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Mark Mason
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Communities Tasmania
Level 1, 22 Elizabeth Street
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22nd February 2019

Dear Mark,

Re: Youth Matter – A Practical Guide to Increase Youth Engagement and Participation in Tasmania

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the ‘*Youth Matter – A Practical Guide to Increase Youth Engagement and Participation in Tasmania*’ document on behalf of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) and our members.

YNOT is a member based peak body representing the interests of young people aged 12-25 years, and the Tasmanian youth sector. We are a not for profit organisation that advocates for, and works collaboratively with Tasmanian young people, the youth sector, and all levels of government to ensure that the voices of our stakeholders are heard. YNOT represents 85,000 young people, 60 YNOT member organisations and approximately 300 youth sector workers, through our regional networks, state-wide.

Our mission is to work with young people, the Tasmanian youth sector, the community, and all levels of government to increase the participation and contribution of young people in the State.

YNOT applauds the Tasmanian Governments commitment to increasing youth engagement and participation of young people across Tasmania and congratulates the Government on the development of a resource that will assist policy makers and service providers to engage with young people who are service users.

The Government should also be commended for actively engaging young people in the development of this document, as too often the voices of young people are overlooked on issues that impact them.

Please find below feedback that we believe will further strengthen and enhance this document.

Background

Whilst the background of the document refers to the *Youth at Risk Strategy (Strategy)* and *Action #26* in the *Strategy* it is not clear that this document was developed to improve consultation mechanisms and inclusive practices targeted towards 'youth at risk'. It cannot be assumed that service providers and policy makers are familiar with the *Strategy* and its Actions. We acknowledge that the document refers to 'young people who live in remote locations' and 'young people experiencing some troubles' however; this does not necessarily mean that young people are at risk.

YNOT believes it is important to clearly define the target group and age range of young people that this resource is designed to engage. This is particularly important if the resource has been developed to deliver on *Action #26* of the *Strategy*. The document appears to be a resource to engage with all young people however, consultation has not occurred with young people aged 18-25 years. Greater clarity in relation to the target group and age range is required to avoid confusion amongst policy makers and service providers.

The use of an image sourced from the 2015 *Dropping off the Edge Report* suggests that areas identified as 'disadvantaged' and 'most disadvantaged' were targeted in the consultation. YNOT is concerned that George Town was overlooked during the consultation process. The level of disadvantage in this area has continued to increase since 2007 and this particular location has high rankings for multiple youth disadvantage indicators. It is not clear how areas of disadvantage were targeted during the consultation process.

Why engage with young people?

The Government should be commended for acknowledging Article 12 of the United Nations (UN) Rights of the Child in this document. However, YNOT believes that this paragraph could be further strengthened by recognising other important benefits of engaging young people including: empowering young people to have greater control over their lives through participation, improving the efficacy and relevancy of services that are designed to meet the needs of young people, and positive youth development.

In addition, YNOT believes the Community Benefits section could also be strengthened by including more examples of the benefits of engaging and consulting with young people including: creating skilled workers for the local workforce, promoting young people as positive members of the community, encouraging civic pride and personal responsibilities in the local area, improving community health and happiness, informing better planning and decision making, and encouraging community volunteering.

Language

YNOT believes that some of the language used throughout the document infers that engagement with young people can be tokenistic. There are several paragraphs in the document where clarification of intention when engaging or consulting with young people would benefit the reader's understanding. The following areas are listed below.

Page 5: "Young people need to feel that they have been listened to and *believe* that their feedback is important and appreciated". The use of the word '*believe*' suggests that young people's feedback is not important as long as they think it is. This word should be removed.

Page 15: Principal 1.4 "*Allow* young people to give feedback on their own terms..." We believe the word '*Allow*' implies that young people need to be given permission to provide their feedback. Alternative phrasing could be used for example "*Ask* young people for feedback on their own terms..."

Page 16: "Consider using incentives to *reward* participation". YNOT suggests replacing the word '*reward*' with '*acknowledge*' as young people do not necessarily need to be rewarded for participating in consultations. Remuneration should also be included as an option with incentives as it may be appropriate to remunerate young people for their time and expertise.

Feedback on Appendices

YNOT suggests that the 'appendices' be presented as 'resources' in the document. Given that these sections stand alone' and are not referred to throughout the document, titling each section as a resource (for example: Resource 1 – Pathways to Participation) would be more appropriate.

