"This is the way it is and is gonna be"

The rural reality for young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania

A report informed by consultation with young people, government health professionals, community development workers, community sector organisations and long-term residents on the West Coast

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ABSTRACT

The Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS) Community Partnership Team on the North West Coast, Healthwest, North West Primary Health Area Management – Health Promotion, Child and Family Centre – Department of Education, in collaboration with the West Coast Council and Rosebery Community House, conducted consultations concerning the challenges faced by young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania. Interviews with young people from the West Coast were conducted focusing on the challenges and also the possible solutions. Additionally, health professionals, community development workers, community sector organisations and long term residents of the area, completed questionnaires and written observations also focusing on these. The re-occurring issues of concern across all youth focus groups were directly related to isolation and the associated injustice; family situations and conflict; limited schooling and employment options and information; lack of housing availability and access to transport; difficulty accessing information and support around relationships, sexual health and pregnancy; small town trust and privacy issues; not having anything to do or a place to go; and a lack of awareness of existing services and how to find information. The young people had a strong reliance on family members, especially their mothers, as well as friends or their friend's parents, when it came to accessing information. The problem of suicide was also raised as were alcohol and drug related issues and educational disadvantage. The young people reported wanting, but not having, someone that they could go to outside of close networks for support and information. They also voiced wanting, but not having, a place to go to for information, leisure and socialising. The young people thought that having somewhere to go and someone to talk to, were two of the possible solutions to the challenges they faced. The adults who were consulted also voiced these as possible solutions, but added that the emphasis should be on empowering the young people to tap into resources themselves. It is proposed that combating the challenges faced by young people on the West Coast may be best achieved through employing a positive, collaborative approach that empowers the young people and increases their capacity to do something about their own situation, if they so desire.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION THREE

THE CONSULTATIONS **25**

SECTION FOUR

THE SHARED THEMES AND KEY MESSAGES **27**

SECTION FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS **48**

APPENDIX **54**

REFERENCES **58**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

West Coast Rural Youth – What is there where you live? Project

In 2007 and early 2008 there were comprehensive reviews of the Tasmanian Child Protection, Out of Home Care, Family Support and Disability Services. These system wide reviews recommended significant and sustained reform to support high quality services and effective outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families and people with disabilities their families and carers. A key finding of all the reviews was the requirement for integrated service delivery utilising shared governance at a state wide and area level. These arrangements create a fundamentally different relationship between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Community Sector Organisations (CSOs), related government agencies, and families, carers and people with disabilities.

Area Advisory Groups (AAGs) were established as the key governance forum at Area level. The four Area Advisory Groups are responsible for supporting the coordinated delivery of services, enabling a holistic response to the individual and their family, the provision of a flexible continuum of services locally, and opportunities to make best use of resources at the area level to improve responsiveness to community needs. While the focus is on services funded by DCYFS, the aim is to increasingly work in partnership with all relevant services in the area to provide seamless client pathways and quality client outcomes. The Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS) Community Partnership Teams are responsible for organising and providing secretariat support for the Area Advisory Groups.

Throughout 2010 the North West Area Advisory Group worked on service mapping for the local area, as well as identifying service gaps. The group then used this information to inform the development of an Area Plan for 2009 – 2012, which includes twenty client based goals, categorised by either theme or location (i.e. place-based goals). One of the place-based goals identified was to address service gaps for young people on the West Coast. In June 2010 a representative from the Community Partnership Team presented this project idea to the West Coast Service Provider meeting, on behalf of the North West Area Advisory Group. As a result of this meeting a working group was established and the West Coast Youth Project initiative was developed.

A collaborative approach, focusing on high levels of communication, networking and resource sharing between service providers was seen as necessary and partnerships were therefore formed between the Community Partnership Team North West – DCYFS, Healthwest, Health Promotion North West Area Health Services and Department of Education, West Coast Council, Rosebery Community House and Anglicare Tasmania. Six people from across these community sector organisations and spheres of government indicated their interest in the initiative and formed a working party that commenced planning and designing the West Coast Rural Youth - What is there where you live? Project

The main aims of the project were to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by rural young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania and to gain insights into the existing service gaps for the young people residing in these communities. The initial party concerns raised at service provider meetings in regards to the overall health and wellbeing of young people on the West Coast brought forward shared concerns about limited access to services and resources in these isolated communities and the impact this was having on young people.

To aid in understanding this impact it was decided that consultations with the young people themselves would be necessary, in conjunction with consultations with key stakeholders, around the main issues for young people on the West Coast especially in the areas of relationships, housing, employment and leisure. It was proposed that identifying the main issues had the potential to highlight service provision gaps and provide insights into how to address these gaps. Addressing these gaps may then enhance community benefits through more effective service delivery to young people.

The Place - The West Coast of Tasmania

The West Coast is one of nine municipalities in the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania and consists of five remote communities, these being Tullah, Rosebery, Zeehan, Queenstown and Strahan. These communities are relatively isolated due in part to their distance from the main cities and transport issues which are associated with limited services and/or weather conditions which often lead to unpredictable road closures at certain times of the year.

This isolation is often exacerbated for young people due to the limited access to numerous resources, including those essential to their overall wellbeing such as transport, housing, employment, leisure,

health and educational services. Despite this isolation, the close nature of the relationships and networks in these communities are highly valued and many have a strong attachment to their hometowns.

The key industries on the West Coast are mining and tourism, with locals reporting that changes in these industries impact heavily on the small communities in this municipality. For example, family and community lifestyles on the West Coast have altered significantly over the past twenty five years, arguably due to changes in the mining industry. Miners are typically working rotational twelve hour shifts rather than the traditional Monday to Friday, nine to five shifts. This has given rise to the introduction of the itinerant worker ('drive in, drive out') which many locals believe impacts on the family life of the local miner and social and family connectedness. There are additional concerns held by many West Coast residents that the young people living there are experiencing the after effects of generational community and social loss; which they also attribute to the changes in the mining industry in particular.

There is evidence to suggest that there has been limited support specifically for young people on the West Coast during the last three years. A Youth Health Worker was employed on the West Coast as far back as the late 1990's and the social workers and psychologists, who work in the schools, are not usually positioned there on a full time basis. Guidance officers are typically based outside the West Coast municipality and as a consequence visit the schools on an itinerant basis. The isolation and 'place-specific' situations outlined above would suggest that the young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania are indeed disadvantaged by their 'rurality'.

The Rationale - Inequity of Access

Research has consistently shown that young people in rural areas are more at risk of being socially excluded through isolation. This is compounded by these young people often having less access to the services and resources that are more readily available to their urban counterparts. Most of these services are those which are essential to health and wellbeing including transport, housing, education and employment services, with limitations having a combined effect to place rural young people at a disadvantage.

Addressing this rural disadvantage and implementing strategies that increase young people's access to resources and services is considered to be a matter of social justice. All individuals should have access to the resources and services that enable them to fully participate in society, regardless of rurality, socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, disability and so forth. Young people living in isolated or remote areas should not be disadvantaged and at a higher risk of social exclusion because of their geographical location. Additionally, they should not be at a higher risk of certain health and social problems due to where they live.

THE LITERATURE – Supporting the rationale

Considerable research has been conducted into the challenges faced by young people living in rural and isolated communities with researchers consistently reporting more limited access to resources, opportunities and services in these areas as a significant issue for young people. Research involving rural and regional Australian youth has highlighted the experiences of isolation and inequities of access that exist for this group, as has research conducted in Tasmania, which included young people living on the West Coast.

THE CONSULTATIONS

Consultations were conducted with key informants living and/or working on the West Coast of Tasmania, namely the young people themselves, community workers from various organisations, government health professionals and long term residents across municipalities. Consultations were also conducted with young people from the West Coast who were staying at the Hellyer College residence in Burnie. The consultations were conducted by members of the working party, who were individuals from across community sector organisations and spheres of government.

The Youth Consultations – Focus Group and Individual Interviews

Small focus group interviews were conducted with 72 young people aged between 13 – 16 years of age living on the West Coast of Tasmania and 18 young people from the West Coast who were staying at the Hellyer residence in Burnie. Individual semi-structured interviews were also conducted in March 2011 with 2 young females on the West Coast, aged 16 and 17 years, who had not been able to participate in

the focus groups and who wanted to have their voices heard. Additionally, a more informal one on one interview with a 17 year old male living independently on the West Coast was undertaken. Due to personal circumstances the young man had not been able to participate in the focus groups but still wished to be included in the consultations and respond to the same questions asked in the focus groups. (Please see appendix 1 and appendix 2 for the interview schedules for the young people).

The Adult Consultations – The Observations and Questionnaires

Government health professionals, community development workers and representatives from various community sector organisations were consulted between July 2010 and April 2011 into the challenges for young people living on the West Coast. The above-mentioned key informants were asked to submit their own thoughts and observations based on their experiences as the facilitators and interviewers of the youth focus groups.

In addition to the observations, community development workers, representatives from various community sector organisations and long term residents of the West Coast were also consulted in regards to life in general for young people living on the West Coast as well as the challenges for them. These key informants were asked to complete a questionnaire on the social and cultural aspects and benefits and challenges of living on the West Coast for young people. The purpose of the observations and questionnaires was to gain additional contextual depth and perspective from these adults. (Please see appendix 3 for the adult questionnaire).

THE SHARED THEMES AND KEY MESSAGES

THE YOUTH CONSULTATIONS

The Challenges

The re-occurring issues of concern across all youth focus groups were directly related to isolation and the associated injustice; family situations and conflict; limited schooling and employment options and information; lack of housing availability and access to transport; difficulty accessing information and support around relationships, sexual health and pregnancy; small town trust and privacy issues; not

having anything to do or a place to go; and a lack of awareness of existing services and how to find information.

These issues sometimes interacted to have a greater impact or created additional challenges in other areas of the young people's lives. For example, limited access to transport impacted on employment opportunities and contributed to feelings of isolation; small town trust and privacy concerns were linked to sexual health and pregnancy issues; and not having anything to do or a place to go to was associated with a lack of awareness of existing services and how to find information, but also to the apparent normalisation of alcohol and drug use.

It is also important to note that the young people had a strong reliance on family members, especially their mothers, as well as friends or their friend's parents, when it came to accessing information. In some cases this was seen as a positive for them, however on close interpretation of the data, it appeared that not all parents, friends and friend's parents had the capacity to fulfil this role.

