

WARRINGAH COUNCIL'S YOUTH STRATEGY

2013-2023



Table of contents

Introduction

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Why a Youth Strategy? | 1 |
| Guiding Principles | 4 |
| What did young people tell us? | 5 |
| What will we do? | 6 |

Strategic Directions

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Connection and belonging | 9 |
| Life skills and career choices | 12 |
| Mental health and emotional wellbeing | 15 |
| Recreation and physical wellbeing | 18 |
| Engagement and participation | 21 |

Implementation

| | |
|--|----|
| Integration with business planning | 23 |
| Measuring progress | 24 |
| Summary of strategic directions and lead roles | 25 |

References

Supporting material (separate document)

Methodology
Demographic profile of young people in Warringah
Key findings from Youth SpeakUp survey 2012
Overview of Council's role in addressing the focus areas

Why a Youth Strategy?

They [youth] are the miners' canaries of our society, acutely vulnerable to the peculiar hazards of our times. The health and wellbeing of young people is a critical measure of a society for two reasons: in moral terms, how well a society cares for its weak and vulnerable is a measure of how civilised it is; in more pragmatic terms, a society that fails to cherish its youth, fails. It's as simple as that.
(Eckersley 2004: 148)

Background

Adolescence and early adulthood is a time of significant change and development. In addition to the general trials of growing up, the current generation of young people face unique challenges related to an uncertain and changing world: globalisation and its impact on local labour and financial markets; climate change and loss of hope; the impacts of social media on relationships; changing family and relationship structures; and delayed transitions to independent living.¹

More than 1,000 young people (aged 12 to 24) have contributed to this Strategy. They tell us that they are generally happy with their lives on a whole, yet feel pressured and fear not living up to their own expectations, not 'keeping up' with school work. The majority say that they experience feelings of anxiety, stress and depression on a regular basis.

Our findings correspond with national research which shows that young people today are experiencing the highest levels of stress, anxiety and depression ever reported by an adolescent population, yet maintain that they are overall

'happy with their lives'. While traditional measures of health (e.g. mortality rates) show significant improvements and positive trends, recent research suggests that young people's health may in fact be declining. *"Mortality rates understate the importance of non-fatal, chronic ill-health [...] Mental illness and obesity-related health problems and risks have increased. The trends are not confined to the disadvantaged. The causes stem from fundamental social and cultural changes of the past several decades."*²

This challenges us to think about health and wellbeing broadly and in new ways. The traditional approach to health policy says that interventions should target minority groups at risk. However in light of current trends, particularly regarding mental health and impacts of stress and pressure on *all* young people irrespective of socio-economic standing³, we also need broader efforts to improve the wellbeing of the youth population at large.⁴



¹ Eckersley, R. (2004); and Robinson, L. & Lamb, S., The Foundation for Young Australians (2012).

² Eckersley, R. (2011): p627

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Cat. 4840.0.55.001*. (July 2012 update)

⁴ Eckersley, R. (2011); Robinson, L. & Lamb, S., (2012); and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2011); Mission Australia (2011)

Purpose

The Youth Strategy is a long-term guiding document for Council. The purpose is to set overarching strategic directions for how Council approaches health and wellbeing for young people that are grounded in young people's own views as well as social research. The Strategy provides a 'compass direction' in contrast to plotting a specific route on a map. This adaptive approach allows flexibility and room for new knowledge to be continuously considered over the expected eight to ten year lifespan of the Strategy.



The Strategy will serve the dual function of forming the basis for Council's annual community services planning as well as being the basis for ongoing conversations and collaboration with young people, the community at large, and with other stakeholders.

Motivation

The health and wellbeing of young people not only affects their immediate quality of life and productivity but also shapes the future health of the whole population and, in a broader social sense, the health of society. Tackling health and wellbeing issues when they occur in adolescence is socially and economically more effective than dealing with enduring problems in adulthood. The benefits flow through to the entire population in terms of stronger families and safer and more connected communities.⁵

In particular, our motivation to develop this Strategy stems from a number of considerations:

- **Duty of care** – a need and responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of all our young people. We must work collaboratively to address the trends in declining mental health that is impacting on all young people irrespective of socio-economic standing
- **Community interest in youth** - our community surveys shows that the Warringah community want to see Council do more about providing for young people
- **Young people want to be involved** in decisions that affect them – they are a source of energy, creativity and passion and are able to contribute to our planning and service provision in innovative ways
- **Long term demographic challenges** – our population is ageing and we need a strategic approach to ensure that we retain young people in Warringah as part of a diverse community

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2011): p1

- **Economic and social interest** – young people who are disengaged or struggle with difficult life and family circumstances must be supported and given opportunities to learn and be included in the community in a positive sense. We need to ensure that risks to their own health as well as to the community at large (i.e. through alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and vandalism) are minimised.
- **Holistic approach** – “Youth” is not just Youth Services business. Much of what we do as a council has a direct impact on youth and we need to coordinate our efforts internally.
- **Regional approach** – young people will seek services and programs where they are accessible to them. We need a regional approach to make best use of our combined resources.

The need for an integrated approach is well documented in key Council plans and strategies, namely the Strategic Community Plan, the Social Plan and the Recreation Strategy.⁶

Understanding health and wellbeing

This Strategy is based on a broad understanding of health and wellbeing in line with the World Health Organisation definition (see below) in going beyond physical or mental disease to include non-clinical perspectives and a wide variety of positive dimensions which are not normally directly considered as health issues (such as education, employment, public places, and natural beauty). All of these factors, and many more, influence our state of mind and general wellbeing and can broadly be viewed as pre-emptive health care.

In this light, it is not just the responsibility of health care agencies, service providers and government health departments to look after people’s wellbeing. It involves all sectors of society. Local Government can play a pivotal role creating a stronger community and bringing together agencies and programs that play a key role in supporting the health of the community.

Defining health and wellbeing

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines **health** as a “*state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*”.¹ In 2008 the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health established that health is influenced by the social and economic conditions of daily life as well as by biological conditions. **Mental health** is defined by the WHO as a “*state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community*”.

⁶ Warringah Council’s Strategic Community Plan (2011): p199; Social Plan (2010): p81; and Recreation Strategy (2009): p35.

