



*Additional submission notes:*

## **A bit about the Injury Control Council of WA**

The Injury Control Council of WA (ICCWA) - Understanding and Building Resilience (U&BR) Project won the 2009 Suicide Prevention Australia award for Healthy Communities. The Resilience project is a multi-level suicide prevention project operating since 2005 in the six communities of Busselton Margaret River, Bunbury, Collie, Manjimup and Bridgetown – Greenbushes. These communities are all in the rural South West Region of Western Australia. As you may be aware 3 of these communities are deemed Inner regional and 3 are in Outer regional. We have not spoken to one person living in these communities yet that understands the rationale for this, and we ourselves are at a loss to differentiate between the communities in relation to access.

The Project focused on what communities can do to prevent suicide, with community resilience being the central theme. The Project was initiated by concerned people in the region after a cluster of suicides occurred in 2003. The Project began with community consultation through action research. The research then informed action for suicide prevention across the region. Local Working Groups were established in each of the six communities with commitment and ownership from community members. Key objectives were then identified by the local people (informed by the research) in the communities, to develop Local Action Plans. These plans highlighted areas of need and ways in which group members could work together toward reducing risk factors for suicide. As a result, strong partnerships have been formed within the local community and across the six participating communities.

Action plans developed within the 6 communities included four key areas: Resilience Building through the provision of education, training and skill development to build the capacity of communities to recognise and respond appropriately to people at risk of suicide and to raise awareness of how to build resilience; Connecting to Community, identifying and promoting strategies that facilitate opportunities for people to connect with their local community; Service Gaps and Access Issues, to build capacity of local communities to address service gaps and improve access to existing services; and Referral, Networks and Help Seeking, to build community capacity for help seeking by increasing awareness and knowledge of referral pathways and support services.

The Resilience Project provided opportunities for inter-sectoral collaboration, local partnerships and community engagement. The project has identified and highlighted the accomplishments of communities; and these are directly related to the level of connectedness and cohesion. In communities that feel a sense of inclusion and participation, there is greater achievement and

therefore increased community capacity and resilience. This in turn leads to better community mental health and wellbeing leading to better community outcomes.

The strength and success of this project lies with the comprehensive consultation process and the engagement of community members, agencies and departments in the 6 communities. Building community resilience and capacity are central themes.

## **Inequity of regional classifications:**

We fear that the impact across the South West, and the perceived inequity of the criteria as viewed by the different regions, related to the changes to eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance will threaten some of these core strengths within and between the local government areas. Ultimately it will negatively impact on community resilience and capacity, with the potential to have long term implications to community health and wellbeing.

In submissions received by your committee there is evidence of distress related to the loss of the criteria for inner regional potential students.

Families are worried about their ability to still realistically access university education for their children leaving school. Firstly the criteria change now excludes young people in Inner Regional Zone from qualifying to be an independent student after one Gap year. Secondly there is considerable stress related to unrealistic and unattainable goals in the pursuit of 30 hours per week work. These factors will have serious community implications.

Some of the effects of this on the communities we foresee are:

## Increased financial pressures

### Leading to:

- Family disharmony
- Increased levels of mental ill health and depression
- Pressures on other family members and risk to younger siblings.
- Increases in Domestic Violence
- Loss of family home or car
- Family discussions around financial prioritising.
- Feelings of discrimination
- Shame and isolation

### Evidence:

*Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education, 2007, by Naomi Godden.*

The annual cost for regional young people to study away from home is estimated at \$15-20,000 a year, plus a vehicle. Expenses include:

**Start-up expenses** (3-6,000 plus a vehicle): travel and accommodation to enroll, attend orientation week, and source accommodation; bond; computer; moving costs; setting up a house; and a vehicle

**Living expenses** (\$250-400 per week): private accommodation – rent, utilities, and food; residential accommodation – fees (up to \$12,000 a year), and parking fees. Expenses for all students include: phone; transport (car, fuel, car maintenance, registration and insurance, and/or public transport); clothing; sporting fees; work uniform and travel; health; socialising; and unexpected expenses.

**Study-relates expenses:** printer; internet connection; stationary; lecture notes; textbooks; short courses; and student association fees.

**Travel home:** bus, train, aeroplane or car travel; and travel and accommodation costs for family to visit children.

Regional young people and families cover the costs through a combination of methods, including parents' contributions, Youth Allowance, semester work, holiday work, 'gap year', savings, preparation, scholarships, debt, families moving to the city.

