

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH CITIZENSHIP: THREE CASE  
STUDIES.

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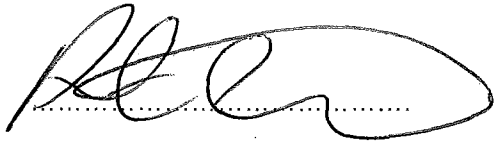
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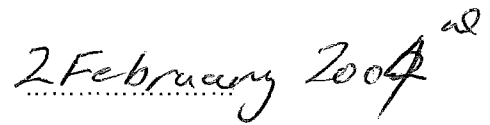
August 2003

## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree, diploma, or post graduate qualification at any other university or institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is provided.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, written over a dotted line.

Signature

A handwritten date in black ink, written as '2 February 2007' with a small superscript '20' at the end, written over a dotted line.

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is often said that 'nothing worthwhile comes easy'. If I didn't know before, I now firmly believe this to be so. I am sure that my wife Terrie and the rest of my family would agree. Expressions of heartfelt thanks for their support, and apologies for the manner in which this project was to in many ways dominate their existence will seem inadequate relative to the sacrifices they made. Completion of this thesis is very much a testament to their support and tolerance.

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## Abbreviations

ACC	Athena City Council
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
BCC	Burke City Council
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSF	Community Support Fund
DEET	Department of Education Employment & Training
KSC	Kimberly Shire Council
LGA	Local Government Area
LHMU	Liquor Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers Union.
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MSD	Melbourne Statistical Division
NOLG	National Office of Local Government
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VLGA	Victorian Local Governance Association

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## **Thesis summary**

This study centred on three local governments which claimed to give priority to youth participation. Two of those municipalities were identified on the basis of employing youth participation officers, while the third was volunteered to participate in the study by the Mayor of the day who claimed that “their Council was streets ahead” of other local governments in their response to the issues of young people from within their municipality.

The study was designed to ascertain how the selected Councils engaged with young people and provided opportunities for them to participate fully in the community. I interviewed the key stakeholders of the three municipalities from which I had agreement to participate. During these frank, unstructured interviews, I asked a range of questions about engagement of young people within the community. Each interview was of approximately one hour duration.

Interviewees included elected councillors including the Mayor of each municipality; senior staff within Councils including each Chief Executive Officer; and youth work staff including those described as Youth Participation and Youth Development Officers.

I also examined corporate documents including Annual Reports, Annual Plans, and Council Meeting Minutes from each of the councils under study. These documents provided valuable information about Council priorities, budgets, achievements and future directions.

For another part of the study, I examined back copies of Leader newspapers published in each of the municipalities under study. Using a specially designed data collection form, I collected a range of information about all articles referring to young

people, or which had young people as the main focus of the article. Following collection of newspaper data, I entered all of the information into a specially designed template I had previously created in the Statview statistical analysis program. A range of statistical calculations were then performed and frequency tables produced. This part of the study was conducted in response to a claim that newspaper reporting of youth issues in Kimberly was quite generous compared to other municipalities. Such a claim was not proved to be statistically significant however. Nonetheless, the data showed that contrary to anecdotal evidence and other research related to young people and media, the nature of reporting of young people and their issues in the municipalities under study was overwhelmingly positive.

Despite the rhetoric espoused by each local government in relation to youth development within their municipalities, two Councils proved to be disappointing in respect to what they actually delivered. This demonstrated that simply hiring a youth worker and giving them the title of Youth Participation Officer will achieve little if the Council is not serious about youth participation.

For Athena and Burke City Councils, the rhetoric failed to concur with reality. Athena City Council demonstrated few opportunities for young people to participate in community activities and interviews with Athena staff revealed interference from elected representatives, compromising attempts to empower young people. Such interference has been blamed on Councillors trying to hurry a process to see results on the board for political gain.

This study showed that the Council with the least resources and the largest geographical area actually performed far better than the other two municipalities. That particular Council adopted a community development approach to working with young people within the municipality out of necessity. As a municipality comprising a

number of towns over a large area, such an approach was the only way that the youth worker could service the community.

Despite individual failings, a major finding of this study is that we can conclude that local government does have a valid role in promoting the full participation of young people within their communities. This includes the involvement of young people in the development of programs and services that best meet their needs and wants. Further, while the focus of this study was largely on the concept of social citizenship, it became apparent that a broader definition of political citizenship than simply voting or standing for office is as important for the development of young people and their participation in the community, and sometimes indistinguishable from, the concept of social citizenship.

Gleaned from the study is a range of conditions determined as desirable to be present for maximising young people's full participation in their communities. These conditions are more indicative of young people's development opportunities than any of the geographical or demographic traits. These conditions include a stated policy commitment to young people; a professional framework for delivery of programs and services; a holistic approach to the delivery of services, connected to sound planning and coordination; and a supportive elected leadership team that refrains from interfering for political gain. Further, a dedicated council officer with a commitment to positively promoting and empowering young people, and supported by the organisations' policies and practices is essential. That same officer would also require a liberal dose of autonomy and an approach to the development of young people that sees the participation in a process as important as any outcome, and indeed as an outcome in itself.



That local government is seen as key player within the community in relation to youth issues also became apparent from the study. Across Australia, a wide range of programs, activities and approaches were highlighted which relate to aspects of citizenship. This demonstrates an acknowledgement by local government as a sector that youth issues and youth development is no longer an optional extra, but is indeed 'core business'.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore how selected local governments in Victoria are promoting engagement with and involvement of young people within their communities, encouraging participation in decision making and civic processes, and involving young people in the development of programs and services that best meet their needs and wants. While Manly (2000) suggests that young people's participation in public and community activities provides them with opportunities that may not exist elsewhere in their lives, Ewen (1994) and Manning (1992) point out that the benefits to young people of participation cannot be overstated. For Davies and Gibson, participation is a fundamental part of young people's social education:

The place of young people in our society is one of extended socialisation...where the adults in a society equip, deliberately or not, their young to contribute to and to benefit from the society in which they are growing up (Davies & Gibson 1967:56), and:

Truly helpful social education must...prepare young people for the parts they are obliged to play in society (Davies & Gibson 1967:17).

Similarly, Pittman (1996) suggested that as young people grow, it is important to set expectations for them to be "not just problem-free, but fully prepared". This thesis will illustrate how three local governments within the State of Victoria approach the challenge of 'fully preparing' young people toward full participation in society and extending citizenship for young people beyond simple political and legal rights. At the centre of the study is an examination of the means by which these Councils are encouraging and involving young people in community and civic activities, as well as attempts to ameliorate risk factors and disadvantage within their municipalities<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that due to an undertaking to provide anonymity to interview participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the text in place of the actual names of Councils and individuals interviewed. Chapter 1.4 *A note on the use of pseudonyms* describes this more fully.

This study sought to answer three key questions. Firstly, what are the prerequisites for local government in the State of Victoria to promote citizenship among young people, particularly in relation to the concept of social citizenship as described by British Sociologist T.H. Marshall? Secondly, how can local government best engage with young people and how would a 'best practice' model of engagement with young people look? Thirdly, what barriers exist within local government toward delivering such a model? These key questions became the ultimate determinants of the methodological framework of the study and suggested an interpretive approach employing primarily qualitative data. Complex interaction between local governments and their communities can provide a number of ways of understanding, or separate 'realities', depending on whose perspective is taken.

## 1.2 Rationale for the study

My interest in youth participation and citizenship stems in part from more than a decade as a professional youth worker. My professional experience extends across youth housing, juvenile justice, employment placement and training; and involvement in the training of youth workers at both TAFE level and University.

'Encourage young people to participate' was the catchcry regularly heard in organisations where I had worked, though this often meant 'find a young person courageous and/or articulate enough to be the young people's representative on the Committee of Management'. Such attempts at encouraging young people to 'participate' were rarely sustained, with staff continually feeling the pressure to find ways for young people to have meaningful involvement in decision making at the agency level.

During the same period, successive Federal governments expressed concern at the level of knowledge displayed by young people about our system of government and

democracy. As a result, the continuing *Discovering Democracy* project was launched in secondary schools across the country (Erebus Consulting Group 1999). While not dismissing the importance of such knowledge, I began to take the view that citizenship and democracy for young people had to go beyond simply being able to name successive Prime Ministers and having sufficient preparation to exercise the right to vote or stand for public office.

A further stimulus for personal interest in this topic was provided by my election to the Darebin City Council in September of 1998. As I began to gain an understanding of the complexities of local government, I observed with interest attempts by the Darebin City Council and other Victorian Councils to provide young people with decision making opportunities, both as part of the political process and more broadly in genuine consultative attempts to plan services and activities in conjunction with them. Even more exciting was that some Councils saw a more expansive role in relation to the community and young people, venturing into activities that would more rightly be categorised as fitting Marshall's<sup>2</sup> social, rather than political or rights based citizenship schema. Similarly, at a state government level we have seen the emergence of community building and whole of government approaches to youth development issues including the provision of education, training and employment.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature concerning a number of concepts and issues relevant to the study. These concepts are categorised under the headings of Citizenship, Youth Rights, Local Government, Political Apathy and Participation and Democracy. Within the local government section are examples of local government contributions to innovation and good practice in youth development, across Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 Literature Review for an examination of Marshall's concepts of citizenship

Chapter Three of this thesis will outline the methodological framework which underpins this study, the nature of the data collected and the methods of collection; and methods of data analysis employed during the research. Further, this chapter will outline the rationale behind the choice of cases. Access to cases will be also discussed, in addition to ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six respectively present the case studies of each of the three municipalities under enquiry. At the beginning of each chapter is demographic information such as population, diversity, unemployment and income levels; as well as the nature of the political leadership of the Council. The second and major component of these chapters is comprised of data extracted from transcriptions of interviews conducted, in addition to information gleaned from relevant council and other documents. Organised according to a number of themes identified during data coding, these sections will present details of the programs, policies, successes, failures and barriers to success of each Council relative to young people and participation. Further, these case study chapters will present data collected from an examination of local newspaper reporting within each Local Government Area, focussing on how young people are portrayed. Each of these chapters will conclude with a summary of the characteristics of the respective case.

Comparative issues will be the focus of Chapter Seven. Organised under four sub sections, data from each of the three cases will be compared and contrasted. The first explores the physical, social and political environment. Here, information about the people and the places are juxtaposed to investigate whether similarities or differences in the nature of engagement of young people can be linked to factors such as isolation, diversity, or a particular 'colour' of political leadership within those communities.

The next sub section compares the individual organisations and how their values, structures and leadership contribute to the nature of youth activity within each respective municipality. This includes the kinds of commitments made by the Council, and the way the organisational structure may advance or inhibit youth participation in Council decision making and community activities.

The third sub section within this chapter will provide comparative analysis of particular actions, initiatives and outcomes from each municipality, while the final section of this chapter will summarise the previous sub sections.

Chapter Eight presents the conclusions drawn and recommendations arising from the study. General discussion of the findings and implications for theory and practice are expounded, particularly those relevant to local government. Limitations of the current study and opportunities for further study in this field are also explored.

#### 1.4 A note on the use of pseudonyms

During the course of this study, I sought the cooperation of interview respondents to be as candid as they possibly could. Some respondents were initially cautious prior to interview until I gave a commitment that their identities would be protected. Despite these assurances, on a number of occasions during interviews I had to reassure interviewees, particularly after comments from them including "I think I've said too much" (interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000), and after speaking about another individual, "this isn't going to the person written down is it?" (interview Denis O'Brien 27/2/2001).

Not to protect the identity of all would have exposed some individuals, particularly paid staff, to at least embarrassment and perhaps, professional or workplace difficulties. This would have compromised a commitment given in accordance with

RMIT Ethics Committee approval that the conduct of this research project would not cause any immediate or future disadvantage to individuals or agencies agreeing to participate or not.

All pseudonyms used within this study were chosen by the researcher and bear no relationship to the municipalities or individuals they represent. In addition, the gender as indicated of any individual interview respondent is no indication that the person so described is of that gender.

The use of pseudonyms for local governments involved as case studies and individuals from those local governments has necessitated protecting the anonymity of documents sourced from subject councils. Such documents will be described with their pseudonymous names in the text of the thesis and will be listed separately from the bibliography, again using the pseudonym, as in Appendix i. Where the title of the document is likely to identify the subject council or individual, eg media releases, the title of the release is not included and is simply described as '*Media Release*'. To ensure that all evidence presented within this thesis is verifiable, a complete list of such publications described in full with original names and publication details is available and can be provided to supervisors and examiners if required.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 The concept of citizenship

Central to this study is the examination of the notion of citizenship, beginning with the seminal work of British Sociologist T. H. Marshall (1950). Marshall proposed that citizenship emerged in three phases: civil, political and social (1950:10). He suggested that civic or civil rights are those necessary for individual freedom; liberty of the individual, freedom of speech, right to own property and the right to justice. By political citizenship, he included the right to participate in the exercise of power: to vote and stand for elected office. By 'social citizenship', Marshall is describing the rights of people to a minimum of economic welfare and security, through to "the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in our society" (Marshall 1950:11).

A major theme of Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950) was that expanding citizenship rights were incongruous with the inherent inequalities in the capitalist system (1950:29). However, he contended that prior to the end of the nineteenth century, while ostensibly a means of class abatement, social rights served to keep the 'lower classes' relatively quiet and content enough not to destroy the system (1950:32-3). The development of social rights in the twentieth century was more focused on changing the structures that created and maintained inequality (1950:47). According to Shaver, "Marshall saw the social rights of the welfare state as managing the contradiction of the inequalities of labour market and social class and the equality of status appropriate to a democratic community" (1995).

Critics of aspects of Marshall's theory have emerged (Kenny 1997; Coles 1995; Barbalet 1993; Turner 1993a, 1990; Jones and Wallace 1992; Lister 1990); particularly in relation to his narrow definition of a citizen. "Citizenship is a status



bestowed on those who are full members of a community (1950:28)” and the adult male is “...the citizen *par excellence*” (1950:24). Wallace (2001:16-17) states that Marshall’s concept of social citizenship was “...based upon a post war model of the welfare state established by Keynesian policies of full (male) employment”. Wallace further argues that such a model was predicated on the ‘standard’ transitions to adulthood experienced by young people of that period. Since 1970 however, access to many of the benefits of social citizenship has been reduced.

Further critics of Marshall’s concept of citizenship include Dean (1996), who suggests Marshall’s schema is ambiguous. This criticism may be justified, given Marshall’s contention that citizenship was a mechanism towards equality while accepting inequalities as being necessary for the capitalist system to function. Coles charged that Marshall concentrated on the rights of citizenship without due regard for responsibilities (1995:83). In defence of Marshall, it can be seen that he considers the responsibilities of citizenship in a number of spheres including the public duty to exercise the right to education (1950:26), a sense of responsibility to the community when considering strike or similar action (1950:70) and the duty to work and pay taxes (1950:78). With the respect to the charge that Marshall’s view is ambiguous, Helve and Wallace (2001:3) suggest that he is not alone in that ambiguity.

That Marshall’s schema was Anglo-centric and failed to highlight the differences between the welfare rights won by the working class and the civil rights afforded to the bourgeoisie were among a number of criticisms made by Giddens (1982). Turner (1986:45-6) dismisses these claims, stating that “If we are to criticise Marshall, it should be on different grounds to Giddens”. Contemporary relevance is an issue for Davidson, suggesting it is time to move on from Marshall in citizenship discourse (1997b: 71). Conversely, Hall et al (2000:463) suggests that Marshall’s work on

citizenship serves as a "...useful foil to contemporary debates". Walter argues that despite being seen as culturally specific to Europe and with gender, class and racial biases, no reason exists to prevent the use of Marshall's matrix in an inclusive fashion (1997:63).

Turner (1993a) questions whether only one version of citizenship exists, while Dee (2000) argues that young people experience a form of multiple and contradictory citizenship whereby full adult citizenship is deferred due to policy enactments such as minimum wages for under 21-year-olds. Policies that deny welfare rights due to age based criteria, particularly in the absence of an opportunity for full employment result in social disadvantage for young people. Other writers lament recent trends toward the treatment of citizens as consumers or customers, largely facilitated by government policies (Purple Sage Project 2000; Evans 1998; Wyn & White 1997; Cox 1995; Jones & Wallace 1992).

Whilst exploring maximal and minimal concepts of competency and citizenship, Evans (1998) explores young people's needs in relation to personal, social and financial support toward becoming full citizens and the role of education, training, work and the community in providing such support. Like Wyn & White (1997), Evans (1998) considers how a focus on employment as criteria for full citizenship and an extended transition to adulthood can undermine such citizenship. Wallace also raises issues for young people facing such extended transition and suggests that this situation has helped redefine the meaning of young (2001:18). Dee (2000), Jones & Wallace (1992) and Coleman (1992) highlight the irony of a situation where young people are encouraged to be active and responsible citizens while at the same time being excluded from the benefits of such citizenship.

Despite much of the contemporary citizenship discourse focusing on political participation and knowledge, there is more to being a member of a democratic society than simply "...casting a vote once every three or four years... It is about belonging..." (Purple Sage Project 2000:28). Others also view citizenship more broadly, focusing on the array of roles that individuals can play in forming, maintaining and changing their communities (Kenny 1997; Owen 1996). Similarly, Turner (1990) argues that citizenship is concerned with the nature of social participation of persons within the community.

For those young people described as the 'underclass' or socially excluded, full participation within the community will be difficult to achieve. Writing of the UK experience, MacDonald (1997) suggests that withdrawal of unemployment benefits from those aged under 18 years and reduced benefits for those under 25 is a policy based on an assumption that young people are to blame for their own situation. Despite MacDonald's assertion that due to labour market conditions many young people now have little option but to continue school, those that do 'drop out' are denied financial support until aged 18. Those young people in that category have been described as 'status zero' (Williamson 1997). According to MacDonald, "...young people now grow up in social economic and political conditions radically different to those encountered by their parents' generation in the post war years of relative economic prosperity and social cohesion" (1997:20). A similar situation currently exists in Australia. A focus of this study will be the denial of Marshall's social citizenship rights to these young people and efforts by local government level to ameliorate this situation.

## 2.2 Youth rights

According to Coleman (1992:8), "We cannot expect young people to accept the responsibilities of citizenship if they are denied the rights that accompany it." While Coles (1995) argues that discussion about youth citizenship should be concurrent with debate about youth rights and indeed suggests a paradigm for how these rights may be viewed, just when a child becomes an adult requires clarification (Coleman 1992; Wyn & White 1997). Periods of youth and childhood are social constructs that combine with an erroneous view of young people as a homogeneous group, detracting from our understanding of young people and contributing to a risk of failing to meet their diverse needs (Malone 1999; Wyn & White 1997; Graycar & Jamrozik 1993; Stein & Frost 1992). According to Maas (1990), "A clear marker of adulthood is both needed and welcome to remove the 'twilight zone' between youth and adulthood". Another definition describes young people as "...those members of communities who have lost the status of children but not yet gained that status of adults" (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997:7). Given that local governments adopt the near universal definition of young people as being between the ages of 12 and 25, this study will be consistent with that definition in its discussion of young people.

The enshrining of rights for children and young people has long been advocated in Australia including the call for a Bill of Rights (Gray 1987). Civil rights are also a contemporary issue in relation young people within Australia, with Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, The Hon. Alastair Nicholson echoing the call for a Bill of Rights and suggesting that Australia should legislate to "give domestic effect to" the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2002). Indeed, the recent use of mandatory sentencing laws in Western Australia and the Northern Territory may well be cited as examples of the contravention of children's rights. This study is particularly relevant to Article 12 (1) which states:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UN 1989).

The debate over youth rights is not limited to the legal status of young people however. In their work *Negotiating Youth-Specific Public Space*, White et al (1996) suggest a range of guiding principles of use in planning for accessible public space for young people. A number of these principles are equally relevant in any discussion around citizenship and young people. These include fostering the idea that young people are valuable and valued members of the community; acknowledgement that young people have the right to meet together and be free from unnecessary interference in their efforts from authority figures; a recognition of the need to offer positive alternatives to regulation of youth behaviour and to do so by way of empowering youth by incorporating decision making processes; ensure that young people have adequate social, leisure and recreational services in suitable and accessible locations; and to cater for the diversity of needs of young people, recognising the diversity of social, economic and cultural backgrounds of young people (1996:15).

## 2.3 Local government

### 2.3.1 Origins and recent history

Local Government in Victoria has its origins in the establishment of the Melbourne Town Council in 1842 (Barrett 1979). Drawing authority from the Local Government Act of 1989, there are currently 79 Local Government authorities in Victoria.

Prior to a 'reform' process undertaken by the Kennett Government in Victoria, 211 local governments across Victoria managed the municipal affairs of their respective communities. Following amalgamations during the period between 1992 and 1995,

only the 78 remained<sup>3</sup> (Ellison 2000, Lonie et.al 1997), with the size of resultant councils in many cases so large that the notion of local government as the home of 'grass roots democracy' is under challenge. Indeed, Jones (1989:4) questioned whether a strong 'grass roots Australian democratic tradition' has ever actually existed. It is axiomatic however that an increase in size of local governments following amalgamations serves to further distance people from the decision making process (Galligan 1996; Jones 1989; Thompson 1970).

In addition to amalgamations, further 'reforms' to local government during the Kennett era included the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), impacting upon the delivery of services to young people within local communities. CCT legislation required that at least 50% of Council expenditure must be 'market tested' (Mowbray 1999; Lonie et. al 1997:69). Ostensibly to ensure 'value for money' services to ratepayers and residents, Councils were forced to make choices about which services were put to the test and outside tenders across the range of Council functions became commonplace. This process resulted in all areas of Council, including youth services, having to apply market principles to their operations and in many cases tender for the delivery of services that they may have been responsible for many years. Youth development, once the cornerstone of local government youth services, was to suffer under this regime. Youth services put to tender became outcome rather than process focussed as they sought to satisfy their tender specifications (Bessant 1997; Bessant & Emslie 1996).

Mandatory 20% cuts in Council rate charges (Darebin City Council 2002:17) and several years of 'rate capping' were the other major Kennett Government legacies to Local Government. Many councils have since struggled to provide similar levels of

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<sup>3</sup> Since 2002, there have been 79 municipalities in Victoria following the 'de-amalgamation' of the Delatite Shire Council into two separate local government areas.

service as enjoyed before amalgamations and each facet of activity, including youth services, is under more pressure each and every year to demonstrate tangible outcomes without increased funding. The minutes of the *Special Budget Meeting* of Darebin City Council held on 15 July 2002 provide an illustrative example of this pressure to do more with less:

Prior to the formation of Darebin City Council in 1994, the former Northcote and Preston City Councils were collecting a combined level of rate income of \$41.3 million. Following amalgamation, all Local Governments were required to effect a 20% cut in the amount of rates to be collected. Since that time it is only in the 2001/2002 year that Darebin again collected as much in rate income as was being collected prior to amalgamation (Darebin City Council 2002:17).

For more than a decade, governments (both Federal and State) from both sides of the political spectrum have embraced what has been described as an 'Economic Rationalist' approach to government (Pusey 1991). Pusey further argues that economic rationalism gives rise to a climate where the economy is given first priority, followed by the political order, followed by the social order and suggests that as a result, "... extended family, church, and local community neighbourhood have all been burnt up as fuel in the engine of economic 'development' " (Pusey 1991:241).

According to the People Together Project (2000:44), it is time for local government to "...reclaim the important role of community development and foster the development of structures that facilitate local community engagement across the municipality". The role of local government in community development has been widely acknowledged (Raysmith 2001; Mowbray 1999; Hill 1999; White et. al 1998; VLGA 1997; O'Brien 1977; Social Welfare Commission 1976) in addition to being recognized as having 'huge' potential to deliver social justice programs (Hogg 1987:93).

### 2.3.2 Youth development initiatives across local government

In keeping with Marshall's concept of social citizenship, recognition of the importance of youth participation and community involvement and the need for a sound youth policy and practice framework is gaining momentum across the Australian Local Government sector. For example, in Victoria, a partnership between RMIT University, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the National Office of Local Government (NOLG) has enabled the employment of a Project Officer to work with rural and regional Councils in Victoria in developing their work with young people. Strategies have included the staging of a Rural Conference which attracted representatives from 35 Councils; in conjunction with youth development workers, the creation of a toolkit to improve their practice; Youth Strategy workshops which have assisted 20 Councils in shaping their youth plans; and defining and advocating the role of Local Government with young people by way of a developing 'Local Government Youth Services Network'. (Local Government Focus 2002:8).

At the National General Assembly of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) held in November 2002, the Local Government sector similarly committed to action in relation to the wants and needs of rural and regional young people. Results of an online survey coordinated by Outback 2002 Ltd with support from the National Museum of Australia were presented to the delegates (ALGA 2002a) and a pledge of commitment to action endorsed (ALGA 2002b). The survey canvassed a wide range of significant concerns of rural and regional young people and found that some of the most important issues raised were both relevant and had the potential to be influenced by local government. These included the need for a formal voice in local government; the need for people in power to use language that is easily understood; and a desire to live near services and especially entertainment. A further concern was raised that not enough is being done to get young people jobs and "a place in



the world” (ALGA 2002a). While local government is certainly not the key sector to address this issue, many local government authorities are taking greater responsibility for job creation and education pathways as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Such recognition of Local Government’s role in youth development and youth affairs generally is not new however. The underlying theme of the Municipal Association of Victoria’s *Roads rates and rock ‘n’ roll* (1987), was that while the delivery of services to young people was largely the domain of community groups, the planning of such services was the role of local government, after consultation with, and participation of the community, including young people.

A broad range of initiatives are currently being directly implemented across Local Government throughout Australia and are presented here, categorised according to the major stated aims of the project, as follows<sup>4</sup>:

- programs designed to promote youth participation in decision making;
- enhancement of education training and employment opportunities for young people;
- the promotion of positive images of young people; and
- programs designed to promote community and/or personal development.

*Youth participation in decision making*

*No 13 Youth Recreation and Development Centre* is the focus point for many of the youth activities of Burnie City Council in the North West of Tasmania. In addition to providing a range of services and activities in a ‘one stop shop’ environment, young people are given the opportunity to contribute to decision making within the centre,

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<sup>4</sup> Programs described may incorporate features from more than one of the project categories as described

including determining priorities for funding through annual budgets and seeking external funding. The centre also provides links to community networks and through the youth consultative committee *Youth Making Changes Around Burnie (YMCAB)*, provides an opportunity for young people to have a direct voice into Local Government (NOLG 2000).

While numerous Councils across the nation either have implemented or are planning to implement skate facilities for young people, Bass Coast Shire Council in Victoria has seized the opportunity to use the establishment of such facilities as a development tool for local young people. Young people are encouraged to participate in the decision making, design and fund raising processes for new facilities and have been assisted to set up a Shire Skate Association. The Council believes added benefits involving young people to this level are the skills in community leadership and negotiation gained by young people, in addition to enhanced knowledge of Local Government decision making processes (NOLG 2000).

Onkaparinga City Council in South Australia have also recognised the need to encourage youth participation judging by the development of their youth services model entitled *Youth Participation – A New Approach to Local Government Youth Services*. This model aims to improve young people's access to Council, government and community services, establish programme and service priorities and facilitate regional planning and implement local responses. Further, through this process Council seeks to be responsive and flexible to changes and trends in community needs and maximise the use of scarce social and capital resources by increasing the collaboration and coordination across the youth sector. Council claims work with young people has shifted from a problem centred approach toward one based on sound community development principles (NOLG 2000).

The City of Banyule in Victoria provides young people with the opportunity to determine the direction of its leisure facilities and activities through the VOTES (Voices of Teenagers Encouraged in Society) program. Young people are involved in every aspect from consultations and planning to the implementation of key strategies. Following initial consultations with over 5500 young people, a committee was formed to oversee the ongoing consultative process and make broad recommendations to Council on identified key leisure areas of skating, bike riding, amusement facilities, music events and information dissemination. In addition to providing the opportunity for young people to contribute to decision making, a number of recreational facilities and programs have been successfully implemented as a result of their work (NOLG 2000).

A popular vehicle for youth participation in local government circles remains the Youth Council. This is particularly so among some rural Councils including the Rural City of Wangaratta. With its vision 'to build an attractive, culturally diverse environment for Wangaratta's youth; and to motivate and encourage their talents to shine', the Youth Council is expected to be effective, meaningful, accountable and responsible and create tomorrow's leaders. Objectives of the Youth Council include the provision of a forum to consult with and receive quality advice from youth; the establishment of a high quality, affordable and flexible youth program; and to involve young people in the planning, development and implementation of matters that will directly affect them. A further aim is to provide an environment for young people to learn about Local Government and its processes. The Youth Council consists of twelve young people who meet monthly at the Municipal Offices. Accountability measures are also in place with the Youth Council responsible for reporting back to the City on achievements against identified key result areas and the break down of its \$20,000 annual budget (NOLG 2000; Rural City of Wangaratta 2003).

In Tasmania during 2001, young people marked the Centenary of Federation through a series of Youth Parliaments which were hosted by schools and local governments in that state. According to the project coordinator, as well as providing the opportunity for young people to present their views to decision makers, the Youth Parliaments brought young people together in an understanding of federation (Local Government Focus 2001). In Western Australia, a partnership between Local and State Governments has seen the introduction of 78 Youth Advisory Councils across the state. Comprising of young people elected by their peers, Youth Advisory Councils are designed to enable young people to represent their communities and to provide advice to the Minister for Youth and the Government directly about issues facing young people and possible solutions (Western Australian Government 2002).

#### *Education, employment and training*

A commitment to educating young people about the role and function of each level of government is demonstrated by initiatives undertaken by Wyong Shire Council in NSW. Included on their website and distributed to local schools is a kit for schoolchildren entitled *Local Government and You: Waste Away*, aimed at educating young people about waste and the environment. Linked with the New South Wales Education Department syllabus, the kit has a strong link to the roles and responsibilities of local government (Local Government and Shires Association 2002).

A further learning tool distributed for use by young people within the Shire and online is a publication called *Government what is it and who needs it?* Produced by the Wyong Shire Council (2002), this is a kit designed for delivery in schools which provides historical and contemporary information about each level of government in

Australia, with a particular emphasis on the genesis of early governments and detailed information about the current Wyong Shire Council.

