The Lake Macquarie Youth Development Survey was delivered in High Schools across Lake Macquarie in November 2015, incorporating students from Year's 7, 9 and 11. The survey was conducted in schools managed by the NSW Department of education, the Catholic Schools Office and other independent schools. In total 1435 students took part in the survey including 140 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people 148 young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities. 30 students declined to answer any questions within the survey. This represents an 11.8% response rate from the regions 12,150 enrolled students for 2015. The survey covered a total of 23.9% of students in Years 7, 9 and 11 across Lake Macquarie.

This report analyses Student Concerns, Health, Wellbeing & Happiness, Bullying & Crisis Events, Community Engagement & Further Education, Sexual Health and Accessing Support. The report highlights the changing nature of youth concerns across genders and education stages and identifies trends that are occurring schools and across the region.

For young people across Lake Macquarie there are a number of areas of interest that warrant further exploration. Of primary interest is the high level of mental health concerns, in particular stress and school/study problems in Year 11 students. Concerns relating to suicide are also highly elevated in young people of all ages.

For Year 7 Students a larger than normal rate of concern in regard to Suicide has been highlighted by more than 40% of students. Year 7 students are also experiencing bullying at much higher levels. In Year 9 higher rates of concern are indicated for bullying and concerns relating to school and study problems increase. This is coupled with heightened relationship concerns and increased concern surrounding depression. Year 11 students are reporting increasing school stresses, with more than 65% concerned with study and workload. This along with a significant increase in overall stress levels to encompass 69% of students is placing these young people in a vulnerable condition. Concerns around body image are at their peak in this year.

Male students have reported that their highest concerning issues are with their mental health. Male students are also at greater risk of experiencing physical bullying and are more likely to contract an STD/STI and engage in unprotected sex than female students.

The rate of Body Image concerns is significantly higher with female students and they are more inclined to skip breakfast than male students. Female students are experiencing much higher rates of bullying than males, in particular through forms of covert bullying such as cyber bullying and text bullying. Both of these rates are well above the region average and are most prominent in Year 7.

Young people are experiencing the world in a much different way than that experienced just 15-20 years ago. The increase in social media forms and the need to be constantly connected with the news of the world has opened up the accessibility young people have to view issues such as war, poverty, politics, crime and terrorism. The rates of concern reported by young people have increased dramatically over the five years that the youth development surveys have been conducted. We seem more open to allowing young people to experience these issues, but have failed to provide support and guidance on how to cope with these new images. As a result, the ability for young people have to filter these images has decreased. Young people have become far less resilient to grief, stress and loss.

There are several ways of addressing these issues at a school level. Primarily, increasing the amount of information available to students is beneficial, however the method in undertaking this is of vital importance. Getting the right messages to student’s means embracing the modernised tools of communication in the form of social media. In particular student’s prominent use of YouTube provides a means to connect with young people in their environment. The Internet continues to be the tool for seeking information, with over 67% of students logging on for more than one hour each day. Parents, Relatives and Friends also play a vital role in providing information, advice and support for students across the region. Improving the information and resources available to these groups will aid in enhancing the flow of information to students. Young people are telling us that School Counselors are performing this role far more often than before, however classroom teachers are being underutilised as a source of information, advice and support by students.

As the Youth Development Officer for Lake Macquarie, it is a part of my role to support schools and services through the identification of new and existing resources, programs and services that can address the needs and concerns of young people. When undertaking any future planning for the welfare of young people the services of the Youth Development Officer and the information contained in this document can be utilised and is encouraged.
Students were asked to rate how concerned they were about a range of issues. Their responses were rated on a 5 point scale, with a sum of their responses adding to provide the level of concern as indicated in these graphs and tables. The top five concerns for young people in Lake Macquarie were stress, school and study problems, body image, depression and bullying. These results are similar to the 2015 Mission Australia Survey of Youth, however bullying was ranked at number six in the Mission Australia survey and was replaced by Family Conflict, which is number six in Lake Macquarie.

