

# Youth Empowerment Project 2019



autismWest

WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER



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YES Group Fremantle

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to report on the Youth Empowerment Project. The report will outline a description of the Youth Empowerment Project, the aim of the project, the project activities, the results of the project and any issues and resolutions that the project encountered.

## 2. Scope

To develop a program which may be applied annually. The Youth Empowerment Project will be co-ordinated through the Youth Advisory Council, where young leaders will engage participants within our social groups to contribute towards various projects. The program aims to engage the participants at Autism West in opportunities that facilitate learning of new skills and build their self-determination and confidence.



### 3. Roles and Responsibilities

#### 3.1 Project Manager

The Project Manager of the Youth Empowerment Project's main role was to oversee the timeline and manage the budget of the project to ensure the grant objectives were met. The Project Manager ensures that the activities of the project were completed in a timely manner. The other main role of the Project Manager was to liaise with the staff involved in the Youth Empowerment Project.

#### 3.2 Facilitator

The Facilitator's main role was to follow direction given from the Project Manager and ensure they were completing tasks in a timely and efficient manner. The Facilitator undertook the work that went on in the background, such as; writing reports, creating surveys, creating presentations, liaising with workers to ensure tasks were getting completed, attending groups with members of the Youth Advisory Council to undertake research.

#### 3.3 Group Facilitator

The group facilitator's main role was to co-facilitate with project staff in activities relating to the project. The Group Facilitator ensured that all ideas for the project came from the group members and encouraged the participants to stay motivated and engaged in the project. The Group Facilitator helped to run workshops that were needed to meet the objectives of the project.



Youth Advisory Council Interview



AW Youth Advisory Council

#### 4. Project description

Participants from Autism West engaged in education and training around youth action research. Through learning and engaging in action research, participants learnt about mentoring and gained leadership skills. Participants also learnt skills around how to use public speaking and social media to educate other participants on their relevant issue, how it related to them and their role in the issue.

Workshops were created to teach participants from the various groups skills in leadership, decision making, communication and strategic thinking. The participants whom were of high school age and transitioning at various points (primary school to high school or transitioning out of high school), were asked to identify social issues which were relevant to their peers. The young leaders were then asked to conduct research around how participants in their social groups at Autism West felt about the chosen issues. Research was gathered by the young leaders in the older cohort via videotaping interviews and filling out questionnaires. The interviews and questionnaires focused on how a strengths-based approach may benefit them now and in the future. For those participants in the younger groups, research was more practical and scaffolded in its approach.

The young leaders identified in our social groups, together with group participants were asked to evaluate and present their findings. They also gave recommendations to Autism West, policymakers and the greater community on how to resolve these issues, in conjunction with the young people they affect through Autism West's Youth Advisory Council. The young leaders will also present the findings of the project at Autism West's upcoming Symposium "Join The Conversation" at the Pan Pacific Hotel on November 2 2019. In 2018, a number of young people joined the Youth Advisory Panel to contribute to their presentation which focussed on employment, the social issue selected and researched by the older YES group participants.



## 5. Aims and Objectives

### 5.1 Autism West Project Objectives:

- Increase awareness of societal factors that affect themselves and their and their peer lives
- Empower young people on the autism spectrum to research current issues that are of relevance and interest to them.
- Understand that they have a voice and have a role to contribute to current issues which will be valued.
- Contribute to improving outcomes for quality of life and mental health resilience with projects aimed at increasing self-determination using industry aligned self-determination scaling (AIR Scaling).
- Increased engagement and interest in issues via their group measured through staff observation as well as Autism West's social impact indicator questionnaires.
- Provide a focus to Autism West's emerging Youth Advisory Council to increase validity of their role to the Board and Autism West's strategic development.

### 5.2 Educational Objectives (NGCS):

- A lifelong sense of belonging to, and engagement with, civic life, with the capacity and willingness to be informed, responsible, ethical and active participants in society at a local, national and global scale.
- The ability to think critically, solve problems, make informed decisions and propose actions in relation to real world events and issues.
- Build enterprising behaviours and capabilities that enable them to be active participants and decision-makers in matters affecting them, which can be transferred into life, work and business opportunities.
- An understanding of, and commitment to, the concepts of sustainability to bring about equity and social justice.



