

YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAM (YAP)

Relationship focused support for young people transitioning through care



The YAP Model

The Youth Advocate Program (YAP) is a relationship focused transitional program, delivered through Advocates (mentors) who provide intensive support to young people with complex needs, and their families.

The program incorporates practice principles, strategies and interventions from the fields of wraparound, mentoring and positive youth development. This has evolved into YAPWrap, a unique and multi-faceted holistic services model, grounded in evidence and designed to achieve positive outcomes for young people with the highest needs.

YAPWrap provides young people and families with a voice and access to, and ownership of, their own, highly individualised service plans. Each plan engages a team of formal stakeholders and informal community supports to help the young person meet their needs and build on their assets and interests in a post-care environment.

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The relationship between the YAP worker and the client is much more personal and much less superficial than a lot of other things I've dealt with before.

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The role of an Advocate (mentor) must reflect a truly ecological approach, be mindful of people and systems who form the natural world of a young person, be cognisant of the family, and cultural responsibilities of the young person themselves and may be performed by more than one person. YAP may take a lead or supplementary role.

YAP Principles

- Individualised Service Planning
- Partnering with Parents
- Strength-Based Work
- Cultural Competence
- Team Approach
- Community-Based Care
- Unconditional Caring
- Corporate and Clinical Integrity
- Giving Back
- “No Eject” Policy

Program Model



How it works

The mentor relationship provided by the YAP Advocate offers critical support at a time of immense change to ensure a young person with complex needs is successful in their transition from or post care. Advocates are trained and supervised and provide intensive, individualised support that is structured and holistic.

The Advocate will be that one trusted adult who will help a young person navigate engagement across many service systems, building on or enhancing needed skills and addressing the multiple challenges they face in the early days, without the safety net of “care”.

It is the Advocate that supports their young person to complete any actions within their Individualised Service Plan (ISP) to achieve their goals.

A key focus for YAP is to actively work with a young person to identify close and extended family members, repairing or forging relationships that will support the young person going forward. Where ‘natural’ supports do not seem available, the Advocate will help the young person identify ‘informal’ or alternative supports who will be there for them.

Research driving positive outcomes

Research has shown that many young people draw on natural mentors (i.e. non-parental adults) for guidance, encouragement and emotional support and those that do, tend to experience more positive outcomes.¹

The needs of young people in care can be complex and extensive. Alongside formal supports, there is growing evidence that the availability of social support from a trusted adult (Advocate) can make a significant difference in the life of a young person. Such relationships:

- Can be protective in helping young people overcome adversity and help compensate the risk of experiencing negative outcomes
- Be a flexible intervention that can work with the ‘whole young person’ in his or her own environment, culture, context and gender
- Build on the strengths of the young person
- As a social policy intervention, mentoring also has the advantage of being available outside of ‘working hours’ and thus has the potential to provide support to young people when they need it.²

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It was nice to have someone there, especially towards the end when I was freaking out the most, to have that one continuous person that was there. Normally kids don't really have that sort of support. But that's why it's good for me, I'm really happy at the moment because I have those supports. I've established that sort of thing.

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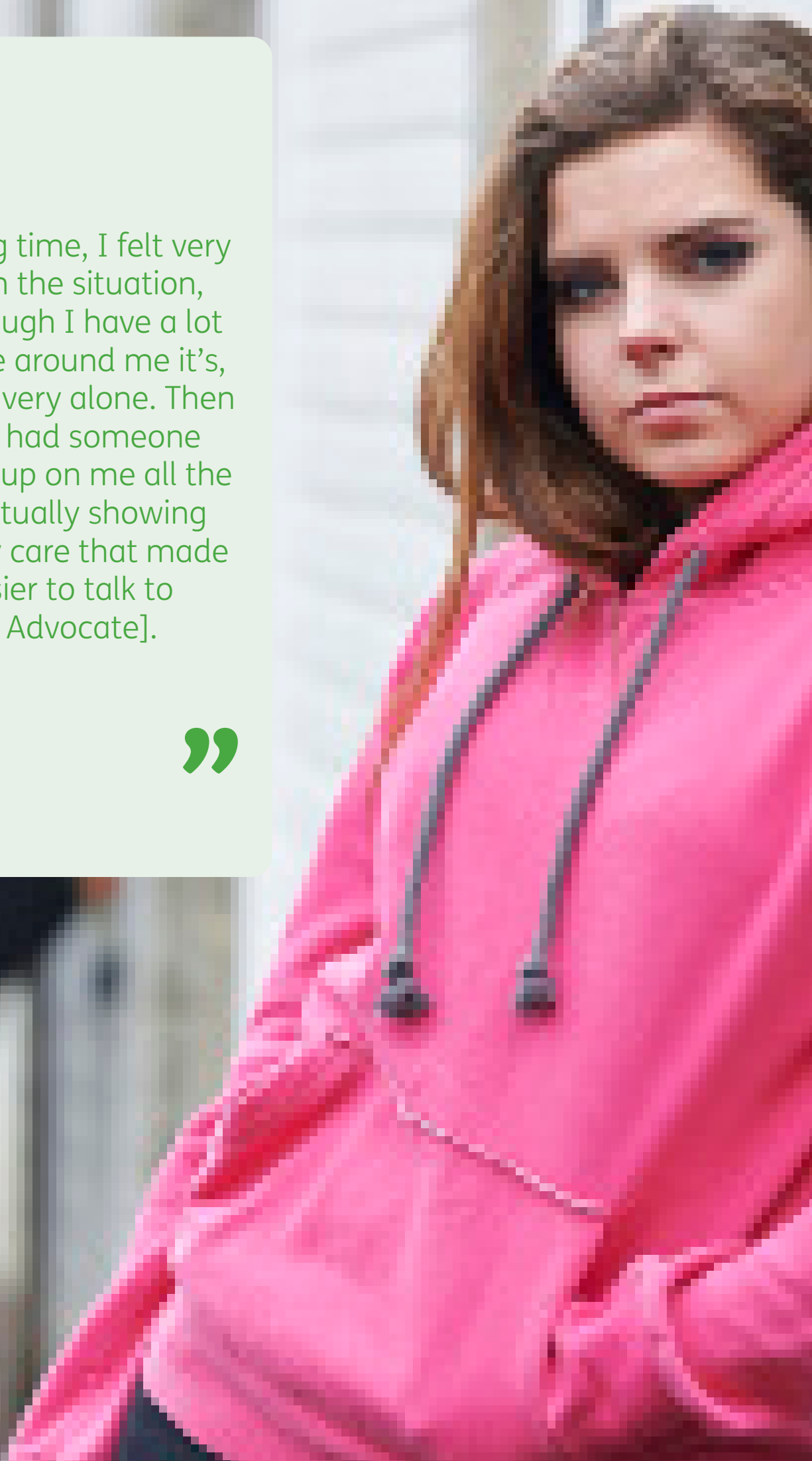
¹ Munson, Smalling, Spencer, Scott, & Tracey 2010; Songer, Bergin and Hokanson 2013

