



2021

Youth Mental Health Forum
Post Event Report

Wagga Wagga, Murrumbidgee Region

Details

Author:	Cassie Maye, Community Engagement and Awareness Officer - headspace Wagga Wagga
Name:	2021 Youth Mental Health Forum
Date:	Tuesday the 1 st June 2021
Location:	Wagga Wagga Christian College, Wagga Wagga
Attendees:	16 high schools, 123 students
Facilitators:	Burn Bright (https://www.burnbright.org.au/)
Guest Speakers:	Cassie Maye (headspace Wagga Wagga)
Q&A Panel:	Matthew Lynch (Psychiatrist – Community Mental Health), Kaitlyn Robinson (Mental Health Clinician– Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service), Stephen McMullen (Psychologist – Department of Education), Jasmine Williams (Aboriginal Mental Health Worker- Like Mind)
Financial Sponsors:	Personnel Group, Catholic Education Dioecies of Wagga Wagga, Wagga Wagga City Council

2021 Steering Committee Members

- headspace Wagga Wagga
- NSW Department of Education
- School-Link – NSW Health
- Murrumbidgee Local Health District (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- Personnel Group
- City of Wagga Wagga (local council)
- Karralika

Overview

Questions are often asked as to why young people may be disengaging from education. One potential answer is related to poor mental health, a significant barrier for young people meaningfully engaging in education¹. To help address this, a local steering committee comprising of education providers, mental health professionals and a variety of community and youth service representatives, implemented the Youth Mental Health Forum (YMHF). The YMHF approach has been implemented in multiple locations across the Riverina over the last 9 years. As of June 2019, Wagga Wagga has held eight consecutive forums for the high schools across the region. Due to the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic the 2020 YMHF had to understandably be cancelled due to social distancing requirements in our communities. The 2021 Steering Committee wanted to see the YMHF continue, as the positive impacts of the forum which were outlined in the 2018 & 2019 YMHF Post Event reports.

The YMHF provides young people with access to accurate mental health information, including local mental health services, how and when to access these services, and some ways to help someone in need. The YMHF also assists teaching staff and service providers to improve referral pathways for young people to mental health services by providing an opportunity for education and service providers to collaborate in relation to student wellbeing. The YMHF approach emphasises the critical presence of education providers as a fundamental part of early intervention, education and awareness of mental health. The YMHF embraces a whole of community approach to systematically address the mental health and wellbeing issues being faced by young people. The forum relies on the ongoing commitment from steering committee members, education providers and students themselves to bring about positive change overtime.

Aims

The overall aim of the forum is to empower young people to address mental health problems being faced by the individual, peers, family or broader community networks. Over time, these forums will contribute to a positive change in reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues and improve the overall wellbeing of young people in schools. This will be achieved by enabling young people to personally engage with the mental health and youth services available in their local area, and access information and resources related to mental health. The YMHF also aims to build capacity within the school environment to effectively bring about change regarding mental health and wellbeing. During the forum, students are tasked with developing a 'Take it Back' Project to implement in their school in the hope that the information gained at the forum will be shared throughout the school community. The forum engages students in a fun, relevant and interactive way, supplying skills for young people to return to their respective school community and start developing school based projects targeting mental health issues.

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

Objectives

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

Student Objectives

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

Steering Committee Objectives

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

The Day of the Forum

The 2021 YMHF was held on Tuesday 1st of June at the Wagga Wagga Christian College. 16 regional high schools, 123 students and 20 teaching staff attended the forum, along with support from several Steering Committee members including headspace Wagga Wagga, Personnel Group, Murrumbidgee Local Health District, NSW Department of Education, City of Wagga Wagga and Karralika.

Students were provided with information from the Steering Committee prior to the forum to prepare them for the day, distributed through their schools. Staff members in the high schools were also contacted with information before and after the forum.

Aunty Gail Manderson commenced the 2021 YMHF with a 'Welcome to Country' prior to the facilitators, Burn Bright beginning the program.



