

Tasmanian Youth Forum 2023

Mental Wellbeing
and Resilience

Help us help
ourselves...

...and each other



Report

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the palawa and pakana people as the traditional, original and continuing custodians of lutruwita (Tasmania) and the continuing connection that Tasmanian Aboriginal people have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

About YNOT

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for young people aged 12-25 years and the non-government youth sector in Tasmania. YNOT works to ensure policies affecting young people in Tasmania are relevant, equitable and effective and that young people have a voice on issues that matter to them.

Our Vision A Tasmania where all young people are valued and can achieve anything.

Our Purpose To drive positive change with young people and the youth sector in Tasmania.

For further information

Youth Network of Tasmania
12/29 Murray Street
HOBART TAS 7000
tyf@ynot.org.au

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 youth sector in Tasmania. TYF is YNOT's single large youth consultative event, bringing together young Tasmanians to discuss issues important and relevant to them, as well as solutions and ideas to improve outcomes for young people and their communities.

Acknowledgments

YNOT would like to thank young people who participated in the TYF consultation process. We also acknowledge and thank the educators, youth workers, and parents and guardians who supported young people to participate.

TYF 2023 was developed in consultation with a Youth Advisory Group, who informed the TYF topic, content and consultation methods used. Thank you to Kai (20, South), Tarcin (15, South), Jet (16, North-West), Sam (15, North), Nina (19, North) and Sophie (23, East Coast) for helping shape a successful program.

A special thanks to Jet, who identifies as a young Indigenous person, for opening the forum with an Acknowledgment of Country, to Tom (24, South) from TJH Creative for graphic design of TYF promotional material, to Abby (21, South) for producing the TYF demographic infographic, and to Justyne (18, North) for photography.

Thanks also to members of the Sector Steering Group, who worked with YNOT to ensure the emotional safety of TYF participants was safeguarded: Cate from Corner Stone Youth Services, Bridget Wallbank from Mental Health Council of Tasmania, Kylea Aldred and Callan Hume from Speak Up! Stay ChatTY, Will Smith from JCP Youth, Curtis Knox from the City of Clarence, Stephanie Armour from Launceston City Council and Nickie Brannigan from the office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

We acknowledge and thank our emcee Will Smith and the team at JCP Youth for facilitation, Kylie Dunn from dinkylune for graphically capturing discussions on the day and creating the youth-friendly report, and headspace Hobart, Launceston and North-West for creating our annual ChillZone for forum participants. A special thanks to Bridget Wallbank from Mental Health Council of Tasmania for developing the *Wellbeing Snakes and Ladders* and *Resilience Toolbox* activities.

The Tasmanian Youth Forum was funded by the Tasmanian Government and sponsored by the City of Launceston.



Tasmanian Youth Forum supporters

YNOT would like to thank the following schools and organisations who participated at the TYF 2023 Forum in Launceston on 2 June 2023:

- Association for Children with a Disability
- Big Picture School Hobart
- Burnie City Council
- Circular Head Council
- City of Clarence
- City of Launceston
- Cornerstone Youth Services
- Derwent Valley Youth Action Team (D'FAT)
- Devonport City Council
- Don College
- Dorset Community House
- Huon Valley Council
- Kennerley Homes
- Leighland Christian School Ulverstone
- Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Riverside High School
- St Michael's Collegiate School
- St Patricks College
- West Tamar Council
- Waratah-Wynyard Council
- Wise Employment
- Yolla District School

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Executive Summary

What is your vision for a Tasmania that supports young people's wellbeing and promotes resilience?

This is the question posed to young people participating in the Tasmanian Youth Forum consultation process in June 2023. Over two hundred (242) young Tasmanians told us what kind of Tasmania they want to see:

A Tasmania where mental wellbeing and mental health can be discussed in an open manner.

A Tasmania that combats drivers of low wellbeing and poor mental health.

A Tasmania that supports social connection and peer support to build resilience.

A Tasmania with available, affordable, and timely mental health services for all.

Findings from TYF 2023 support what previous reports already highlight: Tasmania is not yet delivering on the above vision. Young Tasmanians have experienced worrying spikes in low wellbeing and mental ill-health in recent years, with rates of high or very high psychological distress among young people aged 18-24 up three-fold since 2009, to 33.8% in 2019 (Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Mission Australia's 2022 Youth Survey found that Tasmanian young people were below the national average in their personal wellbeing, both in relation to their life as a whole and in relation to a range of issues such as health, social connection, safety, autonomy, and connection to culture (Mission Australia, 2022).

Crucially, young Tasmanians view themselves as active agents in the maintenance of their own wellbeing and mental health as well as the wellbeing and mental health of their friends. Exercise and talking things through with friends, family, or professionals, time with pets, creative activities, mindfulness and affirmation practices and light entertainment all were part of young people's daily "resilience toolkits."

Nevertheless, young people say, there is still much to be done to help young Tasmanians support their own well-being and mental health. Asked for their thoughts and experiences around wellbeing, mental health and resilience in seven key areas of life, young people shared the following:

Social media: Whilst it was recognised that social media platforms can play a positive role by building interpersonal connections and connecting young people to resources, young people acknowledged that social media can also distort young people's self-images, expose them to inappropriate or even dangerous material, and allow opportunities for bullying and abuse. They say that parents, educators, youth organisations, the Tasmanian Government and social media platforms themselves can do more to empower young people to keep themselves safe in the world of social media and to impose control on negative content, in particular cyberbullying, unsafe content, and unmediated exchanges.

Community: Young people say that close-knit communities can provide emotional and practical support in tough times as well as connecting young people to valuable employment and training opportunities, but also can turn against people who don't fit in easily. They say that young people will benefit from more community activities and facilities; safer communities with better acceptance of diversity; and more community exchange and cohesion.

Schools and education: young people say that schools are a perfect environment for supporting young people's mental wellbeing and instilling resilience, and that many schools have existing initiatives that support this through programs and activities. However, many think that schools still need to do more to ensure that their philosophies, programs and staff are all genuinely aligned and on board with a wellbeing-focused approach to education. Young people believe that more work is needed in schools to de-stigmatise and address mental health issues, neurodivergence, and the impacts of trauma, with a focus on early intervention.

Identity, diversity and inclusion: Young people see positive movement in Tasmania around acceptance and inclusion of diverse backgrounds, cultures and identities, and want to see more: *more* dates, events and community initiatives celebrating diversity, *more* focus on Aboriginal history, *more* policy and legislation protecting diversity, and eventually more open mindsets among Tasmanians of all ages and backgrounds.

Sport and recreation: Young people say that sports and recreation promote young people's "mental fitness," helping young people build and maintain well-being through physical and mental challenges as well as social contact, team solidarity, and personal and collective pride. However, lack of groups, facilities, and transport, particularly in rural areas, can make it difficult for some young Tasmanians to have the opportunity to participate. All of these issues need to be addressed, young people say, as well as training in mental health, diversity inclusion, health literacy and injury prevention training for clubs and organisations.

Friends and peers: Young people value their friends highly, and many turn to them as their first ports of call when they are feeling low. Knowing how to support a friend who is going through a tough time is crucial, young people say, and can involve young people receiving training in good communication and relationships as well as mental health first aid training. But young people also say that they need more opportunities to make friends in the first place, including activities that promote genuine open discussion and more support to help young people with diverse identities and abilities to connect with each other and with new people.

Workplaces: Young people believe that workplaces are deeply enmeshed with young people's wellbeing and mental health, both as places of support and as potential sources of stress. Workplaces with a poor culture of supporting mental health are particularly challenging, given the additional stigma that young people face based on their age alone. They hope for better acknowledgement and understanding of wellbeing, mental health and chronic ill-health in workplaces; more flexibility to manage challenges; and more workplace protections for employees.

Young people were also asked where they get information about services available to them, what promotional material should be provided to them 'at a glance', and what barriers they experience when using a service once they're aware of it. They favoured clear, concise information about what the service offers, who it's for and how young people can access it. They also highly value upfront information on matters such as confidentiality and inclusivity.

Recommendations

1. Establish and/or strengthen youth participation mechanisms across Government

Ensure that youth participation mechanisms in Government are strengthened, clearly articulated and embedded in the development, implementation and evaluation of all youth mental health policy and programs relevant to young people aged 12-25 years.

2. Prioritise and invest in policy and initiatives that support young Tasmanians mental wellbeing and resilience

Ensure greater alignment of relevant government plans and strategies aimed at improving the mental wellbeing and resilience of young Tasmanians such as the Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, Department of Education Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy and Rethink 2020 to avoid duplication of effort and to drive tangible outcomes for young Tasmanians.

3. Enhance prevention and early intervention youth mental health supports in the community

Prioritise and adequately resource the meaningful engagement of young Tasmanians in the development, implementation and evaluation of Tasmania's new Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Framework as part of the 2022-23 Rethink 2020 Implementation Plan (Reform Direction 2). Ensure young people are at the forefront of designing prevention and early intervention youth mental health initiatives to meet their diverse needs.

