



**2017**

**Youth Mental Health Forum**  
Post Event Report

**Wagga Wagga, Murrumbidgee Region**

## Details

<b>Author:</b>	Sarah Groves (Community Engagement Officer - headspace Wagga Wagga)
<b>Completed:</b>	4th December 2017
<b>Name:</b>	2017 Youth Mental Health Forum
<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday the 6 <sup>th</sup> of June 2017
<b>Location:</b>	Mater Dei Primary School Hall, Wagga Wagga
<b>Attendees:</b>	18 high schools, 160 students
<b>Facilitators:</b>	Burn Bright ( <a href="https://www.burnbright.org.au/">https://www.burnbright.org.au/</a> )
<b>Guest Speakers:</b>	Jarrad Hickmott (lived experience), Sarah Groves (mental health introduction)
<b>Q&amp;A Panel:</b>	Sean Hodgins (Psychiatrist – Community Mental Health), Kylie Hamblin (Clinical Psychologist – headspace Wagga Wagga), Anne Egan (Psychologist – Department of Education), Jarrad Hickmott (lived experience), Troy Fisher (School Liaison Officer – NSW Police)
<b>Financial Sponsors:</b>	NSW Department of Education, Catholic Schools Office – diocese of Wagga Wagga, City of Wagga Wagga, Community Drug Action Team – Wagga Wagga, Charles Sturt University – Head of Campus Wagga Wagga

### 2017 Steering Committee Members

- headspace Wagga Wagga
- COMPACT
- Catholic Schools Office – diocese of Wagga Wagga
- TAFE NSW – Riverina
- NSW Department of Education
- Mission Australia
- NSW Police
- Anglicare NSW
- Intereach
- City of Wagga Wagga
- Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga
- Relationships Australia Canberra & Region
- Rural Advisory Mental Health Program – NSW Health
- STARTTS
- School-Link

## 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 education<sup>1</sup>. To help address this, a local steering committee comprised 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 5 years. As of June 2017, Wagga Wagga has held six 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 over time.

## Aims

The overall aim of the forum is to empower young people to address mental health concerns being faced by the individual, their 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 youth mental health 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 and promote positive help seeking behaviours
- 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 youth mental health 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 evidence-based 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 2017 YMHF was held on Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of June at the Mater Dei Primary School Hall, Wagga Wagga. 18 regional high schools, 160 students and 21 teaching staff attended the forum, along with support from several steering committee members including headspace Wagga Wagga, Intereach, STARTTS, City of Wagga Wagga, Relationships Australia Canberra & Region, School-Link, NSW Police (volunteers), and Mission Australia.

Schools were encouraged to select ten students from various backgrounds and year levels to attend the forum. 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 Isobel Reid (local Wiradjuri Elder) commenced the 2017 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, and regularly met in the months leading up to the forum (Run Sheet – Appendix A). Burn Bright specialise in individually-tailored leadership and wellbeing programmes for young people right across Australia. The 2017 YMHF 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, Jarrad Hickmott, who bravely shared his story. Jarrad Hickmott has been involved with **headspace** over the past six years, including the role of Youth Advisor for **headspace** National Office 15/16.