When viewed by Year Level, there are some well identified trends in the rates of concern of students. This is shown in the table below. Bullying is a concern more apparent in Year 7, with declining representation as students progress through to Year 11. The concern around alcohol and drug use is stable across Years 7 to 9 and drops dramatically by the time students reach senior schooling. Whilst financial stress is of minor concern to those in Years 7 and 9, the rate for Year 11 students more than doubles from when they first entered high school. Concerns relating to relationships and sex increase dramatically in Year 9 whilst the concerns around school and study problems increase dramatically in Year 11, along with Stress, with more than 65% of students raising these two issues as a concern in senior schooling. In Lake Macquarie, the concern around suicide is much higher than the national rate of concern for this issue (28.8%). This is more apparent in Year 7 students with 40.6% of students highlighting this as a concern in Lake Macquarie.

Stress and school or study problems were the top two concerns for young males in Lake Macquarie, followed by bullying, depression and body image. For females, body image was indicated prominently as the number one concern, with stress the second highest issues of concern followed by school or study problems, depression and bullying. The rates of concern between genders is similar for most issues however there are some notable differences. Body image in females is rated as a 24% higher concern as well as a 10% higher concern relating to depression. The proportion of males concerned about drug use is 13% higher along with alcohol use which is a 9% higher concern than for females. Financial stress and gambling concerns are also much higher in males, with 9% and 10% higher rates than females respectively.

The trend between 2011 and 2015 has shown an increase in the concerns of young people across every field with the exception of gambling which has seen a 2.7% drop. Whilst the top five issues of concern have remained the same, the order of these has changed, with bullying dropping from the top concern in 2011 to the fifth highest concern in 2015.

Of particular note is the rate of increase across every measured field (with the exception of gambling). Students have reported an 8% to 27% increase in their concerns, which indicates that young people are experiencing a wider range of concerns simultaneously, compared to 2011. This may also indicate a lower level of resilience and coping mechanisms.

Whilst bullying has dropped from the 2011 rate of 60.6% to the 2015 rate of 49.7%, this is a significant increase from the 2013 rate of 35.4%. Each other field has shown an increase from year to year.

Young people are also showing much higher rates of concern in the mental health fields in 2015 compared to those of 2011. Stress has increased by 22.5% to the current rate of 60.47%, Depression by 27.4% to 48.4% and suicide by 20.5% to 35.2%.

There has also been significant increases in associated mental health concerns across Lake Macquarie.
Students from across Lake Macquarie were asked to identify what activities they have been involved with in their community over the past twelve months.

The top three activities for young people to engage with are sport, art/culture/music and leadership based activities. These rates differ greatly from the Mission Australia Survey of Youth's national result, which indicate that Volunteer work is the second highest activity for young people, with 52% of respondents engaged. In comparison, the Lake Macquarie volunteer rate is 31.8%.

Community participation levels in Lake Macquarie are lower across all categories with the exception of sport. Environmental activities are 5.5% lower, religious group engagement is 9% lower, political group engagement is 2.5% lower, leadership activities are 4% lower, volunteering is 20% lower and engagement with youth groups is 8% lower.

As shown in the graphs, the participation rate between genders is very similar in the fields of sport, religion, politics, leadership activities and youth group participation. A larger proportion of Males are engaged in environmental activities (3.2% higher) whilst female participation is higher in Arts/culture/music (17.5% higher) and volunteering (7.7% higher).

When asked if they would like to participate in any of these activities but are not currently doing so, 12% of respondents indicated a desire to undertake volunteering. 10.4% indicated the environment as an interest whilst 9.5 and 8.5% of young people in Lake Macquarie respectively are interested in engaging with environmental activities and youth services that aren't currently doing so.

Young peoples use of social media is more prominent via YouTube than any other social media type. 61.26% of young people utilise YouTube to access information and social content for more than 1 hour per day, compared with 38.88% through Instagram and only 7.53% via Twitter. The use of Facebook is declining, with only 52.26% of young people using this form of social media for more than 1 hour per day in 2015 compared to 60.51% in 2013. The Internet in general is being accessed by 77.44% of young people for more than 1 hour per day across Lake Macquarie.
Students were asked to indicate what they were planning on doing after completing school. Given the respondents' capacity to answer across more than one field, a standardised ratio has been used to accurately represent the rate of interest in further education and employment pathways.

Young people from Lake Macquarie have indicated a higher level of interest in further education and training options than their peers across the nation. When comparing these results with those of the 2015 Mission Australia Survey of Youth, 43.13% of local young people plan on University entrance compared to 40.97% across the nation. This is similar with TAFE (10.4% local vs 8.16% national) and apprenticeships (10.4% vs 6.09%). There is significantly less interest in plans to get a job, with only 11.09% of local young people planning this pathway compared to 21.64% nation wide. The interest in travel is also lower in Lake Macquarie with only 9.23% planning on taking a break before further education or employment compared to 18.57% nationally.

