



12th December 2016

Media Release – Keep Youth Services Local

Tonight, Wollongong City Council will consider the Future Directions for Youth Services. The recommendation is for Council to cease to fund community organisations to deliver place-base community responsive programs and instead deliver all services from a centrally located Youth Centre. However, the Council paper, and the Report on the Youth Services Review do not provide enough evidence to support a complete dismantling of the current system.

The report clearly indicates “the youth services program is largely providing programs that cultivate the conditions necessary to promote social capital outcomes (e.g. young people feeling safe, feeling like they have a say)”.

“We would therefore contest that some NYP providers are doing an excellent job.” CEO of the Illawarra Forum, Nicky Sloan said “In these cases, we would be apprehensive about the impact on the young people who rely on these services, should they be withdrawn. We are also concerned about the impact on the social capital and social cohesion within vulnerable communities, as the withdrawal of funding may jeopardise the organisation, resulting in the loss not only of the current program, but also of a valuable community asset.”

“Small place-based organisations are closely connected to their communities, have strong understanding of community need, and are able to quickly.” Said Ms Sloan “These organisations play an important role in building community cohesion and capacity”

It couldn't be more evident than from feedback from young people who took part in recent activities run by Port Kembla Youth Project:

“I really got a lot out of being involved – like how to deal with pressure, and stand up for my rights”

“I have learnt so many things, and have created bonds”

“I'm more confident in myself... I felt as if I finally belonged somewhere.”

The Illawarra Forum recommends the current model be continued for a further 12 months for those services being delivered effectively by contracted service providers, which would allow time for the outcome of the FACS Targeted Earlier Intervention Program reform to be released.

“A 12 month extension of the program would also provide a valuable opportunity for WCC to test the effectiveness of both models, and enable development of a more efficient and effective outcomes framework.” Ms Sloan said

In this way, Wollongong Youth Services could deliver services per model A to Bellambi, Warrawong, and Kemblawarra, and outcomes could be compared with those of the contracted services delivered in Port Kembla, Berkeley, Cringila, Helensburgh and Dapto/Koonawarra.

This would enable Council staff to make more informed recommendations about the future of the Youth Work Program, and give Councillors empirical data to assist decision making.

The added value of the extension is that it would give the opportunity for Council to undertake a co-design process for the development of future youth services, which would give young people an authentic voice in developing services which meet their needs.

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