

ACTivate: young people in NSW having a say



Introduction

This report provides information on the ACTivate project, a state wide youth consultation conducted by the Youth Action & Policy Association (YAPA) between May and December 2002. The report discusses how ACTivate was conducted by YAPA, who was consulted and summarises the issues raised by young people during consultations.

YAPA is the peak community group working in the interests of young people and youth services in NSW. YAPA strives to achieve social justice for young people, including the appropriate provision of services for young people.

The role of YAPA is to:

- Monitor and respond to government policies and proposals affecting young people.
- Promote and advocate on issues affecting young people and youth services.
- Bring young people and youth workers together to act on issues affecting them.
- Work to raise a positive profile of young people in the media and in the community.
- Provide training, forums and conferences to young people and youth workers.
- Provide information & referral.
- Produce a range of resources, publications and newsletters.

What ACTivate is all about

“It’s about giving those young people who don’t usually speak the loudest a chance to have their say.”

— ACTivate Youth Consultant

In preparation for the March 2003 State election YAPA decided to conduct consultations with young people across NSW. We wanted to be sure that we were representing the issues most important to young people and that young people from different areas in NSW, as well as different backgrounds and life experiences, were given an opportunity to have their say. The consultations focused on YAPA's State election campaign priorities of safety, transport and health. However, consultations also provided opportunities for young people to raise any other issues of importance to them.

The information gathered from young people has now been used in factsheets on health and safety produced by YAPA as part of our State Election Campaign Kit and to inform YAPA's election recommendations. Issues identified by young people through ACTivate are also raised when YAPA is discussing issues with NSW Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, department representatives and media.

Who conducted the consultations

YAPA advertised around NSW for young people to apply for positions as youth consultants to conduct the consultations. We felt that it was important that the young people being consulted felt comfortable speaking about issues that concerned them, and one of the best ways of doing this was to have other young people asking the questions. We also wanted to support the skills development of young people by employing and training them in consultation techniques.

In response to our advertisement for youth consultants we received applications from approx. 50 young people. 14 young people were chosen as the successful applicants by a panel of three and were then employed as casual YAPA employees. In making our decision we tried to make sure there were young people from a diversity of backgrounds, life experiences and ages. We did not make our decision based only on people's past experience, achievements or skills.

In May 2002 we held a training day for the 14 youth consultants. These young people came from Western Sydney, Wollongong, Gosford and Newcastle. At this training day the young people were provided with the opportunity to get to know each other and were trained in



Youth consultants at the ACTivate training day

consultation methods and media interviewing techniques.

During the 7 months of the ACTivate project the majority of the youth consultants conducted at least two consultations in different parts of NSW.

Many of the youth consultants will continue to be provided with opportunities by YAPA, either representing YAPA on committees, at conferences or speaking with the media on youth issues.

Who we consulted with

“Young people are a diverse group of people with diverse opinions that need to be heard.”

— ACTivate Youth Consultant

Between May and December 2002 we consulted with approx. 500 young people aged 12 to 25 years old. Young people were accessed through youth services and at youth events. These young people came from a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences. Some attended school, TAFE, University, worked full-time, were unemployed or looking for work. We spoke to Aboriginal young people, young people from non-English speaking backgrounds, young parents, gay and lesbian young people and young people with disabilities.

Where we went to consult

Marginal seats or areas of interest for the State election were chosen by YAPA as priority areas for consultations. We also conducted consultations during YAPA policy forums and at youth events where young people from many different parts of NSW attended. Consultations were held in the following locations:

- YAPA’s Families and Relationships Policy Forum in Sydney during May 2002.
- YAPA’s Mudgee Rural Youth Issues Policy Forum, Mudgee Youth Café, Mudgee High School and Mudgee PCYC and with Dubbo Youth Council during July 2002.
- Kariong Youth Centre and Regional Youth Support Service, Gosford in July 2002.
- Cabramatta Community Centre, Wentworthville Youth Services and Eagle RAPS in Doonside (Western Sydney) during September 2002.
- WISE UP, YAPA’s Western Sydney Youth Conference in October 2002.
- Livid Music Festival in Sydney during October 2002.
- YAPA’s Mental Health Policy Forum in Wollongong and at Wollongong Youth Services during October 2002.

