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Youth Participation in a Rural Community Centre: The Case of Southwest Victoria

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The place of ‘youth centres’ in youth policy has become quite problematic since the development of ‘drop-in’ centres in the 1970s. However there is still an expressed need by many youth to have access to non-threatening environments and processes that do not alienate them. A range of youth consultations over the past decade has seen the same theme emerge in southwest Victoria. This article analyses the development of a concept for a community youth complex in southwest Victoria. It begins with a discussion of youth, social capital and participation. The article then surveys the literature on rural youth in a changing social-economic environment. After a discussion of the views of youth in southwest Victoria derived from the range of consultations over the past few years, the article then looks at the transition from a ‘youth centre’ to a ‘community youth complex’. The last section looks at the underlying ideas and mechanisms of the proposed ‘community youth complex’. The article concludes by summarising the underlying approach to active citizenship used by Brophy Family and Youth Services for the complex.

Introduction

The term ‘youth’ is often defined as a phase in life or a period between childhood and adulthood that involves a number of significant changes. Following the rapid biological and social changes of teenage years there is the school to work transition where young people leave full-time education and enter the labour market. This may be accompanied by the domestic transition where youth attempt to gain relative independence from their families. Another stage is the housing transition where youth move away from the parental home. The transitions may be separate or simultaneous but they all this involve changes in self-esteem, personal autonomy and self-advocacy and are all associated with taking on new roles and responsibilities (Sercombe, et al., 2002).

More often than not though the category ‘youth’ is approached as a problem area where young people are portrayed as needing redemption from some form of social ill. Indeed such stigmatising of young people often reduces the way that they participate and contribute to society (Roche and Tucker, 1997). The underlying assumptions that produce the stereotype of ‘youth as problem’ derive from many of the established institutional structures of society that include the family, the churches, industry and the state. As changing social and economic forces challenge these institutional structures problems arise that produce new forms of unemployment, homelessness and social dislocation that affect youth in a variety of ways. Solutions to these problems are sought in the welfare system, in greater coercive policing and in the criminal justice systems that impact on youth in particularly acute way. As a consequence many youth find that their ability restricted to fully participate in society in ways that the community will acknowledge. The challenge for people in communities both young and old is to maintain youth connectedness across a range of processes including health, shelter, social support, education, training and personal development, protection from exploitation or abuse, and the development of skills and opportunities for participation in the economy and the community.

This article addresses some of these issues using the experience of Brophy Family and Youth Services in Warrnambool, Australia, an organization that originated in 1974 with its beginnings in hostel accommodation for homeless youth in southwest Victoria but now offering a comprehensive range of services for people particularly the young. The article begins with a discussion of youth, social capital
and participation and then surveys the literature on rural youth in a changing social-economic environment. After a discussion of the views of youth in southwest Victoria derived from the range of consultations over the past few years, the article then looks at the transition from a ‘youth centre’ to a ‘community youth complex’. The last section looks at the underlying ideas and mechanisms of the proposed ‘community youth complex’. The article concludes by summarising the underlying approach to active citizenship used by Brophy Family and Youth Services for the complex.

Youth, social capital and participation

Over recent years policy makers in Australia have turned to a ‘community’ discourse that focuses on the use of the voluntary capacity of people to help to solve their own problems (Adams and Hess, 2001). Both sides of politics endorse this re-emergence of community for different reasons. The left embraces the community approach as a reinvigoration of collective approaches to public policy while the rights sees it as a way of providing a solution to market failures by using community voluntary action (Bowles and Gintis, 2000). There are two significant aspects for youth in this community policy framework: capacity building and participation.

The emphasis upon community in public policies entails a commitment to what has become known as social capital. Some have argued that social capital is a ‘cottage industry’ that dominates much of the discussion around community issues (Turner, 1999, Woolcock, 1998). Using the works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988, 1990) and Putnam (1993) a bevy of writers have attempted to incorporate community issues under the banner of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1990, Coleman, 1988, Putnam, 1993). The concept of social capital is summarised in Putnam (1993: p167) where he defines social capital as ‘features of social organisation such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions’. The three elements of trust, norms and networks are in some form or another accepted as crucial to the presence of social capital but are treated differentially by various authors (Flora, et al., 1997, Jordan, 1999).

