

DEFINING YOUTH WORK IN QUEENSLAND



YANQ compiled and verified the following definition of Youth Work in Queensland by:

- **Researching international and interstate definitions** of Youth Work and developing an initial working definition congruent with YANQ's values and positioned within a rights based framework¹
- **Promoting this definition** widely throughout the sector and holding 8 consultation workshops in 4 regions across Queensland, including holding separate sessions for Murri, to gauge support for it. Over 80 workers contributed to these, including approximately 40 Murri Youth Workers²
- **Compiling an alternative definition** from input during the consultations, identifying differences between both definitions and further testing support for them via an on-line survey³

A Youth Worker is someone who works with young people within the context of their culture, identity and place to ensure their rights are protected and promoted and their needs are genuinely met.

A Young Person is someone who sees themselves differently to an older child but who is not yet an adult or being given their due rights as an adult.

The primary purpose of Youth Work is to resource and support young people who want help to access, navigate and make the best of their life choices.

Youth Workers do this by:

Promoting strengths and change

1. Using a strengths based, solution focussed approach to our work with young people
2. Recognising the worth of all young people and building on their assets and strengths
3. Helping young people make their own choices and learn from their own experiences
4. Showing young people what is possible and helping them achieve their own goals
5. Helping young people who need it to navigate the best possible pathway in life
6. Being role models ourselves: setting an example in our own community
7. Building young people's belief in the possibility of change and their capacity to contribute to positive social and individual change
8. Helping young people to adjust to change and harness opportunities

Supporting young people's culture, place and identity

1. Supporting positive connections between young people, their families and the broader community
2. Recognising the diversity amongst young people, and listening to and valuing individual young people's needs, ideas, preferences and choices

¹ YANQ (Oct 2010), **What is Youth Work? A Discussion Paper**, Suzi Quixley – the paper can be downloaded from YANQ's website: <http://www.yanq.org.au/what-is-youth-work>

² YANQ (July 2012), **Are We There Yet? Findings from What is Youth Work Consultations**, Liz Archer. The paper and survey can be downloaded from YANQ's website: <http://www.yanq.org.au/what-is-youth-work>

³ YANQ (Nov 2012), **What is Youth Work? Defining a Sector**, Liz Archer. the paper can be downloaded from YANQ's website: <http://www.yanq.org.au/what-is-youth-work>

3. Supporting the development of young people's identity as an individual, within their family and as part of broader communities
4. Encouraging and supporting young people to take responsibility as active global, national and local citizens
5. Advocating for young people within their family and community
6. Recognising the integral relationship between young people and their family, community and society
7. Recognising that young people identify with a range of different cultures and supporting them in developing their own cultural identity
8. Helping parents, adults and elders to understand young people

Working ethically

1. Being conscious of our structural power and influence as a Youth Worker, and not taking power over young people
2. Particularly recognising the cultural context of marginalised young people and taking responsibility for learning to work in a culturally appropriate way
3. Being responsible for what we do with or for young people and their families and being able to justify why we do it
4. Being clear about our ethical responsibilities to ourselves, young people, families, communities, our organisation and within the broader sector
5. Being proud of our identity as a Youth Worker: supporting one another, seeking to ensure new colleagues understand what Youth Work means and educating other workers or services about young people and about our role

Meeting young people's needs

1. Providing proactive and holistic support to young people
2. Providing young people with linkages to other services and supporting them in accessing these
3. Providing practical, useful support to address young people's real situations and needs including being able to provide consistent, longer term services for

4. young people who may require more intensive support
4. Using an integrated and broad range of models, tools and approaches consistent with providing youth centred, culturally appropriate services and supports. This includes community development and peer based projects as well as personal support
5. Providing flexible support for young people outside formal, statutory systems

Providing informal, youth centred support

1. Working at the young person's pace
2. Maintaining young people's confidentiality
3. Remaining open-minded about people's backgrounds and circumstances and treating each situation individually
4. Providing youth centred services and supports in a friendly and informal way
5. Being there for young people
6. Genuinely caring about young people
7. Supporting youth led and youth participation activities

Promoting young people's rights and empowerment

1. Respecting and promoting young people's rights
2. Supporting young people's voices to be heard within their families and the broader community
3. Being solid and proud defenders of "youth culture:" challenging negative assumptions made about young people in our communities
4. Encouraging and supporting young people to be agents of change – both individually and collectively at both a personal and social level
5. Helping young people to understand their rights, and resourcing young people to address breaches of their human rights
6. Lobbying the government to improve the situation for young people
7. Promoting the actual and potential contributions of young people to the wider community
8. Advocating young people's right to actively participate in community life and access their fair share of community resources

Values underpinning Youth Work

Youth Work is deliberately values based. The values upheld by Youth Workers are those consistent with rights based, young person driven, culturally relevant Youth Work (e.g. respect, trust, honesty, empowerment, fairness).

