Young Social Change Making in Regional Oz
The Foundation For Young Australians sparking the change making ideas of young people in regional and rural communities across the nation.

Young Social Change Makers are individuals with innovative solutions to societies’ most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent in tackling major social issues by offering new and innovative ideas for change in areas such as mental health, agriculture, disability, education, poverty and the environment. More powerfully, these young people have the enthusiasm and fervor that is needed to shift traditional systems thinking, overcome racism and discrimination and create opportunities to reposition overwhelming negative stereotypes that mainstream media harbors toward our current generation of youth.

At FYA we believe an important lesson in life is that you can make a difference no matter who you are or where you come from. Young Social Change Makers amplify optimism, generate energy, get results and above all shine a light on the possibilities and alternative futures available to Australian society.

Young Australians in remote regional locations across our nation have limited access to the social engagement structures available to young people in populous metropolitan centers. Social and physical isolation pose significant challenges to Australian youth in regional and rural areas of Australia. These challenges are evident in a number of ways, including mental and physical ill health, substance dependency; reduced education opportunities and employment opportunities. What we know is that active participation in social and civic life provides cascading benefit to the individual and the communities they live in.

Through Change It Up young people, as supported by their local communities, can build optimism for the future of Australian regional and rural youth and expand opportunities for the broader community to connect and drive grassroot social change.

Come on Australia; lets celebrate and unleash the curiosity of our young people igniting their potential to inspire sustainable futures for regional and rural communities across Australia. Change It Up!
Change It Up
Imagine Tomorrow. Start Today.

Change It Up (CIU) aims to energise and engage young people, aged 16 to 19 years living in regional and rural parts of Australia, who have an interest in sparking change within their local communities. In partnership with teams of local citizens, Change It Up ignites and empowers young people to have a voice and make a difference around issues that are important to them and their local communities.

At FYA we strongly believe that learning should be fun, engaging, challenging, purposeful and creative. Young people need opportunities to make meaning of their lives and this can be achieved through facilitation processes that promote enquiry and problem-solving. The CIU program is designed to support this kind of learning and we are call our model for engagement a ‘Pop Up’ experience. A ‘Pop Up’, otherwise known as a temporary classroom, lends itself to greater freedom and creativity when learning and is more provocative than established or formal and structured classroom environments.

Change It Up travels to regional and rural towns across Australia and selects 20 young people to participate in the program. Successful participants are curious, creative, concerned or just plain crazy about their local community!

Two full days of workshops and two half days of events make up the CIU Pop Up program. The experience will inspires innovative thinking, broaden networks and strengthen a young persons skills to lead change in their community. Content ranges from learning modules that focus on personal growth, leaderships, partnerships and communication; to social change idea generation and participation in out of the box experiences like Digital Flash Mobs, Town Hall Meetings and a PitchUp.

The contents of this booklet are word for word transcripts of the Macedon Ranges Pitch Up. In essence the courage, imagination and will of young people in regional Victoria May 2012.

Enjoy!
BOTH OF US HAVE LIVED IN THE MACEDON RANGES OUR WHOLE LIVES AND HAVE GROWN UP WITH THE OPEN SPACE AND THE BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDINGS OUR HOME HAS TO OFFER.

Andrew and Tyler, age 17

Urban Sprawl

Beautiful. Unique. Admirable. Magnificent. Gorgeous. Outstanding. This is what people think of the Macedon Ranges. Both of us have lived in the Macedon Ranges our whole lives and have grown up with the open space and the beautiful surroundings our home has to offer. We have loved growing as individuals in the Macedon Ranges and appreciate being supported by other people in our community have helped us to develop into the young people who stand in front of you today. Some of the opportunities that we have had have been open land where we can explore as a child and see all the fantastic wildlife that is on offer. Andrew and I would like to have these wonderful experiences available to the next generation so they can also learn and explore in this lovely community too. Also, we as young people think that if we make these open space available to everyone of all ages then young people are more likely to get outside more and not play as many video games. We can make these issues real by using opportunities like today to spread the word. Also, we can hold more events and use the internet as an alternative way of communicating. Hopefully other young people in the area support us with the cause and want to have a say as well. What Tyler and I want to put forward to you today is the idea of young people having a say in how resources, established and accessible, in Macedon Ranges can be utilized. We are interested in ways in which youth can have a say in putting restrictions on housing development and instead have our community focused on green spaces and helping people to remain in the area. By doing this we can maintain the country feel and ensure that young people have a chance to grow in this community. We will introduce the use of surveys that help to tell young peoples point of views about this issue. Another idea we would like to explore is a group of young people as a representative council who are a part of the council conversations about community decision making. We can all agree that the ranges are unique and we need to sustain it for the future.
WHEN YOUR FRIENDS AND YOUR TEACHERS ARE STRESSED YOU ARE NOT SITUATED IN A SUPPORTIVE OR FRUITFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

