



Tasmanian youth forum

Statewide Forum on Study and Stress

Communiqué

Introduction

On August 31 2012, around 170 young people (aged 12-25 years) from across Tasmania gathered together at the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) Statewide Forum on Study and Stress. The event was held at Door of Hope in Launceston and facilitated by Brad Chapman of MoHOW Consultancy.

The Statewide Forum was an initiative of the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF), the peak youth consultative body in Tasmania. TYF is supported by the Youth Network of Tasmania, the peak organisation for the nongovernment youth sector. The forum aimed to:

- provide an opportunity for young Tasmanians to discuss their concerns relating to study and stress;
- provide a platform for young Tasmanians to take their concerns in relation to study and stress to Government and any other interested groups; and,
- assist young Tasmanians to design their own strategies to promote healthy choices for themselves and their communities.

The Statewide Forum included guest speakers such as Nathan Gelston, a TYF volunteer and young man who has struggled with mental health issues, as well as Cedrick Mulumba, the Tasmanian representative to the Australian Youth Forum. It also included games and brainstorming with facilitator Brad and local youth comedian Dylan Hesp.

Participants also took part in workshops around particular issues relating to study and stress, including managing high expectations, mental health, coping strategies and work and study balance. These workshops were facilitated by TYF youth volunteers, as well as members of community groups relevant to each of the groups. These 'community experts' were from organisations such as National Job Link, headspace, Flourish Mental Health Action in Our Hands Inc, Mission Australia's Youthbeat, Drug Education Network, Wise Employment and UTAS Student Learning.

YNOT and TYF would like to thank all those individuals and organisations who supported the event, including many fantastic volunteers. We would also like to acknowledge the event sponsors, Launceston City Council, Community Development Division Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) and Flourish Mental Health Action in Our Hands Inc.

This communiqué outlines the main ideas and issues raised by the young Tasmanian present at the forum. It also outlines some of the practical strategies and initiatives proposed by the participants to promote healthy habits when studying. It also includes a brief analysis of the anonymous survey that the participants completed at the beginning of the day.



Brainstorming and Vision Casting

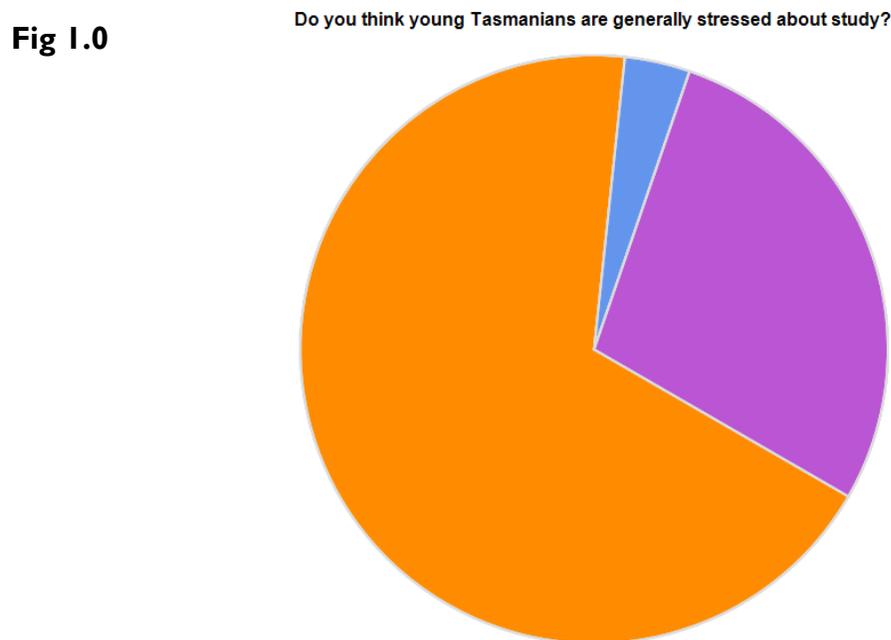
At the start of the forum participants were invited to reflect upon general study and stress issues, and the impact of these issues had on their lives and the communities in which they lived. This session included participants brainstorming their ideas with facilitator Brad Chapman as a big group, as well as completing an anonymous survey.

