

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION REPORT

for development of a

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Huon Valley Council

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Over about 15 weeks in 2018, Fae Robinson Futures undertook a wide range of consultations and conversations with people living and/or working in the Huon Valley (the Valley) to inform the development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the consideration of the Huon Valley Council and the community. This extensive research was undertaken to better understand the community and organisational heartbeat of the Valley, and to ensure the resulting Strategy considered and included the best thinking about community-driven, wellness and prevention-based approaches to health and wellbeing.

Twelve group consultations were held:

- Public consultations in Huonville, Dover, Cygnet and Geeveston
- Huon Valley Council Executive and Staff
- Service Providers
- Stakeholders
- School Principals and Teachers
- Secondary School Students
- Primary School Students

I had 59 conversations with individuals including:

- Community members
- State and Federal Government service providers – Tasmanian Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania Police, Department of Education, Primary Health Tasmania
- University of Tasmania staff
- Not-for-profit services providers
- Volunteers
- Religious organisations
- Business owners/senior staff
- Council staff

Three written submissions were received and 72 people completed the Health and Wellbeing Survey posted on the Huon Valley Council website and available in hard copy.

Conversations about health and wellbeing were held at two meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Advisory Committee (HWBAC), and with members of the now disbanded Positive Ageing Advisory and Access Committees. The HWBAC will continue to meet throughout the development and implementation of the Strategy.

The approach to the consultations was informed by principles of wellness, prevention and community, and a framework called THRIVE (Tool for Health and Resilience in Vulnerable Environments). THRIVE helps to understand the underlying factors that impact people, the places where they live and work, and their economic and education opportunities. Using the



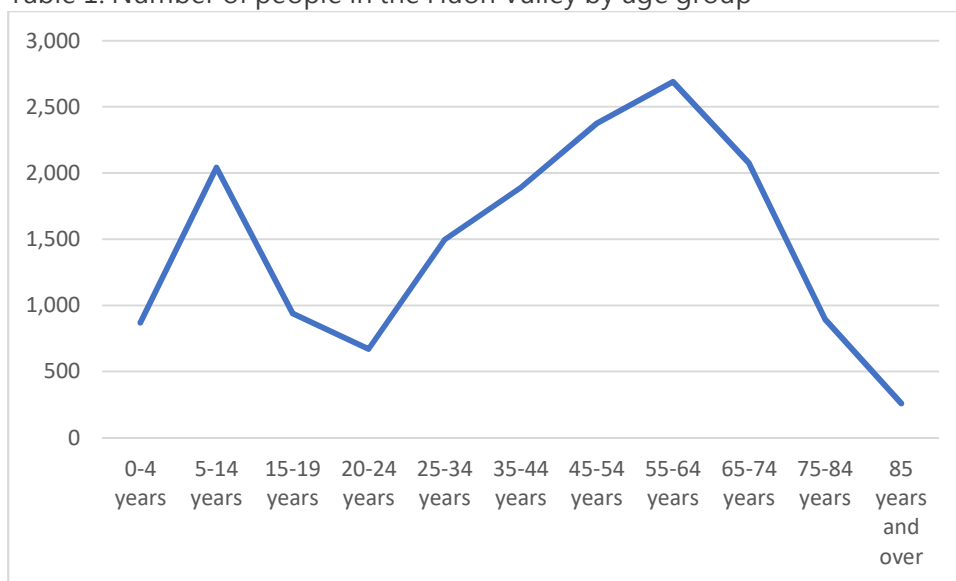
THRIVE model ensures all sections of the community are authentically engaged and contribute to successful and sustainable strategies to improve health and wellbeing.

This Report reflects the issues and views of those that contributed to the group consultations, the individual conversations, and the survey.

## 2 OVERVIEW

The 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) Census data reports that 16,199 people lived in the Huon Valley at that time. The population is dispersed across larger townships and smaller hamlets including Huonville, Dover, Cygnet, Geeveston, Ranelagh and Franklin; each has its own population mix, challenges and opportunities. The age distribution of the Huon Valley population is shown at Table 1, which suggests that young people are leaving the Valley for other opportunities, while peak population groups are in the younger years and people aged from their 40s to their 70s.

