



**yourtown  
youth engagement  
strategy**

2024 – 2026





## message from yourtown CEO

I am thrilled to present our 2024–2026 Youth Engagement Strategy which reflects our unwavering commitment to empowering and uplifting young people. As it should be, this strategy was co-developed with young people, reflecting their perspectives and hopes for the way we work together to make an impact as an organisation and as a community.

Over the past five years, we have made significant strides in integrating the participation of young people into our way of being as an organisation. From the establishment of advisory groups to innovative projects like the Pride Art Show and the 'I am Enough' poetry book, to the development of service design associate roles, young people's voices have been at the heart of our initiatives.

As we embark on this next phase, we transition from youth participation to a broader and more inclusive term—'youth engagement.' This shift underscores our dedication to creating reciprocal relationships where both young people and **yourtown** benefit and grow together. It is about acknowledging the vital contributions of young individuals and ensuring they are valued, heard, and included in meaningful ways.

Our youth engagement strategy is built on the principles of inclusivity, respectful collaboration, and creating safe spaces where young people can thrive. We aim to provide opportunities that cater to the diverse backgrounds, interests, and talents of young people across Australia. By doing so, we not only provide opportunities for young people to showcase their skills and enhance their well-being but also enrich our organisation with their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas.

I know we all share in our commitment for **yourtown** to be a safe place and an empowering place for young people, our youth engagement strategy builds on that commitment and reinforces our belief in the great capacity of young people.

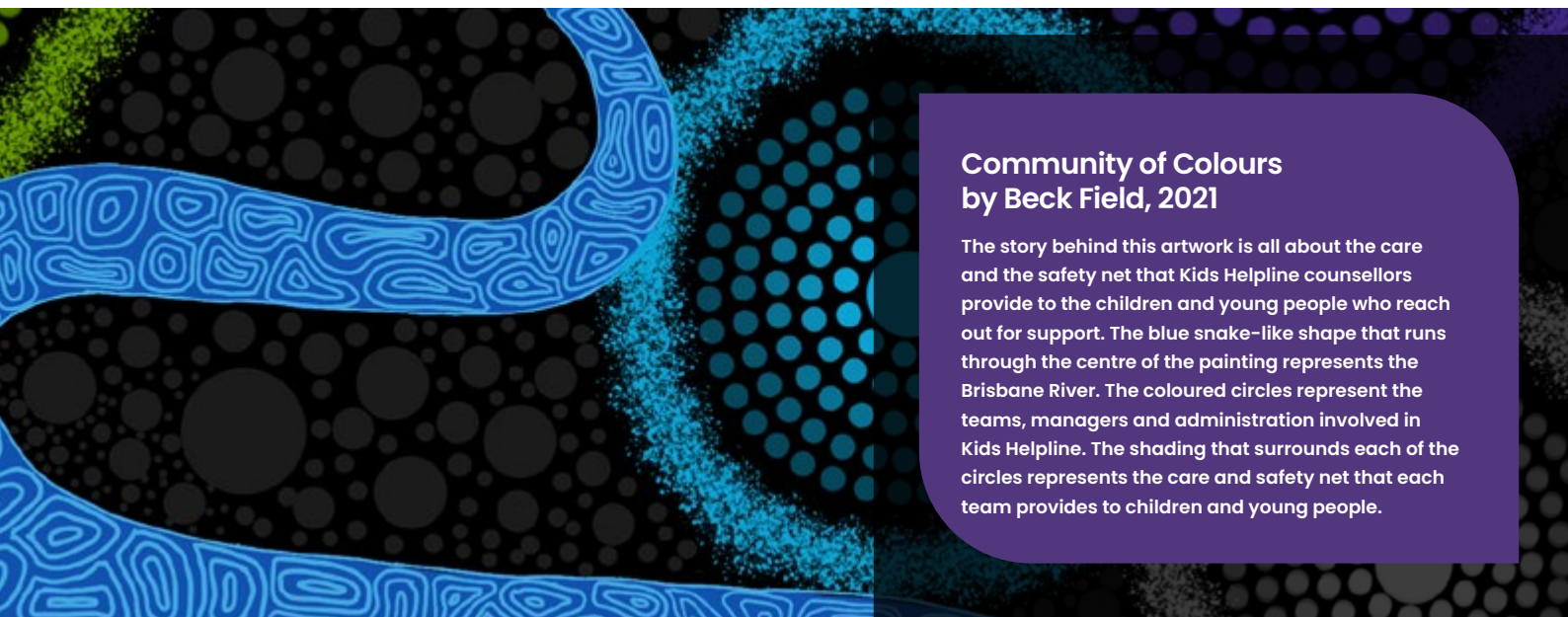
Warm regards,  
Tracy Adams  
**CEO, yourtown**

