Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah
Findings from the Student Wellbeing Survey

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# CONTENTS

Citation .................................................................................................................. 2
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................. 2
Project Overview ...................................................................................................... 3
Executive summary ................................................................................................. 4
  Key Findings .......................................................................................................... 4
  Implications ........................................................................................................... 5
  Recommendations ................................................................................................ 5
Theoretical framework ............................................................................................. 8
Survey Measures ....................................................................................................... 9
Demographics of survey respondents ..................................................................... 11
Overview of trends across year levels .................................................................... 12
Overview of trends within well-being dimensions across year levels ...................... 14
  Psychological Well-being ...................................................................................... 14
  Cognitive Well-being ............................................................................................ 17
  Emotional Well-being and Strengths .................................................................... 19
  Social Well-being .................................................................................................. 23
  Physical Well-being ................................................................................................ 27
  Economic Well-being ............................................................................................. 33
A good life: As defined by students in Maroondah .................................................. 36
Challenges faced by students in Maroondah ............................................................ 37
Aspirations of Maroondah students ......................................................................... 38
Maroondah Youth Consultation ............................................................................... 40
  Core theme 1: Systems and infrastructure ............................................................. 43
  Core theme 2: Schools ........................................................................................... 45
  Core theme 3: Community .................................................................................... 47
  Core theme 4: Areas of concern needing greater awareness ................................. 49
Discussion ................................................................................................................ 51
References ................................................................................................................. 57

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Citation

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Project Overview

Maroondah City Council undertook the Maroondah Youth Well-being and Consultation Project to inform the development of their Youth Strategy. The project involved extensive consultation and needs analysis with young people and stakeholders in Maroondah, to identify their needs and help plan the most effective ways to maximise well-being outcomes for Maroondah’s young people.

The project involves four key components:

• The Maroondah Well-being Survey in schools, utilising The University of Melbourne’s Well-being Profiler for Schools
• Broader youth consultation, to reach those young people not able to access the school survey
• Stakeholder consultation, including youth service providers, school staff and parents/carers
• Research, including demographics, social and well-being data, youth needs/issues, and best practice youth service delivery

Data collected through this project will be used locally to design effective well-being interventions in schools, and collectively for community-wide planning and decision-making about how Council and other community organisations can improve well-being outcomes across the community. This report will focus on the findings from the well-being survey in schools. The Centre for Positive Psychology is pleased to have this opportunity to work collaboratively with Maroondah City Council to improve student well-being.
Executive summary

In Australia, 1 in 5 adults report experiencing a mental illness over the past year and over 75% of these individuals will have their first episode before 25 years of age. Schools are ideally placed to identify and provide support to the changing needs of young people as most young people attend school so schools can deliver a whole school approach to well-being without the negative connotations typically attached to mental health services. The focus on early intervention and prevention in schools is not only more cost effective than clinical intervention and treatment but also contributes to the promotion and maintenance of good mental health for all young Australians.

The growing demand in schools and communities to measure youth well-being is reflective of the significant shift towards a strengths-based approach in both education and mental health systems. Maroondah City Council is committed to providing relevant and practical support for young people in local schools and the wider community and has commissioned the Centre for Positive Psychology at The University of Melbourne to measure the well-being of young people who attend school in the municipality. This report provides an overview of the survey findings from The Well-being Profiler for Schools, which was conducted with 10-20 year olds in 19 different educational settings (including primary schools, secondary schools and VCAL students in one TAFE) in February-March 2016.

Key Findings

• The majority of young people in Maroondah schools report that they are hopeful and optimistic about their future, with 88% of survey respondents indicating that they have much in life to be thankful for.
• There is a general decline in well-being across the six well-being domains as young people transition from primary to secondary school, and also across the secondary school years.
• Risk factors of well-being increase across the secondary school years, with nearly 1 in 4 reporting that they often feel unhappy, and 1 in 2 reporting that they worry a lot and experience stress easily.
• The majority of young people enjoy spending time with their family, however, 1 in 2 avoid talking to their parents about their problems and 46% feel that their parents do not understand what they are going through.
• Homework and school appear to be major stressors for young people with a noticeable decline in perception of school from primary to secondary school, particularly between Years 7 and 8.
• Physical health indicators were also on the decline, specifically in areas of physical exercise, sleep quality and perception of their overall health. Increasing levels of sedentary behaviours were on the rise across year levels.
• Most young people reported that there is financial stability at home, however, 1 in 5 often skip breakfast because there’s not enough food at home.
Implications

There is an increasing need for schools to measure student well-being and provide school-based well-being programs to reduce the incidence and prevalence of mental illness. Even though there are numerous school-based programs targeting the mental health of young people in schools, limited time and resources significantly impede efforts in schools to have suitably trained staff to deliver relevant, relatable and practical programs for young people in their care.

Systematic collection of large-scale data can help improve knowledge of youth well-being in the local community, so that responsive actions can take place to improve services and youth well-being. These data can be used to engage key partners (local community agencies; schools; parents) in dialogue and initiate action plans for improving well-being outcomes. On-going long-term well-being data collection can help evaluate the effectiveness of program implementation, and provide evidence for informed decision making and planning.

