

YP Space MNC Inc
Response to the National Conversation -
Towards a National Strategy
For Young Australians
Discussion Paper November 2009



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YP Space MNC Inc's Response to National Conversation – Toward a National Strategy For Young Australians October 2009.

Introduction and Background

YP Space MNC is a Homelessness Assistance Youth Service that was previously funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), now under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) under the Specialist Homelessness Services umbrella. YP Space MNC has been operating in the Macleay region, of NSW, for over 21 years, a region that covers Nambucca to the north, Comara to the west and Kundabung to the south. The focus of the service throughout this time has been providing 24/7 hour crisis accommodation services to young people aged between 14 years and 9 months to 17 years (inclusive). A further focus for this organisation has also been to provide tenancy support and accommodation to young people from the age of 16 to 25 years with our Exit Units, funded under the Community Accommodation Program. Essential core business of YP Space MNC from inception to the current day has been to provide support structures to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and the issues that impact on young people's health and housing status. The service delivery model implemented by YP Space MNC has evolved throughout its existence to reflect the changing needs of young people who access the service, the management structures in operation at the time, the best practice and service standard structures current for the period and the changing political environment in Australia.

In 2008 YP Space MNC reconfigured its service structure, as a result of funding constraints, to ensure financial and operational sustainability and viability into the future. The reconfigured service structure has increased YP Space MNC's capacity to provide services to young people that are comprehensive, holistic and seamless. YP Space MNC now works from a comprehensive case management model, to ensure young people are engaged in the process, have a strong voice in the support they receive and have the systemic and individual issues that are impacting on them addressed. This reconfiguration process has also provided YP Space MNC the framework and opportunity to expand our advocacy services and leadership position, and has created a stable platform for our organisation to make constructive and sophisticated contribution to public policy and the accountability of the services systems we work within.

YP Space MNC Inc's team, in consultation with young people accessing this service, have responded to the National Conversation – Towards a National Strategy for Young Australians, Discussion Paper from a position of over 21 years supporting young people and responding to the issues young people experience in their lives. Our service response is a culmination of extensive experience in supporting young people, working with the barriers and constraints that young people face in a disadvantaged community and working developmentally in our community to ensure young people are provided the opportunity to be active citizens and willing participants in community evolution.

YP Space MNC Inc acknowledges that young people of all cultures and minority groups are often the most disadvantaged group within our community, due to experiences of poverty, mental health issues, homelessness, family breakdown, lower socio-economic status, decreased access to education and training, drug and alcohol use, trans-generational trauma, sexual and physical violence and often social perception. All of which are identified

pathways that lead to social exclusion and lack of basic human rights. YP Space MNC Inc also recognizes that young people often experience a sense of dispossession and disconnection to self, spirit and community through these experiences and the overt importance of connection to community lessens in comparison to basic survival needs.

YP Space MNC seeks quality of life and provision of Basic Human Rights as an outcome for all young people in Australia, not just service access. The underlying principle of any new National Strategy for Young Australians should have strong foundations in Social Justice, and should seek to link a 'new' vision of a 'whole of community' response to young people, their development and inclusion in our society.

YP Space MNC wants to see the development of a National Strategy that ensures:

- the basic human rights of young people;
- the rights of young people to access tailored and effective support;
- the rights of young people to have access to community participation and the resources to support this;
- the rights of young people to have access to client-focused programs based on respect and dignity;
- the rights of young people to not have a '**one size fits all**' service system/ support program structure enforced upon them;
- the rights of young people to be the authors of their own lives and not the product of government policy;
- Government and Corporate sectors, working to support young people are governed accountably and transparently, in line with the non-government sector.

