

POTTSVILLE DISTRICT YOUTH CENTRE

c/o 7 Monash Place, Pottsville 2489

19th May 2006

Tweed Shire Council Administrators, General Manager and Executive.

TWEED SHIRE COUNCIL

PO Box 816, Murwillumbah 2484

Copy sent to Neville Newell, MP for Tweed.

Dear Administrators, GM & Executive

POTTSVILLE RESPONSE TO COUNCIL "YOUTH NEEDS SURVEY"

As you are aware, the Pottsville District Youth Club represents the legitimate aspirations of thousands of Pottsville parents and youths who have worked for 2.5 years to achieve a youth facility.

In spite of forwarding proof of community support, community need and legitimate research, we are again being forced to prove our community support, this time responding to Council's request for public comment on the "Youth Needs Survey" commissioned by Council, and Council's recent resolution based on that survey requesting public comment.

Attached is a disc with 550 signatures from specifically Pottsville parents and children, collected recently in very few days amongst our supporters, stating quite clearly that Pottsville residents support the PDYC and asking Council to express goodwill towards this community project. This is quite separate from the 1200 signature petition we have already presented you, the 200 forms submitted by Pottsville youths, the 72 volunteer register, and the obvious support expressed at the Administrators' last visit to Pottsville (and the many other forms of support we have sent you during the last 2.5 years).

Before covering Council's request for comment on the "Youth Needs Survey" and Council's youth policy, we need to emphasise the following. **Our letter dated 13th March states quite clearly that the PDYC has the support of our local Member Neville Newell MP and the State Government. Neville Newell has already publicised his desire "...to build the Pottsville Youth Centre - subject to Council endorsing a site..." (Tweed Sun announcement dated May 4th). Nine State Govt "Country Labor" MPs who visited us and inspected the proposed Crown land site (in the rain) have also confirmed their support for the construction of the PDYC facility.**

TSC is not being asked to pay for the building, nor contribute the land, the games area, or the equipment. Surely Council should now extend their goodwill and support our Pottsville community, our local Member and the State Government's efforts to complete this much needed community facility as a matter of urgency.

COMMENT ON TSC POLICY & "Youth Needs Survey".

Whilst we have no argument with the majority of the Survey's conclusions and recommendations for Tweed Shire as a whole, they are inaccurate and seriously flawed with respect to their recommendations on Pottsville.

Take the following survey statements:

- a) *“Overall, young people, service providers and the project team did not support the development of a youth centre in Pottsville, at this point in time.”*

Pottsville young people made it very clear to the survey leader that they did support and badly need a supervised indoor facility, because no such safe place exists here.

- b) *“Is not currently in a position to develop and manage indoor youth spaces, and development of these spaces is presently best undertaken by specialist service providers such as PCYC ”*

Most indoor youth facilities in Australia are run by community incorporations, not Councils or the PCYC. We are not asking Council to either pay for or run our PDYC because we recognise that they neither have the budget nor the skills. We have had meetings with PCYC about cooperation with them and I believe we have their full support including a letter in the mail to us confirming it (They also confirmed that there are dozens of community organisations running successful youth facilities throughout Australia).

- c) *“Young people and the youth sector did not identify the development of indoor youth centres as a priority for addressing the space and place needs of young people in the Tweed Shire at the key forum for the project.”*

Whilst many of the “Needs Survey” findings are sound with respect to other areas of Tweed, the report does not, and did not, address the unique isolation needs of Pottsville. The “young people in the Tweed” at that key forum meeting were not Pottsville kids (I was there), so why include that comment in the recommendation for Pottsville? Other areas such as Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads already have youth facilities (eg: Murwillumbah and Cabarita Baptist Church facilities and the currently expanding Tweed PCYC), as well as theatres, gym, shopping malls, milk bar/cafes etc. Pottsville’s 7000 post code residents have no facilities whatsoever and no transport at night to travel to others. Already our kids travel nearly 2 hours/day to high school and your “Youth Needs Survey” is recommending busing our children to Tweed and back to meet each other! Cabarita, a much smaller population centre, has a Baptist Youth Group and Kingscliff is only 10 minutes drive from Tweed as opposed to 30 minutes each way from isolated Pottsville.

The reality is that many of our youth-aged kids, including females, end up down the beach or in dark parks at night because there are no alternate safe places to meet here in Pottsville.

Our local mothers react quite aggressively to suggestions that their children should be bused to Tweed Heads at night to find things to do, not only because they consider it unsafe for their children, but because already the kids spend nearly 2 hours every day on buses getting to Kingscliff High School and back.

