

EDUCATIONfirstYOUTHfoyer

# Social Connections Offer Conceptual Framework

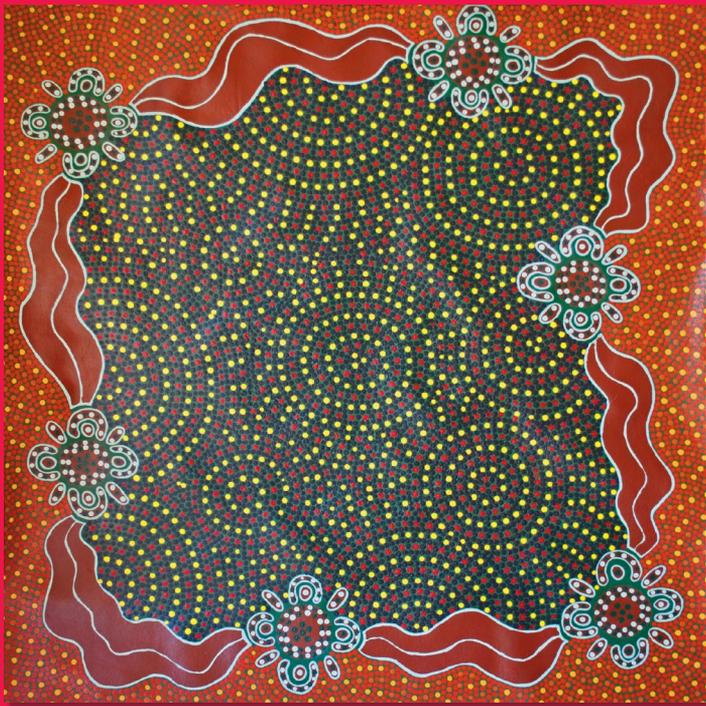


Brotherhood of St Laurence  
Working for an Australia free of poverty



IT'S TIME TO END  
HOMELESSNESS





**On the cover**

'Six Degrees of Separation' by Miss Christinaray Nadya Weetra  
(Warumungu, Arrernte; b. 1992, Darwin, NT)

*'Just like the meaning of the painting's name I wanted to show how everything around us is connected to each other, how we go to the same places as the people before us. That's why I did children, women and men sitting around the meeting ground, in each and every place, to represent a type of cycle we all go through.'*

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The Education First Youth Foyer Social Connections Offer Conceptual Framework has been developed in partnership by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Hanover Welfare Services, which in July 2015 merged with HomeGround Services to form Launch Housing.

A downloadable PDF of this Conceptual Framework is available @ [efyfoyers.org.au](http://efyfoyers.org.au).  
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The Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer’s practice approach, including the Social Connections Offer, has been greatly inspired by the work of Colin Falconer, Director of Innovation and Strategy at the United Kingdom (UK) Foyer Federation. An extraordinarily innovative and creative thinker, Colin shared his ideas in a spirit of great generosity, openness and dialogue. His ideas have inspired Hanover Welfare Services (Hanover)\* and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) to seed and develop a uniquely Australian version of Open Talent, in collaboration with the UK Foyer Federation, which is embedded in each of the 6 Service Offers (see opposite page).

The EFY Foyer Social Connections Offer also draws on the PERMA model (see p. 4) developed by Professor Martin Seligman (2011) and adopted and modified by Geelong Grammar School (GGS) into a Positive Education framework. PERMA is drawn from extensive and diverse research in the broad field of positive psychology. In the GGS context it is embedded into the pedagogy and school culture. Reflecting this influence on our thinking, the EFY Foyer’s description of PERMA draws on the extensive and comprehensive work of GGS.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the Education First Youth Foyer Service Development team and those staff who attended meetings, engaged in discussions and provided feedback on the content of this conceptual framework.

In addition, we would like to extend our thanks to the Bouverie Centre, Victoria’s Family Institute, which has provided invaluable feedback on the drafts of this Conceptual Framework. Bouverie’s work focuses both on the fundamental role of the family and alternative social networks and on the power of relationships to foster social, emotional and mental wellbeing. Bouverie will also be involved in implementing this Offer through the provision of training for EFY Foyer staff in how to engage with, and attend to the needs of, family members in service contexts, as well as acting as a referral point for those young people seeking family therapy or access to family mediation, counselling and reconciliation services.

*Please note:* Hanover merged with HomeGround Services in July 2015 to form Launch Housing. This publication, and subsequent published material related to the EFY Foyers, will refer to Launch Housing rather than Hanover.

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## Abbreviations

<b>BSL</b>	Brotherhood of St Laurence	<b>EFY Foyer</b>	Education First Youth Foyer
<b>CRIL</b>	Certificate of Recognition of Informal Learning	<b>FaHCSIA</b>	Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (former Australian Government Department)
<b>DEECD</b>	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)	<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>DI</b>	Developing Independence	<b>TAFE</b>	Technical and Further Education
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Human Services (Victoria)	<b>YDW</b>	Youth Development Worker

# About the EFY Foyer 6 Service Offers Conceptual Frameworks

A key component of the Education First Youth Foyer Model is the provision of 6 Service Offers in the areas of:



## Education

Creating a bridge to mainstream education for young people



## Employment

Providing young people with access to real-world work experience and job opportunities



## Health and Wellbeing

Focusing on developing young people's capacity to thrive



## Social Connections

Encouraging thriving relationships that support young people to achieve their goals



## Civic Participation

Facilitating young people to give back to their community



## Housing and Living Skills

Assisting young people to access and sustain housing

The inclusion and development of these 6 Offers in the EFY Foyer Model is grounded in research and practice evidence that highlights the role of these domains in facilitating young people's successful transition to adulthood.

Conceptual frameworks have been developed for each of the 6 Offers, which provide an addendum to the EFY Foyer Practice Framework.<sup>1</sup> They detail the different components and processes of each Offer, the rationale for their development and delivery, and demonstrate how the Offers link to each other and to the broader EFY Foyer Model and the Open Talent (OT) approach currently being used in the EFY Foyers.

As such, they provide a more detailed understanding of the rationale behind the development and delivery of the Service Offer components of the model and the evidence base upon which they are built.

This conceptual framework for the Social Connections Offer also outlines the practice model, the operational approaches and some of the tools that can be used to implement this particular Offer. It is designed for use by EFY Foyer practitioners, educators, those developing and delivering youth services and other stakeholders, including government and non-government agencies, businesses and philanthropists.

<sup>1</sup> S. Mallett, S. James, N. McTiernan & J. Buick 2014, *Education First Youth Foyer Practice Framework*, Hanover Welfare Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), Melbourne.

## The EFY Foyer Model

Developed by the BSL and Launch Housing, with funding from the Victorian Government, the EFY Foyer Model is currently being piloted in three Victorian EFY Foyers – at the TAFE (Technical and Further Education) campuses of Holmesglen, in the eastern Melbourne suburb of Glen Waverley, at Kangan, in the northern suburb of Broadmeadows, and at Shepparton in central Victoria.

The Model has a number of key features that differentiate it from other Foyers in Australia and overseas:

- 1 Education First** – Engagement in education and/or training is the priority. Stable accommodation and support are the means to facilitate young people's engagement in education and employment.
- 2 An Open Talent** approach – EFY Foyers embed an Open Talent approach in all practices, processes and tools from the development stage. Founded on advantaged thinking this approach promotes and builds young people's skills and capacities.
- 3 A multidisciplinary, 24/7 staff team** – Who work to coach and develop young people rather than adopting a traditional case management approach.
- 4 Mainstream** – EFY Foyers prioritise engagement in mainstream education and services, as demonstrated by:
  - their location on TAFE campuses, which ensures they are comparable to other university-style student accommodation
  - their engagement with the 6 Service Offers.
- 5 Viable Model** – With student accommodation for 40 people, EFY Foyers have sufficient scale to ensure:
  - the financial viability of the Model
  - the potential for replication and reform to programs for youth in transition
  - the ability to attract philanthropic and corporate funding, resources and opportunities.

**6 Evidence informed** – Developed, implemented, reviewed and evaluated with reference to available evidence on the experience, needs and good practice models for young people.

**7 Governed through 'top-down and bottom-up' partnerships** – This includes essential government departments: Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Human Services (DHS), community service agencies, education and training institutions, employer bodies, local government, business, service clubs and philanthropy, and community programs. These partnerships are underpinned by key, signed-off agreements.

## Key terminology

### Why language matters

How we view and value young people in the wider society influences the way we work with them, which in turn influences their ability to access opportunities and resources. If we consider engagement in education, employment and independent housing as critical achievements for transitioning young people, then service offerings designed to realise these outcomes are crucial –and changes to public perceptions about young people will follow. Conversely, if we define young people as at risk, provide crisis management and report on crisis interventions, this provides wider society with a very different view of them.

The following key terms provide an overview of some of the terminology used by those involved with the EFY Foyers to develop and promote the capacities, talents and potential of young people.

### Advantaged Thinking

Advantaged Thinking is a shift in the way we think about, and respond to, young people experiencing disadvantage and exclusion. It is a shift away from deficit, disadvantaged or problem-saturated thinking and acting, towards identifying, developing and, most importantly, investing in the skills, capabilities and assets of these young people.

Through the EFY Foyer's 6 Service Offers young people's skills are identified, developed and invested in to enable them to build sustainable livelihoods. The goal is to build young people's capacity to make positive decisions in their lives and to think and act on their own behalf. It is reflected in the language that EFY Foyer staff use when having conversations with, and describing, the young people with whom they work.

### **Open Talent**

The Open Talent approach was developed by Colin Falconer of the Foyer Federation in the UK and is founded on the understanding that everyone has talents and abilities – not just those people in elite sporting, artistic or academic programs – and that not all of these talents are recognised or valued in the same way. For some, especially those struggling to transition to adulthood, there has been little or no investment in building their talents or skills. Open Talent asserts that instead of investing in these young people's problems, the community needs to re-direct investment to building and nurturing their abilities and harnessing them for personal as well as social good.

### **Service-connected**

To avoid the language of disadvantage, a key term introduced in this document is 'service-connected'. This term is used to describe young people who, as a result of disadvantage, are clients of the State and/or are supported by the community services system (e.g., DHS, Centrelink and/or Department of Justice).

This term is considered to be a more accurate and positive descriptor of a young person than terms like 'disadvantaged' or 'disconnected'. It is a temporary descriptor as it is the aim of the EFY Foyer for students to transition to independence so that they will no longer be 'service-connected' but 'independent young people who are connected' to mainstream community resources, their peers, places of employment and/or institutions of learning.

### **Family-connected**

The term 'family-connected' is used across the 6 Service Offers to differentiate between young people who are service-connected and supported and those who are primarily connected and supported by their families. Family-connected young people represent the majority of youth in Australia – they have 'good enough' support and are largely independent from the welfare system. They have a safe and stable family home, at least one parent, guardian or relative on whom they can rely and turn to for support, a social and/or professional network they can utilise if required and relative economic security.

### **Mainstream services**

The term 'mainstream services' refers to services that are available to the general community and typically designed, delivered funded and/or regulated by government. This includes health services such as hospitals and GPs, as well as specialist mental health services, State schools, TAFEs and public universities, national job service agencies and careers curriculum delivered in schools and available on careers websites.

### **Mainstream education**

'Mainstream education' includes both compulsory and post-compulsory education. It includes those opportunities that are State regulated, government supported, and designed for the educational development of young people. For example, both primary and secondary State schooling are regulated by the Victorian Department of Education, funded by the Victorian Government and designed specifically for children and young people aged 5–18.

Mainstream education also includes post-compulsory, tertiary opportunities that are government supported and facilitated by formal, accredited educational institutions, for example, TAFEs, universities and apprenticeships/traineeships, but not private colleges.

## Co-design

Each of the 6 Service Offers has been co-designed, peer reviewed and delivered in partnership with key community or business partners. 'Co-design' refers to a collaborative development and design process to ensure that the proposed initiatives and outcomes are realistic and tangible.

## Shared delivery

The 5 Key Partnerships of the EFY Foyer Model – Business, Government, Services, Community and Philanthropy – provide the foundations for shared-delivery of the EFY Foyer program to, and good outcomes for, students. Developing quality, purposeful and sustainable partnerships is core to the EFY Foyer model, and this is actualised by actively sharing delivery of services and outcomes.

The aim of a shared-delivery model is to ensure that students are included and engaged in mainstream services and programs, as opposed to being relegated to community-delivered alternatives. It is therefore critical that the EFY Foyers and staff do not provide and deliver all of the requisite activities, services and programs to students, but rather that a number of key external partnerships are developed to share their delivery across each of the 6 Service Offers. This will serve to broaden students' networks, increase their social and personal capabilities, and work against welfare or service dependency.

## PERMA (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement)

PERMA is a Positive Education framework that is drawn from the positive psychology movement, in particular the work of Martin Seligman.<sup>2</sup> The EFY Foyers have adopted a version of PERMA based on the Geelong Grammar School (GGS) model,<sup>3</sup> which focuses on six key domains for optimal wellbeing: positive emotion, positive engagement, positive health, positive purpose, positive relationships and positive accomplishment. The EFY Foyer has adapted this GGS model and created its own key domains – the 6 Service Offers.

## Flourishing

Flourishing is the end goal of the PERMA model, with the six associated domains of PERMA central to the promotion of flourishing. Quite simply, flourishing refers to feeling good and doing good; it is the sense that life is going well, even in the face of difficult emotions, circumstances or experiences.<sup>4</sup> At EFY Foyers, students should be flourishing when they are happy, have strong social relationships, can identify and reach their goals, are confident and valued by others, and can give something back to their community and others.

## Health

The World Health Organization defines health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'.<sup>5</sup>

## Wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined as the experience of good mental, physical, emotional and social health, and the 'ability to have a good quality of life'.<sup>6</sup> Wellbeing is a subjective experience that is related to experiencing good health.

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<sup>2</sup> M. E. P. Seligman 2011, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing – And How to Achieve It*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London.

<sup>3</sup> Geelong Grammar School (GGS) 2013, 'Model for Positive Education'. Available at: <http://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/Model-for-Positive-Education>.

<sup>4</sup> Seligman 2011, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) 1946, *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization*, WHO, Geneva.

<sup>6</sup> R. Anderson 2012, 'What is health and wellbeing?', *Training Journal*, May:28–32

## Introduction to the 6 Service Offers

### Purpose of the 6 Service Offers

Each of the 6 Service Offers are stand-alone programs within the Education First Youth Foyer Model, but are all also interconnected. Through their engagement with the Offers, Foyer students will build the foundations for a sustainable livelihood through:

- developing their talents, skills and qualifications to further their personal goals and aspirations
- accumulating an Address Book of contacts and networks that builds their social capital and social connection
- developing the understanding, skills and capacities needed to thrive.

Each of the Offers invests in structural and individual level interventions to achieve these aims. This includes access to training, activities, opportunities, networks and resources that are flexibly delivered and tailored to each student's needs and aspirations over their time in the EFY Foyer and after they leave.

### Common features of the 6 Service Offers

The 6 Service Offers are all structured around the key components of the EFY Foyer Model and, as such, each share the following features.

#### **Underpinned by an Open Talent and Advantaged Thinking approach**

The OT and Advantaged Thinking approaches articulate a new way of working with young people who have experienced disadvantage. Both approaches invest in the potential of young people by providing opportunities that foster the development of their talents and abilities.

In the EFY Foyers, OT and Advantaged Thinking are operationalised through the 6 Service Offers. The Offers focus on developing young people's assets, on co-creating solutions, and on providing real jobs, real education and real community connections.<sup>7</sup> The 6 Offers integrate individual, familial, communal and structural ways of working to achieve sustainable outcomes for young people.

#### **Providing real-world and mainstream opportunities**

Each of the 6 Service Offers is grounded in providing 'real-world' and 'mainstream' opportunities. 'Real-world' opportunities are those that are readily available to young people who are family-connected, but which are often denied to those who experience homelessness and disadvantage. Many young people who are estranged from their families are also excluded from mainstream services. The EFY Foyer connects these young people to mainstream services and opportunities including, but not limited to: mainstream education delivered at expert and high-quality institutions; informed careers advice, work experience and meaningful employment; and physical health and recreation activities (e.g., gyms, sporting teams, specialist classes). These opportunities are considered vital to enabling young people to thrive.

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<sup>7</sup> Mallett et al. 2014, op. cit.

### **Co-designed, shared delivery and facilitated by 5 Key Partnerships**

Diverse, strong and effective community connection and partnerships are essential for the Foyer to deliver real-world opportunities to students through each of the 6 Service Offers, and to leveraging access to resources, extended networks and services. The 5 Key Partnerships of the EFY Foyer model – Business, Government, Services, Community and Philanthropy – provide the foundations for the development and shared delivery of services and outcomes to students.

In addition to the provision of resources and opportunities, these partnerships are critical to the design and delivery of each of the Offers, which are co-designed, peer reviewed and delivered in partnership with an expert institution, organisation or business.