Steph

When you, your friends and your teachers are stressed you are not situated in a supportive or fruitful learning environment. You lose a lot of confidence and self esteem when the message changes from “your best will always be enough” to “compete, compete, compete”. It annoys me that even though we are treated to numerous speeches and campaigns about maintaining physical health we are not taught about maintaining mental health and dealing with anxiety and stress issues. I think that reflects the fact that the leading cause of male death in Australia is suicide.

I would use the seed grant to collaborate and print small booklets containing mental health tips and information to be distributed in all the secondary colleges in the Macedon Ranges for study in peoples homes. Mental health isn’t something everyone likes to talk about in public even around parents, friends or close relatives but if everyone has a little bit more information especially about stress management and anxiety I think that would bring about a healthier community.

Steph, age 16

Unrealistic expectations of success in senior school
Mitchell and Sam working together to rejuvenate places for youth to gather for friendship, safety and creative expression.

We have been working together throughout Change It Up and we have been asking ourselves the question “What would it take to change the perception of young people in the Macedon Ranges?”

We are focused on the skate and hip hop cultures. Mitch is about creating a space for us to exist in and I am about what we do in that space.

We will bring 300 young people who all think the skate park is important and in return we want the council to make the skate park a safe space for the community to be.

We want our community to pledge 5 things:

1. To respect each other
2. To respect our space.
3. To keep the space safe.
4. To keep the space clean.
5. To welcome everybody.

All the 300 young people who want the space will pledge the same. We would like it if the Council could work with us on our project to make it a reality.

We are asking for $1000 towards creating a family day to introduce the community to the skate park. We will then match that $1000 with $1000 of donations. By this time our skate park will have been made safe by the council.

Seeded! Thanks to the Macedon Shire Council and the Commitment of Sam and Mitch to following through with their idea $1000 in seed funding was awarded to the boys to activate their project.

Alumni in focus

Kyneton Crew Scoring Funds to Fix Skate Park and Smash Stereotypes

Wednesday, 02/03/2012

A group of young people from around Kyneton in central Victoria have won a grant of $1000 to make repairs to their local skate park and run projects aimed at changing the negative stereotype of youth in their community.

Year 11 students Mitchell Noonan and Sam Hasell pitched their idea to local leaders at Kyneton Town Hall on Monday as part of the “Change It Up Macedon Ranges” program, run by the Foundation For Young Australians.

The boys told the audience of 80 local citizens that they wanted to change the negative perception of the young people who hang out at Kyneton’s skate park.

“We want to change the incorrect view, so people see it as a fun place to be, where they can come down and have a barbecue or birthday parties,” said Mitchell.

Mitchell Noonan wants to create a more positive image of youth in his community. Photo by Dewa Bilumos. Concept by Katharine Wills.
Sam, age 17
Creative Expression through Hip Hop

I feel in love back in grade 6,
I feel in love with words so what I’m here
to say is,
Until the sky is grey and the rabbits run
away hip hop is here to stay,
So there is no point in trying to hate it.
I took this culture and mine I made it,
I wrapped in year 7 but my peers they
hated,
They couldn’t see my point of view.
Frustrated.
My music is movement by they delayed it
why?
Cause I don’t look like I can rap.
I don’t wear baggy tracks, fat laces and a
backwards cap.
I don’t rhyme about sex, drugs money or
my tough time and upbringing,
I celebrate living in the act,
But they wouldn’t notice that.
I was put down because I rap but wasn’t
black.
I was told I wasn’t true to who I really
was.

