

Take action now on Crime - Keep Young People Safe

During 2002 YAPA conducted extensive consultations with young people across NSW as part of a project called ACTivate. ACTivate involved the training and employment of fourteen young people from to conduct consultations with other young people from across NSW.¹ The youth consultants went to local areas with YAPA staff and talked with young people about three important issues for young people: safety, transport, and health.

Much of the feedback about safety focused on the importance of relationships. Young people's safety and their perceptions of safety are greatly influenced by the quality of the relationships they have with a range of people such as friends, parents, family, teachers, police, security and the general community.

The consultations stressed the need to build a sense of connection between young people and the broader community, and the positive benefits that this can have for young people.

We asked young people what made them feel safe and unsafe in different areas of their lives.

What makes young people feel unsafe?

- Violence
- Bullying
- Not being able to be with their friends
- Not having support from adults
- Being treated unfairly
- Lack of respect
- Not being taken seriously
- Not being listened to

What makes young people feel safe?

- Being with friends
- Supportive relationships with adults
- Having people they can talk to and turn to for help
- Fairness - being treated equally
- Being treated with respect
- Being taken seriously
- Having their views heard

When we think of safety and crime in public places, we sometimes think of the elderly as likely victims and perhaps the young as likely offenders. However, it is people between 15-24 years of age who are most

likely to be the victim of a crime. People aged 65 and over are in fact the least likely to be the victim of a personal crime. In 1999, 10% of all young people experienced a crime against their person, whereas, in the same year only 1% of the elderly population experienced a personal crime.

Police

Many young people reported that they feel safer when police are around and would like to see more police on the streets. 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 - stopping, questioning, searching or moving them on. Police tend to target young people who they have already had contact with, homeless people, people of particular racial or ethnic backgrounds - especially young Aboriginal men, and people who look a certain way (eg wearing 'homie' clothes).

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

One young person commented that "[Police] need to start looking out for us, not looking for us."

Security guards

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

Often security guards will not let groups of four or more into shops, or if you sit down for more than 5 minutes they will ask you to leave.

Staying Safe on the streets

Young people reported that they often feel more unsafe at night - this was particularly the case for young women. 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 reported that they often have to stay out at night because there is no way to get home. Local safety committees are generally aimed at businesses and tend not to have the interests of young people as a priority.

Staying Safe 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.

Staying Safe on transport

Young people are big users of public transport, and they tend to walk more than older people do. Safety on trains, at stations and bus stops, and on the streets are important concerns for young people.

Young people 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. However, 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 and many young people commented that train guards are often sleazy with girls, and try to chat them up.

Staying Safe at school

Young people reported that bullying at school was a big concern. They were also concerned about some teachers behaving inappropriately, particularly with regard to sexual advances made towards young people.

Staying Safe at work

Young people reported that they are often abused by customers and not awarded adequate support from their employers. Young women were particularly concerned about sexual harassment in the workplace and many recommended that every employee and

employer should be provided with information about harassment and workers' rights.

YAPA recommends that:

1. The NSW Government develop strategies to address negative community perceptions of young people. This includes more training for police, security guards and community workers in working with and managing young people in public and private spaces, negotiation and communication skills.
2. The NSW Government and NSW Police ensure that adequate support is provided to young people who are victims of abuse/crime.
3. The NSW Government and NSW Police place an emphasis on diversionary programs from the criminal justice system.
4. Young people are included in local safety committees and safety audits and are involved in the design of public space and new estates.
5. The NSW Government ensures that appropriate and accessible accommodation for young homeless people is provided – particularly for young mothers, young people with alcohol and other drug issues, and young people with a mental health illness. Safe and secure housing is a basic human right.
6. The NSW Government increase support for family and parenting programs.
7. The NSW Government strengthen anti-bullying strategies in schools.

Take Action Now on Safety for Young People

- If you would like to support the campaign for *safer communities for young people* write to your local State MP, relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers outlining your concerns and case studies. See the Take Action Now – Contacts Sheet contained in this Campaign Kit.
- Meet with your local MP.
- Talk with the local media and/or write a letter to the editor.

¹ Consultations were conducted in Sydney, Western Sydney, Wollongong, Gosford, Mudgee, Dubbo, Goulburn, Grafton, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Kempsey and Taree.



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