### **Fostering mutual accountability**

Together, the 6 Service Offers constitute a program of activities and opportunities at the EFY Foyer that are formalised in a reciprocal ‘something for something deal’ between students and the EFY Foyer staff. ‘The Deal’ is an agreement between the young person and the EFY Foyer that activates the rights and responsibilities of both parties. Students are primarily accountable for remaining engaged in education, training and employment, contributing to the wider community and for responsibly maintaining their accommodation within the Foyer. The EFY Foyer is responsible for promoting a safe and secure environment that gives students access to opportunities, resources and networks to enable them to use their talents and to make personal change.

The reciprocity inherent in ‘the Deal’ expresses shared ownership of the Foyer program. By holding high expectations of the students, ‘the Deal’ demonstrates that young people are valued citizens with something to offer the community. It also provides them with opportunities to advocate for policy and program change. As such, ‘the Deal’ aims to empower students and promote the transition to independence.

### **Providing a core skill set**

In addition to opportunities, networks and resources, young people need key skills, assets, attributes and character capabilities to make the transition to adulthood and to flourish. These skills are needed to participate in education, in work and in the broader community. Through engagement with the 6 Service Offers, students will develop core personal and social skills, as well as capabilities that foster agency. A range of practical skills relevant to each particular Offer will also be developed. Each of the Offers will contribute to, and reinforce, the development of particular skills while also demonstrating their use in a range of contexts.

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#### *Education First Youth Foyer Key Partnerships*

**B** Business

**S** Services

**P** Philanthropy

**G** Government

**C** Community

## Part 1: Overview and Rationale of the Social Connections Offer

This conceptual framework outlines a new Social Connections Offer that is geared towards young people who are experiencing disadvantage. It sits alongside the five other Service Offers, all of which have been created with the voices and needs of young people front and centre.

As young people transition into adulthood, their desire for independence is often matched by an increased reliance on and connection to others. High-quality supportive relationships and social networks can provide young people with a sense of belonging, and confidence in themselves. These strong bonds with others gives them someone to turn to in times of joy or trouble, and the ability to navigate opportunities as well as to overcome life crises.

Friendships with peers are generally very important to young people.<sup>8</sup> Different from the parent–child relationship, friends tend to be ‘more accepting than parents, who are necessarily more oriented toward the future and concerned with the potentially negative consequences of the child’s behavior’.<sup>9</sup> Among close friends, young people can feel a sense of acceptance, mutual trust, and comfort.<sup>10</sup> Together, they also have the opportunity to explore their identities and enhance those social and emotional skills (e.g., conflict resolution) that are vital to developing and sustaining future relationships.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the increased importance of friends, family remains an important part of young people’s lives. In families that function well, young people are encouraged and supported to pursue their interests, achieve their goals, follow clear expectations regarding behaviour and responsibilities, and emulate positive

adult role models. As a result, they feel well cared for and safe, and can develop positive identities, strong social and emotional skills, and a clear vision for their future.

Research has also shown that even young people who are estranged from their families recognise the importance of maintaining these relationships over the long term and seek out services to support them to do so. For example, the Youth Coalition of ACT’s investigation into what young people with complex needs thought of the case management they received in the youth service sector found that many wanted to maintain a connection with their family, but felt they needed extra support to address family issues. One young person in the investigation noted:

*Some workers reckon that if we’re out of home its because we hate our folks. That’s not right – we just need time out. They’ve gotta help us keep up with our families, keep ‘em involved, or they’ve got it all wrong (Luke, 15)*<sup>12</sup>

Another young person indicated:

*I wasn’t getting on with my mum and dad but I wanted that bad. They’re part of my life and it was really good that [my worker] made sure they stayed involved (Cassie, 16)*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2011, *Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2011*, Cat. No. PHE 140, AIHW, Canberra.

<sup>9</sup> R. Crosnoe 2000, ‘Friendships in childhood and adolescence: The life course and new directions’, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(4):377–91.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> T. Moore 2004, *What Young People Want: Responses to a Survey with Young People about Case Management*, Youth Coalition of the ACT, Canberra, p. 14. Available at: <https://www.youthcoalition.net/dmdocuments/whatyoungpeoplewant.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

Apart from family and friends, young people often increase their interactions in a range of social environments, broadening their circle of relationships in both the school and community settings.<sup>14</sup> A growing body of research indicates that having a sense of belonging and connectedness to school is important for young people's development, as it has been found to be 'positively related to self-esteem, academic engagement, academic achievement, motivation, and adjustment in school'.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, being well connected and supported by social networks is vital for gaining economic stability and sustainable employment.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the pursuit of greater independence, adolescence is also a time characterised by major personal changes and life transitions. This includes, for instance, physical maturation, exploration of self-identity and the development of reasoning skills. As noted by the World Health Organization, 'while adolescence is a time of tremendous growth and

potential, it is also a time of considerable risk during which social contexts exert powerful influences'.<sup>17</sup> Adolescents have to navigate peer pressure and many must also deal with mental health issues. Brain science suggests that many do this at a point in their brain development when they are not yet fully capable of controlling impulses and understanding the consequences of their actions.<sup>18</sup>

Research tells us that young people experiencing major transitions or facing significant crises are better able to navigate all these changes and opportunities, and transition successfully into adulthood, when they are well connected to and supported by social networks (e.g., family, friends, and community members).<sup>19</sup> The support and comfort such networks provide enhance their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy to deal with change, and offer them a secure base from which they can try to put the pieces back together or explore new responsibilities and identities.<sup>20</sup>

“

...being well connected and supported by social networks is vital for gaining economic stability and sustainable employment. ”

<sup>14</sup> E. Oberle, K. A. Schonert-Reichl & B. D. Zumbo 2010, 'Life satisfaction in early adolescence: Personal, neighborhood, school, family, and peer influences', *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 40:889–901.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> World Health Organization 2015, 'Adolescent development'. Available at: [http://www.who.int/maternal\\_child\\_adolescent/topics/adolescence/dev/en/](http://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/adolescence/dev/en/).

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> L. Steinberg 2007, 'Risk taking in adolescence: New perspectives from brain and behavioral science', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(2):55–9.

<sup>19</sup> S. W. Hwang, M. J. Kirst, S. Chiu, G. Tolomiczenko, A. Kiss, L. Cowan & W. Levinson 2009, 'Multidimensional social support and the health of homeless individuals', *Journal of Urban Health*, 86(5):791–803; AIHW 2011, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

## 1.1 Overview of the Social Connections Offer

### Vision

The Social Connections Offer seeks to equip EFY Foyer students with the social and emotional knowledge, skills and opportunities to develop thriving social relationships and networks (including with family, friends, partners and services), and ultimately to have sustainable connections with helpful support and resources.

### Purpose

The Social Connections Offer will provide resources, opportunities and support for EFY Foyers students to:

- 1 Develop meaningful social connections goals and aspirations and plans to achieve them
- 2 Engage in relevant, meaningful activities (e.g., social activities, sporting clubs, support groups, house meetings) to develop positive, supportive connections with adult facilitators and peers through the sharing of interests, thoughts, ideas and feelings
- 3 Access mainstream resources and supports (e.g., family mediation, counselling) relevant to their social connections' goals
- 4 Develop the necessary skills to build and maintain relationships (e.g., communication skills, cooperation, conflict resolution, empathy, understanding social norms)
- 5 Access ongoing opportunities for social connections both in Foyer and post-Foyer.

### Rationale

The social, emotional and relationship skills and capabilities needed to develop positive relationships and social networks are not innate to everyone. Young people typically develop these vital skills in their early years of life within supportive, stable family environments that offer emotional warmth and responsiveness, comfort and security, and opportunities to take risks, make choices and to interact and collaborate with others beyond the family unit. Within these family environments, young people are afforded the opportunity to develop and practise a range of positive skills and capabilities, including self-confidence, emotion regulation, conflict resolution and cooperation, decision-making and self-advocacy, creative problem solving, effective communication, and the ability to trust others. As such, they feel well cared for and safe so are able to develop positive identities and a clear vision for their future.

Not all young people, however, have stable, supportive family environments. For those still in the process of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, the absence of family support can have significant impacts on their social and emotional development, as well as their housing, health, education and employment prospects. The Social Connections Offer presents a new approach to building service-connected young people's social, emotional and relationship skills and to ensuring they have the capacity to build thriving relationships and networks into the future.

The Social Connections Offer is based on evidence that:

- Young people experience homelessness for a variety of reasons, but most commonly because of conflict with parents, violence at home, anxiety and depression, drug or alcohol use (their own or that of another family member) or the desire for independence. This means that they have often lacked the positive influence and role modelling, support, networks and resources needed to develop the skills and capabilities to gain and maintain positive relationships and social networks.

- Supportive family relationships and social connectedness through the developmental years play a key role in shaping young people's identity, and developing the skills and capabilities needed to gain and maintain positive relationships and social networks.
- Youth homelessness services often focus disproportionately on managing young people's problems rather than enhancing their skills to manage solutions now and in to the future.
- Youth homelessness services are generally designed to pick up a young person in a crisis, stabilise them and then move them on as quickly as possible. However, this does not afford young people with the time and attention needed to build meaningful, wide-ranging and long-lasting connections with peers and significant adults.
- Family mediation and reconciliation programs developed for young people experiencing homelessness have been recognised as being important for giving families and young people the skills and capabilities needed to improve or mend relationships. However, at present these are not systematically provided by the service system. Therefore, the important role that family can play in helping young people exit homelessness and successfully transition into adulthood tends to be neglected.

## Supporting social connections through a shared delivery model

The Education First Youth Foyer aims to bring together resources and opportunities from specialist, mainstream and community service organisations to work with service-connected young people to build the skills and experience needed to develop positive social relationships and networks. The EFY Foyer will also provide a secure environment and activities that will help facilitate meaningful, nurturing relationships. This includes, for instance, connecting Foyer students to the following:

- specialists who can provide information and advice on developing and maintaining healthy relationships, and expertise regarding family mediation and counselling
- Youth Development Workers (YDWs) and mentors who can offer coaching and guidance to set and achieve social connections' goals and with whom young people can build one-on-one trusting relationships
- mainstream institutions and groups outside of their existing social networks
- government and community organisations that are able to provide young people with social and recreational opportunities to participate in the broader community.

## 1.2 Why a new social connections offer is needed

Social relationships and community connections are among the key factors that impact both on a person's quality of life and their wider economic, social, psychological and political engagement. While there are a number of avenues available for young people to develop positive social relationships, predominantly through family, schools and community groups, these opportunities are largely predicated on having access to supportive and nurturing family relationships. Most young people who are family-connected receive good enough support from their families. They also benefit from their family's extended networks that provide them with the emotional, social, financial and material supports needed to facilitate achievement, as well as formal and informal information, advice and role modelling. In addition, the security and stability of a family home usually allows young people to take risks and to make mistakes, while maintaining financial and housing stability.

Many young people also experience difficulties related to their social connections at some point during adolescence and will need assistance to help them function through the difficult times. They may withdraw from friends and family, lose interest in group activities in which they were previously involved, and/or begin exhibiting antisocial or defiant behaviour. While this can simply be part of adolescence – that is, establishing an independent sense of self – in some instances it can also be an indication that other underlying problems are occurring in their lives, such as abuse, mental health issues or drug use.<sup>21</sup>

For young people with strong and supportive family connections access to the services they need to navigate such difficulties is generally available. This includes referrals to specialist services through their schools or doctors, participating in counselling or family-focused interventions delivered by private practitioners or family support services, and attending social and

recreational programs for young people delivered by community organisations. Family support also provides young people with gradual social and emotional skill development through the intensive daily emotional support, assistance and advice given by parents or guardians about how to navigate friendships and relationships and how to establish personal boundaries.

By contrast, young people not connected to their families often lack access to even the most basic supports, such as safe home environments and positive, adult role models, and face significant barriers to accessing assistance when they need it. This can very quickly lead to them becoming socially excluded, with serious implications for their educational engagement and their capacity to find employment and housing. According to the Australian Council of Social Services:

*Social exclusion can be defined as the systematic exclusion of people from full participation in economic and social life, in areas such as employment, community services, housing, social relationships or citizenship. It can mean, for example, being unable to afford a visit to the dentist, to find decent housing, to get a job, to upgrade skills, or lacking family and other supports to provide care when a serious illness strikes. More than that, social exclusion is the consequent exclusion from the normal standards of life expected by the community as a consequence of these and other problems. The risk of social exclusion is much higher in 'poverty postcodes' where financial hardship and social exclusion reinforce each other.<sup>22</sup>*

Young people, particularly those with limited or no family support and who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, need new service offerings that will help facilitate and sustain their broader personal, social and community connections. This is particularly vital for those young people who may have left school early or who do not have connections that help smooth their access to people, resources and opportunities.

<sup>21</sup> A. A. Odhayani, W. J. Watson & L. Watson 2013, 'Behavioural consequences of child abuse', *Canadian Family Physician*, 59:831–36; American Psychiatric Association 2013, 'Substance-related and addictive disorders', in *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn, American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC; and S. Carter & L. Clayton 1995, *Coping with Depression*, Rosen, New York.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Council of Social Services 2007, 'Australia Fair: Taking Steps towards a Fair Go for all Australians, National Annual Conference 2007', papers from 22–23 November 2007, Australian Council of Social Services, Strawberry Hills, NSW.

## Homelessness and social connections

Not all young people in Australia have the same opportunities to achieve good social connections. Some, as a result of their life experiences, are put at increased risk of poorer outcomes than their peers.<sup>23</sup> Almost 4,000 young Victorians experience homelessness on any given night.<sup>24</sup> In the July–December quarter 2012 just over 10,000 18–24 year-olds (and 2,500 15–17 year olds) used Specialist Homelessness Services in Victoria.<sup>25</sup>

Young people experience homelessness for a variety of reasons – for example, anxiety and depression, drug or alcohol use (their own or that of another family member) or the desire for independence.<sup>26</sup> One of the leading factors that contributes to young people's homelessness is a difficult family situation.<sup>27</sup> According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, international research on youth homelessness demonstrates 'that characteristics of family environments can lead to homelessness, such as family breakdown, conflict, poor communication, lack of emotional warmth, abuse and neglect'.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, of young people aged 15–24 who sought assistance from homelessness services in Victoria, the main reasons reported for seeking support was due to

'domestic and family violence' (15%) and relationship/family breakdown (13%).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, it has recently been reported that 36 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness in Victoria left their previous accommodation due to 'conflict/family issues'.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that families are always responsible for family breakdown. Many are doing their best to cope with difficult situations and are in need of additional supports or assistance. Not only are negative relationships with adults in the home a risk factor for homelessness, but so too is a lack of connectedness at school, particularly with adults in the school.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately for some young people, school is a negative experience that can be characterised by poor relationships with teachers and peers, limited satisfaction with the school culture, culturally irrelevant curriculum, and a lack of continuity of support for personal needs (e.g., limited access to teacher aides, little assistance dealing with trauma).<sup>32</sup> Difficulties in dealing with negative school experiences can be compounded for those with limited emotional and financial support from their families, such as young people experiencing homelessness. As a result, they often feel alienated and marginalised both from the learning process and from mainstream education, and are at high risk of early school leaving.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) 2011, *How Young People Are Faring 2011*, FYA, Melbourne.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness 2011*, Cat. 2049.0, ABS, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsw/mf/2049.0>.

<sup>25</sup> AIHW 2013, *Specialist Homelessness Services: 2012–2013*, Cat.No. HOU 270, AIHW, Canberra.

<sup>26</sup> S. Mallett, D. Rosenthal, D. Keys & P. Myers 2006, *Moving out, Moving on: Young People's Pathways in and through Homelessness in Melbourne, Key Findings*, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

<sup>27</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) 2012, *Literature Review: Effective Interventions for Working with Young People Who Are Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness*, FaHCSIA, Canberra, p. 3. Available at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06\\_2012/literature\\_review.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2012/literature_review.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> E. Robinson, L. Power & D. Allan 2010, *What Works with Adolescents? Family Connections and Involvement in Interventions for Adolescent Problem Behaviours*, AFRC Briefing No. 16, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> AIHW 2013, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> M. Grace, D. Batterham & C. Cornell 2008, 'Multiple disruptions: Circumstances and experiences of young people living with homelessness and unemployment', *Just Policy*, 48:23–31.

<sup>31</sup> A. Dworsky 2010, 'Supporting homeless youth during the transition to adulthood: Housing-based independent living programs', *The Prevention Researcher*, 17(2):17–20.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) 2012, *Beyond Learn or Earn: Young People Tell How Policy Can Better Support those Who Need it Most*, AYAC, Surrey Hills, NSW. Available at: <http://www.ayac.org.au/learnorearn.html>; Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) 2001, *Innovation and Best Practice in Schools: Review of Literature and Practice*, DETYA, Australian Government, Canberra; L. Davis 2009, 'Homelessness, impoverished language and educational engagement: What's the link?', *Parity*, 22(6):23–4.

<sup>33</sup> G. Considine, I. Watson & R. Hall 2005, *Who's Missing out? Access and Equity in Vocational Education and Training*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide.

In fact, young people experiencing homelessness tend to report that a negative relationship with one or more of their teachers was a major contributing factor to their dropping out of school.<sup>34</sup> Research investigating pathways out of homelessness shows that young people who leave home at a young age and exit education early are unlikely to return to education. They are also highly likely to remain long-term unemployed and welfare dependent.<sup>35</sup> Research also shows that ‘around 11,000 Victorian young people leave school each year without any kind of qualification even though they have limited job prospects’.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the extent to which young people are socially connected at school can significantly impact upon their economic participation.

