



*Looking After
our Community*

YOUTH STRATEGY

15 JUNE 2017

MID-WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES

 TOWARDS 2030



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1. Agenda

To outline a strategy for youth engagement and services in the Mid-Western Region, with the key objectives of enhancing opportunities, connection and wellbeing.¹ Youth development is a key focus of MWRC, with roughly a quarter of our region's population aged under twenty: in 2014 20.2% of MWRC area residents were aged 0–14 years and 11.2% were aged 15–24 years.² Further, approximately 3.9% of the region's population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander compared to 2.5% of the total New South Wales population.³ Council has a budget of \$25,000 to be directed towards youth initiatives and this strategy aims to address gaps in services and infrastructure – in consultation with young people – through a ten year plan.

¹ Focal points derived from The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2016–2019

² Source: ABS, 2011

³ Source: ABS, 2011

2. Summary of Previous Youth Strategy

Mid-Western Region last endorsed a youth strategy in November 2005. The focus of the previous MWRC Youth Strategy was heavily on drug and alcohol issues and while they are not issues to be ignored in this strategy, it is the aim of the next ten-year plan to look beyond health issues, into social, educational and economic infrastructure to offer Mid-Western Region youth the best possible chance of success. Key issues presented in the 2005 Youth Strategy included:

- Isolation
- Substance abuse
- Family breakdown
- Youth awareness of existing support services and facilities
- Under-utilisation of existing facilities
- Lack of regular recreational events especially in outlying areas
- Youth access to existing recreational/cultural activities

While these issues have been addressed to varying degrees, responses from the recent Youth Forum that indicate continuing issues with – for instance – accessibility and communication. These concerns will be addressed in the following strategy.

3. Summary of Existing Services and Programs

3.1 Youth Council

Youth Council is a major feature of youth development via MWRC and provides a forum for consultation between Council and local young people. Youth Council exists to:

- Consider and implement the recommendations in the Youth Strategy and Social Plan for the wide-ranging needs of resident youth throughout the Council area.
- Provide support for youth related programs and initiatives including Youth Week
- Identify gaps in service provision for youth and provide ideas for future service delivery, events and resources
- Connect youth with existing resources including cultural and arts resources in communities within the Council area.

Youth Council meets throughout the year and presents projects and initiatives, such as movie nights and skate park improvements. Youth Week NSW⁴ is a major Youth Council activity, during which Youth Council plan and run a variety of events throughout the region, including trivia and talent nights, mental health initiatives and creative competitions. Major challenges for youth council are maintaining representation and attendance from across the region and having students engaged during busy times (such as exams and holidays).

3.2 Infrastructure

Council infrastructure catering to young people currently includes:

- Rylstone skate park
- Mudgee skate park
- Gulgong skate park
- Youth Room in Mudgee Library
- Mudgee Town Hall Theatre and Cinema
- Public swimming pools

⁴ Youth Week began as a NSW Government initiative in 1989. The NSW Government invites all Local Councils in NSW to jointly fund Youth Week activities in their area. As part of their funding agreement with the NSW Government, Councils agree to involve young people in all aspects of Youth Week, including the planning, development and management of activities.

www.youthweek.nsw.gov.au

- Parks and playgrounds
- Sportsgrounds across the region

There is also infrastructure that doesn't cater specifically to young people – such as parks (for leisure and activities) and bushland (for walking and mountain biking) – but these do rate highly with youth as existing services.

The Mid-Western Regional Library provides a safe space for young people to access the Internet, gather in comfort away from the elements, and study, read or work. Specific youth services have also been developed, such as the Homework Collection, which encourages students to use library study resources by providing books and free photocopying.

