

Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth and the Hervey Bay Youth Sector Network

Collaboration streamlines Hervey Bay's response to youth unemployment

The inception of a Youth Sector Network in 1996 was the start of collaborative efforts by Hervey Bay's youth agencies to address high youth unemployment.

Since the network's foundation in 1996, the Hervey Bay City Council's Youth Development Officer has played a key leadership and facilitation role to define and formalise the Hervey Bay Youth Sector Network. The network has resulted in good communication between youth services.

Rather than competing for funding, the partners below agreed to formalise the Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth to make shared decisions about the best way to optimise funding for Hervey Bay.

Partners

- Area Consultative Committee Youth Response
- Behaviour Management Team, Education Queensland
- Bay Safety Mates
- Fraser Coast Anglican College
- Fraser Coast Training and Employment Support Services (TESS)
- Glendyne Youth Training Farm
- Health Promotion Program, Queensland Health
- Hervey Bay Chapter of the Bundaberg and District Division of General Practice
- Hervey Bay City Council
- Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre
- Hervey Bay Student Industry Training Experience (SITE)
- Juvenile Justice Program, Department of Communities
- Lifeline
- Peirsons Youth and Community Care Program
- Pialba State School
- Fraser Coast Reconnect Program
- United Ministries, Hervey Bay
- Urangan High School Guidance Counsellor (Full Schools Program, Commonwealth funded program)
- Youthcare
- Youth Development Officer, Department of Employment and Training
- Youth Suicide Prevention, Queensland Health

Background

Hervey Bay has a population of 48,000¹ and is situated on the Queensland coast about 300 kilometres north of Brisbane. It is the fastest-growing city on the eastern seaboard.² The regional economy is supported by tourism, construction, government services and rural enterprises. Along with rapid growth has come high unemployment, including a high rate of youth unemployment and its associated disadvantages. A 1994 community workshop highlighted these issues and, over time, local services have developed a response.

Drivers for collaboration

The socioeconomic issues relating to high youth unemployment prompted the formation of the Hervey Bay Youth Sector Network in 1996. Agencies recognised they were working in isolation which meant there were gaps in service delivery as well as some duplication of effort. The potential benefits of collaboration for young people were evident.

Based on interviews with network members, youth-specific drivers for collaboration were identified, including the need for:

- reduced crime and vandalism
- improved workforce participation
- improvement in young people's self-esteem
- reduced homelessness
- improved school retention rates, and
- reduced 'service fatigue' and worker burnout.

Service drivers included the need to:

- eliminate duplication of effort
- ensure effective use of resources
- optimise government funding and investment
- reduce costs through cooperation
- increase and streamline opportunities for community engagement
- improve the use of volunteers for program implementation
- build cohesiveness and an identity for the youth sector network
- build a sense of belonging for the youth sector, and
- increase young people's participation at different levels of decision making.

¹ Hervey Bay City Council Economic Development Notes 2006.

² Bernard Salt Speech to Beach on the Bay July 2006.

The collaboration story

The Hervey Bay Youth Sector Network's good intentions took a leap forward in 1996 when the Hervey Bay City Council secured funding for a youth development officer dedicated to the tasks of coordinating, facilitating and leading the network.

There were some important planning and collaboration milestones such as:

- 2001: Collaborative Youth Services Trial. This encouraged collaboration and capacity building. An environmental scan documented agencies' core business.
- July 2002: Community Renewal (a strategy of the Department of Housing) brought together residents, representatives from local service organisations, councils and government agencies to discuss issues facing young people.
- August 2002: Forum to formulate services' commitment to youth in Hervey Bay. The mission and vision for Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth were defined.
- September 2002: The first memorandum of understanding (MoU) (Attachment 1) between the service agencies was formulated and signed.
- 2003: Education and Training Reforms for the Future (a strategy of Education Queensland) through the Hervey Bay Youth Sector Group, sought to identify issues and opportunities for youth in the region.
- September 2004: The 2002 MoU was reviewed, current needs identified and a new MoU signed by all participating service agencies.
- 2006: Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth renegotiated for a further two years to 2008.