Table 1: Number of people in the Huon Valley by age group



The Huon Valley of the 1980s was described as 'a very traditional, remote, close-knit Tasmanian community' with 'less than 6000 people south of Kingston'. Conversations with locals described the population growing rapidly over the last 40 or so years: the original descendent families were joined by 'a wave of hippies' in the 1970s and 'sea-changers/tree-changers' came from about the 2000s on, mostly retirees. More recent growth has included "millennials" – those born between about 1981 and 1996, described as "tradies" or commuters to city jobs.

A wide mix of people live in the Valley: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (over nine per cent of the population [ABS]); people with disability; LGBTI people; people with varying education expectations and achievements; and people with very different socio-economic experiences. The 'striking growth' has changed the population mix and expectations in different ways in different townships.

### 3 STRENGTHS OF THE HUON VALLEY

#### Community organisations and individuals

The consultations revealed the Huon Valley is a collection of dynamic communities taking action on things that matter to them. There was enormous energy and commitment to community wellbeing and the community was described as 'resilient and adaptive', with a 'strong sense of community spirit', where 'people look after each other'. Communities described providing support to the homeless; churches were seen as a 'huge support'. People spoke of the power of their communities in times of crisis – supporting each other during emergencies.

There are many examples of individuals and groups creating support in their local communities – driven for the community by the community – including the Salvos Drop-In Centre and Chatterbox programs, the Cygnet Hub, Men's Sheds, University of the Third Age, Geeveston Cares, Living Boat Trust, Tassie Teens, Dover Seafest, and sporting clubs (sailing, rowing, footy etc) among others. There are also regular social events in the townships such as Eating with Friends (Franklin and Dover), The Franklin Long Table (Franklin), and Geeveston Twilight Feast.

There are also key organisations embedded in the community, like the Geeveston Community Centre (GeCo), wayraparattee (Child and Family Health Centre), State Libraries, and South East Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation (SETAC) which are reaching out to the community and providing much-needed support. The Zayed Huon Energy Futures team has plans for their repurposed building at Huonville High School to be 'the best community centre we can produce; for the whole community to feel welcome here at any time'.

This list above is not exhaustive, but indicative of the commitment of organisations and individuals to the wellbeing of the Huon Valley community.

#### Business

Business plays a key role in individual, family and community wellbeing. At its heart, employment is a key "determinant of health" and contributor to health and wellbeing. New jobs are being created for which there is 'a preference for locals'. Employers described this as 'a fortunate time in the Huon – there is significant activity compared to the rest of Tasmania'; 'locals have more opportunity than they've ever had'. Some businesses also work closely with the Trade Training Centre to build skills, provide qualifications and prepare individuals for work.

Business was noted for giving back in other ways. It was said 'businesses give freely' and 'the majority of employers are good at having health and wellbeing programs'. These programs include support for improving literacy and numeracy among workers, and by extension, to their families; improving mental health with mental health first aid training; and reducing drug and alcohol abuse through appropriate programs. Some individuals with limited

means are being supported by local businesses, for example, living in pickers huts year-round for a token rent.

Some businesses also had grants programs that are responsive to the needs of their local communities. Bendigo Bank has returned \$2.1 million to the community over the last 15 years and has plans to increase that contribution in the future.

## Education – Schools, Child and Family, and Trade Training Centre

The schools, wayraparattee, and the Trade Training Centre all accepted a role beyond that of educator. Schools were described as ‘connectors’, ‘bringing the community together’, ‘good at providing food’. The Trade Training Centre has a ‘mix and match’ approach to allow students to blend vocational and academic subjects through to Year 12. It was described as ‘a place of aspiration, change and upskilling’ and offered opportunities to adults as well as those completing their secondary schooling.

wayraparattee has a special place in the Geeveston and wider Valley community. It is ‘a meeting place, a hub’ and ‘operates to fit in with the community’. It has an integrated service delivery model that is child-centred and provides support to parents through a parenting program, Circle of Security.

## Council

Huon Valley Council was seen as a key player in understanding need and connecting organisations to build a healthier community; it was described as ‘having the capacity to make change’. Participants in the consultation process wanted Council to actively engage in best practice community development.

There was a strong view that Council has a big role, but not the only role, to play in health and wellbeing – ‘Council is uniquely placed to be a community leader’; and ‘it’s about mobilising a community’. People saw Council as ‘important to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy by ensuring the community is part of it and providing mechanisms that people want to be part of’. Council’s role was described as one of ‘working in partnership’, ‘building networks’, ‘connecting with community’ and providing leadership to ‘facilitate, enable, house’.

