



Achieving independence

**Insights and concerns
from young clients
accessing our services**

**MISSION
AUSTRALIA**

**Youth Survey
2015**

Executive summary

For the last 14 years, Mission Australia has conducted an annual survey of young people aged 15 to 19 across Australia. The *Youth Survey 2015* had 19,038 respondents.¹

The survey collects socio-demographic information and asks young Australians about their current circumstances, values, concerns and aspirations. Each year a special focus topic is also included. In 2015, we asked respondents about various aspects of their home life and housing, including frequency of moving residence, perceived safety within their neighbourhood, level of comfort in inviting friends over and any time spent away from home due to feeling unable to return.

This report presents findings from the Youth Survey based on the 1,062 respondents who were Mission Australia clients from 34 employment, education, homelessness, and drug and alcohol services across the nation. Of these, just over 52.5% were female, with 23.9% identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.² Throughout the survey, our clients told us about the challenges they face and the issues they felt were important in Australia. The results capture their unique experiences of homelessness as well as their expectations and aspirations around employment and other future opportunities.

This executive summary sets out key findings from the results and recommendations for policy and practice. The main body of the report will describe the results in greater depth.

Key findings	Key policy recommendations
Developing and achieving	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While two thirds of non-MA clients reported that they planned to go to university, only a third of MA clients reported this. MA clients more frequently reported an intention of going to TAFE or college and getting an apprenticeship.• For MA clients, family responsibilities, financial difficulties and academic ability were identified as the barriers most likely to negatively impact the achievement of their goals while non-MA respondents cited academic ability, financial difficulties and lack of jobs as barriers. Compared to non-MA clients, MA clients were more likely to	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expansion of alternative education options to help young people stay engaged in education and prepare for the workforce.• Successful mentoring programs such as Indigenous Youth and Careers Pathway (IYCP) Program should be re-funded and used as a model to mentor other groups of young people requiring support and advice to navigate post-school pathways.• Expanded training and apprenticeship opportunities are required to ensure that young people can navigate an appropriate

¹ Note: only 18,994 of these were included in the data analysis for the main *Youth Survey 2015* report released in late 2015; the remaining hard copy surveys were received after the cut-off date but have been included in this report to ensure maximum representation of client voice.

² Several of the issues discussed in this report are especially pertinent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and clients. These will be explored in further detail in an in-depth report on findings amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people that will be released later this year.

<p>cite family responsibilities and where they live as barriers to achieving post-school goals.</p>	<p>post-school pathway that is relevant to their career aspirations. Vocational training options also need to reflect growth industries and sectors in demand, such as aged care and early childhood education, and not be limited to traditional roles.</p>
<p>Economic wellbeing</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Getting a job</i> was found to be relatively more important to MA clients than non-MA clients, being highly valued by almost half of MA clients compared with just over one third of non-MA clients. • Despite valuing <i>getting a job</i> more highly than non-MA clients, MA clients were less likely to be in paid employment currently, and notably more likely to be looking for work (half of all MA clients compared to around one third of non-MA clients). • While non-MA clients were slightly more likely than MA clients to identify <i>the economy and financial matters</i> as an important issue facing Australia today, MA clients were more likely to nominate <i>employment</i> as an important national issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Transition to Work program should be extended or supplemented to cater for young Stream C job seekers with severe vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment, including young people experiencing poor mental or physical health, with substance abuse issues, living within dysfunctional families and with a history of contact with the juvenile justice system. • More work experience programs should be incentivised by the government and provided by businesses to assist young people to gain traction on their career path.
<p>Healthy</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MA clients reported higher levels of concerns than non-MA clients across issues related to mental health including depression, suicide, bullying and emotional abuse, drugs, alcohol and gambling. They were also more likely to nominate mental health as a key issue facing Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective youth mental health services are required to provide young people with skills to cope with stress when it arises, as well as equipping friends, family and other important people in young people's lives to provide effective support. • Universal programs should also be provided through schools to improve mental health and mental health awareness, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking and provide

	pathways to support.
Housed	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA clients were more likely to have moved house in the past three years and to have spent time away from home because they felt they could not go back than non-MA clients. Couch surfing was often not an isolated incident for MA clients and typically occurred for a more prolonged period amongst this group than among non-MA clients. MA clients were around twice as likely as non-MA clients to identify <i>homelessness/housing</i> as an important issue facing Australia currently. 	<p>To address serious concerns around youth homelessness, immediate priority should be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-based youth homelessness identification and intervention models in high risk communities as pioneered in the Geelong Project; Zero tolerance approach to young people leaving the out-of-home care system becoming homeless; Provision of crisis accommodation for children and young people escaping domestic and family violence; Extension of the Reconnect program for 5 years; Ensuring access to youth specific services in rural and remote areas; and Facilitating foyer-like supportive models of youth accommodation.
Inclusive and cohesive/Connected and participating	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of both clients and non-MA clients had good relationships with their families. However, MA clients reported higher levels of concerns around family conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Services that work with young people need to have capacity to work with families where issues of family conflict are evident or refer to appropriate services.
Safe	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than one in eight MA clients reported not feeling safe in their neighbourhood. One fifth of MA clients were highly concerned about <i>bullying/emotional abuse</i>, and around one in seven were highly concerned about <i>personal safety</i>. These proportions were slightly higher than those found among non- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place-based approaches to improve community safety and connection, school-based programs to address bullying and discrimination and programs that address the impacts of domestic and family violence on young people are all required for young people to have a sense of safety.

MA clients.	
Supported and resourced	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MA clients were more likely than non-MA clients to seek help from school counsellors, community agencies (unsurprisingly) and telephone hotlines. Conversely, non-MA clients were more likely to turn to the internet than MA clients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrap around case management support remains important for young people with complex needs and lacking family support. Caseworkers can link young people to other appropriate services and address their needs in a holistic way.

Mission Australia's young clients

Most young people who complete the Mission Australia *Youth Survey* are engaged in school, planning to complete Year 12 and continue into further education or training or get a job. Many have stresses, particularly around school or study problems, and nationally reports of being concerned about drugs and alcohol were at a high in 2015, but despite this, most young people remain optimistic about the future. Friendships, family and family friends were all valued and important avenues of support for the majority of these young people.

Nevertheless, the findings of the *Youth Survey* also reveal that some young people are facing a range of complex challenges which, if left unaddressed, may be detrimental to both their current and future wellbeing. For instance, a concerning number of respondents reported moving home often or spending time away from home because they felt they could not go back – issues that can predispose them to a range of negative outcomes, including disruptions to schooling, social networks and community connections, poorer physical and mental health, as well as potentially putting them on a trajectory toward homelessness. Fortunately, most of these young people have support from school, friends and family to help them avoid many of these negative outcomes and prevent them from progressing into more entrenched homelessness.

But for some young people, their needs are more complex than can be helped by their personal support networks, or the support networks are not there to help them, so there is a need to seek support outside of these typical avenues, from services such as those provided by Mission Australia. For all young people, leaving school and transitioning into either further study, training or work is a difficult step, however for those young people coming from backgrounds which are complex or those who have complex needs, this transition is fraught with obstacles.

Services that focus on young people as they transition from childhood to early adulthood and involve young people in the decisions that affect their wellbeing are important for those who require support and can be vital in assisting young people to achieve independence. Mission Australia's work with individuals, families and communities focuses on developing self-efficacy and optimism, confidence and fulfilment, as well as participation and inclusion, with the expectation that they can progress towards independence. For young people, we do this by providing services which focus on:

1. Developing and achieving – young people need to be skilled and confident, in education and with access to tertiary education, training or employment. All young

people should have the best foundation for learning and development and be able to participate as valued members of society.

2. Economic wellbeing – young people should be able to afford the essentials in life and have good financial management skills. They should have pathways to economic participation, fulfilling employment and independent living.
3. Health – being healthy is a significant contributor to overall wellbeing, and this includes participating in activities such as sport. Health incorporates both physical and mental health and Mission Australia believes that for young people to transition successfully into adulthood all aspects of health are important.
4. Housed – a supportive and stable home environment is a particularly important aspect of a young person's life: it is essential for good physical and mental health and has positive impacts on educational outcomes. Stable housing also provides a platform for other supports in the community, through schools or neighbours.
5. Inclusive and cohesive/Connected and participating – it is important that young people have a sense of belonging, feel part of the community and are given opportunities to participate in activities and events that allow them to develop relationships with others. Young people should also feel included and be actively involved in decisions affecting their lives and assume a full role in society.
6. Safety – feeling safe and keeping young people safe is a responsibility of the whole of society. Young people need to feel safe in their families, neighbourhoods and schools. All young people should have a safe, secure and stable home and be protected from bullying and discrimination at schools and in their community.
7. Supported and resourced – young people and those around them such as their peers, family and relatives must have access to services to meet their needs. Mission Australia believes support is essential for young people whether this be universal or more targeted support. These services need to be quality services which are holistic and improve outcomes over time. Services should produce evidence which helps improve service delivery. This includes listening to young people and including their opinions in service development.

By involving our clients in the *Youth Survey*, and specifically analysing the needs of our clients, we are ensuring that the voices and views of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people are used to influence the decisions that affect them.

Young people and transitions

The transition between adolescence and adulthood has become the focus of researchers across disciplines, and has received attention from program designers and policy makers. During the transition into adulthood, young people experience and learn to cope with a range of changes which are physical, psychological, financial and social. This time is important as it sets the scene for a happy and successful adulthood. To complete the transition, young people need to fulfil their educational goals, become economically self-

sufficient, and develop and maintain affirming social relationships.³ Attaining these goals is increasingly complex and, for vulnerable young people, this acquisition of skills is even more complex and often takes longer to accomplish.

