

**Submission  
No 148**

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Dubbo Regional Council

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Parliament of NSW  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety

## **SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Dubbo Regional Council is a local government area located in the Central West and Orana regions of New South Wales Australia.

Dubbo Regional Council services Dubbo, Wellington and surrounding towns and villages. Our Council comprises of an area of 7536 kilometres and has a population of 55,518. The median age of the community is 36 years, the population of people aged under 25 years is 32.3% and 16.6% of residents identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2021).

The drivers of youth crime across regional and rural NSW have been clearly identified and have remained constant for many years due to underlying issues including but not limited to families with challenging and complex circumstances, intergenerational disadvantage and trauma, disparity in socio-economic status, disengagement from schooling, mental health, drug, and substance abuse. These issues are exponentially complex, nuanced, and multifaceted.

The impacts of the pandemic led to significant changes and saw issues faced by youth and their families to become further exacerbated due to a myriad of factors including loss of household income and cost of living pressures, increased mental and physical health issues, social and community isolation, and restriction of access to schooling and services. With schools and community programs closed, suspended, or cancelled there was less supervision and engagement for youth. The boredom, stress, and anxiety that youth faced due to the lockdowns may have led to increased substance abuse and engagement in negative and criminal behaviour. Additionally, societal shift to online and digital environments during the pandemic led to increased exposure to the negative influence of social media exposure and engagement, coupled with an exponential increase in the high-risk offending of children (e.g., motor vehicle theft and police pursuits being recorded and broadcast on TikTok) can be attributed to a surge of youth crime instances.

Within a rural and regional context, the community often look to local government to “do something” about public safety, maintain law and order and reduce the impact of youth crime. Each level of government within NSW has specific functions and roles that they can provide to address youth crime. The local government role can be broken down into three main categories being.

- 1) Direct influence and control over urban planning and maintenance, provision and management of infrastructure and well-designed open spaces.



- 2) Advocacy and representation for the community – Advocating for the identified needs and wants of the community it represents to organisations, relevant levels of government and authorities.
- 3) Collaboration – collaborating with various bodies and delegations to work to address issues that benefits the growth and prosperity of the community it represents.

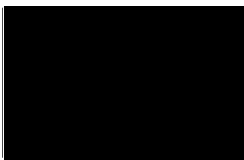
No one level of government or community service provider is responsible for, nor capable of achieving outcomes to reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime in regional and rural NSW. In addition, there is no shortage of service providers and funding across state and federal government agencies and non-government organisations to design, implement and deliver programs and services designed to provide wraparound and diversionary measures for youth and families of all cultural backgrounds but in particular First Nations people.

However, there is an ongoing efficiency to be made around coordination of that effort. This has been one of the key and recurring themes to Council's recent community consultation. Like what the role of a Youth Meeting Coordinator (YAM) can do with the police with regard to coordinating youth service and program provision across different services providers, a similar Community Safety and Crime Prevention coordinating influence is required. The coordination of these groups needs a degree of authority and gravitas to hold other bodies accountable for their performance.

Finally, a key consideration for the review is the realisation that the 'system' is mostly designed to assist people that want to be assisted. Existing mechanisms fall away quickly when dealing with individuals that, for any number of reasons, are difficult to help or find themselves 'out the other side' of a system that has either failed them, or that they have failed. As a Council, it is this cohort that we are mostly responding to on our streets and other public open spaces. What is needed is the time, resources and flexible thinking required to build a relationship with these individuals and guide them to more appropriate decisions over a longer term.

Local government is a broad tool for basic community services. As a community leader it can collaborate and advocate as well as provide a coordinating influence for a wide range of service providers. The larger share of the effort, the resourcing and long-term innovative thinking across a statewide context needs to come from our State Government.

Yours faithfully



*Craig Arms*  
Director Community, Culture & Places