

# TASMANIAN YOUTH FORUM 2020



## BUILDING A BETTER TASMANIA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

A REPORT ON THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN 2020 AND THEIR IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS FOR THEIR FUTURE

## Message from the CEO

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), like many other community sector organisations, was significantly impacted by COVID-19.

During the height of the pandemic, YNOT made the difficult decision to postpone TYF 2020 following public health advice from the Tasmanian Government. Uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and strict social distancing requirements meant that we could not deliver our face-to-face event earmarked for June 2020.

Instead, we focused our energies on exploring alternative youth participatory models to ensure young people still had a platform to have their say. We also revisited the TYF topic based on feedback from young people during our statewide consultations.

COVID-19 presented us with an opportunity to do things differently.

We set about changing the TYF topic from *'Climate Change'* to *'Building a Better Tasmania for Young People'* and for the first time we co-designed the new online TYF model with young people and our sector. The success of TYF 2020 would not have been possible without the support of our sister peak in Victoria, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, who played an integral role in the development and delivery of our event.

As you read this report, you will note that there are some distinct themes. Equitable access to opportunities, social connection, community safety, diversity, inclusion and youth voice feature heavily throughout the report.

Young people are looking to their family, school, and government to help them live their best life in Tasmania and to navigate a COVID-changed world. Importantly, young people want to be taken seriously and see government act in response to their concerns.

Young Tasmanians want to have a greater voice in the future of our State.



Tania Hunt  
Chief Executive Officer  
Youth Network of Tasmania

## About the Tasmanian Youth Forum

The Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) is an initiative of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT). YNOT is the peak body representing young people 12-25 years and the Tasmanian youth sector. TYF is YNOT's single largest annual youth consultative event bringing together young Tasmanians to discuss issues important and relevant to them as well as solutions and ideas to improve outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

YNOT would like to thank young people that participated in the TYF consultation process. We also acknowledge and thank the support of educators, youth group leaders, and the parents and guardians who supported their young people to attend.

YNOT gives a special thanks to Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC) for supporting the development and delivery of the online event model. We would like to give our deepest thanks to Sam Champion and his team from YACVIC for their dedication and support at TYF.

TYF 2020 was developed in consultation with a Youth Focus Group and Steering Committee. We would like to thank the members of the Youth Focus Group for identifying the topic content and helping to formulate the activities and online survey. We also thank our Steering Committee comprising members from the Department of Education, Independent Schools Tasmania, the Tasmanian Council of Social Service, Impact Communities, Mental Health Council of Tasmania, and the University of Tasmania, for helping to design, develop and promote TYF 2020.

Thank you to young Tasmanian, Tyenna H, for opening the forum with an Acknowledgement of Country and to headspace Hobart for closing the forum with a mindfulness session.

TYF Building a Better Tasmania for Young People 2020 was supported by the City of Launceston and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

TYF 2020 graphics design was completed by a young graphics designer, Olivia Aitchison.

YNOT is funded by the Tasmanian Government: Department of Communities Tasmania.

TYF 2020 Supported by:



## Recommendations to government

### **Recommendation 1. The school curriculum**

Consider broadening the school curriculum to provide young people with more practical skills necessary to enter the workforce and live independently; information about mental health and resilience; understanding of diversity and inclusion; and enhanced sexual/reproductive health education. Young people want to be better prepared for life after school.

### **Recommendation 2. Support for students**

Provide more support staff and psychologists in schools to help young people who are struggling and the victims and the perpetrators of bullying, and provide more learning options for disengaged students. While the school system caters for the majority, too many young people are ‘falling through the cracks’.

### **Recommendation 3. Preparation for work**

Provide more work experience opportunities for young people, and deliver information to students on alternatives to university, how to get an apprenticeship, how to get a job, and workers’ rights. Young people want to be informed of their career options and be better prepared for the workforce.

### **Recommendation 4. Having a voice**

Strengthen the role of YNOT and the Premier’s Youth Advisory Council, increase young people’s engagement in local government, and provide training in civic and political processes. Young people want to have a say in decisions affecting their lives.

### **Recommendation 5. Legislation**

Maintain current legislation supporting diversity and create new laws promoting access, inclusion and respect. Young people want a world that values diversity and is inclusive of everyone.

### **Recommendation 6. Planning for inclusion**

Plan for access and inclusion of people of all abilities in government planning and development processes. Young people are aware that people with disability are often excluded from buildings, events and facilities.

### **Recommendation 7. Housing**

Provide affordable housing options for young people and increased access to loans. Young people are concerned about the cost and lack of available housing once they become independent.

### **Recommendation 8. Mental health**

Provide specific mental health support for young people with eating disorders, young men, and those living in rural areas, and develop a phone-based app so young people have ready access to local support services. Young people want more support services in the community, and are also keen to see existing services and programs that are working well adequately resourced and maintained.

