Beyond Strategic Metrics

Centering living experience in youth program evaluation



Dr Annabel Prescott

TRACTION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Who is evaluation data

I've been feeling optimistic about the future
I've been feeling useful
I've been feeling relaxed
I've been feeling interested in other people
I've had energy to spare
I've been dealing with problems well
I've been thinking clearly
I've been feeling good about myself
I've been feeling close to other people
I've been feeling confident
I've been able to make up my own mind about things
I've been feeling loved
I've been interested in new things
I've been feeling cheerful

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Where I am standing

WHO	Young people aged 10 to 16 who are disengaging from school
WHERE	South East Queensland and Toowoomba
HOW	Hands-on mentoring. BUILD, IGNITE, CONNECT, Building Deadly Riding Deadly
FRAMING	Disengagement is what happens when systems stop holding a young person

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Two ways data can travel

The default



The young person supplies the entire dataset and never reads it.

Returned first



The first reader is the person the data is about. Everything else is downstream of that.

Same instruments. Same rigour. Different first reader.

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Two arms, five levels, and a return

Everything is built to serve both arms of the strategy. The evidence it produces comes back to the strategy, rather than leaving.

YOUNG PEOPLE

STRATEGY Two arms: deliver, and influence	Youth development and systems change. Everything below is built to serve both, not one.
VOICE They Build, choose, propel & imagine	The disengagment sits in the system's response, not the child.
EVALUATION FRAMEWORK Both arms are evaluated, not just delivery	Appropriateness before effectiveness. Influence and Consilidate carry equal weight.
INSTRUMENT Measures that ask about wellbeing, not symptoms	Progress scored from the young person's own starting point, never an adult standard.
PRACTICE The young person is the first reader of their own result	They keep their own copy, and decide who else sees it.

EVIDENCE RETURNS

Evaluation is not downstream of strategy. It is how the strategy learns whet

Annual strategy reviews against KPI's. Quarterly learning huddles. A mid-term review in 2028. Pilot evaluations feeding Phase 2 decisions.

Strategy

LEVEL ONE

The Problem

20% of Australian students become chronically disengaged by year 10 costing up to A$50.5 billion. Continued engagement in school, particularly for under 16 year olds, is a crucial enabler and enhancer of life long opportunity.

Our Strategy

TRACTIONS' approach from 2026 to 2031 is grounded in the growing urgency of youth disengagement and TRACTION's readiness to influence change.

Our Long Term Vision

To cement a legacy of enduring opportunity and empowerment across generations.

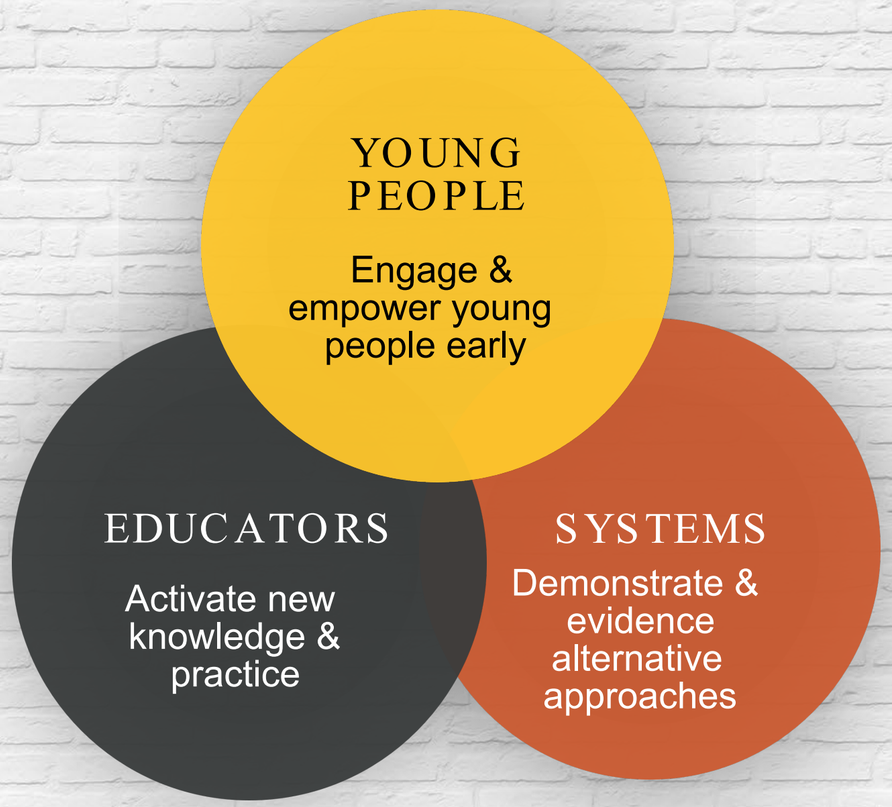
Our Purpose

To work alongside young people early, to build confidence, wellbeing and strong futures.

