

2021

# Regional Youth Taskforce Yearbook







# Minister's foreword

I am so pleased to be able to congratulate the 2021 Regional Youth Taskforce on such a successful year. Alongside the wonderful Bronnie Taylor, the previous Minister for Regional Youth, they persevered through one of the most challenging years we have faced, presented innovative policy ideas, provided insightful feedback and advice, and remained focused on ensuring there is a better future for thousands of young people across regional NSW.

Members of the 2021 Taskforce reflected the tremendous diversity of young people in regional NSW, with representatives from the bush, regional centres, and beachside communities. A range of cultural backgrounds were also represented, including Aboriginal young people and our refugee community, as well as myriad other interests and values. While all members were different, they were united by the vision to improve opportunities and experiences for young people across regional NSW and I thank them for putting themselves forward to represent their communities.

The Taskforce met officially four times over 2021, with lots of additional online catch-ups and training sessions. They discussed the pillars of the Regional Youth Framework in detail, with members sharing their ideas, experiences and advice with Ministers and special guests.

#### Here are just some of the 2021 Taskforce's achievements:

- advised on the importance of role models and the success of past alumni events in schools. As a result, the NSW Government has created the "Office for Regional Youth Alumni School Events Program" to be run in 2022
- provided advice to the Hon. Victor Dominello MP, and the Department of Education on the Student Learner Profile, ensuring that this work reflects the unique needs of regional young people
- participated in the Push-Up Challenge to raise money for Lifeline
- advised on how important it was for young people to have opportunities to participate in youth-friendly events and activities in their local community, resulting in a commitment from the NSW Government for an additional \$10 million over the next four years to deliver free activities for young people in regional NSW

- delivered an amazing online event with the Office for Local Government, with more than 45 young people from across the whole of NSW gaining information and inspiration about running for council
- filmed videos in support of their peers through the COVID-19 pandemic
- advocated for the creation of a youth-endorsed mental health providers list—which the Office for Regional Youth and the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) have begun working on in partnership with the Department of Education and NSW Health.

The achievements do not end here, with the advice and feedback provided by the 2021 Regional Youth Taskforce continuing to assist decision makers across government. I look forward to seeing more of their visions come to life.

*Signed,*

**The Hon. Ben Franklin (MLC)**

Minister for the Arts and Minister for Regional Youth,  
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

The role of the Regional Youth Taskforce is to provide policy and operational advice to the Minister for Regional Youth on regional youth issues.





# Key functions of the Taskforce:

## Identifying & advising

on regional youth matters and providing expertise and knowledge of the environment and context.



## Providing input

to and comment on the development of the Action Plan.



## Providing advice

on areas for state-wide reform.



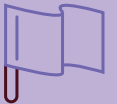
## Providing comment

on policy initiatives proposed by the Minister and sharing information and contacts to inform development and implementation.



## Advocating

for regional youth issues and championing the Regional Youth Framework and the resulting initiatives.



## Keeping informed

of the implementation of key local initiatives and their success stories.



## Consideration

of any other matter as nominated by the Minister.



