

Articles

The value of youth to the Shire

Last week Byron Shire Youth Service manager Paul Spooner and young local woman Anamai addressed Byron Shire Council. These are edited extracts from their talks.

I am the Manager of Byron Youth Services. Byron Youth Service was formed in 1987 to meet the needs of young people in the local community. Over the years we have developed a special interest in young people who are, to use a cliché, 'falling through the gaps'. Much of our work has been identifying those gaps and designing suitable interventions to address them.

We currently operate throughout the Shire with our Youth and Family Liaison program in Mullumbimby and our Job Placement Employment and Training program operating in Ballina, Mullumbimby and Byron Bay. We run Links to Learning in Byron Bay – a creative and practical program for young people who have left school early. We also provide TAFE outreach for young people wishing to complete secondary education via a Learning Centre at the Youth Activities Centre.

The things that affect all young people affect our clients more severely. These are: lack of transport, lack of further training, lack of opportunity for apprenticeships, poverty and poor motivation.

In May last year, we entered into partnership with Byron Shire Council to develop a Youth Commitment in the Shire. The objective of the youth commitment is to forge more effective links between the community, the business sector, and the training and education sector to ensure that young people make viable transitions from education to the world of work.

You have received the report from our first meeting in May, so I will not elaborate more, but simply give an update on what we have achieved since that time. We have formed working groups around four key goals:

- education and mentoring;
- business and enterprise development;
- youth engagement; and
- coordination and promotion.

The business and enterprise group has developed a plan for the creation of a youth enterprise culture in the Shire. We have received funds from the federal government to develop a best practice model and trial two pilot projects. We have received state government funds toward co-ordination of the youth commitment.

Council currently works in partnership with us on the



Support is vital to young people

Hi, my name is Anamai. I'm 21 and have lived in Byron Bay for two years.

I came to Byron after living in the south coast all my life. I was homeless at 14 but managed to get by with the help of youth services, particularly JPET in Nowra.

When I arrived in Byron Bay I connected with Michael, the JPET worker in Byron Bay, and the other staff of Byron Youth Service.

Through their amazing support I have negotiated numerous crisis situations with accommodation and personal issues.

This support extended into me landing a five star job that was my career goal after much training and work over the years. Since I have become established in Byron Bay I have continued to receive support in personal issues with Michael and other staff.

I went on to pursue my personal dream of becoming a fashion designer. After information and advice from BYS I participated in two Links to Learning courses which were held at the YAC, one was fashion the other was hair/ beauty and retail.

I have continued to work hard towards my dream and have now been accepted into the Wollongbar TAFE'S full time Certificate IV clothing production course, due to my previous train-

ing at BYS. The kind of support I have received is vital to young people in the Shire.

I have become more aware of this due to my experiences and those of my peers. Due to Byron Bay being such a diverse youth culture I believe there's a great need for funding to employ a generalist youth worker to give youth access five days a week for counseling assessment and referral.

All existing youth workers are tied into programs that make them unable to attend to general youth issues.

Due to shortage of employment and part time employment most youth find all their income (that's if they do have work) goes to accommodation and transport so affordable housing is a real issue for us. I would like Council to develop an affordable housing policy.

The YAC is a fantastic venue but it needs to be promoted more and young people need to see signs around town telling them where it is. The signs should be graphically interesting and young people could compete to design them.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk to you. I realise that these are just things I would like to bring to your attention and I will continue to pursue them to their conclusion.

Youth Commitment – we would hope this will continue in the future.

The future of community services are not secure, we are increasingly being asked to do more, for less. This places an enormous strain on small organisations, such as ours, with limited resources.

I would ask Council to consider the ways it may assist Byron Youth Service to continue to develop programs for the young people of the Shire.

So, why should you care about these issues? May I give you what I consider to be some very good reasons:

One in six people of the Shire are between the ages of 12 to 24.

Currently Byron Shire Council has an operational and program budget for young people of \$25,000 or \$5.45 per young person. That

is, young people get the equivalent of two cups of coffee out of the council each year.

Byron Youth Service currently pays rent to Council of around \$18,000 per year to operate from youth-specific buildings. If this income is taken into account the Council's nett contribution to young people drops to \$7,532 or \$1.65 per young person. That is, less than one cup of coffee per year.

On the other hand the Byron Youth Service generates just over \$500,000 or \$113 per young person to operate its programs as a non-profit, community based organisation.

Byron Youth Service is currently facing at least one program being cut by the federal government to the tune of \$80,000.

Not due to inefficiency but

due to federal government policy.

Clearly, it would make a lot of sense for Byron Shire Council and Byron Youth Service to work closer together to ensure that quality programs may be offered to the young people of the Shire.

In closing, may I suggest an immediate and practical opportunity be explored by Council to provide greater support directly to youth programs in the Shire by ceasing the practice of charging rent in youth-specific buildings to Byron Youth Service.

Such a contribution would go a long way towards ensuring the ongoing financial viability of this important community organisation, while at the same time sending a positive message that 'Byron Shire Council cares about its young people'

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Proceeds from the sale of two tickets 'Buys a Day of Recovery' for one person, as well as helping maintain the exceptional services of the Buttery's therapeutic community.

The Buttery would like to thank:

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