A blunt message from young people attending a youth forum in Victoria's Delatite Shire was the catalyst for Delatite E Café project. Almost eighty young people attending revealed that they would expect to have left the Shire during the following five years. Recognising that young people are central to the future viability of rural communities, the Council undertook to engage with young people to determine solutions to local problems. Managed by young people with the broader community, the two E cafés in Delatite are essentially internet businesses meeting the identified information technology needs of the community, whilst ensuring that young people are at the centre of economic activity and decision making (NOLG 2001).

An innovative approach to youth unemployment in Surf Coast Shire in Victoria saw that Council linking the summer surfing season to the winter ski season, aiming to provide opportunities for sustainable retail employment for young people. The Council facilitated the collaboration of a number of government agencies, employers and a registered training provider to develop and deliver a one year, fully accredited traineeship programme which supplied trained staff to employers during peak business periods. According to the Shire, industry enthusiasm for the program has meant the program has increased in scope and in size, and offers a model for local governments across Australia, particularly rural, that have to contend with the detrimental impact on the sustainable employment prospects of young people (NOLG 2000).

Described as a prime example of Local Government assisting communities to find local solutions to local issues (NOLG 2000), the Whittlesea Youth Commitment is a program which, in partnership with the schools and other educational providers,

employers and the community, seeks to ensure that every student leaving school has an appropriate pathway from education to employment and an individual plan for future education, training or employment. The program provides follow up and support to young people following their exit from school and a process of data collection and analysis to determine reasons for early school leaving. Recognising the importance of education, employment and training to young people's full participation within the community, the City of Whittlesea has taken a lead role in the development of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, bringing together such partners as schools, community agencies, employers and government institutions (NOLG 2000).

A further initiative of Whittlesea City Council is the Cyberbus project, a mobile Internet service and skills training program. According to the original proposal for its inception, Cyberbus aims include increasing the technological skills of young people, employment assistance and youth counselling, providing linkages to business and community, and, the provision of enhanced social opportunities toward citizenship (ARK Australia 1996). According to Federal MP Fran Bailey, Cyberbus also provides an opportunity for 'young isolated people to interact and learn new skills' (Leader Press 2001).

A realisation that young people were leaving the Shire to seek employment was the catalyst for the Beaudesert Shire (QLD) Youth Vocational Development Project. Research conducted in the district suggested that young people were not sufficiently aware of employment and training options within the Shire and a breakdown in communications between local employers and training providers was a contributory factor.

The youth vocational development project aimed to 'stem this flow of young people leaving the Shire and highlight local employment and training opportunities', in addition to providing opportunities for young people to learn the basic skills and experience in operating their own small businesses. An 'Opportunities Expo' was held, where local employers and training providers were able to provide information to more than 700 high school students and other young people (NOLG 2000).

A key plank in the Victorian Government's Education and Training Policy is the introduction of Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). While not specifically a local government initiative, the LLENs are significant for the sector as they are based largely on local government boundaries and with few exceptions have local government as key partners, along with education providers, local employers, unions, and other interested community members. Through LLENs and focusing on community building, innovation and the development of infrastructure, the state government is seeking to shift the emphasis away from centralised decision making in education to one of empowerment of local communities (Department of Education Employment & Training 2001).

The main functions of the LLENs are to identify gaps in the provision of education and training; plan for the development and delivery of educational programs that lead to appropriate pathways for more young people; and provide policy advice to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC). While certainly some have been more enthusiastic than others, most Local Governments across Victoria appear to have embraced the LLEN concept, acknowledging that they are often best placed to facilitate the partnership building required of the model (Department Education Employment and Training 2001).

### *Positive images of young people*

According to the Hornsby Shire Council (NSW) Youth Service Strategic Plan, Council aims to promote a positive public image of young people and a flexible approach to the planning of youth services. Central to its aims are the facilitation of a youth advisory committee comprising young people aged 12-25 years, and the operation of a Youth Centre as a multi-use space designed for young people and their families. The Council acknowledges the importance of enhanced youth participation and is implementing mechanisms that give young people access to decision-makers within the Shire (NOLG 2000).

Operating since 1994, the Baulkham Hills Shire "Excellence in Youth Awards" aim to promote a positive image of young people in the community by the encouragement of young people to realise their respective dreams. Awards, including educational scholarships, are given across a range of cultural, education, community, employment and sporting and recreational pursuits. The project includes award recognition at an annual event, and the opportunity for young people to connect with business and community leaders who may assist the young people toward achieving their goals. The "Youth Ambassador" award provides an opportunity for one young person to represent the views of young people to Council and the wider community (Shire of Baulkham Hills 2002).

The Frankston Town Centre Project (FTCP) in Victoria, a joint initiative between Frankston Council and Frankston Town Centre, is a further example of local government acting to address the issues of negative perceptions of young people as the users of public space. A winner of the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Award in December 2000, the program is managed by Council, funded by Frankston Town Centre and implemented by a Youth Outreach Worker. Operating from a



model of community development, the FTCP promotes young people as valuable consumers and provides them with a voice, as well as a range of opportunities to contribute to Frankston Town Centre. Elements of the project have included the formation of an advisory group for information sharing between key stakeholders, the development of protocols of behaviour, and designing and developing the 'Ycard', a value-added initiative for use at youth specific retailers within the Town Centre (McLean 2001).

A less recent attempt by local government to address negative images of young people, particularly in relation to public space, was the Melton Shire Council's "*Youth Access Audit*". Conducted during 1998, this project empowered young people to address issues surrounding their access to public and private spaces. Aimed at changing negative stereotypes surrounding young people and their use of public space, Melton Shire Council coordinated a team of eight young people to conduct a youth access audit of local businesses, community agencies and general public spaces. At the conclusion of the audit, the young people made recommendations and gave a rating of 'youth friendliness' based on a nominated set of 'youth friendliness' indicators to each audited venue (NOLG 2000).

A collaborative event between the City of Swan, Shire of Mundaring and Town of Bassendean in Western Australia is the annual "Hyper youth festival". Rotated between the three local government areas and coinciding with National Youth Week, the festival aims to generate a positive image of young people through events that demonstrate their skills and abilities (NOLG 2001a).

#### *Youth and community involvement/personal development programs*

Numerous examples exist of recent Local Government initiatives toward community and personal development targeted at young people. In the Northern Territory, the

Palmerston Town Council initiated the Young Adult Programme (YAP) in response to traditionally poor use of libraries for non-school purposes by people aged 14 to 18. In partnership with the council, a youth group was convened and undertook a range of activities based at the library, including the production of radio plays for the ABC's Triple J radio station. The YAP youth group has subsequently continued to drive library youth programme development and has succeeded in attracting more young people to the library, ensuring greater use of youth materials, attracting more diverse groups (such as young people from disadvantaged backgrounds), and involving young people directly in youth programme management and implementation (NOLG 2001a:194).

Recognising the social benefits of providing opportunities for young people to be involved in youth specific theatre, Darebin City Council has for several years initiated the production of successful youth theatre performances including *Platform* in 1998, *Home* in 2000 and *Shimmer* in 2001 (City of Darebin 2001). From these successes has emerged the *Platform Youth Theatre*, a permanent youth theatre company for the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. Becoming incorporated during February 2003, Platform Youth Theatre Company will continue to provide opportunities for young people to be active in theatre production while also being responsible for the running of their own organisation, with continuing support from Council (Verbal briefing to Darebin Councillors 10 February 2003).

Wyong Shire Council in NSW based the development of their community plan around providing young people with opportunities to fully participate in the community. As a result of the plan, Council established a regional youth facility entitled the *Oasis Youth Centre*, which included youth specific health and support services, and recreation and entertainment facilities. Locating the centre in an old warehouse close

to rail and road access, Council leased the site to the Salvation Army where a range of programs are offered including, employment courses, numeracy and literacy training, self-esteem development and conflict resolution, addiction counselling, sporting programmes chaplaincy and general counselling services. Since opening in 1999, the Centre has been accepted by the young people of the Central Coast of NSW as a major step in gaining trust and solving personal problems (NOLG 2000).

In conjunction with the Scone Shire Youth Forum, Scone Shire Council in NSW has developed the Young Endeavour Scheme aimed at preparing young people for leadership roles within the community and the development of self esteem. The scheme involves providing places for nominated young people to experience the challenge of sailing on the tall ship *Young Endeavour*. Funded by Council with corporate and community sponsorship, the program accepts nominations for participation by young people from sporting bodies, schools and non profit organisations. Previous participants are encouraged to act as mentors and role models for new participants (NOLG 2000).

Decision making is the focus of the Responsible Educated Decisions (RED) program sponsored by the Shire of Yarra Ranges (Vic) and the Dandenong Ranges—Yarra Valley Road Safety Council. This initiative encourages young people in secondary colleges within the Shire to explore the process of their decision-making in every day life. Dramatic performance is used as the medium to examine a range of issues focussing on the real experiences of group members (NOLG 2000).

Issues tackled through the performances include decision making in a social setting; substance misuse; rebellion and authority; gender differences in relation to responding to issues; and situations and outcomes and repercussions resulting from

decisions. The young people are responsible for the production in its entirety, including creation of the plot, script, music, costumes and sets. With the assistance of their school drama teacher and an experienced youth worker trained in creative arts, the group works together to deliver the performance to their peers, families and the general community. This forum provides an opportunity for young people to develop positive citizenship and community skills and find practical solutions to common problems, whilst engaged in a process requiring negotiation, discussion, teamwork and problem-solving skills (NOLG 2000).

The Gippsland Youth Leadership Programme (GYLP) is a Latrobe City Council (Vic) program aimed at identifying leadership potential in young people and developing their capacity to lead. Run annually, the project has resulted in increased self-confidence, preparedness to participate, expansion of networks, greater understanding of local and regional issues and a greater sense of “self” for the 30 or so participants. At minimal cost, the development of young leaders through GYLP provides ongoing benefits for the participants and their families, partner organisations, and the community (NOLG 2000). According to Lee McNeill, a previous facilitator, the program has been a great success:

The GYLP is such a worthwhile program for the young people of the Latrobe Valley, we have the ability to help create lifelong opportunities and memories for these young people. My personal objective with this program is to plant the seeds of leadership in our young people, to help them face future challenges that will arise as a teenager and as an adult (City of Latrobe 2002).

Creating safer communities through linking young and old residents is the theme of the *‘Absolutely Everybody – Creating Safer Communities Linking Young and Old’* program from the City of Joondalup in Western Australia. This initiative is designed to reduce the fear of crime, reduce stereotyping of both young and older persons; and to bring together different generations to explore ways of feeling safer and being

safer in their communities. A range of valuable partnerships have been formed among groups including Family and Children's Services, Youth Services, Youth Advisory Councils, senior citizens clubs and the Joondalup Community Police. Through the program a video entitled '*Absolutely Everybody*' was produced, depicting local people, both young and old, discussing their views about crime and how it affects their lifestyle. It is reported that both groups are highly satisfied with the outcomes of the program (NOLG 2000).

Described as a 'previously fragmented community', Huon Valley in Tasmania is home to *The Shed* youth development project. Initiated by the Valley Huon Valley Council in consultation with the Tasmanian Police, this project uses an existing sporting facility to expand the range of sporting and social activities for children and young people. *The Shed* contributes positively to the development of pride, self respect and social and communicative skills in young people (NOLG 2000).

With the development of its Youth Action Resource Centre (Youth ARC), Hobart City Council has embarked on an ambitious program to meet a wide range of needs of young people in the one location. The first of its kind in Tasmania, the Youth ARC seeks to provide a model for Local Government to deal with issues of youth and unemployment, education, training, self-esteem and personal development, community belonging and positive images of young people. Community input and ownership is a feature of Youth ARC toward assisting the development of young people's skills in employment, education, training and enterprise, while in a safe, central, drug and alcohol free environment (NOLG 2001a).

## 2.4 Political apathy and alienation

Numerous recent studies have pointed to widespread political apathy and alienation amongst young people in Australia (including Wilson 2000; Krinks 1999; Mellor et. al

1998; Hartley et. al 1997; Owen 1996; Civic Experts Group 1994). These results have been consistent with those of earlier studies conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission (1987, 1986 & 1985, cited in Youth Research Centre 1989).

Similar concerns have been expressed overseas, including the United Kingdom and United States (Dee 2000, Thompson 1970) and initiatives have been developed within those countries to address the issue. These include a series of research programs under the banner of *Youth Citizenship and Social Change* (Dee 2000) in the UK, the *Civic Practices Network* (CPN 2000) in the US, and the *Discovering Democracy* programme in Australia. *Discovering Democracy* provides curriculum resources to all schools and professional development activities in States and Territories to assist teachers in the delivery of civics and citizenship education (Nelson 2002).

According to then Federal Minister Education, Training and Youth Affairs, the Hon Dr David Kemp, "Dynamic and effective civics and citizenship education is vital to maintaining a strong Australian democracy" (2001). The current (2003) Minister for Education, Science and Technology, the Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson highlights the importance placed on the *Discovering Democracy* program by the Howard government:

Civics and citizenship education is an important national priority. Our democracy depends on informed participation. Schools play a crucial role in helping to foster such participation. Young people need to understand the workings of our political and legal system and our history as a democratic nation so they can take their place as confident and open-minded citizens in a twenty-first century Australia (Nelson 2002).

Notwithstanding the support held by the current Federal Government for the *Discovering Democracy* program, an early evaluation of the *Discovering Democracy* program found that it did fail in its broader intent:

In many instances the civics component is reduced to an historical study and the citizenship component becomes a study of social or environmental themes (Erebus Consulting Group 1999).

According to Pascoe, sweeping changes in Australian society over the past two decades have been of mixed social benefit:

...marked increases in the sense of personal alienation, powerlessness and a diminished sense of community...suggest the need for some reappraisal of citizenship, national identity and community goals...(1996:18)

Eckersley suggests a lack of interest in matters of politics is symptomatic of the general malaise of young people and is potentially damaging for society if continued (1996, 1995, 1988). However, education for citizenship and political participation should be seen as only one facet of youth development and community involvement.

...If democracy is to survive and young people are voting in smaller and smaller numbers world wide, there must be a more vibrant relationship between citizens and the state than simply voting and paying taxes... (Hoodless, in Hartley et al 1997: 25).

According to the Purple Sage Project, "...democracy suffers when there are deep levels of dissatisfaction with politicians and political processes" (2000:28), adding that despite its faults, a democracy is the best way known to create and maintain a just and civilised society (2000:32). Burnheim contends that politicians are out of touch with the needs and aspirations of the community (1989), contributing to what Goot described as the "...public's increasing alienation from the body politic..." (1995:26). The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) acknowledges a problem of relevance for our political system:

The single most important reason why young people fail to register to vote is because they do not see any direct link between the Government or Government institutions and their own lives. They become apathetic and will not take the necessary steps to become enrolled (AEC 1989:36).

Political alienation is not confined to young people however (McAllister 1998; Jones 1989; Goot 1995). Nor should it be seen as a recent or short-term trend. Finley (1973), Thompson (1970) and Pateman (1970) each discussed consistently low

interest in politics and its processes throughout the western world while Davidson suggests such lack of interest is likely to be a long-term problem (1997). In discussing similar lack of interest in local government in Britain, Dearlove (1979:39) suggested that, "Electoral participation is low and declining..." in addition to an extant climate of high levels of public ignorance. According to Ellison (2000:10), "...restructuring of local governments (in Victoria)... have contributed to this already prevalent feeling of being alienated from the political process."

Gould (1989) suggests that the Australian voter may indeed be 'irrational' if he or she takes an interest in local government affairs. Central to this theory is that political interest requires information, gathering information takes time, and the well informed voter still only has the same voting power as the uninformed. "What difference can I make?" becomes a rational view of the situation.

The Civic Experts Group, chaired by Professor Stuart MacIntyre and appointed by the Australian Government in 1994, was charged with ensuring "...that Australians have sufficient information about our system of government to participate fully in decision-making processes..." (MacIntyre1995:3-4). Described by Goot as a 'treatment' for the problems of political participation (1995:26), the *Discovering Democracy* program was an outcome of the recommendations of the Civics Expert Group and in line with the former Keating Government view that citizenship and civics be a policy priority in education and research (Stokes 1997).

Although civics education is seen to have value in educating the community for citizenship, a number of issues have been identified in relation to the civic education program. MacIntyre suggests that such education should go beyond simply knowledge of government and its processes (1995:11). Heater poses the question as



to whether schools should indeed be the place for civics education (1990). This is poignant given the irony of a situation where civics education in Australia concludes at the end of year 10, just as young people approach legal adulthood (Colebatch 1995).

While Australians are generally comfortable with citizenship and usually take such matters for granted, effects of globalisation and the decline of the welfare state mean that "...Australians can no longer afford to simply shrug and say 'she'll be right' " (Davidson 1997:247). Informed and knowledgeable citizens are essential for the functioning of representative democracy.

## 2.5 Participation and democracy

Many youth workers espouse participation and empowerment as one of their guiding principles in work with the client group. In the context of youth work, participation means that in order for young people to be participating, they must not only take part in the activities of the group concerned, they must also have some kind of a say in how it is run (Gordon 1989:7). Within the social policy context, the term refers to the ways in which ordinary citizens can or do take part in the formulation or implementation of social policy decisions (Richardson 1983:8).

According to Gordon (1989), participation in the running of activities and programs are a good way of promoting social and political education. Young people, working together toward common goals assists in developing relationships with others, enhances their social skills, and enables them to give public expression to their views.

While such participation might be seen as good practice for the wider involvement of young people at a later date, some commentators argue for a greater say in the

broader community at an earlier age. Sidoti (1998), Croche (1997) and Longmuir (1995:4) are among those who have floated the idea of lowering the voting age of young people, suggesting that an increase in the pool of young voters would arguably increase the participation of young people in the formation of policies that affect them.

It is argued that learning democracy should occur at the local level (People Together Project 2000; VLGA & MAV 1999 Pateman 1970; Thompson 1970). During the late 1970s, a number of programs specifically aimed at youth participation at a local level were conducted by the Youth Council of Victoria, including 'Youth 2009...Local Youth Policy Development', 'Youth 2007...Local government and Process', and 'Youth 2006' (Shone & McDermott 1980; Youth Council of Victoria 1977; Cusack 1976). In the 1987 report *Roads rates and rock 'n' roll*, the MAV suggested that for young people's involvement to have meaning and be effective, the issues on which they are engaged need to be "relevant and of concern to them"; such engagement should be supported with resources and training; and adults involved should have the "motivation and flexibility to facilitate active involvement of young people" (p17).

In their discussion paper into the development of a national youth civic service scheme in Australia, Hartley et al (1997) describe the innovative strategies of a number of local governments in engaging youth people in participatory processes. Further, Hartley et al saw a national youth service as a method of encouraging youth participation in the community stating that "...it promotes an active engagement with, and participation in society, and it is a way of exercising the responsibilities of citizenship" (1997:84-5). Local government was viewed as a potential provider of such a service however Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was seen as a barrier to such involvement.

Participatory democracy is popular within local government systems in Western countries, but Jones (1989:140) argues that the trend to increase the size of local government authorities actively works against local involvement. He suggests that direct public interest and involvement may decline after an authority reaches only about 8000 people. Davidson agrees that participatory democracy becomes problematic in larger authorities (1997:218), a view that is consistent with this observation from a citizen of Aotearoa/New Zealand:

...But when Government decided to amalgamate boroughs, communities became bigger and people got more isolated. The amalgamation of smaller communities has been detrimental to the community. People have lost their sense of identity. There has been many complaints... (Commonwealth Foundation 1999: 62).

Unlike the ancient Greeks who ruled by direct democracy facilitated by their relatively small citizen numbers, even the smallest modern state is larger than the biggest of the Greek city states and thus necessarily leads to a form of representative democracy (Davidson 1997: 218; Finley 1973:18-9). Despite these difficulties, Local Government has a unique opportunity to provide for young people's participation at the neighbourhood level, but such participation must be genuine and lead to the provision of real decision making power.

Gould however (1988: 215-6) suggests that the requirements of participation and for authority in political life actually stand in contradiction to each other. She suggests that any democratic theory that takes participation as a central value must, for most intents and purposes exclude any concept of authority. Further she asks, "How can the free and equal individuals presupposed in democratic theory accept as legitimate the power of the state or of other individuals to constrain their actions or to make decisions for them with which they may not agree?"

According to Richardson (1983:114-5), the motives of service providers and service

users in encouraging a participatory model of local government decision-making differ. Service users embrace participation as a means to being heard on issues that concern them, while some local authorities have a genuine concern for listening to the views of their constituents and actually consider these views when making decisions. Others use participation as a means of confirming that a choice of action is palatable to the local community, while still others use participation to justify the course of action they have already decided to take (Pusey 1992, Jones 1989). Jones is savage in his condemnation of local government in this country, stating that, "In comparison to truly democratic countries like America and Switzerland, Australian Local Government seems to be a conspiracy between the staff and the councillors against the people" (1989: 11).

Gould (1988:84) argues that the principle of democracy is that "every person who engages in a common activity with others has an equal right to participate in making decisions concerning such activity". This right to participate applies not only to the domain of politics but to social and economic activities as well.

Young people need to feel a sense of self worth and to be part of the communal effort. They can achieve this most easily and naturally if the potential of local communities is recognised and fostered (Blakers 1992:69).

Reports released both in Australia and overseas in recent years have espoused the benefits of the engagement of young people within their communities. According to the Centre for Social Health's survey of risk and protective factors for young people (Bond et. al 2000), one of the three most prevalent protective factors for Victorian young people is the opportunity for positive community involvement. The report cites age appropriate sporting teams and youth groups as examples of such positive involvement. Protective factors are described as positive elements present within a

young person's environment that assists them to deal with problems better (Victorian Department of Human Services 2000). According to Bond et. al:

A higher level of protective factors in the young person's environment was associated with a lower prevalence of substance use, anti-social behaviour and other adverse health outcomes (2000:34).

Similarly, "...evaluations of programmes for young people have identified a consistent set of factors that help young people overcome disadvantage", and include active involvement in families, school and community life (Social Exclusion Unit 2002).

Earlier local and overseas experience has also highlighted the benefits of youth participation for the individual and community. According to Cole (1988), such experience indicates:

...that young people can contribute to the resolution of particular localised problems and to an enrichment of the life of a community and can help to relieve the personal suffering, loneliness and alienation that is felt by individuals within a community.

Alternatively, alienation from the community is linked to poor health outcomes including antisocial behaviour, particularly for young men. White (1997:37) suggests that attaining 'social health' was becoming increasingly difficult for many of our young people who "are excluded from making meaningful contributions to our society".

## 2.6 Chapter summary

This study entitled '*The role of local government in the development of youth citizenship: three case studies*' was fashioned by a number of concepts and actions applicable to democratic society and relevant to the institution of local government within Victoria. The literature review has demonstrated how such concepts and actions impact on the lives of young people within their local communities, and

provides examples of how local government does involve itself toward facilitating the engagement of young people within their communities. Also, the literature provides weight to an argument that local governments are well placed to assist toward Marshall's social citizenship, including positively impacting on the provision of education and youth development.

Necessarily, the review began with an exploration of understandings of citizenship, and particularly Marshall's thesis outlining his three stages of citizenship. Evidence is also presented which suggests that concepts of citizenship are broad and varied in their meanings, and that some criticism of Marshall's somewhat narrow 'schema' may indeed be valid. Notwithstanding such criticism and whilst not ignoring the importance and value of political citizenship, Marshall's concept of social citizenship is one which enables a thinking beyond simple rights to vote or hold office or own property; or more relevant for young people, a form of citizenship that is not age limited. It was such a view of citizenship which was to underpin this study.

Strongly linked with youth citizenship is the issue of youth rights. Arguments are presented that make it clear that acceptance of the responsibilities of citizenship requires recognition of a number of fundamental rights for young people and that of number of these rights are not currently extended to young people. It is also contended that in contemporary Australia, little clarity or indeed consistency exists on the question of young people's rights. Extant literature also suggests that such a debate has both local and international significance.

A brief overview of the origin and recent history of Local Government within the State of Victoria includes discussion on the forced amalgamation of 210 Councils into 78, the application of market principles to service provision, and, the impacts of such 'reforms'. Recognition of the community development role of local government is also

highlighted, as are a range of youth development initiatives undertaken by Councils across Australia.

The literature also highlights that political apathy is seen as a threat to the future of healthy democracies, particularly in the Western World. However it is acknowledged that such apathy is not new. This section of the literature review indicates the existence of an interesting paradox: while there appears to be growing resentment of the political process, there seems to be an increased willingness of citizens to voice their concerns, whether by collective or individual action. This apparent contradiction is, anecdotally at least, particularly true within the local government sector where there appears to be a growing desire of citizens to communicate their concerns and aspirations.

Understandings of participation and democracy and resultant implications for young people and their development are also discussed within the literature review. Evidence is presented that such issues are not simply questions relevant to Australia and the rest of the developed world. We have seen through the work of the Commonwealth Foundation (2000) and others that issues of citizenship and participation are equally important to smaller and less developed nations, particularly as they relate to the development of their young people. Further, while it was acknowledged that participation is seen as desirable for the development of young people, such participation has a range of meanings and indeed, the literature has raised more “how do we do it?” questions than answers.

## **3 Methodology and Methods**

### **3.1 Methodology**

Presented within a paradigm of interpretive research, this study is predominantly reliant on the use of qualitative data. While a range of research designs may be employed to undertake interpretive research, Ragin (1994:92) argues that almost all qualitative research seeks to construct representations based on in-depth, detailed knowledge of cases. A case study approach appeared to best 'fit' the conditions of this project. According to Yin (1984:13), "...case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how and why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context." This project meets Yin's criterion. Firstly, the proposed project seeks to answer a number of 'how' and 'why' questions; for example how do young people have a say in what happens in their communities and why are particular programs provided over others? Secondly, little potential exists for the researcher to manipulate or control events that may occur within organisations chosen for examination. Thirdly, while selected historical events will be considered, this will only be in the context of 'building a picture' of where local government is today. Yin argues that the strength of the case study method is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence (1984:19-20). Walton et al suggests that "Case studies are likely to produce the best theory" (1992:129).

### **3.2 Methods**

#### **3.2.1 Choice of cases**

For the purpose of this study, 'cases' were purposively selected. Those local governments were primarily chosen on the basis of having identified youth participation as an aim of their council. Evidence of such an aim was demonstrated



on the basis of employing a youth participation officer (or similarly termed) within their council. A number of prospects emerged on this basis and subsequently, one 'inner' metropolitan city, one 'rural' shire, and one council described as being 'interface' or located on the 'urban/rural' fringe were identified and selected as 'case studies' to be explored in depth.

Cultural, ethnic and political diversity were also considered in the choice of local governments to be studied, though inclusion of such diversity is not intended to imply that these cases are representative of all, or indeed many local governments in Victoria. This study was not based on representative logic; rather, in seeking to identify a best practice model for young people to be engaged with their communities that could be replicated across local governments, those local governments that were at 'face value' likely provide much learning were chosen. A further factor considered in selecting councils to be studied included ease of gaining access. The following section explains how this was achieved.

### 3.2.2 Gaining access

Once identified as potential candidates, preliminary discussions were held with representatives from each of the subject councils. While other Councils were contacted to provide for 'backup' if required, from the first contact, a willingness to participate in the study was indicated from those councils originally identified.

Certain participants may be described in Neuman's terms as elites. For the purpose of this study, these may include mayors and councillors and senior executive staff. He suggests, "A researcher's personal social background or pedigree is an important resource...he or she may need to cultivate appropriate sponsors with the right connections" (Neuman 1994:338). In this instance, it may be argued that this

researcher was advantaged in gaining access to 'appropriate sponsors' by holding an elected position in local government and recognition as a youth practitioner.

This advantage was evident in a number of ways. Firstly, as an elected councillor, access to each Mayor was far easier than may be achieved by the general public. While each potential participant was sent a covering letter and plain language statement explaining the purpose and proposed conduct of the study, I made informal contact with each Mayor to assure them that what was proposed was part of a legitimately approved higher degree course from RMIT University, and subject to the rules and regulations of the university. During these informal discussions, the mayor of one local government asked me to ensure I include that organisation, feeling the achievements of that municipality warranted inclusion in the study. Another mayor, an acquaintance of some years, agreed immediately once asked.

The third Mayor I approached appeared initially confused as to my reasons for wanting to include them in the study asking, "Why would you want to talk with me? We have a portfolio system here, you're best speaking with..." and named another Councillor. I explained that I had written them a letter requesting participation and explaining the project and my rationale for wanting the mayor included in the study. After indicating they could not recall the letter, the response was "I get a lot of letters". Eventually agreement was given, with the condition that the interview be conducted after the Mayor had the opportunity to be fully briefed by relevant officers. Despite the difficulties encountered as a result of this initial confusion, I would contend that access would have been more difficult in all of these instances had I not been considered a peer.

In addition to Mayors, I requested participation from a number of other Councillors from subject Councils. These Councillors had either demonstrated a keen interest in youth issues within their municipality, or had been recommended as a valuable resource by other participants. Seeking their participation met with mixed success. One Councillor who I had been told was a 'champion' of youth issues did not respond to my letter and subsequently did not return telephone calls. Accordingly, an interview with that Councillor did not proceed. Another, after giving a verbal commitment to assist with the project, had clearly not read the letter I had sent. When I telephoned again to confirm support, I was informed that the youth services coordinator had been told to 'get on with it and assist me'. After I confirmed that I was seeking the view of councillors with an interest in youth issues in addition to a practitioners view, the Councillor concerned agreed to an interview. Again, despite this difficulty, I believe that my standing as a Councillor assisted me in gaining access where others not similarly involved with local government may have failed.

At this point an element of potential bias in relation to gaining access needs to be highlighted. Most of the elected representatives contacted who agreed to be interviewed were members of the Australian Labor Party. My political affiliation is also with the Australian Labor Party where I was a Branch President for five years from 1998. Notwithstanding this potential for bias, I do not believe that party affiliation was to impact on the study. Indeed, despite such party affiliation, I had not previously met most of the Councillors who subsequently participated, and such affiliation was not discussed at the point of seeking involvement in any way.