# Taskforce Members



**Adrian Le**  
Illawara Shoalhaven  
15 years old



**Ben Caughey**  
Riverina Murray  
17 years old



**Bihozagara Ndabagaza**  
Riverina Murray  
22 years old



**Clodagh Falvey**  
Hunter  
16 years old



**Elka Devney**  
New England and North West  
18 years old



**Francois van Kempen**  
North Coast  
17 years old



**Imogen McDonald**  
New England and North West  
18 years old



**Isaac Ford**  
Far West  
13 years old



**Isabella Metcalfe**  
Hunter  
16 years old



**Jayden Redfern**  
Central Coast  
15 years old



**Katelyn Whyman**  
Far West  
16 years old



**Lachlan Hicks**  
Central West and Orana  
23 years old

2021



**Lola Stravoskoufis**  
South East and Tablelands  
13 years old



**Paris Brailsford**  
North Coast  
17 years old



**Phoebe Sheridan**  
Central Coast  
16 years old



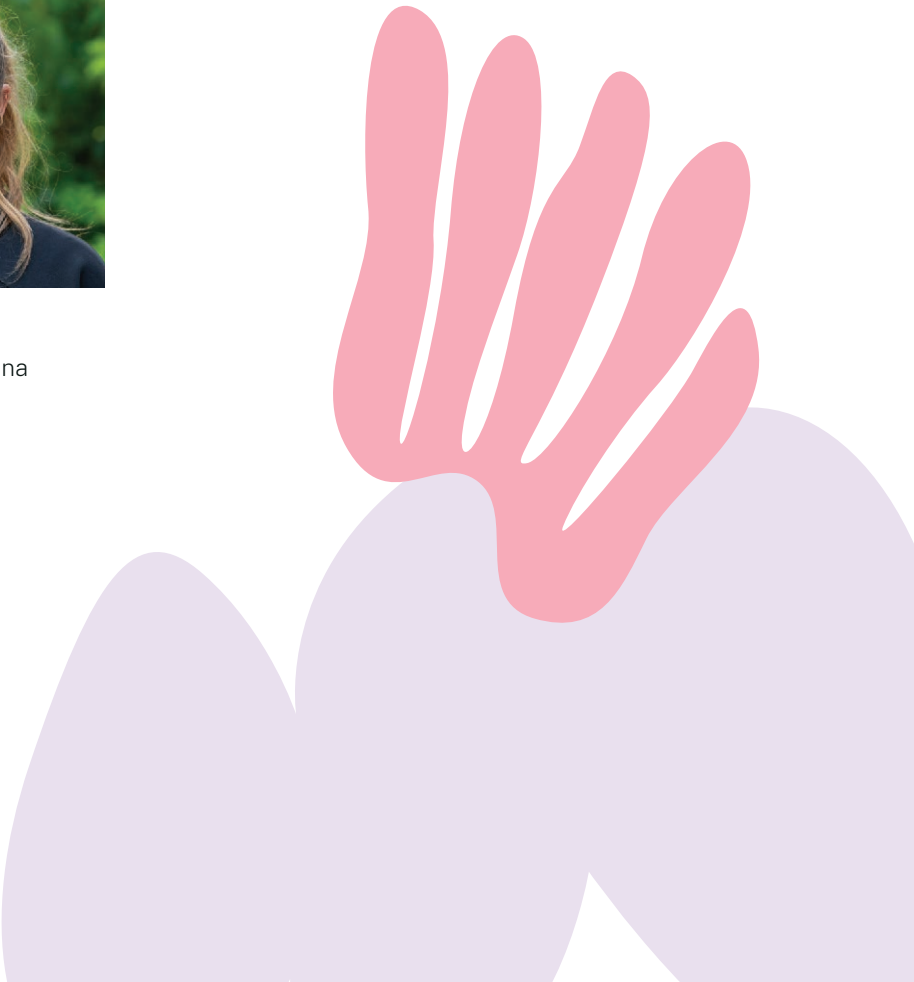
**Samantha Dunn**  
Illawara Shoalhaven  
20 years old