Guiding Principles

The principles below will guide our approach and will help define the actions we need to take. These are the filters through which priorities and strategic directions have been identified and underpin all our policies, programs and services for young people.

Engagement and involvement

We will work closely with young people to make Warringah a better place. Where possible, we will encourage and support young people in taking on leadership and/or facilitation roles on key community projects or events.

Access and Equity

We will provide services and facilities that cater for all young people, while providing additional support to those groups that may require more specialised programs and support. We will ensure that programs and services are physically, technically and financially accessible and culturally safe, recognising the diversity of culture and needs.

Value for money

We will assess potential projects and initiatives on the basis of the relative and long-term expected costs and benefits (financial and non-financial) taking into account that the direct impacts of preventative programs can be difficult to measure.

Span of control

We will focus our efforts on those areas where we can make a difference, and join forces with other stakeholders to lobby State Government for improvements in areas where we have limited control. We will provide ancillary services and facilities where possible, particularly in regard to making it easier to get around.

Working with families

We will facilitate initiatives that seek to increase the capacity of families to support young people.

Regional approach

Local Government boundaries are largely irrelevant to a young person. We will make sure that we close gaps, reduce duplication and where appropriate take advantage of economies of scale in working with our regional partners and other service providers.

Place planning

We will build strategic relationships with property owners and residents, local businesses, community groups and agencies so that our management of places and the delivery of services and events to local communities reflect young people's needs and aspirations.

Adaptability

We will make sure that our programs and services are evaluated on a regular basis so that they may be adapted to the changing needs of young people, the organisation and the emergence of new technology.

Integration and holistic planning

We will ensure that this Strategy is integrated with other key strategies and planning instruments, namely the Community Strategic Plan, Social Plan, Recreation Strategy, Economic Development Plan and the Sustainable Transport Strategy (in drafting).

What did young people tell us?

The openness and complexity of life today can make finding meaning and the qualities that contribute to it—autonomy, competence, purpose, direction, balance, identity and belonging—extremely hard, especially for young people, for whom these are the destinations of the developmental journeys they are undertaking.

(Eckersley 2004: 4)

Key findings from our consultation

More than 1,000 young people (aged 12 to 24) completed our detailed online survey - Youth SpeakUp 2012. The survey provides a rich source of knowledge on what it's like to be young in Warringah and is the first of its kind and on this scale to be carried out on a local government level. We have also talked to young people and key interest groups face to face as well as facilitated a large Youth Forum where more than 60 young people participated. To understand how young people's views fit with parent's perspectives we conducted a separate online survey for parents which was completed by approximately 250 people.

The vast majority (82%) of the young people we surveyed say that they are "happy with their life as a whole" and value the life-style of the northern beaches. However most (66%) also say that they feel anxious, stressed and depressed on a regular

basis. The proportion of people experiencing anxiety, stress and depression on a regular basis jumps from the tweens (12 – 14 year olds) to the teenagers (15 – 17 years) by 17%. A total of 71% of all teenagers say that they experience these mental health problems on a regular basis. For young adults (18 – 20 year olds) the proportion is an alarming 76%.

In terms of physical health and fitness young people in Warringah appear to be faring well with the vast majority (98%) rating their general health to be in good shape. However many, and young women in particular, struggle with body image issues.

Our survey shows that young people think deeply about their future and are worried about their career prospects, failing exams, and not living up to their own expectations. They rank bullying as the top health and wellbeing issue facing Warringah's young. Many young people commented that they experience a sense of 'disconnect' from their peers and community. This is perhaps surprising, given that this is the first generation to grow up in a 'digital age' and are supposedly more connected than ever through mobile phones, the internet, cable television, and social media. Young people are intimately connected to and through electronic devices, but is it at the cost of more real social interactions? Certainly we need to be mindful of creating 'real' connected communities.



What will we do?

Adults forget what it is like to be young, just as we also eventually will.

[...] it is imperative that initiatives such as these surveys and WYAC [Warringah Youth Advisory Committee] continue so that an accurate depiction of what the youth in Warringah needs/desires can be established and then acted upon.

(17 year old, Youth SpeakUp)

Council's role

Council is in a good position to play a key role in shaping a community that is supportive of young people. We can work to create vibrant, welcoming places where young people can simply 'hang out'; provide safe and accessible youth events and programs; facilitate programs that support the mental health and wellbeing of young people; and offer recreational and sporting options that cater for both physical and social needs. We can also advocate on behalf of youth on issues that fall beyond our direct sphere of influence, namely regarding transport, education and affordable housing opportunities. These aspects are all proven to have a direct and profound impact on the wellbeing of young people.

Youth services

We currently **(2013)** provide a broad range of services specifically for young people including:

- YOYO's Youth Centre – regular events such as band nights, acoustic nights
- The annual Northern Composure Band Competition
- Facilitation and liaison with Warringah Youth Advisory Committee (WYAC)
- Discobility (Dance parties for young people with special needs)
- Speakers Nights and Triple P Program - targeting parents of teenagers
- Annual 24/7 Youth Film Festival (In partnership with SHROC Councils)
- Annual Youth Forums
- Warringah / Brewarrina Sister City Youth Exchange Program
- Youth Week – Youth Fest
- Recreation and sporting programs for youth
- General community services and facilities (i.e. libraries, sports fields, swimming pools, walking and biking trails and tracks, life guards and patrolled beaches)

Other youth services

Queenscliff Health Centre, operated by the NSW Area Health Service, is the main counselling and mental health service available to young people on the Northern Beaches outside of the school system. However it is commonly understood to be under-resourced and hence focussed on providing support to those people who are deemed most at risk. According to the parents and youth surveys, school counselling services (where they exist at all) suffer from the same resource limitations.

