

**Submission
No 100**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Ballina Shire Council

Date Received: 29 May 2024



Mr Edmond Atalla MP
Chair, NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services
NSW Parliament House
[Community safety in regional and rural communities \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)
[Lodge a Submission \(nsw.gov.au\)](http://nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Atalla

Re: Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety Inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities. This submission has been prepared by Council staff based on experience in engaging with youth in the Shire across a variety of programs and services over time.

The Ballina local government area is located on the Far North Coast of NSW and has long been seen to be a haven for retirees and empty nesters. However, the makeup of our community is changing as our area has experienced population growth driven by families with young children that have moved into the area.

The number of children and young people have grown consistently for many years. Our local schools are reporting increases in enrolments. Local youth service organisations also report increasing demands for services.

Council has over recent years created public spaces that included design elements to meet the needs of young people. Examples include skate parks, teen adventure playgrounds and planned the construction of a BMX pump track. Council supports local NGO and youth service providers by leasing facilities for these groups to operate from.

Looking at youth services and opportunities from the perspective of proactive enabling of positive and healthy activity and interactions the following suggestions are provided for the consideration of the committee.

There is an ongoing need to ensure that our young people have opportunities to engage in community life. The role of local youth workers is vital in ensuring that young people remain engaged and supported. This support is particularly important to young people who feel isolated and marginalised.

Local youth services operating in Ballina LGA deliver a range of services to meet the needs of young people. These services are working to capacity and would benefit from the allocation of additional resources. Significantly the Ballina Shire does not have a specific youth diversion program.

Recommendation: Continue to support existing youth services through the allocation of long term additional funding to specifically target youth at risk.

Council understands that most existing youth services operate during business hours. There is an opportunity to introduce additional youth services that would operate after hours and during weekends. These services would provide young people with opportunities to socialise and participate in activities in a safe space that is staffed by professionals.

Recommendation: Introduction of fully funded after hours youth service. This service would aim to address the risk factors by providing activities for young people at times where many young people have little to do.

Local youth services have advised that most funding for local youth services is time limited (2-3 years). This time restriction can impede the development of building meaningful relationships with young people and service providers.

The ability to attract and retain skilled youth workers is also linked to the funding cycle. We have had examples locally where youth workers who have built and delivered meaningful programs have had to stop working locally as funding has expired.

Recommendation: Fund youth programs long term (5 years minimum).

Regional areas such as Ballina do not have extensive public transport systems. Local transport services are limited in terms of hours of operation and service routes. Youth programs must be supported via the inclusion of youth transport options.

Recommendations: The provision of free youth transport program to support programs is a key component of enabling access to services and also getting young people home after youth programs.

The need to engage early with children and young people who are at risk of developing destructive behaviours is well documented. There is potential to develop early intervention service that targets specifically 11-14 year olds. This service could offer a range of activities and programs for young people after hours and on weekends.

Recommendation: Establish an early intervention program targeting 11-14 year olds with a focus on diverting them away from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Our local young people are valued members of our community and Ballina Shire Council is supportive of programs that aim to positively assist young people. Council is committed to continuing to plan for and respond to local needs. At its April 2024 ordinary meeting, Council resolved to receive a report on options for additional youth services and activities in the Ballina Shire.

More specifically in relation to local government, funding is a central issue. Funding constraints and rising costs make it difficult for local government to commence and or expand youth based programs.

Funding support for local government to continue to provide modern infrastructure for youth activity as well as to enhance interaction the NGO sector over a sustained period would improve the basis for proactive and positive youth engagement statewide.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission. If you have any enquiries regarding this matter, please contact Roberto Kenk, Social Planning Coordinator, on 02 6686 1293.

Yours faithfully



Mathew Wood
Director
Planning and Environmental Health Division