Discussion Questions:**National Strategy:****1) What role do you think the Australian Government should have in supporting young people?**

Any support the Australian Government provides needs to acknowledge the structural issues that young people experience (poverty, trauma, domestic violence, family disconnection, economic participation and unemployment) and ensure that early intervention strategies are a key priority for service provision. The Australian Government needs to acknowledge the diversity within our youth community and ensure strategies are delivered equally, with a social justice framework. A National Strategy needs to ensure that the key policy positions do not excluded the most vulnerable groups and individuals within our community and does not put “blame” on the survivors of systemic disadvantage.

- Providing targeted support to young people, without further disadvantaging the already disadvantaged youth of our country.
- Funding appropriate services and programs. Particularly more early intervention and crisis services;
- Investing in programs and opportunities for young people to feel connected and included in their local communities;
- Investing in young people’s future, through education, social capital and economic development, particularly in resource and opportunity poor communities;
- Developing infrastructure, particularly in regional and rural areas, to increase access to opportunities for young people;
- Social justice policy positions and legislation that reflects and supports disadvantaged youth in the same capacity as “mainstream” youth;
- Not focusing specifically on economic participation but working from a holistic and social justice framework.

2) What would you expect to see in a National Strategy?

It is essential that any National Strategy for young Australians have at its core the rights of young people to be the authority in their own lives, the development of self-determination and youth participation. Strategy frameworks need to provide a platform to create a legislative culture, service delivery and management systems and communities that move towards mobilizing and promoting informed decision making by young people. The principles of ‘rights based approaches’ and empowering young people through capacity building strategies that celebrate and capitalise their strengths, and that realistically address the systemic issues that impact on social exclusion/ inclusion for young people within Australia need to be embedded into the strategy framework and any regulatory practices. A National Strategy needs to govern and motivate young people, communities and service

systems to ensure they work with young people in a way that promotes their skills, knowledge and resilience and creates a culture and environment that celebrates young people and their participation.

- Social Justice and social inclusion framework.
- Policy positions that reflect the diversity of our youth community and are predominately in-line with social justice principles.
- Government initiatives that support both mainstream and disadvantaged youth.
- Strong links to existing policy and legislation – in terms of child protection legislation, Homelessness Legislation (when developed), Social Inclusion Policy positions, with a stronger enforcement of social justice principles;
- Youth participation in the development and evaluation of the National Strategy.
- Strong connection to holistic and collaborative measures, to ensure all aspects of young people's development, health and well-being are addressed equally;
- Realistic benchmarks and performance measures – that are not tokenistic, that are not purely economic development/ employment focused.

3) How do you think the Government should make a National Strategy happen?

Ongoing and timely consultation, with young people, Youth Peak bodies and youth community services with experience and knowledge of the sector, needs to occur. This consultation process needs to move past just the metropolitan areas to incorporate regional and rural young people, communities and service systems, to ensure the Strategy development and policy position stance is reflective of all individuals and communities needs.

- Through strong and consistent consultation with young people;
- Through strong partnerships with NON-government Youth Peak Bodies (YAA, YAPA etc), with Non-government community services;
- Extensive consultation and partnership with regional and rural services, where young people are often the most disadvantaged on multiple levels;
- Through moving away from the Large community organisations government usually consult and partner with and moving towards smaller, locally focused community services and agencies – who often have the most experience in local communities;
- Through the development of national standards for the Government and Government agencies;
- Through the implementation of realistic funding opportunities for services that work to support young people;

- Through the development of a comprehensive strategy encompassing the three levels of Government and the community sector.

4) How do you think the Government should communicate the National Strategy?

Community movement and action comes from the development of relationships, and through meaningful conversations with the key drivers within our community. As such any government initiative that has young people at it's core should at all times work from a youth participation model.

We believe that young people are the experts in their lives and respect must be given to their voice.

- Social networking sites (high volume of young people) and multi-media;
- Through the voices of young people who have been actively engaged in the development of any National Strategy
- Through local community agencies;
- Education institutions; and any service that young people frequent.

Vision:

5) What do you think is important for young people?