4. Improve awareness of positive mental wellbeing and mental health literacy in the community

Ensure that Tasmania's Mental Health and Wellbeing Literacy Campaign evaluation measures the efficacy and relevance of the campaign to young Tasmanians, particularly in relation to associated campaign resources and age-appropriate communication platforms.

5. Build the capacity of young people to support their peers

The Tasmanian Government has recognised the value and importance of youth peer support through investing in the development of a youth specific mental health peer support program. Ensure equitable access to existing youth mental health peer support programs in Tasmania, and other relevant training programs such as Teen Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid, to help young people develop the tools and skills needed to support their peers.

6. Invest in safe spaces for young people, particularly in rural communities

Young Tasmanians consistently identify the need for safe, accessible youth friendly spaces in the community during consultations including: TYF 2022 and 2023, the Tasmanian Youth Story: Unearthing the Story of Young Tasmanians 18-25 years, and the 2022 All Advisory Youth Summit. Explore opportunities to introduce a holistic youth-drop in hub, such as 'one stop service centre', to support wellbeing and to connect to other likeminded young people.

Introduction

Mental well-being and resilience are issues that have dominated discussion at the Tasmanian Youth Forum for several years. Mental ill-health and poor mental wellbeing are significant challenges for Tasmanians as a whole, particularly young Tasmanians. Over half of young Tasmanians (59%) who responded to Mission Australia's 2022 Youth Survey reported that they are likely to need support with their mental health at some point in their life (Mission Australia, 2022). Mental health challenges and coping with stress were also at the top of the list of personal challenges and issues of concern for young Tasmanians. Wellbeing and mental health challenges, meanwhile, were identified by survey participants as the most significant barriers that young Tasmanians face to being able to achieve study or work goals. (Mission Australia, 2022). Indeed, as little as a year ago, Tasmanian young people had the highest rates of completed suicide of any state in the nation, exceeded only by the Northern Territory (Ross, 2022).

In developing the theme and activities for the Tasmanian Youth Forum, YNOT collaborated with stakeholders to ensure that TYF2023 complemented work already happening in the area. The *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2021) aims to support the mental and physical health of young people through the domain *Being healthy*. Under this strategy, the Mental Health Council of Tasmania is currently developing a Youth Peer Work Model that aims to build a Tasmanian youth peer workforce so that young people experiencing mental ill-health can be supported in their recovery by a peer who has lived experience of mental ill-health. (Mental Health Council of Tasmania, n.d.) The state Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services also underwent a review in 2019 (McDermott, 2019); the recommendations from which are still being implemented.

Meanwhile, the Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Directorate released the latest *Suicide Prevention Strategy* at the start of the year (Department of Health, 2023). Unlike previous iterations, this did not include a specific youth suicide prevention strategy. Nonetheless, *Implementation Plan One: January 2023 – June 2024* recognises young people aged 12-25 as a group that may be at increased risk of suicide, and outlines youth-specific actions including working with young people to develop actions to include in implementation plans (Department of Health, 2023, *Action 3.3.2.b*). Similarly, *Reform Direction 6 of Rethink 2020* (Tasmanian Government & Primary Health Network Tasmania, 2020) focuses on getting in early – in the lifespan and in illness progression.



Jet delivering an Acknowledgement of Country to open the Forum

This year's Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) has given young Tasmanians the opportunity to speak up about what they need to support their mental wellbeing and resilience in challenging times. The 2023 TYF topic was chosen in consultation with young people throughout 2022/23, and is no surprise given the continued emergence of this theme throughout YNOT's consultations in recent years. The findings of TYF 2023 reinforce the view of young Tasmanians as active agents in their own wellbeing and resilience. And, as this report shows, young people are indeed feeling hopeful that mental wellbeing and resilience are increasingly recognised as important in Tasmania.

Nevertheless, many young Tasmanians also feel that more emphasis on mental health and wellbeing at school, in the community, in the workplace, and in social policy in general would assist them to address these challenges. A wellbeing and resilience focus across all these areas, young people say, can help young people address challenges in their lives before they begin to impact their mental health. Some of the solutions proposed by young people in this report are simple, while others are more complex and require a considered response from individuals in our communities as well as decision makers. Importantly, young people want to see themselves represented and included in the discussions and considered during decision-making processes that foster a more diverse and accepting future for Tasmania.

The Process

The Tasmanian Youth Forum consultation was held throughout June 2023 and consisted of an in-person forum and an online survey. Young Tasmanians were asked what topic they would like to explore at TYF 2023 through an online survey open in November 2022, advertised through social media and youth sector networks. Based on responses to this survey, Mental Wellbeing and Resilience was selected to be the topic.

The content of TYF was informed by a Youth Advisory Group made up of 6 passionate young people from around the state. Members helped shape the consultation activities, topics and questions, as well as providing advice on how to make the forum an inclusive space in which all young people could feel safe and empowered.



TYF2023 Youth Advisory Group members at the Forum (from left to right): Jet, Sam, Nina, Kai and Ash (YNOT)

A Stakeholder Steering Group was also convened, involving representatives from organisations across the youth and mental health sectors. The Steering Group's role was to advise on safeguarding the emotional and psychological safety of participants, noting that young people may find conversations in the mental health space personally challenging. The Steering Group also helped develop best-practice guidelines for table facilitators around language and discussion direction.

The Forum

127 young people aged 12-25 attended the forum, held at the Tailrace Centre Launceston on Friday 2 June 2023. The event was launched by the Honourable Roger Jaensch, Minister for Education, Children and Youth. Jet, a young Indigenous person and member of the Youth Advisory Group, delivered an Acknowledgement of Country. The forum was facilitated by Will Smith from JCP Youth.

Young people were invited to consider the ups and downs they may face on a day-to-day basis in an activity called Mental Wellbeing Snakes and Ladders, and the skills and attributes they already have in their Resilience Toolbox to draw upon when life gets tough.

The day also included table discussions in the Wellbeing Café in the morning, and Resilience Café in the afternoon. These sessions saw young people working collaboratively to outline what they would like to keep, change and create in their lives, their communities and Tasmania to support their mental wellbeing and resilience, in two World Café-style sessions.

The event concluded with groups presenting an 'Elevator Pitch' of a practical implementation to support the mental wellbeing and resilience of young Tasmanians. This was attended by State politicians and dignitaries, including the Hon Jo Palmer MLC, Hon Nick Duigan MLC and Lara Alexander MP.



Forum participants delivering their Elevator Pitches

The Survey

The survey was launched immediately following the conclusion of the Forum and remained open throughout the month of June. The survey questions reflected those asked at the forum, giving young people who were unable to attend on the day, or couldn't fully participate, the opportunity to have their voices heard.

The survey was promoted through social media, sector networks and TYF supporters, and two \$50 gift vouchers were offered as an incentive to participate. A total of 144 young people completed the survey.

What young people were asked

The TYF program and survey content were designed by YNOT and the TYF Youth Advisory Group. The Youth Advisory Group identified seven topics for discussion through the thematic lens of mental wellbeing and resilience. These were:

- Social media
- Community
- School and education
- Identity, diversity, and inclusion
- Sports and recreation
- Friends and peers
- Workplaces

Young people were asked what they would KEEP, CHANGE and CREATE in these areas, to better support themselves and their peers to maintain good mental wellbeing and stay resilient when times get tough.

Young people were also asked:

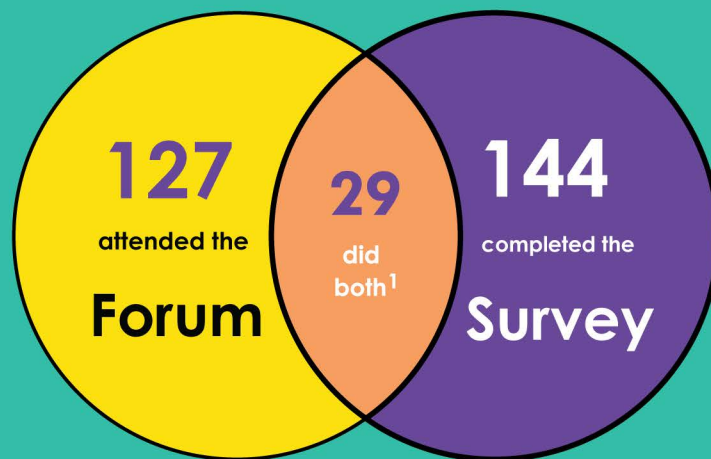
- What is in their “resilience toolbox”: what skills or traits they use to maintain their wellbeing when life gets tough.
- How services can best communicate their offerings to young people: what sorts of things catch young people's eye and help them identify at a glance if a service is right for them, and what barriers exist to their taking up services.

