

The Hon Michael Sukkar MP
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Young rural Australians are facing a mental health crisis - 20% will experience a mental health challenge¹. Shockingly only 1 in 4 Australian teens will seek help². 32% of Australia's rural young people will not seek help because of stigma.³ In the wake of bushfires, drought, and the COVID-19 pandemic young people require effective mental health services more than ever.

Youth Insearch runs one of the most successful youth intervention programs in the country. As a leading rural-focused, provider of youth mental health support programs, Youth Insearch delivers proven results in creating long-term, positive, behavioural change. It is critical to address youth mental health challenges now and avoid the long-term costs of crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm and suicide in young people.

Since 1985 Youth Insearch has met this need through peer-support programs designed with and for young people and delivered in the community, to date directly helping 32,000 young people. In Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria we deliver our evidence-based model to get youth back into services and society – becoming active and positive Australians.

The Federal Government's *Fifth Mental Health Action Plan Response to Recommendations* aligns with the aims of this submission. In particular:

- ❖ Recommendation 10: Improve service equity for rural and remote communities through place-based models of care
- ❖ Strategic Direction 4: Empower and support self-care and implement a new model of stepped care across Australia
- ❖ Recommendation 11: Promote easy access to self-help options to help people, their families and communities to support themselves and each other, and improve ease of navigation for stepping through the mental health system

To support the Federal Government's objectives we are seeking \$21.3 million over four years to fund our implementation of the Youth Insearch Place Based Model, to expand our reach to 25 new communities who seek our support. Our peer-to-peer program supports young people from lifetime welfare dependency that costs

¹ https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1-facts_figures.pdf

² [https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=)

³ [https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=)

the Federal Government \$306,000 per person estimated by the Australian Priority Investment Approach⁴. We expect that this expansion of the Place Based Model will achieve approximately \$383,634,000 in lifetime welfare dependency cost savings, before including the cost of damages, mental health interventions, policing and welfare services.

Our comprehensive early intervention program has earned a reputation for helping the most vulnerable young people that other services struggle to effectively support. Currently, we are trusted by 526 young people in 39 communities across Australia. Our continued excellence attracts support from Rotary International, Telstra, Salesforce, Department of Social Services and more. We deliver on partnerships through measured outcomes and impact. We pride ourselves on openly sharing the results from our proven model <https://youthinsearch.org.au/programs/results>.

The Australian Families Institute research investigating Youth Insearch programs found 80% of participants made significant positive changes and these changes are long lasting as a result of the current model. With Federal Government support a Place Based Model pilot has been completed and evaluated. One key result of the young people addressing their mental and social health challenges is that they nearly doubled sustained employment – from 26% to 50% beyond six months. With employment, they can create the future they want and no longer be at high risk of long-term welfare dependence.

These results or better can be expected in delivering our unique model across Australia. This has long-term benefits for individuals and communities by ending welfare-dependence, improving mental health and bettering social connection.

For 36 years we have committed to being financially sustainable. We currently raise revenue from diverse sources and strike strategic partnerships to reduce costs.

The transition to a Place Based Model is already supported with partial funding. Now more than ever, scaling up this model of proven effectiveness is critical to help our growing youth mental health crisis.

We respectfully request funding of 25 new place-based social workers over four years at locations confirmed with the most immediate high needs across regional Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The following proposal provides you the full details.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Mr Stephen Lewin



Chief Executive Officer

Mr Garry Rothwell



Chairman

Treasurer via CoS Martin Codina
Prime Minister via senior adviser Dr Rachel Howard
Ministers Greg Hunt, Anne Ruston, Ken Wyatt, Alan Tudge
AMs Michelle Landry, Luke Howarth

⁴ [ParlInfo - Government seeks new approaches to tackle welfare dependency \(aph.gov.au\)](#)

YOUTH REBUILDING YOUNG LIVES INSEARCH



Youth Insearch Foundation

2021-2022 Federal Government Pre-Budget Submission

FUNDING REQUEST OVERVIEW

NEED:

Young Australians are facing a mental health crisis - 20% will experience a mental health challenge⁵. Shockingly only 1 in 4 Australian teens will seek help⁶. 32% of Australia's rural young people will not seek help because of stigma⁷. Rural suicide is 50% more prevalent than in our capital cities⁸. Since 1985, Youth Insearch has provided effective support to over 32,000 of these most at risk young Australians.