Lets Get Working –YES Group Fremantle



## Marangaroo Super Heroes

### 5.3 Empowerment Theme

The theme of empowerment was the underpinning principle of the Youth Empowerment Project. The Human Rights Commission defines empowerment as:

*Empowerment is an active and multi-faceted process, whereby people realise their potential and ability to make decisions and work towards attaining the goals they have set. Empowerment of an individual brings about self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and a personal ability to take part in decision-making and have control over the resources in their environment.*

The Youth Empowerment Project's aim was to empower the participants at Autism West through the use of youth participatory action research, which gave them the opportunity to learn new skills and build their self-confidence. An underlying aim throughout the project was to build self-determination within the participants by building their confidence and ability to take part in decision-making. Autism West puts a strong emphasis on a strengths-based, person centered approach in all areas of the work that they do with participants, a philosophy which also underpins the Youth Empowerment Project. Additionally, Autism West focuses on the social model of disability, where systemic barriers and attitudes are identified as the main reasons why people with a disability are often excluded from participation. Through the interviews in the Youth Empowerment Project, Autism West aimed to get participants to look at themselves from a strengths model, where they were asked to identify the strengths they possessed and talk about how these strengths would benefit them in the future. The projects main aim was to provide participants with knowledge and to learn skills that would enable them to have the confidence to engage positively within their communities. It built the participants confidence around self-advocacy and having the ability and knowledge to be able to advocate on behalf of themselves, which is empowerment.

As previously mentioned, Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) was the vehicle to deliver the Youth Empowerment Project. YPAR was used as a tool to build the participants knowledge and skill base and with the information provided from the YPAR process, to advocate for change within the community. YPAR is a process that encourages youth to be the experts in their lives and challenge issues that affect their lives. YPAR encourages youth and adults to partner together with the aim of improving the outcomes. YPAR empowers by teaching vital research, critical thinking and communication skills which they can utilise in their lives, as well as a source of knowledge for their peers. The participants at Autism West chose four topics to explore, these are listed and explained below.

## 5.4 Actual Topics Selected

### 5.4.1 Employment

The YES (13–18 years) selected employment as their topic. Employment is enshrined as a human right (United Nations, nd). It not only enhances an individual's quality of life through the dignity of labour and feeling that one has contributed to their society but has other beneficial outcomes such as promoting cognitive development. Furthermore, by providing financial security employment enables individuals to live independently. Regrettably, employment outcomes for individuals with autism are quite poor both in Australia and globally (Gustafsson, Peralta & Danermark, 2018). For example, according to a study in Australia by Scott et al. (2017) 50% of individuals with autism remain unemployed after leaving high school and the labour force participation rate of individuals with autism is 11% and 41% lower than people with different disabilities and people without disabilities respectively.

This high rate of unemployment and/or low participation rate is unfortunate given that individuals with autism possess attributes and strengths that could be deemed quite helpful to employers (Bölte et al., 2014; de Schipper et al., 2016). In a recent international survey by de Schipper et al. (2016), the researchers found that individuals with autism possessed attributes many employers would find favourable such as attention to detail, a strong sense of morality, trustworthiness, loyalty, and good memory. Additionally, many people with autism exhibited good visual perceptual skills, and strong mathematical abilities. Since 2016, at least 26 companies within Australia, such as DXC, have recognised the contribution that people with autism can make to their companies and have employed them accordingly. Specialisterne is also an organisation dedicated to enable careers for people with autism by helping employers understand the value of a neuro-diverse workplace (Specialisterne, 2018). Despite evidence for the various strengths that people with autism demonstrate and positive developments such as programs like Autism@Work and Specialisterne, the poor employment outcomes for people with autism illustrate that many barriers still exist for people with this condition.

One such barrier is employers overlooking the strengths and capabilities of people with autism due to their perception that people with autism are not as competent (Strickland et al., 2013). This barrier is an example of a demand-side barrier; in which people with autism are able and willing to work but due to unfavourable perceptions and discrimination are not hired. There are also supply-side barriers to consider – obstacles that people with autism face during the application process or during the employment period itself. Examples of the former include difficulties related to job search and the application process (e.g. designing a resume, undertaking an interview); whilst examples of the latter include failing to adapt to a new job routine, or performing poorly in regard to social interaction with other employees (Lorenz, Frischling, Cuadros, Heinitz, 2016). The proliferation of open-plan offices in the work environment is another example of an, oftentimes unintentional barrier to employment, as many autistic individuals are highly sensitive to sensory input like noise and light. The absence of private, individual workplaces make it difficult for people with autism to work in such environments (Lorenz et al., 2016). Thus, to improve employment outcomes for people with autism both demand-side barriers such as negative employer perceptions; and supply-side barriers such as the need for suitable work environments need to be addressed.



These statistics intertwined with personal experiences is why the young leaders and mentors at Autism West's chose employment as their theme for their Youth Empowerment Project. The participants from Autism West are aiming to use the information gained from the YPAR to design and distribute an employers' kit that helps them overcome misperceptions of people with autism, understand what benefits employing people with autism can bring to their organisations, and tools for creating an appropriate work environment in which employees with autism can thrive.



