

Submission
No 74

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND
CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY
CBD

Organisation: Regional Youth Support Services Inc.
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Date Received: 15/09/2008



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RECEIVED
15/9/08

12 September, 2008

Dear Committee Manager,

This letter is to confirm that Regional Youth Support Services are interested in being part of the NSW Public Works Committee,

Please find attached some of the discussion points for the Inquiry that you mentioned in your letter of invitation,

For more information please do not hesitate to contact Kim McLoughry – Service Manager for RYSS on the above number

Please note that this letter is slightly late, I spoke to Amy on the 25th of August, explaining that I was unfortunately off work due to being sick. Amy gave me a new deadline of the 14th of September

Very Kind Regards,

Liz Carter
Youth Arts Coordinator
Regional Youth Support Services Inc.

Inquiry into the development of Arts and cultural Infrastructure outside the Sydney CBD

- **Past, present and future funding patterns for cultural infrastructure, venues, production and promotion in NSW, particularly in areas outside of the Sydney metropolitan region.**
 - Unsuccessful Submissions - One of our issues being outside the Sydney area is that we are seen as Metropolitan, when really Gosford and the Central Coast are a far cry from Metropolitan. When we apply for Regional funding we have been told we are 'metropolitan' and for this reason we are not able to be considered for funding.
 - Successful submissions – operations funding. Community funds, Arts NSW, ArtStart, Indent – Music NSW, local Council Cultural grants (Gosford & Wyong)
 - All of our Art Projects are Partnership models, for example TAFE Outreach, Dept housing, Celebrate Safely, Health

- **Funding options for arts or cultural infrastructure.**

150,000 Federal Grant
100,000 State Grant, local Council, Rotary & private support

- **Arrangements that are in place to ensure an equitable spread of arts funding across regional and rural NSW.**
 - NIL
 - Should consider growth areas for example; Central Coast over 300,000 need cultural facilities close to create 'hub' and not compete for funds, eg Gosford & Wyong Councils bid for large performance Centres

- **Fair and equitable access to cultural infrastructure for all people living in NSW.**
 - Under resourced to match population growth, topography and specific demographic needs.

cultural funding. A local Rotary Club helped fund catering costs and a low budget launch was conducted in February 2007

- Very minimal support formally. RYSS success is due to partnerships and local residents support.

- **Support through Arts NSW for local councils to undertake integrated cultural planning/planning for cultural infrastructure.**

- Limited integrated planning at the coal face
- Need an improved consultative process, it should not be driven by local councils, but guided as a strategic 'key stake holders' process (regional steering group with state government administrating process)

- **Effectiveness of Cultural Accords – partnerships with local government, which encourage local councils to invest in the Arts and to develop cultural life in local government areas.**

- RYSS applied to Gosford City Council in 2005 / 06 for \$50,000 which was to contribute towards the \$450,000 estimated fit out cost. GCC agreed to support the project by offering a loan for \$50,000 plus interest to complete a north facing wall to upgrade to OH & S fire standards and upgrade the structure to comply with the standard building code. This alliance between an NGO and local Government was a positive step however as the structure is a Council owned building the NGO hoped that GCC would contribute the \$50,000 not as a loan but as an upgrade to their building to enable the Youth Arts Warehouse to be constructed. This seems in contradiction to Gosford City Councils Cultural Plan to develop a Youth Arts Centre in the Gosford Shire area for young people. The result of this decision was that local business's felt compelled to cover the deficit to complete the building.
- The main support GCC has offered Parkside Pty Ltd is a 20 year fixed lease supporting all the community agencies including the Youth Arts Warehouse, who occupy the premises in Gosford CBD.
- Gosford Council have been able to financially support the Youth Arts Warehouse with is the opportunity for us to apply for the Annual Cultural Grants.

- **Federal funding availability to local councils either directly or through Arts NSW.**

- Funding to be directly available to NGO's

- **Plans or current structures / arrangements for funding large scale arts and cultural infrastructure development outside of the big seven institutions based in the Sydney CBD.**
 - Current – New Youth Arts Warehouse in Gosford CBD (funded as above) we are the only ‘Youth Art Centre’ on the Central Coast. The Youth Arts Warehouse comprises of four different spaces, a performance space – capacity 250, A Visual Arts room, A Music Recording Studio and a Multi Media area.
 - We are currently completing the space with theatre drapes and lighting and music equipment. Seeking funding private businesses and Arts NSW – Committed funds from Community Chest United Way, donations (cash & drapes, local Rotary’s

- **Implications for the availability and priority of cultural infrastructure funding in relation to the Metropolitan Strategy and regional strategies.**
 - High growth area misses out on program / project funds. No ongoing funding, just one off.

