TASMANIAN YOUTH FORUM

NORTH-WEST REGIONAL ROADSHOW!

Consultation Report: January 2026

Young people's views and ideas on the issues that matter most in the North-West.

Tasmanian youth forum

youth network of Tasmania

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Youth Network of Tasmania
12/39 Murray Street, HOBART, TAS 7000

E: tyf@ynot.org.au
W: www.ynot.org.au

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and continuing custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania and recognise the continuing connection that Palawa people have to the land, sea, sky and waterways. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Executive Summary

The Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) North-West Regional Roadshow was held in Burnie on 31 October 2025, bringing together 26 young people from across the region. The forum provided an opportunity for young people to share their views about living in the North-West and the issues important to them, and to identify ideas and solutions to address the challenges they face. Throughout the forum, young people emphasised the importance of being listened to and having their perspectives inform decisions that affect their lives.

Participants were proud of living in the North-West, highlighting the region's natural environment, strong sense of community, and slower pace of life as unique benefits. At the same time, young people identified persistent barriers that impact their safety, health and wellbeing, and access to current and future opportunities. These included bullying in schools, limited support for neurodivergent students, challenges accessing transport and gaining their licence, gaps in sexual health education, and difficulty finding information about services and supports, and accessing local opportunities.

Through facilitated discussions, young people developed a series of 'Big Ideas' focused on improving school safety and inclusion, strengthening sexual and reproductive health education in schools, and increasing access to information, resources, local services and opportunities.

This report summarises what young people shared at TYF and presents their ideas to inform decision-makers across education, local and state government, and the community sector, helping to shape coordinated actions to improve outcomes for young people in the North-West.

Introduction: The TYF Regional Roadshow

The Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) is the annual youth engagement event of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), the state's peak body for young people aged 12–25 and the youth sector. TYF provides a platform for young Tasmanians to share their views on topics that are important to them and to share their ideas and solutions to improve outcomes for their peers and communities. Feedback is used to drive positive change on youth affairs across Tasmania.

In 2025-26, YNOT introduced the TYF Regional Roadshow, bringing the forum to Tasmania's three main regions. This approach was developed in direct response to feedback from young people who wanted opportunities to explore regional issues important to them, to connect with local decision-makers, and to improve access for young people living in rural areas.

The North-West forum was held on Friday, 31 October 2025, at the University of Tasmania, Cradle Coast Campus, bringing together 26 young people from across the region. The day was facilitated by Taz and Em from Futures Isle, with opening contributions from Riley (17), YNOT Youth Advisory Council member and Sunali (17), Burnie Council Youth Mayor. Young members of the Burnie Works Youth Council also led the opening icebreaker activity.

We thank the young people and adults who attended, Don College and The Righteous Youth who supported groups to participate, and headspace Cornerstone for providing a dedicated 'Chill Zone'. We also thank invited guests, Rob Fairs MP, Roger Jaensch MP, Craig Garland MP and Teeny Brumby Mayor of Burnie Council, for attending and engaging with young people throughout the day.

Methodology: How we listened

The forum used a participant-led, strengths-based approach designed to move from identified concerns to practical solutions.

The process included:

- Whole group discussions to identify the positive and challenging aspects of living in the North-West, and ideas to improve outcomes.
- Creating a 'Big Idea' in small groups, focused on a specific issue and solution.
- Group 'Big Idea' presentations to attendees and invited guests.

Discussions were captured through live documentation and handwritten participant notes. Feedback from across the day was collated and analysed for key themes using thematic analysis, compiled into this summary report for participants and decision-makers.

What's it like living in the North-West?

Young people described the North-West as having strong community connections and exceptional natural surroundings, alongside challenges that affect young people's safety, service accessibility, and post-year 12 pathways.

Environment and place

Young people were proud of the region's natural environment, including the beaches, waterfalls, mountains, wildlife, and access to bushland and walking tracks. The clean, fresh air and proximity to nature were defining features of living in the North-West.

Small towns and a slower pace of life were also valued. Participants described less traffic, easier access to the environment, and a sense of calm compared to larger cities.

Transport

The benefits of regional living are often offset by limited transport options. Young people who travel between towns for school, work, or services described public transport as unreliable and poorly connected.

Long wait times for community learner driver programs, reported as six months to a year, make it difficult to obtain a licence without access to a car or driver supervisor. This limits independence and access to education, employment, and services, as well as social and recreational opportunities.