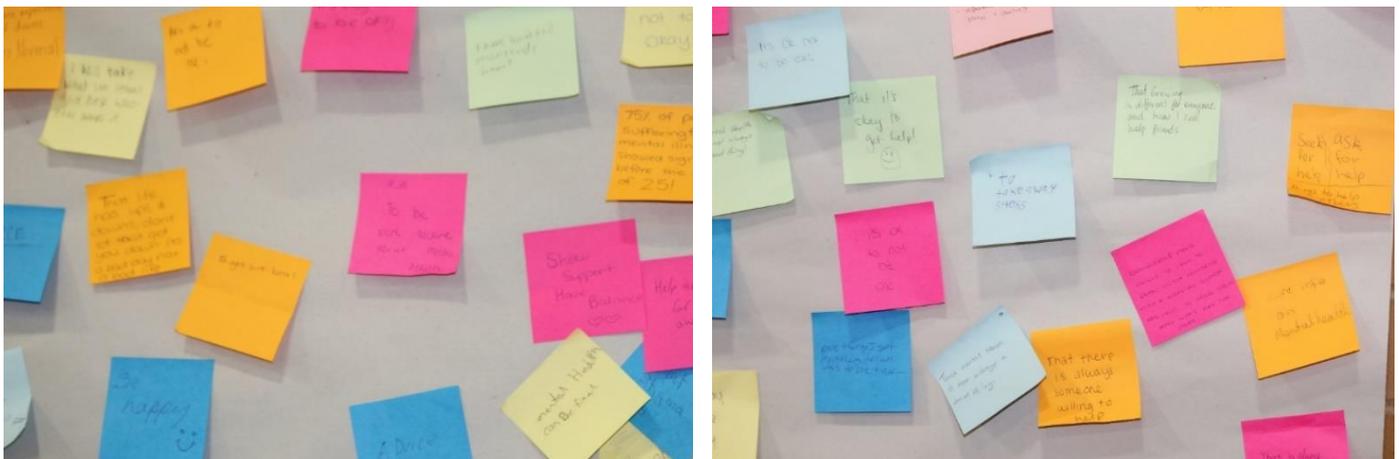


## 2) Answer our questions – where can we seek help?

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 Sean Hodgins (psychiatrist), Jarrad Hickmott (lived experience), Troy Fisher (NSW Police), Anne Egan (school psychologist), and Kylie Hamblin (clinical 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. Thirty students wrote the statement “It’s okay not to be okay”, followed by statements such as “it’s okay to ask for help”, “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. School groups of students worked alongside each other to develop initial project ideas and follow an allocated time slot, students were asked to present these ideas to the entire forum. 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"> <li>• Event to break down the stigma to be held middle to end of Term 3</li> </ul>
Junee High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Wellbeing Day</li> <li>• Presentation at the school from mental health services (e.g. headspace)</li> <li>• Develop activities to engage the school and raise awareness</li> </ul>

Tumut High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event to breakdown the stigma and talk about ways to overcome it</li> <li>• Make it an all school event</li> </ul>
Mater Dei High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intend to hold an event for RUOK Day in September, focus on student involvement</li> <li>• Encourage yellow clothes, decorations and selling yellow items to fundraise</li> <li>• Ensure information about support services are available for students</li> </ul>
Young High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop strategies to decrease stigma and encourage help seeking behaviour</li> <li>• Speak Up Day – a day where there is an anonymous box which students can tell their story, ask questions, and get general advice from the school psychologists</li> </ul>
TAFE NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put together a video to be distributed across the campus which raises awareness and beats stigma</li> <li>• Video title: “Video killed the mental health stigma”</li> </ul>
Koorinal High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a movie night and show movie Inside Out to raise money and start the conversation about mental health</li> <li>• Organise a break from anxiety and stress for students</li> </ul>
Finley High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put together a video – stomping out stigma</li> <li>• Share the current statistics around mental health</li> <li>• Help seeking behaviour information to be distributed across the school</li> </ul>
Mount Austin High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devoting 10 minutes to each roll call class before school for wellbeing</li> <li>• Have guest speakers around their journey and share their story</li> </ul>
The Riverina Anglican College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a sense of community by allocating students to a ‘family’ – support network, mental health and wellness awareness</li> <li>• Have a mental health day</li> <li>• Students and staff wear masks to school (a metaphor for people to realise you don’t have to hide behind a mask)</li> <li>• Information about support services to be distributed throughout the school community</li> </ul>
Deniliquin High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Battle of the Bands – a whole school engagement project that can also be a community event</li> <li>• Fundraising for a mental health organisation through a cupcake sale</li> </ul>
West Wyalong High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactive skit for awareness around mental health</li> <li>• To enter into the Dramatic Minds festival</li> <li>• Start the conversation and combat social anxiety</li> </ul>
Ardlethan Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Dog Day</li> <li>• Wellbeing Day</li> <li>• Involving the school counsellor</li> </ul>
Ariah Park Central School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview different students to find out their coping strategies/create a survey</li> <li>• Create a PowerPoint with these coping strategies, statistics and survey results</li> </ul>

Kildare Catholic College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a bake sale to raise money for a selected mental health organisation</li> <li>• Put posters up around the school</li> <li>• Send out an email to all the students with the school counsellor details</li> </ul>
Wagga Wagga High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini Mental Health Forum</li> <li>• Q&amp;A Panel</li> <li>• Target each year group individually through creative means (e.g. creative arts, music, video clip)</li> </ul>

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

The 2017 YMHF Steering Committee was committed to following up with the schools who attended to assist with the ‘Take it Back’ projects if required. Below are two detailed examples of the innovative and student-led projects implemented post forum.

