Young Social Pioneers

Evaluation Report

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List of abbreviations

GEM  Global Entrepreneurship Monitor
IYF  International Youth Foundation
MSC  Most Significant Change
SSE  School for Social Entrepreneurs
YAN  Youth Action Net
YSP  Young Social Pioneers
PLP  Personal Learning Plans
Executive summary

The Young Social Pioneers (YSP) program was established by The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) in 2009 as a national institute of the International Youth Foundation’s (IYF) initiative, Youth Action Net (YAN). Over a 12-month period, the YSP program seeks to develop the capacities and enhance the professional and social support networks for 14 change makers aged between 18 and 29 years. YSP seeks to develop the individual in order that they effect positive change in their local, national and global communities through a range of innovative social initiatives.

The YSP program has four key objectives, these are:

• To deliver a 12 month learning journey which expands and deepens participants inquiry into who they are and what they do as young social pioneers (social change makers) and to further equip them with comprehensive skills and a range of attributes which will enable them to become even more impactful leaders in their work and their lives.
• To offer participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events.
• To connect the participants to a community of individuals within Australia and the world who have the courage to see freshly in the most challenging and uncertain times.
• To introduce participants to sustainable, alternative and innovative business practices which align with their work and their personal philosophies.

Evaluation design and implementation

The evaluation of the 2009 YSP program aimed to reveal any underlying factors which enable or inhibit the fulfilment of the aforementioned aims of the program. In addition, it is anticipated that the findings will inform a future evaluation framework which not only charts the progress of the individual participants but also seeks to measure the community impact of their projects. The evaluation reported here employs a qualitative approach based on data collected between August 2009 and March 2010. The breakdown of methods and participants was:

• 3 sets of interviews for each pioneer (13) over 12 months
• Most Significant Change (MSC) data (stories and discussion notes) from 10 pioneers
• MSC data from the MSC panel consisting of 3 stakeholders

Observations by the evaluators and unanticipated feedback of pioneers taken from an impromptu session spurred by the MSC exercise were also used as data in the report.
Key findings and recommendations

- Participants experienced a positive shift in their self-understanding; a greater sense of their role as leaders and change makers.
- Realising a shared identity as a community of social entrepreneurs, there was a development of being part of something bigger than themselves for participants.
- Almost all participants expressed a desire for succession planning and for skills learnt to be transferrable from one initiative to the next. That is, pioneers almost always discussed their initiatives as their current work and expected to be working on a different social entrepreneurial activity in the future. Therefore the premise of skilling up the individual to create greater social change is supported by participants.
- An anticipated but nonetheless powerful outcome was the collegiality between participants. The pioneers felt the collaborative nature of the program generated the greatest benefits.
- The wider YSP community is an important resource that was accessed with varied results by participants. The broadening of networks resulted in opportunities and opened up pathways for the expansion of initiatives, award of grants etc. Despite these achievements, participants did not always identify YSP as a cause of their success.
- Achieving a greater sense of clarity around the purpose and goals of their initiative was a key outcome for many of the pioneers.
- It is currently difficult to determine the extent to which the business practices introduced by the program align with the work and personal philosophies of pioneers until (or unless) these practices are put into action.
- Sustainability and the lack of resources for pioneer’s initiatives is a complex ongoing issue. Implementing a social enterprise framework was mentioned by many participants as a possible solution but not instigated or workshopped by the program. Gaining resources i.e. writing funding submissions or creating an enterprise is a recommended learning outcome of the future program.
- The program assumes that participants have high level of competency in self directed learning. The program risks alienating some participants from fulfilling objectives if expectations of self-directed learning and action are assumed and not made explicit.
- Mentors were of critical importance to the program; a linchpin to keep pioneers connected to the program and nurture development. The experience of the relationship varied greatly for participants. Successful mentorships were based on clarity of expectations, strong personal connections, reliability and relevance of experience. These successful attributes need to be embedded in the program going forward.
- Future evaluations need to apply a multi-level approach (individual, partner and community) to provide more evidence of the difference YSP is making beyond the individual.
1. Introduction

The Foundation for Young Australians’ Young Social Pioneers program is based on the International Youth Foundation’s global initiative Youth Action Net (YAN), which has supported over 140 young social entrepreneurs from many countries including: the USA, Brazil, Spain, Mexico, Jordan and Israel. At the heart of the program is the development of skilled, passionate, and committed leaders who can respond to the increasing challenges of a post-global world. As described by YAN:

*The Young Social Pioneers Program recognises that in the face of urgent social challenges - poverty, climate change, HIV/AIDS, homelessness - young people are exercising their leadership potential like never before. They are doing it differently and creating new approaches and solutions. Their energy and instinct for making a difference drives them to take risks, to look beyond obstacles, and to develop innovative solutions (YAN 2010).*

While sharing YAN’s vision of ‘All young people are active global citizens, shaping the world with power and confidence’ (YAN 2010), YSP responds locally to the needs of young Australian social entrepreneurs and works to fulfil the broader mission of FYA: to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens. FYA does this by supporting innovative initiatives like YSP that provide rich learning opportunities for young Australians. YSP works with young people aged 18 to 29. The significance of youth voice central to YSP as many of the young people involved in the program have set up their projects in an attempt to take action in areas of need that may not be addressed by government, market-based mechanisms or third sector agencies. YSP and FYA work to support young people in achieving positive change for themselves, their community and for humanity.

Designed to fill an existing gap in social entrepreneurs/change maker programs, YSP primarily functions as a vehicle for social entrepreneurship for young people, setting it apart from other social entrepreneur programs which are characterised by a business or social enterprise focus; predominantly for older people. There is an emerging body of literature which highlights the need for greater support of social enterprising activities in young people. The 2006 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s (GEM) Social Entrepreneurship Report (Harding 2006) provides a picture of attitudes to social entrepreneurship in the UK and how this relates to a social enterprise agenda. A survey of 27,296 18-64 year olds revealed that ‘Younger people are more likely to be social entrepreneurs than any other age grouping’ (Harding 2006: 3). However, the research found that as entrepreneurs become more experienced the rate of disenchantment rises. Supporting social change makers in the early stages is, therefore, vital. The report concluded that providing young entrepreneurs with networks
and guidance is a critical ingredient for building successful social leaders rather than disillusioned entrepreneurs:

*Social entrepreneurs are community-centric and rely heavily on networks … Networks are easy and relatively cheap to construct (Harding 2006: 18).*

These findings are supported by research conducted by the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) London (also now in Melbourne), which aims to develop entrepreneurial skills in budding social leaders in order that they can create effective change in their communities. In 2006, the new economics foundation (nef) conducted an evaluation of SSE’s activities. Specifically, the evaluation assessed the degree to which the SSE program was meeting its objectives. Drawing on data from 250 Fellow questionnaires, the evaluation reported that 90% of Fellows felt the program was well suited to their needs (nef 2006: 3). A feature of the SSE is that it employs an ‘action learning model’ (nef 2006: 3) which recognises that social entrepreneurs are individuals with a diverse set of personal and professional objectives. This adaptable learning framework is vital to the future impact of the participants and ‘is the key to SSE’s success’ (nef 2006: 77).

Where many organisations focus on supporting the enterprise, SSE sees the individual needs of the entrepreneur as paramount. Their evaluation findings emphasise the value of developing qualities such as confidence, resilience and passion in the individual and that social action initiatives rely on traits such as these to succeed. Specifically, Fellows’ organisations were found to be over one and half times more likely to succeed (compared with mainstream businesses) when these individual attributes were developed, thus highlighting the benefits of this approach (nef: 7, 76).

In 2008, Clore Leadership Programme UK commissioned an evaluation of its principal fellowship programme. Amongst the objectives of the evaluation was a focus on participant impacts as well as those on the cultural sector, in which Clore is positioned. Using a combination of document analysis, interviews and observations (of the induction process for new Fellows), the evaluation found the program was considered to be confidence building in both personal and professional arenas and effective in opening up pathways to employment in the cultural sector. Fellows reported the development of highly beneficial social support networks, enhanced self-reflection, increased awareness and learning. Importantly, the evaluation also revealed that the program was effective in challenging the Fellows’ ‘habitual ways’ of doing things. Fellows reported that after the program they felt reinvigorated and re-energised professionally and they considered themselves better leaders.

The notion of building individual capabilities is central to YSP’s key objectives. This is premised on a positive youth development approach which builds on an individual’s character and existing strengths enabling them to ‘flourish throughout life’ (Park 2004: 40). Character strengths can include optimism, wisdom, social intelligence and teamwork. In addition to promoting wellbeing and providing a buffer against social disadvantage, the
The development of these personal competencies is considered to lead to an array of outcomes. As a leadership program, YSP harnesses these competencies (traits, talents, skills, knowledge and abilities) in an effort to produce broader community outcomes through the creation of young leaders.

However, there are underlying assumptions to the notion of character building which have not been adequately explored. For instance, using youth development programs as an example, Park observes that there is a tendency for:

> ... the youth development field to regard competencies (including character) as outcomes of intervention programs, coequal with the reduction of problems, rather than as mediators: that is, factors cultivated by the program that in turn produce outcomes of interest. Character matters in part because behaviour follows from it (Park 2004: 49).

While YSP seeks to build these competencies to produce outcomes, character strengths need to be understood as mediators as well as outcomes. Moreover, the conceptualisation of leadership should be understood and measured as a skill rather than a character attribute.

The evaluation of YSP reported here focuses on: firstly, outcomes such as the development of a set of competencies considered essential to the fulfilment of social entrepreneurial activities (in young people); and secondly, the process of the development of these competencies as they unfold throughout various programmatic milestones through enhanced social and professional networks and support mechanisms which have been highlighted by the existing research as potential pathways to success for the young social pioneers.

### 1.1 What is YSP?

The 12 month YSP program is structured around a series of reflective workshops designed to develop leadership skills, resilience, business planning, media training and the positive emotional attributes that will enable pioneers to be more effective with their initiatives. Pioneers come together at the initial five day retreat where they develop a group identity, sharing their work and goals, and are supported in creating a personal learning plan. During the subsequent weekend workshops, pioneers receive training in effective leadership, communication skills, branding, financial management and guidance on how they might evaluate their work. Pioneers are expected to lead their own learning in between retreats and workshops by building relationships with peers and mentors as well as following up strategic networks with individuals and organisations.
1.1.1 Program aims and objectives

YSP is a year-long learning experience for fourteen young people between the ages of 18 and 29 who have been leading social change projects for a minimum of six months. It provides training in communications, financial management and leadership, with built-in mentoring and personal development. Participants can access a broad range of networks from corporate, philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors. Furthermore, the program creates a community of young social pioneers by bringing participants together for peer-to-peer learning opportunities. The objectives of the program are as follows:

- To deliver a 12 month learning journey which expands and deepens participants inquiry into who they are and what they do as young social pioneers (social change makers) and to further equip them with comprehensive skills and a range of attributes which will enable them to become even more impactful leaders in their work and their lives
- To offer participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events
- To connect the participants to a community of individuals within Australia and the world who have the courage to see freshly in the most challenging and uncertain times
- To introduce participants to sustainable, alternative and innovative business practices which align with their work and their personal philosophies.

