



A commitment by Newcastle City Council to the young people of the city

Prepared by Human Services at Newcastle City Council

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A COMMITMENT BY NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE CITY

The Council of the City of Newcastle acknowledges that young people are an integral part of the community and will actively encourage their inclusion in all facets of community life and promote recognition of their achievements.

Council is committed to ensuring that the well being and diverse needs of young people both male and female are incorporated into all Council activities.

Council acknowledges that there are differences amongst young people and will seek to recognise the different interests of these groups.

Thirteen Actions form an essential part of this commitment.

1. Establishment of a Youth Venue

Together with young people, Council will facilitate the establishment of an appropriate centralised facility with the potential to offer a wide range of activities suitable for both males and females and catering for the diverse needs and interests of young people.

2. Access to Public Areas

Council will facilitate young people's access to public areas and the acknowledgment of their use of these areas by:-

- Working with owners and developers to determine how the needs of young people can be reflected in the design and management of privately owned public space.
- Working with retailers and business to determine how the needs of young people can be reflected in design and management of public space.
- Promoting a greater understanding between the police and young people in use of public space.

3. Employment of a Youth Program Co-ordinator

Council will employ a person with appropriate skills who, in co-operation with young people will develop the proposed venue and also activities in alternate locations to promote a shared use of public spaces throughout the city and ensure that the needs of young people are addressed in new release areas.

4. Youth Council

Council will promote the Youth Council as a Youth Advisory body. In particular Council will:-

- Continue to allocate resources for the Youth Council and continue to sponsor an annual Youth Forum in Youth Week to increase awareness of issues relevant to young people.**
- Establish a mechanism for two way flow of information between Youth Council and Council.**
- Refer matters for advice and consideration to the Youth Council as appropriate.**
- Council will take steps to ensure the Youth Council represents a wide cross section of the community.**

5. Information Technology

Council will assist in the provision of information to young people through:-

- Expanding the current home page published by the Newcastle Library to provide information of relevance to young people including an events calendar.**
- Providing access to the Internet for young people at Library branches.**
- Providing computers through Library branches for use by unemployed including young people.**

6. Participation

Council will promote the participation of young people in the city's activities through:-

- Encouraging appropriate representation of young people on forums and committees.**
- Expanding Council's current education program to include secondary students and identify how young people can be actively involved in the development of the program.**
- Encouraging participation for a full range of groups including multi-cultural groups, males and females**

7. Media Representation

Council will seek co-operation of the media to increase understanding and challenge stereotyped perception of young people by other sections of the community by promoting the positive contribution made by young people.

Encouraging the reporting of youth activities be included as part of Council's Media Officers job description

8. Activities for twelve to fourteen year olds

Council will promote activities for twelve to fourteen year olds through:-

- **Promoting the libraries as an interesting and safe place for this age group.**
- **Continuing to ensure that the Museum includes programs which target young people in exhibitions.**
- **Extending Art Gallery holiday activities for younger children to cater for the twelve to fourteen year olds.**
- **Promoting appropriate programs in the identified Youth Venue.**
- **In liaison with funding sources and government departments, supporting the development of services targeting the age group**

9. Planning

Council will ensure that the specific interests and issues for young people will be addressed in all planning processes which Council undertakes.

In particular Council will:-

- **Give particular attention to young people in the development of the Social Impact Development Control Plan.**
- **Encompass the needs of young people is in the process of developing an Disability Action Plan.**
- **Consider how to incorporate use of skateboards in the existing bike paths and other open space areas.**
- **Explore the options for go/no go areas for skateboarders in the city in liaison with young skateboard riders.**
- **Incorporate the needs of young people in the development of the Newcastle Urban Strategy.**
- **Ensure cycleways are an integral part of the planning process.**

10. Recreation

Council will consider the preferences of young people for recreational activities by:-

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- Supporting the development of age appropriate adventure playgrounds and areas of open space which are not highly serviced.
 - Incorporating the interests of young people both male and female in the Sports Policy and use of the beach and the available facilities as identified focal points for activities.

11. Cultural Activities

Council will recognise and encourage the richness and diversity of cultural expression by young people at all levels of Council activity from policy development and planning to its day to day dealings with young people.