Poor social connections not only contribute to young people becoming homeless, but are also a major consequence of homelessness. As noted in the Australian Government’s 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, ‘Homelessness removes stability and connection in people’s lives’.<sup>37</sup> People who become homeless often lose contact with their family, friends and local community. As a result, their connections to supportive relationships and networks are disrupted and opportunities to restore these connections become difficult.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, young people in this cohort experience a myriad of mental health issues, such as anxiety, which compounds their social isolation. Adolescence is frequently viewed as a critical life stage in terms of both the emergence and trajectory of mental illness.<sup>39</sup> Having mental health issues is also considered to be a contributing factor to, and a consequence of, homelessness. A study of homeless young people in Melbourne found that 26 per cent of those surveyed reported a level of psychological distress indicative of a psychiatric disorder and 14 per cent reported clinical levels of depression (the general youth rates are approximately 10% and 6%, respectively).<sup>40</sup> This suggests that young people faced with precarious housing issues are particularly challenged during adolescence and the transition to adulthood, and are more vulnerable to poorer mental health.

A 2011 Melbourne-based study investigated the relationship between precarious housing and health inequalities, and found that those with poorer housing also had poorer mental health.<sup>41</sup> Participants in the lowest quintile (bottom 20%) for mental health scores were twice as likely to live in an inferior quality dwelling compared to those in the top quintile.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, poor family cohesion and family conflict (e.g., domestic violence), which is not uncommon for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, is associated with an increased risk of mental health issues such as depression.<sup>43</sup> Evidence also suggests that mental

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*; Y. Symons & R. Smith 1995, ‘Noticed but not understood’, *Youth Studies Australia*, 14(1):29–35.

<sup>35</sup> Mallett et al. 2006, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) 2003, *Promoting Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing through Participation in Economic Activities: Key Learnings and Promising Practices*, VicHealth, Carlton South, Vic.

<sup>37</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2008, *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Homelessness Taskforce, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 10. Available at: [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/the\\_road\\_home.pdf](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/the_road_home.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> R. Scutella & G. Johnson 2012, *Locating and Designing ‘Journeys Home’: A Literature Review*, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

<sup>39</sup> T. Paus, M. Keshavan & J. N. Giedd 2008, ‘Why do many psychiatric disorders emerge during adolescence?’, *National Review of Neurosciences*, 9(12):947–57.

<sup>40</sup> Mallett et al. 2006, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> S. Mallett, R. Bentley, E. Baker, K. Mason, D. Keys, V. Kolar & L. Krnjacki 2011, *Precarious Housing and Health Inequalities: What Are the Links?*, Hanover Welfare Services, The University of Melbourne, University of Adelaide and Melbourne City Mission, Melbourne.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> J. Margo, M. Dixon, N. Pearce & H. Reed 2006, *Freedom’s Orphans: Raising Youth in a Changing World*, Institute for Public Policy Research, UK; M. G. Sawyer, F. M. Arney, P. A. Baghurst, J. J. Clark, B. W. Graetz, R. J. Kosky, B. Nurcombe, G. C. Patton, M. R. Prior, B. Raphael, J. Rey, L. C. Whites & S. R. Zubrick 2000, *The Mental Health of Young People in Australia: The Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey for Mental Health and Wellbeing*, AusInfo/Mental Health and Special Programs Branch, Canberra.

health issues make people more susceptible to homelessness, as struggling with social anxiety, depression and/or psychosis (e.g., having delusional thoughts) can cause them to 'withdraw from friends, family and other people. This loss of support leaves them fewer coping resources in times of trouble'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the Australian Government's recommendation in *The Road Home*<sup>45</sup> that additional services are needed to address family breakdowns, current approaches to youth homelessness tend to ignore the role that family plays in helping young people transition to adulthood. Young people experiencing homelessness are often without the guidance and back-up typically provided by parents or guardians during this critical developmental stage of transition. This can have profound effects on young people's health and wellbeing, with poor family cohesion and family conflict being associated with depressive illness, disruptive behaviour and poorer academic outcomes.<sup>46</sup>

A new social connections offer is needed to look beyond families and schools as the sole sites of enabling healthy relationships, and to collect evidence about what works in equipping service-connected young people with the skills and experiences to develop broad, lasting and positive relationships. In addition to building skills that help young people negotiate boundaries and relationships, manage conflict or communicate more effectively, they also need experiences of positive relationships that can support their personal growth and development.

### 1.3 The 'standard social connections offer'

For all young people in mainstream settings there is a 'standard' social connections offer that is accessed through family, school and community. While this will differ slightly in how it is realised for individuals, family-connected young people generally have access to each of the elements outlined below. For those who are service- rather than family-connected, these supports and opportunities are simply not available.

#### Family connectedness provides a secure base for expanding other social connections

Support from family is considered to be one of the primary factors associated with social inclusion for young people during the critical developmental stage of transitioning to adulthood. This transition is now protracted for many young people – taking place over a longer period of time compared to previous generations – due in part to a decline in housing affordability coupled with the changing nature of the labour market. Increased casualisation, precarious employment and a growing demand for post-secondary qualifications have disproportionately impacted upon vulnerable cohorts within the job market. As a result, young people generally rely on family support and guidance for longer than ever before, which has resulted in delays in leaving the family home, intermittent returns back to family after their initial leaving and the need for financial support to obtain housing (rental or home purchase).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> The Homeless Hub 2015, 'Mental health'. Accessed on 10 October 2014 at: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness/topics/mental-health>.

<sup>45</sup> Commonwealth of Australia 2008, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Margo et al. 2006, op. cit.; Sawyer et al. 2000, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> A. Beer & D. Faulkner 2011, *Housing Transitions through the Life Course: Aspirations, Needs and Policy*, Policy Press, Bristol, UK.

Families also provide emotional support and social connectedness, which play a key role in shaping adolescent identity. This support is essential, from a psycho-social perspective, for a smooth transition through adolescence in which ‘adult commitments’ – such as employment, partnering and parenthood – are tested and accepted.<sup>48</sup> While all adolescents participate in a level of exploration and experimentation as a dynamic process of identity development, the absence of reliable supports and positive role models can lead to ‘identity confusion’ characterised by delayed decision making, increased anxiety and poor choices. On the other hand, crucial aspects of individual identity are nurtured and reinforced through academic achievement, strong support networks and participation in pro-social community activities.<sup>49</sup> The importance of ongoing family support, a strong parent–child relationship and adequate social capital are, therefore, critical for young people to navigate this prolonged transition successfully.

It is not uncommon for adolescents to seek greater autonomy from, and become less dependent on, their parents.<sup>50</sup> However, a wide body of evidence suggests that family connectedness is still very important during this phase of life and is one of the greatest protective factors for adolescents.<sup>51</sup> For example, research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that 89 per cent of young people were ‘highly satisfied’ with their relationship with their parents.<sup>52</sup>

Family connectedness also provides a secure base upon which young people can develop a sense of belonging, trust, emotion regulation skills and self-

efficacy.<sup>53</sup> Secure parent–adolescent attachment is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including:

- a strong sense of identity and values
- good social skills
- a commitment to learning
- the ability to cope with stressful life events and transitions (e.g., post-school planning)
- high levels of physical activity.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, family connectedness is negatively associated with antisocial and self-destructive behaviours, such as suicide attempts, risky sexual activity and substance abuse.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, family supportiveness can help young people achieve success in life and work, feel like a valued citizen and attain happiness and a sense of wellbeing.

Evidence suggests that young people in the Australian population generally feel well connected to family and friends. For instance, those aged 18 to 24 years have the highest rate of social contact compared to other age groups, with 98 per cent having had contact with family or friends at least once per week.<sup>56</sup> Not only is it important to have regular contact with family and friends, but also to feel satisfied with the relationship and supported when it really counts, such as in times of trouble. A recent analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data found that, in 2006, 96 per cent of young people aged 18 to 24 years reported they were able to get support in a time of crisis from

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, a review of the role of identity in emerging adulthood by S. Schwartz, B. Zamboanga, K. Luyckx, A. Meca & R. Ritchie 2013, ‘Identity in emerging adulthood: Reviewing the field and looking forward’, in *Emerging Adulthood*, 1(2):96–113.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, Power & Allan 2010, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> AIHW 2011, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, Power & Allan 2010, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> AIHW 2011, *op. cit.*; T. Frigo, J. Bryce, M. Anderson & P. McKenzie 2007, *Australian Young People, Their Families and Post-School Plans: A Research Review*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Vic.

<sup>55</sup> D. H. Bernat & M. D. Resnick 2009, ‘Connectedness in the lives of adolescents’, in R. J. DiClemente, J. S. Santelli & R. A. Crosby (eds), *Adolescent Health: Understanding and Preventing Risk Behaviors*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 375–89; Robinson, Power & Allan 2010, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Australian Social Inclusion Board 2012, *Social Inclusion in Australia: How Australia Is Faring*, 2nd edn, Australian Government, Canberra. Available at: <http://apo.org.au/node/30582>.

persons living outside the household – most frequently from a family member (81%), a friend (80%), a work colleague (30%) or a neighbour (21%).<sup>57</sup> They also found that approximately ‘93% of young people could ask for small favours from people living outside the household’.<sup>58</sup>

For young people engaged in mainstream settings, structures and opportunities are available to them for developing supportive relationships with significant adults and peers. The benefits of making connections in these settings can be wide-ranging for a young person, including the development of social and relationship skills, and positive identity under the guidance of supportive role models. It is important to feel well connected so as to reap the benefits that these connections can offer.

## Schools, local government and community organisations as conduits of social connections

School provides a significant source of social connections for many young people. When enrolled in mainstream schooling, young people are generally given plenty of opportunities to engage in recreational and social activities that are meaningful and interesting. Students are usually able to engage in a variety of academic and extra-curricular activities that take place at the school (e.g., drama, sport, choir) or in a community setting (e.g., work experience placements, volunteer programs). These activities are ideal situations in which to connect with other young people who share common interests, and with professionals who can provide support such as career advice or future employment opportunities. Furthermore, schools tend to have on staff professionals, such as Student Welfare Coordinators and Educational Psychologists, who can provide direct social and emotional support to students.

The social connections opportunities made available within the school setting can also provide young people with positive sources of inspiration and influence, and access to broader networks and role models, including through friends, friends’ families and teachers. This has the flow-on effect of exposing them to positive role modelling and relationship experiences, which can be additional sources of support to those that are provided by their family.

Victorian State schools also provide support for at-risk students via the Student Support Services program.<sup>59</sup> This service is comprised of one Student Wellbeing Coordinator per school, and a team of specialist Student Support Services Officers who work within school networks on a needs basis. This program is complemented by the School Focused Youth Service, which aims to create partnerships between schools and community organisations to support at-risk young people to access external services.

Local government and community organisations also acknowledge the importance of social connections by funding or delivering services that are primarily focused on connecting young people with common interests or backgrounds. Examples of these services include:

- art groups for young people to explore their creative interests together, such as painting, photography and ceramics
- sexual identity groups that give GLBTI<sup>60</sup> young people the opportunity to hang out, manage events and go on trips together
- music and event management groups that enable young people to access affordable music and cultural events, and opportunities to organise and perform in events
- gamers’ groups for young people to get together to play board games and video games.

<sup>57</sup> AIHW 2011, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Department of Education and Training (DET) 2015, *Support in Schools*, DET, Government of Victoria, Melbourne. Available at: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/health/Pages/ssso.aspx>.

<sup>60</sup> GLBTI – Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Intersex.

A growing body of evidence indicates that not only can participation in these programs provide young people with alternatives to engaging in risk-taking behaviour, but can also have a positive impact on their healthy development.<sup>61</sup> For instance, these programs give young people a safe space to form positive relationships with peers and adult facilitators, to feel a sense of belonging, to improve their self-confidence, to build social skills and relationship skills, and to develop abilities such as leadership and knowledge that can be transferred to other areas of life.

In addition to these standard or mainstream opportunities around social connections, efforts are also being made to engage those young people who do not have access to mainstream supports and opportunities. Programs such as Reconnect,

for example, provide early interventions that address family breakdown by focusing on reconciliation to resolve the family conflict that has contributed to the initial instability in the lives of young people – aged 12 to 18 (or 12 to 21 for young people recently arrived in Australia) – at risk of or experiencing homelessness.<sup>62</sup> At present, the Australian Government provides approximately \$24 million in funding to the Reconnect program, to service around 100 services in rural, remote and metropolitan regions across Australia.<sup>63</sup> Approximately 70 per cent of the Reconnect services provide ‘standard’ services, while the rest supply ‘specialist’ services to specific disadvantaged client groups, such as to culturally and linguistically diverse youth, those leaving detention centres or those with disabilities.<sup>64</sup>

“ School provides a significant source of social connections for many young people. ”

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<sup>61</sup> M. Gardener, J. Roth & J. Brooks-Gunn 2008, ‘Adolescents’ participation in organized activities and developmental success 2 and 8 years after high school: Do sponsorship, duration, and intensity matter?’, *Developmental Psychology*, 44(3):814–30; J. Roth, J. Brooks-Gunn, L. Murray & F. Foster 1998, ‘Promoting healthy adolescents: Synthesis of youth development program evaluations’, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 8(4):423–59.

<sup>62</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2013, *Phase 2 Evaluation: Departmental Review of the Reconnect Program*, FaHCSIA, Australian Government, Canberra. Available at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02\\_2013/dept\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_reconnect\\_program.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2013/dept_review_of_the_reconnect_program.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

## 1.4 The results of the 'standard social connections offer'

### Different outcomes for different groups

Although social connections are facilitated for mainstream young Australians through the family, school, local community and government, there are evident inequities for young people on the margins of society who have limited access to, and thus are unable to benefit from, the same supports and opportunities. This is particularly the case for young people experiencing disadvantage or homelessness and for early school leavers who often don't have family support. Young people experiencing homelessness, for example, typically miss out on the guidance and support provided by parents or guardians in the critical developmental stage of transitioning to adulthood – which can have profound effects on their health and wellbeing. Due to a lack of role modelling, many of these young people also go on to develop negative patterns in relationship building. In addition to missing out on these vital emotional and developmental supports, young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness are often unable to access school and government services that promote social connections, as access to these are often facilitated by families.

Young people who leave school early also tend to miss out on the activities and supports provided by the school and consequently the social connections these afford. This is compounded by the fact that those young people who leave school early often also leave home early, and therefore miss out on any support the family can provide. Evidence indicates that young people who receive support from their families and their

families' extended networks are more likely to attain better marks, to finish school and to find work.<sup>65</sup> Poor family relations are frequently associated with mental and physical health issues, disruptive behaviour and poorer academic outcomes.<sup>66</sup>

The importance of ongoing family support, a strong parent–child relationship and adequate social capital are critical if young people are to navigate the transition to adulthood successfully. The steady dismantling of the 'welfare state', and the shifting of responsibility for child wellbeing on to individuals and families, has placed an increased importance on the availability of family resources and social capital as determinants of a successful youth transition. However, the availability of these resources is dependent on a social background that may be linked to intergenerational poverty or disadvantage.<sup>67</sup> Children and young people growing up in disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to lack the economic, social or human capital essential to their development, educational outcomes and having a smooth transition to adulthood and independence.

Young people experiencing intergenerational poverty or disadvantage who are connected to their families also have restricted social capital, particularly when compared to their peers from more affluent families; that is, they are more likely to have limited financial assets, social networks, access to information and resources.<sup>68</sup> In the BSL's longitudinal *Life Chances* study, parents in low-income families reported that they struggled to pay for food, medicine and school fees. In addition, the children from these families missed out on school activities, such as sport and excursions, and were less likely than others to have 'educational' resources at home like books and computers.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> D. Oliver & M. Circell 2012, *Youth Transitions: What the Research Tells Us*, NCVET, Adelaide.

<sup>66</sup> Paus, Keshavan & Giedd 2008, op. cit.; Sawyer et al. 2000, op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) 2013, *How Young People Are Faring*, FYA, Melbourne; T. Kauppinen, A. Angelin, T. Lorentzen, O. Bäckman, T. Salonen, P. Moisio & E. Dahl 2014, 'Social background and life-course risks as determinants of social assistance receipt among young adults in Sweden, Norway and Finland', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 24(3):273–88.

<sup>68</sup> R. McLachlan, G. Gilfillan & J. Gordon 2013, *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, Productivity Commission, Canberra; W. Stone, W. Gray & J. Hughes 2003, *Social Capital at Work: How Family, Friends and Civic Ties Relate to Labour Market Outcomes*, Research Paper No. 31, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

<sup>69</sup> Taylor & Allan 2013, p. 18.

While programs such as Reconnect demonstrate the government's understanding of the importance of family in facilitating social connections, more is needed. For example, during 2011–2012, only about 6,000 clients across Australia received support from the Reconnect program.<sup>70</sup> But in Victoria alone there were around 12,500 young Australians aged 15 to 24 who used Specialist Homelessness Services during the July–December quarter in 2012,<sup>71</sup> highlighting the limited access to the Reconnect program for many young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

### The costs of not being socially connected

The inability of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate fully in the social and economic life of their community can have serious cyclical effects that can lead to deeper and prolonged forms of social exclusion. Particular groups of young people who have grown up in circumstances where their development, health and wellbeing has been interrupted or compromised are at even higher risk of social exclusion and of never making a successful transition to adulthood and independence.<sup>72</sup> These include children experiencing family conflict, domestic violence, parental neglect, family homelessness, and chronic long-term parental unemployment or ill health.