Results from the consultations were analysed to identify key issues and to capture what is working, what needs to change, and what could be created. Young people identified a wide range of ideas on how young people's mental wellbeing and resilience can be supported by families, schools, services, and the Tasmanian Government.

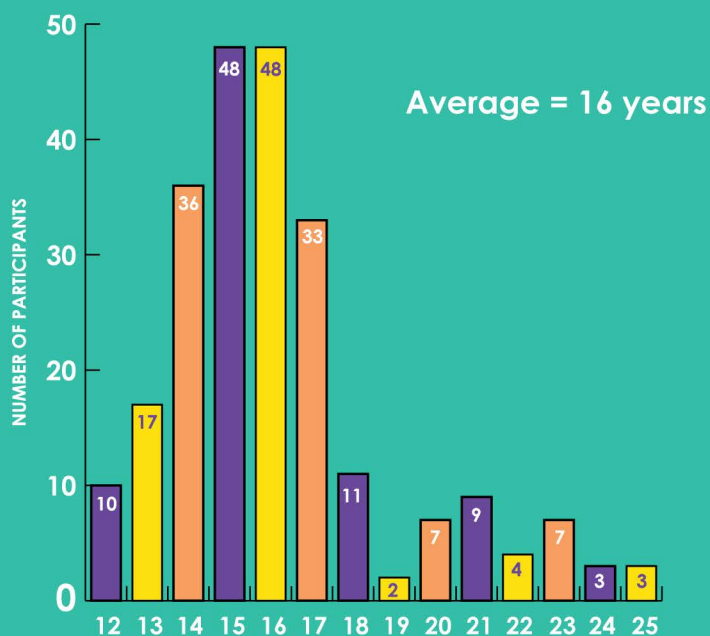
The high level of interest from young Tasmanians in the consultation process clearly demonstrated the value they place on having their voices heard. As young people grapple with the complex challenges posed by a rapidly changing world, they have also identified their hopes and visions to create a Tasmania that supports good mental health and wellbeing for all.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

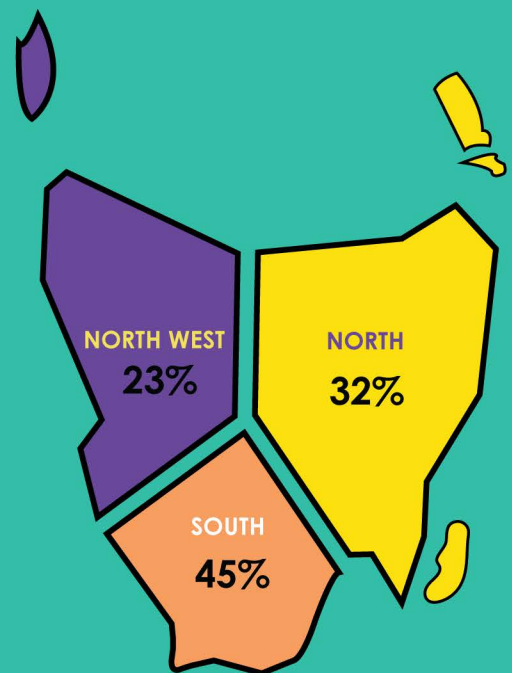
242
YOUNG TASMANIANS
HAD THEIR SAY



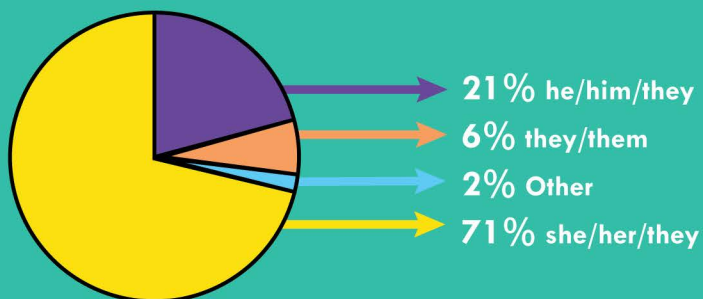
AGE ²



REGION ³



PRONOUNS ⁴



DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

| | |
|--|-----|
| LGBTIQA+ | 28% |
| Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander | 13% |
| Living with disability | 11% |
| Culturally and/or linguistically diverse | 6% |
| Carer or parent | 4% |
| Migrant or refugee | 3% |

¹ Young people who completed both consultation activities are counted once in the demographic data analysis

² 4 people did not disclose their age

³ 4 young people did not disclose their region

⁴ 11 people did not disclose their pronouns

What young people said

Young people have a clear vision for a Tasmania that supports the wellbeing and mental health of young people, and Tasmanians of all ages, in ways that promote resilience and connection. They hope for:

A Tasmania where mental wellbeing and mental health can be discussed in an open manner.

A Tasmania that combats drivers of low wellbeing and poor mental health, including:

- *All forms of abuse, whether in the home, by peers, on social media, or in the form of societal-level discrimination.*
- *Economic insecurity and its consequences, including insecure housing and food insecurity.*
- *Immobility stemming from lack of access to transport.*

A Tasmania that supports social connection and peer support to build resilience.

A Tasmania with available, affordable, and timely mental health services for all.

Resilience toolbox

As noted above, young people viewed themselves as active agents in the maintenance of their mental wellbeing and resilience in the face of challenges – even if, as discussed below, they would often appreciate more support. Almost every young person we spoke with said that they had their own “resilience toolbox:” a range of things that they do to support their own mental health and wellbeing. Their most frequently mentioned resilience tactics were:

Exercise. Young people are well aware of the importance of physical activity to support positive mental health and wellbeing. Young people reported that they participate in team sports like football, netball, basketball, or cricket, individual pursuits such as archery, yoga, karate, dance and roller skating; go for runs, walks and bushwalks; ride their bikes; and go the gym.

Contact with friends and family. Many young people value time with their friends, parents, siblings, and grandparents, who take their minds off their troubles, listen as they let off steam, and give good advice at difficult times.

Talking with a professional. For more complex situations or times when family and friends are not available, many young people reach out to teachers, school counsellors, and therapists, counsellors and/or psychologists at services such as headspace or The Link.

Time with pets. Many young people depend strongly on their pets for companionship and emotional regulation in hard times – something that some note makes it difficult to find a rental property.

Creative activities. Young people reported de-stressing through drawing, painting and ceramics; singing and playing instruments; cooking and baking; knitting and crocheting; participation in theatrical productions; and creative writing.

Mindfulness and affirmation practices. In addition to yoga, many young people engage in meditation, breathing practices, journaling, gratitude practice and positive self-talk.

Light-hearted/relaxing entertainment. Young people de-stress with amusing movies, videos and clips on social media; video games and anime; and listening to music.



Resilience Toolbox Activity - Notes

WHAT
DO YOU
THINK?



- Surround ~~your~~ self with safe people you trust
- spending time with positive & loved people to help you feel energised
- Top 5 = 5 people that makes you feel good

• Notice & Name

Outside activities / Bike riding

BREAKING THINGS Down

• Breathing exercises.

• goals / dreams - First Aid kit : Bandaid or Broken bone situation?

• gratitude

• PLAYING WITH A PET.

• Journalling

clothes that make you feel good

• going for a drive

tYF
Tasmanian youth forum

 Mental
Health
Council
OF TASMANIA

Collection of responses to the Resilience Toolbox activity from Forum participants

"I listen to music, write out my feelings, I watch/read favourite shows/books, hug friends and parents. I tell a trusted adult so they can keep an eye out for if I start spiralling. I do my best to be patient with myself for needing help."

Survey participant (15, she/her, South)

"I try to explore my character strengths, which can be my strengths, habits, or values. For example, I can try to focus on my strengths, such as being kind, resilient, optimistic, and so on. This kind of attention makes me feel more valued and positive."

Survey participant (15, he/they, North-West)

Mental wellbeing and resilience on social media

Social media is everywhere, for good or for bad. Young people say that various social media platforms can play a positive role in supporting mental health by building interpersonal connections, pointing young people to resources, and lifting people's moods through amusing or inspiring content. This ability to connect people and services at a distance, young people say, is one of the online world's greatest strengths.

But on the flip side, young people say social media platforms can distort young people's self-image, expose young people to inappropriate or even dangerous material, and open the floodgates to bullying and abuse. Some young people indeed feel actively threatened by the anything-goes ethos of some platforms.

"Social media can serve as a useful tool to enable young people to keep in touch with family and friends and access information to improve mental health and resilience. However, excessive use of social media can have a negative impact on mental health, so we need to promote mature and beneficial social media use."

Survey participant (12, she/her, North-West)

"The massive use of TikTok is absolutely horrendous. It promotes body shaming and if you aren't a certain way, you'll be attacked in the comment section. There are also many mean videos made. People record people who are just living their life because they're fat, a different style or disabled. It's all recorded for content that terrible people will laugh at. I fear that I've been filmed in public before too."

