

YOUTH
COMMUNITY
FUTURES

Youth Community Futures Report 2024

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Final report for the
Queensland Government
**Department of Environment
and Science**

School of Humanities and Communication and
Centre for Heritage and Culture
University of Southern Queensland



DISCLAIMER STATEMENT



Youth Community Futures acknowledges the First Australians as the Traditional Custodians of all lands throughout Australia and recognise their cultural and spiritual connection to land, waterways and community. We pay our respect to Elders Past, Present and the Emerging leaders who walk together in partnership on this journey.



Youth Community Futures advocates for inclusive communities. We are committed to fostering inclusion, eliminating discrimination in the provision of services and supporting human rights, based in principles of dignity, fairness, equality and mutual respect. We welcome all people irrespective of age, sex, disability, ethnicity, culture, faith and sexual orientation.

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How to Cite This Report

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Accompanying Materials

Further materials from Youth Community Futures can be accessed via <https://youthcommunityfutures.org/>

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*'All these
perceptions around
what youth are doing,
what youth believe, it does really
upset me. Are you really part of the
community if half of it perceives you
as a criminal?'*

(Lutin, April 2023)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Youth Community Futures was possible through funding provided by the Queensland Government Department of Environment and Science. Ms Zoe Kemp supported the overall management of the program and provided insight into the Department's priorities and research foci. Ms Grace Berg and Ms Sarah Mitchell provided support and advice on Departmental requirements, including practical aspects of the Youth Forum convened in May 2022 and Youth Research Showcase event in April 2023. These events were integral to Youth Community Futures and provided the opportunity to relay outcomes derived from the program's research. The Department also provided recognition of the impact of Youth Community Futures, with the research team honoured to receive the Department's Sustainable Communities Award in April 2023.

The Youth Connect team at Toowoomba Regional Council were active collaborators. Ms Margot Ross, Mr Rory Towler and Ms Lisa Byers were integral in the coordination of workshop sessions and liaising with Youth Connect's youth researchers. Toowoomba Regional Council Youth Leaders Mr Samuel Wong, Ms Mehek Syed, Mr Benji Wenitong and Mr Lutin Cliff coordinated teams of youth researchers and demonstrated the value of youth-led research in the generation of important sociological insight.

Likewise, cohorts of collaborating students from Laidley State High School, Warwick State High School, Lockyer District State High School and Centenary Heights State High School undertook a series of 'citizen science' projects that were core to the inquiries within Youth

Community Futures. The enthusiasm shown for these projects was significant, with the insights relayed in this report indicative of this engagement. Likewise, their supporting teachers, including Ms Karen Day, Mr Alistair Smith, Mr Ryan McDonald, Mr Will Curthoys, Ms Chantal Revell and Mr Ian Insley aided the development of these local projects.

At the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ), students and colleagues in the Residential Colleges provided important viewpoints. We especially thank Simeon Kelly, Cooper Timms, Taylah Hoffman, Brydie McKee and Dani Challacombe for their insights into the experiences of young people who relocate for their education and employment. Colleagues in the Office of Research, and especially, Director of the Office Dr Samantha Rose supported this project from the outset and assisted with the provision of UniSQ resources for the various forums and public events that were central to Youth Community Futures.

Several community-based organisations supported this program. Adam and Susy Wenitong from Adapt Mentoring and Tiffany Spary from the Base Services provided crucial insights into the experiences of young people who face significant social and emotional challenges. Discussions with Adam, Susy and Tiffany offered perspective and clarity for understanding the positions of marginalised young people. Paddy Long and Joshua Willson from Rare Squid Creative provided videography and documentary interview expertise, and Leisa Clark from Retrohex furnished Youth Community Futures with its web and social media presence.

We also wish to thank those participants whose anonymity we have preserved here, but whose contributions to this project have been valuable and insightful.

Youth Community Futures was an all-of-community project that worked to reframe the narratives that circulate around young people and their

aspirations. It was with the support of the individuals and organisations named here that Youth Community Futures was equipped to progress its research agenda.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people inhabit a world that is largely not of their making, but within which they confront significant social, ecological, and economic challenges. These challenges are intensified in regional settings. The opportunities for young people to progress meaningful lives and engage productive pathways through education and employment are constrained in regional Queensland, with factors including geographic distance, social isolation and a shortfall of opportunity limiting what is available to young people.

This situation is further complicated by the significant public attention that has been given in recent times to 'youth crime' and anti-social behaviour. Generating visions of dangerous and delinquent youth, negative prevailing views of young people have had the effect of alienating all members of community and damaging the cohesion of community networks. It is vital that more complex, insightful and compassionate understandings of young people are generated to prompt the building of more inclusive and harmonious communities.

Youth Community Futures focused on understanding the experiences of young Queenslanders and the challenges they face. The projects constituting Youth Community Futures worked in collaboration with cohorts of young people aged between 13–25 to understand how young people engage with their communities and progress fulfilling lives. Scant sociological research has chronicled the experiences of young people in regional Australia, so it was in response to this lacuna that Youth Community Futures set about capturing accounts of the regional experience.


Extending a series of provocations developed during a Youth Forum convened at UniSQ in May 2022, a research agenda constituted by three principal themes established the foundation for Youth Community Futures. The Forum participants—a group of over 80 young people, their teachers, community service workers and representatives of the wider community—identified Connectivity, Communication and Cultural Understanding and Visibility of Opportunity as focusing themes for

further inquiry. It was from this basis that the research agenda underpinning Youth Community Futures was established.

The projects conducted under these themes revealed that young people are impacted by a conflation of societal and socioeconomic factors, but that they maintain significant capacity for generating creative and resilient responses to the challenges they face. However, more must be done to support young people to achieve the aspirations they hold, with the direct engagement of young people in community decision-making, the provision of resources that enable visible pathways into education and employment, and greater opportunities for community cohesion representing the key findings to emerge from the research. Young people have the capacity to generate significant contributions to society, but they require commensurate support to achieve their aspirations.

This report provides an overview of the Youth Community Futures program of research and a discussion of the generated outcomes. Included within this report are descriptions of the project streams that constituted Youth Community Futures. Specific attention is given to a series of Research Provocations that are drawn from the dataset, with these points representing areas where local and state governments might join with communities to provide

young people a platform to extend fulfilling lives and contribute to the development of their communities. It is vital that young people are provided the opportunity to reach their aspirations and engage as valued members of their communities.



