Mental Health Edition

A newspaper created for young people by the young people of the Wodonga community, sharing their stories of mental health.
A message from Corey Taylor, Deep Dive Artistic Director:

I am so proud to be a part of such an amazing project. I have a passion for youth representation in the bigger world. We are the future and I believe our voices aren’t heard enough. I chose an underwater theme for this project for many reasons. I suffer from mental health issues and I have always found water calming. The sounds of the ocean and the river. Feeling the cold movement of the water over your feet can be one of the most grounding things. I also chose water because I’ve found that many people compare the feelings and issues of mental health to drowning. I want this to represent the positives we can find in the negatives and the ups and downs that come with mental health. There is beauty in everything, we must just look hard enough.

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What is Deep Dive?

The aim of this project is to hear the voices of young people in the Wodonga community and their experiences of mental health. The resilience and determination of the many young people who contributed to this newspaper and the obstacles they have faced and continue to overcome in has touched everyone associated with this project.

Thank you to:

-Ovens Murray Regional Partnership for funding this engagement project
-Junction Support Services and staff for their time and effort, especially from the Continued Care team’s Residential Carers, to support young people to be involved and contribute their stories and art
-City of Wodonga for advocating for and supporting the project
-Department of Health and Human Services for supporting the project
-headspace and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for their input

Special thanks to:
-This newspaper’s young Artistic Director Corey Taylor for her creativity, hard work and enthusiasm
-All the young people who contributed their stories, thoughts, feelings and artwork
-Young people, past and present, in Out of Home Care with Junction Support Services who took part
The power of a diagnosis

“I was told it was behavioural but it wasn’t... it was mental health”

Mental health has been a huge thing for me, but it wasn’t talked about widely then like it is now. About four years ago, when I was living in residential care, I was diagnosed with bipolar and borderline personality disorder. I don’t remember why or how I was placed in care.

I was bullied at school and got involved with the wrong people. I suffered from severe depression. I had a very low weight because I didn’t eat and I just wanted to sleep all the time. Then I would be manic and I’d go out doing drugs. I’d smoke weed, nothing else, and get involved in the wrong things and hanging around with the wrong people.

Mum took me to hospital a lot of times and they’d take bloods but couldn’t find anything wrong. So I’d be sent home. It was really hard.

Then I was sent to live in resi in Shepparton. I was a very scared girl who didn’t know where I was going. It was horrible. It wasn’t welcoming. It was like ‘I am going to put you here in this room... Here’s a towel and a toothbrush’. I didn’t have clothes so I went and stole my own. I was angry, so I trashed the house and left.

I spent a couple of weeks in juvie (juvenile detention). I went to secure a lot too. (Secure is a safe place for young people who are at risk.) It was like being treated like an animal.

Then I ended up in one of the other houses run by Junction. At first it was really hard, but being in that house changed my life. I was an unwell girl and scared of going somewhere new. There was a smell in the bedroom from the kid who was in there before me and had just left. But the resi carers there changed my life. These two (Janine and Craig) were there for me through everything.

I kept being told it was behavioural but it wasn’t - it was mental health. I was manic when I was in that house. I cooked so much that I used up everything in the pantry. That was a turning point. The patient transport arrived at the house to take me to hospital.

Nearly 1 in 3 (32%) young Australians (12 to 25 year olds) report high levels of psychological distress.
- headspace

I sat on the front door step and I was all packed. They refused to take me. And I refused to not go. I was so determined to get well and get healthy. You have to want to help yourself. I thought about what type of person I wanted to be. Not who I was but who I wanted to be.

A diagnosis, the correct medication, therapy and a fantastic counsellor helped. I learnt how to see the signs and how to deal with stuff and I see a psychologist now.

I’m working. It’s part time but that’s all the doctors will let me do. I’ll still have ups and downs and I have to realise that. Living in this world with mental health is hard.

I had my 21st birthday a little while ago and five of the carers came to celebrate with me. It was great having us all together again. We haven’t been together like that since I was 17. I have kept in touch with them because I love them.

Message for young people in care...

Just allow yourself to trust a little bit. You don’t have to take a huge leap, choose someone, like a resi carer, that you have a connection with and talk to them. And if you don’t have anyone like that then try to find someone that you can connect with.

Message to the people who make the decisions...