Recommendations

- **As schools:**
  - Adopt a strength-based approach by leveraging existing strengths and resources to promote well-being across multiple domains.
  - Improve sleep quality and increase exercise, and limit sedentary activities by:
    - providing more regular opportunities for students to be physically active and break up long periods of sitting down (beyond physical education classes and competitive sport).
    - providing more information about key lifestyle factors such as importance of sleep and offer strategies for optimising sleep.
    - encouraging participation in exercise through peer group participation and family lifestyle change.
  - Provide more support and resources to improve emotional well-being by:
    - developing an experiential stress management program specifically on performance and exam anxiety and implement regularly at strategic times.
    - targeting attention regulation and emotional regulation.
    - consider using biofeedback techniques to help with training – setting up ‘health stations’ in accessible locations at school where students have the opportunity to learn how to change their physiological responses to stress.
  - Consider running emotional literacy programs that teaches young people about healthy and adaptive ways of handling emotions.
• Boost social well-being by:
  ▪ fostering quality student-teacher relationships through the
    identification of teams of highly ‘relatable’ teachers – this team to
    foster interaction with students and be aware of current youth issues
    so as to provide appropriate support.
  ▪ focusing on improving perceptions of school through:
    o engaging students in developing a school project or assignment.
    o involving students in co-creating school activities.
    o instilling meaning, optimism and hope to better engage young
      people in school and life more generally. Discuss flow, energy,
      grit and inspiration and ways of fostering these qualities in Years
      10 and 11.
• Addressing the issue of loneliness (feeling isolated and unsupported)
  ▪ Create more relationship focused tasks (e.g., community engagement,
    connections with older peers).
  ▪ Discuss real case studies illustrating the social relational outcomes
    related to school and non-school pathways.
  ▪ Mentoring from older peers.
  ▪ School based initiatives to promote inclusivity of everyone
• Promoting peer-to-peer support groups and youth-led programs to
  strengthen community relationships.
• Co-creating with young people safe spaces to relax, hang out with peers, and
  for homework, both at schools and in the community.

➢ As a broader network of Maroondah schools:
• Acknowledge and continue current efforts taken by teachers to improve well-
  being. Schools may already be applying teaching strategies and engaging with
  students in ways to that enhance well-being (e.g., perseverance in tasks).
• Develop awareness of how to use current strengths to cultivate growth in
  other areas to help further enhance well-being.
• Collaborate and share resources to drive common goals and initiatives that
  are reviewed periodically to assess effectiveness.
• Work closely with local community agencies and youth services.
• Tailor the content and delivery of well-being programs that are addressing the
  needs of students, and the relevant school context.
• Shift towards a long-term vision of developing whole school culture of valuing
  well-being as the foundation of learning and growth.
• Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to drive well-being
  initiatives, implement and review programs.
• Provide adequate support and resources for well-being team to plan, develop,
  implement and revise programs to cater to students’ needs.
• Involve young people in co-creating activities, programs, and safe spaces in
  schools.
• Acknowledge the contribution and voices of young people, and encourage
  young people to communicate with others about their concerns and needs.
As a council:
- Continue to collect long-term well-being data to measure impact.
- Develop awareness and provide resources to improve physical health outcomes by:
  - providing more regular opportunities in the community for youth to be physically active (beyond physical education classes in schools and competitive sport).
  - providing more information about key lifestyle factors such as importance of sleep and offer strategies for optimising sleep quality.
  - encouraging participation in exercise through community or youth-led group participation and family lifestyle change.
- Facilitate community education sessions for young people and their families to encourage conversations around youth concerns (such as managing relationships, handling stress from homework and school).
- Consider co-developing resources and information with schools and young people for managing stress and anxiety.
- Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to implement well-being initiatives and programs.
- Continue to involve young people in co-creating programs, activities, and safe spaces in the community.
- Facilitate collaborative work between local schools, agencies and businesses.
- Partner with mental health and well-being researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of well-being initiatives and programs.

As community agencies:
- Acknowledge and continue current efforts taken by agencies to partner with council and schools to implement targeted strategies that promote positive mental health and various aspects of well-being.
- Collaborate with council and schools to facilitate community education sessions for young people and their families around youth concerns (such as bullying, homelessness, mental health issues).
- Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to implement targeted well-being strategies and programs.
Theoretical framework

Adolescence has been recognised as a distinct period of life within the human lifespan, and in the 21st century, young people face complex challenges with the rapid development of technology, social media use, evolving economic climate, urbanisation, education demands, and unique biological and psychological maturation processes. Hence, there is a need to encompass the current socio-cultural changes and developmentally appropriate transitions to understand youth well-being more fully.

Well-being is commonly defined not only as the absence of illnesses and negative conditions, but it also includes a prevalence of positive attributes. In this vast research area, well-being has been defined in many ways, such as:

- Experiencing more positive emotions (e.g., happiness) compared with negative emotions (e.g., sadness, fear)
- Living a life that is meaningful and in accordance with one’s values
- Being able to sustain independent living and contribute productively to society
- Having the skills and resilience to deal with challenges and setbacks
- Having satisfaction with various important areas of life, including physical health, job status, relationships and finance
- Having basic needs for food, shelter and safety fulfilled
- Having psychological needs for autonomy, meaningful relationships, and a sense of competency met
- Having strong relational ties with people and actively contributing to civic activities

In summary, well-being is a complex human condition that encompasses several facets. Multidimensional models of well-being have been developed to capture a more comprehensive understanding of well-being. This simply means that the concept of well-being can be understood by a combination of different factors instead of one sole definition.

The Well-being Profiler was developed to measure well-being in six empirically supported domains as important indicators of youth well-being. The six domains are: Psychological, Cognitive, Physical, Emotional and Strengths, Economic, and Social well-being. This 6-dimensional framework is consistent with the World Health Organisation model of adolescent well-being^6 and the Australian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victorian Children and Adolescent Outcomes Framework.^7
Survey Measures

The Well-being Profiler survey consists of 160 7-point Likert-scale items measuring youth well-being in the following six domains:

1. **Cognitive Well-being**
   Young people’s perception of their quality of life, competence and accomplishments and their capacity to be mindful in the present moment.
   Cognitive well-being consists of the following constructs:
   Attention regulation, Mindful acceptance, Accomplishment, Life Satisfaction, Competency and Goal Striving.

2. **Economic Well-being**
   Young people’s perception of economic stability in their home environment.
   Economic well-being consists of the following constructs:
   Financial stability and Responsibilities at home.

