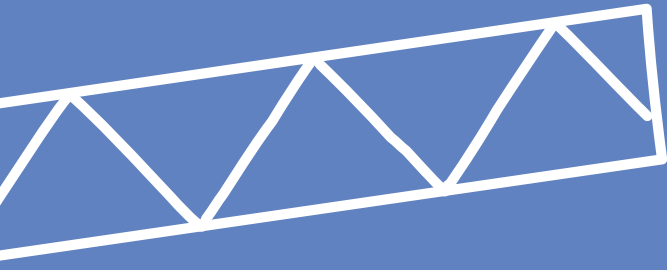




Youth Conversations Engagement Framework





About Beyond the Bell

Beyond the Bell is a community-led initiative committed to ensuring all children and young people in the Great South Coast are supported and inspired to achieve their full potential.

We believe that education is the key to unlocking life opportunities. Those who complete Year 12 or equivalent (VCAL or Certificate III) are more likely to be healthier, wealthier and happier.

Young people in the Great South Coast are less likely to achieve Year 12 than their metropolitan counterparts. Beyond the Bell's goal is for the percentage of young people completing year 12 or equivalent in south west Victoria will be the same or higher than the Victorian average by 2030.

Our purpose

To actively work with communities to enable children and young people in south west Victoria to engage in education and successfully transition through key stages of their learning.

Our vision

All children and young people are connected to education and engaged in their learning.

To achieve our goal, Beyond the Bell engages with all sectors in the regional and local communities. Community and partners, with Beyond the Bell as backbone support, work diligently to offer innovative solutions that support our children and young people on the ground. Bespoke program facilitation ensures that local solutions are offered for local problems. Regionally led initiatives advocate for large scale system change.

Beyond the Bell was founded in 2012 and plays a significant role across the region in leading and partnering to enable children and young people to have every choice and every chance to be connected to education and engaged in their learning.



*Our children and young people;
every choice; every chance*



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Introduction to the framework

The Beyond the Bell Great South Coast (Beyond the Bell) Youth Engagement Framework is designed to capture the process of engaging young people aged 12-19 years for the engagement work carried out for the Youth Conversations Project. The Framework may be used to develop future youth engagement opportunities and a basis for reflection and review of current practices.

What does this framework do?

- Encourage youth organisations and services to listen and acknowledge young people's needs and experience to then advocate for improved services and opportunities
- Share our experience of different ways we implemented engagement opportunities throughout this project
- Provides examples of authentic youth voice and agency and how it can benefit organisations
- Creates opportunities for young people to express their views on what matters
- Support and guide future project implementation



**Youth
Engagement
Framework**

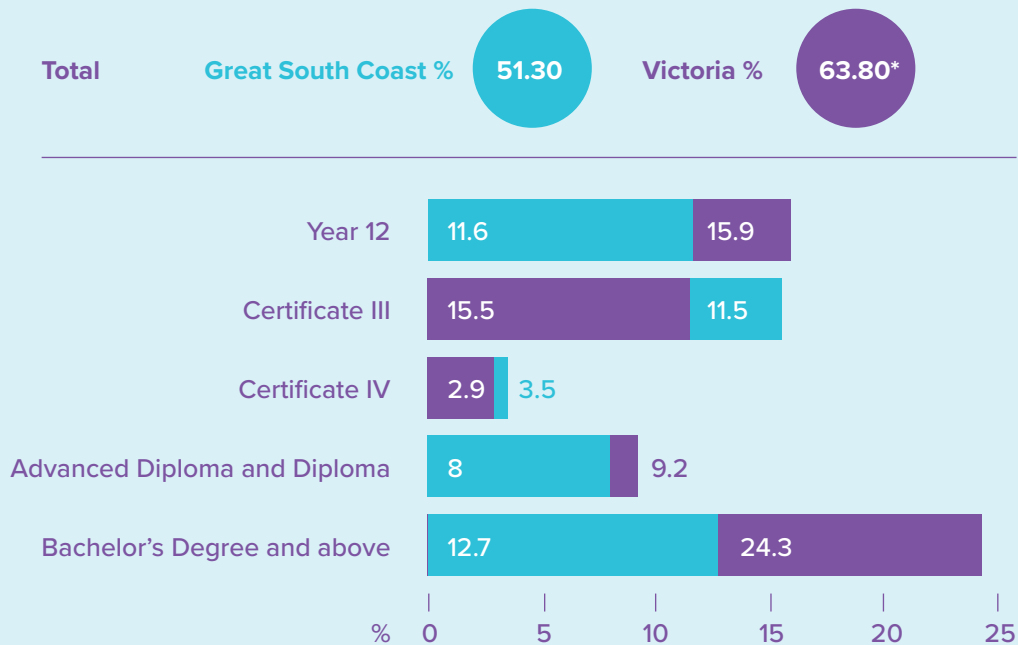
Background to the Youth Conversations Project