### **Recommendation 9. The workforce**

Give incentives to businesses to provide work experience and to employ more young people particularly in rural areas, establish more career hubs, and provide information about young people’s rights in the workplace. Young people want to work, and they want a positive work experience.

## Key findings and proposed solutions

The key findings of the TYF and the solutions proposed by young people were as follows.

### 1. Living my best life in Tasmania

**Finding.** Social connection, inclusion, diversity, having a voice, and having equitable access to opportunities are important to young people in Tasmania.

### 2. Hopes and dreams for the future

**Finding.** Young people are concerned about the state of the world, especially COVID-19, bushfires, and the environment, but are generally optimistic and would like opportunities to thrive and live a good life.

### 3. Diversity and inclusivity

**Finding.** Young people are very aware of racism, discrimination, and exclusion, many having experienced these behaviours themselves, and want our community to be a safe and inclusive place for people of all abilities.

Proposed solutions:

- Include knowledge and understanding of other cultures, diversity, and gender identities in the school curriculum
- Appoint champions for diversity and inclusivity in schools to provide good leadership and role modelling for young people
- Maintain legislation supporting diversity and create new laws promoting access and inclusion, and respectful treatment of individuals and groups
- Increase safety and accessibility for people of all abilities in the community.

### 4. Having my voice heard

**Finding.** Young people are keen to have a greater voice in the future of Tasmania, with their ideas acknowledged and action taken in response to their concerns.

Proposed solutions:

- Increase YNOT's role in the north of the state and regional communities
- Strengthen the role of the Premier's Youth Advisory Council
- Increase engagement of young people in local government
- Provide young people with training in civic and political processes.

## 5. Mental health and wellbeing

**Finding:** Young people are worried about the mental health of themselves and their peers.

Proposed solutions:

- Provide information and discussion in schools about mental health and how to help people who are suffering from mental ill-health
- Provide instruction in schools on building resilience
- Offer behaviour modification programs to perpetrators of bullying
- Employ more psychologists and counsellors in schools, with continuity of support people
- Offer more professional support to people with eating disorders
- Provide male-specific support to young men experiencing mental ill-health.
- Develop an app listing support lines and services for young people in Tasmania
- Provide more access to mental health support in rural areas
- Support and build on things that are already working to improve youth mental health.

## 6. Education that makes sense

**Finding:** Young people feel that the curriculum should be more flexible, and schools should offer more practical life skills.

Proposed solutions:

- Enable staff and counsellors to provide more individual support to people who are struggling
- Offer training in life skills such as learning how to sew and cook, open a bank account, get a car, pay rent, get a house, apply for a job, or prepare a résumé
- Promote arts and languages in schools, and potentially include them as 'core' subjects rather than 'soft' options
- Include more career-focused subjects such as engineering or aquaculture
- Provide more options such as Big Picture Schools for disengaged students
- Provide better sexual/reproductive health education, and general health education
- Introduce different ways of assessing students (other than NAPLAN and TCE exams).

## 7. Having a good job

**Finding.** Young people are keen to find work that is fulfilling and meaningful as well as paying the bills.

Proposed solutions:

- Reduce pressure on young people in high school to have a career mapped out, but start offering advice in Years 8 and 9
- Provide more information to young people on alternatives to university
- Give incentives to businesses to employ young people
- Provide more work experience opportunities in schools
- Provide information in schools on how to get an apprenticeship, and the practical steps people need to go through to get a job
- Establish 'job boards' specifically for young people and more career hubs (like the the South East Employment Hub in Sorell).

## 8. Finding work after school

**Finding.** Young people are worried about entering the job market because of high unemployment, a lack of unskilled work, and concerns that young people are not treated fairly in the workplace.

Proposed solutions:

- Create more jobs for young people, particularly in rural areas
- Offer more training in schools in the development of work-related skills
- Provide information in schools on workers' rights and training in how to speak up
- Develop online platforms and support groups for young people on their rights in the workplace.

## 9. Living independently

**Finding.** Most young people are keen to live independently but they are concerned about the high cost of living and the lack of affordable housing in Tasmania.

Proposed solutions:

- Provide education and advice in schools on how to live independently, manage money, cook, pay bills, etc.
- Provide more affordable housing options for young people, increased access to housing loans, and education about handling money responsibly.

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## Introduction

Young people have experienced a year of unprecedented change. Their lives have been impacted in ways never imagined and young people have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Young people's education, training, employment, and work prospects have been greatly disrupted. Many young people are experiencing psychological distress and increased mental ill-health.<sup>2</sup> These worries come on top of existing stresses for young people.

Every young person has had a different experience during the pandemic, some good, some bad. The pandemic showed that some existing challenges have been greatly exacerbated, while other pandemic responses have created temporary relief from the hardships young people were experiencing.