- Harbour Youth Service in Coffs Harbour, House of Youth in Kempsey, Greater Taree Youth Advisory Committee and Grafton New School of Arts in November 2002.
- Baileys Place Youth Service, Goulburn in December 2002.

How we consulted

In organising the consultations YAPA staff contacted local services in each area and worked with youth workers to gather a group of young people together to consult.

Consultations were conducted informally with young people through group discussions. YAPA’s youth consultants developed a list of questions at the training day in May, which were used to guide consultations. These questions were intended to promote discussion on issues young people were facing as well as encourage young people to make recommendations to address these issues. YAPA staff attended all consultations to provide support and record notes.

Consultations ranged from groups of 5 to 15 young people. Consultations at the Livid Music Festival were conducted from a stall where young people visiting were asked to fill in written surveys and take part in tape recorded interviews.

What young people said

Throughout the consultations young people shared many different perspectives and issues of concern with us. However, there were a number of issues young people raised that were similar no matter where we went, or who we spoke to.

In discussing issues and providing ideas to address these issues, most young people stressed that the issues facing young people are all related. A lack of entertainment and recreational opportunities for young people can lead to drug and alcohol abuse, which can lead to mental health issues and/or homelessness. Young people said that it is not about just finding a solution to one issue but looking at all the issues and how they can be addressed together.

Young people wanted to feel a part of the communities they lived in and wanted to improve relationships with older people, families, police, doctors and youth services. There was also a feeling amongst young people that the NSW Government had a large part to play in fostering these relationships through providing funding and support for programs that improved young people’s lives.

Young people were asked about the types of public transport they access, how much it costs them to use public transport and barriers that exist to accessing public transport.

Transport

For most young people public transport is important, as it is their main means of getting around. It is how they get to school, TAFE, University, work, go shopping, visit friends and family and go out. Young people also mentioned the environmental benefits of having a good public transport system as being important to them.

Many young people thought transport was ok sometimes and not so good other times. As one young person said, "...sometimes the service is great, sometimes the service is shitty." Young people had many criticisms regarding public transport including cost, reliability and safety.

Concessions

The issue most raised by young people was concessions. There was much confusion surrounding who was eligible for concession fares, how to get a concession card and when you could use a concession card.

Young people who lived in areas where there was no government run public transport had much more difficulty accessing concession fares than those living in the city where there were government buses and trains. Non-government buses don't provide the same level of concessions as government services, thus disadvantaging young people who live outside Sydney. For example, young people who attend TAFE full-time are not able to use their TAFE concession cards on the weekend when using non-government buses, whereas they can get concessions all the time on government buses and trains. Between different bus companies the different policies on when young people could use concession cards was unclear and even between different bus drivers in the same company. Young people felt that it would be a much more simple and fairer system if access to concessions was consistent across both government and non-government public transport. Some young people consulted said they had 3 different concession cards for each bus company they used.

Many young people who were eligible for concessions, such as those receiving Youth Allowance, did not know they were eligible and were paying full fare on public transport. They said that the Centrelink Officer had not told them they were eligible. Other young people who attended TAFE and were also eligible for a concession card on non-government buses said that it was a hassle to get a concession card. They said it involved filling in too many forms, sometimes having to pay money and having to go and see all different people, including the bus company and the TAFE administration office.

In some areas bus companies have developed schemes where young people can receive concessions all the time, young people thought these schemes were a good idea. However, some young people said that it was a hassle to get these concession cards because you have to apply for it and pay a fee. Many young people were just not aware of where to go to get a concession card. Again, young people said that there should be one concession card for all public transport, government and non-government and this card is automatically given to you when you enrol in school, TAFE, university, etc.

Young people under 16 years of age said that bus drivers sometimes believed they were older and therefore charged them full fare, even though they are entitled to a half fare. These young people have no identification to prove their age and suggested that all young people should automatically receive a travel identification card with a photo and their age on it when they reached high school.

