



Central Highlands  
Children & Youth  
Area Partnership

## “Straight Up”

The Lived Experience  
of Central Highlands Youth

August 2015

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# 1

## Introduction

The partners for this project were the Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership Steering Group and Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network. In addition, a range of local agencies assisted by referring young people who were willing to participate in this project.

### 1.1 CHCYAP

The Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership (CHCYAP) brings together local, state and commonwealth government; community and health services; police; education and training providers; and the broader community to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people from birth to eighteen years. A particular focus of the CHCYAP is to work to improve the way government agencies and community organisations work together to support children and young people in the community and help them achieve the life they want to live.

The CHCYAP covers the local government areas of Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Moorabool and Pyrenees. A total of eight Area Partnerships were established across Victoria in 2014

### 1.2 HLLLEN

The Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network (HLLLEN) is a Not-for-Profit Organisation that has been in operation for over 12 years. The goal of each of the 31 LLENs in Victoria is to support young people aged between 10 - 19 years by improving their participation, engagement, attainment and transition outcomes. LLENs are made up by a number of interest groups including education providers, business and industry, community agencies and parent and family organisations. The key focus of the LLENs is to develop strategic and sustainable partnerships designed to improve outcomes for young people. The Highlands LLEN covers five local government areas including Ballarat, Pyrenees, Moorabool, Hepburn and north Golden Plains.

### 1.3 The Project

All Area Partnerships in Victoria are required to identify local priorities that the partnership will focus on. The CHCYAP aims to ensure that all children and young people in Central Highlands are safe; growing up in environments that are nurturing and free of violence and are engaged in, and benefitting from, education. The three priorities that the CHCYAP have identified are:

1. Reduce the incidence of family violence and its impact on children and young people
2. Improve the capacity of parents to effectively nurture and protect their children from harm
3. "Learning matters" - increase attendance and engagement at kindergarten and school

It is an expectation of the Children and Youth Area Partnership model that involving people with 'lived experience' of vulnerability needs to be a core component of any work undertaken by the Area Partnership. The CHCYAP recognises that people with lived experience of vulnerability can provide valuable insight in determining directions for the Area Partnership and are committed to keeping the input and feedback of vulnerable children, young people and their families at the centre of any work undertaken.

The CHCYAP established a time limited working group to develop a strategy and plan for engaging vulnerable families, young people and children in the work of the Area Partnership .A key component of the plan was to undertake initial conversational style interviews with a small number of young people and parents/carers with lived experience of vulnerability about their perceptions and experiences of educational and support services and family stressors. Highlands LLEN was approached to undertake these interviews with young people in Central Highlands and then report their findings to the Steering Group and relevant working groups.

Sixteen young people who have lived experience of vulnerability were interviewed and their feedback has been presented in this report. Intake data collected by Youth Connections in 2012, 2013 and 2014 identified a range of barriers to participation in education (*Barriers to Education:*

*Attachment 1*). This data provided a starting point for composing questions and preparing for the interviews.

In summary, the **aim** of the project was to gain feedback from young people regarding issues around engagement and attendance at school (or alternative educational settings) plus the family stressors they experience. The information gathered would contribute to the knowledge base of the Steering Group and Working Parties for the CHCYAP and help inform strategies and activities

## 2 The Interviews

The intention of this project was to capture the “voice” of young people with lived experience of vulnerability in the Central Highlands region through conversational style interviews. The interviewers contacted local agencies and forwarded a letter introducing the project (*Letters to Parents and Young People; Attachment 3 and 4*). The agencies chose young people they thought would be suitable and willing to participate in an interview. A gift voucher of \$50.00 was offered as a token of appreciation for the time committed to the interview.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face by two HLLLEN staff, one male, one female - in some cases a worker attached to the young person was also in attendance but generally did not participate in the discussions. The interviewers met with the young people in a variety of venues in Ballarat and regional towns; the young people were from Ballarat, Daylesford, Creswick, Ararat and Bacchus Marsh. The consultations largely occurred in office settings in a range of organisations. Interviews were scheduled during working hours over a 2.5 month period and were generally no longer than 1 hour in length. Twelve of the sixteen interviews were recorded using an iPhone: the remainder involved the interviewers taking notes

In total, 16 regional young people took part in these discussions, 7 males; 9 females. They ranged from 15 – 24 years of age with the majority of participants being 15 to 17 year olds.

Age	Number
15	5
16	2
17	5
19	3
24	1

Two young people were in out-of-home care (OOHC); 2 were Indigenous; 4 were Youth Justice (YJ) clients; and 6 were in alternative education. A number of the young people were involved with up to 7 agencies, common were headspace Ballarat, Child Protection and Victoria Police.

At the beginning of the interview process, the project and purpose were outlined following the *Outline for Interviews (Attachment 5)*. This explanation covered the organisations involved, the purpose, how the information gained from interviews would be collated and distributed, the confidentiality of information, withdrawal rights, follow up post-interview, debrief arrangements, interviewer contact details and presentation of the gift voucher.

The interviewers followed the pre-prepared questions (*Interview questions: Attachment 6*). These were grouped around: personal background, where they live, primary school experience, secondary school experience, family life, personal stresses and how life could be better (what needed to change). Whilst the interviews were structured around the specific questions, the young people were encouraged to elaborate and talk freely, the interviewers also asked many additional questions prompted by the responses of the young person. A relaxed environment was created and participants were assured that their identity was protected. The interviewers accepted the participant’s stories at face value and understood that the descriptions were from the perspective of the young person.

At the conclusion of the interview, all young people were told that they would be advised of the project outcomes and invited to participate in future opportunities created as a result of the CHCYAP initiative. All recordings and interviewers’ notes were transcribed; they ranged in length from 1 - 30 A4 pages.

# 3

## Results - Quantitative Data Summary

A quantitative summary of issues emerging from the consultations with 16 young people are provided below.

### 3.1 Family and individual stressors:

#### Family violence

- **88%** of YP interviewed have experienced family violence

#### Housing and financial stress

- **69%** of the YP interviewed moved house a minimum of 3 times
- **50%** of the YP interviewed have moved house between 4 and 9 times
- **44%** of the YP interviewed identified financial stress within the home environment ( The 2 YP in OOHC did not site financial issues)
- **19%** of the YP interviewed have taken on a significant carers role within the home

#### Family structures

- **38%** of the YP interviewed have step or 1/2 siblings
- **38%** of the YP interviewed have 5 or more siblings

#### Alcohol and other drugs

- **38%** of the YP interviewed identified that a parent / parents have issues with alcohol and / or other drugs
- **25%** of the YP interviewed have or are experiencing issues with alcohol and or / other drugs

#### Mental and other health issues

- **63%** of the YP interviewed have or are experiencing a medical illness (physical and /or mental health issues)
- **31%** of the YP interviewed identified that they have issues with anger management

#### Agencies

- **38%** of the YP interviewed have been or are currently linked in with 5 or more agencies
- **38%** of the YP interviewed have had a personal involvement with the legal system
- **13%** of the YP interviewed have a parent that has been involved with the legal system
- **25%** of the YP interviewed have had direct involvement with Child Protection

### 3.2 Education, training and employment:

#### Number of schools

- **100%** of YP interviewed attended a minimum of 3 different schools
- **63%** of YP interviewed attended 4 or more schools
- **25%** of YP interviewed attended 6 or more schools

#### Bullying

- **69%** of the YP interviewed indicated that they were bullied at school
- **56%** of the YP interviewed identified that school / schools did not adequately address bullying issues

#### School exit/attendance

- **31%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 8
- **25%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 9
- **19%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 7
- 1 YP interviewed has not completed Year 7, 8 or 9
- 1 YP interviewed has not completed Year 7 or 8

- **56%** of the YP interviewed are currently attending an alternative education program
- **13%** of YP interviewed are currently not involved in education, training or employment
- 1 YP interviewed is currently attending a mainstream school
- 1 YP interviewed is currently attending university

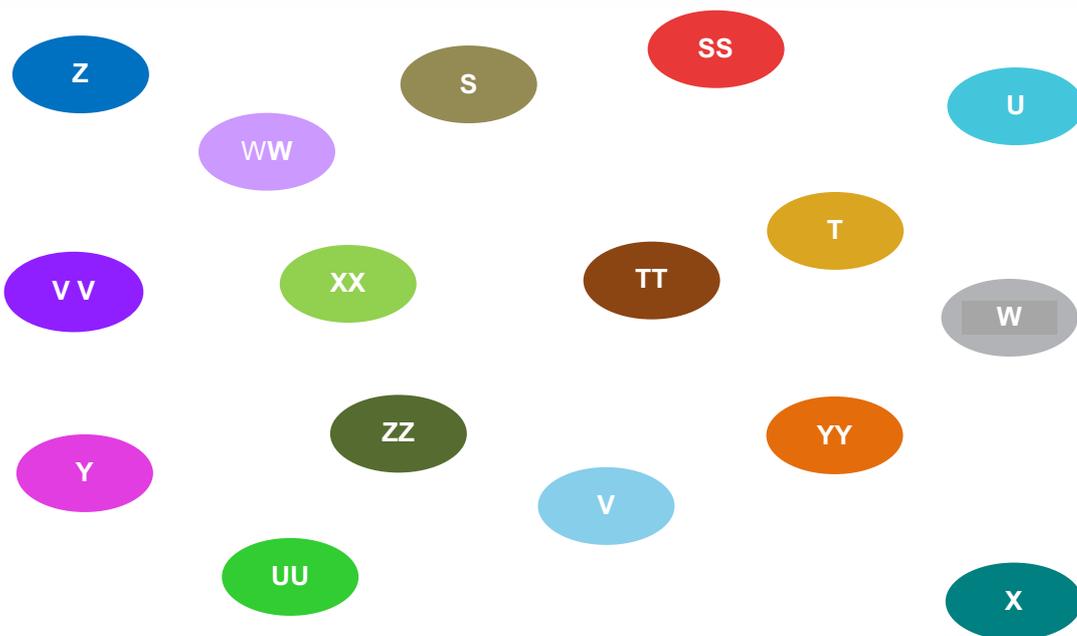
**Employment/career goals**

- **56%** of the YP interviewed identified that they are planning to pursue work in community service fields e.g. youth work, aged care, counselling, teaching and childcare
- **19%** of YP interviewed are currently working part-time

A summary table of the interviews was completed and distributed at the CHCYAP Steering Group meeting on June 19, 2015 (*CHCYAP Youth Interview Summary: Attachment 7*).

### Coding Themes for Participants

The 16 participants are represented in the remainder of the report by the following colours and identification.



# 4

## Results - Recurrent Themes: Family and Young People Stressors

The 16 young people raised a range of barriers and challenges in their discussions with the interviewers. These have been grouped as thematic responses in relation to the CHCYAP priorities.

A number of family and personal stressors were identified. Family violence was the most prevalent. These stressors often affected attendance and engagement at school. Bullying was also a contributor to many young people leaving their secondary school.

A number of young people are currently or had been involved with Child Protection. Some had been in out-of-home care. The presumption of the interviewers was that this was because they were perceived as at risk in their home environments. However their experiences of the child protection system were often negative.

Quotes from the young people have been selected to demonstrate the themes and provide their perspective of their "lived experience". Quotes in italics are direct quotes from young people (bold type being the interviewer's words) and where quotes are not italicised they are a paraphrase of the young person's words.

### 4.1 Family violence (including sexual, emotional and physical abuse)

During the 16 interviews, 14 young people identified situations of family violence (as defined by DHHS website 12/07/15 – refer Glossary) when recollecting their upbringing or describing their present situation. They referred to emotional and psychological torment, indirect threats and controlling behaviour. In the case of sexual assault, 2 of 16 young people stated they had been victims of sexual abuse.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **family violence**:

Z

*“ Z is talking to headspace at the moment. And I'm waiting to see the GP to organize more sessions and I'm going to CASA at the moment because my mum's ex-boyfriend decided to sexually assault me on my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. So, I'm going to CASA for that. And I'm seeing the counsellor here once a week. ”*

XX

*“ There are other children in the family - 9yo and 14yo. XX is still there because of a sense of responsibility. XX is the mediator as he is the oldest. He feels a need to keep the peace and has done so from an early age, as long as he can remember! Wants to protect his little sister... XX said he has learnt to watch out at 5.00pm as his father changes when he drinks. ”*

U

*“ ...When you were little from what I've picked up, it sounds like you were a pretty angry kid? Yeah. So what was that about, do you reckon? Um, I got abused when I was little. I got sexually abused and, um, my stepdad always hit me. It's pretty dumb. How old were you? I was probably about 4 or 5 when I was sexually abused by an Uncle. Um, he was staying with us for a bit, yeah. And then, probably 5 till I was about 10 or 11 my stepdad was here. It's pretty stupid. Yeah, I was really angry at that. ”*

YY

“ Um, he was kind of good to my litt....eh....middle brother, like and his step kids and all that. But I wasn't his, so I was treated like shit, sort of thing. Um, you know, nothing I ever did was that good. I tried to stay out of his way, um, I can't remember all of it, I've blocked quite a bit out...but I think there was mental and physical abuse and all that sort of stuff. So he was good to my... to my brothers and everything which I was happy about.... Um, I just kind of learnt to stay out of the way and kind of hide emotion, 'cause, if you show emotion it's kind of a bad thing... I saw him from like, I was halfway across the gardens hiding behind a big tree and I saw him standing on the other side on a bench, and I just got angry and like punched the tree and that sort of stuff. Um, but yeah, and then another time he came into the house and was like talking to people, I just stayed in my room and I heard his voice and got angry, so I just put my headphones on and just ignored it. Um, yeah it's not too bad really. ”

Y

“ **So what's your dad like?** Mmm... he can be pretty violent. But he's alright. **What do you think might help him out?** Um, some counselling. And anger management. **So what seems to make him angry?** Um, he had a bad past. **So he's carried that through his life?** Yep. ”

