



The Y NSW Youth Parliament

Equitable Third Spaces Youth Act 2026

Bill Proposed By: 2026 Families & Communities Portfolio

Lead Sponsor: Ellena Halloran, Youth Minister for Families & Communities,
Youth Member for Wallsend

Sponsors: Emma McLennan, Youth Member for Cessnock
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Laisa Gordon, Youth Member for Rockdale

Summary of Debate:

On Wednesday the 15th of July 2026 the *Equitable Third Spaces Youth Bill 2026* was debated on the floor of the NSW Legislative Assembly; presided over by The Hon. Abigail Boyd MLC.

Results of the Vote:

The results of the vote on the passage of amendments were 24 Ayes, 24 Noes, 7 Abstentions. As such, the amendments were resolved in the negative.

The results of the vote on the passage of the bill were 45 Ayes, 4 Noes, 2 Abstentions. As such, the bill was passed.

The *Equitable Third Spaces Youth Bill 2026* was passed in its original form.

I certify that this Bill has been duly passed by the Y Youth Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, has received assent, and is now a Youth Act.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JD'.

Jamison Dustin, 24th Youth Governor of the Y NSW Youth Parliament

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The Y NSW Youth Parliament

Equitable Third Spaces Youth Bill 2026

Act no. 05, 2026

An Act to

Increase community engagement and connection for young people in NSW and related 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.

Alyssa Pinchbeck, Youth Premier of the Y NSW Youth Parliament – Leader of the Government in the Legislative Assembly

Explanatory Note

Summary

The object of this Bill establishes a framework for the creation and operation of Youth Oriented Third Spaces across NSW, in order to provide young people, families, and marginalised community groups with accessible, community-driven support.

This Bill comes at a time where young people, particularly those from regional, rural, and remote communities and/or marginalised community groups, face significant barriers to accessing resources and support networks. Without adequate community infrastructure, young people become increasingly vulnerable to disengagement, isolation, and crime. This applies to young people across metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote communities, as well as marginalised groups including First Nations peoples, migrants, refugees, and those impacted by the justice system.

This bill aims to establish accessible and inclusive third spaces that serve young people and their communities by equipping them with the necessary life skills to thrive, including occupational and education related assistance, financial literacy, and healthy relationship education. Through mechanisms that review the operation of Youth Oriented Third Spaces, the Bill aims to ensure that they are run effectively and provide community-identified solutions.

Ultimately, the establishment of Youth Oriented Third Spaces must serve to address inequities in community support, by creating accessible spaces that foster belonging, opportunity, and wellbeing for young people and their communities across NSW.

Overview of Provisions

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

Part 2 focuses on ensuring that local communities have access to Youth Oriented Third Spaces which effectively represent the needs of the community. Executed through the inclusion of appropriate expertise and diverse perspectives to create an operational structure for the execution of further initiatives.

Part 3 focuses on promoting accessible, inclusive and equitable Youth Oriented Third Spaces. It aims to ensure all young people can access support, opportunities and community connections regardless of their background or location.

Part 4 outlines the mandatory and elective programs and youth and community contribution initiatives offered by the Youth Oriented Third Spaces Committee. These programs are supported by community-led delivery frameworks, which aim to best reflect the needs and concerns of both local communities and the State.

Rationale

Young people across New South Wales are experiencing increasing levels of disengagement within their communities. These challenges are contributing to broader issues including increased youth crime, declining mental health and reduced community participation. Third spaces are defined as environments outside the home, school or workplace where individuals can gather and engage socially, and are able to play a critical role in addressing these challenges by providing opportunities for community participation.

This rationale looks at key issues young people are currently facing and why existing spaces are not meeting their needs, before exploring how better designed and more accessible third spaces could help improve connection and engagement across NSW.