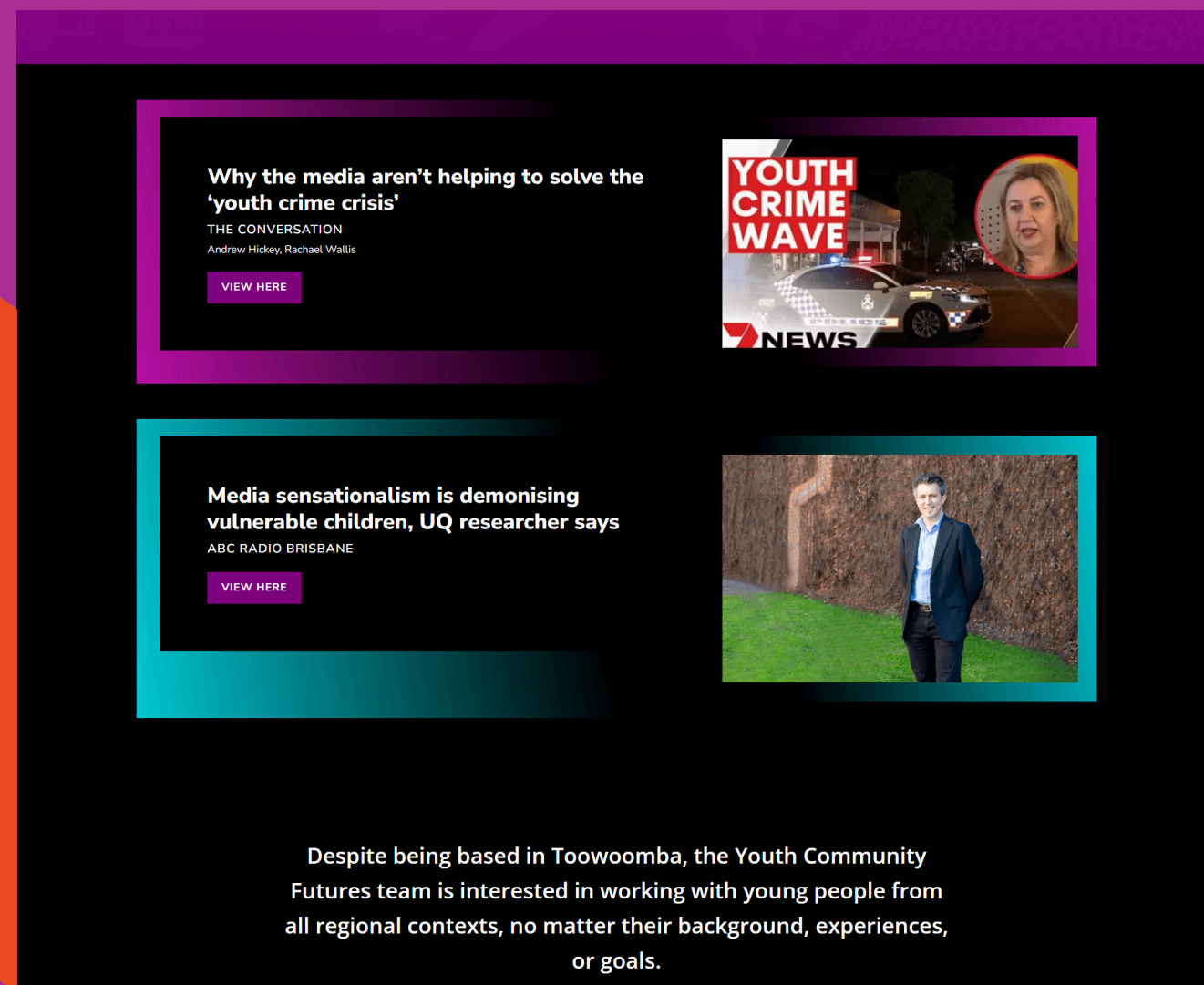
'If we can't go to look for help anymore, from the older generation, who do we get help from?'

(Benji, April 2023)

YOUTH COMMUNITY FUTURES ONLINE PRESENCE

A project website accompanies this report. On this site access to descriptions of project streams and materials developed through the course of the research are available.

The Youth Community Futures website can be found via:
<https://youthcommunityfutures.org/>



PROJECT PARTNERS

The Youth Community Futures Research Program partnered with the following organisations:

Queensland Department of Science and Environment – funding partner

Toowoomba Regional Council Youth Connect

UniSQ Residential Colleges

Queensland College of Wine Tourism

Education Queensland – Laidley State High School, Lockyer District State High School, Centenary Heights State High School, Warwick State High School



Professor Andrew Hickey

Chief Investigator

Andrew is a Professor of Communications and an ethnographer who has undertaken large-scale projects exploring community, the public pedagogies of place in urban developments, and the enhancement of social harmony with partners including the Canadian Government,

Australian Government Department of Education and Training, Education Queensland, state and local governments, and a number of community and not-for-profit organisations.

Andrew holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Southern Queensland, Master of Applied Science from Charles Sturt University, and PhD from the University of Southern Queensland.



Professor Stewart Riddle

Chief Investigator

Stewart is a Professor in Curriculum and Pedagogy in the School of Education at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. His research examines the democratisation of schooling systems, increasing access and equity in education and how schooling can respond to

critical social issues in complex contemporary times.

Stewart holds a Bachelor of Music from the Queensland University of Technology, Bachelor of Education, Master of Educational Studies, and a PhD, all from the University of Queensland.



Professor Celmara Pocock

Chief Investigator

Celmara Pocock is Director of the Centre for Heritage + Culture. She is an anthropologist who researches people's attachment to places. She works in partnership with communities, including First Nations communities, and state and commonwealth government agencies.

The Youth Community Futures project contributes to the Connected Communities research theme in the Centre for Heritage + Culture.



Ms Alarnah McKee

Research Program Manager

Alarnah has worked closely with young people as a sporting coach, welfare advisor, and administration officer in the higher education context and is always excited to hear their stories. Having recently completed her studies at the University of Southern Queensland, Alarnah is passionate about understanding identities, interpersonal relationships, modes of creativity, and especially, how young people

navigate the world, specifically, through ethnographic methods of research.

Youth Community Futures caught Alarnah's attention due to its emphasis on collaboration. As a young person herself, Alarnah relished the prospect to work alongside young people, support connection to community, and invoke positive change in regional contexts.

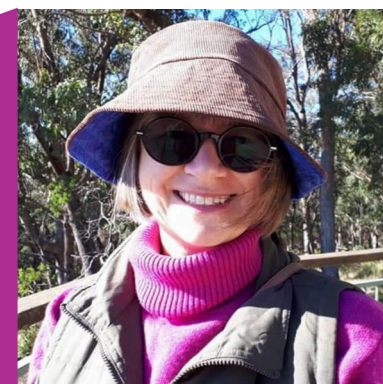


Ms Danika Skye

Research Assistant

Danika comes from Birpai Country and has previously tutored First Nations students in both high school and university settings. She recently completed her Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis researching the cultural distinctiveness of contemporary Aboriginal People. Danika brings her experience of working with young people into the Youth Community Futures Research Program.

Danika holds a Diploma of Education from the University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from the University of Southern Queensland.



Dr Rachael Wallis

Research Assistant

Following a career in arts management in both Canada and Australia, Rachael transitioned into academia and now researches in the areas of identity, belonging, space and place. Her PhD project examined the phenomenological and discursive practice of place for lifestyle migrants and her writing explores social imaginaries, discourse and material culture from an ethnographic perspective. Rachael's previous work links

closely with this project, exploring social engagement, connection to community, communication and opportunity in rural Australia.

Rachael holds a Bachelor of Arts from Griffith University, a Master of Arts from the University of Southern Queensland, and a PhD, also from the University of Southern Queensland.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THIS RESEARCH

Youth Community Futures was designed to extend the following principles:

Collaborative Research

A core feature of the conduct of Youth Community Futures focused on engaging young people as co-researchers. Building on a 'citizen science' model (Roche et al. 2020; Dickinson et al. 2010; Bonney et al. 2009), Youth Community Futures engaged with its participating young people to co-design and conduct the research inquiries. While 'citizen science' is typically activated to engage members of community in the collection of large-scale datasets, a variation of this approach was derived to generate specialised 'ethnographic' data, namely via interview, observational and documentary data generation techniques. This approach involved the training and professional development of our participating young people, and for which the research team worked closely with the participants to demonstrate effective approaches to data collection and research conduct. The result of this approach is evident throughout this report.

Strength-Based Representations of Young People

this project also centred on identifying young peoples' capacities as active

members of community. In context of negative media and populist representations of young people, Youth Community Futures sought to illustrate instances in which young people were positively activating change and engaging with their communities. Young people hold sophisticated understandings of the social contexts they inhabit and remain capable of confronting the challenges posed by restrictive socioeconomic circumstances. Moving beyond simplistic renderings of young people as 'irresponsible' and 'out-of-control' (Hickey & Phillips 2013; Phillips & Hickey 2013), Youth Community Futures sought to capture detailed accounts of young peoples' aspirations and strategies for navigating complex worlds.