Pictures from top to bottom: the YMHF participants during the day including listening to facilitators, energizers and 'get to know you' sessions.

Burn Bright developed the program in collaboration with the Steering Committee, regularly meeting in the months leading up to the forum (Run Sheet – Appendix A)

The program focused on three parts:

1) **Stigma and supporting each other**

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





Pictured: Panel Members answering Questions from the audience

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

Students were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had relating to mental health from a panel of health professionals and community representatives. The Q&A Panel members (from left to right) included Stephen McMullen, Jasmine William, Matthew Lynch and Kaitlyn Robinson.

Students were also encouraged to share what they had learnt so far at the forum by putting a post-it note message on the Post-It Note Wall. Students wrote statements such as “It’s okay not to be okay”, “always seek help” and “speak up”. Full list of statements can be found in Appendix B.



Pictured: Panel Members L-R: Stephen McMullen (Psychologist – Department of Education), Jasmine Williams (Aboriginal Mental Health Worker- Like Mind), Matthew Lynch (Psychiatrist – Community Mental Health) and Kaitlyn Robinson (Mental Health Clinician– Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service)

3) 'Take it Back' – you can make a difference

Burn Bright collated the data from the 'Take it Back' Project section of the forum. During lunch, teachers were briefed on the session and given resources to assist in the facilitation of discussion. The Wagga Wagga and Region Suicide Prevention Network (WWRSPN) offered students the opportunity to apply for a small grant (up to \$500) to bring their project to life. A full list of Take It Back Projects can be found in Appendix B.



Pictured: Students planning their 'Take It Back' projects in their school teams

The 2021 YMHF Steering Committee was committed to following up with the schools who attended to assist with the 'Take it Back' projects if required. Below is one example of the innovative and student-led projects implemented post forum.

Mater Dei Day Catholic College

Olympiad 10-week challenge

The students from Mater Dei Catholic College project proposed that students compete in home groups in Olympic-style challenges to increase knowledge about positive mental health strategies.

The students met with Melanie Cramp, Leader of Students to discuss their proposal around 'Making Connections'. They then presented their Olympiad Challenge for Term 3 to the Student Representative Council, which they are part of and received great feedback and support.

We got in contact with the school early term three to see how their project was going,

“We are currently in our second week of the 10-week Olympiad, which is a series of events that are designed to encourage students to make connections within their homegroups and score points. Homegroup happens every morning and homegroups are vertical which means there's a mix of all year groups. Last week was a trivia challenge and this week was the Stare Competition. Next week is the homegroup handshake challenge.” Melanie Cramp, Mater Dei Catholic College



The students decided to do a tunnel ball challenge the next week rather than a handshake challenge for COVID reasons, and the feedback was fantastic.

We were informed that every student got involved and that it was a great way to start the day with fresh air and smiles all round.

Pictured: Mater Dei Day Catholic College Students participating in week 2 & 3 Olympiad challenges



Forum Evaluation

One of the key Steering Committee objectives is to establish an evaluation framework to continually improve and strengthen the sustainability of the YMHF. The 2017 YMHF Steering Committee collaboratively developed an evaluation process for the forum which involved a pre-forum questionnaire, post-forum questionnaire and voluntary 4-month-post forum online survey for the students, along with two questionnaires for staff (on-the-day and 4-month-post forum online survey). The 2021 YMHF Steering Committee utilised the same evaluation process, however, has removed the 4 month-post forum online surveys. We noted the low number of responses from the 4-month survey in 2017 and 2019, less than 25% of those who agreed to be contacted completed the survey.

A summary of the forum evaluation is outlined below. This summary includes demographic information (from the post-forum questionnaire data), pre-forum questionnaire highlights, post-forum questionnaire highlights, pre/post forum comparison and staff feedback highlights. This feedback was collated by Steering Committee representatives Cassie Maye (Community Engagement Officer – headspace Wagga Wagga). Complete copies of evaluation data and all appendices are available on request (contact details on final page of document).