## Acknowledgement of Country

**yourtown** acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to the land and their waterways. We pay our respects to them, their culture, and their Elders; past, present, and emerging.

# what's inside

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## Community of Colours by Beck Field, 2021

The story behind this artwork is all about the care and the safety net that Kids Helpline counsellors provide to the children and young people who reach out for support. The blue snake-like shape that runs through the centre of the painting represents the Brisbane River. The coloured circles represent the teams, managers and administration involved in Kids Helpline. The shading that surrounds each of the circles represents the care and safety net that each team provides to children and young people.

## message from **Kayla**

As a former service user at **yourtown** and now a changemaker actively involved in shaping the Youth Engagement Strategy, I am deeply proud of this groundbreaking strategy. This strategy is unique because it seamlessly integrates youth engagement into the core values and operations of **yourtown**.

From the outset, it sets a new standard for how staff interact with and support young people. It ensures that every department within the organisation is aligned in its approach, creating a cohesive and youth-centred environment. By embedding these principles into daily operations we not only lift the bar for engagement but also foster a culture of continuous improvement and advocacy. This strategy ensures that **yourtown** remains in touch with the ever-changing world of young people, helping us stay relevant and effective in our support.

What truly sets this strategy apart is its commitment to meeting young people where they are. The climate in which young people live is constantly evolving, and it is crucial that our services reflect their current realities and aspirations. By embedding youth voices within our policies and practices, we build stronger advocacy efforts and create more responsive services. This approach not only benefits the young people we serve but also sets a benchmark for the sector. It demonstrates the value of incorporating youth perspectives into all aspects of service delivery, ensuring that we remain a leader in youth engagement and empowerment. As a member of the project team, I am excited to see this vision come to life and to witness the positive changes it will bring to our community.

Kayla

youth engagement strategy development project team

## message from **Fiona**

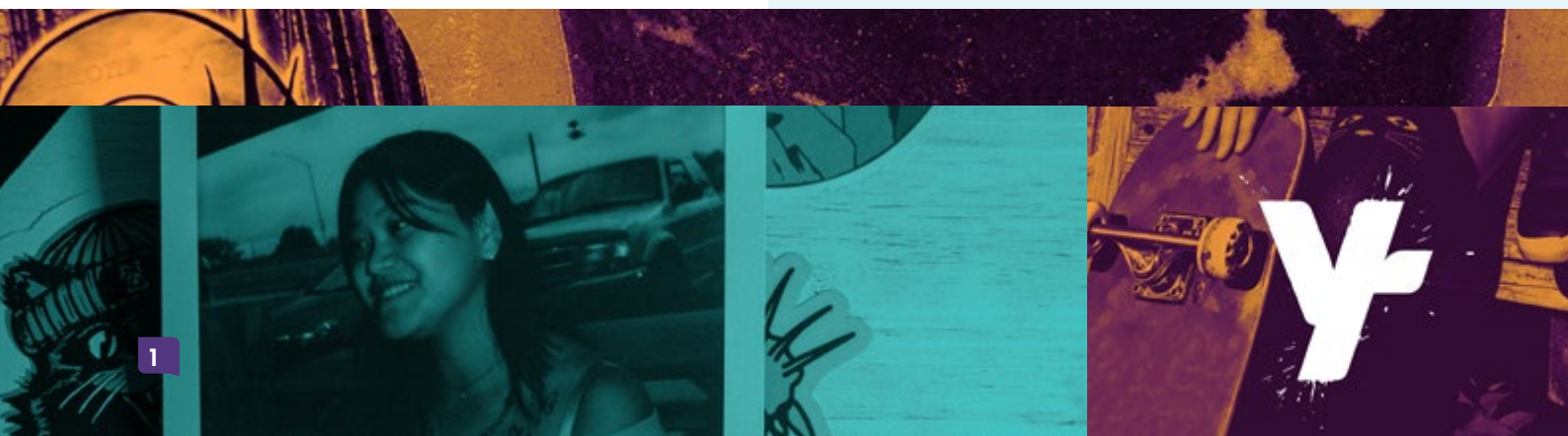
As a member of the Youth Engagement Strategy Project Team, working alongside other passionate young people and **yourtown** staff to develop this innovative strategy has been both an incredibly empowering and insightful journey. The strategy development process has reinforced the importance of providing young people with access to meaningful opportunities in decision making as well as collaborating with young people on their terms.

