

# Environmental Scan for the Macarthur Youth Commitment

## Executive summary

*The Macarthur Youth Commitment will help to increase the opportunities for all young people to complete school, obtain relevant qualifications and obtain full-time employment*

*To Conduct an Environmental Scan, or map, of the circumstances of youth and youth related services in the region*

*Macarthur's population is on average young and fast growing with a high concentration of families*

*Macarthur youth tend to leave school earlier than elsewhere in NSW, and have higher rates of full-time employment once they do leave.*

*The Scan found no single means of tracking the outcomes of youth over time in the region.*

## **What is the Macarthur Youth Commitment?**

The Macarthur Youth Commitment is an umbrella community partnership that aims to build on the benefits of combined effort and the values of collaboration to guarantee that all Macarthur youth will have the opportunity to develop the basic skills and capacities to cope with the demands of the modern market place.

## **Tasks of the Macarthur Youth Commitment (MYC)**

The first task of the Macarthur Youth Commitment has been to produce an Environmental Scan of the region that not only maps the circumstances of youth and youth related services, but also documents their participation in employment, education and training. The Environmental Scan will be used by the MYC to clearly identify benchmarks and performance indicators to be used in evaluating the outcomes of the Youth Commitment. It is envisaged that these indicators will be periodically evaluated.

## **Key Findings of the Environmental Scan**

The Macarthur region has one of the fastest growing populations in NSW, with an above average level of youth aged residents. The region also has a higher concentration of Australian born residents than NSW, though it has small pockets of significant ethnic diversity. Macarthur has rates of average income similar to the rest of Australia. The industries of Manufacturing and Retail trade represent the largest employers of Macarthur residents.

High School retention rates among Macarthur schools were found to be slightly lower than the rest of NSW. However, the region has a higher proportion of residents enrolled in part-time TAFE courses and over one third of early school leavers (prior to year 12) going immediately into full-time work. The region also has a lower University participation rate than elsewhere in NSW.

The majority of employed youth work in the retail, manufacturing and construction industries and are typically employed as trades persons, clerical or sales and service workers. A significantly higher proportion of Macarthur youth also participate in the labour force.

*The Environmental Scan identified a variety of perceptions about school that were held by early school leavers from the region*

*The Scan also identified a variety of needs and aspirations that were commonly expressed by youth in the region*

*The Environmental Scan then looked at the range of School-to-Work programs that exist in the Macarthur*

*Vocational Education and Training's (VET's) has been one of the major successes among schools in the Macarthur*

Based on a survey of students in the region who left school prior to completing year 12 conducted by Vickers (2000), the Scan identified some of the common reasons that students gave for leaving school early. These included; teacher attitudes, unnecessary school rules and pettiness, unfairness and subjects that seemed difficult or required low interaction and creativity by students.

Some of the needs and aspirations that youth commonly expressed through various consultations conducted in the region included: youth stating that they found poor public transport reduced the accessibility of education, employment, training and recreation; a need for more adequate health services (esp. counselling and drug, alcohol and crisis centres); and a need to know what services are available to them.

The Macarthur region is highly serviced by a range of both large and innovative School-to-Work programs. The big challenges for the Macarthur Youth Commitment will be to ensure that these service providers, as well as school careers advisors reach all students in the region. Several of these programs already operate in partnership with each other. Registered training organisations were also identified as being able to assist in providing advice to youth about services and programs that can assist them in designing a 'Jobs Pathway'.

Over 3,000 students were enrolled in VET courses across the Macarthur in 2001. This number is also growing rapidly. All government and non-government High Schools in the Macarthur offered VET courses as full HSC programs for the first time in 2001. Particular enthusiasm exists among high schools to support both VET courses and school based 'New Apprenticeships'. Given the scale and growth in VET course enrolments in the region, one of the biggest challenges that will face the Macarthur Youth Commitment will be ensuring that mandatory work placements for all students are met.

The majority of mandatory work placements occur in the industries of building, construction and hospitality. Shortfalls are expected in high growth VET courses such as information technology and accounting in 2001-02.

*The Macarthur has a small number of government and other organisations committed to promoting economic development*

*The Environmental Scan then reviewed and evaluated the services that exist in the Macarthur to meet youth needs*

*Needs identified from the Environmental Scan will ensure that a stronger regional Youth Commitment is created to assist young people, with particular support for early school leavers and the disadvantaged*

All three of Macarthur's local Councils have strategies designed to promote the economic strengths of the region. Key industries that are being promoted, with the view of increasing local employment opportunities include: Manufacturing, Information Technology and Tourism. Several other key regional business organisations are interested, or actively involved in youth training and employment programs. Centrelink also has a large number of unique youth programs operating in the Macarthur.

The Environmental Scan surveyed a large number of youth service facilities that exist in Macarthur. This survey (conducted by informal telephone discussions) identified a wide range of both specific and general youth issues in terms of services that exist in the region. Based on the general findings of this research, it was clear there exists a variety of challenges that the Macarthur Youth Commitment could address in ensuring that community services in the region more adequately assist youth.

The majority of youth service providers surveyed by the Scan indicated low levels of awareness of other youth services or programs that could assist Macarthur youth. Youth also expressed a need to know about services available to them.

### **Learning and work for young people in the Macarthur region: Needs identified by the Environmental Scan**

- To integrate existing services for young people, adding greater value to what already exists.
- To track and monitor all school leavers.
- To provide personal action plans for all secondary students in the Macarthur.
- Ensure that there is an individual case management plan for those young people leaving school before Year 12.
- Offer career options based on community links.

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