

TESTING THE USE OF CREATIVE EVALUATION STRATEGIES IN THE YPAVE PROGRAM



Overview

The YPAVE program (Young Parenting and Very Excited) aims to provide a TAFE course for young girls aged 14-25 who are pregnant or parenting. The program runs weekly during school semesters and offers three different sessions to address the needs of girls at different stages in their journey through adolescence, pregnancy and parenthood:

- Bellies and Newborns (0-5 months)
- Mums and Bubs (6 months – 18 months) – Run at Cockburn Youth Centre & Waikiki Family and Community Centre
- Positive Parents (toddlers plus) Young Parents Rock Rocky (funded by Education Department – Pave The Way)

The young mums transition between the groups as their children get older. Each group has a TAFE Lecturer, who designs the semester long programs to meet course outcomes, and a Transition Support Officer, who helps participants and partners transit into education, training and employment.



Target Group

Young girls aged 14-25 who are pregnant or parenting and living between Fremantle and Rockingham, Western Australia and surrounding suburbs.



Evaluation

Key performance indicators (KPI's) have been designed with Department of Education funding. These are:

- Number of participants.
- Number who enrol in further education/training or gain employment.
- A positive self assessment and anecdotal evidence of improved self confidence, health and accessing of youth/health services.
- Retention rate.

Outcomes	Measured by	KPI
1. Participant will increase his/her knowledge of child development	Pre/post course observation	Participant contributes to discussion about relevant topics, asks questions, demonstrates understanding
2. Participant applies knowledge of child development	Pre/post course observation.	Application of knowledge demonstrated in interaction with his/her child
3. Re-engagement of participant in formal education or employment	Pre/post course observation.	The participant enrolls in another course or gains employment.

Outcomes	Measured by	KPI
4. Increased understanding of the importance of health and nutrition	Pre course/post course observation	Participants can pack a nutritious school lunch at the end of the course
5. Increased confidence in their ability to manage responsibilities in daily life and education.	Pre course/post course information from the student. Pre course/post course observation	The participant meets Centrelink requirements for participation. Participant joins in group activities and initiates conversation

Evaluation is particularly challenging for the YPAVE program. There are no crèche facilities, some of the girls have low literacy levels having finished school early and there is a ratio of approx. 1 staff: 5 mothers (plus children), therefore limited capacity to provide support to girls for evaluation activities e.g. whilst completing questionnaires.

YPAVE participants' experience of evaluation was limited to questionnaires provided by TAFE containing some questions that had no perceived relevance to the YPAVE participants but were perhaps more relevant for TAFE students on campus. Questions were often answered incorrectly rather than left blank, thus potentially skewing the data.

Methods

The My-Peer project team collaborated with the program co-coordinator and two peer research assistants recruited from the longest established YPAVE group to identify evaluation questions that needed to be answered and to design, develop and trial a range of creative evaluation strategies which would complement existing evaluation processes.

Four evaluation questions were identified with a focus on collecting feedback from participants:

- 1) How useful and acceptable are creative evaluation strategies in the YPAVE environment?
- 2) What impact does the YPAVE program have on participants?
- 3) Are program objectives being met?
- 4) What features of the program contribute to any impacts seen?

Four evaluation strategies were chosen due to their perceived efficiency in answering the identified questions and compatibility with group dynamics. The selected strategies were:

- 1) Scenario discussions
- 2) My support map
- 3) Digital storytelling
- 4) Graffiti artwork.

The table below shows how the evaluation strategies map on to the evaluation questions.

Evaluation questions	Scenario discussion	My support map	Digital story telling	Graffiti artwork
How useful and acceptable are creative evaluation strategies in the YPAVE environment?	Y	Y	Y	Y
What impacts does the YPAVE program have on participants?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Are program objectives being met?	Y	Y	Y	Y
What features of the program contribute to any impacts seen?			Y	Y

Each evaluation strategy is described in more detail below.

1. Scenario discussions

The scenario discussions activity aimed to test young parents' awareness of support services. Ten scenarios were generated with the help of the peer research assistants together with a comprehensive list of support organizations that may be useful. To ensure relevance, scenarios were developed by the peer research assistants based on their own experiences and experiences of others. The topic areas were relationships, financial, health – child and mother, babysitting, domestic abuse/violence, drug and alcohol issues and isolation.