Another issue raised by young people who were receiving Youth Allowance or Newstart payments from Centrelink was having their concession card taken away from them when breached by Centrelink. This means that young people who are already earning very little and who have had their payment reduced are further punished by having their concession card taken away and thus having to pay full fare to travel. These young people must also continue to fulfil their mutual obligation requirements, such as attending interviews.

Young people who were apprentices, trainees and worked casually said it was unfair that they were not able to access concession fares, despite the fact that they earned very



Youth Consultant, Shannon, with young people at the Coffs Harbour consultation

little. Some young people pointed out the unfairness in giving retired people who are not on low incomes and can afford to pay for public transport, discount fares such as the \$2.20 pensioner excursion ticket which entitles them to all day travel on government public transport in the Sydney metropolitan region.

Cost

For many young people the high cost of transport was a significant issue and barrier to them using public transport more regularly. When young people were asked about how they would improve public transport, the majority said they would make it more affordable, particularly for low income earners.

Young people said that if you have to use public transport all the time, more than twice a day, it gets too expensive. Many young people said that because of the high cost they just don't buy tickets on trains, particularly if they are only going a few stops and doing this a few times a day. One young person said that because the cheapest train fare is \$1.10 it costs too much if you are getting on and off the train.

Many young people said that the high cost of public transport was a deterrent to getting a job or keeping one. This was particularly the case for young people who worked part-time on weekends and couldn't use concession cards in some instances. One young person said that he had to do some volunteer work as part of his TAFE course but couldn't afford the bus fare to do it where he wanted. He was therefore forced to do the volunteer work closer to where he lived, but it was not really what he wanted to do and he didn't enjoy it.

Another issue young people raised concerning cost of public transport were fines. A lot of young people we spoke to said that they had received fines on trains for having invalid tickets. One young person said that he had received a fine for using a concession card when he was not supposed to, but that used it because didn't have enough money to pay full fare.

Service levels

"Transport is shit – you can never rely on it. It's always late."

— Young person at Livid

For young people living in regional and rural areas the lack of public transport was a significant issue as only non-government buses service most of these areas. In contrast, young people who lived in the inner city said that public transport was great – it came regularly and was easy to use. Young people living in regional and rural areas



Young people at YAPA's Families and Relationships Forum in Sydney during May

relied on parents and friends to drive them around and most couldn't wait for the day when they were able to drive and could afford to buy their own car. In some towns young people don't use public transport, apart from buses to and from school, because it just doesn't go where they want to go. This is particularly an issue on weekends and school holidays when young people want to use public transport to go to work, access entertainment, recreation or visit friends. In some rural areas the school bus is the only form of public transport so that outside of school times there is no way to get around. As a result, most young people either walk or use their bicycles, skateboards or scooters and then get in trouble for riding on the footpath or road. These journeys can also involve long distances along dangerous and busy roads.

In rural areas often young people drive without a licence, load lots of people in a car or drink and drive because there is no other way to get around. In rural areas young people spoke about the high number of car accidents involving young people, most had known, or known of, someone who had been in a serious or fatal car accident. Young people felt that improving public transport was one way to reduce these accidents and risk taking behaviour amongst young people.

Young people also said that services from small towns to larger cities were very limited, so that they could not get out of their local area without having to rely on someone to give them a lift. The cost and number of stops was also a barrier to young people using these intercity services.

Another issue young people raised was that transport was unreliable. Young people said that catching connecting trains or buses was difficult because public transport was often late. Young people who catch trains said that regular track work on weekends makes it difficult to get to work and go out on weekends, the time when most young people use public transport. Many young people said that

sometimes it was quicker to drive and so that if they had a car or when they get one they will drive everywhere rather than catch public transport.

The irregularity of transport was an issue for young people. Some spoke about how they had to wait for 1/2 hour at a bus stop for a 1/2 hour or less trip. Young people also said that the connection between trains and buses was not very good in some areas, meaning that you have to wait around a long time between them, particularly at night. At night young people said that in many areas there was no public transport, so they must walk home if there is nobody to drive them.

The state of trains and buses was another issue young people raised about public transport. Many felt that public transport was always dirty with graffiti, food scraps, rubbish, etc. in carriages and on buses. This deterred young people from using public transport and contributed to the feeling that the government doesn't really care about public transport, therefore why should any commuter.