## Community knowledge and expertise

The Valley has a fantastic store of knowledge, skill and practical experience to draw on. Some of it is new knowledge, like the recent success of the Zayed Huon Energy Futures project, where volunteers are providing expert guidance in highly technical areas at no cost; some of it builds on traditions of the Valley, in industries like agriculture, aquaculture and wooden boat building. The influx of semi- and fully retired people adds other knowledge and capability to the mix. The knowledge resides in organisations, businesses and individuals and both people and organisations are keen to contribute their knowledge and expertise for the wellbeing of the Valley.



## Joined Up project and Service Provider Network

The Joined Up project aims to provide better support and improved access to information and services for community members, particularly those with high needs. It's working to support a strong, collaborative, cooperative service system based on 'information sharing, trust, better understanding of clients, and strengthened connections'; and to 'provide a platform to facilitate information so clients don't have to keep repeating their stories'. It applies a model, Lead Support Coordination Service, that is person- and strengths-based and allows the client to plan their own priorities. The aim is to transition the approach from a project to full integration with the service system.

The Service Provider Network, which connects people with resources and service providers best suited to their needs, has been running since 2011 under the auspices of Huon Regional Care. It has been successfully reviewed and is funded until June 2019. The coordinator is widely respected – she coordinates a website, bi-monthly meetings, a weekly newsletter, The Right Place (which supports people to find the services they need, when they need them), and attends meetings of other health and wellbeing groups as needed.

## Connections to place

People living in the Huon Valley feel very connected to it, or at least to the township or hamlet they live in – 'people have come for a sense of community, a sense of place and want to get involved in local activities'.

The Valley was described as 'so special, so unique'; 'there's something about the Valley – people feel freer, it's subliminal'; it has 'natural environmental beauty', 'good recreation grounds' and 'excellent playgrounds'. It has the advantage of being 'an easy commute'.



## 4 CONSULTATION THEMES

### Transport

Accessible, affordable, available transport was the most frequently raised issue in the consultations and conversations. Various aspects of the transport challenge were: a lack of regular public transport and transport to training and employment; transport that's designed for commuters not social interaction; and transport not meeting the needs of young people going to college – transport issues were particularly acute for young people.

It was recognised that transport, or lack of it, creates other health and wellbeing issues – 'it gets hard being so remote'; it can generate feelings of social isolation and lower engagement in education and other activities. There was some encouragement towards finding more creative solutions – Kentish Council is currently piloting new transport options and the Derwent Valley community has been involved in the co-design of a transport approach to address similar issues. Their approach was presented at the Huon Valley Transport Access Committee meeting in June.

### Mental health

Mental health, or mental ill-health emerged from both the consultations and the survey as an important issue – almost three quarters of survey respondents said 'Improve mental health' was important or very important to them.

Young people described mental health as 'becoming a big problem – the group looks fine from the outside, but people are holding things back, holding things in'. Issues of anxiety, bullying, isolation and limited choices were all identified as contributing to poor mental health; it can also be 'difficult for teenagers to come out' as an LGBTI person.

Survey respondents noted the challenges in finding suitable mental health services for young people in the Valley. Tassie Teens, a Huon Valley-based initiative, provides a website that brings together resources for young people experiencing mental health challenges; Primary Health Tasmania (PHT) has commissioned a number of organisations to deliver services across the mental health spectrum.

Structural issues of unemployment, geographic isolation, lack of transport and family connections were all identified as contributing to poor mental health. Rural Alive and Well, Relationships Australia, SETAC and local initiatives like the work done by the Cygnet Community Hub are all focusing on the reduction of suicide and providing support "in place" although they expressed the need for more outreach – 'we need to get to people where they are'. About 40 per cent of people dropping into the Salvos Drop-In Centre are thought to have some level of mental ill-health.

### Youth space

Empowerment, respect and trust were central to young people's thinking – to be themselves in a space exclusively for them, with someone they could relate to. Members of Council's

Youth Advisory Committee expressed it as 'needing a room for even a couple of days a week' with 'someone youth can have a personal connection with'. The younger students involved in the consultations were also keen to have their own space.

In all the conversations conducted with young people, the desire for a space designed by, and dedicated to, young people was a priority. Possibilities were raised about the PCYC – that it had 'the potential to serve the community in different ways' without the need for new infrastructure.

