

Youth Summit 2025

Your Voice, Your Future

A Council Led School Engagement Forum Targeting Year 9 and 10 Secondary Students

Summary Report of Findings

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Introduction

The City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services supports young people aged 12–25 and their families who live, work, study, or have a meaningful connection to the municipality. As Australia's most multicultural community, Greater Dandenong is home to approximately 158,000 residents, including 30,000 young people aged 12–25.

Our service is committed to promoting the healthy physical, social, and emotional development of all young people in our community. We do this by strengthening protective factors and supporting young people to build on their strengths, skills, and aspirations.

Youth and Family Services is dedicated to empowering young people to actively participate in their community and contribute to local decision-making. A key focus of our work is youth participation and amplifying youth voice, achieved through proactive engagement and co-designed initiatives. One such initiative is the Youth Summit, which Council's Youth and Family Services team deliver every few years to ensure we are meaningfully engaging with local secondary school students.

In 2025, Youth and Family Services hosted the Youth Summit: Your Voice, Your Future, welcoming 115 students from eight local secondary schools and 25 youth leaders. The summit was co-designed and delivered in partnership with participants from Council's 2025 Young Leaders program, embedding youth participation throughout the planning, preparation, and delivery of the event.

The Greater Dandenong City Council's Young Leaders program is designed for young people aged 16–25 and provides opportunities to develop leadership skills and contribute to community impact through designing two major projects. The Youth Summit was the first project for the 2025 cohort, who played a leading role in event planning, emceeing, workshop delivery, and co-facilitating consultation activities.

The summit opened with a speech from the Deputy Mayor, a performance by Indigenous Outreach Projects, and a keynote address by Tim Wamala from The Push, a youth music organisation and charity. These elements set the tone for the day's theme: **finding and using your voice**, which was woven throughout the consultations and interactive workshops. The event was well received, with 90% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had a positive experience.

Group discussions explored the challenges faced by young people in Greater Dandenong, providing space for students to share insights and propose solutions. The feedback gathered from this summit, will amongst other youth consultation engagement activities, inform the development of the next Children, Youth and Family Integrated Strategy - guiding future service responses and priority areas. This report presents a summary of key findings and highlights priority issues identified by young people, including mental health, stress, and education support.

What students told us?