Transport staff

Many young people said that bus drivers were mean to young people and suggested that transport staff should be friendlier and undertake training in communication skills and dealing with young people. Staff at train stations were seen by young people as being unhelpful and many young people didn't understand the roles of the various inspectors and officers on trains.

Young people also said that ticket inspectors targeted them, particularly young men from particular cultural backgrounds. Young people said that ticket inspectors were really strict with them, issuing fines for having their feet on the seats, etc., but letting older people "get away with it." They felt that the overall negative perceptions of young people within the community largely influenced the way that transport staff treated them.



Youth Consultant, Scott, interviewing at Livid

Community transport

Most young people said there was no community transport for them as there was for older people in their local area. In areas where there was community transport available young people said that they never had the opportunity to access it or didn't know about it. Young people said it would be good if youth services were able to access community transport to take them to and from events. In some areas youth services organised U18s events for young people but as there is often no public transport to get home, young people don't go.

Young people also spoke about safety on public transport, what young people had to say about it is in the next section on safety.



Youth Consultant, Shannon, with young people at Grafton

Safety

We asked young people what made them feel safe and unsafe in different areas of their lives. We also asked about the relationships between young people and police or security guards.

Police

“They [police] assume that because you did something wrong before, you will always be like that, but people change. All young people make mistakes.”

— Young person from Gosford

“They need to start looking out for us, not looking for us.”

— Young person from Mudgee

The majority of young people said that they have had no contact with police, either because they’ve never done anything wrong or they just don’t see them in their local area. Young people said that there weren’t enough police around when you needed them, but that during the middle of the day or when no trouble was happening they are everywhere targeting young people and asking them to move on.

Many young people said that they feel safer when police are around and would like to see more police on the streets. Young people recognised that if you show respect to police you will receive it back and this had been their experience. Unfortunately, some young people reported that police and security guards — those whose job it is to protect them and provide community safety — actually make them feel less safe. Young people are often the target of repeated police attention such as stopping, questioning, searching or moving them on. Police tend to target young people who they have already had contact with, such as homeless people, those hanging around in a group, or people of particular racial or ethnic backgrounds, especially young Aboriginal men and people who look a certain way (eg skaters, punks or wearing baggie clothes). Some young people felt that police can’t do much and that they don’t make them feel safe because there are so many people who are not afraid of the police and will do whatever they want.

Some young people felt that the police Youth Liaison Officers (YLOs) treat young people with more respect. However, some felt that other police generally have a negative attitude towards young people, ignoring young peoples rights and even inciting them to react negatively.

Young people also said it was difficult for young people, particularly young women, to report a crime to police as often they are not believed. This is particularly the case when it is an assault by another young person. It is also difficult as young people feel that they are being “dobbers” and will be further targeted by the person who committed the crime against them.

Security guards

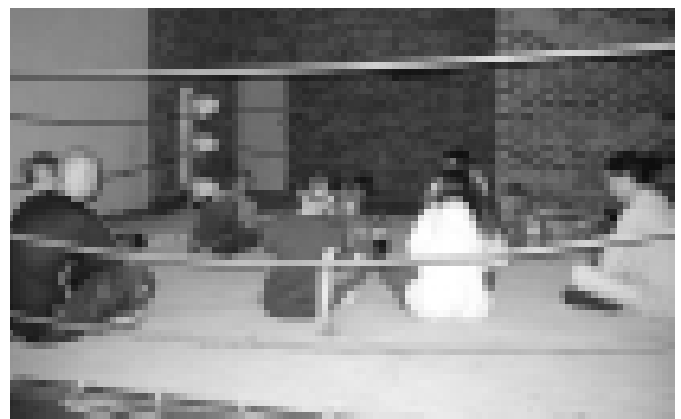
Although some young people noted that there were some good security guards at shopping centres they frequented, this was a rare occurrence. Like police, young people felt that security guards tend to have stereotypes about young people and target those who look or dress a particular way.

Young people spoke about how some security guards will not let groups of four or more into shops, or if young people sit down for more than 5 minutes they will ask them to leave.

Young people were confused about the powers of security guards and often when they challenged how security guards treated them got into more trouble.

