...good things can happen when ideas are valued more than power.

– James, Executive, ReachOut by Inspire Foundation

Official policy discourses provide a context in which non-government, community and youth-led organisations develop and articulate notions and commitments to youth participation. As NGOs and community sector organisations take on more responsibility for the research, advocacy and service delivery once provided by the state, discourses and practices of youth participation proliferate. Many organisations advocate for youth participation in service and policy development, call for recognition of children and young people’s citizenship and for the development of youth-friendly communities, organisations, institutions and service systems. However, it is not always clear what is meant by these agendas, how these play out at an organisational level or how such discourses feature in the actual practices and decision-making processes of organisations. This chapter considers how non-government and youth-led organisations do the work of defining and promoting young people’s participation and negotiate the complex and messy relationship between government and community policy discourses and young people’s participation. Analysis of staff interviews, reports and website content of a number of non-government organisations examined the following:

- **Aims and key activities**: expressed on the websites, in strategy and programmatic documentation and in interviews;
- **History and operation**: the background and current resources of the organisation;
Discourses: the ways ‘youth’, ‘participation’ and ‘digital media’ framed and articulated in both overt and implicit ways;

Mechanisms for participation: the modes of participation promoted by the organisation both internally and externally.

This section contextualises the approaches of select organisations in each country by looking at their policy positioning on youth and participation, their mechanisms and models for participation and the role of digital media. Four case studies are presented that each illustrates at least one of the two dominant aims of youth participation as articulated in policy discourse: shaping services and policy; and, volunteering and social action. The following analysis specifically explores how organisations are situated in relation to the policy contexts discussed in Chapter 2 and, as such, are organised according to country. However, the organisations presented have been selected because key questions can be examined across all four case studies. How do organisations conceptualise young people and their role in their organisations? What role do they envisage and promote for youth participation in community and government decision making? In the context of network governance, are NGOs and practitioners contributing to counter discourses on youth and participation, further shaping the contexts in which young people confront opportunities and challenges of participation and citizenship?

Australia

Case study: ReachOut.com by Inspire Foundation

ReachOut.com by Inspire Foundation (ReachOut) is an Australian non-profit organisation which uses information communication technologies to deliver programmes to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 14–25 years of age. It has an annual expenditure of approximately AUD 4.5m (ReachOut.com by Inspire Foundation, 2013) and receives funding from government, trusts and foundations, major donors and the general public. The organisation was established in 1996 to address high rates of youth suicide in Australia and launched its flagship programme ReachOut.com in 1998. The first online service of its kind, ReachOut.com receives a reported average of 1.4 million unique visitors per year. It has launched sister sites in Ireland and the US and has won national, international and industry awards for suicide prevention and health-promoting websites and games. The organisation also aims to influence policy on mental health, technology and youth affairs more broadly, supported by programme evaluation, research and