Recognising that young people are the experts of their own lives, Youth Engagement empowers them to create meaningful change from sharing their own experiences and stories. Youth Engagement provides young people with more than just opportunities for professional and personal growth – it can be a life changing experience.

Looking ahead, I hope these strategic initiatives continue to evolve with the dynamic needs of young people, ensuring **yourtown** remains not only responsive, but a highly proactive and impactful organisation deeply connected to the young people we support. The opportunity to embed my lived experience and voice into this strategy was just a sneak peak of what's around the corner for yourtown, and I'm eager to witness and take part in the development of a space where young people feel heard, supported, and empowered to shape their own futures.

Fiona

youth engagement strategy development project team





# our business

**yourtown** is a national organisation and registered charity, and is currently one of the largest not for profit providers of services to children and young people in Australia, responding to more than 170,000 contacts over the past 12 months. **yourtown** currently employs approximately 779 team members in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania across 32 sites. Of our workforce, 40 or 5.1% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**yourtown** is a safe, welcoming community where everyone respects and sees value in every person and is a leading authority on issues affecting young people in Australia.

Powered by **yourtown**, Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, confidential 24/7 support service that protects and safeguards the mental health of children and young people in Australia. We provide young people with a choice of counselling options and accessible self-help tools when and where they need them.

We acknowledge the bravery, fearlessness, and determination it takes to seek support and are proud of the more than 156,000 young people across Australia who connected with our professional, caring, and motivated teams over the past 12 months.

In Queensland and the Northern Territory, **yourtown** also operates Parentline, a phone and web-based support service for parents and carers.

In all communities and regions **yourtown** works in close partnership with industry, education and training providers, community organisations and government to help young people overcome barriers and re-engage with the community, learning and work.

**yourtown** provides a variety of offerings to help young people through difficult challenges. These include youth support and development programs; life and employability skills training; programs for young parents; mental health programs; specialist accommodation services for young families and those affected by domestic and family violence; school retention and re-engagement programs; work preparation training; paid transitional employment through work-based social enterprises and youth-specialist job placement services.

# our vision for youth engagement



## everyone belongs

We aim to make sure that every young person, regardless of their cultural background, language, faith, abilities, or identity, feels welcomed and valued when engaging with **yourtown**. We strive to create an environment where diversity is celebrated, and everyone is supported to be able to engage. By embracing and respecting each individual, we build a stronger and more inclusive community where every young person feels like an essential part of the team.



## win-win collaboration

Our youth engagement strategy aims for everyone to benefit. It's about creating opportunities where both young people and the organisation gain something positive. By working together, we ensure that the experiences and contributions of young individuals enhance their skills and well-being, while also bringing valuable insights and benefits to the workforce and the organisation more broadly. This principle emphasises the idea that when everyone involved can thrive and grow, we've achieved success together.



## respectful collaboration

We prioritise treating every young person with dignity and regard. We recognise the value of their input, and we commit to keeping them informed about the outcomes and reasons behind decisions. This involves establishing a feedback loop, ensuring that we not only listen to young people but also loop back to them with clear explanations of how their input has influenced outcomes. This principle emphasises the importance of maintaining open communication, acknowledging the perspectives of young individuals, and showing them the respect they deserve throughout the decision-making process.