Survey participant (14, he/him, North)

What's working

Young people note that they turn to social media to support their mental health through:

- Connection to good friends and family, as well as like-minded people, at all hours and across distance.
- Light entertainment such as amusing videos and memes, comedy clips and games.
- Enjoyable news items, for instance around sport.
- Useful information, such as information around career opportunities.

Notably, supportive social media platforms can also provide non-threatening opportunities for young people to talk about mental health and wellbeing with people they don't know well, without the stress of face-to-face, personal contact. And the existence of these platforms, plus the opportunities for promotion offered by in-app ads and algorithms, make the web a valuable forum for challenging stigma and normalising the discussion of mental health.

*“Motivational content, online guides and educational videos,
activities that improve real-life skills.”*

Survey participant (13, he/him, South)

*“It is really helpful to have support from people that aren't in our
immediate family or friend groups. Having information on people
that we can contact works really well on platforms like Facebook.”*

Survey participant (15, she/her, South)

What needs to change

Notwithstanding these positive aspects young people believe much more needs to occur to help and empower young people to be protected from social media's dark side: misinformation, hurtful comments, unrealistic comparisons, cyberbullying and trolling, and content that actively promotes self-harm, violence and suicide. These harms, young people note, occur against a backdrop of mass collection of data by corporations and government, as well as, in some contexts, digital censorship.

An important first step, according to young people, will be raising awareness of the harms of social media - but social media platforms also need to take greater responsibility in controlling harmful content.

*“TikTok taught me about self-harm and certain ways of doing it
when I was about 12. It caused me to spiral into a deep depression.”*

Survey participant (14, he/him, South)



Young people during the Wellbeing Cafe session at the forum.

How this could happen

Young people see at least two paths to tackling the worst of social media's harms: helping young people navigate the complicated social media environment safely and to their own greatest advantage, and imposing controls on content.

Empowering young people. Parents, educators, youth organisations and young people themselves can play a role in helping and empowering young people and keeping them safe in the world of social media, whether in the way that they engage with platforms, or by knowing when to disengage completely.

"I think we need to keep safe boundaries around what we do and don't see online."

Survey participant (14, she/her, South)

"Deleting the TikTok app was one of the greatest decisions I've ever made."

Survey participant (14, he/him, South)

Young people particularly hope that:

- *Parents* will engage more with them around social media in helpful rather than prohibitive or punitive ways.
- *Educators* will provide more intensive training around social media use in schools.
- *Youth organisations* will help empower young people to take control of their social media use and create more social media groups that provide safe spaces for young people to connect and offer up positive content.

"Conversation between parents and child about dangers of social media etc. Why they can't use certain apps."

Forum participant

"Tools to assist young people with taking a break from social media/reducing their use."

Forum participant

"Help young people understand how to take control of their own cybersecurity [...] who you're following [...], what content you're consuming. Checking up on how your phone time is making you feel and why."

Forum participant

Imposing control. Young people want more support from the Tasmanian Government and from social media platforms to help them avoid and cope with the downsides of social media. Young people particularly hope that:

- *Legislators and state government organisations* will look at legislated requirements for social media platforms to crack down on negative content and boost positive content, as well as funding and creating resources such as helplines, help websites, and tools to help young people reduce their use of social media.
- *Social media platforms* will introduce features to keep young people safer from cyberbullying, unsafe content, or unmediated exchanges.

“We need a switch off button that you can press to get away from dramas or heated conversations. Maybe a temporary block where you can block someone for 24 hours then come back and be respectful.”

Survey participant (17, she/her, South)

Finally, destigmatising social media use and internet use will in itself help young people feel better about themselves.

“Just because I’m on my phone a lot doesn’t mean I’m a failure.”

Survey participant (14, she/her, South)

Mental wellbeing and resilience in the community

Communities can be a great support network for the individuals in them. The Tasmanian Youth Story consultation has shown that warm community connections are invaluable. They can provide emotional and practical support in tough times as well as connecting young people to valuable employment and training opportunities.

But Tasmania's close-knit social environment can be both a blessing and a curse: while communities are supportive for those who fit in, for young people with marginalised identities or family problems, it can be much harder to get help in hard times. Similarly, while social connections can make it easier to find employment, for those young people without connections, cronyism can make it hard to break into the job market. It is important, young people say, to make sure that communities are equally supportive for all.

"My neighbourhood is a great community, they all keep us safe and happy."

Survey participant (13, she/her, South)

What's working

Young people agree that there are already many ways by which they can seek out support from their communities. Key support mechanisms, which some young people believe have been strengthened in recent years, include sporting, recreational and youth groups such as sports teams, PCYCs, Girl Guides and Scouts, and facilities such as skateparks, community sector organisations, facilities and programs such as Neighbourhood Houses, the Migrant Resource Centre, YFCC holiday programs, Wynyard's SevenUp Centre; local mental health services such as Headspace and the Link; and individual mentors in the community.

"[Keep] Helplines, mentors and groups such as sporting clubs and youth groups."

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

"The improvement of the community has helped me a lot."

Survey participant (24, he/him, North-West)

What needs to change

Some young people, however, note that some aspects of their communities are draining for young people's mental health and wellbeing. Key concerns include:

- *Safety.* Domestic and family violence, and its impact on the wellbeing of entire families, is a specific concern for some young people.

- *Diversity.* Young people note that all Tasmanian communities are not equally open to diversity, and even within communities, all members are not equally open to all diverse identities.

“Change stereotyping, stigma toward different community members.”

Forum participant

- *Communication.* Young people note that lines and norms of communication in many communities are unclear or poorly observed, making it hard for young people to have their concerns about mental health (and other issues) heard.



Brainstorming ideas on butcher's paper at the forum

How this could happen

More community activities aimed at bringing people together. Many participants hoped for more community-driven initiatives that would put members of the community in touch and permit like-minded community members to spend time together in recreational or pro-social activities.

“More programs/educators: easily accessible in the community, that are engaging and interactive. More diverse activities, spaces for youth to try new things, indoor/outdoor: Relate it back to how these things benefit one’s resilience, like-minded people, positive attitudes.”

Forum participant

More community facilities for young people to connect with their peers and other members of the community.

Safer communities. Combatting domestic and family violence and abuse has the potential to address a major stressor for many young people at home – but broader lack of safety in the community, including unsafe behaviours, also take their toll.

“We could create a loving and safe neighbour/community by putting safe housing in every suburb to make people feel safe and people who are the ones causing the unsafeness will know about the safe house and security cameras that would make them feel stuck.”

Survey participant (13, she/her, South)

Better acceptance of diversity. Many young people feel that many communities, or members of communities, need to lift their game to achieve better awareness and acceptance of diversity in all its forms.

“Active government and community service effort to create inclusivity for marginalised people - this means co-design and consultation with all groups of young people, especially disengaged groups.”

Survey participant (23, she/her, North)

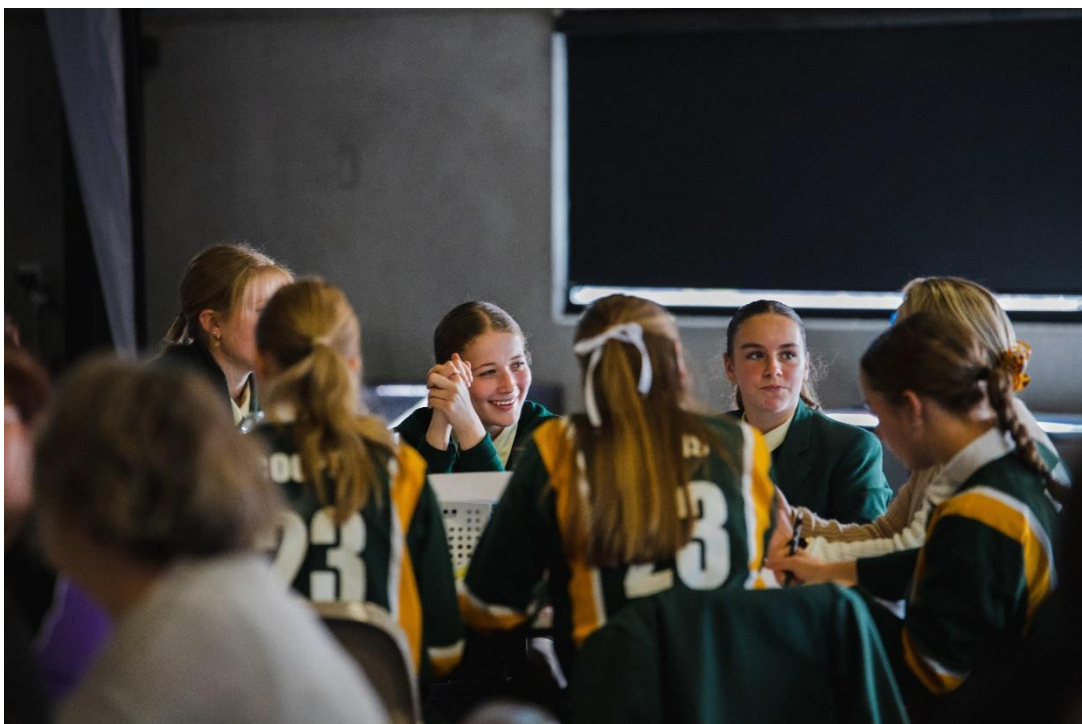
More community exchange and cohesion. Some young people suggest that communities can benefit from better communication channels and efforts to overcome the tendency to form cliques.

