

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE
SAID

JUNE 2015

A REPORT ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S IDEAS ABOUT POSITIVE
MENTAL WELLBEING COLLECTED BY THE TASMANIAN YOUTH FORUM



Tasmanian youth forum



youth network of Tasmania

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About TYF

The Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) is Tasmania's peak youth consultative body. TYF is an initiative of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), the peak organisation for the broader youth sector in Tasmania, with funding from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, through Communities, Sport and Recreation Tasmania.

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**YOUTH, FAMILY
& COMMUNITY
CONNECTIONS**



Youth Network of Tasmania

A: Suite 4a/236 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay

T: 6223 5511

M: 0488 235 511

E: tyf@ynot.org.au

W: www.ynot.org.au

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the views and ideas of young people who participated in the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) *Mental Health Matters* Statewide Youth Forum and the accompanying *Mental Health Matters* online survey.

The *Mental Health Matters* forum and survey were developed by TYF, which is the peak consultative body for young people in Tasmania. TYF is an initiative of the Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT), the peak organisation for the non-government youth sector in Tasmania.

TYF conducted the Forum and Survey to give young people the opportunity to discuss their concerns about maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing and to discuss barriers that impact their mental health and wellbeing. The Forum and Survey were solutions focused, giving young people the opportunity to discuss the positive and useful things that are already in place that assist them to develop and maintain positive mental health, and the chance to think about, and share, their ideas for the future.

The Report found that young people are utilising multiple strategies and seeking assistance and advice from multiple sources in relation to positive mental health and wellbeing. The findings also suggest that rather than developing entirely new resources, young people had ideas to expand, improve or further utilise resources that were already in place.

The results and ideas from the Forum and Survey have been combined to inform this report and develop key findings.

Key Findings

Finding 1: Young people rely on multiple sources and forms of support for their mental health and wellbeing.

Finding 2: Stigma, fear and judgement are the main barriers that prevent young people from seeking help with their mental health.

Finding 3: Mental health services in Tasmania need to be available in all locations of the State with easy accessibility for young people to reduce barriers accessing these services.

Finding 4: Young people want Tasmania to be a safe and healthy place for everyone and understand that this requires structural and societal changes across multiple areas.

Finding 5: Young people understand that they need to take care of their mental health and wellbeing, and use multiple strategies to keep mentally healthy.

Finding 6: Young people want people they turn to for support to listen to what they have to say and ask then what they need to be supported.

Finding 7: Being mentally healthy is something that is important to young people.

Finding 8: Young people are more likely to access mental health services in times of crisis or need, rather than as a way to maintain their mental health.

Finding 9: Young people recognise the importance of having capable and professional staff at services who can help support their mental health

Finding 10: Young people are most likely to go to their friends and family for support with their mental health and wellbeing.

Finding 11: Young people report that friends and family are less likely to be well informed about mental health and wellbeing than professionals or other sources of support.

Finding 12: Young people want more skills to support their friends and family with their mental health

Finding 13: Young people want a positive and caring environment when they seek support to talk about their concerns.

Finding 14: Young people want to encourage their peers to seek help and talk to people if they are experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

Introduction

In consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Tasmanian Youth Forum (TYF) developed the *Mental Health Matters* Statewide Forum by considering background research, previous community consultations and previous TYF forums.

The TYF *Mental Health Matters* Forum provided young people aged 12-25 with the opportunity to discuss their mental health and wellbeing. They had the opportunity to discuss issues and barriers, as well as, solutions and ideas they thought would benefit them and other people in Tasmania. In conjunction to the Forum, an online Survey was also conducted to ensure young people who were unable to attend the Forum still had the opportunity to have their ideas heard. This also assisted in ensuring there was a wide reach of respondents.

This report outlines the ideas shared by each group, as well as whole group brainstorming and activities that took place throughout the Forum. However, the key findings are based on the entire consultation process.

Background Information

Young people are resilient but they lead busy lives and have many competing priorities and concerns that occupy their time. Research has identified stress related to school, such as pressure to succeed in final exams, as a key issue for many young people with 40% of year 12 students reporting symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress that fall outside what is considered to be a normal range (Smith & Sinclair, 2000). Data from the Australian National Mental Health Survey in 2011, showed that young people have the highest incidence and prevalence of mental illness compared to any other age bracket (Milnes et.al. 2011).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2007) 30% of females aged 16-24 years and 23% of males aged 16-24 years had experienced symptoms of a mental illness in the years leading up to data collection. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) suggests that over three quarters (76%) of people who experience a mental illness during their lifetime will first develop a disorder before the age of 25 years. Young people, especially adolescents, have specific needs in terms of how services and assistance are delivered due to their stage of development.

Mission Australia's annual Youth Survey in 2012, coping with stress was listed as the top concern for young people with 36.6% of young Tasmanians stated they were either extremely concerned (15.2%) or very concerned (21.4%) about this issue. This concern increased in 2013 which 39.6% of young respondents in Tasmania indicated this as the top concern with 15.3% being extremely concerned and 24.3% very concerned. One in five respondents in 2013 were either extremely concerned or very concerned about depression. In the 2014 survey coping with stress was still the top issue of concern with 32.6% of respondents from Tasmania indicating they were extremely concerned (12.1%) or very concerned (20.5%) about this issue. School and study problems also ranked highly, with 31.8% of respondents rating this as a major issue of concern for them. One in five young people in the 2014 survey were extremely concerned or very concerned about depression, demonstrating no change in this area since 2013.

There are also a range of other factors that can have a negative impact on the mental health of young people. These include friendships, family breakdown, financial instability, employment and cultural influences.

Additionally, there are also a number of positive and effective mental health services and interventions available but there is still work to be done to ensure these services are promoted, accessible, affordable and youth friendly.

Scope

This report aims to communicate the ideas and views of young people who participated in the TYF *Mental Health Matters* Statewide Forum and Survey. Both the Survey and the Forum engaged a diverse range of young people from across the State that were aged between 12 and 25 years and from a wide range of backgrounds.

Consultation Process: Forum

Young people attended the *TYF Mental Health Matters* Forum on Friday 20 March 2015 from 10:00am-3:30pm. This Forum was held at the Door of Hope Conference Centre in Launceston. Participants came from all across Tasmania including from Wynyard, Kingston, Sorell and Oatlands. An experienced youth facilitator was engaged with to assist with the running of the forum. An agenda was developed for the day but was flexible to accommodate the ideas and discussions participants were most interested in (see Appendix 1). The primary focus of the forum was small discussion groups on particular topics (see Appendix 2). These small discussion groups were supported by a worker who helped to focus the discussions and refine the ideas.

Through collaboration with Headspace a Chill Out Space was available at the Forum, for any young people who needed some time out from the whole group discussion. Given that mental health can be a topic that can trigger a range of emotions for people it was an important part of the consultation process to ensure that there was a safe space where young people could go if they needed to talk with someone. A psychologist from Headspace was in the Chill Out Space all day to assist young people using the space.

The day began with an introduction to the Forum by Mo, the youth facilitator for the day. Minister for Health, Michael Ferguson, opened the Forum and talked about the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing. Participants then had the opportunity to complete the Survey. The Survey was followed by Big Picture Brainstorming where participants moved around tables and brainstormed ideas about mental health and wellbeing in Tasmania and what is working well for young people and where improvements could be made. Participants were also asked to contribute their ideas through the Ideas Wall and Positive Mental Health Wall activities, and the ideas from these two parts of the Forum are discussed later in this report.

The majority of the forum was dedicated to the small discussion group topics (see Appendix 2) to focus the discussions on what was working well, what needed to be changed and what young people wanted to create to help young people with positive mental health. For the second discussion group participants were asked to move to a different topic discussion table. The discussion groups were each asked to choose one idea that was discussed to share with other participants and workers. Participants were given five dots to vote on the ideas they would most like to see implemented. The Forum concluded by summarising the ideas of the day, filling out feedback forms and thanking participants for their contributions.

Initial Brainstorm of the Ideas

Participants at the Forum formed small discussion groups to brainstorm their ideas and respond to three questions. Participants spent approximately fifteen minutes on each question before moving on to the next question, hearing the ideas discussed by the previous participants at the table and then picking up where the discussion left off. Each of the three discussion questions, including a summary of the participant's responses follows:

What currently encourages and supports positive mental health and wellbeing for young people in Tasmania?

Participants identified four key areas that currently support and encourage their mental health and wellbeing. Firstly, organisations and services were identified. Participants listed several services and organisations that they felt supported and encouraged their mental health and wellbeing. Secondly participants identified people such as social workers, teachers, family, psychologists, counsellors, youth workers and friends as people who support and encourage positive mental health among young people. Thirdly, things that young people can do themselves such as drawing, exercise, yoga, reading, getting enough sleep, playing sport and taking time to relax were identified as important factors to maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. Finally, young people talked about things that the people around them do that help them to be mentally healthy. These things included listening, being inclusive, being kind and caring, friendliness and assisting them to make positive choices.

Finding 1: Young people rely on multiple sources and forms of support for their mental health and wellbeing.

What are the barriers or limitations to developing and maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing for young people in Tasmania?

Participants at the forum identified barriers that may prevent, or make it difficult, for young people to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing.

Waiting Lists

Waiting lists to get an appointment for mental health support were listed as being a barrier for young people. Getting an appointment when needed can be difficult, especially for young people who live in rural or remote areas with no access to public transport. Young people reported that they find it challenging to get the help they need, when they need it.

Fear

Young people discussed the fear of being judged or discriminated against as a barrier. Judgement or discrimination may come from family or friends, peers or society. Any form of judgement or discrimination can be detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Fear of being judged by service providers also creates a barrier to help seeking behaviours. Young people need to feel accepted in order to seek help when they need it.

Stigma and Labels

Stigma surrounding mental health, in particular mental illness, also creates a barrier to help seeking behaviour. Young people stated it was difficult to seek help when they feared they would be labelled as "crazy" or "weak". Participants discussed feeling embarrassed to seek support and that stigma makes it difficult for young people to feel comfortable enough to seek help if needed.