As with the Mission Australia Survey of Youth, the most frequently chosen option for both male and female respondents was university. A higher proportion of females stated that they planned on University entrance (50.16% compared to 36.62%) as well as TAFE (13.06% compared to 7.92%). A much larger proportion of male respondents plan on undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship (15.9% compared to 4.35%) and paid work (13.15% vs 8.87%) compared to female respondents. A significant number of local young people are yet to identify any post school options. Across the region 15.75% of young people are yet to choose their pathway, with 17.79% of these being male and 13.56% being female.

When looking at the trend between 2013 and 2015 the options chosen by all young people in Lake Macquarie have remained reasonably steady. The significant change over time is shown in the options chosen by female young people. Females are now setting their post school plans earlier and are more focused on choosing a pathway. Only 13.55% of female respondents in 2015 do not have set plans compared to 22.05% in 2013. The rate of females choosing travel, apprenticeships or a job have remained steady, whilst a significant increase is seen in tertiary study (up from 57.46% in 2013 to 63.22% in 2015).
Students were asked to indicate if they have skipped eating breakfast for at least one day of the week. Responses were tallied for both Males and Females and are represented in the graphs above. Across Lake Macquarie 46% of young people have indicated that they skip breakfast at least once per week. This is an increase of 8% from the 2013 response rate. There is also a higher proportion of females (53.43%) to males (38.17%) that skip at least one breakfast meal per week. Both male and female rates have increased from 2013, with males rising by 6.8% and females by 10.5%.
Health, Wellbeing & Happiness...

Cigarettes & Tobacco

Young people were asked to indicate their level of tobacco usage in an average week. Across Lake Macquarie the rate of young people who smoke cigarettes is minimal, with only 5% indicating usage. 2% of respondents have recorded high usage (10+ per week).

These rates are a decrease on the 2013 response, which indicated usage by 11% of young people. In 2013 7% of respondents recorded high usage.

Energy Drink Consumption

Young people were asked to indicate their level of energy drink consumption in an average week. Across Lake Macquarie the rate of young people who consume energy drinks is 30%, with 3% of young people consuming at least one energy drink every day.

These rates are a decrease on the 2013 response, which indicated energy drink consumption by 38% of young people. In 2013 8% of respondents were consuming at least 1 energy drink every day.

Consumption of Alcohol

Young people were asked to indicate their level of alcohol consumption in an average week. This was recorded as a standard sized can or bottle of alcohol or a standard sized glass of spirits.

In Lake Macquarie 16% of young people have consumed more than 1 drink per week, with 5% of young people consuming 6 or more drinks on average per week.

These rates are a slight decrease on the 2013 response, which indicated consumption of alcohol by 18% of young people. In 2013 9% of respondents were consuming 6 or more drinks on average per week.
Young people were asked to indicate if they had
experienced any form of bullying over the past twelve
months. The responses allowed included physical
bullying, verbal bullying, cyber bullying, text bullying or
racism. An average rate was ascertained and is
recorded in the following graphs.

Whilst bullying is still a major concern of young people in
Lake Macquarie, the rate of bullying across each field
has reduced dramatically from 2011 to 2015. Verbal
bullying remains the most prominent form of bullying,
with 29.59% of students indicating experiencing this
form. Cyber bullying and text bullying have overtaken
physical forms of bullying as the second and third most
common experiences for young people.

Male respondents have indicated that verbal (25.8%)
and physical (11.13%) bullying are most prominent. A
much greater proportion of female students have
experienced verbal (33.69%), cyber (21.27% vs 8.7%)
and text (17.08% vs 7.13%) bullying compared to males.

Bullying is also experienced differently by each gender
depending on school year. For males the rate of bullying
in Year 7 is higher for physical and verbal abuse. In
Year 9 a greater proportion of young males experience
physical and verbal bullying whilst in Year 11 this
becomes more covert, with a rise in cyber and text
bullying. Levels of racism also increase as young males
get older.

For females verbal bullying is experienced in much
greater proportions than any other form of bullying.
Cyber and text bullying rates are significantly higher
than that of males, peaking in Year 9 at 23.8% and
20.0% respectively. Physical bullying is experienced at
lower levels for females than males (9.94% vs 11.13%).
Students were asked to indicate if they have experienced domestic violence in their own home.

