

# BEYOND GIVING VOICE

PARTNERING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE  
WITH A LIVED EXPERIENCE TO IMAGINE  
AND CREATE RADICAL CHANGE

Y-CHANGE'S SUBMISSION TO THE  
VICTORIAN YOUTH STRATEGY

DECEMBER 2020



A SNAPSHOT

WE WERE  
TOO YOUNG TO  
GO THROUGH  
WHAT WE WENT  
THROUGH, BUT  
IT HAPPENED.

WE AREN'T  
TOO YOUNG TO  
BE INVOLVED  
IN WHAT  
HAPPENS NEXT.

# ABOUT OUR APPROACH

This snapshot centres the lived experiences and expertise of young people.

Historically, young people with a lived experience of socioeconomic disadvantage are spoken about or to – we are often not the authors of our own narratives or stories. We are made to be passive voices, considered subjects of study rather than theorists ourselves.

We have intentionally centred our voices in the creation of every aspect of this submission: ideas, stories, recommendations for change and most importantly, the style of language.

**We're not hard to reach, we're just not invited in**

Young people who experience systemic oppression are often labelled as 'hard to reach' and 'not engaged'. We intentionally seek to challenge this because we know we aren't hard to reach – spaces just aren't made for us.

**From voices heard to actioning real change – the value of lived experience**

When young people are invited to be involved in sector projects, it's usually to tell our story and have our voices 'heard', but not to action change ourselves.

Despite having significant knowledge, experience and insight, we are excluded from meaningful policy reform, systems change efforts and service design, and at decision-making tables.

We believe that all young people have a right to access information and policy documents in ways that make sense. For this reason, we have made sure this submission is written simply and so that you can hear our voices in it.

To do this, we used a method called co-production, which is defined as:

*"... a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them."*

– Social Care Institute for Excellence

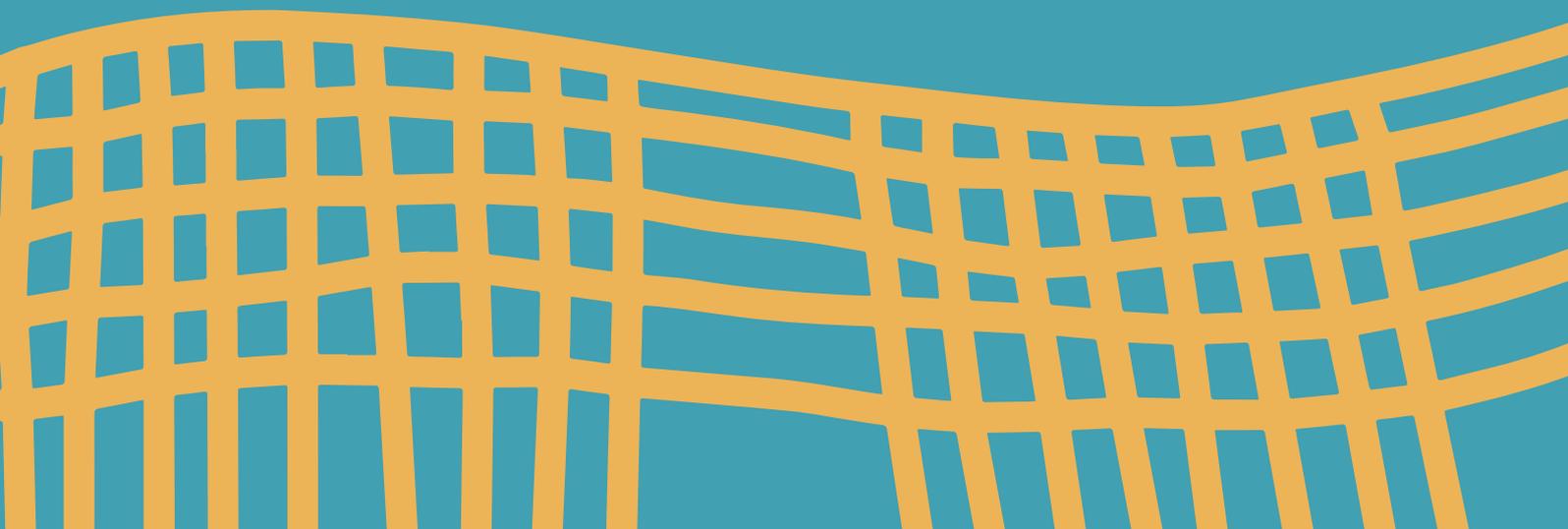
As young people with lived experiences of systemic oppression, we have inherited and often internalised the faults of systems. We wear the cost. Now, what we seek to do is make our pain purposeful. This submission centres our voices, our stories and our ideas for change.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS AND BIG IDEAS FOR CHANGE

