



# Commissioner's Listening Tour Peel Region

10-11 March 2022

In early March 2022, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, visited the Peel region to meet with and hear from young people about their concerns and what matters to them. Young people consistently raised concerns about safety in the community and on public transport; the environment; mental health; bullying, both at school and online; and the need for more opportunities in training and employment.

The concerns raised by young people throughout the visit supported the information gathered through the Commissioner's *Speaking Out Survey* in 2021 and demonstrates that there is a need for a cohesive, holistic approach to service delivery to support children and young people in accessing appropriate supports at the right time.

Homelessness, poverty, wellbeing and mental health are key concerns across all cohorts with whom the Commissioner met during the visit.

The Commissioner is grateful to everyone in Peel that took time to share their experiences and insights with her.

## Who did the Commissioner meet with?

During the visit the Commissioner visited:

- John Tonkin College
- Passages Peel Youth Engagement Hub
- City of Mandurah
- Mandurah Youth Advisory Group
- Billy Dower Youth Centre
- Choyces (formerly Peel Youth Service)
- Peel Health Hub, Peel Youth Medical Service, GP Down South and Allambee Counselling
- Nidjalla Waangan Mia Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Centre
- Department of Communities.

## What the Commissioner heard from children and young people

### John Tonkin College – students in the Years 7-9 leadership group

The Commissioner met with seven students from the leadership group, five of whom participate in the Surf Science program.

When asked about the things they like about living in Mandurah, students responded that they like the following things:

- The natural environment – including the beaches, estuaries and parks
- The activities and events, such as the Markets, CrabFest, and Festivals
- At school they enjoy the time with their friends, excursions, electives and the canteen food which has really improved.



Some of the things that students would like to be improved in their community are:

- A wider variety of affordable sports for young people
- More security, including on buses and trains, and in the community to make them feel safer when on transport, jogging or walking
- Access to employment and developing skills so they can get the experience needed to apply for work
- Access to health services - two young people spoke about waiting seven and twelve months respectively for assessment appointments for themselves or a sibling
- For one student, reducing drug issues, fighting and disturbances that happen in their neighbourhood (Kwinana).

At school they would like:

- More time on the oval.

## Mandurah Youth Advisory Group



The Commissioner had a virtual meeting with seven members of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) aged between 16 and 22 years.

The YAG members were very comfortable with an online meeting as they use this mode regularly and all know each other very well. The YAG is supported by Tamara Mott, the Youth Development Officer for the City. YAG members consider and comment on all briefings and proposals developed by the City before

they progress to the Council for decisions. This process allows for the YAG comments to be considered before decisions and noted by the full council. At times a representative of the YAG will attend council meetings to speak about specific issues or proposals.

The City has also run a Junior Council for 30 years.

When asked about the things they like about living in Mandurah or that the Council does well members highlighted the following:

- The Billy Dower Youth Centre is accessible, runs great programs and activities each year and has good support staff
- The Peel area is a beautiful place to live and the Council has done very well to ensure natural spaces and trees have been preserved in all parts of the region
- The built environment is also very respectful of the natural spaces
- The arts and cultural aspects of Mandurah are great and the community activities such as the CrabFest and Mandjar Markets
- Leadership development opportunities like the Junior Council and the YAG
- Mandurah is also very invitational and welcoming.

Some of the challenges in the region identified by the YAG members were:

- Improving young people's mental health and reducing the stigma
- More events are needed to promote positive mental health to young people and educate them to get help
- More funding is required for mental health services, which are very limited and have long waiting times
- More employment opportunities for young people as they often leave the area to pursue higher education and then don't return as there are fewer jobs available to them locally
- More pathways to higher education, not only ATAR and TAFE
- Keep protecting and improving the natural environment in the regions.

## **Billy Dower Youth Centre (BDYC)**

Three young people who attend the BDYC regularly were very pleased to introduce the Commissioner to young people in the centre. Young people were engaged in their activities of choice; such as Dungeons and Dragons; online games; playing pool and table tennis; and having boxing and cooking lessons.

The young people spoke about how welcoming staff and volunteers at the centre are, that they get to have a say about the programs and activities, and how there is always good food being cooked for them. They can also help with the food preparation and can learn barista skills on the machine in the kitchen. The young people enjoy meeting up with friends, making new ones and joining in the activities they are most interested in.

## **Choyces (Children and Youth Community Services)**

Choyces is an organisation which supports children and young people from primary school age through to those in their early twenties.

The Commissioner met with three young women and their support workers at the Choyces centre. The young people each had experienced trauma and hardships and had found the support from their youth workers or counsellor invaluable. Each of the young women talked about difficulties in accessing mental health services and concerns about their safety in the community. They were also concerned about substance misuse, homelessness and the lack of opportunities in employment and training.