3. **Emotional Well-being and Strengths**
   Young people’s perceived ability to manage their emotions and their ability to use their strengths in their daily lives.
   Emotional well-being and Strengths consists of the following constructs:
   Emotion regulation, Resilience, Knowledge and Use of personal strengths, Happiness, Anger, Anxiety, Depression and Stress.

4. **Physical Well-being**
   Young people’s perception of their general physical health, their physical appearance and their sleep quality.
   Physical well-being consists of the following constructs:
   General health, Self-concept, Sleep, Exercise, Sedentary activities, Nutrition (Healthy and Unhealthy).

5. **Psychological Well-being**
   Young people’s beliefs and attitudes about what they value, their outlook on life, and their engagement with life.
   Psychological well-being consists of the following constructs:
   Autonomy, Engagement, Gratitude, Optimism, Perseverance, Hope, Self-esteem and Self-efficacy.

6. **Social Well-being**
   Young people’s perceived quality of relationships with their parents, teachers, peers and community. This domain also assesses the presence of bullying, loneliness and pro-social behaviours.
   Social well-being consists of the following constructs:
   Peer and Parent connectedness, Perception of significant relationships, Perception of school, Connectedness to community, Pro-social behaviour, Negative peer pressure, Bullying, Cyber-bullying and Loneliness.

*7-point Likert-scale from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Strongly agree”*
Apart from the quantitative survey items, The Well-being Profiler survey also included a demographic section, asking young people about their levels of exercise, sedentary activities, time spent on electronic devices and social media. In addition to open-ended questions on perceptions of Quality of life, Life goals and Purpose, and Significant life challenges, this survey incorporated additional open-ended questions asking young people about changes that would make Maroondah better for young people, suggestions for improving the well-being of young people in Maroondah, and what young people in Maroondah need.

Schools in the Maroondah municipality were invited to have their students complete The Well-being Profiler survey. Years 5 to 12 students from the participating schools were provided with an online survey link between 15 February 2016 and 3 March 2016. This report presents an overview of the survey findings.
Demographics of survey respondents
A total of 4,777 young people (2325 female; 2298 male; 50 others; 104 prefer not to say) between the ages of 10 to 20 years old completed The Well-being Profiler survey. Table 1 below shows the distribution of survey respondents across the various school levels. Students were from 19 different educational settings (11 primary schools, 7 secondary schools and VCAL students in one TAFE).

Table 1
Distribution of survey respondents across year levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Fem</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<td>449</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of trends across year levels

Table 2 below shows overall trends for the six domains of well-being indicators across the year levels.

Table 2
Well-being indicators across year levels

Note. The lowest possible score is 1 and the highest possible score is 7 for the series of graphs in this report. For positive indicators, higher scores are indicative of greater levels of well-being.
Table 3 below shows overall trends for the three well-being risk factors across the year levels.

Table 3
Well-being risk factors across year levels

Note. The lowest possible score is 1 and the highest possible score is 7 for the series of graphs in this report. For risk factors, lower scores are indicative of greater levels of well-being.
Overview of trends within well-being domains across year levels

**Psychological Well-being**

Table 4 below shows overall trends for Psychological well-being across year levels.

Table 4

*Psychological well-being indicators across year levels*

Note. Engagement and Self-efficacy ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
A traffic light system is used to present the distribution of the 7-point Likert rating scale:

Red zone: Proportion of respondents with low well-being or high risk factor ratings
Amber zone: Proportion of respondents who indicated neutral in the survey question
Green zone: Proportion of respondents with high well-being or low risk factor ratings

Figure 1 below shows overall survey rating distributions for a selection of survey questions in Psychological well-being domain.

Figure 1
Survey rating distributions for sample survey questions within Psychological well-being domain
Overall trends for Psychological Well-being of Maroondah students:

- Young people in Maroondah reported relatively high levels of Gratitude, with the majority of survey respondents (87.6%) indicating that they have so much in life to be thankful for.
- Nearly 40% of young people indicated that they are unlikely to persevere through tasks even though they had initially planned to, with a general decline in Perseverance from Years 7 to 11, before picking up again in Year 12.
- 70% of young people reported that they are hopeful and optimistic about their future.
- Nearly 80% agreed that they can be themselves on most days, with Year 6 students reporting the highest levels of Autonomy, and Year 9s indicating the lowest levels.
Cognitive Well-being

Table 5 below shows overall trends for Cognitive well-being across the year levels.

Table 5
Cognitive well-being indicators across year levels

Note. Attention regulation, Mindful acceptance and Accomplishments ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
Figure 2 below shows overall survey rating distributions for a selection of survey questions in cognitive well-being domain.

Figure 2
Survey rating distributions for sample survey questions within Cognitive well-being domain

Overall trends for Cognitive Well-being of Maroondah students:

- 78% of young people reported that life is going well for them and despite the decline from Year 7 to Year 11, Life satisfaction ratings pick up again in Year 12.
- Nearly one third of young people in Maroondah reported that they are not very accepting of their thoughts and feelings, and they have difficulties maintaining focus on tasks that they are doing. Across all year levels, overall ratings for Attention regulation and Mindful acceptance are generally lower than other aspects of Cognitive well-being.
- Around 75% of young people have a clear idea of how they can achieve their goals and feel capable of completing set tasks in school.
Emotional Well-being and Strengths
Table 6 below shows overall trends for Emotional well-being and Strengths across the year levels.

Table 6
Emotional well-being and Strengths across year levels

Note. Emotion regulation (Reappraisal) and Strengths use ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
**Emotional Well-being and Strengths (Risk)**

Table 7 below shows overall trends for risk factors of Emotional well-being and Strengths across the year levels.

Table 7
*Emotional well-being risk factors across year levels*

Note. Emotion regulation (Rumination and Suppression) ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
Figures 3 and 4 below show overall survey rating distributions for a selection of survey questions within the domain of Emotional well-being and Strengths.