We believe in dreaming big and in a future where *all* young Victorians are able to thrive, not just those who currently have the most access. Involving us in the Victorian Youth Strategy is more than asking us for submissions as a once off, we want to be actively partnered with to create solutions.

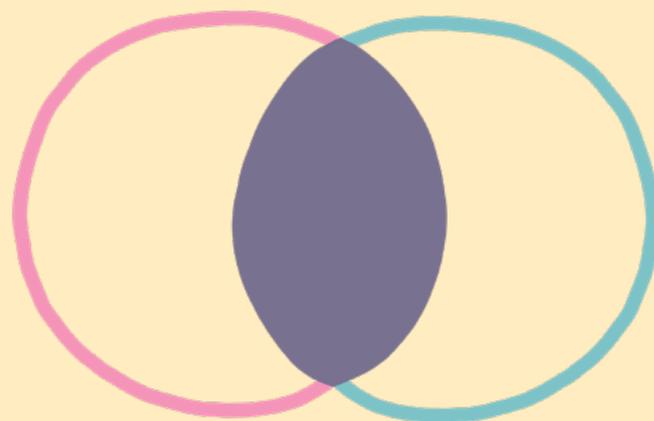
Given the depth and breadth of the Victorian Youth Strategy and how far it will reach across our state, our recommendations have implications for agencies outside the specific responsibility of the youth sector. As we've mentioned, no service system operates in isolation and the issues that young people are experiencing are deeply intertwined.

An overarching message that sits above our recommendations is the importance of collective responsibility as a community to look after one another, especially outside our immediate circles and networks. **It takes a village, after all.**



## RECOMMENDATION 1 MOVE BEYOND GIVING VOICE

In our sector, 'giving' young people a voice and a chance to 'have our say' is often seen as good practice. We don't need to be given a voice; we have voices – the problem is that people aren't listening to us. Partnering with young people isn't just a good opportunity for us, there are many benefits for others too and this needs to be better understood.



### We want to see:

- the Victorian State Government fund and develop a workforce of Youth Consultants as community builders, project workers and Peer Support Workers that are hired in a paid capacity to support youth-related projects and initiatives across government departments.
- young people paid for our time and expertise on projects and research. Even better, hire us as Lived Experience Consultants or Youth Peer Workers as part of your organisations.
- an Adversity and Trauma-Informed Practice Guide for working with young people to be co-produced in partnership with young people with lived experience. We then recommend a partnering workshop training series be co-produced and co-facilitated in partnership with young people for the benefit of the Victorian youth sector.
- young people specifically recruited on co-design and co-production projects as a result of the recommendations of the final Victorian Youth Strategy.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 1 – Move beyond giving voice](#), p.126.

**RECOMMENDATION 2**  
**SHARE YOUR INSTITUTIONAL POWER,  
HELP US BUILD OUR OWN TOOLBOXES**



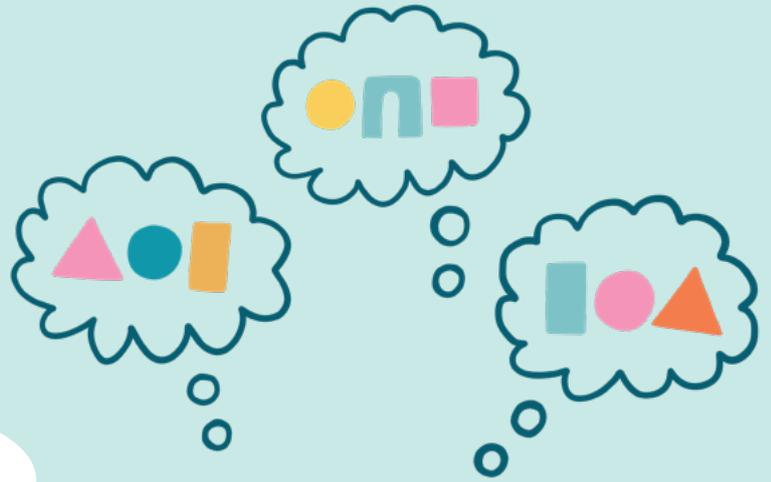
As young people with lived experience, we have power and capability often learnt through adapting and surviving in the world. When young people with a lived experience come to work in the community sector, there are massive power imbalances between us and the services we've used. These need to be made visible and shifted.

