

HOLDING THE SPACE:

Collaboration with young people in Palmerston

October 2018 - January 2019

Palmerston Youth Local Action Group



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A Node Community
Co-design Project



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Pipe-cleaner design made by
young person during a
Youth Representative Group
meeting

About the Project...



In September 2018, the Palmerston Youth Local Action Group (LAG) identified a need to:

Hear More About Young People's Thoughts on living in, and improving, Palmerston and to

Partner with Young People and Explore ways to participate in Local Action Group processes

This sparked a four-month project that involved engaging with young people and asking questions about moving Palmerston forward. The project was collaborative and took some interesting twists and turns. It was a process that put young people in the driver's seat and gave rise to some great learnings. The four main themes to the learnings were:

- Young people in Palmerston have complex understandings of social issues, can identifying areas for action, and **lead community change**
- Trusted adult mentors and small action groups create **safe spaces** for young people, from diverse backgrounds, to step into.
- By inviting young people to connect in **diverse ways**, we get to engage with young people with broad experiences and backgrounds
- Action-making can be risky. It is important to have the right **youth work skills** within the community to mentor young people while they make their projects and ideas a reality

What we did...

We had a lot of data from an earlier consultation (see appendix) where we asked 120 young people about their priorities for improving Palmerston. We wanted young people to help us understand this data a little more deeply and help us pull out some priority actions that could go into the Youth Action Plan being developed by the Local Action Group.

We invited young people to come together for a major youth forum to help us with this task. This forum was held at the local Recreation Centre and brought young people together to have their say about youth issues in Palmerston. Local Action Group members and youth mentors came along to support the process. The consultant visited community groups that had engaged during previous consultations and discussed the project with mentors and youth workers. The forum attracted 23 young people and a substantial amount of work was done by young people. They identified key directives for change for Palmerston and developed priorities and strategies on how this might be rolled out. The forum data was produced into a poster (see attached) and distributed around the community and also presented to the LAG. A number of young people who

That was actually quite fun!

They wanted to help people be more understanding towards young people

attended the forum said they would like to continue to be involved in the process. At the end of the forum, some young people commented, “that was actually quite fun!”. It was at this forum that a group of young people identified the need to “educate adults about what some young people have to go through”. They wanted to help people be more understanding towards young people and help them understand ways to help young people achieve. This became the basis for a project worked on by the youth representative group.



A youth representative group (*The Palmerston Youth Rep Group*) was also established with young people who had said they wanted to help out in this way. This group met fortnightly and then weekly as their project ideas began to take shape. Membership was fluid for the whole consultation period with some young people coming along for one or two sessions and not returning. It wasn't always the right fit for everyone.

This group was given the original task of broadening the youth representative group membership however the group trialled a number of methods to broaden their membership with varying success. The aims of this group changed over time to have more task-focused goals. This fits with literature on youth participation with young people from diverse backgrounds where task-focused groups tend to be preferred by young people.

In response to their own concerns about people having a negative view of all young people, this group implemented a project aimed at sharing understandings of trauma and barriers experienced by some young people in Palmerston. A walk-in, guided display designed and curated by young people in an empty shopfront was created in the local shopping centre. It was well attended by passers-by and developed quite a profile in the community. Aside from community members, Police, state and local government representatives, a

number of non-government organisations and a Channel 9 news crew came along and took a tour of the installation. It is important to note that the Palmerston Shopping Centre Manager was very keen to partner with this group. Their support for the project gave the group a real boost and the resources to bring their idea to life. A news story on the project aired several days later. This group has subsequently been invited by NGO's working in this sector to provide feedback on literature aimed at young people in Palmerston. This week they are making a film for International Women's Day. Their work in the community continues.

A collaboration with a school holiday activity; a pool party, was also trialled during the consultation period. This activity occurred when there was a smaller attendance at the pool party event and little data was collected. Some recommendations around future outreach activities were recorded. The need for better signage and some bean bags for young people to sit on and talk about their ideas were identified.

Within the consultation, there was also a strong emphasis on understanding community knowledges about what participation models are useful. Strong relationships were made with Larrakia Nation, Student Voice - Positive Choice, City of Palmerston, NGO's and Territory Families. This was influential in developing recommendations.



