



Prepared by

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2009

**A Northern Territory Youth Round Table
Community-based research project**



Please note: The Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians is an independent advisory council. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Office of Youth Affairs or the Northern Territory Government.

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Tennant Creek Youth Development Unit
The Department of Business and Employment
The Office of Youth Affairs

Abbreviations

BSC	Barkly Shire Council
BRSCC	Barkly Regional Safer Communities Committee
CETAG	Community Employment & Training Advisory Group
DBE	Department of Business and Employment
DoJ	Department of Justice
NT	Northern Territory
NTG	Northern Territory Government
OYA	Office of Youth Affairs
SRC	Student Representative Council
YAG	Youth Advisory Group
YDU	Youth Development Unit
YSP	Youth Service Providers

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people (0-34 years) account for 56.9% of the population in the Northern Territory.¹ It can therefore be assumed that the young people of today will make up a significant proportion of the population in the not too distant future, particularly in the workforce. Supporting this age group is vital to the region's future success. All individuals and organisations should see the benefits of engaging with young people for a brighter future.

The aim of the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is to establish a reference group for the Barkly region that focuses on identifying issues of importance to young people and making recommendations to the Barkly Shire Council and the Northern Territory Government (NTG).

The group looked at previous research conducted on youth participation including *Rewriting the Rules for Youth Participation*.² This report focuses on the strengths and limitations of targeted versus universal approaches to involving young people and existing opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds to participate in decision making.

YAG is an advisory group assisting young people in the region wanting mentoring or a voice for issues affecting them that they wouldn't otherwise address. YAG is also the centre point for advice and feedback for youth events and activities directed towards young people.

The group is made up of young people and local service providers – particularly those on the ground working with young people that understand and have experienced youth issues first hand.

YAG then reports to a larger stakeholder group in Tennant Creek, including:

- Youth Development Unit (YDU)
- CatholicCare NT
- Barkly Shire Council (through the Tennant Creek local board)
- Tennant Creek Youth Service Providers (group meetings).

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au)

² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

YAG also provides a link between youth programs available in the region and young people and will assist with the promotion of existing services and events. YAG's structure could be replicated in other jurisdictions as an example of how community people, organisations and government can work together to support our young people.

Throughout 2009, YAG has been associated with many programs running in Tennant Creek including the implementation of Community Courts, Child Protection Week, Mental Health Week, *headspace* and the Barkly Regional Attendance Action Group.

In addition, members of YAG have been involved in making recommendations to the Northern Territory Government and the Barkly Shire Council on local issues that have affected youth, that otherwise would not have been heard.

Recommendations of this project include:

1. The 2010 Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians continue with this project next year and grow it to include a school-based apprenticeship focus i.e. designed to help in building business and employment networks in regional areas and communities.
2. Further research to be conducted into the YAG framework. Talk to other councils and see what support they provide for their youth groups.
3. Tennant Creek Local Government continues to support YAG's progress with attention to young people, activities and issues through attending YAG meetings quarterly.
4. The YAG becomes established and sustainable even after member departure. Without long term sustainability, the turnover could affect the training, skills available and networks established by previous members.

2. INTRODUCTION

This report will provide a case study of the development of the Barkly Youth Advisory Group, lessons learnt and recommendations to ensure future sustainability of the group. Young people in regional areas are disadvantaged compared to other major centres with limited access to services (i.e. mental and physical health, career planning, and training). Having a focus on these areas of development and mentoring should not be underestimated.

In Tennant Creek there has been an identified need for an established, effective youth group that will report on the challenging issues in the Barkly and develop recommendations as a group representing young people. Feedback from local service providers indicates that government and local industry bodies experience barriers when attempting to engage with local youths.

I chose to conduct an action research project to develop the Barkly Youth Advisory Group, otherwise known as YAG in the Barkly Region. There has previously been no other youth representative group like this for the Barkly region. The group advises Council and other youth stakeholders and will be restricted to a Group (as opposed to a committee), for all young people (15-30), in the Barkly Region.

If young people are included in decisions that affect their lives, you can expect greater contribution from young people in activities and events. The Cultural Indigenous Research Centre of Australia quoted the following;

Engaging young people in determining both processes and the content for participatory decision making increases the engagement and commitment of young people from diverse backgrounds.³

This has been proven with the notable increase in the amount of youth engagement in local activities since the establishment of YAG.

³ Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/youth/programmes_funding/nyars/Rewriting_the_Rules_for_Youth_Participation.htm

With an enthusiastic group of young people, YAG established itself reasonably fast. Meetings are being held fortnightly with an average of 12 people attending at any time. There is an average of 50 people, from nine organisations (varies) who have an indirect interest in the group and a further six organisations that are directly involved in meetings and events.

2.1 Background

YAG was originally created to be the conduit between local business people and young people. To increase young people's access to job opportunities and apprenticeships in the Barkly Region. The group became a demanding task itself to organise, coordinate and manage. Throughout the development stages other purposes for the group were identified as opportunities. In addition to its original purpose the group provides a key network to the major youth service providers in the Barkly Region as well as providing information about jobs and training available to increase employment and skills.

Although apprenticeships and employment of young people will not be the YAG's only focus, the group can still be the network group that will support young people in the workforce by linking with relevant departments (i.e. the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Business and Employment).

2.2 Objectives

The overall objective of this research project was to establish a group of young people aged 15-30 (negotiable) concerned with matters involving youth. YAG acts as a reference point for anyone wishing to engage, identify and progress issues with young people in the Barkly Region.

The group represents young people at an organisation and government level and involve young people in consultations relevant to the Barkly Region on major issues including major projects and decisions. The group can be used as a means of engaging with young people in Tennant Creek and the Barkly Region, particularly for those from interstate or intra-territory.

Some of the issues of interest for young people of the Barkly or reasons that an organisation might engage with young people include:

- employment and training
- physical and mental health
- business and economics
- mentoring and development
- events and safety
- drugs and alcohol
- law reform and regulation.

YAG's main objectives are the following:

1. Identify issues young people face in the Barkly and deliver/make recommendations to:
 - Northern Territory Government through the Minister for Young Territorians
 - Barkly Shire Council through the local board
 - youth service providers in the region.
2. Professional development and mentoring mechanism for young people needing experience in leadership roles.
3. Support for programs in the Barkly Region that are in the interest of young people.
4. Promote events and market information to young people in the region.
5. Act as a representative body and support young people in the Barkly Region.

2.3 Purpose of YAG

The purpose of this group is in direct response to the following issues in the Barkly region which were identified through youth consultations and feedback provided from local youth service providers through the Youth Service Providers committee:

- There is a lack of youth consultation in decisions that affect young people's lives.
- Limited resources are available for the promotion of events/opportunities and circulation of information amongst young people.
- Limited youth voice previously in the region.

The group creates a sense of youth empowerment in the community. To date, many decisions that affect people’s lives have not been made in consultation with young people. YAG has the ability to affect decisions including:

- decisions made at council meetings
- legislation regulating topics of interest to young people
- decisions made about the priorities in young people’s lives.

As YAG has connections with two tiers of government in Tennant Creek, the group can be used as a consultation point with young people for all government departments, particularly those that would benefit from youth participation.

YAG should take action around identified youth needs and issues in the community and not be restricted to its original purpose. The group will need to assess their ongoing focus areas and priorities at each meeting.

2.4 S.W.O.T analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established and experienced networks exist in the Barkly region. 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key people moving on – high turnover of motivated people willing to contribute.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have a voice. • Professional Development and mentoring for young people. • Can be used as a model for other Youth Groups in Councils. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of commitment from Barkly Shire Council.

2.5 Evaluation of YAG

Although the YAG has formally become part of the Barkly Shire Council, it is necessary that the Council see continuous value with the involvement and contribution of young people for the sustainability of the group. It is necessary for YAG to provide evidence as to the value of council consulting with youth and to show that when the Council has youth participation, there is a difference.

Identifying measurable outcomes could be difficult, so we have decided to measure the success of YAG's involvement with the Council based on the following occurring:

Council Information

Does the Council include YAG in promotion when necessary and do they recommend youth and other interested parties come to the group for advice or information?

Agenda/action list

There are several items relating to YAG that have been previously added to the agendas of board members' meetings in the community. These actions have been discussed in detail which can be noted in the minutes.

Success will also be measured by the value young people and youth service providers place in the YAG. Feedback and evaluations will be sought to consolidate the community's opinion as to the value of the YAG.