Rural Australians are battling more than their metropolitan counterparts. They have faced droughts, floods, bushfires and now a global pandemic with insufficient mental health and wellbeing support. The 2020 National Mental Health Commission submission finds:

“On almost any indicator, people living outside of metropolitan areas experience inequity both in terms of their health and in getting access to appropriate services” p.3

We commend the Federal Government's efforts to begin addressing this unique challenge – now is the time to act at scale.

In 2018 Orygen reported stigma as the top barrier to help-seeking for 32% of Australia's rural young people⁹. Mission Australia and Reach Australia found from their youth survey the key practical barriers are affordability (48.1%) and accessibility (28%). The New South Wales Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) identified through its consultations that peer-to-peer support is what young people want and find most effective. Youth Insearch was recommended twice as an example of this – from ACYP (Recommendation 1.3) and the young people surveyed (Recommendation 8.1).

Youth Insearch has started the transition to a PlaceBased Model of youth peer-to-peer support programs, with three independently evaluated trials. This involved placing one Aboriginal youth support worker in Moree, New South Wales, and three social workers in Queensland in partnership with Dalby State High School, Chinchilla and Tara High Schools, and headspace Bundaberg, supported with funding from the Federal Government via Try Test Learn funding, the Tim Fairfax Foundation and Tenix Foundation. We need funding to scale and respond to the youth mental health crisis we face.

⁵ https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1-facts_figures.pdf

⁶ [https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=)

⁷ [https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=)

⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6719075/>

⁹ [https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=.](https://www.orygen.org.au/Policy/Policy-Areas/Government-policy-service-delivery-and-workforce/Service-delivery/Accessibility-and-quality-of-mental-health-service/Orygen-Accessibility-quality-mental-health-service?ext=)

THE SOLUTION:

The Youth Insearch program is specifically designed by young people, for young people. We support at-risk young people aged 14 to 20 living in rural Australia. We will place Youth Insearch Social Workers in the identified communities to embed positive peer support networks to achieve the most impact. Leveraging Youth Insearch peer-to-peer programs to rapidly build trust and engage with young people, supporting them in addressing childhood trauma, seeking mental health support and re-engage in education and employment.

The Social Worker will work one-to-one with young people and support them in attending Youth Insearch weekend workshops, where they participate in peer-led group therapy, addressing trauma, and removing the underlying causes of anti-social and self-destructive behaviour. The young people return from the weekend and continue to be supported by the Social Worker and their peer group, attending weekly peer-led Youth Insearch support groups, setting goals and engaging with additional support services to achieve sustained and permanent change.

80% of the young people will make significant positive change in behaviour including increased engagement in education and employment. Many of these young people will complete the Youth Insearch Leadership Training Program and become Youth Leaders. The Youth Leaders will continue to support the Youth Insearch program in their community. They will continue to volunteer for an average of 7 years, providing sustained peer support networks and significant positive change within the community.

