

Voice of Our Youth

Final Report | June 2020



**A youth consultation project
that engaged 12.5% of young people
aged 12-25 in the Loddon Campaspe region
on their experience of our education system.**

Foreword

In the second half of 2019 Voice of Our Youth consultation project engaged with over 5,000 young people aged 12-25 throughout the Loddon Campaspe region.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the young people who engaged with us at some point across our six month listening project.

To these young people we say a massive thank you! Thank you for sharing your thoughts, concerns, ideas and personal stories with us.

We hope you do appreciate just how amazing you are and how powerful your voice and story can be.

This report is for every young person who took the time to speak up for what they want for their education and how they want to be best prepared for the world of work.

David Richardson

Chair - Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership



Acknowledgement of Country



WE ACKNOWLEDGE AND PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THE ABORIGINAL TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND ON WHICH OUR WORK TAKES PLACE, THE LANDS OF THE DJA DJA WURRUNG, TAUNGURUNG AND YORTA YORTA PEOPLES, AND WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THEIR ELDERS, PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR LIVING CULTURE, THEIR PROUD HISTORY AND THEIR DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF AND CONNECTION TO COUNTRY.

Table of Contents

Front Cover	p.1
Foreword	p.2
Acknowledgement of Country	p.2
Table of Contents	p.3
Introduction	p.4
Acknowledgements	p.5
Executive Summary	
- Engagement Stats & Reach	p.6
- Key Findings	p.7
- Voice of Our Youth - Direct Quotes	p.8
- Summary of Recommendations	p.9
Loddon Campaspe Profile	p.11
Campaspe Shire Snapshot	p.14
City of Greater Bendigo Snapshot	p.17
Mental Health	p.20
Bullying	p.22
Stress	p.24
Curriculum	p.26
Disengagement	p.28
Youth Voice.	p.30
Concluding statement	p.31

Introduction

The Voice of Our Youth (VOOY) project was designed and facilitated for two main reasons. To hear from young people on the issues that have and continue to impact upon their school/education experience, and to find out what ideas young people had to make school, and their transition to work or further education easier, more engaging and more attainable.

Conducted from July through to December 2019, VOOY was a six month youth consultation and listening exercise initiated by the Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership with support from project partners and key stakeholders including:

Campaspe Shire Council | Campaspe Cohuna Local Learning and Employment Network
The Department of Education and Training | The City of Greater Bendigo

A major focus of this consultation were the Shire of Campaspe and the City of Greater Bendigo, which is where the majority of youth and stakeholder consultation occurred.

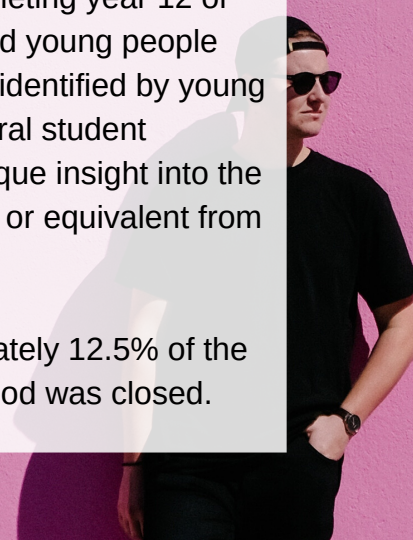
This approach was taken because both shire councils partnered with and contributed to this project from its inception, but also because the VOOY project group believed a detailed examination of the similarities and differences of two neighbouring but very different LGAs would be enlightening, and provide insight that may otherwise not be available from a region-wide approach.

The backbone of the VOOY consultation project was a series of six different engagement tools, all designed to engage young people around their own lived-experience of the education system and pathways to employment. These engagement tools were listed on the consultation's homepage www.voiceofouryouth.com.au and included:

10 question online survey | 2 minuted postcard activity | 5 minute voice-recording activity
Youth focus groups | Stakeholder consultations events | Sector-wide Deep Dive event

What started out in July 2019 as a consultation focusing on the experience of those young people who had, or were at risk of disengaging from school prior to completing year 12 or equivalent, quickly broadened its scope to engage secondary school aged young people more widely. This was because the experiences, influences and barriers identified by young people at risk of disengaging were not in isolation from those of the general student population. After all, every secondary school-aged young person has unique insight into the challenges, pitfalls and potential solutions involved in completing year 12 or equivalent from their own lived experience.

By December 2019 the VOOY youth consultation had reached approximately 12.5% of the Loddon Campaspe's young people aged 12-25, and the consultation period was closed.



Acknowledgements

This report gives voice to the more than 5,000 young people from across the Loddon Campaspe region, clearly identifying what our regions most valuable resource, our young people, want and need for a better education experience and an easier transition to work.

The VOOY project would like to thank every young person who took part in this project with special mention to the Bendigo Youth Council for their assistance in co-designing elements of this youth consultation. Without youth voice there would be no project and no report.

In trying to find better outcomes for our young people, young people told us that we must allow them to not only feed into decision making processes, but to also lead them. They told us that they are experts in their own lives and are best placed to create the change they require from the grass roots up.

Critically, the VOOY project adds greater youth voice from this region to inform decision makers and ultimately to provoke further action for and with young people to make their schooling, and their transition to work or further education easier, more engaging and more attainable.

The Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership has a recent track record of supporting young people to bring about change in their community, but the VOOY project would like to acknowledge the support provided to this project from the schools, organisations and community groups that helped us connect with their young people.

Further, we want to thank your teachers/staff/volunteers for the amazing work they do every day to support young people when and as they need it. Throughout this project we have heard directly from young people just how important trusted and supportive adults are.

This report has been compiled with data from the most recently published census, but also includes data and insights taken from the following trusted and respected sources:

- The Victorian Government's Department of Education and Training's research unit which produces the State of Victoria's Children Report and On Track profiles;
- Mission Australia's Annual Youth Survey reports;
- The Foundation for Young Australians New Work Order research series.

The VOOY project acknowledges the breadth and depth of work of these organisations and government departments in helping define the current situation for, and amplify the voice of, our region's young people.

We hope in reading this report you hear the voice of our young people and that together we can create the change that is needed at the school, the community and the state level.

Engagement Stats & Reach

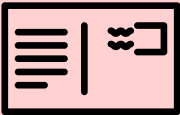
**FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 2019
THE VOICE OF OUR YOUTH CONSULTATION
ENGAGED WITH 12.5% OF YOUNG PEOPLE
IN THE LODDON CAMPASPE REGION.**



171 young people attended a youth focus group



749 young people took our online survey



4,559 young people did the postcard activity



We captured **7,555** individual statements of need or ideas for action...

...and we also recorded **43,440** seconds of young people talking about what matters most to them.

**Voice of Our Youth heard from young people
from across the region including from**



Key Findings

Bullying is the single biggest factor in young people not attending school with young people citing concern for the **physical and emotional safety** of themselves of their peers.

Stress is a major concern for our young people with expectations of others, scheduling of tests/exams, **homework**, and ATAR **ranking** all negatively contributing to this.

Hands on learning and real life skills are the best way to engage learners but are biggest items missing from the curriculum in mainstream schools at present, especially in years 7-9.

Mental health was the number one issue raised by young people. They acknowledge supports do exist but feel like the education system is letting them down by design.

Despite some great programs in the region there is still **not enough being done to re-engage young people in education** and too many young people are falling through the gaps.

Less or no homework, a less strict uniform policy, better/cheaper food at the canteen and a later school start time were popular suggestions for a better school experience for students.

Friends, a supportive family and good teachers make it easier to attend school... but bullying, anxiety, stress, ill-health, family problems and lack of motivation all make it harder.

Young people do want to have a **voice in how their school operates** and how the education system can be reformed so it is fit for purpose in 2020 and beyond.

Alternative Education Centres are successfully engaging and re-engaging students, but they require more resourcing and the region needs more centres to meet the demand.

