NSW Youth Parliament 2024

Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Youth Act 2024

Rural and Regional Development Committee

![NSW Youth Parliament logo]

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Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Youth Act 2024

Lead Sponsor:	The Hon. Chelsea Pharaoh, Youth Member for Monaro *Shadow Youth Minister for Rural and Regional Development*
Sponsors:	Gypsy Rigatos, Youth Member for Bega Finlay Cassidy, Youth Deputy Opposition Leader, Youth Member for Kiama Madeline Standerwick, Youth Member for Northern Tablelands
Lead Refuter:	The Hon. Ammar Syed, Youth Member for Albury *Youth Minister for Rural and Regional Development*
Refuters:	Ayla Crotty, Youth Member for Lismore Noel Arafat, Youth Member for Northern Tablelands The Hon. Marty Davies, Leader of the House, Youth Member for Orange
Crossbench:	Rotem Hadad, Youth Member for Ballina

Summary of Debate

On Thursday 11 July 2024, the Rural and Regional Development Committee debated their Youth Bill, *Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Bill 2024*, on the floor of the Legislative Assembly; presided over by The Hon. Jacqui Munro MLC.

Results of the Vote

The results of the amendments were 32 Ayes, 24 Noes, and 2 Abstentions. As such, the amendments were resolved in the affirmative.

The results of the vote on the Bill were 53 Ayes, 2 Noes, and 1 Abstention. As such, the Bill was resolved in the affirmative.

The *Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Youth Act 2024* (NSW) had **passed in its amended form.**

Explanatory Notes

Summary
The object of this Bill is to engage rural and regional youth within delegated spaces that focus on priorities for local youth engagement and development.

This Bill comes at a time where we see rural and regional youth disproportionately disadvantaged in areas of mental health support and physical health knowledge, with severe disproportions of schooling and education disengagement, all acting against the success and wellbeing of our rural and regional young people.

This Bill aims to support youth through a focus on providing resources to dedicated spaces to better engage and support youth. Building up centres with a community-led model to best achieve connection and engagement of young people, we create spaces for the function of in demand information, services, and skills.

Overall, the Bill serves to best uplift our rural and regional young people with resources and support channelled through centres, with functions to best serve individual communities and youth.

Overview of provisions
Part 1 sets out the short title, commencement, objects, and definitions of the act.

Part 2 sets out a new commission, the NSW Regional and Rural Youth Engagement Centres (NSW RRYEC) with management and structure, it describes the standards and function of staffing and volunteers, implementation logistics and community connection.

Part 3 sets out the functions of health and safety facilities, services and access of information.

Part 4 sets out the function and guides for services and activities based on outlined age groups from 5 to 25.

Background

Introduction to the issue
According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of themselves and of their family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social service" (UN, 1948). It also states that "everyone has the right to education." However, within remote, rural, and regional NSW, there are particular issues within these landscapes. From inadequate facilities for healthcare, lack of access to education and extracurricular activities as well as the lack of staff and volunteers, the remote, rural and regional population is placed at a disadvantage to metropolitan areas. "On average, Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas." (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

Facilities
Most remote, rural and regional towns have existing facilities such as community centres. However, these facilities are not utilised to their full potential. However, smaller rural towns don't have access to safe community areas such as community centres. These towns often don't have a large enough population to devote the resources to such facilities or are too far away from larger towns. Mobile service delivery has been trialled in rural areas for other services, for example, through mobile libraries.

Existing programs should be expanded upon and provided with facilities for St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) and similar organisations to broaden their reach. Currently services are separate and often compete for clientele. A facility would provide a hub for them to collaborate and benefit as many members of the community as possible.

Education
Rural and remote students have reduced access to education services compared to metropolitan students despite 43.5% of schools being classified regional or rural (NSW Department of Education, 2021). "Vern Hilditch, a Wodonga school principal for over 30 years, says that finding and keeping qualified teachers in Wodonga has never been harder. The school has been advertising 11 positions since the end of last year and so far, has received zero applications" (Helen Haines MP – 2023). These students attend school less frequently – with average attendance rates of 89.4% and 83.9% for regional and rural areas respectively compared with 92.1% for urban areas – and only 43% complete year 12, in comparison with 78% in metropolitan zones (NSW Department of Education, 2021). Students within regional and rural communities are less likely to go to university and are more likely to drop out if they enrol.