## secure spaces, safe voices

We strive to create environments that are physically and emotionally secure, where every young person feels protected and comfortable to express their thoughts and opinions. Upholding safety and safeguarding measures is paramount, fostering an atmosphere where young voices are not only heard but also valued without fear of harm or judgment. This principle underscores our dedication to prioritising the well-being of each young person throughout their engagement journey.



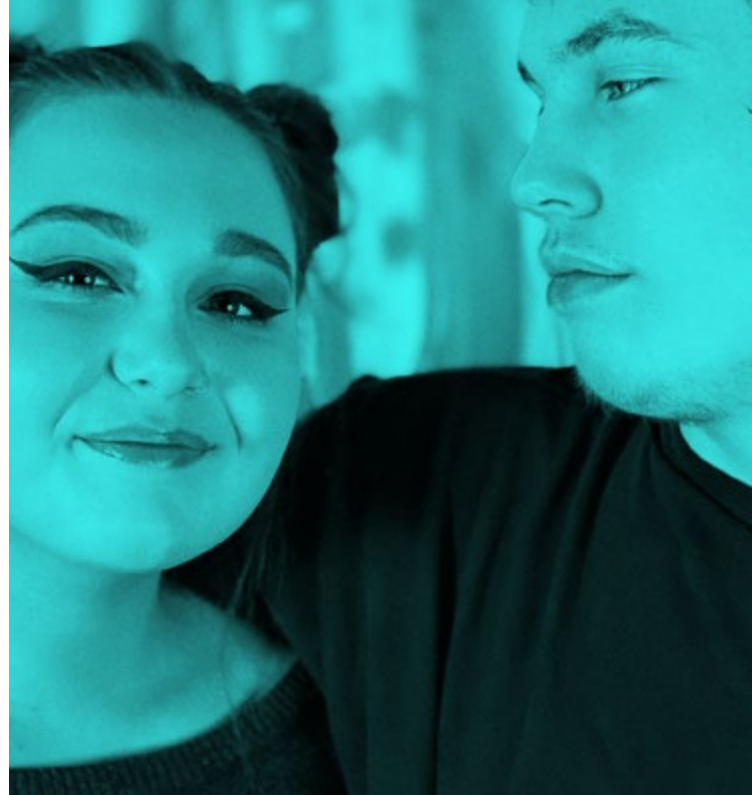
## providing choice

We understand that young people are a rich tapestry of backgrounds, interests, and talents. By offering a variety of opportunities at **yourtown**, we aim to ensure that each individual's unique strengths and preferences are provided for.



## beyond ourselves, we all thrive

We uphold the principle of thinking beyond ourselves as individuals. It encourages young individuals to consider the broader community and the collective impact of their actions. This principle underscores the idea that our decisions and contributions should take into account the well-being and perspectives of others. By fostering a community-minded approach, we create a space where young people actively consider the greater good, collaborate for shared goals, and contribute to a positive and inclusive environment.



# definitions

The following definitions help to articulate the scope and approach of youth engagement at **yourtown**.

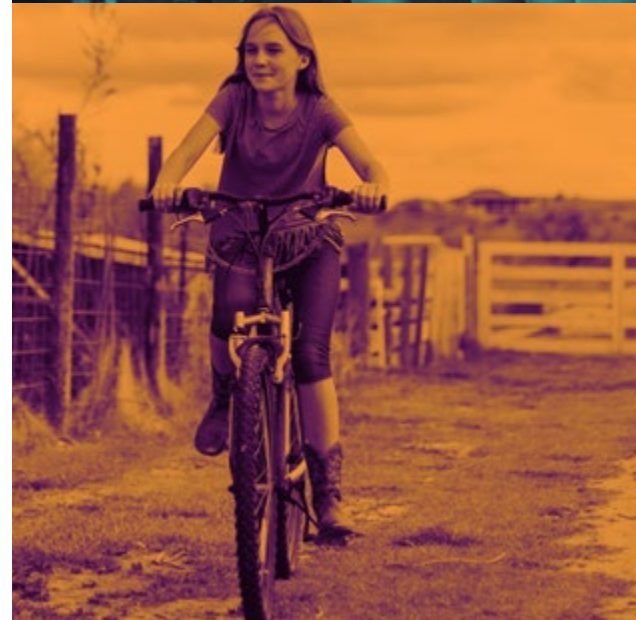
## young people

Young people are defined in this strategy as those aged 12–25. This life stage, from adolescence to young adulthood is a critical time for acquiring the emotional and cognitive abilities for independence, completing education and transitioning to employment, civic engagement and for forming lifelong relationships (Patton et al. 2016).

