

Youth CONNECT Annual Investor Report

February 2021



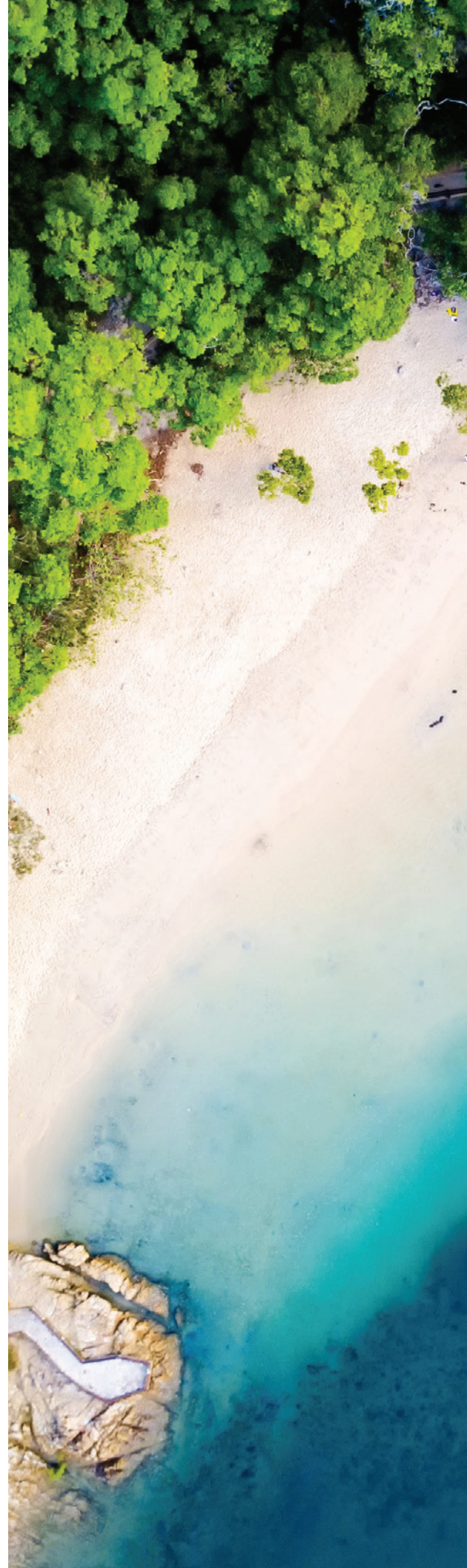
Acknowledgement of Country

We at Churches of Christ in Queensland acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we stand and pay our respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures, hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Further, we acknowledge the grief and loss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have endured from the harm caused by invasion and colonisation over the last 200 plus years resulting in historical, cultural and intergenerational trauma.

We at Churches of Christ in Queensland also recognise, respect and celebrate the survival and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people including recognition of those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote the world's oldest living culture will leave a lasting and proud legacy for their people.

We stand with you in solidarity now and always.



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A message from the Chief Executive Officer

Resilience is a word that is often bandied about, but it could well be the word that epitomises 2020.

Many commentators have lucidly described the challenges of the year and I certainly don't need to re-state them, other than to acknowledge the extraordinary context that the Youth CONNECT program has operated within. Resilience is more than the ability to endure hardship, it is the ability to face a challenge, recover quickly and move forwards.

As you read this third Annual Investor Report, I am confident that you will be inspired by the resilience shown by the young people we work with – and the resilience of our amazing team.

The statistics, numbers and figures as encouraging as they are, all represent

hours of compassionate and committed human contact. The case studies provide a small glimpse into the very real challenges, struggles, hopes, break-throughs and successes that our clients and team members share in each and every day.

I commend this report to you and trust that it will also inspire your own experience of resilience.



Gary Edwards
Chief Executive Officer
Churches of Christ in Queensland

Overview of key outcomes

The Youth CONNECT program supports young adults with safe and stable housing, education and work-readiness, employment, personal development and social and community connections.

250
young people referred

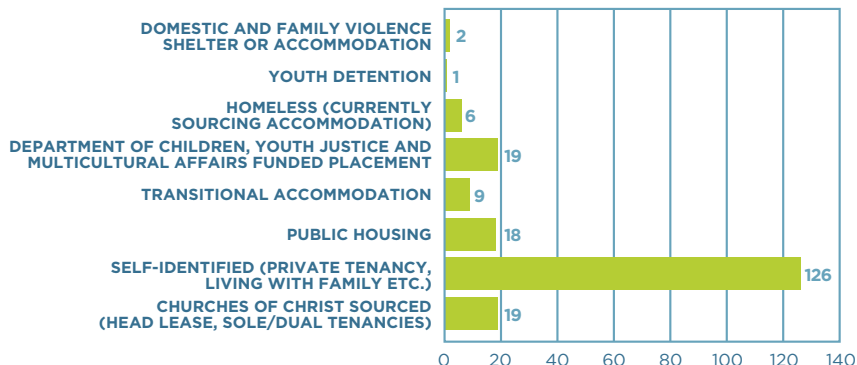


17% young people are parents of infants and young children

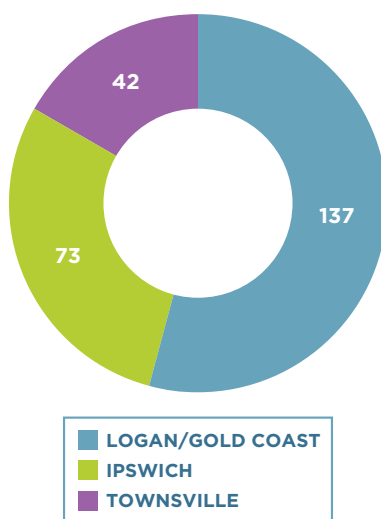


completed, with high rating in the *practical life skills, choices and behaviour* and *people and support* domains

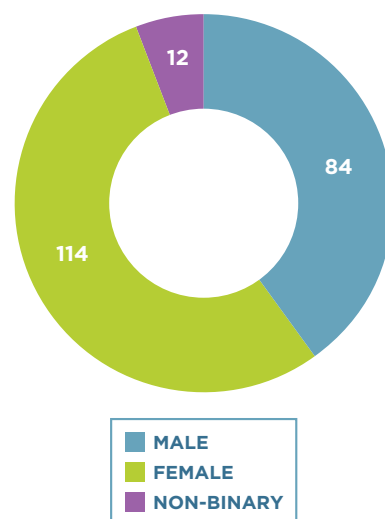
Housing Types



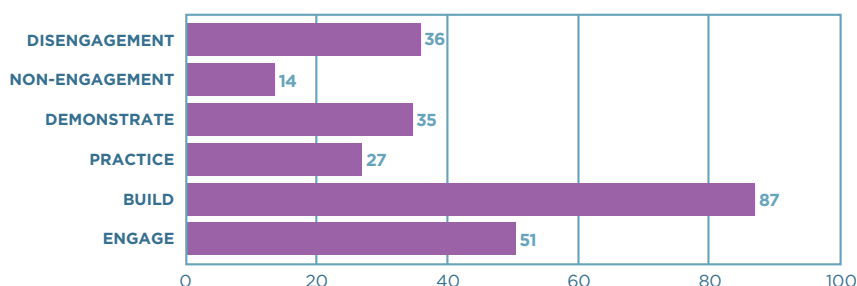
Number of clients per region



Gender



Progress Phases



Introduction

On 1 December 2017 Churches of Christ in Queensland, in partnership with the Queensland Government, officially commenced the Youth CONNECT program.

The past year has been an unprecedented and difficult one for all, including the young people within the Youth CONNECT program. Throughout this time, our dedicated team members have supported young people and formed strong relationships with other stakeholders to create appropriate wrap-around support.

At the end of Year 3 of the program, we have continued to see positive and encouraging outcomes for young people in the program. In 2021 the first of the young people will commence their transition after having completed all four stages of the innovative program.

The Youth CONNECT team are immensely proud of the outstanding achievements of the young people since beginning with Youth CONNECT.

Program objective

Youth CONNECT is an individually-tailored program that supports vulnerable young people to get on their feet and survive and thrive in their adult life. It delivers sustainable housing and wrap-around support for young people exiting or who have exited, statutory care and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It aims to build resilience and reduce homelessness for these vulnerable young people. We are the first Social Benefit Bond in the world to focus specifically on this cohort.







*"Even though
it's a struggle
sometimes, I have
the support
if I need it."*



Program case story 'Katherine'

"Hi, my name is Katherine I have been in the Youth CONNECT program for just under a year. I am currently working full-time and have just moved into my own private rental with my boyfriend, Jonah.

Moving into my own home has given me a huge sense of achievement and working full-time to achieve this goal is very exciting for me. I currently work in the disability support industry, where I have recently been promoted to full-time, which has given me more financial freedom.

I am excited to see where the future takes me. In the next year or so I would potentially like to study so I can further my career in the disability support industry. I would like to be able to own my own home within the next few years. Having a place to call home is important to me, it makes me feel safe and gives me a place I belong.