VCAL and VET provide students with excellent vocational education and employment pathways, but suffer from under funding /resourcing, restricted subject offerings and attached **stigma**.

The Voice of Our Youth

real quotes from
unreal young people

"This VCAL program is better than any VCE program I know of. It is the best thing I have done... They accept me for who I am. I get treated like an adult. It's real life learning. Anything is possible."

"School is a safe place for me because I know that there is someone and somewhere I can go to if needed."

"Let everyone have a say in what they want to do at school, what they need to do that and start there."

"I know school is going to get me where I want to go with my future."

"I would abolish the school uniform policy. You really don't need uniform socks. That is ridiculous... allow young people to express themselves openly and without judgement."

"I think it's ridiculous that kids are ranked in VCE and that is what it's all about. If I don't get this score then that's me done, that's my career done for life... that is what kids focus on."

"Start school later and finish school earlier... and have a longer lunch break."

"Teachers are such an amazing resource and support."

"Reduce homework. If kids are serious about their education they should be able to get their work done in class. Home time should be time for them to work on themselves because teenagers need to be able to get out and play."

"Remove all draconic aspects of education. Get rid of uniform and rules like having to ask for permission to go to the toilet. Like the kind of stuff you would expect to see in the classroom in the 1960s or 70s not in the modern day. They are total arbitrary rules that impede on students learning."

"The education system could definitely use some more funding."

"Train all teachers in Mental Health First Aid so that they know how to help student with mental health and support those in minority groups like the LGBTQI+ community."

"Having amazing friends and really good teachers definitely makes school a better place for me."

"I feel like everything I do here is a test. They don't treat me like a person. I am just a grade."

"Financial distress, living in a remote area and threats to my physical and emotional safety get in the way of me being at school."

"Attending an alternative [education] program really helped me."

Summary of Recommendations

MENTAL HEALTH

VOOY recognises the significant levels of service provision and supports that currently exist to support young people's mental health, but calls for further investment be made in youth mental health prevention and intervention programs. This investment should be from all levels of government to every school and community to better support and address the mental health of our region's young people. This should include the rollout and continued support of evidence-based, community driven youth mental health programs, as well as the capacity development of both school staff members, teachers, parents and students.

Please see page 21 of this report for the full list of recommendations on mental health.

BULLYING

Schools anti-bullying policies and practices are viewed by many students as ineffective. This report recommends all schools continue their efforts to effectively address bullying by working to:

- Ensure school anti-bullying policy is actually understood and adhered to by the entire school.
- Increase student voice / youth participation in reviewing school policy and addressing bullying.
- Provide more effective engagement with students who are being bullied or who are most vulnerable to bullying.
- Provide more anti-bullying professional learning for both pre-service and practising teachers.

Please see page 23 of this report for the full list of recommendations on bullying.

STRESS

VOOY recommends that schools must work with their student body to develop up strategies and systems to assist in the reduction of stress caused at school, including:

- Improving scheduling of exams and assessment tasks for all subjects/students.
- A major reduction in the amount of homework required to be completed by students.
- The provision of a chill-out space at school for students who are stress/anxious.

VOOY supports the calls to end the ranking of students with an Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) because of the stress and anxiety it causes students and recommends students are provided support to investigate/trial a better model, and to also develop local student action/advocacy groups focused on lobbying for the removal of the ATAR system.

Please see page 25 of this report for the full list of recommendations on stress.

Summary of Recommendations

CURRICULUM

VOOY recommends the following actions to strengthen vocational education in Victoria:

- That VCAL/VET/VCE move to a single-certificate framework in Victoria.
- That VCAL and VET subjects are offered with more flexibility and permeability.
- That additional resourcing and supports are provided to existing VCAL and VET programs.
- That VCAL/VET feeder-streams are created and offered for year 7 to 9 students.

VOOY also recommends the following actions to improve mainstream education offerings:

- A region-wide youth-led review of the national curriculum and its application in schools, to provide its own evidence-based report and findings for broader consideration.
- Increased access of online course offerings from other schools or institutions to increase study options and subject choice for all students.

Please see page 27 of this report for the full list of recommendations on curriculum.

DISENGAGEMENT

VOOY recommends that more alternative education centres/models are established, in order to support young people throughout the region who are at-risk of becoming, or are already disengaged from mainstream education. It may also assist to identify and re-engage young people who have detached from the education system completely.

Alternative education models have been shown to be effective in their engagement of students through the key elements of individual learning plans with a person-centred approach, ongoing connection to a mentor or similar and inquiry/project based learning. The Loddon Campaspe region has some fantastic alternative education centres, but simply not enough to cater for the growing demand for this form of education.

For further information see page 29 of this report for the full list of recommendations on disengagement.

YOUTH VOICE

VOOY encourages all schools to recognise that their entire student body, not just those in leadership positions, are uniquely placed to advocate on the issues and policies that impact them, and recommends that the school engage their student body in real dialogue on the topics that matter most to their young people. What might seem small or insignificant to adults at first glance may have complex underlying issues behind them that warrant unpacking and workshopping through a human centred design framework/process to find new ways of working together for better outcomes for all.

See page 30 of this report for the full list of recommendations and specific examples on youth voice.

Loddon Campaspe Profile

The Loddon Campaspe region is in north central Victoria. The region comprises of 19,100 square kilometres across six local government areas and makes up approximately 8 per cent of Victoria's land mass.

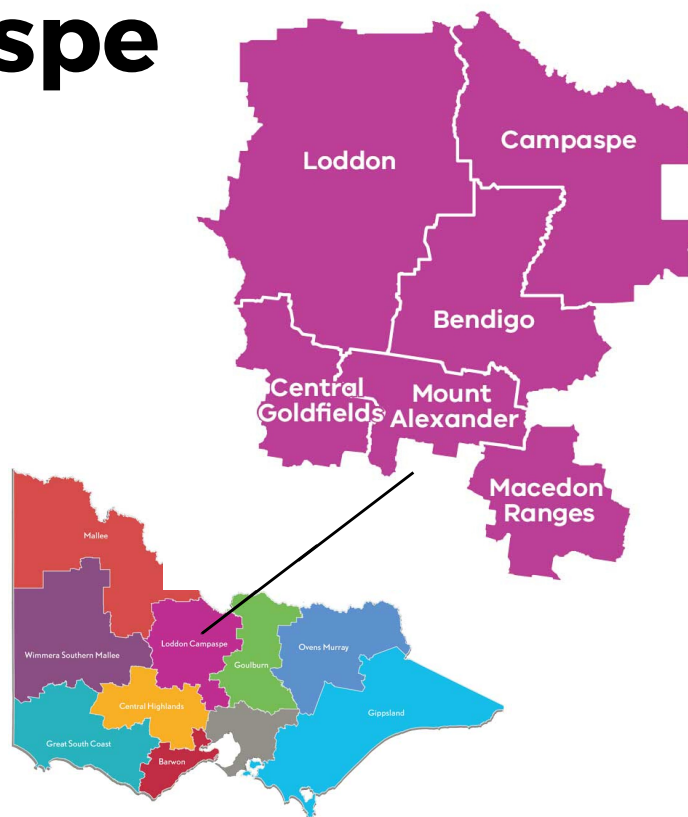
The Loddon Campaspe region is comprised of:

- Campaspe Shire
- Central Goldfields Shire
- City of Greater Bendigo
- Loddon Shire
- Macedon Ranges Shire
- Mount Alexander Shire

The region is home to 232,903 (ABS 2016a), almost 4 per cent of Victoria's population. Bendigo is its regional central with a population of 91,567, but the region is also home to a long list of vibrant communities including:

Echuca (12,882)	Rochester (2,692)
Castlemaine (9,811)	Heathcote (1,677)
Gisborne (9,551)	Lancefield (1,443)
Maryborough (7,430)	Tongala (1,292)
Kyneton (4,806)	Inglewood (731)
Kyabram (5,714)	Boort (725)
Woodend (3,782)	Dunolly (659)
Macedon (2,727)	

