



Represent

Optimising the impact of
young people's participation and
advocacy in St John

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youth participation
advocacy
representation
decision making assets
engagement support
mentoring
synergy skills development
sustainability

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Harper Family Endowment Scholarship

Represent: Optimising the impact of young people's participation and advocacy in St John is a research project funded by the Harper Family Endowment Scholarship.

The Harper Family Endowment Scholarship is a project-based research scholarship and is intended to enhance the recipient's personal professionalism, the project and the capacity of St John to make first aid a part of everyone's life.

The Scholarship was established in January 2011 to provide opportunity for committed individuals to make a continuing contribution to St John Ambulance Australia through enhanced managerial, professional or organisational skills.

Further information on [Member Connect](#) (search 'Harper').

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Definitions

adultism prejudice and accompanying systematic discrimination against young people.

St John St John Ambulance Australia or the organisation

young people people aged between 8 and 25 years of age.

youth proofing the practice of ensuring policies and practices are relevant and inclusive for young people

youth representation engaging young people in organisational decision-making, consultation and contributing to brand growth and development. Youth representation can come in different forms, such as youth councils, advisory committees, key stakeholders, members on committees and general member engagement.

Report summary

Represent: Optimising the impact of young people's participation and advocacy in St John is a research project funded by the Harper Family Endowment Scholarship.

The aim of *Represent* was to investigate the benefit of youth representation in St John Ambulance Australia (St John) with a focus on how young people are positive assets who contribute to the development of St John and their communities. In particular, this research project sought to:

1. develop a greater understanding of the benefit of young people in decision-making and in particular, how St John and young people can be positioned to work more effectively with each other to achieve the goals of the organisation
2. investigate international best practice for organisations engaging with young people in decision-making.

The methodology employed in this research included:

- a review of youth-focused literature
- a review of youth advisory council models
- face-to-face interviews with focus groups
- consultation with youth organisations in Australia, Europe and America
- a review of the current St John Australian Youth Council.

This research highlights how other youth-engaged organisations partner with young people to achieve a greater synergy with their membership and identifies how these best practice examples can be applied in the context of St John.

The key findings of this research identified a number of benefits to St John, including:

- the benefits of actively engaging with and including young people in decision-making throughout the national organisation
- key principles that should be embedded within youth advisory councils
- the benefits for reviewing policy, procedure and practices that support and promote a valued and active involvement of young people.

Based on the research findings, this paper recommends strategies where St John can further benefit from promoting a valued and active engagement with all of its members, including young people. St John can do this by implementing the following recommendations.

St John should develop a strategy to ensure that young people are appointed to positions on all decision-making bodies in the organisation and that they are appropriately supported, trained and mentored in performing these required roles.

St John should implement a new model for a national youth advisory body, the Australian Youth Advisory Team (The Team). Additionally, St John should commit to providing ongoing support, training and mentoring for young people on The Team to ensure a valued and active involvement in the organisation and its decision-making.

St John should also undertake a 'youth proofing' exercise that reviews all national St John policies and practices to ensure that St John enables young people to be included and that they have a valued engagement

with the organisation and with organisational decision-making. However, it is important that St John and all organisations aim for continuous improvement and regularly asks:

Can we do things better? **Yes**

Should we do things better? **Yes**

Can we better partner with our members, including young people, to achieve our mutual goals? **Yes**

The research identified a framework for optimising youth participation using Hart's *Ladder of Participation* (Appendix 1. p. 33) and identified a template for organisations to facilitate a youth-focused review of policies and practices, the *Here By Right self-assessment tool* (Appendix 2. p. 34). This research highlights benefits for St John using each of these tools for organisational development and best practice.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, St John would benefit from promoting a valued and active engagement with all of its members, including young people. St John can do this by implementing the following recommendations.

St John should develop a strategy to ensure that young people are appointed to positions on all decision-making bodies in the organisation and that they are appropriately supported, trained and mentored in performing these required roles.

St John should implement a new model for a national youth advisory body; it is suggested that this be the Australian Youth Advisory Team. Additionally, St John should commit to providing ongoing support, training and mentoring for young people on The Team to ensure a valued and active involvement in the organisation and organisational decision-making.

St John should undertake a 'youth proofing' exercise that reviews all National St John policies and practices to ensure that St John enables young people to be included and have a valued engagement with the organisation and with organisational decision-making.

This paper demonstrates that St John and its youth membership can work together to ensure that St John develops the skills of its members, increases individual and community resilience and achieves the goal of making first aid a part of everyone's lives. By doing so, we ensure St John is representative of its membership and the community it serves, and that St John exists as a vibrant and sustainable organisation into the future.

Coming together is a beginning,
staying together is progress,
and working together is success.

Henry Ford

St John Ambulance Australia and young people

St John Ambulance Australia is a self-funding charitable organisation active in all states and territories, dedicated to helping people in sickness, distress, suffering or danger. St John is Australia's leading community-based first aid service and training organisation and has been serving the Australian community for over 130 years.

In Australia, St John aims to:

- make first aid a part of everybody's life
- be the leading provider of first aid services, training and products
- provide first aid related services which build community and individual resilience
- provide highly accessible and effective ambulance services where contracted by government.

St John proudly promotes its engagement with young people throughout the organisation, with young people undertaking voluntary and paid staffing roles in event health services, training and development and community care. St John also has a vibrant and active youth program, including the First Aid in Schools program, as well as the National Cadet Program. Young members are also engaged in a variety of roles within adult divisions throughout Australia.

Across all services in St John, both paid and voluntary positions, young people make up 38% of the total membership (St John, 2013 annual statistics). St John therefore has a higher proportion of young people engaged as members than the proportion of young people in the general Australian population (23.4%, aged 8–25 years) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013).

Currently, young people are involved in a variety of ways that can be seen as youth representation. For example, the Australian Youth Council (AYC) is a group of young people who directly consult and engage with young people. St John has also adopted a set of Youth Participation Principles that demonstrates its commitment to youth participation. Most notably, the St John National Board has a permanent position for a member under the age of 26 (Winner 2011). These strategies show a true commitment to young people.

Now and into the future, it is important to understand that young members are interested in the decision-making processes and development of St John and involving young people will be key to engaging with, and best using the skills of our young members (Boessler & Ding 2012). In order to develop and grow our youth membership and future-proof the organisation, it is important that St John makes youth engagement in decision-making a key focus of its overall organisational ethos. Organisations are not static entities; they develop, grow and change over time. As such, St John has the opportunity to continuously improve its engagement with young people and implement new strategies that could see a greater investment in the vast knowledge and expertise this demographic has to offer, as well as broaden its reach in the Australian community.

Across all services in St John ... young people make up 38% of the total membership.

St John, 2013 annual statistics

In a study from St John (Cibich, Winner and Stickland 2012) based on figures released by the ABS (2010), the authors suggest that:

Young people represent the fastest growing group of volunteers in Australia. Engaging this group in decision-making platforms is not only a smart idea (i.e. to increase organisational output), but it also aids the ongoing sustainability of the organisation and its aims, as young people offer a unique commodity which St John can benefit from. The ability to effectively engage young people can provide the organisation with a different energy, new ideas and flexibility that may not have existed before.

A key finding of that study indicated that young people want to have the opportunity to be included in the operation and development of St John. One of the 5 recommendations from this study was:

That St John makes an effort to consult more regularly with young members and create processes that allow young people to contribute directly to decision-making in the organisation. (Cibich, Winner and Stickland 2012)

Steve Mokwena's report into youth engagement (Mokwena 2006) supports this approach, indicating that developing policy and providing executive level support, in addition to providing support to our grass root membership to feel empowered to engage, is vital. Therefore, St John can benefit by creating processes and policies that empower young people to be involved in decision-making, and partnerships that see young people supported by leaders of St John. It is when these systems are in place that member ideas and opinions are truly valued.

By taking action to engage young members in decision-making, St John has the perfect opportunity to set the standard amongst all organisations who engage with young people. By investing in quality youth representation and empowering youth as a vital source of contribution to decision-making, St John's future can be one of diversity, innovation and growth.

Young people represent the fastest growing group of volunteers in Australia.

ABS 2010

Research methodology

Aim

The aim of this research was to investigate the benefits of youth representation in St John, with a focus on how young people can be positive assets that contribute to decision-making and the development of St John and their communities.

Objectives

To investigate the benefit to St John engaging with young people in decision-making.

1. To establish how St John currently engages with young people in decision-making.
2. To investigate challenges young people face to being included in decision-making.
3. To investigate ways that St John can optimise its engagement with young-people in decision-making.
4. To identify examples of organisational best practice regarding involving young people in decision-making.
5. To provide an authoritative report to key stakeholders on how St John can optimise its engagement with young people in decision-making.

