



# Annual Membership Survey

November 2024



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

Yfoundations acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we and our members operate on across NSW. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We thank them for protecting the land and its ecosystems for time immemorial and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

## Introduction

As the peak body for child and youth homelessness in NSW, Yfoundations is committed to supporting positive change across the sector by providing advocacy, research, sector development, and policy advice, with a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This sector holds a wealth of collective wisdom, knowledge, passion, operational insight, and frontline and lived experience. We believe that for our work to be impactful, it must be informed by the sector itself, voices from the frontline, and the voices of those with lived experience.

Each year, through our Annual Membership Survey, Yfoundations reaches out to our members and stakeholders in the youth homelessness services sector to gather feedback on our work throughout the previous financial year. It gives the sector the opportunity to evaluate and suggest improvements for our work advocating for children and young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and the services that support them. We use this feedback to gain insight into what's working and what needs improving so Yfoundations can grow and refine our goals as a team and organisation.

This year, our survey was distributed on 28 September 2024 via email and promoted through our newsletter and across our social media platforms. The survey closed on 22 November 2024 and yielded 44 responses.

This year's survey was reworked to provide a better understanding of:

- the demographic reach and diversity of Yfoundations' members and stakeholders, building a profile of survey respondents including their districts, ages, roles and the organisations they work in
- the lived experience that exists within the sector, and respondents in priority cohorts, particularly those who identify as First Nations or from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- the longevity of experience in the sector workforce, wellbeing supports within the sector, career progression, and how the workforce can be better supported
- sector concerns and priorities, providing respondents with the opportunity to report the issues and challenges they believe most affect children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in NSW
- how respondents perceive and value Yfoundations, enabling us to process valuable feedback on how we can improve our reach and impact.

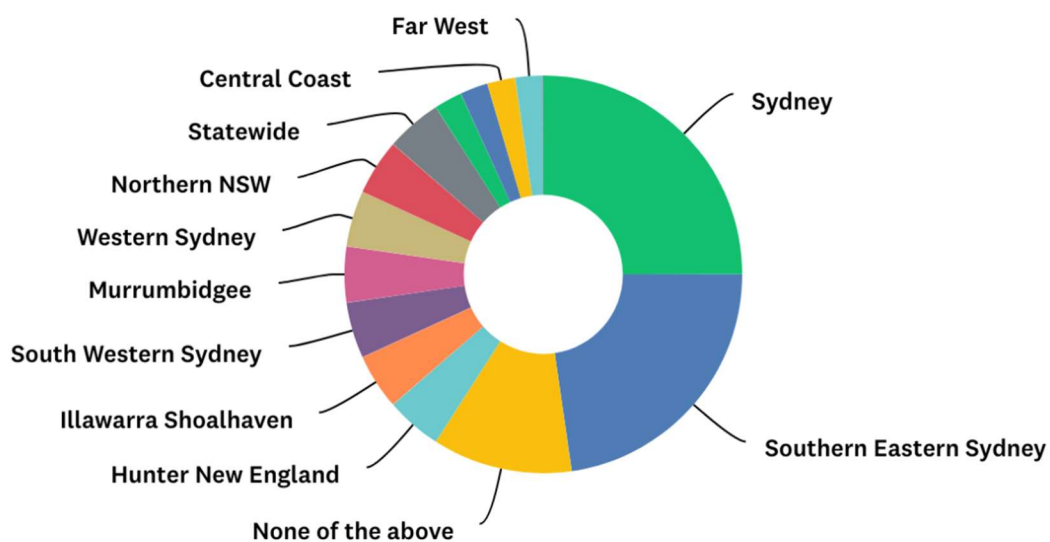
This report will draw comparisons from our 2023 Annual Membership Survey where possible.

## Profile of respondents

The first section of our survey aims to build a profile of respondents to better understand certain characteristics of our members and stakeholders, including locations, ages, position titles and roles. This year, the survey included new questions on the composition of the workforce to gain a better understanding of the diversity of the workforce, workers who are informed by their own lived experience, and the nature of that lived experience.

As the youth homelessness sector is largely funded through the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), we asked which of the 15 DCJ districts respondents worked in. As seen in [Figure 1](#), the Sydney district accounted for 25% of respondents and remains the most represented district (as in 2023), with South Eastern Sydney next at 22.8%. Encouragingly, the Central Coast and Far West districts, which provided no responses in 2023, each comprised 2.3% of respondents in 2024. We received an even number of responses (4.6% each) from the remaining regions, with the exception of Western NSW, Northern Sydney and Southern NSW, which elicited no responses.

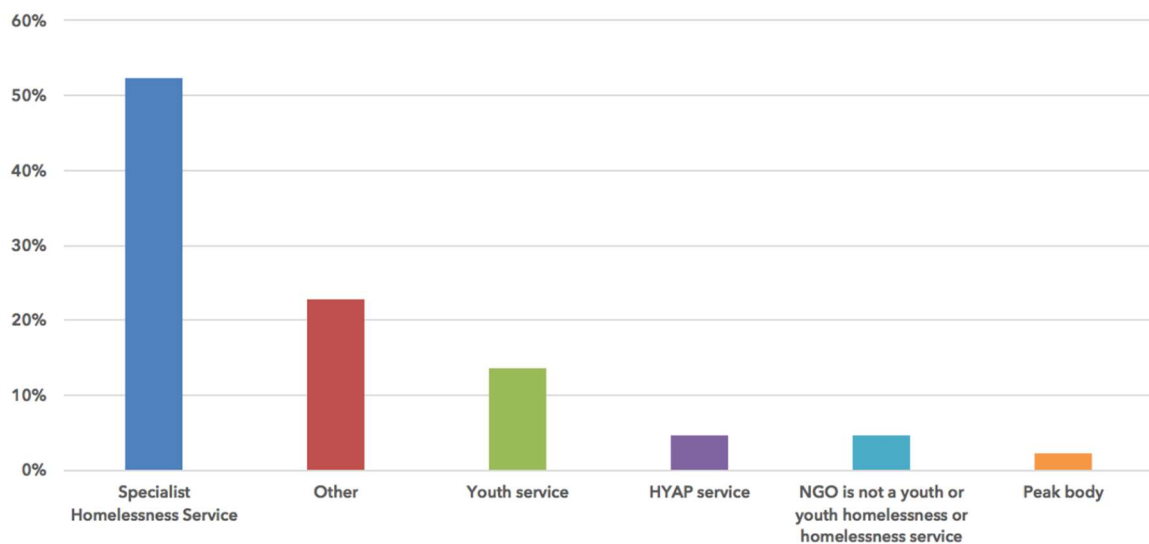
This year, we introduced the 'Statewide' category, which yielded 4.6% of responses and accounted for organisations providing services across NSW. We also included a 'None of the above' category, which yielded 11.4% of responses and captured organisations that service more than one region but are not statewide, as well as stakeholders that do not receive DCJ funding.