All of these factors can exact a toll on the social connectedness of young people experiencing homelessness or disadvantage. In addition to the significant personal costs to these individuals, the social exclusion they experience can also lead to a significant social and financial outlay for the wider Australian society in the form of increased welfare dependency, contact with the criminal justice system and lost economic contributions. Thus, one's inability to participate in the social and economic life of a community can have serious cyclical effects resulting in deeper and prolonged forms of social exclusion.

Disconnection from mainstream social networks can lead to isolation or bonding with other socially excluded individuals, prompting further detachment from positive relationships and mainstream social networks and thus increased entrenchment.

### Assumed supports

Even when service-connected young people are able to access services delivered by the school, local government or community organisations, the support they provide does not replace that of a family. In Australia, there exists an inherent assumption in the mainstream setting that young people are well supported by their families. For instance, in the Australian education system it is assumed that families can fully support their children beyond the school gate to achieve at school. However, in reality the level, extent and continuity of support that a service-connected young person receives is paltry in comparison to a family-connected young person.

Most family-connected young people receive good enough support from their families, and benefit from their extended networks through a range of emotional, social, financial and material supports that facilitate both achievement as well as access to formal and informal information, advice and role modelling. Evidence indicates that family networks (including friends and relatives) play a 'crucial role' in young people's educational and social development, and are influential in helping them find employment.<sup>73</sup> They also assist them with making the important transitions from primary to secondary school and from school to tertiary study and/or work by assisting with homework, paying for resources, camps, excursions and uniforms, guiding career research, as well as discussing the importance of schooling. In addition, the security and stability of a family home usually allows young people to take risks and to make mistakes, while maintaining financial and housing stability.

<sup>70</sup> FaHCSIA 2013, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> AIHW 2013, op. cit.

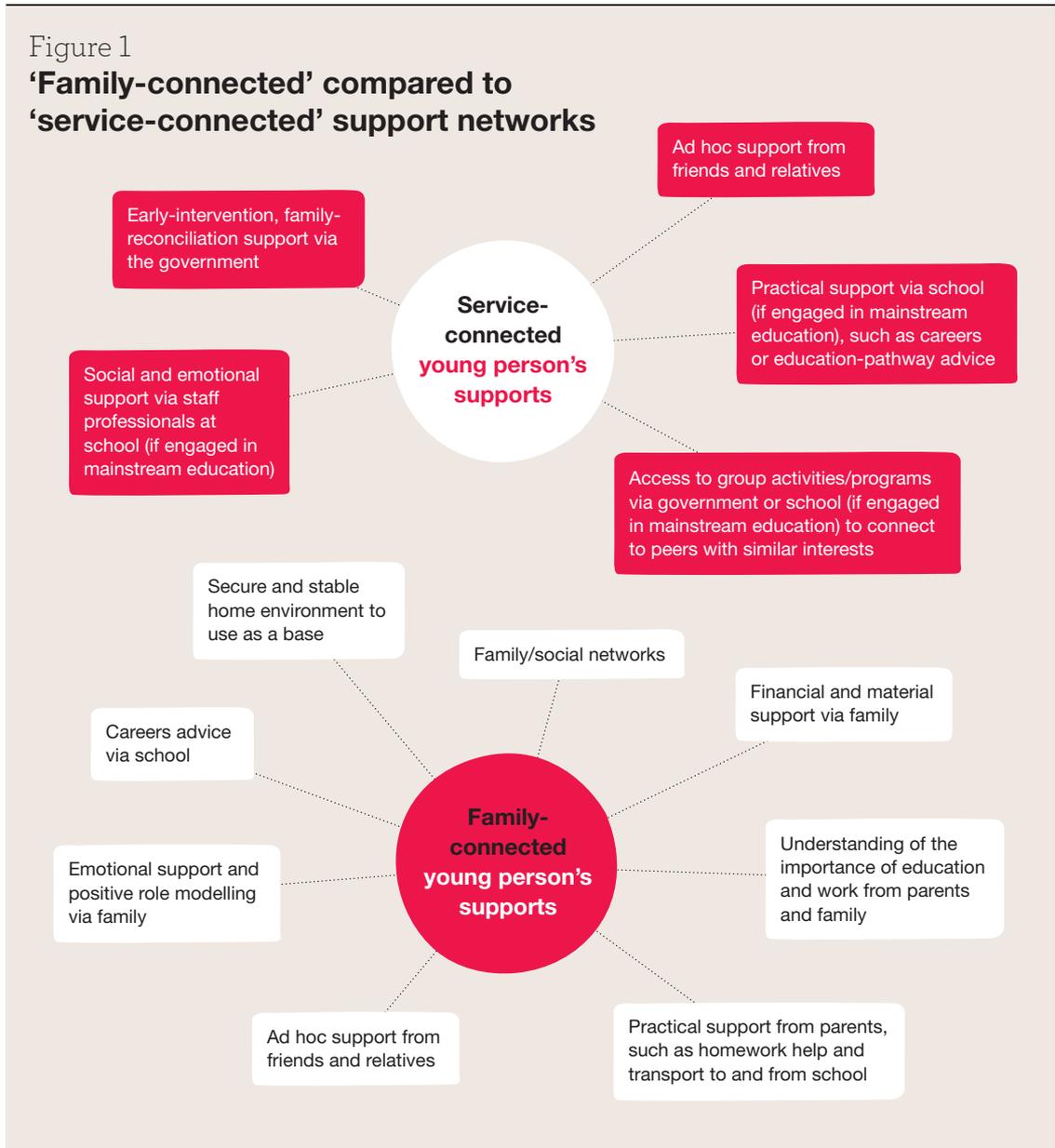
<sup>72</sup> See, for example, the Scandinavian evidence that social background matters in Kauppinen et al. 2014, op. cit.

<sup>73</sup> Oliver & Circeli 2012, op. cit.

By contrast, service-connected young people with either no support or limited support from family often lack access to safe home environments, sufficient nutrition and positive, supportive adult role models. Unfortunately, the services available to these young people tend only to provide support that is time-limited and context-limited.

Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of the support that service-connected young people receive in comparison to family-connected young people.

Figure 1  
**‘Family-connected’ compared to ‘service-connected’ support networks**



## 1.5 Summary of the barriers to social connectedness

Service-connected young people face multiple and complex barriers to being socially connected. Although there are a number of social and welfare services for those experiencing disadvantage, these programs fail to address adequately or systematically the complex needs of young people experiencing disadvantage. Some of the key barriers to social connectedness are summarised here.

### Poor family cohesion

While some of the current programs addressing youth homelessness in Victoria incorporate elements that build young people's social connections, there is rarely a systematically rolled-out approach that prioritises re-establishing family connections and developing social networks. Neither do such programs generally focus on prioritising positive social connections moving forward.

Current youth homelessness services frequently assume that 'because young people are [often] fleeing damaged family situations, in order to move forward with their lives they must leave that world behind'.<sup>74</sup> As a result, these services prioritise developing young people's independence and living skills and securing them accommodation,<sup>75</sup> and tend not to help address the family conflict that contributed to them leaving home in the first place.<sup>76</sup> However, many family relationship breakdowns are retrievable with appropriate support; but without it, young people who do return home potentially face the same conflict, neglect and/or abuse they experienced before they left. This has the potential to entrench cycles of dysfunction and exclusion.

### Negative experiences at school

The current mainstream education system does not provide adequate support for service-connected young people to achieve their potential at school and to maintain their social connectedness. Young people experiencing homelessness often report that their time at school was negative – from poor relationships with teachers through to curriculum that had limited real-world relevance.<sup>77</sup> Feelings of alienation and marginalisation from mainstream school can be difficult to overcome, particularly for service-connected young people who lack the support of parents or guardians.

Both the Victorian and Australian Governments have attempted to broaden school-based health and wellbeing support for students, through Student Support Services and programs such as Reconnect. These programs aim to create partnerships between schools and community organisations to support at-risk young people to access external services, but are not providing adequate support for disadvantaged or service-connected young people. Too often, students with high needs and low family support remain on the margins of mainstream education and tend to leave school early. When this happens, young people lose access to a number of academic, extra-curricular and therapeutic opportunities that otherwise connect them to peers with similar interests and to professionals who can offer social and emotional as well as career-planning support.

Categorically, young people who leave school early do so without the qualifications, skills and knowledge required to gain stable, good-quality employment. As a result, they have self-limiting economic connections and inadequate financial and material resources to maintain housing and economic independence, and to participate in social activities, groups and community life more broadly.

<sup>74</sup> D. Winland, S. Gaetz & T. Patton 2011, *Family Matters – Homeless Youth and Eva's Initiatives 'Family Reconnect' Program*, The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, Toronto. Available at: <http://www.slideshare.net/TheHomelessHub/family-matters-homeless-youth-evas-initiatives-family-reconnect-program#>.

<sup>75</sup> Robinson, Power & Allan 2010, op. cit.; M. Baxter 2009, 'So, it's time for early intervention to take centre stage?', *Parity*, 22(2):8–9.

<sup>76</sup> Melbourne City Mission 2014, *Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP) Info Kit*, Melbourne City Mission, Melbourne.

<sup>77</sup> J. Hanson-Peterson, S. Bond, G. Myconos & J. Borlagdan [2013], 'Literature review on supporting homeless learners in VET' (unpub. ms), BSL, Fitzroy, Vic.

## Lack of opportunities

The opportunities available to service-connected young people do not compare to those available to their family-connected peers. The combination of recent rapid social and economic change in Australia has weakened the capacity of many disadvantaged families to provide the level of support and nourishment needed for their children to gain the core skills and personal agency to navigate what has become a risky and protracted transition to adulthood. Service-connected young people have often experienced generational cycles of disadvantage and face a number of risk factors linked to social exclusion. These include family stress, poor health, domestic violence, weak social networks and labour market connections, and limited access to resources and information.

Typically, support services for young people experiencing disadvantage or homelessness do not provide sufficient access to similar opportunities and resources available to family-connected young people, particularly those from families with strong social capital. This makes it increasingly difficult for service-connected young people to access 'real-world' opportunities, high-quality resources and useful information. As a result, they have limited prospects of building their social capital and thriving.

## 1.6 What young people need to develop strong social connections

Emerging evidence suggests that young people flourish when their home, school and community contexts are abundant with positive supports and opportunities.<sup>78</sup> A report on youth mental health issues by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation found that

*...young people who are more supported and who are integrated into their communities will be more likely to achieve in education, in work and with friends, and to have better mental health and wellbeing. Our community responsibility lies in the provision of this support because it is an investment which will benefit the whole community in the immediate and long term.*<sup>79</sup>

If service-connected young people are to gain greater control over their lives, and become independent, yet connected, adults, they need opportunities and resources to develop their core skills and capabilities, and the social networks to access appropriate services and supports. This support needs to span both formal, structural initiatives that alleviate economic, social and cultural barriers, as well as more personalised skills building and access to positive relationship modelling.

Concerted policy and practice interventions aimed at those young people experiencing social exclusion should include a greater emphasis on providing access to early intervention and family mediation programs, as well as more integrated homelessness services that connect them to caring adults and mainstream opportunities and services.

<sup>78</sup> B. Bernard & S. Slade 2009, 'Listening to students: Moving from resilience research to youth development practice and school connectedness', in M. J. Furlong, R. Gilman & E. S. Huebner (eds) 2009, *The Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools*, Routledge, New York, pp. 353–70.

<sup>79</sup> VicHealth 2003, op. cit.

## Core skills and capabilities

Research suggests that a positive sense of self is critical to making a successful transition to adulthood. Being valued, loved and respected by others creates a sense of self-worth that protects against feelings of social isolation, depression and anxiety. It can also motivate and inspire young people to set and accomplish goals.<sup>80</sup> Negotiating relationships, developing independent living skills, understanding their own sexual identity and developing an understanding of what they value and stand for are all part of the transition.<sup>81</sup>

Many young people who have experienced homelessness or a disrupted family life have had limited opportunities to develop and enhance their sense of self and self-worth. Their personal strengths and capabilities have often not been recognised and they have had limited access to the people, opportunities and experiences that would enable them to flourish. Many have also experienced negative relationships that can foster a sense of distrust and defeatism.

Thus, for young people to improve their social connections and to develop positive relationships, it is important that they have the opportunity to build a range of personal and social skills. These include the development of:

- personal skills including self-awareness and self-efficacy
- social skills including conflict resolution, communication and understanding social norms
- capabilities that foster agency including decision making and problem solving.<sup>82</sup>

While most people develop these types of skills in the early years of life within a supportive and stable family environment, they are skills that can be learned, cultivated and enhanced at any point. As such, it is important that service-connected young people are provided with a supportive, stable environment by the services they access – one that allows them to feel secure enough to explore, to make mistakes and learn, to engage in positive, quality relationships, and to practise and develop these skills in both formal and informal settings.

## Family reconciliation and mediation support

Evidence suggests that family connectedness is one of the most important protective factors in the lives of adolescents. Even after young people leave their family home – for such reasons as family conflict or neglect – they often strongly long for a connection with their family.<sup>83</sup> Thus, family can play an important role in helping young people exit homelessness.<sup>84</sup> In a recent large-scale longitudinal study of homeless young people, it was found that over one-third of those interviewed returned to living with their family after about two years of being homeless or living independently.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, another study recently found that young people newly experiencing homelessness who maintained contact with their mothers, in particular, were more likely to return home than those who had no such contact.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>80</sup> GGS 2011, 'Positive Education resources'. Available at: <http://www.ggs.vic.edu.au/School/Positive-Education/Resources>.

<sup>81</sup> Foyer Federation 2013, *MyNav, Destination Independence – Navigating the journey to Independent Adulthood*, The Foyer Federation, UK, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Robinson, Power & Allan 2010, *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*; Department of FaHCSIA 2012, *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Mallett et al. 2006, *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

The benefits of reconnecting with family can be profound for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In a study on the outcomes of young people using homelessness services, it was found that those who returned to live with their parents had better outcomes across a range of areas compared to the ones who had not returned home.<sup>87</sup> In particular, the researchers found that young people who

*returned to live with their parents had less trouble with police, used fewer legal services, were more likely to attend school or graduate, and were less likely to run away after discharge. These youth also attended religious services and reported having close friends.*<sup>88</sup>

The former Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs or FaHCSIA also highlighted the importance of family-focused interventions for tackling youth homelessness, stating: 'Working with families and young people is an important way to maintain stability and other forms of support (social capital), community engagement and participation'.<sup>89</sup>

Families experiencing conflict or dysfunction are often in need of support themselves. Whether they are facing financial hardship, dealing with mental or physical illness within the family environment or have their own issues of abuse or violence to deal with, many are seeking and could benefit from family counselling or mediation services. Given that it is not uncommon for young people experiencing homelessness to return home at some point, it is crucial that service-connected young people have access to interventions focused on reconnecting them with family, where appropriate, and improving family relations. Such interventions can provide families with the skills to develop new patterns

of behaviour and access to support, while mending damaged relationships can build both the young person's confidence and their social and relationship skills. This in turn can enhance their supportive social networks (e.g., with family, peers) and their ability to participate more fully in the community.

## Experiences of positive relationships

Research suggests that relationships which provide social support, especially in difficult times, are fundamental to one's physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. They act as a buffer by enabling people to navigate and cope with challenging life circumstances and feelings.<sup>90</sup>

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack pro-social, positive adults in the family home, as well as people within the wider community who can assist them with study, education and career guidance, and provide them with useful contacts in both the community and the labour market. As such, service-connected young people need opportunities to experience caring relationships with supportive adults, who can actively role model positive behaviours as well as build their social capital by connecting them to useful contacts and networks.

It is important to connect young people with adults who recognise their capacity to make positive changes in their lives, who will invest in building their talents and skills, and who are interested in forging authentic relationships. Similarly, it is crucial to engage young people in positive environments that nurture their talents, value their contributions and meet their needs. Research indicates that connectedness to caring adults, and participating in one's community, contribute to young people's resilience, sense of confidence, self-efficacy and motivation.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Department of FaHCSIA 2012, op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> S. J. Thompson, D. E. Pollio & L. Bitner 2000, 'Outcomes for adolescents using runaway and homeless youth services', *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 3(1):91.

<sup>89</sup> Department of FaHCSIA 2012, op. cit.

<sup>90</sup> Hasset 2008, op. cit.; Resnick et al. 1997, op. cit.

<sup>91</sup> K. G. Oliver, P. Collin, J. Burns & J. Nicholas 2006, 'Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation', *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 5(1):1-7. Available at: [http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/3691/1/3691\\_Oliver\\_et\\_al\\_2006.pdf](http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/3691/1/3691_Oliver_et_al_2006.pdf).

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Service-connected young people need to be provided with opportunities for meaningful participation and to make a contribution.”