The Solutions

The young people, across all focus groups and individual interviews, reported wanting but not having, someone that they could go to outside of close networks. They also voiced wanting, but not having, a place to go to. The young people wanted someone who they could trust and who would understand what they were experiencing, a place to go to for information and a place to go to for leisure activities and networking. They also wanted more options across the board in regards to education, employment, leisure, transport, housing and health services.

There were shared expressions of interest in having somewhere they could go to where they could talk with someone about employment and housing as well as have access to computers and the internet. The young people also saw this 'place' as a possible meeting place for leisure activities and networking. It was implied that this 'place' would be a youth centre or information centre, however further consultation may be required to clarify if this was in fact what the young people had meant and how they envisioned it's overall purpose, how it would be used, and so forth.

Other Key Messages

Many other issues were raised in the focus groups and were of particular concern to some individuals, however did not appear as a theme across all focus groups. For example, the problem of suicide was raised as were alcohol and drug related issues and how these contributed to arguments. In relation to alcohol-fuelled arguments, concerns were also raised in two of the focus groups about police not being situated in some towns, leading to response times to emergency calls that were slower. Concerns about educational disadvantage were not mentioned during any of the focus groups; however this was brought to the forefront during one of the individual interviews in some depth, suggesting that this too may be a key message, or an issue requiring further investigation.

THE ADULT CONSULTATIONS

The Challenges

The adult key informants considered the main areas of concern to be around the isolation associated with a number of resource and service provision issues surrounding transport, housing, employment, education, health and leisure; limitations on local opportunities, particularly for employment and leisure; the lack of awareness the young people had in how to access information and the confidence to do so; the social acceptance by the young people of family and social violence, pregnancy and alcohol use; trust and privacy issues; and the sense of hopelessness/apathy that had come through during the consultations. These concerns reflect much of what was found in the youth consultations, and any material considered to be complimentary or additional is discussed shortly.

The Solutions

The solutions offered by the adult key informants were not dissimilar to those suggested by the young people, however they contained additional depth. The desire for a youth worker comes through in adult consultations as does the need for young people to have a space in which to engage with a youth worker. Additionally, however, were suggestions that are in line with a capacity building approach which has a focus on development and facilitation, such as tapping into community resources and West Coast residents to increase their skills.

Other Key Messages

Health professionals also noted that the young people often expressed a desire to remain in their hometowns or with their families, with some expressing their considerable enjoyment of where they live and its associated activities such as bush bashing on motorbikes, going bush, fishing and so forth. On the contrary, another theme which emerged from the data collected from adult key informants was that the West Coast had changed over the years and that this was not necessarily a good thing, with it having a negative impact on the 'sense of community' that had existed in previous times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data collected from the West Coast consultations highlights that from various perspectives there are numerous gaps in service provision and community engagement on the West Coast and that this clearly has an impact on young people and potentially their options for the future. Access to a range of resources, including support services and information is lacking in relation to a number of areas including those essential to health and wellbeing, such as education, employment, housing, leisure and transport services.

The young people themselves voiced their concerns around isolation and injustice, limited access to numerous services, resources and activities, and openly at times discussed social violence, sexual health, pregnancy and alcohol issues, as well as their need for a place to go and someone to talk with, which was closely associated with their lack of awareness of existing services, how to access information and needing a base for leisure and networking. These concerns were shared by the adult key informants in this study, who additionally reported on the sense of hopelessness and lack of faith the young people had in anything being done about their situation or requests.

What is most concerning about the current 'rural disadvantage' faced by young people on the West Coast, which is associated with access limitations and other social issues, is that it places them at a higher risk of social exclusion as they move through their teenage years and into early adulthood and beyond, purely because of where they live.

In regards to the young people on the West Coast, we need to view them as individuals living in a particular place who are exposed to certain social and cultural norms that come with living where they live. To be able to do this, more intensive, in-depth interviewing of the young people themselves is necessary, as is further consultation with adult health professionals and youth workers on the West Coast. In the meantime, however, insights have been gained through recent interviews that may guide in the development of intervention strategies, which are outlined below.

Recommendations:

1. A capacity building approach that exposes the young people to a wider range of socio-cultural experiences and opportunities - this will initially require a facilitator with access to information and resources and some sort of platform in which to work from

2. Further consult with the West Coast young people and provide them with an appropriate 'place to go' for information, leisure activities and networking

3. The challenges and possible solutions voiced by the young people, the health professionals, the community development workers, the service providers and long-term residents of the area are taken into account when developing any intervention strategies - these strategies need to be adopted based on the voices of those from within the West Coast itself and be driven by those from within the West Coast, with other key stakeholders complimenting this in a 'supporting and resourcing' role

4. It is strongly recommended that what is required is a not a Youth Worker per se, which is a solution voiced across consultations, but rather a Youth Development Officer

5. The local Council host the Youth Development Officer, who will be under the guidance and direct supervision of the Community Services Manager

For additional depth and rationale for these recommendations, please see Section Five of this report

SECTION ONE

BACKGROUND

West Coast Rural Youth – What is it about where you live? Project

In 2007 and early 2008 there were comprehensive reviews of the Tasmanian Child Protection, Out of Home Care, Family Support and Disability Services. These system wide reviews recommended significant and sustained reform to support high quality services and effective outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families and people with disabilities their families and carers. A key finding of all the reviews was the requirement for integrated service delivery utilising shared governance at a state wide and area level. These arrangements create a fundamentally different relationship between the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Community Sector Organisations (CSOs), related government agencies, and families, carers and people with disabilities.

Area Advisory Groups (AAGs) were established as the key governance forum at Area level. The four Area Advisory Groups are responsible for supporting the coordinated delivery of services, enabling a holistic response to the individual and their family, the provision of a flexible continuum of services locally, and opportunities to make best use of resources at the area level to improve responsiveness to community needs. While the focus is on services funded by DCYFS, the aim is to increasingly work in partnership with all relevant services in the area to provide seamless client pathways and quality client outcomes. The Disability, Child, Youth and Family Services (DCYFS) Community Partnership Teams are responsible for organising and providing secretariat support for the Area Advisory Groups.

Throughout 2010 the North West Area Advisory Group worked on service mapping for the local area, as well as identifying service gaps. The group then used this information to inform the development of an Area Plan for 2009 – 2012, which includes twenty client based goals, categorised by either theme or location (i.e. place-based goals). One of the place-based goals identified was to address service gaps for young people on the West Coast. In June 2010 a representative from the Community Partnership Team presented this project idea to the West Coast Service Provider meeting, on behalf of the North West Area Advisory Group. As a result of this meeting a working group was established and the West Coast

Youth Project initiative was developed as a means of identifying and addressing gaps in services for young people residing on the West Coast of Tasmania.

A collaborative approach, focusing on high levels of communication, networking and resource sharing between service providers was seen as necessary and partnerships were therefore formed between the Community Partnership Team North West – DCYFS, Healthwest, Health Promotion North West Area Health Services and Department of Education, West Coast Council, Rosebery Community House and Anglicare Tasmania. Six people from across these community sector organisations and spheres of government indicated their interest in the initiative and formed a working party that commenced planning and designing the West Coast Rural Youth - What is there where you live? Project

The main aims of the project were to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by rural young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania and to gain insights into the existing service gaps for the young people residing in these communities. The initial party concerns raised at service provider meetings in regards to the overall health and wellbeing of young people on the West Coast brought forward shared concerns about limited access to services and resources in these isolated communities and the impact this was having on young people. The overall project aims are outlined below.

The Project Aims:

- Gain an understanding of the challenges faced by rural young people living on the West Coast;

- Gain insights into the existence of, access to and understanding of services for young people;

- Enhance community benefits through more effective service delivery to young people;

- Provide the opportunity for young people and service providers to participate in the project at a local level;

- Provide greater collaboration across youth, community sector organisations and all spheres of government;

To aid in understanding the impact of service provision gaps on young people living on the West Coast, it was decided that consultations with the young people themselves would be necessary, as well as

consultations with key stakeholders. The focus of the consultations would be the main issues for young people living on the West Coast especially in the areas of relationships, housing, employment and leisure.

The Place – The West Coast of Tasmania

The West Coast is one of nine municipalities in the Cradle Coast region of Tasmania and predominantly consists of five remote communities, these being Tullah, Rosebery, Zeehan, Queenstown and Strahan. These communities are relatively isolated due in part to their distance from the main cities and transport issues which are associated with limited services and/or weather conditions which often lead to unpredictable road closures at certain times of the year.

This isolation is often exacerbated for young people due to the limited access to numerous resources, including those essential to their overall wellbeing such as transport, housing, employment, leisure, health and educational services. Despite this isolation, the close nature of the relationships and networks in these communities, the natural beauty and some aspects of the lifestyle, are highly valued and many have a strong attachment to their hometowns and a desire to remain in them.

The key industries on the West Coast are mining and tourism, with males dominating the mining arena and females the accommodation and food services positions (Institute for Regional Development, 2009). Employment in the mining industry in the region can be unpredictable, however, and the tourism industry is generally low-paying employment (Institute for Regional Development, 2009). Additionally, many miners are now 'bus in bus out' miners who have families and homes in other municipalities, which has implications in regards to spending locally (Institute for Regional Development, 2009) as well as in regards to other input into the community that is not necessarily financial.

West Coast locals report that changes in these industries impact heavily on the small communities in this municipality. For example, family and community lifestyles on the West Coast have altered significantly over the past twenty five years, arguably due to changes in the mining industry. Miners are typically working rotational twelve hour shifts rather than the traditional Monday to Friday, nine to five shifts. This has given rise to the introduction of the itinerant worker ('drive in, drive out'), mentioned earlier, which many locals believe impacts on the family life of the local miner and social and family

connectedness. There are additional concerns held by many West Coast residents that the young people living there are experiencing the after effects of generational community and social loss; which they also attribute to the changes in the mining industry in particular.

In terms of socio-economic disadvantage, the West Coast recently rated the most disadvantaged in the Cradle Coast region (ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006). The West Coast had the highest percentage of low-income households in the Cradle Coast region in 2006 and 13.3% of families on the West Coast with children had incomes under $500 per week, this being the highest percentage in the region (Institute for Regional Development, 2009).

