

Hilltops Youth Forum 2023



**2023 HILLTOPS
YOUTH FORUM**

Sept 15 2023 | 9am to 2.30pm | PCYC YOUNG |
Open to all Youth aged 12-24

COME ALONG, MAKE FRIENDS & ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE
BBQ LUNCH
CHAT TO YOUTH SERVICES & ORGANISATIONS
WORKSHOPS HOSTED BY:

headspace | YOUTH ACTION

For more information contact the Hilltops Youth Officer on 6384 2409 OR email youth@hilltops.nsw.gov.au



A Summary Report of the Hilltops Youth Forum

15th September 2023

Executive Summary

Hilltops Council hosted a full-day consultation event on Friday 15th September 2023, involving approximately 100 young people, representing schools and communities from across the Hilltops LGA.

The day involved the following elements:

- Introduction, acknowledgement of country and an ice breaker exercise
- An overview of the results from the recent Hilltops YOUth Survey
- Roundtable discussions on key issues identified by young people through a survey completed by young people living in Hilltops prior to the event
- Workshops on three topics of interest to young people, run by youth service providers
- Young people working together in small groups to develop a brief “pitch” on the issue that matters most to them
- A “pitch” session involving each small group presenting an issue that matters to them and what they would like to see happen to address this
- Feedback from a panel of VIPs on the issues raised by young people in their pitches
- Discussion about next steps, and how the information will be used

The day focused on the topics highlighted as being of most concern in the Hilltops YOUth Survey. These topics formed the basis of the roundtable discussions, and the final “pitch” session to a panel of VIPs. These included:

- Vaping and smoking
- Mental Health
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination
- Boredom
- School and study pressure
- Drug and alcohol issues

With these issues in mind, the following recommendations arose from the day:

1. That Hilltops Council investigates the development of one or more youth centres to provide a range of services and provide young people with fun, affordable activities.
2. That Council works with Hilltops Youth Action Group to assess the outdoor spaces within Hilltops’ towns and villages.
3. That Council explores the issues raised by young people about transport and accessibility within and between Hilltops’ towns and villages.
4. That Council works with key stakeholders to explore more effective ways to support young people’s mental health needs.
5. That Council continues to offer regular forums and consultations similar to this one.
6. That Council explores avenues for providing a range of youth-focused events and activities suggested by young people at this forum.
7. That Council works with key stakeholders to explore ways to reduce the prevalence of smoking and vaping amongst young people.
8. That schools in Hilltops review their policies and programs concerning bullying, discrimination and harassment.

Further details surrounding these recommendations are included at the end of this report.

Background

On September 15th 2023, Hilltops Council hosted a full-day consultation event at the Young PCYC involving approximately 100 young people, representing each of the high schools in Hilltops. The majority of young people who attended were aged 12 to 15. The day was organised by Anna Dreverman, Council's Youth Officer, who worked closely with a steering group comprised of local service providers, school teachers and young people.

The day began with a welcome to country by Cath Carrol, in recognition that Hilltops is home to both the Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal people. This was followed by an ice breaker exercise.

Prior to the day, young people across Hilltops were surveyed in order to identify the issues that matter most to them. The survey responses were used to select the themes for the round table discussions at the forum. By the time of the forum, 240 young people had completed the online survey.

A brief presentation highlighted key findings from the survey responses, to provide a starting point for the day's discussions. The presentation included the following points from the 240 responses to the survey:

- 80% of respondents were aged 12 to 15, with 15% aged 16 to 18, and 5% aged 18 to 24
- Nearly two thirds of young people live in a town or village, with one third living on a property
- Two thirds of young people believe there are enough services to support young people in Hilltops. Just over one quarter believe there are not enough services
- 40% of young people feel either very connected or connected to their community. 44% of young people feel "sort of" connected. 16% feel disconnected from their community
- Over 60% of young people feel either safe or very safe in the community, with a further 24% feeling "sort of" safe. The remaining 16% feel either unsafe or a little bit unsafe
- Nearly 60% of young people rated their mental health as good or better. Conversely, over 40% of young people rated their mental health as fair or worse
- 40% of young people said they had been treated unfairly or discriminated against in the last year, with a further 18% saying they were unsure
- Over 50% of young people said either their family and/or their community had been directly affected by extreme weather in the last year