The TYF 2020 topic, *Build a Better Tasmania for Young People*, was chosen to give young people an opportunity to speak up and be heard on what they think is needed to live their best lives in Tasmania. We wanted to learn from their experiences in COVID-19 and hear their ideas and solutions to improve outcomes for young Tasmanians.

## Process

TYF 2020 consultation process consisted of an online forum and a survey. Results from the forum and the survey were compiled into a single analysis of trends, themes, and solutions.

### The Forum

This was the first time YNOT has hosted an online forum of this size, a face-to-face meeting not being possible at the time under COVID restrictions. The forum was co-designed by the TYF Youth Focus Group and TYF Steering Committee, and developed in collaboration with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC). Three \$100 online e-gift voucher raffles were conducted to encourage young people to participate in the forum.

The forum was facilitated by Mo O'Meara, an expert in youth consultation, and was supported by a team of Youth Facilitators. The Facilitators (8) were aged 17 to 25 years and had all undertaken training in group facilitation skills delivered by YNOT, YACVIC and Mo O'Meara. They were remunerated for their time at the Forum. Each Facilitator was matched with a TYF Mentor (either a social worker or youth worker) to support them during the group sessions.

Both the mentors and facilitators gave positive feedback about the process, with the young people saying that they valued the opportunity to build their facilitation and leadership skills, and their confidence. We will look at using a similar process for future forums.

The forum was hosted online from 9am to 12:30pm on Friday 30 October 2020, using ZOOM. Mo O'Meara launched the morning, with Tyenna, a young Aboriginal woman, performing an Acknowledgement of Country. Mo and two of the Youth Facilitators introduced the primary topic of the day, each presenting their ideas on what they think is needed to build a better Tasmania for young people from the perspective of their diverse background.

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<sup>1</sup> Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. Interim Report, July 2020. Tasmania.

<sup>2</sup> YNOT COVID-19 Surveys 2020. See: <https://www.ynot.org.au/policy-and-advocacy/reports>.

The forum then broke into smaller groups, each with a facilitator and mentor to conduct icebreakers and warm-up activities. The young people were asked, 'What is one thing you need to live your best life in Tasmania?' and 'What are your hopes and dreams for the future?' Groups then chose two *World Café* topics to discuss what they would keep, change, and create. The topics were:

- Diversity and inclusivity
- Having my voice heard (youth voice and participation)
- Positive mental health and wellbeing
- Education that makes sense
- Having a good job (employment)
- Finding work after school (transitioning to employment)
- Living independently.

Some of the young people then presented a summary of their group's discussion to the whole forum.

Members of State Parliament and government representatives were invited to join in on the final forum session to hear the ideas and solutions from young people. Young people thanked the following special guests for joining them: The Hon. Roger Jaensch MP, Alison Standen MP, Cassie O'Connor MP, the Secretary of the Department of Communities Tasmania, the Deputy Secretary of State Growth, and the Secretary of the Department of Education.

### The Survey

The online survey was created using Survey Monkey and was open from 11 November to 1 December 2020. Four \$50 online e-gift vouchers were raffled to encourage young people to complete the survey.

The survey was designed to replicate the questions and discussions of the forum so that the data could be readily collated and analysed. Respondents to the survey were asked the same introductory questions as the Forum about what they need to live their best life in Tasmania, and what are their hopes and dreams for the future. They were also asked to choose one of the *World Café* topics to discuss in more detail.

The survey was promoted to young people through Facebook and through Tasmanian school, community, and youth worker email networks.

# TYF PARTICIPATION

# 215

**YOUNG TASMANIANS AGED 12-25  
YEARS PARTICIPATED IN TYF 2020**

**111** YOUNG PEOPLE ATTENDED THE ONLINE FORUM  
**104** YOUNG PEOPLE COMPLETED THE SURVEY

## GENDER

**29.0%**

**MALE**

**66.9%**

**FEMALE**

**4.1%**

**GENDER DIVERSE**

## AGE

**77.4%**

**AGED 12-17 YEARS**

**22.6%**

**AGED 18-25 YEARS**

# LOCATION

16.1% - NORTH

17.7% - NORTH-WEST

3.3% - EAST COAST

62.9% - SOUTH



## EDUCATION / EMPLOYMENT

86.3% - STUDENTS

16.1% - UNEMPLOYED &  
LOOKING FOR WORK

29.0% - EMPLOYED

7.3% - UNDEREMPLOYED &  
WANTED MORE HOURS

## IDENTIFYING CHARACTERS

9.7% - YOUNG PERSON  
WITH A DISABILITY

25.8% - YOUNG LGBTQIA+  
PERSON

7.3% - CULTURALLY &  
LINGUISTICALLY  
DIVERSE

10.5% - ABORIGINAL OR  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER

## What young people said

During the forum, all participants were asked to comment on two broad topics *What I need to live my best life in Tasmania* and *My hopes and dreams for the future*. Most participants shared their thoughts.

