

# YOUNG PEOPLE

YOUNG AUSTRALIANS:  
THEIR HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING REPORT  
STATED THAT:

“The health and wellbeing of young people not only affects their immediate quality of life and productivity but also shapes the future health of the whole population and, in a broader social sense, the health of society.”<sup>1</sup>



## OVERVIEW

The term ‘young people’ in this Social Issues Paper describes people aged 12 to 24 years. This age range includes the three main stages of adolescence - early, middle and late. This a time when physical, intellectual, emotional and social changes are taking place.<sup>2</sup>

THE STATE OF AUSTRALIA’S YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT STATES:

*“Young people’s social participation plays a key part of their lives. Their interactions with family and friends impact on their social and emotional well-being. And young people spend considerable time socialising with friends and undertaking leisure activities like sport. They also spend their free time taking part in community activities, including volunteering. The extent to which young people become civically engaged varies, as does their commitment to certain causes, including religion.”<sup>3</sup>*



Similar to other regional areas, the 18-24 youth cohort is declining as a proportion of the resident population of the Bega Valley. It is acknowledged many will leave the area in pursuit of life experience, higher education or employment opportunities.

### IN THE BEGA VALLEY

According to 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data there are 4,464 young people in the Bega Valley Shire, representing 14% of the population.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of young people to the Shire's population is significantly less than the NSW average.

There is a significant decrease in numbers in the 20–24 year age group once young people reach school leaving age. This exodus of young people was raised as an issue during consultations for this Social Issues Paper.

Almost all young people in Bega Valley Shire come from English-speaking backgrounds, but there is also a relatively large, and growing, number of Indigenous young people in the Shire.<sup>5</sup>

### THE CHANGES

There have been many changes in Australia and overseas in the last 10-20 years. These social, economic, environmental and technological changes can make the transition into adulthood a complex time for young people.<sup>6</sup>

Cyber bullying is a recent phenomenon causing many problems for young people and their families. Cyber bullying occurs when new technologies such as computers and mobile phones are used to harass or bully somebody. The perpetrators often use SMS, e-mail, chat rooms and Facebook to spread their message.



## THE SOCIAL ISSUES

### Transport

Young people are more isolated in the Bega Valley community than other communities due to the spread of townships. The need to have access to a car or public transport is important for young people in the Shire to enable them to be actively engaged in the community. Unfortunately, car ownership is too expensive for some young people. Furthermore, public transport in the Shire is very limited and not available after hours.

It is acknowledged that further work needs to be undertaken to investigate more transport and/or access solutions to reduce barriers to young people accessing education, employment and recreational opportunities within the Shire.

### Education and Employment

It is understood that young people in rural and remote areas are at an educational disadvantage in terms of attainment, performance and participation when compared to young people in urban areas.<sup>7</sup> It is widely known that significantly less numbers of young people reach year 12 in the Bega Valley. Both the TAFE and University offer some options to study locally, however there are limited choices for those young people who wish to continue their study in the Shire. The need to travel long distances to complete TAFE studies, particularly for trades is an issue.

Innovative programs such as the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) have emerged in the past few years developing collaborative partnerships with local industry creating and developing jobs, education and vocational training for young people. Trade training centres such as the one opened recently at Eden High School is another example of steps being taken to address this issue.

The unemployment rate for young people in the Shire is 11.9%.<sup>8</sup> There is an increasing awareness of the need to improve training and employment opportunities for young

people within the Bega Valley. A special focus needs to be given to supporting Indigenous young people to undertake training and employment.

### Youth Housing

The lack of locally based crisis accommodation options remains to be a significant issue for young people. Some young people are forced to leave home because of conflict, violence, abuse, neglect or sexual assault within their families.

Due to a lack of youth housing options, many young people resort to 'couch surfing' or other temporary shelter. This is a difficult situation, in particular for young students who are unable to stay at home to study.

The NSW Government's Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2010-2014 cited Census 2006 figures which showed 208 homeless households in the Bega Valley.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the Bega Valley Shire has the highest rate of homelessness in South East NSW. Counting the Homeless 2006 also showed that 21% of the total number of homeless people were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own) and 10% were young adults aged 19 to 24.<sup>10</sup>

### Youth Health, Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Consultations have identified a need for more information and support around youth mental health issues in the Shire. Council recognises that youth are future civic leaders and business people, and will

ACCORDING TO THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH AND WELFARE (AIHW)::

**“Many young people experiment with substances that can cause immediate and long-term health and social problems.”<sup>11</sup>**

assist the development of youth through facilitating mental health and substance abuse intervention and support programs.<sup>12</sup>

The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing showed that 13% of Australia's young people aged 16-24 had a substance use disorder.<sup>13</sup> Alcohol use was the found to be the most common concern, followed by marijuana and stimulants.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE SURVEY DEFINES SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS AS INVOLVING:

*“the harmful use and/or dependence on alcohol and/or drugs....Harmful Use is the pattern of use of alcohol or drugs that is responsible for (or substantially contributes to) physical or psychological harm, including impaired judgement or dysfunctional behaviour.”*<sup>15</sup>

Alcohol use amongst young people is one of the most widespread social issues. More than half of all 15-17 year olds and almost all 18-24 year olds have drunk alcohol.<sup>16</sup> Consultations have suggested that more information and access to services relating to drug and alcohol abuse is required in the Bega Valley.

