

Future Proof



*Young People, Disaster Recovery,
and (Re)building Communities
2022 - 2025 Impact Report*



RURAL



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



An Australian Government Initiative



Acknowledgment of Country

Our work takes place across Victoria.

YACVic's head office is on the lands of the **Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation** in Naarm (Melbourne). We also have offices on the lands of the **Gunditjmara Nation in Warrnambool**, and on the lands of the **Wemba Wemba and Wadi Wadi Nations in Swan Hill**.

We wish to specifically acknowledge the **Traditional Owners of the lands upon which Future Proof operated**, including the **Gunaikurnai, Taungurung, Yorta Yorta, and Wiradjuri People**.

YACVic pays our respects to Elders past and present for their **wisdom, strength, support and leadership**. Bunjil's lore states that **those who walk on this land must care for Country and the waterways as well as care for the children and young people of this land**. We stand in solidarity to pay respect to the ongoing culture and continued history of **all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations**; we celebrate and respect their continuing cultures and are committed to walking beside **all traditional owners as we move toward reconciliation**. Sovereignty was never ceded.

This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



Commitment to Child Safety

YACVic will **not tolerate any abuse of children and young people**. We are committed to protecting and **enhancing the safety and wellbeing** of all children and young people engaged in our physical and online activities. All children and young people are valued, **we actively create opportunities** for their voices, feedback and complaints to be heard and take action to prevent and **safeguard them from future abuse, harm, and neglect**. YACVic responds to **all safety concerns for children and young people**, including if the safety concern is a direct result of engagement with us. **YACVic will continue to invest** in a culture that prioritises the **safeguarding of all children and young people**.

Read our full Statement of Commitment to Child Safety at yacvic.org.au/child-safe-standards.



About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people aged 12-25, and the youth sector that supports them. Our vision is that **the rights of young people in Victoria are respected**, and that they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

We promote youth participation and make policy recommendations on **issues that affect young people's lives**, build the capacity of the youth sector, nurture connections for collaboration and support, and identify and advance thinking on **emerging issues** for young people. We have a particular focus on **young people who face marginalisation** and disadvantage.

We provide additional targeted advocacy through our key agencies, **YACVic Rural** and the **Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS)**.

YACVic recognises that young people and sector professionals in these areas **face particular challenges** and offer specific insights that differ to their metropolitan counterparts. YACVic's presence across the **Great South Coast and Southern Mallee regions** are funded by the Victorian Government through the Rural Presence Program. YACVic Rural also **coordinates and implements** a range of targeted projects across regional and rural Victoria including in **response to disasters**, which have been funded by both Victorian and Australian Governments.

YACVic has worked with young people across **disaster-affected areas** in response to the Black Summer bushfires, throughout the COVID pandemic, and the 2022 Victorian Floods to **inform and support disaster response and recovery** using a youth participation model. YACVic has also worked to **support youth service providers** to identify, develop and support locally relevant and youth-led response and recovery activities to meet community needs. We hope to **continue expanding** our state-wide services to get the best outcomes for **young people throughout rural and regional Victoria**.

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Gang Gang Cockatoo



Executive Summary

April Harrison (she/her), YACVic Future Proof Youth Advisory Group

Future Proof has been a **three-year project** engaging young people in disaster preparedness, education, response and recovery.

As a member of the Future Proof Youth Advisory Group (YAG) I was involved in and contributed to all major decisions of the project. **Having young people advise on what we want to see within a project like this was vital**, as young peoples' voices are often forgotten, or simply left out.

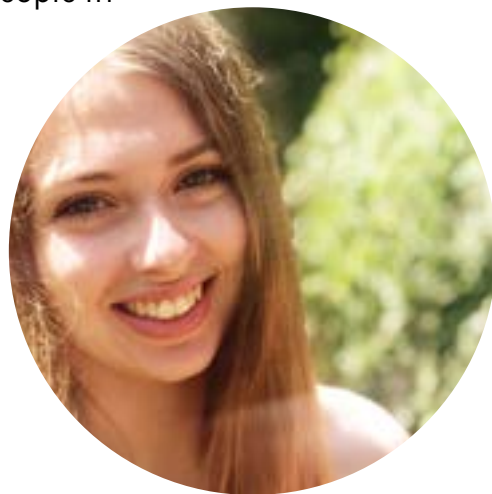
Rural and regional engagement is **often overlooked** where young people are concerned. This project specifically empowered **young people from rural communities**. It authentically provided engagement opportunities, resulting in **legitimate positive change**, and investment into young peoples' futures.

Future Proof is something I am **immensely proud to have been involved in**. Youth advocacy, **disaster resilience and leadership are important to me** as someone who has experienced disaster firsthand. Being able to witness the achievements of young people involved in this project **fills my heart with joy**.

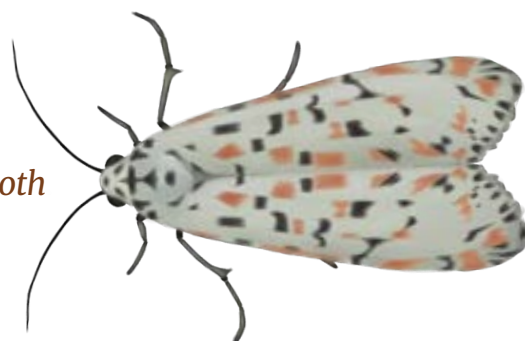
I know that within Future Proof, **my voice mattered**. As YAG members, our perspective and opinions on relevant ideas and decisions were actioned. We were **listened to and trusted as young people** with valuable contributions. Young people are the future leaders, innovators, politicians, scientists, teachers, the list goes on. When young people say we want to be heard, **we mean it**, this project has allowed that, and it has valued our voices.

Young people are coming away from this project with **newfound skills, certificates, training, knowledge and a sense of agency** that was unbeknown to them. They have come away feeling **empowered** with a drive for community youth engagement and a need for further involvement in and **dedication** to their futures.

As a young person who has experienced disaster, **I wish I had something like this project** to utilise in my own recovery. The engagement now is something that would've been so valuable then. I am so happy that we are finally **investing in, considering and listening to** young people. We have **so much** to offer. We are aware of the issues we face, and we have **solutions to contribute**, as it is our futures that are on the table.



Heliotrope Moth



Mary Nega (she/her) YACVIC Ceo & Derm Ryan (he/him) Head of YACVic Rural

Young people have a right to be involved in decisions about them and they have a **right to participate**. YACVic believes that by involving young people in projects about them, **it makes them better**, not just for the young people but for the whole community.

At YACVic, we are committed to ensuring young people are not just included in disaster recovery efforts but are **leading them**. Future Proof has set a new standard for youth participation in **resilience-building**, demonstrating when young people are empowered, entire communities benefit. This project was never just about responding to a crisis—it was about **shifting the way we engage young people** in disaster preparedness and recovery and putting them front and centre. Through a network of **dedicated partners**, Future Proof created **real opportunities** for young people to build skills, find employment, and take ownership of their futures. The impact is clear: **young people now have greater access to career pathways in emergency management and community services, and they are embedded in decision-making at local and regional levels.**

One of the **most powerful outcomes** of this project is the shift in perception. Young people are no longer seen as **passive recipients of disaster aid** but as essential contributors to recovery and **long-term resilience**. This change is not just symbolic—it is reflected in new policies, strengthened community networks, and **increased youth-led initiatives**.



Echidna





Common Flat-Pea

Recommendations in this report are from **young people directly** and from the sector that partnered on delivering Future Proof. They call for **all levels of government** to meaningfully include young people at **all levels of disaster response** going forward. There are also recommendations for greater qualification pathways **enabling and securing** young people's active participation in our collective response to disasters. We encourage government and community to **work together to turn these recommendations into action**.

As **Future Proof** comes to a close, our responsibility is to **ensure its legacy endures**. The lessons learned must inform future recovery models, and young people must **continue to have a voice** in shaping their communities.

To every young person who stepped up, took on leadership roles, and challenged the status quo—**this success is yours**. YACVic will continue to stand beside you, advocating for systems that recognise and **support your contributions**.



Changing the Story

Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and (Re)building Communities initiative set out to address a fundamental gap in disaster response and recovery: the meaningful inclusion of young people. As a collective impact project, Future Proof brought a range of partner organisations, working alongside emergency response agencies.

Together, we worked alongside young people to shift their roles from participants in recovery to leaders **shaping their communities' futures**.

In the wake of the 2019-20 **Black Summer Bushfires**, young people in affected communities faced immense challenges—disruptions to education, employment, mental health, and a lack of representation in recovery decision-making. Future Proof established a common agenda to **empower young people** in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. By embedding youth-led decision-making, providing access to training and qualifications, and fostering community engagement, **we built a movement that laid the foundation** for long-term resilience.



At the heart of Future Proof was a commitment to working collectively, breaking down silos, and ensuring that **every partner played a unique but mutually reinforcing role**. Through structured collaboration, we:

- **Created sustainable workforce pathways.** More than 1,900 young people attained qualifications in emergency management and community services, positioning them for careers that directly contribute to community resilience.
- **Built strong, place-based networks.** Through Community of Practice (CoP) gatherings, bimonthly partner meetings, and continuous mentorship, we facilitated knowledge-sharing and innovation across sectors.
- **Advocated for policy and system-wide change.** The project's impact extended beyond local communities, influencing national conversations about youth participation in disaster resilience.

Future Proof demonstrated that **true resilience is built from the ground up**. We embedded young people into emergency planning, fostered cultural inclusion through Aboriginal-led initiatives, and ensured that **local communities drove their own recovery efforts**.

Future Proof provides a model for **systemic change driven through deep collaboration**, shared measurement, and a steadfast commitment to empowering young voices.

As we reflect on this journey, one thing is clear: **young people are not just the future—they are the present**. Their leadership, innovation, and passion are essential to building stronger, more prepared communities. Future Proof, shows that **when young people are given the opportunity to lead, entire communities benefit**.

What is Future Proof?

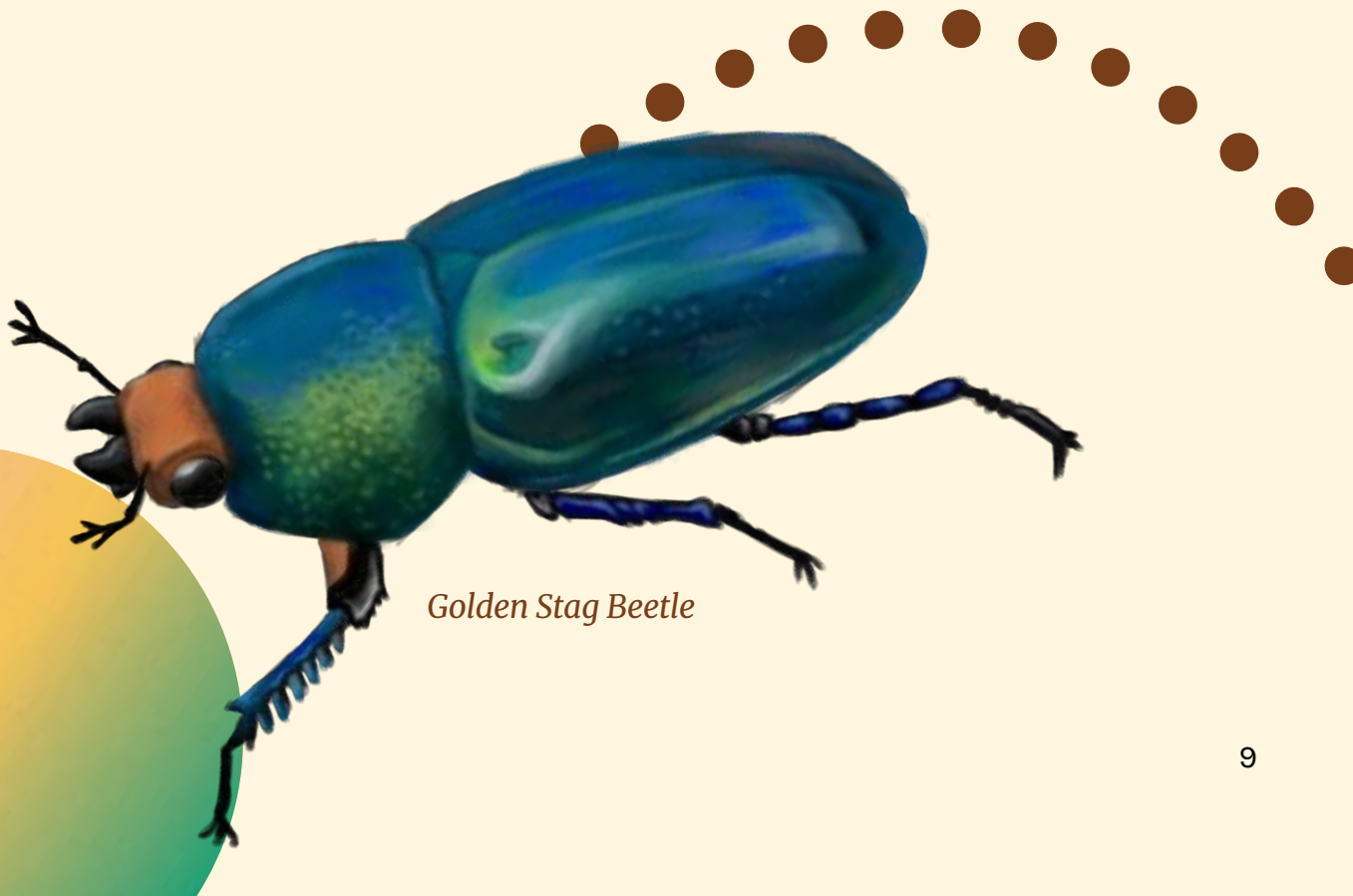
Future Proof was an ambitious collective impact project led by YACVic, in response to the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires. It brought together **14 partners across 8 flame and fire impacted local government areas** across Gippsland and North East Victoria including Local Councils, Non-Government Organisations (**NGO's**), Aboriginal Community Control Organisations (**ACCOs**), Local Learning and Employment Networks (**LLEN**) and Victoria University.