Additionally, "remote communities are home to one-quarter of Australia's Indigenous population. Consequently, the educational challenges faced in remote areas have a disproportionate impact on Indigenous Australians" (Victoria University, 2015). There is clearly an educational imbalance between metropolitan and rural and regional areas. Tutoring disparities worsen this as tutoring plays a major factor in education. The lack of affordable tutoring has a major impact on low-socioeconomic individuals. The NSW Department of Education stated that these individuals have "lower levels of engagement, wellbeing and academic achievement than their peers from higher SES backgrounds."

Low socioeconomic students have poorer access to technology compared to other students, leading to poor mental health because of not being able to use technology as an avenue to access services such as mental health programs, relying on informal networks like their

parents for careers advice, which is fragmented compared to formal programs afforded to higher socio-economic students.

Online Education and Tutoring
There are major disparities in tutoring facilities and services between metropolitan and rural, regional and remote areas. The populations of these towns render facilities not feasible, however, online education and tutoring could be utilised to bridge this disparity.

In 2015 through Action 9.1 of the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint, a virtual selective school called Aurora College was established. It provides gifted and talented students from rural and remote areas with an opportunity to extend beyond the regular curriculum, an opportunity not usually available in remote, rural and regional areas.

The Evaluation of the Rural and Remote Education Blueprint found that the major issue experienced with Aurora College was timetable clashes with the students' local schools (NSW Department of Education Rural and Remote Education Blueprint). All principals nominated timetabling issues as a challenge; around 78% considered it a 'major' challenge, The next most cited challenge for principals was appropriate learning space for students to attend the online classes; around 39% of principals with students at Aurora considered this a 'major' challenge.

Another example is The Smith Family which operates Learning Clubs across Australia that provide free out-of-school tutoring to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These clubs focus on literacy and numeracy, offering structured sessions with trained volunteers. According to The Smith Family, students attending Learning Clubs show improved school attendance and academic performance, with a reported 87% of participants improved their literacy and numeracy skills. Programs such as this need to be made more widely accessible for remote, rural, and regional areas.

High School Qualification
The Smith Family's Review into Regional, Remote and Rural Education stated that "There is a 14.3% difference in Year 12 completion between those living in major cities and those in inner regional areas, with the gap further increasing with remoteness" (Lamb et al. 2015).

Many of these students are leaving school to pursue their career through TAFE. Vocational Education and Training (VET) allows students a pathway to receive qualifications while remaining in high school. The prevalence of VET courses in regional, rural and remote areas should be increased to keep students in high school. VET is an important pathway for regional and remote students. "Students in provincial, remote and very remote areas are more likely to enrol in VET than those in metropolitan areas" (University of Melbourne, 2019).

Where the opportunity lacks for students to undertake these courses, it would be wise to ensure there are facilities for students to undertake these courses online.

Extracurricular Activities
Participation in extra-curricular activities is linked to positive academic outcomes, such as students' grades and educational aspirations, improved attendance, pro-social behaviours and academic, psychological, and behavioural adjustment (NSW Department of Education, University of Michigan & Connecticut College). Additionally, a lack of opportunities for extracurricular activities worsens the disconnection between the private and public education sectors in rural and regional areas. This effect is greater in rural and regional areas in comparison to metropolitan areas since interschool connection through extracurricular activities is widely accessible in metropolitan areas.

Healthcare

Australians living outside major cities generally experience poorer health outcomes than those in major cities, influenced by lower educational levels, higher unemployment, limited health service access, and a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. People in regional and remote areas are more likely to consume alcohol daily (8% versus 5%) and exceed guidelines for a lifetime (21% versus 15.4%) and monthly single occasion risk (29% versus 24%).