Youth Advisory Council Interview (outside)

#### 5.4.2 The Future

In the AWESOME (10-15 years) group at Claremont, the future was chosen as the topic to research. The participants researched two areas of the future that they believe are relevant to themselves, these were; Today and Tomorrow (Future of the Globe) and Science Conquering the Future. They chose to research this topic because they were curious what the world will look like when they get older, especially with the rapid advances of science and technology. Both groups researched their topics and then made PowerPoint presentations and presented their ideas to the group. Through researching about the future, the participants gained knowledge about what the future could look like and some of the issue that the world faces if humans do not change the way they engage with the world. For the participants, this knowledge will allow them to be active advocates within their communities.



#### Awesome Rockingham

### 5.4.3 Superheroes

In the AWESOME (10–15 years) group at Marangaroo, Superhero's was chosen as the topic to research. The participants researched their favourite superhero and then had the task of creating their own superheroes. The superhero that they created was to represent themselves and the qualities they possess, adopting a strengths-based approach throughout the activity. The participants superheroes were each made to represent themselves and the participants picked a social issue that their superhero was made to fight. This activity engaged the participants in acknowledging their strengths and their own identity, bringing it to life through their individual superhero.

### 5.4.4 Child Safety

In the AWESOME (10–15 year olds) group at Fremantle, Child Safety was chosen as a topic. For the participants in the AWESOME group it is important they learn about child safety and have the knowledge to keep themselves safe in unfamiliar situations. The areas of Child Safety that the participants researched were; boundaries, trust, online safety, rights and responsibilities, complaints and helplines. Children and young adults are a vulnerable population, thus, researching around boundaries and trust was important to participants to ensure they had the tools to be able to identify safe people in their lives and recognise when safe boundaries are being crossed. Online safety is another important aspect to child safety for our participants, especially for those spending time in online forums. Research around online safety taught the participants about how to keep personal and private information safe and keeping identifying information unseen. Lastly, it was important to research around rights and responsibilities, complaints and helplines, to give the participants a greater understanding of where they can turn to if they ever feel unsafe or vulnerable.

## 6. Project Activities

Project Name	The Youth Empowerment Project
Topic	Youth Employment
Project Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase self-determination of Autism West's participants</li> <li>• Inform Autism West board, policy makers and wider community on social issues that affect young adults with Autism.</li> <li>• Teach participants new skills</li> <li>• Increase participants confidence around decision making and engaging with the wider community</li> </ul>
Method	Members of the Youth Advisory Council acted as mentors to members of the Autism West group to undertake action research, by interviewing members from the YES and AWESOME groups around the topic of employment. These videos were collected, and answers were then analysed by the Facilitator and members of the YAC.
Summary of Tasks and Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage participants who wanted to be part of the Youth Advisory Council and create the group.</li> <li>• Members of the Youth Advisory Council to vote on a topic for the project.</li> <li>• Create a workshop on teaching about action research with the Youth Advisory Council.</li> <li>• Collaborate and create interview questions.</li> <li>• Run a workshop on teaching how to film interviews.</li> <li>• Create consent to participate forms and give to social groups to sign.</li> <li>• Mentors from Youth Advisory Council go out to Autism West's social groups to film interviews.</li> <li>• Create transcripts of the interviews.</li> <li>• Youth Advisory Council to analyse transcripts.</li> <li>• Engage AWESOME groups in the Youth Empowerment Project by getting them to pick their own topics, research and create presentations.</li> <li>• Create surveys for all participants who were involved in the Youth Empowerment Project to gain an understanding of how the project benefited them and adhered to the objectives.</li> </ul>

