

# Working with young people to tell great stories

The [Foundation for Young Australians' \(FYA\) Youth Media Centre](#) has been in operation for almost two years. In this time, we've learned a lot about how to work effectively with young people sharing their lived experience. We've compiled some tips to support the media to work more effectively with young people and ensure their stories are told respectfully. We also asked eight young advocates from across the country for their advice to journalists who want to produce better stories with young people.

## Understand how young people view the media

Young people we've worked with feel that media stories about them are usually told by people who aren't young. In interviews with journalists, young people often get the sense that the narratives about them were predetermined before the interviews were conducted.

"Issues that young people are taking the lead on often get overlooked by older people. The media is a great tool to elevate our voices and perspectives. Often our words get used against us, so it's really good when the media can elevate our authentic voices."

**Natasha Abhayawickrama, School Strike for Climate**

While a few young people had wholly positive and professional experiences when engaging media, others described the experience as exploitative and tokenistic.

### Tips

- Give young people as much notice as possible about an interview.
- Be clear about the details of the interview - whether it's live or pre-recorded, who else is being interviewed, and any flexibility of interview time and mode i.e. Zoom, phone, in-studio.
- Make your intentions clear, evidence your agenda or the producer's / editor's agenda.

### What young people said

"Media has mostly been pretty professional. Most of my interactions have been ok, no matter what side of the political fence they're on." - Natasha Abhayawickrama

"Media swarm in while an issue is hot, then disappear. You feel used." - Mililma May

"The journalist's interpretation of what is important reigns over what we want to talk about" - Mac Zamani

## Techniques for top interviews with young people

“The best questions are those that are holistic, asking me about my community, not just my perspective. As a young person, this is really cool, because we get to celebrate our elders and communities. It’s shaping us as spokespeople but not experts. The best questions ask us about our communities, instead of positioning us from the outside looking in.”

**Mililma May, Uprising of the People**

Young people want journalists to ask them questions about their lives and advocacy issues in a holistic way, where they are given an opportunity to talk about solutions as much as problems. The most problematic questions young people were asked showed little research into the issue, or failed to challenge stereotypes about young people. These types of questions undermine trust between young people and journalists.

“I loved this interview because the host let me talk about what I wanted to talk about. We had a shared understanding, and shared experiences which was really good. There was a lot of room for my voice, instead of feeling like the interview is tightly controlled. I knew what I was getting into - the show structure, its audience and the sort of guests they have on. It also didn’t feel too formal, which was nice.”

**Natasha Abhayawickrama, School Strike for Climate**, Sept 2021 / 3RRR / [Blak Jewellery](#), IPCC report on climate change, Shelter 2, Tinika

### Tips

- Do your research about the issue/s and community you're interviewing.
- Challenge bias, and avoid questions that reinforce stereotypes about young people or communities.
- Don't ask young people to comment on behalf of all young people or entire communities. No one person can represent the diversity of entire groups of young people across Australia.

### What young people said

*“Questions that show the journey of a person, providing a pathway for people to follow were my favourites. On the other hand, I always get asked if I'm on drugs and alcohol; assumptions in the homelessness space are massive, and it dehumanises people.” - Sammie Wilson*

*“When my terminology is respected, that makes for a great interview. Also, questions that respect my journey, and don't turn it into a sob story.” - Julie Charlton*

## Build trust

“A sign of a good interview is when my quotes sound like me, especially for print and digital content....Trust is built by showing they understand the language, terminology and nuance of an issue.”

**Mac Zamani, queer and disabled youth advocate**

Journalists build trust with young people during interviews by showing a genuine interest in their perspective and contributions to the story. Demonstrate an understanding of the issue and knowledge of any identity or advocacy area-specific terminology, or a willingness to learn and adopt this. Journalists who support young people to build their agency in the interview process and understand the way their words are framed helps level the perceived power imbalance between young people and the media.

“With this story, the journalist took on the idea of building rapport. We yarned at the market to get a sense of each other beforehand. She met us in a neutral spot, a place that felt comfortable with us, and put the time in to get to know us. We chose where to meet, and were able to tell her why we chose this place, and share our story. We didn't feel like we had to rush. She sent us the story before it was published, and it didn't feel like our words were going to be changed.”

**Mililma May, Uprising of the People**, May 2021 / Sydney Morning Herald / [Crackdown on youth crime a 'Band-Aid at best, a death sentence at worst'](#)

### Tips

- Show young people the questions you will ask them ahead of time, even if it's only possible at a high-level.
- Ask young people if they want to contribute any questions to the interview, or have anything to add at the conclusion of an interview.
- Provide a guarantee they can review the content (where the interview isn't live) before publication, and can edit or retract quotes.