- **Outcomes from the Western Sydney Arts Strategy, and possibility of plans to replicate the Western Sydney Arts Strategy in other regions.**
 - We would we welcome a consultative plan for the Central Coast Region

- **Existence of any audit of the cultural venues or cultural infrastructure that exists in NSW outside of the Sydney CBD and Metropolitan area.**
 - There was one carried out by Gosford City Council. Arts and Cultural facilities site Audit in 2007

- **Mechanisms and support that are in place to ensure the importance of art and culture in the lives of people and the development of local identity to be taken into account when planning new regional centres and undertaking urban consolidation.**
 - The Youth Arts Warehouse is a good example model of different levels of funding working together for the benefit of the local and wider community (* Please see attached.)
 - RYSS applied for Festivals Australia Regional Residencies program (Australian Government dept. communications, Information Technology and the Arts to open the Youth Arts Warehouse themed with celebrating the Central Coast identity. The Launch was not funded by any arts /

- **Role of private sector funding, sponsorships or trusts for regional arts and cultural funding and infrastructure (or for arts and cultural funding and infrastructure outside of the Sydney CBD/Metropolitan area).**

- The Creation of Parkside Multi Service Youth Facility and Youth Arts Warehouse (level 2) in Gosford CBD are excellent examples of collaborative partnerships

(* Attached article from Melbourne Uni / Foundation for young Australians)



Australian Government
Department of Transport
and Regional Services

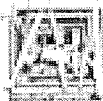
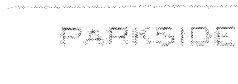


arts | nsw

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| Raybal Building Services
(Project Management) | Jeskah Steel |
| Perkside Gosford Ltd | Fletcher Insulation
(Insulco) |
| Economy Waste Services | ACE Access & Seafoods |
| Walker Bros Timber | Bunnings Warehouse |
| Active Hire Group | Coast Reo |
| Borg Manufacturing | Gosford City Council |
| Central Fire Doors &
Frames | MWC Electrical |
| Coastwide Ready Mix
Concrete | PlastaMasta |
| H&M Contracting | Ray Hindes Electrical |
| Neometro Architects &
Planners | Waters Cranes |
| Pro Painting | Wattyl Paints |
| U Install Kitchens | Survival Solutions |
| Lakes Tiles | Thomson Grass Valley |
| Stephen Moore Architects | Microgram Computers |
| Work Wise Central Coast
Inc "Work for the Dole"
(GCC) | Inspire Foundation |
| Clubs NSW | Sydney Theatre Company |
| Gosford Rotary | School of Media, Film &
Theatre |
| Gosford North Rotary | Megadeck |
| Rotary Club of Terrigal | |

This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government's Regional Partnerships Program Arts NSW and Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation.

The Youth Arts Warehouse Project is managed by
Regional Youth Support Services Inc
02 4323 2374



CHARITABLE
FOUNDATION

Working with our community

Construction of the Youth Arts Warehouse

Regional Youth Support Services, Gosford

Through the voices of: **Kim McLoughry** (RYSS Service Manager) and **Ray Southeren** (Gosford North Rotarian)

With comments from: **Shannon and Shona** (Peer Educators), **Liz Carter** (Youth Arts Co-ordinator), **Glenys Tory** (Interlynk Lounge Youth Project Worker) and **Fran White** (Parkside Manager)

A unique local partnership in Gosford enabled a youth facility to be upgraded to provide a Youth Arts Space – a large music venue, sound recording studio and arts studio space with disabilities access. The construction took five years of consultations, lobbying and submissions – as well as practical work – from youth agencies in partnership with local Rotary clubs and businesses.

The geographic dispersal of the NSW Central Coast means that many young people suffer the effects of isolation on low income. The little affordable entertainment that exists is generally inaccessible by public transport, especially outside weekday business hours.

Shona is 19 years old, She has been active at the Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) in Gosford for six years, and is a member of Indent Central Coast. She reports some of the consequences of this isolation:

We need more activities for young people to be involved with during the day. A lot of people have dropped out of school and haven't got anywhere to go. There's not much to do, so they end up hanging round the shops and getting in trouble from shop owners. There needs to be something for them to do during the day. Also, there's really nothing for people under 18 to do over the weekend. It's really hard to get to things that are on in the other towns, so we need more things here in Gosford.

Kim McLoughry is Manager of the RYSS. She provides some background to the partnership:

I'd been working on the project for a youth arts space since 1998 but didn't have the money & partners to do it. Initially a Rotarian named John Spath (the owner of Jeskah Steel) said to me: 'This will happen and we need to get the ball rolling.' I thought: 'If he believes that this major construction can happen, then it can.' I got a Federal Government Regional Partnerships grant for \$150,000 for the lift and stairs. We got some local government funding, then some funding from the State Government, Newcastle Permanent Building Society and Clubs. One bit of support led to another.

