



youth affairs network qld

NESB YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK

RESPONSE TO

THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT'S

CONSULTATION REGARDING THE PROPOSED

YOUTH PARTICIPATION CHARTER & STRATEGY

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INTRODUCTION

The NESB Youth Issues Network (NESBYIN) welcomes the opportunity to input into the Queensland Government's proposed Youth Participation Charter and Strategy as detailed in the *Generate* discussion paper. However, the extent to which a comprehensive consultation with NESB young people can occur has been limited by the very short time available to do so. Additionally, it must also be recognised that NESB young people are not a homogenous group. Indeed, in Queensland alone there are approximately 80, 000 NESB young people from 160 ethnic communities. It is estimated that 55, 000 of these speak a language other than English at home. This represents a significant population of young people in this state. The time given to undertake this consultation would in no way allow NESBYIN to connect with anywhere near the full range of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds. NESBYIN believes this to be an inherent flaw in the process and one, which does not do justice to genuine consultation.

NESBYIN is of the view that consultation processes, especially with NESB young people, should be developmental. It must be noted for example, that for some NESB young people, there exists a degree of unfamiliarity regarding government systems, concepts and terminology in the Australian context, all of which are evident throughout *Generate*. Therefore, it often takes time and relationship building to be able to walk alongside some NESB young people and develop with them, a sufficient understanding of the ideas and concepts like those entrenched within *Generate* in order to solicit an informed response. NESBYIN believes that the limitations around this consultation process have presented real barriers to this occurring.

ABOUT NESBYIN

NESBYIN is a statewide issues based Network comprising of 135 individual and organisational members derived from the youth sector, ethnic sector, and those generally concerned with NESB youth issues. NESBYIN was first established in 1991 in response to increasing concerns relating to the lack of government and non-government responses to the issues that affect the lives of NESB young people. At that time, NESBYIN developed a strong relationship with the community youth sector peak body, the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ), in order to encourage a peak body response to identified issues of concern. The result of this ongoing relationship has been the continued employment of a NESB Policy Officer at YANQ during the past 5-year period. This position is now recognised as a core part of YANQ. NESBYIN members continue to support the NESB Policy Officer at YANQ through active participation in policy development processes, participation in working parties and involvement in various consultation processes.

NESBYIN'S CONSULTATION PROCESS

The resources supplied to YANQ from the Office of Youth Affairs enabled the NESB Policy Officer to undertake consultations with NESB young people regarding the proposed Youth Participation Charter and Strategy were utilised in the following way:

- The funds enabled 4 NESB young people (2 young women and 2 young men) to be contracted by YANQ to undertake consultations with their peers.

- The NESB Policy Officer and 2 youth workers connected to the 4 young people met on 2 occasions to dialogue around the ideas and concepts presented through *Generate* and to brainstorm appropriate consultation processes with their peers.
- 2 of the young people felt that they did not need support from the NESB Policy Officer at their consultation session and preferred to undertake this independently. The other 2 young people required support and the presence of the NESB Policy Officer and youth worker at their consultation.
- The NESB Policy Officer also met with 1 other group of NESB young people independently of the 4 young people contracted to undertake peer consultations.

It must be noted that all of the young people had difficulty reading the *Generate* document because of the format, colour coordination, font size and the lengthy nature of the discussion paper. Additionally, it is estimated that 95% of the young people had difficulty understanding the ideas and concepts presented through *Generate*. It is acknowledged that the level of difficulty experienced ranged from *not that hard* to *fairly extreme difficulty*. None of the young people had any desire whatsoever to complete the questionnaire provided at the back of the *Generate* document. They felt that this was an inappropriate way to gather feedback and ideas from young people, that there were far too many questions, and consequently much preferred to open up dialogue in order to give feedback and ideas.

CONSULTATIONS ↓

Consultation One

The NESB Policy Officer has over time, developed relationships with a group of 20 young people from the Horn of Africa who meet every Sunday to play soccer informally at Yeronga State High School. 12 of the young people are originally from Eritrea and the remaining 8 from Ethiopia. All of the young people are young men. Their respective ages range from 14 to 25 years. The postcodes of the areas in which they live are as follows:

- 7 of the young people = 4104.
- 3 of the young people = 4103.
- 2 of the young people = 4102.
- 8 of the young people = 4151.