### What young people said

“For me, trust was built through open and clear communication, where there is lots of preparation, several phone calls before and a general sense of feeling prepared and across the process.” - Nathan Gunn

“This year I've had some good experiences with editors, though I've had to do some educating about cultural protocol and ICIP. Some publications advise against sharing your draft pieces with those you interviewed, because they feel this could prolong and complicate the editing process. But as you know when interviewing First Nations people, Knowledge Custodians and Elders, "talking back" is extremely important, considering we've been historically misrepresented in media.” - Gemma Pol

## Debrief, reflect and provide feedback

Providing an opportunity for young people to debrief and provide feedback after a story is aired or published shows that you care about the young person and value them sharing their lived experience with you.

When young people have negative experiences with media, they're reluctant to provide feedback out of fear of damaging relationships with journalists and media outlets. Opportunities for feedback should be led by journalists who are open to receiving and responding to feedback at a range of times during and after the interview process. This is to allow for time needed by individuals and communities to process media attention and potentially hurtful or traumatic reactions to stories.

### Tips

- Build in debriefing and following up into your interview process. Ask for feedback at the conclusion of an interview.
- Notify a young person if you believe the interview or story is likely to receive significant attention or negative commentary when it goes live. This can help them engage supports, or give them notice about avoiding social media.
- Consider diverse ways of accepting feedback following an interview, including anonymously or through intermediaries.

### What young people said

"A quick survey or short phone call after publication would be great...2-3 minutes is all it takes."

Jahin Tanvir

"I wish there was an external link to provide feedback online, and anonymously. I don't want to burn bridges with media."

Sammie Wilson

"It would be good to have another body we could give feedback to, who could pass it onto a media company or journalist. This would be good because there'd be a mediation process. It doesn't have to be an attack, rather feedback given on behalf of young people. All parties are protected. This review or complaints body would be really nice. This sort of body could also give young people's feedback credibility and weight behind it."

Mililma May

"With this story, the journalist gave me a call and was very friendly and compassionate with how she approached the interview. I was also shown the article prior to publication and I was also notified that if there was anything I wanted to change, that I would just have to let them know, which provided me with a lot of comfort and confidence in the process."

**Jahin Tanvir, mental health and CALD community advocate**, Sept 2021 / Wollondilly Advertiser / [Worthy locals recognised in Volunteer of the Year awards](#)

## A vision for future reporting with youth voice

Young media advocates we work with believe that safe, effective and inclusive storytelling is possible, and are ready to work with journalists to make this happen.

“Young people are allowed the same amount of time as other spokespeople. We have lived experience that is very valuable. Opportunities to speak alongside experts makes for really strong storytelling.”

**Sammie Wilson, homelessness advocate**

I would love to see more positive engagements with these communities, and better experiences for people. They shouldn't have to be representatives of entire communities. They should be free to speak as themselves, and feel comfortable doing so.”

**Julie Charlton, disability and LGBTIQ+ advocate**

### Tips

- Treat young people as equals, using their lived experience in safe and compelling ways.
- Increase transparency in the interview process, from briefing through to publication and review.
- Pay young people for their time and sharing of their lived experience.

### What young people said

“Treating youth voices as equal to other voices. Improving the way we value young people, especially their lived experience, is essential.”

Mac Zamani

“Young people need to know that it's a privilege for journalists to talk to them. We have the means to tell our own story, but when a good journalist tells our story, it really helps our work.”

Mililma May

## Finding diverse young spokespeople

News stories about young people often don't include the voices and experiences of young people themselves. Our 2020 report, [Missing: Young People in Australian News Media](#), revealed that 59% of headlines about young people don't include a quote or case study from a young person in the body copy.

[FYA's Youth Media Centre](#) supports more than 150 young advocates to use the media as a tool to drive change, and to ensure that stories and narratives told about young people authentically include their lived experiences and perspectives. We support them with media training, radio / TV interview practice, post-interview debriefing support, pitching support and journalist liaison.

Email us at [youthmedia@fya.org.au](mailto:youthmedia@fya.org.au) if you're looking for a young person to comment on a story you're preparing, and we can do our best to put you in touch.

### To our collaborators and co-designers

Enormous thanks go to the following eight young people who generously shared their experiences working with media over the last 12 months across a range of issues - First Nations justice, disability, homelessness and housing security, climate change, mental health, gender rights, racial justice and education reform.

- Gemma Pol (she/her), Common Ground
- Jahin Tanvir (he/him), mental health and CALD community advocate
- Julie Charlton (she/they), disability and LGBTIQ+ advocate
- Mac Zamani (he/him), queer and disabled youth advocate
- Milima May (she/her), Uprising of the People
- Nathan Gunn (he/him), education reform advocate
- Natasha Abhayawickrama (she/her), School Strike for Climate
- Sammie Wilson (she/her), homelessness advocate