





From Service Users to Change Makers

Youth-led advocacy and co-design at the Our Place Youth Foyer

Our Place Youth Advisory Group · Canberra



Our Place Youth Foyer, Canberra

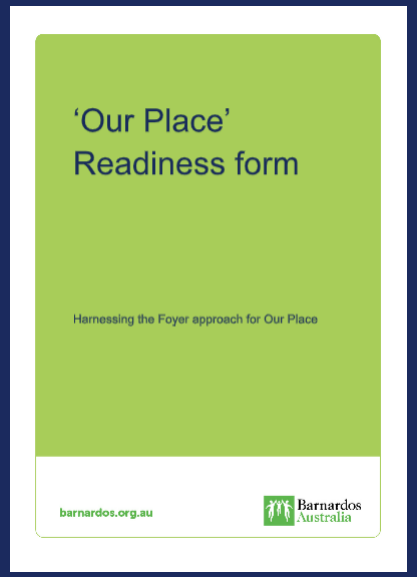
- Opened 2011, up to 25 residents

- Youth Advisory Group formed early 2025:
  - 3-5 members
  - Gives residents a voice in how Our Place is run & ensures young people are part of the decisions that affect us.

Today:

1. Service-level impacts – intake paperwork
2. System-level impacts – funding advocacy
3. Why and how to listen to young people

Service-Level Impact: The Intake Form



Every YAG member had filled out this form themselves, so we could tell staff how it reads to a young person in crisis.

Family and social support questions

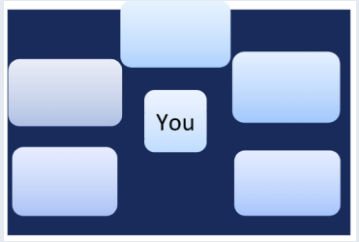
THE ISSUE

Questions assumed these supports existed → highlighted how isolated and unsupported many of us were.

BEFORE

"What is your relationship like with your family?"

"Who are the important people in your life right now? Who are the people you rely on?"



AFTER

"Do you have a relationship with your family that you would like us to know about?"

Diagram removed so young people can write as much or as little as they want. Added:

"There is no pressure to feel like you need to be able to name anyone here. We hope that you might be able to find your people here at Our Place."

'Our Place' Program

Service-Level Impact: The Intake Form

AOD questions

THE ISSUE

Deficit-based questions + felt like honesty could cost you your place.

WHAT WE ASKED FOR

Reword to balance what staff need to know and ability for young people to answer honestly and safely.

BEFORE

"Do you think your alcohol or drug use would impact your participation in the program, or the participation of others?"

AFTER

"Are you worried about your alcohol or drug use?"

Mental health questions

THE ISSUE

Deficit-based questions + confronting or triggering to answer alone.

WHAT WE ASKED FOR

Reword and soften the questions, and ask them in person during intake, not on the form.

We understood why staff needed this information – so we asked for changes to how, when and where it is asked.

System-level impact: advocating for funding

Feb 2025

- YAG formed
- Residents told the foyer's funding ends in 6 months
- Youth Homelessness Matters Day (YHMD) planning

Apr 2025

- YAG writes to politicians attending YHMD
- YHMD event

May 2025

Months of work with 4 ACT MLAs and a federal politician: meetings, media releases, the Legislative Assembly

Sept 2025

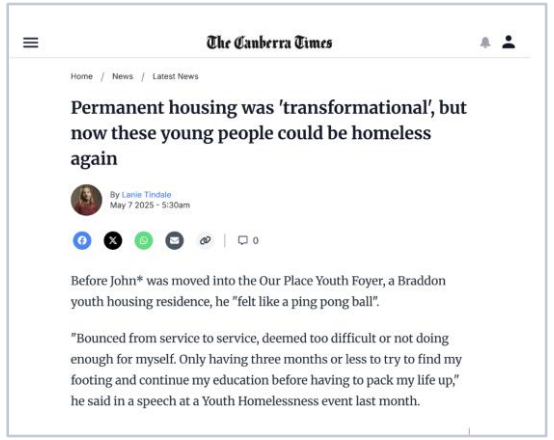
New contract signed for the foyer

May 2026

Motion passed to create an ACT Youth Homelessness Strategy







The Canberra Times

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Permanent housing was 'transformational', but now these young people could be homeless again

By Lanie Tindale
May 7 2025 - 5:30am

Before John* was moved into the Our Place Youth Foyer, a Braddon youth housing residence, he "felt like a ping pong ball".

"Bounced from service to service, deemed too difficult or not doing enough for myself. Only having three months or less to try to find my footing and continue my education before having to pack my life up," he said in a speech at a Youth Homelessness event last month.

Why young people's voices matter



Lived experience offers a perspective staff can't

Young people's insight into the service is essential to improving it.



Our voices can drive systemic change

When young people are recognised as lived experts, our impact extends beyond individual services to the wider community.



We are ready to lead

We are resourceful, courageous and willing to challenge the status quo. What we need is meaningful opportunity and the right support.

What we need



Real decision-making input

What we say needs to carry weight and shape decisions. It shouldn't be a box-ticking exercise.



Trust

We need to know what we say won't affect our care, that you'll act on what we say and that you keep your word.



Support

Lived experience work means revisiting some of our hardest moments - we need support to engage fully and compensation for our time and expertise.



Trauma-informed participation

Choice about what we share, flexibility to step back when we need to and return when we're ready.







Our call to action

Services

Build a youth advisory group with real resources and act on what it tells you.

Policymakers

Bring young people with lived experience into the room before decisions are made and fund that work.

Everyone

Challenge deficit-based language, assumptions and stereotypes. Treat young people as experts in our own lives.