As the coordinating partner, YACVic provided **backbone support** to each partner to deliver youth-led activities and initiatives including:

- Qualification pathways for local young people to **kickstart careers in emergency management** and community services.
- The creation and support of local **Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs)** to design and deliver locally led projects.
- Training and workshops to **build the capacity** of local young people and youth workers.

Future Proof strived to be **place-based** and apply youth work principles to support young people in youth-led recovery projects and community decision-making.

The project was funded under the **Australian Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants program**. The objective of this grant opportunity was to support the recovery efforts of communities in eligible Local Government Areas (LGAs) affected by the 2019-20 bushfires to enable them to **apply for projects that addressed community recovery needs** within their own timeframes on behalf of the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NEMA). The intended outcome of the grant opportunity was to **empower local communities** to address bushfire recovery priorities, including through **creation of jobs, sustainable infrastructure and community investment** targeted at the specific needs of the community.



Golden Stag Beetle

History of the Project

Black Summer Bushfires

Australian Indigo



Impacts on Victoria

The 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires had a catastrophic impact on Victoria, particularly **East Gippsland and the North-East**, where more than 1.5 million hectares burned from November 2019 to February 2020. The Victorian Government declared a state of disaster on 2nd January, leading to one of the **largest emergency responses** in Australian history.

Over 300 homes were destroyed, five lives were lost, and bushfire smoke contributed to an estimated 120 additional deaths. Communities including **Mallacoota, Buchan, Sarsfield, Genoa, Bruthen, and Corryong** were among the hardest hit, with entire towns isolated for days without power, telecommunications, or access to essential services.

As of 28 May 2020, the Insurance Council of Australia estimated the total insured losses reached **approximately \$18.6 million**, with thousands of insurance claims lodged. Young people in these regions experienced **significant disruption** to education, employment, and mental health, as schools closed, services were stretched, and support networks were fractured.

Youth Participation in recovery efforts

In the years since the Black Summer bushfires, YACVic has worked alongside young people in these fire-affected communities to ensure they are **central to the recovery and rebuilding process**. Through initiatives like Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and (Re)building Communities, YACVic have supported youth leadership in disaster resilience, **advocated for youth-led recovery efforts**, and provided platforms for young voices in decision-making.

However, **ongoing challenges remain**, including access to mental health support, rebuilding opportunities for employment and education, and ensuring young people continue to be heard in emergency management and disaster recovery planning.

Young people are experts in their own lives and have important and equal contributions to make in bushfire recovery and rebuilding efforts. Understanding young people's agency **contributes to their mental health and wellbeing** in relation to traumatic events.

YACVic's role in supporting youth-led recovery

In 2020, YACVic was engaged by the Victorian Government – Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV) and the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) – to **engage directly with young people** and community members in rural and regional areas about their experiences of, response to, and recovery from the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires across Eastern Victoria. This provided communities, in particular young people, with **the opportunity to share their ideas for recovery**, rebuilding and preparation for a better future.



YACVic delivered:

- A series of consultation project reports, which outlined initiatives that **young people wanted to see enacted** in their local communities.
- A good practice guide and fact sheets to **support organisations** to meaningfully include young people in recovery-based work.
- Trainings for **local community and local organisations** working alongside young people in the recovery space.

For the young people YACVic worked with over 18 months in these rural and remote communities, the effects have been compounded by the **multiple crises of bushfires, drought, floods, storms, and COVID-19**. The consequence of trauma from these events can change the trajectory of their lives, impacting mental health, education, employment, social development and connection with community and country.

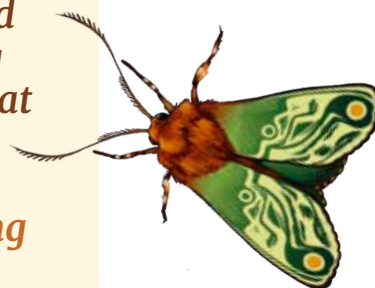
Young people as active leaders in disaster management

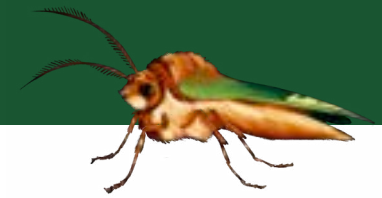
The United Nation Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (UN, 2015) highlights **children and young people as disproportionately affected by disasters**. Our instinct, in the face of disasters, is to ensure the safety of vulnerable people, including children and young people. However, vulnerability, risk, and **resilience discourse in disaster management** individualises young people's experience and views them through a deficit-based lens as passive disaster victims without agency. As a result, **young people are not actively involved** in the design and implementation of disaster management. YACVic has undertaken this work with the objective of **upskilling the community** to support young people's meaningful participation in a safe and inclusive way, ensuring they are active in the recovery and planning space.

YACVic's work continues to focus on **empowering young people** as key stakeholders in their communities, ensuring they are not just recipients of recovery efforts but **active participants shaping a more resilient future**.

"Young people need to be involved as they are going to be here for the long term, they have lots of ideas, and it's just important. We will be inheriting everything after this so we should be involved. I am confident that the community would listen to us."

- Young Person, Bairnsdale 2019 'Speaking Up' Young People's Experiences of Bushfire and Recovery





Establish

The Future Proof project was launched in 2022 in response to the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires, recognising the need for youth-led disaster recovery efforts. YACVic convened partners, secured funding through the Australian Government's Black Summer Bushfire Recovery Grants program, and developed the project framework to embed young people in resilience-building initiatives across disaster-affected communities.

Initiate Community of Practice

A structured Community of Practice (CoP) was established to bring together youth workers, peer workers, and sector leaders. The first CoP sessions focused on defining roles, capacity building, and sharing best practices in youth participation and disaster recovery. Ongoing CoP gatherings facilitated cross-sector collaboration and learning.

Commence Youth Development

Local Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) were formed, ensuring young people had direct input into disaster recovery efforts. Recruitment of youth and peer workers began, alongside the development of training programs to equip them with skills in emergency management, leadership, and community engagement.

Presentation and Oversight

Youth workers, young peer workers presented progress updates and project plans through CoP meetings and sector forums. These sessions helped refine project activities, address emerging challenges, and share successes across partner organisations.

Delivery

Project activities were rolled out across eight local government areas, including training, employment pathways, community engagement projects, and youth-led disaster preparedness initiatives. Ongoing partner coordination ensured alignment with the project's goals.

Progress Review

Regular evaluations and impact assessments were conducted to measure outcomes. Data collection from training completions, youth engagement activities, and community participation informed continuous improvements.

Extension

Based on demand and emerging needs, the project was granted an extension in November 2023. The impact was profound in some regions, allowing communities to deepen youth engagement, enhance sustainability, and strengthen local networks supporting young people in disaster recovery.

Complete Project Delivery

Final workshops, training sessions, and youth-led initiatives were completed. Partners consolidated learnings and prepared for transitioning project components into long-term community strategies.

Final Review and Recognition

A comprehensive evaluation assessed project impact, highlighting key achievements, challenges, and recommendations. A celebration event was held to recognise the contributions of young people, partners, and stakeholders.

Project Completion

The formal phase of Future Proof concluded in December 2024, with outcomes integrated into ongoing local and state-level recovery efforts. The legacy of the project continues through youth leadership pathways, embedded disaster resilience strategies, and policy influence.

Final Reporting

A final report documented the project's impact, key learnings, and recommendations for future youth-led disaster recovery initiatives. Findings in these reports were shared with government bodies, partner organisations, and the broader community and aim to inform future policy and practice.



How We Measure Impact

Collective Impact is a social change framework for collaboration that engages communities, sectors and groups in place-based settings to address a complex social issue. Future Proof was designed as a **collective impact project** to empower young people in disaster recovery, aligning with the **five key elements** aimed at driving systemic change:

It's based on the idea that to address social impact, a complex and systematic approach to improve inequity is needed.³ It was first coined by Kania and Kramer (2011), who developed the framework, consisting of 5 elements aimed at **creating population change on complex social issues**. It has grown in popularity and been described as a “distillation” of existing knowledge and wisdom to guide collaboration.⁴

1. A common agenda

Future Proof **united partner organisations** under a shared goal: to ensure young people were actively involved in **community recovery and resilience-building**. The project was **place-based, youth-centred, and flexible**, allowing each community to tailor recovery efforts while remaining aligned with the overarching vision.

2. Continuous communication

Trust is key. And the only way to build trust is through open communication and genuine collaboration. This should involve regular meetings between high level leaders in the sector.

Future Proof fostered regular engagement and collaboration through:

- **8 Community of Practice (CoP) gatherings**, uniting youth workers, peer workers, and managers to share insights and challenges.
- **Bimonthly partner meetings** to align efforts across the network and over 200 1:1 monthly check-ins with YACVic and each partner organisation
- **Bimonthly YAG meetings** – 13 in total
- **An online Basecamp platform**, enabling real-time resource sharing and problem-solving among partners. This open and structured communication built trust, encouraged innovation, and strengthened collective action.
- **Meetings with youth workers and peer workers: 17**
- **Bi-monthly Managers meetings: 17**



Southern Bell Frog

3. Backbone support organisation

The backbone organisation needs the skills and resources to keep all the collaborative work on track. They're responsible for providing strategic direction, facilitating stakeholder communication, monitoring data collection and analysis, overseeing funding and coordinating with communities.

YACVic played the **critical role** of backbone organisation, providing:

- **Project coordination** across all partners.
- **Administrative and governance support** to ensure grant compliance.
- **Training and mentoring** for peer workers and youth workers.
- **Advocacy and policy engagement to amplify youth voices** in recovery planning.

This centralised support structure allowed partners to **focus on their core strengths** while ensuring the project remained cohesive and impactful.

4. Mutually reinforcing activities

Stakeholders' actions need to have a shared plan for mutually reinforcing activities that all contribute to the same goal.

