



2022 KALBARRI & NORTHAMPTON

Listening Tour

Summary Report



About YACWA

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak body for young people and the youth sector in Western Australia. We operate primarily as a human rights organisation that seeks to address the exclusion of young people in a rapidly changing society.

Our continued vision for Western Australia is one that celebrates and engages young people in all aspects of the community. Our role is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration; professionalism and voice of the non-government youth service sector to better serve the young people of Western Australia.

During 2021-2023, YACWA received pilot funding from Lotterywest to strengthen our regional engagement by employing local staff through a place-based model. Our aim was to build strong regional connections to better understand regional issues and amplify these in our policy and advocacy work, increase the capacity of young people to be changemakers in their communities, and support the youth sector where needed with training, networking, events and activities.

About the Midwest Listening Tour

The aim of the Listening Tour in August 2022 was twofold;

- to explore the strengths and challenges in remote Midwest communities, and capture these as a peak body, and;
- create a space to work together to map out approaches and solutions that create better outcomes for young people and the services who support them in the community.

YACWA invited sector professionals across 14 local government areas of the Midwest to connect with one another in a half-day workshop format, facilitated by YACWA. Representatives from the sector came together to not only share the strengths and challenges within their community but to explore solutions at a local level. A small number of local representatives ranging from government, non-government organisations and community participated in the Kalbarri/Northampton conversations. This provided us the opportunity to build relationships, listen to the needs and priorities of remote communities within the Midwest, and capture what we heard to assist in identifying advocacy priorities moving forward.

This report summarises the issues we heard from participants in regional and remote Midwest communities, with the intention of capturing sector voice that may otherwise often go unheard and to advocate to decision makers to engage in dialogue with communities and provide the necessary place-based resourcing.

This report was prepared by Melissa Myers, YACWA Regional Project Officer – Midwest, with support from YACWA's Regional and Policy and Advocacy staff.

YACWA acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of this land, sea and waters. We also pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging of the lands on which we reside and travel.

Towns invited/engaged to participate in the Midwest Listening Tour

- Carnamah
- Coorow
- Cue
- Greenhead
- Kalbarri
- Leeman
- Meekatharra
- Mount Magnet
- Mingenew
- Morawa
- Northampton
- Perenjori
- Three Springs
- Yalgoo

This report highlights the strengths, challenges and solutions for the **Kalbarri and Northampton** communities. To review the Listening Tour Reports for the other above-mentioned communities, please visit the YACWA website <https://www.yacwa.org.au/regional-yacwa/>

Preface

Common themed issues emerged as they have in our other reports from the Great Southern Youth Sector Forum [2022], Midwest Youth Sector Forum [2021] and the State of Youth Sector Forum [2021]), highlighting the challenges the sector and young people face regarding Housing & Homelessness, Education, Employment, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Youth Justice, Child Protection and emerging more, Climate Change.

However, as we heard from our conversations, these remote communities have less access to resources to support outcomes in the aforementioned areas compared to major regional hubs or the greater Perth metropolitan area, exacerbating systemic issues throughout remote communities.

STRENGTHS IDENTIFIED IN THE COMMUNITY AND YOUTH SECTOR

Sport plays a key role in community

We heard of the strength that community sport plays in the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of young people within both towns. The recognition of local young people not only making it into professional sporting careers but becoming mentors has been seen as a highly effective motivator.

Extra-curricular activities generate valuable experiences

One example of an extra-curricular activity we heard of that provides benefit to young people in the area is Kalbarri District High School's Bushrangers program, which aims to provide young people with positive experiences whilst building skills and expertise. The Bushrangers have been a significant part of learning about and taking care of the environment, and in 2021 were a part of the major cleanup of the Kalbarri foreshore alongside the Northampton Shire and Kalbarri Development Association, following Cyclone Seroja.

