Answers to supplementary questions - YOUth Speak

1. **How long has the issue of youth crime been prevalent in your region and why do you think it's continued?**

   Youth crime isn't a new issue… It's been around as long as young people have. The causes aren't usually as simple as they're sometimes portrayed. In many cases, youth crime comes from a combination of natural adolescent behavior and challenging social conditions. While media coverage or social shifts might make it feel like youth crime is "increasing," evidence shows there hasn't been a significant rise in youth crime overall. Often, it's changes in reporting or greater community awareness that drive perceptions of an increase. Youth crime persists because the core issues, like lack of mental health resources, barriers to connection, and limited support for employment and education, haven't been fully addressed.

2. **With respect to any programs you deliver for young people for which you receive funding:**

   YOUth Speak started in volunteer capacity in the Bellingen Shire and was funded through Uniting's BecomingU Program in Nambucca Valley following the success of the Bellingen Shire YOUth Speak Project. All youth-led initiatives have been possible due to grant funding.

   a. **How many programs are you currently delivering and what is each program called?**
   b. **What is the purpose and audience of each program?**
   c. **How many young people do you have on your books within each of the programs that you deliver?**
   d. **How many full-time equivalent staff in each program?**
   e. **How many days per week are you doing direct engagement with young people in each program?**
   f. **How many (if any) young people are on waiting lists or have been referred for each program but are not able to be supported at the moment?**

   We are not funded for case management or funded through any program requiring KPI's to be kept or met, but over 700 young people filled out the surveys from across both LGA's, over 350 attended a youth forum, and now there are approx. 75 young people involved in all projects. There are no young people unsupported as there is no cap and the program is delivered by multiple services/schools/community groups and partnerships. My role as the project coordinator I have mostly done in volunteer capacity and in Nambucca Valley with a small stipend to support delivery of the project to a point where it can be sustained by the community.

Bellingen Shire Drug Education Project (Grant funded and completed)

- Purpose: To educate young people and parents about harm minimisation, specifically focusing on Alcohol and Other Drugs (AoD) and strategies for prevention.
- Audience: Primarily parents, with a secondary focus on young people, to foster open dialogue and better understanding around AoD-related issues.

Ramp Up

- Purpose: To advocate for the creation of a new skate park in Dorrigo, offering a positive recreational space for young people and enhancing the community's support for youth needs.
- Audience: Young people in Dorrigo, local community members, and stakeholders such as council representatives.

Rec Keys for Free (Trial)

- Purpose: To remove financial barriers by offering free access to recreational facilities in Dorrigo, promoting physical activity and well-being.
- Audience: Young people in Dorrigo who might otherwise be unable to access these facilities due to financial constraints.

Sport Wellbeing Gala Day (Fully funded and continuing annually)

- Purpose: To foster stronger connections between young people from the two high schools in the Bellingen Shire through sports and wellness activities, aimed at building community and reducing social isolation.
- Audience: High school students from the Bellingen Shire, with a focus on promoting positive social interactions and community spirit.

Dorrigo Youth Night (Grant funded and commencing over the coming months)

- Purpose: To provide a youth-led, community-based event offering young people in Dorrigo a safe, enjoyable space to socialise and participate in activities, combating isolation.
- Audience: Young people living on the Dorrigo Plateau, particularly those who experience physical and social isolation from the broader community.

Youth Today are the Leaders of Tomorrow (Grant pending)

- Purpose: To create a youth council, giving young people a voice in the future planning of the Bellingen Shire and addressing the gap in youth participation in local decision-making.
- Audience: Young people in the Bellingen Shire who are interested in leadership and having a say in the future of their community.

Project Pawn

- Purpose: To revitalise a frequently vandalised public space and turn it into an area that is respected and owned by the community, especially young people.
- Audience: Local youth, community members, and organisations, with a focus on creating a space that encourages positive social behavior and community pride.

Open Streets Program - Macksville (Grant funded, commencing 23rd Nov)

- Purpose: To create an event that allows young people to develop skills in the events industry while providing opportunities for community engagement.
- Audience: Young people from the Nambucca Valley and local residents, focusing on fostering youth involvement in local events and development opportunities.