3.3 External Resources

3.3.1 Service and Community

- Barnardos Australia Western NSW Centre was established in 2000 and runs out of Mudgee. It administers the programs: Reconnect Mudgee, Family Support, Families NSW and The Loft youth drop-in service in Kandos.
- PCYC Mudgee runs fitness classes, school holiday activities and safer driver courses, as well as rockwall, laser tag and disco events.
- Samaritans in Mudgee runs youth development, family support and community services
- The Benevolent Society is a voluntary service which assists people 16 years and over to overcome severe barriers to their daily functioning and independent living as a result of a mental illness
- Mudgee Health Service and Gulgong Multipurpose Service⁵
- Schools: sexual health, anti-bullying and counselling initiatives
- Max Potential is a leadership development program run through Club Mudgee with school and community support

3.3.2 Sport and Leisure

A variety of youth sports and leisure activities are conducted across the region: including football (league, soccer, union, touch), tennis, cricket, netball, archery, dance, gymnastics and basketball. Some activities (such as archery and basketball) are run through the PCYC, some (such as dance) through private facilities and the majority make use of Council facilities. There are 10 local and 2 regional sporting grounds in the MWRC area.⁶

⁵ Information on regional health services – including mental health, drug and alcohol resources – can be found via <https://wnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au>

⁶ Sporting ground location and facilities available at: <http://www.midwestern.nsw.gov.au/community--recreation/Parks--Sports-Grounds/Sporting-grounds/>

3.3.3 Arts and Culture

The Mid-Western Region has a strong and vibrant arts community. Programs directed at youth in the region include:

- The Mud Factory and Little Rascals run art classes for young people
- Cudgegong Youth Theatre runs weekly workshops and holds a major performance at least once a year
- The Mudgee Readers' Festival brings authors into schools and runs youth events including workshops, book swaps and author talks
- Orana Arts offers digital creative workshops for young people and schools
- Privately-run dance schools provide a variety of dance classes
- Gulgong Arts Council runs youth art competitions
- Regional shows provide an outlet for creative and agricultural skills
- Monthly community movies are held in the Mudgee Town Hall Theatre with one of every two monthly movies directed at the younger range of movie goers demographic, and the Youth Council supports movie nights once a term aimed solely at the youth.

MWRC is also involved in several creative initiatives including Waste 2 Art and Youth Week art and writing competitions. These projects are growing in popularity (with the creative writing competition jumping from fewer than 5 entries in 2016 to 25 entries in 2017). The MWRC – through the Mudgee branch of the library – also partners with the Mudgee Readers' Festival to run youth events, the aim of which is to expose the local community to the library facilities and develop literacy levels.

4. Community Consultation

4.1 Youth Forum

The MWRC Youth Forum – held on Monday 5 December 2016 – was designed to inform the development of the youth strategy. The input of young people is essential to the development of council initiatives and 52 people attended the forum to have their say in person. It is important to note that the forum was held at the Mudgee Town Hall and that young people of Kandos and Gulgong were not proportionately represented. The issues were broken down into categories, which young people could address:

- Economic
- Social
- Education
- Recreation/Culture
- Health

The ideas from the forum will strongly contribute to an ongoing youth strategy, with individual initiatives and specific action items. Two key questions were asked: what currently exists for young people within our region; and what can be done to make the region more attractive and engaging for young people?

4.2 Youth summary of resources currently existing in the region for them:

4.2.1 Economic

- Recruitment agencies, including Barnardos, Mission Australia and LINK
- Part time/casual work, with emphasis on hospitality
- Volunteer – including work experience – opportunities
- Trade-based employment, eg. in mining and agriculture
- Internet and public transport infrastructure (though spoken of critically)
- AREC/showgrounds
- Small business development opportunities
- Apprenticeships and TAFE courses

4.2.2 Social

- School support including counsellors and school socials
- Sport including swimming
- Parks, fishing and mountain biking
- Theatre including cinema/movies

- Shopping
- Library
- Youth Week
- PCYC
- Organisations such as the Samaritans and Barnardos
- Social Media
- Mudgee Show

4.2.3 Education

- Distance education and internet-based study
- Cadetships
- Traineeships
- Schools, including preschools, primary, high schools and TAFE
- Library
- Max Potential
- Lifeskills Plus
- Scouts
- School-based apprenticeship programs