For the majority of young people, the transition to adulthood takes time and they move from early areas of support such as schools and friends to more adult areas of support such as work and developing their own family. However, for some young people this time period is accelerated from a very young age. Some young people have to deal with many complex issues such as domestic and family violence (DFV), mental health issues, teen pregnancy and disengagement from school. Conditions such as these often mean they lose their support networks or have to deal with 'adult' institutions, before they are developmentally able, such as requiring support from mental health or homelessness services without the social skills to access these. For young people, dealing with these issues early has long term effects on their transition to adulthood, and they are often unable to deal with complex issues without support networks.

This report looks at the *Youth Survey* findings amongst this cohort of young people who are facing often additional challenges such as those above, and require the support of services outside of the school and home environment. It compares the responses of Mission Australia clients to those of other young people participating in the survey and highlights areas of similarity and difference. In order to assess young people's journey into independence and the types of support they may require, the following discussion of findings is structured according to the outcomes Mission Australia services strive to achieve for their clients.

Discussion of key *Youth Survey* findings

In comparing clients' responses to the *Youth Survey* to those of young people who were not receiving support from Mission Australia there are some notable contrasts.

Developing and achieving

A good education is essential for a good future and that starts with making sure children and young people go to a school that provides high quality learning opportunities and complete Year 12 or equivalent in preparation for higher education or employment. The skills that young people learn during their final years of school are wider than academic skills, but include communication, leadership, knowledge and attitudes which are essential in the realisation of post-school health, social and economic outcomes. The results show that:

- While nearly all young people were studying, around one in ten MA clients were studying part-time and over three quarters remained in full time education. Across both cohorts there was high satisfaction with their studies although, as found in previous years' results, more male than female clients planned to leave school before completing Year 12.
- In terms of plans after school there were stark differences between MA and non-MA respondents. While two thirds of non-MA clients reported that they planned to go to university, only a third of MA clients reported this. Similar proportions of both groups indicated plans to get a job, but MA clients more frequently reported an intention of

³ Xie, R., Sen R. and Foster, M. (2014) 'New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education Special Issue: Meeting the Transitional Needs of Young Adult Learners' Volume 2014, Issue 143, pages 29–38.

going to TAFE or college and getting an apprenticeship. Very few young people felt there were no choices available to them after school.

- The majority of young people, both MA and non-MA respondents, were confident in achieving their post-school plans (either work or study). Both groups recognised that there would be barriers to achieving these plans although the proportion identifying each barrier showed some importance differences. For MA clients, family responsibilities, financial difficulties and academic ability were identified as the barriers most likely to negatively impact the achievement of their goals while non-MA respondents cited academic ability, financial difficulties and lack of jobs as barriers. Compared to non-MA clients, MA clients were more likely to cite family responsibilities and where they live as barriers to achieving post school goals.

“Alternative schooling is a good option for our clients and provides a friendlier environment for re-engaging with education.”

Program Manager, Western Australia

“Apprenticeships are often hard to access with limited places and a long way to travel, however some providers have specific apprenticeship programs for disadvantaged young people and these have worked really well.”

Program Manager, Western Australia

“Young people’s family responsibilities can involve caring for younger siblings or caring for their own children when they have had an early marriage or pregnancy. Access to childcare and out of school hours care is important to address this.”

Program Manager, Victoria

Policy recommendations

School

Young people need access to a high quality education that provides the academic confidence for entry to higher education and the skills for employment. This includes access to alternative education options where young people become disengaged from mainstream schooling and wrap around supports to support educational engagement.

Programs like Flexible Learning Options (FLO) in South Australia can go some way towards bridging this gap. However existing programs do not meet the level of need, particularly in regional areas. Mission Australia sees a need for the expansion of alternative education options to help young people stay engaged in education and prepare for the workforce.

MA has a best practice, national approach to case management that underpins our approach to FLO Case Management and places the young person at the centre of our service. It employs a strength-based approach to working with them, and ensures that we are constantly asking ourselves “what is best for the young person?” This enhances the quality of our services and transforms the lives of young people.

Students develop a personal development plan and identify programs with a focus on personal development, anger management, life skills, community development, drug and alcohol programs which are all customised to the student needs.

Mentoring and information provision

Building aspirations for higher education and career pathways is also an important part of supporting youth transitions. Disadvantaged young people in particular benefit from mentoring on the pathways into further education and employment.

Often young people need help in acquiring the knowledge base necessary to navigate post school transitions. This is particularly important for young people in rural and remote areas who have long distances to travel to continue their education after school.

Successful mentoring programs such as Indigenous Youth and Careers Pathway (IYCP) Program should be re-funded and used as a model to mentor other groups of young people requiring support and advice to navigate post school pathways.

University

Affordable access to university remains an important consideration for all young people. Female MA clients were still most likely to indicate an intention to go to university after school and overcoming barriers to access including financial difficulty is an important consideration in this context. While universities will offer some grants based on ability or socio-economic status a broader needs-based funding mechanism is required to assist young people who do not have the financial resources to attend university, particularly those who cannot stay with family and need to travel.

Vocational education and training

For some young people, including many of our clients, vocational education and training options present a valuable and often preferred career pathway. These options may provide more immediate employment prospects, more local employment prospects and more closely match some young people’s interests.

Expanded training and apprenticeship opportunities are required to ensure that young people can navigate an appropriate post-school pathway that is relevant to their career aspirations. Vocational training options also need to reflect growth industries and sectors in demand, such as aged care and early childhood education, and not be limited to traditional roles.

Alleviating the burden of family responsibilities

For MA clients and other young people requiring additional supports, more needs to be done to alleviate family responsibilities. This includes addressing financial and caring commitments. Greater supports to the whole family are required to enable the young person to pursue their career pathway and achieve independence. This includes recognition of caring responsibilities by employers and institutions, appropriate supports for young carers, accessible childcare, flexible learning hours and appropriate financial assistance.

Connected: Classroom to Community

The Connected: From Classroom to Career Program is a partnership between MA and BHP Billiton Iron Ore. The program supports students in BHP Billiton funded education programs and assists around 700 students, working with schools and universities on goal setting and providing support. It provides one-on-one support and mentoring to students in the Pilbara and Perth to help them achieve their aspirations. The program helps to overcome financial difficulties through grants, as well as providing information that students need to navigate their post-school pathways. It also nurtures wellbeing and provides connection to the community including through sporting teams and events.

Economic wellbeing

For their health, housing and participation, it is important that young people and their families have adequate finances and financial management skills their needs are met. Similarly, young people need to have pathways to future economic wellbeing, including prospects for employment and independent living.

- When asked about items of value to them personally, around four in ten non-MA clients and just over one third of MA clients placed a high value on *financial security*. *Getting a job* was found to be relatively more important to MA clients than non-MA clients, being highly valued by almost half of MA clients compared with just over one third of non-MA clients.
- Despite valuing *getting a job* more highly than non-MA clients, MA clients were less likely to be in paid employment currently, and notably are more likely to be looking for work, with half of all MA clients looking compared to a third of non-MA clients.
- Around one in six non-MA clients and one in seven MA clients identified *financial difficulty* as a perceived barrier to the achievement of their study/work goals after school. However, this could be linked to the types of aspirations young people reported, with university attendance (planned by a larger proportion of non-MA clients than MA clients) likely to require more finances, for instance, than plans to get a job after leaving school.

- While non-MA clients were slightly more likely than MA clients to identify *the economy and financial matters* as an important issue facing Australia today, MA clients were more likely to nominate *employment* as an important national issue.

Despite the comparative strength of the Australian economy, we still have rates of youth unemployment above 12% for 15-24 year-olds, and above 20% in some particularly disadvantaged areas. The ‘scarring’ that occurs when someone is out of work for a lengthy period can have long term negative impacts which are far wider than just a job; including on a person’s health, future aspirations and the likelihood of employment.

After a prolonged gap in specific youth employment services, this year’s Federal budget included a \$331 million youth employment strategy. The largest component of this was \$212 million for youth transition to work (TtW) services. There was also funding provided for intensive support trials for vulnerable job seekers including disadvantaged young people with mental health concerns and vulnerable young migrants.

“Achievable goals are going to vary depending on the young person’s situation. They might need to take small steps at first like getting their ‘white card’ or they may need someone to go with them to drop off resumes. If they are in recovery from substance abuse they will need to focus on counselling and rehabilitation, but they also need a job so they are not sitting at home bored and feeling hopeless. So there have to be holistic supports that meet the young person where they are at.”

Program Manager, Western Australia

“Job service programs are often inadequate for young people, particularly our clients. They may do traineeships and gain a Certificate but it needs to lead to a job, otherwise young people will become disillusioned and disengage.”

Program Manager, Victoria

“Some young people don’t have a family network to teach them the basics. They need to learn the skills required for independent living such as paying their rent and bond and budgeting or they will end up in debt.”

Program Manager, Victoria

Policy recommendations

Strength-based approach

- The findings suggest that young people have a strong desire to work. It is important that this is recognised in public discourse and that young people are not labelled or stigmatised as lazy or unwilling to commit to work, when in fact it is a lack of appropriate jobs rather than a lack of willingness to work that is at fault.

Work experience

- Employers frequently want prior employment experience, but this is difficult for young people when leaving school, so opportunities for work experience and volunteering while still at school are valuable. The Government's scheme to maintain income support for young people while getting experience with an employer is a first step, although this scheme should be expanded and earlier opportunities provided for meaningful work experience. Businesses also have a role to play in providing traineeships and other work experience opportunities to young people with aspirations to work in their industry.

