Introduction

There has been a longstanding debate in the Youth Work sector across Australia about the role of values and ethics in the Youth Work relationship with young people.¹ AYAC believes this is an important discussion to be had at the national level and could contribute to our goal of a youth sector that is unified, well-resourced and professional.²

In 2011, AYAC conducted an online debate to canvass views across the Youth Work field, including practitioners, academics and peak body representatives, to progress this conversation. Since conducting that debate, AYAC has worked to bring the sector together through a number of activities. In the past few years, we have:

- conducted the AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 survey, to paint a clearer picture of the Youth Work sector as it is today,
- led sector discussions to develop a nationally agreed definition of youth work
- held national youth sector and youth affairs conferences in 2011 and 2013.

There have also been a number of changes in the context in which the Youth Work sector operates nationally, as well as lots of progress made in some states. In particular, Tasmania has completed its process of developing its own ethics framework for Youth Workers and in South Australia, a working group has been convened to establish a South Australian Youth Workers Association.

Therefore, it appears appropriate and timely to revisit those discussions and make more significant progress towards a unified national understanding of the role of values and ethics in Youth Work.

While acknowledging these past debates and various points of contention, this discussion paper aims to focus attention on the broad agreements that have been achieved in relation to the commonalities of Youth Work practice across Australia, as well as feeding the views of young Australians into these discussions with analysis from our recent survey on young people’s views on what makes good youth work practice.

We hope that each of you in the Youth Work sector continue this important discussion over the coming years, and take ownership for driving good practice in a unified Youth Work sector.


² See AYAC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and AYAC Policy Platform: Youth Sector
Background & Context

AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013

In 2013, AYAC surveyed 1,185 people currently employed in Youth Work positions for the AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013. The survey included a number of statements relating to the identity of Youth Workers, with respondents being asked to let us know the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. In relation to this discussion on the Code of Ethics, the findings of the snapshot research were as follows:

“When asked about whether youth workers are bound by professional ethics in their work with young people, 95.3% agreed, where just under two-thirds agreed very much (64.4%), and only 2.9% disagreed (n=1179). Regarding how to foster more ethical conduct and practice, respondents were very divided about whether there is some value in a national code of ethics to foster more ethical conduct and practice by youth workers. Just over half of respondents agreed (51.6%), but 30% believed such a national code would not do much to foster more ethical conduct and practice, and 18.4% respondents had no opinion on the matter (n=1177).”

Furthermore, the research findings show that:

- 89% of Youth Workers in the survey disagree with the notion that ‘anyone can be a youth worker and there are no qualifications required’ and
- 69.8% of Youth Workers disagree with the statement that ‘youth work and social work are pretty much the same thing’

In summary, the findings indicate that Youth Workers believe that they are part of a qualified and distinct practice that is bound by professional ethics, although only a slim majority believe a Code of Ethics will assist in achieving more ethical conduct and practice, with almost 1 in 5 respondents having no opinion on the matter.


The AYAC National Definition of Youth Work

Throughout 2013, AYAC worked with representatives from our Policy Advisory Council to develop national agreement on the definition of Youth Work. A national definition has long been acknowledged by the sector as desirable - an aspiration that was reinforced through the AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 - however the process of arriving at a national definition had not progressed for over a decade.

At the end of this process, involving a series of consultation processes, lively face to face discussions and a number of rewrites, the AYAC National Definition of Youth Work was released in October 2013. The definition clearly articulates the core attributes of Youth Work and differentiates Youth Work from other disciplines that work with young people.

AYAC is taking ongoing feedback on the definition, which will undergo its first periodic review in October 2014 once it has been in operation for 12 months. Further details on the AYAC National Definition of Youth Work, including a breakdown of the terms used and updates on how you can contribute to the late 2014 review, can be found on the AYAC website at www.ayac.org.au/youthworkdefinition.

Youth Work in Australia

Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first.

Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the young person in their context.

Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realisation of their rights.

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3 Reimer L, AYAC National Snapshot of Youth Work 2013 p26
4 ibid
The process of developing the definition indicated to AYAC that the core elements of Youth Work are able to be articulated in a unifying definition that will be useful as a point of reference for subsequent discussions on the Youth Work sector across Australia over the coming years.

**Discussions on the Youth Work Codes of Ethics**

Given the progress of discussions across the Youth Work sector since AYAC commenced work in 2011, including the National Snapshot and the National Definition, we suggest it is timely for the sector to re-engage with discussions relating to the Youth Work Code of Ethics at a national level.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria’s (YACVic) Code of Ethical Practice defines a code of ethics as a document developed in order to “provide an agreed framework and set of values for professional practice. It provides a frame of reference in which to develop ethical and safe practice.”

Ann Davie from the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies discusses the role of the code of ethics further, noting that for Youth Workers:

“there are three main relationships affected by a code of ethics:

- youth worker and young person
- youth worker and those who also choose to abide by the code of ethics, such as researchers and educators
- youth worker and others who are not colleagues (primarily those the youth worker works with collaboratively, such as government agencies, NGOs, social workers, etc.).”

Davie goes on to state that:

“By developing and maintaining a code of ethics, youth workers are able to define – as a group – shared beliefs. As a code of ethics is not just a static document, youth workers also determine how those beliefs translate into ethical behaviour.”

and further that:

“By defining and determining their beliefs, youth workers establish an identity that those inside and outside the sector can recognise.”

It is clear from the statements above, and similar views across the literature, that many consider a Youth Work Code of Ethics as a useful tool for further discussions, with young people, other Youth Workers and other partners, that leads to improvements in safety and ethical practice in working with young people and a shared identity for the Youth Work sector.