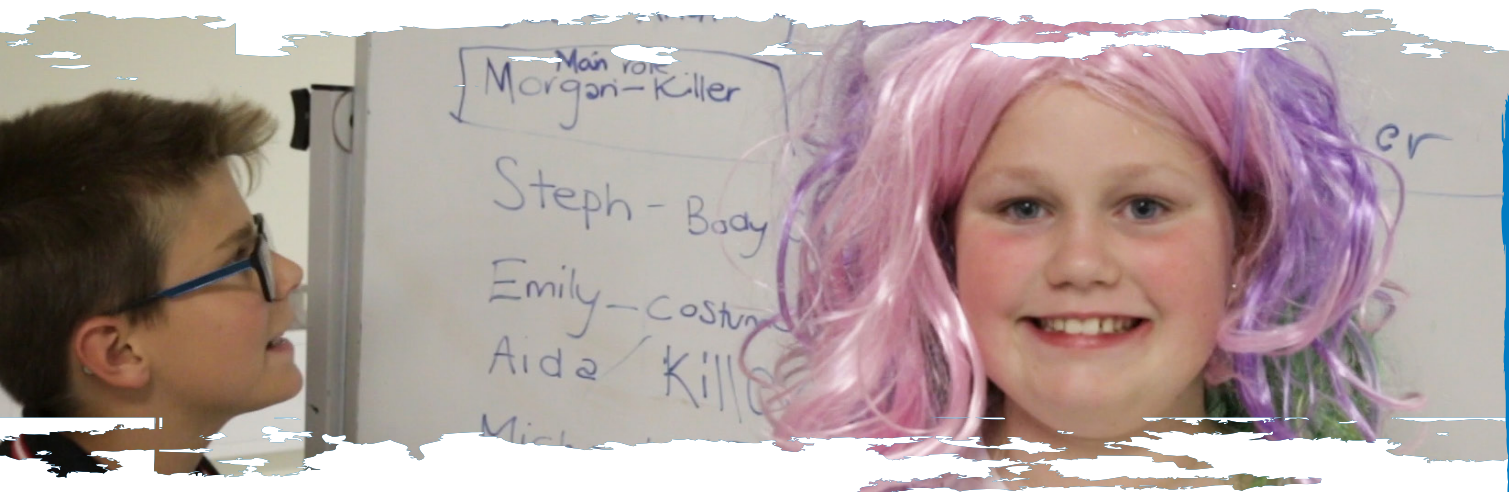


Materials and Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Video camera</li> <li>• Tripod</li> <li>• Computer</li> <li>• Pens, pencil and paper</li> <li>• Printer</li> <li>• IPADs</li> </ul>
Issues and Resolutions	<p>The biggest issue that the project faced was that the theme chosen was not suitable for the wide range of ages of participants at Autism West. Employment received more interest from our Teenage (13-18) participants therefore becoming the target audience for this topic.</p> <p>Time was another big issue that faced the project. Due to the issue of employment not being a suitable theme for all the ages of participants who wanted to take part in the project, we restructured the project so as to be able to include our enthusiastic younger age group. In order to accommodate the younger group, changes as outlined above were made to the project which added some delays to completion but increased motivation of the participants. Fortunately, however, we were able to rectify this problem by the Project Manager liaising with NGCS to gain a short extension on the funding for this project. This allowed us to finish the project and meet the requirements of the budget.</p>

Project Name	The Youth Empowerment Project
Topic	Special Interests – Child Safety The Future Superheroes
Project Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase self-determination of Autism West's participants</li> <li>• Inform participants on child safety, in particular; safe boundaries, trust, online safety, rights and responsibilities, complaints and helplines</li> <li>• Teach participants new skills</li> <li>• Increase participants confidence around decision making and engaging with the wider community</li> </ul>
Method	Members of the Youth Advisory Council acted as mentors to members of the Autism West group to undertake action research, by undertaking research with the AWESOME group around the topic of child safety. This research then informed workshops that the AWESOME group participants participated in. Surveys of the AWESOME group participants feelings around the project were collected and analysed.
Summary of Tasks and Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage participants who wanted to be part of the Youth Advisory Council and create the group.</li> <li>• Members of the Youth Advisory Council to vote on a topic for the project.</li> <li>• Create a workshop on teaching about action research with the Youth Advisory Council.</li> <li>• Engage AWESOME groups in the Youth Empowerment Project by getting them to pick their own topics, research and create presentations.</li> <li>• Undertake research with AWESOME group around child safety</li> <li>• Create consent to participate forms and give to AWESOME group to sign.</li> <li>• Workshops facilitated on child safety.</li> <li>• Create surveys for all participants who were involved in the Youth Empowerment Project to gain an understanding of how the project benefited them and adhered to the objectives.</li> <li>• Youth Advisory Council and biostatistician to analyse results.</li> </ul>

Materials and Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer</li> <li>• Pens, pencil and paper</li> <li>• Printer</li> <li>• IPADs</li> </ul>
Issues and Resolutions	<p>All Topics – The initial consensus was to conduct the employment theme in the Awesome groups. The topic received a lack of interest and was therefore deemed unsuitable for the target age of participants.</p> <p>To address this issue and motivate the AWESOME groups to engage in the Youth Empowerment Project, we allowed each group to pick a topic that was relevant to them. They picked their topic and were required to do assisted research around the topic and then put their findings into a presentation to present to the rest of the participants in their group. Some groups found it easier to do a whole group presentation, which they did and turned their presentation into PowerPoints. Changing the topics increased motivation within the AWESOME group participants, whilst still meeting the objectives of the project.</p> <p>Child Safety – This particular topic required resources from the Child Safety Commissioner to ensure the material was appropriate to their ages.</p> <p>Topic was chosen by Group Facilitator/s</p> <p>The Future – Group Facilitators felt this topic was relevant for current news items and Autism West intends to extend this topic.</p> <p>Topic was chosen by Group participants</p> <p>Superheroes – Original concept (Short Movie) Concept changed to Arts &amp; Craft Workshop</p>