And with that in my ear I didn’t know
who I really was.
So I said “shut up”.
I said “yeah” hip hops not my culture but
I took hip hop and I changed it,
And when I stopped copying that culture
and make the music mine people started
to praise it,
And now the roof I raise it.
In the booth display it.
The truth I’m here to say it
And I stand here, uncovered in front of all
of you I’m almost naked.
Hip hop means the world to me and I
want to change the way that people see
the art of rap.
The skill of boom bap and the acceptance
of who people truly are.
History.
I want to live in a world where everybody
writes, speaks, draws, paints, films with
words, images, sounds takes flight.
I want to live in a work where people are
allowed to love who they are.

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Sam
Hannah

Drugs and alcohol awareness for teens

Today I want to tell you a story. It is hard for me because it is so personal but I am telling you because something needs to be done.

I once had a friend, a real special friend who I loved him a lot. In the end we ended up losing contact for two months. By the time I saw him again he was lost to drugs. I was so upset and lonely. I felt like no one understood. It was then that I realized you can’t go around life experiences, you have to go through them; and I think the education system needs help to understand this and how much it is affecting us in our hometown.

The issue of drug and alcohol abuse is important to everyone because the whole community is effected by it in one way or another. We need people to take action to prevent the next generation from being hurt.

I want younger people to feel like they don’t have to depend on drugs to feel alive. I want to educate youth about the effects of drugs using new media. I will start a campaign using videos and blogs that tell personal stories of young people who have been through drug abuse. I want to call it “Winning”.

I have come to Change It Up to develop and pitch my idea. Already I have spoken with Dan Hirst from Heywire about media connections; and Lauren Right for connections to schools in the Macedon Ranges. Annie from the Macedon Youth Unit has also offered me a short film crew to help me start a short film project. What I need is a mentor and someone to help me build a website. Also I need funds to make marketing materials. Imagine if youth in the Macedon Ranges didn’t need drugs to feel alive. No one would have to lose a friend in the way that I did. Thank you.
Katherine, age 17

Inclusive Education

I was eleven when I had my first panic attack and soon after that I was diagnosed with panic disorder. I felt terrified because I didn’t know what was happening to me; I still remember how I felt when I had my first panic attack. I felt lost, confused, anxious, terrified, upset and alone. That of course affecting my schooling. My teachers did not know how to deal with me and so they didn’t deal with me at all.

In some ways they [teachers] worsened my situation by belittling me and because of that I did not feel safe to go to school. That is not right and no one deserves for that to happen to them. That of course affected me when I started high school and as a result I dropped out in year 7. Even though highschool tried to help me there was not enough support systems within the school to help me come back.

After dropping out [of school] I stayed home for four years feeling forgotten by society and the education system. That time was painful. There was literally a pain in my chest like my heart was broken. It was the worst time in my life as I felt like I was suffocating in a dark whole. It felt like there was no way out. There was a lot of self hate. I wanted to somehow escape myself and found I would be up at all hours of the night asking myself why? What did I do to deserve this? I felt so lost and alone. No teenager deserves to go through this.

I was lucky to get help from some wonderful people who helped me to get back into school and now I am completing my grade 12 VECAL at the Macedon Ranges Community based VECAL centre. It wasn’t easy coming back though. Coming back to school was the most terrifying thing for me because I did not trust the education system. (PTO)
Katherine, age 17
Inclusive Education

Continued.

The community, my peers and the education system need to be more aware of mental illnesses and need to be educated about it to prevent it as much as possible. There is nothing that frustrates me more than the ignorance and neglect regarding this issue.

We live in Australia and for an advanced country are lacking in the knowledge of mental illness as a society. 1 in 4 teenagers will suffer from a mental illness within 12 months. Do you think that is fair?

For people so young to go through such a traumatic thing and to have such a huge thing thrown at them with little support. Maybe if people were educated we would pick up the early signs and symptoms so that other young people like me don’t have to suffer. No one deserves to suffer. No teen deserves to be robbed of their teenage years.

I want to change the preconceived notion of mental illness education teachers, young people and the broader local community. I also believe that there should be some kind of support system within those schools to help those kids come back to school. Something needs to be done. I am determined to not let anyone go through what I had to go through. There needs to be change.
I dropped out of school in year 7 and that was for a lot of reasons and still to this day I am not sure about all of them. From there I pretty much tried every sort of education - homeschooling, I went to a community based program for kids that don’t attend school and I am now in Macedon Ranges community based VECAL where learning is more about getting a job. Its not about tests and stressful things like that. It is about making a difference in your community or just getting you through the course so that you can find a job and start your life.