Social capital is often treated as some kind of community cement that somehow leads to community well-being (Cox and Caldwell, 2000). In this sense social capital can be interpreted as reinforcing opposing positions (Gamarnikov and Green, 1999). On the one hand there is a community involvement view that embraces progressive and civic notions of co-operation, empowerment and participation. On the other hand social capital can be interpreted in such a way as to reinforce traditional forms of power relations: ‘three strikes and you’re out’, ‘mutual obligation’, ‘tough on crime’ etc.’. Morrow (1999) contends that using this view can lead to social capital becoming part of what might be termed ‘deficit theory syndrome’, yet another ‘thing’ or ‘resource’ that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities and neighbourhoods lack’ (Morrow, 1999, p.760). When young people in rural areas are left without employment or social support mechanisms they often produce alternative cultural forms that are treated by the community as deviant behaviour. The internal network of shared values within such a youth group may be strong in ‘social capital’ but because of their deviation from the norm, the group’s social capital is not held to be ‘good’.

Strong networks, trust and shared norms can often be found in groups that are socially excluded. People in ghettos are often excluded from other neighbourhoods for socio-economic, racial or other structural reasons but that exclusion can lead to strong internal bonds that amount to high social capital (Portes, 1998). There is trust, shared norms and networks of people who come together in criminal gangs. Some research suggests that young people in the juvenile justice system who develop strong networks amongst their peers reinforce their social marginalisation leading to undesirable social outcomes like criminal behaviour, drug use and alcohol abuse (Dishon, et al., 1999).

The emphasis on the blessings of consensus in social capital act as a brake on disagreement amongst people (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Disagreement may arise from a variety of perspectives. Those without the necessary resources to wield power may yield to the
pressure to conform or express their disagreement in more radical ways. The pressure to conform may also crush diversity such that expressions of difference are subordinated to peer pressure. In the case of youth in rural areas the pressure to conform to social stereotypes can lead to significant social problems. For example youth suicide in rural areas may be related to a number of factors including both geographic and social isolation (Burns and Field, 2002).

In a community people interact directly, frequently and in multi-faceted ways (Bowles and Gintis, 2000). There may be a sense of shared meaning but it will also involve ‘squabbles and fights as well as cooperation and affection’ (Wilkinson, 1991, p.17). In this sense diversity is integral to embedding the community in the capacity building process (Flora, et al., 1997). In the first instance it is important to construct issues in such a way that all proposed solutions to problems are treated as legitimate in discussions. The focus here is on the process where deliberation is accepted as the central means of achieving outcomes. In seeking to solve problems the first step is the recognition of diversity of interests and aspects (Kooiman, 2000). In so doing sources of tensions can be identified and either led to specific solutions or revisited in the on-going process of decision-making.

The aim of capacity building is to mobilize all resources at both individual and community level. Since community issues are always multi-faceted it is the acceptance of diversity in the outcomes that will assist the future legitimisation of different approaches. Accordingly, developing ‘strong’ ties locally needs to be balanced by the ‘weak’ ties with outside networks. Sustainable structures depend upon weak ties (formal and transitory contact with relative strangers) to bind strong ties (continuing relations with family, friends and local community) into broader networks (Granovetter, 1973).

‘Communities can sometimes do what governments and markets fail to do because their members, but not outsiders, have crucial information about other members’ behaviours, capacities and needs’ (Bowles and Gintis, 2000, p.4). But just as markets and governments fail so do communities (Bowles and Gintis, 2000). Communities can become quite oppressive when conformity becomes the major social norm. That is they ‘fall’ because a monopoly is imposed upon local social norms and networks. When decision-making at local level becomes dominated by parochial attitudes and community members can punish non-conformist behaviour, there is a strong incentive either to comply with the unwritten norms of the community or to leave. What is paraded as social capital is really an adherence to homogeneity among the members and any deviations are treated as weakening the community. For example some young people keep away from youth ‘drop-in’ centres as they see them as centres for ‘drop-outs’ where strong peer pressure by one group dominates all proceedings (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003).

Mobilising local resources for self-help then requires not only building local social capacity but also linking individuals and community to wider resources. Focusing on diversity will help both individuals and the community to develop and this will most likely depend upon strengthening the weak ties. In community capacity building it is important that diversity is not only recognized but is encouraged. In the first instance this may allow people to go beyond peer group pressures especially where the ‘social capital’ of the group is creating anti-community outcomes. For example, local youth who are ‘proud to be perceived as ‘different, bad, tough etc’ and express this difference through a variety of anti-social and dangerous activities need to be exposed to alternative ways of expressing themselves (Warrnambool City Council, 2003). By increasing the availability of activities outside their peer group young people can express their diversity. This is unlikely to happen within the locale where the peer group dominates norms and behaviours.