The need

Young people in the Great South Coast region are more likely to drop out of school than their metropolitan counter parts, face significant health and social disadvantages and are struggling to make successful transitions into employment. This has a serious impact on the well-being of our community.

Across South West Victoria rates of completion of Year 12 or equivalent (equivalent meaning Certificate III or above) are among the worst in Victoria, this has driven the need for the Youth Conversations Research Project.

Level of highest educational attainment Percentage of population



Note: Figures taken from percentage of the population 15 years and over

*Total figures indicate % of population, 15 years and over, who have completed year 12 or equivalent include assumed prerequisite, and higher attainment studies


Why was youth engagement important in the project?

This project aimed to ultimately improve young people's chances of attaining Year 12 or equivalent and better prepare them for a successful transition to the next phase of their lives by listening about the disadvantages they face preventing them from reaching this goal.

Beyond the Bell first began discussions on the concept of capturing youth voice in the form of '1000 Conversations' across the region with the Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Employment & Learning Network, Brophy Family and Youth Services and Youth Affairs Council Victoria in August 2018. These discussions led to a joint submission to the BBRF in November 2018.

The submission was successful and funding from the federal government was announced in February 2019.






The initial aim of the project was to:

- create opportunities for 1000 young people aged between 12-19 years living in the six Local Government Areas (LGAs) to express their views on what matters to the youth population of Great South Coast
- Involve and build capacity of youth facilitators to engage in this research
- Connect youth facilitators with community concerns
- Recommend strategies for addressing what matters to young people
- Develop a report that informs local youth organisations seeking to support youth access / participation / attainment in education, training, employment within community

And to carry out the project formed partnership with:

- Australian Government, Building Better Regions Fund
- Brophy Family & Youth Services
- Deakin University
- Regional Partnerships- Great South Coast
- Victorian State Government; Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.
- Youth Affairs Council Victoria
- Department of Education and Training, Wimmera South West Area
- Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Employment & Learning Network
- South West TAFE
- Young people who provided advice to the Project Control Group
- Youth Facilitators and Project Officers.



No single person, organization, sector or government can accomplish our shared goal alone (complex problems need complex solutions). Initial discussions led to a joint application to the Building Better Regions Fund in November 2018. This was successful and funding from the federal government was announced in February 2019.

With partnership from Youth Affairs Council Victoria, Glenelg Southern Grampians Local Employment & Learning Network, Deakin University, Department of Education and Training, Brophy Family and Youth Services and Department of Health and Human Services a reference group was formed with representation from all partners plus one young person and planning commenced.

Young people are the experts on what impacts them being, and staying, connected to education. The Youth Conversation offered a forum where young people could articulate their thoughts and expectations about education, training, and future employment. The young people were also invited to talk about how they connected with local community and how these communities could better meet the needs of young people.

By keeping young people at the centre of our work, the project was facilitated by volunteers aged between 18-25 living locally throughout the region who were passionate about youth voice and agency. The youth facilitators' role was to guide the conversations of young people to relate to the following co-designed questions.

What events/activities do you participate in that make you feel connected to your community?

- What do you want your community to look/feel like?
- What do young people want their near future to look like in terms of education and employment?
- What would help young people stay in school and pursue training/employment in the region?
- What has changed for you since the COVID-19 pandemic? How have you adapted to the pandemic?
- What have you learned about yourself and others during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Throughout the project the aim was to ensure authentic youth voice and agency.

