.

The data from these consultations will be analysed and reported by YACVic in a final report. Information will be deidentified and uploaded to the YACVic youth bushfire recovery webpage for public access. Upon approval from the department and BRV this information will also be shared with place based (local) bushfire recovery and support services, youth workers, schools, local government and community recovery committees to further assist with bushfire preparedness and recovery efforts at a local and regional level.

**Workshop 3 & 4 – ‘The Silver Lining’ and ‘Rising from the Ashes’**

In these consultations young people identified ideas and aspirations for skills and jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts, or that should be considered as part of the long-term strategy for the community. Young people explored unique needs and ideas for the recovery and rebuilding of their communities with an aspirational view for the future.

Participants throughout this consultation series also took the opportunity to participate in an additional consultation to contribute and reflect specifically on the Emergency Response for the purpose of informing the Inspector General of Emergency Management, that was facilitated in parallel with Workshop 3 & 4. *(Participant numbers and details are outlined in the appendix)*

**Consultation Workshop Design**

Our consultation Workshops were codesigned with members of the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group, who also assisted in the delivery of this series. YACVic facilitated these workshops face to face in the bushfire affected communities of Cann River, Mallacoota, Orbost, Bairnsdale/Sarsfield, Corryong and Bright *(Please refer to attachment 1 for Participant details).* Please note mental health services and debriefing opportunities were incorporated into the workshop design.

Consultation workshops were held in spaces and places that were accessible for young people, and in which they felt safe and included: Youth Centers, community education spaces and even outdoors at the local skate park.

Youth Working Group members also assisted YACVic staff to identify the evolution of local language used by those affected by the fires. An example of this was flame affected/fire affected: participants were able to identify their level of impact whilst not having to disclose individual experiences that could be triggering. This use of language was also helpful for community to self-manage their own perceived guilt if they were not directly flame affected whilst acknowledging that they were still very much fire affected.

**Workshop Framework**

YACVic staff in consultation with the YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group designed the workshop framework to unpack key areas and concepts specific to local community needs. The draft plan for the workshop was taken to the working group and finalized in a 3hr workshop for both the Silver Lining and Rising from the Ashes workshops, to be unanimously agreed upon.

YACVic used flexible approaches and natural conversations to unpack comments and supported young people to do this throughout to elaborate and explore ideas and concerns, specific to their community.

Workshops utilized several consultation methods including drawing, mapping, games, small and large group discussions, which were recorded by session scribes. Images of some of the workshop drawing/mapping activities can be seen throughout this report. Workshop frameworks can be provided upon request; below are some examples of workshop questions.

**The Silver Lining**

* What are the main employment options young people traditionally have in your area?
* What jobs can flow on from Recovery and Rebuilding?
* What roles do you think young people can hold in local industries?
* What are the barriers to young people gaining employment in your area?  What are the solutions to these barriers?
* What about education and training, how could that help you to gain employment?

**Rising from the Ashes**

* If you came back in 15 years, what would you hope to find here in your community?
* What do you wish was available now that would make your community better?
* What would you like to see your community create, improve, or encourage in your area/town/school?
* How can you be involved/advocate to make it happen?

**YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group**

The YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group consists of 12 young people aged 12-25, currently living in rural and regional parts of eastern Victoria impacted by the 2020 fires (East Gippsland, Towong, Alpine and beyond). YACVic provided the Youth Working Group with training in facilitation and advocacy and meet with the group monthly.

Youth Working Group members are currently assisting in the development of new resources to support young people and local communities. They have consulted with young people and community about the fires and what is needed in the recovery response, co-delivered local workshops and participated in a number of training opportunities with young facilitators in partnership with local communities.

**Target Population Group**

Young people aged 12-25, currently living in rural and regional parts of eastern Victoria impacted by the 2020 fires (East Gippsland, Towong, Alpine and beyond). *(Participant numbers and details are outlined in the appendix)*

**Consultation Workshop 3: THE SILVER LINING**

Young people who attended these consultations identified ideas and aspirations for skills and jobs that could flow from the recovery and rebuilding efforts, or that should be considered as part of the long-term strategy for affected communities.

**Existing pathways for youth employment**

Around half the participants were engaged in part time employment, with the majority in hospitality and retail, arts (paid gigs locally), babysitting and many in farming and agriculture. Participants identified limitations to ongoing employment in these regions, with the majority expressing they would need to relocate following secondary education for further education and employment.

YACVic asked participants the following questions: What are the main employment options young people traditionally have in your area? What role do you think young people can hold in local industries?

