

# SOUTH COAST YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT FORUM



NSW Greens MP and South Coast spokesperson Justin Field held a community forum in Nowra on 25 October, bringing together educators, service providers, employers and other key stakeholders to address the high rate of youth unemployment in the Shoalhaven.

Youth unemployment in the Shoalhaven and Southern Highlands is at crisis levels and is the highest in NSW. The rate has been rising since 2014 and has reached almost 30 per cent - more than 2.5 times the state average.

The objectives of the forum were to bring together local stakeholders to foster better working relationships, identify key issues and structural barriers to reducing local youth unemployment and identify proposals and opportunities that could be pursued to address this critical issue for the region.

## IDEAS FROM THE FORUM

A clear message I took from the Forum was that inconsistent and intermittent funding has frustrated local efforts to help young people find work. Whatever we do, we need to give programs time to work and evolve to suit our local needs.

Key themes for action from the day:

- > Improved local coordination is needed between different agencies and groups and to connect people to the various programs; and
- > Local transport solutions to ensure young people can get to education, training and work.

For any of this to work, our young people need to be open to facing the challenges of the future and to do so with a sense of confidence and hope. Mentoring and early intervention programs have already had local success and need to be expanded.

— Justin Field, MLC



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## PRIORITY IDEAS

### LOCAL COORDINATION

There are a large number of programs and services targeted at trying to address youth unemployment, readying young people for work, supporting them to find employment and encouraging employers to take on young people. It was clear that even among people who work in the sector, not everyone knew the extent of available programs and duplication of services exists.

There has been an historical role for an employment coordinator in our region but this was discontinued in 2014. The Illawarra, as part of the Illawarra Youth Employment Strategy (YES) program, has recently established a coordinator position but there isn't a dedicated coordinator in the Shoalhaven, the area with the highest youth unemployment rate in the state. We need dedicated resources to help coordinate local effort.

### DEVELOPING A LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN

There was near universal agreement that the lack of transport options makes getting to and from education, training and employment is a big challenge for our region with its dispersed nature and many small villages. This is particularly an issue for young people who may not yet have their licence or access to a car.

There were many complementary ideas including:

- > Improving local public transport links, electrifying the train line from Kiama to Bomaderry, council supported car sharing programs, and
- > Coordinating volunteers to support young people to get their drivers licence.

Some of these ideas already have specific proposals on the books, others are ideas looking for a champion.



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Photo: Marc Dalmuder

## SIMPLE IDEAS, BIG IMPACT

### **EXPANDING inVEST AND MENTORING PROGRAMS**

"There are several small-scale programs delivering results in the local area. inVEST identifies high school students unlikely to complete Year 12 or the HSC and supports them into training or jobs. AIME is an educational program proven to support Indigenous students through high school and into university or employment at the same rate as all Australians. The expansion of these and similar programs is essential.

### **"LOCAL SERVICES MAP**

Even people working to support young people into work find it hard to know what services and programs are available and how to connect to them. There is need for an accessible map of local services so all stakeholders can quickly and easily identify available programs and get in contact with the right people.

### **LIST OF LOCAL BUSINESSES TAKING ON TRAINEES**

Work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships are a critical opportunity for young people, providing skills, and practical experience in the workplace. Having a list of local businesses prepared to take on young people would make identifying opportunities for young people much quicker and easier and give businesses a central location to register their needs.

### **BIG PICTURE IDEAS**

Participants recognised that today's youth unemployment risks getting worse as the nature of work shifts and automation increases. Long-term policy work is needed to:

- > Develop local procurement policies to favour local projects and businesses;
- > Position young people to take advantage for growth in the Construction, Aged Care and Agriculture/Food sectors.