Key Issues Youth Are Facing

Youth Crime

Youth crime remains a steady issue within NSW, with 21,062 young offenders between January and December 2025. Within these statistics, 14-17-year-olds committed over 80% of offences. Further, the 4 highest crimes committed included non-domestic violence-related assaults, stealing from retail stores, intimidation, stalking and harassment and disorderly conduct. (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2024). Factors contributing to these crimes include peer pressure, exposure to violence, association with anti-social peers, gender-based power inequalities and digital activity.

Social and situational crime prevention methods such as diverting youth from high-crime areas such as shopping malls, providing educational or recreational activities to support youth or offering a safe, neutral space to hang out are key ways to address youth crime.

Mental Health

Across NSW, youth are experiencing significant levels of poor mental health. In 2026, 21% of people in NSW aged 10-24 were identified as not having positive mental health levels (Denejkina, Chambers and Baganz, 2026). In the 2024-25 NSW budget, \$2.9 billion was set aside for mental health support services (NSW Health, 2024). However, these supports are often not accessed by struggling disadvantaged youth.

Reasons for not seeking professional help include cost, access, and lack of support (Denejkina, Chambers and Baganz, 2026). Despite many young people wanting to connect with others and build life skills, they are often isolated from these opportunities. Members of minority communities and those who live in remote, rural and regional areas are often the most socially isolated, and this can lead to mental illnesses (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025). This gap in support must be met in a way that better suits those of varying backgrounds.

Youth Disconnectedness from Communities and Peers

Young people across NSW are experiencing alarming rates of disconnection from their communities and peers. Nearly one in four young people report feeling lonely all or most of the time, and 35% say they do not feel connected to people in their neighbourhood (Mission Australia, 2025).

This disconnection is driven by the decline of accessible third spaces and economic disadvantages that prevent participation in community events such as paid activities or programs which foster a sense of belonging. Thus when young people lose this feeling, communities lose the opportunity to provide support and connection that would positively impact struggling individuals.

How Do Third Spaces Address These Issues

Existing Structures in Regards to Third Spaces in NSW

Existing structures, including libraries, community centres, youth hubs and council-led initiatives, provide limited opportunities for social connection and engagement, but their accessibility depends heavily on local funding, proximity, and awareness. As a result, there is currently no consistent, statewide provision for youth to access safe and inclusive third spaces. This issue is exacerbated in remote, rural and regional areas, wherein access to essential wellbeing and social services is significantly hindered and requires greater investment. (NSW Council of Social Service, 2025)

The NSW Government has acknowledged this ongoing issue through programs such as Youth Opportunities, which has invested \$19.8 million and delivered 434 youth-empowering projects since 2012. However, the fact that funding is delivered through discrete rounds, including \$1.5 million to 35 organisations in 2024/25 and a further \$735,000 to 16 organisations in April 2025, demonstrates that support for youth spaces remains uneven, competitive and dependent on grant availability rather than guaranteed access.

Currently, there is a lack of incentives to join programs, as there is a pre-existing ideology of what the youth enjoy. Organisations fail to ensure their activities remain relevant to the changing tendencies of young people as a whole. To reach a broader youth population, organisations should utilise resources, such as the Youth Engagement Toolkit created by the Office for Youth.

What Do We Want Third Spaces to Look Like?

Activities Provided

Increasing the number of third spaces must be accompanied by a diverse and meaningful range of activities to create engaging and supporting environments. A mandatory baseline of programs should include educational initiatives such as domestic violence awareness, and essential life skills. These spaces need to provide discreet access to support young people who may not have safe avenues to seek help. Furthermore, third spaces must offer community-specific recreational and creative programs to encourage participation to foster a sense of community such as access to technology or support services.

Youth Involvement in Process

Young people must be actively involved in shaping the programs offered, ensuring activities reflect their interests and needs. For First Nations youth, culturally appropriate programs are essential, including opportunities to connect with local Elders and engage in cultural practices, storytelling, and community-building activities. These spaces should be designed to feel welcoming and youth-oriented rather than overly institutional.

