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THE FUTURE OF THE GREATER WEST: Young People and Placemaking

**SUBMISSION TO
THE GREATER SYDNEY COMMISSION**





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About Youth Action

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. 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.
2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy to shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services.
3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers.
4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services.
5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them.
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.

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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Greater Sydney Commission establishes a Youth Peer Engagement Program to build capacity of young people in Western Sydney to increase youth participation in local community and urban design processes.

Recommendation 2: That the Greater Sydney Commission facilitates youth-friendly workshops to design and create public spaces that fulfill the needs of young people in the West Central District.

Recommendation 3: That the Greater Sydney Commission develops a detailed framework to embed meaningful youth participation into all district plans, as well as the overarching Social, Economic, and Environmental plans.

Recommendation 4: That the Greater Sydney Commission works with existing local resources and networks through service providers and other youth organisations to better engage young people with greater barriers to participation.



Introduction

It is in the best interests of governments, young people, and the community at large to meaningfully engage young people in the decision-making processes that impact their lives. This includes the design of the communities in which they live, work, learn, and play. Meaningful youth participation and engagement in such processes delivers benefits that go far beyond better public spaces, including the potential to impact on issues such as social inclusion and education.¹

Youth participation draws upon the interests, skills and expertise of young people to engage them in an active and meaningful way in the decision-making processes that affect them.² It is protected as a fundamental right of young people by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³

Current efforts in broader community consultation often exclude young people from participating, or only include them in a peripheral or tokenistic manner. This may be due to a lack of specialist understanding of youth participation methodologies among built environment professionals, combined with a reliance on flawed consultation frameworks. One such example is the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), which is often relied upon for community consultation processes in NSW, and around the world.⁴ The IAP2 framework

¹ C Millard, 'Young people and placemaking: Engaging youth to create community places', *Project for Public Spaces*. 2015. <<https://www.pps.org/blog/young-people-and-placemaking-engaging-youth-to-create-community-places/>>

² B Checkoway, 'What is youth participation?' *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 33. 2010, pp. 340-341. <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740910003270>>

³ UNICEF, 'A simplified version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'. 2009. <<https://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycrc.pdf>>

⁴ International Association of Public Participation, 'Foundations of public participation'. 2014. <https://www.iap2.org.au/Tenant/C0000004/00000001/files/IAP2_Foundations_of_Public_Participation.pdf>

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provides a useful model of public participation in instances where barriers to participation are low, but does not currently have mechanisms to specifically engage young people. The reliance upon a framework that inherently excludes young people perpetuates the deficit in youth participation. This can result in young people being perceived as apathetic and unwilling to participate in consultations, when in fact the opposite is true; young people are actively looking for ways to contribute, but are met with significant barriers.

Reaching and hearing from young people requires addressing those barriers with a multifaceted approach to community consultation, using traditional participation methods alongside innovative approaches and taking advantage of the networks of young people that already exist in communities. A wide-reaching approach to youth consultation is especially important in uniquely youthful populations like South West and Western Sydney that are rich with cultural and linguistic diversity. A local, community-driven Placemaking approach may be most effective at meaningfully engaging diverse young voices in these areas.

Young People, Placemaking, and Western Sydney

Placemaking can be defined as ‘...strengthening the connection between people and the places they share... a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.’⁵ This approach to designing communities can be especially relevant for regions undergoing transformative growth, such as the South West and West Central districts.

Western Sydney is projected to be the fastest growing area in Australia over the next two decades. The 5-19 year age bracket is forecast to grow by over 50% in both the South West and West Central districts.⁶ Given that young people use public spaces as much, if not more than, other age groups,⁷ it is important that areas with significant youth populations are equipped with sufficient and suitable public spaces where young people can not only safely meet and utilise, but feel a sense of belonging to.

Unfortunately, this is not currently the case in Greater Western Sydney. Both the South West and West Central districts have a below-average area of public open space compared to Greater Sydney as a whole.⁸ This shortfall is particularly severe in the West Central district, where public open space makes up just 13% of land

⁵ Project for Public Spaces ‘What is Placemaking?’. 2009.
<https://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/>

⁶ Greater Sydney Commission, ‘Draft South West district plan overview’. 2016, p. 2. <http://gsc-public.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/south_west_overview.pdf?z0l4FT1J19LrBnZ_rmXoVJpY056EF4lu>

⁷ C Millard, op. cit.