Each partner played a unique role while contributing to the collective goal. For example:

- **Local councils integrated young people** into emergency management planning.
- ACCOs ensured **cultural safety and inclusion** in disaster response strategies.
- RTO providers delivered qualifications that **equipped young people with emergency and community resilience skills**.

Youth workers and peer workers provided **on-the-ground engagement** and mentorship.

This coordinated approach ensured that recovery efforts were holistic and community-led, leveraging local expertise to maximise impact.

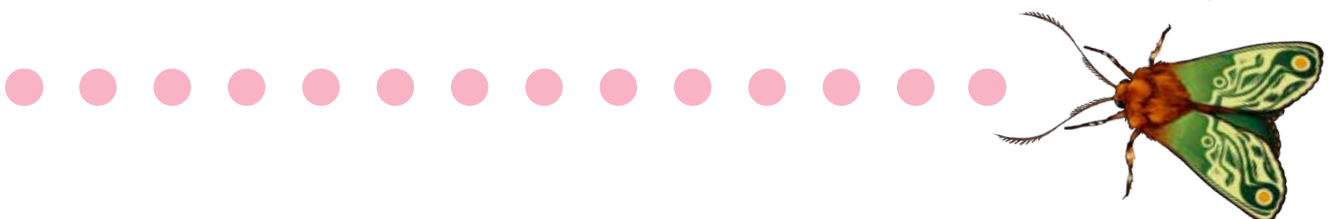
5. Shared measurement

It's important that stakeholders develop a set of shared indicators to assess progress of the collective impact initiative. Evaluating these indicators through regular meetings with stakeholders can help refine the project's strategy. The backbone organisation plays a key role in enabling the indicators or providing training and support for data collection methods.

YACVic and its partners established **clear impact measures**, including:

- Number of young people **engaged** in recovery efforts (6,500+)
- Number of young peer workers **employed and upskilled** (13 peer positions, 27 peer workers employed)
- Number of **Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs)** formed (10)
- Number of **qualifications** attained (1,300+)

Regular data collection and reporting ensured alignment across Partners and allowed the project to **track progress, adjust strategies, and share learnings** in real time.



Future Proof Youth Advisory Group

“Being able to utilise my personal experiences to help other people is so valuable. I have loved working with other young people that are passionate about this space.”

– April Harrison, YACVic Future Proof YAG member

Being part of a Youth Advisory Group has been a **rewarding opportunity** to contribute to valuable projects. Over three years, I got to be part of a team of young people that gave insights on a wide range of things, from the **creation of the Future Proof logo**, to helping create online resources for other people our age. These projects, as well as many others, helped to **strengthen communities affected by fire**, including my own area in the Wellington Shire, and give opportunities to young people to learn skills to help their communities **thrive**.

Throughout the life of the project, we were guided by **fantastic facilitators** who

helped lead our meetings and encouraged us to **express our ideas**, while also keeping us in the loop about the rest of the project happening all over Victoria.

Our meetings were filled with faces that eventually became familiar, providing a wide range of **opinions and life experience** to ensure all our ideas came from many different perspectives. This led to productive discussions where lots of ideas could be thrown around. Every meeting we were given specific things to review but were **always encouraged to share any ideas** we had for any aspect of the project.

By having the opportunity to sit on this YAG, I gained **valuable skills in communication** and providing constructive feedback. I got to see my suggestions realised and **got a chance to be heard in a way that could make an**





Grey Shrikethrush

impact. My favourite experience was getting to meet many of my fellow YAG members **face to face** at the end of project celebration. Getting to meet everyone in person was **a very special opportunity** after having collaborated so much online.

I am grateful to have been able to be a member of this YAG and have a say on how things that will affect me in the future will be carried out. **Having a voice is valuable and when it is granted in such an important and respectful environment it offers an opportunity to make real change.**

**Serena Savage (any pronouns) –
YACVic Future Proof YAG member**



Waxcap Mushroom



Future Proof Coalition

Each Future Proof Funded partner (excluding Victoria University and the Local Learning and Employment Networks) shared the same outcome objectives:



At least
150

young people engaged, (re)connected and supported, via place-based bushfire recovery programs and events and expert strengths-based youth work approaches.



15

young people supported to attain locally useful qualifications (e.g. public safety, firefighting, emergency response, youth work, community development, mental health).



10

young people upskilled to participate meaningfully in local recovery committees and governance processes and other leadership opportunities.



10

young people upskilled in public speaking, project management, peer facilitation and other relevant community activation expertise

Junction Support Services

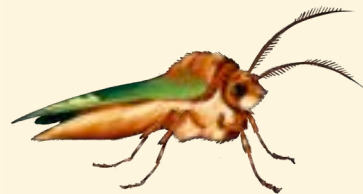
Junction Support Services (Junction) is a leading advocate for youth engagement within the **Ovens and Murray community**. We deliver over 44 programs, including crisis accommodation, youth services, family violence support, disability services, care services, education, and driver education.

Junction joined the Future Proof Project in March 2023, recruiting staff and forming a diverse **Youth Advisory Group (YAG)** of 13 young people. The YAG later merged with Junction's embedded youth advisory group, **Youth of 3690 (Yo3690)**. This group contributed to event planning, activities at Junction's youth space—Windbreak3690—and advising on youth issues. Meeting fortnightly, they **brainstormed, planned, hosted, volunteered, and evaluated events** throughout 2023 and 2024.

To prepare for their roles, Yo3690 members participated in leadership training and workshops covering **communication, conflict resolution, media training, problem-solving, event planning, and project management**.

In 2024, the Yo3690 applied their skills by contributing to **15 large-scale events** and **45 smaller activities** celebrating and engaging young people. These included **school holiday programs, leadership camps, trivia nights, career days, a dance party, wellbeing workshops, a movie marathon, and biweekly youth activities**. Over the past 12 months, more than 3,500 young people participated in these initiatives.

Junction's Future Proof qualification pathways have supported **92 young people** in obtaining **Certificate II and higher** qualifications in Public Safety (firefighting operations), Youth Work, Community Services, Agriculture, Mental Health, and Rural Operations. Additionally, **259 young people completed accredited training**, including White Card, First Aid, CPA, and Warden training, while 265 participated in skill-based workshops.



The program has achieved a 79.4% completion rate for Certificate II and above qualifications—**exceeding the 2019–2020 state average** under the Free TAFE scheme.

In May 2024, Junction expanded its role as the lead organisation for qualification pathways support across North East Victoria. This resulted in **265 additional young people** enrolling in formal qualifications, while 205 completed accredited training programs.

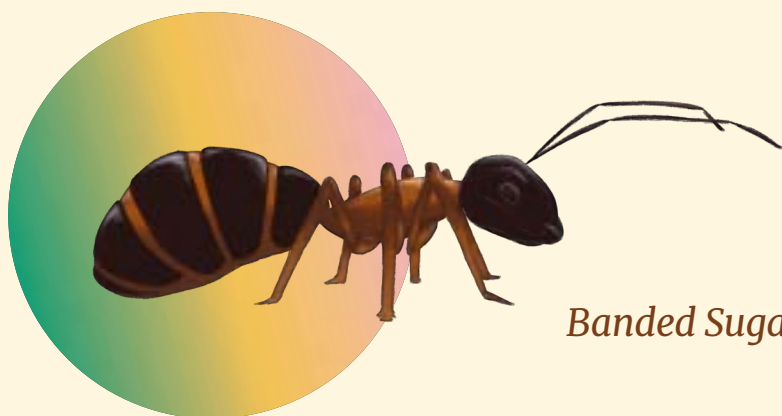
In collaboration with a Registered Training Authority, Junction secured approval to **modify the delivery of accredited training** for young people in residential care. Traditionally, White Card training is delivered in a seven-hour block; however, the approved model structured the training into three two-hour sessions. This approach **improved accessibility** for

an often-disengaged cohort and challenged traditional education models. As a result, **nine young people from out-of-home care expressed interest** in obtaining their White Card, with eight successfully completing the course.

The Future Proof Project has also **expanded opportunities** for young people to engage in disaster preparedness, recovery, and resilience initiatives. Through accredited training, leadership programs, and skills-based workshops, they have **developed the knowledge and capabilities** to contribute to emergency response efforts. Their involvement in **planning and delivering community activities** has deepened their understanding of disaster impact and recovery. Many have pursued qualifications in **Public Safety and Community Services**, equipping them with skills to **support local resilience efforts** in times of crisis. This engagement has empowered young people to play an active

role in **safeguarding their communities while building confidence** and leadership experience.

Most importantly, this initiative has fostered **meaningful peer connections** among diverse young people, **including those who identify** as neurodiverse, are homeschooled, come from refugee and migrant backgrounds, reside in residential care and youth refuges, attend public and private schools, live with disabilities, or identify as LGBTIQA+. The project has provided **a safe and inclusive space for young people** to explore their identities and interests while enhancing their skills. Furthermore, it has **strengthened relationships** between young people and key stakeholders, including training providers, businesses, peer groups, schools, and **advocacy organisations**, fostering broader community integration and opportunities for youth development.



Banded Sugar Ant

Alpine Shire Council

Alpine Shire Council, located in North East Victoria, covers **4,788 square kilometers** and serves a population of 13,235. Through its Youth Team and programs like the Future Proof project, the Council is **committed to empowering young people** and fostering community connections.

The Future Proof Program has made a significant impact, particularly through its work with the Youth Advisory Group, **Resilient Alpine Youth Squad (RAYS)**. This initiative has helped nurture **at least six young leaders**, now active in youth advocacy and activism, who are making **meaningful contributions** to the community. With increased resourcing, the Council is able to **continue supporting** the YAG's growth.

Alpine Shire's vast geographical area and **limited public transport options** pose challenges for young people's accessibility. However, the Future Proof project has enabled the leasing of a **7-seater vehicle**, greatly improving young people's access to events, training, and other opportunities.

The project has also fostered stronger links between the Council's Youth Team and **Emergency Management, Resilience, and Recovery teams**. This collaboration will continue to benefit both youth and emergency services by involving young people in future emergency planning.

The YAG has made **significant progress** in building relationships with local Councilors'. Despite the arrival of a new Councilor cohort, the Future Proof project has provided the YAG with the **skills and confidence** to maintain these connections with the support of Youth Workers. The project has effectively **amplified the voices** and needs of young people within both the community and emergency service agencies.

A key initiative, The Lighthouse youth hub in Bright, has become a **vital safe space** for young people to connect after school, access training, and engage with supportive adults. This initiative is crucial in **enhancing social connectedness and resilience**, especially during challenging times. The Future Proof project has also exposed young people to **disaster recovery and emergency preparedness**, further enhancing their readiness for future challenges. The project has provided valuable training for young people in areas like **first aid, chainsaw operation, and emergency response**, equipping them with foundational skills for careers or volunteering in emergency services. The Bright CFA unit, which now boasts the **highest number of young members in the**



Sydney Green Wattle



region, has benefited greatly, with several youth participants moving into professional roles in emergency management.

By working closely with the Emergency Management, Resilience, and Recovery teams, the Future Proof project has **raised awareness among young people about disaster preparedness** and its impact on their well-being. The 72-Hour project, which focuses on emergency preparedness, has sparked **important conversations** and promoted young peoples' involvement in community resilience.

The Future Proof project's **most unexpected benefit** has been employing two young people, who have grown significantly in their confidence and development as **youth workers**. Initially concerned about future support after the project ends in 2024, the advocacy of youth workers and participants led the Council to **create a permanent full-time youth officer role**, ensuring

continued support for young people and their communities.

In sum, the Future Proof project has **strengthened community ties, developed leadership, and enhanced the resilience** of both youth and the wider community, leaving a lasting impact on the region.



Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service

Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service (AWAHS) is a not-for-profit organisation based on the border of New South Wales and Victoria. AWAHS was established to cater for the **primary healthcare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** and their families.

AWAHS recognise that young people are our **future decision makers**, and that culture is what makes them strong. AWAHS offers programs and social groups that create **opportunities for young people to practice and develop a deeper understanding of culture**, developing confidence and resilience, whilst creating grounds for friendships and skills-based training.