Advocacy Agenda

Young people are often maligned and absent from public discussion. An imperative for the research conducted in Youth Community Futures corresponded with the intention to provide evidenced insight into the experiences of young people and their communities. Cast as a 'critical ethnography' (Soyini-Madison 2011), Youth Community Futures worked to generate an evidence-base of data that demonstrated young peoples' capacities and presence in community, while casting light on the distinct structural and socioeconomic challenges that constrain young people. Following

this ethic, Youth Community Futures had at its core the following principle: 'the world is capable of being changed; change can come from any direction, and especially from the bottom up' (Johnson & Parry 2022: 1).

These principles defined the conduct of Youth Community Futures and its intent to move beyond simplistic, inaccurate and incomplete accounts of young people. By working with our youth researchers to co-design inquiries that recorded accounts of life in regional

Queensland, Youth Community Futures activated a mode of research that sought to amplify the capacities that young people hold as active members of community.

BACKGROUND: THE UNISQ YOUTH FORUM AND YOUTH COMMUNITY

The Youth Community Futures program of research emerged from a Youth Forum convened at UniSQ on May 17, 2022. Over 80 participants took part in defining a research agenda that focused on understanding young peoples' experiences of life in regional Queensland. Young people in regional Queensland face a range of unique challenges, particularly around the provision of educational, employment and social opportunity. It was in context of these socio-demographic conditions that a program of research for Youth

Community Futures was defined. The Forum identified that a research agenda focused on illuminating the challenges that regionally situated young people encounter would provide important insights for policy and the development of initiatives that support young peoples' social engagement.

It was in this spirit that the Youth Forum set out to:

- i) Identify the major issues confronting young people in regional, south-east Queensland.
- ii) Define a research agenda that would provide meaningful responses to the socio-demographic challenges that young people encounter.

From the discussions convened during the Forum the following themes were identified as focal points for the Youth Community Futures program of research:

Connectivity: Social engagement, connection to community and social inclusion in regional settings are crucial for supporting young peoples' sense of place and identity.

Communication and Cultural Understanding: Developing networks of communication in which young people are 'heard' provides a means for genuinely engaging young people in community. This is especially important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Visibility of Opportunity: Education, employment and social opportunity in regional settings are often limited in comparison to metropolitan areas. Identifying where the provision of services and opportunities for young people may be activated presents as an important means for retaining young people in their communities.



A series of six projects were devised to respond to these themes. Utilising a social research methodology that included 'citizen science' approaches that engaged young people as co-researchers, Youth Community Futures progressed the following projects:

Project 1:
The Elders' Network

Project 2:
The Sentiment Log

Project 3:
Young Peoples' Futures

Project 4:
Leaving Home

Project 5:
Young People and the Social Imaginaries of Youth

Project 6:
Community-Focused Youth Service Provision

These projects and their findings are discussed in the subsequent sections of this report.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

An important focus for Youth Community Futures centred on the regional experience. In regional Australia, as in non-metropolitan locations worldwide (Jivetty et al., 2016; Mueller & Thurlow, 2019; Wells et al., 2019), a variety of socioeconomic and demographic factors conflate to define young people's experiences. Farrugia's (2013) identification of the peculiarity of the 'macro-level processes that shape young lives' are notable in this sense, with the experience of young people in regional settings prefigured not only in terms of the affective-symbolic associations that individuals sustain in place and with each other, but also in the material, socioeconomic structures that configure the conditions inherent to these settings.

In regional Australia, young people's experiences are marked by precarity and restricted opportunities in employment, education and sociality (Lamb et al., 2015; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Alston & Kent, 2001). The youth unemployment rate in regional Australia is persistently higher—typically double that of the general population (Woodhouse & Thorpe, 2018). Opportunities for quality schooling, training and higher education are operatively limited (Chesters & Cuervo, 2022; Cuervo, 2014; Halsey, 2018). The forms of social interaction and engagement possible in these locations are presaged by geographic distance and isolation (Waite, 2020). This compound of

effects impacts the ways in which young people progress their life trajectories. Indeed, we go as far as to suggest that the current situation for young people in regional Australia is limited, generally, with opportunities to progress lifeways and lead successful lives affected by the conflation of spatial-geographic and socioeconomic factors.

During the conduct of Youth Community Futures, a further aspect of young peoples' experiences of public life was especially pertinent. Young people in regional Australia (and regional Queensland in particular) have been subject to intense media and social scrutiny following a spate of high-profile burglaries and assaults. Mobilising a figuration of 'young person as dangerous', and reviving accounts similar to those chronicled by Cohen (1972) and Hall et al. (1979), media reporting has cast a deliberately narrow view of the young person as dangerous. This figuration follows a 'larger' representation of regional spaces as marginalised locations, with the impact of crime and associated anti-social behaviour providing a notable thematic in media reporting on this so-called 'youth crime crisis'.

Drawing an initial coordinate from the geographic positioning of young people and the ways that young people come to be recognised in spatially situated terms, we draw attention to the regional

experience to consider the influence of the spatial terrain that young people inhabit. Who young people are is directly associated with where they are, with this imbrication of identity and geography representing a crucial factor in the framing of the experience of youth.

The social dynamics inherent to this spatial figuring of young people define the ways that young people come to be

engaged in their communities in very particular ways. This exerts effect over the participation young people are authorised to enact in different social contexts (Hickey & Phillips 2013), with young peoples' experiences in regional settings providing a thematic focus in the inquiries conducted for Youth Community Futures.

PROJECTS

Youth Community Futures supported six distinct projects. Descriptions of these projects, their guiding rationales and outcomes are detailed in the following descriptions.

The projects utilised social research techniques that were geared towards the generation of insights into the experience of being a young person. Particular emphasis was given to understanding dimensions of the regional context. Interviews, focus groups, social mapping, and survey techniques were utilised to generate data, with idiographic modes of analysis highlighting the affective and intra-personal dimensions of the experience of being a young person in regional Queensland.

Within this, a remit to engage young people as 'citizen scientists' (Roche et al. 2020; Dickinson et al. 2010; Bonney et al. 2009) was enacted, wherein training and professional development for a cohort of participants was provided in ethnographic and interpretivist modes of social research. This inclusion of young people as co-researchers provided strength to the research, enabling not

only the professional development of a group of talented youth researchers, but depth to the data.

Outcomes from this research are summarised in the following descriptions, with more detailed accounts available via the Youth Community Futures website (<https://youthcommunityfutures.org/>). The selection of reels, clips, academic papers, press releases and conference presentations collated on the Youth Community Futures web site outline the depth of the findings generated from each project.

PROJECT 1: THE ELDERS' NETWORK

Project Theme: Communication and Cultural Understanding

Led by a cohort from Laidley State High School, the Elders' Network was designed to broker stronger connections with local Elders. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage was identified as important for all members of community, with the place of Aboriginal culture and heritage in regional settings especially significant. This student cohort sought to develop practices for bringing together Elders and student cohorts for the purpose of celebrating Aboriginal culture and heritage and transferring knowledge between generations.

Background

The Elders' Network was launched in October 2022, with two planning workshops convened at Laidley State High School. These workshops were focused on exploring who the students identified as an Elder and the qualities that an Elder possessed. From this foundation, the students then worked to define an approach for identifying and brokering connections with Elders. The planning sessions also explored the existing social connections that students maintained within their communities and where important points of advice and mentoring resided. It was from this basis that the identification of groups of Elders (i.e., as individuals who were recognised

as holders of cultural knowledge) and other significant members of community (e.g., individuals who engaged with young people in their day-to-day lives) was undertaken with a view to developing connections between Laidley State High School and these groups.