Many young people suggested that both police and security guards needed to receive more training on working with young people and communication skills. This training should be part of their initial training as well as ongoing.

Young people wanted more information on their rights in relation to police, including reporting crimes. They said that there was not enough taught at schools on what your rights are and the roles of different police officers and security guards.



Consultation with young people in Taree

On the streets

“No [I don’t feel safe in my local area] because I am a girl and we get harassed all the time.”

— Young person at Livid

Young people hang out on the streets and in public places because often there is nowhere else for them to go. It is simply an affordable and accessible past time. Public places are also an ideal place to meet up with friends and make new friends. Many studies have found that hanging out with their friends can be beneficial to young people’s wellbeing. It is an opportunity for young people to talk about their problems and find and give support to each other. Young people said that they feel safe when they are with a group of friends. They also said that being familiar with the area and knowing the people around made them feel safe.

Generally, young people said that they felt safe walking around the streets and in their local areas, but not at night. Young women in particular said that they would not walk around their local areas at night. Feeling unsafe at night was put down partly to a lack of adequate street lighting in areas. In addition, some young people commented that certain suburbs are not safe at night. Some young people said that they often have to stay out at night because there is no way to get home. Young people said that while many older people think that they are the ones causing trouble, it is often adults or drug users who make younger people feel unsafe.

In areas targeted by the media as being high in crime, young people felt unsafe and concerned about where they lived. In small towns any violent incident has a large impact on young people and how safe they feel.

Young people suggested that there needs to be more entertainment and recreation facilities for young people so that they are not walking around the streets all the time and getting into trouble.

Safety on public transport

Young people were concerned about the lack of safety on public transport, particularly on trains. They reported that being around more people made them feel safer on trains. Some said that they preferred it when train carriages were shortened and everyone is in a few carriages. Most young people said they wouldn’t use public transport at night because they felt unsafe. While many acknowledged that buses were generally safer than trains, the fact that they often don’t operate at night, are more expensive to catch and take longer, meant that young people would not use them.

Many young people reported being victims of violence on trains. One young male spoke about how he was threatened on the train by a group of older males who took his mobile phone and wallet and nobody else in the carriage did anything. The security guards came a while later, but the offenders had already gotten off the train.

Generally, young people felt that there needed to be more security on public transport. However, as was stated in the discussion on transport staff, a number of young people commented that transport staff are often unhelpful and do not help you when you need it. It was also noted that security guards often do not move through the trains frequently enough. Many young people commented that security guards often spend their time chatting to young women rather than doing their jobs. Young people said that security guards are slow in coming to help on the trains, the help points are sometimes not working or are difficult to hear through. As was the situation above, by the time the security guards arrive, it is too late for them to do anything.

At home

Young people commented that sometimes home is the least safe place and that often neighbours do not call the police if they hear incidents of domestic violence. Young people feel safe in their homes when their families make them feel safe.

At school

Young people reported that bullying at school was a big concern. Many said that they did not know if their schools had any complaint mechanisms and did not know who they could talk to about being bullied. Young people were also concerned about some teachers behaving inappropriately, particularly with regard to sexual advances made towards young people.

At work

Many young people we spoke to worked in customer service positions and reported that customers often abuse them. Some young people said that they not given adequate training and support from their employers. Young women were particularly concerned about sexual harassment in the workplace and recommended that every employee and employer should be provided with information about harassment and workers’ rights.

Young people were asked about the most important health issues for them and what they felt needed to be done to address these issues. They were also asked what makes a good health service and what are some of the barriers for young people in accessing health services.

Some of the most important health issues raised by young people were:

Sexual health

Many young people felt that they did not have enough information about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Equally, young people said that they would like more information about safe sex practices, making the right decisions and sexuality.

Drugs and alcohol

Many young people said that drugs, such as cannabis, ecstasy, speed and heroin are readily available in their local areas and easy to buy if they want them. Peer and social pressures meant that young people were starting to smoke, drink and take drugs when they got into high school. Young people were generally concerned about this and felt that information on the effects of drugs needed to be taught early on, preferably in primary school. They said that they received information and education about alcohol and cannabis, but little information is provided about other drugs. Some felt that this lack of information and the illegality of some drugs might lead to unsafe practices.