**Figure 1: Responses to the question, 'Which district do you work in?'**

As shown in [Figure 2](#), the majority of respondents (52.3%) worked in specialist homelessness services (SHS) with a further 13.6% working in youth services and another 4.6% in HYAP services, maintaining the focus on youth homelessness. The landscape of organisations and sectors represented in the survey was notably more diverse compared to 2023, with an increase to 22.7% of respondents selecting the 'Other' category, encompassing respondents from organisations covering a range of issues and broader client bases, including some (another 6.9%) with SHS as one of a broader range of services. These include:

- agencies for youth and family services that cover homelessness, social housing, family support, juvenile justice, counselling, youth health, out-of-home care, and others
- HYAP services and YI (Youth Initiative)
- child and family support
- family and domestic violence
- health services, including Aboriginal health.



**Figure 2: Responses to the question, 'What type of organisation do you work for?'**

A majority of respondents were working at managerial and senior managerial levels with managers accounting for 25% (up from 16.2% in 2023), CEOs comprising 18.2% (on a par with 2023), and Executive Managers making up 11.4%. Youth/community workers accounted for 13.6% of respondents, down from 25.6% in 2023, while 9.1% of responses were from case managers and 2.3% from social workers. NGO workers who do not provide frontline services comprised 6.8% of respondents, as did those in the 'Other' category, which included health-focused roles. No responses were received from young people with lived experience of homelessness, emphasising the importance of encouraging their input into future surveys.



**Figure 3: Responses to the question, 'What is your position title?'**

Around 27.9% of respondents have worked in their current role for more than 10 years, with smaller percentages in the 7-10 years (9.3%) and 4-6 years (7%) brackets. A significant proportion (32.6%) have been in their role for 1-3 years, with 23.3% for one year or less.

Capturing multi-layered perspectives ensures a comprehensive understanding of the sector's challenges and opportunities as well as the practical challenges and solutions in addressing youth homelessness on the frontline. We continue to emphasise the importance of organisations sharing this survey with frontline staff to ensure their voices remain well-represented.

Most of our responses were from people who have worked in the youth homelessness sector for more than 10 years (58.1%), with an even spread of respondents with 4-6 years and 7-10 years of experience (7% each). Those having 1-3 years of experience comprised 9.3% of respondents, with 7% having been in the sector for less than one year.

The majority of respondents were aged between 35-44 and 45-54 years (25.6% each), followed by 55-64 years at 23.3%, and 21% in the 25-34 years age group, with 4.7% being 65+ years. There were no respondents from the under-18 and 18-24 years age groups.

Most survey respondents (74.4%) identified as women, 21% identified as men and 4.7% identified as non-binary.

In 2024, we asked respondents whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI). One respondent said they identify as Aboriginal, no respondents identified as Torres Strait Islander, and none selected both.

A question about cultural and linguistic backgrounds was also included, with 9.3% of respondents identifying as being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

These questions were not asked in previous years, making this year's data particularly valuable in understanding the cultural diversity of survey respondents. Workers from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and CALD backgrounds bring unique perspectives and expertise to the sector, particularly when engaging with clients from similar backgrounds. They play a crucial role in enhancing cultural responsiveness and bridging gaps in service delivery, improving accessibility for diverse communities.

Furthermore, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and CALD workers are identified as priority cohorts under the SHS Industry and Workforce Development Program, which aims to recruit, retain and sustain a more diverse workforce within the sector. Ensuring these workers are included and supported is essential to strengthening the sector's ability to meet the complex needs of all populations and to foster more equitable and effective services.