Strategies

Phase 1. Background and preparation

1. Literature review of documents addressing youth participation, youth councils and youth advocacy.
2. Consultation with the Australian Youth Council.
3. Consultation with NSW-based youth organisations and St John to investigate best practice examples for engaging young people and establishing St John practice.

Phase 2. International consultations

4. Best practice principles investigation via face-to-face consultation with international youth organisations in Europe and America.

Phase 3. Review of the Australian Youth Council

5. Consultation and SWOT analysis of the AYC.
6. *Here by Right self-assessment tool*, conducted by the AYC.

Phase 4. Analysis

7. Analysis and review of findings from Phases 1, 2 and 3.

Phase 5. Reporting

8. Preparation and finalisation of research report.

Literature review

The value of young people to organisations

A literature review was undertaken, with a focus on the value of young people to organisations, particularly the value of young people in organisations similar to St John.

The literature describes that in a challenging and competitive corporate climate, organisations must become smarter and better use their current resources to ensure survival (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2010; Youth Leadership Institute 2009). One of the most valuable ways for an organisation to do this is by investing in its membership. By doing so, organisations are not only making a commitment to their present, but to the future also. This commitment will ensure that all members are valued, and importantly, actively involved in decision-making at all levels in their communities and organisations. Typically, adults control decisions, resources and the direction of an organisation. However, by actively seeking the views and expertise of its members, including young people, the literature suggests that organisations will ultimately benefit (Youth Leadership Institute 2009).

Benefits to organisations

Hardly anyone in the leadership of organisations and key institutions opposes the ideal of bringing in young people as partners in social and business change and development, yet everyone struggles to find creative and long lasting ways to make it happen. (Mokwena 2006)

Young people offer many benefits to organisations (Youth Leadership Institute 2009; Mokwena 2006; Martin *et al.* 2007; John J Heldrich Center for Workforce Development 2000).

- Young people provide a new and different approach within organisations, highlighting their ability to identify and uncover innovated ideas for improving the organisation and its products.
- Young people are enthusiastic and optimistic as they have not necessarily had the time to absorb the negative aspects or the history of an organisation.
- Engaging young people in the decision-making process entrenches the importance and need of young people to the organisation.
- Young people have the capacity to develop creative strategies to solving problems and to thinking differently in response to challenges faced by the organisation.
- Adults may not be the best people to communicate with young people. By empowering young people to be valued leaders in the organisation, organisations can use young people to be the mouthpiece to better communicate its vision to younger members.
- Organisations must stay relevant. Young people will enable organisations to stay relevant to other young people who use their services or engage in their activities.

By actively seeking the views and expertise of its members, including young people, the literature suggests that organisations will ultimately benefit

Youth Leadership Institute 2009

- Young people live in the age of technology and are working to create the technology of tomorrow. Understanding current and new technology should be important to organisations.
- Instead of seeing young people as a burden, organisations can empower young people to be problem solvers.
- Most importantly, organisations that employ and support young people are developing future leaders and champions of the community. These leaders will be vital to the longevity of the organisation.

The Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) suggests that organisations that use their young members in setting the direction of the business stand to benefit from innovation, increased engagement and the willingness to learn from proven practice (YLI 2009). YLI also suggests that one core benefit of engaging young people in decision-making enables an organisation to be connected to its members. In turn, this connection allows young people and the organisation to work closer and more collaboratively together. With young people's innovation, organisations work to ensure that they continue to remain relevant and don't risk being left behind by other organisations. By creating an environment where innovation, engagement and learning is fostered, organisations can ensure that individuals, the organisation itself and the broader community benefit from, and value the organisation as, a modern and inclusive organisation in the community.

By actively including young people, the British Youth Council (2012) suggests organisations have the potential to set themselves apart from other organisations who fail to value the skills and benefits of young people. They suggest organisations who do not actively involve their membership may fail to truly prepare their organisations for the future.

Benefits to the individual

Young people benefit directly, in a variety of ways, when they are included in decision-making. By engaging young people, organisations are actively valuing their members as assets important to the success of the organisation. Instead of seeing them as an additional feature, young people are now valued as integral to the organisation (Advocates for Youth 2013). This inclusion allows young people to reach their potential whilst providing them with an environment to develop their capabilities and strengths to which the organisation can benefit.

John Finlayson's paper on youth advocacy (2007) concludes that young people who are engaged in decision-making have the opportunity to develop their advocacy and leadership skills whilst increasing their active communication with adults. Fundamentally, young people who are actively engaged will develop their capacity to be informed and their desire to make positive change whilst having real opportunities to see this change occur.

Potential challenges

There are a variety of challenges and historical barriers that organisations may be required to address in order to truly benefit from engaging young people in the organisation and in decision-making (YLI 2009; Mokwena 2006). These include:

- organisations may have a lack of understanding of the potential and skills of young people and the resources that they can offer

- organisations tend to have historic structures whereby power and authority is distributed based on the length of service, as opposed to the experience and capabilities of its members
- the stigma of young people as lazy and disinterested often means that adults in power need to be shown that young people can be of benefit
- young people are often perceived as problem starters as opposed to problem solvers.

What is often evident to young people and their supporters is the need to change the perception of young people. Instead of seeing young people as unskilled, unmotivated and lazy, they need to be seen for the value and potential they possess (YLI 2009). In the first instance, organisations must address any negative attitudes held toward young people. By doing so, organisations can achieve a high functioning and healthy partnership between younger and older members; organisations can then flourish. The challenge for organisations will fundamentally be in addressing and implementing strategies of achieving this cultural change.

It is important for all members to understand the role and potential of young people. Organisations must have the vision and desire for young people to have a valued place in the organisation. Without this, young people will never truly be used or valued and ultimately the organisation may suffer (Mokwena 2006).

Martin *et al.* (2007) suggests the key for organisations is to treat young people as equals amongst their adult colleagues, whilst providing support for them to develop and achieve in their roles in community. By doing so, organisations can positively integrate young people in decision-making processes. By working in partnership with young people, organisations can develop holistic and creative approaches to challenges and can work at a more strategic level in developing its members at all ages (YLI 2009). Young people have the capacity and desire to learn, and also the ability to self-reflect and recognise that they do not know everything (Cibich *et al.* 2013). Adult members working in partnership with young people is a valuable process, and one in which historical practices can be preserved and or adapted to meet future needs (Mokwena 2006).

There may be reservations for including young people as decision-makers but the benefits speak for themselves. By actively including young people in decision-making, organisations are developing socially informed and engaged citizens who are motivated to see the organisation succeed, and ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future. Young people are valuable and if organisations commit to actively engaging their young members in a decision-making partnership, they can make young people invaluable.

Consultations

Together our voices can move mountains.

Vanessa Leane, St John SA (in consultation)

The following is a summary of the consultations undertaken with European, American and Australian youth organisations during the research phase of this project. Consultations were performed in personal (face-to-face) interviews with key staff and volunteers responsible for, and working with, young people.

Europe

International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation, Belgium

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) is based in Brussels. It is the international peak body for the representation of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) members of the whole community, including the student community. IGLYO interacts with thousands of young people, national and international youth advisory committees and advocate agencies, working to increase the positive impact of LGBTQI people to their communities. IGLYO works with these youth advisory groups to provide awareness of the challenges that LGBTQI people face, to create resources for young LGBTQI people and ultimately provide the largest voice for young LGBTQI people to influence the development of national and international policy.

IGLYO has an Executive Board that leads the strategic development of the organisation, in addition to engaging in activism and advocacy. This Board is made up of 6–8 members, aged between 18–30 years of age, each serving a 2 year term, with half the Board rotating every second year to ensure its sustainability and continuity. IGLYO has a binding statute that mandates the Executive Board be held only by persons within this age range.

IGLYO engages with young people using a variety of strategies. One strategy is by forming and using small working groups, made up of 3–5 IGLYO members, and each led by a member of the Executive Board. These small working groups facilitate individual research and policy-based projects, specific to areas such as sexual health, youth development and social strategies to promote diversity. IGLYO also conducts multiple conferences and forums annually, which bring together young people from all around the world to participate in consultation, building the capacity of younger people and developing their expertise. Some conferences focus on a particular theme, such as health; others on individual and organisational development. They aim to develop strategies and skills for young people to use in their own organisations and communities, such as education tools and training, and 'to provide them with an opportunity to increase their capacity and expertise' (IGLYO, 2013).