Principles of Engagement

The following principles were adopted as a guide from The Code of Ethical Practice YACVIC

Youth workers will work towards enabling and ensuring:

1. The empowerment of all young people
2. Young people's participation
3. Social justice for young people
4. The safety of young people
5. Respect for young people's human dignity and worth
6. Young people's connectedness to important people in their lives, such as family and community
7. Positive health and wellbeing outcomes for young people
8. The positive transitions and healthy development of young people.

Initial Engagement

Our established connections in community enabled early engagement with local networks, action groups, schools, partners, and stakeholders to determine the best way to engage young people in this conversation and how they could get involved to facilitate or participate. Announcements were made and information provided about the project on the Beyond the Bell website and relevant social media channels. In addition, local newspapers and radio stations announced project details.

Participants

Engaging over 700 young people aged between 12-19 from 6 LGAs to either participate in a focus group (face to face and on Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions) or an online survey to explore issues linked to attaining Year 12 or equivalent was attained by our Project Officers networking abilities. Linking in with schools, agencies who work with young people, and clubs to then engage with the young people and have them 'sign up' for the conversation sessions offered in their town/region. Young people were recruited from a diverse range of cultures, religions, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and disabilities to be confident that results of the research represents and reflects the diversity of our youth.

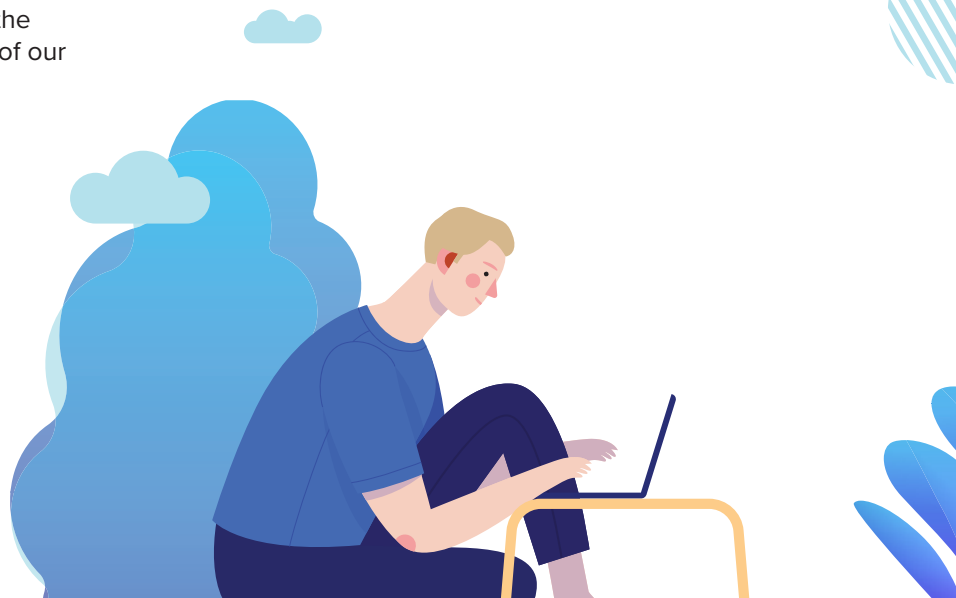
Facilitators

The Project Officers aimed to recruit 10 youth facilitators aged between 18-25 from across the 6 LGAs to ensure that young people were leading young people in this conversation. Our facilitators received specific training and support from Beyond the Bell and YACVIC to assist in the design process of the questions, co-facilitated focus groups, both online and in person, and collect data from these focus groups. The intention of employing young people to facilitate was to build capacity and connection to community concerns.

Throughout this project there was 46 focus groups co-facilitated by 13 youth Facilitators who were paid a stipend for their time. We had a range of sessions facilitated by each of our 13 Youth Facilitators between 1-8 focus groups each.