Transition to Work

- The Transition to Work (TtW) program's focus on individual case management and localised service delivery that is connected to school, employers and community groups is to be applauded. However the TtW service is largely for Stream B jobseekers with moderate barriers to employment. There is a cap of 10% of all places for Stream C job seekers with severe vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment including young people experiencing poor mental or physical health, with substance abuse issues, living within dysfunctional families and with a history of contact with the juvenile justice system. The scheme should be expanded or supplemented to provide appropriate employment supports to young people with complex needs which includes many of Mission Australia's young clients.
- Consideration should also be given to broadening the age range for support to 15-24 and extending eligibility to those at risk of disengagement from education or employment, not just those who are currently unemployed, as early intervention is crucial to addressing disadvantage before barriers are compounded.

Healthy

Physical and mental health are critical to the overall wellbeing of young people, their ability to pursue future ambitions and to successfully navigate the transition into adulthood. It is important that young people have access to age appropriate physical and mental health services and that they have the opportunity to participate in health-promoting activities such as sports. The *Youth Survey 2015* found that:

- Over half of all MA clients and over six in ten non-MA clients placed a high personal value on physical and mental health (rating this as either 'extremely' or 'very' important to them).
- Non-MA clients were more likely to participate in sport as a participant and a spectator than MA clients.

- Around one in ten young people (both MA clients and non-MA clients) felt that physical or mental health posed a potential barrier to the achievement of their post-school work or study goals.
- MA clients were slightly more likely than non-MA clients to report high levels of concern about depression and suicide. Just under one quarter of MA clients reported high levels of personal concern about depression, and around one in seven reported high levels of concern about suicide (being either 'extremely' or 'very' concerned about these issues). Comparatively, around one in five non-MA clients indicated high levels of concern about depression and around one in ten reported high levels of concern about suicide.
- Over one in ten MA clients and non-MA clients nominated mental health as a key issue facing Australia today.
- One in five MA clients also reported bullying and emotional abuse as a concern, which was higher than for non-MA clients.
- MA clients also reported higher levels of concerns across, drugs, alcohol and gambling.
- A majority of both MA clients and non-MA clients indicated feeling positive overall about their lives. Encouragingly, both MA clients and non-MA clients expressed similar levels of positivity when asked how they were feeling about the future, with around six in ten feeling either *positive* or *very positive*. Around one in ten young people across both cohorts, however, indicated feeling either *negative* or *very negative* about the future.

Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service – Level Up

Young people from Belmore in NSW have been taking part in the Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service (CBYS) Level Up program. Level Up aims to get young people in the area engaged in physical activity. They train on the same field as the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs NRL team, and are often excited to see the players running out past them to train. Initiated by MA, Level Up leverages on existing community relationships with Canterbury Council and the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs. The program is growing and engaging high risk young people who are often difficult to engage, but who feel safe and comfortable, and want to be involved in this program.

“We've run a lot of programs in the past around mental health and coping strategies but we hadn't really focused on physical health and it was something that we found young people, particularly in this area, weren't able to access. It's also important for them to recognise the link between physical and mental health. Young people really respond to team sports and they are much more likely to open up about other issues if they have seen us in a vulnerable way and worked with us through sports.”

Program Coordinator, Western Sydney

Policy recommendations

Physical health

- Young people need access to age appropriate physical and mental health services that can be accessed alone or with parents or guardians as the situation requires. In some cases young people may need to be linked to health care through their case worker or existing service links.
- It is also important that young people have the opportunity to participate in health-promoting activities such as sports. Participation in sport should be encouraged by schools and by youth services which cater for young people with other needs.

Mental health

- MA clients' higher levels of concern about depression and suicide also point to the need for effective youth mental health services that provide young people with skills to cope with stress when it arises as well as equipping friends, family and other important people in young people's lives to provide effective support.
- Universal programs should also be provided through schools to improve mental health and mental health awareness, reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking and provide pathways to support.

Alcohol and other drugs

- Increased alcohol and drug education is required within schools.
- Youth specific drug and alcohol services which support co-morbid mental health issues and work with clients over the long-term including appropriate after care are also required.
- In order to address concerns about alcohol and drugs as an important issue in Australia, substance use issues need to be addressed as a broader social problem rather than focussing solely on young people's use, including issues such as public safety and substance abuse within families.

Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS)

Our Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS) is a 24 hour residential rehabilitation service provided by Mission Australia to young people aged 12 to 19 years throughout Western Australia who are experiencing alcohol and other drug issues. This facility provides a 3 month structured rehabilitation program that is evidence based and client directed where possible.

Clients have access to a range of integrated services allowing a continuum of care throughout their stay and post-treatment. This includes mentoring, family counselling, transitional housing and community casework.

Housed

As noted, a supportive and stable home environment is a particularly important aspect of a young person's life. There are high personal, social and economic costs associated with poor housing, with young people requiring adequate and stable housing as a foundation to maintain good physical and mental health, participate in education and employment and develop supportive networks within the community. The *Youth Survey* results show that:

- Around half of all MA clients reported having moved house in the past three years, with one third having moved more than once. These proportions were notably higher than those seen among non-MA clients (around one third and fewer than one in five respectively). Reasons for having moved commonly included family breakdown or conflict, issues with the landlord (including being forced to move) and having moved out of home.
- MA clients were also more likely than non-MA clients to have spent time away from home in the past three years because they felt they couldn't go back (a proxy indicator for couch surfing). Around one quarter of MA clients reported having done so, with female clients slightly more likely to report doing so than male clients. Comparatively, around one in eight non-MA clients had spent time away from home due to feeling unable to return.
- Importantly, this was generally not an isolated incident, with almost half of all MA clients who had spent time away from home reporting having done so at least six times over the past three years. Moreover, a concerning number reported that this was often a prolonged absence, with around half of MA clients typically spending at least one week away from home and around one in seven reporting spending more than six months away from home on each occasion. Again, these proportions were higher than those found among non-MA clients.
- MA clients were around twice as likely as non-MA clients to identify *homelessness/housing* as an important issue facing Australia currently, with this being nominated as the second top issue of importance amongst female clients in particular.

“Overcrowding is a big issue for young people, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. More social and affordable housing stock is required.”

Program Manager, Victoria

Policy recommendations

Housing and homelessness

While homelessness is a serious risk for many young people, these results paint an even starker picture for MA clients who are often in more vulnerable situations. As set out in our recent youth homelessness report, we believe that youth homelessness can be halved by 2020.

Priority should be given to the following youth specific policy measures:

- Schools-based youth homelessness identification and intervention models in high risk communities as pioneered in the Geelong Project;
- Zero tolerance approach to young people leaving the out-of-home care system becoming homeless;
- Provision of crisis accommodation for children and young people escaping domestic and family violence;
- Extension of the Reconnect family reconciliation program for 5 years;
- Ensure access to youth specific services in rural and remote areas; and
- Facilitating foyer-like supportive models of youth accommodation.

Examples of Mission Australia's Youth Homelessness Services

The Ryde Project is a joint initiative between schools and local agencies including Mission Australia that assists young people who need support to better engage with school or who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. The Ryde Project is based on a proven early intervention model first developed in Geelong which recognises that the best outcomes for young people can be achieved if difficulties are identified, and support provided, as soon as possible.

In Victoria, Mission Australia delivers the **Springboard program** which provides intensive youth focussed assistance to those aged 16 to 18 in residential out-of-home care, or up to 21 years who have left residential care. It supports these young people to gain secure long-term employment by re-engaging with appropriate education training and/or supported employment opportunities.

Reconnect is an example of a successful early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is a Commonwealth-funded program that works with young people and their families in flexible ways, including counselling, mediation and practical support. It has a focus on responding quickly to referrals. Reconnect results in significant positive outcomes for young people and their families, particularly in terms of housing stability and family reconciliation.⁴

⁴ Ryan, P. (2003) 'I'm looking at the future': Evaluation report of Reconnect. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services.

Inclusive and cohesive/Connected and participating

For young people feeling included in their families and their communities is an important part of growing up. When young people live in communities that are cohesive and inclusive research shows us that these young people have more optimistic futures and are less likely to engage in risk taking behaviours.⁵ Taking part in community based activities and being members of associations and clubs are also important ways to be part of a community and develop relationships and trust with other members of the community.

The development of values throughout adolescence is important as values determine young people's life courses in terms of their wellbeing and future social connections and employment. Mission Australia knows that the development of strong family and friends relationships throughout adolescent act as a protective factor for future risk taking behaviours. Again, for young people personal concerns can have an impact on their ability to achieve, set aspirations and plan for the future. Much work has been done on the concerns that adolescents have and it is considered typical for them to be concerned on issues such as school, stress, the economy and their future.⁶ For some though, when worries won't go away, get worse or interfere with a child's daily life, this could be a sign that a child is struggling with more serious issues such as depression or anxiety.⁷

As noted, young people need to be given the opportunity to participate in their community as valued members. Adolescence is an important period in which relationships with family, peers and others may undergo changes, but it is vital that strong networks are put in place that will support young people through this transitional period and into the future.

- For MA and non-MA clients the order of the top four concerns were the same, family relationships, friendships (other than family) , school and study satisfaction and physical and mental health. MA clients were less likely to report each of these as a concern compared to non-MA clients.
- Both MA and non-MA respondents had the same top three concerns (coping with stress, school and study problems and body image).
- As noted, the majority of both clients and non-MA clients had good relationships with their families. However, MA clients reported higher levels of concerns around family conflict.
- Non-MA and MA clients both reported that they participated in a range of activities over the course of the previous twelve months.
- Across the areas of arts, volunteering, leadership activities and religious activities more non-MA clients reported participating than non-MA clients. In the areas of environmental groups and political groups slightly more MA clients reported participating.