IGLYO also works closely with youth advisory bodies, providing guidance and encouragement to these youth bodies to ensure they continue to operate effectively. IGLYO discussed strategies to employ to ensure that youth advisory bodies are as high functioning as possible. In their

Paid support is a fundamental for young people and youth bodies to succeed. (IGLYO 2013)

experience, IGLYO suggests the practice of engaging mentors to work alongside team members to support them to discover their motivations and tie these into the overall work of the council as a key strategy. By doing so, IGLYO finds that members can achieve a greater level of ownership and engagement in the youth advisory body/council. The other strategy was to limit the overall group size to a small, highly engaged and productive group who are constantly within the 'inner circle' of activity, or the key group of advocates which an organisation such as St John can use.

IGLYO values the need to continue general consultation yearly to maintain a current awareness and understanding of the needs of young LGBTQI people, in addition to their other focused research/consultation. Aside from the aforementioned conferences, they mainly achieve this via social media and surveys.

IGLYO operates a 'Friends of IGLYO network' which is made up of other like youth organisations, past members and other interested organisations. They use this network of organisations and individuals to extend their reach to a greater audience of young people and youth-interested organisations and supporters.

IGLYO values the need to disperse information directly to young people, as opposed to other in-direct methods. They produce their own monthly newsletters and distribute these via their youth-based network. They find this more successful compared to other methods of contact outside of conferences or face-to-face contacts. This method also provides for an unfiltered and regular mechanism for regular engagement with young people, to promote inclusion, empower people by informing them on current develop, and provide a means to participate in organisation discussions and potential decision-making. It also creates a tool for an organisation to better communicate and access a network that can assist in the development of policy, new innovations and seek advice on particular areas of an organisations operation, such as strategic planning.

Youth United Foundation, UK

The Youth United Foundation UK (Youth United) is a network of voluntary youth organisations working together to increase access to opportunities for young people, particularly in disadvantaged areas (Youth United, 2013).

We need to invest in the ideas of our younger members.

Youth United Foundation UK (in consultation)

Youth United's network is made of up organisations including St John UK, Army Cadets and Scouts UK and engages with a network of young people in the tens of thousands.

It was identified that Youth United had two models that they use for youth participation in policy and decision-making. These projects were being developed and/or reviewed at the time of consultation. The projects are the Youth Mentoring Network and the Youth Action Group.

The Youth Mentoring Network is an informal network enacted with the aim to provide support to young people wanting to grow in their organisation and develop skills to be more active in the progress of their organisation, including organisational decision-making. Young people are matched with a leader in the organisation and they work to develop the skills of the young person based on the individual's personal goals.

The Youth Action group was a small group of young people (under 10 members) which operated for 2–3 months. It was a youth-led and operated consultation model where young people engaged and consulted with other young people on issues that affect them, either within their organisations or more broadly in their communities. The role of the Youth Action Group was to develop findings for Youth United, particularly around the experiences of young people in youth volunteer organisations. The aim of this consultation was to ensure that Youth United can offer a quality service that meets the needs of young people and using the skills of young people to gain this knowledge and perspective.

National Youth Agency, UK

The National Youth Agency (NYA) is a key funded body in the UK that facilitates a youth organisation accreditation system to ensure best practice within youth-focused organisations.

The NYA uses Roger Hart's *Ladder of Participation* in their accreditation system. This Ladder is an 8-step principle that outlines 8 stages of youth engagement: from Ladder Level 1 where young people are taken for granted and never integrated in decision-making, through to Ladder levels 7 and 8 where by young people are actively engaged in every level of decision-making throughout the organisation. The ideal goal is that this occurs, not because organisations feel they *should* engage young people, but because young people have the right to be involved in the development and direction of their organisation and they are valued. (See Appendix 1. Hart's *Ladder of Participation*, p. 33.)

NYA has a key focus on ensuring that youth-focused organisations understand the importance of the need to youth proof all activities, policies and practices. By doing so, they believe that not only will organisations be providing young people with the most ideal environment to develop, but they will reap the ultimate benefit of engaging with young people to better develop the organisation for the future.

NYA have developed the *Here by Right self-assessment tool* for use by organisations to enable them to review, monitor and implement better practices for organisations to maximise the valued participation of young people in their organisation. This self-assessment tool addresses 7 key areas of organisational practice (see pp. 29–30). The key aim of self-assessment is for organisations to drive the analysis and development of their own operations. This self-assessment program has had outstanding success for hundreds of youth organisations, resulting in the ongoing funding of the Hear by Right program by the British Government.

The overall benefits to organisations for conducting this level of analysis are limitless, particularly at a national organisational or executive board level. The analysis provides an organisation with the tools to support young peoples' inclusion in all levels of organisational decision-making and provide the organisation with the infrastructure, such as policy, to ensure that young people are valued members of the organisation. NYA believes that when young people are valued in organisations, they are more encouraged and willing to participate in supporting the overall strategic goals of the organisation. This is because not only are young people engaged to assist in the development of the strategic goals, but they are encouraged to be involved in developing new and innovative means of fulfilling these goals. The *Here By Right* tool is a cost-effective way to review the systems and procedures to ensure that organisations

Listening to young people provides better quality services based upon their need, rather than the organisations perception.

National Youth Agency, UK
(in consultation)

are doing all that they can to benefit from the presence and voice of young people. Importantly, young people can be a part of the process. This represents a great opportunity for intergenerational engagement between leaderships and young members.

The benefits of an organisation rethinking the way they engage with young people, and thinking of young people as customers of the organisation, was explored with NYA. It was concluded that organisations should pose the question, 'What are the needs of the youth *customer*'? Organisations generally approach their work from this business-centered model, as it is important to provide and operate to the needs of the customer to ensure that the business not only thrives but survives. The same model applies to organisations working with young people. For a youth organisation to thrive, they should actively engage with their younger members as 'customers'. These 'customers' will inevitably take over as leaders with the dedication, experience and the ability to be a great source of knowledge, skill and passion for their organisation. Customer satisfaction is key.

A specific example of direct youth engagement from NYA is The Young Researchers Network (YRN). The network is a program that aims to value, support and encourage research projects that are led by young people as it found that most research on youth is not actually carried out by young people. YRN combines the principles of advocacy and participation to give young people an active means to influence practice and policy and to put substance to their voice. YRN provides a short-term participation option for the duration of the research project, and serves as an active reminder that young people can have a positive and skilled contribution to the organisation.

NYA take the view that it is important that young people have a voice in everything that affects them. The performance of services and organisations can be improved by taking proper account of that voice, particularly when a large proportion of the volunteer work force is conducted by members in the youth demographic.

Scouts UK

Scouts UK are the national organisation for the scouting movement in the United Kingdom. They take youth engagement very seriously, and this message is filtered all the way from the executive to the grass-root membership level. In particular, Scouts UK has a key organisational policy for youth engagement, ensuring that every committee, network, executive and board features at a minimum, two youth members.

Like St John in Australia, Scouts UK employ a youth council/advisory group model as a vehicle for youth participation. This model includes a key youth working group with 6–8 members. This group of young people has similar functions to the Australian Youth Council in Australia and have a big presence in social media, using a Scouts UK Youth Facebook page. The youth working group advocate to stakeholders and decision-makers about the needs, and ultimately the collective voice of young members. All of their youth councils, locally, regionally and nationally, facilitate direct consultation with young people, including at national events where youth councils consult on general youth-related issues, as well as issues surrounding organisational development, service provision and strategic goals.

Young people are the future of our organisation so they need to have the opportunity to shape it.

Scouts UK (in consultation)

The Scouts UK headquarters underwent a whole-of-organisation youth proofing project a few years ago, where a team of staff, volunteers and young people worked to review all policies, procedures and practices to ensure that young people were always being actively engaged by the organisation. A review model similar to the NYA's *Here by Right* tool was used, with recommendations from the group resulting in amendment and modification of organisational practice. One example of change was the development and introduction of policy requiring two young members to have membership on all decision-making bodies. Another example was the addition of young people being consulted and invited to assist in the development of the current organisational strategic plan.

The organisation also conducted research, assisted by young people, to develop guidelines on how Scouts UK could better work with young people as part of the youth proofing exercise.

St John UK

St John UK is the national organisation for St John in the United Kingdom. St John UK has two main methods for directly engaging with young people in decision-making. Each year, the National Cadet of the Year is used as a figurehead to represent the views of young people, by attending events on behalf of young people in the organisation and engaging with key organisational stakeholders. At the time of consultation, St John UK was investigating ways that the organisation, including young people, could benefit from the use of social media to engage with its membership. St John UK recognised the potential of using social media to engage with its members, particularly young members, especially to develop best practice around service provision models and promoting flexible volunteering models.