Awesome Fremantle

## 7. Outcomes

### Qualitative:

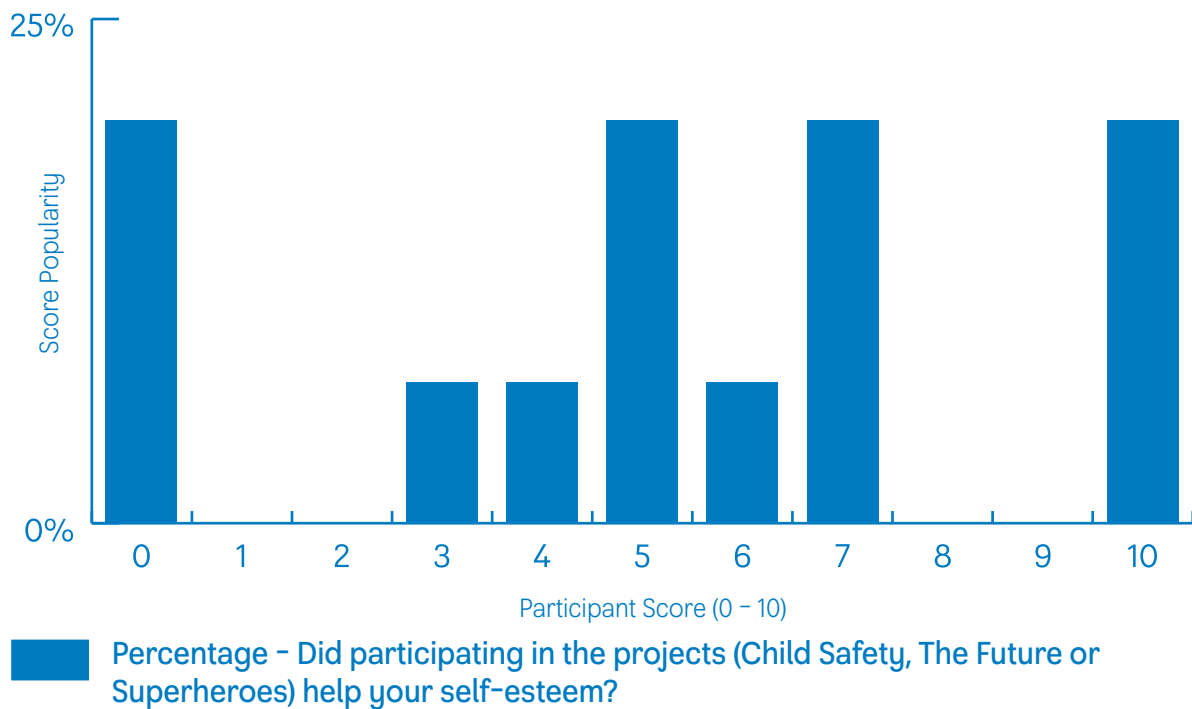
The interviews focussed on employment with the YES (13-18 years) participants. The interviews undertaken with the participants at Autism West were analysed and put into transcripts. A recurring theme throughout the interviews was that at the beginning of the interviews, participants struggled to identify their strengths. When the mentors explained to the participants what strengths could look like, the participants who were being interviewed were then able to easily identify some of their strengths. It was evident from the interviews that the participants had all thought about employment but felt that there were some barriers that they may face to finding a job i.e. competition. Although they felt like there was going to be barriers, all participants remain hopeful and will try to gain employment in the future. It was a split consensus around wanting colleagues to know about autism and neurodiversity (disclosure) with some participants said that they felt like it would help them in a work place, however, others said that they felt like they wouldn't disclose because they didn't want their colleagues to treat them differently. This it was felt was a result of societal perception of what autism is and how it impacts on them. The Youth Advisory Council has since gone on to deliver school assembly presentations to schools on diversity and how it is OK to be different.

It was evident from the videos that the workshop on interviewing that Autism West ran for the mentors who undertook the interviewing was beneficial. In the workshop the mentors were taught how to reframe questions if the participants did not understand the questions, this tool was used throughout all the interviews that the mentors did. The workshop taught the mentors how to use minimal prompting when interviewing, which allowed the participants the chance to speak freely and encouraged open narrative. This tool that the mentors used was helpful in gathering substantial information from the interviews.

The quantitative results also indicated an improvement for individuals. The project proved more appropriate for the older groups with YES returning better results on questions focused on the social issues indicating that the theme of empowerment is suited to a mature cohort.