The resources appear valuable to improve engagement with young people; however there is no direction given to the reader on how each resource is to be used. We believe the resources will have stronger value if further context on how they can be used and what they will provide the reader is given in the introductory section on page 12.

It appears that the appendices have only been slightly adapted from their original source, with the exception of Appendix 4, therefore it may not be appropriate to state "we have developed a suite of resources that will help..." Perhaps phrasing such as "we have compiled a range of resources that have been adapted from their original source that will help..." would be more appropriate.

Appendix 1 - Pathways to Participation

YNOT believes it is important to provide context with regard to the use of this Appendix to be of benefit to the reader.

This resource has been adapted from Harry Shier's 2001 *Pathways to Participation Model* that was created as an *alternative* model to Roger Hart's 1992 *Ladder of Participation Model*.

This diagram requires more information to direct how each stage of commitment addresses the five levels of participation, and how the resource should be used. Harry Shier 2001 stated that the model may not be helpful to just work through each question, but instead to incite discussion at each stage if an answer is 'no'. Such as 'should we be able to answer this as a yes?', 'are we ready to make changes?', and 'are we prepared for the consequences?'

The 'Obligations' section of this resource requires more than just a policy requirement at each level of participation. For example, Levels 4 and 5 can have legal, ethical, and privacy requirements.

Is the objective of this resource to encourage government and non-government organisations to create internal policies for youth participation? Harry Shier 2001 stated that the Pathways to Participation model should be used to develop action plans to enhance children's participation in organisations, but this outcome or result is not clearly stated within this resource.

Appendix 2 – The Ladder of Participation

The resource states that the Ladder of Participation has been adapted by "Ross Harts Ladder of Participation (1992)". YNOT believes the correct author should be "*Roger Hart Ladder of Participation (1992) Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, UNICEF*".

Appendix 3 – Principals of Engaging with Young People

YNOT believes that a brief statement outlining the underlying principals of youth engagement would strengthen this resource by providing context before outlining the principals. The principals are interconnected and should be considered in full to ensure successful engagement with young people. This is particularly important given that this resource has not been referred to throughout the document.

Appendix 5 – Youth Engagement Checklist

Engagement purpose

In addition to determining the level of engagement required (dot point 3) YNOT believes that consideration needs to be given to the most appropriate way to engage young people. Adding how we can engage with young people is important as this will vary based on the needs of individuals or groups. It's also important to ask young people how they would like to be communicated with and what role they would like to fulfil in the engagement activity.

Participants

YNOT believes consideration should be given to flexible options for participation. Both formal and informal options are important as engagement and participation can occur with young people in various ways for example; online or face-to-face.

Data collection, Storage and dissemination considerations

YNOT believes that greater emphasis needs to be given to informed consent from young people, as well as ethical considerations and legal obligations of workers.

This section of the resource refers to informing parents or carers about the engagement process and seeking consent if required. However it overlooks the importance of seeking and gaining consent from young people themselves.

Obtaining consent from parents or carers for young people under 18 may fulfil legal obligations; however it does not necessarily satisfy ethical practice. Informed consent must also be sought from young people. Young people need to understand what they are consenting to, and have the legal

capacity to provide consent. Ethical interaction with young people is essential. YNOT believes prompts that focus on the process for obtaining consent from young people should be included in the resources as well as referring to Youth Ethics Frameworks.

Individuals engaging with young people also need to be aware of their legal obligations with regard to privacy laws, mandatory reporting, and collecting and storing personal information. Does the organisation have a privacy or confidentiality policy? Has consideration been given to how information will be stored after the engagement activity?

YNOT believes that ethical frameworks and legal obligations when engaging with young people should be included as a separate section in the checklist.

Furthermore, the Statewide Youth Collaborative (SYC) Group has previously developed a checklist on youth consultation '*SYC's guide to consulting with young people – Top 10 Tips*' that may be useful to include as a resource in this document.

Appendix 6 – Examples of How to Engage with Young People

YNOT believes that this section would be further enhanced by providing examples of how to engage young people with Boards and Committees and mentoring programs. These are highly important engagement activities that give young people opportunities to develop valuable skills including governance, leadership, and public speaking.

YNOT commends the State Government on the development of a resource intended to improve youth engagement and participation however, we believe further consideration is required in relation to the feedback contained herein to strengthen and enhance this document.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on *Youth Matter – A Practical Guide to Increase Youth Engagement and Participation in Tasmania*.

Kind regards,



Tania Hunt
Chief Executive Officer