VV

“ He used to be abusive to mum. He, um, locked me in my bedroom with no light or anything because his friends were over drinking and I was about 4, maybe 3. I was about 4, yeah. Um... and he's just a horrible person. I don't... I'm not surprised he's got no one. He's got restraining orders... people have got restraining orders against him. Um, yeah. And then he whinges about it but it's his own fault. If he wasn't so horrible to people, they would want to be around him. ”

S

“ It's really just me that the abuse was towards. I don't know why, but... cause I think he didn't abuse my brother as much because he was like the only boy there...mum gets pretty badly abused as well. But, like, I think dad's calmed down a little bit now because the police got involved and he was like scared that he would lose his job. Yeah. But I'm not sure. I haven't talked to mum in a while. Like, I try to call her up and stuff, but she's always kinda busy... I feel like the police could've done a bit more. Cause they were going to like check me for bruises and stuff, which I had, but they didn't. Yeah, and then they're like “oh, sorry we can't” cause this is like 2 weeks later, and they called me up and they're like “oh, do you still want to come in for us to like check you” and stuff and it's like... well, it's a bit late for that now isn't it? ”

TT

“ Mum said to us “well dad's coming home from a party soon” and I'm like “ok, sweet”. He comes home, he's pissed as a maggot... What I remember was... My dad and my brother, they started play fighting, then dad got serious and he started bashing my brother...So I started laying into him and stuff. I ripped him off Rxxx. Told Rxxx to get out of the house then I hold my dad off for as long as I can and mum's screaming. Youngest one was sitting in the lounge room watching the whole thing happening. It's just fucked...Well, at the end of it I called the cops. Yeah, and they took him away...Yeah that fight. That just ended it. ”

## 4.2 Financial stress

During the 16 interviews, 7 young people identified **financial stress** within their home environment.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **financial stress**:

UU

“ **What do you reckon are the biggest stresses on the family at this time?** *Probably money.....yeah.....nah,....yeah just money issues I guess. That's probably the only...the biggest thing that I can think of. **How does this impact?** Um, sometimes it impacts on, like, if mum doesn't have enough money to... fuel... like driving to school, um, money for the bus and stuff like that. And lunch money. Like, we need to sort of stretch it out and budget and stuff a lot. Yeah, instead of just having all the money every day.* ”

XX

“ Money is very tight in the family. Mum wanted him to go to a private school but the pressure didn't help him study. The school was 'not who he was.' Mum is still paying off private school fees 3 years on. He describes his father as an alcoholic who spends the family's money. Sometimes he can't eat as there isn't enough money. Mum and dad have separated but can't afford to live separately so they co-exist. He can't remember a time in life where there wasn't stress. Centrelink is the main source of income for the family. Mum isn't working at present. Money is a big problem; mortgage is an issue and a challenge to meet payments. Dad is in and out of work. ”

T

“ **When you think about the events in your life that have caused you stress what comes to mind?** *T's mum - Well I think shifting around a lot. First of all we sold firewood and then the wood started to run out and then we started milking cows and then we kept moving.* ”

Z

“ *Um, a few years ago when my dad lost his job, all of his friends pitched in and we all had meetings, informal meetings, and they all pitched in money and food and, um... But there's been a lot of problems with the child support money that um, there's been times that mum has refused to pay it and we've had to only just scraped by. Like, my dad's had to borrow money off my grandma before, numerous times just so he can get food for the week.* ”

VV

“ **So can you tell us a little bit about where you've lived, then? You mentioned XX.** *Yep. Um... **Have you generally been in that area?** No. I used to um.... I lived in Brown Hill, then Ballarat East, then Redan, then Canadian, and now I live in XX. So I've moved around a little bit. **And is that because Mum's moved around, or has there been a reason for the moves?** Well me and mum don't get very much money, because my dad doesn't pay child support, um, mum doesn't get much money from Centrelink, her pay is not that good, so we struggle a lot and the rent is just too much in the houses we were living in, so we had to move. Yeah. **And what about XX, do you think that might be a place that you'll stay for a bit?** Um, probably not. Once again, we're struggling with stuff. Like, with money and stuff like that. So, we'll probably end up moving again. But, oh well. We'll find a house one day.* ”

X

“ My parents can't afford to live alone so they coexist. They have tried separating. ”

### 4.3 Instability (multiple schools/homes)

During the 16 interviews, 11 young people identified that they had moved house 3 or more times with 8 of those having moved between 4 and 9 times in total. All 16 young people had attended a minimum of 3 schools, 10 young people had attended 4 or more schools and 4 young people attended 6 or more schools.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **moving schools and homes**:

ZZ

“ We're renting a house through Uniting Care 'cause mum applied for like a hundred houses and they all got knocked back, like all of them. Cause like, it was before she got with her boyfriend, so they knocked her back 'cause they said she didn't earn enough money and all this other stuff. But like, she's always paid her rent up and everything, so I don't understand why they've said that. And like cheap houses too, like, all \$200-\$250 and that and under, and they full said she didn't earn enough money. But, so, like, so we tried, when we were in Melton, we tried going to Ss's and they like practically knocked us back and we were living in our car and they said there's nothing they can do. So we come down here, and like that's when we moved around and mum found her new boyfriend and moved in with him and like then the house lady wanted her house back, cause they were renting it like through like through a real estate, obviously, but like the guy, the other guy that was living there, it was his sister's house that owned it. So he ended up moving out and we all ended up moving in, with, um, CC. And, so like, yeah, and then she wanted the house back and she said she wanted it back because she wanted to do something with it but, that was actually a lie, she just wanted her sons to move in. And then like, as soon as we moved out, her sons moved in straight away. Like, the day we moved out. So we went to Uniting Care and they helped us so much. They've got us in, um, what's... emergency housing and stuff, and we stayed there for like two weeks, and then they put us in, banged us into an actual house, that's where we've been for like 5 months and then there's an, we're on the waiting list for like an actual, like a permanent one. We're just staying there for a while until we can find one on our own. But like mum applied for so many houses, and we got knocked back for every single one. Like, there was not one we got approved for. And it's like hard cause she got like so many kids. ”

T

“ It probably didn't help that I went to 15 schools in 3 years so I could never really settle in any school. ”

V

“ I was at XX School then my mum pulled me out and took me to ZZ. Then dad pulled me out and took me back to XX 'cause I don't live with Mum anymore, I live with Dad. ”

YY

“ Well back when I was in Ballarat, we lived in one house for 8 years and it had a really big nice back yard and a big front yard and it was just heaps of room to play and be silly and everything. Um, when we moved to NSW, we lived at my stepdad’s mum’s house for a while. That was like a 5 acre property so we’d just goof around on that. Then we moved out of there and moved into a, um, 2 story house that overlooked the beach, sort of thing. It was pretty far away from the beach, maybe a 10 minute walk, but you could still see everything. Um, that was a pretty nice house, except it was all big stone, it was cold. Then we moved to XX and lived in a court. **Then you came back to Ballarat?** Yeah, a kind of emergency getaway from up there sort of thing. Packed everything into a trailer and just left. Um, we stayed with one of mum’s old friends, which wasn’t exactly the safest house to be in. Um, she was a bit of an angry person and she had guns in the house. Like, they were licensed and everything but she was a bit of an angry person you didn’t want to make angry. Um, so we moved out of there into My Uncle and Auntie’s. And then we got a place up in AA. We stayed there for a while but the wiring was dodgy, um, and even when it said on the radio, as we were having an inspection about a house set on fire because of faulty wiring in the roof, they still didn’t fix it. So we moved out down, all the way to TT in a house that was a bit better, it was still a bit of a..... **Bit of a fixer upper?** I spent a lot of time trying to fix it still...barely got anywhere. And then just as mum, when we were living in mum’s boyfriends, um, I’d met my girlfriend and we’d decided to move in after a few, quite a few months and all that sort of stuff. ”

U

“ I went to BB Primary School. And then I went to PP College. And then I went to XX. Um, SS... Yep. Um, and tried to going to VV but they didn’t want me there. And then, KK... I went there for 3 days and then they kicked me out. **How long did you end up at VV, like even a day, did you go?** Oh, I only went there for an interview, and they said “oh, no, you’re too dangerous to be around students”. I’m not a dangerous person. Um... I was at SS for about a year but I left because they were being racist. And... **ZZ?** I left ZZ because I just didn’t... it’s too much hassle catching the bus all the way out to the other end of MM. Um, and I just got kicked out of PP for..... in the first term of year 7... ”

#### 4.4 Complex family relationships

During the 16 interviews, 6 young people indicated they had step or half siblings and 6 young people revealed they had 5 or more siblings. A number of young people stated they did not have a close relationship with all their siblings, however, all the young people identified at least one sibling that they considered they have a close relationship with. The young people often described a family life that consisted of living with multiple carers across their life.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants’ experience with **complex family arrangements**:

YY

“ All up I have 6 brothers and 4 sisters. My mum and dad separated before I was born, my dad moved away, then he already had a daughter, which is my older half – sister. Then my Mum met my stepdad, TT and had my other 2 little brothers. And then my dad had that one and the one from before, and had 2, then met XX broke up with her and met another person. Had a child with her and then she had 2 kids. So they’re step ones. That’s why I had to count, it’s too much to keep track. ”

ZZ

“ I have my baby sister who’s 2 and I have a baby brother who’s 11. My brother lives with my dad and my little sister lives with her dad. Me and my sister have two different dads, but me and my brother have the same dad. ”

Z

“ I’m just with Dad, my parents split up when I was a toddler, and I don’t talk to my mum much anymore. **And, have you got brothers and sisters?** I have a younger brother, he’s 11, and well, my older sister – she went down the wrong track a few years ago. Um, she started doing drugs and drinking and all of that. And now she’s 16 and has a 1 year old daughter. **Can you tell us a little more about your sister? What’s she’s doing now and why you think she might’ve gone that way?** Um, her parents split up when she was young and her mum’s boyfriend, now, her and him don’t get along. And um, she was about 12 when she started running away and not coming home until the early hours of the morning. She started with; she got started by peer pressure and her friends were saying ‘hey, try this’ and ‘you should do this, and that’ and it kinda just led her down the path she’s gone down. ”

SS

“ SS and 1 of her siblings are now living back home with mum and dad. One of her younger sisters remains in care. Two of her siblings have left care, but she does not know where they are... *I’m one of nine. I think I have more than just one older brother.* ”

Y

“ Um, one of my brothers lives with dad and another lives with mum, and another one lives with my nan and my sister has a little boy. And then I had two other brothers that live in Melbourne somewhere. ”

#### 4.5 Alcohol & drug use

During the 16 interviews, 10 young people talked about **alcohol and other drugs** as a personal challenge for them or their family. Of the 10, 4 young people discussed their own alcohol and/or drug use and 6 young people identified family members’ use as a challenge.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants’ experience with **alcohol and other drugs**:

ZZ

“ My mum was like really bad on drugs last year, so they came like, we had this girl living with us who was like my best friend. And then me and her had a fight and she moved out and she like called them and she like made up all this stuff about us. So they got involved and they took my baby sister and put her in with her dad. And they didn’t even check her dad’s house or anything to see if it’s clean or anything. They didn’t like make him do drug tests or anything and he was really bad on drugs as well. ”

V

“ **What about Mum, where’s she living?** Mums in Melton, I think. I dunno. I don’t talk to her...she’s on the drugs so I don’t talk to her ”

Z

“ Um, at the time it was my mum because I’ve had a bit of a rough relationship with my parents over the last sort of few years. When I was born, my parents split up and my dad wasn’t around for the sort of first 3 or 4 years and then dad came back into my life and mum went out. And then mum came back and dad left, again. Then dad came back and mum left again. And then, um, Christmas 2013... mum got really drunk and she was at a friend’s house and I’m like “Mum, can we go home soon?” And then she starts yelling at me because apparently I’m being disrespectful. And she got physical with me and I ran away and then she tried to make me walk home. I just ran in the opposite direction and called my dad. And, um, my dad came and picked me up. And my mum tried to beat up my dad. And then we called the police. Then I got an AVO on my mum then for a year that ran out this January. And towards the end of it, mum and I were kind of talking a little bit but not much. And then dad, dad had a big problem with alcohol this year, so I went and lived with mum for a bit. And then mum had a big problem with drugs so I went back to dads. And then I was at mum and dads, sort of shared and now I’m back at dads. So I’ve had a very rough patch with where I’m living and who I’m living with. And right now, I don’t really want to talk to either of my parents so I’m staying at my grandparents for a little while. ”

WW

“ ....believes his dad is not fit to look after his sister as he is an alcoholic and pot smoker. WW – has been on probation twice – *In too much trouble*. He got into trouble with the cops because he was “pissed.” He was first on probation when he was 13/14 and has a “thick record”. He said he won’t want to read it when he is older! *I was like superman or the villain in Batman.* ”

TT

“ Yeah it was pretty crazy. Um, well, me and my brother came home one night, stoned as fuck, and mum said to us “well dad’s coming home from a party soon” and I’m like “ok, sweet”. He comes home, he’s pissed as a maggot... What I remember was... My dad and my brother, they started play fighting, then dad got serious and he started bashing my brother. **Oh really.** Yep. So I started laying into him and stuff. I ripped him off Riley. Told Riley to get out of the house then I hold my dad off for as long as I can and mum’s screaming. Youngest one was sitting in the lounge room watching the whole thing happening. *It’s just fucked.* **Was that something that had happened before? Or was it a one-off?** Oh... It happened every now and then, that sort of shit. *But not that far... never used to go that far.* **And you would’ve been what age at that time?** I was about 17... 18... **So big enough to take your dad on?** Yeah. I tried **And how did it end?** I was really stoned so I don’t... Well, at the end of it I called the cops. Yeah, and they took him away. **Oh, ok. So mum’s reaction was...?** She was fucking shocked. She didn’t know what was going on. Dad was just threatening to kill her and he said fucking all sorts. **And that was the cause of the separation? Or, the final...?** Yeah that fight. That just ended it. I was happy. ”