4.2.4 Recreation + Culture

- PCYC
- Cudgegong Youth Theatre (performing arts) + dance centres
- Glen Willow Sports Facility, plus sporting groups and clubs
- Friends
- Art Schools, specifically The Mud Factory
- Bushwalks, including The Drip, National Parks, Avisford
- Church youth groups
- Natural aquatic features: Quarry, Windamere, Dunns Swamp
- Cirque M including bubble soccer
- Music including church choir/carols and school/town bands
- Restaurants
- Skate parks
- School sport
- Museum + Lands Council

4.2.5 Health

- Medical centres and mental health centre

- Compulsory health programs through schools
- Gyms and sporting clubs (including PCYC)
- Domestic violence awareness program (Love Bites)
- Hospital and pharmacies
- Doctors, dentists and physios
- Psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors (including anti-bullying programs)

4.3 Youth summary of what can be done to make the region more attractive and engaging for young people in the Mid-Western region:

4.3.1 Economic

- More scholarship/cadetship opportunities
- Better public transport across the region
- Affordable housing
- Employment opportunities
- Education on job seeking (including in-school programs)
- Youth employment officer
- Transport to get people to employment and TAFE

4.3.2 Social

- Youth music festivals
- Cinema
- Shopping mall/longer shopping hours
- Youth drop-in centre
- More frequent youth activities (outside of Youth Week)
- Better promotion of youth events (and targeting of youth by organisations such as Mudgee Tourism)
- Indoor pool

4.3.3 Education

- Wider range of TAFE courses and apprenticeships
- Establishing a university
- Directory of youth services and events
- Community information in prominent public spaces
- Late night library study opportunity in the library
- Greater youth engagement by Council

- Higher educational standards
- Driving school
- Accessible and affordable tutoring
- Funding for scholarships (for TAFE, dance and art opportunities)
- More accessible work experience placements

4.3.4 Recreation + Culture

- Better quality/more footpaths around residential areas
- Indoor recreation centre including pool, paintball, bowling alley, parkour, roller and ice skating and laser tag
- More public art displays
- High ropes course (including zip lining)
- Greater variety of cultural programs
- Youth Centre and/or family centre
- Cinema (or more frequent/better option screenings)
- Bike tracks

4.3.5 Health

- Access to specialist services (and visiting specialists)
- Larger hospital with better facilities
- More doctors and orthodontists
- Headspace (mental health service)
- Better information about seeking medical assistance privately (without parental intervention)
- More support for disadvantaged families (including foster care improvements and awareness-raising)
- Youth specific health workers and mentors
- Drop-in clinic

4.4 Have Your Say Campaign

From the *Have Your Say* campaign, devised to feed into the Towards 2030 Community Strategic Plan, the top five projects for under 20's (from 54 responses) are:

- Entertainment Centre
- Outdoor Water Park
- Create Town Squares
- Mudgee Hospital Upgrade
- University Campus

4.5 Postcard Survey

An informal survey – distributed via postcards – was conducted at primary and high schools across the region, which revealed anecdotal evidence via written feedback (from 385 under 20s) that supported the findings of the youth forum.

What young people love most about living in the region:

- sense of community and friendliness
- outdoor amenities such as pools, parks, nature access/walks, skate parks and sporting facilities
- access to eateries and shops

What young people would like to see improve in the region:

- More youth activities, including cinema, theatre, and retail shops
- Expansion of facilities to include flip out, slides and diving boards at all pools, more parks, better roads and indoor pool
- Greater sense of community through town centres

Additionally, multiple suggestions were received about the following:

- Slides at pools (and diving boards at Kandos)
- Indoor/heated pools for year-round use
- Skate park (Kandos/Lue)
- More youth activities for teens/young adults (holidays and after school)

5. Future Direction

5.1 Personnel

Council currently has allocated a \$25,000 budget plus possible infrastructure funds for youth based programs. There is scope for existing services to work together and for stronger Council support for current cultural and social resources. However, to pull this plan together in a sustainable way, the addition of a Youth Officer to the Council team is ideal – even essential.