Our Focus

We work EARLY at three interlocking levels:

- alongside young people;
- leading collaboration to enable effective engagement in learning;
- reforming regulatory and policy frameworks that govern those environments.



TRACTION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

They build, choose, propel, imagine

From the brand style guide: “They build, choose, propel, imagine. They are not served, targeted, or delivered to.”

What we write

- young people
- youngpeople who are disengaging from school
- participants
- real models
- spark real momentum

What we do not

- at-risk youth, clients, kids
- disengaged youth, school refuses
- beneficiaries, service users, cases
- role models
- drive outcomes, deliver impact

Also cautioned: vulnerable, troubled, hard ro reach, fixing, saving, giving back, less fortunate.
And any construction that positions young people as recipients of charity rather than agents of their own futures.

**Disengagement happens to young people in response to how sys
not as a defect in the young person.**

Theory of change

However, if we...

THE PROBLEM WE SEEK TO SOLVE:

Across Australia, up to 20% of young people disengage from school by Year 10, eroding their confidence, connection, and future pathways.

Systemic response often deepen disengagement and accelerate harm.

Australia faces an estimated A$50.5 billion social cost from a system not desinged to keep young people engaged.

TRACTION'S OUTPUTS

BUILD & IGNITE

We create safe, practical spaces where young people make things, build confidence, and have a go

01

CONNECT

We bring young people and employers together to try out real, hands-on work in a safe, supported way that can lead to on-going work-experience

02

INFLUENCE

We host and participate in events to share what we learn and help schools support young people earlier and better

03

FUNDER'S OUTPUTS

PHILANTHROPY & CORPORATE PARTNERS

Invest funding and practical support that enables TRACTION to run and grow its prorgams

TRACTION'S OUTPUTS CONT.

CONSOLIDATE

Build a sustainable, diversified revenue base that enables TRACTION to reach every young person who needs our support.

04

then we expect that...

CHANGE AGENTS' OUTCOMES

	MENTORS	EMPLOYERS	PRINCIPALS & TEACHERS	STRATEGIC PARTNERS
SHORT TERM	Establish predictable, trust-based routines that create psychological safety.	Show openness by engaging in low-stakes workplace exposure activities.	Identify and refer disengaged young people earlier.	Share insights and referal pathways to align around disengagement needs.
MEDIUM TERM	Tailor activities and feedback to individual strengths and learning profiles.	Provide structured, scaffolded work-experience opportunities.	Integrate TRACTION into coordinated, flexible engagement pathways.	Embed TRACTION within local youth engagement and transition-to-work strategies.
LONG TERM	Sustain long-term mentoring ecosystems that support transitions to work or training.	Adopt inclusive hiring and onboarding practices for diverse young people.	Instititionalise trauma-aware, relational, flexible learning practices.	Amend education regulations and practice to support disengaged young people.

which will engage and empower young people to...

THE IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

SHORT TERM	Re-engage through feeling safe, seen and sucessful in hands-on activites.
MEDIUM TERM	Stay engaged while building confidence, persistence, and readiness for learning and work-like environments.
LONG TERM	Sustain engagement in education, training, or employment and building stable, future-oriented lives.

Interpretation guards

Five rules written into the framework and applied at analysis. They exist to stop the instrument misreading the young people.

1. Score against self and band

Movement is the outcome. Never a fixed adult standard.

1. Help-seeking can fall as autonomy rises

Growing self-reliance is a development gain. Do not code it as regression.

1. Watch for suppression

Low expressed distress is not necessarily good regulation.