In seeking commitment to participate in the study from CEOs, I was careful to ensure that they felt they had a choice and would not be subject to political pressure to be involved. I felt that any such pressure to participate would impact on future dialogue

to be had with them. To establish my credentials with each CEO, a phone call from the deputy CEO of my council (an officer widely respected by his peers and also an executive member of the Local Government Professionals Association) was of assistance. Once confirmation was received that the telephone calls were made, a letter formally asking for support with the project and enclosing the requisite plain language statement was sent. At the point of interview, as with all participants, written consent was obtained.

Youth workers and relevant managers and coordinators within the subject councils were generally willing participants. However, after initially agreeing to assist, a team leader at one council became impossible to 'pin down'. After rescheduling a number of times and leaving numerous messages with no response, it was assumed that this worker was either too busy or not sufficiently interested to warrant further persistence. A subsequent interview therefore did not proceed.

The ease or difficulty of gaining access in each municipality proved to be indicative in some ways of issues which were to emerge through the study and consistent with conclusions drawn about individual Councils. With the level of 'gatekeeping' experienced, in particular with trying to communicate with the Mayor of Athena, one may raise doubts about the opportunities that may be afforded to 'average' citizens to readily access their civic leaders. Indeed, I feel that if I had not identified myself to the Mayor's staff as a fellow Councillor, I would not have had the opportunity to conduct that interview.

### 3.2.3 Data Collection

A range of data collection methods were used during this study. Data included transcriptions of interviews with key individuals, observation and field notes, council

corporate documents and information handbooks, local newspaper reports, Australian Bureau of Statistics and other government and non government reports.

### **In depth interviews**

While individual interviews were sought on each occasion, I had to be content with interviewing the Mayor, CEO and Manager of Community Services of Kimberly Shire at the same time. This may have been due to time constraints on behalf of those who had agreed, or perhaps in order that a single 'corporate line' was pushed. While not totally desirable, these circumstances were beyond my control and therefore had to be accepted. Furthermore, such was the openness and obvious comfort with the topic of the discussion of each participant, I doubt whether individual interviews would have achieved a different result.

During the course of the study, ten interviews of approximately one hour's duration were conducted with 12 key individuals from the subject local governments. Those interviewed included Mayors and Councillors, Chief Executive Officers, senior managers and council youth and community workers. As discussed in Chapter 3.2, two people I had intended to interview did not make themselves available despite repeated attempts to contact them. Specifically, these were a Councillor from Kimberly Shire and the Youth Services Team Leader from Burke City Council. Table 3.1 over page highlights those who were interviewed during the course of the study and the position held by those individuals at the time of interview.

**Table 3.1 Position of interview subjects and dates of interview**

	<b>Mayor</b>	<b>Councillor responsible for youth issues</b>	<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>	<b>Manager Community Services</b>	<b>Youth Services Coordinator</b>	<b>Youth Participation/ Development Worker</b>
Burke	Cr Pat O'Shea 28/11/00		Ronald Tregear 8/11/00			Carol Neil 15/11/00
Kimberly	Cr Ian Ross 22/11/00		Richard Lewis 22/11/00	Allen Mathews 22/11/00		Sally Stewart 12/12/00
Athena	Cr Roulla Poulakis 30/11/00	Cr Rose Davies 27/11/00	Michael Moran 9/11/00		Terry Roberts 9/11/00	Denis O'Brien 27/02/01

Informed consent was sought and granted from each participant to both conduct and create an audio recording of each interview. Such informed consent included an explanation as to who would have access to the recordings and subsequent transcripts. In addition, as described in Chapter 1.4, each participant was informed that anonymity and confidentiality was assured, and that this would include the use of pseudonyms for each interview subject and local government under examination. Contact details were also provided to each participant should they require contact with the principal RMIT University Supervisor and University Ethics Committee.

On each occasion, interviews were conducted at the participant's workplace or in a venue chosen by them. The date and time was also (within reason) of the participants choosing, with a range of dates suggested and the respondents choosing which day was more suitable and a time to match. During these interviews, a number of questions were posed to the participants. However, rather than being an

exhaustive list requiring concise answers, these questions were used more as prompts to stimulate conversation and guide the discussion. The nature of questions asked for this purpose was largely dependant on the position held by the participant. Appendix ii details those questions posed to elected representatives and senior staff, while Appendix iii lists questions asked of youth work staff.

At the conclusion of each interview, audiotapes of these interviews were then transcribed by the researcher and word-processed for analysis. Tapes were then stored with signed consent forms in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher. Only one set of keys are in existence for the locked cabinet, accessible only to the researcher.

Subsequent to interviews with respondents, follow up telephone calls were made where required to either clarify information gained during the interview, or to ensure that information remained current. For example, where information relating to the approval of a new project may have been flagged at the time of interview, a call was sometimes necessary to confirm completion or otherwise, of the project.

### **Council and other documents**

Council corporate and strategic plans, meeting minutes, reports, press releases and memorandums all provided much information as to the stated aims, objectives and values of each respective organisation. As public documents, these were sourced from relevant councils in hard copy and in a limited capacity online. Youth services handbooks and Council web pages were valuable in understanding the range of services provided by each municipality.

Documents and reports from organisations external to local government but with an interest in their operation also proved useful. These included both hard copy and

online reports from the National Office of Local Government (NOLG) and *Local Government Focus*, an Australia wide Local Government Industry periodical.

### **Local Newspaper Reports**

This particular facet of the study resulted from the emergence of different perspectives from interview subjects across the three Local Government Areas, in relation to the level and nature of local newspaper coverage of youth issues. In particular, it was suggested by one interview respondent that local newspapers covering the Burke municipality are reluctant to report positive youth issues, while a Kimberly respondent claimed that youth issues and events are regularly reported and young people themselves have easy access to journalists within the Shire. In order to test these propositions, I undertook to examine local reporting of issues that either related to young people in general or had as its main character(s), one or more young people.

“There is a widely held belief that young people are delinquent and that many are involved in violent or antisocial crime” according to Malcolm (1999:29). He presents evidence to suggest that youth crime is over represented in the media and not surprisingly, that it is in the best interests of the newspaper to print stories that may have the element of scandal given such articles are likely to generate more public interest. This component of the study examined the nature of reporting of young people and related event or issues, in each of the selected municipalities.

During this aspect of the study, I undertook only to examine newspapers published by the Leader Newspaper Group in each municipality under examination. This was to try to ensure consistency of the data collected. While some other local newspapers were published in various parts of the subject LGAs, the Leader



Newspaper Group was the only company that published across all three municipalities. The next step was to gain access to the particular newspapers required. By telephoning the Leader Newspaper Group, consent was obtained to access copies of each relevant local newspaper from July 1999 to June 2001, with such access provided at the office of the respective newspapers. Details of the methods of analysis will be described in Chapter 3.2.4 to follow.

### 3.2.4 Data Analysis

Data was all analysed with a view to theory generation. Such theory generation was reflective of the aim to develop a conceptual model of how local governments may work toward youth development, and identify elements that must be present for success. This suggested an approach that was able to identify those elements that exist, fit them together and actually see 'what is going on'. A grounded theory approach appeared to be the most suitable approach for such theory generation. Layder (1993:19-20) argues that the '...point of grounded theory is to encourage the researcher to be as flexible as possible when interpreting the findings of the research.' He further suggests that the theory should fit the data obtained, rather than seeking data to suit a preconceived hypothesis or theory (Layder 1993:20).

The use of grounded theory within this study raises issues for discussion. Firstly, in the years that have followed the publication of the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967, co authors Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss have had a divergence of opinion as to the 'correct way' to employ grounded theory. Indeed, according to Babchuk (1996), Glaser suggests that it is obvious that Strauss never understood grounded theory in the first place and as a result, two distinct methodologies have emerged. Glaser's approach to grounded theory is inherently more flexible than the methods of Strauss (Babchuk 1996), the latter's approach described as 'reworking'

the method to "...incorporate a strict and complex process of systematic coding (Goulding 1998). A further divergence is to do with *a priori* ideas. Glaser suggests that one should enter the field without any preconceptions, while the views of Strauss appear to be somewhat more realistic in that there is recognition that people do not enter the field *tabula rasa*, but rather, should identify and address elements that may cause bias.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that the approach taken by Strauss is overly restrained and more in tune with quantitative measures (Babchuk 1996). For this reason alone it is not simply a matter to dismiss Glaser and adopt the approach of Strauss. For the purpose of this research, I will be seeking to be true to Layder's premise that grounded theory requires that the theory should fit the data obtained (1993: 20).

### **Qualitative data**

For the purpose of storage and retrieval of qualitative data, a series of relational databases created from the 'Filemaker Pro' software package were used. These databases were also invaluable toward the identification and sorting of project data into themes during coding. As with all data collected for the research, all computer files containing data are accessible only to the researcher.

Transcribed interview data, corporate documents, field notes and council minutes were all analysed by using a method described as 'coding' (Neuman 1997:422-5); a major tool of grounded theory. Coding of the data enabled the identification of themes present in the data and subjects to be identified and analysed and required much reading and re-reading of field notes, transcriptions, and subsequent reflection. This method, as described by Neuman citing Strauss (1987), required that the data be reviewed on three occasions. On each occasion, a different method of coding is

used. The first process is performed during a first examination of recently collected data and locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels to the data. Known as 'Open Coding', this process required slow reading of field notes, historical and other sources, looking for critical terms and key events or themes. According to Neuman (1997:422), "...open coding brings themes to the surface from deep inside the data."

The second process used is described as 'Axial Coding'. Axial coding focuses on the initial coded themes more than the data, toward organising ideas or themes and identifying key concepts under analysis. During axial coding, the researcher seeks to find connections between the themes, looking for categories or concepts that may be grouped together. In addition, further categories may also be defined (Neuman 1997:423).

The third coding process is termed 'Selective Coding' and according to Neuman (1994:424), by the time a researcher is ready to subject the data to this process, the major themes of the research project have been identified. This process involved scanning the data and previously allocated codes, seeking cases that would best illustrate themes and make comparisons and contrasts after all or most of the data has been collected.

### **Quantitative data**

Limited quantitative data were also used during this study. This data included statistical information related to demographics within each municipality and was largely sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), before being modified in its presentation to correspond with relevant aspects of this study.

Further use of statistical data resulted from the analysis of local newspaper reports relating to young people, as previously discussed in this Chapter (p 52). To

undertake this part of the study, I employed a research process termed content analysis. Content analysis has been described as:

...a quantitatively oriented technique by which standardized measures are applied to metrically define units and these are used to characterize and compare documents (Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994:464).

The first step in this process was to construct a reporting form, similar to a check list, with which to accurately record data and collect the maximum amount of information about each article in a consistent manner. Although the focus of this part of the study was primarily to look at how young people were being portrayed, the reporting form allowed for a wide range of information about each article to be systematically collected. This was to prevent the need to return to the newspapers should a piece of information previously considered irrelevant become significant.

Space was made available under a number of headings which included the name of the newspaper; title of the article; age of the main subjects; article size; and the kind of images portrayed of young people through these articles. Much of the data collection was straightforward, for example; size of the article in square centimetres, or is a photograph included with the article yes or no? Other items required a degree of subjectivity; such as whether the article portrayed young people in a positive/not negative or negative manner, or the theme (of which there are six) under which the kind of event or issue raised within the article would be best described.

Information was then carefully recorded onto the data collection form for each article that referred to young people. To assist with maximum reliability during this process, consistency of coding was required. A tool used to achieve this was a system of 'spot checking' newspapers at random that had been previously coded. In this way, ambiguity was removed. At Appendix iv is an example of the data collection form

designed for the study, while at Appendix i for a list of newspapers and publication dates of those accessed<sup>5</sup>.

On conclusion of the newspaper data collection, all of the information was entered into the *Statview* statistical computer program, within previously prepared tables. Data were then categorised within these tables and identified as either 'Informative', 'Continuous' or 'Nominal variables'.

A range of analytical calculations were then conducted from which a number of tables and figures were produced. These included selected histograms and contingency tables.

While the histograms were provided to demonstrate simple numbers accorded to a variable, contingency tables were used to determine whether a relationship exists between two nominal variables. This was achieved by performing a Chi-square test of significance, using the features of the *Statview* program. "The hypothesis of independence states that the likelihood of an observation falling into one group for one variable is independent of the other group the observation falls into" (SAS Institute 1998). This test calculates the number of observations for every combination of groups based on the hypothesis of independence and compares the observed with the expected values in each cell (SAS Institute 1998).

A low Chi-square and a high probability (*p*' value) suggest accepting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which indicates the two variables are independent. Conversely, a low *p* value indicates that the results are less likely to occur by chance and therefore more likely to be significant. A *p* value of .01 suggests a probability of one in hundred that the results of the test are due to chance.

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonymous references only are given at Appendix i. Chapter 1.4 outlines use of pseudonyms.

### *Validity*

According to Neuman, validity refers to the confidence placed in a researcher's analysis and data as accurately representing the social world in the field (1997:369). The approach taken during this study to eliminate bias and achieve a measure of validity was to use a range of data sources, including a number of interviewees from each case study organisation. Interviewing of a number of individuals from the same Council but with clearly different roles and positions within the organisational hierarchy provided the opportunity to understand several perspectives of the same phenomena. Different data sources were compared during collection with conflicting views explored and explanations sought for divergent views.

Council aims in relation to young people as articulated in corporate documents were compared with individual aims and outcomes as described by informants. This was useful in establishing whether or not the individual was in agreement with the direction the organisation was taking. In addition, the aims of both council and individual were then compared with results and perceptions gleaned by the full range of sources including interviews with informants, observation, local government annual performance statements, local newspaper reporting, and council minutes.

During the course of this study, it was the individual experiences and interpretations of the informants and the impact of such interaction, along with the political dimension of local government on young people's opportunity for engagement that were sought. During the analysis of interview data, it was assumed that information given by respondents was done so in good faith and that they meant what they said. According to Hall and Hall, when conflicting accounts are provided by respondents in a qualitative study, the job of the researcher is: "...not to decide who to believe, but rather to understand *why* the accounts differ – that is, to place them in the context of

the social position of the informant and make sense of them that way (1996:210 italics in original). Similarly says Neuman (1997:335); "...the first step in qualitative interpretation...is to learn about its meaning for the people being studied." He further suggests that qualitative research "...raises questions of bias, but it also provides a sense of immediacy, direct contact, and intimate knowledge" (1997:333). While some writers suggest that triangulation may assist in validity (Layder 1993; Hall and Hall 1996) it is not a guarantee of more valid results. Indeed Sarantakos (1993:156) suggests that even if a number of methods are used and these all support each other's findings, it could be that all findings are invalid.

### *Reliability*

According to Neuman, measures of reliability require internal and external consistency. Internal consistency refers to whether the data matches what is known about the individual or organisation under study, while external consistency is achieved by verifying divergent observations with other sources of data (1997:368). As discussed previously, a range of data sources are to be used through the study which will provide the opportunity for such cross checking.

### 3.2.5 Coding and themes

During the process of open coding data, a number of themes emerged from the data which appeared to be of significance and occurred in some form or another in each of the case studies. These themes became the basis for the organisation of data derived from interviews and documents. For the purposes of consistency, all themes are addressed in each case study.

The themes identified were not present to the same extent in each of the cases however. For example, the theme 'Councillor involvement' recognises that Councillors in each municipality saw a role for themselves in the development of youth participation and social citizenship within their municipalities. Not all such involvement has been viewed by others in a positive way however. Some respondents have viewed Councillor involvement as destructive rather than 'championing the cause' of young people and citizenship. A further example relates to the theme 'Adult control' and is associated with the level of adult control imposed on youth programs and activities. While a level of adult control appeared to exist at two of the Councils under study, the third appears to operate from a model of empowerment of young people.

Themes identified during open coding are; language; a holistic approach; marginalisation of youth services; Councillor involvement; process versus outcome focus; translating talk into action; positive images of youth; innovation; and adult control. From these themes emerged a number of axial codes which are described as follows:

- ◆ Planning and coordination for youth development
- ◆ Professional framework for youth development
- ◆ Congruence of theory and practice.

Whilst the themes identified during open coding relate to the axial codes, an open code may be related to more than one axial code. For example, 'marginalisation of youth services' may relate to a lack of planning and coordination for youth development, however it may also indicate a lack of a professional framework for youth development leading to an ad hoc approach.



### 3.3 Limitations of the study

A number of issues should be considered limitations to this study. The first is that I did not get the opportunity to interview all of the people I had sought in the first instance, due to one individual in particular who made himself unavailable every time I sought to come in contact. This omission means that I may not have got the widest view of the situation at Burke City Council.

Further, and as described in Chapter 3.2.3, while most participants agreed to be interviewed alone, I was shocked to arrive at one interview destination to find almost all of the people I had intended to interview from that Council had arrived together. Subsequently it was discovered that all present were seeking to be interviewed together. On this occasion I had no choice but to accede to their request.

Thirdly, it may be argued that not interviewing young people is a limiting factor in relation to this project. While the views of young people may well have provided useful insights, difficulties would have presented in seeking to locate and interview a representative sample from each of the municipalities.

A final limitation of this study is that it is a 'snapshot in time', rather than a definitive evaluation of the performance of each local government over a long period. Services and programs do change over time, as do individuals within organisations move on. With such movement of personnel over time, particularly elected representatives, policies and practices are also subject to change. Nonetheless, this study provides an insight into the circumstances extant during a period in the life of each organisation, and has provided evidence in relation to the nature of youth participation that may be generalised toward a participatory model of youth work practice.

### 3.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have described the rationale for adopting a case study methodology and a grounded theory approach to theory building. In addition, an explanation of the basis of and process for choosing cases and gaining access has been provided. Further, the nature of the qualitative and quantitative data collected and how such data was processed was discussed, followed by identification of the main themes to emerge from the data. Finally, limitations of this study have been considered.

By adopting a consistent approach to data collection across all three cases, the opportunity arose to unearth certain common characteristics and differences in approach within councils that facilitate such participation. Such an approach was essential in order to progress toward desired outcomes for the study, including the development of a useful framework or set of “guiding principles” for local governments to include young people in community and civic activities. Of particular interest were strategies used to promote inclusion of culturally diverse, isolated or otherwise marginalised young people from within their communities. Issues such as diversity, geographical location, social and economic conditions may all play a role in determining the nature of engagement of young people within each local government area.

## **4. Case One: Burke City Council**

### 4.1 Socio demographic profiles

#### 4.1.1 Formation, Size and Location

Formed in 1994 following the amalgamation of two smaller Councils, the Burke City Council is located on the Melbourne metropolitan fringe. It covers an area in excess of 500 square kilometres and is bounded by a number of creeks, freeways and the foothills of a mountain range. Burke boasts a number of major localities within the City ranging from large industrial areas; well established suburbs through to the development of new estates; and what may be described as 'satellite' or semi rural suburbs.

#### 4.1.2 Governance and local politics

Burke is governed by eight Councillors, elected by residents and ratepayers every three years. The nature of voting is determined by the Council and can be either by attendance at polling places or by postal ballot. The last three elections have been by way of postal ballot with the most recent held in March 2003.

The majority of current Council members were elected as endorsed candidates for the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in the most recent election, while the remainder claim to be independent of links to political organisations. Links with the ALP are even stronger for the 2000-2001 Mayor, who was employed as a ministerial advisor until the State Government moved to prohibit the employment of Municipal Councillors as ministerial advisors.

Three Federal Parliamentary seats share some part of the municipality, with one seat described as safe Labor, one marginal Labor, and the other marginal Liberal (AEC 2002). The municipality is represented in the Victorian Parliament by three lower and

two upper house members, all of which are held with comfortable margins by members of the Australian Labor Party.

#### 4.1.3 Population

At the 2001 Census, Burke's population was in excess of 130,000. This figure is expected to grow at a faster rate than the metropolitan average over the next twenty-five years, continuing the trend demonstrated in Table 4.1 where population growth patterns in the period 1991-2001 far exceeded that of the State of Victoria overall. Burke is considered to be one of Australia's fastest growing municipalities, however official projections from the Department of Infrastructure indicate that future growth will stabilise at an approximate average annual rate of 2% (Burke City Council 1999c:5).

Table 4.1 also shows that patterns of growth have not been consistent across the municipality. Indeed, large variations of population growth have been experienced across different localities within Burke. Little growth has occurred in the long established Central Burke, while the well established Western Burke has seen increases over the period 1991-2001 at three times the level of growth experienced by the State of Victoria. During the same period, the relatively new suburb of North Burke has seen its population more than double. Table 4.1 presents population growth data for Burke compared to those for Victoria.

**Table 4.1: Burke Population Growth 1991 to 2001 compared to whole of Victoria**

	<b>% growth 1996-2001</b>	<b>% growth 1991-2001</b>
Victoria	6.2	9.4
<b>Burke</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>28.9</b>
Central Burke	0.3	4.2
North Burke	45.4	113.0
West Burke	13.4	30.1

Source: Derived from ABS Statistics Basic Community Profile and Snapshot 2001

#### 4.1.4 Age Cohorts

Consistent with what might be expected from a city experiencing large population growth, Burke in 2001 presented as a relatively youthful city compared to age cohorts across the State of Victoria. This is particularly true in relation to those aged 17 and under, where approximately 31% of the Burke population are within that range. This compares to approximately 24% of those people aged 17 and under for both the Melbourne Statistical District and the State of Victoria.

In addition, age cohort figures for Burke show a significantly lower proportion of the population in the post retirement age group compared with metropolitan and state-wide figures. The median age of Burke residents is rising however, and reached 31 years in 2001, up from 29 years in 1996 and 27 years in 1991. Table 4.2 shows the age cohorts for Burke in 2001 as a percentage of its total population compared with that of the Melbourne Statistical District and the State of Victoria.

**Table 4.2 Age cohorts for Burke, MSD and Victoria**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 4.1.5 Ethnicity

As illustrated in Table 4.3, the 2001 census shows Burke to have a high proportion of overseas born residents in comparison with whole of Victoria figures. The largest numbers of these residents originate from Southern Europe, the Middle East and the United Kingdom. More detailed data found in the 2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot (ABS 2001) indicates that the spread of overseas born residents is not consistent throughout the municipality, with the West Burke area home to a comparatively low 15% of overseas born residents, while North Burke has 25% and Central Burke some 37% of the population born elsewhere. Table 4.3 details the main countries of birth of Burke residents, and provides comparative figures for the State of Victoria.

**Table 4.3: Country of Birth of Burke Residents (%)**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 4.1.6 Language

Consistent with a significant number of overseas born residents, a range of languages other than English are spoken in Burke households. A comparison with the figures for the State of Victoria demonstrates a much lower number of Burke residents who speak English only. Other than English, Turkish and Italian are the most frequently spoken languages in the home, followed by Arabic (including Lebanese) and Greek. Table 4.4 details the most widely spoken languages in the municipality.

**Table 4.4: Languages Spoken at home (%)**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 4.1.7 Industry

Burke boasts a strong industrial base comprising manufacturing, heavy engineering, freight handling, electronics and communications and paper and food manufacture. The municipality is also home to a strong commercial and business base with a mixture of retail, office and institutional development.

According to 1996 census figures, the major employer of young people within Burke is the retail sector, particular for those aged between 15 and 19 years.

The manufacturing sector is another important employer for young people in Burke, particularly for those aged between 20 and 24 years. More than one quarter of young people in employment are engaged in manufacturing.

The hospitality industry is also a significant employer of young people within Burke, however in common with the retail sector, many hospitality jobs are casual and or part-time. The next two most prolific employers of young people in Burke are the Property and Business Services and Health and Community Services sectors. Interestingly, both of these industries are also suggested as employers of high numbers of casual workers with figures of 28% and 23% respectively (Watson et. al. (2003). Table 4.5 presents details of the major employers by industry within Burke in 1996.

**Table 4.5: Burke Employment by Industry**

Industry Type	15- 19 years %	20-24 years %	All employed persons
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	0.1	0.3	0.2
Mining	0.1	0.1	0.1
Manufacturing	10.7	17.6	18.1
Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	0	0.2	0.3
Construction	3.6	5.1	5.2
Wholesale Trade	2.7	6.3	5.2
Retail Trade	49.7	23.7	12.7
Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants	8.9	10.3	4.3
Transport and Storage	2.1	4.7	5.2
Communication Services	0.5	2.8	2.7
Finance and Insurance	1.5	7.2	4.6
Property and Business Services	5.6	12.8	10.3
Government Administration and Defence	0.4	2.5	4.4
Education	1.3	5.2	7.6
Health and Community Services	3.1	9.2	9.4
Cultural and Recreational Services	2.8	4.0	2.3
Personal and Other Services	2.3	4.8	3.9
Non-classifiable economic units	1.5	2.1	1.6
Not stated	3.4	2.4	1.9
Total	100	100	100

Source: Adapted from ABS Census Data 1996  
 Note: Columns may not total 100 due to rounding



#### 4.1.8 Unemployment

While unemployment rates for Burke North and West are comparable with the Metropolitan and state averages, figures for Central Burke are dramatically higher than for the rest of the City. As unemployment rates increased marginally throughout Melbourne and Victoria during the period June 2001 and 2002, comparatively larger increases in unemployment were experienced in Burke for the corresponding period. Figure 4.1 highlights respective unemployment rates for Burke against the Melbourne and Victorian figures.

**Figure 4.1 Comparative rates of unemployment: Burke, Melbourne, Victoria**

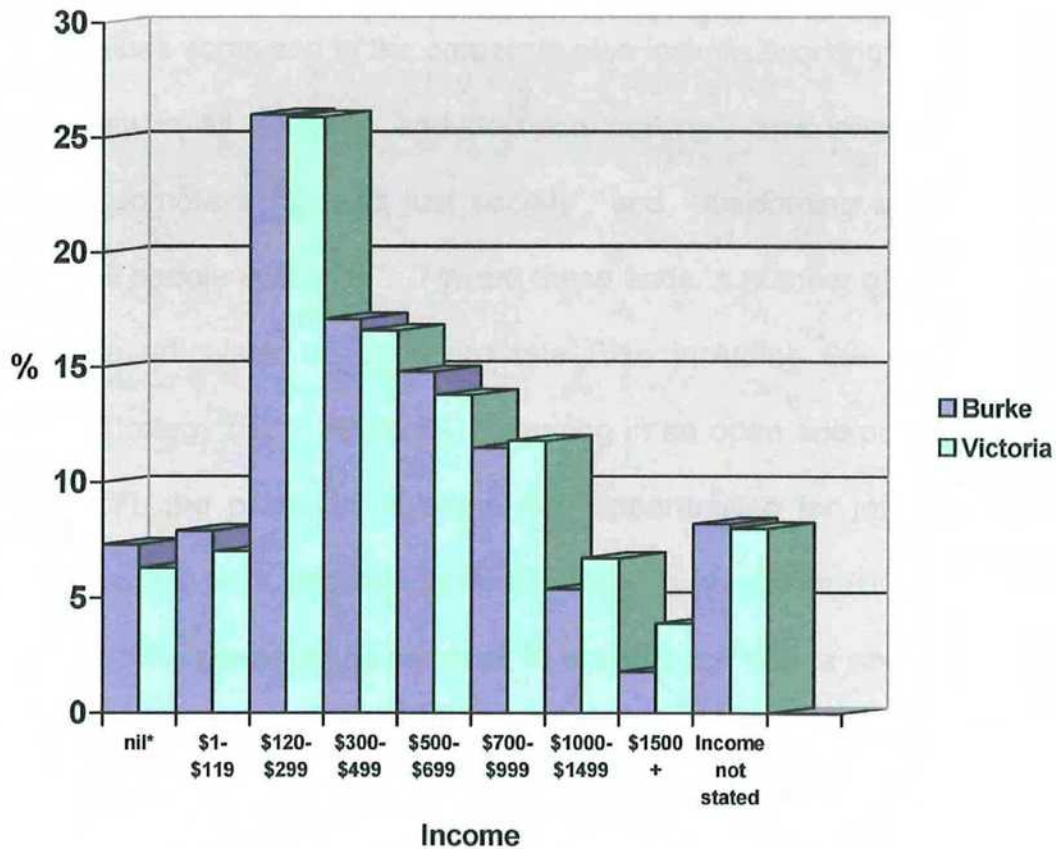
[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 4.1.9 Income

According to ABS Census data (2001), Burke residents over 15 years of age generally received lower weekly individual incomes than the same group across the whole of Victoria. Incomes of between nil and \$129 per week were received by 7.9% of residents of employment age, compared with a figure of 6.9% across the state. 73.1 % of Burke income levels were less than \$700 per week, while figures for the

whole of Victoria showed only 69.6% of incomes were below that figure. At the higher end of the scale, 7.2 of Burke individual incomes were \$1000 and above, compared with the whole of Victoria figure of 10.1%. Figure 4.2 provides detail of individual weekly income levels for Burke City and the whole of Victoria.

**Figure 4.2 Weekly Individual Income 2001: Burke City and Victoria**



Source: adapted from ABS Census of Population and Housing 2001

## 4.2 Towards participation and social inclusion

### 4.2.1 Council rhetoric and youth participation in Burke

Commitments to social justice and encouraging participation from all in the community, including young people, are strong messages that emerge from a number of Burke City Council corporate documents. According to the Burke Corporate Plan 2000-2003, Council's future vision for its community in part aims for the City to be "...distinguished by the diversity of its community and renowned for

fairness and community inclusion” (BCC 2000a). Indeed, the title of this plan, ‘Building a future together’ suggests a strong commitment to the involvement of all its citizens in community life. Pat O’Shea, Mayor for 2000-2001, says the Council has aspirations for Burke to be a fair and just place, where ‘cultural diversity thrives and all citizens are encouraged to participate in community life including decision making’ (interview 28/11/2000).

Burke City values espoused in the corporate plan include “working in partnership with the community in all activities and decision making”, “ensuring Council activities uphold and promote a fair and just society”, and, “welcoming and supporting the inclusion of all people in city life”. Toward these ends, a number of commitments and strategies are articulated in the Corporate Plan including the development of a consultation strategy (BCC 2000a:6), governing in an open and participative manner (BCC 2000a:7), the provision of some 400 opportunities for job seekers through Council sponsored work experience and/or training programs (BCC 2000a:8), and, adopting and then providing its services in accordance with a social justice charter (BCC 2000a:12).

