



2019

Youth Mental Health Forum
Post Event Report

Wagga Wagga, Murrumbidgee Region

Details

Author:	Sarah Groves, Community Engagement Officer - headspace Wagga Wagga
Name:	2019 Youth Mental Health Forum
Date:	Tuesday the 4 th of June 2019
Location:	Wagga Wagga Christian College, Wagga Wagga
Attendees:	19 high schools, 180 students
Facilitators:	Burn Bright (https://www.burnbright.org.au/)
Guest Speakers:	Gus Ferguson (lived experience)
Q&A Panel:	Sean Hodgins (Psychiatrist – Community Mental Health), Kylie Hamblin (Clinical Psychologist – headspace Wagga Wagga), Stephen McMullen (Psychologist – Department of Education), Gus Ferguson (lived experience), Troy Fisher (School Liaison Officer – NSW Police)
Financial Sponsors:	NSW Department of Education, Murrumbidgee Local Health District, Wagga Wagga Community Drug Action Team

2019 Steering Committee Members

- headspace Wagga Wagga
- NSW Department of Education
- Mission Australia
- Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
- Rural Advisory Mental Health Program – NSW Health
- School-Link – NSW Health
- Murrumbidgee Local Health District (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Personnel Group
- Pathways Murrumbidgee (Directions Health)
- City of Wagga Wagga (local council)

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, implemented the Youth Mental Health Forum (YMHF). The YMHF approach has been implemented in multiple locations across the Riverina over the last 7 years. As of June 2019, Wagga Wagga has held eight 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 2019 YMHF was held on Tuesday 4th of June at the Wagga Wagga Christian College. 19 regional high schools, 180 students and 25 teaching staff attended the forum, along with support from several Steering Committee members including headspace Wagga Wagga, Mission Australia, Personnel Group, School-Link, NSW Police (volunteers), Murrumbidgee Local Health District, NSW Department of Education, City of Wagga Wagga and Pathways Murrumbidgee.

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 contacted with information before and after the forum.

Aunty Gail Manderson commenced the 2019 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.

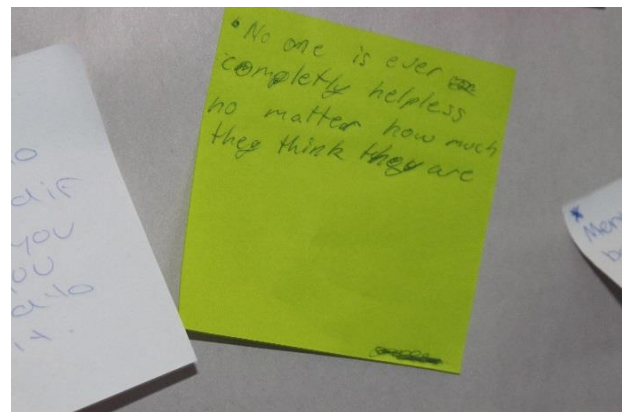


2) Answer our questions – where can we seek help?

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 (from left to right) included Troy Fisher (NSW Police), Dr Sean Hodgins (psychiatrist), Kylie Hamblin (clinical psychologist), Stephen McMullen (school psychologist) and Gus Paterson (lived experience).



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”, “always seek help” and “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. The Wagga Wagga and Region Suicide Prevention Network (WWRSPN) offered students the opportunity to apply for a small grant (up to \$500) to bring their project to life with at least six schools being successful in the process. 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"> • Having an anonymous Q&A Box • Whole school mental health day with lived experience speaker
Coolamon Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise a fun run, musical performance and overnight stay at school • Plant a symbolic tree to represent mental health

Mater Dei Catholic College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Random acts of kindness” in conjunction with the canteen when students purchase an item
Hennessy Catholic College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a RUOK Week with each day dedicated to different activities paired with positive mental health messages
Young High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an anonymous box for questions that can be answered on Mondays at whole-school assemblies
Koorinal High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an interactive mural to break the stigma about mental health and spark conversations
Finley High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise Blue Day for the month of October to align with mental health month which will include dressing up, assembly, workshops and a colour run
Mount Austin High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe space within the school for students to connect and have access to up-to-date information about services available
The Riverina Anglican College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise and coordinate a mental health themed movie night with a guest speaker to highlight the importance of talking about mental health
West Wyalong High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole of school event that focuses on positive mental health messages and promoting positive self-care strategies
Temora High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the wellbeing centre with a focus on engaging more out-of-school providers • Ensure that all students have access to up-to-date information about where to access support
Tumut High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a student wellbeing club that focuses on wellbeing from a young person’s perspective
Oaklands Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise a whole of school event that involves fun activities that are paired with mental health information to normalise discussions and break the stigma
Sacred Heart Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a mural in the school playground • Develop a QR code that links to mental health information. Pair the QR code with positive messages on the back of toilet doors.
Kildare Catholic College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate a whole of school Mental Health Day where the focus is on building positive coping strategies (connecting with others, self-care, learning new skills)
Marian Catholic College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a ‘hub’ that can be a safe space that promotes support and mindfulness
Yanco Agricultural High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use ‘gap period’ effectively to promote positive mental health messages, collaborate with staff and other students to incorporate appropriate activities
Junee High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a positivity wall in a common place in the playground
Wagga Wagga High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create ‘peace of mind’ canvases with positive messages regarding mental health • Fill piñatas with lollies and positive mental health messages that can be used in the playground as a symbolic way to break the stigma