The results of the survey provided many interesting insights into the lives of the young people present. The results of the survey indicate that 65.5% of the participants were aged 12-15 years, whilst 22.5% were 16-18 years. Also worth noting is that there were more females (70.8%) than males present, as well as comparable numbers of participants from the South and North of the State. There were also a few participants from remote areas such as Southport, St Helens and Cape Barren Island. Particularly interesting was the high percentage of participants from the North West coast, with over half the participants from areas such as Smithton, Devonport, Sheffield, Burnie and Wynyard.

One of the questions asked participants to describe, in their own words, what was meant by the term 'stressed'. Many young people used similar ways to describe 'stressed', such as

'anxious, down, unsure of their direction, more isolated'
'trying to deal with a lot of pressure, not coping with it'
'someone who has a lot of things going on at once and can't handle them'
'under pressure and confused'

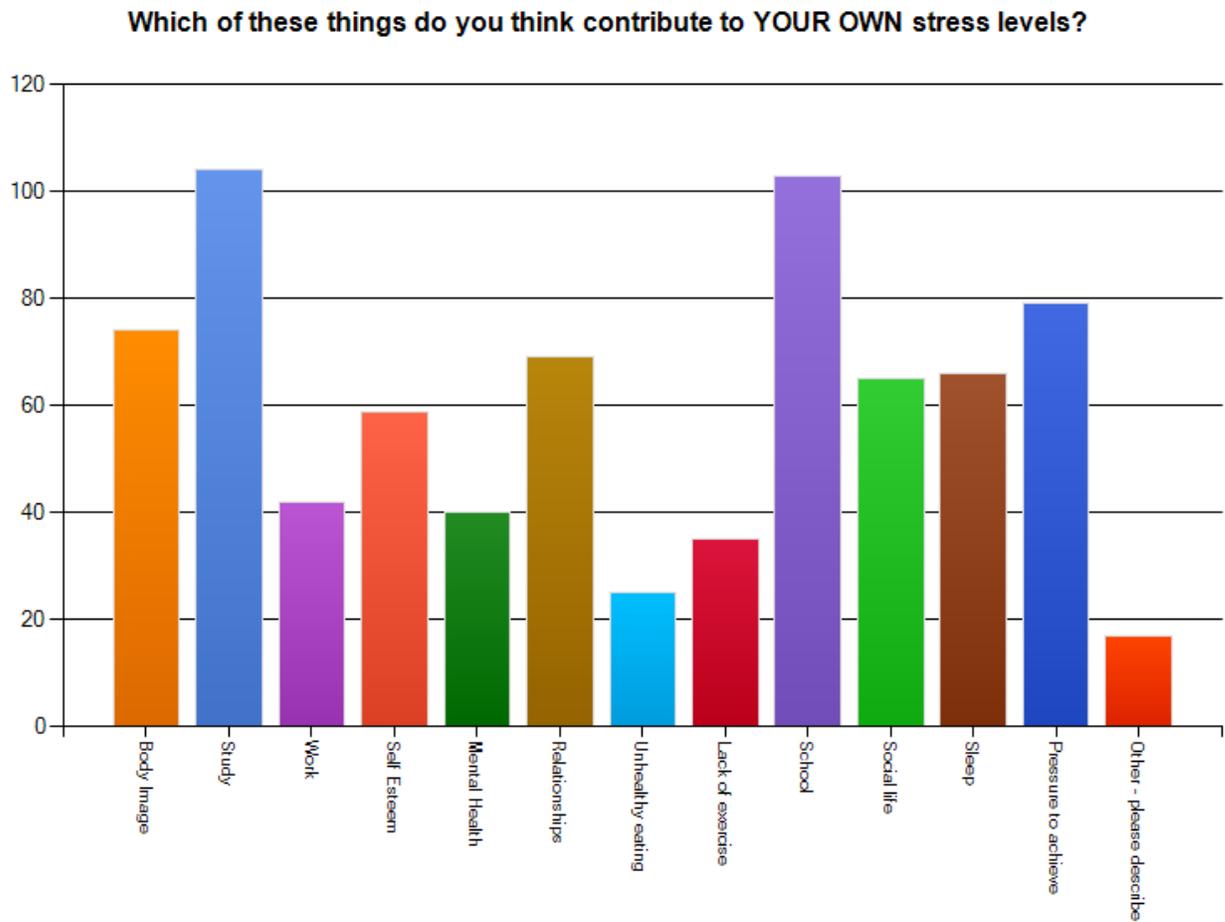
One of the concerning issues raised by the survey was that 68.3% of participants suggested that they believed young Tasmanians were stressed about study (Fig 1.0), although 64.5% of the young people present believed themselves to be only 'a bit' stressed.