Of the World Café topics, *Mental health and wellbeing* elicited the most comments (108), followed by *Having a good job* (96), *Having my voice heard* (74), *Diversity and inclusivity* (66), *Living independently* (58), *Education that makes sense* (52), and *Finding work after school* (43).

## Living my best life in Tasmania

*"I would like opportunities to grow and learn and have access to things that can get me where I want to go in life."*

**Finding.** *Social connection, inclusion, diversity, having a voice, and equitable access to opportunities are important to young people in Tasmania.*

The TYF participants were keen to have equitable access to opportunities in life that help them to achieve their goals. For some, these opportunities were a stable roof over their heads and enough money for food, water, clothing, and other necessities. Others wanted access to more sports, recreation and cultural activities, safe places to hang out, and the types of events offered in mainland Australia.

Social connection and inclusion featured strongly among their wishes. They called for reconciliation and a culture that is supportive and accepting of diversity. Some young people wanted more support in school and in the workforce for those with disability, and for increased awareness within the school curriculum of other cultures, gender identities, and disability. Others called for a more reliable public health system, and better mental health support.

Family and friends were important to young people, as was a supportive network of services. Community support, safety, freedom, security, stability, connection, and the environment were common themes. The need for better access to transport, especially in rural areas, was mentioned.

Several of the participants thought Tasmania already offered them everything they needed to live a good life, one commenting that while there are plenty of opportunities here, not enough young people know about them. They said the culture in Tasmania is still based on 'who you know' rather than 'what you know'.

The engagement of key decision makers with young people, and the enabling of young people to have a voice in decisions affecting their lives were regarded as essential aspects of a good life in Tasmania.

## Hopes and dreams for the future

*"I hope we can create a world where everyone is given the opportunities they need to thrive."*

**Finding.** *Young people are concerned about the state of the world, especially COVID-19, bushfires, and the environment, but are generally optimistic and would like opportunities to thrive and live a good life.*

Most of the young people were optimistic about the future and had aspirations for themselves, the Tasmanian community, or the planet. Several were worried about their personal circumstances. One commented that their dream was merely to have a future, while another hoped to be able to spend the rest of their life without worrying about whether they had what they needed to stay alive: 'I have little else to talk about while this is not true or guaranteed.'

COVID-19, bushfires, and the environment were major concerns. Young people said they did not want to go back into lockdown, which had been extremely hard for some. They were glad that Tasmania had kept COVID at bay but wanted the world to get back to normal. One young person would like to live in a world that was not at risk of burning to the ground every summer.

Some young people said they would like to create another world in place of our current one. That world would be more equitable, everyone would feel accepted and free to be themselves, and people would be kinder to one another. They would like to have a more caring government that listens to young people, that is willing to take action on climate change and reducing waste, and that provides the opportunities young people need to grow and thrive.

On a personal level, young people wanted to be happy, healthy, and successful in their chosen career. They wanted enough income to be able to live independently and to have a safe and happy life. 'Getting a job, having a family, and living a good life' summed up many of their hopes and dreams.

While some of the young people were keen to find a job that was well-paid, others were primarily motivated to select a career that they enjoyed. Their aspirations were many and varied. Some wanted to go onto college or university and pursue professional career. Several wanted to become vets. A few aspired to become doctors, nurses, paramedics, psychologists, or medical researchers. Some had sporting careers in their sights, while several were looking to join the defence force. One wanted to 'become a fighter pilot and write books'. A couple were keen to further their interest in the arts. Others intended to become a truck driver, a pastry chef, a fish farmer, a designer, or an animator. One wanted to be a leader in the community – either a CEO or a politician.

Some of the young people had specific plans. One wanted to invest in a hobby farm, pay off the mortgage, then retire early; another wanted to purchase his 'dream ute'; while another wanted to own a Landcruiser and a property where he could go shooting. One young person wanted several careers in combination – a photographer travelling the world, an interior designer, and a designer/baker of wedding cakes.

Owning a home and having a family featured strongly on some young peoples' agendas. One young man was keen to 'be a father to multiple children'. Others wanted to travel the world.

## Diversity and inclusivity

*“Diversity and inclusivity are important to me as I am Aboriginal. I believe that if we all work together and include people from all cultures, we can make the world a great and happy place for everyone.”*

**Finding.** *Young people are very aware of racism, discrimination, and exclusion, many having experienced these behaviours themselves, and want our community to be a safe and inclusive place for people of all abilities.*

Many of the young people involved in the TYF had experienced various forms of racism, discrimination, and exclusion, so this was an important topic for them. They saw a need to change peoples’ mindsets around diversity and inclusion, while recognising how difficult it is to do so when people justify oppressive behaviour and ‘hate speech’ as their right to freedom of speech.