1.1.2 Structure of program

The YSP learning program is a 12 month journey that consists of two parts; the individual work of each participant and the journey of the group. The pioneers come together on three occasions during the year for a 5 Day (live-in) learning retreat and two weekend skill workshops. The learning retreat includes the following activities:

- Group hypothetical
- Community conversations indentifying the key attributes important to healthy sustainable communities
- Inquiry into leadership practices from a range of current world practice and their own individual approaches to leading
- An introduction to positive psychology precepts such as Authentic Happiness and building resilience
- Development of personal learning plans (including their individual Signature Strengths and their leadership styles)
- Sharing each other's work and approaches
- A presentation of their work
- Consistent reflection on successes and challenges.
The two weekend workshops focus on the areas: communication, branding, social media, media training, business planning, financial acumen, how to evaluate your work, creating effective, powerful presentations.

Throughout the year participants are required to continue to the learning and build relationships with peers, former Young Social Pioneers and network with strategic individuals, organisations and mentors (FYA sources mentors and connects pioneers to individual and organisations who can assist and support their work). The program completes with a final retreat where the group debriefs.

1.1.3 YSP learning model

YSP focuses on creating a community of inquiry where the participants explore common issues, concepts and challenges. This learning, which is based on such models as that explored in the report by Cisco Inc., The Learning Society (2010), is enabled by the structure of the program and must be both a group and individual experience. The learning of the individual is very much tailored to the needs and goals of their initiative and their personal leadership style. Whilst the program looks for participants to reach a shared set of overall outcomes, they do this by taking different paths, having different learning experiences and at varied paces.

The program adopts an informal learning model, i.e. unstructured learning in a structured environment, which is:

- Facilitated
- Personalised
- Flexible
- Collaborative
- Technology enabled
- Experiential
- Inquiry driven.
2. Evaluating YSP

2.1 Aims of the evaluation

The aim of the evaluation is to gather information on the processes and outcomes of the program and to identify areas for improvements in the young pioneer’s journey. Specifically, it explores the nature and influence of YSP on its participants throughout the 12 month program and seeks to reveal any underlying factors that may act as enablers or barriers to the pioneers fulfilling the aims of YSP. In addition to investigating the role of the YSP in enhancing the capacity of young people to effect change in their communities, this evaluation is also designed to inform an evaluation framework that can be applied in the future roll out of the program, as well as track the community impact of the projects initiated by the pioneers during the course of the program.

2.2 Evaluation questions

In order to capture evidence of change, a set of evaluation questions based on the YSP stated objectives were developed. These are:

- Did YSP deliver a 12 month learning journey which expanded and deepened participants’ inquiry into who they are and what they do as social change makers? Did it further equip them with comprehensive skills and a range of attributes which enabled them to become even more impactful leaders in their work and in their lives?
- To what extent did YSP offer participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events?
- Did YSP facilitate the connection of participants to a community of individuals within Australia and the world?
- Did YSP introduce participants to sustainable and alternative business practices which aligned with their work and personal philosophies?

While it is recognised that a more comprehensive evaluation would incorporate an analysis of impact on a multi-level basis, such as at the levels of individual, organisational and community, this report focuses on the evaluation at the level of the individual.
3. Methodology

A qualitative approach based on face-to-face interviews and questions via an online medium as well as a final Most Significant Change (MSC) session was best suited to, and consistent with, the principles of the collaborative nature of the YSP program. The individuality of each of the pioneers and their initiatives called for a more nuanced approach to understanding the differing perspectives.

At the outset, this evaluation looks at the extent to which the program contributed to its desired outcomes, rather than making a case for how the outcomes can be wholly attributed to the program. This distinction is drawn from a relatively new approach, gaining popularity in the field of program evaluation, called Contribution Analysis (Mayne 1999). Contribution analysis measures progress towards outputs and intermediate outcomes (relying on a program logic). The approach recognises that it takes time to achieve an impact and therefore does not attempt to prove an impact before it can realistically be achieved. Rather, it seeks to provide more plausible evidence to counter the uncertainty about the impact a program is attempting to make. Attribution, on the other hand, involves drawing causal links and explanatory conclusions between observed changes and a program. Determining whether the outcome was caused by the program is an ongoing challenge and many evaluations identify whether the outcome was achieved and if it was, assume the program can take credit for this (Kotvojs 2006).

Data collection for this evaluation was conducted between August 2009 and March 2010 and corresponded to the three key program phases; an initial learning retreat, two weekend workshops and a final retreat.

3.1 Instruments

Traditionally, outcome studies involve the use of quantitative measures, questionnaires conducted on a pre/post basis, sometimes with the incorporation of ‘pre-test’ (up to a month before the first day of the program) and ‘post-test’ (up to three months after the experience) measurements to secure a more reliable indication of causal relationships. More recently, qualitative approaches have been adopted to provide a more comprehensive picture of outcomes and impact of such programs. Quantitative methodologies are effective in identifying positive impacts regarding the individuals’ self-perceptions, while qualitative components support the theory of transferability of these positive outcomes. A combination of interviews and an MSC session (see below) was employed in this evaluation.

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1 Feedback from the preliminary findings report suggested it would be beneficial to explore the wider impact of the program through the collection of data on pioneer initiatives i.e., who they are reaching, number of volunteers and staff, and other program monitoring data.
3.1.1 Interviews

Interviews were conducted for phases one and three of the evaluation (see Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). During phase two, a series of interview-type questions were posted to an online community platform. MSC was carried out during the final retreat.

Sample

Interviews were conducted with all 14 pioneers who participated in the 2009 YSP program. For the first report, a sample of six pioneers drawn from the complete data set was analysed and presented in a preliminary findings report. It was decided a sample of six would provide a detailed enough account to satisfy the objectives of the evaluation (principally a learning exercise). In this final report, all 13 participants are included. The original group consisted of 14 pioneers, however due to wellbeing issues one participant withdrew after the first retreat.

The data presented here represents the views of eight females and five males.

Implementation

The face-to-face interviews were on average 20 minutes in length and, with the consent of the participants, involved the use of recording devices (both audio and video). Transcripts were not sent back to the interviewees for review and comment before being included in the analysis. The interviews were structured around broad themes derived from the objectives, these themes were: leadership; organisational (projects); collaboration/partnership; and impact and sustainability. The interview questions addressed these themes and included a number of follow-up probe questions for use if required.

An important consideration in the reporting of these findings necessarily is the protection of the confidence and privacy of participants. Consistent with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, identification of participants has been removed in this report.

Analysis

In an effort to faithfully capture the participants’ intentions, meanings and experiences, the full interview transcriptions were analysed using a ‘buddy’ system. This system involves two members of the evaluation team drawing key themes from the data. The role of the ‘buddy’ is to provide an independent and critical view of the data collected. The two sets of interpretations are then discussed and compared, and subsequent conclusions and recommendations are developed.
3.1.2 Most Significant Change

MSC is an evaluation technique originally designed to measure end-user experiences of widely geographically distributed development programs against original program aims. MSC maps the social processes that are given to change and principally relies on story-telling. However, it differs from a typical narrative methodology in two key ways. The first difference is that the methodology respects the ‘voice’ of participants, avoiding problems in typical qualitative methods where the results derived from stories or interviews depend solely on the interpretations of the researchers. The other difference is that the results have an objective interpretive structure determined by the relationship of the stories to domains derived from program objectives. Although these ‘domains of change’ are widely used in MSC, due to time limitations the decision was made to not apply them here.

MSC was also considered to be suitable for the final retreat as it provides testimony from participants as to how events are interpreted and what meanings are attached to activities when they have had time to reflect on the past 12 months.

Finally, in addition to the interview data there is also observational data collected across the program phases. This data provides further contextual information and has been incorporated throughout this report.

Sample

A single MSC session was conducted with 10 pioneers (3 were not in Victoria)

Implementation

The adaptation of the MSC technique for this evaluation involved three stages:

1. Stories were collected from each participant in a focus group setting where the larger group was broken down into smaller groups of 3-4. Participants were asked to write a story consisting of a single event reflecting practical change (for good or bad) related to the program;
2. In the first selection phase, the most representative stories were selected by the participants in their small groups based on the extent of the common experiences they -, and the meanings or values participants found in the stories. During this time, a scribe was designated in each group who records key points from the discussion regarding the first selection. This more tangential data forms an equally critical part of the MSC data set along with the selected stories. In all, 3 stories were collected from this session which went forward to the second level selection phase;
3. In the second selection phase, a panel made up of key stakeholders reviewed the selected stories from the first phase and chose one final story which reflected their own views of the program aims.
While MSC is a highly regarded and useful technique for a program with smaller participant numbers, there were several challenges revealed through its implementation which are worthy of mentioning here. Key amongst these was the need to emphasise that the story to be selected by participants during the first session did not necessarily have to be a ‘good story’ or written by a popular participant. Similarly, during the panel selection process, panel members were all initially drawn to the story which was pleasantly written and had to be continually encouraged to pay less attention to the writing style and more to what was being depicted.

A value of MSC is that it creates a safe environment for participants to express themselves. An outcome of this is the emergence of unforeseen ‘satellite’ discussions which give rise to additional data. In the case of the YSP evaluation, the MSC provoked an informal feedback session whereby participants expressed views about the program which were not intended to be elicited through the interviews or MSC process. These views have been incorporated throughout this report where relevant.

Analysis

The MSC data, which was made up of the first three chosen stories, the participant selection discussion notes and the notes from the panel were integrated with the data from the interviews to be analysed.

3.2 Ethics

In order to observe conventional research ethics protocols, in application the participants consent to evaluation and all data being used publically (for research/program purposes) but anonymously. The interview data was stored under a locked file system, while the MSC data was de-identified and stored in a filing cabinet.

3.3 A note on this report

This report is the second (final) part of a two stage analysis and reporting process for this evaluation. As mentioned previously, a preliminary findings report was compiled and submitted for review prior to the formation of this current report. A key advantage of this strategy is that through both the analytical process and feedback (from members of research, development and programs teams) provided for the preliminary findings report, this current account benefits from a more evolved level of reflection and deliberation such that some observations which were once relevant, are no longer appropriate in the context of a fuller, more rounder picture. In addition to provoking a refinement of thinking about the findings, the highly useful comments provided through the review process added a second (organisational) layer to the interpretations which have been incorporated in this report as footnotes. The value of this process of self-reflection about how the program sits within the larger organisational purpose should not be underestimated. Therefore, this
second articulation differs from the first in not only incorporating the remainder of the pioneer body, but also encompasses the additional insights gained from the feedback loop.

Finally, a further benefit of reporting the YSP evaluation in two stages is that the initial learnings were able to be incorporated into the program for its second cycle. This is consistent with the principle of a planning-programming-evaluation loop underpinning good quality program evaluations.

4. FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

The following sections present preliminary findings organised around each evaluation question. Mentoring provided an unexpected and important finding therefore it was decided that this be presented as a separate component.

4.1 Did YSP deliver a 12 month learning journey which expanded and deepened participants’ inquiry into who they are and what they do as social change makers? Did it further equip them with comprehensive skills and a range of attributes which enabled them to become even more impactful leaders in their work and in their lives?

This section analyses the evaluation data in relation to how YSP builds the capacity of the participants as leaders and young social entrepreneurs. It seeks to distinguish the contribution YSP makes to the development of participants through the themes of Personal inquiry and Doing leadership. The examination of interview and MSC data reveals the extent to which the above objective was met through the self reported experience of the participants.

Personal inquiry

It is clear from the interviews that the initial learning retreat provoked this sense of optimism and inspiration, the atmosphere was one of motivation and excitement about the potential that lay ahead as 13 young social pioneers came together for the first time:

*YSP is just amazing backing in general, just the confidence of the programs and providers here, what they're talking about in the future, the way they're structuring this whole unit, this whole camp, it's been inspiring. Every day is like 'Woah! What happened there?' It's really positive (M2, phase 1).*

Such sentiment is reflected by almost all pioneers in their phase one interviews; anticipation that YSP would be the ultimate backing they had been waiting for. There was much emphasis on the program being the catalyst for a ‘deeper sort of self acceptance and self-knowledge’ or that it will be the chance for one to ‘indulge’ as a
leader. When the retreat finished and the pioneers were forced back to their independent work and lives some of this exuberance diminished. This could be due to several factors; the fact that the retreat was enforced time-out for a group of young social entrepreneurs who were coping with extremely busy lifestyles means a sense of rejuvenation and clarity could be expected.

Another factor is that the cosseted environment of the retreat was not necessarily ‘reality’ for participants; it was a cocoon of like-minded individuals and facilitators focused on a distinct purpose with deep personal inquiry was expected. The program must be cautious to acknowledge the impact of the initial retreat and the vulnerability that an intense period of self-reflexivity can spur. During the unplanned post-MSC discussion, almost all participants spoke of the need for more facilitated reflection throughout the program as they enjoyed at the retreat.

The YSP program initiated a process of self-reflexive inquiry for almost all participants; although to varying degrees. The program allowed participant’s to focus on the self, identify strengths and weaknesses and to decide upon the mode of leadership best suited to their character and to their cause. Early in the program the peer group represented both a support mechanism and a locus for comparisons to be made between participants. Although self-assessments made around skill gaps was confronting for some pioneers, most participants tackled weaknesses and limitations with curiosity and used this group dynamic as motivation throughout the program:

Practically I would like to gain a whole lot more skills in terms of funding, getting funding stuff like that. There are so many things after coming this past week that I know I can improve on (M3, phase 1).

This experience has been interesting because if anything it actually made me less confident for a bit but that was in a good way, it made me really re-think a lot of stuff and feel less certain about what I was doing, but hopefully that will then mend to be even stronger (M4, phase 1).

Both the interviews and the MSC exercise revealed that many participants began to acquire ‘self-belief’ and in turn reported a sense of transformation in their leadership style. Confidence is a word that often comes up in the data, an attribute that one could assume applicants of YSP would already possess. Yet through the strength of the peer group and the accountability of the program, participants talked of being pushed by the program to ‘step up’ as a leader and thus realising the ‘responsibility’ they had due to their role. The notion of confidence became more like a goal that one ‘could actually contribute something useful’:

Growing up I never really saw myself as an entrepreneur. I’m always someone with ideas but sometimes struggle to make them really happen and I feel so supported in this environment ... I can see that stuff will happen (F1, phase 1).
Many participants acknowledged YSP as a contributing factor to their greater depth of vision and sense of purpose. Participants demonstrated an expansion of their capabilities as change makers with a deeper investigation into what they could achieve:

*I think my personal vision has gotten a lot larger since joining YSP...my original vision as helping young people, it wasn’t clear enough, it wasn’t direct enough and it wasn’t large enough and I think through YSP and the people that I’ve met and the skills that I’ve learnt I think that I can, that I personally and through my projects and stuff can make a bigger heavier impact within the Australian community...larger, bigger, better (M3, phase 3).*

This is further exemplified by one participant who looked beyond her initiative and expressed a determination to make significant strategic changes including how she could lead this change:

*...YSP has definitely made me think about the bigger picture and not just so focused on [my initiative] itself but sort of what the broader picture is and like trying to sort of increase the importance of young people to [auspice organisation] and really having their voice heard. So I’ve definitely tried to push that agenda on a national level (F2, phase 3).*

In most cases the project vision itself remains unchanged, tellingly however, over half the participants stated that their personal vision had expanded. This endorsement of the program to strengthen the recourse of young social change makers is extrapolated further in section 4.2.

The MSC story selection data from one group claims ‘what has changed is how I see myself’ with the chosen story revealing that this change has repercussions for the community:

*I acknowledge myself as a professional doing important work for the people in my community...I learned to respect my own worth and the value I bring to my community. This is important because with self worth comes a much greater impact (MSC story).*

This is a central yet somewhat contentious presumption of the YSP program; supporting the growth of the individual change maker as a path to greater social change. This tension was not lost on the MSC panel as they discussed elements of the stories in relation to the goals of the program. A panel member commented on the program enabling self-belief in participants and ‘really building that confidence and building that sense of self-value’. Conversely, the differentiation of a personal development program for young people versus a program for young social entrepreneurs was essential for one panel member:
...they're young people so you're bound to get this focus ... [but] it's not a personal development program. I think YSP is much more than that. It's about young social entrepreneurs (MSC panel member).

Interestingly though, the very people she believes the program is 'about' consistently claim their principle achievement as self-belief, arguably an element of personal development. Furthermore, another panel member believes that 'Until they develop as a person they are going to find the next step hard' thus seeing the logic in the YSP model. The alignment of these aspirations poses potential challenges to the implementation of YSP.

**Doing leadership**

For the most part, participants held a democratic, supportive view of their own leadership style rather than prescriptive. This in part may be an effect (by-product) of the selection process, whereby certain self-reported leadership styles are privileged. This would be consistent with a program that is designed to build on existing competencies such as a more self-aware, egalitarian approach to leading others. To this end, YSP allowed participants to reflexively engage with what it is to be a 'leader', and in a way honouring it rather than just going through the motions:

[I am] more proactive with being leader and making things happen rather than just kind of thinking that's part of what I do - just accepting that that's who I am and that's what my role is - [I'm] just taking more responsibility with it (F5, phase 3).

This has made me think really differently about a lot of things. I think maybe it's different ways of testing yourself...made me think about some other qualities that are really important for me that I'm maybe not emphasising in the way I lead and the way I do things, so I think that will really change how I approach tasks from here so that's been really significant (F1, phase 1).

The participants explain a significant shift, conveying a sense of ‘experiencing the experience’ of being a leader rather than viewing it as just part of the job. For instance, one participant who describes herself as ‘maturing as a professional’ identified a shift in style from one characterised by ‘micromanagement’ to ‘collaboration’. Some of the observed effects of this are that others in their team are provided with an opportunity to step into a leadership role. This self/other distinction is an important one as is as it paves the way for more productive and collegial relationships to be formed. Such remarks also highlight the importance for the individual in being taken out of one’s own environment; questioning pre-conceived notions around leadership and their role as an entrepreneur.
Conversely, there are other participants who report no change; although they identified the individual transitions they hoped to make as part of their learning development. In spite of a tacit, ongoing need for tangible aspects of leadership training, such as in the area of people management, it appears in some cases this was not effectively met. One participant does not mention the program at all when discussing leadership and the explicit challenges he faces:

"It's been an interesting ride for the last 6 months particularly around leading people and managing people and some of my biggest challenges have been around...managing different personalities and all that sort of thing and trying to get the most out of people...I think some of the challenges that we've had at the moment are really highlighting the importance of that sort of leadership and management... so I'm getting a few hard lessons right now (M1, phase 3)."

The fact that this participant experienced these challenges is not in itself problematic. However, it does indicate a gap in the learning as there is no evidence of him feeling equipped by the program to negotiate his leadership challenge. Another participant reported that she was still ‘struggling’ with being a leader half-way through the program but noted:

"I see myself as a role model for some of the young people, that is quite clear coming from them, but as a leader for the group I still struggle with that and I don’t think that has anything to do with YSP. I think I’ve learnt a lot from YSP. I think that’s more to do with the fact I’m wearing so many hats (F3, phase 3)."

This all demonstrates that the delivery of leadership training may not be limited to the development of a particular set of attributes, that it also requires cultivation and follow through to ensure it is implemented in the participants’ work and lives. This is not to say that participants did not demonstrate applied learning. Several pioneers attributed skills and knowledge to the program, such as having the ‘tools and ways [to] encourage people to work more effectively together’. The following explanation illustrates how one pioneer utilised the leadership training within her team:

"The training that we did on retreat that expanded my knowledge about various leadership types...it made me think a lot more about what a leader was and to think about how I deal with other members of my team and try and make sure I'm not doing the negative aspects of the different types of leaders ... these kind of things pop up in your mind when you're in a difficult situation and you think ok what's the best way as a leader to deal with this kind of situation and I think that the YSP training sort of made me think a lot more being a leader rather than just actually being one (F2, phase 3)."
The participant feels she has indeed been equipped with skills for her to become a more impactful leader. She has been armed with knowledge that allows her to take a self-reflexive stance when assuming the role of leader with her peers, thus being a leader becomes a constructive process compared to just a title. Another potent display of leadership is one participant taking the experience of YSP back to his group:

_I suppose there’s been a lot of rewarding experiences, especially at the retreat, but just being able to bring that experience back home and back to my local group. I don’t know, it’s just that sort of moment where everyone has that understanding that there is something, that there are people out there who want to support us and who want to help us and we do have friends in wider networks, just to be able to share that feeling with a bunch of 20 disengaged young people it’s just incredible and they love it and they feed off it and that’s fantastic (M3, phase 3)._

Growth in confidence and self-efficacy are exemplified here as the individual moves from being a sole visionary to someone who is physically out there impacting the community.

YSP worked to locate participants as leaders in their own context and for many, leadership capacities, or the practical application of this, increased as a result of the program. YSP provided a number of pioneers with clarity of purpose, developing a renewed sense of self located within the growing scale or strengthening of their projects. When discussing leadership one participant recounts defining his strategy and growing his team from none to 18 volunteers (who volunteer for 15hrs per week). In contrast to the subjective evidence of change in leadership style captured in this evaluation, this quantitative dimension is notable.

