



# SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

## INQUIRY INTO THE PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND IMPACTS OF LONELINESS IN NSW

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Top Blokes Foundation (Top Blokes) is a youth mental health charity supporting young males aged 10-24 years old. Top Blokes welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues into the prevalence, causes and impacts of loneliness in NSW, with a focus on the experiences of young males.

Our submission is informed by our experience working with young males in schools and communities since 2006, the lived experience of our Youth Ambassador Council members (10 young males who have participated in Top Blokes programs and provide advice on Top Blokes strategy and operations). To develop this submission, we ran a focus group with Youth Ambassador Council members.

The results of this focus group, as they relate to the terms of reference for this inquiry, can be summarised as follows:

- Young males are at a heightened risk of social isolation and loneliness. Many do not have 'organic' opportunities for meaningful social connection at school and need facilitated access to these opportunities.
- Starting secondary school and Years 7 to Year 9 are key transition points for young males that can adversely impact their sense of connection and belonging.
- Positive male role models are critical to reducing social isolation and loneliness among young males. When a role model demonstrates openness and transparency, young males feel less alone and can build up the trust and rapport needed to open up to someone.
- Young males have a complicated relationship with social media. They acknowledge that social media can impact them negatively, but also recognise that social media supports their sense of belonging and connection.

### OUR SUBMISSION MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Invest in programs that work with students at risk of exclusion by enhancing behavioural management strategies and equipping educators, school leaders, and mental health professionals with best-practice approaches for engaging students diagnosed with neurodiversity, including ADD and ADHD.
2. The NSW Government invest in a 'Supervisor of Boys' position within the Teacher's Employment Award to improve the mental wellbeing of male students to promote school engagement and avoid school exclusion.
3. Programs aimed at improving the social connection of young males include a focus on supporting young males to explore their sense of identity outside of dominant forms and patterns of masculinity.
4. Invest in initiatives that promote sustained engagement in social activities for young male students transitioning through Years 7 to 9, such as clubs and community sports, with a focus on fostering continuous participation, enhancing social cohesion, and supporting the holistic development of young males.
5. Invest in greater access to mental health services for young males in schools.



6. Programs aimed at reducing the social isolation and loneliness of young males include a focus on the link with violent extremism (particularly helping young males recognise and critically analyse extremist content online) to prevent the health and safety costs of violent extremism to young males and the wider community.
7. Engage young males to contribute to local and national strategies aimed at reducing extremism.
8. Invest in long-term programs that encourage mental health discussions among young males and that give them the opportunity to bond through sharing personal experiences.
9. Investment in initiatives (e.g. campaigns and programs) that provide young males with positive male role models that talk openly about mental health.
10. Advocate to the Federal Government to consider better regulation of social media for young people, as opposed to a ban, to ensure young people continue to derive the benefits of social media on their sense of connection and belonging.

## ABOUT TOP BLOKES FOUNDATION

Top Blokes supports 2,500 young males across NSW through programs delivered in 65 schools. We provide safe and supportive spaces where young males can meaningfully connect, explore their identities beyond traditional masculinity, develop critical thinking skills, and build resilience.

Our programs are grounded in frameworks that promote healthy masculinities, improve mental health, and minimise harm. Qualified Youth Workers deliver these programs in schools and communities across NSW and Queensland.



**Our mission is to challenge and nurture young males to be their best selves.**

**Our vision is for more young males to lead healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives.**



We offer three key programs:

- 10-13 Program: Delivered over one school term in primary schools.
- 14-17 Program: Delivered over two school terms in high schools.
- 18-24 Program: Run over 10-20 weeks in partnership with community organisations.

Graduates join our Grad Club for ongoing support, leadership opportunities, and connections with peers.

Our Youth Ambassador Council—10 program graduates—provides lived experience advice, guides programming, and engages in advocacy.

# MEET THE YOUTH AMBASSADOR COUNCIL



**BEN, 15**

I want to help make an impact and help young men improve their lives.



**NICK, 18**

I want to share my ideas within Top Blokes and help others with mental health issues.

**DANIEL, 15**

I want to support young men and help prevent youth crime.



**AUSTIN, 17**

I want to change the stigma around men's mental health.



**SALIM, 17**

I want to help my friends and other boys understand positive men's mental health.



**LUIS, 17**

I want to help the Top Blokes program grow and impact more young men.

**ALEKS, 16**

I want to reduce the stigma around addiction and help young men overcome them.



**LOCHLAN, 16**

I want to be a voice for reason for young men to succeed in their life dreams.



**RAFAY, 16**

I want to be a voice for young people who are on the Top Blokes program.



**REUVEN, 15**

I want to help young men understand they're not alone in this journey.



# THE TOP BLOKES MENTORING PROGRAM TOPICS

## 1 CULTIVATE RESPONSIBLE DECISION MAKING

- Meet and Greet
- Leadership and Teamwork
- Influence of Alcohol
- Effects of Drugs
- Mental Health
- Resilience
- Anger Management
- Redefining Masculinities
- Peer Pressure and Risk-Taking

## 2 FOSTER HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

- Online Behaviours
- Communication and Connection
- Healthy Relationships
- Realities of Pornography
- Sexual Health

## 3 EMBRACE DIVERSITY & ACCEPTANCE




- Diversity and Inclusion
- Racism and Stereotyping
- Graduation

I'M MORE CONFIDENT AND WILLING TO SEEK HELP IF I NEED IT. I'VE LEARNT DURING THE TOP BLOKES PROGRAM THAT NOBODY DOES ANYTHING GREAT BY THEMSELVES AND EVERYBODY NEEDS HELP FROM TIME TO TIME AND IT'S NOT WEAK TO ASK FOR HELP.

Top Blokes Participant, Aged 16



## FIND US ON ONLINE

-  topblokesfoundation
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[WWW.TOPBLOKES.ORG.AU](http://WWW.TOPBLOKES.ORG.AU)

## CONTACT US

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