- d) *“That Council uses the recommendations outlined in this report to develop the Murwillumbah youth space project as a pilot project for meeting the place and space needs for young people in Tweed shire.”*

The report recommends building a prototype facility in Murwillumbah and not supporting our facility in Pottsville for at least 5 years, a suggestion that has been circulating in Council for more than 12 months. How can the survey justify recommending a facility for Murwillumbah having rejected Pottsville's PDYC facility on the basis that 'Tweed youth' do not prioritise indoor facilities (particularly now that our Pottsville post code population is now greater than Murwillumbah urban area)? We would support and help create a Murwillumbah facility, but not at the expense of Pottsville being rejected.

The "Needs Survey" is correct in stating that TSC needs to develop relationships with State and Federal government bodies for major help in creating such facilities. However, we have already done that for Council with respect to our Pottsville project. Council's current refusal to approval in principle Neville Newell MP and the State Govt plan to fund the PDYC building in Pottsville is completely the opposite of that Youth Needs Survey recommendation.

How can TSC justify rejecting Pottsville's proposals whilst simultaneously offering \$150,000 additional financial support to Tweed PCYC, who already have \$1.3 million and are changing their building to introduce a model identical to Pottsville's? Any concerns on our management system, operating costs or income projections can readily be resolved by direct discussion with PDYC together with examining the help system we already have available and promised to us by other facilities such as PCYC, Boystown, Youth At Risk Alliance, etc. Pottsville has done the work and we now need Council's goodwill urgently rather than the rejection you have adopted.

Conclusion

If you consider all the above in conjunction with the attached '*Addendum of Flawed Youth Needs Survey Problems*', we believe you cannot fail to reach the conclusion that the "Youth Needs Survey" is seriously flawed with respect to its data gathering and recommendation for specifically Pottsville (not for the Tweed generally).

In fact, had TSC counted into their "7 Year Plan" result the signatures on the forms we collected and delivered to Council chambers on 21st May, it would have caused a huge increase in the 'Community Life' votes from 18.3% to 33%, at least 10% ahead of the reduced 'Roads' percentage (and dramatically changed the other results). What is very surprising is that the Council only got 2430 forms returned from a Shire population of nearly 80,000, a 3 % response after two months of publicity and many access talks by the GM plus Administrator access meetings. By comparison PDYC supporters got 550 genuine signed responses with only three days of distribution from within Pottsville post code 2489 with only about 7000 residents (7.9% of our PO 2489 population, nearly three times Council's 'whole of Shire' response rate with much less effort)! Given an extra week we could have exceeded Council's whole of Shire vote from Pottsville signatures only! Surely it is time Council offered to assist us instead of ignoring us and voting that Pottsville shouldn't get an Indoor Youth Facility for 5 years (based on flawed survey results).

We repeat that we do not expect Council to pay for our facility or donate Council land, just to revert to the positive attitude TSC displayed in 2004 prior to the last Federal election. Our letter dated 13th March 2006 makes very clear statements on our expectations and hopes in regard to Council's role, and asks again that Council return to the attitude of 'goodwill' exhibited before the last Federal Government election. Your own statistics indicate that 'Pottsville 2489' does represent approximately 10% of the Shire's population our community feels entitled to receive

Council's goodwill and some positive attitude when we try to help ourselves as a community.

Yours sincerely

Victor Cusack – Chairman, Pottsville District Youth Centre management committee.

Att: Addendum of flawed youth needs survey problems.

ADDENDUM OF FLAWED YOUTH NEEDS SURVEY PROBLEMS.

1. When the head survey Consultant visited our PDYC in Pottsville, he told 14 of our Youth Committee kids present and the 5 adult PDYC Committee members (at the hurried conclusion of his visit) that he was very impressed, that he recognised Pottsville's isolation need, and that his report ***"would be recommending that Pottsville should get their Youth Facility"***! Such an action is both irresponsible and cruel.

Also when the consultants attended that meeting, they:

- * Arrived late.
- * Complained more than once they had to leave early to go to Byron Bay.
- * Ignored our kids' obvious appeal that they needed a safe, supervised indoor place close by to meet with their friends at night and have fun?
- * Introduced the idea half way through the meeting that "the Council had no funds so wouldn't the kids be happy getting a skateboard park and some one-off events instead"?
- * Ignored the fact the girls said that night time skateboarding didn't meet their needs?
- * Brought a Skate Board Professional" with English language skills that were inadequate for the task (but interesting funky clothes).
- * Insist on me showing them the two sites prioritized by Council's survey of suitable land in the middle of the night after that visit, with negligible street lighting and no moon, all in a hurry so they could depart to Byron Bay?