The diversity of the youth community within Australia naturally leads to a diversity of priorities, needs, wants and issues of importance for our young people. Consultation with young people is essential to ensure strategies developed reflect the aspects of life that are important to the youth of our country. The risk associated with consultation is the invisibility of disadvantaged and disenfranchised young people, whose core priority is to survive the personal and systemic abuse they may be experiencing. Having a voice, regardless of your economic, social and cultural situation is perhaps the most important human right.

- Diverse community and sub-cultures;
- Basic Human Rights!!!
- Access to affordable and secure housing, particularly in regional areas;
- Access to specific support, particularly for disenfranchised and disadvantaged young people;
- Access to early intervention services, that reflect and respond to the issues young people are experiencing;
- Independence;
- Information;
- Income support;
- Being valued by peers and community;
- Connection to peer support and community;
- Participation and active citizenship;
- Education access;
- Safety;

- Access to transport;
- Access to financial support;
- Access to skill development and employment opportunities. This is particularly relevant in regional and rural communities, where young people are often forced to relocate to larger areas to access further education and employment opportunities;
- Technology development and access;
- Community perception of youth and youth culture.

6) How can we make this vision a reality?

It is essential to identify that youth in this country are identified as young people from the age of 12 years to 25 years. This alone is a challenge. Developing Social Policy and National strategies that speak to a whole generation – with the vastly different physical, developmental and social development aspects of this age range- creates numerous barriers & possible exclusionary practices. The economic resources required to ensure this vision becomes a reality would be intensive, as without realistic resource allocations the strategy would purely be tokenistic.

- Audit existing Government policies that exclude young people or create further barriers to young people accessing appropriate support;
- Work from a social justice framework;
- Further policy development, with links to existing social policies that do not isolate or further disadvantage young people;
- Develop infrastructure in regional and rural areas to create more opportunities for young people – in terms of access to affordable housing, education, employment, transport and services;
- Increased funding for Early Intervention Programs to work with young people, families and communities before crisis occurs;
- Deconstructing the information, sector and policy level silos that create barriers to young people accessing appropriate support;
- Increase core funding to existing services who are achieving excellent outcomes for/ with young people in local areas;
- Ensure a consistent Policy approach to all social issues
- Consult young people and ensure youth participation

7) What are some practical ideas to help communicate this vision to young people?

- Social networking sites (high volume of young people) and multi-media;
- Through the voices of young people who have been actively engaged in the development of any National Strategy
- Through local community agencies;
- Education institutions; and any service that young people frequent.

Goals:

As stated previously, youth within Australia are considered young people from the age of 12 to 25 years. This is a significant age range, in terms of physical, emotional, developmental aspects. Of particular concern is the goal of:

“enabling young Australians to accept full responsibility for their lives, their actions and their behaviours”

The areas of concern with this goal include:

- 1) Young people with “Parental Responsibility” to the Minister, or young people in DoCS care. Their lives are governed by Government Policy and service system involvement. ‘*Keep them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing*’¹ highlighted the challenges involved in the care and protection of young people and the long term barriers these young people continue to face after leaving Governmental care. Without appropriate and relevant support these young people often experience disconnection to community, barriers to interpersonal connections and support structures, cyclic homelessness and economic disadvantage.
- 2) Trans- generational issues within families and communities. Once again the cyclic nature of trauma, poverty, disengagement, decreased access to opportunities and education can lead to multiple and complex issues for young people if appropriate support is not implemented. Personal responsibility is often a low priority when survival is a core priority. Without adequate funding for early intervention and support services this goal may further isolate many young people.
- 3) What would be principles and frameworks used to develop National Benchmarks for this goal?

8) How can we make these goals achievable?

