

EVERY *Voice* HEARD

Advocating for the rights of children and young people





Every year, hundreds of thousands of children and young people in Australia experience harms that go unseen.

By the time our young people have turned 25, 40% of them will have experienced multiple types of abuse¹.

That's over 3 million children or young people right now who have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or exposure to domestic violence.

And every year approximately 5 out of 10 will experience a civil, family, or criminal law problem². Nearly half will not have their legal needs met³.

These young people's voices remain unheard, and without help their trauma can result in lifelong adverse consequences.

Youth Law Australia (YLA) exists to rewrite this narrative so that every child or young person can access help and get the support they deserve.

By advocating with YLA you will ensure that every call is answered, and you will help thousands of young Australians to transform their lives.

Will you help YLA answer the calls?

¹ Mathews B et al. (2023) The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: findings from a national survey. *Med J Aust.* 218 (6).

² Macourt D et al. (2014) *Youth and the law: the impact of legal problems on young people.* Sydney: Law and Justice Foundation of NSW.

³ Rychner, G et al (2024). *Young people's experience of legal problems.* Melbourne: Victoria Law Foundation.



“ I had a lot of trouble with school so I left when I was 16 and got an apprenticeship. But from my first day, my supervisor bullied me non-stop. It got worse and worse and I didn't have the confidence to stand up for myself. After six months, I had a nervous breakdown. I was hospitalised for a few days and just when I was at my lowest point, I was sacked from my job.

All it took was 48 hours for my life to turn upside down.

Not only had I lost my job, but all of this along with my health, left me homeless. I had no money and no one to turn to for help. I soon found myself crashing in a garage at a sharehouse. But it wasn't long until the others living there told me I had to move on.

I have never felt more desperate and alone. Seeing the struggle I was in, one of the guys suggested I contact Youth Law Australia to get help.

I remember the day and the time when I called YLA because it was a moment that changed my life.

It was two o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon...”

**names have been changed throughout, to protect identities*



Lee's story*
-16 year-old
from NSW.

Juanita*
YLA Lawyer

“

“ I answered the phone that Tuesday afternoon when Lee called YLA.

I’ll never forget it. His voice was shaky and he spoke timidly. He was alone and afraid.

He shared that he had been a victim of workplace bullying, an experience that led him to a mental breakdown. Unable to regain control, I could feel the desperation through the phone.

Young people’s experiences shape the rest of their lives; those early years are all-important. YLA steps in to assist young people who have no one else to turn to, at critical moments in their journey.

When the law and the adults around children fail them and disempower them, we do everything possible to support them and ensure their voices are heard.

We are a safe place and we offer support, without judgement. When children and young people come to YLA, they are in control, they can choose to remain anonymous and they can trust that their personal information is 100% confidential and that we believe them.

We truly exist to enable children and young people to speak up – to have their voices heard.

When a young person like Lee picks up the phone and calls us, it is a life-changing moment. If only we could answer every call.”

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Children and young people's problems are very often legal problems.

Children and young people are experiencing harm at alarming rates. However, they often can't access the specialist support and services that are critical to their safety and wellbeing.

Legal problems can have a devastating impact on children and young people. During these experiences, they are more likely to encounter poor mental health, online harassment, financial distress, housing instability, relationship breakdowns and be excluded from education and training. Victim-survivors of child maltreatment often experience complex trauma. It is these impacts, along with the legal problems themselves, that YLA aims to address.

Without YLA, so many children and young people would receive no help at all.

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“For young people – when they deal with personal issues – it can be all-consuming. The idea that these tectonic issues in a young person’s life can be solved, using the full weight of the law, is extraordinary. It’s not often you tell a young person, “You need a lawyer”.

YLA IS INSPIRING: IT’S A SPECIAL SERVICE DELIVERED BY SPECIAL PEOPLE.

We are their access to a powerful tool, law, that can solve their problem!
I like that we’re technology-driven. Young people can contact us
however they want – it’s unique.”