One important justification for the new emphasis on community in public policy is that citizens can participate in a range of self-governing activities like decision-making, service delivery and management of resources. However merely promulgating policies on community involvement does not guarantee participation. There needs to be a clear
commitment to accepting diversity otherwise community governing will be characterised by uneven levels of participation and the emergence of exclusive cliques. While there are no hard and fast rules for the establishment of participatory mechanisms, people will participate in community structures given the right conditions for them.

To account for the complex nature of participation in rural communities participatory theory may need to be refined in two ways (Edwards and Woods, 2000). Firstly, while there may be debate around rational actor and incentives theories to participation, of particular importance is the spatialised political-cultural context. In other words individuals respond to incentives to participate in local activities according to their particular local circumstances both personally and politically. Secondly, participation is circumscribed by particular local discourses of power. That is, incentives to participate can be shaped by individuals’ interpretation of the incentives for participation as well as the social, economic and political circumstances.

People will participate if they feel that the issue or activity is important to them (Barnes, et al., 1997). A fundamental issue for participation models is whether people are motivated to ‘join in’ and this can be viewed in an instrumental, communitarian or educative way (Stoker, 1997). An instrumental approach is governed by a ‘rational choice’ theory that suggests that participation is about expressing and defending one’s interests. A communication approach places more value upon concern for the ‘collective’ while an educative approach integrates and builds trust in the community. Whatever the motivation, research has indicated that citizen participation is more likely to occur when there is an emphasis upon practical concerns working through local leaders actively recruiting local citizens (Lowndes, et al., 1998). By grounding issues in practical concerns there is likely to be a reciprocal process of education and information exchange (Lowndes, et al., 1998). For example, if local youth do not believe that their action in the community will make any difference to local employment outcomes, they will have little or no incentive to participate.

If we want young people to participate then we need to develop the notion of inter-generational equity (Ife, 1995). The concept of inter-generational equity implies that the well-being of future generations needs to be taken into account in policy decisions, and that we must identify whether future generations will ‘win’ or ‘lose’ as a result of a particular course of action. From a specifically community development perspective increased participation encourages the creation of community facilities and structures that will have long term benefit, and that are likely to endure. Its importance lies in the emphasis on social responsibility that extends to future generations, as well as to the disadvantaged in the present. It is commonplace that longer-term future directions are discounted in favour of immediate needs and benefits. A more integrated, holistic approach is required through which the past is seen as important as a framework for understanding the present, and the concept of inter-generational equity forces us to confront the future, including the future implications of present actions (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000).

Different forms of participation must also be acknowledged and valued (Ife, 1995). This is not only in the different roles played by community members but also in the values expressed by different groups. If participation is to be for everyone, then the diverse skills, talents and interests of young people need be accepted as legitimate. They need to be able to participate as active citizens, but they should also have the ‘capacity’ to be able to participate. In this sense service delivery that makes transport available, provides childcare, ensures safety and is organised to suit the timetables of the prospective participants is essential. Finally the provision of non-threatening environments and processes that do not alienate participants is basic to ensuring that people feel comfortable in continuing to participate.

Rural youth in the changing socio-economic environment

The lives of young people in rural areas in Australia have been subject to fundamental strains over recent decades due to the impact of globalisation, technological development, economic and industry restructuring,
deregulation, and the ideological dominance of economic rationalism. In this transition rural areas have suffered structural changes such as significant demographic shifts, population depletion, rapid growth, economic diversification, service withdrawals and deteriorating social and physical infrastructures (Cheers and O'Toole, 2001). Youth in regional/rural communities have been particularly vulnerable to the impact of economic restructuring (Davies, et al., 2001). Many of the jobs traditionally done by youth have disappeared as the youth employment markets collapse. Much of the existing youth employment has been casualised and transformed into temporary or part-time work. The growth of service industries that demand further educational qualifications has left many rural youth no option but to leave their locality and seek work in urban areas. Even those who wish to pursue professional careers in education, health, welfare and other allied services often need to leave their rural abode to study elsewhere. Investment in higher education has not been focused on servicing rural Australia and it is hard to recruit and retain professionals. However access to education is not the only issue confronting rural youth. Housing, transport, communications and many cultural activities are also lacking.

