

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

THE SOCIAL SPARK LAB

FINAL PROJECT REPORT



Youth Volunteering

The Social Spark Lab

Executive Summary

The Social Spark Lab – Youth Volunteering Project was developed to reimagine how young people engage in volunteering by creating opportunities that are meaningful, youth-led and responsive to the needs of today's generation. Funded through Volunteering Queensland, the project sought to strengthen both the supply and demand for youth volunteering by supporting young people to become active contributors while equipping organisations with the knowledge and tools to better engage them.

The project successfully delivered its three key objectives:

1. Development of a Youth Volunteering Guidebook – “Find Your Place” designed by and for young people, providing practical information, inspiration and pathways to help young people understand volunteering and create positive change within their communities.
2. Development of an Organisation Handbook & Workbook that assists community organisations to attract, engage and retain younger volunteers through contemporary, evidence-informed practices and practical case studies. Trial the Handbook & Workbook at the Volunteer Conference in collaboration with Scott Millar.
3. Delivery of the Social Spark Lab, a series of youth engagement activities, consultation workshops, innovation programs and community events that empowered young people to identify local issues, design solutions and develop leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills including a Youth Pitch Event.

Throughout the project, young people were engaged as partners rather than participants. Activities included youth focus groups, school-based placemaking workshops (Social Spark Labs), a Youth Pitch event which gave out \$15,000 to support young people's ideas, volunteer coordinator training, and collaboration with schools, community organisations and local government.

The project demonstrated that today's young people are highly motivated to contribute when volunteering is flexible, purposeful, skills-based and connected to issues they care about. It also highlighted that many organisations require practical support to adapt traditional volunteer models to better meet the expectations of emerging generations. Rather than simply increasing volunteer numbers, the HBNC Social Spark Lab has laid the foundations for a new approach to youth volunteering, one that values co-design, innovation and community leadership.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Find Your Place

OBJECTIVE ONE

Development of a Youth Volunteering Guidebook –
“Find Your Place” designed by and for young
people, providing practical information, inspiration
and pathways to help young people understand
volunteering and create positive change
within their communities.

Youth Volunteering Guidebook

Work with young people to develop the resources in draft format and finalise in April ready for print and launch during Youth Week (April).

Youth Volunteering Handbook:

- Host Youth Feedback Forum on what volunteering looks like, how they would like to support community, and what are their motivations and barriers.
- Conduct Literature Review to review available and existing resources
- Develop Youth Volunteering Handbook
- Develop a resource that relates to young people 12-18 years of age to be inspired in creating change in their communities.

The guidebook will help youth understand how to volunteer and engage with other organisation or come up with their own ideas.

Outcome Measures

- Number of Youth Feedback Forum attendees
- Number of Youth Volunteering Handbooks distributed to young people

Final Report Outcomes – Task Completed

The Youth Volunteering Guidebook '*Finding Your Place*' was co-designed with young people to create a practical, engaging resource that inspires 12-18-year-olds to become active volunteers and changemakers within their communities. A Youth Feedback Forum was held to better understand young people's perceptions of volunteering, including their motivations, interests and barriers to participation. These insights were complemented by a comprehensive literature review, *Reimagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures*, which examined Australian and international research on youth volunteering and informed the development of the guidebook.

The guidebook was not completed in time for launch during Youth Week but will be released in July. It provides practical information, reflective activities and real-life examples to help young people understand the many pathways into volunteering, identify causes they care about, and develop their own community projects.

Outcomes Achieved

- Youth Feedback Forum conducted to inform resource development.
- Comprehensive literature review completed to provide an evidence base.
- Youth Volunteering Guidebook developed, published and currently being launched.



Finding Your Place – Youth Volunteering Guidebook was developed as an interactive journal and practical guide to inspire young people aged 12–18 to explore volunteering as a pathway to creating positive change in their communities. Rather than simply explaining what volunteering is, the guidebook encourages young people to discover their interests, identify local opportunities, build confidence and take practical steps towards community involvement.

Through reflective activities, community exploration, myth-busting, volunteering tips and Social Spark Lab exercises, the resource helps young people develop a sense of purpose, belonging and civic responsibility while empowering them to become active contributors and future community leaders.

Snapshot



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Engaging the Next Generation

OBJECTIVE TWO

Development of an Organisation Handbook & Workbook that assists community organisations to attract, engage and retain younger volunteers through contemporary, evidence-informed practices and practical case studies. Trial the Handbook & Workbook at the Volunteer Conference in collaboration with Scott Millar.

Volunteer Organisation Handbook

- Conduct Literature Review to review available and existing resources.
- Incorporate case studies of good examples on how not-for-profits/ community groups are supporting and engaging young people.
- Develop Volunteer Organisation Guidebook to support engagement with young people 12-18 years old (in collaboration with young people) aimed at increasing their volunteering.
- Deliver training to not-for-profits to upskill community groups and organisations on how they can engage with young people.

Final Report Outcomes – Task Completed

A literature review, *Reimagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures*, was completed to explore current Australian and international research on youth volunteering. The findings highlighted the need for flexible, meaningful and youth-led volunteering opportunities and informed the development of all project resources.

The project developed the *Engaging the Next Generation of Volunteers Handbook* and *Implementation Workbook*, providing volunteer coordinators with practical, evidence-based strategies to attract, engage and retain young volunteers. The resources include contemporary case studies, implementation tools and practical activities to help organisations create more inclusive and engaging volunteer programs. This was further supported by the BAGSFULL practical guide to lead staff through exercises to gain greater understanding.

To build organisational capability and test these resources, The Art of Volunteer Coordination Conference was delivered, bringing together volunteer managers and community organisations to explore practical approaches to engaging young people. Together, these resources and training have strengthened the capacity of organisations to create welcoming, youth-friendly volunteering opportunities.

Engaging The Next Generation Of Volunteers

With 7.6 million Gen Zs and Alphas in Australia (and 4.4 billion globally), these digital natives are reshaping the future of work, community and volunteering. As we work to engage them in our communities, I thought I'd share a quick refresher from our session to help you turn some of those insights into actions as you head back to your teams.

Here are the key takeaways from our session exploring the theme of 'Engaging The Next Generation Of Volunteer':

Key Themes Covered

Leverage Gen Z Superpowers

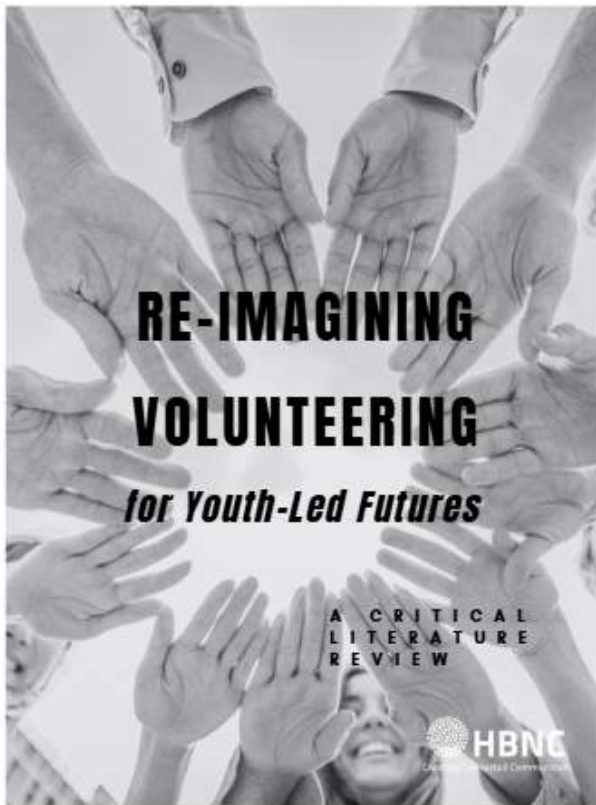
Gen Z are the first generation to grow up in a world surrounded by touch screen devices, wifi and social media. As a result this generation bring a suite of tech skills with them that can be harnessed by organisations to refresh your digital presence, upskill your volunteers in digital tools and bring your social media to life.

Speaking Their Language

The most effective way to engage Gen Z volunteers is to get onto the social media platforms they're already using and share posts that speaks their language. Make sure everything is visual, easy to read and aligns with the values and motivations of young people today.

Understanding What Makes Them Tick

With five generations in our community together there is no longer a one size fits all model to management. Spend time understanding how each member of your team operates, adapt your approach across generations and spend time check in to see how your volunteers are going both professionally and personally.



The Reimagining Volunteering for Youth-Led Futures literature review explored current Australian and international research on youth volunteering to better understand what motivates young people to engage in community action.

*Chloe Lhotka,
Social Worker
Coordinator for
Social Spark Lab*



The review found that young people continue to have a strong desire to contribute to their communities, but they are seeking volunteering opportunities that are flexible, meaningful, skills-based and aligned with causes they care about. Traditional volunteer models are often viewed as too rigid and fail to reflect the expectations of younger generations. The review highlights the importance of co-designing opportunities with young people, reducing barriers to participation, and recognising volunteering as a pathway to leadership, wellbeing, employability and social connection. These findings informed the development of the Social Spark Lab and the accompanying youth and organisational resources, providing an evidence-based foundation for a more contemporary approach to engaging the next generation of volunteers.

Snapshot





Scott Millar **Generational Consultant**

Scott Millar is a trusted voice on the future of work, helping organisations understand the trends shaping Gen Z. Scott brings fresh insight into the shifts transforming workplaces, industries and communities. HBNC contracted Scott to work on the Organisational Guidebooks with Social Spark Coordinator.

Flexible Opportunities To Get Involved

Consider how you can reposition some of your volunteer roles to attract Gen Z. The ability to offer flexibility around their study/work commitments and the opportunity to have short term commitments initially will help you stand out.

Meet Them Where They Scroll

Try posting a few videos on social media to share stories from your volunteers and what a 'day in the life' as your organisation looks like. Take inspiration from accounts such as @MrLuke and @TheDailyAud by using simple, bite-sized content that communicates clearly and aligns with how people now consume information.