Figure 3
*Rating distributions for positive well-being indicators in Emotional well-being and Strengths*

![Diagram showing rating distributions for positive well-being indicators]

**Note.** Survey rating for risk factors is reverse-scored. Red zones represent proportion of respondents who report having experienced negative emotions such as depression, anxiety or stress.
Overall trends for Emotional Well-being & Strengths of Maroondah students:

- 83% of young people are aware of the things they do well in, with higher scores for Strength Knowledge than Strength Use.
- 78% of young people reported that they feel happy, with Year 6 students reporting the highest Happiness scores.
- Similar downward trends were observed for both Emotion regulation (Reappraisal) and Resilience scores.
- 50% indicated that they are more likely to ruminate about past negative experiences and suppress their feelings, with an increasing trend from Years 7 to 12.
- 1 in 5 reported that they are often unhappy, with experiences of depressive symptoms increasing from Years 5 to 12.
- 1 in 2 reported that they worry a lot and get stressed easily, with increasing symptomatic reports of Anxiety and Stress from Years 7 to 12.
**Social Well-being**

Table 8 below shows overall trends for Social well-being across the year levels.

Table 8
*Social well-being indicators across year levels*

![Diagram showing trends in social well-being indicators across year levels.](image)
**Social Well-being (Risk)**

Table 9 below shows overall trends for risk factors of Social well-being across the year levels.

Table 9
Social well-being risk factors across year levels

Note. Negative peer pressure and Cyber-bullying ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
Figures 5 and 6 below show overall survey ratings distribution for a selection of survey questions within the domain of Social well-being.

Figure 5
**Rating distributions for positive well-being indicators in Social well-being**

![Positive Well-being Indicators](image)

Note. Survey rating for positive indicators is forward-scored. Red zones represent proportion of respondents who report having experienced financial stress, housing stress, family tension, or lack of emotional support.

Figure 6
**Rating distributions for well-being risk factors in Social well-being**

![Risk Factors](image)

Note. Survey rating for risk factors is reverse-scored. Red zones represent proportion of respondents who report having experienced loneliness, bullying or cyber-bullying.
Overall trends for Social Well-being of Maroondah students:

- Even though Connectedness to family and parents declined from Years 5 to 11, 3 in 4 young people indicated that they like to spend time with their parents and that they feel loved.
- 1 in 2 avoid talking to their parents about their problems and 46% of young people feel that their parents do not understand what they are going through.
- 1 in 4 young people reported that they don’t have someone to go to when they have a problem.
- 63% of students feel that their teachers do not understand what they are going through and Perception of school gradually declined from Years 5 to 9 before picking up in Years 10 to 12.
- 1 in 5 do not feel safe in their neighbourhood and Connectedness to the community seems to decline more rapidly for young people in Years 7 to 10.
- 3 in 4 young people reported that they have someone who will be there for them when they have a problem and Perception of significant relationships was fairly stable from Year 10 onwards.
- 1 in 5 indicated that other people said mean things about them on social media and 1 in 10 reported that they had experienced cyber-bullying.
- One third of young people reported that others often picked on them and 1 in 5 had experienced bullying.
- Risk factors such as Bullying, Cyber-bullying and Negative peer pressure had similar trends of increasing from Year 7 to 8, and gradually declining from Year 9 onwards.
- 30% reported that their friends often pressure them into doing things they are not comfortable with and Negative peer pressure presents as a fairly strong risk factor across all the year levels.
- 44% of young people reported that they often feel misunderstood and alone, with overall Loneliness scores increasing from Years 7 to 12.
**Physical Well-being**

Table 10 below shows overall trends for Physical well-being across the year levels.

Table 10  
**Physical well-being indicators across year levels**

- **General health**: Perception of overall physical health.
- **Self-concept**: Satisfaction with one's physical appearance.
- **Nutrition (Healthy food intake)**: Frequency of healthy food intake.
- **Sleep quality**: Quality of sleep.
- **Exercise**: Frequency of engagement with physical exercise.
Physical Well-being (Risk)

Table 11 below shows overall trends for risk factors of physical well-being across the year levels.

Table 11
Physical well-being risk factors across year levels
Figure 7 below shows overall survey rating distributions for a selection of survey questions in Physical well-being domain.

**Figure 7**  
*Rating distributions for positive well-being indicators in Physical well-being*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Rating Distribution (%)</th>
<th>General Health</th>
<th>Sleep</th>
<th>Self-concept</th>
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<tr>
<td>Survey rating distributions</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<td>24.9</td>
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<td>19.97</td>
</tr>
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</table>

- Red: Strongly disagree  
- Pink: Moderately disagree  
- Orange: Slightly disagree  
- Yellow: Neutral  
- Green: Slightly agree  
- Light green: Moderately agree  
- Green: Strongly agree
Figures 8 and 9 below show overall survey rating distributions for frequency of physical activities and amount of time spent on sedentary activities within the domain of Physical well-being.

Figure 8
Rating distributions for frequency of physical activities

Figure 9
Rating distributions for amount of time spent on sedentary activities

Note. Red zones represent proportion of respondents who report spending 5 or more hours per day on sedentary activities.
Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah

Table 12 below shows the overall distribution of sleep quality ratings against the hours of sleep reported by young people.