Student Feedback Evaluation

Demographic Information

Gender

Gender	Percentage of attendees
Male	27%
Female	68%
Gender neutral or unanswered	5%

Year Group

Year	Percentage of attendees
Year 7	0%
Year 8	1%
Year 9	4%
Year 10	48%
Year 11	36%
Year 12	10%
Unanswered	1%

Attending High Schools

- The Riverina Anglican College
- Tumut High School
- West Wyalong High School
- Narrandera High School
- Murry High School
- Batlow Technology High School
- Leeton High School
- Temora High School
- Oaklands Central School
- Mater Dei Catholic College
- Koorinal High School
- Wagga Wagga Christian College
- Marian Catholic College
- Wagga Wagga High School
- Yanco Agricultural High School
- Lake Cargelligo High School

Pre-Forum Questionnaire

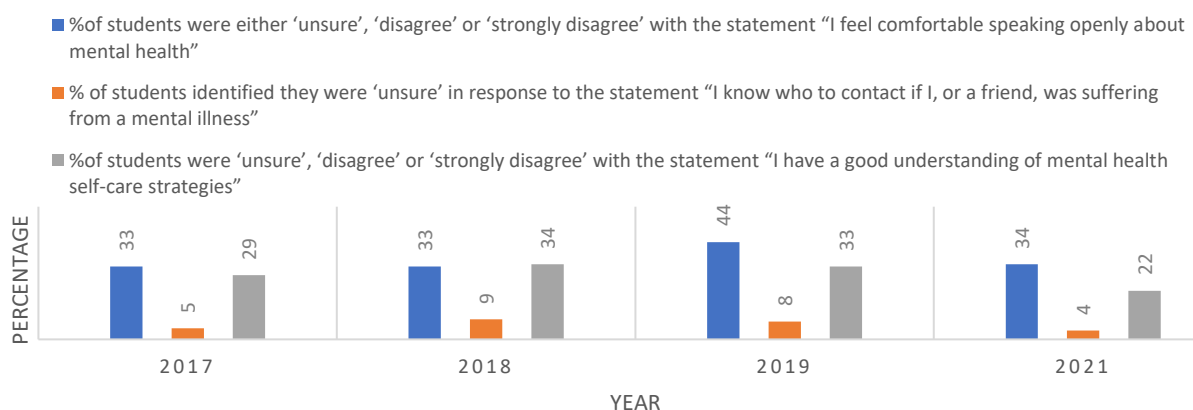
Each student was given the opportunity to complete a pre-event questionnaire and bring it along on the day (Appendix B). The pre-forum and post-forum questionnaire asked students to rate their agreeance with a variety of statements on a 5-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The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

Of the 54 pre-event surveys completed:

- **34%** of students were either 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement *"I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health"*
- **4%** of students identified they were 'unsure' in response to the statement *"I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness"*
- **22%** of students were 'unsure', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' with the statement *"I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies"*

These same questions have been asked at the YMHF pre-evaluation process for past 4 forums. Below is a table showing the percentages of the above questions over the past four forums.

PERCENTAGE OF PRE-FORUM SURVEY RESPONSES OVER 4 CONSECUTIVE YMHF



Post-Forum Questionnaire

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

Of the 120 post-event surveys completed:

- **80%** of students were either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement "*I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health*"
- Only **3%** of students identified they were 'unsure' in response to the statement "*I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness*"
- **92%** of students identified they were 'agreed or strongly agreed' with the statement "*I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies.* 0% of students 'disagreed or 'strongly disagreed' with the same statement.
- **97%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement "*the Youth Mental Health Forum met my hopes and expectations*"
- **89%** of students either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement "*The annual running of the Youth Mental Health Forum is important for my school*"
- **93%** of students either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement "*I would recommend the forum to my peers*"