2. I was advised by Meredith Burton, Head Teacher of Welfare, Kingscliff high school, that the teachers there were outraged at the unprofessional approach shown by the consultants when they visited their school. At the request of the consultants a number of teachers organised a selected articulate student group (not specifically Pottsville kids) supervised by a number of teachers. The one 'consultant' (is alleged to have) turned up more than one hour late, were poorly prepared and he left after only staying for 15 minutes. The children were asked a number of questions in that time that were not presented as written and asked to scribble their answers on scraps of supermarket flyer paper circulated and collected by the consultant. The teachers were significantly upset at being treated that way. The kids frustrated because they actually ended up missing 2 lessons, some quite upset ***"because they missed a practical PE or marine studies lessons as a result of the survey being held so late. They were certainly disappointed in the whole process"*** (Quote: Meredith Burton's email to PDYC). Meredith Burton even offered to attend a Council meeting to voice her concern!

After all that, why does the survey acknowledgements' give "special thanks" to Meredith Burton (who is furious at the way the teachers and kids were treated). Has presentation been valued above accuracy and sensitivity?

3. Why were the participants at the Consultants' "key forum" on Tuesday 29th November asked to choose between 'Transport to events' or 'Indoor Facilities' during their 'quick assessment' system of prioritizing youth needs? Obviously in a large mixed group of mainly adults with some few children from Tweed and Murwillumbah High Schools (no Pottsville kids present) the majority would put 'transport to special events' ahead of another indoor facility because Tweed and Murwillumbah already have many forms of indoor meeting places, whereas Pottsville has none.

4. Why did the Consultants (and Council) ignore the very comprehensive, well prepared, large 'Needs Survey' done in Pottsville by 2001 executive team of PBNB that clearly indicated 72% to 76% of Pottsville's people felt the major need of our village was "Youth Facility". The consultants were given extracts from the survey, shown and offer a copy, and told where to find a copy on Council's files.

5. Why does the survey recommend 'Occasional Events' as an answer to nearly 500 kids approaching adulthood who have nowhere to go every night to meet when they want to? Our committee of kids told the Consultant that occasional events could be great, even being bused to them, but that it would not solve their nightly/weekly problem.

6. Why didn't the Consultants study the six Gold Coast indoor facilities we referred them to (or why Gold Coast are now adding two additional indoor facilities). Are they saying that Gold Coast got it wrong? Why didn't they speak to Lisa Francisco, a consultant to all Gold Coast's indoor facilities employed by "Youth at Risk" whose salary is paid by Gold Coast Council (we gave them Lisa's contacts and they said they would consult with her, but didn't. Lisa has been helping us now for 12 months and is hugely experienced in this field.) Surely when Tweed co-exists beside Gold Coast, studying their experience and greater commitment towards Indoor Youth Facilities would be an essential part of any Tweed Shire study?

7. Why did the Consultants ignore the 150 forms filled out by Pottsville-only teenagers at a properly planned group discussion organised by Kingscliff High School teachers for PDYC, forms that very much show that Pottsville kids want and support a supervised safe indoor facility. The consultants were given copies of those forms, and the results they show are the opposite to the consultants findings and recommendations for Pottsville.

8. Why does the survey revert to the already rejected "use of existing community centre in Pottsville as a possible short term option" when the Council's own Hall Committee has clearly broadcast the fact verbally and in writing for more than 12 months that the existing facilities are too heavily booked for such alternative use (aside from being impractical)? Our research indicates that a properly organised facility will often have more than 100 kids attending on many nights. There is no building available in Pottsville that could cope.

9. Why does the Consultant seem to suggest that PYCP or other community groups are not capable of operating and managing indoor youth facilities? Such a suggestion can't be based on experience or research because there are more indoor facilities run by incorporated community groups in Australia than there are PCYC facilities; and very few actually run directly by Councils. Our about-to-be incorporated management group has some of the most experienced professionals in this field as committee members, including people who were or are responsible for existing facilities. Does the Consultant have the experience to make such statements?

10. The Consultant advises that the Council should be "Identifying good practice in youth development, facilities and service provision for local government to provide a benchmark for the Tweed Shire Council", but it makes no attempt to advise Council on what is good practice in terms of indoor facilities. We have done that research as applied to Pottsville and it seems obvious to us that the Consultant has not; and doesn't have the experience to do so within the cost restraints of their commission.