Lack of opportunities for youth in rural areas is often associated with issues of health and illness as Table 1 indicates. The death rate for young rural males is significantly higher than for city males. While the death rate for young women is not as high for women overall there is still a discrepancy between rural and city areas. On average more young men in rural areas take their lives than young men in the city. Further young men in rural areas are more likely to be hospitalised for self inflicted injuries and violence than city males. In rural areas up to 24% of young people will have suffered at least one episode of major depressive disorder by the age of 18. Additionally, 50% of adolescents of those who have experienced depression will suffer more recurrences of depression and depression is associated with an increase in risk of suicidal behaviour over the following two decades (Burns and Field, 2002).

**Table 1. Death and Injury of Rural and City Youth:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate per 100,000</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death Rate (Males)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Rate (Females)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide (Male)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-inflicted injury (Male)</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence injury (Male)</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Moon et al, 1999*

A significant issue for young girls is in rural areas is teenage pregnancy. Girls in country Victoria are almost twice as likely as their city counterparts to have babies. The birth rate for girls aged between 15-19 in country Victoria is 16.2 births per 1,000 teenage girls. (ABS, 1999). In city areas, the figure is almost half at 8.6 per 1,000. Furthermore, 60% of rural young pregnant women are more likely to be hospitalised than their city cousins (Moon, et al., 1999).

Governments at state and federal level have made attempts to redress some of the issues related above. However there have been concerns that many of the programs offered to young people in rural/regional communities are often tokenistic, and do not engage them (Davies, et al., 2001). At issue is the lack of consideration given to the input of youth to the development and delivery of many programs. Each time research delves into youth issues the same themes reoccur with youth indicating that they need to be informed, heard and resourced (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003). While many indicate that they had been consulted in needs studies, they often complain that they are not invited to be part of the next level of planning, development and implementation. This runs counter to discourse concerning the decline in populations of young people in rural areas. Youth are seen as the basic building blocks for securing sustainable futures but are rarely invited to join the local development processes.

**Consulting youth in southwest Victoria**

There has been a range of youth consultative surveys and reports undertaken in the southwest region over the past few years (*Young People in The City of Warrnambool, 1992; Youth Information Report, 1997; Youth Entertainment Report, 1997; Youth Services*
Research, 1997; Brophy Community Youth Complex Survey 1997, DeBono Youth Forum, 2001 and The Moyne Warrnambool Local Government Youth Survey, 2001). The reports consulted youth from a wide variety of backgrounds and raised a range of issues under the following headings:

- General health services specific to youth
- Lack of access and coordination of generalist services for young people
- Limited options for pathways from education to training and employment
- Limited options for youth to engage community

The issue of health services was high on the agenda for youth. Two separate consultations indicated that many youth wanted medical services in a youth specific environment. A Brophy survey of youth aged between 12 and 25 years of age and the 2001 DeBono Youth Forum found that youth wanted to receive up-to-date, relevant health and welfare information and the opportunity to participate in preventative programs that improve their health (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 1997, DeBono Youth Forum, 2001). Health information provided in the Warrnambool youth services booklet was the usual collection of services for all people in Warrnambool (Downes, 1998). Only one listed service provider (Family Planning and Education) offered some form of primary health care (pregnancy testing). There were no services listed where youth felt that they could have their anonymity ensured, especially in areas of counselling and support.

Lack of access and coordination of generalist services for youth is a major issue in southwest Victoria. In the Brophy survey the concern of young people was that they did not know about the location or type of generalist services available. Further, even if they were aware of generalist services they found access to them difficult because of what they perceived as barriers in terms of attitudes or inappropriate for their particular problems (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 1997). The evidence from elsewhere supports the need for youth specific services. In 1993 the Victorian Youth Advocacy Network reported that young people rarely use non-youth specific services, and do not trust professionals who do not understand youth issues (Beer, 1993). A report on youth access to the community in Bright indicates that if there are not youth specific services, young people have to compete with the more dominant members of the community and thereby do not use the service at all (McLaren, 1993).