## 4.6 Mental health

During the 16 interviews, 15 young people identified **mental health** as a challenge in their lives. Of those 15, 9 young people spoke about their own experiences with mental health and 6 young people highlighted it as an issue within the family. Anxiety, depression and socialisation were raised by young people as a barrier to their education and 5 young people discussed their personal struggle with anger management. Within the family structures, the young people often made reference to their parent's mental health and how they had cared for them at times and would like to see them get professional support.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **mental health**:

ZZ

“ I don't really leave the house. I just like stay in my room, just keep it all in cause I gotta be there for mum and help her out, 'cause she gets really upset about it. As soon as she comes home from visitation, she just sits in her room and cries for two days. ”

TT

“ **Was carrying a knife around something that you had done a bit of or was it just a one off?** Mmm... Not really. I done it quite a bit, like when I was going down the river and stuff. Yeah. **So was it just for your peace of mind?** I have no idea. I don't know why I used to carry around knives. It's really weird. And kinda scary. But I did carry around a bit. **Is that something that you've discussed with a psychologist or counsellor?** Years ago. **And what did they say?** They didn't really come up with anything. They were hopeless. **\*laughter\*** **so it's just left us with one of those mysteries?** Yeah, pretty much. They did diagnose me with depression and that stuff though. **At what age were you then?** Umm... 14, yeah. That's when I started going \*whistles\*... off the rails. **And what did you think of that diagnosis?** I didn't really think anything of it. I didn't know anything about depression at the time. **Looking back, do you think that it was correct or not correct?** About? **Their diagnosis.** Yeah, it was correct. **And did they offer any treatment for... once they'd said you had depression?** Yeah they, um... they sent me to some psychiatrist, put me on medication. I didn't take it. **And so then what happened to the depression?** It kinda got worse, yeah. **And were you out of school when this was all going on?** Yeah I was out of school. **So you had very little to do as well?** Mmm. Nothing to do. I was just out all the time, just causing trouble. **So when do you reckon that there was a shift? That you would say that you didn't experience depression anymore, or is it something that still sits with you?** It's still there. It's not going to go anywhere. **Do you know how to work with it?** Yeah. **That's cool. So how do you manage?** Uh... How do I manage? It's confidential, isn't it? **It is confidential.** All right. I just go out and get pissed with my mates or just get high. That's it. **So you just do your own stress release?** Yeah. **And that gets you by?** It just gets me by... **So what about the depression that you've mentioned... how would you describe it right now?** I don't 'know. It just comes and goes. But it's there every day, I know that **How do you know that... that it sits there? What happens?** It's just this sickening feeling, right there. **In your gut?** Yeah, you just fucking feel it. ”

V

“ **What happened? What went wrong?** Oh, I lit a fire and then I threatened to kill people and all that. I used to get angry and go around threatening to kill people. ”

U

“ Oh, I kept bashing someone because he kept hitting me and I hate boys when they hit girls, so I just went off my nut. And I wasn't medicated to control my anger. **And what about primary school? You just when straight through it at BB?** I was getting suspended like all the time. **Oh, really?** In grade prep I was... I was suspended starting from grade prep for bashing people. And then I got better in Grade 6. And then, yeah, I was pretty good. ”

W

“ I started going to Head Space and they helped me out a little bit. Um, but really talking about my problems kind of makes it worse. I like keeping it to myself. Um, there's certain things that I can talk about, but there's a lot of stuff that I feel better keeping, like, bottled up. **Yep. And so is Head Space one of the only ones... so, are they one of the only services you've used outside of...?** Um... actually I was with a counsellor... can't remember what her name was... someone... and she told me that it was ok to hurt myself as long as I didn't die. And I was like “no, I'm not going back to her.” And yeah, 'cause I went through a stage where I self-harmed a lot. Um, and I was about 2 months before my Aunty's wedding and mum's like “we don't want you to get judgemental stares with, like, your wrists and everything” so that was... that kind of like woke me up a little bit. And then my Aunty said that, like not being rude or anything, but she said she didn't want me in the wedding if I had marks on my skin. And that was massive for me. I stopped straight away. ”

S

“ Dad was offered counselling and stuff, and they wanted like a, someone from DHS to come in and check on them every month or so. But he, like, he made an argument and stuff, and he's like “nah, I don't want people coming to my house” and you know checking on my family, because nothing's going on and this and that... and, yeah. We were supposed to do like Reconnect counselling, a few times, like we made a few appointments, but he kept like saying “oh, I've got work then” and he wouldn't show up. Yeah. So I feel like maybe they should've pushed that a little bit more with him. ”

Z

“ Um, most of the time I can be stressed and my mood changes a lot. Um, I've just been told that I have a personality disorder. Which means that my mood changes very rapidly and one day, or one minute I can be “oh, look, there's a butterfly, it's very pretty” and I can be very happy and sort of la-di-da type thing and then 30 seconds later I can be “rar rar rar!” and just hate everyone and there's nothing that triggers that, there's just something in my head switches and makes my mood change very dramatically sometimes. And I can't control it and I can't do anything about it. ”

WW

“ Mum isn't going very well since the sisters were taken but she is getting mental health support. ”

Y

“ So that became the barrier to going to school... the barrier to a social life and stuff as well, or did you have a good social life? *Um... I had an alright one until I started on the drugs. Yeah. So stopped school, and maybe stopped some of the friendship groups and stuff you were hanging out in? Yeah, right. Do you have good friends now? Don't like anyone anymore.* ”

#### 4.7 Physical health

During the 16 interviews, 8 young people identified **physical health** as a barrier to their education. The physical health issues described were obesity, multiple concussions and undisclosed sustained illness. Two of the 16 young people discussed concussions that kept them away from school for extended periods and they described the struggle they experienced when returning to the hyper-sensory school environment. They expressed difficulty sustaining attention and retaining information. They believed the school did not do enough to address their needs during this period. Three of the 16 young people referred to their weight as a cause of school yard bullying or teasing which subsequently affected their school attendance.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **physical health**:

XX

“ During secondary school, he suffered numerous concussions from football injuries and ultimately had to take 2 months off school to recover. He was on Endone for a year. This disrupted his learning. He has suffered over 20 concussions in total. School tried to adapt but couldn't find a way to cope or help him. ”

V V

“ *I broke my collar bone at Year 7 camp and the nurse said the only reason I broke it was because I'm overweight. Any normal kid would just get up and walk it off.* V V also has a history of self-harm. ”

W

“ **So is your memory a bit affected by the accident?** *Yeah, it's pretty affected, yeah, so it's a bit hard to like um... that's why I kept asking you, like, what did you say next, you know what I mean... Do you want to tell us about with what's happened with... from the accident with your health and with your, your head?* *Yeah, um, well we could say I forgot a lot of things you know what I mean, like I could barely speak... Memory loss? ...at the start of it, so my speaking's getting better but... That's really good.* *Yeah, couldn't really think of anything else, forgot things, speaking... well even walking cause my pelvis... couldn't... I can't even run, I had no muscles in my arms, I had to lay down for like 30 days you know what I mean. So basically, I'm on the mend, so can't complain.* ”

Z

“ ....described how she was teased because of her weight. *Cause when I started primary school and through primary school I was gaining a lot of weight and I was quite a heavy girl for someone my age and height. By the time I was in grade 3, I weighed almost 100kg. Which is a lot.* ”

# 5

## Results - Recurrent Themes: School Experiences

### 5.1 Bullied at school

During the 16 interviews, 11 young people identified **bullying** as a challenge during their schooling. The majority (9) felt that the bullying had a significant negative impact on them. A large part of the bullying behaviour was rumours being started about the young person and the escalation of incidents that followed. A number of young people identified a lack of support / action by schools in addressing bullying issues, this was a perception shared by the majority of young people who experienced bullying. In most instances the young people indicated that they did not feel that their school managed the issues they were experiencing and failed to take adequate action. The common response by young people (and in some instances supported by family) was to change schools. In a number of cases the bullying led to the young person just walking out of school and never returning.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **bullying**:

V V

“ I was at (local secondary school) but I was struggling with bullies there, rumours and stuff. So I had to move. Um, I struggled with depression for a little bit, became a hermit crab and didn't leave the house for nearly 2 months, didn't really talk to anyone, don't have many friends anymore. Um, I've been to... I went to 4 different primary schools. Um, and I've been... Yep. Um, it's been... every time it's been bullies. Um, I get bullied really bad about my..... Well, I'm not going to say like "brains", because well, I'm ok but I'm not very smart, like... I'm not as smart as people wanted me to be there. Um, got bullied about my weight, got bullied about not having a dad, um... and just yeah stuff like that, didn't have many friends...A rumour started about me that I was fooling around with an 18 year old and that I was pregnant. And I denied it and everything, so then my friends started calling me a liar and other really horrible names, telling me to kill myself, no-one would miss me if I died tomorrow. Um, and they said about my dad that the only reason he's not around is because he didn't want to have a little slut like me in his life..... yeah I just haven't been able to handle like staying at a school for too long cause bullies get too much. ”

X

“ In year 8 a rumour spread about him across the whole school regarding his sexuality. ”

Z

“ Um, first school I went to was (local Catholic secondary). I know it's got this great reputation as like a 'private school' that's awesome. But it's not. My first week of year 7, I knew absolutely no one, I was the only one from my primary school to go there. I had no friends, and this year 12 girl decides to push me, and I swung around and cracked the window with my head and gave myself a concussion. I'd never spoken to her, never ever before. Never even seen her before. And it was on purpose, 'cause she looked at me in the eye and then pushed me.' I ended up leaving because there were rumors spread about me that I was raped by a teacher and that I had to get an abortion. ”

UU

“ Um, Year 7 I didn't really like because I got bullied there. Then Year 8 was alright because the bullying stopped and I was just sort of doing my own thing and then Year 9 I didn't like because.....like people were starting to bully again and um, a lot of girls weren't very nice...there was bullying on Facebook and stuff. ”

Y

“ Um I was only at school XX for 1 day, so I didn't really know much about XX. But at school Z I got bullied every day. ”

XX

“ ....indicated that there was a group of kids determined to make life hell, so he wagged whenever he could. He felt very much on his own, the bullying was constant, day in and day out. He was elbowed; they would lay into him calling him names. He would end up with cuts and bruises. ”

Z

“ The principal came running up and pushed her off me. And then and there I was watching the principal run up and I could see it in his facial expression – he didn't care whether he got into trouble for physically touching her or... He didn't care, he just wanted to get her off me... I left school after that day and didn't look back. ”

## 5.2 Poor school attendance

During the 16 interviews, 3 young people indicated they left mainstream education in year 7; 5 left at year 8; and 4 left at year 9. Two young people identified that they did not complete year 7 or 8.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **school attendance and exits**:

ZZ

“ **That was here in Ballarat?** No, that was in Melton. And like, my cousin and that went there and I was hanging out with them all day and like I just didn't care about school really. And so I left like term 3 in year 7, and didn't go back until the next year. I tried to change schools and they wouldn't let me. They kept saying, no you're fine to go here. So I went back there year 8, and I went there one day and it wasn't even a full day. I left again, 'cause I got bullied. And then I didn't go the whole year. **Really?** Yeah, and then like I eventually went back to that school again and they were going to put me in year 9, knowing I hadn't finished year 7 or year 8, but mum's like "no, you put her back in year 8", so they put me back in year 8. And I went, I think it was two terms. **Ok, so you've had a couple of goes at year 8. Yeah. Did you try year 9? Nope. So the most you did was a couple of terms of year 8? Yeah. I did two terms of year 8.** ”

W

“ **And what happened at the accident?** *Oh, a car crash. Ok. And where were you in the car?* *Uh, the passenger seat. Basically hit a pole at like 100km, yeah. You copped the impact?* *Yeah, hit on my side next to me. Yeah, I've got a scar from there to there on me to prove it. So you were... what was happening around that time? Was it school holidays when that happened I'm guessing?* *Nah, I was basically a bad person, really. Oh, really?* *Yeah, just a bad person, smoking some ice I think that night and fucking smoking some choof and then, police chase really, and then we got away from the police and then the dickhead hit the pole. Oh, mate. So you weren't at school at that stage?* *Nah, I haven't been at school since I was like 14.* ”

YY

“ *Um, and then um, came back down here like 4 years ago I think it was. Um, so I went to BB primary. Then I went to DD. Then it was MM. Then I went to JJ primary, then I went to KK High school and CC in Ballarat, then finished before the end of year 9 and left school because of responsibilities at home, looking after my little brother, all that stuff and I just couldn't do school and all that all at the same time.* ”

T

“ *Kids in trouble don't really get the support they need. I pulled out in Year 9.* ”

Y

“ **What year level did you do at school X?** *Um half way through year 7 and a week of year 8. Then just....? Stopped for 2 years.* ”

Z

“ **Was there something that was going on?** *There was this one girl. You know how everyone has that high school tormenter? Mm-hmm. Not just girls. So you had one of those?* *I had one of those. And every time she looked at me, she'd come up to me in this huge rage and you know, threaten to kill me or bash me or get people to kill me. It wasn't very fun and she pinned me on the ground once and I was really scared that... She's quite a strong girl and I reckon that if she wanted to, she actually could've done some very serious damage, I was terrified. I left school after that day and didn't look back. That was mid-year 9.* ”

### 5.3 Perceived lack of intervention

WW

“ So at the time, what did you tell the teachers? I told them everything that was happening. Um, that I was being called names, that I was being abused on like Snapchat, and that there was rumours being spread about me and they said that they couldn't do anything because they didn't know if I was lying or not. And I was like hysterical, like I couldn't stop crying, mum had to come in to the school because she called me and she goes “who have you given my number to?” And I said “Just a couple of my friends, why's that?” She goes, “Well I just got a phone call from one of the girls at your school, pretending to be, um, a mum and apparently her name was Michelle” And I said, “Oh, what'd they say?” and she said “Well, apparently I've been fooling around with an 18-year-old and I think I'm pregnant” and I lost it. And mum's like “I'm on my way to the school now” because I couldn't stop crying, I couldn't talk to her, I couldn't breathe. Yeah. So mums' like “Alright” and I moved schools. ”