- expand the Regional Art Gallery's youth based activities and exhibitions particularly its workshop program and exhibitions such as ArtExpress
- incorporate the use of visual art by young people in appropriate town revitalisation projects
- continue to encourage socially responsible aerosol/graffiti art including the provision of legal mural space.
- establish a gig guide as part of its internet home page which easily permits event organisers to "post" information about upcoming events to it.

Council will:-

- Ensure that Bicentennial Events Corporation in the planning of general events encourage the inclusion of young people.
- In developing activities aimed exclusively for young people the Bicentennial Events Corporation should consult with the age group.
- Ensure that young people are encouraged to have access to the Honeysuckle Heritage Buildings and Civic Precinct Arts and Cultural Facilities which are proposed and that the encouragement and ongoing development of their skills are fostered by the groups managing the facilities.

12. Employment

Council will, in the development of the Economic Development Strategy give specific attention to the issue of new and existing youth employment opportunities .

Council will investigate ways of providing additional apprenticeships in relevant fields.

Council will investigate additional ways of providing broad ranging work experience in Council operations.

13. Health

Council will support the ongoing establishment of shade structures at the beach and outdoor venues.

Council will extend the Smoke Free Policy for Public Buildings to include grandstands and change rooms.

Council will hold discussions with the Police to identify actions which could prohibit under age drinking on licensed premises.

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INTRODUCTION

In October 1994 Council endorsed the Community Development Policy which provided a set of principles and values for continued policy development.

The Human Services Policy and the Access Policy have been developed using these values and principles as a basic concept.

The stated values of the Community Development Policy are

- Respect
- Self determination
- Democracy
- Common good
- Equity of access
- Diversity.

These values form the basis for this Commitment Statement

The Commitment Statement aims to promote an inclusion of the interests of young people in all facets of community life and defines a role for Council in achieving this goal through a whole of Council approach.

1. BACKGROUND

In May 1996, Council endorsed a brief to develop a youth strategy for the city which encompassed recreational, social and cultural areas of interest.

The objective of proposal was to develop a strategy specifically for young people which incorporated the findings of previous studies and youth forums and identify ways in which Council could promote the interests of young people in the decision making processes.

2. PROCESS

A major consideration in the process was to actively encourage the participation of young people to ensure that their views and ideas were incorporated into the document.

The Newcastle Youth Council provided an initial reference group with members providing a wide range of interests and backgrounds.

The information from the Youth Week forums which have been sponsored by the Youth Council and Student Representative Councils were also used in identifying relevant issues for young people.

A review of existing documentation was undertaken and the issues relating to young people were identified. This included the studies undertaken by both Council and other organisations.

These were discussed with relevant groups and a public workshop which was well attended by young people was held to further develop possible strategies for inclusion in the policy. The issues discussed were matters which young people themselves had indicated as significant.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMITMENT

The objectives of the document are aimed at acknowledging young people as a significant group in the community and promoting their inclusion in community life.

- a To identify appropriate roles which Council could pursue to enhance the quality of life for young people
- b To provide a framework which will assist Council to incorporate the interests of young people into its activities and decision making.
- c To raise awareness of the issues which may confront young people incorporating those which arise from gender differences.
- d To improve access by young people to all services and facilities and public space.
- e To promote participation by young people in the activities undertaken in the city.
- f To encourage and promote the development of skills in young people and to acknowledge they are a valuable resource for the community.
- g To acknowledge the diverse groups and interests of young people in the community.

4. CURRENT COUNCIL CONTRIBUTION

The needs of the young people in the city has tended to be included in the general planning and provision of services and facilities in the city. In addition Council in accordance with the Community Development Policy acts in an advocacy role and facilitates actions for all sections of the community.

Council's current contribution includes:-

Provision of a range of sporting and recreational areas including areas for -

- organised sports
- skateboards
- swimming
- passive activities

Provision of facilities throughout the city from which programs can be offered including the Youth Centre at Maryland.

Section 356 contributions to some youth activities.

Continued support for Youth Council

Participation in the Building Better Cities program to provide housing for groups who have difficulty in gaining access to housing including youth.

Establishment of S355 Committee to administer housing funds including student housing.