### 4.1.1 Summary

This evaluation examined the extent to which the program met the first key objective of the YSP program through self-reflexive practices, whereby pioneers were prompted to assess their own attitudes and values. Aspects of the program, including that of the group dynamic, were challenging for some pioneers as they began to explore their own capacity to identify as entrepreneurs. Importantly, YSP aids the understanding of the practical nature of leadership and how the strengthening of the self can lead to a greater sense of clarity and purpose. To this end, for almost all participants there is evidence of expansion and a deepened inquiry into who they are as leaders and change makers.

### 4.2 To what extent did YSP offer participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events?

This section discusses the extent to which the YSP program offered participants an opportunity to deliver their message across a range of contexts. This includes a focus on the changes in each participant’s understanding
of their own capacities and how these shifts played out in the world of their initiative. This section also examines what dimensions of the program, if any, supported improvements in this area. A review of both the interview and MSC data reveals three key themes relating to outcomes for this objective, these are: clarity of purpose, presentation skills, and depth of peer connections.

Clarity of purpose

The importance of achieving a greater sense of clarity around the purpose and goals of their initiative was a key outcome for many of the pioneers. A common observation was that the retreat was a catalyst for this process. The need for clarity in articulating one’s project purpose was a recurrent theme. In addition to enabling the better communication of what they do, by refining the articulation of their activities, pioneers were able to see a bigger picture. The program in this respect acts as a pull towards a valuable process of reflection. This is evidenced in the remarks of one participant who felt her day-to-day life did not allow for much ‘time to see that future goal’ and prevented her from:

... taking the time to understand what my cause is and all the things that we’ve been learning ... and how to articulate that. So already in this retreat I feel like I’ve taken that giant leap forward in knowing what I need to do and how to get there (F5, phase 1).

This process of ‘forced reflection’ is integral to the process of expansion, both of oneself and the initiative. It provides a critical link between one’s ideas and activities. However, with a growing sense of possibility for their project comes increasing frustration at the challenges around fulfilling on these ambitions. The same participant (at a later period) comments on her lack of resources to fulfil on the promise of her project because ‘I just don’t have the resources or the time to do it’. However, this process should not be considered as negative; indeed expanding oneself to the point where there are new challenges to sufficiently meet one’s aims simply provides a new gap in which the pioneer can step into. A post-post (12 months) evaluation could add further insight into the outcome of such ‘opportunities’.

A consequence of refining and articulating their purpose is the privileging of quality over quantity. For many participants, an outcome of the program was a paring back of their activities, driven by a new found appreciation that their project cannot be everything for everyone. This sense of maturity and focus was a key pattern across all the pioneers. Focusing on the fewer activities that will ostensibly make a bigger impact is a major (and perhaps underrated) outcome.

Another benefit of gaining clarity was that it provided the pioneers with an access to ‘what’s next’ by giving them a clearer sense of what was needed in order to progress their initiatives:
I think I’ve just got more clarity. I think when it started I was a bit unfocused I think now I’ve really connected with what the whole process needs, now I’m actually making it happen whereas before I was kind of going with whatever was happening at the moment but now I can see what a vision for the future could be (F5, phase 1).

The importance of gaining clarity is highlighted during the MSC story collection and selection process. Indeed this element is expressed as the major point of ‘change’ in the story that was ultimately selected by the small group of participants during stage one of MSC and then again at the second stage panel selection. The story commences:

The biggest change in the first one fifth of program was self-belief and clarity of purpose ... especially towards the end of the retreat, I did get clarity and I did start to overcome I guess what you’d call an inferiority complex and start to appreciate the value of what I was doing (MSC Story).

When this story was selected by the participants, it was the ‘clarity of purpose’ dimension which was emphasised as important. When selected by the second level panel, the value of achieving greater clarity of purpose was further elucidated:

... in that first story I picked up things like clarity of purpose, so that's a fundamental asset for the pioneer to have clarity that they can then communicate. That they can then sell. That they can then articulate to others, get others on board with what they're doing (MSC panel member).

Through the program, pioneers are forced to stop and reflect. This forces them to refine their objectives and enable the clearer and perhaps more impactful articulation of their project purpose.

I’ve never looked at myself and why I do what I do and because I’ve had to do that it’s made me question what I want to do and why I’m doing it and what skills I have or what skills I need. Through the program I’ve learned things I’m good at, things I’m not good at, things I need to work on ... and that’s how I can be a benefit to [initiative] and obviously just knowing it is what I want to do and going back and reflecting on that. Just the meaning behind it and the purpose of it all (F5, phase 1).

It is clear from the interview and MSC data that achieving increased clarity around the purpose of their initiatives made a significant difference in how the pioneers communicated their message. Part of this is discussed in section 4.1 (although not explicated in the interviews), is due to an increased sense of confidence seemingly accompanying this enhanced clarity (or vice versa).
Presentation skills

Amongst the more immediate and practical benefits for the participants of the YSP program was an improvement in their ability to ‘pitch’ their work. Creating a powerful ‘pitch’ is invaluable for young social entrepreneurs as they must communicate what they do and the impact of their work to potential funders and stakeholders. One participant candidly admitted that the program forced her to deliver pitches and presentations herself rather than passing this task off to others, which was in the past customary for her. She acknowledged that having to carry out this task herself forced improvement in this area:

I think it was just going through the process of acknowledging that it [leadership] wasn’t something that I was particularly comfortable with particularly in terms of stepping up... asking for funding ... I think through YSP it was the process of doing some of those presentations and pitches was a good start ... there was none of my team members there that I could sort of encourage to do it or pass off on to so it’s definitely something I’ve done more frequently in that sense I feel like I’m getting better at it (F4, phase 3).

Not having her usual support group to rely on, assisted this participant in developing a deeper sense of responsibility over her role as leader. Another participant commented on the value of refining and developing ‘muscle’ in refining her pitch:

I kind of think there’s a big difference between public speaking and presenting so actually pitching and or selling my idea ... I am getting so much clearer and I’m getting so concise that people are starting to understand me a lot more (F6, phase 3).

In addition to the tangible improvement in her ability to communicate her work purely out of gaining clarity around it (and contemporaneously forcing her to seek clarity), this participant saw how having her audience understand her work was important. Having others listen to you in different ways is a powerful indicator of effective leadership and a key objective of the program.

While there have been shifts for many pioneers in the area of public speaking with one participant reporting an increase in in-kind support and resources (to the value of $150,000), using this skill does not appear to have translated to increases in sponsorship and financial support. This tension is evident for the participant who achieved the $150,000 of in-kind support and resources (who incidentally counts her public speaking as her most successful approach), yet notes her personal limitations around ‘seeking sponsorship’. This dissonance between being an effective communicator yet adept at gaining financial support highlights a gap in the program in that although it seeks to develop the pioneers’ ability to get their message out across a range of contexts this appears insufficient for having them acquire funding for sustainability.
Depth of peer connections

Arguably a key mechanism for enabling participants to deliver their message is the program’s attribute of bringing together other pioneers. This, along with the provision of mentors (discussed in section 4.5), allows for the expansion of the pioneers’ existing social networks, which can be capitalised on to further their project goals. The area of enhanced peer networks, particularly through the formation of a community of pioneers, was considered particularly valuable and a clear theme woven throughout the data. Participants described the importance of these networks as providing opportunities for knowledge acquisition, sharing of ideas and importantly, learning from others, which were reported as outcomes of the initial retreat. The important attribute of gaining access to a community of ‘like-minded’ individuals is captured by the following comment:

... hearing everyone talk about their projects I was sitting there going ‘our project really needs to start getting itself out there and making people aware that we’re here and we’re happening and what we’re doing’... So I think that would be one of the most valuable things for the project, just to be able to connect with other people and network and provide those opportunities to take our project out there (F3, phase 1).

Being in an environment surrounded by others who were working towards similar aims provided this participant with a renewed commitment towards getting her message out. Furthermore, the powerful effect of mutuality and collaboration is echoed in the following remark where another participant moves his thinking beyond a place-based focus to a desire for broader social change:

I’ve got heaps of ideas in community work, there’s a lot of communities that I want to go around and between all this I will be ... doing workshop programs around Australia and ... in my local area ... the collaborative approach amongst us, how we can work together in order to create this future social change for Australia. It’s been great minds here, once a few of us get talking it’s like ‘bam, bam, bam’ so it’s been good (M2, phase 1).

For many participants there were significant gains from just interacting with fellow pioneers:

... we’ve already collaborated on a project idea in bringing young people from different communities together and helping them become leaders in their own communities, and that’s just from discussion, that’s just from like-minded people being together so I think it’s extremely important (F5, phase 1).

The value of peer-to-peer networks was an ongoing theme across both the interview and MSC data. How this collegiality works to bring about such benefits is illustrated in the following comment:
If a few of you come together and do all that sort of stuff, it’s positive. When you’re doing this stuff by yourself it just gets alienating. You get ideas but you don’t know where to go (M2, phase 1).

By bringing together these young pioneers, as a ‘community of practice’, the program encourages them to consider what might be possible in terms of their initiatives and the potential impact in the wider community. With this growing awareness comes a sense of appreciation for the value of being exposed to a collective environment and what could be achieved through this collectivism:

... something I’ve come to realise especially with my local group is that I haven’t really shared my vision, I’ve been focusing so much on everyone else that I haven’t shared my own vision for what we could achieve and what I think that we can achieve together, and that’s definitely something I’m going to take back and try to do (M3, phase 1).

This, combined with the clarity of purpose referred to earlier, is indicative of a powerful effect. Sharing ideas amongst other pioneers builds a stronger message about social change making. Amongst the discussion points for one of the stories selected during the first MSC stage was the idea of a ‘community of young people who care, who are brave enough to do something ... We care about each other at such a deep level ... I now find myself co-fighting for issues that matter’. This is quite a significant impact and it was often remarked that being in a group mobilised around a common purpose led to greater levels of ‘confidence in ourselves and our message and confidently share the importance of what we do’ (MSC story selection notes).

This theme of leveraging the YSP community (acting as a litmus test) to further refine and develop the delivery of their message was captured in additional participant comments, whereby there was a recognition of the value of having an environment of ‘like-minded’ individuals around in which to ‘bounce ideas off’. The notion of peer learning and support was captured by the following comment:

It’s always good to know that you’re not out there on your own doing these things, that’s been one of the biggest benefits and I think it will continue to be. It will be good to maintain group contact over the twelve months (F4, phase 1).

The existence of more hidden barriers that may limit or undermine the YSP objective of providing participants with opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events, was demonstrated in the limited resources and support participants felt they had access to. Throughout the interviews many participants commented on the constraints presented by a lack of sources of support and/or funding that could be drawn on. It appears while pioneers are beginning to expand their social networks as a result of their engagement
with the program, there are still obstacles to securing interest outside the specific sectors in which their initiatives exist:

I have been successful in gaining several research grants to scope the project and concrete networks with partner organisations, travel grants and conference attendance. University support also looks promising. It’s been difficult to date to gain support beyond the design/education sector - we need to work on approaches whereby people working outside of design can still get passionate about it and support our work (F1, phase 2).