I think my best qualities are my resilience and initiative. Despite all life has thrown at me I have still been able to make small achievements along the way. Even though it is still a struggle sometimes, I feel like I'm doing well. Recently I was nominated for a 'Women in Leadership Award'. This was exciting for me as I felt like the community recognised my struggles and hard work.

Working with Youth CONNECT has had its up's and down's. I've had a few case managers along the way, but I have always felt supported. Recently, Jasmine (Youth CONNECT Case Manager) helped me with different funding and this has made moving into my own home easier. It is good to have that extra support if I need it."

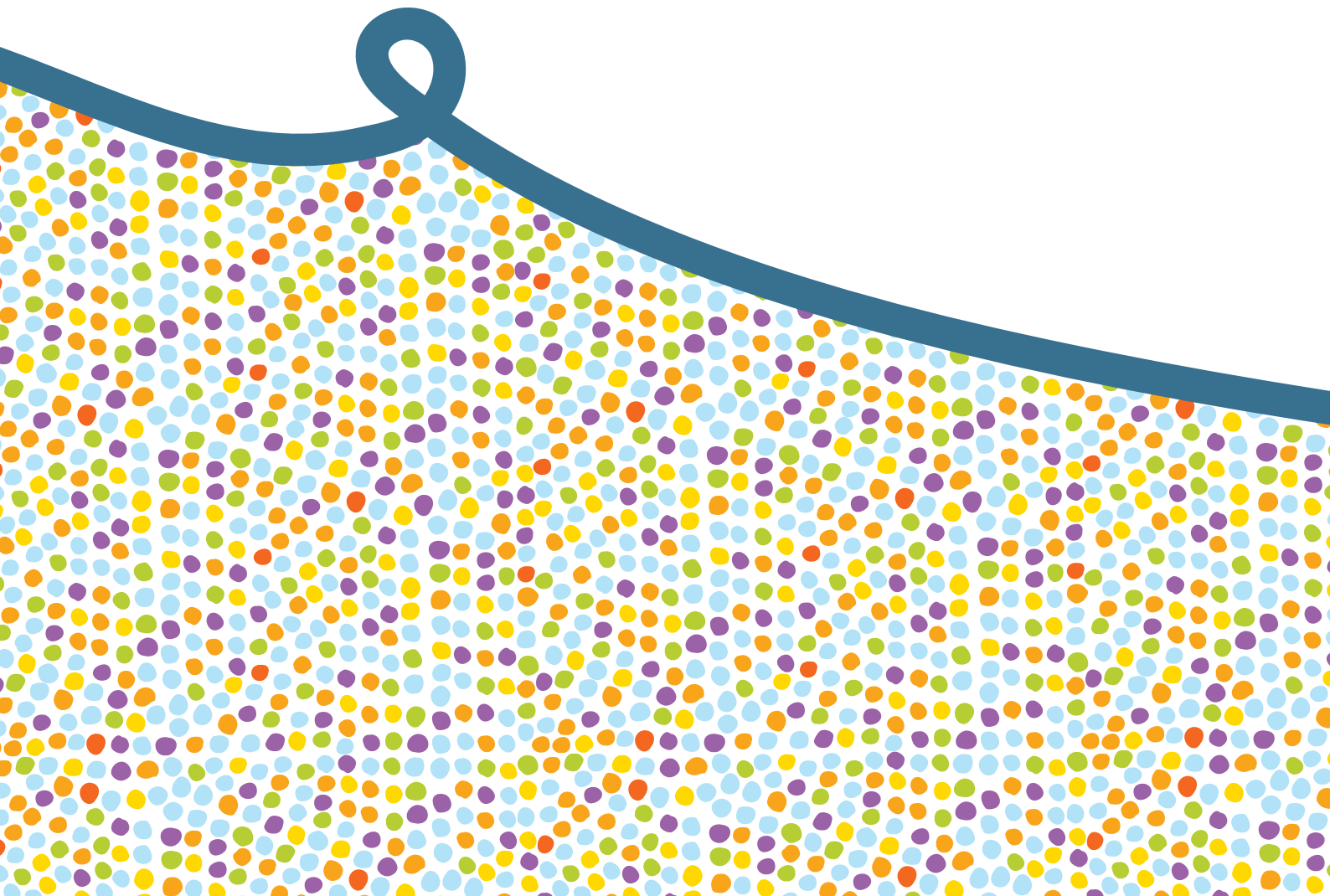
Program update: referrals

The quarterly referral allocations for each Youth CONNECT quarter is outlined in the table below.

Quarterly Referrals to Youth CONNECT by referral period

Referral Period (1 Dec – 30 Nov)	Preferred Quarterly Referral				Aggregate Cohort Number
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2017-18	10	14	16	20	60
2018-19	23	24	24	24	95
2019-20	24	24	24	23	95
2020-21	20	20	10	0	50
Total					300

A nominal referral allocation number is attributed to each quarter, with a total referral allocation identified for each year of the Youth CONNECT program. At the end of Year 3, Quarter 4, Youth CONNECT has received and accepted the expected referral target of 250 referrals.



Program update: service locations

Youth CONNECT delivers services across three locations Logan/Gold Coast, Townsville and Ipswich and accepts referrals from surrounding areas accessible to these locations.

We received 101 accepted referrals during Year 3. There were 5 *non-engagements* and 3 *disengagements* across the Year 3 cohort, resulting in a total of 93 active service users for Year 3.

Total number of service users by service location

Service Location	Service Users by Year			Total
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
Logan/Gold Coast	28	49	60	137
Ipswich	19	28	26	73
Townsville	12	13	15	40
Total	59	90	101	250

At the conclusion of Year 3 there were 200 *active service users* engaged in the Youth CONNECT program. In Year 3 Department of Housing and Public Works referred 129 young people, of which 28 were determined to be unsuitable to participate in the Youth CONNECT program due to a range of factors. Youth CONNECT, Department of Housing and Public Works and the referrers all subsequently agreed to withdraw all 28 referrals and therefore they will not be included in the calculation of performance.

The end of Year 2 saw a referral deficit of five service users. The Department of Housing and Public Works sourced additional referrals during Year 3, resulting in Youth CONNECT meeting the preferred referral numbers by the end of Year 3. Year 4 will see the intake of an additional 50 service users. Once this number has been met, Youth CONNECT will cease accepting new referrals.

Program phases

Youth CONNECT is a four-phase model of service delivery, with all being completed within a three-year period. Each phase is underpinned by ensuring access to safe and stable housing that is not reliant on social housing (unless this is required to meet individual needs and is agreed to by the State) and with a focus on moving the young person from reliance to resilience and from dependence to independence/interdependence.



The progress of each of the three cohorts across the lifespan of the program:

Stage	Cohort 1 (2017-18)	Cohort 2 (2018-19)	Cohort 3 (2019-20)	Total
Engage	0	0	51	51
Build	0	47	40	87
Practice	0	25	2	27
Demonstrate	35	0	0	35
Non-Engagement	6	3	5	14
Disengagement	18	15	3	36
Total	59	90	101	250

Young people have continued to progress through the program phases. In Year 3 we saw the first young people progress to demonstrate. Young people in our Year 3 cohort have progressed into the build phase more quickly than we observed with our first two cohorts of service users.

Exited clients

Program non-engagement

Non-engagement occurs where multiple attempts are made to contact a referred young person however they cannot be contacted within 20 business days from the date the referral is accepted or, when contacted, the young person chooses not to participate in the program.

Program disengagement

Disengagement refers to those young people who consent to participating in the program, but subsequently withdraw.

Year 1					Total Service Users	59
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	1	1	2	2	6	10.1%
Disengagement	9	4	4	1	18	30.5%

Year 2					Total Service Users	90
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	0	3	0	0	3	3.3%
Disengagement	3	2	2	8	15	16.7%

Year 3					Total Service Users	101
Referred In:	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Quarter 3	Quarter 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	1	1	3	0	5	5%
Disengagement	2	1	0	0	3	3%

Combined					Total Service Users	250
Year of Exit:	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total	Percentage
Non-engagement	5	4	5	0	14	5.6%
Disengagement	5	14	17	0	36	14.4%

The anticipated non-engagement risk is 10% and the anticipated disengagement rate is 15%. The State accepts the first 5% of the non-engagement risk and this will not affect program outcomes. Anything over 5% will affect program outcomes. The net impact at the end of Year 3 is 5.6% non-engagement and 14.4% disengagement. Both non-engagement and disengagement levels are under the anticipated levels. We have continued to observe a significant decrease in both non-engagements and disengagements as we have progressed into Year 3 of the program.





Youth CONNECT demographics

Youth CONNECT recorded a small increase in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people referred to the Youth CONNECT program in Year 3 compared to Year 2. The overall percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the program remains relatively high (compared to population demographics) across all referral locations.