1. Safety precedes help-seeking

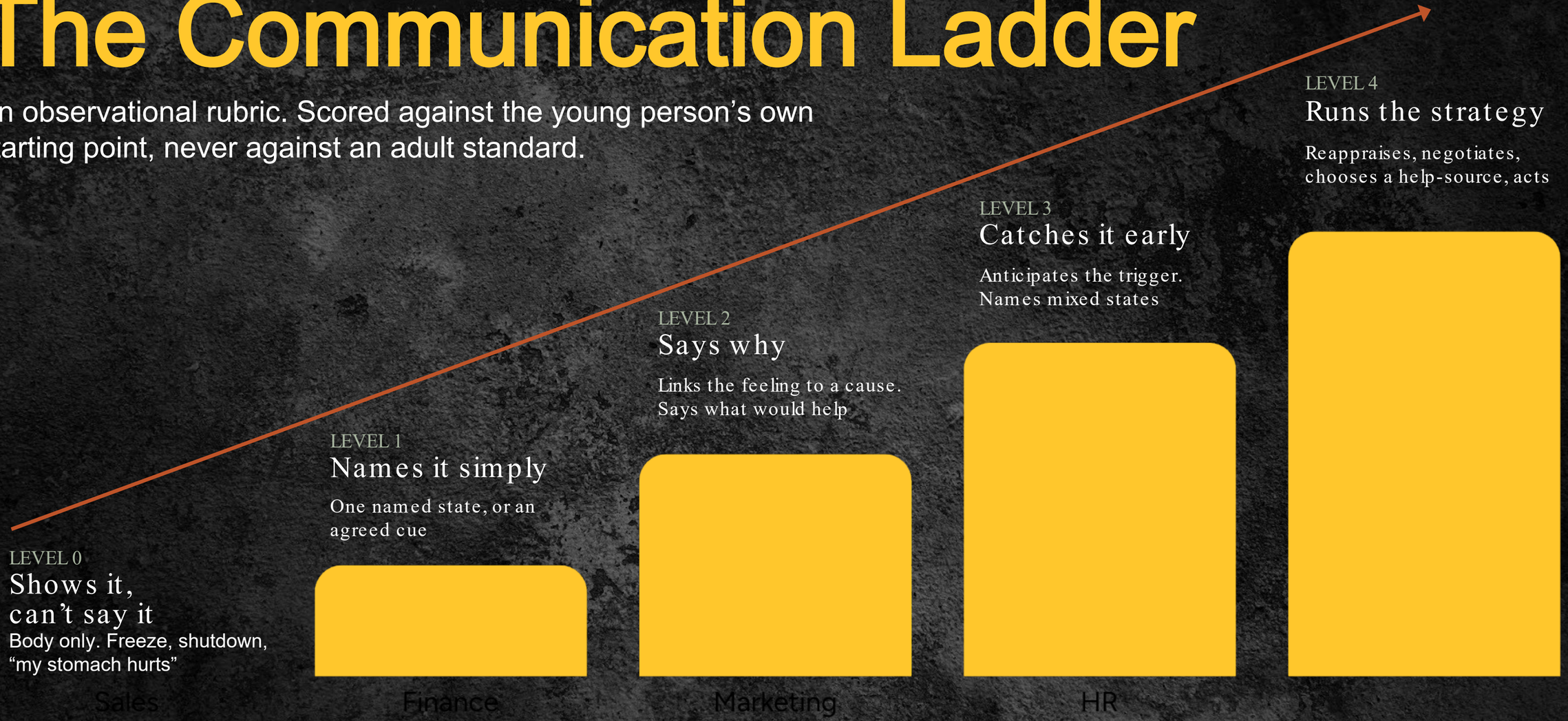
Low help-seeking in a low-strategy context is an environment finding, not a young-person deficit.

1. Guard against verbal bias

Self-report privileges young people already high on the Ladder, and will under-count

The Communication Ladder

An observational rubric. Scored against the young person's own starting point, never against an adult standard.



Higher level never replace lower ones.

This is channel expansion, not body replacement. Still showing it in the body is not a failure to progress.

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Where a young person meets their ow

AT ENTRY

A validated measure,
completed as a conversation

WEMWBS for BUILD, KIDSCREEN10 for IGNITE.



DURING

Facilitated conversations
abouyt their own progress

The conversation is the intervention.

AT COMPLETION

The same measure again.
Before and after, side by side

They read the change themselves.

AFTERWARDS

They keep their own copy
and choose who sees it

Family. Teachers. Whoever they decide.

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Three tensions

1

PARTICIPATION

How do we design evaluation that acknowledges young people as active participants in their own change process, not passive subjects of measurement?

2

WHAT COMES FIRST

What shifts when we position self-awareness and celebration as primary evaluation outcomes, with strategic metrics as secondary?

3

AGENCY AND EXTRACTION

How do we ensure data collection practices honour young people's agency, rather than extracting information purely for organisational purposes?