When someone asks for help you have to give it to them. Don’t make them wait so long because it just gets worse.
Finding your own path through mental health

“There are things we can do to help ourselves when things aren’t going great”

"Rebecca" was in her early teens and living in Out of Home Care in regional Victoria when it was identified that she needed support with mental health. She had experienced significant childhood trauma, including family violence and relatives with mental health issues and drug use. At a young age, Rebecca lost her mother to suicide.

She knows these are all contributing factors to her own mental health. Now 19 and having left a residential house for young people and transitioned to independent living, she has begun to address her mental health.

She is supported by headspace Albury-Wodonga. Junction Support Services staff take her to and from appointments at headspace. Health professionals are exploring possible diagnoses of bi-polar.

“I do things to help myself, like yoga, playing with my pets and walking my dog at the park,” she says. Sometimes, she also self-medicates by smoking marijuana.

“I feel that as a ‘kid in care’, I didn’t get the same treatment and mental health support as a young person who was not in care,” she says.

“I would like to see this changed and for all young people treated equally. The main thing I would like to see changed in mental health space would be for support to be more affordable to young people who are over 18 and need mental health assistance.”

* "Rebecca" is not her real name but this is a real young person’s story

Worst things about being in residential care:
- Young people not getting treated fairly in the home and society
- Resi houses are not “homely”
- Staff don’t show emotion

Best things about being in residential care:
- Activities outside such as movies, drives and laser tag
- The positive role models you find and the connections you make with a small number of staff
- Friendships made within the houses and other units connecting with other young people who have been in similar situations

One in 10 young people aged 12 to 17 years have engaged in self-harm
-Beyond Blue

Choose your path wisely
I am more than my emotions

I was born in Melbourne. My parents frequently fought after my Dad picked up a drinking habit. We had police visits frequently.

I remember hiding in my room with my 2-year-old sister trying to keep her calm while the smell of pepper spray filled the house. Dad was in and out of my life after that.

We moved a lot. Dad would promise he was sober. He would come over with presents and be absolutely awesome. Then he would drink. We had to move to escape. This happened a few times. We moved more and more rural until we settled in Bright.

Sadly, Dad wasn’t my only problem. From Year 3 I dealt with bullying. I was called things like fat, emo and freak. This progressed into Year 7. I moved schools at the end of Year 7 to try and escape it.

My Year 8 was spent yelling and crying over other kids making comments. I started skipping school because I couldn’t deal with the other kids. I actually loved school and really wish I had the strength to return but my emotions got the best of me. I became angry and impulsive. I started becoming so overwhelmed with every little thing, I would hit myself and scream just to make my chest stop from feeling like it was going to explode. I left school.

I made some wrong decisions, got involved with some bad people and DHHS ended up involved in my, and my family’s life. The stress made me and my Mum crumble.

I’ve always had an amazing relationship with my Mum. She’s more of a best friend than my Mum. We started fighting. Even though I started seeing a youth psychiatrist, it didn’t help. I didn’t enjoy meeting with the psychiatrist but there was no other professionals locally. We tried NEAMHS and headspace but couldn’t financially support getting to Wangaratta or Wodonga every week.

My mental health plummeted. My 3-year-old sister copied things I did during my “breakdowns”. This caused me and Mum to come to the agreement I couldn’t stay at home because I couldn’t receive the help I needed for my mental health there.

After couch surfing, I moved into the Junction Youth Refuge in Wodonga. I was there for 8 weeks. I’m now in a share house and I’ve reconnected with headspace. It helps to have headspace, but it’s hard to build anything on a cracked foundation. I’m still struggling to find stable housing. I’ve tried my best to stay connected to support services like Junction but trying to stay connected has proven more stress than it’s worth.

Since I moved into the Refuge, I have had 3 different case workers. My first case worker would disappear for a week at a time. I hadn’t heard from a case worker in 2 weeks. And then I found out I was getting a new caseworker but not for a week. At this time, I was trying to re-enrol myself in education. It was all too stressful.

My Dad is now sober and we have reconnected. He’s homeless and, since multiple operations, he has really been struggling. My Dad and I have applied for houses but with no rental history, getting a private rental seems impossible. Beyond Housing can’t do much as their housing is so limited. The fact I still don’t have a place to call home looms over me darker than any bullying ever did. Every day you don’t know where you could end up. I want a place I’m comfortable and can focus on maintaining my emotions. I still struggle with mental health.