² Brady and Dolan 2007

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For a long time, I felt very alone in the situation, even though I have a lot of people around me it's, like, I felt very alone. Then when I had someone checking up on me all the time actually showing that they care that made it easier to talk to [my Advocate].

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Wraparound approach

In instances where supportive relationships are lacking, formal mentoring programs, such as YAP, can replicate the benefits of natural mentoring relationships by ‘matching’ a young person with a volunteer or paid mentor. Research also supports the effectiveness of the wraparound process, particularly when implemented with fidelity. YAP is considered a “Promising Program” and there is a growing body of internationally accepted evidence that supports the effectiveness and fidelity of the program.

Service we deliver

Life Without Barriers delivers the Youth Advocate Program across the Greater Sydney area, for young people aged 12-25, who:

- Have self-placed or are being restored or reunified with families
- Are leaving care for semi/independent living
- Are on an NDIS plan – any young person who has a disability and needs assistance with the development of independent living skills.

The duration of YAP is usually 6 – 9 months but can be extended to 12 months dependent on the young person’s needs. The young person is matched to a dedicated Advocate who provides up to 15 hours of individualised face-to-face support. This support is extended to families and any identified informal supports to ensure the best possible transition from care.

YAPWORX

YAPWORX focuses on preparing young people for economic success and is an exciting addition to the YAP Toolkit. It offers an interactive curriculum that looks at how to teach, model, and practice pre-employment and employment skills with young people aged 14-21.

YAPWORX offers a series of modules and concepts that are broken down and provided in either individual or group settings over a period of months.

YAPWORX aims to:

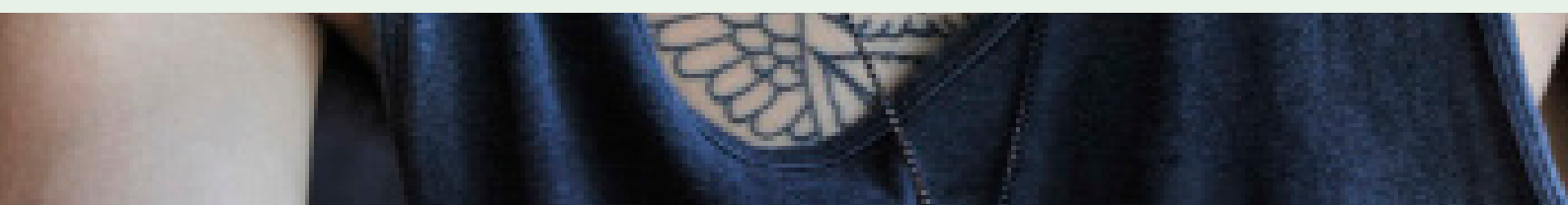
- Build youth and community knowledge and access to labour market information and career opportunities
- Provide authentic learning opportunities to help enhance young people’s knowledge of various career pathways, behaviours, and employment skills
- Work 1:1 with young people and their family to remove barriers to long-term employment
- Foster long-term positive relationships between young people and Opportunity Advisors (de-facto career mentors) and elicits their support in helping young people learn about in-demand employment opportunities, find part time work experiences, and other developmental opportunities.



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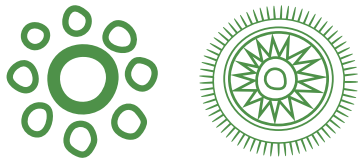
...I would encourage any young person to participate, whether they are leaving care or leaving the house or even if they're not leaving their home and they're just leaving care. It's a really good program to help get them focused and get excited about the next stage of their life.

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About Life Without Barriers

Life Without Barriers is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit service providers, supporting vulnerable people for over 25 years. As a leading out-of-home care agency, we support over 2000 children and young people in foster, kinship and residential care across Australia. Beyond these services, Life Without Barriers also delivers an extensive national network of disability, aged care and mental health services.



Acknowledgement

In the spirit of Reconciliation, Life Without Barriers acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country, and their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and to Elders past, present and emerging.

Want to know more?

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Youth **Advocate**
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