## Pressure on Young People

### Leading to:

- **Guilt related to increased financial pressure on parents.**
- **Choosing to opt out of university due to financial constraints to family**
- **Loss of opportunity of “escape” from undesirable current circumstance – ie living in dysfunctional family or undesirable community.**
- **Conscious decision at year 10 level not to chose subjects that lead to a university career if family circumstances do not indicate viability to the young person. (Important to note that young people mostly would not have this conversation to clarify with parents).**
- **Increase to the current 30% of young people not returning to university following a gap year.**

### **Evidence:**

*Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education, 2007, by Naomi Godden.*

Page 10. Findings: Financial difficulties with studying away from home...create a barrier to access. Participants believe the most sustainable way to address the regional skill shortage is to adequately support regional young people to access education and training.

Rurality is highly relevant, including distance, isolation, culture, identity, and disadvantage. Regional young people have high expenses when studying away from home – which all participants described as the biggest challenge, and affects participation and choices. Regional families are extremely financially burdened with the expenses, particularly when they are ineligible for Youth Allowance.

Compounding emotional, financial, and educational challenges cause stress and poor health.

## Pressure on (working) Parents:

### Leading to:

- Need to take on more employment. Parents in regional areas working “harder and longer”.
- Consequent need to consider impact on other – younger – siblings.
- Need to make choices on possible relocation.
- Need to discuss financial constraints with children.
- Forced to make decisions and choices about which degree they can afford or is accessible or how to tell a younger child that they can’t have the choices or maybe even go to university like their older sibling because the rules have changed.

### Evidence:

*Victoria, Parliament, Education and training Committee, [Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education](#), July 2009*

Page 171: Numerous inquiry participants estimated that each year, the cost of living away from home to study is approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Page 172: the Committee notes that unlike the deferred cost of tuition fees, living expenses are immediate, ongoing costs that can wear away at a student’s persistence over the course of their studies. Many schools, students, student unions, local governments and parents spoke about young people from their communities who had enrolled in university subsequently left, largely due to financial pressures.

Page 175: The Committee heard that a substantial proportion of students struggle to gather sufficient income to meet the costs of participation. This is not surprising given OECD estimates that Australia ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> among 31 OECD countries in terms of students’ ability to finance their education costs, as measured by the ratio of tuition and living costs to available individual funding.

Page 179: The Committee believes that the inequities are greatest between metropolitan and non-metropolitan young people, with rural students who move away from home often paying double the costs of metropolitan students over the duration of their course.

Page 192/193: The Committee heard from a number of parents from rural and regional areas who were paying the costs of one child or more living away from home for study. Supporting one or more children to live away from home for study causes great financial stress for many families.

*Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education, 2007, by Naomi Godden.*

Page 10. Many parents and young people experience financial stress, affecting their relationship, physical and mental health and educational performance, forcing some regional young people to leave tertiary education.

Page 12. Regional Australians are considerably disadvantaged by current Youth Allowance policy, because they MUST leave home for tertiary education. Their financial and emotional difficulties are not adequately understood by urban people and systems. Thus, regional Australians feel increasingly alienated and unsupported by urban-centric policies and perspectives.

## Shortage and loss of intellectual property in the South West

A “dumbing down” of the regional areas. This is impacted by:

- Lure of the “Boom State” northwest or mining opportunities as a financially lucrative alternative to young people when the higher education option becomes less attainable.
- Professional people are those more likely to value tertiary education. They may choose to move to Perth so that their teenagers can live with them, if unable to access Youth Allowance through independent status.
- If young people from Regional WA are not being supported to go to University, the numbers will drop. This will in turn further reduce the numbers of highly sought after professionals willing to come to or “return” to regional areas to work.

**Evidence:**

	Bunbury		Busselton		Capel			Metro	Country	State
At TAFE, CAE or Uni	1,286	4.3%	817	3.2%	404	4.0%		6.6%	3.1%	5.8%
With a Tertiary Education	2,161	8.9%	2,099	10.6%	955	12.8%		16.0%	8.8%	14.4%

	Collie		Dardanup		Harvey			Metro	Country	State
At TAFE, CAE or Uni	267	3.1%	341	3.3%	649	3.3%		6.6%	3.1%	5.8%
With a Tertiary Education	309	4.7%	569	7.3%	1,260	8.4%		16.0%	8.8%	14.4%

Citation: Population characteristics of residents of the Bunbury, Busselton, Capel, Collie, Dardanup and Harvey (S) LGA. Epidemiology Branch (PHI) in collaboration with the CRC-SI. November 2009.

*Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Educational Opportunities, Universities Australia, October 2009.*

...Over half of graduates from regional areas stay in or return to Australia’s regions after graduation...