Table 12
Distribution of sleep quality and quantity ratings across year levels

Young people who reported having 7 hours or less of sleep also tend to report lower satisfaction with quality of sleep. Young people with 8 to 11 hours of sleep are more likely to report greater satisfaction with quality of sleep. Results are consistent with the guidelines provided by The National Sleep Foundation in United States of America\(^\text{10}\) which is also adopted by the Sleep Health Foundation Australia, that optimal sleep duration is around 9 and 10 hours for young people.
Overall trends for Physical Well-being of Maroondah students:

- All aspects of Physical well-being seem to decline from Years 7 to 12.
- Levels of physical exercise, sleep quality and perception of general health are declining rapidly.
- 3 out of 10 young people are not satisfied with their health, with 3 in 4 reporting that they often feel sleepy and tired.
- One third of young people reported having 7 hours or less of sleep each night, and this group of young people are also more likely to experience poorer sleep quality.
- 64% of young people reported having 8 to 11 hours of sleep each night, with 9 hours of sleep associated with a higher proportion of young people who reported better sleep quality.
- 52% reported spending 4 hours or more each day engaging in sedentary activities at home such as watching television, doing homework, or playing games.
- 73% of young people reported consuming less than 1 soft or sugary drink per day, with 14% consuming at least one per day, and the remaining 13% consuming at least two per day.
- 3 in 5 reported having food from a fast food restaurant at least once per week, with 15% consuming fast food at least twice or more each week.
Economic Well-being

Table 13 below shows overall trends for Economic well-being across the year levels.

Table 13
Economic well-being indicator and risk factor across year levels

Note. Responsibilities at home ratings for Years 5 and 6 are not reported as younger students completed a shorter version of the survey.
Figure 10 shows survey respondent distributions for some of the selected survey questions within the domain of economic well-being.

**What young people in Maroondah are saying:**

“I often skip breakfast because there’s not enough food at home.”

![Pie chart showing survey respondent distributions for sample survey questions in Economic well-being.]

“We have difficulties paying our bills at home.”

![Pie chart showing survey respondent distributions for sample survey questions in Economic well-being.]

*Note.* Red zones indicate proportion of respondents who agree with the statements.
“I am often responsible for the cooking, cleaning, or childcare at home because my parents are busy working.”

Note. Red zones indicate proportion of respondents who agree with the statement.

Overall trends for Economic Well-being of Maroondah students:

- 1 in 5 indicated that they are often responsible for the cooking, cleaning, or childcare at home as their parents are busy working.
- Nearly one third of young people reported that their families experience difficulties paying bills at home, with 1 in 5 reporting that they experience financial problems at home.
- 1 in 5 often skip breakfast because there’s not enough food at home.
A good life: As defined by students in Maroondah

Figure 11 below displays the list of the top 20 factors that students in Maroondah reported when asked: “What makes a good life for you?”

Social support is essential for young people to thrive.

**Legend:**
- **Social well-being**
- **Emotional well-being**
- **Hobbies & interests**
- **Physical well-being**
- **School**
- **Economic well-being**
- **Psychological well-being**

Note. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being. Values in figure represent weighted percentage for all responses.
Challenges faced by students in Maroondah

Figure 12 below shows the types of challenges reported by Maroondah students when they were asked: “List three things that are difficult and challenging in your life.”

Figure 12
Types of challenges faced by Maroondah students

Note. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being
Size of word in word cloud reflects the frequency that the word/phrase is reported.

While students value school and social relationships as important factors for a good life (see Figure 11), these areas also pose significant challenges for them. Other challenges include various life hassles, such as waking up in the morning, time management, not having a job, balancing life, school and work, and difficult life events, such as death of a loved one, and parents divorcing.
Aspirations of Maroondah students

Figure 13 below shows the summary of the most important aspects that matter to students in Maroondah for the future. Each young person who completed the survey provided 3 ranked responses and the responses were coded and tabulated to provide a total score for the top 20 most important things that matter for the future and these are presented below.

Figure 13

List of the top 20 most important aspects for the future

Note. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being. Values in figure represent the actual number of survey respondents who nominated the named aspect.

Students identified social, economic, emotional and physical well-being factors such as family, jobs, friends, happiness, education and health as the most important aspects for the future.
Students’ aspirations about the future:

**Family, friends and happiness**

“

To never give up on my dreams.
Also to have a healthy and happy family when I'm older.

Year 6 survey respondent (11, F)

To be happy and do things I love and be surrounded by people who I love and love me.”

Year 11 survey respondent (16, F)

**Career, community and environment**

“

To become a speech pathologist and help younger children who are deaf so they don't have speech problems like I did.

Year 7 survey respondent (12, F)

To improve my community or the world in some small way.

Year 12 survey respondent (18, M)

To try and revolutionise technology to help people in need to help the environment restore to its natural state.

Year 8 survey respondent (14, F)

To Become A Scientist Of Some Sort And Invent New Products That Will Help The World.

Year 7 survey respondent (12, M)
Maroondah Youth Consultation

Maroondah City Council are keen to find out from young people who study, work, play or live in Maroondah about their needs and their ideas for what the Council can do to further support young people in Maroondah. The following three open-ended questions were therefore included in The Well-being Profiler survey:

Q1) If you could change one thing to make Maroondah better for young people, what would it be, and why?
Q2) If you could change one thing to help improve the wellbeing of young people in Maroondah, what would it be, and why?
Q3) What do you think young people in Maroondah need?

Figures 14, 15 and 16 show the key words reported by Maroondah students in response to the three open-ended questions.

Figure 14
Summary of key words in response to Q1: If you could change one thing to make Maroondah better for young people, what would it be, and why?

Note. Size of word in word cloud reflects the frequency that the word/phrase is reported for Q1. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being.
Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah

Figure 15
Summary of key words in response to Q2: If you could change one thing to help improve the wellbeing of young people in Maroondah, what would it be, and why?

Note. Size of word in word cloud reflects the frequency that the word/phrase is reported for Q1. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being.

Figure 16
Summary of key words in response to Q3: What do you think young people in Maroondah need?

Note. Size of word in word cloud reflects the frequency that the word/phrase is reported for Q1. Colours are representative of common themes and domains of well-being.
The responses for each question were coded, tabulated and common themes were identified. As similar themes were identified across the thematic analyses for each of the three individual questions, an overview of all four core themes identified is presented in Table 14, and further details for each identified theme is presented in Tables 15, 16, 17 and 18. Number of respondents who identified the concern within each theme is reported, alongside the corresponding percentage out of the total sample of 4777.