There is only very limited (if any) mental health or counselling services available to the general population of young people who experience less severe and/or early onset mental health issues. Most parents who have sought help commented that Queenscliff essentially only performed an assessment and/or referral service role in these 'early' or 'mild' cases. The only option for treatment was often private therapists which many could ill afford.⁷

There are a number of other services and facilities that cater for the particular needs and requirements of young people. Some of the key services that are available to all youth include Manly Drug Education & Counselling Centre, The Burdekin Association (youth accommodation and early intervention services) and Manly Sexual Health Service. The Northern Beaches Education and Employment Network (NBEEN) provide a facilitation role where they seek to educate, advocate and bring together young people and potential employers and/or education providers. Finally, there are specific outreach and education services available to young people deemed to be at risk, such as the Beach School and various mentoring programs.⁸

Vision and strategic directions

Our vision is for a generation of valued, connected and resilient young people to be supported in being the best that they can be.



To achieve this vision we have identified five themes and strategic directions which synthesises the outcomes from our extensive consultation and research. The youth forums and youth survey (2012) in particular have been critical in identifying the key issues, concerns and values of young people and these have been filtered through our guiding principles (see above) to define our focus areas.

The filtering process and analysis against key parameters - importance, urgency, control/domain and extent to which there is a service gap or opportunity – has allowed us to identify those areas where our research tells us we can make the biggest difference. See also the supporting material for an overview of what role Council potentially can play in each of these areas.⁹

⁷ Warringah Council Youth SpeakUp Survey 2012; and Parents Survey 2012.

⁸ For a full list of services, please refer to the Northern Beaches Youth Directory.
<http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/services/documents/PYSIncDirectory0809.pdf>

⁹ Three core issues that consistently have been brought up by young people – transport, affordable housing and the environment – have not been included as separate themes in this strategy. That is not to say that they are not significant. On the contrary, they are all of critical importance to the whole of Warringah. For this reason they are dealt with in separate strategies and planning instruments. For further illustration of the 'filtering process', please refer to the supporting material – methodology.

To achieve our vision, we will focus on five overlapping themes and strategic directions:

Figure 4: Focus areas



These areas have been prioritised because research, expert opinion and young people tell us that each aspect plays a crucial role in young people's ability lead fulfilling and meaningful lives. These are areas where we have the ability to play a significant and positive role.

For each of the focus areas, we are committed to:

- **Connection and belonging:** Creating places and programs that stimulate social interaction and creative expression
- **Life skills and career choices:** Supporting young people to shape their own futures through education and employment
- **Mental health and emotional wellbeing:** Building resilience and ability in young people to cope with the pressures of life
- **Recreation and physical wellbeing:** Being responsive to the evolving needs for recreational and sporting opportunities
- **Engagement and Participation:** Supporting young people to take part and be active members of the Warringah community

Connection and Belonging

A close community of diverse people that live and work together and make the area a flourishing and friendly place. I would particularly like to see neighbours know each other and a sense of unity across Warringah.

(18 year old, Youth SpeakUp)

Why is this a priority?

Having a sense of 'being connected' to people and places in meaningful ways is especially important to young people as they seek stability, balance and identity at a time of great personal transformation and growth.

Research confirms the importance of social places and community connectedness to overall health and wellbeing. For example, a decade of research by the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index demonstrates a strong correlation between the wellbeing of people and the sense of community, belonging and social opportunities where they live.¹⁰

Many young people in Warringah feel disconnected from their peers, places and the wider community and wish for more opportunities and better access to get together, to 'hang out'. As one survey participant commented:

"Overall I just want new and easier ways to meet people and make friends in a society that otherwise makes that a huge challenge".¹¹

While recreational, sporting and leisure opportunities for young people are highly valued, there is a persistent call for a more diverse and vibrant cultural and social environment.

Our aim is to create places and programs that stimulate social interaction and creative expression. We can make a positive difference to the 'feel' of Warringah through better and more integrated planning and place-making as well as through cultural and artistic events and programs that meet identified needs of Warringah's young people.



¹⁰ Australian Unity & Deakin University (2001); and Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, updated April 2012, online www.australianunitycorporate.com.au/community

¹¹ Warringah Council Youth SpeakUp Survey 2012

What will we do to achieve this?

In order to achieve our aim of creating places and programs that stimulate social interaction and creative expression we have defined the following strategic directions and commitments.

Direction 1: Ensure that public places are welcoming, vibrant and accessible and offer a variety of uses and functions to cater for all young people

- Involve young people in planning for places that are accessible (in terms of transport, disability access and being culturally safe) and welcoming
- Establish a Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) as a central community gathering place, offering diverse functions and programs ranging from casual places to socialise to active places and programs for welfare, recreation and cultural use
- Work with other stakeholders and government departments to create a Community Hub in a central location
- Ensure that the design of public places takes the unique environment, built form, urban landscape, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage and community values and long term community needs into account
- In partnership with young people and the Warringah Youth Advisory Committee, create and promote opportunities for better information sharing and networking
- Work with other stakeholders to lobby the State Government for appropriate and safe public transport options, particularly during weekends and at night
- Liaise with retailers to promote and encourage 'third spaces'¹² in local neighbourhoods that welcome young people and the broader community
- Expand Wi-Fi zones in public places

Direction 2: Youth programs and events are in sync with the social and creative interests and needs of a diverse population of young people

- Involve young people in activation of community places through cultural events and programs
- Ensure high visibility and promotion of youth programs and events
- Involve young people in identifying, designing and running regular community initiatives such as recreational, music, arts and cultural events

¹² Originally coined by Ray Oldenburg in 1989, "third space" is a term used in the concept of community building to refer to social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home and the workplace – ie.it can be an informal coffee shops or café that encourages socialising.

Direction 3: Continuously explore innovative approaches to designing built and social environments that contribute to community connectedness

- Continuously evaluate and explore best practice and creative planning processes and ensure that this knowledge is promoted, debated and retained as corporate knowledge
- Develop practical guidelines, resources and tools for design of vibrant and welcoming public places with reference to Councils planning framework.¹³
- Build the capacity and skills in Council for place-making

How will we measure progress?