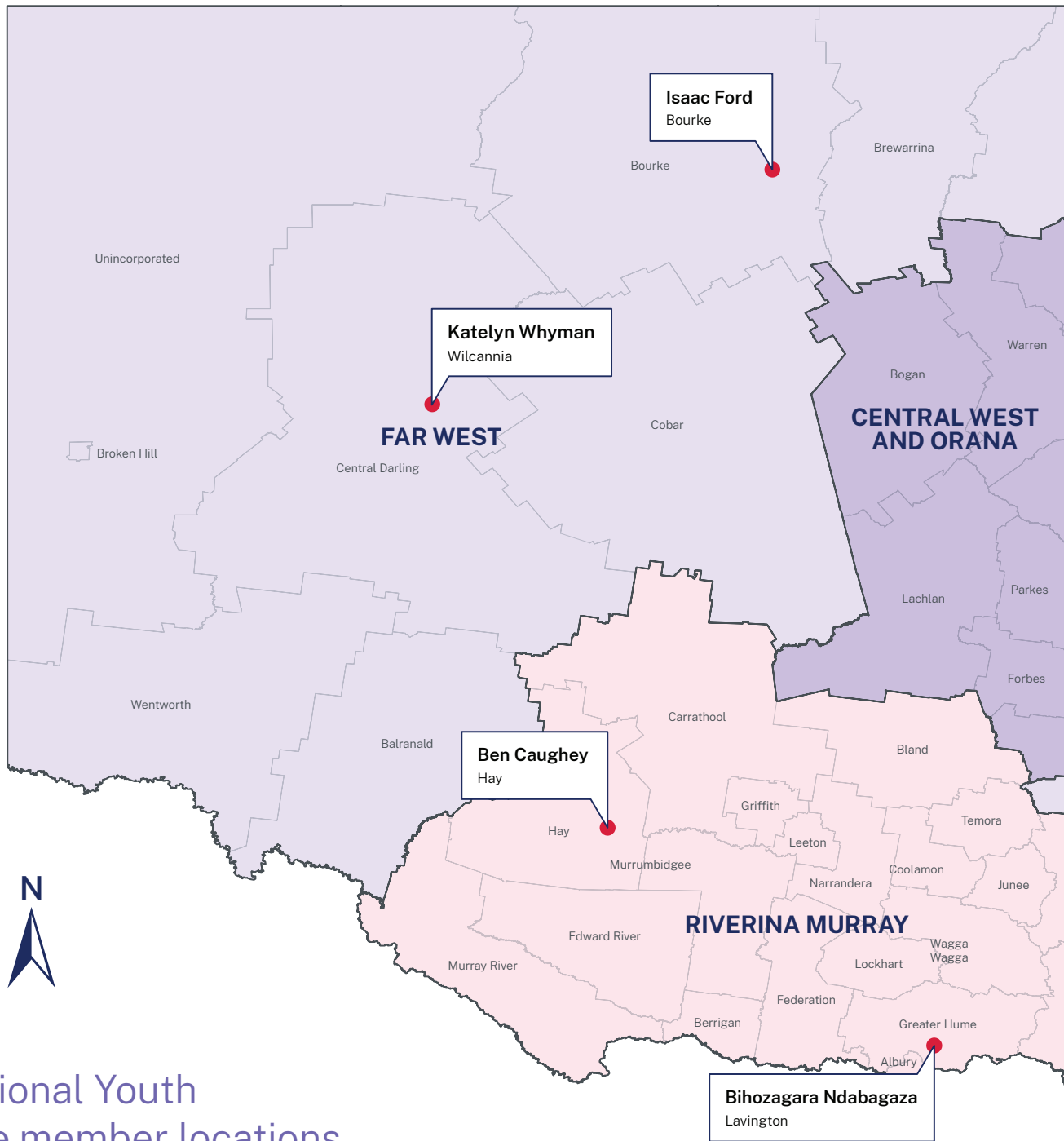
**Samuel Pevere**  
South East and Tablelands  
14 years old