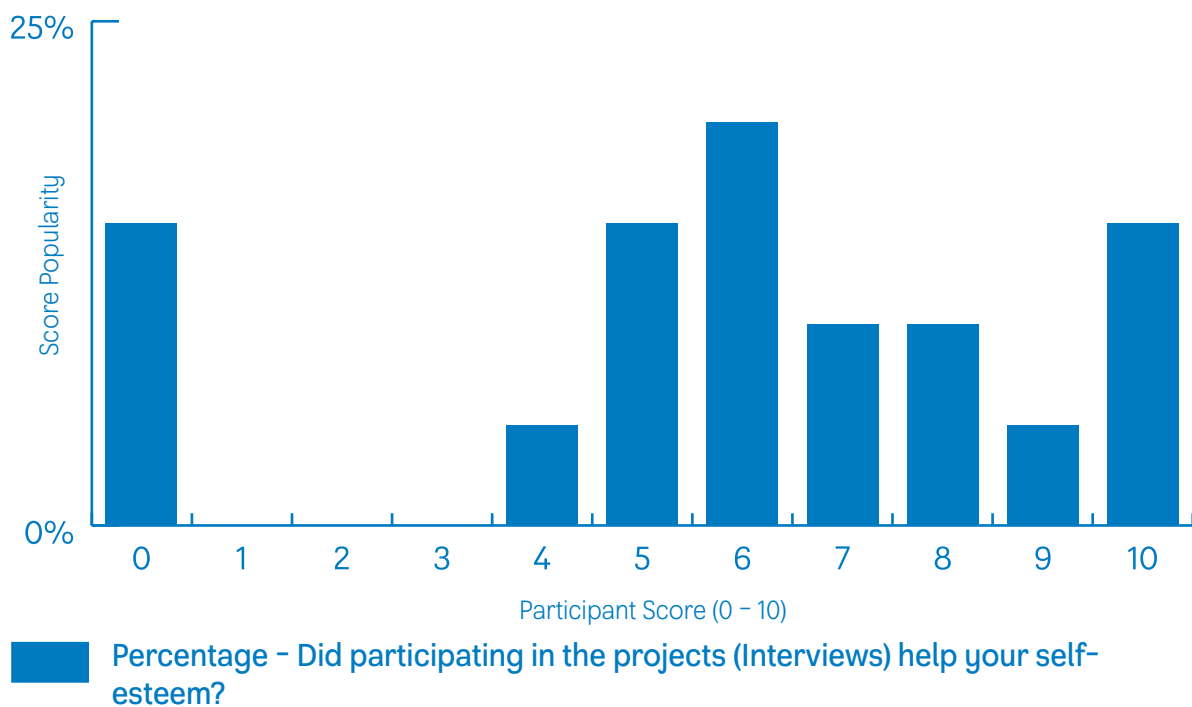
## Individual Breakdowns Awesome Projects - Special Interests

Figure 1: Awesome (10-15 year old)  
Group Survey Results



## Individual Breakdowns YES Projects - Employment Interviews

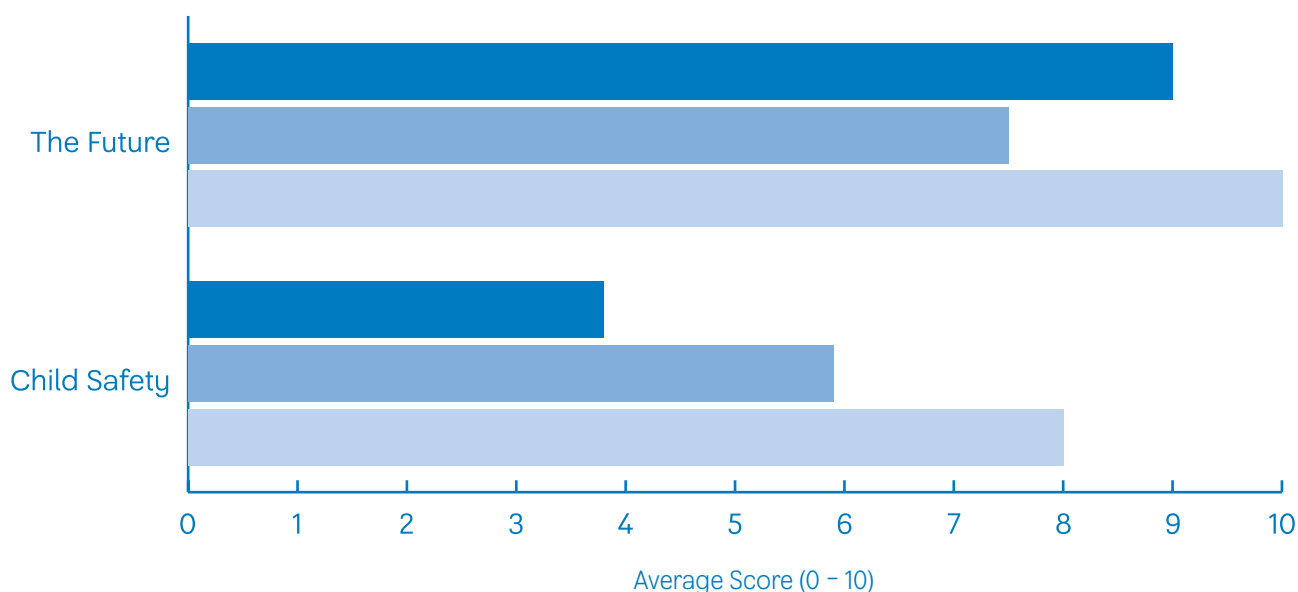
Figure 2: YES (13-18 year olds)  
Group Survey Results



