

Field Work Safety Policy

Essential Summary

Field work forms an essential part of the role of Youth Justice NSW (YJNSW) community employees. This *Field Work Safety Policy* reflects the commitment of YJNSW to ensure that field work is undertaken in a safe way.

This policy applies to all YJNSW employees undertaking field work, particularly Youth Justice caseworkers (YJCW) in the community, sessional supervisors, Youth Justice conference convenors, mentors, assistant managers and area managers.

This policy identifies YJNSW employee responsibilities when undertaking field work, specifically the prevention, identification and mitigation of risk factors and hazards. This policy should be read in conjunction with the *Field Work Safety Procedure* and *Field Work Risk Assessment Form*.

The Field Work Safety Policy supersedes the *Safe Operating Policy: Field Work Safety, Community Services*.

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1 Scope

This policy applies to all YJNSW employees who undertake field work in the course of their employment, including caseworkers, sessional supervisors, youth justice conferencing convenors, mentors and their managers and supervisors.

YJNSW community office workplace employee inductions must include this *Field Work Safety Policy*.

2 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide YJNSW employees with direction and information to:

- identify and manage safety risks associated with field work by eliminating hazards arising from working in the field, or where not possible, minimising the risks and
- understand the minimum standards of safe practice that must be adhered to.

3 Definitions

Control means a measure planned to manage the risk from a hazard. Controls include any process, policy, device, practice or other actions that modify risk. Controls are selected from the 'hierarchy of controls' which can be found in the *Field Work Safety Risk Assessment Form*.

CIMS means YJNSW Client Information Management System.

Convenor means a person appointed as a Youth Justice Conference Convenor under section 60 of the *Young Offender Act 1997*.

Employee means worker, as defined in Section 7 of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. It includes any YJNSW person who carries out work in any capacity for a person conducting a business or undertaking, including but not limited to paid employees, convenors, contractors, labour hire, apprentice, volunteer or student undertaking work experience. Young people who are completing community service work, community clean-up work or any other similar undertaking, are considered employees.

Field Work means work that takes place when working with young people, their supports, associated services or youth justice conferencing participants associated with YJNSW, in an environment that is not a YJNSW premise and does not have the normal support networks of a YJNSW workplace.

Field Work Risk Assessment Form means the endorsed form which is used to assess and address hazards and risks for field work.

Field Work Tracking System means the system that is used to keep a record of where, when and how an employee undertakes field work, which is approved by the Director, Community.

Hazard means a situation, condition or source that has the potential to lead to negative consequences, harm or loss. A hazard is not the negative outcome itself.

Hierarchy of Controls refers to a list of types of hazard controls, which are in order of most effective to least effective.

Risk means the possibility of suffering harm or loss.

Young Person means all young people that YJNSW work with, whether in community or custody.

4 Field work in YJNSW

YJNSW employees are required to undertake field work activities as part of effectively engaging young people and their families.

Field work involves work undertaken in an environment outside of a YJNSW premises and includes, but is not limited to:

- young people's homes
- cafés, restaurants and shopping centres
- public spaces such as parks and gardens
- Youth Justice Conferences

It can also include travelling to and from court, non-government agency locations and schools with young people and their support people.

All YJNSW employees are responsible for taking reasonable care of their own health and safety, as well as the safety of others. When working in the field, employees do not have the support systems normally in place at YJNSW community offices and centres, which makes the field risk management process more involved.

Some potential risks can include traffic accidents, vehicle problems, falls and incidents that involve other people. Risks need to be assessed thoroughly and addressed so safe field work can occur. If these risks cannot be adequately assessed and controlled, then the work must be cancelled or postponed until the work can be completed safely.

4.1 Safety in YJNSW

YJNSW is committed to having a safe working environment for everyone, including employees, young people, conference participants, and business partners. To achieve this, safety must be built into our policies, procedures and practice, as well as our culture. In order to be effective at creating change in young people, employees must feel safe, valued and empowered to make choices that improve their safety.

Each community office must regularly discuss and review their practices to identify how safety is being championed, where it can be improved and how a culture of working safely can be developed.

This policy aims to assist employees and offices in developing effective field work safety practices which meet local needs, while providing a clear framework for identifying and addressing risk.

5 Risk managing field work activities

Field work activities must be planned to ensure that field workers are safe. Field workers and their managers must make sure that

- hazards for the type of field work, or field work location have been risk assessed and documented in a risk register and
- a communication process and an emergency process is in place for field work.