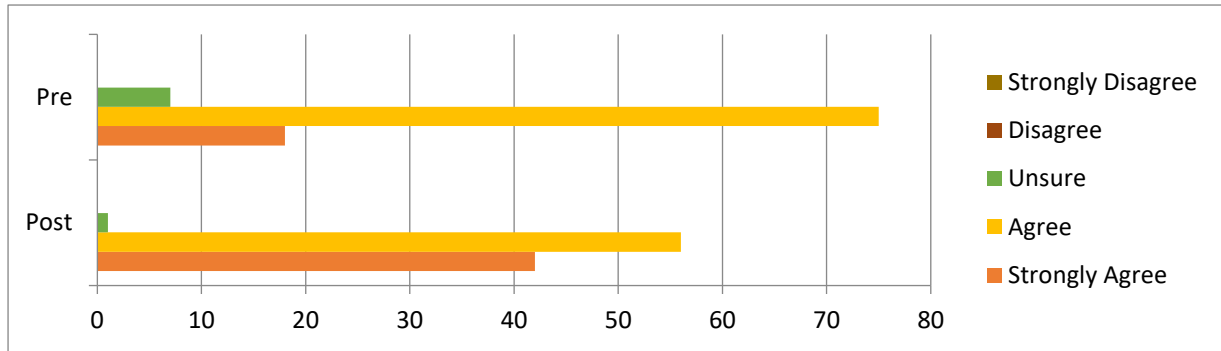
The students were asked the open-ended question "*What was the main message that you learned from today's forum?*" See a list below some of response that were repeated the most.

- That you are not alone
- How to approach a friend.
- What mental health is.
- What you can do to help yourself.
- Three steps to start conversation – I noticed, I am, how can I help.
- It's ok to speak up about your mental health.
- Ways that you can help your mental health as well as your friends.
- How to be respectful of your friends' feelings.
- I learnt that talking helps with mental health.
- That there are so many different ways to cope and there are people always willing to help and to talk
- That there is always someone to talk to.
- It's ok not to be ok.
- To speak up/talk to someone about mental health
- it's okay to not be okay, speak up

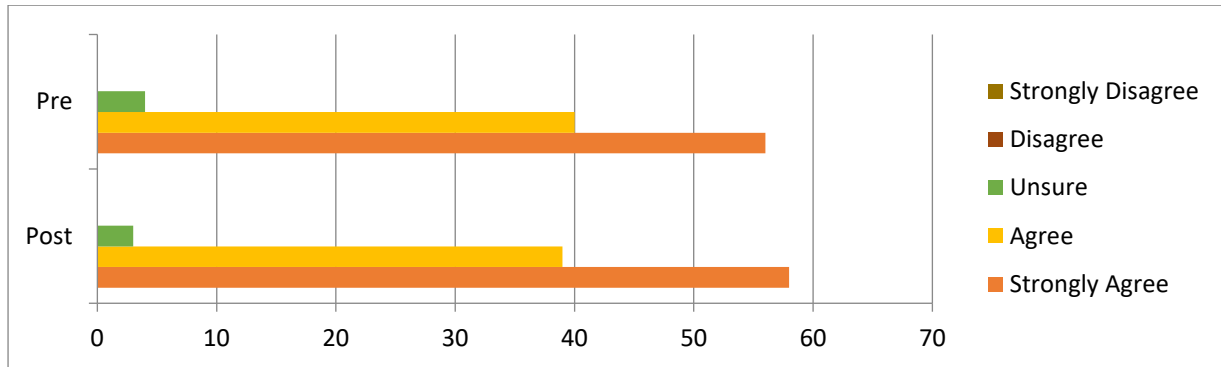
Pre and Post Comparison (%)