We will measure progress on two levels: firstly in terms of standardised participation reviews and evaluations of individual programs and events; secondly through broader studies and reviews on community connectedness in Warringah. Broader measurements will include:

- Evaluation of public spaces from the five perspectives of People, Place, Product, Program and Planet ("the 5 Ps of Place")¹ and consideration of to what extent these perspectives are integrated in project planning
- Our annual broad-scale community surveys will also provide some indication of how we are progressing overall, not only in terms of youth, as part of this survey addresses community connectedness

¹³ Namely the Warringah Urban Design Guidelines (draft - 2012); Warringah Development Control Plan (2012); and Warringah's Local Environmental Plan (2011)

Life Skills and Career Choices

In relation to the 'not meeting my parents' expectations' I would say that they do not put pressure on me to do well or be the best, instead I put pressure on myself to please them even if they make it clear that they don't want me to stress about things.

(15 year old girl, Youth SpeakUp)

Why is this a priority?

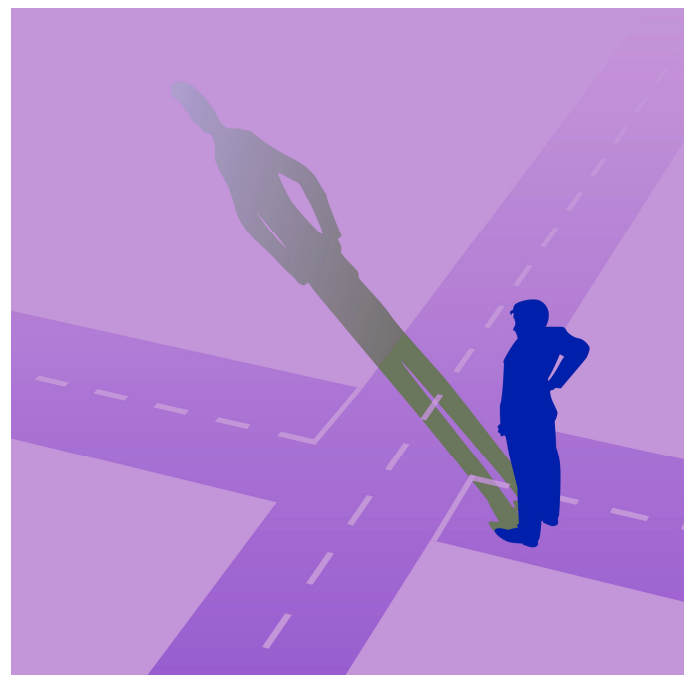
Young people are more concerned than ever before about being able to keep up with school work and eventually finding a job and being able to afford a house. These pressures and worries have a direct impact on their wellbeing generally, and specifically in terms of their mental health.

In a national survey¹⁴ of more than 15,000 young people, coping with stress and school or study problems was identified as the issue of most concern to young people, with many expressing fear of failure and the perceived lack of career prospects as a result of poor grades in Year 12 as major stressors.¹⁵ As well as coping with school, many young people were also trying to manage work, family and social commitments and the cumulative effect of these demands appears to be leaving many young people feeling overwhelmed and struggling to cope.

Our survey closely aligns with these findings. Young people in Warringah appear to be overwhelmed by pressures to perform.

"In this day and age there is a great amount of stress and worry thrust upon the shoulders of many young people, mainly HSC students. The goal for a great career has led people into thinking I need a 90 or the rest of my life is going to be unsatisfying due to a dud career".¹⁶

There is recent evidence that these pressures to perform academically start at an increasingly young age. National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing is becoming the HSC of primary school. Melbourne University's survey of 8,000 school teachers found that NAPLAN has significant negative



¹⁴ Mission Australia (2012)

¹⁵ *ibid*: p7

¹⁶ Warringah Youth SpeakUp survey 2012

consequences for children's wellbeing in years 3 and 5 with nearly 90% of teachers reporting that students were feeling stressed in the lead up to NAPLAN.¹⁷

It seems that there is a risk that education has become more about passing tests than about knowledge and life skills. *"The fundamental tasks of education today are not just to prepare students for the future, but to equip them to create a future they want to live in."*¹⁸

Our aim is to support young people to shape and manage their futures through education and employment. This requires support on both a practical and technical level as well as a more general level in terms of personal development and coping mechanisms for dealing with stress.¹⁹

What will we do to achieve this?

In order to achieve our aim of supporting young people to shape their own futures through education and employment, we have defined the following strategic directions and commitments:

Direction 4: Provide easily accessible information and engagement contact points between potential employers, young people and other stakeholders

- Work in partnership with key stakeholders such as Northern Beaches Business Education Network, Manly and Pittwater Councils and business networks, to facilitate employment expositions and forums that cater to the needs of young people
- Establish a regional working group to examine ways in which we can retain young people in Warringah through education and employment
- Facilitate a central information hub for young people to network and access information about career choices and job seeking
- In partnership with other stakeholders, such as the Shore Regional Organisation of Councils (SHOROC), lobby State Government for improved public transport to key employment and education centres
- Promote programs, events and initiatives related to employment of young people
- Lobby State Government and plan for increased employment options for young people in relation to new growth employment centres (e.g. Frenchs Forest Hospital)

Direction 5: Improve accessibility and equity to educational opportunities

- Work with other stakeholders to lobby State Government for a local and/or on-line tertiary education institution on the Northern Beaches
- Based on additional research and consultation with young people, facilitate and promote on-line education opportunities in both tertiary and vocational education

¹⁷ Dulfer, N., Rice, S. & Polesel, J. (2012)

¹⁸ Eckersley, R., (2004): p201

¹⁹ Robinson, L. & Lamb, S. (2012)

- Support good study practices that cater for all young people by providing quiet spaces with internet access, computers and other office requirements through our library services. This support also includes advice regarding study tips, techniques and internet based research techniques
- Contribute to better information and knowledge regarding disengaged youth to understand why some young people may not be able or wanting to undertake further education or gain employment

Direction 6: Through facilitation of training and personal development opportunities, help build the skills and confidence of young people to manage their career and life choices

- Promote and facilitate access to personal development courses and leadership and mentoring programs and/or seminars
- Work in partnership with other service providers and stakeholders to facilitate and promote opportunities for development of job-seeking skills (e.g. resume writing, interview techniques etc.)
- Work in partnership with other service providers and stakeholders to facilitate and promote opportunities for training in general life skills (e.g. budgeting, management of personal finances, goal setting, cooking)

How will we measure progress?

