



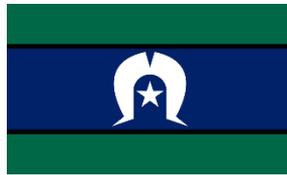
“At times I need to get something off my chest, I don’t need answers.”

Taking Action, Creating Change Together Project (TACCT) | March 2024

Acknowledgment of Country

Youth Action acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We understand that sovereignty was never ceded and recognise their continuing connection to lands, languages, waters, and cultures.

Our office is located upon the land of the Gadigal people. We recognise their traditional and ongoing Custodianship, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.



About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and the services that support them in NSW. We work towards a society where all NSW young people are supported, engaged, valued, and have their rights realised. We represent over 150 Member organisations and regularly engage with young people and youth workers from all over the state, as we have for over 30 years.

We give a particular focus to young people who are regional, First Nations, LGBTIQ+, with disability, from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, including migrants and refugees, and doing it tough. We use a rights-based lens to focus on programs, policy and advocacy that achieve meaningful outcomes, embed strengths-based approaches, and are informed by data and evidence. We are an ally to the self-determination of First Nations communities, are led by the expertise of young people and the Sector, and work to be a trust-worthy partner and collaborator.

Youth Action
262 Liverpool Street,
Darlinghurst 2010 NSW
(02) 8354 3700
info@youthaction.org.au
ABN 17 209 492 539
www.youthaction.org.au

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Introduction

In October 2023 Youth Action was commissioned by Youth Off the Streets to facilitate consultations with young people on the content development of their training Taking Action, Creating Change Together (TACCT) Project. We conducted four roundtable consultations with 32 young people between October 2023 – February 2024.

The aim of the roundtables was to identify what information young people felt should be included in the training for youth workers working with young people with lived experience of domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV).

Key recommendations for areas to be included in TACCT worker training content

1. Developed empathic listening skills and building trusting relationships with young people.

Workers supporting a young person that has experienced DFSV need to have well developed empathetic listening skills to build a relationship of trust with the young person. Workers should be supported to develop these skills and understand that taking the time to develop a relationship with the young person is needed before interventions can occur.

2. Supporting young people to retain control of their story

Workers need to understand that restoring choice and control is an important first step when supporting a young person who has experienced DFSV. This includes supporting a young person to own their own story.

3. Trauma informed practice and cultural safety with young people.

Training for workers on trauma-informed practice and cultural safety are crucial in ensuring that young people from socially excluded groups (such as LGBTQIA+ young people, young people with disabilities, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and First Nations young people) receive the appropriate care and support.

4. Understanding the context in which DFVS experiences by young people occurs.

Workers should understand that young people that have experienced DFSVD need support workers that are able to understand the complicated contexts in which these young people find themselves. Workers need to show understanding about the impacts of abuse over time, and that these young people might wish to address other more immediate priorities first.

5. Holding supportive conversations in response to a disclosure

While holding space for a young person to make a disclosure about DFSV, support workers must ensure the young person's agency by laying out options forward, while also respecting the young person's capacity to make informed

decisions. Workers must validate the experiences of the young person in the present while also assisting the young person to know that recovery will happen and rebuild their sense of hope for the future

6. Communicating the referrals process

Support workers need to explain referral processes in detail to the young people they work with, including being clear about next steps, what the young person can do if the referral does not follow through and checking in with the young person to ensure that the referral has been successful.

7. Young people and their rights

Support workers need to clearly explain a young person's rights with regard to confidentiality and reporting requirements at the first point of contact. Young people also want to be reminded of these requirements throughout their contact with the support worker.

8. Implications for young people under 18 of disclosing and reporting DFSV

Support workers should have regard to the fact that reporting obligations can be intimidating for a young person, who might be nervous that making a disclosure about abuse could have repercussions if they live with or are still connected to the person responsible for the abuse. Workers should be clear at the beginning of a conversation (i.e.: before a disclosure is made) about what the potential outcomes and repercussions are if a young person chooses to disclose abuse.

9. Responding to young people with diverse life experiences and backgrounds

Young people want their support workers to be well trained in the unique way that DSFV affects them as members of a particular group, while being mindful of personal bias. Workers should be trained to understand the different contexts that a young person might come from and to be able to make appropriate referrals to services uniquely placed to support that young person.