### Lived experience

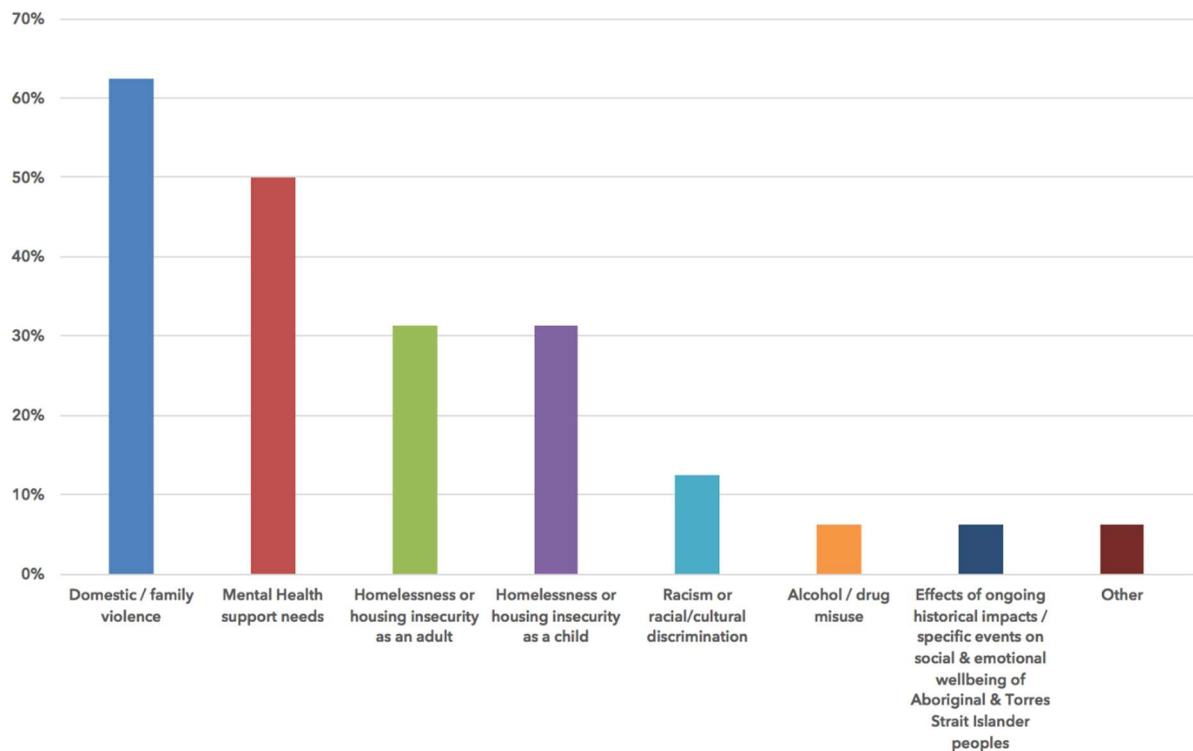
Given the increased recognition of the importance of lived experience within the community sector generally and the role lived experience plays in informing the work of Yfoundations, this year we introduced a question asking respondents whether they have lived experience, intentionally leaving the term undefined to allow them to interpret the concept of lived experience based on their own understanding.



The data shows that 40.9% of respondents identified as having lived experience while 54.6% did not and 4.6% preferred not to say. By not defining the term, we also aimed to capture a broader range of experiences, recognising that lived experience can vary greatly from person to person depending on their personal journey and perspectives.

As shown in [Figure 4](#), among those who reported having lived experience:

- 62.5% had experienced domestic and/or family violence
- 50% experienced mental health support needs
- 31.3% faced homelessness or housing insecurity as an adult and 31.3% as a child
- 12.5% had experienced racism or racial/cultural discrimination
- 6.3% experienced alcohol and/or drug misuse
- 6.3% experienced the effects of ongoing negative historical impacts and events on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- 6.3% reported 'other' experiences and chose not to specify.



**Figure 4: 'Does your personal lived experience relate to any of the following areas?'**

These figures underscore the complex and diverse lived experiences of workers in the sector, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed care, support systems and policies that address not only the professional but also the personal challenges workers may face.

Including people with lived experience in the workforce is vital to providing services that are not only informed by professional expertise but also shaped by personal insights into the realities faced by people experiencing homelessness and related challenges. This alignment of lived experience with professional roles can enhance service delivery and improve outcomes for clients.

The lived experience cohort is also recognised as a priority group under the SHS Industry and Workforce Development Program, highlighting its importance in shaping a responsive and inclusive workforce. Anecdotally, we hear from young people who have experienced homelessness and express a desire to enter the homelessness services sector themselves. Many are motivated by the support they received during their own experiences or by positive interactions with case workers. This demonstrates the powerful role lived experience can play in inspiring future professionals in the sector.

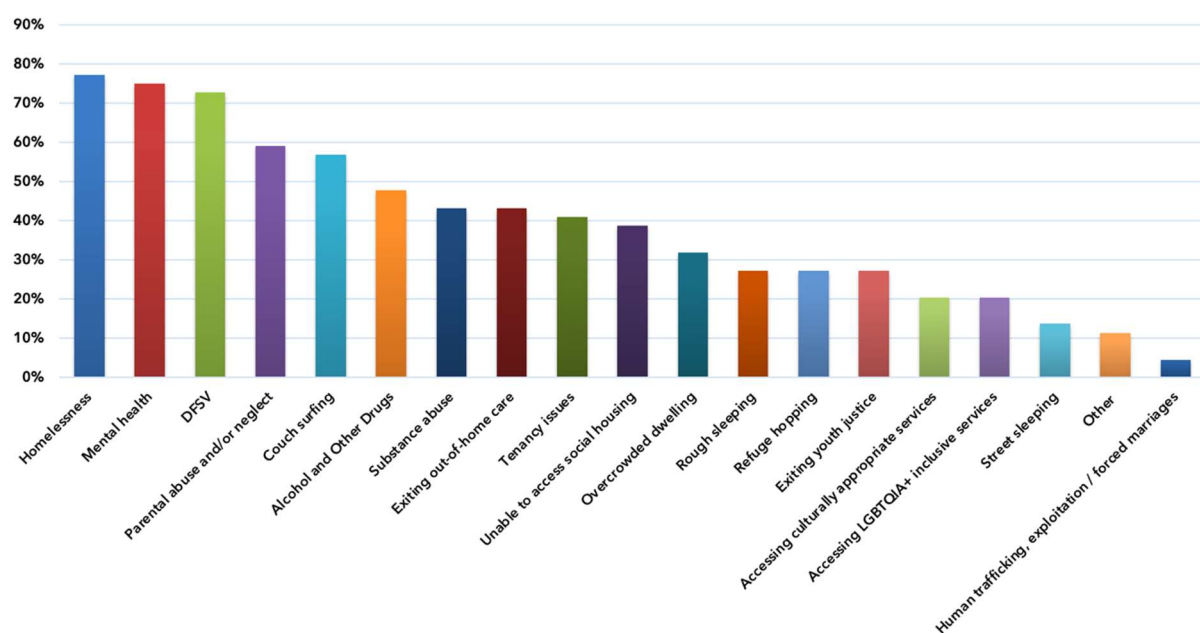
## **Sector concerns**

As the NSW peak body representing the services that support children and young people experiencing and at risk of homelessness, understanding key sector concerns and priorities is crucial to informing our work. To ensure our work is



