

Youth Forum Report

1 November 2018

CONTENTS

Background.....	1
World Café Feedback.....	2
Participation and Engagement.....	2
Health and Wellbeing.....	2
Recreation and Leisure.....	3
Education and Employment.....	3
Facilitators feedback from the workshops.....	4
Participation and Engagement Youth Leading the Way workshop.....	4
Health and Wellbeing Workshop.....	3
Recreation and Leisure Workshop.....	4
Education and Employment Workshop.....	5
Overall Recommendations.....	6

BACKGROUND

In November 2016 Wingecarribee Shire Council, in partnership with local youth service providers held the first of what has become a biennial youth forum. The objective of the forums is to gather information directly from young people who live, work and play in the Wingecarribee on what their needs are. Further information and reports on the 2016 consultation can be found on www.yoursaywingecarribee.com.au/youth or www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/community/young-people

On 1 November 2018, Wingecarribee Shire Council held the second youth consultation (forum), the objective was to ensure that, as a community we are continuing to meet the needs of young people in the Wingecarribee. The 2018 Wingecarribee Youth Forum was facilitated by Western Sydney Community Forum who collated the information on the day.

The 2018 Forum involved 110 young people ranging from year 6 through to year 11 from various schools across the Local Government Area (LGA). The day was organised in conjunction with the Youth Forum Steering Group involving representatives from Highlands Community Centre, Sector Connect, Barnardos Australia, Uniting, Youth Solutions, St Vincent de Paul Society and most importantly ten students from Bowral and Moss Vale High schools whose expertise was utilised to create the format of the day. Young people and services met on a regular basis to plan and deliver the 2018 Forum. The young people participating in the Steering Group were provided with training to support them in facilitating conversations with confidence.

The Forum was designed to encourage conversations at every opportunity. Local youth service providers were invited to attend and host a paperless information stand. Youth participants were given a small passport on arrival with time allocated for them to engage with the services and have meaningful conversations. A QR code enabled participants to access more detailed information on all the services that attended on the day.

The Forum was based around the theme of the Five Ways of Wellbeing with a short video compiled by students at Moss Vale High School, the clip can be viewed on the following link;

<https://www.wsc.nsw.gov.au/community/young-people/five-ways-to-wellbeing>

The day began with world café conversations which are a whole group interaction method that focused on conversations that were identified by young people at the 2016 Wingecarribee Youth Forum as the key priority areas;

- Participation and Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing
- Recreation and Leisure
- Education and Employment

The objective was to establish if there were significant changes for young people in these areas.

The team of youth advisors facilitated these conversations, supported by a member of the steering group, while the participants rotated topics to ensure that all aspects of the priority area could be discussed, an hour was dedicated to these conversations with each group adding an additional layer of information to the previous group. The information was digitally recorded and scrolled on display boards in real time so that young people could see their feedback as it was being recorded.

Young people also had the opportunity to pre-register for a workshop of their choice, the workshops were also based around information that was collated from the 2016 consultation;

- Participation and Engagement (Environmental sustainability)
- Health and Wellbeing
- Recreation and Leisure (Events and activities)
- Education and Employment



PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Volunteering and community involvement

Young people discussed increasing opportunities and incentives for community involvement and volunteering. It was recognised that young people have a lack of knowledge on current youth programs and opportunities that are available.

Solutions that were proposed included advertising in places that are frequented by young people and promotion at school assemblies. Also increasing the range of volunteering opportunities to include events, committees, sporting and school events.

Events and activities

Feedback received was that young people want to be more involved in event planning and that ongoing group activities would be well received. Promotion and advertising of events needs to be more wide spread

Solutions included having a youth advisory group to guide youth programs, utilising the school environment for promotion along with increased social media presence and possibly cinema advertising

Perception of young people

Young people felt that they were misrepresented in the community and that some targeted work on intergenerational activities could break down the current stereotyping.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Mental Health

There is a need to increase awareness of the services available to young people and how to access them. Consistent with the 2016 Youth Forum there are still concerns around the stigma associated with mental health.

Solutions suggested were to have a clear source of information on the available services that could be accessed by young people, schools and families.

Bullying and social support

Bullying is a concern to young people and it was proposed that social support groups would be beneficial for young people experiencing bullying or harassment.

Service accessibility and barriers

Service providers providing outreach to schools was proposed as a way of building connections, it would benefit services to build rapport with both young people and their parents. Limited public transport options reduce accessibility for young people living in the outer villages.