The role of education in increasing people’s understanding of different cultures, religions, race, Aboriginality, gender diversity, and disability was recognised, as was the need to embrace different ways of learning. TYF participants proposed that children be educated from a young age about equality and that it is okay to be different. They suggested that the school curriculum could expand students’ knowledge of other cultures, help them to learn about diversity, and understand more about different sexual and gender identities by creating a safe space for open discussion and sharing of experiences.

Some participants commented that children need to be taught how to get along with other people even if they disagree with them, and to realise the consequences of discriminatory or bullying behaviour. They thought that these messages should come from parents and the general community as well as from teachers. It was suggested that schools could appoint champions for diversity and inclusivity to provide good leadership and role modelling for young people.

TYF participants acknowledged that adults often need help in responding better to diversity – in using appropriate pronouns for people that do not identify as he or she, for example – and the media could help in this regard.

The young people said they wanted to keep legislation protecting and supporting inclusivity and diversity in the community and create new laws protecting diverse communities, promoting equal access, upholding people’s right to be treated respectfully, and protecting those who feel oppressed or ignored. It was also suggested that there should be consequences for people using social media in ways that deter diversity and inclusion.

The TYF participants wanted to see more change happening within the community to promote diversity and inclusion. Community action such as Black Lives Matter and marriage equality rallies were seen as useful in bringing attention to the rights of diverse groups. They wanted the community to be a safe place for everyone and for it to be fully inclusive of people with disability, with the built environment enhanced to improve accessibility. One person said that communities need to work harder to include people regardless of their previous history, such as ex-prisoners.

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**Proposed solutions:**

- Include knowledge and understanding of other cultures, diversity, and gender identities in the school curriculum
  - Appoint champions for diversity and inclusivity in schools to provide good leadership and role modelling for young people
  - Maintain legislation supporting diversity and create new laws promoting access and inclusion and respectful treatment of individuals and groups
  - Increase safety and accessibility for people of all abilities in the community.
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## Having my voice heard

*“We need to be heard because we are the future, we have to live with today's mistakes. The decisions current leaders make will affect us more than them.”*

**Finding.** Young people are keen to have a greater voice in the future of Tasmania, with their ideas acknowledged and action taken in response to their concerns.

The TYF participants were keen to have a greater voice in the future of Tasmania. They felt that all too often young people were ignored, shut down, and told their views are not valid. They believed adults often do not listen to young people. They think they are too young to understand what they are talking about and they need to have decisions made for them. While the establishment of various youth advisory groups by state government, local councils and other agencies was welcome, some of these mechanisms were seen as tokenistic. There was frustration expressed about the inability of government to enact genuine change.

Young people said they wanted to be listened to and acknowledged. They would like help in expressing their views and they would like more opportunities to do so. They want to know how they can get involved in decisions affecting their lives – to understand civic and political processes and the responsibilities that accompany engagement. They want to be included early in planning and decision-making, not as an afterthought, and they want their diversity of views and ideas considered. And they want to see action taken to implement their ideas.

The TYF participants said they would like to see the role of YNOT strengthened, with more resourcing for staff, an office in Launceston, and outreach to regional areas. They would like the Premier's Youth Advisory Council to be more accessible and inclusive and to meet more frequently. They would like to see more initiatives like the CCYP Ambassador Program (organised the office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People) enabling young people to have their voices heard. They would like local council youth advisory mechanisms more widely promoted and stronger efforts made to engage a diversity of young people. They called for the voting age to be lowered, perhaps as an opt-in measure, and more education on political structures and processes.

The TYF participants discussed youth involvement in school strikes and other action on climate change. They thought that young people were gaining more confidence when it comes to sharing their thoughts, opinions, and values around issues that they are passionate about. While some commented that young people are not well represented in traditional media, they said there were more opportunities on social media for young people to share their views and have great conversations.

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### Proposed solutions:

- Increase YNOT's role in the north of the state and regional communities
  - Strengthen the role of the Premier's Youth Advisory Council
  - Increase engagement of young people in local government
  - Provide young people with training in civic and political processes.
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## Mental health and wellbeing

*“I have really struggled with my mental health for a long time, especially this year... I haven’t been able to speak out about it, and I don’t want other people to have to go through what I’m going through.”*

**Finding:** *Young people are worried about the mental health of themselves and their peers.*

Mental health was an important topic for TYF participants. It attracted more comments than any other issue. A significant proportion of participants indicated that their mental health was compromised in some way. The impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on people’s mental health was mentioned.