Discussion took place regarding the 4 proposed ideas detailed in *Generate* relating to participation strategies. Responses to each were as follows:

Internet website:

- None of the young people have computers at home so access to the website is difficult.
- When asked if they would access the website through the use of computers at libraries or Internet cafes only 3 said that this would be something they may consider. The young people talked about the 'hassles' involved in accessing computers at such places. Difficulties cited included the money it costs to use such computers and the booking systems that are often in place. Most agreed that these factors presented sufficient barriers that would prevent them from accessing the website.
- All did agree that the website is a good idea for those who have computers in their homes.
- All of them agreed that information in a range of community languages on the website is positive.

Young people's register:

- This idea raised suspicion within the group. This is understandable given that many have refugee backgrounds and have experienced violent and oppressive government regimes in their former countries of origin.
- The young people discussed the rate at which they move from one place to another as presenting difficulties in how up to date such a register would be.
- None of the young people would want their names included in such a register.

Youth Advisory Council:

- All of the young people had difficulty understanding how such a mechanism might give them a voice in government.
- Questions were raised regarding the selection process and assumptions made about the type of young person likely to be chosen.
- The young people felt that such a mechanism would not last long because young people would get bored with the process to quickly and especially in light of their view that nothing much changes anyway and there are very seldom tangible outcomes that can be seen.

Local level consultation:

- The young people liked the idea of “*people like me coming out to see them to talk about problems and ideas*”.
- It is estimated that at least half of the young people are connected to a youth worker or community service provider. Those who are suggested that they could give them their ideas and information regarding issues so they could feed it into government, but again, the issue of them experiencing a lack of outcomes and change in the past was raised. They also stated that information could be given to them through services they may be accessing.
- It was stated that they felt young people do not like sitting around tables in offices talking all the time about problems and issues, and would prefer to see interaction and dialogue occur through structured activities.
- Local level consultation was met a lot more positively than any of the other ideas because the young people recognised that this mechanism presented far more opportunities for them to participate than any of the others.

None of the young people could see any benefit in the Youth Participation Charter and felt that it would only serve to assist politicians to continue to think that they know “*how it is for young people when they really don’t*”

Additional issues and concerns raised by this group of young people includes the following:

- Genuine NESB youth participation strategy rather than assuming a blanket strategy will work for every young person.
- Employment and training opportunities.
- Enhanced English as a Second Language Program in state schools that will better assist NESB young people to gain a good education.
- Safe, secure and affordable housing options for young people.

Consultation Two

The information from Consultation Two represents feedback from the 2 young people who consulted with their peers independently. Feedback is as follows:

- 15 young people were consulted.
- 6 of the young people were originally from Bosnia. 2 of these were young women and 4 young men.
- 6 of the young people were originally from Sudan. All of these were young men.

- 2 of the young people are from second generation Spanish speaking communities. Both of these were young women.
- 1 of the young people was originally from Iraq. This person is a young man.

All of the young people consulted live in areas with postcodes: 4104, 4103 & 4300.

The age range of the young people consulted was 16 to 20 years.

None of the young people consulted were interested or concerned with the Youth Participation Charter so declined to comment. Feedback regarding the 4 proposed Youth Participation Strategies is as follows:

Internet website:

- None of the young people consulted have a computer at home.
- The young people consulted suggested that information should be disseminated through their schools, through television and media advertising, at cinemas, and at other places and venues that young people are likely to access.

Young people's register:

- The young people consulted would prefer to be involved in a range of structured activities and be resourced to participate in other aspects of community life and through these mechanisms, be available to be consulted. Ideas such as youth spaces where young people can meet one another and hang-out, night-life options for young people under 18 years of age, and supported accommodation/housing options represent the ideas for structured activities given by the young people.
- The young people stated that the idea of a register is positive if it is to be used to disseminate information, but not so good for the purpose of contacting people to be involved in committee's and/or advisory boards. They did not view these as relevant ways for young people to be involved and as suggested above, would prefer to participate through other mechanisms.

Youth Advisory Council:

- All of the young people consulted stated that the Youth Advisory Council should be comprised of youth sector organisations and government departments rather than young people because they feel that this is not the way their peers want to participate.
- Again, the issue of a lack of action and outcomes that directly benefit young people was raised as a major concern regarding groups that feed into government decision-making processes.
- It was also stated that young people need to be educated about government before they can be reasonably expected to participate in it.