10. Resources

When sharing resources with a young person, support workers should provide a range of resource options so the young person can choose what is best for them. In providing a range of resource options, the support worker should also be mindful to include resources that acknowledge their intersectional lived experiences and backgrounds.

Methodology

Young people were recruited to this project through an expression of interest (EOI) form that was distributed to our youth sector and young people networks. Our aim was to be representative of the diversity of young people in NSW with a particular focus on Youth Action's priority groups: young people from regional NSW, First Nations young people, young people from culturally diverse communities, young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ young people, and young people doing it tough.

Youth Action heard from 32 young people across the four roundtables. There were two open the roundtables were open consultations, a third was run with members from Youth Off the Street's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) and the final

roundtable involved a presentation and feedback session of the findings and recommendations.

Across the roundtables the young people we heard from discussed the following questions:

- What are the qualities of a good support person working with young people with lived experience of DFSV?
- What do you think is important for a someone supporting a young person with lived experience of DFSV to know?

Are there any resources that you think are useful for young people with lived experience that you think support workers should know about? The safety and welfare of young people was considered in every step of the project. As a result of the sensitive nature of the topic, Youth Action's duty of care, consent and mandatory reporting requirements for disclosures made by young people under 16 years of age, Youth Action limited participation to the project to young people 16 – 24 years of age.

The safety and welfare of the participants was paramount during this process. On the EOI form we provided the following contact numbers for support: NSW Sexual Violence Helpline: 1800 424 017, 13 YARN: 13 92 76, 24/7 Crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Domestic Violence Line: 1800 65 64 63, Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800, 1800 RESPECT: 1800 737 732, Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service: 1800 938 227, Men's Referral Service: 1300 766 491, and Lifeline (24 hour crisis line): 131 114.

Youth Action also ensured that support was available for participants during the roundtables. We contracted Full Stop Australia for counselling support during the open consultation and staff from Youth Off the Streets supported

participants in the consultation with the YAG group. After each consultation, Youth Action provided the contact details for Full Stop Australia for any of the participants who wanted to debrief after the session.

We would like to thank Youth Off the Streets for their recognition that young people are experts in their own lives and for their commitment to the inclusion of young people's views and lived experience in the development of training content for the TACCT Project.

We were aware that this can be a sensitive and difficult topic to discuss. We would like to thank Full Stop Australia and Youth Off the Streets for supporting us in creating a safe space for the young people involved by providing support during the roundtables.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the brave, articulate, and passionate young people who so generously and openly shared their views and experiences. Your lived expertise and desire to see the system change to better support young people like yourselves is deeply inspiring.

Demographic Information

We heard from a diverse group of young people from different life experiences, backgrounds and identities. The demographic data below was taken from the EOs:

Location - Greater Sydney 33%, Western Sydney 33%, Regional: 25%

Age - 16-17: 39%, 18-24: 61%

Gender - Female: 62%, Male, 18%, Other gender: 20%

Youth Action priority groups - First Nations: 5%, LGBTIQ+: 41%, Disability: 32%, CALD: 14%, Doing-it-tough: 36%

Young People's Responses

What are the qualities of a good support worker working with young people with lived experience of DFSV?

What is a support worker?

For the purpose of these consultations, we defined a support worker as someone who a young person might seek help from but who is not a specialist in domestic, family, or sexual violence. This might be a youth worker, teacher, student support officer, caseworker, or other person in a professional helping role. The nature of interaction that a young person has with a support worker might be either formal in the form of a regular meeting or session or informal through interactions that happen whilst a young person is engaging in an activity with the work.

Highly developed empathic listening skills and understanding about how to build trusting relationships with young people.

In Youth Action's 2023 Report on the Voices of Young People on Sexual Violence, young people said that societal attitudes and the culture of victim blaming and stigma impact young people's ability to seek help. In these consultations, young people said feelings of shame and fear discourage them from speaking up about DFSV.

To address this culture, young people agreed that building trust between a support worker and a young person is the most important first step. This creates a sense of safety for the young person, so they feel comfortable talking openly about their experiences.

“One of the most powerful things I found is really making sure that whoever you’re going to understands and acknowledges the trust that have in them to share that information ... they say ‘thank you so much sharing’.”

Young people had varied experiences with seeing support workers. Some young people reported having a support worker with them only briefly, while others had long term interactions with the same worker. They said that trust needs to be built first before they feel safe to move into conversations about more sensitive topics, regardless of the length of time a young person is connected to a support worker. They spoke about how trust develops over time and improves every time the young person sees a worker.

