

Children and Young People at Risk Summit

28 – 29 October 2025 | Rendezvous Melbourne

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:



Luke Twyford, *Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission*



Shona Reid, *The Guardian, Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People SA*



Professor Leah Bromfield, *Director & Chair, Child Protection Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia*



Elissa Scott, *Chief Executive Officer, Blue Light*



Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, *Commissioner, Children and Young People, Western Australia*



Jodie Griffiths-Cook, *Children and Young People Commissioner, ACT Human Rights Commission*



Matthew Smith, *Founder, Fostercare FC*



Natalie Garcia de Heer, *Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Department of Education Victoria*



Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw, *7NEWS Young Achiever Awards Winner; 2024 Young Australian of the Year for Warrego; Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Queensland Youth Parliament*



Dr Stephane Shepherd, *Co-Founder & Co-CEO, 16 Yards; Professor of Forensic Psychology & Criminology*



Emma Gierschick OAM, *Child & Young People Advocate*



Neda Erjaei, *Child Safety Compliance Officer, People & Culture, City of Stonnington*



Shorna Moore, *Head of Policy, Advocacy and Government Relations, Melbourne City Mission; Coordinator, Home Time Campaign*



Tony FitzGerald, *Virtual Services Manager, yourtown and Kids Helpline*



Judith Atkinson, *Chief Executive Officer, Concern Australia*



Chris Lacey, *General Manager – Programs, Les Twentyman Foundation*



Helen McLean, *Chief Executive Officer, Young Carers SA*



Yusuf Liban, *Executive Director, Multicultural Youth Group*



Kym Langill, *Reference Group Member, PeakCare Board Chair, National Therapeutic Residential Care Alliance*



Carolyn Blanden, *Principal, Warakirri College*



Abraham Kuol, *Co-founder & Director, Black Rhinos*



Sally Lasslett, *Executive Principal, Hester Hornbrook Academy*



Cassandra Hadson, *GM – Strategy & Performance, The Huddle*



Jodie Long, *Assistant Principal – Research and Advocacy, Brotherhood of St Laurence, David Scott School*

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Children and Young People at Risk Summit

Tuesday 28 October 2025

DAY 1

8:30 Registration & Morning Coffee

8:45 Welcome to Country

8:55 **Opening Remarks From the Chair**

Emma Gierschick OAM, *Child & Young People Advocate*

9:00 **OPENING KEYNOTE**

Luke Twyford, *Chief Executive and Principal Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission*

9:30 **KEYNOTE | Who's Telling the Story? Reclaiming the Narrative About Children and Young People**

This keynote will explore the dangerous trajectory we are on when the public portrayal of children and young people - particularly those who are vulnerable, in care, or in conflict with the law - is one of threat rather than potential, risk rather than rights, and danger rather than development.

Shona Reid, *The Guardian, Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People SA*

10:00 **KEYNOTE | Hope not fear: We need a different approach to responding to child abuse and neglect**

- Key data on the incidence of abuse and neglect,
- Original critical analysis for why our reforms have failed and system for protecting children isn't working, and
- Key opportunities for a new way forward

Professor Leah Bromfield, *Director & Chair, Child Protection Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia*

10:30 **Strengths-Based Lived Experience Responses to Youth Crime**

- The Youth Justice Landscape – current high-harm offending trends
- Contemporary needs of young people and gaps in service delivery
- Professionalising lived experience and effective strengths-based approaches
- The 16 Yards Identity Transformation Model

Dr Stephane Shepherd, *Co-Founder & Co-CEO, 16 Yards; Professor of Forensic Psychology & Criminology*

Shayne Hood, *Co-Founder & Co-CEO, 16 Yards*

11:00 Networking Break & Morning Tea

11:30 **SESSION SPOTLIGHT | Adaptive technology for re-engaging vulnerable young people**

11:50 **What Saved Me, and What Could Save Them: A Vision for Real Youth Work**

Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw, *7NEWS Young Achiever Awards Winner; 2024 Young Australian of the Year for Warrego; 2024 Darling Downs Child Protection Award Recipient, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Queensland Youth Parliament*

12:20 **FIRESIDE CHAT**

12:50 Networking Lunch

13:50 **PANEL | Addressing Youth Homelessness**

- What are the primary drivers of youth homelessness in Australia?
- How can schools, community organizations, and local governments work together to identify and support at risk youth before they become homeless?

Paul McDonald, *Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare Victoria & Chair, Home Stretch*

John Macmillan, *Chief Executive Officer, Yfoundations*

Shorna Moore, *Head of Policy, Advocacy and Government Relations, Melbourne City Mission; Coordinator, Home Time Campaign*

Tania Hunt, *Chief Executive Officer, Youth Network of Australia*

14:30 **Behind the Call: What Australia's Young People Are Telling Kids Helpline**

- Overview of Kids Helpline's vital role as the safety net for Australian Kids
- Emerging issues impacting children and young people
- Looking forward - the challenges yet to appear

Tony FitzGerald, *Virtual Services Manager, yourtown and Kids Helpline*

15:00 **PANEL | Youth Justice: Building pathways to rehabilitation and support**

- What are the key factors contributing to youth involvement in the justice system?
- How can community-based interventions and support networks reduce recidivism among young people?
- How can young people with lived experience in the justice system be involved in shaping policies and programs that affect them?