Of some concern is that research has found a relationship between lower socioeconomic communities and poorer overall health, with individuals who live in locations that are reported to be socioeconomically disadvantaged, having higher incidences of some illnesses and less healthy lifestyles (ABS, Australian Social Trends, 1999). Some evidence of this may be seen with the West Coast having recently recorded a higher than the average standard rate of cancer and heart related deaths as well as having the highest percentage of individuals at risk of inadequate nutrition, smoking and risky alcohol consumption (Tasmanian Population Health Survey, 2009).

Some studies have also reported a connection between lower socioeconomic communities and problem gambling. Evidence of this may also be seen as occurring on the West Coast which was ranked in the top two municipalities in the Cradle Coast region for the highest percentage of net player losses for gambling in recent times (Cradle Coast Regional Profile, 2003). Of concern with this is that problem gambling has been linked to a number of other health and social problems such as higher rates of psychological disturbance, hazardous alcohol use, smoking, depression, marital breakdown, financial stress, child abuse and neglect, family violence, criminal acts and loss of employment (e.g. see Rickwood et al, 2010).

Another concerning finding is that there are higher rates of children in remote locations across Australia who are considered to be developmentally vulnerable in a range of developmental domains (AEDI, National Report, 2009) and evidence of this may be seen on the West Coast, with 29.3% of children being assessed as developmentally vulnerable in more than one of these domains (AEDI, National Report, 2010).

The rate of teenage pregnancy in Tasmania is second in the country only to the Northern Territory (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, 2009) with anecdotal evidence, in the form of referrals to various health services, reporting a high rate of teenage pregnancy on the West Coast. Similar reports have been made in regards to sexually transmitted diseases, also seen in the number of referrals from the West Coast in recent times.

There is also anecdotal evidence from key individuals in education circles uncovering a significant rate of non-completion of post year 10 schooling for young people from the West Coast. Some of this has been linked to the costs and emotional factors associated with having to leave home to engage in Year 11 and 12 studies. For example, the Institute for Regional Development (2009) reported that the costs of accommodation and travel influenced participation in education for those from the West Coast.

Of particular interest are net migration figures in the region for young adults aged between 20 – 24 years between 2001 and 2005, which show that the West Coast municipality attracts this cohort second only to Burnie, however the net migration for 'young workers' aged from 25-34 to the West Coast is in the negatives (Institute for Regional Development, 2009). According to the IRD, lower income in-migrants have been attracted to the West Coast in previous times due to the cheaper housing that used to be available prior to the mining boom; however, this in-migration has placed demands on social services.

There is evidence to suggest that there has been limited support specifically for young people on the West Coast during the last three years. A Youth Health Worker was employed on the West Coast as far back as the late 1990's and the social workers and psychologists, who work in the schools, are not usually positioned there on a full time basis. Guidance officers are typically based outside the West Coast municipality and as a consequence visit the schools on an itinerant basis. The isolation and 'place-specific' situations outlined above would suggest that the young people living on the West Coast of Tasmania are indeed disadvantaged by their 'rurality'.

The overall picture of the West Coast, as can be seen from the brief overview above, is that despite the close-knit relationships, its natural beauty and having certain outdoor lifestyle drawcards, there are limited services, resources and opportunities as well as several health issues and social concerns in this municipality. For young people currently living on the West Coast and the 20 – 24 year old cohort

attracted to this area, it raises questions about the additional demands on social services in particular and what may be strategies that can work to combat the impact of these demands.

The Rationale – Inequity of Access

Research has consistently shown that young people in rural and regional areas are more at risk of being socially excluded through isolation. This is compounded by these young people often having less access to the services and resources that are more readily available to their urban counterparts. Most of these services are those which are essential to health and wellbeing such as transport, housing, education and employment services, the limitations of these have a combined effect to place rural young people at a disadvantage.

Addressing this rural disadvantage and implementing strategies that increase young people's access to resources and services is considered to be a matter of social justice. All individuals should have access to the resources and services that enable them to fully participate in society, regardless of rurality, socio-economic status, age, gender, ethnicity, disability and so forth. Young people living in isolated or remote areas should not be disadvantaged and at a higher risk of social exclusion because of their geographical location. Additionally, they should not be at a higher risk of certain health and social problems due to where they live, those which have been outlined above. An overview of the literature outlining this rural disadvantage is presented below.

SECTION TWO

THE LITERATURE

The Australian Context

Considerable research has been conducted into the challenges faced by young people living in rural and isolated communities with researchers consistently reporting more limited access to resources, opportunities and services in these areas as a significant issue for young people. Research involving rural Australian youth has highlighted the experiences of isolation and inequities of access that exist for this group, as has research conducted in Tasmania, which included young people living on the West Coast. Despite a range of issues that have been reported in the literature as having an impact on rural young people, Farrin et al (2005) advocate that services are still difficult to access and the few that are available are under-resourced.

According to Alloway et al (2004), young people in rural and remote areas of Australia are more socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged than many of their urban counterparts. This disadvantage is of particular concern and has lead to suggestions that young people in rural communities are at a higher risk of becoming socially excluded through 'declining or restructured employment, financial constraints, reduced opportunities to leave town and gender, ethnic and class issues…' (Alston & Kent, 2003).

Those things which limit a young person's capacity to fully participate in society include the lack of access to a range of services and opportunities, which are found more so in rural populations, and heavily influenced by social and economic change (White & Wyn, 2004). This rural disadvantage may be generally attributed to the provision of infrastructure including health, education, transport, communications, and employment with there also being an interaction between all of the variables with each having an effect on the other in some way (White & Wyn, 2004).

Loss of services and more limited employment in rural areas is usually linked to the ageing populations in these locations and associated decline in key industries (ABS Social Trends, 2003). Recent migration statistics have shown that there is a continuing trend in Australia for rural young people to move to

larger population centres where there are more opportunities for employment; education and training (ABS, Australian Social Trends, 2003). This is supported by Farrin et al (2005) who attach the issue of 'regional drift' to "the lack of support and opportunities for young people within their rural communities".

In saying this, however, research has found that participation rates in higher education are lower for those young people from rural communities (Marks et al, 2000; Bradley et al, 2008) and that, as the level of remoteness increases, the likelihood of completing year 12 decreases (ABS, Australian Social Trends, 2003), with research reporting lower completion rates for secondary education for those students who are from rural areas (James et al, 1999; Lamb, Dwyer & Wyn, 2000 as cited in Abbott-Chapman, 2001).

Researchers have argued that many rural young people are at an educational disadvantage as they are unable to access post year 10 compulsory education and training without leaving their hometowns (Apostal & Bilden, 1991; Alston & Kent, 2003; ABS, Australian Social Trends, 2008;) and hence face the psychological stress of leaving family and friends (James et al, 1999; Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001; Alloway et al, 2004) and the additional financial burdens associated with relocating for school (Apostal & Bilden, 1991; Alston & Kent, 2003, Alloway et al, 2004). Those young people who do not leave for further education and choose 'to stay behind', according to Alston & Kent (2003) may be more vulnerable to depression, poverty and long term unemployment. As it is, prior to leaving home for higher education, rural students have experienced narrower school curricula and had limited exposure to the range of occupations and role models (Apostal & Bilden, 1991).

Additionally, parents in rural areas may have doubts about the value of further education (Alloway et al, James et al, 1999) and family networks may prefer to see young people secure a job locally than move away for school (Alloway et al, 2004), with some parents expressing concern about the young age in which their children are forced to leave, especially the girls (Abbott-Chapman, 2001). Bell (1992) takes an overall perspective on educational disadvantage for rural students through linking it to a range of economic and cultural factors, including unemployment, underemployment, poverty, lack of adequate services such as housing, transport and health and inadequate cultural facilities. Of particular interest, some have argued that increasing access to educational resources is a means of addressing social exclusion (Alston & Kent, 2003; Wyn, 2009).

In regard to housing in rural areas, Farrin et al (2005) discuss the lack of affordable and accessible housing and how this impacts on rural young people. In their study, they report more specifically on the greater impact of homelessness on rural young people due to these housing issues, socio-economic disadvantage, higher unemployment and numerous other factors that come into play such as the psychological effects of domestic violence and family conflict.

Other research has discussed how access to private and public transport is an additional source of social disadvantage for rural young people (Green & McDonald, 1996) compounding the impacts of disadvantage previously mentioned, such as those associated with education, health and employment (e.g. Bell, 1992; Alloway et al, 2004; White & Wyn, 2004).

Rye (2006) explains that, in conjunction with the limited range of services in rural areas, another common complaint by teenagers in these locations is that there are "few entertainment opportunities and other cultural activities" (Rye, 2006). Some researchers have reported a relationship between limited leisure options and alcohol and drug use, for example, Alston & Kent (2003) found that underage drinking and drug taking was an issue across the board and closely related to the lack of leisure options in rural towns as well as peer pressure. Other research has found a strong link with sport, which is the dominant recreational activity in most rural areas, and alcohol consumption (see Alloway et al, 2004).

This brief overview of the literature highlights that there is a 'rural disadvantage' across rural Australian communities. This may also be seen to be the case on the West Coast, with evidence of this presented below from a study conducted by the Office of Youth and Family Affairs in 1997. It should be noted, however, that some researchers have cautioned labelling all young people in remote areas as 'disadvantaged' and ask that consideration is given to the diversity and uniqueness of each and every regional community, as there may be similarities in some aspects of rural life, but there are also many differences (White & Wyn, 2004).

The Literature – The Tasmanian Context

A study conducted by the Office of Youth Affairs (1997) with rural and isolated young people in Tasmania, including those residing on the West Coast, reported the issue of isolation as "intrinsic to many of the concerns identified by young people". In addition to isolation being a key issue for young people in rural and isolated areas in Tasmania, the Office of Youth Affairs (1997) also listed a range of other issues as being significant to the young people and key stakeholders who were consulted including, the lack of privacy in small towns; lack of transport options; not having 'something to do and somewhere to go'; limited information on drugs and alcohol; Limited access to service provision, information and support; having to travel to access post year 10 education and not being aware of all the educational options; a desire and need to be included, have their say and be heard; the lack of employment and training opportunities and information about the options; and the need for more promotion of their communities to draw people to the area (Office of Youth Affairs, 1997).

The literature highlights that the general rural disadvantages for Australian young people are therefore, to a certain extent and in varying ways, also experienced by Tasmanian rural youth – including those living on the West Coast of Tasmania. It is proposed that this inequity for rural young people has been long standing and needs to be addressed, rather than ignored and accepted.