When asked what they like best about their community, the top responses were:

- Easy to get around (54%)
- Small country town feel (50%)
- Sports / sporting activities (42%)
- Open spaces (36%)
- Everyone knows everyone (35%)

When asked their top five issues for young people in Hilltops, the top responses were:

- Vaping and smoking (64%)
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination (50%)
- Mental health (50%)
- Boredom / not enough to do (49%)
- School and study pressure (43%)

Following the presentation, young people were then invited to take part in round table discussions to further explore these issues. The issues highlighted in these discussions are outlined later in this report.

In the next session, young people were divided into three groups. Each group attended the following workshops:

- *Advocating for Change* – facilitated by Kate Munro, CEO of Youth Action
- *Ways to Support a Friend* – facilitated by Laura Fletcher and Sam Heffer of Headspace
- *Information stalls and activities* – facilitated by various youth service providers in Hilltops

After lunch, young people were asked to choose the issue they were most interested in, to focus on in more detail. They were then asked to form groups to develop a one to two-minute pitch to highlight their issue, and present their ideas of why the issue is important, and what can be done to address it. The topics explored in small groups were:

- Vaping
- Mental health
- Access to health services
- Bullying
- Discrimination and harassment
- Fun things to do

The final session involved young people “pitching” their ideas for what they would like to see happen to address their issues and concerns, in order to make Hilltops an even better place for young people to live. Each group had one to two minutes to pitch their ideas to each other, and to a panel of VIPs. The VIPs were asked to provide feedback on the young people’s ideas. A summary of the issues highlighted in the pitch session is included later in this report.

Hilltops Council commissioned Andrew Cummings to facilitate the forum. Andrew is an independent consultant with over 35 years’ experience working with young people in a wide range of organisations and settings, including running national and international youth organisations in Australia, the UK and Europe. The forum received financial and practical support from the Office for Regional Youth, with Andrew Britton and Michelle Williams from ORY providing support in planning the forum, and on the day.



Round Table Discussions

Following a presentation on the key outcomes from the Hilltops YOUth survey, young people participated in round table discussions aimed at exploring the issues that matter to them. This included issues highlighted in the presentation on the Hilltops YOUth Survey results, as well as other issues young people wished to raise. Table facilitators were given guiding questions to help steer the conversations. Below is a summary of the key issues discussed.

Things We Like About Living in Hilltops

The roundtable groups started by discussing the things they like most about living in Hilltops. The following things were highlighted:

- The range of sporting activities and the depth of sporting talent
- Musical and artistic talent
- Resilience and the ability to “bounce back” and overcome challenges
- Hard working
- Energetic
- Confident
- Friendly and kind
- Supportive, helpful and caring community
- Working together / teamwork
- Generous
- Healthy and active
- Multicultural
- Honesty
- Loyalty
- Creativity



Things We'd Like to Change About Hilltops

The following issues were raised by young people as things they would like to address or change about their community:

- Lack of transportation
- Not enough activities
- Boredom
- Hate against LGBTIQ+ people
- Parks and public spaces not being suitable for teenagers
- School pressures – too many assessments
- Bullying – at school, on social media etc
- Vaping and smoking
- Crime
- Lack of sporting options in some towns and villages
- Many activities are expensive
- Mental health and wellbeing; and concern about self-harm and suicide
- Concern about the environment and climate change
- Body image
- Feeling unsafe
- Sexual assault and harassment, and issues around consent
- Domestic and family violence
- Lack of career opportunities
- Homelessness
- Better roads, fewer potholes
- Lack of support for people with a disability
- Drug and alcohol issues