**Traditional employment rolls identified by workshop participants include:**

* + Retail
	+ Hospitality
	+ Farming and agriculture
	+ Cleaning
	+ App development and administration
	+ Childminding
	+ Arts/music
	+ Volunteering
	+ Tourism
	+ Laboring

Young people described existing employment and voluntary roles and the opportunities that are available to them. They spoke about the skills and benefits (as detailed in direct participant comments below) that are gained via local employment and training as well as some of the barriers that exist, including the need to travel and how many people still need to permanently leave a rural community to access further education and to start a career. They told us about the importance of connection to local community and how ‘knowing someone’ assists in facilitating employment opportunities.

Direct quotes from workshop participants:

* *Volunteering like as a life saver, surf coaching and then into surf-teaching.*
* *Mostly people need to travel out of here to get a career started. People tend to come back for teaching.*
* *A lot of people left after the fires because it was not nice, but now lots are coming back, a lot of their parents are here.*

**YACVic asked participants: *“If you want a job can you get one”?***

* *Yes, but because it’s a small town if you have a good reputation you will get a job, it is also about who you know. Skills are not needed as most people will train you, like parent’s farm (sometimes paid, not very often), a few young people in the bakers’ shop, folding boxes in pizza shop, IGA and agriculture.*
* *Supermarket is the biggest employer in the area, pizza shop, baker, and newspaper delivery.*
* *Got given a cow and then when sold had the money given to them.*

**Bushfire Response and Recovery Career Pathways (short, medium, and long term)**

Participants identified a range of career pathways and opportunities that could exist in the community immediately following the disaster response, in locally driven locations such as relief centres.

**YACVic asked participants: ‘What jobs/skills can flow on from Recovery and Rebuilding?’**

* *Relief Centres – at the epicenter and the school when that first opened up it was mainly locals who were involved, not sure if they got paid or was voluntary, not sure if there was a plan at the relief center or these just responded, not so much young people, more elderly people say 50 or more.*
* *Packing, boxing, animal care, childcare.*
* *Young people could register at the youth center, put their name down and be given a job.*
* *A few picked up local work with the recovery and support services, GROCON workers and others from Melbourne and elsewhere, not overly advertised, just tried to fill as quickly as they could.*
* *Blaze Aid were quick, got the job done, had about six workers out there.*
* *Tons of cool things, good things happening in the area, hunting, fishing, ecotourism, farming, building airplanes etc.*
* *Get young people to do social media for businesses.*
* *Summer crew and park rangers. It was confusing about the requirements and qualifications for summer crew and park rangers.*
* *There needs to be more local opportunities for these positions. Need to be more locals in the rangers and summer crew could be focused on young people.*
* *Advertised a few through the Neighborhood House, water organisations, fence making, so we tried to promote local. Some of the local workers picked up things with GROCON, fencing etc.*
* *Environmental conservation projects/groups.*
* *Landcare do try, people talk about A.I. situations (Artificial insemination).*
* *Outlets to get involved in helping with social improvements, being a part of save the children for example.*
* *Areas that have grown – traffic controlling, that was amazing because there were 12-hour days with lots of opportunities around tree felling, truck driving.*
* *Heaps of work on farms, if you aren’t picky, I’m a school leaver who stayed and I’ve tried one thing and if that hasn’t worked out, so I’ve gone to another.*
* *Driving the tractors with longer term options they can’t find good laborer’s, but for shorter term not the skills.*
* *Farming received a pretty big boost with the silt/ etc. on the land, bumper crops, and grass season for farmers from healthier soil.*

**Ideas/opportunities for skill development**

Participants identified opportunities to provide upskilling for young people in local communities across a range of industries, through non-traditional pathways including volunteering, work experience, mentoring and non-accredited training via neighborhood houses ‘learn local’ and school-based opportunities.

The young people offered many solution-based ideas and strategies that would benefit them personally, but would also help and give advantages to local communities in the response to the crisis, recovery, and rebuilding efforts.

Participants also identified opportunities to build community and school-based collaborations for skill development.

A coordinated and area wide approach that includes young peoples’ ideas to further improve community cohesion will be included in YACVic’s final report along with recommendations.

