



2018

Youth Mental Health Forum
Post Event Report

Wagga Wagga, Murrumbidgee Region

Details

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| Author: | Sarah Groves, Community Engagement Officer - headspace Wagga Wagga |
| Name: | 2018 Youth Mental Health Forum |
| Date: | Tuesday the 5 th of June 2018 |
| Location: | Mater Dei Primary School Hall, Wagga Wagga |
| Attendees: | 23 high schools, 240 students |
| Facilitators: | Burn Bright (https://www.burnbright.org.au/) |
| Guest Speakers: | Gus Ferguson (lived experience), Sarah Groves (mental health introduction) |
| Q&A Panel: | Ben Hoadley (Psychiatrist – Community Mental Health), Kylie Hamblin (Clinical Psychologist – headspace Wagga Wagga), Stephen McMullen (Psychologist – Department of Education), Gus Ferguson (lived experience), Timothy Bourke (School Liaison Officer – NSW Police) |
| Financial Sponsors: | NSW Department of Education, Catholic Schools Office – diocese of Wagga Wagga, Wagga Wagga & Region Suicide Prevention Network, Murrumbidgee Local Health District (School-link) |

2018 Steering Committee Members

- headspace Wagga Wagga
- Catholic Education Office – diocese of Wagga Wagga
- NSW Department of Education
- Mission Australia
- NSW Police
- Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
- Relationships Australia Canberra & Region
- Rural Advisory Mental Health Program – NSW Health
- School-Link
- Murrumbidgee Local Health District (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service)

Overview

Questions are often asked as to why young people may be disengaging from education. One potential answer is related to poor mental health, a significant barrier for young people meaningfully engaging in education¹. To help address this, a local steering committee comprising of education providers, mental health professionals and a variety of community and youth service representatives, developed the Youth Mental Health Forum (YMHF). The YMHF approach has been implemented in multiple locations across the Riverina over the last 6 years. After June 2018, Wagga Wagga has held seven consecutive forums for the high schools across the region.

The YMHF provides young people with access to accurate mental health information, including local mental health services, how and when to access these services, and some ways to help someone in need. The YMHF also assists teaching staff and service providers to improve referral pathways for young people to mental health services by providing an opportunity for education and service providers to collaborate in relation to student wellbeing.

The YMHF approach emphasises the critical presence of education providers as a fundamental part of early intervention, education and awareness of mental health. The YMHF embraces a whole of community approach to systematically address the mental health and wellbeing issues being faced by young people. The forum relies on the ongoing commitment from steering committee members, education providers and students themselves to bring about positive change overtime.

Aims

The overall aim of the forum is to empower young people to address mental health problems being faced by the individual, peers, family or broader community networks. Over time, these forums will contribute to a positive change in reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues and improve the overall wellbeing of young people in schools. This will be achieved by enabling young people to personally engage with the mental health and youth services available in their local area, and access information and resources related to mental health.

The YMHF also aims to build capacity within the school environment to effectively bring about change regarding mental health and wellbeing. During the forum, students are tasked with developing a 'Take it Back' Project to implement in their school in the hope that the information gained at the forum will be shared throughout the school community. The forum engages students in a fun, relevant and interactive way, supplying skills for young people to return to their respective school community and start developing school based projects targeting mental health issues.

¹ Youth Mental Health Report, Youth Survey 2012-2016, compiled collaboratively by Mission Australia and Black Dog Institute. For access (<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/research/young-people>)

Objectives

In 2013, the YMHF Steering Committee outlined several key objectives for the YMHF. These key objectives continue to play an integral part in the development and implementation of the forum.

Student objectives

- To participate in an engaging, interactive and safe learning environment to discuss and explore mental health and wellbeing issues
- To increase students' understanding of common mental health issues
- To increase students' knowledge of where and how to access help regarding mental health and wellbeing issues
- To explore and develop strategies to support students' own mental health
- To empower and build capacity of students to support friends and family who may have, or may develop a mental health issue in the future
- To explore opportunities that exist within school and community environments to overcome barriers to mental health issues
- To access accurate information and resources about mental health and wellbeing issues
- To engage with the mental health and youth services available in the local area
- To identify, develop and implement a 'Take it Back' project in their school community

Steering Committee objectives

- To coordinate the implementation of the YMHF annually utilising a partnership framework consisting of stake holders from education, health, government and community
- To ensure accurate and up-to-date information about mental health and wellbeing is provided to students
- To identify areas of need directly from young people's experiences regarding mental health and wellbeing
- To establish an evaluation framework to continually improve and strengthen the sustainability of the YMHF

The Day of the Forum

The 2018 YMHF was held on Tuesday the 5th of June at the Mater Dei Primary School Hall, Wagga Wagga. 24 regional high schools, 240 students and 30 teaching staff attended the forum, along with support from several steering committee members including headspace Wagga Wagga, Mission Australia, Personnel Group, Relationships Australia Canberra & Region, School-Link, NSW Police (volunteers), Murrumbidgee Local Health District and the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga.