St John UK has youth councils (similar to the current St John Australia model) that consult, engage and advocate on behalf of young people throughout the organisation. These councils exist in all levels of the organisation including regionally and nationally, with face-to-face quarterly meetings of the National Youth Council—there is strong emphasis on the value and necessity of these personal meetings. The Youth Council also annually conducts the *Here by Right* self-assessment to review, monitor and modify practices to ensure that St John UK supports the active and valued participation of young people.

Further, St John UK conducts an annual national conference where the National Youth Council meets to consult with other young members on organisational matters and develop suggestions for improvement of practices to better promote the influence and participation of young people in the national organisation.

St John UK also values the need for young people to represent themselves on external bodies, and facilitates this by supporting a small group of young members to participate in the Britain-wide, British Youth Council (BYC). The BYC is a national council which aims to empower young people to inform and influence the decisions that affect their lives. The BYC provides leaders and advocates to give a voice to young people through consultation. Using these voices, the BYC lobbies decision-makers and

key stakeholders such as the National Government. St John membership on this external youth council ensures that the voices of young St John members are heard within the broader community and ensures that St John maintains itself as an active participant in the community, particularly for young people.

United States of America

The Door

The Door is a youth social work organisation that works with more than 11,000 young people in New York every year. The Door's mission is to empower young people to reach their potential by providing comprehensive youth development services in a diverse and caring environment (The Door, 2013). These services include college advice, leadership development, youth advocacy and facilitating the Young People's Peace and Justice Conference.

The Door aims to ensure that young people are involved with all decisions that impact on them, from personal and intimate decisions, through to governmental decisions that have an overall impact on the community, including young people. They do this by ensuring that young people have access to information that is relevant to them (e.g. youth leadership opportunities), with a particular focus on the use of technology (such as Facebook) to disperse this information, and an internal newsletter and other resources. The Door also offers training and awareness-raising regarding the importance of young people being involved in the democratic process. This is facilitated in the running of youth advocacy events.

As an organisation we need to support our younger people to have voices of value.

The Door, US
(in consultation)

The Door holds youth advocacy events where they aim to consult with other young people and inform them of current issues that are affecting young people in New York and potentially the whole of the USA. They also use these opportunities to train young people to lobby governments and decision-makers, and assist in forming the strategic plan of the organisation. This strategic plan is developed in conjunction and with direct engagement and support from the executive decision-makers of the organisation. This is not dissimilar to youth consultative events St John Australia currently run, namely the National Youth Stakeholders Weekend. The difference, however, is a focus of engaging with a broader network of young people, as opposed to a small group of youth stakeholders. These events also provide a direct form of consultative engagement that The Door uses to involve young people to review and recommend changes to way that The Door offers its services. This can include reviewing the way that staff interact with the community, access and eligibility of services, and exploring new innovative service delivery models based on the perceived and recognised needs of the youth community.

As mentioned previously, The Door facilitates a youth conference, The Young People's Peace and Justice Conference. This conference is a two day conference where young people engage together to address social justice issues affecting young people—as described by The Door, to 'harness youth dialogue, awareness, engagement and build skills around social justice issues'. The overall aim of the conference is to equip young people with the skills, strategies and resources to engage in social justice work.

The Door also forms valuable links with other youth participation organisations that help to provide pathways for young people to gain skills to become more effective advocates for themselves in their organisations and in their communities. An example of this was a collaborative project with a Washington DC-based organisation, Advocates for Youth (AFY). In partnership with AFY, The Door facilitated a training package for young people to develop their advocacy skills under the guidance and training of AFY. This external link also provided a network for young people to engage with broader social issues, and use information gained when opportunities to contribute to program service delivery modification, occurred.

Youth on Board

Youth on Board is a private company that establishes school-based youth advisory bodies within the Boston schools districts and acts as an adviser to a broad range of organisations and government departments on the benefit of valued engagement with young people. Some of these organisations include local and district council bodies, national education government departments and organisations including Advocates for Youth.

Young people also have the answers.

Youth on Board, US (in consultation)

Since 1994, Youth on Board has grown and developed as one of the pre-eminent youth advocacy companies, used by organisations and government agencies to address internal issues surrounding lack of engagement with young people in organisational and governmental strategic policy, practice and direction.

Youth on Board works to reduce the impact of adultism within the youth–adult community and aims to reskill adults to not only work for, but with young people. By strengthening this youth–adult partnership, Youth on Board believes that organisations and the community will benefit from young people no longer being engaged as young people, but as valued resources. Youth on Board do this through a number of mechanisms, including the Boston Student Advisory Council, the National Student Voice in the Classroom initiative, as well as through the dissemination of the training packages and educational resources on best practices for engaging with young people.

The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) is a group of elected students from the Boston schools district. Young people can nominate and stand for election and it is understood that this Council has membership of about 10 members. BSAC works to identify issues facing students and advocating this voice to decision-makers. BSAC do this by holding consultation and focus groups with students in their local schools and local areas. They target specific educational issues that are recognised as effecting young people. BSAC have been instrumental in informing and assisting in the development of district school policies, including Teacher Evaluation and Hiring, Student Government, and Student Safety. In particular, the Teacher Evaluation and Hiring project enabled young people to develop a system and practice of being included in the evaluation and review of teaching staff and curriculum, to ensure that the ultimate customer of the education service was being included in the development of the education product. This policy continues to exist with young people included throughout the process.

The national Student Voice in the Classroom initiative is a by-product of the Teacher Evaluation and Hiring Policy work and aims to provide an ongoing campaign for the inclusion of young people in service delivery. The Student Voice in the Classroom initiative uses technology to enable young people to provide feedback and opinion to inform practice and policy. Youth on Board have developed a photo booth website in conjunction with Facebook and Instagram phone applications, where students can illustrate in a photo, their voice and opinion regarding their education (Youth on Board 2013). This tool has been used since 2013 and is currently still in operation and receives funding and support from the WK Kellogg Foundation. The photos are then translated and used to inform policy documents, and trends in opinion are analysed with Youth on Board being able to advocate the voice of young people in the development of education services. Youth on Board asserts the use of technology as a vital link and cost effective way of engaging with technologically minded young people.

Advocates for Youth

Advocates for Youth (AFY) are proud advocates who work directly with young people aged 14–25 in the US and internationally. Their primary aim is to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

AFY achieve their aims by focusing on what they define as the '3R's' (AFY 2013):

1. **Rights** Youth have the right to accurate and complete sexual health information, confidential reproductive and sexual health services, and a secure stake in their future.
2. **Respect** Youth deserve respect. Valuing young people means involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being.
3. **Responsibility** Society has the responsibility to provide young people with the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

In 2013, AFY worked with over 28,000 health care providers, educators, and other youth-serving professionals in the US to '...directly and indirectly strengthening the ability of more than nine and a half million youth to make informed, responsible decisions about their sexual health' (AFY 2013). Some of the projects that AFY have conducted are:

- Adolescent Contraceptive Access Initiative: supporting adolescents to access information and providing resources and networking surrounding safe sexual health.
- Cultural Advocacy and Mobilisation Initiative: AFY worked with 60 young people in youth councils across 6 states in the US to support the councils to advocate for sexual education in their communities.
- Public Policy Initiatives: AFY aim to educate government stakeholders and community decision-makers on a variety of issues that affect young people. AFY work with young people to develop policy positions and support young people to directly advocate and liaise with these stakeholders and decision-makers through ongoing mentoring, training and support.

One of the key operations of AFY is the Youth Activist Network. This network is made up of a number of different youth advisory committees

We all have a right to be heard; young people included.

Advocates for Youth, US
(in consultation)

and councils, each focused on individual aspects of health and sexual health awareness. The network includes:

- Campus Organisers
- International Youth Activist Network
- International Youth Leadership Council
- State activists
- Young Women of Color Leadership Council
- Youth Resource Online Peer Educators
- Young Men's Project.

Of particular importance and relevance to this project is the International Youth Leadership Council (IYLC). This is a council of 7 members with a primary focus on working to improve the health and well-being of their peers. IYLC is made up of a team of high functioning young people who work specifically on lobbying decision-makers, conducting research and consultation, independently and in conjunction with key organisational stakeholders. IYLC members develop media campaigns, conduct forums focused on health and education policy, coordinate press conferences, directly advocate to policy-makers and attend conferences.

