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Western Sydney young people drive solutions to challenges of housing affordability, unemployment, and mental health

Homelessness, housing affordability, mental health, social inclusion, and unemployment are just a handful of the big issues being tackled by more than three hundred Western Sydney youth as they share experiences and develop skills to drive practical, youth-led solutions for their communities.

Beginning today, the *What's Up West?* conference in Parramatta features presentations by inspiring local young people, practical skills workshops, discussions on key issues, and networking opportunities that will allow the development of new programs and initiatives to continue well after it ends.

Organised by Youth Action — the peak body for young people and youth services in NSW — the event will also highlight successful programs born out of the first conference in 2013.

“With nearly 400,000 young people living in Sydney’s greater west, an economy third in size only to the Sydney and Melbourne CBDs, and one of the youngest, most diverse communities in the nation, the untapped potential is enormous,” Youth Action Western Sydney project coordinator Natasha Lay said.

“Young people are experts in their own lives, they know the challenges facing them, their friends, and their broader communities, and with the right skills, support and inspiration they are the people best placed to drive solutions.

“There’s no shortage of politicians, pundits, and experts discussing the challenges of unaffordable housing or youth unemployment, all offering their own solutions, but the young people of Western Sydney that know these issues better than most are all too often ignored.

“This conference isn’t about highlighting problems and asking other people to fix them, it’s about empowering young people with the skills, knowledge, contacts and tools to drive their own solutions.

“What happens next is determined by the 300 young people here today, but we do know the first *What's Up West?* conference in 2013 has already led to the creation of exciting new projects that have the potential to make a big difference to our city.”

Ms Lay said the region was one of the most diverse, multicultural communities in the world, with half the population being first or second generation Australians.

“Our community is growing faster than the rest of NSW, it’s already home to more than 2 million people, there’s 240,000 businesses that generate nearly \$100 billion dollars a year for the country’s economy, so it’s no surprise that so many future community innovators call the area home,” she said.

“This conference is about amplifying the voices of young people and building their capacity to become active leaders in their communities that create positive, lasting social change.

“Everyone attending wants to be part of youth-led solutions to challenges such as homelessness and housing affordability, mental health, racism and social inclusion, gender diversity and sexuality, climate change, environment and sustainability, and human rights.”

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What's Up West? youth conference:

When: 9am to 3pm, Thursday 16 and Friday 17 July, 2015

Where: Building EA, UWS Parramatta Campus, James Ruse Drive, Parramatta

Presenters:

- **Nishan David:** co-founder of cult streetwear brand Bloodless, which redistributes all profits to support grassroots social entrepreneurs in developing countries;
- **Amna Karra-Hasan:** founder of the Auburn Tigers women's AFL team;
- **Subeta Vimalarajah:** whose "Stop taxing my period!" petition to remove the GST on tampons collected more than 100,000 signatures and launched a national debate;
- **Clary Castrission:** an 'accidental' social entrepreneur who founded education charity 40K following a trip to India; and
- **Yasmine Lewis:** law student, spoken word poet, performer and high school student mentor.