**YACVic asked participants: ‘What skills/opportunities are need to participate in Recovery and Rebuilding?’**

* *Create programs and give skills to young people to set up a crew of young people to help.*
* *Focus on what your existing skills are but be focused on what you can use them for.*
* *(A local school) school has a year 9 program, works with all the local area, some kids are excluded but does not help anyone who is below that year level.*
* *Room for lots of youth entrepreneurship opportunities, someone’s nephew aged 7 is selling eggs through local businesses.*
* *Someone took classes around how to service a car, went to schools did group with girls and boys.*
* *Recommendations in the environmental and agricultural sector were highlighted, partnering with local TAFE providers, Learn Local Agencies, and trade colleges.*
* *A day on farms, trying to tap into local areas where young people can spend a day learning skills. Gardening skills, growing your own vegetables etc.*
* *All-round skills-not so much longer-term courses, but short and sharp, like doing a 2-day course on truck driving etc.*
* *Bushfire – Junior programs can lead into summer crew (DEWLP). Apply and hope that you get it. But no CFA programs for young people specifically.*
* *Increase the ability to take part in environmental preparation, while being paid.*
* *Roll out training like white cards, so young people could do fencing.* (White Card is the common name for the 'Prepare to Work Safely in the Construction Industry CPCCWHS1001' training course).
* *Could summer crew (DEWLP) be an opportunity for young people to participate in and get skill development as part of that, like chainsaw, drive a manual car.*
* *Sit down and work out how to do an application, do I want to do this job, was a bit overwhelming, I know I struggled, trying to get my shit together.*
* *It would be awesome if locals, especially young farmers, had all round skills. As a young person I need to know all these things because a good farmer is all-round. They are going to be able to help their fathers and then respond, Allrounders.*
* *Reconnect – people who haven’t finished school or job applications, Gemma runs that but really hard to keep people involved.*
* *Skills stuff would be incredible, there are silly feuds that hold tons of things back, tourism, people joining forces, coming together, I’m not going because that person is going.*
* *Heard that up at the high school there used to be a fire training session, but it has stopped now, could learn how to use pumps etc., COVID interrupted.*

**Barriers to employment and participation**

Barriers identified by young people for participating in skill development and employment included: lack of experience, a young person’s and regional reputation/stigma in the local community, lack of transportation, reliance on volunteers, Covid restrictions and bureaucracy.

Not including young people in the community response can result in them feeling disconnected and lead to a lack of pride in their local town or area. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development, and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

Participants identified barriers to employment and participation

**YACVic asked participants: ‘What are the barriers to young people gaining employment in your area? What are the solutions to these barriers? What about education and training, how could that help you to gain employment?”**

* *Some farms take backpackers rather than locals, they are on site.*
* *Stigma around Victoria about coming to [\*deidentified town] now.*
* *Reputation, can we trust them? What’s that person like? We haven’t employed people because of their reputation.*
* *Effect on local contractors - with free services in the area, farmers opted for the free version.*
* *[\*Deidentified town] has stayed the same and it feels like it’s dying out. There is nothing here for young people.*
* *Heavily reliant on volunteer work.*
* *We weren’t allowed to help, trying to help out unpack boxes and things but weren’t allowed to, no reasons given.*
* *Provide young people with skills.*
* *Transport is an issue.*
* *We want you to know that the biggest hurdles we face are bureaucratic. We can get a lot more done with less* *bureaucracy. Why is there a need for so much paperwork?*
* *Qualifications and experience, but how do you get the experience without being given a go?*
* *Need to be physically fit, like to do fencing.*
* *We were unable to do work experience because of Covid.*
* *Most people were not planning to stay in [\*deidentified town]. There is not a lot to do here.* [5 of the 6 at this consultation wanted to live in another regional town, 1 in the city. Half wanted to consider spending time in another country but not to live.]
* *We felt like we were imposing trying to help.*
* *I wanted to volunteer anywhere, missed out, I had zero qualifications.*
* *I can’t get involved with [\*participant identified their local CRC] because you need a lot of experience.*

***This last comment highlights the need for collaboration to ensure direct feedback and comments from young people can support local Community Recovery Committees to include young people in their committee structure in a meaningful and supported way.***

When discussing barriers to employment it became clear from what young people said that they were not aware of any overall local or area-wide plan that included industry employment options tied to initial or longer-term recovery. Involving and consulting with local young people remains an area that can be improved.

**Workshop 4: Rising from the Ashes - Aspirations for Community Recovery**

Due to young people's availability, time constraints, online fatigue and the narrow window of time coming out of COVID-19 restrictions, this workshop was held concurrently with Workshop 3, also taking advantage of the momentum of young people’s enthusiasm to meet in a face-to-face environment. (Workshop statistics are outlined in appendix 1.)

*Rising from the Ashes* explored unique needs and ideas for recovery and rebuilding of affected communities within the broader community and school settings.

In order to do this, we spoke to young people and asked them about: Access to services/youth specific spaces, access and connection to peers (outside of school time) and access to information.

As noted in the first report, a consultation participant clearly identified that our approach should be contextualised moving forward, saying *“stop asking us to think outside the box, when we don’t know what the box is.”* This sentiment was echoed by many young people – both those connected to services and those who had limited involvement in recovery efforts – and confirmed by the YACVic Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group.