The 2019 YMHF Steering Committee was committed to following up with the schools who attended to assist with the 'Take it Back' projects if required. Below is a detailed example of the innovative and student-led projects implemented post forum.

The Riverina Anglican College

The students from The Riverina Anglican College decided that they would host an event for their school community to start the conversation about mental health. The students who attended the forum worked closely together to put on a movie night for all students to come along, discuss mental health and enjoy the acclaimed Pixar film Inside Out.

The students requested a representative from the 2019 YMHF Steering Committee (headspace Wagga Wagga) open the movie night with a reminder of the importance of having open conversations about mental health and challenging the existing stigma about mental health.

The students from The Riverina Anglican College were supported by a small grant from the Wagga Wagga and Region Suicide Prevention Network to cover the cost of food for the evening. Approximately 60 students from a variety of year groups attended.



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 2017 YMHF Steering Committee collaboratively developed an evaluation process for the forum which involved a pre-forum questionnaire, post-forum questionnaire and voluntary 4-month-post forum online survey for the students, along with two questionnaires for staff (on-the-day and 4-month-post forum online survey). The 2019 YMHF Steering Committee utilised the same evaluation process and may complete a comparison across forum years.

A summary of the forum evaluation is outlined below. This summary includes demographic information (from the post-forum questionnaire data), pre-forum questionnaire highlights, post-forum questionnaire highlights, pre/post forum comparison, 4-month-post-forum highlights, and staff feedback highlights. This feedback was collated collaboratively by Steering Committee representatives Sarah Groves (Community Engagement Officer – headspace Wagga Wagga) and Scott Harding (Adolescent and Family Counsellor – Mission Australia). The 2019 YMHF Steering Committee would like to acknowledge their in-kind contribution to the evaluation process. 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	29%
Female	71%

Year Group

Year	Percentage of attendees
Year 7	1%
Year 8	1%
Year 9	13%
Year 10	34%
Year 11	45%
Year 12	6%

Attending High Schools

- The Riverina Anglican College
- Finley High School
- Tumut High School
- Kildare Catholic College
- Junee High School
- West Wyalong High School
- Hennessy Catholic College
- Sacred Heart Central School
- Mount Austin High School
- Coolamon Central School
- Young High School
- Oaklands Central School
- Mater Dei Catholic College
- Koorringal High School
- Temora High School
- Wagga Wagga Christian College
- Marian Catholic College
- Wagga Wagga High School
- Yanco Agricultural High School

Pre-Forum Questionnaire

Each student was given the opportunity to complete a pre-event questionnaire and bring it along on the day (Appendix B). The pre-forum, post-forum and 4-month-post forum questionnaire asked students to rate their agreeance with a variety of statements on a 5-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The similar scale ratings allow for the comparison of pre and post data to reveal significant differences. A similar format was used for the Staff/Organiser questionnaire.

Of the 108 pre-event surveys completed:

- **44%** of students were either 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement *"I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health"*
- **8%** of students identified they were 'unsure' in response to the statement *"I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness"*
- **33%** of students were 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement *"I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies"*