Participation in New Work Opportunities

Traineeships/ apprenticeships for young people

Allocation of areas for graffiti art.

Bicentennial funding to community organisations.

Youth membership on Social Strategy Committee

Provision of programs for young people through the Museum

Provision of Library services to a significant number of young people.

Provision of Art gallery programs.

5. IDENTIFIED ISSUES

The issues which have been identified tend to be inter-related and the suggested strategies often cover several of these issues. Many of the identified issues are not exclusive to the youth of Newcastle. This would indicate that the young people in our society have similar experiences and perceptions of their value in the community as those elsewhere.

5.1 Activities for under eighteen year olds

This issue has been identified as one of major concern for a number of years. Young people find it difficult to understand how, with so many empty buildings in the city, an appropriate area for youth activities is not available.

The concept has been more clearly defined in recent consultations and identified as a lack of an appropriate centralised multipurpose venue where a range of recreational social and cultural activities could be held in a safe environment.

The identified uses by young people for such a venue includes:-

- safe meeting place to socialise
- place to explore and develop creativity
- see bands
- see performance and visual arts
- an all ages venue
- space for arts and crafts
- areas for classes
- video screenings and festivals
- internet access
- rehearsal areas
- young people's craft market

The young people have indicated that they want to feel part of the community rather than pushed to the margins and that a venue should be based in a centralised and public place not on the fringe areas of the city.

For the venue to achieve these objectives young people should have a major input into how it is managed and what activities should be offered to ensure that their diverse interests will be catered for.

An appropriate means of advertising and notification of coming major events should be developed.

Any venue should not be "welfare" oriented and marketing of such a facility would be important. The challenge is that marketing will need to capture the interest of youth but also allay any fears that parents may have that the facility may not be a 'safe' environment. A balance will need to be achieved between young people's desire for lack of authority and parents' concern for their well being and safety.

There is also a need for appropriate activities to be available for twelve to fourteen year olds after school and during holiday periods as this age group cannot use the existing services offered for children up to age twelve which are funded by the Federal Government.

Existing facilities provided by Council such as the Library, Art Gallery and Museum could provide appropriate activities for this age group.

5.2 Use of Public Space

The use of public areas by young people and acceptance of this use is an issue that occurs in many communities.

There is a negative perception from other sections of the community of young people congregating in groups in public places, particularly in areas of commercial operations such as shopping areas. Young people expressed the view that their limited spending power contributed to their exclusion from these places. There is a lack of acceptance of activities and behaviour which the young people view as part of the necessary process of learning and being allowed to be 'young'.

In this context there was concern expressed that the media tends to emphasise negative aspects of young people which encourages a lack of respect and suspicion from other sections of the community.

To improve this, it has been suggested that a youth issues reporter be appointed for the local press. This reporter could provide media coverage which portrayed the actions and attitudes of the majority of young people rather than the high achievers or alternately those who exhibit antisocial behaviour.

A positive approach may limit some of the negative attitudes expressed towards youth.

The media could also be used to promote an appreciation of the diversity in young people which would increase acceptance by other sections.

It is fortunate that Newcastle youth have access to beach activities which are an important component of our culture and that congregation of groups of young people in this area is accepted by other groups. Young people question why this acceptance does not extend to use of other areas where in a group they are perceived as intimidating. They have indicated there needs to be mutual respect between young people and other sections of the community and that this could be encouraged by young people being given some responsibility within the community.

In addition consideration should be given to how management issues in city planning can encourage mixed use of the limited areas of public space by all sections of the community.

5.3 Recreation

Young people have indicated that preferred recreational activities away from home, include beach, parks, shopping centres, movies, 'Maccas,' and music gigs rather than structured sporting activities. These activities are linked with activities for under 18's and also the use of public space areas.

The beach and associated activities are a major focal point for our young people possibly because it is a space where they can socialise, exercise and 'hang out' without complaints from authorities or other sections of the community.

Young people residing in the Western sectors of the city have less accessibility to the popular forms of activity associated with the beach.

Recreational activities not available in Newcastle which have been identified previously include:

- Ice skating
- Theme/fun parks
- Rollerblading/skateboard areas
- Water slides
- Wave pool
- Basketball courts

These factors should be considered in the development of recreational spaces particularly in the Western sectors and young people be consulted so that their interests can be catered for as well as the more traditional sporting facilities.