The trend has continued for more young women than young men to be referred to the program. We have also observed an increase in transgender service users entering in the program. Currently five service users identify as being transgender, and four of these young people joined the program during Year 3. Youth CONNECT is committed to providing the best possible service for clients who are part of the Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) community. The team have been proactive in attending training around working with this demographic, and share their learnings across teams. Future training for our Youth CONNECT team is planned for early 2021 in acknowledgement of the need to develop the skills of our work group to respond to the needs of LGBTQI+ young people.

There was a further increase in the number of young people with disabilities (intellectual and physical) referred to the

program. The number of young people living with a disability who have already been assessed and receive NDIS support has also increased from 6 to 17 in 2020. This assists in developing strong case plans and coordination to ensure that their needs are met while they are supported in Youth CONNECT. However, there are currently an additional 29 clients who have disabilities that significantly impact their day-to-day life who are without NDIS plans.

Youth CONNECT has worked intensively to advocate and support young people living with a disability to apply for access to NDIS. This has required strong advocacy and we will continue to work with our young people to obtain the assistance they need. We are aware that access to sustainable support is vitally important for young people living with a disability and that these disability needs are unlikely to be resolved while the young person is engaged in the Youth CONNECT program. For young people living with a disability the need for support will most likely be lifelong.

There were 34 (17%) of young people who are parents of infants and young children engaged in the Youth CONNECT program at the end of Year 3. An additional 10 young people or their partners are pregnant.



“Responding to the individual needs.”

Active Year 3 Clients – Demographics

Logan	Male	24	42%	ABTSI	20	36%
	Female	30	54%	Non-Indigenous	36	64%
	Non-Binary	2	4%			
Ipswich	Male	9	44%	ABTSI	10	40%
	Female	14		Non-Indigenous	15	60%
	Non-binary	2				
Townsville	Male	3	25%	ABTSI	6	50%
	Female	9	75%	Non-Indigenous	6	50%

All Active Clients – Demographics

Logan	Male	49	46%	ABTSI	36	34%
	Female	56	52%	Non-Indigenous	71	66%
	Non-Binary	2	2%			
Ipswich	Male	25	39%	ABTSI	28	45%
	Female	10	33%	Non-Indigenous	35	55%
	Non-binary	38	61%			
Townsville	Male	20	67%	ABTSI	17	57%
	Female	9	75%	Non-Indigenous	13	43%

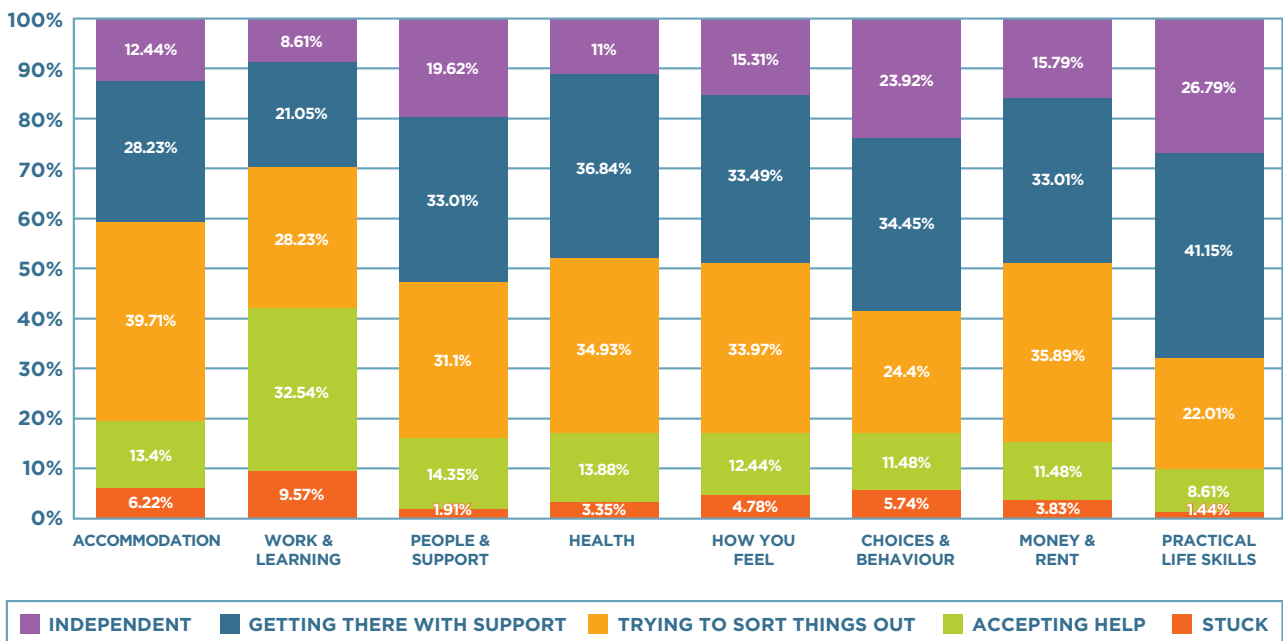
Outcomes Star

A key case management tool for young people is the Outcomes Star – Young Person Star. This collaborative tool includes the young person self-assessment and working collaboratively with their case worker to identify progress along key domains and to determine where they may need to consider additional support and motivation across the domains of: *accommodation, work and learning, people and support, health, how you feel, choices and behaviour, money and rent* and *practical life skills*. The resulting assessment provides a picture of how the young person and their safety and support network, assess achievement and progress throughout their journey of change.

The first Star for a client is conducted approximately three months into the program and is designed to establish the current state of need for the young person and inform the development of the initial goals. Subsequent Stars are completed at minimum every six months and provide a measure of progress through motivational interviewing techniques to support the individual's journey of change.

There are currently 517 Stars completed across the Youth CONNECT program, which means for young people who have completed two or more stars, we are able to compare their readings across their journey of change.

The below graph shows a snapshot of where young people are currently rating themselves across the eight domains:




Across the program young people are rating themselves highly in the *practical life skills, choices and behaviour*, and *people and support* domains. The *people and support* domain in particular demonstrated an increase in ratings when compared to the 2019 results. Anecdotally, clients have reported to team that experiencing the impact of COVID-19 has helped them connect with the people around them, family, friends, neighbours and other community members, which may help to explain this outcome.

Young people are rating themselves lower on the *work and learning* domain. This was expected as work and learning

have been heavily disrupted during the pandemic. *Accommodation* is also being consistently rated low across the program. This was surprising, as Youth CONNECT has experienced their lowest rates of homelessness since the program's inception. However, audits have shown that there are some practice issues with this domain. Young people are rating themselves lower on the journey of change, which is resulting in ratings that do not truly reflect the young person's situation.

Further development of team's understanding of the journey of change is currently underway to improve the robustness of the data.



*"Supporting
the individuals
journey of
change."*

Case study: Outcomes Star in practice

Dylan* entered the Youth CONNECT program in early 2020. Dylan's partner had recently been accepted into the program and during a visit Dylan asked if he may also be part of Youth CONNECT.

The couple were new parents to their infant daughter and wanted to get support for this next chapter in their lives. Dylan and his partner were particularly interested in support around accommodation, as their current lease was coming to an end.

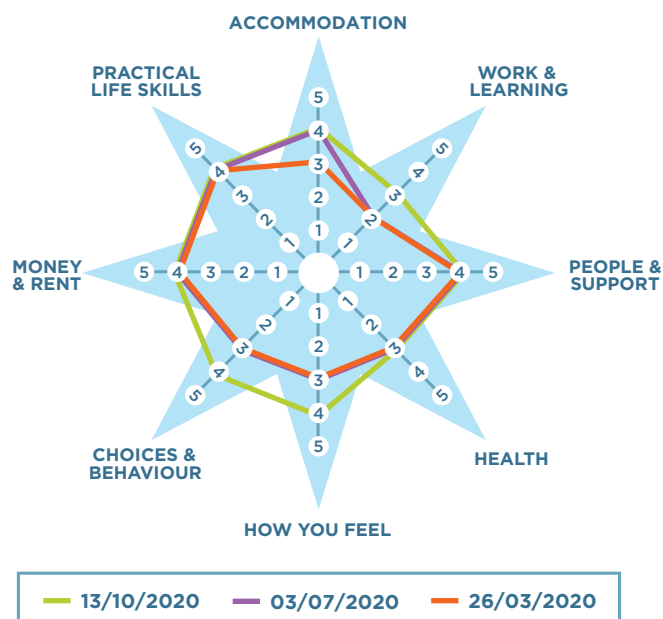
Upon entering into the program Dylan was enthusiastic about completing an Outcomes Star. He had been present when his partner had used the tool to set some goals and wanted to do the same.

During the first Outcomes Star assessment, Dylan set the goal of finding accommodation for himself and his family. Dylan was able to achieve this goal and he and his partner moved into a Churches of Christ in Queensland Head Lease with their daughter during April 2020. The couple report to love their home, and are continuing to maintain their tenancy while working on repaying some rental arrears. Dylan further reports he has made friends with his neighbours, and the couple spend leisure time with their new friends.

Throughout 2020, Dylan completed three separate Outcomes Star assessments with his Case Manager. In only 12 months we have seen Dylan grow and flourish. His Star shows he has seen improvements in his *accommodation, work and learning, how you feel and choices and behaviour domains*. Dylan attributes his housing stability and increased support as major foundations for himself and his family.