Another participant identified a similar challenge:

Small mindedness, bigotry, fear and prejudice of people and communities have definitely thrown a few challenges my way. Also a lack of funding and financial support of our group and cause (M2, phase 2).

While participants did not consider YSP as being responsible for their powerlessness in generating a wider pool of resources and support, that this was a recurrent theme highlights an area where the program could be improved. Although the objective currently under review here explicitly relates to the opportunities pioneers have available to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events, that there is a common experience of not being able to translate this communication into collateral towards the sustainability of their initiatives, is something which must be acknowledged. For example, the following comment conveys the sense of struggle and frustration experienced by the participants:

It is really hard to find support, the Foundation of Young Australians have [sic] been great, but a lot of the time it feels like I’m going around in circles. I have a great product in helping youth except finding the work can be really challenging. I am starting to create a good network though it takes a lot of time (M2, phase 2).

It seems that proficiency in communicating messages is insufficient to address the reality for many of these pioneers. These comments suggest that resilience could be a factor influencing program outcomes for the pioneers. The notion of resilience is not formally enunciated in the program aims yet represents a hidden and potentially powerful mechanism for the fulfilment of its objectives. While the benefits of fostering a collaborative environment and broadening social networks are evidenced in the interview data, building resilience in the individual in the face of ‘no agreement’ is an area which could be improved:
The struggles expressed in the above comment do not explicitly mention YSP however a growing sense of despondency was echoed throughout the data. Challenges around funding and support are both a common and expected reality of social entrepreneurship; that this ultimately is an individual experience with potentially considerable impacts could be further explored. Similarly more longitudinal research could be usefully applied here to capture the longer term outcomes for participants. Gaining funding may be a longer process and therefore not fully captured within the parameters of this evaluation. The pioneers themselves acknowledge this by recognising that their skills will be used at a later date. As put frankly by one participant during the MSC story selection stage, some skills can be ‘banked to use at a later time’.

4.2.1 Summary

The extent to which YSP participants are able to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events depends on a number of factors, including having greater clarity around their initiatives, enhanced presentations skills, and the depth and quality of connections they form between one another. The interview and MSC data clearly show that there was a broadening of social networks of the pioneers through the promotion of an environment of creative capacity building. Through the process, participants identified pathways for the expansion of their social networks and a keener desire to get their message out. Not surprisingly, this came with a greater sense of what could be possible for their initiatives; a desired and somewhat expected outcome of this type of program.

Both data sets reveal that much depends on an environment which actively facilitates dialogue and communication, and the importance of working together and being connected with others through the shared experience of the program. More research could be done in the area of communities of practice to better understand and leverage this (ostensibly latent) attribute of the program. This also includes the encouragement of online communities which, as noted earlier in this report, although included in the design of the program, was not a particularly noteworthy feature for the pioneers; it was barely mentioned at all throughout the data.

It is worth mentioning here that no part of the YSP program was explicitly designed to address the objective of offering participants opportunities to deliver their message in a range of contexts and events\(^2\). The

\(^2\) A comment provided by one of the reviewers of the preliminary findings report supports this point. It was recommended that this omission be explicitly addressed through either reviewing the objective or the implementation of the program such that it addresses this objective more clearly.
interpretations presented here have been drawn (in some cases rather loosely) from the participants’
experience as revealed in primarily the interview data. To overcome the incommensurability between the
objective and the current program delivery strategy, in future it would be worthwhile to either review the
objective itself so that it maps better to the program, or adapt the program to ensure consistency with this
stated objective.

4.3 Did YSP facilitate the connection of participants to a community of individuals within Australia and the
world?

The previous section discussed the extent to which the program gave the pioneers the opportunity to deliver
their message in a range of contexts and events. It also explored the forging of social networks, particularly
within the pioneer community and how this has contributed to a sense of collectivism and enhanced
opportunity through the leveraging of shared goals and experience. This section now turns to the broader
national and international communities accessible to the young pioneers and how the YSP facilitates
connections to these wider networks. The data is organised around two key themes that reflect the specific
questions designed to measure the extent to which this objective was achieved: partnership/collaboration and
the achievements/successes of the pioneers. Both these themes explore the ideological and practical
implications for the pioneers linking in with broader national and international communities.

**Partnership and collaboration**

On the whole, participants identified the opportunities presented by enhanced links with local, national and
international communities. A common theme woven throughout the data was a sense of improved
connections and in some instances the program was seen as pivotal in the development of the partnerships:

*Partnership is looking for different people to fulfil different key needs but being able to build a much
broader relationship and that’s been really fundamental for me, that has been a really key advantage of
the program (F1, phase 3).*

For this participant, expanding her social network has been a key outcome which has been a significant benefit
to her. She was able to draw on several resources, including her mentor to reach a wider pool of connections
and potential partners, ‘I’ve felt like I’ve had a huge amount of support from other resources’.

The notion of being connected to a ‘community of individuals’ is further exemplified in the following remark:

*For this first week, one of my expectations was not so much around the skilled training side ... it was
more around just being with a group of other young social pioneers and engaging with them and*
learning from the peers. That to me is greater than any facilitation ... I can get those specific skills back home but ... when you get a group of young people who are leading in their own pioneering realms, put those people together, what comes out of it is priceless. That is the biggest value for me from YSP (M1, phase 1).

This comment highlights an important distinction between skills acquisition and the development of social capital; in particular, the value placed on the latter. This pioneer is clear about the types of opportunities that are unique to the program, the value of which is not lost on him.³

A strong appreciation for partnership was pronounced in the third phase of the program cycle, ‘we will not go any further without new partnerships and we will cease to exist’. For some, having had direct experience of the benefits of enhanced connections through the peer group provoked thinking about what else was possible. In terms of the quality of links forged, some pioneers focused on more local links, ‘we try to partner with local community arts groups’, while others adopted a more global perspective. As one participant explains:

I want to take the program onto a global sort of scale. Create a movement where there’s not just hundreds of students in Perth helping handfuls of people with disabilities but there’s hundreds of thousands of students around that are all, yeah have the ability to make a real difference, so influence and inspire and create that sort of movement (M1, phase 3).

During the MSC story collection stage, it emerged that for one pioneer the ability to add a critical player in her social network, and with a strong international link, was attributed to the program:

This year I recently went back overseas and I was able to meet and international XX artist XX. One year ago I don’t think I would have taken the risk of going out of my way to meet him. YSP helped me gain more confidence and begin to realise some of those dreams (MSC story).

For this individual, having overseas networks is key to her fulfilling on the greater ambitions she envisions. She adds:

My passion in life is to see people’s eyes light up. YSP has been such an important factor in helping me to know the part that I play and in some ways this is just the beginning (MSC story).

³ A member of the review panel for the preliminary findings noted that this was a strength of the program but raised questions as to whether this was unique to YSP, compared to other entrepreneur programs such as SSE. The literature review conducted for this evaluation found that YSP is unique in that it provides a platform for young people specifically, whereas other programs target adults with more social enterprise, rather than change making imperatives.
The selection panel, when discussing this story, expanded this point further by remarking ‘it’s not just connecting with other people in the group but connecting to make even more change’; thus identifying a key YSP precept around partnerships and collaborations; that change comes with growth and expansion. However, this was not without its tensions. A second panel member challenged this observation by claiming:

So going overseas and connecting with someone, actually, yeah, the confidence to do that would have come from the program but that in itself wasn’t really the program (MSC panel member).

This contradiction in the program between personal outcomes and social outcomes was raised earlier in section 4.1 of this report. Notwithstanding the lack of concordance on this matter, it is clear that there are multiple interests at play (pioneers, program coordinators and stakeholders) reflected in the individual’s location in or experience of the program.

By the completion of the first retreat it is evident that participants start to authentically speculate on ways to leverage the opportunities afforded by these newfound connections and exchange of ideas. The value of being brought together in an environment which is supportive and which makes possible reflection, lends itself to alterations in how the individual relates to his or her initiative. This was evidenced time and time again through comments relating to gaining greater clarity around purpose (discussed in section 4.2).

Despite recognising the value of being in an environment surrounded by like-minded individuals, there were instances where the intended outcomes of the program were not always achieved. Several participants acknowledged that there were opportunities presented in the YSP program yet they were not effective in taking action on them. As one participant candidly put it when asked if YSP had enhanced her opportunities for collaboration: ‘It has, it has, but I haven’t put them into effect’.

Another participant who was asked the same question replied:

Um, to be honest not really. Not from a corporate side of things. There has been some interest in sort of discussions around partnering with one of the projects around XX ... but that kind of fell through ... So in terms of other organisations outside of the individual I don’t think we really done much [sic] outside of that (M1, phase 3).

This highlights the existence of a set of assumptions around competence, and that acting on opportunities provided through the program is unproblematic. It also suggests that the quality of connections outside the YSP may be wanting.
For others, they recognise that the program provided the initial grounding for building partnerships, rather than having a direct influence:

_"I think in terms of partnerships the benefit of the YSP has just been to help build my confidence and my understanding of how partnerships work in general and how organisations and individuals can work together and then I’ve used that within my own networks that I have around Australia (F5, phase 3)."

In a sense, this comment reveals a potential mechanism through which the program produces outcomes. This type of response is not entirely surprising given that as the selection criteria for the program privileges a set of leadership skills that imply a level of proficiency in the area of causing change in, or having a significant impact on, one’s social environment. That the application states young entrepreneurs are required to have their initiative running for six months prior to applying is testament to this. A precept of YSP is to take an already successful individual and build on his or her capacities (strengths model). The methodological challenge resides in uncoupling the effects of the program from any pre-existing propensities in these high achieving individuals as well as other (external) mediating factors. This point is supported by comments made during the spontaneous discussion which took place at the completion of the MSC session, where participants commented that they felt the program ‘set the bar too low’, and that the expectations of the pioneers ‘should have been greater’. Related to this, it was also remarked that there did not appear to be enough accountability measures built into the program. These comments suggest that the pioneers wanted to be pushed more and is something that, although these insights were not gained through the formal data collection methods, should be considered more closely in future program implementation strategies.

Another recurring theme throughout the data was that the pioneers struggled to directly attribute the program to many of their achievements. On many occasions when participants were asked if the program was responsible for certain outcomes, a common response was ‘not directly’. Similar to the point made throughout, there is a sense that there might need to be more time before the real effects of the program can be felt. Many participants accepted that the groundwork has been laid, but substantive outcomes are yet to materialise (although they recognise that these could take time). Some participants expressed (again during the post-MSC discussion) a desire to see more individual planned learning which they considered would lead to greater YSP networks.

In light of this, it seems the current program acts as a (less obvious) catalyst for action. One participant captures this lucidly by claiming:

_"I’m not sure because obviously there was no ‘this is a partnership workshop’ at YSP. But I find that question really hard to answer just because the experience of YSP ... possibly something I was talking to..."_
XX about might have triggered something that made me realise ‘oh maybe I need to do that’, but I can’t know for sure (M4, phase 3).