Concluding statement

Youth Workers recognise that working to genuinely empower young people will inevitably require a higher than usual level of commitment, self-examination and a willingness to grapple with social issues affecting marginalised young people. It will require clear articulation of the multiple social advantages of enabling active civic participation by young people and undertaking community development – in particular, the social value of contributing toward a vibrant, genuinely inclusive democracy in Queensland.

MURRI YOUTH WORK

Murri youth work includes and supports the statements and principles made in the overall (or general parts) of the definition.

Murri Youth Work also includes:

Following Murri traditions, laws and protocols and respecting the full diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia

Being solid and proud defenders of “Murri culture”. Challenging assumptions made about Murris and Murri youth in our communities.

1. Persisting in supporting pride in being Murri. Holding out against the constant barrage of “whiteness” at school and in other places and encouraging young Murri pride in their “blackness” and cultural identity
2. Supporting and learning from the aunties and nannas who are growing up lots of family
3. Seeking to involve elders and extended family where possible and linking young people in with supportive family members
4. Recognising that Murri Youth Work is often about a search for identity and helping heal transgenerational traumas resulting from parents and grandparents being grown up within white institutions and not being allowed to speak our language or practice our cultures: as well as being culturally traumatised these parents have little knowledge of how to grow up their own children. Murri Youth Work therefore includes strengthening and healing family connections where possible. Murri Youth Workers play a critical role in modelling appropriate behaviour within communities and often take on a closer relationship with young Murris, including being seen as “Aunty” or “Uncle.” This

must be understood and accepted by the broader Youth Sector

5. Advocating for young Murris within their families and communities
6. Playing a broker or bridging role between young people and their families/communities and encouraging both to understand the other’s perspectives

Recognising that cultural mentoring is an essential part of Murri Youth Work

For Murris this means:

1. Supporting one another as Murri Youth Workers no matter where we come from
2. Finding our own cultural mentors & seeking their guidance
3. Finding out whatever we can about our family history and cultural backgrounds, especially if these have been taken from us
4. Being prepared to act as strong role models for young Murris and within our Murri families and communities
5. Doing what we can to educate others about Murris and working with young Murris

For others working with young Murris it means:

1. Seeking – and accepting - cultural and other guidance from local Murris
2. Respecting cultural contexts or protocols without the need to question them
3. Accepting that you will rarely have the relationship that Murri Youth Workers have with young Murris, doing whatever you can to acknowledge and support their cultural development as Murris, and finding the best ways to offer what you can as non-Indigenous workers

Painting: Gavin Tyson

voluntary

informal

BACKGROUND

This definition of youth work is the result of a three year long process, and is a summary of the full report *What is Youth Work? Defining a Sector*, published by the Youth Affairs Network Qld (YANQ) in November 2012.

In early 2009, YANQ began a major youth sector workforce development project. This project was designed to develop a sustainable and vibrant youth sector workforce in Queensland, which protects and promotes young people's rights.

The lack of a commonly held definition of Youth Work was identified as a major obstacle to ensuring that Youth Work remains a clearly identified and valued occupation within the broader sector and YANQ released two discussion papers to assist the sector to develop this. The *What is Youth Work* discussion paper considers the history, different approaches to and current status of Youth Work and proposes a working definition. The *Which Way? Values in Youth Work: A Murri Perspective* discussion paper looks specifically at Murri Youth Work, including its history and current context and focuses on the values and attitudes required to work well with young Murris.

In 2012, a series of consultations were undertaken with the sector and with young people to gauge support for the draft definition. The results of these are collated in *Are We There Yet? Findings from consultations around developing a working definition of youth work in Queensland* and in *We are Here: Young People's opinions on Youth Work*.

ABOUT YANQ

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland.

Representing individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, we promote the interests and well-being of young people across the State by:

- Disseminating information to members, the youth sector and the broader community
- Undertaking campaigns and lobbying
- Making representations to government and other influential bodies
- Resourcing regional and issue-based networks
- Consulting and liaising with members and the field
- Linking with key state and national bodies
- Initiating research projects
- Hosting forums and state conferences
- Input into policy development
- Enhancing the professional development of the Youth Sector.

We advocate on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people to government and the community. We promote and support cultural diversity. We encourage the development of policies and programs that respond to the rights and needs of young people.

Find out more at www.yanq.org.au