Dylan is now linked in with his local job provider and is looking into Youth Work courses – something he is truly passionate about. Dylan also was experiencing anxiety and stress when first entering into the program. However, Dylan engaged in making a Safety Plan and Self-Care Plan with his Youth CONNECT team, as well as learning new communication strategies alongside his partner to ensure they were taking care of their relationship as well as their little one. Dylan also completed a parenting course and reflected that becoming a father has been a huge motivator to make good choices and be a positive role model for his daughter.

Youth CONNECT is extremely proud of everything Dylan has accomplished within his first year with Youth CONNECT and we look forward to seeing what is next for Dylan and his young family. Dylan has shown a tremendous amount of motivation and resilience during 2020 and we are grateful to walk alongside this couple as they enter 2021.







Education, employment and personal development

During the COVID-19 pandemic many young people experienced reduced involvement in the labour market. They also experienced increased difficulty finding employment. Those who were employed prior to the pandemic were predominantly in the hospitality and retail sectors, which were significantly affected during 2020. These employment difficulties are reflected in the data and there was a small decrease in employment across the cohort in Year 3 when compared to Year 2.

However, during this year Youth CONNECT saw increased numbers of young people enrolling in education and training courses.

Our Youth CONNECT employees also focused on linking young people in with appropriate learning opportunities and we saw a small increase from Year 2 to Year 3 in the amount of young people engaged in education.

The majority of clients are currently seeking employment. Youth CONNECT assists these clients by linking them into relevant employment and or education opportunities, as well as coordinating with job network agencies. Youth CONNECT currently has confirmation that 28 of these clients are registered with Job Active – this is a successful outcome as defined by the Operations Manual.

	Education	No Activity	Employment	Job-seeking	Personal Development
Cohort 1	5	0	5	14	11
Cohort 2	17	0	15	25	15
Cohort 3	25	2	10	37	19
TOTAL	47	2	30	76	45
	13 in High School 10 in Flexi-school 1 in Certificate II 17 in Certificate III 6 in University	One Service User is currently incarcerated and is not involved in any activities. Another Service User who was referred during Year 3, Quarter 4 is in the process of applying for Centrelink benefits.	5 Full-time 7 Part-time 18 Casual	28 of these clients are registered with Job Active. Goals of attaining employment in: • Apprenticeship • Carpentry • Retail • Hospitality	9 Parenting 10 Disability 9 Mental Health 17 Cultural Connection





“Supporting young people to find accommodation that works for them.”

Financial update

Youth CONNECT year from 1 December 2019 – 30 November 2020

The balance in the Trust Account is \$1,894,002. This remains in line with the original cash flows forecast.

Operating Expenses	This Quarter actual	Budget/plan this Quarter	Last Quarter actual	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	Cash in Reserve for program needs
Quarter 1	\$472,000	\$507,099	\$504,635	\$2,612,818	\$2,778,637	\$165,819
Quarter 2	\$571,108	\$507,102	\$472,000	\$3,183,926	\$3,285,739	\$101,813
Quarter 3	\$492,782	\$507,100	\$571,108	\$3,676,708	\$3,792,839	\$116,131
Quarter 4	\$498,641	\$513,159	\$492,782	\$4,175,349	\$4,305,998	\$130,649

Housing strategy

The initial Youth CONNECT Housing Strategy indicated an expected use of Churches of Christ in Queensland sourced properties at 50% in Year 1. It was clear that over the first year of the program though further data would be required to determine the ongoing housing requirement for young people in the Youth CONNECT program.

The Housing Strategy has remained reliant on head leasing properties in the private rental market.

At the conclusion of Year 3, the use of Churches of Christ in Queensland properties is 9%. Year 3 saw a distribution of service funds

to support increased teaming as a planned approach to lower the use of Churches of Christ in Queensland housing.

This year saw the lowest rate of homelessness across service users over the lifespan of the Youth CONNECT program. Increased teaming has seen more resources allocated to supporting young people find accommodation options that work for them, and the increased Centrelink benefits during COVID-19 were helpful for increased financial protection within the rental market.

Current active clients

Housing Type	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Total
Churches of Christ in Queensland sourced (Head Lease, sole/dual tenancies)	6	7	6	19
Self-identified (private tenancy, living with family etc.)	22	52	52	126
Public Housing	3	10	5	18
Transitional Accommodation	2	3	4	9
Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs Funded placement	0	0	19	19
Homeless (currently sourcing appropriate accommodation)	2	0	4	6
Youth Detention	0	0	1	1
Domestic and Family Violence Shelter or accommodation	0	0	2	2
Total	35	72	93	200

The COVID-19 experience within youth CONNECT

This year we have witnessed unprecedented times across the world, resulting in health, economic, social, and cultural consequences in our communities. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted widespread changes and Youth CONNECT clients were also impacted. To learn more about the pandemic impacts our clients experienced, we designed and implemented an online survey. We collected data from 62 young people over a two-week period in July, giving us a 34.2% response rate across the program.

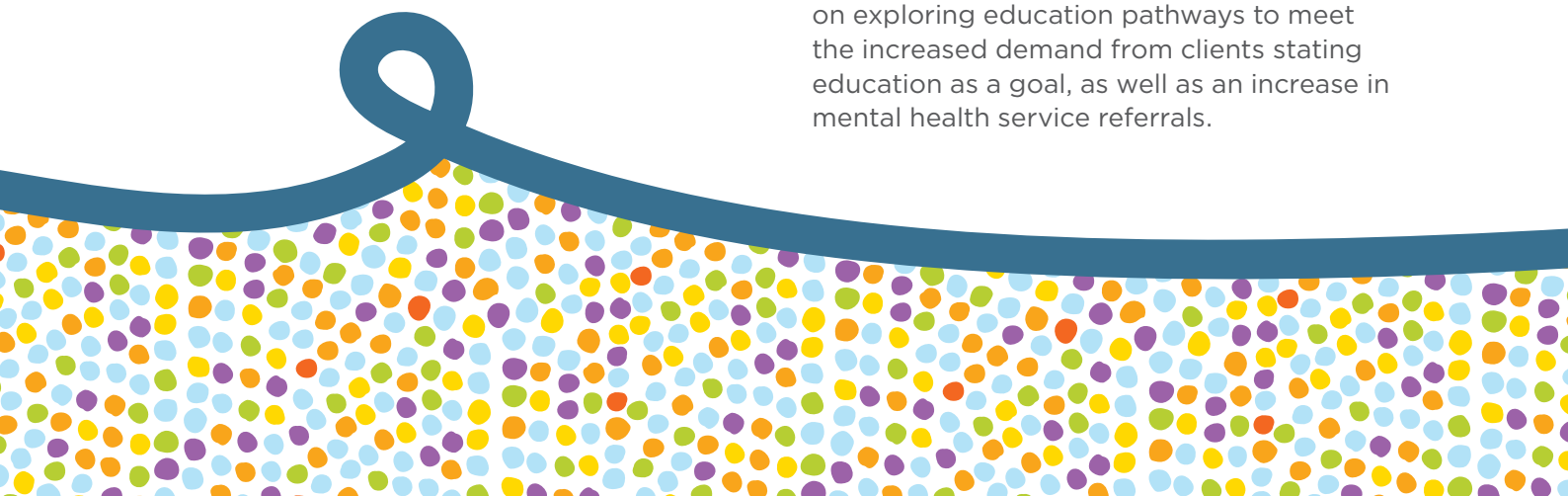
There were several encouraging results from this survey. The first was that the majority of participants (60%, N = 37) reported having positive experiences with Youth CONNECT during the pandemic and feeling well supported and connected. Another positive result was the majority of participants (76%, N = 46) has seen little to no impact in terms of their access to safe and stable housing during this time.

What was apparent in the feedback responses was the impacts of COVID-19 on our young people within the employment section, with 80% (N = 50) of participants reporting they were not currently employed. This figure is generally representative of the current cohort, with approximately 19% of clients involved in some type of employment. This is not unsurprising given the number of young people in Youth CONNECT who were employed or seeking employment in the hospitality, retail or construction trades. These employment sectors have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions and social distancing.

Since April 2020, we have observed an increase in the number of young people currently engaging in study, with 35% (N = 22) reporting they were participating in an education course. The survey further highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of young people within Youth CONNECT with approximately 47% (N = 30) of participants stating they had experienced an increase in anxiety and depression during this time.

However, a number of Youth CONNECT young people stated they had positive experiences during this time as well. Several stated they had enjoyed feeling more connected to their friends and family, with the requirements of social distancing resulting in young people having more time to maintain social connections. These young people have demonstrated their increasing resilience by identifying the risk to sustainable income and employment and addressing this by engaging in opportunities to increase their training and educational skills. Youth CONNECT additionally works with some very self-driven young people who have found alternative ways to financially support themselves, including running online businesses and collecting ad revenue through platforms such as YouTube.

