



Youth

DID YOU KNOW?

“Youth” refers to young people aged between 12 and 24 years of age.

In the Mountains we have **high numbers of school aged young people and low numbers of over 18s:**

- 9% of BM population are 12 - 17 year olds (higher than the Sydney average of 7.9%);
- 7.9% of BM population are 18 - 24 year olds (Sydney average 9.9%).

This is largely due to there being very few higher education or employment options for school leavers.

Adolescence is recognised as a unique period of life.

When we talk about or make decisions that affect young people, it is important to recognise that we are talking about a distinct group of people in our community. They are not children and they are not adults. Measures of most abilities indicate adolescence is the healthiest and most resilient period of lifespan, and yet overall morbidity and mortality rates increase 200-300% from childhood to late adolescence. Primary causes of death/disability are related to problems with control of behaviour and emotion.

Young people in Australia are faced with the prospect of taking on three times more debt than their parents to buy their first home.

Adolescence is recognised as a unique period of life.

Faulconbridge had the highest proportion of youth unemployment in Blue Mountains City (20%), followed closely by Katoomba at (19.1%). (2011 Census).

Psychological stress: 16.2% young people in Blue mountains aged 16-24 have high to very high levels of psychological distress – higher than the NSW average (especially for young men, where it is considerably higher than the rest of NSW).

Across the BM population:

- alcohol is consumed at risk and high risk levels equal to NSW averages - however **66% of young men aged 16-24 years consume alcohol at risky levels, and 51% at high risk levels, which are significantly higher than NSW averages and of considerable concern** (NSW Population Health Profile 2009)
- possession and/or use of cannabis had a 20% increase over the 2005-2009 period (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research 2005–2009).

Nationally, 30% of young people in the labour force are unemployed or underemployed.

Our Goals

The vast majority of young people in the Mountains will successfully negotiate adolescence to become positive members of society, thanks to supportive families and communities. Unfortunately a small, but sometimes highly visible, percentage of young people will face a great number of barriers to becoming healthy & happy adults.

Young people today are not getting worse.

During adolescence there is a mismatch in brain development - the part of the brain that regulates and controls behaviour and emotion remains underdeveloped until the mid-20's. Typically young people have difficulty understanding the future consequences of their actions, have poor risk perception, and are highly susceptible to peer pressure. The good news is that by about age 25 all this changes.

Shakespeare: “I would that there were no age between ten and twenty three are heated by nature as drunken men by wine”.

Aristotle: “Youth... for there is nothing in between but getting wench with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting...”.

However, adolescents today are typically dealing with increasingly more difficult decisions and challenges to self-control.


Some key areas that we as a community are working to address are:

- **Binge Drinking:** NSW Population Health Survey 2005-2007 states that 51% of males ages 16-24 in the Blue Mountains report being engaged in ‘high risk alcohol consumption’ – the state average for the same group is 24%.
- **Isolation:** Over 20% of households in Katoomba report having no car (this is nearly double that of the state average). For young people living in the Upper Mountains with limited or no access to employment or higher education, the inability to travel outside the Mountains is highly isolating.
- **Homelessness:** The Platform (youth accommodation service) has in excess of 200 active clients (young people who are homeless & are receiving case management support), at any one time. The number of homeless youth not accessing support is unknown.
- **Boredom:** Young people want somewhere safe to meet & talk with friends. As a community we tend to frown upon young people ‘hanging-


out' in public places. With no roller skating rink, bowling alley or similar business in the Mountains, young people are left feeling bored.

- **Hopelessness:** The biggest factor impacting on the lives of our most vulnerable young people is hopelessness brought about through generational poverty. Young people coming from families with no history of employment, where drug & alcohol abuse is common & where parent or older sibling might be in prison, have little reason to be optimistic about the future. Our goal is to break the cycle of generational poverty & disadvantage through supporting young people to complete education & enter meaningful employment.


What We're Doing to Achieve Our Goals

 There is a broad range of general and specialist youth services in the Blue Mountains. Key amongst these in the non-government sector are: The Platform (previously Blue Mountains Youth Accommodation and Support Service), Blue Mountains Youth Futures Group, and Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST). Together with other relevant and interested organisations and agencies, they form the Youth Mental Illness & Substance Abuse Network (YMISA), which has a range of ongoing projects and programs such as:

- Midnight Basketball
- iDrinkSmart
- the NGO Youth Worker Training Passport
- harm-minimisation activities for young people (eg WinterMagic Festival, in conjunction with the Red Frogs; education & information on secondary-supply of alcohol).

 **Jacob's story:** *'Jacob' starting attending the Youth Centre after doing the Outdoor Education Program MYST runs in conjunction with local high schools. He presented as a fun-loving individual but it was evident to workers that there was more to his situation, as he was prone to outbursts of frustration. The youth workers noted this and made efforts to build rapport with Jacob over the next few months. One day he opened up, and spoke of feeling depressed and very stressed with his situation at home. We were able to link him in with our counsellor immediately so he had a trained professional to discuss his issues with. He came in a couple of weeks ago and told us he had been kicked out of home after having a fight with his step-father. He could stay with one of his friends for a few days, and we referred him to the Glue Factory where he was able to get crisis support. The Glue Caseworkers were able to give him some food and toiletries to support his short-term accommodation and put a referral into the youth refuge where he was accepted. They have also assisted him in navigating Centrelink, kept him engaged with schooling, organised a payment plan for his outstanding train fines, and linked him in with a local mental health professional. The MYST counsellor began having sessions with him and*

his step-father and mother in an attempt to help repair their fractured relationship. 'Jacob' still has his dark days, but his overall perspective on life has greatly improved, and he has begun to talk about his plans for the future, which include going to TAFE to learn about computer programming.

 **Youth Roundtables** and development of the **Child, Youth & Family Plan**. In late 2013 and early 2014 the community sector hosted a series of Roundtable consultations with the youth sector, schools, young people, business and the community. The consultations initially focussed on the Mid-Mountains, where activities, opportunities and services for young people were perceived to be even sparser than for the rest of the Mountains. The Roundtable participants concluded that what was needed was a new Youth Strategy for the Mountains. Recognising the value of the Stronger Families Alliance's (SFA) shared vision and goals, and the success of this broadly-based and collaborative Collective Impact initiative – and to avoid wasting time and energy on 'reinventing the wheel' – the decision of the participants was to approach SFA to see what synergies there might be. The result is a re-development of the *Plan* into the *Child, Youth and Family Plan*, currently underway.

✓ How is State Government Contributing to These Achievements?

- ✓ **Early Intervention & Prevention Program (EIPP).** Most of the youth sector organisations in the Mountains receive their main funding through this Family & Community Services (FACS) program. The program provides appropriately targeted child, youth and family support services to reduce the likelihood of children and young people entering or remaining in the child protection and out-of-home care systems. These services are provided along a continuum of family and community needs – from lower-level parenting and youth support, to intensive family and youth interventions to prevent children and young people from coming into care. This funding program is currently under review; contracts with existing service providers have been renewed until June 2016.
- ✓ The Nepean Blue Mountains District of NSW Family & Community Services (FACS) formally launched **The Collective NBM** – with a focus on Youth. CEOs and Managers from some 60 organisations (NGOs, community sector organisations, government agencies, business and sporting organisations) met in late 2014 with a commitment to collaborating to break the cycle of generational disadvantage, and improving outcomes for young people in the NBM District.

