

On the 16th June Kingaroy hosted a Ministerial Regional Community Forum. Local forum members met with the Honourable Rod Welford MP, Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts, the Honourable Margaret Keech MP, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women and Ms Karen Struthers MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health.

This forum focussed on youth issues.

Lloyd Back our Local Community Partnership (LCP) facilitator with CTC Youth Services presented to the forum. This is a summary of what he said.

Successes and Challenges of a Rural Youth Worker

- 1. Rural young people are outstanding!** – Not our success, but the influence of families, schools and communities in which the young people grow up.

The LCP has a close connection with 14 secondary schools. We do lots of camps and have time to get to know kids and observe them. I meet outstanding young people everywhere I go.

- ⊕ Monto – has two QLD touch football representatives
- ⊕ A former Goomeri SS student is now working as a sports psychologist preparing the Australian Olympics team for Beijing.
- ⊕ Gayndah – has two QLD cricket representatives.
- ⊕ Kingaroy SHS – the concert band got into the State finals for Fanfare.
- ⊕ Hamilton Island resort managers - “send us the country kids, they have it all over kids from the city. They’re polite, well mannered, they want to work and they know how to work”.

Rural young people achieve so much in spite of serious barriers and challenges. A major one is ...

2. Transport

CTC run a lot of camps and holiday programs. It is not unusual to have kids who’ve never been to the beach, or to Brisbane.

Eg. – “I’ve just been on a train!”. Some kids have never experienced any form of public transport (except a school bus)!

Accessing the larger communities of Kingaroy or Murgon is extremely difficult. There is limited or no public transport from most towns. This prevents young people’s access to training, employment and involvement in sport or cultural activities.

For many of our young people and their families, there is no choice. They have a finite (often very low) income, and with the rising cost of fuel, they simply go without.

In many rural towns there is no local charter bus company operating.

We have young people who want to be active, to achieve, who bring tremendous value to the community and possess wonderful potential as our future leaders ... disadvantaged by a lack of transport/funding for transport.

- Therefore, **meaningful, accessible programs for young people in our rural areas must have a strong transport component and associated funding.**

3. Homelessness

Will always be an issue to some degree, however CTC knows from experience that quality intervention and development programs (the earlier the better) make a huge impact by helping young people maintain existing accommodation or stabilise their secondary homelessness situation. CTC has recorded the number of young people who present at our office over the last few months. In May, 111 young people asked for assistance with a total of 524 contacts to the front desk. All these young people were assisted to achieve their goals whether through education and training, financial assistance, life skill programs, mediation and individual case work as well as a variety of other assistance. Over this period none moved into primary homelessness.

- **To effectively reduce homelessness funding needs to have a strong focus on holistic intervention strategies.**

4. Program Delivery

Government departments are sometimes tempted to (and no doubt feel budget pressures to) thin out program resources. They may do this by

- increasing delivery regions;
- decreasing budgets;
- moving programs from delivery to facilitation roles;

The idea of programs being 'facilitation' role only does not work!

The last thing schools, young people or communities want or need is another 'expert/facilitator/consultant' to tell them what they could or should do, to 'provide resources', to liaise etc. And this is not the role we want. We want to continue doing what we do best and what we believe makes the most difference for young people; to connect and build relationships with them, to give individual support, to meet local needs in practical ways, to offer a useful service delivery to busy and overstretched schools.

- **Ensure funded programs have a strong inter-personal, relationship building component.**

5. Families

We have found that young people can cope and survive in the most challenging situations if they have a strong family support base. When that

family structure is broken or lost, a young person's resilience is severely weakened.

- **If you want to support young people, do whatever you can to support families.**

6. Conclusion

Never underestimate the tremendous resource we have in rural young people. Please invest in them in practical ways; provide transport which enables them to pursue opportunities and pathways available to them, ensure that programs allow practical, hands-on, one-on-one connection with young people, and support families.