Research Focus

The students were introduced to social research techniques that included social mapping, interviews and focus group discussions. The prerogative for this project was to identify the intergenerational connections that the students currently accessed, or felt would be beneficial but did not currently participate in. The project sought to understand how the young people generated a sense of belonging with their communities and established relationships with wider networks. Defining the function of these networks as connection points for mentoring and advice was central to this initial activity, and it was from this that a network of Elders would be identified. A specific focus identified by the students related to the development of understandings of cultural knowledge within the school, with the Elders' Network positioned to provide insight into cultural practice and knowledge.

The students set about identifying their existing connections through a social mapping exercise that considered the important relationships that the students maintained. Following this mapping exercise, the students turned to forming

the Elders' Network by issuing invitations to Elders to attend a school event and the later convening of yarning circles. Plans were developed to establish a calendar of activities, including yarns, ceremonial events and community days. The plans established by the students centred on the brokering of relationships between Elders and the school, where the Elders would represent an important point of contact for mentoring, sense of belonging, intergenerational relationships and the relay of instruction and advice.

Outcomes

Unfortunately, the Elders Network did not materialise. The following significant factors emerged as constraints to this project:

- The majority of students engaged in this project were new to the region. This meant that their connections to wider networks of individuals beyond the school were limited. Many of the students reported having few social connections.
- The continuing legacies of settler-colonialism were also evident. The Lockyer Valley region is a contested space, and identifying Elders with cultural authority to represent country was difficult. This challenge was further exacerbated by issues associated with the identification of Elders who held authority to share cultural knowledge. This aspect of the project ultimately led to its downfall. While a small group of individuals (n=3) expressed initial interest in working with the students, the students were unable to progress the formation of the Network.
- Of those Elders who were identified, bureaucratic restrictions emerged as hurdles. Convoluted

application processes associated with, for example, Blue Card accreditation represented a major challenge in recruiting Elders, and ongoing sustainability for payment to Elders for time spent was prohibitive.

- The demographics of the Elders also represented a challenge. Prospective Elders identified by the students were all aged, and prone to mobility and associated health issues that limited their capacity to attend and participate in events.

The project pivoted to consider whether wider groups of individuals might be engaged by the students. Teachers from both Laidley State High School and Laidley District State School collaborated to organise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures Day in August 2023, and although a viable cohort of attendees was present at this event, no ongoing connection between the students and community developed.

Findings

This project illustrates the complexities inherent to working respectfully with Aboriginal peoples and cultures. Two distinct challenges were evident in this project. First, identifying Elders who had the time and capacity to work with the students represented a fundamental challenge for the Elders' Network. The school had made several previous attempts to generate connections with community, but these had been complicated by key individuals leaving the district, illness, and competing demands on Elders' time. These challenges were further complicated by the social context of the Lockyer Valley, where community connections had been fractured in a sequence of past events. Second, the ongoing legacies of settler-colonialism represented a further

challenge. Aboriginal knowledges and ways of knowing continue to be maligned in this region, with this coinciding with contested claims over country and incomplete knowledge of culture within the Lockyer Valley region. The uncertainty and complex social politics encountered by the students resulted in the project being unviable.

A parallel challenge was also noted in terms of the demands that the Elders' Network placed on specific individuals. Ms Karen Day, Community Education Counsellor at Laidley State High, was instrumental in brokering opportunities for the students to engage with and learn from community. However, it was noted that she was working (mostly) individually within the school. The immensity of her workload and responsibility that she felt to provide space and support for the school's Indigenous students was evident. Although Karen had the support of her cohort of students, and endorsement from the school to progress initiatives such as the Elders' Network, it remained that the organisation and practical conduct of the project rested with her. Given that this project was in extension to her substantive workload, it became clear that the situation was unviable. Projects of this type require meaningful institutional support, personnel and strong connections to be successful.

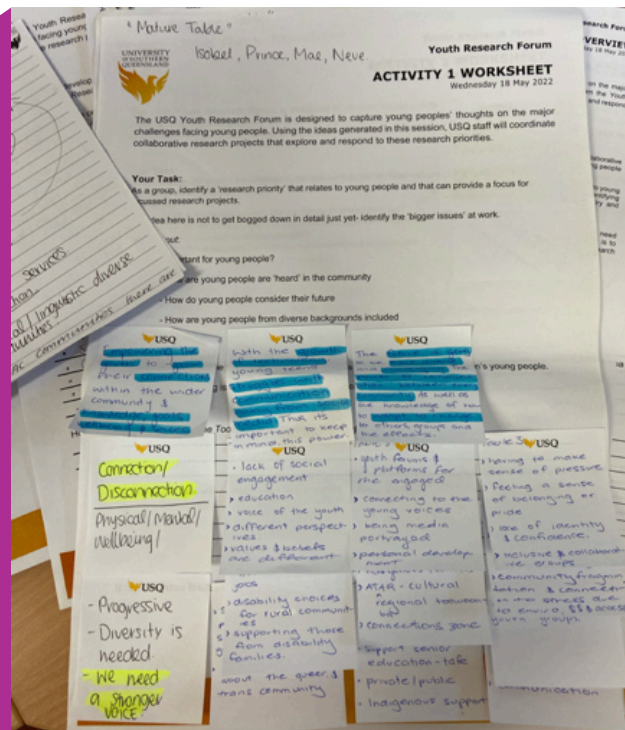
The project did generate important insights, however. It occurred that the students sought to collate their own knowledge of culture and to work together to mentor younger students within the school. Undertaking grassroots practice of this type demonstrated the value that can come from self-sustained emergence of community, and where the students themselves took on an important leadership role in nurturing community

and understanding in their school. Although the opportunity to fully explore this aspect of the project was prohibited by time, there is significant potential—especially in settings where connections to culture are fractured—to establish networks convened by young people themselves. Several of the students engaged in the Elders' Network demonstrated knowledge of culture and leadership capacity, and it is with this that reemergent formations of culture became evident.

Further research to identify approaches to student-led cultural networks hold the potential to establish effective methods for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges in schools where connections to community are marginal.



PROJECT 2: THE SENTIMENT LOG



Project Theme: Connectivity; Communication and Cultural Knowledge; Visibility of Opportunity

Working across all three themes emergent from the Forum, this project captured accounts of young peoples' experiences of life in regional Queensland. The narratives relayed by cohorts representing the Toowoomba Regional Council's Youth Leaders Council (n=25), Centenary Heights State High School Leaders Group (n=12), Warwick State High School Leaders Group (n=4) and UniSQ undergraduate students (n=62), provided ethnographic insights into how young people navigate their worlds and narrate the experience of

being a young person in regional Queensland.

Background

The Sentiment Log emerged from the Youth Forum as a project dedicated to capturing audio- and video-recorded accounts of young peoples' experiences of life in regional Queensland. Capturing ethnographic reflections relayed by participants, this project provided valuable insights into the ways in which young people understand and enact their place in the regional milieu, and how they conceptualise their futures and aspirations for education, employment and sociality.

Audio and video artefacts captured for The Sentiment Log are available via the Youth Community Futures Resources page (<https://youthcommunityfutures.org/resources/>). The recordings illustrate the complexity of young peoples' conceptualisations of their worlds; conceptualisations that confront populist renderings of young people as ignorant and naïve (Walsh et al 2021; Hickey & Phillips 2013). The insights captured in these clips detail challenging aspects of being a young person in regional Queensland, with particular attention given to the current 'youth crime crisis'. The young people featured in these clips identify how they are positioned in 'limited' terms (Hickey & Pauli-Myler 2019), and where media representations cast a view of young people that inflects their day-to-day encounters in community.