Young people said they wanted more information and discussion about mental health within schools to counteract the stigma attached to mental ill-health and perceptions that this is a ‘no go’ zone. They would like more open conversations and debate, so that individuals are not singled out but are encouraged to speak up and seek help. They also wanted to know how to recognise when their friends were not travelling well and what they could do to help without being overly intrusive and ruining friendships. Some suggested that more instruction on building resilience skills would be beneficial in helping people cope and recover from setbacks. Activity-based support was suggested – programs based on ‘doing things, rather than talking’ to change young peoples’ mindsets and increase their motivation.

Strong links were made between mental health issues and bullying with some young people having been the brunt of bullying. Young people would like to see schools doing more around bullying and raising awareness about its effects. They thought that bullying behaviours should not be punished directly, but the perpetrators should be offered strategies to modify their behaviour. Some young people commented that smaller rural schools offered more supportive cultures with less bullying.

The lack of counsellors and psychologists in the education system was raised as an issue. Some young people felt they really needed to talk to someone, but they were not able to access psychological support in the public system, and could not afford to seek help privately. They were aware that waiting lists for mental health support had blown out due to COVID-19. Some people said they had managed to get some counselling through their school, but the support people keep changing so they had to re-tell their story again and again.

The lack of eating disorders specialists and services in Tasmania was mentioned by several of the young people. They talked of excessive waiting times to see a psychiatrist, who might then not be experienced enough to provide adequate help. One of the young people had a family member who had had to go to a facility in Melbourne for six months as there was no service available in Tasmania.

Young men were seen to have the greatest difficulty in speaking up about their mental health struggles, resulting in heart-breaking and unnecessary suicides. One young person commended the Ulverstone-based ‘Men Care Too’ project (which supports male carers) for helping men with their mental health and identifying where they fit in society. They would like to see this project extended to other places around the state.

Several young people proposed that more after school youth hubs to be developed where young people could go to have something to eat and drink and hang out. Mental health workers could be available in those spaces for a casual chat, reducing the stigma associated with making an appointment to see a psychologist.

The headspace 24-hour help line was said to be working well for young people requiring help after hours. It was proposed that an app listing support lines and other places where young people can get help would be useful.

The young people were aware of the risk of suicide caused by mental ill-health. One young person said that instead of focusing on what is not working in terms of mental health support, government should work out what is working best and keep supporting those things. Another young person talked about the need to create more mental health facilities in rural communities and establish better transport services so that people in rural areas have better access to city-based services.

The need to offer people with mental health issues more financial stability so they can afford better healthcare was discussed. Increasing financial support to people and introducing a universal basic income was mentioned in this context.

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**Proposed solutions:**

- Provide information and discussion in schools about mental health and how to help people who are suffering from mental ill health
  - Provide instruction in schools about building resilience
  - Offer behaviour modification programs to perpetrators of bullying
  - Employ more psychologists and counsellors in schools, with continuity of support people
  - Offer more professional support to people with eating disorders
  - Provide male-specific support to young men experiencing mental ill-health
  - Develop an app listing support lines and services for young people in Tasmania
  - Provide more access to mental health support in rural areas
  - Support and build on things that are already working to improve youth mental health.
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## Education that makes sense

*"I dropped out of school the first week in Year 8 because I just couldn't retain the information. I got no help, just detentions and constant bullying. There needs to be better support for children with learning disabilities. I think we should be taught more useful things that will prepare us for adulthood like doing your taxes and job applications, and the process of finding and paying for a home. Some of us don't have parents or family to guide us and help us through life."*

**Finding.** Young people feel that the curriculum should be more flexible, and schools should offer more practical life skills.

Most of the TYF participants were students and were therefore well-acquainted with the education system. Some loved school and were fully engaged but many more commented on the lack of relevancy of the curriculum to their lives and their disengagement with education. Many of the young people talked positively about teachers, while recognising the pressures they were under. They thought the public education system in Tasmania is stretched too thin and teachers do not have the time to provide the support many students need. Some suggested that education needs to be more student-centred, with more staff and counsellors providing individual support to those who are struggling. They thought the school environment needs to be more adaptive to help bring out the best in everyone.

Some young people commented about government subsidies to private schools which enabled them to provide students with more advanced technology than public schools and 'perpetuated intergenerational wealth inequality'.

Subject choice was a big issue for many young people. They wanted more education in life skills to prepare them for living independently after school. Learning how to sew and cook, open a bank account, get a car, pay rent, get a house, apply for a job, or prepare a résumé were mentioned.

Some young people wanted more valuing of arts and languages which they thought should be included as 'core' subjects in schools, rather than being provided as 'soft' options. Others wanted career-focussed subjects such as engineering or aquaculture. The mandatory curriculum came under scrutiny: 'We should be able to study what we are interested in rather than just what the government says we need to learn.' They said there should be subject choices for everyone, not just people who are academically inclined. They recognised that some students are practical learners and do not cope well in a classroom environment. Big Picture Schools were seen as a more appropriate environment for young people who 'slip through the cracks' and are disengaged from mainstream education.