Table 14
Overview of core themes identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core theme 1: Systems and infrastructure</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and systems</td>
<td>1235</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health care and support services</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core theme 2: Schools</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core theme 3: Community</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core theme 4: Areas of concern needing greater awareness</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and education</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual needs</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 0% 1 – 10% 11 – 30% 31 – 50% 51 – 80%

Across all three questions, students identified the strongest need for more or improved systems and infrastructure, particularly to make Maroondah better for young people, and to help improve their well-being. Students also identified various aspects of community and school that could benefit from more support, as well as several areas of concern for young people that require greater levels of awareness, education and resources to respond to issues such as bullying, homelessness, and more specifically individual needs about personal relationships, health and well-being.
Core theme 1: Systems and infrastructure

Table 15 shows the summary of the responses across the three open-ended youth consultation questions for the identified theme: Systems and infrastructure.

Table 15
*Overview of core theme 1: Systems and infrastructure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilities and systems</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve facilities for recreation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. playground, parks, community gardens, libraries and sports)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>660</td>
<td>13.82</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve other facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(water fountain, walking paths, public toilets, internet)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>168</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible/more shops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable living</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(meet basic needs, food, housing, activities)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable, reliable, accessible public transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>256</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More job opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health care and support services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better healthcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better mental healthcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe place to seek help and support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>9.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(general public safety, safety around public transport and traffic safety)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety in public especially train stations and walking on the streets at night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic safety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase police presence in public</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less crime and violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 0% 1 – 10% 11 – 30% 31 – 50% 51 – 80%

Apart from improvements to general facilities, students indicated a need for greater mental health care and support services to improve their well-being. Students also raised concerns about safety, particularly around train stations and at night.
What young people say about:

**Facilities and systems**

“I think we should set up more recreational areas with proper facilities and is open to the public because people need to stay active and need something to do.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (16, M)*

“Access to support systems without feeling embarrassed, and more outdoor sporting facilities and park to promote the outdoors.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, M)*

**Mental health care and support services**

“Provide more spaces specifically for teenagers (troubled or not) to go and maybe read, study, participate in various activities of their choice, and so on, because we seriously need it, and we need it to be for us specifically.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, P)*

“I think it would be nice for young people who are troubled to be able to go to a place where they can talk to someone if they feel stressed.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, M)*

“A bigger focus on mental health issues and to have them treated like physical illness, because they are just as serious.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, F)*

“Hold more seminars about opportunity for employment and opinions when you leave school because it would help younger people know what they want to do and what they need to do to get there.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, M)*

**Safety**

“Safer public transport. I’d really like to go out with friends to Eastland and see a late movie but I don’t want to catch the train alone to go home late at night. With safer public transport it would make things more accessible to youth who’s parents can’t be driving them around all the time.”

*Year 12 survey respondent (16, F)*
Core theme 2: Schools

Table 16
Overview of core theme 2: Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Freq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>13.69</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More support and funding to improve</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school programs and buildings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote good mental health practices</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better education with more help and</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support with school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less stress from homework and school</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less pressure from homework/schoolwork</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later school start time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce school hours/more play time</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More schools</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 

The highest demand within the core theme of schools was having access to better education with more help and support with school. Students also expressed the desire to reduce stress associated with school and homework. This is consistent with earlier findings that school in general was challenging and that more than half the students experienced stress, with increasing symptomatic reports of stress from Years 7 to 12.
What young people say about:

Schools

“A service where new students can go to, to make new friends, I have seen a lot of students in the yard by themselves and it’s really sad so it’d be great for them to find new friends.”

Year 8 survey respondent (14, M)

“Allow young people to take ‘mental health days’ every once in a while. Mental health is just as important as physical health, and is crucial to our levels of success. By allowing us to have days - or even just periods/classes - off, you better our chances of success, as well as allow us to take care of ourselves; something ridiculously important for a developing brain.”

Year 10 survey respondent (15, P)

“School stresses out a lot of children my age so maybe dulling the amount we have to do because everyone learns at a different pace.”

Year 10 survey respondent (15, M)

“Make education more appealing, because lots of young people don’t see the point in it.”

Year 12 survey respondent (17, M)

“More education about healthy eating, exercise, wellbeing and how to cope with stress.”

Year 8 survey respondent (13, F)

“Help with things that they are struggling with because then it helps kids with things at home as well as it makes problems a lot easier to deal with.”

Year 8 survey respondent (13, M)

“I think they need help and support and a better education system.”

Year 9 survey respondent (14, F)
Core theme 3: Community

Table 17
Overview of core theme 3: Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Q1 Freq</th>
<th>Q1 %</th>
<th>Q2 Freq</th>
<th>Q2 %</th>
<th>Q3 Freq</th>
<th>Q3 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having our voices heard</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>18.74</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>14.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An inclusive, connected and supportive community</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs and activities</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create safe places where young people can hang out with friends and meet new people</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean up public spaces/plant more trees/less pollution</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No drugs, alcohol, smoking</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 0% | 1–10% | 11–30% | 31–50% | 51–80%

There is clear demand for safe, affordable and accessible programs and activities in the community. Students also desire to have access to more safe spaces where they can hang out with friends and meet new people. Across all three questions, students highlighted the importance of having and being part of an inclusive, connected and supportive community.
Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah

What young people say about:

**Community**

“Community spirit, help the homeless and less fortunate in our own community.”

*Year 8 survey respondent (13, F)*

“I would change the way we are seen by adults, because we are often viewed negatively, and need a lot of support which can be difficult to find at times.”