“My experience as a youth facilitator was overwhelmingly positive. Youth Conversations phase one was structured to make sure young people were co-designers every step of the way but that they were also well supported to step up into that role and we had some great training from Beyond the Bell and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria around how to be a good facilitator which has served me well in a number of roles since and in my personal life.

Being a youth facilitator for the project helped me to situate myself as a leader and part of a continuum of local innovation, working with very young people who are just finding their voice, and being mentored by established voices in the social and community space. Being a youth facilitator reaffirmed my love for working closely with the community and enabled me to share that passion and give something back to a diverse range of young people who participated in the group sessions. It was also a valuable way of staying connected to my community during COVID-19 lockdowns and sharing stories and experiences as well as listening to the young people tell us about their struggles but also their triumphs and their learning during this challenging time.”



Project Officers

An Expression of Interest (EOI) to be a project officer was sent to our networks resulting in six casual project officers employed, residing across the six LGA with existing deep youth networks and experience in youth participation and community engagement. The Project Officers were expected to complete induction, two days of training, and a half day to review and plan;

- Promote the project
- Recruit participants
- Co-facilitate engagement activities alongside young people engaged as facilitators
- Assist in the capture and reporting of engagement outcomes *

Training

Training was provided to build capacity in facilitation, mandatory reporting and running sessions for both Youth Facilitators and Project Officers. This ensured the Facilitators and Project Officers were comfortable in their roles and aware of what to anticipate for the focus groups. After training the Project Officers and Facilitators were provided a 'toolkit' which included all resources for youth engagement with activities and sample ideas for ice breakers and ways to engage young people in safe and open conversations. Our Facilitators and Project Officers worked together to plan the focus group sessions and review the data after each session. A mid-way/ touch base session was held with everyone involved in this project to review, reflect and debrief. A wrap up session once the project was completed was also conducted.

Implementation

When conducted plans were finalised to meet with groups of young people and a practice for the focus group, conducted each conversation session was led by the Youth Facilitator with the Project Officers supporting in the background. 46 focus groups were conducted despite the challenges of the pandemic halfway through this project. Our Project Officers and Facilitators collected the data and passed it on to the project co-ordinator to then distribute to the data research team at Deakin University.

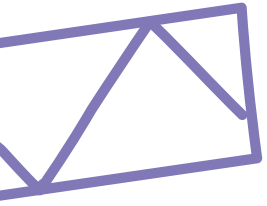
Review

Once the data was collected the Project Officer and Youth Facilitator were given the opportunity to review the information to ensure it was reflective of what they had heard throughout the focus groups. There was also an opportunity to review the draft report and share feedback before publishing.

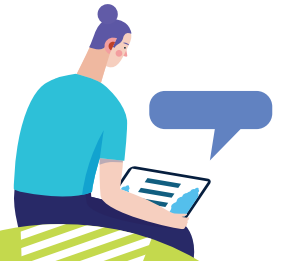
Final Report

As a result of this experimental project, we now have 36 findings and 9 recommendations as to what young people need to keep them connected to community, staying at school, pursuing further education and training, and what effects the pandemic has brought.





Project Flow Chart

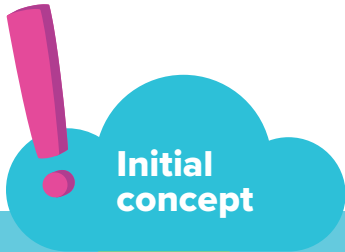


Trainings

Recruit youth Facilitators



Recruit project Coordinator



Initial concept

Scope with potential partners/ stakeholders

Finalise project scope

Seek funding

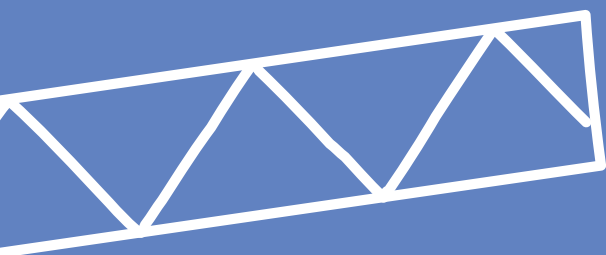


Establish Project Control Group





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*Our children and young people;
every choice; every chance*

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