Increasing Accessibility and Knowledge

Increased accessibility requires practical and prominent advertisement through multiple channels, such as local businesses, schools, social media, and community organisations. Through strong advertising, newer and/or improved third spaces will become more commonly used. It also requires optimal placement of these third spaces, such as rural and remote communities where there is limited access. Utilising pre-built spaces within communities can reduce the expense of creating a new facility. Physical accessibility needs to be considered, such as disability support access, flexible hours, and feasible public transport. Lastly, youth activities must offer effective incentives to encourage participation such as free entry and/or food.

Conclusion

Third spaces are a necessary implementation to enhance youth community engagement and address issues seen in current third spaces, mental health, youth crime and youth disconnection. They are a vital way to ensure youth are able to access a space where they feel safe and are able to successfully participate in local activities.

Reference List

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The Y Youth Legislature of New South Wales enacts—

Part 1 Preliminary

1 Name of Act

This Act is the Equitable Thirds Space Youth Act 2026

2 Commencement

This Act commences upon Assent.

3 Objects

The objects of this Act are to—

- (a) To establish equitable third spaces for the youth of New South Wales.
- (b) To increase community connection and engagement within local communities.
- (c) To provide effective support and structure for the establishment and operation of youth-oriented third spaces.
- (d) To promote inclusivity and accessibility for all youth, particularly:
 - i. Disadvantaged and/or marginalised communities,
 - ii. First Nations communities,
 - iii. Rural, regional and remote communities,
 - iv. People with physical disability or mental health challenge.
- (e) To actively engage with local young people and community members to ensure an accurate reflection of community requirements.
- (f) To establish a state-wide approach to addressing discrepancies and provide support to young people in New South Wales through the use of mandatory programs.
- (g) To establish community-led elective programs to best reflect the needs and wants of the local communities
- (h) To ensure Youth Oriented Third Spaces are held accountable in addressing the needs of the local community
- (i) To ensure that youth and community contributions shape the development of youth-oriented third spaces in New South Wales
- (j) solidate and update laws governing public records
- (k) promote standardised digital recordkeeping
- (l) facilitate safe and efficient public access to government information
- (m) preserve records of cultural, historical, or legal significance.

4 Definitions

In this Act—

Young people refers to persons aged 12 to 25

Third Space means a social environment outside of a person's home and their school and/or other formal education setting and/or workplace

Local community includes a group of people that share common geographic, cultural, or other experiences.

People experiencing family or housing instability refers to individuals who currently lack access to safe, permanent, and affordable living arrangements

People impacted by the justice system refers to those who have directly experienced the criminal or youth justice systems. This includes formerly or currently incarcerated people, individuals on parole, and their families.

People experiencing low-socio economic situations refers to individuals or households with limited financial resources, lower educational attainment, and marginalized employment.

People experiencing mental health challenges refers to people experiencing disruptions in their emotional, psychological, or social well-being that make daily life or relationships hard to manage

People who identify as neurodivergent refers to people's brains functioning and processing the world differently than what society considers to be standard

Marginalised community group refers to a population that has been denied access to equal opportunities and resources due to factors such as bias and discrimination

Geographic accessibility standards refer to guidelines that measure and evaluate the physical ease for individuals to access particular services, based on their location and available transportation infrastructure

MM means Modified Monash in terms of the Modified Monash Model

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

Part 2 Youth Oriented Third Spaces

5 Establishment and Use

- (1) The Minister must provide Youth Oriented Third Spaces to local communities.
 - a. the Youth Orientated Third Spaces shall primarily serve
 - i. young people; and

- ii. marginalised community groups; and
 - iii. families.
 - b. The Minister is to establish a Youth Oriented Third Spaces Committee within their portfolio to:
 - i. Appoint a community liaison officer; and
 - ii. Collaborate with the community liaison officer to establish an adequate location for the installation of a third space; and
 - iii. Oversee the implementation and continuance of the mandatory and elective programs; and
 - iv. Ensure the adherence of Youth Oriented Third Spaces to the designated requirements
 - c. The Youth Oriented Third Spaces should be established through either:
 - i. The creation of new dedicated facilities; or
 - ii. The repurposement of underutilised spaces.
- (2) Each of these Youth Oriented Third Spaces should include:
 - a. Areas accessible to the wider community, including families.
 - b. Dedicated spaces for specific activities and youth age groups.