Local level consultation:

- This mechanism was viewed as very positive because the young people could see how this participation pathway could be related to activities they may access through service providers with whom they have developed relationships and are therefore comfortable to discuss issues of concern with.
- The young people also stated that local level consultation could be a way to develop opportunities for young people to be employed to consult with their peers. Again, this point was raised in the context of the young people feeling comfortable to discuss issues with a person they have developed a relationship with.

Other issues raised by these young people include the following:

- No trust in government at all.
- The need for youth spaces.
- The need to prevent young people from being homeless.
- The need to get young people involved in government programs.
- The need to give young people employment opportunities.
- The need to support young people with drug and alcohol issues rather than sending them to prison because it is not their fault.
- The need to ensure that young people are not hassled and discriminated against by police officers.
- A participation strategy targeted towards NESB young people in recognition that they are often more disadvantaged than their counterparts.

Consultation Three

The third consultation involved the 2 young people who required support and the presence of the NESB Policy Officer and a youth worker at their consultation session with peers. Feedback is as follows:

- 8 young people participated in this consultation session.
- 3 of the young people were young men from the Horn of Africa with 4151 postcodes. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20 years.
- The other 5 young people were young women whose ages ranged from 17 to 19 years. 3 of the young women were born in the Former Yugoslavia and the remaining 2 young women from the Horn of Africa. All of the young women have a 4102 postcode.

Again, none of the young people were concerned about the Youth Participation Charter because they felt it had no relevance to them whatsoever. Their feedback regarding the Youth Participation Strategies is as follows:

Internet website:

- None of these young people have a computer at home, therefore they view access as difficult.
- Access to the Internet via libraries and community centre's was raised, however, the young people pointed out that accessing the Internet through such places means they would have very limited time to do so. Cost and transport was also raised as an issue.
- The young people suggested additional mechanisms through which information can be disseminated. These included television and media advertising/campaigns, information at train stations, bus stops and Centrelink. The idea of a young people's magazine that could be in all newspapers and other venues was discussed as one mechanism to disseminate information on services, rights, activities, and consultations.

Register:

- This proposed strategy was met with suspicion because of a lack of trust in government.
- The young people also raised concerns about how the government would keep such a register updated given they move home fairly often.

Youth Advisory Council:

- The idea of a Youth Advisory Council was met with some skepticism among the young people. They raised concerns regarding the 'types' of meetings these would be. Again, they were more inclined to see genuine participation occur through developmental processes such as relationship building with groups of young people through the provision of activities. It was also suggested that the government should employ young people to talk to other young people regarding their input into decision-making processes.

- The young people questioned whether such a Council would facilitate clear and expedient outcomes that would directly benefit young people such as them.
- The young people also liked the kind of process the NESB Policy Officer and accompanying youth worker were facilitating regarding these consultations. They are also familiar with YANQ and NESBYIN and are comfortable regarding the work we do as long as we keep talking to them and can demonstrate clear outcomes.

Local level consultation:

- If local level consultations mean processes such as the one they are engaged in through the YANQ consultation, then they see this as positive.
- Young people should be employed by government to talk to other young people locally.
- Youth workers working in local communities should be involved in local level consultations because they have relationships with young people.
- The young people also discussed the potential to input through local members of parliament, but again, felt that there is insufficient information and knowledge on how to do this.

Other issues raised by this group of young people includes:

- Concerns regarding the extent to which real estate agents discriminate against young people, especially those from a NESB.
- The need for youth spaces and activities for young people.
- The need for increased employment opportunities.
- The need for safe, secure and affordable housing options.
- The need for the broader community to stop stereotyping young people.

To end, the young people wanted these quotes included in this report. They were assured that they would be:

“why do young people get less money than everybody else through Centrelink and work when it costs us the same to live as every other person who is older than us”

“politicians suck, they think they know what is like for young people, but they are not in touch with our reality, we need things done now and quickly”

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland and NESBYIN would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the many young people who took the time to participate in this consultation process, even though for many, it was a struggle to do so because as they kept reiterating to us.... ‘nothing ever changes anyway so why bother’.