2.6 Geography/Population

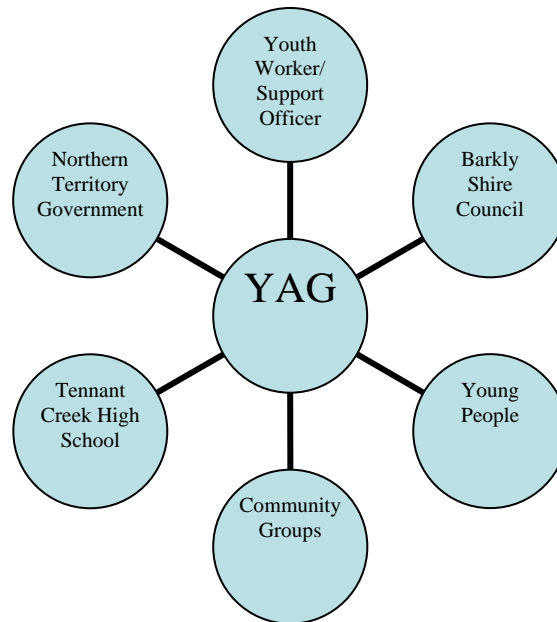
Tennant Creek is the fourth largest town in the Northern Territory and located 500km north of Alice Springs and 1000km south of Darwin. Tennant Creek has a population of 2920 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 Census. The 2006 census shows that 653 young people aged 12-25 resided in Tennant Creek, this is approximately 22% of the Tennant Creek population. For the whole of the Barkly Region (6529 people), 25% of the population is aged 12-25.

In widening the age range for young people, statistics show that 56% of the Tennant Creek population is under 35 years of age, while 62% of the total Barkly population is under 35 years of age.⁴

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au)

3. STRUCTURE

To assist with the focus of professional development and being responsible for a particular role, YAG has a structure that benefits anyone wishing to ‘do business’ or engage with young people.



3.1 Members

The group requires a structure in order to be well organised and effective. When positions were created, they were given to members who could draw on their personal strengths and abilities to benefit the group’s overall mission.

As the group becomes more established, each position grows and duties and responsibilities grow. We have found that this has been a valuable exercise for all our members, as experience for the future and youth empowerment is gained. Once a member becomes comfortable in their position, they will be asked to mentor another youth member for succession planning.

The reasoning behind the 15-30 age range is that young people are living at home longer and joining the workforce later. To exclude anyone above 25 does not represent the ideal youth professionalism we wish to use as mentors in the group.

We also do not want to be limited to a certain age. By restricting the age, then we miss the opportunities to involve professionals or experienced people with the capacity to become a mentor.

3.1.1 Positions

President/ Vice-President

The President and Vice-President are the face of the group. They attend all events, promoting the group on all levels and act as leaders for the rest of the group.

Communications

Duties include replying to emails, writing letters, and reporting to the group or external organisations about YAG activities.

Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians

Should a person win a position on the Youth Minister's Round Table, they will automatically be invited to join YAG as an active member.

IT Member

This person is in charge of ensuring all correspondence to the email address is passed onto the Communications member. Updating the Facebook site is also a responsibility of the IT Member.

Outreach (Community Members)

These are the members that are based in remote communities (including Ali Curung, Canteen Creek and Elliott). They liaise with the Communications member frequently and update the group of issues in their region.

Local Outreach Member

This person reports to the group about issues in local town camps.

Members of the group will have the opportunity to act in all positions to gain experience so that they can prepare themselves as future leaders.

3.2 Auspice Body

After many recommendations by the group to apply for various funding grants, the need arose to have a body that could support funding applications of the group. Fortunately, after working closely with the Barkly Shire Council (BSC), the decision to auspice the YAG was approved in March 2009. It was decided that all YAG funding applications would be directed and facilitated through Council's Sport and Recreation position.⁵

3.2.1 Contacts

The BSC has agreed for the YAG to use their postal address and any other resources available including fax and phone. The group has created its own email address (youthadviosrygroup@hotmail.com) that is managed by the administrative members of YAG.

3.3 Stakeholders

YAG is flexible and can connect with any services whose core business is helping young people, particularly if they do not have a presence in Tennant Creek, for example Commonwealth funded organisations like *headspace*. The benefits of youth groups gaining knowledge of services not provided in their region means that the group itself can be a good referral/knowledge point for other young people. YAG can also assist larger groups, not established in the region, to advertise through another means as well as mainstream sources (i.e. schools).

The group could potentially have members associated with several youth groups around the Barkly so that the people who work directly with the youth can also have a say at YAG meetings.