The feedback from our young people and our own observations, indicate that for many Youth CONNECT clients, their engagement in the Youth CONNECT program has meant they have the emotional and practical support to help guide them through this difficult time. Our Youth CONNECT care teams have also increased visits and communication where we have identified that this would benefit young people. Youth CONNECT has further focused on exploring education pathways to meet the increased demand from clients stating education as a goal, as well as an increase in mental health service referrals.





Staffing

To support the growing number of young people in the Youth CONNECT program we have continued to recruit qualified and experienced staff. We currently employ:

Service Manager	1
Team Leaders	2 based in Logan and Brisbane
Case Managers	10 across all service locations
Support Workers	4* across all service locations
Senior Administration Officer	1
Housing Officer	1

* 1 Support Worker identifies as being Aboriginal.





Professional development and training

Churches of Christ in Queensland has an extensive curriculum of training and professional development available to employees. This includes Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Sanctuary training, Domestic and Family Violence training, Outcomes Star training, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness, as well as organisational orientation.

We attempt to address areas of learning and knowledge development through practice experience. An example has been our increasing awareness of the need to support young people who identify as gender diverse and young people who are experiencing intimate partner violence.

February 2020 we conducted a workshop on working with young people diagnosed with Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder delivered by Dr Howard Bath.

Our team participated in a number of professional development opportunities throughout 2020, including:

- Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness workshop
- Preparing young people to leave care during a pandemic workshop
- Understanding and responding to domestic violence during COVID-19 training
- Intergenerational trauma training.

Good practice

The implementation of the Children, Youth and Families Cultural Practice Framework in Youth CONNECT

Youth CONNECT delivers services to young people Townsville, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Brisbane and Gold Coast.

- **Townsville:** The Bindal and Wulgurukaba People are the Traditional Owners.
- **Ipswich and Toowoomba:** The Yuggera and Ugarapul peoples of Ipswich. Giabal and Jarowair people of the Toowoomba area.
- **Brisbane and Gold Coast:** The Logan and Gold Coast traditional owners are Yugarabul, Yuggera, Jagera and Turrbal people and Yugambeh, Kombumerri peoples of the Gold Coast.

Cultural connection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is the most significant factor that supports cultural attachment, cultural identity, cultural safety and cultural resilience. All of these areas of childhood development are critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow up safe, proud, affirmed and connected. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disconnected from culture and community their cultural development and attachment is interrupted.

Having a positive and continuous connection to culture and a strong cultural identity provides an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person with a sense of belonging, purpose, social support and self-worth. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people this process may occur very early in their development through an attachment to a traditional cultural group whereby belief systems, values, obligations and practices are shared and reinforced by the culture and connection to family, community and country. The benefits of sustaining a strong

cultural identity and or participating in cultural activities is well documented and includes:

- promotes resilience
- enhances self-esteem
- improves coping skills
- is a protective factor for forming positive relationships and social networks and against mental health symptoms.

Currently in the Youth CONNECT Program the rate of the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who are exiting care and or experiencing or at risk of homelessness is upward of 41.5%. Additionally, within the program many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have limited cultural attachment and connection to family, culture and community. Hence the significant and pressing need to re-connect young people with their culture, family, community and country. The Cultural Practice Framework has been developed and implemented across Youth CONNECT from the start of the program. To date, almost 70% of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people have participated and been involved in developing their cultural strengths plan within Youth CONNECT.

Youth CONNECT Case Manager Taylor Alapaki embodies this commitment to cultural affirmation and celebration. After a client of Taylor's expressed a desire to learn more about their Aboriginal culture, Taylor researched and sourced a Cultural Guided Tour through the Kalwun Development Corporation, a program established and authorised by the traditional descendants of the Yugambeh language speaking people of the Gold Coast and surrounds. After completing this tour, Taylor's client reported to feel more empowered and strengthened in their cultural identity. Taylor was determined to make this experience available for all Youth CONNECT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Taylor spent considerable time in organising a day where





clients could attend a guided cultural tour at Jellurgal Aboriginal Cultural Centre, followed by a shared lunch and a Yarning Circle. The team loved this idea and we saw commitment to bring this event together from all levels of team. There were a lot of things to consider when planning an event like this and team rallied to make it happen.

On 3 November 2020, 10 clients attended this event with seven team members, a client's partner and another client's infant son. It was a large group and the team pitched in to transport everyone and get them ready for the walk.

The group went on a guided tour facilitated by a local Cultural Advisor and before returning for lunch. Afterwards, the Yarning Circle was held in the Jellurgal Cultural Centre and facilitated by Tammy Wallace. The team reported how rewarding it was to see the young people engage in discussions around their culture. The Yarning Circle focused around the question, 'what does culture mean to you'. We saw the young people really open up and talk about their culture, their pride in their culture, as well as experiences of shame they have felt when being culturally disconnected.



Many young people talked of their families and communities and the support they get from this. One particularly significant moment was when one client talked of how she feels lucky to have the opportunity to pass her cultural knowledge down to her infant son.

Churches of Christ Queensland also recognised how valuable Taylor's contributions are to our organisation. In December 2020 Taylor was awarded a Shining Star award from CEO Gary Edwards to recognise his incredible work.

Youth CONNECT is very proud to have a team who are as self-driven and committed to cultural learning as displayed by Taylor through this event. The team is further appreciative that we have the expertise of team members such as Tammy Wallace, Kylie Barnardh and Joshua Maher who were instrumental during this day and took time away from their roles to be part of this important event.

We are grateful that we are able to provide opportunities for our clients to celebrate their cultural history and who they are, as well as being able to learn from our clients' experiences. Youth CONNECT is committed to continuing these opportunities for further celebrations of cultural strength.



What 'meaningful engagement' looks like

Client Noah* was accepted into the Youth CONNECT program in December 2019. Noah was close to exiting out-of-home care and was living with his foster carer at the time of referral. Youth CONNECT knew we would need to work hard to gain Noah's trust when he was first referred. His foster carer reported Noah was anxious around new people and was dreading moving out of home.

For the first quarter of 2020, Youth CONNECT were worried we would lose contact with Noah and he would become disengaged from the program. The team texted and called but were rarely able to get a hold of Noah. However, Noah's Youth CONNECT team were determined. The team linked in with Noah's support networks to find opportunities to offer Noah assistance. Noah's foster carer, his Child Safety Officer and his partner were instrumental in helping Youth CONNECT to find ways to support Noah.

Youth CONNECT were able to connect with Noah after a few failed attempts at meeting up. Noah let us know he was looking into some share house options and asked if his Case Manager might be able to come along to a property viewing for support. Not only did Noah's Case Manager attend the viewing, but also assisted Noah in his application. Noah was successful in this and moved into his very first private rental.

During this time Noah's relationship with his Case Manager strengthened. He reached out more often and was proactive in setting goals around what he wanted his life to look like. The next step was getting a job. Youth CONNECT were able to support Noah to

enrol in his local TAFE to an automotive vocational program, and we're thrilled to see Noah thrive in this course. Noah has successfully been able to complete his student placement and has since graduated.

Noah felt frustrated about having his new qualifications, but not being able to transport himself to work. Youth CONNECT worked extensively with Noah to prepare him to sit for his provisional licence through providing driving lessons, as well as sourcing additional lessons from a professional driving school. After these lessons Noah felt confident enough to sit for his test, which he passed.

Youth CONNECT then supported Noah to apply for Youth Housing and Reintegration Services (YHARS) funding to help pay for a car. Our Administration Officer spent significant time liaising with both the YHARS program as well as car dealerships. In November 2020, Noah successfully purchased his very first vehicle. We were ecstatic for Noah, as this new purchase means he will be able to start his new job.

Noah reported that the process of buying a car was made much simpler with the help of Youth CONNECT. It is admirable just how much Noah has achieved in such a short time. When Noah first came into the Youth CONNECT program he did not have any source of income and had not had Centrelink set up. To see how much he has achieved over 12 months is truly inspiring.

Youth CONNECT are very proud of the collaborative work that it took to keep this young person engaged in the program. Persistence, team work and great case management led to Youth CONNECT having the opportunity to support an incredible person in a highly formative time of his life.



*“Linking
with support
networks to find
opportunities.”*







Good news stories

Taking over a head lease

Billie* was the very first young person to be referred and accepted to the Youth CONNECT program, starting her time with us on 9 January 2018. Billie put in an application for a Public Housing property, and this was granted shortly after she entered into Youth CONNECT.

Billie moved into this property and stayed there for over a year, before moving into a sharehouse with friends. However, this relationship broke down and Billie found herself couch surfing without a stable place of residence. This can often happen for the young people we work with and can be a time filled with stress and crises. The Youth CONNECT team were astoundingly impressed with how Billie handled her situation at this time. Billie reached out for help while still being self-driven and motivated.

Billie and two friends had been applying for private rentals, but were continually knocked back from real estate agencies due to their age and limited incomes. Youth CONNECT began looking for potential properties for these three young people for a Head Lease arrangement, with the hopes the three could take this lease over once already establishing a relationship with the real estate.

