



IT'S OUR FUTURE

Report on what young
people in the Wollongong
LGA need and want



A hand with a yellow wristband reaches out from the top right corner against a bright, hazy sunset sky. Below the sky, a dark treeline is visible, and in the foreground, a blue metal railing of a playground or park structure is seen. The overall image has a warm, golden-hour glow and a torn-edge aesthetic.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wollongong Youth Services (WYS), part of Wollongong City Council, delivers targeted programs and services to improve opportunities for young people aged 12-24 in the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA).

Over the past four years there have been local, State and Federal surveys which gather data on issues and solutions to help young people. These include:

- Mission Australia's Annual Youth Survey
- Family and Community Services Illawarra Targeted Early Intervention Forum report from 2015
- Council's Strategy for Engagement with Young People
- Wollongong City Council's Youth Services Review
- Illawarra labour forces trends from Australia Policy Online
- The Strategic Plan for Children and Young People – Consultation Results Report (Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, ACYP)

Building on these findings WYS engaged with young people and service organisations to find out what are the best things about being a young person in Wollongong, what activities there should be more of, what type of support is needed and what WYS can do to enhance the lives of young people.

In an effort to hear as many voices as possible WYS undertook a range of engagement activities including an online survey, community circles, vox pops, forums and interviews in May and June 2016.

Interestingly, the local findings of young people in the Wollongong LGA reflected those at a State and Federal level.

The majority of young people thought they could fulfil their academic goals but feared the lack of employment opportunities. They thought the education system is working well but believe governments should keep it as a high priority.

Access to sporting and social activities is working well but public transport is expensive.

For the first time, the National Mission Australia Youth Survey found that young people aged 15-19 thought drugs and alcohol were the most important issue. On a state and local level, domestic violence and bullying were issues of concern.

The State Government's ACYP asked 4,000 young people in NSW, "What are the qualities of a good society?" Responses identified respect, equality, safety, supportive environment and inclusion.

Young people in Wollongong like the relaxed atmosphere of Wollongong, the friendliness, the CBD feels clean and safe, as well as the natural environment of the beaches and bush land.

Young people are concerned about the transition from school to working life, the lack of work experience and employment opportunities, and would like to see more opportunities to gain life skills and free training.

The report aims to highlight gaps in services for young people and identify the barriers young people face in their daily lives. WYS will use this information to develop a strategy for program planning and delivery.

The research findings will be presented to elected representatives and peak bodies and will be made available to young people, members of the community and other services.

In May and June 2016, WYS had conversations with 171 young people aged 12-24 years, eight high school teachers/carers and 12 youth workers in the Wollongong LGA. During these conversations we asked four questions:

1

What is the best thing about being a young person in Wollongong?

2

What fun activities would you like more of in Wollongong?

3

What types of support would assist you to be the best version of you?

4

What things could Wollongong Youth Services do to help make your life, and the lives of other young people, better and easier?

The following sections provide an overview of the comments and discussions that emerged regarding each of the four questions.





What is the best thing about being a young person in Wollongong?

Recreational activities

Young people discussed the vast number of recreational activities available in Wollongong, these included skate parks, fishing, horse riding, motor biking, golf, soccer clubs, football, boxing, ABLES - rotating dance party for those with barriers 18+, under 18 dance parties in night clubs and Comic Gong. Young people said they would like free or affordable recreational activities available to them.

The City Centre

Young people said that they enjoyed the big brand shops now available in Wollongong and the new shopping mall. They also said they liked the free bus service and that Wollongong has a safe and clean CBD.

The Community

Participants said Wollongong has an easy going and progressive culture, beautiful beaches and escarpment and great cafés and restaurants. Its an accessible city that is close to Sydney but not too busy. The roads are easy to drive on and there is not too much traffic. They enjoyed spending time with friends, meeting new people and said that everyone is very friendly and seems to know one another. The availability of education opportunities and services for young people including New Outlook was raised. Head-Space and Wollongong Youth Services programs were mentioned. They also mentioned free community events and great parks.