The Poster: Results from the forum...

At a recent forum held in Palmerston 23 young people came together to talk about their priorities for change in Palmerston

They looked at the results of an earlier consultation in which 150 young people brainstormed their ideas for improving Palmerston and then added their own ideas and thoughts.



The areas they chose as **most urgent** were:

1. To work towards a safer community

- Educating adults about what some young people have to go through
- More care and less judgement towards young people
- Safe places and services for young people to go to, to get help
- Create positive pathways for all young people

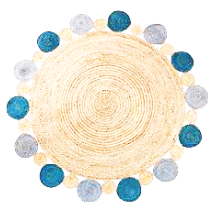


2. To create opportunities to learn life skills

Other areas that had young peoples' attention were:

3. Making a range of **events and activities**

available to Palmerston youth that are:
fun, *engaging* and enjoyable!



4. **Families** coming together in Palmerston

- Regular dinners
- Safe spaces for families to enjoy and be active



5. A place to go to have fun for **younger age groups** (9 – 12yo)

What's next?
Want to get involved?
Want to know more?

Email Jacqui Dysart (project worker):
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What made a difference...

The type of offer we put to young people

Good food, the right venue, vouchers and safety were really important in supporting diverse participation. It is important to acknowledge barriers faced by some group members including food security and limited transport. The capacity for the program to 'give' back' made some activities more attractive than others to young people.

Young people were also more likely to engage if a mentor supported them to attend. Mentors actively explained the importance of the event, offered transport and came along with young people until they were settled. It is interesting to note that safety and violence within the youth community was a big concern identified by young people in the July consultation (see appendix). The choice to engage when adult mentors were involved may be a response to this.

These observations also sit well with theory on **relationship-based practice** and connect well with relationship-based teaching innovations. These approaches are trauma-informed and show some promise in helping communities where there is a history of trauma. They have been used extensively in SA where youth organisations are engaging in training and reflective practice sessions based on this approach. Early findings from a Melbourne University research project on social and emotional wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in contact with the justice system in Darwin also point to the importance of relationship and mentoring in assisting young people to stay on positive pathways.

It is important to note that this project was preceded by 3 months of consultation (see short report from this project in appendix) in Palmerston. Key relationships had already been made within the

Relationships were the key to project outcomes

community and enabled the consultant to 'hit the ground running' and test out previous recommendations. This way of working is highly recommended for future projects. Our experience was that young people and organisations warmed up to the work across time and, as trust grew, so did the outcomes.

Support and encouragement from a trusted adult

The membership of the Youth Rep Group was strongly supported by a local parent and LAG member, Serena Dalton. Membership fluctuated and, at times, it was only her family members that participated. This commitment allowed the project to continue while and other young people came in and out of the process when they were able or interested. This 'entry rich' way of working is in line with recommendations in the literature around young people being able to step in and out of consultation mechanisms.

Serena has a way of making young people feel welcome. People walked into the Youth Rep Group meetings and felt instantly accepted

As she was a parent, Serena's involvement meant that transport and scheduling issues were also reduced. Serena spent time encouraging and explaining to group members the importance of their participation. This is an important observation in informing future program development. The observations indicate that support and encouragement from a trusted adult are an important key to success in a youth participation in

Serena's involvement underpinned the project. Her support and understanding of the community meant the Youth Rep Group was well connected and well-informed

Palmerston. Serena's involvement underpinned the project. Her support and understanding of the community meant the Youth Rep Group was well connected and well-informed. She has a way of making young people feel welcome. People walked into the Youth Rep Group meetings and felt instantly accepted.

Community connections

In our earlier consultations (July 2018), young people talked about a feeling of connectedness in the Palmerston community. One young person stated "It's more like family than in other places. It's not like that when I go in to Cas". As the consultation progressed, this connectedness continued to be a strength. Businesses that were connected to the program through sales of materials and vouchers became interested in the program. They were more likely to partner with the group in later activities. This was seen in the shopping centre project where the local shopping centre supported young people to hold an information stall in one of their empty shops.

"It's more like family than other places. It's not like that when I go in to Cas"

Non-government organisations who had engaged with the consultation previously also made contributions to activities. The YMCA, for example, provided a free venue for meetings and Larrakia Nation donated canvas for the 'changing the narrative' project. The Local council was also very supportive in providing meeting spaces without charge.