SECTION THREE

THE CONSULTATIONS

Consultations were conducted with key informants living and/or working on the West Coast of Tasmania, namely the young people themselves, community workers from various organisations, government health professionals and long term residents across municipalities. Consultations were also conducted with young people from the West Coast who were staying at the Hellyer College residence in Burnie for study.

Youth Consultations – Focus Group and Individual Interviews

Small focus group interviews were conducted with 72 young people aged between 13 – 16 years of age living on the West Coast of Tasmania and 18 young people from the West Coast who were staying at the Hellyer residence in Burnie. The first round of consultations covering housing and relationships occurred between 13th July and 17th August 2010 encompassing a total of 34 West Coast young people and 18 students from the West Coast studying at Hellyer College. The second round of consultations covering employment and recreation occurred with West Coast young people on the 3rd November encompassing a total of 38 students.

The participants were divided into small focus groups for round one and round two of the consultations, with two key stakeholders leading each group and working together to facilitate the discussions and transcribe responses. The consultations included a list of set questions for consistency across focus groups; however responses or comments not directly related to the questions were recorded by members of the research teams and considered valuable contributions. Additionally, any observations by members of the research teams during the consultations were also recorded and considered valuable for adding depth to the material as well as creating background and contextual information - these are discussed in Section Four.

Individual semi-structured interviews were also conducted in March 2011 with two young females on the West Coast, aged 16 and 17 years, who had not been able to participate in the focus groups and who wanted to have their voices heard. The interviewers asked the participants the same questions as

those asked in the focus groups, however due to the one-on-one nature of the situation, additional, open-ended questions were also asked. Additionally, a more informal one on one interview with a 17 year old male living independently on the West Coast was undertaken. Due to personal circumstances the young man had not been able to participate in the focus groups but still wished to be included in the consultations and respond to the same questions asked in the focus groups.

The Adult Consultations – The Observations and the Questionnaires

Government health professionals, community development workers and representatives from various community sector organisations were consulted between July 2010 and April 2011 in regard to the challenges for young people living on the West Coast based on their own professional observations. The above-mentioned key informants were asked to submit their own thoughts and observations based on their experiences as the facilitators and interviewers of the youth focus groups. One of the health professionals involved also presented two case studies as material for analysis to highlight individual struggles that occurred in a particular place, that place being the West Coast.

In addition to the observations, community development workers, representatives from various community sector organisations and long term residents of the West Coast were also consulted in regards to life in general for young people living on the West Coast as well as the challenges for them, based on their own professional observations and personal experiences. These key informants were asked to complete a questionnaire on the social and cultural aspects and benefits and challenges of living on the West Coast for young people. The purpose of the observations and questionnaires was to gain additional contextual depth and perspective from these adults.

SECTION FOUR

THE SHARED THEMES AND KEY MESSAGES

THE YOUTH CONSULTATIONS

A range of issues were raised by the young people over the course of these consultations. There were issues that were more applicable to some individuals than others as well as issues that concerned the majority. A thematic analysis of the data highlighted that some of the issues raised were shared across all focus groups, indicating that they were potentially more significant overall challenges and were experienced by most of the young people, albeit on varying levels. These are discussed shortly.

Some of the issues raised were also shared across questions, in particular those in relation to existing services and support networks, which also highlights their significance to the majority of young people. Some shared solutions and ideas were also pulled from the data collected from the youth consultations with the focus of these being on ideal services and resources in particular. An overview of these shared themes, including issues of concern/challenges and solutions is outlined below. Material from the individual interviews is also included in the shared themes below if it was complimentary to any of the common themes that were found in the focus groups. A brief overview of some other key messages that emerged from the youth consultations is also provided in this section of the report, as these too enable valuable insights, despite not presenting as shared themes across all groups.

The Challenges

The re-occurring issues of concern across all youth focus groups were directly related to isolation and the associated injustice; family situations and conflict; limited schooling and employment options and information; lack of housing availability and access to transport; difficulty accessing information and support around relationships, sexual health and pregnancy; small town trust and privacy issues; not having anything to do or a place to go; and a lack of awareness of existing services and how to find information.

These issues sometimes interacted to have a greater impact or created additional challenges in other areas of the young people's lives. For example, limited access to transport impacted on employment opportunities and contributed to feelings of isolation; small town trust and privacy concerns were linked to sexual health and pregnancy issues; and not having anything to do or a place to go to was associated with a lack of awareness of existing services and how to find information, but also to the apparent normalisation of alcohol and drug use.

It is also important to note that the young people had a strong reliance on family members, especially their mothers, as well as friends or their friend's parents, when it came to accessing information. In some cases this was seen as a positive for them, however on close interpretation of the data, it was evident that not all parents, friends and friend's parents had the capacity to fulfil this role.

Many other issues were raised in the focus groups and were of particular concern to some individuals, however did not appear as a theme across all focus groups. For example, in two of the focus groups during the relationships discussions, the problem of suicide was raised as were alcohol and drug related issues and how these contributed to arguments. In relation to alcohol-fuelled arguments, concerns were also raised in two of the focus groups about police not being situated in some towns, meaning that response times to emergency calls were slower. Concerns about educational disadvantage were not mentioned during any of the focus groups; however this was brought to the forefront during one of the individual interviews in some depth, suggesting that this too may be a key message, or an issue requiring further investigation.

Isolation and the associated injustice

The issue of isolation and the associated injustice appeared mostly in the interview material when the participants were asked about reasons for moving out of home and it was closely linked with transport and housing but also leisure options. For example, feelings of isolation, frustration and injustice emerged in discussions around the lack of housing availability and the lack of transport, including transport between West Coast towns and to Burnie. These transport issues increased feelings of isolation as they meant not having access to additional leisure options in Burnie such as the cinema, shopping and so forth. In addition they also impacted on the young people's capacity to meet with friends who lived in other towns on the West Coast or engage in sporting events across the municipality.

In relation to transport, one youth commented, *"It's hard if you live in Zeehan and Rosebery, (we) feel disadvantaged on the West Coast"*. Other relevant responses for reasons behind moving out of home were mostly a one word answer, that simply being, *"isolation"*, without further description provided.

Family situations and conflict

On asking the participants to name any reasons why young people living on the West Coast would move out of home, one of the main themes that evolved was around family situations and conflict, including different forms of abuse, violence, fighting, harassment and parental breakups. For example, when asked this question, some of the first responses included *"family violence – bashed by parents"*, *"problems with families/family member - abuse, fighting, harassment"*, *"sexual abuse"* and *"parent break ups"*. Other related responses to this particular question centred around parents having new partners, parents being annoying, the young person wanting to get away from their parents and fighting with siblings. In one of the individual interviews, the following response was provided as the first answer to what may be any reasons for moving out of home, *"Their parents can't afford to keep them here…and violence from the parents to the kids, and they don't feel safe at home…",* providing additional evidence to the family conflict concern which was raised and shared across the focus groups.

Limited schooling and employment options and information

More schooling and employment opportunities *"on the coast"* (e.g. Burnie and surrounding coastal towns) were also shared reasons for moving out of home as well as an overall issue in their own right. In regards to school and employment for example, respondents wanted *"more options"* and expressed a desire for more information and help in these areas, one response to this that, *"There is no help trying to decide what you want to do at schools here – we would like someone to help find jobs."*

Another commented that, *"There are limited jobs with the only options of the Supermarket, Bakery, 'Purple Shop', Pharmacy, Autos...there are no Pizza Hut, Kmart, Chickenfeed, Reject Shop, Maccers [sic] to get jobs."* There was a general consensus that work opportunities were limited as was the pay, with one respondent commenting, "*There are not enough jobs because it's a crap hole"* and another with *"Not worth working because it's a very low pay…lots of people working but not enough jobs for all people".* During one of the individual interviews this concern was also expressed and can be seen in the

following response: *"There's not enough jobs available but I know that there's only so many open places in each town, like in Zeehan there's one Supermarket, one pub really and one takeaway shop".*

There were other responses that highlighted some motivation inhibitors such as early morning starts, with one youth saying he had quit a job because he had to get up at 7am and another stating that, *"There is nothing to go out for – pretty much it is always raining".* Another response that reflects much of what was said across focus groups in regards to employment was the belief that they were "*too young or (it was) too hard to get a job".*

Of particular interest was the acceptance that it wasn't necessarily *"what you know but who you know"* when it came to local employment, with this being stated on more than one occasion. One student gave an example of how they got a job at the local supermarket because they had friends already working there and another commented on having relatives who are already working in the mine can increase your chances of getting a position there. This same comment came through in one of the individual interviews around what services or people can help you with employment issues, in that, *"Um, parents I guess can help you, um, it's all who you know".*

Having to relocate to Burnie for post year 10 compulsory education was also named as an issue across focus groups, however none of the participants went into any detail about this issue, apart from one boy who mentioned that his sister was at Hellyer college and she hated it and wanted to come home.

Another common theme that evolved was that the young people felt there were not opportunities locally for work experience, with the following response capturing much of what the majority expressed: *"We don't have skills to learn on the West Coast, we don't have facilities here to learn those things before we get a job".*

Lack of housing availability and access to transport

The lack of housing availability was raised in discussions around reasons to move out of home, one youth commented that, *"There is little housing available – lived here 14 years and housing is getting harder to find".* In discussions around relationships and housing issues, one participant knew a way of securing a house, which can be seen in the following statement, *"If you are pregnant you get homes*

quicker". There were also concerns about affordability with one commenting, *"You wouldn't phone for private rental because you can't handle it when the bills come in"* and another stating that, *"You could loose rental to someone that is prepared to pay more".*

In regards to transport issues, the young people reported having to rely on parents or hitch hiking. Two respondents in one of the focus groups said they would consider stealing their parent's car, with one stating *"Dad wouldn't care"* but another in the group stating that, *"Dad would shoot me".* Access to transport was a dominant theme which was linked to having the capacity to take on employment opportunities and engage in leisure activities across the West Coast municipalities or in Burnie. More than one of the participants suggested, "*A regular bus to Burnie*" as a solution to combat the lack of things to do and associated feelings of isolation.

Difficultly accessing information and support around relationships, sexual health and pregnancy

Some of the young people reported kindness in relationships and enjoying relationships, however there were shared concerns about the issue of verbal, physical and sexual abuse, as well as arguments stemming from drugs and alcohol or feeling pressured to have sex. Concerns about pregnancy and the high incidence of STI's and STD's on the West Coast were raised and one comment about older males in relationships with younger girls.