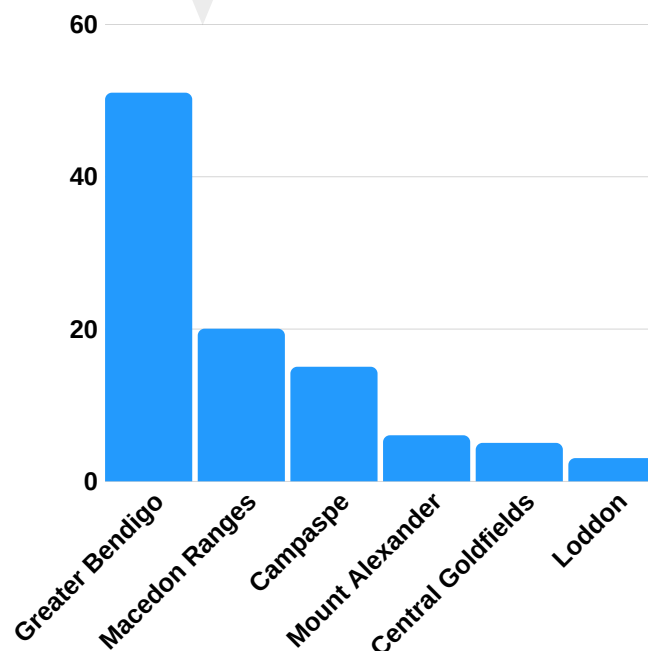
The Loddon Campaspe region includes the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Yorta Yorta people, who have legislated rights and responsibilities relating to the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage places in the Loddon Campaspe region.



Above: Map of Loddon Campaspe region

The Loddon Campaspe region is home to 41,971 young people aged 10-25 with just over half of all young people in the region living in the City of Greater Bendigo.

The chart below shows the percentage of young people per LGA within the Loddon Campaspe region.



Loddon Campaspe Profile

**IF YOU LIVE IN LODDON
CAMPASPE YOU ARE LESS
LIKELY TO COMPLETE YEAR 12**

1 IN 5
(20%)

DO NOT COMPLETE YEAR 12,
COMPARED WITH 1 IN 10 STATE WIDE.

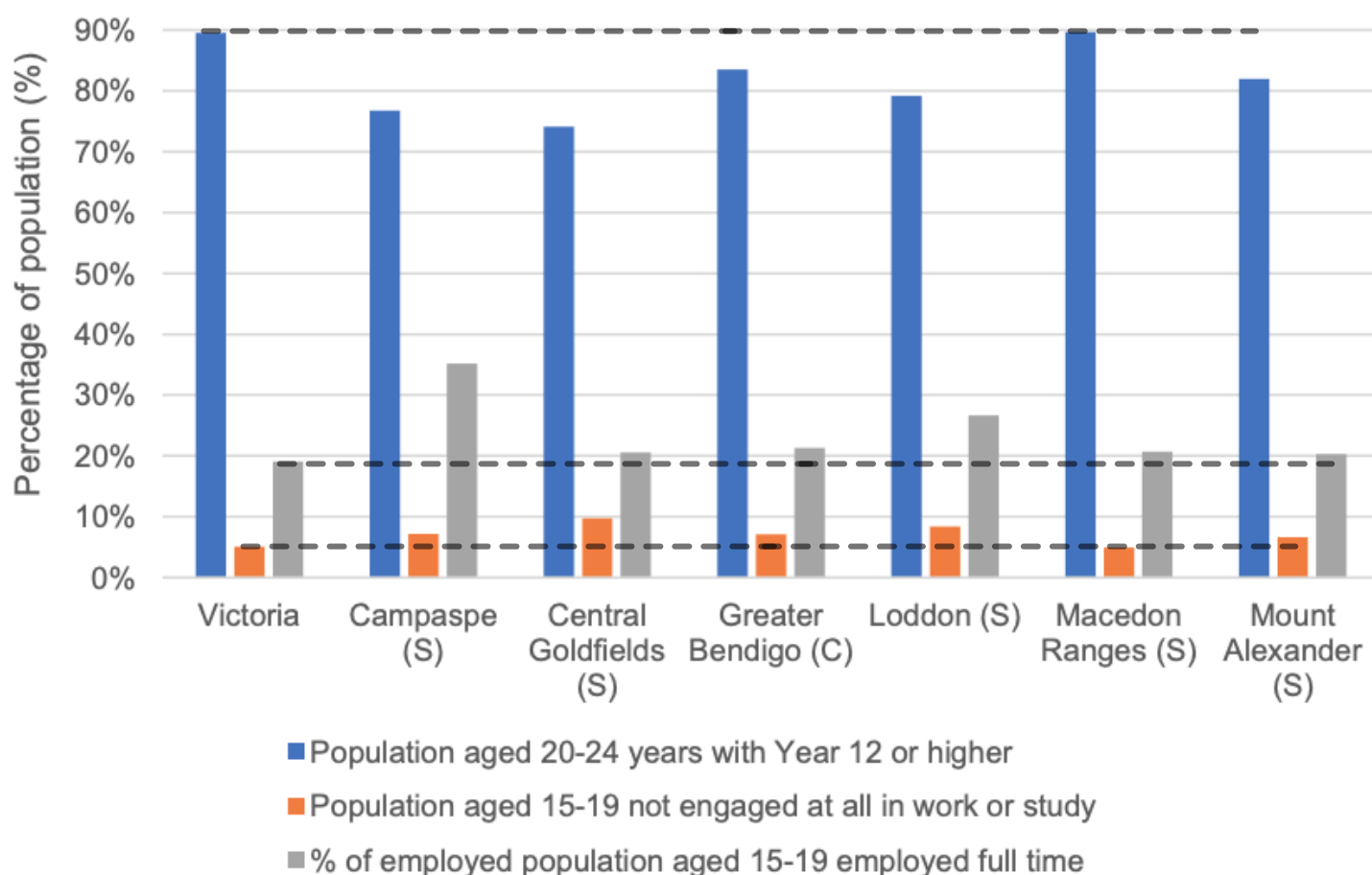
Victorian Department of Education & Training data from their On Track reports highlights the situation that has the Loddon Campaspe region with the highest level of year 12 non-completers in the state.

11.4%
(2,900+)

OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN
LODDON CAMPASPE WERE
**NEITHER EARNING NOR
LEARNING** IN 2016.

**SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN
THE STATE AVERAGE OF**

8.6%



Data in this section of the report was provided by the Victoria State Government's Department for Education and Training, specifically that of its On Track reports and The State of Victoria's Children Report. This data and research is invaluable in providing us with a clear picture of the state of both education and disengagement in education by young people in the Loddon Campaspe region including the following:

- In 2018 one in five (or 1,925) school leavers from Loddon Campaspe left without a year 12 or equivalent qualification.
- In 2016 11.4% (2,900+) of young people on Loddon Campaspe were neither earning or learning.
- The graph on the bottom of page 12 shows us that in 2016 of the six local government areas that form the Loddon Campaspe region only Macedon Ranges Shire meets the Victorian state average of 20-24 year olds having completed year 12 of higher qualification, with Central Goldfields having the largest deficit being more than 15% under the state average.

The State Of Victoria's Children Report

The table of the below highlights that on those young people who completed year 12 or equivalent in 2016:

- Loddon Shire and Macedon Ranges Shire recorded the highest percentage (65%+) of young people continue in to further education or training.
- Campaspe Shire recorded the highest percentage (15%) of young people taking up an apprenticeship or traineeship.
- Mt Alexander Shire had the highest percentage (58.8%) not continue in further education or training, but also the highest percentage (45%) of those who went to employment.
- Central Goldfields Shire recorded the highest percentage (3.9%) of young people completing year 12 or equivalent in 2016 who were not in either the labour force, or moving on to education or training.