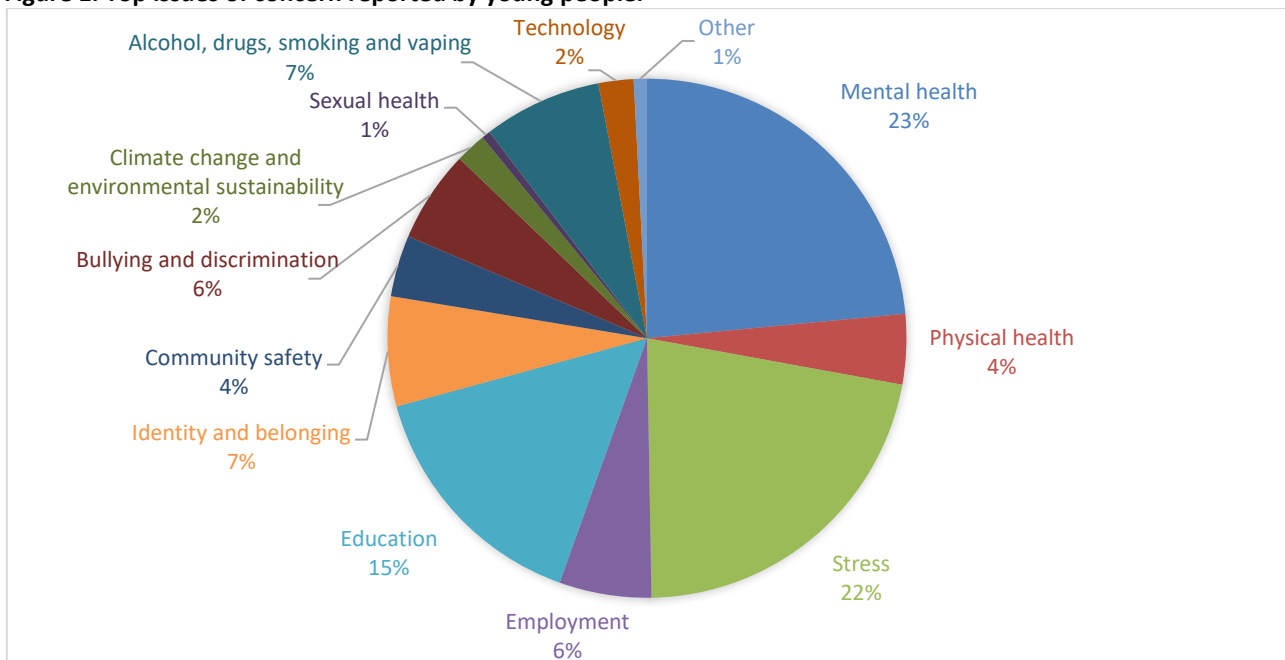
Overview | Top Three Issues

Students at the summit were invited to share their responses to the following question:

What is the number one challenge you face as a young person in the community?

Of the 140 young people (comprising both students and youth leaders) in attendance, 122 provided a response to this question. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of participants' responses.

Figure 1. Top issues of concern reported by young people.



The top three challenges identified by participating students were **mental health** (23%), **stress** (22%), and **education** (15%). A key insight from the data is the congruence between mental health and stress, which together account for 45% of all responses. This highlights a significant and interconnected issue affecting students in Greater Dandenong. These findings align with national data. Mental health was identified as one of the top four issues facing Australia by young people aged 15–19, alongside cost of living, climate change, and safety. With 23% of young people listing mental health as one of the top issues young people face in the 2024 Mission Australia report. The survey included 17,400+ young people across Australia.

To gain deeper insight, students were further prompted to identify specific sub-issues within the broader categories of mental health, stress, and education. This allowed them to refine

their responses and delve deeper into the aspects most relevant to their individual experiences.

Among those who selected mental health as a priority concern, the most identified sub-issues were:

1. Anxiety (47%)
2. Body image (21%)
3. Resilience and coping skills (20%)

Within the issue of stress, the key challenges were:

1. School/study stress (31%)
2. Managing expectations (23%)
3. Worrying about the future (20%)

Lastly, the priority issue of education identified the challenges of:

1. Motivation (70%)
2. Disrupted learning (13%)
3. Pressure to leave education and provide for the family financially (11%)

School/study stress and education motivation were the highest recurring sub-issues under the overarching categories of stress and education, respectively. This highlights the need for collaboration between Council, services, and schools to support young people throughout their education journey.

Mental health, stress, and education consistently emerged as the key themes throughout the 2025 Youth Summit, and in previous years. This recurring pattern highlights the continued need for investment and supports to young people in these areas. While mental health constitutes a broad spectrum, young people frequently cited anxiety as their top priority under the mental health category.



Top Three Issues: Notable data trends over time | 2018-2025

Comparison can be drawn from the top three issues that emerged at Youth and Family Services' 2022 Youth Summit: *Conquering 2022 and Beyond* and the 2018 Youth Summit: *Better Together*.

Percentage of participants that voted for each top issue of concern.		
2025	2022	2018
1. Mental health (23%)	1. Mental health (23%)	1. Mental health (18%)
2. Stress (22%)	2. Stress (18%)	2. Bullying & discrimination (12%)
3. Education (15%)	3. Physical health (12%)	3. Crime and safety (12%)

A snapshot review over time shows a consistent pattern in the issues young people have identified as most pressing at consecutive Youth Summits in Greater Dandenong. Comparing the top three concerns from the 2025 Youth Summit: *Your Voice, Your Future*, the 2022 Youth Summit: *Conquering 2022 and Beyond*, and the 2018 Youth Summit: *Better Together* reveals recurring themes and evolving priorities.