Managing the interface between young people and others in the community

During this consultation, young people did carry out work into public spaces. We did encounter negative attitudes towards young people and fear about theft and violence. In one instance, for example, young people were not able to use a gift voucher (which had been provided to cover lunch) because a shop owner wouldn't let young people into their shop without a supervising guardian. A mentor then supported that young person to make his purchase however it demonstrates some of the barriers young people are facing in Palmerston. Others adults used judgmental language when talking about young people in the shopping centre display. These moments were carefully managed by the young people and the adults supporting them. We had spent a good amount of time planning the shopping centre project so that it would feel safe for community members and anticipated this response. This work requires active advice from youth mentors and active learning from young people. It could be considered an action point of community change and therefore needs skilled support and planning. This work can be tricky and requires a strong network of people around young people and their mentors.

Entry-rich processes

Young people joined events and activities at different times and in different ways. Some young people helped out for forums and activities, while others met for planning sessions every week for two months. Some group members faced barriers to participation, including transport, family violence, being banned from venues, and work commitments. A non-judgmental, join-in-anytime culture developed. The group met in an open space in one corner of the YMCA drop-in program. The group became adept at asking young people who dropped in to the meetings for social reasons (or to share our food), about their opinions. People came to expect that they would be included in the process in some way if they came into the youth rep space. As a

Young people created their own diverse participation pathways within the consultation process

result of this attitude in the group, young people, who had barriers to participation, were able to drop-in and drop out and create their own participation pathways within the consultation process.

The youth rep group had a strong focus on questions. Time was taken to draft the right question and try out what it was like to ask other young people. The questions, then, could be tailored to different audiences so that different groups could participate in the community conversation. By having 'main questions' and flexible approaches, it meant that diverse groups could participate. This mixed-method approach was an effective way of working with diverse groups and holds promise for future consultation work in Palmerston.

The skills within the youthwork team

The way we worked with young people in the Youth Rep group was relationship-based. We took time to get a sense of who we all were; talking about favourite foods, sports and things that are important to us. Ideas and projects were not pushed through; they were allowed to grow and shift until the right ideas became action.

Ideas and projects were not pushed through; they were allowed to grow and shift until the right ideas became action

Young people were in the driver's seat most of the time but there were other times when the adults in the room actively offered perspectives and guidance. There was enough trust between the people in the room to allow this process to happen. Together, the group designed innovative and trauma-informed approaches to complex problems.



Recommendations...

The recommendations in this report bring together best practice values and community needs, as experienced by the consultant across the three-month consultation period. They have been noted based on their value to the Local Action Group youth participation program. They are also built on the observation that young people in Palmerston are ready and willing to speak up in change-making conversations and have skills in making action happen. The Palmerston community and its connectedness offers a good environment to grow youth innovations. The beginnings of great projects are there and waiting to happen. We just need to provide the right resources and partnerships to help them carry out their work. The special thing about this work is its potential to invite young people along on positive pathways. By holding the space for collaboration with young people, we demonstrate our belief in their ability to make the world a better place. This is a powerful act in itself.

Promote youth participation work in the community. Develop trust and diverse networks

Use wider community events like markets or pool parties to engage with the community

Provide lots of different opportunities for young people, with diverse life experiences, to participate in LAG processes

Use entry-rich approaches, allowing young people to create their own pathway through participation processes

Create large scale, networking and consultation events to hear young people's ideas

Invite young people to form project groups and support these groups with resources (including catering, venue and mentor support)

Invite organisations who are looking to partner with young people on projects to come along to forums and make connections

Acknowledge the value of young people's work by including reciprocity in project budgets and funding programs

Value young people's voices, and ideas by publishing the results of forums in youth friendly formats and distributing them broadly

Tailor youth participation events to foster strong relationships with youth mentors as well as young people

Place value on the role of youth mentors, youth workers, coaches etc in Palmerston