5.1 What needs to be risk assessed

All field work must be risk assessed, including;

- home or community visits with young people, families, support people and victims
- group activities in the community
- Youth Justice Conferences (including the venue)

Community Service Orders and Community Clean up order risk assessments are not covered under this policy, and are to be completed using the *Community Service Order Policy* and procedure and the *Community Clean Up Order Policy* and procedure.

5.2 Locations with existing WHS protocols

Some field work activities are conducted at locations where there are well-established, rigorous safety plans, and risk register in place. If this is the case, employees may not need to complete a field work risk assessment. Examples could include a YJNSW satellite office based within another organisation, other government offices and some non-government organisation offices.

Consultation between the relevant employees (e.g. YJNSW managers, employees and WHS representatives) must occur to determine and record whether any field work locations do not require a field work risk assessment to be undertaken.

All employees must consider their safety and the safety of others wherever they are working. If a hazard is identified it must be reported and the risk addressed.

5.3 Risk management

Employees must implement the following risk management processes when undertaking community field work activities:

1. **Identify** any foreseeable hazards
2. **Assess** the level of risk
3. **Eliminate** the hazard, or **control** the risk
4. **Monitor** how effective controls are and review them if changes occur
5. **Share** information with all relevant people about the level of risk, and controls

Further information about risk management can be found in the *Justice Procedure: WHS Risk Management*.

5.3.1 Identify any foreseeable hazards

All workplaces and field work locations have hazards. Hazards for field work are varied and can come from different sources including the environment, weather, vehicles (including heavy traffic), animals, people, residences and work that is being carried out (such as CSO work). When

identifying hazards, YJNSW employees must consider the field work activity and the potential hazards that could impact on themselves or someone else.

Hazard and risk related information can be sourced from various areas including:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIMS (offence list, alerts, background reports, VRI, YLSCMI/AA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultation with other employees, organisations, clients and their families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local safety plans and risk registers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your own site inspection or observations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Police Force (police) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • site risk assessments (if provided by venue)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other documents, such as CSO checklists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YJNSW Security and Intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YJNSW hazard and incident reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • previous risk assessments for the site being visited, or other young people from the area. 	

5.3.2 Assess the level of risk

The *Field Work Risk Assessment Form* must be used when conducting home visits, transporting young people and any time employees are working with young people or their supports outside of a YJNSW workplace. The form assists employees to:

- identify the worst credible consequences for each hazard
- determine the likelihood of the hazard occurring
- assess the risk for each hazard based on all the existing controls being in place
- determine a 'current' risk rating by cross referencing the consequence and likelihood ratings using the risk matrix

Risk of violence

All young people and their families, friends and members of the public have the potential to become aggressive and violent. The likelihood of this occurring and the capacity for harm vary considerably.

When assessing the risk of violence from someone prior to field work, employees must consider:

- Is there an indication of intent? (the level of threat)
- Have there been previous incidents of threats or violence which shows a capacity or capability of being violent? (capability)
- Has the person showed an ability to regulate their behaviour in normal or stressful situations? (emotional regulation)
- Do particular people or situations impact the young person's behaviour? (known triggers for violence)

Health considerations

The *Field Work Risk Assessment Form* requires employees to assess their own personal health or medical conditions that may impact their ability to complete field work activities safely. Employees must discuss the matter with their area manager if they receive advice from a doctor that their ability to undertake field work may be impacted by a medical condition. Employee health related information must not be stored on a young person's file, but should be stored separately (e.g. on a secured personnel file) in order to maintain the employees privacy and confidentiality.

Competent field workers

Managers must only allow independent field work to be performed by employees who have been assessed as competent. An employee is considered competent if they possess a combination of the theoretical and practical skills required to safely undertake the planned field work visits. Managers must consider whether the employee has shown the ability to assess risks and complete field work safely. E-learning courses such as the Driver Safety module and Work, Health and Safety Fundamentals may form a part of the assessment process.

If an employee has not been identified as competent to perform field work, this must be identified as a risk. These employees must not be permitted to undertake unsupervised field work until they have been assessed as competent. Additionally, all employees must hold the appropriate license for any vehicle they are driving.

5.3.3 Eliminate the hazard or control the risk

The *Field Work Risk Assessment* form provides information on the hierarchy of controls which must be implemented to reduce the consequences or likelihood of the identified risk.