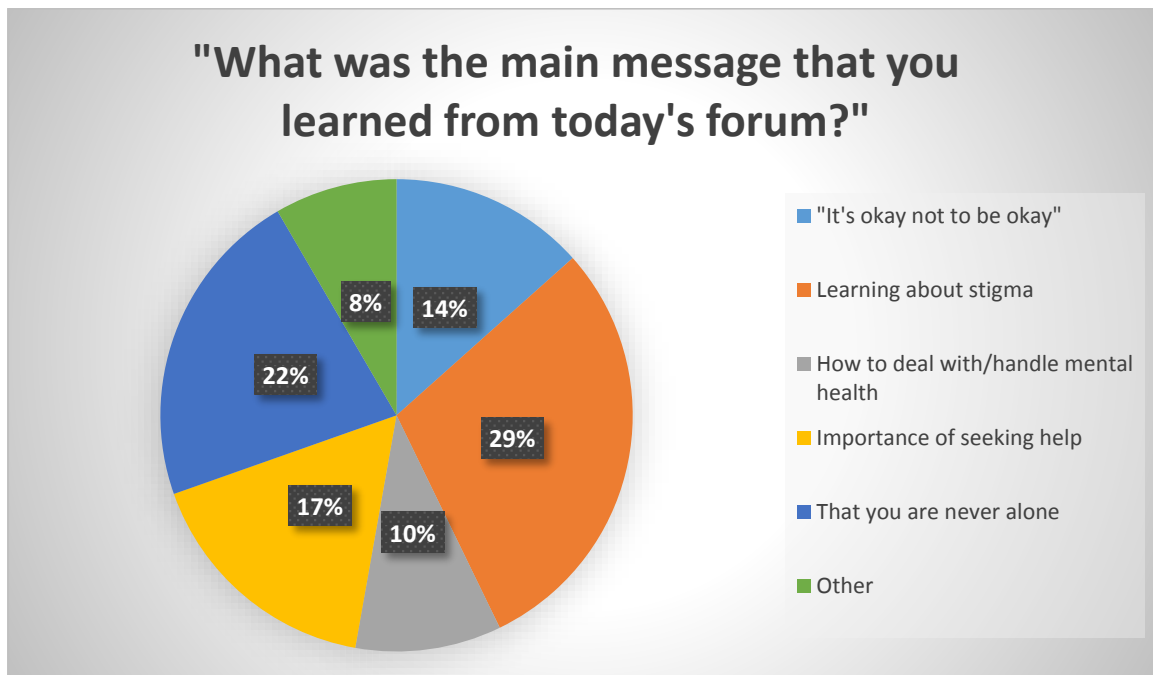
Post-Forum Questionnaire

Prior to departing, each student was asked to complete a post-forum questionnaire to gauge their experience of the forum (Appendix C).

Of the 124 post-event surveys completed:

- **21%** of students were either 'unsure' or 'disagree' with the statement *"I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health"*
- **1%** of students identified they were 'unsure' in response to the statement *"I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness"*
- **10%** of students identified they were 'unsure' or 'disagree' with the statement *"I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies"*
- **97%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"the Youth Mental Health Forum met my hopes and expectations"*
- **95%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"The annual running of the Youth Mental Health Forum is important for my school"*
- **98%** of students either 'strongly agree' with the statement *"I would recommend the forum to my peers"*

The students were asked the open-ended question *"What was the main message that you learned from today's forum?"* The figure below illustrates the majority of responses from students.



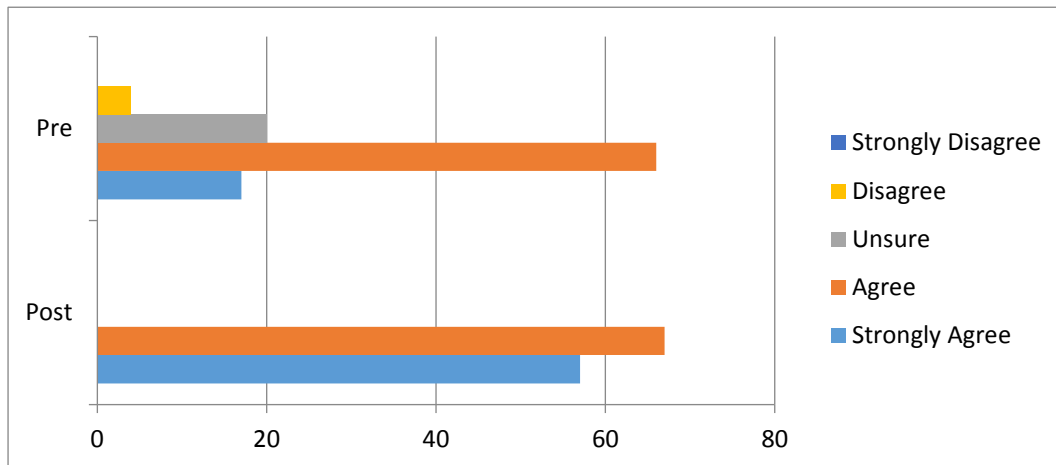
29% of students reported that the main message they learned was related to stigma and the important role we can all play in breaking the stigma about mental health.

17% of students' responses related to the importance of seeking help with an overall trend of accepting help seeking behaviours.