Pregnancy was thought to be an issue faced by young people in relationships as it appeared as a common theme across focus groups. Some thought pregnancy was a valid option if you wanted to stay on the West Coast but concerns existed around telling parents and needing someone they could trust to talk to. This was linked to issues of privacy in a small town and getting into trouble for underage sex if you went to the doctor.

Young participants reported sexually transmitted diseases as an issue on the West Coast, with some unsure where to go for advice. Some reported that STDs and STI's are kept secret with limited opportunities for a diagnosis. Some wouldn't seek advice as they believed it would be embarrassing, the person may not understand or they may be given incorrect information. Additionally, there were privacy and trust issues influencing decisions to seek advice with one response being *"What if they betray you?".*

The young people were very reluctant to seek assistance from outside the circle of close family and friends/networks, especially in regards to relationships, sexual health and pregnancy issues, much of which they associated with privacy and trust concerns in a small town. Some reported that they would go to their mother but many expressed needing someone to go to for information and support outside of the family and friends where it was private and confidential. Most young people reported that they currently utilise the Internet to obtain information about sexual health in particular as they don't have access to health professionals locally and/or are fearful of breaches of trust. One of the young participants also expressed the following concern in regards to relationship issues: *"If marry young and move out, then relationship falls apart, the parents don't want you back".*

Small town trust and privacy issues

Another topic that dominated the discussions was that the young people across all focus groups reported wanting, but not having, someone that they could go to outside of close networks. They desired someone who they could trust and who would understand what they were experiencing. In regards to relationship, sexual health and pregnancy issues in particular, young people reported needing someone independent to talk with outside of their close circle of friends and family as they feared breaches of confidentiality and small town gossip. For example, one of the participants said, *"I wouldn't talk to someone in case they talk to someone, there is a risk of gossip – it could develop into rumour, rumour spreads quickly…".* The majority of young people reported utilising the Internet as a source of information as it protected their privacy and they had no one else they could go to apart from their mothers. In regards to having outside support for relationship problems, one young person said, *"If there was a service you would have to know you could trust".* Some of the young people reported that they currently deal with issues by not telling anyone or by going to the pub.

Trust, or mistrust, was also a key theme in regards to 'outsiders' of the West Coast these included individuals or collectives who do not live there or who do not have a regular presence there. This could be seen across the focus groups with a general consensus that it didn't matter what was offered as a solution, as no one would do anything about it anyway. One group in particular voiced that they had no faith or confidence in the health professionals ability to deliver on any of the requests or suggestions they made.

Not having anything to do or a place to go

Not having enough things to do was another shared concern. During discussions around leisure activities some issues were around the limitations, with one respondent stating, *"Rosebery wasn't made, it was dug". A*nother stated *that "Um, I don't think there's much to do but I guess that's an issue that you face in a small town, what you can do is very limited because of the weather as well".* Some reported engaging in sports but explained that commitment from others was hard to obtain, there were limited numbers to make up the teams and some sports were seasonal. In the summer months, skate parks and the swimming pool were the only real meeting places for leisure. Most groups also reported that parties and drinking were the common leisure activity outside of this, hanging out down the street was another common pursuit, with comments such as, *"There are only drinks in Queenstown", "Kids smoke, drink, drugs, walk the streets in all towns"* and *"Sometimes (we) just go down the street and just sit".* Other comments were made such as the following by one of the individual's interviewed: "*There's not much to do, like the skate parks are only for boys and girls that know how to skate, there's hardly any disco's…"*.

The young participants reported spending their holiday time as *"couch potatoes",* watching television and playing computer games, with one of the individual's interviewed describing a typical day in the following way: "*Get up, go on the computer and watch t.v and not go outside*", however there were some young people who enjoyed motorbike riding, bush bashing and the outdoor activities that were available when the weather was suitable.

When asked for the ideal service or resource, one participant responded with, *"It doesn't matter what you say, people try and nothing happens - they try but don't maintain"*. Another said, *"This is the way it is and it is gonna be"*. Others, however, had suggestions such as the following: *"Somewhere to go when it's raining"* and *"Money injected into the community for more activities"*. The overall wish list for the young people included some of the following suggestions: a KFC and McDonalds, a cinema, a dance studio, a motorbike track, an indoor skate park and boxing ring, photography and more transport options. What was most evident in the discussions around leisure was that in every focus group and individual interview the young people voiced wanting, but not having, a place to go. This is discussed in more detail later under the banner of 'shared solutions'.

A lack of awareness of existing services and where to find information

Many of the youth respondents lacked knowledge of existing services that were available to assist with any of the issues outside of the realm of the school, apart from the Neighbourhood/Community Houses. Rather than actual services, the young people consistently named people as a source of information and support and made comments such as the following in regards to what was available: *"There are no services on the West Coast – not enough".*

There were three services, however, that were frequently mentioned when young people were asked about current services that they could go to and these include the police, Centrelink and the Neighbourhood centres. Some of the younger participants were not aware of services or support at all but the College students were familiar with some services or programs.

Most of the young participants did not know where to obtain information from outside of their close networks with the following response reflecting numerous other responses across focus groups, *"If I didn't have family support I wouldn't know where to go for information, so it would be good if there were others (people or friends) that could help".* The Internet was voiced as a source of information for young people in most cases outside of these close networks, especially for confidentially purposes.

Most young people were unaware that there were any services or people to help with relationship problems. For example, when asked about what services or people were there to help with relationship issues, one participant answered, *"I didn't know we did",* and another, *"I wouldn't have a clue".* During discussions around leisure issues and any services or people to help, one typical response which reflects that of the majority was, *"Nothing – nobody".*

Sometimes, but not always a positive - reliance on family and friends for information

Across all issues, the majority of young people reported family and friends as their main support network, along with parent's friends and the school social worker (please note: some focus group participants did not know who the school social worker was but reported this person as someone they could go to). Across focus groups and individual interviews, mothers were named as the first point of call in regards to finding out information and for overall support.

Other wider support networks for these young people were evident in their mention of one of the school principals and reference to teachers, Council employees and certain prominent community members; however the role played by these individuals and the nature of these support relationships is unclear. It would appear that these individuals are used at times as points of referral to more appropriate services. In some cases this reliance on mothers and close networks was seen as a positive for the young people, however on deeper analysis of the data, it was evident that not all parents, friends and friend's parents had the capacity to fulfil this role as they themselves were not aware of how to access information or support.

The Solutions

A place to go, someone to go to and other ideal services

As mentioned above, the young people across all focus groups and individual interviews reported wanting, but not having, someone that they could go to outside of close networks. They also voiced wanting, but not having, a place to go to. The young people wanted someone who they could trust and who would understand what they were experiencing, a place to go to for information and somewhere to go to for leisure activities and networking. They also wanted more options across the board in regards to education, employment, leisure, transport, housing and health services.

There were shared expressions of interest in having a 'youth centre' or 'information centre' where they could talk with someone about employment and housing as well as have access to computers and the Internet. The young people also saw this as a possible meeting place for leisure activities and networking. For example, there were several suggestions for "*a youth centre*", or similar type of space, and "*A youth worker*". In addition to this, one participant suggested they needed more "*Education of what services are available to find out where to go for information*". One of the College focus groups suggested the need for "*roving services*". *T*he younger cohort reported wanting a place, like a building, room or shed with one group suggesting "*Cannon fire – It was legit, would like to see something that was here in Rosebery in the past where the heritage centre is but closed down. Kids met there, talked about stuff, played eight ball, computers...*". Other suggestions included "*a one-stop shop - all round service*" and "*any service would be better than none*" (as long as it did not look like Centrelink).

During one of the individual interviews the following suggestion was made in regards to what else could be done in terms of ideal services: *"Um, what else could be done…a bus to Burnie would be a good idea, like once a week or maybe on a Saturday, or yeah, go on a bus to visit your friends in other towns, and just stuff to help when the weather's bad like it always is, and maybe like have a place where we can actually shoot hoops with a basketball because we don't have any of that.".*

Other suggestions were around a visiting practitioner that they didn't know and some of the young girls suggested a female professional for support around certain health issues. In regards to education and employment, some suggestions were that they would like more work experiences and career information expos like *"practice a trade - to come to the West Coast"*. Requests for local job agencies and personnel to assist in online access centres and so forth were also suggestions offered by the young people consulted.

Other Key Messages

Many other issues were raised in the focus groups and were of particular concern to some individuals, however did not appear as a theme across all focus groups. For example, in two of the focus groups during the relationships discussions, the problem of suicide was raised as were alcohol and drug related issues and how these contributed to arguments. In relation to alcohol-fuelled arguments, concerns were raised in two of the focus groups about Police not being situated in some towns, meaning that response times to emergency calls were slower. In relation to alcohol, the young 17 year old male who was interviewed commented that, *"Parents aren't good role models for the younger youth, children are drinking because of the examples their parents are setting".* Further exploration of how the apparent normalisation of alcohol is impacting on young people may be a valuable exercise, as the issue dominated some of the discussions in two of the focus groups in particular.

Concerns about educational disadvantage were not mentioned during any of the focus groups; however this was brought to the forefront during one of the individual interviews in some depth, suggesting that this too may be a key message, or an issue requiring further investigation. The participant was asked to state the biggest issue for them in relation to living on the West Coast and their response is as follows:

"I think for me it would be the education as well, I don't think they're up to good standards. At high school I struggled I think because we're constantly getting relief teachers, there's no permanent teachers….[prompted]…Year 11 I found it really hard because I was behind in a lot of things, I didn't learn how to do essays and stuff like that, exams…never got prepared for that and it was very hard to catch up and for the people who aren't as dedicated to their work, they would just, wouldn't cope."

THE ADULT CONSULTATIONS

On interpretation of the observations and questionnaires, several issues were identified as being shared themes, and as expected, all of these themes reflected what the young people had voiced in the interviews. The observations and questionnaires supported what the young people had themselves voiced and they also provided greater depth into some of these issues and insights into other concerns which will be discussed in this section, along with possible solutions.