VV

“ Yeah, I told the teachers and they didn't really care. They told me just to stay away from them. And it's not that easy when they follow you around the yard and make fun of you. So yeah, mums like we'll move schools and....yeah ”

XX

“ ....Was quiet and reserved in school, he kept to himself and found it hard to fit in He was picked on because he was a loner. He told teachers but nothing was done. According to XX, They needed to intervene. ”

X

“ Year 9 was *Hell on earth* according to X. He felt invisible, bullying (not physical – mental) was way more difficult to deal with. In Year 8 when a rumour was spread about his sexuality across the whole school he withdrew, stopped caring and his grades dropped. He spent all his time just sitting in the library. He believes the school needed to be aware of situations that can arise like this and know how to deal with it. His family relationships were at their worst at this time. He had to convince his parents that he needed to move schools. ”

### 5.4 Drug activity at school

Z

“ And I just didn't feel safe at that school anymore so I moved schools, got new friends. **Where did you go to next?** I went to EE. **And did you like it there?** For the first little bit, yeah. But I found out that there's little bit of, not a lot, but a bit of drug trafficking going on at EE between students. **And what did that make you feel?** Made me feel, like, cause my parents, maybe not particularly my dad, but my mum in particular, she's had a lot of problems with drugs when I was growing up, from when she was a teenager. I felt very insecure and not very safe when my mum was doing drugs or getting high or doing whatever she did. And I felt exactly the same way when I was at EE. I didn't feel safe. **So the teachers at EE were good in that period?** Yeah. But they were so clueless about what was going on in their school. **So they were helpful, but not very aware?** Yeah ”

WW

“ The school wasn't smart as the kids smoke pot but the teachers don't know. ”

### 5.5 Subject selection

T

“ I wanted to do metal work and was not allowed to do it. I was considered too dangerous to have in a metal work class....because of my behavior. I got angry a lot at school. The kids doing well get to choose their electives. ”

### 5.6 Exiting school – no apparent school follow up

YY

“ I was planning to move to SS secondary to see if it would be better. But, so, I kind of told some teachers that I was moving to SS and then before I did the SS stuff, I kind of just stopped going to school and never got bothered again. **No-one chased you up?** Nope, not once **Really?** Not a single time, no letters, nothing. ”

TT

“ **How did it end?** I don't know, I think she just got sick of me (girlfriend) ...”Not too sure, but... she left me. I got even more depressed. Then I went off the rails again and failed year 11. **Oh, so you were still going in year 11? Wow. So you made a real good go of going back.** Yeah, I did for the year. Then after that, 3 weeks into it, I was like “nah, I'm out”. **Yep. And so did you stop attending and stuff?** Yeah. **Did you just make your way out of school or did they kick you out?** I just walked off, and didn't go back. **Just drifted off?** Yeah. **Did they follow up when you disappeared?** Nuh. They didn't say anything. I've still got the school laptop. ”

### 5.7 “Kicked out of school”

U

“ And then, XX school... I went there for 3 days and then they kicked me out. ”

VV

“ Yeah I went to about ½ way through year 8, and then they kicked me out. Like they didn't want me there anymore. ”

TT

“ So a couple of weeks into year 7 you reckon you got kicked out? Yep. ”

V

“ What, did you finish, did you leave early? Nah, I got kicked out in year 9. ”

## 5.8 Primary school experience

S

“ Do you remember primary school well? Did you like it? *Primary school was great. Better than high school. What did you like about it? Just not doing anything really. Just going outside and playing. That was great. Just being energetic. Now I have no energy left, it sucks being a teenager. So how many primary schools were you at? Just one. Ok. And was, um... did you have lots of friends, what were the teachers like? Oh, well, I didn't really have many friends cause I was just really quiet, usually. But the teachers were pretty fine. They were pretty nice So all in all, good memories at primary school? Yeah. Good memories. And so, was the transition from primary to secondary easy? Um, well it was a bit weird, just going from like you being like the oldest there to like 18 year olds... it was just weird. But it was pretty nice. Did a lot of your friends move from XX, from primary to secondary? Yeah. So it was good.* ”

SS

“ Do you have good memories? *Oh yeah. Primary School's better than high school. You know who your friends are in primary school, whereas in High School you just have bitches. That's just my opinion. Just saying. You're allowed to "just say" the whole way through today Cool! So primary school was alright? Yep.* ”

TT

“ But yeah, so there's obviously nothing that you that you think about, about primary school in a positive or a negative sense, so there's nothing that you can remember that was crap...? *Some of the teachers were shit, that's about it.* ”

U

“ And what about primary school? *You just when straight through it at XX? I was getting suspended like all the time.* ”

UU

“ Um, well I'm living in Wendouree and my first primary school I went to was XX Primary School. I really liked it there and then in grade 4 in the middle I went to XX Primary School. Didn't really like it that much there. But then... finished from year 4 to 6 and then Year 7 to 9 I went to XX. And then, yeah, from year 10 I'm here now. And, um, I live with mum and my brother XX. He goes to this school as well. ”

W

“ So can we perhaps go back to just hear a bit about how your primary school experience was? So you were at Black Hill primary for the whole 6 years? *Yep. And how would you describe that? Yeah it was pretty good. But I was a little bit troublesome, if you know what I mean. Yeah, I wasn't the best at reading and stuff like that, so yeah, but otherwise it was pretty normal really. Mm-hmm. So did you go to school all of the time? Yeah most of the time. I used to like enjoy going to school but not anymore. Yeah, when you were younger you liked it? Yeah I liked it, yeah, it was pretty good. If I missed a day I'm like "ohh! I missed a day!" \*laughter\** ”

V V

“ So, we both sort of work in the education field. So, could you do a little bit of a step-by-step, ‘cause you mentioned 4 primary schools, could you give us an idea of why you might’ve moved from the... cause I know some of them will be that you just moved or whatever, um... can you step us through why you moved schools? *Yep. Um, it’s been... every time it’s been bullies. Um, I get bullied really bad about my.. well, I’m not going to say like “brains”, because well, I’m ok but I’m not very smart, like... I’m not as smart as people wanted me to be there. Um, got bullied about my weight, got bullied about not having a dad, um... and just yeah stuff like that, didn’t have many friends. I got sent home from, um, XX in prep, ‘cause one of the boys gave me a black eye. Um, I used to get pushed off the monkey bars all the time. He punched me in the eye, that’s why I had a black eye, and... yeah I just haven’t been able to handle like staying at a school for too long cause bullies get too much.* ”

Y

“ So you said that you, I think, you went to three different primary schools? *Yep. Were there... I suppose, what were the good parts about the different schools you went to? Didn’t like them At all? Nope. What was it that you didn’t like? Um, the people. And sometimes the teachers.* ”

YY

“ What about before, sort of, the job and stuff, and moving out, when you were in Primary school for instance, do you have good memories at Primary School? *Um, yeah, dep... um... at some primary schools. Gerard was the best, cause all of year 6 knew each other and there was no “groups” or anything like that. Um, other schools it was a bit more divided and a bit more frustrating and some kids were just rude and bullies. Um, I got used to running away and dodging punches cause I was a smarty pants to the bullies. So they were being all rude to kids and I was, I’d say something and they’d get angry. Um, So, school was kind of... it’s always different schools too. I found that up in Queanbeyan, it was a lot more “together” and then I came down here and went to XX and it was like groups everywhere, and groups picking on each other and all that sort of stuff. Um, but back when I was in Karabar, um, it was like a lot of us just stayed together and I could walk around the entire school and just see friends everywhere, and just talk to them. Was primary school a good experience or was it a ...? You said you didn’t go much? Yeah it was alright. I had a lot going on at home and then like when I did go to school I got picked on so much, cause I was like the little chubby kid. And then in Year 4, I got picked on because I didn’t shave my legs. And like...* ”

# 6

## Results Recurrent Themes: Service Response

### 6.1 The Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) experience:

During the 16 interviews, 4 young people identified that they had had direct involvement with Child Protection with either themselves or a sibling being removed from the family home. One young person identified that her sister has a child in **OOHC**.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **OOHC**:

SS

“ ...was living with mum and dad when SS and 4 of her siblings were taken into care. SS indicated that this was due to *the usual stuff, you know...the dysfunctional side of the family. I say that in a nice way. Yeah..so yeah, that happened. The problem in the dysfunctional side, like with all the abuse and stuff that was just against my brother and instead of putting him in jail...or getting him charged or removed or whatever...they removed us instead.* She went on to say, *They didn't remove him...I get why they couldn't remove him, cause he's over 18, that's understandable, but um..the thing I don't get is why they couldn't solve the problem. Instead they just removed the family practically. Yeah it was crazy and that's when like...that's when all the ....real...that's when everything got real, really quick and all the anger from all of us was thrown at DHS.* SS and 1 of her siblings are now living back home with mum and dad. One of her younger sisters remains in care. Two of her siblings have left care, but she does not know where they are. ”

Y

“ ...went into OOHC at 18 months of age. Five of her siblings were also taken into care. One of her brothers now lives with dad and another one lives with Mum. One brother lives with Nan. Y remains in care. She did see her parents up until the time she was 12 or 13 but currently has little contact with her parents: *I choose really not to see them much, 'cause they're just trouble.* Y has been in her current placement for 5 months. When asked how she feels about that she said, *Hmmm...not so alright.* When asked to give a score out of 10, she replied, *Majority of the time, about a 9 and sometimes about a 3.* ”

WW

“ ...has 2 younger sisters that were taken into care. He said he was asked to leave while the girls were removed and that no one spoke to him about it or why they were doing it. He said they were dobbed in by a woman who is a 'druggo.' He was furious. Then his sisters were split up, which he believes has 'fucked them.' One went to dad and one to Nan. He believes his dad is not fit to look after his sister as he is an alcoholic and pot smoker. He visits his sister who lives with Nan but doesn't see his sister who lives with dad. Mum has weekend visitations and is taking it very hard. *She has not been going very well since the girls were removed.* ”

ZZ

“ ...Lives with Mum and her mother’s boyfriend. Her younger sister was removed from home and placed with her dad. Her brother lives with their dad. *My mum was like really bad on drugs last year, so they came like, we had this girl living with us who was like my best friend. And then me and her had a fight and she moved out and she like called them and she like made up all this stuff about us. So they got involved and they took my baby sister and put her in with her dad. And they didn’t even check her dad’s house or anything to see if it’s clean or anything. They didn’t like make him do drug tests or anything and he was really bad on drugs as well. And then like, oh I dunno, it’s just like our worker, they came to our house like 6 or 7 times before they took her and each time they had this one worker and then they had another come with that one worker every time it was a different one come with that lady worker every time. And that one worker just sat there and did nothing. And then it turns out she was actually, turned out to be our worker. And, yeah, she’s just, a cow. And then they got involved again. Like, they tried to take me. And they came and they like, they left straight away pretty much and closed the case. And then they came again a couple months later and they closed it again. So, they left me but then like my other best friend’s living with us as well, and she’s almost 17 and they got involved with her and now they’ve taken her and she’s not allowed to live with us either. Which I don’t understand either. Like, if they left me, they said that she’s not safe here, there, but I am and my sister’s not either. It makes no sense. I’m so confused about it.*

ZZ has noted a change in her little sisters’ behaviour since being placed into the care of her father. *Yeah, like, she’s been gone for so long. And her dad... Mum’s never smacked any of us kids ‘cause she like cries... she felt so bad... And then he... he smacks my sister all the time. As soon as she done something wrong. I don’t have anything against it, but I don’t think a baby should be smacked. And I dunno. She’s just gone downhill since she’s been there. Like, she was talking and laughing all the time and dancing and everything and now when we see her, ‘cause we’re only allowed to see her in the office, when we see her, she just doesn’t talk, she just sits there, looks at us, she doesn’t go near mum. She comes near me sometimes. Gives me cuddles. But, she doesn’t act like a normal 2 year old. **So you’ve noticed a real change in her?** A big change. And she used to love taking photos on my phone. And now, if I give her my phone, she’ll throw it. She’s just... quiet.* ”

SS

“ **So is resicare a lot harder than foster care?** *Oh no, no. Foster care. You’re put in a house with someone who completely... who is there to pretty much... well, be there, but doesn’t know anything about you. They just... that just pissed me off a lot. Yeah. Cause I, um... but then when I left, they were going to pretty much... there was talk of were I was going to next, where my next move was and I made it pretty clear that I was staying in Ballarat, that it was going to be resicare. No foster. And they were thinking of putting... they were thinking of throwing me in the direction of xx. I’m thinking “Ha! Fuck off. No.” Cause I knew where that would’ve went. There would’ve been less access, there would’ve been... it would’ve been a lot harder for me to get in and out of Ballarat because it’s three hours. And I was just like “no thanks”. I made it very clear. Like “you shove me over there and I and my future gets fucked up, I’m blaming you”. From there, it was a case of “we’ve found this good house in Ballarat!”. I was like “yeah!!”* SS was later returned to her parents, she said: *The area we live in, it’s bad. Cause we live in probably the worst part of xx. And the thing I do not like about the part we live in, is that the streets have pretty names but the people that live on those streets are pretty ugly. It’s crazy. **So does that add a bit of stress on the family, do you think?** Nuh. Well, to be honest, I would prefer to be safe in a house than go out and get killed* ”

## 6.2 Linkages

During the 16 interviews, 6 young people identified they were linked with 5 or more agencies, 6 had a personal involvement with the legal system, 5 had direct involvement with Child Protection and 7 had used headspace Ballarat. The young people described negative incidents that caused their connection to services however, 13 of the 16 young people interviewed identified an agency worker as someone who had had a 'significant or positive influence' on them.