Work in a culturally appropriate, trauma-informed way

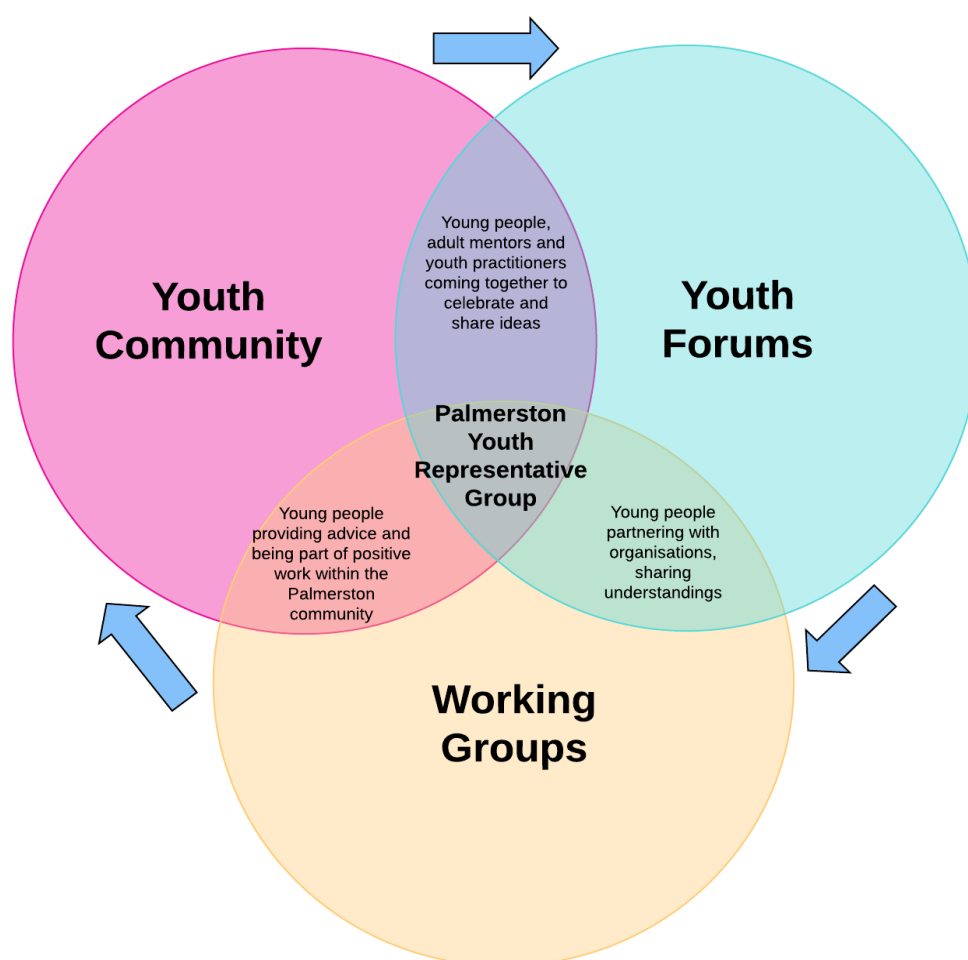
Establish a database and maintain an active network so that the LAG, local businesses, organisations and young people can collaborate on actions at any time

Understand the need to support young people at the interface between them and the broader community

What could the space for collaboration with young people look like?

The Proposed Model:

The following model is presented as a possible approach for the LAG. It is based on the above recommendations and is a community wide process. This approach has been suggested as both a mechanism for facilitating youth participation with the LAG but also for facilitating the inclusion of young people in the design and implementation of community solutions across Palmerston. It is explained in further detail below:



Youth Community

This circle refers to all young people in Palmerston. It also includes a diverse range of groups, clubs, organisations and service providers across the community that interact with young people. In this approach, a network of youth providers and mentors is developed in order to share skills, information, resources and challenges.

This group is then able to work with young people to help them participate in youth forums and activities.

Experience from the consultation tells us that if the workers on the ground believe in a process, there is a much greater rate of participation from young people. It is argued that mentors, coaches and youth workers are one of the strongest resources for community change for young people in Palmerston. Because they are trusted adults, they have significant influence on how young people view themselves. By believing that young people are capable of leading innovation and change, and supporting them to participate, they are collectively strengthening a positive youth culture in Palmerston.