Service-connected young people also need relationships with adults who have high expectations of them and can help them to achieve these expectations. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, often lack the social capital required to support their choices and decision-making related to their aspirations. This can discourage them from pursuing their aspirations and limits the hope and agency they feel they have over their future. In addition, many of the youth services working with young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness tend to engage in deficit, disadvantaged or problem-saturated thinking and acting, rather than empowering these young people and investing in their skills and capabilities.

Service-connected young people need supports that communicate the rights and responsibilities they have, that challenge them to take positive risks and share their talents with others, and that provide them with an opportunity to have a voice and influence. Such supports will help them to be respectful of others, to understand they are valued citizens with something to contribute to society, and to become motivated to achieve their aspirations.

### Access to opportunities to participate in social and economic life

Service-connected young people need to be provided with opportunities for meaningful participation and to make a contribution. Research shows that such engagement enhances young people's motivation to succeed, fosters their resilience and improves their health, social relations and academic achievement.<sup>92</sup> It is also important that young people participate in and develop activities that are relevant to their interests and goals. However, many young people who have experienced homelessness and disadvantage have not had the opportunity to prioritise such participation, due to limited resources and opportunities.

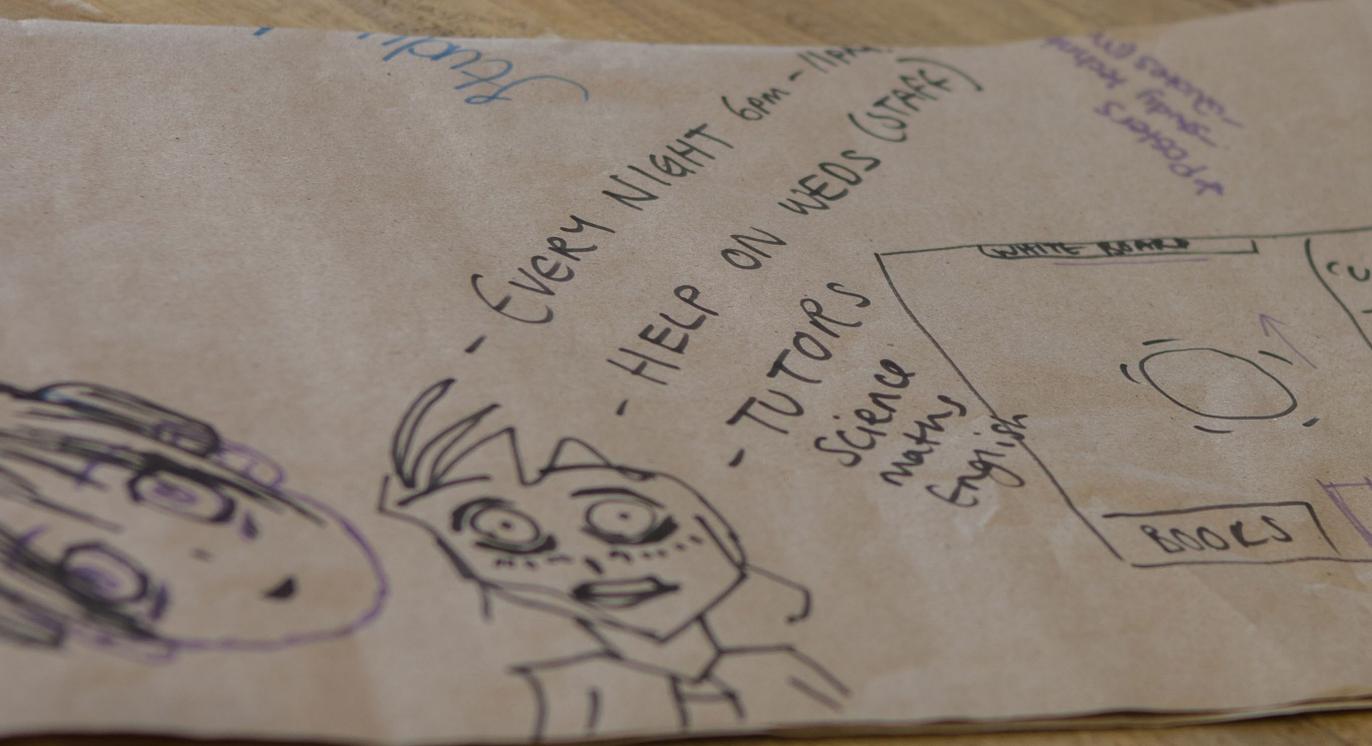
In its *Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper*, the Victorian Government Department of Human Services highlights the need for youth services to allow participating young people to contribute to the development of activities. It argues that doing so has been shown to enhance their levels of motivation to engage, as young people 'felt most connected and valued when they owned and developed youth activities and programs within their communities'.<sup>93</sup> Providing young people with opportunities for self-direction and self-determination help them to feel a sense of value, purpose and agency over their lives.<sup>94</sup> It also enables them to connect with significant adults and peers around common interests and goals.

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Department of Human Services 2008, *Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper*, DHS, Victorian Government, Melbourne, p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> R. M. Ryan & E. L. Deci 2000, 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being', *American Psychologist*, 55:68–78.



EFY Foyer student notes on 'Brainstorming Internal Opportunities'

**Photography** Dani Burley

## Part 2: Theories and Frameworks

### 2.1 EFY Foyer theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for the EFY Foyer Model articulates a number of ideological 'shifts' required to break down the barriers of disadvantage and social exclusion for service-connected young people. In summary, they are:

- moving from deficit to advantaged thinking at a systems level
- investing in building young people's abilities, developing their assets and co-creating solutions that enable them to achieve independent adulthood
- adopting an inclusive growth approach to economic development
- recognising that young people's capacity for economic and social participation will be realised through investment in opportunities that enable them to develop the three dimensions of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking
- valuing service-connected young people as social citizens who are able to and expected to contribute to the development of their own lives, as well as to the lives of others, including those in the wider community.

The 6 Service Offers are also underpinned by core sets of theoretical perspectives and approaches. For the Social Connections Offer, these include the PERMA model and Positive Education, social capital, youth development and resilience, and the Self-Determination Theory. Our practice is also informed by a number of approaches including Open Talent/ Advantaged Thinking.

### 2.2 Social connections theories and frameworks

#### The PERMA model and Positive Education

The Social Connections Offer draws on the PERMA model developed by Seligman<sup>95</sup> (Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Achievement) and adapted by Geelong Grammar School into a Positive Education framework.<sup>96</sup> The EFY Foyer has adopted and adapted the GGS model, which focuses on the following six domains for optimal wellbeing:

- **Positive emotion** – Experiencing positive emotions can lead to healthy engagement with the environment and to flourishing.<sup>97</sup>
- **Positive engagement** – Students who are engaged are curious, motivated, interested, are persistent in the face of challenges and experience, and flourishing.<sup>98</sup>
- **Positive health** – To flourish, students need to develop and practise sustainable habits for optimal physical and psychological health.<sup>99</sup>
- **Positive purpose** – To flourish, young people need to understand, believe in and service something greater than themselves, and deliberately engage in activities for the benefit of others.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Seligman 2011, op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> GGS 2013, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> B. L. Fredrickson 2004, 'The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 359:1367–77; B. L. Fredrickson 2009, *Positivity*, Random House, New York.

<sup>98</sup> Ryan & Deci 2000, op. cit.

<sup>99</sup> GGS 2011, op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

- **Positive relationships** – Social relationships and connections are critical to flourishing.<sup>101</sup>
- **Positive accomplishment** – Working towards meaningful goals, being motivated to persist despite challenges and setbacks, and the achievement of competence and success is key to flourishing.<sup>102</sup>

The Positive Relationships domain is particularly relevant to the Social Connections offer. A range of social and behavioural research underlines the significance of social relationships to mental and physical health and wellbeing<sup>103</sup> – from the impact of social relationships on the development of self-worth and empathy, as a protective factor against isolation and depression, and as a motivating factor for engagement, participation and self-care.

Relationships, however, can also have detrimental effects on all of the above areas of wellbeing when they are abusive or ostracising, or promote harmful or risk-taking behaviours. A focus on building positive relationships, therefore, also needs to have a focus on recognising and understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as promoting the skills to negotiate and navigate them.<sup>104</sup>

Another important consideration in the Positive Relationships domain is the influence of technology and social media on students' interactions. Advances in technology, such as email and mobile phones, and the use of websites such as facebook and instant messaging offer young people increasing opportunities to make and sustain connections with a wide range

of people. Use of these technologies is a routine activity for many and research has shown that it can benefit children and adolescents by enhancing communication, social connection and even technical skills.<sup>105</sup>

However, there are also dangers in its use, particularly for adolescents who often have a limited capacity for self-regulation and increased susceptibility to peer pressure.<sup>106</sup> These dangers include exposure to inappropriate content, cyber bullying, harassment or privacy issues, as well as long-term reputational risks due to the permanency and broad accessibility of some Internet postings. As such, the Positive Relationships domain recommends that initiatives to help students develop emotional and social competencies should be extended to consider online and mobile interactions. Furthermore, skills specific to the use of technology should be encouraged so that students know what is and what isn't appropriate when communicating online.<sup>107</sup>

## Social capital

Social capital is a concept with many definitions, although its fundamental tenet is that social networks have value. Colin Falconer defines social capital simply as the resources provided to an individual through the social networks they hold.<sup>108</sup> He notes that social capital is 'widely perceived as a means to understand how we engage as citizens', 'how we secure economic gains' and 'how communities develop'.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>101</sup> C. Hassed 2008, *The Essence of Health*, Ebury Press, North Sydney, NSW; U. Bronfenbrenner 2005, *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

<sup>102</sup> GGS 2011, op. cit.

<sup>103</sup> Hassad 2008, op. cit.; Bronfenbrenner 2005, op. cit.; GGS 2011, op. cit.; B. N. Uchino, J. T. Cacioppo & J. K. Kiecolt-Glaser 1996, 'The relationship between social support and physiological processes: A review with emphasis on underlying mechanisms and implications for health', *Psychological Bulletin*, 119:488–531.

<sup>104</sup> GGS 2011, op. cit.

<sup>105</sup> G. Schurgin O'Keeffe, K. Clarke-Pearson & Council on Communications and Media 2011, 'The impact of social media on children, adolescents and families', *American Academy of Pediatrics*. Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2011/03/28/peds.2011-0054.full.pdf+html>.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> GGS 2011, op. cit.

<sup>108</sup> C. Falconer 2012, 'Open Talent: Investing in a transformational future for Britain's young adults' (unpub. ms).

<sup>109</sup> Falconer, *ibid.* draws on R. D. Putnam 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York; R. S. Sobel 2007, *Unleashing Capitalism: Why Prosperity Stops at the West Virginia Border and How to Fix It*, Center for Economic Growth, The Public Policy Foundation of West Virginia, Morgantown, WV; R. Gittel & A. Vidal 1998, *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Three dimensions of social capital are commonly distinguished – bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital involves trust and reciprocity in social networks within a community of people who are similar; bridging social capital refers to networks that are established across diverse communities; and linking social capital refers to connections between individuals and institutions of authority. All three are important for the construction of a civil society as well as for individual health and wellbeing – bonding social capital for social support and solidarity; and bridging and linking for providing resources, opportunities and links to institutions and systems that aid ‘getting ahead’.

To build sustainable livelihoods disadvantaged young people need access to, or the opportunities to develop, all three forms of social capital, which the EFY Foyer Model provides. However, as the social citizenship literature points out, to build independent, yet connected, lives they also need to be recognised and recognise themselves as part of the community – of civil society – with rights and responsibilities to themselves and to others. Thus, disadvantaged young people need to recognise themselves as capable of acting and participating on their own and other’s behalf.

## Youth development and resilience

Resilience theory draws on a number of renowned theories on human development, including Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model<sup>110</sup> and Bowlby’s attachment theory.<sup>111</sup> According to resilience theory, a young person’s experiences and social relationships in their home, school and community influence their development. Resilience research indicates that optimal, healthy development can be achieved, even in high-risk environments, when these different contexts are abundant with positive supports and opportunities,

also known as external assets. Youth development and resilience theory identifies three specific external assets that are associated with positive outcomes among youth: (i) caring relationships; (ii) holding high expectations; and (iii) meaningful participation and contribution.<sup>112</sup>

Caring relationships involve young people connecting with supportive individuals who take an interest in their thoughts and needs, provide help when needed and are trustworthy. Meaningful participation and contribution involves young people being connected to relevant and engaging opportunities that align with their interests, help them to feel like they are making a difference and allow them to make decisions (e.g., rule setting). Holding high expectations involves young people having individuals in their lives who challenge and encourage them to take positive risks and do their best, offer strengths-based guidance, acknowledge their efforts, believe they will succeed and expect them to follow rules.

When a young person experiences these positive supports and opportunities, ‘they are much more likely to meet their developmental needs or drives for love, belonging, respect, identity, power, mastery, challenge and meaning’.<sup>113</sup> As a result of these needs being met, their internal assets can flourish, including their ‘social competence, problem solving, autonomy and identity, and sense of purpose and future’.<sup>114</sup> Not only are these characteristics associated with improved social, health, and academic outcomes for young people, but they also act as a buffer against risky behaviour, such as criminality and alcohol and drug abuse.<sup>115</sup>

To develop into healthy and successful adults, disadvantaged young people need access to all three external assets – which the EFY Foyer Model provides. Not only do the Foyers aim to provide these supports

<sup>110</sup> U. Bronfenbrenner 1979, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA..

<sup>111</sup> J. Bowlby 1999 [1969], *Attachment: Attachment and Loss*, Volume 1, 2nd edn, Basic Books, New York.

<sup>112</sup> Bernard & Slade 2009, op. cit.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p. 354–5.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

and opportunities directly to the young people living in the Foyers, but they also strive to better equip their families, and intentionally select or train members of the local community to provide these external assets as well. This is particularly important so that young people are well supported after they leave the Foyer and thus continue to develop into healthy adults.

## Self-determination theory

According to self-determination theory, people's internal motivation and pursuit of their goals are associated with the following three psychological needs:<sup>116</sup>

- relatedness – the need to interact and connect with others (e.g., family, friends, partner)
- autonomy – feeling a sense of control over one's own decisions and action
- competence – feeling a sense of mastery over one's skills and believing in one's own ability to achieve goals.

When all three psychological needs are satisfied, people's 'psychological growth, integrity and wellbeing' are fostered and their maximum potential can be achieved.<sup>117</sup> This includes demonstrating high levels of engagement, motivation, dedication to achieving goals, skill mastery, creativity, and health and wellbeing. The Social Connections Offer is particularly concerned with relatedness, which research has found can increase motivation and self-care as well as empathy and engagement in pro-social activities.<sup>118</sup>

## Systemic theory/Family systems theory

Systemic theory, broadly, is an interdisciplinary theory that focuses on understanding the relationship or interaction between phenomena instead of focusing on individual parts or elements.<sup>119</sup> Family systems theory, developed by Murray Bowan, applies this theory to human relationships and suggests that individual behaviour cannot be understood in isolation, but rather in the context of the broader social system of interconnected and interdependent individuals, such as the family.<sup>120</sup> This theory has formed the foundation of family therapy approaches characterised by a move away from psychoanalysis or attempting to understand individuals' behaviour through examining subconscious impulses or experiences of childhood trauma.

Rather, systemic family therapy focuses on addressing the influence of relationship patterns. This is important in the context of working with young people, as behaviour is viewed in the context of the bigger picture of their life and relationships. This approach does not focus on blaming either parents or adolescents for family dysfunction, but instead seeks to identify and change negative patterns of behaviour or unhelpful family dynamics.<sup>121</sup>

Changing entrenched patterns of dysfunction within family interactions is something that is beyond the practice of the EFY Foyers and should be carried out by expert family therapists. However, this theory does provide a foundation for helping young people to develop self-awareness about their reactions to others, as well as how others respond to their actions. Focusing on the patterns of the family system, rather than on individual events or circumstances, can help young people learn to develop healthy relationship patterns into adulthood.<sup>122</sup>

**116** E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan 2000, 'The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4):247.

**117** *ibid.*

**118** L. Pavey, T. Greitemeyer & P. Sparks 2011, 'Highlighting relatedness promotes prosocial motives and behavior', *Pers Soc Psychol Bull*, 1 July, 37:905–17.

**119** C. Mele, J. Pels & F. Polese 2010, 'A brief review of systems theories and their managerial applications', *Service Science*, 2(1/2):126–35. Available at: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/serv.2.1\\_2.126](http://dx.doi.org/10.1287/serv.2.1_2.126).

**120** Family Systems Institute 2015, 'Some core principles of family systems approach'. Available at: <http://www.thefsi.com.au>.

**121** J. Brown 2012, *Growing Yourself up: How to Bring Your Best to All of Life's Relationships*, Exisle Publishing, Wollombi, NSW. Available at: <http://www.exislepublishing.com.au/Growing-Yourself-Up.html>.

**122** *ibid.*

## Part 3: The Social Connections Offer Model and Practice Approach

### 3.1 The EFY Foyer Social Connections Offer

#### Vision

The Social Connections Offer seeks to provide EFY Foyer students with the social and emotional knowledge, skills and opportunities to develop thriving social relationships and networks (including with family, friends, partners and services), and ultimately to have sustainable connections with helpful supports and resources.