DESTINATIONS OF 2016 YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT COMPLETERS LODDON CAMPASPE (%)

	Campaspe Shire	Central Goldfields Shire	City of Greater Bendigo	Loddon Shire	Macedon Ranges Shire	Mt Alexander Shire	Loddon Campaspe Region	Victoria
In further education or training	58.1	60.5	60.2	66.7	67.9	41.2	59.1	74.9
Bachelors degree	32	40.8	39.5	50	41.8	23.5	38	53.8
Certificates/ Diplomas	11	9.2	10.5	8.3	15.7	11.8	11.1	12.9
Apprentice/ Trainee	15.1	10.5	10.3	8.3	10.4	5.9	10.1	8.1
Not continuing in further education or training	41.0	39.5	39.8	33.3	31.7	58.8	40.7	25.1
Employed	33.7	28.9	31.9	25	26.5	45.1	31.9	19.5
Looking for work	7.0	6.6	6.7	8.3	4.0	13.7	7.7	4.6
Not in the labour force, education or training	1.2	3.9	1.3	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.1	1

Campaspe Shire

Snapshot

Campaspe Shire is 180 km north of Melbourne and encompasses the service centres of Echuca, Kyabram, Rushworth, Rochester and Tongala and townships including Gunbower, Strathallan, Stanhope, Bamawm, Ballendella, Whroo, Patho, Wyuna, Lockington, Toolleen and Torrumbarry.

According to the **Campaspe Shire Council's website**, the shire is home to **6,889 people aged between 12 and 25 years**, which is equates to almost one in five residents being a young person.

According to the 2016 census approximately 40% of Campaspe's young people living in or near Echuca with another 20% living in or near Kyabram. The other 40% live either in or near smaller towns across the 4,526 (m2) of country that is Campaspe Shire.

There are eight secondary schools in Campaspe:

- Echuca College
- St Joseph's College Echuca
- Echuca Specialist School
- River City Christian College
- Rochester Secondary College
- Kyabram P-12 College
- St Augustine's College Kyabram
- Rushworth P-12 College

Post secondary education options may be limited in Campaspe with the shire having no university campus, however it does have a TAFE campus and hosts Learn Locals and other registered training providers.

Of concern is that in the 2016 Census 497 youth were identified as disengaged (aged 15-24 and not employed or in education) in the shire.

Voice of Our Youth Consultation in Campaspe Shire



100 young people attended a youth focus group



352 young people took our online survey



2,421 young people did the postcard activity

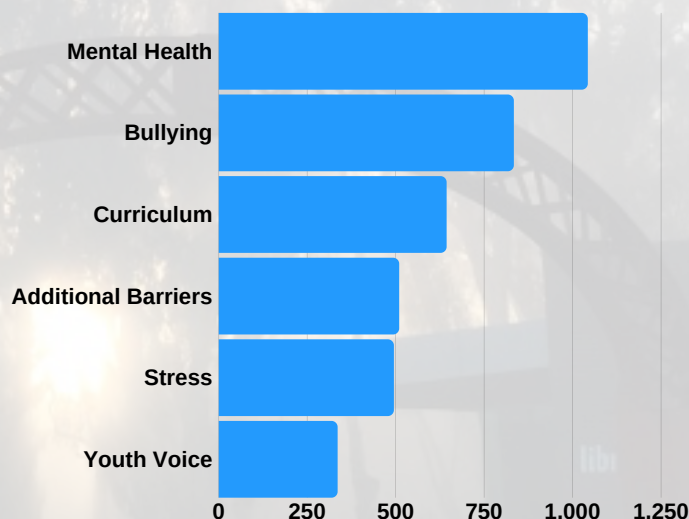


We captured **3,829** individual statements of need or ideas for action...



...and we also recorded **23,548** seconds of young people talking about what matters most to them.

Topic by number of mentions (Campaspe Shire)



Campaspe Shire

Snapshot

Youth advocates and stakeholders in the Campaspe Shire hold a number of concerns for their young people, including: issues around vulnerability, poverty and the effects of trauma; poor outcomes for early school leavers and students at risk; a decline in the share of students going on to further education; Indigenous student engagement and attainment; youth health, drug and alcohol use.

In 2015 youth research conducted jointly by the Shire of Campaspe and CCLLEN obtained input from 876 young people. The Youth Research survey identified the challenges and issues that young people encountered:

- Not keeping up with school work was the biggest issue of concern (48%) for all the young people who completed the survey
- Boredom/having nothing to do was the second highest overall concern (37%)
- Bullying, in its various forms, was amongst the top ten overall concerns
- 26% of respondents were planning to leave the area after completing school.

Post Secondary School

Data from 2016 shows that post secondary school less young people from Campaspe go on to study at university as compared to the state average, but rates of apprenticeships and traineeships in Campaspe are almost double that of the state average.

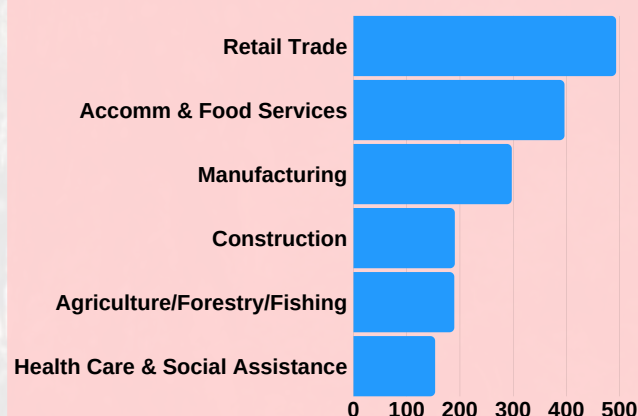
Strong youth employment industries in the shire including construction, retail, food services and manufacturing support this higher rate of apprenticeships and traineeships as well as boosting numbers of young people looking to exit school straight in to the labor force in Campaspe (+15% vs the state average).

DESTINATIONS OF 2016 YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT COMPLETERS CAMPASPE (%)

	Campaspe Shire	Victoria
In further education or training	58.1	74.9
Bachelors degree	32	53.8
Certificates/ Diplomas	11	12.9
Apprentice/ Trainee	15.1	8.1
Not continuing in further education or training	40.7	25.1
Employed	33.7	19.5
Looking for work	7.0	4.6
Not in the labour force, education or training	1.2	1

The table above shows a large variation between Campaspe Shire and the state averages in regards to young people going on to further education & training (-16.8%) and employment (+14.2%) or job seeking (+2.4%) from 2016.

Youth Employment Industries by the numbers (2016)



The table above shows the industry and employment of young people (15-24) for 2016 in Campaspe with retail trade and accommodation & food services employing the greatest number of young people.

Campaspe Shire

Snapshot

Findings from the Voice of Our Youth Consultation Project as they relate specifically to the Campaspe Shire, where the majority of consultation took place, including hearing directly from students from every secondary school in the region, were for the most part consistent with the data we obtained from across the Loddon Campaspe region as a whole.

The highest variance however was observed in the area of curriculum, where young people in the **Campaspe shire mentioned curriculum approximately 30% more** often than young people from elsewhere in the region. If we look closer in to the data we can see that young people in Campaspe Shire are in general more concerned about two areas of curriculum:

1) the need for more resourcing, supports and options for hands on learning and practical projected based program such as VCAL and VET.

"More hands on stuff in class and no book work because hands on stuff is more fun and you can learn more stuff."

2) the lack of subject options they have to choose from in their school.

"Have more classes for people to choose from so they can study what they want."

Given the data on the previous page showing a high level of movement from school to traineeships and apprenticeships, as well as strong youth employment numbers in industries such as retail trade, construction, hospitality and manufacturing, it is not surprising that young people are wanting a strong focus on vocational education and applied learning.

There are many great programs already operating within schools in the shire, of note is the VCAL class at Kyabram P-12 as well as the work of Hands on Learning Australia in most secondary schools. However the young people we heard from are calling for a more rigorous approach to hands on learning not just at years 10 to 12, but also earlier on when student cant access the VCAL or VET programs.