Teen pregnancy rates in rural areas are three times higher than in metropolitan areas (Family Planning Australia, 2020). Adolescent mothers and their babies are more likely to experience health difficulties in the short and longer term. Young mothers also tend to experience socioeconomic disadvantages, including lower rates of education and reduced employment opportunities. An absence of the skills and knowledge about contraception significantly affect the issue of adolescent fertility.

Housing and Homelessness

Youth homelessness in rural areas of Australia stands at 6.2%, compared to 0.8% in urban areas, an unacceptable disproportion as reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) in their Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23. The AIHW defines homelessness as "living in improvised dwellings, supported accommodation, temporary lodging, or severely crowded situations". The AIHW also report that the key factors for youth homelessness includes housing crises (17%), family violence (17%), and inadequate living conditions (12%). Existing programs linked with organisations such as St Vincent de Paul (Vinnies) provide crucial services for homeless youth. However, these services are primarily available in urban areas, leaving rural youth underserved.

Safe accommodation should be provided to ensure homeless youth have a secure place to sleep, with collaborations with existing services, this can be provided through youth centres. Another factor in combatting youth homelessness is to promote social interaction through engaging homeless youth with other young people to foster social connections and community support, volunteering and social interconnection are great ways of achieving social interaction.

Staffing and Volunteers

Youth centres and activities rely on volunteers for support and functionality. The community and Youth sector survey of February 2024 found that the largest way that would help workers better support young people in their community was "access to funding for programs and services" indicating a demand for support of staff and volunteers alike ensuring services are more consistent and accessible. Survey responses from the Riverina Murray in the Regional Youth Insight Report of October 2022 (p. 35) assist in outlining key issues; lack of connection and lack of services, these issues limit their effectiveness of outcomes.

Utilising volunteering initiatives such as the NSW Volunteer Strategy (2020-2030) we can create effective measures, targeting key issues to better meet the demands of youth spaces. Through the prioritisation of staffing and volunteers, directing volunteering strategies to focus on the function of youth services allows further accessibility and support to rural and regional youth.

Contents

I certify that this public Bill, which originated in the Youth Legislative Assembly, has finally passed the Youth Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

Hamani Tanginoa, Youth Voice Coordinator

NSW Youth Parliament

Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Youth Act 2024

Act no. 5, 2024

A Bill for

An Act to engage and support young people through community led spaces; and for other purposes

I have examined this Bill and find it to correspond in all respects with the Bill as finally passed by the Youth Legislative Assembly.

Joshua Shaw, Youth Governor of the NSW Youth Parliament

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The Youth Legislature of New South Wales enacts—

Part 1   Preliminary

1   Name of Act
This Act is the *Rural and Regional Youth Engagement Centre (RRYEC) Establishment Act 2024*.

2   Commencement
The Act commences on 12 August 2025.

3   Relationship with other Acts and laws
This Act prevails to the extent of an inconsistency with another Act or law.

4   Objects
The objects of this act are to—

(a) establish an organisation that orchestrates the operation of facilities targeted at individuals 5 to 25 years of age,

(b) formulate logistical structures, functions, requirements, and hierarchies for said organisation,

(c) provide services to youth demographic in regional and rural areas to bridge inequality gap with metropolitan youth in areas of healthcare, education and training, and recreation,

(d) establish a community-led model for all facilities to ensure maximised benefit to demographic and community, and

(e) establish and encourage a collaborative process for the youth facilities with external organisations.

5   Dictionary
In this Act—

      community is the local area of the youth spaces.

      qualifications are the attributes of an individual, corresponding to the subject of matter, with regards to the necessity of the performance of the duties.

      resources are the materials and equipment used by the facilities.

      upskilling is the ability to build additional skills for future or current endeavours.

> **Note**— The *Interpretation Act 1987* also contains definitions and other provisions that affect the interpretation of this Bill.

Part 2   Establishment

Division 1   Organisational structure

6   State Government oversight
(1) The Government shall maintain ultimate oversight and authority over the centres.

(2) For a facility to be granted approval, it must meet certain criteria and undergo an assessment conducted by the Government.