Additional funding could be sourced externally, through grants and sponsorship, and these could be combined with financial support from Council. Plans have been developed that propose an additional staff position of a dedicated Youth Officer who would have primary responsibility for the following:

- Coordinating recreational/educational programs for children and young people;
- Seeking to engage with indigenous youth;
- Raising awareness amongst young people, their families and schools about resources and services available to them through the library;
- Developing and fostering partnerships and networks with other Council departments, youth agencies, community groups, schools and external organisations, including service providers and vendors;
- Developing an annual program of displays and events that reflect and appeal to young people;
- Coordinating youth-specific activities, including film nights, Youth Week activities (skatepark events, art and craft competitions, trivia nights, etc) and Youth Council meetings and representations to Council itself;
- Coordinating awareness training on youth-specific issues, such as job seeking, drug and alcohol awareness, sexual and mental health and suicide prevention;
- Providing support and referrals for youth-specific issues, such as job seeking, drug and alcohol awareness, sexual and mental health and suicide prevention;
- Representing Council staff in a variety of meetings, such as skatepark working parties, Rylstone Family Fun Day planning committees and Interagency;
- Pursuing alternate sources of funding for youth-related initiatives;
- Exploring, encouraging and supporting volunteering opportunities for local youth.

While the Youth Officer position may not be permanently funded at the early stage of the strategy, sponsorship would allow time for community outcomes to be established and documented, with the aim of funding a permanent position. This position would be a major resource for Council's ongoing youth engagement: developing projects, networks and co-ordinating resources between agencies.

It is anticipated that ongoing youth funding may be able to be sourced through Council funds and through external grant opportunities at a rate of approximately \$155,000 annually (in 2017/18 dollars). This could include the current allocation of \$25,000.

5.2 Infrastructure and Services

Other potential strategies are listed here, as responses to the Youth Forum and additional community feedback.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Communication of existing opportunities and resources	Public noticeboard dedicated to youth opportunities and information or development of social media profile targeting young people specifically (communications mentoring for Youth Council member to enhance Youth Council accounts)
Accessibility of events and services between towns within the region	Regular bus service between Kandos–Rylstone and Mudgee and Gulgong and Mudgee
Availability of life skills training	Seminars on life skills, in partnership with community organisations, administered by MRWC (outline below)
Lack of late night study space	Open the Mudgee branch of the MWRC Library one evening a week for additional hours (during peak study/exam times as a pilot program, with a view to expanding to Kandos and Gulgong)
Pool unavailable during winter	Investigate options for heating and enclosing pools: Kandos, Gulgong and Mudgee
Lack of youth activities	Host more activities outside of Youth Week (while still holding activities under the Youth Week NSW banner) – holding an event (movie night, talent show, bubble soccer, creative workshops etc) once each month or school holidays alternating towns in the region

5.3 Proposal: Life Skills Seminars

Many agencies and organisations offer services that engage with young people in social, creative and skills-based ways. MWRC is in a unique position to bring these services together in a bid to educate and connect with youth across the region.

Life skills seminars (under the banner of Your Life: Next Level) – could see MWRC partnering with local organisations such as Ride Mudgee, Mudgee Readers' Festival,

Barnardos, PCYC, Cudgegong Youth Theatre and more – to deliver practical skills and community connections to Mid-Western Region youth. Suggested sessions could include:

5.3.1 On Your Bike: Bike Maintenance (ages 11–16)

One hour workshop on the basics of caring for your bike – tires, brakes, chains. Learn the basic mechanics of your bicycle, become a more confident bike owner and get some hot tips on the best places to ride around the region.

5.3.2 Speak Up (ages 11–16)

Public speaking and meeting new people can be scary but there are ways to appear more confident. Learn how to talk to people and give speeches with confidence in this fun skills-building session.

5.3.3 Delicious and Nutritious (ages 11–16)

There is a lot of information out there about food and nutrition, but how do we make yummy and healthy food without much fuss and without spending too much money? Learn how to make some basic meals and snacks.

5.3.4 You're Hired: Writing Cover Letters and CVs (ages 16–25)

Whether you're looking for part-time work or applying for a traineeship, make the best possible impression on your future employer with this one-hour professional skills development session. Bring your drafts and your questions.