⁵ Editorial (2013) 'Cohesive, Trusting Communities Buoy At-Risk Youth Throughout Adolescence' Journal of Adolescent Health 53 pp. 1-2.

⁶ Huan V., See Y., Ang R. and Har C. (2008) 'The impact of adolescent concerns on their academic stress' Educational Review Vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 169–178.

⁷ Raising Children Network (2014) 'Teenage Issues: What Teens Worry About' cited at http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/teenage_issues_worries.html

- Positively, nearly one in ten of both MA clients and non-MA clients reported being able to invite their friends over to spend time in their home.

Policy recommendations

Enhancing cultural participation

While MA clients are getting good exposure to political and environmental groups, exposure to cultural activities including arts, volunteering, leadership and religious activities could be improved. This may require more direct connection through services where young people express interest and the overcoming of financial and transport barriers to participation. A broad range of activities that build social capital should be on offer to young people to help them feel connected to their communities and build self-esteem through achievement.

Place-based approaches

Young people's opportunities should not be limited by the area in which they live. To address this, local responses are needed in areas or places of socio-economic disadvantage. Place-based responses that engage and build the whole community are essential if long term disadvantage is to be addressed. Lowering overall inequality, investing in human capital and promoting a socio-economic mix within neighbourhoods will help to provide opportunities and promote mobility.

Addressing family conflict

Services that work with young people also need to have capacity to work with families or refer to appropriate services, particularly where issues of family conflict are evident. In some of our services, most of the young people have had experienced domestic and family violence in their homes and this needs to be addressed as a priority.

“Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds need to feel comfortable with their own cultural heritage as well as their new Australian identity. If they don't develop strong identities they may end up in destructive social relationships and situations of group violence.”

Program Manager, Victoria

“The hardest thing to see is how much young people really want to get away from their life but it is so entrenched. Kids who go home to parents who are addicted to methamphetamine or who have been in and out of jail since they were 10 with most of their family in prison. We need the resources to be able to engage with their families for any hope of sustained change.”

Program Manager, Western Australia

“Often the biggest risk factor for young people is poor family relationships, services need capacity to work with families, otherwise all the work through school and community may not work.”

Program Manager, Victoria

“It is estimated that 89-95% of young people in our juvenile justice programs such as MAC River have experienced domestic and family violence.”

Program Manager, Western NSW

Safe

For a young person to be able to participate in their community and build positive social connections, it is first and foremost important that they feel safe. This encompasses safety both at home and in the broader neighbourhood, in both physical and emotional dimensions. The *Youth Survey 2015* found that:

- Encouragingly, the vast majority of MA clients and non-MA clients reported feeling safe in their local environment. However, more than one in eight MA clients reported not feeling safe in their neighbourhood.
- When asked about their personal concerns in the past 12 months, around one fifth of MA clients were highly concerned about *bullying/emotional abuse*, and around one in seven were highly concerned about *personal safety*. These proportions were slightly higher than those found among non-MA clients. When asked about their biggest personal concern in an open-ended question, many MA clients further highlighted concerns about bullying and discrimination at school and online – issues that can have very detrimental effects on their mental health, social engagement and educational participation and attainment.

Policy recommendations

Safety

- Young people’s safety needs to be addressed in the private realm of the home, in public places; and/or as a consequence of bullying experienced at school. As mentioned above place-based approaches to improve community safety and connection, school based programs to address bullying and discrimination and programs that address the impacts of domestic and family violence on young people are all required for young people to have a sense of safety.

“In neighbourhoods with high drug use, safety is a concern for all age groups including young people. Police need to build trust with the community so that crime is reported and addressed.”

Program Manager, Victoria

Supported and resourced

All people need support and, commonly, this comes from their family, friends, neighbours and communities. Assistance needed may be intensive and short-term or continuous. The occasions where support is needed often coincide with a period of transition or change such as moving through childhood into adolescence and adulthood, when responsibilities change, financial circumstances alter and previous support networks may no longer be in place.

There are occasions when support from family, friends, neighbours and communities cannot be realised; as for some young people, their needs are complex or they may live away from their families and, long-term, require a greater degree of support. Several circumstances lead people to seek assistance from outside of their immediate support networks, including a breakdown in family relationships, social stigma, isolation or complex needs that require specialist support services. Such support needs to provide assistance towards the progressive realisation of goals and the achievement of milestones, whilst empowering and building resilience in people.

- When asked how well they thought their families got along more non-MA clients reported either excellent or very good relationships with their family. Likewise, slightly more clients than non-MA clients reported fair or poor family relationships (around one quarter compared to around one fifth).
- For both MA and non-MA clients, the top three sources of support were friends, followed by parents and relatives/family friends, with more MA clients reporting turning to relatives/family friends than non-MA clients.
- MA clients were also more likely than non-MA clients to seek help from school counsellors, community agencies (unsurprisingly) and telephone hotlines. Conversely, non-MA clients were more likely to turn to the internet than MA clients.
- Key issues that young people identified as personal concerns (and thus, where support is likely needed) include coping with stress, school or study problems and body image. These were the same top three issues for both MA clients and non-MA clients, with over one quarter of MA clients highly concerned about all of the above.
- Compared to non-MA clients, MA clients revealed higher levels of personal concern about bullying/emotional abuse, drugs, alcohol and suicide.

Policy recommendations

Access to support services

- It is important that young people are aware of the sources of help that are available to them and their friends at school and in the community.
- It is important to equip young people themselves as well as their friends, relatives and parents with the skills needed to effectively respond to concerns.
- Wrap around case management support remains important for young people with complex needs and lacking family support. Caseworkers can link young people to other appropriate services and address their needs in a holistic way.

Whilst the above discussion has summarised the key findings from the Youth Survey in terms of the similarities and differences observed in responses from MA clients and non-MA clients, these outcomes and issues should not be viewed in isolation but rather need to be approached holistically. Young people, particularly those lacking support from family, friends, schools or others close to them, are often facing a range of complex issues that requires a person-centred response and coordinated wrap-around service provision that can address the full variety of challenges faced, for instance, mental health, employment, housing or alcohol and drug issues.

Detailed results

Profile of respondents

In total, 1,062 young people from MA services aged 15-19 years responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2015*. These respondents came from 34 Mission Australia services nationally. Table 1 indicates the number and percentages from each state/territory. The composition of this sample reflects only the clients of MA services who participated in the *Youth Survey 2015* and is not a representative sample of our client group, disadvantaged young Australians or the Australian population more generally.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents by state/territory

	Number of respondents (MA)	% of respondents (MA)
NSW/ACT	252	23.7
NT	135	12.7
QLD	178	16.8
SA	216	20.3
TAS	25	2.4
VIC	111	10.5
WA	145	13.7

Sample



Gender breakdown

Around half (52.5%) of the respondents from MA services were female and 47.5% were male.

Identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

A total of 274 (26.9%) respondents from MA services identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Of this total, 244 (23.9%) respondents identified as Aboriginal, while 14 (1.4%) identified as Torres Strait Islander (the remaining 1.6% identified as both). Similar proportions of female and male respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (25.3% compared with 28.7%).

Language background other than English

127 (12.4%) respondents from MA services stated that they were born overseas and 164 (16.1%) young people reported speaking a language other than English at home. Among MA service clients who spoke a language other than English at home, 12.6% spoke Indigenous languages.

Disability

A total of 88 respondents from MA services indicated that they had a disability, with slightly more males (9.9%) than females (7.6%) reporting a disability.

Detailed results

Education

As indicated in Table 2, over three quarters (78.0%) of MA clients were studying full-time. Female clients were more likely to respond that they were studying full-time than male clients (81.2% compared with 74.3%), while a higher proportion of males (15.7%) than females (8.9%) reported not studying at all.

Table 2: Participation in education

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Studying full-time	94.9	78.0	81.2	74.3
Studying part-time	2.1	9.9	9.9	10.0
Not studying	3.0	12.1	8.9	15.7

Fewer MA clients were studying full time than non-MA clients (78.0% compared with 94.9%), while larger proportions of MA clients stated that they were not studying at all (12.1% compared with 3.0%).

Respondents who reported that they were currently studying were asked how satisfied they were with their studies. Responses to this question were rated on a 5 point scale, ranging from *very satisfied* to *very dissatisfied*. The majority of MA clients reported that they were either *very satisfied* (17.7%) or *satisfied* (51.5%) with their studies. Less than one in ten were *very dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied* (1.4% and 6.1% respectively). As shown in Table 3, these levels of satisfaction were similar to those seen among non-MA clients.

Male clients were slightly less likely than female clients to report feeling *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (16.7% and 49.0% of males compared with 18.7% and 53.5% of females respectively).