Align With Their Motivators

For some young people, volunteering is an opportunity to make an impact. For others it is a chance to grow professional skills and experience. And for many it's a chance to make friends and grow confidence. Understand how your roles could align with their motivations and offer value to Gen Z volunteers.

Where To Go For More Information

If this session has sparked your thinking about how Gen Z are approaching community, impact and lives, here are a few other articles you might like to shape your thinking:

Engaging Gen Z Volunteers: Understanding how Gen Z is reshaping volunteering, community and impact for the future.

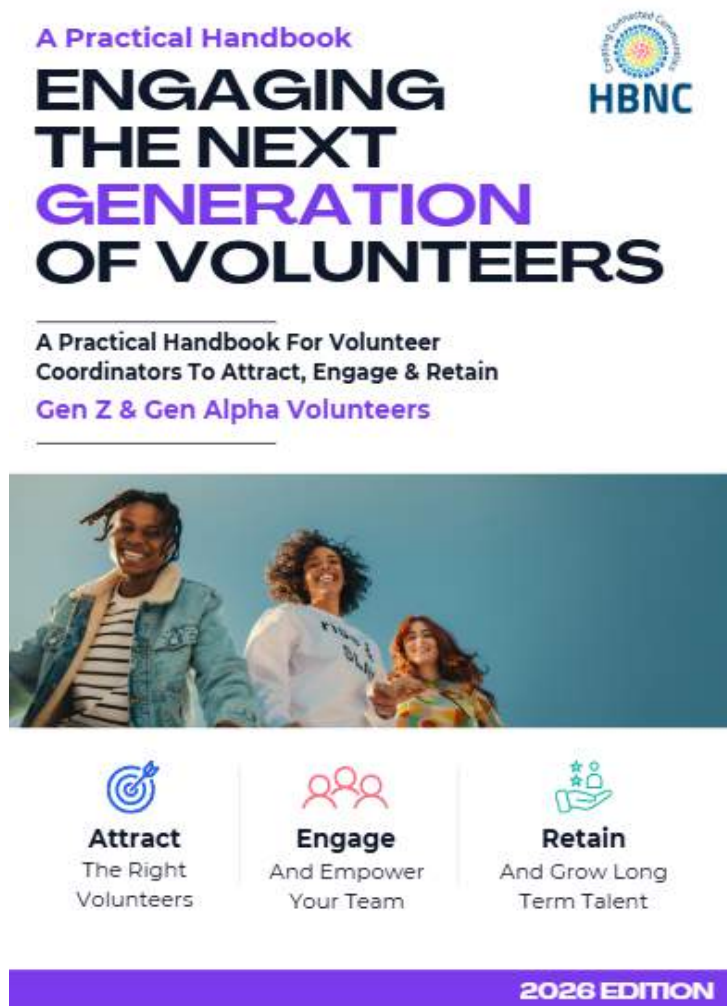
www.iamscottmillar.com/post/engaging-gen-z-volunteers

Rethinking Giving In A Digital World: How Gen Z is driving the future of fundraising through clicks, creators and cause-based campaigns.

www.iamscottmillar.com/post/gen-z-fundraising

Why Gen Z Employees Are Leaving Jobs: Unpacking what Gen Z turnover reveals about leadership, retention and workplace culture.

www.iamscottmillar.com/post/why-gen-z-employees-leave-jobs



The Engaging the Next Generation of Volunteers handbook was developed as a practical resource to help volunteer-involving organisations adapt to the changing expectations of Gen Z and Gen Alpha volunteers. Created in collaboration with Scott Millar and supported by Volunteering Queensland, the handbook translates current research into nine simple, actionable strategies focused on attracting, engaging and retaining young volunteers.

Covering areas such as purpose-driven volunteering, digital engagement, flexible opportunities, volunteer wellbeing, intergenerational collaboration, skills-based volunteering and reverse mentoring, the resource provides volunteer coordinators with practical tools to build more inclusive, engaging and sustainable volunteer programs for the future.

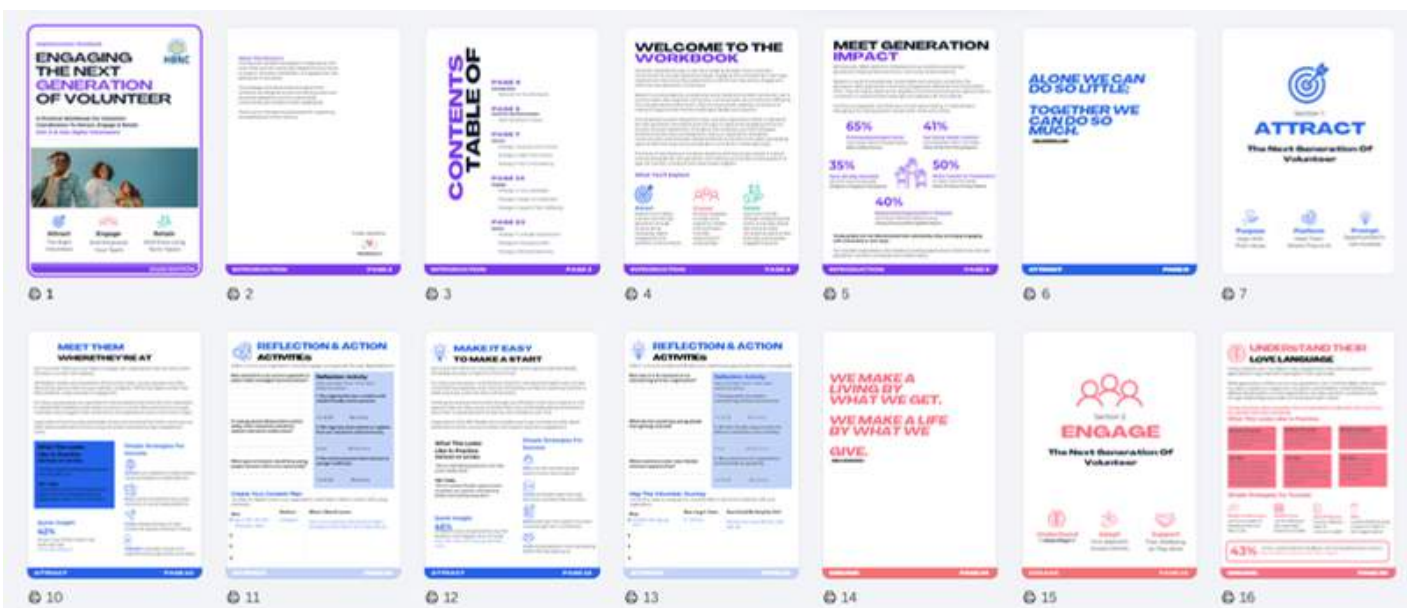
Snapshot





Engaging the Next Generation of Volunteers is a practical implementation workbook developed to help volunteer-involving organisations attract, engage and retain Gen Z and Gen Alpha volunteers. Drawing on contemporary research and developed in collaboration with Scott Millar and Volunteering Queensland, the resource translates evidence into nine practical strategies supported by reflective activities, planning tools and implementation exercises. The workbook equips volunteer coordinators to create more purposeful, flexible and inclusive volunteer programs, strengthening organisations' capacity to recruit and retain young volunteers while fostering intergenerational volunteering and building a sustainable volunteer workforce for the future.

Snapshot





A BAGSFULL Approach: Engaging Young People in Volunteering was developed as a practical facilitator's guide and four-hour workshop to support volunteer-involving organisations to better engage, retain and empower young volunteers.

Grounded in contemporary research and the BAGSFULL framework (Be Authentic, Accessibility, Growth, Safety & Stability, Freedom & Understanding, and Lived Experience & Listening), the resource provides practical activities, reflective exercises and implementation tools that help organisations create more inclusive, strengths-based and youth-centred volunteering environments.

By translating evidence into action, the guide supports organisations to redesign volunteer practices that foster meaningful participation, intergenerational collaboration and long-term community engagement.

Snapshot



THE ART OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

Inspiring the Future of Volunteering Together

Celebrate volunteers week and network with other coordinators, community organisations, and sector partners to explore the future of volunteering.

This one-day conference will share practical tools, fresh thinking, and real-world strategies to attract, support, and retain volunteers – including engaging young people and planning for the changing landscape of community participation.

Through keynote speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities, delegates will gain insights, build connections, and leave inspired to strengthen volunteering in their organisations. Whether you coordinate volunteers, lead teams, or support community programs, this conference is designed to equip you with ideas you can put into action immediately.

Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre

22 Charles Street, Pialba

Tuesday May 19 2026

9am to 3pm

\$20.00 (morning tea and lunch included)

www.hbnc.com.au/events



HBNC

Creating Connected Communities

Volunteer Speaker Program



Scott Millar
Founder & CEO

Scott Millar is the Founder and CEO of BOP Industries, an education company delivering future-focused learning experiences for young people across Australia and internationally. A recognised business leader, TEDx speaker and award-winning entrepreneur, Scott is passionate about helping students build the skills, confidence and experiences needed to thrive in the future workforce.



Chloe Lhotka
Social Spark Coordinator

Chloe Lhotka is the Social Spark Coordinator at Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre, where she supports young people to build confidence, creativity and leadership through innovation and community engagement programs. Chloe holds a Master of Social Work and is passionate about empowering youth to create positive social impact through connection, ideas and opportunity.



Susie Musgrove
Volunteer Qld

Susie Musgrove is the Membership Engagement Coordinator for Volunteering Queensland, where she supports organisations to strengthen volunteer engagement and community participation. Passionate about building connected communities, Susie works closely with members across Queensland to promote the value and impact of volunteering.



HBNC

Creating Connected Communities

Volunteer Speaker Program



Farzina William

Manager Enterprise &
Development

An experienced leader with over 15 years in management and business, and six years in the multicultural sector. Passionate about diversity and inclusion, she is dedicated to empowering communities and fostering cultural understanding. Farzina holds a Bachelor of Human Services from USQ and was recognised in 2024 with a Highly Commended Multicultural Sector Outstanding Achiever Award.