⁸ Greater Sydney Commission, ‘Draft South West district plan overview’. 2016, op. cit., p. 11.

area, well below the Greater Sydney figure of 56%.⁹ Additionally, the frequent exclusion of young people from the design process – whether deliberate or not – means that the public spaces that do exist are generally equipped with facilities tailored for small children and their parents, to the detriment of teenagers and young adults.¹⁰

The lack of suitable public spaces – a direct product of young people’s exclusion from the design process – is problematic, as it has flow on effects that can lead to social isolation and other issues. When youth-oriented public spaces are not available, young people are forced to meet in other areas, such as car parks and transit interchanges. This often leads to other members of society feeling annoyed or even intimidated by their presence in these areas, perpetuating a negative stigma of young people.¹¹ This stereotyping of young people can lead to further social exclusion, potentially pushing young people towards antisocial behaviour and reinforcing this cycle of alienation.¹²

Greater Western Sydney’s many languages and cultures make the region unique and rich, yet it is also these characteristics that compound the existing exclusionary cycle. As ‘the epicentre of Australian migration’,¹³ Western Sydney has higher levels of overseas birth, and lower levels of English language proficiency than Greater

⁹ Greater Sydney Commission, ‘Draft West Central district plan overview’. 2016, p. 11. <http://gsc-public.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/west_central_overview.pdf?m3qFOY1z50lZn_zjLzz_DBkTxSTQTLAY>

¹⁰ C Millard, op.cit.

¹¹ ibid.

¹² M Dee, ‘Citizenship, community, public space and the marginalisation of children and young people’, *The Australian Sociological Association*. 2012. <<https://www.tasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Dee.pdf>>

¹³ G Capuano, ‘Western Sydney profile: A region of diversity and growth’, .id: *The Population Experts*. 2015. <<http://blog.id.com.au/2015/population/local-government/western-sydney-diverse-and-growing-rapidly/>>

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Sydney and Australia as a whole.¹⁴ When participatory processes fail to account for diversity, they, in effect, are designed to exclude such communities and exacerbate social isolation. Placemaking has a crucial role to play in combating isolation and antisocial behaviour, particularly to build socially cohesive communities in Western Sydney.

In this respect, creating places impacts a sense of belonging for young people – that is ‘...young people’s belonging to a place, a sense of rootedness or a form of place attachment impact on their everyday decisions (e.g. to stay or leave a community, place).¹⁵ A strong connection to place provides young people with avenues to stay connected to the people and places that they care about. This is especially important in the context of the South West and West Central districts, where populations and supporting infrastructure will undoubtedly change the places in which young people live and belong to.

Placemaking should be considered for its merits, which extend far beyond the creation of better spaces and social inclusion. When young people have a greater understanding of local issues and are more actively engaged in their communities, they can also develop skills relating to initiative and entrepreneurship.¹⁶ Young people should be valued as active citizens of the present, and therefore places should be designed with their current needs in mind; it is also important to consider young people as future leaders, and recognise the value in nurturing their

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ H Cuervo, N Baraka, M Turnbull, Identifying opportunities and barriers for Indigenous young people in remote communities, Research Report 44, 2015, p. 25, <http://education.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1429359/2015_RR_44_final_May_2015_web.pdf>

¹⁶ *ibid.*

interests and capabilities particularly in relation to local communities.¹⁷ The capacity-building value of participatory placemaking is a notable benefit, particularly in an area like Western Sydney with lower-than-average levels of formal education attainment.¹⁸

While the benefits of youth-specific placemaking are evident, engaging a diverse group of young people can prove a difficult task. Youth populations are often considered 'hard to reach', and don't respond in large numbers through traditional channels of public engagement, such as written submissions, focus groups and town hall meetings.¹⁹ Common barriers to participation include time and financial constraints,²⁰ as well as less tangible barriers, such as a lack of trust in government processes and insufficient understanding of the planning system.²¹ Successful youth participation in placemaking relies on a variety of engagement methods, using traditional consultation processes in combination with current technology and social media, as well as engaging young people through pre-existing youth networks and organisations. This need for a more complex approach to consultation means that projects need dedicated youth consultation processes to

¹⁷ Fairfield City Council, 'Strategy for Young People in Fairfield City 2013-2017'. 2013, p. 5.
<http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/info/20005/community_services/290/council_youth_strategy_2013-17>

¹⁸ Greater Sydney Commission, 'Draft South West district plan overview'. 2016, op.cit., p. 10.

¹⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet, 'Young people: A guide to engagement', *Tasmanian Government*. 2011, p. 3.