The Corporate Plan is silent on commitments and strategies aimed specifically at young people; however these comments from Councillor O’Shea may provide some explanation:

We have talked about social justice. We have talked about...participatory democracy but I don’t know that we’ve taken it down to the level of saying, “ok, this is what we need to do for the youth and this is how we’ll do it by using participation and using a social justice framework” (interview 28/11/2000).

While young people are not singled out for discussions in the Corporate Plan, a number of other documents have a focus on Burke youth. These include a paper entitled *Supporting Our Young People* (BCC 1999 a). This document provides much

detail as to youth needs and issues in Burke and provided the background to the development of approaches to youth related matters in the *Burke Community Safety Plan* (BCC 1999 b). The Community Safety Plan addresses a range of youth issues under the banner of *Investing in Our Young People*. Included under this heading are the development of strategies to improve school retention rates, reduce truancy and the achievement of quality education outcomes for all students; early intervention and support initiatives for at risk youth; cross-sectoral coordination to improve service delivery for young people; improvement of young people's cultural, leisure and recreational opportunities; improving relationships between young people and police; promoting the involvement of young people in needs analysis, peer support, and problem solving/decision making processes; and, addressing substance abuse issues through education, awareness and harm minimisation strategies (pp 16-7). According to the plan, dealing with these issues is crucial toward building a safer city:

Burke City Council's Community Safety Objective for Young People is to develop young people as valued, socially active and productive members of the Burke community and, as a consequence, prevent young people's involvement in crime and anti-social or destructive behaviour (BCC 1999a: 25).

One of a number of recommendations made in the Burke Community Safety Plan (BCCI 1999a:25) is that a "whole of government and whole of community youth strategy be developed for the Burke City incorporating the Youth Services Strategic Plan 1997-2002..." and other relevant documents drawn from internal and external sources. Built on existing planning strategies within the municipality, this '*Youth Services Strategic Plan*' (BCC 1997: vii) provides recommendations for a number of actions aimed at 'inclusion' of all young people within the municipality. These include targeting a broad range of services to all young people within the community; provision of a wide range of recreational and life skills development activities; development of a youth leadership program; redevelopment of both existing youth

programs and facilities to encourage greater use by young people; implementing strategies to engage young people from diverse backgrounds; and the establishment of youth services in a number of specific localities that are somewhat remote from Burke City centre.

According to the *Youth Services Strategic Plan 1997-2002*, “Council has historically provided a broad range of services, with an emphasis upon targeting all young people within the municipality” and recognises the need to plan to “ensure access and equity for all young people within the municipality” (BCC 1997:vii).<sup>6</sup> Developed during the period of the former Kennett State Government, the plan considered changes occurring within Local Government at that time; particularly the impact of compulsory competitive tendering and the intention to ‘market test’ Family Services, including Youth Services. Based on a desire to address issues such as a lack of employment opportunities for young people; education difficulties including decreased retention rates, access to services for culturally and linguistically diverse and disabled young people and access and locality issues in relation to existing services and facilities (BCC 1997:viii-ix), the strategic plan outlined a range of suggested roles for local government. These included taking the lead in planning and facilitating service development within the municipality; provision of demographic information to local service providers; facilitating networking; encouragement of service development to meet gaps and the provision of generalist youth services.

According to CEO Ronald Tregear, Council has a broader role in the development of young people; “...in some respects...Council is about developing young people...” He suggested however that families and the organisations within the wider

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<sup>6</sup> Given the word ‘historically’ has been used here in a document written in 1997, I have made the assumption that ‘Council’ in this context refers to the current Council and its antecedents prior to amalgamation in 1994.

community should not be underestimated or devalued in relation to the role in shaping young people:

...youth are a part of mainstream society... and I'm taking youth in the broader context...youth just don't exist out there on their own, children who are still at school are parts of families, they're involved in basketball or football, or other recreational pursuits, or maybe they're not...but they're part of mainstream society....and... I mean I just don't think you can't underestimate the tennis clubs, the footy clubs, the drama classes and all the after school programs (interview 8/11/2000)

Ronald recognizes that there are gaps that need to be filled however:

...I guess you also need to provide depth in terms of your programs to ensure that people who may not be involved in the mainstream activities are being involved in one way or another in terms of opportunities... we're trying to respond to the broad spectrum of youth needs, many of which are well satisfied in traditional services and then there's some that fall through the net (interview 8/11/2000).

#### 4.2.2 Holistic approach

Burke Council is seeking to take a holistic approach to issues within the community, including those affecting young people according to Ronald Tregear: He states that "... if we're dealing with an issue like drugs, or gambling or whatever it is, we don't deal with just that the issue; we deal with the whole issue..." Council sees its role as one of community building in attempting to deal with the prevailing conditions in which the episode of drug taking occurred, rather than the crisis response:

I think that's a key role for ... Councils, is coordination and facilitation. I think the ...other role ... we have in terms of service delivery for youth, is really about the long term solution, empowering youth to take control of their own futures rather than addressing crisis situations. I think there are other agencies that can look at crisis things and I think that there better equipped to do it and I think that...if local government gets into crisis management...there is a real risk that you could soak up a lot of funds and resources and you get so busy with the crisis management ...you can't see the forest for the trees sort of thing... (Interview Ronald Tregear 28/11/2000).

Notwithstanding the recognition that youth development, citizenship and participation were desirable in Burke, both Ronald and Pat suggest that there is a need to 'break the cycle' of disadvantage before such 'higher order' pursuits can be the key focus.

Ronald put it thus:

because unless the home structures are right, unless there's an income, unless they've got a roof over their head and unless mum and dad... can deal with some of the problems they've got...then kids are going to carry it on to the next generation (interview 8/11/2000).

#### 4.2.3 Marginalisation of youth services

Carol Neil, Burke Youth Participation Officer, would suggest that the senior management and Council are not really in tune with what the Council actually does in relation to young people:

...there is definitely a perception issue in terms of what youth services does...how they work with young people. I think there is a fairly basic assumption that we just provide activities for them and that everything's 'hunky dory' and we take them on activities and that's about it...and I think that's reflected perhaps in Council (interview 15/11/2000).

And further:

...they don't really have a good understanding of what youth services [is] or what it could be...perhaps there's...almost a lack of vision... I'm sure they just see as us in rec.[reation], I don't think they see us as anything else (interview 15/11/2000).

A further hindrance is a lack of access to the Internet. According to Carol, access to the Internet including email, is not available to Council staff<sup>7</sup>. She suggests this serves to inhibit her work with young people.

...for us as workers and to work appropriately with young people on the Internet, then we need to have access, ready access to it as well... We don't have external email, we don't have Internet in any of our youth Centres (interview 15/11/2000).

Carol adds that senior staff members do not take this issue seriously:

...as our former team leader said, "you can go to the library". I just don't think that's good enough... My understanding is that it's been sitting on Ronald's [CEO] desk for a long time now, about six months (interview 15/11/2000).

Carol sees her role as youth participation officer as "...the conduit between making sure that young people are being actively...consulted and working on decisions,

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<sup>7</sup> In a telephone conversation with Carol on 10 July 2002, she confirmed that internet access had recently been provided as had external email

within council, and between Council and ...the community...” She states that when the new Council was elected, signs were really positive that youth participation would flourish, particularly with the interest shown by Mayor O’Shea in meeting with and engaging with young people involved in staging a major youth forum. That optimism has waned somewhat as she suggests that there doesn’t appear to be a coherent plan for youth services, and further, “...in terms of the bigger picture...I guess I can’t really comment because...we haven’t got the youth services structure...I just don’t know what’s going on” (interview 15/11/2000).

This lack of clear planning and a strategic focus on the part of Councillors has been highlighted in Council minutes. For example, despite having already approved particular actions in relation to youth services and programs, Councillors sometimes contradict such plans at Council meetings or seek to implement programs or services that are already in place (BCC 2000b; 2000c; 2000d).

According to youth participation officer Carol Neil, a number of other internal issues have contributed to limiting her effectiveness and that of many of her colleagues in the youth services team. She believes the nature of the team structure at Burke is the first barrier. Carol explains that there is little connection and communication between various members of the youth services team because of being posted in various locations throughout the municipality, adding that a staff meeting fortnightly is often the only opportunity to catch up. She also suggests there is little connection to other departments and gives the example of the social planners being accommodated at opposite ends of the municipality and not having the opportunity to connect with them. She further states that a lack of a person in a team leader role compounds this issue as she contends that this should be part of their role:



...so if all the planners and stuff are... this is where you need a team leader... it would be the responsibility of a team leader to make such links (interview 15/11/2000).

A further role of the team leader would be to keep the team informed of relevant events, programs and organisational issues. According to Carol, a good example of where the information is not passed on to staff relates to the opening of a new youth and community facility in a relatively new part of Burke (interview 15/11/2000). Built as part of a 'developer contribution'<sup>8</sup>, Carol had no idea of plans for the Centre at all.

...first of all, we didn't know about it, [laughter] Troy [manager] knew about it, but, the first thing that we as a group knew about it was two weeks before it was going to be opened, but hey, there's an expect[ation] – we have been told that we have to offer an activity, and activities for the opening...(interview 15/11/2000)

That's not all that is wrong with the facility says Carol. She states there is no money to staff the facility and it's "a big building in the middle of nowhere amongst the new estate...it's supposed to be staffed by volunteers..." (interview 15/11/2000).

These comments are consistent with findings of the Burke Youth Services Strategic Plan 1997-2002, where issues raised included a lack of support for team members, lack of communication within the team and with management, low morale, an uneven workload, a lack of clear planning and coordination within and beyond the team, and little consultation (BCC 1997).

#### 4.2.4 Councillor involvement

According to Carol Neil, the rhetoric of Councillors is strongly supportive of youth services within Burke and this was initially seen as a positive for young people:

...when the Council initially came in... messages we were getting were very positive, and... the Mayor is really... proactive in this type of stuff and that's really good and he'll come to a meeting with young people and he was quite involved in meeting the young people that were involved in the youth forum...(interview 15/11/2000)

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<sup>8</sup> Contributions to infrastructure required by Councils to be paid by developers, particularly during construction of new estates. It is not uncommon for such contributions to be in the form of community buildings.

To Carol's disappointment however, such enthusiasm is not sustained, suggesting that "...because sometimes...with the committees, councillors don't turn up and that's a bit frustrating". She adds that the development of youth services is largely driven by the bureaucracy rather than any direction provided by Council (interview 15/11/2000), a sentiment largely acknowledged by Pat O'Shea, 2000-2001 Mayor (interview 28/11/2000).

#### 4.2.5 Process versus outcome focus

Carol Neil maintains that the process of being engaged is as important as any outcome:

...its all process, absolutely, and especially I think with the shifting rhetoric on local government to be...working more closely with its community and to be providing more locally based programs...well its almost a perception and a process, the process really has to be quite in touch... working with young people in terms of participation can be quite exciting because you can actually almost set models or, or create opportunities... to give young people that opportunity to feel that they can make a difference can be quite, well quite empowering for them I guess...(interview 15/11/2000).

She adds that good process is not easy however, "...it's a pain in the a--- really...it can be really empowering, but it's not something you do if you've got a deadline, its not going to be pretty (Laughter)".

#### 4.2.6 Translating talk into action

On the actual participation of young people in decision making, Ronald Tregear suggests that Councils must find a way to facilitate this:

Now in terms of engaging them in relation to policy formulation...councils have got to go out of their way to provide an opportunity to get a perspective from younger people...(interview 8/11/2000).

Pat too believes that Council has a key role in engaging young people:

I believe as a Councillor, and with a strong belief in social justice, community, participation, volunteerism, all those types of things, that you have to both encourage it, facilitate it, not force it...I think there are opportunities that young people do want...(interview 28/11/2000).

Pat suggests that there definitely is a role for young people in contributing to decision making and whilst she agrees that that few young people may in fact be interested, this is reflective of the interest of the adult population in any case. She also articulates a strong confidence in the young people of Burke to make a positive contribution after her experiences as Mayor and meeting many young people from the municipality, stating, "...the kids I've met are just fantastic" (interview 28/11/2000).

According to Pat, Council has some 'catching up' to do as local community participation suffered during the seven year period of the Kennett State Government. She says that this lack of community involvement also detracted from the development of young people as active citizens. This lack of community input contributed to Pat's decision to seek a return to local government after an absence of more than a decade:

I'm not going to blame him [Kennett] for every ill in society or community, but it seemed to me and one of the reasons I got back involved in local council is, that where people were fearful of the future...they seemed to operate inwardly rather than outwardly. And it was sort of to protect the sanctity of the family and to the protecting of the job, and therefore didn't get involved in a whole lot of community activities (interview 28/11/2000).

A particular opportunity for young people within the municipality to contribute to decision making has been in relation to the development of skate parks within the City. Young people have been involved from the start in lobbying Councillors for funding to build the parks, contributing to design elements and providing input on where the parks should be located. In one instance, young people formed a skate association in order to place further pressure on Council to build the park and to provide input into the design and management of the facility.

Pat terms the skate park projects as highly satisfying in terms of engaging young people within the municipality. She suggests that although there may be other priority issues for young people, once the process has started toward facilities like skate parks, they need to be delivered relatively quickly. She offers that young people who start campaigning for a skate park or similar aged fourteen are not going to have much faith in their local government if that facility is not delivered until they are eighteen. This is particularly important when they have been involved in a participatory process. She adds that the young people are going to be the next leaders and all efforts should be made to ensure they do not feel disenfranchised from their Council (interview 28/11/2000). While Pat claims this is a social justice issue, she is certainly cognizant of the accompanying political imperative:

...that's the case with any lobby group that you may not be able to meet their aspirations...they'll be really disillusioned if they feel that the elected people within their Council don't listen to them... and they've moved on and are disillusioned and will never be supportive of council...(interview 28/11/2000).

Despite this obvious support for the process, the implementation of skate parks has been a slow process. While a number of these have been completed or are nearing completion, one proposed skate park in an area identified as in need has been continually deferred. This is despite Council allocating funds in the 2001/02 Capital Works budget to construct the park. According to a report presented to Council and subsequently endorsed, 'strong opposition' to the proposal had been received from the community (BCC 2002a). When asked during a post interview conversation, Councillor O'Shea indicated that the skate park proposal would be 'put in the too hard basket' until after the March 2003 Council elections (Personal communication 10 December 2002).

In Chapter 4.2.1, a strong desire on the part of Burke City Council to encourage youth participation was highlighted. According to Pat O' Shea, Council's aspirations

in relation to participation of young people in the democratic process are currently far from being achieved however. She states, "I believe that in our corporate plan that we've got participatory democracy but at the Council we don't really understand and we don't implement it." Councillor O'Shea adds that young people are encapsulated in Council's social justice ideals that seek to promote inclusion and participation by all citizens. She admits that they are a long way from reaching these goals in relation to young people:

We have aspirations but I don't know how much we have actually achieved that. We believe that young people have a capacity to influence, um, decision making at the local level... Whether we've achieved that or not is something that I doubt, but I think that is where the aspirations are (interview 28/11/2000).

Carol Neil, Youth participation Officer agrees:

... we can consult which is one way but in terms of participation...and actively guiding the way we run our youth services, we're not at that level yet (interview 15/11/2000).

To date, a 'whole of government and whole of community' youth strategy as discussed in Chapter 4.2.1 is yet to be developed as recommended in the Burke Community Safety Plan (BCC 1999a:25) In addition, there is no specific youth policy for the city either, according to Burke CEO, Ronald Tregear:

... I'm not sure if we've done that strategic thinking and put it on paper... there's been a bit happening...I think that the only...the main gap that I see is at the strategic level...and I think that's probably where we need to do some work to pull it all together (interview 8/11/2000).

Further, youth services and initiatives happen in spite of a lack of a philosophical commitment backed by sound policy at the Councillor level and Pat has no hesitation giving any credit that may be due to the youth workers:

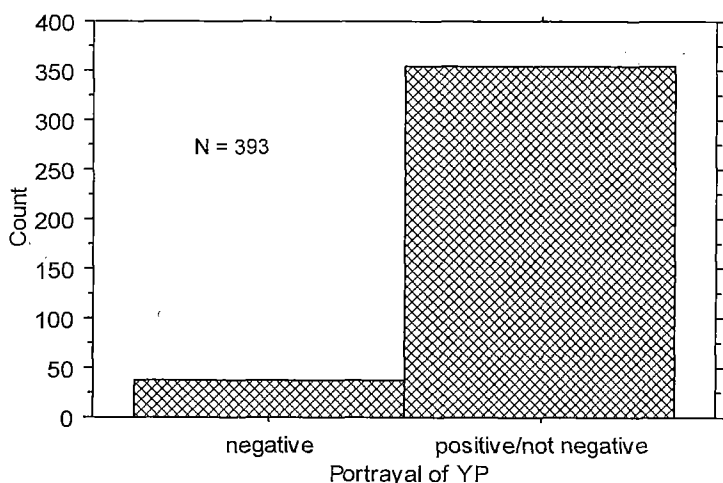
I think the quality of our youth programs and the level of participation relates very directly to the staff and the enthusiasm of them, and I would say that a lot of the youth initiatives are driven at the staff level, and, a fairly junior level, than it is from sort of a philosophical stand or vision of the council (interview 28/11/2000).

#### 4.2.7 Positive images of youth

As a means of getting more young people involved in youth week, Carol Neil has run a poetry competition that has been quite successful. She was particularly pleased with the year 2000 contest which attracted more than 120 entries and drew favourable comments as to the quality of the entries from the judge, a published poet. While successful in those terms, Carol expressed disappointment that she could not get local newspaper coverage, even to publish the winning poems. She had worked to get interest in the story stating, "...the 'journos' came out, took the photos, I was in touch with all the 'journos' and faxed all the winning poems through, but in the end, nothing." This was not the only disappointing aspect of local newspaper coverage however. She adds, "...and with the youth week stuff, hardly anything got in the paper, apart from what council paid for" (interview 15/11/2000).

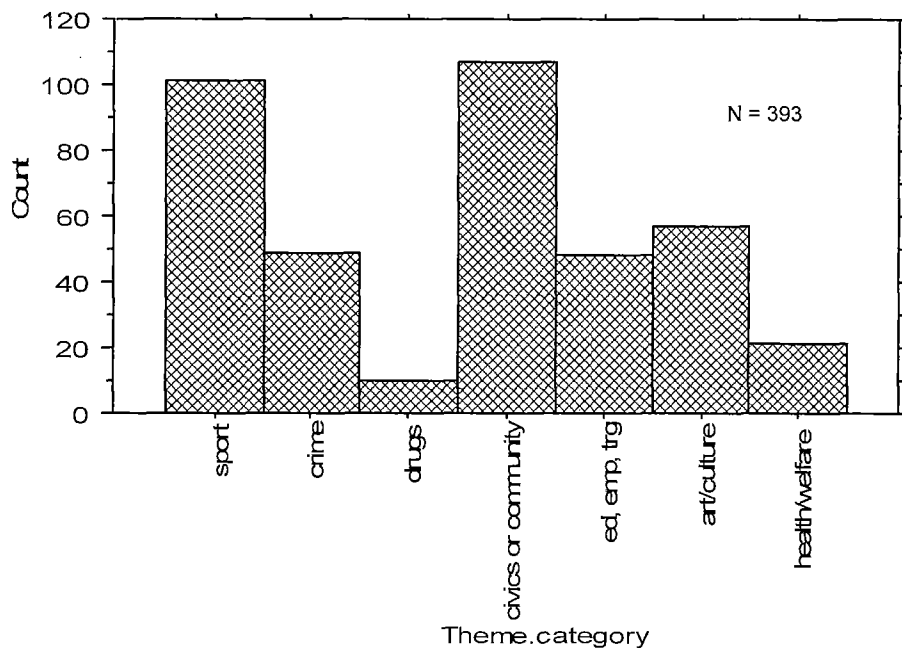
Despite Carol's stated lack of success in publicising Council events, considerable reporting of youth events and issues does occur in the Burke Leader Newspaper. During the period July 1999 and June 2001, three hundred and ninety three articles (N) were identified as relating to a young person or young people from Burke. This equates to almost four articles per week and does not include articles that discuss the issues of young people in general or represent young people from outside of Burke. Examination of these articles showed that young people were generally portrayed in a positive manner or at worst, not negatively. Figure 4.3 over page depicts the classification of articles as positive /not negative or negative in their portrayal of young people.

**Figure 4.3 Portrayal of young people in Burke newspaper articles**



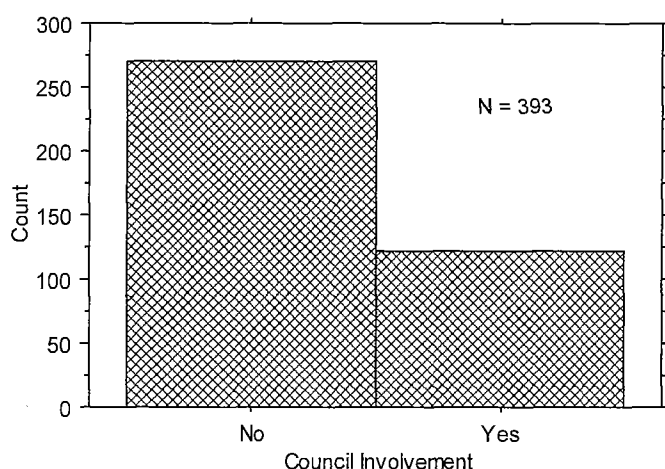
A breakdown of the articles into themes appears to confirm the positive nature of much of the reporting about young people in Burke. Figure 4.4 shows the nature of the articles depicting young people according to these themes and shows that the largest numbers of articles focus on civic and community or sporting type activities.

**Figure 4.4 Themes for articles about young people in Burke**



Carol had previously stated that despite her best efforts, she finds it difficult to get newspaper interest in the activities and programs Council is running for young people. Figure 4.5 demonstrates that while the majority of articles identified as being related to young people have no connection to Council, almost one third of articles do have some nexus to the activities of Council.

**Figure 4.5 Council nexus to Burke articles**



While Council was linked to less than one third of articles identified through this part of the study, of interest is whether Council involvement in a story can be linked to whether the stories tend to be positive or negative. Table 4.6 displays the observed frequencies of articles with Council involvement, cross tabulated against positive/not negative and negative articles.

**Table 4.6 Observed Frequencies for Council Involvement, Portrayal of YP**

	No	Yes	Totals
negative	28	9	37
positive/not negative	243	113	356
<b>Totals</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>393</b>

To test the independence of these two variables, a Chi-square test was performed. With a confidence interval of 95, meaning that there is a ninety-five percent chance



that the results are not due to chance, the Chi-square figure was .861. The Chi-square 'p' value was .3533. This suggests that the null hypothesis (Ho) must be accepted in that there is no relationship between Council involvement in local articles about young people in Burke and whether or not the young people are portrayed in a positive manner.

As one might intuitively expect, a glance at the cross tabulated data representing article themes and portrayal of young people suggests that there may indeed be a relationship between the nature of the article and the image of young people it portrays. Table 4.7 demonstrates observed frequencies for the portrayal of young people in such articles against identified themes.

**Table 4.7 Observed Frequencies for Portrayal of YP and Theme**

	sport	crime	drugs	civics or community	ed, emp, trg	art/culture	health/welfare	Totals
negative	0	30	1	3	2	0	1	37
positive/not negative	101	19	9	104	46	57	20	356
Totals	101	49	10	107	48	57	21	393

A Chi-square test performed on this cross tabulation gave a Chi-square value of 178.216 with a Chi-square 'p' value of <.0001; again with a confidence interval of 95. Ordinarily such a 'p' value would indicate that we can reject the null hypothesis and state that there is a correlation between the nature of the themes and whether or not an article about young people in Burke will be positive. On this occasion however, the reliability of this test is under question given that there are a number of cells in the table with low (under 5) or zero counts (Connor-Linton 2003).

What we can deduce from Table 4.7 is that it is really only articles related to crime that give a negative view of young people in any great numbers. Additionally, almost

40% of articles linked to crime do not portray young people in a negative manner; often because the young people portrayed were victims rather than perpetrators of crime.

#### 4.2.8 Innovation

Among the range of programs and activities currently available to young people in Burke, a number of innovative and exciting initiatives are being developed which have the potential to impact positively on young people's social and political involvement in their community. According to Carol Neil, the implementation of 'Student Action Teams', spread across schools within the municipality, has provided such an opportunity. With funding from the State Government's 'Safer Cities and Shires' program, student action teams from each school involved secondary school students building bridges with the community and local businesses to tackle issues of community concern. In a particularly successful example, a group of young people from a local secondary college undertook a project with Community Police and traders from a notorious shopping centre to improve physical safety and perceptions of safety experienced by that local community. Says Carol,

...young people, especially in ... are seen as just troublemakers...you know...alcohol problems and definitely drugs issues on some of the corners of the shopping centre...so it's not a real friendly atmosphere...(interview 15/11/2000).

By a process of young people and traders engaging in dialogue, Carol contends that the relationship between young people and traders has improved markedly as has the level of actual and perceived safety in the Shopping Centre. Particularly pleasing for Carol is that the group of young people involved may well have been perceived as the very troublemakers the program sought to target:

...apparently the students have just excelled...Now these are students who weren't coping at all with school, probably you know, will leave school, early school leavers, and just absolutely loved and have really benefited from working on such a project...(interview 15/11/2000).

As its name suggests, the *Youth at Risk* program is a targeted program aiming to assist those young people at risk of dropping out of school and of other harm. Imported from the UK, Burke City Council is piloting the program that provides mentoring, training and other input to young people who, without such support, may struggle to find a successful pathway to employment or further training. Says Pat O'Shea, "While we would like to be working purely at the developmental end within Council, we have some catching up to do" (interview 28/11/00). Described as the program "...where troubled young people are given the opportunity to turn their lives around and become active and socially responsible members of the community", *Youth at risk* seeks to provide a program of youth development, albeit for a small number of arguably some of the most disadvantaged young people from within the community (BCC 2001:6).

The Burke City Council has also been quite successful at attracting both Government and corporate support for a number of educational initiatives aimed at reducing social disadvantage in the city. One major development is the Burke Interactive Library, due for completion in 2004. Pat O'Shea describes this project as the "...most modern, up to date library facilities that you could get." She argues that parts of Burke have a very low level of readership and the particular site for the new facility currently does not have a library, contributing to social disadvantage. The aim of this Centre is to encourage young people in particular to use the facility with Internet access a focus:

We'll take the view that internet is power and that we will want to be bigger, better than anywhere else, because we're already dealing with a group of people who are under privileged, under accessed...and disempowered...(interview 28/11/00).

On a smaller scale, a development with similar aims and sponsored by a large corporation is to open in another needy location within the municipality and a recent

announcement (BCC 2002b) suggests that a number of internet kiosks will be set up in youth and community facilities in other areas of need, to provide low cost internet access to the community.

Whilst not a particularly original idea, the Burke Youth Services youth magazine is a popular vehicle for young people's involvement within the city. Young people control the production of the magazine with few restraints other than budget issues or intervention to ensure offensive or defamatory information is not printed.

A further positive innovation for the City is the manner in which partnerships with the corporate sector have been approached. Burke City Council has had considerable success in gaining sponsorship from the corporate sector, together with State Government funding, for a number of large-scale projects. These projects are essentially library based with an emphasis on information technology, aimed at improving literacy and other skills of Burke citizens and especially young people (interview Pat O'Shea 28/11/02000).

Considerable involvement in the development of a LLEN is further evidence of Council's commitment to the education of young people (Personal Communication Pat O'Shea 10 December 2002). In addition, Council's Community Safety Program and the involvement of young people in recognising and finding solutions to neighbourhood problems are opportunities for young people to engage with their communities and demonstrative of sound community development (interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000: BCC 1999b).

#### 4.2.9 Adult Control

One of the vehicles for youth participation in decision making for Burke young people was to be the youth advisory committees. Unfortunately says Carol, these committees have had to be placed on 'hold' as they were not achieving the desired

results. According to Carol, adult control had crept into their operation; "...the meetings certainly weren't orientated towards young people and getting them involved". She is hopeful that the resumption of these committees will be mean that the original aims of youth participation are met, "...and there won't be any adults...we don't want just the articulate kids. We want something that's diverse..."

For power to be devolved to young people also requires agreement amongst the staff team as to how that is to occur:

"... you actually have to come to consensus within the youth workers that you're working with on, well what is participation, what does consultation mean, how do we work with young people...and that's been fairly difficult as well..."

She adds that the way that Burke City Council and its antecedents have worked with young people in consultation the past has not been as well developed as other Councils and "its been a shift of culture as well" (interview 15/11/2000).

#### 4.3 Commentary: heading in the right direction?

##### 4.3.1 Influences on youth citizenship beyond Council control

Demographic data presented at the beginning of this chapter has shown Burke to be a culturally diverse and rapidly growing community which experiences relatively high levels of social disadvantage. Indeed, pockets of extreme disadvantage are found within the city, with unemployment levels in some areas three times those of other areas within Burke.

Pat O'Shea quotes one study which claims that part of Burke is considered one of the most disadvantaged localities across Victoria and NSW, "...according to a whole list of criteria including social security benefits, jail, school leaving, educational levels, and [other] risks..." (interview 28/11/2000). Such poverty and related disadvantage is

expected to continue among significant numbers of Burke residents for the foreseeable future, with generational unemployment a major concern.

While not an issue that is under the direct control of Council, such poverty, together with the diversity and growth apparent within Burke, is bound to add significantly to the challenges faced by Burke in providing opportunities for citizen participation and a sense of 'community' for young people. For example, Pat O'Shea suggests that breaking the cycle of poverty is a far greater priority than being concerned with a youth development focus or participation in decision making (interview 28/11/2000).

Opportunities for full employment for young people in Burke would go a long way toward alleviating such endemic poverty. Within Burke however, the retail sector is by far the biggest employer of young people, particularly for those aged between 15 and 19 years. Whilst not dismissing the importance of such work, particularly for providing students with a level of income, such work is often casual or part-time (LHMU 2003; Watson et. al. 2003). Additionally, it is argued that casual employees potentially face a range of disadvantages such as increased job and income insecurity, lower levels of satisfaction with income and work in general, lower occupational health and safety standards and poorer access to training (Watson et. al 2003).