Secondly the lack of coordination in service delivery also causes problems. For example in the Warrnambool region there are only two youth agencies, Brophy and the Youth Department at the City Council. While both have a number of programs aimed at supporting youth they lack the more generalist health and welfare services. One study of rural youth in Warrnambool indicated that interagency collaboration has the potential to improve outcomes and services, and overcome service delivery problems affecting all young people (Davies, et al., 2001). Certainly the Brophy youth survey found that while young people wanted to have services where they felt familiar they were also wary of stand-alone services as they attracted a specific social stigma (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 1997). This is especially so when approaching specialist services associated in areas such as suicide, depression, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, infertility and sexually transmitted diseases. Youth see the value of the integrating information, activities and services as a way of maintaining their anonymity.

Another significant issue is information sharing amongst youth themselves. Research indicates that youth have a better chance of resolving issues or problems when they are able to share them with others of the same experience (Sercome, et al., 2002). The emphasis upon people to people contact is fundamental for allowing what has been called the 'little narratives' being accepted as legitimate knowledge(Lyotard, 1984). While expert knowledge in the form of service providers is important it is often the little narratives of experience that help people to imagine their own solutions. People seeking solutions to common problems through interaction with the little narratives (or everyday experience) of others can also build self-confidence.

Pathways from education to work are a significant issue for many youth. In Victoria more than one in four country students drop out of school before they finish year 12 (75%
retention rate), despite overall retention rates rising in the state from 81.2% to 85.3% since 1999 (Warmambool Standard, 18th July 2002). While some of those who leave school early take up apprenticeships or find local jobs there are also those who seek alternative means of education in the school to work transition (Chamberlain and Mackenzie, 1997). There are some small-scale programs in place that focus on training institutions or job placement but there are no services in place that integrate across the different sectors (Douglas, et al., 1997). Whether they are in school or looking to train for or gain employment, most of the young people said they wanted help to get them on their way (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 1997, Debono Youth Forum, 2001).

Youth and other members of the community alike sometimes question the amount of youth engagement in the community. Many young people felt that there was 'a bit of an anti-youth thing' in the wider community but they still expressed a desire to improve the future of their local community by playing a more central role (Douglas, et al., 1997). However there was the feeling amongst youth that they were not part of the decision making process over matters that concern them. While there may be meetings like youth forums etc there was no structure through which the youth could coordinate and develop strategies for the community. In the Debono Youth Forum young people continually mentioned the need for a multi-purpose space in which they could have some ownership and a sense of responsibility.

From 'youth centre' to 'community youth complex'

A local bikie and youth enthusiast who worked as a nightclub bouncer first raised the concept of a youth centre in 1994. He argued that Warrnambool needed a youth centre where 'kids' could go for entertainment and at the same time seek out help for any problems they had. However while there was muted support the youth centre idea was scuttled by the media's portrayal of the youth advocate as long-haired bikie (Broekman, 2000). When a local community lawyer raised the idea six months later it once again failed to materialise. A major issue was its vision as a 1970s 'Drop-in Centre' that could not attract sufficient funding. The next phase was the development of the Warrnambool Youth Centre Committee (WYCC) based upon a small SAAP youth agency (Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program). However, when the agency was de-funded after suffering a major staff and management committee wrangle the youth centre concept once again appeared to be doomed. However when Brophy was approached to auspice the SAAP the concept took on a new life. Working in partnership with the newly resurrected Warrnambool Youth Centre Committee, Brophy agreed to auspice the project. In this arrangement the Warrnambool Youth Centre Committee would play an advisory role to Brophy's management committee. The partnership did not continue for long as the WYCC wanted to resume sole control over the project, fearing that it might lose its function in youth services in Warrnambool. However Brophy did not relinquish its auspice of the project, continuing to seek wide-ranging community support including the WYCC (Broekman, 2000).

The environment surrounding the issue of a youth centre in Warrnambool up until 2001 was driven by some important local political considerations. First collaboration across agencies dealing with youth issues was made extremely difficult in a competitive tendering environment. Secondly a youth centre was dependent upon the development of a sustainable model for funding infrastructure costs would not be supported by government. Thirdly, the perception of a youth centre in the community's mind conjured up visions of the unsuccessful '1970's drop in centres', which were renowned - rightly or wrongly - as 'drug pushing places where undesirable males hung out'. Finally, while the WYCC was Warrnambool focused Brophy had a mission to extend its services across the southwest region of Victoria (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003).