Each of the 7 members of IYLC signs a participation contract with AFY and receives a nominal allowance to be used during their IYLC volunteering for things such as travel, attending external conferences and meetings. Each member engages in media and lobbying exercises and facilitates consultation with young people and stakeholders, similar to the current St John AYC. Additionally, each youth council is required to participate with monthly reporting on their engagement (a noted 100% reportage rate) including ongoing performance reviews. This model is regarded as being highly reliable as well as promoting a more engaged level of participation from members. The IYLC is supported by the AFY headquarters which advises that this ongoing support is fundamental to the longevity of the Council.

Another example of the AFY youth programs is the International Youth Activist Network (iYAN). iYAN consists of youth activists and adult allies across the globe who work to influence policies and programs in their countries and internationally, to support improved youth reproductive and sexual health. They do this by sharing information about their work, providing networking opportunities to young people, producing advocacy materials and tool kits and producing a monthly newsletter. This network serves as the greatest ability for AFY to stay connected with young people across the globe, and helps to share information and ensure that young people are informed and up to date with all relevant developments and decisions that affect them. This model appears to provide a flexible opportunity for young people to be engaged and informed with regards to organisational development and progressing policy and practice.

Young Invincibles

Young Invincibles was founded in 2009 '...motivated by the recognition that young people's voices were not being heard in the debate over health care reform' (Young Invincibles, 2013).

Young Invincibles (YI) do not have a youth council, instead opting to have a team of employees, including young people, whose sole role is to directly engage with young people. One of the strategies that YI

Young people represent our most valuable resource.

Young Invincibles, US
(in consultation)

employs is a Youth Road Trip, where a team of 5 employees traveled across the majority of US states to consult directly with young people in these regions. As a result, YI has developed many policy papers, lobbying packages and increased the network of young people that they engage with. Some of their key achievements include the development of the Health Care Finder mobile app which provides youth-relevant information for accessing health insurance in US and the Closing the Race Gap which was a campaign that developed a research policy paper on reducing systematic racial discrimination in the workforce for young (and old) African-American citizens.

Young Invincibles have also developed toolkits for young people to access, which focus on key youth-related issues, like unemployment, health and higher education. They also facilitate a blog that they use to directly engage and inform young people on an ongoing basis and have a Youth Invincibles Network, which enables YI to stay informed on current social issues and engage with a broad range of community members and young people, internal and external to YI.

Australia

Sally Hasler, CSTJ, Chair of Community Care

I was fortunate to be Chair of the Australian Youth Council at the time the National Board decided to create a new position for a young person on the board. This was a significant development for the organisation because while a new focus on youth participation had led to a lot of consultation, there was limited (if any) opportunities for young people to be placed in positions where they exercised meaningful decision-making responsibilities—particularly not at this level. This is the ‘pointy end’ of youth participation and allows the organisation to benefit from the diversity of perspective that young people bring to the decision-making process.

There is substantial evidence that demonstrates the benefits that are generated when people bring different perspectives to the table—and also demonstrated risks of developing a ‘group think’ mentality. My role was not to represent young people, but to bring a perspective from one young person in the organisation. The value that young people bring to the board is their different perspective informed by their life experiences which are generally different to other directors: their lifestyle, currency of education, social norms, use of technology, work experience and generational differences. While not necessarily superior, it is this difference which allows decision-making processes to fully embrace and consider all the factors, benefits and risks involved in taking a certain path.

While youth consultation may consider a young person’s perspective on a particular issue, the full benefits of youth participation (as described above) are not totally realised without young people also being in positions where they can exercise decision-making responsibilities.

St John Ambulance Australia

St John Ambulance Australia is a leading provider of youth development programs and opportunities for young people aged 8–25 years (see cadets.stjohn.org.au). The youth development program aims to develop ‘competent and confident individuals for the community’ (SJAA, National Youth Plan 2014).

The organisation has a number of avenues that young people may participate in and be included in the decision-making of the organisation.

1. The Chair of the Australian Youth Council (AYC) is a non-executive director, who sits on the Australia Board.
2. The AYC is a national youth advocacy body and considers issues relevant to young people across the organisation nationally, and works with the state and territory youth councils and other key stakeholders to consult directly with young people’. (Winner, 2011) The AYC’s membership is constituted of 5 national portfolio members, including the Chair, who form the national team, as well as 2 representatives from each state and territory.
3. State/Territory youth councils/advisory groups or representatives each undertake a variety of functions in their respective state or territory, for example, consulting directly with young people about youth-relevant issues such as flexible volunteering. They are funded and report to an executive position, either directly to their state/territory Chief Executive Officer or to a high ranking official in the Event Health Services Branch.

Young people have the passion to contribute to St John.

Peter LeCornu, CEO,
St John (in consultation)

Australian Youth Council, St John Ambulance Australia

In 2013, 2 separate focus groups were conducted with the AYC including all state and territory representatives. The focus groups addressed the benefits and perceived challenges facing the AYC.

The following **benefits** of the AYC were identified by the focus groups:

- innovative, relevant and current
- good representation over a large geographic spread
- a young representative on the Australian Board
- salaried young people working in the National Office
- high quality of AYC work produced with past successes including e.g. first aid flash mob, flexible volunteering, Luna Park consultation and the Disaster Resilience Toolkit
- a diversity of well-skilled young people
- engaged in broad consultation with a large target audience
- members who are more flexible and adaptable to using social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc) and therefore using existing technology more broadly.

The focus groups also identified a number of **challenges** consistently faced by the current existing AYC structure:

- limited ability for self-promotion

- quality of leadership depends on level of support, personalities of stakeholders and the leaders themselves
- self-limiting: fear of being crushed
- low confidence: not as outspoken as preferred
- lack of advocating at times when it is needed, due to negative organisational messages
- lack of engagement with other organisations
- recommendations not being heard or being applied within the organisation
- need to always ask permission
- lack of internal AYC engagement.

In 2014, the AYC National Team conducted a review of the AYC's practice of using the *Here by Right self-assessment tool* (see Appendix 2, p. 34). The AYC recognised that across most areas of their operation, procedures and structures that support youth involvement are currently in place, but there is a need for improvement. For example, developing and contributing to the youth strategic plan and encouraging diversity in involvement with their consultative practices.

The need to have a greater presence throughout the organisation and structures in place to support a broad level of communication with the membership, was prevalent. Additionally, was the need to ensure that St John actively supports the research and findings of the AYC in the development and review of policy, practice and procedures. This requires the AYC to have a more active involvement with key stakeholders, and for the AYC to better communicate its research and recommendations with the organisation.

Importantly, the AYC identified that the main issue facing young people in St John, and in particular for the AYC, is ensuring that managers and leaders support innovation with active involvement, accepting risks of mistakes and are committed to reflection and learning. What this requires is for managers and leaders to act as the champions of young people; to support and empower young people to be involved.

We don't toot our own horn. If we have a success,
we don't make sure people know about it.

AYC National Team, 2014

Youth Action and Policy Association NSW

Youth Action and Policy Association NSW (YAPA) are the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in New South Wales. YAPA work towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. When this occurs, YAPA believes young people and the community can flourish.

YAPA have over 2000 members and engage directly with young people through targeted consultation on social, economic, health and policy issues. YAPA also engages with young people through social media, online forums and regular publications, particularly by way of blogging. YAPA described these means of engagement with young people as highly effective and crucial to maintaining links to young people, particularly with the use of social media. YAPA also have a commitment to ensure general consultation regularly occurs as a means of capturing the most

current perspectives of young people, as well as to identify presently occurring or repeating trends or issues that have an effect on young people. YAPA see this as an important means to ensuring they have current and informed links with young people to facilitate their roles as youth advocates. They do this using traditional methods such as focus groups, surveys, as well as modern methods using online platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

Young people need space to participate,
engage and really be heard.

Youth Action and Policy Association NSW
(in consultation)

YAPA works with key government ministers, departments, non-government organisations and other youth social programs by lobbying them on behalf of young people with regards to policy documents and consultation data that has been developed by, and in conjunction, with young people. Recent examples of policy documents relate to youth homelessness in Western Sydney and the impact of the 2014–15 Federal budget on young people.

A key feature of YAPA is its student internship program, where university students are engaged as volunteers to work in the YAPA team. The internship program is designed to provide young people with the opportunity to undertake a research project, that not only works to develop the skills of the individual, but allows young people to provide policy direction papers on issues that affect young people in the community. For example, public policy direction, health issues, education and employment. Two intern students are chosen each year.

YAPA conducts a variety of media functions to ensure the wide distribution of its youth message. For example, participating in talk-back radio interviews with government officials and engaging in television interviews advocating the voices of young people regarding specific policy platforms.