Location and Availability

Living in a remote location with limited transport was also identified as a barrier. Young people are often unable to get to services or organisations because they are not available in

the area in which they live. When services are available in rural or remote locations this can also be a challenge for young people as they may fear the community knowing they are seeking support from the service due to the nature of living in a small town. Resources and services are limited and may not always be available when young people need them. This can make it difficult for young people who need to fit an appointment in with a school, work or their personal schedule. Lack of knowledge of services and resources was also discussed. Participants acknowledged that it was difficult to seek help from a service when they do not know it is there and the internet is not always the most reliable source of information.

Negative past experiences

Past experiences can impact on whether a young person is likely to access help again in the future. If a young person has a negative experience at a service, such as waiting for a long period of time, feelings of discrimination or judgement or not feeling safe, they are less likely to seek out help again in the future. Young people noted that they place a lot of emphasis on the experiences or stories shared by their friends or peers. If a friend had a positive experience at a service then young people are more likely to use the same service.

Finding 2: Stigma, fear and judgement are the main barriers that prevent young people from seeking help with their mental health.

Finding 3: Mental health services in Tasmania need to be available in all locations of the State with easy accessibility for young people to reduce barriers accessing these services.

What would you like Tasmania to be known for in the future in relation to mental health and wellbeing and what would you create to achieve this?

Many participants wanted Tasmania to be known as a State with equal rights and equal opportunities. These equal rights included equal marriage rights and equal pay for men and women. Young people also wanted Tasmania to be a state of no racism and discrimination and young people having equal opportunities in the community.

Young people at the Forum also stated they would like Tasmania to be known as a State with no stigma and as a bully free zone. Young people reported bullying as something that impacts their mental health and wellbeing. Participants discussed schools as bully free zones and wanted to see the idea of a bully free zone be expanded to include the entire State.

Tasmania is already known for some of the fresh produce we have available, however, young people wanted Tasmania to be known for selling healthy foods that are affordable for all Tasmanians. They also wanted health services to be more accessible for young people in the State and this included more face to face support.

Education and support for teachers and workers was also something young people wanted Tasmania to be known for. Young people wanted to be known for the support we provide to teachers and workers because if they are supported in their roles it enables them to better support the needs of the young people they work with. This idea was discussed by many young people and they suggested support and education sessions should be free and would include young people sharing their ideas with the workers.

Finding 4: Young people want Tasmania to be a safe and healthy place for everyone and understand that this requires structural and societal changes across multiple areas.

Ideas Wall Activity

Throughout the forum participants had the chance to answer the question **what do you do to look after your mental health?** The responses were displayed on the wall so other participants could read through them and take some of the ideas to try themselves. Many of the strategies were focused on these key themes:

- Spending time with pets
- Exercise
- Playing video games
- Positive thinking
- Taking time to relax before going to bed
- Listening to music
- Spending time with friends
- Drawing and
- Taking time out for themselves.

Many young people also stated how important self help was to them and had multiple strategies that they used to look after their mental health and wellbeing. The Ideas Wall showcased the multiple positive strategies young people use to support their mental health. It also demonstrated that many young people have multiple strategies they use which is positive as the one strategy will not necessarily be successful every time.

Finding 5: Young people understand that they need to take care of their mental health and wellbeing, and use multiple strategies to keep mentally healthy.

Positive Mental Health Wall

The forum discussions primarily focused on young people's ideas about positive mental health and wellbeing and asked for their solutions to some of the issues they face. However, another important aspect of young people's mental health is understanding what young people need to be supported in the best possible way. To address this, a wall was dedicated to the question 'what do people need to know about supporting young people's mental health?' The responses have been grouped into nine categories.

Respect Diversity – understanding that all young people are different and will deal with things differently. It is important to acknowledge this when assisting young people with their mental health.

Encourage self care – assuring young people that their mental health and wellbeing matters and encouraging them to take care of themselves, as well as encourage help seeking.

Don't give up – young people may not feel comfortable to share what is happening in their lives straight away but it is important not to give up on them. When young people share their ideas and share what is happening in their lives listening without interruption is vital.

Be mindful of what you say – it is important to be mindful of what you say and to be non judgemental. Sometimes you might think your words are helpful but sometimes it can be best to say nothing at all but instead just let the young person know that you are there for them.

Provide space – young people just need their own space sometimes and it is important you are there but not invading their safe spaces.

Be there and listen – going over problems and reassurance that everything will be fine is not always helpful for young people. It is important not to dismiss what young people are saying. It can be comforting to know there are other people who have experienced similar

situations and emotions, however it is important not to dismiss their experiences. Offering inspirational quotes can also be seen as dismissive and not helpful.

Don't place blame – not feeling mentally healthy is nothing to be ashamed of and is not the fault of the young person. It is important that young people are not blamed or made to feel ashamed.

Normalise your support – everyone needs support and some people need more support than others and will need different types of support. Asking young people what they need from you to feel supported is encouraged by young people.

There is always more going on – it doesn't matter what the issue, experience, problem or situation is there will always be more happening and things that you are not aware of. Young people have suggested that it does not matter how happy they may seem there can still be other things happening so it is important not to assume you know everything that is happening.

Finding 6: Young people want people they turn to for support to listen to what they have to say and ask them what they need to be supported.

Discussion Groups

In order to focus the discussions on ideas and solutions, participants separated into topic groups. There were 11 topic groups that participants could choose from and they were able to attend two topic groups throughout the forum. A worker was stationed at each table to assist with the facilitation of discussions. These topics were selected prior to the Forum and were based off background research, ideas arising from previous Forums and consultation with young people. The topics were there as a guide for the discussions, however, the discussions were flexible to enable young people to express any ideas and solutions they had.

Groups were asked what they would retain, change and create in relation to their discussion topic and mental health more broadly. What young people wanted to retain focused discussions on what is already in place and what young people thought was working well and wanted to keep. The discussions about change focused on the things that were already there but could be improved to better address and meet the needs of young people. The discussions focused on 'create' included creating new ideas to address the issues young people are facing in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

Discussion Groups: Retain and Change

The following section provides a summary of what participants wanted to keep and what they wanted to change across each of the discussion topics.

1. Study: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Young people identified several things that are already in place that are working well for them. Many of the ideas discussed were related to support. These ideas included breakaway/study spaces within their schools and the presence of social workers in schools, as well as additional support from teachers. In addition to support, having a routine was also identified as being something many young people currently have in place that is working well for them. Routines included things such as set study lines within their timetables, goal setting, breaking study down into small and achievable components, having a schedule, deadlines in place and being able to prioritise their workloads. Flexible learning, in particular programs such as the Big Picture Education Program, was also identified as something already in place that young people would like to 'retain'.

While young people want to keep flexible learning it was also discussed as something that could be improved and expanded. Young people discussed the idea that one model of education will not suit each student and they would like to see more programs that are focused more on each individual student and their particular interests and skill sets. Another idea that was discussed was increased education and/or training for teachers. Young people identified this as an area they would like to see 'change' and wanted teachers to acknowledge the other commitments they have and the impact competing priorities may have on mental health and wellbeing.

2. Stress Creators: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants in these discussion groups discussed the things that create stress in their lives and things they would like to 'change'. One of the stress creators that was discussed was peer pressure at school and also from friends. Cyber bullying and pressure to be present on social media was also discussed as a stress creator. Expectations were discussed and the places that expectations come from. Young people identified that they had self-expectations that created stress in their lives, as well as the expectations they feel from parents, teachers and friends.

Participants also identified several approaches and tools they use to reduce the stress in their lives. Listening to music and exercising, as well as keeping a diary and seeking support from friends and family were listed as tools and strategies used to deal with or minimise stress. Problem solving skills such as breaking down problems into smaller, achievable parts, preparation, task completing and time management were all strategies participants discussed when addressing the issue of how they combat or reduce stress.

3. Family: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

There were several qualities that participants identified as positive and helpful qualities about families when supporting their mental health and wellbeing. Participants identified family as a positive support as they are "people you can talk to" and are the ones who keep young people safe and assist them to stay on the right track. Participants also said keeping in touch with family can be a challenge but said that when they did keep in touch it was a good thing for their mental health and wellbeing.

The key discussion points that participants would like to see change were related to family separation and divorce. Being separated from siblings, feeling left out, not being consulted, adjustment to new lifestyle/culture and feelings of being at fault were all discussed. Favouritism of children was also something participants discussed and would like to see 'change'. Consistent with research, participants stated that arguments and family violence negatively impacted on their mental health and wellbeing.

4. Employment: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Given the high rates of youth unemployment in Tasmania and the difficulties young people face when looking for work, there were several ideas discussed during the discussion of what young people would like to see changed or improved in relation to employment. Young people want to see more effective communication between employers and young employees, and want to be able to feel comfortable to discuss issues such as workplace bullying and feelings of being overloaded with their employer. Workplace bullying and feelings of being overloaded were two additional issues impacting on the mental health of young people in the workplace. Participants also discussed the need for more part time jobs that fit in with their school timetables, family commitments, sporting commitments and social

lives. Participants discussed feeling offended or upset when given feedback or when complaints are made that were not strictly their fault. This was something young people identified as something that negatively impacts on their mental health and is something they would like to see 'change'.

Despite the many challenges young people report experiencing in the workplace face in relation to their mental health and wellbeing, there were also several things young people identified as positive factors. Gaining valuable experience, confidence and having a sense of independence were all identified as factors in the workplace that have positive impacts on young people's mental health. Meeting new people in the workplace and establishing workplace connections was also identified as a positive factor relating to the mental health of young people.

5. Alcohol and Drugs: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants said that, when used responsibly, alcohol can be part of social events, special occasions and celebrations. However, the importance of having a group of friends who are a good influence and do not pressure their friends to drink was identified as something young people would like to keep to assist with their mental health and wellbeing. Finally, participants discussed how drugs are often prescribed as a form of medication and this is something that can be a positive thing for mental health and wellbeing and it is something young people would like to 'keep'/have. Participants also stressed that while medication can be a good thing, it needs to be used how it is prescribed to be effective.