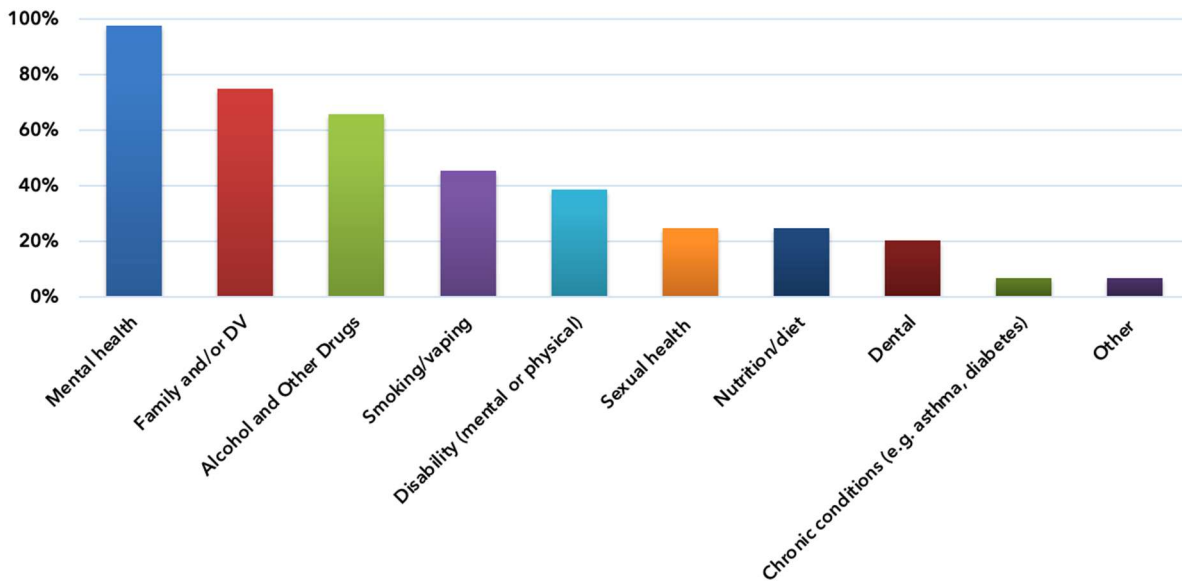
aligned and up to date with the key issues faced by the sector, in this section of the survey we asked a series of targeted questions about child and youth homelessness.

This year, we introduced two new questions to gain insight from frontline providers into the key issues they are having to address for children and young people presenting to their services. We asked them to identify what they saw as the main presenting reasons for children and young people accessing their service. As seen in Figure 5, homelessness was the highest reason, selected by 77.3% of respondents, followed by mental health (75%) and domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) (72.7%). The next highest reason was parental abuse and/or neglect at 59.1%, followed by couch surfing at 56.9%.



**Figure 5: ‘In the cohort of clients your organisation sees, what do you see as the main presenting reason that they access your service? (tick all that apply)’**

We also asked what respondents saw as the main presenting health issues affecting young people at risk of homelessness (Figure 6). An astoundingly high response from 97.8% of respondents was mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression, eating disorders). This was followed by family and/or domestic violence at 75%, with alcohol and other drugs (AOD) the next highest at 65.9%, followed by smoking/vaping at 45.5%. Disability (mental or physical) was also high at 38.6%, followed by sexual health (including STIs, contraception/pregnancy and consent), and nutrition/diet, both at 25%.



**Figure 6: 'In your opinion, what are the main health issues affecting young people at risk of homelessness? (pick all that apply)'**

When asked what they thought were the biggest issues affecting the youth homelessness sector, respondents were given the option of selecting as many issues as they thought applied. In previous years, they were asked to nominate up to three.

Housing and accommodation-related issues remain the primary concerns for those working in the sector, along with the cost-of-living crisis.