Conversely, Suzi Quixley & Siyavash Doostkhah in a paper written for the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) in 2007 suggests that “debate over whether, or not, to adopt a Code of Ethics for youth work has been characterised by an uncritical assumption that having a code is a good thing ... that it will automatically produce more ethical practice or protect against unethical practice” and further that “institutionalisation of a Code of Ethics would inevitably stifle learning and debate, and serve to exclude some workers from the youth sector.”

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5 YACVic 2007 p6
6 Davie A, A code of ethics for youth work?, YSA, 2011 30:2 p58
7 ibid p59
8 ibid
9 Quixley S & Doostkhah S, Conservatising Youth Work?: Dangers of Adopting a Code of Ethics 2007 YANQ p4
10 ibid p5
Youth Work Codes of Ethics in Australia

There are several codes of ethics that apply to the Youth Work sector across Australia. The Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) developed the “Fairbridge Code” in consultation with the Western Australian sector and finalised in 2003. Their code has since been used as a founding document for the Western Australian Association of Youth Workers, as well as being adopted with minor changes by the youth affairs peak bodies in the ACT and NSW.\(^{11}\)

In 2007, YACVic developed its own Code of Ethical Practice in consultation with the Victorian sector and this Code is a foundational document for the Victorian Youth Workers Association. At the time of writing this paper, “YACVic and the Victorian Government Office for Youth are working with the Victorian youth sector to further promote the Victorian Code and ensure ethical practice is at the core of all work that occurs with young people. Information is being collected about who is using the Code and how they’re using it, and what kinds of tools/resources will support practitioners and organisations to promote and embed a culture of ethical practice within their policies and practice.” \(^{12}\)

Most recently, the Youth Work sector in Tasmania was led through a consultation process by the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), resulting in the launch of Youth Ethics Framework for Tasmania in December 2012.

Each of these codes cover several of the same principles and themes, as shown in Appendix 1, below. As such, in the 5 states/territory that have adopted a code of ethics, there is general agreement on what constitutes ethical practice in the Youth Work sector across Australia.

There are currently no codes of ethics endorsed in the three other jurisdictions of South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) have argued against the adoption of codes of ethics for the Youth Work sector, noting a number of dangers to institutionalising a code of ethics for Youth Work, namely that codes of ethics:

1. “Mainly function to protect workers, rather than clients,
2. Mainly function to protect a particular ‘in’ group of workers,
3. Are often widely open to interpretation,
4. Require large amounts of time to maintain – review, re-review, re-re-review...
5. Can actually reduce the level of ethical behaviour of workers, and
6. Encourage conservatisation of the occupation.” \(^{13}\)

The Northern Territory has no recognised youth peak body, as the scope of work of the unfunded Northern Territory Youth Affairs Network is limited and therefore unable to progress this discussion.

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\(^{11}\) While Youth Action NSW has endorsed the Fairbridge Code, it utilises a version with minor modifications to the wording throughout its work. However, the substance and intent of each ethical principle remains unchanged.

\(^{12}\) Statement provided by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, March 2014 (unpublished)

Furthermore, AYAC consultations in the NT in 2012 strongly indicated a deficit in the availability of applicants for Youth Work roles who possess relevant qualifications for this work, and a lack of availability of relevant training and education programs for workers currently in the field.

The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) explored the role of ethical practice in the South Australian youth sector in 2007-08 and again in 2011, through mechanisms included two discussion papers and a forum with representatives across the Youth Work sector. While there was agreement shown in these processes that ethical standards and practice were an essential part of Youth Work in SA, there has been limited support expressed for the development of a sector-wide mandatory code. In 2009, YACSA developed and published a guide to ethical Youth Work, which was well-received and continues to be purchased by individuals and service delivery and training organisations.

More recently, a number of parties within the South Australian youth sector, including Youth Work educators, have formed a steering committee for the creation of a South Australian Youth Workers Association (SAYWA), to “actively promote practice standards and the professional recognition and identity of youth workers, thus improving the quality of care for young people in this state, and ensuring the ongoing viability of youth work as a specialist service... [The] SAYWA Steering Committee is in the process of identifying the ethical framework for its intended membership and aims to publish inaugural standards, which will include ethical frameworks, by August 2014.”

The SAYWA Steering Committee notes that many Youth Workers and Youth Work educators in SA currently refer to the Fairbridge Code in the absence of a formal agreement within their sector, and will be looking towards this model, the YACVic code and international comparisons as they develop their inaugural standards.

Common Principles in existing Australian Codes of Ethics

As noted above, AYAC’s analysis of the codes of ethics currently in operation across Australia cover 14 key principles, albeit in different ways and to differing extents. These key principles are as follows:

- Primary Client / Consideration
- Social Context / Ecological and Structural Influences
- Equity, Non-Discrimination & Anti-Oppressive Practice
- Self-Awareness
- Empowerment
- Duty of Care
- Transparency
- Anti-Corruption
- Cooperation
- Boundaries
- Knowledge
- Self-Care
- Confidentiality
- Professional Awareness / Integrity

The consistency across these statements on ethical practice, as well as comparisons with similar statements internationally, serve as a powerful indication of the common threads that run through the values and ethics base of Youth Work practice in Australia and around the world.