In the future participants wanted to see less promotion of alcohol, stricter rules on forms of identification and a change in the way people view alcohol. These things were suggested as areas of change that would have a positive impact on young people's mental health. Participants acknowledged that current drug and alcohol services were there to assist young people who may seek assistance with alcohol or drugs however it was suggested that having services and workers who come to young people on an outreach basis would improve the current services available. Participants also discussed the importance of having people with life experience coming into schools to discuss the impact of alcohol and drugs on young people.

6. Experiencing Change: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants discussed changes in their education, family and friends and discussed the importance of having people they can confide in and seek help from when it is needed. Many participants discussed reluctance to experience change and discussed how this can have a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. 'Change' was also discussed as a positive thing, with participants suggested that 'change' can make a significant difference in positive mental health and wellbeing.

7. Grief and Loss: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Young people at the Forum first defined grief and loss as something that has multiple contexts and stated it could be grief and loss due to a death but acknowledged that people can experience grief and loss due to loss of possessions, property, identity or relationships. Participants said they would like to 'keep' the feelings that are experienced with grief and loss and the support they receive from their friends and family and the people they trust. Pets were also discussed as a factor that impacts positively on the mental health of young people who are grieving and experiencing loss.

Having open and regular discussions about grief and loss was something participants wanted to see happen in future. They also wanted to see more acceptance and support for people experiencing grief and loss. Participants wanted more education and ideas about how to talk to someone who is grieving to assist them and also highlighted that they would like to see more awareness about the different ways people deal with grief and loss and that people experience grief and loss in different ways.

8. Friendships and Relationships: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants listed several factors in their friendships and relationships that they would like to 'retain'. These positive factors included having regular contact, loyalty, respect, trust and how they assist to build social skills and confidence.

Discussion also identified several factors that participants would like to see 'change' in future. These factors included peer pressure, bad influences and people moving away and going in different directions. Participants also discussed the importance of being mentally prepared for a relationship. It was stated that this is something that is positive and something young people would like to keep. However, participants also noted that this is an area that would benefit from improvement because not all young people are mentally prepared for a relationship.

9. Hobbies and Interests: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants identified hobbies and interests as a positive thing for their mental health because they provide enjoyment and fun and "keep you out of trouble". Participants also discussed hobbies and interests as a means of meeting new people and creating new friendships while doing something that can be relaxing and a way to reduce stress. Expanding knowledge and learning new skills were also identified as positive aspects of having hobbies and interests.

Looking for opportunities to move outside of their comfort zone is something participants identified as something they would like to see happen more in the future. Participants also wanted to expand their hobbies in order to increase their knowledge. Hobbies and interests that are more about participating and having fun, rather than focused on competing and winning was something participants wanted to see 'change' in the future.

10. Sleep and Diet: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants wanted to 'keep' the current education in schools on these two topics as this was seen as a positive. Getting the recommended eight hours of sleep was also something participants identified as something that is positive for their mental health and wellbeing. Participants also wanted to 'keep' the current availability of healthy and organic foods. Many participants suggested turning technology off before going to sleep was positive for mental health and wellbeing. It was also discussed that this is something that is often not done and could be improved.

Participants wanted to 'keep' the availability of healthy and organic foods however; they wanted to see the cost reduced to make it more affordable. They also wanted to see more detailed and honest labelling on food. In relation to sleep, participants suggested that school begins too early and suggested school would be better if it began at 10am. Body image was discussed in this topic group and participants stated there is currently too much

emphasis on a particular size and looking a certain way to be considered attractive and wanted to see this 'change' in the media, their peer groups and in society.

11. Technology: what young people want to keep and what they want to change

Participants stated that technology provided them with a way to keep in touch with people which was positive thing. Participants were also content with the age restrictions that are placed on accessing social media.

More effective processes for responding to complaints and dealing with incidents of cyber bullying was something that participants discussed as needing improvement. Participants also want to see increased education about social media and being responsible online and also discussed the desire to have more services provide a phone service to make them more accessible to young people.

Discussion Groups: Solutions and Ideas

The following section provides a summary of the ideas and solutions participant's discussed in relation to the 11 topic areas.

1. Study: young people's ideas and solutions

The solutions young people discussed and later presented were focused on increased education and the use of individualised study plans. Participants suggested regular classes on health and wellbeing, with specific focus on mental health would be a positive thing for their mental health and wellbeing. Making a class like this compulsory would ensure everyone has the same learning opportunity was presented as an important component of this idea.

Participants also suggested that individualised learning plans would encourage positive mental health and wellbeing. This idea included a calendar app that incorporates classes, due dates of assessments, personal commitments and extracurricular activities. Young people suggested that this would be most effective if their teachers, parents, coaches etc could also access it so everyone was aware of the various commitments young people have in their schedules.

2. Stress Creators: young people's ideas and solutions

Participants at the Forum suggested that current youth spaces need to be made available State wide so more young people are able to access them. Young people also suggested that mandatory pre parenting training would give parents resources and knowledge to assist their children to be mentally healthy. It was suggested that this training should be free and that it would be run by Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Department of Education and that all parents should be involved in this.

3. Family: young people's ideas and solutions

Young people acknowledged that assisting them with their mental health can be a challenge for family members. To help family members, participants suggested that providing families with free education about mental health would be a means of ensuring that families are in the best possible position to assist their children and young people they know to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing.

Participants identified family separation and divorce as a situation that many young people find challenging and something that can negatively impact on mental health and wellbeing. They suggested that creating formal agreements between children and their separating parents would ensure they have the opportunity to have their feelings and ideas heard. Agreements would be a collaborative process by both parents and all children and would take into consideration things like living and school arrangements, religion and cultural practices and the costs associated with the children. Young people also stated it would assist with their mental health if, within these agreements, both parents agreed to not put the other parents down in front of the children.

4. Employment: young people's ideas and solutions

Junior Seek would serve as an online networking base for young person to find employment, find tips for writing resumes and selection criteria and will provide advice for keeping work. Participants would also like to have help getting a tax file number and assistance with literacy and numeracy available to them on an online resource such as *Junior Seek*. A resource such as *Junior Seek* would, according to the participants, be most helpful if it also included assistance to build interview and social skills and tips for how to behave in the workplace. It was suggested that this resource would be most useful for young people if it was easily accessible by making it available as an app, as well as, a website.

Being unable to find work or not feeling work ready can both impact mental health and wellbeing. Increased opportunities for work experience during high school would assist young people in learn practical work skills and allow them to begin creating networks that may result in gaining employment in future. This idea was combined with the idea that young people who are already working should be encouraged to continue working while studying and the education system could take into account the necessity of learning skills, earning money and maintaining employment and allow young people to have a certain amount of study hours that they can take off to work in paid employment.

5. Alcohol and Drugs: young people's ideas and solutions

Increased education in schools about the potential harms of drugs and alcohol was something young people suggested to assist them to make healthy choices in regards to their mental health. Young people suggested that this education would be most effective if it was taught by people who have personal experience with mental illness, drugs and alcohol because they wanted to learn from hearing about real life experiences.

Participants wanted to create new Government issued ID cards that cannot be reproduced to make the production and distribution of fake ID's impossible. Participants also suggested that alcohol should have explicit labelling of the negative impacts of alcohol consumption and that the legal age of drinking should be raised.

6. Experiencing Change: young people's ideas and solutions

Participants identified Pathway Planners as a needed form of support within schools and rather than create something new they wanted to see pathway planners increased and available in more schools state wide. Alternative education options were also discussed and participants wanted to see programs already operating in this space, such as the Big Picture Program, expanded to accommodate more young people.

7. Grief and Loss: young people's ideas and solutions

One group of young people wanted to create a place called *The Living Room* which would serve as a safe space that young people can go to when they are experiencing grief or loss.

Young people at the forum wanted this to be a nationwide initiative that would be confidential and would be young people helping other young people to get through their grief and loss.

Participants discussed creating an app called the *Talk to Me Pocket Social Worker*. They wanted to create this app as a way of avoiding stigma and judgement that young people may feel when seeking face to face help from a service or organisation. When the app is downloaded it would ask a series of questions that will enable each user to be paired with other young people and also a worker who best suit their needs and are a good match for them to provide support. The app will also let young people share their personal stories and provide links to services and organisations.

8. Friendships and Relationships: young people's ideas and solutions

Participants wanted to create a group that focuses on education about friendships and relationships. In particular, the indicators of positive relationships compared to negative relationships. Young people suggested these groups would be most effective if they were facilitated by other young people with experience to share. These groups would also include an educative component and provide information to young people about how to get out of a bad relationship and how to assist friends who may be in a relationship that is impacting negatively on their mental health and wellbeing.

9. Hobbies and Interests: young people's ideas and solutions

Young people wanted current youth centres to expand to include more lessons and resources to accommodate more interests and hobbies. Young people at the forum wanted these spaces to include hobbies and interests such as music, art, sport and other recreational activities. These expanded youth centres would also give young people the opportunity to connect with workers, learn new skills and meet new people outside of their friendship group or school networks. It was also suggested that involving parents and schools in young people's hobbies and interests would create a better understanding of what young people are interested in and how they spend their time.

10. Sleep and Diet: young people's ideas and solutions

During this discussion group young people developed the idea of a *Sleep Pass* that could be used during the school day. This pass would be for one hour each week and could be used at any time for young people to take a short nap and refresh their minds during the school day. Young people suggested that this pass would allow them to take some time out when they needed it; however, they also stated that it would be up to each person to catch up on any work that they had missed during the hour.

Participants at the forum would like to create food labels that provide more detailed information about ingredients in food and also where it was sourced to provide more honest labelling and less ambiguity. Young people said it was important that people knew what was in the food they were eating and where the food was coming from. This information would need to be written in clear and understandable language. Young people also wanted to create a subsidy on healthy foods to encourage more people to eat healthy food options.