### **Housing and accommodation concerns**

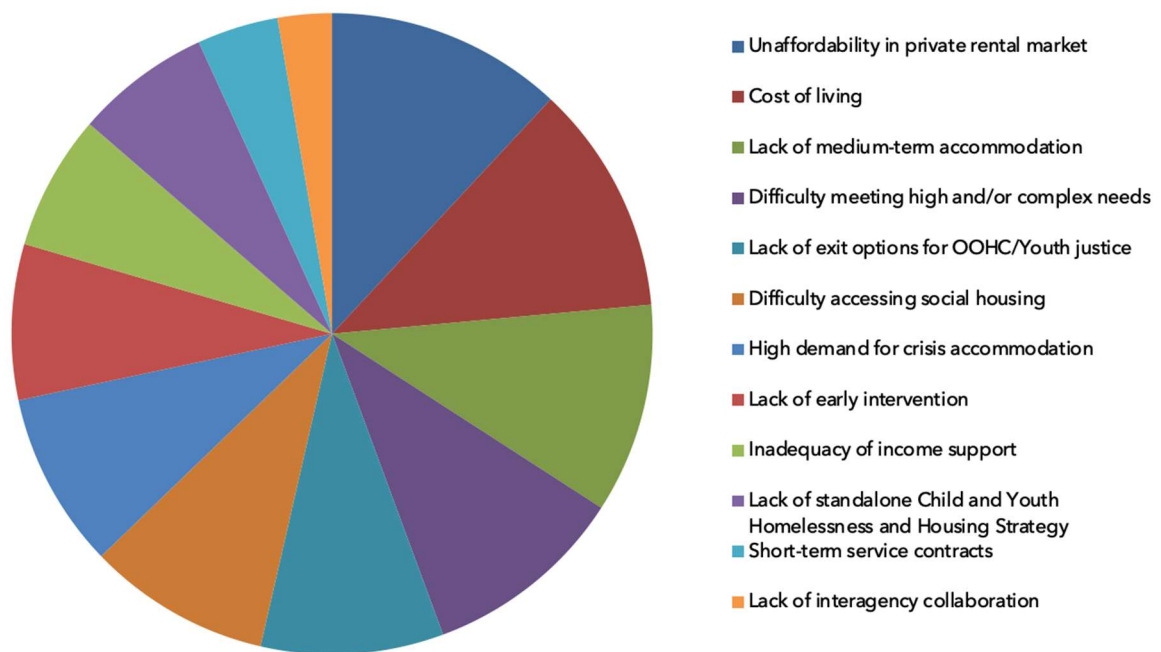
As shown in [Figure 7](#), unaffordability in the private rental market was the highest concern in 2024 (selected by 89.7% of respondents) and reflects the worsening affordability crisis, which continues to place immense pressure on young people seeking stable housing.

Lack of medium-term accommodation remained the next highest concern with 79.5% of respondents citing it as an issue, indicating the significant impacts of the gap in housing options for young people transitioning from crisis accommodation to stable housing.

Difficulty accessing social housing was a major concern, with 69.2% of respondents noting it as an issue, as was the lack of exit options for young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) and youth justice (69.2%), highlighting the need for improved pathways for young people transitioning out of institutional care and the youth justice system.

High demand for crisis accommodation was also a key issue (66.7%). This is consistent with the SHS Annual Report national data 2023–24, which showed that SHS providers are experiencing a surge in demand, and current inadequate

resourcing of these services is resulting in approximately 50% of young people being turned away from crisis accommodation services.



**Figure 7: ‘What do you think are the biggest issues affecting the youth homelessness sector? (select as many as apply)’**

### Non-accommodation concerns

Cost of living was a prominent issue in 2024 with 87.2% of respondents highlighting it as a significant concern. This reflects broader economic pressures that contribute to and are particularly felt by young people experiencing homelessness.

Difficulty meeting high and/or complex needs was highlighted by 77% of respondents, indicating the significant challenges for service providers in addressing the complex needs of young people.

Lack of early intervention was the next highest issue highlighted by 59% of respondents, signalling a need for more proactive support for at-risk young people to prevent homelessness becoming entrenched.

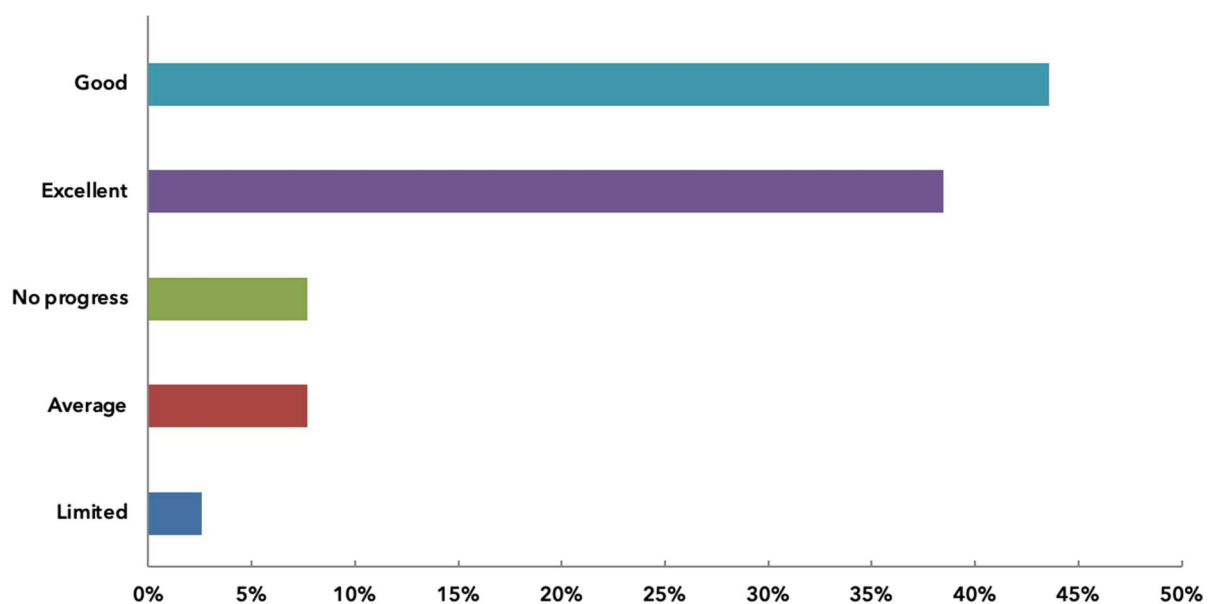
Inadequacy of income support was also a concern (51.3% of respondents) and shows a continued recognition of the need for better financial support for young people. An equal proportion of respondents also highlighted the lack of a standalone Child and Youth Homelessness and Housing Strategy, which was a key focus of Yfoundations’ campaigning and advocacy throughout the year.

Overall, the 2024 survey responses reflect a continued focus on housing affordability and availability, with a recognition of the complex needs of young

people, the broader economic pressures they face, and the need for systemic improvements in available housing and accommodation options to ensure appropriate supports, pathways and solutions are available for children and young people.