YAPA also facilitates multiple youth conferences around NSW annually, including an annual general meeting of YAPA. These youth conferences are a tool YAPA use to directly engage with young people, and each conference focuses on particular youth-related issues, for example youth mental health. These conferences aim to achieve a greater level of participation amongst young people, and is another method where YAPA can directly engage, consult and advocate for and on behalf of young people. These conferences have the purpose of developing new projects and policy documents, as well as aim assist to inform current projects and activities of YAPA.

Discussion

Optimising young people's participation in the decision-making of St John

The research findings highlight 3 key focus areas where St John can modify practices to position itself and young members to work in partnership to achieve the goals of the organisation and provide a development opportunity for young people.

1. Greater youth access to decision-making: shared decision-making.
2. Remodeling the Australian Youth Council to the Australian Youth Advisory Team.
3. Youth proofing St John.

Should St John optimise the participation of young people, it is suggested that the ultimate reward can be generations of diversity, growth and innovation.

Hart's Ladder of Participation

Before addressing the key focus areas, it is important to analyse the effect of St John engaging with young people and understand how St John is influenced, based on the way in which it chooses to engage with young people.

Roger Hart, a prominent expert in youth participation, has developed a tool to illustrate how organisations engage with young people, and the associated results from these methods of engagement. This tool is known as *Hart's Ladder of Participation* (Hart 1997). [Appendix 1. p. 33.](#)

Hart's *Ladder* represents an organisation, with 8 rungs (or levels) illustrating the varying degrees in which the organisation engages with young people. Hart's work is seen as ground-breaking (Fletcher, 2008) as it clearly defines how organisations can maximise their achievements through modifying the way in which they engage with young people.

Hart describes that engaging with young people in ways consistent with Levels 1–3 equates to non-engagement and is therefore detrimental to not only the relationship between the organisation and young people, but also results in a decrease in productivity in this relationship. These first 3 levels imbue in an organisation a culture of adultism. When young people are treated as tokens or as decoration they will disengage, as a key motivation to youth engagement is to feel valued and believe that they are working to make a difference in their organisation or community.

Hart has identified that engaging young people at Levels 4–8 is where organisations will experience the benefit of the resources offered by young people. The optimum level for maximum benefit is Levels 7–8.

In the context of St John, the organisation currently supports youth councils and advisory committees that often operate under the supervision and direction of adult leaders. There are varying levels of consultation between younger and older members, with a limited degree of youth-based decision-making. By this assessment, St John would currently be considered as engaging with young people between Levels 4–5. This is the prime foundation for St John to modify practices to enable the organisation to engage with younger people at higher levels

on the *Ladder*. In consultation, the National Youth Agency of UK (NYA) discussed the relevancy of operating at either level, whether it is 7 or 8. NYA believes that there are only small variances between each level, and that an organisation can float between levels and simultaneously reap the rewards. NYA believes the foundation should always be a Level 8 youth–adult partnership where young people and older members work together with equal access and authority to make decisions. In addition to this Level 8 foundation to ensure that young people have the ability to lead and advocate on behalf of young people, there should be a model of youth-led advocacy which encapsulates the principles of Level 7 of Hart’s *Ladder*. St John would benefit from the continued support of young people to associate and lead activities that empower young people to be the motivators and champions of their involvement in the organisation.

Therefore, in order for St John to operate at Level 7–8 on the *Ladder of Participation*, the organisation has to make an overall commitment for the organisation—it is at these levels, as described by Hart, that St John and young people will thrive.

3 key focus area

For St John to engage with young people at Levels 7–8, a key cultural shift is required in the practices and policies around engaging with young people. The following 3 key focus areas illustrate how, by using the principles of Hart’s *Ladder*, St John can achieve its organisational goals and imbue innovation, diversity and growth by using young people as equal resources. If St John aspired to operate at Levels 7–8, not only will it be actively engaging with young people as valued members but, as Hart suggests, St John will be investing in its human resources, ensuring that St John can maximise the potential of achieving all of its goals and ensuring that the organisation has the greatest capacity to survive into the future.

1. Greater youth access to decision-making/shared decision-making

St John can benefit when young people are included in all committees, networks, advisory panels and boards. St John can include young people by:

1. redefining the structure of all forums, including amending constitutions to include membership quotas for the inclusion of young people
2. providing adequate and ongoing training, mentoring and supportive policy infrastructure to support young people to have a valued and meaningful contribution on these forums
3. influencing organisational culture to become more inclusive, whereby the influence of adultism is reduced and negated.

By engaging with young people at Hart’s Levels 7 and 8, St John can optimise the knowledge and expertise of its membership whilst reinforcing a culture where all members are equal and involved in the overall development of the organisation.

According to Hart and the National Youth Agency, UK, what is required of an organisation to operate at Level 8 is for young people and adult members to work in partnership, with equal access to authority and decision-making. Practically, this requires a modification of St John policies effecting membership on all committees, networks and boards

The key to understanding the needs of our members, is by listening.

Melissa Oudshoorn St John SA
(in consultation)

and redefining the function of these bodies to ensure that young people have a valued and meaningful impact in these forums.

Currently, Scouts UK uses a model of quota systems in forums, where membership provides representation of 2 young people on all forums. Scouts UK comment that this model provides the simplest method of ensuring diversity and youth representation at all levels of decision-making. This quota-system model seems most suitable for St John to employ to ensure that all forums, from the 'grass-roots' level through to the Australian Board, have youth representation. St John should also aim to ensure that equal opportunity policies exist to provide diversity amongst decision-making panels, including age, as well as gender and other culturally diverse backgrounds.

Based on the Scouts UK practice, St John should also aim to provide adequate resources, such as access to training and mentoring and suitable policy frameworks to ensure that young people's participation in these forums is enabled and engagement is valued. Advocates for Youth and The Door also implore that for young people to have valid and meaningful participation, young people must have access to mentors and receive adequate and ongoing training. With these resources, St John will see young people contributing to all aspects of the organisation, including strategic development of future policies and practices, such as the development of technology, programs and services to ensure that St John can meet its key organisational goals.

To reduce the effect or existence of youth prejudice, St John would benefit from investing in educating all of its members about the benefits and capacity of all members, particularly its young people. Scouts UK and Youth on Board have each developed educational tools for adults working with young people, particularly when young people are engaged as stakeholders in decision-making forums. Scouts UK have developed their Youth Involvement Key Messages ([see Appendix 3. p. 35](#)) and Climbing Wall ([Appendix 4. p. 36](#)) that provide a guide outlining the roles of young people and leaders in programs, particularly highlighting the need of leaders to encourage, foster participation and provide ongoing support to young people. Scouts UK Climbing Wall is an adapted version of Hart's *Ladder*, and is aimed at ensuring that all members have an awareness of Hart's participation principles, and its application in an organisational context.

St John, drawing on the models of both Scouts UK and Youth on Board, may develop awareness information and educational tools that address working with young people, to ensure that the influence of adultism is reduced, with the ultimate aim that each member is seen as equally having the ability to contribute, regardless of the age of the member. Not only might such resources benefit young people in decision-making roles, but St John and its membership more broadly.

Remodelling the Australian Youth Council

As Hart's *Ladder* illustrates, an organisation is engaging at a high level with young people when it allows and supports youth-led activism. The most common method used around the world is a youth-led advisory body or youth council (Youth Leadership Institute 2009). There are many benefits to organisations supporting youth-led advisory bodies. Most importantly, these bodies provide an easy link for leaders and stakeholders to directly engage with young people. Youth advisory bodies are also a great source of opportunity for young people to develop their skills as leaders and

can be the breeding ground for future leaders of an organisation. St John should continue to support the operation of a highly functioning youth advisory body ensuring that it maintains a strong, independent and direct link to young people, as well as investing in the development of a pool of future leaders for the organisation.

Each organisation is different and therefore the models of a youth advisory body will be different depending on the needs, demographic and goals of the organisation. In respect to St John, a model should ultimately reflect the needs and goals of the organisation, including the needs of young people, and should be supported at all levels to ensure that it continues to operate at its highest possible productive capacity.

Through an analysis of assorted models used by different organisations internationally, there appears to be key trends in how youth councils are designed and how they function to ensure that they are highly useful tools to both young people and the organisation. These trends are:

- **membership:** a core team of 4–8 members, including external members
- **funding:** assured ongoing funding and independently managed by support staff
- **function:** youth-led and directed, reviewing practice and politically active
- **communication tools:** social media and use of youth correspondence
- **portfolios:** focus on social media/communication and policy
- **accountability:** ongoing and formal performance reviews
- **networks:** maximising the reach and message of young people, including an alumni and external organisations
- **consultation:** general consultation in addition to targeted research-based consultation, including active involvement with executive management and board of directors
- **meetings:** use of technology with a focus on regular face-to-face contact
- **events:** 1–2 annual youth summits led by youth advocacy bodies
- **development:** use of short-term volunteer research placements/internships
- **participation:** membership on all key stakeholder forums including external bodies
- **support:** ongoing support from key paid, voluntary and executive staff.