Tools and strategies

In addition to planning and opportunities to share information as mentioned above, the MoU (Attachment 1), reviewed every two years, is the main collaboration tool. With the MoU's shared vision as a base, the network works on important service delivery and funding matters.

Outcomes

- A shared vision for outcomes for young people
- An agreement to make collaborative decisions about funding opportunities: to agree that one agency is best placed to apply; or to agree that more than one agency should apply and then discuss their respective approaches so that confidence in each other's intent is preserved; or to agree to submit an integrated joint application by complimentary services. A recent example is the successful application for two crime prevention grants for separate projects totalling more than \$800,000, enabled by the two organisations' ability to demonstrate links and collaboration as well as need, commitment and capacity.
- Greater coordination of effort and alignment between agencies to achieve the agreed common vision for young people
- Reduced duplication of effort
- A link on the Hervey Bay City Council website to information about youth issues and the youth sector services
- Development of improved regional communication with services beyond Hervey Bay

- The introduction of a wallet-sized Fraser Coast Youth Survival Card with information for young people to improve service access across the whole region
- The encouragement of active citizenship of young people between 12 and 25 years of age through a long-term junior council and a youth council and other programs for young people through a wide range of projects.

Success factors

- Continuation of the Hervey Bay Youth Development Officer role to foster collaboration and facilitation
- Improved communication between agencies by email, monthly meetings and other network-facilitated activities underpins all collaborative achievements
- Trust between agencies.

Challenges

- The need felt by some agencies to preserve the status quo rather than pursue change
- The occasional tensions between network commitments/goals and individual agency commitments/goals
- Setting clear strategic directions to improve wellbeing for young people, then aligning as separate agencies to achieve success.

The future

After considering the area's needs, available resources, capabilities and opportunities to tackle some of the harder service efficiency/rationalisation and human resource issues, some stakeholders have a vision for going further as a network to develop an integrated action and business plan. Finding educators, counsellors and youth workers with the necessary motivation and skills is an obstacle to better service delivery. Formal agreements for collaboration and resource sharing have been mooted. Going forward will depend on reaching consensus about future possibilities, with leadership and facilitation from Hervey Bay City Council.

For more information

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Attachment 1

Memorandum of Understanding between Hervey Bay Youth Sector and service organisations to form the Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth

Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth is a collaborative effort by local youth services to develop young people's skills and ability to cope with the demands of the modern marketplace.

It provides a common framework for action and a collective means of developing the life skills and active citizenship of young people in Hervey Bay.

Collaborating parties

The Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth is a community partnership comprising representatives from local schools, government and non-government agencies, and community service organisations.

Duration of this collaboration

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will operate for an initial period of two years.

Aim of the Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth

The aim of the Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth is to increase the wellbeing of all young people in Hervey Bay by addressing young people's social and recreational needs, raising awareness of young people's cultural needs and to be flexible in the delivery of education and training to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood.

The goals of the Hervey Bay Commitment to Youth will be delivered through a collaboration of services drawing on existing resources and presenting a strong case for additional Commonwealth and State Government investment in the future of young people

Mission

Our mission statement will include the following identified outcomes:

- wellbeing potential — social and recreational
- life skills — cultural wellbeing
- access to health care and education
- mental health
- community/schools
- flexibility to deal with other needs
- holistic /inclusive
- connected to community into adulthood
- support systems
- commitment to voluntary action and the responsibilities of choice
- enhanced skill development
- effective membership and leadership
- whole-of-community approach
- ground work to include people
- family context
- mentoring

- resources — community toolbox
- professional development
- what is achievable in the long term
- what have we got in the short term
- commitment to voluntary action and the responsibilities of choice
- enhanced skill development, and
- effective membership.

Review of this MoU

The parties will review this MoU as soon as practicable after the first anniversary of the date of this agreement with a view to learning from the experience at that point and confirming or revising the MoU accordingly.