After identifying these issues and challenges, the roundtable groups spent time discussing in more detail a few of these issues, choosing the ones that were most important to them. These discussions are summarised below:

Addressing Boredom - Fun Things to Do

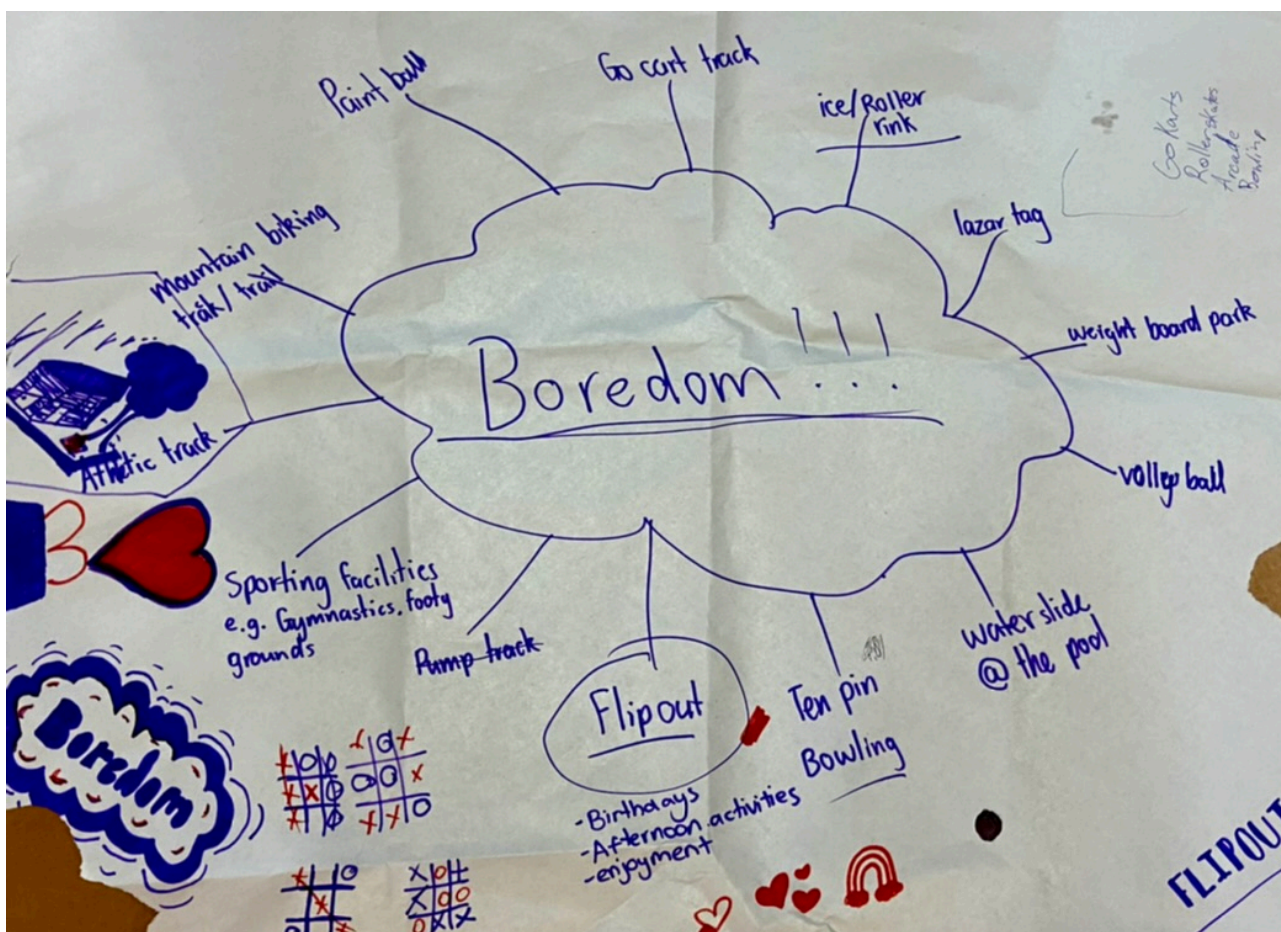
Boredom was identified as one of the most important issues for young people in Hilltops. Young people shared their opinions about the impact of boredom, and suggestions for addressing boredom by providing more fun things for young people to do.