The 2022 results closely align with those of 2025, reinforcing a clear trend: mental health and stress have consistently been the top two concerns for young people over the past three years. Looking further back to 2018, it becomes evident that mental health has remained the leading issue for seven consecutive years. While the third most cited concern has varied, these themes continue to surface across Youth Summit activities and consultations, underscoring their ongoing relevance in the lives of young people.

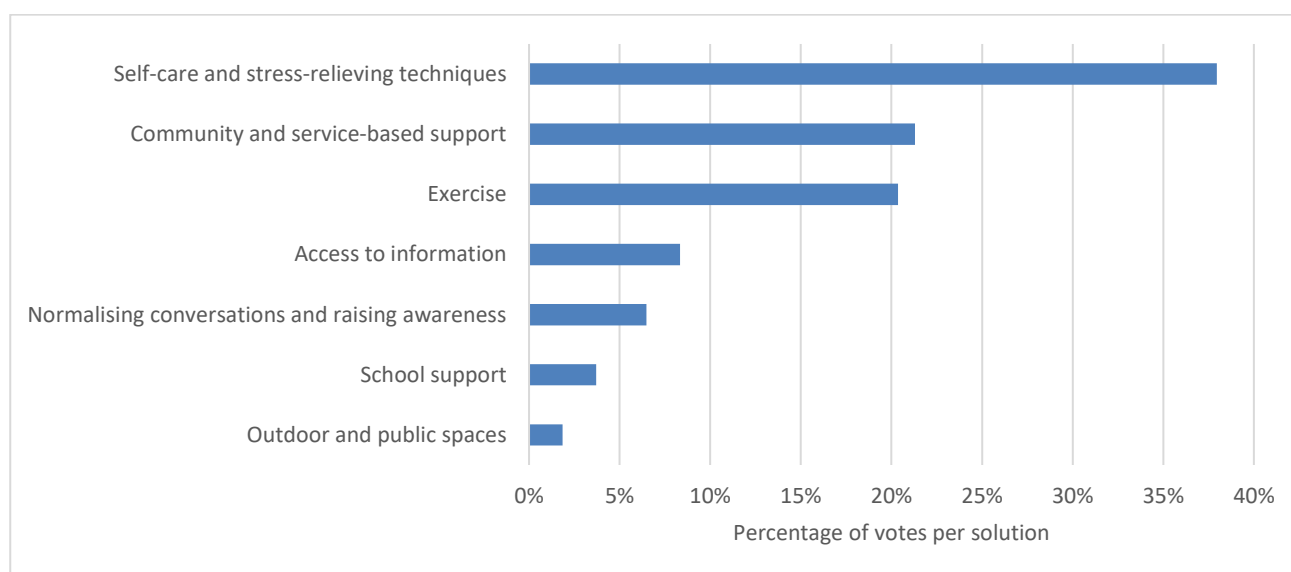
It is important to note that during this period, young people also experienced protracted lockdowns and significant disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified the challenges around mental health and stress.