The other notable variance that was observed related to **the topic of stress, which whilst still of concern was on average mentioned less by young people from Campaspe Shire** compared to other shires. Whilst it is hard to ascertain with any accuracy why this is the case from just the data, having visited schools in every town in Campaspe and worked with the teachers and support staff across the shire, we believe it potentially could be because of the stronger connection/relationship between school staff and students across the board due to smaller enrolment numbers in schools as compared to those in the City of Greater Bendigo.

Young people we spoke to in Campaspe Shire were benefiting from alternative education programs being offered in both Echuca and Kyabram for example. **There is a need however for more investment in providing a larger footprint for alternative education programs in Campaspe Shire** so a larger cohort of young people to access it within the shire rather than having to travel outside of the area. See pages 29-30 of this report for addition information on such programs.

City of Greater Bendigo

Snapshot

Covering over 3,000 square kilometres of Central Victoria, the City of Greater Bendigo is home to over 110,000 people and includes not just Bendigo and surrounds, but also the communities of Heathcote, Elmore, Goornong, Marong, Redesdale and Axedale.

In 2016 16.9% of Greater Bendigo residents were young people aged 12 to 24 years, with 2,880 of these 18,723 young people living in rural areas.

According to the Victorian State Government's Bendigo Education Plan:

In 2017, approximately 3365 students were enrolled in the four government junior secondary schools across Bendigo. A further 1762 students (approximately) were enrolled at Bendigo Senior Secondary College.

There are also two specialist schools that cater to students with additional needs. Bendigo also has a TAFE, a university and a range of flexible learning options for young people who are finding it hard to remain engaged at school... including Flexible Learning Options (FLO) centre, NETschool, Reconnect and Learn Local programs.

According to City of Greater Bendigo's Youth Strategy 2017 - 2021 Youth Issues Profile young people have identified coping with stress, school and study issues, body image, education, and employment as issues of personal concern.

They also identify other issues they believe are of concern to the local community such as crime and safety, mental health and discrimination.



58 young people attended a youth focus group



292 young people took our online survey



1,842 young people did the postcard activity

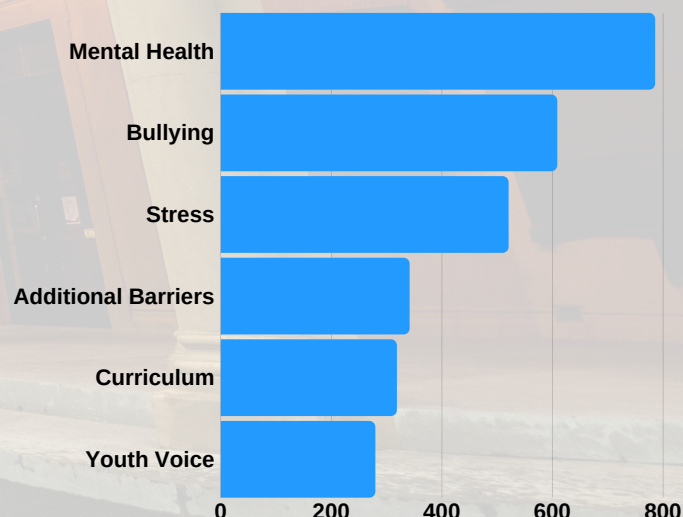


We captured **3,010** individual statements of need or ideas for action...



...and we also recorded **16,942** seconds of young people talking about what matters most to them.

Topic by number of mentions (City of Greater Bendigo)



City of Greater Bendigo Snapshot

According to the Victorian State Government's Bendigo Education Plan:

Approximately 23 per cent of Year 12 or equivalent completers who exited school in 2015 in the City of Greater Bendigo were not engaged in education or training in 2016.

In Bendigo, only 81.1 per cent of 20–24 year olds have completed a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared to 86.5 per cent for the state average.

A high variance between the state average was also recorded in the 2016 year 12 completers who went on to study a bachelors degree, with Greater Bendigo recording 14.3% less (as shown in the adjacent table) despite having a university campus in its shire.

According to the City of Greater Bendigo it is the third largest economy based in Victoria. Youth employment industry profile for Greater Bendigo, which is similar to that of Campaspe Shire, features a strong presence in the retail trade and accommodation and food services industries.

In 2016 City of Greater Bendigo had a youth unemployment rate of 14% with 1,318 young people aged 15-24 living within the City of Greater Bendigo.

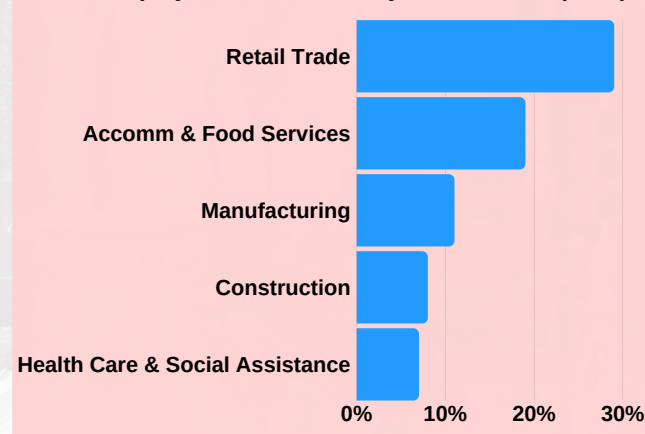
In 2019 a Brotherhood of St Laurence report into Australia's youth unemployment hotspots identified the Bendigo region as having Victoria's highest youth unemployment rate of 18.3% recorded in 2018. The youth unemployment rate has reduced since it spiked, falling to 13.6% in March 2019. An ABS spokesperson was quoted as saying, "Due to the smaller sample sizes for regional areas, estimates can be more volatile from month to month, particularly when broken down by age and sex."

DESTINATIONS OF 2016 YEAR 12 OR EQUIVALENT COMPLETERS CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO (%)

	City of Greater Bendigo	Victoria
In further education or training	60.2	74.9
Bachelors degree	39.5	53.8
Certificates/ Diplomas	10.5	12.9
Apprentice/ Trainee	10.2	8.2
Not continuing in further education or training	39.8	25.1
Employed	31.9	19.5
Looking for work	6.6	4.6
Not in the labour force, education or training	1.3	1

The table above shows a large variation between Greater Bendigo and the state averages in regards to young people going on to further education & training (-14.7%) and employment (+12.4%) or job seeking (+2%) from 2016.

Youth Employment Industries by the numbers (2016)



The table above shows the industry and employment of young people (15-24) for 2016 in Greater Bendigo with retail trade and accommodation & food services employing the greatest number of young people.

City of Greater Bendigo

Snapshot

As with Campaspe Shire, findings from the Voice of Our Youth Consultation Project as they relate specifically to the City of Greater Bendigo were for the most part consistent with the data we obtained from across the Loddon Campaspe region.

Data provided by our consultation shows that for young people within the City of Greater Bendigo, which was the second largest area of youth engagement for this project, it is the issues of mental health, bullying and stress that young people are struggling with the most in relation to their education.

The *Topics by number of mentions* graphs on pages 15 & 18 of this report show that the top six of the most popular topics for both LGAs were almost identical. The ranking of topics with mental health and bullying being listed first and second respectively for both. The only difference in the order the top six topics were ranked was that for Greater Bendigo the topic of stress was ranked in third highest and curriculum in fifth, whereas Campaspe had curriculum in third and stress at fifth.

Stress was a standout topic with one in eight comments we heard from young people in the City of Greater Bendigo relating to stress. Inline with the broader consultation the topic of stress was intrinsically linked with other issues such as mental health, exams, testing, homework and relationships. Here is how young people put it:

"I have friends who suffer anxiety/depression, and one who suffers from both autism and anxiety... their attendance is much lower than average due to stress..."

"The stress of school work, exams and assignments is hard enough on a young person's mind even when you don't consider problems with friends and mental health issues like depression and anxiety."