11. Technology: young people's ideas and solutions

Young people want to create education courses for parents and teachers to increase their understanding of social media which would enable them to assist young people to use social media responsibly and look after themselves online. The content of these education courses would include information about being responsible online, protecting your personal information and how to use filters.

Participants also created a resource known as S3 (*Safe Social Space*) which would be a mental health hub full of information and information, as well as access to professionals. S3 would include an online forum where young people can share their experiences and build new connections.

Analysis of Retain, Change and Create Discussion

Young people at the Forum came from a wide range of locations and backgrounds and were of different ages. This meant there were very different experiences and ideas to share across the discussion topics. For example, some young people discussed mental health services as a mechanism that currently supports young people's mental health and wellbeing and this is something they would like to keep the way it is. For other young people they recognised the work these services and organisations do but wanted to see them expand and become more youth friendly or more accessible for young people.

The two main things that young people wanted to retain were the various mechanisms of support that they already have in their lives and the skills and knowledge that they already have. This demonstrates that many young people have a support system in place to assist with their mental health and wellbeing and they value the support they get from family, friends and services.

The two main things that participants wanted to change were the attitudes and views around certain things such as grief and loss, mental health and alcohol and the availability of services and programs that they thought would benefit their mental health and wellbeing. This demonstrates that young people are impacted by the attitudes and behaviours of others and this is something that needs to be addressed. It also demonstrates that young people are thinking about the gaps in services and programs and thinking about ways these gaps could be filled to suit their needs.

Participants shared several ideas of things they would like to create to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. Many of these ideas were expanding or altering programs, services or resources that are already in place which demonstrates that young people are thinking of ways current services can be improved rather than beginning a new service or resource. Many of the ideas were focused on ways to make things more accessible or available for young people. This suggests that young people want to be able to access services and resources but may not know they are there or how to go about it.

Forum Feedback

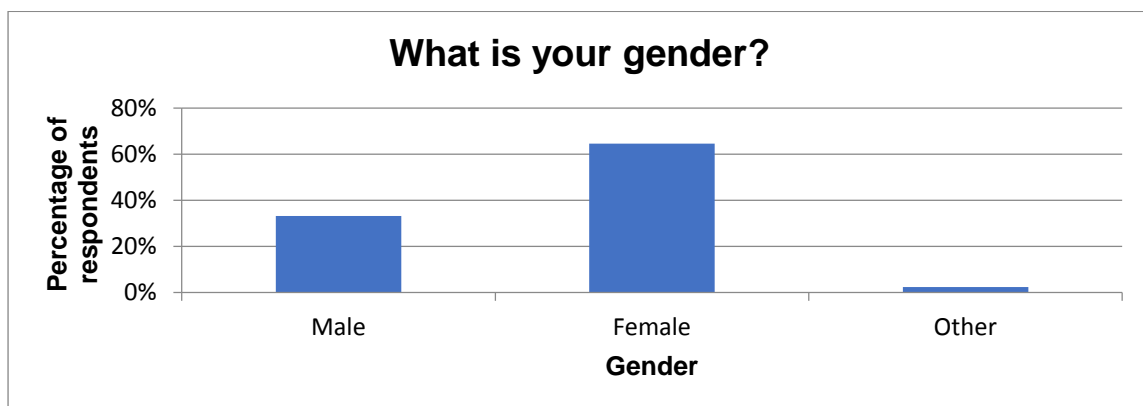
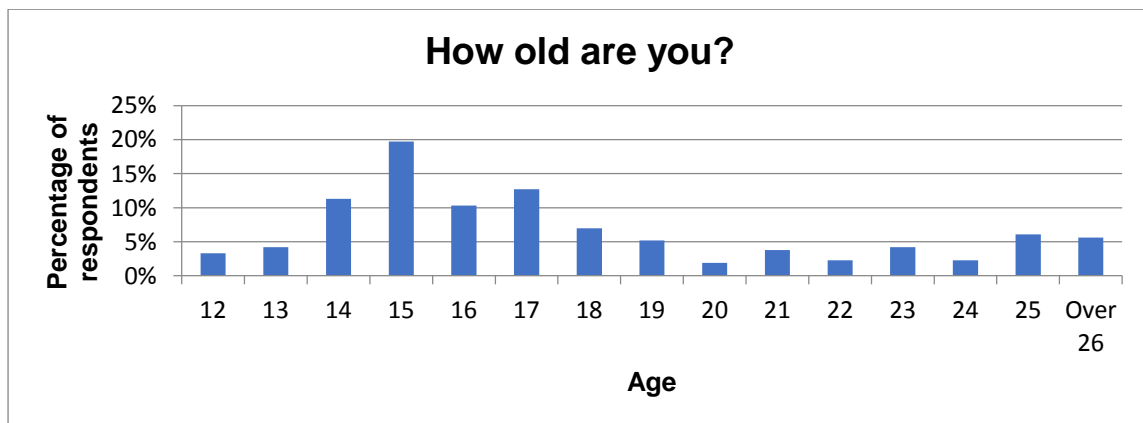
The Forum aimed to provide participants with the opportunity to learn about different ways they could support their own mental health on a daily basis. After the Forum, 75% of participants said that they had more ideas about what they could do to be mentally healthy. This included talking to friends and family, speaking up about how they are feeling, knowing about information and resources available to help young people, and to participate in hobbies or activities that they enjoy. There were also 76% of participants who said that they had learnt tips about being mentally healthy at the Forum that they could share with other young people.

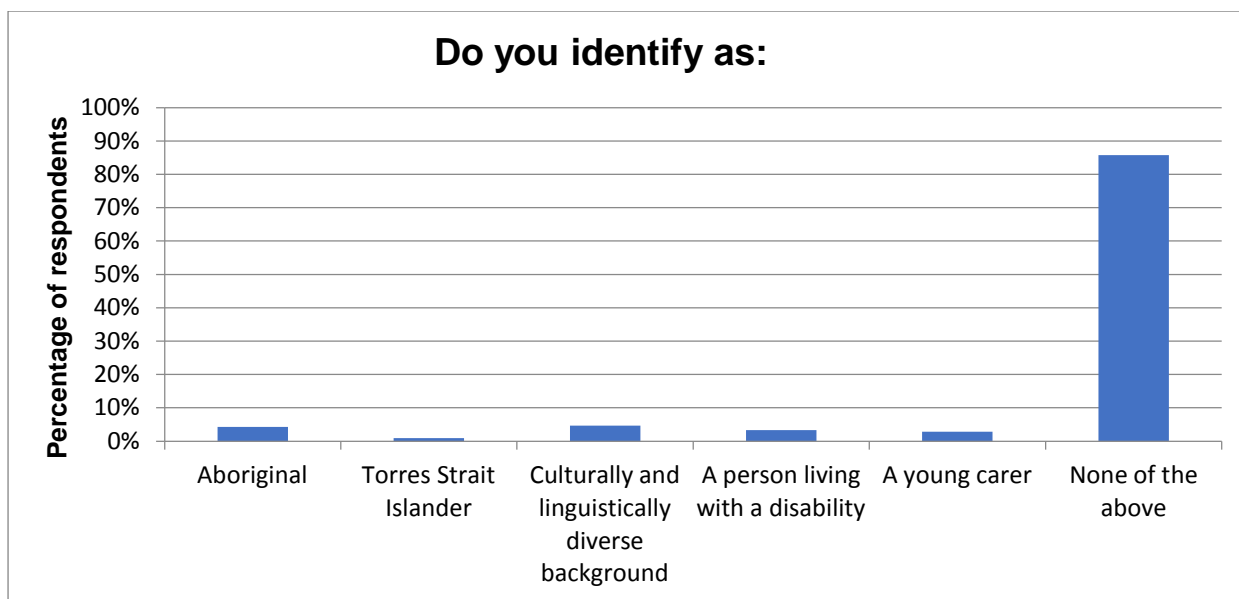
Some participants identified that they wanted to have the opportunity to discuss other things that related to mental health at the Forum. This included specific mental health illnesses, how to support someone with a mental illness and specific topics such as bullying. While the Forum was structured in a way to try and promote discussions led by young people and encouraged them to do so, they may not have felt like they had the opportunity to raise their own issues or ideas, or felt comfortable to do this in group discussions.

Participants were asked what the best part of the Forum was. Aspects that had the highest amount of responses from participants included the opportunity to meet new people, listening to new ideas from other young people, learning from other people about mental health and having group discussions. Some things that respondents said the Forum could improve on included having more interactive activities for participants and getting more young people to attend.

Consultation Process: Survey

An online survey was created to run in conjunction with the TYF *Mental Health Matters* Forum to enable more participants to contribute their thoughts and ideas if they were unable to attend the Forum. The survey received 228 responses which included 108 participants at the Forum who completed a hard copy of this survey. Respondents came from 88 different suburbs. Of these, 51 were located in Southern Tasmania, 24 in the North and East of Tasmania, and 13 in the North West of Tasmania. Bigger cities such as Hobart, Launceston and Devonport had higher numbers of responses but this is likely due to young people identifying this as their suburb rather than the suburb that relates to their address.





Young people aged 12 to 25 responded to this survey and some people over 25 also responded. Respondents who identified as 26 years or older had their answers excluded from the following survey analysis as TYF works with young people aged 12 to 25, leaving 216 responses that were included in the survey analysis of the remaining questions. The high proportion of young people aged 14 to 17 reflects the demographics of Forum participants. The Survey also received a high proportion of respondents who identified as female. There was a small proportion of respondents who identified with either being Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, living with a disability or as a young carer.