Natural wonders provide opportunities

Kalbarri and Northampton are popular places to visit for their scenic natural beauty. Participants felt that this was a real benefit for young people residing in these towns as it provides many educational and recreational opportunities that many other young people may never get to experience, including visiting the beautiful coastline with the many water sports/recreational activities available, traversing the natural rock formations providing scenic views, abseiling and hikes, participating in river activities, alongside opportunities available at farming and station properties just a few kilometers inland from the coast.

Flexible funding provides opportunities for growth in community participation

Funding was made available in the regions in 2022, which provided flexible timeframes and open-ended applications over 18 months. The funding approval time is quick and funding criteria is broad, allowing for easier access to funds. The funding has provided the communities with events such as community art workshops, a women's wellbeing weekend, community skill building (12-week digital workshop), yoga and tea (8-week event) as well as children's week activities. We heard that these events have received positive feedback from both sector and community and are examples of more holistic community-based activities for young people to engage with peers and improve their wellbeing.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY SECTOR WITH A SUMMARY OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Increase competitive sporting opportunities in Kalbarri, to support psychosocial health

We heard that more sporting opportunities are needed for young people such as two-on-two basketball or street soccer run by locals in Kalbarri. A lack of understanding around whose responsibility it is to deliver these activities, combined with access to funding to do so, may be impacting on the consistent availability of these activities.

We heard that having more sporting coordinators from the Midwest region who can provide regular sessions to help young people to find a sport they enjoy and provide coaching and/or umpiring clinics could provide many benefits to the community. This includes improving local skills, reducing boredom and nurturing young people's passion for sport. Using the school as a foundation to introduce these sports as well as at community events is one way to introduce sports and generate interest with young people.

We heard that establishing group activities focusing on friendly competition that also provides a secondary focus/outcome of psychosocial support could be a good fit for the Kalbarri community, in addition to support groups that are aimed at a particular issue. Offering something for free or as a competition through sport or a community event could be a good motivator for young people, while providing reward and associated support/mentoring.

Collaborative partnerships are needed between the public and private sector to facilitate career and study opportunities for young people

To support young people to remain in regional WA, the sector felt that a space was needed to upskill and train local young people for free. This could be a partnership approach between local government, local businesses and industry with the aim of making it appealing to live and learn locally, as well as be able to engage in remote secondary and tertiary education opportunities, without having to leave the community.

Sector also identified the importance for communities to provide technology supports and access to resources in places such as the library and in Community Resource Centres, that are accessible outside business hours, to provide inclusivity to all to further their education.

More student workforce participation opportunities are needed

Participants also identified there are limited opportunities for students to participate in the workforce in Kalbarri and Northampton. It was identified that the provision of more career pathway options in upper secondary school and community sector placements could address this issue.

This includes volunteer positions such as bushfire brigades, Police Cadets, Volunteer Ambulance Officers, as well as paid sports umpiring and access to coaching training

courses. This also includes working with local businesses to identify local employment gaps and partnering with the community workforce to offer the necessary training for eligible students to fill some of these vacancies.

Provision of mental health support for young people is an unmet need

We heard anecdotal reports that young people are not satisfied with the current provision of mental health service available to them, as the reliance on online support via Zoom and Telehealth are viewed as impeding authentic engagement. Local service providers have heard that young people would like to see a greater variety of mental health service providers with several options of support, such as the option to talk to someone younger, or face to face for example. Sector also highlighted the need for more peer support guidance.

Alternatives to alcohol and other drug use are needed

We heard of recreational drug use amongst young people in the community, potentially due to boredom, generational habits and parents working long hours leaving young people unattended. The use of vapes on school grounds has also been identified. We heard that more harm reduction education delivered by external service providers could help, as well as more opportunities for young people to participate in extracurricular activities to alleviate boredom.

External support services are valuable and more regular outreach support is needed

We heard that the community enjoys having external service providers and facilitators visit the towns. Sector felt that these kinds of services are better supported in smaller communities as young people can find it easier talking to professionals that they do not have to see often, and asking questions that they may feel embarrassed to ask other members of the same community.