6 Resources and Review

- (1) The Minister is to work in collaboration with the Youth Oriented Third Space Committee and the respective community liaison officer to determine a budget of expected costs.
 - a. This is to include, but is not limited to:
 - i. Staffing salaries; and
 - ii. The creation or renovation of facilities; and
 - iii. Maintenance and upkeep; and
 - iv. Mandatory and elective program funding
- (2) Each Youth Oriented Third Space must issue an Implementation Plan in collaboration with the Youth Oriented Third Space Committee and the respective community liaison officer, outlining:
 - a. The projected dates of commencement and completion; and
 - b. The methods through which the Youth Oriented Third Space will engage with their respective community; and
 - c. When mandatory programs will commence; and
 - d. Which elective programs will be run, and when they will commence.
- (3) The Minister shall establish an independent review body to ensure:
 - a. The accountability of Youth Oriented Third Space Committee and the respective community liaison officer; and
 - b. Young people, marginalised groups and the wider community are actively and sufficiently supported.
- (4) The Independent review board shall oversee the execution of the following measures, but not limited to:
 - a. The location of the venue; and
 - b. Budget allocation; and
 - c. Implementation of mandatory and elective programs; and
 - d. Effectiveness of advertisement and engagement.

Part 3 Accessibility and Knowledge

7 Inclusive and Accessible Youth Oriented Third Spaces

- (1) Youth Oriented Third Spaces must be physically accessible, by:
 - a. Providing appropriate ramps and accessible pathways; and
 - b. Complying with disability standards set by the National Construction Code; and
 - c. Complying with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) and the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW).
- (2) Youth Oriented Third Spaces must offer support and cater to people experiencing mental health challenges, including but not limited to:
 - a. Providing access to mental health support, which may involve:
 - i. An on-site trained professional; and
 - ii. Assisting with scheduling visits to a mental health professional; and
 - iii. Facilitating access to online mental health services or platforms accredited by the National Safety and Quality Digital Mental Health Standards.
 - b. Designating at least one quiet area suitable for a mental health and wellbeing space, where possible.
- (3) Youth Oriented Third Spaces must offer support and cater to people who identify as neurodivergent, including but not limited to:
 - a. Creating a welcoming, safe space; and
 - b. Facilitating connects to existing resources and networks of support.
- (4) Youth Oriented Third Spaces must offer additional support to marginalised community groups, including but not limited to:
 - a. People experiencing family or housing instability by:
 - i. Providing assistance in applying to emergency shelter; and
 - ii. Facilitating connections with existing infrastructure and initiatives
 - b. People who identify as migrants and/ or refugees by:
 - i. Providing financial literacy support; and
 - ii. Providing language support; and
 - iii. Facilitating connects to existing resources and networks of support.
 - c. People who identify within the LGBTQIA+ community by:
 - i. Facilitating connections with confidential support networks and resources; and
 - ii. Offering confidentiality in regards to mental health support.
 - d. People experiencing low-socio economic situations or unemployment, by:
 - i. Providing assistance with identifying and applying for scholarships and financial aid; and
 - ii. Creating connections to relevant local and state-wide financial support resources and services; and
 - iii. Providing assistance with job seeking, including resume preparation, interview skills, and submitting applications.
 - e. People impacted by the justice system, including those transitioning from detention into the community, by:
 - i. Supporting access to reintegration services and transitional assistance programs; and
 - ii. Creating connections to relevant local and state wide housing, education, employment, and wellbeing support services; and
 - iii. Facilitating access to mentoring, life skills, and community engagement programs aimed at supporting positive social outcomes.