*Year 12 survey respondent (17, F)*

“Wider acceptance of stress and mental illness, because I know people very close to me who battle mental illness and feel as though they need to hide it from the world.”

*Year 12 survey respondent (17, M)*

“I think we all need a place that we come that is safe, where we can learn and do what we love and what will help us. Where we can have access to resources and talk to other people about it. Some place that engages all of us and makes us feel comfortable.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, F)*

“More community events for teens because we can meet more people and it would be an opportunity to be around people from different schools.”

*Year 11 survey respondent (16, F)*

“Set up more Wellbeing centres and advertise it and make people feel welcome if ever they are struggling.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (16, M)*

“Add more mental health and youth services that are easily available for younger people who are struggling and need someone to talk to.”

*Year 10 survey respondent (15, F)*

“I think drugs have become a social thing that have changed the well being of people in Maroondah and I think that without that it would improve the wellbeing of young people in Maroondah.”

*Year 11 survey respondent (16, F)*

“Make it safer around places like train stations and less drugs.”

*Year 7 survey respondent (12, M)*
Core theme 4: Areas of concern needing greater awareness

Table 18
Overview of core theme 4: Areas of concern needing greater awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q1 Freq</th>
<th>Q1 %</th>
<th>Q2 Freq</th>
<th>Q2 %</th>
<th>Q3 Freq</th>
<th>Q3 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and education</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs, alcohol, smoking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth issues</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop bullying</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrict social media/technology</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual needs</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>16.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness/fun/no sadness</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: 0% 1 - 10% 11 - 30% 31 - 50% 51 - 80%

Students identified several issues such as homelessness, bullying, and equality, that they hope to have better awareness and education, both for themselves and the broader community. Many students also mentioned important aspects of individual needs that young people require, such as good relationships, happiness and fun, as well as health and well-being.
What young people say about:

Awareness and education

“I think young people in Maroondah need more education on drugs, as the amount of teenagers taking illicit drugs is huge and many teenagers are throwing away their lives and not realising what they are getting themselves into. I think drug counseling should also be free, and better advertised.”

Year 12 survey respondent (17, F)

“I would make more smoke free zones and make more parks because the health of young people is important.”

Year 7 survey respondent (12, F)

“More awareness about issues in society like drugs, alcohol, homelessness, etc.”

Year 8 survey respondent (14, F)

“Training for children on stranger danger and what to do when people offer you drugs.”

Year 9 survey respondent (14, M)

“A real serious talk about all the bullying problems due to race, gender, and sexuality.”

Year 10 survey respondent (16, M)

“Do things to help people going through tough times and bullying because I didn’t have that and if Maroondah do have they need to advertise it more and make a known resource.”

Year 9 survey respondent (14, F)

Individual needs

“Need to learn how to pick out the best and positive things in their lives instead of the bad.”

Year 11 survey respondent (16, F)

“They need support. I believe that everyone needs support from family, friends, coaches/instructors.”

Year 9 survey respondent (14, F)
Discussion

The purpose of this large-scale study is to examine the well-being of adolescent students in the City of Maroondah using The Well-being Profiler for Schools. The results obtained from 4777 students, aged 10 to 20 years old, in Maroondah revealed that they are satisfied with their lives in general and that they reported moderate to high levels on many of the positive indicators of well-being. Apart for economic well-being, which was perceived as stable across year levels, students reported varying degrees of decline on the remaining five domains of well-being across Years 5 to 12. For the well-being risk factors, students reported increasing levels of emotional distress, such as feelings of stress and worry, across the year levels.

Students in Maroondah identified many aspects that make up a good life, such as, close relationships, health, happiness, school, games and sports. Although students value these aspects of life, they also reported that similar areas like school and social relationships also pose significant challenges for them. Other areas that were viewed as challenges include various life hassles, such as time management, waking up in the morning, balancing life, school and work, and difficult life events, such as death of a loved one, and parents divorcing.

Students in Maroondah also indicated that they hope to have better access to improved facilities and services for health and well-being, as well as safer and more reliable public transportation. Students also hope to have more help and support for coping with stress from homework and school. There is a demand for more safe spaces, for relaxing and hanging out with peers, and for being able to get help and access support services, both in schools and in the community. Students also raised concerns in the youth consultation open-ended questions about general safety, bullying, and the apparent increase of peers having access and being involved with drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. Many hope that there will be greater awareness and education about the risks of substance abuse and also what they can do when they are offered such substances.
What do the Maroondah results mean?

- Most of the students surveyed feel grateful for the people in their lives and are satisfied that life is going well. They are generally optimistic and hopeful about the future, and enjoy quality relationships with their parents and significant others. They feel a sense of autonomy in expressing themselves, feel competent in completing set tasks, and are confident in achieving goals they have set.
- These areas of strengths can be valuable resources that can buffer young people through challenging times, and help them to thrive and enjoy life.
- Overall trends across year levels revealed decline in many areas including engagement, perseverance, attention regulation, mindful acceptance, resilience, emotion regulation, school and community connectedness, sleep quality and physical exercise. The overall trend also revealed an increasing trend in negative emotions, like anger, depression, stress and anxiety.
- These results of diminishing well-being could be in part due to significant challenges, such as managing social relationships, school related issues, and completing homework, as reported in this study.
- These results are also consistent with past research that reported that young people experience a decline in satisfaction with life during this phase of development. This phenomenon could also in part be explained by unique developmental transitions that are taking place in this phase of life. From physical changes to changing social networks and shifts in self-identify, young people face more complex life situations as they gradually transit into adulthood. Therefore, developmental transitions can result in struggles with regulating emotions and changes in how young people relate to others.
- Increasing academic demands can also account for increasing frequency of sedentary activities and decreasing amount of physical exercise during study time, and elevated levels of stress and anxiety related to homework, learning new content or challenging subjects, and taking exams.
- The rapid decline of community connectedness across year levels is an area that warrants further investigation.
- One of the major findings in this study is that the majority of students reported feeling not well rested in the morning and that they have inadequate energy levels during the day. The results also indicated that optimal sleep duration is around 9 and 10 hours, which is consistent with the guidelines provided by The National Sleep Foundation in United States of America which is also adopted by the Sleep Health Foundation Australia.
Opportunities for Maroondah City Council, agencies, and schools to use current findings to promote well-being programs and outcomes across the municipality are set out in the following recommendations.