Students were provided with information from the Steering Committee prior to the forum to prepare them for the day. Key staff members in the high schools were also contact with information before and after the forum.

Aunty Gail Manderson commenced the 2018 YMHF with a 'Welcome to Country' prior to the facilitators, Burn Bright beginning the program.



Burn Bright developed the program in collaboration with the Steering Committee, regularly meeting in the months leading up to the forum (Run Sheet – Appendix A). The program focused on three parts:

1) Stigma and supporting each other

During this part, students were presented information on the importance of early intervention, help seeking behaviours, empowerment and mental health, and participated in interactive energisers.

Students also listened to the lived experience speaker, Gus Ferguson, who bravely shared his story.



2) Answer our questions – where can we seek help?

Students were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had relating to mental health from a panel of community representatives. The Q&A Panel members included Kylie Hamblin (clinical psychologist), Gus Ferguson (lived experience), Dr Ben Hoadley (psychiatrist), Timothy Bourke (NSW Police) and Stephen McMullen (school psychologist).



Students were also encouraged to share what they had learnt so far at the forum by putting a post-it note message on the Post-It Note Wall. Students wrote statements such as “It’s okay not to be okay”, “don’t bottle it up”, “I am not alone” and “to speak up”.



3) ‘Take it Back’ – you can make a difference

Burn Bright collated the data from the ‘Take it Back’ Project section of the forum. During lunch, teachers were briefed on the session and given resources to assist in the facilitation of discussion. Schools were offered the opportunity to apply for a small grant through the Wagga Wagga and Region Suicide Prevention Network of up to \$500 to make their ‘Take it Back’ Project happen and were supported by representatives of the 2018 Steering Committee to do this. Below is a table summarising the various projects students developed.

| High School* | Proposed ‘Take it Back’ Project |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Wagga Wagga Christian College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Care Day or a Healthy Wellbeing Day for the whole school |
| Coolamon Central School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mindfulness Day on R U OK Day |
| Tolland Outreach Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An event to combat stigma with information and videos about different people’s experiences, wear bright clothes on launch day |

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Mater Dei Catholic College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education resources to be distributed in school to break the stigma about mental health |
| Hennessy Catholic College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking the stigma down into stages • Host a fete, musical performance or another creative activity to start the conversation |
| Albury High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve relationships around school to increase belonging and break down barriers • Try to have a forum day with guest speaker |
| Koorungal High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBQ Lunch and motivational speaker • De-stress activity afternoon on RUOK Day, encourage students to wear yellow to raise awareness |
| Sacred Heart Central School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage more interaction between Year 10 students and the junior years to help built trust and open conversation • Make a mural wall in the high school |
| Finley High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chill zone once a week at lunch time, safe and supportive area with student support team • Invite local services to attend chill zone to share information and resources |
| Cootamundra High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run workshops to increase engagement with mental health • Discuss mental health in engaging ways, potentially have headspace attend and encourage interaction |
| Mount Austin High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a variety day with art, crafts and raise money for a mental health charity • Invite other schools to attend |
| The Riverina Anglican College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a chat conversation group to reduce stigma and make conversations comfortable and connected |
| Deniliquin High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a sports day • The MAD (Make a difference) team to organise an inclusive day for all students |
| West Wyalong High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a unisex netball gala day with a focus on positive mental health messages |
| Oaklands Central School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a challenge Day to overcome stigma |
| Wade High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a school fete with food stalls and music • Focus on reducing stigma and normalising help seeking behaviours |
| Temora High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host an event on RUOK day with activities and speakers • Potentially look at having BurnBright attend and run a mini forum |
| Ungarie Central School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start an alternative learning program fortnightly at school • Skill stations day • Stress free zone with counsellor and a technology free space |
| Kildare Catholic College | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on wellbeing for Year 10/11 transition • Share videos and strategies in Term 3 |
| Wagga Wagga High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RUOK Day event • Peace of mind mindfulness assistance |

*PLEASE NOTE – GUNDAGAI HIGH SCHOOL, MARIAN CATHOLIC COLLEGE AND TUMUT HIGH SCHOOL WERE UNABLE TO PRESENT THEIR PROJECTS DUE TO TIME RESTRICTIONS AND AS SUCH, THEIR PROJECT DATA WAS NOT COLLATED

Forum Evaluation

One of the key Steering Committee objectives is to establish an evaluation framework to continually improve and strengthen the sustainability of the YMHF. The 2018 YMHF Steering Committee collaboratively developed an evaluation process for the forum which involved a student pre-forum questionnaire and post-forum questionnaire, along with an on-the-day questionnaire for staff and organisers.