- Development of realistic benchmarks and performance measures against the identified goals;
- Multi-levelled Government involvement;
- Realistic funding and economic development of services and programs that support young people;
- Involving young people in the development of benchmarks and policy positions;
- Developing support structures that meet all the necessary goals;
- Infrastructure development in disadvantaged communities;
- Increased funding for Early Intervention programs;
- Increased connection to Corporate sponsorship through Community Responsibility/ Shared responsibility programs.
- Working developmentally with communities to address the systemic disadvantage experienced.

¹ Justice Wood, 2008. Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW, NSW Government

9) What is already happening in your community that helps young people achieve these goals?

- Existing Community organisations- Supported accommodation programs, youth services, AOD services, family support services, Health services and early intervention programs;
- Kempsey Shire Councils Youth Advisory Committee. This committee attempts to represent young people from the shire, however barriers to disadvantaged young people being represented exist;
- Limited Education opportunities;
- Limited employment opportunities exist, yet support agencies provide valuable links to local enterprise;
- Community development initiatives.

10) Is there an area you can identify where young people are not meeting these goals? What can we do to prevent this?

- Safety and Security – young people do not have access to affordable accommodation in the local area. High incidence of homelessness (on all levels) exists due to lack of affordable housing stock. Lack of secure and safe tenure creates multiple level barriers to young people accessing education, employment, creates decreased health outcomes, increased AOD use, mental and emotional health issues, economic vulnerability and increased connection with the Juvenile Justice system.
- Building Resilience – Due to the funding climate and process often effective services that work with young people are not recurrently funded and provide a bandaid more than long-term solutions. Inappropriate core funding of existing services creates barriers to working developmentally with young people and families in local communities;
- Decreased access to education created limitations on opportunities available for young people in regional communities. Trans-generational issues (particularly in terms of family breakdown, domestic violence, housing instability, financial hardship and AOD use) create further barriers to young people identifying and accessing opportunities;
- Limited infrastructure in regional and rural areas decreasing opportunities for employment and training;

Core Priorities for Action:

11) What do these core priorities mean to you?

The underlying principles of the core priorities are predominately based on social justice and equality for all young Australians. The priorities appear to be strongly linked with existing Government policies and positions, particularly the “education Revolution” and the “Learn or Earn” position. As identified within this document, the vision, goals and core priorities of this strategy development are resource

intensive and tailored more towards mainstream young people, than disadvantaged young people. Tailored approaches to the diversity of our youth community are essential. Creating National frameworks that promote a 'one size fits all' is unrealistic and ineffective.

- “Pretty words but completely unrealistic” – (young person quote);
- Extensively resource intensive to achieve these results;
- Without resource and extensive financial investment these are unrealistic;
- Early Intervention is the best part of these strategies. The recognition of the success of these programs is encouraging;
- Very broad and provide no real strategies for implementing these priorities;
- The whole document is very broad and talks alot about nothing – in terms of on the ground implementation and investment.

12) What do you see as the big challenges for you/young people in these areas?

- Resources and core funding to support young people;
- Knowing what these priorities will mean on a service provision level;
- Young people surviving the traumas they are experiencing “right now” , without the support of effective programs and the lack of funding available to local community organisations;

13) What do you see as the greatest needs within these areas?

- Increase in Early Intervention programs – BUT this will also need a financial investment from the Government.
- Developing realistic community youth participation models that engage and encourage young people to become active citizens within their community.
- Challenging the negative perceptions of the community about young people and their experiences in this community. Young people are often blamed for the trauma and situations they experience, eg homelessness.
- Increasing funding to existing services to provide support to young people;
- All the points raised in this document.

14) What do you think should be done for young people within these areas?

- Implementing the suggestions and ideas already identified in this document.

15) What works for young people in these areas?

- Youth participation programs;
- Early intervention programs;

- Having access to appropriate support in their local area;
- Having tailored responses to their individual circumstances;
- Working from a strengths-based framework with young people;
- Having community services that are non-judgemental, where young people are treated with respect and dignity;
- Case Management;
- Existing supported accommodation, crisis accommodation and youth services;
- Goal setting and mentoring.