Table 3: Satisfaction with studies

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Very satisfied	16.0	17.7	18.7	16.7

Satisfied	57.0	51.5	53.5	49.0
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21.4	23.2	21.7	24.9
Dissatisfied	4.3	6.1	4.9	7.7
Very dissatisfied	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.7

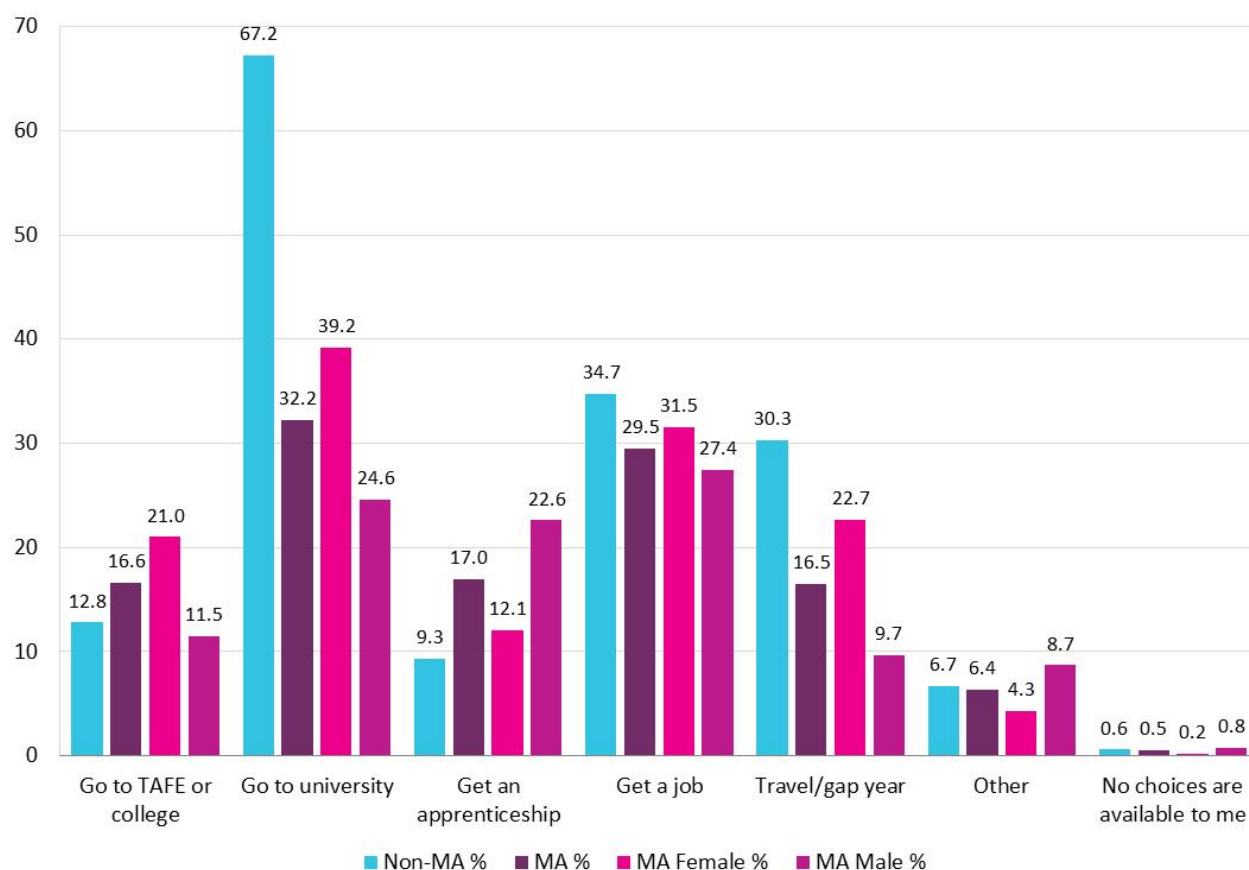
I need to focus and concentrate on studying and forget about the difficult issues I have (MA client – M, 17, NT)

Of the MA clients who were still at school, 89.4% stated that they intended to complete Year 12 (compared with 96.9% of non-MA clients). Male clients were more than twice as likely as female clients to indicate that they did not intend to complete Year 12 (13.2% compared with 6.2% respectively).

Respondents who were still at school were also asked what they were planning to do after leaving school. Figure 1 shows that around one third of MA clients planned to go to university after school (32.2%) and a similar proportion planned to get a job (29.5%). Many clients also indicated plans to get an apprenticeship (17.0%), go to TAFE or college after school (16.6%), or to travel or go on a gap year (16.5%). A small minority of clients (0.5%) indicated that they felt no choices were available to them after they left school.

Female clients were more likely than male respondents to indicate plans to go to university (39.2% compared with 24.6% of males) or to TAFE or college (21.0% compared with 11.5% of males) after school. They were also more likely to be planning to travel or go on a gap year (22.7% compared with 9.7% of male clients) and were slightly more likely than male clients to report plans to get a job after school (31.5% compared with 27.4% respectively). Conversely, male clients were more likely to be planning to get an apprenticeship after school (22.6% compared with 12.1% of female clients).

Figure 1: Plans after leaving school



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

MA clients were much less likely to be planning to attend university after school than non-MA clients (32.2% compared to 67.2%), but were more likely to be planning to get an apprenticeship (17.0% compared with 9.3%) or to attend TAFE or college (16.6% compared with 12.8%).

Employment

Respondents to the *Youth Survey 2015* were asked whether they currently have paid work. Those who answered that they had paid employment were asked to specify how many hours they worked per week, on average. Table 4 shows participation in paid employment. In line with the data from non-MA clients, only a small minority (1.3%) of MA clients were employed full-time. However, given the percentage of respondents who were in full-time education this is not surprising. Around three in ten (29.4%) MA clients reported part-time employment. Almost seven in ten MA clients reported that they were not in paid employment, with 50.5% looking for work and 18.8% not looking for work.

The proportion of MA clients not in paid employment and looking for work was much higher than for non-MA clients (50.5% compared to 35.1%).

Table 4: Participation in paid employment

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Employment full-time	0.5	1.3	2.1	0.4
Employment part-time	39.3	29.4	34.6	23.6
Not in paid employment, looking for work	35.1	50.5	47.1	54.5
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	25.1	18.8	16.2	21.5

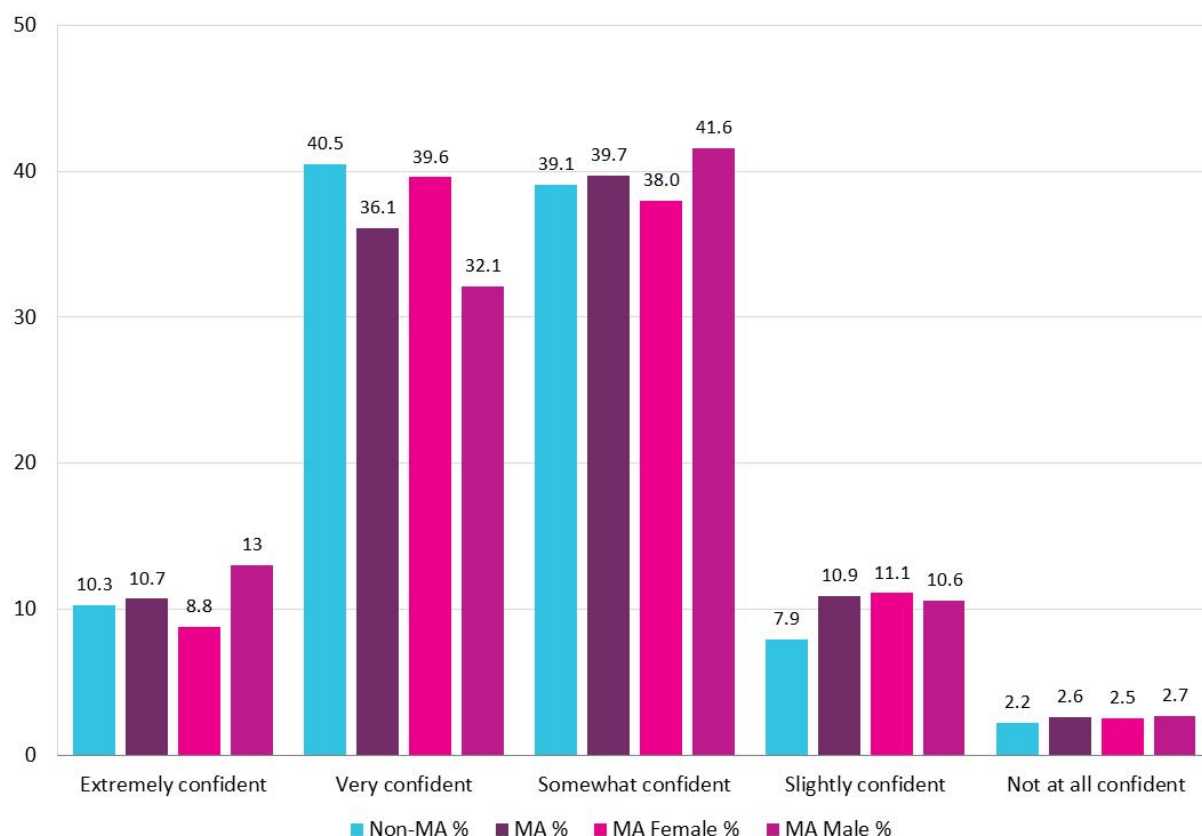
Note: Part-time is considered to be less than 35 hours per week and full-time is 35 hours or more.

I need to try and complete year twelve this year and find a job, maybe do some volunteer work, fix family issues, work for money to be able to pay bills and food, find a place of my own and look after it (MA client – F, 17, SA)

How confident are young people in achieving their study/work goals?

In 2015, respondents were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. Responses for this question were rated on a five point scale from *extremely confident* to *not at all confident*. Just under half of all MA clients surveyed indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve study/work goals, with 10.7% indicating that they were *extremely confident* and 36.1% indicating that they were *very confident*. However, around one in seven clients were less confident in their ability to achieve their goals, with 10.9% being *slightly confident* and 2.6% *not at all confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. A slightly higher proportion of male clients than female clients reported feeling *extremely confident* they would achieve their goals (13.0% compared with 8.8%), however, overall the proportions feeling either confident or less confident were similar across both genders.

Figure 2: Confidence in achieving study/work goals



Non-MA clients were slightly more likely than MA clients to indicate high levels of confidence that they would achieve their goals (50.8% *extremely* or *very confident* compared with 46.8% of non-MA clients).