Young people described different examples of ways workers had built trust with them.

“Allow time to discuss the other things that are important to them in their life.”

“You see them as like a friend, someone you can trust, if you tell a joke they laugh with you, they understand your tone and respond.”

The common theme in young people’s positive experiences of support was that workers demonstrated how they cared about the young people by being interested in them as a whole person rather than only their trauma experience.

“Lead with empathy first, don’t go straight to asking about the facts.”

“The worker needs to feel confident in providing the space for the young person to share, but recognise when they might need prompting, and recognising their skillset and hobbies, and themselves as a whole ... kind of knowing when to break up the conversation with lighter stuff when it's getting too heavy for the young person at a moment.”

These workers came across as genuine and were able to respond in ways that young people said did not feel like they are following a guideline or textbook. They acknowledged that each young person has different needs.

“The support doesn't have to be practical, but an individually tailored response like asking what you would like me to do. Someone who isn't set on a strict approach. Someone with flexibility and adaptability and understand that everyone is different.”

“Especially as a kid going through a DFV, instead of asking you personal questions, asking questions that aren't related to the situation, so you feel like you. Someone who isn't intimidating to a young kid to open up their problems, more of a bond. Someone who gets to know you.”

Once trust was established, young people said the next step is for workers to show that they recognise and validate how hard it is for a young person to disclose a lived experience of DFSV, whether historical or recent.

“People coming forward are taking a huge step – it helps to give them reassurance to continue seeking support.”

“Be aware that it was already incredibly difficult to tell someone ... understand that it took courage and might have taken years for it to come out.”

A number of young people talked about how the most important thing for them in these early stages of disclosure was to have their experiences and feelings validated, with affirmation to the young person that what happened was not their fault. They said that this was the most powerful response a worker could give.

"I don't want a professional to be sorry but acknowledge that the things that the person went through is valid and painful."

They felt it was critical that workers are able to be comfortable holding space to listen openly and non-judgementally to allow a young person to talk in their own time.

"Knowing how to give a young person space, no pressure to have to speak."

"(They understand) the relief you feel by just sharing rather than having to know about support afterwards."

On the whole, young people said that in this initial stage they did not want to feel workers were rushing to making suggestions, action plans, or referrals. Young people said they felt most supported when a worker allowed them to speak about their experiences and feelings, listened, and then asked their thoughts about what to do next.

"At times I need to get something off my chest, I don't need answers."

"They know how to comfort me without immediately coming to a solution and bombarding me with solutions."

"They respect your privacy and take time to help you move forward to a solution."

Young people wanted to know that workers had knowledge and expertise about developing action plans and making referrals, but they did not want them to offer these until they could see the young person was ready to move into this phase.

"Giving people space, but also giving them the options. The sense of what could I do from here, if I shared something...the worker can give me options to be in control of what to do next."

"People don't always know what they want to do especially right after an incident has happened."

Young people also highlighted the need for support workers to understand their boundaries in relation to skills and expertise. Some described negative experiences with workers who they thought had taken on more than they had the skills or experience to manage.

"Understand when you can't handle someone or something ... (if you) can't build trust and refer them on or accept if a young person says it isn't working... trust won't develop."

Allow young people to retain control of their story.

All young people agreed about the importance of allowing young people to have control about how and where they spoke about their experiences. They described that taking control back is part of the process of healing and

recovering from having been in a situation where they felt powerless, and control was taken away from them.

"My support person asks 'Is there a place you want to go' ... I set the place where I want to be ...they ask if I would like to sit or stand or walk ... I feel like I have control."

"They acknowledge that you had decision-making power taken away from you when you experienced the abuse so now, they want to help restore it."

Young people wanted support workers to recognise that their role is not to understand the facts of what happened, but rather to support the young person to tell their story and make sense of their experience.

"Being able to control the narrative and having the professionals understand that it is your story, and they don't have to understand everything. They're there more so to provide support."

Expertise in working with young people that is informed by understandings about trauma informed practice and cultural safety.

Young people said that while a support worker does not have to be an expert in DFSV, they do need to have knowledge and expertise on the impacts of trauma in order to adopt a trauma-informed approach to working with young people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. This is necessary to ensure that the worker understands what might be happening for young people with experiences of DFSV. This includes First Nations young people, young people with disability, young people from culturally diverse communities, and LGBTQIA+ young people.