A Deeper Dive

Top Three Ranking Priority Issues of Concern | Prospective Solutions

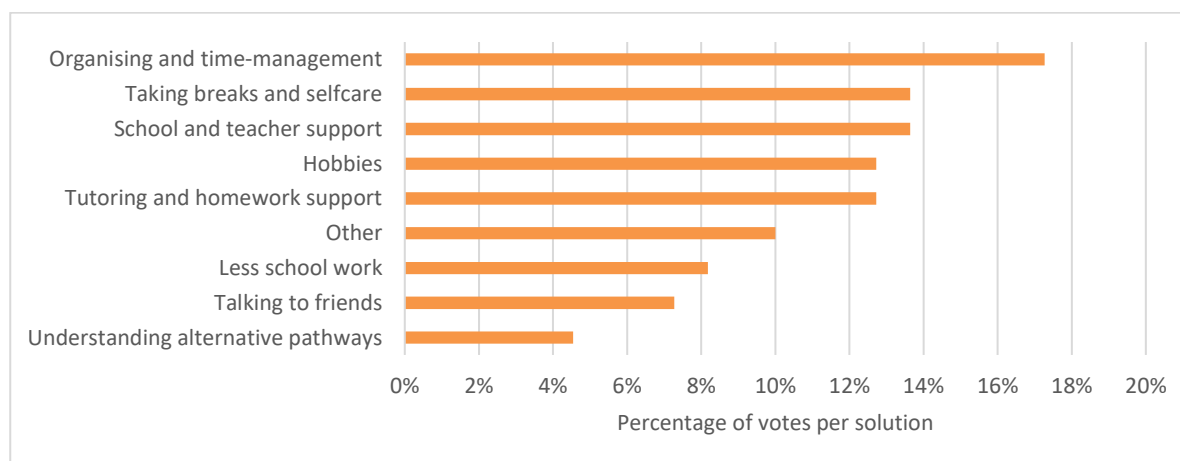
In response to identified challenges, students were also asked to consider and offer prospective solutions. The themes to emerge from each challenge are captured in the tables below.

Figure 2. Solutions: Mental Health, Anxiety



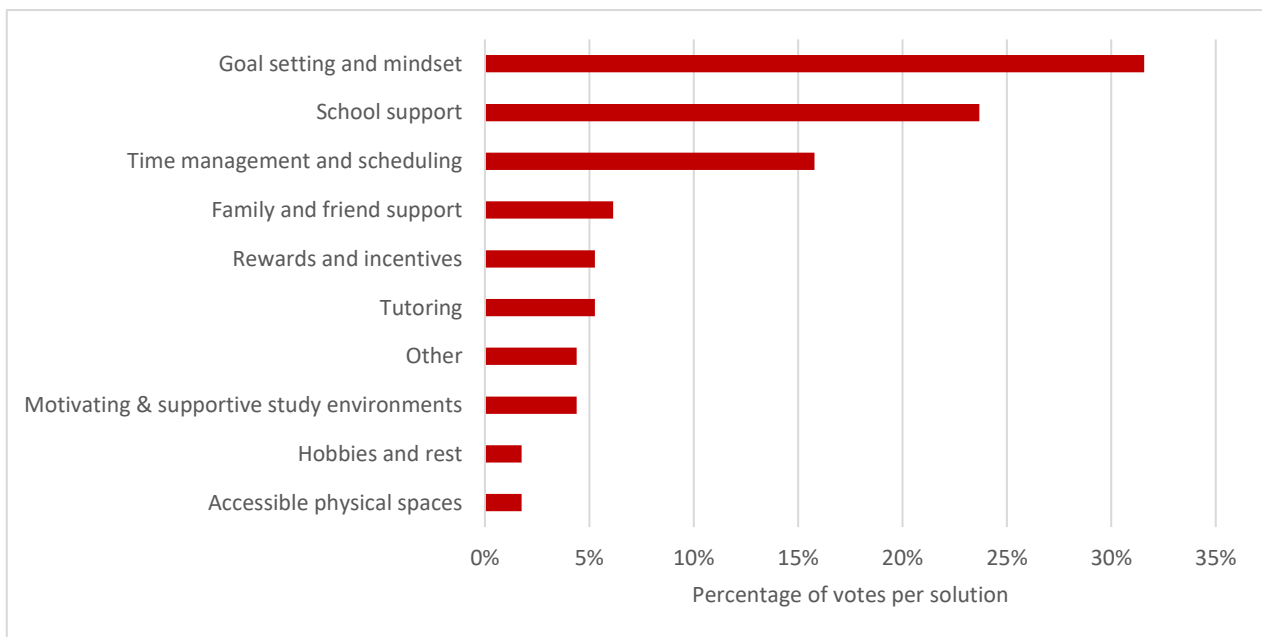
Students primarily voted for self-care and stress-relieving techniques (38%) as a solution to the prevalence of anxiety in the Greater Dandenong community. Students recommended practices such as “*breathing techniques*,” “*hobbies and music*” and “*taking time for yourself*.” Both community and service-based support (21%) and exercise (20%) were also proposed.