Issues and Concerns

- There is a lack of safe, fun and affordable things for young people to do after school, on weekends and during school holidays.
- There is too much focus on sports. For young people who are not sporty, there are limited options.
- Parks in Hilltops are too focused on younger children. There is a lack of spaces, activities and equipment designed with teenagers in mind.
- Lack of transportation makes it difficult for young people to take part in activities and events that take place in other towns or villages.
- Boredom leads to a range of negative behaviours amongst young people – including drug and alcohol use, vaping and smoking, crime and vandalism, mental health issues.

Solutions and Recommendations:

- Build or develop a youth centre that provides a safe space for young people to hang out, as well as a variety of programs, services and activities for young people. This might include arcade games, books, a study area, board games, consoles, pool table, workshops and courses, youth workers / counsellors.
- Improve the swimming pool by building a water slide; extending the opening times of the pool; and building an indoor heated pool.
- Increase the range of sporting activities and facilities – e.g. gymnastics, football fields, mountain bike trails, volleyball and basketball courts, Ninja Warrior course, pump tracks.
- Provide other fun activities – Go Cart track, tenpin bowling, paint ball, wakeboard park, laser tag, ice skating / roller skating rink, Flip Out, arts and drama-based activities etc.
- Improve local parks by including more activities and facilities for teens – such as hang out spaces, gym equipment, pump tracks.
- Hold more social events such as discos, excursions, festivals, social clubs, BBQs etc, for under 18s, as well as creating social options and events for 18 to 24 year olds.
- Better transport options between towns and villages – such as providing a regular shuttle bus service.
- Many young people would like a better range of shops and shopping centres.



Vaping and Smoking

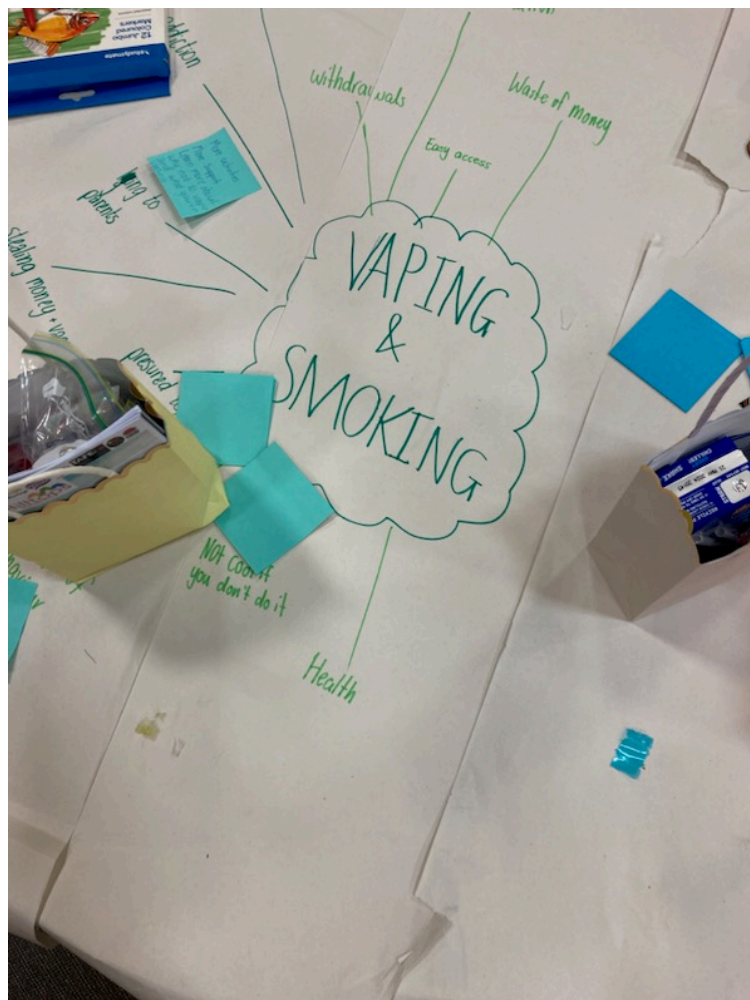
Vaping and smoking are also issues that young people in Hilltops are particularly concerned about. They discussed the following concerns, and possible solutions:

Issues and Concerns

- There is peer pressure to vape and smoke – they are seen as “cool” things to do.
- Vapes and cigarettes are easy for young people to access.
- Young people spend a lot of money on vaping and smoking, and this leads some young people to steal from their parents and others to buy them.
- The health consequences are serious; and in the case of vaping, the longer-term consequences are still largely unknown.
- Vaping and smoking are addictive.
- Smoking and vaping can lead to changes in behaviour and attitudes in young people – causing them to lose interest in school, sports, other friends.

Solutions and Recommendations

- More education about the health and social impacts of smoking and vaping, and the short and longer-term consequences.
- Stronger surveillance of smoking and vaping amongst young people, especially at schools, so that it can be “shut down”.
- Providing a counselling/mentoring service for students who vape and/or smoke.



Sexual Assault and Harassment

One roundtable group discussed their concerns about sexual assault and harassment, and ways to address this in Hilltops:

Issues and Concerns

- Concern about the number of sexual assaults.
- There is a lack of understanding about consent, and the importance of only having sex when both people involved are fully consenting.
- Some young women have had their drinks spiked.
- Lots of young people send naked images of themselves.

Solutions and Recommendations

- Better education for both girls and boys about what sexual harassment and sexual assault are – including things like verbal violence, name calling etc.
- Educate young women to always buy their own drinks, and not to accept drinks from anyone they don't know and trust.
- Mentoring & empowerment programs for young women.

Homelessness

One roundtable group discussed concerns about homelessness. The issues they explored included:

Issues and Concerns

- Homelessness often arises as a result of domestic violence.
- It impacts people on a number of levels – including hygiene, access to food etc.
- There is a lack of options available to people experiencing homelessness.
- There are no safe places to go.

Solutions and Recommendations

- Build shelters and homes for homeless people.
- Educate homeless people and those at risk of homelessness on the services and supports that are available to them.
- Improve access to hygiene products, public showers etc.
- Provide a food hub for homeless people.





The “Pitch” Session

The last session of the day involved young people working together in small groups, with each person choosing the issue that they would most like to see addressed in order to make Hilltops an even better place to live for young people.

Each small group prepared a one to two-minute presentation, which they “pitched” to a panel of VIPs who were chosen for their ability to help bring about the changes the young people are advocating for. The groups used a variety of approaches to get their messages across including speeches, drama and comedy. The VIP panellists were:

Alison Foreman	Hilltops Deputy Mayor
Patrick FitzGerald	Hilltops Councillor
Kate Munro	CEO, Youth Action
Michelle Williams	Office for Regional Youth
Karen Clarke	Youth Engagement Officer, NSW Police

The topics the young people chose to focus on and the key issues they highlighted are outlined below.

Vaping

- Highlighted the dangers and health issues related to vaping
- Called for more education about the impact of vaping in schools
- Challenged the idea of vaping as a “cool thing to do”
- Called for more positive, fun activities to provide a healthy alternative to vaping.

Mental Health

- Highlighted the need for more support services for young people to tackle mental health
- Proposed the idea of youth mentors to support young people with their mental health
- Proposed a ‘Scream Room’ for young people to vent frustrations, as a creative way of improving mental health and wellbeing
- Proposed a Zen Garden to encourage positive mental health, and provide a space for reflection and relaxation.