The Partners

The local partnership that was created involves youth agencies, businesses and the local Rotary. They are:

- ✚ *Parkside*, a co-located, multi-service youth centre, located in central Gosford. There are currently ten independent youth services located at Parkside including the Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS) and the Youth Arts Warehouse (YAW).
- ✚ The *Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS)*, a focal point of access on the Central Coast for high quality services, resources and facilities specifically tailored to people aged 12 to 25 years. One of RYSS's functions is to encourage a greater awareness, harmony and understanding of issues that are important to young people. It maintains a staff of professional youth workers to foster social and support networks with young people and to make available assessment, information and referral services. RYSS coordinated this project and the partnership.
- ✚ *Central Coast Rotary Clubs*, the local organisations of business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian, educational and cultural exchange services worldwide and within local communities. Gosford Rotary, Gosford North Rotary, and the Rotary Club of Terrigal were invaluable project supporters.

- Local Sponsors, including Jeskah Steel (project management) and Raybal Building Services (site/project management) as well as Parkside Gosford Ltd, Bunnings Warehouse, ACE Access and Scaffolds, Active Hire Group, Economy Waste Services, Plaster Master, Walker Bros Timber, Waters Cranes, Fletcher Insulation (Insulco), Sky Dome, Lakes Tiles, Stephen Moore Architect, Neometro Architects and Planners, Watty Paints, Gosford City Council and WorkWise Central Coast Inc 'Work for the Dole' crew. Financial sponsors were Regional Partnerships (Department of Transport and Regional Services), Arts NSW (capital and co-ordinator), Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation and Clubs NSW (Woy Woy Leagues Club).

This partnership was set up to convert the top floor of the Parkside Youth Building into a Youth Arts Space, and to undertake this project using community donations and goodwill in order to minimise costs. In turn, the goals of the Youth Arts Space are to provide creative opportunities for young people aged 12 to 24 years. "Our main aim is to provide a link for young people interested in the Arts at secondary and other entry levels, providing training and opportunities that will enhance their future professional possibilities in the arts."¹ RYSS also talks of empowering young people: "giving them a chance to have a voice and a role within their own community as well as ownership" as well as providing a facility that builds the cultural profile of the whole Central Coast community and that enhances arts opportunities with a priority of use to young people.

Strategies

In developing and pursuing the partnership that achieved this Youth Arts Space, three main strategies were used.

The critical strategy in this project was to **bring together people with business and community influence into a community-based Steering Committee to direct the construction**. The members of the steering committee were overseers of the construction process, were seeking funds, volunteer labour and assistance from throughout the Central Coast community. The Steering Committee meant that the operation was efficient and cost effective. It consisted of Ray Southeren from Gosford North Rotary Club, John Spath from Terrigal Rotary Club, Peter Atkinson from RAYBAL Construction, Fran White from Parkside, Liz Carter from RYSS and Kim McLoughry from RYSS. That steering group had to report back to the management committee of RYSS.

Fran White, Parkside Manager, describes the operation of this Steering Committee:

The partnership was basically for getting the building done, working out who was responsible for each job. Each meeting was basically: 'What's the next stage? Who's responsible for that? What do I have to do to make sure that happens without affecting the other tenants of the building? Who's going to pay for it? What's the result? When's the next meeting?' It was weekly phases of co-ordinating the building.

Each partner contributed his or her time and expertise voluntarily. Additionally, they accessed their networks and connections within the community to generate donations and cheap materials. Kim reports:

The biggest benefit was having a genuine partnership evolve with lasting relationships. The second benefit was a massive cost saving. The project management over more than 12 months was done for free. Most of the other partners contributed materials, or asked others to contribute materials. We didn't pay commercial rates for anything.

The Steering Committee also gave access to expertise that couldn't have been bought. Ray Southeren from Gosford North Rotary Club was on the Partnership Steering Committee. He explains Rotary's interest and role:

Rotary has an aim to help the community generally, and young people particularly. Our club has been focused on that over the years. Rotary has got the advantage of being able to slip in and do the things that others can't do – little things; if there is something to clean up, we can get half a dozen guys to clean out the centre before building started. We've got the manpower to do the jobs that fall between the cracks, using our business expertise. Because Rotary is not an individual, we bring a whole lot of talents. We've got contacts, talents and skills in the business community.