Greater provision of activities can mitigate issues

We heard that local young people are generally well-behaved and approachable in Kalbarri and Northampton and most of the antisocial behaviour that occurs in town is during school holidays, with boredom being a factor. More activities for young people, especially in peak times such as holidays, could assist in preventing antisocial behaviours from occurring. Local services providing youth specific activities supported by community development officers was suggested to address this.

Sector told us that out of all cohorts, young people miss out the most on activities and events within their communities. It was recommended that activities be tailored to suit age and interest. Asking local young people for their input was viewed as imperative to the planning, development and delivery of local events and activities. Mechanisms for young people to connect across towns in the district was also raised as an opportunity, with suggested

activities such as camping trips, school formals and activities focused on friendly competition providing opportunities for young people to socialise and build friendships.

Cyclone Seroja continues to impact the lives of young people

Sector told us that young people in the community are struggling as they have not had an opportunity to talk about their experiences in the cyclone due to the vast damage within the community and the focus on entire community wellbeing. We heard that many young people are still struggling with processing the emotions of those around them and the ongoing ramifications and impact of Seroja twenty months on.

Young people need opportunities to express themselves around climate change and the weather impacts in their communities. In addition, their input on how to rebuild their local communities is important and necessary since they are the ones more likely to remain and reside in the community over the longer term.

Limited resources and funding impact on continuity of care and costs of services

Lack of resources and funding are having an impact on the ability of services to provide continuity of care. Participants shared their concern around the costs of services for young people and how this can also present as a barrier for some members of the community, especially those who must travel for follow-up care. The added costs for those to access services can result in poorer outcomes.

More options for affordable, sustainable and youth-appropriate housing are needed

There is a lack of affordable and sustainable housing opportunities for workers, families and independent young people in the region, and we heard that this is a growing concern in the communities of Kalbarri and Northampton. Young people are also at a disadvantage when trying to start in the workforce as they struggle to find housing to accommodate their needs, such as in proximity to their work. Many of the houses in the area are aged and in need of repairs and upgrades and some are still damaged and uninhabitable due to Cyclone Seroja, which significantly affected some towns in the Midwest in April 2021. The allocation of resources to upgrade and maintain this existing housing stock should be considered a priority.

One idea (also heard by YACWA in other areas) is to have young people who are experiencing unemployment, involved in fixing up rundown houses within communities for them to reside in. This initiative can be used to provide positive employment opportunities for young people at-risk of disengagement and is also a way to enhance local skill sets and increase the pool of locally based workers.

Cost of living pressures in rural communities needs to be addressed

Local families of Kalbarri and Northampton have been heavily impacted by the recent rise in the costs of living. Due to the town's location, food insecurity has become a major concern and we heard the need for more services to address and support this. Fuel has also become too expensive for the communities, especially young people who may earn less due to their age, making travelling for work, health or social events difficult to achieve. Further discussions with community stakeholders are encouraged, to explore local level initiatives to alleviate pressures.

Dedicated Local Government youth engagement staff are needed in the area

We heard that local governments in the area could benefit from employing youth engagement officers or have community development officers support youth planning. The value of this role would be in having a dedicated resource to bring sectors together, identify priority issues and work with services to deliver joined-up outcomes-based solutions. This role would also be a key liaison with young people themselves to facilitate their involvement in planning and gain feedback on how to improve services to best meet their needs.

Where to from here?

Thank you to the community and youth sector professionals in Kalbarri and Northampton for contributing their time and effort to meet and collaborate to provide the information highlighted in this report, as well as participating via phone and email.

By highlighting key regional issues, we hope this report adds value and supports Kalbarri and Northampton's youth sector planning, collaboration and advocacy work.

YACWA will share this report with key decision makers, to highlight and advocate for the key issues raised by the youth sector in smaller towns throughout the Midwest. This report will also guide YACWA on where to focus our advocacy efforts and where to play our role in supporting the Midwest young people and communities moving forward.

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