For example:

'If you had to take one of your children to hospital, who would you ask to mind your other children?'

'Your old friends are busy ever since you had your baby and you don't fit into the local play group. It's a day when there is no YPAVE. Who can you go to for support?'

'What would you do if your child would not stop crying?'

Each scenario was read by one of the peer-research assistants and then answered by the group participants. Their responses were noted on the white board so that at the end of the session a list of services had been compiled by the group.

To capture any gaps in participants' knowledge of relevant support organizations, the program coordinator can compare the group's list of support organizations generated through the scenario discussions to a pre-prepared comprehensive list of support organizations which had been developed previously in conjunction with the peer research assistants.

2. My support map

The 'My support map' activity is a creative strategy that captures changes and/or growth in participant's support networks. The peer research assistants helped to develop this activity and were instructed on how to facilitate the activity.

Levels of support available to the girls at the time of joining YPAVE and since joining YPAVE were compared using support maps filled out by each participant. The support maps consisted of two concentric circles. Sources of 'Immediate support' were written in the inner circle e.g. mother, partner. Other important sources of support that had been accessed were written in the outer circle e.g. Relationships Australia, friend of participant. Participants were asked to write down only those services they had accessed. Emphasis was also placed on quality of services rather than quantity i.e. it was ok to have very few services on your support map.

In addition, participants were asked *'Did you feel you had adequate support at the time of joining YPAVE?'* and *'Do you feel you have access to adequate support since joining YPAVE?'* followed by open-ended questions *'Why?'* or *'Why not?'* The participants were also asked to comment on any changes in support since joining YPAVE.

The 'My Support Map' activity was implemented in two YPAVE groups. In the first group, it was combined with the scenario discussions to form a workshop on awareness of and accessing support services. In the second group, time restraints and low attendance meant that the scenario discussions were not included.

3. Digital storytelling

Digital storytelling was an innovative way of capturing the experiences of the YPAVE program using participants' own words, stories and images. This activity was facilitated by a researcher. The finished 'digital story' can be used as a promotional tool or added as a link on a face book page, email or website page. Confidentiality and consent is important and all participants are asked to sign a consent form stating their preferences for use of their voice, data, and/or images. The option to share their story but not use a recording of their voice was offered (Appendix 1).

A story circle exercise was used as a warm-up activity asking each participant '*You are here. Why?*' This was followed by a sentence completion activity: '*I come to YPAVE because...*', '*The thing I value most about YPAVE is...*' and '*The biggest impact of YPAVE for me has been...*'. Participants were able to record their answers on a handout (Appendix 2). The use of the sentence completion activity offered time for participants to reflect and aided in formalizing thoughts. This activity provided the stimulus for the group discussion.

The group discussions elicited feedback on what had been 'the most significant change' for participants since joining YPAVE. The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique is a way of formalizing the collection and analysis of anecdotal data. MSC can be used to clarify program aims and objectives and highlight the range of experiences one program can have on a group of participants. Notes were taken by the researcher. Participation was voluntary.

Short interviews (Appendix 3) were then conducted with all consenting participants and recorded using a digital recorder. Some participants used their sentence completion handout as a prompt sheet during the interview. Sound bytes were used to write the digital story script (Appendix 4). Note: a group discussion could also be used to generate script content however individual voice recordings are more difficult in a group and given the presence of young children this approach was not considered suitable for the YPAVE digital story. The interview and discussion data can also be used for reporting purposes.

The next step was to take photographs and gather additional images, video footage and music choices from the participants. The final step was to combine all the elements and edit. A storyboard template was used (Appendix 5). The final product was shown to the whole group and suggested changes to the digital story were incorporated.

4. Graffiti artwork

The aim of the graffiti artwork activity was to create a long-lasting low budget visual image which illustrated participants' experiences of the YPAVE program. The aim of the evaluation strategy was to capture development of artistic, team work and communication skills as well as changes in confidence levels. The intention was to use the artwork for marketing purposes and to increase the profile of the YPAVE program within the local community as well as engage new members to the group.

Five members of the YPAVE group committed to attending three half day sessions to design and create the artwork. Two local artists were commissioned to guide and assist the group to create a professional product. Child care was provided to enable the girls to engage fully in the activity. A 2m x 2m sturdy canvas sheet was used as the basis for the artwork. Seams were created at the top and bottom of the canvas to allow it to be hung using poles but rolled away when not in use or for transportation.