- f. People who identify as a woman, including both cisgender and transgender women, by:
 - i. Facilitating access to safe, inclusive, and supportive community spaces and services; and
 - ii. Promoting opportunities for leadership development, community participation, and social connection; and
 - iii. Supporting access to mentoring, advocacy, and programs designed to promote safety, inclusion, and equal participation within the community.

8 Cultural Inclusion and First Nations Considerations

- (1) All Youth Oriented Third Spaces must be inclusive and responsive to First Nations cultures by:
 - a. Consulting with First Nations Elders and communities; and
 - b. Displaying First Nations artwork, flags, language and signage within the space; and
 - c. Ensuring staff and volunteers have completed cultural awareness training; and
 - d. Creating safe and welcoming environments where discrimination and racism are not tolerated; and
 - e. Including books, music and resources created by First Nations authors and artists; and
 - f. Hosting collaborative programs, led by First Nations people.
- (2) All Youth Oriented Third Spaces must provide, or facilitate access to, culturally appropriate programs and facilities for First Nations people, including but not limited to:
 - a. Opportunities to connect with local Elders; and
 - b. Engagement in cultural practices, including but not limited to:
 - i. Yarning circles and Storytelling from Elders
 - ii. Dance language workshops
 - iii. Art workshops
 - c. Resources to assist young people in finding their Country; and
 - d. Cultural mentoring and leadership programs led by First Nations community members; and
 - e. Facilities to cater to cultural ceremonies; and
 - f. Outdoor spaces that encourage connection to Country and nature; and
 - g. Educational resources that reflect First Nations histories, perspectives and achievements.
- (3) First Nations Programs must be co-designed or reviewed with First Nations community members.
- (4) Cultural programs must allow non-First Nations people to participate respectfully and learn about First Nations cultures.

9 Geographical Accessibility Standards

- (1) The Minister must establish geographic accessibility standards for the distribution of Youth Oriented Third Spaces to ensure equitable access across NSW.
- (2) The Minister must establish separate criteria for:
 - a. Metropolitan areas (MM 1); and
 - b. Regional centres (MM 2); and

- c. Rural towns (MM 3-5); and
 - d. Remote Communities (MM 6-7)
- (3) To determine the distribution of Youth Oriented Third Spaces, the Minister must establish a travel time or distance quota which must:
- a. Not exceed 60 minutes or 48km by available transport for metropolitan areas; and
 - b. Meet a standard established by the Minister for regional, rural and remote communities; and
 - c. Consider the availability of public transport and infrastructure within each area.

10 Advertisement and Engagement

- (1) The Youth Oriented Third Space Committee is to work alongside the Community Liaison officer to ensure adequate advertising by:
- a. Facilitating youth-led advertisement initiatives,
 - b. Designating a youth media officer,
 - c. Promoting the Youth Oriented Third Space through multiple forms of advertisement, including but not limited to:
 - i. Social media; and
 - ii. Local community print media; and
 - iii. A state endorsed Youth Oriented Third Space campaign.
- (2) The Youth Oriented Third Space Committee is to work alongside the respective Community Liaison officer to ensure adequate engagement, by
- a. Meeting engagement quotas set by the independent review body, which may include:
 - i. Magnitude of attendees to the Youth Oriented Third Space
 - ii. Participation in mandatory and elective programs
 - b. If the prescribed quotas are not met by a respective Youth-Oriented Third Space, appropriate interventions must be undertaken, which may include:
 - i. A review of the quality, delivery, and administration of the program; and
 - ii. The expansion or improvement of advertising and community outreach initiatives; and
 - iii. Research and consultation conducted by the Community Liaison Officer, including surveys where appropriate, to identify any aggravating factors and to recommend or implement suitable changes.