Figure 3. Solutions: Stress, School/Study Stress



When considering solutions to school/study stress, students endorsed improved organisational skills and time management (17%), taking breaks and self-care (14%) and school and teacher support (14%). This includes “*advance planning*,” “*sleeping*” and requesting “*extensions/support if needed to manage workloads*” respectively.

Figure 4. Solutions: Education, Motivation



Students identified goal setting and mindset (32%) as a solution to the issue of education motivation. Suggested practices to implement this solution include “*finding a way to make learning fun*,” “*discipline*” and setting “*career goals and dreams*.” School support (24%) including “*less stress and pressure from school*” and “*hands on/engaging activities*” were also recommended. Thirdly, time management and scheduling (16%) was repeated as a solution, as in Figure 3.



Supports

Youth Perspectives on Support and Service Access in Greater Dandenong

As part of the 2025 Youth Summit, Council sought to better understand the supports young people rely on, the services they access, and any gaps or barriers they encounter. Students were invited to respond collaboratively to three open-ended prompts, resulting in a diverse range of insights.

1. My Main Supports – The People You Turn to for Help.

This prompt generated the highest number of responses, with 268 supports identified. Young people primarily turn to:

1. Friends (25%)
2. Family (14%)
3. Teachers (9%)
4. Parents (9%)
5. Themselves (4%)

These findings highlight the importance of informal support networks in young people's lives.

2. Services I Can Access – The Local Services You Know

A total of 228 responses were collected for this prompt. Students demonstrated broad awareness of available services, most commonly identifying:

1. School wellbeing teams or counsellors (19%)
2. Kid's Helpline (16%)
3. Doctors or general practitioners (11%)
4. Teachers (10%)
5. headspace (7%)
6. Beyond Blue (5%)
7. Youth and Family Services (4%)

While this list reflects strong awareness of widely available services, it also reveals a gap in knowledge of organisations that specifically serve the Greater Dandenong community.

3. Service Gaps and Barriers – Gaps or New Services Needed in Greater Dandenong

This prompt received 107 varied responses, aiming to uncover both service gaps and areas where young people lack awareness. Key themes included:

1. Limited knowledge of free therapists and check-ups (10%)
2. Desire for confidential wellbeing support that does not involve parental disclosure (8%)
3. Lack of awareness of online support tools and wellbeing apps (6%)

These responses suggest a need for improved promotion of local and digital mental health resources, with particular attention to privacy and accessibility.



Young Leaders' Workshop

Strategic vision and planning

As outlined previously, the 2025 Young Leaders cohort were deeply engaged in the design, planning, and delivery of the Youth Summit. Young Leaders facilitated a workshop that asked young people to interactively answer three questions to inform Council's strategic planning. Students' written responses were captured through activities designed by Young Leaders and subsequent vox pop interviews.

1. What do you love about the City of Greater Dandenong and your community? What does the word community mean to you?

Students answered this question on individual puzzle pieces and worked with their table to connect the puzzle. Students reflected that cultural diversity (31%), the wide range of opportunities (18%), a sense of connection (12%) and food (11%) are what they love most about their community. Young people's love for cultural diversity within the City of Greater Dandenong suggest there is great benefit to, and appetite for, celebration and diverse positive profiling.

"The word community means inclusivity, equality and family."

"I love that the City of Greater Dandenong encourages young people to use their voice."

"I love how there are so many opportunities to experience community in such a diverse area, full of culture. I am grateful for the community I have around me."

2. What would you like Council to focus on in the next four years?

Participants shared recommendations for Council's focus over the next four years, which will inform the forthcoming Children, Youth and Family Strategic Plan, through writing on paper planes. Key emerging themes include community safety (25%), providing opportunities such as sport (19%), events (15%), creating spaces for youth voice (15%), education (14%), and mental health (12%). This illustrates a need for Council to address actual and perceived community safety concerns.

