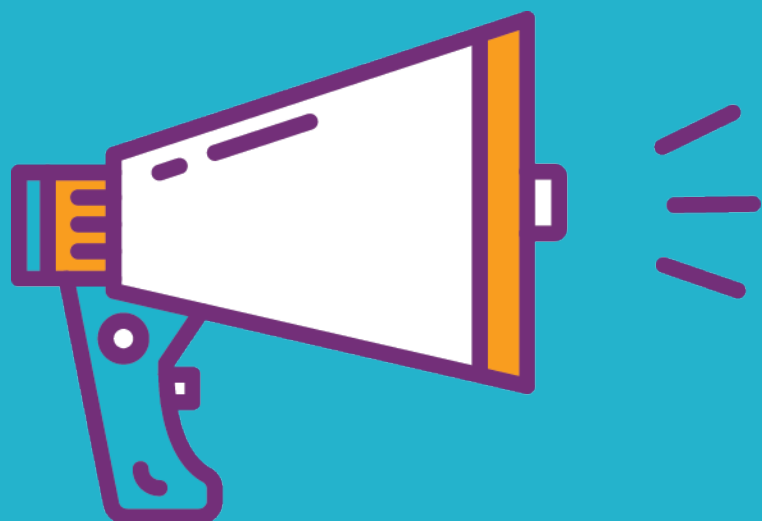




WHAT'S UP WEST? 2017 REPORT



ABOUT YOUTH ACTION

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing 1.25 million young people in NSW and youth services that support them. Our work helps build the capacity of young people, youth workers and youth services, and we advocate for positive change on issues affecting these groups.

It is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth service sector.
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2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services.
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3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers.
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4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services.
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5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them.
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6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services.
.....
7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Youth Action acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners of the land, past and present and future, across NSW. We are committed to a positive future for Aboriginal young people and their communities. What's Up West? was held on the land of the Darug Nation, and we acknowledge their traditional custodianship.

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BACKGROUND AND SNAPSHOT

Greater Western Sydney is a region undergoing rapid change. There are 470,000 young people living in the region. Many of them feel positive about Western Sydney and want to be a valuable part of its future. What's Up West? is Youth Action's biennial conference for young people in Western Sydney, bringing together 250 young people from across the region over two days.

The conference was designed to:

- Give young people the skills and the pathways they need to create real change in their communities
- Connect young people with stakeholders in the region, so that they can be involved in the creation of the future of Western Sydney
- Consult with young people on how key issues in Western Sydney impact them and what they would like to see change in their community.

This report:

- Looks at highlights and key statistics for What's Up West? 2017
- Summarises the findings from consultations with young people across the issues of education, the future of Western Sydney, health and wellbeing and participation in the arts
- Identifies the key issues by Local Government Area (LGA) identified by young residents.

SNAPSHOT OF WHAT'S UP WEST? 2017	HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE
37 workshop sessions delivered by more than 20 organisations	87% of young people said they had a great time
41 expert speakers and presenters	87% said they picked up a new skill they would use
20 community organisations showcasing opportunities for young people to get involved	55% said they'd work to make a change in their community after leaving
250 young people over both days	

The event was attended by young people who work, live, and study in:

SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY

- Canterbury-Bankstown
- Campbelltown
- Camden
- Liverpool
- Fairfield

WESTERN SYDNEY

- Blacktown
- The Hills
- Parramatta
- Cumberland

NEPEAN/BLUE MOUNTAINS

- Hawkesbury
- Penrith

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT: IDEAS TO MAKE THE REGION THRIVE

Young people were tasked with designing the changes they want to see in Western Sydney. They shared their experiences of what it was like living in the region, and what needed to change.

Consultation with young people brings a depth and insight to issues that is often overlooked. This workshop showed that young people seek out and actively engage in opportunities to offer valuable contributions on issues that will affect them.

Five issue areas framed the consultation:

- Education and employment
- Health and wellbeing
- The future of Western Sydney
- Building strong communities through art.

KEY FINDINGS

Young people in Western Sydney:

1. See their education as vital in preparing them for their future in the workplace, and want adequate skills training, work experience programs and career guidance.
2. Identify with the diversity of Western Sydney as a significant strength of the region, and want to see the continuation of this diversity into the future.
3. Are excited about Western Sydney's future growth, but want to make sure that the region has adequate infrastructure for them to be able to live, work, and study.
4. Have a nuanced understanding of the interdependence of the different dimensions of health (physical, mental, sexual), and want structural, sociocultural, and governmental changes that address their concerns in each of these dimensions.
5. Believe in the value of the arts in strengthening the region's diversity, and use the arts to showcase this unique identity.