There were some success in our AWESOME projects, however there was a noticeable difference between each topic and its impact on self-esteem and engagement. Quantitative results yielded positive results for The Future topic whereas Child Safety received a more mixed reaction. The Future topic was conceived based on participants interests in the topic whereas Child Safety was chosen based on its relevance for the age group.

### Awesome Projects Breakdown The Future vs Child Safety

Figure 3: Awesome (10–15 year olds)  
Group Survey Comparison

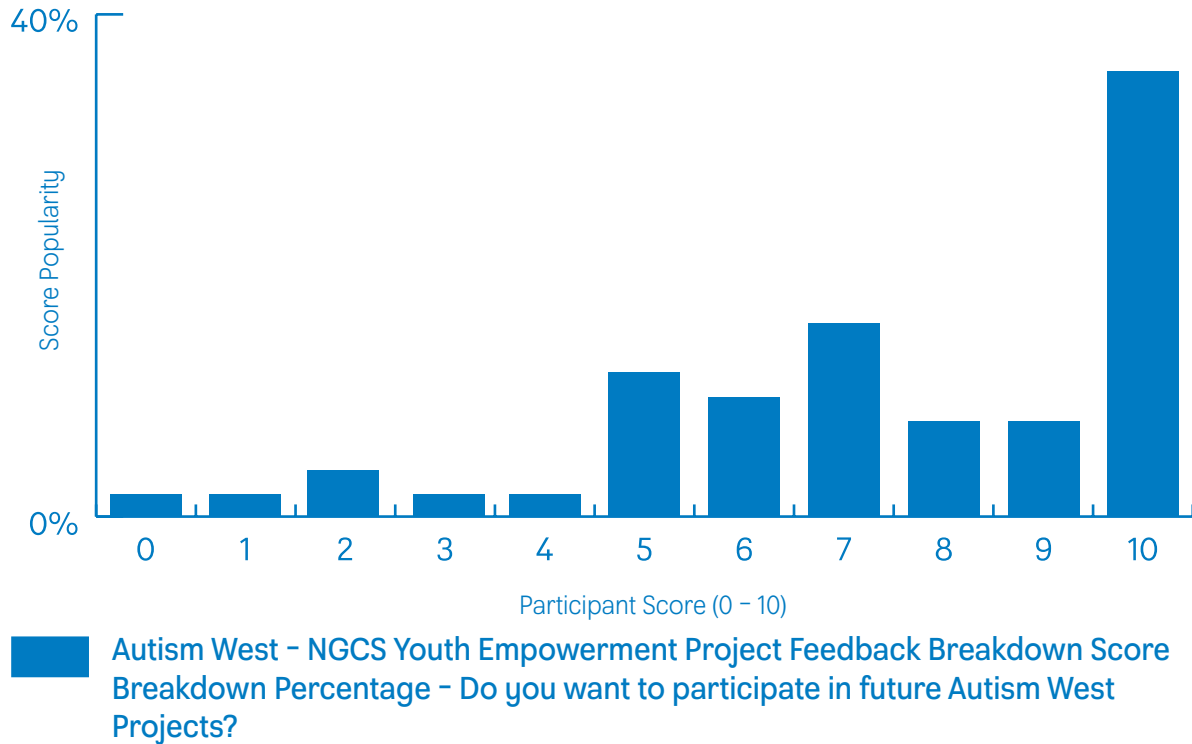


- Average Score - Did participating in the projects (Child Safety, The Future or Superheroes) help your self-esteem?
- Average Score - Did you learn something new from doing the projects in group?
- Average Score - Do you want to participate in future projects run by Autism West



### Individual Breakdowns: Do you want to participate in future Autism West Projects?

Figure 4: Combined (Awesome & YES  
Group Survey Results)



Through the project and from the data collected by the participants, further projects have been adapted. An employability handbook has been developed by the participants at Autism West. This handbook is designed to be distributed to local businesses and potential employers within the community. The handbook outlines information on neurodiversity and the different needs of employees who are neurodiverse. The aim of the handbook is to provide information to potential employers and advocate for individuals with autism who may be seeking employment and finding it difficult.