Pre and Post Comparison (%)

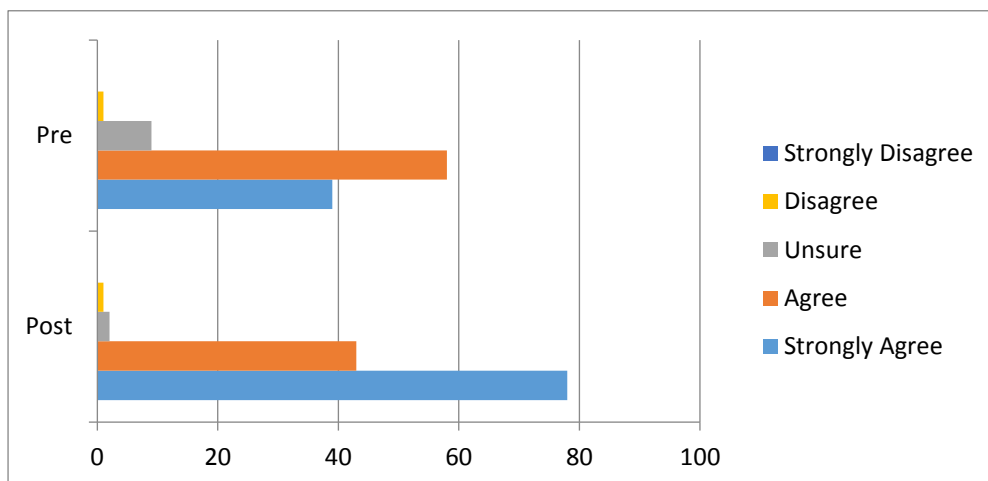
The pre-forum and post-forum comparison visually demonstrates the significant differences between student's pre-forum and post-forum questionnaire responses. This comparison is provided as an additional evaluation to the information above to further demonstrate the positive evaluation of the YMHF.

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



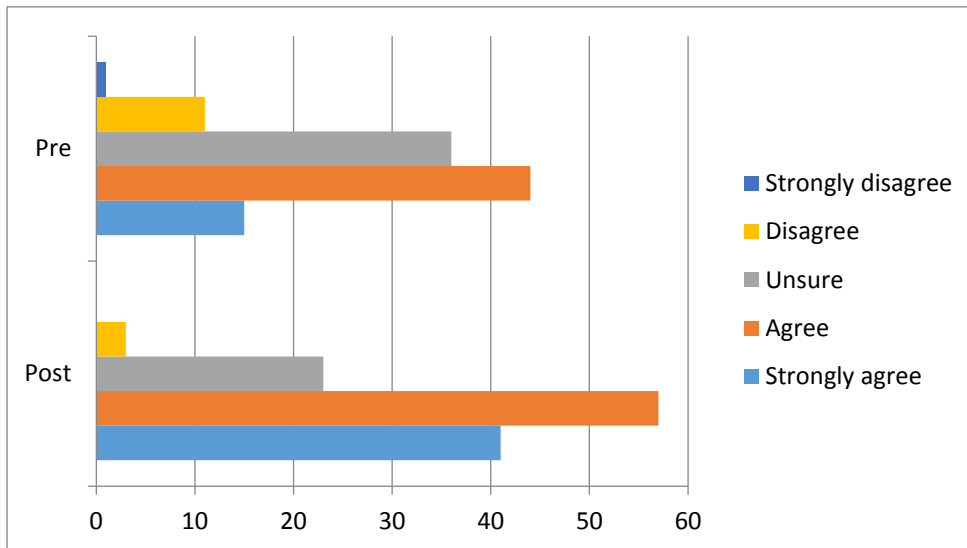
- Approximate 30% increase in student's responding to the statement with 'strongly agree'
- Complete elimination of student's responding to the statement with 'disagree' or 'unsure'

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”*



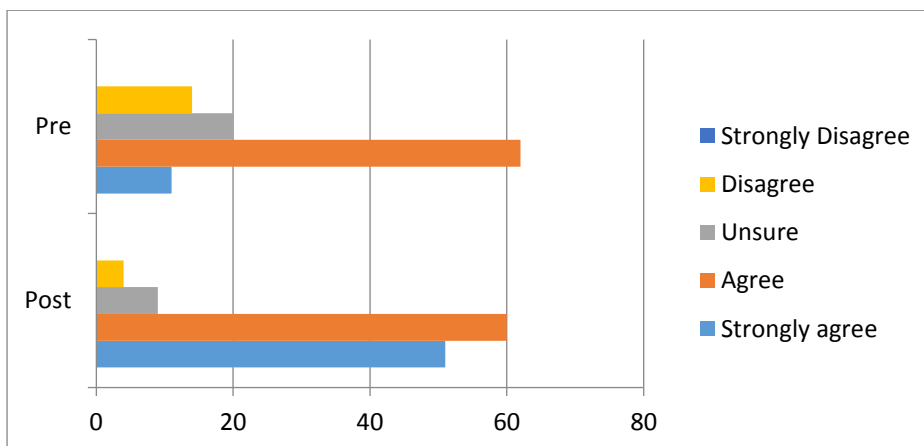
- Approximate 30% increase in student's responding to the statement with 'strongly agree'
- 5% reduction in student's responding to the statement with 'unsure'