Bowra Youth Fest (Funded through ACCO, commencing 7th Dec 2024)

- Purpose: To provide young people in Bowraville with the opportunity to host their own event, addressing their desire for more activities in their town.
- Audience: Young people in Bowraville, with a focus on empowering them to organise and lead community events.

Cultural Camp at Brewarrina (Funded by Uniting)

- Purpose: To help young Indigenous people reconnect with their cultural heritage through hands-on experiences, fostering pride and unity.
- Audience: Indigenous youth from the Nambucca Valley area, with a specific focus on young men seeking cultural connection and resilience-building.

Learner Driver Volunteer Call to Action (Grant pending)

- Purpose: To address the long waiting times for learner driver programs by

increasing the number of volunteer driving instructors, improving access to driving lessons.

- Audience: Young people in Nambucca and surrounding LGAs who are on waiting lists for driving lessons, with a broader aim of reducing barriers to obtaining a driver's license.

Business Case for Night Markets at Nambucca V Wall (Collaborating with Premiers Dept, RDA Mid North Coast, Schools and Council)

- Purpose: To explore the feasibility of creating night markets in Nambucca, providing young people with an opportunity to develop entrepreneurial and event management skills.
- Audience: Young people from Macksville and Nambucca Heads high schools, with a broader community and economic development focus.

3. **With respect to 'Project Pawn':**

a. **Who was involved in the design of the project, and how was it funded?**

It started with a group of five young people from Bellingen High School and the Bellingen Youth Hub. This project is yet to be funded and all discussions, surveys, meetings etc. have been held between the Rotary Club, the business chamber, Council, the high school and the Bello youth hub as a collaborative effort to move towards solutions. Some of the challenges of this project need buy-in from other levels of government due to the area (it is right next to the old Bellingen Court House which requires a significant investment to fix and repurpose) in oder to create a vibrant area that deters vandalism rather than welcoming it. This is acknowledged by all parties involved however designs and advocacy are pressing ahead so far with no funding.

b. **What outcomes have you observed as a result of the project?**

Unintended outcomes include young people getting jobs through their advocacy efforts to get the businesses on board with their project, having opportunities to attend leadership courses in Canberra, winning awards through local government and being recognised for their leadership and advocacy, more youth engagement in local government planning processes (Bellingen council had over 100 survey responses from youth aged 12-17 in their recent community strategic planning survey which is unheard of in local government), and being held in higher regard within the community.

c. **How do you think youth-led community initiatives such as Project Pawn contribute to 'meaningful change'?**

Youth-led initiatives like Project Pawn have the power to create lasting, positive change in several ways, both for the young people involved and the wider community.

1. Empowerment of Young People:
   By involving young people in the design and execution of community projects, they gain a sense of ownership and responsibility. This not only builds confidence but also provides them with real-world skills such as

leadership, advocacy, and project management. In Project Pawn, for example, young people have engaged in extensive discussions with local stakeholders, including the Rotary Club, Council, and businesses, to revitalise a neglected public space. This experience teaches them how to navigate complex systems, work collaboratively, and advocate for their needs and ideas.

2. Positive Community Impact:
The project's goal is to transform an area that has been prone to vandalism into a community space that young people can take pride in and respect. This shift can deter negative behaviors and encourage community ownership of public spaces. The initiative contributes to the broader vision of creating a vibrant and safe community—one that welcomes rather than rejects its young people. As a result, the community becomes more inclusive, with youth playing a central role in shaping their environment.

3. Increased Youth Engagement in Local Government and Planning:
One of the most significant unintended outcomes of Project Pawn is the increased youth involvement in local government processes. The Bellingen Shire Council saw over 100 survey responses from youth aged 12-17 in their Community Strategic Planning survey—an extraordinary result. This level of engagement shows that when young people are given the opportunity to contribute to decisions that affect their lives, they respond with enthusiasm and insight. Their involvement brings fresh perspectives to local planning, ensuring that policies and projects are more reflective of youth needs.