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

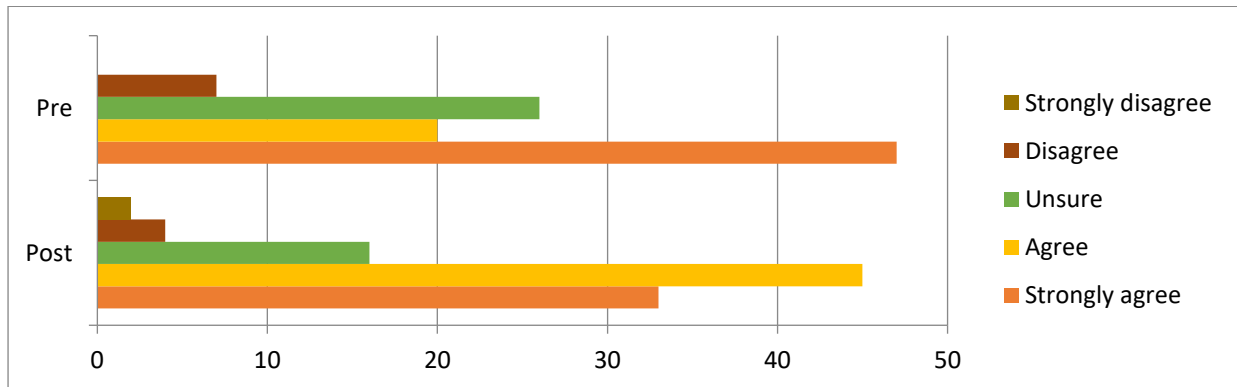
The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“overall, my knowledge around the topic of mental health is good”*



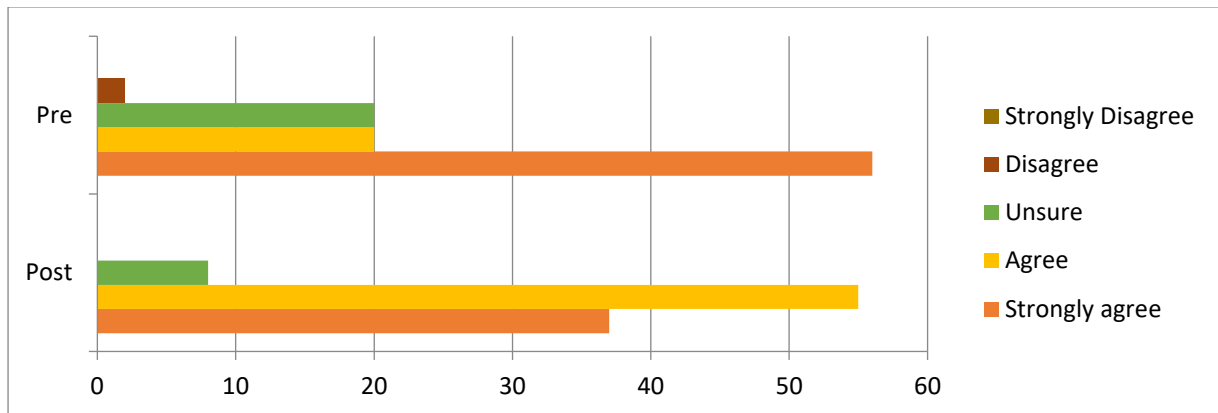
The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“I know who to contact if I, or a friend, was suffering from a mental illness”*



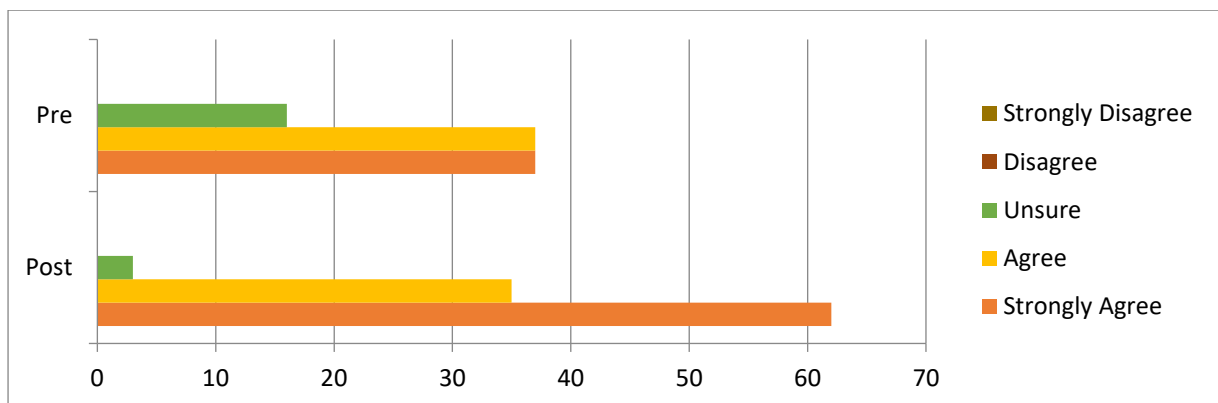
The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“I feel comfortable speaking openly about mental health”*