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



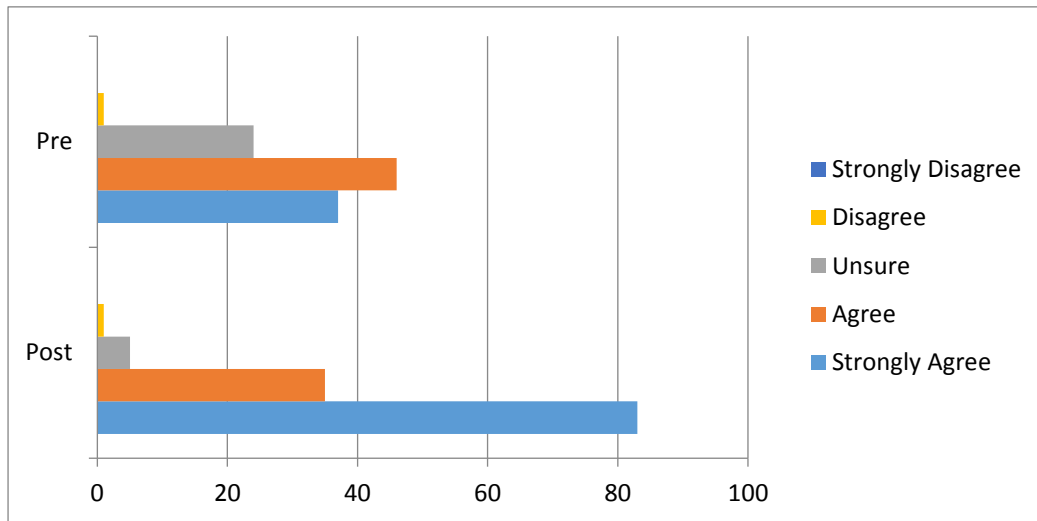
- Approximate 20% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Approximate 7% reduction in student’s responding to the statement with ‘disagree’
- Approximate 10% reduction in student’s responding to the statement with ‘unsure’
- Complete elimination of student’s responding to the statement with ‘strongly disagree’

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



- Approximate 35% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Approximate 20% reduction in student’s responding to the statement with ‘unsure’ or ‘disagree’

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



- Approximate 40% increase in student’s responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Approximate 15% reduction in student’s responding to the statement with ‘unsure’

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.

4-Month-Post Forum Online Survey

Students were given the opportunity to share their email address with the Steering Committee on the post-forum questionnaire form to participate in ongoing follow-up. 46 students shared their emails on the day of the forum in June 2019. The voluntary online survey was completed via SurveyMonkey and 9 students completed it (Appendix D). The 9 students were representative of several high schools who attended the forum.

Of the 9 survey responses completed:

- **100%** of students either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“overall my knowledge around the topic of mental health is good”*
- **88%** of students either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness”*
- **75%** of students either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health”*
- **75%** of students either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies”*

When these percentages are compared to the post-forum questionnaire data, the sustainability and retainability of YMHF information and key messages is clearly demonstrated. This suggests that students have maintained their increase in mental health literacy, awareness of service provision, acceptance of mental health and understanding of coping strategies overtime.

School Staff/Organiser Feedback Evaluation

School staff were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the conclusion of the forum. 21 questionnaires were completed with the following significant findings:

- **100%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"Overall, the forum was well organised and ran smoothly"*
- **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"*

4-Month-Post Forum Online Survey for School Staff

The steering committee decided to create a survey for the staff so that they had the opportunity to share any further feedback that arose following the day of the forum. 26 staff members were sent the survey and 10 completed.

Of the 10 survey responses completed:

- **100%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"the content of the forum was useful for my understanding of youth mental health"*

Several other questions were asked of the staff in the hope that their valuable feedback can be utilised to further enhance the youth mental health forum model and ensure school staff also get the most out of the day.

The staff indicated that the resources they were provided with and the opportunity for their school to apply for a small grant are both important and valuable aspects to the growing model.

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 increasing 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 2019 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 2020 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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