At the start of the first session, a group discussion was conducted with participants, facilitated by a researcher. Participants were asked:

What do you think of when you think of YPAVE?

Why do you come to YPAVE?

Why do you value YPAVE?

What is the best thing about YPAVE for you?

What has been the biggest change for you as a result of coming to YPAVE?

Is there a difference between what you got out of YPAVE at the start and what you get out of YPAVE now?

Why did you want to be involved in this artwork?

The outputs of a group discussion and ideas from the participants and artists were used to inspire the design. A colourful, 'street art' style was agreed on comprising a brick wall on which 'graffiti' images and words were displayed using paint and spray cans. The use of stencils helped create a more professional look. The total budget available for the art materials and artists was \$500. Venue and childcare costs were also incurred.



Outcomes

The benefits and limitations associated with each of the evaluation strategies that were tested are discussed below.

Scenario discussions

Benefits:

- Engages young people while providing way to increase awareness of support services, learn about services available or test knowledge of support services
- Realistic scenarios make the activity more relevant and meaningful to the group
- Gives participants an opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences of services and feel valued by their peers
- Demonstrated that participants learn from each other for example a peer was named as a source of support for financial advice.

Limitations:

- Difficult to engage the girls for more than 15 minutes with young children around unless the activity is conducted in smaller groups and those not involved at any time take on additional childcare duties.
- Childcare was provided by the program facilitator thus minimizing their input and feedback.
- Difficult to predict how many attend each session which can influence the capacity of the program coordinator to participate.

Comments:

This activity could provide more of a learning opportunity if it is conducted by the program coordinator or someone with knowledge of local human services present as they can provide suggestions for services where there is a knowledge gap. Recommendations would be to use fewer scenarios and include ones that contain more general problems. New scenarios could be added to this activity to reflect real experiences as group members change over time. In addition it was recommended to spend more time discussing organizations – services provided, location, whether youth friendly, personal experiences accessing organization and so on. This activity resulted in the production of a list of services grouped according to type of support. This list could be added to over time.

My support map

Benefits:

- Participants were happy to fill out the maps and found the activity relevant.
- Inclusive - participants may share feelings, revelations etc. with the group or alternatively can opt to complete their maps silently
- Positive realization for participants that they have more support now – the majority of the participants were a little taken aback when they reflected on their narrow support network at the time of joining the YPAVE group: *“I didn’t realise I had so little support”* and how much they relied and still rely on YPAVE: *“I don’t know what I would have done without YPAVE”*.
- Quick activity – 10 minutes maximum to carry out both maps in one session
- Emphasis on quality rather than quantity of support
- Demonstrated that participating in YPAVE increases the range of support accessed
- Captured the common belief that they felt more supported since joining YPAVE
- Can be preceded by the scenario activity to aid recall.

Limitations:

- Difficulties recollecting services accessed at early stage of pregnancy and motherhood and those sources of support accessed only a few times
- Challenging for some to separate primary and secondary support
- Deciding where to put friends presented a dilemma for some participants e.g. differentiating between friends from YPAVE ‘who understand’ and regular friends
- May put down all services they know of, rather than those they have used or would use
- Childcare was provided by the program facilitator thus minimizing their input and feedback.

Comments:

When this activity is carried out at the time of joining a program and then at a later point, each part takes only five minutes which means it can be easily integrated into the program schedule. As young mothers may join the program at any time, it may be easier to facilitate on an individual basis within the first few weeks of joining and then at a later designated point in time. This activity can be facilitated by peer facilitators or the program facilitator.

There is a potential risk associated with this activity. For new members to a group who may be feeling very isolated, this activity may be distressing and exposes their isolation further. It is important to build a good relationship with participants first rather than ask participants to do this activity on Day 1. Asking participants when they would like to complete the activity may be preferable since it gives them a degree of control in disclosing personal information. The timing of implementing this activity needs to be carefully considered. Offering counseling or extra support may be necessary.