It has also been suggested that informal spaces such as adventure playgrounds or areas of open space which offer a natural environment may be appropriate open space to meet the needs of young people.

A balance should be maintained between structured recreation and sporting groups and the need for unstructured and more informal activities.

Unemployed young people have also indicated a need for recreational facilities including access to centre based activities, a venue catering for under eighteens and lighting around skateboard facilities.

Open space needs to be linked by cycleways or pathways to promote accessibility for a range of activities.

To ensure that young people with disabilities are not disadvantaged, the access to all facilities and venues should comply with the disability standards.

Sporting personalities can be used to provide positive role models for young people and encourage their participation in sporting activities. This is particularly relevant for Indigenous young people and also for young people with disabilities.

There has been a positive response and emphasis placed on achievements in the recent Olympics and this attitude could be used to promote the value of participation and the development of skills for young people .

Council's Sports Policy should be extended to ensure that needs of young people and the different interests between males and females are incorporated into provision of facilities.

There is interest in a wide variety of music forms and young people have indicated that places are required for both practice and performance space which can be accessed at a reasonable price.

Encouragement of the ongoing development of a strong music culture would assist the acknowledgment of the skills and contribution of young people to the industry and could provide additional avenues for employment.

5.4 Affordability

Financial independence/dependence is an issue for young people in seeking access to any activity. The difficulty relates not only to gaining access to an activity but to transport costs

Young people have indicated that due to limited financial means it could take some time for a youth venue to be financially viable.

Access to some structured sports and facilities can be limited due to the costs of participation which can prove difficult for parents or young people to meet.

It is important that there continues to be free access to popular activities such as the beach to allow participation and use of associated activities.

The cost of any program or activity needs to take into account the ability for young people to meet associated costs.

Many providers view youth as a ready and profitable market and some young people will take part time work, usually in the service areas, to provide some funds and to gain experience which may assist in permanent job seeking.

5.5 Transport

Young people use a variety of transport modes including vehicles, public transport, bicycles, skateboards or rollerblades and pedestrian means. Young people have consistently identified access to safe, affordable transport as a major consideration.

Bikes are the primary means of getting to school and the Bike Plan has identified suitable routes to promote this use.

Young people also use skateboards as a form of transport as well as a recreational activity and safety issues have been raised by other sections of the community in relation to this use. Shared use by skateboarders could be considered in the ongoing development of bike paths throughout the city.

Cost is another factor in young people using public transport and the value of a single ticket charge which would cover multiple mode use has been raised.

There needs to be a coordinated approach to provide transport at a time which enables young people to attend regular or major activities .

There is the additional problem of safety for young people in using public transport, especially late at night. The issue of violence from other young people or from people who may be slightly older has been raised as a concern.

5.6. Cultural Diversity

The youth culture is made up of sub cultures which can at times be in conflict with each other, and can promote a negative reaction from other sections of the community. This may be due to the dress code or behaviour attributed to a group which can result in a feeling of apprehension from other people.

The negative perception of young people by other sections of the community can lead to a feeling of both exclusion and a belief that issues which are significant to that group are not viewed as a priority by the community generally.

While some sections of the community view all graffiti as vandalism, a distinction should be made between tagging in public places and graffiti art works in designated places.

Tagging is the "signature" scrawl which can deface buildings and structures and is distinct from the works done in designated places which have enabled graffiti artists to develop their skills.

Young people from non english speaking backgrounds have to balance the values of two systems which can often lead to intergenerational conflict as they embrace the attitudes of their peers and at times reject their cultural identity.

Others in the community tend to have a stereotyped image of the cultures of people from both Indigenous and non english speaking backgrounds in addition to the negative perception of young people in general.

The use of cultural activities can assist in positively addressing some of these issues.

In addition, the sporting achievements of people from different backgrounds can provide excellent role models for young people.

To achieve a more positive image of young people and a greater understanding of their culture it has been suggested that a youth issues reporter be appointed for the local press. This could provide media coverage which portrayed the actions and attitudes of the majority of young people rather than the high achievers or alternately those who exhibit antisocial behaviour.