⁵ Tennant Creek Local Board Minutes – March 2009

Stakeholders include:

- Youth Service Providers
- Community and Youth Justice Organisations
- Anyinginyi Sport and Recreation
- Tennant Creek High School Student Representative Council (SRC) and School Captains (The school has recognised the benefits of YAG and have excused students who wish to attend meetings)
- CatholicCare Youth group (aged 8-13)
- Tennant Creek Youth Development Unit
- Department of Justice
- *headspace*
- Council of Elders and Respected Persons
- Northern Territory Police
- Australian Red Cross
- Barkly Region Safer Communities Committee
- Mental Health Association of Central Australia
- Neighbourhood Watch NT

As time passes, it would be in YAG's interest to develop more resources (i.e. finance, access to grants, marketing materials), such as those already available with other established organisations. In the future, YAG can promote larger organisations to assist both external service providers and youth to have better access to services not currently provided in the Barkly Region including *headspace*.

As YAG has no financial resources, we benefit from linking with other service providers that have a similar agenda in helping young people. For example, YAG members have the opportunity to travel to remote communities with the Australian Red Cross, as they are a key stakeholder and both YAG and the Australian Red Cross have a similar agenda.

YAG will also have participation at government level to assist in addressing local youth issues. In 2009, YAG was involved in the *Interagency Tasking Coordination Group* on the topic of petrol sniffing in Tennant Creek.

An example of a government department linking with YAG for the benefit of young people is the relationship YAG has with DBE. DBE has a focus on youth in business and employment. Furthermore, DOJ has had the opportunity of briefing YAG on issues regarding consumer awareness including buying a car, buying a phone and generally being aware of scams.

Representatives from the YAG attend many other key meetings in Tennant Creek including:

- Community Employment and Training Advisory Group
- Tennant Creek Interagency Tasking Coordination Group
- Youth Service Providers Group
- Regional Coordination Group (Local, Northern Territory and Australian Governments)
- Alcohol and Other Drug Services Central Australia
- Barkly Region Safer Communities Committee
- Barkly Regional Attendance Action Group

3.4 Sponsorship

With YAG's excellent community spirit, in a short time of being established, we have received sponsorship from local businesses, supporting our cause. Support such as this is greatly appreciated as it contributes to the success of the group without the group incurring unmanageable costs. Sponsorship includes:

1. Free advertising from our local paper – Tennant and District Times
2. 20 sponsored shirts supported by Outback Outfitters

3.5 Promotion

YAG actively distributes information that would benefit young people, especially in the following areas:

- healthier living – mind and body
- youth justice
- youth employment
- the arts
- youth in business (including Intellectual Property – protecting young people's ideas).

Fliers and posters have been developed and distributed around the Barkly Region. They are placed at relevant offices and provided for local stakeholders to hand out where they feel appropriate.

YAG also holds stands at local events to further promote activities. These stands are usually attended by members wearing YAG shirts to talk to potential future members or organisations.

3.6 Resources

YAG has obtained many resources that belong to the group that can be accessible to any young people wishing to use them.

- DVD's on youth parenting
- depression videos
- career path information
- DVD's/books on topics including violence, alcohol and drug abuse.

3.7 Meetings

Meetings are held every three weeks at Barkly House and are open to any person wishing to attend and raise issues. YAG has the support of the local newspaper which advertises the week before in the Tennant and District Times to ensure that all people in the Barkly have the chance to have input into the meetings.

4. PROJECTS/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

YAG has had the opportunity to be involved in many community events and projects. Members that attend events, do so voluntarily. YAG averages at least two representatives at any event with our best turn out including seven members. Estimated contribution of members is calculated at 50+ hours attending meetings and events.

YAG members attend most major events in the Barkly Region that concern youth. We like to make our presence known and it is a great opportunity for the group to build networks and discuss issues with youth people that otherwise wouldn't be raised.

4.1 Events

ANZAC Day

Raising awareness for young people to respect the purpose and meaning behind events such as ANZAC Day. YAG was represented by its members at the Tennant Creek ANZAC Day march and laid a wreath.

Child Protection Week

YAG was involved in the Child Protection week by assisting with promotion and distribution of materials to contribute to the day's success.

Mental Health Week

A representative from the Mental Health Association for Central Australia attended a YAG meeting to promote mental health week. Two YAG members also attended a formal dinner to open the week.

Desert Harmony Festival

YAG was involved in the Desert Harmony Festival which in 2009 aimed to promote youth and the Arts.