A summary of the forum evaluation is outlined below. This summary includes demographic information (from the post-forum questionnaire data) and a pre/post forum comparison. Complete copies of evaluation data and all appendices are available on request (contact details on final page of document).

Student Feedback Evaluation

Demographic Information

Gender

| Gender | Percentage of attendees |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Male | 26% |
| Female | 73% |
| Gender Neutral | 1% |

Year Group

| Gender | Percentage of attendees |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Year 8 | 1% |
| Year 9 | 9% |
| Year 10 | 53% |
| Year 11 | 34% |
| Year 12 | 3% |

Attending High Schools

- Deniliquin High School
- Koorungal High School
- Wagga Wagga High School
- The Riverina Anglican College
- Mater Dei Catholic College
- Tumut High School
- Cootamundra High School
- Mount Austin High School
- Wagga Wagga Christian College
- Oaklands Central School
- Marian Catholic College
- Tolland Outreach Centre
- Albury High School
- Coolamon Central School
- West Wyalong High School
- Ungarie Central School
- Temora High School
- Finley High School
- Kildare Catholic College
- Wade High School
- Gundagai High School
- Hennessy Catholic College
- Sacred Heart Central School

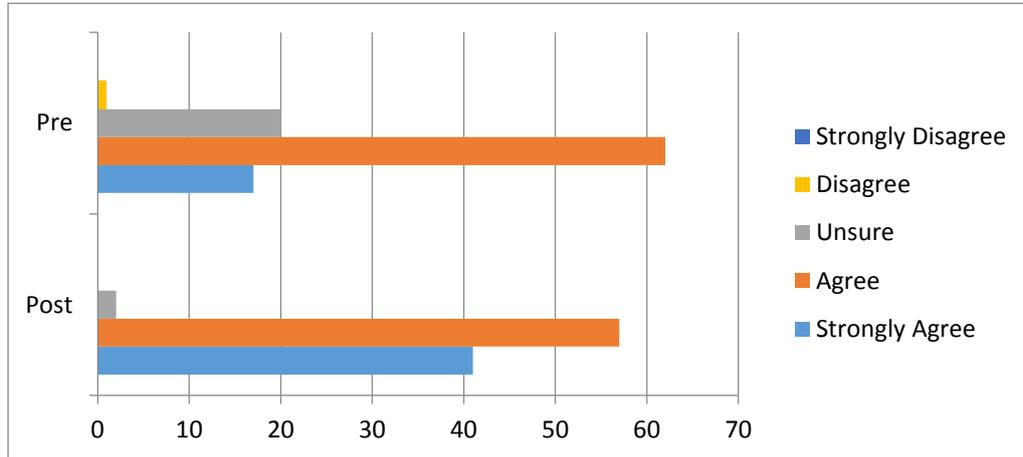
92% of students who attended the 2018 YMHF 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement **"The YMHF met my hopes and expectations"**

96% of students who attended the 2018 YMHF 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement **"I would recommend the YMHF to my peers"**

Pre and Post Comparison (%)