## Workforce development and wellbeing

To gain insight into advancement opportunities for workers in the sector, we asked respondents to describe their career progression in their current role or in the sector. As [Figure 8](#) shows, most respondents (82.1%) reported positive progression, with 38.5% describing their growth as 'Excellent', having experienced significant growth and advancement opportunities, and 43.6% describing it as 'Good', having had steady progress and occasional advancements. Fewer respondents noted slower progression, with 7.7% rating their career progression as 'Average'. 'No progress' was reported by another 7.7% of respondents. A small percentage (2.6%) felt their career has had 'Limited' progress and opportunities for development.



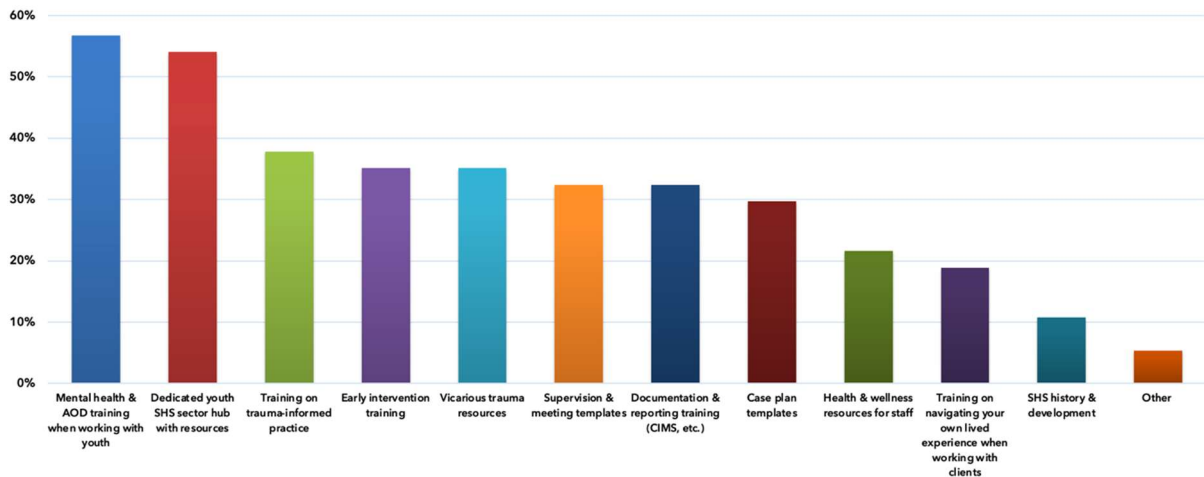
**Figure 8: 'How would you describe your career progression in your current role or industry?'**

To better understand the motivations of workers in the sector, when we asked whether they intended to continue working in the sector, 97.3% of respondents said they did.

When asked why, responses reflected the strong commitment and passion for the work among respondents with several expressing their passion for supporting young people to make a positive difference in their lives, and the rewards in setting them up for the next step and seeing them thrive.

Other common themes included a dedication to the sector, the meaningfulness of their work, and a commitment to challenging systemic barriers that contribute to





**Figure 9: 'What workforce and sector development resources would you like to see available in the future for youth SHS? (select all that apply)'**

These responses reflect a need for practical supports, work-related stress and wellbeing supports, and organisational supports to address the complex challenges confronting the youth homelessness sector.

When asked what supports are available to them for managing work-related stress and wellbeing issues, the majority of respondents reported having access to a range of supports with 84.6% highlighting the Employee Assistance Program and 79.5% highlighting opportunities to debrief. Flexible working arrangements were available to 76.9% of respondents, as was a supportive team, and 69.2% said they receive regular supervision with their manager.

Other supports include access to domestic violence leave (56.4%), and wellbeing days and stress leave (53.9%), followed by accessible training (48.7%), and regular supervision with an external service (33.3%). Some respondents highlighted additional supports, such as emotional intelligence culture and team reflective spaces.

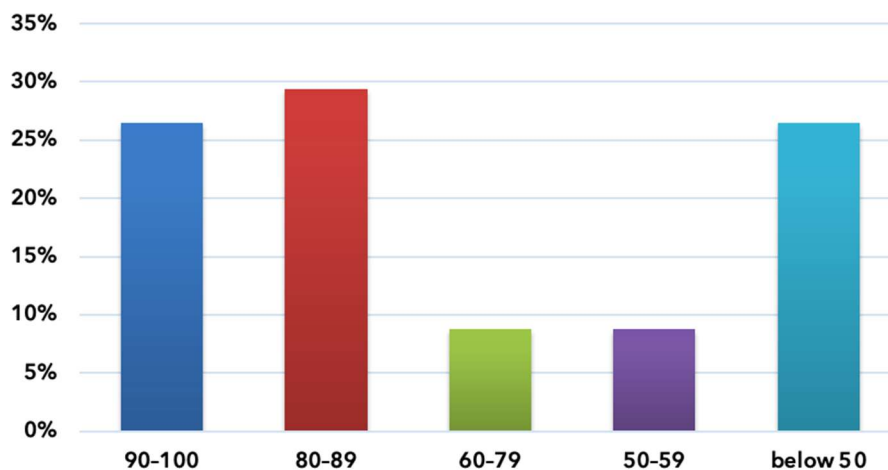
## Our performance

The final section of this report focuses on our performance as a peak body, including levels of trust, satisfaction and engagement between us and relevant stakeholders. Responses to this part of the survey helps Yfoundations determine the effectiveness and reach of our sector consultations and work. While most of the responses were positive, this series of questions provides us with critical insight into where we can improve.

