



Yawning Cows and other Projects for Young People

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The Yawning Cows Youth Group was formed in 1994. 'Yawning' represents the boredom felt by young people, and 'Cows' the rural image of where they live. The group, with 40 members, creates opportunities for young adults in the Grampians region of rural Victoria and meets at the Grampians Community Health Centre in Stawell. The group organises projects and fundraising events, such as rock concerts, for young people, and gives the valuable opportunity to learn team building and organisation skills. Many of its projects are in conjunction with other youth programs developed from the Health Centre.

The first major project was *Street-Beat* which was a user friendly needs' sheet to evaluate, then address young people's needs in Stawell, Ararat, and surrounding rural areas. *Street-Beat* focused on secondary schools and young people in the community with allocated 'lessons' and Street Walks for direct response in completing the forms. The project accessed about 600 young people, and the information provided the foundation for meeting their needs.

The next stage was to start the *Adult Resource Network* in Stawell and Ararat. Local businesses and organisations were targeted to become part of the *Network*, and there are now over 170 members. They directly support and assist young people with their projects. Following this, the *Peer Resource Network* was developed to form groups of young people in

Stawell and Ararat, including the *Yawning Cows*, YAC in Ararat, Young Achievers Group, and the Young Women's Health Group. The main focus for each group is for young people to get together and effect positive change in the community to meet youth needs.

The groups are supported by a youth worker, health workers, and community members, to assist them in achieving the knowledge and skills for group and personal needs and empowerment. Training workshops and information sessions have included: peer support training; alcohol and drugs information; women's health training; suicide intervention; one-to-one counselling; and the Grampians Work Experience Project.

Two particularly interesting ongoing projects are the youth camps - Wet Ducks Adventure Camp and Wild Ducks Youth at Risk Camp. These involve 2-4 day camps with canoe trips on the Glenelg river, fishing, bush walking, mountain bike riding, and team building games. The camps assist young people at risk to build self-esteem through developing problem solving and communication skills.

Working with young people is challenging and demanding, but most of all it is rewarding.

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