



Mr. Edmond Atalla MP  
Chair  
Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety

17 March 2025

Via email: [lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr. Atalla,

### **Responses to supplementary questions**

Thank you for this opportunity to answer supplementary questions from the Committee. We are pleased to advise as follows.

#### **How was Becoming U program designed and implemented?**

#### **How did you engage with the broader community to promote support of the program?**

#### **How did you identify people who could act as 'bridges'?**

The Becoming U program was designed by Uniting in collaboration with community stakeholders in both the Nambucca and Toormina communities. Initially, a community connector role was seed funded by Uniting to build relationships and trust in the community and to understand the communities' needs and assets. The goals and detail of the program were then designed with the community, including young people and schools. The program commenced in the Nambucca Valley in 2018, funded by Uniting, with some additional funding from Government provided in 2020-2022. In 2022, we were invited to take the program into Toormina with funding from the Government. Whilst the high-level model is the same for Toormina, the detail of the program has been co-designed with community and youth advisors.

The program funds a backbone team in both sites whose role is to enable collaboration and co-design across the community and with young people. This includes supporting a youth advisory and community advisory group who advise on the direction, focus and activities of the program.

Broad community consultation informed the initial design of the program and the community connector role is responsible for ongoing community engagement work. This

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includes recruiting local people to be part of the advisory group and be employed as mentors ('bridges') for young people. These people are selected based on their commitment to the community and young people, local relationships and role in the community. They are often volunteering in other roles in the community or play other key roles such as supporting local sporting clubs.

### **Could you provide more information about the Strengthening Communities Alliance and how it is working to promote effective, place-based initiatives?**

The Strengthening Communities Alliance is a network of organisations committed to creating positive social change by taking a place-based, community-led approach to supporting the systemic drivers of wellbeing and equity in communities.

It supports place-based approaches through funding and capability building of 'backbones' in communities, with a commitment to leading transformational change in the systems that are needed to enable place-based work to flourish.

The purpose of this Alliance is to shape the investment and infrastructure supporting place-based work to affect positive social change. This will be achieved through the collaboration of influential stakeholders working together with common principles and objectives and a shared vision where place-based responses are delivered in all communities affected by disadvantage.

The Alliance does this by focusing on five kinds of activity:

1. Demonstrating and evidencing place-based work through the codification of our work and through sharing insights from our practice experience.
2. Collaborating with others to affect transformational change in the systems needed to enable place-based work to scale.
3. Influencing funding models for place-based work so they are fit for purpose, enabling community decision making, the redistribution of power and sustainability.
4. Advocating for and creating opportunities for community representatives to have more power in policy and program design.
5. Enabling a community of practice for those who are leading and doing place-based work to build capability and enable peer to peer support and learning.

### **Could you provide more detail on the Extended Care program?**

The Extended Care pilot program was developed and funded by Uniting, and operated within our out-of-home care service from 2019-2023. It was designed to improve life outcomes for young people leaving out-of-home care. It supported young people from age 15 to age 21, by providing:

- support from a Youth Development Coach (YDC) to work on future planning and developing life skills, and to prepare for the end of their care orders, and
- the opportunity for participants to continue to live with foster carers (or other subsidised accommodation) after turning 18.

An independent evaluation conducted by Nous found that the program was seen by

participants as highly beneficial. Analysis of linked government data showed it:

- Improved placement stability during care (an average of -1 placement changes per young person over the three-year period from 15-18yo).
- Reduced homelessness after leaving care by 66%.
- Improved housing stability after leaving care (75% reduction in housing changes per 10,000 days).
- Improved engagement with work or study (70% of our cohort were in full-time education, of whom half were in higher education).
- Promoted pro-active management of physical and mental health (13% reduction in hospital admission and 3% reduction in emergency presentations).
- Reduced interactions with police and the justice system by up to 85%.
- Reduced rates of young parenthood by up to 75%.

Nous estimated these outcomes delivered net savings for the State and Commonwealth Governments of more than \$187,000 per program participant, at a return on investment of \$1.97 for every dollar spent by Uniting. We believe that the return would likely be higher if implemented by the NSW Government, because the cost of implementation would be offset by savings from existing programs that it would replace.

More information is available in the annual evaluation reports, which are published on Uniting's website here: <https://www.uniting.org/blog-newsroom/research-publications/ri-browse-by-theme/browse-by-theme-youth-transitions>

**Do you think existing government programs and funding are adequate and accessible to young people leaving care? Do you think they reduce their risk of contact with the justice system?**

We do not believe that existing government programs and funding are adequate to fully meet the needs of young people leaving care, or that they are as accessible as they could be to those young people.

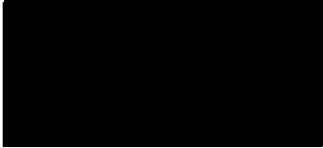
The Office of the Children's Guardian's *Report on the leaving care monitoring program 2020-21* provides an overview of many of the issues with the leaving care planning process itself. It found, for example, that over half of young people leave care without an approved plan. This has significant consequences for these young people's access to funding and supports. In our experience as a provider of both out-of-home care and aftercare supports, financial plans vary considerably between DCJ districts, and many young people struggle to access funding to which their plans suggest they are entitled. Aftercare supports are not well-funded. Young people who have left care often struggle to find and engage with mainstream services, such as education and mental health services.

We believe that successful interventions could reduce the risk of contact with the justice system. Our evaluation of Extended Care, discussed above, showed an 85% reduction in contact with police and the justice system among program participants. We believe that youth development coaches were a significant contributor to this, based on the

experience of our other programs which also provide coaching using the same model (FoyerCentral and the Youth Initiative in the Mid-North Coast).

For additional information or comment, please contact [REDACTED], Head of Research and Social Policy, at [REDACTED], or on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Andrew Montague**  
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