## youth engagement

Youth engagement brings the rich perspectives, ideas, expertise and skills of young people to the fore. It also empowers young people by giving them opportunities to meet community needs through decision-making and delivering services. It aims to ensure **yourtown** remains responsive to the expectations and needs of young people it serves. As such, this definition has been adapted from Fatherling (2012) by the project team as a fitting definition for **yourtown**.

Youth engagement at **yourtown** is viewed as culture and practices that are mutually beneficial for young people and the organisation, where young people are seen and treated as partners who take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about the issues that affect them.





“ One of the most impactful things we can do when advocating for policy change affecting young people, is to ensure their voices are heard and taken seriously. Emily, staff member

“ The power of youth engagement is in collaboration. Collaboration combines expertise and real-life, in-the-moment experience to create something that exceeds anything any of us could achieve alone. Amanda, staff member

“ Participating in activities with yourtown gave me the push to go to TAFE – If it wasn't for youth Participation I would still be wondering what I was going to be doing. JR 22

“ Youth engagement at yourtown has offered me opportunities to grow and expand as a youth advocate that I never thought possible. I cannot think of any other organisation that would offer me the opportunity to curate an art show or write/edit a book, but yourtown has offered me both. Zoe, youth network member

“ It's important to highlight that outcomes change over time and for the better when young people are at the helm; we can't predict what a project might deliver, but it always expands our horizons.

Sarah, staff member

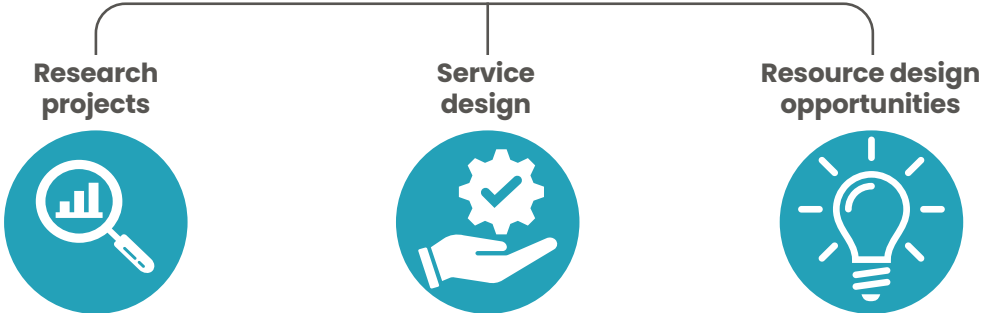
“ Through all of my struggles I had with mental health, I always wanted to tell my story and try to make a difference in others lives and being part of Youth participation allows me to do that. CB 20

# what youth engagement looks like at yourtown

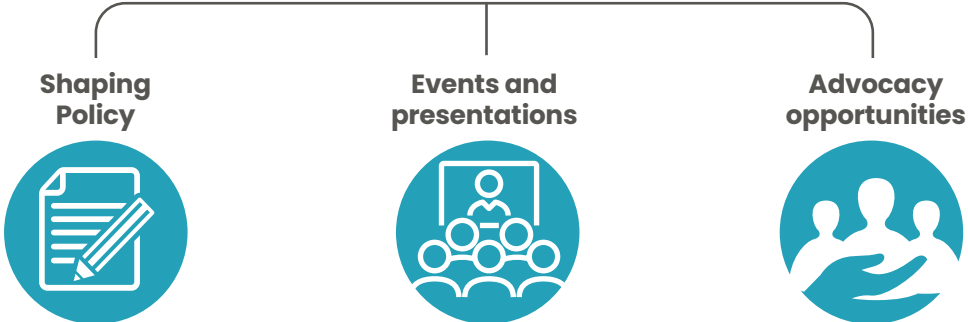
## Young people in governance



## Young people in service development



## Young people in advocacy and partnerships





# OT

## authentic partnering

**yourtown** is strongly committed to ensuring young people are at the heart of all it does. This has involved initiatives where young people are included in the design and delivery of **yourtown** services, as well as consultation opportunities provided by the youth network.