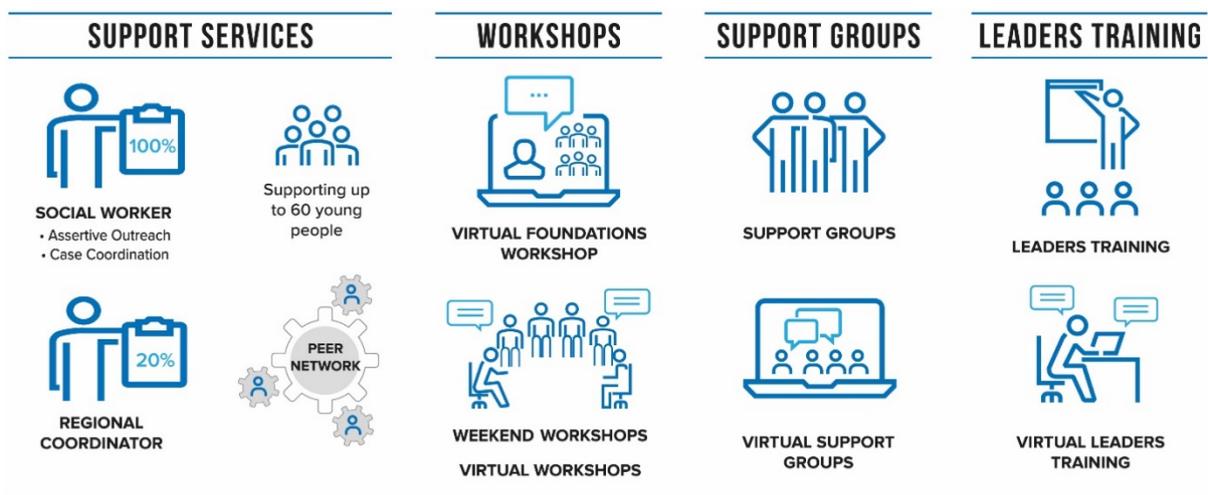


Figure 1-Youth Insearch Place Based Model

Youth Insearch will deploy 25 full-time social workers; five social workers will be placed in each of these high need regions across Australia:

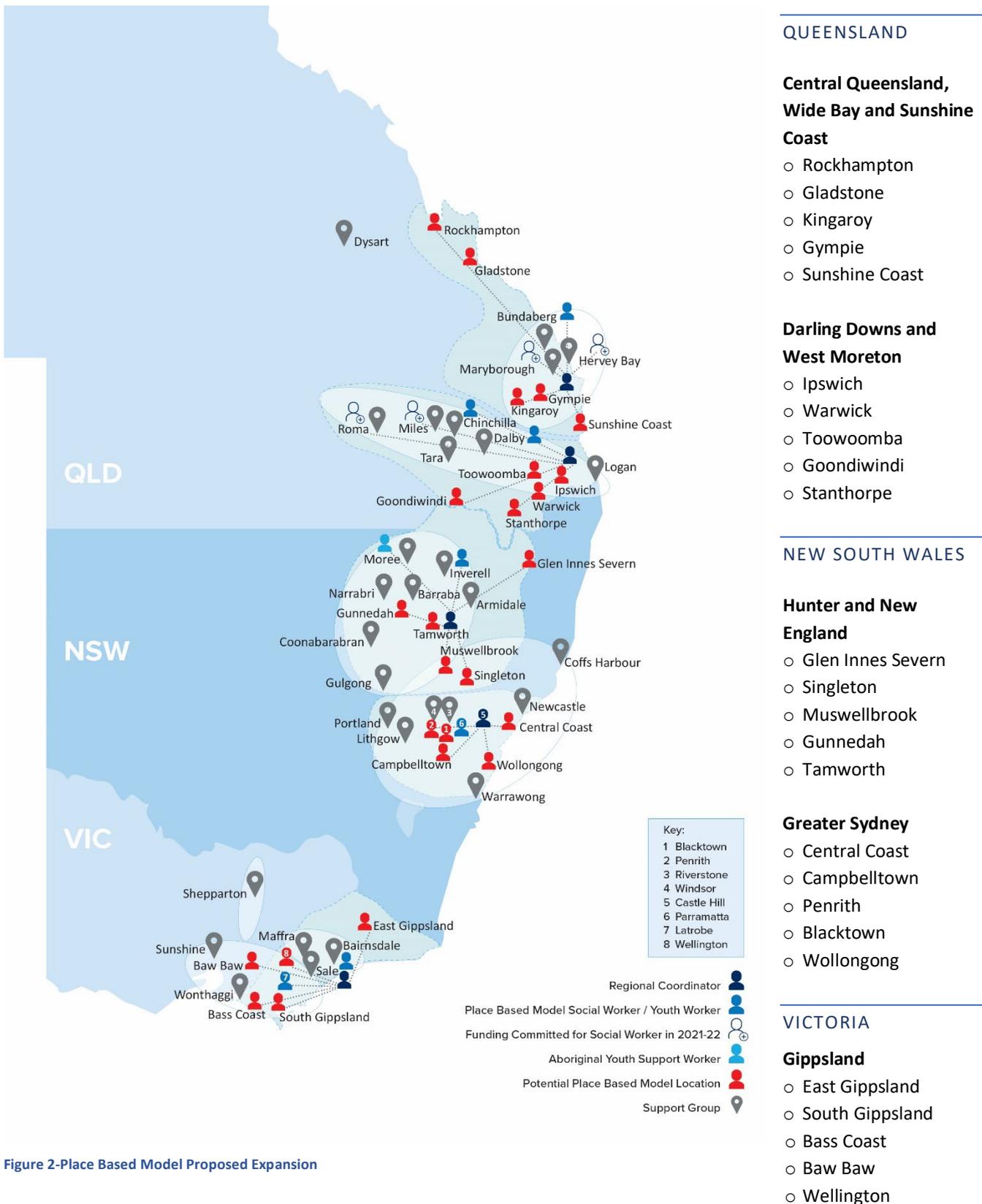


Figure 2-Place Based Model Proposed Expansion

These locations are based on need identified by our regional coordinators working extensively across these regions. Each Social Worker will have a caseload of 60 young people, equivalent to 1,500 young people supported annually – a 128% increase on our current support levels.

YOUTH INSEARCH TRACK RECORD IN DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

The Council of Australian Governments' *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* emphasised the importance of enhancing access to appropriate support services for recovery, where abuse and neglect has occurred, and aimed to improve support for people leaving care. Youth Insearch is an evidence-based, award-winning, comprehensive early intervention program that improves the lives of the most vulnerable young people across rural Australia. Since 1985, our organisation has worked tirelessly with over 32,000 young people in communities across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Youth Insearch supports young people that otherwise fall between the cracks. We are trusted by service providers and governments to deliver local support for the most vulnerable young people. Our model ensures each young person can embark on a program of change while remaining within their own home and school environment.

The Youth Insearch program is based upon attendance at monthly weekend workshops and weekly support meetings held in the participants' local area. Our team supports young people to attend other related services including headspace, school, local youth services and more through strong locally created referral pathways and stepped care. Peer-to-peer support enables them to build their own, better future.

Youth councils from all the regions in which we currently operate provide continuous input to our leadership to ensure all programs and efforts meet young people's needs as they evolve and as they change, region to region.

Our 19 professional and highly experienced staff and trained volunteers deliver our proven model that helps young people stay connected in their communities while overcoming their own challenges. Together with local services and communities, we deliver a suite of targeted programs that arm young people with the ability to speak up about their mental health and seek help, so they can create a better future.

Our team is focused on helping young people who are experiencing:

- Dysfunctional homes
- Sexual, emotional or physical abuse
- Exiting juvenile incarceration
- Exiting youth care programs
- Mental health challenges

As a result, they face a wide range of additional issues from alcohol and other drug abuse to homelessness to emotional distress and beyond.

RECENT EVENTS HAVE EXACERBATED AND HIGHLIGHTED THE NEED FOR YOUTH INSEARCH

We commend the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health's comments after the devastating Black Summer fires:

"We need to ensure the trauma and mental health needs of our people are supported in a way like we never have before." National Bushfire Recovery Agency *Journey to Recovery* p.17

After this disaster, young people reported their need for Youth Insearch to the New South Wales Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP). In its July 2020 review Youth Insearch was mentioned in two recommendations:

1. Raising Awareness recommendation 1.3, from ACYP
Support for Youth Insearch programs in schools that encourage Peer to Peer support and training for children and young people.

8. Mental Health Recommendation 8.1 from children and young people
Mental health and youth peer support programs to enable young people to support each other during and after disaster events (for example, Youth Insearch).

Then, in the wake of COVID19, these needs have continued to grow.

In March 2020, our experienced team immediately responded by making 6,126 support calls totalling 31,586 minutes. Within 48 hours, we re-developed our programs into effective online versions. With our partners at Telstra and Salesforce we have gone on to deliver 463 weekly virtual support groups, 26 virtual workshops supporting 526 vulnerable young people through the crisis.