We will measure our progress through both primary and secondary information sources, where key measures include:

- Monitoring of employment and education trends (e.g. ABS data)
- Increased options available to undertake leadership, mentoring and 'resilience' training
- Expanded opportunities for on-line and/or local tertiary and vocational education
- Number of people attending key youth employment/education events and programs

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Anxiety is currently flooding our generation! More support needs to be widely spread so it shines a light to restore confidence in us so it then filters down to the younger generation who look up to us.

(16 year old, Youth SpeakUp)

Why is this a priority?

Mental health problems affect young people's psychological growth and development, health care needs, educational and occupational attainment and ability to function socially. It is also likely to have a strong influence on mental health disorders later in life.²⁰ In short, mental health and emotional wellbeing has far reaching consequences, not just for the individual but also for the broader community.

In 2007, 9% of young Australians aged 16 to 24 years in Australia had high or very high levels of psychological distress. One in four experienced at least one mental disorder in that year and there was

no correlation to socio-economic status.²¹ Mental health does not just affect socio-economically disadvantaged youth but the whole population of young people.

Warringah Council's SpeakUp Youth Survey (2012) aligns with these findings. The survey showed that while 82% of all participants said that they were either "happy" or "very happy" with their lives on a whole, 66% reported feeling "anxious, stressed or depressed" on a regular basis. Only very few young people, and notably fewer males than females, would seek support. Many felt that there was no support available to them.

*"It's a worry these days that so many teens have this idea that they have nowhere to go and that they can't talk to anyone about what they're going through and it should be made more known that that isn't true, everyone should be given the chance to be listened to."*²²

Mental health issues are often (but by no means always) expressed through behaviours such as risky sexual behaviour, risky drug and alcohol consumption, eating disorders and intentional self-harm. There is anecdotal evidence that the incidences of intentional self-harm (particularly amongst young women) is prevalent and increasing in Warringah.²³ Parents are deeply concerned about these trends, particularly regarding drugs and alcohol and sexual behaviours,



²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011): p24

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007)

²² Youth SpeakUp survey 2012 - quote from 20 year old woman

²³ NSW Department of Health (2012) *Health Statistics NSW*, online www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au In NSW self-harm hospitalisation rates are consistently higher in females than in males, where rates reached peak in 2004/05 for 15-24year olds at 482.2 per 100,000 and remains higher than for any other age group. For males the rate is 163.4 for 15 – 24 year olds.

including the sharp increase in sexually transmitted diseases, such as chlamydia. One parent commented:

*"I work in a local emergency department and am shocked and saddened at the amount of young people (10 – 16) who come in suicidal, drunk, have self harmed. Majority report due to school and bullies."*²⁴

Despite the prevalence and increase in mental health issues amongst young people, it remains a largely silent epidemic characterised by a high degree of stigma and social prejudice. As policy makers and service providers this challenges us to not just promote and facilitate broad mental health support for all our young people, but also to ensure that mental health is put firmly on the overall community agenda in an effort to normalise the issues.

Our aim is to work collaboratively with other stakeholders to build the resilience and ability in young people to cope with the pressures of life.

What will we do to achieve this?

In order to achieve our aim of building the resilience and ability in young people to cope with the pressures of life, we have defined the following strategic directions and commitments:

Direction 7: Ensure that professional mental health support is available to all young people

- In collaboration with other key stakeholders, facilitate and promote the Federal Government's Headspace program to provide mental health support for all young people
- Provide links to resources regarding mental health on the proposed phone app and web based Youth Space namely including reference and links to key internet or phone based counselling services such as eHeadspace, beyondblue and Lifeline.
- Through forums such as the Peninsula Youth Services Inc., jointly advocate for better and earlier provision of mental health support and provision that caters for all youth and offers early intervention support.
- Ensure that information about mental health is up to date and relevant to our provision of services. This research could include regular (e.g. biannual) surveys of young people; surveys of children's mental health and wellbeing to help inform early intervention, marketing and liaison with parents. Additional research should also consider the prevalence of mental health amongst specific groups that may be at risk such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young people with disabilities and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people as there potentially could be additional barriers for these groups to gain access mental health support.

²⁴ Warringah Council Parents' Survey 2012

Direction 8: Increase the visibility of mental health issues and general support options

- Conduct marketing campaigns for mental health awareness - with particular emphasis on reaching young males - in new and innovative ways, taking on advice from young people on how best to get the messages through
- Create awareness amongst other service providers, schools and stakeholders of the prevalence, frequency and early onset of mental health issues amongst all young people. Have particular regard to services available to young people who may struggle with sexual/gender identity.
- Work with parents to create a broader understanding of how to deal with mental health issues in young people and highlight the importance of talking about mental health issues amongst friends, family and broader community so as to normalise it and reduce associated stigma

How will we measure progress?

This is a notoriously difficult area to measure progress. On the one hand self-reported mental health is very subjective. On the other hand quantifiable information regarding for example number of referrals to GPs is certain to underestimate the issue. Keeping this in mind, any analysis should therefore carefully consider the wider context. The following sources offer benchmarks against which we can monitor general mental health:

- Youth survey (self-reported levels of anxiety, stress and depression)
- Monitor NSW Health annual release of health and mental health data
- Evaluation of Headspace data and reports
- Peer review and discussions, namely through Peninsula Youth Services Incorporated
- Participation rates and feedback from seminars and forums
- Novel and engaging ways of gaining feedback from youth (e.g. short film competitions, art work)

Recreation and physical wellbeing

Not only is exercise good for fitness but it also helps manage stress and anxiety which is another issue facing the youth of the council.

(16 year old girl, Youth SpeakUp)

Why is this a priority?

Recreation and sports provides a broad range of benefits that go beyond the physical health aspects of staying fit and healthy. The correlation between physical and mental health is well documented.²⁵ Physical activity is also known to help pre-empt or manage anxiety, stress and depression.

We provide a range of facilities that cater to the recreational needs of the community at large. We do not ourselves provide sporting events and programs, but are in a good position to promote and facilitate

both sporting and recreational options. By researching and coordinating recreation and sports facilities and services that are attuned to the needs of young people, we can play a significant and positive role in terms of improving their physical wellbeing and importantly also create opportunities for simultaneous benefits such as: social interaction; personal growth potential through team sports or a sense of individual achievement; and emotional wellbeing through opportunities for being in a beautiful natural environment. This is why we have chosen to focus on physical 'wellbeing' as opposed to physical 'health' – we wish to emphasise the broader benefits and implications of recreation and sports.