¹ RYSS June 2006: 'Youth Arts Warehouse' - newsletter

Young people active in running the space: Young people continue to be actively involved in the programming of the space. A Central Coast Indent² group have started to organise music events there. This involved application for funding, and then mentoring in event management. Liz Carter explains:

As the Youth Arts Coordinator, I try to implement a space where the young people have mentoring throughout the process, so they get to experience event management. There are always a lot of staff around on the events so the young people feel supported: how to stage manage, representatives from work cover to explain OH&S within the venue, technicians to show them how the equipment is turned on and off, how to coil microphone leads etc. Some of the young people were trained in the 'Save a mate' program, so at an event they can identify someone who needs a Youth Worker's help. We go through the budget with all them also, so they are aware of all the elements of how to run an event. The Indent crew help out with other events; they have become the RYSS/Youth Arts Warehouse crew and are the face of the Youth Arts Warehouse.

Glenys Tory is a Youth Worker at RYSS. She points to the crucial role played by these young people and their skills in contacting other young people:

*Without the input of the skills that these young people have, in being able to tap into their peers and bringing to the table the specific wants and needs of young people, then we wouldn't have the success that we have now. No matter how hard I try, there is a generation gap. What I think young people want is totally different to **their** ideas, their enthusiasms. Each young person that is here has specific skills to contribute: one is really good at promotions, one is really good at public speaking, one is really good at connecting with and motivating the teens.*

The final strategy involved **liaison with regional cultural planners**. Planning for the use of the Youth Arts Warehouse occurred alongside the construction phase, bringing in the goodwill and expertise of a regional cultural network. Liz Carter points out that: "setting up the Youth Arts Warehouse is not just a building, but making something that works for a community." She reports a statement from the Gosford cultural planner: "setting up the Youth Arts Warehouse could be like having a body but without the blood pumping through the veins." That meant a concentration on how they were going to use equipment and spaces and how that would enable them to reach out to the community. So the input from the *Cultural Development Officers (Gosford & Wyong)* was crucial.

Outcomes for Young People

There continue to be two main outcomes for young people from this project: the **construction of the youth arts space** itself, and **enhanced social capital**, through connection with community members.

Young people's expressed needs for recreational activities and, in particular, for more all-age music events have been met with the **construction of the Youth Arts Space**. Schools, TAFE and community groups are running art and other youth programs during the day in the space, and in the evenings and over the weekends there are many other events. More than 2800 young people used the facility in the first 10 months. A partnership with TAFE Outreach presents a creative program within the art space that engages marginalised young people.

Shona reports that the main outcome has been that: "a lot of kids said they wanted music events, and those kids and their friends show up; the tickets are really affordable." There is a big music event every couple of weeks, plus youth forums and other community events that are free or affordable to young people, and the Youth Arts Warehouse is also hired out for selected private events.

Liz Carter points out that the Youth Arts Warehouse is "creating new artistic, cultural and recreational opportunities for youth and emerging artists on the Central Coast" but that it is also "allowing young people a voice."

The partnership model is continuing into the programming of the Youth Arts Warehouse. For example RYSS has partnered with 'Celebrate Safely' for events. Glenys Tory explains:

² Indent is a NSW grant scheme for young people organising music events.

When we work in partnership, it's about empowering young people to want to celebrate safely, in a safe environment that is drug and alcohol free, where they can come and participate in varied and diverse activities. Without partnerships, the best service couldn't be provided.

In addition to the physical outcome of the provision of the Youth Arts Warehouse, there have been outcomes for young people in the enhanced relationships between the broader community and the youth centre and its active young people. This is particularly true for young peer educators within RYSS, who have a sense of ownership and pride in their achievement. Glenys Tory reports that: "Training our older young people up into peer educators has really enhanced their self esteem and their feeling of contribution to the community. They've gone from being clients to being peer educators and volunteers at the service. It's about making them feel valued and recognising the skills that they have."

There has also been a process of challenging negative stereotypes about young people amongst the business and Rotarian participants. Together, these mean that there is an **enhancement of the social capital of young people through connection with community members**. RYSS is optimistic that the cultural events being organised in the space by and for young people will continue to counter prevalent stereotypes.

Ray Southernen points out:

When I talk to my fellow Rotarians about this project, they think a youth space is going to be full of 'druggies'. After talking to them for a while, you can convince them it's the opposite – that it's going to be a positive thing in the community, not a negative. When they hear that, they are happy to be involved... It challenges their stereotypes to meet young people like that.

The process of youth workers, business and community leaders working together has developed ongoing relationships within the community, which have generated support and broader responsibility for the success of the Youth Arts Warehouse. Kim points out that the Steering Committee provided the basis for on-going relationships: "I like the fact that the relationships have continued on since then. The stakeholders and individuals will continue on with the development in the future. There is a sustainable community partnership."

What Worked in the Youth Arts Warehouse Partnership?

Four important lessons have been identified as contributing to the success of this partnership.