A recent AIHW report showed that the leading cause of death and hospitalisation among young people in Australia is from injury and poisoning. It is reported that land transport accidents and suicide accounted for two thirds of these deaths. The report suggested that many injuries are preventable through public health interventions.<sup>17</sup>

In the Bega Valley there are limited bulk billing medical practices that are 'youth friendly' and support young people. Supporting the health needs of our young people is important.

### Entertainment and Social Activity

The State of Australia's Young People report states that social participation is a very important component of young people's lives.<sup>18</sup> This is well known and a lack of entertainment, particularly in the evenings,



has been repeatedly raised in consultations as a problem for young people in the Shire.

Consultations have suggested that older children 12-17 years have particular needs that are not being addressed. A need has been identified for regular activities for older children, such as YMCA activities or camps in the natural environment. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that there are inadequate school holiday programs for children 12-16 years old.

Particular needs have been identified during consultations, such as the need for youth spaces and well placed skate parks throughout the Shire. Participants of consultations expressed a desire to have the planned youth space in Bega to be staffed so it is a place to hang out after school and on weekends. Another specific identified need is for the development of a skate park in Bermagui.

## Cyber bullying

There is a clear connection between cyber bullying and school life. A survey conducted in 2004 showed that more than a quarter of Year 8 students knew somebody who was experiencing cyber bullying.<sup>19</sup>

Cyber bullying usually takes place at the home of the offender and it is understood that parents generally underestimated their own children's bullying behaviour. It is also widely known that cyber bullying has a detrimental effect on the victims' physical and emotional well-being.<sup>20</sup>

## Sexuality

There are a number of young gay men and women that reside in the Bega Valley community. At a local level the lack of access to specific services, homophobia and the extraordinary pressures on young men and women coming out in a rural area are significant issues.

Whilst sexuality is a defining factor for many young people they also face similar issues as other young people. These issues are highlighted in this and other Social Issues Papers.

## STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY

The young people of the Shire are perhaps the greatest strength here. In a Shire with a relatively small population, there is significant achievement amongst young people across the Bega Valley in the areas of arts, music, sport and education.

There are a number of education facilities in the Shire, four high schools, TAFE and the Wollongong University campus. Universities such as the Australian National University and University of Canberra are developing local pathways. A wide range of sporting opportunities and leisure pursuits can also be accessed. However, there appears to be fewer options for young people to be involved in the arts.

There is a strong network of Youth Services across the Shire that provides an opportunity for collaboration and the exchange of ideas and to increase the capacity of the community to address youth issues. Organisations working with young people are encouraged to look for opportunities to support and further develop the Youth Services Network.

## THE CONSTRAINTS

The settlement patterns of smaller coastal towns and growing new estates in the Shire have little or no transport options. This has been identified as a high priority issue and has a negative impact on young people. This can lead to social isolation, loss of self esteem and barriers to access facilities, programs, training and employment.

Moving away is an important part of the transition to adulthood, however for young people in the Bega Valley Shire most do not have a choice about staying or leaving. The youth exodus is fuelled by a number of factors such as limited education and employment opportunities. There are community perceptions that young people who want to 'make something' of themselves need to do so out of the area.

## THE OPPORTUNITIES

Council recognises that all levels of government as well as non-government, private and community organisations all play vital roles in improving health, well-being and quality of life for young people. Furthermore, young people in the Shire have an opportunity to express their views through the Bega Valley Youth Council.

Encouraging a greater range of social activities, entertainment opportunities and recreational spaces for young people 12-18 years is a need that has been identified through consultations. There is an opportunity for community groups to work together to provide young people with places to hang out, such as youth spaces or well placed community skate parks.





There are opportunities for organisations to develop partnerships to investigate youth crisis accommodation issues. Currently the closest Youth Refuge is in Cooma or Moruya. Furthermore, when discussing youth housing needs, consideration needs to be given to the location of housing to ensure there is access to services and employment/training opportunities.

There needs to be an increased awareness of the need to improve training and employment opportunities for young people within the Bega Valley. This is becoming particularly important with the NSW Government raising the school leaving age to 17 years, and also recently announced funding cuts to Education. A specific focus is required around supporting Indigenous young people to undertake and achieve in training and employment opportunities.

Consultations have suggested that strategies should be investigated to address youth health issues. There are opportunities for organisations to form partnerships with the Southern NSW Local Health

District and other organisations such as the Bega Valley Suicide Action Prevention Network (SPAN). Furthermore, the Federal Government has recently announced that the Headspace School Support Program will be made available for grieving school communities dealing with suicide.

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## Further Reading

Investing in Young People: A Stocktake of Australian Government Initiatives for Young People <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/OfficeForYouth>

National Survey of Young Australians 2011 <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/category/29-2011>

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### SOCIAL ISSUES PAPERS

This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its' entirety go to [www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au)

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