When respondents were asked on a scale of 0-100 to rate their satisfaction with Yfoundations' engagement and consultation over the past year, as [Figure 10](#) shows, 29.4% ranked their level of satisfaction between 80-89 and 26.5% ranked their level of satisfaction at 90-100, indicating a high level of satisfaction for around

56%, with a further 8.8% provided a rating of between 60-79, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction. At the other end of the scale, 26.5% ranked their satisfaction at below 50, and another 8.8% rated it as between 50-59.

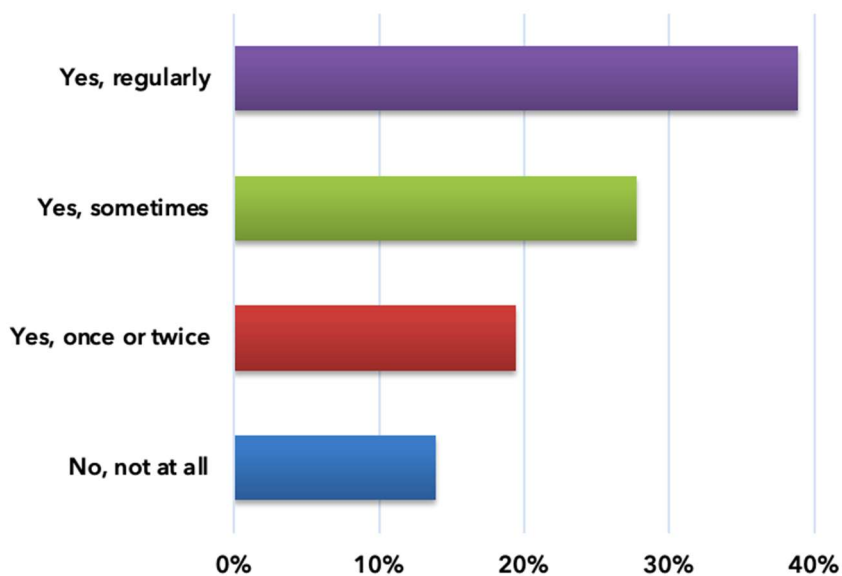
While we are encouraged that a majority of respondents were satisfied with our engagement and consultation, reducing the number of stakeholders who are less satisfied with this aspect of our work is a high priority for Yfoundations.



**Figure 10: ‘How satisfied are you with the engagement and consultation Yfoundations has conducted with your organisation over the past year?’**

When asked whether respondents utilised any Yfoundations resources and information in the past year, 86.1% reported they had (down from 90.7% in 2023). However, there was a significant rise in regular usage (38.9%) compared to 16.3% in 2023. Associated with this increase in regular usage was a drop in those who indicated they used our resources sometimes (27.8% compared to 51.2% in 2023) and a drop in those who had used them once or twice (19.4% compared to 23.3% in 2023).

While the increase in regular usage is encouraging and indicates our resources and information have been useful to our members and stakeholders, the data highlights opportunities for improved awareness and engagement with our resources, and further enhancement to ensure resources are consistently accessed and highly valued by all stakeholders.



**Figure 11: ‘Have you utilised any Yfoundations resources and information in the last year?’**

When asked on a scale of 0-100 how they rated the extent to which Yfoundations provided their organisation with useful information over the past year, 34.3% of respondents ranked this at between 80-89, and 14.3% ranked it at 90-100, indicating a high satisfaction rating for just under 50% of respondents. A further 22.9% provided a rating of between 60-79, indicating a moderate level of satisfaction. At the other end of the scale, 17.1% selected a ranking of below 50, and another 11.4% rated it as between 50-59.

Again, while we are encouraged that a majority of respondents were satisfied with the information and resources we made available to them, reducing the number of stakeholders who are less satisfied with this aspect of our work is a high priority for Yfoundations.

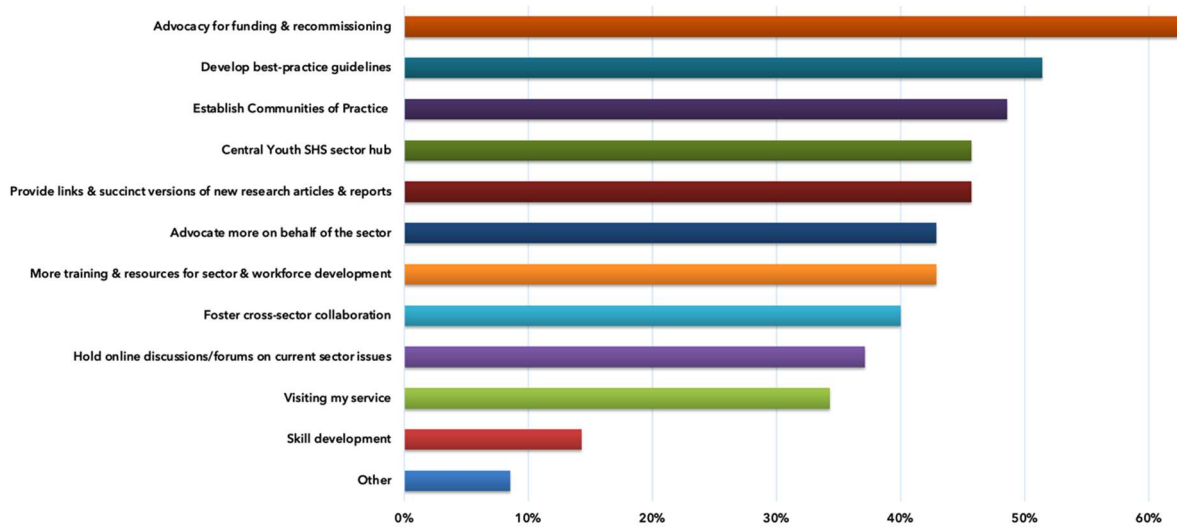
To better support the sector, Yfoundations will aim to refine our resources and communication strategies, and seek more regular informal feedback from members on our output, working towards a higher score that reflects consistent value and relevance to stakeholders.