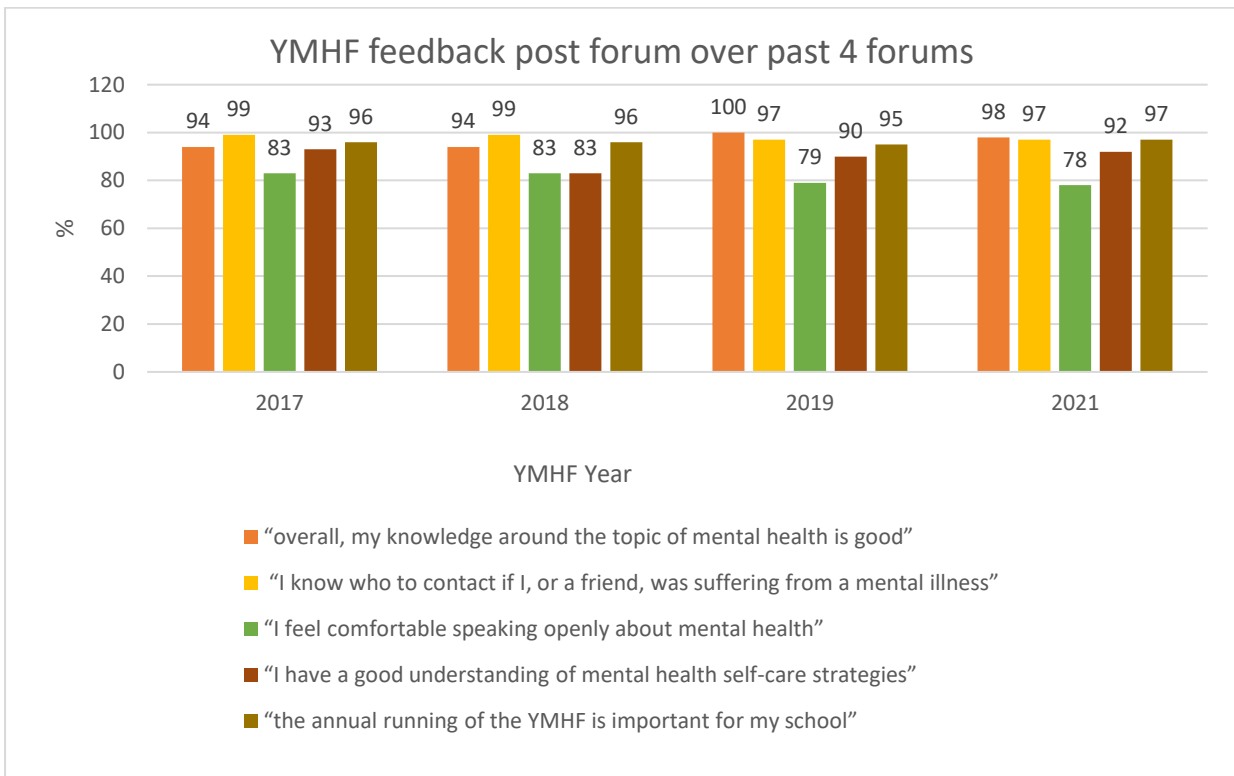
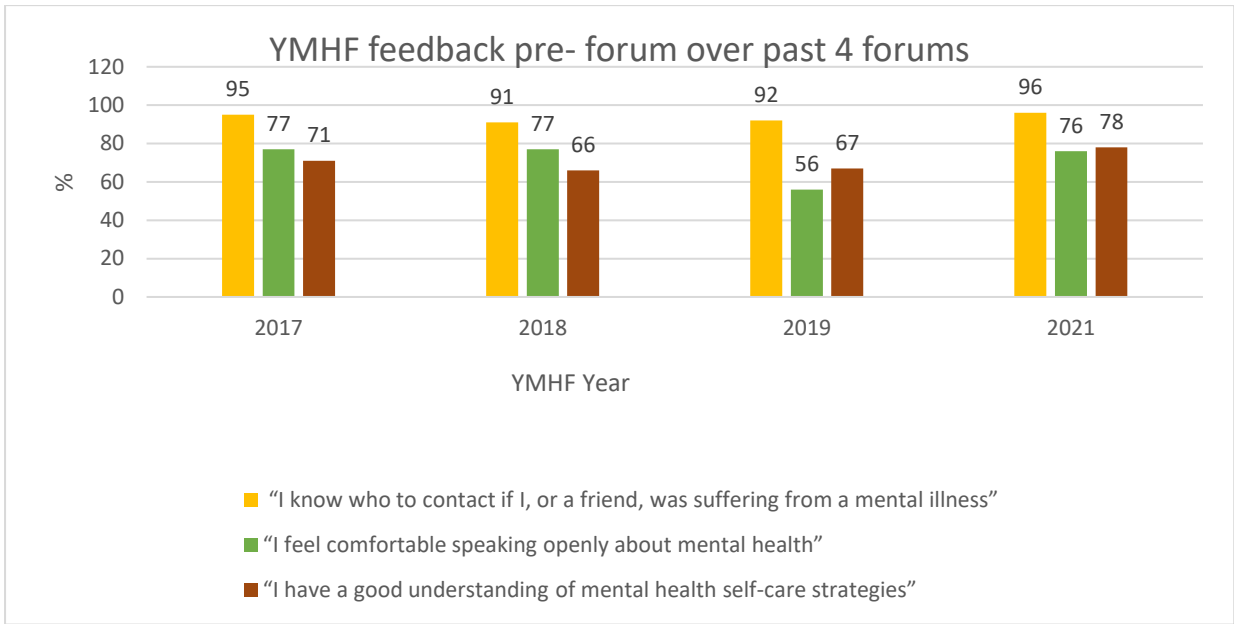
The figure below illustrates the pre and post comparison for the statement *“I have a good understanding of mental health self-care strategies”*