I’m very grateful for the support I do receive but I do believe it could be better. Support networks need to connect to more rural areas as kids there are being left behind. I would do anything to move back home with my Mum, but I can’t work on my mental health or study there. I am determined to show myself I am more than my emotions and they do not control me.

Dear Diary,

I need help. I feel so stuck. Almost as if I’m glued to my bed. I feel my sense of time drifting further from me. I forget even exist sometimes. Just drifting along...

This room feels foreign, as if I’m not meant to be here. Looking through the cupboards makes me feel like I’m going through someone else’s stuff...

It feels as if every day in here I’m confronted with different faces and rules. Forced to meet the burdens of different rules the workers. The more out of visiting my family makes me feel wrong and constantly anxious for my placement. This is all I have to survive but my friends are all I had to feel loved. I shouldn’t feel like I have to choose...

Just realising I’ve awaken still myojself with tears. What will today be like? Who’s working? Will that other kid finally leave me alone? Will I be able to sleep tonight, or will there be more yelling?

We’re never told anything until last minute. I wasn’t even told I could be sharing a room with another girl until half an hour before I left the house. To leave my 2 approved nights out.

I thought I was going to come home to a stranger in my room. Those 2 nights were filled with too much anxiety. Will I get along with her? Will she be the type of person I want in my life? Will I be able to sleep again?

I couldn’t even imagine telling my siblings and friends.

I came back to no roommates... I’m suffocating in my own emotions. My bucket is full and with the slightest ripple, I feel as if it’ll spill.

I guess that’s okay, I get here.

Stuck. It’s safer than spilling...
Vox pops

We asked workers who support young people in Wodonga:

What do you want to see in the future for young people and their mental health and wellbeing?

“J hope for enough resources across the community to ensure that no young person falls through the cracks.”
- Katy McCarron
- Team Leader, CAMHS, Albury Wodonga Health

“Every young person deserves the chance to receive holistic mental health support so they can achieve their full potential.
Young people in Wodonga need the government to invest further in an early intervention services and a local mental health inpatient service to provide intensive ongoing support because, at the moment, the nearest is in Melbourne.”
- Megan Hanley, Junction Support Services CEO

“Streamlined, holistic care from an adequately funded and resourced system.”
- Jade, Case Manager

“More culturally specific services for Aboriginal young people including after school programs.”
- Taylor, Residential Care Worker

“A genuine sense of belonging in their community!”
- Dom, Team Leader

“Colleen receive timely, holistic support - services often close too quickly.”
- Colleen, Program Manager

“To have more clinicians on the ground to support young people’s mental health needs.”
- Shari Webb
- Senior Clinician/Social Worker, CAMHS, Albury Wodonga Health

“To be able to gain access to services that will assist them to develop skills to positively manage their mental health as they make the journey into adulthood.”
- Ally, Case Manager
"Both mental health services across our community continue to work together so that no matter which service the young person makes contact with, they are supported to gain access from the service they most need, at the time they most need it."
   - Lucie Shanahan, Executive Director Mental Health, Albury Wodonga Health

"Empathy, not labelling. Judgemental eyes do not help anyone."
   - Chris, Case Manager

"That they genuinely feel they have a right to be treated with respect & safety and experience no further harm in respect to their mental health."
   - Gayle Webber, Clinician/Social Worker, CAMHS, Albury Wodonga Health

"For clinical and community services to have the resources to provide a more intensive and person directed approach for young people. I would also love to see more young people involved in sports and other community groups and for the local communities to have support in making these groups as inclusive and accessible as possible."
   - Jen, Program Manager

"I wish...
I wish...

"For young people to be able to seek and gain assistance whenever required, safely, within an inclusive, understanding and accepting community."
   - Jacque, Community Worker

"I wish young people were more confident to reach out to each other if they suspect a peer is not travelling well."
   - Zach, Case Manager

"My wish for young people is to get outside, breathe some fresh air and use your body."
   - Tim, Outdoor Education Specialist
Young people are getting arty in houses run by Junction Support Services across north-east Victoria. Young people and carers created a positive mural wall at one house for young people in Wodonga and their creativity has inspired the rest of the team at Junction Support Services.