Some young people recommended that there should be more support services for young drug users, rather than treating them as criminals. Young people in regional and rural areas said that there were not youth specific services such as detoxification and rehabilitation services, which meant that young people were forced to travel for such services or help themselves.

Teenage pregnancy and homelessness

Both young women and young men were concerned about teenage pregnancy and the potential of being kicked out of home as a result. Equally young people were concerned about homelessness and the effects of being homeless on young people's physical, emotional, and mental health.

Mental health

Young people were concerned about mental health issues, including depression and suicide, but also body image, self esteem and eating disorders particularly amongst young women.

Depression was raised a number of times by young people as being something that most young people go through. They felt that pressures at school, family problems, friends, thinking about their future and what was happening in the world were all issues that can make a young person really depressed. Young people said that depression amongst young people needs to be taken more seriously by the community and that it is not just “teenage angst” or “moodiness”.

Suicide was particularly an issue for young people in rural and regional areas. The majority of young people we spoke to who lived in small towns knew at least one young person who had committed suicide. Some young people spoke of the feeling of being trapped in the town in which they live. They said that they felt so overwhelmed by boredom and pressures from those around them and unlike in large cities there isn't really anywhere to go to escape or anyone different to talk to about how they are feeling. In some areas access to affordable, ongoing counselling for young people was very limited. Young people were able to see someone for a short period of time for specific issues, but after that were “left alone to deal with their problems.”

Young people felt that more information needed to be available to both young people and the broader community about mental health issues so that there is more understanding of the issue.

“Young people need to be given more input in the creation of policies on these issues.”

— Young person from Western Sydney

What makes a good health service

Young people wanted health services that are free, confidential, welcoming and where they don't have to wait too long. The health services young people said that they liked were those specifically for young people, where there were youth workers, counsellors and health care workers, such as doctors. They said that often health services are not youth specific or youth friendly. Health services can be very clinical and focus on treatment options rather than prevention options. Young people said they would like to

see more focus on information and prevention. Given the option many girls and young women prefer to see a female doctor, however, they are often not available, particularly in regional or rural areas.

Accessing services

Some young people reported that it is easy to get access to health related information, but only if you know where to go in the first place. Young people are not always aware of what health services exist and what types of services are available. Young people need more information about these services and they recommended that this information should be presented in ways that appeal to young people, not just pamphlets. It was suggested that some strategies that work well are funky pocket size info packs being handed out at youth events and on educational campuses. Articles and information in magazines that young people read were also seen as being a good way to provide information.

However, even if young people have information on where they need to go, if the person they need to see is not appropriate, young people won't use the service. Many young people said they don't go to doctors unless "it is really bad" and even then they will go to the emergency ward at their local hospital or a medical centre, rather than going to a GP. The attitudes of doctors and other health professionals were considered very important by young people. Young people preferred doctors who spent time to talk and explain things simply to those who had a very clinical approach.

Young people also spoke about the importance of being able to trust the person they were seeing. Many young people said that they trust youth workers they see regularly and that is why they feel comfortable talking about their problems with a youth worker, rather than someone they don't know. Young people at school said that they would like to see the School Counsellor, but were concerned about confidentiality. Many young people

told of incidents where the School Counsellor had told their personal information to another teacher. Young people wanted to have professionally trained Counsellors in schools.

Cost of services

Young people identified cost as one of the primary barriers to accessing health services. Particularly in regional and rural areas where few services exist, there are few doctors and health services that offer bulk billing. Young people generally have less disposable income and are therefore adversely affected by this trend because they can not afford to see doctors who do not bulk bill.

Young people recommended that Medicare cards should be automatically distributed to all young people on their fifteenth birthday. They felt that this would encourage young people to think about health issues as well as being able to afford them.

Rural health services

Confidentiality in health services was a serious concern for all young people, particularly for young people in rural and regional areas. It is not the doctors that young people are worried about, as most know that doctors have to keep their information confidential, but the nurses, receptionists or other people in the waiting room. It is difficult for young people to visit their doctor without feeling like everyone will know about it. One young person in Mudgee said, "the local health service is run by my mate's mum."