AWAHS has held **several youth participation** events over the life of the Future Proof project. Youth participation has had a wide range of **positive impacts**, both for the young individuals involved and for broader community.

The Future Proof Project has created **several ongoing and lasting impacts** for young people in the Albury Wodonga Community, shaping their futures and **contributing to their overall well-being**.

Sustained Self-Confidence and Leadership Skills

The skills and self-esteem developed through the project will have **long-term benefits for young people**. As they continue to engage in community activities and leadership roles, they will carry forward the **confidence gained** from their experiences.

Young people through the YAG have indicated that they have gained valuable **leadership, communication and teamwork skills**.

*“Young men not being shamed and being able to connect with each other has been good.”
– Junior King*

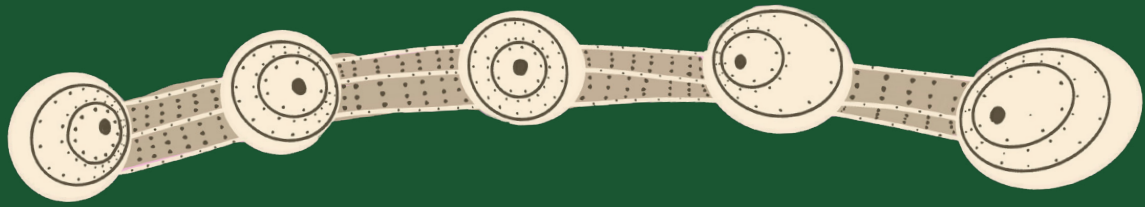


Cultural Identity and Pride

By emphasising cultural learning and connection, the Future Proof Project has helped young people develop a **strong sense of identity and pride** in their culture. This cultural grounding will continue to influence their lives, **promoting resilience and a deeper understanding** of their roots. As they grow, they will likely **pass on this appreciation for culture** to their peers and future generations, ensuring that cultural traditions and values are preserved.

Expanded Educational Opportunities

The educational opportunities provided by the project will have a **lasting impact on young people's aspirations**. With increased awareness of educational pathways and career options, participants are **more likely to pursue higher education** and vocational training. Through involvement in workshops and training sessions, the young people have been able to get certificates and **increase their knowledge** that will have an impact.



Networking and Support Systems

The **friendships and connections** formed during the project will create a lasting support network for young people. These relationships can provide **emotional support, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities** as they navigate challenges in their personal and professional lives.

Resilience and Coping Skills

The experiences gained through the Future Proof Project will equip young people with essential coping skills and resilience. As they face future challenges, whether personal or professional, they will be **better prepared to manage stress and adversity**.

Intergenerational Impact

As young people engage with elders and learn from their experiences, they will carry forward **valuable lessons and traditions**. Future Proof has equipped young people with essential coping mechanisms to manage stress and anxiety associated with disasters through workshops **focused on mental health and emotional resilience**, fostering a sense of agency and control during challenging times.

By facilitating the development of strong social networks, the project has created a **supportive environment** where young people can rely on peers and mentors for emotional and practical assistance during crises, enhancing their sense of connection.



Gippsland East Local Learning and Employment Network

Gippsland East LLEN is **one of 31 LLENs across Victoria** and is based in East Gippsland. We coordinate and facilitate a range of **accessible programs** for young people, aiming to empower and engage them in learning and employment pathways in their local communities. We have a **focus on collaboration** and combine efforts to create work-based learning opportunities for young people through our strong local partnerships.

For Gippsland East LLEN, the timeline extension provided to the project has offered the **opportunity to reflect with our team and stakeholders**. We discussed what we have been able to achieve in a short amount of time and **what we would have liked to be able to offer** if there was extra funding available. As the qualification budget was utilised to the fullest, knowing **how much more we could achieve** and how many more young people we could assist is both rewarding and disappointing, knowing we are unable to assist when there is such a need in our area. Additional time meant that we could **complete a few more qualifications**.

A big portion of our community has participated in courses or events run through Future Proof. This has given young people opportunities to also **network with other volunteer organisations** and get recognition. This can hopefully lead to future employment for these young people. Future proof provided many different courses. These courses included Certificate II in Public Safety and Firefighting through to White Card and First Aid. All of these **benefit the community** and in the case of disasters, the community can rely on our young people to help and **learn new skills** along the way.





This work has also **provided young people** with the opportunity to be able to offer their newfound skill sets to assist in **rebuilding and supporting their own community**, as was reported as a needed outcome from this project. Ongoing impacts of the project include young people being able to **give a helping hand and use what they have learnt** when disasters hit our community in future. The courses have been **very beneficial**, and the young people have learnt new skills from these qualifications which are a **massive asset** to have, especially in small communities.

Benefits:

Student support groups forming through networking during the courses that would not have necessarily happened. People join the Study Hub for support or work together. This has **assisted young people with making and maintaining friendships** from courses run in the community, not at school.

Negatives:

This is not a direct result of the project. There remains **a major transport issue** within the region which creates many barriers for young people, especially in being able to undertake qualification pathways and **remain in tertiary education**, obtain employment, access essential services and participate in social activities outside the home environment.

“Jade and her mother Vanessa are very grateful to be part of the Future Proof Project. It has given Jade hope. According to her mother, as Jade has had a tough time throughout both disasters, upskilling her with this certificate will build her self-confidence and allow her to be part of the recovery in the event of another disaster.”

- Gippsland East LLEN



Moogji Aboriginal Council

Moogji Aboriginal Council is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCO) providing services across the communities of East Gippsland.

Moogji provides a range of services to the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community and **supports families** to help improve their health and wellbeing.

Moogji work with community to **support young people in developing social skills and independence**, learn life skills, gain work experience, prepare for job interviews, mentoring and assistance to **stay engaged in education**.

The Future Proof project has led to **numerous positive outcomes for young people**, the general community, schools, and the Moogji Aboriginal Council.

“I always thought emergency response jobs were for older people, but now I know I can do it too, and I’m excited to make a difference in my community.”
– Young Person, Orbost

Key outcomes include:

Youth Empowerment:

Young people have played **central roles** in disaster preparedness and community initiatives, developing skills in leadership, teamwork, and disaster response.

Community Strengthening:

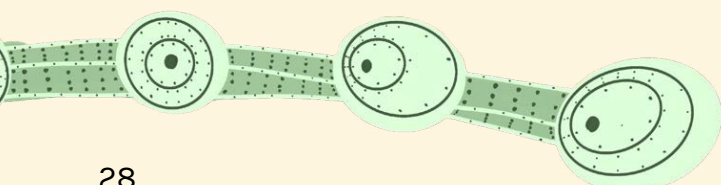
The project has fostered **stronger social ties**, especially among young people from diverse backgrounds, leading to a more unified community capable of working together during disasters.

School and Organisational Engagement:

Schools, local organisations, and community hubs like the Moogji Youth Drop-In Centre have been **instrumental** in supporting the project, creating a strong network for sustaining the project’s impact in the long term.

Wider Community Engagement:

An unexpected outcome of the Future Proof project was the **increased engagement between the non-Indigenous community and the Moogji Aboriginal Council**. The project fostered cultural understanding, bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. Through shared initiatives, such as disaster preparedness efforts, both communities collaborated, building **mutual respect and stronger relationships**.



Impact on community:



Prepared Youth: Through training in emergency management, firefighting, and first aid, young people in the community are now **better prepared for the next disaster**, with many eager to volunteer and take leadership roles in future recovery efforts.

Staff Shortages: The number of young people trained in emergency management and disaster response may **help alleviate staff shortages** in these critical areas, as young people are now trained and will be available to assist in disaster response and recovery.

Increased Volunteering: The number of young people volunteering has **increased**, providing the community with a more resilient volunteer force. This will have lasting effects on the community's ability to **manage and recover** from future crises.



Positive Benefits:

Confidence and Leadership: Young people have become **more confident** in their abilities to lead, whether in community projects or emergency situations.

Community Engagement: Stronger connections between young people and their broader community have been fostered through collaborative projects. Many young people have **developed a greater sense of responsibility** toward their community and are more willing to engage in volunteer work.

Challenges:

Resource Strain: The increased demand for young peoples' involvement placed a strain on **existing community resources**, requiring better coordination to ensure all volunteers and participants had the support they needed.

Burnout: Some young people experienced burnout from their intense involvement in the project, **highlighting the need for ongoing support** and balance to maintain engagement without overburdening participants.

The Future Proof project has **created a lasting impact in the community**, with many of the initiatives continuing beyond the project's official timeline. The focus on youth leadership, disaster preparedness, and community engagement has built a foundation for **future resilience, empowering young people to take on leadership roles** and volunteer within their communities. With the development of ongoing programs like the Youth Drop-In Centre, **the legacy of this project** will continue to shape the community for years to come.

Corryong Neighbourhood Centre

Corryong Neighbourhood Centre (CNC) is based in the Shire of Towong. We provide a vibrant hub that **brings the whole community together** and connects services, programs, employment, and activities with people.

CNC's youth program works with **young people to have greater control over their lives**. They support young people to take on valued roles, address issues in the community and more broadly, influence real outcomes & **create opportunities**.

The CNC's Upper Murray Youth program has been **boosted immensely** by Future Proof throughout the time of **March 2023 – Dec 2024**. As the CNC is a not-for-profit that exists to provide relevant services to the rural community, the bushfire resilience funding has been **incredibly relevant and supportive** for the young people in our community. We realised very quickly that we needed to be **flexible and adaptive** to the evolving needs of each different cohort of young people that came through the program over its lifetime.

Future Proof outcomes include:

- **Upskilling young people** to become community leaders in areas of personal interest.
- **Increased connections** between young people and the wider community.
- Older community members now recognise young people as **valuable contributors**.
- Empowering young people to **share ideas**, trusting they will be heard, while integrating life skills into fun projects.
- Facilitated youth-led ideas that have **exceeded expectations** by trusting their knowledge of their demographic.
- **Supported and paid young people** for their contributions to improving the area.





Our community is much more likely to **include young people in decision-making**, and disaster management in the future. We facilitate many cross-generational community events that prove **people need to be listening to the experiences of young people** all the time. With the resources of Future Proof, we have broken down barriers, de-bunk long-standing myths and reiterated to older generations that **young people are not lazy**, they are often ignored, which can lead to them being angry and **unlikely to participate** in formal processes.

We believe that young people of the Upper Murray who were fortunate enough to benefit from the Future Proof project will grow to be **fully functioning, contributing members of society** wherever they may end up. Through the project, young people have been put in the driver's seat of change and have witnessed the realities of **large-scale projects, re-building, recovery, and preparation**. They know that they can ask questions when they need to, but they can also **make decisions** when they need to. Young people are more aware of their agency than ever before.

Young people in the Upper Murray experienced the realities of disasters firsthand with the 2020 Black Summer fires. We believe that by holding events and activities that gather young people together, we have **facilitated much needed debriefing and discussions** about being prepared for the future. Young people can solve **complex problems** and put the needs of the greater good above all else. Of course, young people still want to have fun, and they should, because if we're going to have any luck in **diverting climate disaster**, it'll probably be during a fun event that was youth-led, and generally enjoyable.

Young people in the Upper Murray Youth Working Group who attended training and workshops specific to disaster recovery, now have an **added tool in their repertoire**. This includes the skills to de-escalate a mental health emergency, **be a good friend/listener**, where to find important information, and who to call in the event of an emergency. They are equipped to tackle anything that might happen. The last 3-4 years have already proven to them that **nothing is guaranteed** and they might as well work together to figure out the way forward.

East Gippsland Shire Council

East Gippsland Shire Council is a local government organisation based in Gippsland, located in the eastern part of the state. It covers an area of **20,940 square kilometres** and as of the 2021 census it had a population of 48,715.

East Gippsland Shire Council work to support young people in their communities through various projects, working to ensure they can grow up **happy, healthy and safe**.

The timeline extension of the project has given Council the ability to employ more young peer workers and undertake targeted activities.

Having youth workers upskilled early in the project has supported Council to **build project plans and programs** where they are able to share and mentor young people from the community in a more planned and informed way.