#### Key components

##### Skills and knowledge development

The Social Connections Offer provides EFY Foyer students with the opportunity to develop a range of knowledge and skills that will assist them to form strong and nourishing relationships. This will include opportunities to develop:

- personal and social and emotional skills – such as managing and regulating emotions, understanding social norms, communication skills, conflict resolution and empathy – that will enable them to build the necessary self-worth and self-confidence from which to pursue healthy relationships with others
- an understanding of the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships and the skills required to negotiate and manage these relationships in a range of contexts including in intimate, personal, family, work, cyberspace and house-sharing contexts
- knowledge about safe, appropriate and productive use of technology and social media to assist in creating and maintaining social, civic and employment connections.

#### Mentoring

The Social Connections Offer provides EFY Foyer students with opportunities to engage in positive, supportive, trusting relationships that serve to develop their social capital and the skills needed to replicate healthy relationships elsewhere. This will include providing students with the opportunity to be matched to a mentor who will give support, encouragement and guidance and who, through the mentoring process, will aim to equip students with the tools to replicate good relationships elsewhere. Mentors will also provide young people with the opportunities to:

- explore their personal and professional aspirations for the future
- set clear goals
- access positive social, cultural and economic networks
- develop their sense of self-worth and self-efficacy through receiving encouragement and positive feedback.

#### Access to family reconciliation and mediation and family counselling

While EFY Foyers ultimately seek to promote students accessing sustainable independent housing, such as private rental, for some students the pathway to this outcome will include a temporary return to family. This could be for a specific period or in and out of the family home over a number of weeks, months or possibly even years.

For others, living with family may not be a viable option. However, the possibility of re-connecting, understanding, repairing or resolving damaged relationships or conflicts can provide young people with numerous benefits. This includes the possibility of future emotional and/or financial support from family, and a stability that can increase young people's emotional and psychological health and their ability to develop other healthy relationships.

While EFY Foyers will generally refer students to specialised family mediation and counselling where appropriate, YDWs will also receive training. This is so they can carry out initial family consultations that can determine the potential for, and possibly facilitate, family involvement within the Foyer context. The development of a framework for family involvement within services should also be established. A good example of this is Mottaghipour and Bickerton's the Pyramid of Family Care.<sup>123</sup> Formulated to work with families of patients with severe mental illness, this framework also has broader applicability in developing family inclusive practices. It progresses from establishing minimal levels of family involvement, starting from connection and assessment, to the provision of general education, before moving to more specialised interventions such as psycho-education, consultation and family therapy.

It is important to note that family reconciliations will not always be desirable or appropriate. In cases where serious physical, sexual or other abuse has occurred ensuring the safety of the individual is paramount. If there is a desire for family mediation or counselling in such contexts, it is crucial that this is done through referrals to specialist services.

### **Experiences of positive relationships and meaningful engagement**

Students will have opportunities to experience positive relationships through their interactions with EFY Foyer staff and peers and through the use of an Open Talent approach in building authentic, transparent relationships.

The Social Connections Offer provides coaching support to EFY Foyer students to help them set and achieve goals related to their social connections and networks. Rather than utilising a traditional case

management approach, EFY Foyer staff and teachers coach students using inspiration, guidance and opportunities that help them to build their skills and capacities so they can achieve goals that are self-determined. Coaches also hold high expectations of all EFY Foyer students, and support and challenge them to achieve these expectations. This works to motivate students to do their best, to take positive risks and to share their talents with others. In this way students are able to develop agency and the capacity to seek and develop healthy relationships and sustainable networks beyond their stay in the EFY Foyer.

Individual coaching, group training and social activities facilitated through the EFY Foyer program will also encourage students to develop positive, supportive connections with adult facilitators and peers through the sharing of interests, thoughts, ideas and feelings. Students will also be encouraged to interact with friends and family outside the Foyer (where appropriate), including referrals to relationship counsellors and family mediation where necessary.

Young people need to be involved in activities that are relevant to their interests and goals, that allow them to make decisions and connect with others, and that make them feel like they are making a difference or helping others. This also includes providing support to stakeholders (e.g., local employers) to assist them in understanding that even young people who have experienced or are experiencing disadvantage can achieve optimal, healthy development when they have positive social supports and are afforded constructive opportunities.

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<sup>123</sup> Y. Mottaghipour & A. Bickerton 2005, 'The Pyramid of Family Care: A framework for family involvement with adult mental health services', *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health*, 4(3). Available at: [www.atoda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/mottaghipour.pdf](http://www.atoda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/mottaghipour.pdf).



Kangan EFY Foyer dining area  
**Photography** Dani Burley

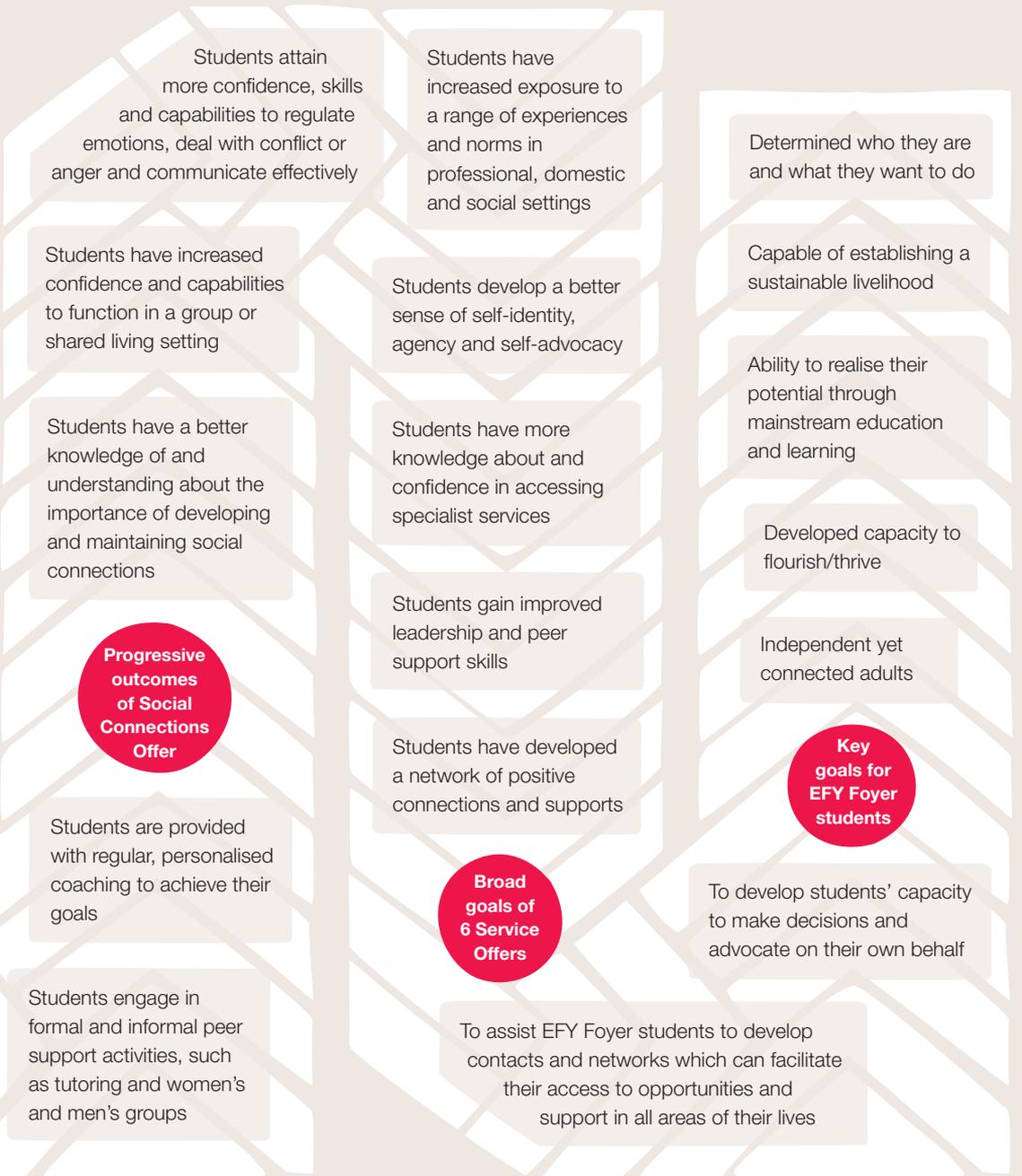
## Activities and outcomes

The activities and outcomes of the EFY Foyer Social Connections Offer are outlined below in Figure 2.

Figure 2

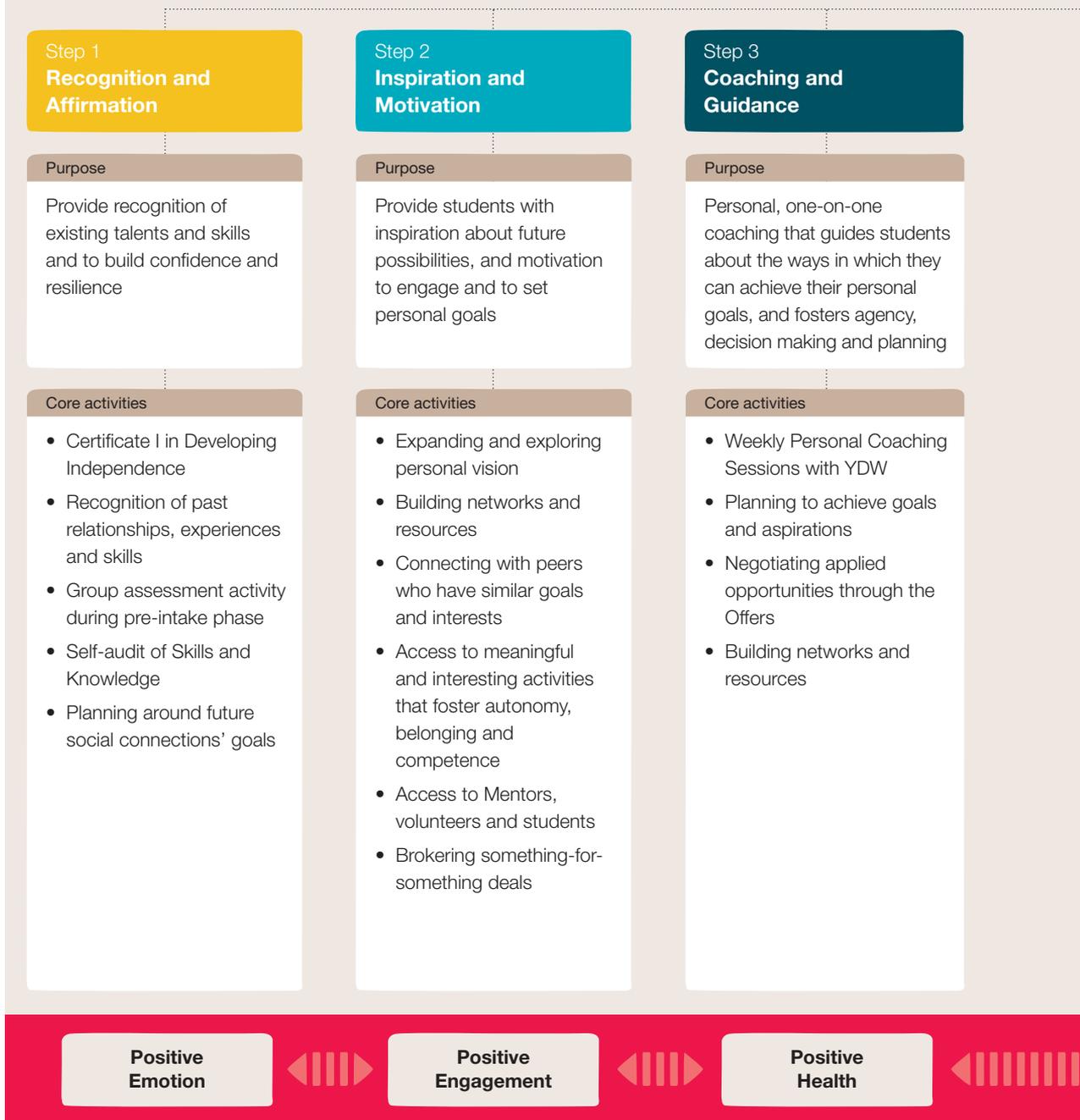
### Social Connections Offer activities and outcomes





## 3.2 Key practice elements

Figure 3  
**Social Connections Offer practice model**



**Step 4  
Internal  
Opportunities**

**Purpose**

Opportunities through EFY Foyer and TAFE that build skills relevant to individual goals and aspirations

- Core activities**
- EFY Foyer environment with communal spaces that promote social engagement
  - Activities aimed at developing social and emotional skills and understanding of social norms
  - Opportunities to engage in group social activities
  - Opportunities to engage in and lead peer-support groups
  - Enrolment in Certificate I in Developing Independence
  - Accessing TAFE resources, staff and the wider TAFE community

**Step 5  
External  
Opportunities**

**Purpose**

Opportunities through external networks and services that foster the application of new skills and knowledge

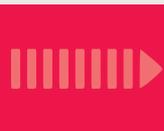
- Core activities**
- Shared delivery with local community groups and services such as youth engagement programs and activities
  - Assistance accessing information and advice on developing and maintaining healthy relationships
  - Assistance accessing specialist health services, such as family mediation and counselling

**Step 6  
Celebrating  
Achievements**

**Purpose**

Acknowledgment and celebration of achievements, including the steps that are taken towards achieving goals

- Core activities**
- Ongoing engagement in social activities, positive relationships, and with social networks
  - Reflecting on achievements
  - Celebrating sustained engagement in social activities, positive relationships and with social networks
  - Recognising challenges and celebrating small steps forward
  - Award ceremonies



**Positive Purpose**



**Positive Relationships**



**Positive Accomplishment**

## Practice assumptions and explanations

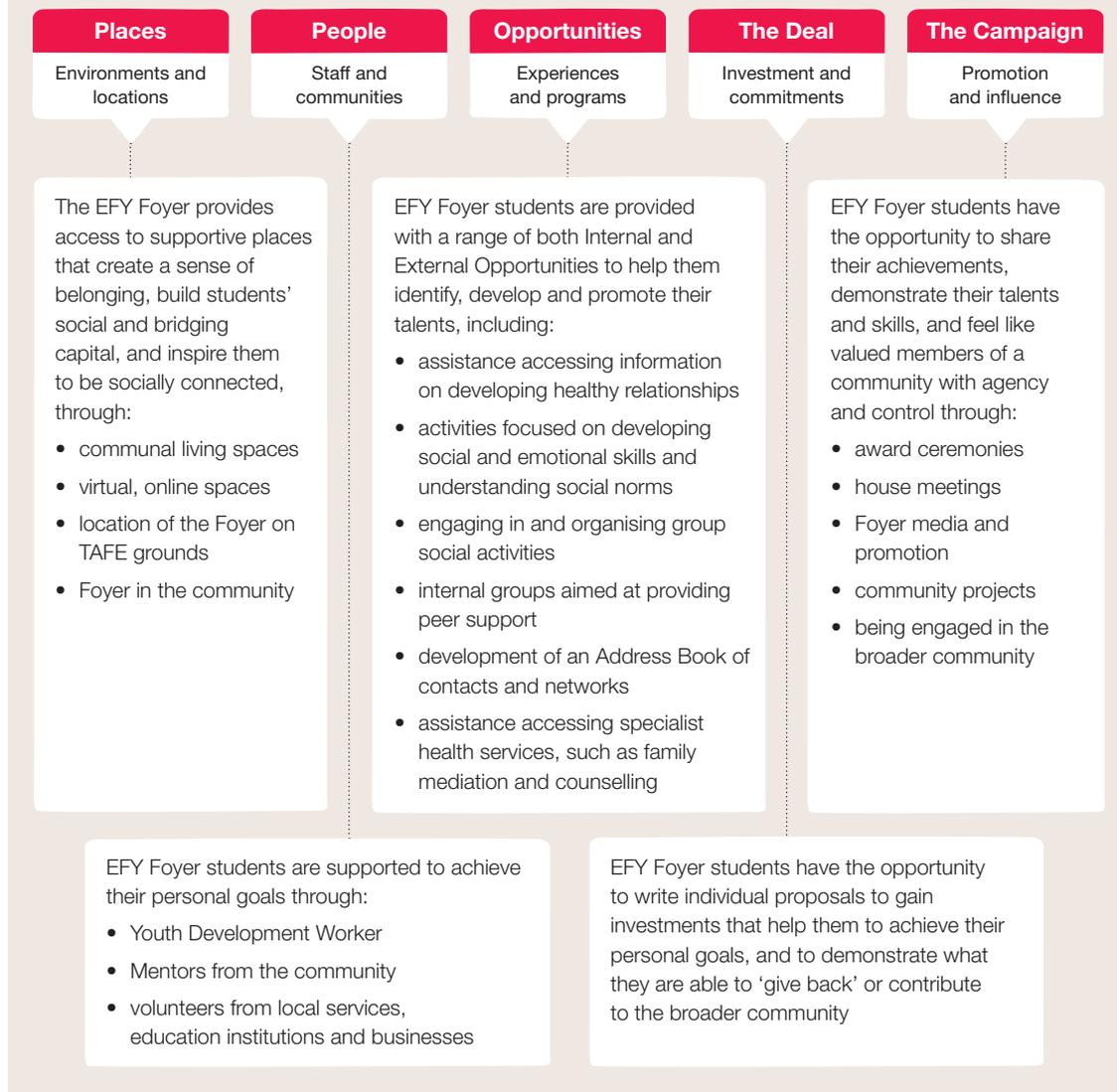
Each of the 6 Service Offers employs a common set of broad practice steps as a way of engaging students and maximising their potential for positive outcomes. Each step or aspect of this practice is also informed by an evidence base that underlines the importance of this form of engagement. These steps also align with Open Talent and Positive Education approaches.