Mental wellbeing and resilience in schools and education

The experience of attending school is the common denominator for most (although not all) young people in Tasmania. Unsurprisingly, education and its accompanying stressors loomed large in young people's determinants of mental wellbeing – and many feel that schools are not doing all that they could to reduce unnecessary stress on students or to help young people who are struggling. At the same time, young people said, schools are a perfect gateway environment for supporting young people's mental wellbeing and resilience.

"I think that teachers and educators play a huge part in a child's life and that school districts (and whether they are good or not) have a huge impact on the kind of person a child develops into, and the kinds of teachers that have the hugest impact are those who are: open to encouraging children who are suffering both inside and outside of school, encouraging those who come from a different background, working to defend and not be judgemental towards people who are different- such as members of the LGBTQI+ community and people who are completely willing to help and be respectful to everyone."

Survey participant (12, she/her, South)



A school group at TYF2023

What's working

Young people note and appreciate many existing initiatives by many schools to support students through programs and activities aimed at mental wellbeing and resilience. Young people particularly mention teacher support for individual students, the presence of school counsellors, initiatives such as RUOK? Day, and training such as the Mental Health First Aid as supporting young people who may be struggling. Many young people also strongly appreciate the ability and willingness of many schools to accommodate different learning styles and to support neurodivergent students. Opportunities to participate in decision-making and implementation of programs, particularly around their own wellbeing, is also highly valued by young people.

"I think that [schools have] become so aware about mental health and that is a big step in the right direction."

Survey participant (23, she/her, North-West)

"Easy access to the youth health fund through school nurse, school psychologist available, teachers reminding us that we will live on if we fail a test or exam and that "believing you can't do" higher education isn't a good reason not to pursue that goal (if relevant). TASC reasonable adjustments are helpful. Teachers' understanding is very important."

Survey participant (18, she/her, South)

"Keep non-mainstream school's freedom to teach differently – e.g. listening to music in class as long as not disturbing others (like Big Picture schools)"

Forum participant

"Opportunities to attend youth forums/surveys/conversations/ keep wanting our input."

Forum participant

What needs to change

These positive initiatives and attitudes, young people say, are a great start – but they are not universal across all schools, years and classes. Many schools still need to do more to ensure that their philosophies, programs and staff are all genuinely aligned and on board with a wellbeing-focused approach to education. This can include better engagement with the student body to identify problem dynamics as they arise. It also means more respectful teacher behaviour, more awareness of mental health, more flexibility for students experiencing mental health issues, greater involvement of young people in finding solutions, and adequate resources for mental health support inside and outside schools.

“I think the expectations on young people are a lot, the burn out and stress is so common and takes a big toll on people’s mental health and general well-being. If the workload can’t be lessened, there at least need to be further supports for people!”

Survey participant (16, she/her, North-West)

“The environment that we are in and not being heard are major issues. The classroom is often loud, unsafe. People are rude and disrespectful. Some people never get the same chances as other people do to feel heard as well.”

Survey participant (14, she/her, South)

“It is very difficult for students to gain access to reasonable adjustments as the paperwork required and the meetings that must be made with psychologists can be time consuming. As a result, students can feel overwhelmed and miss the deadline, especially because these students are already vulnerable to stress due to the state of their mental health.”

Survey participant (17, she/her, North)

How this could happen

Better awareness of and destigmatising around mental health issues, neurodivergence and the impacts of trauma. Simply raising awareness, young people say, can reduce stigma and lead people to change their behaviours. Meanwhile, directly addressing and combatting stigmas – not only around these issues, but also around gendered issues such as menstruation – leads to even greater impact.

“Talking about mental health more openly and honestly in everyday life, to reduce the stigma and remove the awkwardness of talking about your mental health to others. “

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

More education and training around mental health for staff and for students. Young people want classes specifically on mental health, teacher and student training in Mental Health First Aid, and training around self-harm and suicide.

“At [our] school, 90% of all teachers are MHFA trained. We think all teachers should be MHFA trained. “

Forum participant

Stand up for young people. Ill-treatment by others is always unpleasant and can cause serious mental health issues. Young people say that simply modelling good behaviour is not always enough: sometimes teachers and staff have to actively stand up for young people who are being stigmatised, bullied or otherwise treated unfairly by peers or other staff.

“Bullying. Actually listen to victims and help them get away from that environment.”

Forum participant

Support groups for young people experiencing mental health challenges. Schools, young people say, are in an ideal position to establish after-school support groups or social media groups where students experiencing mental health challenges can support each other.

Better use of school building, physical and sensory spaces to support people’s mental health and learning needs. A good physical environment, young people say, can help people get through a bad moment. Quiet spaces for people who are feeling emotional or sensory overwhelm, separate spaces for people with different learning styles, and a reduction in noisy interruptions such as bells and announcements can all reduce mental stress at school for young people.

“More break-out spaces and alternative learning areas More flexibility and understanding from teachers.”

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

More support for marginalised groups. Students with diverse identities – different backgrounds, different gender and sexual identities, differing levels of ability – are at particular risk of mental health challenges, young people say, and require access to support that meets their experiences and needs.

More support at an earlier age. Young people note that mental health issues do not suddenly emerge in the secondary years; primary school students are equally in need of support, which can help ward off issues in future years.

“I think that early intervention might be good? Like, discussing age friendly coping skills and letting kids be aware of what mental health is beyond 'growth and fixed mindsets'? I started having issues YOUNG and I didn't understand what I was even experiencing until I got onto the internet and did my own research. Having some more discussions younger would be nice is my point, I guess. Teaching kids how to recognise stuff going in a crappy direction, how to develop healthy coping mechanisms[and] where to get help.”

Survey participant (17, he/him, South)

Two-way flow of communication. Young people want to have a voice in relation to approaches to supporting mental health – which, they point out, can lead to better solutions for all in the short and longer terms. Open conversations with teachers and school administrators about mental health support requires commitment from all parties.

More work around masculinities and the needs of male students. Some young people identify certain norms around masculinity as being particularly harmful to others – although some also particularly note the need for more support for boys.

“One thing I notice is that all my school's councillors (2) are female. Some kids do not feel comfortable talking to a female about things that might really hurt people. The male teachers also don't feel like they can do the same as a licensed councillor.”

Survey participant (14, he/him, South)

Changes in stressful operational routines and norms of assessment. Changing school hours to later in the day can accommodate adolescents' biorhythms; exam-based assessment is particularly hard on students' mental health.

Finally, some young people say, teachers and staff themselves require better support for their own mental health if they are to be able to support young people well.

“Do teachers have mental health support? Because dealing with your own psyche as a teenager sucks enough, I can't imagine having to support lots of teenagers' crappy psyches and neuroses without any support for yourself.”

Survey participant (17, him/him, South)

Mental wellbeing and resilience and identity, diversity and inclusion

Everyone has a unique identity and experiences. Young people were asked what resources or supports could help young people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and identities maintain their mental wellbeing and stay resilient.

“Diversity needs to be present at all levels of community - finding humanity in the things that tie us together in spite of and because of our differences is what makes people feel connected to others.”

Survey participant (23, she/her, North)

What’s working

Young people see positive movement in Tasmania around acceptance and inclusion of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Existing steps that young people want to see built on included:

Dates and events celebrating diversity. Young people mention notable dates and events that acknowledge identity and struggles such as Pride Week and the Pride March, Harmony Day/Week, National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week, and International Women’s Day.

“Community events that acknowledge identity and struggles (National Sorry Day).”

Forum participant

Legislation and legislated outcomes protecting diversity. Young people are happy for antidiscrimination laws as well as for the wheelchair access mandated under the Disability Discrimination Act and acceptance by schools of the hijab and other cultural dress as part of their uniforms.

Education and awareness-raising around diversity and the history both of marginalised groups and of the discrimination and violence they have faced. In this regard, a number of participants appreciate learning more about Aboriginal history and the focus on discrimination and racism that has emerged from the Black Lives Matter movement.

“[It’s important to learn about] discrimination in religion – antisemitism.”

Forum participant

Existing community initiatives signalling an embracing of diversity. Some young people note with appreciation the measures that some businesses and organisations have taken to publicly identify themselves as diversity-friendly, including shop window stickers.

"All are welcome" stickers in shopfronts etc. "

Forum participant

Changes in mindset. A number of participants say that they have already seen Tasmanians being more open-minded and more willing to listen and learn than in the past.