Future Proof has resulted in **many positive outcomes** in East Gippsland.

Outcomes include:

- **Youth Empowerment** where young people bring their **unique experiences**, and passion to the ongoing conversations around their community recovery.
- **Formal qualifications** through traineeships, Certificate IV qualification, accredited training in areas such as First Aid and leadership.
- **Incorporating creative arts into Future Proof sessions**, with the Youth Art Prize engaging **over 40 young people** during the 2023 awards night, including a new category, 'My Thoughts on Bushfire Recovery'.
- **Enhanced knowledge of emergency preparedness**, community recovery, and cross-learning with Council's Emergency Management and Community Resilience teams
- **Increased Council capacity** and capability in emergency management.
- **Supporting volunteers** by offering opportunities to engage with young people and recognize their contributions to community recovery
- **Helped young people develop valuable skills** in preparation for future employment and community leadership roles.
- **Awareness of the Natural Environment** - National Tree Planting Day saw 30 young people from Bairnsdale Secondary College come together to plant some new trees at their school.

Burrnan Dolphin



Anecdotally Future Proof has **increased the level of resilience** for the young people in our community. This has been achieved by **building knowledge of emergency preparedness**, raising awareness of risks, providing opportunities to **gain new skills** or build on existing skills. Young people have been empowered to **feel more confident** in preparing for emergencies and **helping the community recover** and rebuild from those emergencies.

In 2022 a Council social recovery survey showed 89% of all respondents **identified social connection** as the most pressing social need. The opportunities provided through Future Proof for **young people to come together** either through training, events or activities has provided unique social connection opportunities.

Within Council the project has built on the **capability of the youth workers**. The skills staff use in leading and mentoring the various young people will not end when Future Proof ends. Elements of the program can be incorporated into youth programs

going forward. Future Proof has built the skills required within Council to **more effectively engage with young people in emergency situations** and to include them in recovery.

Eight young people have expressed interest in volunteering with an emergency service. Council has been involved in **many funding opportunities** associated with the 2019/20 Bushfires; however Future Proof is unique in its focus on young people.

The concept of skills development is a sustainable approach, and the result will be an **increased understanding and involvement of young people** in future disasters.

Future Proof has provided many opportunities for young people to be better informed on emergency planning and associated disaster recovery. It has also provided the Youth Workers within Council **greater understanding of disaster recovery and resilience** which will go on to support young people into the future.



Rural City of Wangaratta

Rural City of Wangaratta is a local government organisation based in North East Victoria. It covers an area of **3,645 square kilometres**. In August 2021, it had a population of 29,808. Rural City of Wangaratta are building a community where young people will **thrive, feel valued, supported, inspired, and empowered**. We offer a range of programs to support young people's engagement in the community.

Future Proof has created opportunities for young people to **grow, connect, reflect, and develop** as individuals and has also **fostered stronger community connections**, with increased social cohesion across the region.

“Future Proof was able to impact young people throughout our communities more than I have ever seen before. It addressed key issues identified by locals and has gone a long way to future proofing our young people in ways that will create lasting change.”
– Taylah Jenkin, Youth Resilience Peer Worker

Redback Spider



Wangaratta's Future Proof team have been able to provide a **dedicated level of educational support** for impacted young people in the community. The Youth Resilience Peer workers were actively upskilled within their position, gaining new **insights, experience and confidence** in multiple key areas of their personal and professional development. The team were able to host **emergency go bag building** and evacuation plan sessions across multiple satellite community primary schools who are frequently under threat of bushfires and other natural hazard-based disasters.

One benefit included the expansion and **strengthening of existing networks and collaborations**. This created opportunities for organisations to connect, leading to the sharing of resources, ideas, and opportunities. Collaborating on shared goals fostered **stronger working relationships, increased trust, and improved communication** among stakeholders, laying the groundwork for future collaborative efforts.

The ongoing impacts in Wangaratta's communities will forever be a key stepping point for young people to reflect on. This project has shown **young people they can overcome challenges big and small** and that there is always a way to move forward. It has given young people the skills to feel **prepared for disasters** while also providing them with the tools to go and teach others so they too can be safe and prepared. The older demographics



have recognised the importance of **youth participation**, and emergency services actively seek to engage them for programs such as Cadets. The skills young people have acquired aren't temporary and **they will carry them in everyday life**, applying them to new challenges as they go. The connectivity supported by Future Proof will outlive the project and has shown young people the **benefits and necessity** of sharing their voice within the wider community.

Young people in the community will be **prepared for the next disaster**, equipped with the skills and knowledge of preparation and safety. There is no doubt that the previous feelings of helplessness will be replaced with **certainty and confidence within themselves**.



"I am from the cold breeze and frost, the adventure of mountains, beautiful landscapes and waterways. I am compassionate, understanding and brave, who wants to be heard or understood. I am from community to connection, and a future of sustainable change. From first impressions and fond farewells, to representing and fighting for youth wants and needs. I am a future of disaster resilience, youth advocacy, and youth empowerment, and I am going to be a voice inspiring and driving change."

- Disaster Resilient Youth (DRY) Group Member

Indigo Shire Council

Indigo Shire Council is a local government organisation based in North East Victoria. It covers an area of **2,040 square kilometres** and in August 2021 had a population of 17,368.

Indigo Shire Council supports the young people in their communities through **leadership and personal development opportunities**, focusing on disaster recovery, events and recreation, and mental health support.

Ongoing lasting impacts of Future Proof for the community:

- Young people are **more connected** to others in their community, and council services.
- Young people feel like **their voices matter** and have built the confidence to speak up about things that matter to them and ask for what they want/need.
- Young people feel they have the **skills and confidence** to work with external stakeholders, deliver their own events, apply for grants and feel supported and know who to go to when they need assistance.
- Increase team capacity **enabled activations** across the entire Shire. Delivery occurred across 5 towns, some that have had **limited youth engagement**.
- Group of neurodiverse young people that have felt **safe and included**.
- Leadership opportunities for young people contribute ideas, guide programs and continue facilitation **beyond the program**.
- **Strong relationships** with local schools and community groups.

*Young people have the skills to overcome challenges and setbacks.
“It’s ok to rely on others to support and cheer you on”*





Grey-Headed Flying Fox



This is the **first time** Indigo Shire Council has engaged a young person as a peer worker. The opportunity to have a Peer Worker employed at Council **benefited the entire organisation** and demonstrated the **immense skill and capability** of young people as well as the benefits of employing them within the organisation. This created a **strong link** between young people in the community and Council.

Participation in meetings, workshops, and training sessions held during fortnightly YAG meetings has **equipped young people with practical skills** relevant to disaster recovery and resilience. These sessions have empowered young people to advocate for their needs to the community, as well as **giving them tools to become more resilient.**

Participation allowed young people to **access a range of training and develop skills** they may not have easily accessed

previously. Through connections with external facilitators, they have become **more aware of support available to them** in the community, and how to access these supports in a time of crisis.

Provision of accredited courses and workshops have **given the community skills** to assist during a disaster or during recovery. Community members received training in wildlife handling, chainsaw operation, fencing, food safety, fire extinguisher use, and more. These practical skills can be applied **during and after a disaster in relief centres**, environmental recovery, clean-up efforts, and at home. The benefits extend **beyond individuals**, supporting the resilience and recovery of the broader community. Over the course of these workshops, community members **not only connected with facilitators, but also each other.**

"I think it's amazing to see what young people can do when they are feeling heard, they feel comfortable and when they are provided with opportunities. It feels amazing to feel empowered and trusted to do your own thing but also know who to go to with questions if you get lost or are not sure. It feels amazing to feel so supported and cared for."

- YAG Participant

North-East Local Learning and Employment Network (NELLEN)

NELLEN is a Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) that works to build relationships with local organisations in North East Victoria, to **support young people in the communities they work with**. They aim to support young people to learn and thrive by bringing together schools, local government, youth agencies, businesses and health services.

Future Proof has given a lot more young people the **opportunity to upskill** within the community. Whether they are completing a Diploma, Certificate courses or short courses, young people would **most likely not have completed any of the available courses without the presence of the Future Proof Project** and the dedicated supports we were able to provide them as part of the project.

With Young people working towards completing their courses, a **new generation** of youth workers, support workers and mental health workers will emerge be present within rural communities, providing support to others.

An example of how this initiative delivered results is where **the project supported a young person in obtaining his Remote Pilot's Licence (RePL)**. He has learnt how to use a drone legally and responsibly and now has a relevant licence to operate them. The young person hopes to utilise this licence to **monitor the livestock and land** that surrounds his home during bushfire seasons, using it as a tool to keep his family and neighbours safe.

This young person has stated that **he thoroughly enjoyed the course** and the content he learnt. He also enjoyed connecting with other like-minded young people completing the course through Future Proof as well. The young person feels like **this licence will help him and his family stay better prepared during bushfire seasons** in the future.



Emperor Gum Moth

A lot of the young people enrolled used the Future Proof Project as an **opportunity to upskill for work and employability skills** rather than focusing on the outcome of disaster resilience and recovery within their community. In some instances, this resulted in some young people **not having the appropriate support in place** to complete the training/course they enrolled into or completely withdrawing from the course due to a range of factors including where **the course no longer aligned with their job criteria or career aspirations**. In a small number of cases this resulted in the fees being paid but the course was not complete. Greater support to assist young people to complete their course needs to be considered with ventures like this in the future.

In the partnering communities, seeing the LGAs and other organisations bring their YAG's together has been **amazing** to see. The groups have been formed of young people with a shared experience of disaster within their communities and have the common goal of working together in **making their communities more prepared, resilient, and aware** of the dangers that can occur.

It has been inspiring witnessing these **young people create something positive from such a devastating experience**. The friendships that have blossomed over the course of Future Proof has been such an amazing thing to see as well.



Mansfield Shire Council

Mansfield Shire Council is a local government organisation based in North East Victoria. It covers an area of **3,844 square kilometres** and in August 2021, had a population of 10,178.

Mansfield Shire are guided by three key priority areas when working with young people.

These include

- **Creating safe and accessible spaces** and opportunities for young people to connect with each other and other members of their local community
- **Promoting happiness** by furthering the skills of young people, professionally and personally, to equip them with strong foundations for future work and life
- **Empowering young people to live healthy lives** by providing access to professional services, such as counselling, career guidance, education and training.

Mansfield Shire Youth has built **long-lasting relationships** within our community and outlying towns. We have been able to rebuild and establish an exciting safe space through programs and events run during our Future Proof program. Our staff have **created meaningful relationships with many young people** and their families that will continue in years to come. This sense of connection has been critical in

creating a community that is both **supportive and resilient**, particularly in times of crisis or uncertainty.

By actively engaging residents in a variety of projects—from **creative endeavours** like murals to **social activities** such as youth camps and advisory groups—the program has fostered a deep sense of pride and ownership. Residents feel a **stronger connection** to the spaces they inhabit and the decisions that shape their community.

The community has seen first-hand the value of **investing in young people**, not only for disaster resilience but also for a broad range of sectors such as agriculture, community services, and volunteer work. This shift will have **lasting impacts** as the community looks to sustain and expand its **commitment to youth involvement**, ensuring that future generations continue to play an active role in shaping a resilient and thriving Mansfield Shire.

Future Proof has been proactive in **increasing disaster-related awareness** within the community. This has been achieved through organising workshops with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and first responders, providing **critical knowledge and skills** to ensure the community is well-prepared in the event of a disaster. Our YAG now feel prepared and know exactly what they will pack and **when they plan to leave** in the event of a bushfire.

One of the most notable impacts will be



Common Spotted Ladybird



the **increased readiness of young people** for future disasters. With many young people participating in training programs related to Emergency Management, Disaster Response, and Youth Work, the community will have a **more knowledgeable and capable generation** ready to respond to emergencies. This preparedness will extend to the next disaster, where these trained individuals will not only be able to offer immediate support, but will also be positioned to **play an active role in recovery efforts**. The training initiatives, such as those with the CFA and first responders, have laid the foundation for a **more resilient community** that can respond swiftly and efficiently to crises.

