

Monday 18 September 2023

## Taking University to the Streets of Katoomba

The Street University Katoomba officially opened this week providing a free community space for young people (aged 12-25) that embraces art, music and culture while providing early intervention support for alcohol, drug, mental health and wellbeing concerns.

The service is federally funded through Wentworth Healthcare, the provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN) and is delivered by the Ted Noffs Foundation building on the success of their seven existing Street Universities across Australia, including one in Penrith.

The Street University concept, developed by the Ted Noffs Foundation, is a unique intervention centre structured around drug, alcohol and mental health services. A diverse range of artistic, cultural and educational programs (called “hooks”) are designed to engage difficult to reach young people and bring them into the centres. This “non-traditional” health setting provides counselling to young people that delivers a significant decrease in drug use and crime, and improvement in their mental health and wellbeing.

Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay said that she was proud to bring this innovative youth service to the streets of Katoomba and to surrounding areas through their outreach activities.

“Essential to what we do as a Primary Health Network, and as a regional health planning and funding body, is knowing our region and understanding the healthcare needs of our community,” she said.

“Our region has been lacking alcohol and other drug support services and particularly services that engage with young people in a non-clinical setting. To be able to bring this innovative service to the Blue Mountains is at the heart of why Primary Health Networks exist,” she added.

An internationally [peer-reviewed independent study by the UNSW](#) of the Street Universities found that young people with the highest levels of psychological distress, drug use and lowest overall quality of life, demonstrated the most significant improvements in all three areas after taking part in Street University programs and counselling.

Matt Noffs, CEO of the Ted Noffs Foundation, said that the biggest strength of The Street University, lies in its ability to connect with the most at-risk and disadvantaged young people.

“The Street University model combines two key areas, engagement and therapy. Young people are first offered a space they help design that has real meaning and buy in for them. Once they are engaged with this space, our service’s trained counsellors provide support and guidance to help them make positive, sustainable changes in their lives,” said Matt Noffs.

Lizz Reay also added that The Street University Katoomba will deliver outreach services to the upper-mountains and greater Lithgow areas like Portland and Wallerawang, which was previously delivered by the Penrith centre.

“Having a Katoomba location means that staff and young people can benefit from a more local approach, and these life-changing services will now be more accessible to those who need it most,” she explained.

Federal Member for Macquarie, Susan Templeman, said “I’ve seen firsthand how transformative creative spaces can be for the mental health and wellbeing of young people. I’m so glad young



people in the Blue Mountains will have access to this service, thanks to Federal Health funding of \$1.7 million over two years for The Street University Katoomba.”

Since opening its' doors, The Street University Katoomba has already engaged 168 young people, who have either attended the service or engaged via outreach services. These services are now delivering outreach two days per week to Portland and Lithgow areas.

Through The Street University Katoomba, young people can also access the Deadly Dreaming program, which is an additional outreach program conducted in schools and through Cobham Juvenile Justice Centre, targeting at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

“The Deadly Dreaming program offers a 10-week early intervention drug and alcohol cultural program through creative and traditional workshops to provide experiences of custom, lore and value systems to build connections and a sense of belonging for young people. This is another service that can expand its reach thanks to The Street University Katoomba,” said Ms Reay.

The Street University Katoomba is located at 93 Katoomba Street and is open from 12:00 pm to 7:00 pm, Monday to Friday. Walk-ins are welcome and no appointments or referrals are needed. For more information, visit [www.nbmphn.com.au/KatoombaStreetUniversity](http://www.nbmphn.com.au/KatoombaStreetUniversity)