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



The positive impact of the YMHF can be clearly illustrated in the comparison graphs above. There is a clear increase in mental health literacy, awareness of service provision, acceptance of mental health and understanding of coping strategies. Below is a comparison of the feedback over the past four YMHFs with students either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statements listed in the graph below. Partially of interest is the pre-forum in 2019 only 56% of young people felt they could talk openly about mental health before attending the forum, contrast to 2021 where before attending the day 76% of young people agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Despite the challenges of the 2020 global pandemic, it appears that overall young people were coming into the 2021 YMHF more informed of where to seek help, more comfortably speaking openly about mental health and more aware of self-care strategies than in previous year. We also saw, as in all years an increase in this knowledge and awareness after attending the 2021 YMHF.



It is clear from the post-forum questionnaire data, the increase in knowledge that the YMHF information and key messages is clearly demonstrated and known to majority of our young people. This suggests that students have increase in mental health literacy, awareness of service provision, acceptance of mental health and understanding of coping strategies.

Brodie (pictured below) attended the YMHF in 2018 and 2019 with her high school, she returned to the forum this year as a volunteer with the Youth Reference Group (YRG) for headspace Wagga Wagga. A small but powerful example of the impact that a day can have on young people and their futures.

We asked Brodie about her experience coming back and attending the Forum in 2021.

"I attended the youth mental health forum when I was in year 11 (2018) and year 12 (2019). I was looking for more information regarding mental health as I was experiencing some issues due to high school stresses. The forum helped me access support networks such as headspace and helped me understand what mental health actually is, and how to deal with it.