"I want the community to grow in kindness, respect and courage."

"My dream/hope for the future is to get my dream career and become a leader."

"I hope in the future no violence and no fights, plus have my dream career and lifestyle."

Young Leaders' Strategic Vision and Planning, Continued

3. What are your hopes for the future?

Hopes for the future were submitted by participants on postcards through the *Anywhere Door* from the anime *Doraemon*. Young Leaders saw the *Anywhere Door* as a symbol of their wishes and dreams. Many students shared a hope for landing a specific dream profession (53%), community safety (21%) and a stable income, financial security, and wealth (20%). This data highlights the need for services to provide pathways and support for young people to fulfill their employment goals.

"In the future I want the community to include youth like us more in decision making."

"My hopes would be... to be able to encourage young people to believe in themselves and to be confident with opinions."

"I want to be a lawyer, and for the community to be more open and accepting."

Connection, Belonging and Inclusion

1. What makes you feel connected to your community and the City of Greater Dandenong?

In an art workshop setting, participants were prompted to share how they feel connected to the community, identify what is missing and how they could be better included in the City of Greater Dandenong. Students each provided multiple answers to the following questions through written responses and illustrations.

Young people noted that school (48%) and friends (46%) made them feel connected to their community, followed by sports (27%) and family (22%). This illustrates the integral role schools, friends, sports, and family play in sustaining young people's sense of connection and belonging.

"My school and its community – I'm grateful and happy to have my school."

"Friends make me feel connected."

"Volleyball club because I found some people that has similar hobbies as me."

2. How could young people feel more included to the Greater Dandenong community?

To feel more included in Greater Dandenong, students impressed the importance of holding festivals and events (62%), providing outlets to participate in hobbies such as sport and art (48%) and the opportunity for youth voice to be shared and heard (16%). This insight suggests young people value opportunities for to engage through a variety of events and activities.

“More festivals, sports tournaments badminton, volleyball, basketball, soccer, community sports.”

“Through more events that empower students to use their voice.”

“Having more events like this, making more comfortable places for people to voice their opinion, creating an inclusive place, promote communication.”

Youth Voice, Engagement and Participation

The Youth Voice workshop built upon the keynote speaker’s message that young people do not need to wait until they are older to have an opinion, and they should speak up and use their voice no matter their age. This workshop was facilitated by a local young person and explored two questions.

1. How can Council better involve young people in decision making?

Student responses explored this question, culminating in a range of recommendations on how to better involve young people in decision making. The priority suggestions included providing opportunities for young people to participate in programs where they can share their opinions (22%), actively including young people in discussions and decisions (20%) and facilitating more events and involving young people in event planning (19%). Students’ call for greater involvement in Council planning, and event delivery, suggests a need for further collaboration between services and young people.

“I want to be involved in shaping decisions that may affect me, by being able to express opinions on the matter.”

“The council can better involve young people in decision making by showing that they care about and want their opinion. Maybe they could make a vote for young people so they can influence decisions.”

“Targeting and understanding the needs that young people have.”

Feeling supported and heard was a strong theme of the Youth Summit. Students felt best valued, safe, supported, and heard when surrounded by good and caring people (38%), being given opportunities to share their views (31%), being appreciated (13%) and being in a safe space (13%). This affirms the need for young people to be provided with opportunities to access and experience positive role models and safe spaces in sharing their opinions.



Youth Summit Recommendations

Council, Schools, and Community Organisations: Collaborative Actions to Support Young People

The data collected at Youth and Family Services' 2025 Youth Summit: *Your Voice, Your Future* highlights several key messages from young people in Greater Dandenong. These messages reflect their lived experiences and aspirations, and help inform local service planning and community engagement strategies:

- Young people are experiencing elevated levels of stress and mental health (anxiety).
- While some support avenues are known by young people, there are still significant gaps in awareness of available services.
- Young people want to be actively involved in shaping their future and supported to reach their full potential.