Several participants called for better health education and sexual/reproductive health education: 'We are taught what is normal for our bodies but not how to tell when something could be wrong, and we should seek medical attention.'

NAPLAN was raised as an issue causing excessive stress for students, and college-level exams were said to contribute to student burnout. The young people thought that there should be better ways of testing people.

A few TYF participants said they thought the TCE provided a good range of options, with students able to choose subject according to their abilities, but they noted the limited choice of subjects and lack of opportunities in rural schools. It was suggested that people with trades backgrounds should be brought into high schools and colleges to teach more practical-oriented skills.

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**Proposed solutions:**

- Enable staff and counsellors to provide more individual support to people who are struggling
  - Offer training in life skills such as learning how to sew and cook, open a bank account, get a car, pay rent, get a house, apply for a job, or prepare a résumé
  - Promote arts and languages in schools, and potentially include them as 'core' subjects rather than 'soft' options
  - Include more career-focused subjects such as engineering or aquaculture
  - Provide more options such as Big Picture Schools for disengaged students
  - Provide better sexual/reproductive health education, and general health education
  - Introduce different ways of assessing students (other than NAPLAN and TCE exams).
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## Having a good job

*“A good job has a decent boss and good mentors as well as a support network – ideally something that is relevant and helps the community, and that you enjoy doing. It should provide you with enough pay so that you can afford all the things you need to, and good hours so you have time to do other things you enjoy. Something simple, not too stressful...”*

**Finding.** Young people are keen to find work that is fulfilling and meaningful as well as paying the bills.

Young people were understandably keen to secure a good job so they could pay the bills, but they also wanted work to give them a sense of fulfillment and be relevant to society. A good job was defined as something that is enjoyable and motivates you to want to keep working, that is beneficial to everyone, and pays well. It should not be boring. The work environment is important. There should be a good support network of people who respect you and help you on the job. The bosses should be enthusiastic about mentoring the next generation, aware of workers' rights, and not too bossy. If young people did not have any previous experience in a role, they did not want to be left floundering around not knowing what to do.

Finding the right job was part of the TYF participants' hopes and dreams, but they realised that this is out of reach for some young people. They talked about nepotism in the workplace and lots of jobs in government being advertised that were already filled.

Some of the participants thought that there was too much pressure in high school and college to have a career path mapped out – that people needed to be given a chance to work things out for themselves. Others felt that more career advice should be offered in Years 8 and 9. Some participants said that there was a lack of alternatives to university in Tasmania. There was also mention of lack of study options at the University of Tasmania, with some courses not being offered in Tasmania (e.g. physiotherapy), and others being cancelled because of COVID or because they were no longer financially viable. Some young people looked towards TAFE and apprenticeships as more direct pathways to employment.

Young people wanted more assistance with securing the right job. They proposed that the government support businesses to hire teenagers, invest in the arts, and provide incentives to industries that encourage people to stay in Tasmania, reversing the brain drain. They wanted more opportunities in school to learn work skills, and assistance in getting work experience in local businesses and community services. Job experience days, with groups of students going out to different workplaces to get an understanding of their work environments, were mentioned.

The TYF participants said they would like more information about a broad range of career options, not just those requiring university education. They wanted to know how to get an apprenticeship and what practical steps they need to undertake to get a job. Several participants referred to the South East Employment Hub in Sorell as a great initiative helping people find work. They called for the creation of more job hubs in other areas. A simpler, youth-specific job website was proposed to help guide young people towards available jobs. One participant suggested that a youth-focussed 'jobs board' be established, perhaps as a joint initiative of Colony 47 and the Tasmanian Government.

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**Proposed solutions:**

- Reduce pressure on young people in high school to have a career mapped out, but start offering advice in Years 8 and 9
  - Provide more information to young people on alternatives to university
  - Give incentives to businesses to employ young people
  - Provide more work experience opportunities in schools
  - Provide information in schools on how to get an apprenticeship, and the practical steps people need to go through to get a job
  - Establish 'job boards' specifically for young people and more career hubs (like the the South East Employment Hub in Sorell).
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## Finding work after school

*“Being able to find a job that you're passionate about, that you love rather than just working for the sole purpose of earning money, is really important.”*

**Finding.** Young people are worried about entering the job market because of high unemployment, a lack of unskilled work, and concerns that young people are not treated fairly in the workplace.

There was some despondency among the young people about entering the job market after school. They were well-aware of the lack of jobs available. The rural participants talked about the long distances they needed to travel to find work, and the lack of public transport. Some of the young people were on track to go to university or into a trade but others found the prospect of trying to find work quite frightening, one commenting, ‘I feel like I’m so lost with the future, I’m not able to be helped.’