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14 Statement provided by the South Australian Youth Workers Association Steering Committee, March 2014 (unpublished)

15 ibid

16 Further analysis of each of these principles against the text contained in each Youth Work Code of Ethics is contained in Appendix 1, below.
The value of Codes of Ethics for young people

For young people seeing a Youth Worker for the first time, a code of ethics can contribute to a basic level of transparency and trust in the Youth Work relationship. As Davie states:

“The main role of a code of ethics for a young person is to give him or her an understanding of what a youth worker believes in and agrees to abide by. The young person is made aware of what constitutes ethical behaviour and has a way of determining whether or not the youth worker is delivering what has been promised.

More than most other relationships, the relationship between the young person and the youth worker is built on trust and transparency. A code of ethics establishes an understanding between both parties regarding what is acceptable behaviour and what is not.”

Case Study: RYDON Code of Ethics

An example of this in practice can be found in the supporting materials to the Youth Workers’ Code Of Ethics developed by the Regional Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON) which incorporates the Central Coast, Hunter and Mid-North Coast regions of NSW. The RYDON code states that there are a number of activities that are required in order to implement the ethical principles contained in their code. This is reflected in posters that were developed for display in services that have signed up to the RYDON code, which contains the following text:

What can you expect from your workers?
Youth Workers at this organisation have agreed to adhere to the Youth Work Code of Ethics. Therefore you can expect they will:

• Listen to you
• Support your choices
• Involve you in decisions about your life
• Advocate for your access to resources and facilities
• Educate young people both formally and informally
• Promote the positive contributions of young people to the community

Are we doing this?
We want to hear from you - tell us what we are doing well and what we can do better.
This is your service.

Questions for discussion:

• If a national Code of Ethics for Youth Work is developed, do you think that the 14 principles listed above should form its basis? Could one of the existing codes be adapted for use at the national level? Why / why not?
• What ethical principles for Youth Workers are “deal-breakers” (i.e. they are so fundamentally important that they must be in all Youth Work Codes of Ethics and form part of Youth Work practice)?
• Would you use a national Code of Ethics for Youth Work in your practice, if one was developed?
• Do you support the development of a national Youth Work Code of Ethics? Why / why not?

17 Davie A, A code of ethics for youth work?, YSA, 2011 30:2 p58
AYAC Youth Survey on Youth Work

In March 2014, AYAC conducted an online survey of young people about their views and experiences with Youth Workers, including a series of questions on principles commonly identified as relating to ethical practice in Youth Work.

Survey respondents were asked to rate 15 statements relating to ethical practice for Youth Workers, and their importance of each quality for making a good Youth Worker. For each statement, over three quarters of respondents rated the statement as either “important” or “really important”, and less than 7% of responses for each statement rated them as either “not important” or “not very important”.

Furthermore, respondents were provided with a list of common principles contained in a Code of Ethics and asked to imagine if a Youth Worker had told them that they had signed up to such a Code, would that knowledge improve their relationship with the Youth Worker.

• Almost half of respondents (49.3%) believed this could improve the relationship
• 16.4% didn’t know or weren’t sure of the effect
• 23.9% believed it wouldn’t have any effect on the relationship, and
• 6.0% believed it might have a negative effect on the relationship.

A more detailed report on the findings of the youth survey on youth work can be found at Appendix 2, below.

Questions for discussion:

• Do you believe there is value for young people in adopting a Code? Why / why not?
• If a Code is adopted, what arrangements would need to be put in place to ensure Youth Workers are living up to their commitments under the Code?

How to contribute to this discussion

AYAC has partnered with the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies to lead this important national discussion. We’ve created a dedicated Facebook page where we’ll be adding questions and related posts that we hope will ensure some lively and constructive discussion.

To see the discussion, go to facebook.com/YouthWorkEthics and contribute to the conversation! You’ll need a Facebook account if you want to add your thoughts, so keep that in mind when you’re making your comments and posts.

If however, you’d like to contribute to the discussion but value your privacy, or just wish to have your say in another way, please feel free to email information@acys.utas.edu.au and we’ll post your thoughts up anonymously or see what else we can do.

We can’t wait to see what you say!
### Appendix 1:
**A comparison of Code of Ethics principles currently in operation in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania**