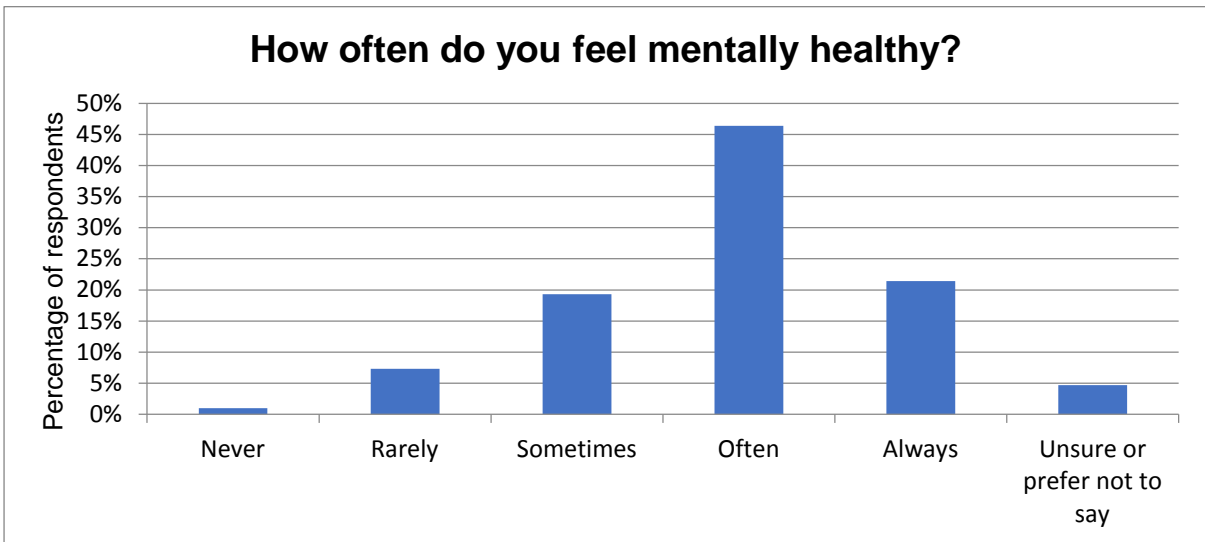
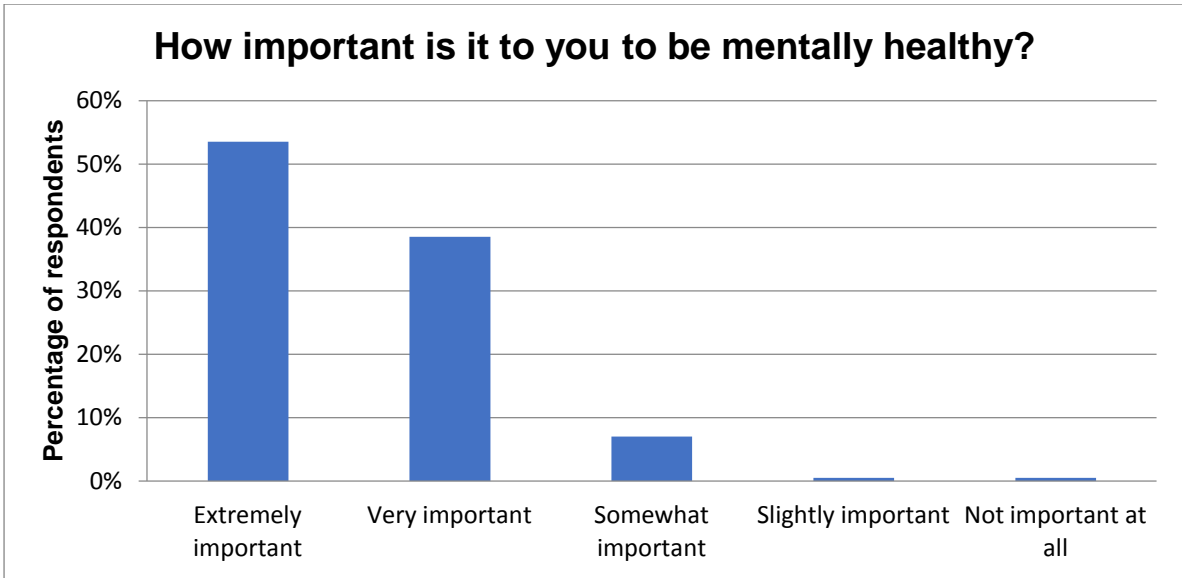
Young people and their mental health

Respondents were asked to define what mental health means to them and have their definition in mind while completing the rest of the survey. Almost half of the responses to this question referred to a broad and general concept of mental health such as having a healthy mind, the state of mind a person has and their emotional, psychological, mental wellbeing. A third of responses also referred to the thoughts and feelings that someone has which could be neutral, positive or negative.

There were also a large amount of responses that mentioned mental health being about the resilience of people such as having the ability to cope with things that happen in the environment around them, the ability to not have extreme emotions, existence of coping strategies, and ability to respond to stress. There were also a few responses that defined mental health by what they said it was not. This included being the opposite to having a mental health illness, the comparison of mental health to physical health or having a physical component to mental health with the way the brain is structured and that you cannot see it.

Respondents were also asked to identify things that help make a person mentally healthy. Over half of the responses to this mentioned that a person who is mentally healthy is happy. A large proportion of responses also mentioned that a mentally healthy person thinks positively and has a positive outlook on life.

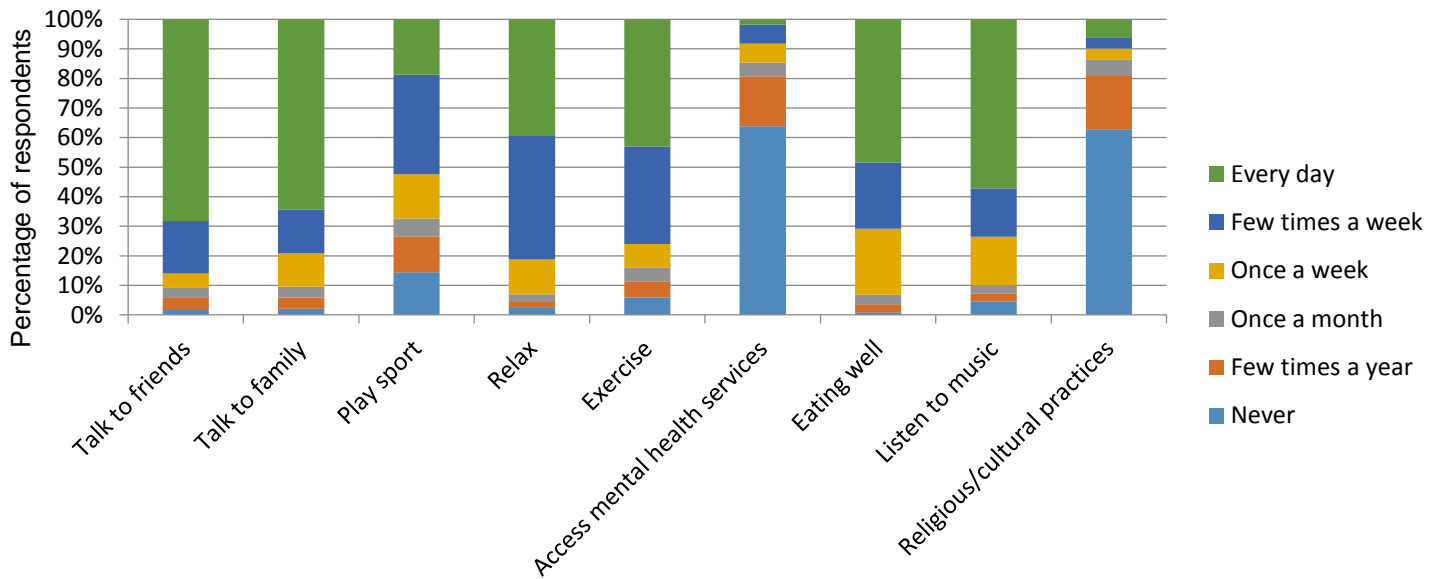
Approximately one third of responses mentioned external factors that a person has that can contribute to their positive mental health. This includes having a safe home environment, having support networks, exercising, having a healthy diet and participating in hobbies and activities. A number of responses also mentioned that a person who is mentally healthy has resilience and knows where they can access help.



Being mentally healthy was identified by 92% of respondents as something which is very or extremely important for them. Despite this, only 68% of respondents said that they feel mentally healthy often or always. There were also 8% of respondents who identified being rarely or never mentally healthy. While being mentally healthy is important to young people, they may find that they do not feel mentally healthy as often as they might like.

Finding 7: Being mentally healthy is something that is important to young people.

How often do you do the following things to look after your mental health?