Barriers to the achievement of young people's study/work goals after school

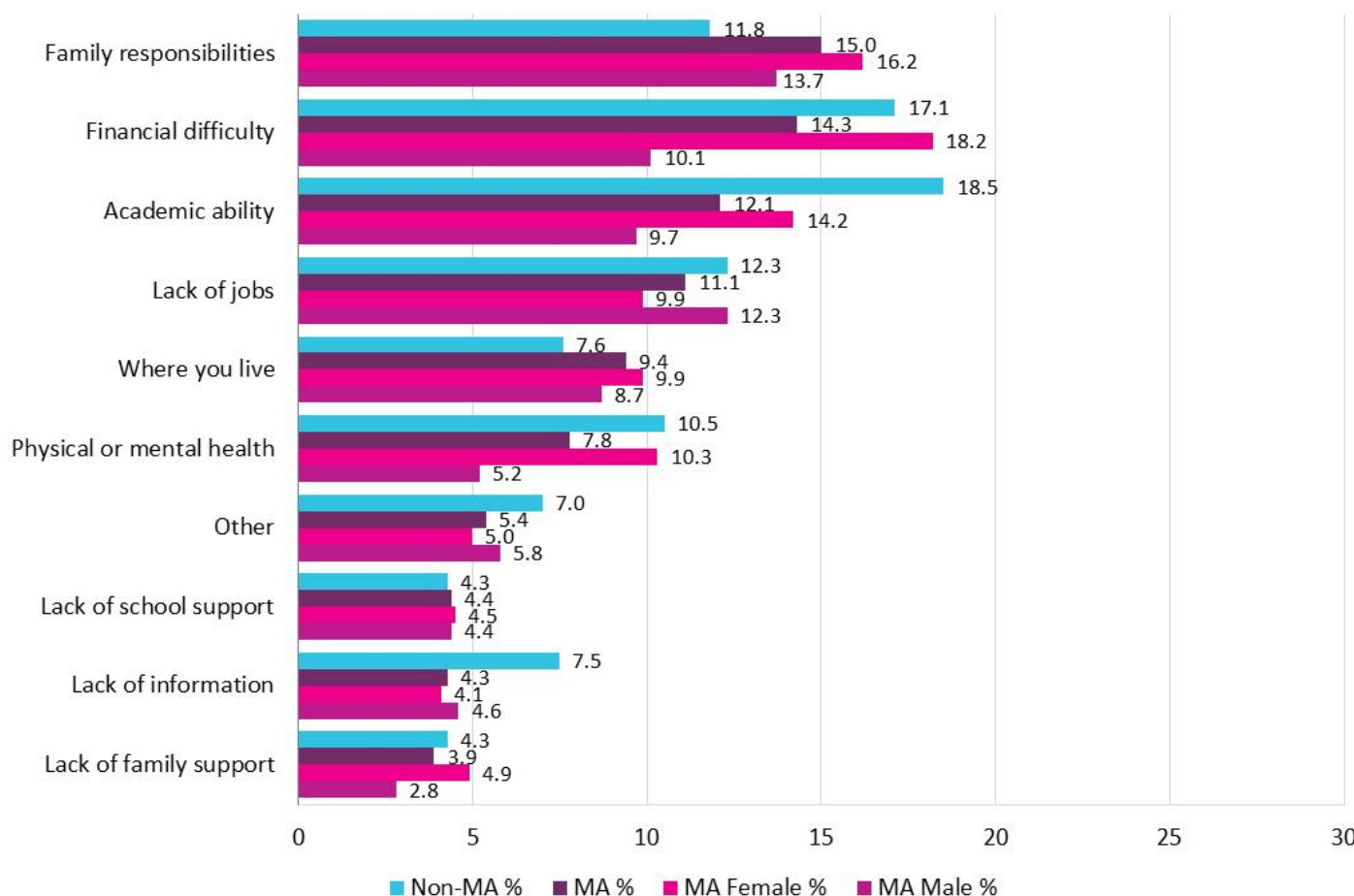
Young people in 2015 were asked whether they felt there were any barriers which may impact on the achievement of their study/work goals after school. Almost six in ten MA clients (57.6%) indicated that they felt there would be barriers to the achievement of their study/work goals, with a slightly greater proportion of female clients (58.8%) than male clients (56.2%) reporting the presence of these barriers. Comparatively, just over half of non-MA clients indicated that they felt there would be barriers to achieving their goals (51.7%).

Respondents who indicated the presence of barriers were asked to indicate from a number of items which barriers they saw as preventing them from achieving their goals after school. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated each item as a barrier. The three top barriers MA clients saw impacting the achievement of their study/work goals after school were *family responsibilities*, *financial difficulty* and *academic ability*. Comparatively, non-MA clients identified *academic ability*, *financial difficulty* and *lack of jobs* as the top three barriers.

MA clients were more likely than non-MA clients to cite *family responsibilities* (15.0% compared with 11.8%) and *where you live* (9.4% compared with 7.6%) as barriers to them achieving their post-school goals. Non-MA clients were more likely than MA clients, however, to cite *academic ability* (18.5% compared with 12.1%) and *lack of information*

(7.5% compared with 4.3%) as barriers. Interestingly, non-MA clients were also more likely than MA clients to indicate seeing *financial difficulty* (17.1% compared with 14.3%) and *physical or mental health* (10.5% compared with 7.8%) as barriers to the achievement of their study/work goals after school.

Figure 3: Barriers to the achievement of study/work goals after school



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among MA clients.

As shown in Figure 3, the top three barriers identified by female clients were *financial difficulty*, *family responsibilities* and *academic ability*, while the top three barriers for male clients were *family responsibilities*, *lack of jobs* and *financial difficulty*. Female clients were more likely than male clients to indicate they saw most of the listed items as barriers to their study/work goals after school, particularly *financial difficulty* (18.2% compared with 10.1%), *academic ability* (14.2% compared with 9.7%) and *physical or mental health* (10.3% compared with 5.2%). However, male clients were more likely than female clients to see *lack of jobs* (12.3% compared with 9.9%) as a barrier.

What do young people value?

In 2015 young people were asked how much they valued *family relationships*, *financial security*, *friendships*, *getting a job*, *physical and mental health* and *school or study satisfaction*. Responses for these items were rated on a 5 point scale, ranging from *extremely important* to *not at all important*. In Table 5 the items were ranked in order of importance by summing together the number of respondents who selected either *extremely*

important or very important for each item. The two most highly valued items for MA clients were *family relationships* and *friendships*. The next most valued item for MA clients was *school or study satisfaction*, followed by *physical and mental health*.

- *Family relationships* were highly valued by 70.1% of MA clients (*extremely important*: 39.2%; *very important*: 30.9%). *Friendships* were also valued highly by 65.3% of MA clients (*extremely important*: 30.6%; *very important*: 34.7%).
- Around half of MA clients highly valued *school or study satisfaction* (*extremely important*: 28.1%; *very important*: 28.3%), *physical and mental health* (*extremely important*: 24.0%; *very important*: 28.0%) and *getting a job* (*extremely important*: 21.8%; *very important*: 26.3%).
- Just over one third of MA clients placed a high value on *financial security* (*extremely important*: 14.6%; *very important*: 22.3%).

Table 5: What young people value – MA

MA %	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Family relationships	39.2	30.9	16.5	7.9	5.4
Friendships (other than family)	30.6	34.7	20.0	7.5	7.3
School or study satisfaction	28.1	28.3	23.3	9.7	10.5
Physical and mental health	24.0	28.0	22.9	12.8	12.3
Getting a job	21.8	26.3	24.3	15.5	12.1
Financial security	14.6	22.3	26.4	18.3	18.3

Note: Items were ranked by summing the responses for *extremely important* and *very important* for each item. Items are listed in order of importance to MA clients.

The two most highly valued items for non-MA clients were *friendships* and *family relationships*. These were the same top two items for MA clients although the order of the items was reversed. As among MA clients, the third most valued item for non-MA clients was *school or study satisfaction*.

- *School or study satisfaction* was highly valued by 68.3% of non-MA clients (*extremely important*: 31.7%; *very important*: 36.6%) compared with 56.4% of MA clients (*extremely important*: 28.1%; *very important*: 28.3%).
- Conversely, *getting a job* was relatively more important to MA clients than non-MA clients, being highly valued by 48.1% of MA clients (*extremely important*: 21.8%; *very important*: 26.3%) compared with 37.5% of non-MA clients (*extremely important*: 15.1%; *very important*: 22.4%).

Table 6: What young people value – Non-MA

Non-MA %	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Family relationships	41.7	31.2	14.9	6.3	5.9
Friendships (other than family)	37.2	39.1	14.9	4.6	4.1
School or study satisfaction	31.7	36.6	20.9	6.5	4.3
Physical and mental health	29.9	33.0	20.8	9.1	7.1
Getting a job	15.1	22.4	27.1	18.8	16.6
Financial security	15.1	26.3	29.4	15.5	13.7

Note: Items were ranked by summing the responses for *extremely important* and *very important* for each item. Items are listed in order of importance to MA clients.

Students need to be reminded constantly that they have to find a job, and need to be assisted in finding a job more (MA client – M, 15, QLD)

What issues are of personal concern to young people?

Respondents were asked to rate how concerned they were about a list of issues, shown in Table 7. Responses were rated on a 5 point scale, ranging from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*. The items were ranked in order of concern by summing together the number of respondents who selected either *extremely concerned* or *very concerned* for each item. The top three issues of concern for MA clients were *coping with stress*, *school or study problems* and *body image*.