This is interesting, as it seemed that the students perceived stress to be a major issue for all young Tasmanians, and yet did not feel overly stressed as individuals. It is also interesting given that in the 2011 and 2012 Mission Australia *Youth Survey* reports, 'coping with stress, school and study problems' was one of the top concerns raised by young people across Australia (as affecting them individually).

However, when given the opportunity to identify the factors that caused them stress as individuals (participants could choose as many issues as they wished), did not hold back, and many of the young people 'ticked' all the possible categories as causing them stress in their lives. The top factors identified as causing young people stress were study, school, pressure to achieve, body image and relationships (Fig 2.0).

Fig 2.0



When asked how they cope with stress, the participants noted strategies such as

‘eat, sleep, try and relax’
‘listen to music and talk to friends’
‘take a moment away from whatever I am doing to just relax and enjoy life’
‘exercise and take time out’
‘talk to someone about it’

Another interesting point raised by the survey results was that 23.5% of participants worked casually, with another 16.2% were employed part-time. Considering that almost all participants were under 18, with the majority around 15-16 years, it is concerning that so many of them were working, as well as balancing high school study. It is also concerning that when asked whether they felt they were successful balancing all their commitments, only 12.3% saying that

they 'do this really well'. Of those young participants who indicated that they would like less commitments (16.7% said 'yes' and 32.6% said 'maybe'), they said that they would like less pressure because

'sometimes I just need a break'
'I rarely have time to just chill out, relax and recover'
'there [will be] less stress coming my way. So I [don't have to] worry about everything all the time'



Refining Our Ideas

In the next part of the forum, participants were split into workshop groups to focus on certain aspects of stress and study. Participants were introduced to the 'community experts' and TYF volunteers that would facilitate each workshop.



The workshop sessions were structured so that each participant could express their concerns in two topic groups, having around 20 minutes of discussion in each. The focus of these workshops was for everyone to have a chance to discuss openly about how the topic affected young people and the community. During the discussion participants were asked the following questions by Brad:

- Why am I passionate about this?

- What are some of the concerns I have when thinking about this issue?
- How are young people affected by this issue?
- In what ways does this issue impact the community?

The young people present on the day seemed to have a reasonable amount of knowledge on the study and stress topics discussed in workshops. Given this, the workshops focused on finding out from participants what their top concerns were for each area. These concerns informed discussions later in the afternoon about developing strategies to combating stress in Tasmanian young people.

Following the workshops, participants broke for lunch. During lunchtime a number of services ran interactive activities. These activities included Chris Sargent from Mission Australia running a mediation and mindfulness activity, Dominique Smith from the Drug Education Network organising an activity on responsible serving of alcohol and dietitian Sharon King showing the young people what is in snack foods.



Following these lunch, participants listened to two inspiring talks given by young Tasmanian leaders. Participants first heard from mental health advocate and graphic artist Nathan Gelston. Nathan is a TYF volunteer and struggled to remain engaged with school. Nathan shared with participants his own personal journey towards accepting and managing his mental illness, as well as coming out, and experiencing of school and transitioning into work.

Following Nathan's presentation, participants heard from the Tasmanian youth representative on the Australian Youth Forum, Cedric Mulumba. Cedric is a young man of Congolese

background who has been involved in many youth and community organisations, including TYF and the Tasmanian African Youth Association. Cedric spoke of the AYF and how he brings Tasmanian issues to the national Steering Committee. He also spoke about how important it was for young people to take charge of their own lives and get involved in their communities.

After Cedric and Nathan's presentations, participants were invited to brainstorm strategies to address the concerns they had highlighted in the earlier workshops, and make positive change in their communities. The ideas were discussed in the same workshop topic groups as before with the leading questions:

What change do we want to see?