As sector staff, you have access to spaces, networks and decision-making tables that we don't get invited to. You've got keys that we don't. We also have access to keys that you don't, like how to connect with our communities and understand 'othered' wisdom. We have important lived experiences that can't be found anywhere else. This doesn't make us 'special'; it means we have expertise that is needed to create systems change.

We want to see:

- a government supported pilot initiative focusing on mentoring in the Victorian youth sector, where older professionals are partnered with young people who enter into a relationship of exchange.
- a board and governance development scholarship program specifically for young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- a youth participation and decision-making framework and guide that is co-produced in partnership with young people and Lived Experience Consultants.
- Y-Change's Youth Exchange training to be integrated across government as an ongoing professional development training package for staff who engage with young people.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 2 – Share your institutional power, help us build our own toolboxes](#), p.128.



### **RECOMMENDATION 3** **EDUCATE YOUNG PEOPLE ON** **WHAT MATTERS (TO US)**

A lot of young people from marginalised backgrounds don't have strong or any connections to family, people, place and community. We often miss out on a lot of significant learning about culture and identity, which can lead to us not having a sense of belonging.

We also don't have anyone to teach us the skills we need to just function and make sense of the world. Without these stable foundations it is almost impossible to build something without it all falling down. But we can't get what we need if the systems we are being told to access aren't working for us.

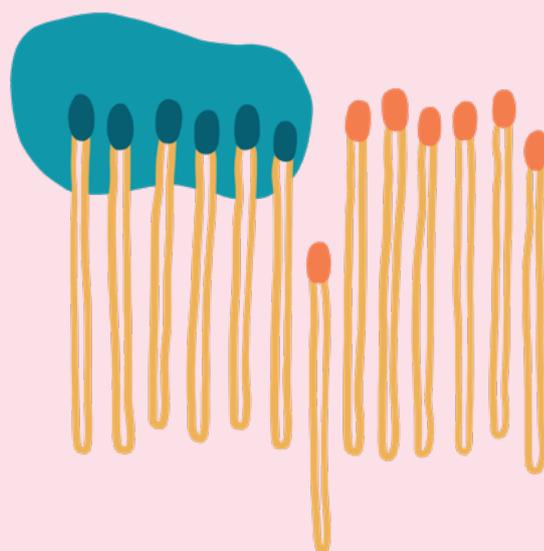
We want to see:

- greater funding, support and promotion of alternative schooling models for young people experiencing disadvantage, such as The Hester Hornbook Academy and The Pavilion School.
- all young people in out-of-home care, residential care and intersecting services to be offered a cultural support plan to help them engage with their own culture and heritage.
- all young people to get access to Respectful Relationships education, even if they're not engaged in school.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 3 – Educate young people on what matters \(to us\)](#), p.131.

**RECOMMENDATION 4**  
**SUPPORT US TO BREAK PATTERNS OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

At Y-Change, we call young people who are breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma, abuse, violence, addiction, poverty and imprisonment 'circuit breakers' – and it's no easy task. We are often holding indescribable pressure on our shoulders, being the ones in our families who decide on treading a different path. We must be supported and not made invisible. Investing in us is investing in prevention.



We want to see:

- a statewide youth employment equity fund and a statewide youth dental and orthodontic equity set up exclusively for young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- investment in our Y-Change model so that we can continue to build a workforce of young Lived Experience Consultants and co-produce an accredited learning package for young people who want to translate their lived experience into a professional skill set.
- a Royal Commission into Centrelink and Employment Service Providers, so that the continued harm these agencies inflict on the most marginalised young people in our communities is formally exposed and they are held accountable for their actions.
- Governments review the 'unreasonable to live at home' application process so more young people can access the financial support they need and are entitled to.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 4 – Support us to break patterns of intergenerational trauma](#), p.133.



