



Supporting young people to thrive: What young people need, what gets in the way, and what solutions exist



All of us share the same fundamental needs – to belong, to have supportive relationships, and to know someone has our back.

Investing in the strengths and resilience of young people now, is also an investment in the future of families and communities. But right now, many young people aren't able to thrive. When every young person feels connected and supported, it creates lasting positive outcomes for all generations and strengthens the social fabric of our society.

By meeting the needs of young people, no matter where they live, we ensure that everyone benefits – because what helps young people thrive also strengthens entire communities.

What do young people need to thrive?

At their core, young people need the same things we all need:

Basic needs being met: access to adequate housing, nutritious food, healthcare, and mental health support

A sense of belonging: spaces where we feel valued, accepted, and included

Supportive relationships: people who care, listen, and 'have their back', including family, peers, mentors, and community members

Identity and perspectives being valued: spaces and opportunities that affirm young people's cultural, social, and personal identities and enable them to shape decisions that impact their lives

Safe and inclusive environments: communities that uphold equity, ensure safety, and foster emotional and physical wellbeing

Opportunities to flourish and contribute: access to education, work, recreation, and cultural activities that allow them to explore their unique strengths and participate

When these needs are met, young people can thrive and contribute their unique strengths to their communities, creating positive ripple effects for society as a whole.



What does it look like when we get it right?

Serenity's story: A young person thriving with support

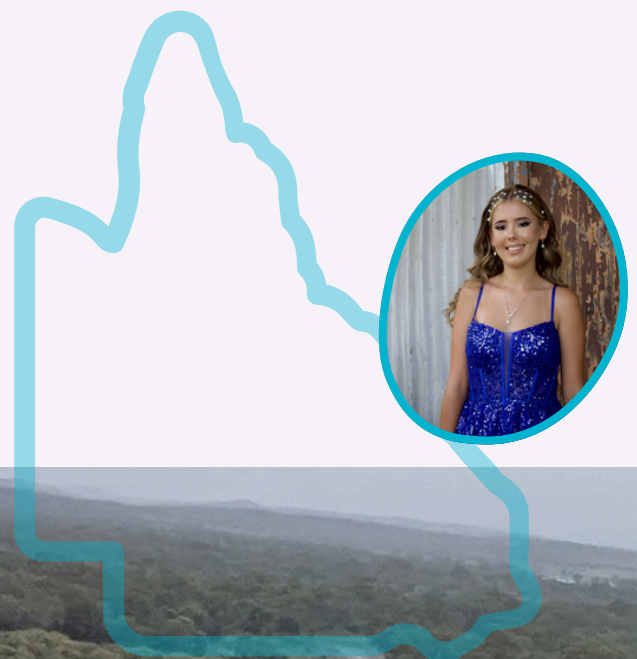
Serenity grew up in Mount Morgan, a small regional town where access to resources and opportunities for young people can be limited. However, through the support of targeted programs, her community, and her family, she found a pathway to success.

Serenity's school, despite being small, provided students with structured opportunities to engage in traineeships, ensuring they had pathways to employment. With a strong connection to culture, passed down from her community, grandmother, and mother, Serenity always understood the importance of speaking up and staying connected. She took up a nursing traineeship, gaining valuable experience, building relationships and connections that led to ongoing support even beyond graduation.

This scaffolding of support – from her training providers, mentors, school and family – helped Serenity not just complete her schooling but also secure a meaningful career in healthcare. Now, she aspires to further her education and continue making a difference in her community.

Serenity's story shows that when young people have access to structured opportunities and the right supports, they can overcome challenges, build confidence, and thrive.

However, when young people don't have access to supportive communities, strong schools and real opportunities to explore their strengths, the consequences are significant.





What gets in the way?

The impact of systemic disruptions

Despite the universal nature of these needs, systemic barriers can disrupt young people's ability to thrive. Inequitable access to resources, fragmented supports, and structural discrimination are systemic disruptions that get in the way of young people being able to thrive. The impacts of these disruptions don't just affect individual young people - they have ripple effects across entire communities.

How systemic disruptions show up ...

Limited opportunities in regional areas: In Mount Morgan, Serenity saw firsthand how a lack of jobs and training options affected young people's futures. Without structured pathways, many struggle to transition into stable employment.