The rate of young peoples experiences with domestic violence in Lake Macquarie has decreased over the past five years. In 2011 12.5% of young people had indicated experience, however this has dropped to 7.55% in 2015.

Young people were asked to identify any personal experiences with homelessness and/or couch surfing.

Youth Homelessness in Lake Macquarie is a rare occurrence. In 2011 4.7% of surveyed young people indicated experiences with homelessness or couch surfing. This rose to 5.5% in 2013 but has fallen to 2.1% in 2015.

According to Homelessness Australia 10% of all homeless people are high school aged and 42% are aged under 25.

Given this survey captures young people in a school setting, these results may miss those homeless young people who do not attend school.
Young people were asked to indicate across a range of eleven different fields where they would go to access information. The graph above shows the rate of respondents who would access each of the identified sources of information. The top three sources of information for young people in Lake Macquarie are the internet, parents and friends.

- The Internet was utilised most prominently (78.48%) by young people as a source of information.
- The family unit is well represented as a source of information with parents accessed by 67.12% of young people and Relatives by 56.65%.
- Teachers (56.99%) feature prominently as a source of information.
- Over 50% of young people access a GP or medical clinic for information
- Community agencies and youth centres are sought out by 33.71% of young people for information
- 27.14% of young people have stated that they are interested in gaining information via a school welfare or expo day.
Young people were asked to indicate across a range of eleven different fields where they would go to access advice. The graph above shows the rate of respondents who would access each of the identified sources of advice. The top three sources of advice for young people in Lake Macquarie are friends, parents and relatives.

- Friends took over from the internet as the most prominently (76.16%) used source of advice, compared to accessing information.
- The family unit is again well represented as a source of advice with parents accessed by 70.79% of young people and Relatives by 65.06%.
- Teachers (47.97%) are the fourth highest source of advice for young people.
- Dr's and Medical Clinics remain highly accessed by young people, with 46.18% of young people accessing for advice.
- 36.39% of young people access a school counselor for advice.
- The Internet drops to 30.63% as a source of advice for young people compared to the 78.48% of young people who utilise the internet for information.
- Community agencies and youth centres are sought out by 20.14% of young people for advice.
- Telephone Hotlines are used by 16.96% of young people for advice.
- Only 11.51% of young people have stated that they are interested in gaining advice via a school welfare or expo day.
WHERE DO YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS SUPPORT

Young people were asked to indicate across a range of eleven different fields where they would go to access support. The graph above shows the rate of respondents who would access each of the identified sources of support. The top three sources of support for young people in Lake Macquarie are friends, parents and relatives.

- The top three sources of support were accessed by more than 59% of young people which was significantly higher than the fourth ranked response.
- The family unit is again well represented as a source of support with parents accessed by 71.99% of young people and Relatives by 59.43%.
- School counselors were prominently accessed by young people (30.6%), rising to the fourth highest source of support.
- Teachers (30.3%) are the fifth highest source of support for young people.
- Dr's and Medical Clinics are less accessed as a source of support, dropping to 23.77% of young people.
- The Internet drops significantly to 14.73% as a source of support for young people.
- Community agencies and youth centres are sought out by 15.52% of young people for support.
- Telephone Hotlines are used by 13.28% of young people for support.
- Only 7.18% of young people have stated that they are interested in gaining support via a school welfare or expo day.

Overall, these figures indicate that the family unit is a primary source of information advice and support for young people. Friends are also accessed predominantly by young people. Our distribution of new information and resources should be made available to these groups so that they are armed with the tools they require to meet the needs of young people who choose to access them.

Increasing the level of information and resources to school counselors, teachers and GP's will also assist in the ability for these individuals to meet the needs of young people. Finding new ways to improve the sense of familiarity between young people and this group of individuals will also assist in increasing a young persons comfort in accessing support here. Community agencies and youth centres need to continually strive to create an environment that caters for the needs of all young people, in diverse and engaging ways that opens up accessibility. This is similar for welfare expos and information days. These days need to be created using unique and entertaining methods that engage young people and involve them in the learning experience. Young people are primarily hands on learners who embrace technology as well as open spaces. Telephone hotline numbers need to become more prominent so that those who are reluctant to seek face to face support can do so in comfort and without feeling threatened.
MENTALHEALTH...

HOW HAPPY ARE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?