**YACVic asked participants: ‘What has happened post bushfire for young people in your area? And ‘What would you like to see your community create, improve or encourage in your area/town/school?’**

Young people have identified unanimously across the bushfire affected communities a need for physical spaces to facilitate a sense of belonging and connection. Community place-based youth spaces are one such recommendation that was identified.

Consultations conducted in communities with a facilitated ‘space’ for young people (i.e. The Sanctuary Mallacoota and Corryong Neighbourhood Centre) indicated that young people had a greater connection to peers, and the bushfire recovery efforts.

Consultations in communities without place-based physical locations, and without a local youth worker, highlighted the disconnection that young people may feel and their desire to have access to a space and connect to their peers and the local community.

Additionally, young people wanted the opportunity to input into the creation of the space. As you can see by the comments below.

**YACVic asked participants: “If you had a youth space what would it be like”?**

* *Open, positive space to be, a safe space, provide group discussion spaces, sausage sizzles and food, chill space, and a place for YP to meet and chill and hang out but also to talk.*
* *(youth space) Don’t go over the top, ask young people how to input into this. Young people could carpool because transport is an issue. You would want experienced people there like in therapy, working with young people.*
* *Town needs a youth worker. Need to be discreet, need an outsider, not like maybe an outreach worker but regular days and times.*
* *It could be done online with the right set up but a mix of group and 1t1 with an experienced Youth worker.*
* *Turn old facilities into a community hub – full of resources.*
* *We should have had a big debrief, group chats for young people that were facilitated.*
* *Young people can contribute to community needs.*
* *The fire was the excuse to set up the Sanctuary [youth space in Mallacoota], other towns don’t have excuses like the fire to set up things like this, but other towns don’t have this because they didn’t have a fire. That sucks because they need a focus point like we have here. We need more staff to help, and [\*Deidentified worker] can’t do it all.*

There is an opportunity for local communities to listen to, engage and act on the suggestions of young people on how to include young people in spaces that engage them.

* *Mountain bike track – making little tracks on hills around town, wanting a mountain bike trail to be built here, young people are now really interested, Corryong boys, wanting to form a little trip to Bright. Going to Bright or Omeo to ride their tracks and talk to the people who built them.*

**Mental health support and stigma.**

The consultations also highlighted Mental Health support, community involvement and peer to peer supports as important. Where communities have access to youth spaces and ‘passive activity’ outlets it also provides opportunities for health promotion, needs identification and referrals, and information, in a trusted space without pressure or stigma.

YACVic asked participants: what do you wish was available now that would make things better?

**Direct quotes from participants:**

* *Practical sense across community, an awareness campaign, creating a culture where people are encouraged to be good, to help others, we saw that with the fires, acts of kindness helps others.*
* *Transparency – we don’t even know who does what, don’t know statistics, where is the funding for recovery?*
* *Develop opportunities for young people in [deidentified\*] to meet with council to tell them what’s going on here.*
* *Giving young people skills in how to talk about mental and emotional help.*
* *To know that it is okay to not be okay and that you’re not alone.*
* *Peer to peer mental health, communication channels and support for each other.*

**Community Recovery**

Young people told us about where and how they sought relief and support immediately following the crisis. They told us about the challenges that they and their families faced in the aftermath and how this could be improved. They also spoke of the emotional burden that they experienced and the challenges they had and still experience because of the fires. Creating a space in both the short term and long term for young people to gather, gain information and to both provide and receive structured professional and peer support remains an unmet need for many of them.

**YACVic asked participants: ‘Is it strange to talk about this (bushfire recovery) now, a year on from the disaster, and what other comments would you like to make?’**

* *No, because it’s still going on.*
* *We need to be listened to and confirmed before the event as to what the event is actually about what the conversation is meant to achieve so we can be listened to.*
* *Next fire season the shire has to implement the fire preparation processes BEFORE the fires not afterwards (this happened last year e.g., The shire was meant to chop down trees and slash dry grass around back roads but that didn’t happen until AFTER the fires hit).*
* *We went to an office, filled out forms, and they gave you money, we caught a train to Box Hill.*
* *We made an appointment with DHHS, my family had no money.*
* *You just don’t know what’s available, who’s there to help?*
* *The Sarsfield hub gave out free equipment and then we had the Friday night feed and there were games and things for young people doing.*
* *There was a place thinking you were so invaluable; being made to feel we were in the way.*
* *Streamlining donations, people donated useless stuff.*
* *People were giving us shit stuff we didn’t need.*
* *More opportunities to connect with peers.*
* *I missed out on climate strikes!! Bloody Covid and fires.*
* *Because of CV19 I missed going on our Snow trip and going on Bondi rescue.*
* *Junior Vic Bushfire came and gave a talk, not really participated, Junior Rotary got us to attend. We took notes, what could we do to improve, how did the fires impact you specifically. They were asking, but not.* (Participant indicated that they did not feel included in the conversation, that they were not meaningfully consulted.)