Access to Health Services

- Called for more local services, and an increase in health professionals
- Highlighted the dangers and challenges for young people and others that arise from poor access and delays to health services.

Bullying

- Spoke of the prevalence of bullying, and highlighted the need to challenge bullying behaviours, both face to face and online.

Discrimination and Harassment

- Highlighted issues for LGBTIQ+ young people growing up in Hilltops
- Called for more support for young people when they are coming out
- Challenged discrimination and harassment in the community.

Addressing Boredom - Fun Things to Do

- Called for more fun things to do including gaming, arcades etc
- Proposed the development of a Mountain Bike trail in Hilltops
- Proposed a trampolining / bounce facility in Young.

Panel Members' Responses

Panel members responded to the issues raised by young people's in their pitches by committing to the following:

- Provide a submission to the NSW inquiry into vaping to highlight young people's concerns. Youth Action will invite input from young people in Hilltops to include in the submission – Kate Munro, Youth Action.
- Link young people in Hilltops with a young person in Wagga who recently started a LGBTIQ+ friendly space in a local cafe – Kate Munro, Youth Action.
- Raise young people's concerns about health and mental health issues at the Hilltops Health and Wellbeing Action Group – Alison Foreman, Deputy Mayor.
- Look for opportunities to support and promote young people's ideas with Council – Alison Foreman, Deputy Mayor and Patrick FitzGerald, Hilltops Councillor.
- Office for Regional Youth committed to going back to Hilltops to meet with young people and assist with planning activities that can address some of their ideas for 'fun things to do' – Michelle Williams, ORY.
- Share previous work on the development of bike tracks and skate facilities, and the processes that led to success for young people in other areas – Michelle Williams, ORY.
- Contact the national association responsible for mountain biking to look into establishing a mountain bike course in Hilltops - Patrick FitzGerald, Hilltops Councillor.
- Look into bringing back the *Bullying No Way* program in Hilltops schools - Karen Clarke, NSW Police.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to Hilltops Council and other key stakeholders, arising from the issues and ideas discussed during the Hilltops Youth Forum:

1. That Hilltops Council investigates the development of one or more youth centres to provide a range of youth services, programs and activities; and provide young people with fun and affordable activities. This should include considering the expansion of existing spaces, such as Young PCYC, investigating successful models in other rural / regional locations, and considering investing in multiple youth centres across Hilltops.
2. That Council works with Hilltops Youth Action Group to assess outdoor spaces within Hilltops' towns and villages, with the view to revitalising them in order to appeal to teenagers. For example, offering more youth-focused recreational activities such as mountain biking, outdoor gym equipment etc.
3. That Council explores the issues raised by young people about transport and accessibility within and between Hilltops towns and villages, including improved footpaths and bike tracks; and providing a shuttle bus service to enable young people from towns and villages throughout Hilltops to access programs, services and events.
4. That Council works with key stakeholders including Hilltops Health and Wellbeing Action Group, NSW Health, Office for Regional Youth, local schools, and youth health service providers to explore more effective ways to support young people's mental health needs. This should include exploring ways to equip young people and community members with the skills and knowledge to support other young people.
5. That Council continues to offer regular forums and consultations similar to this one, in order to promote and encourage consultation, information sharing, collaboration, and the sharing of ideas and resources within and between Council, schools, youth services providers and young people.
6. That Council explores avenues for providing a range of youth-focused events and activities suggested by young people at this forum, ensuring that these are well planned, promoted, affordable and accessible.
7. That Council works with schools, youth service providers and local businesses to explore ways to reduce the prevalence of smoking and vaping amongst young people, and to educate young people about the negative impacts of smoking and vaping.
8. That schools in Hilltops review their policies and programs to ensure that young people receive the best possible education, information and resources concerning bullying, discrimination and harassment.