"They are able to understand the young person and see where they are coming from."

"Never ask 'what's wrong with you' ask 'what happened to you.'"

The young people we heard from said they had benefited greatly from being supported by workers who recognised that their responses to the trauma they had experienced were understandable reactions to what happened to them rather making them feel there was something wrong or judging them.

"When I am talking to my safe people they don't judge me for my emotional reactions."

They also felt it was important that support workers understand that trauma affects everyone differently. When someone is disclosing or talking about traumatic experiences, they may not necessarily describe events in a linear way.

"Be patient when they want to repeat the same thing over and over again to process that trauma they went through. Repeating things is a known way that neurodiverse young people in particular process things."

The young people we heard from described how their reactions to traumatic experiences can impact the way they remember events as well as their emotional and behavioural reactions. The emphasis needs to be on the worker holding a safe and supportive space for the young person and not on trying to understand what happened.

"When you have been through shit you sometimes have a really dark sense of humour."

“Let people have different forms of expression, don’t change the way you treat them.”

Similarly, young people said that support workers and their organisations need to have knowledge about cultural safety in order to create a culturally safe environment for the young people they work with. Youth Action includes the following definition of cultural safety in our Objects and Rules of Association:

“An environment that is spiritually and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together” (Williams, cited in Bin-Sallik 2003, p21). Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics 2010 Cultural Perspectives, In Australia's Rural and Remote Health: A social justice perspective.

Young people said that support workers need to understand the cultural context for young people who have experienced DFSV and should also be encouraged to reflect on their own cultural biases. Many young people reported that there is a connection between culture and religion which can add another layer of complexity. They need support workers to understand this.

“Cultural safety is important especially when approaching things like DV. There is a lot of cultural stigma and judgement. Establishing cultural safety, or if you don’t understand it, ask about it – be curious in a kind and non-judgemental way. Cultural and religious safety is important.”

They also stressed that it was important that support workers be aware of any generational biases they might have. They recognised that people from older generations are often in roles supporting or supervising young people. In Youth Action's 2023 Report on Voices of Young People on Sexual Violence, young people spoke about how they felt older generations sometimes minimised experiences of DFSV because that was how this issue had been understood when they were young people.

Young people described how the professional expertise of support workers who work from trauma informed and culturally safe approaches create a sense of security for them. They described wanting to see support workers feel confident in their knowledge about how to work with the young person, whilst also being able to be their authentic self. They found that this made them feel more at ease as the worker seemed more relatable.

"They are confident in themselves while also being able to be themselves."

What are the main things you think a youth worker needs to know about how to support a young person with an experience on DFSV?

Understand the context in which DFVS experiences by young people occurs.

In our 2023 Sexual Violence Report, young people spoke at length about the need for people working with them to understand the diverse contexts where DFSV can occur. The young people involved in the consultations for this Report also raised the same issue. Young people described a broad range of settings

where DFSV against young people can occur. This includes i in public places such as schools, learning institutions, and workplaces. They said that it also occurs in private, such as within the family in private homes, in intimate relationships, between peers, as well as between strangers. Young people talked about violence occurring in real life and in online environments. In both consultations, young people talked about a continuum of behaviours, from disrespectful words and behaviours through to specific instances of violence and abuse.

Young people also talked about the prevalence of DFSV experiences amongst young people. All young people who have engaged with Youth Action through this work and our earlier 2023 Sexual Violence Report had a personal connection to DFSV either through direct experience as a victim-survivor or through supporting a friend or family member. Sadly, a number of young people in both consultations disclosed having multiple experiences of DFSV from early childhood through to present day.

They said that they want workers to understand this context when speaking to a young person about a traumatic experience. A young person may be talking about a single instance but the trauma they are experiencing might be related to previous experiences.

"I had a lot of self-doubt about what happened that invalidated my experiences ... sometimes it's (telling someone) really terrifying."

Young people also said that addressing the trauma might not be their first priority, as they may have normalised their experiences, found ways to manage what happened to them or might need to focus on other immediate priorities.

“Young people might want to talk about other things first ... let them tell their story in their own way. The abuse might not be the most important thing for them at the time they are talking to you.”

Young people want support workers to understand that for a young person, the process of deciding to speak to someone about their experience may not happen immediately. They may have kept their experience a secret for a long time until they found someone they could trust.

“Know that a young person will have spent so long thinking about this and debating about telling a worker what happened.”