## The Open Talent approach

The Open Talent/Advantaged Thinking approach is expressed through the following 5 Key Practice Areas that are embedded within all of the 6 Service Offers. Figure 4 gives a snapshot of how these practice areas intersect with the Social Connections Offer.

Figure 4

## Open Talent and the Social Connections Offer



## Recognition and Affirmation

Many young people who are service-connected have been exposed to disruptive and often devastating relationships and experiences that have a profound effect on their lives. While many have been traumatised by these relationships and experiences, most, if not all, have also acquired deep insight about themselves as well as skills that are largely unrecognised or unacknowledged both by themselves or others. Acknowledging these past relationships, experiences and skills provides the foundations for the Social Connections Offer.

Recognising and affirming informal learning and life experience encourages students to think positively about themselves and their achievements in life. This is a critical first step towards building confidence as a learner and developing aspirations for independent living. Focusing on capabilities and possibilities, rather than deficits and barriers, gives people confidence as well as hope for the future.<sup>124</sup>

The Certificate of Recognition of Informal Learning or CRIL was developed to formalise this intention – to provide a positive first step into education and to recognise and affirm the individual talents and skills of all young people. The DI Teacher at the TAFE on which the EFY Foyer is located conducts the CRIL interview as part of the pre-Foyer Education Readiness process. It is through this process that all prospective students initially engage with Foyer and key dimensions of the Social Connections Offer.

Recognising and acknowledging these skills and strengths gives students a base on which to build – to develop their confidence and to start developing aspirations for the future. It also helps them to identify their capacity to deal with difficult challenges and experiences. This may include, for instance, recognising their intuitive ability to detect when a family member is on the brink of becoming violent, or who in

their social network can help them to meet their basic needs, such as letting them sleep on their couch or providing food. By utilising the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment, EFY Foyer staff will work with young people on further developing their strengths as well as addressing their challenges.

## Inspiration and Motivation

A sense of inspiration and motivation are essential for EFY Foyer students to achieve key personal and program outcomes, including short-, medium- and long-term social connections. Research suggests that personal motivation is created and maintained by:

- establishing the capacity for **autonomy** or self-direction (over a task or goal, the time, means or techniques and the team to achieve it)
- the opportunity to strive for **mastery** (through mindset shift, recognition of the struggle it takes and that full mastery is rarely attainable)
- a sense of **purpose**, especially in the common good.<sup>125</sup>

Inspiration has many sources, including from the key people in one's life (e.g., family members, peers, mentors) as well as those not personally known (e.g., celebrities, local or community figures). Art, music, nature and engagement in meaningful and interesting activities can also be sources of inspiration. Exposing young people, particularly those who have not had a stable home life, to a range of people, occupations and activities can help to inspire them about life's possibilities and the potential to change their trajectories.

The EFY Foyer Mentoring Program, undertaken through the Social Connections Offer, is designed to build young people's social capital and inspire and motivate them to expand their vision of their future.

<sup>124</sup> Falconer 2009, op. cit.

<sup>125</sup> D. Pink 2009, *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, Riverhead Books, New York.

Each mentor works closely with the mentee by offering support, encouragement and help with goal setting. More specifically, the mentor provides a consistent, non-judgmental relationship; encourages the young person to engage in a range of other relationships; shares knowledge about their education, career and life experiences to assist the mentee in their own education, career and life journey; offers help with setting goals related to career and education aspirations, social relationships, and so on; and suggests possible courses of action and support in making choices.

The EFY Foyer program also develops and fosters student motivation and inspiration through the provision of group activities – for example, groups interested in sexual identity, music appreciation, video-gaming and art – that enable Foyer students to connect over common backgrounds, interests and goals. These groups give young people a safe space to form supportive relationships with both peers and adult facilitators, build a sense of belonging and improve their self-esteem and self-worth. The sense of value and respect that arises from participation in such groups protects against feelings of social isolation, depression and anxiety and can also motivate and inspire young people to set and accomplish goals. In addition, connecting with peers who have similar backgrounds and observing them make personal gains can strengthen young people's beliefs in their own abilities and their motivation to achieve.

### Coaching and Guidance

Young people experiencing homelessness are thrust into independence at an early age, often due to crisis or trauma. They may not be emotionally or financially ready for independent living, and indeed may be grappling with common adolescent concerns, which are compounded by recently experienced crisis or

trauma.<sup>126</sup> In addition to a disrupted education, young people who have experienced family breakdown or dysfunction have also often missed out on positive relationship modelling and critical developmental guidance and support.<sup>127</sup> Providing both formal and informal coaching and guidance mechanisms are vital in establishing the necessary connections and supports that are required in the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Identifying and achieving goals in relation to Social Connections will vary among Foyer students, depending on their current state of mental health, their social and emotional skills and their relationship status with family, friends and extended networks. For example, a student may want to attend Foyer activities to connect with her peers, but she is wrestling with trust issues after years of emotional abuse from family and suffers from severe anxiety – as a result she struggles to leave her bedroom. Thus, it may take considerably longer for this student to accomplish the goals of expanding her social network and developing healthy relationships than a student who usually interacts in a positive manner with peers at the daily Foyer activities – even if on occasion he bullies peers after having another stressful phone conversation with his mother who has a tendency of belittling him. In both situations, the students may be struggling with poor self-esteem and self-worth due to not feeling valued and respected by family, but there may be a discrepancy in the extent to which mental health issues act as a barrier to them achieving social connectedness.

A tailored, graduated approach is needed to help young people identify their goals, address their needs and build on their strengths so they can develop the necessary skills for healthy, sustainable relationships and networks. Such a graduated approach to achieving one's Social Connections' goals involves

<sup>126</sup> G. W. Kamieniecki 2001, 'Prevalence of psychological distress and psychological disorders among homeless youth in Australia: A comparative review', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 35(3):352–8.

<sup>127</sup> DHS 2008, op. cit.

“

A tailored, graduated approach is needed to help young people identify their goals, address their needs and build on their strengths so they can develop the necessary skills for healthy, sustainable relationships and networks.”

both formal and informal methods, and may be done both through internal activities as well as referrals to external support services. It might involve the YDW encouraging a young person during weekly personal coaching sessions to participate in at least one Foyer activity per week, such as an exercise class or group dinners, or providing social support to a group of young people having issues with group dynamics.

Students will be encouraged to engage in formal workshops at the Foyer that develop conflict resolution skills and provide strategies for dealing with anger and stress, as well as a range of activities delivered through the Health and Wellbeing Offer that help young people to develop skills in emotion regulation, decision making, communication and discerning unhealthy relationships from healthy ones. Furthermore, specialists to whom young people are referred will support them to deal with more complex issues, such as depression, anxiety and family conflict.

The Education First Youth Foyer Model provides integrated coaching support for all aspects of a student's development while in the Foyer. The 6 Service Offers are designed to work together to enable students to develop the necessary suite of skills and connections to build the foundations for a sustainable livelihood.

### Internal Opportunities

Providing opportunities, resources and experiences is part of the EFY Foyer team's commitment to 'the Deal'. This is based on the understanding that disadvantaged young people are limited by their lack of resources and opportunities, rather than by a lack of potential.<sup>114</sup> In many ways, the Foyer acts as a supportive *surrogate* family for Foyer students, most of whom come from disrupted and dysfunctional households that are unable to provide safety, social capital, clear expectations, positive role modelling and guidance. The Social Connections Offer provides Foyer students with access to social connections that are relevant to a young person's goals and aspirations and provides them with the necessary *people, networks, resources and skills* to allow them to unlock their potential and to become productive and independent, yet connected, citizens.

Internal Opportunities are geared towards helping students to work on specific goals, to broaden their knowledge and to build and apply their skills within the familiar setting of Foyer – depending on their needs and capabilities. This begins with the Foyer environment in which young people live in a shared space with communal areas that facilitate their connections with peers and adults – where they can eat, relax, study and grow together.

Congregate living can be a challenge with 40 young people from diverse backgrounds residing together. Therefore, the EFY Foyer encourages its residents to participate in or lead social activities designed to establish a positive Foyer culture, enhance connections between people, and expand people's knowledge and understanding of each other's differences. Such social activities might involve teaching peers/being taught how to cook a Middle Eastern dish, playing the guitar, caring for a vegetable and herb garden, or making an effective PowerPoint presentation.

For the young person who leads an activity, it meets the requirements of the 'something-for-something deal' – their provision of this opportunity to other students and/or the community means that they can access resources or opportunities in exchange. These activities enable students to build their self-efficacy and self-confidence, learn about some of the cultural aspects of the people with whom they live, enhance their abilities to live with others, develop a sense of belonging among their peer group, and demonstrate and practise their skills. The result is that the young people in Foyer are motivated by their peers and begin to feel like they can succeed.

Another Internal Opportunity related to the Social Connections Offer is the establishment of Foyer social media groups (e.g., facebook), which can enable easy communication among staff and students, the sharing of information and ideas, the development of relationship skills and an understanding of social norms. Young people also receive training on the appropriateness of using social media, how to deal with bullying and devising anti-bullying protocols.

The 'buddy system' (see p. 52) undertaken through the Social Connections Offer is designed to ease the transition of new students into the Foyer, and build students' agency and connections. Experienced Foyer students take the initiative to induct new students into Foyer living by showing them around both the Foyer and the local area, accompanying them to Foyer activities, and generally being a positive role model and good listener.

In the context of the Social Connections Offer, Internal Opportunities include the development of social skills, positive relationships and social networks. They also include the provision of personalised coaching, and access to information and resources through participation in the range of activities available in all of the 6 Service Offers.

### **External Opportunities**

These provide students with the opportunity to build and apply their knowledge and skills within an external setting, accessed through the networks associated with each of the 6 Service Offers. Given that all students enter the EFY Foyer with different needs and priorities, External Opportunities are highly personalised and relevant to each individual.

The Social Connections Offer builds students' social networks, including those that enhance their social capital and enable them to connect with the wider community and to access employment and other opportunities. Specific External Opportunities through the Social Connections Offer include:

- joining community-based groups, activities or projects, such as sports teams, university campus clubs, music and cultural events and sexual identity groups, which enable Foyer students to bridge diverse communities, connect with supportive peers and adults beyond the Foyer and link to institutions through mainstream services and activities
- developing an Address Book of contacts for social and economic connections, which gives students access to new communities, including education (e.g., university campus), and opportunities to form positive relationships with peers and adults beyond the Foyer
- accessing specialist services, including mental health services, family mediation or counselling, which are important for reconnecting young people with their family and/or addressing complex issues that that can act as barriers to them meeting their full potential in school, work and social relationships.

## Celebrating Achievements

Throughout each stage of the Social Connections Offer, students' achievements will be acknowledged and celebrated. This begins with the CRIL during the pre-Foyer Education Readiness process and continues throughout the two-year EFY Foyer tenancy via mechanisms such as personalised coaching and the Learning Plan, which ensure that Foyer staff are always supporting students to achieve their goals. Students are working towards both short-term and long-term social connections goals, but will often need to undertake a number of steps before these goals can be achieved.

Returning to the previous example of a student who is struggling with anxiety, trust issues and difficulty leaving her room, there are a number of steps needed for her to achieve her short-term goal of wanting to connect with her peers. These incremental steps might include her YDW encouraging and supporting her to leave her room for short periods each day, to tackle her anxiety and self-worth difficulties by seeing a mental health specialist, to select and attend Foyer activities that match her interests at least once a week, and to speak with at least one peer each week during an activity or ask them to hang out beyond the Foyer activities.

Recognising and celebrating these incremental steps increases students' confidence about their own abilities, their capacity to achieve the next step and their potential in the future. Focusing on and celebrating achievements can help students to recognise their strengths and growing asset base, thereby encouraging them to improve their current relationships and connect with new and supportive people and communities.

## Core skills and activities

Many young people who have experienced homelessness have had limited opportunities to develop and enhance their sense of self and self-worth. Their personal strengths and capabilities have often not been recognised and they have had limited access to people, opportunities and experiences that will assist them in allowing these skills to flourish.

EFY Foyers have adopted and adapted the evidence-informed asset matrix that was developed by the UK Foyer Federation to identify the key assets, skills, attributes and character capabilities necessary for young people to transition successfully to adulthood.<sup>128</sup> This matrix is based on three key areas – social, personal and agency capabilities – all of which recognise the central importance of a young person's sense of self and the influence this has on their future outcomes. This matrix also resonates with the youth asset framework developed by Youth Support and Advocacy Service<sup>129</sup> and informed by Ungar.<sup>130</sup>

In addition, the EFY Foyers focus on developing practical skills that are specifically related to one of the 6 Service Offers. Together these core skills are critical to ensuring that students have the necessary capabilities to respond to, and cope with, life's challenges.

Figure 5 on the following page represents the core capabilities required for a young person to reach their potential.

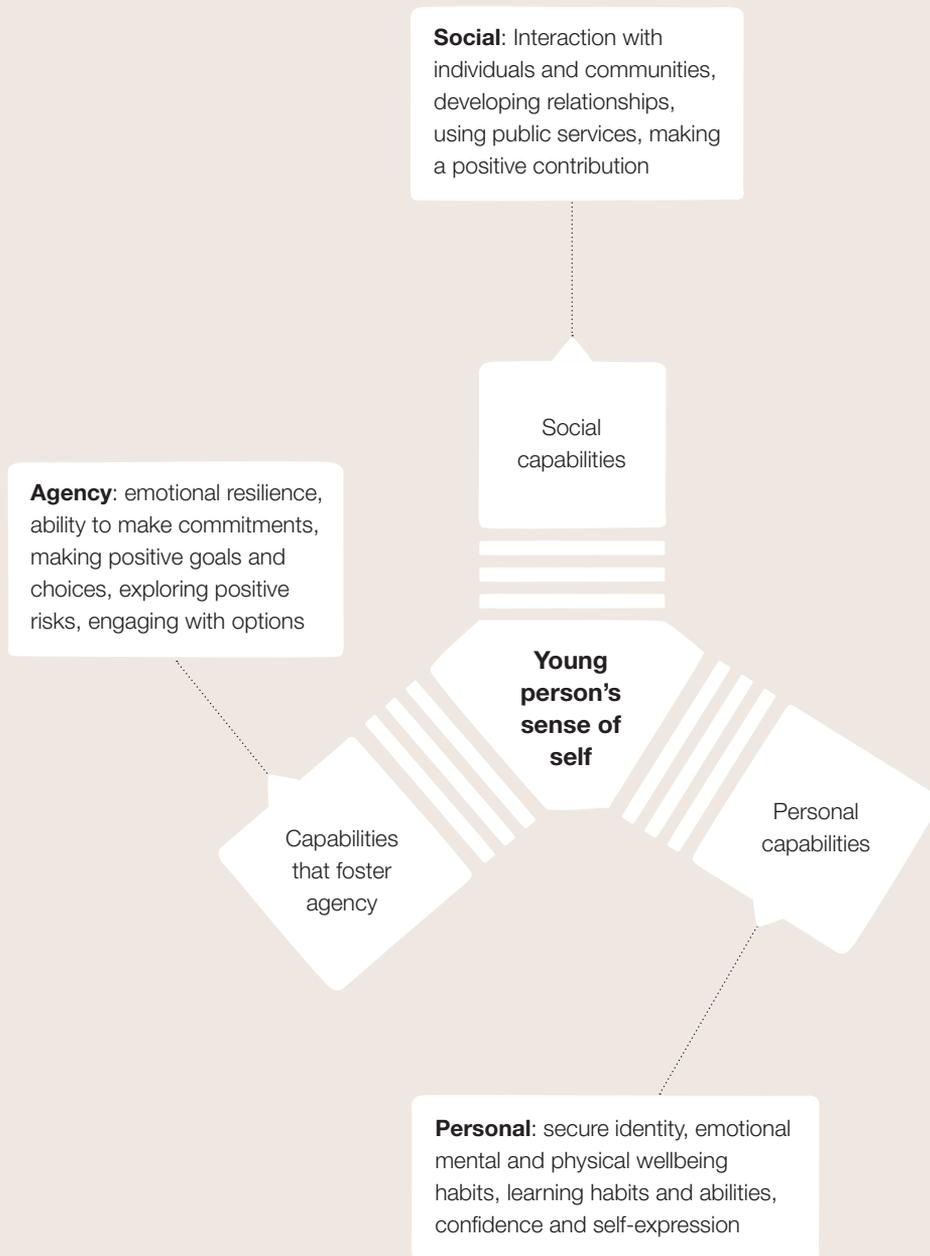
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<sup>128</sup> Foyer Federation 2013, op. cit.