Young people in rural areas also said that there is a lack of resources in their areas. Specialist visits are few and far between and they are not always available in an emergency. Long distance transportation for hospital treatment is often necessary even for minor operations.



Young people from Mudgee High School

Other Issues

Apart from the three issues young people were specifically asked about, many other issues were raised during these consultations:

Entertainment and Recreation

“There’s nothing to do. I just sit at home and do nothing.”

— Young person in Mudgee

Young people, in both the city and rural towns said there was nothing for young people to do where they lived. Young people said that while it may seem like there is a lot to do, such as go to the movies, shopping, go to restaurants, see bands, etc., these all cost money that they did not have. Many young people said that they hang out in the local mall or shopping centre because it costs nothing and it’s where they can meet up with all their friends. However, young people reported being constantly moved on by security guards in shopping centres so that they then had nowhere else to go.

Many young people spoke of boredom and the impacts this can have on young people. They said that they use drugs or drink alcohol on weekends because “there is nothing else to do.” Or, they get into trouble with the police for walking around the streets and getting involved in destructive behaviour such as graffiti vandalism.

Most young people said that there was a need for places for young people to hang out and get together that are free, such as drop-in youth centres. Young people wanted recreation based centres with space to hang out in, things to do such as indoor and outdoor games, computers with internet access, art and organised programs. They also said that youth centres should be opened on weekends and later after hours.

Youth Participation

Young people wanted more say on issues that affected them and more input into how to address these issues, at all levels of government. Many young people said that there were local youth councils in their areas, but they were often not taken seriously by the community.

A common story demonstrating how youth participation operates in reality is that told by young people in many consultations – the construction of a local skate park. Young people and youth workers lobby for the local council to build a skate park, which the council is generally supportive of. A committee of young people is

formed to advise on where the park should be built and what it should look like. The committee would give their advice, a designer would be employed and the skate park built. However, this would sometimes take many years, where the skate park is built and the final design will be very different to that suggested by the committee.

In the end the skate park ends up being built away from public transport and the centre of town, where young people can not access it easily and the design is not good for skating or riding. As a result the park is rarely used and becomes an unsafe place for young people to hang out at. Then older people and councils criticise young people, saying “we build something for young people, but they don’t use it, they are ungrateful” and nothing else is provided for young people in that area by council.

Perceptions of Young People

“Not all young people smoke, drink, take drugs or vandalise.”

— Young person at Livid

Most young people felt that older people had negative attitudes towards young people and that these influenced



Young person at Livid

much of what the broader community felt towards young people. One Aboriginal young person in Western Sydney said “older white people just ignore me, they look the other way when they see me in the street”.

The way that young people are presented in the media was also an issue for many young people. They said that local newspapers often feature negative articles about young people. One young person said that it newspapers must think, “young people never read the newspaper, so it’s an opportunity to bag them [young people] out”. Articles usually feature young people as vandals, hanging around causing trouble or being anti-social behaviour. Young people said that they are not given any opportunity to have input into articles, even though they would like to and often try to.

Young people said that decision-makers and the community need to make efforts to understand young people and take youth cultures more seriously. They need to understand that being young isn’t just a transient stage that everyone goes through, as there will always be young people and youth cultures in our communities.

Employment

Employment was particularly an issue for young people living in rural and regional areas. Young people we spoke to wanted more career opportunities in rural towns, so that they did not have to move away from their town to study or find work. In small regional and rural towns most young people leave to go to tertiary education and then get jobs in those places and don’t come back, putting the future of these towns at risk. Young people who wanted to work said that finding a job when you have no experience was really difficult and its often “who you know, not what you know.”

Some young people spoke about the difficulty of getting a job when you come from a certain area. Young people in Cabramatta in Western Sydney felt they were being discriminated against by employers in areas outside of Cabramatta, because the media portrayed such a negative image of Cabramatta.

Young people also said they needed more information on their rights in the workplace, particularly in regard to apprenticeships and traineeships where employers often take advantage of young people. One young person from Gosford who was doing an apprenticeship in the hospitality industry said that he was paid \$210/week for 60 hours of work. He quit his job because the pay was not enough to support him. Young people wanted information on their rights to be easy to find and presented in a simple way.