**Recommendations**

- **As schools:**
  - Adopt a strength-based approach by leveraging existing strengths and resources to promote well-being across multiple domains.
  - Improve sleep quality and increase exercise, and limit sedentary activities by:
    - providing more regular opportunities for students to be physically active and break up long periods of sitting down (beyond physical education classes and competitive sport).
    - providing more information about key lifestyle factors such as importance of sleep and offer strategies for optimising sleep.
    - encouraging participation in exercise through peer group participation and family lifestyle change.
  - Provide more support and resources to improve emotional well-being by:
    - developing an experiential stress management program specifically on performance and exam anxiety and implement regularly at strategic times.
    - targeting attention regulation and emotional regulation.
    - consider using biofeedback techniques to help with training – setting up ‘health stations’ in accessible locations at school where students have the opportunity to learn how to change their physiological responses to stress.
  - Consider running emotional literacy programs that teaches young people about healthy and adaptive ways of handling emotions.
  - Boost social well-being by:
    - fostering quality student-teacher relationships through the identification of teams of highly ‘relatable’ teachers – this team to foster interaction with students and be cognizant of current youth issues so as to provide appropriate support.
    - focusing on improving perceptions of school through:
      - engaging students in developing a school project or assignment.
      - involving students in co-creating school activities.
      - instilling meaning, optimism and hope to better engage young people in school and life more generally. Discuss flow, energy, grit and inspiration and ways of fostering these qualities in Years 10 and 11.
Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah

• Addressing the issue of loneliness (feeling isolated and unsupported)
  ▪ Create more relationship focused tasks (e.g., community engagement, connections with older peers).
  ▪ Discuss real case studies illustrating the social relational outcomes related to school and non-school pathways.
  ▪ Mentoring from older peers.
  ▪ School based initiatives to promote inclusivity of everyone

• Promoting peer-to-peer support groups and youth-led programs to strengthen community relationships.

• Co-creating with young people safe spaces to relax, hang out with peers, and for homework, both at schools and in the community.

➢ As a broader network of Maroondah schools:
• Acknowledge and continue current efforts taken by teachers to improve well-being. Schools may already be applying teaching strategies and engaging with students in ways to that enhance well-being (e.g., perseverance in tasks).
• Develop awareness of how to use current strengths to cultivate growth in other areas to help further enhance well-being.
• Collaborate and share resources to drive common goals and initiatives that are reviewed periodically to assess effectiveness.
• Work closely with local community agencies and youth services.
• Tailor the content and delivery of well-being programs that are addressing the needs of students, and the relevant school context.
• Shift towards a long-term vision of developing whole school culture of valuing well-being as the foundation of learning and growth.
• Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to drive well-being initiatives, implement and review programs.
• Provide adequate support and resources for well-being team to plan, develop, implement and revise programs to cater to students’ needs.
• Involve young people in co-creating activities, programs, and safe spaces in schools.
• Acknowledge contribution and voices of young people, and encourage young people to communicate with others about their concerns and needs.
As a council:

- Continue to collect long-term well-being data to measure impact.
- Develop awareness and provide resources to improve physical health outcomes by:
  - providing more regular opportunities in the community for youth to be physically active (beyond physical education classes in schools and competitive sport).
  - providing more information about key lifestyle factors such as the importance of sleep and offer strategies for optimising sleep quality.
  - encouraging participation in exercise through community or youth-led group participation and family lifestyle change.
- Facilitate community education sessions for young people and their families to encourage conversations around youth concerns (such as managing relationships, handling stress from homework and school).
- Consider co-developing resources and information with schools and young people for managing stress and anxiety.
- Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to implement well-being initiatives and programs.
- Continue to involve young people in co-creating programs, activities, and safe spaces in the community.
- Facilitate collaborative work between local schools, agencies and businesses.
- Partner with mental health and well-being researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of well-being initiatives and programs.

As community agencies:

- Acknowledge and continue current efforts taken by agencies to partner with council and schools to implement targeted strategies that promote positive mental health and various aspects of well-being.
- Collaborate with council and schools to facilitate community education sessions for young people and their families around youth concerns (such as bullying, homelessness, mental health issues).
- Support on-going training to equip staff with relevant skills to implement targeted well-being strategies and programs.
Concluding remarks

A comprehensive assessment of youth well-being requires a multi-method, multi-dimensional approach.\textsuperscript{11, 12} The Well-being Profiler was used to capture the multifaceted nature of youth well-being across six domains. Findings here suggest that well-being is declining over the secondary school years and it is crucial for parents, schools and community to work closely with youth health agencies and well-being researchers to engage in further discussions about policies, programs, interventions and services that will promote systemic change from an individual to the broader community.

The partnership among Maroondah City Council, Maroondah schools and wellbeing researchers from The University of Melbourne has brought together a range of skills, expertise and experience to bring out the voices of young people so that we can better understand their experience related to their health and well-being. In this partnership, Maroondah City Council Youth Services has played a pertinent role in spearheading this project. This collective vision to improve youth well-being requires on-going funding and joint support from local, state and federal governments to ensure sustained impact. While this project has identified trends of increasing mental health concerns and overall decline in well-being indicators across the year levels, there are significant opportunities for council to lead collaborative efforts to provide engaging resources and relevant support for young people in Maroondah.
References


Understanding the needs of young people in Maroondah
Findings from the Parent and Community Member Survey