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<th>WA, ACT &amp; NSW*</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commentary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Primary Client / Consideration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Youth workers answer to a range of people:</strong> funding bodies, peers, management committees, parents, communities. This clause, which we believe is at the core of the youth work relationship, keeps us mindful of who we are there for. Many people working in the youth field do not recognise the young person as their primary client, but see them as one of many stakeholders. That’s okay; it just means they are not a youth worker. But young people need to know that there is at least one player in the game that they can rely on to uphold their interests.</td>
<td><strong>Young People as the Primary Consideration</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ecology</strong></td>
<td>Youth workers recognise the impact of ecological and structural forces on young people. Their work is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the social context in which the young person lives.</td>
<td>Youth workers are agents of change in a variety of contexts, both with individual young people, but also with the societal systems that can cause the problems in the first instance. As youth workers we need to be very clear that it is of no use dealing with a young person in isolation. Young people (like all of us) are shaped, influenced, contained and to some extent controlled by the contexts in which they live. Young people are part of communities and broader social contexts. This cannot be denied in our approach to working with young people. It would be short sighted to think that they can be dealt with in isolation, ignoring the complex myriad of influences all around them.</td>
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<td><strong>Social Context</strong></td>
<td>Youth workers will recognise the impact of social and structural forces on young people, so that their practice is responsive to young people’s experiences and needs and to break down barriers that restrict young people’s life opportunities. The work of a youth worker is not limited to facilitating change within the individual young person, but extends to the social context in which the young person lives. They are part of their communities and broader social contexts and this should be acknowledged in youth workers’ approach to working with them.</td>
<td>Youth workers are agents of change in a variety of contexts, both with individual young people and in wider society. As youth workers, it is important to consider a young person within their social context rather than in isolation. Young people are shaped, influenced, contained and to some extent controlled by the contexts in which they live. They are part of their communities and broader social contexts.</td>
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<td><strong>Equity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-Oppressive Practice: Non-Discrimination, Equity and Self-Awareness [1/2]</strong></td>
<td><strong>Equity</strong></td>
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<td>Youth workers’ practice will be non-discriminatory.</td>
<td>Youth workers will work towards countering the economic and political marginalisation of young people and facilitate them in finding and using their collective voice. All young people regardless of race, gender, religion, disability, environment, association, background or sexual identity, under Human Rights and Equal Opportunity legislation, have the right to be treated in a fair manner that promotes equity and equality. Regardless of youth workers’ personal beliefs, a young person has the right to be treated fairly and responded to on the basis of their need. If a youth worker is unable to detach their personal beliefs from the situation, they have the responsibility to ensure that the young person is referred to a worker who is able to deal with their needs in a non-discriminatory and sensitive manner. Youth workers actively seek to support young people with experience of social disadvantage and/or exclusion. A youth sector worker will be non-discriminatory in their practice and mindful of cultural diversity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All young people; regardless of race, gender, religion, disability or sexual orientation, under Human Rights and Equal Opportunity legislation have the right to be treated in a fair and appropriate manner. This impacts directly on the youth worker’s approach to young people. Regardless of a youth worker’s personal beliefs, a young person has the right to be treated fairly and responded to on the basis of their need. If a youth worker is unable to detach their personal beliefs from the situation, they have the responsibility to ensure the young person is referred to a worker that is able to deal with their needs in a non-discriminatory and sensitive manner. The focus here is responding to the young person’s need in the best possible way.</td>
<td>Youth workers will work to ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted and will have an understanding of oppression and how it operates in the lives of young people. They will encourage young people to respect and celebrate their own and others’ cultural backgrounds, identities and choices. Youth workers’ practice will be non-discriminatory. Youth workers will work with young people to challenge and oppose racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and all other forms of discriminatory oppression. Youth workers actively advocate and seek to change unjust policies and practices.</td>
<td>All young people have the right to a respectful relationship with a youth sector worker. Youth sector workers have a responsibility to ensure that young people who experience social exclusion and/or disadvantage have access to the services they require, and are supported to be active, valued members of their communities. Youth sector workers acknowledge that groups of young people are particularly affected by social inequality, for example young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, young people identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer, young people with disabilities, young people who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and young people with experience of poverty.</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Awareness</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-Oppressive Practice: Non-Discrimination, Equity and Self-Awareness [2/2]</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self-awareness</strong></td>
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<td>Youth workers are conscious of their own values and interests, and approach difference in those with whom they work with humility.</td>
<td>...They will understand that, to work with Indigenous young people or young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with equity, their practice should be culturally appropriate and culturally competent. Youth workers will make themselves aware of issues around how the dominant culture privileges them in relation to Indigenous young people and seek to ensure that their own work does not abuse that privilege.</td>
<td>A youth sector worker will be conscious of their own values, interests and limitations, and will also be respectful of the values and interests of others.</td>
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See "Anti-Oppressive Practice: Non-Discrimination, Equity and Self-Awareness" above.

Young people hold a diversity of values and interests, which at times may differ from the values and interests of the youth sector workers with whom they engage. Despite these differing values, a youth sector worker who is self-aware is able to act in the best interests of the young person and maintain a relationship of respect and dignity. This may include a youth sector worker recognising their own limitations and relying on the expertise of others, who may be better suited to handling an issue. There are times when a youth sector worker will be required to make a decision based on a young person’s action, which may breach an individual’s rights, but is culturally acceptable. However, this should not result in a situation where the universally accepted concepts of human rights are compromised.
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<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>The youth worker seeks to enhance the power of the young person by making power relations open and clear; by holding those with power accountable; by facilitating their disengagement from the youth work relationship; and by supporting the young person in the pursuit of their legitimate claims. Youth workers presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests.</td>
<td>The term ‘empowerment’ has become a bit of a buzzword, and as a result it’s meaning is sometimes not clear. This principle tries to clarify what empowerment might mean in ethical terms, and what it means for us as youth workers. It focuses our accountability to being accountable to young people. In this context, ‘empowerment’ also refers to young people’s ethical and responsible action. In the last sentence, the word ‘presume’ is important; we presume that young people are competent in assessing and acting on their interests. It may be that an individual young person is not a good judge of their interests. They may have a mental illness, or be in some emotional distress. We may find out about these sorts of things as we assess the situation, but the presumption at the outset is that young people know what they are doing. It is about the assumptions we go into a situation with; we need to assess the assumptions we hold about young people’s competency in assessing and acting in their own interests.</td>
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*n.b. The Victorian Code does not include specifically include empowerment as a specific statement, however it notes that the Code of Ethical Practice is based on a number of principles, including that the Code will “guide youth workers to enable and ensure... the empowerment of young people.”*
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<td>Duty of Care</td>
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<td>The youth worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of further harm or injury.</td>
<td>Youth workers will avoid exposing young people to physical, psychological or emotional harm or injury and will always uphold the principle of ‘do no harm’. They will assess risk and manage the safety of work and activities involving young people while being aware of the need to encourage young people to partake in challenging activities. Youth workers will understand that risk comes in many forms and that cultural abuse and racism are factors that harm Indigenous young people.</td>
<td>Youth sector workers recognise the risks associated with intervention into the lives of young people; sometimes action in a situation can cause additional harm. Workers have a responsibility to ensure that activities, referral processes and programs are generally safe, as well as being appropriate for each particular young person in their care. Risk assessment and management needs to be thorough, staff properly trained and equipment well maintained. Given that abuse of young people is not rare, it is also important to exercise care in the employment of staff, full-time or part-time. Proper investigation needs to be made into the work and criminal histories of potential employees and volunteers.</td>
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<td>“Duty of Care” recognises that sometimes we can do more harm than good by intervening in a situation: that intervention carries some risk with it. We can get a bit fired up with our passion to help people, or to get things moving, or to use the skills and resources we have at our disposal, and it might not actually be the best thing. If we are running an activity, making a referral, or engaging a young person in a program, we have a responsibility to make sure that the activity, referral or program is safe in general and for this particular young person, and there will not be further harm that results from their involvement. Risk assessment and management needs to be thorough. Equipment needs to be well maintained, and staff need to be properly trained. It means that we have to exercise care in the employment of staff, whether paid or voluntary, full time or part time. Abuse of young people is not rare, and we are careful about who we give access to the young people we work with. Proper investigation needs to be made of people’s work and criminal histories, even if they are volunteers.</td>
<td>In working with young people, youth workers have a responsibility to make sure that the activity, referral or program is safe in general, and for the particular young person, and that there will not be harm that results from their involvement. Risk assessment and management needs to be thorough. Equipment needs to be well maintained, and staff need to be properly trained. Youth workers will exercise care in the employment of staff, whether paid or voluntary. They will ensure young people they work with are protected against abuse. This involves being careful about who they allow to interact with the young people they work with. It is a legal requirement in Victoria that all people working either voluntarily or in employment with young people gain a Working with Children Check.*</td>
<td>Youth sector worker avoids exposing young people to the likelihood of foreseeable harm, injury or exploitation.</td>
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**Transparency**