Supportive conversations

Young people in the consultations discussed what they felt workers needed to know when having supportive conversations with young people with experiences of DFSV.

Young people wanted workers to know that the quality of the relationship that workers were able to establish with them was key to ensuring the safety of the young person that was discussing their experiences. Young people said they had the best outcomes when they were connected to support workers who were able to stay engaged with them for an extended period of time. This was closely linked to being able to take the time to build a trusting relationship.

“When you are a first responder or whether you are that person dealing with young people, having someone who persistently checks in within the wishes of the young person, as it’s a case-to-case base. It reinforces that you believe them, and it is significant in their life and you support them through this.”

Having a support worker who “checked in” with them regularly allowed the worker to become part of a young person’s ongoing support network. They felt that with sensitive topics like DFSV, having a support worker who was proactive helped more than having a worker that waited for them to initiate contact.

“Sometimes you need to be there ... rather than saying to a young person ‘just reach out when you need it.’”

“I think that there could be nothing worse than opening up to someone then realising that they’ve given you the initial, ‘Oh yeah, I’m here for you’ and then never hearing from them again.”

In cases where a young person has made a disclosure about a recent experience of DFSV, they said they responded best to support workers who viewed them as someone able to make informed choices regardless of their age.

“Don’t talk down to them (the young person) or think they don’t understand what has happened to them.”

Once trust has been built, young people wanted support workers to explain options to them and take time to help the young person identify what is the best course of action to take. They reiterated again that the victim-survivor has been in a situation where control has been taken away from them during the experience of DFSV. For help-seeking to be effective, it needs to give control back to the young person by allowing them to decide what they want to see happen.

“Offer to explain the options as well, not just giving them. Emotional support vs action-based response. People need to know what their rights are and what paths they can take. Seek to understand what the person wants, put the ball in the victim-survivor’s court.”

Young people said that at this time it was also important for workers to give messages about hope and recovery. Several young people described how vulnerable and afraid about the future they felt when disclosing recent experiences. Others said at the time, the experience uprooted all areas of their lives, including education, employment and relationships. They wanted someone to let them know there was a way forward and that things would not always feel that way.

“There are options to support someone when shit is hitting the fan. That someone can actually know that there are always options for every area in their life. I think it'll be important for social workers, whoever works with children. Finishing high school and getting into university is the front door of the house, but we always focus on the front, but we forgot there's a window, backdoor, go down the chimney, there's many options but most of us only think about the front door because it's the most used.”

Making referrals

Young people also discussed the referral process. They understood that workers will often need to refer young people to services with greater expertise in DFSV so they can get the best and most appropriate assistance. d They talked about how workers could make that referral process a positive one for the young person by increasing workers awareness about how a young person feels when a referral is made.

“After things have happened, even if you refer onwards, it is worth checking in on the young person to make sure they’re linked in afterwards. A young person might be on a waiting list for months, providing that interim support. You can feel a sense of hopelessness when you speak to someone, but then nothing comes out of it.”

Several young people talked about the heightened emotional state that someone may be in when they are talking about experiences of DFSV and how they can be oversensitive to being referred elsewhere, even when they knew it was the best thing to do.

“It can feel quite jarring when a young person is being vulnerable and then they’re just palmed off.”

Young people said that they wanted the worker to be aware of how they speak about making a referral to a young person. The key elements for young people were to feel in control and to feel confident that the worker was going to walk through the process with them. This requires workers to provide information about the referral options, letting the young person decide what feels right for them and following up after the referral to see how things went.

“The language of how a support worker that worked well for was ‘it might be helpful for us to talk to x’. Framing it with words like ‘us’ and as the young person being part of the decision making. To make it sound like the support worker will still be with you in the process. Language is important. Framing it as a team process and the young person leading the process.”

One young person described a positive experience where a support worker who was handing over their care to a specialist wrote a card with a message in it validating their bravery in speaking about their experiences and affirmed their capacity to heal and recover.

Young people and their rights

Young people said that support workers need to educate young people about their rights, especially in relation to confidentiality and reporting requirements.

“Tell a young person what you are going to do with the information.”

Young people wanted this information to be clearly explained to them at the beginning of any interaction with a support worker and repeated throughout the process. This is because some felt they had been too distressed to process all the new information when they first meet a support worker.

“On the role of the first responders, it’s important to remind young people, and I know it’s plastered on the wall and stuff but remind the young people what their rights are.”