Youth Forums

Youth forums are shown to be a good way to ask young people about their ideas. They are great ways for young people to network and hear other young people's ideas as well. There is also opportunity to bring youth workers/coaches and mentors together at these events. We found that the presence of trusted mentors significantly changed the way young people participated, for the better! It might also be a nice opportunity to offer workers networking and PD opportunities later in the day.

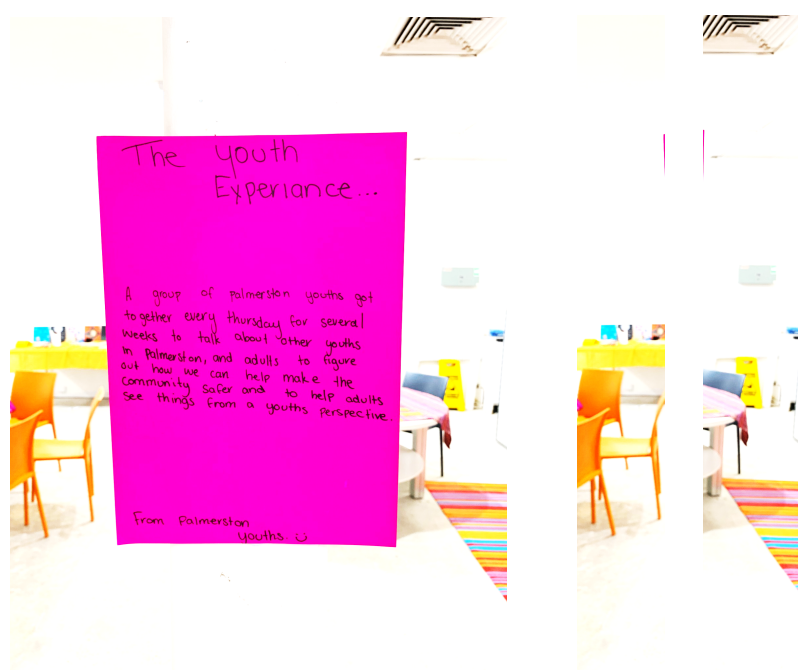
The youth forums are a good way for LAG to get robust feedback on priorities and action plans. LAG members can also let young people know about the things they are doing to strengthen the positive youth culture in the community. We can also invite community groups to pitch 'project offers' to young people; asking them to join their own consultative/working groups and providing resources to make that happen.

Working Groups

These working groups can grow out of the youth forums (but can be joined at any time). Young people can put their names down and invite their mentors to join them to work on projects that they are interested in. They can also ask for support from LAG and other groups in the community. Together, they can plan how and when to meet and what resources they need (FOOD!).

These groups may need admin support and access to forms like: Permission to use photograph, Permission to attend youth group meeting etc. It is recommended that lead organisations become a central source of this support and stay in contact with groups to anticipate need. A monthly meeting with working group mentors would be a great way to do this while also offering opportunity for reflective practice and sharing of approaches to challenges.

Working groups effectively become part of the broader youth community (back in the pink circle) and hopefully are excited to continue the cycle and come along to the next forum and share their developing skills in community action.



Appendix

Earlier Work in the community: *Palmerston Youth Project*

July – September 2018

A Node community co-design project

The Palmerston Youth Project was a three-month conversation with young people in Palmerston. This was established by the Palmerston Youth Local Action Group who were focused on looking for ways to support young people in the Palmerston Area.

Node consultancy developed relationships with key organisations to ensure meetings with young people were carried out in ways that felt safe and culturally appropriate. Young people were consulted through face-to-face interviews and a series of small forums. Over 150 young people in Palmerston were consulted on three questions:

- 1) What do you like about Palmerston?
- 2) What would you improve? And
- 3) How would you like to be involved in the Local Action Group?

Consultation took place in a variety of youth-specific venues. A range of groups participated including young people

attending the YMCA and Mulligas and Cudjeries school holiday programs. Schools

and youth services were consulted including Palmerston re-engagement centre, Anglicare youth housing programs and a young mother's group. Student Voice, Positive Choice were also consulted and participating in a brainstorming activity as part of the project.

The project focused on the voices of young people between 12 and 19 years.