First, this project was straightforward in its goals and there was no attempt by any partner to subvert or change this common purpose: **all partners had a clear and common purpose**. Kim points out that: "We all shared a common goal. Partnering is supported by people who have a genuine belief in the project, which brings you in whole heartedly; we all had that passion." This clear and common purpose could be enhanced by the development of good relationships and flexibility amongst the partners. Kim describes relationships between partners:

It can only work if you get along, which needs people who can negotiate, be diplomatic when you don't agree, be flexible, have to roll with different outcomes. You also need people with effective approaches to troubleshooting.

Whilst Kim claims that she didn't generate support for this project through appealing to abstract concepts of community responsibility, it achieved success because each partner and contributor did have or developed this sense of shared responsibility. Combined with this deeper commitment, the partners from outside the youth sector were extremely well placed to bring support and credibility to the project. The learning is then about how to **involve community minded people with business influence and know-how**. Over many years, Kim has taken a proactive approach to seeking support from local Rotary Clubs. This facilitated the involvement of several clubs in this partnership. She explains:

I frequently go out advocating for young people at Rotary Clubs. I go with the optimism of what we can do for change. Many of them are true to that charter of community service and I press them that that should start at home. I work with many Clubs whose members are over 65, a few with negative impressions or attitudes to young people. I try to turn it around to look at the positive things young people do. I may not change their attitudes but they have been very supportive in setting up this space. That's the great thing about the Youth Arts Warehouse: it provides fantastic opportunities for young people to be truly productive and shape their community.

The culture of the Steering Committee was business-like, although friendly – because everyone was volunteering. *“It was very business-like – a lot like board meetings in corporations,”* explains Ray. *“A problem came up: it was discussed and a solution to deal with it was agreed. It was always a consensus: we never voted.”*

Secondly, RYSS is committed to maximising youth participation in their programs. They were thus keen for the Youth Arts Warehouse development to **consult with young people about their wants and needs and involve them in the stages they chose**. There were three key aspects of this:

Young people owning the idea of the Youth Arts Warehouse: The initial dreaming and planning stages for the Warehouse were highly participatory and, as a result, young people who have been long-term involved at RYSS have a high degree of ownership of the project. Kim points out that:

Young people were involved in planning for this partnership over many years. We had many opportunities to do a thorough consultation with the young people. We discovered that young people needed more recreation: recreation that was safe, drug and alcohol free, affordable, and accessible.

Shona was involved in this consultation:

A couple of years ago we were always saying that we wouldn't mind something happening upstairs. So all the youth around here put in our ideas about what we'd like to have happen up there.

Shannon is 21 years old, has been active at RYSS for six years, and says: *“I'm happy just that I've contributed and that it did start with one of us saying: ‘Why don't you do something with this space?’”*

Young people determining the key features of the space: While the space was being built, RYSS asked some of their youth leaders to conduct a video survey of what young people in the region would like the space to offer. Young people were trained to do video interviews across seven different local youth events during Youth Week, asking: ‘What are the biggest youth needs on the Central coast, directly related to what the Youth Art Warehouse could offer?’ Shannon also remembers that they asked: ‘How far would you travel to be able to spend a whole day doing what you want?’ The results of the survey about young people's ideas for the space were taken to RYSS and to the sponsors, including the Rotary clubs.

Liz Carter, Youth Arts Coordinator at RYSS, reports that this consultation showed positive responses to the idea of a Youth Arts Space. Not only would young people be able to travel to events, but they would be able to fund activities such as attending concerts. She says:

The majority of the young people were really excited by the concept. It started them off having inspiring thoughts about how they could become involved in the arts areas: young guys at the skate competition talking about making their own skating video clips for example.

While they were involved in these consultations and research, young people did not sit on the project steering committee; as such, they were not formally partners in the process. This was considered at one stage, says Kim, but since meetings were at 7.30 am, it was not considered practical. However, *“we made very sure they knew what was happening at every stage and that they were quite engaged in the process.”* The young people similarly note that, as Shona says, *“We didn't get involved in that part, but it was nice to involve the kids in what they wanted and show that we do want them here...”* and Shannon adds:

I don't mind that we weren't more involved with the steering group, 'cos without our ideas it wouldn't exist. They had to get the money and the licensing; we're glad we didn't have to do that. I know I would have thought that was a bit boring. We got involved again when the end product was ready. We had a big party, an official opening and then one for the kids the week after.

RYSS also saw themselves as advocating for young people's views throughout. Liz Carter reports:

I sat in on the morning meetings and would put forward the views of the young people. I would advocate for the young people and would feed back to them dates of completion and progress updates. I had the process of the build videoed for them; the same video artist came in every week and at certain points we played that back, so we kept them up to date with the process. They were able to visualise the process. I also used that footage at stakeholder meetings with artists. The warehouse had been spoken about for more than five years, so people didn't think it was going to happen, so I felt like I had to show them footage to prove it was and get the community excited and behind us.