Youth Advisory Council Birthday

## 8. Conclusion

The Youth Empowerment Project has been an extremely successful and beneficial project for the participants at Autism West. From our data, the participants from Autism West have learnt many new skills and gained confidence through participating in the Youth Empowerment Project. From looking at the data and speaking with the participants at Autism West, all the objectives outlined for the project have been met. Surveys undertaken with the participants show that through being involved in the project, the participants felt like they learnt about the topics they researched, learnt new skills, and gained a sense of belonging and confidence to participate more actively in their communities. By participating in the project, participants increased their engagement and interest in social issues that were relevant to them and their lives, this was achieved by getting the participants to identify the social issues they wanted to learn more about. By allowing participants to pick the social issues and research them, it built their confidence and empowered them with knowledge to be able to make change within their communities.

The success of the Youth Empowerment project can be summarized based on our participants overall enthusiasm towards Autism West running future projects. 66.5% of participants reacted positively (score 7 or above out of 10) when asked whether they would like to participate in future projects, with a noticeable spike on a 10 rating (very strong interest).

## 9. Reference Documents

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## 10. Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Prezi Presentation

file:///C:/Users/Livi's%20PC/Downloads/YEP%20Prezi%20Presentation.pdf

### Appendix 2 – Employment Questions

#### Youth Empowerment Project Interview Questions

Questions:

1. What are the benefits and challenges of being Neurodiverse?
2. What are your strengths?
3. How do you think your strengths could be beneficial to a workplace?
4. What would be the benefits to you and your workplace if co-workers knew and understood neurodiversity?
5. If you could choose, what would be your preferred communication method?
6. Does your preferred communication method change depending on who you're talking to or how you're feeling?
7. What do you think would help you achieve your goals at work?
8. What do you think makes a job meaningful?
9. Do you have any concerns about gaining employment?
10. What are your dreams for future employment?

### Appendix 3 – Interviews with participants

Interview one:

[https://youtu.be/Xsfpd\\_oqvnY](https://youtu.be/Xsfpd_oqvnY)

Interview two:

<https://youtu.be/ddkldsQ12F4>



## Appendix 4 – Survey Questions

### Awesome Survey (from question 3)

- Q3 Do you have fun when you come to Autism West social groups?
- Q4 Do you think we listen to your ideas in group?
- Q5 Do you think you are supported and encouraged in group?
- Q6 Since coming to an Autism West social group my self-esteem (how much I value myself) has improved?
- Q7 Since coming to an Autism West social group are you more comfortable talking to others?
- Q8 Do you think you are listened to by other members of the group?
- Q9 Do you think you can talk to the staff at Autism West if you have any concerns?
- Q10 Are you a more confident (feeling sure of yourself and your abilities) person since coming to the Autism West social group?
- Q11 Does being part of a group at Autism West make you feel valued?
- Q12 Did participating in the projects (Child Safety, The Future or Superheroes theme) help your self-esteem?
- Q13 Did you learn something new from doing projects in group?
- Q14 Do you want to participate in future projects run by Autism West?
- Q15 If you could improve Autism West in anyway, what would you suggest

All answered were rated from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), 5 would represent a neutral response

### YES Survey (from question 3)

- Q3 Do you have fun when you come to Autism West social groups?
- Q4 Do you think we listen to your ideas in group?
- Q5 Do you think you are supported and encouraged in group?
- Q6 Since coming to an Autism West social group my self esteem (how much I value myself) has improved?
- Q7 Since coming to an Autism West social group are you more comfortable talking to others?
- Q8 Do you think you are listened to by other members of the group?
- Q9 Do you think you can talk to the staff at Autism West if you have any concerns?
- Q10 Are you a more confident (feeling sure of yourself and your abilities) person since coming to the Autism West social group?
- Q11 Does being part of a group at Autism West make you feel valued?
- Q12 Being part of a group at Autism West has helped me to make plans and feel good about them?
- Q13 My group at Autism West has helped me and encouraged me when I have had to change my plan?
- Q14 Did participating in the projects (interviews) help your self-esteem?
- Q15 Did you learn something new from doing projects in group?

Q16 Do you want to participate in future projects run by Autism West?

Q17 Did coming to the Youth Advisory Council help with your confidence?

(Only answer if you have attended the Youth Advisory Council)

Q18 If you could improve Autism West in anyway, what would you suggest?

All answered were rated from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), 5 would represent a neutral response



**Thank You!**



**autismWest**

WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER

Designed by Jarrad Chew & Travis Taylor  
Level 11 Design | [level11design.com.au](http://level11design.com.au)

**L11** Level 11  
Design