Based on these insights, the following recommendations are proposed to guide responsive and inclusive action by Council, schools, and community organisations:

1. Promote Self-Care and Stress Management

Insight: Anxiety is the top concern among students.

Actions:

- Share mental health messages via in-person and digital platforms.
- Create safe spaces for self-care practices.
- Teach practical stress-relief techniques and provide accessible resources.

2. Improve Awareness of Local Support Services

Insight: Students lack knowledge of available services.

Actions:

- Educate youth on accessing local and online services, including self-referral.
- Destigmatise help-seeking behaviours.
- Train youth sector professionals in service literacy to better guide young people.

3. Celebrate Cultural Diversity

Insight: Cultural identity is a valued aspect of Greater Dandenong.

Actions:

- Highlight diverse representation in programs and media.
- Facilitate culturally appropriate activities.
- Promote shared values to enhance community cohesion.

4. Clarify Employment Pathways

Insight: Students aspire to meaningful careers and financial stability.

Actions:

- Increase visibility of education and employment options.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, training providers, and youth organisations.
- Deliver work readiness and financial literacy programs.

5. Strengthen Community Connections

Insight: Students feel a strong sense of belonging.

Actions:

- Recognise the role of family, school, sport, and friendships in wellbeing.
- Advocate for inclusive community relationships that support youth.

6. Promote Youth Participation and Co-Design

Insight: Young people want a greater say in decisions affecting their lives.

Actions:

- Embed youth voice in program design and decision-making.
- Foster collaboration between services and young people.
- Champion youth-led initiatives and celebrate their contributions.

7. Embed Youth Consultation and Student Voice

Insight: Young people seek interactive spaces to collaborate with adults and peers.

Actions:

- Create safe, inclusive environments for youth consultation.
- Engage positive role models to facilitate dialogue.
- Offer remuneration for youth contributions to organisational work.

Recommendations for Greater Dandenong Council

1. Enhance Community Safety

Insight: Community safety was cited as a priority for students over the next four years.

Action:

- Challenge negative stereotypes through pro-social initiatives.
- Activate public spaces with youth-friendly activities.
- Recognise and celebrate youth contributions to community wellbeing.

2. Deliver Youth-Centric Events and Activities

Insight: Events were seen as vital for inclusion and engagement.

Action:

- Host free or low-cost events tailored to youth interests.
- Involve young people in event planning and promotion.
- Create opportunities for peer and community connection.

Recommendations for Secondary Schools

1. Support Organisation and Time Management

Insight: School and study-related stress ranked as the second most pressing issue.

Action:

- Encourage open dialogue about academic pressures.
- Deliver education on time management and prioritisation strategies.
- Share practical tips to help students manage their workload effectively.

2. Foster Goal Setting and a Positive Mindset

Insight: Motivation in education was the third most common issue raised.

Action:

- Promote personal growth and resilience.
- Encourage ownership of educational journeys and future aspirations.
- Provide structured support for goal setting and mindset development.

Conclusion

The 2025 Youth Summit: *Your Voice, Your Future* has reaffirmed the power and importance of youth voice in shaping the future of Greater Dandenong.

Through active participation, young people have clearly articulated their priorities, concerns, and aspirations – placing mental health notably anxiety, stress, and education at the forefront. Their insights are not just heard; they are driving action.

Youth and Family Services stands firmly committed to honouring the voices of young people – not only through this summit but through ongoing, meaningful engagement. The recommendations arising from this consultation will directly inform our strategic planning and service delivery. We will continue to advocate for school-based solutions, promote cultural inclusion, and foster safe, vibrant communities where young people feel seen, supported, and empowered.

This is not the end of the conversation – it is a call to action. We invite all agencies, organisations, and community partners to join us in co-designing solutions and implementing the recommendations put forward by young people. Together, we can build a future where every young person in Greater Dandenong can thrive.

Let us move forward with purpose. Let us act on what we have heard. Let us commit to making a difference – together.

For collaboration opportunities, please contact Youth and Family Services at **8571 1620** or email **youthservices@cgd.vic.gov.au**.