**YACVic asked participants: ‘What have been some of the challenges young people have faced, (bushfire recovery) a year on from the disaster, and what other comments would you like to make?’**

* *There are too many meetings at the Sanctuary, but because it’s youth led, we are expected to do it.*
* *Young people took on the brunt of looking after the family emotionally.*
* *Young people on farms saw a lot of trauma especially.*
* *Needed a place to catch up with friends out of school.*
* *Youth Group in C [\*deidentified], and it's hard to get people to join, but we will be a pathway to LAROs (Local Area Recovery Officers) and BRV.*
* *Nothing really happened after the fires to go and talk with your friends about the fires until something big happened (suicide) and even after that, not much happened.*
* *It was great having the army here; they were here for a few months.*
* *We have some services, but they operate out of Bairnsdale and there is no service for young people here.*
* *We need help to get an issue up (Recovery Committees).*
* *I was not so sure about joining as I was in Melbourne at the beginning of the year.*
* *It’s like an assumption that you are going to put everything into the sanctuary but it’s a lot of pressure and people like friends told us to shut it down.*
* *We had to learn as we go.*
* *There is an expectation that we will all do big things in the future.*
* *We are unsure how to get other young people involved, sometimes they get scared off.*
* *The capable people are already doing everything that they can.*
* *Voting system or every so often so people can write down things and ideas.*

**School Based Recovery**

Consultations revealed an inconsistent recovery response from the department. DET is community-led, and implements the *National Principles of Disaster Recovery* and so inconsistency across schools and regions was to be expected.

Individual school-based recovery work for students can be attributed to number of compounding factors – some local, some state and some national. No wellbeing programs are mandated to Victorian schools and Principals have autonomy to opt-in to supports offered, or not, depending on the needs of their individual school community.

Some young people felt that not enough was done to highlight and respond to the issue whereas others were able to point to key things that their local school did to respond.

COVID19 almost directly followed the bushfires, and this had an extremely disruptive impact on processing and responding to disaster recovery. Opportunities remain for schools and DET to create a coordinated response to disaster management, and better involve and include students in the development and implementation of those supports. YACVic’s engagement is an example of a response that involves and includes students in the development and implementation of their bushfire recovery responses.

Some schools that were heavily impacted by the Black Saturday fires of 2009 have developed award winning programs for disaster response which include students in better understanding, preparing, and responding to future disasters. These programs have real benefits for students and the whole of school community and need to be more clearly explored for utilisation in schools and communities impacted by the 2019 and 2020 fires and more broadly to other schools in high fire risk areas.

The DET Trauma Recovery Team has strong links to schools and works closely with Principals. DET have several people with experience from the Black Saturday fires who provide advice and support for Trauma Recovery Team via an Advisory Group (Jane Heyward, Prof. Lisa Gibbs, Dr Rob Gordon).

Participants across all five sites in YACVic’s consultations highlighted the desire for education settings to facilitate greater opportunities for student support and consultation programs. Some young people communicated that DET’s and BRV’s engagement of YACVic to deliver these workshops was the first opportunity they had had to discuss (in a school setting) their experiences and the fire events.

YACVic asked participants: ‘What would you like to see your community create, improve, or encourage in your area/town/school? How can you be involved/advocate to make it happen?’

* *Why is this the first time we have been asked to talk about this in school.*

Participants appreciated the opportunity to feel heard and valued in a safe and confidential setting.

* *Programs exactly like yours need to be implemented in schools without doubt as I definitely found it beneficial to reflect a really hard time without feeling that I was being pushed to talk about it/judged.*
* *Things like this need to be brought in as a whole school approach rather than being mentioned and forgot about or only focused on individuals.*
* *Do these sessions in schools. It should be compulsory. Please follow up and come to our school.*

Participants identified positive communication strategies utilised by schools including the use of Compass, newsletters, social media, and individual phone calls to parents and carers.

Some young people expressed that they felt rushed into recovery.

* *I feel they were all in a rush to move on, bushfires are scary, and it takes a while to move on, they just rushed us.*
* *My school is acting like its over its done move on, thanks for coming.*

As described in the content below, recovery journeys differ for everyone. This requires different and flexible levels of support from community, families and individuals. People on this journey can all be at different stages of recovery at any one time.