**Taje Fowler**  
Central West and Orana  
23 years old

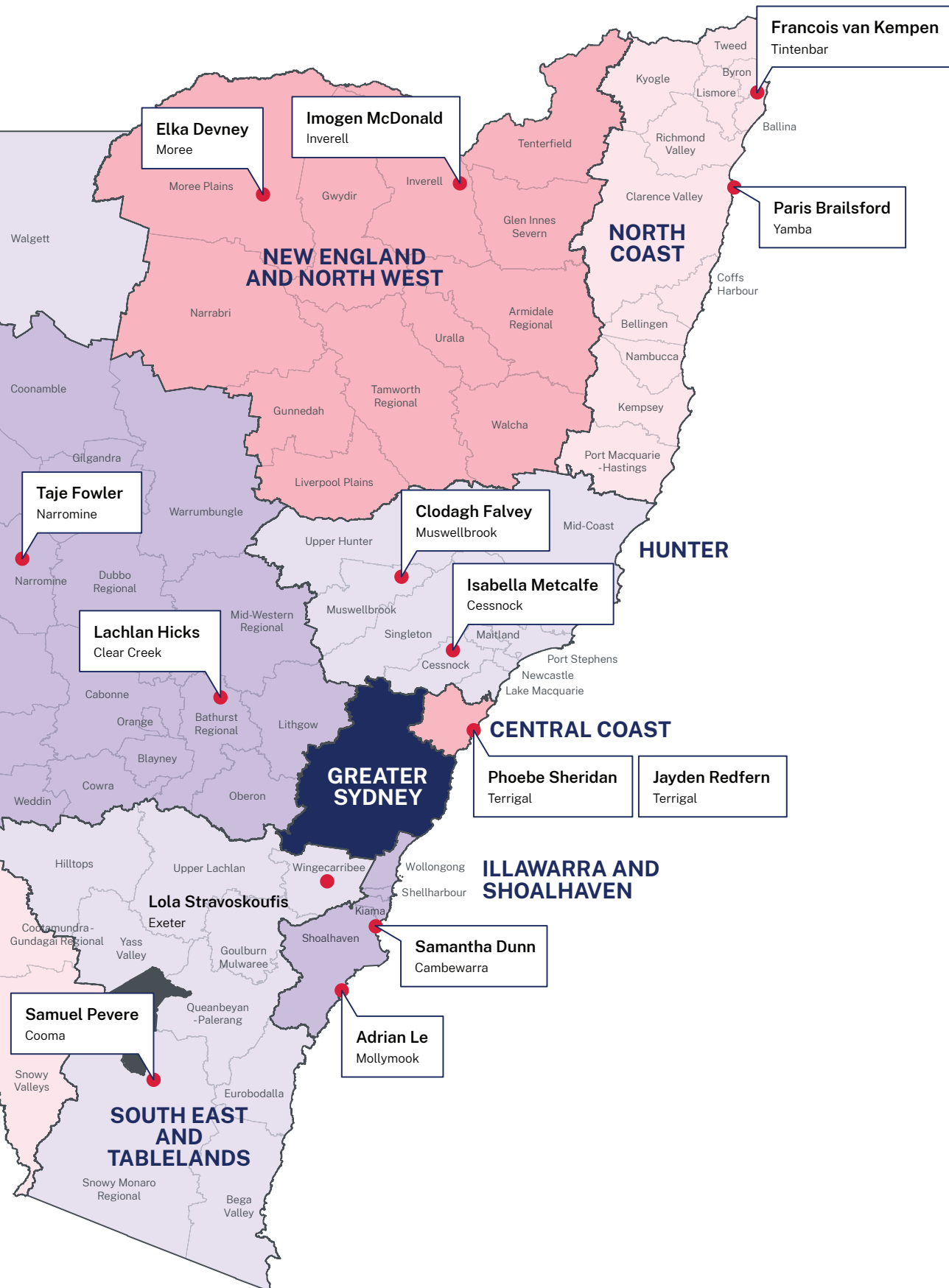


# Member Locations



2021 Regional Youth Taskforce member locations









# Taskforce Meetings

Four Taskforce meetings were held in 2021 to discuss the four pillars of the Regional Youth Framework: 'Work Ready', 'Wellbeing', 'Connectivity' and 'Community'. Taskforce members were also consulted several times outside of meetings. The meetings were facilitated by the Advocate for Children and Young People with a range of invited presenters and speakers.



# Framework on a page

## Vision

All regional young people have opportunities for meaningful work, accessible health care and education; and feel part of vibrant and inclusive communities.

## Guiding Principles

Support <> Resilience <> Fairness <> Get ready <> Youth voice <> Culture, identity and inclusiveness

## Key Pillars

### 1. Work ready

Prepared for regional jobs of the future

#### Priorities

- 1.1 Young people have better access to great education and training opportunities
- 1.2 Young people have improved skills and knowledge to navigate the pathways into careers
- 1.3 Young people have clearer options to take them from school to training, work and further education opportunities
- 1.4 Disadvantaged or at-risk young people are better supported to learn and achieve
- 1.5 Young people have increased understanding of the workforce

### 2. Wellbeing

Mentally and physically healthy

#### Priorities

- 2.1 Young people and their families are supported to improve wellbeing
- 2.2 Increasing young people's understanding of their health needs and navigate the health system
- 2.3 Young people have access to culturally and youth-appropriate services
- 2.4 Increasing the number of young people who can get help, wherever and however they choose to seek it

### 3. Connectivity

Able to access services and opportunities easily

#### Priorities

- 3.1 Young people have increased access to safe private transport
- 3.2 Young people have increased access to safe public transport to the places they need to go
- 3.3 Young people are able to access services without traveling long distances
- 3.4 Young people have the skills to navigate and use information and systems

### 4. Community

Connected and valued by their community

#### Priorities

- 4.1 Young people are provided the opportunity to shape their communities
- 4.2 Young people have increased access to a variety of youth-appropriate activities
- 4.3 Young people feel safe in, connected to, and valued by their communities and connected to their culture

## Strategic Alignment

20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW <> Regional Development Framework  
 Department-specific youth strategies <> Local youth strategies

## Diversity in Regional NSW

Aboriginal young people <> Vulnerable and disadvantaged <> Young people with disability <> LGBTIQ+  
 Young people from a refugee background <> Culturally and linguistically diverse <> Young carers

## Taskforce Meeting One

27 and 28 March 2021 in Coffs Harbour

# Work Ready Pillar

The inaugural meeting of the 2021 Taskforce focused on the 'Work Ready' pillar of the Regional Youth Framework. Taskforce members participated in a Gumbaynggirr cultural workshop and North Coast members met with the Nambucca Youth Force.