<http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/214393/Engaging_with_young_people.pdf>

²⁰ J Bell, A Vromen, P Collin. 'Rewriting the rules for youth participation: Inclusion and diversity in government and community decision making', *National Youth Affairs Research Scheme*. 2008, pp. 129-132.

<https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/rewriting_the_rules_for_youth_participation.pdf>

²¹ Australian Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Mental Health Association, 'Challenges of Youth Participation', *National Youth Participation Strategy Scoping Project Report*. 2008, p. 1.

<http://www.copmi.net.au/images/pdf/Get-Involved/report_fact02.pdf>



meaningfully engage young people and to achieve inclusive and improved community planning and design outcomes.

The West Central draft district plan overview, for example, has no specific priorities or actions in relation to engaging young people. The call for social media feedback using the '#GreaterSydney' hashtag may generate some engagement from young people, but given the diversity of the youth cohort in the area and the 'hard-to-reach' status of many young people, this approach alone is unlikely to return an accurate representation of local youth sentiment. This is insufficient to overcome the barriers young people experience in contributing to public processes. To ensure meaningful, ongoing youth participation at a local level, the district plans need to draw upon past successes in youth engagement to inform a comprehensive strategy for youth consultation.

Youth Action presents three case studies below to showcase effective examples of meaningful youth engagement in projects relating to place and planning. The positive community outcomes that have resulted from each of these case studies demonstrate the impact of effective youth engagement in improved public space and the potential to create better outcomes for and with young people overall.

Case Study 1: Young Placemakers, Scotland

'Young Placemakers' is a youth engagement program delivered by Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) – an independent social enterprise comprising a volunteer base of urban planning professionals with a focus on building active citizenship amongst young people.²² The aim of the program is to appoint young people as community leaders and equip them with the skills necessary to serve as 'ambassadors' for placemaking, encouraging and inspiring their peers to get involved in the placemaking process at the local level.²³ By utilising peer-to-peer interaction, the Young Placemakers program unlocks the 'latent interest' of young people who are interested in the future of their communities, but are unaware of, or uninspired by, the existing avenues of involvement that are available to them.²⁴

In conjunction with advertising through popular social media channels, PAS collaborates with local educational institutions – secondary schools, private colleges and public universities – to find suitable participants for the program.²⁵ The selection criteria are broad, with no prior knowledge assumed or required. Instead, PAS looks for enthusiastic, hard-working, open-minded students who can effectively communicate with other people their age.²⁶ This low barrier to entry means that the program is accessible to students from a range of different backgrounds, provided they possess the right attitude and basic communication skills.

²² S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, 'Young Placemakers: Lessons for youth involvement from an innovative Scottish project'. 2015, p. 12. <www.sustasis.net/Inglis.docx>

²³ *ibid.*, pp. 8-9

²⁴ Innovation Circle Network, 'Youth involvement: The missing piece in the planning jigsaw'. 2013. <<http://www.innovationcircle.net/?id=5215395>>

²⁵ S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

²⁶ Planning Aid for Scotland, 'Young Placemakers: Championing active citizenship in the built environment'. 2014. <<http://pas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Young-Placemakers-Info-Sheet.pdf>>

Upon acceptance into the program, each young placemaker is assigned a research topic and tasked with preparing a report representing and voicing “the concerns and thoughts of their fellow young people” on their particular topic.²⁷ Volunteers with an understanding of, or professional experience with, the planning system are recruited to serve as ‘buddies’ to the young placemakers, guiding them through their project and providing them with information in areas with which they are unfamiliar.²⁸ The young placemakers utilise a range of innovative consultation techniques in order to engage their peers and learn about their thoughts and concerns.

One such technique is ‘social reporting’ which uses visual and aural media to capture and publish ‘stories’ that relate to the young placemaker’s issue of interest.²⁹ This involves audio and video ‘vox pops’ of young people, photography and other illustrations, and ‘news report’ style videos, all of which are then shared online through social media channels. This process of social reporting builds and unlocks social capital and increases the engagement, interest, and understanding of young people on the issues at hand. Innovative engagement methods like these are useful in overcoming the barriers posed by the ‘hard to reach’ nature of young people.

‘Youth visioning’ workshops are another means by which the Young Placemakers program creatively and meaningfully engages young people. At these workshops, which are primarily facilitated by the young placemakers, young people are encouraged to consider changes that have occurred in their local environments,

²⁷ Planning Aid for Scotland, ‘Young Placemakers set to make Scotland greener, smarter and stronger’, 2014. <<http://pas.org.uk/news/young-placemakers-set-make-scotland-greener-smarter-stronger/>>

²⁸ S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, op.cit., p. 6.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 9

and brainstorm further changes that they would like to see.³⁰ The process also encourages participants to consider their ideas for the area in the context of the planning system, allowing them to “develop a greater appreciation of competing development interests and the balancing role played by the planning system”.³¹ The workshops therefore serve a capacity-building purpose in addition to their value as a data collection exercise.