While the Youth SpeakUp survey showed that the vast majority of young people in Warringah (97.6%) rate their general health to be in good shape (and 88.6% stating that they exercise on a regular basis), 21.9% of females say that they are either 'worried', 'very worried' or 'extremely worried' about their weight compared to 7.8% of young men. The proportion of women who state that they are either 'worried', 'very worried' or 'extremely worried' about their body image is 32.9% compared to 16.4% for young men.²⁶

These trends and interrelations - along with the rising threat of obesity, risky use of alcohol and drugs, negative trends in sexual health, and the prevalence of skin cancer - underscore the importance of pre-emptive measures to ensure a better coordination between recreation and sporting provision and general community services. Our aim is to be responsive to the evolving needs for recreational and sporting opportunities in a way that supports the overall health and wellbeing of our young people.



²⁵ Yoon, J., & Bernell, S. (2012)

²⁶ This corresponds with national data, where Mission Australia in their 2012 survey found that the leading issues of personal concern are coping with stress (40.1 per cent), school or study problems (36.5 per cent) and body image (33.6 per cent). <http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/research-social-policy/115-research/research-social-policy/658-youth-survey>

What will we do to achieve this?

In order to achieve our aim of being responsive to the evolving needs for recreational and sporting opportunities, we have defined the following strategic directions and commitments:

Direction 9: Ensure equity in access to affordable recreation and sporting facilities and opportunities²⁷

- Work with other stakeholders to expand safe activity and sports options especially for young women, based on identified needs and requirements
- In partnership with providers, facilitate a diversity of recreation and sports activities that cater for people from different cultural backgrounds as well as young people with disabilities
- Ensure that any new facility is accessible (e.g. in neighbourhoods with high density and/or access to public transport, walking or cycleways.)
- Promote Warringah's bicycle and walking paths specifically to young people (e.g. include in the proposed phone app and on the proposed web based Youth Space).
- Establish additional walking and bike paths to and from community locations and where possible and appropriate provide exercise stations along paths that are frequently used
- Where possible, provide for improvements and linkages between mountain biking and BMX tracks
- Deliver additional social/team based recreational opportunities in step with identified demand and interest. There have been consistent calls for skating and outdoor playing spaces such as basketball courts

²⁷ Warringah Council Recreation Strategy (2009)

Direction 10: Improve the evidence base for decision-making regarding recreation and sporting needs and opportunities

- Conduct recreation and sporting consultation and research as required in order to make informed decisions
- Liaise with sporting and recreational clubs regarding information and knowledge sharing particularly about participation by young people
- Involve young people early in the project design and planning stages on sporting and recreational initiatives and projects
- Work with young people and other stakeholders to identify ways of promoting general awareness of physical wellbeing, particularly regarding diet, sleeping habits, drugs and alcohol, sexual health, and sun protection

How will we measure progress?

The following measures will provide some general guidance as to whether or not we are able to respond to the evolving recreational and sporting needs of young people:

- Use of assets, programs and services as monitored through data collection and analysis (i.e. attendance figures and utilisation numbers)
- Regular assessment of the condition of assets
- Degree to which young people are involved in the project design and planning of services and facilities (and are satisfied with their input as measured through feedback forms)
- Regular assessment of community satisfaction, opinion, behaviour and complaints through customer surveys, annual community survey, service reports and review of strategies (namely the Recreation Strategy), plans and correspondence reviews

Engagement and Participation

I would recommend trying to relate to the youth of Warringah by not just spoon-feeding them information or creating programs that they won't care about like they would get at school. A more effective way would be to get in on what they love and encourage it and go from there. Build relationships with people, not just see them as a statistic or case study.

(19 year old, Youth SpeakUp)

Why is this a priority?

There are three main reasons why actively including young people is important. Firstly, many young people have shown a keen interest and are eager participants in forums on contemporary issues such as climate change, environment, transport and safety. They are able to offer fresh and creative ideas to old problems and help energise debates that may have gone stale. More than half (500) of the participants in our Youth SpeakUp survey registered their interest to be involved and kept informed of Council business.

Secondly, young people today are our leaders of tomorrow. By equipping them with the skills and support to become actively involved in decision making, we can 'pass the baton' and contribute to cultivating inspiring and visionary leaders.

Last but not least it makes good business sense to ensure that young people are included early in the project, during design and planning stages. This minimises the risk of 'white elephants' – building facilities that won't be used. We are well past the approach of 'build it and they will come'.

"Don't just think for the now, think for the future. Instead of just organising/building things hoping my generation will use it, go out and ask us. Go to the beach and say who you are and what you're trying to do for the community and suggest your ideas to them. If they actually want to create a better community they will answer you truthfully. Therefore you don't just have to hope people will use different facilities, but you know they will".²⁸



Our aim is to support young people to take part and be active members of the Warringah community. We are already directly involving young people in our decision-making on youth programs and services, namely through established engagement structures such as the Warringah Youth Advisory Committee and the annual Youth Forum. There is room for these opportunities to be extended and promoted and better utilised on a project basis throughout the organisation.

²⁸ Youth SpeakUp Survey 2012 - quote from 16 year old girl

What will we do to achieve this?

In order to achieve our aim of encouraging and supporting young people to take part and be active members of the Warringah community, we have defined the following strategic directions and commitments:

Direction 11: Improve the opportunities for young people to be actively engaged in Council business and on projects

- Seek the advice of the Warringah Youth Advisory Committee on key youth projects as well as broader projects that involve the whole community
- Promote outcomes from Youth Forums broadly within Council and invite input in future forums
- Facilitate development of governance skills in young people
- Create and promote opportunities for young people to be exposed to Local Government business and decision making. This could include participation in "mock Council meetings", schools programs; and participation in Council and/or Strategic Reference Group (SRG) meetings as youth representatives with observer status
- Create work experience opportunities in Council (e.g. provide opportunities for internships or short term contract work for students on particular research projects)
- Promote and facilitate volunteering opportunities with Council and with the broader community with an aim to build the capacity of young people to take a leadership role in projects and initiatives where they may have an interest
- Ensure that Council staff have the awareness, skills and capacity to engage in a meaningful and respectful ways with young people

How will we measure progress?

