



## Dogs in action

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## Will's legacy

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The Reach Foundation is embarking on a transformative journey to Mount Gambier, to break the silence surrounding mental health concerns that are affecting our young people. In collaboration with the family of the late 14-year-old Will Norman (pictured right), Reach is on a mission to foster a culture of mental health awareness and resilience. Reach, a pioneering organisation

in preventive mental health, has embarked on a week-long excursion in Mount Gambier this week, delivering a series of impactful workshops across multiple schools.

**MENTAL HEALTH IN FOCUS:** (Right) Reach Foundation facilitator Jack Heenan will be in the region this week. **See inside for story**



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# Will's legacy in action

## Will Norman Foundation teaming up with Reach Foundation this week

The Reach Foundation is embarking on a transformative journey to Mount Gambier, to break the silence surrounding mental health concerns that are affecting our young people. In collaboration with the family of the late 14-year-old Will Norman (pictured right), Reach is on a mission to foster a culture of mental health awareness and resilience.

Reach, a pioneering organisation in preventive mental health, has embarked on a week-long excursion in Mount Gambier this week, delivering a series of impactful workshops across multiple schools. With an outreach spanning more than 1000 students, these workshops are designed to equip young minds with the essential skills required to navigate their emotions, connect meaningfully with others, and foster open conversation about the challenges they face in their everyday lives.

A dedicated team of experienced facilitators will lead a total of 16 workshops throughout the week. Megan Byrne (below left), the lead facilitator, emphasised the significance of this initiative.

"We are increasingly seeing young people struggle to be open about what they are going through in their teenage years," Megan said. "Seeing them come together and join us in a conversation where we can all explore what is really going on in life leaves everyone a little bit more connected to the importance of being open, compassionate, and leaning into some vulnerability. Once honesty comes into the room, we feel the respect multiply leaving them that little bit more open to showing up for themselves and each other post-workshop. It will be an experience that will be impossible to forget I am sure of that."

The impactful workshops in Mount Gambier have been made possible through the generous support of The Will Norman Foundation. This foundation was established in memory of 14-year-old Will Norman. The family set up the foundation with the dream and drive that something good may come from something truly unimaginable.

In the family's own words as part of the foundation's social media presence - "It is our longing wish for Will's spirit to live on. We hope to do this through this foundation by providing financial support to other like-minded, hard-working, ambitious youth so they may achieve what he no longer can."

The Norman family has dedicated the funds, raised by the community, to support Reach

workshops, benefiting up to 1000 young people in Mount Gambier. The family's message on The Will Norman Foundation's Facebook page poignantly reflects their sentiments. "As heartbreaking as it is that Will is no longer with us, he can continue to help others, as in life he always did."

Adam Box, the Education Director at the South Australia Department of Education, extended his unwavering support to Reach, emphasising the critical role of Reach workshops in the community, aligning perfectly with their strategy to prioritise student wellbeing. Drawing from his experience as a former school principal, Box shares the profound impact he had witnessed from Reach workshops:

"I have had the privilege of participating with students in Reach Workshops and the incredible skills of the Reach facilitators enable kids to be honest, open, connected, and vulnerable," Mr Box said. "From my experience, the impact of the Reach workshops is long-lasting. I still have past students, who are now adults, talk to me about the positive impact the Reach workshops had on them and the benefits these workshops provided them both in school and life."

These life-changing Reach workshops in Mount Gambier will honour Will Norman's legacy while unlocking the power of up to 1000 young people so they can shape their own lives with strong emotional and social skills.

Reach facilitator Jack Heenan (below right), who is also part of the Mount Gambier delivery, said this week's workshops would be targeting Year7 to Year 10 students.

Each high school workshop can have up to 60 students involved and goes for 90 minutes.

"All of our Reach workshops are designed and delivered by young people – the majority of our facilitators are a few years out of high school themselves which helps them build connections with the students incredibly easily," Jack said. "Every Reach workshop that we deliver has a particular topic or theme that drives the conversation and activities – such as connection, respect or empathy."

"The activities often start with mingling and games to create comfort and safety, as well as facilitators sharing their own stories and experiences to role model honesty and vulnerability and let the young people into who we are – encouraging and empowering them to do the same."

"All workshops have a mix



of big group activities and challenges designed to help young people step out of their comfort zones, and small group activities designed for reflection, sharing and opportunities to connect. In addition to facilitated conversations, we draw on many tools such as writing, drawing, movement or art to help young people reflect and understand their own experiences and who they want to be."

A key part of Reach workshops is role modelling respectful and non-judgemental conversations to empower the students to continue to have these honest conversations in their classrooms or with each other following the workshops.

Working Australia-wide, Jack said common themes do emerge in the workshops.

"It is no secret that there is still a huge stigma around mental health and speaking up - and whilst young people are working hard to change this, there is still a lasting effect on this generation," Jack said.

"When young people start to feel safe and comfortable within the Reach space – we see this stigma being grappled with – and more often than not, young people are choosing to let people in, be honest and share vulnerably. When they do so the common themes we hear spoken about are: the impact of having mental health problems, such as anxiety, overarching feelings of uncertainty for the future and feeling pressure to act or be a certain way."

The strain to fit in was also a common theme.

"Regularly we hear people speak about feeling judged at school or misunderstood by their peers and how that impacts them rocking up to school each day," Jack said. "In our workshops we seek to unpack these topics and try to counter those feelings – allowing people to feel understood, seen and respected for who they are. It is so important that we have these conversations and allow people to speak about these topics, to allow them to get it off their chest and connect them with more support that they may need – whether that be from their peers, school or mental health professionals."

Reach often works side-by-side with community-based foundations, which is why they were so keen to foster the relationship between their programs and the Will Norman Foundation.

"Partnerships and collaborations with the community are integral to what we do here at Reach so teaming up with foundations such as the Will Norman Foundation, other trusts and foundations or community organisations enables us to facilitate workshops all over Australia for young people that need our work," Jack said. "We are always stronger when we work together, and working with local foundations that have a strong connection and understanding of their community and their young people can create a lasting impact. Partnerships that are community driven allow us to get to regional and remote communities that we otherwise wouldn't be able to reach, so we're incredibly excited to be working alongside the Will Norman Foundation to be here in Mount Gambier."

If you or anyone you know are experiencing difficult thoughts or require mental health support, you can call Lifeline 131114 or go to the Reach website, [www.reach.org.au](http://www.reach.org.au), for further resources.



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