#### Deniliquin High School

*Deniliquin High School students who attended the forum wanted to develop a project with a whole of school engagement outcome. The students who attended were a part of the MAD (Make A Difference) Squad, a group within Deniliquin High School with a focus on bringing about positive change to the school community.*

*The students held an annual Big Blue Day, having started to develop the concepts and ideas at the forum. The students also wanted to donate money to a mental health organisation. The students decided to raise money to support “Channel 4 Change”, a community led awareness campaign to address rural mental health. The students fundraised over \$1000 to go towards the “Channel 4 Change” campaign through gold coin donations, BBQ, Pie Throwing Auction and soft drink sales.*

*The day was filled with positive mental health messages, resources, information, self-care activities and socialising between students. The school community evaluated the Big Blue Day as a tremendous success following the YMHF.*

#### Wagga Wagga Christian College

*The students from Wagga Wagga Christian College decided that they would host an event in their school community to break down the stigma surrounding mental health. The students who attended the forum worked closely together to put on a Mental Health Day in September for year 9 and 10 students.*

*The students took inspiration from the forum format, with interactive energisers, engaging music and several topics of discussion. The students invited headspace Wagga Wagga to present on mental health with a focus on self-care, coping strategies and positive mental health messages. Following the presentations and activities, the students enjoyed lunch together as a group. The students were presented with a Certificate of Attendance from the 2017 YMHF Steering Committee (headspace Wagga Wagga representative) in recognition of their attendance and their efforts to disperse key mental health messages across their school community.*

## 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 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), 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 Lehman (Youth Development Officer – City of Wagga Wagga), Sarah Groves (Community Engagement Officer – headspace Wagga Wagga) and Kylie Campbell (Clinical Leader – Relationships Australia Canberra & Region). The 2017 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**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage of attendees</b>
<b>Male</b>	32%
<b>Female</b>	66%
<b>Gender Neutral</b>	2%

##### **Year Group**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage of attendees</b>
<b>TAFE</b>	2%
<b>Year 7</b>	1%
<b>Year 8</b>	5%
<b>Year 9</b>	29%
<b>Year 10</b>	43%
<b>Year 11</b>	16%
<b>Year 12</b>	1%

#### **Attending High Schools**

- Deniliquin High School
- Koorinal High School
- Wagga Wagga High School
- The Riverina Anglican College
- Mater Dei Catholic College
- Tumut High School
- Young High School
- Mount Austin High School
- Wagga Wagga Christian College
- TAFE NSW – Riverina
- Aria Park Central School
- West Wyalong High School
- Ardlethan Central School
- Temora High School
- Finley High School
- Kildare Catholic College
- Junee High School
- Gundagai High School