- *Coping with stress* was the top issue of concern, with 35.2% of MA clients indicating that they were either *extremely concerned* (15.6%) or *very concerned* (19.6%) about this issue.
- *School or study problems* was a major concern for 28.5% of MA clients (*extremely concerned*: 12.4%; *very concerned*: 16.1%).
- Around one quarter of MA clients were highly concerned about *body image* (*extremely concerned*: 11.6%; *very concerned*: 15.4%) and *depression* (*extremely concerned*: 11.0%; *very concerned*: 11.8%).
- Around one fifth of MA clients were either *extremely concerned* or *very concerned* about *bullying/emotional abuse* and *family conflict*.

Table 8: Issues of concern to young people – MA

MA %	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned
Coping with stress	15.6	19.6	21.9	16.8	26.1
School or study problems	12.4	16.1	23.5	20.4	27.5
Body image	11.6	15.4	20.5	20.7	31.7
Depression	11.0	11.8	14.5	16.4	46.3
Bullying/emotional abuse	9.1	11.6	15.7	19.0	44.6
Family conflict	8.1	11.9	17.1	20.7	42.1
Suicide	8.3	6.2	8.1	8.6	68.9
Drugs	7.7	6.3	8.8	10.4	66.7
Personal safety	6.9	6.6	15.4	18.9	52.2
Discrimination	5.2	7.6	12.5	17.1	57.6
Alcohol	4.4	4.1	11.1	14.6	65.8
Gambling	3.4	2.7	5.4	6.9	81.6

Note: Items were ranked by summing the responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item. Items are listed in order of concern to MA clients.

I often get very stressed about school and marks and things like that even though I get pretty good marks. I feel pressured sometimes and try too hard to get these marks (Non-clients – M, 15, QLD)

Both MA clients and non-MA clients ranked *coping with stress*, *school or study problems* and *body image* as their top three personal concerns. However, MA clients revealed higher levels of concern about *bullying/emotional abuse* (20.7% compared with 13.0% of non-MA clients), *drugs* (14.0% compared with 7.1%), *alcohol* (8.5% compared with 4.7%) and *suicide* (14.5% compared with 11.0%).

Table 9: Issues of concern to young people – Non-MA

Non-MA %	Extremely concerned	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Slightly concerned	Not at all concerned
Coping with stress	15.9	22.7	25.0	18.2	18.2
School or study problems	13.5	20.3	26.3	21.0	18.9
Body image	10.2	16.3	24.8	23.4	25.3
Depression	8.7	11.1	15.5	18.0	46.7
Bullying/emotional abuse	5.2	7.8	15.0	20.6	51.4
Family conflict	7.3	10.8	16.1	20.4	45.4
Suicide	5.9	5.1	7.5	10.1	71.4
Drugs	3.6	3.5	6.9	9.9	76.0
Personal safety	4.4	6.5	14.7	21.2	53.1
Discrimination	4.5	6.0	11.8	16.7	61.0
Alcohol	2.1	2.6	9.6	13.8	71.8
Gambling	1.8	1.3	3.8	5.7	87.3

Note: Items were ranked by summing the responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item. Items are listed in order of concern to MA clients.

When asked to specify their top issue of personal concern in the last year in an open-ended question, a number of other important concerns emerged including drugs and alcohol, family issues and conflict, housing and homelessness, financial stress, the pressures of school, self-worth/confidence and issues with mental health. Many MA clients also highlighted concerns about bullying and discrimination in their open ended responses.

Where do young people go for help with important issues?

Young people were asked to indicate from a number of sources where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. Figure 4 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would go to each source. The top three sources of help for MA clients were *friend/s*, *parent/s* and *relatives/family friends*.

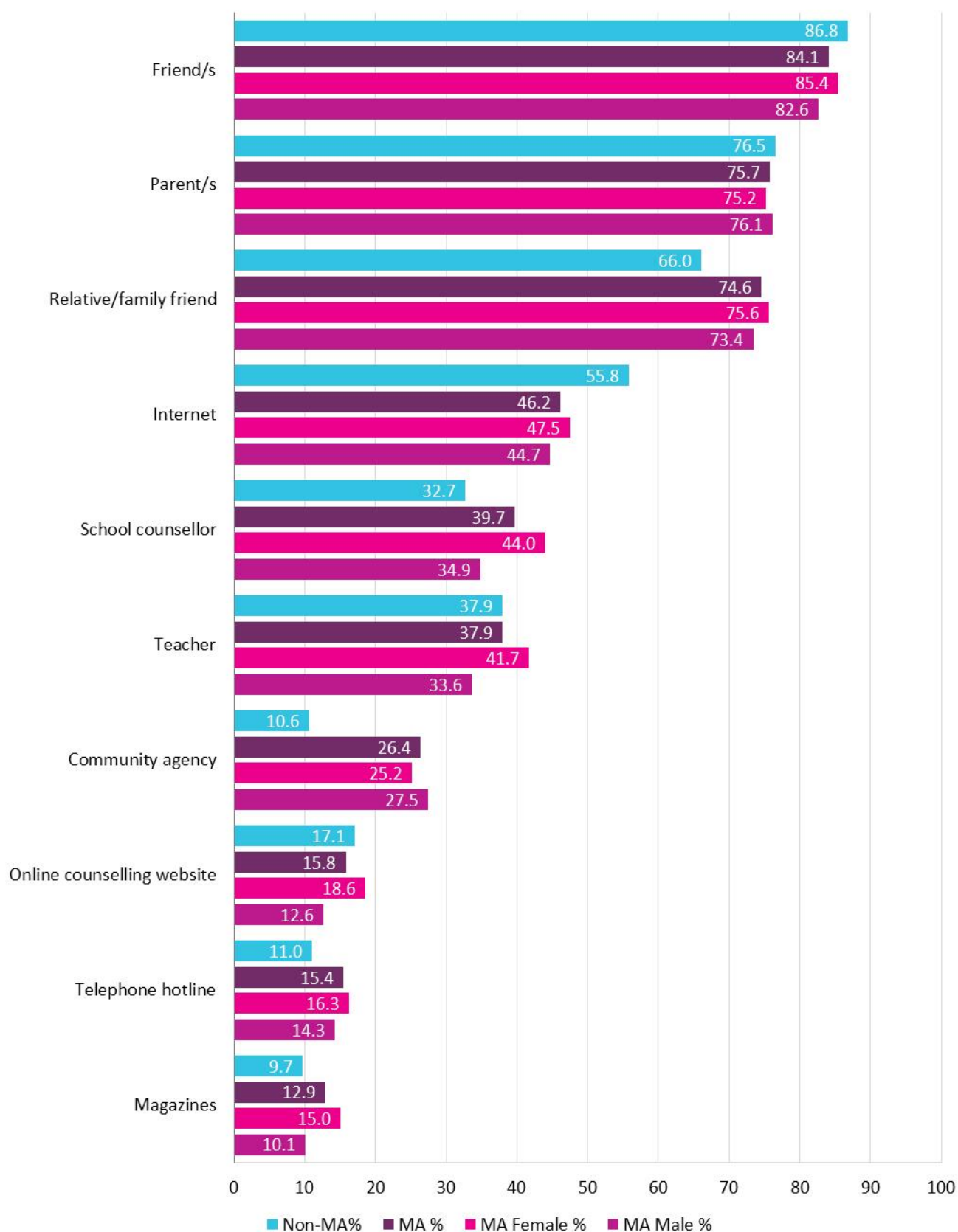
- *Friend/s*, *parent/s* and *relatives/family friends* were the three most commonly cited sources of help for MA clients (84.1%, 75.7% and 74.6% respectively).
- Just under half of all MA clients indicated that they would go to internet for help with important issues in their lives.
- Almost four in ten MA clients indicated that they would go to their *school counsellor* or *teacher* for help with important issues in their lives.

- Just over one quarter of MA clients indicated that they would go to a *community agency* for help with important issues in their lives.

The top three sources of help were the same for MA clients and non-MA clients. MA clients were less likely than non-MA clients to indicate using the *internet* as a source of help and more likely to indicate that they would go to *community agencies*.

I need to believe in myself and have guidance from people with positive attitudes
(MA client – F, 15, QLD)

Figure 4: Where young people go for help with important issues



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among MA clients.

How well do young people feel their families get along?

Respondents were asked how well they thought their family got along. Responses to this question were rated on a 5 point scale, ranging from *excellent* to *poor*. Table 10 shows that, in line with the data for non-MA clients, the majority of MA clients rated their family's ability to get along very positively, with 25.4% indicating that their family's ability to get along was *excellent* and 25.5% that it was *very good*. However, around one quarter of MA clients did not report such a positive experience of family relationships, rating their family's ability to get along as either *fair* (15.3%) or *poor* (10.2%). Male and female clients gave similar ratings of their family's ability to get along, though females were slightly less likely to indicate that their family's ability to get along was *excellent* (23.9% compared with 27.0% of males).

Table 10: Family's ability to get along

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Excellent	27.6	25.4	23.9	27.0
Very good	31.6	25.5	25.8	25.0
Good	21.7	23.6	24.3	23.0
Fair	12.3	15.3	15.5	15.1
Poor	6.8	10.2	10.6	9.9

What issues do young people think are the most important in Australia today?

Young people were asked to write down the three issues they considered were most important in Australia today. The information provided by respondents was categorised and is listed in order of frequency in Table 11. In 2015, the top three issues identified by MA clients were *alcohol and drugs*, *politics* and *equity and discrimination*.