We will measure our progress both in terms of participation rates and evaluations of our projects as well as the extent to which young people are exposed to and encouraged to take part in governance processes. Specific measures include:

- Participation rates in Youth Forums (per year and cumulative)
- Participation in the Warringah Youth Advisory Council
- Extent to which advice from young people is considered on our projects
- Work experience and volunteering opportunities with Council
- Young people trained in governance

Implementation

This section provides an overview of how the Strategy fits within our corporate planning context and details an approach to what we will do to honour our commitments.

Integration with business planning

The Strategy is intended to provide a big picture overview of broad and long term directions that are based on a wide spectrum of research. Shorter-term actions and detailed prescriptions on how we will progress, what projects to implement and when will be derived from this Strategy as an integral part of our annual business planning framework. We will monitor progress and effectiveness of the Strategy on the basis of our business planning framework.

Our implementation and evaluation framework is best described in terms of three key principles to our approach and described in more detail below:

- **Inform and provide direction:** placing the Strategy within our organisational and operational context to ensure integration and synergies between programmes, projects and general council operations and provision of services and assets
- **Alignment of reviews within our planning cycle:** timing our review and monitoring of progress of the Strategy to take advantage of Council's annual and four yearly review processes
- **Pragmatic approach:** making sure that measurement of progress provides a good, effective and cost-efficient basis for further decision-making

The Strategy will be reviewed in context of how well it is able to provide direction to our overall planning and delivery of assets and services. This includes reviewing how effective the Strategy is as a filter for identifying and implementing programs and projects.

This Strategy is informed by the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) which consists of a 10 year visionary plan; a 4 year delivery plan; and an annual operational plan which spells out which projects and initiatives Council will be undertaking in that year. In this process strategic and tactical plans become the main sorting tool for deciding which projects or initiatives to undertake in that year.

The Youth Strategy will be reviewed in alignment with our annual and four-yearly business planning cycles in order to ensure that any factors that may influence our strategic directions and commitments are considered as part of the evaluation of the Strategy.

Table 2: Evaluation overview

| Timing/ business cycle | Evaluation type | Key focus of review in regards to the Youth Strategy |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Annual | Review of annual operational plan | Reporting on project indicators and progress measurements as indicated in this Strategy. |
| 4 yearly | CSP delivery plan | Reporting on progress against strategic directions relative to the Community Strategic Plan priorities. |
| ca. 2016 | Mid term review of Youth Strategy | Assessment of the Youth Strategy in terms of it being able to provide organisational direction and a shared frame of reference in our partnerships and conversations with young people, the community and other stakeholders. Evaluation of currency of the Strategy in terms of its research basis, demographic and other societal trends. |
| ca. 2021 (if not earlier) | End of term review of Youth Strategy | Whole of Strategy review, including effectiveness identification of future initiatives. |

Measuring progress

It would be inherently difficult to measure the success of the Strategy directly in terms of how young people’s health and wellbeing may or may not have improved as a *direct* consequence of this planning – even if we were able to accurately measure the health and wellbeing of young people, then how could we with any certainty attribute any increase or decrease directly to this strategy and the initiatives it recommends when there are so many other factors that come into play? This is particularly true for pre-emptive initiatives without defined benchmarked “before” and “after”. However that is not to say that things that we have limited control over don’t matter, just because they can’t be measured. *“Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts”*.²⁹

Despite the difficulties of measuring social impacts, it is still important to gain some measure of success on how well we are progressing towards our overall aim. We will mainly be using online surveying (especially using the Youth SpeakUp survey from 2012 as a benchmark) as the main method of collecting data. Additional tools and measurements for tracking progress are described for each theme. The Strategy itself will be reviewed in 2016 and in 2020.

²⁹ Cameron, W.B (1963): p13

Summary of Strategic Directions and lead roles

The table below provides an overview of our strategic directions and commitments. A Council department is assigned to each strategic direction to take an overall lead role in overseeing the implementation. We speak of 'lead roles' rather than 'responsibilities' in recognising that most of the strategic directions will require broad input from across the whole of the organisation:

Table 3: Summary of Strategic Directions (lead roles indicated in italics)

| Theme | Strategic Directions | Commitments |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Connection and belonging | 1. Ensure that public places are welcoming, vibrant and accessible and offer a variety of uses and functions to cater for all young people (<i>Strategic Planning</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve young people in planning for places that are accessible (in terms of transport, disability access and being culturally safe) and welcoming • Establish a Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) as a central community gathering place, offering diverse functions and programs ranging from casual places to socialise to active places and programs for welfare, recreation and cultural use • Work with other stakeholders and government departments to create a Community Hub in a central location • Ensure that the design of public places takes the unique environment, built form, urban fabric, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage and community values and long term community needs into account • In partnership with young people and the Warringah Youth Advisory Committee, create and promote opportunities for better information sharing and networking • Work with other stakeholders to lobby the State Government for appropriate and safe public transport options, particularly during weekends and at night • Liaise with retailers to promote and encourage 'third spaces' in local neighbourhoods that welcome young people and the broader community • Expand Wi-Fi zones in public places |
| | 2. Youth programs and events are in sync with the social and creative interests and needs of a diverse population of young people (<i>Community Services</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve young people in activation of community places through cultural events and programs • Ensure high visibility and promotion of youth programs and events • Involve young people in identifying, designing and running regular community initiatives such as recreational, music, arts and cultural events |