Part 4 Programs and Youth Incentives

11 Mandatory Programs

- (1) Youth Oriented Third Spaces must provide community members with opportunities to participate in the required mandatory programs, including:
- a. Healthy relationship education, including but not limited to:
 - i. Family and domestic violence awareness and prevention; and
 - ii. Consent education; and
 - iii. Access to counselling and support services; and
 - iv. Education to enable young people to recognise signs of abuse, access support services, and understand safe reporting pathways for themselves or others.

- b. Financial literacy, including but not limited to the management and understanding of:
 - i. Debt and credit; and
 - ii. Superannuation and tax; and
 - iii. Loans and savings; and
 - iv. The housing and share market.
 - c. Occupation related support, including but not limited to:
 - i. Resume preparation and interview skills; and
 - ii. Assistance with completing job applications; and
 - iii. Understanding workplace rights and responsibilities under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth).
 - d. Life skills, including but not limited to:
 - i. Support with developing cooking skills, nutritional knowledge and healthy lifestyle habits; and
 - ii. Assistance with building organisational, time management and independent living skills; and
 - iii. Car registration, maintenance and safety education.
 - e. Education and school related support, including but not limited to:
 - i. Support with applications for universities, TAFE, selective schools, trade colleges and scholarships; and
 - ii. Support with schoolwork through the provision of tutoring assistance; and
 - iii. Assistance with balancing workload, schedules and time management skills.
- (2) Youth Oriented Third Space committee must establish an adaptable framework for the delivery of mandatory programs, taking into account:
- a. Existing government funded programs and initiatives at both State and Federal levels; and
 - b. Community priorities identified through consultation and engagement,
 - c. Staffing and budget requirements; and
 - d. Suitable recommendations for program frequency and delivery schedules; and
 - e. Different regional and local locations of youth-oriented third spaces.

12 Elective Programs

- (1) Youth Oriented Third Space committee must engage and collaborate with the designated community liaison officer, young people of the community, and other community members to identify elective programs that best meet the needs of their communities, such as:
- a. Sporting opportunities and educational programs, such as:
 - i. Programs that promote physical health, wellbeing, and positive social connection; and
 - ii. Opportunities for involvement in competitions and tournaments; and
 - iii. Access to programs introducing new sports and recreational activities.
 - b. Digital literacy education and support programs, such as:
 - i. Development of essential computer and internet skills; and
 - ii. Education surrounding digital safety, cyberbullying awareness, and responsible online behaviour; and
 - iii. Access to support services addressing mental health challenges influenced by online environments.
 - c. Creative expression initiatives designed to encourage participation and skill development, such as:
 - i. Public performance and showcase opportunities; and
 - ii. Opportunities to participate in art and creative workshops .

- (2) The Youth Oriented Third Space Committee must establish effective program delivery structures for selected elective programs, while considering:
- a. The popularity of the chosen elective, statewide; and
 - b. Existing government funded programs and initiatives at both State and Federal levels; and
 - c. Community priorities identified through consultation and engagement; and
 - d. Staffing and budget requirements; and
 - e. Suitable recommendations for program frequency and delivery schedules; and
 - f. Varying geographical locations of Youth Orientated Third Spaces.

13 Youth and Community Contributions

- (1) The development and implementation of mandatory and elective programs must incorporate meaningful consultation with young people to enable the accurate representation of youth perspectives and broader community needs.
- (2) Youth and community consultation must be facilitated by the creation or utilisation of the following, including but not limited to:
- a. The creation of a Youth advisory council to:
 - i. Evaluate proposals; and
 - ii. Identify potential programs that best meet young people's needs within their communities; and
 - iii. Appoint a designated community youth media officer.
 - b. The establishment of a strategy to increase engagement with isolated members of the community; and
 - c. An established consultation process designed to engage the wider community and representative groups.



Produced for The Y NSW Youth Parliament