* *Journey to recovery considers that people respond to disaster in different ways and over different time frames. The figure below illustrates the psychosocial experiences people may go through immediately after a disaster. Responses range from feeling heroic and a sense of community cohesion to feelings of disappointment, anger and frustration as clean-up and reconstruction commence, finally moving to reconstruction and a new normality. It is important to realise that, just as actions in the recovery domains are not necessarily linear nor sequential, people and communities may move through these phases at different paces, meaning they are ready for new recovery actions at different times.*

*Page 17.* [*https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/sites/default/files/NBRA%20-%20Journey%20to%20recovery.pdf*](https://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au/sites/default/files/NBRA%20-%20Journey%20to%20recovery.pdf)

* *In families, each person reacts in their own way after an emergency. Understanding each other and some of the common reactions to look out for can help your family.* [*https://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief-and-recovery/661*](https://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief-and-recovery/661)*.*

**School based mental health support**

Participants throughout these workshops, and in the previous bushfire recovery workshop held by YACVic ‘Looking Back’, consistently raised the need for increased mental health supports, and the importance of these services being local, confidential, ongoing, trusted, and discreet. Young people identified there was a stigma attached to accessing the mental health services provided to them via the schools, and the desire to increase the variety of services beyond the school counselors, due to the perceived lack of confidentiality.

Throughout the consultations, the participants often led the discussions, with YACVic facilitators encouraging the young people to elaborate on topics that were highlighted as particularly relevant for them.

* *We needed more mental health support. We had very limited access to Mental health. One off mental health, they saw us once and never came back, they were only here for a month. We only had one counsellor at school. They always get on with the little children or the teachers, but not teenagers.*
* *School is not a safe place to talk to someone (MH Services). We needed out of town services.*
* *One girl did go to see the counsellor and she got bullied.*
* *School had some services come in. It’s like I don’t really want to tell you my s\*\*\*.*
* *Some kids were asked to just go to the staff room.*
* *There should have been a whole school approach when accessing counselling.*
* *There were lots of options, but they didn’t really help. One to one session for one young person.*
* *We were told there was a counsellor, but we have never been introduced to them. They need to be more secretive about when you access this (discreet and confidential) but clearer in where to get that help and assisting people in knowing how to do this privately.*
* *They needed to normalize this for all the students, like it’s not a problem to access these services and here is how. They didn’t do this.*
* *One young person represented youth views at a meeting of politicians from Melbourne who came, and young people spoke from school perspective, they asked how they were going to manage students who were really tired from the fires.*
* *There was no assistance with textbooks. We spent so much money on textbooks I had to make sure they were safe.*
* *There was a lack of telephone communication, the school bus didn’t know where to go, transition communication was not good, always lacking.*
* *Schools need to do more.*

**YACVic asked participants: “What did your school do well to communicate what was happening and the supports available?”**

* *The school was great. We didn’t have internet for a while and school was really good, very helpful.*
* *Technically the school was a relief center.*
* *Compass notifications.*
* *[\*deidentified] and my Mum saw it on Facebook and school compass.*
* *Schools contacted families before we went back and made contact. There was a bushfire program for primary schools which gave kids free books and equipment.*

**IGEM – Consultations**

**Communication and Emergency Response *‘How did you know what was happening?’***

YACVic facilitated Workshops 3 and 4 concurrently with a workshop commissioned by the Inspector-General of Emergency Management. This was a youth-centred approach, ensuring that young people were not consulted multiple times by different agencies about their bushfire experience.

Participants were reimbursed for their time and contributions to their work. Outcomes from the IGEM workshops will be delivered to the Inspector-General of Emergency Management, who wanted to hear from young people about the effectiveness of community-facing relief and recovery following the 2019-2020 Victorian bushfires. The IGEM report shares young people's views, insights, and perspectives. The report may be made available to the community at the discretion of the Inspector-General of Emergency Management

For further information with regards to YACVic’s work with IGEM, please contact Sam Champion, YACVic Participation and Development Manager, supervised our Research/Project Coordinator Fiona McDonald
at schampion@yacvic.org.au.

**Conclusion**

Young people who participated in the ‘Silver Lining’ and ‘Rising from the Ashes’ consultation workshops were appreciative of the opportunity to share their stories and feel heard, and excited to communicate to the government and the wider community to influence the actions of the recovery efforts.

The key themes identified in these consultation workshops, combined with YACVic’s prior consultations from workshops 1 (Looking Back) and 2 (Good Practice Guide Consultations), are:

* Access and Inclusion
* Preparedness and Communication
* Connectiveness and Engagement
* Wellbeing and Identity
* Resilience and Capacity

**Next Steps**

There are several elements to the bushfire recovery projects which we will continue to develop and implement over the coming months, which are outlined below. Recommendations from the project will be included in the final report and will be inclusive of the consultations already undertaken, the upcoming workshops and results from the online young people and bushfire recovery survey (closed May 2021). The report will be produced in collaboration with our Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group, and the initial draft will be presented to DET and BRV in early July. Communities and organisations involved in the project will have the opportunity to also provide input.

