

**Submission
No 50**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Uniting NSW.ACT

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Edmond Atalla MP
Chair
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety
Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities
via: lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr. Atalla,

Uniting NSW.ACT submission: Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

Uniting NSW.ACT contributes to the work of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT, through social justice advocacy, community services and spiritual care. We provide services for people through all ages and stages of life, and drive solutions to systemic issues so people experiencing disadvantage can live their best lives.

Our purpose is to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. We value diversity and always welcome everyone exactly as they are.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety's inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities. Our submission focuses on the importance of early intervention and initiatives developed with local communities to build on the strengths of their youth to provide better community outcomes.

Regional and rural communities face unique challenges when it comes to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their residents, particularly young people. Factors such as isolation, limited access to services, and economic hardship can contribute to increased risks for young people, including engagement in anti-social behavior and interaction with the criminal justice system.

The disadvantage felt by young people in regional and rural communities is exacerbated by those young people that also face other social or economic challenges, including young people in State care.

Uniting's Youth Coaching Programs

Uniting operates a range of programs for young people in regional and rural communities, including direct youth coaching and similar models that empower young people. These programs are generally scaleable, and with investment from the NSW Government, these programs could be applied to other locations and cohorts of young people experiencing disadvantage, or at risk of interaction with the criminal justice system.

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Uniting's extensive experience and investment in these programs include a 5-year investment in our *Extended Care* program. This program has demonstrated the benefits of investing in quality and holistic coaching support from the age of 15 to 21 for young people in State care.

It also includes NSW Government-funded programs such as the *Premier's Youth Initiative*, and *Specialist Aftercare*, which provide a strengths-based model tailored to the individual needs of the young person.

These programs have been successful in supporting young people to achieve their goals, avoid negative outcomes, and contribute positively to their communities. By providing young people with the tools and support they need to succeed, Uniting's programs are helping to create safer and more inclusive communities.

The Role of Youth Coaching

Youth coaching is a proactive and preventative approach that has been proven to be effective in addressing these challenges. By identifying and building on young people's strengths and assets, coaching helps them develop the skills and resilience needed to navigate life's challenges successfully. This approach is based on the belief that young people are experts in their own lives and should be empowered to make decisions that will positively impact their future.

Uniting's experience with youth coaching shows that for those young people who may be at a high risk of or experiencing both social and economic marginalisation, dedicated youth coaching can improve outcomes across a range of indicators. This includes through Uniting's *Extended Care* program; participants saw a decrease in interaction with the criminal justice system compared to those young people leaving State care who didn't have access to the program.

Community-based initiatives

Uniting is increasingly seeing successful examples of where place-based community-led work has led to positive outcomes in communities where traditional models of service delivery have failed.

This is a response to persistent, entrenched, localised disadvantage. This disadvantage is generally the result of systemic factors, in particular the rationed nature of services, the silos and fragmentation of the service system, poverty, and the severe lack of social and affordable housing, that get in the way of creating what communities want for their future.

An example such a program led by Uniting is *Becoming U*, designed to respond to and work with the unique and rich circumstances of communities in Nambucca Valley (Bowraville, Nambucca Heads, and Macksville) and Toormina (Coffs Harbour LGA). *Becoming U* is a program designed to empower young people aged 8-18 to build belief and capacity so that they are work-ready, mentally and physically healthy and connected to their communities. In each of these communities, we partner with and engage diverse people, groups, and a broad range of local organisations, to support and strengthen communities, so that young people can thrive.

One of the ways trust has developed in the partnership, and in the project more broadly, is through local people acting as bridges into the community. These links through individual people who are personally known to the local community create an initial space within which trust can grow directly between the people involved as they get to know one another.

Benefits for Young People

Initiatives such as youth coaching and *Becoming U* are inherently future-focused, helping young people set meaningful goals and work towards achieving them. By providing a supportive and non-judgmental environment, coaching helps young people develop a sense of agency and control over their lives, leading to increased self-esteem and confidence. These factors are crucial in helping

young people avoid engagement with the criminal justice system and make positive contributions to their communities.

Benefits for the Community

The benefits of youth coaching extend beyond individual young people to the community as a whole. By investing in early intervention programs like coaching, communities can reduce the incidence of crime and anti-social behavior, leading to safer and more cohesive environments for all residents. Additionally, by empowering young people to become active and engaged members of their communities, coaching can help build social capital and strengthen community bonds.

Recommendation

Uniting urges the committee to consider the benefits of early intervention through youth coaching in regional and rural communities. Our research has shown that by investing in programs that support young people, the NSW Government can create safer and more vibrant communities. Uniting is available to provide further information or participate in hearings as required.

Yours sincerely,



Charlie Chubb
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Uniting NSW.ACT