The Challenges

These adults involved in the youth consultations considered the main areas of concern to be around the isolation associated with a number of resource and service provision issues surrounding transport, housing, employment, education, health and leisure; limitations on local opportunities, particularly for employment and leisure; the lack of awareness young people had in how to access information and the confidence to do so; the social acceptance by the young people of family and social violence, pregnancy and alcohol use; trust and privacy issues; and the sense of hopelessness/apathy that had come through during the consultations. These concerns reflect much of what was found in the youth consultations, and any material considered to be complimentary or additional is discussed shortly.

The questionnaires highlighted a range of issues, with some key informants expressing concerns about different issues they had witnessed over time as a worker in the area and others expressing concerns about issues that they had experienced more on a personal level. When the questionnaires were analysed for common themes they too reflected much of what the young people had voiced themselves in the focus group interviews and individual interviews, but contained additional insights into attitudes and the social and cultural aspects at play.

For example, the same concerns about isolation and lack of services, especially transport, employment, health and education services came to the fore in all questionnaires, as did concerns around binge drinking, drugs, pregnancy, and a lack of things to do. The issue of domestic violence also appeared as did the notion of this being socially accepted. There was also a general consensus that young people needed somewhere to go and more services, including someone independent that they could access as a point of referral for information. Of particular interest were comments about the 'culture of apathy' and 'lack of motivation' which appears to be linked to young people accepting that life on the West Coast is the way it is and that there is nothing they can do about it even if they wanted to. This sense of 'hopelessness' is very much in line with what was reported by those involved in the interviews.

Some excerpts from the questionnaires have been included within the common themes below to highlight some of the shared themes already mentioned and some of the social and cultural aspects of life on the West Coast.

An Overview of the Shared Challenges - Isolation, Service Provision, Local Opportunities

The adult key informants reported isolation as being a key issue behind much of what was happening for young people and that it is associated with numerous service provision issues and limited opportunities.

In terms of employment, it was clear that opportunities for work were limited and the workers noted the comments about *"it's not what you know, it's who you know"* and discussions around securing work locally only occurring through family networks. Some of the workers observed a lack of motivation in some of the young people which was associated with the lack of opportunities and the mood or attitude of 'what's the use' – also associated with the feeling of hopelessness. Worthy of mention is one particular observation that was made which was that young people who were relative newcomers to the West Coast appeared to have more optimism.

Employment issues were also linked in with transport (no transport to other West Coast towns and no bus services to cater for work opportunities – but also no transport beyond the West Coast either) and the limited provision of information and resources through the already stretched school system.
The need for more information and support in planning for education and careers was noted by interviewers as was the desire for more training and work experiences locally, with only a few young

people expressing that they knew what they wanted to do. Observations also recorded the young people expressing wanting more careers days and information sessions, as well as work experience.

Of particular interest in regards to education, were observations indicating that the schools on the West Coast had reported having difficulty in attracting experienced teachers to the West Coast and suggestions for the Education Department to consider incentives to attract and keep these teachers, rather than placing younger more inexperienced teachers in these positions, who do not stay. Other observations around education, included interviewers making note of the number of times young people commented on the limited programs on offer and subject choices, such as not being able to engage in the arts or music.

The lack of transport mentioned above, was also associated with not being able to participate in sports as the young people commented on not being able to travel between towns, which appeared to influence their motivation, as did the cost of such activities. The young people also appeared to be overwhelmed by the lack of available housing and had a very minimal understanding of the support and services to help them. Observations also noted that the issue of housing ran across the board in how it affected the bigger picture, for example, limited housing influenced teacher recruitment and willingness to remain in the towns, or come in the first place.

The questionnaires also supported the notion of isolation but in particular emphasised the impact of the limitations on services and opportunities, with one of the respondents giving a very personal, emotional account of her own experiences to highlight the significance of this issue of service provision for her and her daughter, which is included, in part, below:

"Living and working in a rural and isolated area can be very challenging at times. From a parent's perspective with a teenager it can be frustrating and scary trying to navigate through services if you are trying to find someone to support your teenager. Having to go to work and use your lunch hour to continually hound and contact services on the North West to make contact to support your teenager. Then being told as a parent by a North West worker that you have to get your priorities right an dont go to work and transport your teenager continually up to the North West for support because the specialist service just cant come to the West Coast anymore. Then to top it off, the North West service saying to you, surely there are services on the West Coast that can support your teenager. I feel there is and

ignorance by NW service to what is available for youth on the West Coast and if families don't go to work, they don't get paid. If there is an issue for your youth in the family you really don't need financial problems on top of this. It's not that parents don't want to transport and support their youth, the reason are simple, you may have no choice but to go to work, you may not be able to afford the fuel to the North West and you may not even own a vehicle. There are limited support services for youth and social activities....." (Respondent 16).

Other responses from those who completed the questionnaires highlighted that having no public transport, no infrastructure and lack of services in general, saw their children leaving home early for greater exposure to the opportunities. One of the adults noted this as a challenge for herself but then went on to explain what she thought the challenges were for young people on the West Coast:

"The main challenge for me is accommodation. There is a shortage of good quality accommodation...for young people, there is a lack of services when it comes to other specialist services like speech therapist, psychologist, paediatrician etc. There is no support facilities for women who are trying to escape from domestic violence. For young people, I believe there is not much opportunity of employment unless their family knows of someone who have a business in town. There is no facility for young people who wish to further their education beyond year 10." (Respondent 3).

Lack of awareness of support and services and how to access information outside close networks

A lack of awareness of support and services in general and how to access information was a re-occurring theme. Observations note that the students were very reliant on friends, family, the social worker, the doctor and the Internet as key contacts if they needed help. They expressed that they had no awareness of any services that existed. This was further identified in the questionnaires with several respondents expressing concern about the young people not knowing what was available to them outside of the school.

The interviewers also observed that the tendency to use the Internet as a source of information was because the young people could remain anonymous this way and that the young people had also expressed their desire to have someone they could trust available to talk with about issues and to find out information.

A lack of trust in outsiders and concerns about their privacy were also observed as major issues for the young participants with some stating categorically that they would not approach services as their main source of support and information came from friends. In saying this however, it was observed that some of the young people were reluctant to confide in one another for fear of becoming the victims of small town gossip or slander. This was also mentioned by some in the questionnaires with one of the respondents acknowledging that *'gossip is rife'* and others commenting on the need for an independent person for the young people to have access to.

One of the questionnaire respondents actually felt the consequences of this lack of awareness could be social exclusion, with the following response in regards to the most concerning issue for young people on the West Coast, *"Social isolation that will effect them later on in life – lack of 'the real world'...many teenagers have not experienced life outside of the West Coast – many lack confidence when it comes to moving out of home and into a city or larger town." (Respondent 7).*

The normalisation of family violence, and acceptance of social violence, pregnancy and alcohol

Interviewers noted that comments on family violence and abuse were common across focus groups and in one particular group the conversation lead to young people providing personal examples of situations from the community. Not only did the workers observe the violence as an issue, but also that the young people talked about it as if it was actually a normal part of life on the West Coast, as was pregnancy and excessive alcohol consumption. This theme is also evident in the adult questionnaires which can be seen in the following examples of typical responses around life on the West Coast provided below:

"Life is more laid back and informal on the West Coast. There are few social or cultural opportunities if alcohol is not a major focus of your social life plan. Alcohol is a major theme here on the West Coast and children experience this as part of their lifestyle as a 'norm' of life. This includes the relationship and violence issues as a result of alcohol misuse..." (Respondent 1).

And,

"Living on the West Coast is a much slower pace compared to metropolitan areas. If you are healthy, financially independent, have a car and enjoy the wilderness and fishing, the West Coast is the ideal place to retire. However, there are limited activities for youth on the West Coast., current activities consist of swimming and skate park. There are nil cultural social supports or activities. Alcohol and illicit

drugs are a major part of adult and youth life, this has a triple down effect on families in terms of Family violence and mental health." (Respondent 16).

In addition to the above comments which highlight particular social problems as perpetuating the culture, the below questionnaire response also highlights the consequences for young people if they speak up:

"Diverse activities, transport, Dealing with difficult family issues or personal issues where it is socially expected it will be fixed within the family i.e. domestic violence, abuse, Some of these issues are seen as the norm rather than unacceptable behaviour. Young people have been ostracised by family for reporting abuse." (Respondent 4).

The sense of hopelessness

Workers often reported feeling that the young people in the consultations either viewed the situation as hopeless - they were alone and abandoned by everyone, with comments like, *"services have been here before then they go"* and *"nothing changes"*, or accepted the way it was and expressed that you had to be tough. Being tough however, as reported by the young people themselves, meant learning to fight and/or box. This sense of 'toughness' also went hand in hand with alcohol use.

There were reports by some of the interviewers that they believed that a sense of being let down by parents and/or services was apparent, with young people stating that things were sometimes started and never followed through. Additionally, there was a sense of acceptance that things were the way they were and wouldn't change. One interviewer recalled a youth response around limited opportunities as being *"this is the way it is and is gonna be".* It was evident that the young people did not expect that anything would change by talking about it. Some of the young people accepted that this was the way it is, that opportunities were more limited and that they didn't seem to think they could change this if they wanted to.

The questionnaires also reported on this feeling among the young people, with one respondent referring to it as a 'culture of apathy'. This can be seen in the following excerpt taken from one of the questionnaires when asked an open ended question on what the challenges to living on the West Coast were:

"Access to quality fruit and vegetables and choices for healthy eating is a real challenge. Isolation and distance to travel to pursue social or cultural activities makes you think twice before doing something. Culture of apathy, which seems not willing or wanting to expand thinking or experiences. This 'blanket' thinking impacts the young people who also take this on in the way in which they interact and see their world. People really 'talk' about each other here – gossip is rife. Once people develop an idea about someone or something it is very hard to change even if this is based on feeling or untruths." (Respondent 1).

The Solutions

The solutions offered by the adult key informants were not dissimilar to those suggested by the young people, however they contained additional depth. For example, the desire for a youth worker comes through in the following responses:

"I believe having a worker who's[sic] specific role is to coordinate projects/programs to increase social education, provide referral and pathways and to organise positive activities for young people on the West Coast is a crucial step in meeting the need of Young people on the WC…A positive point of contact for young people is non-existent outside school setting. Education lifestyle programs needed to provide social education and expand thinking – to combat alcohol abuse, address and prevent teenage pregnancy, promote healthy relationships and reduce violence. Positive and structured activities for young people. Young people aren't aware of what services are available." (Respondent 1).