Activities still to take place include:

* **DET funded Youth Network Co-design**

DET will support a school-based student-led, School Leaders for Bushfire Recovery group. This ongoing network will focus on empowering young people, produce ideas on how to best engage students in all levels of education, build connections with diverse young people, and improve disaster responses. YACVic has assisted in developing an framework and ToR for the group.

* **Youth Bushfire Recovery Survey result analysis**

It is important to provide all young people impacted by the 2019-2020 bushfires with the opportunity to contribute and have a say in the bushfire recovery and rebuilding work. YACVic is aware that we have not worked directly with all affected communities and have encouraged all young people to take the time to complete the Youth Bushfire Recovery Survey.

* **Youth Engagement Workshops for CRCs**

BRV has commissioned YACVic to deliver a series of workshops on engaging with young people. It is available to Community Recovery Committee (CRC) members across Eastern Victoria.

The workshops aim to assist CRCs in developing engagement strategies when working locally with young people on recovery-based activities. The workshops will be delivered to CRCs across each LGA (Towong, Alpine and East Gippsland) by young facilitators. Workshops will be run at times that work best for CRC members in 2021. There are 30 places for CRC members in each local area (East Gippsland, Alpine and Towong). I.e. 90 places in total.

The following three topics will be covered in each workshop:

1. ***Youth Engagement and Participation***

Find out how to involve young people in decision-making processes. Examining theory and practice, this workshop uses interactive strategies for participants to reflect on how the work of their CRC impact on young people, and how to engage young people’s voices and perspectives throughout. Participants will commence development of a plan to ensure youth voice is included in key aspects of strategic and operational decision making, project design and delivery, governance, and evaluation. This workshop is co-facilitated with a young person and supported by two more (local) young people to provide support in online breakout groups and bring their local youth perspectives to the workshop.

1. ***Child Safe Standards***

Basics of the seven Child Safe Standards which, under the Victorian Government Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, are compulsory for all Victorian organisations that provide services or facilities for children and young people.  [https://www.yacvic.org.au/about-us/child-safe-standards/](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Furldefense.proofpoint.com%2Fv2%2Furl%3Fu%3Dhttps-3A__www.yacvic.org.au_about-2Dus_child-2Dsafe-2Dstandards_%26d%3DDwMFAg%26c%3DJnBkUqWXzx2bz-3a05d47Q%26r%3Dqm5teyQUkI9cJ7vpTRB_5CGWEroDGQrx3fzvui-GcO8%26m%3DZ8EiU3em-Yvb_7EDcSme7kRo_hsX5PhKcqhfkU356qM%26s%3D72BGenxF8nVUpVZmojHmepMq7wjYYlVav_B5PZAi5MQ%26e%3D&data=04%7C01%7Cdryan%40yacvic.org.au%7C0ae8d4b66f7f4c4b0c3a08d886c82918%7Caf3f112173094a30bf1c69bf4b171c58%7C0%7C0%7C637407541536845707%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=w4hO7dANdfdkY6RjvZ5wcjkGm%2BEtEFnU0bSRdeW5fgs%3D&reserved=0). This workshop is co-facilitated with a young person, to provide support in the online format and bring their youth perspectives to the workshop.

1. ***Code of Ethical Practice***

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector (the Code) is a framework to help people who work or engage with young people to think through the ethical dilemmas that will arise. It is not prescriptive, because each situation will be different, but helps work through right or wrong, and what to do. The Code is based on [human rights](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.humanrights.vic.gov.au%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cdryan%40yacvic.org.au%7C0ae8d4b66f7f4c4b0c3a08d886c82918%7Caf3f112173094a30bf1c69bf4b171c58%7C0%7C0%7C637407541536845707%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=oY6f3U8DtWUD2YyMyEb75AKqEYAeNpusfQdv8uRuy2I%3D&reserved=0), and includes a set of youth work principles and ethical practice responsibilities. It supports, but does not replace, legal responsibilities. This workshop is co-facilitated with a young person, to provide support in the online format and bring their youth perspectives to the workshop.  These workshops will be offered in Alpine/ East Gippsland and/ Towong.

* **Development of Youth Participation Resources**

YACVic with the Bushfire Recovery Youth Working Group members will be utilising the outcomes from the Bushfire consultation series to develop, co design and produce resources for young people and communities in disaster response, recovery, and planning. These include:

1. ***Guide to Good Practice in Youth Participation and Inclusion***

YACVic will provide expertise in the form of a succinct and accessible guide to assist committees, community leaders and other decision makers to ensure that young people are safely and meaningfully included in deliberations, committees, decision-making, project design and implementation, governance and evaluation.  The guide will explain why youth participation is important, the key principles that should be adhered to, and resources for further assistance.