## Further disadvantages the disadvantaged:

- For the young people who are members of socially or financially disadvantaged families, the aspirations to university education have just become a further step away.
- For young people who “dreamed” of leaving behind an undesirable living situation – either in their family unit or community, to pursue a better future, university was sometimes seen as a good option. With reduced possible access to this, other “escapes” may be considered.
- Already financial constraints include not just accommodation (average minimum \$150 / week) plus living expenses, but also include increased cost of return or contact with “home” in Inner regional areas like Dunsborough (256 km from Perth). Cost of living away from home is between \$15, 000.00 and \$25,000.00 per year.

### **Evidence:**

*Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning The University of Melbourne, **Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria**, John Polesel, July 2008*

Key findings, pg ii: cost-related factors and financial barriers are prominent in the reasons given by these young people for deferring a place at university.

Page iii: over half of all university and campus-based VET students (51.9%)...were working while studying, and nearly half of these were working 11 hours or more per week. A further 13.9% of university students and 14.7% of the campus-based VET students reported that they were seeking work. These data are indicative of the financial pressures faced by many students.

Approximately four in ten report that they could not support themselves and that the costs of study are a barrier. Financial pressure on their family, concern regarding HECS debts and the costs of travel were nominated by about one quarter of the respondents, and also reflect the continuing importance of financial barriers to the participation of non-metropolitan youth in education and training. In all, approximately two thirds (66.4%) of those not in education or training nominated at least one of these financial barriers as a reason for not being in education of training in 2008.

### **Large organisations/businesses that have gone into receivership or administration affecting the South West:**

- Griffin Coal
- Finess Foods
- Challenge Australian Dairy
- Challenge Dairy Cooperative
- Marine & Civil
- Australian Energy & Environment (AE&E)

## Feelings of Anger, frustration and confusion related to perceived inequity between local shires close physical proximity.

- **Already pressure exists between neighbouring towns and shires and their residents on issues of equity and resource. This issue places further pressure on these relationships.**
  - **Poor community relations will lead to a sense of injustice and social isolation that are a threat to community cohesion. This further leads to reduced community capacity and results in stress and poor mental health outcomes.**
- An individual sense of isolation and social exclusion. This will be evident as families will not want to disclose that they are unable to support their children to go to university.
  - Feelings of discrimination
  - Stress of young people and frustration of families related to desperation to achieve the unrealistic 30 hr/ week employment in a largely casual and seasonal workplace environment. As realisation occurs, there will be a need to quickly reassess future plans.

### **Evidence:**

*Victoria, Parliament, Education and training Committee, [Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education, July 2009](#)*

Participants highlighted the lack of employment for young people in many small and remote regional communities, especially where drought has reduced the opportunities available in agriculture.

*Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, [Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment \(income Support for Students\) Bill 2009, October 2009](#)*

3.30 - ...from a number of sources was that the 30 hours a week in 18 month criterion would be impossible for many students in some rural and regional areas due to the lack of work, or the inconsistent nature of work that was available for gap year students.

3.32 - The committee was told that many gap year students take on seasonal, part-time and casual work....however, this work is unlikely to satisfy the 30 hours a week for 18 months.



### **Further points which should be considered:**

- Incredulous outrage when awareness is raised. (Currently many families are not fully aware of the changes and their implications – many are still under the understanding that they are having a “gap year” with ability to apply for assistance at the end of this time.)
- Currently most Perth universities do not have policy developed to accommodate a 2 “gap year” situation. This would be the only option for inner regional students to obtain independent status.
- Curtin University requires a Centrelink declaration. UWA do not currently allow 2 year deferral.
- Two years on top of a medicine degree means that a young person will be 8 years post school (25 - 26 yrs of age) before they attain their basic degree and an ability to earn a living.

### **Key recommendations from previous reports which the Committee should take into consideration:**

*Regional Young People and Youth Allowance: Access to Tertiary Education, 2007, by Naomi Godden.*

Recommendation 1: That all regional young people are eligible for the full rate of Independent Youth Allowance if they must leave from home for tertiary education.

*Victoria, Parliament, Education and training Committee, [Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education](#), July 2009*

6.1 - That the Victorian government advocate for Australian Government funding for regional higher education provision that:  
- is based on the actual cost of provision in different rural and regional locations

7.2 - That the Victorian Government advocate to the Australian Government that young people who are required to relocate to undertake tertiary studies be eligible to receive Youth Allowance

*Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, [Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment \(Income Support for Students\) Bill 2009](#), October 2009*

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the workforce participation criteria in Section 1067A (10)(c) (the fixed amount in 18 months) be retained for students who are required to leave home to pursue their chosen course.

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