Judith Atkinson, *Chief Executive Officer, Concern Australia*

Dr Mindy Sotiri, *Executive Director, Justice Reform Initiative*

Kate Crowe, *Churchill Fellow & Honorary Fellow, University of Melbourne*

Jared Sharp, *Former Principal Legal Officer, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency*

Moderator: Chris Lacey, *General Manager – Programs, Les Twentyman Foundation*

15:45 Afternoon Tea & Networking Break

16:15 **CASE STUDY | Blue Light: Building relationships between youth and police**

Elissa Scott, *Chief Executive Officer, Blue Light*

16:45 **PANEL | Empowering Young Carers: Addressing their vulnerability and support they need**

- What unique challenges do young carers face? Are they at risk?
- How can young carers be supported in recognising the value of caregiving responsibilities in shaping personal growth and increasing resilience?
- Where can systems improve awareness and identification of young carers and their complex needs?

Representative TBC, **Satellite**

Madeleine Buchner OAM, *Founder & CEO, Little Dreamers*

Joshua Patrick, *ATAR student living in WA & Young Carer*

Moderator: Helen McLean, *Chief Executive Officer, Young Carers SA*

17:30 Closing Remarks from Chair

17:35 Networking Drinks



Children and Young People at Risk Summit

Wednesday 29 October 2025

DAY 2

8:15 Registration & Morning Coffee

8:45 Opening Remarks From the Chair

Chris Lacey, *General Manager – Programs, Les Twentyman Foundation*

8:50 OPENING KEYNOTE | First Nations Children: Building culturally safe and inclusive support systems

9:20 KEYNOTE

Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, *Commissioner, Children and Young People, Western Australia*

9:50 KEYNOTE | Protecting Children's Privacy: Navigating E-Safety in the digital age

10:20 KEYNOTE | Students' views on school attendance problems: A child rights perspective

A rise in school attendance problems (school refusal) is leaving growing numbers of young people at risk. There is increasing attention on the issue, but a lack of research from students' perspectives. The Commissioner is consulting students during 2025. The paper will amplify their views and potential solutions.

Jodie Griffiths-Cook, *Children and Young People Commissioner, ACT Human Rights Commission*

Amalia Fawcett, *Senior Advisor, ACT Human Rights Commission*

10:50 Networking Break & Morning Tea

11:20 PANEL | Multicultural Perspectives: Supporting vulnerable youth across diverse communities

- How can we strengthen our collective capacity to support vulnerable youth while respecting their cultural identities?
- How can we better advance policies that benefit multicultural children and families?
- How can we ensure that workforce development programs are culturally responsive and accessible to youth from diverse backgrounds?

Neda Erjaei, *Child Safety Compliance Officer, People & Culture, City of Stonnington*

Yusuf Liban, *Executive Director, Multicultural Youth Group*

Akuol Alaak, *Community Liaison Officer, Melton Secondary College*

12:00 Secondary school completion pathways at TAFE settings

Natalie will showcase work to support young people at risk of disengaging from education complete Year 12 at TAFE. Natalie will outline new reforms to develop an equitable funding and service improvement model for the sector so high quality, safe and supported Year 12 completion options are available for vulnerable early school leavers.

Anne will showcase an example of how Year 12 completion at BKI is supporting their students, including the impact of the new reforms.

Natalie Garcia de Heer, *Acting Assistant Deputy Secretary, Senior Secondary Pathways Reform Taskforce, Department of Education Victoria*

Anne Howard, *Director of Education, Foundations, Bendigo TAFE and Kangan Institute (BKI)*

12:30 PANEL | Transforming lives: The value and vision of Therapeutic Residential Care and the experiences of Young People

Therapeutic Residential Care is increasingly recognised as an ideal model of residential care, although debate remains about what specifically constitutes a therapeutic model. While New South Wales and Victoria have both introduced standards to guide the development and implementation of therapeutic models of residential care, there remains considerable variability in how service providers conceptualise the 'core' practice elements that should define therapeutic models. In this panel discussion will draw on significant practice and research knowledge to highlight the transformative power of therapeutic residential care when service providers are adequately supported to therapeutically support children and families impacted by child protection and Out-of-Home Care Systems.

Shelley Wall, *Board Chair, NTRCA; Chief Executive Officer, Infinity Community Solutions*

Dr Tatiana Corrales, *Reference Group Member, NTRCA; Researcher, University of Technology Sydney; Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research*

Senior Representative, **MacKillop Family Services**

Moderator: Kym Langill, *Reference Group Member, PeakCare Board Chair, National Therapeutic Residential Care Alliance*

13:15 Networking Lunch

14:15 PANEL | Alternative Schools: Meeting the needs of students who struggle in traditional education systems

- How do you address the common misconception that alternative schools provide a lower quality of education compared to traditional schools?
- How does alternative school implement trauma-informed practices to support vulnerable students?
- What approaches work best for re-engaging students who have had prolonged absences?

Carolyn Blanden, *Principal, Warakirri College*

Sally Lasslett, *Executive Principal, Hester Hornbrook Academy*

Jodie Long, *Assistant Principal – Research and Advocacy, Brotherhood of St Laurence, David Scott School*

Mohamed Semra, *2025 Young Victorian of the Year, Chief Executive Officer, Endeavour Youth Australia*

15:00 PANEL | Sports as a Pathway: Outreach programs

- What outcomes have you observed in vulnerable youth who participate in sports outreach programs?
- How do you measure the success of sports-based interventions for at-risk youth?
- Could you share some success stories where participation in your sports programs has helped young people overcome significant challenges or escape high-risk environments?

Cassandra Hadson, *GM – Strategy & Performance, The Huddle*

Jonasi Eangano Singehebhuve, *Chief Executive Officer, Acts Of Random Kindness Victoria*

Abraham Kuol, *Co-founder & Director, Black Rhinos*

Matthew Smith, *Founder, Fostercare FC*

Moderator: Rohan Parrant

15:30 Closing Remarks from Chair

15:35 Conference Concludes

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