Bernard Whebell

Ultons

Bernard is a partner with Ulton Chartered Accountants and has lived in Hervey Bay since 2006. Having worked for a number of years in State Government, Bernard moved to Bundaberg and took up a position as an accountant with Hancock Sawyer Corpe who are now known as Ulton. In 2006 he moved to Hervey Bay and became a partner with the firm. Since 2006 Bernard has become active in Rotary and has also been president of the Hervey Bay Chamber of Commerce for three years.



Josh Rimmington

JR Marketing

Josh Rimmington is the founder of JR Marketing, specialising in creative marketing, branding and digital engagement strategies. Passionate about helping businesses and organisations grow their impact, Josh works across a range of projects to develop authentic storytelling, strong community connections and innovative promotional campaigns.



HBNC

Creating Connected Communities

Volunteer Speaker Program

Time	Name	Organisation
9:15am	Volunteer Queensland	How VQ can support volunteer coordination
9:40am	Scott Millar Chloe Lhotka	Engaging Youth in Volunteering Planning for the Future of Volunteering
11:45am	Farzina Khan	Multicultural Training
12:15pm	Gen Perry	Fraser Coast Volunteer Database
1:00pm	Josh Rimmington Katie Scott	Marketing and AI for volunteering
1:30pm	FCRC	Free Training Available
1:45pm	FCRC	Food Safety
2:00pm	Michaela Davis	Australia Day Award Panel
2:30pm	Bernard Whebell	Governance

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

*Social Spark
Lab*

OBJECTIVE THREE

Delivery of the Social Spark Lab, a series of youth engagement activities, consultation workshops, innovation programs and community events that empowered young people to identify local issues, design solutions and develop leadership, teamwork and problem-solving skills including a Youth Pitch Event.

Social Spark Lab Workshops

Objective: Increase youth participation in volunteering by engaging 40 young people (aged 12–18) from local schools in the Social Spark Lab program.

Key Activities

- Partner with local schools and community organisations to recruit participants and deliver workshops.
- Deliver four Social Spark Lab workshops focused on leadership, teamwork, problem-solving and community development.
- Support participants to develop and implement youth-led community projects.
- Collect participant feedback and refine workshop resources throughout the project.
- Deliver Youth Pitch event to give out funding to support young peoples ideas and create greater volunteer opportunities.

Final Report Outcomes – Task Completed

Target: 40 participants → Achieved: 145 participants.

Target: 4 workshops → Achieved: 4 workshops delivered.

Target: 4 schools → Achieved: 4 schools/groups participated.

Target: Youth-led projects → Achieved: Multiple project concepts developed, culminating in a Youth Pitch Event with \$15,000 awarded to support implementation.



Empowering Young People to Create Change Through Volunteering

Social Spark Lab is an interactive, youth-led workshop that empowers young people to create positive change in their communities through volunteering. Participants explore local issues, identify community strengths, and use creative problem-solving and design thinking to develop practical solutions to challenges they care about. Along the way, they build confidence, leadership, teamwork and communication skills while discovering how volunteering can create meaningful social impact. By the end of the program, young people have developed their own community project ideas and gained the knowledge, skills and motivation to become active changemakers in their communities.

Snapshot



RE-IMAGINING YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Delivered by the Grassroots Youth.
By Young People, For Young People.

Do you want to volunteer...
but don't know where to start?
Or feel like it's "not for people like me"?

Come share what's working, what's not,
and what needs to change at the
Youth Volunteering Focus Group
No speeches.
Just real conversations.

Thursday, 19th March
9am - 12pm

Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre
22 Charles Street, Pialba

**SCAN
ME**



Contact: Chloe Lhotka for more information
Email: SocialSpark@hbnc.com.au

Social Spark Lab Outcomes

Social Spark Lab workshops, delivered by the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre with students between year 6 to year 10 students produced some fantastic concepts for youth in the Fraser Coast.

A total of 145 students participated in learning about Community Development and Placemaking including Asset Based Community Development. These workshops were delivered by 5 HBNC Staff, 1 HBNC Social Work Student and a staff member from FCRC Community Development.

All groups identified similar outcomes that may arise with development of more youth-friendly spaces, such as:

- Reduced youth crime
- Increased emotional wellbeing
- Increase in active lifestyles
- Reduce Social Isolation, increase social connection, make new friends
- Happy parents
- Increased youth employment opportunities
- Overall increase in pro-social outcomes
- Increase of tourism and visitors to the area
- Maryborough sports development

The students echoed many elements throughout their excited discussions and collectively constructed the following dioramas:

'Beach' space in Maryborough at Pioneer Park, including:

- o Beach in the forest
- o Café, lounge chairs
- o Dog parks with defined dog swimming areas
- o Beach Volleyball courts
- o Treehouse

Additional Ideas included:

- o Youth Precinct "The LZTM" – indoors, possibly a giant shed – inclusive of:
 - o Laser Tag
 - o Zoo (digital)
 - o Trampoline Park
 - o Movie Theatre (with a smores trailer, obviously.)

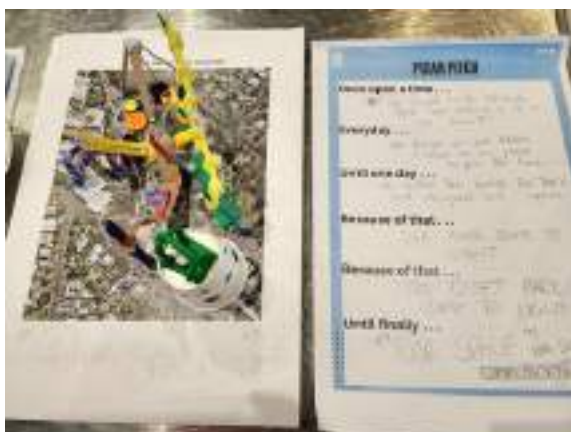
Put Maryborough on the map with o"The Big Umbrella" (a nod to Mary Poppins) in Pioneer Park

- o Central covered area
- o Walking/running tracks
- o Cinema screen lights
- o Dog park
- o Fountains
- o Café
- o Tree Tops course with Flying fox
- o Inflatable water park
- o Pontoon for boats/jetski's
- o Roller rink/court

Youth Precinct, "Our Space" at Brendan Hansen Park

- o Wake/Water Park
- o Jumping pillows
- o Large swings
- o Sauna spa 'therapy'
- o Swim up bar for food and drinks
- o Cinema space





Photo's social park Labs



Fraser Coast Youth Pitch

29 April | Starts 10am - 1pm

Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre

22 Charles Street, Pialba

Do you have the next big idea for the Fraser Coast OR want to hear from up-and-coming community innovators?

You're invited to the next Community Ideas Youth Pitch Event!

- Chance to win up to \$15,000 funding for your idea.
- Get your project in front of influential community members.
- Guidance and support for preparing your pitch.

To pitch an idea, email
hbnc@hbnc.com.au or
scan the QR code



Proudly sponsored by



TIME	Pitch Title	Name
10:05am	Welcome & House Keeping	Tanya Stevenson
10:10am	Pitch One – Next Level Music Program	Amelia Johnson
10:20am	Pitch Two – Birth & Baby Cupboard	Katie Manfield
10:30am	Pitch Three - Echo	Maddi Michel
10:40am	Pitch Four – Life Saving	Darren Everard
10:50am	Pitch Five – Young Rap (NAIDOC Week)	Sam Raveneau
11:00am	Pitch Six – Mother Daughter Program	Gabbi Kubac
11:10am	Pitch Seven – Parenting Ghundu in our way	Gemma Gala
11:20am	Pitch Eight – Level Up (Video)	Jisna Vazhappily
11:30am	Pitch Nine - Coast Creators	Dr Joel Spence
11:40am	Pitch Ten – Social Creatures	Meilz Garret
11:50am	Pitch Eleven – Breakfast Club	GYG
12:00pm	Judges Deliberation/Lunch Served	
12:40pm	Announcements of Funds	
12:50pm	Photo's & Thank you	
1pm	Pack Up	

Sam Raveneau won the Youth Pitch event for \$7,500 to deliver Youth Rap workshops in the lead up to NAIDOC week. Young people will present their work during NAIDOC week events in early July.



Dr Joel Spence won second, \$5,000 to deliver youth-led music workshops in September school holidays.



Maddi Mitchel won third to support the development of a youth-led mental health support group.



YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Budget



Budget

Item	Amount (\$)	Comments
Wages	\$15,400.00	4 hours per week project officer + 2 hours per week CEO
Marketing Guidebook and Handbook	\$2,000.00	Online resources (50 copies printed of each)
Toolkit Materials for Social Spark Lab	\$2,000.00	Catering & Materials for workshop delivery to youth
Training for Volunteer Organisations to attract young people	\$4,000.00	Half day training for volunteer organisations - min. 40 participants.
Administration and management fees added (covering insurance, compliance, finance, IT, phone, internet, amenities, etc)	\$4,680.00	
Less Remainder surplus 2023-2024	-\$6,300.00	Grant underspends carry over
TOTAL AMOUNT	\$21,780.00	All amounts exclude GST

Additional funds received to deliver events:

1. Fraser Coast Mates \$5,000 for pitch projects
2. Bendigo Community Bank \$10,000 for pitch projects
3. HBNC Youth Week Funds – Paint What Matters \$5,000

Total \$20,000

Budget – Actuals

The amount of the Grant is \$21,780.00 (GST exclusive) + surplus from 2024-2024 \$4,816.47 = \$26,596.47.

Total spent of Volunteer Queensland funds: \$29,091.94

HBNC recieved some income from Community Contributions.