The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful. The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from them.

**WA, ACT & NSW**

- We don’t deceive young people, either by saying things that are untrue or by not saying things. This means that in initial meetings youth workers must be clear about what they can and can’t offer. This applies to various areas of practice, agency policy and law. Whilst being open and truthful, youth workers must be clear on what they can and can’t offer. Whilst being open and truthful, they should be mindful of issues of confidentiality, disclosure, health and safety, who the worker works for, and what the agency is funded or contracted to provide. We also have a role in explaining to young people, the nature of other stakeholders relationships to them and the expectations this may place upon them.

**Victoria**

- Transparency, Honesty and Integrity [1/3]
  - The professional relationship established with the young person will be open and truthful. The youth worker will be open and honest with young people, enabling them to access information to make choices and decisions in their lives generally and in relation to participation in youth work activities...

- Youth workers will not deceive young people. This means that, in initial meetings, youth workers must be clear on what they can and can’t offer. Whilst being open and truthful, they should be mindful of issues of confidentiality, disclosure, health and safety, who the worker works for, and what the agency is funded or contracted to provide...

**Tasmania**

- From the outset of the relationship, youth sector workers have a responsibility to be clear with young people about what services they can and cannot offer. Workers should be conscious of not raising unrealistic expectations in their clients about the changes that they can make to their lives. This also includes being clear about the responsibilities that their clients must uphold, for example, acting within the law. Workers should be mindful of (and discuss where appropriate) issues of confidentiality, disclosure, mandatory reporting, health and safety. Workers also have a role in explaining to young people the relationships they have with other interest groups, including where their funding comes from, who they are working for and what they are trying to achieve.

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<td>Text</td>
<td>Commentary</td>
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</table>

**Transparency**

The contract established with the young person, and the resulting relationship, will be open and truthful. The interests of other stakeholders will not be hidden from them.

- We don’t deceive young people, either by saying things that are untrue or by not saying things. This means that in initial meetings youth workers must be clear about what they can and can’t offer. This applies to various areas of practice, agency policy and law. Whilst being open and truthful, youth workers must be clear on what they can and can’t offer. Whilst being open and truthful, they should be mindful of issues of confidentiality, disclosure, health and safety, who the worker works for, and what the agency is funded or contracted to provide. We also have a role in explaining to young people, the nature of other stakeholders relationships to them and the expectations this may place upon them.

- Transparency, Honesty and Integrity [1/3]
  - The professional relationship established with the young person will be open and truthful. The youth worker will be open and honest with young people, enabling them to access information to make choices and decisions in their lives generally and in relation to participation in youth work activities...

- Youth workers will not deceive young people. This means that, in initial meetings, youth workers must be clear on what they can and can’t offer. Whilst being open and truthful, they should be mindful of issues of confidentiality, disclosure, health and safety, who the worker works for, and what the agency is funded or contracted to provide...