Ray suggests that the success of this project in generating such community support may have been more straightforward in regional areas. *"It's easier to pull things and people together than in a capital city. It's easier to identify with the community, because people want to own it. In regional areas people live, work, socialise within the community."* He suggests that Rotarians should involve more members in direct contact with a youth agency, in order to broaden their commitment.

The first advice I would give to other Rotary clubs considering being involved in a similar project is: do it, be involved. Be involved in the levels that you feel that your club's talents can most serve. Remember that you've got to be in there for the long haul. There's no point thinking you can tackle these projects in the short term. Every Rotary club is completely different; some don't want to be involved at all – they just raise money and contribute. Others don't have money but do the manual work.

This partnership can demonstrate the effectiveness of sharing positive, human outcomes with partners to ensure their satisfaction and ongoing advocacy for the project. It also demonstrates that it is useful to provide rewards by **connecting partners to the positive outcomes for young people and by providing positive publicity.**

Kim explains that RYSS held a 'Thank You to the Stakeholders' celebration to show them how significant their role in this project had been. They provided display certificates and started a newsletter with statistics and pictures showing and demonstrating the highlights of youth participation and events run in the Youth Arts Warehouse. *"We wanted to make sure there was full acknowledgement of everyone's contribution,"* she says. *"We did lots of press releases, emphasising that our sponsors were good, local, user-friendly businesses."* Liz Carter adds that: *"We talk to other people about the partners; we recommend them to other people. We tell others about how the manager of the building took us on, how it was built with a lot of love, and with a spirit that we couldn't have captured with lots of money."*

This partnership also demonstrates the value of their approach to **youth participation**, which was to enable participation of young people in areas and on levels they wanted, and that made sense to them. Shona notes the importance of *"involving us in what they can; if they can involve us they make sure they do. They'll talk to us about what we want, and whether we'd want to be involved."* Similarly Shannon advises: *"Keep the youth involved, really involved – even if they don't want to get involved in the business bit."*

Liz Carter points out:

Young people being involved in the process is about consultation being paramount to any development in any community. You need to know whether something is going to be utilised or valued. You need to know what the young people want – what they need. You take what the young people need and also the identity of the area – that's where you do your consultation with your stakeholders. You must also consult with your community and get them involved and behind you. Community growth, development and ownership can only be achieved when you consult every sector of the community, including local businesses.

*The Youth Arts Warehouse would not be such a special, youth-driven, up and coming Arts venue without our dedicated young crew, who are prepared to put themselves out, represent their voices as young people, and represent Regional Youth Support Services. My advice to other communities wanting to involve young people to set up a project like this, would be to speak to the young people, and to work with them. They are very valuable – not the future generation but the **now** generation!*

Finally, Ray Southern sums up the key to the partnership's success:

What works is having a common goal. You're all pulling in the same direction. More or less like having a business plan: 'What's the end product?'; the aim of the steering group is to get there. The rest of it flowed from that. None of us were experts but we all brought our own talents to it.

In Summary:

After five years of consultations, lobbying and various submissions, a unique collection of partners brought the construction of a Youth Arts Space in Gosford to fruition. The Regional Partnerships Program and the NSW Ministry for the Arts, along with local Rotary Clubs and

businesses, came together to enable the second storey of the Parkside space (a youth co-location) to be upgraded to provide a large music venue, sound recording studio and arts studio space with disabilities access.

The partners identify three specific learnings as being critical to their success:

- ✦ All partners have a **clear and common purpose**;
- ✦ The partnership **involves community minded people with business influence and know how**;
- ✦ It connects partners to the **positive outcomes for young people**; and
- ✦ There is **active youth participation**.



Youth Action and Policy Association NSW

working in the interests of young people & youth services in NSW

Regional Youth Support Services at Gosford

by Michael Aiken

Since 1991 numerous surveys, reports and investigations into youth services and opportunities on the Central Coast have been conducted, all of which identified the need for the introduction or major development of youth facilities, services and support across the Central Coast. Over the last fifteen years however, there have been very few youth services organisations in operation on the Central Coast, and each new survey, report and/or investigation invariably identifies the same issues and concerns as its predecessor, with apparently little action taken to overcome these matters.



One of those very few youth service providers on the Central Coast over the last two decades, and the only specific, community-based youth service organisation, is Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS), an association that is leading the way in providing real and lasting alternatives to the youth of the Central Coast across social, cultural and employment fields.

RYSS, which had its beginnings in 1986 as Gosford Youth Services, is an independent, non-profit organisation for young people on the Central Coast, providing support services to develop, promote and encourage participation by young people in all levels of the community, particularly socially and in arts, employment and vocational training. Gosford Youth Services came into being as a response to the escalating growth of the Kariang housing estate and subsequent increase in the local youth population. Initially funding was provided by the State Government for one part-time youth worker, eventually leading over the next four years to the construction of a modest youth centre at Kariang.