PAS have found that, in most cases, the participants in these youth visioning workshops not only discuss changes that would benefit young people in the area, but also those which would have positive impacts on older residents, young children, families, and tourists. In the case of the Loch Lomond National Park, for instance, the participants provided a range of ideas relating to what older residents would need in the park, including accessible shops and housing, leisure facilities, better transport, and enjoyable civic space.³² At the conclusion of the workshop, a number of participants made formal submissions to the National Park Authority, which resulted in them receiving direct feedback and ongoing information about the process of the plan's development.³³ The workshops assisted in taking the process beyond tokenistic consultation and into ongoing engagement.

The papers completed by the young placemakers are published in a variety of online and offline formats, generating public interest and discussion on the relevant issues. The level of further influence the work of the young placemakers has is dependent on the project. In the Loch Lomond National Park example,

³⁰ Planning Aid for Scotland, 'Youth engagement and input to the Main Issues Report consultation'. 2014, p. 25. <http://www.ourlivepark.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/20140829-PAS-LLTNP-report-V01_ps2.pdf>

³¹ S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

³² Planning Aid for Scotland, 'Youth engagement and input to the Main Issues Report consultation'. 2014, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 26.

participants had the opportunity to present their findings to the board of the National Park Authority, and all of their work was officially considered in the development of the authority's plan for the park.³⁴

In another case, involving the creation of a strategic district plan for southern Scotland, the young placemakers were invited to present their work to the relevant minister in Scottish Parliament.³⁵ Topics that featured prominently in the young placemakers findings – namely public transport and health – were subsequently given increased attention in the planning authority's draft district plan.³⁶ This builds confidence in PAS's claims that the program gives young people "a central role in the creation of Scotland's future places",³⁷ and "demonstrates the potential for substantive engagement of young people in the processes shaping place to improve professional practice and produce tangible results".³⁸

Educating and engaging young people in the planning process in this way empowers those overlooked and is an effective means of community capacity building. The young placemakers are trained in communication and facilitation, and additionally develop research and design skills.³⁹ There are also significant networking opportunities for participants, which are especially useful for those who wish to enter the planning profession in the future. Another major benefit of the

³⁴ S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, op.cit., p. 9.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Planning Aid for Scotland, 'Young Placemakers set to make Scotland greener, smarter and stronger'. 2014, op.cit.

³⁸ S Inglis, H Allan, C Hague & P Biberbach, op.cit., p. 8.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 11.



program is that it satisfies aspects of Scotland's national curriculum, meaning that participants can also receive academic credit for their work.⁴⁰

It is unclear whether the young people involved in the Young Placemakers program are paid for their time. Youth Action strongly recommends that young people's contributions are valued through appropriate remuneration.

Overall, the program succeeds in not only creating better public places for young people, but also developing a more educated and capable generation of young citizens. A program of this nature would yield significant benefits for Western Sydney, including public spaces that better fulfil the needs of the broader community and a youth population that is more willing and able to participate in community decision-making.

Recommendation 1: That the Greater Sydney Commission establishes a Youth Peer Engagement Program to build capacity of young people in Western Sydney to increase youth participation in local community and urban design processes.

⁴⁰ Planning Aid for Scotland, 'Young Placemakers: Championing active citizenship in the built environment', 2014, *op.cit.*

Case Study 2: Fremantle Esplanade Youth Plaza, Western Australia

The Fremantle Esplanade Youth Plaza is a large multi-use public space in the centre of Fremantle, Western Australia. The plaza features a range of youth-oriented recreational facilities including a performance space, a rock climbing wall, a world-class skate park, and ping pong tables⁴¹. The space was designed and built using a combination of state and local government funding.⁴² The initial vision for the space was an inclusive, flexible, youth-oriented facility in a central location, with opportunities for families and young people.⁴³

Prior to finalising a design for the plaza, the City of Fremantle worked with Convic – an independent design firm with a focus on creating youth-inclusive spaces – to design and conduct a seven-month consultation process on the plaza’s design.⁴⁴ This involved two main stages: an initial ‘information gathering’ phase, followed by a series of community workshops.⁴⁵ The Council wanted participants in the consultation to represent ‘the diverse community of Fremantle’,⁴⁶ but also recognised the need to consult specifically with the future users of the space, many of which would be young skaters.⁴⁷ By giving the plaza’s users a significant say in the design of the space, the consultation process would ‘empower youth’, and

⁴¹ C Millard, op.cit.