**yourtown's** leadership, workforce and members have expressed high interest and motivation for a more consistent, embedded youth engagement culture where young people are included as 'real partners' to a greater extent across the organisation. This would mean more opportunities for sharing ideas and decisions between the workforce and young people on a regular basis.



**We need to demonstrate our commitment to this. It can't just be lip service.**

Staff member

It would mean that young people's involvement in the strategic and operational functions of the organisation is the norm, rather than exception.

This requires a workforce culture that prioritises and values partnering with young people, and has the skills and resources to do so effectively: a culture where youth engagement is viewed as 'everyone's core business', not only the work of one or two dedicated roles.

## authentic partnering

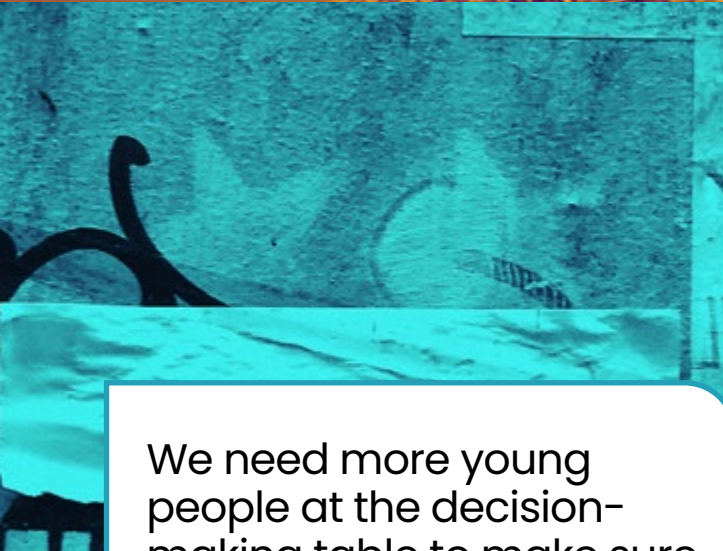
### action 1:

Equip the workforce with the knowledge and resources to be actively involved in partnering with young people on governance, service design and delivery and advocacy activities.

	timeline	responsibility
Develop new materials for induction and the staff intranet, co-designed and delivered by young people. This will include a suite of resources to support staff to work in partnership with young people who may have specific lived experiences including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI+ and mental health challenges.	December 2024	Knowledge and Performance
Appoint Executive Sponsor for youth engagement.	August 2024	Chief Executive Officer
Introduce a youth engagement recognition and reward category that is embedded into the broader enterprise recognition and reward program.	September 2024	People and Culture
Establish a fund that provides budget to support innovative and meaningful youth engagement initiatives that aligns with the youth engagement strategy and the organisation's strategic priorities.	July 2025	Chief Executive Officer
Develop and implement accessible and user-friendly youth engagement toolkit, with policy and work instructions to enable staff to engage in high quality, consistent youth engagement practices across the organisation.	August 2024	Knowledge and Performance
Re-establish dedicated youth engagement coordination and support roles to effectively implement the youth engagement agenda with all service areas across the organisation.	August 2024	Knowledge and Performance




# 02 creating opportunities



We need more young people at the decision-making table to make sure we're delivering the right services in the right ways.

staff member

**yourtown** is uniquely placed to offer opportunities that can create positive outcomes for children and young people who have experienced disadvantage and trauma. While **yourtown** already provides high quality and impactful services to large numbers of young people across Australia, there are experiences that young people would like to see made available with the organisation they trust to grow their skills, build confidence and contribute to positive community outcomes.



Because **yourtown** is a child safe organisation whose brand is known and trusted by children and young people, it is well positioned to provide deep and safe learning opportunities to those who typically find it difficult to access these.