- From the outset of the relationship, youth sector workers have a responsibility to be clear with young people about what services they can and cannot offer. Workers should be conscious of not raising unrealistic expectations in their clients about the changes that they can make to their lives. This also includes being clear about the responsibilities that their clients must uphold, for example, acting within the law. Workers should be mindful of (and discuss where appropriate) issues of confidentiality, disclosure, mandatory reporting, health and safety. Workers also have a role in explaining to young people the relationships they have with other interest groups, including where their funding comes from, who they are working for and what they are trying to achieve.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WA, ACT &amp; NSW*</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Tasmania</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-Corruption</strong></td>
<td><strong>We often think about corruption as just about money. This principle encourages us to keep ourselves honest in terms of our motivations and rewards, which may involve financial gain but also may involve other things such as power, profile, emotional security, personal identity and so on. It is important to realise that this principle does not require altruism; in other words, we don’t need to act with an entirely unselfish regard for the needs and interests of young people. It doesn’t mean that youth workers shouldn’t do well out of their youth work. It is just that this cannot be at the expense of young people, so that young people don’t do as well out of the youth work relationship as they would otherwise.</strong></td>
<td><strong>...Youth workers also have a role in explaining to young people the nature of other stakeholders' relationships to them and the expectations this may place upon them...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency, Honesty and Integrity [2/3]</strong></td>
<td><strong>...Youth workers and youth agencies will not advance themselves or other stakeholders at the expense of young people...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-Corruption</strong></td>
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### WA, ACT & NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Awareness / Integrity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Workers are loyal to the practice of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute. Youth workers will respect the strengths and diversity of roles other than youth work.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency, Honesty and Integrity [3/3]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...They will adhere to the principles and practice responsibilities of youth work, not bringing it into disrepute.</td>
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### Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional awareness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A youth sector worker is committed to the development of a strong youth sector, that is able to support young people as they transition to adulthood. They will be aware of the strengths and diversity of young people and those that support them.</td>
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### Tasmania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional awareness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth sector workers are aware that their role is to support young people, but not to make those young people dependent on their assistance. A youth sector worker assists clients to recognise and develop their strengths, building their capacity to be responsible in their own lives. In turn, youth sector workers must endeavour to develop their own capacity both individually and as a sector, personally and professionally, to respond to the ever-evolving needs and challenges of working with young people. Youth sector workers will engage in relevant and value-adding professional development and networking opportunities to aid their practice and ability to respond to the evolving nature of the profession. As youth sector work is a unique profession that is often not recognised or understood by others, it is important that youth sector workers ensure that those they are working with understand their role in providing support to young people. Youth sector workers also need to acknowledge and respect the approach of other professionals and their respective contributions in assisting young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth workers will seek to cooperate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth workers seek to cooperate and collaborate with others in order to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. They seek opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and professionals from other agencies and sectors, and will mobilise young people and others to work together collectively on issues of common concern. Youth workers will be particularly conscious of the need to work with Indigenous services in order to secure positive outcomes for Indigenous young people.</td>
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</table>
The youth work relationship is a professional relationship, intentionally limited to protect the young person. Youth workers will maintain the integrity of these limits, especially with respect to sexuality. Youth workers will not sexualise their clients.

This means that Youth Workers will recognise that the relationship between themselves and a young person is a contracted relationship and therefore recognises the need to be non-sexual and limited. This ensures the relationship and subsequent service or intervention is not compromised, a consideration that is particularly important in work with young people who may have less access to knowledge, resources, and skills than we do.

It is important that youth workers are able to develop trusting, healthy relationships with the young people they work with and recognise the power imbalance inherent in the professional relationship. Youth workers often become a significant adult in that young person’s life. They will recognise that the relationship between themselves and a young person is a professional relationship and will remain within professional boundaries, therefore non-sexual and limited.

Young people are in a position of vulnerability as they have less access to knowledge, resources and skills than workers. Creating a safe place, where boundaries are not compromised, is important as it enables young people to share personal issues, sensitive information, fears and emotion, that they may not share in any other relationship.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>WA, ACT &amp; NSW*</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Tasmania</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Knowledge, Skill and Self-care [1/2]</strong></td>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up to date with the information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.</td>
<td>Youth workers have a responsibility to keep up-to-date with the information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people. They have a responsibility to undertake appropriate cross-cultural training to ensure the best possible outcomes for Indigenous young people and for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds...</td>
<td>A youth sector worker has a responsibility to keep up to date with the current information, resources, knowledge and practices needed to meet their obligations to young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a level of competence through an ongoing commitment to being informed and skilled in relation to 'best practice' in youth work is essential. This is a standard requirement of most professions.</td>
<td>Maintaining a level of competence through an ongoing commitment to being informed and skilled in relation to best practice in youth work is essential. This includes recognising when new skills and knowledge are required, and seeking relevant education and training as well as feedback from service users and colleagues on the quality of their work. This also requires engaging in opportunities to reflect on practice. Youth workers will only undertake work or take on responsibilities for which they have the necessary skills, knowledge, training or support.</td>
<td>While acknowledging that the youth sector is diverse and workers have varied backgrounds and focuses for practice, it is essential that youth sector workers maintain a high level of competency in working with young people. This includes workers in issue-specific areas, as well as volunteers and other workers who operate outside the mainstream youth sector, for example a worker who engages with young people in an alcohol and other drug service but is not a youth-specific worker.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Working with young people requires specific and specialist skills and knowledge, and youth sector workers should regularly participate in training and remain up to date with current ideas around ‘best practice’, relevant legislation and policy developments, changes to services and structure within the youth sector and reporting requirements. Youth sector workers should also aim to attend networking opportunities and professional development, including participating in briefing sessions, regional and local youth sector meetings, conferences and forums, to not only learn and develop their professional skill set, but also engage with other workers in their area of expertise and region and to expand their knowledge of ‘best practice’. Engaging with other youth sector workers also works to strengthen youth sector networks and the ability of the sector in Tasmania and nationally to respond collectively and appropriately to youth issues in the community.</td>
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### Self-Care

Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers. This means that youth workers need to prioritise the practice of self-care; of looking after the self as a means to assure longevity of career and continued high quality service provision to young people. The level of benefits to the worker from adequate self-care practice will be congruent with the level of benefits to the young people we work with.