"Less pressure with things such as tests which can be very stressful and can lead to things such as anxiety and low self esteem."

Also of note, the data shows that curriculum was not as significant an issue for young people in Greater Bendigo compared to the Shire of Campaspe. This could be due to the presence of NETschool, SEDA, a VCAL offering at Bendigo TAFE and Flexible Learning Options as a cluster alternative education centres offered from Bendigo well beyond those available to other young people in the Loddon Campaspe region. Additionally, Greater Bendigo secondary schools have generally larger enrolments and greater subject offerings than most other schools in the region, and also have the single senior campus for year 11 & 12 in Bendigo Senior Secondary School.

As identified by young people during our consultation who had mixed reviews of the 'super school', the presence of this single senior campus for Bendigo does present an additional transition point for students, at arguably the worst time in their schooling life as they enter their final years of VCE, VCAL or VET. So whilst a single senior campus does present more options in regards to curriculum, it remains unclear as to what impact it might have on students' mental health and stress levels to have an additional transition so late in their secondary education.

Voice of Our Youth on Mental Health

According to Mental Health First Aid Australia 75% of young people in Australia will be impacted by poor mental health before they turn 25. This has the potential to have a profound impact on a student's wellbeing and engagement in school.

Mental health is understood by young people to be a big issue in their eyes with 36% of the 25,156 young people aged 15-19 surveyed by Mission Australia in 2019, listing mental health as the most important issue to young Australians today.

Mental Health was the number one issue raised by young people across all engagement methods during the six month Voice of Our Youth consultation project. Students told us about the difficulty of navigating secondary school with a mental illness and what they perceive as a lack of understanding or support from their peers and teachers leaving them feeling isolated and without access to appropriate support services.

"I have dealt with harassment, bullying and having no support with my severe depression and anxiety... sometimes it feels like nobody loves me..."

"Almost my entire school experience I just felt like I was drowning... getting in to high school and dealing with my own mental health issues I felt like I sunk deeper and deeper."

Young people we heard from are calling for:

1. More mental health education and training for both teachers and students,
2. Mental health education to be imbedded more fully into the curriculum,
3. Increased supports and reduction in stigmas surrounding mental health in schools, as well as in the broader community.

"Focus more on mental health and sexuality in class and teachers being more open minded for students."

"Improve connection with student/teachers to assist with mental health supports and to help provide better access to support services."

"Train all teachers in Mental Health First Aid so that they know how to support those in minority groups like the LGBTQI+ community."

"Make sure there are monthly mental health checkins for everyone and make sure you encourage students to check on their peers every once in a while."

Recommendations for Mental Health

Voice of Our Youth project would like to acknowledge the fantastic projects, initiatives and organisation that currently exist in the Loddon Campaspe region to support our young people in relation to their mental health, and recognise that there are significant steps being made to increase this support and service provision. For example in the Shire of Campaspe:

- Qualified mental health practitioners have commenced working in some schools as a part of the commitment from the State Government that every Victorian Government secondary school campus will have a suitably qualified mental health practitioner by 2022.
- A new headspace centre will be established in Echuca in 2020.
- The development and rollout of a Stop Mental Illness Stigma Charter by the Murray Private Health Network (PHN)



Young people we heard from throughout the VOOY project recognised the importance and benefit of both new and existing services and supports, but they told us again and again that we need to be doing more to support our young people as they navigate their way through school and into the workforce. In line with the wishes of the young people we heard from as well as from experts in the mental health field, this report calls for:

Further investment to be made in youth mental health prevention and intervention programs, from all levels of government to every school and community.

At a community or regional level this report recommends further investment through the rollout and continued support of **evidence-based, community driven youth mental health programs** such as the award winning Life4Life program. **Life4life** is an innovative, evidence-based, local community driven response to youth mental illness that was initially developed by Macedon Ranges Shire Council and now operates in multiple shires throughout Victoria. Life4Life works in schools and across communities to:

- Increase the mental health knowledge of secondary school aged young people, teachers, parents and community members;
- Reduce barriers to seeking help for emerging or current mental health issues in young people and increase awareness of local professional help;
- Decrease stigma and reduce youth suicide in rural communities.

At a school level this report recommends further investment in the capacity development of both school staff members, teachers, parents and students through the provision of additional training and education on youth mental health\illness.

A specific example of this would be the provision of training provided by Mental Health First Aid Australia - a national not-for-profit health promotion charity focused on mental health training and research. Two day trainings for adults working with young people, as well as shorter targeted education programs for for years 7-9 and year 10-12 students are conducted by accredited Mental Health First Aid instructors.

Voice of Our Youth

on Bullying

Bullying is currently a big issue for young people and the education sector. In 2019 Mission Australia surveyed 25,126 young people aged 15-19 in Australia. It found that more than one in five young people had experienced bullying in the previous year, with 80% of those young people experiencing bullying in an educational setting.

Bullying was the most common response we heard from young people when we asked them what makes it harder for you or others to attend school? Young people described how they **“woke up everyday scared to come to school because of bullying”**, and how they were sick of **“being bullied and no one being able to do anything about it”**.

Throughout our consultation when we heard from young people who had previously struggled attending school; It was the issue of bullying that was most commonly attributed as a factor in their decision to not attend school in the past.

“Year 8 is when it got really rough cos I started getting bullied heaps ... I left school because I got randomly bashed for no reason, so I left school for like a year.”

“I moved schools a lot and fell into the wrong crowd and got bullied heaps but I got no support at all. So for the rest of term two I just stayed at home.”

“Primary school was a blast, then I hit year 7 and started getting bullied, got bashed and then I left school.”

Young people who have suffered from bullying in the past report that they believe there is a massive divide between what a school says they do to address bullying and what they actually do when it happens and are wanting:

1. Real-time action from schools to appropriately address the gap between school's policy and practice when it comes to bullying,
2. An independent statewide review of all schools and how they deal with bullying,
3. Better resourcing at the state level to champion best practice and support the uptake of effective anti-bullying programs.

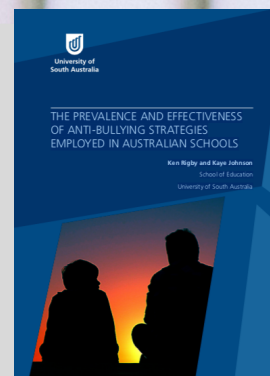
“Do something about bullying when it's actually happens instead of just informing us on the topic.”

“I want to see teachers and students work together to tackle the 'big' issues like bullying and mental health.”

“I want to see more of a movement against bullying in our schools.”

Recommendations for Bullying

This report endorses the **recommendations** 1-12 listed on page 79 of a report by Ken Rigby and Kaye Johnson titled, '*The Prevalence and effectiveness of anti-bullying strategies employed in Australian Schools*', published by the School of Education, University of South Australia, 2016; as follow:



Enable all members of the school community to become familiar with the school anti-bullying policy.

1. Promote greater community awareness to address bullying in schools.
2. Disseminate and discuss information relating to school anti-bullying policies more fully with students and parents.
3. Inform parents about what the school is doing and how incidents involving their children are being handled.

Seek out and act on student feedback on the helpfulness of actions taken by the school in addressing bullying.

4. Identify student perspectives on what is considered most helpful in reducing bullying.
5. Prioritise classroom instruction and activities that are seen by students as particularly helpful, such as instruction on the appropriate use of cyber technology and opportunities to meet and discuss relevant issues in groups.
6. Provide students with the opportunity to evaluate bullying interventions as applied by the school.

Pay particular attention to students who are most vulnerable to being bullied.

7. Recognise and offer support to those students against whom there is social prejudice, as in bullying that is related to race, disability, obesity, homophobia and material deprivation.
8. Identify and assist students who lack the personal capacity to cope effectively with aggressive behaviour of others.

Engage more effectively with students who are being bullied and require help from the school.

9. Inform students and parents of the help that is available from the school in dealing with cases of bullying.
10. Encourage more bullied students to avail themselves of assistance from the school.