With these considerations in mind Brophy set out to galvanise support for a new concept. In discussions with the Community Support Fund (CSF) in the Department of Premier and Cabinet it became obvious that a focus on a youth centre alone would not attract sufficient funding. Using the ideas gleaned from the various consultations outlined above and
research into existing programs Brophy developed a concept of a community youth complex that implies not only a physical location but also multiple access points for youth via different types of media. It also implies a ‘one stop’ shop and co-location of services so that all youth can be included in the services and activities of the complex (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003).

As a first step, in 2002 the Brophy Board purchased a central block of land large enough to incorporate a community and youth complex. They then set out on the long and arduous process of convincing community, government and philanthropic organizations to finance the amount required for the development of the complex. To assist with this process and to offer guidance to the project as a whole the Board then established a Community Advisory Group. With government support, large philanthropic donations and Brophy’s own ability to raise funding it is expected that the complex will be built in the near future.

An outline of the proposed community youth complex in southwest Victoria

It can be argued that ‘in a more fluid and fragmented environment in which the dangers of multiple exclusion are extreme, young people must have the means of effective contact with mainstream, generic and specialist youth services’ (Sercombe, et al., 2002, p.103). In the same vein youth consultation across the southwest of Victoria has indicated that there is a need for some structure through which youth can access services, develop their community capacity and generally provide a supportive framework for the needs of all youth in the region. A major step in that process is the development of Community and Youth Complex (CYC).

Brophy did not attempt to follow a recipe book approach to a community youth complex but to draw upon the experiences of other youth centres at both national and international level. Looking across Victoria alone the group noticed that the structure of youth centres is quite diverse. The issue of co-location is fundamental to a number of services that aim to provide youth services where young people feel accepted and also have easy access to a broad range of services in non-judgmental settings. They often run programs for both males and females that encompass sexual assault, suicide prevention, anger management and peer support programs (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003). Some offer a wide range of visiting services that include everything from juvenile justice to health care. For example the Visey Cares Centre (Dandenong & St Albans) that has been in operation for 3 years is a good example of the co-location of a number of services under the one roof. It offers a broad range of welfare and health services including accommodation, counselling employment and training services including needle exchange, physiotherapy, diet advice and antenatal care (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003).

In rural areas there are also examples of outreach programs aimed at including people from more remote areas. For example the Big Red Bus operated by the Cutting Edge Youth Service in the Moira Shire in North Eastern Victoria offers a mobile youth service (Davies, et al., 2001). Often the bus is the only available human service available in many of the small towns. It offers a range of services including counselling, information and referral about education, training, employment, income support, accommodation, health, legal support and family issues. In-reach models are also used in places such as Horsham and Bendigo where the basic principles are: one entry point to the youth sector; resources, activities and events; multiple access types to cater for age, rural isolation, disability, and other issues that inhibit access to the site; youth driven and welcoming environment; and partnership between it and other agencies. The basic model includes 24 hour 1800 info line, internet service, information and referral centre, café/venue, co-location, meeting and counselling rooms and data collection, analysis and evaluation (Davies, et al., 2001).

Brophy aims to develop a locally based approach by drawing upon these experiences and following the youth consultations in the southwest. The preferred model for the centre involves a number of key features:

- One-stop youth and family information and referral centre;
• Up to three shopfronts for economic participation activities (such as a youth retail business, coffee shop, etc.);
• Range of located, collocated and visiting welfare services currently provided by Brophy Family and Youth Services and other generalist welfare agencies;
• Community meeting rooms and facilities for self-help and support groups;
• Youth committee rooms;
• Family education and support services, including family planning advice and parenting programs;
• Homework Centre, complete with a bank of computers and after school tutorial support;
• Koorie Tutor Service and Young Mothers Support Group
• Consulting rooms for visiting health and legal professionals.
• 1800 Number Info Line
• Linkage to satellite services in Portland, Hamilton, Casterton, Camperdown and Timboon
• Internet Website

The underlying themes of the complex information, learning and services are outlined in the following figure:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Community Youth Complex Model

Much of the information and learning will be built around strengthening the weak ties between and within the various interests involved in the complex. The mission statement of the CYC expresses the approach taken by Brophy Family and Youth Services.

The Community Youth Complex will endeavour to service the needs of youth and families within the community in the areas of health, welfare, education, training, employment and social connectedness throughout the Southwest (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003, p.1).