**yourtown** is also able to rise further as a leader across sectors, with a strong youth engagement agenda that reflects its values and strategic vision.



## creating opportunities

### action 2:

Increase the opportunities for youth engagement in governance, in both voluntary and employment roles.

	timeline	responsibility
Establish <b>yourtown's</b> National Youth Council (NYC) to provide youth leadership, and strategic advice and governance on youth relevant issues.	March 2025	Knowledge and Performance
Inclusion of young people on selected Board sub-committees such as Service Impact and Ethics committees.	June 2025	Knowledge and Performance
Inclusion of young people on the <b>yourtown</b> Board, following sub-committee experience, as per organisational protocols.	December 2026	Chief Executive Officer
Establish and implement internal policy that includes young people on recruitment panels for select <b>yourtown</b> roles.	June 2025	People and Culture

## creating opportunities

### action 3:

Increase the opportunities for youth engagement in content/ service/ policy design, delivery and advocacy through paid and unpaid arrangements.

	timeline	responsibility
Undertake a cost/impact assessment to inform decisions regarding expansion of pathway roles where young people can develop knowledge and skills at <b>yourtown</b> through paid traineeships and employment.	June 2025	People and Culture
Dependent on outcomes from above, implement a pilot pathway program in specific service area/s that is evaluated.	January 2026	People and Culture
Establish the <b>yourtown</b> youth network and platform that safely hosts a community of young people who choose to be involved in a range of volunteer activities to connect, grow their skills, and share their expertise.	October 2024	Knowledge and Performance
Increase the number of young people under 25 engaging with <b>yourtown</b> through both paid employment (e.g. casual and permanent roles, traineeships, social enterprise) and unpaid opportunities (e.g. volunteering, student placements, work experience).	Ongoing	People and Culture



# 03

## hardwiring



We've tried things before and they haven't stuck because the foundations weren't in place.

staff member

**yourtown** has demonstrated its capacity to develop, implement and embed organisational priorities such as the Reconciliation Action Plan and Safeguarding policies.

Similarly, progressing a sustainable youth engagement agenda requires an effective and feasible strategy and action plan that includes attention to governance, evaluation and workforce enablers as well as youth engagement delivery initiatives.

It is important that young people are involved to bring their perspectives, expertise, and ideas to inform these processes, in partnership with **yourtown**, and that the workforce has the resources it needs to achieve a sustainable youth engagement agenda.