Whilst the manufacturing sector is reasonably strong in Burke, it comes in a distant second as an employer of that age group cohort. These factors have implications for successful transitions from education and training to full employment for Burke's young people

Cultural diversity is a further issue that may impact on the ability of council to achieve its aims in relation to young people and their participation. In addition to the costs associated with servicing a broad range of ethnic and cultural groups, it is often

difficult to encourage the involvement of young people from diverse cultures in Council activities or programs (interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000). Of further concern to Carol is the attitude shown to such young people by other young people within the community. Some parts of Burke are described as mainly 'Anglo', while others are decidedly multicultural and she despairs with the attitude of some of these 'Anglo' pockets she describes as racist:

[their] understanding of multicultural issues is ah, downright disturbing at times, yeah. You kind of think the community is moving forward and then ...you hear some of the things the kids are saying and you go 'ohhhh' (15/11/00).

A lack of public transport and subsequent feelings of isolation are issues for young people in the more distant suburbs within the municipality. This is especially so in the newer estates, though residents live in hope of fulfilment of government promises to upgrade the rail system. In addition, cohesion and a lack of ownership or belonging to the Council are issues for several localities within Burke City. Residents in some suburbs have actively campaigned to secede from the city, feeling the amalgamations which occurred during the Kennett years had served to disadvantage their communities by placing them in a city where they had little in common with other areas of the municipality.

#### 4.3.2 Internal influences on youth citizenship in Burke

In addition to external influences, analysis of interviews and corporate and other documents has identified a range of internal factors that contribute to the level of citizenship for young people within Burke. These include the language or rhetoric espoused by the Council. Language used by Councils is quite important, particularly in planning documents, as such documents set out goals and articulate actions required to achieve such goals. If corporate planning documents are not explicit in advancing such concepts as citizenship, participation and youth involvement, actions

toward their achievement are less likely. In the case of Burke, the language used would suggest that the development of young people is taken quite seriously. The focus in Burke appears to be on people rather than structures.

There is recognition that a holistic approach to young people is required and is in many ways being achieved, however there is further acknowledgment of endemic problems that will require continued welfare type interventions. Levels of disadvantage within Burke necessitate a cross- council approach that addresses the continuum from youth welfare to development.

Marginalisation of youth services in Burke is a problem. Without youth services staff members feeling they are part of the 'mainstream', and by being kept out of the 'information loop', a morale problem currently in evidence may translate into serious problems for service delivery. A further problem for a service that is in some ways marginalised is the priority then placed on a service with regards to resources. Attracting resources for services that are highly visible is likely to be easier than for one that is marginalised.

Negative Councillor involvement is not a major issue within Burke in relation to youth services. Some disappointment has been expressed however in relation to the lack of interest sometimes shown toward youth issues, unless a problem emerges. In addition, it appears that some Councillors are not sufficiently aware of facilities and programs for young people. This is evidenced in minutes of meetings where Councillors have on occasion asked about the possibility of implementing an activity or facility to deal with a 'problem' which has either previously been agreed to or is already in operation. It has been further acknowledged that little policy development in the youth area is initiated by the elected Council.



An issue for the youth participation worker at Council is that while it is that process is more important than outcomes, in a political environment such as local government, the pressure to produce the outcome is sometimes overwhelming. A danger of letting 'process slip' is that of undoing the good work done previously (interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000).

A further issue for Burke is translating talk into timely action. During the interview, Mayor O'Shea lauded the process of young people lobbying for a skate park in a particular part of the city (interview 28/11/2000). For political reasons however, more than two years later that particular skate park has not been delivered and is 'postponed' until after elections in March 2003 (personal communication 10 December 2002). Elements of a negative rather than positive view of young people appear at play in relation to this issue, given the delay to the project is due to resident concern about young people and potential behaviour on the site.

Despite the lack of interest in reporting young people's issues in local newspapers suggested by Burke's Youth Participation Worker, evidence to the contrary was unearthed during the study of local reporting. Indeed, many articles relating to young people were identified, of which the overwhelming majority were positive. Even stories related to crime included a high number which portrayed young people in a positive or at worst not negative manner. In some of these cases, young people were identified as victims rather than perpetrators of crime.

There are however a number of challenges currently facing the Burke City Council of which some are unlikely to be adequately addressed in the short term. Huge debts owed by the City will take years to repay, while the need to provide new infrastructure to emerging neighbourhoods in what is considered to be one of the fastest growing municipalities in the country will continue to place heavy demands on Council

resources. Addressing social disadvantage within such a context will be difficult.

Nonetheless, recognition of the need for the provision of welfare and the importance of education sit comfortably with Marshall's notion of social citizenship. Despite some reference to young people in the context of them being future voters, little evidence exists of a heavy focus on political aspects of citizenship such as the right to vote or stand for political office. Council appears to encourage participation of young people in decision making and the appointment of Carol Neil in the new role as Youth Participation Officer can be viewed as evidence of that. Further, though Youth Advisory Committees have been 'put on hold', a commitment exists to restructure these committees and provide avenues for youth participation through these and other less formal structures (BCC 2002b; interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000) . Despite the range of issues it faces, it is apparent that Burke City Council has a positive approach to young people and the provision of appropriate programs and services to them.

## **5. Case Two: the Shire of Kimberly**

### 5.1 Demographics

#### 5.1.1 Formation, Size and Location

Kimberly Shire Council was formed in January 1995, following the amalgamation of a number of smaller shires and the inclusion of a major portion of one other. Covering an area of more than 1700 square kilometres and with a backdrop of the Great Dividing Range, the Shire of Kimberly includes a number of small towns in addition to several significant town centres.

#### 5.1.2 Governance and local politics

Kimberly is governed by ten Councillors, elected by residents and ratepayers triennially. The nature of voting is determined by the Council and can be either by attendance at polling places or by postal ballot. The last three elections have been by way of attendance voting at polling places throughout the municipality. The most recent election was held in March 2003 at which a number of sitting councillors were deposed. A small number of Kimberly Councillors are members of the Australian Labor Party, however the ALP does not favour endorsement of candidates in Kimberly Shire elections. The remaining majority of councillors claim to be independent of links to political organisations.

The municipality is represented in the Victorian Parliament by two lower and two upper house members, all of which are held comfortably by members of the Australian Labor Party. In the federal sphere, all of the Shire is contained within one Federal Parliamentary seat, currently held by the ALP and described as 'marginal' (AEC 2002).

### 5.1.3 Population

According to the 2001 Census, the Shire of Kimberly is home to more than 35000 people. Population growth is currently in excess of the Victorian average, with continued rapid growth forecast. This continues a trend which has seen the population within the Shire more than double within the previous twenty five years. Most recent growth has occurred in southern areas of the Shire in closest proximity to Melbourne. Table 5.1 highlights trend in population growth during the period 1991-2001.

**Table 5.1: Kimberly Populations 1991 to 2001**

	% growth 1996-2001	% growth 1991-2001
Victoria	6.2	9.4
<b>Kimberly</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>19.6</b>
Kimberly West	6.4	12.6
Kimberly Central	12.1	25.5
Kimberly South	10.9	19.8

Source: Derived from ABS Statistics Basic Community Profile and Snapshot 2001

### 5.1.4 Age Cohorts

Perhaps consistent with the high population growth experienced in Kimberly through the past decade, the Shire has relatively high numbers of young people and children for each cohort up to 17 years of age, compared with figures for the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and Victoria. Figures for young people aged between 10 and 17 years are particularly high compared to those for Melbourne and Victoria. These figures appear to match a comparatively large percentage of the population aged between 35 and 49 years; who may be expected to form the bulk of the parent group for those aged 10 to 17 years. On the other hand, numbers of Kimberly residents aged between 18 and 34 years are conspicuously low compared with those for Melbourne and Victoria wide, as are those for people in the post retirement age

group. Table 5.2 shows the Age Cohorts for Kimberly in 2001 as a percentage of its total population, compared with that of the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and the State of Victoria.

**Table 5.2: Age cohorts for Kimberly, MSD and Victoria**

Age Cohort in Years	Kimberly (%)	Melbourne Statistical Division	Vic %
0-4	7.0	6.4	6.5
5-9	9.0	6.7	7.0
10-17	13.7	10.6	11.2
18-24	6.8	10.2	9.5
25-34	11.2	16.0	14.9
35-49	25.4	22.5	22.4
50-64	17.1	15.4	15.7
65+	9.3	12.1	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing 2001. Note: columns may not total 100 due to rounding

### 5.1.5 Ethnicity

At the 2001 Census, relatively few of Kimberly's residents identified as being born overseas. Indeed, the number of people born overseas and living in Kimberly was more than 10% fewer, relative to population, than for the whole of Victoria. Table 5.3 shows the most common countries of birth for Kimberly residents. As shown in the table, of those Kimberly born residents overseas, by far the highest numbers came from the United Kingdom followed by New Zealand and Germany. It should be noted however that of the overseas countries of birth, only the United Kingdom provided more than one percent of the Kimberly population.

**Table 5.3: Country of Birth of Kimberly Residents (%)**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 5.1.6 Language

Consistent with the low number of overseas born residents, languages other than English are spoken in relatively few Kimberly households when compared to the figures for the whole of Victoria. Table 5.4 details the prevalence of community languages spoken in Kimberly.

**Table 5.4: Languages Spoken in Kimberly homes (%)**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

### 5.1.7 Industry

Kimberly Shire is largely an agricultural region with some light manufacturing, timber milling and speciality service industries. Its significance as a tourist destination is increasing, with a number of historic townships providing good quality accommodation and fine food, complemented by a burgeoning wine industry. According to 1996 census figures, the retail sales sector is by far the largest employer of young people between 15 and 19 years, while the manufacturing sector is a distant second.

Table 5.5 provides details of the importance of various industries in relation to employment opportunities within Kimberly, particularly for young people.

**Table 5.5: Kimberly Employment by industry 1996**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

### 5.1.8 Unemployment

While unemployment rates for Kimberly North and West are comparable with the Metropolitan and Victorian averages, figures for Central Kimberly are dramatically higher than for the rest of the Shire. While unemployment rates increased marginally throughout Melbourne and Victoria during the period June 2001 and 2002, comparatively larger increases in unemployment were experienced in Kimberly for the corresponding period. Figure 5.1 highlights respective unemployment rates for Kimberly against the Melbourne and Victorian figures.

**Figure 5.1 Comparative rates of unemployment: Kimberly, Melbourne, Victoria**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

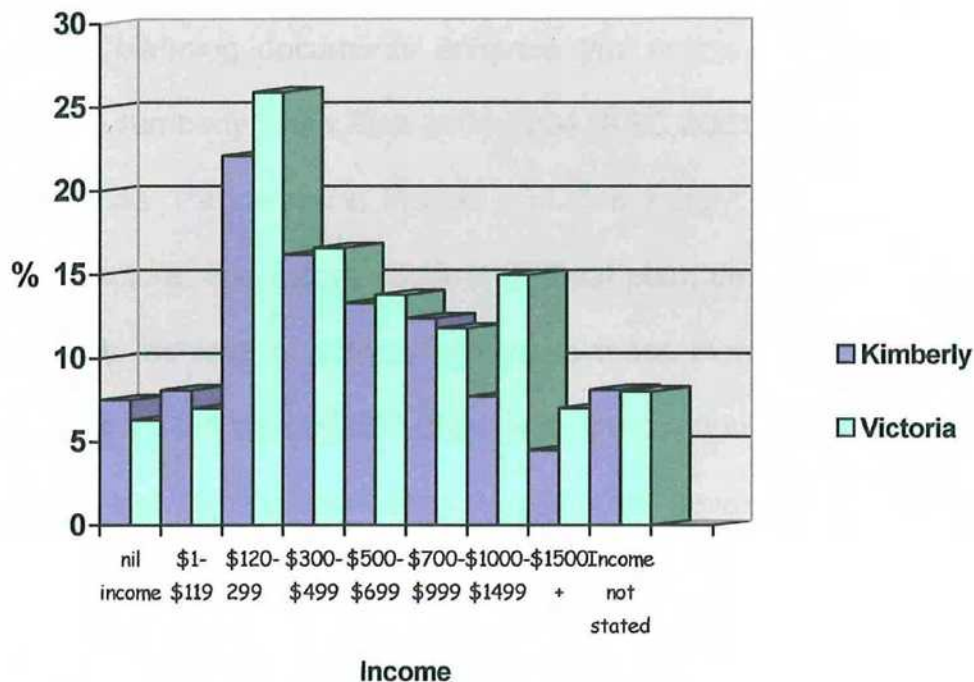
### 5.1.9 Income

According to the 2001 ABS Census data, 15.6% of Kimberly residents over 15 years of age received weekly individual incomes of between nil and \$129, compared to a figure of 13.3% for the whole of Victoria. 67.2 % of Kimberly income levels were less than \$700 per week against the State figure of 69.6%. At the higher end of the scale, only 12.2% of Kimberly individual incomes were \$1000 and above, compared with



the whole of Victoria figure of 22%. Figure 5.2 indicates that 2001 individual weekly income levels for Kimberly were generally lower than for the whole of Victoria.

**Figure 5.2 Weekly Individual Income 2001: Kimberly and Victoria**



Source: Adapted from ABS Census Data 1996  
 Note: Columns may not total 100 due to rounding

## 5.2 Toward youth participation and social inclusion

### 5.2.1 Council rhetoric and youth participation in Kimberly

The language emerging from Kimberly corporate documents emits a strong message that the Council is committed to working in partnership with its community. This is demonstrated in the community consultation framework adopted by Council in November 1999:

Consultation is a process of two way informed communication[s] between the council and the community on an issue or project prior to council making a decision on that issue. Community participation is a means of obtaining that community input. It fulfils a need to ensure community views can be identified and communicated. Consultation enhances the decision making process.  
 (KSC 1999a)

This desire to improve community engagement is also evident from the comments of CEO Richard Lewis, quoted in the Kimberly Shire 1999-2000 annual report

A key challenge for us all will be to find new ways of engaging our local communities to encourage greater participation in Council's decision making processes and, in turn, enable Council to effectively meet community needs (KSC 1999b:2).

Subsequent planning documents enhance this notion of community participation, including the Kimberly Shire Plan 2001-2004 (KSC 2001a). The plan is underpinned by four themes: Partnerships; People and Community; Environment and Heritage; and Infrastructure; and incorporates an annual plan, detailing specific actions to be undertaken to achieve objectives relative to those themes. A number of Council's commitments for the period 2001-2004 articulated within the Shire Plan are to: listen to residents and identify their needs as plans are developed; tell Shire residents of Council decisions and objectives; and define and communicate performance targets and report annually to the community against those measures. While these commitments alone do not indicate a promise to encourage citizenship, promote democracy and facilitate social inclusion, the plan further details strategies and objectives that include working to further improve community participation in decision making; recognition of diversity; encouragement of active citizenship; and a focus on the health and wellbeing of the whole community.

A number of actions with a particular youth focus are highlighted within the 2001-2002 Annual Plan (KSC 2001b). These include a commitment to improved access to education services across the Shire through the establishment of a Local Learning and Employment Network by May 2002; improving educational opportunities for young people in the Shire by developing policies and procedures that promote employment, work experience and training within Council; greater participation and representation of young people in Council meetings and activities; and a commitment

to building three skate parks within the municipality before April 2002. Along with the intention of Council to have Committees of Management established for these skate parks three months prior to opening, the plan articulates a goal for strong representation by young people on these committees (KSC 2001b).

These activities build on previous annual plans including that of 2000-2001, which sought greater participation and representation of young people in Council meetings and activities. A commitment to building skate-parks in a number of towns throughout the Shire was also highlighted within that earlier plan, as was including young people in the development of Council's long term vision to the year 2020, through the youth advisory committee. The provision of a number of youth forums also featured (KSC 2000).

Dealing with the broader demographic issue, during 2000-2001 Council aimed to identify alternate mechanisms for public participation/involvement; gain an understanding of the ways in which residents wish to participate in Council matters; and made clear commitments toward the development of a consultation strategy. Further, Council sought to: "Implement strategies that improve the participation and representation of people with a disability in Council governance", and examine alternative models of direct participation (KSC 2000).

### 5.2.2 Holistic approach

Despite its current commitment to young people, the Shire of Kimberly and its antecedents do not have a long history of specific work with young people. Mayor Ian Ross suggests this changed circa 1994 after a number of youth suicides within the region prompted citizens to organise and demand action from one of Kimberly's predecessor councils to provide services to deal with this problem:

There was a very large public meeting and out of that there was heaps of political pressure and the government funded two youth workers to work with the Shire... I think that was the only Council [in the region] that actually had any sort of youth worker at all (interview 22/11/2000).

According to youth development worker Sally Stewart, before her appointment, youth work in Kimberly was largely reactive save for some standard recreation type activities:

When I got here there was no youth worker for about the last six months and prior to that, there was a youth worker who I think did mainly case work and some holiday program sort of stuff. It wasn't developmental at all, it was very one to one sort of stuff. And to be fair to him, that was the first time that there was a youth worker position in the Shire full stop (interview 12/12/2000).

According to Sally this model of working with youth led to situations of dependency between young people and the youth worker. She argued the effects of this were felt for some time after the worker had left.

What I did notice though was that there was just a big void and all the kids were really angry and burnt because he hadn't been replaced for six months and they were like, 'where is our friend?'... People come and go all the time... You can't afford to have kids that angry 'cause someone left. And they're angry because they, you know, he used to drive them places, he used to take them to Melbourne, whatever, and they couldn't deal with it (interview 12/12/2000).

Sally set about to change this perception of youth services, informing the young people that they could not sit back and expect things to be done for them. "...we're just a team and if you want to help out your community, come see me" she said.

Those at risk are not forgotten however. A youth project worker targets young people aged between 14 and 18 and at risk of leaving school, or already left, to assist young people to build stronger connections with their families, peers, schools, training organisations and the community. Aiming to address individual needs, the project worker supports young people by adopting a case management approach and providing advocacy, assisting with establishing networks, referring to appropriate services and developing a wide range of community based activities for the young

people. A major focus of this program is the development of strategies to provide a range of community projects and placements that will, in turn, give the young person a supportive learning experience within the community.

### 5.2.3 Marginalisation of services

Sally's approach of encouraging youth participation was not just desired; from the point of view of available resources it was essential. She recalls, "...there was really the one staff for the first...three years...there is only one way to service the whole Shire and that is with community development" (interview 12/12/2000). Despite now feeling strongly supported by Council in her approach to the role, Sally admits to feelings of trepidation in those early days, and not just because of few resources:

I don't think the youth here really even counted, like, the first few months I was here there wasn't a lot, I didn't even know who the councillors were. Nobody came and said "I need to meet the youth worker" or anything like that-it wasn't like that...but now...its like, the one thing they want to be on is the youth advisory committee. (interview 12/12/2000).

### 5.2.4 Councillor involvement

Sally claims that over time, more and more of the Councillors have gained an interest in the approach she is taking in her work and that has provided good support:

...Ian was very supportive in the beginning but he's way more supportive now because there's a team behind him for support. I think that makes a really big difference (interview 12/12/2000).

As Mayor, Ian concurs, recognising the importance of a united team behind him:

The whole of the council is very, very supportive...I suppose, you know, it's a unanimous thing in the Council -you wouldn't have one councillor argue against that (Councils' approach to youth programs)...and that's shifted, it hasn't always been that way but I'm...certain it would be now (interview 22/11/2000).

Part of the popularity of the Youth Advisory Committee may be due to political motivation says Sally, but that does not appear to be a concern:

Yeah, they [Councillors] want to be on that because that's the one positive area...it doesn't take you that much work- you need to have some contact and basically that's what you're there for...the kids do all the work and then they ask you to do the final approval ...or whatever it is, and you get a bit of claim to it, you're always in the papers, you know [laughter] you're popular and kids will have parents, parents vote, so if you think about it [laughter] it's a pretty, pretty good strategy to use [laughter] (interview 12/12/2000).

#### 5.2.5 Process versus outcome focus

For Sally, the importance of youth participation cannot be overstated as a tool for youth development and it is about young people being accepted as an integral part of the community rather than as a separate group:

I think the most important thing is really to get ownership from the community about young people...that's really the number one thing with youth...young people belong to the whole community...you have a community approach... (interview 12/12/2000).

Sally believes her role on behalf of Council is to assist in the development of informed, active and responsible citizens. While arguing for the rights of young people to participate and share in what the community has to offer, she also advocates responsibility:

...they (young people) have a right just as much as any adult...not more, just equal and they should be treated the same but they also need to act appropriately too (interview 12/12/2000).

That Kimberly Shire consists of a number of towns spread over a large geographical area would suggest that the task of engaging young people in municipal and community issues would be that much harder than perhaps an inner city area. Nonetheless, Sally has not let this become a huge issue as she believes that young people must help themselves:

I develop like a spider web where, basically you've got a core group and kids represented from every town who come in and meet, and they get back to their own towns and then I support them in their own towns but they know my philosophy. I don't have to convert those kids, those kids are already out there preaching the word, meeting up with shop owners, doing whatever, and they'll come to me and say 'I met with so and so from the shop and they're willing to support us in this, can you just write a letter or whatever?' (interview 12/12/2000).

Allen Mathews, Community Services Manager at the Shire of Kimberly supports Council's developmental role and argues that the process of participation is more important than the outcome:

...and that's more important, I mean the outcome in the end is great, whether it's a new skate ramp or whatever-its, its, its, not so much um, how well, um, whether the band actually turned up for music in the sticks (laughter), events. I mean if they don't, well the kids need to think 'well what did we do wrong', it's more the process of getting there and involving them in that and learning through that and, participating...(interview 22/11/2000).

#### 5.2.6 Translating talk into action

While suggesting that Council's commitment to community consultation and engagement is a continuous improvement process and progress has been marked, CEO Richard Lewis proposes that more needs to be done, particularly in relation to young people:

...to look at...how do we engage people much more meaningfully because the traditional methods just haven't worked, and we've tried a number of different things...even take our corporate plan...there was some dedicated invitations to a number of young people, to actually come along to our corporate planning session, and they were invited to actually speak about things that they really liked...in relation to Council and the Shire, and things that they didn't, and...it was really...fantastic (interview 22/11/2000).

According to Sally, Council is listening to young people and the results are beginning to impact noticeably on the level of resources being provided to youth programs within the Shire. Increased funding is being received directly from Council's budget, but perhaps more significantly, advocacy from Council to State Government has provided external funding from the Community Support Fund (CSF) (interview 22/11/2000).

#### 5.2.7 Positive images of youth

A notable example of the commitment to empowering young people can be found when Sally takes annual leave. Young people involved with local programs actually

have access to her office and continue with the work of the programs, despite her absence. This kind of empowerment also leads to improved perceptions of young people. Says Ian:

It was extraordinary, you walked in her office and ... there'd be about five or six kids all sitting around... Sitting in the office doing the job, I mean it's extraordinary (interview 22/11/2000)!

This was not without some initial trepidation says Sally, suggesting that some staff were fearful at first given '... some of our kids have got long hair, criminal backgrounds...' It seems that this fear has now given way to admiration of the efforts of the young people involved, and the manner in which Sally has encouraged such involvement and commitment from the young people:

...now it's at the point where the front reception will even ask them to man the desk. I couldn't believe it, I thought "God" and then I thought oh you know, "you guys better remember they are only kids", like they probably could only do so much but the kids could answer all the questions that the clients come in and ask, often better than the workers...(interview 12/12/2000).

A strong relationship with local newspapers is a feature of the 'youth scene' in Kimberly according to Sally. She suggests that while such a relationship may not be unusual, that reporters directly contact young people in the Shire for the stories almost certainly is:

...the fact that the reporters respect the kids and will ring them, its all those things that the kids think 'God, we'd never have that in another shire, we'd only have that here' (interview 12/12/2000).

Sally also claims that reporting from local newspapers is almost exclusively positive in relation to young people and not to have a positive story in the newspaper each week is rare:

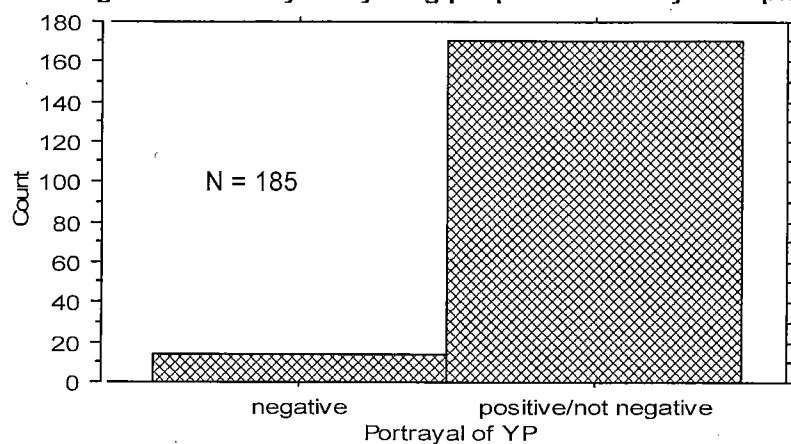
...and if we've missed one, its due to the fact that we've decided were tired of having too many. It's actually a choice that we've made to say that no, we're not going to put one in this week (interview 12/12/2000).

Consistent with Sally's claims, analysis of newspaper articles referring to Kimberly's



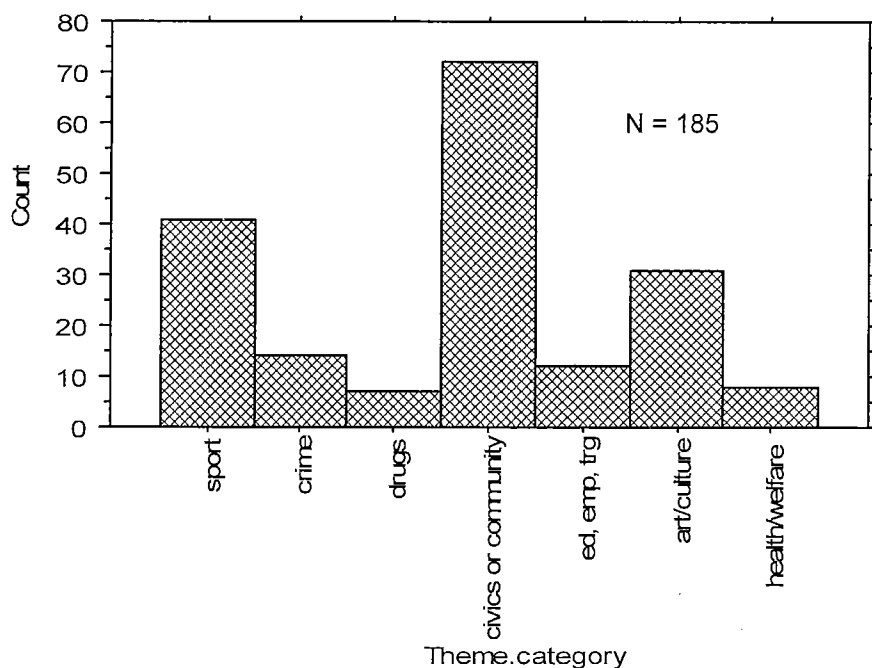
youth showed that the majority of stories portrayed young people in a positive manner. Figure 5.3 shows that of the 185 articles about Kimberly young people examined, very few of these portrayed young people negatively.

**Figure 5.3 Portrayal of young people in Kimberly newspaper articles**



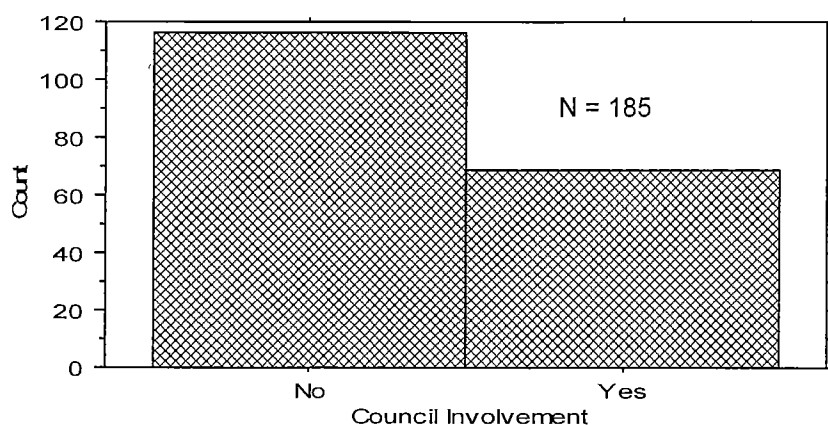
By far the most articles about Kimberly young people focus on community participation and civics, followed by reporting on sporting and cultural or artistic pursuits. Few articles report on negative issues such as crime and drug use. Figure 5.4 highlights the classification of articles according to allocated themes.

**Figure 5.4 Theme for articles about young people in Kimberly**



Consistent with Sally’s claims of good relationships with local reporters and a high level of positive reporting about young people within Kimberly, Figure 5.5 demonstrates that more than one in three articles about young people are connected in some way to Council activities.

**Figure 5.5 Council nexus to Kimberly articles**



If Sally’s claims of positive media relationships with the young people and Council are valid, one might assume that any reports influenced by Council that are about young people would tend to be positive. Table 5.6 displays the observed frequencies of articles with Council involvement, cross tabulated against positive/not negative and negative articles.

**Table 5.6 Observed Frequencies for Council Involvement, Portrayal of YP**

	No	Yes	Totals
negative	6	8	14
positive/not negative	110	61	171
<b>Totals</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>185</b>

To test whether a relationship exists between Council involvement in articles and the likelihood the article will portray young people in a positive manner, a Chi-square test was conducted on this table. With a confidence interval of 95%, the Chi-square figure was 2.551. The Chi-square ‘p’ value was .1102. This suggests that the null

hypothesis (Ho) must be accepted: that there is no relationship between Council involvement in an article about young people and the manner in which young people are portrayed.