These initiatives are a testament to Future Proof's team commitment to building a resilient, connected, and skilled community within the Mansfield Shire. By encouraging ongoing involvement and decision-making, the initiative has **empowered young people to actively shape the future of their community**, ensuring that it remains vibrant, connected, and well-equipped to face challenges in the years to come.



Wellington Shire Council

Wellington Shire Council is a local government organisation that governs the Wellington Shire, located in the eastern part of the state in Gippsland. It covers an area of **10,817 square kilometres** and in June 2018 had a population of 44,019.

Wellington Shire Council supports **several programs and activities** each year for young people. Our programs give young people a chance to grow their skill sets. We encourage young people to **lead and have a voice on important issues** and by doing so they create new connections.

Wellington Shire Council joined Future Proof in 2022 and began the process of recruiting their Youth Worker and Peer Worker. One of the things that was valued so much from this project was **the support to focus on supporting young people to fill the roles**. It enabled them to give young people their first jobs in local government, and the youth sector. For Wellington, this also meant **the organisation was able to recognise the unique skills** and insights these young Peer Workers had. Both were successful in getting other jobs in the shire.

Future Proof has enabled Wellington to **involve young people in conversations** about emergencies, who does what in the community and ways they can get involved. One young person said that not only did she like the Future Proof activities, but **she really appreciated learning about Council** and what their role was and how they fitted with other organisations.



Macleay's Swallowtail Butterfly

When working towards greater impact, Wellington:

- Met young people in public buildings **after school hours** in the towns where they went to school.
- Asked how young people would like to hear from us and **how we used that communication method**. But coupled it with backup communication, often email, that was shared with everyone.
- Visited and spoke with existing community groups. Alongside a young participant we developed the **"Creating Stronger Communities"** workshop which enabled community groups to better prepare for inviting, accepting, and involving young people more fully into their groups.
- This workshop has been put into the **Emergency Management Team Tool Kit** and will be available to roll out to community groups who need help being more inclusive. It is designed so that **young people can continue to deliver it**.



- The Emergency Management team built very strong relationships with young Future Proof staff and have **employed one of them to work within community engagement.**
- Explored ways young people could visibly assist their communities to prepare for emergencies.

A program, **Get Ready Get Techy**, had recently been developed by a member of the Emergency Management Team – who trained young people to deliver this. They demonstrated that this was an **effective way of building relationships**, making young people feel valued, **understand they**

have important roles to play, allowing older people to recognise the skills of young people.

Future Proof allowed Wellington to **deliver activities to small numbers of young people**, which increased confidence, knowledge and the ability to join in the next activity – and maybe bring a friend.

Being able to draw upon and deliver proven workshops (YACVic, Red Cross, Emergency Management team, Future Proof developed) has **enabled them to increase the skills and confidence** of young people.



Victoria University (VU) was the **embedded research partner** in the Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and (Re)building Communities project. VU was invited to be a part of Future Proof to **build upon our previous research with young people** following the 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires and **contribute our internationally recognised expertise** in youth participation and youth work to the partnership.

Embedded research in projects can be understood as a process of **creating new knowledge** that is “produced when academic and [community] organisational ways of knowing are brought into dialogue with one another to create new understandings.”¹ Researchers undertaking embedded research embody the following key principles:

- “The **knowledge and expertise** that researchers bring with them;
- The **research-based knowledge** that they broker into the organisation/program;
- The new insights developed from **gathering and interpreting data** in situ;
- The negotiation of expertise, the **contextualising of external knowledge**; and
- The co-production of **new understandings**².”

Research

As the embedded research partner, a central part of VU’s role was to **conduct research and share the findings** with the Future Proof partners and the emergency, disaster and youth sectors at local, state and national levels. We collected data through:

- **Partner interviews** (mid-project and end-of-project interviews);
- Observations and participation in all **Community of Practice** meetings and partner meetings;
- **Focus groups** with peer workers, youth workers, managers & YACVic at Community of Practice meetings;
- Post-session **feedback surveys**;
- Surveys with **Youth Advisory Group** members;
- Surveys with **training and qualification participants** (conducted through LLENs); and
- Independent evaluation (participant interviews).

“I think VU being a partner on this project was one of the best moves that could have been done.”

*– Future Proof Partner
Organisation Peer Worker*



“VU is there, they’re listening and present. I just think that respect and everything they’ve done to form this little circle of trust we’ve got [has been important].”

*– Future Proof Partner
Organisation Peer Worker*

We shared research findings relating to young people as agents of change in disasters through:

2

Peer-review articles published in the Australian Journal of Emergency Management and Ethics & Social Welfare

1

Peer-reviewed article submitted to the Journal of Applied Youth Studies.

9

Papers presented at international and domestic conferences

(e.g. Disaster and Emergency Management Conference 2024, Nordic Youth Research Symposium 2024, Journal of Youth Studies Conference 2024 and Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2023).

1

Poster presented at a domestic conference (AFAC Conference 2023)



Added Value: Beyond the Research

As the embedded research partner VU was able to both respond to and create opportunities for the following:

- Building **trusted relationships** with partners;
- Providing **academic expertise** and upskilling of participants through formal and informal training;
- Being a **trusted sound-board** and providing feedback loops;
- Facilitating **reflective practice**;
- Up-skilling **partners and organisations** to conduct research; and
- Changing the way partners **perceive research**, researchers and/or the role of universities in community work.

Evaluation of VU's Contribution to Future Proof

In post-session surveys with participants,

- **100% of participants** said that: 'Victoria University's involvement in the project overall has been useful'
- **99% of participants** said that the sessions facilitated by VU had: 'enabled them to learn from others through hearing about their experiences in the project'
- **99% of participants** said that the sessions facilitated by VU: 'been a useful opportunity to discuss & reflect on youth participation'.

VU engaged an independent evaluator to document the role that VU played in this project.

We championed youth participation in research and developed the research capacity of Future Proof partner organisations by:

Providing formal and informal research training;

6

partner organisations submitted abstracts to conferences

Enabling young people to participate in research as youth co-researchers; and

1

youth co-researcher participated in the design, data analysis and dissemination of research findings through conferences and publications

Supporting young people to conduct research in their communities.

4

youth co-researchers designed, conducted and presented their research at conferences

In the independent evaluation, participants noted **a number of benefits** as a result of VU's embedded researcher role in Future Proof. These included:

1. Added legitimacy

Having an academic institution involved was seen to **add validity and rigour** to the project. VU's involvement also ensured accountability and transparency among the wide range of partners, providing **data and reflective feedback** so that adjustments could be made to the project in real-time.

"VU's approach was collaborative and anchored in trust, allowing for deeper engagement, reflection and capacity building in participatory evaluation. This approach shifted participants' perceptions of the university, academia, research and researchers. For the peer workers in particular, research was viewed as more inclusive and relevant, igniting a passion for sociological thinking and critical inquiry in development work."
– Independent Evaluator

2. Building trust

Trust and respect conveyed by the VU research team were described as **essential** to the success of the broader partnership and facilitating understanding across different organisations and people's roles.

3. Personal and emotional support for peer workers

Guidance and mentorship were identified as an **important contribution of VU**. Keeping participants grounded amid

challenges and frustrations, engaging in discussion and **problem-solving and critically analysing** the project became instrumental in building confidence and emotional resilience for peer workers in Future Proof.

4. Professional development

VU contributed academic expertise and **facilitated critical thinking** and reflective practice, enabling partners to develop and improve their own practices.

5. Building research capacities for individuals and organisations

Capacity-building, mentoring and support helped peer and youth workers develop **skills and confidence** in data gathering and storytelling, which they brought back to their organisations and into other projects in their roles.

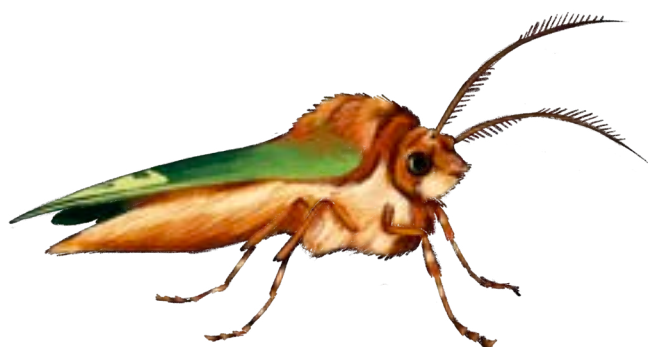
"Our workers have loved having the opportunity to learn how to do posters or write articles, so I think that's beyond the scope of VU's expected role."
– Future Proof Partner Organisation Manager

"In a professional way... they're looking at the project, what's working, what's not... and we can use the [research] to reference our work or change things in the future."

- Future Proof Partner Organisation Peer Worker

"I appreciated how well they listened. And the support, I feel like each of the peer workers has a different kind of connection with VU in a real and personal way."

- Future Proof Partner Organisation Peer Worker



"They've helped staff showcase their thinking and abilities beyond the organisation."

- Future Proof Partner Organisation Manager

"...I went to a sociology conference with [VU researchers] and my eyes were just so open. ...I think it's realising that we're not just in a bubble as there is a lot more. I think my eyes were a little bit more open after meeting [VU researchers], especially after that conference."

- Future Proof Partner Organisation Peer Worker



Fairy Wren

"The VU research team has helped me think laterally as well, improving my problem-solving. They ask 'Is there a different way we can do this? Or what do you mean by that, when you say that that's not working? What does this mean for your community?' It is something I will take with me."

- Future Proof Partner Organisation Peer Worker

Case Studies



Jamie – Young Person, North East Victoria

Jamie lived in a rural area between Wangaratta and Benalla, where she faced **numerous challenges** growing up. Whilst Jamie had always dreamed of working with young people, financial barriers had **prevented** her from pursuing the necessary qualifications.

Jamie said:

“I’ve always wanted to work with kids/youth. I wanted to study youth support, but I couldn’t afford the course.”

Future Proof’s long course qualification pathway program offered Jamie a **tailored approach to study** that considered her work-life balance and personal needs. Already established in her community with part-time work, Jamie needed a qualification that **wouldn’t disrupt her financial stability**.

“I’m very grateful for everything Future Proof has done to make the process really enjoyable and having someone understand your personal, work lifestyle to find the course best suited me.”

With support from Future Proof, Jamie **enrolled in and completed** a Certificate IV of Youth Work and is now equipped with the tools and qualifications to pursue her **dream career**. Future Proof’s ability to **help young people**, like Jamie, overcome personal and financial barriers to **access further education** and career development opportunities helps young people in bushfire affected areas to **achieve their aspirations** and contribute meaningfully to their communities, now and into the future.

Jade – Young Person, East Gippsland

Jade is a 17yo student from far East Victoria who was impacted by the bushfires and COVID. Being so remote, Jade has found the past few years **quite difficult** for several reasons. She only has 18% hearing and will eventually lose her ability to hear. Jade **struggled to properly learn through COVID** as the teachers were all wearing masks and she lip reads, so she fell behind in her schoolwork and was isolated.

Jade has since shown interest in learning to be an **interpreter for the hearing impaired**; this directly relates to disaster resilience as it was shown throughout the bushfires and COVID that there is **always a need for interpreters** in community.

Jade will complete an **Introduction to Auslan** and then a **Certificate II in Auslan**, which is delivered online and self-paced. This is perfect for her current situation. The Future Proof Project **has given Jade hope**, according to her mother, as Jade has had a tough time throughout both disasters. Upskilling Jade with this certificate will **build her self-confidence** and allow her to be part of the recovery in the event of another disaster.

Lara May – Youth Worker, Alpine Shire Council

Lara May is a 25-year-old from **Mount Beauty**, who spent several years since she was 18 chasing winters between Japan and Falls Creek.

When COVID hit, Lara found herself back in Mount Beauty and **in need of a full-time job**. In September 2022, Lara successfully stepped into the position despite having **no prior professional experience** in the youth sector. With the support of YACVic and Alpine Shire Council, Lara quickly adapted to local government work, **gained confidence**, and discovered a true passion for working with young people.