HOW CAN ART BUILD A COMMUNITY?

In partnership with CreateNSW, young people were consulted about creating stronger and more cohesive communities through art.

With the diversity of the region in mind, the focus of the consultation was:

- What diversity in the region meant to them and what made Western Sydney feel welcoming
- Young people's involvement in art as a cultural activity, what their experiences were and how they could be supported to engage more in the future.

ARTS AND IDENTITY IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Young people find the arts to be a necessary component of Western Sydney's identity. They also believe in the value of the arts in strengthening the region's diversity. In explaining what they hoped to achieve when involved in creative or cultural projects, a majority of responses identified these projects as a means to showcase their identity, their diversity and a desire to be involved in their community.

OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED IN THE ARTS

Young people observed a lack of opportunities being created for their participation in the arts. They also mentioned issues such as 'not knowing where to start' as barriers to their participation, with 50% of responses listing personal barriers as their main reason. When they are involved, young people are action-oriented. When asked what their first steps were after having a creative idea, the majority of respondents listed actions like 'do it', 'draw' and 'put in [the] effort', and significantly fewer mentioned planning or networking.

'Art is a way for people to express themselves... It allows people to open up.'



YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We asked young people to consider their experience of health and wellbeing in Western Sydney.

This session focused on:

- Four key categories of health, including healthy living, physical, mental and sexual health
- How young people defined being healthy in each of these categories and what influenced their ideas on the issue
- What they wished parents, teachers and the government knew about these issues as they affect young people
- How services could better support young people to improve outcomes for them.

Young people conveyed nuanced and complex attitudes to each aspect of health, showing their awareness of the connections between different dimensions of health and the barriers that keep them from attaining support in each of these areas.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Young people mentioned exercise, diet and adequate sleep as the most common factors influencing whether someone was considered 'healthy'. But they noted that the barriers to physical health were structural, including a lack of recreational facilities, educational resources on healthy habits, or financial obstacles. Assistance in these areas, like reducing the cost of eating healthily and exercising, new recreational facilities, and firmer regulation of the promotion of unhealthy products, shaped the majority of suggestions to improve this issue.

MENTAL HEALTH

Respondents tended to assign meaning to terms like 'happy', 'positive', 'stable' and 'comfortable' when discussing mental health. But issues of stigma and misunderstandings were seen to cause mental health issues, with this being a common theme in about half of responses. Some respondents associated stigmas and misunderstandings to diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs. For example, one respondent said 'Educating not just young people but parents about mental health, because of Western Sydney's diversity.' Respondants were more likely to list specific support services to address this issue, like 'create an app to direct [young people] to services.'

'Youth are afraid to talk about sexual health with their doctors, in fear that their parents will find out.'

SEXUAL HEALTH

According to participants, safe sex, consent and knowledge or education grounded healthy sexual practices. Respondents were conscious that their education on sexual health was inadequate. One response in particular highlighted this, stating that 'Some of us have to learn about sexuality on our own, especially by watching inappropriate material', demonstrating that young people are forced to turn elsewhere to understand sexuality. Cultural background was similarly seen as a complication in this area. More relatable and comprehensive education about sex, and consent in particular, was suggested for PDHPE classes. This tied in with their framing of what it meant to be 'sexually healthy' as being knowledgeable of safe sexual practices, healthy relationships, and consent.



YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

We asked young people to consider their experience of education and employment in Western Sydney.

The consultation on education and employment focused on:

- Young people's experiences of what a day at their school or educational institution was like
- What aspects of their education they found useful, and what they thought did not prepare them for the future
- Their recommendations on what would assist them in transitioning from education to work and make their education more relevant

JOB READINESS

Young people linked the relevance of their education to practical outcomes, particularly relating to work and skills development. Responding to the question 'how can your education better prepare you for the future?' 71% of responses mentioned either skills or education reform which would focus on how to participate in a workplace. They also highlighted a general need for a sense of independence in their education.

THE RELEVANCE OF THEIR EDUCATION

Education was strongly linked to providing young people with the resources they needed for work. Many responses listed skills that they did not have when trying to transition from education to employment and say their general lack of preparation in their education as a barrier to employment. This backs up findings made in our career guidance paper. When asked what would help their transition, they indicated the need for career guidance that progressed their understanding of employment. Work experience or work placement programs were mentioned specifically by 20% of participants, but many pointed to more comprehensive resources and skill-based training while at school as essential to preparing them for this transition.