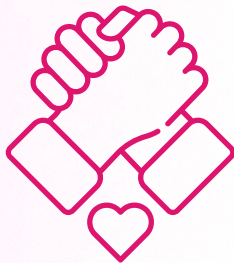
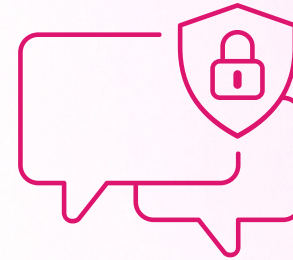
”

Michael - YLA Board Member

YLA IS UNIQUE


FREE CONFIDENTIAL HELP

YLA is a charity providing free, confidential help to any child or young person, with any problem, anywhere in Australia. In multiple studies, children and young people say that participation in decision-making is crucial to their sense of control over the direction of their lives. Part of this is being able to control who knows about their issues.



TRUSTED AND SAFE

YLA supports children and young people to make informed choices. Uniquely, as lawyers, we can maintain our young clients' confidentiality when other service providers may not. In this way, we can provide children and young people with a safe and trusted space to seek help and find out about their rights and next steps.



Jesse's* story
-16 year-old
from Victoria

“I contacted YLA through the 24-hour web form. I was in out-of-home care and had experienced something that no child should ever have to.

I wanted to know what my rights were, and whether I should get the police involved. I didn't want to put any of the other kids who were living there at risk if anything went badly.

I quickly got an email explaining confidentiality, what could possibly be done and they asked if I would like to talk to the lawyer on the phone.

When we spoke, I told them everything: how I had tried to report the issue to child protection authorities but it wasn't taken seriously, how I had no support – how alone I felt and how worried and fearful I was, all the time...

At that time, I had no trust in the world and just didn't know who I could talk to. I wasn't sure what to expect from YLA.

But they were amazing, they explained how I could make a report to the police, and what I would need to do for that, my other options and where I could get counselling and help with money.

I also told the YLA lawyer that I sometimes thought about suicide. He was really good – we talked for ages – and he got me an appointment with a specialist.

I asked the lawyer if he could help me with the police, and he did. He also got the child protection authorities to do an investigation.”

**names have been changed throughout, to protect identities*



Prevention of harm

Children and young people are coming to YLA earlier in their experiences of harm or risk. This presents us with a crucial opportunity to intervene and minimise decades of potential harm.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that survivors took, on average, 23.9 years to tell someone about their abuse⁴.

With just one phone call, email, webform contact or live chat, we have the chance to address years of trauma and pain, guiding children and young people at a pivotal fork in the road of their lives.

However we still need to ask the question, how many callers give up when they can't get through and need us most?

By advocating with us your support will allow more children and young people right across Australia to receive the vital, free and confidential help they need.

⁴ *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse, Volume 4, 2017, p16.*

WE ARE A SPECIALISED COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE, ACCREDITED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES.

YLA ASSISTS THE LARGEST NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF ANY COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE OPERATING IN AUSTRALIA.

Over the last 30 years, YLA has tailored its service to ensure it is accessible to children and young people.

In the 2023 financial year, YLA:



Provided 44.2% of all community legal services to children aged under 18 nationally.



Provided 6,041 legal services to clients.



Helped 5,766 clients (children, young people and their supporters).



Provided support to 3,460 children and young people who were experiencing harm or were at risk of experiencing harm.



Had 1.4 million page views of legal information on the YLA website.



Supported hundreds of children and young people to remain in education, employment, or training.

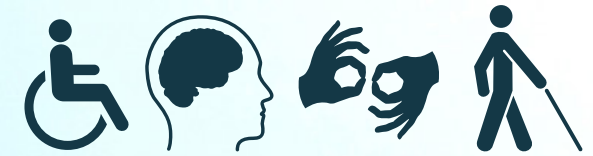
EACH YEAR, YLA DELIVERS ON ITS MISSION TO SUPPORT ANY CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON, WITH ANY LEGAL PROBLEM, ANYWHERE.

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023, YLA provided assistance to approximately 6,000 young clients and their supporters.

In this period:



260 clients indicated they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (4.3%).



492 clients indicated they have a disability (8.2%).



At least 776 clients identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (12.9%).



202 clients indicated they are LGBTQI+ (3.3%).



860 children or young people indicated they had experienced matters where there was an indication of family violence (14.3%).

How we help

1



Abuse and neglect: young people trust us to provide free, confidential help when they've experienced unimaginable trauma because of family and domestic violence and sexual abuse, to prevent and minimise further harm, and to access mental health and other support.