Currently, RYSS is involved in a multi-service-provider project at Parkside in the Gosford CBD, pursuing a leading-edge model of inter-organisational co-operation unique to the Central Coast and a best practice prototype for the rest of Australia. This model already provides young people with an enhanced level of integrated services that directly benefits users and providers, and is quickly achieving recognition throughout the country as a way forward for community services, cultural development and youth work in particular.

RYSS provides several ongoing services and facilities for people aged 12 - 25 as well as organising one-off events and limited duration courses and workshops, including:

- a youth centre at Wyoming
- the Interlynk Lounge - a safe space and avenue for information, referral and support for young people (including a learning centre for CALD/ESL students)
- the online 'Generation Q' resource for young same sex attracted and gender variant people (www.ryss.com.au/Generation_Q),

as well as employing:

- 2 Outreach Workers
- a full-time Youth Arts Co-ordinator responsible for community development regionally, organising and coordinating workshops and training for young people across the arts
- a Resource Worker to provide first point of contact for young people wishing to access RYSS referrals, information and resources.

RYSS is managed by a Service Manager and a Financial Manager under the guidance of a 7 member committee.

RYSS has achieved widespread support across the Central Coast community as well as from Federal, State and Local Government and is supported by contributions from: The

Department of Community Services, Gosford City Council, NSW Arts, the Rotary Clubs of the Central Coast and the people of Gosford LGA.

In addition to the support and encouragement described above, RYSS has been involved in partnership programs with all levels of Government and numerous local non-government organisations, most notably the Parkside project initiated by the joint efforts of Employment Transactions Australia and RYSS Inc.

In 2005 the various RYSS services recorded a total of over 6000 individual contacts with young people seeking information, support or resources.

From 1986 to the present day, RYSS has been consistently and actively advocating for more youth support services and resources on the Central Coast whilst developing its own services to cater to an ever larger and broader clientele.

A brief history of RYSS

1986-1994

Gosford Youth Services (GYS) was formed in 1986 and became an incorporated association in 1991. From 1986 to 1989 the service consisted of one part-time youth worker providing support to the new housing estate in Kariong, south of Gosford.

In 1989 GYS initiated New South Wales' first mobile youth centre, with the aim of meeting the needs of young people in geographically isolated areas, conducting a youth group at various makeshift locations (including a residential garage). The success of this work led to the development of more permanent GYS facilities, beginning with a small clubhouse at Kariong in 1990 (now home to Progressive Community Radio, a venture begun with GYS support as Wyong-Gosford Youth Radio) which served as base for the youth group meetings until the completion of a new Kariong Youth Centre in 1995.

By 1993 GYS was operating new, permanent youth centres in Wyoming and Kincumber, and in June of that year began a youth coffee shop at the Kincumber centre. During the early 1990s GYS was very active in juvenile crime prevention, operating a valuable discussion group for truants, as well as providing several arts orientated workshops and programs in Kariong, Wyoming and Kincumber, including a youth newspaper, young actors' workshop and radio production training.

1995

Until 1995 GYS shared office space in Gosford's CBD with Community Housing and the Volunteers Treasurers Association. In 1995 GYS underwent an organisational restructure to become an umbrella auspice agency for a range of youth projects and moved into independent office space in a fibro house on Mann Street. At this time several new youth worker positions were created, funded by the Area Assistance Scheme, and the new youth centre was developed in Kariong.

1996

In 1996 GYS established a youth café, *The Labyrinth*, in the Gosford CBD with financial contributions from the St George Foundation, as well as setting up a new 'shop front' youth services access point in the same building. Thanks to the support of the St George Foundation and several other new partners - including numerous local Rotary clubs and the Inspire Foundation - *The Labyrinth* provided a free, readily accessible and independent space for young people in Gosford for over three years, not only creating a social space but also a venue for art events, including poetry readings, live music performances and visual art exhibitions. With the development of the youth café, GYS was able to source funding from the Area Assistance Scheme to employ a part-time youth arts/recreation worker to source, organise and coordinate events such as the exhibitions and performances mentioned previously, as well as creative workshops and 'jam' sessions.

1998

In 1998 Gosford Youth Services Inc. became Regional Youth Support Services Inc. in order to reflect the increasingly broad range of services offered and the widening geographical distribution of the communities benefiting from those services. By this time the success of *The Labyrinth* as a youth café and the parallel success of the arts programs being offered contributed to RYSS developing the concepts of a youth-run business enterprise (in the form of a restaurant) and a standalone multi-purpose youth facility.