This raises the valuable question of exactly what role YSP is designed to play in the pioneer’s 12-month journey. Based on the data available, it would seem the distinction is one of an ‘indirect’ versus ‘direct’ influence. However, this begs the question of whether it is an artificial distinction, and what does a ‘direct’ role look like? Perhaps as one observation from the MSC story selection process asserts, ‘YSP, just the beginning’ (MSC story selection notes).

Achievements and successes

Linked with casting a wider net for cultivating connections through YSP is the level of achievement or success of the pioneers as a result of their activities. The benefits of broader community connections are illustrated by the accomplishments of the pioneers. The structure of the program was effective in encouraging pioneers to reflect on their accomplishments. These successes offer insights into the extent to which the program facilitated connections between participants and Australian and international communities. Such achievements included gaining long term funding deals or grants, organisational growth, developing partnerships with other local agencies, coordinating events/festivals, and being invited to participate in forums. Interestingly, one participant gave an account of an achievement but seemed unaware of its value:

“We have launched the council but unfortunately no ticks on the board project wise. We have been able to represent GLBTIQ youth in several submissions to inquiries etc., a new partnership … that’s about it. Personally I have had heaps (F3, phase 2).

Throughout the data there are stories of personal transformation alongside accounts of initiative achievements even when pioneers seem unaware that they are making progress. The distinction being made between these areas raises questions about the relationship between the two, and is one that needs to be more fully explicated in the program design phase.

Notwithstanding this distinction, descriptions of successful moments and achievements were echoed throughout the data. A sense of satisfaction and achievement characterises the experience in a number of interview comments:

“My achievements that supported this [organisational growth] include over $50,000 in grant support to develop research supporting the network, being elected to the [NGO] Advisory Board and serving on a global network, and being appointed to lead and grow existing organisation [name of organisation] (M1, phase 2).
Another participant reported on her activities with 30 communities across Australia and involvement in programs overseas which have had a significant impact on young people’s lives. However, she acknowledges that most of these achievements occurred prior to her YSP involvement.

Given the diversity of initiatives across this YSP group, the successes and achievements can take many forms. The quote below provides evidence of the type of organisational growth that could reasonably be expected through building solid partnerships:

> Since the retreat I've got a whole team of professional artists now as part of [initiative]. Now that I've got a creative team it's been able to move things along a lot more faster, get things from a lot of different perspectives, people that feel [initiative] can grow (F5, phase 3).

### 4.3.1 Summary

The data in this section has illustrated that the forging of national and international linkages was important to pioneers. However, what role YSP played in this outcome is somewhat unclear. The evaluation questions asked were designed to elicit the accomplishments and achievements of the participants which could be linked to the program and identify the ways in which YSP might have contributed to these successes. While the program provided contacts beyond the pioneers’ normal sphere of experience and thus opened up pathways for new opportunities such as expansion of their initiatives, the award of grants, etc., direct links cannot be drawn from these observations as participants generally do not specifically identify the YSP as a cause of their successes.

### 4.4 Did YSP introduce participants to sustainable and alternative business practices which aligned with their work and personal philosophies?

This final section describes whether the YSP program, through program activities and vehicles such as peer-to-peer learning, workshops, mentors and business networks, successfully aligned participants with sufficient strategies for managing and sustaining their organisations in ways which aligned with their value systems. The following themes of sustainability, succession and links to resources have been drawn from the data to demonstrate how effective the program was in addressing this final objective.

#### Sustainability

Seeking ongoing funding or developing effective revenue strategies for initiatives are a key concern for almost all participants. The level of skills and knowledge for building and finding these resources varied between pioneers as did the expectations of what the program would provide. As discussed in section 4.2, this means it becomes difficult for pioneers to continue their work and deliver their message. Furthermore, there is a
significant level of anxiety and frustration due to the majority of projects being in the precarious situation of relying on external funding, as the following participant identifies:

*Because I've got these ideas and half the time they're just like 'well where are you going to get the grant money from?' So three quarters of the time the projects don't get up and running, because it's all there but I don't know where to find the funding. For this trip [coming to retreat] initially for me it was to figure out who I should contact for grants, who I can get in contact with just to make these programs more of a reality (M2, phase 1).*

The interview data suggests that this participant had little success in generating any large amounts of funding and this lack of revenue has had a considerable effect on the impact and reach he is able to achieve. Similarly, another participant is adamant that she does not want her initiative and her community to be in the situation she has become accustomed to through working in the not-for-profit sector:

*I don't want to be reliant on funding because a lot of the places that I work are non-profit organisations that are completely dependent on funding and I don't think that's sustainable and I don't think that's a productive way to work. That's how I work at the moment and I find there's a lot of fear attached to that, and then I feel like the communities never really get their needs met and they're not being taught to be sustainable (F5, phase 1).*

This participant recognises the pitfalls of being forever the grantee, realising that it is not only unproductive for an initiative, more importantly it diminishes the learning of the community in which that initiative works. The participant describes her goal of creating an enterprise whereby local youth can gain employment and build skills, something she sees as improbable if her initiative does not have its own income. This highlights that the unease bound to sustainability is inherently linked to their role as a leader and the social change agenda of a young pioneer. It emphasises the function of programs like YSP to ensure there is support in this complex arena.

In her phase one interview, one participant vents her frustration at the ‘exploitation’ she feels from her community, observing there is a certain expectation and demand for what she does which begs the question, ‘how much more respect do I need to earn from my community before they start putting a monetary value on it?’ She observes that it is in the confines and the supportive environment of the retreat with fellow pioneers that she feels comfortable expressing the level of aggravation at her predicament.

As earlier discussions regarding partnership and collaboration indicate, creating a space for pioneers to share knowledge is an integral element of the program and it is here, in this area of shared responsibility of financial
procurement, that peer-to-peer learning is beneficial. As one MSC panel member when discussing the stories put it:

...there’s all these like-minded people suffering from the same sort of issues and challenges and the sharing of these and being able to use that to build and grow (MSC panel member).

During the MSC story selection process, one group identified an important aspect of the program as ‘being open about failures’ and ‘sharing solutions’ and that the group dynamic welcomed interchangeable teacher and student roles. This camaraderie described by participants indicates that the YSP community alleviates the alienation and despondency felt in this situation as the group itself becomes a (non-financial) resource.

Although this type of collaboration is a great outcome for the program, there is an enduring narrative that suggests sustainable business practices are still evading participants and their projects. This is evidenced in the MSC panel discussion where a panel member proposes that the young pioneers come to the program seeking guidance on how to ‘grow their entrepreneurial endeavour and how do I manage my organisation?’ Indeed, the participants experience ranged from having no ideas to having practical, often sophisticated ideas about sustainability, the latter is exemplified by the following passage taken from the interview data:

So it’s converting that design into a product ... each piece of IP that comes out of that program, potentially that will provide an income source to feed back into the research and development and that’s where the sustainability starts to come into it is when we are taking our products from the prototype stage into the market and generating sales for that and the proceeds of that going back to fund new projects (M1, phase 1).

Like this young entrepreneur, many other pioneers discussed intentions of social enterprise, from professional consulting, shop-fronts, clothing brands and ‘user-pays’ models. Yet an unfortunate predicament for the majority is that there is little evidence that structures were put in place to fulfil such plans. The program objective is to introduce participants to sustainable business practices and it seems many look to a social enterprise framework as one such practice that aligns with their personal and professional philosophies, thus arguably the program has a responsibility to nurture these strategies for pioneers’ initiatives.

The capacity building or personal development attribute in creating a secure framework for ones initiative cannot be ignored. One participant who did begin to construct a social enterprise model for her organisation through YSP commented on the assurance this brought her:

...we sat down one day and ended up sketching out business models and stuff which was incredibly helpful, because I work in XX I would like to move towards a social enterprise model rather than a non-
profit model ...you’re fee-for-service because you’re an expert in development and community interaction and consultation and that sort of thing, there’s a bit of a niche there (F1, phase 1).

While tackling the seemingly impersonal issues of business sustainability, a powerful and unexpected outcome of self determination was at play; the participant has located herself as an expert and her work as a niche operation. Furthermore, another participant demonstrates the responsibility that rests with the leader of an initiative and that understanding capacity can be instrumental in achieving sustainability:

At the moment some of our things around future planning is that we’ve kind of got a fairly niche project that fits into a distinct market, rather than trying to be everything to everyone we’re really focusing on having the program as our core and not trying to be too many things to too many people (F4, phase 3).

This wisdom is testament to the sensibilities that bring these young people to the YSP program. If this motivation can be harnessed and developed, alternative business practices will no doubt thrive resulting in a significant impact on society.

Succession

YSP is designed to respond to the pioneers’ needs as they attempt to lead successful initiatives whilst like other 18 to 29 year olds, they are in the midst of carving a professional niche and establishing a career. Almost all participants wished to hand over their project within a few years and to this end succession planning was highly desired and valued. Not unlike sustainability there were varied pathways and levels of knowledge about how succession was to occur. For some pioneers their project’s mission is inherently linked with them moving on:

...my ultimate goal in every community that we engage in is that the program’s no longer needed. A big part of my role is actually during the programs, we try to identify the number of young people that are showing a bit of leadership potential, kind of stepping up, and the long-term goal is to train them up to run the program. My side of it won’t be needed because the communities will be running it themselves (F4, phase 1).

The comments of other participants concur. For instance, one participant argued that the eventual test for his organisation will be the ability for him to step away, while another describes how she wants ‘someone else to come and put their mark on the organisation and take it to wherever it needs to go next’. It is within this attitude that the entrepreneurial spirit manifests and it becomes evident that programs like YSP are valuable for young people to locate their worth beyond their own initiative. For a program that sits within an organisation that aspires to systemic change, the question arises as to whether adequate support is given to
13 change makers extend to the rest of society? How can equipping 13 young people with alternative and sustainable business practices for their work and life shape communities and achieve wider impact? A post programmatic evaluation could track the impact of this initial small scale individualised support. However, it is worth noting that succession planning not only affects the individual but also their stakeholders. This participant’s comment underscores the potential impact his experience can have within his group:

For myself, I would like to be taking more of a facilitative role and have new vision come into the council, and for me to be able to take a step back and coach the people and make it their journey, in a way (M3, phase 1).

As described in earlier sections of this report, the evaluation captured evidence of participant learning and critically this learning is being shared with and by their teams. This is how one participant who expressed a desire for succession planning discusses her current project in the long-term:

...the way that I’m looking at making it sustainable is looking at the problems that we’re having and really shifting that focus from our festival to the actual structure of [auspice organisation] and creating change within that structure to have a youth [presence] (F2, phase 1).

The participant is passionate and lively when discussing the organisation’s future even though she may not be part of it. The business philosophies and experiences she has been exposed to as part of the YSP program have been shared with her team, potentially having a greater impact on the practices of young people beyond her own. Not only will this participant carry through the learning from this experience but she leaves a legacy for the organisation and her team.