Implications for young people of disclosing and reporting DFVS.

Young people spoke extensively about the experience of making a disclosure when they were under 18 years of age or for someone under 18 years of age such as siblings or other family members.

“Reporting in DFSV is very complex – it’s a common feeling for people to worry about breaking up the family. It’s important to have responders understand that it’s complex and traumatic.”

The main concern was about the ramifications of making a disclosure, particularly if it related to an experience that had happened in a family or intimate relationship. They believed that this added another layer of complexity for support workers as they needed to create a safe and supportive space to have the conversation with young people while also being honest about their mandatory notification obligations. They wanted workers to understand what might be going through a young person’s mind when making these disclosures, so they know how to support them.

“You still love the person who has done harm to you, you don’t necessarily want to end that relationship ... workers need to find a way to help navigate what the young person wants.”

“You want to be able to tell someone without instant repercussions that someone will come along and lock up their family member.”

“The reporting process takes control out of young people’s hands again.”

They wanted workers to be clear at the beginning of the conversation about what they might need to report so a young person knows what might happen as a result of talking about their experience.

“Be upfront with young people about who else you have to tell or report to so they can decide what they want to tell you, so they don’t have to retell their story again.”

Responding to young people with diverse life experiences and backgrounds.

The young people we heard from spoke about how young people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences will have different needs that support workers have to take into account when deciding how best to support a young person.

“Understand that sometimes a young person will feel more comfortable talking to someone of the same gender, cultural identity, life experiences etc.”

“I think responders need to understand that each person is going to be different and the intersection of their identity will affect the type of support they need.”

Young people with disability

Young people with disability wanted workers to understand that they may need different strategies for working with a young person with disability with lived experience of DFSV. They felt that it was most important for support workers to not make assumptions about how they expect a young person to react or what they might need, but instead ask the young person how they want to be supported. This could require accessing disability support services, contacting someone from the young person’s support network or making accommodations to physical environments that help to create a safe and trusting space for the young person to feel comfortable to speak.

There were several neurodivergent young people in our consultations who gave the following suggestions.

“(Workers) need to speak clearly and in a way this group of young people can understand, recognise that someone experiencing trauma has less capacity to think abstractly.”

“Having sensory toys, and other things available during sessions for neurodivergent/anxious young people that need something else to concentrate on while they are having intense conversations.”

LGBTQIA+ young people

LGBTQIA+ young people said one of the most important things that made them feel safe and respected was when support workers were aware of their use of gendered language. They said workers should check in with young people to confirm their pronouns and gender identity.

“Make sure you ask up front how they want to be referred to, use inclusive language like use partner rather than assume girlfriend or boyfriend, try not to be gendered.”

They also wanted workers to be able to connect them to resources or services that address the issue of DFSV for LGBTQIA+ people.

Young people from culturally diverse communities and First Nations young people

Young people wanted support workers to recognise that young people from diverse cultural backgrounds may prefer a support worker or a supportive adult from a similar cultural community to them. They may need an interpreter, or

their support person may need an interpreter. They wanted to be connected to resources and services relevant to their cultural identity. They stressed that workers should not make assumptions about young people but should ask how they want to be supported.

“Be curious about a young person’s cultural and religious background ... don’t make assumptions.”

Young people from culturally diverse communities talked about how some communities and faiths have different understandings about DFSV which can be another complicating factor for a young person.

“There’s some words that don’t work in English, this can make it hard to express my feelings.”

Refugee and migrant young people we heard from for our 2023 Sexual Violence Report spoke about intergenerational differences where parents and families may have responded by blaming the victim-survivor because this was how they were taught to understand DFSV. Young people wanted support workers to understand that a young person might also have been brought up with these beliefs and so it could be hard for them to initially see that they were not to blame for what happened to them. The young people also said that a support worker might need to work with the young person’s family to help them to see the situation differently.

“Workers need to be mindful not to push their own beliefs on a young person as this can add trauma to an already bad situation.”

Young people in residential care or housing programs

We were fortunate to hear from a group of young people from Youth Off the Street's Youth Advisory Group who shared their views about what it is like for a young person in residential care or a housing program with a lived experience of DFSV. They spoke about the additional challenges they face as the worker supporting them may also be supervising other young people that are living with them, while juggling the roles of being their support person and reinforcing the house rules.

"Workers need to understand individuals respond differently depending on the environment like whether you are on your own or in a group."