Job Profit & Loss Statement

1/07/2025 To 29/06/2026

ABN: 34 683 873 965
Email: Financemanager@hbnc.com.au

Account Name	Selected Period	Year To Date
VolunteerQLD- SocialSpark	VolunteerQLD-SocialSpark	
Income		
Volunteering Queensland Inc	\$21,789.00	\$21,789.00
Ticket Sales	\$9.09	\$9.09
Comm Contributions Rec'd - Int	\$385.00	\$385.00
Total Income	\$22,183.09	\$22,183.09
Expense		
Catering & Refresh - HBNC	\$968.00	\$968.00
Hall & Room Hire - HBNC	\$1,055.00	\$1,055.00
Advertising & Promotion	\$406.37	\$406.37
Bank Merchant Fees	\$0.43	\$0.43
Computer & Software Exps	\$85.00	\$85.00
Insurance - Workers Comp.	\$208.69	\$208.69
Printing & Stationery	\$216.37	\$216.37
Telephone, Fax & Internet	\$426.18	\$426.18
M/V Rep. & Maintenance	\$36.83	\$36.83
Consultants - Activities	\$2,727.27	\$2,727.27
Consumables - Activities	\$353.64	\$353.64
Wages & Salaries	\$19,119.80	\$19,119.80
Annual Leave Provision	\$1,011.08	\$1,011.08
Queens Levy	\$21.84	\$21.84
Superannuation	\$2,294.37	\$2,294.37
Police Checks/Blue Cards - Staff	\$161.09	\$161.09
Total Expense	\$29,091.94	\$29,091.94
Other Income		
Non Committed Surpluses in	\$4,816.47	\$4,816.47
Total Other Income	\$4,816.47	\$4,816.47
Net Profit/(Loss)	-\$2,092.38	-\$2,092.38

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Youth Projects

Youth Week Event



The Social Spark Lab delivered to 11 young women who are no longer engaged in school to develop a youth-led event at the youth week celebrations in April. The event was supported by Grassroots-Youth-Gang (GYG) with a focus on making youth visible.

Approx. 200 young people participated in the event in City Park during youth week. The Youth Survey Statistics were displayed and used to raise awareness for young people.



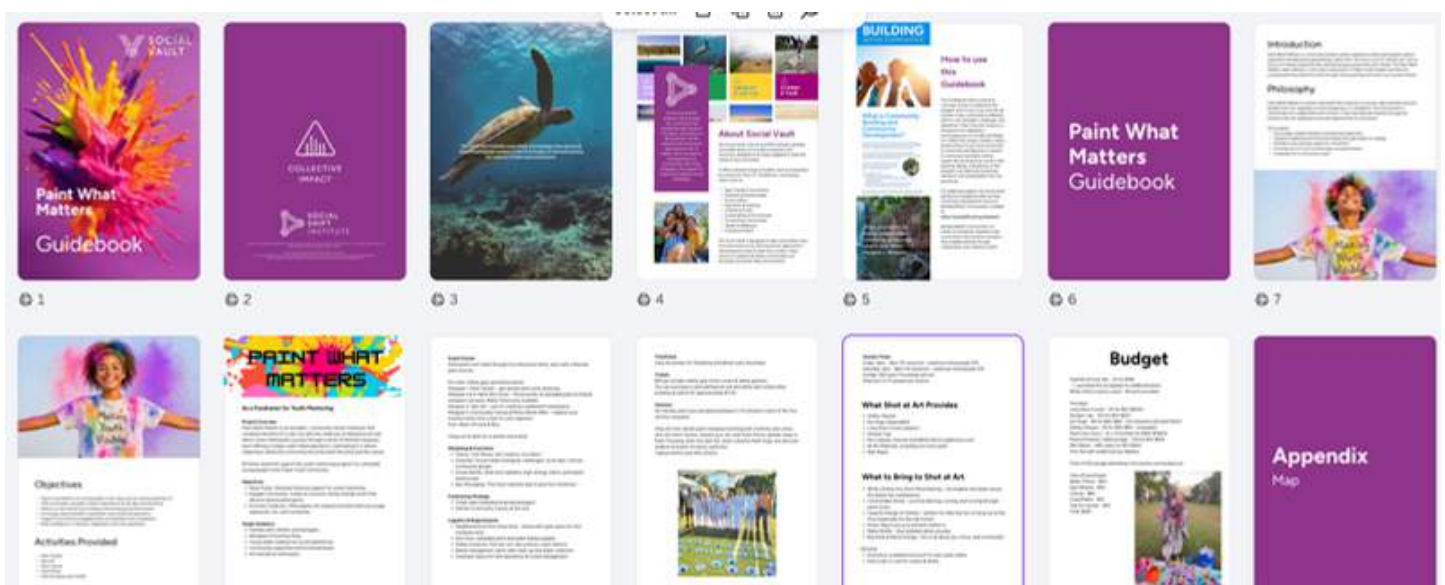


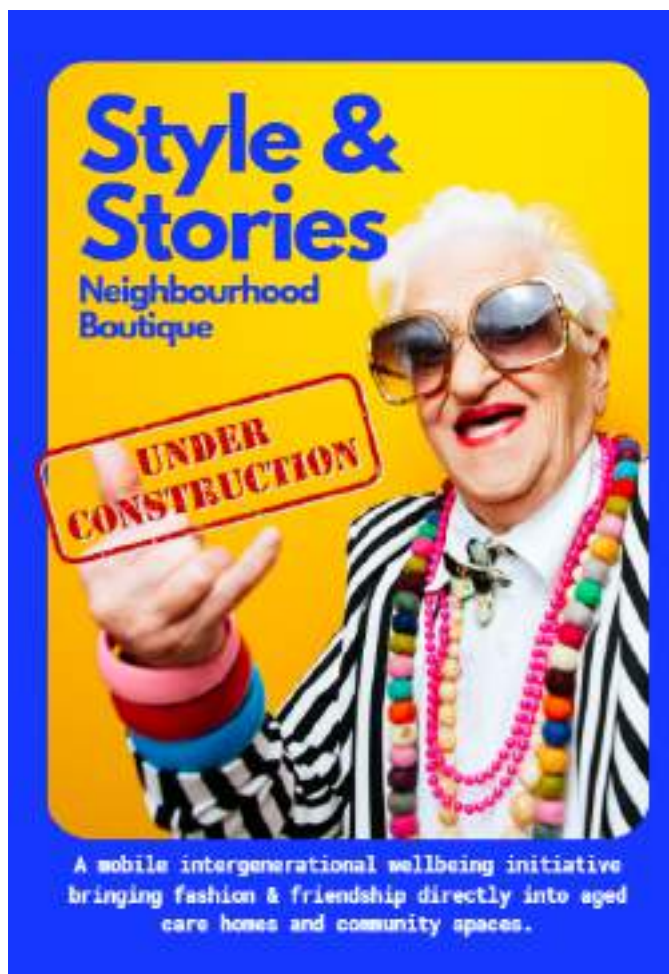
The Paint What Matters event was documented and turned into a practice guide for other youth to learn from. The Guidebook details 'How to run this Event' including budgets, risk assessments, materials and maps. This will be uploaded onto HBNC Social Vault to share with other young people and youth services.



Paint Twister

Snapshot





Style & Stories Neighbourhood Boutique

A mobile Neighbourhood Boutique is an experience that brings affordable clothing, books, gifts, and meaningful social connection directly into aged care homes and community spaces.

More than just shopping, it creates moments of dignity, joy, and belonging for older adults who may be socially isolated or unable to easily access the community. The boutique also brings generations together by partnering with schools and young volunteers to help create warm, welcoming experiences through conversation, styling, storytelling, and companionship.

This project is currently under construction with some young people at Carinty. It will be trialled in July.

Combining vintage charm, radical hospitality, and community connection, The Neighbourhood Boutique is a social enterprise focused on making every visit feel special.

Snapshot





Fraser Coast Youth Survey 2025

Outcomes Report



Executive Summary

The Fraser Coast Youth Survey 2025 marks the seventh consecutive year that the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre (HBNC), in partnership with local high schools and youth service providers, has gathered insights from young people across the Fraser Coast region. Conducted between May and September 2025, the survey engaged 2,263 students from Years 7 to 12. Delivered under the Social Shift Institute, HBNC's research, innovation and community development arm, the survey continues to build a valuable multi-year dataset that highlights the issues, challenges, and lived experiences of local youth.

The survey provides critical information on topics including homelessness, safety, mental health, alcohol and other drugs (AOD), and other key social issues, helping to address the ongoing lack of local evidence in the youth sector.

Key findings from the 2025 survey include:

- **Homelessness:** The proportion of young people currently experiencing homelessness has seen a small increase to 2%, while the overall number who have ever experienced homelessness remains steady at 15%. There was, however, a 10% decrease in the number of youth who reported knowing where to get help if they were unable to go home, and a 2% decrease in young people reporting they had run away from home.
- **Safety:** Reports of young people feeling unsafe at home increased by 2% compared to 2024.
- **Economic Disadvantage:** A 2% increase was observed in the number of young people whose families accessed food bank assistance, potentially influenced by rising cost of living pressures.
- **Mental Health:** There was a significant 11% drop in the number of students who accessed mental health services. This may reflect both positive developments-such as improved awareness and wellbeing strategies-and ongoing challenges such as service capacity and accessibility.
- **Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD):** Usage rates remained relatively consistent. 20% of youth reported drinking alcohol (the same as last year), 6% reported using other drugs (a 1% decrease), and 9% said they either smoked, vaped, or did both (unchanged from 2024).
- **Top Community Concerns:** The leading issues identified by young people were Cost of Living (69%), followed by Safety & Crime (55%) and Mental Health (53%).
- **Top Personal Challenges:** The main personal challenges reported were School, followed by Mental Health, and Relationship Challenges.

How are youth doing?