## Drug and alcohol education

Both ice and marijuana were identified in the consultations as drugs of concern in the Valley, while alcohol was also seen as an issue for some groups. Young people suggested marijuana was 'a big problem in our community' while some commented on the chronic levels of alcohol abuse. There was a view that 'education is the key'.

Under the auspices of GeCo and Rural Alive and Well, and funded by the Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation, a collaborative Local Drug Action Plan has been developed with partners, Huon Police, Huon Valley Council, Huonville Trade Training Centre, Tassal, Mitchell's Plastic Welding, and Dover District High School. The plan is 'to strengthen support networks in the area through education, outreach and relationship building... minimise the risk factors of youth unemployment, disconnection from education and help young workers and jobseekers, as well as local businesses, take an informed and early intervention approach to the use of AOD in the Huon Valley.' The project is waiting on another tranche of funding to employ a worker.

## Isolation, information, interaction

Isolation was described in several ways: in geographic terms, exacerbated by a lack of flexible transport; in terms of older people wishing to stay in their own homes, perhaps with limited mobility; and in terms of people not knowing what's on, or feeling the confidence and welcome to join in. Other concerns relating to isolation included intergenerational poverty, low resilience of some families, loss of footy clubs, and cost of activities or getting to them. The feeling of isolation was most acute among young people, and isolation was just as possible living in a township as in more remote areas.

Ensuring people know what is available and how they can access it is vital. In Cygnet there is reportedly more than 100 activities; other townships also offer activities and opportunities to volunteer, or creating connections through an interest or hobby. Survey respondents identified the need for fun, affordable or free, well-advertised 'lessons', services and programs – almost 40 per cent identified 'community programs' as the best support to help them be healthy and well – only family and friends were rated ahead of these.

## Affordable housing

Concerns were expressed throughout the consultations about homelessness, of people living in cars or living in the caravan parks, and of the unavailability of affordable housing. Rental stress was seen to generally impact on the ability of some to live a relatively stress-free life with enough money left after paying the rent to pay for food, electricity and children's basic education needs.

Housing innovation was high on the list of priorities to address this – people mentioned the Abbeyfield model, co-housing models such as Habitat for Humanity, and housing land trusts. There are good examples of different solutions to housing affordability around Australia.

Circular Economy Huon is also seeking to contribute to comfortable, affordable housing with a proposal 'Better Housing – Better Health' based on the Get Bill Smart project. In their written submission, the group suggested that such an approach would contribute to better health and wellbeing for some at-risk groups.

## Walking trails and bike tracks

There was frequent discussion about the potential for improved footpaths and pedestrian refuges that support access for all abilities and include seating – Cygnet was keen for walkability with provision for rests, from 'the top pub to the bottom pub'!

Universally accessible shared walking tracks and bike paths that connect people to townships, their locality or facilities were frequently raised, for example Huonville to Ranelagh; Huonville to Franklin; Geeveston to Shipwrights Point; improving the track from Burtons Reserve to the Yacht Club.

Walking trails and cycle ways were generally seen as a way to get outdoors and to exercise more frequently. 76 per cent of survey respondents reported 'Get more active' as very important or important to help improve their health and wellbeing. Many of the respondents suggested improved walking tracks, footpaths and safe cycleways as ways to improve the health and wellbeing of the Huon Valley community. Bike-friendly road design and awareness raising was also identified for consideration.

## Access to fresh food

The desire to connect the community to fresh food was strongly voiced in the consultations and conversations. 60 per cent of survey respondents rated eating fruit and vegetables as very important or important to improving their health and wellbeing. There was strong concern expressed in the survey comments about the need for a 'healthy diet and lifestyle' and for more education around healthy eating.

The Valley is recognised for its strong tradition of growing fresh food, and for its traditions of sharing excess foods, especially to those in need. It was seen as 'a producer of healthy food with a connection to food in the past' that could bring food production to

communities. The desire to move 'from food relief to food producers' could be achieved through the creation of more community gardens – there are already a number in the Valley – and food cooperatives. The Huon Farmers for Action on Climate Change has proposed a Food Policy Council as a 'mechanism to encourage a more systematic approach to support more residents to enjoy more healthy foods... it would consider the whole local food system'.

## Literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy issues were raised as a key challenge for employers – compliance with work, health and safety requirements, and monitoring and reporting standards, for example, requires workers to have both general and digital literacy; lack of competency 'is limiting futures'. The 26TEN program is being used by employers to address the issue and the Libraries Tasmania provides help with reading, writing and maths and support with computer literacy for which it has trained volunteers. There is a view that a more comprehensive approach is needed.

Health literacy, a specific element of literacy, supports people to understand basic health information and services. The University of Tasmania's Peter Underwood Centre for Educational Attainment has undertaken health literacy projects with children at primary school.

## Valuing education across the generations

To be part of the "knowledge economy", it is essential that learning is supported from cradle to career, and to facilitate connections to school and/or vocational education. This ensures more children and young people attend school and see it through to year 12.

Throughout the consultations, concerns were raised about families 'doing it tough', about some not providing support to children and young people through school. Some suggested there 'can be an intergenerational fear of education'. wayraparattee works to lay the groundwork for school in the early years 'where pregnant women, children aged birth to five years and their families can access a range of education, health and wellbeing services'. The Centre supports children's progress into school and provides a critical opportunity for the first 1000 days.

Schools also appreciate and understand family histories and 'all schools make a point of connecting' to ensure the best educational outcomes for the current generation. Education has an expanded definition – it is about 'building the capacity of staff to support families and children'.

## Gyms and activity stations

In the ideas and suggestions section of the survey many respondents expressed a desire for a gym in their locality as a way of getting more active. Some also wanted a pool, or

improvements made to the existing pool facility at Port Huon. The desire for gyms or outdoor activity stations also came up in the consultations.

## Digital connections

The internet, and public WiFi space is limited in some areas of the Huon Valley. The Government regards digital inclusion as an essential service, including reliable and trustworthy digital connections and adequate digital literacy.

## Domestic/family violence

In 2016-17 the Huon Domestic Violence Service (HDVS auspiced by GeCo) had 556 client contacts, a 33 per cent increase over the previous year. Police report domestic violence is 'a large percentage of our work'; Tasmania Police supports arrest and prosecution of perpetrators and has a focus on the least disruption to children and families.

In trying to deal with domestic violence incidents, the HDVS often finds shelters are full and has challenges providing services for animals during crisis times (for farm-based clients); there is no active perpetrator program.

## Safety at skate parks

Students and parents who participated in the consultations expressed concerns about safety at skate parks. The parks themselves were seen as valuable community assets providing an essential activity, but there was uneasiness and perceived lack of safety. Primary school students wanted to 'ban the bullies, install cameras, have more Police, and signpost what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour'.

## APPENDIX

Throughout the consultation and conversation process, 'bright spots' became evident – the resilient, often creative and innovative organisations and individuals in the Valley with whom to plan and deliver a sustainable Health and Wellbeing Strategy based on wellness, prevention and community.

**The list below is not exhaustive** but begins to identify the opportunities for Council to work in partnership with capable and supportive organisations. There may be other organisations the consultation did not have the privilege of meeting.

- SETAC – services the community from a holistic perspective
- Bendigo Bank – has returned more than \$2.1 million to the community over its 15 years of service
- GeCo – its 27 different funded programs make a multi-faceted contribution to the Huon community with true community development approaches
- Salvos – their Drop-In Centre provides food relief and social and other support to those in need in Huonville; Chatterbox is a program devised for girls in years 5 & 6
- Service Providers Network – connects service providers for the wellbeing of individuals and the community
- Cygnet Hub – meets people where they're at and connects them to services and resources
- Huon LINC – provides accessible knowledge connections
- Zayed Huon Energy Futures Team – provides an energy-efficient, sustainable vision for the Huon Valley, focusing on change at the community level
- Trade Training Centre – provides a place of aspiration, change and upskilling
- Schools – connect with communities, families, young people and children
- Huon Regional Care – is a participator and facilitator of integrated health services
- Geeveston Cares – aims to 'put a smile on someone's face' and is generously supported by business
- Living Boat Trust – is a vibrant community-based organisation that draws on the wooden boating history of the Valley
- Tassie Teens – provides an online resource for young people
- wayraparattee – the Child and Family Centre at Geeveston that is an educational and community hub
- Huon Farmers for Action on Climate Change – working cooperatively to establish local food bowl and resilient economy
- Key businesses – several Huon Valley businesses generously contribute to individuals, families and community. These include Duggans, Willie Smiths, Huon Aquaculture.