Lara completed a Certificate IV in Community Development, attended conferences, and **built strong connections with internal and external stakeholders**. Among her key achievements were rolling out Teen Mental Health First Aid training in all local schools, ensuring **a youth voice was heard in council decisions**, and establishing “The Lighthouse,” a youth hub in Bright alongside her co-worker.

The Community Development Coordinator, Daisy, remarked, “Lara built relationships with young people across the Alpine Shire **in a way no youth worker before her has managed**.” At the age of 25, Lara could **relate to the experiences of young people** in a small rural town, using her lived experience to **build meaningful connections**.

Lara was promoted to Youth Worker **just a year** into the program and successfully demonstrated the **value of the youth program** to council, which transitioned the role from part-time to full-time after the Future Proof funding ended. She also mentored a young person through the **Resilient Alpine Youth Squad (RAYS)**. That young person went on to become a local councillor at **just 20 years old**.

The impact of Lara’s work has been **significant**, contributing to outstanding outcomes for young people in the community. Their manager noted, “Our current Youth Officers have done an **excellent job** advocating for the importance of resourcing youth in Council, which has resulted in our CEO **increasing substantive resourcing for youth programs**.”

Lara’s story is a testament to the impact of the Future Proof program on both young people and youth workers. Looking back on her journey, Lara said, “**If I could do it all over again, I would.**”



Red Bellied Black Snake

Community Of Practice

The Community of Practice (CoP) aimed to **enhance interpersonal connections** and collaboration among the coalition partners, YACVic, youth workers, peer workers, researchers, community members and sector leaders. By creating a structured environment for collaboration, the CoP **enhanced communication and trust** among the 14 partner organisations, allowing for a more cohesive approach to youth engagement in disaster recovery, focusing on **improving disaster recovery efforts** through youth participation. The CoP's were staged like a mini-3-day conference or think tank styled event focused on approaches to **maximising young people's participation** in a disaster context. All hosted in different rural locations, access keys were developed in advance of the event, agendas were prepared, **Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony** arranged with local traditional land management organisations, a conference style dinner was hosted often with entertainment or key speakers. **Accommodation** was booked, catering organised, including people's dietary requirements, speakers arranged,

travel plans made. Evaluation was conducted at each event, so **lessons and feedback** could inform the next event.

Each CoP was hosted in **Future Proof funded communities** to foster localized engagement and collaborations, highlighting the **positive attributes of each community** and holding space for each of the partners to introduce key contributors to their local approach. YACVIC took this approach because **rural workers told us they did not want to just come to Melbourne for meetings** but wanted the opportunity to show off their local areas and have others learn about where they were from, how they had been impacted by disasters and to **create a space to invest** in the local community and economy.

The CoPs purpose was to establish a structured forum for **knowledge sharing, skill-building, and collective problem-solving** among partners engaged in the project. It also created a forum where all staff levels of the projects could **meet and strengthen** networks collectively, and on peer-based levels.





The impact of the CoP was significant, as it **fostered ongoing communication** and trust among participants, enabling them to **address challenges collaboratively**. Through regular in person sessions, partners shared best practices, resources, and insights, leading to **improved understanding of youth participation** strategies and the unique challenges faced by their communities. This knowledge exchange helped **refine project approaches**, ensuring that initiatives were tailored to local needs.

Outcomes included **strengthened partnerships**, the development of tailored project plans, and **increased youth involvement** in community initiatives.

The CoP directly contributed to the capacity **building of local organisations** through professional development for participants, offering workshops on critical topics such as Child Safety and Youth Participation, which **equipped partners with the skills necessary** to effectively engage in the collective impact model approach.

As a result, partners reported **increased confidence** in implementing youth-led projects, leading to greater involvement in disaster recovery efforts. The CoP not only strengthened individual organisations but also fostered a collaborative network that enhanced the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the Future Proof initiative.

1. Wangaratta – 13-15 September 2022
2. Lakes Entrance – 15-17 November 2022
- 2.2. Wodonga – 7-8 February 2023
3. Beechworth – 7-9 March 2023
4. Mansfield – 20-22 June 2023
5. Sale – 6-8 September 2023
6. Bright – 5-7 December 2023
7. Bairnsdale & Eagle Point – 7-9 May 2024
8. Celebration Event Melbourne Town Hall – 12 December 2024



Highlights and Outcomes



Future Proof functioned as a transformative Collective Impact framework, driving **systemic change and empowering young people** in disaster recovery by:

Embedding Young People as Leaders in Disaster Recovery

Future Proof shifted the narrative of disaster recovery by **placing young people at the center of decision-making**, equipping them with skills, qualifications, and leadership opportunities. 14 diverse partner organisations **united under a shared vision**, ensuring young people were recognised as key stakeholders in **building community resilience**, shaping policy, and leading recovery efforts in their own communities.

Breaking Down Silos to Drive Collective Action

By **fostering collaboration** across government, community organisations, the community and education sector, and Aboriginal-led services, Future Proof created a **networked response to disaster recovery**. Through continuous communication, shared learning, and a coordinated approach, Partners worked **beyond traditional silos** to build long-term capacity, ensuring young people had the support and resources needed to thrive.

Creating Tangible Pathways for Future Resilience

Through accredited training, peer-led programs, and youth advisory groups, Future Proof **transformed recovery into opportunity**. Over 1,900 young people gained qualifications in emergency management and community services, embedding **youth expertise** within local resilience efforts and building a future workforce dedicated to disaster preparedness and community leadership.

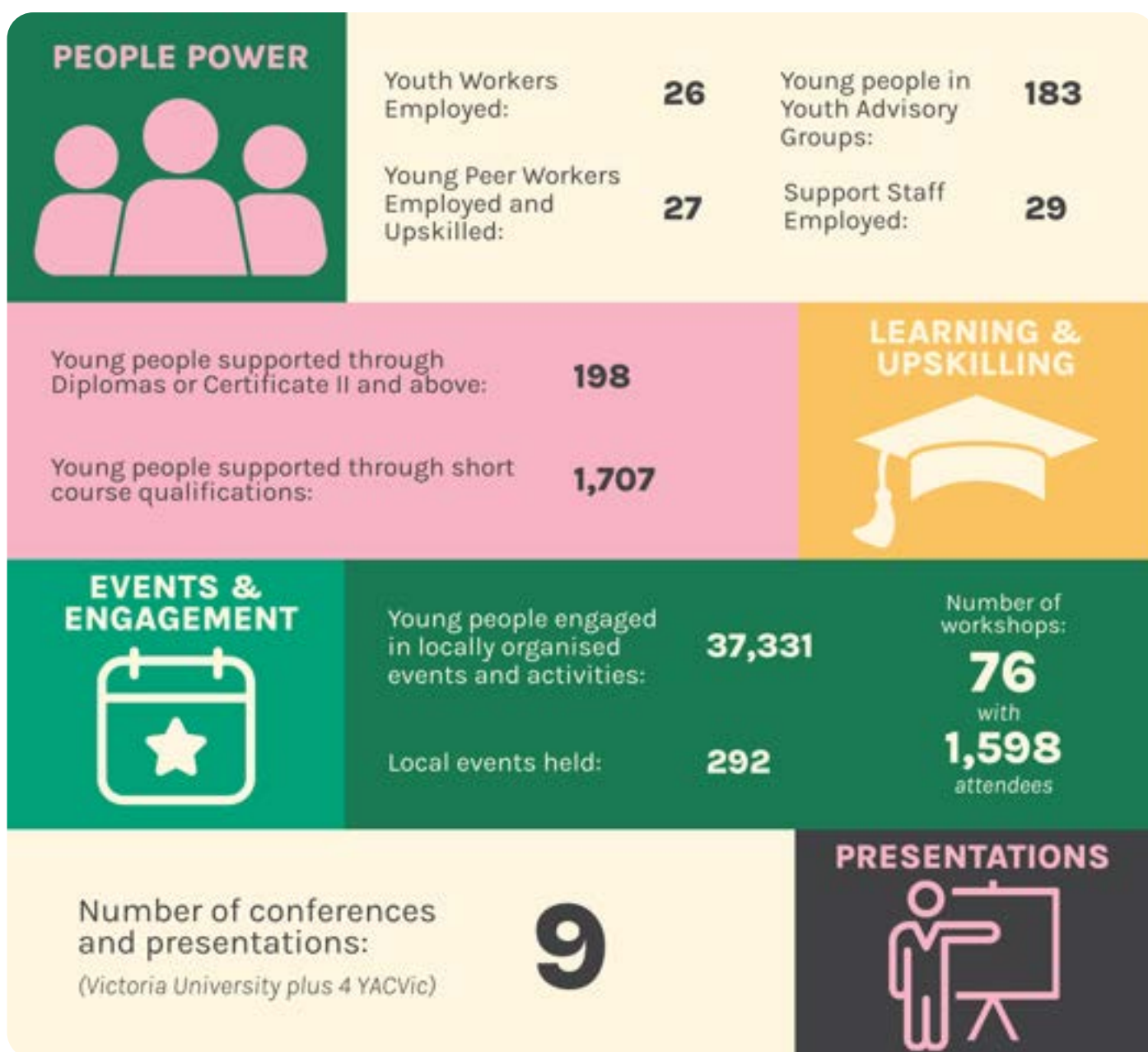


Scaling Local Impact into Systemic Change

The project's place-based approach **ensured recovery strategies** were locally led and community-driven while feeding into broader systemic change. Insights and learnings from Future Proof directly **influenced policy discussions**, demonstrating the power of youth participation in disaster response and setting a precedent for **future youth-led recovery initiatives** across Australia.

Redefining Disaster Recovery as a Community-Wide Responsibility

Future Proof challenged traditional disaster response models by **positioning young people as active contributors** rather than passive recipients of aid. The project strengthened communities by **integrating young people** into emergency planning, fostering cultural safety through **first nations led initiatives**, and ensuring that recovery efforts addressed the needs of young people, not just in the aftermath of disaster, but in **shaping a more resilient future**.



Evaluation

Evaluation was continuous and undertaken in a **range of ways** throughout the project. A lot of our evaluation data and information has been **reported elsewhere in this report** as well as in our separate evaluation report, and in the **VU research finding report** (forthcoming).

From the outset we wanted to measure **a range of key impacts** that were shared across the project. We set about **establishing regular data collection** methods and developed regular reporting processes to **ensure alignment across all partners**. As a collective impact project this was a set of shared indicators to assess **progress of the collective impact** initiative. This allowed the project as whole to track progress over time, adjust strategies, and **share learnings in real time**. The key outcomes we wanted to measure included:

- **Number of young people engaged** in recovery efforts because of being involved with the project
- **Number of young peer workers employed** and upskilled as part of the project
- **Number of Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) formed** because of the project funding and additionally those already in existence that were able to provide input to local projects and to the overall project
- **Number of qualifications** attained

In addition to this YACVic developed a range of ongoing evaluation tools for

- **Community of Practice** events,
- **Post training** evaluation forms
- **Case study templates** for partners to record and featuring the experiences young participants and YAG members as an addendum to their regular reports to Government.

Another feature of our evaluation efforts included **the work undertaken by VU** as an embedded research partner to the project. Their work was to **articulate and describe** the process of creating new knowledge and is detailed on pages 42-44. One of the **many benefits** to having an embedded research partner in the project was **not only to engage and encourage partners and participants** with the process of research, but additionally this **allowed for the research findings to be shared throughout the project** with the Future Proof partners and the emergency, disaster and youth sectors at **local, state and national levels**. The collected data will continue to be credible and valuable source of information **used by all partners** now and into the future.



Australian Magpie

Additionally, we employed a evaluation consultant to analyse and collate all the data that was collected and reported by all the partners throughout the project as part of an end of project evaluation report.