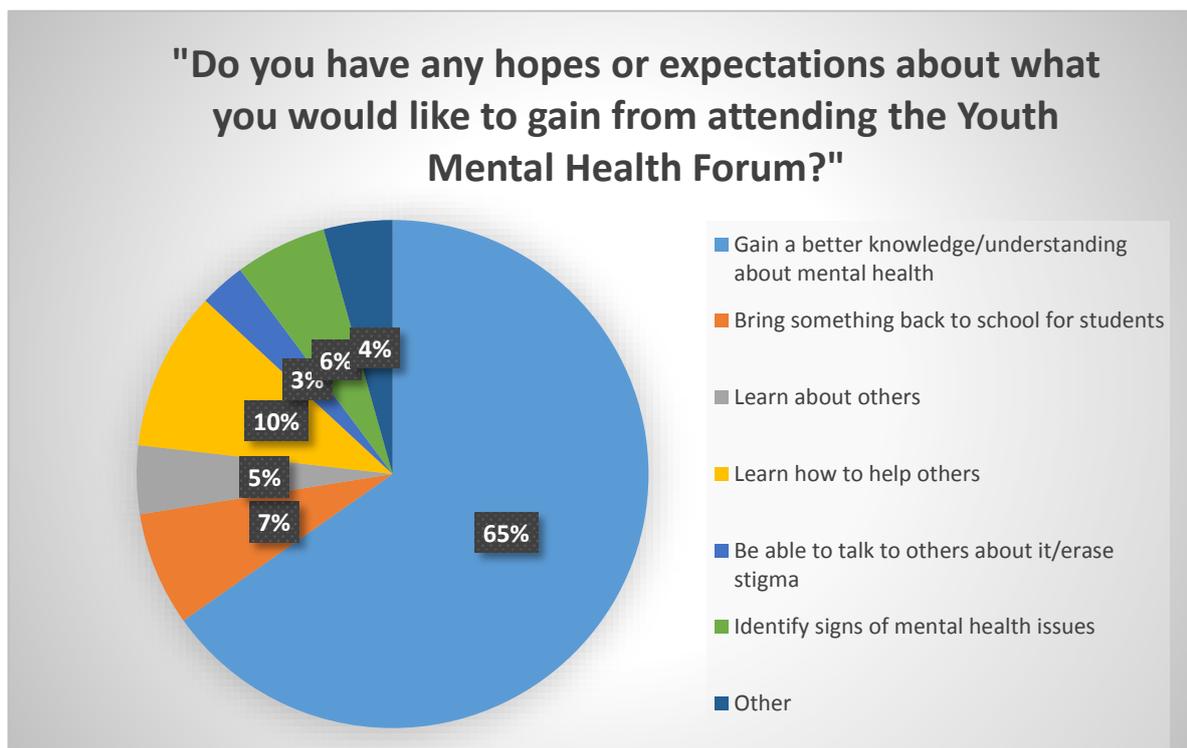
### Pre-Forum Questionnaire

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-monthpost-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 86 pre-event surveys completed:

- **33%** of students were either 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement *"I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health"*
- **5%** 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"*
- **29%** of students were 'unsure' or 'disagree' with the statement *"I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies"*

The students were asked the open-ended question *"Do you have any hopes or expectations about what you would like to gain from attending the Youth Mental Health Forum?"* The figure below illustrates the majority of responses from students.