Of interest was the question of any relationship between the themes of articles and the manner in which young people were portrayed within such articles. Table 5.7 demonstrates the observed frequencies for the portrayal of young people against the themes of the stories.

**Table 5.7 Observed Frequencies for Portrayal of YP and Theme**

	sport	crime	drugs	civics or community	ed, emp, trg	art/culture	health/welfare	Totals
negative	1	9	0	4	0	0	0	14
positive/not negative	40	5	7	68	12	31	8	171
Totals	41	14	7	72	12	31	8	185

On this occasion, the Chi-square value was 71.093 with a Chi-square '*p*' value of <.0001. Such a figure would ordinarily suggest that we can reject the null hypothesis and state that there is a correlation between the nature of the themes and whether or not the article will be positive. As with Table 4.7 in the previous chapter, the reliability of this test is under question given that there are a number of cells in the table with low or zero counts (Connor-Linton 2003).

As in Chapter 4.2.7, stories focussed on crime are the only major contributor to negative portrayal of young people in local newspapers analysed for this study. Again consistent with Chapter 4.2.7, just because a story was crime related did not automatically mean that young people would be portrayed in a negative fashion. One may similarly suggest that young people have been reported as victims of crime as well as perpetrators.

### 5.2.8 Innovation

While not particularly a ground breaking activity in itself, the approach to the implementation of permanent skate parks in the Shire has been creative and has involved young people throughout the process. Indeed, it was largely the young people's urgings to Council and their strong support for a temporary skate park that led to Council developing proposals for permanent skate facilities. In partnership with the local community, Council and the State Government, and having their efforts rewarded with one permanent skate park within the Shire, the young people of Kimberly are working towards the establishment of similar facilities in three other towns within the Shire. Young people have driven the process from the outset, consulting with the community and obtaining financial support from businesses throughout the Shire.

The experience of young people being listened to and encouraged to use their initiative has proved to be of benefit across the community. Young people within Kimberly are using the skills and experience they have gained to undertake projects to help others. For example, after a tragedy which left young children from the Shire orphaned, a group of active young people set about to help financially.

They put on a really big fundraiser and the whole town's saying like 'wow!' you know, and that was done by the kids only, but the fact that the kids believed enough in themselves and said 'look we can do something...' (Sally Stewart interview 12/12/2000).

The support of Kimberly's young people to others also extends to senior members of the community through a youth music group operating throughout the Shire. Another example of Council's strong commitment to youth participation, the group is a drug and alcohol free youth events group facilitated by Council with funding from State Government and aimed at building avenues for youth and the community to work together. Regularly participating in Senior Citizens week, the young people have

suggested they should assist to run events for that week, arguing, "...we know all about organising bands, we should be doing stage management..." (Sally Stewart interview 12/12/2000).

During 1999, the innovation and success of the youth music group was rewarded when they gained an invitation to host a live music show at the Royal Melbourne Show. In addition to this event, the group have been active across a range of other areas:

...we've been in with Lions and with Rotary to do a Xmas party, we'd link in with some other group from another town and we'd do whatever; when the

daffodil festival is here we do something at the daffodil festival...(Sally Stewart interview 12/12/2000).

While there are a number of similar structures to the Kimberly Youth Advisory Committee operating across local government, the support and encouragement Sally and the Council gives to these and other young people to become involved in civic activities is immense. An example of this is the trust given to the young people to enable them access to Shire offices while Sally takes leave, as discussed previously in Chapter 5.2.2.

#### 5.2.9 Adult Control

Little evidence exists of a propensity at Kimberly council to impose control. Indeed, quite the reverse occurs, with processes set up to enable young people to have the major say. This is contrary to perceptions of rural Councils from the past where young people are to be seen and not heard. Sally puts it simply, "...the kids do all the work and then they ask you to do the final approval..." interview 12/12/2000).

### 5.3 Commentary: Doing a lot with a little?

#### 5.3.1 Influences on youth citizenship beyond Kimberly Council control

In Chapter 5.1, demographic data was presented which illustrates that Kimberly is a municipality with few issues related to community diversity. The majority of the population are Australian born and of the migrants who have settled in Kimberly, quite a number of these are from English speaking nations. Therefore, few young people within the Shire are limited in their access or participation due to language or cultural difference.

Data was also presented in Chapter 5.1 which indicated a high proportion of the population to be 17 years or under at the 2001 census. Such relatively high numbers of young people is likely to increase demand for youth services, programs and activities within the Shire. In addition, unemployment is increasing in Kimberly, particularly in the central part of the Shire. Should such levels of unemployment be sustained, the attainment of full citizenship in Marshall's terms may be comprised for some young people.

Limited opportunities for employment may also force young people to move from their town of origin to seek work in Melbourne or elsewhere. In addition, other young people are likely to accept opportunities to study at Universities and TAFE Colleges elsewhere. Young people having to leave their community to pursue work or study compromises full participation in their community.

Distance between towns is a further factor which may inhibit citizenship for young people. This is particularly true for those without cars as public transport is both limited in its forms and frequency. For those young people unable to travel easily

between towns, access to recreational and social activities may prove difficult, as may employment and training opportunities.

While Kimberly's population boasts a high proportion of young people, the overall population is relatively low compared to most metropolitan and some larger regional municipalities. This translates into a lowered capacity for raising funds through rates and other charges and a relatively high cost of delivering services. Consequently, spending on youth projects and services within the Shire may appear restrained compared to other Councils.

Despite these issues of distance between towns, increasing unemployment and a high proportion of young people to service from a low financial base, relatively few external factors appear to limit Kimberly Shire Council's ability to positively impact on citizenship for young people within the Shire.

### 5.3.2 Internal influences on youth citizenship in Kimberly

A number of important factors characterise the approach of Kimberly Council to young people within the Shire. The first is that the Shire aims for a holistic approach to its service for young people. Whilst attempting to achieve positive outcomes for young people 'at risk' or experiencing crisis or various forms of disadvantage, youth development toward full and active citizenship appears to be the ultimate aim.

A youth service that appears to be accepted as 'mainstream' is another feature at Kimberly. Evidence has been presented to suggest that Councillors and staff have fully embraced the activities of the Youth Team and see their work as important as any other performed by the Council. While such Councillor support may not be entirely altruistic, the possibility that a Councillor may support things for political gain,

however cynical it may seem, does not necessarily detract from the benefits to young people of that support.

A focus on good process is another trait to be observed and applauded at Kimberly. Recognition that the act of participating is as important, if not more important than the outcome, is fundamental to the work of the Kimberly youth workers. Such good process recognises the need for young people to 'learn by doing', even if they make mistakes along the way.

The rhetoric espoused in corporate documents and from interviewing participants suggests a strong emphasis on community engagement and community building, rather than a focus on democratic citizenship. This extended to aims for young people in relation to citizenship. Whilst participation in the democratic process was certainly seen as important, a focus for young people on participation in community activities was seen to be the starting point.

Young people are also viewed very positively within the Shire. Council has assisted young people to promote themselves and their activities and this has influenced the local newspaper to incorporate a dedicated youth page in each edition. Young people have built relationships with local journalists and provide their stories direct, gaining much positive coverage. Conversely, negative stories about young people receive little space.

With limited resources necessitating an innovative approach to youth issues within the Shire, Kimberly Shire Council has moved from a municipality where young people with problems had access to a limited service, to one where development of the whole community is the focus. While Council will still attempt to meet the needs of young people in crisis or requiring other assistance, the focus on community and



youth development, and citizenship means that limited financial and staffing resources are used to the best advantage. It also appears that young people are relishing the opportunities and are realizing the benefits of the direction taken by Council in its response to youth within the Shire.

## **6. Case Three: Athena City Council**

### 6.1 Demographics

#### 6.1.1 Formation, Size and Location

As part of the restructure of local government across Victoria during the years of the Kennett State Government, the Athena City Council was created in June 1994 from a merger of two smaller Councils. This merger incorporated all of the area of one municipality with most of the other. Some six months later, an area of land formally contained within another municipality was added to the responsibilities of the Athena City Council. With an area of in excess of 50 square kilometres, the City makes use of the natural boundaries provided by creeks on two of its borders, with major roads delineating the remaining borders.

#### 6.1.2 Governance and Politics

Athena is represented by ten councillors, of which the vast majority were elected as endorsed candidates of the Australian Labor Party. A lone independent Councillor currently occupies one seat, while the Australian Greens have a solitary representative. Links to the ALP are strengthened with a number of the Councillors employed in the offices of State or Federal members of parliament. The next election for Athena City Council is scheduled for March 2005, however this may change given a commitment from the Bracks Government to align all Council elections in the same year.

In the Federal Parliament, Athena residents are represented by one member of the House of Representatives; occupying what is considered to be a safe ALP seat (AEC 2002). Three lower house and two upper house members of the Victorian Parliament

are elected to represent respective portions of the City. Each of these State seats is currently held by the Australian Labor Party by substantial margins.

### 6.1.3 Population

At the 2001 Census, Athena had a population in excess of 130,000 people. This figure represents a decline in population over the period 1991-2001 of 1.4% against small growth of 1.0% during the five years 1996-2001. These figures contrast with relatively strong population growth of 9.4% for the whole of Victoria during the corresponding ten year period and 6.2% for the five years 1996-2001.

Population movement was not consistent throughout the municipality however. The north of the City experienced small net growth over the period 1996-2001, while the well established central and southern portions of the City experienced net losses. Table 6.1 details population growth between 1991 and 2001 compared with figures across the State of Victoria.

**Table 6.1: Athena Population Growth 1991 to 2001 compared to whole of Victoria**

	% growth 1996-2001	% growth 1991-2001
Victoria	6.2	9.4
<b>Athena (LGA)</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>-1.4</b>
South Athena	1.4	-0.5
Central Athena	-2.4	-4.8
North Athena	4.3	1.6

Source: Derived from ABS Statistics Basic Community Profile and Snapshot 2001

### 6.1.4 Age Cohorts

Consistent with an ageing city and one experiencing little net population growth in recent years, Athena in 2001 presented as a city with a lower proportion of residents aged 17 and under compared to both the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) and the whole of Victoria. In addition, figures show a higher proportion of the population in

the post retirement age range. Table 6.2 details the Age Cohorts for Athena City for 2001 compared with the MSD and the whole of Victoria.

**Table 6.2: Age Cohorts in Athena 2001**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 6.1.5 Ethnicity

The City of Athena is home to a large number of overseas born residents coming from all parts of the globe. Of these overseas born residents, many originated in Southern Europe or the Middle East.

Table 6.3 illustrates the high numbers of overseas born residents and their countries of origin compared with figures for the whole of Victoria. Table 6.3 also shows that a lower proportion of Athena residents were born in English speaking countries than for Victoria overall.

**Table 6.3: Country of Birth of Athena Residents (%)**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

### 6.1.6 Language

Consistent with a significant number of overseas born residents from many different countries, a wide range of languages other than English are spoken in Athena homes. Indeed, some 47% of Athena residents aged over 5 years speak a language other than English. Apart from English, Turkish and Italian are the most frequently spoken languages in the home. The next most common is Arabic (including Lebanese) followed by Greek.

Table 6.4 over page details the prevalence of the most commonly spoken community languages in Athena.

**Table 6.4: Languages Spoken in the Home of Athena Residents (%)  
Persons aged 5 years and over**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

#### 6.1.7 Industry

Despite a decline in the textile clothing and footwear industry over time, manufacturing remains the largest employment sector within Athena. Other significant employers are in the education, health and community services, transport and storage, and government administration and defence sectors (ACC, 2000:7).

For young people however, retail is the major employment sector within Athena. Almost half of Athena's employed young people aged between 15 and 19 years work in the retail sector, while almost 20% of those aged 20-24 within that age group are also employed in retail. Manufacturing is the next most significant employer of young people, followed by the hospitality, business and property and health and community services sectors. Table 6.5 presents details of the major industry employers within Athena in 1996.

**Table 6.5: Athena Employment by Industry 1996**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

### 6.1.8 Unemployment

Athena experiences relatively high rates of unemployment throughout its boundaries, compared to unemployment levels for Melbourne and across the State. This is particularly true of the southern portion of the city. Consistent with trends across Melbourne and Victoria, unemployment levels increased marginally between the period June 2001 and June 2002.

Figure 6.1 over page provides details of comparative unemployment rates between June 2001 and June 2002.

## Figure 6.1 Comparative rates of unemployment in Athena, Melbourne and Victoria

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

### 6.1.9 Income

According to the 2001 ABS Census data, the number of Athena residents over 15 years of age receiving nil or negative incomes was at 6.3%, the same as that for the whole of Victoria. Incomes of between \$1 and \$129 per week were received by only 0.9% of residents of employment age, compared to a figure of 7% across the state. A total of 59.7 % of Athena income levels were less than \$700 per week, while the data for the whole of Victoria showed 69.6% of incomes were below that figure. Figures for incomes above \$700 per week in Athena were comparable with at 33.3 % against 33.8% across Victoria, while incomes above \$1000 were only achieved by 17.5% of Athena residents of employment age compared with the whole of Victoria figure of 22%. While the data shows that Athena residents fared comparatively well in the range between \$500 and \$999 per week, the number of individuals earning more than \$1500 per week in Athena was significantly fewer at 4.6%, opposed to the Victorian figure of 7%. Figure 6.2 details 2001 individual weekly income levels for Athena and state-wide.



**Figure 6.2. Weekly Individual Income 2001:  
Athena City and Victoria**

[Copyrighted material omitted. Please consult the original thesis.]

## 6.2 Toward youth participation and social inclusion

### 6.2.1 Council rhetoric and youth participation in Athena

The Athena City Council enjoys a reputation in local government circles for a strong commitment to local democracy and encouraging its citizens to participate fully in community life. CEO Michael Moran suggested this commitment to democracy was significant in enticing him to Athena:

...this is the great thing that I find and what attracts me to a place like Athena...there is just a real commitment to the democratic process (interview 9/11/2000).

According to the Athena Council Plan 2000-2003 (ACC 2000), a key commitment of the Council is 'Strong Democratic Practice', which is in part described as:

...nurturing a democratic and participatory culture including consultative decision making practices and meaningful opportunities for both individual and community involvement in the issues that affect the lives of people living and working within the city. (p10)

In accordance with the requirements of section 153A of the Local Government Act 1989, the Athena Council Plan is developed to guide the activities of the Council over the ensuing three year period according to priorities determined by the elected representatives. The plan includes a vision statement for the future of the City and outlines the key commitments areas toward achieving that vision.

The Mayor's speech is another important planning document for the Athena City Council. Presented at the installation of the Mayor in March of each year, this speech outlines priority activities for the ensuing year and provides the foundation from which the key features of the three year Council Plan are derived. Linked closely to the Mayor's speech is the Annual Business Plan, which is again a requirement of the Local Government Act 1989. Aligned with the Key Commitment areas of the Council Plan, it outlines the goals, targets and performance measures expected for each department of Council for the ensuing year, based on the priorities identified in the Mayor's speech. CEO Michael Moran describes the process as "...we take the Mayor's speech, and we operationalise (sic) it if you like..." (interview 9/11/2000).

Mayor for 2000-2001, Roulla Poulakis describes the Mayor's speech as "...the bible for the officers to try to implement things through the council plan." Similarly, CEO Michael describes the Mayor's speech as the political or philosophical document and the Council Three Year and Annual Plans as the 'how we do it' documents. The political emphasis is certainly evident in Councillor Rose Davies' description of the Mayor's speech:

I mean the way we do things in Athena is that we got elected on a platform...  
It's (Mayor's Speech) essentially a big document of things we will do...when we're elected and have a majority, we simply, replace the words, 'The Labor Party believes' with 'Athena believes' (Interview 27/11/2000).

While objectives, goals and strategies toward greater levels of democracy and concepts of citizenship are frequently discussed in Athena Corporate documents and Mayoral Speeches, mention of young people is limited to a few small paragraphs. Key references to Council's aspirations for young people include "...increasing the educational, social and employment opportunities of the City's young people" and "...develop and build on the skills of young people in their local community and assist them to be active citizens" (ACC 2000 ).

An important demonstration of Athena's commitment to democracy and citizen participation may be seen in the language used to describe Council activities and facilities. An example of this is the naming of Council's service points as 'Citizen Service Centres', rather than the more commonly used 'Customer Service Centres'. The rationale is that residents and ratepayers are citizens not customers, and should be described as such. The term customer is identified by Athena's Councillors as more suited to a profit making enterprise than a democratically elected Local Government.

This reflects an attitude toward democracy and citizenship that is said to be shared among elected representatives and Council staff:

...the ethos of...a strong local democracy, it's so strong here, amongst staff, we have a huge commitment...amongst certainly the councillors that we have, a real commitment to making democracy live...in saying to the community... "this is important, pay attention"... "...the more you pay attention, the better we are going to get...you need to hold us accountable..." (Michael Moran interview 9/11/2000).

### 6.2.2 Holistic approach

According to the Athena City Council *Guide to Youth Services*, Council works with young people aged 11 to 25 years to help develop and build skills as well as promote active participation in the community. Councillor Davies suggests Council has adopted a broader role however:

... we're involved from that crisis end and helping specifically young people experiencing disadvantage in Athena, through to the sort of the higher end stuff of getting their views through the youth forums and that sort of thing, right through then to education...It's all the way along the continuum, (laughter) we always try to do too much (interview 27/11/2000).

While Councillor Davies suggests involvement of Council in crisis intervention with young people (interview 27/11/2000), discussions with youth services staff and documentary evidence suggest that this involvement is usually limited to referral on to agencies 'best suited to deal with specific issues such as housing, drug and/or alcohol or agencies providing specific counselling. Limited targeted work with 'at risk' or otherwise disadvantaged young people occurs; though a youth 'Trust'<sup>9</sup> operating within Athena is ostensibly aimed at disadvantaged young people.

Co-ordination of service delivery and the filling of gaps in service provision is a key role for council according to Youth Services Coordinator, Terry Roberts. He states that whether Council "likes it or not", the community looks to council to provide the linkages between the community and service providers and "...of course it's also our business to...if we don't run it, to ensure that someone else does run it..." In particular, Terry suggests that with the demise of generic youth workers within the community giving way to specialist workers in agencies dealing with issues such as housing, health and drug and alcohol issues for example, Council is one of few options to provide generalist services (Interview 9/11/2000).

Youth Participation Officer Denis O'Brien agrees that Council has a definite role in the co-ordination of services but suggests that this aspect of Council's operations needs to improve:

I'd like to see somehow the networks with other agencies improve, so that we've got their support as well... sometimes I think we bang heads against each other a bit, in that we've got a program, you've got the young people, and we've got the young people as well, but, you know, can't we kind of connect the two? (27/02/2001).

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<sup>9</sup> More fully described in Chapter 6.2.8

According to Councillor Davies, it is important that Council seeks to facilitate the involvement of young people to their fullest extent within the community. She believes that opportunities become available to young people through their community participation, however she suggests the most important thing for young people is "Education, education and education" (interview 27/11/2000). In a practical way, Council supports the education of young people by its involvement in a number of programs aimed at increased school retention rates and positive pathways to further education, training or employment.

Notwithstanding the importance of education, Councillor Davies recognises that what is required for young people to develop to their full potential is "... not just education, but education and decent family life and the right conditions in society, really". She also prioritises a role for Council in being able to offer the right social conditions for young people to achieve within the community.

Councillor Davies also cites the need for Council to do all that can be done to assist young people in gaining and maintaining meaningful employment within Athena or nearby, otherwise young people may simply move to where employment opportunities exist, "...and then you may lose them". She states that "if young people go to school here, their family is here ...and then if they can find, you know work in the city as well, then they are here for probably their life and the next generation's here". Fortunately she says, a fairly high proportion of young people do tend to remain within Athena.

### 6.2.3 Marginalisation of services

According to Terry, Council has identified the need to change the way it relates to young people in order to achieve its goals. He states that the Youth Services Team

is seeking to change perceptions and practices across Council. For example, he suggests that when conducting consultations with young people, such an event should be planned through the eyes of a young person:

...adults love the tea and coffee and sandwiches. Kids find it very boring (laughter). So, then I've said to people, and that's everyone from the health promotion officer to the transport people, 'you need to provide chips and lollies and soft drinks'.

A lack of a current youth policy has been identified in a number of Corporate Planning documents. Without such a policy, the potential exists for youth services and programs to be ad hoc in their conception and delivery. Indeed, the need for a current policy was identified by Terry Roberts during interview. He stated bluntly that Athena has a policy, but it is quite old:

It dates back to '96 I think. So it was just after amalgamation. It doesn't look like anyone else's policy, certainly, the other branches and the other departments, so we've put some funds in the budget for this financial year... we need to be doing, as well as coming up with a policy statement as well as a strategic plan for youth services (interview 9/11/2000).

Successive Mayoral speeches (ACC 2001; 2002) have indicated that this policy review process has begun. Once completed, the review was meant to inform the development and subsequent adoption of a new Youth Services Strategic Plan late in 2002. The importance of an up to date strategic plan for youth services is highlighted by Denis who suggests that the Youth Services Team "...couldn't just think of any program and just start it...", rather, it would need to not only demonstrate a need for the program or activity, but that activity or program would need to be seen as working towards the objectives of the Youth Services Strategic Plan (interview 27/02/2001). Despite these commitments, as of 25 June 2003, Athena City Council still did not have an adopted Youth Policy, or Strategic Plan.

#### 6.2.4 Councillor involvement

The issue of Councillor involvement in 'day to day' or operational issues is seen by

some at Athena to be a constraint in encouraging effective youth participation. According to both the youth participation worker and youth services coordinator, the involvement of Councillor Davies in such a manner is inappropriate and they seek ways to lessen her influence. According to Denis, it is not just a matter of the 'clouding' of operational and governance roles, it is the issue of an adult in a position such as Councillor Davies wanting to do too much and not having the patience to allow the young people to 'learn by doing', whether or not they make mistakes in the process. Suggesting "she should butt out", Denis stated that "... she'd (Councillor Davies) want to just basically make all the decisions, and hurry them along, even though the process for them is very different" (interview 27/02/200).

For some at Athena, such deep involvement is a good thing. According to Michael the CEO, there is a grey line at Athena and it is quite acceptable for Councillor Davies to get involved.

I think that our Councillors for example are much more involved than that. They're not at arms length from the running of the organisation. We have very clear ideas as to, pretty clear ideas usually, as to what my responsibility i.e. the organisation and staff responsibilities versus the local rep[resentative]s responsibilities. But I would say that its not, you know, a solid work line. It's more a moving grey line (Interview 9/11/2000).

While the Local Government Act (1989) is not clear on the division between the role and function of the Council and the Executive, it suggests the primary role of councillors is determining policy, setting objectives and establishing the strategic directions of Council (Lonie et. al 1997; Local Government Board 1995).

In a short time in his position, Denis has become quite cynical about his role and the overall commitment of Council to young people and participation. He stated that one program was not achieving its aims, but couldn't be changed because of Councillor interference:

...it has always been there...the councillors wouldn't let us get rid of that... there's kind of an overriding kind of thing that you don't change programs or you don't get rid of a

program because the community have seen it... they're expecting it to happen. So whether people are utilising it or not, you still keep doing it... (Interview 27/02/2001).

Similarly, another program was identified as being more suited to another area of the municipality. It was envisaged that more young people would attend the alternate venue, however due to logistical concerns; the program remained where it was. Attendance was a fraction of that provided for in the planning and preparation of the program (interview Denis O'Brien 27/02/2000).

#### 6.2.5 Process versus outcome focus

Denis was also critical of the way that political expediency sometimes got in the way of proper process with young people. An example he gave referred to recommendations from a previous youth summit that had been endorsed by Council. He stated that some of these proposals did not sit well with the young people and they were reluctant to implement them, however Council's view was that the recommendations of the summit needed to be implemented. In addition, the time frame demanded for such implementation placed pressure on the youth services staff to do much of the work themselves. What had been intended as a process for young people to be deeply involved with became one where they were almost excluded. One example was the introduction of a 'Youth Discount Card' for which the young people canvassed local storeowners for support were excluded from completing the process. According to Denis, young people were meant to do all of the work however "Councillor Davies stuffed it up" by demanding immediate action.

Further, Council must be clear about what should be expected from a consultative process, in order to avoid situations where people have their say and the outcomes suggest that they have not been listened to. Michael explains:



So when you go out to consult, what do people expect in return? Do they expect that, you know because this vocal group or ten or twenty or thirty or a hundred people had a particular point of view that that's what Council needs to do...It's managing those expectations, it's making sure that people understand consultation is about listening, it's about having a two way conversation, and then the elected reps are charged with the responsibility of making the decision on behalf of the whole city (9/11/2000).

This was demonstrated during a consultative process with young people around the construction of a skate facility. After young people had contributed their ideas and had expectations that the facility was soon to be constructed, they were disappointed when political pressure was brought to bear from residents' groups opposed to the facility. Such political pressure contributed to numerous delays in Council's decision making, including a petition presented to a Council meeting in May 1999 which voiced objections to the placement of the proposed skateboard facility at a location which had previously been considered as suitable. During Question Time at the same meeting, a resident asked the Council why it decided on the location at a local park, voicing concerns about the potential for noise and other 'problems'. The meeting resolved that Council officers would meet with residents to further discuss the proposal, before a further report be presented to Council, but that "...Council is committed to providing decent recreational facilities for young people in consultation with nearby residents." Some three years later, this particular skate facility had not been built.

#### 6.2.6 Translating talk into Action

According to Councillor Poulakis, democracy was stifled during the years of the Kennett government. During the period of Commissioners particularly, she claims citizens were not encouraged to get involved in the democratic processes and the subsequent return to elected local government became a catalyst to renewed interest in civic participation. Consequently, Council has provided opportunities for the involvement of citizens "...pleased to see the return of open and democratic

government in their City.” In his work *What Price Citizenship*, Williamson supports the notion that democracy and citizenship during this period suffered, claiming:

...the reforms of the Kennett Government subverted the political rights and obligations of citizens, rendering citizenship peripheral to the mission and strategic planning of local governments (2001:7)

He does caution however that the notion of renewed citizen enthusiasm for involvement in local government process may be tempered by citizens feeling:

... slightly confused and/or cynical about governments being interested to engage with them after such a prolonged period of being viewed by some as irrelevant, merely ‘customers’ to their own public services (Williamson 2001:7 )

Athena Council has sought to implement practical ways in which to engage its citizens in political issues. A noticeable example of this was Council’s sponsoring of a community debate in relation to the Republic referendum of 1999. According to a former Councillor, Athena Council had recognised the “...growing disillusionment with politics and democracy...” and suggested that the referendum was particularly important for younger Australians to engage in the debate as it was they “...who will live with the outcome of this vote.”

Practical application of the democratic ideals espoused by the Athena City Council includes appropriate consultation with the community, according to CEO Michael Moran (interview 9/11/2000). The Council is constantly working to improve its consultation with all facets of the community, including young people. He does note however that young people are not a homogenous group and that consultation processes designed to engage young people need to recognise this and inform the thinking around such design:

So it’s finding ways that are meaningful to the particular people you’re trying to engage, and that sometimes means going to their venues, it means different days of the week, it means different hours of the day, it means different sorts of events (interview 9/11/2000).

Youth services coordinator Terry Roberts echoes the need for specific strategies to engage young people, and agrees that Council staff share this commitment to democracy and encouragement of community involvement (interview 9/11/2000). Councillor Rose Davies, charged with portfolio responsibility for young people and education at Athena is particularly keen on young people being involved in decision making processes:

...perhaps, just for them to be involved and have access to opportunities. That's the main thing...they will get the best opportunities by being involved in the fullest extent that they can in our community (interview 27/11/2000).

Athena Mayor for 2000, Roulla Poulakis agreed with the importance of getting young people involved:

As to do with youth, I mean I personally and the whole council believes it's very important to include young people in decision-making and we're trying to make them get more involved (interview 30/11/2000).

But perhaps in keeping with her role as Mayor, Cr Poulakis reminded of the political imperative for community participation, particularly in relation to young people as they approach the right to vote and hold public office:

I think it's a good idea to keep in touch and make sure that the young people, I mean ... they will be constituents of ours that might want to enter politics and to know more about local government (Interview 9/11/2000).

Denis suggests that the implementation of a Youth Council may be a useful strategy toward achieving its goal of encouraging greater active citizenship. Rose disagreed however arguing that Council's role extended beyond the education or development of a few:

I don't see the point in essentially getting you know, young people ... and skilling them up as super representatives and leaving the rest off where they are. .. that's why we do the youth summit and then we try and do a number of things that would involve a number of young people, 'cause they're not councillors, I mean you know, in replicating a council, it's a very simplistic and easy way to look at the role played by Councils and then say their views are heard, well, no! (laughter) You know, it's not the same and it doesn't work that way. I think you know, if you want to get their views and you want to speak to a large number of them, and if you want them to be involved, then you've got to skill them up and skilling [only] ten up doesn't give you that (interview 27/11/2000).

The equitable provision of programs and services to young people from across the municipality and from various cultural and racial groups is important according to youth participation worker Denis. Unfortunately however, he claims that this is not always achieved. In particular, Denis cites his frustration with the Council's *Youth Citizenship Program*, stating that young people from areas away from Athena's administrative centre miss out on participating in that program because of a lack of access to public transport for young people and the difficulty of providing transport to them. He adds that young people from some of the ethnic communities within Athena lack understanding of what Council has to offer and so also do not participate in programs and services delivered, while still others are prevented from full participation because of cultural or religious beliefs. Further, Denis argues that programs should not be just for those young people "... that have got leadership or you know, are going well and can be active citizens or who can take on responsibilities, but also those who are disadvantaged..." (interview 27/02/2001).

In addition to running programs that seek to improve the skills and participation of young people within the community, Denis is tasked to provide opportunities for young people to be consulted across the wide range of Council functions. He suggests that sometimes the Council say youth services are a big priority "... but they probably say that but don't really see us as that". He states that Council could do more to develop young people and young people could have much more influence in the community if the view of young people across Council was different:

...young people involved in the community, I think it could be more developed and more-I think young people could have much, a heap more influence. (interview 27/02/2001).