⁴² City of Fremantle, ‘Esplanade Youth Plaza’. 2014. <<http://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/youthplaza>>

⁴³ Convic, ‘Fremantle Esplanade Youth Plaza: Concept design report, part 1 of 2’. 2013, p. 7. <<https://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/Convic%20Report%20-%20Part%201.pdf>>

⁴⁴ ibid.

⁴⁵ ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁶ ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁷ C Millard, op.cit.

encourage young people to 'take ownership' of the plaza and 'become guardians of the space'.⁴⁸

The initial stage of the consultation process primarily consisted of an online survey about the site's design.⁴⁹ The survey received over 200 responses, mainly from young people. Additionally, to engage meaningfully with the future users of the space, the Council hosted a number of skate workshops at local skate parks, and interviewed the participants in the workshops about what they would like to see at the new facility. This not only allowed the interviewers to collect relevant information from the participants, but also to build a rapport with the skaters, encouraging them to engage with later stages of the consultation process.

Following the completion of this initial consultation stage, the Council formulated two concept designs based on the information collected from the surveys and interviews.⁵⁰ These designs were presented at a series of community workshops, attended by approximately 100 people in total. The workshops represented the diversity of the area's population, and included a large proportion of young residents and skaters. Centred around the question 'What do you want the Fremantle Youth Plaza to be?', the workshops provided participants with information about the site and the planning process, and involved creative design exercises. Participants were asked in groups to create a design for the plaza using site models, and the outputs from these exercises were used to inform the final design of the space.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Convic, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁰ City of Fremantle, 'Esplanade Youth Plaza', 2014. <<http://www.fremantle.wa.gov.au/youthplaza>>

⁵¹ Convic, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

After opening in early 2014, the youth plaza became an instant success, with the space being heavily utilised by young people and families alike.⁵² The high visibility and central location of the site has been praised, as it places young people at the focal point of the community and encourages other residents to view them as the valuable citizens they are.

It could be argued that the popularity of the space is partly due to the Council's willingness to rely on the future users of the plaza so heavily in the design consultation process, resulting in a space that is designed according to the wants and needs of young people in the area, rather than according to broad (and often incorrect) assumptions about what young people want. The plaza is an example of the benefits of meaningful consultation with young people in the placemaking process.

The need for youth-specific public spaces in Western Sydney is evident, and a creative, inclusive approach to designing these spaces will result in the best outcomes for young people and the broader community.

Recommendation 2: That the Greater Sydney Commission facilitates youth-friendly workshops to design and create public spaces that fulfill the needs of young people in the West Central District.

⁵² G Revell, 'Freo's Happy Park: Esplanade Youth Plaza', *ArchitectureAU*, 2015.
<<http://architectureau.com/articles/fremantle-esplanade-youth-plaza/>>

Case Study 3: Fairfield Youth Strategy, NSW

The Fairfield Youth Strategy was adopted by Fairfield City Council in 2013, with the purpose of 'providing strategic direction and formalising Council's commitment to the development and support of young people in Fairfield City'.⁵³ The strategy was also designed to integrate with federal Government's policies, including the 2010 *National Strategy for Young Australians*⁵⁴, as well as state and local government strategic plans.

The Fairfield Youth Strategy is specific to the local government area of Fairfield, the characteristics of which, in many ways, mirror those of the broader South West and West Central Districts – with a high proportion of young people, a large number of recent immigrants, low levels of English language proficiency and high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. Based on these similarities, an approach to consulting young people that is effective in Fairfield City has a reasonably high likelihood of being effective in other similar areas of Western Sydney.

Over 500 young people took part in the consultation process for the youth strategy.⁵⁵ While some were reached through online channels, the vast majority were reached through secondary schools in the area. As part of surveys and focus groups, the participants were asked what changes they hoped to see in Fairfield City over the next decade. The overwhelming majority stated that they would like to see more recreational activities and facilities available to young people in Fairfield City.⁵⁶

⁵³ Fairfield City Council, op.cit., p. 4.

⁵⁴ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 'The national strategy for young Australians', 2010, <<http://apo.org.au/node/30323>>

⁵⁵ Fairfield City Council, op.cit., p. 16.