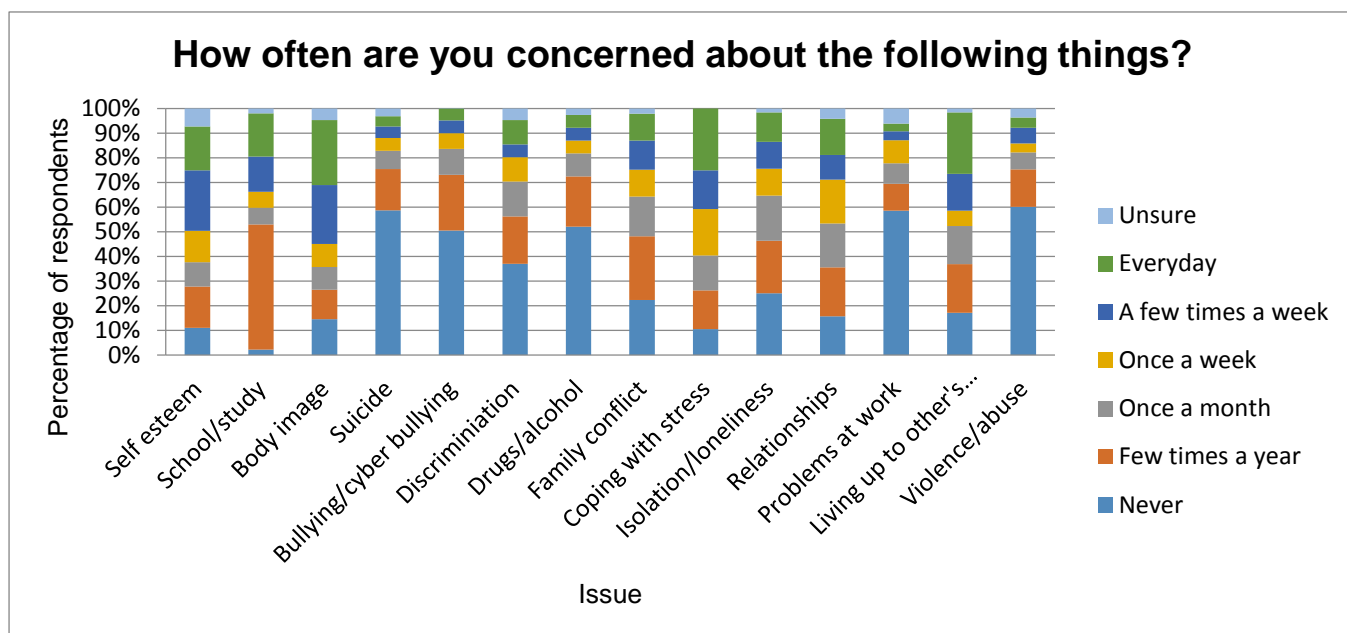
Over 60% of respondents identified talking with friends, talking with family and listening to music as things that they do on an everyday basis for their mental health. Relaxing, exercising, eating well and playing sport were activities that a high proportion of respondents identified doing at least a few times a week for their mental health. A high proportion of respondents (over 60%) said that they never accessed mental health services to help look after their mental health or participated in religious or cultural practices.

The high proportion of responses indicating that they never access mental health services could be because mental health services can be seen as a place to go when you are experiencing considerable mental health difficulties and not a place for early intervention or prevention support.

Respondents identified other activities they do to look after their mental health. This included spending some time alone, spending time outside or participating in hobbies or activities that they were passionate about or had a specific interest in. Respondents also listed different ways that they engage with technology to help look after their mental health. This included turning off technology, spending time watching TV shows or movies and playing video games.

Finding 8: Young people are more likely to access mental health services in times of crisis or need, rather than as a way to maintain their mental health.

Issues young people are concerned about



Respondents were asked how often they were concerned about a range of different issues that can have a negative impact on mental health. The issues that respondents were most concerned about at least a few times a week were:

1. School/study (59%)
2. Body image (50%)
3. Coping with stress (40%)
4. Living up to other's expectations (25%)

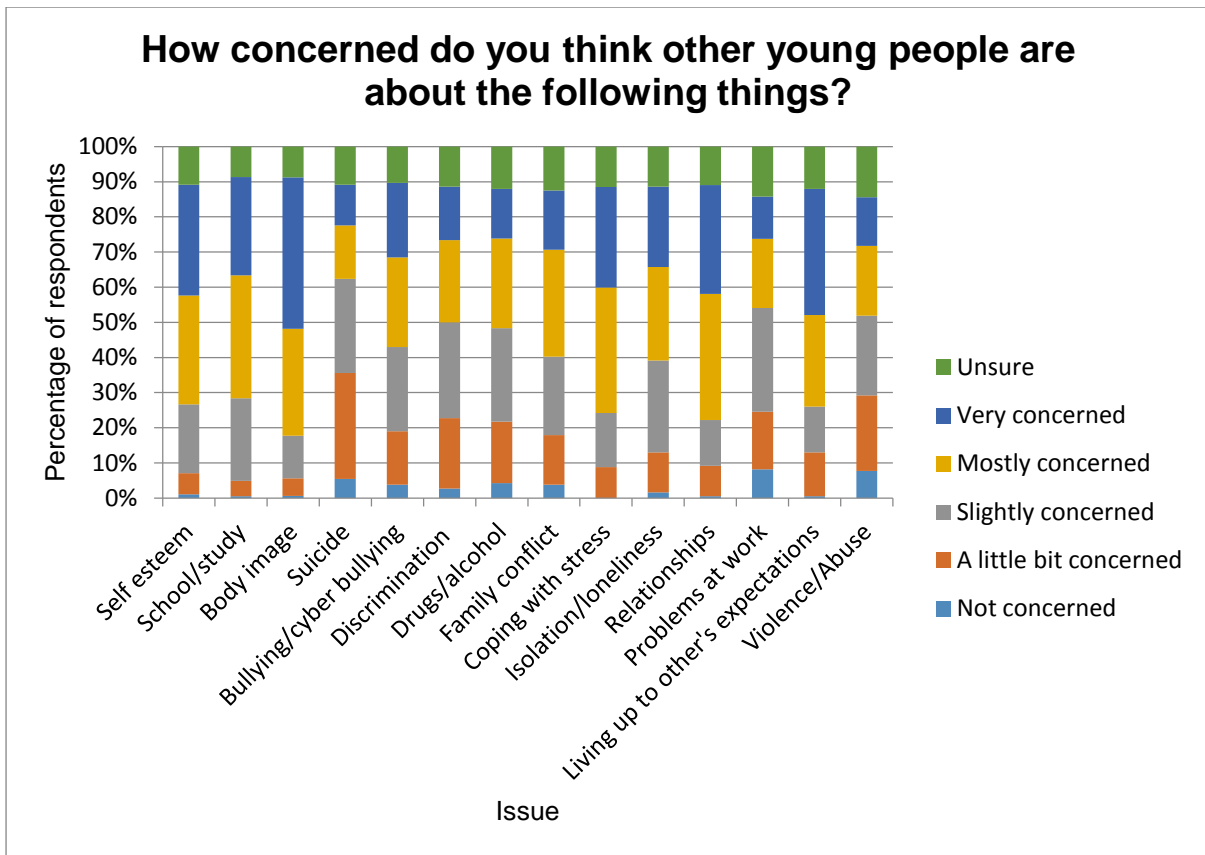
These issues are more likely to concern young people on a regular basis as they often are experienced daily by young people.

Issues that respondents identified as being never concerned about or only a few times a year included:

1. Suicide (75%)
2. Violence/abuse (75%)
3. Bullying/cyber bullying (72%)
4. Drugs/Alcohol (72%)
5. Problems at work (69%)

Although there were fewer respondents who identified being concerned about these issues, the impact of these issues can still be significant for an individual. The age of respondents also means that there may be a significant number who are not in employment and therefore problems at work are not a concern.

Other issues that respondents identified being concerned about were the work or financial issues, the wellbeing of others they knew and their community/the world, their relationships with others which were either general or with a specific person and specific mental health issues.



The issues that the highest number of respondents identified as being something that young people were concerned about at least a few times a week were:

Young people

1. Body image (74%)
2. Living up to other's expectations (67%)
3. Relationships (67%)
4. Coping with stress (64%)
5. School/study (63%)

The issues that had the highest number of respondents who identified it as something that young people were concerned about never or a few times a year included:

Think they are least concerned about

1. Suicide (36%)
2. Violence/abuse (30%)
3. Problems at work (25%)
4. Discrimination (23%)
5. Bullying/cyber bullying (19%)

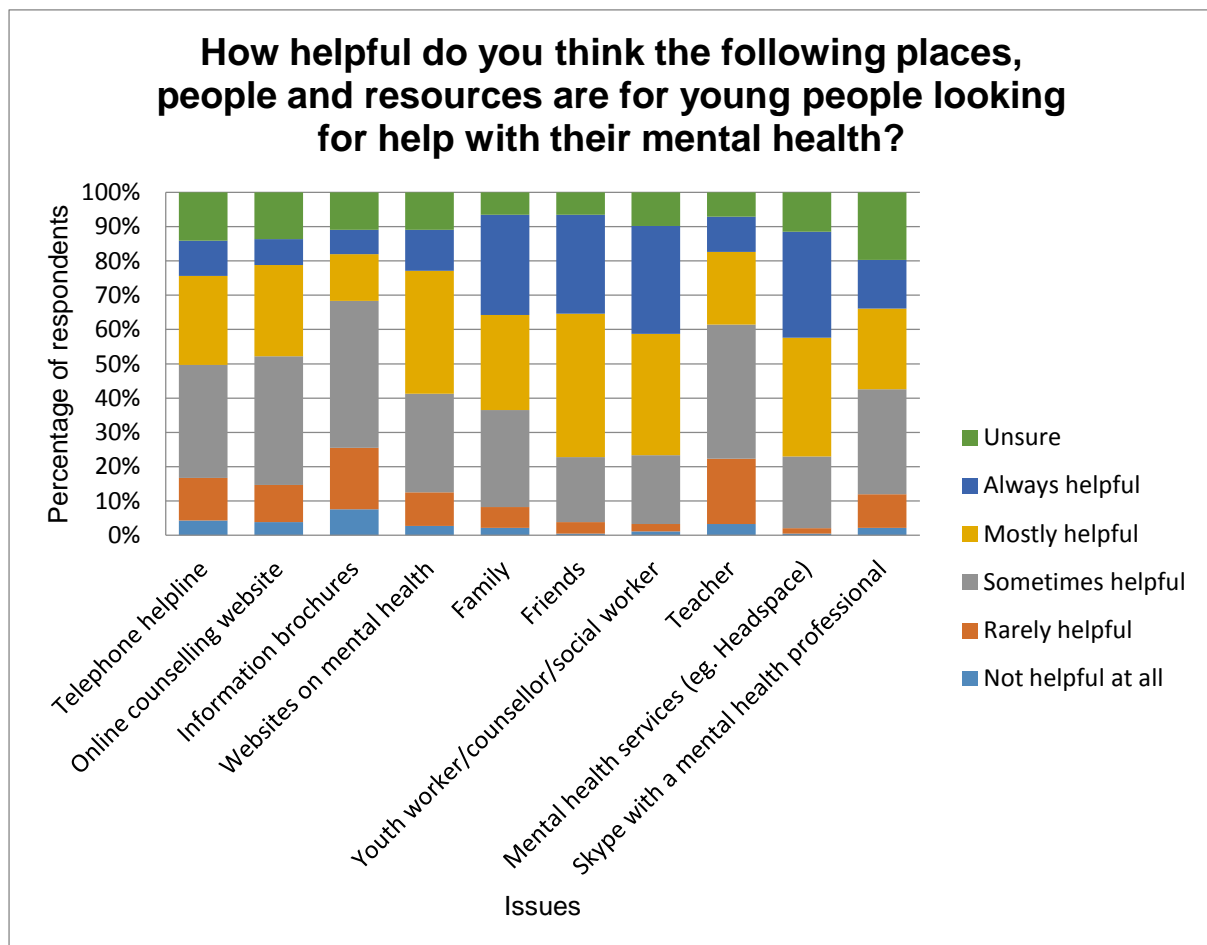
Other issues that respondents identified included being accepted and fitting in, having employment to earn money to be able to pay for things such as healthcare and housing and the increases with these, gender and sexuality and peer pressure.