Churches of Christ in Queensland Housing Services worked extensively with Billie and her friends to find the best possible place for them. Our Housing Officer remarked that this process was relatively simple, due in large part with how flexible the group were with the suburb they lived in. When they first began planning with Housing Services, the group had said they were happy with any location. However, further conversation revealed that Billie and her friend were both enrolled in

higher education courses in campuses some 100 kilometres away. The Housing Officer then narrowed their search to a home that would be in the middle of these two campuses.

Youth CONNECT found a suitable property for the three friends, who moved into a townhouse close to public transport, and which also allowed Billie to have her very beloved cat at the home as well. The group were very excited about their new place and moved in during April 2020.

Billie and her two housemates managed their tenancy extremely well. During their latest housing inspection, the group of housemates had the opportunity to meet the property owner, where they all expressed how much they adored the property. The real estate had further provided feedback on how well-spoken and polite Billie was in their interactions with her.

As Billie and her friends were going so well in this home, Youth CONNECT encouraged the three to make an application to take over the head lease. They were successful in this application and in October 2020 took over the lease in their own names. This is a huge achievement as Billie was not only the first client who entered into the Youth CONNECT program, but is also the first client to successfully take over a head lease property.

We are very proud of all the work Billie has done to get to this point. Team describe Billie as someone who is highly organised, independent and capable. At Youth CONNECT we are incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to lend a hand to people like Billie.

Billie had all the skills she needs to successfully maintain her own tenancy, but just needed that extra help in the form of a head lease to get her foot in the door of the private rental world.

Youth CONNECT cooking classes

It is not unusual for many of our young people to experience periods of food insecurity. Access to affordable, healthy food and the knowledge of how to plan, prepare, store and cook meals is often a skill they have not had the opportunity to develop. We found that many of our Youth CONNECT clients are aware of this skill gap and have identified goals of developing their skills and knowledge through their Outcomes Star assessment process.

The Youth CONNECT team proactively and creatively planned how this need could be addressed. Staff encountered several barriers in teaching cooking skills within the young people's own homes – including affordability of ingredients, motivation, access to an appropriate cooking space, as well as a lack of confidence in the kitchen.

The Youth CONNECT team wanted to create a space that allowed young people to continue their already established cooking skills as well as learning new skills to cook quick, healthy and affordable meals within their own homes. To achieve this, Youth CONNECT staff linked with CYCLE, our alternative education program. While CYCLE has an office, they do not operate on Fridays and generously offered Youth CONNECT access to their space, which includes a large kitchen staff felt was perfect to host cooking classes with our clients.

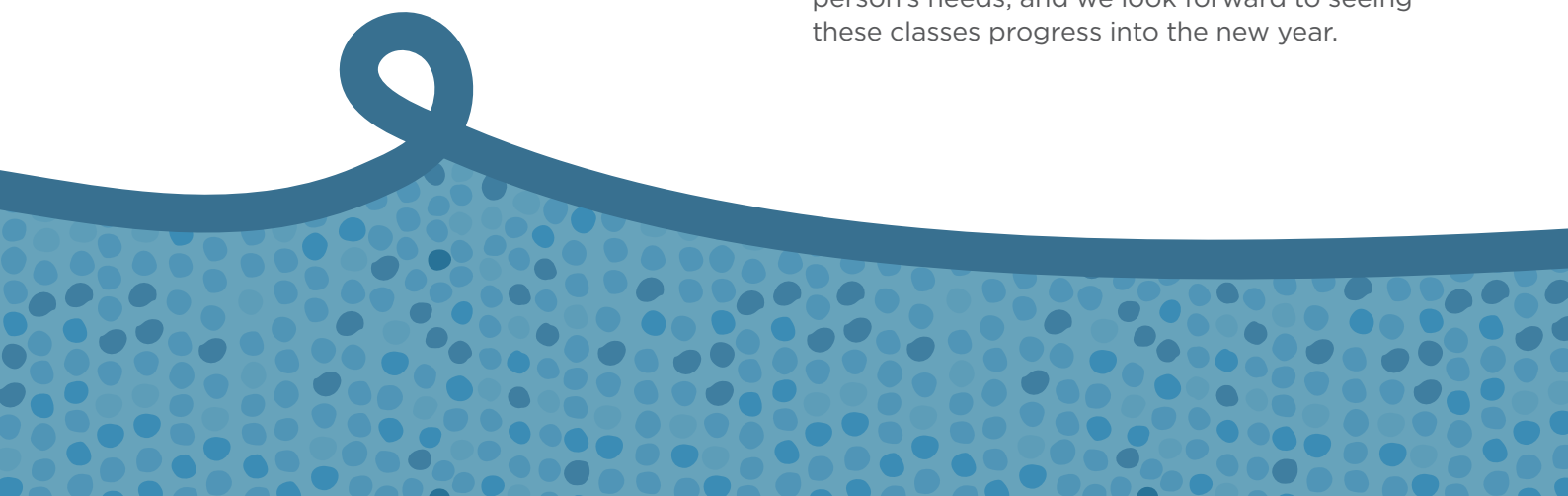
Staff completed a cooking class with client Max*. Max had identified that he likes cooking, but felt it was difficult to find the money and motivation to make enough food in the week.

Prior to coming to CYCLE, Max worked with his support staff to find a recipe for lasagne he wanted to try and went shopping for

ingredients to get an idea of how much this would cost. After the activity Max wrote out a 'review' of this activity and sent it to his Team Leader. Max stated, "honestly, I wasn't really convinced at the start that it would be any fun or of use, but as it went on I realised it was truly that easy to make lasagne. Also how you did the first layer, then got me to help with the second layer, then got me to do the entire third layer was a good idea to ease people into the cooking process. This was a good idea and I'm glad you somehow got me to do it as I am now looking forward to making stir fry."

Staff felt this experience had been a great success, and have since repeated this activity on three separate occasions – once with two clients together, and the other two sessions with individual young people. The feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive, with young people saying how much they enjoyed this activity. Staff have been creative with how they use the time during these sessions, and have included the clients in action research strategies while waiting for their meal to cook. These include learning about what home means to these young people, as well as discussing what healthy relationships look like. After the activity is finished, the team creates personalised recipe books for the clients to refer back to when making these meals in their own homes.

We are proud to have such a creative team who look for unique ways to help the young people we work with achieve their goals. We see Youth CONNECT staff members continue to seek out opportunities to both help clients grow, and to feel valued by the people around them. Youth CONNECT is fortunate enough to have a flexible case management model that can be individually tailored to each young person's needs, and we look forward to seeing these classes progress into the new year.









Communication and marketing strategy

Throughout 2020 the focus for the Youth CONNECT Communication and Marketing Strategy was to increase the knowledge of young people and referring partners. Our website and related marketing collateral were developed to inform and educate referrers and their clients to improve the eligibility and suitability of referrals. An updated Youth CONNECT Communication Plan was developed in 2020. The strategy developed was focused on the following areas;

- Developing the Youth CONNECT website
- Youth CONNECT Participant Handbook
- Youth CONNECT Participant Information Book
- Youth CONNECT Referral Agency Information
- Youth CONNECT Information Sheet

A central concern had been to ensure the cultural appropriateness of the Youth CONNECT marketing collateral and to ensure that they were young person friendly. We aimed to provide information for young

people and their referring agencies that encouraged them to engage with our service but also reflected the capacity and ability of Youth CONNECT to respond to the individual needs of each young person. In the initial referral periods we had already identified that there was some confusion regarding the purpose of the Youth CONNECT program. Over the past 12 months our marketing collateral has also been revised to better reflect to diversity of our service users. Youth CONNECT commissioned digital imagery that mirrored the Queensland environment as well as including representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

In 2021, as we move into Year 4 of the Youth CONNECT program and as we receive the final referral allocation our communication and marketing strategy becomes less about information and more about reporting. It is our intent to use our existing communication pathways to disseminate outcomes and to continue to raise the successes of the Youth CONNECT program and our young people.

Contract risk management

The Youth CONNECT program has continued to employ a robust governance framework to ensure the sound and effective management of the program throughout Year 3. Risk management is a shared responsibility of the following governance bodies:

- Youth CONNECT Internal Reference Group (CofCQ)
- Youth CONNECT Joint Working Group (CofCQ and State Queensland/Queensland Treasury)

- Youth CONNECT Research and Evaluation Reference Group (CofCQ and University of Sunshine Coast)
- In 2020 an additional meeting of JWG members was held to ensure any impacts from COVID-19 were discussed regularly.

The Joint Working Group meeting is now scheduled quarterly to align with reporting. Any areas of risk are raised and discussed at these meetings as a standard agenda item along with the program performance measures as agreed in the Youth CONNECT Operations Manual.

Program risk management

In Year 3 of the Youth CONNECT program a number of risks and issues were identified and strategies developed to respond appropriately.

Issue: The impact of COVID-19 on the Youth CONNECT program

One of the issues that had the potential to affect outcomes for the Youth CONNECT program was the impact of COVID-19. Over the period of lockdown and beyond we have seen the contraction of employment opportunities as well as access to accommodation.