**RECOMMENDATION 5**  
**UPHOLD AND PROTECT OUR**  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**

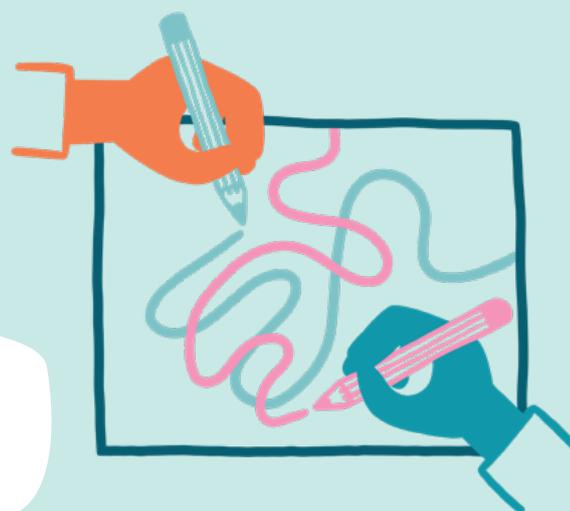
Young people have to rely on laws, rights, and policies and we need to be aware of what they are to make sure the people around us are upholding them. We need to imagine and then work towards building a world that young people can feel safe in.

We want to see:

- every young Victorian receive a wallet card version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a poster size version be hung up at every Victorian school and service system organisation.
- the Victorian State Government back the 'Raise the Age' campaign and advocate to all Australian governments to raise the age at which children can be arrested or locked up.
- increased support for victims of sexual assault and reform how the police and justice system respond to sexual assault when it involves children and young people.
- a lived experience advisory group established in relation to sexual assault of young people.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 5 – Uphold and protect our human rights](#), p.136.

**RECOMMENDATION 6**  
**IMAGINE AND DESIGN SERVICES WITH US,  
NOT FOR US**



Our lives are constantly changing and moving, there's so much instability and so few places we can stop and just take a breath out, realise we're home and that we belong there. We need free spaces, events, and services that we can go to escape all that's going on in our lives and these need to be built with us, not for us. We want to be a part of creating the services that we will use so they work for us.

**We want to see:**

- a statewide, specialist Youth Central Hubs pilot project, where accessible 24/7 centres for young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage can drop in to get their needs met and find community, without being forced to sign up for services.
- extended operating hours for services that young people need access to, including libraries, youth crisis services and youth spaces, especially for young people experiencing homelessness, family violence and mental health crises.
- regular free events showcasing local support services for children, young people and the wider community in metro and regional and rural Victoria.
- greater investment in co-located services with access to multidisciplinary workers, specialists and practitioners.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 6 – Imagine and design services with us, not for us](#), p.139.

## RECOMMENDATION 7 ENABLE OUR AGENCY AND AUTONOMY



We know and understand a lot because of what we've lived through. We've been forced to navigate systems and make sense of a lot to survive, usually before we were even ready to. We need autonomy and to be part of making decisions based on our interests and values. We need to be seen and respected as key decision-makers in our own lives and for people who are representing us to keep us informed so that we can meaningfully contribute.

We want to see:

- more agency and autonomy afforded to school students through reviewing mandatory dress codes and forced participation strategies.
- support of The Foundation for Young Australians' 'Missing: young people in Australian news media' report recommendations, which includes employing young people in newsrooms.
- the expansion of Body Safety Australia and the integration of a team of Lived Experience Consultants as part of their team of educators.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 7 – Enable our agency and autonomy](#), p.141.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**  
**OFFER US THE SAME ACCESS AS**  
**OTHER KIDS**

If life was a race, some young people get to keep taking two steps forward, while those of us who face systemic barriers are 10 steps behind the starting line. We shouldn't be at a disadvantage because of our postcode, our class status, or the families we're born into.