While the issues in each of these lists are similar to the lists drawn from the frequency of issues that respondents identified being concerned about, respondents were more likely to think that young people were concerned more often about the issues than they identified.

Defining Young People and Mental Health

Respondents were asked to describe a young person who is mentally healthy. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents said that a person who is mentally healthy is happy and has a positive outlook on life. Other characteristics and attributes that respondents identified included confidence, outgoing, friendly and caring.

Respondents were then asked to identify what might prevent someone from seeking help if they are concerned about their mental health. Most respondents said that the stigma of seeking help, being judged or feeling embarrassed when seeking help would prevent young people from seeking help for their mental health. Other barriers that a large number of respondents identified included not knowing where to go for help, being afraid to talk about any problems, concerned about confidentiality and the risk that other people might find out through a number of ways and not having the support of friends or family to access support.



Respondents were asked how often they thought a list of people, places and services were to support young people with their mental health. The people, places and services that most amounts of respondents said would be always or mostly helpful for getting help with their mental health were:

1. Friends (70%)
2. Youth worker/counsellor/social worker (67%)
3. Mental health service (65%)
4. Family (51%)
5. Websites (48%)

The people, places and services that most amounts of respondents said would be never or rarely helpful for getting help with their mental health were:

1. Information brochure (26%)
2. Teacher (22%)
3. Telephone helpline (17%)
4. Online counselling website (15%)
5. Websites on mental health (13%)

Other places, people and resources that respondents mentioned are useful for when they seek help for mental health included specific organisations, people that they know and trust who may not be a family or friend (eg. Partner, other trusted adult or doctor), youth groups, and online forums and resources.

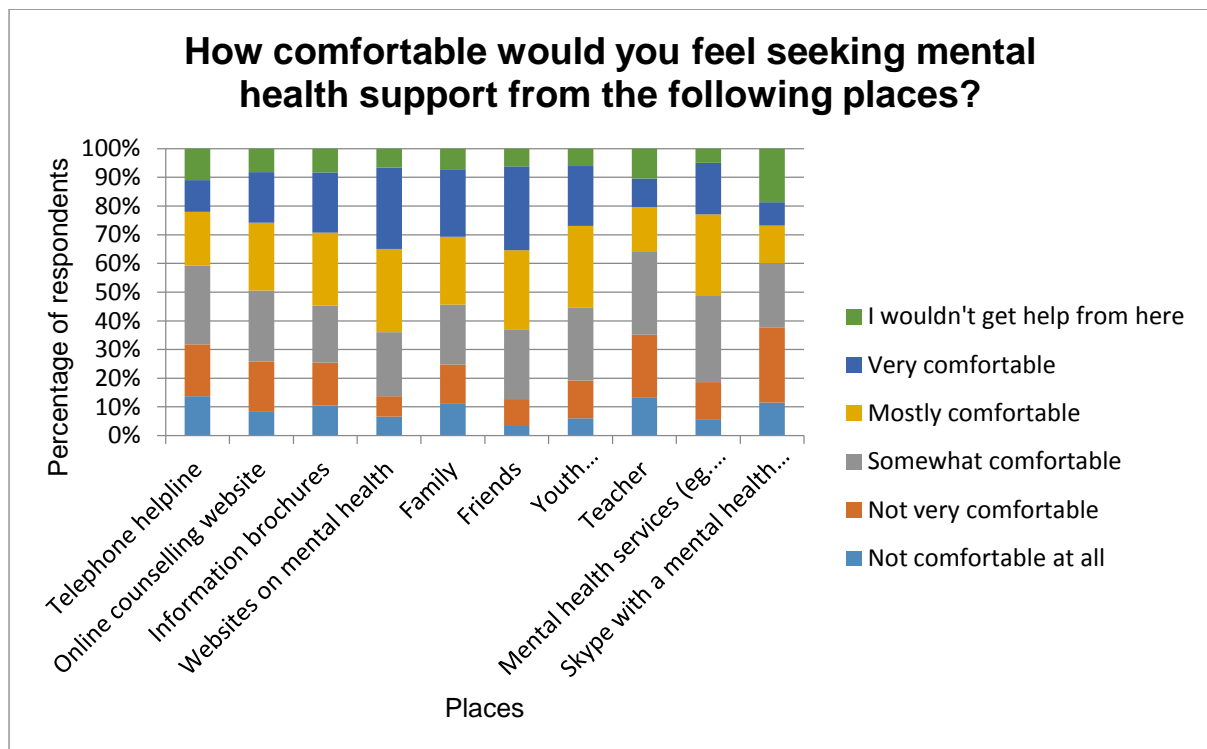
Respondents were also asked what makes a resource or service youth-friendly. Having professional staff and services was identified by the most number of respondents as something that makes a service youth friendly. This included having staff who would not judge young people, be easy to talk to and help young people to address any issues they may have.

Respondents also identified that having easy access to a service is important which includes their location, hours they are open and ability to get an appointment easily and quickly. Respondents also said the information that is communicated is important. This includes have information about mental health in easy to read formats with easy to understand language and positive messages from staff within the service about young people being valued and that it is ok to seek help.

Making sure that confidentiality is maintained and explaining this to young people was another important aspect of a youth-friendly service that was identified by respondents.

Finding 9: Young people recognise the importance of having capable and professional staff at services who can help support their mental health

Accessing Mental Health Services



The majority of respondents said that they would be at least somewhat comfortable in accessing mental health support from the people, places and services listed in the survey, however, there were still some places which respondents were more likely to feel comfortable accessing support for mental health.

The following people, places and services had the highest number of respondents who said that they felt mostly or very comfortable accessing support for mental health.

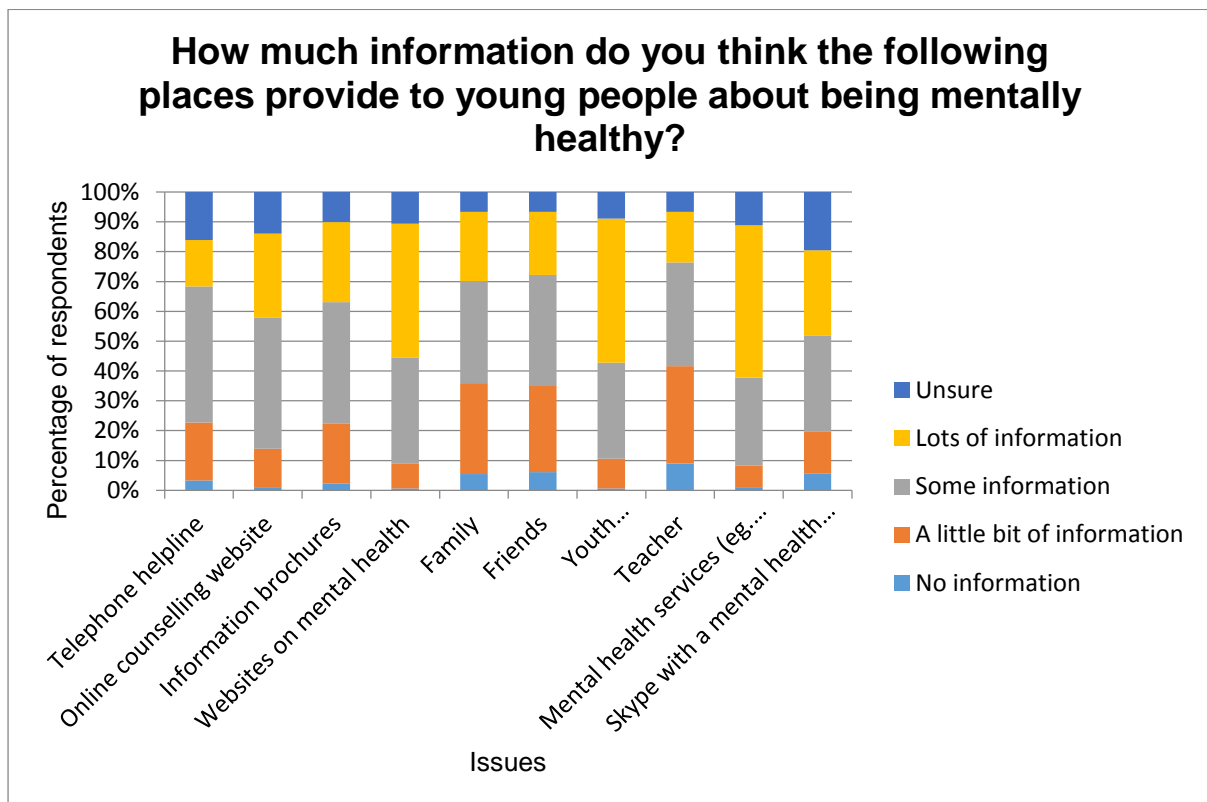
1. Friends (57%)
2. Mental health websites (57%)
3. Family (47%)
4. Brochures (46%)
5. Mental health service (46%)

These people, places and resources would be familiar to young people or would enable young people to access them anonymously which could be why they may have been identified by more respondents.