Research Focus

An important aspect of The Sentiment Log involved the participating youth researchers designing and enacting the research. This involved the deployment of an ethnographic research approach centred on the conduct of video interviews with cohorts of young people known to our youth researchers. The youth researchers were tasked with i) identifying a cohort of prospective participants from whom insights into the regional experience might be gleaned; ii) undertaking training in ethnographic interview method with the Project Lead for Youth Community Futures, Andrew Hickey. Further, the activation of this approach enabled the youth researchers to iii) develop skills in digital videography, with instruction and support provided by collaborating videographers Rare Squid Creative. The youth researchers first convened in February 2023 and undertook an intensive program of research and videography training during February and March, meeting weekly for workshop training sessions. In late March the youth researchers had identified a cohort of interview participants, with recording taking place during April and May 2023. A series of 'reels' were

produced, which showcased key moments from the video interviews, with these accessible via the Youth Community Futures website.

Outcomes

The participants provided insights into the experiences that young people have in their day-to-day activities. Several of the participants noted that their connection to community—of feeling part of the community—was affected by wider media stereotypes of young people. Other participants discussed the opportunities that present in regional settings, while others noted that regional settings provide opportunities to engage closely with community.

Media bias and negative reporting of young people was raised as a factor that all interviewees felt was significant. The participants noted how they felt marginalised by media reports that were predominantly negative, emphasising that these reports were not indicative of the majority of young people. Echoing themes associated with 'moral panics' and young peoples' positioning as dangerous and out-of-control 'folk devils' (Cohen 1977; Hall et al. 1979), the

participants relayed that they were acutely aware of being perceived poorly, and that positive achievements of young people were often ignored, while more negative reporting was disproportionately amplified. These views align with established accounts provided in the literature (Threadgold 2020; Hickey & Pauli-Myler 2019; Notley et al. 2019; Mazzarella 2003; Bessant & Hill 1997). The worrying implication reported by our participants involved the translation of negative representation to their lived experience. The participants reported instances where they were received with caution, and reported feeling as though a sense of who they were was formed in advance of the encounters they had with others in public spaces. The participants indicated that the bombardment of negative representation of young people in mainstream media generated a particularly fraught situation; one that was disproportionately shaped by the 'youth crime crisis' underway when the interviews were captured.

The selected recordings available on the Youth Community Futures website provide insight into the participants' views. The interviews provide first-hand accounts—some troubling—of the experiences the participants encountered in their day-to-day lives. It is clear from these accounts that wider assumptions around who young people 'are' circulate in the public imaginary, and that these have effect in framing the

encounters that young people are exposed to. Our participants relayed that they were aware of these perceptions, and in certain situations, adjusted their behaviours so not to draw unwanted attention or criticism.

Findings

How we engage with young people at the societal level is critical to their sense of engagement in community. When negative imagery and representations of young people as dangerous and out-of-control dominate the public imaginary, this has effect on the entire community. For young people, the situation is one of marginalisation. For community, the effect is one where young people are not fully embraced.

The young people we engaged with in The Sentiment Log demonstrated that young people are engaged, socially aware, responsible and active members of their communities. However, their capacity to engage in community is significantly influenced by how they are received. The Sentiment Log sought to challenge some of the prevailing stereotypes that circulate. This project demonstrated that young people hold significant capacity as active members of their communities, and that it is incumbent on society—and the media industries in particular—to provide more accurate representations of young people.

[True Crime Australia](#) > [Police & Courts Townsville](#)

Vigilante fears as kids 'wrongly' targeted in Bushland Beach

Parents have raised fears about vigilantes patrolling the streets at night in a Townsville suburb after kids were reportedly chased walking home from work and getting pies at a local servo.



Natasha Emeck

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PROJECT 3: YOUNG PEOPLES' FUTURES

Project Theme: Connectivity; Visibility of Opportunity

The opportunities available to young people in regional Australia are distinct from those available in metropolitan settings. Drawing from a collaboration with students from Centenary Heights State High School (n=22), Warwick State High School (n=12) and Lockyer District State High School (n=16), Young Peoples' Futures sought to identify how young people establish strategies to achieve their aspirations.

Young Peoples' Futures extended from two concomitant perspectives:

- i) the experience of the regional setting is in itself unique.
- ii) the array of opportunities available to young people are often limited when compared to metropolitan spaces.

Understanding how young people living in regional settings identify and engage with pathways into education, employment and sociality is important for enhancing the experience of regional communities and the provision of opportunities for young people.

Background

To theorise this positioning of young people, we drew on a conceptualisation of the 'spatialised' young person. As detailed in Hickey et al. (2024 forthcoming), it is noted that the:

spatial terrains young people inhabit and traverse, and the imbrication of identity with(in) geography ... configures a 'spatial' figuration that determines who the young person is (and can be) based on the situatedness of their positionality. The social dynamics inherent to this situatedness define the ways that young people come to be engaged and positioned in defined ways, with this in turn having effect over the participation young people are authorised to enact in different social contexts. (Hickey et al. 2024 forthcoming)

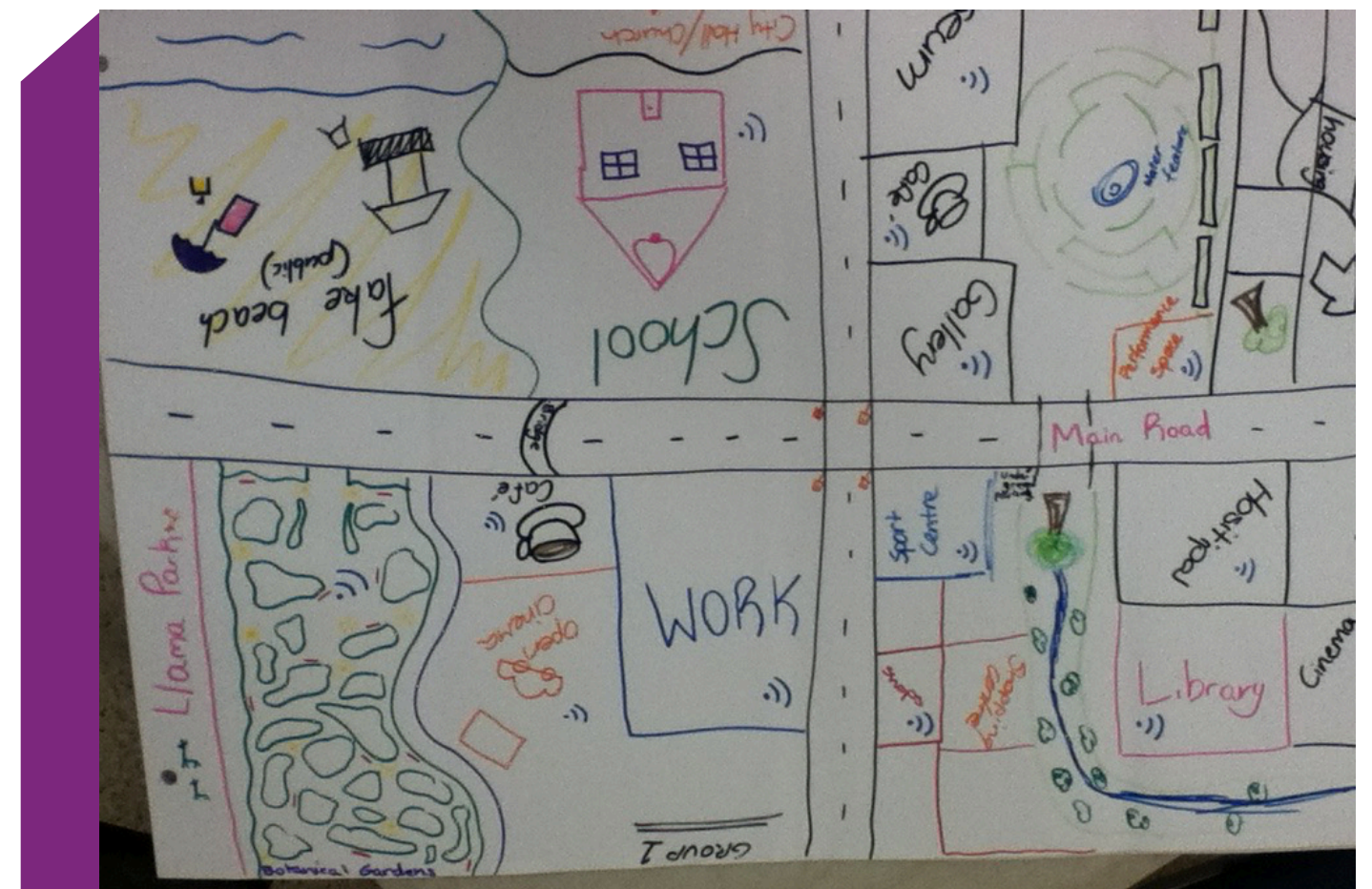
In establishing this conceptual basis for considering the effect that the regional milieu has on young peoples' sense of identity, reference was given to Threadgold's (2020) accounts of the 'figurations' that inform the idea of the 'young person'. Threadgold (2020) catalogued a series of figurations that symbolically mediate the 'different ways "youth" works in public discourse' (687) to argue that the inflections implied within different figurations frame the ways that young people come to be conceptualised in common understanding. Threadgold (2020) noted that 'figures of youth can illustrate how one thing can be used as a stereotype, cliché, meme, target, scapegoat, folk devil, stigma, discourse and signifier' (688).