What needs to change

Despite these positive developments, many participants say, there are still many things that can be changed in Tasmania in relation to diversity – although all too often, young people's concerns can be dismissed because people think that "kids will be kids."

"For humans to stop discriminated against people who have different views, values, traditions, etc. Us as humans should just treat everyone the same, no matter how they identify, dress, look, act, etc."

Survey participant (14, they/them, North)

"Change stigma around gender diversity, sexuality, religion and culture."

Forum participant



Young people sharing their ideas on Identity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Wellbeing Cafe session.

How this could happen

Young people want to see more campaigns and events educating and promoting diversity, more opportunities for young people of diverse identities and backgrounds to come together, and more community initiatives to help everyone feel safe and accepted. It was noted that some teachers need education on diversity, but also that teachers can play a positive role in holding students to account. Practical steps such as gender-neutral bathrooms and uniforms, chill-out spaces and acceptance of headphones to shut out noise are all practical steps that can make young people feel safer and more welcome. Meanwhile, some hope for more online services for young people who do not feel comfortable going to places in person.

“Build a loving and accepting environment that can support young people of different cultures and identities. Help young people stay healthy and resilient by providing support and resources tailored to different groups.”

Survey participant (21, North-West)

“Educate and empower young people from diverse backgrounds, cultures and identities. Spaces in the community for people to discuss with different people. Create opportunities for leaders to meet with struggling/disadvantaged communities to ask what support they need, rather than assuming and creating an academic solution. A program in the curriculum to provide education on autism, neurodivergence, diverse backgrounds.”

Forum participant

Mental wellbeing and resilience in sport and recreation

Young people were asked how clubs and organisations - whether it's playing basketball, watching footy on TV or chess club - can support young people to maintain good mental wellbeing and build resilience in order to stay "mentally fit."

"Team sports hold you accountable - you have a role to play in your team (responsibility). Friendly competition builds resilience, you can't always win."

Forum participant

What's working

Participants emphasise the importance of sports and recreation to young people's "mental fitness," helping young people build and maintain well-being through physical and mental challenges as well as social contact, team solidarity, and personal and collective pride.

"Club sports are crucial in a person's life. They build a community where you can feel comfortable and supported while gaining strong physical fitness."

Survey participant (15, she/her, North)

Participants hope that Tasmania will continue to have:

A diverse range of clubs, organisations and opportunities to meet young people's individual interests. The sporting and recreational interests of participants spanned a wide range of individual and team activities, indoors and outdoors, including bushwalking, archery, football, running, yoga, netball, and basketball, to name only a few. All, young people suggest, are equally important to the wellbeing of their participants, and all deserve support.

A positive sporting and recreational culture. Young people believe that one of the most valuable things about a good sporting or recreational experience, is the sense of solidarity, celebration of individual and collective accomplishments, and norms of fairness. "Recognising everyone's efforts," "giving people a fair go," "positive reinforcement," "honouring people," "good sportsmanship," and "role models" all featured in young people's comments.

An emphasis on the individual's wellbeing. Sporting or recreation clubs play an active role in supporting young people's mental health off the field as well as on through cultures of encouragement and support.

"Getting checked in on to see if you're okay."

Survey participant (12, she/her, North-West)

What needs to change

The things that participants want most to see change are the flip sides of the above. These include:

- **Limitations** in the number of clubs and organisations and their facilities, particularly in rural and regional areas.
- **Unhealthy sporting cultures**, including excessive competitiveness and lack of respect for umpires and referees.
- **Lack of inclusivity**, including discrimination against girls and young women, young people of different cultural backgrounds, and gender diverse young people.
- **Lack of understanding of mental health issues** and their impact, particularly in relation to competition and pressure to perform.

“I think that something that we need to change is the stereotype [in the sporting community] that mental health issues are a problem and that they are bad.”

Survey participant (12, she/her, South)

How this could happen

More sporting and recreational groups. Young people want opportunities for all young Tasmanians to participate in recreational groups – currently a challenge in Tasmania’s small rural communities. In addition to wider availability of mainstream sports, many want better opportunities for emerging and non-team activities and for more emphasis on social as well as competitive sport.

“Social sport that is purely social, not competitive (inclusive, everyone can play regardless of their skill). More than just training for games, create a community.”

Forum participant

More facilities, including non-physical recreational facilities. Young people hope for spaces for all young people’s interests to be accommodated, physical or social, distributed in an egalitarian way across Tasmania’s dispersed population. Facilities must be disability-accessible and ideally could host allied health services (physiotherapists, nutritionists) to benefit not just young people’s sporting performance but also their overall health and wellbeing.

“Community spaces (hubs) for youth to meet, hang out, and socialise, sort of like free youth groups. Craft, free time, food, service providers (e.g. Headspace).”

Forum participant

More transport to activities. Lack of transport is all too often an insurmountable barrier to young people's participation in activities after school hours and off school grounds, particularly but not exclusively in rural areas. If young people can't get to an activity, young people consistently tell us, it might as well not be there. Not all transport options need to be public ones, some participants note; greater promotion of and incentives for carpooling, for example, may be the most practical option in rural communities.

Lower financial barriers to participation. Cost is a barrier to participation in a range of activities for young people from families on low incomes or young people who are on low incomes themselves. Existing financial support is aimed primarily at covering club fees rather than equipment or membership at commercial facilities such as gyms. Young people hope that facilities would lower their fees, and that more funding will be available to young people to meet the remaining cost of membership as well as equipment.

More promotion of youth participation opportunities. Some young people wish that there were more ways to spread the word about the benefits of participation in sporting and recreational activities – particularly since the survival of existing clubs depends on recruiting new members. Promotion, some participants say, should extend to social as well as competitive sport to bring as many young people into more active lifestyles as possible.

More mental health, health literacy, and injury prevention training for clubs and organisations. Given the importance of sporting and recreational organisations for young people's mental health, young people say, it is well worth investing in the mental health support skills of their staff and volunteers through training such as mental health first aid or trauma-informed approaches. Recreational activities can also be a valuable opportunity to raise young people's health literacy – another area in which staff and volunteer training would be helpful. Finally, many sporting organisations could benefit from better training around preventing injuries in young participants, which can lead to major mental health impacts.



Forum participants doing the Nutbush during a break.

More inclusive clubs and organisations, supported by training if necessary. Many participants hope that recreational clubs and organisations will be more supportive of Tasmania's growing diversity, for example around gender identity. Some staff and volunteers might need diversity training to familiarise themselves with new concepts; by the same token, stronger consequences for harassment and discrimination may be necessary to achieve change.

"Create clubs with a variety of age groups, so people can have closer relationships with older people."

Survey participant (13, she/her, South)

Taken together, young people suggest, these actions will create environments that are more likely to foster sporting excellence, as well as participation.

"Recently my school had weeks where we could pick our own sports and it resulted in majority of the students participating in their chosen sports, where there are usually a lot fewer students participating. It gave kids the opportunity to try something new, or pick something they are good at, be with friends."

Survey participant (15, she/her, North)

Finally, it was noted that not all young people are attracted to physical activities, especially club activities, and that their preference to not participate in such activities needs to be respected as well.

"There are hundreds of children and teenagers who purposely choose not to participate in sports and recreational activities due to feeling insecure or not enjoying the specific sport being played. I believe adults need to understand that some sports aren't for everyone and forcing them to participate only makes them more insecure and scared."

Survey participant (15, she/her, North)

Mental wellbeing and resilience and friends and peers

The importance of friendships and warm relations with peers to young people's mental wellbeing and resilience came through clearly in participant responses. Young people were asked what they need to maintain good wellbeing and resilience not only for themselves, but also for their friends – to whom they often turn first if they need support through challenging times.

“Friends and peers are vital to support young people during difficult times. This includes both emotional support and practical help, such as providing helpful advice and resources. To maintain good mental health and resilience, young people need to build good relationships and actively seek help.”

(15, he/him, North-West)

“They brighten my day. I can always turn to them in any situation. They always have my back. They make me laugh.”

Forum participant



Three young people at the forum.

What's working

Young people know how precious friends are. Participants describe their friends as loyal; trustworthy; non-judgmental; positive in their mindsets; and encouraging in tough times. They also say that their friends can be the ones to urge them to seek out other mental health supports.

"I think that the younger generation has a good understanding of how mental health affects you. so, as long as we keep educating younger people that it is okay to not be okay, we can learn to support each other."

Survey participant (15, he/they, North-West)

But young people also know that friendships and good relations with peers don't happen by magic, and that cultivating and maintaining warm connections requires work and social skills. Good communication and a healthy degree of self-awareness, some say, are some of the most important aspects of a good friendship – although also it was noted that tact has a place as well.

"Having good communication. Being open and honest. Keeping yourself aware of how you are acting towards others. Minding your own business and keeping some opinions to yourself in order to gain people's confidence."