The following people, places and services had the highest number of respondents who said that they did not feel comfortable or not very comfortable when seeking support for their mental health.

1. Skype with a mental health professional (38%)
2. Teacher (35%)
3. Telephone hotline (32%)
4. Counselling website (26%)

Despite most young people having regular interactions with teachers, respondents were less likely to identify teachers as a person that they felt comfortable in getting support for their mental health from.



Respondents were asked how much information they believed different people, places and resources were able to provide for young people seeking help with their mental health. The majority of respondents said that these would be able to provide at least some information for young people seeking support.

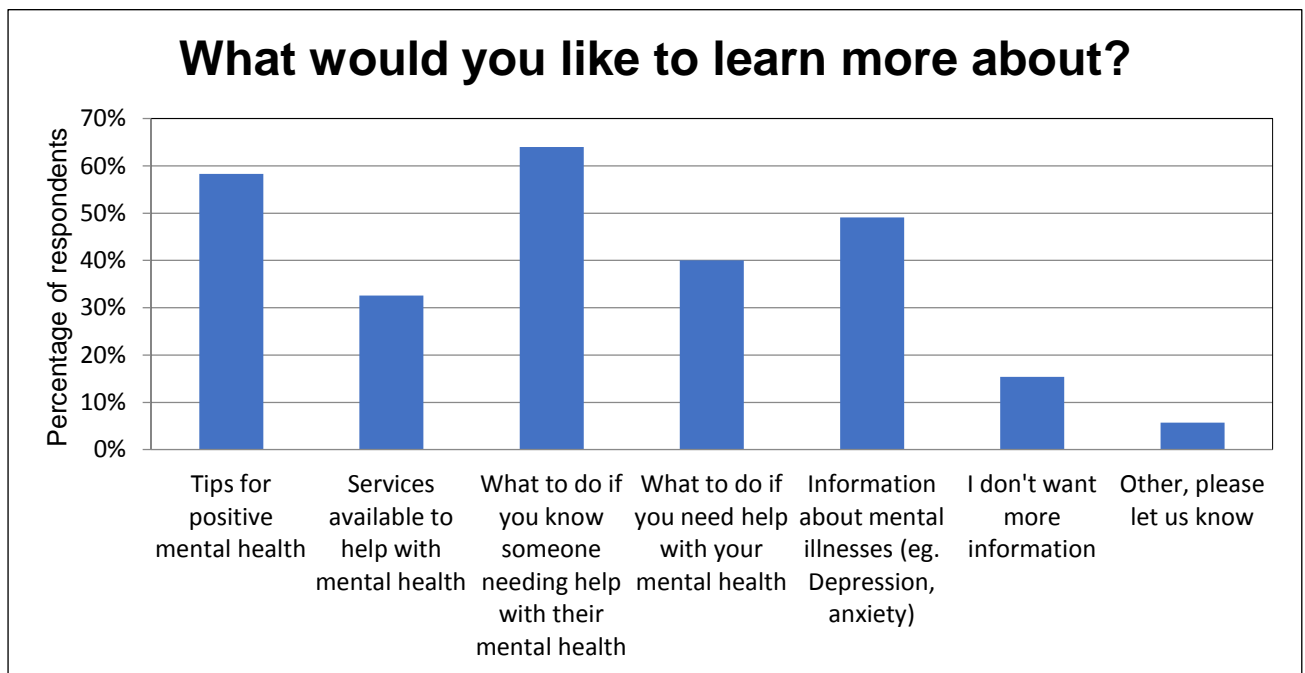
The people, places and resources that the most number of respondents listed as providing at least some information for young people were:

1. Mental health service (51%)
2. Youth worker/counsellor/social worker (48%)
3. Websites on mental health (45%)
4. Skype with a mental health professional (28%)
5. Online counselling websites (28%)

Teachers, family and friends were rated by the most number of respondents as the people who would have little or no information about mental health for young people seeking help. As family and friends are people that young people identified that they would turn to, it is important that they have the knowledge to support young people when they seek help.

Finding 10: Young people are most likely to go to their friends and family for support with their mental health and wellbeing.

Finding 11: Young people report that friends and family are less likely to be well informed about mental health and wellbeing than professionals or other sources of support.



Respondents were asked what they would like to learn more about in regards to mental health. The option with the highest amount of respondents indicating they would like to know more information was what to do if you know someone needing help with their mental health (64%). This ties in with the finding that young people are more likely to their friends for help with their mental health but they are also some of the people that young people think will have the least information about being mentally healthy.

Finding 12: Young people want more skills to support their friends and family with their mental health

Respondents also wanted tips for having positive mental health (58%) and information about mental illness (49%). While this information might be available for young people, it may not be very well explained, young people might want to have a conversation about it with someone or they might not know where resources relevant to them are.

Other information that was identified by respondents included how to take care of their own mental health, what is being done by government and in the community to raise awareness of mental health issues and to support young people, and how can help others.

Young people's ideas about mental health

Respondents were asked what they would create to help support young people to be mentally healthy. Four main ideas were identified by respondents. These were:

1. Using technology to communicate with others or access opportunities to improve mental health. Respondents listed different types of information they wanted to access such as events happening in their community they could participate in, talk to counsellors online and have a forum to ask questions online that could be answered by a mental health professional.
2. Having a space for young people to go and spend time while supporting their mental health. This included having games and activities to promote positive mental health, having a safe place to go, being able to talk to other people and having access to mental health professionals.
3. Participating in activities for fun to be mentally healthy. Respondents listed different activities including volunteering opportunities, art, music, sports, exercise, festivals and spending time with animals.
4. Having a support group for young people where young people can meet and talk to each other about what is going on and help each other out.

Some of these ideas may already exist but young people may not have access to them or know about them.

Finding 13: Young people want a positive and caring environment when they seek support to talk about their concerns.

Respondents were asked what advice they would give to other young people about mental health. Overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents said that the advice they would give to other young people is to seek help and talk to people if they were having trouble with their mental health. A large number of respondents also said they would let others know to think positively and take care of themselves by participating in activities that they

Finding 14: Young people want to encourage their peers to seek help and talk to people if they are experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

Conclusion

This Report demonstrates that young people are thinking about the influences and issues in their lives that impact on positive mental health and wellbeing. They are also implementing multiple self care strategies to assist them to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing, while not taking away from the fact that professional help is also an important form of support.

Young people involved in the Forum and the Survey identified several things that currently encourage and support young people's mental health, many of them being services and

organisations. Despite this, they were also able to identify areas in need of improvement that could be expanded to better support young people and their mental health and wellbeing.

Young people at the Forum had some creative ideas of what they would like to see in place for the future. Services and resources are available, however many young people are not aware of them. This suggests we need to be encouraging and supporting young people to access the resources that are already in place while taking into account their ideas for the future. We need to have services, policies and resources in place that assist young people, but more importantly, we need to ensure young people know these are available and where they can be located.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Agenda for the TYF *Mental Health Matters* Forum

Time	Activity
9:30am – 9:55am	Registration
9:55am – 10:00am	Arrival and taking of seats
10:00am – 10:05am	Brief Introduction by Mo
10:05am – 10:10am	Welcome message from MP Michael Ferguson, Minister for Health
10:10am – 10:30am	Introduction by Mo continued
10:30am - 10:45am	Filling out of <i>Mental Health Matters</i> survey
10:45am -11:10am	Big Picture Brainstorming – Facilitator Mo
11:10am – 11:30am	Morning Tea
11:30am – 12:20pm	Solutions Group 1
12:20pm – 1:00pm	Lunch (collect resources, contribute to the ideas wall)
1:00pm – 1:30pm	Solutions Group 2
1:30pm – 2:10pm	Reporting Back
2:10pm – 2:25pm	Activity – sticky note wall
2:25pm – 2:45pm	Afternoon Tea
2:45pm – 3:05pm	Forum wrap up
3:05pm – 3:25pm	<i>Mental Health Matters</i> forum feedback form
3:25pm – 3:30pm	Thank you and conclusion from YNOT and TYF
3:30pm – 4:00pm	Depart

Appendix 2: Topics for the discussion groups at the TYF *Mental Health Matters* Forum

TOPICS	DESCRIPTION
Study	getting through school, study and training
Stress Creators	who, what, when, where, why and how do you approach the things that create stress in your life
Family	immediate family, extended family, keeping in touch, family commitments
Employment	finding a balance: the need to live and work
Alcohol and Drugs	positive behaviour and negative behaviour
Experiencing Change	what does it look like and what does it mean?
Grief and Loss	types of grief and loss in everyday life
Friendships and Relationships	new connections, old connections, reconnecting and disconnecting
Hobbies and Interests	do what you love and love what you do
Sleep and Diet	looking after your body and brain
Technology	connecting and disconnecting with the digital world: is social media really social?

Appendix 3: Quotes from young people who participated in the Forum

Quotes from the Day

This is a collection of quotes that have been collected from the Forum and the online survey. All of the ideas that were contributed during the Forum and the Surveys are important and have been summarised to write this report. However, these quotes provide the opportunity for the ideas of young people to be communicated directly and reflect some of the discussions and ideas that were presented.

Future Vision: What would you like Tasmania to be known for?

“Remove the stigma through education. There is stigma because people are in fear of being excluded by family, friends and society. They don’t want to be judged or seen as crazy. People resort to silence as a result of this.”

“Everyone matters. We need to listen and work together.”

What do people need to know about supporting young people’s mental health?

“Your mental health matters take care of yourself because you are loved.”

“Small problems dealt with, don’t turn big.”

“Mental health problems are nothing to be ashamed of.”

“My friend told me I have a mental weakness, not mental illness. People need to know that having a mental illness does not make a person weak; in fact they are incredibly strong. Since my diagnosis I have been able to do things I would never have thought possible.”

What do you do to look after your mental health?

“I think about a time when things were going really well and then I think about how I got there and how I can do it again.”

“I have made my own ‘recovery folder’. I have coping ideas that I turn to. I am a big believer in self help.”