How Happy Are You With Life As A Whole?

In total, young people rated themselves at 6.88 on the happiness scale. This is slightly up on the 6.83 rating from 2013. There are however some differences between males and females and across year levels. The male average is 0.6 higher than the female average, which is consistent with the 2013 result. The ATSI rate has improved from 5.51 in 2013 to 6.53 in 2015.

Year 7 male and female students both rated their happiness approximately 0.4 points higher than the rate in Year 11, however the female rate dropped 0.6 points for females in Year 9 compared to a 0.2 point drop by males.

Female students in Lake Macquarie have identified significantly higher concerns in the mental health related fields than male students. Body image concerns were 23% higher than males, with 66% of females concerned about body image. Stress in females is also a significant issue, with 63% of young females reporting this as a major concern. More than 50% of young female students report concerns in for of the five mental health related fields. A 36% concern relating to suicide is also significant given this is the leading cause of death in young people across the country.

For male students, stress and school and study problems are the highest mental health associated concerns with both being identified by over 50% of students as a significant issue. At 34%, the concern relating to suicide is comparable to that of females, indicating that one in three high school students have a concern relating to suicide.
Across Lake Macquarie 20.24% of males and 17.67% of females have indicated that they are sexually active. This is slightly down on the response rate from 2013, which indicated a 22.26% rate of sexually activity amongst both males and females.

For students across the Lake Macquarie Region the average age of first sexual engagement is 14 years and 8 months. For males this is 14 years and 7 months and for Females the average age is 14 years and 8 months.

In 2013 the average age of first sexual engagement was 13 years and 1 month, however there were also 33% of respondents who indicated their first sexual encounter was below the age of 12. This has improved to 7.8% in 2015.
STD'S & STI'S

6.61% of sexually active students across Lake Macquarie have reported contracting an STD or STI. This rate is higher among males (7.2%) than females (5.88%). This rate is comparable to the recorded rate in 2013 of 6.52%.

SAFE SEX PRACTICES

The rate of unsafe sexual practices by young people across Lake Macquarie is reported to be 17.47%. This is significantly higher than the 13% of young people who do not employ safe sex practices across the country, according to the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society survey (2013). The rate of unsafe sexual practices for Lake Macquarie young people is increasing, with 10.02% reporting not employing safe sex in 2013. Young males are less likely than young females to practice safe sex, with 20.47% of males vs 13.73% of females reporting the use of safe sex practices. This is against the national trend, which indicates that females are less likely than males to employ safe sex practices.
The Lake Macquarie Youth Development Survey is undertaken by the Youth Development Officer for Lake Macquarie.

The Lake Macquarie Youth Development Officer promotes and addresses the rights and needs of young people in the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area by supporting and resourcing the Lake Macquarie youth sector, community organisations and community members.

This is achieved through researching and identifying the needs of young people, agencies supporting young people and the Lake Macquarie community. The Youth Development Officer assists in the development of programs and services designed to address the needs of young people and as required, assists agencies with the submission of funding proposals to enable the provision of identified services. The Youth Development Officer also advocates for young people, supporting young people and the community of Lake Macquarie.

The purpose for compiling this report is to explore the issues faced by young people in Lake Macquarie and to identify the main issues and needs that are represented by this section of our community. We can then look to creating programs, services and intervention strategies which will address the views represented in this report.

The Lake Macquarie Youth Development Survey provides the region with a range of information pertaining to the issues and concerns faced by Young People. The local data is measured against national statistics from the 2015 Mission Australia Survey of Youth to provide an insight into the challenges faced by Young People and the services that work to support them. It is hoped that this data can be utilised to create new and exciting programs to support Young People of Lake Macquarie and provide services with accurate information about the Young People who access their services.

The issues and concerns of Young People in Lake Macquarie in 2015 are indicative of the growing pressures placed on Young People on a global scale. Young people are more frequently facing major issues such as terrorism, the economy and climate change. There is an expectation that these young people will become our future leaders, providing the answers to world crisis, all whilst navigating their way through adolescence and its own set of challenges. We can see through data collected directly from young people where support is required and where questions need to be answered. This data is a tool to be used by all services to provide that support.

Community Activities Lake Macquarie Inc (CALM) is funded to provide the Lake Macquarie Community & Youth Development Project by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. Through this funding CALM employs a Youth Development Officer to provide support to youth services and young people across the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area.