What makes me really upset is a lot of people in that class and in the community see it as the ‘dumb ass class’. Like it is the ‘easy fly through’ class. The truth is though, if you really do put in the effort it takes to pass it isn’t easy at all.

When people put it down it makes me really upset. So, what I am aiming to get out of this is for our local community to support an education system that is inclusive of all programs and see’s them all as equal.

From the experience I have had learning should be about making progress and viewing education as a pathway to whatever you want to do.

I don’t wish to be in an alternative education system. I want to be part of an inclusive education system.
Sally, age 16
Revitalising the Recreation Reserve

I want to revitalise my community by re-establishing our Lancefield recreation reserve. The project is important to me and my community because almost two years ago a young boy, Reece Rogers, passed away.

Reece attended Kyneton secondary and lived locally in Lancefield. Reece spent all his time at the BMX track. He wanted to make a career out of BMX’ing and by being at the track he made it a safe and happy environment for everyone.

The BMX track now looks like a pile of dirt. It is in a really shocking state and is not safe or fun for any young people in our community to use. A lot of the young people in our community are now traveling to Melbourne to use the facilities there instead and that is having a negative effect on our local economy.

For my community project I want to help the community re-establish the skate park as a legacy to Reece Rogers. As a community we can create a safe and happy environment which was once existed. To do this I will find funding and community members who are eager to help me achieve this goal.

There are many different ways I plan to go about finding money to support the project. One way is to ask local business and schools for donations and fundraising. Also, will be attending local farmers markets and using crowd sourcing as a useful tool as well.
Sally, age 16
Revitalising the Recreation Reserve
Continued.

To cut costs I will be asking for volunteers to help with the manual labour. Another big source of support can be through the media, for example local papers and radio stations to communicate to people what we are trying to achieve and how the project will benefit everyone – especially young people.

My biggest obstacle is re-motivating our community and getting them as passionate about this project as I am. For this goal to be achievable there will be a long road ahead and I am prepared to follow this path even if I follow it alone.

By looking into the history of the BMX track, and working with the community to create a new design that reflects the youth and what they want in the space now, we can together build a new and safe track that includes a memorial for Reece at the track he loved more than anything.

May his legacy live on.
Maddie, age 17

Bullying

I came to Change It Up because I believe bullying is a massive issue in our community and that people are disconnected because of their differences. They are judged instead of celebrated. I believe that people judge people or form opinions about people before they even get to know them. They make those judgments based on people clothes, what they wear and how they look. So, wanted to try and fix this; to try and find ways to make things better. I hit brick wall after brick wall after brick wall trying. I thought to myself how can I change it? What can I do?

I realised there is no immediate fix. But I also realised that that’s ok because I am not going to stop trying. I’m not going to give up, instead I am going to keep on going. One important thing I realised while I was at Change It Up is that I have to practice what I preach. So, I vow to you all here today that from now on. From this day forward I am going to try my absolute hardest to not judge people before I get to know them. To not base my opinions of people on what other people have said. To simply accept them, get to know them and embrace them.

I believe that if I do that then maybe the people around me will do that too. Maybe they will see what I do, like what I do, and do the same thing. Maybe that is the way to change things. Person by person, by individual person. Bit by bit. One by one. That might work.

I stand here today and urge you to all do the same. It’s simple - for a day, a week, the rest of your life – don’t judge people. Instead, get to know them. Embrace them.
Brittany, age 16

Competition to succeed at school

I would like to start off with a definition of health. It is a complete of physical, social and mental wellbeing.

VCE students are being negatively effected by the amount of stress and pressure being put on them. How? By the amount of pressure from schools and teachers to get good grades. By the amount of homework. By the expectations of others and yourself.

VCE is competitive. It is a competition. We are competing against our friends and this is being constantly drilled into us every school day. This just adds to the amount of pressure it doesn’t make it better it just makes it worse. Some people say that competition is healthy and to a certain extent it is. But everyday? It becomes to much.