MENTAL HEALTH

- 29% of youth have accessed mental health services
- 59% of those who accessed services were supported for anxiety
- 43% were supported for depression
- 44% were supported for stress

1



LIVING SITUATION

- 2% of youth were currently homeless
- 15% of youth report experiencing homelessness at some point in their life
- 51% said they didn't know where they would get help from if they were ever in a situation where they couldn't go home
- 13% of youth said they had run away from home at some point
- 12% of youth had felt unsafe at home

2



ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUGS

- 20% of youth report drinking alcohol
- 7% of those feel that alcohol is a problem for them
- 6% of youth report using drugs
- 15% of those feel that drugs are a problem for them
- 9% of youth report they smoke or vape
- 29% of those who do feel it is a problem for them

3



TOP 5 CONCERNS YOUTH HAVE ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY

1. Cost of Living
2. Safety & Crime
3. Mental Health
4. Housing & Homelessness
5. Environment

4



TOP 3 PERSONAL CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH

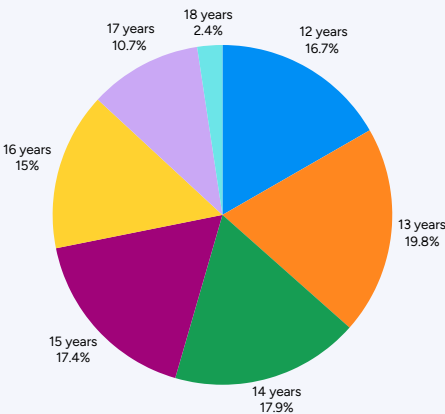
1. School Challenges
2. Mental Health Challenges
3. Relationship Challenges

5

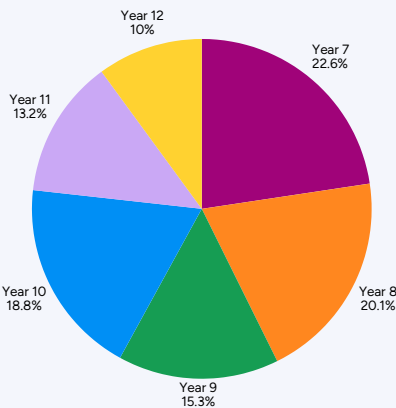
FC Youth Survey 2025

Participant Demographics

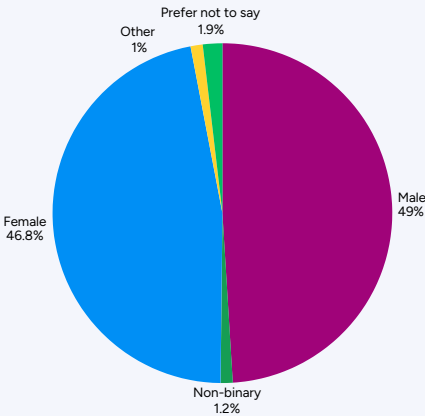
Age



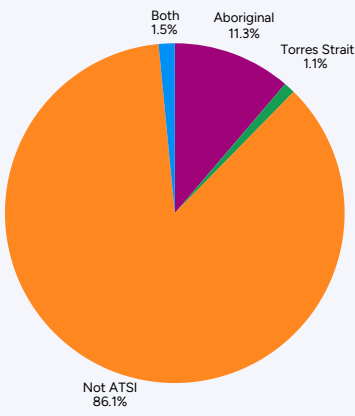
Year Level



Gender



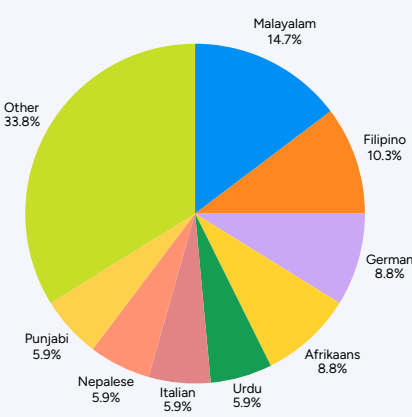
First Nations



English as first language



Other languages



Living Situation



12%

Of total youth respondents are currently homeless, 98% live at home
(1% increase from 2024)



51%

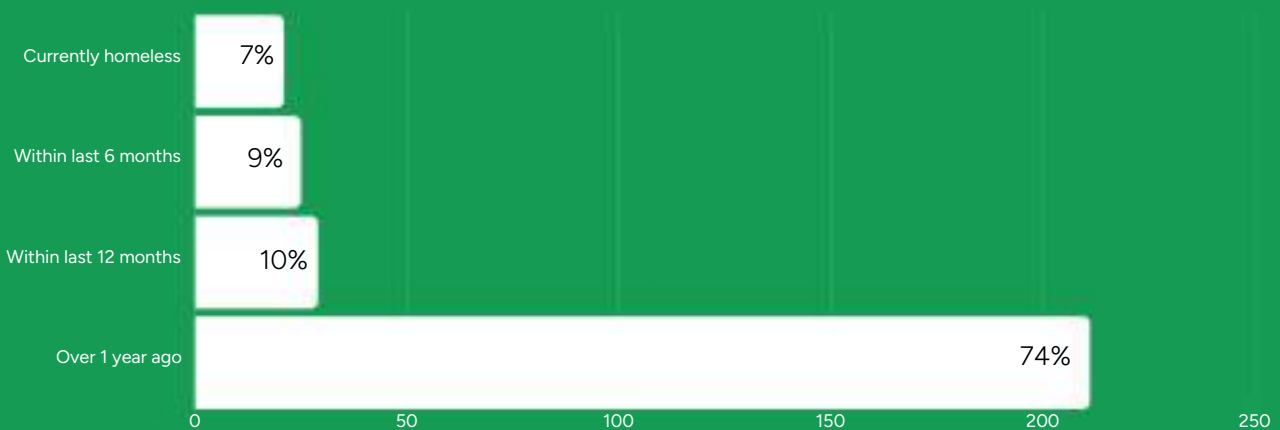
Of youth don't know where to go if they are homeless & can't go home
(10% decrease from 2024)



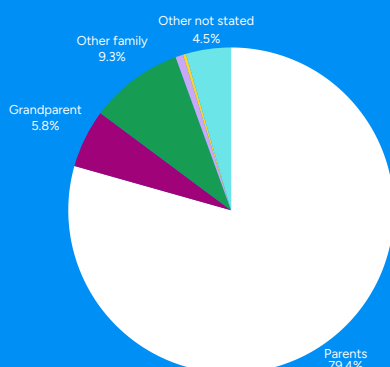
14%

Of youth report being homeless at some point in their life
(1% decrease from 2024)

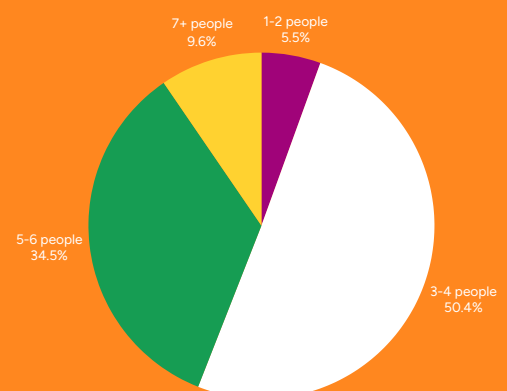
When youth experienced homelessness (of those who ticked yes)



Where youth are living



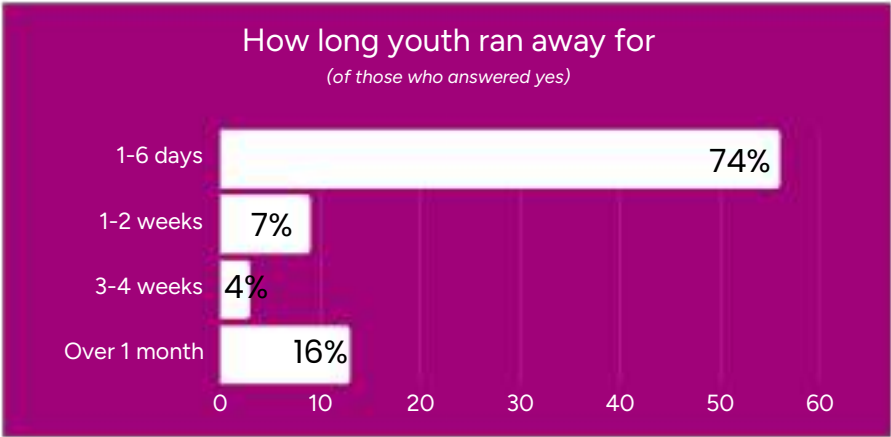
House hold size



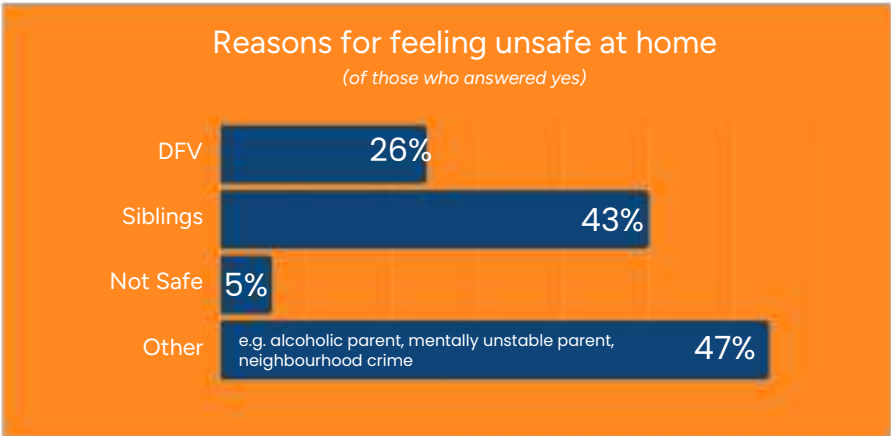
Safety



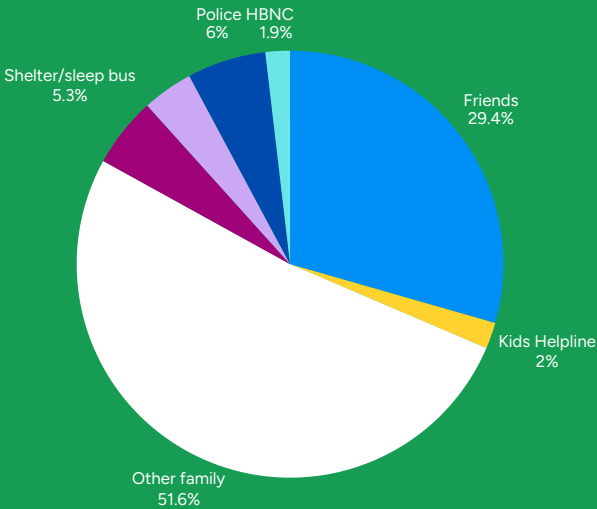
Of youth report they have run away from home at some point (2% decrease from 2024)