The following descriptions and quotes are a selection of the participants' experience with **linkages to agencies**:

ZZ

“ So tell us what it was like coming to Ballarat to school? So how did you find out about (alternative education setting)? *Uh, I can't remember... Oh, my worker! Because I got into a bit of a fight, it was a very big fight, and the police referred me to this lady and she was, like I started talking to her and she told me about (alternative education setting) and she enrolled me and everything. Oh ok. Was it someone at Youth Justice? Do you remember, does that sound right? YS or something... Yeah... Youth Support Services? And is that how you ended up with YSS? Uh, no. I was so angry one day, 'cause everything had just happened with my little sister and this girl was going around saying stuff and I didn't like what she was saying cause... it. .. What she was saying wasn't true. And it can get someone in a lot of trouble and everything. I kinda seen her down the street and.... she... I ended up putting her in hospital, it was pretty bad. I regret it so much, I wish I hadn't have done it. Um, but, that's how I ended up with J. And I have not been in a fight since.* ZZ is / has also connected with DHS, Victoria Police, Headspace and Uniting Care ”

Z

“ Talking to Headspace at the moment. And I'm waiting to see the GP to organize more sessions and I'm going to CASA at the moment. Z is/ has also been connected with DHS, Victoria Police and Youth Justice. ”

Y

“ So that's 2 positives that are happening right now, that sounds good. Are there any other workers that you're involved with? You've got Dee (Springboard) and then we talked about justice and then alcohol and drug counsellor...any other workers? *Um disability. What sort of work are they doing with you? Um they just help me with every day stuff... like everyday living.* Y is/has also connected with Berry Street and DHS ”

S

“ So how did you get onto CAFs? *Um... It was when I went to the police and spoke to the counsellor... and she's like "oh, I'll get you into CAFs" ... like, the reconnect program and stuff. Yeah. So one led to the next to the next to the next and the Reconnect program lead onto the youth housing with Ray and stuff?. Yeah.* S is/has also connected with DHS, Victoria Police, Centrelink and local GP. ”

XX

“ ...eventually spoke to the school counsellor who found Headspace and took him in and he never turned back. Support received from Headspace for 10 sessions, then away for 1 year. *Should have gone back to them during this time.* The point of contact now for support is Beyond Blue and Headspace. XX is/ has also been connected with Centrelink. ”

WW

“ He has been in court 4 or 5 times and on probation twice. He knows he could be a better person. Nan and mum tell him to stay out of trouble. He used to drink a lot before DHS stepped in. His YJ worker brought DHS back into his life which he hated. Current YJ workers “are better” He has 6 months left of his probation and just wants to see it out. Used to see breaking the law as a bit of a game that he could win. He is seeing a psychologist but he doesn’t get him. He has seen a doctor but didn’t like her as she wouldn’t give him a diagnosis and just wanted to give him drugs. He didn’t trust her. ”

S

“ Centrelink, Do they look after you? Yeah they’re not bad. Gotta love them. ”

SS

“ And then I went to Centrelink, and I was like “you know what? No skin off my nose. I’ll tell Centrelink I’m now a job seeker”. **How has Centrelink been?** Yeah, they’re pretty good. Yeah. The thing I think is hilarious... Cause the guy I went to speak to not long ago, he was just telling me how Centrelink will be of no use when Tracey’s become A for E, because they would be technically... they’re a new and improved Centrelink. Yeah, cause they’d be better than Centrelink. Yeah, cause you’d have, um, there’s a national name for it... ”

YY

“ Centrelink was a pain. An absolute pain. It took me, I think it was 2 or 3 months to set up a basic Youth, um, payment sort of thing. And the Centrelink Job Services are useless. ”

VV

“ **And is that ‘cause Mum’s moved around, or has there been a reason for the moves?** Well me and mum don’t get very much money, because my dad doesn’t pay child support, um, mum doesn’t get much money from Centrelink, her pay is not that good, so we struggle a lot and the rent is just too much in the houses we were living in, so we had to move. Yeah. ”

W

“ **Um, so what is involved with the TAC? So are you back and forth with them, did you say?** Yeah, it’s like, they’re just looking after me, kinda like, I’m not getting paid by Centrelink, I’m getting paid by TAC. Like, um, they’ve bought me a gym membership and all these other things, you know what I mean, trying to get me back to working order. But, yeah, pretty good so far. ”

YY

“ **So how do you get by on such few hours of work?** Um, a little bit Centrelink. And otherwise, I’ve just been saving and limiting and... Still doing pretty well, though. I’m still managing to save... Getting my fuel to work... and all that sort of stuff, save and still have the one or two things through the week. Um, still getting more and more money in my account. It’s not a whole heap but still making some money. **And over the Christmas break, do you get a lot more opportunities for work?** Um, yeah, during Christmas break I’ll get like, over the 6 weeks, I get maybe 3 days off. Um, once the school holidays come around it’s kind of, it’s generally about 8, \$900. I’m just working flat out. Um, hopefully, I can get onto the grounds crew and my pay will become more. Which will make it a bit better, but yeah. It’s kind of, seasonal, sort of thing. The rest of it’s a bit of just Centrelink payments which I don’t get a whole lot. ”

XX

“ Centrelink is the main source of income for our family. Mum isn't working at present. Money is a big problem; mortgage is an issue and a challenge to meet payments. Dad is in and out of work. ”

Z

“ It's nice to see that your doors have opened again after you felt like they shut on you a little bit. So here's a weird question for you: What is your advice, so taking into account the story you've given us, right, where could've government played a better role helping you and your family, do you think? Are there any parts that you think they could've intervened in? There's been a lot of problems with the child support money that um, there's been times that mum has refused to pay, or mum's refused to pay it and we've had to only just scraped by. Like, my dad's had to borrow money off my grandma before, numerous times just so he can get food for the week. And I think the government could have helped out a little bit there. Cause there are people that use, say centrelink, just to get money. But there are people who use Centrelink to live, to be able to afford the things that they need. ”

### 6.3 DHHS / Child Protection:

The 4 young people that had personal experience involving Child Protection described very negative memories about these interactions. They also commonly identified that they were not shown respect by the workers and in some instances stated that the workers misrepresented the truth around their case. All young people who had experience with Child Protection also questioned the effectiveness of the workers in their role.

Y

“ Have you ever wanted to give them some advice (CP)? What would you tell them if you could? Yep, they don't listen, they judge. They judge on a piece of paper. Um, your everyday life is written on a piece of paper and they just judge by that. They need to sit in a room for an hour or two and get to know the person. ”

ZZ

“ It's weird, cause like when she got taken (little sister), they just came at like 8 o'clock in the morning and like they had cops and everything there and they had to wake me up and I was crying and like I grabbed my sister, and the cop held me down by my throat and ripped her away from me. “So they got involved and they took my baby sister and put her in with her dad. And they didn't even check her dad's house or anything to see if it's clean or anything. They didn't like make him do drug tests or anything and he was really bad on drugs as well. **So, this is a bit of a big question. What do you think you would change if you got the chance to go and talk to the people that run DHS?** The way they treat some of their like... clients, the way they treat us. Sometimes they're just like so cruel. They full said that mum full abuses them and everything but mum doesn't even raise her voice. I think it's like impossible for her to raise her voice. So it's like confusing. they should like listen to the teenagers more than making up their own decisions, really. **What about even just the way they talk to you and stuff?** They're so rude. We've met a couple of nice ones. Like, there are a couple of ones that are nice but there's like 3 that are honestly so rude. Can't even talk to them for two seconds without them like walking off on us or like talking down to us or something like that or like... (Best friend's) worker, for instance, yells at her. ”

SS

“ Yeah they were there with us for 2-3 months. So, ‘cause they were... it was court-ordered for them to be there. Um, yeah. They were nice (CAFS workers) and, um, the DHS childcare workers that we had there, they were idiots. I just think they didn’t know anything. **What made them like “not knowing” in your view?** Well, um, the things we said... we read the reports... and the things we said were just blown out of context. There were heaps of things that were said that were just weren’t said from anyone. Yeah, so I think they were good at storytelling in their day at high school, I think. But, you know... **So not accurately portraying what people were saying?** Pretty much. There was a lot of false information, and then they threw at court, and we said that to our lawyers... they threw that back at our lawyers and said that we had said it, that out of five individuals, the five had said it. But that’s just not right because AA, the youngest, and BB, you wouldn’t understand a damn thing they said. They don’t know anything... they’re storytellers themselves. They have imagination, so their lawyers came back at our lawyers that we had said all that stuff but we didn’t. Pretty good storytellers, I have to admit. Pretty good storytelling. The DHS workers we had, Child Protection, were idiots. They didn’t know what they were doing half the time. **Do you feel like they listened to you? Do you feel like they cared about your situation? Are there any of those sort of bits and pieces that strike you?** No, um, except for the two DHS workers I’ve... actually, three... um, cause over the summer the last 3-4 years, I’ve had four workers. **That sounds pretty hard.** Um, yeah. 4 DHS workers. Only one of them was nice. Two of them were just... I don’t even know where to begin with those. And another one needed to get her facts straight and keep to a lot of... Oh! Big big factor, too many kids when you ask them, was lying and making promises that they couldn’t keep. That’s another big thing. **That’s really good.** Um... but before... like, when my case was put in the hands of DHS, everything was just shit ‘ Cause, I mean, their workers that we had were just shit-talkers, whereas, give my case to someone else who knew what the hell they were doing with kids... Like, in Berry St, there’s more of a personal sort of level there, because, well, they’re there all the time pretty much.

”

# 7

## Results - Positive influences on young people and what is working well

Young people identified a range of positive influences that are/have been present in their lives

### 7.1 Significant support person:

All of the young people interviewed were able to identify at least 1 person who supported them and listened to them. Some young people were able to identify a number of people who had / have a positive influence on them; this included friends, parent/s, other relatives, teachers and workers.

WW

“ His Nan: *listens the most*. He said his Nan: *is the best, no one can hurt her or I would hurt them*. He also has a significant male role model (calls him his uncle) that he turns to for support. He is, *the best*. When WW ‘flips’ this is where he goes. He (uncle) keeps WW and his brother ‘going’.

U

“ Um, so I’ve been living with my Aunty since 2012. Yeah, it was October 2012 since I’ve been living with my Aunty. It’s been good for me. She’s helped me heaps. Like, if I need something she’ll get it for me.

### 7.2 Local programs:

Many of the young people interviewed were able to identify specific local programs that they had participated in and found beneficial.

YY

“ Ballarat Health Services was really good. We used to go over to Sebastian’s and they’d sit down and we’d get some chips and drinks and sit and we’d talk. **YY is referring to the PATS program. The program participants came from families experiencing mental health issues.** Occasionally they would ask us if we would like vouchers...so if we wanted a break and get away from everything we’d get some movie vouchers and go to a movie. Um...you could get some for the day spa which was awesome, just like get a 45 minute massage. Um, or like bowling and that sort of stuff. And they also, um, if you needed help with transport, they’d provide it as, um, taxi vouchers. They would call a taxi and send it to you.

X

“ ...Participated in the YAE program (run by the Committee for Ballarat), he found this a very positive experience: *You got out and about, there were fun things to do. There was a large focus on you and there were more opportunities to work in the community. Traditional school was too much its own thing.*

### 7.3 Alternative education

The majority of young people were very positive in relation to their experiences in alternative education settings. The factors that they indicated were different than their experiences in mainstream school were that they had good relationships with their teachers and were treated with respect.

Z

“ Really enjoying it. Like the teachers and what we’re learning and the teachers seem to care more. ”

TT

“ Teachers don’t treat you like a kid, they treat you like an adult. It feels like they are your mates. ”

U

“ Teachers are great...wonderful. ”

ZZ

“ Schools good fun and interesting. I never used to go, ever. ”

VV

“ People (fellow students) have gone through similar stuff to what I’ve gone through and they all understand how I feel and stuff like that...and I guess they don’t want to put me back in that position because they know how it feels. And...yeah...it’s good. ”

### 7.4 Significant case workers

A number of young people described excellent relationships with case workers from various agencies.

ZZ

“ So tell us what it was like coming to Ballarat to school? So how did you find out about (alternative education setting)? Uh, I can’t remember... Oh, my worker! Because I got into a bit of a fight, it was a very big fight, and the police referred me to this lady and she was, like I started talking to her and she told me about (alternative education setting) and she enrolled me and everything. Oh ok. Was it someone at Youth Justice? Do you remember, does that sound right? YS or something... Yeah... Youth Support Services? And was she helpful? Yeah, I still talk to her now. Oh really? Yeah I’ve had her for half a year. She’s really good, I like talking to her. That’s good. So she asked you if you want to enroll at (alternative education setting) and you said you were happy to go. Yep and then like I had a meeting there and everything and she’s like “how do you feel about going?” I’m like “pretty good” and then they put me into like (alternative education setting program), and I did really well in that. I finished that early. ”

SS

“ ...the last 3-4 years, I've had 4 DHS workers. Only one of them was nice. Two of them were just... I don't even know where to begin with those. And another one needed to get her facts straight. when my case was put in the hands of DHS, everything was just shit. They were just shit people. But then when they, um, went... they gave my case to Berry St, it was just different. It was better.... he did more for me in 3 years at that point than any DHS worker had. Cause, um, there was talk of me going home cause there was no point in me being in care cause I was seen as very independent. I was getting paid every fortnight from Centrelink, I was at school, I was doing... practically very independent at 16. so... Um, we made a plan to, um, as the months progressed to a certain point where we reached my court date, which was in December last year, that we'd, um, increase access visits. I got access visits... I actually got to go home every weekend. So that was pretty cool. Then they increased to two days, pretty much the whole weekend. So, from Friday night to Sunday night. So, it's pretty good. Yeah that was with mum and dad. And, um, there was... that was going really well and they were going to increase it more, so I'd be there from Friday till like Monday night. It was increased practically... But I only got it... it only got to the point with the weekend, it didn't get any further than that. And then, there was this two weeks where I didn't hear from VV (worker)... didn't hear anything at all, and then I find out that he was constantly in and out of court for me, trying to get me home and then he came to the house and he gave me this little list. And I was like “what is this?” and he told me that, um, “you're going home in 2 weeks,” and I was just like... it was great. **So he was really in there fighting for you.** Yeah, he did more for me in 3 years at that point than any worker did... or DHS worker. Yeah ”

## 7.5 Positive attitude by parents regarding school

A number of parents were positive about education and the importance of attending school. They support young people to get to and from school.