<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td><strong>Commentary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>Ethical youth work practice is consistent with preserving the health of youth workers.</td>
<td>Knowledge, Skill and Self-care [2:2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See &quot;Knowledge, Skill and Self-care&quot; above.</td>
<td></td>
<td>See &quot;Knowledge, Skill and Self-care&quot; above.</td>
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### WA, ACT & NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by young people will not be used against them, nor will it be shared with others who may use it against them. Young people should be made aware of the contextual limits to confidentiality, and their permission sought for disclosure. Until this happens, the presumption of confidentiality must apply.</td>
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</table>

### Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Privacy and Confidentiality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people’s rights to privacy and confidentiality must be respected. This means that youth workers avoid any undue invasion of privacy when collecting information about a young person and that confidentiality is protected. There are limits to preserving confidentiality, some of which are outlined by legal obligations on youth workers to share types of information. This means that young people must be informed from the outset about the restrictions to privacy and confidentiality that may exist and what may be done with information they provide. It is best practice to obtain their informed consent before collecting personal or health information or sharing it with others. Youth workers are encouraged to go beyond simply considering their legal obligations in protecting privacy and confidentiality, to consider the full extent of the privacy implications of particular activities or actions that a young person may engage in.</td>
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### Tasmania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information provided by young people will be respected, they will be made aware of the limits to youth sector workers’ confidentiality, and, where possible, their permission sought for disclosure. In accordance with the Privacy Act 1988 and Personal Information Protection Act 2004, young people have a right to expect that their information is kept confidential. However, in some cases, confidentiality is not possible or even desirable: there are always limits. It is important that the limits of confidentiality are explained to young people at the beginning of their relationship with a worker. If a circumstance should arise where the youth sector worker is mandated to, or believes, disclosure to police, child protection, or other group is necessary, they have a responsibility to discuss this with the young person and explain why this is an appropriate course of action.</td>
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### Confidentiality

Even where we think it might achieve good outcomes, we don’t give names or other details to police, schools, Centrelink, other agencies or anyone else unless young people have been made aware of why there may be a need to give private information to others and their permission has been given. In accordance with National Privacy Principles we presume that young people expect us to keep their information confidential, even if that is about where they were and who they were with. Perfect confidentiality is of course not possible or even desirable: there are always limits. We need to know what they are ourselves, and communicate and clarify them to young people at the onset of the relationship.
Appendix 2: 
Survey report - Young people’s views on the Codes of Ethics

In March 2014, AYAC conducted an online survey of young people about their views and experiences with Youth Workers, including a series of questions on principles commonly identified as relating to ethical practice in Youth Work. 136 young people across each state and territory responded to the survey over a two week period, with most respondents aged between 15-25 years.

Figure 1: What is your age range?

![Bar chart showing age distribution: 12-14 years (6), 15-17 years (46), 18-21 years (33), 22-25 years (51)]

Figure 2: In what state / territory do you currently live?

![Bar chart showing state distribution: NSW (21), ACT (6), Vic (37), Tas (31), SA (13), WA (12), NT (2), Qld (10)]
**Good Youth Work Qualities**

Survey respondents were asked to rate a number of statements relating to ethical practice for Youth Workers, and their importance of each quality for making a good Youth Worker, as follows.

*A good youth worker...*
- ...is always on my side and puts me and my interests first
- ...makes it easy for me and other young people to engage with and relate to them
- ...really listens to me
- ...is someone you can trust and isn't just in it for themselves
- ...treats everyone fairly and doesn't discriminate against me or anyone
- ...is clear and open about what they can and can't do with/for me
- ...respects me and the things I can do for myself and for others
- ...trusts me to make decisions for myself
- ...works to improve things in the whole community for young people
- ...respects my privacy / confidentiality in whatever I tell them

Respondents were given the option to rank each as “Not important”, “Not very important”, “Somewhat important”, “Important” or “Really important”. Their responses are shown in the chart below:

*Figure 3: Thinking about your relationships with youth workers, how important are each of these qualities to you for making a good youth worker?*

1 - Not important
2 - Not very important
3 - Somewhat important
4 - Important
5 - Really important
The chart shows that for most of the statements provided, over 80% of respondents believed that the statement was either “important” or “really important”. The exception to this was the statement that a good youth worker “is always on my side and puts me and my interests first” which attracted 76.0% of responses in these two categories. When asked why they answered in this manner, responses included:

- “I put ‘somewhat’, because although it is good to have someone that you can go to talk to and make you feel better about the situation that you may be in, it is also important to me to get the youth worker’s views. Although disclosure of information can be hard for the youth worker, I think it is really important to get the youth worker’s world view on the things I discuss with them.”
- “they shouldn’t always be on my side because I may be wrong, but it’s extremely important to see it from my point and if I’m wrong address it nicely in a way where it doesn’t make me feel stupid”

Less than 7% of responses to each statement rated them as either “not important” or “not very important” on the scale, showing that each of these statements relating to ethical practice is important on some level to the vast majority of young people who responded to the survey.

Experiences with Youth Workers

Survey respondents were asked if they ever had a good/great experience with a Youth Worker, and alternatively if they had ever had a bad experience with a Youth Worker. 88.7% of respondents indicated that they had a good or great experience with a Youth Worker, while 37.7% of respondents stated that they had a bad Youth Work experience.