Cultural erasure in schools: Programs like Deadly Choices, which provided health education and cultural connection, were removed because they were seen as 'unfair' to non-Indigenous students. As a result, many young people lost critical access to identity-affirming programs.

Discrimination and exclusion: Serenity experienced racism at school, from being singled out for attendance issues (despite being in an approved traineeship) to being told she couldn't participate in Indigenous programs because she wasn't 'dark enough'. For some young people, experiences like these can erode self-worth and lead them to disengage from education and community life.

Barriers to further education: Cost, practical logistics, and systemic racism make it difficult for many young people to pursue higher education. Serenity recognises that many young people in her community struggle with the financial burden of university, making further study feel out of reach.

When systems have stopped working, communities suffer

If young people don't have access to quality education, employment pathways, and culturally safe relationships and spaces, we all feel the effects. Young people's potential is limited, communities lose future leaders, and cycles of disadvantage continue.

However, supportive networks and targeted, community-led interventions supports and programs can mitigate these barriers. Despite facing racism and structural discrimination, Serenity had access to tangible opportunities, and the supports that she needed to be able to take them up. She was able to remain connected to culture, and was supported by her family, and engaged in structured training - all factors that helped her push forward when she otherwise might have disengaged.

Her experience highlights the power of meaningful community-led local solutions, mentorship, and early intervention connection in ensuring young people stay on track feel valued and able to contribute.

It's clear that our systems and services that work alongside young people and communities, need to be flexible and locally-focused. When systems are able to respond to the diverse experiences of young people, and provide support in ways that work for them, then all young people and communities will thrive.



Doing what works

Together, we know what young people need to thrive. Now, we need to ensure these supports and programs are available equitably and sustainably.

Stronger school-to-work pathways: Every young person should be able to have a clear and supported transition from school to work, training, or further study. Programs that offer real-world experience, mentorship, and industry connections are key – especially in regional and remote areas where opportunities are fewer.

Culturally safe and inclusive education: Schools play a major role in shaping young people’s identity and sense of belonging. Indigenous-led programs, culturally responsive teaching, and diverse learning experiences help all students feel seen and valued. This is especially important for Indigenous students, who thrive in environments that honour cultural knowledge and strengths.

Flexible learning models: Not all students learn best in a traditional classroom. Hands-on, community-based, and interactive learning keeps young people engaged, particularly those who excel in real-world, collaborative environments. Offering diverse, strengths-based education options improves motivation and long-term success.

Involving young people in shaping solutions: Young people must have a say in shaping the policies and programs that affect them. When they are involved in designing solutions—through youth-led initiatives, advisory groups, and co-designed services—they are more likely to engage, lead, and contribute to their communities.

Ongoing mentorship and support: Support shouldn’t stop when school ends. Long-term mentorship and guidance helps young people navigate the new challenges they will face after leaving school, to early adulthood. Programs that extend beyond traditional education provide stability, trusted relationships, and career pathways.

Equitable and evidence-based justice responses: How young people experience the justice system affects their trust in society. Evidence-based restorative justice, youth diversion programs, and culturally safe interventions help prevent unnecessary criminalisation. Approaches that support rather than punish lead to safer communities and better outcomes for all.

Investing in young people for today, and for our shared futures

Ensuring all young people have what they need to thrive is not just an act of fairness today – it is a community-wide investment in a stronger, more vibrant society. We all have a role to play. Whether it’s by advocating for inclusive policies, supporting youth-led initiatives, or ensuring funding reaches the programs that work, we must commit to creating a future where every young person – regardless of where they live – has the opportunity to succeed.

Let’s build a system that works for all young people, now and for the futures of all of us.



This paper was created by the [Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership Framing Initiative’s Framing Champions](#) group, with the case study provided by Office for Youth. Serenity has provided informed consent for her story to be used by the Queensland Government Office for Youth in partnership with Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership for the purpose of highlighting the needs of young people and informing discussions on targeted prevention and early intervention. Her case study may be featured in Queensland Government publications, reports, online resources, presentations, social media, and public awareness campaigns, including the Investing for Prevention Symposium on 4 February 2025. To learn more about framing, visit the [Framing for Change Learning Hub](#), developed as a key resource of the Framing Initiative.