⁵⁶ Fairfield City Council, op.cit., p. 17.

Without dedicated youth spaces, young people in Fairfield met up at local shopping centres, where they were often forced to move along by centre staff. Other community members reported feeling intimidated, and young people were consequently ejected with no suitable place for them to move along to. They subsequently met in groups at transit points, resulting in public transport users potentially feeling uncomfortable or intimidated.⁵⁷ This is a clear example of how failing to engage young people in placemaking can result in the stigmatisation and social exclusion of young people in their own communities.

Another major finding from the consultation process was that young people felt they hadn't been properly consulted in the past on decisions affecting them. In fact, less than half of those interviewed or surveyed said that they felt like they had a say in community decisions.⁵⁸ This is particularly troubling given that young people flagged issues of importance as part of the consultation process that hadn't been thought of by Council prior to the consultation.

Those who felt like they had a say in community decisions tended to be more involved in local leadership initiatives such as the Fairfield Youth Advisory Committee (YAC).⁵⁹ YAC members receive advocacy training, have opportunities to raise issues directly with Council members, and help to organise youth events in the area, but the time commitments and other resources required to participate in this program often preclude young people with greater barriers from being involved. Many of those consulted stated that peer-to-peer engagement

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Fairfield City Council, 'Youth Advisory Committee', 2016.

<http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/info/20005/community_services/287/youth_advisory_committee>

approaches would be an effective way of getting more young people involved in community decisions.⁶⁰

In addition to reaching students through schools, Fairfield City Council also worked with local service providers to speak with young people who have experienced homelessness.⁶¹ This was an important part of the consultation process, as this group of young people raised specific concerns and ideas for public spaces that weren't raised by the others consulted, such as internet access in public spaces, and longer library opening hours. The Council also consulted directly with a range of youth-oriented service providers in the area. This was necessary to ensure that the full range of viewpoints was considered, particularly those from marginalised groups who may be disengaged from school or unable to participate directly in the consultation process.

The consultation process had a significant impact on the Fairfield Youth Strategy, with the strategy's guiding principles being directly formulated from the consultation data.⁶² The first guiding principle, which states that the top priority for young people is access to affordable recreation and safe places, is evidence of the importance of placemaking to young people in the area. The findings of the consultation process also informed the design of the Fairfield Youth and Community Centre, which was opened in 2015.⁶³

The centre, which was jointly funded by the federal and local governments, contains a wide range of recreational facilities for young people, and has been

⁶⁰ Fairfield City Council, 'Strategy for Young People in Fairfield City 2013-2017'. 2013, op.cit., p. 23.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶³ Fairfield City Council, 'Fairfield Youth and Community Centre official opening', 2015.

http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/press/article/72/fairfield_youth_and_community_centre_official_opening



hailed as a resounding success.⁶⁴ The centre serves as an example of how the thoughts and ideas of young people can be meaningfully used to inform the design of effective community spaces. By formalising the involvement of young people in the decision-making process, the Greater Sydney Commission can ensure that future public spaces in the South West and West Central districts are designed with a consistent and comprehensive approach to youth consultation.

Recommendation 3: That the Greater Sydney Commission develops a detailed framework to embed meaningful youth participation into all district plans, as well as the overarching Social, Economic, and Environmental plans.

Recommendation 4: That the Greater Sydney Commission works with existing local resources and networks through service providers and other youth organisations to better engage young people with greater barriers to participation.

⁶⁴ F Carbone, 'Youth Centre award recognition', Fairfield City Council, 2015.
<http://www.fairfieldcity.nsw.gov.au/info/20010/your_council/456/november/5>

Conclusion

Meaningful youth engagement in placemaking results in better community outcomes overall. In addition to the design of better public spaces, the Young Placemakers case study illustrates the capacity-building opportunities presented by youth engagement in placemaking. The Fremantle Esplanade Youth Plaza demonstrates the ability of meaningful youth consultation to change community perceptions of young people. The Fairfield Youth Strategy example emphasises the importance of formally integrating young people into the decision-making process through a comprehensive youth strategy. By embedding youth perspectives into planning decisions, the resulting public spaces will likely be more accommodating to the needs of young people, be well utilised and will result in improved community cohesion and wellbeing.

Effectively integrating youth perspectives into the future planning of the South West and West Central districts will require a combination of explicitly incorporating youth involvement into urban planning policies and documents, reaching young people in innovative ways, and genuine consideration and implementation of the ideas put forward by young people. The result of this process will be better public spaces for young people, and therefore better outcomes for the entire community.