Denis stated that one program was running in a particular area but thought it may be more effective in another; however he indicated that transport was an issue for that

program and was too hard to organise. Consequently, the program stayed where it was (interview 27/02/2001).

Taking the programs to the agencies is important too says Denis. He argues that Council should take the role of networking more substantially with external agencies to find the clients. Again citing the example of the *Youth Citizenship Program*, Denis stated that within days of the program beginning for the year, no young people had indicated their intention to participate:

Yeah, at the moment it's really difficult...the first week is on Thursday night and I still haven't got anyone being referred or any names as yet. Last year we seemed to have a large amount from a particular school...and part of that [is] because they have a community service obligation (27/02/2001).

#### 6.2.7 Positive images of youth

While Cr Davies maintains that young people should be treated with respect and seen for their skills and potential rather than being judged simply on the basis of their age, she concedes that negative perceptions of young people are often a reality, "... its something that people always talk about, 'gee, young people are bad, or in a bad way,' This negative view appears to extend to year 2000 Athena Mayor Roulla Poulakis, who suggests that Council has a role in providing opportunities and activities for young people so they do not get bored and become public nuisances:

...I don't think we do enough for young people. There isn't much around for young people to do and especially in my area... apart from the leisure centre. People hang around the shopping, little shopping strips and they make nuisances of themselves or they go to parks and vandalising (sic) things. ... I think we should be doing a lot more for the young people to give them some more interests and occupy them so they will not think of doing silly things (Interview 30/11/2000).

Cr Davies suggests Council has a responsibility to treat young people in the same way as the rest of its citizenry, rather than view young people from a deficit perspective. It is the skills and abilities of people that are important. She argues that

people are assisted by focussing on abilities rather than any accompanying disabilities or perceived deficits:

In regards to ... getting them involved, we're also just treating them like normal people. Because too often you can make a mistake and say well "they're young people just sit them over there in the corner, put a fence around their concerns" and well, there you go. It's just not the case at all. I mean I think it's a mistake to consider it that way...it demeans their role in society. I mean what's the difference between a young person and an old person (interview 27/11/2000)?

Readers of local newspapers might get a more favourable impression of Athena's young people according to analysis of 538 articles (N) published about young people from Athena. Figure 6.3 demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of newspaper articles published locally were positive or not negative in their portrayal of young people.

**Figure 6.3 Portrayal of young people in Athena newspaper articles**

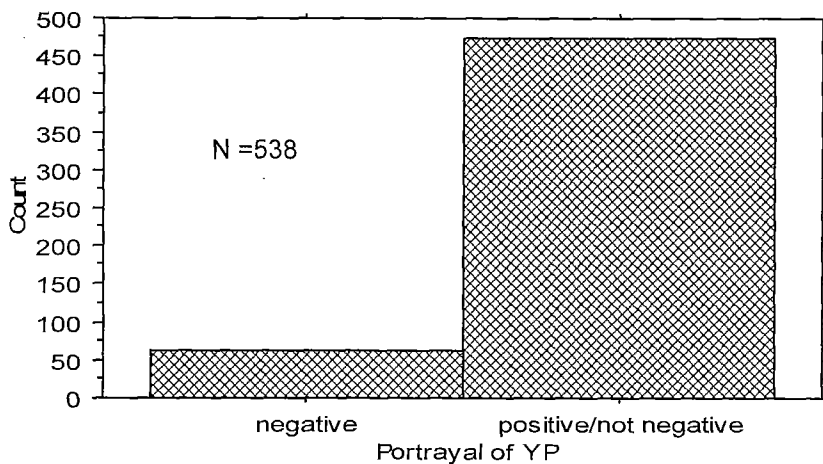
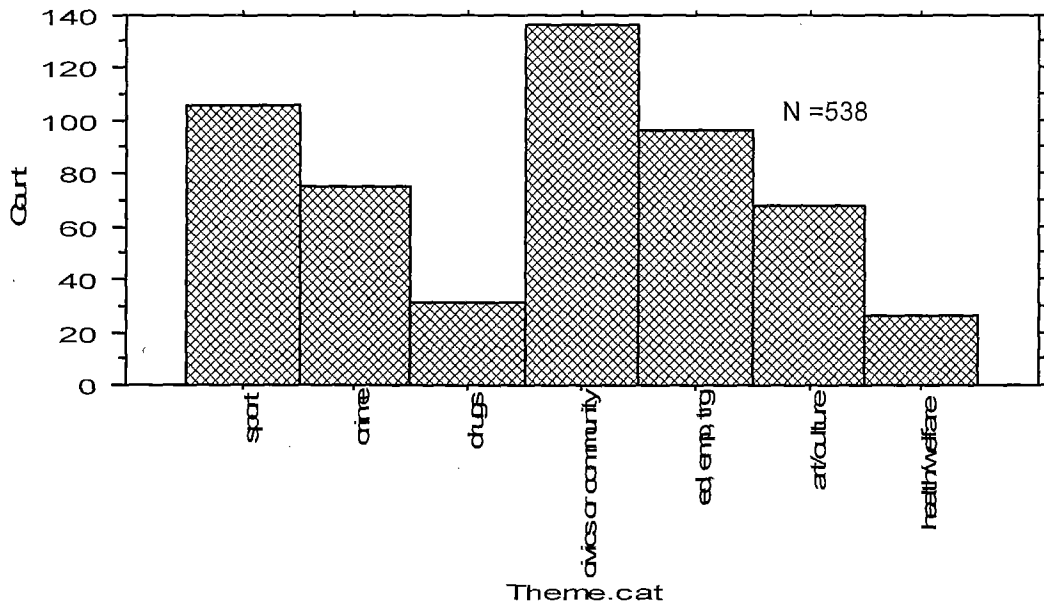


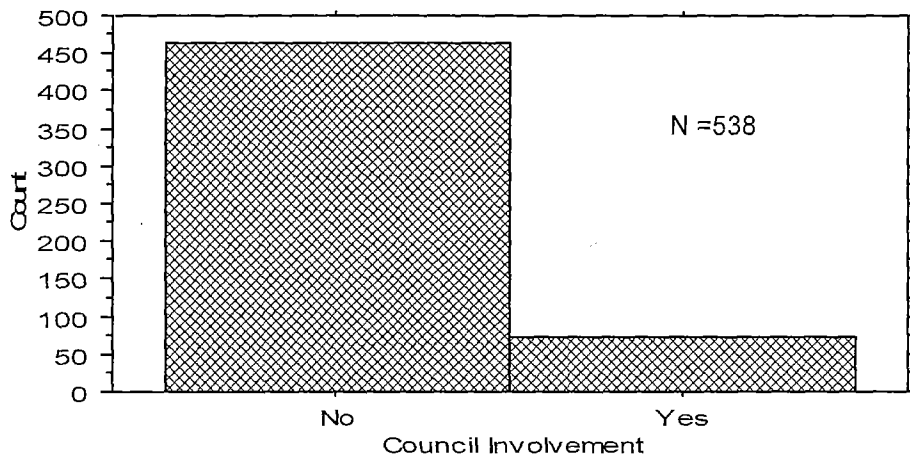
Figure 6.4 highlights that the most prolific themes by which the articles were categorised are positive endeavours such as civics and community, and sport; although more than one eighth of all articles had crime as its main focus, ahead of arts or cultural activities.

Figure 6.4 Theme for articles about young people in Athena



While many of the articles published about young people were indeed positive within Athena, it appears that Council was involved on relatively few occasions with articles published in local newspapers about Athena’s young people. Figure 6.5 displays the proportion of articles identified as being connected to Council activities.

Figure 6.5 Council nexus to Athena articles



Despite there being considerably fewer articles identified as having a connection to Council, of interest is whether a relationship exists between the nature of portrayal of

young people and Council involvement in the article. Table 6.6 displays the observed frequencies of articles with Council involvement, cross tabulated against positive/not negative and negative articles.

**Table 6.6 Observed Frequencies for Council Involvement, Portrayal of YP**

	No	Yes	Totals
negative	56	7	63
positive/not negative	408	67	475
Totals	464	74	538

To test whether a relationship exists between Council involvement in articles and the likelihood the article will portray young people in a positive manner, a Chi-square test was conducted on this table. With a significance level of interval of 95%, the Chi Square figure was .420. The Chi-square 'p' value was .5168. This suggests acceptance of the null hypothesis (Ho), that there is no relationship between Council Involvement in an article about young people and whether they are portrayed in a positive manner.

Of further interest is whether a relationship exists between the theme of an article and the portrayal of young people. Table 6.9 demonstrates the observed frequencies for the portrayal of young people against the themes of the stories.

**Table 6.7 Observed Frequencies for Portrayal of YP and Theme**

	sport	crime	drugs	civics or community	ed, emp, trg	art/culture	health/welfare	Totals
negative	2	45	4	5	6	0	1	63
positive/not negative	104	30	27	131	90	68	25	475
Totals	106	75	31	136	96	68	26	538

To test the possibility of a relationship between the theme of an article and the portrayal of young people, a Chi-square test of significance was conducted. On this



occasion, the Chi-square value was 200.931 with a Chi-square '*p*' value of <.0001. According to this '*p*' value, there would be no sufficient reason to accept  $H_0$  and thus we would then reject the null hypothesis and state that there is a correlation between the themes of an article and whether that article will be positive in its portrayal of young people. As in Chapters 4.2.7 and 5.2.7 however, low or zero values in cells within the table cast doubt as to the reliability of the '*p*' value and any subsequent conclusions which may be drawn (Connor-Linton 2003). Also consistent with the previous chapters, stories other than those related to crime were almost exclusively positive in their portrayal of young people while almost 40% of those articles related to crime portrayed young people in a positive fashion.

#### 6.2.8 Innovation

During the lead up to the Republican referendum of 1999, Athena City Council facilitated a series of public debates aimed at educating the community and particularly young people about the issues. Young people were actively included in these debates, with one held in the auditorium of a local secondary school with a panel of young people and a vote from all in attendance at the end of proceedings. Says Chief Executive Michael Moran, this was consistent with Council's approach in "...trying to make democracy come alive" (interview 9/11/2000).

Talk to the Mayor was another innovation, where young women in particular were encouraged to communicate with the Mayor of the City via an internet chat room (interview with Mayor Roulla Poulakis, 30/11/2000). In addition, other councillors encouraged participation in an online and radio 'talkback' program, aimed at engagement with young people from the community (interview with Cr Rose Davies 27/11/2000).

An initiative that has great potential to impact on the inclusion of young people in

council processes is an attempt by the Youth Services Unit to change the way in which the organisation engages with young people across the organisation. As described in Chapter 6.3, Terry seeks cooperation from other departments in Council to not only work towards including young people in their consultation programs, but to consider what may attract them and encourage their continued participation.

On a broader level, Terry convenes a network of workers with young people to maintain a strong link to agencies within the community. This encourages service collaboration and enables Council and the network of agencies to respond to service needs within the municipality (interview with Terry Roberts 9/11/2000). A demonstration of this collaboration was the formal commitment given by Council to the establishment of a local learning and employment network in partnership with two neighbouring municipalities (ACC 2000a).

Another initiative which draws on the participation of young people is the administration of the Athena Youth Trust. Community involvement, self reliance and social wellbeing among disadvantaged young people are among the key focuses for the Trust, established many years earlier by one of Athena's predecessor Councils. After lying dormant for some years, a committee including a number of young people was set up to revive and administer the trust with the oversight of the Council, through Councillor Davies as Chairperson. Exemplifying the aim of giving young people responsibility for its operation, the role of Treasurer went to a young person of sixteen whose initial task was to find the right account in which to deposit the money. Councillor Davies described the process thus:

...we just sent her off and said, "right you've got to report back in a month on how is the best way to invest that money" (Interview 9/11/2000).

Another important strand of Athena's efforts to engage young people is the Bi Annual Youth Summit. According to Terry, young people are encouraged to participate in

the planning and implementation of the two day summit which aims to discuss with young people their needs, wants and aspirations. Participants include representatives from each of the various schools in the city, young people who may have left school and/or are referred to the summit from various community agencies.

Denis describes the summit as an event where Council can:

...get them together and talk about issues or concerns that are...important to them, that they feel need some improvement, or also...that they're encouraged by. So [its] the good things...particularly [about] being a young person in Athena (interview Terry Roberts 9/11/2000).

During 2000, Athena City Council embarked on an innovative project to assist the adjustment into the Athena community of new arrived migrant and refugee young people from all around the world. Participants, having arrived from countries including Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Somalia, Samoa, Burma and Greece, are introduced to workers at local agencies who may assist with issues related to settling in a new country such as housing, social isolation, unemployment and torture and trauma. In addition, the program uses '...high profile sports people and local police officers as role models to encourage an interest in sport and recreation and to promote positive lifestyle messages within the group' (ACC 2000b).

#### 6.2.9 Adult Control

As discussed earlier in 6.2.4 and 6.2.5, Councillor Davies has been accused of inappropriately involving herself in operational issues relating to youth services by Terry Roberts and Denis O'Brien, who both seek way to lessen her influence. They suggest it is not simply an issue of mixing the role of governance with day to day issues-it is the issue of an adult such as Cr Davies limiting the opportunities for young people, by wanting to do too much and not having the patience for the young

people to do the task. Further, to the dismay of some youth services staff members, the achievements of young people are sometimes used for political mileage at Athena, much to the dismay of youth services staff. According to Terry, Councillor Davies has sometimes sought to identify young people involved in Athena programs in Council Reports and during Council debate, a practice he describes as "... going into dangerous areas". Terry argues that regardless of the program that young people are involved in, they must control their involvement and their anonymity must be maintained so that they are not compromised in any way.

...we need to ensure that young person is able to attend because they want to, not because the next door neighbour has found out and they think...it's a good idea (interview 9/11/2000).

## 6.3 Commentary

### 6.3.1 Influences on youth citizenship beyond Athena Council control

A number of issues that are outside of the direct control of Athena Council are limiting factors toward full citizenship for young people. Given that access to full employment is considered essential for attainment of social citizenship, unemployment and underemployment are key issues in Athena. Unemployment figures throughout Athena are consistently higher than metropolitan and State averages including youth unemployment, which is exacerbated by large numbers of young people employed in the retail sector where the use of casual and part-time labour is common (Watson et. al. 2003). Combined with the steady decline of the manufacturing sector, which has traditionally been an employer of high numbers of young people, this casualised and part-time employment has ramifications for successful transitions from education and training to full employment for Athena's young people.

Dealing with cultural and religious diversity is also a factor which could serve to limit social citizenship. In Chapter 6.2.6, youth participation worker Denis O'Brien suggested that engaging diverse communities of young people was sometimes difficult due to their cultural and religious beliefs. He adds that sometimes these difficulties are further exposed by Council's inability to communicate effectively to some of these diverse communities.

### 6.3.2 Internal influences on citizenship in Athena

At first glance, the language used by Athena City Council suggests it is clearly a strong advocate for local democracy that is fully representative of its citizens. Reference can be found in corporate documents to a commitment to each of the rights of citizenship espoused by Marshall; civic or civil rights, political citizenship and social citizenship. Indeed, the language used by Athena in describing its constituents as citizens rather than customers appears to be testimony to this. Interviews with a number of senior people appear to confirm this view. Further, a number of programs and strategies have been implemented since the inception of the Athena City Council that makes progress toward transforming the rhetoric into reality.

Attitudes of Council toward young people are also likely to impact upon the opportunities presented to them. Despite the rhetoric of democracy and participation espoused by Athena City Council however, there appears to be little evidence that young people are given opportunities to control their involvement on their own terms. In addition the Mayor's view that Council needed to "keep them off the streets" may indicate a less than valued opinion of at least some of the city's young people.

Council also appears to do little to promote positive images of young people to the wider community. Indeed, it uses few opportunities in local newspapers to promote young people and their activities.

The nature of the planning process may also obstruct an optimum approach to youth participation. Terry states that there is some incompatibility in the timelines in which the planning documents are delivered. Some of the program planning for the following year is done prior to the delivery of the Mayor's speech, and then any changes in direction identified in that speech need to be incorporated for inclusion into Council Plans, before individual staff teams develop their own work plans. He states that this process results in "...very short timelines ...it's like, it needs to be done by tomorrow, or you've got two days".

It is also apparent there are a number of tensions between the stated aims of the Council in relation to democracy and citizenship, and the realisation of those aims. This is particularly true in relation to young people and the range of opportunities provided to them. For example, it has been claimed that some programs are based where they are easiest to deliver rather than where the most need exists. In addition, it has been stated that Athena continues to operate programs for young people that are no longer relevant and/or not well patronised. Further, intervention in processes initially devolved to young people in order to achieve corporate or political objectives is contrary to Council's often stated commitment of maximising youth participation.

The absence of a current youth policy or strategic plan is an issue that may limit the effectiveness of Council's Youth Services. A formally adopted policy and strategic plan that could transcend the years would negate the need for ad hoc planning or having to be subject to the annual 'whims' of each incoming Mayor. While Athena has recognised this and begun the process of strategic review of its youth services, it will have taken almost three years to complete. Despite acknowledgement of the need for a contemporary youth policy, Athena City Council still does not have such a policy as at 30 June 2003.

Similarly, it has sometimes taken years to deliver outcomes to young people after raising their expectations by consulting with them at length. An example is a proposed skate facility which has been on the drawing board since at least 1999 and has not yet been constructed. Resident angst at the proposal including petitions tabled appears to have contributed to this indecision (ACC 1999a; 1999b). This is likely to impact on the view those young people have of their council and local government in general and any future commitment to participating in Council processes.

Of further concern are statements made by the Mayor referring to the need for young people to be occupied lest they do the wrong thing, particularly if that view permeates into process of planning for youth programs and activities. A belief that youth services and projects are to be used as a form of social control is divergent to any concept of the encouragement of full citizenship. This view does not sit well with Marshall's 'social citizenship' schema; rather it appears to be consistent with a focus on the political aspects of citizenship where your value as a citizen increases as you become closer to voting age.

While the Youth Summits attract a number of young people, a downside to this method of encouraging youth participation is that it is often the most articulate young people that attend. Denis acknowledged that many of those that attend are generally the 'good kids within the local schools', so the broad range of opinions of young people of young people may not be canvassed. In addition, if recommendations are too slow to implement and the young people do hear feedback from their contribution, they may withdraw from future opportunities to participate (interview 27/02/2001).

## **7. Case study comparisons**

### **7.1 Physical and social environment**

This section compares and contrasts a number of physical and social characteristics of the municipalities under study, in order to determine what influence such factors may have on full community participation and the development of young people as citizens. For example, the location and physical size of a municipality may impact on the ability of young people, particularly those reliant on public transport, to easily access the social, recreational and employment opportunities throughout the municipality.

#### **7.1.1 Getting around**

As an inner urban city, Athena is compact in size and is well serviced by the full range of public transport options in the southern and central areas of the City. For those living in the north of the City, transport options are somewhat more limited. At the other end of the scale, Kimberley is a spacious rural shire with limited public transport linking towns within the municipality. Services to Melbourne are also limited. Burke sits somewhere between Athena and Kimberly in both size and access to public transport. In the north of the City, rail and bus services are relatively few in number and frequency, whilst in the southern part of the City, regular fixed rail services link to a substantial bus network.

#### **7.1.2 Diversity**

Diversity is another area where each of the case study councils presents a different story. Athena has a huge number of overseas born people within their municipality, while Kimberly is predominately made up of Australian born people. Additionally, the relatively few migrants that do settle in Kimberly are predominately from English speaking countries. Burke has a moderate number of overseas born residents, with



most of these settling in the more established southern portions of the city. Conversely, the north of the City is described as "...prédominately Anglo, [and their], understanding of multicultural issues is downright disturbing at times" (interview Carol Neil 15/11/2000).

Diversity is a factor with the potential to influence the range and type of services provided. For example, providing services to new and emerging communities may require new understandings and perhaps new and innovative services. Providing services to English speaking Australian born young people will differ to providing services to young people originating from places such as the Horn of Africa or Middle East. Similarly, facilitating youth development for Australian born young people compared to overseas born may differ. Those young people who are new arrivals to Australia are likely to require a different approach toward their development as citizens than young people from non-migrant backgrounds. Indeed, mention was made during interviews of the difficulties that sometimes arise in relation to getting young people from other cultures to participate in activities (interview Denis O'Brien 27/02/01).

### 7.1.3 Numbers of young people

The number of young people in each municipality relative to total population may also impact on the respective Council's approach to youth development issues. Kimberly has a relatively small but growing population with young people between 10 and 17 years comprising close to 21 % of the population. Kimberly Council is not in a position to allocate substantial funds to youth issues however. Certainly, limited resources have been a critical factor in the design of youth services at Kimberly Council in recent years. According to youth development officer Sally Stewart, getting better outcomes for more young people with such limited resources became

the 'driver for change' and the whole service was overhauled on her arrival toward this aim (interview 12/12/2000).

Burke is an example of a rapidly growing municipality, with large numbers of young people within its borders at almost 23% of the population between 10 and 17 years. Much of that growth is centred on the north of the City, where community infrastructure is not as developed as for more established southern and central areas. This provides a challenge for Council in trying to maintain existing services in more established areas, while attempting to keep up with the demands of such growth.

Conversely, Athena has a stagnant, largely ageing population with proportionately fewer young people aged 10 to 17 years than Burke or Kimberly at less than 19% of population. The largest concentration of young people is in the north of the municipality however, where facilities for young people are lacking and transport to established facilities in the south of the city is more difficult to access.

#### 7.1.4 Youth employment

In the area of youth employment, each municipality is consistent in that retail is the highest employer of young people within each LGA. Manufacturing is the next most important employment sector for young people while hospitality, health and community services and property and business services employed reasonable numbers of young people within each local government area. Figures show that while retail is the most important industry employing young people overall, that sector employs several times the numbers of young people aged 15 and 19 years against those aged between 20 and 24. Conversely, manufacturing becomes more important as young people enter the 20 to 24 age cohort. This was consistent across each of the three local government areas.

### 7.1.5 Local Political Affiliation

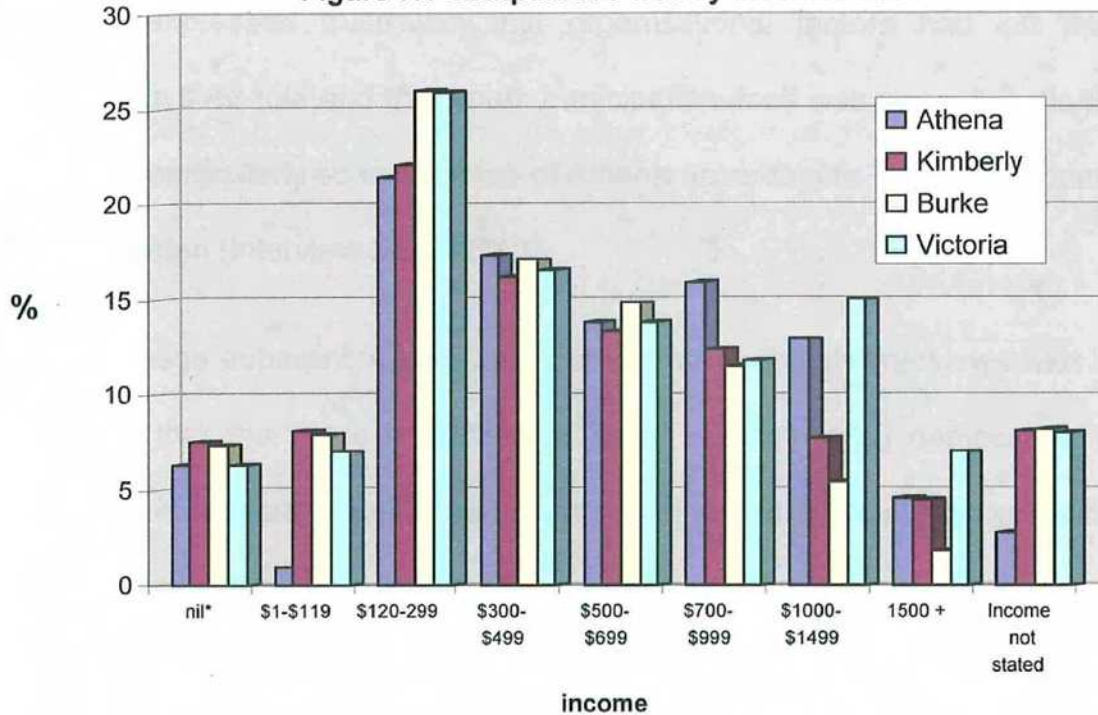
As both the Councils of the Cities of Burke and Athena are comprised of a large majority of endorsed members of the Australian Labor Party, it would be expected that both those Councils would demonstrate similar policy aims. Indeed, such endorsement effectively binds these Councils to taking decisions that are in line with, or where silent, do not conflict with Official Labor Party Policy. This requires Labor Party members to meet as a 'caucus' before decisions are formally taken, with the decision of the caucus binding on each member. Kimberly Shire Council differs in that a number of independent and conservative Councillors serve with a small number of ALP Councillors.

At both State and Federal levels of government, the Australian Labor Party dominates representation for each of the three municipalities studied. In fact all members of parliament representing these local government areas are Australian Labor Party members.

### 7.1.6 Income levels

According to Mayor Pat O'Shea, a recent major study found Burke to be one of the most disadvantaged municipalities in Victoria (interview 28/11/2000). One measure of disadvantage is weekly income, where levels in Burke are clearly below those of both Athena and Kimberly. Incomes in Athena are relatively higher overall than Burke and Kimberly; though these figures are still below Victorian earnings. Figure 7.1 shows the comparative weekly incomes for each municipality and the whole of Victoria.

Figure 7.1 Comparative weekly incomes 2001



## 7.2 Organisational values and culture

The culture of a local government organisation and the values which guide its actions are likely to impact both on priorities, and the manner in which services are delivered to their community. This section examines the organisational factors which may lead to different approaches and outcomes for young people within each of the respective municipalities.

### 7.2.1 Language used

The language used by Councils in communicating with their communities gives insight to their values and aims. Each of the councils examined for this study appear to operate from a different philosophical perspective.

That both Athena and Burke Councils had employed youth workers with the title '*Youth Participation Officer*' may at first glance suggest a strong commitment to youth

participation and development. On closer examination however, both of these workers expressed frustration that organisational factors had left them largely impotent in their role and that youth participation itself was more rhetoric than reality. This was particularly so in the case of Athena according to Youth Participation Officer Denis O'Brien (interview 27/02/2001).

The language apparent in corporate documents and from interviews with key people suggests that the focus at Athena is about strengthening democracy. For young people, this may translate into a concern with providing young people with the skills to exercise their political rights at the expense of other educational or developmental aims. The term citizen is used to describe the constituency; even down to the renaming of Council Service Centres from 'Customer Service' to 'Citizens Service Centres'. In addition, programs that continue because people expect them and not because they work (interview Denis O'Brien 27/02/2001) and a suggestion that Council needed to provide programs and facilities to young people so that they would not do 'stupid things' (interview Roulla Poulakis 30/11/2000) may be all be seen as contributory to Athena's hegemony.

The City of Burke displays a commitment to the achievement of 'social justice for all residents'. Such a commitment is clear from speaking with key stakeholders and from corporate documents produced by Burke City Council over several years. This commitment stems in part from recognition of the level of disadvantage experienced within the City and acknowledgement that a range of structural issues need to be addressed before that disadvantage may be ameliorated. The effect of such a focus for young people is that a sizeable share of available resources will be expended trying to ensure equality of opportunity for all young people, subsequently leading to a concentration of work with those most at risk. There is however acknowledgement within Burke that young people have the capacity and the right to participate in

decisions that affect them, and that Council subsequently seeks to provide youth development opportunities as well.

The resounding idiom emerging from Kimberly in relation to young people is about being part of the 'community' and helping themselves and others. This approach to young people within the Shire appears to have emerged as a result of a number of main factors. The first is a pragmatic response to a situation where Kimberly could never afford a resource intensive youth services team operating throughout the Shire. The second is what appears to be a shared communitarian belief held by the leadership of the Council.

According to Adams and Hess (2001), community has "re-emerged " in the rhetoric of public policy discourse in recent years, after being the focus of a "...flurry of activity..." as typified by the Australian Assistance Plan during the time of the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s. MacDonald & Marston (2001) suggest the current use of the term community is "...intimately implicated in a conservative politics which serve to minimise state responsibility for the support of a whole range of life course dependencies." In other words, when government withdraws or reduces its commitment to all kinds of welfare obligations, the 'community' is expected to fill the void. Nonetheless, Kimberly Council appears to have embraced a somewhat more benign use of the term community and has set about to build the structures that lead to reduced dependency and enable young people to help themselves and each other.

Adapted from Adams & Hess (2001), the following table demonstrates the links between the focus of each Council as identified and what such a focus might mean for young people in relation to the policy approach of the Council. The table also identifies the institutions by which the focus might be realised. For example, Athena

speaks of a focus toward strengthening democracy. The institutions through which democracy are realised and maintained are governments and their bureaucracies. Burke promotes social justice as its key social aim and similarly, the instruments through which social justice are to be achieved are again governments and their bureaucracies. On the other hand, Kimberly's main focus on community is deliverable not by governments, but by the individuals, families and organisations that make up that community. Table 7.1 demonstrates the linkages between the policy foci and the language used.

**Table 7.1 Language and policy direction**

	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Key terms</b>	<b>Main focus for young people</b>
<b>Athena</b>	Democracy	Governments Public service	Politics Education Citizens Votes Law Representation	Political citizenship
<b>Burke</b>	Social Justice		Welfare Residents and ratepayers	Removal of disadvantage Redistribution of resources
<b>Kimberly</b>	Community	Families Associations	Partnerships Community members Networks Cohesion	Self help Youth and community development Participation Reciprocity

Source: Adapted from Adams & Hess (2001) Community in Public Policy: Fad or Foundation.

### 7.2.2 Influence of the leadership team

A range of variables may impact upon the particular approach taken by local governments toward particular program areas. Ideology and attitudes, available resources, personalities and personal preferences, management styles and governance structures may all come into play. A variety of approaches and idiosyncrasies in relation to the delivery of youth programs were discovered during this study.