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7   Structure

(1) The Department of Communities and Justice shall create the "Office for Rural and Regional Youth Centres".

(2) The Office is responsible for the formation of individual facilities, formed with consultation with communities prior to a facility being established.

(3) The Office shall be responsible for the operation of a facility after it is established.

8   Responsibilities

(1) The Minister shall be responsible for the oversight, implementation and management of facility policies, as well as coordinating with the Office to ensure effective operation.

(2) The Office shall be responsible for the operations of facilities and liaising with individual community organisations for the effective delivery of services.

(3) The Community Organisation shall be responsible for the operation of local youth centres in accordance with state guidelines and policies and reporting regularly to the Office.

9   Community Organisations

(1) Community consultations shall occur regularly, involving stakeholders from the community to provide input and feedback on the operation and management of the centres.

(2) Youth Councils shall be established by each local Council to represent the interests and perspectives of the local youth with a direct line of communication with the facilities.

(3) Community organisations shall consist of—

(a) Youth Councils,

(b) local Government Councils, and

(c) youth centre employees.

Division 2   Staffing and volunteers

10   Staff

Persons may be employed in the Public Service under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* to enable to organisation to exercise its functions.

11   Staff and volunteer accreditations

(1) All staffing and volunteers, where applicable, must meet requirements and have at minimum NSW Working with Children Check and Police background checks.

(2) All staff must have an up-to-date accreditation from an appropriate first aid and mental health first aid certificate.

(3) For specific roles, any additional checks and requirements must be attained and submitted within applications.

(4) All staffing and volunteers shall be trained within the People with Disability Australia training for disability awareness.

12   Volunteer management opportunities for 18-to-25-year olds

(1) Opportunities will be provided for individuals who are at least 18 years of age, but not older than 25 years of age to volunteer to coordinate and help with the management of youth centres. This will provide them with upskilling.

(2) The responsibilities placed on these volunteers should be tailored to their skill level.

(3) Placement of centres

13 Wellbeing management

(1) Staff and volunteers shall sign in and out of centres for safety measures, management, and report purposes.

(2) Wellbeing members may be appointed by a head panel and provide online support for staff and volunteers through developed resources by the panel.

14 Employment selection

(1) All employment of volunteers is the responsibility of the Managerial Department, which may appropriately delegate responsibilities to District and Local Managers as needed.

(2) All positions, excluding Board positions, must be available to the public and will be awarded on basis of applicant merit and value of contribution.

(3) Board positions may only be filled through targeted offers from the Managerial Department to qualified individuals.

(4) Community roles are to be appointed by District Managers.

Part 3   Implementation

Division 1   Services offered

15 Placement of centres
Regional and Rural Youth Engagement Centres shall only be placed in levels MM 2 to MM 7 of the Modified Monash Model.

16 Tutoring
Tutoring may be done by community or qualified persons or organisations.

17 Prioritising rural and regional teaching in vias

(1) The Government calls upon the Commonwealth to emphasise volunteer teaching in rural and regional areas through the Skilled Work Regional Visa (subclass 491), which the NSW Government provides nomination for.

(2) Monetary amounts to teachers in regional and rural areas shall be increased with—

(a) the current Rural Teacher Incentive be increased by 100% and made applicable to all rural teaching roles, regardless of demand,

(b) the Experienced Teacher Benefit be increased by 33%, and

(c) the Retention benefit be increased by 100% and the maximum increased from 10 years to perpetuity and made applicable to all teaching roles rather than those currently eligible.

(3) All benefits outlined in subsection (2) shall be applied to regional areas with a monetary benefit of 50% of that in rural areas.

(4) Monetary benefits shall apply to a rate of 75% for non-Government schools.

18   Collaboration with existing services

(1) Tutoring services shall be supported within the facility through either in person or online engagement.

(2) The facility shall collaborate with transport services, according to community needs.

(3) TAFE services may be accessible based on community request through online or physical services.