- Over one third of MA clients identified *alcohol and drugs* as an important issue in Australia today.
- Around one in five MA clients identified *politics* (21.3%) and *equity and discrimination* (19.6%) as important issues in Australia today.
- Other important issues identified by just under one in five MA clients included *employment* (17.2%), *homelessness/housing* (16.1%) and *the economy and financial matters* (15.8%).
- A greater proportion of male than female MA clients identified *politics* (27.1% compared with 16.3%) and *equity and discrimination* (23.0% compared with 16.7%) as important national issues.
- Conversely, a greater proportion of female than male MA clients identified *mental health* (16.5% compared with 7.9%) as an important issue.

There should be extra support for young people in the youth justice system/education about crime, drugs & alcohol for young kids (MA client – M, 16, VIC)

Table 11: Most important issues in Australia today

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Alcohol and drugs	26.6	34.4	34.4	34.5
Politics	15.9	21.3	16.3	27.1
Equity and discrimination	25.3	19.6	16.7	23.0
Employment	12.5	17.2	16.5	17.8
Homelessness/housing	7.4	16.1	17.2	14.8
The economy and financial matters	19.1	15.8	15.6	16.2
Crime, safety and violence	9.9	13.2	13.9	12.3
Mental health	15.0	12.5	16.5	7.9
International relations	13.5	10.8	9.2	12.6
Bullying	9.2	10.6	10.6	10.7

Note: Respondents provided three open-ended responses, which were coded and aggregated. This table shows only the top 10 issues for MA clients. It may not include the top 10 issues for non-MA clients.

MA clients were notably more likely than non-MA clients to nominate *alcohol and drugs* (34.4% compared with 26.6%), *politics* (21.3% compared with 15.9%), *employment* (17.2% compared with 12.5%) and *homelessness/housing* (16.1% compared with 7.4%) as important national issues. Conversely, non-MA clients were more likely than MA clients to identify *equity and discrimination* (25.3% compared with 19.6%) as an important issue.

What activities are young people involved in?

Young people were asked to identify the activities that they have been involved in over the past year from the list shown in Table 12. The top two activities for MA clients, as they were for non-MA clients, were *sports (as a participant)* and *sports (as a spectator)*. The third most common activity for MA clients in 2014 was *arts/cultural/music activities*, while for non-MA clients it was *volunteer work*.

A lower proportion of MA clients participated in most of the nominated activities than non-MA clients. However, MA clients were slightly more likely than non-MA clients to have participated in *youth groups and clubs* (37.7% compared with 32.8%), *environmental groups*

or activities (23.8% compared with 21.9%) and *political groups or organisations* (8.5% compared with 7.7%).

Table 12: Activities young people were involved in over the past year

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Sport (as a participant)	74.8	65.2	59.9	71.0
Sport (as a spectator)	68.1	55.8	49.0	63.5
Arts/cultural/music activities	51.0	45.5	49.6	40.4
Volunteer work	51.7	44.1	48.0	39.5
Youth groups and clubs	32.8	37.7	34.0	42.1
Student leadership activities	40.3	34.6	36.2	32.6
Religious groups or activities	31.2	24.6	22.5	26.9
Environmental groups or activities	21.9	23.8	24.5	23.0
Political groups or organisations	7.7	8.5	7.8	9.3

Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among MA clients.

How happy are young people?

Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being *very sad*, 5 *not happy or sad* and 10 *very happy*. In line with recommendations from the authors of this question⁸, responses were standardised on a scale of 0 – 100, with 100 being the happiest. As Table 13 shows, around six in ten MA clients (60.2%) responded in the range 70 to 100, indicating that they felt positive overall about their lives. Responses were similar for both male and female clients, although male clients were slightly more likely than female clients to indicate that they felt *very happy* with their lives as a whole (16.3% compared with 13.5%). Responses were also similar between MA clients and non-MA clients.

⁸ Cummins, R.A. & Lau, A.L.D. 2005 *Personal Wellbeing Index – School Children (PWI-SC) (English)*, Manual, 3rd Edition.

Table 13: How happy young people are

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
100	11.9	14.8	13.5	16.3
90	13.9	13.4	13.1	13.6
80	22.0	16.9	16.1	17.9
70	17.2	15.1	15.5	14.6
60	9.5	8.3	8.1	8.5
50	11.4	16.0	16.1	15.9
40	5.4	6.0	6.5	5.5
30	3.5	3.2	3.7	2.6
20	2.4	3.5	3.7	3.3
10	1.2	0.8	0.9	0.6
0	1.6	2.0	2.8	1.2

How do young people feel about the future?

Young people were asked how positive they felt about the future, with responses rated on a 5 point scale from *very positive* to *very negative*.

- Almost six in ten MA clients felt either *positive* (43.7%) or *very positive* (15.2%) about the future.
- Around three in ten MA clients (31.3%) felt *neither positive nor negative* about the future.
- 7.6% of MA clients felt *negative* about the future and 2.1% felt *very negative*.
- Male and female clients were similar in terms of their feelings about the future.
- Responses were also very similar among MA clients and non-MA clients.

Table 14: Feelings about the future

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Very positive	15.0	15.2	15.3	15.1
Positive	47.0	43.7	43.7	43.8
Neither positive nor negative	28.0	31.3	32.6	29.7
Negative	7.4	7.6	6.6	8.8
Very negative	2.5	2.1	1.7	2.6

Do young people feel safe in their neighbourhood?

The *Youth Survey 2015* asked young people whether they feel safe in their neighbourhood. Importantly, the majority of both MA clients (86.8%) and non-MA clients (91.0%) indicated feeling safe in their local environment. Both male and female clients were equally likely to say they felt safe. While encouraging, these results also reveal that more than one in eight MA clients do not feel safe in their neighbourhood.

Especially as a young female, I am very concerned of safety in the streets. I am highly aware of the dangers in city areas and a lot of the time I do not feel completely safe when in public
(Non-client – M, 17, VIC)

Are young people comfortable inviting peers to visit their home?

The *Youth Survey 2015* asked young people if they were comfortable inviting their friends over to spend time in their home, so as to better understand their thoughts on their home environment, their neighbourhood and also as a measure of their participation in social life. In a positive finding, the vast majority of MA clients (88.2%) indicated feeling comfortable inviting friends over. Male clients were slightly more likely than female clients to say they were comfortable doing so (89.7% compared with 86.8%).

Very similar results were found among non-MA clients, with 89.1% indicating that they were comfortable inviting friends over to spend time in their home.

Frequency of moving house

As shown in Table 15, approximately half of all MA clients who responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2015* (50.5%) reported having moved house in the last three years, with around one third (32.8%) having moved more than once. Male clients were slightly more likely than female clients to have moved house (52.7% compared with 48.4%) but overall, the number of reported moves was similar for both male and female clients.

Comparatively, around one third of non-MA clients (34.7%) indicated having moved house in the previous three years, with fewer than one in five (17.0%) having moved more than once.

Table 15: Times moved in the last three years

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
0	65.3	49.6	51.6	47.4
1	17.7	17.7	16.0	19.6
2	8.3	12.6	12.1	13.1
3	4.7	8.8	9.5	8.0
4	1.8	3.5	3.9	2.9
5 or more	2.2	7.9	6.9	9.1

When asked the reason for their last move, common reasons from MA clients included:

- Family breakdown or conflict;
- Issues with the landlord, including being forced to move; and
- Having moved out of home.

Time away from home

In 2015 young people were asked if, in the past three years, they had spent time away from home because they felt they couldn't go back (a proxy indicator for couch surfing). Almost one quarter of MA clients (24.4%) reported having spent time away from home, with female clients being slightly more likely to report having done so than male clients (27.1% compared with 21.5%).

Comparatively, around one in eight non-MA clients (12.8%) indicated having spent time away from home due to feeling unable to return.

Respondents who reported that they had spent time away from home were asked how frequently they had done so over the past three years. As shown in Table 16, the majority of MA clients who had spent time away from home because they felt they couldn't go back had done so on more than one occasion (90.3%). Female clients were more likely than male clients to have stayed away from home more than once (93.4% compared with 85.5%).

Almost half (45.8%) of all MA clients who had spent time away from home reported having done so at least 6 times over the past three years, with around one third (33.8%) having done so on more than 10 occasions.

Comparatively, 83.4% of non-MA clients who had spent time away from home reported having done so more than once in the past three years, with almost four in ten (38.5%) having done so at least 6 times and around one quarter (25.7%) having done so on more than 10 occasions.

MA clients were more likely than non-MA clients to be unsure of the number of times they had spent away from home (15.0% compared with 8.6%).

Table 16: Frequency of spending time away from home during the past three years (among young people reporting spending time away from home)

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
Once	16.5	9.8	6.5	14.6
2-5 times	36.3	29.5	33.3	24.0
6-10 times	12.8	12.0	10.1	14.6
More than 10 times	25.7	33.8	35.5	31.3
Not sure	8.6	15.0	14.5	15.6

Young people who reported that they had spent time away from home in the previous three years were also asked about the length of time spent away from home on each occasion. As can be seen in Table 17, around half (49.6%) of MA clients reported typically spending at least one week away from home, with around one in seven reporting spending more than six months away from home on each occasion. Male clients were slightly more likely than female clients to report spending lengthy periods of time away from home, with 36.4% of male clients indicating that they typically spent at least one month away, and 15.6% reporting staying away for more than six months (compared to 26.5% and 12.9% respectively of female clients).

Table 17: Typical length of time spent away from home on each occasion (among young people reporting spending time away from home)

	Non-MA %	MA %	MA Female %	MA Male %
One day or less	28.2	13.2	11.4	15.6
One day to one week	47.1	37.3	40.9	32.3
One week to one month	13.7	18.9	21.2	15.6
One month to six months	3.8	16.7	13.6	20.8
More than six months	7.2	14.0	12.9	15.6

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people regain their
independence - by
standing together with
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