**65% of students identified that they would like to gain a better understanding or knowledge about mental health.**

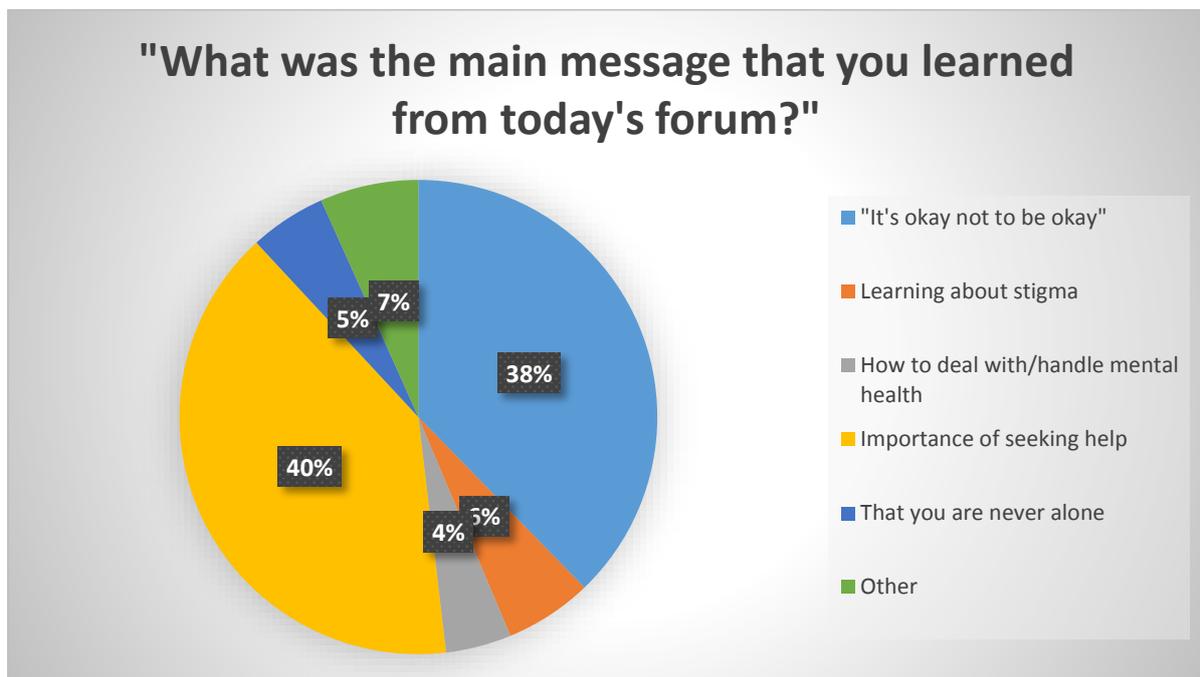
### Post-Forum Questionnaire

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

Of the 142 post-event surveys completed:

- **16%** of students were either 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly 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"*
- **7%** of students identified they were 'unsure' with the statement *"I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies"*
- **93%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"the Youth Mental Health Forum met my hopes and expectations"*
- **96%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"The annual running of the Youth Mental Health Forum is important for my school"*
- **95%** of students either 'strongly agree' or '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.



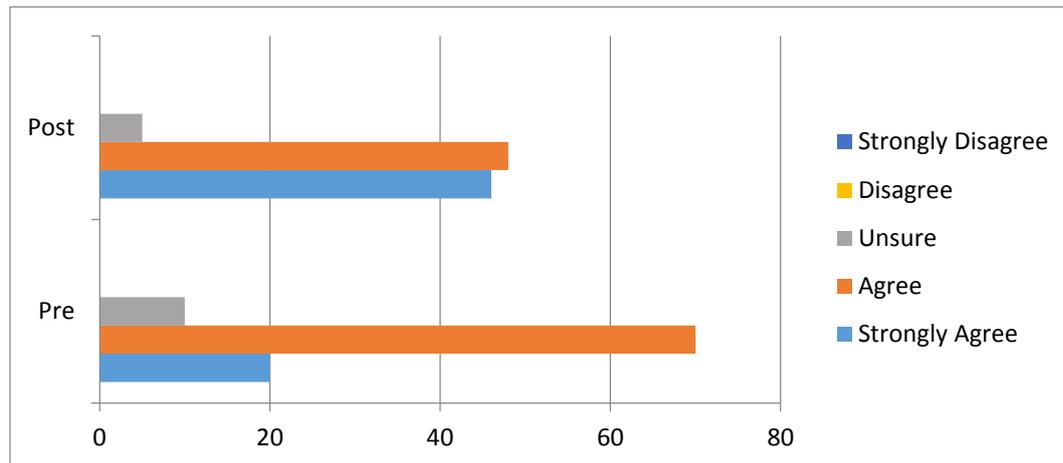
**40%** of students' responses related to the importance of seeking help with an overall trend of accepting help seeking behaviours.

**38%** of students reported the main message they learned reflected an acceptance of imperfection with the statement *"it's okay not to be okay"*.