'Give us the skills that we need, like resume writing.'



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT FOR WESTERN SYDNEY

Consultation on the future of Western Sydney was framed around three key areas:

- The 'Growth' in the region, including population and the development in infrastructure and services
- The sense of 'Place', meaning its location, environment and landmarks
- The 'Identity' of the region, including its cultural diversity, perceptions, and socio-economic status.

The participants were asked to think through these key areas by considering:

- What they found concerning, exciting, and what was changing in their region in each of the areas
- Their personal experiences of life in Western Sydney

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Given the growth of the region, young people were conscious that getting infrastructure development right would be a key issue. Transport generally (roads, parking and tolls), and public transport in particular, were raised by over half the respondents, and 38% mentioned traffic congestion specifically. They felt that while these were current issues, as the region grows it will be vital to improve the infrastructure of the region to cope with changes.

REGIONAL DIVERSITY

This was seen as a strength that should be fostered in Western Sydney. When asked 'What's exciting about the future of Western Sydney?' 63% of responses in the 'identity' category highlighted diversity, with responses like 'the increase of acceptance and decrease of discrimination,' demonstrating the pride young people have in a Western Sydney that is diverse.

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND DENSITY

Many respondents also saw the impacts of regional growth on the quality of living, particularly in the form of housing affordability and density. Half of the young people involved identified this as a concern for the region's future. The increasing price of housing was an issue that could block access to housing for young people in the future, while increased housing density was seen as decreasing the region's open and shared living spaces. But housing developments were also seen as opportunities for employment, with jobs in the region supported by the growth.



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE WANT FOR THEIR AREA

Young people formed connections with others in their LGA, and with other attendees from across the region. In these groups, they were tasked with building the 'big picture' for tangible action on issues facing their communities. These networks are valuable because they create tangible pathways through which young people can go on to create change after the conference.

HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE IN THESE SESSIONS COMMITTED TO TAKING ACTION ON IN THEIR COMMUNITIES:

SOUTHWEST SYDNEY

Macarthur – Campbelltown/Camden

- Cut down smoking in Campbelltown.
- Better transport to Spring Farm.
- Increase the number of recreational facilities across the region.
- Life skills training for young people at school.

Canterbury Bankstown

- Promote the cultural identity of the area.
- Improve the region's retail and shopping facilities.
- Enhance the prominence of the Arts and provide more funding.
- Develop faster, safer transport with more options for commuters.
- Rework schools to be more accessible for all students.

Liverpool/Fairfield

- Improve the sustainability of the local environment.
- Promote safety within the Fairfield and Liverpool area.
- Enhance parking and waste facilities in Fairfield.
- Boost the cleanliness of parks, schools and local areas across the region.
- Increase the availability of public transport.

NEPEAN/BLUE MOUNTAINS

Hawkesbury/Blue Mountains/Penrith

- Increase opportunities and youth spaces for young people in the Hawkesbury.
- Renovate the local Richmond library.
- Develop urban areas more intelligently with public transport in mind across the region.

WESTERN SYDNEY

Blacktown/The Hills

- Reduce the stigmas surrounding mental health.
- Improve public transport accessibility across the region.
- Decrease the incidence of racism in the community.

Parramatta/Cumberland

- Prioritise pedestrian safety across the region.
- Improve hygiene and sanitary facilities.
- Increase the number of green spaces across Parramatta.
- Enhance the safety and reliability of public transport.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What's Up West? Was designed and run in collaboration with:



CONFERENCE CONTENT

A diverse and expert selection of people from the Greater Western Sydney region facilitated sessions and presented keynotes:

Keynote addresses from - L-FRESH the Lion and Assmaah Helal

Panel of Young People Leading Change - Gidon Goodman, Christina Chun and Apajok Biar

Culture and the Face of Western Sydney - Western Sydney Wanderers

Young People in Leadership - Meredith Turnbull

The Impact of Homelessness and Mental Health - St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

WORKSHOPS FROM

Self-Care for Superheroes - Headspace

Visual messages - Young Storytellers

Cash for your Cause - StartSomeGood

Leadership Skills - Western Sydney University – the Academy

Organising communities and winning campaigns - Oxfam

Writing effectively to create change - Sydney Story Factory

Campaigning Creatively and Productive Protests - The Australian Youth Climate Coalition

Making your voice heard - NSW Advocate for Children and Young People

Masterclass: Power of the Spoken Word - Bankstown Poetry Slam