Links to resources

There were many vehicles for introducing participants to business practices and ideas and correspondingly, pioneers recognised that they must diversify their networks and resource base. One participant is very clear when discussing his revenue strategy, with a plan to ‘work on other kind of incomes, sponsorship and activities income’ realising that he must move beyond his reliance on philanthropic support. Another pioneer excitedly realised knowledge acquisition through partnerships is a benefit of the program and the networks it provides, thus addressing his questions around succession. Interestingly, participants came to the program with pre-conceived notions of their abilities when it came to business practices. As the following passage illustrates, personal philosophies can influence a participant’s scope when generating resources:

For me, I have been very cautious in who I address for resources etc, and usually only ask organisations with a specific interest in SSA [same sex attracted] people. Word of mouth has been the best tool so far
in terms of rallying support. I hadn’t necessarily had much bad reception when approaching people as part of an organisation (M3, phase 2).

Success has stemmed from approaching like-minded organisations which have similar philosophies to his own and consequently he feels most comfortable continuing this trajectory on behalf of his organisation. But this behaviour can diminish the experience of pioneers and their projects. Similarly, one participant describes that an organisational challenge is gaining endorsement beyond those with a known interest:

*It’s been difficult to gain support beyond the design/education sector – we need to work on approaches whereby people working outside of design can still get passionate about it and support our work (F3, phase 2).*

In this instance the latter participant has realised she must diversify her resource base. She later observes that she must ‘embrace corporate finance/fundraising grants’ even if this is outside her sector. Therefore, although the objective is to introduce participants to business practices which align with their personal philosophies, the program must challenge some of the pre-conceived notions and support pioneers to open doors they may not open alone.

**4.4.1 Summary**

The majority of participants attribute personal growth to the YSP program, but unlike leadership training for example, there is little evidence that business practices or skills introduced in workshops have been transformative for participants and their initiatives. The program is a learning journey for young change makers, with alternative methods for enhancing and organising their initiatives a significant element of this journey. Participants have been introduced to fresh ideas regarding sustainability and succession, and both the interview and MSC data show that participants have reflected upon and discussed these topics with others (both internal and external to the program). Still, the issue of how to make ones initiative sustainable is an ongoing concern as pioneers grapple with futures beyond current work. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the program has introduced business practices that align with work and personal philosophies until participants begin to put such practices into action, or in fact whether they use the practices at all. In discussing sustainability, many participants mentioned implementing a social enterprise framework but it seems this was not something neither introduced nor investigated by the program. Determining the personal philosophies of participants is seemingly implicit and unchallenged within the program, which could have an effect on partnerships and collaborations across sectors and the ways pioneers negotiate their work and life.

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4 A reviewer’s comment noted that it may be an organisational objective to look at engaging a potential corporate partner in funding, co-designing and facilitating such sessions.
This analysis, in relation to business practices, has revealed an inherent tension of the program; the extent to which the program supports the pioneers’ projects versus the growth of the individual. Linking some of the successful self-reflexive inquiry with business development and mentoring could be of benefit to pioneers as they carve a niche for themselves and their initiatives to ultimately impact the wider community.

This next section now turns to the issue of mentoring as experienced by the YSP pioneers.

4.5 Mentoring

A recurrent theme woven throughout the interview data refers to the provision of mentors. The mentors, who were chosen by YSP, were designed to continue the learning for the pioneers beyond the program’s structured sessions. The intention of these ‘coaches’ was to accompany the pioneers through their journey and support them in dealing with challenges encountered along the way. Existing international research on mentoring programs claims the positive effects of mentoring programs with youth are improved when there is a strong relationship between mentors and young people (DuBois et al 2002). Mentors can play an integral role in keeping up momentum; keeping participants connected to the program and the learning journey, which is especially important due to the structure (time in between collective workshops) and geographical nature of the program. The powerful role the mentor can play is exemplified by the following comment:

*I think that the mentor part of the program is just, yeah I don’t think the program would be as strong without it, I don’t know just having that someone who relates to your work and your project who can give you advice and feedback and do all the direction giving stuff that we need, I think it’s brilliant (M3, phase 3).*

It is clear that participants valued mentors as potential conduits for their success. Matching the right mentor, who shares similar experiences with the participant, can be pivotal to the personal development of the participant and the progression of their project. The majority of participants expressed a deep appreciation for being given the opportunity to work with a mentor, however, as will be discussed shortly, there were instances where this relationship did not materialise.

The patterns around mentor-pioneer relationships revealed in the preliminary analysis for this report were also present (if not somewhat magnified) in the further data; out of 13 pioneers, six reported positive experiences with their mentors, while five reported less than ideal outcomes (mostly that they seldom, if at all, met with their mentors). Furthermore, two participants did not receive mentors from the program, rather they retained pre-existing mentors and it is not clear whether this was their own decision.
Nevertheless, on the whole, participants saw significant value of being connected with a mentor. Many used their mentors as a resource when ‘stuck on something’ and were not afraid to seek help:

*At the moment I’m having to make all these career decisions and stuff ...and I sort of wrote to [my mentor] and was like HELP and he was like I know exactly what you’re going through and let’s catch up when you come over. Yeah so he’s really good ‘cause he’s gone through the same things as I’m going through now (F2, phase 3).*

This participant called on her mentor for negotiating career challenges, a pressure which may be compounded for young pioneers who are deeply involved in their initiatives, but acutely aware that they must look beyond their current work. As another pioneer describes, having a mentor that she can identify with was extremely valuable:

*We’re both working in development but [my mentor] obviously has got quite a different business model or whatever from what I’m looking to set up ... [he] helped me with strategy and visioning for the organisation ... because he works in the same sector he has asked really key questions about the approach and the methodology and what we’re really trying to achieve and that’s been really key (F1, phase 3).*

For others, the mentor relationship was not fundamental to their initiative, yet despite only meeting the once, they still felt the experience worthwhile:

*But even that one time that we met up was awesome. That really pushed me in the right direction but it would be good to meet up with him more from now until the end of the program ... he is definitely the right person, he knows the community that we’re working with. He’s definitely someone that really inspires me so I am glad that he is my mentor (F5, phase 3).*

Although the participant is positive about her mentor match, it raises the question of how much more the relationship could have impacted her work if more contact time had been achieved. This links to another challenge identified in the interview data, the role and structure of the interactions between the pioneer and their mentor. Participants told of numerous attempts to reach their mentors with little success, one participant described how once overcoming the initial challenges around contact, she was successful in having a meeting but then her mentor had a baby. While circumstances like this are unavoidable, if there was sufficient time for the pioneer to be provided with a replacement mentor, this perhaps should have been done. This seeming lack of follow through and monitoring the progress of pioneer-mentor relationships highlights an area of improvement for the program. It appears this area was loosely defined and mostly left to
the pioneers to negotiate with seemingly little structures for support embedded in the program. Geographical barriers between mentor and participant was another issue to emerge from the data. For a number of participants, having a mentor based interstate placed considerable limitations on his/her ability to meet face-to-face. While the process of finding an appropriate mentor must focus on skills, knowledge, networks and experience, it seems the actual ability for the pioneer to physically meet with their mentor was overlooked in favour of other qualities. Finding the right mentor to satisfy the needs of the participant was attempted by the program, however this can alter over time, as one pioneer describes when discussing his mentor relationship:

I think it could’ve been improved. My kind of notion of a mentor has changed. You know 6 months ago I thought of a mentor as someone that you catch up for coffee with and debrief and sound board ideas whereas now I’m more interested in mentors are a bit more hands on and can be collaborators ... And it’s been something that hasn’t worked ideally but it has been good ’cause its consolidated my view of how it can work in the future (M5, phase 3).

The participant is still able to utilise this experience and transfer it to positive learning. Although it is difficult to know what an individual might need six months into the program, a more structured matching of requirements to expertise would be highly beneficial. Having the mentor commit to the twelve month program (perhaps in the form of an MOU), concretises the relationship and the learning that it is anticipated will follow. Such an approach would guard against any ambiguity around roles and responsibilities and provide a clear pathway for accountability for both parties. Perhaps even more beneficial would be to have the pioneer involved in drafting this agreement, enabling them to take more responsibility for the relationship.

The mentor relationship is a powerful conduit for participant and program. Considering the actual program has minimal face to face time there must be mechanisms to connect the participant to their learning and the objectives of the program in between. This also raises the contentious issues of accountability and responsibility, both important factors to the success of the pioneers. In the unplanned MSC debrief, a debate between pioneers arose around who is accountable for learning outcomes; a few suggested that it was up to the program to inject such measures, while others argued that it was the individual participant’s responsibility. This is an extremely important issue. It raises the question of how the program can support the pioneers in between workshops and explicitly define expectations. As the following participant explains the mentor was invaluable for some pioneers and the impetus of their initiatives:

I think the momentum and the accountability has been quite important because I think I probably could’ve just as easily decided not to do it ... having the whole network around me and feeling accountable to myself through them and through my mentor it has really incrementally become something much bigger than I initially planned. Yeah, taught me to think bigger I guess (F1, phase 3).
In a review of the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs in the United States, DuBois et al (2002) found that several practices were found to be significant moderating factors on the effectiveness of mentoring programs. These included program features such as: ongoing training for mentors, structured activities for both mentors and participants, defined expectations around frequency of contact, and overall monitoring of program implementation. The authors found that when further interrogated these practices were ‘... revealed to be represented consistently among the strongest predictors of greater reported positive effects of mentoring programs’ (DuBois et al 2002: 187-188). This was consistent with a study done by Hamilton and Hamilton (as cited in DuBois et al 2002: 188) who found the provision of adequate structure and support in the formative stages of mentoring relationships is critical.

The notion of careful selection and a structured approach to brokering the mentor- participant relationship was emphasised as pioneers described the importance of feeling understood and comfortable to talk with their mentors. The role of the mentor to simply provide an objective springboard for ideas is significant for many pioneers, as the following participant describes:

“Our first discussion was, for me it was really full on because it was like a dump I was just able to get all these things off my chest...To have an outsiders point of view...For me it’s been really reassuring because...I haven’t been able to bounce any of my thoughts off anyone else without worrying about them taking it out of context...it’s nice to be able to bounce it off someone who is aware of the project but not involved...and just get ideas and have a conversation rather than have a debate (F3, phase 3).

For this participant, the non-partisan position of the mentor was key to her being able to be frank. It does not necessarily mean outcomes would have been different for her had she not had a mentor however, the importance placed on having a person with whom you can engage in a conversation without any ‘politics’ is telling of the way pioneers may see the world of their initiatives.

4.5.1 Summary

The issue of mentors is of central importance for both positive and negative reasons. On the positive side, the interviews revealed demonstrable benefits of the mentors acting to bring about a stronger connection between themselves and the program. While all participants agreed this aspect of the program was vital, there are some differences in pioneer experiences in this regard. It seems the logistical challenges around coordinating and finding mentors who match well with the pioneer is brought into relief by the examples where the relationship did not get off the ground.