### Pre and Post Comparison (%)

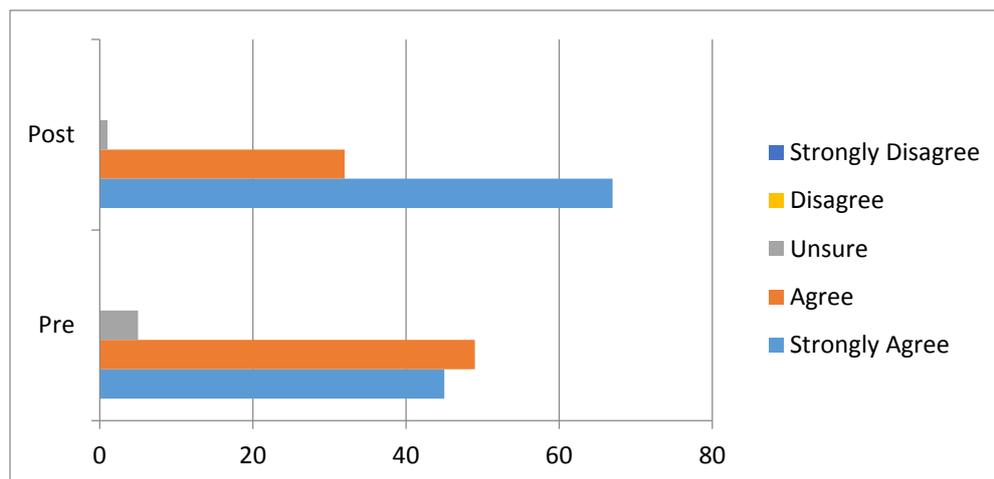
The pre-forum and post-forum comparison visually demonstrates the significant differences between students' pre-forum and post-forum questionnaire responses. This comparison is provided as an additional evaluation to the information above to further demonstrate the positive evaluation of the YMHF.

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



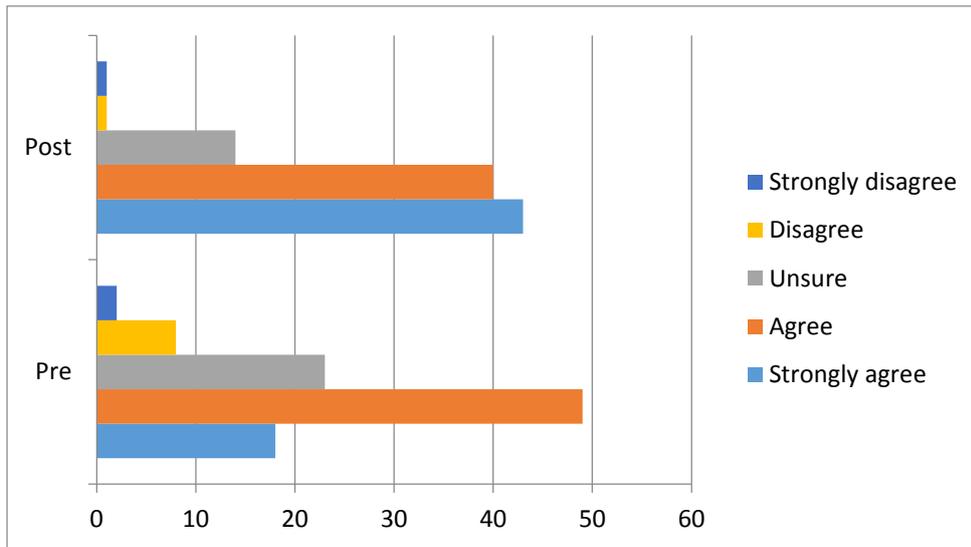
- Approximate 20% increase in students' responding to the statement with 'strongly agree'
- Approximate 5% reduction in students' responding to the statement with 'unsure'

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”*



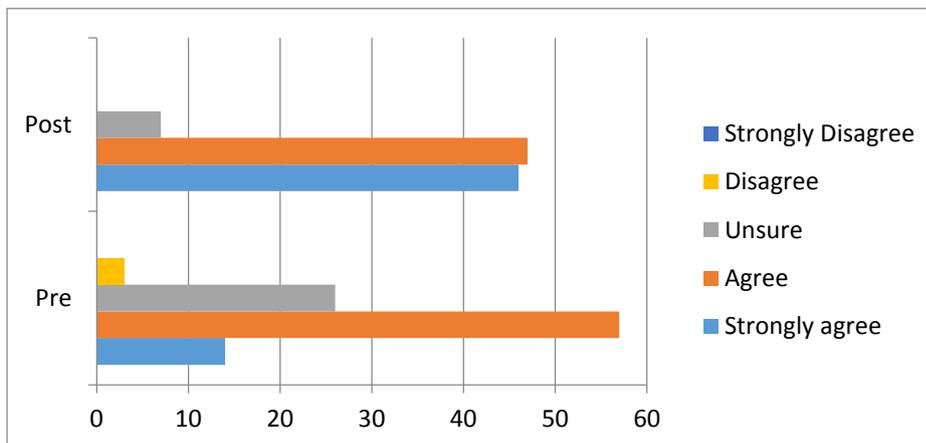
- Approximate 20% increase in students responding to the statement with 'strongly agree'
- 4% reduction in students responding to the statement with 'unsure'