### Key themes discussed and passed onto relevant agencies were:

- alumni events at schools are a good way of introducing students to a diverse range of career paths as opportunities in regional NSW can often appear limited. These events can bring back former students to talk about their career paths. The Office for Regional Youth has established funding for schools to host these events via the "Regional School Alumni Events Program"
- the limited availability and accessibility of part time and casual work opportunities
- support needs for apprentices, trainees, and young employees who have limited knowledge of their rights and often face challenging work environments
- concerns around work experience programs not being available at all schools and that young people are often left to find their own opportunities without connections and guidance
- work readiness subject areas, including soft skills such as communication, teamwork, resume writing and interview skills should be incorporated into the school curriculum and commence as early as Year 7.



## Taskforce Meeting Two

4 July 2021 held online

# Wellbeing Pillar

The second meeting of the 2021 Taskforce focused on the 'Wellbeing' pillar of the Regional Youth Framework and was held online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The Taskforce engaged with several organisations and guests, including Headspace Armidale, Bernie Shakeshaft, founder of Backtrack Youthworks and Dominic Teakle, CEO of PCYC NSW.

**Key themes discussed and passed onto relevant agencies were:**

### MENTAL HEALTH:

- the Taskforce suggested the creation of a list of youth endorsed mental health training providers for schools to access and pass on to students where needed. This idea has been included in the Advocate for Children and Young People's Strategic Plan and is supported by the Department of Education and NSW Health
- limited access or awareness of mental health services
- limited amount of mental health support for specific groups including LGBTIQ+ youth and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- a need for more focus in schools on educating people about mental health and how to access services. Key suggestions included guest speakers in schools to discuss mental health and resilience, training of students and teachers in mental health first aid, mental health education programs for younger students (from age 12) and peer support programs to enable conversations and support around mental wellbeing.

### VAPING:

- vaping is becoming more prevalent among young people, leading the Taskforce to suggest vaping should be part of drug education, with more resources for students about its effects
- concern regarding other kinds of drug and alcohol use among their peers
- different approaches to drug education are required, including involving those with lived experiences.

### COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE, PLACES AND PHYSICAL HEALTH:

- the Taskforce suggested that more community infrastructure should be made accessible for community events and for young people to use
- more programs focused on physical activity as well as sporting opportunities in regional areas would be beneficial.



## Taskforce Meeting Three

11 September 2021 held online

# Connectivity Pillar

The third meeting of the 2021 Taskforce focused on the 'Connectivity' pillar of the Regional Youth Framework and was held online due to COVID-19 restrictions. Guests included the NSW Chief Data Scientist, Australian Government eSafety Commissioner, Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, the CEO of Reach Out and the Founder of The Daily Aus.

### Key themes discussed and passed onto relevant agencies were:

- a youth Dine and Discover voucher style initiative could be implemented, as well as increased government investment in youth festivals and events that travel to regional NSW as a potential way to enhance young people's participation in their communities
- administering vaccinations at schools would make them more accessible for youth in regional and remote areas and easier for parents and carers. This has been taken up by the Department of Education
- the risks young people face in online interactions including cyber bullying and other forms of online harassment were discussed. The Taskforce suggested providing youth led eSafety programs in schools to complement the existing work of the eSafety Commissioner. The eSafety Commissioner announced in December 2021 the formation of the 'Online Safety Youth Advisory Council' who will report to the Prime Minister on ways to make the internet safer
- the Department of Customer Service consulted the Taskforce on what young people would like to see on the NSW Government Youth Portal. In the consultation, the Taskforce also provided suggestions for updating the Regional Youth Taskforce website
- tertiary students in regional NSW should be able to access local schools to study. This will address both the issue of poor internet connection in their homes and travelling long distances to TAFE and University
- young people in regional and remote areas have limited access to public transport, limiting their options for social and recreational interactions. To give youth more transport options, the Taskforce suggested incentivising the purchase of bicycles (including e-bikes) and introducing innovative youth community transport initiatives, such as the YAXI program in Northern NSW
- advice was provided to the Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government on a proposed Digital Education Passport.