Community and representation

Participants described a strong sense of community, often referred to as the "North-West spirit". Young people feel supported and connected by community members, local arts initiatives, and youth councils, and believe they can create change with the support of engaged adults.

Simultaneously, young people do not always feel represented at a state or national level. Advocacy opportunities such as Youth Parliament or UN Youth are often held outside the North-West, and many participants were unaware of existing youth voice opportunities. Young people said this limits their participation and contributes to an underrepresentation of the North-West in broader policy discussions.

Safety, wellbeing and education

While the region is generally perceived as safer than major cities, school safety emerged as a significant concern. Almost all participants reported experiencing bullying, both in person and online. Many felt current responses are ineffective and place responsibility on victims rather than addressing harmful behaviour by perpetrators or the social media platforms.

Young people value local support services, including organisations such as Youth, Family and Community Connections Inc. School-based initiatives, such as events offered by Don College Community Services, were highly valued for increasing young people's awareness of local services and supports.

Participants identified limited pathways after school, including fewer job opportunities, apprenticeships, and training options. Many feel they must leave the region to pursue further education or employment.

In-school support for neurodivergent students and those experiencing mental health challenges was described as inconsistent and inadequate. Young people reported that teachers often lack the training or resources to respond effectively.

Cost of Living and Housing

Although housing costs are lower than in major cities, young people still face affordability and availability challenges. Participants raised concerns about short-stay accommodation and rental investors impacting the private rental market, as well as rising costs of groceries, contraception, and personal hygiene products.

School-based supports such as free period packs, school nurses, and counselling services were highly valued for helping young people manage cost-of-living pressures. However, participants noted that these supports are overstretched and unable to meet demand.

The Big Ideas

Building on discussions about life in the North-West, participants identified key areas they believe should be prioritised to improve outcomes for young people. These priorities reflect where young people felt action would have the greatest impact across education, health, employment, transport, and access to information and services.

The priority areas identified were:

- Improving sexual health education in schools and increasing access to free or low-cost contraceptives and sanitary items.
- Teacher training to better support neurodivergent students, trauma-affected learners, and young people with mental health concerns.
- Life skills and financial literacy education to support independence after school, including budgeting and navigating the tax system.
- Statewide student identification cards, rather than school-based IDs, to ensure identification continuity for young people who do not yet have other valid forms of ID.
- Addressing public transport barriers, costs associated with obtaining a license, and access to learner driver mentor programs
- Stronger protections and supports for young workers, including appropriate supervision and training for their age and experience.
- More effective, accountability-based responses to bullying in schools and online.
- Ensuring that young people can continue to connect and access information following the incoming 'social media ban'.
- Simpler mental health service pathways across school and community settings.
- Improved access to information about youth-focused events, training, participation opportunities, and services.

In small groups, participants selected one priority area to explore in depth and developed a 'Big Idea' to present to forum.

Rise Above Bullying: Improving school responses and supports.

"It can be difficult to see that it's happening. Don't filter information – learn how to identify bullying… we need strong support teams in schools."

Young people identified bullying as a key driver of poor mental health and school disengagement. Participants described current responses as inconsistent and often ineffective, particularly where young people who react to ongoing harassment are penalised, while the underlying behaviour of the perpetrator goes unaddressed. This was described as the "retaliation trap".

To address this, participants proposed a series of school-wide workshops alongside the establishment of dedicated support teams to identify, respond to, and address bullying behaviours. The focus is on moving away from unhelpful advice and tokenistic awareness campaigns towards clear, consistent intervention.

In practice, this would include regular, honest sessions led by people with lived experience, alongside appropriate interventions and supports for both those experiencing bullying and those responsible for harm. Young people emphasised that speaking up must lead to visible action and ongoing support, rather than further risk or isolation.

Listen to the 'Tism: Inclusive education and neurodiversity support.

"Behavioural issues are being mistaken for 'naughtiness'…Teachers disregard young students on the spectrum and aren't making a learning plan for them. Teachers don't understand what to do with meltdowns…"

Young people reported that the education system often fails to accommodate neurodivergent and trauma-affected students. Participants shared experiences of self-regulation behaviours, such as stimming, being penalised by teachers rather than recognised as support needs.

Participants proposed mandatory, practical training in neurodiversity and mental health for all school staff. They suggested this could be linked to Teacher Registration or Registration to Work with Vulnerable People requirements to ensure consistency and accountability.

