

Gippsland Local Turns Lived Experience Into Support For Youth

Gippsland local Dee overcame childhood trauma through Youth Insearch, becoming a Peer Leader now supporting Gippsland youth facing similar challenges.

GIPPSLAND, AUSTRALIA, June 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Gippsland resident Dee's early years were marked by instability. At a young age, she was removed from her parents' care due to unsuitable and unstable living arrangements due to exposure of mental health crisis, drug and alcohol use and exposure to family violence. Dee was later connected to Youth Insearch through her school, a charity delivering peer-led programs for young people healing from adversity. After attending multiple programs, Dee completed further training and became a Peer Leader. Today, she supports young people across Gippsland facing many of the same challenges she once experienced.



Gippsland local Dee turns lived experience into support for youth

Life demanded that Dee grow up fast. "We lived and grew up in a small regional town in government housing", said Dee. At 14, she was exposed to volatility and instability, "my parent's relationship broke down my dad stopped working; both parents started to drink and use marijuana on the daily," she said.

The months that followed brought further separation, strain and loss. "My parents ended up rekindling their relationship, then in 2015 my dad passed away unexpectedly. Which led my mother going into a mental breakdown in which she turned to drugs and alcohol and her old lifestyle," said Dee.

But one day at school, a Youth Insearch presentation helped Dee realise she did not have to face everything she was carrying on her own. "Since my first Weekend Workshop in 2012 I finally had a place to be held, seen and heard and be around other young people who have also been through similar things," she said.

Youth Insearch's unique peer-led model sees young people with lived experience facilitate programs with the support of qualified clinicians, a point of difference that resonates with many young people. "What stood out to me the most is it was young people supporting young people and the support adults that were a part of the program help facilitating," said Dee.

With the support of Peer Leaders and Social Workers, Dee began to make sense of her experiences. "Youth Insearch has impacted my life by offering me relief and response from my situations that I was living through. It also gave me tools and strategies on how to best support myself. It gave me the opportunity to get the support that I was seeking that was needed that I wasn't receiving at home," she said.

Dee continued attending the programs with aspirations of becoming a Peer Leader herself, knowing that understanding and healing her own experiences was the first step to helping others. "I think the main reason why I came back is because I knew that I wanted to work on myself. I no longer wanted to be the victim of the circumstances and situations that had happened in my life, and I aspired to become a leader," reflected Dee.

After several years in the program, Dee went on to become a Peer Leader. In 2024, that journey came full circle when she was offered employment at Youth Insearch. "I'm now a Peer Worker for the East Gippsland region, supporting young people the same way I was once supported," she said.

Looking ahead, Dee's hope for the future is simple, yet powerful. "I hope to be in this role for as long as funding allows me to be and make the impact on many young people's lives."

Young people in Gippsland face significantly higher and more complex mental health challenges than their metropolitan peers. According to Gippsland Primary Health Network (PHN) data, up to 17% of children and adolescents experience a mental disorder each year, and suicide and self-inflicted injury are leading causes of disease burden for people aged 15–44 in the region.

Youth suicide rates are above the Victorian average, with young males in regional areas facing around double the risk of their metropolitan peers. Almost 60% of student presentations to Doctors in Secondary Schools clinics in Gippsland were related to mental health concerns, indicating that mental health is the dominant presenting issue for young people.

While Youth Insearch currently supports young people across Gippsland, including Baw Baw, Latrobe City, Wellington, South Gippsland and East Gippsland shires, the organisation has also released its Victorian and Federal Budget submissions calling for expanded investment in its peer-support model, to enable more young people in Gippsland and across the country to access the support they need.

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