Of youth report they have felt unsafe at home (2% increase from 2024)



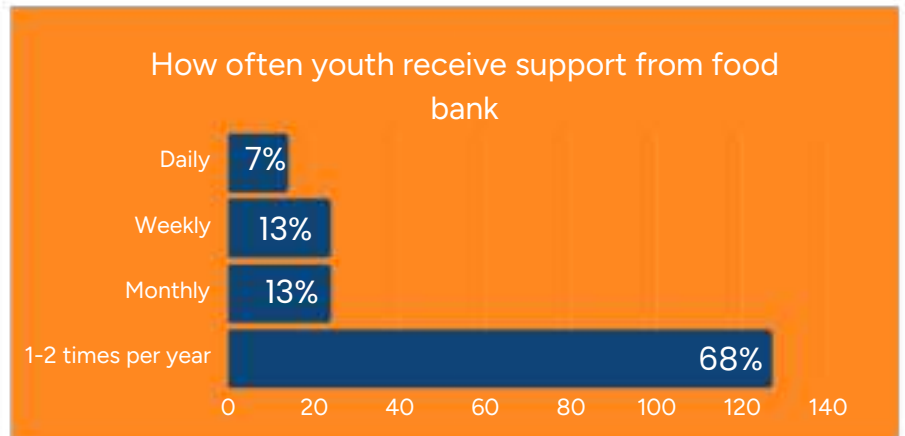
Where youth would seek help from if they can't go home or it is unsafe



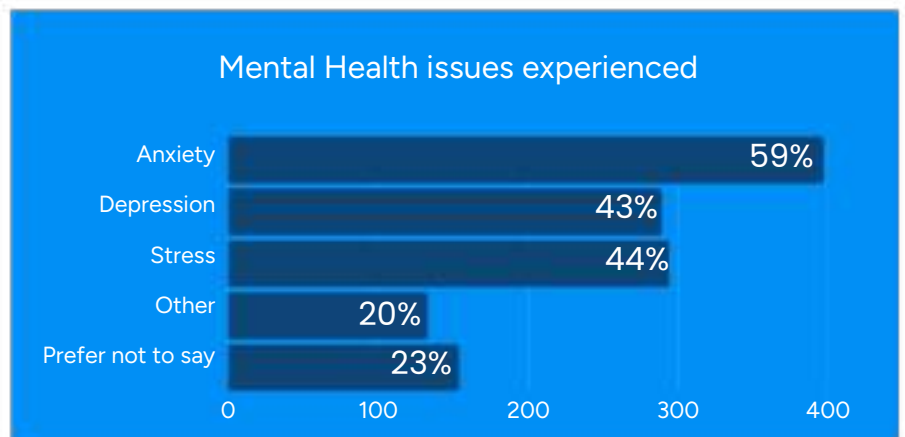
Majority of students reported they would seek help from other family, followed by friends and the police.

Other 29% included Centrelink, PCYC, Headspace, and school.

Disadvantage



Mental Health



Mental Health Issues listed in "Other"

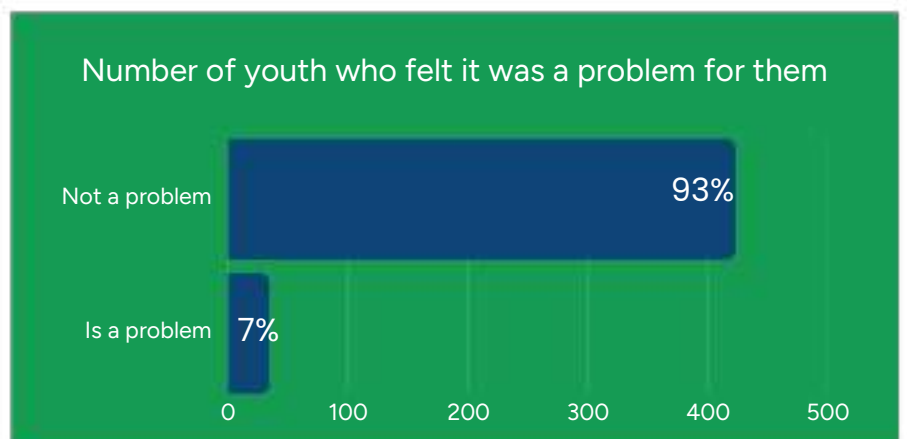
- Anger management
- Grief & loss
- PTSD
- Parents separating
- Neurodiversity
- Eating disorders
- Various mental health conditions

Alcohol



20%

Of youth report they drink alcohol
(same as 2024)

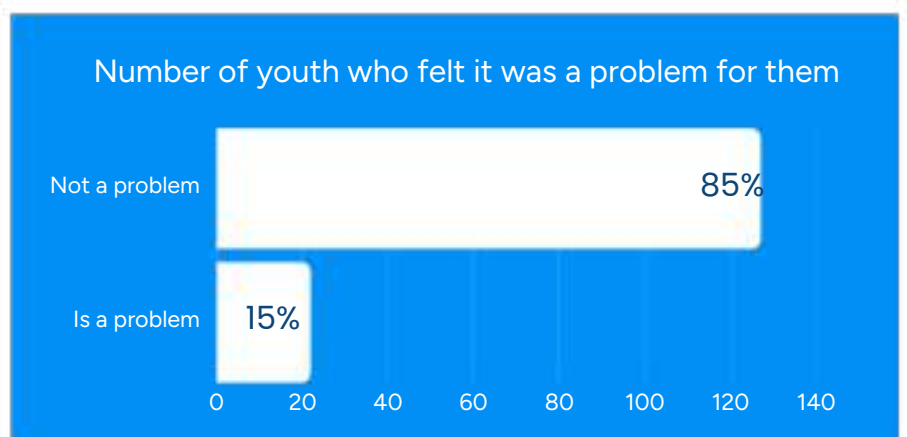


Drugs



6%

Of youth report they take drugs
(1% decrease from 2024)