RECREATION AND LEISURE

What is happening now

Participants stated that at present, there are many programs and events outside of school hours, including sporting clubs, dance classes, art workshops and school holiday programs. Young people are less aware of other recreational and leisure opportunities that are not as structured.

Ideas for activities

There were multiple suggestions to hold inter-school activity days where young people could participate in structured activities that were based around having fun not necessarily competition. Colour Run, music and performance events were also recommended.

Promotion

It was evident that enhanced promotional methods are required with more advertising in schools, on social media and by word of mouth. Posters and printed material are what sells the event, they need to be eye catching and youthful with the inclusion of public transport options and other information that assists young people to attend.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Limited work experience opportunities

Experiences for young people varied based on the school they attended, for those that do participate in work experience there are limited opportunities. Young people that were left to find their own work placement found the process very difficult.

Solutions suggested were increased involvement and organisation by schools and asking students for feedback on local opportunities. The possibility for online work experience and short educational programs were presented as an alternative option.

Career pathways and subject choices

There was interest from students to have a local career's expo that included TAFE and Universities who could inform them of the correct subject choices for senior years. Guest speakers at the expo could be young people to talk about what their work and study experiences have been since leaving school.

Learning opportunities fitting the needs of young people

Skill based workshops and short courses both within and outside of schools were of interest as young people felt that they required more knowledge in the transition from school to employment. Further to this, young people put forward the concept of schools providing information to TAFE to assist in supporting tertiary education courses that reflect areas of interest.

Local employment

Consensus was that there are limited options for employment available locally and the cost of living in the Wingecarribee was a major contributor to young people leaving the area after school.

Conclusion

The main themes that stood out from the comments received on the day are:

- Young people want to be more engaged in creating opportunities
- Young people need to be provided with more information on services and accessing support
- Services need to be more creative in promoting opportunities
- Career pathways and employment opportunities are very limited

Overall, the comments and ideas from this forum were important and gave insight into many of the issues concerning youth in the Southern Highlands.



FACILITATORS FEEDBACK FROM THE WORKSHOPS

PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT YOUTH LEADING THE WAY WORKSHOP

Background

The Environment and Sustainability (E & S) team delivered an environmental workshop titled “Youth Leading the Way”. The workshop was designed to highlight to youth the various options that existed for them to get involved in environment and sustainability initiatives. The workshop encouraged youth to think about both global and local environmental issues and how youth can help to influence a more sustainable future. The workshop highlighted the various community-based E & S networks available to youth and also encouraged youth to start their own youth environmental network.

Following this workshop, youth who were interested in knowing more about the various networks, provided their email and there was a follow up meeting with these young people to discuss the best way forward in terms of beginning a youth environment network.

Objective:

Empowering youth to help shape a sustainable future for the Southern Highlands

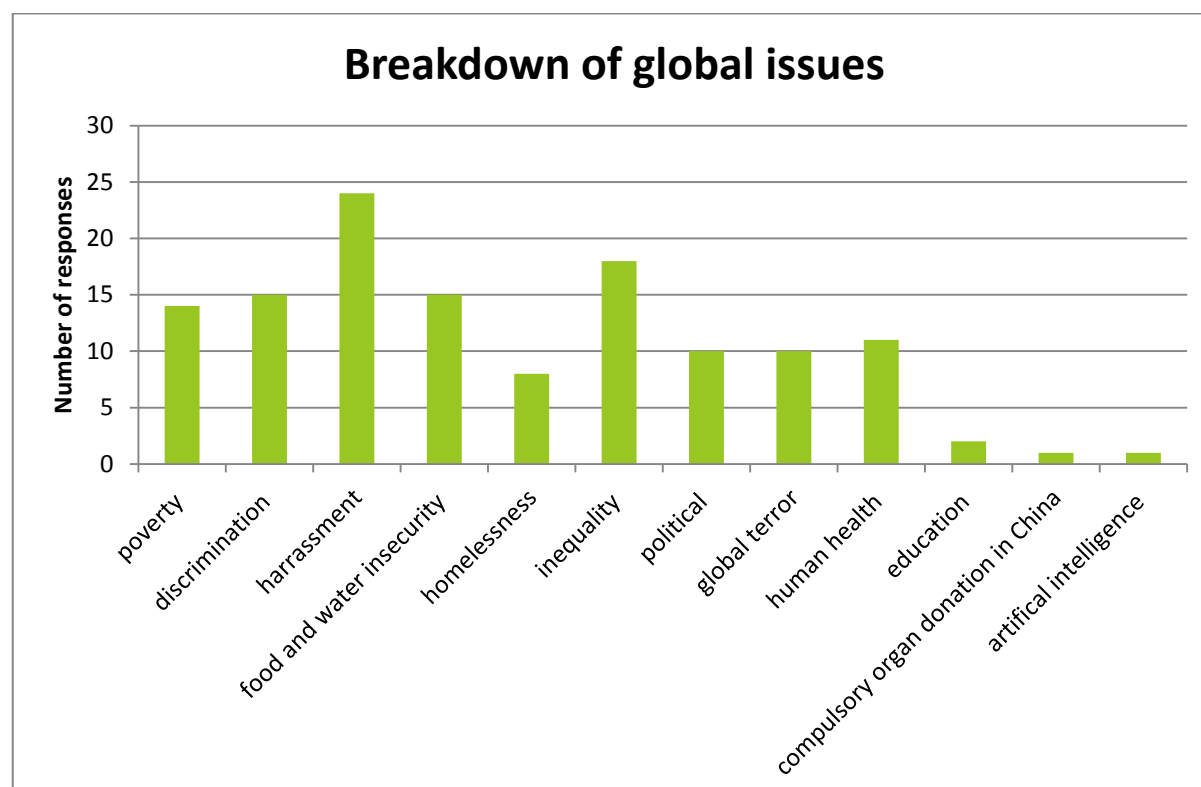
Goals:

- To assess the potential interest of youth involvement in the creation of a local E&S youth network or the joining of an already existing E&S network
- To encourage youth to believe in the influence they can have in their local community to shape a sustainable future for the Southern Highlands

Summary of findings:

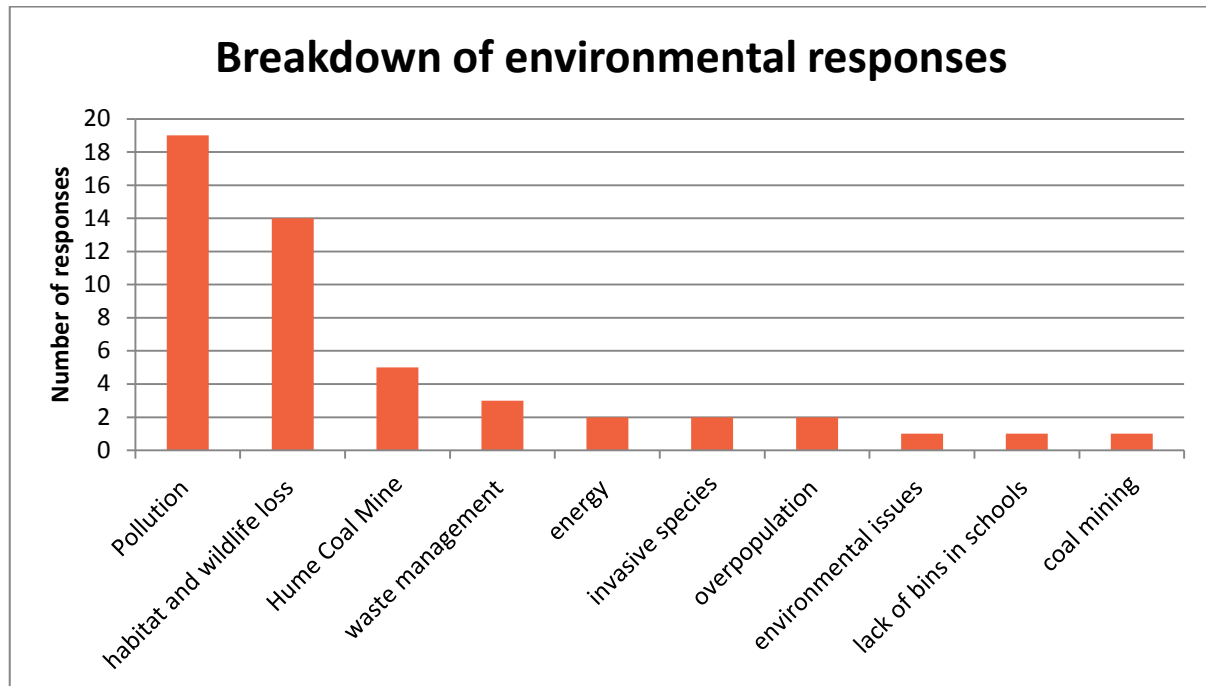
1. Global issues of concern to local youth