Respondents were asked to provide further details on their experiences, which included the following:

- “My experience with a good youth worker was a great experience. The youth worker listened to me and worked with me to find a hostel that would get me off the streets and into some stable accommodation. By actually listening to my story and my worries, they were able to get me on track for accommodation and as a result I was able to continue at school and work to get to where I am today.”
- “They were genuinely interested in me and seemed to encourage my participation and input into the project we were working on. I also really liked it how she was kind and supportive and positive to my younger brother and his mates. Its like she was just that sort of person who likes all young people and was really genuinely interested in hearing about their thoughts, aspirations and ideas. She was very encouraging. She followed up with stuff that was raised in our conversation- she didn't have to, but she did- that thoughtfulness was fantastic. I felt she really believed in us. Anyway, even though I knew she was the youth worker, I felt as though we were a team, working alongside each other, working together.”
Some of the details of bad youth work experiences were as follows:

- “I met a youth worker once at the youth centre at an event - she was a guest or something. I felt as though she was really bossy and had her own agenda and it was all about her. I felt as though she really judged others who didn't agree with her position or beliefs - it was a bit full on.”

- “I have had some terrible experiences with youth workers, who acted selfishly and utterly incompetent, picking favourites and turning on the young people they were meant to protect. They could have just been better human beings.”

- “they didn't listen to me and made me feel belittled, they shut down any ideas I came up with and didn't try to reason with it, they would tell us their ideas and it was their way or the highway, no leeway”

- “I remember I went to the hostel after being on the streets and I said I’m so glad I have a place to live and this youth worker said ‘honey, you’re still homeless’”

Impact of a Code of Ethics

Finally, respondents were provided with a list of common principles contained in a Code of Ethics and asked to imagine if a Youth Worker had told them that they had signed up to such a Code, would that knowledge improve their relationship with the Youth Worker.

As shown in Figure 6, below:

- Almost half of respondents (49.3%) believed this could improve the relationship
- 16.4% didn’t know or weren’t sure of the effect
- 23.9% believed it wouldn’t have any effect on the relationship, and
- 6.0% believed it might have a negative effect on the relationship.

There were also three “other” responses, who specified “kind of”, “as long as their actions met the stated words in the Code of Ethics” and “Signing a contract is one thing, actually applying the code of ethics in-session is what really matters” as their responses to the what they believed the impact would be on their relationship.

Respondents were also asked to expand on their response to the question above. Several of the respondents whose answer was either of the two “No” options indicated they saw some value in the Code, although with notable reservations. For example:

- “Even though I would probably find the youth worker more trustworthy, it would probably have a negative effect on the relationship because I would feel that the only reason the youth worker is listening to me was because it is their job and they signed a stupid form, not because they legitimately wanted to be there for me”

Figure 6: Imagine if a youth worker told you they had signed up to a Code of Ethics... Would knowing they had signed up to this improve your relationship?
• “For me personally, I don’t think that it would have any difference if a youth worker told me they had signed a code of ethics. The youth workers who I have engaged with in the past and currently have been extremely good at engaging with youth, and I personally know that although they are extremely friendly they are getting paid to be a youth worker, they are professionals and they have to follow rules.
But with that being said, I think in terms of referring to services it might be good to tell youth that they have a code of ethics, but I don’t think youth between the ages of 12 - 18 will really care and then youth my age 18-25 will just be put off.
I think the way youth workers engage with youth is the most important part of this we don’t need to be told that the youth worker is following this set of ethics/guidelines/rules because a good youth worker will be able to tell you when he/she can’t do some thing due to him/her being a youth worker.”
• “Just because they sign a code of ethics doesn’t mean they’ll stick by it. If [you] weren’t going to stick to a code of ethics then why would you sign it? I think the workers have their own version of ethics and would stick by them”

Others interpreted the question in the context of their current relationship with a good Youth Worker, rather than a hypothetical work, which resulted in responses such as the following:
• “Because Jess already does all of those things”
• “My youth worker is always upfront about how they work with me”

Expanded responses from young people who were unsure about the impact included:
• Most organisations have a code of ethics of some description, however not all workers appear to be monitored to ensure that they are being followed or respected. There needs to be a system of monitoring and feedback to ensure clients are reaping the rewards.
• Maybe if they told me this before we started working together, I’d be able to hold them to account if I felt like they weren’t working to those values. But this could be hard to do/depending on relationship. Most workers already do this anyway.

Reasons provided for believing that knowledge of the Code of Ethics could improve the Youth Work relationship included:
• “The code of ethics specifically lists commitments to problems I experience with youth workers.”
• “They should all do this.”
• “Because it makes them feel like one of us, not just some person thats wants to hear our problems”
• “I think it shows their hand, it shows that they will be open and honest with you and that they respect you.”
• “By having a youth worker sign a Code of Ethics you know they are genuinely wanting to help you, and you feel better knowing that if they are not obliging to the Code, then they will be in trouble depending on the severity of the misconduct.”
• “I think it could improve if people took the code seriously. A lot of people sign it, and talk the talk but never actually walk the walk and carry it out on a daily basis.”
• “Because you would have an extra boost of comfort and reassurance that they are in it for the right reasons and always willing to help you out.”
• “If a young person was concerned about anything it would open up the opportunity for them to know it was safe and even if a youth worker had to be honest and day they couldn’t help than at least they would know up front”

Finally, one of the three respondents who listed “other” as their response to the question explained their reasoning as follows:
• “All of the items in the Code look great and when they happen its fantastic. I reckon youth workers should sign up to a code for themselves so they know what young people need and expect. I answered the way I did (i said “other”) and “as long as their actions met the stated words in the Code of Ethics”, because I think you need to ACT that way - it’s not just words on paper!”

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