



LEFT: Hayley Neuschafer, Connor Gibbins, Emily Harrison and Chelsie Mackenzie were some of the headspace Swan Hill representatives at the 2026 Headspace Forum held in Brisbane.

Youth Reference Group members Jack Steel and Angelica Watson helped showcase the social groups LNKD and Mini LNKD as important services Swan Hill headspace provides. Pictures: Supplied



Growing together at headspace forum

Louis Harrison

SWAN HILL headspace team members and Youth Reference Group members travelled to Brisbane for the 2026 headspace National Forum.

The forum ran across three days and included keynote speakers and panel presentations centred around the theme of Growing Together.

Youth Reference Group member Jack Steel said the event invited challenging conversations among participants, and despite the content being “intense” at times, it was a worthwhile experience.

“There was a lot of tough conversations on a lot of heavy topics, but I thought it was a really good environment to ask tough questions, and it was a safe place to have those conversations, and was well worth my time to attend,” he said.

Some of the speakers included headspace CEO Jason Trethowan, assistant minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Emma McBride and Minister for Health and Aged

Care, Mark Butler.

Addressing those present, Ms McBride said the number of young people experiencing mental health challenges has doubled since headspace was established.

“It’s more than a number - it’s your friend, your family member, your colleague,” she said.

“The drivers of distress are complex and the way young people seek help is changing, and the kind of support they need is changing.”

Ms McBride also said the diversity of people accessing the services at headspace has increased over the last 20 years.

“Today, 12 per cent identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 13 per cent as culturally and linguistically diverse, and 28 per cent as LGBTIQA+,” she said.

These are important figures. They show that more young people are seeking support and, critically, that more young people feel safe and welcome when they do.”

One of the panels presented at the forum covered topics impacting young men and their experience of mental health problems and seeking help.

Swan Hill headspace community awareness and engagement officer Chelsie Mackenzie said this panel provided an insight into how to normalise making spaces accessible for young men to share their thoughts and feelings.

“It sounded like many young men are privately feeling or experiencing the same things, but they don’t want to tell each other due to fear of being judged,” she said.

“I think through informal shared third spaces, we can create environments where young people feel comfortable enough to share how they feel because it’s normalised.”

Headspace senior clinician Connor Gibbins said having representation from headspace centres right across Australia meant people could talk about shared challenges and reflect on what’s working.

“It’s a good space to be able to reflect on not only what some of the difficult times are, but then what’s going well, how people are growing, and how people are adapting to certain changes or certain challenges in their communities,” he said.

One of the biggest takeaways for Mr Steel as a YRG member was that there are a lot of opportunities for young people to get involved.

“You have a real opportunity to bring ideas forward,” he said.

“I guess there’s just a lot of power you don’t realise you have as a young person, and it was good to learn that.”

Headspace Swan Hill centre manager Hayley Neuschafer said her biggest takeaway from the event was that supporting youth mental health didn’t have to be “over complicated”.

“My biggest takeaway is that providing support to young people doesn’t have to be fancy, and that just providing a safe space of connection, and how providing the really basic, but meaningful, human interactions is probably what makes the biggest difference,” she said.

People aged 12-25 seeking help for a mental health problem should contact headspace at [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

Anyone requiring urgent help can call Lifeline: 13 11 14, Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636 or Kids Helpline: on 1800 551 800.

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