Action: Business Continuity Plan; Youth CONNECT Young Person survey; Joint working group meeting (COVID-19 group).

Our young people were able to report – in the survey we completed with them – that they had found an increased interest in education and training, and many young people reported feeling more connected to family, friends and their community. The survey results are discussed in more detail within this report.

Our Youth CONNECT team also developed strategies to increase our ability to continue to engage and support our clients during this time. This included using Skype, FaceTime, contactless drop offs of food and other staples to their homes and assisting to set up Telehealth appointments for medical and mental health support. Our young people identified a number of concerns regarding mental health during lock down and we continue to see some of the impacts as we enter 2021. Youth CONNECT also developed a documented Business Continuity Plan that was shared with our referring partners and the State. The Youth CONNECT Joint Working Group also established a separate COVID-19 working group with representatives from the State and Churches of Christ in Queensland. This group met regularly to review and problem solve impacts of COVID-19 and our ability to deliver services to young people during this time.



Issue: Access to safe and stable accommodation

There is increasing rental stress, particularly for lower cost, private rental accommodation, with an increase in the cost and a decrease in the availability of this accommodation.

Various lessons learned and challenges impacting the viability of a housing supply strategy are:

- The transient nature and rapidly changing needs of the cohort
- The variance in expected numbers, and suitability of referrals
- The geographical spread and varied locational needs of referred applicants hindering planning or investment in fixed location assets
- Rental market conditions – supply and demand, public perceptions, COVID19 impacts, etc.
- Sourcing of housing and accommodation has had to revert to a reactive nature, rather than planned strategy, to meet the diverse, complex and unique needs of each individual participant.

The impacts from the COVID19 pandemic has further exacerbated the supply of housing, which has reduced dramatically in Queensland during the latter months of 2020. The more affordable end of the rental market, which we target for young people on low income, is now more than ever the most competitive with properties being re-let within hours of listing.

Action

However, coincidental timing and the fact that we are now at the midway milestone of the program, has lessened the severity of the housing supply shortage on the pilot project to some degree. Due to a number of the participants now exiting, or in the final demonstration phase of the project, we have been able to re-use some properties as they become vacant to the newest referred participants. This has gone some way to counteract the issue of being unable to source any new properties from the rental market from July to December 2020. As outlined already in this report we have observed the lowest rate of homelessness across Youth CONNECT in the past 12 months. We have also supported a number of young people to successfully take over their head lease and our Youth CONNECT team have been able to build collaborative and purposeful relationships with community housing services and real estates.

As state borders re-open and normal migration between states begins to recover, we hope to see the Queensland rental market slowly return to normality in 2021. We will also need to explore other possibilities such as rental guarantor options, focussed marketing drives, and looking for opportunities to leverage from other new initiatives that may arise out of the state and economic recovery strategy.





Youth CONNECT participatory action research and evaluation

In keeping with the Churches of Christ in Queensland value of continual innovation, Youth CONNECT incorporated a research component within practice from the very inception of the program.

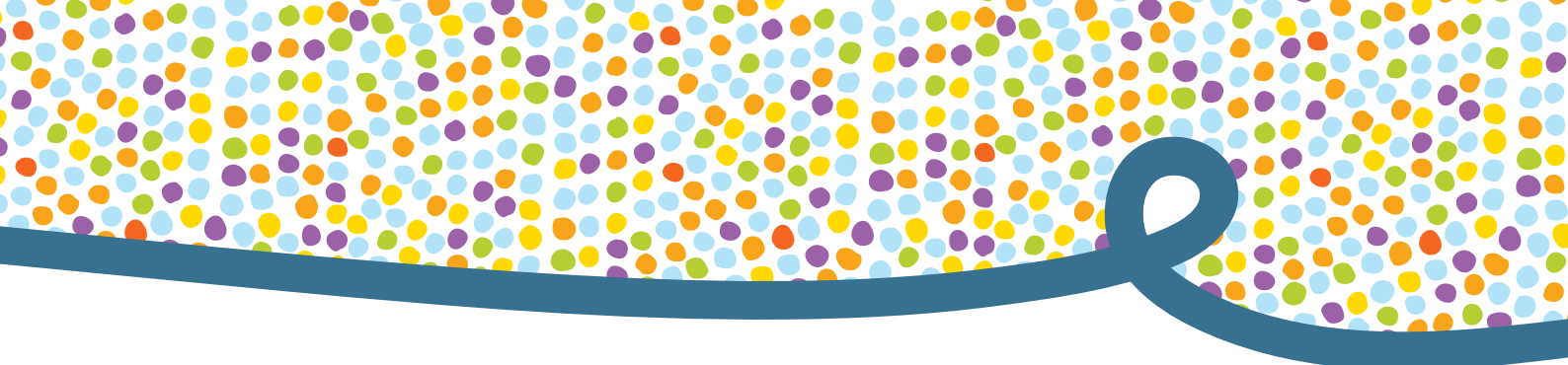
This research includes Participatory Action Research (PAR) as well as Developmental Evaluation. PAR is an approach to the program's continual development and learning and gives voice to all participants involved in Youth CONNECT, from managers to young people. Youth CONNECT has partnered with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) and are grateful for the expertise of Chief Investigator Dr. Phil Crane, Chief Evaluator Marion Norton, and Research Assistant Rachael Stubbs, all of whom have been paramount to this process.

We have seen a greater focus on the Developmental Evaluation component of our research throughout 2020. In June we successfully submitted the Youth CONNECT Ethics Application that outlined the research planned. This application relates to the collection of primary and secondary data that can be used for publications and reports co-authored by the USC Chief Investigators. On 9 September 2020 the ethics approval was provided for the research project '*Youth CONNECT Participatory Action Research and Evaluation*'.

Since this time, Youth CONNECT and the USC have been dedicated to processing this evaluation. Our team, referrers and stakeholders and young people and their support networks have all been invited to take part in this evaluation through interviews and focus groups. Throughout November 2020 the USC interviewed a number of participants with full anonymity. The learnings from these interviews will be shared with Churches of Christ in Queensland in early 2021 and will be used to improve and develop practice. The USC team have also dedicated time to reviewing and evaluating Youth CONNECT's documentation.

The Youth CONNECT team have also been dedicated to progressing the different PAR work through the current active working groups. These four groups focus on the notion of '*homefulness*', cultural practice, healthy relationships, and the systemic embedding of PAR in Youth CONNECT. Each team member is a part of at least one of these groups.

The **Homefulness** group continues to examine practice around the notion of homefulness, or what makes a place a home for the clients we work with. The team have continued to engage in activities with clients around their view of home. Team have shown great creativity in this area, with some creating collages or drawings with clients. This activity has evolved over time



and provides an opportunity for engagement as well as better success when matching young people with accommodation types.

The **Cultural Practice** group has successfully hosted a number of Yarning Circles over 2020. Most have been facilitated virtually, however Youth CONNECT were able to host a Yarning Circle in person during November. These Yarning Circles have been attended by clients who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and focus around discussions regarding cultural connection, strength and loss. We have had very meaningful engagement with our clients through this process, and team have found new opportunities to connect clients with their culture. This group has also overseen the implementation of Cultural Strength Plans throughout Youth CONNECT. As of November 2020, over 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients have begun the Cultural Strengths Plan process. We have seen an increase of clients identifying cultural goals they wish to work on.

The **Healthy Relationships** group was established in 2020 in response to the increase in domestic violence rates we were seeing within Youth CONNECT. The group is currently trialling asking clients about their views and opinions on healthy relationships, and hope to develop activities that will provide opportunities for psycho-education around interpersonal relationships.

The **Systemic PAR** group has focused on embedding PAR within the Youth CONNECT practice model throughout 2020. This group successfully hosted a two-day training for all levels of team with the aim of better equipping team to practice research in daily practice. This was a shared project between CofC and USC and included a mix of contextual information around the framework of action research, as well as group discussions around practical considerations. Feedback was collected after the training was completed and showed participants overall found the training useful and increased their knowledge of participatory action research. Team requested on-going refresher training to provide opportunities for team to continually reflect on practice and growth.

We have witnessed an increased dedication from all levels of team to the PAR and Evaluation process and are incredibly proud with everything the team has achieved during 2020. There has been truly meaningful work done across the program that has resulted in both increased understandings of our clients' lived experiences as well as improvements to practice. An ongoing challenge is providing new team with relevant and appropriate induction training around our research, and this will be further developed throughout 2021. We look forward to another year of research and evaluation learnings.