When addressing a risk, employees must consider whether there is anything that can be done to eliminate, avoid or reduce the potential harm or likelihood of harm from the identified hazards.

The best way to manage a hazard is to eliminate it. If it cannot be eliminated, then it should be controlled, as far as reasonably practicable. If a risk cannot be controlled effectively, the field work activity must not be undertaken, or it should be postponed to another time where the risk can be eliminated or controlled effectively.

5.3.4 Monitor and review

Employees must be aware of the risks and control measures before undertaking any field work. Employees must regularly review the control measures and consider whether they are still effective at controlling any identified hazard prior to field work being undertaken. If the control measures are still effective, then field work may continue. If the controls are no longer effective, or more effective controls are available, then they must be implemented and the risk assessment and risk register (if applicable) must be updated.

Risk assessments must be updated any time the circumstances change for the field work being undertaken, and at a minimum of every six months.

A change of circumstance can include (but is not limited to) a change in venue or address; a revised YLSCMI-AA; fresh offences; new information from police; a change in behaviour or attitude

of the young person or a change of employee who is completing the field work. When a risk assessment is amended, a copy of the original must be kept on the young person's file (e.g. C file or YJC file).

Additionally, any injury, illness or near miss which occurs in the course of work must be reported using the SAP online incident report form. Additional reporting may also be required on CIMS, in line with the *Incident Management Policy*.

5.3.5 Share information

All risk and control measure related information should be shared and made available to employees who undertake field work with the same people or at the same location. For example, a risk assessment for a young person's home completed by a caseworker must be provided to a YJC convenor who may be undertaking field work at the young person's home during the allocation process.

There are times when young people are considered employees under the WHS legislation, such as when they are removing graffiti as part of a Community Clean Up Order or undertaking Community Service Order work. Under these circumstances, young people must be provided with risk information by the employee who is supervising the activity, without compromising confidentiality and security requirements. This may take the form of a site induction or safety briefing.

Relevant information from the local risk register must be provided to YJC convenors and control measures in place must be suitable. This may require separate control measures to be put in place for convenors in the risk register. Convenors must be consulted and informed of any changes to the risk register that may impact them.

6 Local safety documents

To ensure that field work safety is considered, managers must ensure that the following local safety documents are developed:

6.1.1 Communication process

Managers must ensure that a communication process is in place for checking the safety of employees undertaking field work activities. The process must outline what steps will be taken if an employee does not check in on time or cannot be located as per their *field work tracking system*. Processes may include contacting the employee on their work phone (if applicable), their personal mobile, contacting any other employees or persons who accompanied them or the family of the people they are visiting. If contact is not made and an employee's location is unknown, the police must be contacted and informed of the concerns.

The process should also provide instructions for what to do when working in areas that do not have mobile phone reception.

The communication process must also include:

- who is responsible for tracking convenor field work during work hours
- the allocated after hours manager's contact details for after hour and weekend field work activities

- alternate contact details if the afterhours manager is not able to be contacted
- a requirement that convenors call or send a text message to the allocated person before and after each field work activity.

6.1.2 Field work tracking system

A *field work tracking system* may be a physical or electronic document that provides key information about the employee and the field work being undertaken so that incidents can be responded to quickly.

The details of planned field work must be recorded before field work is undertaken. This includes the location of the work, details of the people to be visited, a contact number for the employee, the expected time of the visit and any other significant information. The information on a field work tracking system must be available to the employee assigned the task of monitoring field work activities and must be retained for seven years.

Each office must have a local field work tracking system to record this information and meets their location's needs. *The Field Work Tracking Form*, is an example of a printable field work tracking system, however offices may also use the CIMS diary, their Outlook calendar, or another locally developed process. Each offices process must be endorsed by their Community Director.

In instances where field work tracking information is not able to be updated (e.g. a change of plan while undertaking field work) employees must have approval from their managers to undertake field work activity.

Each community office must consider and address the risks of their individual field work tracking system, including accessing the relevant information during events such as building evacuations, blackouts or computer network outages.

The *YJC Convenor Field Visit Record (CFVR)* is the field work tracking system that must be used by Youth Justice Conference convenors to schedule and document meetings with participants when preparing for a conference. To allow managers to plan and monitor convenor safety during field work, the CFVR should, whenever possible, be submitted to a manager two business day prior to field work. Convenor field work cannot be undertaken if it is not approved by a manager.