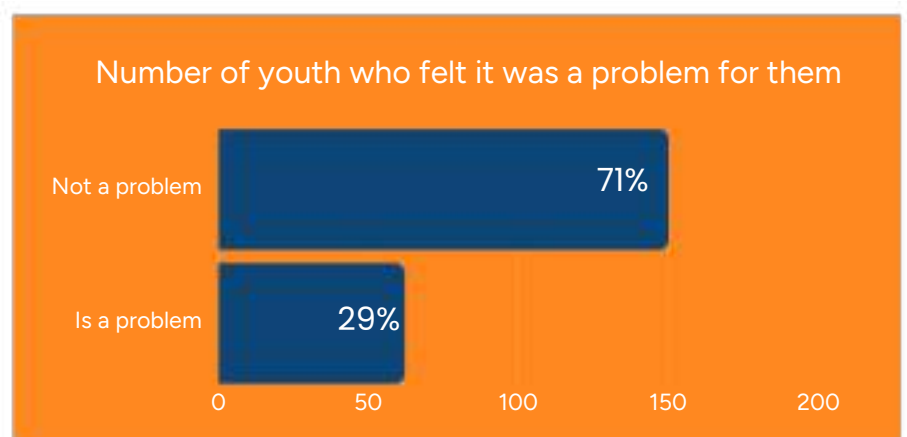


Smoking & Vaping

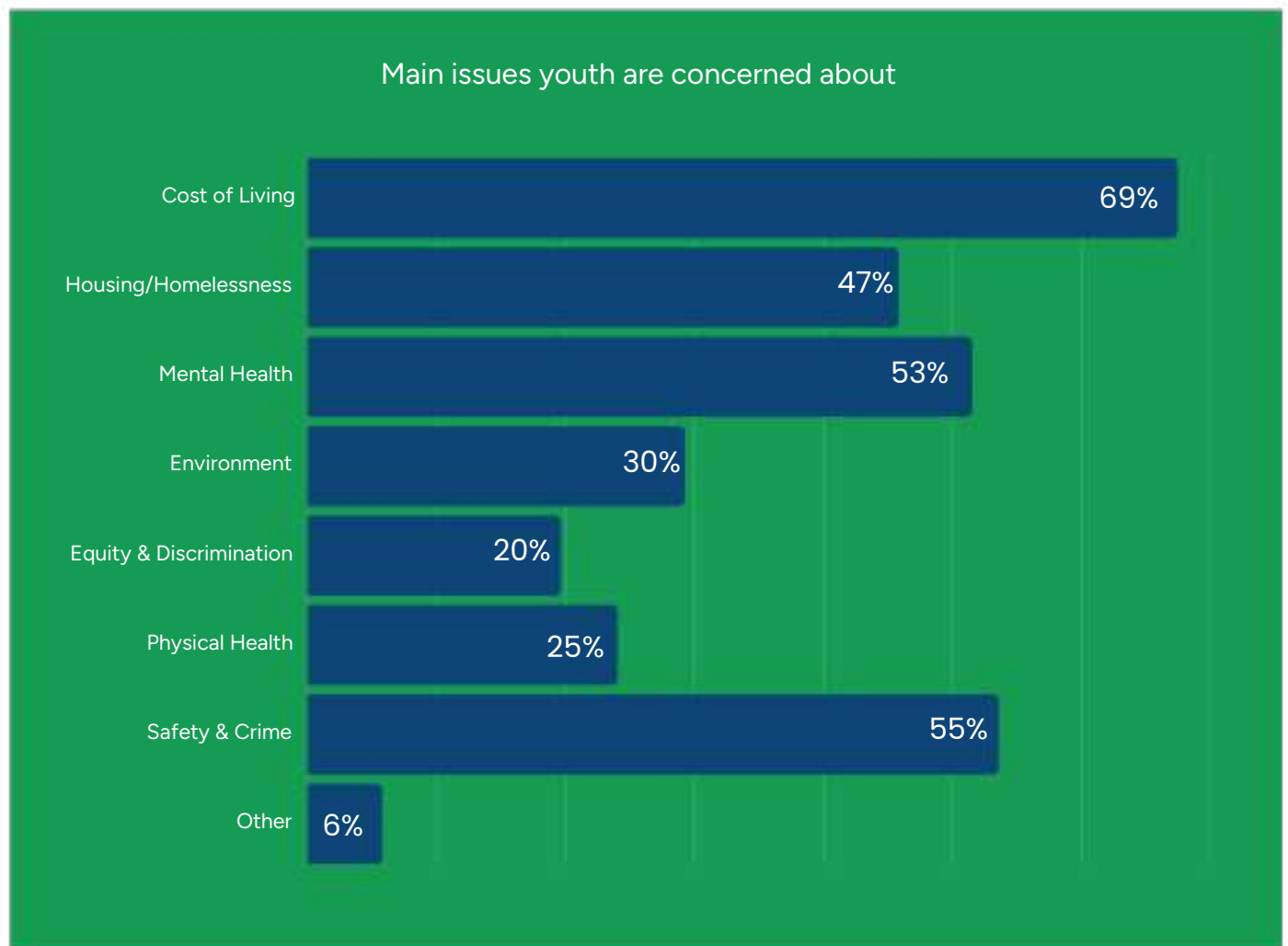


9%

Of youth report they smoke,
vape or both
(same as 2024)

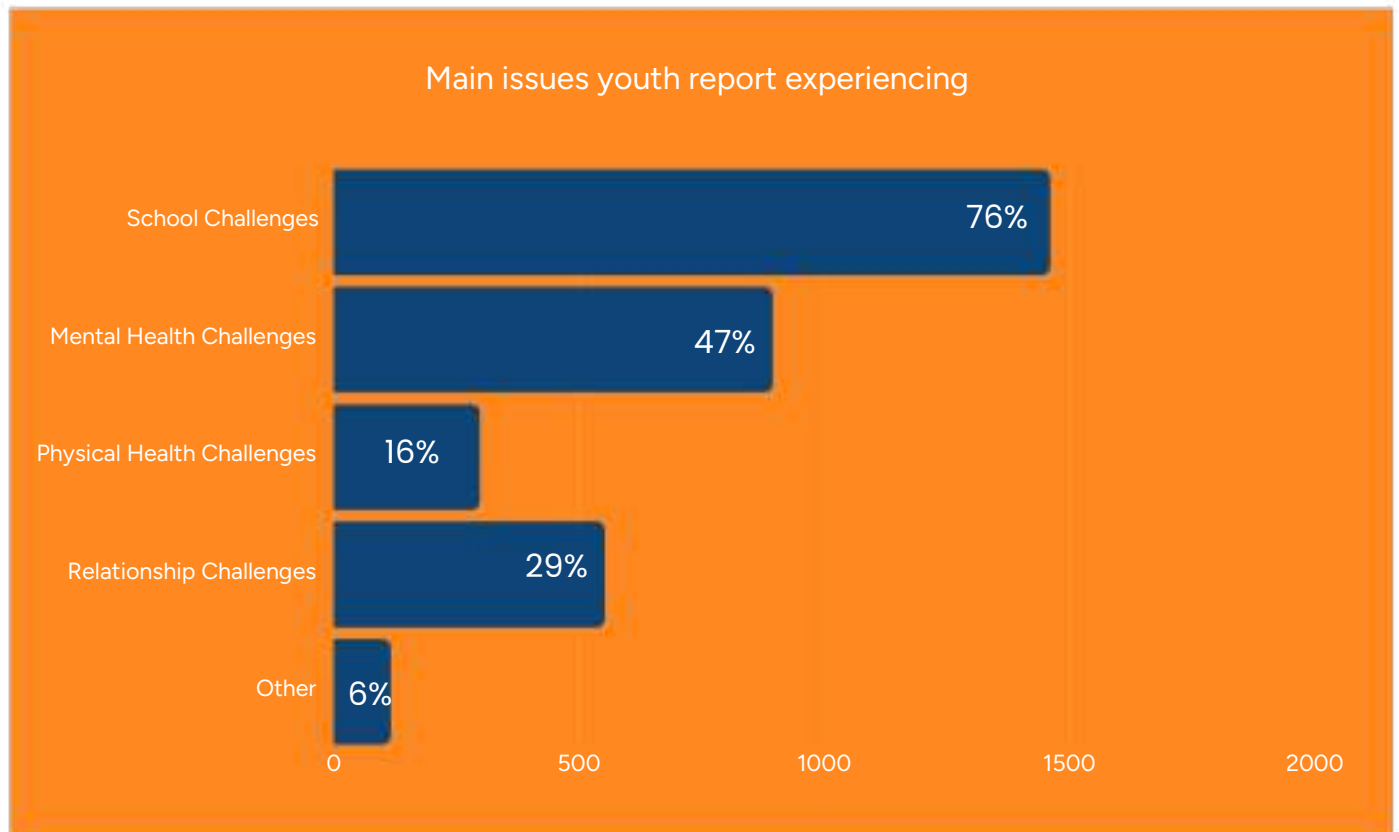


Main issues youth are concerned about in the local community



Young people were asked to share their biggest concerns within the community. This year, “Cost of Living” was added as a new category in response to the high number of comments about it last year. It emerged as the top concern, with 69% of students selecting it. The second most common concern was safety and crime, chosen by 55% of respondents, followed by mental health, which 53% identified as a key issue.

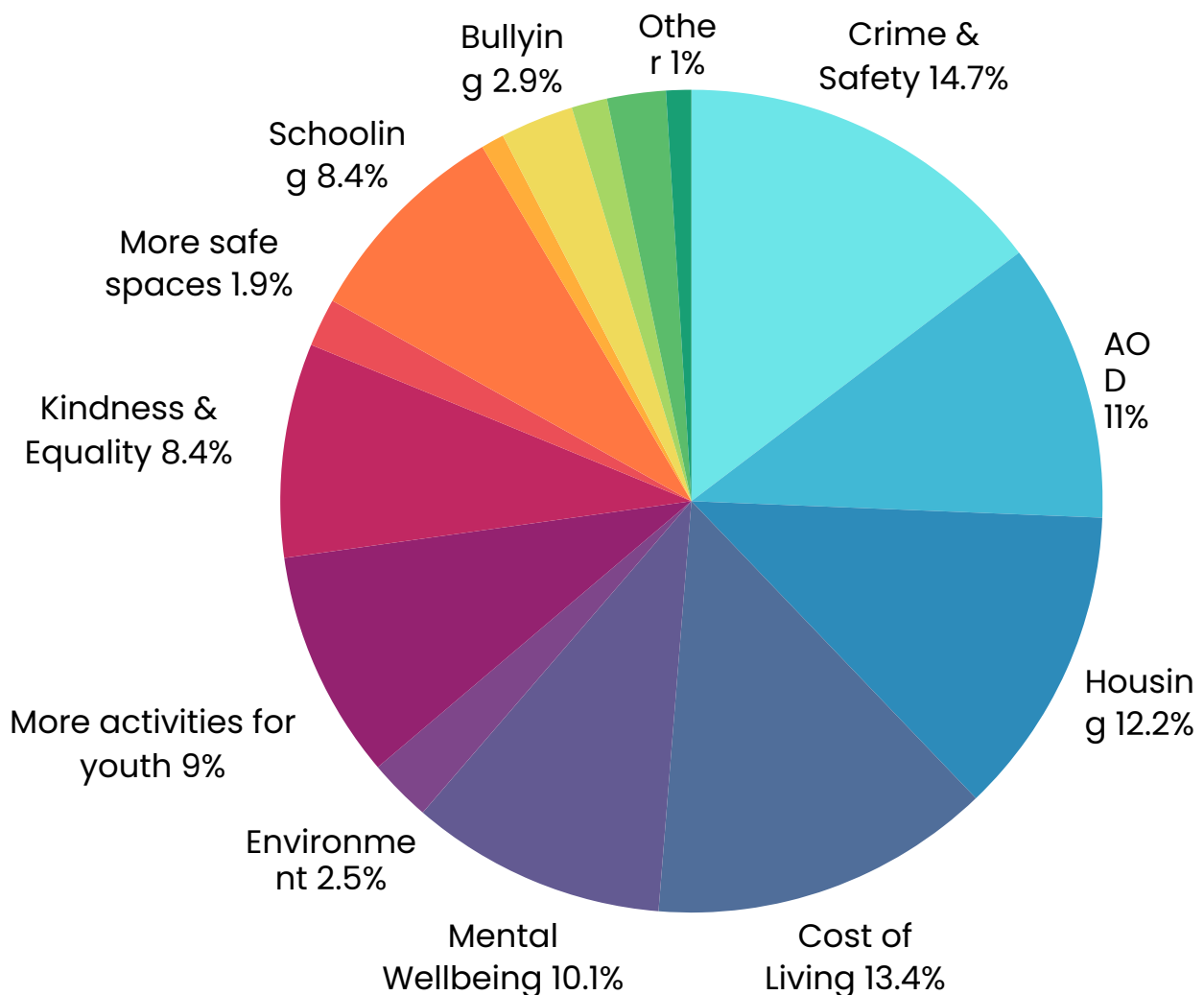
Main challenges youth are experiencing



Youth were asked what are the main challenges they are experiencing in their lives. School challenges (e.g. study, high workload) was the main challenge reported, followed by mental health relationship challenges, which were the same top 3 concerns from 2024. In "other", many students were focused on sport challenges as presented in the word cloud below.

home
sport family
injury work

What would youth change in our local community?



Young people were asked, "If you could change one thing for youth in our community, what would it be?" A total of 1,208 categorisable responses were received. The main areas identified by youth included Cost of Living (163 responses), Safety and Crime (178), Housing and Homelessness (148), Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) (133), Mental Health and Wellbeing (122), and Kindness and Equality (102).