**We want to see:**

- expanded and sustainable funding for the School Breakfast Clubs Program, which is vital for young people who don't have access to sufficient breakfast meals.
- a statewide funding pool for students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, where they can access no strings attached funds for school uniforms, camps, activities and excursions, and other school related expenses.
- the continuation and expansion of the Community Traineeship Pilot Program.
- an expansion of the Myki smart card ticketing system into rural and regional areas in Victoria that don't currently have it, including more places for people to top money up on their cards.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 8 – Offer us the same access as other kids](#), p.143.



**RECOMMENDATION 9**  
**BUILD ACCESSIBILITY IN FROM THE START,  
NOT AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT**

Without accessibility built in from the start, young people are coming up against constant barriers and discrimination in schools, services and workplaces. It's often not thought about until a young person shows up and then it is left up to us to ask for what we need. We need to be able to bring our whole selves into spaces.

We want to see:

- the Victorian State Government support the Victorian Council for Social Services's 'Stronger Schools Campaign' and partnering education action plan.
- Mental Health First Aid become a compulsory unit for all Victorian primary, secondary and tertiary schools.
- funding to implement the Berry Street Education Model in Victorian schools.
- the Victorian State Government continue to strongly advocate for an overhaul to standardised testing.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 9 – Build accessibility in from the start, not as an afterthought](#), p.145.

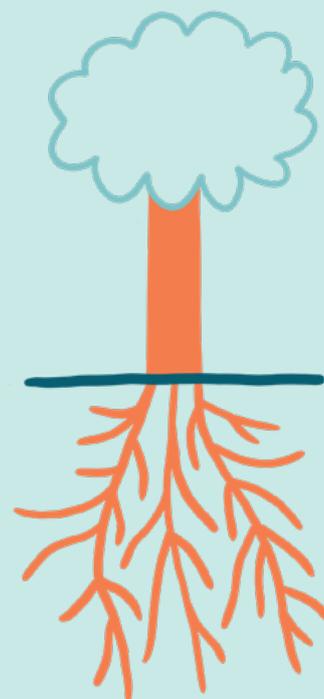
**RECOMMENDATION 10**  
**PARTNER WITH US TO CREATE EQUITABLE  
AND SAFER SYSTEMS**

Children and young people are often not involved or spoken to because of potential and assumed risk; but by not including and speaking to us, it can be more of a risk to our safety. We need to be part of building our own spaces. Our perspectives, experiences, worldviews and priorities are distinct and must be deeply considered.

We want to see:

- the Victorian State Government back the 'Raise the Rate' campaign and its recommendations.
- children and young people be recognised as primary victims in the eyes of the family violence service system and the courts and considered separate to primary parent victims.
- the child protection and out-of-home care systems be radically reformed to enable them to better support children and young people and their families.
- youth service organisations across Victoria integrate and follow the Indigenous Status Standard – Standard Indigenous Question (SIQ) as part of client data collection.

Read more actions we want to see for [Recommendation 10 – Partner with us to create equitable and safer systems](#), p.148.



# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

We believe that allowing young people to continually struggle is a political choice and that the lack of systems transformation is due to a lack of mainstream political will.