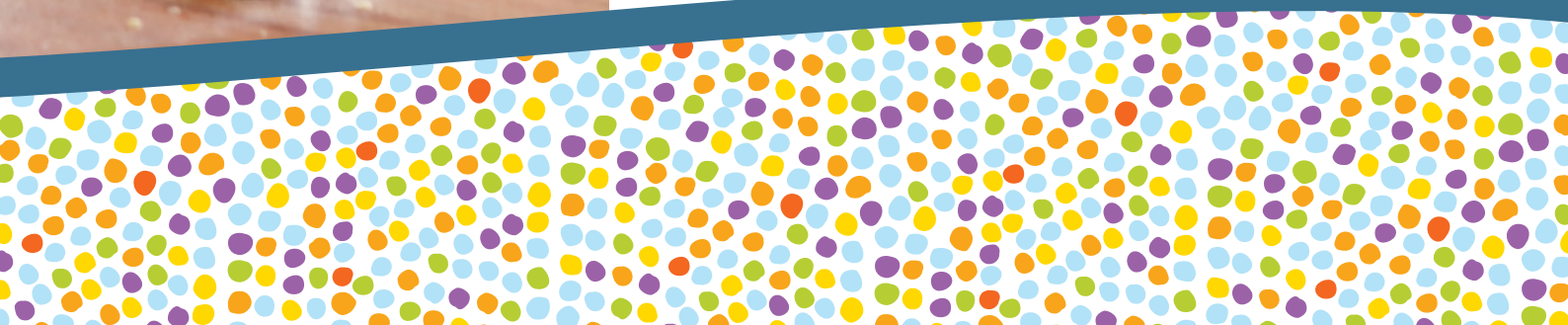
Testimonials

Youth CONNECT client Jenny

“Hello! My name is Jenny*, I’m 17 years old and I really enjoy art and doing some baking. I like doing baking because it’s something I am good at and I can eat it after I bake it. At the moment I am studying my Certificate 3 in Early Childhood Education and I’m enjoying being able to learn new skills. I’m proud that I’ve started the TAFE course because it helped me get new skills. I got my First Aid Certificate and I’ll have something really good to put on my resume.

In five years, I’ll be 22, which is still young, so I want to be working in a childcare centre as a full-time worker and want to be all of the children’s favourite worker. I’ll have lots of experience by then and want to look into more courses that will help me get a job working with children living with a disability. I also want to be living by myself and have my own reliable car. In five years, I want to start saving to purchase my own house.

I’ve been in the Youth CONNECT program since 2018 and have enjoyed the support I get because it’s nice knowing that I have people in my life helping me get on track. The main thing I like about Youth CONNECT is that the workers actually care for me and they help me remember what I need to be doing to help myself. I think that I have improved with Youth CONNECT and also actually want to make better decisions. I have realised that I have hung out with better people in the last few years. My Case Manager Adelisa is one person that helped me realise the way I deserved to be treated which is that I deserve to be treated nicely, spoken to nicely and feel comfortable around people and not scared.”



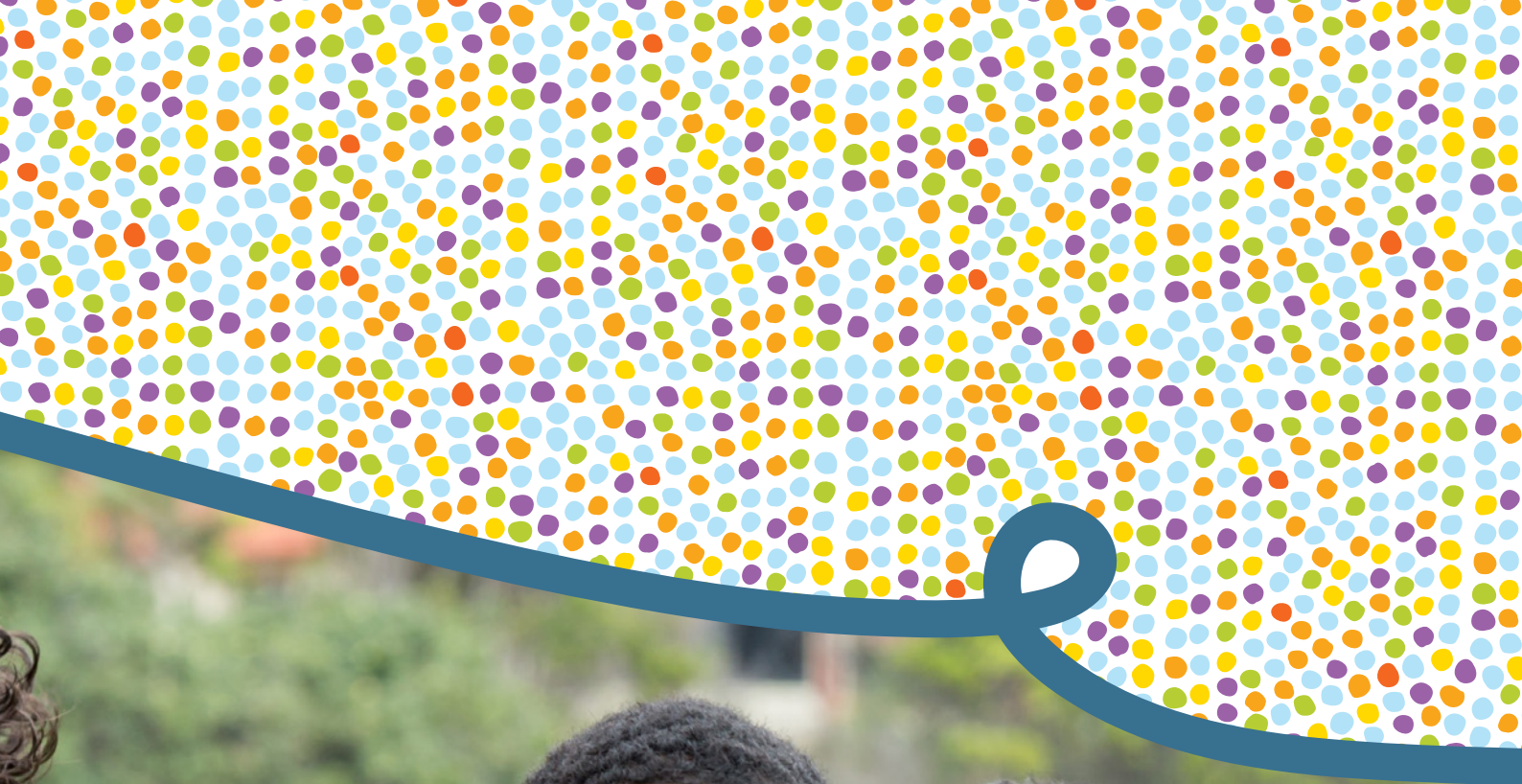
Outcome assessment

The first Performance Assessment Date for the Youth CONNECT program will be held on 1 March 2021. On this date, the Independent Certifier will assess the first cohort of Assessable Users according to the success outcomes of the program. These success outcomes are Sustained Housing Conditions (safe and stable accommodation for six months) and the Continuous Participation Conditions (employment, education and/or personal formation for twelve months).

We have been actively prepared for this important milestone, ensuring that all documentary evidence is collected, securely stored and easily accessible for the Independent Certifier. The process and schedule for this review is detailed within the Implementation Agreement and Operations Manual.

We look forward to communicating with you further in Quarter 2 of 2021 and keeping you up to date with the performance review process.





About us

Churches of Christ in Queensland has been an active part of the community since 1883. We have a significant presence across Queensland, as well as Victoria and Vanuatu, with over 300 services in more than 100 communities. Thanks to the support of almost 3700 team and 1000 volunteers, we impact the lives of tens of thousands of lives through our services to assist families, the elderly and people in need.

Since 1970, we have responded to community needs and grown into a leading service provider of early childhood education, family-based care, transition to adulthood and family support services. Through each of these services, our dedicated team strive to give voices to the children, young people and families who are experiencing vulnerabilities and calling on us in their time of need. Through listening to their experiences and understanding their journey, we support them to belong, grow, connect and thrive.

We are currently one of the largest providers of alternative care in Queensland, supporting over 20 per cent of children and young people in state care.

We are also a leading provider of housing solutions for those facing housing stress and homelessness. As a registered housing provider, we have been delivering responsive housing outcomes for people and communities for over 35 years. We currently

manage a portfolio of over 1300 properties in Queensland, accommodating over 3000 people.

Youth CONNECT supports young people who have exited or are exiting statutory care and are homeless or at risk of homelessness to build their resilience to homelessness. The program has a housing-first approach and emphasises education, employment and connection to community, which can influence their individual future trajectory towards achieving sustainable 'homefulness'. Through our teams dedicated to providing holistic case management, housing, education and workplace support, we support this cohort of vulnerable young people as they transition to adulthood and independence.

Social Outcomes have acted as the intermediary for the design and development of the Social Benefit Bond. Social Outcomes are managing the registry and are the point of contact for investors.

Churches of Christ in Queensland ARBN 147 481 436 (incorporated in Queensland) is a legal body incorporated under the Letters Patent issued pursuant to the Religious Educational and Charitable Institutions Acts 1861-1959. Churches of Christ Housing Services Limited ABN 25 604 517 026 and is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Churches of Christ in Queensland.

**Case studies and testimonials have been de-identified. Images are not of the individual.*

*"Helping
young adults
grow."*



Every child, young person and family deserves to grow,
belong, connect and thrive in their community.

Connect with us at cofc.com.au/youthconnect or call 1800 314 417

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