And,

"I feel having a youth worker full-time on the West Coast would not only benefit youth it would have a triple down effect by benefiting families and relieving stress. It would also reduce the high work load of other community service programs that are not youth specific but support youth because there is nil access to a local youth worker…Drug and alcohol use also mental health and family violence issues have an impact on youth. I feel having a youth worker as a point of contact and referral resource, advocate, independent of the current West Coast DHHS service or Education Departments would be a major and much needed positive step to support West Coast youth.....The youth worker could also be a facilitator for other youth community service programs on the West Coast, for example: LOVE BITES Program, safe

sex and educational and lifestyle programs. The youth worker could also promote what services and activities that are available on the West Coast as the majority of youth are not really aware of what is available to them..." (Respondent 16).

Other solutions offered by the adult key informants that were in line with those suggested by the young people include those for additional services and a place to go. For example one of the participants suggested the West Coast *"Needs an injection of services for all ages. Young and old. Bus service would also be nice to see. Drop in centres – youth groups for kids, run by kids." (Respondent 11).*

On another note, however, some of the adult key informants had ideas around capacity building and development which may be seen in the following responses:

"Many West coast residents have an enduring strength, tenacity and commitment to their community if this could be encouraged and harnessed in a positive way, it would benefit all ages including young adults on WC." (Respondent 1).

And,

"The Walking Tall Program (Health West) is a wonderful opportunity for young people to develop their self-worth, skills and social interaction. Local community members need to be more pro-active in working with the youth on the West Coast." (Respondent 8).

Other Key Messages

Desires to stay

Health professionals also noted that in most cases the young people expressed a desire to remain in their hometowns or with their families, with some expressing their considerable enjoyment of where they live and its associated activities such as bush bashing on motorbikes, going bush, fishing and so forth. On the other side of this is when the weather does not permit for these leisure activities which saw the young people commenting on boredom and having nothing to do, with some of the young people reporting that the main recreation was partying and drinking. The questionnaires revealed a

similar story, painting the picture that with lifestyle benefits also came negatives associated with limited services, which may be seen in the following response from one of the adults when asked about the benefits of living on the West Coast:

"I enjoy less traffic and fresh air. I enjoy listening to the heavy rain on the roof at night and being able to walk the dog in a beautiful and scenic environment. For young people who are interested or supported by parents to explore their rural environment hobbies can be developed and enjoyed. However, without transport even being able to access 'the great outdoors' is an obstacle for young people. With a teenage daughter of my own I am aware that other than 'driving' as an activity there is little to do for young people other than 'hang out' or Face Book. With Face Book being such a social focus for the young and this being such a small community I am aware that Face Book Bullying is a big activity. Boredom is a big factor for young people." (Respondent 1).

Other factors which were considered to be valued by the West Coasters were its natural beauty and the people. This may be witnessed in some of the responses from the questionnaires asking key informants to list the benefits of living on the West Coast, including, *"Clean air, clean water, close knit relationships, strong sense of community" (Respondent 14) and "Beauty of the West Coast, being a small town" (Respondent 2).*

The Changing West Coast

Another theme which emerged from the data collected from adult key informants was that the West Coast had changed over the years and that this was not necessarily a good thing. This can be seen in the below response:

"Growing up on the West Coast some years ago was an experience I will never forget. At that time the town was booming and had over 5000 residents. Sport was a huge focus on the weekends with Hockey and Netball being played on Saturdays, as well as the local Golf Competitions and the local Football competition played on Sundays with teams from both Queenstown and Rosebery and in later years Zeehan. The mini league competition was strong and also incorporated Strahan. Local Basketball competitions were held.....Due to the decline in mining people left the town and sadly a lot of these sports have been affect to the point of almost extinction. Houses were sold by the mine and were

basically advertised on a National Current Affairs Program which prompted people of lower social economic groups from Mainland Australia to purchase "affordable" housing and re-locate to the West coast 'sight unseen' and the town is no longer the thriving community it was." (Respondent 6).

Additional insights into the rural reality – Real lives and real struggles

One of the health professionals involved in the West Coast Rural Youth Project has daily contact with a number of young people on the West Coast who are facing significant challenges and two such young people volunteered for their stories to be heard. These have been included below as a means of providing insight into the reality of life for these two young individuals living on the West Coast and the impact of service provision gaps on them and/or their families.

Case Study – John (alias):

"John had been asked to leave home when he was seventeen. John lived with his mother and two younger siblings in Queenstown. Mum had recently begun receiving support through the IFSS Family Support program but prior to this mum had informed John that he needed to leave the home. IFSS family support program works with families but not with young people living outside the family home. John said he didn't want to leave home and wanted mum to change her mind and allow him to stay. John didn't feel he had anyone he could turn to or talk with about his situation. John was unable to secure an independent tenancy due to his age but his mother chose to co-sign a lease and John moved into independent living. John was in Year 11 when this move occurred. Initially John appeared to be managing but after several weeks he was feeling very 'down' and contacted his mother's support worker. John said he was feeling sad and alone. His father didn't live on the West Coast and he told the support worker that he was missing his mother and siblings. John sought emotional support and a referral was made to a doctor and counselling. Several more weeks passed and then John again contacted our Service. John said his electricity bill had arrived, in fact was overdue and he didn't have the means to pay his account and was afraid he would be disconnected. An appointment was made for John and after an emergency relief assessment our service was able to pay the account and support John in setting up a direct debit for electricity. John has had several 'speed bumps' in his journey to independent living to date. In hindsight John said that 'it was a hard time' and that if he hadn't met one of the Family Support workers that he wouldn't have had anyone to talk with or help him. John said he knew little about renting privately or about any services that might be available to young people in his situation. One comment

that John made though is 'that I hope it will be easier for my sisters to get help or information when it's their turn'. John has remained in contact with our service and has participated in the individual youth consultation."

Case Study – Jenna (alias)

"A fifteen year old female in a supportive family on the West Coast was having a difficult emotional time. A young woman who is a high achiever at school and is well liked by her peers and other adults in the community Jenna didn't feel she could talk with anyone about the way she was feeling or why she may be feeling this way. Jenna's attempt to 'stop' the feelings that were becoming very painful and overwhelming resulted on one occasion with Jenna 'self-medicating' and Jenna was required to attend hospital. Jenna was remorseful and hadn't considered the possible effects of her actions. Jenna's mother too wanted to ensure that Jenna was connected with someone or a Service who could support Jenna through this difficult time. After leaving the hospital Jenna's mother was informed that someone would call to follow up within two days and then dependant on how Jenna was feeling she would have an opportunity to meet with a doctor and social worker with a view to counselling. Jenna and her mother waited and after the time had elapsed Jenna's mother rang the Service. The referring Service had no record of this and suggested that Jenna's mum ring the hospital. Jenna's mother then spent time in the next five days tirelessly ringing and begging for a follow up appointment. Jenna and her situation had become 'lost' in the system. Eventually Jenna and her mother were able to secure an appointment after at least 8 phone calls made by the mother. An appointment was made for Jenna but now the family had to travel to Burnie for this. Further appointments have yet to be finalised because Jenna's mother must take time off work to transport Jenna for appointments. There was a period of eight days that Jenna had no follow up and no one she could speak with about her situation. Without Jenna's mother's persistence and capacity to navigate systems Jenna may still be waiting. Jenna is still willing to speak with someone about her feelings but there is no youth focus worker on the West Coast to advocate or refer Jenna to the Services that are available. As a working single parent Jenna's mother is desperate to ensure that her daughter has the support required but that this comes at a price of her taking time off work to transport and in taking on the lead role in securing appointments for her daughter. Jenna is wanting to connect to work through her feelings and issues but there is no one available on the West Coast for young people and the transport issue makes her feel guilty that her mother has to take time from work to take her for any appointment and this also puts pressure on Jenna to 'make out' that she is ok to relieve pressure on the family."

SECTION FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data collected from the West Coast consultations highlights that from various perspectives there are numerous gaps in service provision and capacity building on the West Coast of Tasmania and that this clearly has an impact on young people and their options for the future. Access to a range of resources, including support services and information is lacking in relation to a number of areas including those essential to health and wellbeing, such as education, employment, housing, leisure and transport services.

The young people themselves voiced their concerns around isolation and injustice, limited access to numerous services, resources and activities, and openly at times discussed social violence, sexual health, pregnancy and alcohol issues, as well as their need for a place to go and someone to talk with, which was closely associated with their lack of awareness of existing services, how to access information and needing a base for leisure and networking. These concerns were shared by the adult key informants in this study who additionally reported on the sense of hopelessness and the lack of faith the young people had in anything being done about their situation or requests. The consultations revealed a mistrust towards 'outsiders' to the West Coast, including heath professionals, with clear scepticism surrounding the support or the capacity of these 'outsiders' to act on the young people's requests for services or resources. It is possible that this belief stems from the past experiences these young people have had and this has potentially led to what one adult key informant named as 'the culture of apathy'. This has implications that will need to be fully considered prior to any proposed intervention, for example, where is the intervention coming from, and is it what the young people want? This will be discussed in more detail shortly.

What is most concerning about the current 'rural disadvantage' faced by young people on the West Coast, which is associated with access limitations and other social issues, is that it places them at a higher risk of social exclusion as they move through their teenage years and into early adulthood and beyond, purely because of where they live.

This 'rural disadvantage' has existed and persisted for many young people in rural areas across the country for many years with this reality being well documented in the literature, which indicates that it is not a new phenomenon (see Section Two). However, as has been argued by some researchers (e.g. Bell, 1992), intervention that works in some places does not necessarily work in other places, suggesting that the approach taken in addressing this inequality for West Coast young people, needs to take into account that particular place. If we consider that 'everything has to be somewhere' and whatever it is that is being implemented, is being done so in a particular place, then we need to accept that there are things about that place which will have an influence and take this into consideration (see Becker, 1998). So, no matter what it is that is being studied, it is important to consider certain aspects of the place. Therefore, the 'solution' for some rural communities will be different than those for other rural communities and hence why it is strongly recommended that looking at some of the social and cultural aspects of a particular place is critical when discussing possible strategies or intervention. A remote area like the West Coast is influenced by a complex set of systems that need to be carefully navigated for intervention.