If St John supports a model that aligns with these trends, then it will be supporting a youth advisory body that can optimise its impact and consistently operate at a high strategic level. By incorporating these trends, the youth advisory body can be positioned at Level 7 of Hart's *Ladder* and avoid the impact of any perceived tokenism within St John. With an increased focus on networking and engagement with young people, increased accountability and increased avenues for ongoing development, the youth advisory body can provide a better informed and direct link to young members for St John. This will also provide a better environment for the development of future organisational leaders and support an inclusive and transparent organisation. Such a model could see young people taking a more active role in the overall operation of St John and provide a more focused and valuable service for St John to achieve its goals and deliver its corporate and community service aims.

Moving forward

Currently St John supports the Australian Youth Council (AYC), a national consultative and advisory body of young people aimed at providing a voice for young people throughout St John. The AYC is led by a Chairperson and a national team of youth members each managing a project-based portfolio. The Council is also made up of delegates from each state and territory youth councils and advisory committees or representatives. Theoretically, the AYC could have maximum membership of 21 members.

The AYC model has served St John well, however as the organisation changes, develops and grows so must the AYC. In order to ensure that St John has the best equipped and effective youth advisory body that meets organisational need, a new model of participation in decision-making is proposed, the Australian Youth Advisory Team (The Team).

2. Key information

The Australian Youth Advisory Team would be a group of 5–7 high-performing individuals working to advocate and champion the active involvement of young people throughout St John. The Team would include and be led by a team leader who would continue to hold the position of independent director on the National Board. The Team's key functions would be consultation, advocacy and policy development; not a focus on the facilitation of youth projects. Via The Team Leader, The Team would report directly to a key national stakeholder within the organisation, either the National CEO or the Board of Directors. Fundamentally, The Team would be an independent body of young people, who are empowered to freely advocate on any issue that is of current impact to young people in St John. The Team would also benefit from having an active involvement determining its funding. This funding should be assured on an ongoing basis.

The Team structure

Each Team member would have an active portfolio responsibility covering, but not limited to, the following areas.

Youth leadership and mentoring: identifying ways to improve the access of young people to leadership opportunities in the organisation and identifying and advocating ways for young people to maintain roles of significance, for example Directors on State and Territory Boards, as well as other key roles in voluntary and paid capacities.

Policy and strategy development: working to identify gaps in and changes to existing practice, and promote the benefits of active involvement of young people in St John.

Information distribution: active communication with young people about current affairs and opportunities. This particular role should be a regular and highly important function. It may be best suited to 2 individuals.

Information disbursement

The Team would have a focus on providing members, in particular young members, with information regarding St John in addition to other youth-related information occurring in the youth and volunteering sector. The Team would also focus on ensuring that young people and the organisation are informed about work that is being conducted by The Team. St John would provide appropriate resources to The Team. For example, paid support from the National Office to enable The Team

to better communicate with young people and St John, and a regular publication or monthly feature in the national publication, *Spotlite*.

Eligibility and term of membership

Eligibility for The Team would provide for both internal St John members, as well as provisions to enable The Team to recruit additional members externally from the wider community. Any externally recruited members must comply with National Child Protection Protocols. The age requirements of the current AYC model allows members from the age of 12 with the current maximum age being 26, and this should be supported.

As in the current model, the term of membership for each member would be 2 years with the option for an additional year extension. Membership would be renewed in a staggered manner, meaning that no more than 2 membership terms would expire in the same year. This model ensures a level of consistency and enables existing members to assist with the development of new members. Each member would be provided with an orientation package, facilitated by The Team Leader.

Team engagement

The Team would meet via teleconference on a monthly basis as well as regular face-to-face meetings throughout the year. The Team would have at least four face-to-face meetings per year in a central and financially suitable location. Additionally, to continue to support the network of other young advocates throughout the organisation, such as state and territory youth advisory bodies, The Team would be invited to be a member on each of these state bodies. This will allow for ongoing youth-led support and mentoring, and act as a communication link throughout the organisation, particularly between national and state/territory youth advisory bodies and councils. This approach should allow state and territory youth bodies to receive youth-based support to assist state and territory youth bodies to provide active services to their respective jurisdictions.

Team support

The Team requires various ways of support from the organisation to ensure its success. Similar to the current model, The Team would receive ongoing support from paid staff in the National Office. This support is vital to The Team's ability to provide a valued and highly focused service to young people and St John. Ongoing mentoring and support is identified as a key principle of empowering young people to hold effective and significant roles in organisations. Each Team member would be supported by a mentor in an executive position of the organisation, such as a member on the National Board or the Chief Executive Committee.

Youth consultation

The Team would ensure that they regularly consult with young members and St John more broadly. The Team would conduct at least two consultations with young people per year. To maximise the involvement of young people in the national organisation, The Team would conduct these in different locations throughout Australia and online. There would be a focus on general consultation with members regarding youth member needs and The Team would conduct consultation that targets specific volunteering and/or policy areas that are of key significance during the term of The Team.

In an effort to ensure a high level of strategic policy development throughout St John, The Team and the National Board would commit to ongoing and regular consultative projects. These projects would be aimed at strengthening the relationship between The Team and key youth stakeholders, as well as providing young members with the opportunity to work with key members within St John. This initiative can be in addition to other consultative projects.

The Team and the National Board may commit to a key consultative/research partnership each year, and, as used by IGLYO, use the model where a Board member works to support the project. Ideally, this Board member would be a different member to the The Team Leader. This model can promote greater inclusion, diversity and more active and closer working relationships between the National Board and The Team. This also links directly to the point of St John providing active and ongoing supports to the function of The Team. This support would be vital to the success of The Team.

Youth network

A youth network is a database or register of young people that can be used by The Team and St John to connect with young people. To maximise the influence and engagement of The Team with the broader membership, The Team would be supported to operate a youth network throughout Australia with St John members aged under 25 and other youth stakeholders and supporters, including external organisations. This network would allow ongoing direct engagement with members, to assist participation in Team-led consultation, research and policy projects. A strategy that could be employed would be an 'opt in' system whereby members have the option to engage with the network. A common tool used by organisations is Facebook for advertising current surveys or other consultative projects, as previously mentioned. In addition, The Team would actively engage with external organisations and key stakeholders to enhance and boost the impact of the voice of young people. It can also ensure The Team and St John maintain up-to-date and relevant links to current affairs and policy that impacts on St John and young people.

Accountability

In order to ensure that The Team continues to be highly effective and viable, The Team would adopt and commit to ongoing reporting and review of each Team member. Each role would have specific key performance indicators (KPIs) and a quarterly reporting tool would be developed. The Team Leader would conduct quarterly reporting meetings with individuals to monitor overall performance and work to provide ongoing support and development of Team membership. These quarterly reviews could coincide with quarterly face-to-face meetings. In addition, the Team and Team Leader would develop an informal mechanism for ongoing review and support to be provided between formal quarterly reviews. This would be supported by a National Office staff member. This reporting model would be linked with ongoing eligibility with The Team, with continued non-compliance grounds for membership termination.

Research and development volunteer internships

The Team would also have a yearly development stream for external members to The Team. This may be a research/projects trainee program, similar to models used by National Youth Agency and Advocates for Youth.

For example, 1–2 young members could be engaged in a development pathway to assist with consultation projects and policy development activities, as well as communication and information distribution activities to support The Team. This development stream would be limited to people who have not previously held positions in The Team and ultimately provide for an active succession planning for The Team and St John. The term would be for 12 months. These volunteer intern places would increase membership and reach of The Team each year.

The Team membership on decision-making forums

It is proposed that The Team would hold mandatory membership on every national network, forum or decision-making panel, including, for example, the National Board of Directors, the National Cadet Group, the National Training Group and the National Event Health Services. Team members should be empowered to have an active role on each of these forums and receive adequate orientation and mentoring throughout their membership with the forum.

3. Youth proofing St John

In line with the principles of Hart's *Ladder of Participation*, in order to achieve a Level 7–8 organisation, all of St John's policies, procedures and operational guidelines should be reviewed and modified to enable young people to be actively involved in the organisation and decision-making. This process is known in the sector as 'youth proofing'. By imbuing Hart's principles and ideals of valuing young people into organisational policies and practices, St John would be making a valued investment in its future and organisational prosperity.

Youth proofing St John will be a 2-stage process (one which Scouts UK has successfully employed) with:

Stage 1. initial organisational review and self-assessment

Stage 2. subsequent implementation of the recommendations of the organisational review.