This report can be read found here: yacvic.org.au/rural/disaster-hub/



By the Numbers: some highlights of the data analysed

Indicator	Target	Achieved	Status
Youth Peer Workers & Youth Workers employed	12 Peer Worker 12 Youth Worker	12 Peer Worker 12 Youth Worker	Achieved
Recruitment within 6 months	100%	100%	Achieved
Retention after 12 months	90%	92%	Achieved
Training sessions provided for staff	6	6	Achieved
Young people engaged	1,500	37,371	Exceed
Establishment of YAG's	8	8	Achieved
YAG contributions to recovery project decisions	5	8	Exceed
Young people obtaining Qualifications	150	192	Exceed
Completion rate of Qualifications	75%	81%	Exceed
Job Placement post training	50%	58%	Exceed
Leadership training participants	100	312	Exceed
Increase in Confidence reported post training	80%	88%	Exceed
Governance training for young people	100	112	Exceed
Young people assuming governance roles	50%	605%	Exceed
Cross LGA initiatives developed	5	7	Exceed



What would we do differently if we had our time again?

- **Earlier Integration of Young People in Decision-Making**

While young people were central to the project, **engaging them even earlier** in the design phase could have ensured their perspectives shaped the framework from the outset, rather than adapting mid-project.

- **More Sustainable Funding for Long-Term Impact**

The project **successfully built pathways** for young people's involvement, but securing longer-term funding from the beginning would have **strengthened the sustainability** of employment and training opportunities beyond the project's lifespan.

- **Enhanced Support for Youth Workers and Peer Leaders**

Many staff particularly in leadership roles faced burnout. Providing **structured mental health support** and reducing workload pressure could have ensured their sustained engagement and well-being.

- **Greater Focus on Embedding Change in Policy**

While the project influenced local decision-making, a **more strategic approach to embedding youth-led disaster recovery** into state and national policy frameworks could have ensured lasting systemic change.

- **Stronger Coordination Between Partners**

The collective impact model was successful, but a **more unified approach to data sharing and reporting** across all partners could have improved real-time decision-making and outcome tracking.



Imperial Jezebel Butterfly



Recommendations



Recommendations from Young People

1. Embed Young Voices in Disaster Decision-Making

Young people must be **actively involved in all aspects of disaster response**, from policy development to recovery planning and evaluation. Their lived experience offers critical insights, and their contributions should be recognised through financial compensation and professional facilitation. **Meaningful engagement** fosters resilience, leadership, and a sense of belonging in their communities.

“Opportunities that allow for learning and build confidence build resilience in my community. As a young person I am able to participate when I’m supported by other young people as well as adult mentors. When people give help when asked I feel respected and like my voice matters.”

2. Strengthen Support for Rural and Regional Young People

Expand sustained funding for place-based, youth-led initiatives that develop leadership, disaster resilience, and skills. Equitable access to resources, transport, and flexible participation models

are **essential** to ensure young people in disaster prone/affected communities can engage meaningfully. Investing in initiatives like Future Proof ensures **young people are empowered to take ownership** of their disaster resilience now and into the future.

3. Improve Accessibility and Engagement

Opportunities must be **tailored to young people’s needs**, ensuring they feel safe to share experiences and lead recovery efforts. Flexible, hybrid delivery models, culturally safe engagement, and **transport support are necessary** to remove barriers to participation. Programs should build **long-term connections** between young people and their communities, strengthening resilience.

Recommendations from the Youth Sector

4. Expand Training Pathways

Develop accredited short courses in disaster response and resilience to **equip young people with practical skills** and employment opportunities. Support mechanisms **must be embedded** for young people with disabilities, learning difficulties, and mental health needs to increase accessibility and ensure no one is left behind.

5. Establish Youth Disaster Advisory Groups

Create formalised advisory groups at state and national levels to **ensure young people play an active role in shaping disaster preparedness**, response, and recovery policies. Their perspectives must inform risk assessments, training, and cross-government collaboration to strengthen disaster management at all levels. **Young people should also be included** as a distinct group in national training and exercise regimes to enhance capability assessments.

6. Prioritise Marginalised Communities

Disaster preparedness efforts must **prioritise young people from First Nations, LGBTQIA+, CALD, disability, and low-income backgrounds**. Systemic inequalities must be addressed to ensure equitable access to disaster recovery resources and support services. These measures should align with UNCRC principles on non-discrimination and social security rights.

7. Improve Digital Access and Emergency Communication

Enhance **digital literacy and access to emergency information**, particularly in rural and regional areas. Training in cybersecurity, crisis communication, and online safety will **strengthen disaster resilience** and ensure young people can navigate digital tools effectively.

8. Secure Long-Term Funding for Youth-Led Resilience Programs

Invest in leadership and capacity-building programs that **integrate young people into disaster preparedness and recovery efforts**. Sustainable funding must be prioritised, removing financial barriers for small organisations that **deliver essential** youth-led initiatives.

9. Embed Young Voices in Disaster Management Plans

State and territory governments must **formally include young people** in local and regional Disaster Management Plans. Their lived experiences and insights should inform decision-making to create **more inclusive and effective** disaster resilience strategies.

10. Align Disaster Reporting with Global Standards

Ensure disaster resilience strategies align with the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**, recognising young people as key agents of change. Strengthening accountability and reporting mechanisms will **enhance youth participation** in disaster response efforts.

11. Establish Youth-Friendly Safe Spaces for Recovery

Fund youth-specific recovery hubs that **provide mental health support**, peer networks, and essential post-disaster services. These spaces should **foster social connections and long-term community resilience**, removing financial barriers such as dollar-for-dollar funding requirements for small organisations.

12. Integrate Disaster Resilience Education into Schools

Disaster preparedness education must be **embedded into school curricula and youth programs**. Schools should support young people in building disaster resilience, ensuring they are equipped to **respond effectively** before, during, and after a crisis.

13. Engage Young People in Disaster Risk Assessments

Incorporate young people into **participatory risk assessments and data collection efforts**. Their insights will strengthen national risk profiles, improve resource allocation, and develop stronger disaster response policies.

These recommendations, drawn from the **lived experiences of young people** and the expertise of the youth sector, outline a clear framework for **ensuring disaster recovery efforts prioritise youth leadership, equity, and long-term sustainability** of young people's involvement in these efforts.

Closing Statement

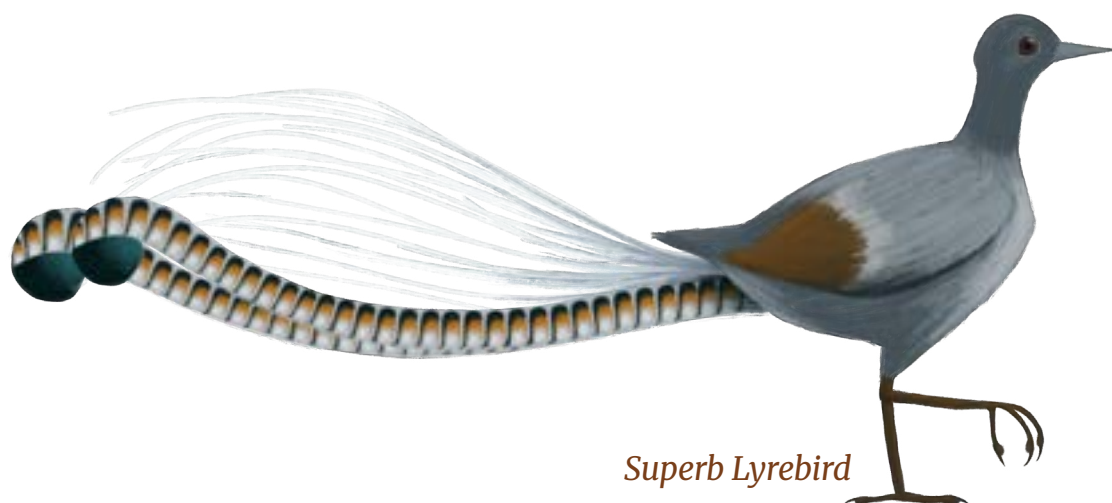
As we bring **Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and (Re)building Communities** to a close, we reflect on the **extraordinary commitment, passion, and resilience** that have made this, the *largest project ever undertaken in YACVic's history*, a success. Over the past three years, young people have stepped up—not just as **participants** but as **leaders** in disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. Together, we set out to walk alongside communities healing from the Black Summer bushfires. While there were challenges along the way, we worked with **integrity, adaptability, and determination** to make a meaningful impact.

Through education and training, young people have gained **skills and qualifications** that open doors—to careers, volunteering, leadership, and a seat at the table where decisions are made. **Research and shared learning have strengthened local networks**, while youth-led initiatives have ensured that disaster recovery is not just about rebuilding structures, but about restoring hope, agency, and connection. Future Proof has demonstrated that *when young people are empowered, entire communities benefit.*

At its heart, this project has been about investing in Human Infrastructure—the **relationships, skills, and leadership** that make communities more resilient. The impact of this work extends far beyond statistics. It is felt in the confidence of young leaders who now see themselves as *agents of change*, in strengthened partnerships between local governments and youth services, and in policy shifts that recognise **the value of youth-led disaster resilience.**

The need for sustainable, youth-led disaster programs has **never been clearer.** Future Proof has not only responded to disasters but has **helped build strong foundations for climate mitigation and long-term community resilience.** To every young person, partner, and advocate who contributed—you have shown that young people are **not just preparing for the future; they are creating it now.** This is your legacy: a future where young people are recognised as **essential** to disaster resilience and climate action, shaping communities that are stronger, fairer, and more prepared, for **whatever comes next.**

Carla Hall (she/her)
Future Proof Disaster Resilience
Coalition Principal



Superb Lyrebird

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Report Prepared By:

All content, data and analysis provided in this report was prepared by YACVic Staff **Carla Hall** and **Harmony Carmichael**.

A summary of the independent evaluation was provided by KD Solutions specialty strategic advisory agency dedicated to working with organisations committed to increasing their social impact with young people

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Top-Knot Pigeon

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One Day Studios worked with YACVic to **engage and employ young people** on this design project. They were involved with client meetings, drafts, and they had **tri-weekly meetings** to illustrate and work on the Future Proof Impact Report. Four of the students worked with lead illustrator Maiya to **create artwork of flora and fauna** native to the areas that Future Proof covered. Design assistant Jesse worked with lead designer Greta to **create spreads in InDesign** for the final product. One Day Studios is happy to report high engagement from all students, who now have a **new credit** on their resume.

One Day Studios operates in Warrnambool on **Gunditjmara land**.
www.onedaystudios.org.au

Thanks to Our Staff



With profound gratitude, we extend a **heartfelt thank you** to each and every one of you—our coalition partners, inspiring youth workers, dedicated peer workers, and the **incredible young people** who have led with courage and vision. 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 unwavering support and partnership**, which have been pivotal in driving this initiative forward.

A special acknowledgement goes to our funders, the Australian Government, whose belief in the **potential of young people** has made this project possible.

Lastly, to the remarkable YACVic staff, your **tireless dedication and passion** have been the **backbone** of Future Proof, ensuring **every voice is heard** and every effort counts.

Together, we have forged a path of **resilience, inclusivity, and hope**, ensuring that young voices lead the way in shaping a brighter future for all in the face of an **uncertain climate future**.

*Green Skinhead
Mushroom*





Albury Wodonga
Aboriginal Health Service



ALPINE
SHIRE COUNCIL



EAST GIPPSLAND
SHIRE COUNCIL



GIPPSLAND EAST
Local Learning & Employment Network



INDIGO
SHIRE COUNCIL



Mansfield
Shire



ABORIGINAL COUNCIL



Rural City of
Wangaratta



WELLINGTON
SHIRE COUNCIL

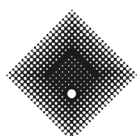


RURAL




Future Proof

Young People, Disaster Recovery
and (Re)building Communities



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA



"I am from the cold breeze and frost, the adventure of mountains, beautiful landscapes and waterways. I am compassionate, understanding and brave, who wants to be heard or understood. I am from community to connection, and a future of sustainable change. From first impressions and fond farewells, to representing and fighting for youth wants and needs. I am a future of disaster resilience, youth advocacy, and youth empowerment, and I am going to be a voice inspiring and driving change."

- Member of Wangaratta Disaster Resilient Youth (DRY) advisory group.

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