Young people want classrooms that are responsive to immediate needs and supportive of diverse learning needs. In practice, success would mean staff are equipped to recognise trauma triggers, respond effectively during periods of distress, and support students within mainstream settings rather than separating them. Participants noted this approach would benefit all students, reduce teacher stress, and create more inclusive learning environments.

Open Circle: Real-world sexual and reproductive health education.

"All genders need to know about sex. Stop separating them into different classrooms… Boys need to know about periods and consent, too!"

Young people identified gaps in current sexual and reproductive health education, including inconsistent delivery, stigma, and discomfort when content is delivered by regular teaching staff.

To address this, two groups proposed updating the curriculum through the "Open Circle" program, delivered by external specialist organisations with expertise in sexual health education. Participants felt external facilitators would reduce stigma and the "awkwardness"

often associated with these topics and the delivery of content by teachers, allowing for more open and honest discussions.

In practice, this would involve mixed-gender, practical workshops covering anatomy, consent, safe sex, and reproductive rights. By providing age-appropriate, up-to-date information from an earlier age and reducing the cost of contraceptives, the program would improve long-term outcomes related to unplanned pregnancy, sexual assault, and sexually transmitted infections in Tasmania.

Online Youth Access Hub: Up to date information and resources.

"People use social media to find opportunities, which the social media ban is removing. An app will help those wanting to actively participate to find what's going on around us."

Young people expressed concern that proposed national changes to social media access could disrupt their main way of finding events, opportunities, and ways to connect. Existing communication methods, such as school notices, were described as easy to miss or ineffective.

Participants proposed the development of a statewide digital hub or app designed to centralise information about regional events, youth programs, services, and advocacy opportunities.

In practice, success would look like a trusted, easy-to-use platform integrated with systems young people already use, such as school learning platforms. Young people described this as a "one-stop shop" that ensures equitable access to information in a post-social-media environment.

Let's Go to the Expo: Connecting young people to local opportunities and services.

"People don't know what's there, what they [services] offer or how to access it. Better promotion of existing services and groups will help young people be more social, hear about opportunities and improve access."

Young people frequently described a lack of social and recreational opportunities, and service access in the North-West, leading to the perception that there is "nothing to do" or "nothing available". However, participants also identified that many clubs, groups, and services already exist, but are poorly promoted, difficult to find or hard to access

To bridge this gap, participants proposed a Youth Expo to bring school-based and community opportunities together in one accessible, high-visibility event. While delivered in partnership with schools to maximise reach, the expo would also be open to the wider community.

In practice, success would look like high-energy events featuring stalls, demonstrations, and on-the-spot sign-ups. Young people would be involved in planning and delivery, supporting leadership development, social connection, and greater awareness of local opportunities. Participants suggested piloting the concept in Burnie and Devonport, or delivering it in collaboration with councils and community organisations during Youth Week Tasmania.

Conclusion

Young people in the North-West are proud of their region, communities and the 'North-West spirit' but recognise that pride must be matched by progress. Throughout the forum, participants shared clear insights into the challenges they face, many of which are long-standing, and identified practical, achievable ways to improve outcomes for young people in their communities.

Supporting young people to act on the issues they care about is essential to building a stronger, more resilient North-West.

The forum highlighted three priority areas for action:

1. Embedding young people's perspectives in decision-making.

Across all discussions, young people emphasised the importance of being listened to and taken seriously when decisions affect their lives. While the Big Ideas focus on specific issues, participants consistently highlighted the need for their perspectives to inform how solutions are designed and implemented.

2. Improving school environments and real-life learning outcomes.

Schools play a central role in young people's lives. Participants called for safer, more inclusive learning environments that respond effectively to neurodiversity and mental health needs, deliver clear and accountable responses to bullying, and provide practical, real-life learning. This includes financial and life skills education, alongside honest and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education

3. Building connected communities.

Young people need better access to local information, services, and opportunities. Strengthening pathways, leadership opportunities, and community supports is essential to ensuring young people can participate and thrive in their own region. . A trusted, easy to use information platform for young people to obtain information was considered essential, particularly with the introduction of social media age restrictions.

The ideas outlined in this report are not a wish list or 'nice to have'. They reflect practical, youth-informed priorities and solutions grounded in lived experience and real need. Implementing these priorities will require collaboration between young people, schools, governments, councils, and community organisations. By working alongside young people, decision-makers can support a North-West where young people are empowered to participate, contribute, and drive positive change.