(4) Coordination for cultural groups or events may collaborate with state or national associations and events or my run independent groups.

(5) Wellbeing services such as headspace shall be included within the facility though online or physical services.

Division 2   Resources

19   Collection of resources

(1) The collection of resources is the independent responsibility of the Management team and staff of each facility according to community needs.

(2) Staff are to use organisation designated funds to obtain the resources for the facility.

(3) All purchases using facility designated funds are to be logged and submitted to the Management team of the facility.

20   Allocation of resource or service funds

(1) Allocation of funds for resources and services must be decided for individual facilities by the Finance Department on an annual basis.

(2) Management teams of facilities must be notified of funding allocation meetings at least 3 months prior.

(3) All facilities must submit a location-specific report prior to the allocation of funds.

21   Details included in resource or service funds report

A resource or service funds report must be completed by a facility every year which contains—

(a) facility information, including locale and contact details,

(b) data regarding utilisation of facility and services offered,

(c) data about the youth demographic surrounding location of facility,

(d) an outline of issues faced by youth in surrounding community,

(e) justification for the pertinence of existing services,

(f) funds usage records,

(g) staffing and non-confidential data,

(h) an estimated amount of funding needed to run each facet of the facility and sustain necessary resource supplies,

(i) any requests for further or developmental funding, which must include an outline of the need and the amount of funds needed, and

(j) any other details deemed relevant by facility staff or organisation.

22   Report and funding logistics

(1) Using the submitted reports information, funds are to be designated by the evaluation panel on a location-specific needs basis.

(2) Any further requests for funds beyond regular allocation must occur via formal application to the evaluation panel.

(3) The formal application is to be formatted similarly to report submitted prior to funding allocation meetings with reasoning for request.

(4) Any requests for further funding must be addressed within 3 months by the evaluation panel unless due to extenuating circumstances.

23   Property requirements

(1) The building size of all facilities must adhere to safety requirements in accordance with SafeWork NSW Guidelines.

(2) Essential amenities including drinking water, electricity, permanent light fixtures, bathrooms, and washing and eating facilities must be provided in accordance with SafeWork NSW Guidelines.

(3) All buildings and facilities must adhere to the safety regulations guide for small/medium commercial infrastructure.

(4) All permanent facilities locations must be selected by evaluation panel in collaboration with the community.

(5) Where there is limited access to public transport to the facility, a mobile facility model shall be created.

(6) The mobile facilities will be equipped with—

(a) resources for health services,

(b) educational support,

(c) recreational activities,

(d) counselling, and

(e) any other services deemed necessary by the direction of the provider in accordance with consultations with the local community.

(7) All facility buildings must uphold the Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010.

24   Grants for resources

Grants for recreational activities may be provided if preexisting budgets are insufficient.

Division 3   Community connection

25   Community engagement and upskilling

(1)   Communities will be encouraged to engage with facilities according to community demands.

(2)   Online support and services shall be created to foster effective community engagement and skills.

(3)   Checks required for facilities may be widely accessible to communities through Service NSW Mobile Service Centres based on community needs.

26   Communication with councils

(1)   Local Councils must be regularly surveyed within annual and needs-basis reports to ensure compliance with community needs.

(2)   Surveying of a Council must inquire on quantitative and qualitative data concerning local demographics of individuals who are at least 5 years of age, but not 25 years of age.

(3)   The inquiry shall investigate—

    (a)   the population distribution of individuals who are at least 5 years of age, but not 25 years of age,

    (b)   school enrolments,

    (c)   attendance rates,

    (d)   primary and high school completion rates,

    (e)   crime rates,

    (f)   recreational and extracurricular activity rates,

    (g)   rates for negative incidents at school,

    (h)   issues faced by young people,

    (i)   minority demographics,

    (j)   any recent significant changes or events in the community that could have affected young people,

    (k)   things the community, including young people, would like to see in the facilities,

    (l)   feedback about previous experiences with youth facilities, if applicable, and

    (m) any other details deemed necessary by the facility or Council.