| Theme | Strategic Directions | Commitments |
|--|--|---|
| | <p>3. Continuously explore innovative approaches to designing built and social environments that contribute to community connectedness (<i>Strategic Planning</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuously evaluate and explore best practice and creative planning processes and ensure that this knowledge is promoted, debated and retained as corporate knowledge • Develop practical guidelines, resources and tools for design of vibrant and welcoming public places with reference to Councils planning framework. • Build the capacity and skills in Council for place-making |
| <p>Life skills and career choices</p> | <p>4. Provide easily accessible information and contact points between potential employers, young people and other stakeholders (<i>Strategic Planning</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in partnership with key stakeholders such as Northern Beaches Business Education Network, Manly and Pittwater Councils and business networks, to facilitate employment expositions and forums that cater to the needs of young people • Establish a regional working group to examine ways in which we can retain young people in Warringah through education and employment • Facilitate a central information hub for young people to network and access information about career choices and job seeking • In partnership with other stakeholders, such as the Shore Regional Organisation of Councils (SHOROC), lobby State Government for improved public transport to key employment and education centres • Promote programs, events and initiatives related to employment of young people • Lobby State Government and plan for increased employment options for young people in relation to new growth employment centres (e.g. Frenchs Forest Hospital) |
| | <p>5. Improve accessibility and equity to educational opportunities (<i>Strategic Planning</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other stakeholders to lobby State Government for a local and/or on-line tertiary education institution on the Northern Beaches • Based on additional research and consultation with young people, facilitate and promote on-line education opportunities in both tertiary and vocational education • Support good study practices that cater for all young people by providing quiet spaces with internet access, computers and other office requirements through our library services. This support also includes advice regarding study tips, techniques and internet based research techniques • Contribute to better information and knowledge regarding disengaged youth to understand why some young people may not be able or wanting to undertake further education or gain employment |

| Theme | Strategic Directions | Commitments |
|---|---|---|
| | <p>6. Through facilitation of training and personal development opportunities, help build the skills and confidence of young people to manage their career and life choices (<i>Community Services</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and facilitate access to personal development courses and leadership and mentoring programs and/or seminars • Work in partnership with other service providers and stakeholders to facilitate and promote opportunities for development of job-seeking skills (e.g. resume writing, interview techniques etc.) • Work in partnership with other service providers and stakeholders to facilitate and promote opportunities for training in general life skills (e.g. budgeting, management of personal finances, goal setting, cooking) |
| <p>Mental health and emotional wellbeing</p> | <p>7. Ensure that professional mental health support is available to all young people (<i>Community Services</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with other key stakeholders facilitate and promote the Federal Government's Headspace program to provide mental health support for all young people • Provide links to resources regarding mental health on the proposed phone app and web based Youth Space namely including reference and links to key internet or phone based counselling services such as eHeadspace, beyondblue and Lifeline. • Through forums such as the Peninsula Youth Services Inc., jointly advocate for better and earlier provision of mental health support and provision that caters for all youth and offers early intervention support. • Ensure that information about mental health is up to date and relevant to our provision of services. This research could include regular (e.g. biannual) surveys of young people; surveys of children's mental health and wellbeing to help inform early intervention, marketing and liaison with parents. Additional research should also consider the prevalence of mental health amongst specific groups that may be at risk such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young people with disabilities and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people as there potentially could be additional barriers for these groups to gain access mental health support. |
| | <p>8. Increase the visibility of mental health issues and support options (<i>Community Services</i>)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct marketing campaigns for mental health awareness - with particular emphasis on young males - in new and innovative ways, taking on advice from young people on how best to get the messages through. • Create awareness amongst other service providers, schools and stakeholders of the occurrence and frequency of early onset mental health issues amongst all young people. • Work with parents to create a broader understanding of how to deal with mental health issues in young people and highlight the importance of talking about mental health issues amongst friends, family and broader community to reduce associated stigma. |

| Theme | Strategic Directions | Commitments |
|--|--|--|
| Recreation and physical wellbeing | 9. Ensure equity in access to affordable recreation and sporting facilities and opportunities (<i>Recreation Management</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other stakeholders to expand safe activity and sports options especially for young women, based on identified needs and requirements • In partnership with providers, facilitate a diversity of recreation and sports activities that cater for people from different cultural backgrounds as well as young people with disabilities • Ensure that any new facility is accessible (e.g. in neighbourhoods with high density and/or access to public transport, walking or cycleways.) • Promote Warringah's bicycle and walking paths specifically to young people (e.g. include in the proposed phone app and on the proposed web based Youth Space). • Establish additional walking and bike paths to and from community locations and where possible and appropriate provide exercise stations along paths that are frequently used • Where possible, provide for improvements and linkages between mountain biking and BMX tracks • Deliver additional social/team based recreational opportunities in step with identified demand and interest. There have been consistent calls for skating and outdoor playing spaces such as basketball courts |
| | 10. Improve the evidence base for decision-making regarding recreation and sporting needs and opportunities (<i>Recreation Management</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct recreation and sporting consultation and research as required in order to make informed decisions. • Liaise with sporting and recreational clubs regarding information and knowledge sharing particularly about participation by young people. • Involve young people early in the project design and planning stages on sporting and recreational initiatives and projects. • Work with young people and other stakeholders to identify ways of promoting general awareness of physical wellbeing, particularly regarding diet, sleeping habits, drugs and alcohol, sexual health, and sun protection. |

| Theme | Strategic Directions | Commitments |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Engagement and participation | 11. Improve the opportunities for young people to be actively engaged in Council business and on key projects (<i>Community Services</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek the advice of the Warringah Youth Advisory Council on key youth projects and other broader projects involving the wider community. • Promote outcomes from Youth Forums broadly within Council and invite input in future forums. • Facilitate development of governance skills in young people. • Create and promote opportunities for young people to be exposed to local government business and decision making. This could include participation in 'mock' Council meetings; school programs; and participation in Council and/or SRG meetings as youth representatives with observer status. • Create work experience opportunities in Council (e.g. provide opportunities for internships or short term contract work for students on particular research projects). • Promote and facilitate volunteering opportunities with Council and with the broader community with an aim to build the capacity of young people to take a leadership role in projects and initiatives where they may have an interest. • Ensure that Council staff have the awareness, skills and capacity to engage in a meaningful and respectful ways with young people. |

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Key Warringah Council plans and strategies

All Council plans and strategies are available online at www.warringah.nsw.gov.au

For this Strategy, the following documents provide direct reference:

[Recreation Strategy 2009](#)

[Strategic Community Plan 2011](#)

[Social Plan 2010](#)