When asked what global issues are most important to them, young people provided the following answers:



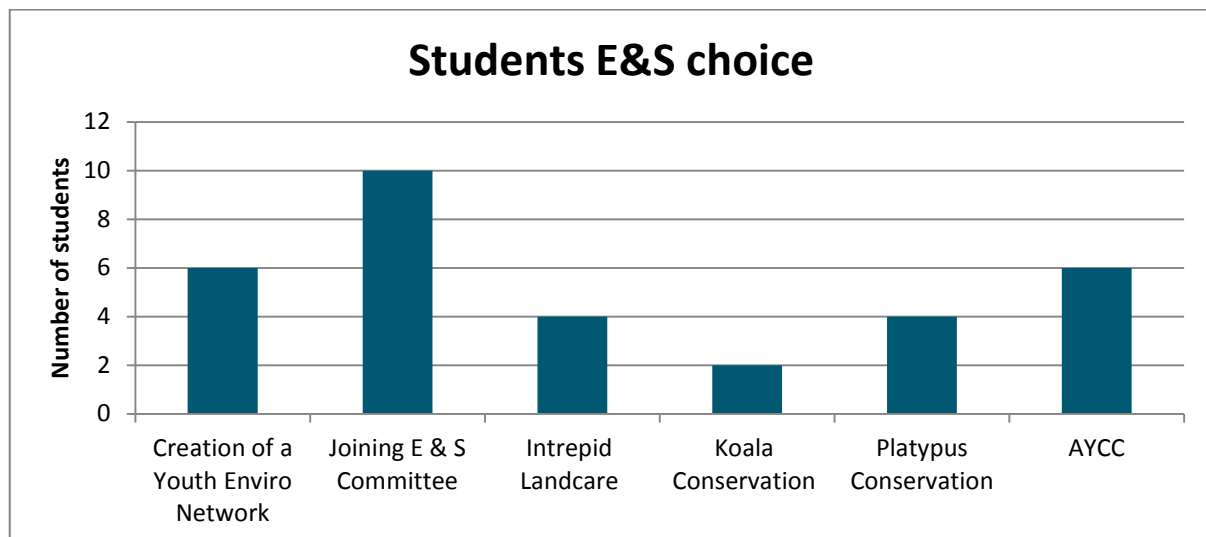
2. Local sustainability issues of concern to local youth

When asked what local sustainability issues are most important to them, young people provided the following answers:



3. Type of E&S network/group youth want to join:

When presented with the various E&S networks or groups that were available for youth to join, young people provided the following answers (note* students could choose more than one option)



Evaluation of workshop:

- The workshop achieved the goals set out, though the overall aim of empowering youth to help shape a sustainable future for the Southern Highlands still requires a number of new goals to be developed
- Ran out of time to deliver all information during workshop. If this were to be run again, a revision of information would be required or increase duration of workshop
- On review, the data collection sheet should have asked for school names as well as student names



HEALTH AND WELLBEING WORKSHOP

Background

The workshop was conducted by Uniting, Youth Solutions and the Family Referral Service. The Health and Wellbeing workshop conducted five activities that corresponded with the Five Ways of Wellbeing

Activities;

- 1) **Connect:** Participants completed the Human Knot activity, the purpose of this activity was to assist students in getting past any barriers they had with connecting and communicating with each other, especially in regard to problem solving with someone they may not know well. They reflected on how it felt to move past any barriers that stopped them from connecting and moving towards a common outcome.
- 2) **Be Active:** Participants completed the Robot Chairs activity, this activity got students moving quickly so they can feel the positive effects exercise has on their minds and bodies. We discussed the ways they can implement physical activity in their everyday lives and the positive benefits this has on their mental health.
- 3) **Keep Learning:** Participants were given instructions on how to tie a scout knot, draw a bird, fold origami and juggle three balls. The purpose of this was for students to understand the importance of trying to learn new skills even if they feel they may not be 'good' at that new skill. The presenters spoke about the positives of challenging yourself in a healthy way and how that builds resilience.
- 4) **Take Notice:** Participants had to look at an image, the image was then hidden and then they were asked questions about what was happening in the image. The aim of this was to teach participants how to be mindful, live in the present moment and the importance of this on their mental health. This led to discussions on good mental wellbeing, as well as the importance of practicing how to focus on one activity with so many distractions around them (e.g. technology).
- 5) **Give:** Participants had to complete an obstacle course in pairs, one participant had their eyes closed and the other assisted them. The purpose was for students to realise the positive effects it had on their own wellbeing when they assisted another individual. The activity led to discussions about trust, teamwork, and how vulnerable you feel when you need help, but how rewarding it feels to assist someone