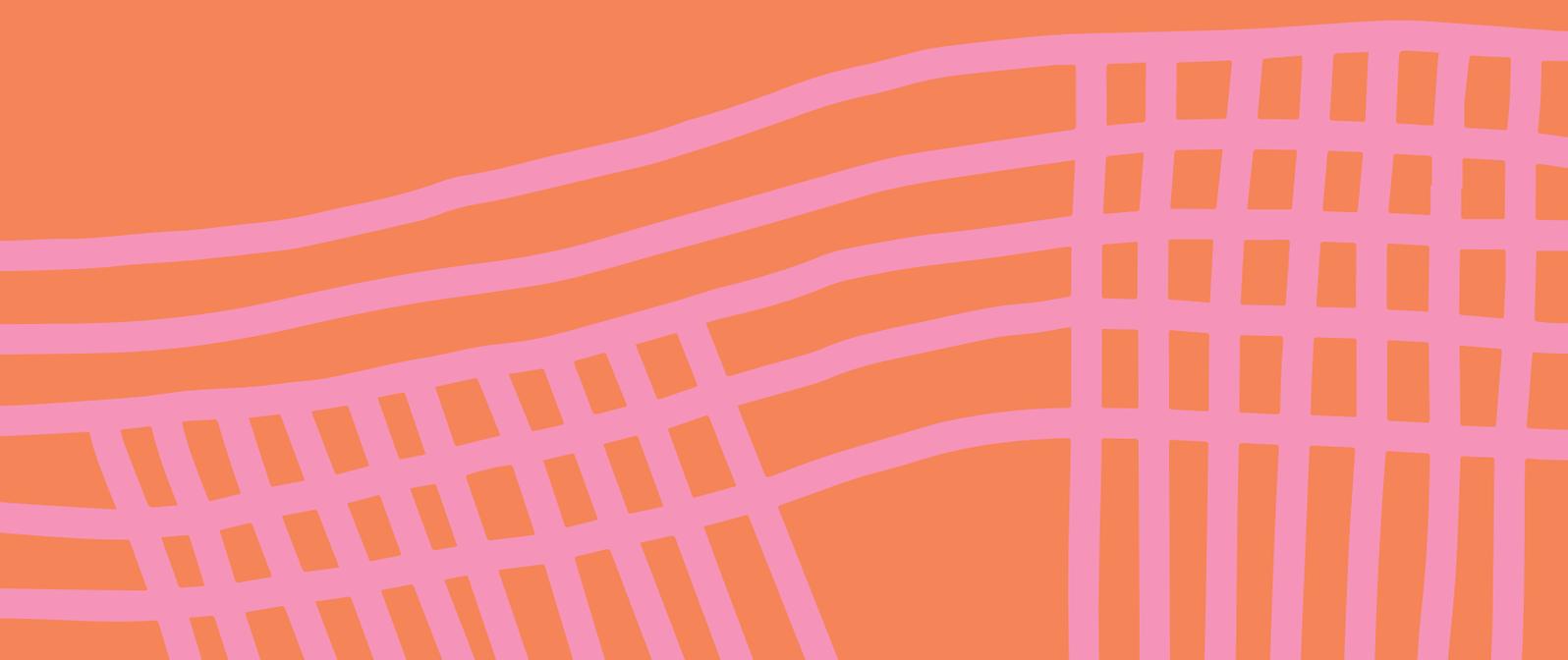
Socioeconomic disadvantage is the result of deep, systemic injustice deeply impacting on and playing out in young people's lives. Responses that are imagined with us are vital if we really want things to change. Through our lived experiences, we can see just how much change is needed and how harmful systems and services can be for children and young people. **After all, we know where the cracks are because we fell through them.**

We want to change the way lived experience is recognised and create a shift in valuing 'non-typical' knowledge and expertise. This involves challenging people's assumptions and the ways in which they see young people who experience socioeconomic disadvantage.

To create real change requires us to expand our thinking, which is often an uncomfortable but important process. It demands that we open our minds and imagine something different, to seek out and build more innovative pathways.

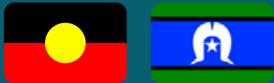
If we are to become good ancestors to children and young people, we must become who we are waiting for, now. We must act boldly, now. We must dream bigger, now – while we have this once in a lifetime window of opportunity.

[Read Y-Change's full submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy.](#)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, the First Nations People. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and honour the self-determination and survival of Indigenous Australians. We recognise the continued impacts and violence of colonisation and our role in dismantling systems that harm.



We acknowledge that as people who use personal experiences to influence social and systemic change, we stand on the shoulders of giants. To the Australian and global consumer participation movement, without your continued advocacy and fight for the influence of lived wisdom, we would not be here today.

This submission is authorised by us, the Y-Change team of Lived Experience Consultants who worked on this project: Artemis Munoz, Beanz, Emilie Oraylia, Geordie Armstrong, Janelle Graham, Kaitlyne Bowden, K.C, Mikayla Ramm, Paige Glover and Tash Anderson.

### Lead authors and process facilitators:

**Morgan Cataldo**  
Senior Manger Youth Engagement

**Kirra-Alyssa Horley**  
Y-Change Lived Experience Consultant

### Lead research and co-author:

**Shakira Branch**  
Y-Change Project Administrator

### Process and research support:

**Bec Percy**  
Y-Change Project Administrator

### Production:

Edited by Stephanie Baker  
Design by Samantha Jayaweera  
Illustration by Nina Sepahpour

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