27   Communicating with young people

(1)   Facilities must engage with young people through annual surveys shared to schools, youth centres and via public community announcement.

(2)   Surveys for young people must inquire about—

(a) school performance,

(b) school attendance,

(c) services offered at school, which may include—

    (i) mental health or wellbeing programs,

    (ii) sporting events

    (iii) extracurriculars,

    (iv) academic events,

    (v) artistic events,

    (vi) leadership programs,

    (vii) healthcare services or education, such as vaccinations or mobile dentistry clinics,

    (viii) personal and professional development workshops, and

    (ix) any other services offered at the school.

(3) Communities shall be engaged within location of services as outlined in section 28.

Part 3   Health and safety services of youth centres

28   Health services in permanent facilities
All facilities will offer services including—

(a) free access to unclassified contraceptives, with appropriate information on how to use,

(b) accessible information regarding Sexually Transmitted Diseases testing and signs for Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and

(c) accessible information regarding age-appropriate sexual education and consent.

29   Drug testing facilities
(1) All facilities shall also have drug checking facilities based on the CanTest permanent pill testing facilities.

(2) These drug testing facilities must—

(a) be able to test for the contents of drugs in their pill, capsule, powder, crystal or liquid form,

(b) not confiscate the tested substance, and

(c) communicate the contents of the substance in an understandable and accessible manner, including harm reduction strategies and potential consequences.

(3) For drugs that cannot be tested, such as those in their plant or diluted form, the facilities shall provide general information.

30 First Aid Courses
Facilities should provide regular first aid upskilling services that provide the *HLTAID003 Provide First Aid Course* and its subsequent training.

Part 4   Education and training services of youth centres

Division 1   Primary school students

31 Recreational activities

(1) A list of recreational activities shall be chosen from participants of the facility who are enrolled from Kindergarten to Year 6.

(2) Both physical and creative recreation must be available within facilities.

32 Education and development

(1) Tutoring and educational activities shall meet NSW Education Standards Authority curriculum.

(2) Youth spaces must include education games and resources.

(3) Allocations of focused education resources shall be community and youth based.

33 Community and culture

(1) Community volunteering shall be implemented within programs to provide community connection and involvement.

(2) Cultural events shall be celebrated and acknowledged within youth spaces based on youth and community demands.

Division 2   Secondary school students

34 Recreational activities

(1) Recreational activities decided by communities and young people, shall be incorporated into spaces through allocation of funding and another services.

(2) Recreational activities may include both physical and creative recreation options.

35 Community and culture

(1) Community volunteering shall be implemented within programs to provide community connection and involvement.

(2) Cultural events shall be celebrated and acknowledged within youth spaces based on youth and community demands.

36 Education and tutoring

(1) Education resources will be prioritised towards academic subjects.

(2) Tutoring grants will be applicable to bring tutors into the communities and upskill community members.

(3) The focus of tutoring shall be chosen by the community, young people and local schools, considering variables that may include—

      (a) school subject results,

(b) youth input,

(c) NAPLAN results, and

(d) Tell Them from Me surveys.

37   Upskilling and development
(1) Grants for community and young people shall be applicable for upskilling and development in areas such as—

(a) work and trades skills,

(b) lifestyle and independence,

(c) job applications and interviews,

(d) volunteering and community service, and

(e) study and education skills.

(2) Upskilling resources may be sourced from communities or preexisting organisations.

Division 3   Advanced youth

38   Upskilling and development
(1) Funds may be used for upskilling in areas of demand that are identified by young people.

(2) Financial skill workshops shall be provided, with frequency requested by community.

(3) Financial literacy resources shall be provided within all youth spaces.

(4) Funding may be allocated within upskilling areas with additional grants on application such as—

(a) work and trades skills,

(b) lifestyle and independence,

(c) job applications and interviews,

(d) volunteering and community service, and

(e) study and education skills.

39   Community and Culture
(1) Community volunteering may be implemented within programs to provide community connection and involvement.

(2) Cultural events shall be celebrated and acknowledged within youth spaces based on youth and community demands.