We extend the 'figures' that Threadgold (2020) identified to include the consideration of the spatial positioning of regionally situated young people, with Young Peoples' Futures geared to exploring how the participant young people conceptualised their location within the regional milieu and framed accounts of their opportunities for education, employment and sociality.

Research Focus

Understanding how figurations function to i) categorically configure the idea of 'young person'; and ii) frame the experience of actual persons is crucial for determining how young people come to be understood and afforded capacity to participate in the world in certain ways (Phillips & Hickey 2013). The research team worked collaboratively with the

student cohorts to undertake a 'mapping' of their social networks. These maps were socio-spatial in that they sought to capture a sense of the social interactions the participants had in relation to the geographic space of their towns. From this, a series of maps were produced :





These maps identified key locations frequented by the participants and the associations they had with groups and individuals. Notable distinctions between ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ facing relationality and association were identified in the maps. The participants indicated the encounters they had locally—typically with family and friend networks—as well as with ‘routine’ places, in particular sites of schooling and employment. But significantly, the maps also provided insights into the future aspirations the students held. The students spoke about opportunities for ongoing employment and higher education beyond their township, which in turn provoked the consideration of the material resources required to support relocation and transitions to adulthood.

A series of interviews were convened with the participants to decode the maps and provide insights into the social geographies they traversed. These interviews provided further context to the maps and enabled the research team to understand how the participants conceptualised life beyond school.

Outcomes

As a vast, but sparsely populated continent, Australia is defined in terms of its spatiality, with national mythology (Blainey 1966) and the basic pragmatics of mobility inferring a discernible character to the regional Australian landscape. Crucial to the symbolic configuration of imaginings of the Australian landscape is a binary distinction that designates the metropolitan as distinct from its 'peripheral' interior; spaces designated as

'regional', 'rural' or 'remote'.³ In Australia, representations of non-metropolitan spaces are especially evocative, and often romanticised, with imaginings of the 'Outback' particularly archetypal.

The lived experience of these locations is however often at odds with the imagery. Rural, regional and remote locations can be sites of loneliness and isolation (Williams et al. 2022; Lock et al. 2012; Chipeur and Pretty 2000; Woodward and Frank 1988). They are also settings of reduced social opportunity; with prospects for employment and educational pathways especially limited (Chesters and Cuervo 2022; Halsey 2018; Cuervo 2014).

The socioeconomic determinants of the regional experience combine to limit the material opportunities available to young people. As our participants revealed, the possibilities for charting their future lives and achieving aspirations in education and employment often involved moving away from their home location. Although our participants saw this as an opportunity to expand their perspectives and gain life experience, it remained that a discernible aspect of the regional experience centred on the limited opportunity available within the regional locale.

For young people in particular, the geographic 'distance' from the metropolitan centre exacerbates prospects for education, training and employment (especially post-school), which in turn limits life opportunities, health and social engagement (Passy and Ovenden-Hope 2020; Wyn 2009). This limited provision of opportunities also has effect on the regional setting itself, most notably in terms of the migration of young people away from the regional locale in search of enhanced opportunity for education and employment (ACTU

2018; Cook & Cuervo 2020; Farrugia 2017).

Findings

Three coordinates emerged from our collaborations with the student participants to define the experience of regionally based young people:

- Distance: A Primary Characteristic of a Spatial Figuration
We suggest that the experience of young people located in regional, rural, and remote settings prefigures 'distance' as a prevailing descriptor. Distance from social networks, employment and education were prefigured in the participants' maps and accounts of their future lives.
- Access: A Secondary Characteristic of a Spatial Figuration
The students relayed that the opportunities they had to participate in part-time work, extracurricular activities (and within which sport was predominant) and wider leisure pursuits (including 'hanging out' with friends) was determined by the basic capacity to traverse geographic space. Many of the students—particularly those whose families were engaged in farming and agricultural enterprises—lived beyond the limits of the township itself, with this limiting their access to employment, educational and social opportunities.
- Sociality: A Third Characteristic of a Spatial Figuration
One of the effects of distance reported by our participants corresponded with the opportunity the regional locale afforded for enactments of 'sociality'. This theme related to the ways the participants maintained friendship and peer networks to engage interpersonal connections. Although 'distance' continued to provide a predominant touchpoint within these accounts, a

nuanced sense of the ways in which sociality became possible in terms of distance emerged as a significant to these young peoples' everyday lives. For the young people we encountered, having the capacity to traverse space was directly tied to who they could engage with.



PROJECT 4: LEAVING HOME

Project Theme: Visibility of Opportunity

The popular imaginary indicates that the process of relocating for higher education represents a time of excitement and trepidation. Relocating for (higher) education represents a time of renegotiated social relationships, where existing connections to family, social networks and place shift in emphasis as the relocation proceeds.

This project worked with students from the UniSQ Residential Colleges (n=89) to understand the processes that students from regional settings engaged when relocating for university study. The project utilised focus group, survey and interview techniques to capture viewpoints from current UniSQ Residential College students on their experiences of relocating to UniSQ. The discussions focused specifically on the affective dimensions of relocating and establishing a 'sense of community' in the new setting (McMillan 1996).

Background

The transition to higher education is well documented in the literature (Hussey & Smith 2010; Kift et al. 2010; Leese 2010). However, not as well recognised are the experiences of students who relocate in their transitions to higher education from rural, remote and regional settings. Considerations around the practical and material dimensions of physically relocating and generating the resources

to support the transition, combined with the emotional and affective dimensions of leaving family and social networks in the home locale. We were interested to understand the experiences encountered by UniSQ's Residential Students and set about engaging discussions with cohorts of College residents through 2023. Commencing with a large focus group discussion in late 2022, further one-to-one interviews were convened in conjunction with a survey, which sought to gauge the practical, material and affective dimensions of relocating for study.

Research Focus

The discussions sought to uncover 'phenomenographic' insights into young people's experiences of relocating for higher education. A specific aspect of the inquiry focused on the role played by the Residential Colleges and the support that students received. The students relayed accounts of how the practical relocation occurred, including insights into the anxieties associated with leaving the home locale. The students emphasised how they established new social networks, as well as the initial experience of commencing study and life on college.