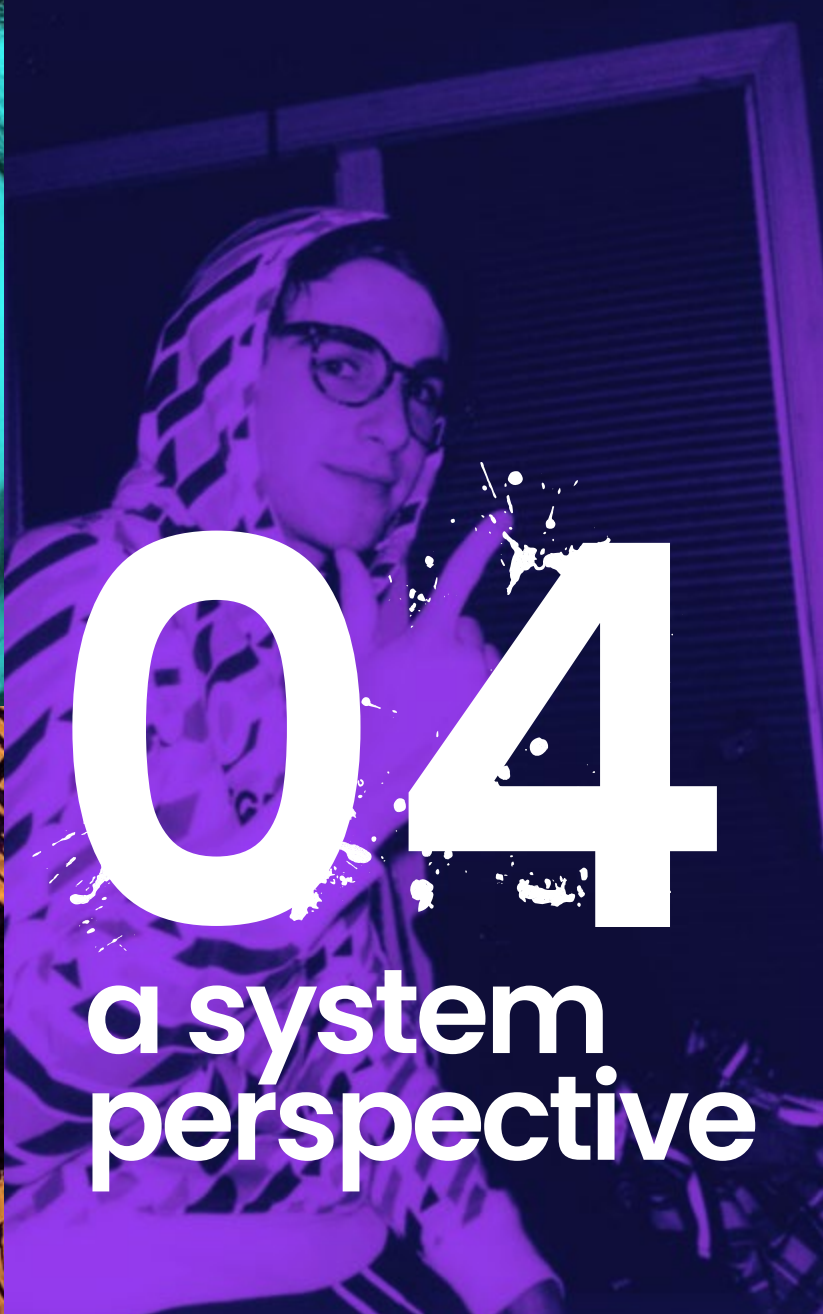


## hardwiring

### action 4:

Hardwire practices for a feasible, innovative and sustainable youth engagement agenda.

	timeline	responsibility
Socialise and launch an enterprise-wide strategy.	December 2024	Knowledge and Performance
Incorporate measurement and indicators related to youth engagement into <b>yourtown's</b> evaluation and impact frameworks.	Ongoing	Knowledge and Performance
Develop and implement an internal and external communication plan that promotes the youth engagement agenda.	July 2025	Internal and External Communications teams
Leverage <b>yourtown's</b> change influencers group to champion and support the embedding of the youth engagement agenda across all parts of the organisation.	Ongoing	Knowledge and Performance



# 04

## a system perspective

We shouldn't pretend this work is easy. It can be hard and it takes a lot to do it well, but it's an imperative – and we don't have to do it all alone. We can work with our partners across the ecosystem.

Tracy Adams, CEO

We heard that **yourtown** wants to build a culture of youth engagement internally, but also contribute at a broader system level. **yourtown** is well placed to partner, lead and convene across sectors to elevate youth engagement and its positive impacts statewide, nationally and globally. This is an opportunity for **yourtown** to provide leadership and showcase best practice, to assist other organisations to raise the bar on youth engagement.

A more joined up approach will help amplify young people's voices and impact, as well as reduce duplication. There is a great opportunity for **yourtown** to play a role in connecting the system effectively in partnership with others.

Early testing of this approach with a range of partner organisations was met with high interest and motivation.



## a system perspective

### action 5:

Work in partnership to strengthen the youth advocacy agenda across sectors and system to deliver positive outcomes, driven by young people.

	timeline	responsibility
<p><b>yourtown</b> advocacy submissions involve young people in conceptualisation and development, with an interface with the <b>yourtown</b> National Youth Council.</p>	Ongoing	Knowledge and Performance Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy
<p><b>yourtown</b> provides active contributions to communities of practice and youth advocacy networks locally and nationally. This includes developing strategic partnerships with agencies such as Queensland Family and Child Commission, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, and Multicultural Youth Networks.</p>	Ongoing	Knowledge and Performance Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy



**“ Involving young people isn't just beneficial, it's essential for creating a world where every voice is heard and valued. – Fiona, youth network member**



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