5.3.5 Know Your Finances (ages 16–25)

Learn the basics of looking after your own money, in this special session designed to help young people learn about spending, saving, budgeting, taxes and all that other fun financial business. Bring your questions and learn some tips for saving money for that big trip or investment.

5.3.6 Car Basics and Road Safety (ages 16–25)

Get under the hood with this practical session on car maintenance basics and road safety. Know your rights and responsibilities on the road.

5.3.7 Get Involved: Volunteering (ages 16–25)

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills, meet people and impress your future employers. Make connections with representatives from Gulgong Arts Council, Park Run Mudgee and the Kandos Museum and learn about how to get involved.

This program would be piloted in 2018, with options for community feedback on the topic of future seminars – ongoing youth consultation via the Youth Council or suggestion boxes in library youth rooms or social media is essential to

continued development of this program. It is clear from the Youth Forum that young people need to feel connected and consulted and this program is an immediate way to build confidence, skills and engagement, as well as foster interagency projects. It is also essential that this program operates across townships, communicating with schools and after-school programs in Gulgong and Kandos to ensure maximum impact.

In addition to this, there is also opportunity for MWRC to provide direct assistance to local youth through the provision of traineeships in order to boost work experience.

5.4 Implementation

The timeline below lays out the suggested solution across the ten years of this plan, allowing for consultation and analysis, and aligns each suggested outcome with the concerns outlined in the agenda: opportunities, connection and wellbeing.

YEAR	AGENDA	OUTCOME
2017-18	Social media strategy focused on youth outreach	Connecting young people to opportunities, improving wellbeing by highlighting health and social services
	Late night library study – once a week during exam/study time	Improves educational opportunities (and wellbeing by providing a safe space for study)
	Exploration options relating to heated pools/indoor facilities for Mudgee Pool	Develops wellbeing by encouraging year-round activity and exercise.
2017-18	Launch of Your Life: Next Level seminar series	Improve opportunities for young people by better equipping them with confidence and skills
2020-21	Public transport infrastructure developed between towns	Access to opportunities and connection between townships
2018-19	Establish youth activities once a month, rotating through townships	Enhances wellbeing through social opportunities and creative activities, provides connection with others in a safe space
2019-20	Upgrading of skate park/bike track facilities across the region	Develops wellbeing by providing space for exercise/meeting place/activity options
2020-21	Youth Forum	Fostering a connection between youth and their Council and giving young

		people a platform to voice feedback on the outcomes from the strategy and future development
2026	Evaluation of Youth Strategy + formulation of future strategy	
2027	Launch of the subsequent youth strategy: beyond 2030	

Key to this strategy is the ongoing nature of community engagement projects, as well as internal assessment and setting of future goals.

Evaluation and continuation are essential to maintaining a strong connection with the region’s young people and ongoing consultation will help a responsive Council to engage with an increasingly enthusiastic youth population. Evaluation needs to begin before the strategy timeline has concluded so that any shortcomings can be identified and explored.

It should also be emphasised that this strategy has the greatest chance of success if a Youth Officer position within MWRC is prioritised, as the management of resources across communities in our region and capacity to connect the various communities and organisations with each other requires a dedicated individual to support and advocate for our young people.

6. Additional Resource

The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2016-2019⁷ is a valuable resource for the development of youth programs and initiatives. The findings strongly support MWRC's own youth surveys:

6.1 Connection

Children and young people often raised a lack of things to do in their local area as a major issue – this is especially true for children and young people living in rural and regional areas. Young People said they wanted a single place to go online that had information on activities in their local areas.⁸

6.2 Opportunity

Limited work opportunities for young people were a major concern, particularly for young people in rural and regional areas, as were a lack of opportunities for work placements, work experience and apprenticeships, difficulties in gaining employment with no prior experiences and difficulties for students to find casual and part-time work.⁹

6.3 Wellbeing

Wellbeing refers to how people feel about their lives. A good society for children and young people is one where our social and economic activities deliver high-levels of sustainable wellbeing for all children and young people and health inequalities are reduced.¹⁰

⁷ <http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/plan>

⁸ page 16

⁹ page 20

¹⁰ page 22