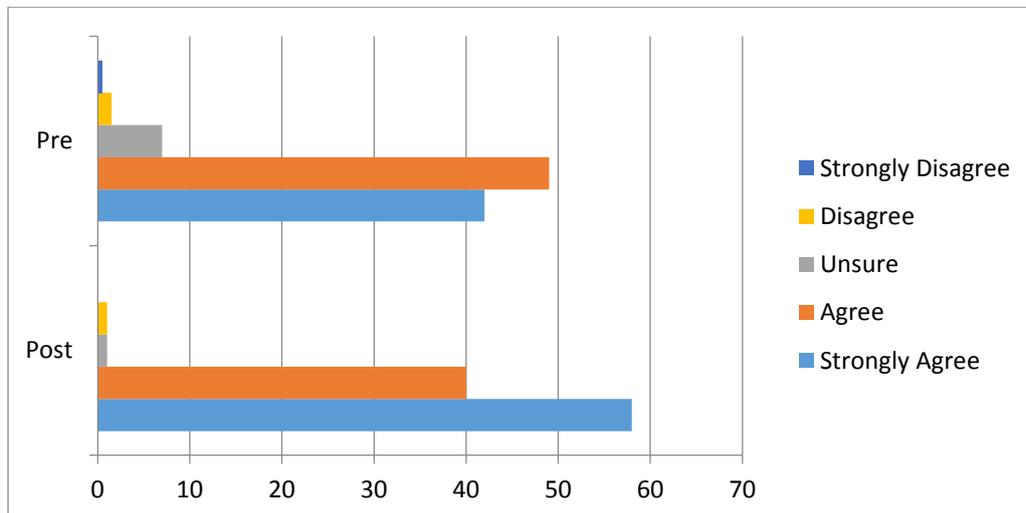
The pre-forum and post-forum comparison demonstrates the significant differences between student's pre-forum and post-forum questionnaire responses. This summary was collated using the pre and post event questionnaires for the students.

The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *"overall, my knowledge around the topic of mental health is good"*



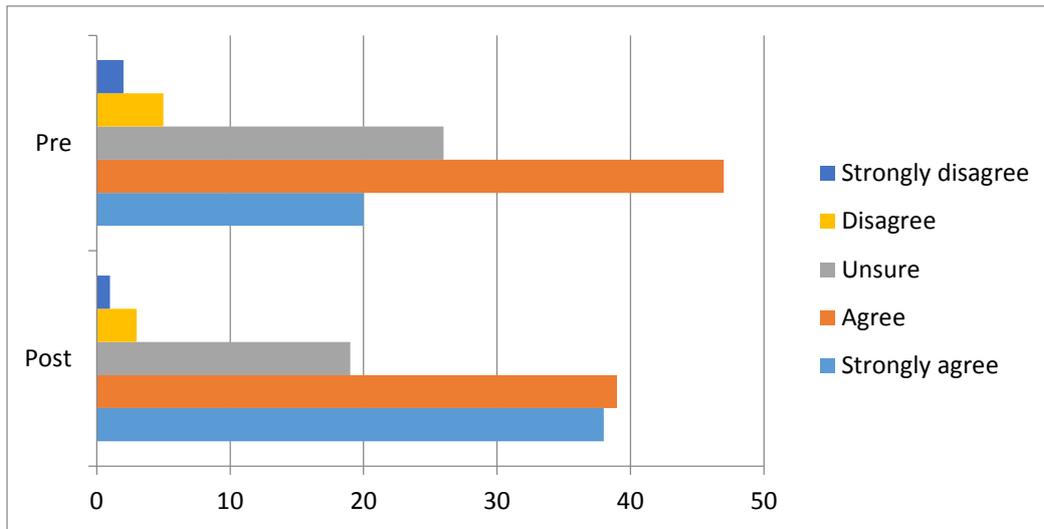
- Approximate 20% increase in student's responding to the statement with 'agree' or 'strongly agree'

The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *"I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness"*



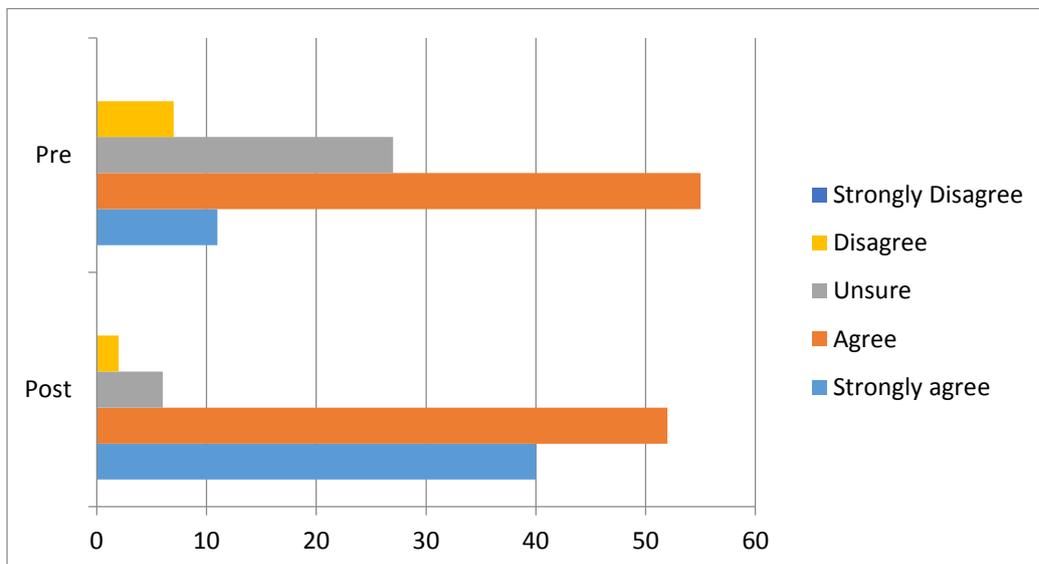
- Approximate 10% increase in student's responding to the statement with 'agree' or 'strongly agree'