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

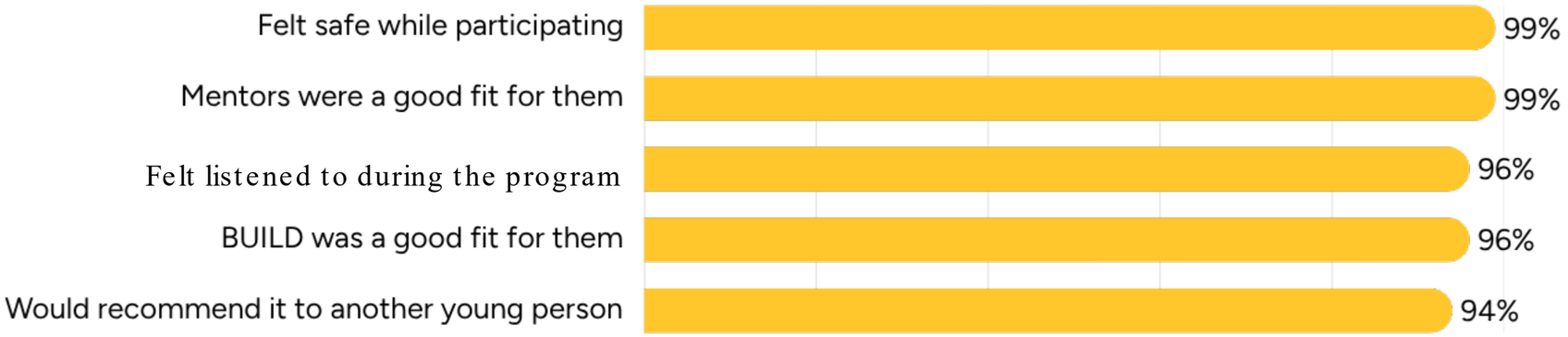
How do we design evaluation that acknowledges young people as active participants in their own change proces

Consultation is not the test. The test is whether their reading of their own result goes anywhere.

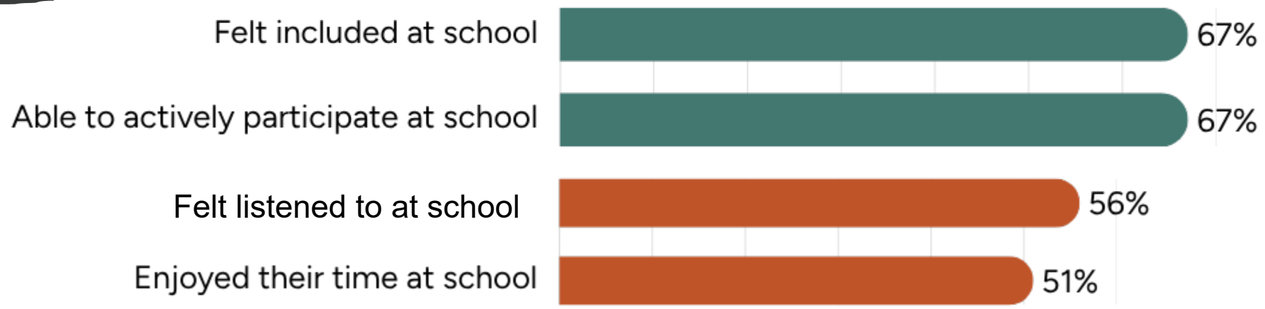
The same young people, two environm

BUILD and Building Deadly Riding Deadly participants. Post-program self-report, one survey.

In the program



At school



96% felt listened to here. 56% felt listened to there.

Same young people. The same survey. The gap is between two environments, not inside the child.

TRACTION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

What the economic frame cannot hold

$3.39

of benefit for every dollar invested in TRACTION

Independent impact study, 2025

COULD NOT BE MONETISED

- Enhanced identity and resilience
- Increased connectedness, belonging and community participation
- Increased benefits of philanthropy

The First Nations program was excluded from the study entirely, for want of data.

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Where this transfers

The case for returning data to the participant strengthens in proportion to how much that population has already been measured, recorded and reported on by systems that did not report back.

For these populations the standard evaluation transaction is not neutra because it is recognisable. It resembles every previous encounter in w supplied information and received nothing.

TRACTION
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Five questions to take back

Ask them of your own evaluation practice

1. Could a participant in your program obtain their own data if they asked? Would they know it existed?
2. Is your instrument readable by the young person completing it?
3. When a participant disagrees with their own result, is there anywhere for that to go?
4. Which of your outcomes cannot be counted, and what happens to them?
5. Do your strategy, voice, framework, instrument and practice agree?

   Most organisations center young people at one level and call it a value. The test is whether all five point the same way.

Strategic metrics are what you get when the levels stop agreeing with each other.

A young person reading their own res the last of five decisions, not the first.

It is only possible because a strategy located the problem outside the child, a style guide refused to let anyone describe them as the problem, a framework asked whether the program was right for them before asking whether it worked, and an instrument was chosen that a young person could stand to read.

Strategic metrics are what you get when those levels stop agreeing.

Dr Annabel Prescott - TRACTION for Young People

TRACTION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

TRACTION

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

www.traction.communit
y