Education

Many young people spoke about large class sizes and overworked teachers in public schools and the impacts this had on their learning. There was a strong feeling that public education was underfunded compared to private schools. Young people also believed strongly in free tertiary education.

A number of young people said that school doesn’t cater for young people who learn in different ways, are not interested in going to university or have other interests such as art. They felt that schools needed to be more flexible and provide for the diversity of interests and skills young people have. Young people felt that schools that cater for young people who don’t fit into the mainstream are really important. Young people who were attending alternative educational institutes spoke about how much they enjoyed this and were benefiting compared to when they went to a large public school where they felt “lost in the system.”



Youth Consultants, Rey and Wayde

Conclusion

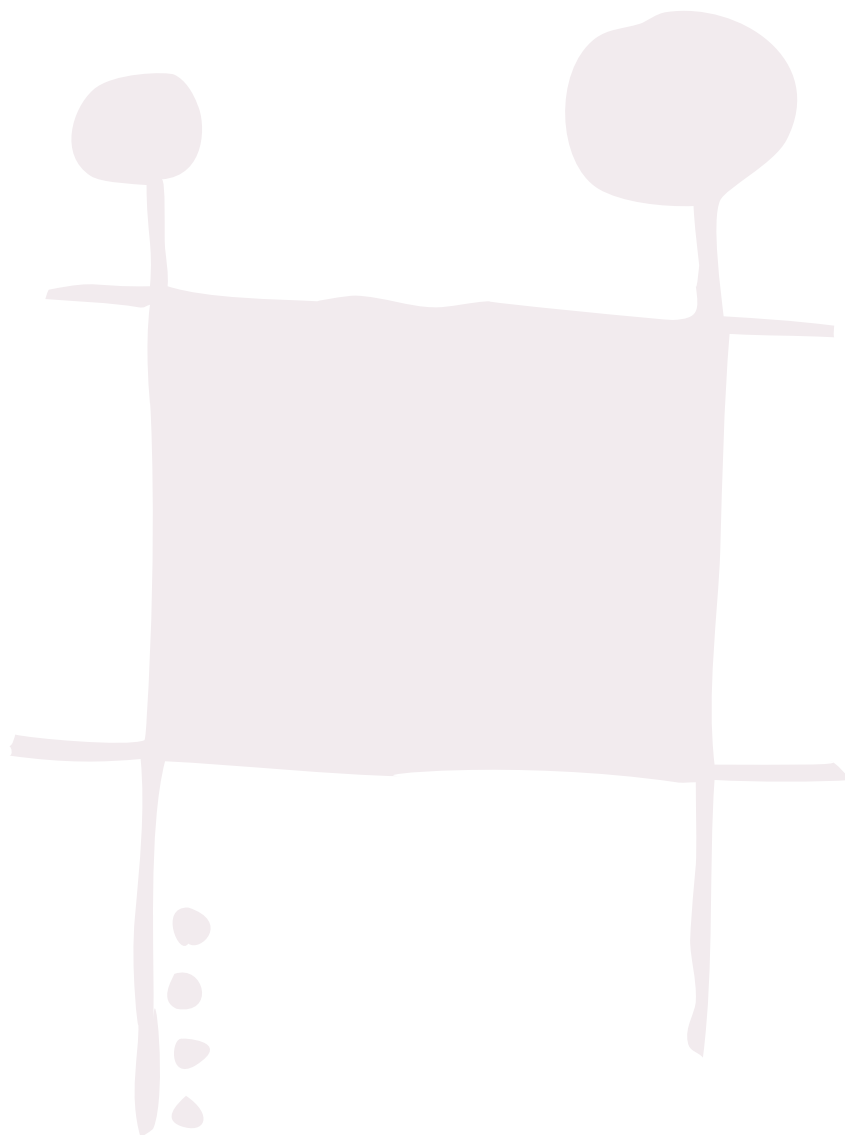


Youth Consultant, Rob, at YAPA's Livid stall

YAPA would like to thank all the young people we spoke with and the youth workers who organised consultations and supported young people to attend.

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The information contained in this report will continue to be used by YAPA in our work to achieve social justice for young people in NSW.



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