Digital storytelling

Benefits:

- Cathartic to talk to someone – was not seen as emotionally challenging or negative
- Gives participants an opportunity to express their ‘voice’
- Young people gain knowledge of interviewing skills
- All young mothers participated in the data collection process
- The use of the sentence completion method e.g. *‘The thing I value most about YPAVE is...’* was very effective for those with low literacy or those who were reluctant to share in a group. Also acted as a memory aid when participant was being interviewed
- Pen and paper prompts increases comprehension as the wording was easy to understand
- Some things were written down that were not shared with group e.g. dealing with depression

- Creating the voiceovers was the most engaging part but needs practice if recording a script and needs silence which is difficult when young children are in the vicinity
- Provided opportunity for participants to reflect - they may not have thought about what YPAVE meant to them
- Promotional tool that can be used in various settings, including the internet, to engage other young mothers

Limitations:

- IT skills required - professionals can be employed to give a polished finish to the final product if budget allows or editing skills can be developed within the group. Could be timetabled so it is included as part of an IT class for example
- Time consuming – to reduce time spent editing audio, the interviewer needs to ensure interviewee does not stray from topic discussed. Alternatively, a script can be developed before recording. However, using the latter approach may miss spontaneous responses and lose the natural flow of speech
- Can be distressing for some girls as it may trigger feelings and memories of difficult times. However, all participants involved in the YPAVE digital story had a positive experience
- Use of the Most Significant Change Technique was challenging for some participants. The whole process of becoming a parent is huge and YPAVE is one piece of that journey. At first it was hard for some participants to isolate its exact impact and the degree of this impact

Comments:

The digital story can be reused for any number of years. As a new group of participants progress through YPAVE, they could be charged with producing a new, up-to-date digital story, perhaps every 2-3 years.

Consent regarding voice recordings and photographs needs to differentiate between consent to the use of their story and their voice and the option to share story but not use recording of voice. How the digital story may be used should be carefully considered since this is likely to influence whether participants give consent to use their voice or images and also what might be considered appropriate or suitable content. The likely uses may also dictate the required quality of the finished product and the budget required. A digital story that is produced solely for internal use may not need to be as polished a product as one intended for use as promotional material for example.

The style of the story should be considered in conjunction with intended audiences. A punchy story with lots of movement and activity will require lots of images (up to 100 images for a 5 minute story). Fewer images are needed for a slower more reflective style of product. The participants should be closely involved in determining the style and imagery for the digital story.

The involvement of an external person, skilled in digital media is recommended. It also allows the final product to reflect the voice of the group rather than be influenced by the program coordinator. However, some control of the process may be lost by involving an external expert. Providing a storyboard showing what content (including images and sound) will be included and involving any experts right from the start of the project is recommended.

Silence is not necessary when background noises are relevant and contribute to atmosphere – for example, a baby’s laughter. Child care is however necessary to reduce distractions and engage participants fully in the process. Having access to a “digital diary room” where young people can record answers to questions posed to them in a quiet room may also be an option. These sound bytes could be collected over time and then put together for a digital story.

The program coordinator should monitor the activity closely. Making provision for extra support or counseling is recommended in the event that any participants become distressed by the activity. The final product should be reviewed by the group as a whole. Any feedback needs to be addressed and final edits made to ensure group ownership of the final product.

Graffiti artwork

Benefits:

- Enjoyable and fun activity for all involved
- Provided a break from children
- Process was self affirming
- Option to write down images or words during the group discussion was more inclusive - appeals to shy or quiet people who do not feel comfortable participating in group discussions
- Art has therapeutic consequences and provided a good distraction and release from serious issues some of the participants were facing in their lives
- Satisfying and exciting for participants to see something develop from thoughts and images into an actual piece of artwork (Appendix 6)
- Promoted lots of casual conversation and interaction amongst the group
- Promotional material, something that will be used for a long time (see Appendix 2 for an image of the final product)
- Something the group can feel proud of
- Provides a visual reminder of why young people come to YPAVE
- Appeals to creative individuals who prefer to draw/use images rather than complete surveys
- Great way to raise profile within local community
- Partnership is beneficial for local artists too
- Important to recruit a core group of artists that can commit each week until the artwork is finished
- Availability of a mock-up image was very useful for everyone to know what they were working towards
- Availability of a good space to work in was also critical. The youth centre had a creative, modern, youth friendly feel about it and there was lots of space to spread out and do the artwork whilst the children were kept safe.
- Provided leadership and teamwork opportunities
- Provided opportunities to extend participants' thinking about who they are in relation to others

Limitations:

- Some young people did not have much confidence in their artistic capabilities
- Time consuming
- Costly – artists, materials, childcare
- Program participants attend when possible, thus it could not be guaranteed that the same participants would be present at a follow-on evaluation session.