When asked how we can support you better, [Figure 12](#) shows that key areas for improvement selected by respondents include:

- advocacy for funding and re-commissioning (62.9%) and more advocacy on behalf of the sector (e.g. to Ministers) (42.9%)
- developing best-practice guidelines (51.4%) and seeking more training and workforce development resources (42.86%)
- establishing Communities of Practice (48.6%), fostering cross-sector collaboration (40%), and holding online discussions or forums on sector issues (37.1%)
- providing links and simplified/succinct versions of new articles and reports (45.7%) and a central youth SHS sector hub (45.7%).



These findings reflect a strong demand for advocacy, practical resources, and greater collaboration to strengthen sector support and outcomes.



**Figure 12: 'How can we support you better? (select all that apply)'**

Much of this aligns with the work Yfoundations has had in train throughout 2024 and is due for completion in the coming months, such as the production of good practice guidelines for youth SHS (in consultation with a range of member organisations), and the Youth Justice SHS Capacity Building Project training resources. We continue to advocate for better funding on behalf of the sector, and a key focus throughout this coming year will be advocacy for the re-commissioning, with increased advocacy on other key issues impacting the sector.

Our regular general member meetings provide a forum in which member services exchange knowledge and learn from each other and, through our special webinars, we initiate and host online discussions and forums on sector issues. Research summaries and links are a feature of our regular newsletters; and resources, position papers and submissions produced by Yfoundations are uploaded to the Yfoundations website.

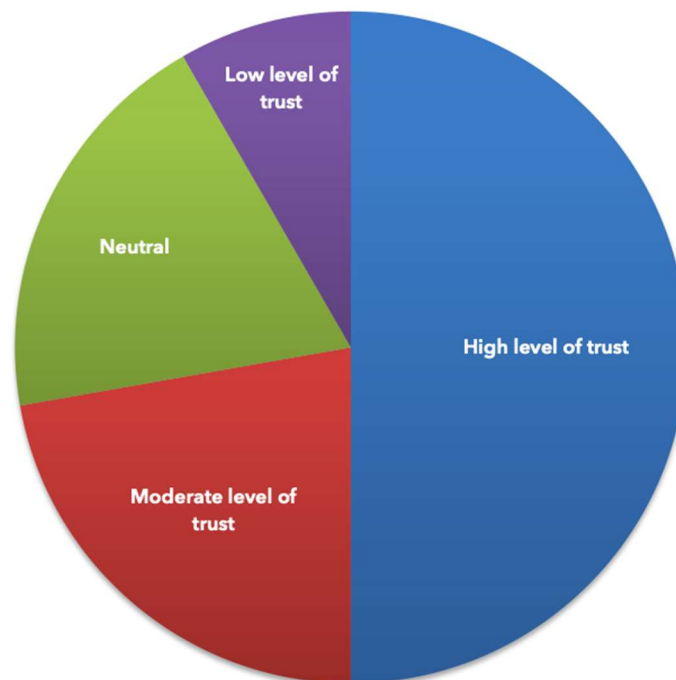
To better support the sector, Yfoundations will aim to refine our resources and communication strategies and seek more regular informal feedback from members on our output, working towards a higher score that reflects consistent value and relevance to stakeholders.

Almost 70% of those who completed the survey confirmed that their organisation is a member of Yfoundations (on a par with last year's result), while 8.6% indicated they are not members. Additionally, 22% were unsure or did not know their organisation's membership status. This is consistent with the percentage of respondents who placed their organisation in the 'Other' category when asked what type of organisation they worked for, which contributes to understanding the

following responses to the question about why they were unsure about their membership status.

For those who were unsure about their membership status, when asked why, some indicated they have not been informed about membership or the topic has not been discussed within their organisation, and others did not think their organisation was eligible for membership. Of those who are not members, one responded that they were a member of another peak.

The results regarding trust in Yfoundations to represent the organisation and the sector show that 50% of respondents have a high level of trust (up from 46.5% in 2023), and 22.2% have a moderate level of trust. Additionally, 19.4% were neutral (up from 14% in 2023), and 8.3% have a low level of trust. No respondents reported a very low level of trust.



**Figure 13: ‘How much do you trust Yfoundations to represent your organisation and the sector?’**

We are encouraged at the increase in the high level of trust and that almost 73% of respondents have reported high to moderate levels of trust in Yfoundations.

Recognising the importance of trust from across the sector, we will be focused on rebuilding and maintaining this in the coming year.

## Conclusion

The survey results provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the challenges, opportunities and needs within the youth SHS sector and for children and young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness. It also provides valuable and much appreciated feedback on our performance and advocacy as a peak body and our value as an organisation, offering us clear direction for enhancing the support, resources and services we provide to the sector.

Your feedback has highlighted the importance of practical, actionable resources, wider engagement and stronger sector-wide collaboration. As we reflect on these results, we are committed to using this feedback to improve our advocacy efforts, refine our resources and strengthen our collaboration with both frontline services and other key stakeholders.

We are encouraged by the positive responses regarding the resources and support we provide, and acknowledge the areas where improvement is needed. We are committed to addressing these areas, ensuring Yfoundations remains a strong and trusted representative for the youth homelessness services sector, and continues to offer the support needed to strengthen the sector.

We express our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in this year's sector survey. Your insights and feedback are invaluable and play a crucial role in guiding our work at Yfoundations. We deeply appreciate the time and thoughtfulness you put into sharing your experiences and suggestions.

Your continued engagement is essential to the success of our shared work, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration and progress in the year ahead. Together, we can continue to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness, and create a stronger, more connected youth SHS sector.

If you have any further comments or would like to discuss any aspect of this report, please do not hesitate to reach out to us directly.

Sincerely,

***The Yfoundations Team***