It's clear that young people have many ideas and suggestions for making our community a better place. They proposed a range of improvements, such as providing more activities for youth, creating safe spaces to go after school, making changes to the schooling system, increasing access to support services, improving infrastructure, and enhancing environmental supports.

"Change school to less results orientated and more individually drives. Look at Norway's school system"

"I would make more childcare for DV survivor's kids and more houses."

"More places to perform music for gigs and such"

"Provide more education on opportunities outside of Maryborough"

"How people are viewed and accepted. Particularly the 'challenging ones' are not just bad kids but people with hard circumstances."

"More bubblers on Boundary Road...and more opportunities for activities and to meet people"

"Make it easier to get around with safe and cheap public transport. And in general make the city more accessible for people before they get their P's"

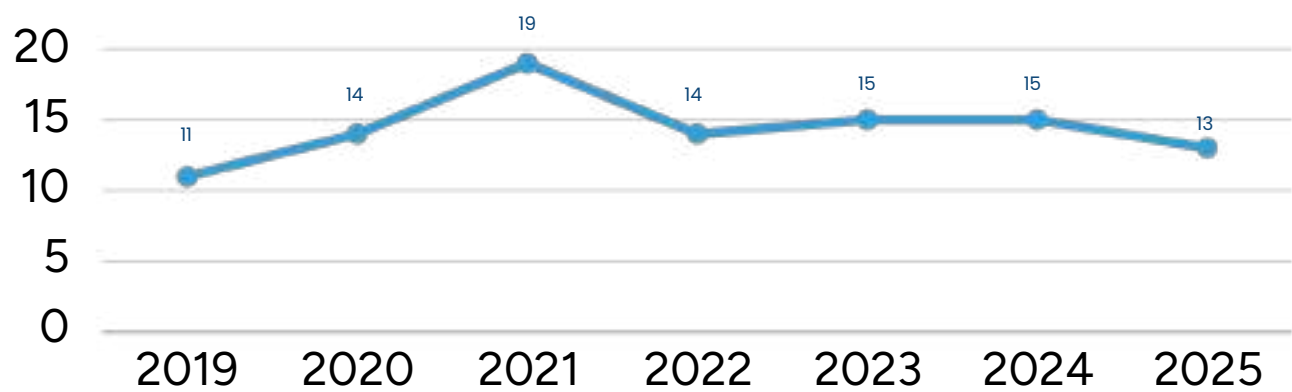
"Restricted access to electric vehicles. e.g. electric shooters. Or to treat the selling of these vehicles like cars"

"A little place where if people need a place to stay there are little cubes that you can rent out and have a warm and safe place to stay with it, like \$5 a night for homeless and for people who ran away from home"

"I would attempt to put more focus on teenage social interaction by providing spaces for recreation...This could include better social seating areas and housed spaces for clubs and other groups...The main problem I find is that shopping centres are the most popular areas for social interactions instead of the esplanade, and the recreational areas are all catered for kids while remaining far too spread out"

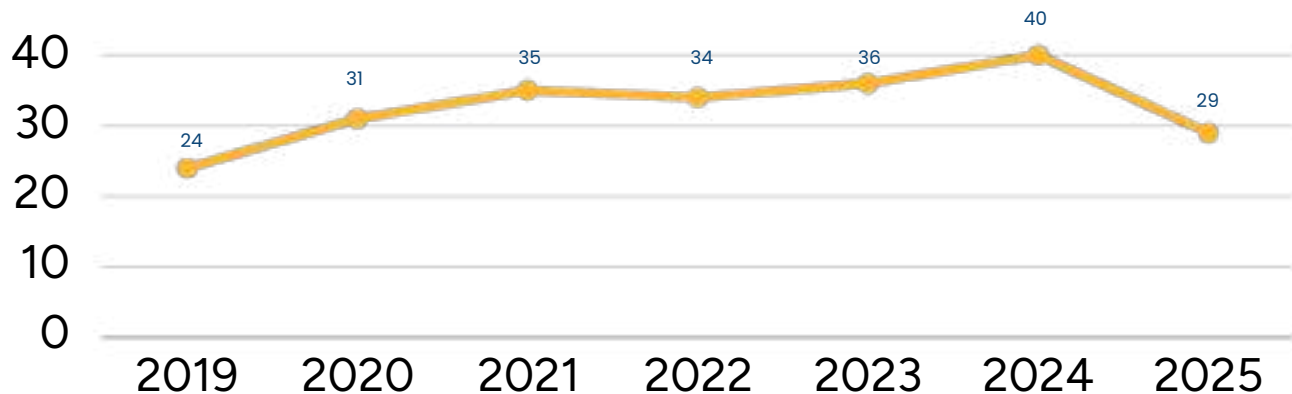
6 Year Comparison

Run Away From Home



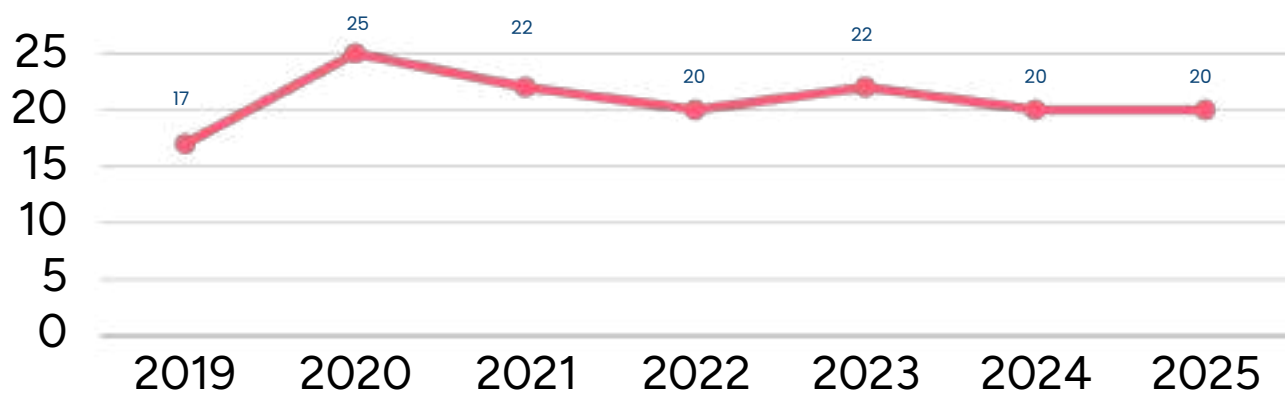
% of youth who reported they had run away from home

Mental Health



% of youth who reported they had accessed mental health services for support

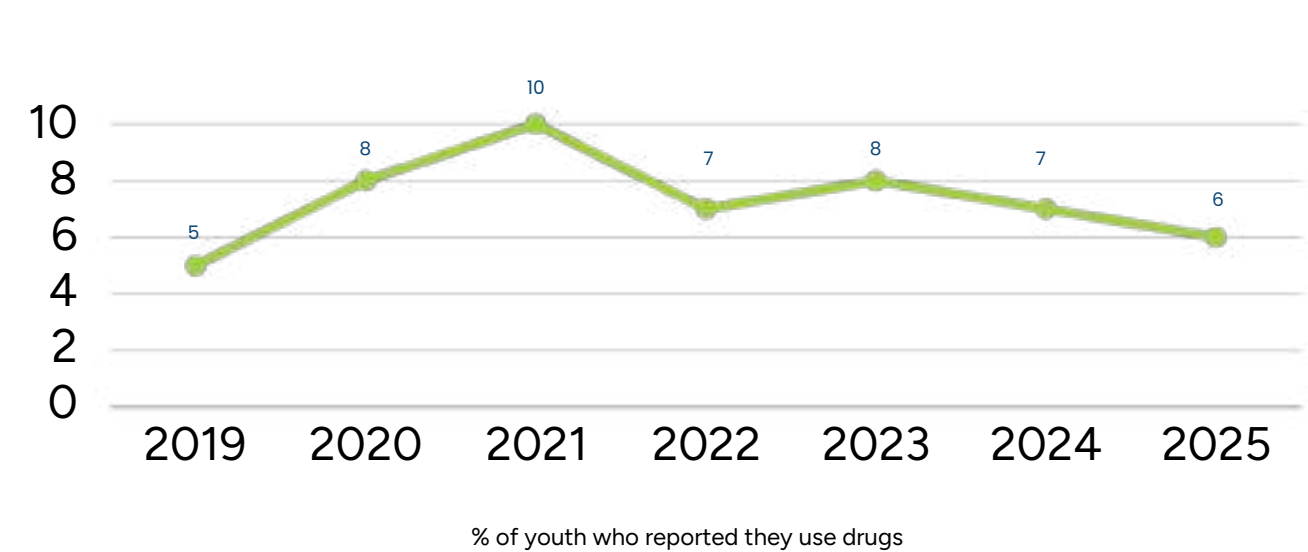
Alcohol



% of youth who reported they drink alcohol

6 Year Comparison

Drugs



Fraser Coast Youth Survey 2026

School Information Brochure



What is the survey?

Every year, the HBNC partners with local high schools to run the Fraser Coast Youth Survey. The survey is aimed at finding out what issues youth 12-18 y.o. are experiencing in their lives. This helps us to create a snapshot of youth in our region to help direct local community resources to where they are needed most. 2026 is our 8th year of running the survey. The survey is run by the Social Shift Institute of HBNC.

How do schools implement the survey with students?

SocialShiftInstitute will send schools a link to the online survey where students can anonymously complete the survey. Alternatively, we can deliver paper copy surveys if that is easier for schools. We will liaise with you as to what suits best. We recommend schools do the survey in form class for better completion rates. We can also provide support if required.

Survey Timeline

March : Liaise with schools to prep to do survey



May-June: Schools implement survey with Years 7-12



July: Data collection of all completed surveys



August: Collected data is analysed



November- FC Youth Survey Report completed and released to schools

For more information please contact: socialshift@hbnc.com.au