Outcomes

The students overwhelmingly reported that the transition to higher education was significantly enhanced by the networks they were able to form. A significant aspect of the relocation to college revolved around the social

support provided by the college structure. The role played by staff in nurturing student networks and establishing a collegial environment was crucial in supporting students in their transition to higher education.

The discussions identified that the Residential Colleges function as an ‘in-between’ space. College represents an interstitial location that enables students to experience independent life beyond the home, but in a supported way. Within this, access to support networks, including those formally mediated by the Colleges and more informally through the establishment of social networks was considered vital in the enculturation into university life.

However, a risk associates with this function. College residency brought with it the potential for ‘cloistering’ within the college environment. A peculiar aspect of UniSQ (as with many regional universities in Australia) is its location on the urban fringe. UniSQ is at distance to the city centre, with travel beyond the university requiring transport. For students to move about the city and engage with networks beyond the university, access to private vehicles is necessary. In the absence of reliable public transport systems, for students without their own vehicle, the risk of ‘insulation’ in the college emerges.

The students also relayed views around their choice of relocating to UniSQ and Toowoomba. Beyond more deliberate factors including the availability of specific courses and degrees, the participants noted that Toowoomba is an ‘approachable’ location. This represented a significant marker in the students’ choice to study at UniSQ. As students who derive from small regional towns, the prospect of relocating to a major urban centre was viewed as overwhelming. Toowoomba represented

a more accessible city in terms of its scale, with the range of services and amenity it offered considered favourably.

Findings

The students identified that they would be unlikely to return to their home location at the completion of their study. Toowoomba and UniSQ had provided a sense of what independent life could provide, with the opportunities available beyond the home locale motivating the decision to pursue career opportunities elsewhere. The home location, while recalled with fondness, was considered a place of limited opportunity to pursue careers and the progression to adulthood. This clearly holds implications for the viability of (smaller) regional locations. Echoing findings from the existing literature (Australian Government 2018; Farrugia 2016), the challenge of this migration of young people away from smaller locations is evident.

PROJECT 5: YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARIES OF YOUTH

Project Theme: Connectivity; Visibility of Opportunity

This project shifted focus to report on adult perceptions of young people. Focused specifically on the intergenerational assumptions and stereotypes that inform understandings of who young people 'are', this project chronicled the viewpoints of a group of adult participants (n= 12) from two regional towns in Queensland. The participants were asked to recount their views on the pathways that young people should lead in service of productive lives, and how young people might attain markers of adulthood such as stable employment and housing.

Confounding simplistic viewpoints of intergenerational division and misunderstanding, our participants relayed a deep sense of concern for young peoples' successful progression to adulthood, but did so via the relay of prescriptive accounts of how young people 'should' live.

Background

In their survey of older generations' criticisms of young people, Protzko and Schooler (2019) charted a lengthy history

of accounts 'denigrating' the young on the perceived 'decline of the present generation...relative to earlier generations' (p. 1). Protzko and Schooler (2019) noted that:

The tendency to disparage today's youth may be person specific, critically depending on the evaluator's own standing on the trait in question. Individuals who excel in a particular trait are likely to notice disparities between themselves and the youth of the present. Various factors, however, might bias their recollections of the way the youth of the past actually were, including memory biases and/or exposure to a more similar population of youth growing up. (p. 1)

Views such as Protzko and Schooler's (2019) are typical of populist renderings of older generations' 'disparagement' of the young. Young People and the Social Imaginaries of Youth found that older generations' views of young people are more complex than this. The views reported by the adult participants were relayed not with an intent to dismiss

younger generations, but with a desire to see young people achieve their life aspirations; in effect, to lead 'good' lives. The accounts indicated a deep sense of concern for young people, with particular emphasis given to how young people might best generate social connections and educational and employment pathways into adulthood.

Research Focus

We linked our participants' desire to see young people achieve, in part, to the spatial-geographic setting of this project. In regional Australia—as in non-metropolitan locations worldwide (Jivetty et al., 2016; Mueller & Thurlow, 2019; Wells et al., 2019)—a variety of socioeconomic and demographic factors conflate to define young people's experiences. Farrugia's (2013) identification of the peculiarity of the 'macro-level processes that shape young lives' are notable in this sense, with the experience of young people in regional settings prefigured not only in terms of the affective-symbolic associations that individuals sustain in place and with each other, but also the material, socioeconomic structures that configure the conditions inherent to these settings.

Notable within the accounts offered by our participants was the sense that regional locales impose limitations on young people's life courses. Apparent throughout the interviews was the common view that young people were 'working against the odds' to overcome the constraints inherent to these settings—in education, employment and opportunities for social engagement. Although our participants were generally positive about their respective towns and considered these locations to be good places to live, a pragmatic awareness of the relative isolation and limited opportunity available to young people in

each location permeated the conversations. In casting their views on how young people might overcome these limitations, our participants relayed prescriptive accounts of how young people should progress their lives. Our participants articulated narrow renderings of what constituted an effective youth positionality and corresponding life course, and in recognising the limitations inherent to the regional settings, articulated views of young people and young people's lives that mediated markers of success.

Outcomes

All participants in this study were aged 45 or older, and occupied social positions where engagement with young people was frequent. The participants maintained long-term residency (typically > 10 years) and were prominent in young people's lives—as employers, through formal or informal social interaction, as family members, and via other vocational-professional association (e.g., as teachers, church leaders or health professionals). The interviews were mediated via a semi-structured design that initially sought insights into the participants' perspectives on the socio-demographic characteristics of young people within their town. The discussions then progressed onto more focused questions, which explored: i) the participants' perceptions of the young people they encountered; and ii) their views on the nature of young people's experiences as members of these communities. A stock of phenomenographic insights were generated from these discussions. Although partial to the viewpoints of the participants and their subjective positioning, these views nonetheless provided insight into the way that prevailing assumptions around young people form and circulate. That these

viewpoints were, in some cases, based in nothing but assumption and speculation was in fact significant, and worked to demonstrate how unfounded views of young people gain currency.

Findings

In providing their assessments of an appropriately constituted youth, our participants provided examples from their own youth as an evidentiary basis for the capacities they perceived as being important to the successful progression from youth to adulthood. These nostalgic reminiscences provided a touchpoint for contextualising the participants' assessments of young people. The participants' memories functioned not only as a rhetorical clarion for envisioning an ideal(ised) youth, but as a marker for assessing the young people they invoked in their accounts. On this we note Smith and Campbell's (2017) distinction between 'reactionary nostalgia' and 'progressive nostalgia'. For Smith and Campbell (2017), reactionary nostalgia functions as a 'sentimental

longing for an imagined and superior past', whereas progressive nostalgia focuses on establishing a 'progressive agenda for the future' (Smith & Campbell, 2017, p. 613). Both invocations of nostalgia were evident in the participants' accounts, with any seeming chastisement of young people evident in the participants accounts geared towards the desire to see young people achieve. Far from representing a denigration of young people, our participants' views—including those that initially appeared negative—were relayed with the concern to see young people succeed.

PROJECT 6: COMMUNITY- FOCUSED YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION

Project Theme: Connectivity

The role played by service agencies in supporting young people to succeed is immense. For young people in situations of precarity and vulnerability, the support and mentoring afforded by community-based service agencies represent an important lifeline for positive social engagement. Understanding the perspectives that service workers bring to their work is significant for understanding how vulnerable young people might be best supported to lead productive lives.

This project proceeded in conjunction with a group of support workers (n=20) representing youth service providers focused on the provision of drug and alcohol rehabilitation, housing support, mental health provision and mentoring and employment training across the Toowoomba region. The insights provided by these service workers identify the important role played by service providers in the delivery of specialised support to vulnerable young people.