The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health”*



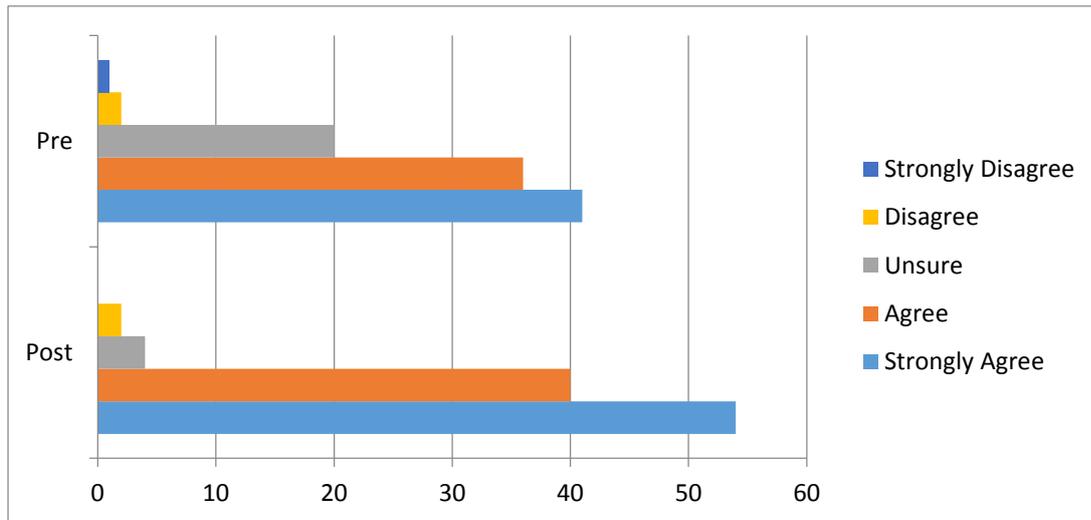
- Approximate 10% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies”*



- Approximate 25% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“the annual running of the YMHF is important for my school”*



- Approximate 20% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’

The positive impact of the YMHF can be clearly illustrated in the comparisons above. There is a clear increase in mental health literacy, awareness of service provision, acceptance of mental health and understanding of coping strategies.

School Staff Feedback Evaluation

School staff were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the conclusion of the forum. 25 questionnaires were completed with the following significant findings:

- **100%** of respondents either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“the forum was well organised and ran well”*
- **100%** of respondents either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“the organisers of the forum communicated information clearly and in a timely manner”*
- **100%** of respondents either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“the information presented was appropriate and helpful for young people”*
- **100%** of respondents either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“The YMHF met my expectations and I would recommend that students attend this forum in the future”*

Where to from here?

The YMHF approach is one strategy implemented in the Murrumbidgee region to address the barriers posed by mental health problems for young people engaging in meaningful education. The forum has the overall aim of: empowering young people to address mental health concerns, building capacity within the school environment to effectively bring about change and increase knowledge of local support services. From the forum evaluation outlined above, the outcome is clear – young people within the education sector are increasing their knowledge around mental health and breaking down the barrier to engaging in education from within their school community.

The take away message from the 2018 YMHF related to positive help seeking behaviours and the statement “it’s okay not to be okay”. From the YMHF Steering Committee point of view, these are key mental health messages which we proudly provide a platform for delivery. We look forward to seeing what 2019 and beyond brings for the students of the Murrumbidgee Region.

Contact Details

The YMHF Steering Committee comprises of education providers, mental health professionals, and a variety of community and youth services, located in the Murrumbidgee Region. The Steering Committee is committed to the ongoing sustainability of the YMHF and are continually evaluating our approach. If your organisation would like to be involved in the steering committee or your school would like to be invited annually, we would love to hear from you.

Furthermore, if you would like a copy of the complete forum evaluation data or document appendices, please email the contact for the Steering Committee.

Contact for the YMHF Steering Committee – Murrumbidgee Region

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