As demand grows with these vulnerable young people, it is more important than ever to find efficient approaches to deliver our Australian-grown example of world-leading innovation in youth social and mental health support.

Youth Insearch participants

Approximately 30% of participants are Indigenous and 10% are culturally and linguistically diverse. The demographic of previous participants includes over 80% still attending school and over 50% female. Prevalence of drug (25%) and alcohol (48%) use and of violent behaviour and crime (64%) among young people involved in the program is high. Many have suicidal tendencies, with one in two (50%) reported having suicidal thoughts prior to involvement in Youth Insearch, and one in three (32%) reported having attempted suicide (Rintoul, et al., 2008).

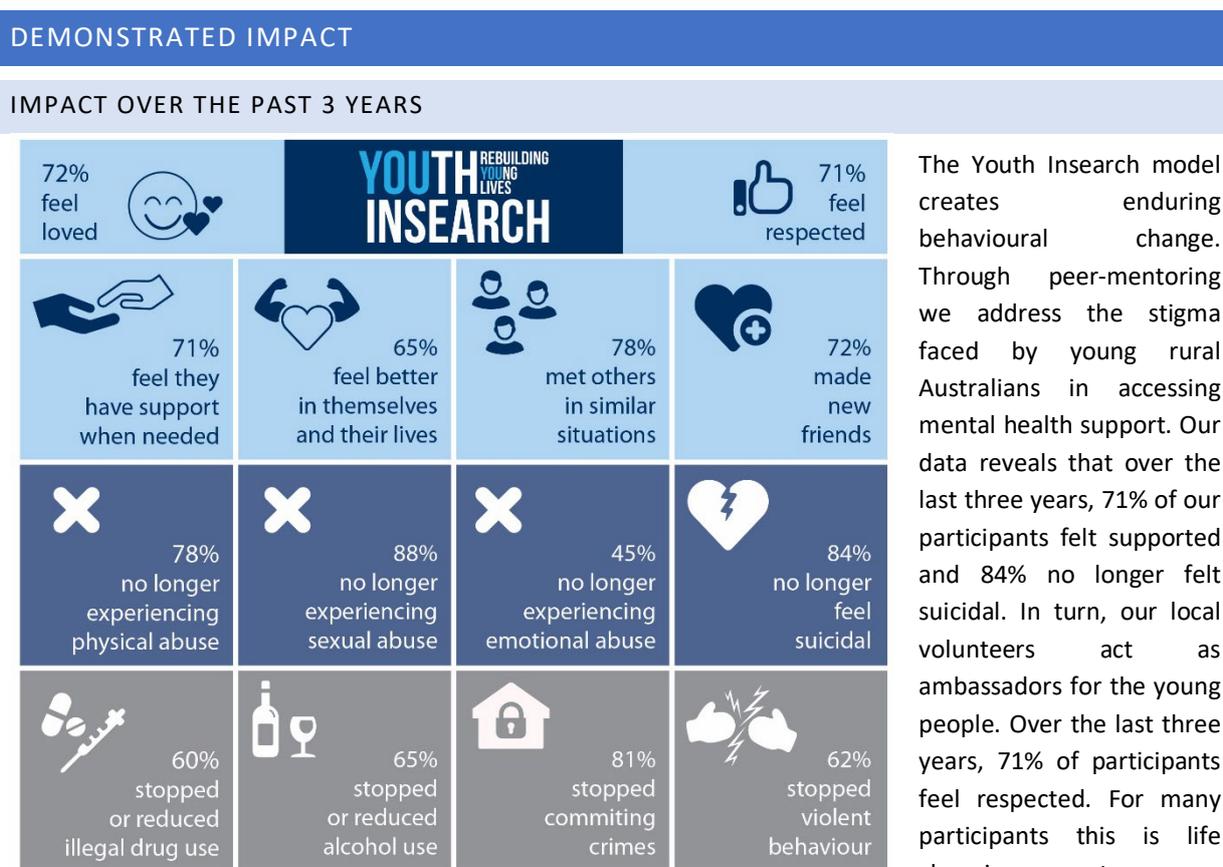


Figure 3 -3 year outcomes

Past participant Simon shared “without Youth Insearch I don’t know how far in life I would have gotten or even if I would still be alive”. Another young participant Marlie explained “Youth Insearch gave me the strategies to cope when I was not okay”. Youth Insearch gives young people the safety and support to follow through on their journey of change.