## Taskforce Meeting Four

26 and 27 November 2021 held in Sydney

# Community Pillar

The final meeting of the 2021 Regional Youth Taskforce focused on the 'Community' pillar. Over two days, Taskforce members had the opportunity to visit NSW Parliament House, meet with the Deputy Premier and other members of parliament, and participate in training run by Reach on mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

### Key themes discussed during the meeting and passed onto relevant agencies were:

- the limited number of avenues for young people to find local and reliable news. Regional young people rely mainly on metropolitan news outlets or social media, but lack the skills to critically analyse media, particularly social media and information sources. Proposals included increasing funding for regional journalism, providing incentives for journalists to go regional and providing support for young independent journalists and youth led media outlets
- to increase reliability of media and the skills of youth, the Taskforce suggested members of parliament provide regular public updates and provide opportunity for a Q & A with the public. They also suggested media literacy training for young people
- youth representation needs to increase at a local level. The Taskforce encouraged local councils to establish youth councils and taskforces across a number of local government areas that could link into the Regional Youth Taskforce
- suggestions on how to simplify grant processes, particularly for Non-Government Organisations. This will assist small grass roots programs for young people to improve and expand their work
- life skill classes should be made available during and outside school hours with locally tailored content delivered by external facilitators
- regional youth often must move to another city or travel long distances to access tertiary education. To combat this, new regional scholarships and expansion of the Country Universities Centre model were discussed as potential solutions
- more support is needed for young people affected by drugs and alcohol. The Taskforce proposed increasing the length of time a young person could stay in homeless shelters, and creating more community based youth facilities where young people can detox. Pharmacies were also suggested as a first point of contact for mental health support
- the Taskforce suggested the NSW Government invest in LGBTIQ+ education programs targeting late primary and early high school to address the safety and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ young people
- there is a need for more volunteer driving mentors in communities to enable young people to reach the 120 hours of supervision needed for a licence. Using support from students on work placement in regional areas, as well as additional funding to cover volunteer costs were suggested as solutions.



## Taskforce Members' reflections on their year

### What has been your highlight of the Regional Youth Taskforce?

**Isabella Metcalfe:** I have loved the leadership and development opportunities that we have had as part of the Taskforce, and now we are able to take that back to our communities.

**Clodagh Falvey:** I love how connected I have felt with the Taskforce. I came into this hoping to make some friends, but I never realised how close we would all become and how much we feel like a family.

**Jayden Redfern:** I have loved being able to share opinions and issues in my community, and have people provide feedback on solutions I can take to people who can instigate change.

### Why is it important for young people to have a voice in NSW government?

**Samantha Dunn:** Young people have bright and bold ideas and we are the ones going into adulthood who will be implementing changes for the future.

**Jayden Redfern:** It is important that young people have a voice on issues affecting them, because they are the ones experiencing it and they are the ones who know how to tackle the issues.

**Ben Caughey:** We are the future. It's left up to us. Our input is the most important.

## What did you get out of this experience?

**Phoebe Sheridan:** My experience has been life changing, a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet young people from regional areas who have so many ideas that can either be so similar to mine, and we're advocating for the same issues, or that challenge me and make me want to go back and make more change in my community. Honestly, I owe so much to this opportunity.

## What have you learnt?

**Ben Caughey:** No idea is too big. No idea that I've had is too crazy to actually be able to see change, and to try and see something come out of it. I've grown a lot of confidence in my ideas and my ability to present them as something we could potentially change.

**Taje Fowler:** Our youth really do hold the answers to their problems.

**Adrian Le:** Be resilient, never give up and always give it a go.

**Lachlan Hicks:** I've met people all over the state with diverse opinions, that have really grown me in what I do, and has made me so much more aware of the issues going on in NSW.

## What would you say to young people who are considering taking part in the Regional Youth Taskforce?

**Lachlan Hicks:** If you get the opportunity to be part of something like the Regional Youth Taskforce, you need to take it.

**Elka Devney:** Jump in the deep end-don't hold back. Things that are happening in our communities that need to be changed won't change unless someone like you stands up, fights for what you believe in, and shares your passion with the world.

**Ben Caughey:** This is an opportunity you might not ever get again in your lifetime. Even if you don't see a future for yourself in politics, you'll see a lot of personal growth and increased confidence.

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