In successful mentor relationships the mentor often provides both personal and professional development structures that compliment the program. The right mentor can bring a world of expertise and authority in
certain business realms and their readiness to take on this role makes it even more likely that positive outcomes will result. To this end, the YSP program could perhaps do more to ensure mentors have a greater presence in the program. Furthermore, the program would benefit from the incorporation of more structured and explicit accountability mechanisms via the mentor.  

5. Conclusion

The 2009/10 YSP evaluation has revealed a number of key themes common to all 13 participants. These relate to: personal inquiry; leadership practices; achieving clarity of purpose; skill development; quality of peer connections; partnerships and collaborations; pioneer successes; sustainability practices; succession planning, and links to resources. The MSC and interview data confirmed that the YSP program provided an enhanced sense of community for the participants and a revitalised understanding their own achievements and future possibilities. The program resulted in a greater appreciation for leadership in the pioneers, and what could be achieved through collaboration and leveraging networks both for their immediate projects and future endeavours. This sense of being part of something bigger than oneself has parity with the overarching aims of YSP.

The evaluation also revealed how the pioneers individual attitudes and values are refracted through the program, particularly as a result of the encouragement of self-reflection and peer interaction. While aspects of the program such as the group dynamic were considered challenging, the pioneers were able to explore their own capacities and self-identifications as social entrepreneurs. Having a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the qualities of good leadership, participants expanded their personal boundaries as who they knew themselves to be as change makers.

This evaluation also highlighted how the capacity of pioneers to deliver their message depends on a range of factors including having greater clarity of purpose, enhanced presentations skills, and durable peer-to-peer relationships. Both data sets reveal that much depends on an environment which actively facilitates dialogue and communication, and the importance of working together and being connected with others through the shared experience of the program. As a result of this, participants were able to identify pathways for the expansion of their social networks and, not surprisingly, this came with an increased sense of possibility for their initiatives.

5 A member of the review panel for the preliminary report commented that due to potential corporate funders now wanting employee involvement opportunities in programs (rather than just financial support), a structured more explicitly defined mentor role could influence resource/support outcomes.
The support for the pioneers provided by YSP allowed them to reach a wider audience, where there might not have otherwise been the opportunity. There was a strong sense of collaboration within the pioneer group, but in terms of the global or business networks, the program is weaker. Such criticisms do not automatically suggest the YSP was inadequate but seems a more general criticism of the third sector generally and the relationship between funding bodies and these types of initiatives. While the program provided contacts beyond the pioneers’ normal sphere of experience and thus opened up pathways for new opportunities such as expansion of their initiatives, the award of grants, etc., direct links cannot be drawn from these observations as participants generally did not specifically identify YSP as a cause of their successes.

The challenge of how to make one’s initiative sustainable emerged as an ongoing concern for the pioneers, the data provided little evidence that business practices or skills introduced in workshops were able to be transferred to participants’ initiatives. The pioneers were introduced to fresh ideas regarding sustainability and succession, and both the interview and MSC data show that participants reflected upon and discussed these topics, however it was difficult to determine the extent to which the program introduced business practices which aligned with their work and personal philosophies and there appeared to be limited opportunities for them to put these actions into practice. Providing more expertise in social enterprise frameworks could be an option for the program, with almost half commenting that to make their initiative sustainable they would create a social enterprise.

Not surprisingly, programs like YSP tend to rely on assumptions around the abilities of young social entrepreneurs. This speaks to a strengths model of youth (civic) participation and is a popular counter to previous deficit models applied in the field. Such an approach, however, risks overlooking differences in capability. Assuming a level playing-field in this way, although unintended, is problematic as it fails to recognise diversity of experience. The variability and struggles of the pioneers demonstrate this point. While the YSP program is by nature a highly individualised program, this mostly seems limited to the pioneer initiatives; the individual is still presumed to possess some baseline capabilities, the application process ensures this. It is possible that the selection criteria for entry into the program are biased towards a particular type of individual; the self-selection process means that the program leans towards a particular level of proficiency in certain skills/areas. The types of character attributes that bring someone to engage in a year-long leadership program need to be recognised as a possible outcome variable. This evaluation raises questions around whether the weaknesses of the pioneers are being sufficiently addressed. It seems participants were looking to improve on their existing weaknesses and this need appears to remain largely unmet.

A second and ostensibly more important point relates to how a strengths based approach influences access to the program. This points to a need for taking greater measures to encourage applications from Culturally and
Linguistically Diverse (CALD) young people and that such measures are conducted in a more explicit and systematic way. Furthermore, FYA would benefit from a deeper interrogation of the opportunities it offers to members of marginalised groups and to what extent YSP reflects the needs of CALD members.

In this evaluation the issue of mentors turned out to be a key dimension of the program both in terms of its centrality and impact on the pioneer experience. An important aspect of the successful mentor-pioneer relationship is accountability. For a national program that has participants spread across the country, mentors serve as a powerful linchpin in keeping participants connected to the program. Participants who experienced a greater sense of accountability through their mentor felt that their project thrived and as a result describe a positive YSP experience. However, there were clear limitations in the effectiveness of the mentor role with less than half of the participants reporting a positive mentor experience. International research on mentors and young people indicates a more structured and defined mentor-pioneer relationship would have a positive impact on the pioneers and their initiatives.

5.1 Strengths and limitations

There are a number of methodological strengths and weaknesses to come out of this evaluation that warrants a brief mention here. Perhaps a key strength of this evaluation is in the tracking of participants over time. This approach has provided a rich and nuanced snapshot of the pioneer journey. However, by limiting its focus to the individual, this evaluation was unable to explore the greater organisational and community impacts of the program. It is advisable that a more longitudinal approach be adopted to capture organisational and community gains.

The value of the MSC technique is that it reveals insights not visible in the interview data. For instance, the declared shift in self-awareness for pioneers, which came out of the MSC stories and selection discussions, was not as acutely reflected in the interview responses yet had a significant impact. The nature and timing of the MSC technique—traditionally at the completion of a program—promotes a data distilling process which enables more meaningful interpretations to emerge. Furthermore, the use of an MSC panel to discuss the chosen stories captures valuable stakeholder insights about the program.

It is clear that YSP has achieved one of its key aims in building on the strengths of the young pioneers. However, the full impact of this is not sufficiently captured in this report for reasons of scope and timings mentioned above. A 12-month follow up would assist in determining how enduring these initial outcomes are and the degree to which they impact on the beneficiary communities of the pioneers.

The YSP program is an ambitious one: to achieve broad change in 14 young people who share similar goals but have operated largely in isolation and with often competing interests regarding funding and support. The
success of the program rests in the establishment and continuation of social networks which have the capacity
to realise ongoing benefits through the identification of a common purpose for the pioneers and opportunities
to work together. While YSP participants derived great value from their involvement in the program it is clear
from the findings that a number of project goals have not been realised. Among some of the weaknesses in
the program are the gaps between the program objectives and its current delivery strategy. The learnings
gained from this pilot year, and building on the strengths of this experience with a greater understanding of
the needs of young social entrepreneurs, will lead to improved outcomes, both for the participants and the
broader communities they seek to impact.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this report is to inform how the program can be improved to better meet the needs of the pioneers
and to provide suggestions for how to capture its impact. The following recommendations are offered for
consideration:

Program

- Program to explicate how improved leadership leads to greater social change
- PLPs to focus program input more sharply on pioneers’ specific needs and weaknesses
- Make resilience explicit in the learning program
- Formally incorporate Communities of Practice principles via a web medium
- Greater effort to enhance transferability of skills
- Clearer program objectives with measurable outcomes
- Interrogate recruitment practices for hidden bias towards privileging certain groups (does the
  program’s promotion and application process inadvertently discourage certain groups?)
- Incorporate more structured follow up plans for the intervening period between pioneer face-to-
  face contact time (retreats)
- Ascertain business practices preferred by pioneers and provide training, i.e. social enterprise
  models
- Greater effort to connect pioneers to fundraising opportunities and funding channels.
**Methodology**

- Question wording needs to be reviewed\(^6\)
- Future evaluations to apply a multi-level approach (individual, organisational and community) as well as a triangulation of methods to provide more robust evidence of the difference YSP is making
- Apply a contribution analysis approach to future evaluations
- Employ surveys measuring satisfaction with certain aspects of the program and the extent to which the pioneers needs were met, including level of support
- Compare outcomes with individuals who were unsuccessful in their applications
- Collection of impact tracking data to measure reach and growth:
  - how many people are the pioneers reaching through their initiatives;
  - number of staff, volunteers, recipients/clients/users of their services etc;
  - location of project
- More rigorous use of PLPs for baseline and program monitoring data.

**Mentors**

- Define a more structured role for the mentor with clarity around expectations, contact time expectations etc., via MOU
- Increased monitoring and oversight of pioneer-mentor relationship (perhaps milestones included in MOU)
- Mentors to be interviewed in future evaluations.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) The preliminary report reviewers suggested questions be categorised in relation to: program delivery; the effectiveness of elements of the program for pioneer initiatives; and, the wider impact of the program.

\(^7\) Suggestions from the review members were that questions for mentors be designed to elicit what attributes are being sought in mentors; what they understand as the time commitment expected of them; and questions which draw out the intersections between participant, mentor and program.
References


APPENDIX 1

Pioneer Interview Questions

Phase 1: September 2009 (Face-to-face)

1. What is a typical day like in your project / work?
2. What does leadership mean to you? What individual qualities do you think are vital in being an effective leader? How will being a Young Social Pioneer support the development of your skills as a leader?
3. How is YSP assisting you in meeting your project’s purpose?
4. How would you define partnership? How important is collaboration / partnership to achieving your project’s purpose?
5. Where do you see yourself and your project by the end of YSP?
6. How will you sustain your project? What is your long term revenue strategy?

Phase 2: November 2009 (Online)

1. Why is your work / approach better or more effective than others working in same / similar area?
2. What have been your most and least successful approaches to generating resources and support?
3. Tell us about your achievements to date?
4. What have been the most significant challenges with your work?
5. How will you sustain your project? What is your long term revenue strategy?

Phase 3: March 2010 (Face-to-face)

1. At the retreat we talked about leadership and how YSP could develop the notion of leadership for you, you mentioned [reference to prior comments]. Has your perspective changed? Do you feel your leadership has developed since joining YSP?
2. One of the objectives of YSP is to create greater networks for the pioneers. With whom or what do you partner/collaborate with to achieve your project’s purpose? Who are your most important partners? How has YSP enhanced / improved opportunities for partnership?
3. Who is your YSP mentor? Have you found your YSP mentor beneficial?
4. What has been a successful moment or rewarding period of your work since joining YSP?
5. When evaluating or defining your success you look at your project’s objectives- what level of impact or change do you wish to achieve (e.g. Individual, local community, national, international)?

6. Are you still working toward your original vision? Do you feel your focus has shifted since the beginning of your YSP journey?