Alby leads push for track

Most 12-year-olds who want somewhere better to ride their bike might complain to Mum.

Alby Dolling decided to write to the people who could actually do something about it.

The Tongala Primary School Grade 6 student has launched a campaign for a new or redeveloped BMX and mountain bike track in Tongala, complete with a community petition, letters to political and civic leaders and the backing of his school principal.

And, as it turns out, Alby's idea already has a place in Tongala's plans for the future.

The Tongala Place Based Plan identifies mountain/BMX bike trails among the community facility priorities to be considered through the Tongala Township Facility Plan, along-side projects including a district play space, splash park and skate park extension.



For Alby, though, the campaign started much more simply.

He and his mates just want somewhere safe to ride.

Tongala already has a BMX track area at Centennial Park, near Garrett St, but Alby says its condition means young riders are no longer able to properly use it.

"It is covered in bindis, potholes, fallen branches and has just been neglected over time, making it unusable," Alby wrote in the letter he plans to send to decision-makers.

With nowhere suitable to go, youngsters have instead started making their own jumps around town, including near the old railway area and behind local businesses.

That's something Alby wants to change.

"My friends and I would love a space where we can ride and have fun without the risk of cars," he wrote.

"A bike track would be a big benefit to our town.

"It is something that families and any age group could use and come together.

"It could even bring people from other towns to come try it out.

"It could be something our town could be very proud to have."

Alby's campaign has quickly grown legs.

He has begun collecting signatures at Tongala Primary School and St Patrick's, with plans to place petition sheets in businesses around town.

At the time *Tonny Times* spoke with the family, more than 60 signatures had already been gathered between the two schools.

A social media post seeking support had also attracted more than 110 reactions and dozens of comments, while Tongala Primary School principal Rob Hogan has provided a letter supporting the push.

Perhaps most encouragingly, practical help has already been offered.

A local business has contacted the family after seeing the campaign and said they would be willing to donate time and machinery if the project could gain the necessary approvals.

Alby and his family are conscious that any work would need Campaspe Shire Council approval and say their focus is the proper channels rather than simply arriving with machinery and building jumps.

That begins with Alby's letters.

He is approaching Campaspe Shire Council and political representatives asking not simply for money, but for guidance about what needs to happen next.

"Could you please help me find out what I need to do to get a bike track built in our town?" he wrote. "What other ideas can you suggest to help get it done?"

His timing may be better than he realised.

When more than 580 people contributed to developing Tongala's Place Based Plan, youth disengagement, decreased activity and a lack of activities targeted at young people were specifically identified as concerns.

The Plan says Tongala's public spaces should cater to the interests and needs of local people, promote active living and community connection, and specifically identifies mountain/BMX bike trails as a future community facility priority.

Three years after that plan was developed, one of Tongala's youngest residents is putting his hand up to help make that particular idea happen.

Alby knows it might take time.

But you've got to start somewhere.

And for this 12-year-old, it started with a bike, an idea and a letter.

- **Keen to support? Look out for Alby's petition in businesses across Tongala.**