As discussed in Chapter 6, despite the rhetoric of participation and democracy, political expediency sometimes gets in the way of good process at Athena. The same charge may be levelled at Burke, particularly in relation to the postponement of the construction of a skate park until after Council elections, in a similar fashion to what had previously occurred at Athena. In both cases, protest by some sections of the community led to Councillors retreating from commitments made. Conversely, Kimberly kept faith with its young people by delivering skate facilities it had promised, within the stated timeframe.

A willingness of a Councillor at Athena to become involved in operational matters is an issue that is also a barrier to optimal youth development. With approval from the Chief Executive Officer, that particular Councillor has become involved at the 'day to day' level in youth related issues. Such involvement has served to compromise good process, particularly when Councillors are impatient for outcomes. Based on the evidence to date, no such claims may be made against Kimberly Council, despite a number of Kimberly Councillors somewhat cynically seeking to exploit their legitimate involvement with youth activities for political gain<sup>10</sup>.

Just how important youth services and youth development is to the respective leadership groups is of concern to Youth Participation Officers at both Athena and Burke Councils. Both workers expressed feelings of disappointment with the level of priority given to their role, support provided, and the lack of integration of youth services into the 'mainstream'. By way of comparison, the youth development worker at Kimberly has expressed the view that ample support was provided for the role. It should also be noted that each of these workers promoted a similar philosophy toward their work with young people. It appears that differing cultures and support

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<sup>10</sup> Somewhat ironically, at the most recent election five of nine sitting Kimberly councillors were defeated. Most of those lost their seats were considered the most 'progressive' of the nine and were strong advocates for Kimberly's young people.



from within the organisations contributed more strongly to the differences in outcomes for each of these workers than their individual efforts or attitudes.

### 7.3 Actions, initiatives and outcomes

While each local government has a responsibility toward the delivery of programs and services to young people, the type of initiatives, manner of delivery and indeed the relative success of a program or service may differ markedly from one organisation to another. This section will explore some key similarities and differences in program aims, delivery and outcomes across the case study councils.

#### 7.3.1 Relevance of programs

The level of young people's participation in activities is a reasonable measure of the relevance to young people of an activity or program. Both Athena and Burke youth participation officers have reported poor attendance at activities citing various reasons, while activities at Kimberly are reported to be almost always fully subscribed. As indicated in Chapter 6, some programs are being run in Athena despite previous advice that programs are either being held in the wrong place or not necessary at all. That Kimberly young people are given the opportunity to be fully involved in the planning of relevant activities in the Shire is no doubt a success factor.

#### 7.3.2 Local newspaper reporting

As indicated in previous chapters, raising the profile and image of young people within their communities was a stated aim of youth workers at Burke and Kimberly Councils, both of whom indicated different levels of success. The importance of seeking positive media reporting toward improving images of young people cannot be understated. As Bolzan (2003) points out, "Adults with little or no personal contact

with young people were more likely to be influenced by media reports”. It follows that the prevailing image of the young people within a municipality will also have an effect on young people’s opportunities and that it is indeed a valuable exercise of local governments to seek to affect positive images of young people in local newspapers.

Regular reporting of youth activities is the norm in Kimberly, along with a dedicated youth page in each edition of the weekly Leader newspaper. Burke reportedly has less success, while it appears that promoting the reporting of youth activities is not a Council priority in Athena. Of a total of 538 articles about young people from Athena, only 74 or under 14% of articles about young people are related to activities of the Council. For Kimberly, some 60% of articles have an obvious nexus to council activities, while for Burke the figure is just over 45%. Table 7.2 presents observed frequencies for council involvement in articles across the three local government areas. ‘Other’ refers to articles which are focussed on young people that could not be attributed to young people from any of the featured municipalities, but may also refer to youth issues in general without reference to any individual(s).

**Table 7.2 Observed Frequencies for LGA, Council Involvement**

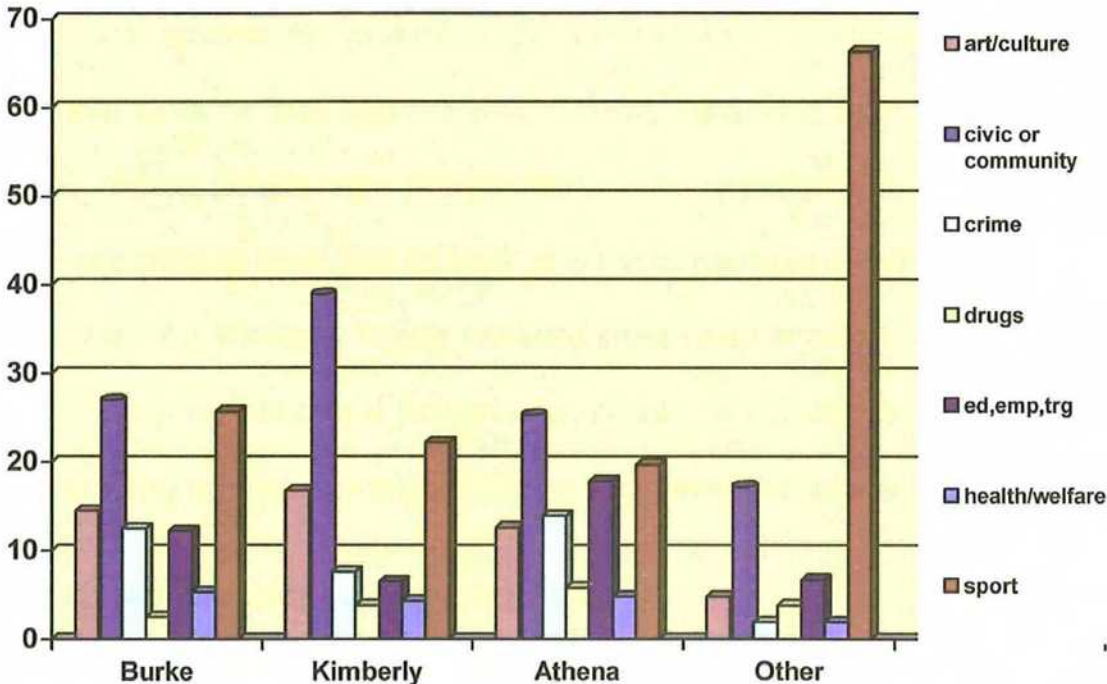
	No	Yes	Totals
Burke	271	122	393
Kimberly	116	69	185
Athena	464	74	538
Other	194	15	209
Totals	1045	280	1325

To test the independence of these two variables, a Chi-square test was performed. With a confidence interval of 95, meaning that there is a ninety-five percent chance that the results are not due to chance, the Chi-square figure was 195.105. The Chi-square ‘p’ value was <.0001. This suggests that the null hypothesis (Ho) must be rejected and we can accept that there is a correlation between the quantum of

articles published about Council sponsored youth activities and the individual Council. In this case, the data demonstrates that articles related to Council activities for Athena are far less likely to be published than for articles reporting on Council activities from Kimberly or indeed Burke. This appears to support Sally Stewart's (Kimberly Youth Development Officer) claims of positive and supportive relationships between Council, young people and the local media. According to Bolzan's (2003) research, it should not surprise that the Leader newspaper in Kimberly, as a rural newspaper, is more supportive of young people than city media outlets.

The types of activities for which young people are gaining publicity in local newspapers are also of interest. Figure 7.2 presents a breakdown of articles attributed to each of seven predetermined themes against the relevant LGAs, expressed as percentages of the total number of articles for each LGA.

Figure 7.2 Identified Article Themes



The previous table shows quite clearly that across all municipalities, civics and community type activities and sports news provided the most local newspaper articles about young people. At the other end of the scale, relatively few articles report crime information, issues around young people and drugs or welfare issues. This concurs with the findings of Bolzan (2003), who suggested that in the review of media representations of young people over two separate periods, reporting of young people was not as negative as some previous studies or indeed anecdotal evidence had earlier suggested.

### 7.3.3 Youth decision making initiatives

While each of the subject councils advocate youth decision making activities within their municipalities, the effectiveness of such activities are subject to much variation. Athena's attempts at youth participation through the Bi Annual Youth Summit have met with limited success, due largely to the fact that the decisions of the young people are ignored for political expediency. Burke's problems with participatory structures differ in that youth advisory committees had been 'captured' by older people. Young people were not afforded a valid opportunity to make decisions and so the committees were 'put on hold' in order to recreate a better structure. On the other hand, the Kimberly Youth Advisory community is given real decision making power. It has control over a portion of youth services funds, determining how that is spent and has a major role in planning for youth services across the Shire.

### 7.3.4. Council and community partnerships

With limited resources compared to large metropolitan Councils like Burke and Athena, Kimberly Council is active in seeking partnership funding from community members and organisations and other levels of government. Its success in this area

has been instrumental in enabling Kimberly to provide a skate park in each major town. As described in Chapter 4.2.8, Burke too is active in seeking partners and has been quite successful in recent years in attracting substantial philanthropic and government funding toward the construction of state of the art libraries and learning centres; aimed at reducing social disadvantage for its citizens, especially young people.

#### 7.4 Chapter summary

Whilst not intended as an exhaustive comparison of the subject councils, this chapter has presented information regarding a number of different aspects of the municipalities under study. This has included comparative commentary on social and physical characteristics, organisational issues, and the kinds of initiatives and outcomes achieved.

Despite experiencing quite distinct social and geographical characteristics, the approach of each municipality toward youth issues does not appear to be overly influenced by such characteristics. While a number of differences among the municipalities have been highlighted, by far the biggest influence on youth issues appears to be within the culture of each organisation and subsequent model of practice employed. Despite each worker espousing similar professional standards and ideals, the nature of the organisation and its structure and leadership will have a major impact on processes and outcomes for young people.

Kimberly appears to approach its responsibilities toward young people with the notion of community at the forefront, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to issues due to identified need outstripping available resources. Acceptance of this reality has meant that a community development approach employed in the Shire has been embraced by key stakeholders including young people and effectively implemented. The Youth

Development Officer is given autonomy to deliver appropriate youth programs and activities within a professional framework and claims to be free of interference, while able to attract appropriate support when it is required.

Alternatively, and contrary to the rhetoric it promotes, Athena appears insular and largely disinterested in promoting young people's issues in any substantial manner. Existing participative structures are not used effectively as outcomes that may be used for political gain are seen to be more important than the process of engaging young people. A professional framework for youth work practice appears to be ignored by decision makers with youth work staff actively seeking ways to limit interference by elected representatives. Elected representatives extol the virtues of their own participation in youth activities while the youth work team collectively cringe and implement 'damage control'.

Both Athena and Burke City Councils appeared some distance from facilitating youth development in any systematic and sustained fashion, though the reasons for this were somewhat different in each case. Councillor interference in operational matters; the absence of policy; marginalisation of the youth service; and decision making based on what's best politically were some of the negatives from Athena. In addition, not matching match rhetoric with action; a failure to listen and act on what young people had told them; and treating young people as simply voting commodities were elements of Athena's approach to young people.

While Burke too demonstrated a number of the same traits as Athena, such as a marginalised youth service; broken promises based on political decisions; and the absence of a solid policy to go forward, young people are seen as valued members of the community. A range of programs and processes along a continuum from welfare to development are provided at Burke City Council. In part due to Council's








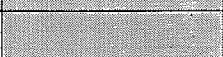






















financial position, and in no small way connected to the level of disadvantage found in the municipality, Burke simply does not have the capacity to do all that is required.

Clearly, it appears that elected representatives, senior staff and youth work staff are not in agreement on the approach to youth issues and indeed, what is appropriate in working with young people. An understanding and agreement of what is professionally appropriate is required for all parties at Athena, particularly when senior staff appear to be tacitly endorsing such compromising behaviour.

Burke City Council seems to recognise the limitations placed upon it because of the high level of need within the City, and because of this seems to be operating largely from a welfare framework, working on addressing disadvantage. Despite the employment of the designated Youth Participation Officer, Burke seems to be concentrating on social justice and equity issues rather than a focus on building the capacity, or enabling the development of young people. The Youth Participation Officer feels somewhat marginalised because of structural issues within the organisation that appears to severely limit effective communication. For the time being, it is almost a case of 'survival' for youth services and the Youth Participation Officer until broader social conditions and the structure of the organisation are improved. Nonetheless, whilst largely stuck at the welfare end of the service continuum, Burke is still seeking to provide developmental opportunities for young people within its boundaries.

Table 7.3 highlights a number of characteristics identified as impacting on the nature of youth development and participation in the three municipalities studied, indicating the strength of evidence for the presence of such conditions at each municipality.

**Table 7.3 Selected characteristics of subject Councils**

	<b>Athena</b>	<b>Burke</b>	<b>Kimberly</b>
Stated commitment to young people			
Professional framework for youth development			
Congruence of theory and practice			
Planning and coordination			
Holistic approach			
Innovation			
Young people given some control			
Positive images of young people promoted			
Focus on process more than outcome			
Positive Councillor participation			

**Legend**



Little evidence



Some evidence



Strong evidence

As is demonstrated in Table 7.3, Kimberly Council appears to be far more proactive than either Burke or Athena in every measure toward creating a positive environment for youth participation and development.



## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

### 8.1 Learnings

As a sector, it is clear that local government has the potential to play a key role in the development of young people as full citizens. Local government has unparalleled opportunities to facilitate connections with society at many levels and as the first level of government in this country, remains the most accessible. Indeed, if 'Social Capital' is the glue that binds society (Cox 1995), then local government may have a role as the brush that applies the glue.

This study focussed on three such local governments with the aim of understanding the way in which they promote engagement with and involvement of young people within their communities, encourage participation in decision making and civic processes, and draw upon the knowledge and wishes of young people in the development of programs and services to meet their needs.

While this study largely focussed on citizenship within the context of Marshall's social citizenship schema, it should be recognised that there is no clear distinction between political and social citizenship, particularly in the context of local government. In the local government context, political aspects extend beyond simply the holding of public office and voting at periodical elections. Indeed, local government provides a range of ways for people to influence decisions it makes, from simple opportunities to personally lobby elected representatives, right through to participation on community reference or advisory groups.

It could be argued that in an informal sense, local government has a responsibility for the development of young people as politically active citizens and that such activism and education overlaps with Marshall's social citizenship rights to share all that is

available within our community. In this context, the political aspects of citizenship can be the lever to achieving the social. In fact, it may only be by becoming active in the political sense that the opportunities for fulling sharing in the assets of the community are even considered.

A demonstration of this nexus between the social and political aspects of citizenship may be seen in the examples of young people becoming involved in trying to establish skate parks within their municipalities. In each municipality, young people used the process of lobbying for a skate facility (a political act); to achieve a share in the resources of the municipality by having the facility built (an aspect of social citizenship).

In our case study examples however, different forces appeared to be at play at each municipality with different outcomes. In Athena's case, even though young people lobbied for a facility and plans were somewhat advanced, the facility was put 'on hold' when adult (read voting) residents expressed concern.

As discussed in Chapter 4, a similar fate was to befall one planned project in Burke which was subsequently held up due to voter angst. In this example though, concern was expressed by Councillors that if the skate park was not built quickly, those young people who were initially promised the facility would never trust Council again. A cynical view might suggest that this means lost votes into the future. More importantly however, if these young people do not feel they have been heard and their input valued, they may simply not bother with engaging with their Council or other aspects of their local community in the future. Their first foray into active engagement within their community may deter future action.

The approach from Kimberly Council differed greatly from those of its colleagues. Young people lobbied both Council and the Victorian Government, encouraged local traders to provide sponsorship and participated fully in the planning processes. In this example, young people participated in political processes that did not relate to rights to vote now or even at some time into the future, but that related to their rights to be full citizens of the community.

Not all local governments will be as well equipped as some others in providing for the development of its young citizens. A number of factors have been highlighted through the study which can impact on the ability of local governments to meet the needs of their young people. Geographic factors, extant social conditions and an inadequate level of available resources may all prove barriers to creating the best possible conditions for young people to develop as fully participating citizens within their communities. This study has identified three key factors as integral to providing young people with the benefits of social citizenship or the opportunity for full participation in society.

The first is the opportunity for young people to have a say in decisions that affect them. A range of participatory structures that provide such opportunities have been identified through this study, across the wider local government sector.

The second key factor is the opportunity for young people to participate in social and recreational activities. While schools, families and friends may be the provider of many such activities, local government has a role in the provision of sporting facilities and recreational parklands and in some cases leisure centres. A number of local governments now also provide quite strong arts and cultural programs. Unlike the days of the Kennett State Government where services were tendered and users

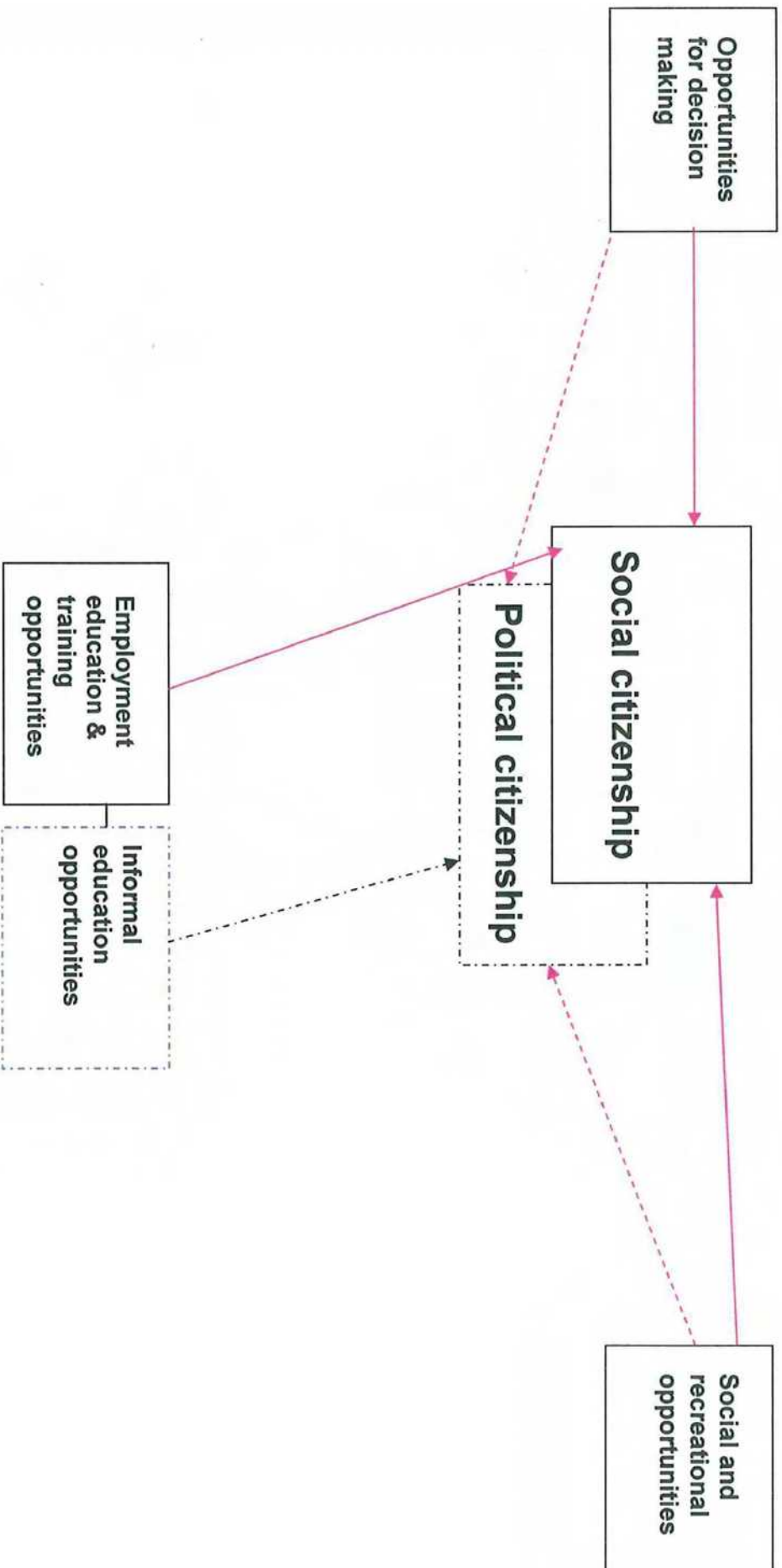
simply purchased such services, these social and recreational opportunities give young people the opportunity to participate in service design and in fact afford them the opportunity to learn political processes.

The third and arguably most important ingredient of social citizenship relates to access to education, employment and training. As Marshall identified, access to employment is essential in order to "...share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in our society" (Marshall 1950:11).

Of course, access to quality education and training is vital to securing work. While the employment, education and training sectors are not the traditional domain of local government, in recent years some Councils have become involved in job creation or 'work for the dole' type programs. In addition, many Councils engage in an assortment of different partnerships with education providers at various levels. Nonetheless, until the establishment of LLENs, local government has simply remained at the periphery of formal education. LLENs have encouraged far greater involvement in the formal structures of education and training. Local government is considered a key partner in LLENs, with positions on LLEN management committees set aside for representatives from local government across the State.

This nexus between the social and political aspects of citizenship is demonstrated in Figure 8.1. Here, the overlap between the key elements required for Marshall's social citizenship and the links to political aspects of citizenship are shown.

Figure 8.1 Essential elements required for social citizenship



## 8.2 A best practice model

As identified in Chapter Seven, a number of conditions would appear necessary for local government to provide for optimum opportunities for young people to fully participate in their communities. The first of these is a stated commitment to young people, backed up by sound planning and a willingness of Council staff and elected representatives to elevate the processes for young people to a level of importance beyond any desire for just outcomes. Young people need to feel that they are able to contribute to at the level they desire without fear of making mistakes. Of course, such involvement is an outcome in itself in the form of citizenship education. This will provide encouragement to young people to further their active participation within their communities.

Secondly, strong leadership of the Council is important. If elected representatives and senior staff are not supportive of a developmental approach to youth issues, then little will be achieved regardless of the prevailing physical, social and economic conditions within the municipality. A commitment from the Councillors and staff to make things happen; licence to the youth participation officer to act with independence; lateral thinking by staff, young people and the community and an understanding that citizenship goes beyond just politics will all contribute to success.

A commitment to devolve decision making to young people is also important. Young people need to be trusted and given opportunities to get involved and contribute to decision making. Control over events and activities empower young people and enable them to learn new skills.

It is clear that young people have the right to a voice and should be provided with the opportunity to impact on decisions that affect them. More often than not however, it is the loudest voices that seem to prevail. Those 'loudest' voices are often heard

almost exclusively, to the detriment of the needs and wishes of young people. Councils must ensure the voices of young people are heard and they do not feel their needs will be subsumed due to Council fears of voter backlash, as occurred with skate facilities in Burke and Athena as described in earlier chapters. Councillors have a responsibility to provide a balance between their leadership and consultative roles. They must seek to be transparent and be willing to engage with all sections of their community, including young people whether they have a vote or not. For inclusion to be meaningful, Councillors must take the opportunity to "...amplify the voices of the submerged" (Enwicht 2002). According to Haid et al (1999):

"Governments suggest that young people are important but rarely put the structures in place to enable them to have a say in policy decision making. Instead, they are seen as the leaders of tomorrow rather than as contributors of today".

Adoption of a sound policy framework would largely eliminate the dilemma of objectors drowning out the voices of others. If a policy was in place and 'signed off' by the community, or if was part of a platform on which an individual ran for election, at the first sign of NIMBY<sup>11</sup> syndrome, the community could be told, "we discussed this with you, you accepted this, you voted us in". Absence of a stated policy has the potential to lead to ad hoc decision making.

A 'best practice' model for youth empowerment should also consider how young people are perceived within the community and seek to address negative stereotyping. Councils could encourage local media to ensure that stories involving young people were balanced and where appropriate, young people be given the right to reply or comment on issues that affect them. According to Bolzan (2003), the most significant influences on perceptions of young people held by older members of

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<sup>11</sup> Colloquially: Not In My Back Yard

society were personal contact and media reporting. By seeking to influence positive reporting within the media and providing opportunities for older people to have positive engagement with young people, perceptions of young people would be improved and the danger of undermining young people's self-respect to the extent that the attitudes became "self-fulfilling prophecies" would be largely eliminated (Bolzan 2003).

### 8.3 Opportunities for further study

A number of options for further study may be identified as appropriate to follow this thesis. Firstly, of interest would be a combined qualitative and quantitative study into aspects of media reporting across local government areas. Such a study may provide further understanding of the nature of media reporting of the issues that affect young people and provide useful insights toward improving perceptions of young people within the broader community.

Next, a longitudinal study where one could watch the changing dynamics of a Council over time would be of interest. In particular, the effects to Council and its approach to youth issues following changes to either the political or bureaucratic leadership may prove insightful in relation to the formulation and development of organisational structure and youth policy.

A further option is to seek the views of a representative sample of young people about their experience with their local Councils and the services offered to them. Such a study may seek to better understand the needs of young people relative to their local area and the capacity of their local governments to deliver.



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Appendix ii: Questions posed during interviews to elected representatives and senior council staff

1. What is Council's philosophy in relation to participation of its citizens in decision-making processes?
2. Does this philosophy differ in relation to young people of your municipality? If so, how?
3. In what ways are young people encouraged to participate in decision making or otherwise inform the decision making process?
4. How well do young people respond to such opportunities?
5. Does Council have a youth policy?
6. If so, what does it contain?
7. What is Council's 'vision' for young people within your municipality?
8. How does Council plan to achieve this 'vision'?
9. What strategies are currently in place?
10. Are there any barriers to achieving this 'vision'?
11. How may these barriers be overcome?
12. What role do you see the internet and other information technology playing in the development of young people?

Appendix iii: Questions posed during interviews to council youth work staff

1. What programs does Council run for young people in your municipality?
2. How well are these programs utilised?
3. What do you see the role of council in relation to young people?
4. What is your understanding of Council's 'vision' for the community according to its latest Council Plan? How do young people fit in with this vision?
5. How do you and your colleagues encourage participation of young people in local decision-making, toward program planning and the provision of services and resources to young people?
6. How successful has this been participation been?
7. Are there barriers to increased participation within the municipality? If so, what are they?
8. How may these barriers be overcome?
9. How supportive are elected representatives toward your work?
10. What role do you see the internet and other information technology playing in your role and the role of developing young people?



Appendix iv Newspaper data collection sheet

<b>Kimberly Observer</b>			<b>Date</b>		
<i>Article Title</i>	<i>Measurements</i> -----	<i>Positive story</i> <input type="checkbox"/>	<i>LGA</i> ----- Council involvement? Y      N	<i>Age</i>	
		Negative story <input type="checkbox"/>		12-15 <input type="checkbox"/>	16-19 <input type="checkbox"/>
		Positive spin on negative issue <input type="checkbox"/>		20-25 <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Negative spin on positive issue <input type="checkbox"/>		Not defined <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Page number</b>	<b>Photo?</b> Y      N				
<b>Themes (x)</b>					
<b>Sport</b>	<b>Drugs</b>	<b>Art/culture</b>	<b>Crime</b>	<b>Educ./Trg/ Emp</b>	<b>Civics/community</b>
<b>Comments</b>					

**Re: Assistance sought with Masters Research Program: Young people, Local Government and Social Citizenship**

Dear

I am undertaking a Master of Community Services Administration Degree by Research through the Faculty of Education, Languages and Community Services at RMIT University, Melbourne. The subject of my research is a case study inquiry addressing the

**'...participation of young people in decision making, civic process and the community as facilitated by selected local governments in the state of Victoria, with particular reference to the concept of social citizenship as described by T.H.Marshall'.**

I am currently a sessional lecturer and tutor in Youth Work at the Department of Justice and Youth Affairs at RMIT University, and youth work trainer at Djerriwarrh Education and Employment Services. I hold the qualification of Bachelor of Arts Youth Affairs (with distinction). In addition, I am an elected Councillor with the City of Darebin and Chairperson of the Darebin Youth Consortium.

The purpose of my study is to explore the role of local government in relation to young people within local communities and the manner in which councils communicate with young people, particularly in relation to providing relevant services and programs for them. To a lesser extent, I intend to explore the role of councils in preparing young people for political participation.

During the collection of data for this project, I intend to examine original documents including archived data, personally conduct informal interviews, and observe events where young people are participating in council or council sponsored activities. Copies of council minutes, reports and memorandums and articles from local and daily newspapers may all provide relevant data.

I intend to interview Chief Executive Officers, elected representatives, senior managers and youth and community workers employed by subject councils; anticipating that such interviews will be conducted with a minimum of three and a maximum of four participants in each of the three municipalities selected as case studies. I will then compare the information gathered to identify certain common characteristics or indeed differences in approach within councils toward facilitating youth participation. I hope to develop a useful framework or set of "guiding principles" for local governments to include young people in community and civic activities as a result of this study. Of particular interest are strategies used to promote inclusion of culturally diverse, isolated or otherwise marginalised young people from within their communities.

Individual organisations and people involved in this project will not be identified in the report, unless permission is obtained in writing.

Any taped or written records of meetings and discussions will remain the property of the researcher (Peter Stephenson) until such time as it is transcribed into aggregate data. All such records and aggregate data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet at my home address of which I hold the only keys. Any computer-generated data related to the project will be password protected.

I anticipate that the conduct of this research project will not cause any immediate or future disadvantage to individuals or agencies agreeing to participate or not.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Any individual or organisation is free to withdraw their consent to participate and discontinue their participation at any time. Participants are also free to withdraw any unprocessed data they have previously supplied.

I will maintain your anonymity in the production of the thesis and any other published material related to this study. At any time during the conduct of interviews or meetings regarding this project, you are encouraged to seek clarification about any concerns you may have with the research project.

I can be contacted during business hours on either 03 9470 2695 or 03 9470 3912 (phone/fax), after hours on 0419 750 503, or via 'pjames@infoxchange.net.au'. Alternatively, Associate Professor David Maunders, RMIT University Research Supervisor can be contacted on (03) 9925 7796 or via 'maunders@rmit.edu.au'.

Completion of the thesis is planned for 2 December 2001, following which it will be held at RMIT University Bundoora, Faculty of Education Language and Community Services. A summary of the thesis will be made available to those interested. Please advise me if you are interested in receiving a copy.

Yours sincerely

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