UU

“ **So what aspirations do they have for you?** They want me to, like, go far and do things I want to do and stuff. And, uh, yeah like dad left in like year 9, I think. And mum... she, uh, started Year 11 but then ended it and wanted just to work. **Have they been very supportive of you going to school, though?** Yep. Me and my brother. ”

X

“ Parents' expectations were not a big deal for X. He enjoyed school; his parents got him to and from school. School was positive and he believed in school. ”

S

“ Yeah, my dad's like “oh, we'll get you into a private school”. It was a lot of money, though, it was a pretty big struggle. **So do you think your parent's perception was that private school would be a better education?** Yeah, definitely. ”

SS

“ **Would you say that over the course of your life your family have been good or bad for you going to school?** *They're pretty good. I mean, my dad's probably the inflictor of it all. He just says "go to school, get an..." well, I don't know what he says in his mind, but I'm pretty sure it's like "get your arse to school, no excuses".* **Do you think he had high expectations of you at school?** *Oh, no no. He doesn't have expectations, he just expects me to get an education.* **Yep. So yeah. Was he educated? Was mum educated? Did they set that standard?** *Um, mum's family... if I was to do a background on her family, we'd be here all day. Her family wasn't the great... she left school I think year 9, year 10, to take care of her younger siblings because her mum and dad were drunks and drug users and gamblers and so... yeah, so she left school to take care of her family. Um, dad left school I think for a job, but he left year 10-ish.* **But they both wanted you to get an education?** *Yep.* ”

”

V V

“ **And what about...You've talked a lot about living with your mum... Has mum always been good for you for school and stuff? Like does she make sure you go?** *Yeah mum's been really supportive. She always makes me go to school. But when I was struggling with my depression, she couldn't get me to leave the house, as I said. So, she just gave up pretty much because I wouldn't leave my room.* ”

”

# 8

## Results - Recommendations from young people

Young people provided a range of ideas on what they believe needed to change regarding services and supports to young people.

### 8.1 Child Protection

ZZ

“ So they need to listen to you guys? Yeah. And like, they need to like investigate more in, like, ‘cause they didn’t even check my sister’s dad’s house at all and like... his house is like disgusting. Mum used to go there and clean it. So like they didn’t check it, nothing. And they’re just... yeah. Oh, and they need to stop like believing everything they hear....And he’s just like... And there was no proof that we were dealing, cause we’re not and everything like that. But they full practically said that we are and they have no proof of it. And they full said that my sister’s in physical harm, but there’s never been like a bruise on her or she never... mum’s never hit her or anything. And so I dunno how she’s in physical harm. And like, yeah, they just need to stop making up stuff. They need to prove stuff, instead of like using allegations pretty much. ”

### 8.2 Generalist youth support services

Z

“ Just having a lot more support systems for young people. Whether it be to get into a good school or to get a job. Cause there’s a lot of support for over 18’s but not for younger people who can go there instead of going to their parents. Cause I would prefer to go to a place where I could be anonymous, where I could ask for help, without having to ask my dad about things that I need help with. ”

### 8.3 Alternative education

YY

“ Need to promote alternative education options more. I had no idea that any single one of those (alternative education) was available. I was clueless about those. ”

WW

“ His attendance is good and he wishes it was better funded so they could do more activities and hands on. Attends 3 days a week but would really like to attend 5 days per week. He feels he is not judged and can let his anger out through hands on learning. ”

## 8.4 Schools

Z

“ Are there any things that would’ve made school better for you? *I reckon the teachers having more training on being aware of what’s going on. So you’re saying of the whole school environment, not just teaching, but looking after kids in the... Yeah... When you were going through the bullying, you’ve mentioned that happened at a few different times, what do you reckon the teachers needed to do? They actually needed to do something about what was going on, whether it be give the bully detention or suspend them or whatever and actually take action, not just let it keep happening. I know it’s not the easiest thing to do, but they were pretty much just sitting on their bums, doing nothing, just watching. Talk to the bullies... see what’s wrong with them, like, not what’s wrong with them but what’s wrong with them in their life for them to like be a bully.* ”

XX

“ *In schools there needs to be more support groups of students where others like you can go to interact around a common interest, e.g. writing* ”

YY

“ *When I had doubles of a class they would take me out of the second half into an office and I could do heaps of catch up by myself and no-one would distract me. So that really helped me to catch up.* ”

U

“ *School could have tried to support me and show me some respect.* ”

TT

“ *I wish school had kept a better eye on me – helped me more.* ”

# 9

## Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

### Discussion on Interviews:

The opportunity through the 16 interviews to learn and discover what young people in the Central Highlands region are feeling and thinking and to hear their stories was a privilege. A number of themes that were expected to be presented by young people were raised and a number of themes that were not expected emerged during the interviews. In addition, there were themes that the interviewers expected to be identified which were not.

During the interviews the young people were encouraged to guide the discussion and they were very willing to participate, be heard and involved in future work by CHCYAP.

Whilst the lived experiences of the young people interviewed varies from person to person, at a macro level their experiences contain many similarities and the feedback they provided during the interview process includes a number of commonalities.

From a systems perspective consistency is key. Young people need the support of workers and educators who both know and understand them and their story and who can commit to establishing a positive and/or enduring relationship with their clients/students. This relationship must be underpinned by communication and trust.

A number of agencies working with these young people consistently received positive feedback. Such as headspace Ballarat, YY - *"Really good to have a consistent worker!"* and, V - *"New counsellor is pretty cool, I like him, he's awesome actually. He gives me real strategies for dealing with my anger."* CAFS, CASA, Berry St, Youth Connections, Springboard, HLLLEN Career Hub, Ballarat Community Health and Youth Justice (in most cases) were also credited with doing good work.

Child Protection did not rate highly with any of the young people interviewed, nor did Centrelink in most instances. YY - *"Centrelink was a pain. An absolute pain. It took me, I think it was 2 or 3 months to set up a basic Youth, um, payment sort of thing. And the Centrelink Job Services are useless."* It was identified by the interviewers that the responses given by the young people when referring to Child Protection were intense and highly emotional. The main emotions conveyed during the interviews were anger and what appeared to be genuine confusion.

Feedback regarding Victoria Police was inconsistent and ranged from, V - *"There were 1 or 2 that used to really listen."* to W - *"I really...I hate the police, you know what I mean. And everyone who's a criminal hates the police, unless they're a person that talks to them, you know what I mean?"* and, S - *"The police could have done more, they didn't check for bruising although they said they would."*

The importance of relationships and 'being heard' was a consistent benchmark identified by the young people when assessing the effectiveness of agencies, organisations and schools.

### Discussion on CHCYAP Priorities:

The CHCYAP has identified three priorities that will frame their future work:

#### 1. Reduce the incidence of family violence and its impact on children and young people

Academic literature clearly identifies the array of negative impacts that family violence has on children and young people.

According to the Domestic Violence Prevention Gold Coast Inc. 20/07/15; *"Children who live in homes where there is domestic violence grow up in an environment that is unpredictable, filled with tension and anxiety and dominated by fear. This can lead to significant emotional and psychological trauma, similar to that experienced by children who are victims of child abuse. Instead of growing up in an emotionally and physically safe, secure, nurturing and predictable environment, these children are forced to worry about the future; they try to predict when it might*

*happen next and try to protect themselves and their siblings. Often getting through each day is the main objective so there is little time left for fun, relaxation or planning for the future."*

The interviewers felt that the young people often minimalised the severity of their experience of family violence due to their normalising of it, or were guarded when referring to parents or carers being physical with them so as not to cause further interest or intervention. Instead the young people mainly referred to emotional and psychological torment, indirect threats, or controlling behaviour. This was not the case with sexual assault where 2 of the 16 young people stated explicitly they had been victims of sexual abuse.

Hearing the lived experience of young people who have been victims of, or exposed to family violence, clearly illustrates the need for a focus on this area by CHCYAP. *TT – "She was fucking shocked. She didn't know what was going on. Dad was just threatening to kill her and he said fucking all sorts." And that was the cause of the separation? Or, the final...? "Yeah that fight. That just ended it. I was happy."*

## **2. Improve the capacity of parents to effectively nurture and protect their children from harm**

The majority of young people interviewed have been required to negotiate their way through life within a context of instability. Consistent change around their living arrangements and locale, attendance at a number of different schools and people regularly moving in and out of their lives (including parents, parents' partners, siblings, friends and case workers) creates a situation where young people lack a sense of security and stability. Whilst none of the young people described security and stability as missing elements in their life, a number of young people did identify that they, *"Didn't feel safe,"* at various times. *"The most critical ingredients your child needs to develop and thrive on are security and stability. You can establish security and stability to your child in simple, everyday ways. The social and emotional development of your child has significant implications for their current and future growth in learning, exploring, blossoming in social, educational and employment success."* (Parenting Help - <http://theparentinghelp.blogspot.com.au/2011/03/importance-of-establishing-security-and.html> - 20/07/15)

Although the main geographical and social demographic of the young people would point to a higher prevalence of financial stress, the young people often didn't see it as a barrier to social experiences or a challenge to education attendance. It was noted that there appeared to be a philosophical approach to discussing finances and young people didn't display anger or a sense of entitlement.

In the lives of so many of these young people, the adults around them and in many instances the systems developed to protect them, have failed. In an effort to address this underlying issue, 'at risk' parents may require support that will assist them to create this critical sense of security and stability for their children.

The prevalence of abuse, alcohol and drug issues, complex family structures and family instability amongst the young people interviewed supports the need to assist parents to nurture and protect their children. *S- (16 years old), "No I don't live with my parents. I moved out maybe 4 months ago, I think, because of.....abuse from dad. It wasn't very nice."*

All of the young people that have experienced issues with drug addiction have expressed a 'wish' that they had never gotten involved with drugs. There was little talk of 'partying' and 'fun' times, rather they all identified the negative impacts their drug issues have had on them and those around them. It was noted by the interviewers that in only one interview did a young person highlight drug use as something thrilling and fun. The vast majority of the young people who talked about their drug use appeared to use drugs in a therapeutic manner or a way to escape. The interviewers did not challenge any claim of mental health or make any assumptions of the causation but were surprised by the level of mental health literacy of the young people interviewed.

### 3. 'Learning matters' - increase attendance and engagement at kindergarten and school

"I was kicked out of school," was a common perception shared by many young people during the 16 interviews. It is understood that the Department of Education and Training has policies in place relating to both suspension and expulsion however, none of the young people interviewed identified a process of investigation or that a behaviour review conference occurred prior to 'being kicked out of school.' Correctly or incorrectly, their perception is that they were 'just told to leave'. DET policy also identifies the 'right of the young person to be heard,' this is not consistent with the perceptions of the young people interviewed.

Ministerial Order No 625 - Procedures for Suspension and Expulsion came into operation on March 1st, 2014. Part 4: point 12; clause (2) states:

*In the case of a student compulsory school age, the principal and the DEECD regional office must ensure that the student is participating in one or more of the following options as soon as practicable –*

- (a) Enrolled at another registered school;*
- (b) Enrolled at a registered training organisation;*
- (c) Engaged in employment.*

Many of the young people interviewed referred to school exits prior to March 1st, 2014. However, there was a similar Ministerial Order and DEECD policy preceding that outlined above.

Only 1 young person identified that a school assisted them to enrol with another education provider upon their departure from the original school.

A disturbing number of young people spoke of 'just walking out of school one day and never being 'bothered' again.' If the young people's recount of events is accurate, the requirement and responsibility of education providers to ensure that young people of compulsory school age are engaged in education, training or employment has not been followed. The data (whilst not a robust sample) supports this;

- **31%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 8
- **25%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 9
- **19%** of YP interviewed left the mainstream education system in Year 7
- 1 YP interviewed has not passed Year 7, 8 or 9
- 1 YP interviewed has not passed Year 7 or 8
- **13%** of YP interviewed are currently not involved in education, training or employment

However, it is extremely positive to note that;

- **56%** of the YP interviewed are currently attending an alternative education program
- 1 YP interviewed is currently attending a mainstream school
- 1 YP interviewed is currently attending university

The majority of young people interviewed have re-entered the education system which implies that these young people acknowledge the value of education. However, the more young people moved, the more prevalent school disengagement seemed to become. The critical consideration for the future is how to ensure that the educational pathways of young people such as those interviewed are positive, engaging and most importantly progressive and seamless.

Whilst in many instances parental life style choices may have directly or indirectly impacted their children's educational outcomes most young people indicated that their parent/s wanted them to do well at school, certainly better than they did. Most young people acknowledged that their parents supported them as best they could to attend school each day. Whilst some young people indicated that 1 parent (generally the parent that they are not currently residing with) may not really care about whether they attend school or not there was not one report of parent/s deliberately discouraging attendance at school.

Consistently, the young people interviewed identified issues relating to a lack of perceived support from schools, poor relationships with teachers and the fact that they 'weren't learning anything.' In many instances the young people also described feelings of isolation and a lack of connectedness at school. When describing the positive and supportive aspects of schools (both mainstream and alternative) their comments centred on relationships and a sense of being valued and heard.