Forum participant

What needs to change

Many people – not just young people – need to reconsider how they approach relationships with others, young people say, to ensure that these are based on mutual respect and trust.

"[People need to] be a lot less selfish and understand the effects of what you say (take on board other's thoughts and feelings). Change the language we use to talk to peers. Be non-judgmental."

Forum participant

Young people also hope to see a breaking down of prejudice, stigma, stereotyping and other barriers to genuine relationships with people of diverse identities and backgrounds. And some hope for a move away from text-based communication to the sound of a friend's voice.

“More awareness of people living with disabilities and our LGBTQIA+ communities.”

Forum participant

“Check in in person and over the phone, less texting.”

Forum participant

How this could happen

More activities to bring young people together. Activities during and after school hours are a great way to meet like-minded young people who may end up as friends. These can span a range of school years in order to increase the chances that a young person will find a peer who is at the same stage of intellectual, physical and/or social development. Also, not everyone is comfortable in face-to-face social settings; online youth groups can permit young people to progress to in-person meetings when they feel sufficiently comfortable.

More activities that go beneath the surface. Beyond physical and intellectual challenges, many young people hope for more opportunities for genuine exchanges of views.

“[Teach us] how to have healthy relationships with those who aren't necessarily friends. Teaching young people how to effectively resolve conflict through schools.”

Forum participant

More help with establishing genuine communication and good relationships. Everyone can benefit, young people said, from learning to communicate with kindness and respect. This, one participant suggested, could also take the form of programs aimed at parents.

“I think as a society we need to educate more parents/ the older generation on how to support their children who are silently or are just suffering from mental health struggles. They grew up in a completely different generation to us and sometimes they JUST DONT GET IT! or they don't deem mental health as a big deal, meaning that many people suffer because they feel unable to speak to their parents or older loved ones.”

Survey participant (17, she/her, South)

More advice on how to support a friend who's going through a tough time. Young people need to be able to speak to someone else if they are worried about a friend without fear of violating confidences or triggering interventions that could make things worse.

More support to help young people with diverse identities and abilities connect with each other and with new people. Young people say that greater inclusion is needed to ensure not only that everyone can have a friend, but also that everyone can benefit from the experience of having diverse friends who expose them to different perspectives.

“Help young people to understand and appreciate their differences.”

Forum participant

Mental wellbeing and resilience in the workplace

Participants were asked what mental wellbeing and resilience in the workplace looks like to young people and how employers can support their employees to overcome challenges or setbacks.

What's working

Young people appreciate compassionate, non-stigmatising workplaces where colleagues and managers are understanding of mental health issues and encourage and help young people to seek out support, as well as providing information on how such support can be accessed. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are helpful where available and can be complemented by other services. The presence in the workplace of an older person who has a good understanding of mental health issues and can provide guidance is a much-appreciated plus.

"I think workplaces are aware that that poor mental well-being exists and they provide a few resources like phone numbers for employees to reach out to."

Survey participant (22, they/them, South)

What needs to change

On the flip side, workplaces with a poor culture of supporting mental health are particularly challenging, given the additional stigmas that young people face based on their age alone. Workplace pressures can themselves trigger or contribute to mental health challenges, a fact that many young people think is under-acknowledged and under-addressed. Training can also be particularly intimidating. It was suggested that employers need to commit to stopping workplace bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination against young people.

"How people are trained, it can be scary and intimidating especially with the people that train you. There should be like a designated training person and it's treated like a course instead of being loosely taught."

Survey participant (16, North)

Meanwhile, young people hope for more recognition of outside stressors in young people's lives. Chronic illness, such as mental ill-health or endometriosis, has much in common with disability, and should be approached with similar levels of compassion and support; however, even more conventionally recognised forms of disability do not receive the support in workplaces that they deserve. Meanwhile, young people note the difficulty of finding workplaces that have the flexibility to accommodate people with multiple commitments, let alone health issues.

“Workplaces don’t often enough engage with employees and understand or provide with respect when work is impacting on their lives. Workplaces need to hold accountability in maintaining safe working environments.”

Survey participant (22, they/them, South)

How this could happen

Acknowledgement and understanding of mental ill-health and chronic health conditions, including ensuring that they are covered under sick leave provisions.

Flexibility to accommodate the physical and mental challenges that mental ill-health and chronic health conditions can create. For instance, a few participants suggested, people should be able to take short breaks when they need them, rather than being tied to a timetable, and that flexible work options and additional leave should be available for people experiencing mental ill-health and chronic conditions.

“Employers need to directly engage with their staff on a more personal level, and provide safe avenues and spaces to seek support. They also need to provide the flexibility for individuals to be able identify that something isn’t working for them and they are supported to come up with individualised resources.”

Survey participant (22, they/them, South)

Private spaces where people can go to regroup when feeling overwhelmed.

Clear information about workers’ rights as well as where people can seek out support.

“Some young people don’t know who to go to for help, particularly if the manager is not responding well.”

Forum participant

Participants also wanted to see more workplace protections for employees, particularly younger and vulnerable employees, including safe communications systems for employees to raise concerns and clear human resource management chains.

Service Promotion

Promotional channels

Young people were asked where they are exposed to information about different services that they may benefit from. They were asked to rank their top five options from a list of common locations and media, with their first selection being the most significant and their fifth selection being the least significant of the endorsed options.

Options included sponsored posts on social media, non-sponsored posts on an organisation's social media page, bus advertising including promotional material in or on the side of the bus, or in bus shelters; email newsletters, ads on Spotify, ads on online catch-up TV and other streaming platforms, advertising on the radio and in newspapers (including online and print version), YouTube ads, posters both in public spaces like doctor's offices or the door on public toilets and youth-specific venues like schools and youth centres, and organisations visiting their school or other education or training institution. The results are summarised in Figure 1, below.

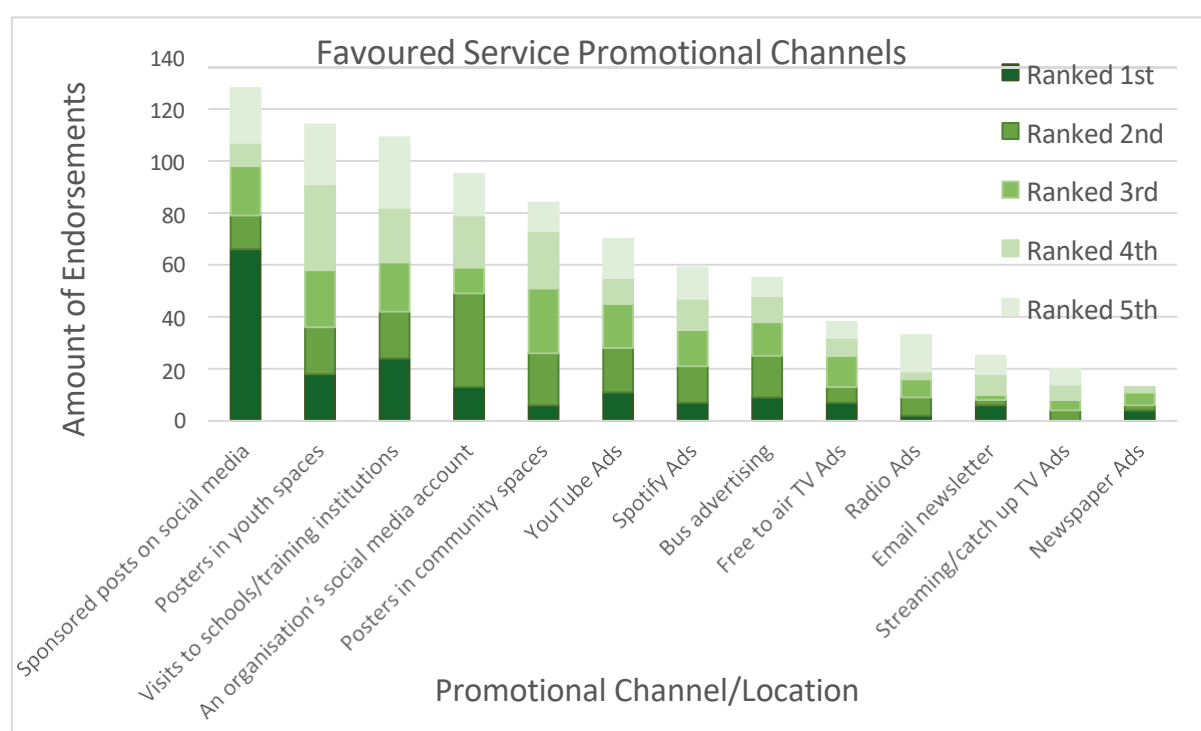


Figure 1: Favoured service promotional channels (by ranking)

As illustrated above, sponsored social media posts was both the most frequently included in young people's top five sources of information about services, and most frequently endorsed as the most significant channel. Other popular options include posters in youth spaces and general community spaces, direct engagement by services providers at school, YouTube ads and general posts on the service's social media, provided that the service already has an active social media presence.