2



Financial hardship and risk of homelessness: young people trust us to provide free, confidential help for issues relating to education, employment, social security, and accommodation, to make sure they can stay in education, employment, and housing, and to stand up for their financial rights.

3



Bullying, harassment, and discrimination: young people trust us to provide free, confidential help when they are bullied, harassed, or discriminated against for any reason – online, at work or school, and in the community. We are a safe space for all young people.

NOW, MORE THAN EVER

For 30 years, YLA has relied primarily on government grants to fund assistance programs for young people. Despite YLA being a trusted national service for children and young people, not every story ends like Lee's and Jesse's.

Each year, thousands of children and young people go unheard.

The demand for services far exceeds YLA's current capacity, and our services are overstretched. YLA is unable to respond to all the requests for help and as a result, has reduced client intake availability by 40%. This involves reducing those clients' access by live chat, phone, webform, and email, and means that when those young people try to contact us to ask for help, they can't always get through.

For the YLA team, one missed call is one too many.

This means that every year nearly 3,000 vulnerable children and young people can't reach us – that's nearly 60 young people a week that are not being heard.

Will you help us answer every call?



INTRODUCING

THE ADVOCATES

The Advocates is a group of like-minded individuals with a shared vision – to ensure all children and young people can access free and confidential help to solve their problems.

Individuals and families who become members of *The Advocates*, either through a gift or a bequest, will be part of a movement that will support every child and young person in Australia.

Becoming an Advocate is a powerful way to provide young people with a voice when they face their biggest challenges and when they have nowhere else to turn.

Through your generous support, you can help ensure that no voice goes unheard.

YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT WILL MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

Collectively, Advocates support YLA to promote and protect the rights and interests of children and young people when they need it most. By strengthening our funding resources through your generosity, we can extend our reach to help more children and young people through:



TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES

With advances in technology, particularly AI and changes in online search, we must adapt quickly. We need to utilise emerging technology to continue to lead and efficiently use resources to increase access to justice for children and young people.



DIRECT YOUTH PARTICIPATION

We want to give children and young people the opportunity to drive reform as a result of their lived experiences and amplify their voices to the nation's decision-makers.



POLICY AND LAW REFORM

We intend to increase our influence to create systemic change that better prevents and responds to children and young people's problems.



LEGAL SERVICE

We must build our operational capacity in order to reach more children and young people who are experiencing abuse and neglect, financial hardship, bullying, discrimination and exclusion from education or training.

THE ADVOCATES

Advocating for the right for children to be seen, heard and supported.

CHAMPION

\$5,000+

(including bequests)

All benefits offered to 'DEFENDER' members, with the addition of:

Behind the scenes tour:

An opportunity to meet our team and volunteers who represent the voices of children and young people.

Recognition:

Your generosity will be acknowledged on our website and in our annual report, highlighting your commitment to justice for young people.



DEFENDER

\$2,500

All benefits offered to 'ALLY' members, with the addition of:

In-depth insights:

Invitations to specialist education sessions including trends and topics such as children's rights and children's legal issues.



ALLY

\$1,000

Informative updates:

Receive select mailings, including our annual report and exclusive YLA impact updates.

Annual donor function:

Receive an exclusive invitation to an annual donor recognition event to celebrate your generosity and hear first-hand the impact of your giving.

Membership pin:

As part of your membership, you will receive an exclusive lapel pin.




Become an Advocate

YLA exists to truly see and hear children and young people, and our work has transformed the lives of tens of thousands of young Australians for more than thirty years.

Every call counts. Every call for help needs to be answered. Every child or young person should be able to access YLA's support when they need it most.

You can stand with YLA to make sure every call is answered, you can become an *Advocate*.



Youth Law Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of all the lands on which we work, including the Bidjigal people of the Eora Nation and the Muwinina people of Nipaluna on whose lands our offices are based. We pay our respects to the Elders – past, present and emerging – and the children, young people and their families who we work with across Australia.

We acknowledge the disproportionate, ongoing and intergenerational harm experienced by First Nations children and young people and commit to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to seek a better future for children based on justice, truth-telling, equal access to rights, and self-determination.



For more information please contact:

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