- What do you want your community to be known for?
- Thinking about the concerns raised in the morning workshops, what do you want to achieve?
 - Example 1 - Awareness raising of issue - want more people to know about the issue, and take action
 - Example 2 - Projects in local communities, at the State level, and nationally

How can we make a change?

- Do you know of some amazing projects or community events? Made them so good?
- Could your community do similar things to make a difference in relation to this topic?
 - Are there any projects or organisations working on this topic that you could work with?
 - Could your school get involved?
 - Could local youth groups get involved?

The following is a summary of the three ideas presented to the audience after the conclusion of this session. They are presented in the order of the most popular. Ideas were graded depending on the amount of 'dots' they received from participants, and each participant was given three dots, which they distributed amongst the ideas as they saw fit.

Bullying (100 dots)

The young people supporting this idea were concerned about it because – it affects young people's self esteem, it makes young people want to stay away from school, teachers do not seem to be empowered enough to deal with it and there is a limited understanding of the issue in the community. There was an acknowledgement by supporters of this idea that there was a lot of resources out there to combat this issue, but they felt that these missed the mark. They argue that the following strategies needed to be in place:

- have discussions in class about bullying – including how to be resilient and recognise when people are joking around;
- more peer support programs for young people in schools;
- have guest speakers with experience of bullying to come into schools and talk to students about their experiences, how it affected them and what strategies they used to cope;

- teachers trained to recognise and respond to this issue;
- delivering education (anti-bullying) not just in schools, but also in sport clubs and workplace
- decision makers introduce tougher laws in relation to bullying, including on social media;
- The young people passionate about this issue also identified what they could do to stop bullying being such as big issue, including; reporting bullying that they experience or witness, asking their teachers for more information, establishing support groups for people being bullied.

Managing High Expectations (63 dots)

The young people supporting this idea were passionate about young people feeling like failures because they had not lived up to unrealistic expectations. These expectations might be from parents, peers, friends, teachers, and even from young people themselves. Young people concerned about this topic suggested the following strategies to help other young Tasmanians deal with this issue:

- discussing progress at school with a supportive teacher and career planner;
- schools organising support workers for young people that are stressed – but all students get a counseling session twice a term;
- Pathway classes in school - students given time to plan and set goals;
- Schools organise ‘reflection days’ once a term for students to set goals and look back on their achievements. This might also include motivating activities for those students who need more structure and discipline.
- Forums in school and community with parents, teachers and students to talk about realistic expectations;
- The young people in the group also said that they themselves would – talk to their parents, friends and teachers about this issue and how they could change their behaviour i.e. setting personal goals, organising counseling were appropriate and setting up peer support groups.



Being Healthy (62 dots)

The ideas in this group were related to making sure that individual young people were able to live healthy lives, including eating a balanced diet as well as getting plenty of exercise and sleep, and having 'time out' to relax. The young people passionate about this group said that being healthy would make it easier to achieve at school, as they would be more focused and have more energy. To help other young Tasmanians improve their health, this group suggested:

- more water dispensers and education at school about eating well;
- more physical activities at school – such as organised lunch activities, daily physical education classes, more varied options for physical education to make it more accessible (dance, zumba etc)



What happens next?

Following the launch of the TYF Statewide Forum on Study and Stress Communiqué, TYF members and YNOT staff will progress the issues raised by participants at the forum. This process will include organising meetings with politicians, community organisations and individuals who work in areas relevant to youth health and wellbeing in Tasmania. It will also involve supporting young people present at the forum to progress their ideas about how to combat stress as a large issue for young people in their communities.

YNOT is concerned that many young people are having trouble coping with school, as well as balancing work, family and social commitments, and the impact this is having on their overall health and wellbeing. We invite all individuals and organisations interested in working with us on this issue to contact YNOT at

a: 4a, Mayfair Plaza, 236 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay 7005

t: 6223 5511

m: 0488 235 511

e: tyf@ynot.org.au

Written by

Alia Hussain, TYF volunteer

Metika Claxton, TYF volunteer

Jacob Couchman, TYF volunteer

Naomi Marsh, TYF Project Officer