Poor educational outcomes, erratic or non-attendance at school and obvious disengagement with the educational journey is (or has been) a reality for all the young people interviewed. The CHCYAP 3rd priority, 'Learning matters' is extremely important for both the present and the future of young people. *Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.* Nelson Mandela. The work of the CHCYAP has the opportunity to change the world for these young people and their peers via improved educational outcomes.

Most importantly..... 86% of the young people interviewed ( 1 young person was not asked at the time of interview) indicated a willingness to be contacted in order to be kept up to date regarding CHCYAP project outcomes and potentially participate in project related activities..... **these young people want to help us to help them!**

# 10 Be inspired.....

The resilience and positivity displayed by the young people during the 16 interviews was extraordinary given their personal circumstances and the adversity they have faced. Their capacity to 'own' their issues and reflect is remarkable and their hopes and dreams for the future were inspiring.

Of significance was that 56% of the young people interviewed identified that they are planning to pursue a career/work in community service fields e.g. youth work, aged care, counselling, teaching and childcare.

'Straight up', in their own words:

V V

“ I reckon now as I look back on it...I just wasn't very nice. ”

Y

“ Do you wish it had've been different? “Yep.” How would you have liked it to be? Um... part of it was over drugs as well. So I would've rather school over drugs. ”

SS

“ Looking back on it now... you're through quite a lot of crap stuff... what kept you going all that time? I don't know. Cause, um, I made a sort of mental decision at the very beginning whether I wanted to... there was two roads I could go down. The first road being I stay the way I am. Second road, be like all the other kids you see in care these days that're involved with drugs. That are involved with like crime and the law, pretty much. I didn't.. I knew I wasn't going down the second road. So, I don't actually know what kept me grounded... I just kept on doing my own thing. For a good three years...I've been home since November, last year. So I'm pretty good. ”

Z

“ So if you think about all that you've been through, what is it about yourself you think from inside has got you to where you are now? What is it about you that's managed? I think it's me wanting to be someone. When I die, I want to be remembered. I want to do something fantastic with my life and I wanna... I'm not saying that I want to be a movie star or popular in that way, I want to be remembered for helping people. I've always wanted to volunteer at one of those pop-up hospitals that you get in some of the 3rd world countries. I've always wanted to fly over there and help out with the free services that they have. **So did you always have big dreams for yourself? Yeah. Did you always believe you could get there? Did you always believe in yourself?** I used to, but now I'm trying to think more... real. I can't think of the word. **Realistic?** Realistic, that's it. And I just want to get through high school. And while I'm in high school, I want to open as many doors as I can. I used to work at the Reject Shop and I used to work at Pizza Hut and I did that work experience thing and I'm doing hospitality and I'm doing choir and trying to open as many doors as I can to try and get myself somewhere in life. I haven't decided what I want to do yet, but that's what I'm trying to do now, trying to get as many opportunities as I can. ”

YY

“ I was 15 and I finally met my dad after 15 years. Um... so we started sorta.....sorta started spending time together and everything and then um, apparently this happened before I met him but he got arrested for like this gang bashing thing that happened, um, where this guy was in a coma for 2 months, um. He was one of the main offenders' sort of thing and possession of cannabis and all of that. So that kind of messed me up for a while. Of course before that, I kept talking to him and it was more.....I was more and more like him than I knew but I'd never met him before so I was kind of worried about becoming.....that! Feeling really positive about my future.....Um, just keep heading where I'm going and keep pushing out, don't think about everything else. ”

X

“ ...believes in surrounding himself with positive and good people. Dreaming about a day where any school he teaches at (undertaking a Bachelor of Education at University) introduces the Theatre of the Oppressed. He wants to travel and understand the world more. He wants to have more scope to give back. ”

TT

“ Wish I'd never touched drugs. ”

VV

“ **So it was only the (car) accident that stopped you?** Yeah, pretty much, yeah. Otherwise, I'd be dead..... Well, dead or in jail for the rest of my life. **Any advice for other young people heading down the wrong path?** Yeah.... school stay in it! ”

XX

“ He doesn't believe home life should be used as an excuse.....Dreaming about peace and unity for society. There is too much friction in the world. He wishes people could be who they are. ”

WW

“ If I could, I would build my own motorbike and ride off into the sunset and away from the shit. ”

## Glossary

### Family Violence:

Family and domestic violence is any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behavior that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.

The term 'family violence' encompasses violence that might occur between family members, such as violence between siblings or across generations, in addition to violence between partners. Use of the term family violence also reflects indigenous communities' preference for the term because it more accurately reflects extended kinship ties and how the impact of violence affects all members of a family. *DHHS website; 120715; <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/family-violence/what-is-family-violence>*

### Vulnerability:

Children and young people are vulnerable if the capacity of the parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long term development and wellbeing is limited *CHCYAP Update May 2015*

### Bullying:

Bullying is when someone, or a group of people, deliberately upset or hurt another person or damage their property, reputation or social acceptance on more than one occasion. There is an imbalance of power in incidents of bullying with the bully or bullies having more power at the time due to age, size, status or other reasons. *DET Victoria website; 120715; <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/Pages/bullying.aspx>*

## Acronyms

**YP** - Young People

**CHCYAP** - Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership

**HLLEN** - Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network

**OOHC** - Out Of Home Care

**YJ** – Youth Justice

**CP** – Child Protection

**DET** - Department of Education and Training

## Attachments (1 – 6)

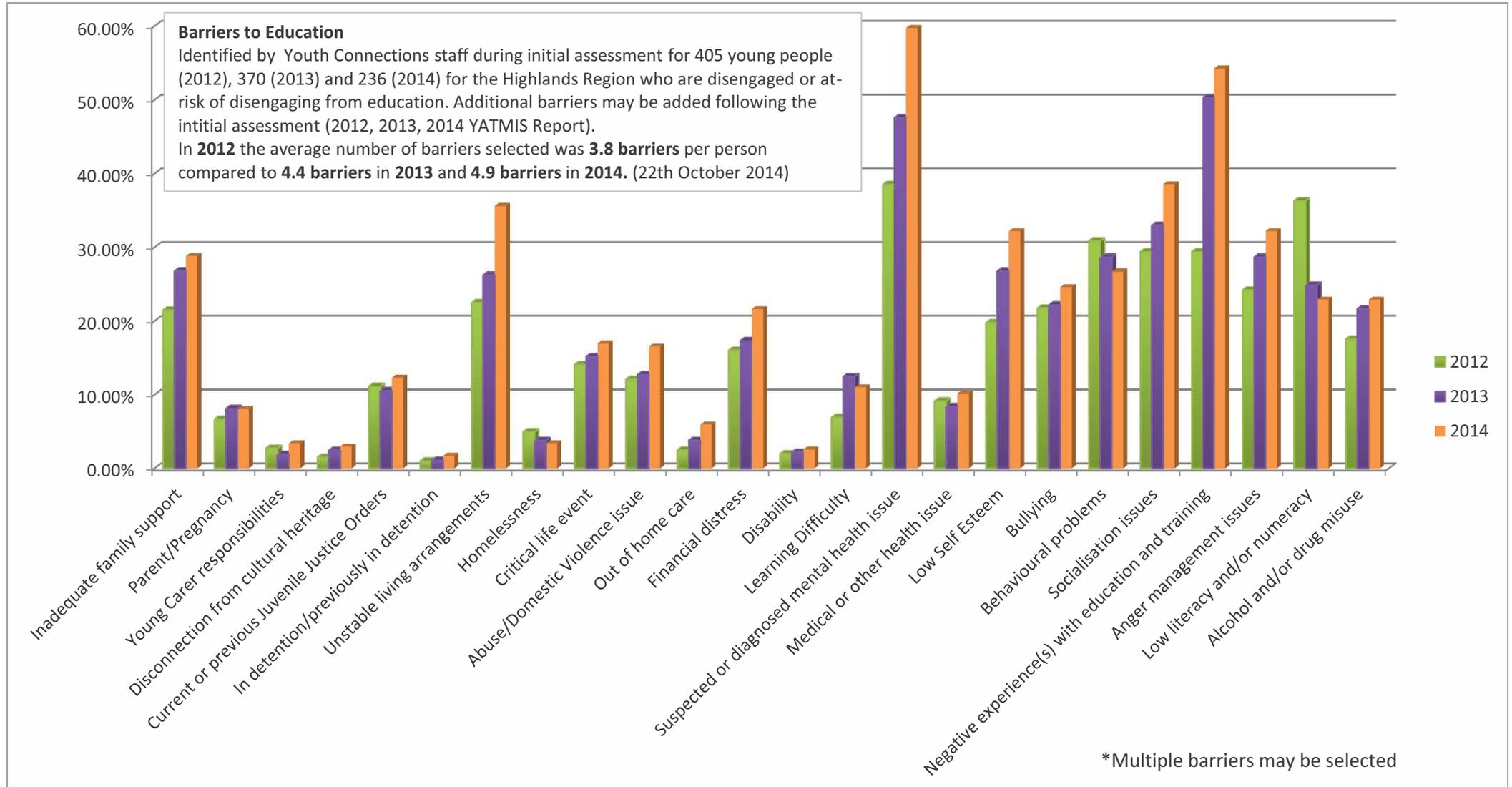
Attachment 1:	Barriers to Education
Attachment 2:	Interview Methodology
Attachment 3:	Letters to Parents and Carers of Young People
Attachment 4:	Letters to Young People
Attachment 5:	Outline for Interviews
Attachment 6:	Interview Questions
Attachment 7:	Youth Interview Summary

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following organisations for their assistance with this project

- Headspace Ballarat
- Berry Street
- Local secondary schools
- Alternative education providers
- Springboard
- Youth Justice
- DHHS
- CHCYAP – Steering Group & Learning Matters Working Party

## Attachment 1 – Barriers to Education



**NOTES:**

**Negative Experience(s) with education and training** - eg, Conflict with teachers; conflict with peers; perceived lack of support from school; not offered services the school has eg MIPS; learning difficulties not supported

**Unstable living arrangements** - eg, Living in transitional housing; moving between mum and dad; moving house a lot

## Attachment 2 – Interview Methodology

### The Interviews

The following outline of the interview methodology provides detail to enable replication of this

#### Design:

A qualitative method of data collection was utilised for this project with the aim to capture the participants “voice” through interviews. Unstructured and open-ended qualitative questions were used and interviews were conducted face-to-face and were in-depth and semi-structured. The interviews took place at a variety of venues in Ballarat and regional towns.

Two HLLLEN staff conducted the interviews (one male, one female) and they were present for all interviews - in some cases a worker attached to the young person was also in attendance but generally did not participate in the interview.

#### Participants:

The target population was young people (YP) in the Central Highlands region; the participants were 16 regional young people, 7 males; 9 females. The participants ranged from 15 – 24 years old with 15 and 17 year olds comprising 62.5% of the sample.

Age	Number
15	5
16	2
17	5
19	3
24	1

The participants were from Ballarat, Daylesford, Creswick, Ararat and Bacchus Marsh. Two participants were in out-of-home care (OOHC); 2 were Indigenous; 4 were Youth Justice (YJ) clients; and 6 were in alternative education settings rather than traditional secondary schools. A number of the participants were involved with up to 7 agencies, common were headspace Ballarat, Child Protection and Victoria Police.

Local agencies were contacted by the interviewers and forwarded a letter introducing the CHCAYP, the project and the HLLLEN (*Letters to Parents and Young People; Attachment 2 and 3*). Participants were selected then referred by agencies as being suitable and willing to participate in an interview - the sampling method was therefore convenience sampling. A gift voucher of \$50.00 was offered as compensation for the time committed to the interview.

The interviews occurred in office settings in a range of organisations such as HLLLEN meeting room, school meeting rooms or offices at Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). All interviews were conducted in a space that was comfortable and private. Interviews were scheduled during working hours over a 2.5 month period and were generally no longer than 1 hour in length. Twelve of the sixteen interviews were recorded using an iPhone, the remainder involved the interviewers taking notes during the interview. .

#### Materials:

The key materials used to conduct the interviews were:

1. Introduction Letter to Young People: Attachment 3
2. Outline for Interviews (for interviewer use): Attachment 4
3. Interview questions (for interviewer use): Attachment 5

## Procedure:

At the beginning of the interview process, the project and purpose were outlined following the *Outline for Interviews (Attachment 4)*. This explanation covered the organisations involved, the purpose, how the information gained from interviews would be collated and distributed, the confidentiality of information, withdrawal rights, follow up post-interview, debrief arrangements, interviewer contact details and presentation of the gift voucher. The participant was asked if they were happy to undertake the interview.

The interviewers followed the pre-prepared questions (*Interview questions: Attachment 5*). These were grouped around: personal background, where they live, primary school experience, secondary school experience, family life, personal stresses and how life could be better (what needed to change). Whilst the interviews were structured around the specific questions, the participants were encouraged to elaborate and talk freely, the interviewers also asked many additional questions prompted by the responses of the participant. A relaxed environment was created and participants were assured that their identity was protected. The interviewers accepted the participant's stories at face value, understood that the descriptions were from the perspective of the participant, asked their opinion and respected their responses.

At the conclusion of the interview, all participants were told that they would be advised of the project outcomes and invited to participate in future opportunities created as a result of the CHCYAP initiative. They were thanked for their honesty and willingness to contribute.

Interviewers regularly debriefed with each other following interviews as much of the content was both disturbing and intense.

All recordings and interviewers' notes were transcribed; they ranged in length from 1 - 30 A4 pages.

## **Attachment 3 – Letter to Parents and Carers of Young People**

# **Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership**

*An opportunity for young people to have their say*

Dear Parents / Carers,

The Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership has recently been set up to improve the way government agencies and community organisations work together to support children and young people in this community and help them achieve the life they want to live.

In order for government agencies and local services to do a better job, it is important that we get the views of young people and families about what organisations need to do to improve support for them. The Highlands LLEN is undertaking a number of interviews with young people in our region on behalf of the Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership.