1999-2002

The further development of a potential youth business was facilitated in 1999 by RYSS and Employment Transactions Australia forming a partnership to bid for the 'breakthrough' funds offered by the Foundation for Young Australians. This secured \$250,000 over 4 years to set up the restaurant. Through consultation with the Gosford Chamber of Commerce a likely venue was identified in the vintage Kibble Park Tea Rooms in the Gosford CBD, a building owned by Gosford City Council. With Council's support, *Donnison's on the Park* opened in 2002, currently employing 3 casual and 3 permanent full-time staff, all aged 25 or under, a project which not only provides employment and professional development opportunities for young people but also contributes to a greater appreciation amongst the rest of the community for the professionalism, skill and dedication of these young workers in particular and young people in general.

Also during 1999, a working party was created in consultation with over ten non-government organisations to further develop the conceptual aspects of the proposed multi-purpose youth facility. In 2001 Gosford City Council purchased the Parkside Centre, a defunct shopping centre in the heart of the Gosford CBD, to provide a base for the multi-purpose youth services facility. Parkside now houses eight youth service providers including RYSS and ET Australia, with an upper level warehouse space currently in the process of conversion into RYSS' latest ambitious project, a Youth Arts Warehouse, intended to host art exhibitions, music concerts, theatre performances, training workshops in photography, multimedia, sound recording production and more through the hire of the facilities housed there. This project has been developed with contributions from many local businesses and Federal, State and Local governments.

RYSS today

Since the purchase and development of Parkside, RYSS has continued to provide innovative and effective programs to the youth of the Central Coast across a broad range of fields.

The Interlynk lounge (situated in Parkside itself) has been operating weekday evenings (3pm - 6pm) providing ongoing computer and internet support, services information and referral to young people as well as hosting several programs including:

- the CALD/ESL homework program, which aims to support young people who have been in the country seven years or less and has a majority of refugee clients
- graphic design courses (in association with TAFE outreach)
- a young women's creative group.

RYSS' outreach youth workers have been conducting several school based programs to great success, while the RYSS operated online resource for same sex attracted and gender variant youth - *Generation Q* - continues to grow. In addition, the continued success of the commercial restaurant and hospitality training venture that is *Donnison's on the Park* has created a real and sustainable opportunity for young people to find employment, training and career advancement.

RYSS also conducts *Burri-minimbah*, an indigenous youth group run from Wyoming Youth Centre. This is a monthly activity hosted by the Centre, supported by youth workers and run through local Aboriginal families and includes education and resources for a local young dance group, Aboriginal story telling and arts workshops in addition to serving as a community education program for the wider community.

Meanwhile, the RYSS Arts Coordinator became a full-time position in 2005 (thanks to increased NSW Arts funding). Since then the coordinator has undertaken a great number of diverse programs in music and visual art, coordinated the Central Coast region's Artstart Youth Arts and Skills Festival and pushed ahead with the Youth Arts Warehouse, due to open doors by the end of 2006.

The future for RYSS promises yet more growth and a further strengthening of programs and services already in place. The potential effectiveness and versatility of the Youth Arts Warehouse gives rise to an amazing range of possibilities for further youth activities, while the continued and increasing success of the inter-organisational Parkside project ensures further opportunity for RYSS to develop as a peak Central Coast youth services organisation.

The greatest challenges facing RYSS at this point, as with many youth services, lie in the need to permanently secure the future of its core staff and programs. With the stability of longer term funding agreements RYSS will be able to make long term planning decisions

that will greatly enhance the effectiveness of the services already provided. To this end, RYSS is currently creating a business plan to set the vision and blueprint for the service's future. RYSS has a strategic approach to link with regional planning, staying at the forefront in planning strategies such as: YAPAG (Youth Action Project Action Group), Wyong and Gosford Cultural Plans and the many local planning initiatives. RYSS recently led the Youth Centres Forum for the Central Coast region, and has worked determinedly to establish strong, long term relationships with the two local governments and many other NGOs.

Kim McLoughry is RYSS Service Manager and Parkside Board member. Kim has been working with RYSS since 1993 and has been successful in finding resources for Central Coast youth programs over the last 13 years. RYSS success has also been due to the support of resourceful and skilled management committee members with complementary roles and expertise being picked from our local area to build the governance of the agency.

Kim is the Central Coast contact for the youth sector on the new DoCS funding policy. Kim continues to work with the wider NSW youth sector including DoCS and supports regional planning, better NGO communication practices and improved development and integration into the future for youth services.

In recent times, several other local councils, youth services groups and NGOs have looked to RYSS and Parkside as a model for the future, including: Gunnedah Council, western Sydney & northern NSW youth services & several other councils and Police services, reflecting the valuable gains already achieved as well as the future potential RYSS is creating with its various programs, projects and partnerships.

More information

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