It is the emphasis on social connectedness that will take the complex beyond a mere 'drop in' or service centre and this is expressed in the underlying values of the project:

• To create a Community Youth Complex that actively seeks to promote youth and community participation that in turn facilitates a sense of individual self worth and community belonging.
• To provide young people and the community with access to services and programs of the Complex regardless of gender, race, sexuality or economic status in an environment that is built on respect and social justice.
• To provide services to those that are disadvantaged, that are affordable, non-discriminatory and non stigmatising. (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003, p.15).

Since connecting youth to the community means training in leadership the Complex's management aims to give different youth access to management skills. To achieve this it is proposed to have:

• A Youth Committee who will oversee the access and the range of youth programs and activities delivered in the complex
• A Stakeholders Reference group that will in conjunction with the Youth Committee oversee the strategic development of the complex. (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003, p.16).

In the spirit of strengthening the weak ties the management process will also involve the 'creation of a community mentor bank that can be utilised for advice to young people on the various issues relating to both the personal and general'(Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003). This approach is aimed at developing 'citizenship links between the rural community and it's young people by facilitating an environment of social and reciprocal investment' (Brophy Family and Youth Services, 2003). A central part of the Complex's approach is to encourage young people attending the complex to develop links with the
community. As the complex develops, room will be made available for other groups to grow and expand especially the connection of youth across both communities of place and communities of interest.

The CYC has already gained the collaboration of a range of services including health, welfare, employment and training, education, legal self-support groups. It will also incorporate a number of activities that are presently in different locations in line with the recommendations of the consultation processes outlined above. To ensure that the complex services the whole region it has will incorporate a number of distance features:

- 1800 number Information Line
- Internet site
- Connection to existing sites such as Youthbiz in Hamilton, Community Centre in Casterton, Brophy Youth & Family Centre in Portland and the Timboon Health Service as satellite centres
- The Development of a Subsidised Bus Service Strategy for young people who attend the Complex.

The Complex will also include features such as shop fronts, meeting rooms, activity rooms and information portals. To ensure access for all types of youth activities the Complex will focus on the need for 'organisation' of time and space. Drop in access will be available for many activities and services and young people will be welcome to use the centre for their specific needs. However it is imperative that different groups of youth and community members are able to plan their specific types of activity.

Conclusion

The article has outlined the ideas and processes that have led to the development of plans for a Community Youth Complex in southwest Victoria. In that process Brophy Family and Youth Services have developed a concept that is based upon an underlying philosophy of active citizenship. What we can conclude from the discussion is that there are four important aspects on which the CYC focuses: community participation, inter-generational equity, personal development and services that are both out-reach and in-reach orientated.

First, enabling young people to strive to transform themselves into active citizens requires that the community allow individual young people to stake their claims through genuine community participation. This is more likely to occur when there is an emphasis upon practical concerns working through local leaders actively recruiting local youth. The CYC is planned to achieve practical outcomes by emphasising that role of youth in the 'community' not as an isolated activity. The idea is for a 'community' youth complex not a 'youth centre'.

Secondly, the combination of youth and community stakeholder committees in the CYC can engender a notion of inter-generational equity that puts emphasis on social responsibility that extends to future generations, as well as to the disadvantaged in the present. By developing a sense of belonging and connectedness youth will be encouraged to believe that they are a legitimate part of the community and that their contributions are worthwhile. This is in turn encourages the creation of a community facility and structure that will most likely to have a long term benefit, and that is likely to endure. As youth become adults they will still be able to communicate with the new generation as they will still be able to interact with the complex.

Thirdly the CYC has the potential to provide youth with opportunities to develop personal and social skills, to have responsibility, and to undertake roles such as leadership, organising and instructing. This is an important part of community governing in that people seek to make decisions about their futures based upon knowledge gained at personal level. Further it contributes to local policy outcomes in that it aims to give people the capacity to develop tolerance in the face of diversity.

Fourthly 'in-reach' and 'out-reach' processes occur both within youth culture as well as within the community as a whole. The more communities have interaction with outside actors the more they can evaluate and shape their own goals and interests. In this sense the CYC can strengthen the 'weak ties' of formal and transitory contact with relative strangers.
while at the same time building the ‘strong ties’ of family and friends into broader networks.

By providing a non-threatening environment and processes that do not alienate youth the CYC aims to ensure that youth feel comfortable in continuing to participate. In this sense the CYC aims to give youth access to a wide range of services, a strong sense of ‘community’ and a supportive framework for the needs of all youth in the region.

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