The TYF participants called on the government to create more jobs for young people, particularly in local areas, and for better public transport. While acknowledging the assistance schools provided in work skills development, they wanted more of this on offer. They wanted more opportunities for work experience, and information about what jobs might be available and how to go about getting them. It was suggested that schools provide a platform to advertise local job vacancies.

Workers’ rights featured strongly in discussions. Participants were very much aware of the possibility of being exploited in the labour force, as young unskilled people with no prior work experience. They discussed jobs where they might be standing for hours on end dealing with unpleasant people for a meagre wage, and the potential to either be working too little or too much. They would like more information provided in schools about workplace rights and how to speak up. They would also like to see some online platforms and support groups for young workers on their rights.

Some participants thought it was the responsibility of the employer to adhere to worker rights and ensure young people were not working too much. Others suggested that individuals should take responsibility for their own self-care and for regulating themselves and their emotions if suffering from workplace stress.

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### Proposed solutions:

- Create more jobs for young people, particularly in rural areas
  - Offer more training in schools in the development of work-related skills
  - Provide information in schools on workers’ rights and training in how to speak up
  - Develop online platforms and support groups for young people on their rights in the workplace.
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## Living independently

*“I am only 15 years old and I have been employed for over a year. That has been an amazing form of independence. Being able to earn my own money and make my own connections through the workplace has been such a brilliant opportunity.”*

**Finding.** Most young people are keen to live independently but they are concerned about the high cost of living and the lack of affordable housing in Tasmania.

For some of the TYF participants, living independently presented an opportunity to become more self-determining - to have a choice in what you do and how you do it and not have to rely on others to do things for you. For a few, independence had been a necessity, not a choice.

The young people perceived independence and the skills required to become independent in various ways. At its most basic, they said independence meant having a safe place to live and enough money to survive. Others saw it as the ability to support themselves financially, have a stable life, and have authority over their decisions with no one telling them what to do or judging them. Some of the skills they associated with independence were the ability to understand conflicting opinions, the ability to bounce back if life takes a downwards turn, and learning to do all the small things that had previously been done for them by parents or carers.

They saw the downside of independence being the potential for loneliness, with all the social problems that could result from this. The need for people to have a strong network of family, friends, and other social connections to combat this was discussed. Sharing accommodation after leaving home was seen as an opportunity to get experience in living with others and meeting people from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Again, the education system was called on to help young people transition to independence. Some young people said that there should be more education and advice provided in schools on how to live independently, manage money, cook and paying bills. They thought that, ideally, young people should be able to transition gradually to independent living, with adults passing on their skills and advice. One participant noted though, that not all parents were equal to this task and some young people were forced out into the world with little or no preparation.

The high cost of living and the lack of affordable housing were seen as the biggest barriers towards independence. There were calls for more affordable housing options for young people, increased access to housing loans, and education about handling money responsibly.

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### Proposed solutions:

- Provide education and advice in schools on how to live independently, manage money, cook, pay bills etc.
  - Provide more affordable housing options for young people, increased access to housing loans, and education about handling money responsibly.
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## Conclusion

The year 2020 has posed many challenges, not the least being how to provide a voice for young people with COVID restrictions on public gatherings and face-to-face contact. Not to be deterred, the TYF team designed a large online forum with separate chat rooms facilitated by young people and mentors that provided participants with flexibility and choice, and opportunity to have their say. Those who were not able to be online at the time of the online forum had the option of completing a survey.

The forum was remarkably successful in attracting a diversity of participants, with the number who identified as Aboriginal, as a young LGBTIQA+ person, as having a disability, or being culturally and linguistically diverse, far exceeding representation in the general population.

Despite the doom and gloom of 2020 and their concerns for their future amid COVID-19 and the threats posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and rampant bushfires, TYF participants were remarkably resilient and optimistic. Like generations that preceded them, they continue to have hopes and dreams for the future and want to change the world for the better. They want Tasmania to be a fairer, safer, more inclusive and equitable place for everyone, no matter their background, diverse identity, interests or abilities. They want healthy debate in the community, and they want to be part of that debate, with their voices heard, respected, considered, and acted on. They want to receive an education that optimally prepares them for life after school - to be resilient, healthy, confident and caring individuals who readily transition into adulthood, and find work and careers that are enjoyable, fulfilling and meaningful. They are Tasmania's future.

## TYF Supporters

City Mission Launceston  
City of Launceston  
City of Hobart  
Clarence City Council  
Department of Education, Tasmania (DoE)  
Impact Communities  
Independent Schools Tasmania  
The Link Youth Health Service  
headspace Hobart  
Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT)  
Mo O'Meara, MoHow Consultants  
Olivia Aitchison, YNOT volunteer  
Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS)  
Tasmanian Government  
Tyenna H., City of Hobart  
University of Tasmania and University College (UTAS, UC)  
West Tamar Council  
Working it Out (WIO)  
Youth, Family and Community Connections INC. (YFCC)  
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVIC)

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