What I would like to do is help relieve some of the stress. I want to do this by adding some play into the school environment. By teaching skills to the students on how to handle stress and how to manage their workload. I want to do this by creating a program for senior school students. I want to teach them stress relief techniques like how to relax and how to meditate. I would also like to teach organization skills like timetabling and how to factor in breaks for timeout for yourself. But not only that, I want to help them stick to it. This program can’t be a one off thing. It needs to be constant and consistent. I do not wish to survive VCE I really want to thrive in VCE.

Brandon, age 16

Learning styles

As we all know everyone learns and understands differently. This is something that the school systems don’t really get.

For example, I am a very practical learner and learn by doing things with my hands not sitting and looking at stuff. Some people do well by hearing the content, others by seeing it. I am not here for funding or anything like that. What I want is for the education system (teachers, schools etc) to realize that people do learn differently and we need to find a way of teaching multiple styles in our classroom.

Students doing their VCE are dropping behind because they can’t keep up with the way teachers are educating them. They are stressed, frustrated and confused. We know everyone learns differently. Lets teach like that.
May, age 16
The dangers of stereotyping youth

Alissa: May, you came to change it up to explore a very specific theme to you. What was that theme?
May: Stereotypes. Stereotypes have been important to me all throughout my life and I just want to put it out there that people aren’t always as they seem when you get your first look at them.

Alissa: You explore stereotypes through a number of different mediums, one of which being art. Can you tell me a little bit about the art work that you did at school recently?
May: We recently had to portray a saying. I made a poster which is about as tall as I am and it illustrates the phrase “don’t judge a book by its cover”. It is created with bits of pages and covers and all sorts of paper textiles.

Alissa: Some other ways that you like to highlight your belief in stereotypes, or rather the dispelling of them, is through the way that you dress. This morning you got up and what was the look that you thought you would bring to the stage?
May: I figured if I dressed ‘professionally’ I would feel more professional and it might help me feel like I knew what I was doing – even though I don’t! (laughs)

Alissa: Do you want to show us how you would have really liked to have come today?
May: More like myself – get some colours going. [May begins to reveal stripy socks, gloves and put on a purple hat.]

Alissa: What do you hope for your future?
May: Just to show that even if you saw me as a young person try to see that I am more than that. I can effect things. Change things. Look twice. See the person. Really see them. At first you might have seen someone really bright and colourful but when you look again you will see that they have more sides to them than that. I really like the whole onion thing...you know, layers.
Day one of school in 2012 everyone returned upbeat anticipating the start of the school year; then at lunch time my attention was drawn to five or six year eight boys chasing a year seven boy around teasing him about his differences.

Those differences were that he wore glasses and carried his books around with him at lunchtime. This was sad to see and although some of my friends spoke to those teasing him it was not good enough and it was immediately reminded me how serious the issue of bullying is and can be.

This story has assisted me with my pitch to you today. Before the Macedon Ranges Youth Ambassadors Summit in August 2011 95% of the 340 people surveyed from different schools in the Macedon Ranges listed bullying as one of the top eight issues in the Macedon Ranges area. Over 60% said that it was the number 1 issue next to other such issues as growing up, drug abuse and body image. Therefore, I have come up with some action plans to try and eliminate bullying or at least reduce the prevalence of it.

I want to gather as many people as I can who feel the same way as I do about this issue to help me and to make bullying more widely known. I would like to hear guest speakers with first hand experience speak at schools and in our community about their stories and how they dealt with bullying, being misunderstood and not being heard by others in their community. It would also be great to have a place in schools in the Macedon Ranges where people could find time to pledge their acceptance to diverse groups such as celebrating different beliefs, choices, religions, cultures, races and sexuality. When people sign this pledge of acceptance they could receive something like a wrist band to show they took part in this pledge and are willing to see and take part in the change that is necessary.

I am more than happy to accept different ideas for how we might eliminate bullying so please come and offer your suggestions because I am happy to listen. I am not necessarily asking for money but rather suggestions to assist with my venture and ideas for guest speakers who would suit this topic be willing to help out and assist with others being accepting of others differences. After all it is those differences that make a community unique.

Recipient of the $1000 seeding grant

Maddie, 17
Bullying
Hosting and Facilitator Team
Macedon Ranges

Thank you:
Hosting Team
Pauline Neil, Macedon Shire Youth Team Leader
Annie Rowland, Macedon Shire Youth Team

FYA
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Ehon Chan, Soften the Fuck Up

Without your creativity, talent and generosity
Change It Up is not possible.