I now volunteer with headspace Wagga Wagga's Youth Reference Group, and I attended the forum as a volunteer in 2021. This experience was so surreal and so rewarding as I had the opportunity to help provide the experiences and support I received when I was a student.

I hope to continue to attend the forum each year and help the local community of young people learn about mental health and the support they can access if needed."

Brodie Manson, Youth Reference Group members



Pictured L-R: Justin Day, Joel Brown, Cassie (community engagement officer), and Brodie Manson. Justin, Joel and Brodie are headspace Wagga Wagga Youth Reference Group members.

School Staff/Organiser Feedback Evaluation

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

- **95%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"Overall, the forum was well organised and ran smoothly"*
- **95%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"the information presented was appropriate and helpful for young people"*
- **100%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"The organisers of the forum communicated information clearly and in a timely manner"*
- **100%** of respondents either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement *"The YMHF met my expectations, and I would recommend that students attend this forum in the future"*

We also asked for open feedback from staff and organisers. We have collated this information and will ensure that this feedback is reviewed again as a steering committee when planning the next YMHF. We do this to ensure we can approach the 2022 YMHF collaboratively and always strive for excellence and best practice.

Where to from here?

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

The takeaway message from the 2021 YMHF related to positive help seeking behaviours and the statement “speak up” and “talk to someone” about mental health. From the YMHF Steering Committee point of view, these are key mental health messages which we proudly provide a platform for delivery. We look forward to seeing what 2022 and beyond brings for the students of the Murrumbidgee Region.

Contact Details

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

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

Contact for the YMHF Steering Committee – Murrumbidgee Region

Shane Thomas- Centre Manager
headspace Wagga Wagga
phone: 02 6937 9000

email: myheadspace@headspacewagga.org.au

Appendix A. Program Runsheet YMHF 2021

TIME	WHO	PROGRAM
9:00am		Students arrive, register and move into venue.
SESSION 1 – Building Healthy Relationships & Supporting Each Other		
9:30am		Official Opening of the Forum & Welcome to Country with Aunty Gail Manderson
		Housekeeping and any other important information
	BB	Welcome to the 2021 Wagga Wagga Youth Mental Health Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to students, teachers and acknowledgement of supporters Introduce the BB Team
	BB	Setting the Scene and Framing the Day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Spectrum of Mental Health and Mental 'ill' Health. Know where we can seek help and how we can take action at any point. Introduce the concept of 'Flourishing'. Empower young people to make a difference. Meet new people and have some fun! BB Video 1
	BB	Energiser
	BB	Getting to Know Each Other and Start the Conversation Activity BB Video 2 – The Importance of a Support Network
		Hear from Headspace Wagga Wagga - Cassie Maye
	BB	BB Brief Students on Q&A Questions and Question 'Text In' Process
10:50 am		Morning Tea (20 Minutes)
SESSION 2 – Understand Yourself to Better Understand Others		
11:10am	BB	Welcome Back
	BB	What Are You Grateful For Activity BB Video 3
	BB	Introduce the Panel
	The Q&A Panel Panellists:	<i>Stephen McMullen – School Psychologist, Dept of Education Jasmine Williams- Aboriginal Mental Health worker, LikeMind Dr Matthew Lynch- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Kaitlin Robinson- Mental Health Clinician, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)</i>
	BB	Post It Note Wall – What Is Something You Have Learnt Or Will Take Away?
12:30pm		Lunch (40 Minutes) During lunch teachers to be briefed on session 3 and collect resources for their group.
SESSION 3 – Take It Back – You Can Make A Difference		
1:10pm	BB	Welcome Back and Intro next session
		Time to Reflect Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing who we are and how we can make a difference.
	BB	Introduce ' Take It Back ' and explore the power we have to make a difference in our schools.
	BB	Take It Back Project Planning – (40 Minutes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers to lead and BB team to support teachers and school groups (Smaller school groups can join forces and take combined idea back to their respective schools).
	BB	'The Pitch' - present the groups idea. (30 second pitch)
2:30pm	BB	Wrap Up – Where to From Here?
2:45pm		Depart