<sup>129</sup> Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) 2012, 'Youth AOD Toolbox', YSAS. Available at: [www.youthaodtoolbox.org](http://www.youthaodtoolbox.org).

<sup>130</sup> M. Ungar 2006, *Strengths Based Counselling with at Risk Youth*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Figure 5  
**Young person's capabilities**



To develop the capabilities displayed in Figure 5, young people require the opportunity to build core skills. Table 1 below demonstrates the core skills required to build personal and social capabilities, agency and practical competencies.

Table 1: Core skills for young people	
Stream	Skills
<p><b>Personal</b></p> <p>Reflectiveness, motivation, responsibility</p>	<p><b>Self-awareness:</b> the ability to act appropriately, manage stress, regulate emotions, possess self-confidence about one's abilities and have optimism for the future.</p> <p><b>Self-expression:</b> confidently express one's identity, talents and abilities, and recognise opportunities for self-development, personal growth and making positive change.</p>
<p><b>Social</b></p> <p>Relatedness, engagement and interaction</p>	<p><b>Social awareness:</b> understand social and ethical norms of behaviour, relate to and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and be aware of family, social and community resources.</p> <p><b>Relationship skills:</b> establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, communicate clearly, negotiate conflict, resist inappropriate social pressure, and seek and offer help when needed.</p>
<p><b>Agency</b></p> <p>The capacity to act on one's own behalf</p>	<p><b>Decision making:</b> make constructive and respectful choices about personal behaviour and social interactions, evaluate consequences of actions and safety and wellbeing of self and others.</p> <p><b>Problem solving:</b> identify and define problems, investigate possible solutions and implement strategies for resolving issues.</p> <p><b>Positive experimentation:</b> be able to take positive risks concerning one's self-development that may include new experiences, places and/or people, as well as pro-active steps towards achieving set goals.</p>
<p><b>Practical skills</b></p>	<p><b>Literacy and numeracy, technology, career planning and development, learning skills:</b> have the ability to engage in education and training at a Certificate III level or higher, utilising ICT, oral and written literacy, critical thinking and analytical skills.</p>



Chrissy and Shannon at Kangan EFY Foyer

**Photography** Dani Burley

## Part 4: Overview of the Social Connections Offer's Tools and Resources

The Education First Youth Foyer Social Connections Offer is supported by a suite of practical tools and resources for use in operationalising the Social Connections Offer. They are specifically designed for the use of Youth Development Workers, Team Leaders, Developing Independence Teachers and mentors in the EFY Foyer

context, but may also be useful to other workers and teachers in youth settings.

All of the following tools and resources have been developed to support the students and staff involved with the EFY Foyers. An overview of these tools and resources is provided here, all of which can be accessed at: [efyfoyers.org.au](http://efyfoyers.org.au).

### Vision of the Social Connections Offer

The Social Connections Offer seeks to provide EFY Foyer students with the social and emotional knowledge, skills and opportunities to develop thriving social relationships and networks (including with family, friends, partners and services), and ultimately to have sustainable connections with helpful supports and resources.

### How the Social Connections Offer supports students to develop thriving social relationships and networks

- 1 **'The Deal'** is an agreement signed by all EFY Foyer students that during their residency in Foyer they are accountable for remaining engaged in activities – e.g., leading an activity attended by their Foyer peers or community members – as set out in a proposal developed by each student. In exchange, the EFY Foyer provides opportunities for social connections that are relevant to students' goals and aspirations, and access to the appropriate people, networks, resources and skills to allow them to unlock their potential to be productive and independent, yet connected, citizens.
- 2 **Coaching framework** formalises the positive, outcomes-focused relationship formed between EFY Foyer students and staff, and provides a weekly one-hour space for each student to engage in tailored goal setting, planning and skill development with their YDW.
- 3 **Mentoring program** offers the opportunity for an authentic, transparent, voluntary relationship to be fostered between EFY Foyer students and Mentors on at least a monthly basis. Mentors provide each of their students with support, encouragement, guidance and access to positive networks.
- 4 **Certificate I in Developing Independence** supports students to set goals and aspirations, plan to achieve them and grow their networks and experiences.
- 5 **EFY Foyer trauma-informed tools and resources** aim to ensure that staff are aware of, and able to support, students with any past trauma, neglect and/or abuse issues, and to identify when students need a referral to specialist support.
- 6 **Internal Opportunities** provide communal spaces that promote social engagement, activities that develop social and emotional skills and positive social connections, and information on fostering healthy relationships.
- 7 **External Opportunities** connect students with community groups and services, social and economic networks, and resources and specialist supports that exist outside of EFY Foyer and TAFE.

## 4.1 Coaching framework

The way that EFY Foyer staff, mentors and group facilitators work with students is central to ensuring the integrity of the Open Talent approach, and we aim to enable EFY Foyer staff, mentors and others involved with EFY Foyers to work in ways that develop their capacity to innovate and lead change.

A wide range of methods – including positive psychology, mindfulness techniques, narrative-based approaches, motivational interviewing, solutions-focused therapy, life coaching and group work methodologies – have informed the development of the EFY Foyer Coaching Framework. It incorporates a youth-focused coaching approach, which is distinct from models designed for adults such as leadership coaching, vocational coaching and life coaching.

Youth-focused coaching marks a move away from a traditional, deficit-based, case-management approach towards one that is ‘aspirational’ and goal-oriented. Such coaching does not replace all other forms of professional health and wellbeing services and supports. Rather, this approach clarifies and reshapes the activities of non-clinical staff in EFY Foyers, such as Youth Development Workers and Team Leaders, whose roles integrate personalised coaching, assisted planning and group work facilitation.

Coaching in the EFY Foyer is led by YDWs and Team Leaders, with the process structured and focused on a clear set of objectives and goals. It is relational and task orientated, and driven by the self-articulated goals of the young person. It requires a shared investment from both the Personal Coach (YDW or Team Leader) and the young person being coached. In the coaching relationship, it is the Coach’s role to:

- recognise and improve skills, abilities and/or knowledge
- have expectations and make demands
- motivate
- facilitate further opportunities for young people to develop skills.

The Coach can also play an important role in supporting young people to arrive at a place where they are building in all areas of their life. The Foyer Federation recognises four distinct levels of livelihood, which map where young people may be on a continuum from surviving towards thriving. These four levels are:

- **Surviving** – a life defined by deficit and day-to-day sustainability
- **Coping** – a life limited by deficit and short-term sustainability
- **Building** – a life moving from deficit to asset and mid-term sustainability
- **Thriving** – a life defined by asset and long-term sustainability.

The EFY Foyer approach towards coaching aims to support young people to move from states of ‘surviving to thriving’ through regular Personal Coaching sessions.

### Coaching Manual

The Coaching Manual provides an insight into the thinking and theory behind youth-focused coaching, as well as practical exercises and tools to use with young people in a coaching context.

### Training

All EFY Foyer staff undertake Induction Training when they commence in a Foyer role and coaching is part of this training. The coaching modules provide practical, hands-on training designed to upskill staff as personal coaches.

## 4.2 Mentoring program

The EFY Foyer Mentoring Program is a relational rather than clinical intervention, through which Foyer students are connected with interested and committed adults who help them explore their personal and professional aspirations for the future, access positive networks, and provide guidance, support and encouragement. Mentoring is focused on the young person and supports their personal growth through the development of this relationship.

Mentors aim to foster strong, healthy relationships that serve to build the young person's social capital. They do this by engaging with their mentee in social and recreational activities that can contribute to self-exploration and affirmation, health and wellbeing goals and/or an awareness of and connection to what's happening in the community. These activities also have the potential to open up new possibilities for young people and can provide inspiration for the future.

In addition, the mentoring relationship can connect students with positive social, cultural and economic networks. While access to such networks can provide young people with useful connections and opportunities, achieving set outcomes is not the sole focus of the

mentoring relationship. The process of equipping the mentee with the tools to replicate good, trusting relationships elsewhere is considered a major positive outcome in and of itself.

The Mentoring Program manuals provide resources and support to both mentors and students participating in the EFY Foyer Mentoring Program. The Mentor Manual includes an overview of the EFY Foyer model, its intended outcomes and how the Foyer works with young people. It also includes an overview of the actual program, how it fits within the EFY Foyer Model and provides a number of resources and tools to assist mentors in fulfilling their role. The Mentee Manual outlines the parameters of the program and prepares students for what they can expect from a mentoring relationship.

The manuals are intended as an accompaniment to training, which will be delivered to all mentors and mentees participating in the program. Mentors and mentees will also be provided with opportunities for reflection, support and guidance once the mentoring relationship has been established. The manuals are available for download at: [www.efyfoyers.org.au/](http://www.efyfoyers.org.au/) resources.

“

Mentors aim to foster strong, healthy relationships that serve to build the young person's social capital.

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## 4.3 Certificate I in Developing Independence Toolkit

### Certificate I in Developing Independence

The Certificate I in Developing Independence (or Cert. 1 in DI) is a key component and driver of the Education First Youth Foyer Model. It is a mandatory course, formally accredited by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority, in which students accepted into the EFY Foyer will enrol on their second day of induction.

The Cert 1. in DI fills a significant gap in the current education and training system by providing a formal, supportive and accredited space for young people to develop core life management skills – such as goal setting, planning and dealing with conflict – as well as recognising and validating their existing skills, talents and aspirations.

Through a combination of personal coaching around education and career planning, enhanced by engagement in group activities at the EFY Foyer, the Cert 1. In DI provides a solid platform from which young people can independently begin to navigate their own career and personal development journeys. It aims to provide a launch-pad from which to engage with the EFY Foyer's 6 Service Offers:



**Education**



**Employment**



**Health and Wellbeing**



**Social Connections**



**Civic Participation**



**Housing and Living Skills**

### Developing Independence Trainers' Manual

The Trainers' Manual is a guide for those staff with responsibility for implementing the Cert. 1 in DI – in particular, Youth Development Workers at the EFY Foyers and TAFE-based Developing Independence Teachers. It includes:

- a course overview
- delivery modes and methodology
- FAQs about the Cert. 1 in DI and the steps to completing the certificate
- examples of student experiences
- an example of a completed Certificate of Recognition of Prior Learning or CRIL
- an explanation of the EFY Foyer's 6 Service Offers and use of the Open Talent approach.

### Developing Independence Learning Plan

The Learning Plan for students is a key component of the Cert. 1 in DI, and is designed to be completed by students enrolled in the certificate in consultation with both their EFY Foyer YDW and their TAFE DI Teacher. The Learning Plan outlines:

- the 6 Steps to attaining the Cert. 1 in DI
- an Assessment Rubric
- the Address Book for Students.

Once completed, approaches to storing the Learning Plan will differ for each EFY Foyer. The DI Teacher will need to keep a record of completed Learning Plans for assessment purposes, and generally the Foyer team will keep a copy in the Student File system.

“EFY Foyer staff work with young people to promote positive health, social and emotional skills, and relationships.”

#### 4.4 Trauma-informed, early intervention tools and resources

EFY Foyer staff work with young people to promote positive health, social and emotional skills, and relationships. This does not mean, however, that they avoid dealing with the difficult issues or the challenges that young people face. Rather, Foyer workers are trained in a range of social and wellbeing areas that enables them to intervene early to prevent any escalation of health and relationship concerns. They are also trained to help students learn positive strategies and habits to manage the challenges related to their mental and emotional health and their social interactions.

They do this by utilising Open Talent and Positive Education/Positive Psychology approaches, along with a myriad of tailor-made tools and resources. These include screening and assessment guides and policies, procedures, information sheets and plans in relation to alcohol and other drugs, mental health, suicide and self-harm risk, and family violence. Workers are taken through each one of these tools and resources and given training on how to use them and in what circumstances.

These early intervention tools and resources are available online for workers to access at any time and include:

- single session family consultations conducted by YDWs
- fact sheets in the areas of family violence and mental health
- training for EFY Foyer staff, including:
  - trauma-informed practice
  - developing family sensitive practices and working with families frameworks
  - working with adolescents to renegotiate relationships with parents or guardians
- checklists and screening tools for referring students to mental health specialists or family mediation counsellors.

All tools and resources are available for download at: [www.efyfoyers.org.au/resources](http://www.efyfoyers.org.au/resources).

## 4.5 Internal Opportunities

The Social Connections Offer provides access to opportunities that are relevant to a young person's goals and aspirations and provides them with the necessary resources and skills to allow them to unlock their potential to be productive and independent, yet connected, citizens.

Internal Opportunities are relevant to all of the 6 Service Offers and are geared towards helping students to work on specific goals, to broaden their knowledge, and to build and apply their skills within the familiar setting of the Foyer depending on their needs and capabilities. For one student, an Internal Opportunity may be working with their YDW on anger management, whereas for another it may be to participate in, facilitate or lead a Foyer activity, or to access TAFE-based tutoring/support. Internal Opportunities relevant to the Social Connections Offer include:

- structured social activity programs aimed at building social connections between students and at developing a positive culture and living environment
- personal sessions to develop social and emotional skills such as mental health and anger management strategies
- training and activities directed at developing positive, supportive and healthy relationships.

TAFEs also have a wide and diverse range of opportunities for social connections available to their students. These may extend from counselling services, career fairs, team sports, special-interest clubs, recreational facilities, music and cultural events, and local and interstate trips. As all EFY Foyer students are also students of their home TAFE, even if they are studying elsewhere, it is important that they know of, and can easily access, the services and opportunities available onsite and that they feel part of the TAFE community. It is also important that the EFY Foyer does not duplicate any TAFE services already provided.

In addition, the Social Connections Offer has developed the following programs to assist YDWs organise activities and groups within the Foyer to build students' opportunities and networks.

## Buddy system

When young people first enter the EFY Foyer as new students, they are surrounded by unfamiliar faces. Thus, each student is assigned a YDW to help them settle into the Foyer, with its shared spaces and communal areas, and to navigate the local community in which the Foyer is situated including the public transport, shops and services. Young people who have experienced homelessness may have limited experience of trusting relationships, of settling into a place for an extended period or of asking for help. Therefore, entering the EFY Foyer as a new student can be overwhelming and disorienting for some, and the challenges they bring with them can make it difficult for them to become comfortable with the EFY Foyer life.

To help ease the transition phase for new students, and build their agency and connections, EFY Foyers have put in place structures such as a 'buddy system'. Experienced Foyer students take the initiative to induct new students into Foyer living by showing them around both the Foyer and the local area, accompanying them to activities, and generally being a positive role model and good listener. Current Foyer students need to consider the following questions when designing a 'buddy system' for their particular Foyer:

- How will buddies be selected, i.e., are there criteria or is there a screening process?
- Do buddies require any training or resources?
- When are new students assigned their buddy – i.e., does a new student receive and meet their buddy on the first day, or will there be a period of time in which the student gets to settle in on their own first?
- How will it be structured – i.e., will buddies and the new students meet on a designated day and time, or do they choose how regularly they meet up?
- What are the specific time commitments and responsibilities of the buddies?
- Who will be the key EFY Foyer contact for the 'buddy system'?

## Relationship and Social Skills Workshops

There may be a need to run Relationship and Social Skills Workshops within the EFY Foyer setting. To scope the needs of EFY Foyer students in these areas, Foyer and DI staff should review the 'Self-audit of Knowledge and Skills' from the CRIL, as well as directly survey and discuss this with students.

A Relationship and Social Skills Workshop is a targeted and purposeful opportunity for students to increase their skills and knowledge related to relationships and social interactions. Such workshops may be targeted 'one-offs' or one of a series, and facilitated by a YDW or an external expert. Example workshops include:

- self-esteem and positive self-expression
- effective communication and listening strategies
- conflict resolution
- respecting boundaries
- healthy relationships
- cyber safety.

In developing a program of Relationship and Social Skills Workshops, the following questions should be considered:

- What do the current cohort of EFY Foyer students identify as 'skills that they need to develop'?
- Does the TAFE or local community run any workshops like this already?
- If not, who could potentially present on these skills?
- Who will be the key EFY Foyer contact for Relationship and Social Skills Workshops?

## 4.6 External Opportunities

Providing opportunities, resources and experiences is part of the EFY Foyer team's commitment to 'the Deal'. This is based on the understanding that young people who are disadvantaged, or have experienced disadvantage, are limited by their lack of resources and opportunities rather than by a lack of potential. The Social Connections Offer provides access to opportunities that are relevant to a young person's goals and aspirations, and also gives them the necessary people, networks, resources and skills to allow them to unlock their potential and become productive and independent, yet connected, citizens.

External Opportunities provide students with the opportunity to build and apply their knowledge and skills within an external setting, accessed through the networks associated with each of the 6 Service Offers. Given that all students enter the Foyer with different needs and priorities, External Opportunities are highly personalised and relevant to each individual.

External Opportunities provided within the context of the Social Connections Offer could include access to:

- specialist mental health services
- family mediation, family counselling and family therapy programs
- youth engagement programs and activities
- new communities, including education (e.g., university campus).

It is important to note that not all activities outside of the EFY Foyer are considered External Opportunities – only those that a student identifies as important to their personal development and goals. Other activities may be purely recreational.

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