Encouraged and supported by carer Leonie, young people have driven the mural and all young people and carers at the house have contributed.

One young person who took part says: “It was good fun. My favourite part was using water-pistols, which were filled with paint, to colour in the background.”
There is an increasing amount of evidence that shows art enhances brain function. Research has shown arts develop neural systems that produce many positive results including development of fine motor skill, creativity, improved emotional balance and feelings of belonging.

The project has been so popular that it is being copied in Wodonga Youth Refuge.

For the past 20 years, “The Ref” has provided emergency accommodation for young people 16-17 to get back on track and either move home or learn the skills they need to live on their own and secure permanent accommodation.

“The mural is about young people leaving their mark,” Wodonga Youth Refuge house supervisor Heather says. “We’re also turning a wall in the games room into an art gallery. Everyone who comes through the Ref will have a chance to create an artwork on a canvas and have it go up on the wall.”
Life is full of challenges for young people experiencing mental health issues. Facing and overcoming those challenges requires extraordinary determination and resilience when you are a young person who has experienced trauma and lived in Out of Home Care.

Two steps forward is often followed by one step back. And so it was for one young woman who was studying and working in the beauty industry – her dream career. She was doing a great job and everyone around her was so proud of her hard work and professionalism.

Then all beauty salons were closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Manager of Continued Care at Junction Support Services, Annie Shirley, became a client and had eyelash extensions applied.

"I was overwhelmed with her professionalism, respect and care for me as a client," Annie says.

"She was kind and genuine in her approach as a beautician and outstanding in her application and attention to detail. I am proud of her resilience and motivation to obtain a career." Our message to her, and all young people, is we believe in you. Just keep going.

One by one... Each eyelash extension is applied individually.

A beautician's equipment waits ready for the next client.
As long as we look hard enough

Delicate work... The young beautician shows great care and concentration.

Inside the salon and Annie Shirley, from Junction Support Services, after eyelash extensions.
Mindful Horoscopes

**Mar 21 - Apr 19**

ARIES

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

- Oprah Winfrey

**Apr 20 - May 20**

TAUROS

Don’t be afraid to start over. You’re not starting from scratch, you are starting with experience.

**May 21 - June 20**

GEMINI

Everything comes to you at the right time. Be patient.

**Jun 21 - Jul 22**

CANCER

Feel what you need to feel and then let it go. Do not let it consume you.

- Dhiman

**Jul 23 - Aug 22**

LEO

Your life isn’t yours if you care what someone else thinks

- Jade Marie

**Aug 23 - Sep 22**

VIRGO

Set peace of mind as your highest goal, and organise your life around it.

- Brian Tracy

**Sep 23 - Oct 22**

LIBRA

You do not wake up and become the butterfly.

Growth is a process.

**Oct 23 - Nov 21**

SCORPIO

Always remember, this is just a chapter, not the whole story.

**Nov 22 - Dec 21**

SAGITTARIUS

Be where you are; otherwise you will miss your life.

- Buddha

**Dec 22 - Jan 19**

CAPRICORN

Be proud of how hard you’re trying.

**Jan 20 - Feb 18**

AQUARIUS

Sometimes the bravest and most important thing you can do is show up.

- Brene Brown

**Feb 19 - Mar 20**

PISCES

Stay close to those who feel like sunshine.

Images: freepik.com
A refuge from family violence and homelessness

A 17-year-old boy shares his experience of life at Wodonga Youth Refuge and why he gave up drugs.

I came to the Ref after being homeless for seven months because of family violence. When I was homeless I became heavily dependent on drugs, such as LSD, weed, MDMA etc.

I heard about the Wodonga Youth Refuge while couch surfing from a mate. I went to Junction Support Services and they accepted me straight away.

When I first went to the Ref I was on edge and didn’t trust anyone, clients or carers, because of my past.

The first couple of weeks I found quite rough and found it hard to accept the behaviours of the some of the young people.

After the first month I became more comfortable and started trusting the carers and able to relate to my problems and fears to them. I also found it easier to relate with some of the clients. After a change of clients the dynamics in the house changed and I felt more comfortable.

Then I felt like I was able to get my shit together. By this time I felt I had a close bond with most of the carers. I found it easier and more beneficial to talk to the carers than at headspace as I knew and trusted the carers.