Comments:

During the pre-discussion, some individuals can dominate/engage in the discussion more than others. Facilitator needs to be capable of ensuring participation of all group members, which can be facilitated through training.

Important to get input and feedback from the wider group to ensure the whole group feels ownership of the artwork. An alternative day and venue was organized for this creative strategy

based on area/space needed, number of individuals interested in participating and childcare needs. This activity has the potential to become stressful for participants without careful planning and support. While not an issue for the YPAVE group an activity debrief and/or access to the program coordinator or counseling afterwards should be made available for any participants who become distressed.

The YPAVE experience was extremely positive for all involved and the success of the activity was probably due to a number of factors:

- Experienced group – the participants knew each other very well and had good relationships with one another. This is essential. This activity would not work with a group that does not know each other since there are too many unknowns and people may not feel comfortable trying something new in front of people they do not know.
- Selecting the right artists – involving youth who were artists and who had some prior knowledge of the YPAVE group. The community artists created a comfortable environment, encouraging the girls to participate, trusting them to do a good job, listening to their ideas and directing them clearly in what needed to be done.
- Good planning – venue, childcare, catering
- Clear process and framework – time, budget, materials, content, roles
- Commitment – this activity will only work with 100% commitment from those involved. One member dropped away and this was acceptable. Forced participation would not have worked.
- Support – the group owned the process but was aware that the facilitator could step in to offer leadership and direction if decisions/progress could not be made.

Note: the data from the group discussion preceding the artwork could also be used for reporting purposes or to create poetry, digital stories or other artwork in future.

Overall comments

The use of creative evaluation strategies within the YPAVE setting worked very well. The strategies were positively received and provided the data sought after. The participants engaged well and this may be in part due to the relevance of the activities. Having a focused activity helped the group work together and produce something they felt proud of. There was a high degree of youth participation, teamwork, self affirmation, increased self esteem and self belief, and opportunities to assess or refine skills including communication skills, problem solving skills, coping skills, teamwork and help-seeking skills. The creative evaluation strategies captured the perceived impact of the YPAVE program and demonstrated that the program is meeting the needs of the participants, thus successfully meeting objectives.

Implementing creative evaluation strategies did however require some organisation e.g. additional venue and childcare for the graffiti artwork, and some specialist skills e.g. use of artists, IT specialists, researchers. It would be interesting to see to what extent these evaluation strategies continue to be used and how the digital story and artwork are used to promote the YPAVE program in the local community.



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Appendix 1 - Consent form

CONSENT FOR USE OF INFORMATION AND PERSONA

I hereby consent to the use of my name in the YPAVE digital story (tick one) Yes No

I hereby consent to the use of my story in the YPAVE digital story (tick one) Yes
No

I hereby consent to the use of audio of my voice in the YPAVE digital story (tick one) Yes
No

I hereby consent to the use of photographs, video or other images of me in the YPAVE digital story (tick one)
Yes
No

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Address _____

Project and location _____

Date of recording _____

Appendix 2 - Sentence completion handout

I come to YPAVE because...

Participating in YPAVE has been a positive experience.

Agree

Disagree

The biggest impact of YPAVE for me has been...

The thing I value most about YPAVE is....



Appendix 3 - Interview questions

Participant _____

Tell me how you first became involved with YPAVE?

What has been the biggest impact of YPAVE for you?

Why?

How do you see YPAVE impacting in your life in the future?



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Appendix 4 – Script template for digital story

Who is the audience for my story?

What is my dramatic question? E.g. *“I said to myself, how can I cope?”*

Instructions:

Write about a sentence or two in each cell (enough to record about 20 seconds at a time – that is the most comfortable length for recording each voice-over clip). If you fill more than 10 cells, your movie will be more than 3 minutes long.

<i>Script (what I will read and what participants will hear)</i>	<i>Images and name of sound file</i>

Appendix 5 – Storyboard template

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Images

Transitions

Effects

Voiceover

Soundtrack

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Images

Transitions

Effects

Voiceover

Soundtrack

Appendix 6 – Graffiti artwork



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