In regards to the young people on the West Coast, we need to view them as individuals living in a particular place who are exposed to certain social and cultural norms that come with living where they live. To be able to do this, more intensive, in-depth interviewing of the young people themselves is necessary, as is further consultation with adult health professionals and youth workers on the West Coast. In the meantime, however, insights have been gained through recent interviews that may guide in the development of intervention strategies, which will be discussed shortly.

The interview material highlights the apparent acceptance of family and social violence, teenage pregnancy and alcohol abuse as being a 'normal' part of life on the West Coast. Another highlighted norm is the reliance on family, friends and close networks for information, especially mothers, and the associated distrust of outsiders. As mentioned earlier, reference was also made to 'the culture of apathy' and 'it's not what you know, but who you know'. The interview material also highlighted that rather than talk about issues, the young people sometimes opted to say nothing, which indicates there is an underlying cultural understanding that this is what you do on the West Coast. It would also appear that non-completion of post year 11 and 12 studies is also a part of life for a significant number of young people on the West Coast and may continue to be the norm if access to educational resources remains so limited.

Some of the cultural understandings mentioned above are related to the various experiences young people have had living on the West Coast over a period of time and possibly linked to not having exposure to a wide range of socio-cultural and economic experiences and opportunities, which may be more readily available in urban areas. In conjunction with these aspects of life on the West Coast, it was also apparent in the interview material that the young people lacked confidence in their ability to access information, services or resources. Some of this may also be associated with their limited exposure to a range of experiences and opportunities which is linked with rurality and limited services and resources. This now brings us to the question of how can the rural injustice be combated using a positive, collaborative approach that empowers the young people themselves and increases their capacity to do something about their own situation, if they so desire?

Recommendation One

It is recommended that building the capacity of young people, in the early stages of intervention requires exposing them to a wider range of socio-cultural experiences and opportunities than they have already had exposure to in their own cultural worlds on the West Coast. This capacity building will initially require a facilitator with access to information and resources and some sort of platform in which to work from. A capacity building approach will require the leadership and co-ordination of a range of programs and projects by a facilitator, that build on the capacity and capabilities that young people have. This may assist them to gain the confidence, awareness and skills to lead and co-ordinate their own programs and projects and access their own resources into the future.

Having exposure to more experiences and increased access to information and resources for the West Coast young people may highlight to them that social violence, teenage pregnancy, and excessive alcohol consumption, for example, may be concerns shared by many young Tasmanians (e.g. Mission Australia Report, 2009) but are not a 'normal' part of life. This kind of exposure that builds their capacity may also aid in combating the 'culture of apathy' and distrust in outsiders as they begin to form and build their own networks and gain confidence in their ability to do something about their own situation.

Additionally, increasing exposure to social and cultural experiences outside of their usual worlds, may increase their awareness and knowledge of the options, broaden their horizons and increase their skills

base. This exposure may also better equip them with the tools they require to co-ordinate, plan and access their own resources – for now and for later in life.

Recommendation Two

The young people on the West Coast have voiced what they are experiencing and what they need. They have asked for more support and resources and they deserve more. They have asked for a place to go and they deserve a place to go. It is recommended that such a place is provided, however, that this is not simply given to them without involving them – as this approach is not sustainable nor does it do anything to empower them or increase their skills base, confidence and overall capacity. The consultations clearly highlight the young people's desires for and need for a place to go. Whether this be a 'youth centre' or 'information centre' requires further consultation with the young people and other relevant parties.

Recommendation Three

It is further recommended that a sustainable, capacity building solution that takes into account what has been voiced by the young people, the health professionals, the community development workers, the service providers and long-term residents of the area is considered. This is because these people are the ones who are affected most by whatever is implemented. The voices of the young people and West Coast residents are especially critical here because not listening to them and including them has the potential to reinforce the existing 'culture of apathy' and mistrust of 'outsiders' and ultimately act as a barrier to development. It is believed that intervention strategies need to be adopted based on the voices of those from within the West Coast itself and be driven by those from within the West Coast, with other key stakeholders complimenting this in a 'supporting and resourcing' role.

Recommendation Four

Throughout the consultations with the above key informants it was clearly communicated that a youth worker was a necessary resource for the West Coast, as was a place for young people to go. The adults also suggested capacity building strategies throughout the questionnaires. On analysis of the data and in

reviewing the literature on capacity building and empowerment, it is strongly recommended that what is required is a not a Youth Worker per se, but rather a Youth Development Officer.

A Youth Development Officer does not just provide a service to the young people – they build the capacity that young people have so as they learn to lead and navigate their own way through the systems. The role of the Youth Development Officer should involve liaison with the young people themselves, community sector organisations, government and other individuals or groups, including the schools and employers, to ensure quality service provision, access to appropriate resources for young people and the employment of contemporary engagement strategies. Initially this may require the Youth Development Officer to provide the young people with information and access to resources and facilitate and co-ordinate certain meetings or events. In consultation and collaboration with various individuals, networks and organisations, the Youth Development Officer would need to facilitate a number of programs that will ultimately build on the capacity and capabilities that young people have so that they may then gain the confidence, awareness and skills to lead and co-ordinate their own programs and projects and access their own resources.

It should be envisioned that the Youth Development Officer becomes less involved over time in the organising of consultations and the co-ordination of programs and projects as the young people's capacity is strengthened, through increased awareness, access to information, increased knowledge and skills base, heightened confidence and so forth. It should be envisioned that the young people themselves, will in time, have the capacity to organise and co-ordinate their own consultations and events, programs and projects and a space in which to base themselves, with minimal need for the Youth Development Officer to be the prime motivator. A reasonable amount of time would be required for this to occur, however, or not only would a Youth Development Officer, who is potentially a young person themselves and a role model, be placed in a situation where they are set up to fail, the young people that rely on them to get started, would also be placed in a no win situation. It is believed that a minimum 3 year period would be required to enable this level of capacity building to occur, however, this may be influenced by many other unknown or unpredictable factors.

Specific programs in the initial stage to increase the capacity of young people on the West Coast would need to accommodate what they need. This requires consultation prior to implementation, especially with the young people themselves. Based on what has been voiced in the recent consultations, a good

starting point for capacity building would be to work with the young people to increase their knowledge of existing services and networks and how to access information to begin with. Programs that build confidence, team work, leadership and problem solving would also be beneficial in the early stages of employing a Youth Development Officer. Mentoring programs where young people are exposed to positive role models, increased experiences outside their hometowns to broaden capacity and awareness and exposure and guidance in the realms of project management may then follow. There are numerous programs and projects that the young people may wish to tap into and/or co-ordinate themselves, for example, arts-based projects that have a community focus and that can build on confidence, team work, and many other skills. If these are driven by the young people and if they have ownership over their learning and experiences, the tools they obtain from this may be invaluable and something they can transmit or 'pass on' to others in their communities.

The capacity to co-ordinate and maintain their own programs and projects and access their own services and resources with the appropriate support is a realistic vision for young people on the West Coast. They will have the potential and the capacity to form their own Youth Council or Youth Network which then has the responsibility of leading and informing those younger than themselves so that they too have the capacity to navigate systems and access resources despite their 'rural disadvantage'. This approach, if supported appropriately with strategic implementation and with close monitoring, is a collaborative, capacity building approach that has the potential to be sustainable and of great benefit to not only the young people on the West Coast but their communities overall.

Recommendation Five

It is recommended that the local Council host the Youth Development Officer, who will be under the guidance and direct supervision of the Community Services Manager. Several Councils across the Cradle Coast region have youth strategies or youth policies and act as the host to Youth Development Officers. It is therefore proposed that this is both a logical and suitable base for such a person. The organisational structures and management protocols are already in place and it is proposed that the appropriate level of support and governance will be provided to the Youth Development Officer by the local Council. A local council has a wider brief that affords an array of disciplines and approaches. This wider brief enables a platform to leverage engagement with a variety of government departments for maximised benefit for the young people on the West Coast.

Appendix 1

Youth Focus Group Interview Schedule

Housing

1. For what reasons would young people where you live move out of home?

2. What services or people do you have where you live at the moment to help you with these issues?

3. If you could have any service or person to help you address these issues what would that look like?

Relationships

4. What kind of issues do young people where you live face in relationships today?

5. What services or people do you have where you live at the moment to help you with these issues?

6. If you could have any service or person to help you address these issues what would that look like?

Employment

7. What kind of issues do young people where you live face with employment today?

8. What services or people do you have where you live at the moment to help you with these issues?

9.   If you could have any service or person to help you address these issues what would that look like?

Recreation

10.   What kind of issues do young people where you live face in having things to do?

11.   What services or people do you have where you live at the moment to help you with these issues?

12.   If you could have any service, people, things or places to help overcome these issues, what would that look like?

Appendix 2

Youth Individual Interview Schedule – Additional Questions (to those above)

1. What are the best things about living on the West Coast for you? Do you think this is the same for other kids here?

2. What are the worst things about living on the West Coast for you? Do you think this is the same for other kids here?

3. Can you give an example of a typical day? Weekend? What about summer holidays?

4. What types of things do you usually do in your spare time? Why? What about friends or other kids - what do they do?

5. Who do you go to the most to find out about stuff?

6. If that person couldn't help you, what would you do? Who would you go to?

7. What do you think is the biggest issue for young people living on the west coast at the moment?

8. What do you think is the biggest issue for you at the moment?

9. If you had a choice, would you like to stay on the west coast to live or move away? Why?

10. If you had a choice, what kind of job would you like to do? What type of schooling would you prefer?

11. If someone came along and said, 'what do kids on the west coast need the most', what would you say? What would be the top 5 on your wish list for your hometown?

Appendix 3

Adult Questionnaire

1. What is life like on the West Coast?

   (e.g. The social and cultural aspects of life on the west coast - you may also like to include your own thoughts on how these influence young people based on your experience working with them).

2. What are the benefits of living on the West Coast?

   (You may wish to provide a general overview as you see them for all people and also how you see them for young people - based on your insider knowledge, experiences, conversations with young people and so forth).

3. What are the challenges of living on the West Coast?

   (You may wish to provide a general overview of the overall challenges for all people in communities on the West Coast and also for young people – based on your insider knowledge and so forth)

4. What do you feel based upon your observations are the most concerning issues that need to be addressed for youth on the West Coast?

5. What is working well for youth on the West Coast?

   (e.g. What are the types of things that you have seen working and why do you think they are working? You may also have some thoughts around what you think could work but has not yet been implemented).

6. Is there anything else you would like to add about life on the West Coast?

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