Dr Maja Moensted is currently conducting a cooperative inquiry research study, commissioned through the Try Test Learn Tranch 2 Fund on the effectiveness of peer-to-peer interventions. Using grounded theory narrative analysis Moensted found that:

- Our programs increase social integration
- Sharing stories facilitates connection and provides opportunities to explore complex situations
- Young people report an increase in resilience and ability to create support systems for their own self-care
- Our programs provide different avenues for belonging by accessing a peer community that does not identify them as ‘misfits’
- Our programs facilitate the development of new relationships, which promotes the introduction of new knowledge, opportunities and resources
- Young people describe feeling enabled to grow in self-confidence and build strong identities
- Young people are socialised into accepting help – help seeking is normalised
- Young people describe personal growth and healing through relational peer support
- Role modelling provides a scaffold for young people to gradually reposition themselves as survivors and experts¹⁰

NEW PLACE-BASED MODEL – THE MOST RECENT IMPACT REPORTS

The Australian Families Institute research investigating Youth Insearch programs found 80% of participants improved their behaviour as a result of the current model and that the changes were long lasting. Pilots of the Place Based Model through the Federal Government Try Test Learn Innovation Fund and through partnerships with Dalby Chinchilla and Tara High Schools and Bundaberg headspace, we have made the following observations:

- ❖ **Participants nearly doubled sustained employment – from 26% to 50% beyond six months**
- ❖ **We can support five times more young people when support worker is local**
- ❖ **The quality of delivery is improved with the benefits of supported professionals**
- ❖ **We have halved the delivery cost per young person.**

These results or better can be expected in expanding our unique model across Australia, to those communities with the greatest identified need.

Even without counting the value of crimes not committed; law enforcement not needed; and no drug and alcohol related hospitalisation, over 10 years, we calculate an 18 times multiplier effect for every dollar invested in the Youth Insearch program. This has long-term benefits for individuals and communities by ending welfare-dependence, improving mental health and bettering social connection.

¹⁰ Moensted, Maja. (2019). Youth programs' ability to meaningfully engage with marginalised young people's social citizenship aspirations. *Journal of Youth Studies*. 2. 44-56.

AMOUNT REQUESTED

In alignment with the Federal Government's *Fifth Mental Health Action Plan Response to Recommendations* Recommendation 10: Improve Service Equity for Rural and Remote Communities through Place-Based Models of Care we are seeking \$21.3 million over 4 years to fund our implementation of the Youth Insearch Place Based Model across 25 communities across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Total operational budget \$21.3 million over 4 years.

Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Total 4 years
2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
\$5,181,238	\$5,223,959	\$5,424,740	\$5,483,815	\$21,313,752

DELIVERABLES

The Place Based Model will enable Youth Insearch to reach 150% more young people than we currently reach. Our expected reach through the Place Based Model is detailed in the below table.

	Per Year	Four years
Total young people	1,500	6,000
Total workshops attendances	3,000	12,000
Total support group attendances	24,000	96,000
Total instances of support	90,000	360,000
Average Hours of Support per young person	95	95
Cost per hour of support	\$39.60	\$39.60

IN SUMMARY:

These results or better can be expected in delivering our unique model across Australia. The benefits of our programs do not just create better lives for individual young people. Youth Insearch creates safer communities.

Youth Insearch supports young people identified as at risk of long-term welfare dependence that costs the Federal Government \$306,000 per person, estimated by the Australian Priority Investment Approach. This expansion of the Place Based model will support 6,000 young people over four years. We expect 80% of the young people to make significant positive change in their lives. Diverting just 20% from a life of welfare dependence will achieve approximately \$383,634,000 in lifetime cost savings, before including the cost of damages, policing, welfare services and more required by young people not supported by this life changing program.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our proposal in person and answer queries.

Stephen Lewin
Chief Executive Officer

Youth Insearch Foundation
(02) 8855 9700