The convenor field visit record must be stored on the young person's YJC file.

6.1.3 Emergency response process

Each office must have a field work emergency response process which contains:

- the contact information of employees undertaking the field work activity
- instructions for what employees conducting field work must do when there is an emergency (including how and who to request help from)
- instructions for managers when informed of an emergency
- medical emergency information – including hospitals or primary locations for receiving medical assistance

- a code word or phrase that employees can use to signal that they are unsafe when speaking with a manager or another employee over the phone.

6.1.4 Local police safety protocol

As a preventative measure, managers must contact the police local area command to develop protocols regarding YJNSW employee field work safety. The protocol should:

- identify when police will be contacted for information prior to undertaking a field work activity.
- contain a process for advising police about planned field visits to high risk areas or young people who present unique risks
- where possible, include an agreement for police to advise YJNSW when they are carrying out operations that may impact on field work activities.

6.2 Complex field work activities

For complex field work, such as large events being organised by an office, or group programs being run outside of the office, the approving manager is responsible for leading the activity and managing the work health and safety concerns, or allocating the task of supervising the field work to another employee (the field work supervisor).

In these situations, a field work safety plan must be created, identifying the role of the field work supervisor, a unique emergency protocol, communication protocol and the risk assessment for the activity. Some locations such as local halls and parks may have risk assessments that have been completed by the site owner. The field work supervisor may request site specific risk assessments, to inform their own risk assessment.

7 Mitigating field work risks

7.1 Protective behaviours

Proactive protective behaviours are an essential part of managing risk when working with young people, their families and communities. Proactive protective behaviours such as those listed in Appendix B of the *Field Work Safety Procedure* should be implemented as control measures, where required, as part of a risk assessment or risk register.

Even with risk assessments in place, unexpected or unforeseen risks can occur. In these situations active and reactive protective behaviours can minimise the chance of an incident occurring, and can help employees stay safe. Appendix B of the *Field Work Safety Procedure* also lists potential active and reactive protective behaviours for employees undertaking field work.

7.2 Managing unexpected high-risk situations

If a high-risk situation emerges during the field work activity (e.g. a young person is heavily affected by alcohol or drugs or someone is becoming aggressive and threatening) employees must terminate the visit and remove themselves from the immediate hazard. Once employees are at a safe distance from the activity, they are to contact their manager immediately and follow through

with any other appropriate actions (i.e. contact police) and comply with the *Incident Management Policy* and procedure.

7.3 Fatigue management

Fatigue reduces a person's ability to perform work safely and effectively. Employees should employ fatigue management strategies during field work, particularly when undertaking long drives. Such strategies must include having a break from driving every two hours and rotating drivers when possible.

An employee support and wellbeing fatigue management page and a fatigue management eLearning module are available on the Youth Justice learning management system, *Success Factors*, to provide information about the effects of fatigue and safe work practices.

7.4 First aid supplies

Adequate first aid supplies must be available during field work, including a first aid kit in each YJNSW vehicle. First aid supplies must be appropriate for the field work and hazards that may be encountered. The Department of Justice's *First Aid Procedure* identifies first aid kit types and content requirements.

YJC convenors are not required to have a first aid kit available for field work, or in their vehicle. However, it is recommended that convenors obtain and maintain a first aid kit for field work.

7.5 Initial meetings with young people and their families

Initial meetings with young people and their families should be held at a controlled location, such as at a YJNSW community office. A controlled location allows for an assessment of the young person and their family's attitudes and behaviour for future field work. This may not always be feasible, particularly for initial address checks, meeting young people who live in remote locations or to accommodate those who work long hours.

YJC convenors are required to organise initial meetings with young people and victims in a public place to ensure that they can quickly access assistance if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Occasionally, a convenor may be required to conduct an initial meeting at the young person's or victim's home, rather than a public location. In this situation, the standard risk assessment process must still be followed and the home visit approved by an assistant manager.

7.6 Assessing risk with little information

At times YJNSW employees may need to complete field work when there is not much information known about a young person such as when:

- transporting a young person from court who has no previous YJNSW involvement
- completing an address check for a new client

A lack of information is not a risk in itself but could mean that there are hazards that an employee does not know about. To address this, YJNSW employees must:

- try and identify risk information and
- set in place control measures which can address likely risks

Risk information about a young person could be provided by the Department of Police Prosecutors (DPP), local police, lists of previous offences in Justice Link, the young person's family, custodial employees who have worked with the young person and the young person.