Outcomes:

- How they could relate to the Five Ways of Wellbeing and easily apply the strategies to their own lives
- That it was good to have a change from the morning sessions conversations and break up the day with a more physical based activity
- Students were highly engaged and responsive



RECREATION AND LEISURE WORKSHOP

Background

This workshop was conducted by Highlands Youth Service, Vinnies Youth Housing, and Wingecarribee Council's Youth Officer. The presenters delivered a workshop that encouraged young people to consider what kinds of events, activities and volunteering opportunities they would like to see happen in the Wingecarribee Shire.

There was a strong interest in volunteering for skill development as a transferable skill that could be used in their area of interest. There was an interest in having schools more involved in offering these opportunities as part of daily school life.

Barriers discussed that limit participation in current events and activities were identified as lack of transport, lack of friends to attend with, lack of knowledge on what is happening in the area, lack of required numbers to run programs and problems around mixing of different school groups.

Young people were asked what kind of activities and programs they would like to see in the area, the students were able to participate in group discussion or leave comments anonymously.

Common themes:

Music; learning an instrument, singing or song writing along with live music events.

Sport; the interschool fun sports gala day idea was repeated throughout the day and was not left off this topic. There was also interest in individual skill-based activities in unstructured activities for example bike tricks.

Other areas of interest included a range of events, activities and workshops. Colour Runs are very popular along with outdoor movies, arts, crafts and cultural topics which included film making, art classes, comedy workshops and poetry. An interest in workshops that were educational, or skills based such as barista courses, cooking, homework or tutoring groups and safe driver courses.

Young people were also asked about what venues they would like to see programs and activities held at. The responses were predominantly outdoor venues, but they would like to see activities more consistently across the Shire.

Outcomes

Supporting the round table discussions, young people felt that there was a need for more involvement and direction from young people with the planning and delivering of events and activities for young people. Young people were given the opportunity to leave their details to be part of an advisory group to develop and run events. Further promotion of the availability to be part of a planning group needs to be promoted through local schools and an online chat group established that will allow for interaction at any time.

This workshop was a bit repetitive as the conversations that came out in the world café had covered some of the material that had been prepared. This will be kept in mind for future planning.



EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOP

The workshop was facilitated by UOW Southern Highlands, with a panel of specialist workers from TAFE, Highlands Recruitment, Moss Vale & Rural Chamber of Commerce and Harbison Care.

The workshop looked at study options available locally at TAFE and UOW, current trends in local employment and the skills required to get the job you want, the variety of employment opportunities available in aged care services which is one of the largest growing industries in the Southern Highlands.

Facilitators discussed what careers young people were interested in, if they were aware of the pathways to get to that career goal and what the barriers might be.

Summary

- Young people are genuinely interested in and concerned about local study and job prospects
- Young people have a perception that it will be hard to build a career locally
- Young people do not necessarily receive or have access to accurate and complete career planning information
- Many young people expect to leave the local area post-school, and only about a quarter of them expect to come back
- Young people value work experience, but the opportunity and support to access this is variable across schools,
- Organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce can be utilised to assist in finding work experience

What could be done better?

- Career information for students provided by employers rather than services
- Workshops for students to build their capacity to better understand and articulate what soft skills and transferable skills are
- Professional development training for career advisors and other key school staff on work experience and building stronger relationships between schools and local business.
- Improved provision of pathways information to students to better understand the transferable skills they have
- Industry-based mentors for young people who can address some/all of the above in a way that is tangible and has real world connection and application for the student



OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The information that was collected from the 2018 Youth Forum was consistent with the information that we received at the 2016 Youth Forum.

However, changes can be seen in some of the priority areas which now have a higher importance to young people. It was evident that more creative ways are required to promote and market services and activities and there is an identified need to strengthen relationships with schools to have information shared.

The findings from the Wingecarribee Youth Forum 2018 were tabled at the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 8 May 2019. The recommendations to amend the Youth Strategy's Action Plan to reflect current youth needs were adopted with the changes now implemented.

The Youth Strategy and Action Plan has been developed to be an adaptable document that will work to support changes in the areas of community development to align with state and federally funded services.





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