I feel that I’ve matured and that, with the help of my carers, I’ve mostly overcome the trauma I’ve experienced in the past.

Moving out of the Ref was hard. I felt really sad to go because I felt a closeness to carers and some clients. I still love to visit the Ref.

When I was at the Ref, I really enjoyed going to the movies and for drives. I’d like to see more funding for activities for young people at the Ref.

I liked that there was an endless supply of food and never had to worry about where my next meal was coming from.

I feel lucky to have been at this Ref and I think it is better than others I have heard about.

It was nice to hang out with staff who understand and don’t judge. The staff here respect the young people’s choices and treat us as humans.

My message to other young people in need is, no matter what, don’t give up. Understand that the drugs aren’t worth it.

Drugs stop you living the life you want.

Talk to people about your dramas, talk to your carers, they won’t judge you. Understand your workers care.

Life might be shit right now but it will get better. Never give up.

IT’S YOU WHO MAKES YOU YOU!!!

STAT and VOL

Background:

“Statutory” clients are young people who have been removed from their families and placed in care.

“Voluntary” clients are young people who have sought out or who have been referred to the Wodonga Youth Refuge.

Young people who are statutory, or “stat” clients, and voluntary, or “vollie” clients, reside together at the Wodonga Youth Refuge.

Our young person says:

“The first couple of weeks I found quite rough and found it hard to accept the behaviours of the Stat clients’ escalations.”

“The difference between Stat clients and Vol clients upset me as the Stats showed little respect to the workers and didn’t care about wrecking the house.

“Each time they played up or yelled reminded me of my past.

“I didn’t like them being disrespectful.”

“I found the mix of clients was hard to deal with.”
Alone
Rap lyrics by Jastar

I'm starting to regret the things I've done,
it's like I'm trapped in the darkness and can't see the sun,
Everything and everyone is locked out, All the people close to me I've blocked out,
Cause I'm used to everyone hurting me, I starting to feel as if everyone's out for me
Everyone's got some doubt in me, I'm sick of people doubting me,
it's put me in a bad mind state, I feel as if no matter where I go I continuously find hate,
I don't wanna fit no more, people have taken everything from me, I don't wanna give no more,
I feel like I'm facing a whole army on my own, feeling so alone, All I seem to do is make mistakes,
That's why I'm full of craze, that's why I don't trust,
Honestly I tried to, but in the end all I got was lied to,
That's why I turned myself on people around around me,
They say confidence is a virtue, but when you expect everyone to hurt you,
it's hard to attain, life's a big ball of pain, trying to maintain in this life....

Chorus
Hello hello anybody out there cause I don't hear a sound.
Ello Ello I don't really know where the love is, I miss you now.

Everyday I feel empty and lonely and I hate it, but this is the way I made it,
I turned my back on the world and it turned its back on me,
I thought everyone was gonna turn around and gonna pack on me,
Because Mum left me behind, Mum left me as a kid,
Told me she was coming back, but she never did,
Made me feel like all people want to do is hurt you, getting used to people dessert you,
It makes you wanna give up on life,
It feels like people have failed on you, when so many have bailed on you,
You don't know who to trust so you stick to yourself,
But the loneliness is hard to deal with,
If this is how life is meant to be? Because if it is I don't think life was meant for me.
So I keep up with it, try to do all the day to day shit.
I feel like a ghost, where is everybody when you need them the most?
Huh? Where the fuck are you?

Chorus
Hello hello is there anybody out there cause I don't hear a sound.
Ello Ello I don't really know where the love is, I miss you now.
The Deep Dive Paper, the Mental Health Issue, was created for young people by young people of the Wodonga community.

Proudly supported by:

- Junction Support Services
- City of Wodonga
- Ovens Murray Regional Partnership
- Regional Development Victoria
- Department of Health and Human Services

Handy contacts for young people:

Lifeline
lifeline.org.au
131114

Kids Helpline
kidshelpline.com.au
1800 55 1800

headspace
Albury-Wodonga
headspace.org.au
02 6055 9555

Junction Support Services
junction.org.au
02 6043 7400

Beyond Blue
beyondblue.org.au
1300 22 4636

Create Foundation
Creating a better life for children and young people in care
create.org.au
1800 655 105

To find out more about the Deep Dive newspaper and wider project, please contact Junction Support Services on 02 6043 7400.