A positive approach may limit some of the negative attitudes expressed towards youth.

The media could also be used to encourage an appreciation of the diversity in young people which would increase acceptance by other sections of the community.

5.7 Youth Participation

There has been limited opportunity for young people to participate in the existing processes which are used in decision making in the city.

Sometimes this is due to exclusion by adults who tend to ignore the fact that young people could make a worthwhile contribution.

It can also be due to a lack of confidence by young people or even fear that there may be a lack of recognition of the relevance of the issues to be discussed to their areas of interest.

In some local government areas Youth Advisory Committees have been established. These can provide a positive indication to young people that their opinions and contribution can be important.

Newcastle Youth Council has the structure to play an active role as an advisory group and provide a conduit to a wider section of young people.

However an appropriate mechanism for information flow both to Council and feedback from Council on recommendations would need to be developed.

Encouragement for young people to participate on relevant forums or committees could demonstrate to young people that their opinion is relevant and their contribution is valued. It would also allow young people to share in the responsibility for input into the decision making processes. Young people expressed the view that the acknowledgment that they could assume a level of responsibility could assist in increasing the respect between the differing sections in the community.

Young people do not have a clear understanding of Council and how it contributes to the community.

The establishment of an appropriate education program would provide the necessary information and establish a procedure for young people to inform Council about matters of concern.

This could be an extension of the existing program catering for primary school children and young people should be consulted and involved in the development of the program to ensure that the interest of young people would be engaged.

The program could identify benefits for young people in playing an active role in the participatory process and encourage involvement.

5.8 Place Issues

Specific areas of the city have indicated concern over activities involving young people from time to time. The concern usually commences with identification by residents, rightly or wrongly, that youth are responsible for the majority of crime/violence/vandalism in an area.

Areas which tend to be isolated also experience problems with limited access to transport at appropriate times. To circumvent this problem, attempts have been made to establish specific activities in those areas and to develop recreational space.

These activities should be established in consultation with the youth of an area and be used to develop the culture of specific areas.

This is especially important in new release areas and can assist in developing a sense of community.

5.9 Safety

The issue of safety is one that concerns young people and also their parents and can affect the use of recreational activities and access to public areas.

Just as other sections of the community may perceive young people in groups as threatening, young people can experience a similar perception towards adults and other groups of young people.

Opinions have also been expressed that adults in authority can also target all young people, not just those causing trouble, which can limit freedom of movement.

5.10. Employment

There are limited employment opportunities for young people and increased competition for available jobs. The difficulty exists regardless of the educational level attained and young people tend to move to capital cities to find work.

The nature of employment in the region has changed with the service area now of greater significance.

Young people expressed the view that there needs to be some self determination in deciding what work or training should be undertaken rather than having to participate in something in which they have no interest.

The proposed Economic Development strategy could consider the specific problems of youth unemployment and consider how Council could work with existing organisations such as New enterprise Initiatives to encourage young people to devise and implement their own activities to generate employment.

Lack of employment opportunities can have both social and economic implications.

Social problems include difficulties for young people to achieve independence and possible family conflict which could lead to homelessness.

The limited opportunities for a career path of choice can also lead to an increased sense of alienation.

Economic issues include limited opportunities to develop skills which would benefit the community.

5.11 Health

Major education campaigns have been developed in some health areas including skin cancer, drink driving and safe sex.

However health issues tend to have a low priority with young people.

Concerns have been expressed by adults about what could be classed as mental health issues which include the increase in youth suicide and eating disorders.

Service providers working with the more disadvantaged have also expressed concern over drug and alcohol abuse which can lead to additional problems such as housing difficulties. There is also a lack of rehabilitation or treatment programs which are youth specific.

The Hunter Centre for Health Advancement has indicated that major areas of health concern which Council could address relate to smoking, unsafe alcohol use and exposure to the sun. These are the issues which are most likely to affect the health of the majority of young people in contrast to the media image of illegal drug use.

Young people expressed concern that often drug and alcohol issues were equated with problems of law and order rather than a result of social problems.

5.12. Housing

The difficulties for young people to obtain housing and the issue of homelessness was highlighted in the Burdekin Report.

The report raised the level of awareness of the problem facing young people and the reasons for homelessness in the age group.