Likely risks should be recorded in the office risk register, along with standard control measures that are used as a protocol to address them.

For example, if there is a risk of violence when transporting a young person who YJNSW do not have much information about, control measures could include:

- Identifying if there is a history of violence from the young person's carers, and police (Confirmation that there is not a history of violence could indicate a low likelihood).
- Having two employees transport the unknown young person (this may reduce the likelihood of violence, and the severity of an injury).
- Speaking with the young person about how they are feeling, observing the young person's behaviour for any risks before transporting them.

The control measures above are examples only, and do not have to be used. Each office must identify what risks should be addressed, and what control measures will work for their team, young people and environment.

7.7 Field work with short notice

At times the requirements for field work may change at short notice. All field work must be risk assessed, however the risk assessment process can be dynamic to meet the needs of the office. For example, if an employee needs to complete a last minute address check, a verbal risk assessment could occur between the employee and a manager, with the controls being clearly identified and recorded. A verbal risk assessment must address all the considerations outlined in the *Field Work Risk Assessment Form* and *Field Work Safety Policy*.

Employees may be more likely to miss a hazard when completing a verbal risk assessment, so tighter control measures should be put in place to account for this, e.g. a caseworker may be directed to only drop off a letter, or knock on the front door but not enter a house. Whenever possible, a written risk assessment must be completed before field work is undertaken and all risk assessments must be recorded.

8 Transporting young people

YJNSW community employees may be required to transport young people, carers and support people in YJNSW vehicles. Examples include transporting young people to programs, appointments or picking them up following their release from custody or court.

If there are any identified unacceptable risks, such as a young person displaying erratic behaviour, or if it could be perceived that transporting a person may be inappropriate, transportation must not occur.

When transporting anyone who does not work for the NSW government, employees must always assess the risks to their personal safety professional integrity and gain approval from their manager.

If employees transport young people who are being released from court or custody, the standard risk assessment process must be followed. As part of identifying any risks, employees undertaking the field work must speak to custodial employees or transport employees to identify any safety concerns, or protective factors that they may be aware of.

If effective control measures cannot be put in place to ensure the safety of employees, the young person and others, then employees must not place themselves in a high risk situation. Employees may help the young person find a suitable way of getting home, i.e. public transport or transport from a parent or carer.

YJC convenors must not transport young people, their support people or victims in their own vehicle, or a YJNSW vehicle.

8.1 Use of private vehicles

Employees must not use their private vehicles to transport young people or their families. Any use of a private vehicle for work purposes must comply with the *Travel Expense Management Guidelines and Policy*.

9 Record management

All safety documents must be retained and managed in line with the *Youth Justice Record Management Policy*. Offices must ensure that risk assessment information and safety documents are readily accessible to employees. Completed YJC field work risk assessment documents, including the *Convenor Field Work Visit Record* and the *Conference Day Risk Assessment* must be stored on the young person's YJC file.

Additionally, all documents must be able to be examined later if required, e.g. for quality assurance or a WorkCover investigation.

10 References

10.1 Legislative context

- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*
- *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017*
- *Workers Compensation Act 1987*
- *Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998*

10.2 Related policies

- *Work Health and Safety Policy (Intranet)*
- *Justice Procedure: WHS Risk Management (Intranet)*
- *Incident Management Policy*
- *Community Service Order Policy*
- *Youth Justice Conference Policy*
- *Travel Expense Management Policy (Intranet)*


10.3 Related procedures

- *Incident Management Procedure*
- *Community Service Order Procedure*
- *Administration of Youth Justice Conferencing Procedure*
- *First Aid Procedure (Intranet)*

10.4 Resources

- *Travel Expense Management Guidelines (Intranet)*
- *YJNSW Field Work Risk Assessment Form*
- *Convenor Field Visit Record*
- *Fatigue Management (Intranet)*

11 Document information

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12 Document history

Version	Date	Reason for Amendment
1.	December 2019	Development of new policy (D19/06953)
1.1	February 2020	Included YJC specific information in record management. (D19/06953)
2.0	September 2021	Updated to include 7.6 and 7.7 – assessing when little information is available – based on post implementation review feedback process. Next review date updated.