The sort of things that we would like to talk to young people about are:

- what they like and don't like about where they live
- their experience at school
- events that have caused stress in their life
- what has gone well / not gone well when working with services
- what they think needs to be improved to create the life they want

If young people choose to take part in the interviews, their name or any other information that would identify them will not be recorded. The interviewers will also respect the young person's right not to answer questions they may feel uncomfortable about or withdraw from the interview at any time.

If the young person does participate, they will receive a \$50 gift card to thank them for their time and contribution.

The information from these discussions with young people will be collated and presented to the Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership Steering Group, which includes senior managers in government. It will assist members of the steering group and relevant working parties to decide what action needs to be taken with regard to local young people and supports.

Young people who take part in these focus group discussions will be kept up to date with the work of the Area Partnership, including how their feedback contributed to any changes or decisions that are made. There may also be other opportunities for young people who take part in these discussions to be involved in other activities or groups to work on the changes that need to be made.

As well as talking to young people, the Area Partnership will be talking to parents and carers to get their views. If you would like to be involved in these discussions, or require any further information, please don't hesitate to call or text **Jannine Bennett on 0458 344 484** or **Katherine Cape on 0457 548 568**.

Thank you for your involvement in this project to help us understand what organisations need to do to improve support to families.

## Attachment 4 – Letter to Young People

# Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership

*An opportunity for you to have your say*

The Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership has recently been set up to improve the way government agencies and community organisations work together to support young people in this community and help you achieve the life you want to live.

In order for government agencies and local services to do a better job, it is important that we get your views about what organisations need to do to improve support for you and other young people. The Highlands LLEN is undertaking a number of interviews with young people in our region on behalf of the Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership.

The sort of things that we would like to talk to you about are:

- what you like and don't like about where you live
- your experience at school
- events that have caused stress in your life
- what has gone well / not gone well when working with services
- what you think needs to be improved to create the life you want

If you choose to take part in the interviews, your name or any other information that would identify you will not be recorded. The interviewers will also respect your right to not answer questions if you feel uncomfortable, you can also withdraw from the interview at any time.

If you do participate, you will receive a \$50 gift card to thank you for your time and contribution.

The information from these discussions will be collated and presented to the Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership Steering Group, which includes senior managers in government. It will assist members of the steering group and working parties to decide what action needs to be taken in regards to local young people and supports.

If you take part in these focus group discussions, you will be kept up to date with the work of the Area Partnership, including how your feedback contributed to any changes or decisions that are made. There may also be further opportunities for you to be involved in other activities or groups to work on the changes that need to be made.

As well as talking to you, the Area Partnership will be talking to parents and carers to get their views. If you know anyone who would like to be involved in these discussions, or if you require any further information about interviews, please don't hesitate to call or text **Jannine Bennett on 0458 344 484 or Katherine Cape on 0457 548 568.**

Thank you for your involvement in this project, this will help us understand what organisations need to do to improve support to young people and families.

## Attachment 5 – Outline for Interviews

### Outline for interviews

- The **Central Highlands Children and Youth Area Partnership** has recently been set up to improve the way government agencies and community organisations work together to support young people in this community and help you achieve the life you want to live.
- The Highlands LLEN is undertaking a number of interviews with young people in our region on behalf CHCYAP. We want to get your views about what organisations need to do to improve support for you and other young people.
- The information you give us will be collated and presented to the CHCYAP Steering Group, which includes senior managers in government. It will assist members of the steering group and working parties to decide what action needs to be taken in regards to local young people and supports.
- We have a number of **prepared questions** but will free flow a lot – the interview will take between an hour and hour & half.
- We would like to **record** this interview and will **take notes**, is this okay?
- Information gained in the interview will be kept **anonymous and confidential** (unless you give your full consent to share). No names will be used in the research report.
- If you **feel uncomfortable** about a question, you don't have to answer. You can **withdraw** at any time.
- We will **keep you up to date** with the work of the CHCYAP, including how your feedback contributed to any changes or decisions that are made.
- We would like to give you a **gift voucher** in appreciation for your time taken to participate, what voucher would you like?
- If you feel the need to **talk to someone after this interview** XXXXXXXXXXXX is available for you to chat to
- If you think of anything else you would like to add after the interview is over, please give us a call – **hand out business card/s**
- Are you happy to progress with the interview? (**informed consent**)

## Attachment 6 – Interview Questions

### Area Partnership Questions

1. Can you tell us/me a bit **about yourself** – where did you grow up, your primary school, your secondary school, who the members of your family are, how old you are and what you are doing now.
2. What do you like about **where you live**? What don't you like about where you live?
3. What were the things that were good about **Primary School**? What things were not good?
  - How different was it to secondary school?
4. What did you like about **Secondary School**? What didn't you like about Secondary School?
  - What was the impact on you of the negative experiences?
  - What were the challenges about getting to school?
  - What was hard about being at school?
  - Was any particular year worse than others, why?
  - What has been the impact of your family on your ability to attend and/or be engaged at school?
  - What did/does your parents think about school?
5. How would you describe your **family** life?
  - What would you say were/are the main stresses on your family?
  - What services have your family used to help them get through, how would you rate them?
  - What is the impact of not having a family to support you?
6. What have been the events in **your life** that have caused you the main stress or problems?
  - What would you say are the biggest stresses on you right now?
  - What services have you used to help you get through, how would you rate them?
  - Who in particular has helped you?
  - Where do you get support from?
  - Tell us/me about your friendship group and relationships and their impact on your life.
  - What is about you that has helped you to keep going?

### Making things better

- What are you dreaming about?
- What does your future look like?
- What would your advice be to Government people about what they need to do to make life better for young people?
- What 3 things would have made school a much better experience for you (and/or other kids)?
- What needs to change about support services for young people and families?
- What 3 things for you personally, that if they changed, would make a big difference?

### Lastly

- Would you be interested in taking part in other activities or working groups to look at how we can improve things for young people in this community?
- What is the best way to keep in contact with you about this project?
- If you know anyone who would like to be involved in these interviews, can you let us know.
- If you feel the need to **talk to someone after this interview** XXX is available for you to chat to.
- If you think of anything else you would like to add after the interview is over, please give us a call.

Thanks heaps for your honesty, time and contribution to this rare opportunity to let the Government know what you believe will make a difference to the lives of young people.

No	Title	Date of Interview	Gender	Age	Barriers/Challenges	School attendance	Significant or positive influence	Agencies in contact
1	Person X	8 April	Male	24	Bullying Rumour spreading Sexual identity	Bullying forced him to leave Sec School	Friendship group Helping young people through theatre headspace YAE program	<i>Referred through headspace</i>  headspace YAE program
2	Person XX	8 April	Male	17	Financial stress Family conflict Alcoholic father Bullying Medication – Endone for 1 yr. Suspected ADHD	Concussions, extended school absence School couldn't deal with his needs when returning	VCAL headspace School counsellor girlfriend	<i>Referred through headspace</i>  headspace Beyond Blue Centrelink
3	Person Z	22 April	Female	15	Bullying Rumour spreading Siblings from different parents Sister's daughter removed by CP Family conflict & violence Financial stress Mother with drug issues AVO on mother Overweight Sexual assault Mental illness - personality disorder Live with dad, don't talk to mum Father has alcohol issues Older sister on ice and single mother Grandfather in army & Vietnam Unstable living arrangements Mother's ex committed suicide	Moved Sec. School due to bullying 6 months off school before Link Up	Yr. 10 @ BLX Teachers & counsellor @ Link Up Choir VET Hospitality Current friendship group Weight loss	<i>Referred through Link Up</i>  DHS Police headspace CASA Court CP
4	Person ZZ	23 April	Female	16	Anger management Care of mother Mother with mental health issues (depression) Mother does not access services Siblings from different parents Mother on drugs Sister removed by CP – went to father Moved around – 10 different houses Moved between mum and dad	School absences – primary & secondary Left yr. 7 in term 3 and returned in yr. 8 for 1 day then left b/c of bullying. Returned again briefly – 2 terms of year 8 Attendance an issue at Link Up	Youth Support Services (DHS, BCH, Police) Link Up Mother supported her to get to school headspace Work experience in day care	<i>Referred through Link Up</i>  CP Police Youth Support Services (DHS, BCH, Police) headspace Uniting Care - housing

No	Title	Date of Interview	Gender	Age	Barriers/Challenges	School attendance	Significant or positive influence	Agencies in contact
					Best friend living with her then removed by CP Bullying (yr. 4 b/c not shaving legs) Rumour spreading Overweight Financial stress			
5	Person Y (OOHC)	6 May	Female	17	Multiple placements Multiple schools Bullying Drug use Court order/Youth Justice Disability – mother and self Generally no parent contact Foster care Removed from parents at 18 months Complex family structure – multiple kinship care arrangements Family violence Father needs service but not accessing them	Number of primary schools (3) Number of Secondary (3) Formal school ended in early year 8 No school attendance for 2 years then went to Berry Street Transport to school a real issue in year 7	Berry Street Wants to go to uni and help others	<i>Referred through Springboard</i>  Berry Street DHS/CP Drug and Alcohol Worker Youth Justice Springboard Disability Worker Court
6	Person YY	12 May	Male	19	Bullying Carer for siblings Many step siblings Father in jail Abuse by step father Mother with physical issue & depression Severe concussions Financial stress	Number of primary schools Left school in yr. 8 to take on caring responsibilities Left school, never follow up	HLLLEN Career Hub Jobs & Skills Drive Employment Girlfriend	<i>Referred by headspace</i>  Centrelink HLLLEN Career Hub BHS – PATS headspace Youth Connections
7	Person W	14 May	Male	17	Marijuana use from age 14 Ice use for 1.5 years Involved with Youth Justice Extensive law breaking Car accident, severe head injuries Nothing/no one could change the path he was on Sister left home because of his drug use	Asked to leave secondary school Left school at 14	Car accident Supportive & stable family Employed by father Youth Justice	<i>Referred by Youth Justice</i>  TAC Centrelink Youth Justice Police Court Parkville Prison – 3 days
8	Person V	18 May	Female	17	Family conflict Bullying Lives with dad not mum Anger management On medication	Changed primary school Asked to leave secondary school – started yr. 10	Strong relationship with counsellor Father Aspiring to work in Aged Care	<i>Referred by Youth Justice</i>  Police Justice headspace

No	Title	Date of Interview	Gender	Age	Barriers/Challenges	School attendance	Significant or positive influence	Agencies in contact
					Mother on drugs, disconnected from her Court appearance – threatening to kill Medical condition – epilepsy Extensive law breaking			
9	Person WW	18 May	Male	15	Anger management Suspected ADHD Use of alcohol Involved with Youth Justice Extensive law breaking Sisters removed from family Alcohol issues for father Mother with mental health issues Accused of rape Volatile relationship with teachers	Multiple primary schools Multiple secondary schools In an alternative setting now	Nan Uncle Brother looks out for him FARM	<i>Referred by Youth Justice</i>  Police DHS Youth Justice GP CP FARM
10	Person VV (Indigenous)	28 May	Female	15	Living with single parent No contact with father Father has drug and alcohol issues Abuse from father in early years Bullying Rumour spreading Mental health issues – depression, self-harm Moved houses a lot Overweight issues Medical issue – appendix Financial stress	4 different primary schools 3 different secondary schools At alternative setting now Many school absences Moved Sec. School due to bullying	Strong relationship with mother (only child) One teacher at secondary Koorie rapper Fed College – Kick Start In school with friends & cousins Music, singing Talent competitions BADA Strong family support	<i>Referred by Federation College</i> headspace Salvation Army BADAC
11	Person U (Indigenous)	28 May	Female	15	Physical & sexual abuse Anger management Live with aunty On medication for violence Racism	Attended 4 secondary schools At alternative setting now Kicked out of Sebas first term of year 7 Suspended for violence in Primary	Aunty Sister	<i>Referred by Federation College</i>
12	Person UU	28 May	Female	15	Moved houses a number of times Bullying Financial stress Single parent family	Multiple Primary schools Left secondary school at the end of year 9, moved to alternative setting	Positive primary school – Forest St. Fed College Nan & Pa One teacher at High School One special girlfriend	<i>Referred by Federation College</i>

No	Title	Date of Interview	Gender	Age	Barriers/Challenges	School attendance	Significant or positive influence	Agencies in contact
13	Person T  (interviewed by Katherine)	12 March	Male	19	Anger management Multiple homes Suicide attempt Family conflict Youth Justice involvement	Multiple schools Left school at year 9	YJ worker Brace	<i>Referred by Youth Justice</i>  YJ Brace DHS CAFS DET
14	Person TT	10 June	Male	19	Bullying Rumour spreading Mental health (self (depression) & mother) Estranged from father Physical abuse by father Caring for sibling Drug & alcohol abuse Siblings split between mother, father and independent	Expelled from two secondary schools in year 7: 1 Independent, 1 Government	Michelle O'Brien – Reconnect program Alternative education setting Best mate Mum Girlfriend	<i>Referred by Bacchus Marsh Community College</i>  Police CAFS Youth Service - Freeza
15	Person S	15 June	Female	16	Family violence Financial stress Homelessness Physical & emotional abuse (reported) Living independently from family No parent contact Parental Trauma (Train Driver) Complex family structure	Sent to an expensive Private School Extended absence due to homelessness after running away from Family Violence	Friend's parent School Wellbeing teacher CAFS	<i>Referred by Daylesford Secondary College Principal</i>  Police CAFS DHS Centrelink GP Hepburn Health Services
16.	Person SS (OOHC)	15 June	Female	17	Removed from parents (with 4 siblings) Abuse from older brother (not specified) Illness Lost contact with some siblings	School attendance Left Government School for Alternative setting Left alternate education due to feeling like she was completing the same work as previous year	Wellbeing teacher Berry Street	<i>Referred by Berry Street</i>  CAFS DHS Child Protection Centrelink Berry Street



**Highlands  
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Creating learning opportunities for  
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