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



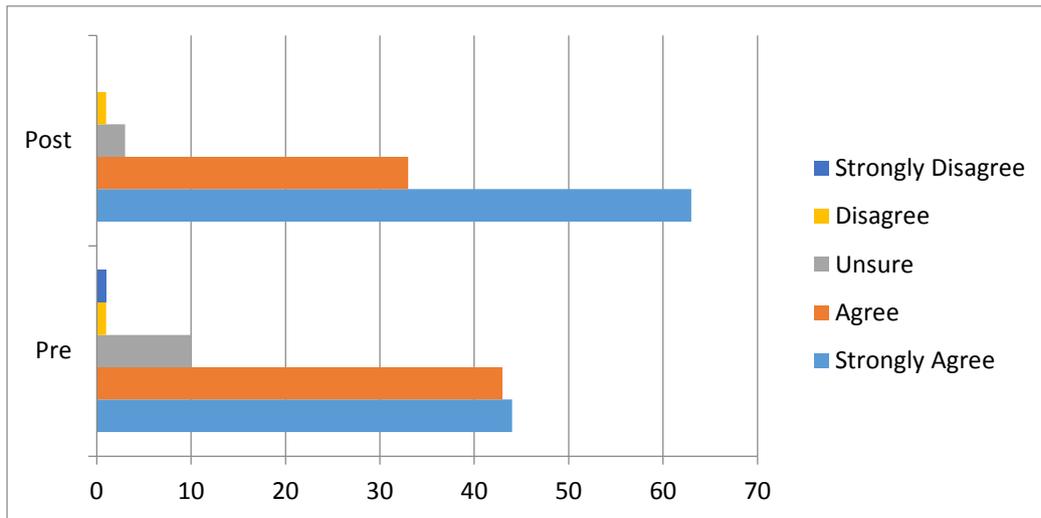
- Approximate 25% increase in students responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Approximate 10% reduction in students responding to the statement with ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’
- Approximate 10% reduction in students responding to the statement with ‘unsure’

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 students responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Complete elimination of students responding to the statement with ‘disagree’
- Approximate 20% reduction in students responding to the statement with ‘unsure’

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 students responding to the statement with ‘strongly agree’
- Approximate 10% increase in students responding to the statement with ‘agree’
- Approximate 5% reduction in students responding to the statement with ‘unsure’
- Complete elimination of students responding to the statement with ‘strongly disagree’

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. 54 students shared their emails on the day of the forum in June 2017. The voluntary online survey was completed via SurveyMonkey, and 13 students completed it (Appendix D). The 13 students were representative of several high schools who attended the forum.

Of the 13 survey responses completed:

- **92%** of students either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the statement *“overall my knowledge around the topic of mental health is good”*
- **100%** 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”*

- **85%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health"*
- **85%** 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. All percentages for student responses of the 4-month-post forum survey were within 5% of the student responses of the post-forum questionnaire. 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 and supporting organisations were asked to complete a short questionnaire at the conclusion of the forum. 22 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"*
- Over **90%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"the information presented was appropriate and assisted young people in understanding mental health and help seeking behaviours"*
- Over **90%** 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"*

The open-ended question *"How could the YMHF Steering Committee support students/schools to implement their projects?"* was asked of the respondents. 12 of the 16 answers suggested the YMHF Steering Committee remain in contact with the schools.

As such, a designated YMHF Steering Committee representative contacted the schools individually to check in with their projects following the forum. This has allowed for the ongoing development of meaningful relationships between service providers and the education sector.

## Where to from here?

The YMHF approach is one strategy implemented in the Murrumbidgee region to address the barriers posed by mental health concerns 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 barriers to engaging in education from within their school community.

The take away message from the 2017 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 2018 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*

Sarah Groves

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