Provide more anti-bullying professional learning for both pre-service and practising teachers.

11. Increase evidence-based knowledge of bullying through improved pre-service education and in- service professional learning.
12. Develop the capacity of school staff to apply bullying interventions as part of ongoing professional learning.

Voice of Our Youth

on Stress

The top two issues of personal concern to young people in Australia as identified in [Mission Australia's Annual Youth Survey](#) for the last three years have been:

1. Coping with stress, and 2. School or study problems.

Stress is without question a major concern for our young people with expectations of others, constant testing, quantity of homework and the Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) system all consistently being raised throughout our consultation.

According to [Australian Learning Lecture Position Paper Beyond ATAR](#), "*Schools, educators, systems have been valiantly trying to move in the right direction. But as long as the markers of success reinforce old standards, the degree of change will continue to be limited and efforts counterproductive* (2019, p.4)."

The statements below from young people from across the Loddon Campaspe region are reflective of what we heard throughout the consultation when young people talked to us about the stress that comes from school:

"The stress of school work, exams and assignments is hard on a young person [and] can play a large part in a person's health, self image and self worth."

"I struggle a lot with the education so eventually I dropped out because I was scared I wasn't smart enough. Being shown you're not up to standards is scary, so I ditched school and stopped educating myself completely."

"I think it's ridiculous that kids are ranked in VCE and that is what it's all about. If I don't get this score then that's me done, that's my career done for life."

"In my opinion, the stress we are sometimes put under to finish tasks and pass exams would be a reason why kids don't want to go to school."

"I feel like everything I do here is a test. They don't treat me like a person... I am just a grade."

"Make our future less reliant on our ATAR. Provide opportunities for students of all abilities."

"Reduce homework. If kids are serious about their education they should be able to get their work done in class. Home time should be time for them to work on themselves because teenagers need to be able to get out and play."

"No homework = No stress."

Recommendations for Stress

Young people we heard from had a wonderful insight in to their own experience of stress and anxiety and equally had wonderful recommendations for how school related stress could be reduced at a school level including the following statements:

"Classes are meant for learning but can become stressful very quickly. Having time for a rest and for a break between work and classes is essential for young minds. I think that more breaks or longer breaks would help with making school better."

"More awareness by teachers or more effort into teaching time management and stress management would improve the mental health of students and leave them with very important life skills."

"Making it so all our class SACS and exams are not piled into one or two days so we have more time to prepare and it will be less stressful."

"Have once a week a class focused on activities that help reduce stress and improve wellbeing."

"Cut down the amount of homework! Even if you don't finish the work in a school you shouldn't have to do it at home in your time!"

"Schools to have a safe comfortable place for students who are stress/anxious."

Young people are also **calling for an end to ranking of students with an ATAR score** because of the stress and anxiety it causes students who are being ranked by academic ability and labelled with a number that "was designed as a tool to facilitate university admissions, but has taken on a life of its own, becoming a goal in itself" - The Mitchell Institute's paper: Crunching the number

Australia is the only country to rank students against each other on a scale from 0-100 and this report echos the voice of our young people in calling to stop ranking students. This system, coupled with the expectation of others, is a recipe for stress:

"Pressure to achieve high scores is no doubt fuelled by the strong emphasis placed on ATAR, which sees years of schooling culminating in a single ranking against peers. While pressure to perform well in exams is a universal issue, the Australian practice of placing the full range of students across one ranking may intensify the underlying stress." - The Mitchell Institute's paper: Crunching the number

To assist in the reduction of stress in young people this report also recommends:

- Supporting local student investigation to find a better, less stressful way to manage this process and this transition point for and with young people;
- Supporting local student action/advocacy in lobbying for the removal of the ATAR system.

Voice of Our Youth on Curriculum

Curriculum related topics were raised by young people more than 1,000 times during our consultation. Curriculum as a topic had a big spike in Campaspe Shire where it was mentioned 643 times with young people telling us they wanted more subject options and flexibility, more relevant and applicable **'real life education'** and a stronger focus on hands on learning across all year levels.

"Provide the broadest range of subjects possible to give students endless opportunities."

"Have more classes relevant to helping a student get prepared for life in the real world."

We also heard young people asking for new approaches to their education. For more fun in the classroom. For better ways of engaging all students and for recognition of different learning styles and needs. But at the heart of the curriculum issue for many of the young people we spoke to was the need for **greater resourcing and supports for hands on learning programs in schools** such as the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Vocational Education and Training (VET). It was widely acknowledged that without VCAL or VET many of these young people would not have been engaged in formal education.

"This VCAL program is better than any VCE program I know of. It is the best thing I have done... They accept me for who I am. I get treated like an adult. It's real life learning. Anything is possible."

Hands on learning and real life skills are what young people believe are the biggest items missing from the curriculum at present. Unfortunately it would seem for many young people who are disengaged from school **VCAL or VET either doesn't come early enough** for them or due to the negative stigma surrounding VCAL and VET young people are discouraged from these pathways.

Young people we spoke to were calling for decision makers to:

1. Expand VCAL & VET and other hands on learning opportunities
2. Reduce stigma surrounding VCAL & VET
3. Provide more choice in subject selection
4. Provide more real world education

"Give students more choice by making a VCAL learning stream for years 7-10."

"Get rid of the stigma around VCAL. At my age the nickname for VCAL students is Veggies. People see them as the dumb kids ... the dropouts or druggies."

"Give us a variety of subject choices relevant to what we want to be."

"I would love to increase the opportunity to provide more resources to VCAL because I think that it has such potential as it helps students gain life skills and work experience whilst they are still at school."

Recommendations for Curriculum

According to the Grattan Institute report 'Towards an adaptive education system in Australia' by Peter Goss from 2017: ***"Australia's school education system is not fit for purpose, and we need to rethink the way we teach students, support teachers and run schools."***

The sentiments of Peter Goss can be heard in the voices of many of our young people in the Loddon Campaspe region who want a major change in the way they are educated.

At the time of this report being developed the Victorian Government is '*undertaking a major review of VCAL and vocational education and training (VET) delivered to school students to ensure that all Victorian secondary school students have access to high-quality vocational and applied learning options*'. This report would like to provide the following recommendations to this review:

1. That we move to a single-certificate framework in Victoria (VCA/VET/VCAL) to reduce the current high levels of stigma towards VCAL and VET programs and increase up-take of vocational and applied learning options.
2. That education options under a single-certificate are offered with more flexibility and permeability than the current siloing of students by VCE, VCAL or VET provides.
3. That additional resourcing and supports are provided to existing VCAL and VET programs in Victorian schools, allowing for better provision of service and expansion of programs/offerings to support existing students and engage new students.
4. That VCAL/VET Feeder streams are created and offered for year 7 to 9 students to provide a hands on learning environment for younger students, to allow them to experience vocational and applied learning earlier, hopefully keeping them engaged in education for longer.
5. That young people, including current and past Victorian secondary school students are engaged in the decision-making process of the current review inline with the principles of human centred design as well as co-design.

Whilst the systemic change needed to make the school education system fit for purpose must be supported at the federal and state levels, this report also looks to promote actions that can be adopted locally that are achievable, scaleable and can help lead the change young people are calling for:

- The establishment of a region-wide youth-led review of the national curriculum and its application in schools to provide its own evidence based report and findings for broader consideration.
- Increase in hands on learning and real world learning for years 7-10 students through involvement of external agencies or resources such as Hands On Learning Australia or Big Picture Education.
- Given the current Covid-19 outbreak necessitating a shift to online learning/teaching as school close, this report also recommends the increased access of online course offerings from other schools or institutions, as well as the provision of student supports for increased uptake where applicable, to increase study options and subject choice for all students.