Worries and concerns

Young people said the things that worried them included limited public transport at night and on the weekend, feeling unsafe on public transport at night, the lack of employment opportunities in the area and the cost of education.

Comments from young people

“Positive and safe environments”

“I like to feel like everyone else so the community helps in making me feel like part of the community”



What fun activities would you like to see more of in Wollongong?

Recreational activities

Young people said they would like to see affordable or free recreational activities including mountain biking, motor biking, boxing, trampolining, swimming, trivia, arts activities, theme parks, arcade/game spaces, roller skating rinks, snorkelling, water sports including surfing, legal bike and motor bike tracks, free tennis courts, arcades where you can use VR headsets, scavenger hunts, pool, table tennis and rugby league.

Opportunities

Young people said they would like affordable educational opportunities, increased activities for young people in the LGBTIQ community, increased group activities for young people, accessible and free technology including Wi-Fi and shopping centres.

Events

Participants said they enjoyed community events including *Viva la Gong*, *Comic Gong*, *Thirroul Seaside Festival* and *Spring into Corrimal*. Young people would like to see more free music, events and festivals for young people as well as skate competitions.

Comments from young people

“Meeting place/ hang out for 18-24 year olds as there is nothing to do during the day particularly for those with mental health being alone is very difficult”

“More regular social events and activities for youth”



What types of support would assist you to be the best version of you?

Financial

Young people said they would like more financial support to help gain independence and live away from home. This financial support could include access to free activities, affordable education, affordable housing, free staple foods, assistance with buying a car, affordable driving lessons and free parking.

Services

Young people said they have trouble finding and accessing information about drug and alcohol services available to them. They wanted assistance in accessing information on services and suggested that WYS could run a monthly information session on services. The lack of places for young people aged 18-24 years and those with a mental illness to socialise was also mentioned.

Employment and education

Participants said they were concerned about the lack of employment opportunities available to them and the need for more volunteer and entry level positions. Access to free or affordable courses would give young people the skills to make them more employable. These courses could include white card training, certificate and diploma courses including basic mechanics and life skills.

Transportation

Young people had concerns about the cost of transportation and the limitations and access to services outside of the Wollongong CBD. They would like to see affordable transportation and increased free and paid services travelling outside of the Wollongong CBD.

Comments from young people

“Opportunities to mix with other people that share the same interest as me, such as events”

“More social gatherings and social areas for adolescents so that I can grow my social skills”



What things could Wollongong Youth Services do to help make your life, and the life of other young people, better and easier?

Recreational activities

Young people said they would like to see more recreational activities. These activities included group sports, martial arts, tai chi, parkour, netball, photography, self-defence and music.

Life transitions and education

Young people said they would like more support and education in life transitions including high school to work, university as well as life skills. These skills included how to manage your tax, housing, planning holidays, budgeting, making sense of bills, how to apply for a loan, interviews, how to fill in forms, cooking skills, study assistance, networking for work experience and car maintenance basics. Young people also said they would like to attend workshops on health such as suicide prevention and support, healthy relationships, safe sex and how to deal with difficult situations.

Infrastructure

Young people said they wanted a safe community environment. Young people suggested improved lighting outside of the Wollongong Youth Centre and MacCabe Park. They would like to see more spaces for young people to use as a social outlet as well as specifically for 18-24 year olds.

Comments from young people

“Having some youth leaders who have gone through what young people these days go through, so that they understand us and so that we can touch base with them”

“Offering more services to youth such as advice on contraception, getting a job and education pathways in a more exciting appealing way to youth.”



EVENTS YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US THEY LIKE



VIVA
LA
GONG



 *Spring
into
Corrimal*

THANK YOU

To all the young people who participated, Dapto High School, Smith Street Unit, Headspace, New Outlook, Wollongong Youth Network, Rainbow League, University of Wollongong, Essential Personnel, Para Meadows School

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