Young people said that confidentiality and being able to maintain control over their own story was important as their personal information was routinely passed on between support workers and case workers. They understood why this might need to happen in a residential setting, however they said they felt uncomfortable when they shared something in private with one worker and then a different worker would come and speak to them about it.

"Youth workers have to write everything in the notes and sometimes other workers talk about what it in the notes. You should let a young person tell you, ask if they are ok first instead of jumping into what they read in the notes".

"I have no issue with things being written in notes, my issue is when a youth worker talks to me about what's written in the notes and then they bring up the topic that would've been written in notes. I didn't tell you these things, then I remember it was probably written in the notes."

They wanted support workers to consider whether it was organisational policy to write everything down. They appreciated when workers were able to use their discretion or when a worker told them what they were writing down.

“Most young people have a preferred worker who they speak to about most topics, that worker respects your privacy and doesn't tell people unless they have to.”

“Being aware of the notes being taken can be a little jarring sometimes.”

Young people felt that workers should let them know if their personal information had to be passed on and that other workers reading the notes should consider how to raise the topics respectfully with the young person.

“Ask how you are rather than dive into the topic and don't say “I know this happened” let them start the convo if they want to.”

“Don't say “I've read the notes” and how are you feeling about this. It's not your business.”

Young people said that workers who are responsible for their day-to-day care can play an important role in supporting them with better understanding about DFSV, how to recognise it and how to get the support they need.

“You may not even know ... (a worker) can help you recognise and point out that what happened was not right or say that was abuse.”

As discussed earlier in this report, it is important for residential care support workers to take the time to build trusting relationships with the young people in their care. Young people said that the workers who took the time to get to know them as individuals were the ones who they were more likely to disclose an experience of DFSV.

“Be able to have a good time ... have fun with you and make you feel at home. It allows you to forget your harsh reality.”

“If you are having regular conversations with someone you trust you feel safer to talk to them about the serious stuff.”

The young people we heard from spoke about their experiences of having youth workers on student placement or newly qualified workers that were responsible for their care. They said that this can sometimes be difficult, especially when dealing with complex issues like DFSV. They felt newer workers need good training and mentoring from experienced workers about how to work with young people who have experienced DFSV.

“A good youth worker is able to admit if they didn’t handle something well and can build trust and healing by talking to the young person about it.”

“Sometimes you just have to observe good case workers. Like knowing when to have fun, and when to lighten up the mood when things get too serious.”

What resources do you think are useful for support workers to share with young people with lived experiences of DFSV?

The young people we heard from all agreed that the most effective resources are the ones that are co-designed with young people from diverse life experiences and backgrounds, and that include resources about supporting peers and bystander education.

Young people said that it was helpful when a support worker provided a range of resource options so that the young person can choose which best suits them. It is important for the support worker to also consider a young person's intersectional lived experience and background

“Directing young people where to go that is confidential, non-committal, free, in person, online, messaging, calling, a whole range so that someone has the choice for what suits them the best.”

“Making sure its tailored specific resources for intersectional groups of people.”

Resources young people found helpful.

Young people particularly liked resources that are designed by and targeted towards young people such as Consent Labs and the NSW Make No Doubt Campaign.

“Consent Labs I found them to have a lot of good resources that were on this specific topic. It's very easy to understand and very accessible.”

Young people said social media and online channels were a common place that they looked at when searching for information, especially when deciding to disclose DFSV. They felt it would be good for support workers to be familiar with those platforms and resources. In our 2023 Sexual Violence Report consultations, young people talked about how it was important to see depictions of victims-survivors as resilient and brave, this instills messages of hope and recovery. They named role models such as Grace Tame, Bittany Higgins, Saxon Mullins, and Chantel Contos as inspirational for themselves and their peers.

Lastly, they said it was important for support workers to be informed about the different services and supports available for the young people they are working with, including resources for young people from diverse life experiences and backgrounds.

“One of the most helpful services has been victim services for the funding they provide – the ability they provide to engage with more helpful supports. Unlike a government organisation they're not understaffed – with social workers it can be a push to give you as many supports as possible, which can be great, but victim services provides that longer term support. Government services tend to be 'in the door out the door as soon as possible ... A lot of youth workers and young people don't know about victim services and what they can provide even for historical cases.”

Young people said resources from trusted sources such as Blue Knot and 1800 Respect are really helpful because they provide links to information for diverse groups, as well as other resources such as checklists and worksheets.