Voice of Our Youth on Disengagement

Listening to young people speak about their experience in and out of the education system one thing became quite apparent. That was that there isn't just one thing preventing young people from engaging in education. In fact there is a long list of things that can and do make it harder for young people to attend school and everyone's experience is unique to them. Common elements we heard throughout our consultation however were young people talking about the impact of poor health and mental illness, financial hardship, lack of motivation and exhaustion, bullying, violence, trauma, family issues, stress, boredom, feeling of isolation or not fitting in at school and just not seeing the point of school.

Any of the factors listed above can trigger a young person to disengage with the education system, though anecdotally it is more often the presence of multiple factors at once that overwhelms the young person to disengage with school. Disengagement or detachment from schooling is a significant issue with a significant flow on throughout the Loddon Campaspe region. For example the Campaspe Shire alone identified that 497 young people aged 15-24 in its Shire were not employed or in education according to the 2016 Census. The Bendigo region also recently gained some unwanted notoriety being listed as having the highest youth unemployment rate in the state at 18.3%.

It is difficult to share direct quotes from young people that represent more than just that individual's experience, but we have tried to select those that show the diversity of issues impacting young peoples engagement with education. Here is what some young people said:

"Financial distress, living in a remote area and threats for physical and emotional safety."

"Sometimes things at home make you have a hard day at school, even if you try to forget."

"Lack of family support. personal mental and physical issues or those of friends and family and difficulty with transport to and from school."

"Bullying, or family matters like illness, transportation, finances or even just motivation."

"It's hard when you're having trouble at home, such as violence or a sick loved one, or if you struggle in the school environment, caused by bullying or teachers who don't understand."

"Divorce, drugs, family problems, money and more."

"Sometimes it's hard to attend school because it feels as if you are drowning in school work and homework."

"It's harder to attend school because of the bullying. It makes me not want to get out of bed because what if I don't look the best and get bullied because of it."

Recommendations for Disengagement

Despite the complexity of factors that can result in students disengaging or detaching from the education system, there are a number of alternative education programs/models that in addition to recommendations in other sections of this report, we recommend warrant further investigation. To support students at risk of disengaging or re-engaging after a period of disengagement throughout the Loddon Campaspe region it is clear that more alternative education centres/models need to be established to **provided young people with an option between mainstream schooling or no schooling at all**. Common to each of the following programs are the key elements of:

- Individual learning plans with a person centred approach,
- Ongoing connection to a mentor or similar,
- Enquiry/project based learning.

Alternative Education Centres, also known as **Flexible Learning Options (FLOs)**, provide casework support and individualised learning programs for high school students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. **NETschool Bendigo** and **Indie School in Echuca and Kyabram** are great example of what can be achieved by engaging young students firstly as a person and then as a student in an alternative education setting. The community of students and active culture of not just learning but of support is something that others could and should model their alternative education practices off.

Save the Children's Out Teach Mobile Education program (currently operating out of Shepparton Vic) supports young people by helping them positively re-engage with their education. They work with young people aged 12 to 18 to offer one-on-one teaching support that comes to them. A specialist educator designs and implements an individual education plan for each student. The plans build on the strengths of each student, and work towards their personal goals. They use a van as a mobile classroom, where students can learn in outdoor and informal settings – especially effective for students who struggle to learn in traditional classrooms. Educators also work closely with youth workers to ensure the emotional and psychological needs of students are addressed so they can focus on their education and their future.

The SEDA College (campus in Bendigo Vic) is an independent, co-educational year 11 and year 12 school empowering students through their passion for sport. The SEDA model places student interest at the forefront of their senior secondary education, alongside a practical connection to industry and an individual approach to teaching and learning. Teachers work with each student to develop their confidence as learners. Amongst other skills, their staff are specifically recruited for their capacity to build healthy and respectful relationships with students and develop skills for life. SEDA College delivers VCAL certification using an applied learning pedagogy where hands-on learning happens both inside and outside of the classroom. Through this applied learning model, students have a deeper connection to their education, resulting in enhanced engagement levels.

Hands on Learning Australia and **Big Picture Education Australia** are two providers also worth examining that support existing schools to engage students through hands on and real world learning.

Recommendations for Youth Voice

Voice of Our Youth was been a major youth voice initiative in the Loddon Campaspe region in the second half of 2019. Young people have shown to us that they are keen to have a voice on what matters to them. This section of the report offers recommendations to educators, administrators and leadership staff working in schools across the Loddon Campaspe region, in addition to the previous recommendations sections, focused solely on **the importance of engaging young people as champions of their own education and life.**

Young people are uniquely placed to advocate on the issues and policies that impact them, but so often remain an afterthought or simply an end user. When we asked students about the one thing they would change if they were a principal for a day it was free food, no homework, a less strict uniform policy and less or no school that were the most popular suggestions for a better school experience.

Young people are passionate about these issues. They might seem small or insignificant to adults at first glance, but there are complex underlying issues behind each of these ideas that warrant unpacking and workshoping of new ways of working through a human centred design framework for example.

If nothing else, **we urge all schools to engage with their students in real dialogue on the topics of uniform and bullying policies.** These are the two topics where the appears to be the greatest divide between rhetoric and reality, and have high levels of resentment from students towards teachers just simply not understanding students perspective or experience in relation to these policies.

There are so many schools, educators and administrators who do student voice really well and who see the power of giving young people a real voice in how they are engaged at school. For those who aren't as skilled in this area the [Victorian Student Representative Council](#) and [The Youth Affairs Council or Victoria](#) both have excellent resources such as YACVic's [YERP website](#) and VicSRC's [Teach the Teacher](#) program for schools.

For more resources and supports check out the [Voice of Our Youth website](#).

"Actually listen to what young people say. Treat us with respect. Then work out how you and other teachers can work with students as equals".

TEACH THE TEACHER



Creating positive
communities
through student-led
conversation

Concluding statement

It has been an absolute privilege and honour to have spent the best part of a year working on the Voice of Our Youth Youth Consultation Project. To have heard from over 5,000 young people. To have travelled extensively through the Loddon Campaspe region. To have visited school and sat down with their students for real, honest and at times raw conversations about their lived experience of secondary school education. As co-facilitators of this consultation project what has really stuck with us is:

- The eagerness of young people have an active voice in decision making, especially on decisions that impact them directly, and their innate ability to speak up on issues that matter most to them.
- Bullying is a serious issue that impacts the wellbeing, safety and mental health of many young people in our schools, and although schools may think they are adequately addressing it young people we spoke to tell us different. We encourage all schools to engage with their students in a human centred design process to reevaluate their anti-bullying policy and the application of it.
- Stress is a major issue for young people today and unfortunately there are many aspects to the school environment/system that hinder rather than help young people destress. More needs to be done to help young people thrive and not just survive. This means moving on from our ATAR ranking system for starters. Giving students less or no homework. Rethinking the way we teach.
- VCAL and VET are hands down the best way to engage a large cohort of students who learn better in a hands on learning environment. The number of young people who told us that if it wasn't for VCAL they wouldn't be a school is surely the best indicator of the programs importance within the broader education ecosystem but the stigma attached to it is brutally unfair and needs to stop.
- This might not be okay to say out loud, but relative to how much the world has changed over the last 20+ years since we were in secondary school, our impression is that not a lot has changed in the education system, in the way we expect students to learn, the way we structure their education.

This report covers off on a lot of what we heard young people speak up about. It tries where possible to let the voice of young people speak for themselves. It breaks apart and separates the issues that young people told us they were facing, to provide commentary and analysis of these issues in isolation. But in reality, in the real world and the lives of young people, these issues are not so easily siloed. Most can't be separated. They are complex, intertwined and at times unrelenting. But there is hope. There is potential for change. There is a world full of possibilities, of supports and of learning waiting for us all just around the corner.

We hold great respect and appreciation for the way the young people we spoke with accepted us in to their space, chose to show up to the session and without coercion shared with us both their darkest truths and their greatest hopes in regards to their education. To these young people we say a massive thank you. You are amazing. You are warriors. You are perfect just the way you are!

Sincerely,

Andy Bell, Facilitator - Voice of Our Youth