



**Youth Advisory Council
New South Wales**

SUBMISSION TO:

**NATIONAL CONVERSATION
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS
NOVEMBER 2009**

**WITH FOCUS ON
TOPIC FOUR: CORE PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

ABOUT THE NSW YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Youth Advisory Council (the Council) is set up by an Act of NSW Parliament, the *Youth Advisory Council Act 1989*. The Council is made up of 12 members from across NSW. The Council's role is to advise the Government of NSW, through the Minister for Youth, on matters of concern to young people and Government policies and programs concerning young people.

CORE PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

KEY ISSUES

The Council welcomes all opportunities for young people to direct decision making which impacts on their lives. Young people need to be central in planning for their future, positioning young people as the solution rather than the problem. The Council considers that the Core Priorities for Action, outlined in the National Conversation Discussion Paper Towards a *National Strategy for Young Australians*, as positioning young people as a problem to be solved. Written within such a paradigm, issues important and relevant to the majority of young people will not be adequately addressed.

Development of a *National Strategy for Young People* offers a unique opportunity for young people to direct future youth policy. Many young people have not heard about the National Conversation towards a *National Strategy for Young Australians*, which raises concerns about the methods of information distribution utilised. Promotion and consultation primarily through the internet is not an effective method in reaching a broad range of young people. Existing networks and structures, such as schools, need to be utilised in order to reach young people from a diverse range of backgrounds and interests. Disadvantaged and vulnerable young people need to be targeted for participation in this strategy as well as the creation of a priority area devoted to meeting their needs. It is particularly important to include Indigenous and rural young people.

The Council is also concerned about the impact of language used on the outcome of this *National Strategy for Young People*. The Council would like to see unambiguous language, clearly defined terms and more specific priority areas. It was also not clear to the Council how the government intends on achieving the priorities for action.

Through its work the Council has identified current youth priority areas including:

- Homelessness
- Employment Opportunities
- Mental Health
- Rural Youth Transport
- Education Wellbeing
- Young Carers

The Council recommends that the *National Strategy for Young People* create a focus on these areas. Reports are being completed in these priority areas which will be made available on www.youth.nsw.gov.au.

ISSUES BY PRIORITY

EMPOWERING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS IN THEIR SCHOOLS, THEIR TAFES AND THEIR UNIVERSITIES TO SHAPE THEIR OWN FUTURES

The Council has also identified education as a priority area for its work. However the Council is concerned that the focus in the *National Strategy for Young People* is on young people who are already engaged in education. Greater focus needs to be given to young people's access to education and breaking down access barriers. Access encompasses transport, Centrelink, accommodation and entry requirements. Alternative studies and entry routes need to be increased for young people who have not been able to gain entry through traditional mechanisms. More affordable short courses in a variety of fields need to be provided, allowing young people to increase their skills base, improving employment opportunities.

In addition to access issues, empowering young people in schools requires relevant education and support to be available when they need it. This requires a responsive curriculum and increasing support staff and counsellors in schools.

Supporting Young Australians within their Families

The Council agrees with the principle of this priority.

MOBILISING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES

The Council understands this core priority as relating to volunteering. Definitions of volunteering often focus on formal volunteering through organisations and exclude informal volunteering such as helping family, friends and neighbours. Often when young people volunteer, their efforts are not recognised because their roles do not fit under the formal definitions of volunteering. For example, young people coaching a team or refereeing a sport may not necessarily be counted in volunteering statistics.

Research undertaken by the Council in 2007 revealed that whilst young people are frequently active in their communities, volunteering and supporting their friends, family and neighbours, young people often did not view themselves as volunteers. This research also identified barriers to volunteering including lack of time, lack of information about opportunities to volunteer, transport, safety and cost.

The Council has also undertaken research on Young Carers in 2008. In addition to the informal nature of young people's volunteering young carers are often not recognised due to often undisclosed care of a parent or family member. This is due to stigma surrounding the disability or illness and a fear that they may be removed from the family.

The Council has also identified volunteering as an important tool for social inclusion and submitted a report to the NSW Minister for Youth regarding Social Inclusion and Young Muslim People. This report highlighted the importance of utilising networks for promotion, encouraging volunteering organisations to become more inclusive

and creation of grants and awards programs to encourage establishment of volunteering programs and increase participation.

The Council's research highlights the importance of valuing and recognising the informal volunteering young people undertake in their communities. Increasing education, support, safety, opportunities and transport will allow young people to continue to be active and increasingly involved and engaged in their communities.

ENABLING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO PARTICIPATE SAFELY AND CONFIDENTLY ONLINE

The Council understands this core priority as relating to Cyberbullying. The Council undertook research into Cyberbullying at the end of 2008. Bullying, harassment and violence are important issues online as well as through other technology and in person. However priority needs to be given to the issue of feeling safe rather than focussing exclusively in the 'online' context.

Young people are technologically savvy and confident online. Using terms like 'enabling' suggest that the internet is not a young person's domain. The Council suggests the use of 'empowering young people to participate safely and confidently'.

Equipping Young Australians with the Skills and Personal Networks they need for Employment

The Council believes young people need employment support and consistently good careers advice. In particular young people need improved support by and access to Centrelink.

STRENGTHENING EARLY INTERVENTION WITH YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO HELP PREVENT ANY PROBLEMS GETTING WORSE AND TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE GET THEIR LIVES BACK ON TRACK

The Council believes young people's lives are most often on track and finds this priority area incongruous with the next priority area focussing on punishing young people. Strengthening early intervention needs to specify the areas that will be focussed on such as violence, mental health and disengagement with education. The Council especially support the one-stop-shop approach where young people can access a variety of support and services in one location specifically tailored to their needs. In particular, building on what is already working is important, rather than creating a whole new strategy.

ESTABLISHING CLEAR CUT LEGAL CONSEQUENCES FOR BEHAVIOURS THAT ENDANGER THE SAFETY OF OTHERS

The Council believes that existing laws and Juvenile Justice Programs already clearly define consequences for behaviours. A focus on prevention and early intervention, especially for young people with mental health issues is important in

keeping young people out of Juvenile Justice Centres. Identifying risk factors early and responding with community based programs is important. The Council also recognises that Indigenous Australians have alternative justice responses that are meaningful and effective for dealing with behaviour that endangers others.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND CONTACT DETAILS

The NSW Youth Advisory Council recognises the importance of developing a National Strategy for Young People and demonstrates commitment to this through this submission to the Australian Youth Forum.

The Council encourages the AYF to contact Amanda Scott, Chairperson for the NSW Youth Advisory Council or Cat Wright, NSW Youth Advisory Council Executive Officer on 9286 7206 or at yac@yac.nsw.gov.au for further discussion or information.