Background

In context of conjoined crisis of youth crime, cost-of-living, housing affordability and social disconnection, understanding the role played by youth service providers is crucial to the effective support of vulnerable young people. The support worker acts as a conduit for the young person to gain access to services in moments of crisis and wider social support. Support workers provide an important point of social connection for marginalised young people.

Remarkably, support workers and social service agencies working on the front line of service provision are often reliant on piecemeal funding and contract-based resourcing, making continuity of service provision difficult. This project sought to understand the day-to-day realities that confront service providers in order to identify where further resourcing might be issued to enable greater levels of support for vulnerable young people.

Research Focus

Our participants provided specialist

insight into the work of community-based service providers across the drug and alcohol rehabilitation, housing support, mental health provision and mentoring and employment training sectors. The insights generated through the interviews indicated how wider societal pressures impact young people, and the delivery of programming. The service providers identified that the provision of support in young peoples' lives can have life altering effects, but issues associated with sustained funding and resourcing represented a challenge to program delivery.

Beyond the interviews conducted with service providers (n=20), this project also extended its reach to interviews with a cohort of young people (n=5) who had successfully transitioned from rehabilitation and training programs provided by the representative service providers. These accounts and life stories provided case study insights into the importance of responsive intervention programming and community service provision.

Outcomes

The prevailing message to emerge from the interviews identified the provision of early intervention programming to support 'at-risk' young people. The participants all indicated that resolving issues early and providing support to young people before more significant marginalisation and alienation occurred represented an effective way to ensure that young people remain socially engaged. These views align with evidence reported in the literature (Colizzi et al. 2020; Rickwood 2019; Crane et al. 1996).

A particular challenge that the participants identified in context of restrictive funding environment revolved

around an overlap in demand for services. As one participant indicated, the issues confronting young people include:

'Trauma, maybe domestic violence, abuse, mental health. Maybe mum and dad are unwell, perhaps schizophrenia. I've worked with a lot of young people where mum and dad are unhealthy. Or that mum and dad are in and out of jail'.

The challenges confronted by young people are often complex and co-dependent. For example, the participants noted that instances of homelessness correspond with poor educational attainment, which in turn increases the risk of anti-social behaviour, poor mental health, and social alienation. Accordingly, service providers respond to a range of issues, sometimes beyond the scope of their service compact. The fundamental disconnect between funding provision, service delivery and community need represented a major challenge and frustration for the service providers.

Findings

The participants identified how the service they provide responds to material deficiencies evident in the lives of the young people they serve, but also emphasised the human element of their engagement:

'In one sense young people need to know that they're loved, that they're cared about, that this community does want to see them grow, see them achieve, see them do well. I have so many young people who come into the program and maybe I'm one of the first people to show them some dignity, show them some care.'

The work of the service providers extended beyond the transactional delivery of services. They were integral to the wellbeing and lives of the young people they serve. The risk inherent to this work corresponds with the emotional labour required of the service providers. Their work extends beyond standard 9–5 hours, and involves working with individuals who are often in crisis. The emotional labour inherent to this work is significant. Ensuring that service agencies are furnished with funding and resources to continue their work is essential.

As the participants identified, ensuring that service providers are equipped to intervene early when a young person is at risk not only mitigates the potential for

marginalisation of that young person but also strengthens community by limiting the ill effects of alienation and anti-social behaviour.

SUMMARY NOTES: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

The six Youth Community Futures projects revealed that young people in regional Queensland are impacted by concurrent societal and socioeconomic factors. More must be done to support young people to achieve the aspirations they hold, with the direct engagement of young people in community decision-

making, the provision of resources that enable visible pathways into education and employment, and greater opportunities for community cohesion representing the key themes to emerge from the Youth Community Futures program of research. Young people have the capacity to generate significant

contributions to society, but they require commensurate support, understanding, and the provision of opportunities to meet this end.

In context of concurrent crises—cost-of-living, housing, the current ‘youth crime crisis’ and the representation of young

people as dangerous and delinquent— young people have been positioned at the core of these social problems.

and sociality mark the experience of the transition to adulthood, at the same time that the regional locale represents a setting of familial connection and place attachment. Identifying how opportunities can be advanced for young people in regional settings is crucial, not only for the betterment of young people and their aspirations, but also for communities.

It is vital that young people are afforded the opportunity to relay their own accounts of the world. Youth Community Futures sought to provide this opportunity for young people to relay their sense of the world and narrate how they interact as members of the community. The participants engaged in the projects undertaken for Youth Community Futures invariably noted that more must be done to meaningfully engage with and listen to young peoples’ voices.

It was from this basis that the key findings from Youth Community Futures emerged. These findings are summarised as follows:

- Regional settings are limited in the educational, employment and social opportunities they can provide, but nonetheless function as important sites of sociality for young people.
- The ‘horizon of aspiration’ maintained by young people in these settings risks being curtailed by the limited opportunities available to young people.
- Media representations of young people influence the general sentiment held about young people.
- Identifying how regional settings can enhance the opportunities available to young people is crucial not only for meeting young peoples’ aspirations, but for enhancing the vibrancy of regional communities.



What predominant stereotypes of young people neglect to account for are the stark experiences that many young people confront. These representations also fail to recognise that the vast majority of young people are actively pursuing their educational and employment aspirations and are active members of their communities. How we engage our young people and provide the best opportunity for these important members of our communities to contribute their views and insights requires attention. There is far more to

the lives of young people than simple stereotypes would suggest.

We, as a society, require more sophisticated understandings of who young people are, how they come to understand their world and how society might enhance this experience. Further, there are distinct aspects of growing up in regional Queensland that are unique, but that often don’t gain recognition in policy programming and the social support of young people. For young people in regional Queensland, limited opportunities in education, employment

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Extending the outcomes and findings listed above, the following avenues are offered as provocations for further research and inquiry. To more fully understand the experience of being a young person in regional Queensland and to ensure that regionally based young people are provided the opportunity to lead productive and fulfilling lives, the following research agendas might be pursued:

Research Provocation 1: Detailed 'snapshot' sociological surveys of the major regional centres of Queensland should be undertaken to gauge the educational, employment and social pathways that are available to young people. Snapshots of this type will provide indicators on the viability of the regional locale to support young people in the development of fulfilling lives.

Research Provocation 2: More sophisticated, and accurate, accounts of young people must be developed to counter the singular narrative that currently circulates around young people. The Office of Youth might undertake to seek ethnographic insights into young peoples' experiences—similar to those captured through Youth Community Futures—to mediate a richer image of young peoples'

lives and to inform public dialogue involving young people.

Research Provocation 3: Further research should be undertaken to identify approaches to student-led cultural networks that hold the potential to establish effective methods for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges in schools. The Office of Youth with the Department of Education might support initiatives to establish best-practice approaches for student-community partnerships.

Research Provocation 4: Engaging with young people as social researchers presents an innovative way of generating sociological insight into young peoples' experiences. Rather than enacting research 'on' young people, working 'with' young people to develop their own research capacities represents a vital opportunity for generating insightful and relevant data pertaining to young people.

The Youth Community Futures research team suggest that these provocations towards further research will provide a platform for ongoing insight into the experiences of Queensland's young

people. A distinct opportunity to establish an ongoing longitudinal data source presents itself, and from which directions for initiatives and programming and policy direction will arise.

Situating a program of research that captures young peoples' accounts of the experiences of living in Queensland, which is generated by young people working in collaboration with researchers represents an innovative means for

informing policy directions and initiatives that enhance young peoples' life prospects.

The Youth Community Futures research team at the University of Southern Queensland is positioned to lead this ongoing research, with indications of the outcomes such an agenda might generate demonstrated in the projects reported here.

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