Young people identified their own clubs, schools and services as the most useful ways of getting in touch

The consultant attended the first meeting of the Palmerston Local Action Group (LAG) to report on the information collected. Suggested structures for youth participation in this group were briefly discussed however the Regional Youth Programs Coordinator was provided with

more in-depth written recommendations regarding structures.

Across the consultation period, community groups reported that information collected was useful to their services and programs for young people in Palmerston. The results were compiled in a simple collective document that compiled all of the responses into categories. There was real excitement when the stakeholders who participated in the consultation were given a copy of the results (see attached).

100% of young people who participated in the consultation said they would be interested in helping to talk more with LAG representatives and help run activities and projects in Palmerston. They identified their own clubs, schools and services as the most useful ways of getting in touch as well as social media, posters in the community and visitors to their clubs and schools.

Based on young peoples' comments and guidance from the literature review and community feedback, a number of recommendations have been made:

- 1) The development of a Palmerston Network for Young People that supports information sharing, youth participation values and supports the inclusion of young people in LAG meetings.
- 2) The formation of a youth representative group where young people can develop their own networks and skills and step in and out of LAG processes in a supported way.
- 3) That the LAG considers formalising processes to ensure meaningful youth representation in decision-making.
- 4) The development of a social media platform that young people can use to access information on LAG activities and upcoming events

100% of young people who participated in the consultation said they would be interested in working with LAG in some way

Not bad suburbs –

All suburbs safe and strong

Jobs that pay enough

A place people want to come to

A better reputation. Clean public spaces.

Jobs

Make Palmerston look good

Less Crime, Less violence

Strong businesses

A safe home for everyone

Hopes for the Palmerston

Somewhere with safe, caring adults.

“Some younger kids are getting into trouble.”

Run activities for this age group. We could help.

Education around

drinking

Somewhere safe for them to go after hours

Somewhere to get a feed.

Things to do

Sports. Art and Music, cooking classes, **life skills** for people who don't get taught.

Free events. BBQs. Events to take family along to. Acting and dance classes. Ping

pong. Fashion Parade. Cheap Gym

membership. Workshops on how to

save/make money. **Free Movies**, Laser-tag.

Music festivals. **Gaming events.**

Excursions. Couches and **WIFI**. **Safe places**

to relax. Teenage space. **Basketball.** It is

hard to find out what is happening.

Better advertising. Facebook. Don't

assume parents always tell kids. Free entry

to pool. Boxing. Parks for teenagers

Motivation. Stay in school.

Choose the right crowd

A future with enough money.

Be good parents. **A good paying job.**

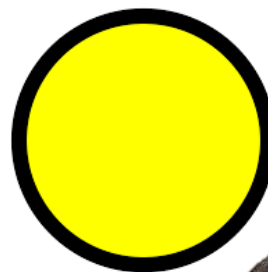
Saving money

Personal Goals



Diversity, Acceptance, Care, Safety, Compassion

Values



Safety



Safety for women
Education about effects of drinking and how to keep safe
Safety at the bus interchange
Fights between kids from different schools
Problems with kids being sold harder drugs
Somewhere safe to be outside of home
Adults we can trust and talk to
Adults who like young people
Daily violence in youth community
More housing options away from violence
Clean facilities

Families

Dad's events
Free family events
Toys in the Library
Safe spaces for women and children
Parenting workshops
Strong families
Strong boundaries
Events you can take your Grandma to

Education

If you drop out, it is hard to get back in
Difference in education between schools
We want teachers to care about us
More job opportunities and VET programs
Get to know students' backgrounds
How to manage money

Thoughts from Young People: Improving Palmerston July -August 2018



Something for younger age group (9 – 12 yrs)



Young People involved in decision-making

We want to be involved. **We want to help run things in Palmerston. Come to our groups and talk to us.**

We have ideas, just ask us.

Connect with us on social media

Contact us through schools and services

Posters in youth friendly spaces

Who did we ask?

We asked Young People from different activities around Palmerston. These included the Young Mullligas and Cudgeries program, Strong Mums Group, Student Voice - Positive Choice, Anglicare Youth Programs, Palmerston Re-engagement Centre, YMCA school holiday program, and Palmerston and Regional Basketball Association.

Thank you to all those who contributed.



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