By using this model, St John could successfully provide the necessary infrastructure that will enable young people to have an equal opportunity to participate with decision-making and influence in St John.

Stage 1. Organisational review and self-assessment

The *Hear by Right self-assessment tool* (self-assessment tool) is an in-depth framework that an organisation can use to review current policies and practices, and to identify areas for improvement. The aim of this exercise is for the organisation to position itself to support active involvement with young people, and ultimately operate between Levels 7 and 8 of Hart's *Ladder of Participation* (NYA 2013; Scouts UK 2013).

The self-assessment tool has 7 areas of focus:

- 1. Shared values.** This area focuses on how an organisation commits to and involves young people in the organisation, and adopts shared values for actively involving young people. It also addresses practices for how young people are involved in reviewing and agreeing on organisational shared values and how an organisation makes these values visible and accessible to the membership and external public. Lastly, it addresses whether or not an organisation uses these shared values to set policy and review practice.

2. **Strategies.** This area focuses on how an organisation plans and creates strategies to build the participation of young people. It also addresses the level of involvement that young people have in contributing to, developing and reviewing the organisation's strategic plan as well as whether or not the organisation is creating links with the broader community to increase the active involvement of young people.
3. **Structures.** This area focuses on how an organisation involves young people in consultation to help review structures and practices, and how an organisation ensures that a diverse group of people, particularly marginal groups, are included. It also addresses whether an organisation engages with external organisations on issues that affect young people. This area also focuses on whether or not there is shared decision-making between young people and adults.
4. **Systems.** This area focuses on what systems, policies and procedures, if any, are in place that support a safe and inclusive environment for young people to be actively involved in the organisation. It also addresses how young people are involved in the development of budgeting and financial systems and what systems are in place for communication with young people.
5. **Staff.** This area focuses on how the organisation engages with young people in relation to staffing, such as whether job descriptions specify ways of ensuring active involvement with young people, and how young people are involved in the recruitment, supervision, training and review of staff. It also covers how young people are involved in the process of electing members of the organisation to the board of directors.
6. **Skills and knowledge.** This area focuses on how an organisation works to identify and create capacity to develop the skills of young people and include them in using these skills and knowledge in making change in the organisation. Additionally, it also addresses how the organisation involves young people in training others in working with young people, and whether the organisation has systems in place to support the development of young people such as mentoring.
7. **Styles of leadership.** This area focuses on how the organisation's leadership supports the active involvement of young people and whether it commits to providing transparent decision-making processes and access for young people to internal and external decision-makers.

The self-assessment tool features a 2-part analysis of each of the 7 areas of focus.

Part 1: Mapping

Each area of focus is analysed over 7 different indicators. These aspects are organised into three groups: 1. emerging, 2. established and 3. advanced.

Each of the 7 indicators are required to be given a score of 1–4 depending on how an organisation meets the specific indicators.

1 = In place and effective

2 = In place, but needs improving

3 = Currently being established

4 = Not in place

Each indicator requires evidence of how a score of 1-4 is achieved.

Part 2: planning

The planning section addresses how the organisation, after completing the mapping phase, has identified areas for improvement. It provides a framework for addressing each of the identified areas of improvement for each of the 7 indicators featured in the Mapping phase.

St John would benefit from investing resources in a team of young people and key staff members to undertake this self-assessment and work with key stakeholders. This team's main goal would be to identify and recommend areas of improvement to ensure that all of St John's practices support active involvement and inclusion of young people. By supporting this active involvement, St John could ensure that young people are in a position to contribute to the delivery of services to the community and progress the key strategies of the organisation.

Stage 2. Implementation of recommendations

Stage 2 would see the recommendations from the Stage 1 review being implemented by St John. This implementation process would be conducted by the National Board and/or the National Office with the assistance of young members, most particularly from The Team. Young people would be consulted throughout this process.

The benefit of undertaking the self-assessment is that the team facilitating the review could also prioritise each identified area of improvement based on need, current resources and relevance to the organisation's current strategic goals.

Conclusion

Every person in our community is of value; each individual brings knowledge, experiences, skills and their own world view. Included in this community, and in particular, the St John community, are young people. With these strengths of knowledge, experience and skill, young people in St John represent a valuable resource to assist the organisation in the delivery of services, achieving organisational goals and promoting resilience in the community. By partnering effectively with young people, St John can promote an inclusive culture focused on collaboration and unleash the potential of all of its members, in particular young people.

It is clear from the findings of this research that no organisation can refute that fostering these strengths in young people is beneficial to developing young people in the overall organisational culture. It should be no surprise that St John, as a leading volunteer organisation has a great capacity to engage and invest in its memberships' opinions and voices, and importantly the voices of its young members; empowering young people to be included in the development of the organisation is a model that St John can benefit from.

What is required is an awareness of the skills of young people and the challenges young people face when their capacity to contribute is denied due to the influence of adultism or prejudice towards young people.

Fundamentally, all members of St John, including its young people, add value and have the capability and capacity to contribute to decision-making within the organisation. St John has already provided a strong foundation for youth engagement in decision-making and is now perfectly placed to strengthen this foundation in the future to ensure an inclusive organisation where all members feel valued and are encouraged to contribute. Ultimately, by including and allowing members to contribute, St John can ensure that it continues to be the leading provider of community-based first aid services, preparing Australians with the skills and training to save lives today and well into the future.

Our young members are more than just the
future of St John—they are half of the present.

Darren Daff, St John SA
(in consultation)

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Hart's Ladder of Participation

Level 8. Shared decision-making

Projects or programs can be initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. This level illustrates a youth-adult partnership where young people equally contribute. This level enables young people and adult members to share in one another's skills and experience.

Level 7. Young-led activism

Young people develop and manage a project or program. Adults are involved in a supporting capacity. This level enables young people to be the sole-decision makers and directors.

Level 6. Adult-initiated engagement

Projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. This level of engagement is focused on participation however does not provide for equal and shared decision-making.

Level 5. Consulted and informed

Young people provide advice on projects and programs led by adult members. Young people do not have any decision-making capacity and often adult members initiate the project or program. This level of engagement is best illustrated by an adult-led youth advisory body or youth council.

Level 4. Assigned but informed

This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

The following three levels of engagement are considered by Hart as non-participation and reflect the influence of youth prejudice or adultism (Fletcher 2008).

Level 3. Tokenism

Young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

Level 2. Decoration

Young people are used to bolster a project or program that is not initiated or influenced by young people.

Level 1. Manipulation

Adults use young people to support projects or programs and pretend that they are inspired by young people.

Appendix 2.
Hear by Right self-assessment tool

hear by right 

Self-Assessment Tool

To map and plan the participation of children
and young people in your organisation



Participation Works



Appendix 3. Scouts UK, Youth involvement: key messages

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Key messages

	Key messages for young people	Key messages for leaders
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Emphasis is on making simple choices and evaluating as part of activities. ■ Some opportunity for free choice, but Beavers will struggle with this and will need guidance. ■ Understand what they have to do to achieve badges/awards. ■ Feel that their voice is heard and valued in the running of the Colony. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide opportunities for choice through games and other fun activities. ■ Be aware that at this age, children's ideas are limited by what they have experienced. ■ Inform Beavers (and their parents) of opportunities locally and nationally (such as events and awards). ■ Develop teamwork and leadership skills by giving Beavers the chance to try out different roles within a group. ■ It is vital to act on the choices made by Beavers. ■ Provide an explanation where there is a good reason why you can't act on feedback or suggestions given by Beavers. ■ Encourage YLs to run Log Chews.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continued emphasis on choice, but with more opportunities to suggest their own activities. ■ Understand what they have to do to achieve badges/awards. ■ Begin to take on meaningful leadership roles within the Pack – Sixers and Seconders should have specific responsibilities (such as running games, showing a new Cub what to do or looking after equipment). ■ Have the opportunity to show other Cubs how to do things, or take on a small role in making activities happen. ■ Feel that their voice is heard and valued in the running of the Pack. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allows all Cubs – not only Sixers and Seconders - to develop leadership skills. ■ Aware that children are becoming more influenced by the world around them and are more capable of making their own suggestions than in the past. ■ Inform Cubs (and their parents) of opportunities locally and nationally (such as events and awards). ■ Provides opportunities for choice through games and other fun activities. ■ It is vital to act on the choices made by young people. ■ Provide an explanation where there is a good reason why you can't act on feedback or suggestions given by Cubs. ■ Encourage YLs to run Pack forums.

Appendix 4. Scouts UK, Climbing Wall



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