A 14-year-old being supported by Choyces has been living with extended family members for a few years and stopped attending formal schooling when she was 11 due to bullying from peers and from a teacher. This young person does not have a positive relationship with her mum, who she said dismissed her mental health issues and didn't get her any help. She is now living with her auntie and said *"family is complicated, their words can leave dents."*

She said she would like to see that *"when young people voice how they feel that they get help,"* and thinks it would be good if schools had a mental health day for students one day each term. Schools could come together and focus on self-care and give students an opportunity to say how they are feeling or to write it down, and to connect with support services. *"Like a self-development day for students, like adults get in a workplace."*

Another 17-year-old present spoke of experiencing bullying and racism at school and said she also mixed with the "wrong people". The young person told the Commissioner she fell out of school as each time she spoke up about the bullying she would be seen as the problem and there were no consequences for the other students and the bullying would continue. The young person was also concerned about her safety in the community and advised she had been harassed by strangers on a number of occasions. She wishes she could have gone back to school and now lives with her grandparents and helps to care for them. She is a mum now with a baby who is nearly one and hopes to return to education

one day. She would like *"schools to deal with bullying better and to make schools safe and welcoming places for all students."*

The third young person, aged 14 years, is still attending school a few days a week with support from Choyces. This young person once disclosed abuse to a trusted adult but felt that she was not provided with enough information on what would happen after the disclosure – and then her mum was informed before she was able to tell her, leaving her feeling quite distressed that all decision-making was removed from her. She understood the need for mandatory reporting but felt it should have been explained in full and what all the steps would be after the disclosure. This young person was very thankful for the support of her youth worker at Choyces.

She thinks *"young people who speak up about being harmed or needing help should be told what will happen next and have a say in it"*.

The young people from Choyces would all also like to see:

- More security on public transport to be safe in the community
- More listening from adults
- More supports for young people and options or choices about the supports that suit them
- More mental health supports
- Alternative education pathways and opportunities to participate in training and employment
- More work to support those who are homeless or living in poverty.

## What the Commissioner heard from service providers and other organisations

### Peel Health Hub, Peel Youth Medical Service, GP Down South and Allambee Counselling

- The Peel Health Hub has been open for four years and provides a range of local services under the same roof; it is the first of its kind in Western Australia
- A Youth Reference Group informed the development of the Hub
- Peel Youth Medical Service provides clinical care coordination for young people who attend the centre, a team member meets with a young person, develops a care and support plan for them based on their needs and decisions about service options for them



- The services providers within the Peel Health Hub have developed a business case to expand the services on the adjacent block of land. Additional services they hope to include are sexual assault services and family and domestic violence services for families, including children
- Concerns noted were the lack of funding for mental health supports, homelessness, addressing poverty and paediatric health.

## **Passages Peel**

Passages Peel provides a drop-in and safe space for young people who are homeless, where they can access: support from case managers; receive food parcels; use shower and laundry facilities; and relax in a welcoming environment.

Homelessness is a big issue for Mandurah and there is a lot of transience amongst young people who are homeless in the local community. The lack of affordable housing is a major contributing factor. The St Vincent DePaul Society fund the Passages service primarily through their op-shop sales and do not receive government funding.

The Passages Coordinator also discussed concerns about the lack of housing and the increase in homelessness among young people, and the need for additional mental health and alcohol & other drug support services.

## **The City of Mandurah**

The City of Mandurah provided a summary of their implementation of National Principles for Child Safe Organisations across their services and teams, and an overview of data across various areas within the Peel District that helps to inform their planning for different types of family and community needs within the region.

The City has a diverse range of programs and activities for children and many opportunities for leadership development for young people interested in being involved in the decision-making processes of the City Council.

The City of Mandurah has been recognised for its outstanding work in the mental health and wellbeing space, winning the main award in the Public Health Advocacy Institute's 2021 Local Government Policy Awards, which aims to promote and celebrate local governments that demonstrate outstanding commitment to the health of children and young.

## **Choyces**

Choyces run a variety of programs for disengaged and troubled youth, including cultural activities; a playgroup for young mums; support to enter education, training and employment; and social/youth workers to provide individual support based upon identified needs.

Choyces has been in operation since 1993 and last year they provided services to 504 young people aged 12 to 25 years. The number of young people accessing services is continued to grow and they are now double that of 2017. In 2021 Choyces trialed a mental health and wellbeing program for primary school-aged children. The trial has been successful and they would like to secure funding to be able to deliver ongoing early intervention programs for mental health.

### **Nidjalla Waangan Mia Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Centre**

The team at the service talked about the concerns in community in relation to alcohol and other drugs; COVID (including vaccinations); mental health; and other supports for families.

The service runs a dental service, medical service and cultural and engagement activities to support the Aboriginal community to come together and build family and community connections.