4. Leadership and Recognition:
Through their advocacy efforts, young people involved in Project Pawn have gained recognition for their leadership. This has led to job opportunities, leadership training in places like Canberra, and even awards from local government. These accomplishments not only boost the young people's resumes but also build their self-esteem, making them more likely to continue engaging in their communities and taking on leadership roles in the future.

5. Building Community Respect and Trust:
The youth-led approach in Project Pawn also shifts the community's perception of young people. Rather than being seen as troublemakers or vandals, the young people involved are now recognised for their leadership and advocacy efforts. This fosters mutual respect between youth and other community members, which in turn strengthens the social fabric of the community.

In essence, Project Pawn is more than just a revitalisation project; it's a platform for young people to drive meaningful change in their communities. By giving youth a voice in decision-making, offering them leadership opportunities, and creating spaces that they can take pride in, initiatives like Project Pawn help

cultivate the kind of youth empowerment and community resilience that lead to long-term, sustainable change.

4. **In your evidence you raised a number of issues related to the inflexibility of grant funding requirements. What changes do you think need to be made to funding processes and structures to:**

   a. **encourage collaboration between service providers?**

      - Flexible Funding Structures: Funding processes need to recognise collaborative efforts. Rather than focusing solely on the outcomes of individual organisations, grants should support joint applications and allow funding to be allocated across multiple service providers. This could include establishing partnerships in grant applications and creating shared performance indicators.
      - Longer-Term Funding: Collaboration often requires time to build trust and create synergies. Multi-year funding instead of short-term grants allows providers to invest in meaningful, long-term partnerships without constantly seeking new funding. I note the move from 3 to 5 year contracts and commend this.
      - Cross-Sector Collaboration: Grants and contracts could encourage partnerships between diverse sectors, such as education, social services, and healthcare. By integrating resources and expertise, service providers can develop more holistic support programs for youth.

   b. **Enable greater flexibility for regional service providers to meet community needs**

      - Adaptable Outcome Measures: Regional providers benefit from funding that supports unique, community-specific goals rather than one-size-fits-all requirements. Outcome measures that are adaptable to local contexts allow providers to align funding with real needs rather than adjusting programs to fit funding restrictions.

      - Simplified Reporting Requirements: For regional providers with limited resources, streamlined reporting can reduce administrative burden. This could involve standardised templates, fewer requirements, or allowing smaller providers to report outcomes in ways that are feasible for them.

      - Emergency or Discretionary Funds: Flexibility is critical for addressing unforeseen community needs. Allowing discretionary funds within grants or emergency funding options can give regional providers the ability to respond quickly to emerging needs, such as a youth mental health crisis or community displacement after natural disasters.

5. **Why is youth participation important in developing community initiatives and how do you generate community buy-in?**

   Youth-Led Insight and Innovation: Young people have unique insights into the challenges they face, as well as the energy to innovate solutions. When youth participate, they bring fresh perspectives that ensure initiatives are relevant and impactful.

   Increased Engagement and Ownership: Involving youth in the decision-making process encourages a sense of ownership, making them more likely to engage in

and promote initiatives. This, in turn, boosts program success and sustainability.

Generating Buy-In: Creating forums where youth can voice their ideas and concerns. The *YOUth Speak Project* is an example, involving surveys, forums, and community presentations. By providing platforms for youth to be heard and taking their feedback seriously, we gain the support of young people, their families, and the broader community.

6. **Are there key learnings you think could benefit other regional communities seeking to engage more effectively with young people?**

Start by Listening: Effective engagement starts with truly understanding youth perspectives. Holding open forums, and seeking feedback from diverse youth groups help capture a wide range of views.

Create Tangible Opportunities for Involvement: Offer real roles in program planning, events, or feedback sessions. This demonstrates to youth that their participation has a direct impact and gives them a sense of responsibility.

Build Long-Term Relationships: Young people engage best when they feel connected and supported. Relationship-building with mentors, community leaders, and peers creates networks that can be leveraged for ongoing support. Think outside the box in terms of who to include in the conversations.

Incorporate Flexibility and Fun: To keep youth engaged, allow for flexibility in programming and incorporate enjoyable elements. Making programs enjoyable and rewarding ensures sustained involvement, leading to greater outcomes for both the youth and the community.