Service providers offer a range of housing options for young people in the city with the emphasis being on independent living with appropriate support.

However the changes to substitute care at State Government level have led to a problem in finding housing for young people under sixteen.

Suggestions has been put forward that a boarding house style of accommodation would be beneficial for this group.

Young people find it difficult to obtain housing on the private rental market because of legal constraints of entering into a lease agreement and the perception of landlords that they would be difficult tenants.

Council is currently developing a Homelessness Strategy which will include an examination of Youth Homelessness.

5.13 Education

Statistics indicate that although there has been an improvement in recent years, there is still a lower than State average of retention rates in senior high schools in Newcastle. A lack of education can sometimes lead to feelings of alienation as young people strive to achieve recognition.

Some young people lack basic numeracy and literacy skills which limits capacity to obtain meaningful employment.

Difficulties have been identified in education of young people which relate to gender differences. The affirmative action in education for females has achieved success while concern is now being expressed by educators that boys also need specific targeting.

Young people understand and acknowledge the increasing importance of information technology. There is increased potential to expand use and access to this form of information to assist young people and engage their interest.

Council libraries could provide an excellent facility for this purpose.

Another issue for young people is the increased cost of tertiary education which may limit access to gaining higher qualifications.

5.14 Gender Issues

This issue is aligned to education and the stereotyped image of appropriate behaviour and interests for males and females.

The acceptance of this stereotyping may be a contributing factor in the mental health issues identified previously and also may promote violent behaviour in some cases. It can also lead to a reluctance for females to participate in activities if they are attended by a higher proportion of young males.

In this context specific programs may need to be developed for young men and young women in appropriate areas of interest.

For example at Maryland a girls group was started so that the females could feel comfortable and not intimidated by the greater numbers of male adolescents who attended some of the activities.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

1. Leichhardt Council NSW

After successful negotiation between a major developer and Council staff, agreement was reached that the new development at Broadway would provide youth facilities within the complex and employ two youth workers to promote activities and work with the youth.

In addition a youth policy for the complex has been developed to provide a clear understanding of how young people can use the development and a Youth Advisory Committee has been established to encourage ongoing communication.

The project provides a different approach towards young people's use of public areas with the provision of spaces and support by the developer rather than security guards and exclusion.

2. Wollongong Youth Centre

A " youth friendly " centre which has had positive endorsement from young people operates at Wollongong and provides a range of programs which cater for the interests of the youth of the area.

The music events offered are the most popular and have contributed to the expansion of the band industry in Wollongong with local bands being given an opportunity to perform and rehearse.

Other activities at the Centre include:-

drop-in area

visual art project with an artist in residence offering classes for a diverse group including people with disabilities

Environmental Youth Action Group

Young Women's Festival (annually)

Magazine publication

Women's writing group

Maths and English tutoring

The Centre employs people with skills in relating to young people and in providing wanted activities to maintain interest.

The atmosphere encourages young people to feel inclusive and approximately five hundred young people would use the facility each week including people from other areas of the State.

3. Penrith City Council

Fusion Youth Cafe

Plan to establish a Youth Cafe (service) in CBD shopping centre to provide a youth service for young people and encourage use of the area.

The project is awaiting funding before relocating from a youth centre which is not centrally located.

The youth cafe operates two afternoons per week at the existing location offering creative activities and local bands perform fortnightly with approximately 150 people attending.

4. Sutherland Council

Rights of Passage Project.

Action research trialing recreational and cultural activities in a shopping centre.

5. North East Regional Youth Council

Midland Gate (Mall) Streetwork Program provided funding towards employment of a youth worker for twenty hours per week from the shopping centre management.

6. Launceston City Council.

Funding has been received for a study to identify projects and develop strategies which will allow young people to have input into the design and development of a number of urban design projects within the Central Activities District. The project is expecting to identify projects and strategies to create youth spaces, developing and utilising appropriate consultation techniques.

7. Open Family Australia

Pilot project in and around Logan City in Queensland to facilitate youth projects in areas of commercial activity where young people are perceived to be in conflict with other users.

8. Devonport Youth Centre

A youth centre is about to be developed after extensive consultation and involvement of the young people of the town.