It will also include information on making sure youth cohorts such as disabled young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQA+ young people, and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds feel safe and included.

1. ***Fact Sheets***

**Effectively Engaging, Including and Consulting with Young People**

How to engage young people through building mutual trust and respect, including young people from diverse backgrounds.  Includes tools and tips on running effective and engaging workshops and consultations.

**Opportunities for Young People in Recovery and Rebuilding**

Information and ideas to explore regarding how young people might contribute to recovery and rebuilding efforts, from participation in Community Recovery Committees, to consulting on issues of concern to young people, to leading community rebuilding projects.

**Including Young People in Committees and Governance**

Good practice in identifying, including, and supporting young people to take on positions on committees and other governance bodies.

**Existing Resources**

### **Youth Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol**

The Protocol establishes a framework for Federal, State and Local Government emergency and recovery services and committees, institutions, local youth services, youth workers and others who engage with young people in disaster affected areas. It provides guidance on key matters for consideration and inclusion of young people in post-disaster recovery and rebuilding, and to ensure positive outcomes for young people aged 12-25 who have been affected directly and/or indirectly by a disaster. [Read the Youth Focused Disaster Recovery Protocol here](https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/Youth-Focused-Disaster-Recovery-Protocol-February-2020.pdf)

**Emerging Themes Report – Workshop 1&2**

The Emerging Themes Report capture young people’s experiences and proposed solutions to assist agencies in affected areas to plan recovery-based activities and engage with young people moving forward. [Read the Emerging Themes Report from those consultations here](https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/Emerging-Themes-Consultation-1.docx)

**Appendix 1: Key Dates and participation numbers for workshops**

YACVic engaged young people to participate in the below workshops and activities by promoting these opportunities in a number of online streams

* Emails directly to schools, youth service organisations, local government, bushfire recovery committees and
* Social media including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and twitter
* Via the YACVic Website
* Via online newsletters, and networking platforms.

Young people self-nominated to participate in these opportunities. Due to the global pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions, many of these workshops were delivered online via Zoom, but affected by online fatigue, moving in and out of remote and on-site learning, and a general lack of motivation toward participation.

It was also difficult to engage with Aboriginal young people and young people from the CALD community. Although communication was established between coordinators and supporting agencies, only a small number of young people from these communities opted to engage.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ORGANISATIONS** | **DELIVERY METHOD/LOCATION** | **WORKSHOP** | **NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE** | **LENGTH**  |
| BRV/DET | 4 x Online 1 x face-to-face, Corryong Neighbourhood Centre, Youth Space | Looking Back | 40 (10 x 12–15 yrs., 6 x 16– 19yrs, 4 x 20+ yrs., 20 age unknown2). 14 x East Gippsland, 2 x Towong, 4 x Latrobe Shire) | 2-3 hours |
| DET | 1x Online  | Student Co Design Network  | 12 (10 x 12-15 yrs., 2 x 16-19 yrs.). 1 x Bright SC, 3 x Corryong College, 7 x Bairnsdale SC, 1 x Lavalla) | 4 hours  |
| SAVE THE CHILDREN IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face, Community Centre, Cann River3 | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 4 (4 x 12–15yrs, from Cann River area) | 1 hour |
| IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face, The Sanctuary, Mallacoota | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 10 (3 x 12–15yrs, 6 x 16– 19yrs, 1 x 20+yrs, from Mallacoota area) | 1.5 hours |
| IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face, Orbost Education Centre | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 6 (3 aged 12–15yrs, 3 aged 16–19yrs, from Orbost area) | 1.5 hours |
| DET | 1 x face-to-face Bairnsdale SC | Student Co Design Network  | 6 (6 aged 12-15 yrs.) Bairnsdale and Surrounds  | 1 hour  |
| IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face workshop, Gippsland East LLEN, Bairnsdale | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 3 (3 x 12–15yrs, from Bairnsdale area) | 1.5 hours |
| IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face, Corryong Neighbourhood Centre, Youth Space | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 11 (6 x 12–15yrs, 4 x 16– 19yrs, 1 x 20+yrs, all from Corryong Area) | 1.5 hours |
| IGEM/BRV/DET | 1 x face-to-face workshop, Bright Skate Park | The Silver Lining & Rising from the Ashes | 0 |   |
| BRV/DET/IGEM | Ongoing: Online via Survey Monkey  | Young People and Bushfire Recovery Survey  | 8  |  |
| Total  | 13 |   | 100  |   |