4.2 Programs/Project involvement

Barkly Region Attendance Action Group

This group came together with the purpose of creating action-based strategies in getting kids back to school. YAG representatives attend meetings and assist with strategies, including, changing the culture of acceptance to not attend school.

Tennant Creek Skate Park

Tennant Creek has had a push for many years to build an appropriate skate park in town. YAG has now revived the idea of a skate park and works closely with the Tennant Creek Skate Park committee to provide much needed assistance with things such as gathering support and youth opinions.

Community Courts

Recently, the Department of Justice has had representatives come and speak to young people about the implementation of Community Courts in Tennant Creek. YAG keeps updated through the Indigenous Court Liaison Officer attending meetings.

Barkly Regional Arts Dance Funding

It was noted at one meeting (raised by young people) that there was a lot of attention paid to sports, and not enough to the Arts. Young people identified their love for dancing and made some recommendations to local arts providers. There was funding available for this particular industry and YAG is working with Barkly Regional Arts to implement a more permanent arts service for young people in the Barkly Region.

Barkly Regional Safer Communities Committee (BRSCC)

BRSCC is designed to be a body that is community driven to coordinate services and funding. It acts as a head support group that covers the majority of industries/sectors in Tennant Creek. One arm of BRSCC is the Youth Service Providers (formally known as the Youth Reference Group). YAG feeds information through the larger group on issues where young people should be consulted.

Mandatory Reporting Legislation amendments

YAG dedicated a meeting to the understanding and interpretation of the new Mandatory Reporting Legislation and all young people were invited to attend. From there, we were able to understand the effects of the new laws and answer questions that any of the young people had.

Youth Allowance Information Session

YAG attended a Youth Allowance Information Session to understand the effects of the new changes. Recommendations were passed on to the Federal Government.

Petrol Sniffing

There has been an outbreak of petrol sniffing and volatile substance abuse in Tennant Creek and the Barkly Region. YAG has attended meetings to educate young people on the effects of petrol sniffing and what to do when you catch someone in the act.

4.3 Community Consultation

YAG held a community consultation to raise awareness of the existence of the group and to reach out to the community to find out more about what young people wanted, their opinions and how best to achieve solutions. 23 people attended this initial consultation.

Questions relating to the overall operation of YAG were more directed towards future recommendations. The group cannot really discuss improvements while still in its infancy (establishment stage).

Questions YAG members asked participants:

1. Are you aware of YAG?
2. Do you believe that young people should be consulted more in decisions that affect our lives?
3. Do you believe that youth opinion and participation is valued?
4. What else do you think the Barkly Region could do to include or promote the involvement of youth and encourage youth opinions?

Approximately 80% of people surveyed stated that they do not believe youth are consulted enough or their opinion is valued. However, 90% of the group agreed that they did not know how to approach government or organisations for consultation.⁶

Other responses collected in these consultations will direct how YAG will function and what paths to follow in the future.

⁶ Barkly Youth Advisory Group – Consultation results 2009

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the YAG has been a positive contribution to our community and especially to the young people of the region. As YAG members continue to mark their space, we can hopefully see local knowledge and empowerment of young people contribute to programs for the next generation.

Becoming a focal point for all youth engagement, YAG should be a valued contribution to any local or external program/project in the region.

The group will continue to set goals that could be difficult to measure; in particular, the relationship with the Barkly Shire Council (BSC) as YAG's major stakeholder. YAG will need to develop a recognised place and purpose in the community and have a valuable contribution to the BSC.

Continuous review of how councillors rate YAG participation needs to be managed and an understanding conveyed that if YAG dissolved, it would make a negative impact on the community.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The 2010 Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians continue with this project next year and grow it to include a school-based apprenticeship focus i.e. designed to help in building business and employment networks in regional areas and communities.
2. Further research to be conducted into the YAG framework. Talk to other councils and see what support they provide for their youth groups.
3. Tennant Creek Local Government continues to support YAG's progress with attention to young people, activities and issues through attending YAG meetings quarterly.
4. The group becomes established and sustainable even after member departure. Without long term sustainability, the turnover could affect the training, skills available and networks established by previous members.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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March 2009

Youth Advisory Group

16 March 2009 Survey results

Barkly House, Tennant Creek

Northern Territory map⁷



⁷ About Australia.com.au - <http://www.about-australia.com/maps/northern-territory/>