Initial impressions

Young people were asked what key information they need 'at a glance' on posters, social media posts, or other forms of promotion to decide if a service or support is right for them. Key messages included:

Presentation

Young people say that the first impressions that services create through their advertising can be important determinants of whether young people will reach out. The emotional tone that advertising material wants to set, they say, is one of warmth and inclusion for all. Bright colours, unfussy fonts, and concise initial information can help to catch the eye and make information easy to retain.

“Bright eye-catching colours, 'cartoon' type drawings and pictures, short information on what they aim to do, multiple posts on social media so it gets into your head because you see it everywhere.”

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

What's on offer

Young people say that they need to know at a glance whether a service is targeted at them. Key information that young people are after includes:

Target age group. Children and young people need to be able to tell at a glance whether services are open to them, as well as whether services are likely to be familiar with the kinds of issues that their age group may face.

Big bold writing and then a simple description of the service underneath; not cheap smiles or fake laughs.

Survey participant (15, she/her, South)

Type of service. Many young people have an increasingly sophisticated understanding of what support services can provide, and are looking for the type of service that they feel is best suited to the issues that they are facing at the time.

How a service does business

How a service operates is as important as what it offers. Key service qualities that will affect whether young people feel that a service might be for them include:

Confidentiality. The issue of confidentiality, many young people say, is their number one concern. Some participants said that they had had bad experiences in the past, feeding their continuing fears of information being shared without their consent.

“The idea that if I go to a therapist or someone to talk to, they're not gonna tell my parents. Like at school, the therapists always tell your parents, even if they said they wouldn't.”

Survey participant (14, she/her, South)

Inclusivity. Many young people feel anxiety about whether they will face stigma, discrimination or judgment around issues of identity, including disability, gender and sexuality, Aboriginality, or country of origin. It is not enough for services to simply state that they acknowledge diversity; young people will look for tangible evidence of inclusivity in language, symbols, etc.

“Something that would discourage me is wrong word usages, like, say, an autism-friendly group is using the term 'Aspergers' which is outdated and offensive.”

Survey participant (14, he/him, North)

Youth-friendliness. Beyond a simple age range for services, young people want evidence that services are aware of, and are trying to address, the barriers and challenges that their age groups can face – transport, for instance. It is also important for services to let young people know whether or not parental consent will be required.

Cost. Affordability is key for young people who do not want or are not able to turn to others for assistance.

Location and availability of telehealth. For young people without easy access to transport options, information on where in-person services are located, and ways of accessing services if these are not easily accessible, is vital.

What misses the mark for young people

Young people are less likely to engage with:

Wordy, vague information. information overloads are more likely to alienate young people who largely prefer crisp, simple language.

“Too much information on a poster can fill someone’s mind and be unable to take in any information. I also believe that if a person notices a poster, social media post etc. is full of colour, which is easy to read and have only crucial information, they will be more drawn to it. While if there is too much information, people become bored or disinterested quickly.”

Survey participant (15, she/her, North)

Generic, clichéd presentation. Young people are suspicious of platitudes and staged photos. Some participants indeed are wary of advertisement full stop, preferring to hear of services from a person who knows them.

Next steps

Young people were asked how they decide if they will contact or access a service once they know about it, and if there are things that discourage them from taking that next step. Concerningly, some participants said that internal barriers – anxiety, shame, embarrassment, self-doubt, internalised stigma – would be enough to keep them from reaching out for help. In particular, participants were afraid that people (family, friends, other students or school staff, other people in the community) would make fun of them or think less of them for contacting support services, or that these people or service staff would be judgmental or dismissive of their issues.

Some were also concerned that even if they tried to keep their engagement from others, word would get out despite services' assurances of confidentiality – a fear that underlay the wish by several for complete anonymity. Meanwhile, many expressed uncertainty that their issues were serious enough to warrant reaching out for help, or that services would have the ability or interest to understand and assist them without judgment.

“Something that discourages me is if I tell my friends I could be made fun of as I’m reaching out to somebody that isn’t them. Also if somebody has to put in their [personal] details they often don’t continue with the service as they would rather remain anonymous and this service doesn’t allow that.”

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

Most young people, however, are ready and willing to reach out for help. However, many reiterate that simply being aware of a service's existence and offerings is not enough, and most said, in line with comments above, that they would need to feel certain that a service will be confidential, inclusive, youth-friendly and inexpensive before they would consider reaching out.

With those points established, young people are looking for:

More detailed information. Young people say that in order to make a decision about whether a service is the right one for them, they want to delve more deeply into its offerings, its values, and its approaches; a few indeed said that they would judge a service in part on its transparency around these issues. While some want to know how many people a service has helped, others feel that large numbers feel depersonalised. Some suggest the inclusion of QR codes on printed materials as an easy way to direct people to more detailed information.

“How it works, as in what happens if you go there. For example, I have no idea what would happen if I went to Headspace. Is it purely mindfulness, or is there something else which isn't advertised as much? How accessible it is. From my understanding, most people do not have time after school, work, or sports to just turn up to an HQ and talk to someone or do some mindfulness”

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

Multiple options for getting in contact. Many young people have a strong preference for or against one or more methods of communication, including coming to an office, making phone calls, sending texts or emails, or making on-line bookings. The diversity of young people's responses suggests that services will do well to offer as many options as possible.

"Online booking systems make it most likely I will access a service. Estimated wait times are useful. Email/phone makes it less likely I will utilise a service. Walk ins are good if possible."

Survey participant (23, she/her, North)

Positive reviews from trusted sources. Many young people are informed consumers and will turn to on-line reviews and internet searches as well as their peers to find out not only what other people's experiences of a service have been, but also a service's overall reputation. Others say that word of mouth would be enough for them, but that they still seek out the opinions of others.

"I decide by mostly whether I believe that they can do what needs to be done, whether they have good reviews, because I want to know that I'm not wasting my time on something that may not personally help me."

Survey participant (18, she/her, North)

Advice from others. Some young people prefer to go to trusted people - usually friends, for reasons of confidentiality - before finally taking the plunge.

"I would go to my friends and ask them for advice and if they think I should then I usually will."

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

Once contact has been established, young people say that the three biggest factors determining whether they will proceed are the complexity of getting signed up, wait times, and accessibility. In this regard, transport issues, while not the immediate responsibility of support services, nevertheless affect whether or not young people can access a service. Frustratingly, however, given the difficulties that many young people face in getting transport to services, some young people also say that telehealth services do not work for them.

"Something that discourages me is knowing that somethings not accessible, for example if it's out of town, or long wait times."

Survey participant (18, she/her, North)

“I would probably choose a place which looks very relaxed and welcoming. Something where you have to sign up and wait to be seen to would probably stress me out more.”

Survey participant (16, she/her, South)

“Well I hate talking to people about my problems online so I don’t “

Survey participant (15, she/her, South)

Conclusion

Young people in Tasmania are living at a moment in time when the importance of wellbeing and good mental health to all aspects of life, from physical health to economic and social success, are increasingly understood. At the same time, systemic barriers such as the cost-of-living crisis, lack of affordable housing and gaps in basic infrastructure like footpaths and street lighting inhibit young people from being able to take action to support their own mental wellbeing. The impacts of climate change, to which Tasmanian young people have shown the highest levels of concern in the nation, will bring unprecedented challenges to young Tasmanians' lives and to their wellbeing and mental health in years to come.

The Tasmanian Youth Forum 2023 has shown that young people in Tasmania are not facing life's challenges passively. They have strategies and routines for preserving wellbeing, and routes that they know, in principle, that they can go down if their mental health begins to suffer. Whilst young Tasmanians increasingly have an understanding of how to maintain good mental wellbeing, they recognise that they are still learning and want to learn how to better look after their own mental wellbeing. The challenge for Tasmania is to ensure that they are supported to expand and employ their "resilience toolboxes"; that individuals and organisations in all areas of young people's lives, from home to school to employment, are aware of the importance of wellbeing and mental health and take a wellbeing-focused approach; and that timely, appropriate, affordable, accessible mental health support is available if needed.

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WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID

...about



Tasmanian youth forum

it was awesome 😊

Today was very meaningful to me.

I really enjoyed the brainstorming ideas sessions.

I enjoyed sharing my ideas

I would love to come again & doing the netbush

today was a very eye opening event, (talking about common challenges and struggles)

I really have taken lots away from this

I liked how relaxed and how we really had opportunities to talk

I enjoyed the activities

I enjoyed getting to network with people from around the state.

Hoping to see our ideas come into fruition

I really enjoyed brainstorming ways to improve resilience. I didn't think I had a lot of ideas when I came, but once I started thinking, I actually had a lot!

I liked the Well being café and finding solutions to youth's mental health.

i hope we've made a difference 😊

Thank you

Thank you 😊

It was fun!